

In London,
Guantánamo:
'Honor Bound to Defend
Freedom' has played
to captive audiences.

THEATER



BY ANA CARRIGAN

Rule of Lawlessness

In recent weeks, *Guantánamo: 'Honor Bound to Defend Freedom'* has been playing to capacity audiences at north London's Tricycle Theatre. The play is a sober documentary on the prison camp at the U.S. naval

base in Cuba, where hundreds of suspected Taliban and al Qaeda foot soldiers have been interned without trial since January 2002. At a moment when no issue on either side of the Atlantic is so urgently in need of rigorous public examination as the conduct of the war on terror, this is the third play in this London theatrical season to take up the challenge. Last month, political satirist Alistair Beaton's ferociously funny and disturbing exploration of the Blair-Bush relationship, *Follow My Leader*, played to sold-out houses at the Hampstead Theatre, and in September David Hare's new play about the Iraq war, *Stuff Happens*, opens at the National Theatre. Later this month, *Guantánamo* will transfer to the New Ambassadors Theatre in the commercial hub of London's West End.

London has a cherished tradition of vibrant political theatre, and London audiences expect their small community theatres to engage with the

major issues of our time. For the past decade the Tricycle Theatre has developed docudramas that it calls "Verbatim Theatre." This award-winning series of "Tribunal Plays" has brought to the stage dramatizations based on the transcripts of war crimes trials (Nuremberg and Srebrenica) and controversial U.K. government inquiries into Iraq policies and into police racism.

In the case of *Guantánamo*—absent any official inquiry, congressional hearing or trials—former *Guardian* journalist Victoria Brittain and South African novelist Gillian Slovo intercut the "spoken evidence" of recently freed British Muslims and their families, the relatives of British prisoners still held, and English and American lawyers with excerpts from desperate letters by the prisoners to their families and comments by British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

The production acquires added gravitas through readings from Lord Justice Steyn, a judge on Britain's highest—and traditionally conservative—court, whose legal analysis drives home the play's bleak message: Those interned in Guantánamo have been trapped by their captors in "a legal black hole." In Steyn's words: "The purpose of holding the prisoners at Guantánamo Bay was and is to put them beyond the rule of law, beyond the protection of any courts, and at the mercy of the victors. ... The prisoners ... will be tried by military tribunals ... they have no access to the writ of *habeas corpus*. ... The military will act as interrogators, prosecutors, defense counsel, judges, and when death sentences are imposed, as executioners. ... The question is whether the quality of justice envisaged for the prisoners at Guantánamo Bay complies with minimum international standards for the conduct of fair trials. The answer ... is a resounding No."

We know some facts about Guantánamo: photos of shackled prisoners led away for interrogation; details of the 8-by-8-foot cages, where they are held under lights blazing 24 hours a day; the re-classification from POWs to detainees to remove their rights under international law. All of this has been known for two years. Now, since the scandal at Abu Ghraib, and the disclosure that the commander at Guantánamo was transferred to Abu Ghraib, the Guantánamo regime has acquired still more sinister characteristics. In examining what Lord Steyn characterizes as "the utter lawlessness at Guantánamo Bay," this play digs deeply to raise profound questions about the direction that those in power on both sides of the Atlantic are taking our societies.

Wonderfully served by the actors, *Guantánamo* lives through the quality of the interviews that involve us instantly in the personal stories of the prisoners and their families. "I will start with his childhood so you have the full picture," is the first line of the play. The father is speaking of his son, still interned in Guantánamo. His account of his son's life, built up from small, everyday things, is spellbinding. And heartbreaking. His reminiscences are interwoven with scenes from a press conference held by Rumsfeld, who is impatient to get out his message that "these are among the most dangerous, best trained, vicious killers on the face of the earth." Meanwhile, in the Kafkaesque world of Guantánamo, his son is losing the struggle against despair.

Great theatre is cathartic. It can lead an audience to open their hearts and minds and imaginations. This is what *Guantánamo* has achieved. ■

ANA CARRIGAN regularly contributes to *In These Times* and *The Irish Times*.



PAULA BRONSTEIN / GETTY IMAGES

BY PAUL MCLEARY

Reason's Heathens

Writing intellectual history is a tricky gig. Too often, ideology and hindsight have blinded writers to the facts on the ground, turning history into little more than a self-serving dialectic. Take any of the competing

"isms" that have dragged the humanities into an archipelago of quibbling camps over the past century and a half, and you'll find more than enough evidence of this technique.

Conversely, simple regurgitation of the past is just as lacking if you're in the business of mining history for nuggets of larger truths. Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit in their new book, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies*, largely have managed to avoid these common pitfalls as they build a layered, cross-cultural critique of the roots of anti-Western bias that has arisen over the last several centuries.

Occidentalism is the name the authors give to a brand of nativist chauvinism that stereotypes the West and its liberal market ideals as essentially weak, soulless and corrupt. If the term sounds a little familiar, that's because it owes much to the late Edward Said's 1979 masterpiece *Orientalism*, which held that Western scholars had produced a false description of Arabs and Islamic culture in order to assert Western cultural

Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies

By Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit
Penguin
160 pages, \$21.95

dominance against the Oriental "other." The authors deftly cast Said's gaze back upon the Orient, however, proving that crude stereotypes can flow both ways. They wisely refrain from trying to refute this pervasive anti-Westernism, in the process situating our current struggle with radical Islam as a new wrinkle in an old story.

The common bogeyman for anti-Western movements is Enlightenment reason itself. In essence, "the West" is shorthand for the secular, pluralistic, consumerist cosmopolitanism the Enlightenment made possible.

But the authors point out that the revolt against the West is itself a Western product that has been exported abroad and cloaked in local prejudices. The German Romantics of the 19th Century complained of a "machine culture" in which higher

values were squashed under the desires of the lazy, trivial bourgeois, while the Russian intellectual class of the same era sought solace in their mystical brand of Eastern Orthodox Catholicism, rejecting Western Europe's Reformation. Both saw disease and decadence in modernism and industrialization, and in the case of the German Romantics, laid the intellectual foundation for Hitler's perverse glorification of the pure "Volk."

To practice wholesale character assassination against an entire worldview (which the West's wildly successful brand of democratic capitalism certainly is), says as much about the hunter as the hunted. "To diminish an entire society or a civilization to a mass of soulless, decadent, money-grubbing, rootless, faithless, unfeeling parasites," the authors write, "is a form of intellectual destruction." Indeed it is, and it is precisely such charges that have been leveled against the West since its ascension as an exporter of ideas—primarily its ideas about free will and the distribution of capital—when Europe set out to

colonize the world.

Symbolism is key here, particularly the idea of the city. Purveyors of "national or ethnic spiritual attacks on Western rationalism" embrace the lame stereotype of the crude bourgeois lifestyle that favors the city over the country, wealth over art, entertainment over spirituality and comfort over adventure. Whether it be Dostoevsky's obsession with the concept of a national soul (an idea that gained tragic currency among later fascist movements), Mao's cultural revolution, or Wahhabism's violent cultural artifice, the city's materialism and workaday lifestyle are seen as all that is wrong with the West.

If you stuck a microphone in front of his smirk, our president might say that Occidentalists "hate freedom," but it's not freedom they're fighting. Rather, it's what Marx called the "commodity fetishism" of capitalism. The West, according to the Occidentalists' script, is obsessed with the spectacle of consumption for its own sake, and is populated by "the settled bourgeois, whose existence is the antithesis of the self-sacrificing hero ... who must be crushed to make way for a world of pure faith." But this pure faith often is a chimera that harkens back to a time and place that never existed.

The good news? Up to this point these movements have largely failed in galvanizing large-scale public support without violently seizing control of the means of production themselves. Does this subvert their claim to legitimacy? According to a cosmopolitan democratic reading, most certainly. But the beauty of liberal democracy, warts and all, is that it is willing to accept all the charges leveled against it, rather than simply shouting down its critics as its rivals do. ■

PAUL MCLEARY regularly reviews books for *In These Times*. For more go to www.theatlas.blogspot.com.

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Man Ray's "Blanche et Noire"

lection erotica. Photos of lynchings and unflinching depictions of slavery and genocide hang alongside seemingly benign sexualized images, creating a jarring collision of pleasure and pain, fantasy and reality.

"The act of visualizing and looking at racial difference continues to seduce and enthrall American viewers," Fusco writes in the catalogue's introductory essay. "The sheer volume of racial imagery that has been and continues to be produced for private consumption, public education and entertainment, erotic stimulation, and aesthetic appreciation signals that America's attraction to race exceeds the boundaries of a discussion of institutional racism. In that sense, it is possible and indeed probable that we like to see race even if we don't consider ourselves racist."

Fusco intends to, as she puts it, "break racial logic down" and thereby make the

case that racial imagery should be a serious field of inquiry in the worlds of art and photography. The power and lure of such imagery is undeniable, whether in the form of *Life* magazine's 1941 dia-grammed photo illustration "How to Tell Japs from the Chinese," or *Time* magazine's infamously darkened O.J. Simpson cover photo. Palpable, as well, is the outrage and fascination the viewer experiences when looking at the 1996 photo by Max Becher and Andrea Robbins, "German Indians: Campfire," which depicts a European sub-culture that romanticizes Native Americans à la Hollywood westerns.

The comment cards posted on the bulletin board at the Seattle showing indicate that the exhibit has gotten under viewers' skin. Hundreds of handwritten comments speak to the heartfelt impact the exhibit has had on viewers' understanding of race and racism.

"It's about the images," Fusco explains. "If I give you a million explanations, you won't want to look closely enough at what you're seeing." ■

SILJA J.A. TALVI is a Seattle-based journalist and eight-time winner of regional Society of Professional Journalists awards.

Skin Deep

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about anti-racist heroes," says co-curator Coco Fusco from her home in Brooklyn. "Nobody who is sensitive to subtleties is interested in such a simplistic [breakdown] of racial images."

Fusco, a professor of visual arts at Columbia University, and Brian Wallis, chief curator at the International Center of Photography, embarked on this ambitious project three years ago, collecting more than 300 images for the exhibit and the accompanying 416-page catalogue, published by Harry N. Abrams Inc. Alongside the work of less celebrated artists, the curators included photographers such as Ansel Adams, Edward S. Curtis, Bruce Davidson, Dorothea Lange, Nikki S. Lee, Robert Mapplethorpe, Man Ray, Cindy Sherman, Andy Warhol and Carrie Mae Weems.

To help viewers digest the material, the curators structured the exhibit around five themes: "Looking Up/Looking Down" explores the concept of racial hierarchies; "All for One/One for All" challenges stereotypes of the 'ideal' American; "Humanized/Fetishized" examines how groups and cultures have been represented as peculiar, bizarre or desirable; "Assimilate/Impersonate" compares subjects who possessed the proper "melting pot" characteristics and those mocked for entertainment value; and "Progress/Regress" demonstrates the connections between pre- and post-industrial landscapes and the concepts of authenticity and civilization.

With photographs that date back as far as 1840, *Only Skin Deep* encompasses an array of visual genres and styles, including photojournalism, anthropological photography, surrealist imagery, pictorialism, social documentary, video and computer imagery, portraiture and even private-col-

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW

LEARNING CURVE

FIRST WE LEARN ABOUT THE ABUSES AT ABU GHRAIB. HARRUMPH! CLEARLY THE WORK OF A FEW BAD APPLES!



THEN WE LEARN THAT IN JANUARY, 2002, RUMSFELD APPROVED THE USE OF DOGS TO INTIMIDATE PRISONERS AT GUANTANAMO--A TACTIC LATER USED AT ABU GHRAIB. ER--WOULD YOU BELIEVE I WAS REFERRING TO TRIUMPH, THE INSULT COMIC DOG?

HIS CLEVER BARBS CAN BE VERY INTIMIDATING, YOU KNOW!



THEN WE LEARN THAT DONALD RUMSFELD REQUESTED A REPORT ON THE LEGALITY OF TORTURE IN MARCH, 2003.

WELL, THAT DOESN'T PROVE ANYTHING!

MAYBE HE WAS SIMPLY DISCUSSING THE MOST RECENT SEASON OF '24' ON AN INTERNET CHAT BOARD SOMEWHERE!



WE LEARN MORE AND MORE, ALL OF IT CLEARLY INDICATING THAT THE TORTURE OF DETAINEES WAS AN OFFICIALLY SANCTIONED POLICY.

LOOK, EVERYONE STAYED WITHIN THE LAW!

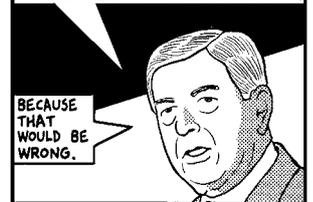
OF COURSE, THE WAY RUMSFELD AND ASHCROFT FIGURE IT, THE LAW IS PRETTY MUCH WHAT WE SAY IT IS!

HEH, HEH! MAYBE I SHOULD DECLARE JOHN KERRY AN ENEMY COMBATANT!



THEN WE LEARN OF JUSTICE DEPARTMENT MEMOS FROM 2002 WHICH DISCUSS THE DEGREE OF SUFFERING ALLOWABLE DURING INTERROGATION.

BUT REST ASSURED, THERE IS NO TRUTH TO THE RUMOR THAT DETAINEES HAVE BEEN FORCED TO LISTEN TO ME SINGING 'LET THE EAGLE SOAR' UNTIL THEY BEG TO HAVE ELECTRODES ATTACHED TO THEIR GENITALS INSTEAD.



AND SOMEDAY, SOME AMERICAN P.O.W. SOMEWHERE WILL LEARN WHY THE ADMINISTRATION REALLY SHOULD HAVE TRIED TO SET A BETTER EXAMPLE.

TODAY WE WILL STRAP YOU TO A BOARD AND HOLD YOU UNDER WATER UNTIL YOU THINK YOU WILL DIE!*

DO NOT WORRY! YOUR OWN GOVERNMENT SAYS IT IS NOT TORTURE!

THINK OF IT AS A HARMLESS FRATERNITY PRANK!



*ACTUAL INTERROGATION TECHNIQUE USED AT GUANTANAMO.

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Only Skin Deep

By Silja J.A. Taki



Photos: (RIGHT) "Klanswoman," by Andres Serrano; (LEFT) Andres Serrano photographing a Klanswoman in Georgia, by Richard Sudden.

How American photography creates and reinforces concepts of race and national identity.

The image around the corner stops visitors in their tracks.

Museumgoers come face to face with a hooded member of the Ku Klux Klan. An oversized photographic portrait, frightening on the one hand, disturbingly matter-of-fact on the other. The pointed and carefully stitched Klan hood is a starched, bright white; one eye peers out, surrounded by a halo of light skin.

This distant gaze comes from a person who looks to be no older than 30 years old. A cold stare? A lost look? A hint of sadness, perhaps? Visitors cease talking and gather around at a careful distance. Jarringly, it becomes apparent: The person under the hood is a woman.

"Klanswoman," a 1990 cibachrome print of a KKK Grand Kaliff is Andres Serrano's contribution to *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self* a traveling exhibit most recently on display at the Seattle Art Museum.

In this groundbreaking photographic collection, nothing is as it initially seems. The powers of the individual photos are indeed in the eye of the beholder. But the collective power of the assembled images speaks to us as a society, raising questions about why we cling to the concept of "race" and pointing out that bigotry still lives and breathes in our midst, fueled in no small part by the media images that saturate Americans' day-to-day experiences.

Yet *Only Skin Deep* is emphatically *not* an exhibit about the evils of racism. A provocative photographic collection, the show bypasses easy targets and speaks complex truths about the construction of nation, race, selfhood and ethnic identity.

"We need to get away from the view that you make [art] shows about either racist depictions or triumphalist counter-narratives

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