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**Review of *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present* By Ward Churchill**

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present.* By Ward Churchill. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998. Illustrations, foreword, preface, bibliography, index. xix + 531 pp. \$37.50 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

Ward Churchill opens the X-Files of American history to examine the phenomenon of genocide in eight essays (some published previously) prefaced by a statement by David Stannard. In American historiography, discussions of genocide float unreal, separated and unanchored in any systematic, analytic context: discussion of the Nazi holocaust over here, denial of the American genocide over there, humanitarian bombings somewhere else. Churchill has prowled disparate literatures—human rights, American frontier history, Native American history, history of the Nazi holocaust—to bring back the information relevant to American history and build it into a single comparative discussion set in a single analytic landscape. That is no place for a historian; Churchill's fields are communications and American Indian studies.

First embracing Raphaël Lemkin's 1944 definition of genocide, Churchill discusses and rejects holocaust denial and Jewish exclusiveness: respectively, the arguments that the Nazi holocaust never occurred and that it was the only authentic occurrence of genocide. Turning his attention to the history of the Western Hemisphere, he compares the careers of Christopher Columbus and Heinrich Himmler, both of whom acted on behalf of a sponsoring state to "encounter" and extract other peoples' re-

sources using other peoples' labor and causing roughly the same number of deaths.

A chronological narrative of the genocide of the indigenous population of Latin America from 1492 to 1992 addresses arguments that ignore, deny, or try to minimize the dimensions of that genocide. The next essay applies the same method to "North America," that is, America north of Mexico. Churchill then interprets the Cold War in the US and Canada in terms of internal colonialism and finds its effects on North American indigenous communities "patently genocidal."

Looking back to the global stage, Churchill recounts the role of the United States in undermining the United Nations Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the aftermath of World War II. When Lemkin coined the term, genocide included "cultural genocide," defined as any form of "planned disintegration of the political, social, or economic structure of a group or nation," and "systematic moral debasement of a group, people, or nation." The United States with Canada and some other nations caused all forms of genocide except "physical genocide," the systematic killing of a targeted group, to be removed from the Convention before its adoption. This collection of essays concludes with a survey of the literary career of genocide as a concept and a proposed convention that restores Lemkin's concept. Readers who want to believe will welcome this pioneering work.

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