

If you treat Tsarnaev's body with dignity, you're letting the dead terrorists win

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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[A funeral director in Massachusetts is struggling to find a community willing to let Boston Marathon bomber Tamerlan Tsarnaev be buried there](#). It's sobering to belong to an ostensibly advanced, decent culture in which people find it reasonable to take revenge on a corpse.

And what is this about if not revenge? When death-penalty supporters argue against criminals' right to the basic dignity of continuing to be alive, they can speak with a modicum of plausibility about preventing future crimes. Tsarnaev's already dead; he's even less of a threat to the public than a killer who gets life without parole. But there's still some dignity we can take satisfaction in denying him.

NPR asked Thomas Lynch for comment, and [Lynch delivered](#):

The people in Worcester who are making much of this, I think, are speaking to an old sort of tribal frustration that we can't desecrate the corpse, all we can do is observe that the dead don't care. . . . Humans are sort of accountable to the corpses of the dead. Not because it matters to the dead, but because to be tended to properly. I mean, this is what separates us from other living things that breed and breathe and die.

The good news is that many people have offered burial plots; the issue is the opposition of their neighbors and local officials. [One offer came from a YDS grad in Connecticut](#):

Paul Keane said he would offer the plot inside the Mount Carmel Burial Ground under one condition - that it's done in memory of his mother, Barbara, who passed away in 1985.

She taught Sunday School for 20 years at the Mount Carmel Church. He said he wants to do this because she taught him "love thine enemy," even if the enemy is a terrorist.

That would be a powerful witness, if Keane's neighbors allowed it to happen.

Ultimately, [Cambridge may have to bury Tsarnaev](#)—Massachusetts law requires that communities provide burial sites for their residents. That's a good law, but it's a

shame that the state has to step in to enforce basic human dignity against people's will.