

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, May 25, 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'll share recent news of Amnesty human rights campaigns and plan future Group 22 actions. Please join us! Refreshments provided.

Tuesday, June 13, 7:30-9:00 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 next to the building. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty.

Sunday, June 18, 6:30 PM. *Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group.* This month we read "**The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu**" by Joshua Hammer.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone,

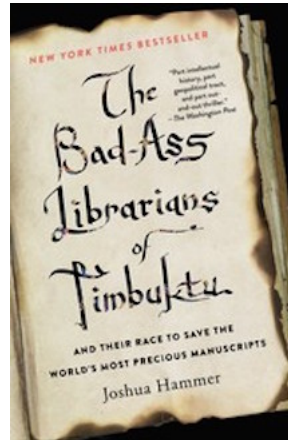
Kathy didn't have time to write the column this month, so here's a few notes from me (Joyce).

Amnesty USA announced a complete makeover of their website. Go to <http://amnestyusa.org> and see what you think. There's a little comment icon at the right which you can click and rate the new site. I'm not sure – perhaps I should try with a different browser, but I didn't much like the graphics – maybe I'm just being cranky.

One thing I really did like about the new website was that there's a tab right at the top for Urgent Actions, which will take you straight to a list of UAs, starting with the most recent. If you can't join us on the second Tuesday of the month for letter writing, you can download whichever UAs appeal to you and take action. Most have email or online options besides the traditional mailing addresses. Be sure and click on the link to report the actions you took!

And of course, the new website has icons at the bottom of the screen to Amnesty USA accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and even more social media. Follow! Enjoy!

That's all for now.
Joyce



Next Rights Readers Meeting

**Sunday, June 18,
6:30 PM**

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

The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu

by Joshua Hammer

BOOK REVIEW

By Ben MacIntyre, April 28, 2016, New York Times

**THE BAD-ASS LIBRARIANS OF TIMBUKTU
And Their Race to Save the World's Most Precious Manuscripts
By Joshua Hammer**

In the summer of 1826, a Scotsman named Alexander Gordon Laing became the first European to set foot in Timbuktu, a city that would become synonymous with mysterious remoteness. The inhabitants of Timbuktu would have been amused by the British imperialist assumption that their city had been "discovered." By the time Laing reached the place, it had been a thriving international center for centuries, the economic and intellectual heart of the sub-Saharan world, where travelers, traders and thinkers, -Africans, Berbers, Arabs, Tuaregs and others gathered to trade gold, salt, slaves, spices, ivory — and knowledge.

While Europe was still groping its way through the dark ages, Timbuktu was a beacon of intellectual enlightenment, and probably the most bibliophilic city on earth. Scientists, engineers, poets and philosophers flocked there to exchange and debate ideas and commit these to paper in hundreds of thousands of manuscripts written in Arabic and various African languages. The British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper once remarked: "There is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness." Timbuktu's staggering manuscript hoard is the most vivid proof of how wrong he was.

That ancient literary heritage, and the threat it faces from radical Islam, is the subject of Joshua Hammer's book "**The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu,**" part history, part scholarly

adventure story and part journalistic survey of the volatile religious politics of the Maghreb region. The title is quite irritating; the rest of it is very good.

Hammer delights in the explosion of medieval scholarship that took place in Timbuktu. By the 16th century, a quarter of the 100,000-strong population were students, drawn from as far away as the Arabian Peninsula. As one proverb puts it: "Salt comes from the north, gold from the south, and silver from the country of the white men, but the word of God and the treasures of wisdom are only to be found in Timbuctoo." As well as religious texts, those treasures included works of poetry, algebra, physics, medicine, jurisprudence, magic, mathematics, history, botany, geography and astronomy. Ethicists debated polygamy, usury, conflict resolution and the -morality of smoking. The thinkers of Timbuktu even compiled sex advice, as imaginative and unreliable in the 16th century as it is today: "The dried, pulverized penis of a lizard placed tenderly into honey then licked will let a man experience full sexual desire and satisfaction."

The city's scribes wrote in a variety of calligraphic styles, inks and colors: the African tradition of Hausa with thick brush strokes, the angled Kufic script from Persia and the curved and looping Maghrebi style. The city was a readers' paradise, its inhabitants "searching with a real passion for volumes they did not possess, and making copies when they were too poor to buy what they wanted." Eclectic scholarship thrived under the mystical, tolerant form of Sufism that dominated what is now Mali. The city, as Hammer puts it, was an "incubator for the richness of Islam." But the tradition of open-minded academic inquiry was also subject to periodic attack from bigots and looters, from bouts of anti-Semitism aimed at the city's substantial Jewish population, and the -anti-intellectual rigidity of successive waves of jihadis.

The history of Timbuktu, Hammer writes, is marked by "the confrontation between these two Islamic ideologies — one open and tolerant, the other inflexible and violent." Radical Islamists saw the manuscripts as heretical, and French colonial forces in the 19th century viewed them as plunder, and so another tradition emerged: that of concealment. The custodians of these priceless documents took to hiding them — inside their homes, in holes or in desert caves. Timbuktu's intellectual inheritance

was not only among the richest in the world, but also one of the most secret.

The hero of Hammer's story is Abdel Kader Haidara, inheritor and protector of a uniquely fine manuscript collection, a gentle, scholarly man who began gathering manuscripts in the 1980s on behalf of the Ahmed Baba Institute of Higher Learning and Islamic Research in Timbuktu. Over the course of two decades, Haidara and other dedicated antiquarians scoured the region, buying up ancient texts from remote villages. Hammer estimates that the intellectual patrimony of Timbuktu now amounts to a staggering 377,000 manuscripts. Then came the 21st-century jihadis, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the latest eruption of Islamic intolerance in the region. In March 2012, briefly combining forces with Tuareg rebels fighting for an independent homeland and armed with weapons from the collapsed Libyan regime of Muammar el-Qaddafi, they descended on Timbuktu.

Having driven out the government forces, the Islamists set about the now all-too-familiar process of religious cleansing, enforcement and destruction. The wide-ranging music selection on Timbuktu radio was replaced by uninterrupted Koranic verse, women were forced behind veils, men made to grow beards. Squads of enforcers ensured strict Sharia observance at the point of AK-47s; citizens who wore their pants too short, or allowed their cellphones to ring with Western tunes, or otherwise violated the minutiae of strict Islamism were liable to thrashing or worse. While the Islamists set about imposing their rules, Haidara and the other librarians undertook one of the greatest cultural evacuations in history: The manuscript collections were secretly packed into metal trunks, loaded onto mule carts, and hidden in private houses and then in the Malian capital, Bamako.

Hammer writes with verve and expertise, but there are two problems with the thriller tone that underpins his story. The first is the question of just how "bad-ass" Haidara really was. While his teams were removing manuscripts, he had evacuated himself to Bamako, offering coordination and encouragement from a distance. This is a perfectly acceptable decision for a middle-aged scholar with two wives and lots of children, but it doesn't quite make him Indiana Jones.

The level of threat posed to the manuscripts is also debatable. Like most terrorists, the forces of AQIM were on the whole very stupid. The Islamists' control of Timbuktu focused on wrecking the ancient Sufi shrines, mounting public amputations and boasting on Twitter; the finer points of the city's cultural heritage didn't seem to interest them, and as Hammer acknowledges, the manuscript collections were "mostly ignored" until the final stages of the occupation. In January 2013, 15 jihadis made a bonfire of 4,000 manuscripts at the Ahmed Baba Institute. But by that time many of the jewels of the collection were already in safekeeping, and the French military was preparing to oust AQIM in what would be an object lesson in the use of force against radical Islamist forces.

The great Timbuktu manuscript exodus may have been more prophylactic than urgently necessary, but it was a remarkable achievement, nonetheless, bringing together international funders, a network of smugglers and a handful of dedicated local curators. The exfiltration required careful cataloging of the collections, and this may be the most lasting legacy of the episode: The Islamists accidentally drew worldwide attention to Timbuktu's literary heritage, and enabled the first full accounting of its -magnificence.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/01/books/review/the-bad-ass-librarians-of-timbuktu-by-joshua-hammer.html>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Joshua Hammer was born in New York and graduated from Princeton University with a *cum laude* degree in English literature. He joined the staff of *Newsweek* as a business and media writer in 1988, and between 1992 and 2006 served as a bureau chief and correspondent-at-large on five continents. Hammer is now a contributing editor to *Smithsonian* and *Outside*, a frequent contributor to the *New York Review of Books*, and has written for publications including the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times Magazine*, *Vanity Fair*, the *Condé Nast Traveler*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the *Atavist*. He is the author of four nonfiction books, including *The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu*, and has won numerous journalism awards. Since 2007 he has been based in Berlin, Germany, and continues to travel widely around the world.

<http://www.simonandschuster.com/authors/Joshua-Hammer/19043478>

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

Good News from Philadelphia

Larry Krasner became the Philadelphia District Attorney. Mr. Krasner has never worked as a prosecutor but has worked as a civil rights and defense attorney who opposes both mass incarceration and the death penalty. Perhaps he can decrease the incarceration rate in Philadelphia which is the highest in the Northeast.

Even though Jefferson Beauregard Sessions, US Attorney General, indicates he would like to fill our prisons, including the private prisons, more, the example set by Mr. Krasner may encourage other cities and states to follow another path.

Executions in Arkansas

I know we all watched the recent mass executions in Arkansas with interest seasoned with more than a little horror. Originally, Governor Asa Hutchinson wanted to execute eight men quickly before the expiration dates on the lethal injection drugs arrived. In the end, "only" four out of the eight had 'justice served' with the executions of Ledell Lee, Jack Jones, Marcel Williams, and Kenneth Williams. These executions give us, once again, the opportunity to examine whether or not real justice is served.

Bryan Stevenson of the Equal Justice Initiative took the opportunity to remind us about what justice means. In an interview on NPR, Mr. Stevenson says, "[T]he state of Arkansas didn't carry out these executions because the process had worked to completion with the kind of reliability that we tend to want. They did it because they were concerned about a drug expiring." Let's think about this for a moment. It's not simply because these men had run out of appeals, but rather because the drug cocktail used to kill them would have gone past its 'used by' date. The 'justice' system of Arkansas had not executed anyone since 2005, but now because of the date on the drugs, Governor Asa Hutchinson felt the need to get on with State-sponsored murder.

The death penalty in the US is in decline. Since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976, 158 people have been released from death row after being proved innocent. According to Mr. Stevenson, that means for every nine people who have been executed, one has

been identified as innocent. He also believes that a conviction that involves the death penalty has more to do with the quality of the person's legal team than anything else. Additionally, the race of both the victim and the defendant play an important part in capital punishment cases with white victims and defendants who are people of color influencing the outcome of the sentencing.

Mr. Stevenson goes on to say, "And that's why for me the question of capital punishment in this country isn't 'do people deserve to die for the crimes they've committed?' The threshold question is, 'do we deserve to kill?'"

(If you have not seen Mr. Stevenson's TED talk, you can find it here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2tOp7OxyQ8>)

Kenneth Williams

One of the men executed in Arkansas is Kenneth Williams. During Mr. Williams' execution "witnesses reported that Kenneth Williams lurched violently against the leather straps that bound him to the gurney 20 times, followed by "[h]eavy breathing — a striving for air — for the next three minutes." Governor Hutchinson dismisses an investigation into Mr. Williams' death by saying he thinks it's "totally unjustified."

What I think makes Mr. Williams's execution noteworthy is the letter sent to Governor Hutchinson from Kayla Greenwood, the daughter of the man murdered by Mr. Williams. In this letter, Ms Greenwood, who was five when her father was killed, says, "It would be dishonest to say that this is an easy thing to do. It is not. When he took my father from us, Mr Williams caused us all a great deal of pain. We still miss him and we still hurt. That does not mean that asking you spare Mr Williams is not the right thing to do. It is." Ms Greenwood goes on to talk about how Mr. Williams has a daughter who is Ms Greenwood's age and who wanted to see her father one more time, so she'd started a Go Fund Me page to raise the money for the trip. This is what Ms Greenwood then says, "My family paid for Jasmine (Mr. Williams's daughter) and her daughter's flight, picked them up at the airport and drove them to the prison. Yesterday, I waited outside the prison while Jasmine and her daughter visited with Mr Williams. Watching her leave the prison and knowing that was probably their last goodbye broke my heart. Jasmine had done nothing at all but like me, she could lose her father. If Mr Williams is executed, her loss, her

pain will be as real as mine. I do not wish this on anyone."

Ms Greenwood goes on to talk about what she'd learned about Mr. Williams. She says, "Jasmine told me that when she saw her father and talked to him she knew he was a different man. He was a man of love and gratitude for the opportunity to say his last goodbye. I have come to learn that he is man who counsels and helps people who may be in a dark place because they never felt love, or were victims of a horrible upbringing that caused trauma and hurt.

Because he once knew that same dark place, Mr Williams could connect and show people that from even the darkest of places, you can always come out and change and help others to see right from wrong. Being there for others, no matter what, and showing what true pure unconditional love is and feels like, that is the closest we can get to God in this physical world. I know Mr Williams has and will change people he meets for the better and alive, he can make a positive difference and I believe that is the most beautiful story of justice."

Ms Greenwood finishes her letter to Governor Hutchinson saying, "My family also requested an opportunity to meet with Mr Williams but it was denied. We just wanted to tell him that we forgave him and thought it was important to do that face to face. It would be one way for us to get closure. We would still like to do that. We would also like to meet with you. If we met, you would know that our wishes are sincere. If we sat and talked about loss and forgiveness from where we sit, you might also forgive Mr Williams and spare his life."

Instead of sparing Mr. Williams's life and giving Ms Greenwood and her family the opportunity "to get closure", Kelly P. Kissel of the Associated Press said, "Mr. Williams was 'coughing, convulsing, lurching, jerking' after the state began to administer midazolam, which is intended to render a prisoner unconscious and insensate before the use of painful lethal injection drugs.

'This is my 10th execution,' Mr. Kissel said. 'This is the first time I've seen that.'

According to Mr. Kissel, Mr. Williams lurched 20 times — 15 of them in rapid succession — and emitted sounds that could be heard in the adjacent witness room. By then, a microphone in the execution chamber had been switched off. The unnerving moments concluded before a consciousness check. Mr. Williams was pronounced dead 13 minutes after the lethal injection drugs began

flowing, an execution length that was not unusually long.”

And yet Governor Hutchinson believes an investigation is “totally unjustified.” The question remains: “Was justice served?”

Recent Exonerations

William Negrón - State: IL

- Date of Exoneration: 4/14/17

In 1995, William Negrón and Roberto Almodovar were convicted of killing two people and injuring a third in a drive-by shooting in Chicago, Illinois and were sentenced to life in prison without parole. They were exonerated in 2017 after the evidence showed the witnesses were told who to select by a police detective.

Adam Gray - State: IL - Date of Exoneration: 5/3/17

In 1996, Adam Gray was sentenced to life in prison for setting a fire when he was 14 that killed two people in Chicago, Illinois. He was exonerated in 2017 after a witness who said that she sold him gasoline shortly before the fire recanted her testimony and experts concluded that the evidence of arson at his trial was invalid.

(source: <https://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration>)

Stays of Execution

April

27 Jason McGehee AR

May

10 Alva Campbell, Jr OH
rescheduled for 9/13/17

10 Ronald R. Phillips OH
rescheduled for 7/26/17

16 Tilon Carter TX

17 Donald Ketterer OH

24 Juan Castillo TX
rescheduled for 9/7/17

Recent Executions

April

24 Jack Jones AR
Lethal Injection 3-drug (midazolam)

24 Marcel Williams AR
Lethal Injection 3-drug (midazolam)

27 Kenneth Williams AR
Lethal Injection 3-drug (midazolam)

May

17 J.W. Ledford Jr GA
Lethal Injection 1-drug (Pentobarbital)

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE Narges Mohammadi

By Joyce Wolf

Alexi has keeping up to date with the work being done for Narges on social media by groups in Europe and in the US.

On May 19, Alexi emailed,
"Dear supporters of Narges and Iranian prisoners of conscience,
Please join the tweetstorm today!

I received an email yesterday informing that Narges's husband has announced that she and other prominent female prisoners have asked to be able to vote today.

Wishing the best for the Iranian people today,
Alexi"

FreeNarges@UnitedforNarges tweeted on May 20 with the following photo:

"Narges Mohammadi (in green) & other political prisoners voted for @Rouhani_ir yesterday in Evin prison. #FreeThem #FreeNarges #iranelection"

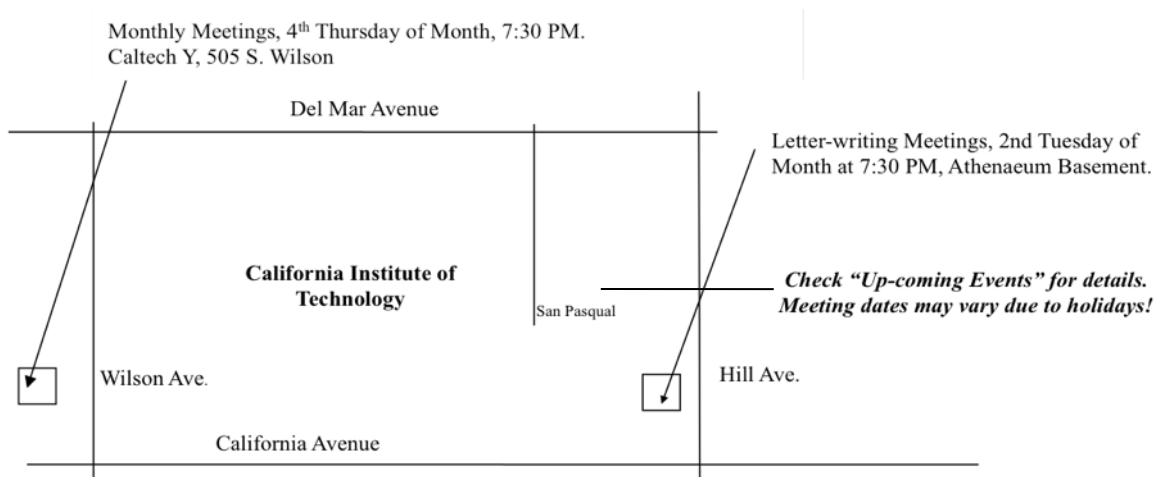


Incumbent President Hassan Rouhani has indeed been declared the winner of the election.

Our group will continue to work with Amnesty local groups on future actions for Narges and other prisoners of conscience in Iran. Group 317 in Indianapolis is working on the case of the seven Bahai prisoners and has asked for support, so we are collecting signatures on their petition.

GROUP 22 MAY LETTER COUNT

UAs	25
Total	25



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.