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# OPINION

## Our Bewildering Descent into Torture

### Can we agree never again?

BY ROBERT C. KOEHLER

"The existence of the approximately 14,000 photographs will probably cause yet another delay in the military commissions at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as attorneys for the defendants demand that all the images are turned over and the government wades through the material to decide what it thinks is relevant to the proceedings."

This was the Washington Post a few days ago, informing us wearily that the torture thing isn't dead yet. The bureaucracy convulses, the wheels of justice grind. So much moral relativism to evaluate.

"They did what they were asked to do in the service of our nation," CIA director John Brennan said at a news conference in December, defending CIA interrogators after a portion of the 6,700-page Senate Intelligence Committee report was made public.

Serving the nation means no more than doing what you're told. Really?

God bless America. Flags wave, fireworks burst on the horizon. Aren't we terrific? But this idea we celebrate — this nation, this principled union of humanity — is now just a military bureaucracy, full



of dark secrets. The darkest, most highly classified secret of all is that we're always at war and we always will be. And war is an end in itself. It has no purpose beyond its own perpetuation.

This is the context of torture.

At least this is what occurred to me as I reflected on the most recent non-news, that the existence of many thousands of photographs of U.S. black site operations are out there somewhere, classified but known and pulsing. What more can we learn that we don't already know?

"On Nov. 20, 2002, (Gul) Rahman was found dead in his unheated cell. He was naked from the waist down and had been chained to a concrete floor. An autopsy concluded that he probably froze to death."

So the Los Angeles Times informed us in December, in an article about two psychologists, Bruce Jessen and James Mitchell, who were serving their country in the early days of the War on Terror by developing the CIA's torture methodology.

"When he was left alone," the article reported, describing another detainee's experience, "(Abu) Zubaydah was placed in a stress position, left on a waterboard with a cloth over his face, or locked in one of two confinement boxes."

"In all, he spent 266 hours — 11 days and two hours — locked in the pitch-dark coffin, and 29 hours in a much smaller box. In response, he 'cried,' 'begged,' 'whim-

pered' and grew so distressed that 'he was unable to effectively communicate,'" the interrogation team reported.

"The escalating torment, especially the waterboarding, affected some on the CIA team. 'It is visually and psychologically very uncomfortable,' one wrote. Several days later, another added, 'Several on the team profoundly affected ... some to the point of tears and choking up.'"

And a few weeks ago, The (U.K.) Telegraph, quoting from the Senate Intelligence Committee Report, described the experience of Majid Khan, who "was raped while in CIA custody ('rectal feeding'). He was sexually assaulted in other ways as well, including by having his 'private parts' touched while he was hung naked from the ceiling ...

"Majid had an uncovered bucket for a toilet, no toilet paper, a sleeping mat and no light ... For much of 2003 he lived in total darkness."

And the awkward part of all this, for defenders of the military bureaucracy, is that these torture procedures produced no information of any value. We sold our soul to the devil and got nothing at all in return. Bad deal.

Whatever details about the torture program remain classified and buried, these stories, along with plenty of shocking photographs, are fully public. There's enough data here to open a deep conversation about

what it means to be a nation and what the limits of power ought to be. What I see instead is a sort of official resignation — on the part of media and government — to the inevitability of out-of-control power in the pursuit of self-defense.

Stanford researcher Philip Zimbardo—whose studies are literally textbook—called this phenomenon the Lucifer Effect: the utterly corrupting nature of total power over others. Reports of CIA torture are rife with observations that the interrogators were out of control. The information they sought from the utterly powerless detainees in their keep was a treasure to be extracted, like oil or diamonds from the bowels of the earth, and no technique was too inhumane, too morally odious, to achieve that end. Call it human fracking. It's for the good of America.

The awareness that must emerge from a decade-and-counting of torture revelations is that absolute power over others does not keep us safe and should not be pursued. And torture is only a minute fraction of the wrong we promulgate through unchecked militarism, the aim of which is domination of the planet.

Step one in the unhealthy pursuit of power is the dehumanization of "the enemy." The consequences of what we do after that will always haunt us.

Robert Koehler, syndicated by *PeaceVoice*, is a Chicago journalist and editor.

## The Amazing Grace of the Mother Emanuel Nine

### Taking action against racism and guns

BY MARC H. MORIAL

They represented the diversity of life in Charleston, South Carolina. Some were teachers; some were lawmakers; others were the glue that bonded their families. While they hailed from all walks and stages of life, the nine innocents slaughtered in the racist-fueled shooting at the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church shared a common faith.

Their devotion to cultivating that faith gathered them together in the unquestioned safety of that church basement. In the end, it would be in the unquestionable embrace of the grace of their faith that their weeping families, mournful church family and our grieving nation bid them eternal rest.

Rev. Clementa Pinckney was a long-serving Democratic state senator and the senior pastor of Emanuel A.M.E. Church. He fought as hard for constituents as he did love and serve his congregation.

In his eulogy for Rev. Pinckney, President Obama remembered him as a "good man." He shared that, "he was in the pulpit by 13, pastor by 18, public servant by 23. He did not exhibit any of the cockiness of youth, nor youth's insecurities; instead, he

set an example worthy of his position, wise beyond his years, in his speech, in his conduct, in his love, faith, and purity."

The married, 41-year-old father of two daughters leaves behind an impressive record of activism, including his recent push to equip South Carolina's police officers with body cameras after the videotaped fatal shooting of a black man at the hands of a white police officer.

Sharonda Coleman-Singleton was as widely known for her smile as she was for her dedication to her family, her church and her community. The 45-year-old mother of three was a reverend at Emanuel A.M.E. Church; the celebrated girls team track coach at Goose Creek High School; and a highly respected high school speech therapist. After her death, her oldest son, Chris Singleton, a baseball player at Charleston Southern University, recalled on social media that he would often tease his mother about going to church so much. He remembered that she would always laugh him off and say, "Boy you can never have too much of the Lord."

It has been reported that 26-year-old Tywanza Sanders died trying to protect his 87-year-old aunt, Susie Jackson. Sanders jumped between the shooter and his aunt, begging him to take his life instead of hers. The shooter is alleged to have said it

didn't matter because, "I'm going to shoot all of you," before he opened fire. Sanders was a recent graduate of Allen University in Columbia, S.C. He received a degree in business administration in 2014. Recently, he worked at Against Da Grain Barber-shop along with his brother.

Despite his bravery and heroism, Sanders could not save his aunt's life. Susie Jackson, a grandmother and longtime church member, became another of the shooter's victims, along with her cousin, 70-year-old Ethel Lance. Like the others, Lance was a devoted member of Emanuel A.M.E. Church. She worked at the church for more than 30 years.

Depayne Middletown Doctor was the mother of four daughters. She was a minister and sang in the church's choir. The 49-year-old devoted her entire career to public service. She had just started a job as an enrollment counselor at Southern Wesleyan University's campus in Charleston—her alma mater. Before that, she was a Charleston County community development director, helping the county's poorest residents receive grants.

Equally dedicated to serving her community, 54-year-old Cynthia Hurd, who was lovingly described by her brother as "a woman of faith," worked for 31 years at the Charleston County Public Library as a librarian. Recently, Hurd was the regional library manager at St. Andrews

Regional Library. County officials have confirmed that the library will be renamed in her honor.

On the path to becoming an ordained minister, 59-year-old Myra Thompson was the wife of a local reverend, Rev. Anthony Thompson, who is a vicar at Holy Trinity REC Church in Charleston. Daniel Simmons initially survived the attack, but died in a hospital operating room. The 45-year-old was a fourth-generation preacher who fought in Vietnam, and during his time with us on earth also worked as a teacher and a counselor. Simmons became the last of the Mother Emanuel Nine to be laid to rest.

Today, we should all be asking ourselves what happens now; what comes next? Do we, as a nation, take up the charge to tackle the ills of racism and gun violence, or will we cast these issues aside once again and wait until the next tragedy jolts us from our complacency?

Will you join in the struggle and sign a petition to rid our public spaces of the Confederate flag—the flag of hate and violence to which the shooter pledged his allegiance? Will you make the lives of those we lost matter by not allowing hate to be the final word in our nation's struggle to form a more perfect union?

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

