

# Amy Biehl: A White Liberal on the Dark Continent

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News events and political interpretations of news events rarely coincide exactly. Life is generally messy and complicated, whereas political analysis aims, often legitimately, to simplify life's complexity into a coherent pattern with a convincing political meaning.

Consider, briefly, the case of Wyoming's Matthew Shepard, a central figure in the American Left's ongoing propaganda campaign against the alleged evils of "homophobia."

Shepard was HIV-positive on the night he propositioned, in a Laramie bar, two heterosexual men for sex. That inconvenient fact detracts from the political narrative of his martyrdom at the hands of intolerant homophobes, which is why the liberal media, the principal agents of the campaign against "intolerance" and "homophobia," seldom mention it. Anyone who knows about Shepard's HIV-status will also know that he was, in effect if not intention, inviting his prospective sex partners to share his own self-inflicted death sentence. If they had complied with his request for homosexual sex, they would have eventually died from AIDS, just as Shepard himself was destined eventually to die from AIDS, had his killers not ended his life first. An inconvenient fact that doesn't fit the media's political agenda has therefore been excluded from almost all journalistic accounts of the event.

Shepard's murder is, nonetheless, broadly congruent with the political interpretation it has now received, the anti-homophobic narrative into which it has been shaped. Shepard died, clearly, because his murderers disliked homosexuals and visited their distaste for homosexuality upon him; he would not have died if most heterosexual men did not find sexual propositions from homosexuals offensive. He therefore died because of homophobia. If we stand back from our own biases, even those of us who share the traditional distaste ("homophobia") for gay sexual practices must concede that the Left's interpretation of Shepard's murder is reasonable. We could probably see ourselves exploiting the same politically simplified version of the event, without much ethical hesitation, if we held the same political views that its promoters hope to inculcate. An inconvenient fact had to be suppressed in

order to make Shepard's murder serve its leftist political purpose, but life rarely provides the same clarity as propaganda.

The death of Amy Biehl is an exception, one of those rare cases where mere recitation of all the facts should be sufficient to demonstrate a convincing political meaning. But in the case of Biehl's murder the political meaning with which her story is now endowed is the exact opposite of what the bare facts would lead any rational, unbiased observer to conclude. Biehl has become a symbolic martyr to the cause of multiracial democracy both in South Africa, where she died at the hands of a savage Black mob, and in the United States, where she had acquired her naive multiracialist ideals, specifically her hopelessly misguided faith in the possibility of democratic self-government by savage Black mobs.

Amy Elizabeth Biehl, by all accounts a talented, intelligent woman, arrived in South Africa in 1993 as an exchange student on a Fulbright Fellowship and was continuing her Ph.D. studies in political science at the mainly Black University of the Western Cape. She left Stanford, where she had received her earlier degrees, for South Africa with anti-racialist political objectives in mind. She wanted to fight apartheid, which she passionately opposed, and accordingly spent much of her time registering Black voters in South Africa's first all-race elections, scheduled for April of 1994, which would hand over political control of the country to its Black majority.

Biehl would have acknowledged, openly and proudly, that she was working against her own race and on behalf of another race, the Black race. That was the principal ideological source of her now celebrated idealism. She wanted to fight White "racism"; she wanted to help its supposed Black victims.

On August 25, 1993, Biehl was driving three Black companions through Cape Town's Guguletu Township. A mob of toyi-toying supporters of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), fresh from a raucous political meeting, attacked her car, pelting it with stones and smashing its windows while shouting "One settler, one bullet," a PAC slogan popular among South African Blacks, "settler" being a synonym for a White South African. Biehl was struck in the head with a brick and, bleeding heavily, dragged from her vehicle. As she tried to flee, stumbling, across the road, she was surrounded by a throng of Blacks who repeatedly kicked, stoned, and stabbed her. The fatal wound, among many, came from

a knife, buried to its hilt, that entered under her ribs and ended in her heart.

It is now claimed by her eulogists that Biehl died bravely. But the truth is that she didn't. She died begging for her life. No one can blame her, of course, but the story of Amy's bravery is just a pious lie. She died as most of us would die under similar circumstances -- a degrading, abject death, beseeching her tormentors for mercy, but receiving none.

Four of Biehl's assailants, from among the dozen or so who attacked her, were arrested and convicted, but in July of 1998, in the wake of apartheid's demise, they were released from prison, on the ground that the motive for her murder had been political. The killers had believed that her death would help end apartheid, Desmond Tutu's Truth and Reconciliation Commission concluded. She was, as the Commission further observed, simply a representative White in the wrong place at the wrong time. As one of the killers testified: "We were in very high spirits and the White people were oppressive; we had no mercy on the White people. A White person was a White person to our eyes."

Amy's father, demonstrating how thoroughly he shared his daughter's anti-racist convictions, shook hands with her murderers and encouraged their release. Peter Biehl told reporters: "We hope they will receive the support necessary to live productive lives in a non-violent atmosphere. In fact, we hope the spirits of Amy and of those like her will be a force in their new lives." Two of the freed killers were, however, subsequently accused of rape, a common pastime in the "New South Africa," and have since fled prosecution; Amy's parents selflessly assumed the White man's burden and befriended the other two. Doubtless Amy herself would have befriended her father's killers, had he been killed by a Black mob instead of her. Such is the nature of anti-racist idealism: It thrives on the most outrageous violations of normal human loyalties.

In itself a single case, like Matt Shepard's or Amy Biehl's, proves nothing, no matter how compelling. At most it only provides a face and a specific life history for a larger factual argument, which should either succeed or fail on the basis of its intrinsic merits and on the weight of evidence its advocates can convincingly adduce, not on the emotions the face and specific life history evoke. But if Amy Biehl's death, taken in isolation from other facts, demonstrates anything, it is surely *not* the likelihood of successful Black government in post-apartheid South Africa. Not

even the most delusional liberal, one would think, could possibly draw that meaning from the brutal racial killing of a defenseless, anti-racist White woman. Yet that, nevertheless, is the significance her murder, remarkably, has been assigned. The death of Amy Biehl represents, in the eyes of her hagiographers, a meaningful sacrifice to the noble cause of racial harmony and multiracial democracy, now well on their way to realization in the New South Africa. It is a political interpretation that requires, much like anti-racism itself, an almost supernatural ability to overlook pertinent facts.

"In her death," Peter Biehl now imagines, "Amy created ... a new consciousness of the depths of human denial and of the raw potential of a free nation." Accordingly the Amy Biehl Foundation has been established to continue what Biehl's parents call "Amy's unfinished legacy": American school children are indoctrinated in the purported but highly implausible "lesson" of Amy's life -- that "a single person can make a difference," just like Amy ostensibly did; musical instruments are distributed to budding Black South African musicians; cosmetics and perfumes are, perhaps quixotically, distributed in Amy's name to needy women in the Black townships and squatter camps; more substantively, training programs for Blacks are funded, in which two of Amy's killers participate, at the moment successfully; a bakery has been established, selling "Amy's Bread -- the bread of hope and peace."

### **Eulogies for Saint Amy**

"She made our aspirations her own and lost her life in the turmoil of our transition as the new South Africa struggled to be born in the dying moments of apartheid." (Nelson Mandela)

"... as she went through her days we saw that she embodied the ideal of making a difference; of living a life with meaning and impact. In truth, the way that Amy lived her life just as much as the way she lost her life gave that life special meaning. She believed that all people have value; that the disadvantaged have special claim on the lives of the more fortunate and that racial justice and racial harmony were ideals worth fighting for and living for and, if need be, dying for." (Secretary of State Madeleine Albright)

"Millions of individuals of all races and backgrounds in the United States and around the world followed Nelson Mandela's example and fought for the abolition of apartheid in the Republic of South Africa, and in this regard, the Congress especially recognizes Amy Elizabeth Biehl, an American student who lost her life in the struggle to free South Africa from racial oppression ...." (Senator Carol Moseley-Braun)

"In the township she loved she died for the cause she embraced with heart and soul and so her Spirit lived! ... A divine grace creates through agony and pain a profound transfiguration: Weakness to Strength, Fear to Hope, Anger to Joy, Hatred to Love. She will live with us again. " (Internet poet William Davis, author of "Amy Biehl Lives")

The obvious problem with the anti-racialist interpretation of Biehl's martyrdom is, of course, that the wrong people martyred her. That is not merely a small and thus dispensable "inconvenient fact" intruding itself into an otherwise convincing liberal narrative, starring Amy as the bearer of hope and peace for a "New South Africa." It is, rather, central to the event: She died, as a representative White, so that people like her killers could govern people like herself, her fellow Europeans, her racial kinsmen.

Black violence is also central, very tangibly, to the Black-governed South Africa that Biehl worked, in her own modest way, to create. Her death at the hands of a Black mob was not unusual in 1993. Exactly a month earlier PAC terrorists, practicing their own brand of anti-apartheid activism, had massacred congregants in a White Church with grenades and rifle fire, killing eleven and wounding fifty-eight, a portent of the even greater violence that majority-rule would soon unleash. The "New South Africa" is, with twenty-seven thousand murders per year, the most dangerous place on earth.

It can also boast of more rapes per capita than any other country; a South African woman is now raped every twenty-six seconds, about forty percent of the victims enduring sadistic gang rapes (or "jackrolling," as its Black practitioners call it) . White farmers, in concrete enactments of the venerable ANC slogan "Kill the Boer, kill the farmer," are now regularly tortured and murdered in brutal, often horrifyingly brutal attacks on their isolated rural homes; farming is thus statistically post-apartheid South Africa's most dangerous profession. Carjackings are now so routine that motorists run red lights rather than risk stopping their vehicles, armed robberies likewise so routine that only in exceptional circumstances do the media bother to report them. Suburban Whites now cower at night behind barred windows, which of course do little to protect them from home invasions, and the more affluent are retreating to fortified enclaves, away from exploding crime in South Africa's formerly First World cities.

All of this, along with an accelerating economic collapse, was predictable and was in fact vocally predicted by White defenders of apartheid, who knew what "multiracial democracy" would mean for their people. With average IQs in the low 70s,

most sub-Saharan Africans are mentally retarded by European standards and thus incapable of either creating or maintaining an advanced, Western society. Black-governed South Africa is simply descending, gradually but inexorably, to the primitive level of the rest of Black Africa. That's what everyone, including Amy Biehl, should have expected.

Biehl selected South Africa for her benevolent ministrations, rather than Rwanda or Sierra Leone, because she recognized that it was the continent's only successful economy. Her parents report:

Amy used to tell us that Africa was the "continent of the future." Amy was drawn by the numerous democratic struggles throughout the continent. She knew that these emerging democracies would awaken and transform a sleeping giant. She recognized that -- because of its economic sophistication and developed infrastructure -- a democratic South Africa could become the dominant player in an African transformation. This realization -- coupled with the depth and breadth of human rights abuse -- took Amy to South Africa.

Comment should be superfluous. Black Africa has, needless to say, not a single genuine "emerging democracy" and not even a single functioning nation-state. Somehow Amy Biehl, a Ph.D. student in political science, failed to grasp that South Africa's "economic sophistication and developed infrastructure" were products of the Whites who governed it and the Whites who, under apartheid, comprised its citizenry.

In the early 1990s, while White liberal activists, assisted by their more sanguinary Black colleagues, worked busily for the dispossession of South African Whites from the homeland that their ancestors had built, the economic output of all of sub-Saharan Black Africa, with a population of about six hundred million, was less than Sweden's, population eight million. Then, as now, eighteen of the world's twenty poorest nations were in Black Africa. Then, as now, Black Africa -- which under European colonialism had produced ninety-eight percent of its food requirements -- was the world's largest recipient of food aid. Then, as now, Black Africa was plagued with endemic hunger, disease, violence and war. Apartheid South Africa, governed by its hated White minority, was the only sub-Saharan exception, the only success story on the entire Dark Continent. But in six short years Black misgovernment has turned South Africa into just another Black failure.

Anti-racialism is more a religious faith than a set of political convictions. Hence the virtual irrelevance of facts in the minds of its most dedicated votaries. White-governed South Africa, like White-governed Rhodesia before it, was always an attractive target for liberal activists, because the very presence of Whites enabled them to ascribe, to their own satisfaction at least, Black poverty and violence to White malevolence. Most deliberately closed their eyes to the fact of Black Africa's manifest failure elsewhere and willed themselves to believe that a Black-governed South Africa would, miraculously, become the continent's sole exception. Although they knew the abundant evidence that indicated otherwise, they chose, in their own anti-racist version of Orwellian double-think, to allow their knowledge to remain inert, with no effect on their equalitarian beliefs, in order that their ideals could remain uncontaminated by evidence.

Should deracinated liberals receive a moral pass for a willed failure to notice the utterly obvious? And wasn't the eruption, in a very physical form, of obvious racial realities into a life devoted to delusional anti-racist activism really the most striking feature of Biehl's brutal murder? The legend of Amy Biehl implausibly claims that her death was a significant sacrifice for a worthy objective. But in simpler and far more convincing terms she was just a naive liberal do-gooder who received, fatally, an unmerited but unsurprising lesson in the real world's indifference to idealistic fantasies.