A Silent Acquiescence to Inhuman Laws:

How Theological Concessions by Protestant Churches to Permit the Enslavement of Black Christians Perpetually Protect and Justify State-Sanctioned Torture in the US

Joshua Matthew Kinnemore

2124608

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Abstract

This essay examines a cultural proclivity towards torture in the United States, tracing its historical context from the emergence of a slave-based economy in the British North American colonies to its modern function within immigration detention centers. Early in the nation's history, this systemic reliance on the torture and destruction of bodies for the acquisition of wealth and power was threatened by a theological question, does baptism free Christians from physical bondage? Protestant churches, however, seeking to expand missionizing endeavors without challenging the flourishing of the slave-based economic and political systems of the colonies, acquiesced to the state the control of bodies by producing a theological division of the body and soul. This relegation of churches to matters of the soul while granting the state sovereignty over bodies, has largely perpetuated the failure of Protestant churches to function as the critic and conscience of the state which recurringly amasses power by exacting torture on persons deprived of rights and protections. This theological sever has established many Protestant ecclesial bodies as apathetic to the practice or even affirming of its use, resulting in American Protestants emerging as the most supportive demographic of torture. However, in drawing on Ida B. Wells-Barnett's anti-lynching advocacy, I will highlight her use of evidence-backed and personal narratives to challenge dehumanizing narratives which justify torture, calling Protestant churches and clergy to adopt similar approaches as its utilization by the state reemerges – particularly within immigration detention centers. By embracing a Eucharistic imagination – a social imagination rooted in a commitment to the interconnectedness of humanity, reconciliatory justice, and the recognition of all as representations of the *Imago Dei* – churches can reclaim bodies from state torture. This, however, requires a rejection of disembodied spiritualities which relegates theological concerns merely to matters of the soul.

Introduction

[People] who stand high in the esteem of the public for christian character, for moral and physical courage… stand as cowards who fear to open their mouths before this great outrage. They do not see that by their tacit encouragement, their silent acquiescence, the black shadow of lawlessness in the form of lynch law is spreading its wings over the whole country.[1]

While churches are debating whether a whale swallowed Jonah, the state is enacting inhuman laws against the oppressed.[2]

On April 30th, 2004, reporter Seymour M. Hersh broke a story that shocked the world: torture was rampant in a US military detention facility at Abu Ghraib, Iraq.[3] Accompanying the story was an image of a man standing on a tiny box, shrouded in black with a black bag covering his head. Electrodes hang from his outstretched hands, forming an eerie resemblance to images of the crucified Christ. This Iraqi man, Seymour reports, was told he "would be electrocuted if he fell off the box."[4] This image was one of many displaying rampant torture in Abu Ghraib, horrifying the world and prompting questions of how such abuse arose within US detention facilities. In response, George W. Bush remarked, "What took place in that prison does not represent [the] America I know."[5] However, what occurred in Abu Ghraib *is* an accurate

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[1] Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *The Light of Truth: Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader*, ed. Mia Bay and Henry Louis Gates, Penguin Classics (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 70.

[2] James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1970), 42.

[3] This essay will utilize the UN's definition of torture:

> Any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.

In "Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment," UN General Assembly Resolution § Article 1 (1984), https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-against-torture-and-other-cruel-inhuman-or-degrading.

[4] Seymour M. Hersh, "Torture at Abu Ghraib," *The New Yorker*, April 30, 2004, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/05/10/torture-at-abu-ghraib.

[5] George Bush, "President Bush Meets with Alhurra Television on Wednesday (Text Only)," accessed December 10, 2024, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/05/text/20040505-5.html.

representation of the America many people have experienced throughout the nation's history and countless others are encountering today.

This essay posits that theological concessions to justification for the enslavement of Black Christians produced a division between the concerns for the soul and the body, stimming churches' silent acquiescence to the coercion of obedience through the torture of bodies. It will also argue that torture emerges as a tool against social groups which have been dehumanized through the production of rhetoric which emphasizes the groups moral inferiority, bestial impulses, and criminal inclinations. By theologizing such rhetoric or remaining silent during the production of these dehumanizing narratives, US Protestant churches have effectively relinquished concerns for the body to a state which amasses power through the torture and destruction of persons it deems superfluous and disposable. This essay will implore US churches to reclaim their function as the "conscious of the state" by reclaiming a socially engaged political theology and practice regarding torture and the dehumanizing rhetoric which justifies it. This social theology, established on the foundation of the Eucharist, calls churches to unity; therefore, rejecting the use of torture which relies on the production of isolation to coerce victims into the social-political drama of the state. It will offer the work of Ida B. Wells-Barnett as a model by analyzing how her production of personal and evidence-based narratives formed an effective resistance to torture in the form of lynching.

Chapter one will trace the emergence of US state-sanctioned torture to Protestant acquiescence of bodies to the state. Originating in the slave-based economy that relied on the torture and destruction of bodies, a theological split confined Protestant churches to spiritual matters, giving way to a racialization which delineated between bodies protected from abuse and bodies justified as targets of torture. After the abolition of slavery, torture remerged to protect the

privileging of those with English, Protestant heritage to govern and determine which groups were afforded legal rights and protections. This chapter will conclude by analyzing Ida B. Wells-Barnett's utilization of personalized, counter-narratives to challenge the "black beast" rhetoric used to justify the torture of Black-Americans.

Chapter two will argue that the subversion of dehumanizing narratives is essential to dissuading the American public from torture. It will employ a mix-methods approach (quantitative, qualitative, and hermeneutical) to product quantitative evidence that revelation of the cruelty of torture is not enough to dissuade support of its use if the narratives used to justify the practice are not effectively challenged. By analyzing Presidential remarks, it will suggest that language along with deeply entrenched prejudices are significant factors for torture supporting beliefs. Torture, I will theorize, garners American support because it is effective in producing a guilty other who fits into preconceived biases and confirms such biases via coerced, self-incriminating confessions.

Chapter three will examine developing uses of torture in immigration detention centers, arguing that similar patterns of safety concerns are producing dehumanizing and deindividuating narratives.[6] This rhetoric, propagating unsubstantiated narratives about immigrants' propensity for crime, is framing migrants as dangerous, superfluous, and disposable. Thus, rhetoric which locates this demographic beyond the place of moral concern and into a system which utilizes

[6] This essay will build upon the definitions of deindividuation and dehumanization created by Martin Reimann and Philip Zimbardo who define deindividuation as: a process which "facilitates the perception of others as lacking in personal identity," resulting in the treatment of "others as anonymous, not as individuals." Dehumanization is defined as: an exclusion from "moral order of being a human being… [denying] uniquely human attributes and is often accompanied by contempt and disgust and by a tendency to explain others' behavior in terms of one's own desires rather than cognitive states." Martin Reimann and Philip G. Zimbardo, "The dark side of social encounters: Prospects for a neuroscience of human evil," *Journal of Neuroscience, Psychology, and Economics* 4, no. 3 (2011): 174-80, 177. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024654.

torture for disciplinary and coercive purposes risks producing conditions similar to Abu Ghraib and the Jim Crow American South.

Chapter four examines the role of American Protestant churches in the context of torture, national security, and immigration. The chapter argues that while safety is a legitimate concern, any conditions leading to justifications of torture must be rejected. This chapter will explore why American Protestants support torture at higher rates than other groups, suggesting the intersection of Protestant identity and nationalism and reluctance of Protestant clergy to speak out against torture and dehumanizing rhetoric as two key factors. The chapter concludes by calling churches to reclaim their role as the "conscience of the state."[7] Drawing from the work of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, I argue that churches must challenge dehumanizing and deindividuating narratives about immigrants and promote personal counter-narratives that reimagine solutions to the US immigration crises that uphold notions of compassion, justice, and human dignity.

Chapter One: Torture in Early American History

In this chapter, I will argue that the protection of rights to privileged groups while permitting the torture of unprotected and disenfranchised others emerged in the earliest moments of US history – the production of a slave-based economy within the British North American colonies. Early during this period, the justification of slave-based economies was challenged by a theological question: does the baptism of enslaved Africans afford such persons freedom of the soul and body? Missionaries, aiming to Christianize enslaved people while legitimizing slavery

[7] Martin Luther King Jr., "Draft of Chapter VI, 'A Knock at Midnight' | The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute," Digital Archive, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/, accessed December 8, 2024, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/draft-chapter-vi-knock-midnight.

insisted that race, not religious identity, was the basis of one's enslavement.[8] This delineation produced a disembodied spirituality, concerning itself with the soul while acquiescing control of bodies to the state and economic systems. The protection of this slave-based economic system was established around the ability to injure bodies on the basis of racial demarcation, consolidating power within a protected class – white, English-heritage, Protestants. Upon the abolition of chattel slavery in the United States this privileged, protected class reasserted its sovereignty over groups deprived of rights through the propagation of dehumanizing narratives, subsequently implementing torture in the form of lynching as response. Finally, I will turn to the writings of Ida B. Wells-Barnett to examine how her work challenged the justification of lynching by revealing the unsubstantiated claims about lynching victims while producing humanizing, personal, and evidence-based counter-narratives.

1.1: Protestant Supremacy and the Construction of Race

The first English settlers arrived at North America in search of an abundance of gold, similar to what the Spanish discovered. However, while they failed to unearth gold mines, they discovered rich, arable farmlands. Such work is laborious and requires immense human capital. The landowning elite of one of the earliest English colonies, the Virginia Colony, devised three solutions for amassing the necessary human labor: (1) by covering the expenses of the trans-Atlantic voyage for poor English workers in exchange for three-to-seven-year indentured servitude to pay off the debt, (2) by enslaving indigenous North Americans, or (3) by importing enslaved Africans.[9] These English settlers did not have a concept of race; rather, they brought

[8] Katharine Gerbner, *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World,* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018),

[9] Heather Cox Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War: Oligarchy, Democracy, and the Continuing Fight for the Soul of America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 14-5.

with them ideas about class and Protestant supremacy.[10] This matters because though nobody in the Virginia colony would have expected indentured and enslaved people to be treated equal to their masters, this hierarchy was built on a premise of class, not race. In England, a social hierarchy was long-established, delineating between a wealthy, landowning class; and a poor, working class. This hierarchical division between rich and poor emerged in the British colonies as a division between the plantation owner elite and the often-exploited working class. This exploited class, comprised both of indentured servants and enslaved people, worked and socialized together and even intermarried.[11] Eventually, the population growth of the underclass outpaced the growth of the elite class, stirring fear among the plantation owners of the Virginia colony. Freed indentured servants and enslaved people who obtained their freedom through conversion to Christianity or by purchasing it, sought to amass their own land and political influence, transgressing the boundary of class.

This period also denotes a shift in the labor demographics from reliance on indentured servitude to slave labor. The Virginia colonists enslaved between 30,000 and 50,000 Native Americans from 1670 through 1715 while rapidly importing enslaved Africans, raising the Black population from approximately 2,000 people in 1671 to 26,559 people in 1720.[12,13] Additionally, new legislation limited avenues for freedom, while expanding categorizations of enslavement, as:

> Atlantic creoles…familiar with Christianity and other aspects of European culture…realized that English practice dictated that Christians should not own other Christians as slaves…. When enslaved in Virginia they often sued for their freedom in

[10] Richardson, Ibid, 14., and Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 1.
[11] Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 32-46.
[12] Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War*, 18
[13] "NPS Ethnography: African American Heritage & Ethnography," accessed November 11, 2024, https://www.nps.gov/ethnography/aah/aaheritage/histContextsE.htm.

> Virginia's courts on the grounds that they were Christians, frequently winning their cases.[14]

In 1667, baptism was eliminated as an avenue to freedom, undoing the theological position that "non-Christians' conversion entitled them to release from slavery."[15] As Protestant missionaries sought to convert enslaved people, they suggested that race, not religion, is what determined who could be enslaved.[16] This rationale was codified into law: "masters, freed from this doubt, may more carefully endeavor the propagation of Christianity by permitting the children, though slaves, or those of greater growth,…to be admitted to that sacrament."[17] This theological shift produced notions of an interiorized spirituality, one which discarded concerns of the body for preoccupations with matters of the soul. This shift also incapacitated churches' ability to effectively advocate for the abolition of slavery. By relegating baptism solely to freedom from spiritual slavery, the mission of the church could be actualized without challenging the state or emerging economic systems seeking to amass wealth and power through the captivity, torture, and destruction of bodies.[18] The state, however, did not relegate itself to concerns of the body; it increasingly utilized religion as a tool for its avaricious control and domination of Black bodies.

In 1680, the Virginia assembly began to establish greater boundaries between enslaved Blacks and indentured Whites through the production of laws which established greater

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[14] John Chilton and Mildred W. Robinson, "Meet Me in Galilee…Beginning the Journey from Repentance to Reconciliation: A History of Racism and Race in the Diocese of Virginia" (Committee on Race and Reconciliation, January 11, 2012), 21. https://www.episcopalarchives.org/sites/default/files/anti-racism/dioceses/Virginia_Study.pdf.

[15] Martha W. McCartney, "Colonial National Historical Park: A Study of Virginia Indians and Jamestown-The First Century (Chapter 4)," accessed November 11, 2024, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/jame1/moretti-langholtz/chap4.htm.

[16] Gerbner, *Christian Slavery,* 3.

[17] William Waller Hening, *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619.* (Richmond: Printed by and for Samuel Pleasants, junior, printer to the commonwealth, 1809), 260. Accessed at http://archive.org/details/statutesatlargeb02virg.

[18] Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 24.

punishments for Blacks.[19] This succession of legislation eventually became the Virginia Slave Codes: a set of laws which afforded new rights and protections along lines of Christian, English, and White heredity. Any person who was Christian, and of Christian parentage, could not be held in servitude beyond the age of twenty-four.[20] However, any servant who could not *prove they were a Christian in their "native country"* was to be converted to Christianity and enslaved for life.[21] Furthermore, since the codes also specified that the bondage or freedom of a child followed the condition of their mother, a baptized child, born to an enslaved Christian mother, was to be enslaved for life.[22] In other words, an enslaved person brought from an African or North American nation, a non-Christian nation in the English understanding, was not only enslaved for life but their offspring too were born into enslavement. The Virginia Slave Codes solidified slavery as a racial system of oppression by demarking one's heritage and body as grounds for subservience. This is the emergence of a political reality which connects the visible demarcation of race to a less visible demarcation, religion. Through this, philosopher Achille Mbembe posits that non-white persons were positioned in a perpetual state of otherness. The enslaved became a foreigner, even if they were born in the Virginia colony to Christian parents. Brown skin became "the ignominy with which they were struck and that passed down from generation to generation as a poisoned heritage."[23] This politic, which views control over bodies

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[19] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith,*24.
[20] William Waller Hening, ed., The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619, (Philadelphia: R. & W. & G. Bartow, 1823), 3:447–463, accessed at: https://encyclopediavirginia.org/primary-documents/an-act-concerning-servants-and-slaves-1705/
[21] Ibid., Emphasis added.
[22] Barton, *Setting the Record Straight*, 4.
[23] Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steve Corcoran, Theory in Forms (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019). 17.

as a preeminent concern, necessitates a form of state control which Michael Foucault terms, biopower.[24]

According to Mbembe, this concept of biopower rests on the idea that "[t]o be sovereign, is to exert one's control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power."[25] As such, biopower is established via the formation of "necropolitics," which is a state's ability to determine who has the ability to live and who must die.[26] The formation of a necropolitic is precisely what is observed in the Virginia Slave Codes to enforce the racial hierarchy of the colony:

> any slave, against whom proclamation hath been thus issued…[does] not immediately return home, it shall be lawful for any person or persons whatsoever, to kill and destroy such slaves by such ways and means as he, she, or they shall think fit, without accusation or impeachment of any crime…[27]

The Slave Codes permitted the dismembering and killing of runaways with absolute impunity. However, if "any negro, mulatto, or Indian, bond or free, shall at any time, *lift* his or her hand, in opposition against any christian, not being negro, mulatto, or Indian, he or she [shall]… receive on his or her bare back thirty lashes."[28] Virginia had effectively enshrined a necropolitical reality which utilized torture and the threat of death to establish white English protestants as the sovereign entity within the colony. This "biopower" justified torture and killing for the preservation of white, English-heritage, Protestants as the privileged and protected governing class.

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[24] Michael Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France 1975-1976,* ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontano, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 239-64.
[25] Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 66.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Hening, Virginia Slave Code XXXIV. in *Statues at Large Volume 3*, 459.
[28] Ibid.

Furthermore, esteemed Protestant ministers lent their theology as justifications of state-permitted torture. Anglican Bishop George Berkeley asserted the "gospel liberty consists with temporal servitude."[29] Thus, not limiting "any proper methods of enforcing obedience" because "Christianity takes not out of the hands of superiors any degrees of strictness and severity that fairly appear to be necessary for the preserving [of] subjection and government."[30] Through accommodations to slavery, many Protestant churches removed themselves from speaking against the atrocities committed by slaveowners against the bodies of Blacks and Native Americans. However, this division – the relegation to churches to the spiritual concerns of enslaved people – permitted its silence to be utilized as justifications for forced enslavement established through torture. Though, a few Protestant clergy did speak against slavery, many anti-slavery advocates conceded that the Christianizing of enslaved people must supersede churches' push for abolition.[31]

1.2: Emancipation and the Lynching Era

Though chattel slavery in the US ended in 1865, the violence used to uphold the racial hierarchy which justified the enslavement of Black Christians did not cease. During the post-American Civil war period, known as Reconstruction (1865-1877), the racial hierarchy in the nation could have disappeared entirely. Black-Americans were afforded full rights as US citizens via the 14th and 15th Constitutional Amendments, and they displayed remarkable agency in becoming a politically involved demographic. Over 1,500 Black men held political office – at the Federal, State, and local levels of government. Some men were even elected as representatives at

[29] Yale, Slavery & Abolition, yaleslavery.org, accessed December 16, 2024, http://yaleslavery.org/Endowments/e2schol.html#berkslav
[30] Chilton and Robinson, "Meet Me in Galilee…," 24.
[31] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 29-30.

the highest levels of government. From 1870 through 1887, 17 Black-Americans served as US Congressional representatives, with one, Joseph Hayne Rainey presiding over Congress as Speaker of the House. [32] However, the political climate shifted as the Democratic party welcomed Southern ex-Confederates back into power; resulting in the systemic exclusion of Black-Americans from the US political and civil sphere. From 1887 through 1901, only five Black men served in congress and from 1901 through 1929, there were no Black-Americans in any part of the federal legislature.[33]

This period coincides with a spike in racial violence as the residual necropolitic from the antebellum period emerged. According to historian Karlos K. Hill, from 1886 through 1892, 780 Black-Americans were lynched, accounting for 73 percent of all lynchings. The targeting of specific bodies sought to facilitate racial domination through torture, precisely as it functioned during chattel slavery. However, as the numbers reveal, the violence of lynching was not only reserved for Black-Americans. White-Americans who supported the equal treatment of Blacks as well as Native Americans and immigrants from Mexico, China, and Italy were murdered.[34] Torture in the form of lynching was implemented "to revive the privileges of white [protestant] masculinity," with this violence often using torture to dissuade Black Americans and others from insisting upon their rights.[35] Post-reconstruction lynching was employed to reestablish the racial hierarchy that was threatened by the emancipation and constitutional protection of Black-

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[32] Robert A. Brady and Vernon J. Ehlers*, Black Americans in Congress, 1870-2007: Prepared under the Direction of the Committee on House Administration of the U.S. House of Representatives, by the Office of History and Preservation, Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives* (Washington, DC: U.S Government Printing Office, 2008),2.
[33] Ibid.
[34] "History of Lynching in America | NAACP," accessed November 17, 2024, https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/history-lynching-america.
[35] Lisa Cardyn, "Sexualized Racism/Gendered Violence: Outraging the Body Politic in the Reconstruction South," *Michigan Law Review* 100, no. 4 (February 1, 2002): 675–867, https://repository.law.umich.edu/mlr/vol100/iss4/2.Cardyn, supra note 55, at 708

Americans and the appearance of non-White immigrants. From the earliest days of the Virginia colony to the global War on Terror, the US has employed or allowed torture when the control of the status quo by the privileged, ruling class – those who ideologically embody the traits and values of English-heritage Protestantism – is transgressed or threatened.

1.3: Ida B. Wells-Barnett's Anti-Lynching Advocacy

In the rise of racial lynching during the post-Reconstruction period, also known as the Jim Crow era, Ida B. Wells-Barnett implored journalists and religious leaders to speak sympathetically to the abuses Black-Americans suffered.[36] Wells-Barnett was especially critical of religious leaders "too busy saving the souls of white Christians from hell-fire to save the lives of black ones from present burning flames kindled by white Christians."[37] Lynching, which Wells understood to be a "relic of barbarism and slavery," was perpetuated, in part, because of:

> [People] who stand high in the esteem of the public for christian character, for moral and physical courage,…stand as cowards who fear to open their mouths before this great outrage. They do not see that by their tacit encouragement, their silent acquiescence, the black shadow of lawlessness in the form of lynch law is spreading its wings over the whole country.[38]

For Wells, there remained no space for apathy to racial torture. However, according to historian Amy Louise Wood, many ministers who witnessed lynchings in their states and towns remained silent on the matter for fear that "in taking a stance, they would divide and alienate their congregations."[39] This permeating fear of congregational divisiveness is made apparent in a 1935

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[36] Stephan Wheelock, "Deracializing Sympathy: Ida B. Wells-Barnett on Religion, Justice, and the U.S. Public," *Berkley Forum*, January 6, 2022, https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/deracializing-sympathy-ida-b-wells-barnett-on-religion-justice-and-the-u-s-public.

[37] Ida B. Wells, Crusade for Justice: *The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, ed. Alfreda M. Duster (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 155.

[38] Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *The Light of Truth: Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader*, ed. Mia Bay and Henry Louis Gates, Penguin Classics (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 70.

[39] Amy Lousie Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 51.

survey of over 5,000 ministers which revealed that only 3.3 percent of the respondents "had preached or worked against lynching in some way."[40] The silence of religious leaders maintained the unity of their congregations at the expense of people whose bodies were unjustly tortured in the name of safety.

Additionally, Wells-Barnett did not merely criticize the apathy of Christian leaders, she also imperatively challenged the narratives used to justify lynching. As racially motivated lynchings in the Southern US rose, a popular narrative of the "Black beast" emerged. This narrative implied that in the freedom gained through emancipation, Black men, no longer restrained by the moderation of enslavement, began raping White women in frightening numbers.[41] This narrative stoked fears of both White and Black-Americans, many of whom believed lynching was necessary and advocated for it as a moral imperative for deterring Black rapists. However, some Black leaders, such as Frederick Douglass, renounced its promulgation;

> [i]t clouds the character of the negro with a crime most revolting, and is fitted to drive from him all sympathy and all fair play and mercy. It is a crime that places him outside of the pale of the law…[42]

Language established a narrative of an entire group's moral inferiority, moving victims beyond the area of moral concern into a space of disposability. In attaching abhorrent injustices to a suspect, rhetoric positions the suspect beyond the limits of empathy, making empathy with the other a moral failing. Wells-Barnett does not merely push for greater empathy toward the black beast, she also reveals the hypocrisy of the narrative. Her pamphlet *Southern Horrors*, produced evidence which: (1) highlights cases in which White women testified about consensual sexual

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[40] Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle,* 51.
[41] Karlos K. Hill, *Beyond the Rope: The Impact of Lynching on Black Culture and Memory*, Kindle, Cambridge Studies on the American South (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 10.
[42] Ibid.

relations with Black men, sometimes recanting accusations of rape; (2) revealed that only one-third of lynching victims were accused of rape, and of the accused, few were guilty of the crime; and (3) displayed that cases of White men raping White women were rarely prosecuted, and in cases of raping of Black women and children, White men were never arraigned.[43] Wells concludes, "[t]he utterances of the leading white men show that with them it is not the crime but the class."[44] Wells-Barnett examined the accusations proceeding 728 lynchings over a ten-year span, discovering that women and children were also victims of lynching. [45] She noted that often the accusations were relatively benign claims such as "quarreling with whites" and "making threats,"[46] In one case, Wells-Barnett uncovers that a boy named Will Lewis was lynched for "being drunk and 'sassy' to white folks."[47] In another case, the Reverand D.M. Pinkard was beaten for dressing up and walking around with shined shoes.[48]

By revealing the unreliable justifications for lynching, Wells posits that justice for the victims of rape was rarely the purpose. She provides further evidence through a story from the Baltimore Sun in which a Black man was lynched for sexually assaulting a White child. Afterwards, the girl continued testifying that her "assailant was a white man."[49] Yet, upon the murder of the innocent Black man, the leaders of the community refused a trial for the case on the grounds that they "wished to spare the white girl the mortification of having to testify in court."[50] Such evidence raises a strong point, lynching did not employ justice, it employed

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[43] Wells-Barnett, *Light of Truth*, 58-66.
[44] Ibid., 67.
[45] Ibid., 70.
[46] Frances Ward-Johnson, "Public Relations as Social Activism: Ida B. Wells-Barnett and America's First Anti-Lynching Campaign," *10th International Public Relations Research Conference* (2006), ed. Marcia Watson DiStaso, 611-618, 614. https://instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/IPRRC10_Proceedings.pdf
[47] Wells-Barnett, Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.

brutality to uphold a narrative implemented to deindividuate a group and relocate them beyond the reach of mercy and legal protection. Wells, however, as a skilled journalist and storyteller resists dehumanizing narratives meant to deindividuate by presenting stories through personal and humanizing perspectives to support her analyses and quantitative evidence. [51]

In reading Wells-Barnett's *Southern Horrors* and *The Red Record*, the use of names and individual narratives is remarkable. She names accusers and victims across a myriad of stories, adding details about the circumstances preceding the accusations. For example, in describing the lynching of a man in Mississippi, Wells-Barnett writes,

> Ebenzer Fowler, the wealthiest colored man in Issaquena Country, Miss., was shot down on the street in Mayersville, January 30, 1885, just before dark by an armed body of white men who filled his body with bullets. They charged him with writing a note to a white woman of the place, which they intercepted and which proved there was an intimacy existing between them.[52]

Wells-Barnett presents this story prior to her analysis of hundreds of lynching cases, and it is an effective rhetorical tool. It is a concrete reminder that lynching is not happening to faceless, black bodies; it happened to "peaceful, law-abiding citizens, and energetic [people]" such as Calvin McDowell, Thomas Moss, Henry Steward, Ebenzer Fowler, Eph Grizzard, Will Lewis, and Eliza Woods.[53]

This chapter illustrates a disturbing throughline in American history: the systematic use of torture to maintain the privileges of a ruling class while relegating marginalized groups as disposable. From the racial violence inflicted in the early North American colonies and codified within laws such as the Virginia Slave Codes to the promulgation of lynching, these practices

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[51] Ward-Johnson, "Public Relations as Social Activism," 611.
[52] Wells-Barnett, *Light of Truth,* 66.
[53] "Eliza Woods Lynched, The Tennessean (Nashville, TN) 19 Aug 1886, Thu p.1," *The Tennessean*, August 19, 1886, https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-tennessean-eliza-woods-lynched-the/9333181/.

represent an enduring contradiction in a nation claiming to value liberty and justice. Yet, models of advocacy can also be found within this period, such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett. The writing and speeches of Wells-Barnett present a critical voice of resistance, offering impactful and personal counter-narratives that reveal the hypocrisy of rhetoric employed to justify torture and killing in the Jim Crow South. Wells-Barnett challenged the myths of Black criminality while simultaneously exposing the apathy of religious leaders and Protestant churches. Her work lambasted an acquiescence to lynching justifications by ministers who shied from speaking against the committed injustices. From the pulpit and the page, Wells-Barnett affirmed the dignity and humanity of lynching victims, demonstrating the transformative potential of Christian practice when wielded as a critique of torture and state abuse rather than existing as an impotent tool of the state.

Chapter 2: Justifying Torture in the War on Terror

In his essay "Persuasive and Unpersuasive Critiques of Torture," Ron E. Hassner, suggests, "the more detail [anti-torture advocates] can offer the public on what contemporary torture looks like, the more likely they are to sway public opinion."[54] For Hassner, there are two general approaches for critiquing torture. The first approach is the consequentialist critique which claims that torture is ineffective in obtaining credible information. This approach suggests that presenting torture as ineffective in producing evidence will dissuade its support. The second approach is a deontological critique which highlights the cruelty of torture and its immoral nature, even if it might extract important information.

[54] Ron E. Hassner, "Persuasive and Unpersuasive Critiques of Torture," *Perspectives on Politics* 21, no. 1 (2023): 160–73, 168. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721004138

In his experiment, Hassner asked 1,031 American adults if they would condone depriving a suspect of sleep to extract information vital to prevent a future terror attack. 76% of surveyed respondents in the control group supported the use of sleep deprivation. Testing the effects of a consequentialist approach, survey respondents in test group one were told that using sleep deprivation "probably won't reveal new information."[55] However, 74% of participants in this test group still supported using the method. Testing the effects of a deontological approach, participants in test group two were informed that with the use of sleep deprivation, the interrogation might last a month. Considering this, only 60% of respondents endorsed its use on the detainee, with a majority of those against its use answering: "A month is too long to deprive someone of sleep."[56] Hassner concludes that providing insight into the cruelty of torture, can significantly reduce support of the practice.[57]However, a meta-analysis of polling data on US opinions of torture during the War on Terror challenges Hassner's conclusion.

Based on Hassner's study, US support for torture should have declined following the revelations of abuses in the US military detention centers in 2004. Cruelty of the torture was repeatedly described in detail, with images of the torture circulating across media outlets. However, a bivariate analysis of national polling data on support for torture reveals increased support for it within the decade following the first revelations of its use, with the regression model predicting that the percentage of Americans supportive of torture rising from an average of 36.4% in May 2004 to an average of 56.9% by May 2015 (Sample Size = 58, $R^2 = 0.5368$, p-value < 0.0001). [58] To control for framing[59], a second analysis was conducted on a single

[55] Hassner, "Persuasive and Unpersuasive Critiques of Torture," 167.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid, 160.
[58] Appendix 1, Figure 2.
[59] "Framing" is the presentation or wording of a question to elicit a biased response.

question that was repeatedly asked by the Pew Research Center to randomized respondents from July 2004 until November 2016. This analysis reveals also that torture affirming responses increase over time with the regression model forecasting an increase from 44.1% in May 2004 to 54.2% by May 2015 (Sample Size = 14, $R^2 = 0.3824$, p-value = 0.03208).[60] This suggests, though graphic descriptions of torture might sway public opinion for a moment, this change cannot be sustained over time and may even reinforce torture-supporting beliefs.

I propose two theories for this increased support for torture. First, torture efficiently produces incriminating confessions. Legal scholars have long noted the significance of confessions in producing convictions. In some cases, confessions are so influential, they can taint cases and override credible contradictory evidence.[61] Though torture, according to the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), "will probably result in false answers;" its efficiency in producing confessions makes it enticing during periods of societal uncertainty.[62] Secondly, during periods of political uncertainty, the US often engages in rhetoric which creates categories of outsiders who must be punished, removed, and ultimately destroyed. Such rhetoric, employs religious language, apprehending theological terms and concepts to conceal desires for domination. The state then forms spaces in which the laws can be suspended so that the US can affirm its own power and security via the domination of this outside group.[63] Torture functions to identify the outsider and to exert US domination.

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[60] Appendix 1, Figure 3.
[61] Sara Appleby and Saul Kassin, "When Self-Report Trumps Science: Effects of Confessions, DNA, and Prosecutorial Theories on Perceptions of Guilt," *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* (2016), 22(2), 127-140, 127.
[62] "Report of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program Executive Summary"" (United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, December 9, 2014), 18. https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/publications/CRPT-113srpt288.pdf.
[63] Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 16.

2.1: Dehumanizing Rhetoric Justifies Torture

President Bush regularly used religious language to craft a narrative of the US moral imperative for engaging in the War of Terror, insisting that the US was engaged in a conflict of good versus evil. Evil was a regular part of Bush's rhetoric. For comparison, an analysis of public Presidential remarks finds that Joe Biden has used the word evil 42 times[64], Barack Obama used the word 106 times and, Donald Trump used the word 297 times as President. George Bush used the word "evil" 1,614 times.[65] This chapter will argue that Bush's rhetoric effectively dehumanized anyone the US deemed a threat, regardless of their culpability, to justify doing "whatever it takes" to overcome evil. This dehumanization enabled the justification of state-sanctioned abuses at military detention centers while excusing inhumane actions of the United States by framing torture as an uncomfortable necessity for the safety of the state. Ultimately, Bush's rhetoric of evil established a national narrative which relied on three aspects: (1) it formed entities of pure evil whose existence is a perpetual threat to the American status quo, (2) it created a bio-political reality in which persons of particular racial and religious identities were viewed with suspicion and placed beyond the protections of US and International law, and (3) it constructed a narrative that evil was a mysterious and omnipresent threat, laying the foundation for torture as a state ritual for identifying and removing the threat.

After the September 11th attacks, President Bush's rhetoric was effective in situating an aggressive US foreign policy within a theological concept which transcends religion and nationality: good overcoming evil. This political theology, predicated on a good versus evil dichotomy became a recurring motif in Bush's presidential speeches and remarks. Resisting and

[64] As of May 9, 2024.
[65] American Presidency Database, University of California Santa Barbara, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/

overcoming evil is a noble claim. The issue with Bush's narrative lies in its limited understanding of what constitutes "evil," and in the way it projects evil as inherent to what others, non-Americans, are, presenting them as underserving of empathy and the recognition of human dignity. Additionally, Bush used "evil" as a noun (1,279 times) far more often than as an adverb, adjective, or verb (335 times). Bush's reliance on using evil as a noun indicates that he did not merely understand evil in terms of malicious deeds or actions. He seemed to recognize evil as an active force embodied by enemies of the United States.[66]

Another characteristic of Bush's rhetoric is the existence of groups of people not defined by their humanity; but rather, as incarnations of evil. In the formation of this narrative, some people are evil beyond comprehension and understanding. However, psychologist Julia Shaw warns against such simplistic approaches. Shaw argues, the idea that some people are incomprehensively evil implies "some people should not be empathized with, lest we imply we too are evil."[67] The rhetoric of evil facilitates a moral divide which cannot be transgressed without oneself becoming evil. Such a division also constructs a counter-narrative of the self: combatting an enemy of inherent evil establishes a self-narrative of inherent goodness.

While Bush never provides a philosophical construct of his concept of evil, it strikes parallels with Saint Augustine's *Privatio Boni*. In his Confessions, Augustine's theodicy investigates how "the supreme and highest good," created a universe filled with evil. [68] Augustine concludes that God, being the supreme good, can only produce good things. As such,

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[66] Peter Singer, *The President of Good & Evil: Taking George W. Bush Seriously*, (London: Granta, 2004), 3.
[67] Julia Shaw, *Evil: The Science Behind Humanity's Dark Side*, (New York, NY: Abrams Press, 2016), 8.
[68] Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions,* 594.

> things which are liable to corruption are good. If they were the supreme good, or not good at all they could not be corrupted…*all things that are corrupted suffer privation of some good.*[69]

For Augustine, evil, that which is corrupted good, is simply the privation of good. If evil is the privation of good, then people who are evil are individuals in which there is little or no good. For Bush, evil people are fully corrupted entities doing all they can to corrupt all that remains good in the world. There is no way forward for these corrupted entities as they are devoid of any decency or goodness within their psyche. Thus, the only way for good to prevail, in Bush's philosophy, is for it to be fully irradicated by any means necessary. However, this is the location in which Bush's political theology diverges from Augustine's *Privatio Boni*. Augustine concludes that evil does not exist, but Bush concludes that evil is real and aggressive in its desire to corrupt. Thus, resisting such evil requires establishing a highly aggressive foreign policy which ruthlessly advances faster than evil. As such, Bush consistently characterized himself as a leader willing to "do what it takes to defend [America] from people who spread evil by killing the innocent."[70] This language of doing "whatever it takes," was such a recurring motif in Bush's remarks, it became his campaign slogan in the months leading up to the 2004 Presidential election.[71] However, as investigations into the conditions of US detention centers mounted, reporters and human rights agencies began to reveal what the Bush administration believed it took to eradicate evil.

A 2011 story printed by *The Guardian* published a leaked government document which revealed that one piece of evidence used to justify the detention of 51 men in Guantanamo was

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[69] Augustine, *Confessions,* 597. Emphasis added.
[70] George W. Bush, "Remarks at the Reception for Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month," https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-reception-celebrating-hispanic-heritage-month
[71] "Bush 2004 Campaign Ad – Whatever it Takes," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgS_qPsTfmQ

their possession of a cheap F-91W Casio watch.[72] According to leaked documents, the Casio watches were sometimes used in the "manufacture of improvised explosive devices (IEDs)."[73] As such, possession of this watch could indicate an al-Qaeda training and affiliation. However, the Casio F-91W is the most sold watch in history; estimates suggest between 90-million to 100-million units have been sold since the product entered the market in 1989.[74] The dubiousness of using such a popular item to identify terrorism suspects has not been lost on some of the Guantanamo detainees. In an article published by *Mother Jones*, Guantanamo detainee, Usama Hassan Ahmed Abu Kabir is quoted: "I have a Casio watch due to the fact that they are inexpensive, and they last a long time… It had a calculator and was waterproof, and before prayers we have to wash up all the way to my elbows."[75] Another Guantanamo detainee, Abdullah Kamel Abudallah Kamel said, "When they told me that Casios were used by Al Qaeda and the watch was for explosives, I was shocked…. If I had known that, I would have thrown it away. I'm not stupid. We have four chaplains [at Guantanamo]; all of them wear this watch."[76] Both Kabir and Kamel were released without any charges, demonstrating the unreliability of using such a popular item to connect individuals to networks of terrorism.[77]

It was not the watch which led to suspicions, it was the ethnic and religious heritage of the watch owner which produced these men into suspects. Within the framing of Bush's narrative of resisting an enemy of inherent evil, such racial and religious profiling adds a new complexity.

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[72] James Ball, "Guantanamo Bay Files: Casio wristwatch 'the sign of al-Quida'" Apr, 24, 2001. Theguardian.com/world/2011/apr/25/guantanamo-files-casio-wristwatch-alqaida
[73] Ibid.
[74] "The Consumer Electronics Hall of Fame: Casio F-91W Wristwatch - IEEE Spectrum," accessed December 12, 2024, https://spectrum.ieee.org/the-consumer-electronics-hall-of-fame-casio-f91w-wristwatch.
[75] Dave Gilson, "Why Am I in Cuba?" Mother Jones, July 12, 2006. http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2006/07/why-am-i-cuba/
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

Bush was adamant that the War on Terror was not a war against Islam; however, his rhetoric also implies brown-skinned, Middle Eastern, Muslims display greater inclinations towards a corruption by evil.[78] Whether this rhetorical connection was intentional or not, it established the basis in which brown-skinned, Middle Eastern, Muslims are viewed with far more suspicion than others. This suspicion, however, is not overtly rooted in racist beliefs. Rather, it emerges from a fear of forfeiting control of the status quo to an omnipresent evil.

This presents a question, what does control of the American status quo mean? It is the establishment of individuals and groups who embody the values and beliefs of English-heritage Protestants, to govern and dictate who has full access to constitutional rights and protections. As such, the 9/11 attacks revealed the finitude of the protectors of the status quo to ensure full protections to the privileged groups of American society. This produced a deep anxiety, evoking what bell hooks calls the "fantasy…that the threating Other is always a terrorist."[79] Building on this conception, Ileana Porras expands on hook's definition, writing, "terrorism has come to be the thing against which liberal Western democracies define themselves…. [T]he terrorist has become the 'other' that threatens and desires the annihilation of the democratic 'self.'…an external force against which democracies therefore must strenuously defend."[80] With these definitions, it becomes easier to see how the photos of tortured brown-skinned, Muslim men confirmed the fears of the American imaginary.

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[78] Bush, George W. "Remarks at a Townhall Meeting in Ontario, California | The American Presidency Project," January 5, 2002. https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-townhall-meeting-ontario-california.
[79] bell hooks, "Representation of Whiteness in the Black Imagination." In *Her Black Looks: Race and Representation*, 165-178, (Cambridge, MA: South End, 1992), 174.
[80] Ileana M. Porras, "On Terrorism: Reflections on Violence and the Outlaw." In *After Identity: A reader in Law and Culture,* ed. Dan Danielsen and Karen Engle, 294-313 (New York: Routledge, 1995), 295.

If the terrorist is always 'other' to the archetypical American – that being an individual who embodies the values of English-heritage Protestantism – then the term terrorist acquires the racialization of an individual or group which embodies traits and values of dark-skinned, non-Western, Muslims. As such, when the protector of the American status quo, President Bush, reiterates the terrorist as evil, the term takes on racial and religious connotations. Thus, if brown-skinned, Middle Eastern, Muslims are more likely to be corrupted by evil, and that evil is an omnipresent threat to the American way of life, then all brown-skinned, Middle Eastern, Muslims should be view first as a threat unless proven otherwise. For Kabir and Kamel, their possession of a Casio watch was not the reason for their detainment. Their ethnic and religious identity in addition to the possession of a Casio watch is what made them suspicious and what ultimately led to their placement beyond the protection of the law.

The detainment of innocent people was not rare. In an interview, Journalist Syed Nazakat, shared about his visit to the Guantanamo detention facility: "Not everyone lodged there was a terrorist. Many captives were at the wrong place at the wrong time when they were arrested…. In the fog of war, many innocents became suspects and terrorists." [81] A 2004 report produced by the International Red Cross reveal similar observations, finding that "between 70% and 90%" of detained Iraqis suspected of terrorist activity were "arrested by mistake."[82] Additionally, records maintained by The New York Times reveals since the opening of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility, 780 individuals have been imprisoned in the camp. Regarded as the "worst of the worst,"

[81] Anadolu Agency, "Tragic Tales of US' Guantanamo Bay Prison," The Express Tribune, October 28, 2021, https://tribune.com.pk/story/2326758/tragic-tales-of-us-guantanamo-bay-prison.
[82] Karen J. Greenberg and Joshua L. Dratel, eds., "February 2004 (The ICRC Report)," in *The Torture Papers*, by Anthony Lewis, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 383–404, 391. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511511127.035

709 of these individuals have been released without charge. [83] An additional 9 have died in US custody. To date, only one detainee has been convicted of a mere 11 charged of any crime.[84] The place holding the worst and most evil people was primarily filled with individuals never involved in hostile acts against the US. Regardless, the imagery of tortured Muslim men in detention centers did not bring them into the space of American empathy; rather they provide visual credibility that such entities were underserving of rights and that such cultures were powerless under the domination of the US state.

This curtailing of rights was an essential aspect of the US foreign policy following the September 11th attacks. Employing controversial policies justified through loose interpretations of international human rights laws, the Bush administration afforded US intelligence agencies unprecedented reach with little to no oversight.[85, 86] The use of enhanced interrogation techniques resulted from these programs as detainees were denied the protections of the Geneva Convention.[87] By engaging in harsh and extrajudicial punishments effectively unleashing the military and the CIA, the state worked "in the shadows" to irradicate evil.[88] As such, it was essential that Bush emphasized how unfathomably evil these detainees were, subsequently

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[83] See "Cheney: Gitmo Holds 'Worst of the Worst,'" NBC News, June 1, 2009, https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna31052241. And The New York Times, "The Guantánamo Docket," *The New York Times*, May 18, 2021, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/guantanamo-bay-detainees.html.
[84] As of December 12th, 2024. The New York Times, "The Guantánamo Docket," *The New York Times*, May 18, 2021, sec. Died in Custody, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/guantanamo-bay-detainees.html#died-custody
[85] United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, "Torture Report," 9.
[86] Tayler and Epstein, "Legacy of the 'Dark Side'," 6.
[87] Jay S. Bybee, "Memorandum for Alberto R Gonzales Counsel to the President, and William J. Haynes II General Counsel of the Department of Defense Re: Application of Treaties and Laws to al Qaeda and Taliban Detainees," Memo, January 22, 2002, 9-10. https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/olc/legacy/2009/08/24/memo-laws-taliban-detainees.pdf.
[88] "The Vice President appears on Meet the Press with Tim Russert," the White House, September 16, 2001. https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/vicepresident/news-speeches/speeches/vp20010916.html

asserting American superiority through the threat of torture and bodily destruction without legal recourse.

Another reason many Americans support torture is due to the narrative that State-sanctioned torture is rare and was only used in extreme cases. Such a narrative resonates with the US public because it recognizes the contradiction of torture but moralizes its use because it appears to be employed with constraint in moments of necessity. This is Bush's rationale for his decision to waterboard detainees:

> I knew that an interrogation program this sensitive and controversial would one day become public. When it did, we would open ourselves up to criticism that America had compromised our moral values. I would have preferred that we get the information another way. But the choice between security and values was real. Had I not authorized waterboarding on senior al Qaeda leaders, I would have had to accept a greater risk I was unwilling to take. My most solemn responsibility as president was to protect the country.[89]

Within the American imaginary, even when brown-skinned, Muslims presented evidence of innocence, the evidence was not to be trusted. With such suspicions, torture became a ritualistic breaking of evil entities to produce information. The efficacy of torture alone, was presented as the unsavory, yet necessary, method for ensuring American safety. However, a 2014 report on torture revealed that no helpful information was revealed by torture.[90]

Religious and political communities, suggests William Cavanaugh, both share interpretations of power which are formed around the ability to identify and expel those who pollute and defile the social order of the community.[91] However, when a community struggles to identify the pollutant, a cultural scapegoat – an enemy or population – becomes identified with

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[89] George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, 1st ed (New York: Crown Publishers, 2010), 169-70.
[90] United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, "Torture Report," 3.
[91] William T. Cavanaugh, Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 31.

the defilement of the social body and must be eliminated.[92] The necessity to eliminate a defiling element within society establishes a state's claim to "sacred violence" – violence which defines the culture. To sustain this "sacredness" of state violence, Cavanaugh writes, states must "discipline bodies, to habituate them and script them into a drama of its own making."[93] This drama relies on the movement of individuals towards collective action, dissolving nuance and empathy into clearly defined in-group and out-group binaries. It also becomes essential for the state to contrast its sacred violences with profane violence; one representing a necessary evil emerging from moral clarity, and the other representing incomprehensible brutality emerging from evil motives. By producing an *other*, a rival, a state can synthesize a strong and cohesive sense of identity which further pressures questioning members into conforming and potentially participating in the state's sacred violence.[94]

Central to sacred violence is the victim who represents a mediator or reconciler who must be killed or expelled to satisfy wrath of the state.[95] The victim embodies a dual nature, receiving transference of blame for evils committed while also receiving praise for restoring order through their death at the hands of the state. However, when innocent people are positioned in the role of the victim, transference risks losing its justification. As such, the role of torture becomes essential to upholding the state's narrative and claim to sacred violence by transforming the innocent into unconfessed defiled entities. Through this ritual, torture invokes violence under the pretense of acquisitiveness, "inflicting ever greater violence to acquire the being of the victim

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[92] Joel Hodge, "Torture and Faith: The Violent Sacred and Christian Resistance in East Timor," in *Violence, Desire, and the Sacred: Girard's Mimetic Theory across the Disciplines*, ed. Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, and Joel Hodge, Violence, Desire, and the Sacred, vol. 1 (New York: Continuum, 2012), 88.
[93] Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 34.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Hodge, "Torture and Faith," 90.

through the victim's own confession and affirmation of violence."[96] This is precisely the narrative used to justify waterboarding by Bush:

> Zubaydah later explained to interrogators why he started answering questions again. His understanding of Islam was that he had to resist interrogation only up to a certain point. Waterboarding was the technique that allowed him to reach that threshold, fulfill his religious duty, and then cooperate.[97]

In facilities such as Abu Ghraib and Bagram, physical, sexual, religious, and psychological abuse was justified as methods for softening up detainees to provoke cooperation and confessions during interrogations.[98] Enemies of the US were not merely punished with torture, they were produced by it by relying on confessions forced through the duress of pain. Extracting a confession via torture, regardless of its trustworthiness, proved the existence of "evil" while simultaneously bringing evildoers to justice.

American torture also asserted US control and dominance over threatening bodies. Hodge contends that the purpose of torture is to convey an utter sense of helplessness.[99] The victim is entirely at the mercy and control of the torturer, and subsequently, the state. This dynamic is inherently dehumanizing because healthy and ordinary human relationships "do not involve taking control of the *whole* of the other's life."[100] Torture, however, perverts human relationships by using control to strip away the whole of a person's identity, dignity, and sense of self-determination. According to Cavanaugh, the immense pain of torture literally reduces the abused individual to only producing "the sounds [they] used before [they] learnt to speak."[101] The ability

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[96] Hodge, "Torture and Faith," 93.
[97] Bush, *Decision Points*, 169.
[98] Antonio M. Taguba, "AR 15-6 Investigation of the 800th Military Police Brigade," Oversight Report, Investigative File (AR 15-6), October 19, 2004, 18. https://www.thetorturedatabase.org/document/ar-15-6-investigation-800th-military-police-investigating-officer-mg-antonio-taguba-taguba-
[99] Hodge, Ibid., 93.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist,* 34.

to communicate and to connect with other human beings is stripped from the abused as they are reduced to "inarticulate screams and moans."[102] All hope and dignity is annihilated, with the only escape of the inflicted pain coming via submission and compliance to the demands of the state. Cooperating in this sense was to accept one's degradation and subjugation. It was to comply with the US narrative of detained people embodying evil, presenting their own words and confessions as immutable evidence.

Former US Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich, famously wrote "language matters" in a letter accompanied with a copy of "Language: A Key Mechanism of Control" he provided to new GOP Candidates.[103] He understood that for his political party to succeed it had to utilize language to form narratives, and then use narratives to establish policies.[104] Dehumanization is not a result of policy, it begins with language, establishing the narratives of inferiority. In asserting that American motives and values were ultimately good in contrast to the evil motives of those racialized as terrorist, Bush employed religious language to align the goals of US foreign policy to the morality of a higher authority. Subsequently, any Middle Eastern man suspected of terrorism was morally inferior, as proven by their own testimonies. Their coerced words supported the US narrative: evil was omnipresent. Confessions extracted through abuse were vital to sustaining the US War on Terror. The Bush administration needed the American public to believe that evil was always present, because as philosopher, Joshua Mills-Knutsen writes, "the more evil appears omnipresent, the more political power Bush [was] able to

[102] Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist,* 34.
[103] "'Language: A Key Mechanism of Control,'" FAIR, February 1, 1995, https://fair.org/home/language-a-key-mechanism-of-control/.
[104] Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War,* xvi.

accrue."[105] Torture was not rare, it was a vital aspect of the US war effort and justification of the country's morally dubious foreign policy.

2.2: The Banality of Dehumanization

Mbembe, theorizes that modern Western democracies, justify war by "exacting violence and cruelty on people who, in the lead-up, have been deprived of all rights."[106] As such, "the desire to tear [those deprived of rights] to pieces is expressed by the generalization of practices such as…pillaging collective food reserves and granaries, rounding up civilians with extreme brutality, or systematic torture."[107] This potentially explains why torture emerged rapidly within US detention centers – it was a reminder to Americans and Middle Easterners of who had rights and who was subject to being deprived of rights at any moment. Professor of Law and Sociology, Dorothy Roberts, observes that torture abroad upholds US imperial ambitions in a similar way that lynching upheld domestic notions of white supremacy.[108] Roberts suggests that in both cases, torture functioned "to mark the bodies of brown-skinned victims as savage objects undeserving of civilized legal protection and to violently impose their subjugate status."[109] This concept, that torture requires and reinforces a dehumanizing narrative is precisely its appeal. When Bush responded to his own rhetorical question, "why do they hate us?" he emphatically stated, "they hate what they see right here in this chamber…they hate our freedoms."[110] Bush

[105] Joshua Mills-Knutsen, "Rhetoric of Evil: How Failure Is Turned to One's Own Advantage," in *Promoting and Producing Evil*, ed. Nancy Billias (New York, NY: Ropodi B.V., 2008), pp. 287-304, 299.
[106] Mbembe, *Necropolitics,* 20.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Dorothy Roberts, "Torture and the Biopolitics of Race," *University of Miami Law Review*, 2008, https://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/faculty_scholarship/575., 230.
[109] Ibid.
[110] George W. Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People," Washington, D.C., September, 2001, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html#:~:text=Americans%20are%20asking%2C%20why%20do,and%20disagree%20with%20each%20other.

could only imagine an enemy who resented the American status quo, which for Bush, was the ultimate display of freedom. The September 11th attacks were horrific murder of innocent civilians, but they also threated American hegemony and the privileging of certain classes of Americans to kill with impunity. As such, torture was viewed as a necessity for producing a sense of certainty by extracting vital information while also reasserting US dominance in a moment when the nation's weaknesses had been exposed and exploited.

Liz Philipose suggests that circulation of the photos from Abu Ghraib solidified the cultural production of the evil Muslim terrorist.[111] The photos provided visual credibility to the language of dominance, creating a self-reinforcing racial profile. Philipose argues, the visual technique that "to be arrested and detained…in the numerous third-country and secret detention centers across the world is to be racialized as terrorist."[112] Circulation of images of tortured bodies is not new in the United States, it has a clear connection to the history of lynching.[113] Photos from both Abu Ghraib and lynchings display victims forced into submissive postures, the triumphant displays of unmasked torturers, and were widely circulated.[114] Though the White-Americans are the perpetuators of violence in the photos, viewing the images through a racialized epistemic still construed the "threatening Other" as terrorist and the embodiment of evil.[115]

[111] Philipose, "Politics of Pain," 1048.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid., 1049.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid., 1053.

Chapter 3: Immigration, Narratives, and Solitary Confinement

The abuse we are witnessing, especially right now against black immigrants, isn't new, but it is escalating… The reality is that ICE operates in the shadows. They thrive in secrecy. We know that the US government is deporting key witnesses in an effort to silence survivors and absolve ICE of legal liability.[116]

A modern form of the Black beast narrative is emerging in narratives about migrant crime. This term, increasingly popular among US politicians and media outlets, constructs a simple narrative that migrants are producing rising crime rates.[117] Immigration is a daunting issue, warranting its own investigative project. However, within the scope of this project, I will examine how rhetoric concerning migrants is functioning similarly to narratives employed during Jim Crow and the War on Terror. This rhetoric is forming a necropolitic by associating criminality with immigration, despite a lack of evidence, while amplifying fears stemming from prejudices entrenched in the American imaginary. Additionally, US policy has also produced a "death-world," which according to Mbembe, is the location "in which the most spectacular forms of cruelty have free rein."[118] This death world is the promulgation of the largest immigration detention system in the world, which, though being labelled a civil, non-punitive detention system, often functions closer to a criminal carceral system.[119] Increasingly, reports of human rights violations and preventable deaths of detained persons are emerging across immigration

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[116] Julian Borger "US ICE officers 'used torture to make Africans sign own deportation orders,'" *The Guardian,* October 22, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/oct/22/us-ice-officers-allegedly-used-torture-to-make-africans-sign-own-deportation-orders

[117] An analysis of the term "migrant crime" reveals a sharp increase in the term, rising in US news media usage from 110 times in 2023 to 1570 times to-date as of October 10th, 2024. See "GDELT Summary: Television Explorer: Migrant AND Crime AND (Station:CNN OR Station:FOXNEWS OR Station:MSNBC)," accessed December 9, 2024, https://api.gdeltproject.org/api/v2/summary/summary?d=iatv&t=summary&k=migrant+crime&ts=full&fs=station%3ACNN&fs=station%3AFOXNEWS&fs=station%3AMSNBC&svt=zoom&svts=zoom&swvt=zoom&ssc=yes&sshc=yes&swc=yes&stcl=yes&c=1.

[118] Mbembe, *Necropolitics,* 18.

[119] Altaf Saadi et al., "Understanding US Immigration Detention: Reaffirming Rights and Addressing Social-Structural Determinants of Health," *Health and Human Rights* 22, no. 1 (June 2020): 187–97, 187.

detention facilities.[120] This combination of a superfluous group of migrants with the expansion of "death-worlds" typically found in the form of detention facilities is producing an alarming rise in torture within US immigration detention centers.

In February 2024, Physicians for Human Rights, Harvard Law School, and Harvard Medical School published a report revealing solitary confinement had been used in immigration detention centers over 14,000 times between 2018 and 2023.[121] The average duration of confinement was 27 days; with some immigrants spending over two years in solitary.[122] Notably, the UN defines: "solitary confinement of more than 15 consecutive days… as a form of torture."[123] Philosopher, Lisa Guenther argues that solitary confinement is "the worst form of torture and the principle upon which all more determinate forms of torture are based."[124] The practice, argues Guenther, actively destroys a person's psychological ability to even know their own humanity. It breaks the bonds of social connection through which a person becomes aware of their subjectivity. Without the existence of others, an individual cannot understand if they themself exist.[125] Prolonged solitary confinement is undeniably torture; however, The Physicians for Human Rights report uncovers that the practice was regularly employed on immigrants for trivial disciplinary infractions such as using profanity or eating too slowly.[126] Though solitary

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[120] Altaf Saadi et al., "Understanding US Immigration Detention," 187.
[121] "'Endless Nightmare': Torture and Inhuman Treatment in Solitary Confinement in U.S. Immigration Detention" (Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program at Harvard Law School, Peeler Immigration Lab at Harvard Medical School, and Physicians for Human Rights, February 6, 2024), 1. https://phr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/PHR-REPORT-ICE-Solitary-Confinement-2024.pdf
[122] Ibid.
[123] "United States: Prolonged solitary confinement amounts to psychological torture, says UN expert," https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/02/united-states-prolonged-solitary-confinement-amounts-psychological-torture
[124] Lisa Guenther, *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), xv.
[125] Guenther, *Solitary Confinement*, xii.
[126] "Endless Nightmare", 8.

confinement is authorized for use as a last resort in immigrant detention centers, evidence reveals it is often and consistently used punitively with little oversight and restraint.

Both anti-immigrant rhetoric and torture within immigration detention facilities concern the protection of borders. Mbembe argues that enforcement of a boundary, whether psychological (such as separation of races), or physical (such as in the formation of geographical borders) is a primary concern of necropolitics. In countries like the United States, territories were amassed through the taking of land through force, then cultivating that land through slave labor.[127] Mbembe suggests that though territorial conquest and enslavement have disappeared from Western democracies, the violence which produced these democracies has not subsided. Rather, the violence which established these nations transformed into new forms typically observed in war, detention centers, and the enforcement of borders.[128] Within these spaces, modern democracies create categories of people who can be destroyed, creating "death-worlds" in which punishment is employed to constitute the sovereign as distinct and dominant over the subject.[129]

As previously observed, torture often emerges when control of the status quo by the privilege governing class is threatened. Immigration into the US, in its current form, will potentially alter the social fabric of the nation. The number of immigrants residing in the US has risen from 31 million in 2000, to an estimated 48 million immigrants in 2023 – nearly 12 million

[127] Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 3.
[128] Ibid., 16.
[129] Ibid.

of whom are undocumented.[130,131] More immigrants reside in the US today than in any other period of US history with roughly one-out-of-every-seven US residents being foreign-born.[132] Though the background of immigrants is diverse, the sheer size of this population reflects a changing social climate within American culture, inherently changing the US status quo. Significant to this cultural shift is not only the quantity of immigrants, but also their countries of origin, as the top five countries of origin are: Mexico, India, China, the Philippines, and El Salvador – countries neither considered Western nor majority Protestant.[133]

Rising numbers of migrants from non-Western and non-Protestant countries threaten the idealized American identity formed around the traits and values associated with English, Protestant heritage. This has resulted in some, such as President Elect Donald Trump, to consider this demographic shift as "poisoning the blood of our country." Trump further explains his statement, adding "they're coming from all over the world, from Africa, from Asia…crime is going to be tremendous, and the terrorism [too]."[134] Within the convergence of these two

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[130] The Pew Research Center and Migration Policy Institute estimate between 11 million and 12 million undocumented immigrants live in the US. However, some politicians suggest the total is between 20 to 25 million. (see, "Immigration, Project 2025, taxes - VP debate claims fact-checked" https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cevyzkdx73yo). A 2018 Yale-MIT study suggests traditional methods for estimating undocumented immigration numbers is faulty. Using alternative mathematical models, researchers estimated between 17 million and 22 million undocumented immigrants resided in the US in 2016, supporting claims undocumented immigration numbers are underestimated. (See: Mohammad Fazel Zarandi, Jonathan S. Feinstein, Edward H. Kaplan, "Yale Study Finds Twice as Many Undocumented Immigrants as Previous Estimates," *Yale Insights,* https://insights.som.yale.edu/insights/yale-study-finds-twice-as-many-undocumented-immigrants-as-previous-estimates.

[131] Steven A Camarota and Karen Zeigler, "In October 2023, the Foreign-Born Share Was the Highest in History" (Center for Immigration Studies, November 30, 2023), https://cis.org/Report/October-2023-ForeignBorn-Share-Was-Highest-History.

[132] Ibid.

[133] Mohamad Moslimani and Jeffrey S. Passel, "What the Data Says about Immigrants in the U.S.," *Pew Research Center* (blog), September 27, 2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/09/27/key-findings-about-us-immigrants/ and "Country Factsheet," in *The World Factbook* (Central Intelligence Agency), accessed December 9, 2024, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/el-salvador/factsheets/#:~:text=Religions,0.2%25%20(2023%20est.)

[134] "Former President Trump Holds Rally in Durham, New Hampshire," December 16, 2023, https://www.c-span.org/video/?532231-1/president-trump-holds-rally-durham-hampshire.

narratives, a new necropolitic is being forged. The first narrative perpetuates the Muslim terrorist as a threat to the American way of life, contending that immigration from Muslim majority nations will be a threat to American safety. The second narrative posits that crime rates will rise as immigrants increase. Research reveals, however, that documented and undocumented immigrants commit crimes at a lower rate than natural-born US citizens, and crime rates across the nation are dropping.[135]

Regardless, an analysis of crime and immigration is beyond the scope of this essay. My concern is how such narratives might justify torture in detention centers. Though there are justifiable reasons for deportation, current rhetoric about migration does not appear concerned with the nuances of a multifaceted restructuring of the US immigration system. Rather, the rhetoric emanating from American leaders overemphasize the security threat of immigrants with unsubstantiated claims. For example, Trump remarked,

> Throughout the world right now…crime is way way down. You know why? Because they sent us their criminals!... They sent us their drug dealers and their murderers.[136]

Such rhetoric deindividuates the diverse experiences of persons entering the US into a single narrative, denoting migrants as dangerous and disposable. Disposing of immigrants is, however, Trump's intention:

> They're sending their murderers to the United States of America…That's why to keep our families safe the Republican platform promises to launch the largest deportation operation in the history of our country.[137]

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[135] See "Undocumented Immigrant Offending Rate Lower Than U.S.-Born Citizen Rate | National Institute of Justice," accessed December 8, 2024, https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/undocumented-immigrant-offending-rate-lower-us-born-citizen-rate, and Ran Abramitzky et al., "Law-Abiding Immigrants: The Incarceration Gap Between Immigrants and the US-Born, 1870–2020," Working Paper, Working Paper Series (National Bureau of Economic Research, July 2023), https://doi.org/10.3386/w31440.

[136] "Donald Trump Speaks at Rally in Ohio," accessed December 9, 2024, https://www.rev.com/transcripts/donald-trump-speaks-at-rally-in-ohio.

[137] Donald Trump, "Read the Transcript of Donald J. Trump's Convention Speech," *The New York Times*, July 19, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/07/19/us/politics/trump-rnc-speech-transcript.html.

Through the guise of safety, a narrative is emerging which deems a significant group of people as entirely disposable. This narrative of crime and safety aims to legitimize that there exist "bad objects that return to haunt them [which] they then seek violently to rid themselves of."[138] Such a narrative, in combination with the largest immigration detention system in the world, risks producing a deportation system that resorts to violence and torture in masse.[139]

Unfortunately, evidence of this system employing torture to coerce compliance exists. In October 2020, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) sought to deport over 200 Cameroonian asylum seekers. To coerce the asylum seekers to sign the necessary paperwork effectuating their deportation, eight Cameroonians reported they "were threatened, choked, beaten, pepper-sprayed and… put in handcuffs by [ICE] officers."[140] The Cameroonians were tortured to obtain fingerprints to certify their deportation documents.[141] Furthermore, a letter to ICE drafted by the Congressional Black Caucus notes this use of force to produce documentation for deportation "is not an isolated incident."[142] Conducting the largest deportation in American history will require mass detentions, increased surveillance, coercion, and the use of force. [143] This will require a bolstering of the US immigration detention system, a system which presently displays strong proclivities towards implementing torture for reasons ranging from "eating too slowly" to obtaining fingerprints required for deportation.

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[138] Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 2.
[139] Saadi, Altaf et al. "Understanding US Immigration Detention: Reaffirming Rights and Addressing Social-Structural Determinants of Health." *Health and Human Rights* 22, no. 1 (June 2020): 187-197, Abstract.
[140] Borger, "US Ice Officers 'Used Torture to Make Africans Sign Own Deportation Orders.'"
[141] Ibid.
[142] Bennie G. Thompson and Karen R. Bass, "Letter to Tony H. Pham," October 13, 2020, https://cbc.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2020-10-13_t_dhs_ice_-_cameroonian_asylum_seekers.pdf.
[143] Hamed Aleaziz, "Trump Wants Mass Deportations. He Will Need Jails and Sanctuary Cities to Help," *NY Times*, December 11, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/11/us/politics/trump-immigration-deportations.html.

Safety is a legitimate concern; governments have a responsibility to protect their constituents. But as anxieties, real or imagined, of physical or cultural annihilation rises within a society, Mbembe suggests that politicians are susceptible to advocate that "to protect themselves against threats and danger the enclosures must be multiplied."[144] Within this ideological protectionism, borders cease to exist as spaces to cross; rather shifting into militarized spaces of separation in which many die or are deported.[145] Through efforts to increase sovereignty and power within such spaces, states increasingly rely on hidden violence, enacting physical and psychological torture to coerce obedience and obtain security of the state. This essay is not arguing against national security and safety protocols within the US immigration system, nor is it arguing for an "open border" - a system of immigration which requires no documentation or governmental approval for entry. My argument is that any position on immigration which produces or relies on torture must be rejected. However, to effectively reject reliance on torture, the patterns of political discourse built upon dehumanizing rhetoric which often proceeds its use must be examined, critiqued, and challenged.

Chapter 4: Challenging Narratives

An examination of patterns often preceding and justifying torture amid concerns of safety is necessary. Consequently, an expansion of societal imagination is required to address the challenges of immigration without relapsing to prior forms of cruelty. American churches possess a unique apparatus to expand imaginaries of safety and justice: the Eucharist. However, to do so, American Protestants must reconcile with two realities (1) American Protestants have largely supported the use of torture at higher rates than non-Christian demographics, and (2)

[144] Mbembe, *Necropolitics,* 2.
[145] Ibid., 3.

American Protestant clergy have largely remained silent about the dangers of dehumanizing rhetoric and the harm of torture. The final chapter of this essay will seek to answer why American Protestants support torture and then will present a model of anti-torture advocacy to churches by returning to the work and writing of Ida B. Wells-Barnett.

4.1 Why do Christians Support Torture?

An analysis of ten surveys on attitudes toward torture, which included data on the racial and religious identity of respondents, reveals a notable trend: in seven of the surveys, White American Protestants supported torture at higher rates than any other demographic. [146] In one instance, Black Protestants were found to support torture at a higher rate than other groups, but overall, Black American Protestants are less likely to condone torture compared to their White Protestant counterparts. Cross-tabulated data further indicate that, on average, 32% of Black American Protestants hold pro-torture beliefs, compared to 42% of White Americans overall and 44% of White American Protestants. [147] While this analysis is not without limitations, it aligns with broader findings. [148] The reasons for this trend among Protestants remain contested. This chapter proposes two potential explanations: (1) the legacy of Protestant Supremacy in the United States has fostered a subset of Christian nationalists who perceive the nation's religious identity as threatened by external forces, leading them to justify torture to preserve the status quo; and (2) some Protestants view torture primarily as a political issue rather than a theological

[146] Appendix 2.
[147] This is the unweighted average of polling data collected from ten polls. Appendix 2.
[148] See Brian J. Fogarty and H. Whitt Kilburn, "American Religious Traditions, Orthodoxy, and Commitment in Public Opinion toward Torture." *Politics and Religion* 8, no.1 (2015), 36-59, 47., https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048314000777; and Elizabeth Quiros, "The Torture Question: The Role of Religion and Psychology in Public Opinion of Torture" (Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 2015), 55-6., http://etd.library.vanderbilt.edu/available/etd-03202015-220231/.

one, neglecting to critically examine whether support for such practices is fundamentally opposed with their religious traditions.

Protestantism has flourished in American society.[149] For some, this flourishing has produced an ideology termed "American Christian Nationalism." Roughly defined, American Christian Nationalism displays three characteristics: (1) The US was founded on Protestant Christian principles, (2) laws in the US should be shaped and informed by Christian principles, and (3) Protestant Christianity should hold a privileged position within US culture.[150] For many American Christian Nationalists, Protestants in the US should hold significant influence on the political process and policies of the country. As such, "because Islam is often framed as the antithesis of both Christian and American identities," American Christian nationalists display high rates of Islamophobic and anti-immigrant attitudes.[151]

American Christian Nationalism is not synonymous with evangelical Christianity,[152] Protestant Christianity, or White-American identity.[153] A study on Christian nationalism conducted by Sean Everton found that between 25 to 30 percent of survey respondents who expressed Christian nationalist sentiments identified as either Black, Hispanic, Asian, or another race.[154] In fact, Everton's study found that race and ethnicity have no correlation with Christian

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[149] Jeff Diamant, "Faith on the Hill," *Pew Research Center* (blog), January 3, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/01/03/faith-on-the-hill-2023/.
[150] Sean F. Everton, "Not All Christian Nationalists Are White (and Not All White Christians Are Christian Nationalists): Exploring the Predictors of Christian Nationalism," *Frontiers in Social Psychology* 2 (November 6, 2024): 1465810, https://doi.org/10.3389/frsps.2024.1465810.
[151] Andrew L Whitehead, Samuel L Perry, and Joseph O Baker, "Make America Christian Again: Christian Nationalism and Voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election," *Sociology of Religion* 79, no. 2 (May 19, 2018): 147–71, ,157. https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srx070
[152] Evangelical Christians broadly defined are a subset of Protestant denominations which hold to strong views on Biblical authority and the development of a personal Christian faith. See "What Is an Evangelical?," *National Association of Evangelicals* (blog), accessed December 12, 2024, https://www.nae.org/what-is-an-evangelical/
[153] Everton, Ibid.
[154] Ibid.

national attitudes; rather, factors such as political conservatism, biblical literalism, and regularity of worship attendance displayed the greatest positive correlations with Christian nationalist attitudes.[155] This might explain why Black-American protestants support of torture is not substantially lower than White-Protestant support. Though race is an aspect of embodying Christian Nationalism's idealized American identity, religion appears more significant. Thus, restricting immigration from Muslim and communists nations appears to be a priority for American Christian Nationalists.[156] Across racial lines, a unifying belief among Christian nationalists is the importance of preserving and protecting an American Christian identity "irrespective of the means by which such a project would be achieved."[157] Thus, torture is merely seen as one means of protecting the nation's Protestant Christian heritage and preserving the privileging of Protestant Christian beliefs and authority. Though this essay teeters on the concept of American Christian Nationalism, such a concept is not this compatible with its argument. The primary cause being that Christian nationalism conflates Christian practice with unwavering patriotism. Such a conflation cannot effectively critique the state. Rather, it lends its voice to the aims of the nation, becoming a cultural tool rather than an effective moral guide and conscious.

Many Christians, however, support the use of torture but do not hold Christian Nationalist beliefs. A poll conducted by Mercer University in 2008 observed that among Southern Evangelical Christians, only 28% of respondents said that they turned to religious resources when thinking about torture. Nearly half (44%) of respondents said they turned to "life

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[155] Everton, "Not All Christian Nationalists Are White."
[156] Rebecca Santana and Ali Swenson, "Trump wants to keep 'communists' and 'Marxists' out of the US. Here's what the law says," AP News, June 28, 2023, https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-immigration-marxists-communists-ban-2024-d9a377149926457d1b8b182293d9c86e.
[157] Whitehead, et al., "Make America Christian Again" 20. Emphasis in original

experience and common sense," when determining their opinions about torture.[158] This highlights a major challenge within the American Protestant Church, the relegation of Christian practice to an internalized concern of the soul, while the state presides over the physical aspects of society. This spiritual-political split appears to be a relic of theological justifications of slavery – the theological foundation which enabled great American theologians to preach and produce robust theological works on total depravity, unconditional without ever asking how such issues related to the reality of human bondage.[159] This perpetual retraction of churches from critiquing the abuses of bodies by the state has prevent many ministers from speaking against slavery, lynching, and the modern issue of torture in US detention centers.

William Cavanaugh suggests that an important contribution of the Church in resisting the tendency of states to oppress is rooted in the Church's modeling of a "contrast society." For Cavanaugh, this presents "a counter-performance of the body to that of the state."[160] If the Church fails to function as a "contrast society," it risks,

> Acknowledging the state's monopoly on coercion, handing over the bodies of Christians to [the state], agreeing to stay out of the fabricated realm of the 'political. Acquiescence to this drama saps the Church's ability to resist where and when states become violent.[161]

Cavanaugh posits that the Church is not merely a spiritual body but also a social body. Thus, Christian practice cannot be relegated to care of souls, while the state apprehends control over bodies.[162] For Cavanaugh, "the state's control of the body is a control of the soul as well."[163] Torture enacts violence on both body and soul.

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[158] David P. Gushee, "Religious Reason-Giving in the Torture Debate: A Response to Jeremy Waldron," *Mercer Law Review* 63, no. 3 (2012): 869–75, 873. https://digitalcommons.law.mercer.edu/jour_mlr/vol63/iss3/6.
[159] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 43.
[160] Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 180.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid., 197.

Solitary confinement, defined as isolating an individual for 22 hours or more per day, [164] punishes the body and destroys the soul, as "to exist as a normal human being," writes Atul Gawande, "requires interaction with other people."[165] Lisa Guenther argues that it strips away an individual's ability to recognize their own humanity, severing the social bonds through which self-awareness is formed. [166] Christian tradition holds that to be human is to be made in the Image of God. If torture destroys one's humanity, as Guenther claims, then it is a desecration of the *Imago Dei*, making it incompatible with Christian teaching. According to Cavanaugh, torture's destruction of the soul contrasts with the vision of the church witnessed through the Eucharist: "torture creates fearful and isolated bodies, bodies docile to the purposes of the regime; the Eucharist effects the body of Christ, a body marked by resistance to worldly power."[167] Support for torture and participation in the Eucharist are fundamentally opposed. Torture isolates victims, producing a sense of utter aloneness in suffering; the Eucharist embodies the church's mission to "reveal to the world its pristine, organic unity." [168] Through a "Eucharistic imagination," the church can form a counter-society that disrupts the violence and isolation of state power, reclaiming bodies and souls with compassion and a vision of reconciliatory justice – this being justice which does not produce exclusions from the "moral

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[164] "The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules)," General Assembly resolution 70/175 § Rule 44 (2015), https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Nelson_Mandela_Rules-E-ebook.pdf.
[165] Atul Gawande, "Is Long-Term Solitary Confinement Torture?" *The New Yorker*, March 23, 2009, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/03/30/hellhole.
[166] Guenther, *Solitary Confinement*, xii.
[167] Cavanaugh, Ibid., 206.
[168] Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Theologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 245.

order of being a human being." [169] Therefore, discipline in the church cannot be achieved through torture, as torture is never employed to restore victims to society. [170]

However, this reclamation must extend beyond symbolic expansions of a Eucharistic imagination; it requires participation with and service to the world. For Yves Congar, the delineation between the social and the spiritual diminished churches from effectively resisting racial segregation of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[171] This failure arose, in part, because of a communion at the level liturgical practice of the churches, but a lack of a sociological communion. Faith, however, for Congar, "must again become humanly present, like Christ," pulling Christian practice back into the discussions and concerns of world affairs.[172] This requires "an effective and concrete human communion;" pointing to a fundamental truth: the Eucharist is not simply a symbolic act but an invitation to a tangible, transformative solidarity rooted in Christian practice.[173] The identity of the Christian is not rooted in national allegiance but in the Church's universal mission to embody God's desire for the unity of humanity.[174] The Eucharist, as a symbol and practice of unity, demands participation in both the spiritual and social dimensions of communion and a rejection of the isolation torture creates within communities, the body, and the soul. This concrete reality requires action by religious communities and religious leaders.

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[169] Cavanaugh, Ibid., and Reimann and Zimbardo, "The Dark Side of Social Encounters." 178.
[170] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 33.
[171] Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit Vol. 2,* trans. By David Smith, (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), 20.
[172] Gabriel Flynn, *Yves Congar's Vision of the Church in a World of Unbelief,* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 50.
[173] Congar, Ibid., 16.
[174] Flynn, Ibid.

4.2: Challenging narratives from the pulpit

Torture is a political *and* spiritual issue. However, many American Protestant churches fail to advocate against its use and the rhetoric which incubate justifications of the practice because of an overemphasized interiorized spirituality. This theological division of the body and the soul has resulted in a church too preoccupied with, to paraphrase Wells-Barnett, saving the souls of American Christians from eternal torment to concern itself the present torment of people in American detention centers.[175] This theological approach, which stems from justifications for the enslavement of Christians, must be undone through the reclaiming of bodies from the state.

As observed in chapter one, even when the cruelty of torture is described in detail, as long as it appears to be done for the safety of the state against morally corrupted entities, support of its use will likely grow. Thus, to quell its support, it becomes vital to challenge the narratives which justify its use. Such counter-narratives should proceed from a counter society, but data reveals that few Protestant churches engage in conversations about torture or immigration. As such, the church can learn from the work of Wells-Barnett, who utilized sharing personal narratives of lynching victims along with quantitative data to challenge the black beast narratives, exposing the practice as a perversion of justice.

4.2.1: Courage in the Pulpit

Wells-Barnett implored ministers to act and speak against the injustice of lynching and was critical of those who failed to advocate against the practice within their communities. In Atlanta, she expressed distain when, following the beating of an African Methodist Episcopal

[175] Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 155.

(A.M.E.) minister, Rev D.M. Pinkard, other ministers failed to "make any mention of it to their people."[176] Engagement with ministers was an essential aspect for Wells-Barnett's advocacy, as she understood the influence that religious leaders held on the political and moral positions of their congregants. She applauded minsters who were willing to take up the cause, like Mr. Aked who, "urged the necessity of the Christian church to do what it could in an appeal to the conscience of the American church to put down this great evil."[177] Additionally, Wells-Barnett utilized her voice in the pulpit to connect and speak to audiences, speaking bluntly about the atrocities of lynching to clergy and laypeople in churches across the US and UK.

American protestant churches can learn from Wells' example. One such lesson is the charge for ministers and pastors to speak out about the injustice of torture, lending their voices and pulpits to counter-narratives regarding rhetoric about migrant crime. While some do preach about immigration, data reveals this as an infrequent practice. For example, a 2015 national survey conducted by Lifeway Research found that only 2% of surveyed evangelical Protestants said that their church influenced their beliefs on immigration.[178] However, the survey found that 68% of evangelicals would value hearing a sermon on biblical views regarding the topic.[179] Findings from a 2010 Pew Research Center study reveals that only one-in-four (24%) of churchgoers have heard clergy at their places of worship speak out about immigration.[180] After conducting a meta-analysis of empirical research on Protestants sermons and immigration, Craig Ott and Juan Carlos Téllez summarize the findings, writing, "although national level [Protestant]

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[176] Wells-Barnett, *Light of Truth,* 86.
[177] Ibid., 184.
[178] Bob Smietana, "Evangelicals Say it is Time for Congress to Tackle Immigration," March 11, 2015, research.lifeway.com/2015/03/11/evangelicals-say-it-is-time-for-congress-to-tackle-immigration/
[179] Ibid.
[180] Craig Ott and Juan Carlos Téllez, "The Paradox of American Evangelical Views on Immigration: A Review of the Empirical Research," *Missiology: An International Review* 47, no. 3 (2019): 252–68, 259. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091829619858215.

leaders and organizations have spoken out on immigration and the need to inform congregations on the issue, relatively few evangelical churches or pastors have done so." [181]This conclusion leads Ott and Téllez to speculate that clergy seldomly preach about the topic of immigration because they understand it to be a complex and purely political issue. Thus, some clergy fear the consequences of raising such a controversial topic from the pulpit, especially if their position differs from their congregants.[182]

As Wells implored, for ministers to speak out on issues of immigration and the harmful effects of dehumanizing rhetoric, courage is required both in "precept and example."[183] Of course, not all clergy will speak with pro-immigration views, but encouraging pastors to take a position on immigration is not my intention. The primary goal is to enable congregants to understand that immigration is a complex, multifaceted topic in the US; and to speak at hand that the implementation of torture must not be accepted as a potential solution to this issue. Torture is anti-thetical to Christianity's belief that to be human is to be made in the image of God, because torture strips victims of a key aspect of their humanity, connection to others. Torture is opposing the mission of the Church, that being to unification of the body of Christ – the rejoining of all back to God through Christ.

4.2.2: Personalized Counter-Narratives.

Narratives of Black men's proclivity to rape were employed with such regularity, that most Americans (including Wells herself) were inclined to believe such accusations.[184] However,

[181] Ott and Téllez, "The Paradox of American Evangelical Views on Immigration," 260.
[182]Ibid.
[183] Wells-Barnett, *Light of Truth*, 17.
[184] Emilie Townes, "Ida B Wells-Barnett: An Afro-American Prophet," 1989, http://hdl.handle.net/1803/9794.

through questioning and thorough investigations, Wells discovered that only one-third of lynch victims were charged with rape, with merely a fraction of victims actually guilty.[185] For Wells, the pervasiveness of an empirically false narrative was employed for two reasons: to label Black-Americans as "a race of rapists," while enabling the torture of Black-Americans through "the plausible screen of defending the honor of [white] women."[186] To challenge this dehumanizing narrative, Wells shared victims' names, details of the offenses preceding lynchings, and stories of their contributions to their communities, creating counter-narratives that reshaped public understanding, mobilized Black communities to prevent further lynchings, and pushed for federal antilynching legislation.[187]

The narratives crafted and perpetuated by politicians, media outlets, and authority figures can reduce entire segments of the population to a singular characteristic. This reduction, termed deindividuation in psychology, is a tactic often used to denote a group as superfluous. In a 2009 TED talk titled *The Danger of a Single Story*, novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie articulates, "to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become."[188] Stories, asserts Adichie, are ultimately about power: "How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power. *Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person.*"[189] As observed through the formation of the black beast narrative or the evil Muslim terrorist, single stories are dangerous because they fold the complexity of

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[185] Wells-Barnett, *Light of Truth*, 70.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Hill, *Beyond the Rope*, 39.
[188] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Danger of a Single Story | TED Talk* (YouTube), accessed December 2, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg.
[189] Ibid., Emphasis added.

groups and individuals into a singular narrative defined by the worst representation of the group. This narrative can then be crafted to mar the character of all members of the group, regardless of its unreliability to describe the true character of the individual.

Churches can serve as locations for a plurality of immigrant narratives, especially in community which either have no exposure to immigrants, or in communities experiencing rapid exposure to immigration. Political Scientist, Robert Putnam argues that demographic shifts can enhance in-group/ out-group distinctions and increase ethnocentrism.[190] Subsequently, ethnocentrism in the US is a key driver for heightened resentment towards immigrants, as some Americans grow distrustful of outside groups and develop perceptions of preferential treatment for immigrants.[191] A potential solution, however, are production of inclusive religious communities, because "for most Americans their religious identity is actually more important to them than their ethnic identity."[192] Putnam's research observed that the formation of religious based identities which cut across conventional ethnic, racial, and national lines was effective in undoing past segregation.[193] This occurs, because if groups are able to identify a point of commonality, it presents an opportunity for other forms of social solidarity which construct "new, more encompassing identities," which expand perceptions of "we." [194]

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[190] Robert D. Putnam, "*E Pluribus Unum* : Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30, no. 2 (2007): 137–74, 144. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2007.00176.x.
[191] Abigail Fisher Williamson, "Mechanisms of Declining Intra-Ethnic Trust in Newly Diverse Immigrant Destinations," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41, no. 11 (September 19, 2015): 1725–45, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1022516.
[192] Putnam, "*E Pluribus Unum*," 160.
[193] Ibid., 161.
[194] Ibid., 139.

The expansion of "we" is an essential call of American churches. According to Ott and Tellez's study, many Christians discussions about immigration are largely impersonal.[195] Thus, churches present a unique opportunity for the presentation of personal stories. Such narratives can occur from the pulpit through inviting recent immigrants to preach, share their stories of migration, or speak about their own Christian beliefs, among other ways to give representation to the diverse array of migrants. Sermons can include stories written from the immigrant perspectives, poetry and songs about the migrant experiences. There is space to revision what sermons can be and how they can address issues of dehumanization and torture of immigrants.

Narratives can be reshaped through church-led initiatives that foster interaction and integration. Programs like language cafes create spaces for cross-group engagement while building skills and promoting cultural integration. Churches can challenge dehumanizing narratives and the use of torture in the U.S. immigration system by reimagining scripture. In 2015, the United Church of Christ included a replica 6-foot by 9-foot solitary confinement cell at its General Synod, stating, "the exhibit aims to raise awareness around issues of mass incarceration and torture, and to mobilize faith communities to advocate for an end to solitary confinement practices."[196] Similarly, in 2019, Claremont United Methodist Church displayed a nativity where Jesus lay in a cage, separated from Mary and Joseph, who were confined in their own cages. One of its co-creators explained, "We put them in different cages, as a symbol representing our community, and all immigrants who are being held in detention centers and

[195] Ott and Tellez, "Views on Immigration," 257.
[196] Emily Schappacher, "General Synod to Address Mass Incarceration, Torture with Solitary Confinement Cell," *United Church of Christ* (blog), June 18, 2015, https://www.ucc.org/news_mass_incarceration_torture_solitary_confinement_cell_06182015/.

need our help." [197] Such imagery is jarring but aligns with James Cone's assertion: "Who Jesus is for us today is not decided by focusing our attention exclusively on either the social context alone or the Bible alone but by seeing them in dialectical relation." [198] Enabling congregations to see today's social context in dialectical relation to scripture is the ultimate task of religious leaders.

To preach the gospel of Christ within this political moment in the US requires courage to speak against the hidden and visible atrocities happening to bodies and souls in immigration detention centers. This means that American Christianity must undo the theologies of enslavement which affirmed a baptism which freed the soul, but not the body. The incarnation itself is a testament that embodiment is significant, and that bodies matter to God. Thus, as people who worship a tortured God, a people who are identified by a depiction of a Roman torture device, Christians cannot ignore those who are tortured among us. Baptism frees the soul and body. As such, American churches must reclaim souls and bodies from the state, challenging any narratives which threaten to demarcate anybody as superfluous and disposable. By doing such, churches can disrupt the unreliable stories employed to justify dehumanization, deindividuation, and torture of immigrants; advocating for Eucharistic reimaginings of potential solutions to resolve the nation's immigration challenges – solutions which center safety and discipline around compassion, recognition of all human dignity, our shared vulnerability, and our unified participation in the diverse body of Christ which transcends ethnic, racial, and national difference.

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[197] France-Presse Agence, "Jesus, Mary and Joseph as Detained Refugees in California Nativity," ABS-CBN, December 12, 2019, https://www.abs-cbn.com/.
[198] James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Rev. ed (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997), 103.

Conclusion

This essay asserts that as long as dehumanizing narratives remain unchallenged, the America represented by the horrors of Abu Ghraib, the lynching tree, and the solitary confinement cell will persist as a reality for countless individuals. While many avenues for anti-torture advocacy exist, American churches possess a distinct capacity to collectively serve as the conscience of the state by forming a counter-society rooted in the unity of the Eucharist. Such unity inherently rejects the isolation upon which torture depends to coerce its victims toward the state's aims. It also calls churches to re-embrace a theological unification which forms a nexus between body and soul, spiritual and physical.

In a theological acquiescence of bodies to the state, American churches relegated themselves to concerns of the soul. This produced theologies of interiorized spirituality too preoccupied with "saving the souls of white Christians from hell-fire to save the lives of black ones from present burning flames kindled by white Christians."[199] However, Ida B. Wells-Barnett presents model of reclaiming bodies from the abuses of the state. Wells-Barnett challenges religious institutions and their leaders to reflect on their complicity in justifications of torture via an acquiescence to dehumanizing narratives. Subsequently, she presents personal counter-narratives which challenged the false assumptions of Black criminality. Her life and legacy remain a call to action for American churches—challenging religious leaders to confront all justifications of torture, refusing to accept it as inevitable.

Torture has been a recurring feature of American history and culture, emerging during periods of societal instability when the status quo is threatened by an "other." This essay

[199] Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 155.

examines three historical contexts— (1) American Slavery and Reconstruction, (2) the War on Terror, and (3) 21st-century immigration—to identify common conditions that give rise to torture. These conditions stem from fear of an external group perceived as a threat to the hegemony of the ruling class. This fear often invokes safety concerns, leading to narratives that dehumanize and deindividuate the targeted group. Torture is then justified as a means of interrogation, punishment, or maintaining safety, serving to elicit compliance or confessions. However, while torture may produce confessions, this essay argues that such confessions are unreliable, often forcing the victim—innocent or not—into a self-incriminating role that fulfills the state's narrative of guilt.

This essay raises several critical considerations. First, an analysis of polling data during the War on Terror challenges the effectiveness of deontological arguments against torture. Despite revelations of torture in U.S. military detention centers, public support for the practice statistically increased as the war progressed. This rise can be attributed to (1) President Bush's rhetoric framing an omnipresent evil enemy and (2) the perception of torture as a rare but necessary tool for state security. Second, early American history reveals a theological concession that permitted bodily destruction within chattel slavery, fostering churches that adopted morally weak positions on injustices like torture. Further research is needed to explore the political influence of Protestant, non-Evangelical preaching on issues such as torture, solitary confinement, immigration detention, and human rights.

The essay concludes with a call to action for American churches to address narratives justifying torture under the guise of safety and national identity. Protestant churches, rooted in compassion and justice, have a unique opportunity to challenge these dehumanizing narratives through theological reflection and practice. By embracing a Eucharistic imagination – a social

imagination rooted in a commitment to the interconnectedness of humanity, reconciliatory justice, and the recognition of all as presentations of the *Imago Dei* – churches can reclaim bodies from state torture, resisting the vicious isolation from which torture employs. particularly in immigration detention centers. This, however, requires a rejection of detached spiritualities which concerns itself to matters of the soul. Entering the world with a renewed call to effectuate a concrete human communion, participation in the Eucharist requires participation in both the spiritual and social dimensions of communion and a rejection of the isolation torture creates within communities, the body, and the soul. Thus, wherever states permit or enact torture through lynching, waterboarding, solitary confinement, or any number of abuse imaginable, the Eucharist – the sacramental reminder of unity – exhorts ministers and ecclesial bodies to resist such abuses and the rhetoric which proceeds it.

Ultimately, the mission of American churches' is not to serve the state or function as a protector of Protestant privileging within US society, but to embody a contrast society—a community that reveals a new imagining of justice and redemption. Through this, American Protestant churches can reclaim their role as a conscience for the state, advocating for practices and policies that emphasize the *Imago Dei* within all, thus holding that the use of torture is incompatible with the Christian practice.

Appendix 1: National Polling Data Analysis Methodology and Findings

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: The revelation of torture at the Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay detention facilities will result in a decreasing trend of American support for torture.

Hypothesis 2: The revelation of torture at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay detention facilities will have no effect on American opinions of torture.

Hypothesis 3: The revelation of torture at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay detention facilities will result in an increasing trend of American support for torture.

Methodology

A bivariate analysis was conducted on polling data collected across 69 polls from 2001 through 2016. The independent variable was time and the dependent variable was torture affirming belief by percent. Due to the various categorial responses of polls, this analysis consolidated polling responses into one of three categories: torture affirming, torture rejecting, or not sure / refused. This is an imperfect consolidation; however, it created an adequate baseline for relative comparisons of a variety of polls. Some polls used in the analysis only present a binary for respondents to select: "approve" or "disapprove." Other polls, such as the pew research poll, allows respondents to select from five options: "always justified," "Sometimes justified," "rarely justified," "never justified," and "unsure." Although "rarely justified" could be argued as a pro-torture position, I chose to categorize it along with "never justified" in a torture rejecting grouping because the response could be understood as rejecting torture except in ideal and unrealistic conditions, such as employed through the logic of the ticking-time bomb scenario. Two polls produced numbers outside of the minimum and maximum bounds

established by the 3rd standard of deviation and were removed from my analysis as statistical outliers. A linear regression was calculated for the data in form of the equation:

$$y = mx + y_{int}$$

The variable "m" represents the correlational coefficient between torture affirming support and time. An "*m*" > 0 displays a positive correlation, denoting an increase in torture supporting opinions over time. An "*m*" < 0 reveals a negative correlation, indicating torture supporting opinions decline over time. The y_{int} (Y-intercept) variable is unimportant and will not be used for the analysis. Finally, the R-squared values and p-values of the linear regression were calculated to determine the statistical significance of the correlations. A bivariate analysis of a specific question repeated from 2004 through 2015 was also conducted to observe if singular, repeated question would display in increase in public support of torture over time. The purpose of this analysis was to control for the potential effects of "framing."[200] Finally, I analyzed polling data from May 2004 through May 2015 to evaluate public responses to revelations of torture at Abu Ghraib over an extended period.

Results

An analysis of data collected in [need new number] polling survey found a statistically significant increase in torture support from May 2004 through May 2015, a stronger correlation is identified with increased statistical significance ($m_1 = 0.0051 > m_0 = 0.0033 > 0$, $R^2 = 0.5368$, $p < 0.0001$).[201] A critique of data on torture collected from polling surveys is that the respondents

[200] A frame occurs in polling questions when the question's text highlights certain aspects of in issue over other concerns or perspectives. The result of framing can effective share how poll respondents understand an issue analyze and respond to the survey. See Blauwkamp, J. M., Rowling, C. M., & Pettit, W. (2018). "Are Americans really okay with torture? The effects of message framing on public opinion." *Media, War & Conflict*, 11(4), 446-475. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635217753655

[201] Appendix 1, Figure 2.

are often primed by the nature of the question; resulting in "framing" which can produce biased responses.[202] To control for framing, I analyzed specific questions as a function of time, testing if a consistently asked question will display an upward trend in public support. Fig. 3 displays torture affirming responses to the Pew Research Center question, "Do you think the use of torture against suspected terrorists in order to gain important information can often be justified, sometimes be justified, rarely be justified, or never be justified?"[203] The "torture affirming" percentage is the sum of poll responses which answered "often" or "sometimes."

Over the time frame of 2001 through 2016, an analysis of 67 public opinion polls reveals a statistically significant long-term increase in torture support ($m_0 = 0.0033 > 0$, $R^2 = 0.3642$, $p < 0.0001$).[204] However,

The bivariate analysis in Fig. 3 displays a statistically significant correlation between time and increased torture affirming attitudes, even when poll respondents are asked the same question over a range of time ($m_2 = 0.0025 > 0$, $R^2 = 0.3824$, $p = .03208$).[205] With these results, Hypotheses 1 and 2 can be rejected and Hypothesis 3 is accepted. The meta-analysis of polling observes a statistically significant increase in torture support, even after leaked photos, journalists, whistleblowers, and testimonies from government offices and officials confirmed that the US has used several instances of torture in the War on Terror. This result challenges the notion that shedding light on an issue will correct the issue. The rest of this project will argue

[202] Blauwkamp, J. M., Rowling, C. M., & Pettit, W. (2018). "Are Americans really okay with torture? The effects of message framing on public opinion." *Media, War & Conflict*, 11(4), 446-475
[203] https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/ipoll/study/31095822/questions#cc4b62f6-eba4-4682-9489-850aa821aa91
[204] Appendix 1, Figure 1.
[205] Appendix 1, Figure 3.

that truth-telling must go beyond the recognition of facts, it must delve into the narratives which rationalize the dehumanization of another.

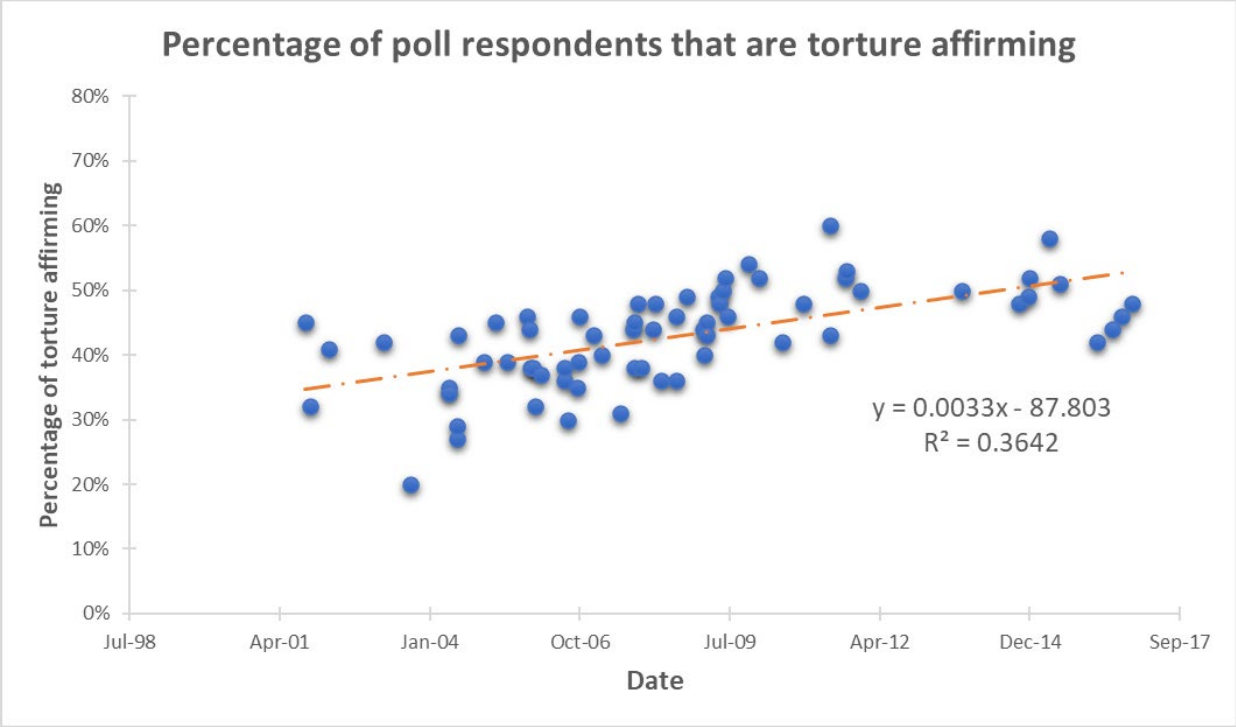

Figure 1: Bivariate analysis (percentage of torture affirming poll respondents as a function of time) of 67 polling results. ($m_0 = 0.0033 > 0$, $R^2 = 0.3642$, p-value < 0.0001).

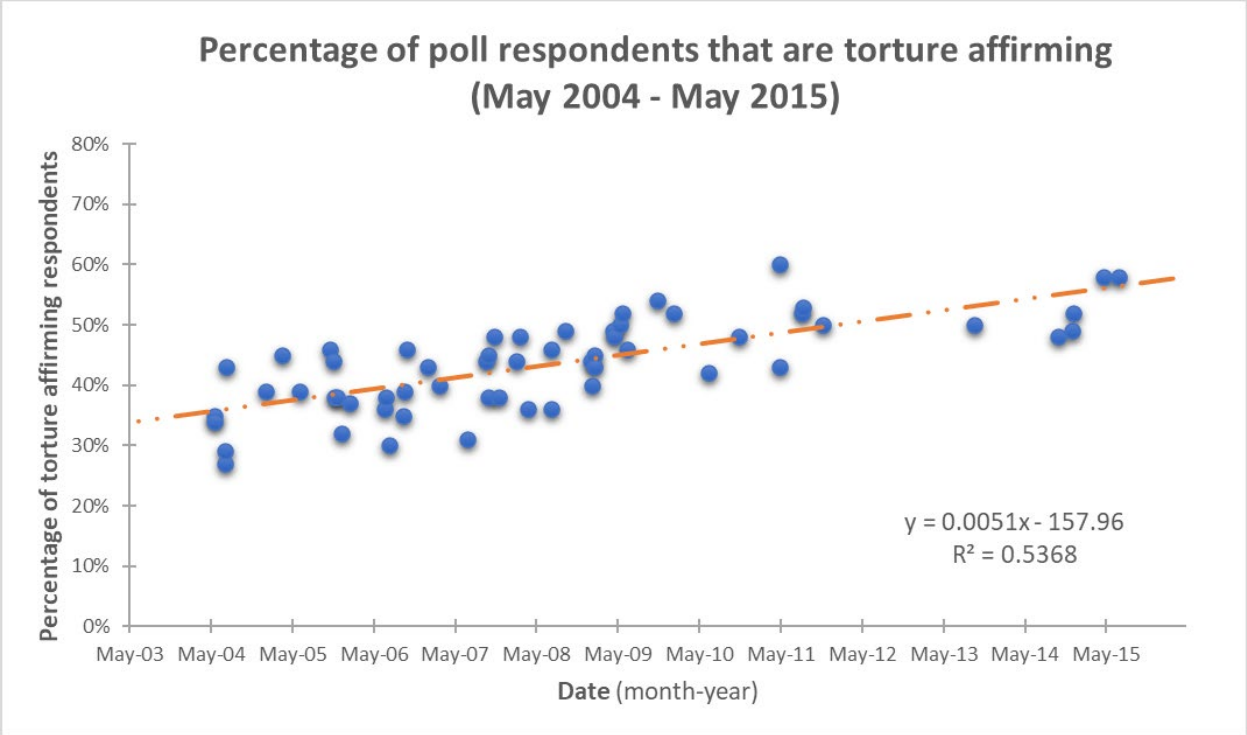

Figure 2: Bivariate analysis of polling data from May 2004 through May 2015. $N = 58$ ($m_1 = 0.0051 > 0$, $R^2 = 0.5368$, p-value < 0.0001).

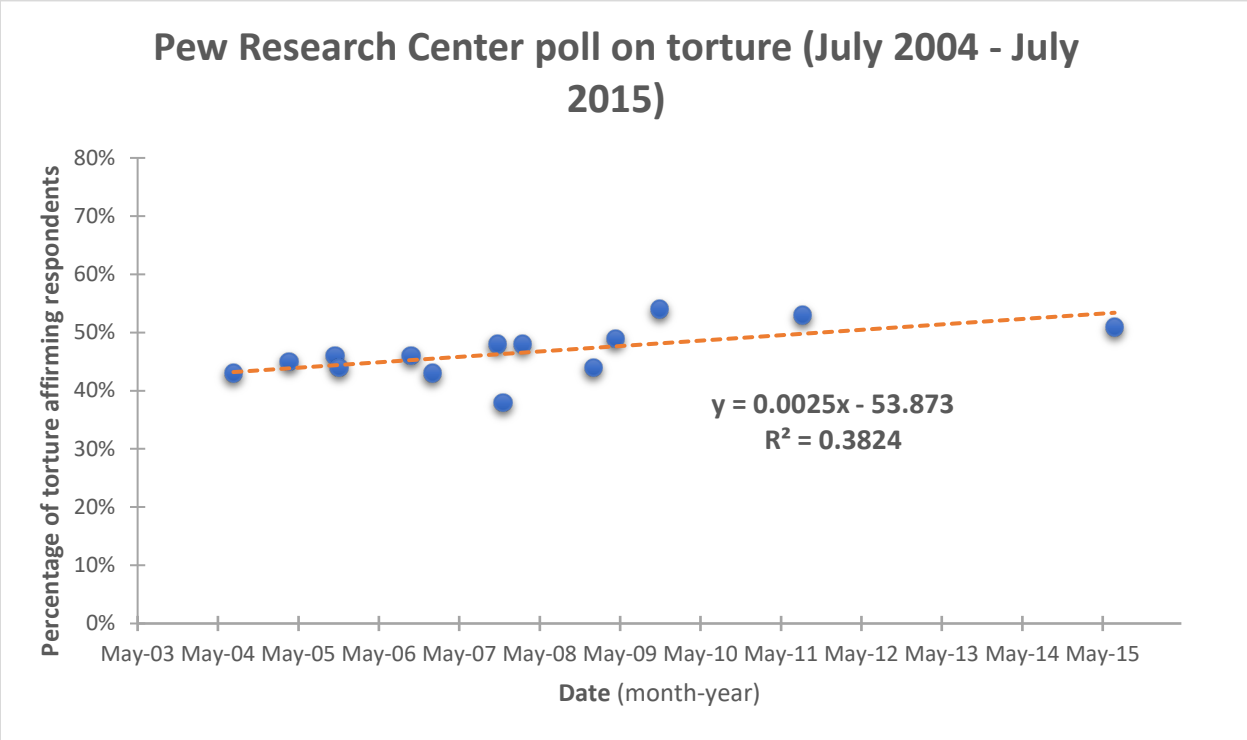

Figure 3: Percentage of poll respondents that selected "often" or "sometimes" in response to Pew Research Center's question: "Do you think the use of torture against suspected terrorists in order

to gain important information can often be justified, sometimes be justified, rarely be justified, or never be justified? $N = 14$. ($m_2 = 0.0025 > 0$, $R^2 = 0.3824$, p-value = .03208).

Appendix 2

4/1/2009	Black protests	white protestants	All Blacks	All Whites
support torture	22	198	26	336
reject torture	47	133	61	307
both	13	18	14	38
Not sure	9	26	13	43
N	91	375	114	724
support torture %	**24%**	**53%**	**23%**	**46%**

Table 1: NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll: April, 2009--Barack Obama. "Question 71. Do you think the use of torture against suspected terrorists in order to gain important information can often be justified, sometimes be justified, rarely be justified, or never be justified?" https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/ipoll/study/31094880/questions#4e244655-de84-444f-9118-18b8aef7e549

4/21/2009	Black Protestants	White protestants	All Blacks	All Whites
Support torture	26	157	31	281
reject	34	131	46	262
don't know / reject		8		17
N	60	296	77	560
support torture %	**43%**	**53%**	**40%**	**50%**

Table 2: Pew Research Center: April 2009 Values Survey [Roper #31095980]. "Question 147. Do you think the use of torture against suspected terrorists in order to gain important information can often be justified, sometimes be justified, rarely be justified, or never be justified?" https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/ipoll/study/31095980/questions#46c11fb7-9220-42fa-b893-7d7ab15719ba

2/24/2008	Black protestants	white protestants	All Blacks	All Whites
support torture	22	139	33	283
reject torture	30	135	47	300
Not sure	1	16	4	22
	53	290	84	605
support torture %	**42%**	**48%**	**39%**	**47%**

Table 3: Pew Research Center Poll # 2008-02POL: February 2008 Political Survey--2008 Presidential Election [Roper #31095924]. "71. Do you think the use of torture against suspected terrorists in order to gain important information can often be justified, sometimes be justified, rarely be justified, or never be justified?" https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/ipoll/study/31095924/questions#1f9e1087-a0d0-4b91-ab47-b15dbcd7100e

	Black Protestants	White protestants	All Blacks	All Whites
Support torture	10	102	18	271
reject	29	196	53	505
don't know / reject	1	21		9
	40	319	71	785
support torture %	**25%**	**32%**	**25%**	**35%**

Table 4: Survey by ABC News/Washington Post. Conducted by TNS Intersearch. Question 38. "38. Would you regard the use of torture against people suspected of involvement in terrorism as an acceptable or unacceptable part of the U.S. (United States) campaign against terrorism?"

11/8/2009	Black Protestants	White protestants	All Blacks	All Whites
Support torture	68	148	132	322
reject	30	129	81	304
don't know / reject	7	16	14	36
total	105	293	227	662
support torture %	**65%**	**51%**	**58%**	**49%**

Table 5: Pew Research Center/Council on Foreign Relations: November 2009 America's Place in the World [Roper #31095972]. Question 102. "Do you think the use of torture against suspected terrorists in order to gain important information can often be justified, sometimes be justified, rarely be justified, or never be justified?"
https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/ipoll/study/31095972/questions#3187946f-5dab-4ba1-8b92-09f571aa43f8

11/8/2009	Black Protestants	White protestants	All Blacks	All Whites
Support torture	23	500	36	880
reject	58	313	107	751
don't know / reject	1	16	5	37
total	82	829	148	1668
support torture %	**28%**	**60%**	**24%**	**53%**

Table 6: CNN/ORC Poll # 2009-007: Barack Obama and his Administration [Roper #31095451]
Question 53. "As you may know, the Bush administration authorized the use of harsh interrogation procedures, including the procedure known as waterboarding, when the US (United States) captured suspected terrorists....Based on what you have read or heard, do you approve or disapprove of the Bush administration's decision to use those procedures while questioning suspected terrorists?" https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/ipoll/study/31095451/questions#812eb611-89ef-4441-833d-4ab60a4ce14e

7/18/2004	Black Protestants	White protestants	All Blacks	All Whites
Support torture	37	176	46	307
reject	53	249	70	437
don't know / reject	5	14	6	24
total	95	439	122	768
support torture %	**39%**	**40%**	**38%**	**40%**

Table 7: Pew Research Center Poll: Foreign Policy and Party Images [Roper #31095822]
Question "Do you think the use of torture against suspected terrorists in order to gain important information can often be justified, sometimes be justified, rarely be justified, or never be justified?"

6/28/2004	Black Protestants	White protestants	All Blacks	All Whites
Support torture	11	95	21	209
reject	55	257	99	556
don't know / reject	1	11	3	29
total	67	363	123	794
support torture %	**16%**	**26%**	**17%**	**26%**

Table 8: ABC News Poll: 9/11 Anniversary [Roper #31086583]. Question 66. "Thinking about the abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners by American military personnel at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, which of the following comes closer to your point of view? In this case, the abuse and torture of the prisoners were justified and understandable because we are at war against terrorists. Abuse and torture of prisoners is always wrong, even in the case of war against terrorists"

9/7/2003	Black Protestants	White protestants	All Blacks	All Whites
Support torture	4	47	8	78
reject	18	185	28	326
don't know / reject	1	8	3	12
total	23	240	39	416
support torture %	**17%**	**20%**	**21%**	**19%**

Table 9: ABC News Poll: 9/11 Anniversary [Roper #31086583]. Question "Do you support or oppose the federal government: Physically torturing people suspected of terrorism in an attempt to get information from them."
https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/ipoll/study/31086583/questions#fcca138e-d486-4a78-8721-85acff2c5a6f

11/20/2011	Black (born-again Christian)	White (born-again Christian	All Blacks	All Whites
Support torture	6	84	9	189
reject	18	48	29	197
don't know / reject		5		10
total	24	137	38	396
support torture %	**25%**	**61%**	**24%**	**48%**

Table 10: CNN/ORC Poll: Military/Immigration/2012 Presidential Election [Roper #31095499]. Question 41. "In a procedure known as 'waterboarding,' interrogators produce the sensation of drowning by either dunking a restrained prisoner in water or pouring water over the prisoner's face. Do you think the US (United States) government should or should not be allowed to use this procedure to attempt to get information from suspected terrorists?" https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/ipoll/study/31095499/questions#0e5f2575-016e-4d58-a103-633b5a6a5c43

4/3/2014	All Blacks	All Whites	All Hispanic	All Surveyed Participants	
Always Justified	10	17	13	16	Support Torture
Sometimes Justified	23	35	32	33	
Rarely Justified	26	20	11	19	Reject Torture
Never Justified	24	21	30	22	
Not Sure	14	8	15	10	
Total					
support torture %	**33%**	**52%**	**45%**	**49%**	

Table 11: YouGov Poll on Torture. Question 1. "Do you think the use of torture against suspected terrorists who may know details about future terrorist attacks against the US is ever justified?" https://ygo-assets-websites-editorial-emea.yougov.net/documents/tabs_HP_torture_20140403_AXqOrPD.pdf

11/8/2016	All Blacks	All Whites	All Hispanics	All Surveyed Participants	
Sometimes acceptable	37	52	40	48	Support Torture
Never acceptable	60	45	56	49	Reject Torture
support torture %	**37%**	**52%**	**40%**	**48%**	

Table 12: Pew Research Center: American Trends Survey. Question. "Thinking about U.S. anti-terrorism efforts, which comes closer to your view? There are times when torture is (1) sometimes acceptable, (2) never acceptable. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2017/01/26/americans-divided-in-views-of-use-of-torture-in-u-s-anti-terror-efforts/

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