

YOU CAN'T BE A SWEET CUCUMBER IN A VINEGAR BARREL

By Philip Zimbardo

For years I've been interested in a fundamental question concerning what I call the psychology of evil: Why is it that good people do evil deeds? I've been interested in that question since I was a little kid. Growing up in the ghetto in the South Bronx, I had lots of friends who I thought were good kids, but for one reason or another they ended up in serious trouble. They went to jail, they took drugs, or they did terrible things to other people. My whole upbringing was focused on trying to understand what could have made them go wrong.

When you grow up in a privileged environment you want to take credit for the success you see all around, so you become a dispositionalist. You look for character, genes, or family legacy to explain things, because you want to say your father did good things, you did good things, and your kid will do good things. Curiously, if you grow up poor you tend to emphasize external situational factors when trying to understand unusual behavior. When you look around and you see that your father's not working, and you have friends who are selling drugs or their sisters in prostitution, you don't want to say it's because there's something inside them that makes them do it, because then there's a sense in which it's in your line. Psychologists and social scientists that focus on situations more often than not come from relatively poor, immigrant backgrounds. That's where I came from.

Over the years I've asked that question in more and more refined ways. I began to investigate what specific kinds of situational variables or processes could make someone step across that line between good and evil. We all like to think that the line is impermeable—that people who do terrible things like commit murder, treason, or kidnapping are on the other side of the line—and we could never get over there. We want to believe that we're with the good people. My

work began by saying, no, that line is permeable. The reason some people are on the good side of the line is that they've never really been tested. They've never really been put in unusual circumstances where they were tempted or seduced across that line. My research over the last 30 years has created situations in the laboratory or in field settings in which we take good, normal, average, healthy people—more often than not healthy college students—and expose them to these kinds of settings.

For example, think of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, in which the key variable in transforming Jack Merridew, a good choirboy, into a kid who could not only kill pigs but also then kill Piggy the intellectual is that he changes appearance. He gets naked, uses berries to mask himself, and makes other kids do the same. Then they do something that has been prohibited; namely, they kill pigs they need for food. Once killing is disinhibited, then they are able to kill freely. Is that idea a novelist's conceit, or is it a psychologically valid concept?

To investigate this I created an experiment. We took women students at New York University and made them anonymous. We put them in hoods, put them in the dark, took away their names, gave them numbers, and put them in small groups. And sure enough, within half an hour those sweet women were giving painful electric shocks to other women within an experimental setting. We also repeated that experiment on deindividuation with the Belgian military, and in a variety of formats, with the same outcomes. Any situation that makes you anonymous and gives permission for aggression will bring out the beast in most people. That was the start of my interest in showing how easy it is to get good people to do things they say they would never do.

I also did research on vandalism. When I was a teacher at NYU I noticed that there were hundreds and hundreds of vandalized cars on the streets throughout the city. I lived in Brooklyn and commuted to NYU in the Bronx, and I'd see a car in the street. I'd call the police and say, "You know, there's a car demolished on 167th and Sedgwick Avenue. Was it an accident?"

When he told me it was vandals, I said, "Who were the vandals? I'd like to interview them." He told me that they were little, black, or Puerto Rican kids who come out of the sewers, smash everything, paint graffiti on the walls, break windows and disappear.

So I created what ethologists would call "releaser cues". I bought used cars, took off license plates, and put the hood up, and we photographed what happened. It turns out that it wasn't little, black, Puerto Rican kids, but white, middle-class Americans who happened to be driving by. We had a car near NYU in the Bronx. Within ten minutes the driver of the first car that passed by jacked it up and took a tire. Ten minutes later a little family would come. The father took the radiator, the mother emptied the trunk, and the kid took care of the glove compartment. In 48 hours we counted 23 destructive contacts with that car. In only one of those were kids involved. We did a comparison in which we set out a car a block from Palo Alto, where Stanford University is. The car was out for a week, and no one touched it until the last day when it rained and somebody put the hood down. God forbid that the motor should get wet.

This gives you a sense of what a community is. A sense of community means people are as concerned about any property or people on their turf because there's a sense of reciprocal concern. The assumption is that I am concerned because you will be concerned about me and my property. In an anonymous environment nobody knows who I am and nobody cares, and I don't care to know about anyone else. The environment can convey anonymity externally, or it can be put on like a Ku Klux Klan outfit.

And so I and other colleagues began to do research on dehumanization. What are the ways in which, instead of changing yourself and becoming the aggressor, it becomes easier to be hostile against other people by changing your psychological conception of them? You think of them as worthless animals. That's the killing power of stereotypes.

I put that all together with other research I did 30 years ago during the Stanford prison

experiment. The question there was, what happens when you put good people in an evil place? We put good, ordinary college students in a very realistic, prison-like setting in the basement of the psychology department at Stanford. We dehumanized the prisoners, gave them numbers, and took away their identity. We also deindividuated the guards, calling them Mr. Correctional Officer, putting them in khaki uniforms, and giving them silver reflecting sunglasses like in the movie *Cool Hand Luke*. Essentially, we translated the anonymity of *Lord of the Flies* into a setting where we could observe exactly what happened from moment to moment.

What's interesting about that experiment is that it is really a study of the competition between institutional power versus the individual will to resist. The companion piece is the study by Stanley Milgram, who was my classmate at James Monroe High School in the Bronx. (Again, it is interesting that we are two situationists who came from the same neighborhood.) His study investigated the power of an individual authority: Some guy in a white lab coat tells you to continue to shock another person even though he's screaming and yelling. That's one way that evil is created as blind obedience to authority. But more often than not, somebody doesn't have to tell you to do something. You're just in a setting where you look around and everyone else is doing it. Say you're a guard and you don't want to harm the prisoners—because at some level you know they're just college students—but the two other guards on your shift are doing terrible things. They provide social models for you to follow if you are going to be a team player.

In this experiment we selected normal, healthy, good kids that we found through ads in the paper. They were not Stanford students, but kids from all over the country who were in the Bay Area finishing summer school. A hundred kids applied, we interviewed them, and gave them personality tests. We picked the two dozen who were the most normal, most healthy kids. This was 1971, so these were peaceniks, civil rights activists, and anti-war activists. They were hippy kids with long hair. And within a few days, if

they were assigned to the guard role, they became abusive, red-necked prison guards.

Every day the level of hostility, abuse, and degradation of the prisoners became worse and worse and worse. Within 36 hours the first prisoner had an emotional breakdown, crying, screaming, and thinking irrationally. We had to release him, and each day after that we had to release another prisoner because of extreme stress reactions. The study was supposed to run for two weeks, but I ended it after six days because it was literally out of control. Kids we chose because they were normal and healthy were breaking down. Kids who were pacifists were acting sadistically, taking pleasure in inflicting cruel, evil punishment on prisoners.

That study has legs even today, especially because of the recent exposé of abuses in the Iraqi prison, Abu Ghraib. But the study was popular even before then because in a way it's a forerunner of reality TV. You take a bunch of boys, put them in a situation, and videotape them hour after hour. We have visual records of the dramatic transformation of these ordinary kids into brutal, sadistic monsters or pathological zombies - in a DVD format entitled "Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Experiment." The prisoners who remained and did not break down just let the guards do whatever they wanted to them. It's really like a Greek drama more than an experiment, because it's what happens when you put good people in an evil place. Does the place win, or do the people? Answer: Place one, People zero.

We made the study very dramatic. The arrests were made by the city police in their squad cars with sirens wailing. Actual policemen brought the prisoners down to the police station in handcuffs and did the booking. We had visiting days with parents. We had Catholic priests and chaplains. We had public defenders. Although it was an experiment in a basement at Stanford University we had all of the trappings of a prison. We created a psychologically functional equivalent of the sense of imprisonment. That's why it had this big impact in such a short time.

There are stunning parallels between the Stanford prison experiment and what happened at Abu Ghraib, where some of the visual scenes that we have seen include guards stripping prisoners naked, putting bags over heads, putting them in chains, and having them engage in sexually degrading acts. And in both prisons the worst abuses came on the night shift. Our guards committed very little physical abuse. There was a prisoner riot on the second day, and the guards used physical abuse, and I, as both the superintendent of the prison as well as the principal investigator—My big mistake. You can't play both of those roles; I continually told them that they could not use physical abuse. But then they resorted entirely to psychological controls and psychological domination. There is an interesting comparison between police detectives who after being forced to give up brutal third degree abuses in getting confessions, switched to psychological tactics - and they were equally effective in obtaining confessions after interrogation, as my research in the sixties documented.

Our guards would say things to the prisoners like, "You're Frankenstein. You're Mrs. Frankenstein. Walk like Frankenstein. Hug her. Tell her you love her." And then they would push them together.

We learned that in real prisons one of the things guards try to do is weaken the masculinity in dominance, because prisons are a threat to the guards' security. And so at Stanford the prisoners wore smocks with no underpants, like dresses. We did that purposely to feminize them. The guards would tell the prisoners that they should line up to play leapfrog. It's just a simple game, except when you leap over each prisoner your genitals smack each guy's head. Then they'd say, "You, bend over. You're female camels." And when they did their behinds were showing. And then they would tell others, "You're male camels. Line up behind them. Okay, hump them." This is a funny play on words, of course, but they had the prisoners simulating sodomy.

These are exact parallels between what happened in this basement at Stanford 30 years

ago and at Abu Ghraib, where you see images of prisoners stripped naked, wearing hoods or masks as guards get them to simulate sodomy. The question is whether what we learned about the psychological mechanisms that transformed our good volunteers into these creatively evil guards can be used to understand the transformation of good American Army reservists into the people we see in these trophy photos in Abu Ghraib. And my answer is, yes, there are very direct parallels.

One of the distressing things I have to think about is whether or not the results of my research, which I've written about extensively, have been incorporated by the Pentagon in its various programs. I hate to think that my research actually contributed to creating this evil, rather than simply helping to explain it. But the situation we have now is that the Army, the Pentagon, and the administration are trying to disown any influence on the specific guards seen in those "trophy pictures." One of the many investigations (the Schlessinger report) into these abuses explicitly states that the Stanford Prison Experiment should have served as a forewarning to those running Abu Ghraib Prison of the potential dangers of excesses by guards in such settings.

It is hard to comprehend what the soldiers were thinking when they took photos of themselves engaged in those abuses—trophy photos." I call them "trophy photos" because the analog is to big game hunters displaying their victory over the beasts of the earth and sea. But a more potent parallel are the trophy photos from lynchings of black men and women over decades. There's a remarkable book called No Sanctuary which shows that for a hundred years not only did Americans lynch blacks in the South and the Midwest, but they often took photos of their illegal lynchings—that often included photos of all those people who were involved. These were not only lynching photos, but brutal whippings, and they also burned blacks alive. In some of the pictures young children are photographed watching the spectacle. To make the horror worse, these images were put on postcards, and people would send them to one another, or would frame them and hang them in their living

rooms. Talk about dehumanization! The concept of lynching or burning somebody alive is horrible enough, but then to take a picture, put yourself in it, and then send it to your mother to say, "I'm the third one on the left," is just evil.

These terrible deeds form an interesting analog in America, because there are two things we are curious to understand about Abu Ghraib. First, how did the soldiers get so far out of hand? And secondly, why would the soldiers take pictures of themselves in positions that make them legally culpable? The ones that are on trial now are the ones in those pictures, although obviously there are many more people involved in various ways. We can understand why they did so not only by applying the basic social-psychological processes from the Stanford prison study, but also by analyzing what was unique in Abu Ghraib.

There are several important concepts. First, in both cases there's the deindividuation, the sense of anonymity. The CIA agents, the civilian interrogators, never wore uniforms or showed identification. In all of the pictures the soldiers were typically not wearing uniforms. They often had their tops off. That's a violation of military protocol, because even in a prison you're supposed to be wearing your uniform. In the 1970s the police would do that during student riots against the Vietnam War. They would take off their jackets with their names and ID numbers. I was at Columbia University in a police riot, and I was at Stanford in a police riot, and the first thing the cops did was to take off anything that identified themselves, or put on gas masks when there was no gassing, only to create a state of anonymity.

At Abu Ghraib you had the social modeling in which somebody takes the lead in doing something. You had the dehumanization, the use of labels of the other as inferior, as worthless. There was a diffusion of responsibility such that nobody was personally accountable. The Stanford prison study identified a whole set of principles, all of which you can see are totally applicable in this setting.

The other thing, of course, is that you had low-level army reservists who had no "mission-specific" training in how to do this difficult, new job. There was little or no supervision of them on the night and there was literally no accountability. This went on for months in which the abuses escalated over time. This also happened in my study. Each day it got worse and worse.

And then there is the hidden factor of boredom. One of the main contributors to evil, violence, and hostility in all prisons that we underplay is the boredom factor. In fact, the worst things that happened in our prisons occurred during the night shifts. Guards came on at ten o'clock and had eight hours to kill when nothing was happening. They made things happen by turning the prisoners into their playthings, not out of evil motives, but because this was what was available to break through the boredom. Also at play in the prison in Abu Ghraib was extreme fear among the guards because of the constant mortar attacks that had killed soldiers and prisoners, and escape attempts.

Dehumanization also occurred because the prisoners often had no prison clothes available, or were forced to be naked as a humiliation tactic by the military police and higher ups. There were too many of them, in a few months the number soared from 400 to over a thousand. They didn't have regular showers, did not speak English, and they stank. Under these conditions it's easy for guards to come to think of the prisoners as animals, and dehumanization processes set in.

When you put that set of horrendous work conditions and external factors together, it creates an evil barrel. You could put virtually anybody in it and you're going to get this kind of evil behavior. The Pentagon and the military say that the Abu Ghraib scandal is the result of a few bad apples in an otherwise good barrel. That's the dispositional analysis. The social psychologist in me, and the consensus among many of my colleagues in experimental social psychology, says that's the wrong analysis. It's not the bad apples, it's the bad barrels that corrupt good people. Understanding the abuses

at this Iraqi prison starts with an analysis of both the situational and systematic forces operating on those soldiers working the night shift in that 'little shop of horrors.'

Coming from New York, I know that if you go by a delicatessen, and you put a sweet cucumber in the vinegar barrel, the cucumber might say, "No, I want to retain my sweetness." But it's hopeless. The barrel will turn the sweet cucumber into a pickle. You can't be a sweet cucumber in a vinegar barrel. My sense is that we have the evil barrel of war, into which we've put this evil barrel of this prison—it turns out actually all of the military prisons have had similar kinds of abuses—and what you get is the corruption of otherwise good people.

I was recently engaged as an expert witness for the defense of one of the Abu Ghraib night shift guards in his court martial trial. As such, I had access to all of the horror images that various soldiers took of their infamous deeds in action, along with most of the reports of the official investigations, spending a day with the defendant and his wife, arranging to have various psychological assessments made, and checking on his background and army reserve record.

In addition to realizing the relevance of my earlier research to understanding some of the forces acting on him and the other night shift soldiers, it became apparent that he was also totally abused by the situation that the military had thrust upon him. Imagine the cumulative stress of working 12 hour night shifts, 7 days a week, with not a day off for 40 days! Also regularly missing breakfast and lunch because he slept through them having finished his tour of duty at 4AM and sleeping in a small cell in another part of the prison that he rarely left. When he complained about children mixed with adult inmates or mentally ill or those with contagious TB among the prisoners, he was reprimanded, but rewarded for helping to get confessions by softening up the inmates. Not once was there any official supervision on his night shift that he could rely on. There were insufficient guards, 8 for 1000 inmates and none had been adequately trained for this tough job.

His psychological testing and my interview revealed a young man who had not a single symptom of pathology that he brought into that prison; the situation was the pathological ingredient that infected his reason and judgment. Indeed, in many ways, this soldier is an American icon—good husband, father, worker, patriotic, religious, with many friends and a long history of having lived a most normal, moral small town life.

Despite my detailed trial testimony about all situational and systemic forces influencing his distorted group mentality, the judge threw the book at him, giving him 8 years in prison and many other penalties. He refused to acknowledge what many of the official investigations clearly revealed, that the abuses at Abu Ghraib could have prevented or would not have occurred were it not for "a failure or lack of leadership." Some reports list the officers and agencies responsible by name, but they are likely never to be considered bad apples, but only the custodians of a barrel that had some defects. The judge, and juries, in recent military jury trials, minimized the powerful situational and systemic factors that engulfed these young men and women. Their actions were assumed to be products of free will, rational choice and personal accountability. I argue not so when deindividuation, group mind and the host of stress, exhaustion, sleep deprivation and other psychological states are at play. They become transformed, just as the good angel, Lucifer, was transformed into the devil. Situations matter much more than most people realize or can acknowledge.

I've been teaching bright college students for nearly 50 years, and it's hard to get them to appreciate the situationist's analysis of evil, prejudice, or any kind of pathological behavior because our whole society is so wedded to the dispositional perspective: Good people do good deeds, and bad people do bad deeds. It's part of our institutional thinking. It's what psychiatry is all about. It's what medicine is all about. It's what the legal system is all about. And it's what religious systems are all about. We put good inside of people, and we put bad inside of people. It's so ingrained in the way we think, but

the situationist's perspective says that although that may sometimes be true, we need to acknowledge that there can be powerful, yet subtle social forces in given settings that have potentially transformative power over us.

That's why *Lord of the Flies* had such a big impact. How could it be that just changing your appearance could make you kill when such an activity was previously alien to you? That's still a very difficult message to get across. You can tell students that the majority of subjects in the Milgram experiment went all the way. How likely is it that you would do it? "Oh no, I'm not that kind of person," they say. Well, the majority of guards in my study did brutal things. If you were a guard what would you do? "I would be a good guard," they answer.

It's partly a self-serving bias. We want to believe we are good, we are different, we are better, or we are superior. But this body of social-psychological research—and there are obviously many more experiments in addition to mine and Milgram's—shows that the majority of good, ordinary, normal people can be easily seduced, tempted, or initiated into behaving in ways that they say they never would. In 30 minutes we got them stepping across that line. I don't know, but I would bet that if you went to more collectivist cultures, cultures that focus on the community or the group as the unit rather than the individual, they might buy into a situationist approach more freely.

The other important thing is to see this as a progression. If the Stanford prison study had continued on for three months then I'd have to predict that there would have been a steady increase in the level of dehumanization and degradation that might have rivaled the abuses at Abu Ghraib.

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The other important thing in all of this is the "evil of inaction." I've been focusing on the perpetrators, but there are two important groups that I want to focus on more in my research and my future writing. What about all the people who observed what was happening and said

nothing? There were doctors, nurses, and technicians. There is a photo in which two soldiers piled the prisoners up in a pyramid, and there were 12 other people standing around, watching. If you watch this happening and you don't say, "This is wrong! Stop it! This is awful!" you give tacit approval. You are the silent majority who makes something acceptable. If I get in a cab in New York and the cab driver starts telling me a racist or sexist joke and I don't stop him, that means he will now tell that joke over and over again, thinking that his passengers like it. He takes my silence as approval of his racism. There is not only the evil of inaction among all those people in that prison, but also the people in society in general who observe evil and allow it to continue by not opposing it.

In our prison study it was the "good guards" maintained the prison. It was the guards on the shift where you had the worst abuses who never did anything bad to the prisoners, but not once, over the whole week, did they ever go to one of the bad guards and say, "What are you doing? We get paid the same money without knocking ourselves out." Or, "Hey, remember those are college students, not prisoners." No good guard ever intervened once to stop the activities of the bad guards. No good guard ever came a minute late, left a minute early, or publicly complained. In a sense, then, it's the good guard who allows this to happen. It's the good parent who allows a spouse to abuse their children without opposing it. That's something that's really important for us to consider.

The other important group for us to recognize are the heroes in our midst. When you take a situationist approach you say the majority of people in these settings will go all the way and step across the line. Because evil is so fascinating, we have been obsessed with looking at evildoers. Well, what about the ones who didn't go all the way? We've ignored them, but those are, by definition, the heroes.

The hero is somebody who somehow has the inner qualities, inner resources, character, strength, or virtue—whatever you want to call it from Marty Seligman's Positive Psychology

perspective—to resist those situational pressures. And we know nothing about those people. There has never been a psychology of heroism. For example, after the Holocaust it took 30 years before anyone asked the simple question of whether anybody helped the Jews. We were so obsessed with the evil of the Nazis that they didn't ask the question. When they asked, the answer was, Yes! In every country there were people who helped Jews. There were people who put their lives, and potentially the lives of their whole families, on the line to hide Jews in barns and attics when, if they were caught, they would be killed. Those are heroic deeds. When those people were interviewed years later, typically they said it was no big deal. They couldn't understand why other people didn't do it. It looked like they were a little more religious, but there is no research that studies the moment of decision when you are about to engage—to go along or to resist, to obey or to disobey. This is the kind of psychological research that would be exciting to do.

It can't ever be done again because all this research is now considered unethical, but in the case of Abu Ghraib we have a hero. A reserve specialist, a low-level guy, saw these pictures on a CD that his buddy gave him. He immediately recognized that this was immoral and wrong for Americans to ever do. At first he slipped the CD containing the images under the door of a superior officer. And then, interestingly, the next day he owned up to it. He said, "I was the one who put it there. I think this is wrong. You should take some action." I talked to some military people who say that it took enormous internal fortitude to do that, because as an army reservist in the military police in that setting, you are the lowest form of animal life in the military. It's only because he personally showed the pictures that they couldn't disown the fact that the abuse was happening, although they tried.

The paradox is that he's an incredible hero who is now in hiding. He's under protective custody. Soldiers in his own battalion say he disgraced them. Apparently there are death threats against him. But this whistle-blower's deed stopped the abuse. There's no question that it would have

gone on. It's only because there is graphic visual evidence of how horrible these deeds are that the abuse stopped and led to more than a half dozen investigations. Again, here is somebody who fascinates me, because he is the rare person we would all like to imagine that we would be.

We like to think we're good, and down deep we'd all like to say, "I would be the heroic one. I would be the one who would blow the whistle." The limit of the situationist approach comes when we see these heroes, because it appears that somehow they have something in them that the majority doesn't. We don't know what that special quality is. Certainly it's something we want to study. We want to be able to identify it so we can nurture it and teach it to our children and to others in our society.

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It's also very important for me, as somebody who's been interested in prisons for a very long time, to make sure that we don't see Abu Ghraib as an exotic Middle Eastern prison that is the only place where these terrible things happen. It may not be as extreme, but terrible things happen in prisons in our own country.

Right now there is an investigation of deaths of American Indians in prisons on Indian reservations. There is a large number of what the media calls "strange" circumstances of death. There's another investigation at the California Youth Authority concerning adolescents who were put in animal cages and drugged over long periods of time so that it would be easier for the guards to control them. At Pelican Bay, a maximum-security prison in California, prisoners are put in extreme solitary confinement units for 23 1/2 hours a day for five or ten years on end in which they never get to see another human being.

One of the issues that society has to face is, if we ever let any of these people out, are they likely to be more or less dangerous to society than when they were put in? The answer is obvious. If you put kids in animal cages and drug them, when they get out they're going to be more like animals. If you put people in solitary

confinement where they never interact with other people, how are they going to be able to interact on any normal basis when they get out? Prisons have lost any semblance of being places of rehabilitation. They are places of punishment and abuse.

Society never gave guards or prison administrators permission to do these things. Society says that if somebody breaks a law we want to separate him from the community for a certain period of time, period. That's what a sentence is. It's only in capital cases that we go one step further and kill him. We don't say that convicts should be abused, or should be put in places that degrade and dehumanize them, because we want them to come out and not go back. The fact that recidivism rates at most prisons are 60% and higher is evidence that this system doesn't work. In addition, the second offense is more likely to be more severe than the first. This means that prisons are places that breed crime and evil. This is not what society wants.

The bottom line is that nobody really cares what happens in prison. Nobody wants to know. Prisons are the default value of every society. We just want to dump convicts there, and let them come back and be good people. We only care about rapists and child molesters, so we want to keep track of them when they get out. For everybody else we don't want to know. We assume they go to prison, we'd like to believe they get rehabilitated, and when they come back they work in society. But from everything I know, most prisons are places that abuse prisoners, making them worse. They make them hate, make them want to get back at the injustice they've experienced.

All prisons are cloaked in a veil of secrecy. No one knows what happens in a prison. And when I say no one outside the prison knows, I mean mayors don't know, governors don't know, presidents don't know, and Congressional subcommittees don't know. Prisons are huge places, and if you just walk in you wouldn't know what to see. They could direct you to one part of the prison where everything is clean and rosy and nice, and the prisoners are eating steak

for your visit. Prisons have to lift the veil of secrecy. The media and lawyers have to have access to prisons.

None of that was true in Abu Ghraib. After a while the Red Cross was prohibited from coming in, because the Red Cross issued reports months before any of these exposés. Once you have a prison shrouded in secrecy, everyone in the prison knows there's no accountability outside. And then again, just as in my study of vandalism in the Bronx, nobody cares. Once you have that mentality as a guard or a prison administrator you say, "We don't really care what happens in prison, as long as it doesn't go too far. We don't want the prisoners to be killed. We don't want them to be extremely tortured. And obviously we don't want pictures of it thrust in our face on the evening news while we're having dinner. But short of that..."

And it's true. Now, one of the counter-reactions to Abu Ghraib is that by forcing us to look at these things the whistle blower almost becomes the culprit. We knew torture was going on at some level, and we knew it was important to get information from these bad people, but we just didn't want to know how bad it was, how far the soldiers had gone, and how far over the line they had stepped.

That's really something that every American citizen has to think about. Prisons are our property. We pay for everything in that prison. We pay all the guards' salaries, the superintendent's salary, and the warden's salary. The whole thing comes out of our tax dollars and we have to care. If the money is not going to rehabilitate prisoners, that means that when these people come out they're going to be attacking, murdering, stealing from us, doing all these terrible things again and again. Who wants to keep paying for that?

Not only do we have to care about what we do in prisons in America, but we also have to care what Americans do in prisons anywhere in the world that we run, because it sends not only a political message, it sends a moral message. One of the worst things about Abu Ghraib is that we have totally lost any sense of moral superiority

that America ever had. Those pictures will be with the world for decades to come. We can say that we're bringing freedom and democracy to the world, but when people look at the pictures they say, "Yeah, and what else are you bringing?"