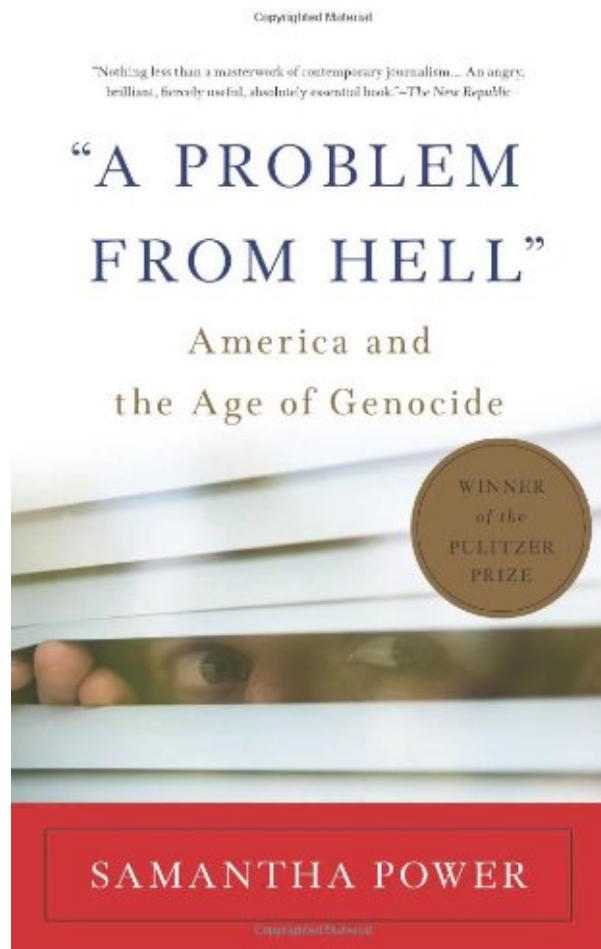


# "A PROBLEM FROM HELL": AMERICA AND THE AGE OF GENOCIDE BY SAMANTHA POWER



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# "A PROBLEM FROM HELL"

America and  
the Age of Genocide

WINNER  
of the  
PULITZER  
PRIZE

SAMANTHA POWER

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Power, a former journalist for U.S. News and World Report and the Economist and now the executive director of Harvard's Carr Center for Human Rights, offers an uncompromising and disturbing examination of 20th-century acts of genocide and U.S. responses to them. In clean, unadorned prose, Power revisits the Turkish genocide directed at Armenians in 1915-1916, the Holocaust, Cambodia's Khmer Rouge, Iraqi attacks on Kurdish populations, Rwanda, and Bosnian "ethnic cleansing," and in doing so, argues that U.S. intervention has been shamefully inadequate. The emotional force of Power's argument is carried by moving, sometimes almost unbearable stories of the victims and survivors of such brutality. Her analysis of U.S. politics what she casts as the State Department's unwritten rule that nonaction is better than action with a PR backlash; the Pentagon's unwillingness to see a moral imperative; an isolationist right; a suspicious left and a population unconcerned with distant nations aims to show how ingrained inertia is, even as she argues that the U.S. must reevaluate the principles it applies to foreign policy choices. In the face of firsthand accounts of genocide, invocations of geopolitical considerations and studied and repeated refusals to accept the reality

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From The New Yorker

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From the Armenian Genocide to the ethnic cleansings of Kosovo and Darfur, modern history is haunted by acts of brutal violence. Yet American leaders who vow “never again” repeatedly fail to stop genocide. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award, "A Problem from Hell" draws upon exclusive interviews with Washington’s top policymakers, thousands of once classified documents, and accounts of reporting from the killing fields to show how decent Americans inside and outside government looked away from mass murder. Combining spellbinding history and seasoned political analysis, "A Problem from Hell" allows readers to hear directly from American decision-makers and dissenters, as well as from victims of genocide, and reveals just what was known and what might have been done while millions perished.

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Inspirational

By A Customer

While one might think that a book about genocide would be depressing, I found reading this book to have the opposite effect. It is inspiring to read the stories of people like Lemkin and Senator Proxmire who doggedly prodded the world to pay attention to this crime. It is also energizing to share the author's outrage at policymakers who trot out every excuse imaginable to avoid taking action in response to reports of genocide. I'm not sure any other book has demonstrated the pattern of response to genocide that is documented in this book. While we pay lip service (particularly since the Holocaust) to the idea that "never again" should such crimes be permitted to occur, every time we see evidence of such crimes actually occurring -- in Cambodia, in Iraq in the late 80's, in Rwanda, in Bosnia -- our leaders are afraid even to use the word genocide to describe them (such as Warren Christopher famously allowing officials to admit only that "acts" of genocide may have taken place in Rwanda). The author is not suggesting that the U.S. intervene in every civil war, but instead that we at least speak out against evil, rather than encouraging it by our silence. Not a dry, dull book at all, but exciting to read.

106 of 118 people found the following review helpful.

Incredible piece of scholarship

By Joshua Gaines

Many of the negative reviews of this book have either decried it for depicting the Armenian genocide or dismissed it as liberal hackery. Both of these objections are spurious. Power has duly researched the Armenian genocide and simply documented the American and international responses to it. Many of the objections actually try to implicate the Armenians as provoking the Turkish authorities into the genocide, while others deny anything took place at all.

As for the charges of a liberal bias, absolutely none exists. And I wonder if anyone who alleges it has actually read the book. One reviewer actually calls Power a communist sympathizer for not reporting on Chinese and Russian atrocities. This absence is understandable when one looks at the fact that American legislators never missed an opportunity to wave moral superiority over Russian and Chinese communists. We almost always criticized them for that sort of the thing. Hell, one of the main reasons for the passage of the Helsinki convention was to be able to criticize the communists for failing to live up to its ratification. There is no liberal bias in this book. Power lauds Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole for making the Balkan genocides a campaign issue, even going so far as to buck the many dissenters in his party. Indeed, even Jesse Helms receives a paean for calling on the Clinton administration to apprehend war criminals. Clinton himself receives a hearty dose of criticism for his languid responses to genocide in Rwanda and the Balkans.

This book is brilliant. Anyone curious about the heroes and villains of twentieth century genocide will be satisfied after reading this.

144 of 163 people found the following review helpful.

An Awesome Work!

By A Customer

This outstanding book was difficult to put down, and even more difficult to stop thinking about. Its topic was burdensome, sad, terribly unrelenting and tragic. Samantha Power's thorough research, well documented bibliography, and clean articulate writing style made the reading of such a depressing topic interesting and compelling. This book took me about a month of careful reading to complete and I highly recommend it.

What disturbs me more than the topic of Ms. Power's book, however, is the lengthy and jumbled review below entitled "Scholarship from Hell." The reviewer is engaging in sophistry designed to discredit Ms. Power and mislead. Beginning with the phrase "Armenian Relocation" the reviewer spirals into ten, inarticulate, horribly written and confusing paragraphs whose sole intent is to misdirect and mislead. Notice the use of the phrase "Ottoman-Armenian Conflict" giving the impression of moral equivalence and balance. In paragraph three, he then attempts to discredit Ms. Power - and subsequently her book - by claiming she did not utilize "objective sources" and as having "...a lack of sufficient grounding in history to tackle a subject as sensitive and controversial as the Ottoman-Armenian conflict." There is nothing controversial or sensitive about the Armenian Genocide, and the careful construction of this babble, undermines Ms Power and devalues the awesome bulwark of research she has undertaken and produced, and is intended to mislead the reader by throwing as much junk at the wall as possible and hoping that some of it sticks. Despite the fact that Ms. Power's work is almost seven hundred pages long (with a bibliography as long as a short novel), the reviewer claims that she fails to refer to "objective scholars" in reference to the Armenian Genocide.

References used by Ms Power include numerous newspaper and magazine articles published in 1915 when supposedly this "sensitive" and "controversial" "Ottoman-Armenian conflict" was at its height. The New York Times had very little doubt about what was occurring in Anatolia since in 1915 alone the Times published almost two hundred detailed articles - including dates, numbers of casualties, villages destroyed etc - about the slaughter of innocent Armenian men, women and children by the Ottoman Army.

Ms Power also references Henry Morgenthau the United States Ambassador to Turkey during World War One. It is almost comical to read the lame attempt by the reviewer at discrediting an ambassador of the



United States, and the ridiculous suggestion that if you really want to understand Ambassador Morgenthau's memoirs and his "interpretation" of the "controversy regarding the Ottoman-Armenian conflict" that a book by some offbeat writer gives more information than Morgenthau's own words. Apparently his idea of an objective source does not include the memoirs of a U.S. Ambassador - nor the army of diplomats British, French and American - who were strewn all over Anatolia and who wrote voluminous accounts of the well organized genocide.

Other trustworthy objective references made by Ms Power include memoirs written by American and European missionaries, references to memoirs written by Ambassador Viscount Bryce (British Ambassador to the US), the renowned British historian Christopher Walker, Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Winston Churchill, Arnold Toynbee, etc. This is a stellar bibliography. In stark contrast the reviewer offers no contemporary sources for his claim that the Armenian Genocide is controversial, sensitive or can be categorized as merely a "conflict." .

In addition the reviewer says nothing about all the other Genocides covered in the book and whether or not Ms. Power did a trustworthy job of covering them. Thus, presumably, Ms. Power had the "historical grounding" and sophistication to get everything else regarding all the other genocides in these seven hundred pages correct and properly documented except for the Armenian Genocide. Of course this begs the question, if she was sufficiently ungrounded to the point of getting the Armenian Genocide incorrect why should I believe anything that she has to say about the other genocides. And conversely, if her documentation is trustworthy about all the other genocides why should I not believe that she got everything correct and properly documented regarding the Armenian genocide?

The point is Ms. Power got everything correct. Genocide scholars, Holocaust scholars and professors from around the world have hailed her book as a monumental benchmark. The goal of the reviewer is to put forth a carefully worded babbling denial that actually does more than simply deny, and does more than simply babble. The reviewer also seeks to blame the victim, and also shroud the events of 1915-1922 behind a scrim of supposed controversy where there is no controversy. The reviewer's goal is not even to re-write history, but rather to paint a situation that seems so hopelessly confused that one would need a doctorate to figure it out. The Armenian Genocide is neither "controversial" nor is it confusing, nor is it a "sensitive" issue (though I am sure it is a sensitive issue if your grandfather was one of the perpetrators of the crime) nor does one need a doctorate to understand it. The Armenian Genocide was a carefully planned genocide by Talat Pasha and Enver Pasha who used a well-trained Ottoman Army, to murder 1.5 million innocent men, women and children. It had nothing to do with World War One (except to the extent that the War was used as a cover,) it had nothing to do with the Russians, it had nothing to do with "relocation," it was all about hate, power, envy and jealousy - the Armenians were a peaceful people who had lived on their ancestral lands for 2,500 years. In "A Scholarship from Hell" the reviewer's careful rambling use of words attempts to sow confusion where none exists, and bring into question the credibility of Ms Power and her research methods, thus rendering anything she has to say irrelevant.

Ms. Power has written an awesome, trustworthy account of Genocide in the 20th century. It is a heavy, time-consuming read, but it is also one of the best non-fiction books I have read in the last five years.

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