

GENOCIDE HAS OCCURRED in every time period and on every continent. Although it took the grim aftermath of the Holocaust for this term to emerge, the phenomenon itself haunts the earliest records of human activity. This book tells the dark story of genocide since the beginning of human history, from the bloodlust of the Athenian empire to the intractable tragedy of modern-day Darfur. Norman M. Naimark lucidly shows that genocide both changes over time and remains the same in many of its murderous dynamics. His equally sobering and compelling narrative sweeps us through the desolation of ancient cities such as Jericho, Troy, and Carthage, across Genghis Khan's grasslands, and into the deadly chaos of Syria today. We come to understand each case of genocide as a distinct episode of mass violence, but also in historical connection with a long and chilling pattern of human behavior.

Naimark emphasizes that genocide can also involve the elimination of social and political groups, providing an insightful analysis of persecutions led by communist leaders such as Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot, as well as those led by their anti-communist counterparts. He pays special attention to settler genocide, illuminating how deeply the elimination of indigenous peoples, especially in Africa, South America, and North America, disrupted those regions and in many ways presaged the mass killing on the European continent during the First and Second World Wars. Most disquieting are discussions of the infamous genocides of the last century – the Armenian genocide, the Holocaust, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Congo – whose survivors know the visceral reality of human cruelty. Together these episodes attest to the insidious persistence of mass killing despite the best efforts of our “better angels.”

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