



## **Blood And Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur**

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## **Blood And Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur** Ben Kiernan

For thirty years Ben Kiernan has been deeply involved in the study of genocide and crimes against humanity. He has played a key role in unearthing confidential documentation of the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge. His writings have transformed our understanding not only of twentieth-century Cambodia but also of the historical phenomenon of genocide. This new book—the first global history of genocide and extermination from ancient times—is among his most important achievements.

Kiernan examines outbreaks of mass violence from the classical era to the present, focusing on worldwide colonial exterminations and twentieth-century case studies including the Armenian genocide, the Nazi Holocaust, Stalin's mass murders, and the Cambodian and Rwandan genocides. He identifies connections, patterns, and features that in nearly every case gave early warning of the catastrophe to come: racism or religious prejudice, territorial expansionism, and cults of antiquity and agrarianism. The ideologies that have motivated perpetrators of mass killings in the past persist in our new century, says Kiernan. He urges that we heed the rich historical evidence with its telltale signs for predicting and preventing future genocides.

## **Blood And Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur Details**

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### **Aleksei says**

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### **Piet Boels says**

Started reading this book after a reference in Steven Pinker's The Better Angels of our Nature (978-0141034645). I even postponed finishing the latter read for this book. It is a well researched book written in an easy readable English but it suffers, very curiously, from an inverted perspective where genocides in early historical times are given much more attention compared to those that occurred (are occurring) in the present times. Lumping Pol Pot's crimes together with those of the Sudanese regime in one chapter labelled "From the Mekong to the Nile", is a bit rich in my opinion. I do not know whether Ben Kiernan's expertise is situated more in early and classical history than in early modern, modern or contemporary history, but the further one reads into the book (and the closer one approaches the present) the shorter and sketchier the descriptions become. A pity for a book where the title appears to promise a complete and equally detailed description of the various instances of genocide throughout history. Contrasting other books on history I have read, am reading, I have not obtained any major new insights from this book, despite its obvious well researched and broad scope.

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### **Garrett Werner says**

Good book overall. I wish things in transition in a much more recognizable way.

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### **anna says**

Even though this was a really dry and at times laborious read, it was a great introduction to the history of some countries that were relatively unfamiliar to me, although the ones that were familiar like the chapters on Nazi Germany, Stalinist USSR, and Mao's China didn't contribute anything new. The chapters on classical and modern Japan were fascinating, and of course the chapters on Rwanda, Cambodia and late 20th and 21st century should make up a whole other volume.

Colonial North America chapter starts out really dry but then it gets going once the reader reaches the massacres perpetrated by the English in New England and the mid-Atlantic states, it's horrific to think that some of these beautiful New England places are really sites of mass murder: the Narangassets of Rhode Island exterminated, the Pequots of Mystic completely annihilated, et. al. And the Old Testament was used to justify the massacres committed by Christians, "I would refer you to David's war....Sometimes the Scripture declare the women and children must perish with their parents...." (231). Never before have I

consciously thought about what happened on this land that we inhabit or compared it to the horrors of the 20th century. Granted, that the majority of native Americans died because of diseases that Europeans inadvertently brought, still the ones that were left were killed off or sold into slavery in the Caribbean. Like in places where Nazi mass murders occurred there should be placards in New England commemorating the different tribes that were exterminated here. The chapter that deals with the 18th century shows that Thomas Jefferson often ordered or condoned mass extermination of native Americans while he was a president, in fact he seems just as scary as Andrew Jackson, and Stephen Austin as well while he governed Texas. (The only good guys in relationship to native Americans -from all those whom history tells us to revere-seem to be Davy Crockett and Sam Houston.) Typical Jefferson quote " however we must leave it to yourself to decide on the object of the campaign. If against these Indians, the end proposed should be their extermination, or their removal beyond the lakes or Illinois river. The same world will scarcely do for them and us" (323) he wrote to Virginian general Clark.

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### **Lauren Ferguson says**

I agree with other readers' sentiments that the topics are covered disproportionately, however, I assume this has more to do with complex political barriers as well as limited access to the full extent of information. Ultimately, reading about genocide and massacre will always and should always be difficult, but still absolutely necessary. We must never forget the horrors of the past lest they continue to be repeated.

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### **sdw says**

What a depressing book! I read the introduction and several relevant chapters. I am sure I would know more about world history if I had read the whole book but the depressing topic and the inability to see this book directly affecting my dissertation lead me to skip whole chapters on horrible atrocities. I am really glad there are historians out there with the emotional distance or fortitude to write such books. Such histories need to be recorded and I can't imagine being the one to write them.

Genocides Covered: "Classical Genocide"; Spanish Conquest of New World; East Asia 1400-1600, Early Modern Southeast Asia; English Conquest of Ireland, Colonial North America, 19th C Australia, Genocide in 19th C US, Settler Genocide in Africa, 1830-1910, Armenian Genocide, Nazi Genocide, Japan and East Asia, Soviets, Maoism, Cambodia and Rwanda. The epilogue is entitled "Bangladesh to Baghdad"

One of the key themes of this book seems to be that genocides are connected. For example, the English conquest of Ireland provided a precedent for the genocide that occurred in North America. This included actual veterans of one conquest involved in another. I was less than pleased when self-defense of communities facing imperialism was labeled genocide. Namely, Indians who killed settlers inhabiting their lands were not on identical moral ground as settlers massacring Indian villages. Nor can slave rebellions be labeled as genocidal actions. However, Kieernan's assertion about the agrarian roots of American empire and the genocide justified by American agrarian expansion proved quite useful to my project. I was also very intrigued to find out what Adam Smith had to say about agriculture the year the US declared independence: "No equal capital puts into motion a greater quantity of productive labour than does that of the farmer" (315). And I didn't realize that the British had sold some Native Americans into slavery in Bermuda and Jamaica.

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### **Joshua Deaver says**

This book is difficult to read. The writing is great, the topic is heartbreaking. Genocide from the begining of penned history to the modern day is ground breaking in its own right. Detaching yourself from the topic is hard but the read is worth the pain!

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### **Michaeld says**

A very difficult read... In the sense that the content is extremely sad and the speed that the information flies out at.

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### **Johann Manstein says**

Excellent book, theory makes a great deal of sense. Examples are well developed though it takes a while to get through all of it.

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### **Andre says**

I would not agree with everything this book says (e.g. it states that next to the Islamic world all of early modern Europe saw the "black African Ham as the archetypical slave" but e.g. in the German speaking area that only came in the 18th century, prior to that they had the image of the "Moor" which is more ambivalent and also includes prestige and wealth next to exoticism) but most of it seems to be accurate.

This book was an interesting and very comprehensive study (and yes it is a study, the author himself states it to be nothing else and that certain areas like the Mongol conquests still need more study).

The author points constantly to models of antiquity, especially connected to expansionist and agrarian themes, as a constant feature of genocidal episodes.

The book starts with examples from antiquity like Sparta and the destruction of Carthage, to later go to the Spanish conquest of Meso- and South America, going further to the genocides in the Vietnamese destruction of Champa, the Japanese invasion and genocide of Korea under Emperor Hidejoshi, leading to a chapter on genocidal massacres in Southeast Asia. In fact these examples already put the claim of Holocaust as the only genocide into perspective as the exclusionist and often apologist, and possible racist, claim that it is.

And speaking of racism, according to this *the English had proven to themselves that their colonial projects required displacement of large native populations. Neither religious reform nor pliant parliaments could assure the supremacy of the conquerors. It was necessary to terrorize and disperse or eliminate those whose lands they seized, and whom they increasingly portrayed as racially distinct.* Not to mention that apparently France once waged "a war of near extermination" against Fox Indians and I wonder whether they have that in their history books.

And when you read this, you know how much hypocrisy there is in the public discourse on genocide, you see in Tasmania we also had public calls for extermination of the Natives, openly and with barely any restraint and if these were Germans and not British settlers, I am pretty sure they would have been called Nazis

already and no one would dare call it anything but a genocide (especially since here wide parts of the public definitely were openly involved) but I guess as this is Tasmania it is totally different... but there are still Americans and Australians, even moderate ones, who still deny that they had genocide in their history.

*In fact, America thus furnished a precedent for German colonial brutality, just as Britain's convict colony of New South Wales had. "Such slaughter, robberies and dissoluteness, much as they are to be condemned, no more reduced the uses of the colony for the home country than they ruled out the introduction of civilization."*

Of course the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust are also in here, sadly as typical focused on Jews and no one else, as well as the genocide in Cambodia (in all the killing there was one against Vietnamese, and the Khmer Rouge had planned to kill all 50 million Vietnamese) as well as the genocide in Rwanda and later genocidal massacres up to Darfur.

So, all things said, this is a very informative book and definitely to be recommended, however I also have to warn anyone who wants to give this a try: This book is pretty damn big.

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### **Colleen Browne says**

This book gives a decent, if incomplete review of genocide from the earliest history into the 21st Century. That is a massive task for anyone and I applaud his ambition. There was a good deal of information and this book seems like a good place to start a study of genocide. From Sparta and Carthage, to Al Queda, there is plenty to learn. That said, Kiernans coverage of genocidal episodes was uneven and toward the end of the book it felt like he lost his commitment to the subject and just wanted to finish it already. His theory of the components of genocide, at least the agrarian part of it is rather tenuous and therefore hard to support overall. I also took exception to his dismissal of the Great Hunger in Ireland during the 19th Century. The UN definition of genocide is as follows:

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

Killing members of the group;

Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;

Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;

Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Kiernan claims that the famine was caused by the failure of the potato crop. Well no. A famine is when starvation is caused by a severe lack of food. There was no shortage of food in Ireland at the time. The problem was that it was all exported. During the 1840's when the potato failed in Ireland, it also failed in several other countries but starvation didn't result because those governments put in place measure to ensure people didn't starve. The British refused to do this and the catastrophe happened. Moreover, the excuse used by some historians that because their belief in Laissez faire was so strong, they couldn't bring themselves to do more. That doesn't even pass the laugh test. If Kiernan had researched it more thoroughly, he might have read the about the deep seated hatred that the British had for the Irish. He might have discovered comments made by the government about their concern that the potato failure wouldn't kill enough people. According to the definition quoted above, anyone with a knowledge of the Great Hunger will realize that it was indeed genocide.

I have read several books on genocide. None of them covered as much as Kiernans but most of them gave a better sense of what it was like on the ground.

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### **Jeremy says**

Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur, the title says it all. Ben Kiernan's book is a dense examination of the causes and outcomes of genocide throughout the world. It's awfully depressing to read how some of these conflicts started so small, and grew to people trying to erase certain groups of people from existence.

Groups hating others because of what land they own, what god they worship and what political party they follow are all some of the reasons given. The results are pretty horrible. It talks about genocides we all know about like Nazi Germany and the deaths under Stalin, but goes back in time for other events, as well as the more recent conflicts in Darfur. The most surprising thing is how much genocide has increased after World War II. You'd think something as horrible as the Jewish people being slaughtered would make the people of the world decide something like that will never happen ever again, but we slip back into it so easily, where now it doesn't seem to get much publicity unless someone makes a movie about it.

It's a depressing book if you can't tell. Something I think was good for me to read, but I'm going to stick with some lighter stuff for a few weeks. It should be required reading by leaders of countries all over the world. The book shows the unstable areas of the world are where genocides start to happen, and the world seems to be turning less stable all the time. It's a good warning of what can continue to happen if we don't find a way to prevent it.

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### **Matthew says**

A bloody book, as you might imagine; it can get kind of numbing after a while. Number one insight: Nazis used the American genocide of Indians as a model, and justification, for the Holocaust.

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### **Brandy says**

A fantastic history but lumped everything since the 1970s together instead of drawing on trends = post WW2 coverage was disappointing

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### **Kelly says**

So far this book is absolutely amazing in the wealth of information it holds. A definite must-read for any/all interested in history.

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