

Hey, Lehigh!

Your students have **Compelling Perspectives** on the Bush administration, too! And in light of his selection as this year's speaker, not to mention the profile posted to Lehigh's website claiming that Bush "liberated more than 50 million people from tyranny," we are taking the opportunity to remind our community of the many instances of violence that mar his legacy.

- President Bush authorized the invasion of Iraq on the grounds of waging a post-9/11 "War on Terror" and preventing the stockpiling of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) by the Iraqi armed forces. Yet, a bipartisan 9/11 commission established that there was no credible evidence tying the Iraqi government to 9/11, and both the Senate Intelligence Committee and United Nations (UN) weapons inspectors determined that the claim about WMDs was also a blatant falsehood. On top of Bush's lie-fueled militarism, the decision to invade was a violation of the UN Nations Charter in and of itself because it infringed on Iraqi political independence, was not an act of self-defense, and was not approved by the UN Security Council.
- Between 186,694 and 210,038 civilians were murdered as a direct result of the Iraq War. If one accounts for post-9/11 violence in Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Pakistan, as well as Iraq, the death toll rises to 934,000 people. If one accounts for indirect deaths due to the conditions created by war, an estimated 4.5-4.7 million people are dead and 38 million more are displaced (Brown University's Cost of War project).
- Some of the tactics used by the U.S. military in Iran were also highly illegal, including the use of white phosphorus against opposing forces, which violated the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons stipulations that it should only be used for obscuration, illumination, and marking targets. The U.S. also participated in excessive bombing of civilian hubs, including in March, 2003, when 3,000 bombs and precision-guided missiles were dropped on Baghdad within 48 hours.
- Bush opened the Guantanamo Bay detention camp in Cuba, where detainees underwent various forms of torture including waterboarding, sexual assault, sleep deprivation, psychological torture, forced desecration of religious texts, physical beatings, etc. These abuses were declared human rights violations by the UN, Amnesty International, and various others. Although Bush's degree of knowledge about the exact methods of torture remains unclear, he intentionally ordered Guantanamo's construction outside of U.S. territories so as to ignore habeas corpus and argue that those imprisoned there had no constitutional rights. The Supreme Court ultimately rejected this claim. Bush also attempted to strip al-Qaeda detainees of international protections by writing that the Geneva Conventions should not apply to them in a 2002 memo.
- These and similar violations also took place at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq between 2003, when the U.S. military took over the facility, and 2004, when horrifying images of prisoners came to light. Bush attests that he was ignorant of the conditions at Abu Ghraib,

yet his administration spent months disregarding warnings from the International Committee of the Red Cross about unchecked systemic mistreatment.

- The ratification of the PATRIOT Act in 2001 drastically expanded the capabilities of law enforcement agencies with little allowance for checks and balances, leading to the rise of the surveillance state.
- The ratification of the Homeland Security Act in 2002 created the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and thereby catalyzed the heightened, ongoing abuse of immigrants by federal agencies.
- There were catastrophic delays in the Bush administration's response to Hurricane Katrina, often attributed to the incorporation of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) into the DHS and the resultant lack of resources allocated towards natural disaster preparedness.

Certainly, the actions of the U.S. government between 2001 and 2009 cannot be solely attributed to its Commander-in-Chief. We could very easily point the finger at Dick Cheney, Colin Powell, Tommy Franks, and countless others. But Bush need not have personally detonated the bombs or wielded weapons of torture to be held responsible for the lies and policy decisions that deliberately enabled so many atrocities. Further, in an era of heightened surveillance, retaliatory logic, continued brutality on the part of the U.S. military in the Middle East/SWANA (Southwest Asia and North Africa), and fearmongering about the Iranian government by the Trump administration, it is imperative that we continue to speak about and reckon with the ongoing consequences of Bush's presidency.

In spite of our frustration, we are not asking Lehigh's administration to give Bush the boot. Such a request would set a dangerous precedent. Nevertheless, if Lehigh is going to platform a war criminal, best believe we have some demands for his visit.

OUR DEMANDS:

We ask that Lehigh a) open the speaker event to the Brown & White Newspaper and other media entities, b) abandon the question curation model/commit to making the event a true open forum so that community members can engage in uncensored dialogue, c) disclose the speaking fee and funding that went towards Compelling Perspectives, and d) enlist someone to rewrite the "Learn more about President Bush" profile (propaganda!) posted to the school's website to more accurately portray the Bush administration (if you're at a loss, Helble, the Lesbian Avengers are more than up to the task).

We ask that the student body treat this event as a call to action and education. Do not accept the image of Bush proffered to you. Do your own research. Understand that the so-called "War on Terror" was a myth sold to frightened U.S. citizens in the wake of 9/11 that legitimized

state-sponsored terrorism abroad for years to come. Understand that Bush's time in office was a part of this country's ongoing neo-colonial mission to orchestrate regime change in SWANA and establish Western geopolitical dominance over the region. Prepare compelling, candid questions. Voice our collective demands, or your own, at every opportunity.

In solidarity and defiance, and may the fire never consume us,
The Lesbian Avengers

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