

JODIE
FOSTER

TAHAR
RAHIM

WITH
SHAIENE
WOODLEY

AND
BENEDICT
CUMBERBATCH

THE MAURITANIAN

BOHEMIST TOPIC JICA



Viewing and Discussion Guide: *The Mauritanian*

Prepared by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture

We invite your faith community or other community group to encourage individuals to watch *The Mauritanian*. This guide provides suggestions for a group discussion and opportunities for people to take action in support of closing Guantanamo and ending indefinite detention.

Synopsis of the film

The Mauritanian tells the story of Mohamedou Ould Slahi and his fight for freedom after being detained, tortured, and imprisoned without charge in Guantanamo. Tahar Rahim (Golden Globe nominee), Jodie Foster (Golden Globe winner) and Benedict Cumberbatch star in the film, which accurately depicts both the torture and other inhumane treatment inflicted upon Guantanamo detainees, and the Kafkaesque lengths that the U.S. government has gone to keep them locked up regardless of their guilt or innocence.

How you can see the film

The Mauritanian is available to stream on numerous services including Amazon, Apple TV, Google Play, and YouTube.

You can see the trailer for the film and options for streaming it at <https://www.themauritanian.movie/>

Warning: *The Mauritanian* contains graphic portrayals of the torture that was inflicted upon detainees in Guantanamo and is rated R. While the acts depicted are accurate representations of torture that actually happened, they may be disturbing to some viewers.

UPDATED JANUARY 2022

Background

Mohamedou Ould Slahi is a Mauritanian man who was imprisoned indefinitely, without charge or trial, in Guantanamo Bay from 2002 until 2016. While imprisoned, Mohamedou was subjected to beatings, sexual humiliation, extreme temperatures, a mock execution, and prolonged isolation, among other forms of torture.

Mohamedou wrote five books while in Guantanamo, one of which, *Guantanamo Diary*, became an international bestseller. He has not been allowed to publish or access the other books he wrote in Guantanamo.

The detention center at Guantanamo Bay was opened by the Bush Administration on Jan. 11, 2002. The Bush Administration chose Guantanamo as a site to imprison suspected terrorists, rather than holding them in the U.S. proper, because Guantanamo is located on land the U.S. leases from the Cuban government. The Bush Administration claimed that by holding prisoners on Cuban land, they would not be protected by U.S. law or international treaties and could be tortured and otherwise abused.

After several years during which Guantanamo detainees were tortured by both the military and the CIA, President Obama ordered an end to the torture program on his second full day in office. In 2015, with support from NRCAT and people of faith from around the country, Senator John McCain and Senator Dianne Feinstein led the Congress to pass a law clearly banning the CIA and the military from ever again engaging in torture.

Following public revelations about how detainees were treated in Guantanamo and their long-running detention without trial, Guantanamo became internationally recognized as a place where the U.S. abandoned the values that it proclaims to the world. Ultimately, the Bush Administration and the Obama Administration both decided independently that the prison at Guantanamo should be closed. Between those two Administrations, well over 700 Guantanamo detainees (almost all of whom were never charged with or tried for any crime) were transferred out of Guantanamo.

It now costs roughly \$13 million per detainee per year to run the prison at Guantanamo – or over half a billion dollars per year in total. There are 39 detainees left in Guantanamo. 13 have been cleared by the U.S. government to leave the prison but are still there as they wait for the U.S. State Department to negotiate a country to send them to. Other Guantanamo detainees await their chance to leave, either by being cleared for not being a future security risk, as a result of plea deals, or in order to finally receive a trial in U.S. courts.

After you've seen the film

1. **Sign our petition** calling for Guantanamo to be closed.
2. **Promote the film on social media.** We have sample tweets/posts you can customize.
3. **Write to your Members of Congress** and ask them to support closing Guantanamo.
4. **Write a letter-to-the-editor** about the importance of closing Guantanamo (we have talking points available).

For these actions and more information, go to:

www.nrcat.org/TheMauritanian

Spoilers

The character of Nancy Hollander, Mohamedou's real-life attorney played by Jodie Foster, appears to begin *The Mauritanian* by assuming Mohamedou is guilty, although she later seems to re-evaluate that conclusion. The character of Stuart Couch, Mohamedou's real-life prosecutor played by Benedict Cumberbatch, also appears to believe that Mohamedou is guilty. As the movie progresses though, his evangelical Christian faith leads him to conclude that irrespective of a person's guilt or innocence, no one should ever be treated like Mohamedou was. As the evidence of torture is exposed, both attorneys realize that the U.S. government's use of torture on Mohamedou makes a fair trial impossible.

This encapsulates the real issues faced by the 39 men left in prison in Guantanamo today. Many people assume that they are guilty, not because they have been convicted of any crime, but rather because they are in Guantanamo. Further, even if some are guilty of something, it may be impossible for them to receive a fair trial after having been tortured by our government. Evidence obtained through torture is not admissible in a fair court and is notoriously unreliable since prisoners will say or admit to anything, whether true or not, to make torture stop.

This movie shows above all that regardless of their guilt or innocence, those held at Guantanamo are human beings and none of them deserved to be tortured. Instead, if they are suspected of committing a crime, they should receive a fair trial and should otherwise be released. This is why we must close Guantanamo. It is a place where our government tortured prisoners and almost everyone there has been held for nearly two decades without a trial. It was wrong to open a prison at Guantanamo in the first place, it was wrong to torture prisoners there, and it was wrong to hold prisoners for years and now decades without trial. It is our moral duty to close Guantanamo now.

Discussion Questions

Zoom and similar platforms allow for fruitful virtual discussions. You can use these questions in a one-time event or with an already formed film discussion group where people watch the film independently and then gather for discussion. Depending on the size of the group, you may want to have the participants discuss one or more of these questions in pairs or threes, rather than as a large group.

1. What scene in the film most caught your attention and why?
2. The attacks of 9/11 are still a defining moment for many in the U.S. and the world. After seeing the film, what would you say to someone who believes that the U.S. government was justified in responding to these attacks by torturing people?
3. How was faith portrayed in the film? Choose a character in the film, imagine what it would be like to be in their position, and describe how their faith influenced their actions.
4. The film showed both brutal acts of torture and acts of decency and humanity. Which affected you more and why?
5. Was the torture portrayed in this film designed to gather intelligence or was it something else, and what should be done to ensure that the U.S. never does this again?