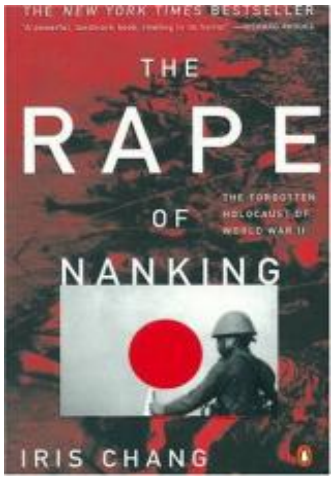
The Rape of Nanking

by Iris Chang



About the Book

Once encircled by an ancient, immense stone wall built during the Ming dynasty, Nanking was a city of imperial palaces and lavish tombs. Temples perched on the surrounding mountains and lotus blossoms studded its lakes. In the summer of 1937, relics of the old Nanking mingled&?and clashed&?with the new Nanking. Automobiles sped past rickasha pullers and an occasional water buffalo or camel wandered into the street. People escaped their sweltering houses by spending their evenings in the open air chatting with neighbors. No one could know that these lazy summer nights would usher in six weeks of terror, and that the majestic Yangtzee River would soon run red with blood.

"If the dead from Nanking were to link hands, they would stretch from Nanking to the city of Hangchow, spanning a distance of some two hundred miles. Their blood would weigh twelve hundred tons, and their bodies would fill twenty-five hundred railroad cars. Stacked on top of each other, these bodies would reach the height of a seventy-four-story building."&?from the Introduction of **The Rape of Nanking**

In December of 1937, the Japanese army swept into Nanking and left a trail of carnage surreal in its horror. The death toll was staggering, far exceeding that of the American raids on Tokyo (an estimated 80,000-120,0000) and even the combined death toll of the two atomic blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the end of 1945 (estimated at 140,000 and 70,000 respectively). If not just for the numbers of dead, the Rape of Nanking should be remembered for the cruel manner in which most of its victims met their end. Japanese soldiers used Chinese men for bayonet practice and often engaged in killing competitions. Some victims were buried alive, others were buried up to their waists and then torn to pieces by German Shepherds. It is believed that between 20,000-80,000 Chinese women were raped; fathers were forced to rape their daughters, and sons were forced to rape their mothers. It seems that the hearts of the Japanese soldiers had decomposed completely&?no act was too evil to commit.

While the Rape of Nanking represents one of the worst instances of mass extermination in the annals of world history it is also one of the most obscure. In the United States, only a scant few World War II textbooks mention the Nanking

slaughter, and almost none of the "definitive" World War II histories include the episode. The Japanese, in addition to editing any reference to the massacre out of their school curriculum, have aggressively campaigned to prevent the Nanking atrocities from becoming common knowledge. In her courageous and important book, Iris Chang both chronicles the massacre of this once proud, imperial capital city, and exposes the historical amnesia that she astutely characterizes as a second rape.

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."**&?George Santayana**

While most of us are painfully aware of the frailty of human life, many of us display tremendous naiveté about the tissue thin nature of civilization. **The Rape of Nanking** is, indeed, a desperate attempt to salvage the memory of the countless souls lost in that bloodbath, but it is also a cautionary tale for anyone lulled into a false sense of national security. The question lurking between the lines of every page of this book is: can we prevent the reoccurrence of such unchecked cruelty? The first step, says Iris Chang, is exploring the darkest days and nights of world history. By doing this we will learn that no one nation is unique in its capacity for savageness&?hence the atrocities of Rwanda, Yugoslavia, and the Holocaust. A mere tear in veneer of society&?even our own&?can give way to episodes of unparalleled barbarity.

Only by remembering can we glean lessons from these massacres&?and the one that befell Nanking nearly sixty years ago. And if memory lies at the root of forgiveness, than the victims of the Rape of Nanking have only just begun their journey toward healing.

Discussion Guide

1. Throughout **The Rape of Nanking**, Iris Chang emphasizes that by not remembering the past, we become victims of it. What do you think she means by this? Other than the Rape of Nanking, can you think of any profound injustices that have gone unnoticed in the world&?and that as a result have become even more sinister and dangerous? How about in your own country&?or even in your own city?

2. If remembering is the first step to repairing the damage incurred by a holocaust, what do you think might be the second? The third? Is there ever a time for forgiving and at least attempting to forget wounds of war?

3. It is true that one of the most distressing facets of the Rape of Nanking&?and in our own day the Yugoslavian conflict and the Rwandan massacre&?is the manner in which the people of the world became merely passive spectators. And as the death toll climb once again in Kosovo, one senses that history will, no doubt, repeat itself. What is America's responsibility to the civilians caught in the crossfire of these civil wars? Do you think the United Nations has the capacity to cope appropriately with these conflicts?

4. How has the media portrayed these conflicts to the rest of the world, and how have you and your family reacted to having visuals of them brought into your home? Do you think that the extensive media coverage of war encourages interest in world events or contributes to the numbing of our conscious?

5. Do you think that a holocaust could occur on American soil? Why or why not? What type of protection against such events does the United States government offer to its citizens? Are these checks and balances sufficient?

6. The epilogue of the book discusses steps being taken by the U.S. government to heighten awareness of the Rape of Nanking, including plans by the San Francisco school district to include the Rape of Nanking in its curriculum. How might you discuss the Rape of Nanking with your children? What are some ways that you could foster in your children an interest in world events? At what age do you think that this type of education is appropriate?

7. One of the most peculiar aspects of the Rape of Nanking was the presence of John Rabe, the Nazi official who risked his life to save the Chinese from the marauding Japanese soldiers. Were you able to reconcile his heroism with his adulation for Hitler? How?

8.. The Rape of Nanking illustrates the absolute depths of war&?a place where humans become inhuman. Is it possible to prevent these episodes, or are they an unavoidable component of war&?one that will exist as long as nations exist?

Author Bio

Iris Chang, a full time author living in California, heard stories about the Rape of Nanking from her parents, who survived years of war and revolution before finding a serene home as professors in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. A journalism graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana, she worked briefly as a reporter in Chicago before winning a graduate fellowship to the writing seminars program at The Johns Hopkins University. Her first book, Thread of the Silkworm (the story of Tsien-Hsue-shen, father of the People's Republic of China's missile program) received worldwide critical acclaim. She is the recipient of the John T. and Catherine D. MacArthur Foundation's Program on Peace and International Cooperation award, as well as major grants from the National Science Foundation, the Pacific Cultural Foundation, and the Harry Truman Library. She is 30 years old.

Critical Praise

"Stomach-turning, tear-wrenching, thoroughly riveting. "

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