

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, May 28, 8:00 PM. [NOTE NEW TIME!] Monthly Meeting. We meet at the Caltech Y, Tyson House, 505 S. Wilson Ave., Pasadena. (This is just south of the corner with San Pasqual. Signs will be posted.) Special guest Mr. Gary Moody will discuss the social justice activities the local chapter of NAACP is engaged in. Everyone is welcome. Tasty snacks will be served.

Tuesday, June 9, 7:30 PM. Letter writing meeting at Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. In the summer we meet outdoors at the "Rath al Fresco," on the lawn behind the building. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty.

Sunday, June 21, 6:30 PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group. This month we read "Philida" by Andre Brink.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone,

I hope everyone had a relaxing long weekend but didn't forget the reason for Memorial Day -- to honor those who gave their lives in service to our country. We went to my Dad's place, barbequed some steaks, ate corn on the cob and watched the National Memorial Day Concert on PBS. In between the band music and song numbers, the struggles of individual disabled veterans were highlighted. It takes guts to keep going when you're in a wheelchair and dependent upon others for your daily needs. It was very moving to see their stories. Their families deserve a medal too!

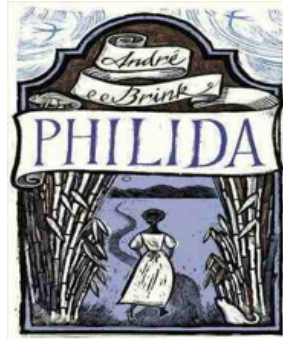
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Kathy

RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group

Keep up with Rights Readers at
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>



AUTHOR BIO



Next Rights Readers meeting:

Sunday, June 21, 6:30 PM

Vroman's Bookstore
695 E. Colorado,
Pasadena

André Brink was born in Vrede in 1935. In his eventful life he has written over sixty books which have been published in thirty-three languages and have received numerous prestigious prizes.

André is the eldest of Aletta and Daniel Brink's four children. The youngest and André's only brother Johan is a physicist. The younger of the two sisters, Marita, is a psychologist and André's other sister, Elsabe, also an author, died in 1998.

André's father, a magistrate, was re-posted every couple of years, so André grew up and went to school in several different villages and towns in South Africa: Vrede, Jagersfontein, Brits, Douglas, Sabie and Lydenburg.

His mother, a teacher, inspired his love of literature, especially the English classics.

BOOK REVIEW

By CERIDWEN DOVEY, FEB. 15, 2013
New York Times [Sunday Book Review](#)

"Philida" is the latest offering from the South African author André Brink, whose anti-apartheid novels -- along with those of such contemporaries as Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee -- have challenged readers to reflect on the intimate brutalities of a society founded on a dehumanizing ideology. Like several of Brink's historical novels, "Philida" probes South Africa's more distant sordid past, animating real figures from the Cape Colony's days of white settlement, when the enslavement and indentured servitude of local black and

indigenous populations, as well as people brought over from the Dutch East Indies, were entirely routine.

This time, however, it's personal. Brink wrote this book after discovering that a collateral ancestor of his owned a slave named Philida in the early 1800s. As he recounts in the acknowledgments, the real Philida lodged a brave complaint to the Slave Protector in 1832 about her treatment by Francois Brink, who was the son of her owner, Cornelis. She claimed that she had four children by Francois, and André Brink uses this historical record as a launching pad for his imagined version of Philida's life. In the novel, she tells the Slave Protector that Francois reneged on his promise of freedom and was planning to sell her, in order to follow his father's orders to marry a white woman.

Philida's resolve to seek justice is strengthened by the rumor -- soon to become reality -- that the British are planning to decree the emancipation of slaves in the Empire, including the Cape Colony, but her complaint comes two years too early to save her from further abuse by her owners, who eventually sell her off with her children upcountry. Surprisingly, her new owner turns out to be less cruel, and Philida eventually finds spiritual sustenance in a local iteration of Islam introduced to her by another slave.

The freedom Brink imagines for Philida is both physical and existential. She is officially released from slavery in 1834, but more emphasis is put on her unlikely and rather contrived transformation from downtrodden slave to empowered free woman. Philida's growth is set against the decline in fortune of the Brinks, an Afrikaans family whose power is waning under the new social order.

The story is told through multiple narrators, ranging from Cornelis and Francois to an old freedwoman who is in fact Cornelis's mother. Brink used this same device in an earlier historical novel about a failed slave uprising, "A Chain of Voices," to suggest the damage a system like slavery does to perpetrators as well as victims. Most of the first-person narration in this new novel, however, is given to Philida. Brink is not unaware of the minefield he has chosen to enter, having admitted in an interview that "there was a particular audacity and bloody cheek involved as a white person in imagining yourself into the skin of a black woman," but that "over so many years, the coming together of black and white has entered so deeply into my

subconscious that perhaps the effort did not need to be too extreme."

Unfortunately, Brink's awareness of his own "bloody cheek" does not make his portrayal of Philida any less troubling. This comes as a disappointment, given Brink's characteristically more complex engagement with the feminist and subaltern politics of who has the right to speak for whom. The issue starts with his questionable use of a stylistic device to distinguish Philida's voice. She has trouble conjugating her verbs — "My head remember this and that and lots of other stuff as well" — yet she's capable of flights of lyrical description when the occasion demands it ("the thin shrilling of the lark like a twine of cotton among the others"), which makes her voice inconsistent. Besides, why give Philida a pidgin "slave-speak/slave-think" while not marking the voices and thoughts of Cornelis and Francois, relatively uneducated white men, to signal their place in society?

Brink's portrayal of Philida becomes even more problematic when she describes her first rape by Francois:

"And after some time I no longer cry, and I just let him do whatever he want, now I can feel him pushing into me, into the deepest deepness of myself, and then he begin to shake like a sheep that got its throat cut, and then I know that this is it . . . and I cannot and will not stop him any more, I just go on crying in his ears, no, no, no, crying no, no, yes, yes, yes, and then I no longer know or care what is happening. . . . I just do whatever you wish, you are the Baas, just push into me, I no longer want or wish anything, just stay inside me, just keep on, don't stop."

It would be one thing for Brink to describe the rape in such a way from Francois's perspective, to show that for certain kinds of ruthless men, a woman's "no" will always be taken to mean "yes." But for Brink to present this from her point of view, in the first person no less, does symbolic violence to Philida. Throughout the book, Brink's account of Philida's relationship with Francois is uncomfortably confused — at certain times, it comes across as one of power abuse and repeated rape; at others, a sentimental romance in which Philida claims to have loved him. This seems to be Brink's clumsy attempt to complicate the master-slave relationship and suggest that the fault lines of domination and attraction can shift. A more sophisticated treatment of the power relations between owners and slaves can be found in Yvette

Christiansë's 2006 novel "Unconfessed," based on historical records of a woman slave in the Cape who murdered her own child.

Other parts of "Philida" display the same disconcerting mix of violence and sentimentality. Each chapter starts with a précis written in the style of a picaresque novel. These twee summaries ("In this Chapter Philida's Thoughts continue to dwell on Zandoliet and the House of Ghosts and Cats in which she lives with her Ouma Petronella") and the often jaunty tone of the narrator-as-picaresque-heroine do not fit with the litany of horrors the chapters hold: Cornelis forcing two slaves to rape Philida in public; a crowd at a slave auction festively disputing the number of stripes across a dead slave's back.

The achievement of "Philida" is how it continues Brink's imaginative search for the roots of South Africa's later evils in its earliest settler history. What the character of Philida warns us about is the importance of not letting those in power get away with anything; just one slip-up, a moment of casual cruelty or neglect or even well-intentioned paternalism, can quickly fester into something more insidious. To represent torture or extreme violence in fiction is, in a context like South Africa, a fraught undertaking. "For the writer," as J. M. Coetzee wrote in 1986, "the true challenge is how not to play the game by the rules of the state, how to establish one's own authority, how to imagine torture and death on one's own terms." If, as Francois at one point admits, the things that are done to Philida (and by extension to all slaves) are "unspeakable," then Brink should take more care when he decides to speak them out loud.

SECURITY WITH HUMAN RIGHTS

by Robert Adams

AIUSA released the following press release on May 23, 2015:

USA Freedom Act Fails Senate Vote As Patriot Act Reauthorization Blocked

WASHINGTON - The US Senate failed to pass a short-term reauthorization of Section 215 of the USA Patriot Act today, meaning that a major legal authority on which the U.S. government has relied for surveillance is poised to expire.

The Senate also failed to pass the USA Freedom Act today, which had passed the House of Representatives earlier this month. Amnesty International USA reiterated its call for true surveillance reform.

"The Senate's unwillingness to temporarily reauthorize the Patriot Act is an important signal that the tide has turned against mass surveillance. We are one step closer to forcing a serious conversation about the need for systemic overhaul," said Naureen Shah, Director of Amnesty International USA's Security and Human Rights Program. "Now there must be further action. In the nearly two years since Edward Snowden revealed the extent of its worldwide surveillance, the US government has avoided any meaningful new limits on the government's collection of our data. We hope today's vote will spur real change so people can again feel confident in their right to live free from government intrusion into their private lives."

"The Senate will reconvene on May 31, the day before Section 215 of the Patriot Act expires. The US government used section 215 of the USA Patriot Act to conduct surveillance far beyond even our worst fears. As governments around the world consider legislation granting far-reaching surveillance powers, they should take note that similar powers are being successfully challenged in the US."

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

Nebraska

What's it like to be the only African-American in a uni-chamber legislature? And for 38 years, to be the person who introduces legislation to abolish the death penalty -- 38 times? Ernie Chambers, a long-time legislator in Nebraska can answer those questions.

The Nebraska legislature has 47 members in its unicameral body and this month after Senator Ernie Chambers once again introduced a bill to abolish the death penalty, 32 of those members voted for abolition. Once before, in 1972, the legislators voted for abolition only to have then Governor Charles Thone veto it. This time is no different with Governor Pete Ricketts pledging to stamp the bill VETOed again.

Nebraska is a conservative state and Governor Ricketts is sure most Nebraskans continue to support the death penalty; although, the bill was co-sponsored by Senator Colby Coash, a Republican. Mr. Coash's path to abolition began when he was a college student in 1997. On the night of the state's last execution, he went to the penitentiary. In the parking lot, he saw revelers having a party complete with a band, tailgating, and a countdown to the execution. He also saw another group praying on the other side of the security gate. These images remained with him as his attitude toward to death penalty changed.

Senator Chambers is unsure he can count on his colleagues to overturn the governor's veto. He said, "The work isn't done yet – if the governor overrides the bill it will be back to us, and you never know if someone will crumble or stumble. There are so many ways for politicians to avoid committing themselves." The bill needs 30 votes to override the governor's veto and according to Mr. Chambers most of the people who voted for the bill have voted for it at least three times in the past. He, therefore, believes they have cast "a principled vote based on conviction" and so, when the governor vetoes it, the legislators will have just one more vote to abolish the death penalty in Nebraska.

Perhaps by next month, Nebraska will have become the 19th US state to abolish the death penalty.

The Death Penalty in *The New Yorker*

The April 15, 2015, issue of *The New Yorker* magazine has an article, "The Death Penalty Deserves The Death Penalty," that explores various arguments for the abolition of the death penalty. Of course, the challenges faced by the lack of drugs for lethal injection are discussed. The following, however, is a fine summary of the situation.

"Even if lethal injection is fatally flawed, of course, there are other means of execution available. Electrocution, asphyxiation by poisonous gas, shooting by a firing squad, and hanging are alternatives in states where lethal injection is currently the primary means of execution. The inmates' plea may also seem myopically focused on one means of death when it is the end—execution as a form of punishment -- that should be judged. But any means inevitably connects to the end. It raises the fundamental question of whether any state is capable of administering capital punishment

in a way that meets constitutional standards. If states can't do that, shouldn't the United States abolish the death penalty?"

To read the entire article, go to <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-death-penalty-deserves-the-death-penalty>

The OK state and its lethal injection drugs

People who want to execute Oklahoma's death row inmates have hit another challenge. Akorn, the manufacturer of the sedative midazolam, have asked the state to return any remaining supplies of the drug the state may have purchased to use in executions. Another drug, hydromorphone, that could be used, but has not previously been used in Oklahoma, also will not be available.

Inmates from Oklahoma's death row have taken a case to the Supreme Court with a ruling expected by the end of June. As a back-up plan, Governor Mary Fallin has signed a law allowing the use of nitrogen gas for executions.

Executing the mentally ill

As we know, we in the USA are no longer allowed to execute juveniles or the intellectually disabled (called mentally retarded in the Supreme Court case), but what about people who are mentally ill? Although we want the person being executed to know he is being killed and why he is being killed, we do not always allow evidence of mental illness to emerge during trials.

This month our lone execution is Derrick Charles. Yes, he committed the crime of which he was convicted, but when he confessed to the police, he said he didn't know why he'd done it. During his trial, none of his history of abuse and mental illness was investigated by his defense attorneys or presented at his trial. That he'd seen his schizophrenic mother stab his abusive stepfather, suffered from tactile and auditory hallucinations since childhood, been hospitalized twice for mental illness by the time he was 13, and heard voices and asked for medication while in juvenile detention for nonviolent offenses (the medication was denied) were not included in his trial.

The courts allow only 'insanity' as a reason not to seek the death penalty, but what constitutes insanity is left up to the states. No universal guidelines of what insanity is exist within the United States. As we know, death penalty cases

are very expensive and mentally ill prisoners may not have the resources available to raise a claim of mental illness during trials.

For the mentally ill, death row itself produces problems. Death row inmates are often isolated in their cells for 23 out of 24 hours and this isolation leads to further deterioration. In Idaho, the isolation is for 24 hours a day. Kate Black, a lawyer for the Texas Defender Service, says the Supreme Court should ban the execution of the mentally ill. She said, "the same rationale that you (the Supreme Court) used in [banning execution of the intellectually disabled] — which is that there's no deterrent effect for someone who doesn't understand it, these people are at risk for having terrible counsel and of not being able to help counsel — all those things are also true about the mentally ill."

Former Georgia Chief Justice Norman Fletcher

As we recall, Troy Davis was executed in Georgia. Now former Chief Justice Norman Fletcher says, "Capital punishment must be permanently halted, without exception. ... With wisdom gained over the past 10 years, I am now convinced there is absolutely no justification for continuing to impose the sentence of death in this country." He has come to believe that the death penalty is unethical, that many innocent people have been killed, that racial disparity exists in the use of the death penalty, and that economic and political factors are involved to determine if and when capital punishment is used.

Justice Fletcher's voice joins that of the drug manufacturers as well as medical professionals and pharmacists who are now prohibited from participating in executions.

Dzhokhar Tsarnaev

Following is a press release from AIUSA's executive director regarding the sentencing of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev.

PRESS RELEASE

MAY 15, 2015

Amnesty International USA Responds to Death Penalty in Boston Bombing Case

In response to the announcement that Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was sentenced to death after being convicted in the Boston Marathon bombings, **Steven W. Hawkins, executive director of Amnesty International USA** issued the following statement:

"We condemn the bombings that took place in Boston two years ago, and we mourn the loss of life and grave injuries they caused. The death penalty, however, is not justice. It will only compound the violence, and it will not deter others from committing similar crimes in the future.

It is outrageous that the federal government imposes this cruel and inhuman punishment, particularly when the people of Massachusetts have abolished it in their state. As death sentences decline worldwide, no government can claim to be a leader in human rights when it sentences its prisoners to death."

Amnesty International has documented a steady decline in the use of the death penalty in the United States and around the world over the past several years, though in 2014 there was a marked increase in death sentences to address a real or perceived threat of terrorism especially in Egypt and Nigeria. There remains no evidence showing that the death penalty deters crime or has any effect in reducing terrorism.

Annual death sentences in the U.S. have declined since 2000. In the last eight years the number of death sentences has been lower than any time since reinstatement of the death penalty in 1976. In 2014 there were 72 death sentences, the lowest number on record since 1976. Executions have declined as well, from a high of 98 in 1999 to just 35 in 2014, the lowest in 20 years; there were 43 executions in 2011 and 2012 and 39 in 2013.

Amnesty International USA opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception as the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. As of today, 140 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. The U.S. was one of only nine countries in the world that carried out executions each year between 2009 and 2013.

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/press-releases/amnesty-international-usa-responds-to-death-penalty-in-boston-bombing-case>

The article "Long wait ahead on death row" from the *LA Times* ends with "The process can be particularly difficult for victims who want to get past the constant reminders, and was one reason many in Boston preferred a life sentence over death. With a life sentence, they argued, Tsarnaev would be locked away and forgotten. 'It will easily be a decade before the death sentence is even carried out,' [University at

Buffalo law professor, Charles] Ewing said.
 'People looking for closure are not going to get
 it. When it eventually happens, this will be way
 out of people's consciousness.'"

Nevada, our neighboring state

And now a little irony. It seems the Nevada
 Death Chamber is not in compliance with the
 Americans with Disabilities Act, so a joint
 Assembly and Senate budget subcommittee
 finds itself split 5-5 on whether or not to spend
 \$860,000 for a new one.

Nevada has not executed anyone since 2006, and
 for some reason 11 or 12 executions carried out
 by the State have been volunteers. Volunteers
 are inmates who chose not to exhaust their
 appeals, so maybe they do need to comply with
 the ADA.

Exoneration

May

4 Willie Manning (#153) MS
 Charges Dismissed
 Years after conviction: 19

Stays of Execution

May

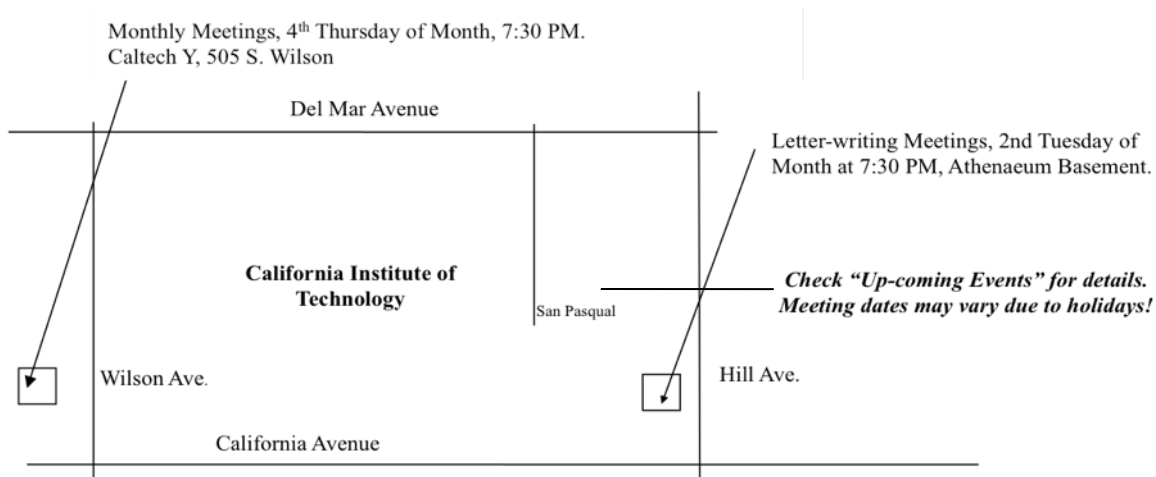
3	Rodney Berget	SD
8	Anthony Reid	PA
12	Kimber Edwards	MO
14	Jeffery Wogenstahl	OH
14	Gregory Lott	OH

Execution

May

12	Derrick Charles	TX
	Lethal Injection	1-drug (pentobarbital)

GROUP 22 MONTHLY LETTER COUNT	
UAs	15
Total	15
To add your letters to the total contact	
aigp22@caltech.edu	



From the 210 exit on Lake Avenue, head south, turn left on Del Mar
 From the 110 continue on Arroyo Parkway north, turn right on California
 Street parking is generally available.

Amnesty International Group 22
 The Caltech Y
 Mail Code C1-128
 Pasadena, CA 91125
www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>



Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.