

A Cat May Look Upon a King, but Not at Gitmo

Daniel Mathews and Julian Assange
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“A Cat may look at a King, and a swaynes eye hath as high a reach as a Lords looke.”

— Robert Greene, *Never too Late* (1590)

This common saying, dating back at least to 1590, encapsulates one of the most basic notions of equality: anyone may, at least, look at anyone else, even a King.

But not at Camp Delta, Guantanamo Bay as of March 1, 2004.

On December 3, 2007 Wikileaks released the secret 2004 manual for the base, together with a detailed list of changes over its 2003 predecessor.

Between March 2003 and 2004, the SOP Manual added a new paragraph in section 11-5.

“Upon the approach of any Distinguished Visitor (DV), an escort team moving a detainee will stop movement and face the detainee away from the passing DV. Once the DV or DV party has passed, the escort team will resume movement of the detainee.”

This provision, while extreme, is in keeping with the spirit of the 2004 SOP Manual. In addition to prohibiting detainees from seeing high-ranking officials, the procedures reveal great efforts to keep detainees isolated, not just from each other, but from current events, the English language, and even basic general knowledge. Moreover, the 2004 manual goes to even greater extremes than the 2003 manual.

Section 15-9 of the manual prohibits detainees from reading books on certain topics. As in the 2003 manual, the 2004 manual prohibits English instruction materials.

In addition, both manuals prohibit reading of books on “extremism”, “anti-Semitism”, and “anti-Americanism”. With a broad interpretation, such stipulations could conceivably cover most books on US foreign policy.

But the 2004 manual adds new prohibitions on current periodicals, “Dictionaries”, “Language Instruction”, “Technology/Medical Updates”, “Geography”. Now even the definition of words themselves are contraband to Guantanamo detainees.