

Also by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen

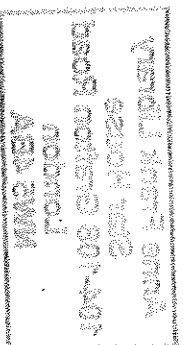
Hitler's Willing Executioners

A Moral Reckoning

WORSE THAN WAR

*Genocide, Eliminationism,
and the Ongoing
Assault on Humanity*

DANIEL JONAH GOLDHAGEN



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Worse Than War Our Age of Suffering

ON OCTOBER 2, 1904, General Lothar von Trotha, governor of the German colony of South-West Africa (today's Namibia) and commander of its troops, issued a public proclamation announcing his intent to annihilate the Herero people:

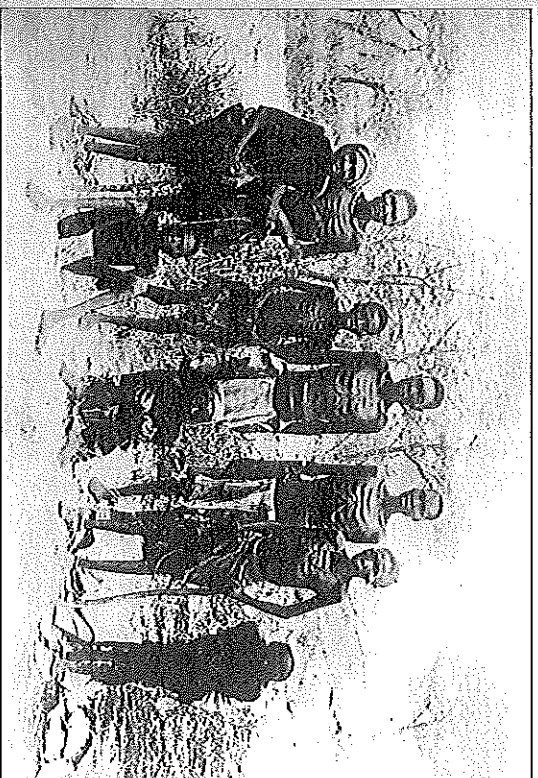
I, the Great General of the German Soldiers, address this letter to the Herero people. The Herero are no longer considered German subjects. They have murdered, stolen, cut off ears, noses and other parts from wounded soldiers, and now refuse to fight on out of cowardice. I have this to say to them: Whoever turns over one of the captains to one of my garrisons as a prisoner will receive 1,000 Marks and he who hands over Samuel Maharero will be entitled to a reward of 5,000 Marks. The Herero people will have to leave the country. Otherwise I shall force them to do so by means of guns. Within the German boundaries, every Herero, whether found armed or unarmed, with or without cattle, will be shot. I shall not accept any more women and children. I shall drive them back to their people—otherwise I shall order shots to be fired at them. These are my words to the Herero people.¹

So began the twentieth century, a century of mass slaughter, with "the Great General of the Mighty Kaisers, von Trotha" declaring unabashedly a policy that has since been so frequently enacted elsewhere, though rarely proclaimed openly: a program of violent elimination, including mass slaughter. The Germans' aim here was total elimination,

for which they deemed expulsion and wholesale killing to be equally good solutions to the "Herero problem." Their ensuing campaign of destruction's comprehensiveness and viciousness rivals any of our age, yet it remains little known. The location, the survivors' political impotence, and the West's continuing racism often render the deaths of non-whites invisible, thus de facto of little broader social and political consequence. Adolf Hitler's musing thirty-five years later, on the eve of launching his annihilationist war with the assault on Poland, "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?" would have been still more apposite had he, echoing von Trotha (see below), asked, *Who now has even heard of the Herero people?*²

Von Trotha's and the Germans' unabashed exterminationist proclamation and deeds caused no real uproar in Germany or internationally. Presaging Hitler, von Trotha responded to the subsequent rebellion of the Nama people similarly, declaiming on April 22, 1905: "The Nama who chooses not to surrender and let himself be seen in the German area will be shot, until all are exterminated. Those who, at the start of the rebellion, committed murder against whites or have commanded that whites be murdered have, by law, forfeited their lives. As for the few not defeated, it will fare with them as it fared with the Herero, who in their blindness also believed that they could make successful war against the powerful German Emperor and the great German people. I ask you, where are the Herero today?" The Germans slaughtered about half the twenty thousand Nama and incarcerated most of the rest in concentration camps, effectively eliminating them from the German colony. Even though the Berg Damara had not even rebelled, the Germans killed about one-third of them merely because they had trouble distinguishing them from the Herero.³

As is true of almost all mass murders, these annihilations' essential facts are straightforward. The best known one, though still barely known, is the Germans' obliteration of the Herero. In 1903 the German colonizers adopted an eliminationist policy of forcing the Herero into reservations as the 4,500 German settlers gobbled up the Herero's land for cattle farming. The Herero, ever more dispossessed and victimized by the Germans since their arrival in 1892, rebelled in January 1904. From the outset of the armed conflict, the vastly stronger Germans exterminated the Herero—massacring them, driving them into



Herero returning starved from the desert; two women are unable to stand.

the desert, poisoning their water holes. Jan Kubas, a Griqua, accompanied the Germans:

The Germans took no prisoners. They killed thousands and thousands of women and children along the roadsides. They bayoneted them and hit them to death with the butt ends of their guns. Words cannot be found to relate what happened; it was too terrible. They were lying exhausted and harmless along the roads, and as the soldiers passed they simply slaughtered them in cold blood. Mothers holding babies at their breasts, little boys and little girls; old people too old to fight and old grandmothers, none received mercy; they were killed, all of them, and left to lie and rot on the veld for the vultures and wild animals to eat. They slaughtered until there were no more Hereros left to kill. I saw this every day; I was with them.⁴

Von Trotha's infamous "Extermination Order" came after the Herero, already defeated, were suing for peace. He wanted to finish them off. Seven years later, the Germans had annihilated 80 percent of the eighty thousand Herero. Having decided that the "Herero cease to exist as a

tribe," the Germans appropriated the Herero's land and cattle, and subjected surviving Herero to a kind of apartheid.

The Germans offered themselves various justifications for why 4,500 Germans' economic well-being and the German empire's glory warranted the elimination of two peoples, twenty times more numerous than the small German colony. Perpetrators are always convinced that they have good reasons for killing their victims, typically the heartfelt fiction that their victims are criminals, miscreants, or impediments of such enormity as to deserve the death penalty.

Our Age's Slaughters

This mass annihilation that inaugurated our time's eliminationist campaigns was characteristic of earlier times: imperialist Europeans acting without moral restraint to secure non-Europeans' lands. As a rule, previous centuries' colonizers—Americans as they spanned their continent, Belgians in Congo, British, French, Portuguese, and Spanish in Asia, Africa, and the Americas—despoiled, enslaved, or killed people of color who resisted or were deemed obstacles to Europeans' occupation or exploitation of their lands. Europeans regularly employed murderous methods against non-European peoples that they did not use against their conventional European enemies. Racism and impunity explain the difference.

The Germans' annihilation campaign is, in a different sense, a quintessential phenomenon of our era: One group, in the name of a national or ideological project, self-consciously attempts to eliminate another unwanted or putatively threatening group, and methodically works to do so for years. The French, Portuguese, and others, also racists, were wantonly murderous in Africa during the first part of the twentieth century, killing or working to death hundreds of thousands or millions in their African colonies, yet they did not set out, as national policy, to systematically exterminate targeted peoples in whole or in large part. But since the twentieth century's beginning, states, supported by significant percentages of their people, have done just that.

Unlike colonial predations in the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries—which include the colossally murderous trans-Atlantic African

slave trade that took 15 million to 20 million Africans' lives, more than the roughly 10 million who survived to become slaves—most of our age's mass murders and eliminations have not been perpetrated by colonial or conquering powers. They have been wholly or principally within the country the perpetrators and victims both inhabit.

In this sense the Turks' mass annihilation of the Armenians during World War I—commonly if wrongly understood to be the twentieth century's first mass extermination—is typical. Under war's cover, the Turkish leaders decided to eliminate their "Armenian problem" because they considered Armenians an irredeemably non-Turkish element posing a secessionist threat. With the transparently false accusation that during World War I the Armenians had revolted against Turkey to abet the Russian enemy, the Turks "relocated" them, which meant rounding them up and quickly slaughtering the military-age men before or shortly after they sent the Armenians marching away. In a contemporary report, the American consul in Kharpert explains what relocation was known to mean and how the Turks disposed of the Armenian men: "If it were simply a matter of being obliged to leave here to go somewhere else, it would not be so bad, but everybody knows that it is a case of going to one's death. . . . The system that is being followed seems to be to have bands of Kurds awaiting them on the road, to kill the men especially, and, incidentally, some of the others. The entire movement seems to be the most thoroughly organized and effective massacre this country has ever seen."⁵ One Armenian survivor relates what happened on her death march:

They asked all the men and boys to separate from the women. There were some teen boys who were dressed like girls and disguised. They remained behind. But my father had to go. He was a grown man with a mustache. As soon as they separated the men, a group of armed men came from the other side of the hill and killed all the men right in front of our eyes. They killed them with bayonets at the end of their rifles, sticking them in their stomachs. Many of the women could not take it, and they threw themselves in the River Euphrates, and they, too, died. They did this killing right in front of us. I saw my father being killed.⁶

The Turks forced the women and children (and the remaining men) to walk for months, with no shoes, little food, no shelter, often no blankets

at night. Barely living Armenians populated Turkey's byways: "At the first station, we saw a lot of Armenians who had gotten there much earlier than us, and they had turned into skeletons. We were surrounded with skeletons so much that it felt like we were in hell. They were all hungry and thirsty, and they would look for familiar faces to help them. We became terribly discouraged, so hopeless that it is hard to explain exactly how we felt."⁷ Their destination was the desert where they perished in colossal numbers, and at the end of the marching, the Turks slaughtered perhaps 200,000 of those still alive. The Turks eliminated almost all of the 2 million Armenians living in Turkey, exterminating 1.2 million, expelling most of the rest. Employing a wide range of eliminationist policies, they also converted, forced into slavery, or kidnapped and raised as Turks between 100,000 and 200,000 Armenian women and children.⁸ The Turks left Armenians in Constantinople, today's Istanbul, alive because eliminating them was unnecessary for solving the problem as the Turks understood it, and extending their eliminationist project to their capital city would have further exposed their predations to the world. With the Bolshevik Revolution and the Russian armies' collapse, the Turks extended the annihilationist campaign to Transcaucasia, known as Russian Armenia, which they occupied in 1918, and where 300,000 Armenians had fled. They killed perhaps 200,000.⁹

Like this mass elimination, many of our era's enormous domestic mass murders have resulted from the perpetrators' calculations that mass killing is a sensible way to destroy political opposition, to forestall secession, or to safeguard their power or their existence. Such Machiavellians have often been satisfied to kill enough of the victim people to stave off the putative danger, and then to cease. Or they have killed some significant portion of their chosen victims and disposed of the rest in some other way, such as expulsion.

Machiavellians, such as von Trotha and the Turkish leaders, have not initiated most of our age's enormous slaughters. Our time's most lethal killers—Hitler in Europe, Kim Il Sung and his son Kim Jong Il in North Korea, Pol Pot in Cambodia, Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union, and Mao Zedong in China and Tibet—have acted from beliefs calling for their societies' or the world's thorough transformation. Several features were common to these mass murderers' eliminationist enterprises. The destruction was enormous. Hitler killed perhaps 20 million people,

Stalin 8 million or more, Mao perhaps 50 million, the dynastic Kims perhaps more than 4 million, and Pol Pot the highest percentage of the inhabitants of any country, more than 20 percent of the Cambodians, totaling 1.7 million. They each set up a new political institution, the camp system, as an infrastructure of domination, violence, and death, and a partly autonomous, if integral, system within each one's society. Hitler built the concentration camps, Stalin the gulag, Mao the Laogai ("reform through labor"), Pol Pot the cooperatives, and the Kims the Kwansiso ("special control institutions"). They killed the bulk of their victims not in a quick assault, but spanning most of their time in power, as they knew they were not subject to opposition, intervention, or punishment. And they made slaughtering people a constitutive feature of their civilizations, because their ideologies, as varied as they were, unceasingly summoned them to eliminate others to preserve the present and create a radically new future.

In the Soviet Union, mass annihilation was the midwife of the communist paradise waiting to be born. Since the birth was expected to be difficult (and was in reality impossible), mass murder became state policy's semipermanent feature, beginning shortly after the Russian Revolution of 1917 and extending until Stalin's death in 1953. The gulag was one of the largest camp systems ever constructed, with thousands of installations in which the Soviets imprisoned probably more than 28 million people over the years. The Soviets dealt with real and imagined political problems by killing people outright or, more frequently, consigning them to the gulag, where the regimen and conditions guaranteed a steady death toll. The great famine in Ukraine in 1933—whether Stalin willfully manufactured it, as some believe, or it resulted from the disastrous and brutally callous communist economic policies, as others hold—augmented the gulag's death toll by 5 million or more. Throughout his rule and especially during World War II, Stalin deported many ethnic groups in whole or in large part, including Chechens, Crimean Tatars, Karachai, and Volga Germans. Deeming these peoples disloyal or treasonous, he deported more than 6 million of them into the country's interior, including Siberia. In the process, hundreds of thousands, perhaps even more of them, died. The impunity with which Stalin could act allowed him to kill a vast array of victims: Ukrainians; so-called class enemies, Kulaks, who were (in relative terms only) prosperous peasants;

various real or alleged uncooperative ethnic groups; repatriated Soviet nationals after World War II; and political opposition, real or imagined, of any kind. The Soviets' mass murdering spanned more time, over thirty-five years, than any but that of the communist Chinese, with the regime's policies taking the lives of at least 8 million people, with many estimates placing the toll at many millions more.

In addition to the Soviets' mass murders and eliminations, World War II saw such predations by the Japanese in China, Korea, and elsewhere in Asia; by the Germans from one end of Europe to the other; by other Europeans, such as the Croats' exterminating of Serbs and others; and by the Americans in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These constitute a sparse, geographic scope, and variety of mass annihilation unequalled during our or any other time.

War can facilitate the mass extermination and elimination of hated or unwanted people. In various ways war makes people more likely to consider eliminationist initiatives. It encourages people to see violent and lethal measures as appropriate for dealing with real or imagined problems that had or would have been previously managed differently. War predisposes people to magnify threats, to believe tales of enemy crimes, and to lash out in fear or in self-righteous retribution. It provides readily believed justifications for mass slaughter, such as an enemy's insurrection or the needs of national security. War also creates new practical opportunities to act on eliminationist desires, by giving perpetrators better access to the potential victims, and by lessening the perceived cost of committing mass murder (one is, after all, already at war). It makes secrecy from the outside world easier, as operational areas become closed to media, and communication among victims to facilitate defense or evasion becomes more difficult.

Japan's mass eliminations became possible because they sought a vast empire in Asia and decided to make war to gain it. The Japanese committed mass murder at the end of the nineteenth century in Korea, a precursor of their more extensive, brutal, and deadly eliminationist subjugation of their country starting in 1910. The Japanese's murderousness increased exponentially with their invasion of China in 1937, and then during World War II. The Japanese, like the Germans in Eastern Europe, were wanton, murderous conquerors, doing anything to subjugate peoples they deemed racial inferiors. The Japanese's racism,

paralleling the Germans', produced similar, vast imperial aspirations and eliminationist practices.

War can incubate existing eliminationist hatreds and provide a context for people to act upon them. But, with rare exceptions, war does not itself *create* the eliminationist animus that becomes the impetus for exterminating people. By whatever mechanism war *itself* is supposed to produce the mass annihilation of civilians—whether it is simply being at war, a real threat of being annihilated, the agony of defeat, or the euphoria of victory—each one fails to account for mass murder's basic facts.

If warfare somehow created the eliminationist mindset characterizing mass murderers, then mass murder would be still far more common. Every war, or at least most wars, would produce an annihilationist campaign paralleling the military campaign. Indeed, in all or most wars two such campaigns, one from each combatant, would occur. Yet in the overwhelming majority of wars it did not, and no evidence shows that the combatants even contemplated annihilationist campaigns. If, instead, suffering is supposed to produce the desire to annihilate the source of one's pain, then the Germans, twice, after each World War, and the Japanese after World War II, would have been destroyed by their conquerors. Overwhelmingly, mass murder's perpetrators have not been defeated people who suffered enormously during war.

The people slaughtering large civilian populations under war's cover have usually been the military aggressors, who furthermore have either exterminated peoples other than those against whom they fought or began their mass murdering before suffering major military defeats. This was true of the Turks' annihilation of the Armenians during World War I, of the Germans and Japanese during World War II, and of many others, including the Pakistanis in Bangladesh in 1971, where they killed between 1 million and 3 million people, and the Indonesians in defenseless East Timor, which started with the Indonesians' unprovoked imperial invasion in 1975 and continued with a murderous occupation that lasted until 1999 and that, all told, killed perhaps 200,000 people.

Perpetrators have slaughtered noncombatants not in reaction to wartime hardship, but as an integral part of their strategic political goals. As a high-ranking German Embassy official reported one of the Turks' eliminationist assault's masterminds, Interior Minister Mehmet Talât, explaining to him, Turkey "wanted to take advantage of the war

in order to thoroughly liquidate its internal enemies (the indigenous Christians), without being disturbed by foreign diplomatic intervention."¹⁰ Talât and War Minister Ismail Enver explained in a telegram to Turkey's ally Germany that "the work that is to be done must be done *now*; after the war it will be too late."¹¹ In the 1930s, Hitler was looking forward to war as an opportunity to carry out his eliminationist projects, including the Jews' extermination. Regarding his mass-murderous project, euphemistically called "euthanasia," to kill mentally ill people and other Germans deemed biologically unworthy of life, he told the Reich doctors' leader in 1935 that "in the event of a war he would take up the question of euthanasia and enforce it" because "he was of the opinion that such a problem could be more easily solved in war-time, since opposition which could be expected from the churches would not play so significant a role in the context of war as at other times." Hitler understood that war would provide the cover "to solve the problem of the asylums in a radical way."¹²

Mass murder and elimination are also not the stepchildren of the euphoria of military victory. If vanquishing an opponent creates a sense of omnipotence and a desire (not previously existing) to annihilate entire populations, then all or certainly many more victors would annihilate their enemies. In 1940 the Germans would have exterminated their bitter enemies, the French, against whom they had fought three major wars in seventy years, and would have planned to kill the British. The Israelis would have annihilated several neighboring peoples after their victories.

Our era's differing landscapes of war and of mass murder belie the common belief that war itself causes annihilationist programs. War has provided the occasion for would-be mass murderers to finally act and has therefore been an *arena* for mass murder. But that is different from war itself producing it.

Many mass slaughters have had little or nothing to do with war. Stalin's mass murdering long predated, and was most intensive before, World War II. Though Stalin deported eight national groups to the Soviet Union's interior during the war, the Soviets' general domestic eliminationist drive markedly abated. Mao's killing took its greatest toll long after the communists had an iron grip on China. This is also true of the Chinese's killing of more than half a million and perhaps as many as 1.2 million Tibetans since their imperial occupation of Tibet in 1950.

The Indonesian military's slaughter of perhaps half a million Indonesian communists in 1965 occurred during peacetime. The Tutsi slaughter of at least 100,000 Hutu in Burundi in 1972, and smaller numbers three other times, had nothing to do with war (a fifth, the most recent, in 1993, occurred in response to a Hutu uprising in which Hutu slaughtered perhaps twenty-five thousand Tutsi). Many mass killings in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s—by Augusto Pinochet in Chile, the military junta in Argentina, José Efraín Ríos Montt in Guatemala, and elsewhere—occurred during peacetime, even if their tyrannical regimes confronted resistance (including some armed resistance).

Slaughtering foreign civilians during war has been a common feature of our age, but mass murder's principal locus has shifted from international to domestic terrain. The impetus to annihilate populations has been less the correlate of conquest or colonization, as it had been in earlier centuries, and more the desire to alter power relations within or to remake one's own society. Seldom has war created in the perpetrators novel desires they had not previously had, to slaughter large numbers of unarmed men, women, and children, or to expel them from their homes and countries. But it has often been the converse. Leaders' and their followers' common desires to eliminate or annihilate other peoples, such as the Germans' desire to create a new empire in Eastern Europe, the Japanese's wish to create an empire in Asia, and the Serbs' wish to secure theirs in Bosnia and Kosovo, have frequently *produced* the idea to initiate military conflicts, which they then use as an occasion to enact previously laid murderous plans. The evidence suggests the relationship between war and eliminationist assaults on targeted groups of people is the reverse of what is commonly held. People harboring mass-murderous and eliminationist aspirations often initiate or broaden military conflicts for those purposes, or see others' violent elimination as integral to the conquest or colonization of foreign territory.

Varieties of Eliminationist Assaults

Even if our age's eliminationist projects have shared certain characteristics, they, especially the domestic eliminationist projects, have also had varying features, which are important to understand.

The communists' colossal mass murders in the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, and Cambodia notwithstanding, either rightist or nationalist or ethnicist regimes (which the Khmer Rouge partly also was) have committed most domestic mass murders. During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, many rightist dictatorships in Latin America, under the name of anticommunism or counterinsurgency, undertook campaigns to exterminate political opponents or indigenous peoples. From 1976 to 1982 the Argentinean military dictatorship conducted a secret campaign against leftists and other opponents—real or invented—murdering 05, in the time's euphemistic language, “disappearing” thirty thousand people, often by dropping them from airplanes into the ocean. Mass-murderous regimes in Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, and elsewhere were moved by the doctrine of “national security,” meaning the nation's integrity, economic order, and security required the annihilation of those deemed a threat—which often included conventional political opponents. This systematic killing of targeted political opponents was analogous to some of Stalin's and Mao's killings, but in Argentina and elsewhere the slaughter was much more selective, and not tied to a visionary transformative project. During this period, across Latin America widespread murder was part of the ordinary repertoire of fortending challenges to political power and economic benefits of the dominant groups and political regimes. The El Salvadoran rightist regime slaughtered perhaps seventy thousand people during a counterinsurgency campaign during the 1970s, though few of the victims were actual guerrillas. The Guatemalan rulers turned a campaign against a relatively unthreatening, leftist insurgency into a systematic slaughter of perhaps 200,000 Maya, mainly from 1978 to 1985, and expelling from their villages between a half million and a million more.

Such “counterinsurgency” mass murder is related to others that, at least formally, are reactions to domestic political challenges, guerrilla war, or concerted rebellions. In 1982 in Syria members of the Muslim Brotherhood (a Political Islamic movement seeking to create theocracies throughout the Islamic world), which was challenging the tyrannical rule of Hafez al-Assad and his Alawite Party, killed government officials in Hama and declared the city's 350,000 people liberated. Assad chose not to root out the few hundred lightly armed rebels. Instead, using planes and artillery, he bombarded the city for days, then sent in tanks.

Assad's forces stopped only after leveling a good part of the city and slaughtering between twenty thousand and forty thousand men, women, and children. Assad opted for a final solution to this particular city's “problem” and also to show Syrians the peril of challenging his rule. Assad's destruction in Hama made any cost-benefit analysis of rebellion a bleak one. As many others have, Assad used mass murder to produce terror and as a deterrent.

Not all of the recent decades' domestic eliminationist projects have been as restrictive as these Latin American and Syrian slaughters of “only” tens of thousands. The Rwandan genocide of 1994 had a comprehensiveness, scope, and killing rate that recalls the Germans' slaughter of the Jews. In Central Africa, Hutu and Tutsi have vied for power in adjacent Rwanda and Burundi, as well as in neighboring diasporas. Since the process of decolonization from Belgium began in 1959 and independence was achieved in 1962, each group has perpetrated several mass slaughters against the other. In 1994, after a plane carrying the presidents of both countries was blown up, in Rwanda the Hutu attacked the Tutsi with unsurpassed intensity and fury, seeking to eliminate them all. In three months, they killed about 800,000 men, women, and children. The remaining several hundred thousand Tutsi fled the country or hid in the countryside. The Hutu's individual, face-to-face butchery of Tutsi, usually by machete, stopped only when a rebel Tutsi army defeated the Hutu mass murderers and seized control of the country. A regional war among different ethnic and political groups, with forces from neighboring countries and a vast array of armed groups, ensued in the Democratic Republic of the Congo—a country of Western Europe's size (including Spain and the United Kingdom). Seemingly all sides perpetrated massacres and pursued policies that have led to rampant deaths from starvation and disease. Although the war formally ended in 2004, slaughters and death from starvation have continued on a massive scale. The death toll, estimated at more than 5 million, has engendered its regionally understandable moniker, the Third World War. Kim Il Song's eliminationist policies in North Korea, now with son Kim Jong Il at the helm, also continue, as does the Political Islamic Sudanese lethal eliminationist assault on the people of Darfur.

The twentieth century's final European eliminationist onslaught started in March 1999, as the Serbs attempted to purge Kosovo of all

ethnic Albanians (or Kosovars). This full-scale eliminationist assault is a classic case of the interchangeability of killing and expulsion as solutions to putative problems. Slobodan Milošević, the Serbian ruler of what remained of Yugoslavia after the country began breaking up in 1990, considered Kosovo an integral part of Serbia, making the Kosovars, composing 90 percent of the population, a threat. The Serbs had a few years earlier made eliminationist politics, a mixture of mass murder and expulsion, their policy in Bosnia. They responded to the Kosovars' desire for more political autonomy, with a more thorough, if less lethal, eliminationist campaign. In the face of international sanctions, pressure, and eventually bombing, the Serbs forcibly expelled 1.5 million people, almost all the Kosovars, from the country. The Serbs also selectively slaughtered approximately 10,000 mainly military-age men, which diminished the Kosovars' capacity to resist Serbian onslaught. Serbs burned and destroyed at least 1,200 Kosovar residential areas, including 500 villages, and tens of thousands of homes, in the ultimately failed attempt to obliterate the Kosovar presence (NATO forced the Serbs to let the Kosovars return).¹³

From the Germans' imperial slaughter of the Herero to the Serbs' mass expulsion and murder of Kosovars, to the recent and ongoing slaughters in Central Africa and Sudan's Darfur region, and China's continuing eliminationist grip on Tibet and Kim's on North Korea, our age's mass slaughters and eliminations have different characters, facets, and features. This considerable heterogeneity makes the Holocaust's status, singly and together with the Germans' other eliminationist assaults, as our time's emblematic (which is different from its defining) mass murder, more understandable and striking—precisely because of its all-encompassing nature.

The Germans' annihilation of European Jewry is the best-known, most extensively documented and studied, and most discussed mass murder of all time. It is the only mass slaughter with an internationally known proper name. It even has two: *Holocaust* and *Shoah*. Yet the Holocaust's preeminent status owes less to a sober, comparative assessment of its features than to misguided and false understandings scholars and nonscholars have propagated.

How did Germany, a highly "civilized," educated, and modern country produce this gargantuan slaughter? To comprehend what to many has

seemed incomprehensible, people have latched on to a fictional framework: The Holocaust represents modernity's lurking dangers. Among the many widely circulating myths and falsehoods about the Holocaust, three specific ones help compose this once all but unquestioned (but now roundly discredited) view.¹⁴ First, the perpetrators were and are *Everyone*, meaning that all people are at any moment equally potential killers of anyone. Second, Germany was no different (regarding its people's attitudes toward Jews and other "races") from other Western countries of the time (or our time). Third, modern technology and organization—conveyor-belt killing, gas chambers, trains, bureaucracy—made the Holocaust possible.

These three myths create a superficially compelling but false universalism: The country, at the pinnacle of modernity, mobilized perpetrators of no distinctive feature, except being modern and therefore like us, to slaughter Jews. These perpetrators killed others in enormous numbers only because the modern world gave them the necessary technology and organizational capacity. This strange combination of rendering the Holocaust commonplace and close—anyone could do it—and also abstract and distant—the technology and bureaucracy of killing replace the human beings as the central actors—has created a continuous fascination and ongoing struggle both to make sense of the Holocaust and to control emotions generated by the notion that this greatest horror can be identified with us all.

The Holocaust has modern features, but they do not distinguish it among mass murders. What is truly modern about the Holocaust, other genocides share. Why have the "civilized" Soviets' killings and camps, begun under Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, not produced a similar fascination and dread? The Bolshevik leaders were more educated, literate, and modern in outlook than the Nazi leaders. Do they "fascinate" people less because they did not create gassing factories—even though their killing, organizationally and logistically, was as technologically modern? Perhaps. But far more important is that people in the West attributed the Soviets' deeds to evil beliefs—the creed of communism—that rendered the actors and their civilization *different* from us and ours.

Yet recent scholarship has demonstrated the fictive character of this previously widespread understanding of the Holocaust. Evil beliefs,

namely antisemitism, moved Germans, Austrians, and other Europeans who helped them, to kill Jews—and led many others to support the eliminationist onslaught. And antisemitism and prejudice are not particularly modern (even if the Germans' particular racist brand of antisemitism is a modern variant), having moved the "civilized" and "uncivilized" alike, from the ancient world through today. Modern technology, especially the gas chambers, was unnecessary to perpetrate the Holocaust. The Germans killed masses of Jews with more conventional methods, which they easily could have employed for the rest of their victims.*

The Germans' mass murdering can be seen as the emblematic instance of our age's mass slaughters, not because of this mythologized view but because of its real character. Even though the Germans did not kill the most people, they were our age's most omnivorous killers, exterminating the greatest *variety* of victims and, upon conquering the main areas of intended destruction, they killed *the most people on average per year* of all mass-murdering regimes. Equally significant, the Germans' mass murdering encompassed virtually all facets of mass elimination and its annihilationist variant.

The Germans killed abroad as imperial conquerors, decimating the peoples living in large swaths of Eastern Europe, so that Germans could Germanify the conquered territories. And they perpetrated domestic slaughters. They killed as self-conceived apocalyptic warriors. And they killed as calculating Machiavellian overlords. They destroyed populations with the passion of fanatical belief. And they killed for cool reasons of realpolitik. For them, mass murder was often an end in itself. And they responded to rebellion with mass murder as a deterrent to

*Had an accurate account of the Holocaust been accepted from the beginning, then this singular fascination with and dread of the Holocaust might not have developed. It might still have been understood as the most horrific episode of bigotry and hatred's consequences, but its central place in the West's existential musings and the academy's detached, abstract theorizing would have been unlikely. Silence about other genocides, a stunning disregard of the facts (including that the Germans shot and starved millions, that antisemitism among Germans was rampant, and so on), and adherence to the paradigm described above led scholars away from fundamental questions (such as the killers' identities, patterns of choices, and motives) and helped to produce a widely held, partly mythologized view of this period that robbed the killers of their agency and humanity and that obscured central features of the Holocaust, such as the perpetrators' widespread, systematic, willful cruelty and glee.

future challenges. They killed with the most time-tested and primitive methods. And they innovated and built death factories. They slaughtered their victims in the cruelest manner. And they killed them clinically, with gas or lethal injection. They killed their victims face-to-face. And they killed them from a distance. They murdered in the most planned and organized way. And they killed in an impromptu way, with every German in Eastern Europe allowed to be judge and executioner of dehumanized people. They killed some categories of people comprehensively. And they killed others selectively. They killed people because of their putative individual biological characteristics (the mentally ill and physically handicapped), social and national identities (which they conceived of in racial terms), and political allegiances.

In these annihilationist and eliminationist campaigns, the Germans used every conceivable violent eliminationist means, from brutally repressing and enslaving, to deporting large populations, to incarcerating people in camps, to preventing reproduction by sterilizing them, to decapitating peoples by destroying their elites, to slaughtering entire populations. They invented and experimented with different killing techniques (including lethal injections, explosive bullets, and gas vans), in order to find ones that would maximize their various murderous values. They drew on professional cadres of killers, drafted citizens into the task, and employed or allowed just about any German in the vicinity to participate. Except for possibly in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, in no other country, certainly not in the modern era, was elimination, and specifically mass murder, such a reflexive state instrument, or internalized by so many ordinary citizens as the all but automatic solution to a vast range of real and perceived obstacles and problems.

Seeing the Germans' slaughters as our era's emblematic moment of mass annihilation and those who perpetrated them in this manner as its emblematic mass murderers is further justified by the aspect of the Holocaust that actually does make it singular: the unparalleled drive to kill every Jew, including every child, and not just in their own country but in other countries, ultimately in the world.

This partial overview of our time's mass annihilations reveals mass murder to have many facets, which the Germans' killings during the Nazi period encapsulate. It also shows the erroneousness of the simple formulae that have been foisted upon the public by theorists of modernity

and the so-called human condition and by the often blinkered and misguided scholarship on the Holocaust, which has also been a major source of images and slogans about genocide in general. Mass elimination and its lethal variant *are* complex phenomena that take many forms and have differing features. They defy the simplistic, ahistorical, and reductionist slogans of "total war," "the banality of evil," "assembly-line killing," "bureaucratic killing," "ordinary men," "slogans that had once been the stock and trade of the Holocaust's interpreters and, more generally, mass slaughterers' commentators.

The Scope of Eliminationist Assaults

Surveying some salient moments and some of the many aspects of our age's mass eliminations only suggests their frequency, scope, and character. Mass annihilations spanned virtually the entire era. Since the beginning of the twentieth century there has been no time when the world was free from ongoing mass annihilation. The number of people who have been mass murdered is, conservatively estimated, 83 million. When purposeful famine is included, the number becomes 127 million, and if the higher estimates are correct the total number of victims of mass murder may be 175 million or more. If we take the conservative estimate, then roughly 2 percent of all people who died during our time were felled by mass murderers. If the high number is correct, then it is more than 4 percent, in other words one of every twenty-five people.¹⁵ If the higher number is correct, their number exceeds the population of all but seven countries today. And all the victims' children, and their children's children, that would have been born, never were or will be.

The geographic distribution of our age's mass annihilations spans the globe. The Americas, from Argentina and Chile at the southern tip, to Brazil at the heart, up through Guatemala and El Salvador, have suffered it mostly in the 1970s and 1980s. From 1910 to 1920, the pre-revolutionary and then revolutionary Mexican regimes killed hundreds of thousands of people. Prior to 9/11, the United States has been spared such ravages, though the United States perpetrated mass murder against the Japanese of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and during the cold war gave

covert aid and public tacit support to mass murderers in many countries, including in Latin America.

Europe has had the most victims. A higher percentage of countries there than elsewhere have fallen victim to mass murderers, who mainly served two regimes: Nazism and Soviet communism. Virtually every European country was touched by Nazism's volcanic murderousness, and many peoples, including Croats, Latvians, Lithuanians, Slovaks, and Ukrainians, themselves slaughtered the Jews of their own countries or helped the Germans do so. All peoples of the multiracial, multiethnic Soviet empire lost members to the Bolsheviks. The peoples of Central and Eastern Europe, among them Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, Hungarians, and Czechs, some of whom suffered enormous loss of life at the hands of the Germans during World War II, themselves undertook, after the Germans' defeat, retributory eliminationist campaigns against ethnic Germans, forcibly expelling roughly 10 million and killing tens of thousands. The Balkans have been a local zone of elimination. During World War II, with German encouragement, Croats slaughtered Serbs, Jews, Sinti, and Roma, then Josip Tito's communist regime during its consolidation of power after 1944 killed on the order of 100,000 to 200,000 people. With Yugoslavia's breakup in the 1990s, Serbs and Croats perpetrated mass murder and expulsions, including the Serbs' eliminationist assaults against Bosniaks and then Kosovars. Turks, whose country is geographically part of Europe, not only exterminated their Armenians and other Christian minorities, including Greeks and Assyrians, during World War I, but earlier annihilated 150,000 to 300,000 Armenians from 1894 to 1896, as well as nearly 5,000 Greek villagers in retribution for a 1903 revolt in Macedonia. During their war with Greece from 1919 to 1923, Turks slaughtered perhaps another 200,000 Greeks. In the 1980s and 1990s, Turks killed 15,000 to 30,000 Kurds. Not only has mass murder victimized most European countries, but the people of many of them have also been perpetrators. The European death toll (this includes the Soviets' Asian victims) to eliminationist onslaughts is in the tens of millions.

Africa has seen the most individual annihilationist assaults, even though it has had fewer victims than Europe or Asia. In the first part of the century and during the later struggles over decolonization, the European colonizers, such as the Germans in South-West Africa, the

Belgians in Congo, the French in French Equatorial Africa, the Italians in Ethiopia from 1936 to 1941, the British in Kenya from 1952 to 1956, and the Portuguese in Angola in 1961 through 1962 committed mass murder—in some places, including Congo, on a colossal scale. They also fomented enmities among different African peoples, as the Belgians did with the Hutu and Tutsi, that would eventually erupt into killing sprees. In the century's second half, the politically and ethnically fragmented African countries have suffered mainly domestic mass murders as a tool in struggles over power and economic benefit. They include the Hausa's and Ibo's killing of each other, mainly through engineered starvation, totaling 1 million between 1967 and 1970, when the Ibo seceded from Nigeria to form the short-lived country of Biafra. Idi Amin's butchery of perhaps 300,000 Ugandans between 1971 and 1979 made his name synonymous with mass murder. In 1972 in Burundi, the Hutu slaughtered about 100,000 Tutsi. Twenty years later, in 1994, the Hutu in neighboring Rwanda unleashed their total extermination campaign against the Tutsi. Between 1998 and 2004, many participants perpetrated mass slaughter in the regional war fought in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the mass murdering continues today. Many African countries have suffered induced or preventable famines, in which millions of people perished, famines that often coincided with other eliminationist measures. Between 1974 and 1991 the Dergue political regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam in Ethiopia slaughtered perhaps 150,000 political enemies, killed perhaps another 100,000 during a regional expulsion program of 1.5 million to 2 million people, and caused another million to die through famine.

The Arab crescent, spanning parts of Africa and Asia and composed of countries governed generally by brutal dictatorships, has suffered widespread mass murder since World War II. In a final colonial attack from 1954 to 1962, the French murdered perhaps tens of thousands, more likely hundreds of thousands, of Algerian Muslims in outright massacres and through privation in camps, in their desperate attempt to hold on to the last vestige of empire. After France's defeat, the new Algerian regime killed many tens of thousands of Algerians for collaborating with the French. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein and the Baathists slaughtered 200,000 to 300,000 Kurds from 1987 to 1991 and 60,000 Shia Marsh people in 1991–1992, as part of their overall mass mur-

dering that numbered perhaps half a million. Syria's Assad and the Alawites decimated the people of Hama. The region's most catastrophic annihilation is ongoing. In Sudan, following on the heels of the Arab Muslim northerners' killing (mainly by inducing famine but also with extensive direct killing) of upward of 2 million black Christian southerners over twenty years, they have, in the past few years, been conducting an eliminationist campaign against overwhelmingly black Muslims in the western Sudan region of Darfur, killing more than 400,000, expelling more than 2.5 million, and burning hundreds of villages so the people will have no place to return to.

Asia has suffered the largest number of gargantuan mass slaughters, with every major country being the site of eliminationist projects. In addition to the Japanese mass murders during World War II of several million people, mainly in China, though also in Burma, East Timor, Korea, Manchuria, Philippines, and elsewhere; the Chinese communists' murdering of a mind-boggling number of people, perhaps between 50 million and 70 million Chinese, and an additional 1.2 million Tibetans; and the Khmer Rouge's lethal eliminationist system in Cambodia, the continent has seen killings of hundreds of thousands during India's partition from 1946 to 1948, and of between 1 million and 3 million during the Pakistanis' onslaught against seceding Bangladesh in 1971. The Vietnamese communists' long-term campaign of killing opponents, starting in 1945 with the war against the French and ending in the aftermath of the Vietnam War in the 1980s, have produced widely diverging estimates of the victims. They killed perhaps 200,000 to 300,000 people (it might be many more), a figure that does not include the 200,000 boat people who died fleeing the regime. North Korean communists have (not including famine deaths) killed perhaps 2 million people since the regime's inception. Indonesians have on their ledger approximately half a million communists in 1965–1966, and 200,000 East Timorese starting in 1975, when Indonesia invaded the country upon the Portuguese colonizers' departure. Other killings include those by colonizers in the twentieth century's first part; a multinational force, including Americans, in China during the Boxer Rebellion; the French in Indochina; and the Dutch in the East Indies and West Indies. Mass-murderous famines have also afflicted Asia. During their attempt from 1958 to 1961 to rapidly transform China socially and economically,

known as the Great Leap Forward, the Chinese communists caused a famine that took the lives of perhaps 25 million people (included in the total above). North Korea let 2 million to 3.5 million people die owing to famine between 1995 and 1998.

In our age, mass elimination and extermination have visited all parts of the world not just geographically but also socially, with peoples of virtually every imaginable type of group falling victim: people defined by ascriptive characteristics such as skin color, by genetic endowments such as autism, by social or cultural identities such as ethnicity or religion, by sexuality, and by political identity, such as national membership, or political affiliation such as being a communist or being an anticommunist. Germans during the Nazi period slaughtered people in all these kinds of groups.

One particular category of victims has repeatedly been targeted in eliminationist and exterminationist assaults, and yet it has been barely noticed: indigenous peoples. From 1900 to 1957 Brazilians alone obliterated more than eighty Indian tribes, with the indigenous population declining from perhaps 1 million to fewer than 200,000. In Latin America, Asia, and Africa, dozens of exterminationist and eliminationist assaults against indigenous peoples have been documented, including the Paraguayans against the Aché from 1966 to 1976, the El Salvadoreans against Indians from 1980 to 1992, the Tanzanians against the Barabaig from 1990 to 1992, the Filipinos against the Agra in 1988, and the Laotians against the Hmong from 1979 to 1986. More groups of indigenous peoples have likely been destroyed during our age than in any other comparable time period.¹⁶

Mass murder and eliminationist's perpetrators have come from all parts of the economic and political spectrum: Nazis, conventional rightist regimes, democratic countries, communists, nationalists, and regimes guided by no particular ideology. Nevertheless, during the past century communist regimes, led and inspired by the Soviet Union and China, have killed more people than any other regime type. Democracies have been by far the least murderous type (although as colonizers—where democracies transform themselves into tyrannies—they have killed liberally), measured in the number of mass slaughters and of victims.¹⁷ Except the Germans' and the Japanese's killings shortly before and during World War II, and the Europeans' mainly earlier colonial

predations in Africa, mass murders have been principally domestic. Perpetrators have overwhelmingly killed their countrymen.

Our time has been an age of mass murder. More so, mass murder and eliminations are among our age's defining characteristics. People understand *individual* eliminationist campaigns—the Holocaust or, more recently, the mass slaughters in Rwanda and Darfur—to be horrific. Yet only when the mass slaughters and eliminations of our age or even of recent times are seen in aggregate does the horror's true immensity become clear. Mass annihilation and elimination are not just an ad hoc problem that crops up with the latest or next instance of mass slaughter or expulsion, usually, for Westerners, in some seemingly remote place. They ought to be understood as among our time's most pressing and systematically produced political problems. They should be at the center of security discussions in the United Nations and in other international and domestic forums concerned with security, the international order, and justice. That they are not shows how skewed are our depiction and understanding of the past century and the one just begun.

Estimates for mass murders are usually imprecise. High estimates are often two or three times low estimates. For the largest mass murders, estimates vary by millions, and even, as for that of the Chinese communists, tens of millions. Most perpetrators keep few if any records, and often sequester or destroy those they do make. Many mass murders are intertwined with war and other forms of elimination, so it is hard to disentangle what deaths are murders. They have often occurred in politically closed or distant places, and against people of color, so little has become known of what has transpired, or its magnitude.

Nevertheless, it is critically important to present figures for individual mass murders and eliminations, and also aggregate figures, keeping in mind the theme is politically charged (with propagandists and partisans on all sides ready to attack those who do not accept their views). I present here the best estimates based on the figures that others have given, fully aware that any given figure may lead to vociferous criticism that it is an exaggeration or understatement. Some estimates might be wide of the actual mark, by millions.

Still, in aggregate, even mid-range estimates produce a frightening, largely unknown portrait of our time. As we have seen, since the

twentieth century began, human beings have mass murdered directly or through famine a conservatively estimated 127 million people, and may have killed as many as 175 million. By the lower figure, mass murderers have killed more than twice as many people than the 61 million people (42 million military deaths, 19 million civilian deaths) dying in war. By the higher figure, mass murderers have killed almost three times as many. By any reasonable accounting, mass murder and elimination have been more lethal than war. Yet war is reflexively, and wrongly, considered *the* major problem of violence around the world, being international security institutions' and public attention's overwhelming focus.

During the past century's second half and into the twenty-first century, the vast majority of people have lived in countries victimized by the systematic annihilation of parts of their population either during their lifetimes or in their countries' recent pasts. They have themselves been such annihilation's targets or near targets, been perpetrators or sympathized with perpetrators, or been related to, or on the sides of, victims or perpetrators. For most people, mass murder and elimination have not been merely a distant problem, but integral and prominent in their mental, emotional, and existential landscapes. This was driven home to the *New York Times*' Fox Butterfield while in Beijing in 1979–1980 during the aftermath of Mao's death and the Cultural Revolution. Butterfield later wrote about the consequences of the Chinese communists' various mass murderous and eliminationist politics: "Almost every Chinese I got to know during my twenty months in Peking had a tale of political persecution. . . . From their stories it seems as if a whole generation of Chinese . . . had known nothing but arbitrary accusations, violent swings in the political line, unjustified arrests, torture, and imprisonment. Few Chinese I knew felt free from the fear of physical or psychological abuse and the pervasive sense of injustice."¹⁸