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The Politics of Torture

By Scott C. Smith

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When the now-infamous photographs of Iraqi prisoners being sexually humiliated at the hands of U.S. military police were made public, reaction was nearly unanimous: disgust and outrage that the U.S. military were abusing prisoners at the same prison Saddam Hussein used to torture Iraqis. President George W. Bush, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and others in the Bush administration quickly condemned the photographs, with Bush promising an investigation. In his May 15 radio address, Bush said, "My administration and our military are determined that such abuses never happen again."

Curiously, right-wing pundits took a different view of the photographs. Rush Limbaugh proclaimed the abuse was nothing more than the troops "blowing some steam off." Limbaugh also compared the abuse to fraternity hazing rituals, and finally, in what must be the most tenuous leap of logic in radio history, blamed the whole abuse scandal on Bill Clinton. On May 14, Limbaugh said, "So while all this is going on, the Democrats are claiming this is a chain-of-command thing, and they're trying to get this linked all the way to Bush, this is happening because of Bush's example, this is happening because Bush doesn't care, this is happening because Bush doesn't use any discipline, this is because it comes from the top. I would believe that if Bill Clinton were still in office. If Bill Clinton were still in office, I could accept the notion this might come from the top and, in fact, depending on the age of these soldiers over there they may in fact be. How many stories have we had lately, oral sex is a great way to stop teen pregnancy? That oral sex is a great way to have safe sex, just had one this week. Who popularized oral sex for the nation? And who was defended day in and day out royally for doing so? Bill Clinton. And who defended him? The Democrats who now find all kinds of atrocities in these photos coming out of Abu Ghraib prison."

Brilliant! The real reason the prisoner abuse occurred had nothing to do with a breakdown in the chain of command. It was because of Bill Clinton's sexual activities!

Other conservatives pointed out that the Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib were not "boy scouts" and, apparently, deserved to be sexually humiliated.

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As the conservative position on the Abu Ghraib abuse scandal shifted away from reality, I'm sure some began to see that their audience was not agreeing with their positions, which were pretty much out of step from the reaction of most Americans. Conservative pundits, I believe, have a need to protect George W. Bush. They know deep down that Dubya isn't the greatest president in the world, but since he's Republican, they will do whatever they can to deflect attention away from Bush and his administration.

I don't know if these conservatives were praying or rubbing a lucky rabbit's foot, but it appears they got their wish on May 11, when the horrifying footage of the murder of Nick Berg was released to the world. Since most conservatives are intellectually dishonest, they needed something to misdirect their audience's attention from the Abu Ghraib photographs. Conservatives like Michael Reagan condemned Democrats for "politicizing" the Abu Ghraib photographs. Only now conservatives have

politicized the Nick Berg photographs, as a counter to what happened at Abu Ghraib.

Indeed, now people like Sean Hannity could make an apples-and-oranges comparison to what happened at Abu Ghraib to what happened to Nick Berg.

On the May 12 Hannity and Colmes, Sean Hannity made the case: "We've learned the difference between mistreatment, which is wrong, and atrocities. Because this is an atrocity what they did to this guy (Berg)." See? While the "mistreatment" of prisoners is bad, it's not as bad as an American being killed by terrorists. Guest Oliver North did his best to minimize what had happened at Abu Ghraib: "...for 13 or 14 days now, all we have seen on the front pages of America's newspapers is a group of obviously twisted young people with leashes and weird sex acts, the kind of thing that you might find on any college campus nowadays, being perpetrated by people in uniform."

Obviously there's a difference in volunteering for a hazing ritual and being forced to participate. I think North is hoping the audience isn't paying attention. And yes, what happened to Nick Berg was horrible, but his death shouldn't be used as a way to minimize the abuse at Abu Ghraib or dismiss it as much ado about nothing. One thing we can count on is conservatives using Nick Berg's death for their own political gain.

About the author: Scott C. Smith is a freelance writer from Beaverton, Oregon. Scott's columns have appeared at the Democratic Underground and The Smirking Chimp web sites. In addition to his weekly column, Scott writes for his web magazine, What's in Scott's Head, at <http://www.scottcsmith.net>.

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Office Politics

By Kevin Hobbs

The Politics of Torture

Office politics! It's just another way of saying: "The employees are not getting along!"

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The Results: High employee turnover Reduced productivity and profitability

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When employees understand the different work styles and how best to relate to each style, the "Office Politics" may be a thing of the past.

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