

Coalition for an Ethical Psychology

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Martin Seligman, the American Psychological Association, and US Torture: Basic Facts

Martin Seligman, a former President of the American Psychological Association (APA), is now another APA leader allegedly connected to our nation's abusive interrogation program. Seligman and the APA have repeatedly condemned psychologist-assisted torture yet effectively abetted it. Here we list samples of such actions, with some legal context. For more information, see www.ethicalpsychology.org.

Seligman convenes counter-terrorism and psychology meeting at his home, December 2001

- A small group of psychology researchers, law enforcement and intelligence psychologists gathers at Seligman's home to brainstorm about Muslim extremism. Among them are the creator of the CIA torture program, Dr. James Mitchell, and CIA Director of Behavioral Sciences Research, Kirk M. Hubbard.
- According to a Truth-Out report by Leopold and Kaye, another former APA President, Patrick DeLeon, was allegedly part of a Pentagon briefing about a highly classified Special Access Program involving detainee interrogations that centered on "deception detection."
- Legal context: U.S. criminal code is amended to allow for DOD human subject experimentation without consent, under certain, undefined circumstances, December 28, 2001.

Psychologists James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen create CIA torture program, April 2002

- Dr. Mitchell's firm, Mitchell Jessen & Associates, is hired by the CIA to introduce harsh SERE techniques, including waterboarding, into the interrogation of Abu Zubaydah. Former APA President Joseph Matarazzo is on the firm's Board of Directors.

Seligman lectures CIA interrogators and psychologists on "learned helplessness," May 2002

- Hubbard invites Seligman to give a three-hour lecture on his "learned helplessness" research on dogs, at the Navy SERE school at the San Diego Naval Base. The event is sponsored by the CIA and co-organized by Hubbard. CIA interrogators Mitchell and Jessen are present in the audience of about 50. Mitchell soon afterwards uses Seligman's concepts in the first "enhanced" interrogations, administering the waterboard and confining the detainee in a cage called the "dog box."

Justice Department "Torture Memos," August 2002

- The Jay Bybee memo permits enhanced interrogations if overseen by health professionals: "If a defendant has a good faith belief that his actions will not result in prolonged mental harm, he lacks the mental state necessary for his actions to constitute torture. A defendant could show that he acted in good faith by taking such steps as surveying professional literature, consulting with experts, or reviewing evidence gained from past experience."

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APA mutes its Ethics Code, August 2002

- Allows psychologists to override the Ethics Code when following military or CIA orders. (APA ignored repeated calls from its own Council of Representatives to rescind the “Nuremberg defense” in its Ethics Code. The language was finally rescinded in February 2010.)
- Allows psychological researchers to dispense with informed consent for research participants when allowed by “federal or institutional regulations.” (This language remains in the Ethics Code despite repeated calls for rescinding it.)

APA co-sponsors the Workshop on the “Science of Deception: Integration of Practice and Theory,” with CIA and Rand Corporation, July 2003

- Hubbard organizes the workshop for the CIA and members of the APA Science Directorate. The CIA funds it. Mitchell and Jessen attend. “Enhanced interrogation” techniques are discussed.
- Another APA-CIA-Rand Workshop on Interpersonal Deception is held in June 2004.

APA Psychological Ethics and National Security (PENS) Task Force develops ethical guidelines for psychologists in interrogations, June 2005

- Six of the ten task force members are psychologists employed by the military or intelligence agencies. Several served in chains of command linked to detainee abuse. Three are Behavioral Science Consultation Team (BSCT) psychologists and/or BSCT supervisors; two are Department of Defense intelligence researchers on interrogation efficacy.
- Task force member names are kept secret from the APA membership and the press until leaked a year later by Congressional sources. Members are pressed to keep proceedings secret.
- Task force meeting has undisclosed “observers,” with high-level contacts in the military-intelligence establishment, as well as one from the White House. “Observer” Russ Newman, head of the APA Practice Directorate, is married to Debra Dunivin, a BSCT member consulting to interrogations at Guantánamo. Dunivin, along with two PENS members, personally brings the *PENS Report* to the Army Surgeon General.
- Task force disregards all reports of psychologists participating in abuses at Guantánamo and elsewhere. Concludes that it is ethical for psychologists to consult to military and CIA interrogations. Endorses the 2002 APA Ethics Code loophole allowing military and intelligence psychologists to override psychological ethics.
- Feeds patently false information to the three voting task force members without military or intelligence employment to gain their compliance. Later all three renounce the *PENS Report* and denounce the process.

APA deflects questions about former APA President Martin Seligman, July 2008

- *New Yorker* reporter Jane Mayer reports that Seligman spoke to the Navy SERE school about “learned helplessness,” as arranged by a CIA psychologist. It rapidly emerges that CIA torture consultants Mitchell and Jessen were in the audience. Seligman issues inconsistent statements that he both didn’t and did discuss the CIA interrogation program. APA issues an immediate denial of wrongdoing by Seligman:

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Dr. Martin Seligman has confirmed to the APA that the allegation surfacing on various blogs that he “provided assistance in the process” of torture is completely false. In May 2002, Dr. Seligman gave a three-hour lecture to the Navy’s SERE school at the San Diego Naval Base. His topic was how American troops and American personnel could use what is known about “learned helplessness” and related findings to resist torture and evade successful interrogation by their captors. Jessen and Mitchell were among approximately 50 people who attended the lecture, and that was the sum total of Dr. Seligman’s “assisting them” in their professional activities.

APA membership passes Referendum; APA refuses implementation, September 2008

- APA members pass a referendum to ban psychologists serving at Guantánamo, the CIA “black sites,” and other detention facilities operating outside, or in violation of, international law or the Constitution. (The Referendum allows certain exceptions, such as psychologists treating US troops.)
- APA leaders nominally endorse the referendum but reject enforcement and implementation of the referendum. APA refuses to issue a statement that service at Guantánamo violates the referendum and is therefore against APA policy.
- In August 2009, the UN Special Rapporteur for Torture states that Guantánamo still operates outside of international law. He asks APA to invoke the referendum and request withdrawal of Guantánamo psychologists. APA leaders do not comply.

Seligman receives a \$31 million, no-bid contract for Army resilience training, February 2010

- In February 2010, the Army awards a “sole source” contract to the University of Pennsylvania for “resilience training” of soldiers. In spite of other demonstrably capable trainers, the Army bypasses the contract bidding system – the touchstone of government integrity – to award \$31,000,000 to the University's Positive Psychology Center, under the direction of Martin Seligman.

APA ongoing lack of action on ethics complaints against APA members

- In summer of 2010, ethics complaints are filed with state licensing boards against three psychologists implicated in the US government torture program. The APA President writes a letter to the licensing board condemning the reported actions of a non-APA member (James Mitchell), but remains silent on similar complaints against two APA psychologists (John Leso and Larry James).
- The APA Ethics Committee has failed to act on multiple complaints filed with it against APA member Maj. John Leso over the past four years.
- The APA Ethics Committee refused even to open an investigation against Col. Larry James when a complaint was filed. Col. James has instead received several APA awards and was elected President of the APA Division of Military Psychology.

The Coalition for an Ethical Psychology is dedicated to putting psychology on a firm ethical foundation in support of social justice and human rights. The Coalition has been in the lead of efforts to remove psychologists from torture and abusive interrogations.