

WHAT IS THE AMERICAN WAY OF WAR?

The Obscene Acts of Unjust War

In early January, a video went viral on the Internet showing four U.S. Marines in Afghanistan urinating on the bodies of three killed Taliban. The video, which the Pentagon confirmed was authentic and was likely taken between March and September 2011 by another Marine on the scene, immediately drew worldwide condemnation.

This outrageous act is a war crime under the Geneva Conventions, which require that the bodies of those killed in war be treated honorably. But it was *not* an aberration committed by a few rogue soldiers, a few “bad apples.” Instead, it represents and exposes a military culture in which soldiers are taught and trained to become cold-blooded torturers and killers in service of the aims and needs of U.S. imperialism through wars of conquest in which enemies are to be treated as demons and sub-humans—as “gooks” and “ragheads” and “sand niggers”—who require and deserve the atrocities brought down on them. And this is true not only of enemy combatants but of whole civilian populations, including children and especially women who, as “trophies of war,” are the victims of rape, mutilation, and gruesome deaths.

Following are just a few examples of the **American Way of War**. We encourage readers to look further into these, and the many others as well.

Genocide of Native Americans: This country was founded on the twin pillars of brutal chattel slavery and genocidal attacks against the native peoples. In 1864, in the midst of the Civil War, the 3rd Colorado Cavalry attacked a Cheyenne and Arapahoe village at Sand Creek. An interpreter living in the village said the victims “were scalped, their brains knocked out; the men used their knives, ripped open women, clubbed little children, knocked them in the head with their rifle butts ... mutilated their bodies in every sense of the word.” Returning to the fort, soldiers wore on their hats or across their saddlebows the breasts they had sliced off and vaginas they had cut out. Such unspeakable crimes against the native peoples were by no means limited to the Sand Creek Massacre. For example, on this page is a photo of the massacre at Wounded Knee, South Dakota in 1890, where the U.S. 7th Cavalry killed hundreds of Lakotas.

Invasion of the Philippines, 1899: At the turn of the 19th century, as the U.S. began to emerge as an imperialist power, it occupied several countries formerly under the domination of Spain, including the Philippines, where the people rose up against their new colonial masters. U.S. military attacks included scorched earth campaigns in which entire villages were burned and destroyed. The entire island of Samar was burned down, with Brig. Gen. Jacob Smith telling his men, “I want no prisoners. I wish you to kill and burn. The more you kill and burn, the better it will please me.” Among the torture techniques the U.S. used against the Filipinos: waterboarding.

The Atomic Bomb Attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki: On August 6, 1945, as World War 2 was coming to an end and the Japanese imperialists had been defeated and were close to surrender, a U.S. Air Force plane dropped the world’s first atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima, killing an estimated 140,000 people, almost all civilians. Three days later, another atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Nagasaki, killing an estimated 74,000 people.

Vietnam, 1965-1975: On March 16, 1968, U.S. soldiers entered the village of My Lai. One soldier later testified, “The order we were given was to kill and destroy everything that was in the village. It was clearly explained that there were to be no prisoners.” Another later testified that it “was just like any other Vietnamese village—old papa-sans, women and kids. As a matter of fact, I don’t remember seeing one military-age male in the entire place, dead or alive.” The soldiers started to kill everyone in sight. Some of the dead were mutilated, with ears and other body parts cut off as a war prize (a practice carried out throughout the 10-year invasion); others were disemboweled and women, some already dead, were raped. One soldier would later say: “You didn’t have to look for people to kill, they were just there. I cut their throats, cut off their hands, cut out their tongues, and scalped them. I did it. A lot of people were doing it and I just followed.”

The second U.S. invasion of Iraq, beginning in 2003: Spring 2004, dozens of photos are leaked showing how U.S. soldiers and CIA interrogators have been torturing Iraqis inside Abu Ghraib prison, near Baghdad. Some photos show Iraqi men, usually naked, with suffocating hoods over their heads and being brutalized by laughing, posing, mocking U.S. Military Police (MPs). One photo shows a prisoner after he had been beaten to death; another photo shows a prisoner with electric wires attached to his genitals. Several show Iraqi prisoners forced into humiliating poses and forced to mimic sexual acts on each other. They are piled naked in large heaps, while MP prison guards pose over them like trophy hunters. When the photos surfaced, President George W. Bush claimed, “That’s not the way we do things in America. I don’t like it one bit.” Also during the second U.S. invasion of Iraq: March 12, 2006, several soldiers burst into the home of 14-year-old Abeer Qassim Hamza, at whom the soldiers had been making sexual passes for some time. One soldier takes Abeer’s mother, father, and five-year-old sister into the bedroom and kills them. Then he and another soldier take turns raping Abeer. When they are done, they shoot and kill her, then set fire to her body.

Footnotes for this article are at revcom.us.



VIETNAM

Photo: Vietnam GI via Wikimedia

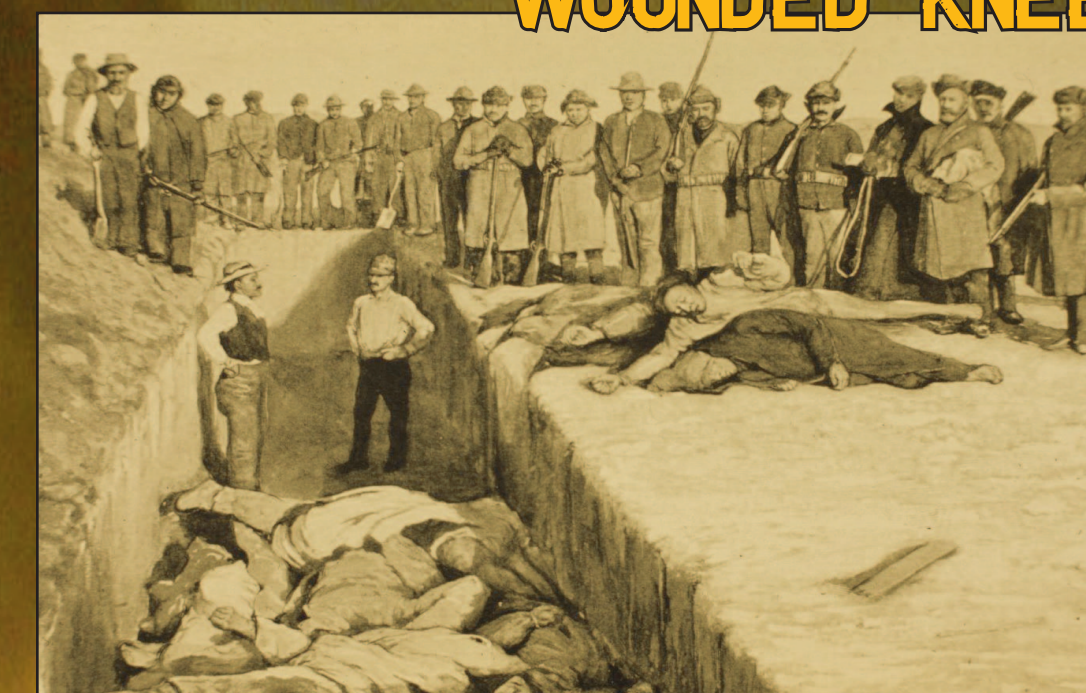
Vietnam, 1968. U.S. soldiers pose with the decapitated and mutilated bodies of Vietnamese liberation fighters.

PHILIPPINES



Jolo, Philippines, 1906. Some of the hundreds of Moro rebels slaughtered by the U.S. Army.

WOUNDED KNEE



Wounded Knee, South Dakota, 1890. U.S. 7th Cavalry bury some of the hundreds of massacrred Lakotas.

Photo: Bainbridge Library, Yale

IRAQ



Abu Ghraib Prison, Iraq, 2003-4. Leaked photos exposed the torture and murder of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. soldiers.

Photo: AP

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The top U.S. military man in Afghanistan, Marine Corps Gen. John Allen, said the actions of the U.S. troops were “in direct opposition to everything the military stands for.” Secretary of State Hillary Clinton claimed, “It is absolutely inconsistent with American values and the standards we expect from our military personnel.”

Just the opposite is true: **This obscene incident, and the long and unbroken record of degrading, depraved acts by U.S. troops is absolutely consistent with the values of those who rule the U.S. and their capitalist-imperialist system. And it is a product and expression of the very nature of the U.S. military, whose role is to ruthlessly and violently enforce that worldwide system of exploitation and oppression.**