

## ***Dirty Harry & "The Thin Blue Line"***

by Earl P. Holt III

Clint Eastwood's masterful film ***Dirty Harry*** is a modern remake of (or *homage* to) the 1952 film ***High Noon***, starring Gary Cooper. In both instances, these lawmen are "***the thin blue line***" standing between psychotic murderers and the innocent public both men are sworn to protect and serve.

Yet, both are repeatedly betrayed by the very people whose cooperation is essential to help protect the public from a murderous and psychotic rampage. In this regard, both films are a metaphor for the difficulties traditionally facing law enforcement. They demonstrate how those who should be assisting law enforcement often lack cooperation, and make the job of protecting the public an increasingly difficult task.

On a larger scale, both films are also a study in human nature: they illustrate how most individuals in a free society tend to underestimate serious external threats and engage in denial. Both demonstrate how creative human nature can be when rationalizing one's own timidity and inaction, particularly when action is warranted but poses inherent risk. In this regard, both films have timeless relevance to free societies.

**NARRATIVE:** The relative tranquility of 1970s San Francisco is suddenly disturbed when a rooftop sniper calling himself *Scorpio* murders an innocent young woman, and then attempts to extort large sums from the city to cease murdering more innocent victims.

San Francisco's despicable and self-righteous Mayor reflexively begins to calculate the political consequences of a variety of responses. Although he sanctimoniously declares that "***The City of San Francisco does not pay criminals not to commit crimes,***" that is exactly what he repeatedly attempts to do.

When the Mayor initially stalls for time, *Scorpio* murders a nine year-old boy to prove he is not bluffing. Now, San Francisco realizes it has a serial murderer on its hands, and one who also appears to be a psychopath. To give emphasis to the point, *Scorpio* then murders a police officer and abducts, rapes, tortures and buries alive a 14 year-old girl in order to extort more ransom money from the city.

**Much of the movie consists of Inspector Harry Callahan's efforts to end the killer's rampage, despite repeated interference from those in authority who frustrate his efforts at every turn and at every level. And, while Harry's moral code won't permit him to abandon the citizens of San Francisco he is sworn to protect, he soon recognizes that he alone is willing to take the necessary steps to end this reign of terror.**

The reaction of those in authority astonishes and then angers Harry. Like Marshall Will Kane in *High Noon*, he soon discovers that those for whom he daily risks his life will do little or nothing to assist him. Their common denominator is a refusal to recognize this external threat in an objective and realistic manner.

Harry gets no support from his own **Police Chief**, who is a cowardly reptile and a political tool, like many who flatter and back-slap their way to that lofty rank. He is also betrayed by the **corrupt leftist media**, which always seem willing to sensationalize phony or questionable allegations of "*police brutality*" to swell viewership and increase advertising revenues.

Worst of all, the **Mayor** is a political whore who seems willing to comply with any demands the serial killer happens to make in order to avoid paying a political price with San Francisco's voters at election time.

**In the hope that she may still be alive, at one point Harry successfully tracks down, arrests and tortures a confession from *Scorpio* in order to obtain the location of the girl he abducted and buried for ransom. The**

fact that *Scorpio* reveals the exact location of the girl proves he is the serial killer, although it's too late to save his innocent victim.

Soon after, Harry is summoned to the **District Attorney's** office, probably expecting to receive a commendation for ridding the streets (and rooftops) of this murderous psychopath. Instead, he is informed by the DA that after consulting with an **Appellate Court Judge** on the case, the DA intends to throw-out *Scorpio's* confession, his arrest and all evidence obtained from Harry's search.



**Harry chastised by DA and Appellate Court Judge**

Both the DA and the Appellate Judge rebuke Harry for violating a litany of the serial killer's extensive rights, including the Fourth, Fifth and Eighth Amendments to the Constitution, and the Warren Court's outrageous decisions in *Miranda v. Arizona* and *Mapp v. Ohio*. The DA even informs Harry that not only is he releasing *Scorpio*, but that Harry is lucky **HE**, himself, isn't being indicted. The DA states: ***"You're lucky I'm not indicting YOU for assault with intent to commit murder."***

As a bewildered and disgusted Harry Callahan is leaving the DA's offices, he has a final exchange with the man who is about to return a psychopathic serial killer to the streets of San Francisco:

**Harry:** *"You know you're crazy if you think you've heard the last of this guy: He's gonna kill again!"*

**DA:** (with a skeptical and condescending smirk) *"And just how do you know that?"*

**Harry:** *"Because he LIKES it."*

Harry is quickly vindicated in his prediction because *Scorpio* soon commandeers a school bus full of grade school kids, which he then holds hostage to extort ever greater sums of money from the city and a jet airliner to fly him and his captives to an undisclosed destination in another country.



**Scorpio about to be ventilated**

In the film's *denouement*, as the Mayor and Police Chief once again scramble to meet Scorpio's demands, Harry recognizes that no one in San Francisco but he has the moral and physical courage to end *Scorpio's* reign of terror. He then deliberately and heroically disobeys direct orders from the Chief of Police and the Mayor of San Francisco, and sets about rescuing the children on the hijacked school bus.

After taking enormous personal risks, Harry successfully rescues all the kids and then splatters the psychopath with two rounds from his trusty **.44 Magnum**. In the last scene he engages in one final gesture of contempt for a city whose power structure abandoned him in his and their hour of need.

Harry pitches his badge into a backwater lagoon -- where *Scorpio's* lifeless body now floats -- just as Gary Cooper in *High Noon* threw his own badge into the dusty streets of Hadleyville after successfully gunning down Frank Miller's gang.



Harry about to pitch his badge