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The Question

By Henri Alleg

With a new afterword by the author

Translated from the French by John Calder

Preface by Jean-Paul Sartre

New foreword by Ellen Ray

New introduction by James D. Le Sueur

Publication Date: September 2006

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Book Synopsis: Henri Alleg's infamous account of his torture and incarceration by the French Military.

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University of Nebraska Press



Book Description

Originally published in 1958, *The Question* is the book that opened the torture debate in France during Algeria's war of independence and was the first book since the eighteenth century to be banned by the French government for political reasons.

At the time of his arrest by French paratroopers during the Battle of Algiers in June of 1957, Henri Alleg was a French journalist who supported Algerian independence. He was interrogated for one month. During this imprisonment, Alleg was questioned under torture, with unbelievable brutality and sadism. *The Question* is Alleg's profoundly moving account of that month and of his triumph over his torturers. Jean-Paul Sartre's preface remains a relevant commentary on the moral and political effects of torture on both the victim and perpetrator.

This Bison Books edition marks the first time since 1958 that *The Question* has been published in the United States. For this edition Ellen Ray provides a foreword. James D. Le Sueur offers an introduction.

Praise for *The Question* (current edition)

"I read *The Question* in one quick sitting, riveted. It packs a tremendous punch today. It ought be required reading in all the military academies and issued to all DOD employees GS-11 and above."—David Levering Lewis

"*The Question* remains a political touchstone in France, and Mr. Alleg, who is still active in his mid-80s, is a familiar commentator there on the past crimes of French colonialism. But in the English-speaking world, the book has been largely forgotten. Now Bison Books, an imprint of the University of Nebraska Press, has published a new American edition, the first since 1958. It includes an afterword in which Mr. Alleg draws parallels between French conduct in Algeria and the American treatment of detainees at Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib."—*The Chronicle of Higher Education*

"The lessons of the French experience in Algeria came into play in 2003, when the Pentagon screened Gillo Pontecorvo's classic 1965 film, *The Battle of Algiers*, for its special-operations chiefs as an example of the tactical use of torture and murder against terrorism. Now Henri Alleg's incendiary little book, *The Question*, has been republished for the first time since 1958, with penetrating contextualization in the time of Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib by historians Ellen Ray and James D. Le Sueur."—David Levi Strauss, *Bookforum*

"Henri Alleg's book *The Question* is a searing, firsthand account of the torture that the author experienced during the Battle of Algiers. Although it was first published in 1958, it is a book that should still be read today: first, because it is a classic of anti-colonialist literature; and second, because—as the horrors of Abu Ghraib and the current debates in the U.S. about the use of torture make clear—"the question" of torture is, unfortunately, still with us."—Kevin Kyle, *People's Weekly World*

"The University of Nebraska Press is to be commended for bringing out this classic at a time when testimony from the past has something to offer to current debates over the Iraq war. It also contributes to the ongoing reexamination of what the war and its memory has meant for French society."—*H-Net Book Reviews, H-France*



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Praise for *The Question* (first edition)

“Even more extraordinary is the manner in which [Alleg] tells his story: in its studied calm, its refusal to give expression to hatred, it nearly reaches a level of serenity and thus increases its effectiveness. This book not only might have shocked the conscience of France . . . it should disturb the conscience of all men.”—*French Review*

“[A] noble and in a sense ennobling book, the dominant impression it leaves is one of a progressive and finally an almost total degradation, a degradation both of persons—except for the tortured, the outlawed—and of social institutions. *The Question* is far more than an account of atrocities, however spectacular.”—*The Nation*

Author Biography



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Henri Alleg, a French-Algerian journalist, was a member of the Algerian Communist party and the editor of the *Algerian Republican* when he was arrested in 1957. Alleg was imprisoned at El-Biar, where he was tortured by highly-decorated military officers. Found guilty of “offenses against the external safety of the State and the rebuilding of a dissolved league,” Alleg was sentenced to 10 years in prison. It was during this time that he penned *The Question* (*La question*), which described his torture and exposed those who committed the atrocities against humanity. Though the 1958 publication sent shockwaves through France and was subsequently banned by the French government, the book received support and popularity in the underground community. Currently, Alleg is a journalist in Paris, the author of many works in French, as well as an internationally respected activist against all crimes against humanity.



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Renowned French Journalist and Author Henri Alleg to Visit U.S. in April

Henri Alleg, a journalist living in Paris and the author of many works in French, will visit the United States April 18-25, 2007. Alleg will speak at Columbia, Vassar, and NYU.

In September 2006—for the first time in the United States since 1958—Bison Books published Henri Alleg's *The Question*. The original edition of *The Question* opened the torture debate in France during Algeria's war of independence and was the first book since the eighteenth century to be banned by the French government for political reasons.

At the time of his arrest by French paratroopers during the Battle of Algiers in June of 1957, Henri Alleg was a French journalist who supported Algerian independence. He was interrogated for one month. During this imprisonment, Alleg was questioned under torture, with unbelievable brutality and sadism. *The Question* is Alleg's profoundly moving account of that month and of his triumph over his torturers. Jean-Paul Sartre's preface remains a relevant commentary on the moral and political effects of torture on both the victim and perpetrator. Jean-Paul Sartre was one of the most influential writers and existentialist philosophers of the twentieth century.

Ellen Ray provides a foreword for the Bison Books edition. James D. Le Sueur offers an introduction. Ellen Ray is the coauthor, with Michael Ratner, of *Guantanamo: What the World Should Know*. James D. Le Sueur is an associate professor of history at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. He is the editor of *Mouloud Feraoun's Journal, 1955–1962: Reflections on the French–Algerian War* (Nebraska 2000) and the author of *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria, Second Edition* (Nebraska 2005).

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