“This wonderful collection addresses all the important questions: How modern is genocide? Can various cases be compared? Why has genocide been committed by such different kinds of states, from liberal democracies to vicious dictatorships? And how can we balance claims for justice with the need for objective scholarship? Everyone should read this book. It is an emotionally wrenching experience, and one that will make every reader think about modern human history in ways few of us learned in school.”

– Daniel Chirot, Professor of International Studies and Sociology, University of Washington

“The comparative study of genocide is an evolving field characterized by great complexity and often competing approaches, dispositions, and interpretations. The editors of The Specter of Genocide clearly succeed in preserving the specificity of the individual cases while also demonstrating the necessity and worth of comparative analysis. Without ignoring the past, the volume focuses on the age of modernity and the direct relationship between ideology, state power, and total war and the perpetration of genocidal acts. It is sure to find broad application in scholarship and in the classroom.”

– Richard G. Hovannisian, AEF Chair in Modern Armenian History, UCLA
The Specter of Genocide


Genocide, mass murder, and human rights abuses are arguably the most perplexing and deeply troubling aspects of recent world history. This collection of essays by leading international experts offers an up-to-date, comprehensive history and analysis of multiple cases of genocide and genocidal acts, with a focus on the twentieth century. The book contains studies of the Armenian genocide, the victims of Stalinist terror, the Holocaust, and imperial Japan. Several authors explore colonialism and address the fate of the indigenous peoples in Africa, North America, and Australia. As well, there is extensive coverage of the post-1945 period, including the atrocities in the former Yugoslavia, Bali, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Rwanda, East Timor, and Guatemala. The book emphasizes the importance of comparative analysis and theoretical discussion, and it raises new questions about the difficult challenges for modernity constituted by genocide and other mass crimes.


Ben Kiernan is A. Whitney Griswold Professor of History and Director of the Genocide Studies Program at Yale University. He is the author of The Pol Pot Regime (1996; 2nd ed., 2002) and How Pol Pot Came to Power (1985) and the editor of Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia (1993).
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