

BOOK REVIEW

Steven Baum's *The Psychology of Genocide: Perpetrators, Bystanders and Rescuers*
[2008 New York: Cambridge University Press. \$24.99]

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Genocide connotes large numbers of people; rarely do we think in terms of individual actions and characteristics. However, in his latest work, *The Psychology of Genocide: Perpetrators, Bystanders and Rescuers*, Steven K. Baum looks at the panoply of behavior and describes three different groups of people who played a role in the lives and deaths of the 263 million victims of genocide during the past century.

Steven Baum is a lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of New Mexico and the author of *When Fairy Tales Kill: Origins and Transmission of Antisemitic Belief*. In his current book, his premise is that people's actions during genocide "actually mirror their behavior in everyday life" (frontispiece).

Building on the work of others in trait theory and key conformity studies, Baum selects three groupings for analysis: perpetrators (those who destroy); rescuers (those who help); and bystanders (those who remain uninvolved, a mid position between the other two groups). He attempts to identify the common mental and emotional traits of each group and to show how these traits flow out of social and personal identity.

Baum's stated purpose in the book is to "examine the psychology of hate and the genocidal mind with regard to maturation" (p. 18) building on a simple premise that the more mature an individual is, the less likely he or she is to hate. Baum uses eyewitness accounts to buttress his own analysis in an attempt to understand how maturation can be achieved and, if it can, how it will manifest itself in individual behavior.

Maturation is discussed in detail in Chapter One, entitled "Charlotte's Question." Based on an incident in a Texas High School, the question was, "Where does all the hate come from?" The intellectual strength of the book lies in Chapter 2, "A Bell Curve of Hate," in which tables and graphs define and expand on the three categories of perpetrators, rescuers, and bystanders. Cutting across all three groups is the identifier of maturation, leading to a discussion of the importance of that characteristic.

The following three chapters are devoted to further amplification of the three categories, and point out that definitive lines are difficult to draw

as the categories may merge as a result of new societal incidents. Each chapter profiles human beings who exemplify the three categories.

The concluding chapter, "Towards an Emotionally Developed World," presents education as the key to eliminating hate by the teaching of defiance, maturation, tolerance, and empathy, all the while targeting perpetrators and involving the community through politics and policy. These solutions reveal a basic optimism about our ability to overcome evil. In service to this notion, the Hotel Rwanda manager, Paul Rusesabaniga, is quoted: "Evil can be frustrated by people you might think are weaklings" cited in Baum, p. 235). But in reality, these "weaklings" are the rescuers and bystanders.

Baum's work raises difficult questions, but he presents concrete solutions for the reader. The book is scholarly in intent without being pedantic. There is a liberal use of endnotes for each chapter, a wide selection of tables and figures, and a comprehensive index. It would be helpful for readers to have a general understanding of key conformity studies, but most readers will be able to follow Baum's review of major genocidal events and his belief in the possibility of an emotionally developed world in which "rescuer qualities" will be esteemed. Certainly this text is a strong addition to the widening field of holocaust and diversity studies, and equally important to those readers committed to improving community life. It is an effective plea for citizens to move toward the "emotional higher road."