

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

https://richmond.com/opinion/their-opinion/columnists-blogs/guest-columnists/long-separating-fact-from-fiction-in-zero-dark-thirty/article_7ab73878-0144-57f7-b1bb-c59eb1e11cde.html

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

During a tense scene in Zero Dark Thirty, SEAL Team 6 methodically assaults Osama bin Ladens compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan one of the most riveting scenes Ive watched recently.

It is an entertaining film, but unfortunately, it gets its facts wrong in ways that threaten to distort the historical record. Instead of showing brutal, months-long torture of suspects that yielded little actionable intelligence, the film softens and justifies the extensive use of torture by American officials in the pursuit of intelligence.

The planners and enactors of torture have been trying to rewrite history in memoirs, hoping to paint themselves in a more favorable light, and Hollywood is giving them an assist with Zero Dark Thirty.

The torture scenes in Zero Dark Thirty are unpleasant, but the producers kept them brief and situated them in dialogue that re-emphasizes the importance of the pursuit of intelligence. This portrayal gives viewers the sense that they are seeing a balanced and realistic perspective a clever but false technique. The reality is that no audience could sit through an accurate portrayal of what American interrogators did to those in their custody.

Khalid Sheik Mohammed, described as a key source of intelligence in the film, was waterboarded not once or twice, but 183 times in one month he was forced to experience the sensation of drowning and then regurgitating water an average of six times a day. The reality of torture is that it is a repetitive, mundane, brutal exercise that degrades both the captive and the torturers. It goes against the tenets of international law and every major religious and moral code, and nevertheless yields little information of actual value.

Zero Dark Thirty not only soft-pedals the extent of torture used against detainees in American custody, but conveys a connection between interrogations and the locating of bin Laden that goes against known facts about the case.

Several members of the Senate Intelligence Committee, which spent more than three years investigating the torture program through access to classified information, have refuted the notion that interrogations led to bin Ladens killing.

That committee even wrote to Sony Pictures Studios to protest the films depictions. One former ex-officio member of the committee, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said in a May 2011 speech, It was not torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of detainees that got us the major leads that ultimately enabled our intelligence community to find Osama bin Laden. In fact the use of enhanced interrogation techniques on Khalid Sheik Mohammed produced false and misleading information.

It may be true that the real-life officer portrayed as the hero in the film spearheaded the search for bin Laden, but the idea that key information came from torture is a fiction created by torturers and repeated by Hollywood.

The authors of the torture program have been working for years to rewrite their actions. Ironically, the film highlights the borderline criminal activities pursued in these officials attempts to justify their actions. In the film, the protagonist reviews hours of interrogation tapes, identifying key bits of information about bin Ladens most trusted courier, whom she later uses to find bin Laden in Pakistan.

A trove of just such interrogation tapes did exist, but CIA clandestine officer Jose Rodriguez destroyed them and then went on to write a passionate defense of the CIAs use of enhanced interrogation, joining a chorus of other officials shouting against the wind.

Before the real history of American torture is overwritten completely by fiction, we must demand to see the full report of the Senate Intelligence Committee on the scale, nature and effectiveness of enhanced interrogation. The committee has adopted the report, but it has not yet made it public. I join the more than 300 religious and faith groups of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture in saying: It must.

Zero Dark Thirty is an entertaining film, but it is not the truth, and the country must not forget that after leaving the theater.

Stephen B. Long, an assistant professor of political science and international studies at the University of Richmond, is an active supporter of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture and member of Midlothian Friends Meeting (Quaker). Contact him at prof.long@gmail.com or (804) 484-1566.

WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON

This is an opinion column from The Times-Dispatch.

This is an opinion column from The Times-Dispatch.

This is an opinion column from The Times-Dispatch opinion page.

This is an opinion column from The Times-Dispatch opinion page.

The media have been obsessed with inflation for the last year and a half, reporting that this is the only economic issue that matters to people

People don't take trips, trips take people, wrote novelist John Steinbeck, a guy who would know: He traveled extensively and also served as

Gov. Glenn Youngkins recently announced \$30 million effort to recruit and attract police officers in the commonwealth is a well-intentioned effort

Historian Jeremi Suri discusses America post-Civil War and the lessons that can be applied to the current state of politics on the Utterly Moderate Podcast.

Historian Jeremi Suri discusses America post-Civil War and the lessons that can be applied to the current state of politics on the Utterly Moderate Podcast.

In a recent Washington Post article, Andrew Van Dam writes about the most-regretted college majors (spoiler alert: it's mostly in the humanities)

Sometimes the quieter political issues have more to say. High-decibel culture warriors have been getting people riled up over everything from

Get up-to-the-minute news sent straight to your device.