

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XXV Number 4, April 2017

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, April 27, 7:30-9:00 PM. *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.) We will be planning our activities for the coming months. Alexi will update us on work for Narges Mohammadi, our adopted prisoner of conscience. Please join us! Refreshments provided.

Tuesday, May 9, 7:30-9:00 PM. *Letter writing meeting* at Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty.

Sunday, May 21, 6:30 PM. *Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group.* This month we read a novel, "*Driving the King*" by Ravi Howard.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone

This has been a busy month for Group 22 and other activists.

Alexi is the co-coordinator for the campaign to free Narges Mohammadi, our prisoner of conscience, in Iran. She brought daffodils to the March letter writing meeting (Narges apparently means daffodil in Farsi) and a group photo was taken with birthday greeting signs and participants holding daffodils. This was for a social media action along with other AI groups for Narges (more about this in article below).

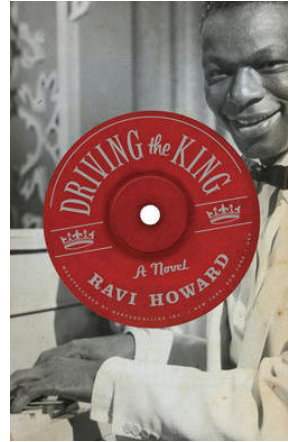
The march for science took place in downtown LA and Pasadena April 22, also Earth Day. Stevi, Paul, Veronica and others participated along with people all over the country. This was to refute the current administration's denial of climate change and threats to defund scientific and medical research.

Group 22 members also participated in actions against the pending executions of 7 men in Arkansas. As of today, I believe that 3 were executed. See the Death Penalty News below.

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GROUP 22 APRIL LETTER COUNT

Arkansas DP UAs	44
Other UAs	6
Total	50



Next Rights Readers Meeting

**Sunday, May 21,
6:30 PM**

**Vroman's Bookstore
695 E Colorado Blvd.
Pasadena**

Driving the King

**by
Ravi Howard**

BOOK REVIEW

By Marc Weingarten, LA Times, January 16, 2015

'Driving the King' a bold reimagining of civil rights era

In "Driving the King," Ravi Howard imagines what it might have been like if singer Nat King Cole had been a figurehead of the civil rights movement. Given that Cole was not a driving force during the civil rights era, Howard's choices in this fitfully moving novel are daring.

In Howard's version of the story, Nat Cole and his fictional driver, Nat Weary, are bound together by a single, wanton act of violence. During a Cole concert in Montgomery, Ala., the singer is attacked on stage by a white assailant, only to be rescued by Weary, who bludgeons the attacker with a microphone. For this act, he gets 10 years in Kilby prison and is subjected to all manner of deprivation, including bearing witness to the daily executions that take place in the prison yard: "We knew the chair was hot when the lights blinked once, twice, or maybe three times if the first jolt didn't finish a man."

A decade later, Weary is released into a world he still recognizes as segregated, but there are new energies stirring things up among his people back home in Montgomery. Some of these folks, including his ex-girlfriend Mattie, are involved in the famous bus boycott that began with Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat.

Howard is good at laying out the civil rights landscape as it was just beginning to take shape in the early '50s; there is much fear, uncertainty

and trepidation mixed in with the hope that things will invariably change for the better.

Cole doesn't forget what Weary did for him on that Alabama stage and takes him on as his factotum. Cole then decides that he will revisit Montgomery to finish the show that was cut short a decade earlier. (In point of fact, Cole, who had been attacked at a show in Birmingham, vowed never to play the South again.)

Howard intercuts scenes from the day leading to the concert with memories from Weary's past, a narrative gambit that doesn't always work. Individual scenes, such as Weary's attempted reconciliation with Mattie, the girl he was to marry before being incarcerated, are heartbreaking. But the lack of momentum and Howard's constant resetting of time and place mean the novel builds toward its conclusion by fits and starts.

Cole too remains curiously out of focus. There are only a handful of scenes involving the singer, and they are some of the strongest in the book, which leaves the reader wondering why he isn't more present. In one such scene Weary takes Cole back to the prison in Montgomery where Weary served time for the crime that saved Cole's neck. Cole, a man who is well aware that a few good turns of luck and talent have spared him places such as this, secretly tosses out packs of cigarettes from his car to some of Weary's old cellmates: "When we'd rounded a corner, beyond sight of the road guards and the towers, Nat started throwing while his music played. ...He was still a good shot, throwing menthol boxes along the prison road and finding the tallest clusters of chickweed where nobody would find what we'd left unless he knew where to look."

Although he is a beloved public figure, Cole isn't immune from the sting of Jim Crow. His new network TV variety show should be a triumph, but instead Cole scrambles for sponsors. At one point, Cole tapes his own promotional spot for the TV show out of his own pocket, tooling around Hollywood in an Alfa Romeo, because "they didn't advertise on U.S. television, so they'd never had a chance to turn him down."

The hard-won, incremental victories happening back in Weary's hometown have had little effect on Cole's career in Los Angeles; this giant talent

remains ostracized by a Hollywood power structure that profits from having someone like Pat Boone appropriate R&B songs for white audiences.

Considering how much license Howard takes with Cole's life story, the narrative is curiously inert, though not without its moments of grace and pathos. By giving Cole his due as an African American performer who struggled on his own at a time when no support structure existed to prop him up, Howard has done the great singer a solid. But the spectral nature of Cole's presence in "Driving the King" is ultimately an exercise in frustration. Nat Weary is a man out of time, thrust headlong into a burgeoning movement. Cole is a man out of the story's frame, out of reach and thus too inchoate to earn our compassion.

Weingarten's books "*Here She Comes Now*" and "*Thirsty*" will be published later this year.
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ravi Howard received the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence in 2008 for the novel *Like Trees, Walking*, a fictionalized account of a true story, the 1981 lynching of a black teenager in Mobile, Alabama. Howard was a finalist for both the Hemingway

Foundation/PEN Award and the Hurston-Wright Legacy Award for Debut Fiction in 2008.

He has recorded commentary for National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, and his work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Massachusetts Review* and *Callaloo*. He also appeared in the Ted Koppel documentary, *The Last Lynching*, on the Discovery Channel. Howard has received fellowships and awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, Hurston-Wright Foundation, Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

His television production work has appeared on HBO, ESPN, Fox Sports 1, and NFL Network. He received a 2004 Sports Emmy for his work on HBO's *Inside the NFL*.

Security with Human Rights

By Robert Adams

French human rights 'at tipping point' as state of emergency continues, says Amnesty International

By Lizzie Dearden: Reprinted from the UK Independent February 23, 2017

Human rights in France are at “a tipping point” as the government expands police powers in the wake of a wave of Isis-inspired terror attacks, a report has warned.

Parliament has voted to extend the country’s ongoing state of emergency five times since 130 people were massacred by militants in Paris in November 2015.

It affords security services exceptional powers including the ability to place anyone deemed to be a security risk under house arrest, dissolve groups thought to be a threat to public order, carry out searches without judicial warrants and block any websites that “encourage” terrorism.

Amnesty International chose to unveil its annual world report in Paris, where the group warned that human rights were being eroded.

Secretary General Salil Shetty said security measures approved by all French political parties had put the country at “a tipping point”.

“It’s absolutely the responsibility of the government to protect the people, but it has to be proportionate,” he added, speaking out against “traumatising house raids...all pointing towards one religion”.

Mr Shetty said Amnesty was very worried about ongoing security crackdown, which has seen more than 4,000 houses searched without a judge’s order and at least 400 people handed assigned residence orders.

“The world is watching France,” he added. The state of emergency is currently in place until 15 July, after France’s national elections, where terror and security is high on the agenda for mainstream candidates and the far-right National Front.

Bernard Cazeneuve, the Prime Minister, said the move was “absolutely necessary” to protect the country from further terror attacks.

The former interior minister said the state of emergency has “fully proven its effectiveness”

with 4,194 house searches leading to 517 suspects arrested, 434 kept in custody and almost 600 firearms seized, including 77 “weapons of war” under the powers.

But Amnesty accused authorities of using “vague evidence” to launch operations and impose restrictions “disproportionately restricting freedom of movement and the right to private life”.

The UN Committee against Torture raised concerns regarding allegations of excessive use of force by police carrying out searches, while a group of special rapporteurs warned “excessive and disproportionate restrictions” were being imposed on fundamental human rights.

They recommended the introduction of judicial oversight for counter-terror measures and electronic surveillance, which give authorities the power to collect, read and store communications and metadata without authorisation or review by a judge but the call was ignored.

A new law was passed in June granting the interior minister the power to impose administrative controls on anyone returning from Syria, Iraq and other conflict zones who is believed to be a threat.

Hundreds of people were prosecuted for allegedly glorifying terrorism, often for comments posted on social media in possible freedom of speech violations.

Several other European nations including the UK were criticised for embedding measures “once viewed as exceptional” into ordinary criminal law.

Amnesty’s report also raised concern over France’s treatment of refugees, including more than 6,500 migrants and asylum-seekers evicted from the Calais “Jungle” in October and relocated to reception centres elsewhere.

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

Judicial Override in Alabama

Good news and bad news come out of Alabama. Early in April, Governor Kay Ivey signed a bill to end judges’ ability to override juries’ recommendation of life without parole with a

sentence of death. Judges are elected in Alabama and many people observed an increased in these overrides to death sentences during election years. Alabama was the only state in the Union where judges had this power. Now though, a person can be sentenced to death with a jury vote of 10 to 12. Nonetheless, now judges will not use the death penalty as a voter getter in elections.

Rodricus Crawford

Since 1973 when the United States of America reinstated the death penalty, 157 people had been exonerated, until April 17, 2017 when Rodricus Crawford, an African-American, became the 158th exoneree.

In 2012, Mr Crawford's one-year-old son, Roderius Lott, died. Mr Crawford was arrested and charged in the child's death. A local doctor said the infant had been suffocated, even though autopsy results showed bronchopneumonia in the baby's lungs and sepsis in his blood. During appeal, Mr Crawford's lawyer, Cecilia Kappel, submitted additional evidence from experts in pediatric pathology, pediatric neuropathology, and pediatric infectious disease that the infant died of natural causes.

During the original trial, prosecutor Dale Cox removed jurors based on race, a pattern that has been documented in a 2015 study that found prosecutors struck black jurors at more than triple the rate of other jurors. Mr Cox is also on the record as saying Mr Crawford "deserves as much physical suffering as it is humanly possible to endure before he dies." He also has said that the state needs to "kill more people." Mr Cox used Christian scripture to support his claims about Mr Crawford. This prompted more than 100 religious leaders (ministers, bishops, rabbis, priests, other ordained clergy and religious leaders) to sign an amicus (friend of the court) brief objecting to what they called Mr Cox's misuse of the Bible to argue for putting Mr Crawford to death. Caddo Parish, where Mr Cox is prosecutor, is responsible for three-fourths of the death row convictions in Louisiana in the last five years.

Enjoy your freedom Rodricus Crawford and may you now grieve the death of your infant son.

Arkansas and their State Sanctioned Conveyor Belt to Executions

The prison system in Arkansas has a problem: the drugs used for lethal injection. The State's

supply of midazolam will expire the end of April. What did the State decide the solution to this problem was? Governor Asa Hutchinson decided that before the end of April employees at the Arkansas Department of Correction in Varner, Arkansas, would execute eight men in the course of eleven days.

One case, that of Bruce Ward, led to a stay. Mr Ward has suffered from life-long schizophrenia that rendered him incompetent for execution. He has no rational understanding of the punishment nor does he understand the reason he would be executed. Due to his delusions, he believes he will walk out of prison a free man and be rewarded with great acclaim and riches. He has spent nearly 30 years in solitary confinement.

The case of Ledell Lee worked its way to US Supreme Court where the Court voted 5-4 to allow his execution. This was the first vote of the newly sworn in justice, Neil Gorsuch, who voted with the majority. James Clark who is the Senior Death Penalty Campaigner at Amnesty International USA posted this on Facebook following Mr Lee's death at 11:56 PM:

Gorsuch's first vote is to allow the execution of a black man accused of murdering a white woman with untested DNA evidence, intellectual disability, horrific representation from intoxicated defense counsel, and a judge sleeping with the prosecutor, using a drug acquired illegally known to cause botched executions.

Mr Lee's requested last meal was Holy Communion.

People arriving at the Arkansas Department of Correction in Varner, Arkansas, are met with a sign that says

NEED A NEW CAREER?
APPLY CORRECTIONAL OFFICER
STARTING SALARY \$14.92

This was the first execution in Arkansas since 2005. For many of the correctional officers, this was their first execution.

John Grisham

John Grisham is an author who lives in Arkansas. April 10, 2017, an article by him appears in USA Today in which he takes to task the drugs used in executions, especially midazolam. He also points out that the condemned men have court appointed lawyers, some of whom they share. Thus it is impossible

for the lawyers to provide the comprehensive representation in the limited time they have with their clients. He says, "It is almost impossible to imagine what the men and women who are tasked with carrying out executions go through, particularly when confronted with one that does not go as planned. Two dozen former corrections officials and administrators recently sent a [letter to Hutchinson](#) asking him to reconsider the schedule, out of concern for the 'extraordinary and unnecessary stress and trauma' to the members of the execution team. Managing seven or eight rapid executions will be a brutalizing experience, even if there are no surprises."

As we know, at least one of the men has been put to death. Mr Grisham ends his article saying, "Even if Arkansas pulls it off, justice will lose."

A novel by Mr Grisham that may interest you is called "The Confession".

Recent Exonerations

Rodricus Crawford

State: LA Date of Exoneration: 4/17/2017

In 2013, Rodricus Crawford was sentenced to death for smothering his one-year-old son to death in Caddo Parish, Louisiana. Crawford was granted a new trial and the charges were ultimately dismissed based on evidence that the prosecution engaged in discriminatory jury selection and the baby died of sepsis.

Eric Wilson

State: VA Date of Exoneration: 3/21/2017

Eric Wilson was one of four U.S. Navy sailors (known as the Norfolk Four) convicted of a 1997 rape and murder in Norfolk, Virginia. He was exonerated in 2017 after the real killer confessed and Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe granted an absolute pardon.

Andrew Wilson

State: CA Date of Exoneration: 3/15/2017

In 1986, Andrew Wilson was sentenced to life in prison without parole for a murder in Los Angeles, California. He was exonerated in 2017 by evidence that witnesses lied at trial and that prosecutors and police concealed evidence pointing to another suspect. (source: The National Registry of Exonerations <http://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/featured.aspx>)

Stays of Execution

April

12	Raymond Tibbetts	OH (rescheduled)
12	Paul Storey	TX
17	Bruce Ward	AR
17	Don Davis	AR
20	Stacey Johnson	AR
20	Ledell Lee	AR (executed)
24	Jack Jones	AR (executed)
24	Marcel Williams	AR (executed)
25	Ivan Teleguz	VA (sentence commuted to life without parole)
27	Jason McGehee	AR

Executions

April

20	Ledell Lee	AR
	Lethal Injection 3-drug (midazolam)	

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

Narges Mohammadi

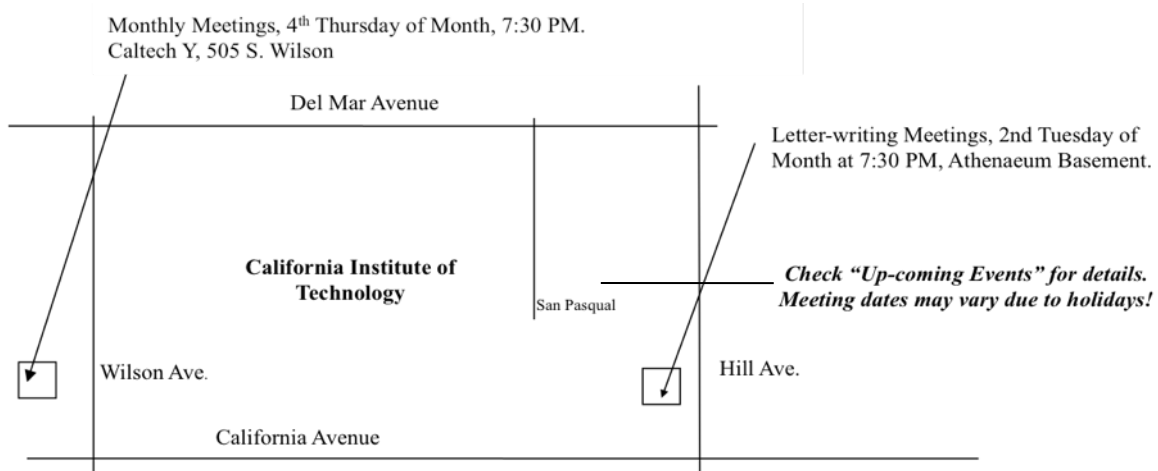
By Alexi Daher



The daffodils photo action [for Narges's birthday] was initiated by AI Denmark and supported by AI EU groups. I coordinated the action in the US. So, on April 21st, a stream of gorgeous photos were circulating on Twitter from all over the world, and our group photo was one of them. We were heavily supported by the Iranian community.

Groups that participated on this action were Group 22 (Caltech, Pasadena), Group 317 (Indianapolis), Group 151 (Boston), Group 47 (Portland), Group 139 (Wisconsin), and the Group from Nashville.

Our group will continue to work with local groups on Narges future actions. Group 317 is also working on the Bahai case in Iran and had asked for support. I can bring a copy of the petition to the next letter writing meeting.



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.