

Race, Nation, and Genocide: Terror in the 20th Century



Presented by the National Humanities Center and
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From the Forum

- What is the definition of genocide? Is the current definition too broad, too narrow?
- Was genocide practiced in the ancient world?
- Has the practice of genocide increased in the last century?
- What causes genocides?
- What roles do scapegoating and competition for resources play in genocides?
- Are slavery and colonialism forms of genocide?
- How can we stop genocide as it is happening?
- How can we prevent genocide?
- How do we counter denial claims by the perpetrator and their supporters?
- In what ways is race a social construct?
- How can we deal with student skepticism in the face of solid evidence?
- How can we promote empathy in our students?
- How can we link the Holocaust to more recent genocides?

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Published in various journals

The Time of Politics (Zamanin Siyasa): Islam and the Politics of Legitimacy in Northern Nigeria, 1950-1966,
(2001)

Co-author

Africa in World History: From Prehistory to the Present

Trading Tastes: Culture and Commodity to 1750

Core Goals of this Webinar

- Gain an understanding of the concept of Genocide and its place in History
- Highlight the power of ideas of Race and Nation in influencing modern genocides
- Understand the moral complexity of many 20th Century genocides.
- Provide you with some of the insights and tools necessary to better present the subject of genocide to your students. Don't try to remember everything!

Overall Structure of Discussion

- Background: The Concept of Genocide
- Background: Genocide in World History
- Why the “Century of Genocide”?
- Argument: Race and Nation in the Making of 20th Century Genocides
- Understanding Race
- Understanding Nation
- Case Studies of Genocide in the 20th Century
 - German South-West Africa (1904-1907)
 - Armenian Genocide in Ottoman Empire/Turkey (1915-1923)
 - Cambodian “Killing Fields” (1975-1979)
 - Conflict and Genocide in Burundi and Rwanda (1958-1993)
- Conclusion: Themes of Genocide in the 20th Century

The Concept of Genocide

- Term “Genocide” developed by Raphael Lemkin in 1944.
 - Polish Jewish lawyer who focused on “Crimes of Barbarity,” particularly the Armenian and Assyrian Genocides.
 - Escaped to US in 1941, and in 1944 wrote *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. It was here that he first coined the term “Genocide.”
 - “By ‘genocide’ we mean the destruction of an ethnic group. ... genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings.... It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups...”
- Lemkin’s work was further reinforced by the concept of “Crimes Against Humanity” as developed during the Nuremberg trials.
- 1946 UN Resolution identifying Genocide as a crime under international law.
 - “... a denial of the right of existence of entire human groups, as homicide is the denial of the right to live of individual human beings.”
- 1948 UN Genocide Convention
 - “In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such:
 - Killing members of the group
 - Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
 - Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.
 - Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
 - Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Genocide in World History

- While developed as a concept in the mid-20th Century and associated with the Holocaust, genocide is not necessarily a modern event.
 - Joshua and the Amorites. (1400-1250 BCE)
 - Spartan conquests & enslavements (8th-7th Century BCE)
 - Destruction of Carthage (146 BCE)
 - Wars of the Reformation (17th Century)
 - European Conquest and Settlement of the Americas (16th-19th Centuries)
 - Japanese invasion of Korea (16th Century)
 - English Conquest of Ireland (16th Century)
 - Atlantic Slave Trade (17th-19th Centuries)
 - British settlement of Australia (19th Century)

A Fundamental Question: Why was the 20th Century So Nasty?

- Just as the 20th Century saw a dramatic escalation of warfare, it also saw a surge in the targeting of civilians.
 - The Congo Free State and “Red Rubber,” 1880’s to 1907.
 - **Herero and Nama Genocide in SW Africa, 1904-1907.**
 - **The Armenian Genocide, 1915-1923.**
 - The Japanese in Manchuria and China, 1931-1945.
 - Manufactured Famine in Soviet Ukraine, 1932-1933.
 - The Holocaust, 1939-1945.
 - Strategic Bombing Campaigns Targeting Civilians. 1939-1945.
 - Famine in Mao’s China, 1959-1961.
 - Indonesian anti-Communism, 1965-1966.
 - Pakistan in Bangladesh, 1971.
 - Dirty Wars in Argentina and Guatemala, 1970s-1980s.
 - **Cambodian Killing Fields, 1975-1979.**
 - **Ethnic Conflict and Genocide in Burundi & Rwanda, 1958-1994.**
 - Ethnic Cleansing in Bosnia, 1992-1995.
 - Anfal Campaign in Iraqi Kurdistan, 1988.
 - Dar Fur in the Sudan, 2003-2009.

Race and Nation in the Making of 20th Century Genocides

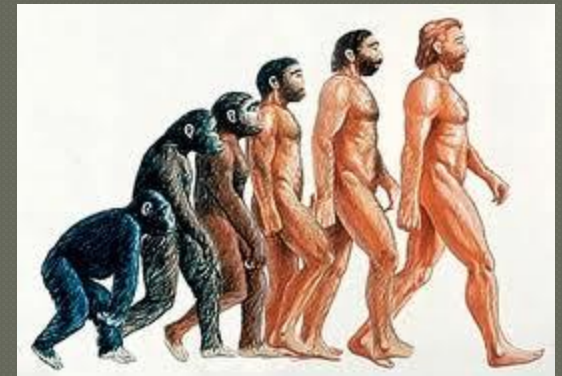
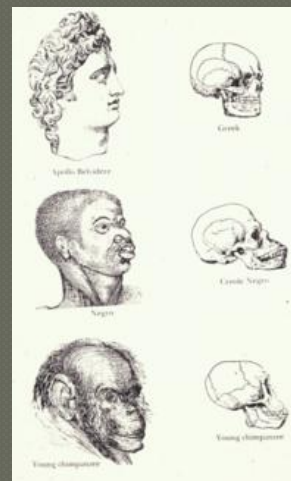
● A Chicken and Egg Problem?

- The ideas of Race and Nation develop at much the same time, and deeply influence one another.
 - Both grew out of a tumultuous era which included the Scientific Revolution, the Reformation, the Closing of the Gaps of Pangea, the Enlightenment, and the Atlantic Slave Trade.
 - Europeans, scholars and lay alike, were struggling to come to an understanding with a world far more diverse than expected.
 - They were also grappling with rapidly changing social, economic, and political frameworks.
 - Came to dominate perceptions in the 18th and 19th Centuries.

- Today, we are so immersed in ideas of Race and Nation that we hardly even question their existence. The fact is, however, that they are both rather modern ideas.

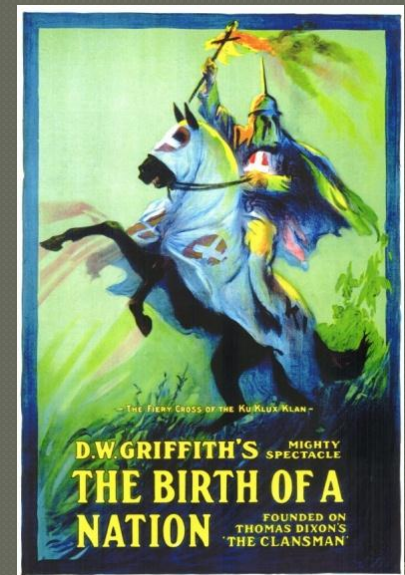
The Idea of Race

- The idea of race is modern, not ancient
- Race is the idea that social and cultural differences are *immutable and inherited*, and that they are tied to the “Race” of the individual and his or her group. Thus, once you know someone’s “Race” you know all sorts of stuff about them.
 - Early scientific desires to “categorize” pretty much everything
 - Need to justify growing notions of European “superiority” while also justifying conquest and enslavement of non-Europeans
 - Theological attempts to explain race
 - Biblical /Abrahamic explanations
 - Degeneration
 - Polygenesis
 - Evolution and the Rise of Scientific Racism.
 - Races as ancient and thus, “very different”
 - Certain races as “more evolved”
 - Craniometrics and intelligence
 - Political Expressions
 - Social Darwinism (Herbert Spencer)
 - Eugenics
 - Utopian Aspirations
 - The Notion of the Nation



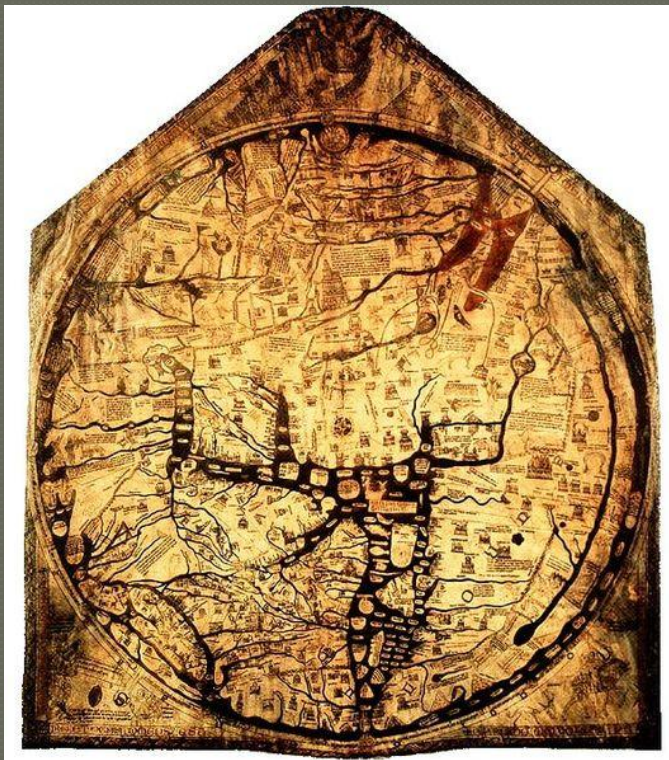
The Notion of the Nation

- Growing idea that “the Nation” was the vehicle by which a race, through political, social & economic unity, could achieve it’s greatness.
 - Thus, in order to be successful, a nation needed to be racially, culturally, and religiously homogeneous.
 - John Jay, in *The Federalist Papers*, wrote
 - “Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people – a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs.”
 - The exclusion of non-whites, non-protestants, and non-Anglos from full sovereignty in early US History is a case in point.
- By the 20th Century, Race and Nation are nearly inseparable.
 - Film “Birth of a Nation” is an excellent
 - example of the elision of Race and Nation.
- Behring Breivik massacre in Norway



Mapping Ideas of Race and Nation: to the 17th Century

- Let me use a few maps to chart the development of these ideas.



Hereford Mappa Mundi Circa 1300 CE

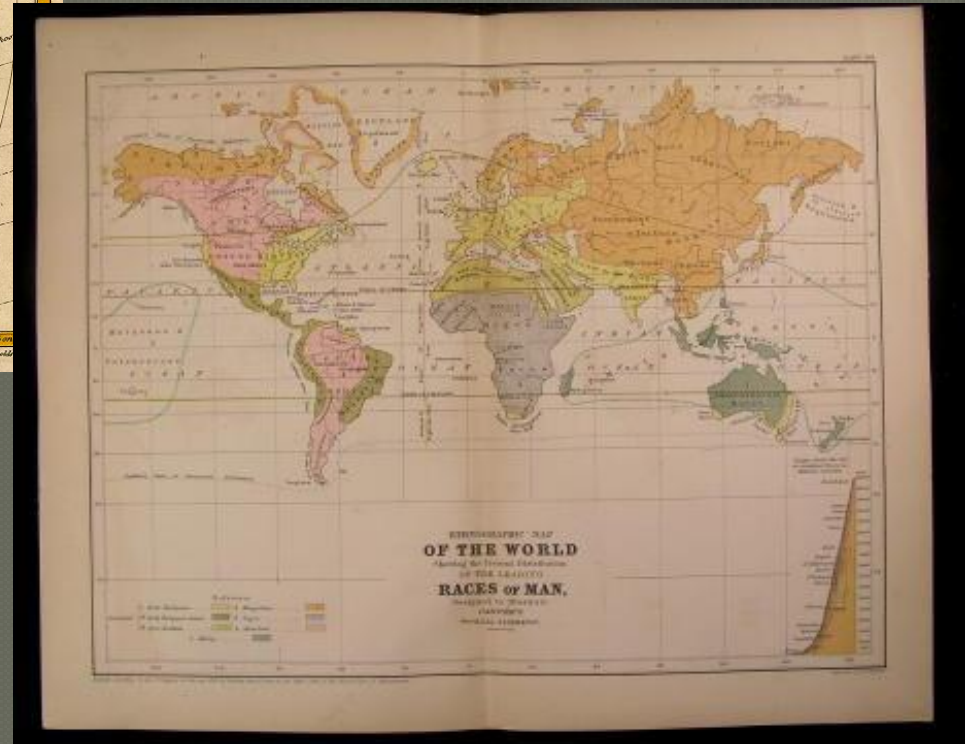


Frederik de Wit, 1688

Mapping Ideas of Race and Nation: 18th and 19th Centuries

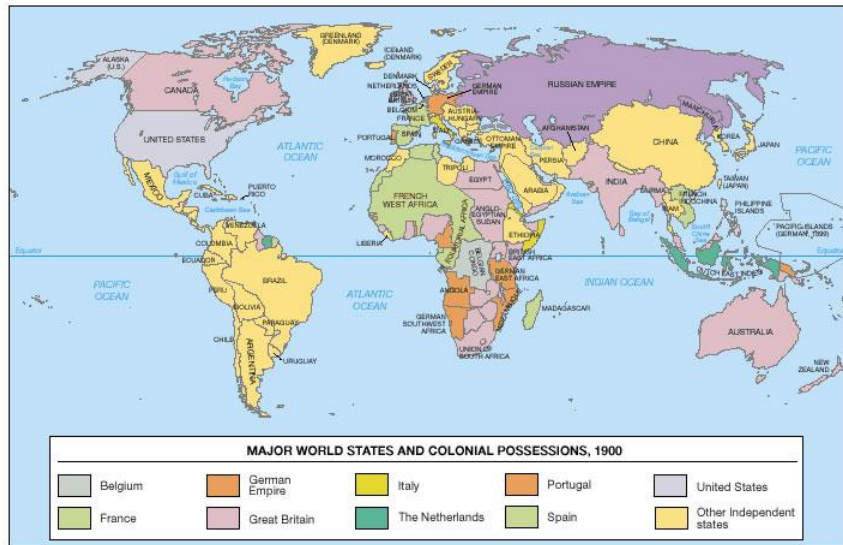



Reynolds,
1771

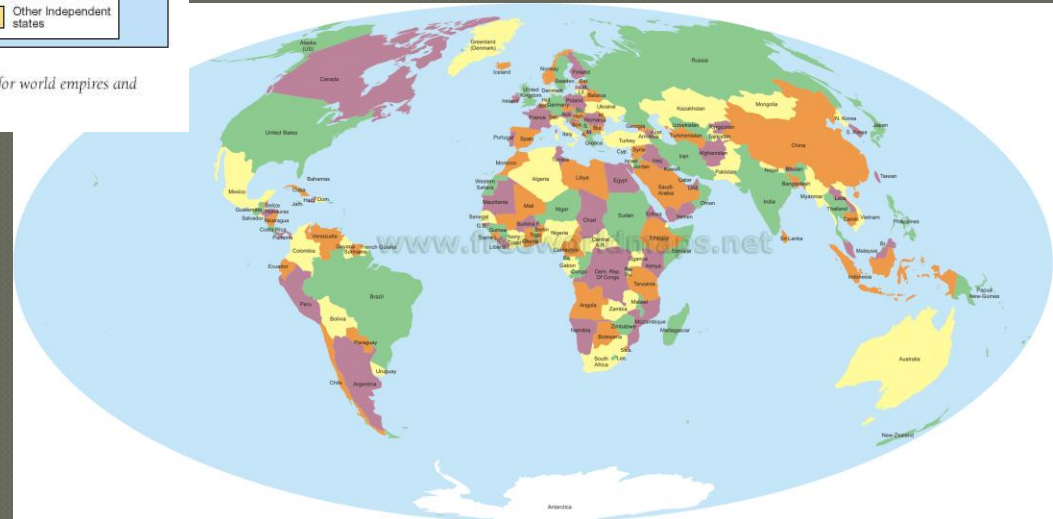


Boynton, 1856

Mapping ideas of Race and Nation: 20th Century



 World Colonial Holdings, ca. 1914. The European powers, great and small, competed with each other for world empires and world influence by 1900.



And now... on to Case Studies

- Goal of these Case Studies is to provide a chronological examination of the different ways ideas of Race and Nation play out in the Genocides of the 20th Century.
 - 1904-1906: Herero and Nama Genocides in German SW Africa
 - 1915-1923: Armenian Genocide
 - 1975-1979: Cambodian Genocide
 - 1958-1994: Conflicts and Genocide in Burundi and Rwanda

Case Study 1: The Herero and Nama Genocides

- Background: The region of SW Africa (now Namibia) was ceded to Germany at the Conference of Berlin (1884-1885)
 - British and German missionaries had been active in the region for roughly 100 years.
 - Expanded settlement by Germans and others after 1885 led to growing tensions with the local populations, particularly the Herero and Nama pastoralists.
 - A brief conflict occurred in 1896.



Colonialism and The Herero and Nama Genocide

- Outbreak of violence: In 1904, the Herero responded to increased German settlement and the opening of a railroad by launching attacks on a number of European farms and outposts, killing some 150 Europeans, including women and children. The Herero, joined by the Nama, substantially outnumbered the roughly 750 German troops in the colony, and laid siege to Okahandja and Windhoek.
- 14,000 troops were dispatched from Germany under the leadership of General von Trotha, arriving later in 1904.
- In August of 1904, the two forces met at the battle of Waterberg, resulting in a crushing German victory.
- Even prior to the battle, von Trotha had advocated a war of extermination against the Herero.
 - *"I believe that **the nation** as such should be annihilated, or, if this was not possible by tactical measures, have to be expelled from the country... This will be possible if the water-holes from Grootfontein to Gobabis are occupied. The constant movement of our troops will enable us to find the small groups of nation who have moved backwards and destroy them gradually."*

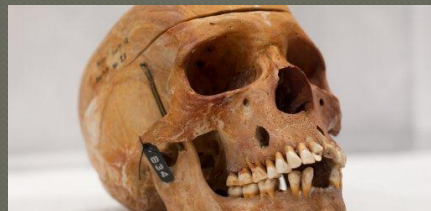
Shortly afterwards, von Trotha issued his infamous "extermination order."

I, the great general of the German soldiers, send this letter to the Hereros. The Hereros are German subjects no longer. They have killed, stolen, cut off the ears and other parts of the body of wounded soldiers, and now are too cowardly to want to fight any longer. The Herero nation must now leave the country. If it refuses, I shall compel it to do so with the 'long tube' (cannon). Any Herero found inside the German frontier, with or without a gun or cattle, will be executed. I shall spare neither women nor children. I shall give the order to drive them away and fire on them. Such are my words to the Herero people."



The End of the Herero and Nama Genocide

- Herero and Nama survivors retreated into the desert, where they were pursued and suffered from dehydration and starvation.
- By the end of 1904, the Herero and Nama will to fight was broken. Many emerged from the desert and surrendered. Most of the weak were killed immediately, while thousands of others were interred in concentration camps and hired out as forced labor to German companies and farmers. Tens of thousands died of starvation, disease, and exposure in the camps.
- Thousands were subjected to medical experiments and dissection, with many “medical specimens” being transported to German Universities. These “specimens” became the subject of much early 20th Century German research on Race and “Aryan Superiority.”
- It is believed that roughly 80% of the Herero and Nama died in the conflict and in the camps, leaving only some 20,000 alive.
- After the conflict, a new wave of settlement occurred, hastened by the availability of land and the discovery of vast diamond deposits in the region.
- In recent years, negotiations between the German and Namibian governments have resulted in an official German apology, reparations, and the repatriation of human remains from German scientific collections for reburial in Namibia.



Case Study 2: The Armenian Genocide

- Background: The decline of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of Turkish Nationalism.
 - Once the most powerful empire in the Mediterranean, the Ottomans had suffered repeated defeats by European powers and by rebellious ethnic groups during the 18th and 19th Centuries.
 - Ottoman “Modernizers,” particularly the “Young Turks,” called for a remodeling of the Ottoman State more along European lines.
 - Constitutional Monarchy
 - Industrialization
 - Turkish Identity.
 - Language
 - Dress
 - Religion
 - Outbreaks of state-sponsored violence against non-Turkish groups, particularly Armenians, in 1894-1896.

WWI and the Armenian Genocide

- WWI as a War of Nationalism
- Conflict with Russia as catalyst for anti-Armenian sentiments.
 - Fear of Armenian collusion with Russians
 - Fear of Armenian nationalism
 - Context of other ethnic/national revolts.
- Process of arrest and deportation
 - Targeting of Armenian troops, leaders, merchants, & educated
 - Massacres in remote locations
 - Death by exposure, dehydration, and starvation
 - Forced assimilation of women and children
 - Lure of land and property for other populations
- Estimated death of 1.5 million
- “Success” of the creation of Turkish Nation – genocide continued under Mustafa Kemal’s “Modern” Turkey.
- Lack of contemporary outcry and limited historical condemnation.
- Ongoing Turkish denial of Genocide.

Case Study 3:

Cambodian “Auto-Genocide”

- The complexity of an ideological genocide.
 - Context of Cold War in SE Asia
 - Efforts at neutrality by Sihanouk govt.
 - Right-wing coup by Lon Nol in 1970 and support for US strikes in eastern Cambodia (which resulted in an estimated 150,000 Cambodians killed)
 - Growth of Pol Pot’s Chinese-inspired Khmer Rouge
 - Pol Pot (“Brother Number One”) who had been raised in a prosperous family and attended school in France. Joined communist party and was aided by North Vietnamese
 - Seizure of Phnom Penh and power in 1975.
 - Changing of country’s name to Kampuchia

Utopia and Auto-Genocide in Cambodia

- Khmer Rouge plan to create an Agrarian Utopia.
 - Targeting of all populations “tainted” by modernization or westernization.
 - Depopulation of urban regions.
 - Factories, Schools, Hospitals, Universities, etc were shut down.
 - Bicycles and money banned.
 - Families separated and work camps organized by gender and age.
 - All religion banned, including Buddhism
 - Targeting of non-Cambodian minorities (Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, and Cham/Cambodian Muslims)
 - Estimated that 1.5 to 2 Million were killed or died of disease, exhaustion, or starvation (20% of total population)
 - Overthrown by Vietnamese invasion in 1979



Case Study 4: Genocide in Burundi and Rwanda

- Background: Economics and Identity in Burundi and Rwanda
 - History of a pastoral minority and an agrarian majority
 - Shared language and culture
 - Frequent intermarriage
 - Wealthy agriculturalists often invested in pastoralism
 - Pastoralists established monarchies in the 17th Century, but ruled in cooperation with agrarian elites.
 - Region is, by African standards, very fertile and densely populated.
 - Northern (Rwandan) and a southern (Burundian) states were conquered by the Germans in the 1880's.

Ethnogenesis and Genocide in Burundi and Rwanda

● Race and Colonialism

- First the Germans and then the Belgians (1918-1962) saw the pastoralists and agriculturalists as distinct groups. They dubbed them the “Tutsi” and the “Hutu,” respectively.
- The Tutsi were deemed “natural rulers” and “a martial race,” and were given favored positions in the colonial economic and political system. They became the backbone of the indigenous civil service, police, and military. The Hutu, in general, were denied access to Western education.
- As decolonization became inevitable in the 1950s, the Belgians announced that a parliamentary democracy would be established.

● Independence and Genocide

- In Burundi and Rwanda, the Tutsi attempted to remain in power via extra-judicial means. They were successful in Burundi, but not in Rwanda, where a “Hutu Revolution” in 1959 resulted in Hutu dominance and widespread attacks on Tutsi, killing thousands and driving many out of the country.
- In Burundi, a Hutu electoral victory in 1965 was rejected by the King (a Tutsi). A Hutu military coup failed, and the predominantly Tutsi military retaliated against Hutu political leaders, killing dozens.
- In 1972, the Hutu majority rose up and killed thousands of Tutsi. Military reprisals, with the aid of Zaire, resulted in the deaths of some 150,000 Hutu.
- Educated and wealthy Hutu, in particular, were targeted

Independence and Genocide in Burundi and Rwanda, continued

- Another round of popular Hutu violence and army reprisals in 1988. Perhaps 30,000 were killed.
- In 1993, Burundi held popular elections, resulting in a Hutu majority victory for president Ndadaye.
- Ndadaye was assassinated by the Tutsi military in Oct. of 1993.
- Popular uprisings by Hutu and military reprisals left some 50,000 dead.
- The Rwandan Genocide
 - Under Hutu rule until 1994.
 - Population aware of conflict in neighboring Burundi
 - Development of a mythology of the Tutsi as “Northern invaders.”
 - Invasion by the Front Patriotique Rwandais (FPR) in 1990, a military force formed by refugee Tutsi populations supported by Uganda.
 - Multi-party elections in 1993 raised tensions.
 - Radical elements formed the *interhamwe* militia
 - Assassination of President Habyarimana on 6 April, 1994.
 - Result was a shocking outbreak of violence, first against Tutsi populations, and then later in retaliation as the Tutsi FPR seized control of Rwanda.
 - Hutu civilians were forced to participate in the killing, at risk of being killed themselves as “sympathizers.” Many massacres took place in churches, where the predominantly Christian population took refuge.
 - Some 800,000 were killed in the next 6 months.
 - Conflict spilled over into Zaire, leading to the collapse of the Mobutu regime. The ensuing multi-party war has resulted in some 4 Million deaths.
 - Global powers and UN officials studiously avoided the use of the term “Genocide” until the conflict had largely run its course.

Conclusions: Themes of Genocide in the 20th Century

- Justifications of genocide are usually racial and/or national in nature.
- Alternative systems of morality (such as religion) are trumped by racial and national concerns.
- Use of terror. Not just murder, but also torture and rape. Death is often drawn out by starvation, labor, and forced marches.
- Targeting of educated, wealthy, and leadership elements
- Populations supporting the genocide generally receive economic and political rewards.
- Many genocides are imbedded in wider conflicts and wars. As such, they are morally complex with no clear innocent or guilty parties. Often, there are mutual atrocities committed.
- Conflict is a means to power. Genocide often serves to propel a new group to positions of leadership.
- While Genocides are often understood in the popular press as resulting from “ancient conflicts,” they are more often a result of very modern identities.
- International groups have shown very little willingness, in general, to intervene to try and stop genocides.
- Reconciliation is very difficult, and the desire of the victors to deny and obfuscate the conflict is great.

Useful Sources

- ◉ William L. Hewitt. *Defining the Horrific: Readings on Genocide and Holocaust in the Twentieth Century* (2004)
- ◉ Ben Kiernan. *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (2007)
- ◉ Samuel Totten and William S. Parsons, eds. *Century of Genocide: Critical Essays and Eyewitness Accounts* (2009)
- ◉ Eric D. Weitz. *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (2003)

Race, Nation, and Genocide: Terror in the 20th Century

Thank you

