

## "I Coulda Been A Contender."

By Amy E. Wong



"All the measures have been done," said Munir Haddad, the judge who upheld Saddam Hussein's death sentence on December 26. "There is no reason for delays."

Although Saddam's execution may take place at any time within the next 30 days, many speculate that the hanging will occur no later than Saturday. According to one of Saddam's lawyers, the U.S. has already transferred custody of Hussein to Iraqi authorities.

I'm feeling ambivalent and a bit sad about the whole thing, but I suppose justice is being served. Back in the 70s, Saddam seemed like a promising leader. Before his reign, two-thirds of Iraq lived in poverty, but he changed that by promoting industrial expansion.

- In 1972, he monopolized the country's oil, bolstered oil prices around the world, and generated tons of revenue.
- Within a few years, he used that money to provide numerous social services to his country's citizens, such as "Compulsory Free Education in Iraq" and the "National Campaign for the Eradication of Illiteracy." As a result, hundreds of thousands learned to read.
- He provided support for the families of soldiers.
- He provided free hospitalization for citizens and garnered an award from UNESCO.
- He built roads and brought electricity to nearly every city in Iraq.
- He expanded female power by offering women high-level government and industry jobs.
- He revolutionized Iraq's legal system.
- He granted subsidies to farmers, modernized agriculture, and distributed land to peasant farms.

I know these things happened a long time ago. I know that, after an unsuccessful assassination attempt in 1982, Saddam ordered a reprisal attack against Dujail, killing 150 and incarcerating and torturing 1,500. I know he unsuccessfully tried to assassinate George Bush, Sr., and that perhaps this is America's reprisal attack. I know he did a lot worse—probably for money, power, and respect. I know that because of Saddam, Iraq has crumpled back into ruins as a result of countless wars (conflicts between Shiite and Baath fighters, the

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war between Iran and Iraq, tensions in Kuwait, and the Gulf War). And yes, I know that many want him dead. After all, that's justice.

In his farewell letter, Saddam asked the Iraqi people to relinquish their hatred of the U.S.-led forces that invaded Iraq in 2003. I can't help but wonder what's going through his mind.

When U.S. forces invaded Iraq, an anonymous former bodyguard recounted this exchange:

- “The last time I saw him, he said, ‘My sons, each of you go to your homes.’ We said, ‘Sir, we want to stay with you. Why should we go?’ But he insisted. Even his son, Qusay, was crying a little. He [Saddam] was trying not to show his feelings. He was stressed, but he didn't want to destroy the morale of the people who were watching him, but inside, he was definitely broken.”

I guess I feel sad about Saddam's execution because it's a tragic end for a tragic character. He tried to create so much, but he destroyed so much more in the process.