This is a selection from the proposal for a book under contract with Pearson Prentice Hall, to be published in early 2011.

From the earliest recorded civilizations, we find not only warfare but also—at least by the eighth century BCE—efforts to exterminate entire groups of human beings, a phenomenon now known as “genocide.” Even the Old Testament has more than one blood-curdling passage that would seem to call for genocide. The Nazi Holocaust shocked the world with its cruelty, scope, and zealous organization, but we would come to understand that this was merely the latest—but by no means the final—chapter in a long, grim history.

How do we define “genocide” ... and what is served by defining it, and by distinguishing genocide from other instances of mass killing? Why have humans so frequently been aroused to commit this greatest of all crimes—while others have stood on the sidelines, unmoved by the plight of people who, in many cases, had been their neighbors? What has led governments and armies to undertake the attempted eradication of entire peoples? And finally, what has the world learned from these grisly episodes? Can future occurrences be averted?

To Kill a People: Genocide in the Twentieth Century confronts these questions in succinct prose, combining scholarly detachment with an appropriate degree of both indignation and compassion. Numerous books on genocide have appeared in the last twenty years, but To Kill a People offers a different approach. To my knowledge, this will be the first book on genocide to be tailored specifically for use in the college classroom. It will consist of an introduction, which will establish the historical context and continuities, followed by four case studies. I have selected four examples—the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust, Cambodia, and Rwanda—that represent considerable geographic and thematic range. The case studies will be supplemented by primary readings and thought-provoking questions, and the book will conclude with a chapter that will synthesize the lessons and issues arising from the case studies.

Each chapter will emphasize, without exaggerating, instances of individual and collective resistance, as well as survival mechanisms employed by the victims or would-be victims. This emphasis on resistance in its various forms, which is the focus of my research on Nazi Germany, will further distinguish To Kill a People. While scrupulously avoiding any “life-affirming” or comforting conclusions, which sometimes mar texts of this nature that are aimed at non-specialists, this attention to resistance and survival—and the contemplation in each chapter of moral ambiguities in the responses of the targeted populations, as well as within the perpetrators’ cultures—should leave the reader disturbed and perhaps prompted to deeper thought, but not hopeless or despairing.