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Julie Gerk Hernandez,

"The Tortured Body, the Photograph, and the U.S. War on Terror"

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Abstract: Julie Gerk Hernandez, in her article "The Tortured Body, the Photograph, and the U.S. War on Terror," engages in an analysis of the institutional mechanisms that lead to dehumanizing violence as a result of the ongoing allegations of torture of detainees at U.S. military bases at Abu Ghraib, in Afghanistan, and at Guantánamo. Hernandez conducts her investigation by examining the photographed torture at Abu Ghraib as an atavistic resurgence of the representational practices at work in post-Civil-War racial lynching. Hernandez also explores the historical and visual parallels between the photographs at Abu Ghraib and the photographs of post-Civil-War lynchings in order to show how the torture at Abu Ghraib exists within an historical continuum of racialized violence. Exposing the direct link between the individual perpetrators' actions and U.S. policy, Hernandez shows that the torture at Abu Ghraib was an institutional rather than a personal act and examines how this institutional connection is successfully eclipsed from public view. She shows through her comparative analysis of these practices that attention to these institutionalized practices is essential for understanding the process of racializing social conflict.

Julie Gerk HERNANDEZ

The Tortured Body, the Photograph, and the U.S. War on Terror

The photographs taken at Abu Ghraib prison, graphically depicting U.S. military officers inflicting torture on Iraqi detainees, burst into the U.S. media on 28 April 2004. The eerie juxtaposition of tormented, unidentifiable Iraqis and smiling, identifiable U.S. officers incited instantly worldwide shock and outrage. In the ensuing months, however, the explosive impact of the pictures slowly and stealthily dissipated, as the scandal vanished into an epistemological void; the US-American public's initial concern was ephemeral. The media attention on individuals such as Pfc. Lyndie England and Spec. Charles Graner distracted the U.S. public from what happened systemically at the U.S. military base in Iraq (and from what continues to happen in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantánamo). Where do these photographs of torture exist in the public's psyche of the US? And what do they reveal about the War on Terror, about our current historical moment, about our past and our possible future?

While top officials have attempted to manipulate legal definitions and public perception in order to slide torture under the door, the U.S. war machine has gained its own sadistic momentum, exhibiting a frighteningly familiar phenomenon. Since launching the War on Terror in response to the attacks on 9/11, the Bush administration has constructed and defied legalistic boundaries with innovative and novel flair. But the photos at Abu Ghraib are not novel; they are reminiscent of a shameful part of our past: the public lynchings of (almost exclusively) African American men, which began after the Civil War, peaked in the 1890s, and continued until the 1950s. The photograph played an integral role in this nightmarish white ritual, as witnesses would acquire copies and send them to family and friends as postcard souvenirs through the U.S. postal service. Describing the lasting legacy of lynching, Michelle Shawn Smith writes, "lynchings and lynching photographs cannot be sealed away in the past. The white supremacism on which spectacles are founded still functions; the communities they forged may still exist" (116). Her words are hauntingly apropos today.

As Hazel Carby and Michael Niman suggested, the photographed lynchings of African Americans and the photographed torture of Iraqis at Abu Ghraib exhibit historical (and violent visual) parallels. The incident at Abu Ghraib seems to represent an atavistic resurgence of post-Civil-War racial lynching. This terrifying possibility forces us to retrieve both sets of pictures from our national unconscious and to put them on public display with the objective of identifying the institutional mechanisms which lead to dehumanizing violence. Building on Carby's and Niman's brief, although provocative suggestions, I attempt to elaborate on those historical and visual parallels in this article by unveiling the institutional mechanisms of torture within the context of the War on Terror. In light of the direct link between the individual perpetrators' actions and U.S. policy, I argue that the torture at Abu Ghraib is an institutional, rather than a personal, act, and I examine how this institutional connection is successfully eclipsed from public view. I also explore the racially and (homo)sexually corporeal dynamic of the torture, relying upon the extensive scholarship on racial lynching in order to show how the torture at Abu Ghraib exists within an historical continuum of racialized violence. It is my hope that this essay serves as a tributary to the body of academic-activist work about torture in today's indefinite war, both joining and extending the discussion until eventually it is both *seen* and *heard*.

Differentiating between war and torture, Elaine Scarry notes, "war more often arises where the enemy is external, occupies a separate space, where the impulse to obliterate a rival population and its civilization is not (or need not at first be perceived as) a self-destruction. Torture usually occurs where the enemy is internal and where the destruction of a race and its civilization would be a self-destruction, an obliteration of one's own country" (61). She further develops this bifurcation, claiming that it is possible to ethically and intelligently defend reasons for going to war, such as a country's right to defend itself or to pursue justice, whereas torture does not merit moral justification

(139; 140-41). However viable Scarry's differentiation in 1985, globalization and the War on Terror threaten to collapse the theoretical distinction between torture (internal enemy) and war (external enemy), if not already rendering it obsolete. John Milbank contends that our current globalized economy undermines the nation-state's capacity to designate "an exterior -- a potential enemy" in order to maintain sovereign identity. "Globalization puts the modern state into crisis," he posits. "There is now the prospect of no more exterior, no more real foes … Without an external enemy, the enemy must now be internal, lurking everywhere. Without the possibility of an occasional emergency of war, there must be perpetual war against an internal danger" (65). The War on Terror, as orchestrated by the White House, both mimics and defies the de-territorializing movement of globalization. The Bush administration promotes de-territorialization by obscuring legal and semantic boundaries defined by the Geneva Convention and simultaneously thwarts de-territorialization by re-constructing boundaries between the interior and the exterior as illustrated by Bush's famous catchphrase, "you are either with us or against us." The us-them/inside-outside distinction collapses at the same time that it is vehemently delineated. Because the war promises to perpetuate indefinitely and because the enemy with whom we are so dangerously dancing does not even signify as an external "enemy," but rather as an "unlawful combatant" who could in fact exist anywhere, the very name "War on Terror" belies actuality. It is fair to assert that we are wedded to an effort which ostensibly announces itself as war and yet does not qualify as such. The ground is ripe for torture.

In the presidential memorandum of 7 February 2002 regarding the "Humane Treatment of al Quaeda and Taliban detainees," Bush argues that Articles III and IV of the Geneva Conventions do not apply to "unlawful combatants" or to those accused of terrorism, because these unconventional fighters do not belong, in theory, to a nation state. He obfuscates his stance, however, by stating, "Our Nation recognizes that this new paradigm -- ushered in not by us, but by the terrorists -- requires new thinking in the law of war, but thinking that should nevertheless be consistent with the principles of Geneva" (Bush, Appendix C). Throughout the letter, Bush purports to respect and adhere to Geneva but then relegates terrorists outside the bounds of international law. His rhetoric marks a striking pattern of doubling: a concession (the U.S. respects Geneva) followed by an eclipse of the concession (Geneva does not apply because terrorists do not adhere to Geneva). Terrorists essentially occupy a non-status, which is all the more troubling when their terrorist nature is presupposed to begin with; the majority of detainees at Abu Ghraib -- not to mention at Guantánamo or in Afghanistan -- have not had access to legal counsel or due process. Suspects are being treated as always already culpable, which defies one of our country's fundamental beliefs that people are innocent until proven guilty. It seems clear that the right to fair trial only applies to those of us on the "inside" (and sometimes not even then). This contradictory approach could not be any more overt than when the government first reacted to the Abu Ghraib scandal. Responding to a reporter in a Defense Department Operational Update Briefing on 4 May 2004, Donald Rumsfeld states, "I'm not a lawyer. My impression is that what has been charged thus far is abuse, which I believe technically is different from torture. … I don't know if it is correct to say what you just said, that torture has taken place, or that there's been a conviction for torture. And therefore I'm not going to address the torture word" (<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2973>). Rumsfeld's rhetorical disavowal ("I'm not a lawyer"), sophistic legalese ("abuse" versus "torture"), and in-one's-face hypocrisy would be humorous if human life, dignity, and freedom were not at stake here.

Contrary to Rumsfeld's initial reaction, we now know that torture not only occurred, but that it also traces back to the Secretary himself. Journalist reportage on Abu Ghraib such as Seymour Hersh's *New Yorker* articles, published first online and then in hard copy in the spring of 2004, make clear that culpability extends from the supposedly "gone astray" GIs all the way up the chain of command to the Pentagon and White House. In addition to the horrifying photos, the impetus for Hersh's groundbreaking work was Major General Antonio Taguba's classified military report, "Article 15-6 Investigation of the 800th Military Police Brigade," which summarized Taguba's investigative findings

at Abu Ghraib from January to February 2004. The Taguba Report, as it is now commonly called, highlights lack of accountability, training, and knowledge of "basic legal, regulatory, doctrinal, and command requirements" (Taguba 22), as well as lapse in Brigade supervision and leadership (Taguba 36-44), for contributing to the crisis. Subsequent governmental reports have located the blame even higher up on the chain-- concurring with Hersh's findings, albeit less forthrightly.

In its "Final Report" released on 23 August 2004, the United States Independent Panel to Review DoD Detention Operations -- a panel appointed by the Secretary of Defense -- documents the dangerous "migration" of policy regarding the treatment of terrorist detainees. The report identifies the aforementioned presidential memorandum as the origin of problematic policy and then traces how this policy moved from Guantánamo, to Afghanistan, and, then, finally, to Abu Ghraib (U.S. Independent 6-10). In a chart titled, "Evolution of Interrogation Techniques – GTMO," the panel lists thirty-six interrogation techniques cross-categorized by four chronological phases in which various techniques were sanctioned and/or prohibited at Guantánamo. This laundry list illustrates a tumultuous policy battle: Rumsfeld would push for harsher interrogative methods; these methods would be given the green light and then shortly after be banned due to legal issues raised by the Navy General Counsel and other such advisory committees. The report indicates that the administration's off-and-on flirtation with "more aggressive techniques" at Guantánamo opened the door for human-rights violations in Afghanistan and Iraq (United States Independent 7). Describing the phase marked by the greatest number of approved-and-then-banned techniques in the shortest amount of time, the executive summary of the report states, "in October 2002, authorities at Guantanamo requested approval of stronger interrogation techniques to counter tenacious resistance by some detainees. The Secretary of Defense responded with a December 2, 2002 decision authorizing the use of 16 additional techniques at Guantanamo … *As a result of concerns raised by the Navy General Counsel* on January 15, 2003, Secretary Rumsfeld rescinded the majority of the approved measures in December 2, 2002 authorization" (United States Independent 7; my emphasis). Many of these temporarily approved measures at Guantánamo -- measures such as "stress positions, like standing," "isolation for up to 30 days," "hooding (transportation and questioning)," "removal of ALL comfort items, including religious items," "removal of clothing," and "exploiting individual phobias, e.g. dogs" -- reared their illegal heads at Abu Ghraib, as clearly documented by the photos (United States Independent Appendix E). It is no accident that these very techniques, which were initially approved and then prohibited at Guantánamo, were repeated at Abu Ghraib. In contrast to what many officials would like the public to believe, the torture at Abu Ghraib was not simply an unfortunate consequence of the confusing morphing of policy; it was instead the inevitable result of the Secretary's sanctioning of techniques that are -- by any legal standard -- torturous. Concentrating on the accidental evolution of policy obfuscates the simple fact that these techniques should never have been "okayed" in the first place.

In response to the question whether the selective application of Geneva at Guantánamo "provided the context [at Abu Ghraib] that rules are not so hard and fast," Army General Paul Kern elevates Guantánamo as a model of success, adducing the prison's much lower detainee-to-guard ratio, clearer chain of command, and more effective supervision as the multi-level safeguard against abuse—in contradistinction to Abu Ghraib's severe overcrowding, disorganization, and lax regulation ("Abu Ghraib"). General Kern's response is troubling on two accounts. First, he fails to mention the fact that many of the techniques used to torture Iraqi detainees were the same measures Rumsfeld specifically approved and then had to retract because of legal concerns. Second, a *New York Times* article, published just a week after General Kern's presentation aired on CSPAN on 23 November 2004, leaked the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) report charging Guantánamo guards with "psychological and physical torture" (Lewis A1). This new information undercuts Gen. Kern's strategy to designate Guantánamo as an exemplar and Abu Ghraib as an aberration. What we discover instead is a widespread systemic problem -- an inherent crack in the apparatus.

Just as the torture is unveiled and the institutional crack revealed, the spectacle repackages the incriminating information. I refer to "spectacle" here as an imbrication of political, military, sociocultural, historico-philosophical, and technological forces, or as Guy Debord defines it: "the *weltanschauung* that has been actualized, translated into the material realm -- a worldview transformed into an objective force" (12-13). There are three main ways the spectacle manages to contain and then re-integrate a scandal such as Abu Ghraib: illusion of anomaly; omission or inoculation; and erasure or re-description.

The GI's behavior at Abu Ghraib had to be presented as an isolated incident. In a congressional report, for instance, members of the House Committee on Armed Services insist that "America needs to reestablish its credibility. We have to prove to other nations -- particularly to our allies and the Arab world whose support we will ultimately need to succeed in Iraq -- that the events at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere were an aberration" (United States House 7; it is noteworthy that the report's use of the word "elsewhere" inadvertently contradicts the notion that the behavior is anomalous or isolated to Abu Ghraib). In order to prove such behavior as aberrant, culpability must be confined to the lower rank, so as to reassure national and international publics that the torture reflects only the poor and misguided judgment of a few individuals and not the illegal machinations of the overarching framework. Furthermore, lurid details, such as the substantiated death of five prisoners as a result of the torture and the possible death of twenty-three others under investigation (United States Independent 13), must be omitted, conditionally mentioned, and/or downplayed. Closely related to the inoculation of information is the erasure or re-description of information. In the CSPAN presentation previously mentioned, General Kern defines "abuse" (selectively using the less explosive term as do most government officials) as a "violation of U.S. and international law," specifying that "any violation of the Geneva Convention" qualifies as abuse ("Abu Ghraib"). He further claims that all U.S. soldiers are trained to adhere to Geneva and that Geneva applies -- without question -- in both Iraq and Afghanistan. What Kern's rhetoric cloaks from view is the fact that the administration has challenged and actually violated Geneva in the War on Terror. To project an image of the law-abiding military is to cover the underside of the law. As Debord argues, "the previous advantage which the spectacle has acquired through the outlawing of history, from having driven the recent past into hiding, and from having made everyone forget the spirit of history within society, is above all the ability to cover its own tracks -- to conceal the very progress of its recent world conquest. Its power already seems familiar, as if it has always been there. All usurpers have shared this aim: to make us forget that they have only just arrived" (16). The spectacle's almost magical ability to disappear incriminating information coincides with the opportunity to reinforce the integrity of the structure. To repudiate the "abuse," Gen. Kern professes admirable allegiance to international law. The U.S. re-embodies itself around the Abu Ghraib scandal, swallowing most of the evidence and appearing even more righteous and fortified than before; what remains in the official wake are emasculating images of the alleged terrorists.

Analyzing the psychological causes of Abu Ghraib "abuse," the Independent Panel to Review DoD Detention Operations makes a curious closing observation: "while the removal of clothing may have been intended to make detainees feel more vulnerable and therefore more compliant with interrogations, this practice is likely to have had a psychological impact on the guards and interrogators as well. The wearing of clothes is an inherently social practice, and therefore the stripping away of clothing may have had the unintended consequence of dehumanizing detainees in the eyes of those who interacted with them … the process of dehumanization lowers the moral and cultural barriers that usually preclude the abusive treatment of others" (United States Independent Appendix G, 7). The panel's analysis curiously portrays the guards and interrogators as experiencing a form of reverse victimization, as if their own methodology went awry, reversed target, and attacked them instead of the detainees. As the report intimates, removing the clothing of the prisoners functioned to dissolve the cultural barrier between bodies, eliciting an uncontrollable desire and taboo.

The panel does not specify the actions directly resulting from the disrobing or dehumanization of the detainees. One could infer, however, that the panel is alluding to the sexual abuse both perpetrated and orchestrated by the guards, which obviously occurred once prisoners were "stripp[ed] of clothing." Stopping short of identifying the abuse as sexual violation or rape, the panel cannot or does not address the psychological motivations for such behavior.

It is all too common to read comments in the media that focus on the sacrilege of sexual violence for Muslim Arabs, even from journalists such as Seymour Hersh who states that "such dehumanization [sexual abuse at Abu Ghraib] is unacceptable in any culture, but it is especially so in the Arab world. Homosexual acts are against Islamic law and it is humiliating for men to be naked in front of other men" ("Torture"). Not only does Hersh conflate inadvertently Muslims and Arabs, but he also overlooks what this behavior says about the American GIs themselves and the military enterprise in general. The homoerotic violence arguably represents a warring of masculinities and competing militarisms where phallic power is paradoxically wielded through the Other's corporeal exposure. In an essay exploring the Croats' "homosexualization" of Muslim prisoners (the Croats' perpetration of sexual violence and the media portrayal of this violence) in the former Yugoslavia, Dubravka Zarkov forwards the following argument: "because the phallic power of the penis defines the virility of the nation, there can be no just retribution for its loss. So, when the male body is ethnic and male at the same time, the castration of a single man of the ethnically defined enemy is symbolic appropriation of the masculinity of the whole group. Sexual humiliation of a man from another ethnicity is, thus, a proof not only that he is a lesser man, but also that his ethnicity is a lesser ethnicity. Emasculation annihilates the power of the ethnic Other by annihilating the power of its men's masculinity" (78). The sexual violation of prisoners at Abu Ghraib clearly functions in the same way: to reduce the terrorists' agency vis-à-vis their manhood and to subordinate their ethnic and cultural identity. It is a brutal assertion of masculine domination and cultural superiority.

According to Scarry, torture entails a narcissistic power relation, which enables the torturer to "etherealize" or transcend the body (disembody) as a direct consequence of the corporeal entrapment of the tortured. She explains, "although the torturer dominates the prisoner both in physical acts and verbal acts, ultimate domination requires that the prisoner's ground become increasingly physical and the torturer's increasingly verbal, that the prisoner become a colossal body with no voice and the torturer a colossal voice … with no body, that eventually the prisoner experiences himself exclusively in terms of sentience and the torturer exclusively in terms of self-extension" (57). Depriving prisoners of clothing or corporeal coverage further intensifies the corporealization process Scarry depicts, superseding the subjugated body itself. If we view the body as a product of civilization -- made comprehensible through cultural encoding such as clothing or ornamentation -- then the denuding of the Iraqi prisoners strips them of cultural meaning or value, relegating the body to the realm of the inhuman, a process which the Independent Panel recognizes as "dehumanization." As Jana Evans Braziel points out, however, the process of "debodying" so profoundly distorts the human form that it appears as raw flesh or meat -- a "thing" rather than a living being, less comprehensible than even the animal body. The specific instances of disrobing and subsequent debodiment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib illustrate what Slavoj Žižek refers to as the "passion for the Real," a phenomenon that emerges pathologically in a society whose reality is dictated by the spectacle. The pervasive image in our increasingly virtual world governs our notion of what is real; the copy first supplants and then eventually eradicates the original. Given the hyperreality of terrorism -- the terrorist presence is ever evasive (always eluding direct confrontation) and, yet, simultaneously invasive (potentially existing anywhere and, therefore, everywhere) -- disrobing functions as a way of reinstating body-to-body contact or re-enacting the Lacanian Real, an action inextricably linked to the sex drive.

Hortense J. Spillers's discussion of the captive slave body as "flesh" offers a way in which to understand the titillating effect of debodiment. Spillers argues that in the "willful and violent … severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire…we lose at least gender difference

in the outcome" and "the captive body becomes the source of an irresistible, destructive sexuality" while "at the same time -- in stunning contradiction—the captive reduces to a thing, becoming *being for* the captor … in this absence *from* a subject position," she elaborates, "the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of 'otherness'," which "translates into a potential for pornotroping" related to the captive's "embodi[ment] [of] sheer physical powerlessness" (457; emphasis in the original). The embodiment to which Spillers refers is, in fact, a debodiment because the captive body, in its reduction to thing, loses its cultural register as human, carrying instead the weight of lack-of-agency. Debodying another person is dangerous for the perpetrator, because it sparks culturally transgressive desire-- desire which challenges racial, sexual, and religious identity. Furthermore, while the initial proximity of the captive body makes real the enemy, allowing the U.S. to re-define the exterior in the War on Terror, the military body eventually internalizes the captive body, obliterating the very boundary of inside-outside. As Žižek explains, "when we get too close to the desired object, erotic fascination turns into disgust at the Real of the bare flesh" (6). At the same time that debodying bestows the perpetrator with ultimate power and disembodied agency, it also mobilizes irrepressible bodily feelings of desire and revulsion within the perpetrator himself/herself. Spillers claims that torture serves as an inverted mirror -- reflecting the captor's socio-ideological interpolation or, more ironically, the culture's viscera: "This body whose flesh carries the female and the male to the frontiers of survival bears in person the marks of a cultural context whose inside has been turned outside" (458). Following Spillers's line of logic, it is fair to argue that the photos taken at Abu Ghraib serve to em-"body" the torturers -- whether or not they are physically featured—offering us a rare glimpse of the raw, internal workings of the military body.

Even at cursory glance, the photographs at Abu Ghraib and the photographs of post-Civil-War lynching contain striking similarities. In both cases, a group of people records -- as a source of enjoyment, pride, and righteousness -- another person's experience of mind-numbing pain or the aftermath of such an experience (death), which individuals of the group inflict. As Niman states, "Those smug happy faces of Americans posing, glistening with pride, over their victims, aren't new. Pick up a history book. Look at the classic lynching photos from the era of the Klu Klux Klan. It's the same evil" (5). The juxtaposition of individuals beaming with elation and bodies deformed by either excruciating pain or death is profoundly jarring; the collective reaction seems psychologically disconnected to the event, and, yet, the depicted euphoria is a direct result of the group's animalistic annihilation of another human being. David Marriott explains that "this appetite for document, this devouring by the eye" must be seen as inseparable from the act of lynching, "as if only a camera can bring the spectator close enough for the eye to be embedded in flesh"; "of course," he adds, "the camera plays its part in sustaining that appetite" (10). In both historical moments, the photograph souvenir represents a demented passion for the Real and a solipsistic desire for power, as if the spectator/perpetrator permanently "owns" a piece of the victim.

The similarities between post-Civil-War lynching and Abu Ghraib torture extend even deeper than the "coincidental" use of photography. The main allegation against lynching victims was the rape or attempted rape of white women, which we now know, through Ida B. Wells's meticulous research, was almost entirely false -- either fabricated to cover up white women's consensual sexual liaisons with black men or fabricated out of thin air. As Smith describes, "lynch mobs purported to 'tame' what they deemed 'black savagery' with 'civilized' white male superiority … proclaim[ing] the black lynch victim a depraved rapist, a racialized emblem of manhood gone mad, the counterimage of a disciplined, restrained (white) masculinity" (128). This impetus to "civilize" emerges in frightening form at Abu Ghraib. In a close-up of a photo picturing a pile of naked male bodies, the viewer can see the word "RAPIST" written on a prisoner's arm in large black letters ("Photo #25" <http://www.antiwar.com/news/?articleid=8560>). What this picture suggests is that the sexual violence at Abu Ghraib stems from the same racialized hatred and fear that made lynching possible.

The large body of scholarship on lynching has identified the overlapping political threats to white, heterosexual, masculine, Christian identity as the underlying cause(s) which spurred Whites to engage in such barbaric ritualized behavior: "The crime of lynching grew in the post-emancipation and post-reconstruction periods," Smith emphasizes. "A time when racial categories were largely in flux, when whiteness and blackness were being defined and differentiated in the courts…. In this cultural context, in which the legal parsing of racial identity could make race visually indiscernible, lynching photographs work as defining images that make whiteness visible to itself" (140). This destabilization of racial identity compounded what William Pinar describes as the nineteenth-century "crisis" of "White masculinity," which he claims resulted from the change of gender roles during the war (White women learning the executorial tasks over which men previously had sole dominion), the South's demoralizing loss of the Civil War ("a profoundly gendered as well as political and military event"), feminist advances in religion and law (increased rights to property and divorce for women), and the "criminalization" or taboo prohibition of homo-social male relations (11). By claiming to protect the white woman from black masculine rapacious sexuality, lynching enabled white men "to reassert control over the white female body, the imagined carrier of white racial identity" (Smith 200-02) and to act out both their performance anxiety, ironically caused by their own projected image of the black alpha-male (Marriott 12), and their own forbidden desires. According to Pinar, the act of lynching empowered the White man -- further solidifying his niche in the hegemonic structure -- while simultaneously fulfilling a deep-seated fantasy of "of being penetrated by a powerful (evil and black) man, in oedipal terms, an absent, loathed longed-for father" (7). Pinar bases his analysis on Eve Sedgwick's theorization about the role of the woman in English literature as a medium for the otherwise prohibited homoerotic exchange of energy between two men. "The Southern 'lady' was … a key site of identification for southern white men, a site of relocated and disavowed desire" he argues a la Sedgwick; "as such, it was a site always in peril and in desperate need of protection" (14). The behavior of the Southern "lady" was so rigidly prescribed that Pinar refers to her as an illusory figure.

Underlying the nineteenth-century racial and sexual panic was the constant threat to Christianity by what was perceived as the uncontrollable, pagan, idolatrous religion practiced by unreformed Africans and "dark" nations nearby, such as Haiti. Among the list of reasons offered to legitimize lynching, Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck cite "conjuring" and "voodooism" (Tolnay and Beck, Table 2-5). Without at least residing in clearly Christian waters, the unanchored definitions of whiteness, masculinity, and heterosexuality were all the more horrifying. Richard Dyer argues that white identity is grounded in the absence of racialization: Whites see themselves as universal, as the "everyman" -- an identity that stems from Christian imperialism. He writes, "Christianity … is founded on the idea -- paradoxical, unfathomable, profoundly mysterious -- of incarnation, of being that is in the body yet not of it. … All concepts of race, emerging out of eighteenth-century materialism, are concepts of bodies, but all along they have had to be reconciled with notions of embodiment and incarnation. The latter become what distinguish white people, giving them a special relation to race. Black people can be reduced (in white culture) to their bodies and thus to race, but white people are something else that is realised in and yet is not reducible to the corporeal, or racial" (14-15). The essentialist racial classification systems of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were predicated on corporeality and visual perception. People of color were seen as "body," whereas whites were perceived as "spirit." In order to be white, others needed to be "bodied." Lynching thus functioned as the ultimate expression of black "embodied" subjugation and white transcendent power.

Like the post-Civil War climate of lynchings, the War on Terror reflects a nexus of racial, gender, and sexual anxieties cast in Christian rhetoric. The fact that the terrorists are willing to sacrifice their body in the name of religious ideology alone strikes a huge disillusioning blow to white Christian disembodiment. As revealed by Iraqis' accounts of being forced to renounce their religion while imprisoned at Abu Ghraib, the assertion of Christian supremacy serves as a demoralizing (or, more appropriately, world-destroying) interrogative technique. Religious fear is clearly operative here.

Riding closely on the heels of religious threat is the transformation of white racial identity: whiteness can no longer be taken for granted as a privileged position or universal category. As Howard Winant observes, "the dissolution of the transparent racial identity of the formerly dominant group, that is to say, the advancing racialization of whites in Europe and the United States, must also be recognized as proceeding from the increasingly globalized dimensions of race. As previous assumptions erode, White identity loses its transparency, the easy elision with 'racelessness' that accompanies racial that accompanies racial domination. Whiteness becomes a matter of anxiety and concern" (59). While the racialization of whites in our country and in the world at large destabilizes hegemonic identity, the advances of women and homosexuals in the U.S. public arena further imperil masculine heterosexuality. This threat to convention is no more apparent than in the military community. As Holly Allen surmises from congressional hearings over the last two decades, the heated debate about the admission of women, lesbians, and gays has revealed that military and political officials fear the "compromise [of] American national values, particularly the nation's commitment to heterosexuality and traditional gender roles;" they also resist the potential philosophical shift "from being a testing ground for transcendent national citizenship into just another 'government-sponsored jobs program,' since neither women nor homosexuals possess the traits to become exemplary soldiers," as well as the threat to the male platonic bonding required for the military "to function as the embodiment of U.S. national community" (323). The quintessential patriarchal enterprise views the infiltration of women and gays as jeopardizing its symbolic representation, because the "embodiment of U.S. national community" ironically necessitates the elision of any citizen with a body (women, people of color, gays, lesbians). Of course, women now fight in the armed faces, and the symbolic embodiment of U.S. power, as enhanced by the Abu Ghraib photos, has never been more visible.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the lynching photograph enabled Whites to stabilize their morphing identity through the violation of the Black body as a palpable expression of White power. Smith contends that within the "cultural context, in which the legal parsing of racial identity could make race visually indiscernible, lynching photographs work as defining images that make whiteness visible to itself;" by "consolidat[ing] a fluid signifier; a pale crowd enacts and fiercely embodies whiteness" (139). They further operate as a position "through which whiteness can be constituted and claimed … both by those represented in the photographs and by those who will later view these images" (143). Through the photograph of racialized violence, whites attempted to channel their previously all-encompassing authority: a disturbing and paradoxical embodiment of disembodiment. The photograph at Abu Ghraib signifies in the same horrific vein: we can see, too clearly, the desire to construct an indelible and solidified image of whiteness and US-American Christian supremacy. The main difference between the two sets of photographs is that the Abu Ghraib pictures were not, as speculated earlier, intended for public consumption. They may have circulated within the community, but their transmission was insular, protected. Whereas a substantial number of lynching photographs feature a "corpse carefully prepared for the camera -- obtrusions shielded from view" which Smith interprets as a "hesitat[ion] to reveal the evidence of the white savagery in its minutia" (127), the Abu Ghraib photographs expose all: the gruesome, bloody infliction of torture while it is occurring, as well as forced sexual interaction. Scarry emphasizes the "almost obscene conflation of private and public" of torture, carrying "with it all the solitude of absolute privacy with none of its safety, all the self-exposure of the utterly public with none of its possibility for camaraderie or shared experience" (53). The military police and intelligence officers at Abu Ghraib operated in deathly secret, capitalizing on the safety of isolation -- their power contingent on their invisibility. The publication of the photos eliminates their safety, making visible their obscenity. As Smith states eloquently, "the violence that sustains the image of white wholeness threatens always to tear it apart, so that white subjectivity remains on the verge of fragmentation, on the verge of recognizing the rupture its figurative and literal dismemberment of (black) others works to conceal" (144-45). Unfortunately, however, the

blatant obscenity of the photos has enabled the Pentagon and White House to blame only those officers directly involved, leaving the institutional parameters of whiteness intact.

The obscene ritual of photographed lynching has re-surfaced in the photographs at Abu Ghraib; the recent accounts of torture do not exist within a historical vacuum. Whether or not we affiliate ourselves with the military enterprise, it represents and projects US-American culture -- who we supposedly are -- at home and abroad. Given the extensive territorial reach of today's War on Terror, we cannot afford cultural-historical amnesia. We cannot ignore the embodiment of white supremacy and military domination. Torture disfigures us all.

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