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The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned into a War on American Ideals by Jane Mayer - Doubleday, 2008

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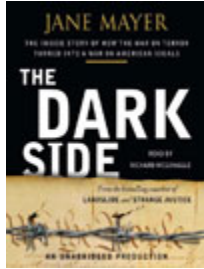
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The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned into a War on American Ideals

by Jane Mayer, Doubleday 2008

Reviewed by William Watts

Mayer's book is important, and will be of interest to anyone who is concerned about the health of our Republic.

Drawing on a series of articles she published in the New Yorker, Mayer knits together into one compelling narrative the interlocking stories of aggressive interrogation methods used at Guantanamo, the abuses at Abu Ghraib, extraordinary rendition, Supreme Court rulings protecting the rights of prisoners, and Congressional efforts to outlaw torture.

The good news in Mayer's account is that many patriotic Americans tried along the way to stop our descent into becoming a nation that tortures. The bad news is that the defenders of human rights and our Constitution almost always lost.

Mayer is very careful both in documenting the actions she recounts, and in drawing conclusions about those actions. It is very hard to read this book, however, and escape the conclusion that Dick Cheney and David Addington, his former legal counsel, have, at the very least, failed to keep their pledge to preserve and defend the Constitution, and it seems likely that George W. Bush and Alberto Gonzales are also culpable.

In a season when Sarah Palin can declare, casually, that "Al-Qaida terrorists still plot to inflict catastrophic harm on America" and Senator Obama is "worried that someone won't read them their rights," we should all be deeply concerned about the culture of torture and abuse documented in Mayer's book.

- William Watts is associate professor of English at Butler University.