

Totten, S. (Ed.). (2018). *Teaching about genocide: Insights and advice from secondary teachers and professors (Volume 1)*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 195 pages, Hardback: \$68.00. ISBN: 978-1-4758-2546-6. Paperback: \$34.00. ISBN: 978-1-4758-2547-3

Totten, S. (Ed.). (2019). *Teaching about genocide: Insights and advice from secondary teachers and professors (Volume 2)*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 221 pages, Hardback: \$68.00. ISBN: 978-1-4758-4742-0. Paperback: \$34.00. ISBN: 978-1-4758-4751-2

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The state of Florida has required teaching about the Holocaust in schools since 1994, and recently, in 2020, Florida updated that mandate (see Florida Statutes 1003.42(g)1 & 2). Therefore, there is a need for materials to better prepare educators about the possibilities and pitfalls of teaching about the Holocaust and genocide more broadly—both in content and pedagogy. Totten’s (2018, 2019) *Teaching about Genocide: Insights and Advice from Secondary Teachers and Professors* (vol. 1 and vol. 2) purport to fill this void.

Samuel Totten, the editor of both these volumes, put together this collection of works pertaining to various genocides—written by secondary teachers, professors, and museum educators. Totten, a now-retired scholar of genocide studies (University of Arkansas, Fayetteville), has been bringing Holocaust and genocide scholarship into social studies for over three decades. The expressed purpose of this book is to provide “insight and advice” from those who have “spent years educating themselves about genocide and honing their efforts to teach about genocide in a pedagogically sound and historically accurate manner” (Totten, 2018, p. 2).

Each volume is organized in two parts: The first half of each book includes chapters from secondary level teachers, and the second half is written by college and university professors. The chapters range from pedagogical strategies to theoretical insights. Some segments include a step-by-step approach while others offer general advice or concepts to consider. Emphasis was placed on collecting chapters from contributing authors of different fields of study and from various countries—a unique

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feature of this edited text, which provides teachers added perspectives on the topics at hand.

Most chapters focused on teaching about genocide in general or on specific areas of genocide education, while a few chapters were dedicated to one specific genocide. For example, in vol. 1, chapters 6, 16, and 20 focused on the Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda,<sup>3</sup> chapter 7 covered the genocide in Ukraine, and chapter 18 discussed the Bosnian genocide (Please see Table 1 for further information about the breakdown of chapters between the volumes<sup>4</sup>).

**Table 1**

*Breakdown of Chapters by Genocide*

| <b>Genocides Covered</b>                   | <b>Chapter #s (vol. 1)</b>  | <b>Chapter #s (vol. 2)</b>                              |
|--|---|---|
| Genocide in General/<br>Multiple Genocides | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10,<br>11, 12, 13, 14, 15,<br>17, 19, 21, 22 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11,<br>12, 13, 14, 15, 17,<br>18, 19 |
| Armenia                                    |   | 6, 7  |
| Ukraine                                    | 7   |   |
| Cambodia                                   |   | 21  |
| Rwanda                                     | 6, 16, 20,  | 20  |
| Bosnia/Formal Yugoslavia                   | 18  | 16  |
| North American Indigenous<br>Nations       |   | 5   |
| Sudan/Darfur                               |   | 8   |

These two volumes provide a variety of chapters that benefit not only newer teachers but also established educators who are looking for more theoretical approaches to expand their methods of teaching about genocide. What makes these books beneficial to the reader is the range of chapters covering a wealth of topics from personal teaching experiences to classroom projects and other activities that were successful in the classroom.

<sup>3</sup>While the book often used the name "Rwandan Genocide" to speak of the genocide that happened there in 1994, we use "Genocide Against the Tutsi," the name that Rwanda uses to refer to the genocide.

<sup>4</sup> Categories were determined by the reviewers' perceptions and depth of coverage of the category at hand. For example, a chapter about the Cambodian Genocide would be placed in that category on the chart, but a mere mention of the genocide in Cambodia may not have led to the chapter being labeled as 'about' the Cambodian Genocide. Please note: No chapter focused on the Holocaust as content; however, several chapters use the Holocaust as the example to demonstrate their teaching strategy or philosophy (e.g., chapter 1 [vol. 1]) or as a baseline of study—leading into other genocides or larger questions of humanity (e.g., chapter 15 [vol. 2]).

Both books also provide a significant number of resources (e.g., vol. 1: chapters 8, 12, 18 and vol. 2: chapters 3, 4, 6, 11). Many authors include a list of resources, readings, and other materials for the reader to utilize in the classroom related to their chapter's topic, and at the end of each book there is an annotated bibliography that provides the reader with practitioner, background, and classroom resources. This allows for the reader to continue to learn how to teach genocide and which materials the author and editor suggests.

While this book provides great advice and insights from various authors, there are a few limitations that need to be addressed. Since each book is organized into two parts based on who authored the chapter (secondary teachers or college/university professors), the outline does not allow for the chapters to flow from one to another. At times, the chapters within those two sections seem disorganized—moving from a step-by-step approach to more complex theoretical approaches towards teaching and back again. Having chapters systematized either by genocide (e.g., the Holocaust, Rwanda, Bosnia, etc.) or by their focus (e.g., content, pedagogical approach, theoretical, or personal experiences) might have been more beneficial to the reader.

Though it is understandable that Totten wanted the authors to have freedom in their writing, there are a few chapters or sections of chapters that become redundant in their message. For example, in vol. 1, chapters 2, 3, and 4 all provide similar advice towards teaching about genocide, including for teachers to explore resources, to know that individuals play a role in genocide, and to empower students by connecting the subject to their personal lives. While each chapter also includes advice beyond the above listed items, the overlaps create redundancy, rather than providing readers new guidance. On the other hand, some chapters offer slightly differing advice; for example, chapter 2 advises the readers to not feel the pressure of becoming experts while chapter 3, suggests to read enough to become as much as an expert as you can be (while also being willing to still admit you don't know when you don't know).

Additionally, we, as reviewers, were hoping the editor would end the volumes by synthesizing, summarizing, and helping us process everything we had learned throughout the books, but neither volume's final chapters do that. Rather, the final chapter mirrors the other pieces—as a 'regular' chapter, and the book seems to end abruptly, followed by the annotated bibliography. Having a conclusionary chapter from the editor in such an edited text, which purports to aid teachers learn how to better teach about genocide, could have helped bring those lessons to a 'close'

enough to provide teachers with a motivating message to further their own learning and the teaching of genocide in their own classrooms.

In the following table (see Table 2), we outline a few chapters that might be of interest to readers based on their experience/knowledge/comfort level in teaching about the Holocaust and/or genocide. We do not map out all chapters in this volume, but rather focus on a few for each 'category' that stood out to us as important and/or impactful. Further, this section is not to be prescriptive or to box anyone into a/one category, but rather, as teachers are always strapped for time, we (reviewers) are trying to provide a guide of where they might begin reading based on their experience/knowledge level. We encourage teachers to be honest about where they and their students are (in terms of emotion, in terms of content knowledge/preparation, etc.). Teaching about the Holocaust and/or genocide is a serious endeavor and teaching about something before one is 'ready' (although one may never actually be fully ready) could be dangerous and/or traumatic for students (and for educators).

**Table 2**

*Some suggested chapters by experience/knowledge/comfort level*

| <b>Level of experience/knowledge/comfort</b>   | <b>Chapter #s (vol. 1)</b> | <b>Chapter #s (vol. 2)</b> |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| If you are just starting out   | 2, 3, 4, 6                 | 1, 3, 11                   |
| If you have already been teaching about genocide and wish to hone-in your skills and knowledge further | 5, 14, 17, 19              | 5, 6, 17                   |
| If you are ready to tackle deeper trauma within your learning/teaching                                 | 8, 16                      | 20                         |
| If you are looking for philosophical conversations about genocide                                      | 11, 12                     | 10, 14                     |

We have listed chapter 3 (vol. 2) under the category *If you are just starting out* because it outlines processes and potential activities/strategies—as well as a list of resources—for utilizing literature circles to teach about genocide through storytelling; the use of literature can “help students to see themselves as part of the human story, as individuals who can change the narrative, and who are motivated enough to take action in their communities and the world” (Szany, 2019, p. 22). Chapter 17 (vol. 2) is included in the category *If you have already been teaching about genocide and wish to hone-in your skills and knowledge further* because this chapter has the reader explore photographs—and their purpose as well as the

problematics of 'reading' photographs at face-value—to teach about genocides; for example, the author admits:

I misread the photograph partly because of the fact that by cherry-picking the information it provided and stitching it into my lecture's overarching narrative and thematic structures, I was unable to acknowledge and appreciate the full extent of the suffering to which the image testifies. (Muller, 2019, p. 150)

Thus, focusing deeply on this specific strategy to teach about genocide requires a greater knowledge of the content at hand (both of the Holocaust, in this case, and of photography) than teaching with a more general approach. Chapter 20 (vol. 2), for example, demonstrates the category *If you are ready to tackle deeper trauma within your learning/teaching*, because it takes the reader through a series of activities one can do with students to release emotions (stemming from viewing—and potentially feeling—trauma) while teaching about genocide utilizing documentary film; some of these strategies include freewriting, embodiment and performance, a critical analysis writing assignment, and optionally engaging in some kind of service learning or activism. However, it is important to note that “[t]eachers face the danger of trivializing the unspeakable horror of genocide with an activity that may seem playful” such as with the embodiment and performance activities (Herndon, 2019, p. 173); for this reason, this chapter was not included in a more introductory section of Table 2. And lastly, we have listed chapter 11 (vol. 1) within the category *If you are looking for philosophical conversations about genocide*, for example, due to its discussions of important tensions within genocide education, such as the role and process of defining 'genocide' (tackling questions such as, *What is the purpose of maintaining a definition of 'genocide'? Should the definition be broad or specific?*); the need to balance intellectual and emotional engagement (e.g., discussing notions [and the limits] of the understanding of human suffering, empathy, utilizing graphic images, voyeurism, and so on); and the moral complexities of genocide, e.g., “It is not that there are no villains or heroes but that most people end up in what Primo Levi called the 'gray zone'” (Gabriel, 2018, p. 93).

Overall, the two volumes of *Teaching about Genocide: Insights and Advice from Secondary Teachers and Professors* (vol. 1 and vol. 2) provide a wealth of knowledge on how to approach teaching the subject of genocide to both secondary

and college-level students.<sup>5</sup> The chapters in both volumes provide resources that benefit teachers of all levels, of course, resonating with each educator differently depending on their level of experience/knowledge/comfort. As a side note, this book—while important for social studies educators—also could speak to other disciplines such as ELA, the arts, and other humanities. This potential for integration provides social studies educators an additional avenue for collaboration with other subject area professionals.

Both volumes are helpful resources for educators in Florida (and nationwide—as well as world-wide) to successfully teach about the Holocaust and other genocides in fulfillment of the Florida Holocaust mandate (or other related state or national legislation). Firstly, there are many pedagogical skills and strategies featured in this text that can be adopted to teach various genocides. Secondly, while many of the chapters focus specifically on genocides beyond the Holocaust (in terms of content), this collection could still be beneficial to educators in Florida because genocides do not happen in a vacuum; Totten, himself, called for students to learn about genocides beyond the Holocaust, saying that “[o]n a basic level, it is obvious that if students do not learn about other genocides, they may assume that the Holocaust was simply an aberration of history” (Totten, 2001, n.p.). While there might be specificities that are unique to a particular genocide, there are some general social, political, economic, racial/ethnic (and so forth) precursors to any genocide that can help students understand human dynamics currently impacting our globe and/or those dynamics that could lead to another genocide—our students must learn to navigate these dimensions in our world for our collective future and for today.

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<sup>5</sup> As an important note, these volumes do not include elementary level teacher authors or their instruction. While the texts might be useful for teachers of any level—including elementary—to increase their content knowledge, the chapters included in these volumes would not help elementary level teachers with their direct pedagogy.

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