

Rwanda Genocide

A Short History of the Rwanda Genocide

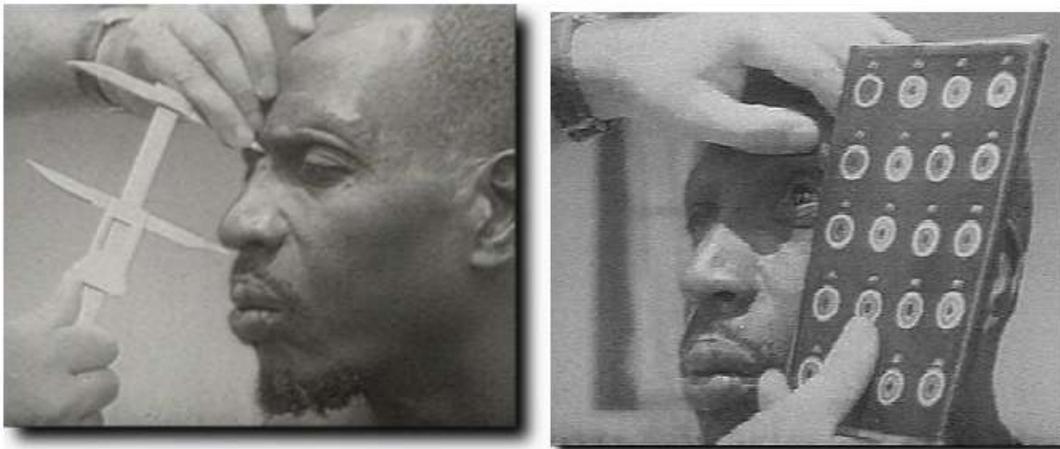
By Jennifer Rosenberg

Beginning on April 6, 1994, Hutus began slaughtering the Tutsis in the African country of Rwanda. As the brutal killings continued, the world stood idly by and just watched the slaughter. Lasting 100 days, the Rwanda genocide left approximately 800,000 Tutsis and Hutu sympathizers dead.

Who Are the Hutu and Tutsi?

The Hutu and Tutsi are two peoples who share a common past. When Rwanda was first settled, the people who lived there raised cattle. Soon, the people who owned the most cattle were called "Tutsi" and everyone else was called "Hutu." At this time, a person could easily change categories through marriage or cattle acquisition.

It wasn't until Europeans came to colonize the area that the terms "Tutsi" and "Hutu" took on a racial role. The Germans were the first to colonize Rwanda in 1894. They looked at the Rwandan people and thought the Tutsi had more European characteristics, such as lighter skin and a taller build. Thus they put Tutsis in roles of responsibility.



The size of the nose and the color of the eyes were factors that determined whether a person was classified as Hutu, Tutsi or Twa.

When the Germans lost their colonies following World War I, the Belgians took control over Rwanda. In 1933, the Belgians solidified the categories of "Tutsi" and "Hutu" by mandating that every person was to have an identity card that labeled them either Tutsi, Hutu, or Twa. (Twa are a very small group of hunter-gatherers who also live in Rwanda.)

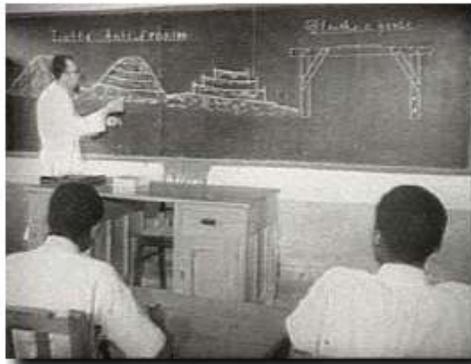
Although the Tutsi constituted only about ten percent of Rwanda's population and the Hutu nearly 90 percent, the Belgians gave the Tutsi all the leadership positions. This upset the Hutu.

When Rwanda struggled for independence from Belgium, the Belgians switched the status of the two groups. Facing a revolution instigated by the Hutu, the Belgians let the Hutus, who constituted the majority of Rwanda's population, be in charge of the new government. This upset the Tutsi.



Even though prior to colonization, the people of the region that became Rwanda lived together, the Belgian colonization put one group above the others.

The animosity between the two groups continued for decades.



Only Tutsis could attend school under the Belgian colonization.

The Event That Sparked the Genocide

At 8:30 p.m. on April 6, 1994, President Juvénal Habyarimana of Rwanda was returning from a summit in Tanzania when a surface-to-air missile shot his plane out of the sky over Rwanda's capital city of Kigali. All on board were killed in the crash.

Since 1973, President Habyarimana, a Hutu, had run a totalitarian regime in Rwanda, which had excluded all Tutsis from participating. That changed on August 3, 1993 when Habyarimana signed the Arusha Accords, which weakened the Hutu hold on Rwanda and allowed Tutsis to participate in the government. This greatly upset Hutu extremists.

Although it has never been determined who was truly responsible for the assassination, Hutu extremists profited the most from Habyarimana's death. Within 24 hours after the crash, Hutu extremists had taken over the government, blamed the Tutsis for the assassination, and begun the slaughter.

100 Days of Slaughter

The killings began in Rwanda's capital city of Kigali. The *Interahamwe* ("those who strike as one"), an anti-Tutsi youth organization established by Hutu extremists, set up road blocks. They checked identification cards and killed all who were Tutsi. Most of the killing was done with machetes, clubs, or knives. Over the next few days and weeks, road blocks were set up around Rwanda.

On April 7, Hutu extremists began purging the government of their political opponents, which meant both Tutsis and Hutu moderates were killed. This included the prime minister. When ten Belgian U.N.

peacekeepers tried to protect the prime minister, they too were killed. This caused Belgium to start withdrawing its troops from Rwanda.

Over the next several days and weeks, the violence spread. Since the government had the names and addresses of nearly all Tutsis living in Rwanda (remember, each Rwandan had an identity card that labeled them Tutsi, Hutu, or Twa) the killers could go door to door, slaughtering the Tutsis.

Men, women, and children were murdered. Since bullets were expensive, most Tutsis were killed by hand weapons, often machetes or clubs. Many were often tortured before being killed. Some of the victims were given the option of paying for a bullet so that they'd have a quicker death.

Media Played a Huge Role in the Genocide

For years, the *Kangura* newspaper, controlled by Hutu extremists, had been spouting hate. As early as December 1990, the paper published "The Ten Commandments for the Hutu." The commandments declared that any Hutu who married a Tutsi was a traitor. Also, any Hutu who did business with a Tutsi was a traitor. The commandments also insisted that all strategic positions and the entire military must be Hutu. In order to isolate the Tutsis even further, the commandments also told the Hutu to stand by other Hutu and to stop pitying the Tutsi.



When RTLM (Radio Télévision des Mille Collines) began broadcasting on July 8, 1993, it also spread hate. However, this time it was packaged to appeal to the masses by offering popular music and broadcasts conducted in very informal, conversational tones.

Once the killings started, RTLM went beyond just espousing hate; they took an active role in the slaughter. The RTLM called for the Tutsi to "cut down the tall trees," a code phrase which meant for the Hutu to start killing the Tutsi. During broadcasts, RTLM often used the term *inyenzi* ("cockroach") when referring to Tutsis and then told Hutu to "crush the cockroaches."

Many RTLM broadcasts announced names of specific individuals who should be killed; RTLM even included information about where to find them, such as home and work addresses or known hangouts. Once these individuals had been killed, RTLM then announced their murders over the radio.

The RTLM was used to incite the average Hutu to kill. However, if a Hutu refused to participate in the slaughter, then members of the *Interahamwe* would give them a choice -- either kill or be killed.