



State Terrorism in Latin America: Chile, Argentina, and International Human Rights (Latin American Silhouettes)

By Thomas C. Wright

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Set in the larger context of the evolution of international human rights, this cogent book examines the tragic development and ultimate resolution of Latin America's human rights crisis of the 1970s and 1980s. Thomas Wright focuses especially on state terrorism in Chile under General Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990) and in Argentina during the Dirty War (1976–1983). The author probes the background of these regimes, the methodology of state terrorism, and the human rights movements that emerged in urgent response to the brutality of institutionalized torture, murder, and disappearance. He also discusses the legacies of state terrorism in the post-dictatorial period, particularly the bitter battle between demands for justice and the military's claim of impunity. Central to this struggle was the politics of memory as two radically different versions of the countries' recent history clashed: had the militaries conducted legitimate wars against subversion or had they exercised terrorism based on a misguided concept of national security?

The book offers a nuanced exploration of the reciprocal relationship between state terrorism and its legacies, on one hand, and international human rights on the other. When the Chilean and Argentine militaries seized power, the international human rights lobby was too weak to prevent the massive toll of state terrorism. But the powerful worldwide response to these regimes ultimately strengthened international human rights treaties, institutions, and jurisprudence, paving the way for the Rwanda and Yugoslavia genocide tribunals and the International Criminal Court. Indeed, Chile and Argentina today routinely try and convict former repressors in their own courts.

This compelling history demonstrates that the experiences of Chile and Argentina contributed to strengthening the international human rights movement, which in turn gave it the influence to affect the outcome in these two South American countries. Ironically, the brutal regimes of Chile and Argentina played the major role in transforming a largely dormant international lobby into a powerful force that today is capable of bringing major repressors from anywhere in the world to justice. These intertwined themes make this book important reading not only for

Latin Americanists but for students of human rights and of international relations as well.

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Editorial Review

Review

Thomas Wright helps us to understand the ways in which justice and impunity have clashed head on in the crisis over human rights in Latin America. . . . Tell[s] a most instructive and comprehensive story through the comparison of Chile and Argentina. . . . This book will be useful for graduate and undergraduate courses in Latin America, peace and justice studies, and democratization, as well as for those interested in better understanding why it has taken so long for justice to be obtained in Latin America. (Susan Berger *Journal of Latin American Studies*)

Thomas C. Wright's *State Terrorism in Latin America* provides a concise and extremely readable synthesis. . . . Wright's comparative approach offers fresh insights. . . . Wright's international perspective marks a truly original contribution, and his broad synthesis brings together material that was formerly scattered in more specialized studies. (*Hispanic American Historical Review*)

Wright draws from extensive personal interviews as well as scholarly resources to explore the impact of state terrorism in Latin America between 1970 and 1990. . . . Well written with full documentation, his book makes a valuable contribution to both Latin American and international human rights scholarship. . . . Highly recommended. (*CHOICE*)

An in-depth account of the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships. His cogent descriptions of their rise to power, their evolving structures, and their systematic abuses provide an excellent overview of this period, particularly for those new to the field. . . . Detailed, compelling, and highly useful . . . it has value for novices and experts alike. (*Journal of Interdisciplinary History*)

About the Author

Thomas C. Wright is professor of history at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

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