

"Be the change you wish to see in the world."

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Done In Our Name

I would far rather be an outcast
upon the bosom of the great world
than be an accomplice to
a moral nothingness

-- Edvard Munch

Modern day blood sport

You see it in the TV shows that've become popular during the Bush Administration, and the new subgenre of horror films called "torture porn". You hear it in the excited and pitiless calls for "justice" and "vengeance" of radio call-in shows and right-wing news channels. You see the gradual normalization of what was once considered condemnable: torture.

In the name of retribution for the terrorist attacks of 9/11, we have moved swiftly from a democracy that honors the sanctity of the individual to a dictatorship that glorifies ever more violent acts upon our so-called enemies, all in the name of "preserving our freedoms".

We are shocked, horrified, and sickened. We are angry that these things were and are being done in our name. We watch the justification of these despicable acts used as reasons to take increasingly more of our rights, to encroach on our liberties, and we wonder to ourselves, "how did we get here?"

There can be no doubt where our nation's collective descent into madness can be placed. And let it never be said that what was done in Afghanistan, Iraq, Guantanamo, countless secret prisons around the world in the War on Terror was merely the work of "a few bad apples". After countless investigative reports, books, whistleblower testimonies, and leaked memos, the responsibility for American's new national shame all points in the same direction: the highest levels of the Bush Administration.

But the culpability of the Bush Administration aside, the horrors wrought during their reign stain us all, for they were done in our name, with an assist from media and the baser natures of our most conservative citizens, and from this dark stain in our history, we will reap the whirlwind.

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The Taguba Report

In 2004, Major General Antonio Taguba was tasked with a fact-finding mission regarding prisoner treatment at Abu Ghraib. His investigation was prompted by reports of detainee abuse cited by Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, one of the commanders of coalition forces in Iraq. Some of the findings (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taguba_report):

- The Taguba Report asserted that, due to "credible" evidence and confessions, numerous instances of abuse occurred at Abu Ghraib Prison in late 2003, including the simple assault of prisoners, the humiliation of prisoners, and the harassment of prisoners.
- The Taguba Report also found "credible" evidence of detainees being burned with phosphoric liquid, subject to aggravated assault, threatened with dogs, and an instance of a detainee who was sodomized with an object.
- The Report recommended increased training of interrogators and the dissemination of information regarding the treatment of prisoners, both actions emphasizing the Geneva Conventions.

The Torture Memos

The Torture Memos were the work of Bush Administration lawyers –mostly John Yoo, a deputy attorney in the Office of Legal Council (OLC) – used by the Administration to justify ongoing torture practices considered illegal tactics under numerous domestic and international laws and treaties. The most infamous of the memos was written solely by John Yoo, and it declared that the Executive had unfettered power vested in the Presidency.

The memos are considered abysmal pieces of work by legal scholars, but they had great value to the President. Dismissing the Geneva Conventions and other law, they used the veneer of serious legal scholarship (abundant footnotes, many citations, long dense paragraphs) to create an aura of legitimacy for near-death interrogation tactics and unrestrained executive power. The memos had high credibility because they came from the OLC, the legal brain trust for the executive branch and (until then) the gold standard for legal acumen. They form the legal basis for current US policy regarding terrorism detainees.

“Let me make very clear the position of my government and our country. We do not condone torture. I have never ordered torture. I will never order torture. The values of this country are such that torture is not a part of our soul and our being.”

—President George W. Bush, June 22, 2004

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The Status of Terrorism Detainee Facilities

BAGRAM AIR FORCE BASE PRISON CAMP

The prison camp has operated in secrecy since it opened in 2002. No one but the International Red Cross is allowed inside, and the roughly 500 prisoners are held in primitive conditions with no due-process rights whatsoever. Some of the prisoners had been captured by the CIA and held in its secret prisons before they were handed over to the Defense Department, and there is resentment that Bagram is being used as a dumping ground for the CIA's mistakes.

According to the New York Times' sources, conditions at the prison have improved since it opened, and abusive interrogation practices have mostly been eliminated. The U.S. has begun a \$10 million project to refurbish an Afghan prison, so that most of Bagram's prisoners can be transferred to Afghan custody. Several hundred detainees have already been released in the last three years.

(http://www.dkosopedia.com/wiki/Bagram_Airbase)

ABU GHRAIB

In late August or early September 2006, the U.S. military closed Abu Ghraib, and transferred its 4500 prisoners to other sites in Iraq, mostly to Camp Cropper [another prison complex not far from Abu Ghraib]. The buildings at Abu Ghraib were handed over to the Iraqi government.

GUANTANAMO

President-Elect Obama has stated that he plans to close Guantanamo. How the remaining detainees will be released, the terms of their release, and what legal recourse may be available to them has not yet been made public.

“More than a fifth of the approximately 385 prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, have been cleared for release but may have to wait months or years for their freedom because U.S. officials are finding it increasingly difficult to line up places to send them...”

-- “**82 Inmates Cleared but Still Held at Guantanamo**”, by Craig Whitlock,
Washington Post, April 29, 2007

SECRET CIA PRISONS IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES

According to an October 4, 2007 article, an administration official confirmed that the CIA's secret prison program remains active. In July 2007, President Bush issued an executive order purporting to establish limits on CIA interrogation techniques. However, it has loopholes that allow any kind of torture to proceed, and it protects torturers against future prosecution.

SECRET CIA PRISONS ON US NAVAL SHIPS

In June 2008, *The Guardian* reported that the U.S. Navy has operated secret prisons onboard some of its ships.

Mandatory Reading & Other Resources

Links

Taxi to the Dark Side – the official movie website

<http://www.taxitothedarkside.com/>

Torture at Abu Ghraib – Seymour Hersh’s famous *New Yorker* article, which broke the Abu Ghraib scandal

http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/05/10/040510fa_fact?currentPage=all

The Torture Memo – investigative report in *The Nation* regarding the Bush Administration’s legal support memos for illegal torture techniques

<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20080428/gillers>

The Taguba Report – the official investigative report filed by Major General Antonio Taguba on the treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib

<http://news.findlaw.com/hdocs/docs/iraq/tagubarpt.html>

Amnesty International – protecting human rights around the world and reporting on human rights abuses

<http://www.amnesty.org/>

Human Rights Watch – protecting human rights around the world and reporting on human rights abuses

<http://www.hrw.org/>

Books

The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned Into a War on American Ideals

Jane Mayer

The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism

Naomi Klein

Administration of Torture: A Documentary Record from Washington to Abu Ghraib and Beyond

Jameel Jaffer & Amrit Singh

The Terror Presidency: Law and Judgment Inside the Bush Administration

Jack L. Goldsmith
