



Poems from Guantanamo: The Detainees Speak

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Since 2002, at least 775 men have been held in the U.S. detention center at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. According to Department of Defense data, fewer than half of them are accused of committing any hostile act against the United States or its allies. In hundreds of cases, even the circumstances of their initial detainment are questionable.

This collection gives voice to the men held at Guantánamo. Available only because of the tireless efforts of pro bono attorneys who submitted each line to Pentagon scrutiny, *Poems from Guantánamo* brings together twenty-two poems by seventeen detainees, most still at Guantánamo, in legal limbo.

If, in the words of Audre Lorde, poetry “forms the quality of light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change,” these verses—some originally written in toothpaste, others scratched onto foam drinking cups with pebbles and furtively handed to attorneys—are the most basic form of the art.

Death Poem by Jumah al Dossari

Take my blood.
Take my death shroud and
The remnants of my body.
Take photographs of my corpse at the grave, lonely.

Send them to the world,
To the judges and
To the people of conscience,
Send them to the principled men and the fair-minded.

And let them bear the guilty burden before the world,
Of this innocent soul.
Let them bear the burden before their children and before history,
Of this wasted, sinless soul,

Of this soul which has suffered at the hands of the "protectors or peace."

Jumah al Dossari is a thirty-three-year old Bahraini who has been held at Guantanamo Bay for more than five years. He has been in solitary confinement since the end of 2003 and, according to the U.S. military, has tried to kill himself twelve times while in custody.

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Editorial Review

Review

"At last Guantanamo has found its voice."--Gore Vidal

"Poetry, art of the human voice, helps turn us toward what we should or must not ignore. Speaking as they can across barriers actual and figurative, translated into our American tongue, these voices in confinement implicitly call us to our principles and to our humanity. They deserve, above all, not admiration or belief or sympathy-but attention. Attention to them is urgent for us."-Robert Pinsky

"*Poems from Guantanamo* brings to light figures of concrete, individual humanity, against the fabric of cruelty woven by the 'war on terror.' The poems and poets' biographies reveal one dimension of this officially obscured narrative, from the perspective of the sufferers; the legal and literary essays provide the context which has produced--under atrocious circumstances--a poetics of human dignity."--Adrienne Rich

Yochi J. Dreazen, *The Wall Street Journal*:

"Inmates at the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, used pebbles to scratch messages into the foam cups they got with their meals. When the guards weren't looking, they passed the cups from cell to cell. It was a crude but effective way of communicating.

The prisoners weren't passing along escape plans or information about future terrorist attacks. They were sending one another poems."

Kate Allen, director, Amnesty International UK:

"The poems in this collection were written against enormous odds. The men detained in Guantanamo Bay are routinely held in solitary confinement, condemned without a fair trial, many of them tortured. Through it all, some have taken sanctuary in poetry, and through this small volume we hear voices and glimpse their innermost feelings. Their poems are a remarkable and moving testament to the power of the human spirit."

About the Author

Marc Falkoff is an assistant professor at the Northern Illinois University College of Law and attorney for seventeen Guantánamo prisoners. Flagg Miller is a linguistic and cultural anthropologist at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Ariel Dorfman is a Chilean American poet, novelist, playwright, and human rights activist who holds the Walter Hines Page Chair of Literature and Latin American Studies at Duke University.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michael Duckett:

Have you spare time for a day? What do you do when you have considerably more or little spare time? Yep,

you can choose the suitable activity regarding spend your time. Any person spent their very own spare time to take a wander, shopping, or went to the Mall. How about open or maybe read a book called Poems from Guantanamo: The Detainees Speak? Maybe it is to be best activity for you. You already know beside you can spend your time with your favorite's book, you can cleverer than before. Do you agree with its opinion or you have additional opinion?

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Renee Chagnon:

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