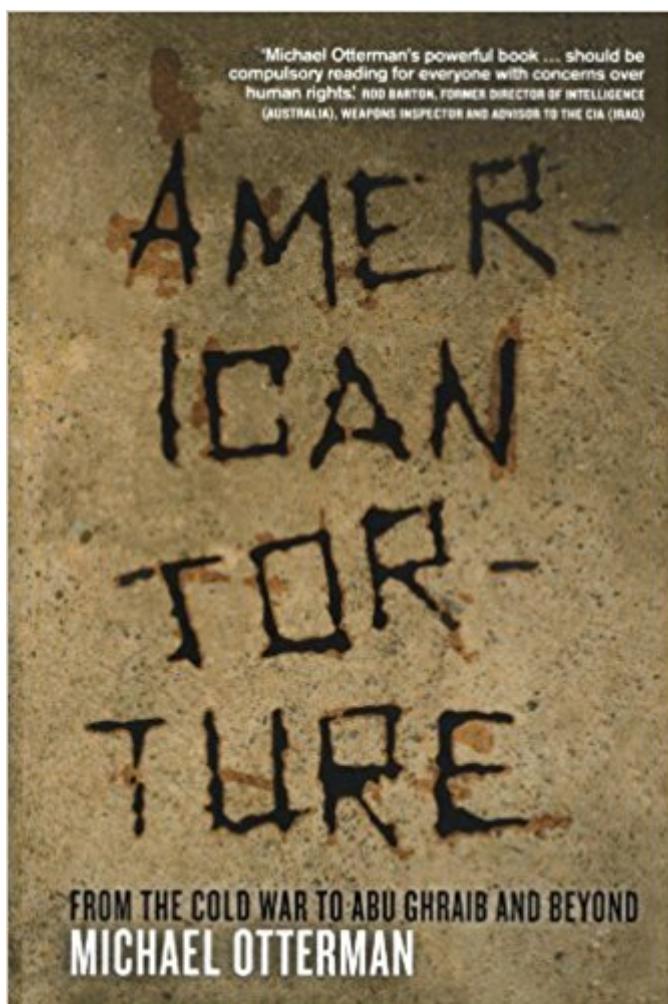


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# American Torture: From The Cold War To Abu Ghraib And Beyond



## **Synopsis**

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## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

'A hard-hitting survey revealing how torture became a standard practice in the War on Terror' -- Internet Bookwatch

Michael Otterman is an award-winning freelance journalist and human rights consultant. He was a recent visiting scholar at the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Sydney. He is the author of American Torture (Pluto, 2007).

This book gets my highest accolade: it is explanatory. It explains in clear prose the complex subject of the evolution of American torture policy. It starts with the CIA's early cold war fear and fascination that the Russians could so successfully "brainwash" Hungarian Cardinal Joseph Mindszenty. It traces how the CIA then adopted these Communist brainwashing techniques, and how finally the Military Commissions Act of 2006 enacted them into law for official CIA use. The cruel and illegal has now become lawful for the CIA. Along the way the book explains, for one among many examples, how John Yoo's infamous memo justifying torture did so only by ignoring the Geneva Convention (which is a ratified treaty and therefore binding US law). This book is a brilliant jury argument to the American people as they begin to gather into judgment about the present regime's attempt to collapse all power into the hands of a single Branch. This book makes the case that the

President has had no respect for the law, particularly the law against torture, and that finally in 2006 the Congress was scared into going along with him. Like a good lawyer's summation to a jury, this book is long on facts and short on argument. It lets the facts make the case - because it's facts that sway juries. The author is a journalist but he can argue a case like few lawyers can. This book needs to be read by any American in the jury who wants to have an informed say about torture. No matter how evil terrorists may be, when we become evil in return we destroy the law that makes us strong. Torture is costing the United States its soul, and even at this price torture yields little useful information.

Otterman's work presented in his book *American Torture* will no doubt be recognized as a classic for those opposing the so called "coalition of the willing" war on Islam. His early chapters describe the torture being applied to detainees (POW's) and suspected terrorists. The 'human face' of torture and the complicity of professionals and the U.S. government in systematic torture of these unfortunate captives. The material is hard hitting and one gets the sense that Mike is pulling his punches in order to not horrify his audience. A wise move, indeed, as the torture is very ugly. My initial response was to ponder what darkness lies in men's hearts to do such things to fellow human beings. Combined with the widely broadcast pictures of torture at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, these chapters resound with Robert Lifton's *The Genocidal Mentality*. Lifton was the sole survivor of his family from Nazi Germany's death camps for Jewish, homosexual and others who are 'different' who live with us. The answer Lifton came to was that the entire process of exterminating Jews (or rephrased for today's audience 'Ethnic cleansing') was done by bureaucrats who were simply following orders. This now seems almost obvious. The torturers were driven by the glue of society - obedience to authority. Authority and power unjustly used is the problem. Otterman does a fabulous job explicating the details of this process and lays the problem directly at the feet of the elected government's neo conservative policies and rhetoric. As a Psychologist, author of several books and University Professor, I was absolutely appalled by the involvement of my profession with respect to their designing, implementing and supervising the practices described in Mike's book. Psychologists are banned from using cruel and inhumane practices in their professional activities. So, the US government defies international law and introduces a re-definition of what constitutes cruel and inhuman practices. A handful of my American psychologists colleagues can then continue to perpetrate the most vile of practices which are condemned by international law. It is true that my confusion and anger with these colleagues' practice of torture as defined by the UN Convention on Human Rights continues to deeply trouble me. However, the problem is clearly laid

at the feet of the fundamentalists' in power governing the US Empire. In his final chapter (The dual state) Otterman finally bursts forth from his closet, pulling no punches whatsoever. In response to Mike Otterman's work in the final chapter, the following quote seems appropriate: All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as self-evident. - Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). Mike has released his book and the reader should understand that we are now dealing with Stage 2 of Schopenhauer's stages. I most heartily endorse this book for anyone who is able to think 'out of the box'. I can say my students will be required to use this book as a text of several on state terrorism. Professor Arthur Veno, Ph.D. Monash University

AMERICAN TORTURE is a hard-hitting survey revealing how torture became a standard practice in the War on Terror, how it was honed and legalized and how the US military and CIA had used torture before both at home and abroad. These tortures were legalized using the laws designed to eradicate their use as the Cold War ended: chapters survey the history of torture in American prisons around the world, discuss teachings of U.S. military survival schools and programs supported by the U.S. around the world, and consider the social impact of torture's acceptance. A 'must' for any college-level collection strong in ethics or social issues.

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