

By Jordan Palmer

"Taxi to the Dark Side" is a 2007 Academy Award winning documentary focused on Guantanamo, Bagram and Abu Ghraib to expose the crimes against humanity which take place in these prisons. Recently, Amnesty International has been asking student leaders to host film screenings at their schools. I, personally, lead the Amnesty at the Lakeside School in Seattle, Washington and besides the screening I have hosted, I've attended another one at Mt. Si High School in North Bend, Washington. Of those I have evaluated, I have made a few observations of common reactions and general effects of the film on high school students.

First and foremost, everybody wants someone to blame. Even in the first twenty minutes or so, discussions focus on Lynndie England, and then as the movie progresses, the blame shifts higher through command and ultimately settles on Donald Rumsfeld and George W. Bush. One discrepancy, however, lies in the similarities between the trials and punishments of Guantanamo soldiers and the Nuremberg War Crime Trials. Sure, they were taking orders, but does this mean what they did wasn't wrong? Why should they not be tried like the Nazis? Ultimately, the discussions are more open-ended than conclusive when it comes to blame; where the real accomplishment exists is in the forum the film provides for discussion. For a multitude of factors — be it lack of information or for lack of opportunity, these conversations are of a variety rarely held openly between high school students. The fact that this movie alone impassions debates, critique, frustration — to a group of citizens ignored politically and voiceless in theory, is an impressive feat. But now that we know what is happening, who is at fault and who is at stake, and what can we do to stop it?

Unanimously, students—even those inexperienced with activism in general, immediately want something to do. The worst thing to do for this film screening would be to show up empty handed. Even if it is just signing a postcard for Barack Obama calling for an end to torture, students need to feel immediately empowered and understand that there is something they can do to help end US torture. This film pinpoints the problem and expresses the results so well that it encourages action, rather than helpless desperation and depression. Essentially, its depiction of torture as a contagious disease moves students to be the cure and this is what not only makes the movie so powerful but resultantly makes it an important movie for all audiences, but students specifically, to see.

