

Jared Del Rosso Researches Torture

Since 2007, Jared Del Rosso has studied the U.S. debate 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 several works based on this research. Two articles focus 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 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," appeared in the journal *Sociological Forum* in 2014. 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 government documents.

A third article, "The Toxicity of Torture: The Cultural Structure of US Political Discourse of Waterboarding," which is forthcoming in *Social Forces*, considers the shared assumptions embedded in the arguments of congressional supporters and critics of waterboarding. The article shows that both sides of the debate about waterboarding reject "torture" because they understand it as a practice associated with non-democracies. What the sides differ on, though, is what they believe waterboarding to actually be. Those who support it view it as a measured, restrained, professional, and effective practice compatible with democratic values. Opponents, on the other hand, view it as a messy, violent practice that assaults the bodies and minds of victims. They also believe it to be a practice that derives from practices favored by notorious regimes, such as the Nazis. This research, combined with additional writing on Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo, and the abuse of the "September 11 detainees" at Metropolitan Detention Center in New York, serve as the basis of a book on the U.S. debate about torture that is forthcoming with Columbia University Press.

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 sides of contemporary debates about violence and to understand why people on both sides of these debates argue the way that they do. 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.