

For Release:
Publication Date: September 25, 2007
Yalebooks.com

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BLOOD AND SOIL: *A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur*

By Ben Kiernan

“BLOOD AND SOIL is a stunning achievement. The idea for the project was clearly a prompting of the heart, but the argument itself is a thing of pure intellect. It surveys thousands of years, visits every corner of the world, and stares with scarcely a blink at the worst horrors the world has ever known. As an act of scholarship, it simply stands alone.”

— Kai Erikson, Yale University

For thirty years **Ben Kiernan** has been deeply involved in the study of genocide and crimes against humanity. He has played a key role in unearthing confidential documentation of the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge. His writings have transformed our understanding not only of twentieth-century Cambodia but also of the historical phenomenon of genocide.

BLOOD AND SOIL: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur (Yale University Press; publication date September 25, 2007; \$40)—the first global history of genocide and extermination from ancient times—is among his most important achievements.

Kiernan examines outbreaks of mass violence from the classical era to the present, focusing on worldwide colonial exterminations and twentieth-century case studies, including the Armenian

genocide, the Nazi Holocaust, Stalin's mass murders, and the Cambodian and Rwandan genocides. He identifies connections, patterns, and features that in nearly every case gave early warning of the catastrophe to come: racism or religious prejudice, territorial expansionism, and cults of antiquity and agrarianism.

Using extensive primary and secondary sources in a variety of languages, **BLOOD AND SOIL** shows how the phenomenon of genocide transcends political labels. It has been associated with expanding colonialism, shrinking empires, religious communalism, atheistic dictatorships, unfettered capitalism, National Socialism, Communist revolution, post-Communist nationalism, National Security militarism, and Islamist terror. Yet genocide's many guises do not make it unsusceptible to analysis or too disparate for description. As irrational as its ideologies often are, its underlying features can be identified, defined, and addressed.

Racism, religious prejudices, revivalists cults of antiquity, territorial expansionism, an obsession with contesting and cultivating land, and the idealization of certain social classes (such as the peasantry): The ideologies that have motivated perpetrators of mass killings in the past persist in our new century, says Kiernan. He urges that we heed the rich historical evidence with its telltale signs for predicting and preventing future genocides.

BLOOD AND SOIL: *A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur*
By Ben Kiernan
ISBN: 978-0-300-10098-3 Cloth
Illustrations: 31 maps (scattered), 38 figs. (in galleries)
768 pages
\$ 40
Publication Date: September 25, 2007



About the Author . . .

Ben Kiernan is the A. Whitney Griswold Professor of History, and professor of international and area studies, at Yale University. Born in Melbourne, Australia, Kiernan earned his Ph.D. in Southeast Asian History at Monash University and taught at the University of New South Wales in Sydney and the University of Wollongong before accepting an appointment at Yale in 1990. He became the founding director of Yale's Cambodian Genocide Program (1994) and the comparative Genocide Studies Program (1998), and directs their award-winning, multifaceted websites at www.yale.edu/gsp. Under his direction the Genocide Studies Program has trained dozens of researchers from Cambodia, Rwanda, and East Timor.

He is the author of the pioneering works *How Pol Pot Came to Power: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Communism in Cambodia, 1930–1975* (Verso, 1985; 2nd ed., Yale University Press, 2004) and *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–1979* (Yale University Press, 1996; 2nd ed., 2002), along with more than 100 other original monographs and scholarly articles on Southeast Asia and the history of genocide. His work has been translated and published in thirteen languages.

Kiernan is a member of the Advisory Council of the International Association of Genocide Scholars. Along with his Yale chair, Kiernan is an Honorary Professorial Fellow in the History Department at the University of Melbourne, Australia. At the University of Sydney in 2006, the government-sponsored Australian Research Council selected him for the prestigious five-year award of a national Federation Fellowship.

**More Advance Praise for
Blood and Soil, by Ben Kiernan**

**To Be Published by Yale University Press
September 25, 2007**

“In exploring the global ‘prehistory’ of the horrific forms of societal violence usually associated with the twentieth century, Kiernan identifies key factors that have been consistently associated with genocidal episodes. His book makes an original contribution to our understanding of the phenomenon.”

— **Michael Adas, Rutgers University**

“Ben Kiernan’s book is a major contribution to genocide studies — a first attempt to tell the history of genocidal events, from Sparta to Darfur. **BLOOD AND SOIL** is a well-researched, detailed account of many instances of mass killings and the reasons for their occurrence. It will no doubt give rise to controversy, new research, and new insights.”

— **Yehuda Bauer, Yad Vashem**

“Ben Kiernan’s **BLOOD AND SOIL** is a major work explaining myths and metaphors that have underwritten genocide for six hundred years—earlier within the bowels of the Western tradition, now commonplace practice far beyond that tradition. In seeing genocide as linked to issues of land as well as race, nation, and expansion, Kiernan has opened up social, political, and economic analysis to the struggle for land and the control of property. Such an approach is unique as it is provocative. It is inspired by the author’s profound reading of Cambodia and Southeast Asia. **BLOOD AND SOIL** provides an angle of vision rarely found in those who start (and stop) with a European base of scholarship. The book opens up new questions and formulations on the nature of state inspired murder. It merits a close reading of the dark side of terror, often commented upon, but rarely probed.”

— **Irving Louis Horowitz, Rutgers University**

A Conversation with Ben Kiernan

Q: What have been the main causes of genocide throughout history?

A: The genocidal impulse involves not only violent ethnic or religious hatred but also territorial expansionist ambition and, with some exceptions, related cults of agrarianism and models from antiquity. These obsessions recur consistently.

From ancient times, genocide is a process of individual human decisions made in circumstances of military dominance. But global historical changes in the modern era accentuated both ethnic conflict and technological disparity. The past five centuries saw worldwide demographic explosions and spreading settler colonizations, including conquests of nearly two entire continents in the nineteenth century alone. Escalated territorial conflict and an increased labor supply both made genocidal outbreaks more likely. Advances in technology and communications made them more feasible.

Q: Your book deals with a current topic of huge importance. How does genocide today differ from other times in history?

A: After centuries of imperial genocides across the globe, twentieth-century Europe and East Asia gave rise to powerful new states propounding “scientific” race, class, or national ideologies. Entire groups became inimical and expendable.

Hitler’s Nazis were obsessed by anti-Jewish hatred, the pristine antiquity of an idealized agrarian Germany, and vast territorial conquest. Stalin’s USSR and Mao’s China, somewhat less preoccupied with racial categories or territorial expansion, pursued mass killing of domestic political enemies, social classes, and some national groups. Unlike the Nazis, both dismissed models from antiquity, while Stalin’s exterminations in the 1930s accompanied massive urban industrialization and did not reflect the agrarianism common to most genocidal ideologies.

The contemporary genocide in Darfur is in part a land war conducted by state-sponsored pastoralists against settled farmers. Yet its perpetrators demonstrate racialist, historical, and expansionist preoccupations, like many of their predecessors.

Q: What practical applications has your research found for preventing future mass murders and do you see hope for change?

A: Centuries of genocides—leading up to the 1971 Bangladesh catastrophe and more recent cases in Cambodia, Guatemala, East Timor, Bosnia, Rwanda, and the current depredations of Al-Qaeda in Iraq—reveal a series of perpetrators sharing violent obsessions with ethnoreligious enmity, territorial aggrandizement, romantic agrarianism, and ancient models. Extremists who display these four common ideological characteristics give early warning of potential calamity.

Long-term historical analysis offers new ways for advocates of genocide prevention or intervention to help monitor political groups in vulnerable regions wracked by war or economic destabilization.