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RESPONSE PAPER #4

The torture and mistreatment of inmates at Abu Ghraib is the connotation many people get when they see the infamous “Hooded Man” photo. The story behind this photo is one of abuse of power by authoritative figures, murder, War, and corruption. To make matters worse, news outlets wrote articles without thorough fact check leading to the mis-identification of the man under the hood. This turned the photo into bigger mystery that became more baffling and shocking the more it is unraveled. With all the information presented to me in this reading, I always found this underlying idea Errol Morris subtly pushed on the reader; there is more that meets the eyes when it comes to photos and the importance of perception.

The name of the man that the news incorrectly identified as the hooded man was Ali Shalal Qaissi. His story was covered and published by Times journalist Hassan Fattah. What made Qaissi a prime suspect in the identity of the hooded man was his disfigured hand which somewhat mirrors that of the hooded man. It wasn't until some time after the release of the story to the public did Fattah confirm Qaissi was not the hooded man. However Errol Morris stressed that the discovery did not in anyway mean Qaissi was a liar, from his perception that photo could have easily been him. Qaissi was confirmed to be a prisoner who had extensive knowledge of what was going on in Abu Ghraib and a nickname “Dr. Claw” which was given to him due to his disfigured hand. He could've easily been the hooded man or an associate of his. A

reporter, Donovan Webster, even believed the identity of the hooded man was irrelevant altogether and the mistreatment is what people should be focused on. To people like Webster, they would see whoever they wanted to see when looking at the hooded man because it was never their intentions to find the real person.

Sabrina Harman was a soldier known to have played a role in the torture that happened in the Abu Ghraib facilities. What's more is a photo surfaced of her smiling with her thumbs up while standing right next to the corpse of an inmate. This made her a topic of deep research in Errol Morris's writing as he wanted to uncover the type of person she was. He believed there was more to her than what was in that specific photograph which he himself admits is disturbing. Errol interviewed her, where she states the thumbs up and smile was a result of force of habit & utter disbelief that the inmate was murdered. Morris confirmed this through multiple pictures of Harman in different circumstances where she does that same habitual act and Morris even interviewed a facial expression specialist just to confirm her smile in the photo wasn't genuine. Morris goes out of his way shed light into her life; a gay female soldier trying to earn respect in the military, a loving wife and a person with a conscious. From the photo of her with the dead body alone, I as a reader already made my assumptions about what type of person she must've been without giving her a chance.

Through that, Morris taught me to be more analytical and cautious about placing bias off a photo with no context. It is very easy that way to brand something and someone, spreading the ignorance of falsehood with other people. Through Photographs, it is easy to form perceptions or quickly form our own truths when no

context is given, but we mustn't follow those way of thinking if we want to be successful at observing photographs.