

# How Do You Define Torture?

The United States government, or its agents or contractors, have used and may still be using a method of interrogation called waterboarding. It consists of binding a person to a board, wrapping his head in plastic, and then dowsing his head with water.

John Edwards, in his historical study of the Spanish Inquisition, writes: "Apart from the secrecy of denunciations and interrogations, the main question on which the Inquisition's more recent objectors have concentrated is that of the use of torture. ... Torture was used to extract evidence [confessions] and not as a means of punishment. ... Three main methods of torment were used by the Inquisition. The first, the 'garrucha', consisted of a pulley attached to the ceiling, from which the prisoner was hung with heavy weights attached to his feet. The torture consisted of raising the accused slowly to the ceiling and letting him fall with a jerk, thus stretching and often dislocating the arms and legs. The second method, known as 'toca', involved tying the accused down on a rack, keeping his mouth open by force, and pouring water continuously into it through a linen cloth (or toca). The third technique, which was most commonly used after 1600, was the 'potro', in which the prisoner was tied to a rack with ropes that were tightened by the orders of the inquisitors. Both men and women were stripped to a few flimsy garments for these procedures, which might be repeated on numerous occasions in order to bring a prisoner to a state of submission. [*The Spanish Inquisition*, by John Edwards, 1999, Tempus Press, USA and UK, ISBN 0 7524 1770 3, p.111]

The second of the two methods of 'interrogation' described differs only in minor details from waterboarding. The evident effect on a prisoner is the same in either case, namely, fear of asphyxiation and panic.

Call this interrogation or torture, as you please. How clever is it of the Bush administration to be seen to be using some of the same methods as the Spanish Inquisition?

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