

The Latest News

Why Are These Men Still Alive?



CRIME FEATURED NEWS

By Alexander Baron



62
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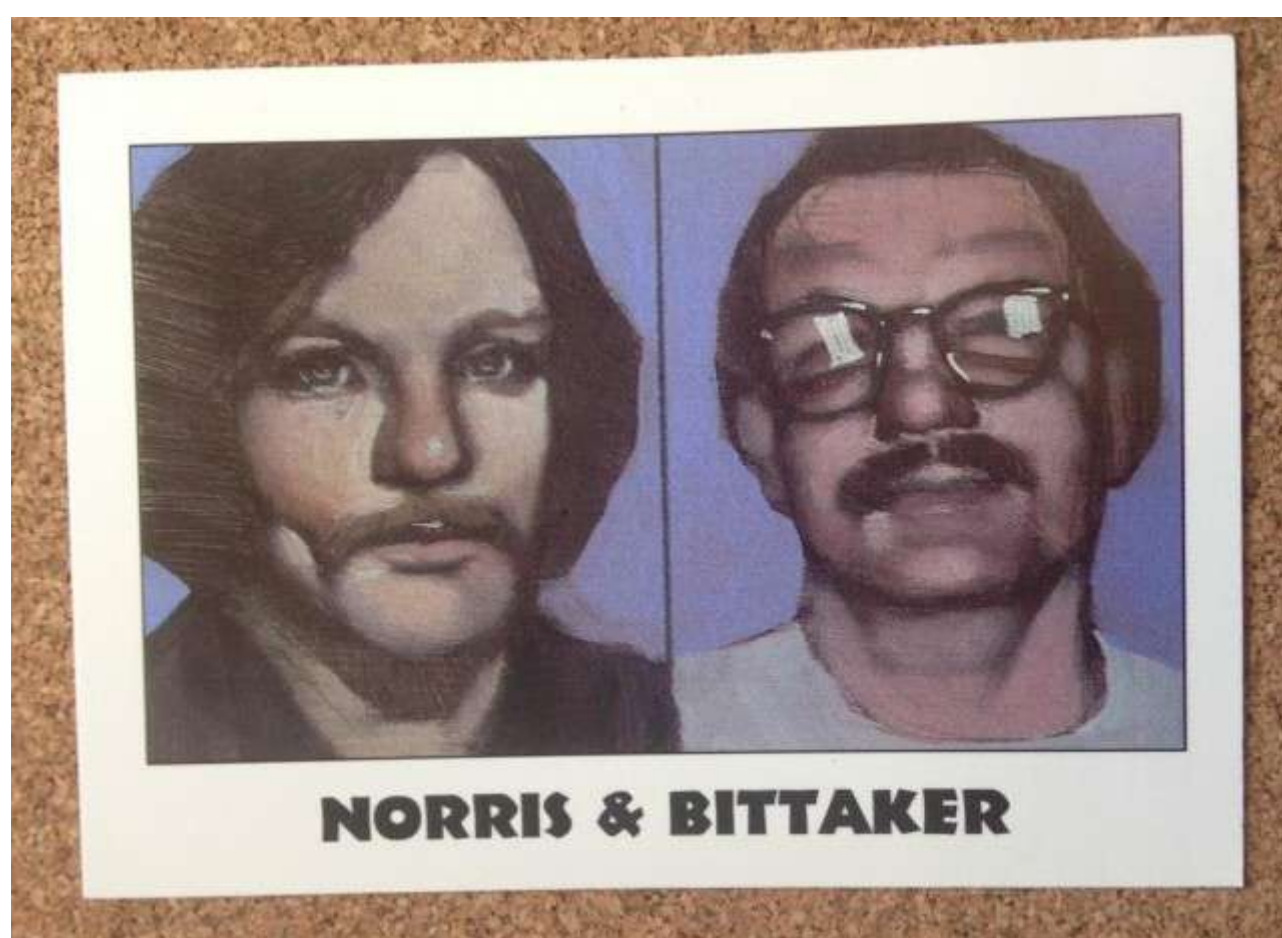
The death penalty is an emotive subject, those who advocate both for it and against it tend to argue with their hearts or even their stomachs rather than with their heads. On the one hand you have the eye for an eye brigade, on the other hand there are those who parrot the mantra what if we execute the wrong person? And if we *murder* a killer we are no better than murderers ourselves.

All these arguments are flawed, but in the case of a man (or woman) who commits a single murder, even one as horrendous as that committed by [Jodi Arias](#), it is not outrageous to argue that a life sentence should be mandatory. Even for a single act that results in multiple deaths – arson for example – this is a tenable argument. But what about someone who kills again and again and again, not out of passion, for revenge, or profit, but from sheer bloodlust?

Serial murderers leave serial clues, and when one is convicted, typically on absolutely overwhelming evidence, why should he not be executed? Lawrence Bittaker and Alfredo Prieto are two such men, their crimes, especially those of Bittaker, beggar belief, yet they are still alive decades after their convictions.

Bittaker was in the news again recently, and such is his notoriety that there is a thriving trade in his memorabilia. So who is he?

Lawrence Sigmund Bittaker was once said to have the highest IQ of any prisoner in the United States. He had talent as well, and could have made something of himself, instead, for whatever reason, he fell into a downward spiral, and while serving a sentence for attempted murder, he met his partner-in-crime. Roy Norris was a convicted rapist, and having discovered they shared similar fantasies, the two agreed that after their release they would kidnap, rape, torture and murder teenage girls. And that is **what they did**. Like the case of the **Cleveland Captives**, this is something both so bizarre and so terrible that you couldn't make it up.



Sketches of Norris (right) & Bittaker (left)

In spite of his high IQ, Bittaker was soon brought to book, but not before he and Norris had claimed five victims. Norris agreed to testify against Bittaker in return for the death penalty being taken off the table; at his trial, the older man relished delivering his testimony, which was so graphic that some members of the public left the courtroom visibly distressed.

On March 24, 1981, Bittaker was sentenced to death, and has been under sentence of death ever since. So why has he not been executed, and doesn't someone like him spending more than three decades on death row make a mockery of the system?

That question has yet to be answered constructively. Although death row is an unappetising place for any man to spend his days, Bittaker was allowed certain privileges, including filing free lawsuits, which in his case were not concerned solely with appeals. In 1993 he was **deemed a vexatious litigant**; one of the suits he filed was against the prison cafeteria for serving him a

broken cookie. There must be a joke in there somewhere. Bittaker will be 75 in September; as things stand, he will make it.

Another serial killer who has had due process and then some is Alfredo Prieto. He was back in the news last year when it was claimed he was mentally retarded. This is nonsense. To begin with, Prieto was capable of driving a car long distances, and anyone who can do that is sufficiently intelligent to stand trial for whatever crime is alleged against him. Even if it were not, should a man be spared execution simply because he is a retard? Of course not! Whatever happened to equality?

This is a new development, previously **it was claimed** that in his native El Salvador: "Prieto regularly saw dead and mutilated bodies in the street, his father brutalized his mother before going to prison, and he watched guerrillas murder his grandfather before he legally entered this country with his mother at age 15. She had left the family six years earlier. Two experts testified about the lasting damage done by exposure to war, poverty, abuse and abandonment."

So anyone who sees horrors is in danger of becoming a serial killer? That bodes ill for the aforementioned Cleveland Captives, but of course it is bunk. Prieto is believed to have committed many murders, but his convictions include the 1990 rape and capital murder of Yvette Woodruff, age 15. Prior to that he raped and murdered 24 year old Veronica Jefferson in May 1988. An even more horrendous crime was the double murder of Warren Fulton and Rachel Raver; Miss Raver was also raped.



Alfredo Prieto

Prieto is currently on death row in Virginia, having previously been on death row in California. He is held in solitary confinement in austere conditions which it is argued by the ACLU are not conducive to his mental health. It is difficult to credit anyone could make out such an argument with a straight face.

Like Bittaker, it remains to be seen when if ever Prieto will be executed as hundreds of thousands of tax dollars are wasted on frivolous appeals, money that could be better spent on victims of crime or even on the rehabilitation of minor offenders, who unlike Bittaker and Prieto do not pollute the air the rest of us have to breath.