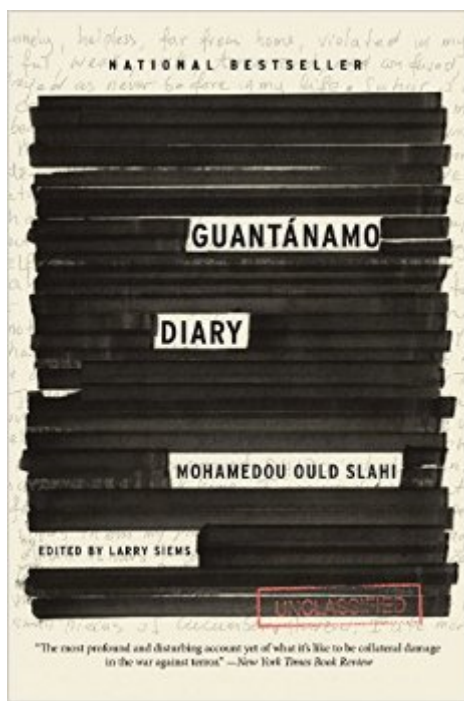


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Guantánamo Diary



Synopsis

The acclaimed national bestseller, welcomed on the cover of the New York Times Book Review--the first and only diary written by a still-imprisoned Guantanamo detainee. Mohamedou Slahi has been imprisoned at the detainee camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba since 2002. In all these years, the United States has never charged him with a crime. Although he was ordered released by a federal judge, the U.S. government fought that decision, and there is no sign that the United States plans to let him go. Three years into his captivity Slahi began a diary, recounting his life before he disappeared into U.S. custody and daily life as a detainee. His diary is not merely a vivid record of a miscarriage of justice, but a deeply personal memoir---terrifying, darkly humorous, and surprisingly gracious. Guantanamo Diary is a document of immense emotional power and historical importance.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is an incredible, first-person story about imprisonment, torture, and life in the secret world of Guantanamo. It is complete with government redaction bars as well as footnotes tying the narrative to declassified documents. Especially interesting are the human relationships formed with guards and interrogators throughout Slahi's ordeal. Sadly, this tale illustrates the plight of many other Gitmo prisoners. A little of Slahi's story: he's from Mauritania and when he was 18 went to college in Germany on a scholarship. In the early 1990s, he interrupted his studies to fight with al-Qaeda units against the communist government in Afghanistan (the U.S.

supported anti-communist forces). He returned to Germany a few years later and got his degree. In November 2001 he went to his local police station in Mauritania to answer questions about suspected involvement in a terrorist plot. He's been a prisoner ever since but never charged with a crime. He was rendered by the CIA to Jordan and Afghanistan for more interrogation before being sent to Guantanamo in 2002. Slahi was one of two so-called "Special Projects" whose treatment Donald Rumsfeld personally approved "treatment that included extreme isolation, sleep deprivation, sexual molestation, frigid rooms, stress positions, and death threats against both Slahi and his mother. Military prosecutors have said that they declined to prosecute him because he was tortured or because they could simply not find anything to charge him with. In 2010, a federal district court judge ordered him released, but the Obama administration successfully appealed and the case was sent back to the district court with instructions to use looser standards to decide whether someone can be held. And so Slahi remains locked up indefinitely, 13 years and counting -- for doing NOTHING. If you want to try to do something about it, there's a petition to send him home at <https://www.aclu.org/free-slahi>

I am probably the least likely person to write a review for this book. But after listening to the editor/author, Larry Siems, on NPR, I knew I had to read it. I am not a highly political person. I am not great with history. I don't understand all the nuances of the military. I also understand that there are people, foreigners, who would love nothing better than to blow up our country and wouldn't feel any remorse. However, the story of Mohamedou is so outlandish that it is hard to believe that we, as Americans, would be okay with this kind of treatment. Let's just say that one of our citizens was held captive (and I'm not naive enough to think that it doesn't still happen) under these conditions in another country for 13+ years, we would be up in arms. The injustice of it all would be all over the news. We are a better country than that. We are morally sensitive on so many issues that it is hard to believe we stoop so low in this regard. So why are we allowed to treat a prisoner this way? Primarily, I am so upset that he has never been charged. That there has been no obvious evidence all this time that actually links him to a terrorist activity. He was pulled from his family and has been brutally and unjustly treated for years. Again, I am not so naive that I don't think torture is going on for the sake of garnering information to protect our citizens. Some is expected and we tend to look the other way, the same way that we don't want to know about how our animals are slaughtered for consumption. I don't necessarily agree with it and it goes against the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of war. As quoted in the introduction, "Prisoners must at all times be humanly treated. Any unlawful act or omission by the Detaining Power causing death or seriously

endangering the health of a prisoner of war in custody will be prohibited, and will be regarded as a serious breach of the present Convention..."The Geneva Convention is violated almost daily with Mohamedou and many of his fellow prisoners. While I can't comment on the innocence of the others since they are not sharing their story, I can say that Mohamedou was granted a release by a federal judge 5 years ago and has yet to be released or even charged with a crime. So getting on to the story. Larry Siems has written a nice introduction. He has tried very hard to organize the information so that we have as much history and detail as possible. Mohamedou has also done a wonderful job of recounting the events of his life, sometimes in gruesome but not gratuitous detail. But the story is redacted, sometimes for three pages at a time, which makes for some stilted reading. Additionally, it jumps around in the timeline. After reading for a bit, it does get a little easier to stay on top of it but the redactions can be really frustrating at times. Mohamedou has a wonderful way of looking at things. He is a prisoner for no apparent reason. He is beaten, subjected to extreme temperatures, restraints, deprivation, seclusion and extreme isolation, interrogated for days, months, and years, and had other atrocities beyond imagination. But he looks for the positive things in his days. Being forced to sit blindfolded next to another prisoner which was comforting just because he was touching another human being. The occasional guard or interrogator with a bit more of a conscience, ones who treat him with a little more respect and humanity. The ability to have a conversation with anyone. He is, by his account, a decent, intelligent man who was just trying to live a normal life when he was suspected of being involved in the Millennium Plot. This is a hard read at times but Mohamedou presents it in such a way that he does not glorify or exaggerate. It is worth a read for us to open our eyes to the horrors of Guantanamo and probably many other prisons, including some housing Americans, under our care. We should be ashamed of the treatment of Mohamedou.

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