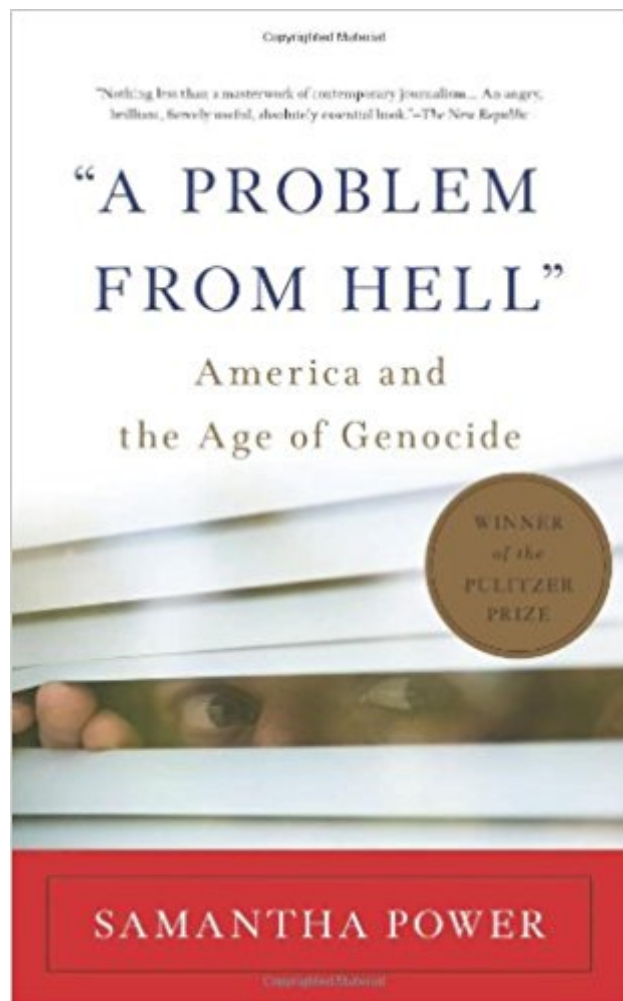




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"A Problem From Hell": America And The Age Of Genocide



Synopsis

From the Armenian Genocide to the ethnic cleansings of Kosovo and Darfur, modern history is haunted by acts of brutal violence. Yet American leaders who vow "never again" repeatedly fail to stop genocide. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award, "A Problem from Hell" draws upon exclusive interviews with Washington's top policymakers, thousands of once classified documents, and accounts of reporting from the killing fields to show how decent Americans inside and outside government looked away from mass murder. Combining spellbinding history and seasoned political analysis, "A Problem from Hell" allows readers to hear directly from American decision-makers and dissenters, as well as from victims of genocide, and reveals just what was known and what might have been done while millions perished.

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Customer Reviews

This outstanding book was difficult to put down, and even more difficult to stop thinking about. Its topic was burdensome, sad, terribly unrelenting and tragic. Samantha Power's thorough research, well documented bibliography, and clean articulate writing style made the reading of such a depressing topic interesting and compelling. This book took me about a month of careful reading to complete and I highly recommend it. What disturbs me more than the topic of Ms. Power's book, however, is the lengthy and jumbled review below entitled "Scholarship from Hell." The reviewer is engaging in sophistry designed to discredit Ms. Power and mislead. Beginning with the phrase "Armenian Relocation" the reviewer spirals into ten, inarticulate, horribly written and confusing

paragraphs whose sole intent is to misdirect and mislead. Notice the use of the phrase "Ottoman-Armenian Conflict" giving the impression of moral equivalence and balance. In paragraph three, he then attempts to discredit Ms. Power - and subsequently her book - by claiming she did not utilize "objective sources" and as having "...a lack of sufficient grounding in history to tackle a subject as sensitive and controversial as the Ottoman-Armenian conflict." There is nothing controversial or sensitive about the Armenian Genocide, and the careful construction of this babble, undermines Ms Power and devalues the awesome bulwark of research she has undertaken and produced, and is intended to mislead the reader by throwing as much junk at the wall as possible and hoping that some of it sticks. Despite the fact that Ms. Power's work is almost seven hundred pages long (with a bibliography as long as a short novel), the reviewer claims that she fails to refer to "objective scholars" in reference to the Armenian Genocide.

"A Problem from Hell" is a straightforward condemnation of the US government for inadequately dealing with instances of twentieth century genocide in Armenia, Nazi Germany, Cambodia, Iraq, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Kosovo. It is a passionately written and often suffers from an intemperate advocacy that doesn't seriously consider any counter-argument. The legal history of genocide is first reviewed, concentrating on the work of Raphael Lemkin, the lawyer who defined the word. Implicit throughout that which follows is Lemkin's principle that the United States (or any other capable nation) has not only the right but the responsibility to interfere when genocide occurs. Power argues that in every historical instance, the US government did in fact recognize genocide (even if it didn't admit as much) and refused to react adequately, if at all. However, her reliance on international treaties and easy moral outrage makes for a rather weak case, for two reasons. First, the strongly interventionist position is advocated without any serious consideration of the costs. Although she asserts that diplomatic and economic pressures might be effective, it is conceded that most cases would require military force and the deployment of ground troops. At the very least this would lead to American deaths, and in some cases carries that danger of a wider war. Such concerns are generally dismissed as a "realist" stance which needn't be a concern in the face of genocide, although it is acknowledged that NATO intervention in Kosovo has had "mixed" results. The book's second and greater weakness is to place the blame for immoral inaction on top State Department officials and, ultimately, presidential administrations without addressing the public opinions by which they are constrained.

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