

Whitewashing War Crimes

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Abu Ghraib. Guantanamo. Bagram. Diego Garcia....

Words have power, and what these words evoke is precisely what American policy makers want to evoke: terror.

The international human rights group, Amnesty International, recently called the infamous Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq, "the gulag of our times."

The reference to the torture chambers and repressive Siberian prisons of the old Soviet Union, marked by the term, 'gulag', was remarkable. It was also correct.

Predictably, White House mouthpieces dismissed the report as "ridiculous", saying that they brought 'liberty' to the people of Iraq. Also remarkable, and in a perverse way, correct. In 2004, U.S. Major General Geoffrey Miller, the American commander in charge of detentions and interrogations at Abu Ghraib prison, conducted a press tour of the dreary facility, to proudly announced newly renovated sections of the joint, which he dubbed, "Camp Redemption", and "Camp Liberty."

At the height of the Civil Rights Movement, while Black and white youth tried to register voters in the Deep South, they faced naked white terrorism from the Ku Klux Klan, and police (who were often one and the same). On movement offices throughout the region could be found posters with the following message:

THERE'S A STREET IN ITTA BENA CALLED FREEDOM. *THERE'S A TOWN IN MISSISSIPPI CALLED LIBERTY.* THERE'S A DEPARTMENT IN WASHINGTON CALLED JUSTICE.

Words like 'liberty', 'freedom', and 'democracy' are just words.

In Iraq, and in America, they are often used to mask the truth that lies behind them.

The spring 2005 issue of *Covert Action Quarterly* has a harrowing article by law professor Marjorie Cohn, who draws the dotted lines between the torture, brutality, humiliations and repression of Abu-Ghraib, the White House, the Department of Defense, and other U.S. government agencies. Using sources like Seymour Hersh's Sept. 2004 book, *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu-Ghraib* (Harper Collins Publ., N.Y.), Cohn leaves little question about how high the crimes of Abu-Ghraib should rise. She cites a CIA analyst who went to Guantanamo in the late summer of 2002, who after interviewing 30 detainees, "came back convinced that we were committing war crimes in Guantanamo."

And, of course, it's not just there.

Think of the thousands of people thrown in Abu-Ghraib by the Americans. The Red Cross has documented that *70-to- 90%* of those people were there by mistake.

There, in that hellhole by mistake, where rape, sodomy with foreign objects, the use of unmuzzled dogs to bite and severely injury handcuffed prisoners, and beating prisoners to death, has been documented. Women prisoners have begged their families to smuggle in poison so that they can kill themselves, to save themselves from the humiliations they have suffered.

A military consultant with Special Ops ties, told Seymour Hersh that war crimes were committed in Iraq, with utterly no repercussions. He asked, rhetorically, "What do you call it when people are tortured and going to die and the soldiers know it, but do not treat their injuries?" The consultant then replied, "Execution." [p.43]

The White House would call this "liberty."

Months ago, I wrote that if anyone would be punished for the actions at Abu-Ghraib, it would be low-level people; those with the least power.

I have no expertise in Iraq, nor in the Middle East, particularly. But I know a thing or two about prisons; and about whitewashes.

It is not in the least surprising that the U.S. would export the worst features of its prison culture abroad.

These are Bush's prisons; Rumsfeld's prisons; Gonzalez's prisons; *these are America's prisons*, and those who are tortured, raped, humiliated, and traumatized, are done so in your name.

Who will solve these war crimes?

Mr. Jamal's new work, WE WANT FREEDOM: A Life in the Black Panther Party, is now available from South End Press, Cambridge, MA. (<http://www.southendpress.org>).

Check out Mumia's NEW book: "Faith of Our Fathers: An Examination of the Spiritual Life of African and African-American People": <http://www.africanworld.com>.

These are VERY SERIOUS TIMES for political activists in this country and around the world. Get full details and keep updated by reading ACTION ALERTS!! at <http://www.mumia.org> and <http://www.movenet.org>

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