

# Abu ghraib torture: deemed unacceptable research paper example

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



## **Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere – Martin Luther King, Jr.**

### Introduction

You all have seen the degrading photos. You remember how you felt the shame, seeing what looked like electrical-shock wires attached to human flesh, whose head was covered by a black cone-shaped hooded cloak. Perfidious sensory deprivation ensued. Someone once conveyed the following words of misery: “ Only by experience can anyone realize how deep, and dark, and foul is that pit of abominations.” These words were written by Harriet Jacobs, a black woman in American history whose first-hand account recorded the atrocities of her captivity and cruelty of slavery (“ Harriet Jacobs Fugitive Slave”). The tortures she suffered are unspeakable. Yet in the 21st century forty-five year old Ali Shalal, gives his account of personal torture at Abu Ghraib saying that his tiny initial prison room “ was flooded with water and human waste up to my ankle level. I was asked to sit in the filthy water while the American interrogator stood outside the door the guards would urinate into the filthy water” (“ Torture at Abu Ghraib Full Sworn Testimony”). The disturbing parallel of these two statements is hundreds of years apart, but sound hauntingly similar. What is wrong with this picture?

Perhaps the best way to begin this argument is to define what torture is in the first place. According to the ‘ International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims’ (IRCT) (2014) the definition of torture means “ any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third

person information or a confession, punishing him for an act” he or she is suspected of (“ Defining Torture”). The article informs that psychological processes of creating terrorizing torture and mistreatment may cause enduring, painful episodes of isolation, humiliation, threats or being forced to watch the torture of others. Aside from the cruel punishments of rape, burns, electric shocks, and bloody beatings – there are issues of morality, law, and the reverberation of great fear within a population. The clear thesis to this paper is as follows. The torture that occurred in Abu Ghraib was immoral and bad, completely representing the fact of all torture as bad because of the proof of what happened at that prison.

## **Body**

The background, and historical context for the Iraq War, came on the heels and in reaction to the World Trade Center attacks on September 11th, 2001 when the United States made it “ successively more clear that it intended to remove the regime of Saddam Hussein” (“ The Iraq Crisis,” 2006). The decision to launch a counter-military set of attacks in retaliation blamed terrorist forces led by the Al-Qaeda network inspired operation of Osama Bin Laden. The official public story and justification, according to an article in Mideastweb (2006) is that “ Saddam had substantial quantities of chemical and biological weapons, and was actively pursuing a nuclear weapons program,” but no official documents provided evidence for this claim (“ The Iraq Crisis,” 2006). Rumbblings at the UN (United Nations) encouraged the United States to seek multilateral support in a collaborative effort to attack Iraq. Meanwhile attempts of Britain and the U. S. to come to an agreed upon

“ second UN resolution that would authorize force” the American press and Bush speeches were having a field day fanning the flames of anger, outrage, and hurt of the American people (“ The Iraq Crisis,” 2006). Whether the torture occurred from poor decision-making of those soldiers at the scene, in Abu Ghraib prison, or whether the incidents were CIA-sponsored – some would argue.

The language and words of observers representing the American mainstream media would cause concern, especially once the story broke, exposing the horrific photographs of the victims so mercilessly and shamefully tortured at Abu Ghraib. According to the Washington Post (2008) Abu Ghraib was a former penal corrections facility wherein Saddam tortured his own countrymen, but was quickly remodeled so that the American soldiers could have a place to put prisoners after sweeps. Then Vice-President Cheney “ told NBC’s Tim Russert that America sometimes had to work ‘ the dark side’” (“ Abu Ghraib the Back Story,” 2008). The Bush administration language in response to the torture events at Abu Ghraib reported the President’s explanation as characterizing the bad conduct as stemming from “ a few bad apples,” rather than a reflection of “ higher responsibility or administration policy” (Porpora et al., 2010, p. 254). Much of the initial language used to describe the clear inhumane, and unacceptable torture that happened at Abu Ghraib centered on the word ‘ abuse’ instead of calling it straight out ‘ torture’ – which is what it was.

Walter Edward Hart of the Department of Sociology, at Texas A&M is highly critical of the Bush torture policies in the incidents at Abu Ghraib. Hart (2011) in an analysis of the photographic evidence of torture at Abu Ghraib

asked a crucial question: “ Why with all the documented evidence did only eleven soldiers receive a courts-martial?” (p. 1). Hart looks at the evidence in the case of Abu Ghraib, which is damn difficult-to-impossible to ignore. One Major General Antonio M. Taguba, reports Hart (2011) submitted a write-up that was released to The New Yorker magazine recounting “ The photographs tell it all. In one, Private England, a cigarette dangling from her mouth, is giving a jaunty thumbs-up sign and pointing at the genitals of a young Iraqi, who is naked except for a sandbag over his head, as he masturbates” (p. 2). Then President George Bush’s only response was that the wrongdoing simply reflected a few troops behaving in a disgraceful manner. But truth be told, this level of torture smacked of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) tactics.

Alfred McCoy reports in detailed accounts firm disapproval of the tortures that occurred at Abu Ghraib, arguing that the blame of the dehumanizing horrors did not come from the lower ranks of soldiers – but were rather condoned from the upper echelon of military and Pentagon-appointed power. Bush’s claim that the torture showed the results of a few soldiers ‘ gone badly’ served as an attempt to excuse the administration of all policy-level responsibility. In Tom Dispatch McCoy (2004) hints that the inhumane torture chamber of misery at Abu Ghraib represents only the tip of the iceberg, in terms of other “ mini-gulag” CIA prisons that were active in other parts of the world like Afghanistan or other “ remote places like the Indian Ocean Island of Diego Garcia” (“ Hidden History of CIA Torture”). These secret detention centers were beginning to be leaked via the unconventional media outlets. McCoy (2004) tells a powerful account of historical torture from ancient

Rome, and medieval torture racks and wheels - to make a point about the inexcusable " humiliations" at Abu Ghraib prison " shocked Iraqis, the world, and many Americans" (" Hidden History of CIA Torture"). Marking a trail and history of perversity, torture's sick pathology in human history shown like an insidious disease of evil souls.

The fact of Abu Ghraib prison's human rights violations brings one to question what the official U. S. policy is regarding torture. Historically, McCoy (2004) recounts, the CIA from " 1950 to 1962" engaged in " massive, secret research into coercion and the malleability of human consciousness" at a cost of billions of dollars annually (" Hidden History of CIA Torture"). In other words, mind-control and drug experimental research to test the bounds of human tolerance were performed - most of which was psychological. It was common knowledge that the Agency so experimented on unsuspecting black American men, but what of the peculiarity of the female guard Lynndie England who homosexualized the barbaric torture of Iraqi prisoner at Abu Ghraib? According to a journal article by Marita Gronnvoll (2007) her analysis shown that the women soldiers responsible, were held to " gendered standards" (p. 371). Even in the General Taguba report mentioned earlier, pertaining to the findings " only mentions the women of Abu Ghraib briefly and focuses its attention on the failings higher up the chain of command" (p. 373). The main theme of the article discusses that the factor of England being a woman distracted from the nasty brutality against another human being, and almost takes the attention away from the cruel torture at Abu Ghraib.

In any case, powerful figures such as Dick Cheney, and Rumsfeld would

argue that this kind of torture is necessary to secure nation from harm. They often utilize language that spoke of national security, and referred to the torture as 'abuses' instead of recognizing human rights violations (in a horrific manner) against persons. The research of Charles Rowling in 'Some Dared Call It Torture: Cultural Resonance, Abu Ghraib, and a Selectively Echoing Press' compiles data to review journalism language and new media coverage following the scandal. He reveals an interesting caveat. Rowling (2011) states that while some believed that "White House viewpoints largely went unchallenged by Democratic Party officials," his team's data demonstrated that the way Federal powers tried to frame the incidents as mere 'abuse' "were regularly challenged by leading Democrats" (p. 1044). But the general national public (nor international audience) never had this fact reported openly in the aftermath of the Abu Ghraib torture horror. However, some, once again would take the position that some torture or any torture is valid to defend a nation's security. But where do you draw the line at human dignity and worth? If you think about it, we are all on this planet together.

So what are the complications surrounding this situation? Is the easy way out to say that all torture is unacceptable without a reason? Of course not, that would be silly and shallow. We must examine the complications of the situation. Now as unpleasant as it may be, common knowledge holds that Arab peoples were sometimes referred to as 'sand' niggers. Some would argue that the history of hegemonic and institutional racism in the United States led a global perspective of cultural disdain for certain persons, according to color. Certain social, political, and cultural realities must not be

ignored. Journal article research writer Bruce Lincoln (2009) makes an analysis for “ sadistic torture” to be understood as a punitive “ judicial ordeal” designed to establish guilt and impose “ imperial ideology” (p. 157). Lincoln (2009) posits that it is a lie to believe that a bunch of low-level soldiers conducted themselves in a perversely cruel way - as an aberration. Nor does Lincoln (2009) believe interrogation is for extracting information, but that the goal was “ to reassert a set of core beliefs in a moment that these had been seriously challenged” (p. 162). In simple words, regimes use torture as a means of controlling what they may view as threats to the system. To support his view, Lincoln (2009) notes that the most famous photograph of the hooded man serves as somewhat of a parody (in terms of symbolism) of the quote “ Terrorist” which is made more ridiculous because the man underneath the hooded garment is dreadfully fearful, and has been “ immobilized” while being paraded on a box or block of sorts.

Think about it. What are the complications surrounding the imagery? The causes and dysfunction are deep. McCoy (2005) in ‘ Cruel Science - CIA Torture & U. S. Foreign Policy’ discusses the Abu Ghraib scandal in light of CIA “ torture techniques” that has been developed into a “ distinctive method of psychological torture” and been “ disseminated” to “ allies worldwide” (p. 209). McCoy (2005) maintains that these soldiers were not some freaks of military nature, but rather carrying out actions under the auspices of the CIA at Abu Ghraib - further claiming that, “ these photos are snapshots, not of simple brutality or a breakdown in discipline” but systemic business as usual (p. 209). In other words, the soldiers carried out expectations of orders from high-up the chains of command. See the



problem? So under the guise of ' War on Terror' the empire uses language, perception, and mainstream media (globally) to present a certain story. Once the true nature of the heinous crime came forth, only then did Bush publicly express his great disgust over the whole affair. Now, go back to the ' box' the tortured man stood on. What does this remind you of? Return to the beginning of this paper, and note the quote from the black slave woman who wrote about the tortures she endured in captivity. Unfortunately there appears to be a non-white designation (from a deep psycho-social perspective) to those whose lives are considered less than precious, sadly.

## **Conclusion**

They used to sell the human chattel (slaves) in the fashion of standing upon auction blocks. Is the similarity in imagery not compelling, if nothing else? What is the message? Were these Iraqi prisoners not perceived as human beings? The perspective represents deep subconscious psychological messages, and dangerous implications for those at risk. Put two and two together and it is not so difficult to figure out. The bottom line reverts back to the original thesis statement: The torture that occurred in Abu Ghraib was immoral and bad, completely representing the fact that all torture is inexcusable and proof that those prison events are unacceptable. One American Sergeant on the Abu Ghraib scene, reported by the Washington Post (2008) witnessed prisoners killed at the death-torture-camp-prison, called home to his father and said " Dad, I can't take this. I can't take innocent lives being destroyed by American bullets. I can't do it" (" Abu Ghraib the Back Story," 2008). The case of the Troy Davis state execution

garnered worldwide attention, given that a plethora of evidence indicated his innocence (included witnesses who admitted they picked the wrong black man). His last words uttered before execution were: May God have mercy on your souls. So, at the end of the day, I agree that it was wrong and should not have been handled the way it was done. The situation began in the context of a prison, but evolved into a torture facility. Finally and gladly the place is shut down.

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