

*Genocide: A World History*. Norman M. Naimark. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

ISBN: 9780199765263

The very brief but cogently argued *Genocide: A World History* by Norman M. Naimark covers the topic for the most part chronologically from the first instances of genocide discussed in the Hebrew Bible to the post-Cold War atrocities in Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and recently Darfur. This slender book is part of the larger Oxford New World History series. The editors' stated goal is trying to avoid the pitfalls of the "old" world history of either covering mostly western history only or just outlining the great achievements of world cultures but neglecting the "total human experience." Naimark is a well-respected historian at Stanford University and is certainly well equipped to handle such a task. His previous efforts have focused on genocide in Europe specifically and include *Fires of Hatred: A History of Ethnic Cleansing in Modern Europe* (2001) and *Stalin's Genocides* (2010).

*Genocide: A World History* begins by pointing out that genocide always has been part of the human experience. It has flourished in small and large, primitive and modern societies, where it has focused on a variety of internal groups, but also neighboring and even distant territories. In providing a brief definition of the term genocide Naimark first discusses the differences to war crimes and crimes against humanity, before stressing the instrumental role of the Polish Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin in defining the modern meaning of genocide. As codified in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide adopted by the United Nations on December 9, 1948, genocide means a variety of "acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such." Naimark is willing to

stick mostly with this commonly accepted definition, but he adds also the attempted elimination of social and political groups.

The main body of the book is divided into eight chapters capturing the story of genocide chronologically beginning with Chapter 1, “The Ancient World.” At the outset, Naimark freely admits to the questionable historicity of the Hebrew Bible and ancient authors such as Thucydides. However, he claims that readers could still learn a lot from studying these sources. The stories of the Amalekites and Melians, of the inhabitants of Jericho and Troy certainly exhibited common themes. Political leaders gave the order to kill “identifiable groups of human beings” in an “intentional, total, and eliminationist” way. In addition, these leaders often used the argument that gods or God had asked for the complete destruction of one’s enemies. Justifications for genocide often included a desire for new land and revenge for alleged past deeds. “Imperial glory, pride, and feelings of superiority” became part and parcel of genocide. Chapter 2, “Warrior Genocides” brings home another important theme common to many such atrocities, their connection to war. Admittedly war has not been necessary for genocide to occur, but the latter has been “most often associated with wartime intentions, policies, and actions.” This connection also makes it often complicated to clearly distinguish between war-related actions and genocide. Naimark here uses the Mongolian conquests beginning in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the various Christian crusades as examples. In his view, the Mongols’ behavior towards their enemies in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe certainly warrants the label of genocide. After all, they eliminated whole communities, at times including women and children, often for a perceived slight to their honor. They were not guided by a specific ideology but by their leaders’ desire to build an empire. In comparison, the brutal atrocities committed by the crusading armies

although justified by an overarching ideology only “contained the seeds of genocide,” which at times took on “genocidal proportions.”

In Chapter 3, “The Spanish Conquest,” the author answers the question if the death of about 70 million Native Americans as a result of first contact with Europeans after 1492 C.E. constituted genocide in the affirmative. He admits that there was an overall lack of intent to exterminate the indigenous population of the Americas, and diseases took their toll for sure. Other behaviors and beliefs of the European invaders, however, made this an instance of genocide. The Spanish arrived imbued with a proto-racism derived from their long-standing hatred of Muslims and Jews. Like the Mongols, they astounded their contemporary observers with their willingness, even eagerness, “to kill at will and to wipe out entire towns and villages, slaying men, women, and children.” They considered the natives inferior, who had no right to exist except as slaves; an attitude Naimark calls the “mentality of genocidaires.” He continues along these lines of investigation when looking at “Settler Genocides” in Chapter 4. In the treatment of the Aborigines of Tasmania he sees an attempt at genocide also. To further the interests of white sheep farmers on the island, a military campaign cleansed it of natives. In comparison, natives in North America could not all be called victims of genocide. Sure, they faced obvious racism and blatant land grabs, but Naimark prefers to use the term “ethnic cleansing” when discussing the plight of the Pequot in New England in the 17<sup>th</sup> century or that of the Cherokee in the Trail of Tears in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast, the Yuki in California clearly faced genocidal conquest starting with the gold rush in the late 1840s. These natives suffered from malnutrition, disease, rape, and the abduction of their children, but also an attempt to kill all Yuki men and enslave the rest. Likewise, the San in South Africa, called Bushmen by the Europeans, became the target of genocide on the hands of the Boer settlers in the 19<sup>th</sup>

century. These descendants of Dutch settlers viewed the San as wild animals, subhuman, and unproductive, and therefore engaged in a systematic policy to shoot them on sight and drive the rest into the desert, where they died from lack of food and water.

Chapter 5, entitled “Modern Genocides,” marks probably the heart of this book. In it Naimark covers the genocides of the Nama and Herero in German Southwest Africa, of the Armenians on the hand of the Turks, and of the European Jews in the Nazi Holocaust. These became the first “modern” genocides due to the use of more efficient ways of transportation and communication, more deadly weapons technology and ways of killing, modern media, and finally a modern bureaucracy. All these innovations allowed for more efficient ways to exterminate whole groups. New ideas and ideologies, such as a racialized social Darwinism going hand in hand with an extreme and violent nationalism, helped to supersede the earlier settler genocides, which allowed for “a new and more dangerous form of mass killing that harnessed the power of the modern state to its murderous ends.” As a result, the Germans used death camps, among other tactics, to reduce the Herero cattle herders in Namibia from 80,000 to only about 15,000 refugees. Likewise, the Germans were involved in the Armenian genocide by serving as advisers to the Turkish government during World War I. In 1915 and 1916 alone, up to 1 million Armenians died in an enforced exodus to the Syrian desert. Finally, the Germans again were instrumental in killing; this time about 6 million Jews during World War II, and also many mentally and physically disabled Germans, homosexuals, and Sinti and Roma.

To capture the essence of the genocides after World War II, Naimark makes use of the interesting division between “Communist Genocides” in Chapter 6 and “Anti-Communist Genocides” in Chapter 7. In the first group fell the violence unleashed by Stalin on kulaks, non-Russian minorities, and even the Soviet Communist Party itself from the 1930s to the dictator’s

death in 1953. Also included were the death of 30 to 47 million Chinese in Mao's Great Leap Forward from 1958 to 1962, and finally the crimes of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia in the 1970s, which cost about 20% of the country's population their lives. In all of these, dictators guided by revolutionary thinking focused on real and imagined class and political enemies. The perpetrators often conflated "the categories of class and politics, on the one hand, and ethnic, religious, and national, on the other." This made the distinction between different kinds of mass killing complicated. In comparison, the anti-Communist genocides in Guatemala, Indonesia, and specifically in East Timor, began as local issues but the Cold War made these conflicts more deadly. Right wing governments, often quietly supported by the United States, used Cold War rhetoric to lash out against leftist uprisings. Therefore, the victims were defined in political terms, but were also ascribed "biological characteristics of lesser beings." As a result, they by necessity had to be exterminated to allow for a "healthy new order to survive and prosper."

Naimark then finishes with Chapter 8, entitled "Genocide in the Post-Cold War World." Beginning with the war in the former Yugoslavia from 1991 to 1995, the Rwandan genocide in 1994, and the intervention in Kosovo in 1999 genocide consciousness and awareness increased tremendously worldwide. For example, at Srebrenica in Bosnia in 1995 the failure of Dutch U.N. troops to save thousands of Bosnian Muslim men and boys led to a major outcry particularly in the western world. A year earlier, in Rwanda about 800,000 people were killed within a matter of weeks; mostly Tutsi, but also about 50,000 Hutu. Finally, between 300,000 and 400,000 lost their lives in Darfur between 2003 and 2010 due to attacks by the so-called Janjaweed militias (Muslims of Arabic ethnicity) on mostly Muslim black Africans. Naimark concludes with pointing to the on-going problem of genocide by mentioning the civil war in Syria in recent years.

Overall *Genocide: A World History* constitutes a solid overview of the topic. It is well written and clearly geared towards undergraduates and advanced high school students, who certainly would benefit from being assigned this volume. It is actually quite impressive how Naimark finds a nice balance between having to cover so many examples of genocide and still being able to outline causation and impact in a detailed manner. He also manages to provide numerous direct quotes from individuals affected by these atrocities, giving the reader a good idea what genocide might have meant to them. Of course, at only 144 pages of text, plus endnotes, a short bibliography, and a list of useful websites, the narrative is rather short. In comparison, the almost encyclopedic *Blood and Soil* (2007) by Ben Kiernan comes in at over 600 pages. Obviously, it was the goal of the editors to put together short and accessible accounts of major issues in world history, but a little more detail here and there would have been nice. For example, it would have been useful to students working on seminar papers to include more detailed annotated bibliographies at the end of each chapter instead of just a very brief list of major works on the topic at the end. Likewise, what is missing a bit here is coverage of the legal implications of genocide. In what ways have perpetrators been put to justice? Or why have they not had to face courts for their crimes? At least the Nuremberg trials after World War II, the Eichmann trial in the early 1960s, and the work of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and its equivalent for Rwanda (ICTR) deserved more specific treatment in the context of the history of genocide. That being said, in general this book is a worthwhile addition to any list of assigned readings in undergraduate classes on genocide and even world history in general.

*Christoph Schiessl, Pierre Laclède Honors College, University of Missouri – St. Louis*