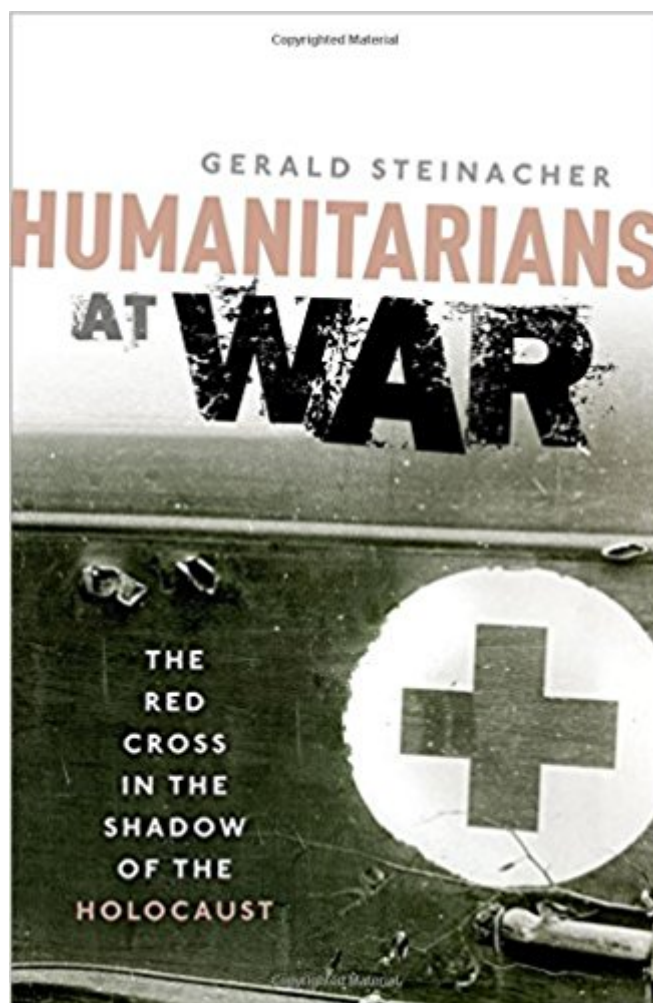


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Humanitarians At War: The Red Cross In The Shadow Of The Holocaust



Synopsis

The Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is one of the world's oldest, most prominent, and revered aid organizations. But at the end of World War II things could not have looked more different. Under fire for its failure to speak out against the Holocaust or to extend substantial assistance to Jews trapped in Nazi camps across Europe, the ICRC desperately needed to salvage its reputation in order to remain relevant in the post-war world. Indeed, the whole future of Switzerland's humanitarian flagship looked to hang in the balance at this time. Torn between defending Swiss neutrality and battling Communist critics in the early Cold War, the Red Cross leadership in Geneva emerged from the world war with a new commitment to protecting civilians caught in the crossfire of conflict. Yet they did so while interfering with Allied de-nazification efforts in Germany and elsewhere, and coming to the defense of former Nazis at the Nuremberg Trials. Not least, they provided the tools for many of Hitler's former henchmen, notorious figures such as Joseph Mengele and Adolf Eichmann, to slip out of Europe and escape prosecution-behavior which did little to silence those critics in the Allied powers who unfavorably compared the 'shabby' neutrality of the Swiss with the 'good neutrality' of the Swedes, their eager rivals for leadership in international humanitarian initiatives. However, in spite of all this, by the end of the decade, the ICRC had emerged triumphant from its moment of existential crisis, navigating the new global order to reaffirm its leadership in world humanitarian affairs against the challenge of the Swedes, and playing a formative role in rewriting the rules of war in the Geneva Conventions of 1949. This uncompromising new history tells the remarkable and intriguing story of how the ICRC achieved this - successfully escaping the shadow of its ambiguous wartime record to forge a new role and a new identity in the post-1945 world.

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Customer Reviews

"A knowledgeable, stringent return to the record and scrutiny of 'good neutrality.'"--Kirkus

"Riveting... An important book that, for the first time, greatly details how the ICRC operated, especially during and after World War II."--Library Journal "[Gerald Steinacher] is an excellent historian with a good nose for archives."--Wall Street Journal

Gerald Steinacher is an Associate Professor of History and the Hymen Rosenberg Professor of Judaic Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He is the author of numerous publications on German and Italian twentieth-century history, most recently *Nazis on the Run: How Hitler's Henchmen Fled Justice* (2010), also published by Oxford University Press, which was awarded a National Jewish Book Award by the Jewish Book Council in 2011.

From time to time a book changes the perspective and understanding of something a person thought they knew quite a bit about. I've been a primary care physician for 35 years, have read extensively on World War Two and had many family members who participated in the war. I have read about medical care in the field and know people involved but never thought about the over-arching way to deal with vast human catastrophes. The massive refugee concerns of the Mideast, Russia and Europe today and the international responses are very much reflected in this book. The "largest state of emergency the world has ever seen" is relevant study for current times. The politics and the personalities involved are heroic and flawed. The book is centered on the "neutral" International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) or Swiss Red Cross situated in Geneva, Switzerland and their need to present a positive picture of their organization even though they were complicit at times with Germany. The Swedish and American Red Cross complete the bulk of the response. The tragedy of the Holocaust and the Jewish population is presented unblinkingly and fairly. The fragility of the humanitarian response is frightening. There is an excellent historical perspective of the Red Cross movement from the early 1800s to modern day, initially for the military and more recently for civilians. The legal aspects are presented including the development of the Geneva Conventions. The book is under 300 pages, pleasantly readable and has extensive references. I would strongly recommend this

book to health care providers, relief workers, history buffs and politicians.

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