THE 1994 RWANDAN GENOCIDE AGAINST TUTSI

ORIGINS, GENOCIDE, AND AFTERMATH
Rwanda was made up of three different groups of people, Tutsis, Hutus, and Twa. The Hutu were the majority of the population with a large minority of Tutsis. In 1994, Rwanda had a population of about 8 million people, where 14% were Tutsi, 85% were Hutu, and 1% were Twa.

Traditionally, the Hutus were peasant farmers and the Tutsi held a more elite status as cattle owners.
HUTUS VS. TUTSI

- After World War I, Belgium took authority of Rwanda from Germany. Belgians took hold of an idea introduced by Roman Catholic missionaries that the Hutus were native to Rwanda, and the Tutsis were a superior and civilized people from the north.

- This idea encouraged a division in society between the Hutus and Tutsis. The Belgian administration issued identity cards classifying the population into distinct ethnic groups.

- Stereotypes of Hutus and Tutsis emerged. Hutus were supposedly short and stocky, while Tutsis were tall and thin. In reality, it was often impossible to tell Hutus and Tutsis apart.
In the late 1950s and early 1960s, a growing Hutu nationalist movement called for freedom of Tutsi rule and an independent Rwanda.

A series of events led to a massive attack on Tutsis causing thousands of Tutsi refugees to flee Rwanda and thousands of murders. The Belgian authorities replaced the Tutsi leaders with Hutu.

About 1 million Tutsis who fled Rwanda lived in refugee camps in Uganda, and many of them built up an army called the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).

The Rwandan government under President Juvenai Habyarimana encouraged violence against the Tutsi people and formed new military training for young men who would later become the Interahamwe (“those who stand together”).

Division between the Hutus and Tutsis widened as the Radio Mille Collines and the newspaper Kangura began broadcasting anti-Tutsi propaganda.
With pressure from Western governments beginning in 1992, the Rwandan government began peace talks. The Arusha Peace Agreement was signed on August 4, 1993 that mandated power sharing between the Hutus and Tutsis.

The government was already stockpiling assault rifles, guns, grenades, machetes, and axes. The militia members were being trained on how to use explosives and kill people quickly. The names and addresses of Tutsi people were prepared. The government was not going to follow the mandates of the peace agreement.

A Hutu member of the Interahamwe leaked information about the planned genocide against the Tutsi people to General Dallaire (left), who was tasked at the time with carrying out the peacekeeping agreement. General Dallaire went to the UN to tell them about the informant’s message of impending genocide, but the UN ordered Dallaire to stop. By the time the genocide began, there was little the small peacekeeping force was able to do to protect the Tutsis.
THE SPARK

- The spark that kindled the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi occurred on April 6, 1994 when Rwandan president Habyarimana and Burundi president Ntaryamira were killed. It is unclear exactly who manned the missiles that shot down the plane, but only a few hours after the plane crash, the presidential guard and militia murdered Hutu officials and opposition leaders (those likely to oppose the genocide) and began systematically exterminating the Tutsi people through the countryside. The Hutu also started spreading rumors that the Tutsi people were the ones who organized the plane crash that killed Habyarimana and Ntaryamira.

- Once the killing began, the troops and Interahamwe encouraged and forced Hutus to join with them, even making them kill members of their own families at times. Although some Hutus did resist and shelter their Tutsi family and friends, hundreds of thousands more joined in the mass murder of the Tutsi people.
People from all walks of society took part in the killing: teachers, priests, doctors, and journalists. The murders happened everywhere: in churches, schools, hospitals, people’s homes, and in the streets.

Reports of this horrific and widespread mass killing were sent out by Rwandan organizations including the RPF and Red Cross seeking help, but the UN responded by pulling out troops from Rwanda, leaving only about 400 behind. The UN later reversed this decision as the genocide progressed, but reinforcements never reached General Dallaire until the genocide ended.
“ARE WE ALL HUMANS?”

- Why did the world look the other way?
  - Eighteen months prior, the US had lost 18 troops in Somalia in the Battle of Mogadishu. The U.S. did not want to risk the lives of anymore Americans for foreign conflicts. They were unwilling to deploy troops on the ground in Rwanda to stop the genocide.
  - Also, in May of 1994, 2,500 journalists were in South Africa to mark the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as president. This overshadowed the violent acts in Rwanda.
  - Most disturbingly, the international community stood by watching the genocide on the nightly news because they did not want to call it "genocide." If they mentioned the "G" word, they would be compelled to take action and stop the genocide. There was no international political will that wanted to save the Tutsi in Rwanda because they had nothing to gain from preventing the genocide in Rwanda. Rwanda was a poor, mostly agricultural country that did not offer oil or other resources valued by the West. In response to this, General Dallaire was quoted as saying, “All that is here are humans. Are we all humans, or are some more human than others?”
The RPF finally managed to defeat the Hutu army in July 1994, and the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi came to an end.

- 800,000 to 1 million people had been murdered.
- A Tutsi-led government have been in power in Rwanda since.
REFLECTION ACTIVITY: WORDS CAN KILL

Hate speech is a common feature of many genocides, and in the 1994 Rwandan genocide against the Tutsis as well. During the genocide, the talk radio station Radio Milles Collines, spread hate speech against the Tutsis by calling them cockroaches and played music that encouraged Hutus to kill Tutsis.

- Today in our world, hate speech is especially prevalent online. Watch this video about hate speech today from the voices of current teenagers.
- After watching the video, think about ways that we can counter hate speech. Using your ideas, create a poster (using art supplies in your classroom/house or digitally) that condemns hate speech and offers strategies and techniques for countering hate speech when people witness it in their daily lives. Share with your classmates per your teacher’s instruction.
EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY: IMMACULEE MUKANTAGANIRA

Below is an account by Immaculee Mukantaganira, who was a survivor of the 1994 Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi. She lost her husband and two children, Clarisse (age 5) and Raissa (age 3) to the genocide.

“When I was a child, there was no peace in my region and in Rwanda. Sometimes we had to spend night in the forests, because we could not be in our houses, with the fear of being killed, because we’re Tutsi. My parents’ house was burned twice during my childhood.

It was just a challenge to grow up in the environment, just because, you know, Tutsi were denied education. Tutsi could not attend high school. So some parents will try to do everything possible for their children to go in private school. And private school, weren’t many. There were very few in the country. And so we had many Tutsi were fleeing to neighboring countries, so that they can live their life, they can live without a fear of being killed.

So for me, when I got married, and I had my children, and when in 1993 we realized that the genocide was being planned, and there was reason (to believe) Tutsi were going to be exterminated.

(The) government has been preparing, planning for the genocide. In the city, you could hear like shots everywhere. Military on the road are saying, “Every Tutsi will die, have to die.”

The strategy of killing people was to tell them: “Let’s go to one area, so that you can protect you better.” I was reading this morning about the Holocaust and realized that that was the same thing. They will promise them to go to this place and protect them, but then that was their way of making sure that they have everyone so that they can kill them.

(We) have to wait for our destiny, which was death.
And they divide us. They started measuring faces of Tutsi, and they started saying: “You know, Tutsi are tall, they have long nose, and Hutu are this.” So they started classification. They started classifying us. And so they gave us identity card; we have an identity, Tutsi, and Hutus had an identity, Hutu. When those militia came to the house, they started asking for identity. So we would show our identity, they will take identity. We were all Tutsi in the house. So they say: OK, now let’s go. We went out of the house, and they took us to this forest that was close to the house, and when we got in the forest, they started killing one by one. When they got to me, it was like militia will come, and there was a military beside him, and he started approaching me and pushing me. And I told him, “Please don’t kill me. If you don’t kill me, I give you money.” And I have money in my dress, in our traditional dress, you can put money inside. So I pull out the money, and I gave to him. And I say, “If you don’t kill me, there is more money inside the house.”

So he pushed me like far from the line. And he continued his killing. But when he pushed me, for some reason, I wasn’t even sure what I was doing, really, I was just saying: If you don’t kill me, and I was just waiting for my death. But for some reason I moved backward in the forest. And I kept moving backward. They continued with the killing, and when I get farther from where they were, I sat under a tree. My son was on my back.

We were rescued. But everything I did during that time, I didn’t know my two girls had died. I didn’t know my husband was killed. Because I didn’t see them killing him.
I was hoping to see my two daughters, but they were gone. And I started telling myself, so now why, why did I survive? Everything I did, everything I tried, I was hoping if my husband died, at least my children will have a mother. If my husband survived, I will see him. But they were gone. That was the worst of my life. Surviving and not seeing them.

So now I know it has been 24 years after we lost them. For so many years I didn’t — I kind of like postponed finding the bodies of my girls. It was just so hard for me. And last year I decided to go and do it.

I wanted to find a skeleton, at least. But what I found was just unbelievable. So I found the two girls, they were 5 and 3 when the genocide took them. So I was about to find their bodies, because I don’t want to say I only found bones. It’s their body; they were together. So I call them “body,” just to restore their dignity. When I went to find the bodies of my girls, when they found them, that was the only thing that can tell me that was them. That’s why I’m sticking to them. So I recognized those, it’s just unbelievable. Everything is gone but their clothes.

So I took them, and I decided to keep them. Because that’s the only thing from (them) that I have. Today they (would) have grown to conquer the world and they would be married, and they would be surrounding me. They were just bright kids. Very bright. But God only knows.”
Immaculee was asked how the genocide has changed her life. She responded: “The experience of the genocide has changed my life forever. First of all, you don’t have your surrounding. So the loneliness and the care that you don’t have from those people — I had a family, very strong and very caring family. And we’re Christian people, and we had so many friends, and all of that was taken away in 100 days. And so you find yourself in this world, and you’re trying to survive, but you don’t have the family that surrounded you — what is happening? The women who were raped, I mean, it’s difficult. But it makes you more compassionate. I’ve become more compassionate. If I see someone falling on the street, I don’t care if they say: Be careful, because you don’t know. I will jump and grab him. That’s how I have become.”
Immaculee’s story and what happened to her family is difficult to hear and comprehend. Yet in spite of all that she has suffered, she still feels empathy and compassion towards other people.

In a journal response, consider what you read and learned about through Immaculee’s story. Think about the following considerations while you are writing:

1. What kind of reactions or responses do you have to Immaculee’s story?
2. What is something you can learn from hearing her story?
3. What is something you would want to teach others about the 1994 Rwandan genocide against the Tutsis after learning about what happened to Immaculee and her family?
SOURCES