



Against the Unspeakable: Complicity, the Holocaust, and Slavery in America (Cultural Frames, Framing Culture)

Naomi Mandel

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In the wake of World War II, the Nazi genocide of European Jews has come to stand for "the unspeakable," posing crucial challenges to the representation of suffering, the articulation of identity, and the practice of ethics in an increasingly multinational and multicultural world. In this book, Naomi Mandel argues against the "unspeakable" as any kind of inherent quality of such an event, insisting that the term is a rhetorical tactic strategically employed to further specific cultural and political agendas. While claiming to preserve the uniqueness, sanctity, and inviolability of human suffering, the author writes, the assumption that suffering is unspeakable works to silence and negate the suffering human body and finally enables us to forget our own vulnerability to suffering. Discussing a variety of texts such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, and William Styron's *Confessions of Nat Turner*, Mandel asks: What does the evocation of the limits of language enable writers, authors, and critics to do? With the goal of reconciling language and corporeality and integrating experience into the economy of language, community, identity, and ethics, she shows how, when, and why the term "unspeakable" is used. Mandel draws on critical theory, literary analysis, and film studies to offer a paradigm of reading that will enable the crucial work on comparative atrocities and the representation of suffering to move beyond the impasse of "unspeakability." Her book will appeal to scholars in the study of trauma and genocide, anti-Semitism and racism, as well as in literary, cultural, and comparative ethnic studies.

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