

By Andy Worthington

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

The weather in the Bay Area is radiant — hot, sunny, and astonishing for mid-October — and, although a ten-hour flight from London and my usual paranoia about Homeland Security could hardly be described as constituting the best recipe for a relaxing welcome to the United States, I got off the plane at Los Angeles International Airport at 2.30 pm on Saturday (while my body was telling me it was 10.30 pm) with something of a spring in my step.

I'm here for a week to take part in [“Berkeley Says No to Torture” Week](#), an extraordinary series of events to raise awareness of the United States' use of torture in the “War on Terror” — and, specifically, to highlight how its use is illegal, morally corrosive, unnecessary and counter-productive. The entire week is taking place in Berkeley not just because of its historical reputation as a place where people understand the difference between right and wrong, but also because one of the architects of the Bush administration's torture program — the unapologetic John Yoo, who [wrote the notorious “torture memos,”](#) which sought to redefine torture and approved its use on prisoners in the “War on Terror” — is a law professor at UC Berkeley.

My presence here is entirely due to the fundraising efforts of [the World Can't Wait](#), who put together “Berkeley Says No to Torture” Week with the [National Lawyers Guild \(San Francisco\)](#)

, [Progressive Democrats of America](#)
, [Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute](#)
, National Accountability Action Network,
[Code Pink](#)

, [FireJohnYoo.org](#)
, Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarian Universalists Social Justice Committee and the Rev. Kurt Kuhwald, and I'm delighted that the week was approved by Berkeley City Council on September 21, when a Resolution was adopted to hold a week of public educational events to educate the community about torture.

With the American public divided into those who oppose the use of torture and believe that those who authorized it should be held accountable, those who have bought the lie that it is necessary and makes us safer, and those who prefer not to think about it at all, this is an extremely important week of events, and should have a resonance that reaches far beyond the Bay Area, especially as so many excellent activists, journalists, authors, artists and psychologists are involved, including Adrienne Aron, Shahid Buttar, Marjorie Cohn, Barry Eisler, Larry Everest, Ruth Fallenbaum, Clinton Fein, Jeffrey Kaye, Mimi Kennedy, Jason Leopold, devorah major, Ray McGovern, Rita Maran, Kathy Roberts, Renee Saucedo, Peter Selz, Justine Sharrock, Cindy Sheehan, Abdi Soltani, Debra Sweet, Fr. Louis Vitale and Ann Wright.

Yesterday evening, “Berkeley Says No to Torture” Week kicked off at Revolution Books with an author event featuring myself (as the author of [The Guantánamo Files](#)) and Justine Sharrock, author of [Tortured: When Good Soldiers Do Bad Things](#)

. With a very lively crowd in attendance, Justine and I ran through various aspects of the “War on Terror” — in particular, its effects on those subjected to arbitrary detention and torture in the cages of Guantánamo and elsewhere, and, through Justine’s account, its effect on the US soldiers required to implement this torture and cruelty by their political masters, who, as [the Abu Ghraib scandal showed](#), then tried to pretend that it was the work of “a few bad apples.”

It was not, of course. The dehumanization and torture of the men and boys detained in the “War on Terror” — in Afghanistan and Iraq, at Guantánamo and in [secret prisons](#) — was directed from the highest levels of the Bush administration — by George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and others — and in refusing to thoroughly address and repudiate these actions, and to hold accountable those who authorized America’s slide into barbarity, President Obama continues to send out a message that it is OK for the nation’s most senior officials to break the law so long as they leave the White House after two terms. He has also, sad to say, [perpetuated](#) many of [the Bush administration’s crimes](#), and [added some of his own](#), and, as part of the bigger picture, has presided over what appears to be nothing less than a battle for the soul of America, between those who embrace endless war, barbarity and torture, and those who do not.

The Bush administration talked of the “War on Terror” as a war that might last for generations.

Those of us who oppose it must be aware that our struggle may also be generational, but I am pleased to note that this seemed to be appreciated by the audience at Revolution Books yesterday evening, and it was noticeable that the spirit that burns against injustice appeared to be burning more brightly than it was [nearly a year ago](#), when I last visited the US to promote the documentary film, “[Outside the](#)

[Law: Stories from Guantánamo](#)

” (which I co-directed with Polly Nash), which, not coincidentally, is showing this evening, at 7 pm, at Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarian Universalists Fellowship Hall, at 1924 Cedar Street.

If you’re in the area, come along, and [please see here](#) for the full list of events this week.