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Samuel Totten

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Book Review

Samuel Totten, ed. *Teaching about Genocide: Issues, Approaches, and Resources*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing, 2004. Pp. 358, paper. \$34.95 US.

Reviewed by Samuel Edelman, *University of Judaism; State of California Center for Excellence in the Study of the Holocaust, Genocide, Human Rights and Tolerance*

There are only a few scholars writing about teaching genocide and the Holocaust, and Samuel Totten is truly one of the most prolific and most effective. His book *Teaching about Genocide: Issues, Approaches, and Resources* is the latest of a long list of publications for educators on the subject of genocide.

This is a highly readable critical work. The introduction and first six chapters lay out very clearly a number of key considerations for both educators and public-policy leaders who are concerned with embedding issues concerning genocide into state educational standards and curricula.

In her chapter, “Educating about Genocide, Yes: But What Kind of Education?” Carol Rittner sets out the parameters of teaching. Teaching solely about the perpetrators, without teaching about the victims, the resisters, and the rescuers, is a problem. Teachers who have only a brief period to teach about genocide have a responsibility, even in that brief time, to be comprehensive to avoid the problem of glorifying the perpetrator. Rittner’s chapter moves us a great distance toward that goal of comprehensive teaching.

Totten’s chapter “Issues of Rationale: Teaching about Genocide” is one of those very critical essays that lay out for teachers, administrators, and state education officials the justification for including genocide in educational curricula. Not only do we see guidelines for writing rationales, we also see Totten’s own extensive experience and knowledge at work here, advising us as to good practice on this issue. Rationales are often ignored, but in fact they provide important guidelines for educational policy development, and this chapter helps us get to this in an effective way.

The chapter by Paul Bartrop and Samuel Totten, “The History of Genocide,” is a tour de force, a brief, tight, comprehensive history of genocide. For teachers with only a brief time to get into the topic of genocide, this chapter is a must. In addition, it contains a tight and well-written synopsis of the career of Raphael Lemkin—the story of a true hero of our age. Finally, this chapter’s section on genocide intervention lays out the possibility of genocide early-warning systems and their potential impact. This is a critical chapter for teachers and students.

In “Wrestling with the Definition of Genocide,” Totten looks at Lemkin’s efforts in defining genocide in more detail and then examines the effect of the definition stated in the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (UNCG). Totten demonstrates the significant problems with the UN treaty definition, as well as with other definitions. This is an excellent appraisal with great potential for policy discussions among students.

Henry Huttenbach’s chapter, “Defining Genocide,” is a little more difficult to grasp. This chapter is both detailed and complex in outlining the issues

surrounding the development of the UNCG's definition of genocide. While it is a useful text, it is somewhat hard to read.

Chapter 6 presents ten case studies (the Armenian Genocide, starvation in the Ukraine, the Holocaust, Indonesia in 1965–1966, Bangladesh, Burundi, Rwanda, Cambodia, genocide against the Kurds, and Bosnia) by some of the most outstanding scholars on genocide in the world, including Richard Hovannisian, Michael Berenbaum, Eric Markusen, and René Lemarchand. Each one provides significant content material that might easily be translated into curricular materials.

The remaining five chapters deal successively with instructional strategies, comparative genocide, issues of human rights, intervention and prevention issues, and an extensive annotated bibliography. Just as the earlier part of the book gives educators a strong and comprehensive understanding of genocide, so this last section gives a strong overview of issues surrounding genocide prevention and the critically important interface of human-rights violations and potential genocide.

It is rare that those of us who work in the field of genocide studies and teacher preparation see works as comprehensive and as useful as this text is. Samuel Totten has once again produced an important and remarkable work that is eminently useable for educators and policy makers concerned with genocide education.