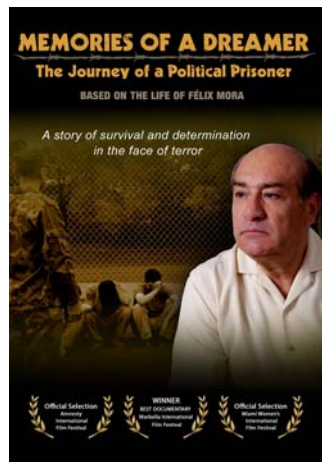




MEMORIES OF A DREAMER

The Journey of a Political Prisoner

Based on the Life of Félix Mora



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Memories of a Dreamer: The Journey of a Political Prisoner

Map of Chile



Background

Location: Southern South America

Area: 756,102 sq km

Population: 16,601,707 (July, 2009)

Ethnic Groups: White, white-Amerindian, Mapuche, other indigenous groups

Languages: Spanish (official), Mapudungun, German, English

Religions: Roman Catholic, Evangelical Christian, Jehovah's Witness

Literacy: 95.7%

Capital: Santiago

Border Countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Peru

Geography: strategic location close to sea lanes between Atlantic and Pacific Oceans (Strait of Magellan, Beagle Channel, Drake Passage)

Government Type: Republic

Head of State: President Sebastián Piñera

Labor: 64% service, 13% agriculture, 23% industrial; 10% unemployment

Population below poverty line: 18.2 %

Timeline of Significant Events in Chilean History

- 1535: Indigenous Mapuche groups resist first Spanish invasion
- 1541: Spanish conquest, led by Pedro de Valdivia. Founds city of Santiago
- 1553: Mapuche uprising leads to capture and killing of Valdivia
- 1810: King of Spain overthrown by Napoleon, military Junta in Santiago proclaims independence for Chile
- 1811: Jose Miguel Carrera establishes military dictatorship
- 1814: Chile returns to Spanish rule
- 1817: Army of Andes, led by Jose de San Martin and Bernardo O'Higgins, defeat Spanish at the battles of Chacabuco and Maipu
- 1818: Chilean Independence declared, O'Higgins becomes supreme leader, begins liberal reforms aimed against church and aristocracy
- 1823: O'Higgins resigns
- 1823 – 30: Civil war between liberal federalists and conservative centralists; ends with conservative victory
- 1879 – 84: Chile expands borders after a victory against Peru and Bolivia in the War of the Pacific
- 1883: Occupation of Araucanía completed
- 1891: Chilean Revolution leads to beginning of “Parliamentarism,” position of president becomes figurehead
- 1927: Carlos Ibáñez del Campo stages a coup and establishes a dictatorship that lasts until 1931. Creates military police.
- 1948 - 58: Under pressure from the US, communist party banned, followers placed in concentration camps.
- 1952: Carlos Ibáñez del Campo returns to power
- 1960: Earthquake rocks Chile, registers 9.5 on the Moment Magnitude Scale
- 1970: Salvador Allende becomes first democratically elected Marxist President in the Americas, begins a program of nationalization and radical social reform
- 1973: Armed forces, backed by the CIA, stage a coup that overthrows Allende and places Augusto Pinochet into power. Allende died during the coup and Pinochet's regime claimed he committed suicide. The repression of leftists and other opponents of Pinochet resulted in approximately 130,000 arrests and over 3,000 dead or missing over the next three years, including Félix Mora who is arrested in 1973
- 1977: Chile gains Picton, Nueva and Lennox islands in the Beagle Conflict with Argentina
- 1989: General Pinochet loses referendum on whether he should remain in power
- 1989: Patricio Aylwin wins presidential election
- 1990: General Pinochet steps down as head of state, remains commander-in-chief of army
- 1998: General Pinochet retires from the army, is named senator for life. He is arrested in the UK, on Spain's request, for murder charges. Placed under house arrest in London
- 2000: Pinochet released from prison on medical grounds, returns to Chile without facing trial. Chilean congress votes to give him title of “ex-president” and immunity from prosecution. However, charges are brought against him for kidnapping
- 2002: Supreme Court dismisses Pinochet's indictment, citing dementia
- 2004: Supreme Court overturns their 2002 decision
- 2005: Chilean Army accepts institutional responsibility for past human rights abuses
- 2006: Pinochet indicted on counts of kidnapping and torture, placed under house arrest
- December 10, 2006: International Human Rights Day, death of Pinochet by natural causes.
- 2010: Earthquake registering 8.8 hits Chile

Vocabulary:

Dictatorship: Form of absolute rule by leadership without regard to law or constitutions, often put in place by force

Socialism: Political and economic theory of social organization that advocates collective or governmental ownership of the means of production and distribution of goods

Coup d'état: Sudden, often violent, overthrow of an existing government

Asylum: Protection granted by a nation to someone who has left their country as a political refugee

Exile: The state of being barred by one's native country, often for political reasons

Glossary:

Félix Mora: A member of Chile's socialist party who was arrested and tortured after Pinochet's coup. Mora managed to escape imprisonment and lived in exile in Italy and Canada. While in exile, he promoted awareness of, and resistance to, Pinochet's dictatorship.

Augusto Pinochet: (November 25, 1915 – December 10, 2006) A Chilean army general who became the president following a coup d'état in 1973. Among his titles, he was the Commander-in-Chief of the Chilean army from 1973 to 1998, president of the Government Junta of Chile from 1973 – 1974, and President of the Republic from 1974 – 1990. Pinochet was responsible for the exile, torture, and death of thousands of Chilean citizens.

Socialist Youth of Chile: Chilean youth organization dedicated to learning about and practicing socialist ideals

Human Rights: As laid out in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948, these are the basic rights and freedoms to which all people are entitled. This includes protection against slavery, torture, arbitrary arrest, forced exile, and discrimination.

DINA: Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (English: *National Intelligence Directorate*) was the Chilean secret police during the Pinochet government. Under decree #521, the DINA had the power to detain any individual so long as there was a state of emergency, as there was during most of Pinochet's regime. Torture and Rape of detainees was common.

Operation Condor: A political repression campaign involving assassinations and intelligence gatherings. Implemented in 1975 by right-wing governments in South America, Operation Condor aimed to eradicate alleged socialist and communist influence and ideas and to control active or potential opposition movements against the participating governments. Condor's key members were the governments in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Brazil. The United States participated in a supervisory capacity. The number of deaths due to Operation Condor is unknown, however, it is believed to be over sixty thousand.

Plebiscite: The direct vote of all the members of an electorate with regards to a matter of national importance

Military Junta: Government led by a committee of military leaders

Memories of a Dreamer: Introduction

“Memories of a Dreamer” combines archival material and interviews to examine the story of Félix Mora, a Chilean exile in Canada who suffered torture and human rights abuses under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.

After the first democratic election of a socialist government in Chile in 1970, Salvador Allende assumed power as the President of Chile. However, by 1973, Allende’s government was overthrown by the military, and Augusto Pinochet stepped into power. Pinochet argued that he acted to protect Chile from the threat of Marxism. The US supported such dictatorships throughout Latin America during the Cold War as a way of limiting socialist influence in the Americas. Although the United States publically denounced the Pinochet regime, declassified documents have highlighted the role of the US in providing economic support to Pinochet and his troops, which helped Pinochet stay in power until 1990.

Shortly after the September 1973 coup, police arrested Mora for his activities within the socialist party. Mora was taken with other political prisoners to the National Stadium. What was once the site of Chile’s favorite pastime became under Pinochet the largest detention camp in Santiago. Inside the camp, particularly within the area known as the “snail shell,” guards routinely beat, tortured, and killed prisoners. Also imprisoned was Mora’s young neighbor, Jorge Aro. Pinochet’s regime routinely carried out human rights violations against Chilean youth, as evidence by the fact that 9.7% of the detainees at the National Stadium were between 18 and 20 years of age, and 4% were under 18. Pinochet managed to hide these abuses and prisoners from much of the international community, including inspectors from the FIFA who inspected the stadium for a World Cup qualifying match without realizing that the prisoners were hidden within.

Although it seemed that Mora didn’t stand a chance of escaping the stadium alive, a bout of typhus allowed him to be placed under house arrest. With the help of his party and encouragement of his family, Mora and others snuck into the Italian embassy and began a life in exile. First in Italy and then Canada, Mora attempted to adjust to life in a new country while reflecting on those he had left behind and dreaming of one day returning to a liberated Chile.

In exile, Mora worked to organize opposition to the Pinochet regime, something that would have been impossible to do inside Chile. By continuing his efforts against Pinochet’s oppressive regime, Mora felt that he was still a part of Chile. In 1977, Mora moved to Canada, where knowledge of the atrocities carried out by the Chilean dictator was virtually unknown. As a result, he and other Chilean exiles raised awareness of Pinochet’s human rights violations by speaking at universities, raising money to send delegates to Chile and write reports to the UN, and organizing solidarity groups.

Confidant that the masses supported his policies of economic and social reform, in 1989 Pinochet called for a plebiscite to determine if he would remain in power in accordance with the 1980 constitution. When the majority voted against a renewal of Pinochet’s term as president, he stepped down from the office, but remained commander-in-chief of the army.

Even after the Pinochet regime ended, it still maintained a firm grip on Chilean society. People had become accustomed to being silenced by the regime and this silence continued. Many citizens were not fully aware of all that had occurred during the dictatorship, and when Mora returned to reunite with his family, he was surprised to discover that those in exile had a more thorough understanding of what had happened in Chile than did those who remained in the country. Mora recognized Chile’s need to come to terms with its past, stating: “Only when society restores its memory and the guilty ones are punished, this country will be able to heal itself and move forward. Otherwise, it will be impossible. So the country that I found was one that ignored many of the things that had happened.”

The extent of human rights violations carried out under Pinochet is still being uncovered. While the number of deaths caused by the Pinochet regime remains unclear (as records were not always kept and many bodies were never recovered), estimates range from 1,500 to over 3,000 deaths and up to 29,000 people tortured.

Pinochet's legacy in Chile remained mixed after the coup, and many Chileans attempted to erase this tumultuous past from their memory and their history. When he retired from the army in 1998, he was named a senator for life, and his crimes against the Chilean people went unpunished. After his arrest on murder charges in London in 1998, on the request of a Spanish judge, Pinochet was placed under house arrest. By 2000, he was released on medical grounds and permitted to return to Chile, where both supporters and protestors greeted him. The Chilean Congress voted to give him the title of "ex-president" and immunity from prosecution, however, a member of the Supreme Court filed charges against Pinochet for kidnapping. In 2002, the Supreme Court dismissed Pinochet's indictment, citing his worsening dementia, however this decision was overturned two years later.

In 2004, under the presidency of Ricardo Lagos, the government of Chile officially recognized crimes committed during the dictatorship and began compiling testimonies in order to create the Torture Victims Report. In 2005, the Chilean Army accepted institutional responsibility for past human rights abuses, however, Pinochet himself had not yet recognized the atrocities carried out in his name. It was only in 2006, after being indicted on counts of kidnapping and torture and placed under house arrest, that Pinochet released a public statement admitting responsibility for his actions. Pinochet died of a heart attack just a few weeks later, on December 10, 2006, which is also International Human Rights Day.

Discussion Questions

- What is the role of torture?
- Why is torture sometimes used as a strategy of war?
- Compare the torture strategies from the film to those used by the Bush administration against terror suspects.
- What are human rights?
- How can human rights be applied to political prisoners?
- What are the psychological, emotional, and/or social implications of being a political prisoner? Give examples of the aforementioned implications from the film.
- How did Pinochet stay in power for so long? How was he able to sustain so many human rights violations?
- How did the Pinochet regime impact different groups within Chilean society (ex: those in power, political prisoners, exiles, those who remained in Chile under his rule, the elite)?
- Why did the United States support Pinochet if he was a violent dictator?
- How did life in exile change Mora? What opportunities did he have in exile that he would not have been able to have in Chile?
- Why did Mora not return to Chile after the end of the Pinochet era? What does Mora mean when he makes a distinction between physical and emotional exile?
- In the film, Mora emphasizes the need for Chile to come to terms with its past. Why is it so important for a country to recognize and remember its history? How have other countries, such as Germany or South Africa, dealt with the question of historical memory?
- What do you think would have been an appropriate method for holding Pinochet and others responsible for their crimes? Should there have been a trial? Public hearings? Official investigations? Who should have been involved?

Additional Resources:

Online:

- <http://www.remember-chile.org.uk/index.htm>
- <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB212/index.htm>
- http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/latin_america/chile.htm
- <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR22/001/1996/en/18158e6b-eb11-11dd-aad1-ed57e7e5470b/amr220011996en.html>
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