



## Imperfect Justice: Looted Assets, Slave Labor, and the Unfinished Business of World War II

By Stuart Eizenstat

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In the second half of the 1990s, Stuart Eizenstat was perhaps the most controversial U.S. foreign policy official in Europe. His mission had nothing to do with Russia, the Middle East, Yugoslavia, or any of the other hotspots of the day. Rather, Eizenstat's mission was to provide justice—albeit belated and imperfect justice—for the victims of World War II.

*Imperfect Justice* is Eizenstat's account of how the Holocaust became a political and diplomatic battleground fifty years after the war's end, as the issues of dormant bank accounts, slave labor, confiscated property, looted art, and unpaid insurance policies convulsed Europe and America. He recounts the often heated negotiations with the Swiss, the Germans, the French, the Austrians, and various Jewish organizations, showing how these moral issues, shunted aside for so long, exposed wounds that had never healed and conflicts that had never been properly resolved. Though we will all continue to reckon with the crimes of World War II for a long time to come, Eizenstat's account shows that it is still possible to take positive steps in the service of justice.

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## **Imperfect Justice: Looted Assets, Slave Labor, and the Unfinished Business of World War II** By Stuart Eizenstat Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1778743 in Books
- Brand: Brand: PublicAffairs
- Published on: 2004-05-26
- Released on: 2004-05-25
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.50" h x .98" w x 5.51" l, 1.10 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 417 pages

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Think of this book as one-stop shopping to learn about the Holocaust restitution negotiations of the late 1990s. Eizenstat was at the center of the tornado, as European companies and banks belatedly made compensation for their WWII-era behavior. In this comprehensive, well-written and unsparing reflection on those negotiations, the former Clinton administration official offers a behind-the-scenes look at how agreements were reached to provide Holocaust survivors with monies they or their families had lost during the war. He begins with the unusual pair of World Jewish Congress (whose president, Edgar Bronfman, was a friend of Clinton's) and Republican Sen. Alfonse D'Amato, who teamed up to make this an issue that Europe could not ignore. Whether writing about the most well-publicized of these negotiations—the German slave labor agreement or the "Swiss gold" affair, which eventually led to a \$1.25-billion settlement—or some of the lesser-known accords, Eizenstat tells his story with flair and with due regard for the role of politics (D'Amato, for instance, "milked the Swiss controversy for everything it was worth"). According to Eizenstat, some elements of the survivors' cases carried little legal weight, but European governments and firms wilted under public relations pressure, often purposefully intensified by lawyers on behalf of the survivors. While other books have been written about this subject, none has been as comprehensive or as balanced. 8 pages of b&w photos, not seen by PW. FYI: The New York Times recently reported on the furor created by the book jacket—a gold swastika superimposed on the Swiss flag—in Switzerland.

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From [Booklist](#)

Although he served in a variety of high-level economic and diplomatic positions during the Clinton administration, Eizenstat will likely go down in American history as the father of the State Department's Office of Holocaust Issues and architect of a series of agreements designed to compensate Jews and others for atrocities suffered in World War II. His story begins with an old woman's attempt to locate her father's wartime Swiss bank account and spirals quickly into an emotionally charged, multibillion-dollar international knot of lawyers, bankers, and politicians. Eventually, the pursuit of reparations extends to the governments of Germany, Austria, and France, as well as to corporations profiting from slave labor on both sides of the Atlantic. The settlements reached are indeed "imperfect justice," but Eizenstat's personal narrative illustrates just how amazing it is that such settlements were reached at all. His highly detailed blow-by-blow of the negotiating process is an illuminating look at the nitty-gritty of human-rights law, but more satisfying for general audiences will be the author's noble vision of conciliation, which rises above petty legal vindictiveness. *Brendan Driscoll*

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Review

"[An] important, moving book... Eizenstat is an impressive guide."

### Users Review

**From reader reviews:**

**Isaias McGee:**

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### **Jason Buckley:**

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