

Human Rights & Human Welfare

Volume 12 | Issue 1

Article 1

2012

Joyce Apstel on The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies. Edited by Donald Bloxham & A. Dirk Moses. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010. 675pp.

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Recommended Citation

Apstel, Joyce (2012) "Joyce Apstel on The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies. Edited by Donald Bloxham & A. Dirk Moses. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010. 675pp.," *Human Rights & Human Welfare*: Vol. 12: Iss. 1, Article 1.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/hrhw/vol12/iss1/1>



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Abstract

A review of:

The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies. Edited by Donald Bloxham & A. Dirk Moses. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010. 675pp.

Keywords

Genocide, History, Politics, Sociology, Anthropology, Philosophy, Holocaust

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The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies, Edited by Donald Bloxham & A. Dirk Moses. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010. 675pp.

New areas of research and interpretations about genocide and other mass violence have multiplied in the last fifteen years. The co-editors of *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, historians Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses, are part of this scholarly enterprise. This collection includes thirty-one essays with short bibliographies introducing the reader to selected topics and new frameworks in the study of genocide.

The volume is divided in five sections: Concepts, Interdisciplinary Perspectives, Pre-Modern and Early Modern Genocide, Genocide in the Late Modern World, and The Contemporary World: Rules and Responses. The editors begin with an essay on "Changing Themes in the Study of Genocide" that gives an overview of the beginnings and controversies in the field such as issues of definition, relationship with Holocaust research, and strengths and blind spots of early scholarship. They argue for the need for "historicization" and the book's organization emphasizes genocide as a global phenomenon that recurs from ancient to modern times. Coverage is an important part of the editors' goals; and they avoid privileging specific regions or events. However, several essays, for example in the Pre-Modern and Early Modern Genocide section such as "Genocide in the Ancient World" and "Early Medieval Europe: the Case of Britain and Ireland" are stand alone pieces that lack reference to the broader themes in genocide studies literature.

Overall the book contains a series of noteworthy contributions. The essays on Interdisciplinary Perspectives are particularly strong and include analysis of developments in law by William A. Schabas, political science by Scott Straus, sociology by Martin Shaw, anthropology by Kevin Lewis O'Neill and philosophy by Martin Shuster. The section will prove particularly valuable as a starting point for students beginning research from specific disciplinary approaches. This reviewer suggests adding essays on history, literature, and on education/teaching and a map and time-line to the next edition of the volume.

The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies reflects the broad range of subjects now linked with study of genocide and incorporates important reframing going on both thematically and regionally in the field. Essays look at a broad, diverse range of topics such as: ethnic cleansing, the state, gender, United Nations and the Cold War, military intervention, and issues of punishment and prevention. For example, Elisa von Joeden-Forgey's excellent essay "Gender and Genocide" analyzes the recent and still small literature on the subject, and provides suggestions for further research areas and re-framing to integrate gender analysis into re-thinking what constitutes genocide. A number of essays emphasize the role of conquest and empire from "Colonial Latin America" to "Rethinking Genocide in North America" to "Genocide and Mass Violence in the 'Heart of Darkness:' Africa in the Colonial Period."

The longest section is on Genocide in the Late Modern World and what is particularly significant here is re-thinking the contexts in which targeted destruction of civilian populations took place during World War One and World War Two, and how the editors place these events and processes within a broader continuum of destruction taking place around the world during the

late modern era. Hilmar Kaiser on "Genocide at the Twilight of the Ottoman Empire" analyzes the Armenian genocide within the "wider Ottoman demographic policies and late Ottoman history" (366). Christopher Browning's essay on "The Nazi Empire" emphasizes that the "Nazi Revolution was to be a racial revolution that reconfigured the demographic make-up of the Nazi empire. The destruction of the Jews was the most comprehensive and far-reaching component of the racial revolution and has become the paradigmatic historical example of total genocide" (424). Other subjects range from "Mass Deportations, Ethnic Cleansing, and Genocidal Politics in the Later Russian Empire and the USSR" and "Genocide and Population Displacement in Post-Communist Eastern Europe." Daniel Feirstein's essay "The National Security Doctrine in Latin America and the Genocide Question" traces the rationale and methods behind how "systematic annihilation of certain groups serves as a tool for the partial destruction and transformation of society from within" (507). A series of essays are on Africa during the colonial period, in North-East Africa and in Africa's Great Lakes region since independence, and on China, Indonesia and other parts of Asia.

The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies is an excellent resource for a range of audiences including students, general readers and human rights practitioners. It provides an overview of the recurrence and variations within genocide as an historical phenomenon along with new directions on a range of concepts, issues and events in studying genocide.

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