

Review of chapter 4
of "american
holocaust" by david
stannard essay
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Review of Chapter 4 of “ American Holocaust” by David Stannard Essay Sample

“ American Holocaust” by David E Stannard was first published and distributed in 1992, the same year that celebrated the quincentenary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. The release date would not have been decided upon by happenchance, but would have been part of a well thought out marketing strategy to take best advantage of the five hundredth anniversary of American ‘ civilisation’. The book is highly controversial in its choice of theme, in that it shows the American people of the time as a barbarous, murdering race, which, at its zenith of policy making, instigated a deliberate tactic of extermination and genocide against the native Indian tribes by the leaders of the new United States, such as Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson. Americans of today are taught to revere the leaders of the past, to elevate their memories to almost mythical status, to see them not as mortal men but as nearing the level of demi-gods. For someone to portray their iconic figures of this time in any other way than civilised and beneficent, for a large percentage of the modern day United States, would be as a minimum seen as disrespectful to their memory and for the majority would be seen as bordering on blasphemous and seditious dissertation. It is also shown in this book that the everyday common folk in eighteenth and nineteenth century America, although not necessarily direct advocates of a genocide policy, allowed it to happen, either with the excuse of the soldier when following orders of the slaughter of natives or by the malaise of the man in the street that is seen as guilty by his own inaction.

This also would not have pleased 1990s Americans, being told that their direct ancestors were as guilty as the perpetrators of these heinous crimes, even if they had had no direct effect on the outcome. Even one of their favourite authors, L. Frank Baum, author of the Wizard of Oz is shown as being a radical Indian hater and exponent of racial cleansing who urges the wholesale extermination of all America's native people. I shall concentrate in this analysis on chapter four of Stannard's book, *Pestilence and Genocide* pp97-146, which concentrates predominately on the nineteenth-century and deals with the removal and relocation of many tribes and of massacres that occurred in this time such as the Wounded Knee and Sand creek bloodbaths.

Stannard makes regular use of comparisons between the new American Government of the 1800s and the dictatorial regime of Nazi Germany. In one part he draws a direct link that Thomas Jefferson had the same ideals as Adolf Hitler. He states '[J]efferson's writings on Indians are filled with the straightforward assertion that the natives are to be given a simple choice-to be " extirpate[d] from the earth" or to remove themselves out of the Americans way...these same words enunciated by a German leader in 1939...'(p120) In another part he links again to another high status American, Colonel Chivington, a former Methodist missionary who led the massacre of Sand creek in 1864. He was known for his anti-Indian disposition and had made speeches earlier that year which compared Indians as lice having nits (children) and the only way to rid the country of lice was to kill off the nits as well. It is at this point that Stannard draws a direct comparison between Chivington and Heinrich Himmler, who would later use a similar

reference in the extermination of the Jews as “ the same thing as delousing”(p130)

Stannard also uses reference to another atrocity that occurred in the Second World War, this time committed by the Japanese. The Bataan Death March happened in 1942 in the Philippines when American and Filipino soldiers were marched for days in the scorching heat through the Philippine jungles. Thousands died, either by execution or from deliberate neglect and cruelty. Those who survived faced the hardships of a prisoner of war camp. Others were wounded or killed when U. S. air and naval forces sank unmarked enemy ships transporting prisoners of war to Japan. Stannard talks of the forced ‘ relocation’ of the remaining Cherokee nation, about 17, 000 that could be rounded up out of 22, 000 in existence and the forced march that was to be known as the Trail of Tears. Around 8000 men, women and children died on this march, some of them on a steamer that sank, due to the deliberate negligence of US officials. The total figure that died amounts to just under half of those forced into resettlement.

Throughout this chapter Stannard uses highly emotive language and his use of words such as ‘ carnage’, ‘ slaughter’ and ‘ murder’ are specifically employed to have the most effect on the reader rather than by using softer more sanitised terms such as cleansing or eradication. He further outrages by highlighting the way in which Indians are slandered by descriptions of the time about them as being like ‘ whining curs, snakes and baboons’. He shows us that by doing this, by using derogatory terms against those we are fighting, that we are able to dehumanise an enemy and therefore to be able too much more easily rationalise the destruction of a species, race or

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people. Stannard's objective seems to have been to write a book that people would take notice of, and to write it in such a way that it would spark discussion and controversy, urging the re-evaluation by people of their thoughts and notions on the history and direction of their country and how it can be applied to today's society, so that the mistakes of the past are not made now or in the future.

The certainty that the modern media was going to receive this book badly and would report journalistically against it would have probably helped to ensure its success in the market. The book, whilst drawing lots of references to Nazi Germany and the atrocities committed there, also warns the American people to make sure that this does not happen again in today's society, by being on guard and wary of those who are appointed to office, as nowadays more than at any other time, it will almost always be someone from a wealthy background and the role of servant of the nation and self serving capitalist do not fit very well together as is shown by the references to former Presidents such as Jackson and Jefferson. The hardest thing for American people to believe is that its own virtuous leaders might be guilty of pre-meditated murder. They would do well to listen to the words of Saint Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, 3rd century AD, who said " Held to be a crime when committed by individuals, homicide is called a virtue when committed by the state."

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