

The Human American

American officials are as fallible as other humans. They should not be above the law. By Allan Abraham

After a British citizen released in March 2004 from two years of illegal imprisonment by the US government in Guantanamo Bay condemned the conditions of prisoners there, US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, made the US case this way: “Because we are Americans, we don’t abuse people in our care.”

There was no attempt to deny the charge with a rejection of specifics or by pointing out what checks against abuse the Guantanamo Bay system has. Instead, Mr Powell invoked Americanism as sufficient rebuttal. Less than two months later, his argument was spectacularly ripped apart when pictures of the torture of Iraqis by Americans at the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad were published—to America’s eternal shame.

The absurdity of America’s moral posturing is well captured by the denials that followed. Most Americans, from the President to newspaper commentators, tried to maintain the illusion of a noble, high-minded America by disowning the perpetrators caught in flagrante delicto. According to the President, this was not the America he knew. Apparently, this is a side of America that many do not like to own up to: One of the accused (Jeremy Sivits) pointed out that it was not the real he who tortured a fellow human being. Presumably it was some Hyde-type of character that crept up on him and displaced the real American.

That’s the point. Americans are as human as other human beings. Possessing American citizenship does not suppress Mr Hyde. If it's not love and understanding that will do this, then it must be the law. When the American government shows a respect for law, such as international humanitarian law, Americans will find that they do not abuse people who are “in their care”. To argue like Mr Powell did is to argue like a fool—even if the Abu Ghraib

torture had not been revealed...or had not happened.

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SIDEBARS

The Nature of Man

Men's natures are alike; it is their habits that carry them far apart.

– Confucius, *The Analects*

Why Law? (1)

It may be true that the law cannot make a man love me, but it can keep him from lynching me, and I think that's pretty important.

– Martin Luther King Jr, quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*, 13 November 1962

Why Law? (2)

To live outside the law you must be honest.

– Bob Dylan, *Absolutely Sweet Marie*, song on the album *Blonde on Blonde* (1958)

SIDEBARS

Why No Law

Laws are felt only when the individual comes into conflict with them.

– *Suzanne LaFollette, Concerning Women (1926)*

Editor: A good reason to scrap inconvenient laws.