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After Abu Ghraib

Editorial
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IT MAY BE the first verdict, but it shouldn't be the last. The 10- year sentence given to Army prison guard Charles Graner Jr. doesn't close the book on the scandal of Abu Ghraib.

He deserved a tough sentence. He's featured in the notorious photos of a pyramid stack of Iraqi prisoners. He beat others with steel rods and forced prisoners to simulate sex acts. He doesn't merit sympathy, and his courtroom expressions of newfound dislike for his work ring hollow.

But he didn't dream up the idea of borderline torture. In his trial, the first court-martial to grow out of the Abu Ghraib disclosures of mistreatment, he claimed he was acting on orders from higher-ups in the chain of command.

He never proved his allegations, and no supporting witnesses were called. But past investigations and lawyers for other prison guards awaiting courts- martial make the same claim: The humiliations and beatings were directed practice.

If that's the case, the inquiry can't end with small-fry offenders like Graner and a handful of others who have pleaded guilty already. Who above him conceived of the rough handling, tolerated such cruelty or failed to intervene? How high up the chain of command should the blame go?

Official reports up to now have tiptoed to the brink of such essential questions. The generalized excuse is that the war on terrorism spawned a belief that tougher questioning of fanatics was needed. Beginning in Afghanistan, prisoners were treated harshly, conduct that spread to Guantanamo Bay and Iraq.

The graphic photos of Graner and fellow guards putting prisoners on dog leashes, under hoods or piled up naked have changed the atmosphere. But the damage is done. The world saw the shameful abuse that has generated a revulsion at the United States.

Americans deserve a fuller look at the episode. The military brass and civilian leaders who authorized Graner must be named and punished. Policies that make abuse part of military questioning must end. Graner can't be made a fall guy for a disastrous, inhumane policy.