

PHOTOGRAPHS

If you haven't already, go read Jane Mayer's article on our methods of torture. The short version: we're using psychological methods to impose "learned helplessness" and dependency, and as a result, we're getting some intelligence, a whole lot of garbage, and we're turning our own interrogators into moral zombies.

I wanted to focus on one aspect of the calculated humiliation she describes:

A former member of a C.I.A. transport team has described the "takeout" of prisoners as a **carefully choreographed twenty-minute routine**, during which a suspect was hog-tied, stripped naked, **photographed**, hooded, sedated with anal suppositories, placed in diapers, and transported by plane to a secret location.

[snip]

The interrogation became a process not just of getting information but of utterly subordinating the detainee through humiliation. "The former C.I.A. officer confirmed that the agency frequently photographed the prisoners naked, "because it's demoralizing." The person involved in the Council of Europe inquiry said that **photos were also part of the C.I.A.'s quality-control process**. They were passed back to case officers for review. [my emphasis]

Part of the very calculating treatment we give these detainees is photographing them, both to humiliate them and for "quality-control." (Quality control of **what**? Is this like glorified meat inspection?)

I wanted to call attention to these passages

because of the dust-up between the Administration and the ACLU last December. Here's a series of posts I did tracking the dust-up:

- The Administration tries to force the ACLU to return a classified document pertaining to torture
- The Administration wants the document back because it shows how its torture policy changed in December 2005
- The Administration declassifies the document rather than risking a court decision against it on classified issues; the document describes a change in the official policy on photographing detainees

Click through to the last link for a history of our changing official policy on photographing detainees.

I raise this dust-up for two reasons. First, to show how the calculating process of using photos (and other humiliation) to dehumanize detainees has a parallel in the calculating process of legally codifying that practice. But also to call attention to the way this exacting process of photographing detainees for "quality-control" purposes can backfire.

BushCo's attempts to get its photographing policy returned closely followed the ACLU's attempts to get photographs of the detainees it was representing. Somewhere, there's a collection of photos of the ways and people we've dehumanized.

The photos from Abu Ghraib showed how out-of-control our interrogations in Iraq were.

Somewhere there's an equally shocking catalog of photos showing how inhumane our more formalized practices are, too.