



# Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

## Boston Strong and Boston Wrong

Posted by James Alan Fox, Crime and Punishment May 9, 2013 10:45 AM

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Earlier this week I published an [opinion column in USA Today](#) about how the controversy over where to bury “ or if to bury the corpse of a suspected terrorist had turned Boston Strong into Boston Wrong. □ The pride I had felt as a native Bostonian for the heroism demonstrated by so many public officials and ordinarily citizens after the marathon bombings was being eclipsed by shame and embarrassment for those who refuse to treat a dead body as a dead issue.

As I should have expected, the venom and vulgarity directed at the deceased Tsarnaev brother were redirected my way as soon as my words appeared in print. Just because I supported the fundamental decency of a burial, I was supposedly in support of the reprehensible act that the deceased had allegedly committed in life. That Tamerlan Tsarnaev behaved inhumanely apparently meant that we Bostonians had to act in kind -- in a manner that is anything but kind. My expression of compassion arguing that the family be allowed to grieve without protestors chanting for desecration of the remains was met with all sorts of ugliness and profanity, veiled threats and personal attacks, even messages of denunciation sent to my colleagues and co-workers.

Notwithstanding my position on the matter, I do respect the right for anyone to resist and resent the idea of having Tsarnaev's body buried in our land. It is the disgraceful way in which they demonstrate their point of view that offends me.

I truly understand and appreciate why many folks want nothing to do with the corpse of a man who apparently hated America and our way of life. I recognize the insulting irony to having him remain within our borders, even if underground. That does not, however, justify this less-than-silent minority from turning on their neighbors with such hostility. Fundamental to our way of life is the freedom of expression. No one should be assailed for their words or beliefs so long as they do not threaten public safety. I fail to see how advocating for human decency -- even for someone like Tsarnaev who came nowhere close to that standard -- should threaten anyone.

In the wake of terrorist attacks, it is important that we not forfeit our civil rights, nor our sense of civility. There are people around the world who perceive us as ugly Americans. We should strive not to confirm those unfair stereotypes. If we are to remain a strong city in the strongest nation on the planet, then we should never suspend our morality and compassion just because some now-deceased terrorist did.

For the benefit of those halfway-readers who would interpret my position as sympathy for the devil, let be by crystal clear: I shed no tears for Tamerlan Tsarnaev. My sadness is for how so many Bostonians have responded in the past few days over attempts to bury some skin and bones. Although the man may have been dangerous and evil, the corpse is of no threat to us.

With the news that Tsarnaev's body has been laid to rest somewhere outside of Massachusetts, hopefully this unfortunate battle can be put to rest as well. To me, it seemed beneath us to block efforts to put Tsarnaev in the ground beneath us. But It was certainly beneath us for people to attack neighbors because of their sense of righteousness.

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**4:00 pm Update:** *In the few hours since this blog post went live, my e-mail inbox has been graced with no fewer than fifty messages indicating the sender's agreement with my observations. This, of course, is in addition to the many readers who have posted positive comments online. I wish I could share with you some of the encouraging and thoughtful expressions of human compassion and decency that were sent my way. Many have stated the case far more powerfully than I could have. I plan to acknowledge each one privately, but wanted to make this public statement of gratitude as well. My faith has been fortified: Bostonians Strong. Now that the burial controversy is done, let us get back to the more critical business of protecting our freedoms of speech, ideas and assembly. Were we to yield these precious rights in any way, our enemies would win.*