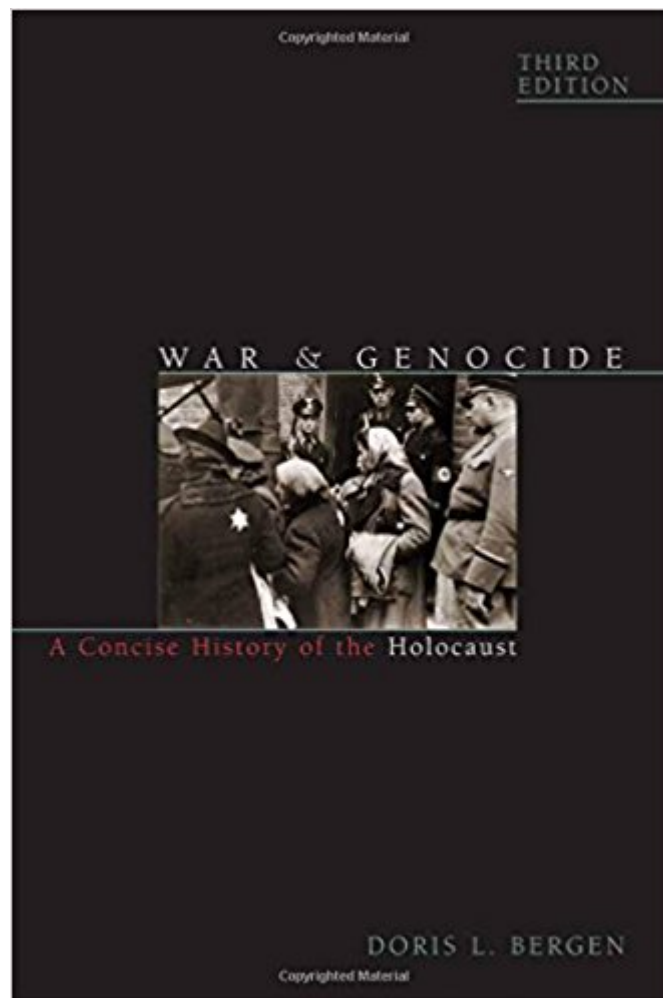




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# War And Genocide: A Concise History Of The Holocaust (Critical Issues In World And International History)



## Synopsis

In examining one of the defining events of the twentieth century, Doris L. Bergen situates the Holocaust in its historical, political, social, cultural, and military contexts. Unlike many other treatments of the Holocaust, this revised, third edition discusses not only the persecution of the Jews, but also other segments of society victimized by the Nazis: Roma, homosexuals, Poles, Soviet POWs, the disabled, and other groups deemed undesirable. In clear and eloquent prose, Bergen explores the two interconnected goals that drove the Nazi German program of conquest and genocide—purification of the so-called Aryan race and expansion of its living space—and discusses how these goals affected the course of World War II. Including firsthand accounts from perpetrators, victims, and eyewitnesses, her book is immediate, human, and eminently readable.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Doris Bergen's *War and Genocide* is a jewel of a book that addresses students, specialists, and the general public alike. Her clear analysis of the development of the genocide is combined with an extraordinary and broad view of the actions and experiences of those involved. She not only covers the history of Nazi perpetrators and their policies but also pays careful attention to the experience of Jewish victims as well as the varied social groups targeted for persecution including women, homosexual men, Roma, the disabled and others. In addition, her nuanced attention to visual and cultural sources further models how a critical history of the Holocaust can be written.

(Paul B. Jaskot, DePaul University) The revisions undertaken by Doris Bergen for this new edition of *War and Genocide* make an excellent book even better. Instructors and students will appreciate the expanded coverage of crucial questions such as collaboration, developments in the Soviet Union, the fate of Roma under Nazi rule, and post-1945 ramifications of the Holocaust, all of which have been subjects of much recent research. Up-to-date and comprehensive, *War and Genocide* remains the ideal introduction to an enormously complex and challenging subject. (Alan E. Steinweis, University of Vermont) *War and Genocide* provides a concise, careful, and engaging discussion of the Holocaust. Written by a master teacher—•a scholar who understands undergraduate readers—it anticipates questions and challenges students to think critically through common misconceptions about the past. *War and Genocide* is the most valuable resource that I have for conveying the complexity and nuance of the Holocaust. (Tatjana Lichtenstein, The University of Texas at Austin) Balanced and comprehensive, this third edition of Doris Bergen's masterly book accomplishes several tasks that few other works on the Holocaust can claim to have achieved: it is meticulously researched, entirely up to date, and highly readable. It sets the Holocaust within a wide framework of origins and wartime events without losing sight of its particular horror and distinct features, and it understands the Holocaust as an assault on humanity that encompassed not only Jews but whole other categories of human beings, not least the handicapped, the Roma, and Soviet prisoners of war. *War and Genocide* is certain to become essential reading for all students of the last century's darkest era. (Omer Bartov, Brown University, author of *Erased: Vanishing Traces of Jewish Galicia in Present-Day Ukraine*)

Doris L. Bergen is Chancellor Rose and Ray Wolfe Professor of Holocaust Studies at the University of Toronto.

When in conversation about a subject as emotionally charged as the Holocaust, many individuals find themselves in a precarious balance between appeals of pathos and the empiricism of statistics in trying to convey their ideas. Though the depth per subject may not be ideal, the chronological, textbook-like approach and grasp on the importance of personal accounts roots *War & Genocide* as a must-have for any individual interested in learning about the Holocaust. Because Bergen chose to cover the entirety of the Holocaust with a mind towards generalities for the sake of conciseness, there is a lack of deep interpretation that would be appropriate for something as complicated as the Holocaust. Indeed, content-wise, Bergen's *War & Genocide* only serves as an introduction piece to the Holocaust. However, as opposed to other scholarly texts that tend to tackle

such a massively complex event per aspect, the chronological approach of *War & Genocide* allows for an intellectual progression that is the most natural and intuitive for a novice scholar of the Holocaust. Though Bergen is limiting her ability to provide deep analysis due to her motivation to be concise, she excels in writing a history of the Holocaust by producing a logical flow within a series of events that many may consider to lack logic. Thanks to the inclusion of such intimate stories of the intense struggles of multiple victims, a reader may have the opportunity to fully grasp just the degree of loss that the world experienced during the Holocaust. It is these emotional appeals, and Bergen's capacity to include them in what is regarded as only an introductory text, that make *War & Genocide* a uniquely effective book in intellectually and empathetically appealing to the reader. The major decision by Bergen to prioritize conciseness when writing *War & Genocide* binds the text's purpose into that of an introductory reading, not containing the analytical proficiency that would be appealing to the more experienced Holocaust historian to mull over. However, this concession is in exchange for a chronologically-based retelling of the events of the Holocaust that a novice reader will become grateful for its ease to intuitively follow. In conjunction with the inclusion of emotionally appealing personal accounts of victims, any individual is encouraged to read Bergen's *War & Genocide* if they wish to gain an understanding of the Holocaust on both an emotional and empathetic level. However, they should also be prepared to look for further readings if they find any aspect especially appealing, for the conciseness of the text will leave any with such a specific scholarly focus wanting more.

Over all, *War & Genocide* contains a very well-rounded description of not only the Holocaust of World War Two, but also several of the causes preceding it. Bergen also incorporates several victims of the Holocaust that are not normally included in these brief overviews, including the Romi (gypsies) and Afro-Germans of the Rhineland. However, she only addresses the war and Holocaust through a Germanic viewpoint, and often digresses from the main point of her book. Easy to read and comprehend, I would definitely suggest this book for both students and those wishing to individually further their knowledge of the Holocaust. Throughout the book, Bergen returns to the concept of "race and space" that she outlines in her preface. Although other scholars have presumably explained the same concept, Bergen does this in a way that is easier to understand, and formulates her arguments in much the same way. "Race and space" refer to Bergen's idea that the Nazis were fighting a war on two fronts: a war against the "pollution" of their race by Jews, Communists, asocials, homosexuals, and Romi; and a war to gain more

space to put their pure Aryan race and allow them to spread said purity over Europe. It was this concept, Bergen argues, that allowed the atrocities of the Second World War to occur with little to no resistance from those within the party. The book is separated into eight chapters, the first two explaining the scene onto which the Nazis (mainly Hitler) arrived, and the latter sectioned into years during which the Nazis were in power. While this ensures that the reader has a chronological flow of events, and makes sense in terms of topic placements, the chapters often become rather comprehensive. For example, in chapter five, "Experiments in Brutality, 1939-1940", Bergen details the euthanasia of mentally and physically disabled people and the war against Poland. While these two subjects do make sense given the title heading, both were the forerunners of later brutality in the concentration camps and in the war against Russia. There was quite a bit of information in those thirty-four pages. Despite this book having the subtitle "A Concise History of the Holocaust", Bergen tends to explain different parts of the war or society in detail, often leaving the connection to the Holocaust more or less to the reader. That being said, these extra tidbits give a much better impression overall as to how or why the Holocaust happened. One of the main problems with *War & Genocide* is that it gives an extremely Eurocentric view of the Holocaust. That is, a Germanic view of the Holocaust. Although Bergen mentions Africa, it is only in relation of Afro-Germans and the prejudices that came from Germany's participation in colonialism and their brutal tactics with the natives of Africa. Granted, the Holocaust was mainly a European phenomenon, however, there are no statements from people of colour that were victims of the Holocaust, and America (despite their part in both the war and liberation) is mentioned only briefly, in the story of the St. Louis. France, too, is more or less delegated to a three-page side note in the westward flight from the Nazis. All of the given causes of World War Two are also pinned on Germany, in general, and Hitler and his closest associates, in particular. Although they are briefly addressed, little attention is given to any reasons that other countries may have been tempted into the war. On the other hand, Bergen often includes personal statements from German and Polish Jews of all social classes, as well as several statements from an "Aryan" who served in the Hitler Youth, offering a glimpse into the mind of those often deemed the "enemy" when discussing the Holocaust. Personally, I have yet to read another book that incorporates "the other side" into the reading as just another aspect of the war and Holocaust, and not as an enemy or brainwashed stooge of Hitler. Many of the Jews that she interviews have amazing stories of how their countrymen and

Women helped them escape from the Nazis, or how they escaped the brutality. While many are inspirational, others seem ridiculous; however, overall, they bring a human aspect into this book that is found in few others. Unfortunately, there are not many statements from those who were neither German nor Jewish—the “innocent bystander”, as it were, is left neglected. Another part of this book that is well done is the pictures. Often, books about the Holocaust or World War Two abound with pictures of mass graves, concentration camps prisoners, the aftereffects of Mengele’s experiments, and the like. While Bergen’s book does include these sorts of pictures, she also makes sure to include pictures that remind the reader that, above all, the people who were involved in the Holocaust, either as a victim, a bystander, or a perpetrator, were humans. One of the most poignant pictures for me depicts a young woman scribbling out a final letter before she is transported to Chelmo (184). While also a useful accoutrement to the actual writing, Bergen proves herself to be quite masterful at choosing pictures that simultaneously inform and bring the reader closer to the actual events. War & Genocide is a very well written book. While it has various flaws, they are negligible in grand scheme of the book. Bergen has proved herself to be an accomplished historian, stating the facts and interpreting them, while also being a fairly good writer—that is, making the book as enjoyable to read as “a concise history of the Holocaust” could be.

In just under 250 pages, Doris L. Bergen investigates various aspects of the Holocaust in a concise and understandable manner for those just beginning their studies on its history. This addition to the subject matter not only serves as a textbook of important dates and events throughout Hitler’s regime, but it is also a narrative with details from personal stories and accounts. She gives life and voice to those who underwent unimaginable anguish and presents it in a compassionate yet academic manner. This is especially noteworthy because in the study of history, it is relatively easy to get lost in the numbers and over-whelming multitudes of stories and experiences. Bergen reminds us as readers that we cannot quantify pain and that we should not approach this particular subject by debating who suffered more. In that sense, she goes beyond the call of duty required from a textbook and is able to find a balance in such a raw topic.

Got it for a college class.

The author provides a very thorough overview of the Holocaust in WWII, and a brief history of

Hitler's rise to power in Germany. The images used in the book are powerful, and well implemented. Highly recommend this book for anyone looking to read more about the Holocaust, or for readers that are just starting to learn about it.

Want to know more about the Holocaust, then this is the book for you. You may be amazed at all you didn't know and will open your eyes to so much about this horrible period. Worth the money and your time. Never Again.

This is a perfect introduction to the Holocaust and a quick read. Highly recommend before diving into more of the history. That said, it does assume that the reader has some background in the history so if you know nothing, then not the best place to start.

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