In 2004, photographs of prisoner torture in Abu Ghraib prison became street murals in Tehran. Photograph: Behrouz Merhri/ Getty Images.

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Torture Culture: Lynching Photographs and the Images of Abu Ghraib

In the topical commentary on the moral disgrace of Abu Ghraib, several commentators have noted a resemblance between the torture photos from Iraq and American lynching photos.[1] These similarities have remained largely unexplored, however, including perhaps the most significant effects of the two sets of photos, which is that both came to function as sites of resistance against the very acts they represent. Between deeds that are very different in nature and motivation, and which took place at very different times and places, what might we learn from the similarities? What indeed constitutes these similarities?[2] In this essay, I examine the usefulness of parallels between the photographs taken at Abu Ghraib and lynching photographs from the early decades of the twentieth century, and explore the political responses to the Abu Ghraib photos both through their public distribution and in contemporary artworks and civic displays.

We may think the similarity between the lynching and prison photos resides in the unabashed picturing of torture and humiliation itself. But more shocking, even, in both sets of photos, are the proud perpetrators whose smug gloating we do not expect to see and who flaunt an appalling shamelessness. This is because we identify the perpetrators as the immediate criminals here, not their prisoners/victims. In both cases, for us, national and international laws against torture and murder are clearly violated, the basic imperatives of humanity and decency dishonored, and the images, like the acts they represent, evoke revulsion at the humiliation and barbarity of it all. But the perpetrators don't see it this way. These events, in part staged for the camera, occur because both sets of perpetrators, in their loftiest rationalizations, believe they are committing their deeds for the good of the nation or, at the least, that their acts are sanctioned by a larger community and serve the interests of that community. This belief illuminates the fact that the exercise of such sadism and humiliation is a fundamentally political act. The viewer is meant to identify with the proud torturers in the context of the defense of a political and cultural hierarchy.[3]

The sense of community sanction was central to American lynching and created the conditions by which white townsmen would attack and drive out black residents, even burning down the black section of town. Following a lynching, they would close ranks around individual perpetrators to protect them from any threat of prosecution by state or federal authorities. Those who might have acted as whistle blowers had nowhere to turn and risked dire retribution. Many who thought they would find a spectacle lynching thrilling instead found it sickening, but they lived in silence with these traumatic experiences. The effects were of course far more devastating for black members of the community.

For white supremacists, souvenir lynching photos became ways of reliving the erotic thrills of torture and mutilation produced under the guise of righteous civic actions, as well as a way of reaffirming a racial and gendered hierarchy that kept white men on top and blacks at the bottom. In gendered terms, lynching meant asserting white male control over the desire of white women by punishing transgressions against the race barrier and affirming a sense of entitlement to the bodies of black women through unbridled coercion. It also meant indulging a covert form of homoerotic gratification through the subjugated bodies of black

1. See Luc Sante, "Tourists and Torturers," opinion-editorial, *New York Times*, May 11, 2004, A23; Susan Sontag, "The Pictures Are Us," *New York Times Magazine*, May 23, 2004, 24ff; Frank Rich, "It Was the Porn That Made Them Do It," *New York Times*, May 30, 2004, Section 2, 1; "Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Remote Control," *Artforum*, Summer 2004, 61.

2. For key texts on Abu Ghraib, see three articles by Seymour Hersh in the *New Yorker*: "Torture at Abu Ghraib," posted April 30, 2004, available online at http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/040510fa_fact; "Chain of Command," posted May 9, 2004, available online at http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/040517fa_fact2; and "The Gray Zone," posted May 15, 2004, available online at http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/040524fa_fact; see also Hersh's book *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004). For Abu Ghraib images, see Web sites such as http://www.antiwar.com/news/?articleid=2444, and http://www.rotten.com/library/crime/prison/abu-ghraib/. The torture photographs and major documents and reports have also been collected in Mark Danner, *Torture and Truth: America, Abu Ghraib, and the War on Terror* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2004).

3. In this regard, Deleuze notes the importance of the revolution of 1789 for the Marquis de Sade and the revolution of 1848 for Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, whose writings invite the viewer to identify with either the sadistic torturer or masochistic victim respectively. See Gilles Deleuze, *Sacher-Masoch: An Interpretation*, trans. Jean McNeil (London: Faber and Faber, 1971).

The lynching of Rubin Stacey, July 19, 1935, Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Photographs & Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

men, who would often be humiliated, tortured, and castrated. In addition to the lynchings themselves, the lynching photographs served as a means of continuing social control, extended tools of terror which ultimately justified the deeds they represented as protecting whiteness, which was code for America itself.[4]

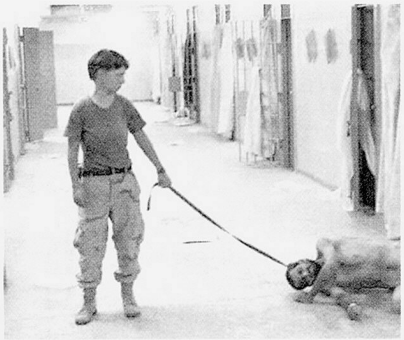
After 9/11, "democracy" became code for America, and defending democracy meant arresting and imprisoning thousands of Middle Easterners in the United States, Guantánamo Bay, and Afghanistan, as well as in Iraq, where the sense of community sanction was fundamental to the torture and atrocities. The community in question was most immediately the military and more broadly the white, conservative, Christian culture represented by the regime of George W. Bush, the commander-in-chief, and reinforced by his cabinet and their chains of command.

As is now known, the campaign of torture in Iraq was a top-secret program, code-named Copper Green, which was approved by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Government lawyers turned somersaults in legal memorandums that attempted to skirt international treaties and show that the Geneva Conventions, which govern the treatment of prisoners of war, did not apply and that President Bush could authorize the torture of prisoners, effectively assigning him a status above the law. As Harold Hongju Koh, dean of the Yale Law School, observed in a scathing rebuke of this unprecedented move, "If the president has commander-in-chief power to commit torture, he has the power to commit genocide, to sanction slavery, to promote apartheid, to license summary execution."[5] In Bush's second term, Alberto Gonzalez, the architect of the memorandum characterizing the Geneva Conventions as "quaint," became the U.S. Attorney General following the resignation of John Ashcroft. On October 25, 2004, the White House announced that according to a new legal opinion, some non-Iraqi prisoners in Iraq were still exempt from the rules of the Geneva Conventions.

Rumsfeld has since admitted to approving an order to hold an Iraqi prisoner but keep his name off the prison rolls in order to shield him from Red Cross inspectors, a violation of international law. An outside investigative panel documented at least seven more cases, followed by the admission that there were dozens or up to a hundred "ghost" detainees. At least forty cases of prison deaths are being investigated as homicides, and this does not include all those who have died in U.S.-run prisons, an unknown number. At least three hundred incidents of abuse have been reported at Guantánamo Bay, in Afghanistan, and Iraq. Bush, meanwhile, demanded that American prisoners of war—a status the United States refuses to apply to Iraqi "detainees"—be treated humanely, a moment captured in the important and provocative film *Control Room* by Jehane Noujaim, about coverage of the war in its first months by the United States and Al Jazeera.

At least some of the explicit photos of humiliation and torture, moreover, were apparently meant as a form of potential blackmail against the prisoners, threatening to shame them in front of their families and community if they did not become spies for the United States. One government consultant said, "I was told that the purpose of the photographs was to create an army of informants, people you could insert back into the population." Seymour Hersh revealed the facts in the *New Yorker*, quoting an unnamed CIA official and both current and former intelligence officials. They trace the problem to a special program set up in Afghanistan with commandos authorized to use terror and degradation at secret

4. See my *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004).
5. Quoted in Adam Liptak, "Legal Scholars Criticize Torture Memos," *New York Times*, June 25, 2004, A14.
6. Hersh, "The Gray Zone."



Lynndie England and prisoner on a leash, Abu Ghraib prison, Baghdad, October 25, 2003.

Abdou Hussain Saad Faleh, prisoner at Abu Ghraib, November 4, 2003.

CIA holding tanks, which was then exported to Iraq.[6]

This would explain why Rumsfeld's first reaction to the photos was not shock, horror, or surprise, but anger that they had gotten out.[7] He immediately banned soldiers' cameras at prisons. Like lynching photos, those from Abu Ghraib were meant to stay within a like-minded community. Spectacle lynchings were recorded by hundreds of amateurs with Kodaks, and professional photographers turned out thousands of postcards. But Southern town leaders were as distressed as Rumsfield when lynching photos found their way into the hands of Northern left-wing and liberal activists, who used them for opposing ideological purposes, although it would have been difficult to ban the taking of such photos (and mayors would sometimes take a cut of the profits of postcard sales).

The tortures in Iraq and the mistreatment of Muslims are not deeply rooted and systematic American phenomena like lynchings, which followed a history of slavery. On the other hand, the longstanding rhetoric of a demonizing "orientalism," the old and unresolved Israeli/Palestinian conflict, and the effects of the first Gulf War in 1991 have encouraged many Americans to view many Arabs and Muslims with growing suspicion and distrust, which burst into open and wanton violence in the United States following 9/11.

Two photos in particular have become most associated with the torture at Abu Ghraib. One is the picture of Private First Class Lynndie R. England, a twenty-one-year-old reservist, holding a leash attached to the neck of a naked crawling prisoner, known to guards as "Gus." England's training as an administrative clerk did not qualify her to be in the prison. She claims she was told by her superiors to pose for the infamous photo, which was first published in the *Washington Post* on May 21, 2004. Her discomfort is palpable as she looks away from the camera toward the human being at the end of the leash she holds. Linked to the prone figure both by her gaze and by the physical line of connection, we might believe that the youthful England is trapped in a descending spiral of victimization produced by the pressure to conform to the demands of prison culture exerted by her largely male peers and superiors. By impelling her to comply with an appalling act of deep humiliation and documenting her complicity, these actions paved the way for future acquiescence and collusion in further acts of torture and abuse. For the Arab world, however, the picture of a naked Arab man held by the throat as the "pet" of a short-haired American woman in military garb can only confirm the worst suspicions of the most perverse anti-Arab contempt harbored by Americans.

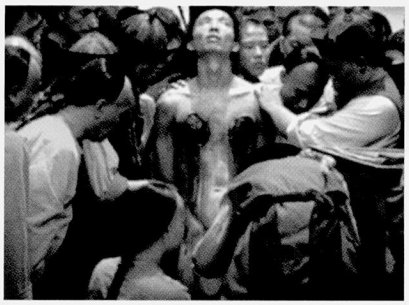
The second photo, first published in the *New Yorker*, represents the most emblematic image of the torture scandal: the hooded man standing on a box with wires attached to his hands, who was told by Specialist Sabrina Harmon that he would be electrocuted if he fell off the box. According to the testimony of the victim, Abdou Hussain Saad Faleh, the wires were not only attached to his fingers but also his toes and penis.[8] Known as the "Vietnam," the image resonates with allusions to the crucifixion, robed monks, the Statue of Liberty, the Klan, the executioner, the mask of death.

But most of all, like the mortified Christ, the image signals abjection and surrender. The echoes of innocence, sacrifice, and suffering that lend it a tragic air are made all the more chilling by the hooding and wires—a decidedly modern emblem of martyrdom, dubbed by Sarah Boxer "the icon of the abuse"

7. On the role of the father of Ivan Frederick, one of the accused soldiers, in getting the pictures to *Sixty Minutes II*, which broadcast them on April 28, 2004, see "Here's How the Abu Ghraib Photos Got Out," available online at http://talkleft.com/ new_archives/006410.html#006410, May 8, 2004. Specialist Joseph M. Darby also turned over CDs with photographs of the torture. See "In a Soldier's Words, an Account of Concerns," *New York Times*, May 22, 2004, available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/22/politics/22WTEX.html?ex=1113969600&en=c6dc9c55e8f06b78&ei=5070&fta=y.

8. See translation of statement provided by Abdou Hussain Saad Faleh, January 16, 2004, in Danner, *Torture and Truth*, 230.

although it shows "no dogs, no dead, no leash, no face, no nakedness, no pileup, no thumbs-up."[9] Rather, it "unites figures of torture and sacredness or divinity," as W. J. T. Mitchell observes. "This is not the crucified or resurrected Christ," he notes, "but a figure from the Passion plays, the staging of the humiliation and torture of Jesus." Indeed, the evocation of the man of sorrows and the sympathy summoned from the viewer, as Mitchell argues, is produced by the stillness and serenity of the figure under duress, the graceful, open-armed gesture that is the "natural result of a man's attempt to maintain his balance in a difficult situation." The U.S. military, although claiming the moral high ground in the name of "spreading freedom and democracy" has here assumed the position of Roman torturers, crucifiers, persecutors of the humble and holy.[10]



Chen Chieh-jen. Still from *Lingchi—Echoes of a Historical Photograph*, 2002. Installation with twenty-four-minute video. Taipei Fine Arts Museum. Courtesy of the artist.

Other images of torture also come to mind, such as those of *lingchi*—the ancient Chinese torture and execution ritual in which the victim is drugged and parts of the body slowly sliced away. Known as "death by division into a thousand parts," the practice was first photographed in Beijing in 1905 by French soldiers. Georges Bataille owned and published three such photographs in his 1961 book *The Tears of Eros*. More recently, a *lingchi* photograph became the basis of a twenty-four-minute video, *Lingchi—Echoes of a Historical Photograph*, by Taiwanese artist Chen Chieh-jen. Such photographs served colonial interests by justifying the Christian "saving" of China; they also represent the first uses of photography in China, making China available as an exotic spectacle in Europe, especially when *lingchi* photographs were made into postcards and widely distributed.[11] Like the lynching postcards and digital snapshots of Abu Ghraib, they functioned as souvenirs that were meant to demonstrate the political superiority of one group over another.

Chen's contemporary video, re-creating the historical torture of 1905, shows what appear to be the deeply shamed witnesses to the torture as well as the grueling ordeal of the victim, allowing the viewer to identify with both and making the experience virtually unbearable. Chen conveys the visual ambiguity between ecstasy and stupefaction in the lolling head and rolling eyes of the victim, which echoes the reading of such photos by Bataille, who saw on the Chinese victim's face an expression that confirmed his assumptions about the close connection between pleasure and pain. Bataille sought to endow the executions of *lingchi* with an ambiguously sacred or sacrificial quality; but, as Giorgio Agamben argues, the conceptual apparatus of sacrifice and eroticism is not adequate to grasp the profane and banal violence of modern political life.[12] The delirium of the victim combined with the shame of the witnesses in Chen's fictional video is piercingly traumatic; this helps to explain the psychological need for the hood in Iraq, which not only disorients the victim, but also effaces their humanity for the perpetrator and more easily turns the subject into an object.

When lynching photos were transformed into souvenir postcards, they were sent to friends and family with the senders' proud boasts of having been in the mob, making blackness an exotic spectacle and privileging the "look" of whites over blacks. Spectacle lynchings similarly relied on the look of the crowd to reaffirm notions of superior white "manliness" over the stereotype of the hypersexual black male, even as many white men in the mob acted on repressed homoerotic desires and many white women found vicarious pleasure in the mob's exposure and penetrations of the black body. At Abu Ghraib, compact

9. Sarah Boxer, "Torture Incarnate, and Propped on a Pedestal," *New York Times*, June 13, 2004.
10. W. J. T. Mitchell, "Echoes of a Christian Symbol," *Chicago Tribune*, June 27, 2004, Section 2, 1, available online at http://humanities.uchicago.edu/faculty/mitchell/interviews.htm.
11. For the most authoritative information on *lingchi*, see the work of the research group Turandot, which held a conference on "The Representation of Pain," April 22–23, 2005, at University College Cork in Cork, Ireland. The Turandot Web site on Chinese torture is http://turandot.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/. Also see An-yi Pan, "Contemporary Taiwanese Art in the Era of Contention," in *Contemporary Taiwanese Art in the Era of Contention*, exh. cat. (Ithaca: Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University; Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2004), 158, 160–61.
12. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 112–15.

discs, videos, and computer files of digital images performed the role of the postcards, and were meant to circulate only within the community of American military personnel, their families, and friends. The pictures established the right of the soldiers to "look" at the nude and brutalized bodies of their victims, even to pose with corpses, while effacing the look of the prisoners through hooding and other forms of degradation.

Likewise, the voices of the tortured, like the voices of lynching victims, were meant to be silenced outside the circumstances of their ordeal. But testimonies have been taken. One prisoner tells of being covered with phosphoric liquid from a chemical light and raped with a stick: "Then they broke the glowing finger and spread it on me until I was glowing and they were laughing. They took me to the room and they signaled me to get on the floor. And one of the police he put a part of his stick that he always carries inside my ass and I felt it going inside me about 2 centimeters, approximately. And I started screaming, and he pulled it out. . . . And they were taking pictures of me during all these instances."[13] The photos were meant to add to the shaming as well as provide souvenirs. The thrills of sexualized violence became less veiled and more explicit than in lynching photos, to the point where photographs and videos of torture and the sexual abuse of prisoners were interleaved with images of American soldiers having sex with each other.

But the pornographic function of the torture scenarios serves a larger political function. The pleasure in the extreme pain and degradation of others relies on a process of dehumanization that depends in large part on constructing Arabs and Muslims as an undifferentiated mass, just as black men were stereotyped en masse by white supremacists. Back then they were all "black beast rapists"; now they are all "terrorists," making them far easier to humiliate, torture, sexually exploit, and kill. The necessary emotional distancing and dehumanization of the Other is also revealed by language. The Nazis referred to Jews as "pieces"; American soldiers refer to an Iraqi prisoner as "it."[14] Although the torture photos seem to employ the basic structuring principle of pornography—the events are real but staged for the camera in order to deliver prurient pleasure—the protocols are fundamentally different. Porno actors do not mug for the camera; they maintain a fiction of authenticity. Here there is no "fiction" of authenticity, not only because the victims are not willing actors, but because the pleasure is not meant to be found in their pruriently deployed bodies but in the exultant mastery of those who wield power over them, representing a different cultural and political order.

Thus the influence of pornography did not determine these torture scenarios, any more than it did lynchings. The trend in American culture which holds Arabs and Muslims in contempt, just as "blackness" was held in contempt, or earlier colonial subjects, must be held responsible for such acts. Hersh reports that as government authorities were searching for ways to dominate Muslims in the months before the invasion of Iraq, pro-war Washington conservatives latched onto the notion that Arabs are particularly vulnerable to sexual humiliation. They used the 1978 book *The Arab Mind* by Raphael Patai, a cultural anthropologist, which became "the bible of the neocons on Arab behavior" and depicted sexual shame and humiliation as the biggest weakness of Arabs. Although privacy is indeed deeply ingrained, commentators have noted that Arabs are as shamed and

13. Translation of statement [name blacked out], January 21, 2004, in Danner, *Torture and Truth*, 248.
14. Robin Tolmach Lakoff, "From Ancient Greece to Iraq, the Power of Words in Wartime," *New York Times*, May 18, 2004, Section F, 3. The Iraqis are also derisively called "hajis," the way the Vietnamese were called "gooks."
15. See, for example, "Muslims Were Outraged; So Were Christians," *New York Times*, May 9, 2004, Section 4, 5. Edward Said roundly attacked Patai's book in his landmark 1978 study *Orientalism*.

humiliated as any of us would be in the same situation.[15]

Stephen Cambone, Rumsfeld's top intelligence official, was the point man for implementing the secret program in Iraq and deciding that no rules applied. Cambone's military assistant, William G. Boykin, in a speech in an Oregon church, equated the Muslim world with Satan. This helps to explain why prisoners, in addition to being raped and ridden like dogs, were also forced to eat pork and drink alcohol in contravention of their religion.[16] These are crimes of national, ethnic, race, and religious hatred, as well as a colonialist mentality by military occupiers. It is no surprise that this is the perception of much of the Arab world, expressed by Abdelbari Atwan in *Al Quds al Arabi*, a London-based Arabic daily: "The torture is not the work of a few American soldiers. It is the result of an official American culture that deliberately insults and humiliates Muslims."[17]

Cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek suggests that the issue of abuse is more pervasive and fundamental to American culture. "Far too often," he writes, "we are treated to images of soldiers and students forced to assume humiliating poses, perform debasing gestures, and suffer sadistic punishments. The torture at Abu Ghraib was thus not simply a case of American arrogance toward a Third World people. In being submitted to the humiliating tortures, the Iraqi prisoners were effectively *initiated into American culture*."[18] Žižek's assertion stereotypes American culture as a whole, while diminishing the specific political culpability of the Bush regime for the crimes of Abu Ghraib. My argument is not that there is some essential American impulse to torture, but that torture and its representations are conscious political acts which follow recognizable protocols of power and subordination, of which lynching and Abu Ghraib are two examples.

There is also an important difference between American college hazing rituals and the torture of prisoners, in that those who are victims/participants in the former activity ultimately have a choice, while Iraqi prisoners decidedly do not. The pranks of frat boys, however dangerous and sadistic, do not yet equal the crimes of rape, torture, and murder at Abu Ghraib, as Rush Limbaugh has publicly suggested.[19] Such behavior was tolerated for months with full knowledge up the chain of command and would not have occurred as an ongoing practice without the conviction that it was sanctioned. It was not surprising, then, when an independent panel headed by James R. Schlesinger, the former defense secretary, assigned responsibility for the abuse of prisoners in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantánamo Bay to senior Pentagon officials, including Rumsfeld, stating that officials were aware of the problems and failed to address them.[20] Indeed, they effectively authorized them.

The abusive behavior of American prison guards—and Charles F. Graner, for example, one of the most sadistic abusers in the Abu Ghraib scandal, was one—serves as a better analogy than hazing rituals. This is especially evident in relation to immigrant "detainees" in the United States who are locked up by the Department of Homeland Security prior to deportation. Without access to lawyers and soon-to-be-out-of-reach in countries such as Guyana, Egypt, and Tunisia, many of these detainees receive brutal treatment all too reminiscent of Abu Ghraib, as Daniel Zwerdling reports for National Public Radio. Such prisoners have no redress for their complaints.[21]

Like the lynching photos which were appropriated and transformed into antilynching images by left-wing and liberal artists and organizations in the 1930s

16. Andrew Buncombe, Justin Huggler, and Leonard Doyle, "Abu Ghraib: Inmates Raped, Ridden Like Animals, and Forced to Eat Pork," available online at http://news.independent.co.uk/world/middle_east/story.jsp?story=523724.
17. Quoted in Alan Cowell, "Bush's Words Do Little to Ease Horror at Prison Deeds," *New York Times*, May 7, 2004, A12.
18. Slavoj Žižek, "What Rumsfeld Doesn't Know that He Knows about Abu Ghraib," *In These Times*, May 21, 2004, available online at www.inthesetimes.com.
19. Rush Limbaugh dismissed the Abu Ghraib photos saying, "It is no different than what happens at the Skull and Bones initiation." Quoted in "Abu Ghraib Timeline," in *Inconvenient Evidence: Iraqi Prison Photographs from Abu Ghraib*, exh. cat. (New York: International Center of Photography: Pittsburgh: Andy Warhol Museum, 2004). See also "Commentators Conflate 'Depraved' Art and Abu Ghraib Photos," May 14, 2004, available online at Artforum.com/archive/ id=6885& search=commentators%20Conflate.
20. See "The Schlesinger Report," August 2004, in Danner, *Torture and Truth*, 329–99.
21. Daniel Zwerdling, "U.S. Detainee Abuse Cases Fall through the Cracks," November 18, 2004, available online at www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4173701.

(such as the John Reed Club and International Labor Defense, both affiliated with the Communist Party, and the NAACP), the torture photos of Abu Ghraib also have become the basis for antiwar images and artworks.[22] The photos of the man on a leash and the hooded man are now painted side by side as murals on a wall in Tehran, demonstrating once again that the meaning of images depends on the arena in which they circulate. Like their distribution in the world media, this public visibility transforms them from private souvenirs of American supremacy into blistering anti-American pictures.

The photograph was reprinted in the *New York Times*, where Sarah Boxer commented on the hooded man as echoing the veiled woman who walks by the murals (with a male companion), effectively conflating the two.[23] But there is a difference between hooding and veiling. Though there is clearly an attempt to "feminize" Arabs and Muslims as a whole through their subordination to American dominance, the hooded figure never becomes a veiled figure. Rather, a continuum is produced between the two murals that transforms the abjection of the crawling prisoner, his body truncated by the edge of the mural, into the upright man of sorrows. The hooded man parallels the masculinized figure of Lynndie England, produced at about the same size, counterpoising the diffident American soldier engaged in a debasing action with the figure who seems to appeal to the world through his open-armed gesture, creating the appearance of noble sacrifice, if for a nonexistent redemptive purpose.

Lynndie England and prisoners at Abu Ghraib.

Just as the lynching rituals threatened men with castration, at Abu Ghraib, terror also took the form of threatening the masculinity of the prisoners, using dogs to menace and attack naked prisoners and allowing women soldiers to sexually humiliate them and even to handle and mock their genitals, pointing and laughing while taking photographs. Here, as Lynndie England mocks the genitals of one in a row of naked prisoners, her jauntiness and the casualness of her dangling cigarette differ markedly from the stiffness of her pose with the prisoner on a leash. England's cooptation is complete. The man to whom she points, who has since been released, has come forward to identify himself as Saddam Saleh. He says he only knows that he is the third from the right because American soldiers brought the photograph to his cell and pointed him out, in an obvious effort to humiliate him further. He was tortured for another eighteen days before the interrogations began.[24]

Other prisoners also have testified about their sexual humiliation: "The two American girls that were there when they were beating me, they were hitting me with a ball made of sponge on my dick. And when I was tied up in my room, one of the girls, with blonde hair, she is white, she was playing with my dick." This prisoner was also urinated on by a military policeman and made to bark like a dog, hit on the side of the head so forcefully that he lost consciousness, forced to wear women's red underwear on his head, and tied to a window in his cell with his hands behind his back until he again lost consciousness. Another saw a prisoner's genitals beaten with gloves. Others remembered how soldiers ordered them to masturbate, sometimes in front of female soldiers, and to simulate homosexual acts.[25] Jonathan Raban effectively characterizes the infantilization and feminization of Arabs by the Americans: "Here is Arabia nude, faceless under a hood, or ridiculously feminised in women's panties, forced into infantile mas-

22. See my *Imagery of Lynching*.
23. Boxer, "Torture Incarnate, and Propped on a Pedestal."
24. Buncombe, Huggler, and Doyle, "Abu Ghraib."
25. See translations of statements: [name blacked out], January 21, 2004; Shalan Said Al-Sharoni, January 17, 2004; Nori Samir Gunbar Al-Yasseri, January 17, 2004; Hussein Mohssein Mata Al-Zayiadi, January 4, 2004; Hiadar Sabar Abed Miktub Al-Aboodi, January 20, 2004; all in Danner, *Torture and Truth*, 247–48, 234, 236–37, 240, 245.
26. Jonathan Raban, "Emasculating Arabia," *The Guardian* (London), May 13, 2004, Features, 6.

Sabrina Harman and Charles Graner behind human pyramid of hooded Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib, November 7 or 8, 2003.

Salaheddin Sallat. *"That Freedom for Bush,"* 2004. Mural in Sadr City, Baghdad. Photograph: AP Wide World Photos.

turbatory sex and sodomy."[26]

A photograph of a human pyramid pictures a grinning Sabrina Harman and Charles Graner posing with their handiwork, Graner offering a thumbs-up. The word "RAPEIST" [sic], written on the leg of one of the prisoners, echoes the charges against black lynching victims and becomes a bitter parody of blaming the victim for the crime of the perpetrator. "We thought it looked funny, so pictures were taken," England told investigators.[27] She confessed that piling prisoners naked or forcing them to masturbate had nothing to do with interrogations; but it has everything to do with the arrogance that seeks global domination and is insensitive to the subjugation of "others," functioning as a corollary to American nationalist pride.

Hussein Mohssein Mata Al-Zayiadi was among the Iraqis in the pyramid who later gave sworn testimony in which he described his ordeal and its aftermath: "After that they brought my friends, Haidar, Ahmed, Nouri, Ahzem, Hashiem, Mustafa, and I and they put us 2 on the bottom, 2 on top of them, and 2 on top of those and one on top. They took pictures of us and we were naked. After the end of the beating, they took us to our separate cells and they opened the water in the cell and told us to lay face down in the water and we stayed like that until the morning, in the water, naked, without clothes." When asked how he felt about this treatment, he replied, "I was trying to kill myself but I didn't have any way of doing it."[28]

Some antiwar images of the hooded man produce a conflation of the two most iconic images. A photograph of a figure at a London protest depicts a black hooded figure with a noose or a leash around his neck, holding a sign with a picture of the hooded man, and the slogan, "Bring the troops home now." In another protest painting, the hooded man is painted next to the Statue of Liberty on a wall in the crowded Shiite section of Baghdad known as Sadr City. The mural is the work of the thirty-one-year-old artist Salaheddin Sallat. The wires attached to the hooded man are connected to an electric grid, as they are in the real photo, with the Statue of Liberty pulling the switch. Sallat, who lives in a small house with eighteen members of his family, observed, "In fact, when I saw the photo of that man, it made me think of the Statue of Liberty," further noting, "I chose this area because everyone can see it."[29] Such recontextualizations of the Abu Ghraib images may be seen as contributing to the resistance against the acts they represent. Here Sallat makes clear his understanding that the mere act of rendering the images visible to the public begins their undoing.

The Statue of Liberty sports a white hood below the spikes of her crown and wears a medallion with a small red cross at her neck, the Eastern Orthodox cross more familiar to Iraqis. The words painted on the wall indicate the mockery of "freedom" that the war on Iraq has produced, doubling the hooded man with the preeminent symbol of America. The Statue of Liberty, once the icon of welcome to refugees, stands above all for American democracy. But the rhetoric of democracy is exposed for its extreme hypocrisy. The images that illustrate the words "That Freedom for Bush" represent what this rhetoric has set in motion and come to mean; since the rationale for war was the export of freedom and democracy, it is Liberty and no other symbol, such as Uncle Sam, which best represents America. But her torch now becomes a lethal electric current. Effectively conflating Liberty and the executioner into a single image, the figures

27. "U.S. Rules on Prisoners Seen as a Back and Forth of Mixed Messages to G.I.'s," *New York Times*, June 22, 2004, A7.
28. Translation of statement provided by Hussein Mohssein Mata Al-Zayiadi, January 18, 2004, in Danner, *Torture and Truth*, 240.
29. Virginie Locussol, "U.S. Prison Abuse Painted on Wall," June 2, 2004, available online at Novinite.com/view_news.php?id=35348.

Linocut, 1935, from Lin Shih Khan and Tony Perez, *Scottsboro, Alabama: A Story in Linoleum Cuts*, published 2002. Courtesy of New York University Press.

Forkscrew Graphics. *iRaq* posters, 2004. Four offset posters, each approx. 24 x 36 in. (61 x 91.5 cm). Published online at forkscrew.com.

become doppelgangers; the mask of degradation becomes the face of America, the hooded man its innocent victim. Commenting on the power of the hooded man and the leashed man images, Mark Danner calls such representations the "perfect masterpieces of propaganda" which have "the considerable advantage of being true." "Had bin Laden sought to create a powerful trademark image for his international product of global jihad," he writes, "he could scarcely have done better hiring the cleverest advertising firm on Madison Avenue."[30]

The Statue of Liberty transformed into the standard bearer of racial oppression evokes an antilynching image from the 1930s produced in protest of the Scottsboro trials, the notorious case of nine young black men falsely accused of raping two white girls on a freight train headed toward Alabama. In *Scottsboro: A Story Told in Prints*, first produced in 1933, a linocut depicts the attempt by the courts to carry out a "legal lynching." A hooded Klansman assumes his position on the pedestal, holding a lynch rope in one hand and a small electric chair in the other. Marked by a swastika, cross, and backwards dollar sign, the Klansman replaces Liberty with race hatred, intolerance, and greed while Liberty runs for her life.

Another protest image, produced by the L.A. graphic design group Forkscrew Graphics, was placed in the subways and streets of New York City and Los Angeles following the revelations of Abu Ghraib.[31] Produced in silhouette, the hooded man in his ragged cape stands on what now becomes a pedestal, like the Statue of Liberty, emphasizing his precarious balance even as it strengthens the iconic status of the image. The hooded man has become a logo for the war itself, codified in the symbol of a time bomb next to the stylized word "iRaq," an echo of the iPod logo, just as the fake hot-pink or chartreuse backgrounds evoke the iPod ads. Alluding to the Pop art multiples associated with Andy Warhol, the slick and colorful posters suggest the commercialization of the war, evoking Halliburton and the staggering profits it has made on noncompetitive contracts. The posters further imply the commodification of torture itself as central to the occupation of Iraq. Torture as a commodity takes its crassest form in the phenomenon of "outsourcing"—the common employment and delegation of the task of interrogation to mercenaries euphemistically called "civilian contractors" (the four men who were notoriously murdered and mutilated in Fallujah in April 2004 were civilian contractors). Inserted among actual iPod ads in subway stations and on the streets of New York and Los Angeles, the selling of torture as a war product is ironically complete.

Richard Serra also appropriated the hooded man for *Stop Bush*, a color lithograph done as a free downloadable poster for pleasevote.com, and, in another version, for an Artists Coming Together benefit print, *Stop B S.*[32] Serra distributed these prints widely in art venues, mainstream publications, and on the Internet in support of the Democratic campaigns for the 2004 election. The haunting image becomes emblematic of American imperial arrogance as well as the signal crime of the Bush administration, encapsulating the argument for his defeat. In an interview with the German newspaper *Die Zeit*, Serra condemned the Bush administration for its denial of Western values and law.[33] Geoffrey Sirc has argued that although images can still unnerve us, it is much harder now to penetrate our "overmediated consciousness."[34] The images that still have such power are those that allude to the real.

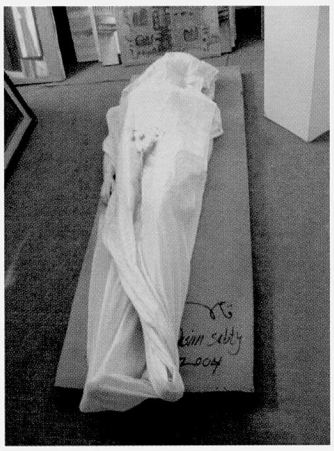
30. Danner, *Torture and Truth*, 29.
31. The hooded man is one of four poster parodies; the other three depict American soldiers in silhouette handling guns, shoulder-fired missiles, or grenades. See www.forkscrew.com/main.html.
32. See www.bloodforoil.org/please-vote/ for another pleasevote.com image designed by Serra that superimposes Bush's face on Goya's painting *Saturn Devouring His Children*; the image was featured as an ad on the back cover of *The Nation*.
33. Artnet.news, September 7, 2004, available online at www.artnet.com/Magazine/news/artnetnews2/artnetnews9-7-04.asp.
34. Geoffrey Sirc, "Undecided, but Leaning toward Skull: Political Art in the Age of Spin," October 28, 2004, available online at http://www.mnartists.org/article.do;jsessionid=EEA59F7168038D64A9417438CA880F4A?rid=51507.

Richard Serra. *Stop Bush*, 2004. Offset printing on paper. Installation view. Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery, New York. Photograph © 2004 Robert Polidori.

The hooded man is the latest addition to a genealogy of iconic images, which includes the photos of the planes crashing into the World Trade Center towers on 9/11 and, from the Vietnam War, Nick Ut's photograph of a naked Vietnamese girl burned by napalm fleeing down a road in Saigon, another sacrificial figure, or Eddie Adams's photo of a communist guerrilla being executed in a Saigon street. After the U.S. government censorship of photographs from World War II and Korea, such pictures had a shocking effect on the American public.[35] Similarly, the Abu Ghraib photos stand in stark contrast to the officially approved and sanitized representations of the American presence in Iraq, which are consistent with the government's refusal to report on Iraqi civilian casualties and its censorship of photos of returning coffins with the American dead.

The issues of gender and sexuality also have been addressed in protest art. The Taguba Report and an unreleased video both show that at least one woman prisoner was raped, while others were forced to strip.[36] Further evidence of soldiers engaging in various sex acts with prisoners and among themselves was reported following the three-hour, closed-door session on May 12, 2004, during which members of Congress were shown over eighteen hundred photographs and videos.[37] In another case, three Army soldiers were accused of assaulting a female Iraqi prisoner. While publications such as the *New Yorker* and the *Washington*

35. See George H. Roeder, Jr., *The Censored War: American Visual Experience during World War Two* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). For the Nick Ut and Eddie Adams photos, see http://images.google.com/images?h1=en&lr=&q=vietnam+war+photos.
36. "The Taguba Report," in Danner, *Torture and Truth*, 279–328.
37. Images included forced sodomy, Lynndie England having sex with other U.S. soldiers in front of prisoners, prisoners cowering in front of attack dogs, Iraqi women being forced to expose their breasts, naked prisoners tied up together, prisoners forced to masturbate, and a prisoner repeatedly smashing his head against a wall. On May 21, 2004, on the *Washington Post* Web site, executive editor Leonard Downie, Jr., described the newspaper's decision not to publish many of the abuse images because they were "so shocking and in such bad taste, especially the extensive nudity." See "Abu Ghraib Timeline," in *Inconvenient Evidence*. Also see Seymour Hersh's presentation at Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia, "Terrorism: A Report from Washington," a video presented on C-Span, September 9, 2004, in which he attests to having seen "many worse" photographs than the ones published by the *New Yorker*, available online at www.c-span.org/search/basic.asp?ResultStart=1&ResultCount=10&BasicQueryText=Seymour+Hersh). The *New Yorker* decided not to publish those photos, a decision that Hersh defended.
38. Quoted in "Theweleit et al. on the Iconography of War," *International News Digest*, May 17, 2004, available online at www.artforum. com/news/week=200421#news6892.
39. Nicholas Blanford, "Iraqi Artists Depict Anger over Abu Ghraib," June 15, 2004, available online at http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0615/p07s01-woiq.html, and Samir Haddad and Mazen Ghazi, "Iraqi Plastic Art Documents Abu Ghraib Abuse," June 6, 2004, available online at http://www.islamonline.net/English/News/2004-06/06/article02.shtml.
40. See "Abu Ghraib's Women Prisoners," May 26, 2004, available online at http://www.thinkingpeace.com/pages/arts2/arts210.html; Francine D'Amico, "The Women of Abu Ghraib," *The Post-Standard*, May 23, 2004, C1; and Annia Ciezadlo, "For Iraqi Women, Abu Ghraib's Taint," May 28, 2004, available online at http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0528/p01s02-woiq.html.
41. Sculptor Taher Wahib produced a Statue of Liberty with her head replaced by chained hands, her feet lashed together, and her robe set on fire by her own torch, which stands on a Baghdad street behind barbed wire and barriers with a flag that reads, "Abu Gulag Freedom Park"; another statue is made entirely of chains and wears a T-shirt distributed to Iraqis by coalition troops,



Qassim al-Sabti. Sculpture, title unknown. Abdel-Karim Khalil. Sculpture, title unknown. Installation views, Hewar Gallery, Baghdad, 2004. Photographs: Steve Mumford.

bearing the words, "Iraq, progress and prosperity." See Sammy Ketz, "Iraqi Artists Portray Ugly Wounds of U.S. Occupation," June 7, 2004, available online at http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/culture/?id=10196=10196&format=0. For more on Baghdad artists, including al-Sabti, see Steve Mumford, "The Artists of Baghdad," in *Baghdad Journal*, November 11, 2003, available online at Artnet.com/magazine/ features/mumford/mumford11-11-03.asp. For an interview with al-Sabti, see Edward Miller, "In the First Person," *Mennonite Central Committee*, September 8, 2003, available online at www.mcc.org/areaserv/middleeast/iraq/interviews/qasim.html.

42. Blanford, "Iraqi Artists"; Hamza Hendawi, "Images of Iraqi Prisoners Used in Art," May 8, 2004, available online at http://www.liberaltopia.org/archives/2004/05/more_proof_some.php.

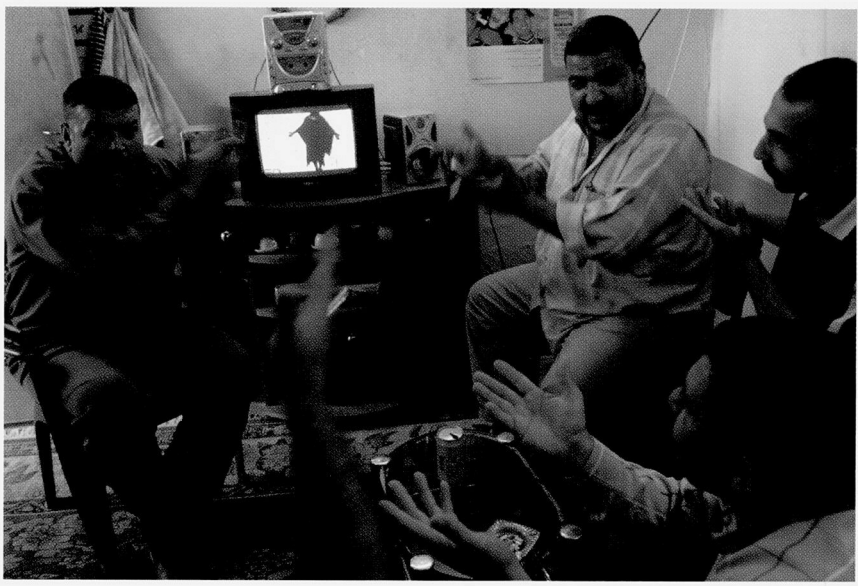
Post made decisions not to publish many of the more disturbing photographs, Klaus Theweleit, author of *Male Fantasies*, in an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, argued against such restraint: "I have these kinds of scenes in my head, from concentration camps, from splatter, snuff, and porn films. We could repress these images, but then we give ourselves over to the illusion spread by the sanitized editions of the daily news: that we live in a half-civilized world."[38]

A protest image produced by Qassim al-Sabti, a fifty-one-year-old Iraqi artist and owner of the Hewar Gallery in the Wazerieh district of central Baghdad, poignantly captures the crimes against the Iraqi woman. A lifesize female mannequin lies prone, her veil a white death shroud marred only by an oozing red triangle. Al-Sabti was inspired to produce this work after receiving a copy of a letter that a prisoner, who was raped and impregnated by a U.S. guard, had sent to her family. "There was a letter circulating in Fallujah from a woman inside Abu Ghraib," al-Sabti said. "She was begging the resistance to bomb Abu Ghraib and bring down the walls on their heads so that their suffering would end. I felt like screaming when I heard this. I wanted to draw the attention of the American people."[39]

The letter, smuggled out of the prison, was one of the few to reveal what was happening to women inside Abu Ghraib. The shame and ostracism attached to having been raped is so egregious that most Iraqi women who have been released will not discuss their experiences, even in private. Amal Kadham Swadi, one of seven Iraqi women lawyers representing women at Abu Ghraib, has begun to uncover the extent of atrocities against women across Iraq, including the case of one seventy-year-old woman who was harnessed and ridden like a donkey at Abu Ghraib. Many women are the wives or daughters of male suspects, arrested as a way of pressuring the men.[40]

Al-Sabti invited twenty artists to contribute works to an exhibition inspired by the humiliations at Abu Ghraib.[41] Abdel-Karim Khalil produced three works for al-Sabti's exhibition, including a roughly foot-high marble carving of a hooded detainee. Combining the medium of white marble associated with classical Greek sculpture and rational civilization with the symbol of a barbarian oppressor, Khalil appropriates a form traditionally used to represent "whiteness" in order to universalize the figure. He observed, "Some artists used to be neutral, but now there are artists, poets, and writers who have all reached the decision that the Americans are destroyers. It has given them a new sense of purpose in art."[42]

It took decades of struggle as well as economic and political forces to finally subdue the systematic lynching of black people and to transform lynching photography from a support of white supremacy into an antilynching weapon through the mass publication of lynching photos and especially the pictures of the vicious disfigurement of Emmett Till, which helped galvanize the civil rights movement. The Abu Ghraib photos had a more instantaneous effect, unleashing public horror and outrage around the world through global distribution of the pictures via the Internet and television. More recently, seventeen of the images were on view in the fall 2004 exhibition *Inconvenient Evidence: Iraqi Prison Photographs from Abu Ghraib*, curated by Brian Wallis for the International Center of Photography in New York and the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh. Like the photographs of lynchings in the exhibitions of *Without Sanctuary* that began in New York in 2000, *Inconvenient Evidence* may raise the question for some of whether such exhibi-



An Iraqi family in downtown Baghdad reacts to images of tortured prisoners broadcast on the Arabic channel Al Jazeera. Photograph: Sungsu Cho/Polaris.

tions make the photographs available once again to a gaze of mastery, reinforcing their humiliating effect. But just as the photos' initial production and forms of circumscribed circulation were political acts, so is their display in such public venues now, exposing American pretensions to racial, cultural, and political dominance in Iraq and revealing a brutality and sense of entitlement that is firmly rooted in the nationalist ideology of the Bush administration.

Indeed, the lurid atrocities that traveled the globe were branded by one military official a "moral Chernobyl." But unlike Chernobyl, as Christopher Hitchens points out, the only accident at Abu Ghraib was the release of the pictures to the world.[43] The torture and abuse of prisoners was mandated and justified at the top, and those who gave vent to even the most gratuitous sadistic impulses felt safe in a carefully circumscribed culture of community sanction. That community began scrambling to repair the public relations disaster this represented for the United States, not to ameliorate the trauma and loss that constitute the human cost in Iraq or to reexamine the underlying policies that have led to the systematic and continuing pattern of torture but to salvage their moral authority by shirking responsibility and blaming a few "bad apples." And they succeeded, at least in the United States, by winning another election. How, then, do photographs of torture produce their own undoing? When is the power of an image turned against itself, transforming it into a picture that opposes the very thing the photograph means to uphold? We can affirm that different meanings are produced according to the arenas in which those images circulate, and that the association of photographs and artworks with the status of the real is critical to producing both a successful countereffect and an effectively persuasive protest art. But we must also recognize that torture images do not inherently produce their own undoing—it depends on us.

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43. Christopher Hitchens, "A Moral Chernobyl: Prepare for the Worst of Abu Ghraib," *Slate*, June 14, 2004, available online at slate.msn.com/id/2102373.