

A Question of Torture

May 1, 2009



TORTURE
and the soul of a people



Remembering Those Who Suffered

The recent release of [Bush Administration memos](#) regarding “harsh interrogation techniques,” has prompted a national discussion in recent weeks about the U.S. government’s use of torture. For many Latin Americans, however, this discussion hits close to home.

It’s long been understood that the U.S. tacitly condoned the use of torture, even taught its techniques — when the Cold War saw the Central Intelligence Agency supporting right wing and military dictatorships throughout the hemisphere to combat the grassroots threat from the political left.

Throughout the 1970s and 80s, Latin American survivors of torture came to the U.S. for safety, survival, and healing.



Filmmaker Juan Mandelbaum

One of those who escaped is Juan Mandelbaum, a writer and filmmaker. Mandelbaum left his native Argentina when the military dictatorship cracked down on leftist thought and culture. When Mandelbaum returned to find out whatever happened to some of his childhood friends who remained, the result was the documentary film titled, “Our Disappeared.” The documentary will air on the PBS series “Independent Lens” in September.

LISTEN TO THE EXTENDED INTERVIEW:

Audio clip: Adobe Flash Player (version 9 or above) is required to play this audio clip. Download the latest version [here](#). You also need to have JavaScript enabled in your browser.

WATCH AN EXCERPT FROM JUAN MANDELBAUM’S FILM:



[Our Disappeared/Nuestros Disaparecidos](#) from [NPR's Latino USA](#) on [Vimeo](#).



listen to this week’s program


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Juan Mandelbaum has been recognized as a documentary filmmaker, and has also worked as teacher, curator and consultant. 

Sister Jean Abbott is the founding clinician for the Center for Survivors of Torture and War Trauma based in St. Louis. 

María Emilia Martin is a pioneering Latina public radio journalist with over thirty years of experience in her field. 

Sister Dianna Ortiz is an Ursuline nun and a human rights activist and advocate for victims of torture. 



further reading

- > UN Convention Against Torture
- > Break Them Down: Use of Torture by US Forces (.pdf)

- › Against Forgetting: 20th Century Poetry of Witness
- › A Guide to the Memos on Torture



more info from the web

- › Physicians for Human Rights
- › School of the Americas Watch
- › Website "Our Disappeared"
- › Casa Ursulina
- › Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet
- › Center for Survivors of Torture & War Trauma
- › Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition
- › Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo

Helping Torture Victims

Healing from torture is complicated. Each case is different. Each person, including torture perpetrators, has different reactions. And in truth, some people never fully recover. According to the Center for Survivors of Torture and War Trauma, traumatic incidents of torture and violence leave lasting symptoms of paralyzing anxiety, grief, and hopelessness, as well as flashbacks, night terrors, and intrusive memories. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can be extremely debilitating and prevent many from living normal lives.

Sister Jean Abbott is the Clinical Director for the Center for Survivors of Torture and War Trauma based in St. Louis. The center provides free psychological and emotional healing counseling for refugee and immigrant survivors of torture and war trauma by providing them with culturally-appropriate mental health services, and through advocacy and community education.



Sr. Jean Abbott

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Web-Extra: Who Were the Torturers?

In the year 2000, *Latino USA's* founding Executive Producer Maria E. Martin won the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award for her investigative radio documentary titled: "The Betrayal of Sister Dianna Ortiz." Martin revealed new information from a former federal agent about the torture of a U.S. nun in Guatemala, ten years after she was kidnapped, tortured and raped by individuals she believes were members of the Guatemalan military. Sister Ortiz accused the U.S. government of suppressing knowledge about her torturers. *Latino USA's* special, which aired in November 1999 on National Public Radio (NPR), reported revelations about the U.S. government's involvement with this incident and with repressive Latin American military regimes.



Sr. Dianna Ortiz

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The Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Awards honor journalists for their reporting on people living at the margins of society, such as children living in poverty, immigrant workers, victims of violence or environmental pollution, people with disabilities, and prison inmates.

Artists Respond to Torture



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- Read an excerpt from Seamus Heaney’s “The Cure at Troy.” (.pdf)
- See a higher-resolution image of Picasso’s “Guernica.”
- Read Miklós Radnóti’s poem “Forced March.” (.pdf)
- Listen to Victor Jara’s song “Cuando Voy al Trabajo.” (.mp3) | Read the lyrics. (.pdf)
- Read Carolyn Forché’s poem “The Colonel.” (.pdf) *[contains explicit language]*

UPDATE: [Charge in Death of Victor Jara](#) (28 May 2009)

Continue [the conversation](#) at the *Latino USA* Blog. We want to hear from you.