



IN THE DOMINION OF THE LEASH

ColdType

JOE BAGEANT

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J O E B A G E A N T

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HERE ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE TRACKS, IN PLACES LIKE FORT ASHBY OR WINCHESTER, VIRGINIA, A HOMELY GIRL WITH A LEASH IS RELATIVELY SPEAKING, AN ANGEL – ALBEIT THE ANGEL OF OUR BRUTISH DISREGARD



“Good for you, Lynndie England, you chinless, inbred, runty, androgynous backwoods mutt! When you mimed a crotch-shot at that hooded detainee, you reminded us all of what Imperial service should be like: one long S&M tour of the tropics, where every man, woman and child of the conquered peoples exists solely as an object for your pleasure.”

- John Dolan, columnist for the website “Exile”

When I saw the above arrogant, piece of witty horseshit, I wanted to go strangle John Dolan myself. Then I came back to the realization that all writing is masturbation, mine included, and that some of us do it with our eyes closed – as John Dolan does. If he had even one eye open he would have seen the pathos and national hypocrisy represented by “the girl with the leash.”

Lynndie England never had a chance. Abu Ghraib, or maybe something even worse (an RPG up the shorts, for instance) was always her destiny. Nearly half of the 800 Americans killed in Iraq to date came from small towns like hers, like mine. Forty-six percent of the American dead in Iraq came from

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towns of less than 40,000. Yet these towns make up only 25% of our population. Most of the young soldiers were fleeing economically depressed places, or dead end jobs like Lynndie had at the chicken processing plant. These so-called volunteers are part of this nation's de facto draft – economic conscription. Money is always the best whip to use on the laboring classes. Thirteen hundred a month, a signing bonus and free room and board sure beats the hell out of yanking guts through a chicken's ass.

And there are those big bucks for college later. Up to \$65,000. Lynndie was supposedly going to college after her enlistment to become a “storm chaser,” like in the Helen Hunt movie “Twister.” Yeah, right. There are millions of openings in the tornado chasing business. And I'm going to be the centerfold in the next Playgirl beefcake issue. I suppose lots of poor kids do go to college on their military benefits. But personally speaking, I can count the number I know who actually did it on one hand. Let's be honest here: graduating from a small town redneck white high school not knowing where Alaska is on a map of the US is not exactly the path to the fountain at Harvard Yard. But I suspect that down inside Lynndie knew her lot in life from the start – she wore combat boots and camo outfits to high school. Swore she loved it. If you are doomed to eat shit, you may as well bring your own fork.

I grew up poor in Winchester, Virginia, about as poor as the pin-up girl of Abu Gharab, a moreover scabby rundown town about forty miles from Lynndie's ancestral mobile home over there in Fort Ashby, West Virginia. Sometimes I walk the street on which I grew up, across the railroad tracks that have divided the classes here since before the Civil War. And when I look around I see the likes of Lynndie everywhere ... girls of the type I dated as a kid. They are all fatter, thanks to the fast food that was unavailable in my youth, but they are the same cigarette-smoking, in-your-face white girls I knew then, the tough daughters of the unwashed. Here in my old neighborhood, over one quarter of adults do not have a high school diploma, and there are lots of yellow ribbons in the windows just like the one on Lynndie England's family trailer, for those serving in Iraq or elsewhere on the far-flung perimeter of our expanding empire of blood and commerce.

Lynndie Rana England was born in 1982. I have a son her age. Like my son, she graduated high school in 2001. Folks in Fort Ashby say she did well in school, which

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is no great achievement in these places where the academic bar is set so damned low it is buried in the ground in hopes that any student who bothers to even attend school will meander across it. Then true to local form she got married at age 19. I'm sure she married mostly out of smalltown boredom. I got married that way once, though I've got sense enough now to be positively embarrassed to tell you how young I actually was. Anyway, Lynndie is now in a "relationship" with a fellow reserve unit member and is now pregnant at 21 and facing a possible prison term. I wonder if she still thinks much about chasing tornadoes like Helen Hunt.

To talk about Lynndie's class you have to talk about that other class, her betters. The class that would not piss on her if her shirt were on fire – the flag people. The kind who smirk at "the mutt girl." I live among them now, on a street where the American flag hangs from nearly every Antebellum or Georgian or Greek Revival front porch, in the part of town where every man is a business man, solidly "patriotic." All went to college and few if any have been in the armed services. The regional tire distribution kingpin across the street from me (who is also a Republican city councilman with, they tell me, a contract for the city's vehicles) flies his flag. Next door the local office supply hotwire (former mayor and born-again chairman of the city GOP) flies two flags, one American and one of his alma mater. The bigtime landlord up the street, another steel bottomed Republican, flies her colors. She, too, is on council and her daughter is state GOP chairman to boot. Next house down is the daughter of a mogul hard-right-wing developer. She has never worked a day in her life; Daddy just bought her a half million dollar home. They are all waving a flag. They are all super GOPers and shitting in the tall cotton.

Waving a flag and making a mint. What the folks on the "good streets" understand but never say is that America's class war is over and they, the business class, won. Now they can sit back and be outraged by the pics of an ignorant girl in the testosterone choked air of an American torture chamber. They won on the backs of the other nine tenths in these non-union towns where the annual wage is less than three-quarters of the national average. And they won because god wants it that way. Their families got here first and stole early. Their daddies stole land from farmers during the Depression and they made millions later selling it to Walmart, the new medical center, and all those low wage non-union factories (after conveniently rezoning it to suit their interests while on city council.) Contrary to

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common belief, the bedrock of this nation's rip-off by the rich is in the small and medium sized towns, where the so-called "small" business associations have a direct phone line to the state capital, where they can stymie any increase in minimum wage or snuff anything even remotely resembling a fair tax structure. And if Lynndie England wants a piece of their American pie, well, she can start in the Army reserves by posing for mock crotch shots in the belly of Abu Ghraib, then claw her way up from there. Just like their great granddaddies did.

My hometown friend and drinking buddy, Richard, is an heir to an old line real estate fortune in the tens of millions (and is a fourth generation city council member, naturally.) He says there is absolutely nothing wrong with this system. I say there is absolutely nothing right with it. And as long as I keep my proper place in the scheme of things, and he continues to be able to hold his liquor (because I sure as hell can't) I suppose we'll go to our graves remaining fairly civil about what we both know is the injustice of it all. You won't ever see any of his privately schooled kids eating MREs in Iraq. Nor any of mine, if I can possibly help it. But for opposing reasons. He's raising his kids to rule in the New Republican World Order and I raised mine to be resistance fighters against that same order.

We've seen the shy and pretty blonde Jessica Lynch exploited as a fake hero rescued from the swarthy hand of the godless Muslim. We've seen the not-so-pretty, coarse Lynndie forced to pose for bondage torture flick, then be publicly scourged in the name of some corrupt justice understood only by those powerful men whose fancy was tickled by an unlawful military attack and occupation. I simply do not see how even a morally and philosophically bereft country such as ours can come up with another way to exploit graphic images of women at war.

Whatever the case, in the end, Lynndie will get some bucks out of all this, if she has not already, from her Today Show appearance, or maybe the book deal, or the movie that will come along to feed our national lust for pain made visible. What the lawyers do not take from her, she had better save. But I suspect she won't. What do you want to bet that her alleged future hubby, Charles Graner, won't want a \$50,000 truck and a super bass boat, or that she won't waste enough of it by her very own petite self? I've seen it a thousand times. Hell, I've done it. It's a white trash gene. But things could be worse. She could go to prison if our commander-in-chief has his way (the same commander-in-chief who once called Africa a country,

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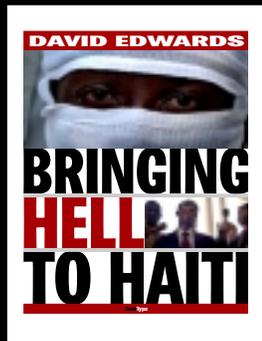
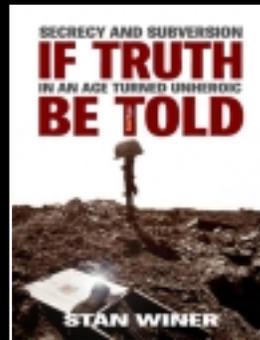
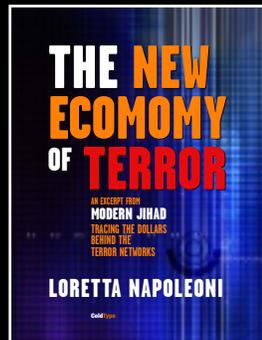
and he didn't even go to school in West Virginia). Or worse yet, she could find religion and be West-by-god-Virginia "saved," a sure road to zombie trailer trash hell if ever there was one.

But hold there, hoss! The Lynndie England show is by no means over yet. As I write, a dozen committees are excavating for the truth about Abu Ghraib. And they remind us that we do not yet know the "full facts." We will not know them until they are done being manufactured by the administration and its stacked committees. And they are stacked. Stacked if for no other reason because the lawyers and politicians doing the judging never received orders to pose for war porn on behalf of a savage, pitiless republic, or faced the prospect of a stomach-turning chicken plant as their destiny. They do not understand that here on the wrong side of the tracks, in places like Fort Ashby or Winchester, Virginia, here in the dominion of the whip, a homely girl with a leash is relatively speaking, an angel – albeit the angel of our brutish disregard.



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