

# Why We Celebrate a Killing

May 09, 2011

## *The New York Times:*

A MAN is shot in the head, and joyous celebrations break out 7,000 miles away. Although Americans are in full agreement that the demise of Osama bin Laden is a good thing, many are disturbed by the revelry. We should seek justice, not vengeance, they urge. Doesn't this lower us to "their" level? Didn't the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. say, "I will mourn the loss of thousands of precious lives, but I will not rejoice in the death of one, not even an enemy"? (No, he did not, but the Twitter users who popularized that misattributed quotation last week found it inspiring nonetheless.)

Why are so many Americans reluctant to join the party? As a social psychologist I believe that one major reason is that some people are thinking about this national event using the same moral intuitions they'd use for a standard criminal case. For example, they ask us to imagine whether it would be appropriate for two parents to celebrate the execution, by lethal injection, of the man who murdered their daughter.

*Read the Whole Story:* [The New York Times](#)