

Naomi Perez

Denying Abu Ghraib

Photographs are often seen as a way to keep special memories alive. Many people use photographs as ways to remember the happy moments in their lives, such as weddings, parties, or even just hanging out with one another. But Abu Ghraib showed us a whole new way in which photographs can be used. The military police (MP) at Abu Ghraib used photographs to show the inhumane things they were doing to the detainees in the prison, and how little they cared about leaving evidence behind. These photographs are an undeniable form of evidence to the atrocities that occurred in the American prison.

To understand what really happened at Abu Ghraib, we must understand what did not happen. The Bush administration, and many of the people in charge of the prison made claims that it was only an issue of “a few bad apples”. Knowing what happened and allowing it to keep happening, and keeping a secret shows us that it was more than just a few bad apples, the whole tree was rotten. The people who could have stopped all of this, want the public to think they had no part in this at all.

Many of the people involved in the Abu ghraib scandal claimed that they didn't know what was going on, or that the people who were torturing detainees were doing so by themselves. Sociologist, Stanley Cohen wrote an article on the uses of denial in torture. “We didn't know' may be true for many people. Public knowledge of atrocities and social suffering varies according to political setting... and much else. Peripheral bystanders or even perpetrators may have no idea of the big picture.” Cohen wrote. To many, this might make sense. But the higher-ups at Abu Ghraib don't get to use this excuse. Many times, we saw them ignore what

they knew was happening. In one case, an MP was even told to “keep it up” in reference to his behavior.

The MP's who were actually at the prison, however, use other forms of denial to excuse what they did at Abu Ghraib. In his article, Cohen talks about how people use denial of responsibility. "These range from total excuses and full incapacity ('I didn't know what I was doing', 'I must have blacked out') to the more moderate vocabularies of social determinism (bad homes, bad friends, bad neighborhood, bad luck)." In Abu Ghraib, many MPs claimed that they were just following directions. They were actively trying to rid themselves of guilt by pinning responsibility on those who gave them orders. Cohen later continues, "The most facile and comprehensible way to evade personal responsibility is to appeal to authority and obedience. You deny agency, intent, disposition, and choice: 'I was just following orders...I had no choice...I couldn't have refused... I had nothing against those people, but they told us we had to kill them.'" The MPs at Abu Ghraib said that what they were doing was not wrong because it was their job. Many of them also stated that they were just doing what they were taught once they arrived at Abu Ghraib. By saying they thought it was all part of their job, it makes it seem as if they had no clue that what they were doing was torture. Many of the MPs claim that they knew it was wrong, but it was their job. Charles Graner, an MP at Abu Ghraib, knew that what he was doing was wrong but he did not care. He told Joseph Darby, "The Christian in me knows its wrong, but the corrections officer in me can't help but love to make a grown man piss himself." When Graner says this, it makes it clear that he thinks he is just doing his job. But no corrections officer should be instilling so much fear in a person that they urinate on themselves. For Graner

to think that his position excused his behavior, was a clear example of denial as explained by Cohen.

It is expected that these people might make excuses for themselves. But another person who used denial to excuse this was President Bush himself. In 2003, the president wrote a statement in solidarity with victims of torture. In his statement, Bush describes torture as something foreign that can only happen in countries under dictatorships and “rougue regimes”. After the Abu Ghraib scandal came to light, he released another statement for victims of torture. In this new statement, he brushes over what happened at Abu Ghraib. After barely mentioning Abu Ghraib, he continues talking about all the hard work Americans have done after 9/11. This is a form of denial because he sets the Americans at Abu Ghraib apart from other Americans. He also says that it’s thanks to Americans that Iraq is free from its dictatorship. But is Iraq really free when you have American soldiers torturing its people? Bush fails to mention who is responsible for this, and what he is going to do about it.