

# Teaching about Torture: A Few Key Facts

## Directions:

*With a partner, put a T (true) or F (false) before each statement. If you are unsure or can't agree with each other, put a ? (unsure).*

- \_\_\_ 1. About 100 countries in the world practice torture.
- \_\_\_ 2. Torture has never been legal in the United States.
- \_\_\_ 3. U.S. first became involved in torture immediately after 9/11.
- \_\_\_ 4. Isolation units, supermax prisons, sensory deprivation and use of torture devices such as stun guns and restraint chairs have become increasingly common in U.S. prisons.
- \_\_\_ 5. Most experts agree that the information gained through torture is unreliable.
- \_\_\_ 6. Recent research supports the Justice Department's 2002 memo contending that only acts that cause pain "equivalent in intensity to pain accompanying serious physical injury, such as organ failure impairment of bodily function, or even death," should be considered torture.
- \_\_\_ 7. The FBI, from 1942 to 2002 controlled counter-intelligence operations using "empathetic interrogation" building rapport instead of torturing.
- \_\_\_ 8. There are currently about 200,000 survivors of torture in the U.S.
- \_\_\_ 9. The School of Americas, renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, has trained over 60,000 Latin American soldiers.
- \_\_\_ 10. Since both the U.S. Constitution and international treaties prohibit torture, American intelligence officials who torture are at risk of prosecution.
- \_\_\_ 11. The International Red Cross has confirmed that once-covert CIA procedures have become standard doctrine in U.S. detention centers worldwide and are an "intentional system of cruel, unusual and degrading treatment and a form of torture."
- \_\_\_ 12. Pentagon reports indicate that almost 50% of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, many of whom were abused and tortured, were not guilty of anything.
- \_\_\_ 13. The International Criminal Court inaugurated in 2002 prosecutes war crimes and other acts against humanity when no individual government will bring charges against the perpetrators.
- \_\_\_ 14. In June 2006 the Supreme Court in Hamden v. Rumsfeld ruled that U.S. procedure for holding and trying Guantanamo prisoners violated federal laws and the Geneva Conventions.

\_\_\_ 15. More than one-third of U.S. soldiers in Iraq surveyed by the Army said they believe torture should be allowed.

\_\_\_ 16. Research shows that TV shows such as "24" that idealize the effectiveness of torture are understood to be fantasy and have little impact on attitudes toward torture.

\_\_\_ 17. U. S. medical personnel have been complicit in torture and the dehumanization of prisoners.

# Teaching about Torture: A Few Key Facts Answer Key

1. **FALSE.** 132 countries, close to two-thirds, practice torture.  
William Schulz, *What Torture Has Taught Me*. UU World, Winter 2006.
2. **TRUE.** In fact many immigrants came to the U.S. to escape torture and oppressive regimes. However, the CIA operates almost exclusively outside our borders and has escaped the moral and legal confines of the constitution in utilizing torture.  
Jennifer K. Harbury, *Truth, Torture, and the American Way*, p.108.
3. **FALSE.** Alfred W. McCoy documents how CIA torture methods have developed inside the U.S. intelligence community over the past half century including extensive funding for university research on psychological interrogation methods.  
*A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation, from the Cold War to the War on Terror*, 2006.
4. **TRUE.** See documentation in *The Prison Inside the Prison: Control Units, Supermax Prisons, and Devices of Torture*, R. Kamel and B. Kerness, American Friends Service Committee, 2003.  
See also, H. Bruce Franklin, *The American Prison and the Normalization of Torture in Torture, American Style, American Historians Against War*, 2006.
5. **TRUE.** McCoy, p. 118 ff. Also, John McCain, "...mistreatment of prisoners is not productive...You don't get information that's usable from people under torture, because they tell you what you want to hear." Quoted in *The Torture Debate in America*, p. 253.
6. **FALSE.** Recent research - reported in the Archives of General Psychiatry by Metin Bosoglu at the Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College, London, found that humiliating treatment, verbal abuse, isolation, threats against family etc. produce the same long-term mental trauma as physical torture.
7. **TRUE.** In fact there has been frequent conflict between the CIA's use of extralegal methods and the FBI's insistence on methods using effective non-coercive questioning. McCoy, p.118; 196.
8. **FALSE.** Over 400,000 torture survivors from around the world currently live in the U.S. Karen Hansom, Advocates for Survivors of Torture and Trauma.
9. **TRUE.** The film "*Hidden in Plain Sight*" documents the abuses by soldiers trained by at the school as well as the annual protest against the school by about 20,000 thousand U.S. citizens annually. See also Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *School of the Assassins: Guns, Greed, and Globalization*, 2001.
10. **FALSE.** A number of U.S. documents have exonerated potential torturers. See for example, self-defense argument of Assistant Attorney General Jay S. Bybee: "If a government defendant were to harm an enemy combatant during an interrogation...he would be doing so in order to prevent further attacks on the United States by the al Qaeda terrorist network. *The Terrorist Debate in America*, p. 357.

11. **TRUE.** In fact the Red Cross visits found that between 2002 and 2004 the psychological techniques had grown "more refined and repressive" involving 'humiliating acts, solitary confinement, temperature extremes and use of forced positions." McCoy, p 156-7.
12. **FALSE.** (Trick question!) The pentagon estimated that up to 90% were not guilty.
13. **TRUE.** However, the United States has refused to join the court, fearing prosecutions of its soldiers and political officials including 350,000 U.S. troops in 130 countries. *Great Decisions* 2007 edition, Foreign Policy Association, p.67.
14. **TRUE.** But the 2006 Military Commissions Act virtually authorizes the tribunals the Court had outlawed several months earlier. There is pressure on both the courts and on congress to invalidate the act. *Great Decisions* p. 73.
15. **TRUE.** In addition two-thirds of Marines and half the Army troops surveyed said they would not report a team member for mistreating a civilian. Less than half believed that non-combatants should be treated with dignity and respect. About 10 percents reported that they had mistreated civilians in Iraq. Thomas E. Ricks and Ann Scott Tyson, *The Washington Post*, May 5, 2007.
16. **FALSE.** According to Jane Mayer, *New Yorker*, February 19, 2007, West Point Dean Dan Patrick Finnigan (accompanied by former interrogator and current anti-torture activist Tony Lagouranis) told the show's producers that "24" undermines the West Point curriculum that teaches torture is illegal and furthermore, doesn't work.
17. **TRUE.** In spite of codes of ethics by the American Medical Association and other professional groups, U.S. medical personnel collaborate with torturers by monitoring and treating persons during interrogations, concealing evidence of abuse, and keeping silent as their imprisoned patients are abused. Steven H. Miles, *Oath Betrayed: Torture, Medical Complicity, and the War on Terror*, reported in *Tikkun*, May/June, 2007, p.40ff.

# Teaching about Torture: A Few Key Dates

## 1215:

- Magna Charta – the great "charter of English liberties" guarantees *habeas corpus*: the right to challenge one's imprisonment.

## 1907:

- Fourth Hague Convention prohibits torture of captured combatants.

## 1947:

- CIA established; supports research on alternative/psychological means of interrogation.

## 1948:

- Birth of modern human rights movement with adoption of United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights:  
*"No one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment."*

## 1949:

- Geneva Conventions, article 3, prohibits:
  - violence to life and person
  - taking of hostages
  - outrages upon personal dignity, humiliating and degrading treatment

## 1944 - 1954:

- U.S. complicit in torture in Guatemala/Nicaragua.

## 1950:

- Nuremberg Trials establish principle that "individuals have international duties which transcend the national obligations of obedience imposed by the individual state."  
Article 8: "The fact that a person acted pursuant to order of his Government or of a superior does not relieve him from responsibility under international law, provided a moral choice was in fact possible to him."

## 1960's:

- CIAs *KUBARK Counter-intelligence Interrogation Manual* is written for use by US agents against communists subversion. CIA trains police officers in Asia; US Army's PROJECT X provides Interrogation training around world.

## 1976:

- President Ford signs order banning assassinations.

**1980's:**

- CIA complicit in torture by Commandos in El Salvador.

**1984:**

- UN Convention Against Torture; ratified by Congress in 1994; is currently ratified by 130 countries. Defines torture as any infliction of severe mental or physical pain for the purposes of punishment or of obtaining information or a confession.

**1996:**

- U.S. Statute 18 USC2340 – "War Crimes Act" – makes torture a felony.

**1999:**

- General Pinochet, Chilean dictator, charged with torture is denied immunity. This establishes the concept of "universal jurisdiction."

**2000:**

- President Bush describes an "Axis of Evil" in his Inaugural Address.

**2001:**

- Following protests, School of America is closed and opens 6 weeks later as Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation.

**2002:**

- President Bush declares that when it comes to Al Qaeda the Geneva Conventions are applicable only at his discretion. The Defense Department claims, "Any effort by Congress to regulate the interrogation of unlawful combatants would violate the Constitution which vests sole authority to the Commander-in-Chief."
- FBI - which is averse to torture - is stripped of its lead role in counter-intelligence and control over Al-Qaeda suspects is given to CIA.

**2003:**

- Commander for Iraq, General Ricardo, issues order for psychological torture combining sensory deprivation, self-inflicted pain, and cultural humiliation.

**2004:**

- Supreme Court in Hamdi v. Rumsfeld states that "enemy combatants" captured in hostilities can be held for duration of war (in Afghanistan).
- Supreme Court rules in Rasul v. Bush that Guantanamo detainees are on American territory and deserve access to U.S. courts.
- Red Cross after repeated visits to U.S. prisons concludes the system "cannot be considered other than an intentional system of cruel, unusual and degrading treatment and a form of torture."
- ABC News poll finds 35% of Americans believe torture is acceptable in some circumstances.

**2006:**

- UN Human Rights Commission releases report branding U.S. treatment of Guantanamo detainees "torture." UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan calls for U.S. to close Guantanamo.
- Military Commissions Act – The Bush Administration and Senate agree on legislation that sanctions secret CIA prisons and permits interrogation methods that violate the Geneva Conventions.
- Defense Authorization Act – Allows the President to declare a "Public Emergency" and station troops anywhere in the U.S. without consent of the governor or local authorities.

**2007:**

- Senator Arlen Specter introduces Habeas Corpus Restoration Act.