

Day 2 Materials

Victor Jara

Victor Jara reached the height of his fame in the early 1970's, with the election of Salvador Allende, the presidential candidate that Jara had supported (and the first Socialist president of a Latin American country.) His face and songs were known across the nation, much as Bob Dylan and Joan Baez were then known in the United States for their own protest songs. Yet ultimately his fame proved to be his downfall. When General Pinochet swept to power in the military coup of 1973, his regime captured, tortured, and killed many thousands of people who had supported Allende's government, especially those that he believed to be dangerous. The following excerpt is from Jara's biography.

Thousands of prisoners were kept for days, with virtually no food or water; glaring spotlights were focused on them constantly so that they lost all sense of time and even of day and night; orders and threats were blared over the loudspeakers...People were mercilessly beaten with whips and rifle butts...[Victor was] once more publicly beaten, the officer nicknamed the Prince shouting at him, on the verge of hysteria, "Sing now, if you can!" (Jara, 249)

Victor Jara was executed that week, though only after his wrists and hands had been broken so he could no longer play his music.

General Pinochet

When General Pinochet assumed power in Chile in 1973, his country was facing incredible difficulties. The economy was in a freefall, and the large middle classes were increasingly angry about the previous government's focus on the working poor. Order in the country was either non-existent or fragile.

Pinochet believed that the best way to restore order to Chile was to crush the opposition (anyone who disagreed with him). Indeed, there is some evidence that in the short term, he was correct. Douglas A. Hibbs, in his study *Mass Political Violence: A Cross-National Causal Analysis*, concludes that a new government, especially a military government, which censors, silences, tortures, or kills its opponents is more likely to be able to operate effectively and quickly. Pinochet released the following statement days after the coup to explain why he was shutting down newspapers, television stations, radio stations, and other places where artists could communicate their protests.

The Military Government is determined to clean up press publications in accordance with what is considered to be the immediate solution for the re-establishment of national harmony and ethical norms. It will not, therefore, accept insults to individuals or institutions, nor impertinent language in the press. (Roxborough, 244)

Instead of listening to Victor Jara on the radio, the Chilean people heard soldiers singing the National Anthem and making speeches about traditional virtues. Pinochet remained in power for almost 20 years.