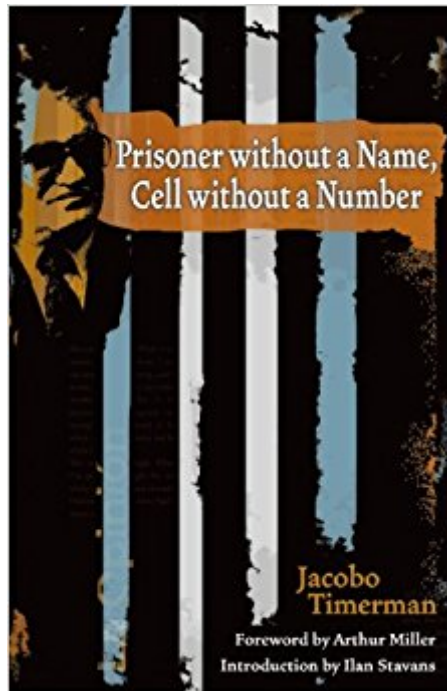


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Prisoner Without A Name, Cell Without A Number (The Americas)



Synopsis

The Americas, Ilan Stavans, Series Editor € Winner of a 1982 Los Angeles Times Book Prize € Selected by the New York Times for "Books of the Century" With a new introduction by Ilan Stavans and a new foreword by Arthur Miller.

Book Information

Series: The Americas

Paperback: 164 pages

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Customer Reviews

Journalist Jacobo Timerman (1923-1999) makes a powerful statement about life as a political prisoner. Timerman was publisher of LA OPINION, a centrist-liberal newspaper when Argentina's military took power in a 1976 coup amidst violent instability. The governing militarists soon launched their National Reorganization Process (or "dirty war") to stabilize the nation by ridding Argentina of leftists, young activists, and other undesireables. Timerman dared publish stories opposing how the military was grabbing people who then disappeared, an action that led to his own arrest in early 1977. Isolated in a tiny cell, Timerman was regularly blindfolded, interrogated, and tortured with an electronic cattle prod. Adding to his dilemma, Timerman was Jewish in a nation hardly devoid of military Anti-Semitism. Timerman describes learning to think and dream of almost nothing as a means of surviving his predicament. Ironically, a smuggled letter from his wife on their anniversary added to his torment by reminding him of family and freedom. Actually, Timerman was somewhat lucky; unlike most detainees he wasn't killed, but instead transferred to house arrest and then deported to Israel - saved perhaps by his stature or the efforts of diplomats. Writing these pages

from exile in 1981, Timerman claimed he was unable to properly describe the physical and mental horror of his experience - although readers should get the point. Additionally, Timerman provides solid political analysis, while opposing violence, corruption, and Anti-Semitism. He also attacks police states of both the right and the left - a nice change from the many that find fault with one but not the other. All this in just 164 moving pages.

It may sound like a bit of hyperbole to compare the Argentina of 1966 - 1980* with present-day North Korea--which I imagine to be the closest thing we have to hell on Earth. But after reading Jacobo Timerman's PRISONER WITHOUT A NAME, CELL WITHOUT A NUMBER, I'll risk it.* N. B.: Never mind that "the military had assumed power by dislodging elected governments in 1930, 1943, 1955 and 1962" (p. 47). "Hate and ignorance. What you don't understand you destroy," he writes (of his captors) on p. 104. In addition to Timerman's sometimes graphic descriptions of captivity, deprivation and outright torture, he gives an insider's testimony of the absolutely stultifying ignorance of the Argentine military and police forces. What's more, it's upon this ignorance (and, no doubt, upon an equal portion of sadistic malevolence) that they act -- on Timerman, obviously, but on tens of thousands of others as well. I've read of past atrocities at places like Buchenwald, Treblinka and Auschwitz -- and yes, even at Andersonville during our own Civil War. I've visited Dachau, though not Abu Ghraib or My Lai. In other words, I'm no Pollyanna, even if I'm better read than traveled. And perhaps the sheer absurdity -- never mind the heinousness -- of each of these 'monuments' to homo sapiens is something they all have in common. And yet, I think that this citation from pp.

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