

By Patrick Halpin and John Vanderkloot

From [The Chicago Monitor](#) | Original Article



International Day of Support for Survivors of Torture

As June ushered in rising temperatures, the month also brought about focus to a unique and controversial topic: torture. June was Torture Awareness Month and in light of this, Chicagoland held major events to advocate and encourage an end to its use in any form and on any governmental level. Amnesty International, the world's largest grassroots human rights organization, hosted a rally on Friday, June 26 at Federal Plaza, which brought together individuals to celebrate recent victories in the fight against torture's use and created an open space to highlight different narratives of torture, both international and domestic.

The United Nations General Assembly [defines](#) "torture" as an:

[A]ct by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity.

Though the United States, as a signatory to the UN's charter, has committed to abiding by international conventions regarding torture, controversy still exists. The definition calls into question the coercive interrogation methods used by the CIA under the Bush administration and the program's continuation by President Obama. The issue's history draws debate largely upon partisan lines with national security often used as justification. However, after the publishing of the Senate Intelligence Committee Report on Torture earlier this year, the debate has shifted away from political allegiances and forced individuals to reexamine the issue, specifically in our own backyard.

Here in Chicago, we have our own troubling history with the use of torture. In 1990, a *Chicago Reader* [article](#)

by John Conroy shed light on the actions of Chicago Police Department detective and commander Jon Burge. The article alleged that beginning in 1972 Burge had been using torture techniques to acquire false confessions, primarily from men of color, under duress. One victim, Marcus Wiggins, who was 13 years old when Burge administered electric shock, recounted his experience in the [testimony](#) of his civil suit:

They started—my hands started burning, feeling like it was being burned. I was—I was shaking and my—and my jaw got tight and my eyes felt like they went black... It felt like I was spinning... It felt like my jaws was like—they was—I can't say the word. It felt like my jaws was sucking in... I felt like I was going to die (Marcus Wiggins vs. Jon Burge 1993).



[enacted of his alleged crime](#)

