

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

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Trending:

There are movies based on true events, and then, there are mockumentaries. The 1984 movie *This is Spinal Tap* portrays the misadventures of a heavy-metal band on an increasingly disastrous and hilarious American tour. It is understood between the moviemaker and the audience that this is fiction.

Much of the same could be said of the film *Zero Dark Thirty*. Promoted as a true account of the hunt for Osama bin Laden, it includes scenes depicting torture, implying that torture played a critical role in finding bin Laden's hiding place in Abbottabad, Pakistan. This notion has been denied by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, chairwoman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. Feinstein, along with Sens. John McCain and Carl Levin, have expressed disappointment with *Zero Dark Thirty*, saying, We believe the film is grossly inaccurate and misleading in its suggestion that torture resulted in information that led to the location of [O]sama bin Laden.

Like the senators, I am concerned about the misleading message in *Zero Dark Thirty*. The Senate Intelligence Committee's recently adopted report on the CIA's past use of torture is important, and I hope to see a public version of it. The report, which is more than 6,000 pages, is the result of the committee's more than three-year investigation into the CIA's post-9/11 interrogation program. The committee's report is based on information contained in several million pages of documents detailing interrogations of detainees in CIA custody.

I join the National Religious Campaign Against Torture and its members a diverse group of more than 300 faith-based organizations in calling on the Senate Intelligence Committee to reveal the truth about torture. The American people have the right to know about the CIA torture program to be able to judge the fiction presented by *Zero Dark Thirty*. But, more importantly, to advocate for safeguards to prevent torture from ever happening again.

Feinstein plays an important leadership role in the release of the report.

Movies are magical. We watch, and believe, what we see on the screen, at least as long as the movie lasts. Transportation to a place of make-believe is what we enjoy about going to the movies, which is fine. What isn't fine is when a movie purporting to be factual distorts the truth and misleads the viewers about what is real and what is fiction.

While some events and characters may be altered to meet cinematic needs, a movie claiming to be based on real events has to present essential facts faithfully. However, at no point does this movie point out that torture is illegal and profoundly destructive to those who engage in it and to societies that condone it.

The demonstrated ineffectiveness of enhanced interrogation techniques is not shown nor the effectiveness of humane techniques. The film gives the erroneous impression that torture works for important intelligence purposes; and in doing so, it skews the public debate about torture.

By all accounts, *Zero Dark Thirty* is a great suspense thriller. But at what cost? Bending the truth for cinematic purposes can call the basic values of the government and our citizens into question. Sadly, many Americans will see *Zero Dark Thirty* and not realize that it is a sly mixture of fact and fiction, moviemaking magic at the cost of the basic values of our democracy.

Louise Specht is a teacher who was the founder of the Bay Area Religious Campaign Against Torture. She is a resident of Berkeley.

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