

By Debra Sweet

From [World Can't Wait](#) | Original Article

The Berkeley Says NO to Torture Week began Sunday October 10 with a book talk by Andy Worthington who wrote [The Guantanamo Files: The Stories of the 774 Detainees in America's Illegal Prison](#), and Justine Sharrock, author of [Tortured: When Good Soldiers Do Bad Things](#)

. Even for people who have followed the US detention of men at Guantanamo, the stories of the real people involved; both those detained, and those who were part of the functioning, are eye-opening and heart-breaking.

The Guantanamo Files: Stories of the 774 Men in American's Illegal Prison

Andy, who knows as much or more about the individual stories of the men detained at Guantanamo, reminded everyone of the reason we're doing this Week in Berkeley: John Yoo is here teaching law at Cal, as he has been since 2004, when he returned from his two years spent in the Bush White House arranging the "legal" justification of torture and indefinite detention. Why stay on the issue of the closure of Guantanamo when, for the time being, it's disappeared off the radar? "Just because something's gone on for far too long, doesn't make it less wrong," Andy says.

He gave a quick overview of Guantanamo, 20 months after Barack Obama said he'd close it in 12 months. 598 men have been released with no charges, mostly by the Bush regime. 174 are left. Of those, the Obama administration plans to charge 35 and try them under the "new" military commissions. 48 are to be held indefinitely — no charges, no trials, no release, in legal limbo. The rest are all "approved for transfer," a phrase this administration picked up from Bush, as opposed to "approved for release" which could indicate they were held without reason. Andy pointed out that the U.S. has prevailed on 15 countries to take detainees after release, but that the U.S. — the country which detained the innocent men — won't take any.

The vast majority of the 774 men were not caught on the battlefield, as the Bush regime said at the time, but were bought for bounty. The US government didn't know who they had, why, or what any of them might have done. General Dunleavy, the first general in charge in 2002 when Guantanamo opened, called a lot of them "Mickey Mouse" prisoners, held without reason.

Nevertheless, while held, one in 6 of them got the “full treatment” of enhanced interrogation procedures, both physical and psychological that we now know to be the Bush/Yoo package of torture. Andy did not confine his criticism to Bush, who came up with the term “enemy combatant,” but described for us what the Obama administration has done, and not done. The term is new: “unprivileged enemy belligerents.” They have habeas corpus rights, but still, many are not being released, much less given an apology or any sort of compensation. See a post from Andy on October 11, [Former Guantánamo Prisoner, Tortured by Al-Qaeda and the US, Launches Futile Attempt to Hold America Accountable](#)

.

Justine Sharrock got to know four men who were involved in torture of detainees at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. She writes with much understanding, developed over time with the men, for how they have been destroyed by participating and being trained as part of dehumanizing package of detention and torture.

[Tortured: When Good Soldiers Do Bad Things](#)
by Justine Sharrock

She read from her book about Chris Arendt, an anarchist, Jack Kerouac-reading punk from the Midwest who somehow ended up in a National Guard unit sent to Guantanamo. As he learned the pattern of detainee abuse, like the “frequent flyer” program where detainees were moved every few hours to a different cell for months, he began folding the order forms into origami birds which spilled over his whole desk. He tried to kill himself.

The jacket blurb reads: “Myths about torture abound: Waterboarding is the worst we’ve done. The soldiers were hardened professionals. All Americans now believe that what we did was wrong. Torture is now a thing of the past. Journalist Justine Sharrock’s reporting reveals a huge chasm between what has made headlines and what has actually happened. She traveled around the country, talking to the young, low-ranking soldiers that watched our prisoners, documenting what it feels like to torture someone and discovering how many residents of small town America think we should have done a lot more torture.”

Justine’s work on how torture was shaped, and has come to be accepted, is really important. She and Andy will be speaking again at a program Wednesday about writers on torture.

Lauro Vasquez, a recent graduate of Dominican College read two of his poems. A member of the Revolutionary Poetry Brigade, he told how he started thinking in poems while working as a dishwasher at college. I’m going to ask him for the poems to post here.