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# Hidden Genocides

Power, Knowledge, Memory

EDITED BY

ALEXANDER LABAN HINTON, THOMAS LA POINTE,  
AND DOUGLAS IRVIN-ERICKSON

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# Introduction

## Hidden Genocides: Power, Knowledge, Memory

DOUGLAS IRVIN-ERICKSON, THOMAS LA POINTE,  
AND ALEXANDER LABAN HINTON

Is slavery genocide?

On one level, a critical genocide studies asks us to consider whether slavery in the United States is a case of hidden genocide. But this is just the tip of the iceberg. As we consider such questions, we must challenge our taken-for-granted assumptions and ask why given cases have been ignored, denied, or deliberately hidden. The Turkish campaign of denial of the Armenian genocide provides a vivid example of this issue, involving a long period of forgetting and then, as the Armenian diaspora mobilized, attempting to discredit, divert attention from, and deny the idea that a genocide had taken place.

The United States has its own contingent of genocide deniers. A state senator from Colorado was recently quoted as saying that calling the U.S. treatment of American Indians “genocide” would diminish those in other countries “who actually died at the hand of governments.”<sup>1</sup> Another, also of Colorado, said legislation recognizing genocide in the United States was disingenuous because “we have not destroyed totally the Native American people.”<sup>2</sup> On the same day, this second senator signed legislation recognizing a day of remembrance for the Armenian and Rwandan genocides. One wonders, does she think there are no longer any Armenians or Rwandans alive? Most likely, this lawmaker’s inconsistencies were underscored by her own narrow interest in getting reelected, recognizing and denying genocides while calculating the votes garnered and lost by taking each position.

Currently, we see movements afoot to recognize hidden genocides, such as the genocides against the Circassians, Assyrians, native peoples in the Americas and Australia, and formerly colonized peoples from across the world. We are fortunate to have chapters in this volume that consider all of these cases. These movements involve struggles with political regimes whose interests lie

in denying genocide, and clashes with social forces dedicated to preserving unproblematic historical narratives that claim a given genocide never occurred.

But we should also be asking, to what extent have we as a scholarly community—as people—forgotten genocides not out of purposeful neglect but because of our own traditions, canonizations, and biases? Why, for example, have scholars—including Raphael Lemkin, who invented the concept of genocide—failed to fully consider whether the European and American trade in African slaves was a form of genocide? Why have we often remembered the Rwandan genocide as perpetrated only by Hutus against only Tutsi victims, without considering the executions of moderate Hutus, or the series of genocides before and after, as part of the same historical process? These are difficult questions to ask. But we must ask them if we want our field to continue to grow.

### Critical Genocide Studies and Hidden Genocides

Our volume shares much with René Lemarchand's recent volume, *Forgotten Genocides: Oblivion, Denial, and Memory*, and Don Bloxham and Dirk Moses's *Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, though our volume is focused more directly on the aforementioned intersection of power, knowledge, and memory.<sup>3</sup> A central theme of Lemarchand's book is the pattern of denial, silence, myth making, and historical revisionism by which so many genocides become forgotten. From Lemarchand's volume, it is clear that what is remembered and what is not remembered is a political choice, producing a dominant narrative that reflects the victor's version of history while silencing dissenting voices. Building on a critical genocide studies approach, this volume seeks to contribute to this conversation by critically examining cases of genocide that have been "hidden" politically, socially, culturally, or historically in accordance with broader systems of political and social power. As such, the contributions to our volume pick up discussions on the various dynamics related to power, knowledge, and memory that have led to certain cases of genocide being denied, diminished, or ignored.

The term *critical genocide studies* appears to have been first used by A. Dirk Moses in his 2006 essay "Toward a Theory of Critical Genocide Studies."<sup>4</sup> Moses draws on critical theory to argue that genocide studies would do well to explore larger global and materialist dynamics—as illustrated by the work of Immanuel Wallerstein and Mark Levene—that are the focus of a "post-liberal" perspective. Central to Moses's approach is Max Horkheimer's insistence that theory must be holistic, historical, and able to reflect on its own role in the process of social reproduction. More recently, in his essay "Critical Genocide Studies," Alexander Hinton has taken a Foucauldian and Derridian approach to argue that the field of genocide studies is premised upon a number of assumptions and biases, including gatekeeping notions underpinned by a dilution metaphor, Holocaust-centric

models of the genocidal process, and a canon of cases (see fig. 1.1, discussed below).<sup>5</sup> For genocide studies to continue to flourish, the field needs to explore its presuppositions, decenter its biases, and shed light on the blind spots.

One way to approach the problem of hidden genocides is through discourse analysis. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault invites us to imagine what human discourse might look like in physical form. It would not look like the great mythical book of history, he writes, but rather an archive, filled with lines of words that transcribe the thoughts of others in distant places with a system that establishes these statements as actual events and things.<sup>6</sup> "The archive is first the law of what can be said," Foucault writes. It does not preserve every utterance for future memory but structures them through a silent process to prevent everything ever said from accumulating endlessly in an amorphous mass. The archive thus produces meaning, with a "system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events" in order to conceal the processes by which the archive was constructed so that the meaning of the archive feels uncontrived, self-evident, or natural.<sup>7</sup> In such a way, human discourses are shaped by silent processes that establish laws over what beliefs or statements are to be included, actively shaping what people believe is the truth of history in line with greater systems of social and political power.

Take the Colorado state senators' denial of the Native American genocide as an example. The statement that Native Americans did not "actually" die at the hands of the U.S. government illuminates a discourse in the United States that the "American" treatment of Native Americans was benevolent by instinct, and their deaths were unfortunate happenstance. We might suggest that a significant thread prohibited from entering this discourse is that the U.S. government, for most of its existence, stated openly and frequently that its policy was to destroy Native American ways of life through forced integration, forced removal, and death. An 1881 report of the U.S. commissioner of Indian Affairs on the "Indian question" is indicative of the decades-long policy: "There is no one who has been a close observer of Indian history and the effect of contact of Indians with civilization who is not well satisfied that one of two things must eventually take place, to wit, either civilization or extermination of the Indian. Savage and civilized life cannot live and prosper on the same ground. One of the two must die."<sup>8</sup>

The question for a critical genocide studies is not whether the United States did or did not commit genocide, however. Rather, we should be asking why U.S. society at one time acknowledged and celebrated the attempt to exterminate Native Americans, only to deny it in later generations and hide it discursively in the interstices of history. What interests are served by denying something that was openly said in the past? And, what is at stake by remembering this hidden genocide?

The process of knowing and the process of knowing history through language are ongoing. Historical interpretation, we contend, is always grounded in the interests and biases of the present historical moment. We approach the problem of hidden genocides noticing that existing idioms of genocide emphasize images of killing fields, concentration camps, and mass death. When one sees genocide as mass killing rather than a cultural destruction, the “truth” of history shifts and the entire conquest of the Americas looks different, David Moshman writes.<sup>9</sup> In the United States, mass killings of Native peoples became less frequent, slowly replaced by policies of cultural integration. Therefore, when we understand genocide to be synonymous with mass killing, we lay the foundation for understanding genocide as a dwindling phenomenon connected to a distant past, if at all.<sup>10</sup> These predispositions are revealed in the assertions of the Colorado senators—that the United States did not commit genocide against Native Americans because there were still Native Americans alive, or because the U.S. government did not “actually” use violence.

The chapters in this volume were originally written for a conference on “Forgotten Genocides: Memory, Silence, and Denial,” co-hosted in March 2011 by the Center for the Study of Genocide, Conflict Resolution, and Human Rights at Rutgers University and the Center for Peace, Justice, and Reconciliation at Bergen Community College. The conference dealt with issues of memory, representation, denial, truth, memorialization, generational transmission, state ideology and silencing, definition, and diaspora. Participants considered a wide range of cases of hidden genocides, employing a critical genocide studies approach to varying degrees. A major theme of the conference, which translates into the participants’ essays, is that the ferocity of the excesses of mass murder and genocide have too frequently been matched by the denial of these atrocities. Or, perhaps worse yet, genocides have seemingly been hidden, lost in the interstices of history and human discourse.

The authors in this volume approach the problem of hidden genocides in a variety of ways. As Donna-Lee Frieze turns to Emmanuel Levinas, and Daniel Feierstein to Raphael Lemkin, Adam Jones establishes a productive historiography of hidden genocides through Thomas Kuhn’s classic *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Realist approaches are very productive as well, as denying genocide is often in line with concrete political interests. For Hannibal Travis; ethnonational realpolitik and the privileging of present-day concerns played a significant role in hiding genocides against Greeks and Assyrians as the historical narrative of the Armenian genocide took shape. As scholars, we have a responsibility to trace the ways in which both genocide and the hiding of genocides manifest as social practices, as well as political and historical processes, using a variety of methodological tools at our disposal.

## Genocide and Ways of Knowing

The book is organized into three parts around the interrelated themes of knowledge, power, and memory. All three of these themes are deeply intertwined, especially because states and political communities define themselves through imagined pasts and shape official and collective memories accordingly.<sup>11</sup> Oftentimes, governmental institutions dynamically shape these discursive, historical narratives in broader society in order to assert the legitimacy of the state.<sup>12</sup> In post-genocidal societies where current regimes are built on a past generation’s genocides, this often entails hiding genocides from historical memory through the law, public memorials, or state education policy. To think critically about why and how genocides become hidden in such ways, we begin by examining the way scholars know genocide and create knowledge about the phenomenon.

When people think of genocide, certain cases remain exemplary, first and foremost the Holocaust. A perusal of book publications, course syllabi, and popular discourse suggests a canon of cases: the Armenian genocide, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, the Holocaust, and Rwanda. Historically, however, there are many cases of genocide from antiquity to modernity that are rarely described as genocide, if they are remembered at all. In other situations, largely forgotten genocides, such as the Armenian and Ukrainian cases, suddenly emerge into the foreground. In a recent article in *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, Alexander Hinton writes that to date there has been a strong bias toward a canon that often follows roughly along the lines depicted in figure I.1 (though the chart is, of course, an ideal type).<sup>13</sup>

Much scholarship in the field of genocide studies, especially from the 1980s through the 1990s, has focused on the Twentieth-Century Core, with the Holocaust both foregrounded and backgrounded. Taking up this task and asking whether or not the Holocaust’s place in the canon has helped us remember or forget other genocides, Dirk Moses in his contribution to this volume looks at a controversy that arose over competing gallery space devoted to genocide at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg. Placing the debate into the context of Canadian anxieties over other hidden genocides, Moses highlights the degree to which memory is believed by many people to be a zero-sum game, where memorializing one genocide is seen as obscuring others.

Human history is filled with genocide. Like the Angel of History in Walter Benjamin’s allegory, we oftentimes look helplessly at countless human catastrophes, unable to bring back the dead and make whole the broken.<sup>14</sup> But some of the leading work on the anthropology of violence would remind us that human beings are not fated to violence by their nature, nor are violence, war, and genocide unavoidable parts of our social existence.<sup>15</sup> A genocide studies that critically engages hidden genocides therefore isn’t simply about compiling a list of atrocities and documenting every human victim in books of facts written for jaded

Prototype	Holocaust
The Triad	Holocaust Armenian Genocide Rwanda
Twentieth-Century Core	Holocaust Armenians Cambodia Rwanda Bosnia Darfur (twenty-first century) Indigenous peoples (taken as a whole)
The Second Circle	Bangladesh Kurdish case Guatemala Herero/Nimibian Kosovo Carthage Settler genocides Ukrainian/Soviet
The Periphery	Indonesia Specific cases of indigenous peoples Genocides of antiquity Assyrian and Greek cases East Timor Burundi Maoist China DRC
Forgotten Genocides	Multitude of more or less invisible/hidden/ forgotten cases

FIGURE I.1. The Genocide Studies Canon

idlers in the garden of knowledge, to borrow Benjamin's phrase. We should move beyond simply documenting human suffering and expose the historical processes by which genocides are orchestrated, then denied, and later hidden where they can be forgotten in the first place.

One reason why scholars are often implicated in the hiding of genocides may well be a "liberal" tendency among some genocide scholars to seek "progress" and,<sup>16</sup> as the U.N. Genocide Convention states, "to liberate mankind from such an odious scourge." A critical genocide studies does not demand that we give up this objective but instead that we think about its genealogy and framings

and our potential conceptual biases and thereby find new ways to approach the problem. How does the "savage"/"barbaric" Other we construct in our analyses of genocidists also construct, through inversion, an image of ourselves as modern, developed, and civilized? What do we miss by such identifications? Our gaze may too easily be directed away from the relationship of genocide and modernity and toward explanations of genocide that smack of ethnic primordialism, stage theory, atavism, or biological and psychological reductionism (our "barbaric" or "sadistic" "nature"—think of *Lord of the Flies*).

For instance, consider how metanarratives of progress and civilization structure our thinking.<sup>17</sup> Oftentimes, our belief in progress directs our gaze away from regimes we consider liberal and open, and toward genocidal despots and authoritarian regimes (think of how the names of Hitler, Pol Pot, and Milosevic so easily connote genocide). The U.N. Genocide Convention codifies this language, stating that genocide is "condemned by the civilized world." Such language implies that genocide is carried out only by "barbarians" and "savages," an understanding condensed by symbols such as the shrunken head from Buchenwald that was exhibited at Nuremberg.

There is a tendency in Western societies to view the violence of liberal democracies as "legitimate" while the violence committed in the name of unfamiliar political ideologies is condemned.<sup>18</sup> While genocide is brutal and to be condemned, it is not something that only "savages" and "barbarians" do. All peoples have the capacity to be genocidists, and genocide is also something that is closely intertwined with modernity and even democracy.<sup>19</sup> The discipline's longstanding neglect of Native Americans, slaves, and indigenous peoples illustrates this point.<sup>20</sup> These biases in our thinking contribute to widely held beliefs inside and outside of the academy that genocide afflicts "weak" or "failed" states and is more common in dictatorships and totalitarian or authoritarian regimes. This implies that genocide is unlikely or even impossible in strong states or democracies. A critical genocide studies would suggest that part of the reason why we remember certain genocides is because it makes "us" feel quite civilized and humane by contrast.

To relate this issue of canonization to our volume, we might say that the "barbaric/civilized" binary at work in the canon has produced a discourse that imagines Germany as "descending" into "savagery" with the rise of the Nazi party. But, as Elisa von Joeden-Forgey's chapter in this volume helps us to see, this narrative overlooks the era before the rise of the Nazi party—a time presumed to be more "civilized" by contrast, but nonetheless a deeply genocidal era as the German Imperial state conducted brutal and extensive genocides throughout its colonial empire.<sup>21</sup>

As is true of all canons, there has been fluidity with some groups (for example, the beginnings of a shift of the Ottoman Assyrian and Greek genocides from

the status of invisible/forgotten genocides to the Periphery or perhaps even the Second Circle). The model in figure 1.1 is, of course, an ideal type, but it points toward some of the disciplinary biases that have emerged in the field. For example, while cutting against the grain in many ways and discussing the Periphery or even Forgotten Genocides at times, Adam Jones's introductory text still gives primacy to the Twentieth-Century Core.<sup>22</sup> A similar statement could be made about readers and edited volumes in the field (see Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn for an early exception).<sup>23</sup>

Issues of definition and canonization are not value neutral but also link to issues of power and knowledge. Why, we must ask, is it that certain cases of genocide are forgotten? The literature on denial has grappled with this question. But we also need to consider why we focus on certain cases and topics and what sorts of inclusions and exclusions ensue. What is left invisible to us and what can we do to cast light on what has formerly been opaque? Given the inevitable politicization of our topic, how might we be influenced by given interests and agendas?

Like all silenced historical narratives, there is a certain amount of victor's justice involved, whereby the people on the underside of power are removed from the story. Foucault may have been wrong when he claimed that genocide was the "dream of modern power," for surely genocide predates the modern state.<sup>24</sup> But Foucault was correct to point out that the battle of genocide does not involve two sovereign powers following the ritualized behaviors of standard warfare but rather one side using military force and other instruments of the state to exterminate an imagined group. So who is the victor when one side uses military, social, economic, or political force to exterminate an imagined group? We usually speak of none.

In his contribution to this volume, Daniel Feierstein returns to the definition of genocide provided by Raphael Lemkin, arguing that genocide re-creates the social world in the image of the perpetrators. Lemkin defined genocide as a colonial practice: "a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves." Genocide had two phases: "One, the destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor." Importantly, Lemkin defined nations as "families of mind" whose collective identity was built through shared symbols, art, languages, beliefs, mythologies, and so forth. He did not conflate the definition of a nation with the social groupings of the nation-state but believed such groups could include any imaginable human group.<sup>25</sup> Genocide, Lemkin believed, was an attempt to destroy "families of mind" in order to restructure the human cosmos. Any human group—such as a religious group, an ethnic group, or even "card players" or "tax criminals"—could be targeted for genocide.<sup>26</sup>

Feierstein's chapter allows us to argue that the social paradigms that are a part of the genocidists' ideology become the paradigms by which future generations remember the genocide. We follow Feierstein's lead and argue that genocidal mechanisms conspire to invent a target group and mobilize populations toward exterminating this imagined threat. These manufactured differences between the victims and perpetrators are made "real" by the very act of genocide being committed. Genocide, therefore, can be said to be a process that somehow transforms an imaginary community into a "real" one by attempting to obliterate the members of the imagined group. Death here functions as a kind of reality effect that confirms the authenticity of the imagined perpetrator group through the negation and suppression of the imagined victim group.

When genocide is denied, the dehumanizing mechanisms in place during the actual genocide are transferred forward in history, ensuring that the genocide continues into perpetuity, long after the physical killing has been done. When we remember genocide, therefore, we often do so in the terms and metaphors invented by the perpetrators. For example, it was the European settlers in North America who invented the concept of an Indian and labeled these people as one coherent group opposed to the peoples of Europe. In historical memory, the social diversity among the native peoples of North America has collapsed into one single category of "Indian" over time so that categorical binaries that frame the genocide place the European citizenry of the United States in opposition to the Indians. This not only denies the historical actuality of North American societies before the advent of the United States, but it makes the category of "Indian" a real category—a category that hides the full scope of the cultural and physical destruction on the North American continent while concretizing the identity of what it means to be an "American." These binary identities, steeped in connotations of the savage versus the civilized, were concretized within the context of a colonial and settler society that explicitly sought to exterminate the entire group of people. The legacy of genocide thus lives on within the political institutions and laws of the U.S. government, which relegates Indians to reservations and deals with them through an exploitative treaty system.<sup>27</sup>

### Power, Resistance, and Indigenous Peoples

The second part of this volume looks at the elements of power and resistance involved in historically hidden genocides. Using newly available primary sources in recently opened Russian archives, Walter Richmond's contribution to this volume is the first systematic and scholarly work to document the genocide of the Circassian people as the Russian state expanded into their traditional homeland in the nineteenth century. Caught in the crosshairs of the Great Game, the Circassians bore the deadly brunt of British, French, and Russian imperial



geopolitics. But it was the interests of the Russian state that finally spelled their doom. Richmond reveals that top Russian military commanders explicitly stated that the Circassians could never be consolidated into Russia, and had to be expelled if Russia were to hold the Circassians' strategically important homeland. The Russian state embarked upon a purposeful attempt to destroy the Circassian people as a group and repopulate the territory with the more favorable Cossack settlers. Currently, the Russian government does not deny that this region of the North Caucasus was the Circassian ancestral home. Denying that the events constituted genocide, Russia currently dismisses Georgia's acknowledgment of a Circassian genocide as a political slight stemming from their defeat in the brief 2008 war and accuses Circassian activists in diaspora of attempting to incite a Circassian rebellion within Russia.<sup>28</sup>

Our approach to hidden genocides implicitly acknowledges that the practice of state building often involves genocide. As imperial Russia did with the nineteenth-century genocides it committed, the United States, Canada, and Australia couched the destruction of entire peoples in the language of benevolence and progress. Chris Mato Nunpa notes in his chapter that the U.S. and European genocide against the peoples of North America—which reached its most cruel heights in the nineteenth century—resulted in a 98.5 percent extermination rate of indigenous peoples. While the genocide is currently denied and hidden, this was not always the case, Mato Nunpa shows. In fact, historically speaking, the genocide in North America is not a hidden genocide. United States policy makers and military commanders openly stated that they sought to exterminate any native peoples who resisted being dispossessed of their lands, subordinate them to federal authority, and assimilate them into the colonizing culture, Mato Nunpa notes. It was later generations that hid the genocide, in part because—as Moses writes in his chapter on the Canadian Museum for Human Rights—a government that derives political legitimacy from claiming to uphold universal human rights historically cannot admit that it was founded through genocide.

Frieze's chapter approaches a similar situation regarding the so-called Stolen Generations, where Aboriginal children were taken from their parents by Australian states to be raised as Australians of European descent. This practice of forced removal of children remained an official Australian policy up until 1970, long after Australia voluntarily became a party to the Genocide Convention. Why did Australian policy makers not realize that the forcible removal of children to facilitate the destruction of the Aboriginal group constituted genocide? Frieze asks. Were they ignorant of international law? How could something so clearly defined as genocide under the U.N. Genocide Convention have been conducted as if it were a humanitarian project? To approach the question, Frieze employs Emmanuel Levinas's *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* to

help explain how perpetrators of genocide could come to see their acts as a form of benevolence toward the victims.

### Forgetting, Remembering, and Hiding Genocides

Certain cases of genocide are recognized, intentionally hidden, written out of history, forgotten, and then remembered in new ways. In her chapter, Krista Hegburg traces a series of paradoxes that emerge from the Holocaust reparations program in the Czech Republic, which promised Czech political justice for the Romani peoples who suffered at the hands of Slovaks and Germans. Hegburg demonstrates how historical memory of the Holocaust was (and is) mobilized to create a newly imagined Czechoslovakian legal order which, in turn, shapes the way the Holocaust is actively remembered.

Even scholars of genocide have been implicated in the “unremembering” of genocides, Hannibal Travis writes in this volume. Prior to the 1960s, Travis notes, the Greek, Assyrian, and Armenian genocides were considered together as part of a broader anti-Christian persecution within Turkey. But, as the Armenian genocide became centralized in the historical narrative, the genocides against the Assyrians and the Greeks slipped under the surface of scholarly and popular historical memory. Travis critically investigates the processes by which the legal and scholarly language of genocide worked to hide these other genocides, as the concept of genocide came with stricter and narrower definitions than the term “massacre,” leading many scholars to regard the experience of the Greeks and Assyrians as something other than genocide.

But a genocide does not have to be written out of history in order to be a hidden genocide. In some cases, as Frieze shows us, state policy and law crystallizes around a version of historical memory that does not consider the genocide to be an atrocity at all. These hidden genocides are not recognized as genocide in the first place. In her chapter, Elisa von Joeden-Forgey asks us why some genocides are hidden, in the sense that they are remembered not as genocides but as acts of benevolence. She argues that the identity of victims of Imperial Germany's genocides in southwestern Africa were constructed through legal categories that undermined cosmopolitan and humanist values in society but served to maintain the legal and social protections of German citizens. Joeden-Forgey thus provides us with an example of how genocide comes to lie hidden in plain sight, where observers in everyday life don't recognize the killing of victims going on around them as bad, or even as killings.

How are cases of genocide revealed and known historically, especially when they are interpreted by many as benevolent and just? How do scholars come to know these cases? Adam Jones's chapter in this volume provides a useful conceptual tool to account for how the field of genocide studies establishes

paradigms of inquiry that constantly shift, placing canonical cases into new contextual light and establishing new conceptual frameworks. Jones writes that the canonical cases of genocide—the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, and the Armenian genocide serve as prime examples—often function as “anchoring genocides,” to which other avenues of scholarship are tethered.

If blood in the sand is doomed to fade into oblivion, should we grieve? Must we remember? Allowing genocides to remain hidden has exacted its toll. We need only look to Jones’s chapter for proof. The wider disinterest in the 1972 killings in Rwanda, and in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa as a whole, set a pattern that played out in the 1994 genocide, Jones argues. The killings in the Democratic Republic of Congo that followed the 1994 genocide have been *deliberately* “hidden genocides,” he adds, not just because of disinterest but because of the determination of influential actors to keep them off the international agenda. It is our hope that the term “hidden genocides” will help to unmask the processes by which this genocide and others are denied or obscured while others are suddenly revealed, thereby providing some measure of historical light for those who suffered and perished at the crux of history’s darkest chapters.

### Conclusion

Clearly, certain historical events will be held up among others, not necessarily because they are important for the sake of historical truth or abstract notions of justice but because they speak directly to the constitution of power in our current world. Ideological perspectives that derive from political or material interests lead to blind spots in the historical record. Oftentimes, scholars and thinkers are swept up in this wake of history. But history, as Hegel reminds us, is a slaughter-bench where material and political interests underscore the processes by which certain horrors fade into oblivion while others suddenly emerge to the foreground. That is to say, we “remember” and “forget” genocides for reasons that serve greater systems of power than our individual selves. Understood this way, remembering and forgetting are two sides of the same coin. One seeks to reveal, the other to conceal. The relationship is a dichotomy, and there are concrete political, economic, and social interests in both. The blood of the victims whose deaths do not matter to the living is just blood in the sand, Hegel coldly tells us. The blood of those who matter to the living will be remembered.

When genocide studies first emerged as an academic field, for example, it was set to the backdrop of cold war concerns and politics. Even Raphael Lemkin dedicated much of his life in the 1950s toward charging the USSR with genocide in an effort to denounce communism as an economic and political system of social organization.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, Jean-Paul Sartre, the consummate scholar of imperialism who charged European colonial powers and the United States with

genocide, diminished genocides that occurred in the wake of decolonization processes he supported.<sup>30</sup>

Today, as Feierstein reminds us in his chapter, ideological blind spots often lead us to conceal past and present genocides committed by strong states while calling attention to the genocides committed by weak states, or so-called pariah states. Indeed, we are also prone to overlooking the genocides upon which our modern states were built—especially the states we view as politically, morally, and socially legitimate. As Helen Fein reminds us, genocidal tendencies are embedded in the myths and ideologies that legitimize the modern state.<sup>31</sup> These include master narratives of benevolence, progress, and state building, which operate under the logic that what *did* happen was what *should have* happened.

From the sixteenth-century Spaniards who conquered the New World to the Khmer Rouge who meticulously photographed their prisoners in S-21, genocidists often provide the most elaborate documentation of their own actions available to the historian or scholar. Obviously, the blood they spill does not embarrass: they celebrate genocide. In a common twist of historical irony, we often find that governments that deny past genocides often violate the desires of the perpetrators of the genocides, who wished for their genocides to be known and remembered. Although hidden in history, the Native American genocide was documented proudly by the United States,<sup>32</sup> the Circassian genocide was chronicled in Russian imperial archives so that it would not be forgotten,<sup>33</sup> and the Armenian genocide was documented as a success by the Turkish state in the years immediately after it ended.<sup>34</sup> This means that the perpetrators believed at the time that it was actually in their interests to prove that the genocides happened. In remembering these genocides, we simultaneously remember how the perpetrator states built their legitimacy upon the bodies of those they killed and drove from their homes. It is entirely possible, therefore, that the perpetrators claimed genocide as a mark of victory—“the closing of the West”—and celebrated their attempt to destroy their victims.

The celebration of genocide places the genocide in full historical view, demanding that what the perpetrators did *not* be forgotten. Perhaps it is remembered not as genocide but as something other than genocide: a war for liberation, the necessary cost of law and order, progress, the cleansing of the social order for the common good, manifest destiny and the closing of national frontiers, or acts of benevolence. In such cases, we confront the paradox that the memory of genocide we seek to preserve might be what the perpetrators wanted to be remembered.

To return to our question about whether or not the slavery and segregation of African Americans was genocide, we would be served well to heed the writing of thinkers such as Paul Robeson. The institutionalized racism of the country, so deeply stitched into the social and political fabric of the nation, led

Paul Robeson to charge the United States with genocide. "We maintain," Robeson wrote in his 1951 petition to the United Nations, "that the oppressed Negro citizens of the United States, segregated, discriminated against and long the target of violence, suffer from genocide as the result of the consistent, conscious, unified policies of every branch of government."<sup>35</sup> Africans entered European modernity as property—not human beings.<sup>36</sup>

The Atlantic slave trade was genocide, trading in the commodity of humans with the intention of transforming the captured into slaves who were bought and sold, tortured, and killed. The Atlantic slave trade resulted in upward of twenty million deaths and the destruction of entire West African societies. As Adam Jones points out in his introductory textbook on genocide, beyond the deaths of those captured, the institution of slavery in the United States meets every criteria of genocide under the Genocide Convention, as well as the broader definition of genocide set forth by Raphael Lemkin.<sup>37</sup> The genocide against Africans captured in the slave trade and their descendants in the Americas had the effect of transforming "white" and "black" into "real" categories in U.S. society—a legacy that still haunts that society.

Long after the institution of slavery came to an end, Robeson contends, the U.S. government on the federal, state, and local levels continued to employ official policies that were intended to destroy, in whole, the population of people of African descent living in the United States. Leading civil society actors in the United States followed this policy directive, embarking on coordinated campaigns of terror and violence toward this genocidal end. As authors and editors of books and conference papers about forgotten or hidden pasts, we would be well served to look within our own pasts in search of hidden genocides and to make bold claims. By using the words "slavery" and "segregation," we in the United States might actually be concealing the genocide that took place against people who were targeted as a group because they drew their ancestry from one particular part of the earth. Such a discourse confines the human suffering caused by slavery to a single moment in history, long ago sealed off as part of a distant past.

Just how hidden is this genocide of slavery? In October of 2009, an Arkansas state representative made national headlines in the United States, stating "the institution of slavery that the black race has long believed to be an abomination upon its people may actually have been a blessing."<sup>38</sup> Echoing the belief that any human suffering was part of a long-distant past, sealed off from the present and vindicated by social progress, the senator reasoned that the descendants of slaves were better off now as Christians and Americans than they would have been if they had been born in Africa. For as much as these comments incited the passions of the public in support and condemnation, public discourse on both sides of the issue accepted the senator's two basic premises: that the legacy

of slavery in the United States is part of the past, not the present; and that the descendants of slaves are better off now as Americans (and Christians). Those who criticized the belief that slavery was "a blessing" did so on the grounds of the massive human suffering of the slaves; they did not question slavery as "a blessing" by pointing to the legacy of slavery that lives on to this day, in the form of social and governmental institutions that survive, permuted and incarnate.

Where can we find the legacy of genocide? One location, Michelle Alexander argues, is the mass incarceration system that inherited the legacy of the Jim Crow laws, which were put in place across the United States to subordinate and effectively re-enslave those who were freed after the Civil War.<sup>39</sup> Today, the United States imprisons more of its minorities than any other country in the world, with a percentage of blacks in jail currently exceeding the percentage of blacks in prison in South Africa at the height of apartheid. Nearly 80 percent of young black men who live in the major U.S. cities have a criminal record, setting in motion a process of social and political marginalization that, among other things, strips people of their rights to vote and allows them to be legally discriminated against when seeking employment and housing. While the mass incarceration system in the United States does not exploit labor or subordinate an entire caste of people because of their skin color, as was the case with the institutions it succeeds, America's prisons have proven to be an efficient tool in marginalizing the country's low-skilled and badly educated poor who are labeled as criminals, stigmatized as superfluous, and seen as disposable pieces of a postindustrial economy who deserve to be politically and socially marginalized.

Within the context of the mass incarceration system in the United States, Alexander argues, the accusation of genocide that emerges from the country's poorest communities from time to time is not paranoid. If genocide scholars agree on one thing, it is that marginalizing and stigmatizing groups as disposable—which often entails stripping them of the rights of citizenship—are preconditions of genocide.<sup>40</sup> If the mass incarceration system was the inheritor of the Jim Crow segregation laws, then the history and legacy of genocide in the United States remain hidden in plain sight. By exploring the nexus of knowledge, power, and memory, this volume seeks to unpack the binaries and given assumptions about genocide that have led us to overlook or turn our attention away from hidden genocides.

#### NOTES

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- the second edition. Similarly, he expanded the first-edition chapter "Stalin's Terror" to "Stalin and Mao" in the second edition. He noted that he self-consciously attempted to weave in a number of cases, ranging from attacks on witches to Iraq after the U.S. invasion, to cut against the grain of canonization.
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