



Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War

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Winner of the Los Angeles Times Book Prize

Peter Maass went to the Balkans as a reporter at the height of the nightmarish war there, but this book is not traditional war reportage. Maass examines how an ordinary Serb could wake up one morning and shoot his neighbor, once a friend--then rape that neighbor's wife. He conveys the desperation that makes a Muslim beg the United States to bomb his own city in order to end the misery. And Maass does not falter at the spectacle of U.N. soldiers shining searchlights on fleeing refugees--who are promptly gunned down by snipers waiting in the darkness. **Love Thy Neighbor** gives us an unflinching vision of a late-20th-century hell that is also a scathing inquiry into the worst extremes of human nature. Like Michael Herr's **Dispatches** (also available in Vintage paperback), it is an utterly gripping book that will move and instruct readers for years to come.

Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War Details

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Author : Peter Maass

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From Reader Review Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War for online ebook

Claire says

I love reading about Yugoslavia, but I have zero time for a book that within less than ten percent packs stuff like this:

- the author comparing himself to someone who has just discovered they have "the AIDS virus" (sic) when finding himself in front of a Serbian warlord who could kill him. I know that this was published in 1996, but come on.

- Talking about the pilot of the plane that's taking him to Sarajevo, the author says that "pilots of transport planes wanted to be ace fighters but didn't make the cut at flight school", so they like flying at a high altitude and do a steep descent into the airport at the last minute for "cheap thrills" (although Maass himself said just a sentence before that this was done to avoid Serbian artillery for as long as possible). Really, landing into a besieged city is "cheap thrills"?

- While on the same plane, a Belgian crew member observes that the war in Bosnia means that the dream of a united Europe is falling apart, and that "this is like Africa", so the author explains that Belgium is a "simple version of Yugoslavia" and that Flemings and Walloons "are not birds" but different peoples within Belgium (you don't say).

Then the plane starts back to leave Sarajevo, and he comments that he's being "left behind in Africa".

Just like another reviewer, I'm asking myself where the hell was the editor on this book.

And while I understand that it's meant as a journey through which Maass (who didn't know anything about the country/ies before arriving and spoke no Serbo-Croatian) learns about the place and the reasons behind the war (which weren't the simple "ethnic hate" explanations that people were being given), but the beginning is just too crass, he thinks his ignoramus kind of comments are funny and I hate the tone of it all.

There are dozens of books about the disintegration of Yugoslavia that I could be reading instead of wasting my time with this one.

Yulia says

Such a gruesome and compelling war biography.

Cheyenne Blue says

The war the world ignored and then forgot. Peter Maass was a war correspondent for the Washington Post and he covered the war in Bosnia in the 1990s. This isn't about military campaigns though, it's stories of war, about ordinary people caught up in something horrific.

When Serbia invaded Bosnia, the Bosnians appealed for help from Europe and America and were fobbed off.

The Serbian propaganda machine, meanwhile, spewed out tales of Bosnians bombing their own cities for sympathy, Bosnians shooting their own and blaming the Serbs -- even the mass executions were blamed on Bosnia.

The book is certainly biased (in favour of Bosnia) but I don't have a problem with that. From first-hand accounts, evidence, and war criminals since, it's pretty much accepted that the majority of the atrocities were committed by Serbs. This isn't an easy book to read; it made me profoundly sad, not in a superficial "oh puppy abandoned by the side of the road" sort of way, but in a deep way, one that can engender hatred. But I wanted to learn more about the war, and how it affected Bosnia, and this seemed a good book to achieve that.

I love Bosnia. I have a cap that says that, and it's true. It's a beautiful country, with friendly, open people who are rebuilding their lives. It's not a comfortable country to visit, even now (we spent a few weeks there in 2008), but it's a rewarding one. There are still many, many villages where the occupants cannot return because of the (mainly unmapped) landmines. You see the signs warning of them everywhere - along main roads, in villages, outside a ruined house, in a farmer's field, in the mountains, and right in the centre of major towns such as Banja Luka and Jayce. One of the things that struck me most when we were there in 2008 was how everyone was getting along. There was none of the animosity and open feuding that even now plagues the factions in Ireland. I asked our Bosnian friend about this. How do people sit down and drink coffee with their Serbian neighbour? That same Serbian may have raped, maimed, tortured, killed. How do they shove it under the rug and sit down without hatred? Was it all glossed over, I wondered. Did it still fester away underneath. No, said our Bosnian friend. The war ended, they just stopped, sat down and drank coffee together.

I was hoping for greater understanding from reading this book. In some ways, I did get that. I know more history, more about humans in war time, more about what drives ordinary people to do terrible things. I know more about beautiful, battered Bosnia than I did before, but I'm not much wiser about how to forgive.

Simon Cleveland, PhD says

While in 1992 I was taking my first trip to Europe, falling in love for the first time, getting my introduction to Pentecostalism and learning to live, people were being exterminated only several hundred miles away from me.

While I was going into my fourth year of high school education in Bulgaria, boys and girls my age were being raped and tortured and murdered and it took me 15 years to find that out. How is it that I knew nothing about that war? How is it I never paid attention to the news, never took interest in what was happening in Bosnia? How? How come I turned a blind eye to the grizzly events occurring in a land where people spoke Slavic language similar to my own, had features similar to mine, shared history similar to the one of my county? How can I have been so ignorant of the genocide in Bosnia?

Then, in the winter of 1992 I came to the United States and looking back now I find I wasn't the only one guilty of ignorance. For three years (1992-1995) United Nations, countries like Britain, France, Russia and of course, the USA, looked to resolved the conflict by ignoring the direct problem in the region. Peaceful solution is what everyone was talking about and looking for, and all the while men, women, and children died by torture, by fire, by knives to their throats. Over 200,000 people. 200,000 died in this conflict and having read Peter Maass' book I feel disgusted with myself, with humanity in general.

I suspect there were hundreds of other conflicts that occurred and I missed. I know there were many more

that history sheltered away from humanity and perhaps I'll never learn about their victims, but having read this book and having learned of the dangerous games politicians and people with power played, I'm left with a nauseating feeling of shame. Shame for being a human and for possessing the realization that evil is something people grow inside, something they cultivate and feed of. For all of our 100,000 years of civilization we have nothing to show except death, destruction and deceit. Is this what we should be proud of? Is this the meaning of life?

I recommend this book to everyone. It's hard to find stories out there that are so open, so raw, so real in their context that make readers seriously wonder what society, civilization, morality and ethics really mean. Mr. Maass, thank you for being so honest.

Jeremiah says

"I am now more aware of the fragility of human relations, and more aware of what being a Jew can mean. I learned this from the Muslims of Bosnia, who made two fatal mistakes. They thought that being a minority group no longer mattered in civilized Europe...They failed to realize that although a person might attach little importance to his religion, other people might take notice one day; and just because your society seems stable does not mean it will always be so. Muslims versus Christians, Jews versus non-Jews, whites versus blacks, poor versus rich - there are so many seams along which a society can be torn apart by the manipulators."

(p 277)

What comes across in Maass's personal and honestly biased account of covering the Balkan wars as a journalist is that the post break-up Yugoslavia conflict grew into a war over real estate, that escalated into ethnic cleansing. Maass's biases are evident and his comparisons of the plight of Bosnian Muslims to Jews living in Third Reich Germany rubs this reader the wrong way. Maass repeatedly expresses frustration and disbelief at the US not intervening. There's an obvious and one word reason for US inaction - Vietnam is less than 20 years past in our country's collective memory. Clinton was new in office at this point and more interested in affairs at home. Even the small scale humanitarian mission in Somalia would become a stumbling block for Clinton. But in Maass's account it has more to do with Milosevich not fitting the American pre-conception of international bad guy, compared to dictators like Noriega or Saddam Hussein. Also the victims are Bosnian Muslims, so there's the accusation of lack of empathy based on religion and ethnicity. Maass somehow forgets how reluctantly America entered World Wars I and II. Maass's writing is fantastic even if his objectivism suffers in reporting the terrible events of a war that remains largely forgotten and misunderstood in by the West.

Laura says

Very interesting read about the war in the Balkans and the propensity of humans to fight and survive wars in general. Devastatingly difficult in many parts, glimmers of hope in others. Ultimately I feel the author's recommendations are too emotive and just as under-considered in terms of their practical consequence as those he criticises throughout the book, but that shouldn't take away from what an excellent book this is.

Omar Mattar says

The world order committed a sin when it turned its back on the Bosnian War. We closed our eyes as the Serbs unleashed chaos; raping, pillaging, and burning their way through the neighborhoods and villages of Muslims and Croats that for centuries had been their compatriots and friends. We denied military aid to these people, handicapping their defenses as we pleaded for "peace" and "diplomacy", while the newsreels made it apparent that the only solution that would satisfy their aggressors was a genocidal one.

The heartbreak behind the Bosnian tragedy is that all it took were 3,500 air sorties-actions that cost NATO nearly nothing in blood, money, or equipment-to give Bosnia time to recover enough territory to negotiate a sustainable ceasefire that prevented the absolute annihilation of its ancient community.

It's not a stretching the example to place the Syrian War, and now the Yemeni one, in the same archetype. When we acquiesce our duty to prevent senseless slaughter from one decade to the next, we permit the darkest aspects of our humanity to fester, and perhaps to one day manifest themselves on our shores.

Almir Olovicic says

If you want to get to the core of everything that happened in the Bosnia and Herzegovina and ex-Yugoslavia from 1992-1995, then this is must to read book. Recommending to anyone who lived, seen and felt those dark 90-s and war that torn apart one or even more generations.

Andrew Robins says

I can genuinely only think of two books which have made me want to cry.

The first was *My War Gone By, I Miss it So*, which is Anthony Loyd's brilliant story of covering the wars in Bosnia and Chechnya, The second is this book, another reporter's story of covering the Balkan conflict.

Loyd's book focused on horrific stories of personal, human loss, something which is inescapable in books about the disintegration of Yugoslavia, but Peter Maass's book - as you might expect for one written in 1995, so close to the events - also conveys in depressingly stark terms the extent of the horrible failure of the United Nations, the US, the European powers, the 'civilised' West, to do anything to help while Bosnia was being torn to pieces.

Maass makes it quite clear where his loyalties lie, whose side he is on, and you could say that that is to some extent an abrogation of the responsibility to impartiality that you expect of a journalist, but the fact is, sometimes the distinction between good and so bad is so sharp, that you have to be 'biased'. The failure of greater powers to understand and admit this is the depressing theme of the earlier years of the war in Bosnia.

This book is fantastically written, conveying not only the well-covered horrors of the war, such as the snipers picking off civilians on Sniper's Alley in Sarajevo, or the re-emergence of concentration camps at places like Omarska, but also the sheer mind-blowing insanity of the crisis we stood by and watched on the edge of Europe.

A British soldier sums up the situation brilliantly succinctly, in three words, as he and Maass watch an overweight pensioner cycle, at snails pace, past a firefight between Croatian paramilitaries and the Bosnian Army - "Bosnian mind fuck".

Unfortunately, one of the most prolific deliverers of 'mind fucks' was the United Nations, and, even with the benefit of almost twenty years worth of hindsight, it is hard not to be shocked and depressed as the extent of the negligent failure not only to intervene, but even to acknowledge openly some of the war crimes which went on under their noses, is laid bare.

What are we to think, for example, of the way the United Nations allowed a situation to develop where, every night for months, they stopped Bosnians trying to escape the siege of Sarajevo by crossing from one side of the airport's runway to the other, the airport marking the boundary of the siege. Effectively, stopping people from escaping the slow, systematic murder of a city.

As if that were not bad enough, not only would they stop these people desperate to escape, they'd also stop people crossing the other way to get food into the city. The food would then be confiscated, and ultimately end up with the Serbian forces.

As if that wasn't enough, when the UN forces stopped the would-be escapees / food smugglers, they'd do so by bathing them in light from their searchlights, at which point, Serbian forces at the end of the runway would take the opportunity afforded by the light to shoot them.

That's United Nations soldiers illuminating refugees so they can be shot by the forces besieging their city.

A really engrossing, upsetting read, and it is depressingly difficult to conclude we've learned much in the intervening two decades.

Kristopher says

The only reason i finished this book was because i just wanted to know the details of the Serbian-Bosnian war. But, it sincerely seems like this book was a first draft by a 17 year old kid that skipped the editor's desk and went straight to print. I find it hard to believe that any editor would have let all these horrible metaphors, digressions and excessive uses of the word "literally" be published, as is.

He made casual remarks that bordered on racist; diverted from the story of the Bosnian plight to talk about himself; used an ocean of terrible comparisons... etc.

"My hopes are with Emir, but I am not hopeful". Seriously.

Brian Page says

Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War expresses all of the rage of one who discovers that global politics, all politics, is the game of kings; and kings care not a whit for the lives of peasants. Author Peter Maass catalogs both the atrocities inflicted by the Serbs in Bosnia and the equal atrocity & hypocrisy of the western democracies in doing nothing to stop it. As Maass notes, "The men with pens were every bit as fascinating

and repulsive as the men with guns.” (p. 249) *LTN* is a timeless account; and that is tragically unfortunate. While it chronicles the war in Bosnia, it would be a simple matter to change a few names & a few dates, and the same story applies to Rwanda, Syria, Yemen, the West Bank & Gaza, Myanmar, *ad nauseum*. Power corrupts not only individuals but states as well.

Rebecca says

I am glad I read this book, but I can't say I liked it. I don't think one can really like a book detailing the comprehensive genocide of a people. Maass' descriptions are graphic, but they need to be in order to convey the absolute horror that ransacked Bosnia during the early 90s. He is unapologetic in his condemnation of Serb leadership, Croat leadership and especially the international community that allowed Serbs to run rampant all over the Balkans without so much as a slap on the wrist. I started reading this right before going to bed and wound up staying up until 2 am to finish it because, like a rubbernecker on the highway Maass used as an example in one of his tangents, I couldn't look away. Coming from the Balkans, this struck especially close to home and I cried a few times (I would have to be hard-hearted not to). Surprisingly, I also laughed as Maass retold the jokes the people used to say about each other. If there's one thing I love about the Balkans, it's that unique sense of humor that allows us to poke fun at ourselves and our neighbors even in the direst of straits.

This is not an enjoyable book to read. I cannot with good conscience recommend it to someone without warning them that it can destroy their spirits for a while, but I also think it should be required reading for anyone who wants to visit the Balkans, talk about the Balkans, praise the UN for its role in keeping the world at peace (ha!) or advocate a return to American greatness - a greatness when we refused to recognize a genocide, when we deliberately ignored the murder and rape of innocent civilians, because it was inconvenient for us.

Georgia Roybal says

This was quite an intense book which examined not just the war in Bosnia, but how humans are led to do horrible things to one another by circumstances and evil people. When I am reading I usually sit and read while I eat. This book could not be read while eating. As a Jewish person, the description of the genocide made me ill. Here are some particularly powerful quotes from the book:

"I never thought that one day I would talk to a skeleton. That's what I did at Trnopolje. I walked through the gates and couldn't quite believe what I saw. There, right in front of me, were men who looked like survivors of Auschwitz. I remember thinking that they walked surprisingly well for people without muscle or flesh. I was surprised at the mere fact that they could still talk. Imagine, talking skeletons! As I spoke to one of them, I looked at his arm and realized that I could grab hold of it and snap it into two pieces like a brittle twig. I could do the same with his legs. I saw dozens of other walking skeletons of that sort. I could break all of their arms, all of their legs. Snap. Snap. Snap."

"As evil as this place was, it had an endearing slapstick side to it. At times, the Serbs seemed to be the gang that couldn't shoot straight; a colleague who wrote a book about Bosnia called them the 'Keystone Gestapo.'"

"It was too much. Old people are the saddest ones of all because they're helpless and without hope. It is

worse to talk with them than to look at a corpse. Dead bodies don't talk, they can't tell you of their woes, of their losses and the terror they have faced, and still face. But old people can talk. They can break into sobs as you ask them about the purse hanging from their neck. They can look at the corpses at the side of the road and whimper, 'Oh, God, I wish I were dead. I wish I were dead.' It's true, they envy the corpses. Their past has been obliterated, their future consists of a grim spell in a refugee camp, where they will die in poverty, among strangers, in a strange land. They know it. The misery has ended for the corpses. It goes on for the living."

"The difference between dreams and nightmares is the difference between night and day. The dreams come at night, when eyes are closed. The nightmares come during the day, when eyes are open, and what they see are the hollow faces of refugees, or the different shades of blood on display in Bosnia (the three main categories are fresh, dried, and frozen). When you start working in a war zone, you might look forward to the dreams. They are an escape, an entertainment."

"Tragedy and absurdity were moons circling the Bosnian war."

"...an unusual death notice appeared in the New York Times...

IN MEMORIAM

OUR COMMITMENTS,

PRINCIPLES, AND MORAL VALUES

DIED: BOSNIA, 1994

ON THE OCCASION OF THE 1,000TH DAY

OF THE SIEGE OF SARAJEVO"

"Bosnia can teach us about the wild, beast, and there about ourselves, and our destinies. What happened in Bosnia was not a Balkan freak show but a violent process of national breakdown at the hands of political manipulators.

Jarome says

I love it when journalists write books to cover a story from a more behind the scenes perspective. None of us will deny that our news-media coverage of events are filtered and sometimes just a joke. However, this not only taught me about the Bosnia-Serbian conflict, okay, 'war', but it gave me yet more insight into the man's-inhumanity-to-man scenario, revolving around the idea of, what people will do and say based, not on what they know, but on what someone else says.

I went through so many emotions reading this it's just unexplainable. It flowed and I couldn't get enough. I tried to read objectively and to grasp and understand both sides. But, involuntarily I found myself (as usual) feeling for the underdog. And if you do not know who that is in the Bosnian-Serbian issue, then read this book. At the end of the day, the title says it all and fits exactly. I can tell what the author is trying to convey, just from the title.

We can eventually see who the "real" cowards are, when, after ordering war and mayhem, run into the hills and hide from justice and/or die mysteriously in a comfortable room, conveniently call a cell.

Lindsay Wilson says

Reading about historical events from the perspective of a journalist is always appealing to me because of the fact that the information is (almost) always presented in such a readable way. *Love Thy Neighbor* is no exception. Maass does a great job condensing a ton of information about the Bosnian War into around 300 pages, and it never felt particularly slow. Granted, I find the Bosnian War fascinating, but I still feel like I can say with confidence that this account is fairly fast-paced.

The downside with reading about historical events from a journalist's perspective is that the graphic details can often be overwhelmingly depressing. This is almost a good thing, as it makes you connect more with the events on an emotional level, which can bring them closer to home. In this case, it was helpful to get such a human element to a war that predominantly affected civilians, but it was also very difficult to get through sometimes.

Despite generally finding this to be a solid book, I do think a bit more historical context would have been nice earlier on, just to situate the interviews Maass was conducting a bit more in what was going on. Maass does say immediately that his book is not a historical account, but rather attempts to discuss "the why" of the Bosnian War. He does a good job with that, but I think a bit more context could have been helpful.

Not an easy read by any means, but definitely worthwhile.
