

Atrocities in Argentina 1976–1983



On March 24, 1976, a military junta led by General Jorge Rafael Videla seized power from President Isabel Peron. Between 1976 and 1983, an estimated 10,000 to 30,000 people the new government suspected of involvement with left-wing activities were “disappeared” by authorities in what is now called the “Dirty War.” Citizens were kidnapped, detained, tortured, executed and occasionally dumped out of airplanes — dead or alive — over the Atlantic Ocean. Those taken came to be known as the *Desaparecidos*, the Spanish word for “Disappeared.”

The United States was a key provider of economic and military assistance to the Videla regime. In 1982, the military junta invaded the British-controlled Falkland Islands. Argentina’s crushing defeat increased public outrage with the ruling government and forced then-leader General Leopoldo Galtieri to resign. A combination of factors caused the junta to dissolve, and a civilian government was returned to power in 1983 with the election of Raul Alfonsín.

As early as April 1977, mothers of the Disappeared began demanding to know where the children had been taken. They organized a group, Madres de Plaza

de Mayo, and marched every Thursday afternoon at half past three, for 30 years, on the Plaza de Mayo, a major square in Buenos Aires. Many of the Disappeared women were pregnant when they were taken; babies who were born in captivity were often adopted by families of the junta. The grandmothers searched for this next generation of lost children. To date, they’ve located more than 80 grandchildren. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo stopped marching in 2006, but have not given up the fight to bring the military leaders of the junta to justice.

In 1983, the National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP) was appointed to investigate the fate of the Disappeared. Its report revealed the systematic abductions of men, women and children, the existence of about 340 well-organized secret detention centers, including the infamous ESMA Navy Mechanics School in Buenos Aires, and the systematic use of kidnapping, torture and murder. CONADEP found “the repressive practices of the military were planned and ordered by the highest levels of military command.”

In 2005, the Argentine Supreme Court lifted the immunity granted to regime officials, and as of October 2010, 748 people were facing charges, and 81 had been convicted, including former military President General Reynaldo Bignone, who received 25 years in prison for the kidnapping and torture of 56 people at the Campo de Mayo military camp on the outskirts of Buenos Aires.

Some Resources on This Topic

Books:

- “The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival” by Alicia Partnoy
- “Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo” By Marguerite Guzman Bouvard
- “Nunca Mas Never Again: A Report by Argentina's National Commission on Disappeared People” by Argentina Comision Nacional sobre la Desaparicion de personas
- “A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture” by Marguerite Feitlowitz
- “God's Assassins: State Terrorism in Argentina in the 1970s” by Patricia Marchak

Web sites:

- <http://www.madres.org>
- <http://www.yendor.com/vanished/>
- <http://www.desaparecidos.org/arg/eng.html>
- <http://www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-argentina>

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