

Discussion Questions for Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction

Introduction

- Why is the study of genocide important, and how can it be intellectually enlightening?
 - What are the personal challenges and difficulties that one may encounter in studying genocide?
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Chapter 1: The Origins of Genocide

- How pervasive is genocide in human history? What are the practical obstacles to understanding this aspect of our past?
 - What are some examples of genocide in antiquity and early modernity?
 - What role does genocide play in the Old Testament?
 - What motivated Raphael Lemkin to study what he would come to call "genocide"?
 - What kind of human groups did Lemkin emphasize in his genocide framework, and which did he tend to downplay? Why?
 - Do you think political groups should be included in the genocide category? What about social classes and gender groups?
 - What are the major features, ambiguities, and controversial aspects of the 1948 UN Genocide Convention?
 - What/who are the major agents, victim groups, goals, and required scale of genocide, according to the diverse definitions provided by genocide scholars?
 - Discuss the "contested cases" of genocide referred to on pp. 23-28. Which do you think deserve to be considered genocidal, and which do not? Explain your reasoning in each case. Are there other contested/controversial cases that you can think of?
 - What is "structural violence," and is it worth examining under the rubric of genocide?
 - Is there such a thing as genocide in self-defense?
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Chapter 2: Imperialism, War, and Social Revolution

- What is the difference between imperialism and colonialism?
 - Why is settler colonialism particularly associated with genocide? What about internal colonialism?
 - What are some examples of imperial famines? Is it legitimate to regard these as genocidal?
 - Describe the link between imperialism and genocide in (a) the Belgian Congo, (b) Japan's "Greater Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere" before and during the Second World War, (c) the United States in Vietnam, (d) the Soviets in Afghanistan.
 - Why are war and genocide "the Siamese twins of history" (p. 48)? Do you see a genocidal dynamic in today's "war on terror"?
 - Why is World War One so central to an understanding of mass violence in the twentieth century?
 - What is the "barbarization of warfare" associated with the Soviet-German war of 1941-45?
 - What is the connection between genocide and social revolution, especially with regard to revolutionary ideology?
 - What is "omnicide"? Do you think the nuclear threat today is greater or lesser than during the Cold War, or about the same?
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Chapter 3: Genocides of Indigenous Peoples

- What are "indigenous peoples"?
- What is the "discourse of extinction" vis-a-vis indigenous peoples?
- Why have so many genocides occurred against indigenous peoples worldwide?
- What role did genocide play in the conquest of indigenous peoples in the Americas, Africa, and Australasia?
- What is the phenomenon of "residential schools" in North America and Australia? Do you think such institutions should be considered genocidal? Why or why not?
- What occurred in Guatemala in the late 1970s and early 1980s?
- What is the concept of a "genocidal society" in the context of Australian history? How have white Australians sought to come to terms with the treatment of the Aboriginal population?

- Why do so many people either deny or celebrate genocides against indigenous peoples?
 - What is the role of disease in the destruction of indigenous populations, and is it possible to separate the unintentional spread of disease from intentional acts of genocide?
 - What is the situation of indigenous peoples around the world today?
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Chapter 4: The Armenian Genocide

- What point was Adolf Hitler making when he said: "Who, after all, talks nowadays of the annihilation of the Armenians?"
 - What were the major factors contributing to the outbreak of the Turkish genocide against the minority Armenian population? How and why was the context of World War One significant?
 - What were the dimensions of "eliticide" and "gendercide" in the Armenian genocide?
 - What was the role of mass deportations in the genocide?
 - To what extent were the perpetrators of genocide brought to justice after World War One? Why weren't such efforts more successful?
 - What has been the role of the modern Turkish state and its international supporters in denying the Armenian genocide? Are there any signs that the official Turkish position may be changing?
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Chapter 5: Stalin's Terror

- What was the nature of the Bolshevik regime installed in Russia in 1917?
 - How appropriate is the genocide framework to what occurred during the period of forced collectivization and mass famine in the Soviet Union, from 1929 to 1933?
 - Who were the "kulaks" and why did they suffer under Soviet communism?
 - What was the "Gulag"? In what ways was it similar to the system of Nazi death camps and concentration camps established during World War Two, and how did it differ?
 - Why did Joseph Stalin seek to "purge" the Communist Party? What were the results?
 - Whom did the Soviets target for persecution and mass killing after the invasion of Poland in 1940? What fate was visited upon national minority groups like the Chechens and Crimean Tatars?
 - On balance, how appropriate is the genocide framework to an analysis of Stalin's actions? Why do some Russians today look back on the Stalinist period with nostalgia?
 - Box 5A: What are the links between the current crisis in Chechnya and the genocides of the Stalinist period?
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Chapter 6: The Jewish Holocaust

- What was the nature of European anti-semitism, and why did it arise? What is the link between such anti-semitism and the Nazi Holocaust against the Jews?
- What factors contributed to Adolf Hitler's rise to power in 1933? What was the nature of Nazi ideology, and the Nazi political system that Hitler oversaw?
- What was the attitude of "ordinary Germans" towards the Nazis' persecution of the Jews during the 1930s?
- What were the various strategies employed by the Nazis to destroy the Jews of Europe? Why was the decision made to switch from up-close executions to murder by cyanide gas?
- Why did the Nazis establish their network of death camps in Poland and not in Germany?
- What are "intentionalist" versus "functionalist" explanations of the Jewish Holocaust?
- How and to what extent did Jews resist the Nazis?
- What role did the Allies and Christian churches play during the Holocaust? Why weren't greater efforts made to save the Jews of Europe?
- What is the essence of "the Goldhagen debate"?
- Is the Jewish Holocaust "uniquely unique"?
- Box 6A: Who were the other principal victims of the Nazis? What similarities and differences do you see between the Nazis' targeting of these victim groups and their strategies towards European Jews?
- What specific role did the Nazi campaign against mentally and physically handicapped people play in paving the way for the Holocaust against the Jews?
- Is it legitimate to consider Germans in general as victims of the Nazis, or of the Allies?

Chapter 7: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge

- What was the impact of the massive US bombing campaign against Cambodia in bringing the Khmer Rouge to power?
- What were the main features of Khmer Rouge ideology? Who were the principal targets of the regime?
- What is "urbicide," and what role did it play in the Cambodian genocide?
- What were the major mechanisms by which Cambodians were murdered between 1975 and 1979?
- What were the similarities and differences between Democratic Kampuchea under the Khmer Rouge, and the Soviet system under Stalin?
- How successful has the post-genocide quest for justice been in Cambodia?

Chapter 8: Bosnia and Kosovo

- To what extent can the Bosnian genocide be ascribed to "ancient hatreds"?
- What are the historical origins of the Yugoslav state? What occurred in Yugoslavia during World War Two, and how did it factor in the outbreak of mass violence in the 1990s?
- What role did nationalist leaders play in the late 1980s and early 1990s?
- What criticisms have been made of the foreign (Western European and US) role in Yugoslavia's dissolution, and during the Bosnian war of the 1990s?
- What was the "gendercidal" dimension of the Bosnian genocide?
- What happened at Srebrenica in July 1995, and why?
- In what ways was the campaign in Kosovo in 1998-99 similar to the Serbs' genocidal strategy in Bosnia?
- Do you think the Serbs' war against Kosovar Albanians should be considered a genocide?
- How successful has the post-genocide quest for justice been in the territories of the former Yugoslavia?

Chapter 9: Holocaust in Rwanda

- Who are the Hutus and who are the Tutsis? Is it accurate to talk about "ancient tribal hatreds" between these two groups?
- What role did Belgian colonialism play in paving the way for the Rwandan holocaust?
- What were the demographic, environmental, and economic factors that may have contributed to the genocide?
- What was the essence of the "Hutu Power" ideology advanced by extremists within the Rwandan regime?
- What was the impact of the invasion of Rwanda by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)? Do you think the RPF should be credited with having stopped the genocide, or blamed for having helped to trigger it?
- What role did Rwandan media, especially RTLM radio, play in the onset and implementation of the genocide?
- Why was the international community so unwilling to intervene to stop the genocide? What would you have done differently? Why and to what extent was an intervention eventually mounted?
- What similarities and differences do you perceive between the Rwandan and Jewish holocausts? In what ways might the Rwandan genocide be considered "unique"? (See also pp. 162-63)
- Discuss the role of ordinary Hutus in perpetrating the Rwandan holocaust.
- How successful have post-genocide efforts at justice and reconciliation been in Rwanda?
- Box 9A: Why has genocide raged in Congo and Darfur in the 2000s, and why has international intervention so far failed to suppress it?

Chapter 10: Psychological Perspectives

- What is narcissism, and what role does it play in genocide? Do you think it is legitimate to talk of "collective pathological narcissism"?
- What is greed? What are some examples of genocides fuelled by greed?
- Discuss the difference between "mortal terror" and "existential dread." How do they contribute to genocide? What is the phenomenon of psychological projection?
- Why is humiliation such a central factor in genocide? Can you think of examples where humiliation has fuelled anger or rage in your own life?

- What do the psychological experiments of Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo suggest about human nature, obedience to authority, and authoritarian behaviour?
 - What are the factors that may enable people to resist unjust authority, and to act as helpers/rescuers in genocidal situations?
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Chapter 11: The Sociology and Anthropology of Genocide

- How are sociology and anthropology related? How do they differ?
 - Define "modernity." What are your views on the debate over genocide and modernity? Do you think genocide is fundamentally an ancient phenomenon, or does it have distinctively modern features?
 - What is "ethnicity"? Do you think ethnic differences are inherent and objective, or subjectively constructed?
 - What impact have globalization processes had on ethnic identities and ethnic nationalism?
 - Who are violence "specialists" and what is their role in genocide?
 - Why might "middleman minorities" be especially vulnerable to genocide?
 - What are the possible advantages of anthropological method in the study of genocide?
 - What is Nancy Scheper-Hughes's concept of a "genocidal continuum"? Do you think it is useful in placing genocide in a broader context?
 - What do forensic anthropologists do, and how can they assist in processes of truth and justice after genocide?
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Chapter 12: Political Science and International Relations

- What has the work of political scientists like Barbara Harff and Ted Gurr taught us about the preconditions of genocide, and where genocides are most likely to occur?
 - What is R.J. Rummel's concept of "democide"? How does Rummel consider "Power" to be related to violence and genocide/democide?
 - How has war changed in the contemporary era, especially after the end of the Cold War? How has the rise of "new wars" fuelled genocide around the world, especially in Africa?
 - What is the relationship between democracy and genocide? Are democratic regimes inherently less likely to commit genocide at home or abroad?
 - What are "norms," "norm grafting," and "prohibition regimes"? How do you evaluate the strength of the anti-genocide prohibition regime today?
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Chapter 13: Gendering Genocide

- What is the difference between "gendercide" and "root-and-branch genocide"?
 - More generally, how does gender condition the experiences of men and women, girls and boys, in genocide?
 - Why may "battle-age" males be particularly vulnerable to genocide? What are some examples of gendercidal killing of this type?
 - What are the particular vulnerabilities of women and girls in outbreaks of genocide?
 - What are some examples of "gendercidal institutions" targeting females and males? Do you think it is legitimate to study such institutions under the rubric of genocide?
 - Are men more genocidal than women?
 - What is the role of gendered propaganda in pre-genocidal and genocidal contexts?
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Chapter 14: Memory, Forgetting, and Denial

- How do governments and other actors seek to control and shape historical memory? What are some examples in the history of genocide?
- What does the debate over the "Museum of Memory" in Argentina tell us about the nature of historical memory?
- How have attitudes to the Nazi past evolved in post-World War Two Germany? What was the Kniefall, and how was it significant in Germany's postwar process of historical reckoning?
- What is "memorycide," and why is it a common feature of post-genocidal societies?
- What are some of the major arguments of genocide deniers? Is all genocide "denial" illegitimate?
- What are some of the most prominent instances of genocide denial?

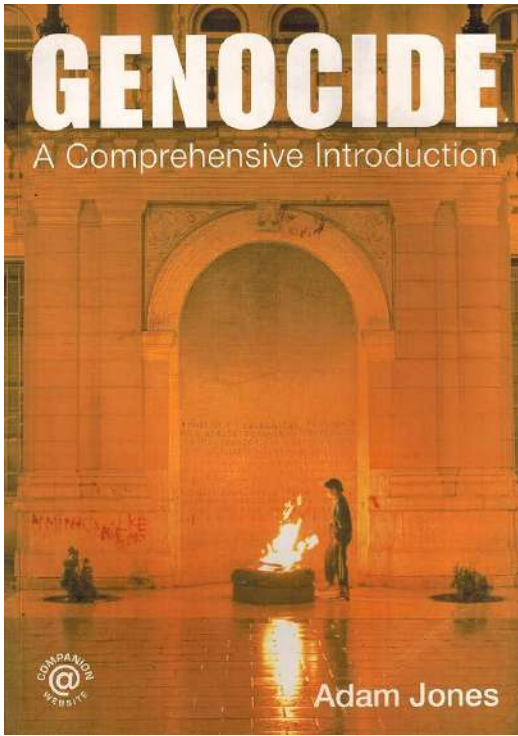
- Do you think denialist statements and hate speech should be banned? How might they be discouraged or marginalized, short of outright suppression?
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Chapter 15: Justice, Truth, and Redress

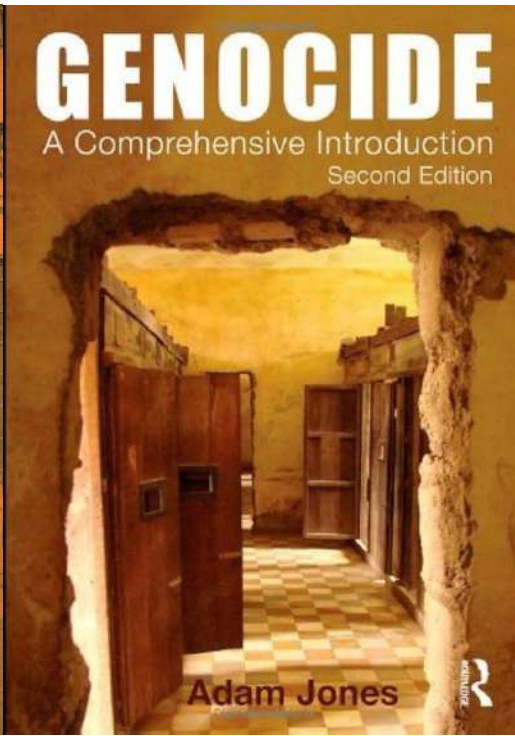
- Can one reasonably talk about seeking "justice" in cases of genocide?
 - What were the strengths and weaknesses of the first post-genocide international tribunals (Constantinople, Nuremberg, Tokyo)?
 - Do you think the Allied powers can be accused of hypocrisy in their handling of the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals?
 - What have been the successes and failures of the international criminal tribunals for Rwanda and former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and 2000s? How have these tribunals contributed to a clarification of the international law surrounding genocide?
 - Do you think Rwanda's gacaca model provides an acceptable substitute for more formal models of justice-seeking after genocide?
 - What is the significance of "the Pinochet case"?
 - Do you think the International Criminal Court will serve as an important bulwark against genocide and other crimes against humanity?
 - What is the composition of international citizens' tribunals, and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these bodies?
 - Are truth commissions always a desirable feature of post-genocide situations? How successful have they been in promoting reconciliation after genocide and mass conflict?
 - What forms of redress are most meaningful after genocide? Are formal apologies a useful component, and if so, when and to what extent?
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Chapter 16: Strategies of Intervention and Prevention

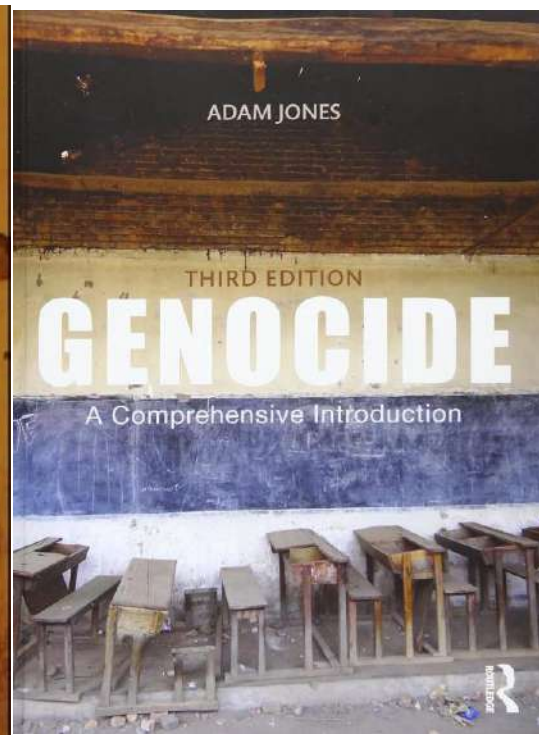
- Is it realistic to think that all genocides can be prevented or suppressed?
 - What are the most reliable indicators that a genocide may be about to occur? Give examples from particular case-studies.
 - What are the challenges and complexities of "humanitarian intervention"? Do you think interventions in genocide are genuinely mounted for humanitarian reasons, or does humanitarian rhetoric obscure more self-interested motives?
 - Are economic and political sanctions a useful strategy against genocidal or otherwise repressive regimes?
 - When is military intervention justified?
 - How successful has the United Nations been in discouraging and preventing genocide? How has its role evolved over time?
 - How would you set about constructing an effective "peace army" or standing intervention force against genocide?
 - What is the role of the "honest witness" in cases of genocide? Why does such witnessing sometimes not receive the attention it deserves?
 - How do religious and secular ideologies contribute to both the perpetration and the prevention of genocide? Do you think the most effective solution to genocide is found in the religious or the secular realm?
 - How can individuals act to reduce their own potential to inflict or support genocide?
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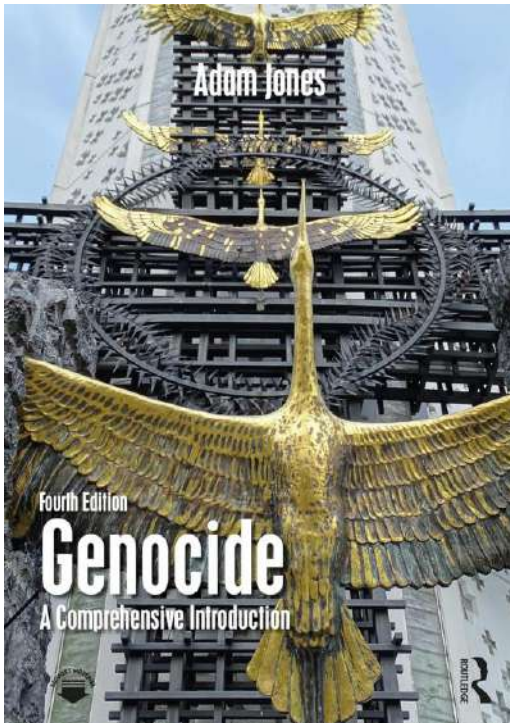
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