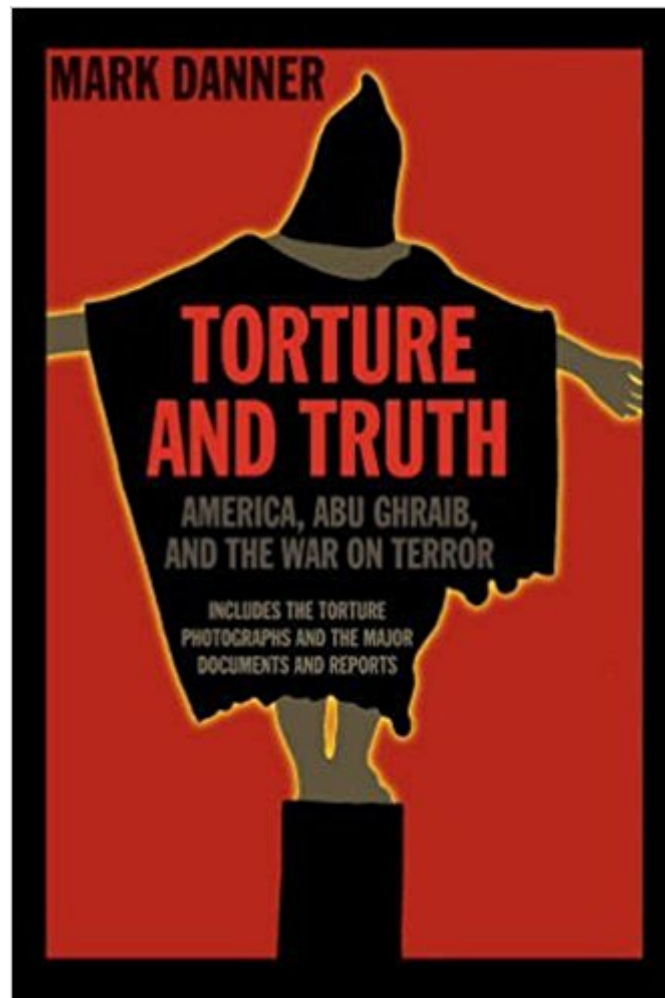




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Torture And Truth: America, Abu Ghraib, And The War On Terror



Synopsis

Includes the torture photographs in color and the full texts of the secret administration memos on torture and the investigative reports on the abuses at Abu Ghraib. In the spring of 2004, graphic photographs of Iraqi prisoners being tortured by American soldiers in Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison flashed around the world, provoking outraged debate. Did they depict the rogue behavior of "a few bad apples"? Or did they in fact reveal that the US government had decided to use brutal tactics in the "war on terror"? The images are shocking, but they do not tell the whole story. The abuses at Abu Ghraib were not isolated incidents but the result of a chain of deliberate decisions and failures of command. To understand how "Hooded Man" and "Leashed Man" could have happened, Mark Danner turns to the documents that are collected for the first time in this book. These documents include secret government memos, some never before published, that portray a fierce argument within the Bush administration over whether al-Qaeda and Taliban prisoners were protected by the Geneva Conventions and how far the US could go in interrogating them. There are also official reports on abuses at Abu Ghraib by the International Committee of the Red Cross, by US Army investigators, and by an independent panel chaired by former defense secretary James R. Schlesinger. In sifting this evidence, Danner traces the path by which harsh methods of interrogation approved for suspected terrorists in Afghanistan and Guantánamo "migrated" to Iraq as resistance to the US occupation grew and US casualties mounted. Yet as Mark Danner writes, the real scandal here is political: it "is not about revelation or disclosure but about the failure, once wrongdoing is disclosed, of politicians, officials, the press, and, ultimately, citizens to act." For once we know the story the photos and documents tell, we are left with the questions they pose for our democratic society: Does fighting a "new kind of war" on terror justify torture? Who will we hold responsible for deciding to pursue such a policy, and what will be the moral and political costs to the country?

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Customer Reviews

When the Abu Ghraib torture scandal broke in April 2004, Americans and the rest of the world were stunned. President George W. Bush condemned the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. soldiers and blamed it on a few bad apples who, he said, had "dishonored our country and disregarded our values." Mark Danner, a journalist with The New Yorker, argues that a key fact was lost amid the media coverage: the torture was part of a deliberate policy of "enhanced interrogation" planned at the highest levels of the administration. But no punishment awaits the senior U.S. officials who orchestrated the abuses in Iraq and other U.S. detention facilities around the world, Danner writes. With the help of a Republican-controlled Congress, the White House and Defense Department have so far succeeded in limiting the fallout from the scandal and blaming it on a handful of overzealous, low-ranking soldiers. Danner's 580-page book is divided into three parts. The first consists of three essays he wrote on the Abu Ghraib scandal in 2004. In them, he cites U.S. military personnel who estimate that 70 to 95 percent of the Iraqis they arrested were detained by mistake. Most were nabbed in night-time "cordon and capture" sweeps and had no intelligence value. Yet, military intelligence soldiers, under enormous pressure to combat a mounting Iraqi insurgency, worked with military police to squeeze "actionable intelligence" out of the detainees. The soldiers urinated on prisoners, threatened to rape them, sodomized them with sticks and chemical lights, deprived them of sleep, beat, kicked, and slapped them, and restricted their breathing with hoods. The rest of Danner's book consists of other essays he wrote about the war in Iraq, photos of the abuses and the texts of official reports and memos that, in grim detail, catalog both the torture and the U.S. policies that made it possible. Abu Ghraib, Danner writes, is just the tip of the iceberg. --Alex Roslin

This stout and valuable instant book presents a documentary history of the Abu Ghraib prisoner-torture scandal. The paper trail includes policy statements concerning prisoner treatment signed by Attorney General Ashcroft and President Bush, reports on prisoner mistreatment generated within the United States armed forces themselves and material (including photographs) from outside agencies. The sheer mass of data requires some background knowledge about the

military and the situation, if only to free the reader from dependence on the author's commentary, although New Yorker staff writer Danner (The Massacre at El Mozote) was in Iraq during 2003, and his opinions, when they come to the fore, are backed up with observations. While the publisher admits to having rushed the book into print, it emerges as a book of permanent value for the study of the Iraq war and of how apparently reasonable policies can be swept away by intense pressure, political or military, to produce a particular result. Abu Ghraib raises issues that will form part of the debate on American military policy long after Iraq is out of the headlines; at the very least, this book provides the information necessary for the public's involvement in that discussion. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Danner's collected 2003 articles from The New York Review of Books, grouped with several Abu Ghraib photographs and several key documents and published in 2004 constituted one of the earliest accounts of torture practiced by the Bush regime and signaled that one of the most important sources for further revelation on the subject would be courageous journalists in various media, a signal that played out through the next decade and informed the American public of some of the crimes had been committed in its name.

Movies have separate ratings for violence, sexual content or language, so should books. Mark Danner's "Torture and Truth" deserves separate consideration. The book is a singular reference for the academic or historian who will try to make sense of an age when Americans acted out of fear instead of strength and confidence, and became the world's bully instead of its protector. As such, this is not for the reader who wants to be entertained. The detailed memoranda that describe intradepartmental and interdepartmental conflict will prevent that, so will the myriad of abbreviations and acronyms that will make the reader turn to the appendix again and again. A few readers will be lucky enough to know what sigint, UCMJ or CSM mean without seeking clarification, but the constant turn to the appendix will cause frustration and disrupt the continuity of reading. What becomes apparent is that torture was considered even before we started taking prisoners or that there was "actionable intelligence" to be gained from them. Colin Powell's State Department sends a flurry of memoranda attempting to convince the Bush administration to act within the rules of the Geneva Convention. The Departments of Justice and Defense, the Office of Legal Counsel, and Bush's own lawyer write the opposite. The forces against Powell are strong. Afghanistan is declared a failed state, the Geneva Convention will be observed but not practiced, and torture is given such a narrow definition as to allow almost any practice short of permanent injury or death. What doesn't

need to be looked at in detail are the pictures of Americans acting as barbarians. It is obvious from the photographs that they were not seeking intelligence information by sitting on top of nude prisoners, torturing them in hallways, putting them on a leash, making one prisoner fellate another, stacking them nude, in human pyramids, or tying them to beds or cell doors while they were also nude. Smiling faces of American women over an Iraqi corpse may sicken the viewer almost as much as seeing the hooded man, standing on a box, believing that electrodes are clipped to his fingers. These are photos of Americans as einsatzgruppen. The sworn statements from prisoners and the February 2004 Report of the International Red Cross show a pattern of brutality in too many facilities to be considered isolated incidents committed by "bad apples." "Certain Coalition Forces military intelligence officers told the ICRC that in their estimate between 70% and 90% of the persons deprived of their liberty in Iraq had been arrested by mistake." The Taguba, Fay, and Schlessinger Investigations point to a lack of leadership, command and control, logistics, training, and continuity to explain the mayhem that resulted, but no investigation is aimed at the decision-makers in Washington. Prisoners are not taken to the rear as doctrine called for because the rising insurgency means there is no rear and no central point to process detainees who exchange number and identification with each other. Soldiers operating under the dilemma of using harsh techniques to provide intelligence and act humanely were given no moral compass by leadership or command and control. In other words, who was in charge? Those who were well-led, knew SOP and policy acted professionally. Some officers, NCO's and enlisted men made it their mission to act professionally, but only some. The U. S. does not plan for combat operations in Iraq to end as quickly as it does. It expects to turn over Iraq to a sycophant who turns out to be a double agent. The U. S. doesn't, and stays. Neither event is planned for. The administration is unprepared for an occupation, an occupation that has no front line, plenty of time for things to turn for the worse, and not enough troops to handle it when it does. It is also apparent that America had come full circle since 1945. It had become the invader instead of the liberator. It had become the brute and the bully instead of the protector. It now leads other nations through domination and coercion, instead of by example and cooperation. This book was written in 2004. To date, no national policymaker has been held accountable for what happened.

The horror of torture, committed for those, who said they were liberator. The dark side of our history shown through documents and testimonies, which explain the terrible, wrong and diabolically calculated "war on terror"

Interesting reading with a new perspective of what happened over there.

use it for my homeland security classes its a great book to have see the positives and negatives of the situation at Abu Ghraib

I bought Mark Danner's TORTURE AND TRUTH several months ago from , and find it ever more relevant to current events. For the numbers of people detained and tortured in the War on Terror-- many of them believed by reputable individuals and organizations to be innocent-- continues to rise, and extends far beyond Abu Ghraib. The very fact that the majority of these people have never been formally charged with involvement in terrorist activity nor tried seems to prove their innocence, for it would be very easy to keep someone in jail these days if one could present solid evidence of their involvement in terrorism. Those who object that the tortures inflicted on these detainees is not as bad as that which some totalitarian governments inflict upon their victims ignore the fact that the "soft torture" techniques in development since the end of World War II have been found to be more effective in "breaking" victims than simple brutality (see Alfred McCoy, A QUESTION OF TORTURE: CIA INTERROGATION FROM THE COLD WAR TO THE WAR ON TERROR). The suffering of these wretched detainees keeps me awake at night, yet to this day most people seem unconcerned about their plight. Danner's comment from the Introduction to his book still holds true: "Like other scandals that have erupted during the Iraq War and the war on terror, it is not about revelation or disclosure but about the failure, once wrongdoing is disclosed, of politicians, officials, the press, and, ultimately, citizens to act."

This is by far the best journalistic account of the torture of suspects at Abu Ghraib. This is also the best book to read after reading the books of documents, which give you the vital context for understanding Danner's book. Read them first and then this one - you will then be able to understand what really happened and why. British and US troops really did commit terrible acts against their prisoners, with tragic consequences for the reputation of both nations in the Middle East. Read Danner and the documents books to discover why. Christopher Catherwood (author of CHURCHILL'S FOLLY: HOW WINSTON CHURCHILL CREATED MODERN IRAQ: Carroll and Graf, hardcover 2004, paperback 2005)

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