

Background and Resources

Rwandan Genocide, 1994

Cumulative Civilian Death Toll: 800,000

Name(s): _____

Rwanda, a small country in Central Africa, is comprised of two main ethnic groups, the Hutu and the Tutsi. Although the Hutus make up approximately 90 percent of the population, the Tutsis were placed in a more privileged position by the colonial Belgian rulers and dominated the Hutu peasants for decades. Following independence from Belgium in 1962, the Hutu majority seized power and exacted reprisals on the Tutsis through systematic discrimination and violence. As a result, over 200,000 Tutsis fled to neighboring countries and formed a rebel guerrilla army, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). In 1990 the RPF invaded Rwanda, which resulted in a peace accord that established a power sharing arrangement between the Hutus and Tutsis, an agreement that left Hutu extremist factions bitter. In 1994 Hutu President Habyarimana was assassinated when his plane was shot down near Kigali airport. Rwanda erupted immediately into violence as Hutu extremists began executing Tutsi leaders and moderate Hutu politicians. The killings spread to the countryside, where Hutu forces carried out the mass extermination of Tutsi civilians, mostly with machetes and clubs. The Rwandan state radio, controlled by Hutu extremists, further encouraged the killings by broadcasting non-stop hate propaganda and identifying the locations of Tutsis in hiding. Some of the worst massacres took place in churches and hospitals, where Tutsi civilians sought safe haven. Hutu civilians were forced to kill their Tutsi neighbors and Tutsis were forced to kill their own family members. After just over a month, the Red Cross estimated that half a million Tutsis had already been slaughtered, with the rate of killing reaching 10,000 per day. Bodies were now commonly seen floating down the Kigara River into Lake Victoria. Following the murder of ten members of a Belgian peacekeeping force, Western countries evacuated its personnel, leaving the Rwandans virtually alone to deal with the murderous Hutu militia. The killings ended only when armed Tutsi rebels, invading from neighboring countries, defeated the Hutus and halted the genocide in July 1994. By then, over one-tenth of the population — an estimated 800,000 people — had been killed. In the aftermath of the genocide, hundreds of thousands of Hutu refugees fled into eastern Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo). The violence and its memory continue to affect the region.

Web Resources

- Case Study: Genocide in Rwanda, 1994 (Gendercide Watch)
http://www.gendercide.org/case_rwanda.html
- Genocide in Rwanda (United Human Rights Council)
http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/Genocide/genocide_in_rwanda.htm
- Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda (Human Rights Watch)
<http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/rwanda/>
- Rwanda 1994 (Peace Pledge Union)
http://www.ppu.org.uk/genocide/g_rwanda.html
- Rwanda 1994, 800,000 Deaths (The History Place)
<http://www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/genocide/rwanda.htm>
- Rwanda: And the World Stood By (Historywiz.com)
<http://www.historywiz.com/rwanda.htm>
- The Triumph of Evil in Rwanda (PBS Online)
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/>

Books

Crisis in Rwanda, Vol. 3 by Charles Freeman

Relates events in Rwanda after the murder of President Habyarimana, including the genocide of the Tutsi, the ill-treatment of refugees, and the eventual reconciliation. 1998, 64 pages, grades 6-10, Raintree Publishers

Hutu and Tutsi by Vincent Emenike Chikwende and Aimable Twagilimana

A Rwandan linguist explains the people of Rwanda and Burundi, and Hutu/Tutsi politics and violence since 1959. 1997, 64 pages, grades 5-9, Rosen Publishing Group

Rwanda: A Country Torn Apart by Kari J. Bodnarchuk

Describes the history of Rwanda's ethnic conflict between the Hutu and Tutsi tribes, the events that led to the Rwandan civil war, its continuing effect on the people of that country, and efforts to bring peace and reconciliation to the war-ravaged region. 1999, 96 pages, young adult, Lerner Publishing Group

Speak Rwanda by Julian R. Pierce

The story of ten people-Hutu and Tutsi, civilians and soldiers, mothers, nurses, politicians, herdsman, and orphaned children-as they attempt to survive one of the most violent and deeply disturbing massacres since the Second World War. 2000, 304 pages, grades 10 & up, Picador

Teenage Refugees from Rwanda Speak Out by Aimable Twagilimana

Teenagers fleeing from Ethiopia and Rwanda relate how they came to be refugees in the United States and Canada. Each title begins with a brief historical survey, followed by profiles of eight young people, who describe the terrible conditions that forced them to leave their homeland; the dangers faced during the actual escapes; and the current challenges they meet in overcoming the language barrier and adjusting to life in an alien culture. 1997, 64 pages, grades 5& up, Rosen