

variables that determine success and failure be reduced to whether or not children live with their married parents? If we stipulate (as Hymowitz does) that there are many exceptions to the rule, and that getting and staying married indicates other useful behaviors that lead to success—like the ability to plan, to exercise self-discipline, and to navigate interpersonal relationships—then the answer is probably yes.

The chief shortcoming of *Marriage and Caste in America* is that it was written not as a book but as a series of essays, most of them previously published in the Manhattan Institute's *City Journal*. The majority of these pieces make an intelligent, compelling case. But taken as a whole they leave too many questions unanswered. Some of Hymowitz's more contentious claims—especially about the harmful effects of divorce and single-motherhood on the educational attainment of children—cry out for documentation, unfortunately not supplied or cited. Similarly, the book lacks a bibliography.

More substantively, Hymowitz's emphasis on the primacy of culture is an important corrective to liberal orthodoxy, but it leads her to scant the considerable economic literature on family disintegration. Though she refers to recent economic theories about the disappearance of marriage in the underclass, and demonstrates what is wrong with explanations that focus only on unemployment or "postindustrial" dislocation, there is more to be said about economic and welfare policy—especially if the ultimate goal is to restore the culture of marriage in the inner city.

After all, the disintegration of the marriage culture among black families was preceded by the passage of generous welfare policies that facilitated out-of-wedlock motherhood. Nor, on the middle-class side of the tracks, is it an accident that divorce became prevalent as the U.S. grew much richer in the late 1960's. What

if wealth permanently undermines the discipline necessary for sustained marriages?

Such questions have no ready answers, and Hymowitz has few prescriptions for what should be done about our family mores. Her signature idea of a "life script" is a brilliant metaphor that deserves wide circulation, but (as she recognizes) exhortation by the government does not carry much credibility. The real attraction of Kay Hymowitz's book is that she has thought her way through some of the most tangled webs of human behavior, arriving at clear and forceful conclusions about what is missing from the impoverished lives that she describes so well.

---

## Organization Man

### The Best Intentions: Kofi Annan and the UN in the Era of American World Power

by James Traub

*Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. 442 pp. \$26.00*

Reviewed by  
Jonathan Kay

SIXTY-TWO years after the fact, it is difficult to appreciate the outsized hopes attached to the United Nations at its creation. John Foster Dulles, who would become Dwight Eisenhower's Secretary of State, called the UN charter "a greater Magna Carta." Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg hailed it as "a new emancipation proclamation for the world." Franklin D. Roosevelt declared it the repository of all his "hopes of success in life and immortality in history."

It did not take long for the USSR to dispel these fantasies. On February 16, 1946, just a month after the

JONATHAN KAY is managing editor for comment at Canada's National Post.

General Assembly held its first session, the Soviet ambassador used his veto power—which FDR had naively imagined would be exercised only in extreme situations—to block an American resolution demanding the withdrawal of foreign troops from Syria. It was the first of 119 vetoes the Soviets would cast during the cold war, throughout which the world body remained a largely irrelevant sideshow to superpower politics.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, many believed the UN's day finally had come. In January 1992, then-Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali proclaimed that "a conviction has grown, among nations large and small, that an opportunity has been regained to achieve the great objectives of the charter." As if on cue, Africa and the Balkans erupted in appalling spasms of ethnic and tribal bloodletting. In the spirit of the new age, Washington sent 28,000 troops to subdue Somalia's warlords—an operation best remembered for its horrifying, widely broadcast denouement in the streets of Mogadishu. When, six months later, Rwandan Hutus slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Tutsis, a chastened West sat on its hands, as it is doing now with respect to Darfur. At Turtle Bay, "never again" has become a ghastly and mendacious cliché.

As the UN's under-secretary-general for peacekeeping in the mid-1990s, and then as Secretary-General for two terms, Kofi Annan personified this second, post-Soviet cycle of hope and epic disappointment. During his first term, he became the most popular Secretary-General in UN history, winning the Nobel Peace Prize, speaking at Davos, appearing as a prized guest on the elite New York City dinner-party circuit. By the time his second term ended this past December, the UN's accumulated failures and scandals had rubbed away his moral glitter.

Since 1998, James Traub, a con-

tributing writer for the *New York Times Magazine*, has chronicled this fall from grace. He followed Annan around the world, interviewed him formally 18 times, and even was permitted to attend official meetings. The work that has emerged from this effort, *The Best Intentions: Kofi Annan and the UN in the Era of American World Power*, is three books in one—a biography of Annan, an examination of the crises he faced as Secretary-General, and an autopsy of the utopian dream that sprouted and died during his tenure.

KOFI ANNAN was born into the tribal aristocracy of Africa's Gold Coast in 1938. In 1959, two years after his native Ghana gained independence, he enrolled at Macalaster College in St. Paul, Minnesota on a Ford Foundation grant. From there, it was on to graduate studies at the University of Geneva, and then to ladder-

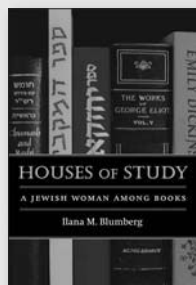
climbing at the United Nations. By all accounts, his bland charm and starchy, risk-averse personality made him a natural fit for the world body's senior bureaucracy.

Thanks largely to his opposition to the Iraq war, Annan is now often cast as a figure of the anti-American Left. But when he became Secretary-General in 1997, many considered him Washington's man. Having spent his adult life in the West, he looked down on the revolutionary, anti-colonial ideology that still permeated the world body. While championing poverty-reduction in the third world, he also emphasized the importance of the free market, globalization, and good governance.

Moreover, and in contrast to Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who had dismissed human-rights activism as "an instrument of intervention to serve the political objectives of the developed world," Annan candidly

preached Western values to African dictators. "His views were fundamentally those of a high-minded and progressive European," Traub writes. "He believed devoutly in what he took to be the universal principles of human rights and humanitarianism and in the use of force against evil, so long as the force was mustered collectively and in conformity with international law."

Though determined to see the UN do more to alleviate suffering in crisis zones, Annan himself did little more than make ambitious speeches. He would say he *could* do little more, since his direct authority extended only to the Secretariat staff, while the UN's real power lay with the veto-wielding members of the Security Council, whose squabbling typically forestalled decisive action on issues of genuine import. And so only in such backwaters as



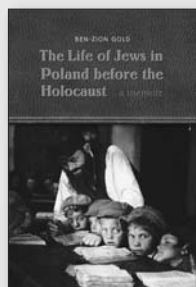
### Houses of Study

A Jewish Woman among Books  
BY ILANA M. BLUMBERG

Set in "houses of study," from a Jewish grammar school and high school to a Jerusalem yeshiva for women to a secular American university, Ilana M. Blumberg's memoir asks, in an intimate and poignant manner: what happens when the traditional Jewish ideal of learning asserts itself in a body that is female—a body directed by that same tradition toward a life of modesty, early marriage, and motherhood?

"Ilana Blumberg captures the voice of a generation of religious Jewish women, in love with Judaism and in love with learning. Her book is the autobiography of the feminist era and its spiritual passions."—Susannah Heschel, author of *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*

\$24.95 cloth | 978-0-8032-1367-8



### The Life of Jews in Poland before the Holocaust

A Memoir  
BY BEN-ZION GOLD

Ben-Zion Gold's memoir brings to life the world of a million Jews in pre-World War II Poland who were later destroyed by the Nazis. Warmly recalling the relationships, rituals, observances, and celebrations, Gold evokes the sense of family and faith that helped him through the catastrophe that followed.

"This beautifully written and moving account of his youth as a member of a traditional religious Jewish family in Radom in central Poland, by Ben-Zion Gold, stands out among Holocaust memoirs.... This is one of the most uplifting accounts of the resilience of the human spirit I have read in recent years."—Antony Polonsky, coeditor of *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Poland: An Anthology*

\$21.95 cloth | 978-0-8032-2222-9



University of Nebraska Press

800.755.1105 | www.nebraskapress.unl.edu | publishers of Bison Books

East Timor, Haiti, Congo, and Sierra Leone—places where none of the major powers had any significant interests—did Annan’s UN stage meaningful interventions.

A perfect case study in such fecklessness has been Darfur, which Traub visited with Annan in July 2004. By then, it was well known that the Sudanese government was supporting an Arab Janjaweed militia staging pogroms against pastoral villagers. As Traub tells it, Annan repeatedly pushed the Security Council to act, even suggesting the need for military action, but was answered only with symbolic gestures. Even if the U.S. or another Western country had the political will to deploy the troops needed to face down the Janjaweed, the effort would likely be denied the UN’s blessing—both because of China, which has billions invested in Sudan’s oil industry, and because of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, whose members vote in ritual solidarity with their own.

Annan’s most keenly felt failure came on March 19, 2003, when the United States invaded Iraq without explicit Security Council authorization. Traub argues that the Secretary-General was not necessarily opposed in principle to war against Saddam Hussein, but rather that his overarching concern was to maintain the UN’s authority as the arbiter of multilateral legitimacy. Still, the Iraq war was just one manifestation of Annan’s emerging rift with the Bush administration.

Though he had begun his tenure as Washington’s choice, by the end Annan had drifted toward the soft-boiled consensus of “old” Europe, according to which American unilateralism is as much a threat to world order as is Iran or North Korea. Such policies, Annan told the General Assembly, were a recipe for the “lawless use of force, with or without justification.” The world would be better served by focusing more on the “soft threats” of poverty, disease, and climate change.

THROUGHOUT this book, Traub keeps his subject at arm’s length, taking care to distinguish fact from self-serving puffery in Annan’s statements. Only in his discussion of the Oil-for-Food scandal, which dominated the last years of Annan’s tenure, does he sound like the Secretary-General’s outright advocate. Responsibility for the Oil-for-Food program, Traub maintains, lay with those who formally supervised it, namely, the nations of the Security Council, and the notion of a “Kofigate”—that is, that the scandal could be traced to the Secretariat—was an invention of “conservatives looking for a cudgel with which to whack the UN.” Whatever the merit of this, the Oil-for-Food scandal was plainly a devastating ordeal to Annan, one that both tarnished his personal legacy and undermined his ambitious (and ultimately unsuccessful) plan for substantial UN reform.

As for the United Nations itself, Traub predicts it will become even less relevant in future global crises. Though the world will continue to look to it for large-scale disaster relief, refugee resettlement, food distribution, and other humanitarian functions, NATO (or some NATO-plus body that includes India and other democracies) may well take over its role as global policeman, as it already has done, to some extent, in Afghanistan and the Balkans.

“The UN cannot deliver us from the evils we most fear,” Traub writes. “And this is so not because of design flaws but because of the structure of the world order itself: one superpower towers above the rest; myriad non-state actors and global forces undermine a state-based system fashioned in the 17th century. . . . A world so fragmented cannot be knit together by a single institution.”

JAMES TRAUB is an outstanding reporter and literary stylist. Given his talents, and the extraordinary access he received from Annan, it is hard to imagine anyone writing a more

readable book about this period in the United Nations’ history from the perspective of the man at the head of the institution.

And yet, despite all this, *The Best Intentions* is often a chore to read. However fine Traub’s own prose, the book cannot escape the stultifying fatuity of its subject, whose words are so measured and politic as to be at times meaningless. Over the course of eighteen interviews, Annan apparently did not supply the author with a single truly memorable quotation. A frustrated Traub attributes this to a lack of “intellectual vanity” so sweeping as to “preclude the normal desire to be found original or even interesting.”

Be that as it may, it is not just Annan’s personality that renders this book unsatisfying; it is his lack of agency. At root, what makes a political biography compelling is the tantalizing fact that, unlike the rest of us, great leaders can change the course of history with a single decision. Whether or not Annan ever had that power, he certainly never exercised it. Moreover, he did not seem to crave it. Though he may be a benign humanitarian at heart, his professional success was rooted in an ability to cater to the needs of an often corrupt organization. In so doing, he became a servant of the amoral protocols and legalisms of a dogmatic multilateralism, and of the immoral policies it encouraged or condoned.

A truly great man does not outsource his judgment. The same can be said for great global actors. In this book’s final pages, Traub laments that there is “something melancholy about the prospect of the UN finding its level amid an array of institutions.” But perhaps the opposite conclusion is more warranted. Whatever challenges emerge in coming decades, the world will be better served if Western democratic leaders, whether operating alone or in league with others, obey their own consciences without being fettered by foreign-

policy doctrines that, in privileging process over outcome, and consensus over justice, play neatly into the hands of the world's villains.

## Variables of Violence

### The War of the World: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West

by Niall Ferguson

*Penguin. 880 pp. \$35.00*

Reviewed by  
Edward N. Luttwak

IN THE last years Niall Ferguson has written six big books while teaching at institutions on either side of the Atlantic—he currently occupies a chair in history at Harvard—and preparing and presenting ambitious television programs. His latest book, which grew out of one of those programs, is a thoroughly disenchanted history of the last century: a century of wars, their almost equally sinister preludes, and their often grisly aftermaths. Like all his books, it is written with fluency and often sardonic wit.

For a book with the word “war” in its title, there is very little actual warfare, whether tactical, operational, or strategic, to be found here—that is, very little military history. That may be because Ferguson thinks there is too much of it already, or more likely because he shares the disdain of almost all academic historians for “war books”—a disdain that stands in stark contrast to the unflagging demand of the reading public at every level for war books of all kinds, from the Peloponnesian war to the latest personal memoir of Iraq.

Instead, Ferguson focuses on

EDWARD N. LUTTWAK is senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.

what he considers important: the politics, economics, public finance, and, above all, human toll of a century of armed conflict, dictatorship, persecution, and civil strife. Page after page of *The War of the World* is devoted, for example, to the despoliation, deportation, and murder of supposedly rich farmers (“kulaks”) by Stalin’s Soviet regime, which went on to persecute just about everyone else as well; of Poles by Germans; of Chinese by the Japanese armed forces whose advance in World War II was often followed by mass rape; and of course of Jews. Among post-World War II victims, we meet the Chinese again, this time suffering on a far larger scale, as well as the Khmers, Bosnians, Rwandans, and many others.

Conspicuously missing from Ferguson’s catalog, as from other, similar surveys, is the 1932–35 Chaco war between Bolivia and Paraguay in which at least 100,000 were killed out of a combined total population of just over three million—a stupendous proportion, unexceeded in the 20th century. But one need hardly criticize this book for not being comprehensive enough or otherwise lacking in solid information. Although there are occasional traces of hurried data-harvesting by way of Internet search engines—as in the misleadingly precise figure of 16,000 Japanese losses in the battle of Taierhchuang in China—these are rare and not decisive.

In any such exercise, however, the great question to be answered is this: *why* was the 20th century so much more violent than earlier epochs of mankind? Ferguson’s answer is that, in this era, a particularly lethal mixture was compounded out of three specific factors: ethnic conflict with a racial dimension, economic volatility, and empires in decline. Across his hundreds of pages, in between descriptions of persecutions, war, and other forms of violence, this contention is explained, detailed, and illustrated. And the three factors, taken to-

gether, do make a kind of sense. Still, questions and doubts remain.

IT IS TRUE, for example, that ethnic and racial conflict tends inherently to be more absolute in character than other forms of violence—and more abhorrent morally, because victims cannot save themselves even by means of political or religious conversion. In the 1990’s no Tutsi could rally to the Hutu side to survive the Rwanda massacre, because, much as with the Jews under Nazi persecution, in Hutu eyes the cardinal and inerasable offense was to *be* a Tutsi, not anything that the victim professed or did. The only ones who might have saved themselves were Hutus known to be against the massacre and thus also singled out for murder; but the only way they could have saved themselves was to join in the killing with enough visible enthusiasm to satisfy their fellow Hutus.

It is a virtue of this book that Ferguson recounts the crimes and tragedies of racial persecution with a perfectly fresh sense of indignation, and with no trace whatsoever of the “Holocaust fatigue” that has become the approved stance of too many writers who should know better. Still, it is a statistical fact that the greatest killings of the 20th century were *not* racially motivated. The two largest, indeed, were carried out by regimes with rather good anti-racist credentials.

Tens of millions of Chinese were killed by other Chinese. To compound the paradox, these were overwhelmingly Han Chinese killed by fellow Han Chinese, while members of China’s many non-Han minorities (except of course for the recalcitrant Tibetans) were, if anything, less likely to be persecuted. Similarly, many millions among the peoples of the Soviet Union were killed by their peers among the minions of Lenin and Stalin. As for the Khmer Rouge, they were definitely racist when it came to Vietnamese, including those who had lived for cen-