

Jared Del Rosso researches torture

Since 2007, Jared Del Rosso has studied the U.S. debates about detainee abuse, torture, and interrogation policy. To understand this debate, Professor Del Rosso analyzed over 40 transcripts of congressional hearings on these issues. Through this analysis, Professor Del Rosso documented a fundamental change in the ways that U.S. politicians spoke about torture. From 2003 to 2005, denial characterized Congress's response to allegations of torture. Members of Congress downplayed incidents of abuse and even studiously avoided using the word "torture" to describe those incidents. By 2008, however, Democrats and several prominent Republicans in Congress had begun acknowledging that U.S. interrogators had tortured detainees; they also began criticizing the policy-makers who had authorized the practice. Professor Del Rosso's research shows that changes in three factors—the balance of power between Republicans and Democrats, evidence of torture, and prevailing views of the relationship between national security and law—set the conditions for U.S. politicians to acknowledge torture.

Professor Del Rosso has published two articles based on this research; each focuses on the government's response to the release of photographs showing Americans torturing detainees at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. The first, "The Textual Mediation of Denial: Congress, Abu Ghraib, and the Construction of an Isolated Incident," appeared in the journal *Social Problems* in 2011. In this article, Professor Del Rosso traces the process by which Senate Republicans, the Department of Defense, and the U.S. military successfully portrayed the violence at Abu Ghraib as an isolated incident that did not represent how the U.S. treated detainees at other facilities. The article shows that the Department of Defense's production and release of official investigations provided support for this claim. These investigations did so by portraying abuse that occurred outside Abu Ghraib in ways dramatically different than how the photographs depicted the violence inside the prison. This article recently received the 2013 Outstanding Paper Award from the Social Problems Theory Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems.

A complimentary article, "Textuality and the Social Organization of Denial: Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo, and the Meanings of U.S. Interrogation Policies," is forthcoming in the journal *Sociological Forum*. This article examines a second component of the isolation of Abu Ghraib, the government's claim that a "few bad apples," rather than official policies, were the cause of the violence there. The article also compares the government's response to Abu Ghraib to its response to Guantánamo and focuses on the ways that officials related the violence at the facilities to policies written up in specific government documents.

Professor Del Rosso's research on torture reflects his broader interest in understanding the ways that societies collectively respond to violence, and his teaching similarly deals with this issue. In courses on torture, discipline and punishment, and state violence, Professor Del Rosso and his students explore how and why contemporary democracies practice violence in the ways that they do. Professor Del Rosso asks students in these classes to consider the various arguments and sides of contemporary debates about violence and to understand why people on both sides of such debates argue what they argue. His hope is that his classes prepare students to enter into such public debates by exposing them to sociological research on the causes of contemporary violence and providing them with first-hand experience critically analyzing governments' justifications and opponents' critiques of that violence.