

The Hidden Legacy of U.S. Foreign Policy in Argentine Memory Sites

Abstract

This paper explores the consequences of the United States' support for the Argentine military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983, focusing on the political, military, and economic aid provided to the repressive regime. Using memory studies as a framework, I explore how U.S. foreign intervention has influenced the collective memory of the dictatorship and human rights in Argentina and the U.S. today. This paper investigates the role of Argentine memory sites, established through transitional justice processes, in confronting these violent legacies. I analyze U.S. responses to its human rights record in Argentina and explore additional avenues for accountability to achieve a more comprehensive truth and reconciliation process in both nations. Pursuing truth and justice in post-dictatorship Argentina remains incomplete without U.S. acknowledgement and accountability.

Introduction:

Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects.¹

– Pierre Nora

Upon entering Parque de la Memoria, or The Memory Park, a solemn atmosphere permeates the air. Located along the Río de la Plata on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, the park's grassy hills stretch toward the sea, interrupted by the Monument to the Victims of State Terrorism, a wall of 30,000 plaques representing those who "disappeared" under the dictatorship. This park, a cornerstone of Argentina's transitional justice model, offers a space to reckon with the violent legacy of the 1976–1983 military regime.² Visitors encounter contemporary sculptures and installations reflecting personal interpretations of the dictatorship's impact. Among them, the Argentine artist collective *Grupo de Arte Callejero*'s installation, composed of fifty-three traffic signs, recounts the dictatorship's history through symbolic representations, including the National Security Doctrine, the U.S. military training school (Escuela de las Américas), and the CIA's Operation Condor. The subtle implication of the United States in this dark history raised many unanswered questions. As a student from the US in Buenos Aires, I was keenly aware of my outsider status in a space dedicated to a history foreign to me yet intrinsically linked to my country's foreign policy. The memory of the military dictatorship is deeply personal for those working at the Memory Park, many of whom inherited stories of disappeared family members or friends or were alive forty years ago to witness it themselves. As I grew familiar with this space, I gained a greater appreciation for the power of memorials to name and make sense of the unspeakable. While I had learned the history of the dictatorship in classes and from books, it was walking through the Memory Park where I felt the closest sliver of understanding of what had occurred.

¹ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire." *Representations*, no. 26, (1989), 9, [doi:10.2307/2928520](https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520).

² "Monumento a las Víctimas del Terrorismo de Estado," Parque de la Memoria, last modified 2020, <https://parquedelamemoria.org.ar/monumento/>.

While the U.S. provided substantial public and covert support to the Argentine dictatorship, the effects of this support are often absent from American narratives about Latin America's history.

Visiting Argentine memory sites, from the Memory Park to the Ex-ESMA, a former clandestine detention center, I encountered reminders of my country's role embedded within Argentina's efforts to commemorate the victims of its military dictatorship.

Since the 1930s, Argentina has endured political and economic instability, including intervals of military rule. However, the military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983, distinguished itself by an unprecedented level of violence and repression. In the years leading up to the 1976 coup d'état, an increasingly polarized political climate under the Peronist party fueled violence from both far-right and far-left factions, leading to the formation of paramilitary groups like the *Alianza anticomunista Argentina*, or the Triple A.³ Following Juan Perón's death in 1974, he was replaced by his wife Isabel Martínez de Perón amid a period of intense turmoil, as military forces began openly plotting against her.⁴ On March 24, 1976, a military junta led by General Jorge Rafael Videla seized power suspending the Constitution and Congress, and announcing a "National Reorganization Process."⁵ Under Videla, students, intellectuals, leftists, and other groups opposing the conservative and neoliberal agenda were violently targeted.⁶ During this period of state terror, approximately 30,000 Argentine citizens were disappeared by state-sanctioned military forces, subject to torture, detention, and even execution.⁷ A pervasive culture of silence and fear allowed the state and military to enact mass violence upon their own people.

³ Emilio Crenzel, *Memory of the Argentina Disappearances: A Political History of Nunca Más*, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 13.

⁴ Crenzel, *Memory of the Argentina Disappearances: The Political History of Nunca Más*, 13.

⁵ Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*, 8.

⁶ Daniel Feierstein, *Genocide as Social Practice: Reorganizing Society Under the Nazis and Argentina's Military Juntas*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 292.

⁷ Feierstein, *Genocide as Social Practice: Reorganizing Society Under the Nazis and Argentina's Military Juntas*, 292.

Argentina's political and economic turmoil, particularly during its last military regime, facilitated U.S. intervention in the context of Cold War geopolitics. Yet, the extent of U.S. complicity in the dictatorship's human rights abuses has been largely unexamined in mainstream American discourse. Through CIA documents, historical accounts, and memory sites, I argue that U.S. accountability is essential to Argentina's ongoing struggle for truth and justice.

The "Special Relationship": US Cold War Policy in Latin America

On the morning of March 24, 1976, a group of Argentine militaries staged a quick and bloodless coup against President Isabel Martinez de Perón. The newly formed junta, led by General Jorge Rafael Videla, suspended the National Congress and Constitution and presented their "National Reorganization Process," promising a return to law and order after years of political turmoil and escalating violence.⁸ The new military government was met with little initial resistance, particularly from the upper-middle-class sectors of Argentina, who hoped it would signal a return to peace and stability. Simultaneously, thousands of miles across the Americas, the United States responded positively to the news. U.S. Ambassador Robert Hill reported to Washington: "This was probably the best executed and most civilized coup in Argentine history...Argentina's best interests, like ours," he concluded, "lie in the success of the moderate government now led by General Videla."⁹ Echoing Hill's response, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger announced: "The present military government does not threaten U.S. interests." He added, "We wish the new government well...A stable Argentina is of interest to the hemisphere."¹⁰ Their eagerness to welcome the new regime would be tested in the following years as the junta's violent and repressive tactics became increasingly apparent to the watching world.

⁸ Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*, 8.

⁹ Schmidli, 9.

¹⁰ "U.S. Elections, Argentine Security and Economy" *Digital National Security Archives*.

In the decades following World War II, the U.S. established a "special relationship" with Latin America shaping its political and economic landscape through entities like the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Alliance for Progress. As Cold War tensions escalated in the 1960s, the U.S. expanded its sights even further, providing military arms sales and training schools to prevent the rise of Communist and Socialist-leaning leaders in Latin America. By the 1970s, Argentina's militaries looked to the U.S. for counter-insurgency and anti-subversion training. As Schmidli observes, "nearly eight thousand additional Latin American military personnel underwent training at U.S. facilities in the Panama Canal Zone or in the continental United States between 1945 and 1959," with the School of the Americas (SOA, or *Escuela de las Américas*) in Panama gaining notoriety for its emphasis on internal security. The U.S. threw its support behind the Videla regime, despite its undemocratic rise, because it mirrored their goal of suppressing communism and promoting free trade and development.

Within this context, the National Security Doctrine emerged in the 1970s as a dominant ideology in Argentina and across Latin America. Adopted by many right-wing leaders, the Doctrine emphasized internal security through coercive and repressive tactics. By training and funding Latin American militaries, the U.S. "exported a paradigm of internal security that extended the military's purview deep into the realms of social and economic policy," reinforcing authoritarian rule across the Southern Cone—Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. The U.S. State Department would later describe this as "a chain of governments whose origin was in battle against the extreme left."¹¹ In February 2020, the National Security Archives in Washington, DC, released declassified documents that further implicate the United States in extensive knowledge of the Argentine dictatorship. The declassified documents, detailing a project known as Operation Minerva, reveal that the U.S. monitored Latin American leaders through an encryption company secretly owned by the CIA and

¹¹ Schmidli, 26.

German intelligence.¹² Countries used this encryption device to facilitate Operation Condor, a strategy of coordinated military repression against "subversive" citizens by Southern Cone military governments during the 1970s.¹³ A CIA report from May 9, 1977, reveals the U.S. knowledge of Operation Condor:

The security forces of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay have for some time engaged in a formalized exchange of information on leftist terrorists. Moreover, these governments jointly conduct operations against subversives on each other's soil. This effort, dubbed "Operation Condor", is not publicly known.¹⁴

Although the CIA report acknowledged their use of violent tactics to suppress "leftist terrorists," it justified their tactics by claiming, "control over security forces generally is not tight enough to prevent innocents from being harmed or mistreated."¹⁵ These documents reveal a deeper level of U.S. complicity with the violence carried out by military regimes in Argentina and across the Southern Cone than was previously known. The U.S. government possessed extensive knowledge of Operation Condor but withheld this information from the public for over forty years.

With Kissinger's "green light" to Videla's regime, the U.S. signaled its willingness to prioritize economic and security interests over democracy and human rights in Argentina. Recently declassified documents on Operation Minerva expose a significant awareness of the atrocities committed by the regime, which the U.S. chose to overlook during the dictatorships' early years. This tacit support for Videla's regime continued, despite mounting evidence of systematic human rights abuses, until international support for the dictatorship finally began to erode under the Carter administration.

In the following section, I examine the truth and reconciliation process in post-dictatorship Argentina, where the United States' "special relationship" to the military regime ultimately came under

¹² Peter Kornbluh and Carlos Osorio, "The CIA's Minerva Secret," *National Security Archive*, Feb. 11, 2020.

¹³ Kornbluh and Osorio, "The CIA's Minerva Secret."

¹⁴ "Counterterrorism in the Southern Cone, Document 2, CIA Report," *National Security Archive*, May 9, 1977.

¹⁵ "Counterterrorism in the Southern Cone, Document 2, CIA Report," *National Security Archive*.

scrutiny. This era marked a pivotal moment, as the human rights movement demanded government accountability and transparency from both governments.

Towards a Reckoning: Argentina's Transitional Justice Process

The Argentine dictatorship ended in 1983 following sustained pressure from both domestic and international human rights activists. The return of democratic elections marked the beginning of a new movement aimed at uncovering the military regime's atrocities and holding those responsible accountable. Under President Raul Alfonsín, the Amnesty Law protecting the military was overturned, and the National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP) was established to investigate the large-scale disappearances and other human rights abuses. The Commission brought together legislators, civil society groups, human rights organizations and representatives of the executive branch to determine the fate of the disappeared and put top military junta leaders on trial.¹⁶ This initiative led to the publication of the *Nunca Más* Truth Report, a foundational document in Argentina's transitional justice process that played a crucial role in truth-telling and healing after the dictatorship's brutality.

Transitional justice efforts, including human rights trials and truth reports, provided factual counterpoints to the military junta's misinformation and secrecy. By collecting individual testimonies and centering victims' voices, *Nunca Más* helped transform these memories into a publicly shared narrative.¹⁷ Historian Steve Stern describes the "memory struggle" as not only a battle against forgetting but also a contest over legitimacy and power.¹⁸ Stern argues that after the dictatorships in Argentina and Chile, memory became both a tool for conscious forgetting and a sacred struggle against

¹⁶ Emilio Crenzel, "The Ghostly Presence of the Disappeared in Argentina," *Journal of Memory Studies*, Volume 13: Issue 3, (June, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698020914011>, 256.

¹⁷ Crenzel, 6.

¹⁸ Steve J. Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile: On the Eve of London, 1998*, Vol. bk. 1. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 148.

erasure."¹⁹ While *Nunca Más* and subsequent judicial efforts established a comprehensive record of atrocities, Argentina's struggle over memory has seeped into the 21st century.

The election of President Nestor Kirchner in 2003 marked a revitalization of transitional justice efforts. Kirchner repealed the Amnesty Law and Alfonsín's restrictions on military trials, reopening new human rights cases that continue to this day.²⁰ In addition to the renewed legal action against crimes against humanity, Kirchner prioritized "reclaiming and re-signifying" former sites of repression from the dictatorship era.²¹ His administration inaugurated a new "memory regime" that reclaimed these sites as spaces of living reflection, mourning, and education, transforming them into spaces of living remembrance. This section explores the enduring environment of "living remembrance" in Argentina, where museums and memorials sustain the memory struggle in contemporary society.

Spaces of Memory: Museums, Memorials and Monuments

Modern life in Argentina is deeply shaped by memories of the dictatorship. The slogans "*Nunca más*" (Never Again) and "*Presentes, ahora y siempre*" (Here, Now and Forever) appear on banners, graffiti, and political paraphernalia across the country, underscoring the regime's failure to erase identities and history. 30,000 – a numerical symbol representing the disappeared – appears on signs held by the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* as they continue to march every Thursday, as well as on the walls of the Memory Park monument. Efforts to uncover the identities and fates of the disappeared continue to honor their legacy.

The persistent presence of the disappeared is also visible in the language used by restorative justice and human rights activists. The term "disappeared" underscores the ambiguous, unresolved status of those taken. Human rights advocates demanded "freedom for the disappeared" and urged

¹⁹ Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile: On the Eve of London, 1998*, 148.

²⁰ Crenzel, 259.

²¹ Crenzel, 259.

CONADEP to treat victims as if they were still alive.²² The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo's plea, "*aparición con vida*," reflect an insistence of truth over resignation. As sociologist Avery Gordon notes, "death exists in the past tense, disappearance in the present."²³ The families choice to refer to their loved ones as disappeared rather than deceased signifies a refusal to mourn without knowing the truth. Scholar Emilio Crenzel explains that "the disappearances entailed a rupture in the conception of death traditionally held in Argentina... As the disappeared occupied a space that was somewhere between life and death, they challenged the basic social frameworks for evoking, namely time, space, and language."²⁴ The state-sanctioned disappearances of approximately 30,000 people have profoundly altered the concepts of life and death in Argentina, creating a new and unresolved category of atrocity.

In addition to formal transitional justice measures, such as truth commissions and human rights trials, memorials play a critical role in preserving the memory of life under Argentina's dictatorship. One approach involves reclaiming former military sites, particularly detention centers, and transforming them into spaces of resilience, memory, and public education. Through this transformation, "sites are repurposed and take on a new meaning: they cease to be "places of death" to become "places of life."²⁵ The former ESMA military academy, once notorious for torture and detention, is now a community space dedicated to human rights education. Crenzel describes this transformation as an "exorcism of death," with activities that reframe the site's historical legacy and help purge its torments from public memory.²⁶ This section examines how spaces like the Ex-ESMA and the Memory Park continue to advance the struggle for truth and justice by serving as contested,

²² Crenzel, "The Ghostly Presence of the Disappeared in Argentina," 257.

²³ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 113.

²⁴ Crenzel, "The Ghostly Presence of the Disappeared in Argentina," 254.

²⁵ Crenzel, 259.

²⁶ Crenzel, 259.

living sites of memory – with particular attention to representation of US involvement in Argentine memory spaces.

The movement to create memory sites in Argentina reflects a need for physical spaces of living remembrance beyond legal measures. Scholars Katherine Hite and Daniela Jara argue that unresolved histories of state-sponsored violence, left addressed by formal channels, often lead to persistent demands of recognition. These demands manifest in ways that grow louder and more visible over time, as “what [has] been simmering below the surface, what has haunted, continues to be exposed, unearthed, visibly awakened.”²⁷ Descendants of the disappeared and human rights activists have sustained this call for accountability, confronting the ghosts of the past that persistently haunt Argentina’s social fabric. Crenzel emphasizes that “these ghosts reveal the limits of the canonical accounts of the transitional justice policies that have been deployed in Argentina since the return to democratic rule.”²⁸ Monuments and memorials provide a tangible anchor for this memory, creating a foundation for studying and honoring the disappeared while confronting the historical record.

French historian Pierre Nora describes memory sites, or *lieux de mémoire*, as spaces where history and memory collide. While history aims to reconstruct the past, memory is fluid and shaped by personal and collective interpretation. According to Nora, these sites “exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications,”²⁹ adapting their meanings over time and creating layered connections with both life and death. As historian Steven Stern notes, memory sites transition personal memories into collective frameworks, embedding them into a broader cultural remembrance. With this understanding, I examine Argentine memory sites that capture the violence of the dictatorship while fostering collective healing.

²⁷ Katherine Hite and Daniela Jara, “Presenting Unwieldy Pasts,” *Memory Studies*, Special Edition Introduction, 13 no. 3, (June 2020), 246, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698020914010>.

²⁸ Crenzel, 254.

²⁹ Nora, 19.

The Memory Park:

The Memory Park and Monument to the Victims of State Terrorism, established by the City of Buenos Aires in 1998 in collaboration with human rights organizations and the University of Buenos Aires, was created as a public space for reflection and education on the dictatorship's violence. The park's location along the *Río de la Plata* holds symbolic significance, as it is "a haunting reminder of a key site of atrocities, as many of the kidnapped, detained, tortured, and disappeared were assassinated by being thrown from airplanes into this river."³⁰ Confronting visitors with the actual site of these atrocities, the park fosters a direct reckoning with the ghosts of the past. Hite describes the park's impact as inducing "empathic unsettlement" in visitors, defined as a state where engagement meets disruption. This productive unease compels viewers to grasp the weight of the atrocity while acknowledging its incomprehensibility, fostering a connection between disparate historical traumas rather than merely comparing them. This encounter allows visitors to bear witness to the past in a way that is both unsettling and moving.

Beyond the central monument dedicated to the over 10,000 known victims of state terrorism documented by CONADEP, the Memory Park features sculptures along the riverbank that offer various interpretations of the dictatorship by Argentine and international artists. One notable installation, *Carteles de la Memoria* by the Grupo de Arte Callejero (GAC), stands out for its direct reference to the United States' complicity during this dark period in Argentine history. This work consists of a series of 53 traffic signs along the riverbank, which narrate the dictatorship's history using symbols and phrases. Beginning with the National Security Doctrine, the signs detail key military operations in Latin America, including the U.S.-based *Escuela de las Américas* and the CIA's links to Operation Condor. Hite notes that the installation disrupts "the ordinary," by forcing viewers to

³⁰ Katherine Hite, "Empathic Unsettlement and the Outsider within Argentine Spaces of Memory," *Memory Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, (Jan. 2015), 42, doi:10.1177/1750698014552407.

reconsider their surroundings, breaking the dissociative tendencies of urban life.³¹ The installation does not end with the restoration of democracy in 1983 but rather connects past memories of the dictatorship – especially U.S. and Argentine military and economic collusion – to contemporary issues of social and economic inequality such as unemployment and poverty. Through this work, Grupo de Arte de Callejero intentionally links Argentina’s struggles for human rights and justice to ongoing socioeconomic challenges, advocating for social and economic justice as an integral part of the country’s human rights legacy.

The Ex-ESMA:

One of the most important memory sites in Buenos Aires is the School of Navy Mechanics (*Ex-Escuela Superior de Mecánica de la Armada*), or Ex-ESMA, a former clandestine detention center during the dictatorship. At its height, the Ex-Esma was responsible for the disappearances of an estimated 5,000 people. Today, it stands as one of Argentina’s largest memory sites, with museum exhibits, art installations, and community events. According to its mission the Ex-ESMA is intended to “serve as a nexus between a repressive past and a present in continuous construction for the transformation of our collective future.”³² Human rights activists argued that preserving these buildings would affirm the public’s demand for truth and justice.³³ As Ana Guglielmucci notes, “the recuperation of spaces which served as clandestine detention centers as ‘memory spaces’ is a public affirmation of the historic demands for ‘truth and justice.’”³⁴ Ex-ESMA thus serves as both a

³¹ Hite, 43.

³² “El Espacio Memoria es el nexo entre un pasado represivo y un presente en construcción continua para la transformación de nuestro futuro colectivo.” Translated from: “Sobre el lugar,” Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos, accessed March 24, 20221, <https://www.espaciomemoria.ar/lugar>.

³³ “La recuperación de los lugares donde funcionaron CCD como ‘espacios para la memoria’ constituye una afirmación pública de su histórica demanda de “Verdad y Justicia.” Translated from: Ana Guglielmucci, *La consagración de la memoria: Una etnografía acerca de la institucionalización del recuerdo sobre los crímenes del terrorismo de Estado en la Argentina*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Antropofagia, 2013), 288.

³⁴ “La recuperación de los lugares donde funcionaron CCD como ‘espacios para la memoria’ constituye una afirmación pública de su histórica demanda de “Verdad y Justicia.” Translated from: Ana Guglielmucci, *La consagración de la*

testament to state terrorism and evidence of the transitional justice movement's commitment to confronting past atrocities.

Within the Ex-ESMA, the Casino building directly addresses the role of the United State in the Argentine dictatorship. The Casino exhibit provides historical context about the dictatorship, highlighting the Cold War era and the spread of the National Security Doctrine across Latin America. A CIA torture manual is on display making explicit the U.S.'s involvement in Argentina's violent past. Katherine Hite, reflecting on a visit with a U.S. student group, observed, "It was unsettling. And, I would argue, the visit will stick with the students—the discomfort but also the haunting, and the insistence on the United States as a primary contributor to the atrocities. There is a way in which this site, more than any other of our visit, produced empathic unsettlement in many of us."³⁵ While this direct confrontation of US involvement may disturb American visitors, it opens the door to transnational solidarity through empathetic unsettlement.

Another Ex-ESMA exhibit that evokes this feeling of unsettlement is a suspended Ford Falcon in the *Centro Cultural de la Memoria Haroldo Conti*. The deconstructed white car appears to float supported by thin metal rods, its shape eerily intact yet stripped of function. Titled "*Autores Ideológicos*," this piece was created in 2006 by Javier Bernasconi, Omar Estela, Marcelo Montanari, Marcela Oliva, Luciano Parodi, and Margarita Rocha.

The Ford Falcon became infamous as the vehicle used by police, military, and paramilitaries alike during the dictatorship. Ford presents the most notorious example of corporate complicity with the Argentine military junta. Historian Karen Robert explains, "Ford's exclusive contracts with the Argentine security forces throughout the dictatorship eventually made the Falcon the single most

memoria: Una etnografía acerca de la institucionalización del recuerdo sobre los crímenes del terrorismo de Estado en la Argentina, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Antropofagia, 2013), 288.

³⁵ Hite, 44.

recognizable icon of repression, one that clearly still resonates today." ³⁶ Ford's relationship with the junta extended beyond vehicle supply; in a 2002 lawsuit, fifteen former employees accused Ford of collaboration with the regime alleging that disappearances, torture, and detentions took place within its Argentine factory plant. After years of legal delays, in 2019, the Argentine court convicted two former Ford executives and a military official of crimes against humanity, including the disappearances of twenty-four employees.³⁷

The deconstructed Ford Falcon draws an inextricable link between corporate complicity and the U.S. government's Cold War policies abroad. By disarming this icon of repression, the piece encourages viewers to reflect on the role of corporate and state violence on Ex-ESMA's mission to reclaim former sites of violence as spaces of unsettling reflection.

Among the many impactful works I encountered in Argentina, the Reconstruction of the Portrait of Pablo Míguez, left a lasting impression. This bronze statue of a young boy floats in the Río de la Plata, facing the sea, his face obscured from view. The subject, Pablo Míguez, was one of the youngest known victims of the military regime, disappearing with his father at age 14. Artist Claudia Fontes created this piece to embody the elusive nature of the disappeared: "For me, this is the representation of the condition of the disappeared: it is present, but we are barred from seeing it." ³⁸ The placement of this structure in the river is symbolic, as military planes disposed of many victims' bodies in this same river. The work is haunting yet beautiful, restoring dignity to a life taken too soon, inviting us to confront the darkness of the past without looking away. The presence of families, school

³⁶ Karen Robert, "The Falcon Remembered," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 39, no. 3 (2005): 12+. *Gale General One File*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A138753287/ITOF?u=nysl_se_vassar&sid=ITOF&xid=2f4da0fa.

³⁷ Victoria Basualdo, "The Ford Trial in Argentina, A Workers' Victory," Justice Info, *Foundation Hirondelle*, April 1, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/3y2z7umn>.

³⁸ Fontes, "Reconstrucción del Retrato de Pablo Míguez," <https://parquedelamemoria.org.ar/reconstruccion-del-retrato-de-pablo-miguez/>.

groups, and couples in the park reminds me of the life that this memorial space also holds. I enter feeling weighed down by its dark history but leave feeling a sense of lightness and renewal.

Conclusion:

During a 2016 visit to Argentina during the 40th anniversary of the military coup, former President Barack Obama expressed regret for the U.S.'s slow acknowledgement of Argentina's human rights abuses.³⁹ Visiting the Memory Park, Obama remarked, "A memorial like this speaks to all our responsibilities. We cannot forget the past, but when we find the courage to confront and we find the courage to change that past, that's when we build a better future."⁴⁰ His words, though not absolving the U.S., represented a step toward recognizing American complicity in Argentina's violent history. Prior to Obama's visit, his administration declassified hundreds of CIA and Defense Department documents on Argentina – a gesture Osorio describes as "declassified diplomacy."⁴¹ These documents mark an essential step toward truth, paving the way for justice and healing.

Despite these strides, there remains limited acknowledgement within the U.S. of its involvement in Argentina's dictatorship. Unlike Argentina, which has actively pursued truth and memorialization, the U.S. often avoids reckoning with its legacy of foreign interventions, slavery, and indigenous genocide. The absence of counter-narrative museums and education in the United States reveals what Hite describes as a "society of deep denial that nonetheless lives the violence of past atrocities very much in the present."⁴² She calls for a shared mourning project aimed at reducing violence and fostering activism against injustices committed in the name of American power.⁴³ I

³⁹ Julie Hirschfeld Davis, "Obama Expresses Regret for U.S. Policies During Argentina's 'Dirty War'," *The New York Times*, 24 Mar. 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/03/25/world/americas/obama-argentina-dirty-war.html.

⁴⁰ Davis, "Obama Expresses Regret for U.S. Policies During Argentina's 'Dirty War'."

⁴¹ Peter Kornbluh and Carlos Osorio, "Obama Brings 'Declassified Diplomacy' To Argentina," *National Security Archive*, 18 Mar. 2016, nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/southern-cone/2016-03-18/obama-brings-declassified-diplomacy-argentina.

⁴² Hite, "Empathic Unsettlement," 46.

⁴³ Hite, 46.

believe this shared project can emerge through practices of transitional and restorative justice, memory sites, and memorials. By insisting on confrontation with the past, memory sites offer us a chance to look forward, to break cycles of violence, and to recognize our shared humanity across political and geographical boundaries. In this way, memorials bear witness to the legacies of suffering while holding out for a more just future.

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