



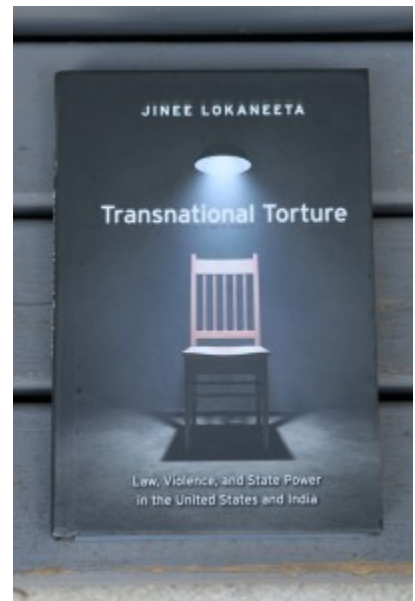
## Drew Today

### Truth About Torture

The photo was sickening: a female U.S. Army reservist holding a leash around the neck of a naked inmate on the floor of Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. But it was also powerful, igniting a national debate about the government’s use of torture to extract information about terrorism post-9/11. Many Americans were shocked by the images from Abu Ghraib and reports of abuse from Guantanamo Bay, the U.S. military prison in Cuba, but they should not have been, professor Jinee Lokaneeta says in a new book.

“People reacted as if Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo were something new, an aberration, but even before 9/11, the laws were much more ambiguous about the infliction of pain and suffering. Democracies say, ‘We don’t allow torture,’ but the fact is that accommodation of violence is actually a problem in liberal democracies,” says Lokaneeta, an assistant professor of political science.

In her book, *Transnational Torture*, she examines the record of two constitutional democracies—the U.S. and India—and analyzes dozens of high court decisions involving charges of excessive violence. India has “quite a high” number of cases alleging torture or death in custody, especially in the disputed Kashmir region, but its government denies the problem, says



Lokaneeta, 40, who taught at the University of Delhi before earning her **Ph.D. at the University of Southern California [Political Science, 2006]**. “It’s always explained as a problem of a ‘few bad apples’ who have to be reformed.”

The U.S. has a multitude of regulations, statutes and constitutional protections prohibiting torture, and abides by international treaties prohibiting cruel and degrading treatment. Yet many of the laws fail to define exactly what authorities may, or may not, do during interrogation sessions. And state officials often interpret them so narrowly “they lose the purpose of protecting people,” Lokaneeta says. While President Obama signed an executive order ending torture in 2009, “he has not addressed these complexities.”

Seven years after the first disclosures about Abu Ghraib, the torture debate goes on. “There is constant debate. The courts have addressed the more brutal forms of torture, but there is a lot of space on the continuum between these brutal measures and torture. Is sleep deprivation torture? Is waterboarding torture?,” she says. “The techniques keep getting modified. There’s an attempt to say, ‘Anything less than physical violence is not torture.’”—**Mary Jo Patterson**

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