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Benjamin A. Valentino. *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the Twentieth Century.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004. 253 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-3965-0.

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The End of Genocide: A Hopeful Approach to a Seemingly Hopeless Human Phenomenon

There is something strangely heartening about Benjamin Valentino's book, *Final Solutions*, on the plainly disheartening topic of genocide and mass killing in the twentieth century. For if the author is right about the critical role of a relatively narrow political or military elite in the most heinous crimes of our time, then genocide/mass killing may not be quite the mystery it would seem. And if its origins can be understood in clear terms that apply to a wide range of case studies, then perhaps something can be done to prevent it. This is, after all, the real goal of all genocide scholars, who are concerned as much, if not more, with the pragmatic consequences of their work in stopping the killing as they are with its purely scientific value.

Generalizing about any human phenomenon–especially genocide throughout the entire world and previous century–seems like a formula for disappointment. Yet in an ironic twist, Valentino has avoided this in part by stretching his subject to include what he calls "mass killing," or "the intentional killing of a massive number of noncombatants" (p. 10). How massive? Here Valentino is uncomfortably explicit in suggesting the figure of "at least fifty thousand intentional deaths over the course of five or fewer years," though if his theory works, he argues, it should hold for lower numbers as well (pp. 11-12). The point is not so much the specific number (and one of the beauties of the UN's Genocide Convention is that it does not put a numerical requirement on a genocide finding), but understanding how the mass murder of innocent, unarmed civilians becomes the policy of states.

Valentino is certainly not the first scholar to theorize about the origins of genocide/mass killing. His broad perspective, however, allows him to make some rather pointed and compelling critiques of earlier explanations such as social cleavage, scapegoating, and raw governmental power. In undermining the "plural society theory" that Leo Kuper and others have proposed to explain genocide, for example, he reminds us that in Cambodia perpetrators and victims came from the same social and ethnic groups, and that many victims, in fact, belonged to dominant ethnic groups (see Chapter 1). Similarly, if less predictably, the author draws on such incidents as French behavior in Algeria to undercut the notion that genocide/mass killing takes place in a proportional relationship to political power and that democracy provides a check on this type of violence. He is equally dubious of scapegoating as the principal motivation, citing Michael Mann's recent study of Holocaust perpetrators as proof that personal grievances were rarely necessary to shape behavior. While these theories, Valentino concludes, have "strong intuitive appeal … they are simply too common to serve as accurate indicators of this relatively rare kind of violence" (p. 28).

The author next challenges another implicit assumption concerning the cause of genocide/mass killing: that it is popular with and supported by the larger society. Most scholars, I imagine, will find little to disagree with in the chapter "The Perpetrators and the Public," which reviews such classic literature in the field as Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men* (contrasted very favorably with Daniel Goldhagen's drastically different conclusions for the same group of men); the authoritarian personality experiments of psychologists Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo; and studies of what makes soldiers willingly risk their lives for causes that have little direct impact on them personally. Valentino argues that the motivation for mass killing lies in situational factors and the initiative of a relatively small but powerful cohort rather than in broad public support and deeply ingrained ideological hatred. This is well supported by the chapter's diverse range of evidence. Indeed, this chapter could stand alone as an overview of the growing scholarly consensus concerning what makes people kill. The larger issue, however, is why.

To answer this, the remaining nearly three-quarters

of *Final Solutions* is a meticulous examination of the "specific situations, goals, and conditions" that lead political and/or military leaders to embark upon a policy of genocide/mass killing (p. 66). In chapter 3, the author, who has a social scientist's penchant for lists and categorization, identifies six primary motives: communist, ethnic, territorial, counterguerrilla, terrorist, and imperialist. Citing communist, ethnic, and counterguerrilla mass killing as the most prevalent and deadly, his work then devotes a chapter to each. Thus, in addition to the usual case studies of ethnic genocide such as Armenia, the Holocaust, and Rwanda, Valentino's work includes a lengthy chapter on the Soviet Union, China, and Cambodia, as well as the counterguerrilla mass killings in Guatemala and Afghanistan. Moreover, and crucial to his argument, he ends each chapter by examining regimes that were considerably less violent and never became genocidal–such as Cuba, South Africa, and the Philippines during its counterinsurgency against the Huk rebellion of 1947-1953.

The upshot of all these case studies, several of which could constitute worthy summaries for undergraduate teaching, is that, with the exception of Cambodia, genocide/mass killing is "rarely a policy of first resort" (p. 240). Rather it is a conscious and rational strategy chosen to achieve a certain aim. The Nazis tried several means to remove Jews from their expanding territories, including forced emigration and expulsion, before turning to extermination. Even Stalin only unleashed the Ukrainian famine once more restrained methods of agricultural collectivization failed. And the author outlines a similar process with regard to the Guatemalan regime's escalating violence against its peasantry in view of the rural population's growing support for the insurgency. While this reviewer is unfamiliar enough with the Guatemalan case that he would have appreciated some background on this 1970s insurgency, the author's points were clear and well-taken: What matters is what the leaders want to do and how they decide that genocide/mass killing is the best way to do it. In other words, killing innocent people in large numbers is explained as a tactical decision based on a clear vision of the end result. In effect, Valentino moves us beyond what motivates people to kill directly, to the larger issue of what motivates their leaders to order them to do so.

It is a compelling, well-conceived and, certainly, important argument, though like most broad-based arguments it leaves some instances to slip through the cracks of the author's six motivational typologies. Consider, for example, the often lethal behavior of the men under the command of Bosnian Muslim Naser OriÄ? in the Serb villages surrounding Srebrenica. Now on trial in The Hague for war crimes, OriÄ? was operating without the authority of the Bosnian leadership in Sarajevo and very much in response to the aggression of the Bosnian Serb army (which was receiving aid and directives not only from their civilian leadership in Pale, but from Belgrade itself). Valentino may argue that OriÄ?'s actions, as those of similar rebels acting on their own fears and authority, never reached the proportions of mass killings in which he is interested. They did, however, terrorize the Bosnian Serb population around Srebrenica as much as Guatemalan peasants were terrorized by their own government. And though the Bosnian Serbs certainly did not need any additional motivation for their clearly conceived program of ethnic cleansing and genocide, OriÄ?'s actions were, we know now, on their minds when they entered Srebrenica in July 2005.

This criticism may strike some as unfair since it perhaps overextends Valentino's carefully conceived definition of mass killing. It does, however, indicate that deeper (or different) motives such as revenge or simply fear, can also provoke episodes of genocide/mass killing, particularly when a formal governing authority is absent or limited. I mention this because Valentino's arguments can at times seem overly optimistic in light of his effort to outline policies that predict and prevent genocide/mass killing, the main theme of his conclusion. A good example of this occurs at the end of the chapter on communist mass killings when, with a tip of the hat to Francis Fukuyama, Valentino postulates that if there is an "end of ideology," or at least to this particularly deadly one, and "if no similarly radical ideas gain the widespread applicability and acceptance of communism, [then] humanity may be able to look forward to considerably less mass killing in the coming century than it experienced in the last" (p. 151). That's a pretty big "if," and perhaps Rwanda and Darfur have already disabused the author of such thinking. Yet when a young scholar expresses this kind of optimism, it's difficult to be too critical. And in terms of sheer numbers and barring nuclear threat, he may, we can only hope, be right.

When first asked to review this work, my response was that as a historian rather than a political scientist like the author, perhaps I was not the right person for the job. While *Final Solutions* certainly demands to be read by scholars from a wide array of disciplines, I was reluctant to critique something that required specialized disciplinary or theoretical knowledge. I must admit too that I struggled in the beginning to understand Valentino's methodology of "process tracing," (defined awkwardly in the introduction as "identifying the causal processes

which link the factors and conditions implicated by the strategic perspective to the outcome of mass killing" [p. 7]). But as I got further into the work, I realized that this term almost elegantly captures the author's patient efforts to understand genocide not as a foregone conclusion, but rather as the carefully chosen means to achieve any number of state policies or ideologies. Hence the apt title of this work is even more literal than it may originally seem.

I offer this information on my academic background not as an excuse for any shortcomings in my understanding of Valentino's important work and/or my conveyance of his methodology and conclusions to H-Genocide readers, but rather because it inevitably shades some additional criticisms that I have, despite my overall admiration for the author's breadth of learning and the conclusions he has drawn. First, readers should be aware that, despite Valentino's frequent references to "my research" (see, for example, pp. 2, 4, 23, 71, 227), this book is actually based on the research of others. Granted this is not so much a criticism of the book's contents and contentions, but rather the way in which they are presented by the author (and viewed by an, admittedly biased, archive-oriented historian). While his sources are acknowledged and his book is amply footnoted (though there is no bibliography), its conclusions rest upon an impressive synthesis of research over the past half century or so rather than on any original surveys, interviews, primary source work, or other research program.

This bears mentioning because it sometimes leads the author to overstate the obvious, perhaps in an overzealous effort to derive maximal meaning from what is basically a synthetic work. Thus, for example, in chapter 3 he previews some rather intuitive factors that make genocide/mass killing more likely, including: "the higher the priority that communist leaders assign to the radical transformation of society"; "the more rapidly ethnic cleansing is carried out"; and "the greater the physical capabilities for mass killing possessed by the perpetrators" (pp. 74-90). Equally self-evident is the author's claim that "the Holocaust was unique because each of the millions of lives it extinguished was unique, never to lived again [sic]" (p. 177). Certainly less obvious and more in need of a gentle corrective is the assertion that in Nazi ideology the Jews occupied the lowest rung of the human racial hierarchy (p. 168). In fact the Hitlerian worldview conceived of Jews less as the ultimate sub-race than the preeminent anti-race, admired, as Valentino acknowledges, for preserving their "racial" distinctiveness for thousands of years, yet feared for their inimitable capacity to contaminate Aryan blood.

A work of this scope is bound to make a few missteps, and it is certainly not this reviewer's intention to belabor them. *Final Solutions* succeeds in providing us not only with a workable explanation for genocide/mass killing, but also with many important suggestions for what we might do to stop it. And for such a difficult and pressing topic as this, the sense of hope that Valentino's scholarship delivers is perhaps its most lasting and welcome attribute.

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