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Political Science

The Trial of Donald Rumsfeld: A Prosecution by Book
Michael Ratner
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Former officials of the Bush administration are guilty of war crimes because their aggressive interrogation techniques are torture, as defined in the Geneva Conventions and other legal statutes, the author claims. Michael Ratner, president of the Center for Constitutional Rights, a progressive legal organization that defends constitutional and human rights, further maintains that although President Bush and Vice President Cheney cannot be prosecuted because of their immunity as the head of state and successor to the head of state, respectively, they are unindicted co-conspirators who have actively encouraged the United States torture program in Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, Afghanistan, and other undisclosed sites.

The evidence against the Bush administration is presented as a trial that includes the opening statement, followed by the indictment, a statement for the defense, and concludes with the Center's rebuttal. Among the fourteen defendants charged are Former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld; Former CIA Director George Tenet; Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, commander of American forces in Iraq; and former White House Counsel and Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez, who authorized the torture methods used by Sanchez and his officers.

The book tells about the inhumane treatment of prisoners: torture techniques are graphically described in first person accounts. Several times the reader confronts stories of "human beings stripped, hung from ceilings, beaten, threatened and attacked by dogs, sexually abused, and waterboarded." A lengthy chapter presents the defendants' views in which former Secretary Rumsfeld and others maintain that they are not guilty of torture as the Bush administration defines it: "physical pain that leads to organ failure or death." The case for the defense is presented through several memos that conclude that the Bush administration did not have to adhere to the Geneva Conventions because the enemies were al-Qaeda and Taliban terrorists who did not serve legitimate nations. The concluding rebuttal challenges the defense for relying on false memos and "illegal lawyering," and forcefully asserts that the defendants are

guilty of war crimes.

This book reveals details about the cruel treatment of prisoners and how the Bush administration reinterpreted constitutional laws and precedents so that prisoner abuse could continue. However, the book also shows how difficult holding a trial is when no plaintiffs and defendants are present to answer charges. Overall, Ratner is effective in presenting his case to the jury of readers who would render a verdict. This controversial book will attract attention and readership in public libraries.

Karl Helicher