



A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide

Samantha Power

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About this book: In 1993, as a 23-year-old correspondent covering the wars in the Balkans, I was initially comforted by the roar of NATO planes flying overhead. President Clinton and other western leaders had sent the planes to monitor the Bosnian war, which had killed almost 200,000 civilians. But it soon became clear that NATO was unwilling to target those engaged in brutal "ethnic cleansing." American statesmen described Bosnia as "a problem from hell," and for three and a half years refused to invest the diplomatic and military capital needed to stop the murder of innocents. In Rwanda, around the same time, some 800,000 Tutsi and opposition Hutu were exterminated in the swiftest killing spree of the twentieth century. Again, the United States failed to intervene. This time U.S. policy-makers avoided labeling events "genocide" and spearheaded the withdrawal of UN peacekeepers stationed in Rwanda who might have stopped the massacres underway. Whatever America's commitment to Holocaust remembrance (embodied in the presence of the Holocaust Museum on the Mall in Washington, D.C.), the United States has never intervened to stop genocide. This book is an effort to understand why. While the history of America's response to genocide is not an uplifting one, "A Problem from Hell" tells the stories of countless Americans who took seriously the slogan of "never again" and tried to secure American intervention. Only by understanding the reasons for their small successes and colossal failures can we understand what we as a country, and we as citizens, could have done to stop the most savage crimes of the last century. -Samantha Power

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