

The genocide of European Jews was possible because of anti-Semitism that reached back hundreds, even thousands, of years. To the common people of medieval Europe, Jews were objects of suspicion, fear, and contempt. Jews, they thought, used the blood of Christian children in barbaric rituals. Jews were considered diabolical, secretive, sneaky, and dirty. Any calamity or misfortune that befell a community—a sick child, a failed crop, a tin of spoiled milk, or dead farm animals—was believed to be the work of Jews. “What then shall we Christians do with this damned, rejected race of Jews?” asked the German priest and revolutionary Martin Luther in 1543. “Since they live among us and we know about their lying and blasphemy and cursing, we cannot tolerate them.”

Luther urged the “setting of fire to their synagogues and schools and covering over what will not burn with earth so that no man will ever see a stone or cinder of them again.” In the German city of Bamberg, Jews were forced to wear a yellow patch or a peaked hat so they could be more easily identified.

Das Volk

German anti-Semitism was the product of centuries of belief, thought, and attitudes. The Germans were a people long before

they were a nation. The German word for people is *das Volk* (the equivalent in English is “folk”). *Das Volk* was bound together by history, culture, and language. It was not created by national borders on a map. The Germans saw themselves as members of a common race.

This attitude may be difficult for a modern young person to understand. In countries such as the United States and Canada, immigrants can become citizens by fulfilling requirements and passing some tests. Moreover, anyone born within U.S. borders is legally considered a U.S. citizen. Immigrants, of course, can face discrimination or not be accepted by other Americans, but they ultimately are still members of the same country.

In contrast, Germans identified themselves as Germans because of their bloodlines. Jews and Germans lived side by side in the same towns for centuries. Jews spoke German as their first language, made significant contributions to German art, literature, and thought—and yet many Germans could not regard the Jews as Germans. Germans identified the Jews as members of a different race. Jews were not part of *das Volk*.

German anti-Semitism relaxed somewhat in the late 1700s and 1800s. Then in 1873, the stock markets plunged and many Germans lost their savings. In rage, they blamed a Jewish conspiracy for the disaster, using centuries-old stereotypes of Jewish bankers and speculators. Anti-Semitic writing and thought revived throughout Germany. Pamphlets and books blamed the Jews, declaring that they wanted to destroy the new German nation. One publication, *The Victory of Jewry over Germanness*, went through twelve printings between 1873 and 1879.

“The Jews,” writes historian Gordon Craig, “were described as being by their very nature an alien element in German society, as being carriers of a disease that contaminated its vital forces

and threatened it with degeneracy and death.” This general hatred of Jews—combined with extraordinary historical circumstances and a single individual—would culminate in what many people today consider to be the greatest crime in history.

Adolf Hitler

Adolf Hitler was born in a small Austrian village just across the border from Germany in 1889. As a teenager, Adolf became interested in German nationalism, or the idea that all Germans should be in one country. At that time, Austria was part of the Hapsburg Empire. The empire’s capital city was Vienna, and it counted numerous peoples as its subjects, not all of whom were German. The empire, with its polyglot of races and languages, disgusted Adolf.

As a young man, Adolf settled in Vienna, where he hoped to study art. In this city, Hitler later claimed, he learned to passionately hate Jews. In Hitler’s mind, Jews were not Germans. As he observed Jews more, “the more sharply they became distinguished in my eyes from the rest of humanity.”

In August 1914, World War I began, an event that Hitler regarded with joy. Within days of the announcement, the twenty-five-year-old Hitler had enlisted in the German army. Hitler took part in the battles raging across western Europe. He rose to the rank of corporal and was wounded in the legs by a shell burst. Back in Germany to recover from his wounds, he was infuriated by civilian unrest and complaints about the war. Germany’s war effort, he determined, was being weakened by Jews.

In 1918, Hitler was in Germany recovering from war strain when Germany finally agreed to an armistice on November 11. “There followed terrible days and even worse nights,” Hitler

later wrote. “In these nights hatred grew in me, hatred for those responsible for this deed.”

Those responsible, Hitler decided, were the Jews.

A Growing Hatred

When the victorious Allies dealt with the defeated Germany, they were determined to make Germany pay for the war. The notorious Versailles Treaty forced Germany to accept responsibility for the war and pay huge reparations.

The treaty caused bitterness and economic unrest across Germany. Outbreaks of violence rocked the nation as different groups tried to seize control of the government. Communists and Socialists (called Marxists by Hitler) led violent rebellions that were crushed by groups of former generals and soldiers. The army was a prominent force in putting down the Marxists, and Hitler was recruited to speak to army soldiers about the dangers of Marxism. He delivered angry, loud speeches to the soldiers, blaming the Marxists and Jews for Germany’s defeat in the war. Many of the soldiers, seeking someone else to blame, agreed with Hitler.

In late 1919, Hitler went to Munich to investigate the German Workers’ Party. Hitler read a pamphlet about the group, which urged a strong government and the rejection of Jews. Hitler, delighted, became a member and was put in charge of recruitment. He delivered passionate, intense speeches to crowded beer halls. Hitler rose to higher positions in the party, which at that time numbered only three thousand members.

In 1920 Hitler chose a symbol—the swastika—for the party and changed the name of the party to the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP). The members were called

Nazis. On February 24, 1920, the NSDAP formulated its platform in twenty-five points. They included the idea that the Aryan race was supreme and that the Jews were to be excluded from the German Volk community.

In November 1923, Hitler led a revolt that collapsed within hours. Hitler was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to five years in prison. He stayed only nine months, and he used the time to dictate his ideas and biography into the book, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle).

Learning from the failed revolt, Hitler resolved to build a movement that would seize control of the government. However, Hitler and the Nazis had a problem. Few paid attention to him because times were good—the economy was strengthening and the sting of defeat was fading.

In 1929, however, the collapse of the stock market in New York brought the economic growth to an end. Millions lost their jobs, and the German economy appeared on the verge of collapse. Suddenly, the Nazi movement began to attract followers again. This time, however, it was not just the unemployed and the poor. Large industrialists turned to Hitler as a figure who could restore order.

With this support, the number of Germans who voted for the Nazis jumped in the 1930 election from 810,000 to 6,409,000. In July 1932, the Nazis tallied 14 million votes and became the largest party in the German parliament, which is called the Reichstag. Hitler maneuvered expertly over the next six months. On January 30, 1933, Hitler became chancellor of Germany, completing his unlikely and extraordinary rise to the most powerful position in the nation.

Many of Germany's 525,000 Jews were terrified when Hitler seized power, but only 38,000 fled the country. Germany was a rich, sophisticated country with deep traditions of art,



Adolf Hitler poses with a group of men in military uniforms after his appointment as chancellor of Germany in 1933.

music, philosophy, and technology. Jews had been an essential part of German culture. Jews had served loyally in the German army during World War I. They had held important positions in government and industry. Yes, there might be additional discomfort and rudeness to deal with, perhaps even some unfair laws, but what could Hitler really do?

Seeds of Evil

With Germany under Nazi control, however, Hitler began to put into effect a plan to eliminate the Jews. In the medieval walled city of Nuremberg, Hitler announced legal codes designed to separate the Jews from Germans—the Nuremberg laws. Ultimately, about four hundred laws and decrees against Jews

were passed. The first laws identified a “non-Aryan” as someone who had at least a Jewish grandparent. Laws forbade Jews from serving in government positions, on juries, or as commercial judges. Jewish doctors and dentists were banned from state hospitals. The Law Against the Overcrowding of German Schools and Institutions of Higher Learning allowed about one student out of one hundred to be Jewish. Others, to prove they weren’t Jewish, had to produce elaborate family trees with official birth records.

The Nazis soon forbade the government from employing any non-Aryans whatsoever. The Reich Chamber of Culture was established to expel Jews from any influence in the nation’s theater, film industry, or art world. The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* editorialized on April 27, 1933, that “a self-respecting nation cannot leave its higher activities in the hands of people of racially foreign origin.”

While these laws were put into place, Nazis systematically isolated Jews socially. Brown-shirted Nazis in polished black boots stood outside Jewish shops and posted signs: “Germans! Protect Yourself! Don’t buy from Jews!”

Jewish schoolchildren became objects of fear and hatred. “Suddenly I had no friends,” remembered Hilma Geffen-Ludomer, a young student who attended school in a Berlin suburb. “I had no more girlfriends, and many neighbors were afraid to talk to us. Some of the neighbors that we visited told me: ‘Don’t come anymore because I’m scared. We should not have contact with Jews.’”

In 1939 the German army attacked Poland and World War II began. Over the next year, Hitler enjoyed a number of successes that shocked the world. German armies conquered Denmark, Norway, and Holland; German tanks overwhelmed France. Convinced that victory would take only months, Hitler ordered



the invasion of the Soviet Union. In June 1941, a massive German offensive crashed into the Soviet Union, quickly occupied enormous territory, and brought many of Europe’s Jews—2.5 million were still in eastern Europe at that time—under Nazi control. These developments made possible Hitler’s plans to wipe out the Jewish race. Nazi leaders called this process the Final Solution.

The Killing Units: Einsatzgruppen

As German armies smashed through the Soviet Union, Hitler put into motion his plans to clear the eastern territories of all

undesirable peoples—especially Jews. Once the area was cleared, German settlers would be moved in to occupy the territory and transform it into a “Garden of Eden.”

The first mass killings occurred in the summer of 1941. Special groups of German soldiers—called *Einsatzgruppen*—began systematically removing Jews from villages and executing them. On July 11, a German officer issued detailed orders about the executions. “The shootings are to take place away from cities, villages, and thoroughfares. The graves are to be leveled in such a way that no pilgrimage site can arise. I forbid photographing and the permitting of spectators at the executions. Executions and grave sites are not to be made known.”

The officer recognized that shooting women and children might be difficult for some of the men. “The battalion and company commanders are especially to provide for the spiritual care of the men who participate in this action. The impressions of the day are to be blotted out through the holding of social events in the evenings. Furthermore the men are to be instructed continuously about the political necessity of the measures.”

Within a week of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, more Jews were murdered than had been killed in the entire eight-year reign of Nazism in Germany. The swiftness of the German advance, the remoteness of the territory, and the confusion of war gave the Nazi units the necessary cover to commit these acts. Thousands of Jewish men, women, children, and infants were shot at close range, often over pits filled with other victims.

These kinds of killings peaked in 1941 and 1942. The historian Christopher Browning did a detailed study of what this campaign was like for a single unit. At dawn, July 13, 1942, a column of trucks carrying German policemen pulled up outside the Polish village of Józefów. The policemen jumped out

of the back of the truck and assembled around their leader, Major Wilhelm Trapp. Trapp fought back tears as he explained their assignment. Inside the sleeping village were 1,800 Jews, he explained. The Jewish men were to be separated from the women, children, and elderly. The men would be sent to a work camp. The Jewish women, children, and elderly, said Trapp, were to be shot. Trapp explained how this was necessary for the war effort, and how German civilians were being bombed in their cities by enemy airplanes. Acknowledging that this might be unpleasant, Trapp said anyone who did not want to participate could drop out.

The families were awakened and driven stumbling from their beds. They gathered in the market square and the working-age men separated from the rest. Groups of women, children, and elderly were then marched into the nearby woods. The crash of rifle volleys sounded and drifted over the town to the square where the other Jews were kept waiting. The sudden apprehension, the nauseating fear, and possibly frantic denial arose in a large cry in the marketplace. Then, however, they settled into a calm silence that startled observers.

Another historian, Daniel Goldhagen, described what actually happened as the killing units proceeded.

Bear in mind, always, the horror of what the Germans were doing. Anyone in a killing detail who himself shot or who witnessed his comrades shoot Jews was immersed in scenes of unspeakable horror. . . . Blood, bone, and brain were flying about, often landing on the killers, smirching their faces and staining their clothes. Cries and wails of people awaiting their imminent slaughter or consumed in death throes reverberated in German ears. Such scenes—not the antiseptic descriptions that mere reportage of a killing operation presents—constituted the reality for many perpetrators.



Jews are escorted
 to a mass shooting
 site in the Soviet
 city of Kiev, 1941.

Outside the Soviet city of Kiev, on September 29 and 30, 1941, more than thirty thousand Jews were shot in a series of massacres. Even before this slaughter, a high-ranking German officer, Reinhard Heydrich, wrote to his superior, Heinrich Himmler, "It may be safely assumed that in the future there will be no more Jews in the annexed Eastern Territories."

The Final Solution

The Nazis intended far more than the destruction of Jews in eastern Europe. Hitler and his top advisers were now resolved to

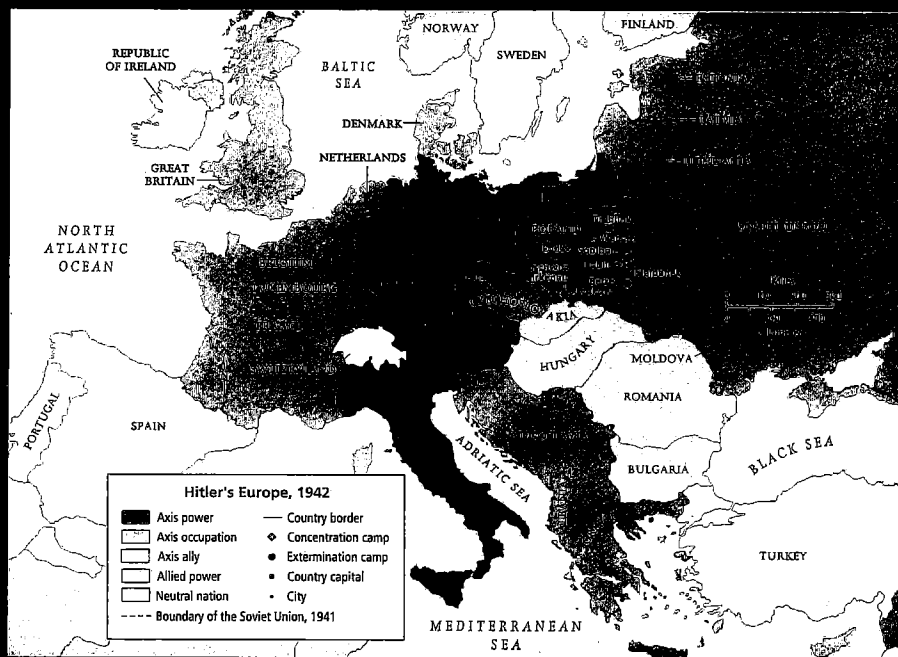
solve the "Jewish Question" once and for all, and all Jews in Europe were targeted. To murder such a large number of people required more than shooting squads. Instead, the Nazis decided to employ killing methods they had first used on handicapped and mentally retarded Germans and Poles in the late 1930s and early 1940s—gas.

Hitler had determined that the handicapped and mentally retarded were inferior, weakened the German race, and therefore should not be allowed to live. One method of execution was to place the victims in a sealed chamber on a truck and pump poisonous gas fumes into the chamber until the occupants were dead. Using this as a model, the Nazis began constructing several camps in Poland. These camps were designed solely for mass murder. The camps were at Treblinka, Sobibor, Majdanec, Belzec, Chelmno, and the Birkenau section of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Before the Jews were sent to these camps, they were crowded into areas of cities that were walled off. In these ghettos—such as in Warsaw and Lodz—the occupants were given little food or medicine and many died. Over time, as the Final Solution progressed, the ghettos were cleaned out and the inhabitants forced onto transport trains that carried them to death camps or work camps.

Poland was crisscrossed with railways, with hubs to the smallest towns. The railway system could move thousands, even hundreds of thousands, of people relatively efficiently. Just as important, the Polish countryside was pocketed with thick woods far from population centers. It was an easy place to put a camp without gathering too much attention.

The railways, like a giant spiderweb stretching across Europe, carried transports of Jews. Over a period of three and a half years, according to one historian, 147 trains from Hungary,



87 from Holland, 76 from France, 63 from Slovakia, 27 from Belgium, 23 from Greece, 11 from Italy, 7 from Bulgaria, and 6 from Croatia, delivered human cargoes to the Nazi camps.

Hubert Pfoch was a young German soldier traveling with his unit to fight in Russia when his train pulled up next to another train filled with men, women, and children. Pfoch wrote in his diary what he saw next.

We heard the rumor that these people were a Jewish transport. They call out to us that they have been traveling without food or water for two days. And then, when they are being loaded into the cattle cars, we became witnesses of the most ghastly scenes. The corpses of those killed the night before were thrown by Jewish auxiliary police on to a

lorry [truck] that came and went four times. The guards cram 180 people into each car—parents into one, children into another, they didn't care how they separated families. They scream at them, shoot and hit them so viciously that some of their rifle butts break. When all of them are finally loaded there are cries from all cars—"Water," they plead, "my gold ring for water." When some of them manage to climb out through the ventilating holes, they are shot the moment they reach the ground—a massacre that made us sick to our souls, a blood-bath such as I had never dreamed.

The Germans treated each transport differently, depending on where the Jews came from. For the Jews coming from western Europe, the guards acted almost courteously. Many of these Jews had become a part of European society. Some thought of themselves as French, German, or Dutch first, and then Jewish.

The object was not to allow the victims to suspect what was about to happen. If they knew their fate, the entire transport might have revolted as soon as the doors rolled open. Understanding this, the Nazis took great pains to conceal their intentions until it was too late. The Jews were told that they were being "resettled" to a new region. Accordingly, they were allowed to bring along suitcases filled with food and goods.

At Treblinka the commander ordered the construction of a fake railroad station. Ticket windows, arrows, and names of places were painted on the walls. It was meant to fool people in the transports into believing that they had arrived at a camp between trains. At Treblinka even a clock was put up, though the hands never moved.

Most transports arrived at the camps full of exhausted people who had not eaten or drunk water for days. Stanislaw Szmajzner, his parents, his brother, older sister, and other relatives were on a train that pulled into Sobibor, Poland, in May 1942.

When the door of our car was pushed open, all we could think of was to get out into the air. What I saw first was two guards with whips. They immediately began to shout, "Out!" "Out!" and hit blindly at those who stood in front. Of course, this made everyone move quickly; those in the back pushed towards the front, and those in front, the immediate target of the whips, jumped off as quickly as they could. It was all perfectly planned to get us out of the cars with no delay. They only opened three cars at a time—that, too, was part of the system. When I jumped down with my family, I immediately caught hold of my brother's and little nephew's hands. I even shouted "We must stick together." My older cousin also managed to stay with us but we immediately lost sight of my father. We looked around desperately, but the hurry, the noise, the fear and confusion were indescribable; it was impossible to find anyone once we lost them from sight. About twenty

meters away, across the square, I saw a line of SS officers and they were shooting. The purpose was to get us all to run in one direction; through a gate and a kind of corridor into yet another square.

At Treblinka the arriving people were told to hand over all their valuables. They were then separated—with men going into one barracks and women and children into another. They were then ordered to undress. Naked, the men and women were lined in rows and forced to run down a fenced-in path that was called "the tube" or "the funnel." At the end of the tube was a large chamber labeled as showers, where the people were told they were going to be disinfected.

"Some of the people from the transport had an idea what was going on, and they know already that they will not stay alive," recalled Abraham Bomba, who was pulled out of a transport to become a worker at the camp. "Pushing the people—they didn't want to or they knew already where they go—toward this big door. The crying and the hollering and the shouting that was going on over there! It was impossible. The hollering and the crying was in your ears and your mind for days and days, and at night the same thing. From the howling you couldn't even sleep a couple of nights."

Once the chamber doors were closed, carbon monoxide gas was pumped inside until everyone was dead. The bodies were then removed by a work crew of Jews (Sonderkommando) and buried in giant trenches.

In the Death Camps

Those who were kept alive lived in constant fear that they would be picked next or that a guard would single them out or



Almost all victims of the Holocaust were transported to the camps in overcrowded freight cars. The photo is from the collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. It was taken in the Treblinka train station in 1942 and shows Jews being loaded onto the freight cars. The victims were packed tightly together, with no room to move or breathe.

that a mistake or small gesture could get them pulled aside and shot. One prisoner, Richard Glazar, carried a shaving kit all the time. He shaved to keep himself looking clean, sometimes seven times a day. When the prisoners were gathered for morning roll call, it was important to look clean and healthy.

"And yet, this was one of the most torturing uncertainties; one never knew how the mood of the Germans 'ran'—whether if one was seen shaving or cleaning one's boots, that wouldn't get one killed," recalled Glazar. "It was an incredible daily roulette; you see, one SS might consider a man looking after himself in this way as making himself 'conspicuous'—the cardinal sin—and then another might not. The effect of being clean always helped—it even created a kind of respect in them. But to be seen doing it might be considered showing off, or toadying, and provoke punishment, or death." Glazar, who was interviewed by a British journalist more than twenty years after the war ended, said he still carried his shaving kit.

Several Jews were kept alive at Treblinka as "work Jews"—carpenters, tailors, cooks, even musicians. In one incident, a work Jew named Blau knocked on the door to the office of Franz Stangl, the camp commander. Blau explained that his father was coming the next morning on a transport. Could Stangl do anything? The man's father was eighty years old. "Really, Blau, you must understand, it's impossible," answered Stangl. "A man of eighty . . ."

Blau asked if he could avoid having his father gassed. Instead, he would take him to a fake hospital, called the Lazarett, where prisoners were killed quickly. Blau had one more request: Could he take his father to the kitchen and give him a last meal?

"You go and do what you think best, Blau," answered Stangl. "Officially, I don't know anything, but unofficially you can tell the Kapo I said it was all right."

Blau returned the next day to Stangl's office with tears in his eyes. "I want to thank you. I gave my father a meal. And I've just taken him to the Lazarett. It's all over. Thank you very much."

"Well, Blau, there's no need to thank me," Stangl replied, "but of course if you want to thank me, you may."

Stangl recounted this conversation in 1971 to journalist Gitta Sereny, who was so disgusted that she almost halted the interview altogether. "The story represented to me the starkest example of a corrupted personality I had ever encountered," she later wrote.

Sereny was interviewing Stangl because she, like the historians Browning and Goldhagen, wanted to understand what kind of person could preside over a mass murder of hundreds of thousands. In her encounters, Stangl was polite, respectful, well mannered, and earnest, but he also seemed incapable of expressing true remorse or having an understanding of what he had done. Stangl recounted several warm anecdotes about his personal kindness to individual Jews who worked closely with him at Treblinka. But when Sereny pressed him to know whether they survived—or whether he had done anything to protect them—he kept answering, "I don't know." What happened to Blau? "I don't know."

Stangl's answer, though evasive, also contains some truth. The Germans committed genocide because of Nazi leadership, propaganda, and ancient prejudices against the Jews, as well as a cultural tendency for individual Germans to respect and obey their government. It is important to understand these reasons because it makes it easier to spot future genocides before they occur and, hopefully, prevent them.

However, on some level we can never completely understand how an individual participates in the violent act of genocide. Sereny hoped to gain some insight into this mind-set

when she interviewed Stangl and published their conversations in a book, *Into That Darkness*. Did she succeed? The title comes from a poem by Edgar Allan Poe, who used the phrase to describe a confrontation with death and meaninglessness. By choosing this line for her book, Sereny is acknowledging that Stangl and the evil he committed are in some ways beyond our understanding. As Stangl said, "I don't know."

"Arbeit Macht Frei"

By 1942 the Nazis had constructed their largest concentration camp—Auschwitz. Unlike Treblinka, Auschwitz had a sizable working population (the gate to the camp carried the slogan: *Arbeit Macht Frei*—"Work Brings Freedom"). When transports arrived, many went through "selection." An SS officer would look over each prisoner and gesture to the right or to the left. Young healthy men and women—who were judged capable of doing work—were sent in one direction. The elderly, many women, and young children were sent in the other.

The fate of those sent to the left was similar to the victims at Treblinka. However, at Auschwitz, the Germans had perfected their killing technique. They constructed giant underground gas chambers with fake showerheads. The people were told to take off their clothes in a large dressing room. To keep them from understanding what was happening, they were told to remember exactly where they had placed their clothing, so they could find it after the shower.

Once in the gas chamber, the airtight doors were closed and Zyklon B gas crystals, an insecticide, were dropped through vents. After a half hour, a ventilation system pumped the gas out of the chamber. The bodies were then removed and transported to a

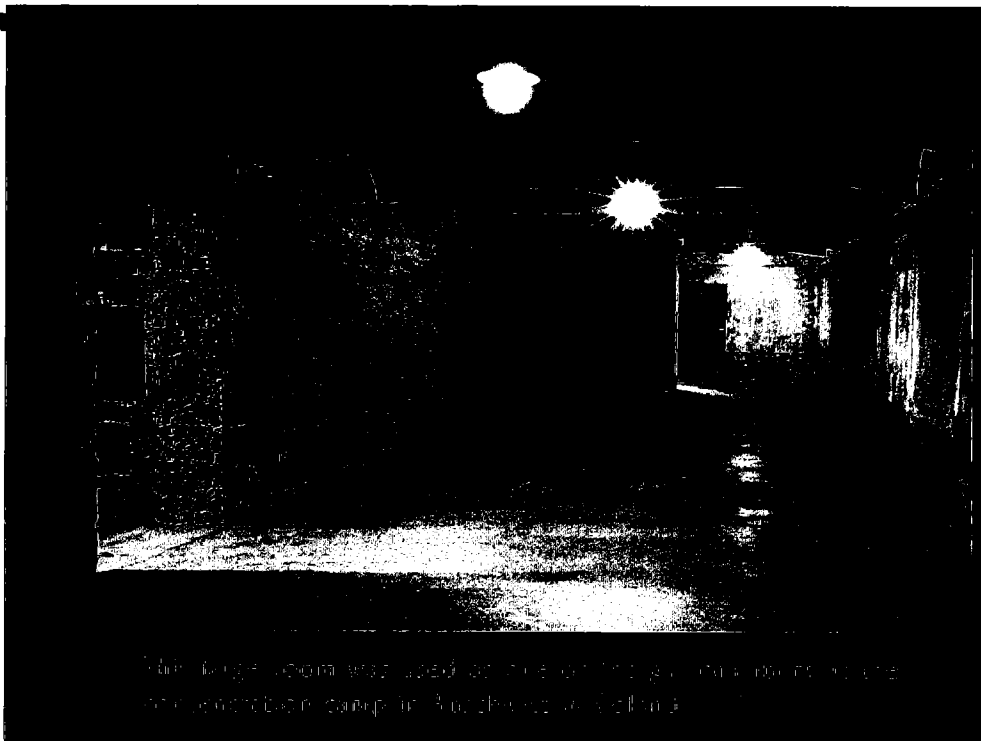
crematorium, where they were placed in ovens and cremated (before summer 1942, however, most bodies were buried in mass graves). The ash was dumped in a nearby pond or river. Five crematories were built at Auschwitz; the largest two had thirty ovens and could burn up to five thousand bodies every day.

"Everyday we saw thousands and thousands of innocent people disappear up the chimney," recalled Filip Mueller, a Jew who worked at Auschwitz. "There they came, men, women, and children, all innocent. They suddenly vanished and the world said nothing! We felt abandoned. By the world, by humanity."

What was in the minds of those who faced the gas chambers? Rudolf Hoess, the Nazi commander at Auschwitz, wrote an account of his time at the camp before he was tried and executed. He often watched transports enter the gas chambers, and he noted that few were aware of what was about to happen. However, he recalled seeing some women with children realize that they were all about to be killed. At these moments, Hoess's description becomes almost respectful. "Even with the fear of death all over their faces, [the mothers] still managed enough strength to play with their children and talk to them lovingly."

When another transport was entering the chambers, a woman with four children, all holding hands, stepped close to Hoess and whispered: "How can you murder these beautiful, darling children? Don't you have any heart?" But another prisoner, this time an elderly man, showed rage. "Germany will pay a bitter penance for the mass murder of the Jews," he told Hoess.

Elie Wiesel arrived at Auschwitz when he was fifteen years old. He passed through selection by telling the officer he was eighteen. Wiesel and his father were with a group of men marching toward a burning pit. As they came closer, they saw



The large room was used as the dining hall for prisoners in the concentration camp in Buchenwald, Germany.

that the pit contained children. Wiesel turned to his father in astonishment and said it wasn't possible—people aren't simply burned to death in this age. Humanity, he said, would never tolerate it.

"Humanity? Humanity is not concerned with us," his father answered. "Today, anything is possible, even these crematories." The men began to mutter among themselves about rebelling. Wiesel considered running and throwing himself onto a nearby electric fence to die, rather than be burned alive. Others began reciting the Hebrew prayer for the dead. Just steps from the burning pit, the group was ordered to turn left and march into a barracks.

"Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night," he later wrote.

"Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. . . . Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never."

Liberation

In early 1945, the German Reich was crumbling under the combined onslaughts of the Soviets from the east and the British and Americans from the west. As the Allied armies approached, the SS ordered many of the prisoners to camps deeper inside Germany. Often the weak prisoners were forced to



Wiesel and his father and brother were spared at the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany in 1945 when the camp was liberated by the Allies.

march for hours in bitter cold. Those who could not keep up were shot. Those who survived were crowded in with other prisoners at camps that could barely hold them. Without medicine or food, more died. Their bodies were left unburied. Survivors were left to starve by German troops who attempted to escape as Allied troops closed in. In this condition, camps were discovered by advancing Allied armies in spring 1945.

Journalist Edward R. Murrow recalled his experience of newly liberated Buchenwald during a broadcast on April 15, 1945. "I pray you to believe what I said about Buchenwald," he told the audience. "I have reported what I saw and heard, but only part of it. For most of it I have no words."



These men were victims and survivors of Germany's Buchenwald concentration camp, which was liberated by Allied troops in 1945. Among them is the (circled) man on the left in the middle bunk, next to the vertical post, who went on to become an internationally famous artist.

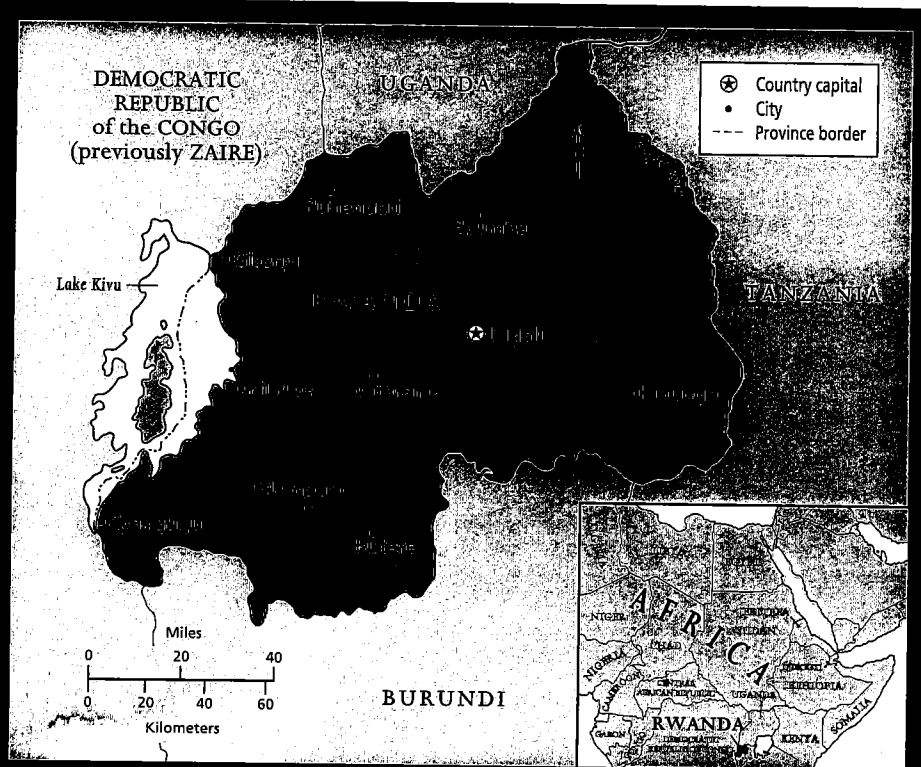
chapter five the tutsis of rwanda

On April 6, 1994, a small private jet flew above Rwanda, in central Africa. The aircraft was about to land at Rwanda's Kigali International Airport when two missiles streaked into the sky and struck the airplane. The craft shuddered and dove into the presidential palace below. There was a flash, a clap of explosion, and silence.

The airplane had been carrying two African leaders. One was the president of Rwanda, Juvénal Habyarimana; the other was the president of the neighboring nation, Burundi, Cyprien Ntaryamira. The deaths of these two presidents led to some of the most horrific mass killings in history. Today, the Rwandans refer to the time before the airplane crash simply as "Before."

Rwanda is occupied primarily by two groups: the Hutu and the Tutsi. Most of the population—about 80 percent—is Hutu. The number of Tutsi is about 15 percent. (The remaining 5 percent is made up of other ethnicities.) Despite being a far smaller group, the Tutsi had dominated for centuries. They owned cattle, a symbol of wealth and power. The Hutu labored in farm fields, hoping one day to scrape together enough money to buy cows of their own and rise to the wealthy class.

Tension ran high between the Tutsi and Hutu. Any Hutu rebellions were crushed violently by the Tutsi. Some Hutu did accumulate the wealth necessary to join the ruling Tutsi. For most, however, it was an unrealizable dream.



When Europeans took over Africa in the 1800s, they exploited the division between the Tutsi and Hutu to secure their own authority. The Germans and later the Belgians favored the Tutsi. They appointed a Tutsi king and a Tutsi nobility to rule the country. For the most part, the Tutsi cooperated with the Belgians. After all, it was a relationship that enabled them to have wealth and power.

The Belgians, however, used more measures to divide Tutsi and Hutu, thus making it easier for the Belgians to rule the country. In schools children were taught that the Tutsi were

racially superior to the Hutu and that it was thus natural that they ruled the country. Tutsi individuals were favored with better jobs and positions of authority. In 1933 the Belgians issued identity cards to everyone in the country. Each card bore a stamp for Hutu or Tutsi. Among the Rwandans, these cards hardened the lines between Hutu and Tutsi. Even if Hutu amassed enough riches, they could never join the ruling class—they were marked for life.

The bitterness of this arrangement exploded in violence in 1959. When the Tutsi king died, the Hutu openly revolted. For the first time, the Belgians did little to support the Tutsi. Europeans were being forced to leave Africa, and the Belgians knew that the Hutu, who vastly outnumbered the Tutsi, would soon take power in Rwanda. By withdrawing their support from the ruling Tutsi, the Belgians were hoping to establish good relations with the Hutu.

The Tutsi found themselves besieged and attacked by crowds of Hutu. No one is certain how many Tutsi died in the violence, but estimates range from 10,000 to 100,000. Tutsi refugees fled to neighboring countries. There, they plotted their eventual return. One Tutsi group, called the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), organized in Uganda.

The Hutu had taken control of Rwanda, but they feared that armed Tutsi groups (called “cockroaches” by the government) would invade in an attempt to regain power. In the minds of the Hutu, the Tutsi became objects of fear and loathing. They were denied jobs by the new government and the equal protection of the country’s laws.

Through the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the Tutsi in Rwanda lived uneasily with their Hutu compatriots. Whenever the economy appeared to be failing, the rulers blamed the Tutsi. In 1987 coffee prices collapsed, putting enormous pressure on the

many Rwandans who grew coffee beans to make a living. Tutsi groups, especially the RPF, continued to fight against the Hutu government along the Rwandan border. The clashes sent Hutu refugees into other parts of the country, where they needed to be fed and sheltered. With the economy failing and rampant corruption in the government, this could not be done easily. The country's leaders, fearful that they were losing their grip on power, spoke louder and louder against the Tutsi, saying they were to blame for everything that was wrong in Rwandan society.

"To peasants with a long folk memory of past Tutsi misrule, the warnings and the increasingly hysterical propaganda had a powerful effect," wrote Fergal Keane, a journalist in Rwanda. "Tens of thousands became infected—and I can think of no other word that can describe the condition—by an anti-Tutsi psychosis; they were convinced through newspapers, radio and the frequent public speeches that the Tutsis were going to turn them into beasts of the field once again." The Rwandan president, Juvénal Habyarimana, created a civilian militia, along with his police force and army units, to defend the Hutu against what he called the Tutsi threat. He named this group Interahamwe, or "those who stand together."

But in 1993, Habyarimana faced an impossible situation. The economy had all but collapsed, he faced growing opposition in the government, and RPF forces were closing in on the capital. Only an intervention of French soldiers saved Habyarimana from total defeat. In August 1993, Habyarimana signed the Arusha Peace Accords, which would allow the RPF participation in the government. It seemed that a new era was dawning in Rwanda, but many of Habyarimana's closest supporters were not about to give up their privileges and share power with the hated Tutsi. It was during the return flight from one of the negotiations that Habyarimana's jet was shot down.

The Genocide Begins

News of the airplane crash spread quickly. A UN commander, Lieutenant General Romeo Dallaire, was watching television in his residence in Kigali when a telephone call alerted him to the situation. Dallaire was in Rwanda to help oversee the accords between the Rwandan government and the RPF, and he knew that Habyarimana's death threatened everything the UN was trying to achieve.

Dallaire rushed to a local military barracks, where a group of Hutu generals had already claimed power over the country. Dallaire reminded the generals that the Rwandan government existed, even if Habyarimana was dead. The lawful leader of the government, he said, was the prime minister—a statement that made the generals laugh coldly.

In the next twenty-four hours, the Hutu methodically hunted down moderate politicians (many of them Hutu) who favored the peace accords with the RPF. A leading figure, Prime Minister Uwilingiyimana, was surrounded with her husband and children by Hutu militia and shot down in a UN compound. Ten Belgian soldiers, part of Uwilingiyimana's escort, were taken prisoner and then hacked to death with machetes. The message to the international community was clear and simple: stay out.

Samuel Ndagijimana was an orderly who worked in a handsome brick hospital that sat on a hill called Mugonero. The hospital was connected to a church complex, and as tension thickened in the countryside, many Tutsi sought refuge there. Samuel saw villages burning in the distance, and each night he saw groups of Hutu gathering. "You didn't know exactly what was happening, just that there was something coming."

More than two thousand refugees crowded onto Mugonero,

with Hutu soldiers forming a tight ring around them. Many of the refugees had already escaped terrible massacres, and they had few illusions about their fate. Tutsi ministers sent notes to the Hutu leaders of the church, asking for mercy. "We wish to inform you that we have heard that tomorrow we will be killed with our families," read one. "We therefore request you to intervene on our behalf and talk with the mayor." The person who received this note would later claim that he could do nothing.

"You must be eliminated," was the response from Hutu leaders. "You must die." Another message announced that the killing would begin the next day at "exactly nine o'clock."

The leaders kept their word, and at nine the next morning, soldiers piled out of trucks and began firing guns and lobbing grenades into the crowd of Tutsi. They chanted "eliminate the Tutsis." Some of the Tutsi had gathered rocks, bricks, and sticks to try to fend off the attackers, but these were "useless,"

remembered a survivor. Several Tutsi hiding in the brush could track the progress of the massacres because large flocks of birds appeared over the fresh killing sites.

An Organized Slaughter

It soon became clear that this was not a spontaneous outbreak of violence caused by a sudden plane crash. The Hutu leaders had prepared. Relying on identification cards that labeled each citizen as Hutu or Tutsi, they had methodically prepared lists of Tutsi to be eliminated. The Kagera River was used as a place to dump corpses. Thousands were killed on the banks and then pushed into the swift currents. Among the most horrific photographs of the Rwandan genocide are those of bloated corpses washed into shallows or caught in weeds or rocks.

Some Tutsi were overtaken before they realized what was happening. Others fled into the thick brush and jungle, where most were tracked down, flushed from their hiding places, and murdered. Many sought refuge in Rwanda's churches. Journalist Fergal Keane and a news crew visited the village of Nyarubuye, where a church and school in the Rwandan countryside was a gathering place for hundreds of Tutsi weeks before.

Keane later described seeing a white marble statue of Christ and a banner celebrating Easter outside the church. "Below that there is the body of a man lying across the steps, his knees buckled underneath his body and his arms cast behind his head." As Keane walked the grounds, he had to avoid bodies strewn along and on the path. He described dead men, women, and children who were killed by machetes or grenades.

"How many are there? I think perhaps a hundred, but it is hard to tell. The bodies seem to be melting away. Such terrible



faces. Horror, fear, pain, abandonment. Here the dead have no dignity." There were many killed outside the door to the church administration office. Perhaps they believed an official could save them. Other Tutsi had fled into the church itself.

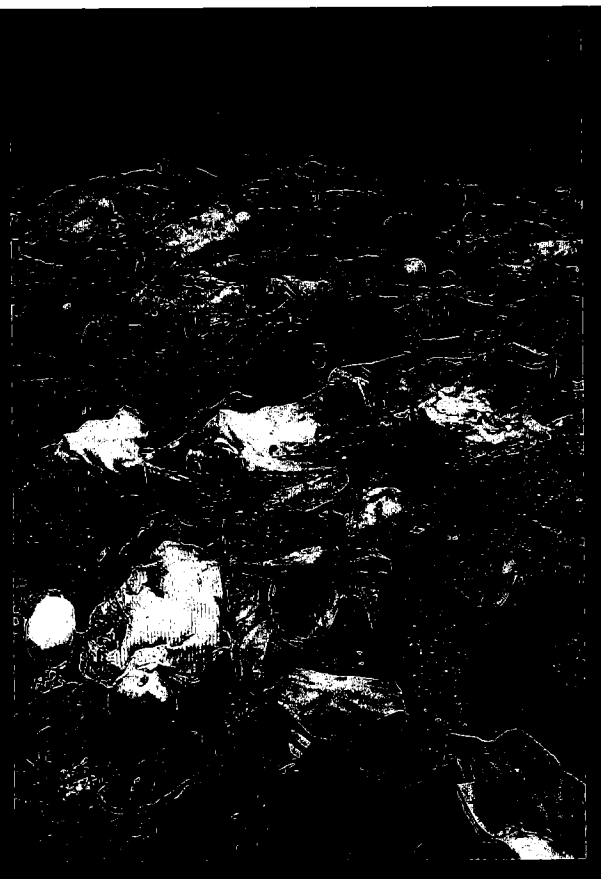
"There are bodies between the pews and another pile of bones at the foot of the statue of the Virgin Mary. In a cloister, next to the holy water fountain, a man lies with his arms over his head. He must have died shielding himself from the machete blows." The dead were left unburied at Nyarubuye as a memorial. A year after the killings and Keane's visit to the site, journalists kept returning to view the bodies, which had become skeletons.

How could the killers commit such acts? One witness later described how groups subtly pressured and then forced individuals to join them. "Everyone was called to hunt the enemy," the witness said. "But let's say someone is reluctant. Say that guy comes with a stick. They tell him, 'No, get a masu' (a stick studded with nails). So, OK, he does, and he runs along with the rest, but he doesn't kill. They say, 'Hey, he might denounce us later. He must kill. Everyone must help to kill at least one person.' So this person who is not a killer is made to do it. And the next day it's become a game for him. You don't need to keep pushing him."

Hotel Rwanda

One man, Paul Rusesabagina, watched the violence with growing alarm. Rusesabagina, manager of the Belgian-owned Hotel des Diplomates in Kigali, was a Hutu, but his wife was Tutsi. Just days after the carnage began, he was in his home with his wife, four children, and thirty friends who had taken refuge with them. Then Rusesabagina received a message. A new government had formed and wanted to make the Hotel des Diplomates its headquarters, but the hotel and all its rooms had been locked up. Would Paul come into Kigali and open the hotel?

Rusesabagina gathered his family and friends and was driven into the city in cars filled with soldiers. Suddenly, they pulled over and a soldier turned to Rusesabagina. "Do you know that all of the owners of the other businesses have been killed? We've killed them," he said. "But you're lucky. We're not killing you today because they sent us to look for you and get you for the government." Rusesabagina sweated with nervousness as he told the men that they would gain nothing



by killing him, rather he had money and they could have it. The soldier listened to Rusesabagina for an hour and agreed to take five hundred dollars. The drive into the city resumed, and Rusesabagina, his family, and friends arrived at the hotel safely.

Three days later, however, the government decided to move and Rusesabagina needed to find a new safe place. One option was another hotel, Mille Collines, where he had been a manager for several years. When the government left the Hotel des Diplomates, Rusesabagina loaded his family and friends into a van and tagged along at the back of the convoy. Since the city was still dangerous, he broke off only at the end to steer the van into the hotel Mille Collines.

The Mille Collines was the richest hotel in Kigali. When Rusesabagina arrived, it was filled with hundreds of people who had so far evaded the murderous rampages. However, it was not a question of whether they would die but when.

Rusesabagina found himself in a delicate situation. Tutsi were being murdered all over the city, and the leaders in charge of that murder often used the hotel as a meeting place or a spot to get drinks. Rusesabagina used this to his advantage. With liquor, money, and his extensive business contacts, he managed to bribe or distract many of these leaders. His priority was to protect the people in the hotel.

However, he could also be firm. "I kept telling them, 'I don't agree with what you're doing,' just as openly as I'm doing now," he told journalist Philip Gourevitch. "I'm a man who's used to saying no when I have to. That's all I did—what I felt like doing. Because I never agree with killers. I didn't agree with them. I refused, and I told them so."

One morning, Rusesabagina was woken by a lieutenant with a blunt request. Everyone in the hotel had to be evacuated within thirty minutes. Rusesabagina immediately recognized

this for what it was—a death order. Desperate, he tried to stall for time. He reminded the lieutenant that the people in the hotel were refugees, and he asked him what security precautions were being taken.

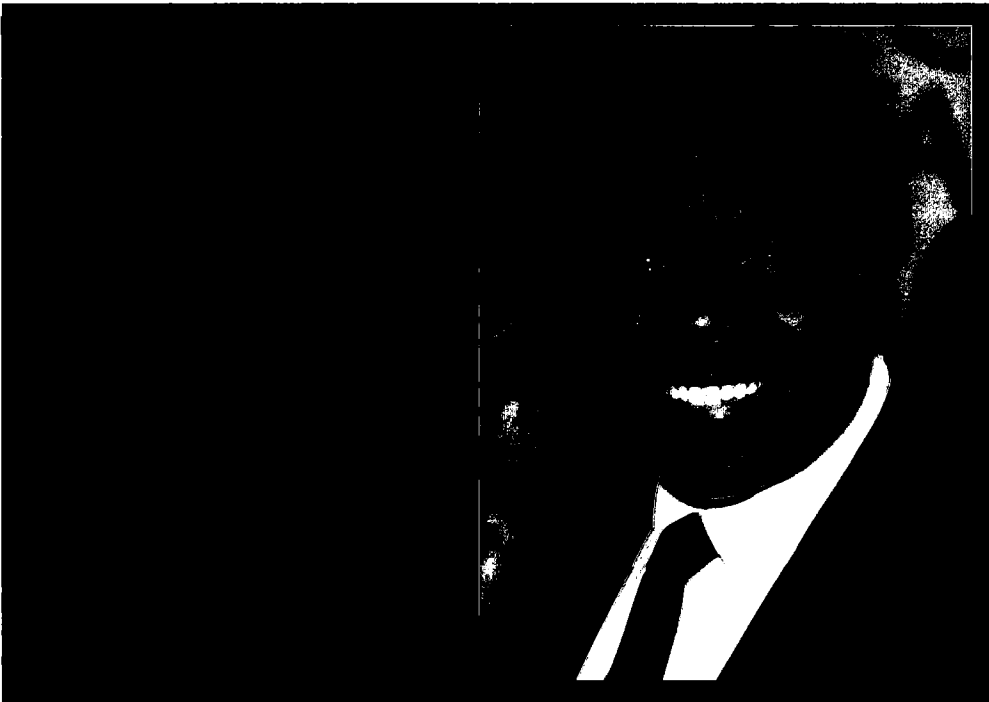
"Didn't you hear what I said?" snapped the lieutenant. "We want everybody out, and within half an hour."

"I'm still in bed," he told the lieutenant, "and need a half hour to shower. I'll then get everybody out." Frantically, Rusesabagina and some trusted friends made calls to their contacts, looking for someone who might overrule the lieutenant. The thirty minutes had ticked away when an army jeep suddenly pulled up to the lieutenant. His troops were ordered to pull back. Rusesabagina peered out a hotel window and saw hundreds of soldiers and civilians, who had surrounded the hotel, leave. They were carrying guns and machetes.

Despite this close call, Rusesabagina continued to reach out to people who were still being hunted. He discovered a woman and her children cowering in their house after the radio announced that they had been killed. Relying on his contacts, Rusesabagina sent an army officer to pick her up and bring her to the hotel. The woman and her family survived.

In another situation, a man at the hotel gave an interview that was broadcast on the radio. The government heard the interview and ordered a soldier to go to the hotel, find the man, and kill him. Rusesabagina, however, refused to allow the soldiers to carry out the order.

A journalist later asked Rusesabagina a simple question—why? Why, when hundreds of thousands were committing acts of violence and terror around him, did Rusesabagina act to protect life? Remember the journalist who asked German commander Franz Stangl how he had overseen the murder of hundreds of thousands? Stangl answered, "I don't know."



But Rusesabagina gave the same answer when asked why he saved lives. "I don't know," he told the journalist. "I don't know, but I refused so many things."

Stangl's answer suggests that people are capable of evil that is beyond our ability to comprehend. Rusesabagina's answer, however, hints at the opposite: that even in the midst of something as horrible as genocide, people are capable of heroism and good that is beyond understanding.

Rusesabagina had a phone line that the government had not yet disconnected. It was his connection to the outside world, and he sent faxes and gave interviews about the situation in Rwanda. "We sent many faxes to Bill Clinton himself at the White House," he remembered. What was the rest of the world doing as Rwanda was devastated?

International Reaction

Dallaire, the commander of a contingent of UN soldiers in Rwanda, was shocked by the first few days of murder, but he also considered them to be an uncoordinated outburst of violence—perhaps the Hutu settling old scores with political enemies. The chaos, he figured, would taper off. But on April 9, Dallaire received an urgent call from UN personnel at a church. When Dallaire's assistant reached the church, he discovered hundreds of men, women, and children had been murdered. The priests, who were Polish, said the killing had been highly organized. This was not a random act of passion or an act of war. It had been planned and executed with cold precision, and it seemed to be against all Tutsi, not just politicians or soldiers.

Dallaire sent a request to UN headquarters in New York City, asking that his force be doubled to five thousand and that he be allowed to use force to stop the killings. "Give me the means and I can do more," he wrote. Unless this support and authorization arrived, Dallaire and his small unit would be helpless.

However, the United States and other countries were not so much worried about Rwandans as they were about their citizens in the country. The United States evacuated its embassy by April 10. Bob Dole, a prominent U.S. senator, said, "The Americans are out, and as far as I'm concerned, in Rwanda, that ought to be the end of it." Dallaire received orders to remain neutral, help the evacuations, and only use force if fired upon first.

The RPF, however, was already calling the actions genocide and urged world leaders to help. "When the institution of the UN was created after the Second World War, one of its fundamental objectives was to see to it that what happened to the Jews in Nazi Germany would never happen again," wrote an

RPF representative to the head of the UN Security Council. Dallaire, watching with growing desperation as the violence rose around him, scanned a book on international law and determined that he was witnessing genocide.

The importance of the word *genocide* cannot be underestimated. If U.S. officials, after all, said genocide was in fact happening, then they would be obligated to do something about it. Over the next two months, U.S. officials refused to use the word until it became untenable. Then they settled on the phrase "acts of genocide," which legally is not the same as genocide itself.

James Woods, deputy assistant secretary for African Affairs at the Department of Defense from 1986 to 1994, testified in Congress on behalf of the Clinton administration during the genocide. The White House, however, ordered him not to use the word when answering questions from members of Congress. He later called the day "miserable."

"[It was] miserable because I think it was sort of a formal spectacle of the United States in disarray and retreat, leading the international community away from doing the right thing and I think everybody was perfectly happy to follow our lead—in retreat," Woods later said.

The United States actively pushed for the UN to withdraw the forces it had in Rwanda, which it did slowly but surely. Among the U.S. public, there were expressions of concern in the media and in Congress, but there was also a sense that there was nothing that could effectively be done. President Clinton did not hold a top-level meeting once during the entire crisis.

One reason U.S. policy makers were so reluctant was because of what had happened in Somalia at the end of 1993. U.S. soldiers had been sent to the African nation as part of a peacekeeping force. But then eighteen U.S. soldiers were killed

in a fierce gun battle, and the bodies of some of them were dragged through the streets of the city of Mogadishu and mutilated. Americans were shocked by what they saw on the nightly news, and their support for the peacekeeping mission abruptly collapsed. Rwanda, in some ways, seemed to be just another example of violence flaring up on the African continent. It didn't seem worth American lives to stop the slaughter.

"The Clinton administration's policy was, 'Let's withdraw altogether. Let's get out of Rwanda. Leave it to its fate,'" writer Philip Gourevitch later said. "The political calculus from the White House's point of view was if they did the completely wrong thing in Rwanda, was there ever going to be a bill to pay for it politically? Probably not."

The Failure of Leadership

Others, however, argued that Rwanda was not just a political calculation. Many leaders in the Pentagon refused to send troops into harm's way unless there was a clear national interest at stake and only if the public and the nation's leaders fully backed the use of force. Woods said that some U.S. generals wondered, "Why is it our responsibility to send our own troops to get killed in every remote corner of the earth?"

Part of the tragedy of the Rwandan genocide was that the United States, in the mid-1990s, was undisputedly the world's only superpower. There was no longer a threat from the Soviet Union, and if the United States wanted something to be done, it could probably have done so. Rwanda, then, was a tremendous opportunity for the United States to show that it would use its power to prevent genocide.

But Rwanda caused a "considerable disillusionment" for those who hoped that U.S. power would be used to stop genocide, said Woods. "In the absence of effective leadership to explain it to [the public], why would the public rally behind sending the 82nd Airborne to a place they've never heard of to sort out ethnic quarrels between people they've never met? I think it can be explained. I think that's what leadership is all about."

Samantha Power, author of *"A Problem from Hell": America and the Age of Genocide*, listed many things the United States could have done, short of sending in ground troops, to delay or even stop the Rwandan genocide. It could have prevented Belgian peacekeepers from leaving the country so early. It could have urged other nations to send troops to Rwanda. U.S. officials could have denounced the slaughter and pledged that the people responsible would be held accountable. U.S. technology could have been deployed to halt the hate radio broadcasts that were largely responsible for creating an environment in which genocide could take place. "In short," wrote Power, "the United States could have led the world."

No Justice

By July 1994, an estimated eight hundred thousand Rwandan Tutsi had been slaughtered. In response to the genocide, the RPF invaded the country and drove the Hutu from power. An unprecedented period of intense violence—which at its peak exceeded the death rate of the Holocaust—calmed into simmering tension. Ever since, international leaders have tried to explain what went wrong in Rwanda and why they did not do more to help the situation.

Four years later, President Clinton visited Rwanda and apologized for his lack of action. "We in the United States and the world community did not do as much as we could have and should have done to try to limit what occurred," he said. "It may seem strange to you here, but all over the world there were people like me sitting in offices, day after day after day, who did not fully appreciate the depth and the speed with which you were being engulfed by this unimaginable terror."

Dallaire would later show his anger at these kinds of half apologies from world leaders. "I blame the American leadership [for the lack of response], which includes the Pentagon, in projecting itself as the world's policeman one day and a recluse the next," he said.

The twentieth century was coming to a close, and still the world seemed no closer to stopping genocide than it had been at the start. While Rwanda exploded into violence that later subsided, a corner of Europe had also descended into bloody chaos. This conflict, in a region called the Balkans, would frustrate and humiliate world leaders—but it also provided a sliver of hope that genocide could, in fact, be stopped and its perpetrators brought to justice.

chapter six the muslims of bosnia

In July 1996, Clea Koff stepped off an airplane in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country in southeastern Europe, on a special mission. The cheerful young American was part of a team that had come to solve a terrible mystery. Just one year before, nearly eight thousand men and boys had been forced to leave the town of Srebrenica to walk across a war-torn region to the town of Tuzla. They had never arrived, and it was suspected that they had been executed as part of a campaign of genocide. Koff and the team were determined to find them and discover what had happened.



Forensic anthropologist Clea Koff led a team of scientists on a search for the truth about what happened to the Muslims in Bosnia in the 1990s.

Koff had studied forensic anthropology in the United States. She learned how to examine human remains to determine how people had died. It might appear to be a gruesome profession to some, but to Koff, it was part of a fascinating process of discovery. Ultimately, forensic anthropology uses science to arrive at truth.

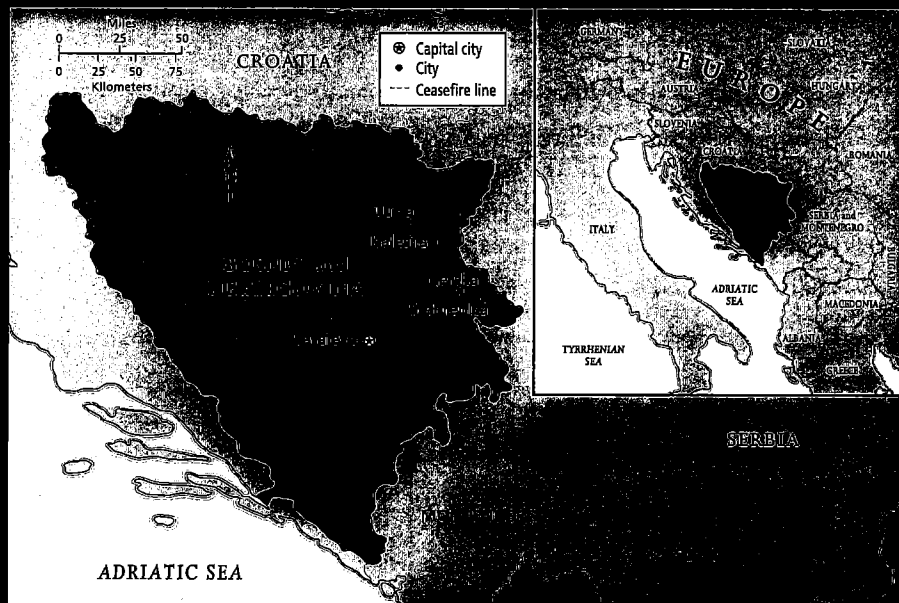
Truth may be the most important weapon in the battle against genocide. Almost all perpetrators of genocide deny that a crime has occurred. They try to hide bodies or weapons (the Nazis destroyed many of the death camps themselves). Leaders often claim that the charges of genocide are lies told by political enemies or other countries seeking to gain an advantage over them. "Where are the bodies?" they ask. "Where is the proof of genocide?"

This was the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina (which is typically referred to as Bosnia) in the mid-1990s. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1990, many areas that had once been under the influence of the Soviet Union were rocked by political instability. The nation of Yugoslavia began to fall apart. In hindsight, this seems predictable. Yugoslavia actually consisted of a patchwork of ethnicities and religions that had been united under a strong and often repressive Communist government for more than forty years. The people, however, had memories, identities, and rivalries that stretched back for centuries.

Slovenia and Croatia declared independence, and war soon erupted between Croatia and neighboring Serbia. When Bosnia also tried to secede, the Serbian army invaded. The war was justified by the Serbs in terms of race and religion. The Serbs were Orthodox Christian, and they declared that they were coming to the aid of fellow Serbs living in Bosnia who were being abused by Muslim forces. Bosnia at the time was a mix of

Christians and Muslims (this area had been ruled for centuries by the Ottoman Empire), and the Serbs began to systematically empty villages of Muslims and destroy the mosques. Some observers of this process, which came to be called ethnic cleansing, accused the Serbs of committing genocide. This is a charge disputed vigorously then—and now—by the Serbs.





Serbian forces used former Yugoslavian military equipment to attack Bosnia, which was defended by ill-equipped units. The Serbian forces surrounded the capital city, Sarajevo, and artillery in the surrounding hills battered the city's buildings. Snipers shot down civilians walking in the streets. Around the world, people reacted with disbelief and horror. Just hours from the comfortable capitals of Western Europe, people were killing one another with a savagery last seen in World War II.

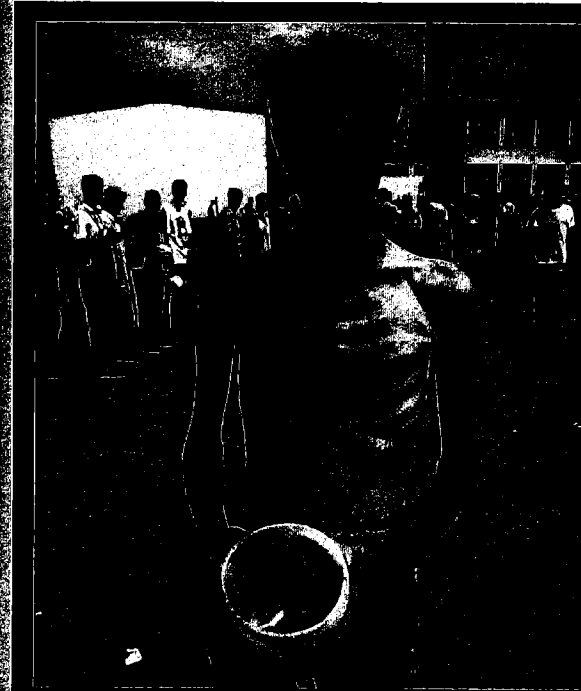
"We Must Do Something"

Many Western leaders loudly expressed sympathy and resolved to act. Some in Europe called it a crisis that would allow Europe

to assert itself as a united force on the world stage and bring peace to the region. Luxembourg's foreign minister, Jacques Poos, declared, "Now Europe's hour has come."

Nothing, however, seemed to actually affect events on the ground. The United States, now undisputedly the world's superpower, was reluctant to get involved in a bloody conflict that many believed was a nasty civil war based on centuries of divisions and hatred. All sides, they reasoned, were to blame. Politicians deplored the massacres, and editorial pages expressed outrage, but the killings, shootings, and ethnic cleansing continued.

Rumors began to circulate that the Serbs had created a number of camps for captured Muslims. Refugees described murders, starvation, and the abuse of women. In the summer of 1992, Western journalists gained access to the camps and



questioned inmates and recently released prisoners. The stories—of tortures and executions—were terrible, but it was the images that would prove to be shocking. Listless prisoners stood behind barbed wire, their skin drawn tight over their ribs, shoulder blades, and cheekbones. The similarity between these images and those of the Nazi concentration camps at the end of World War II was unmistakable.

"The chilling reports from Bosnia evoke this century's greatest nightmare, Hitler's genocide against Jews, Gypsies and Slavs," wrote the *New York Times*. Public approval in the United States for air strikes jumped above 50 percent, and criticism of inaction grew intense. President George H. W. Bush, locked in a reelection battle against opponent Bill Clinton, pledged that all camps would be inspected. However, little else was done.

After Clinton defeated Bush in November 1992 and became president of the United States, supporters of Muslims in Bosnia hoped the new president would use American power to bring peace to the Balkans. They were soon disappointed. Though Clinton had constantly criticized Bush for doing too little in Bosnia, Clinton and his advisers were soon explaining why intervening in Bosnia was not feasible, reasonable, or a solution to the chaos there.

Elie Wiesel, as he had with Reagan earlier, made his opinion known to Clinton. "I have been in the former Yugoslavia last fall. I cannot sleep since what I have seen. As a Jew I am saying that. We must do something to stop the bloodshed in that country."

"Safe Area" Srebrenica

Still, no U.S. soldiers were sent to the region. Under the UN, however, several countries had sent forces to Bosnia. In one

town, Srebrenica, about sixty thousand Muslim refugees had flowed into the city to escape the fighting. As Serb forces approached the city in March 1993, a French UN commander bluffed his way through Serb lines and saw the thousands of starving, sick people in Srebrenica. He immediately declared that the people were "under the protection of the UN." The Serb forces reluctantly halted. Just a month later, the UN declared that Srebrenica and 30 square miles (78 square kilometers) around it was a "safe area"—the first one in UN history. Srebrenica, however, seemed a bad choice to many. The city was deep in eastern Bosnia, surrounded by Serbian forces and within 10 miles (16 km) of the Serbian border.

Over the next few years, Srebrenica and two other "safe areas" in eastern Bosnia had a tenuous existence. The war had exhausted both the Serbs and the Bosnians, and there had been hope for a settlement. But it was clear that the Serbs wanted the eastern safe areas erased, and many Western diplomats, who saw the land as indefensible, secretly agreed.

UN forces, equipped with sky blue helmets and driving in white armored vehicles, tried to maintain some kind of authority. However, there was little question that they would be able to mount any kind of adequate defense against the larger Serb forces around them. Their only real deterrent was the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) warplanes based in nearby Western Europe. Yet even using these planes involved a complicated decision-making process that would not be fast enough to react to events on the ground. When Serbs became too aggressive around the safe areas, by shelling them for example, NATO warplanes conducted pinprick bombing attacks. When that happened, the Serbs retaliated by seizing UN soldiers as prisoners. To secure their release, the bombing attacks were called off.

In January 1995, a force of several hundred Dutch soldiers arrived in Srebrenica, commanded by Tom Karremans. By this time, the fighting in Bosnia appeared to have stabilized somewhat, with no town being captured by either army for almost two years. However, it appeared that Serbs were growing determined to take Srebrenica, and on July 6, 1995, they began their attack.

Hundreds of Muslims in the city, realizing that it was about to fall, fled into nearby woods. On July 10, with the Serbs about to enter the city, UN commander Bertrand Janvier authorized an air strike. Around the city, the Serb forces suddenly halted and the air strike was canceled. The next afternoon, however, NATO warplanes bombed Serb forces, though this ultimately did little damage to the Serbs. Serb soldiers angrily seized Dutch soldiers and threatened to kill them. This was enough to halt any more air strikes, and in the early evening, Srebrenica was captured by the Serbs.

Nightmare at Srebrenica

At first, it seemed that nothing bad would happen. The Serbian general Ratko Mladic assured the crowds of Muslim civilians that "those who want to leave, can leave. There is no need to be frightened." In front of camera crews, Mladic and his men passed out chocolates to Muslim children. More than fifty buses arrived in Srebrenica to deport Muslim civilians from the city. When he met with representatives of the town, Mladic demanded that all weapons be turned over to him. "I guarantee that all those who surrender their weapons will live," he said. "I need a clear answer so I can decide both as a man and as a commander."

As would be learned later, Mladic had already made up his

mind. When the loaded buses left the city, they were soon halted by Serbian soldiers. All men and boys aged twelve to seventy-seven were separated from the rest of the group, as the Serbs explained, to be questioned for war crimes.



As this was going on, hundreds of Muslim men were wandering through the surrounding mountains and forests. Most hoped to somehow reach the safety of Muslim territory 40 miles (64 km) away, and they would rather risk the minefields and treacherous mountain terrain than Serb "mercy." Most of them were snared by Serbian patrols or lured out of hiding by Serbs wearing stolen blue UN helmets and riding in white UN vehicles.

As the buses ferried Muslim women and children out of Srebrenica, thousands of Muslim men, either from the city or captured nearby, were herded into open fields, empty warehouses, and factories. At a nearby Dutch base, Potocari, thousands of Muslim refugees gathered, hoping to be protected by the Dutch soldiers. Serbs demanded they be turned over to them, and the Dutch peacekeepers acquiesced.

Over the next few days, the staccato of machine-gun fire and the concussion of grenade blasts filled the area around Srebrenica. When asked, Serb commanders explained that Serb soldiers were celebrating their victory by firing into the air. Yet disturbing accounts were related from the first Muslim women and children to arrive in safe territory. They spoke of a blur of horrible images—of the men pulled from their families, of dead strewn along the road, of young women taken by Serb soldiers and never seen again. On July 14, a UN top official mentioned in a cable that “we are beginning to detect a short-fall in [the] number of persons expected to arrive in Tuzla. There is no further information on the status of the approximately 4,000 draft age males.”

Uncovering a Crime

Almost one year after this message was sent, Clea Koff and a team of forensic anthropologists pulled up to a secluded spot located on a curve in a road near Cerska, just west of Srebrenica. By this time, as part of the peace agreement, U.S. forces were in Bosnia, and Koff's team was accompanied by a convoy of U.S. Army Humvees and Bradley armored vehicles. Koff thought it was the perfect place for a picnic, but she and the team were soon working on mapping the hundreds of empty shell casings

strewn along the road. By the next day, they had uncovered a shallow trench filled with bodies, and within a week, they had uncovered 150.

The team moved on to other sites around Srebrenica. More bodies were uncovered. Koff, along with other teammates, speculated about how the boys and men had died. All had been hit at close range by a high-velocity weapon. Had they been shot on the edge of the pits and fallen in? Were they already in the pits when the shooting began? Some of the bodies were on their knees. Some were lying stretched out. This kind of language may sound cold and analytical, but it was critically important to the work that was being done—bringing the killers to justice.

Koff, who had worked in Rwanda, found herself thinking how similar it was to her work in Bosnia.



The bodies could have been the same: again, their hands had been tied behind their backs; again, they were all males; again, there were a range of ages; again, they were wearing civilian clothes. I knew there were thousands of men missing from Srebrenica—we had only uncovered about two hundred by then. Just as in Rwanda, I sensed them on other fields, up other dirt tracks, an entire community—albeit just males—of dead all around us.

I felt anger toward people who deem murder an acceptable political policy. I felt the last of my naivete drain away as I uncovered more and more people shot while their hands were tied. And I felt two kinds of duty: one to the bodies—to identify them and allow them to incriminate their killers, the other to their relatives—to help return the remains to them.

But first the bodies had to tell their stories. A morgue was set up in a garment factory that was scarred with shell and bullet holes in the city of Kalesija. Each body was stored in a refrigerated area before it was taken, one at a time, to an X-ray machine. The X-ray revealed all pieces of metal—belt buckles, keys, jewelry—but also bullets or other metal fragments. Each projectile was then removed from the body and submitted to a technician to be analyzed as evidence.

All clothing was removed from the bodies, and the bones were reconstructed in their general anatomical position. By studying different parts of the bones, Koff was able to determine gender and age of the person and also examine signs of abuse—such as a bullet hole—to determine whether it had happened before or after the person had died.

As Koff performed this painstaking work, she also began to take in more of the countryside around her. She noticed posters of General Mladic in some towns, along with warnings to



NATO troops that there would be no peace if Mladic was arrested. She also saw groups of women, calling themselves Women of Srebrenica, in demonstrations, weeping and holding up pictures of missing men.

As the morgue processed bodies and entered them into a computer database, Koff and her team also took stories from women who were seeking their loved ones. Koff noted that the most critical piece of information these women offered often turned out to be their sewing pattern. Because Srebrenica had been cut off from most of the world for so long, the women had frequently patched their families' clothing, each with a unique style of stitching. A repaired piece of clothing could be recognized by the woman who sewed it, and thus the bodies of

family members could be identified.

Koff found herself torn between her job, which was to collect and analyze evidence, and the instinct to return something—even if it was just some stitching—to those who had lost someone. One day a fellow scientist showed her an unusual piece of evidence—a leg bone with a bullet lodged in it. Koff thought this was interesting, and then she laid out the rest of the bones. One of the bones in the hip was just fusing, a sign that the person had been under twenty-one years of age. Another bone revealed that he was even younger, between sixteen and eighteen. Though Koff had already examined hundreds of bodies strictly from a scientific perspective, this time an image formed in her mind—of a young man, perhaps no more than a boy, on the hillside at Cerska.

I 'felt' the pain of the bullet entering his thigh just above the knee; I could sense his youth and the tragedy of it all and I thought of his family and what they were missing, and I thought of what one of the Women had said—how someone had told her they last saw her son getting on a bus with lots of other men and he was crying—and how that was the last she ever heard about him.

An International Court?

Because of the work of Koff and hundreds of others, the story of what had happened at Srebrenica began to emerge. Many Serbs shared the perspective that it was they who were the victims in the war. There may have been some isolated terrible incidents, they admitted, but ethnic cleansing and massacres were propaganda spread by Muslims and their supporters.

This argument became more difficult to support when

hundreds of bodies had been recovered, their hands tied behind their backs and all evidence indicating that they had been shot at close range. Ten years after the massacres at Srebrenica, this evidence would finally be used to bring justice.

Raphael Lemkin had hoped that a permanent court of some kind would be created to prosecute those who committed genocide. He also recognized that such a court would take some time to create. All nations cherish their sovereignty, and an international court, in concept, threatened that sovereignty. Instead, most genocides were dealt with by temporary courts set up in the country where the crimes themselves had taken place.

The Nuremberg trial of Nazi war criminals had been a critically important development for international law. Until then, it was extremely rare that individuals were held responsible for actions during wartime. Many of the Nazis themselves would argue that they had done nothing but follow orders—as all soldiers do. This defense, however, did not succeed. “Crimes against international law are committed by men and not by abstract entities, and only by punishing individuals who commit such crimes can the provisions of international law be enforced,” ruled the court. Of the twenty-two Nazis who were tried, three were acquitted, twelve were sentenced to death, and seven to various prison terms.

Yet the Nuremberg trials had a number of critics. Some believed that the trials didn’t represent justice; they were simply the victors imposing their will on the defeated. It was just another example of “might makes right.” Others argued from a legal perspective. They wondered how the Nazis could be convicted for laws that didn’t exist on an international level before World War II. Another criticism was that the procedure for convicting war criminals was more lax than in many countries. In most countries, the death penalty required the

consent of all members on a jury. In some war trials, however, death sentences were imposed by margins as slim as 6–5.

Despite these criticisms, the Nuremberg trials set an important example. Those who committed certain actions such as genocide, no matter when they were committed, could be held personally responsible. It took more than forty years, however, before the example set by Nuremberg was enforced again. In 1993 the United Nations established a court at The Hague, Netherlands, to prosecute violations of international law committed in Bosnia and the surrounding countries since 1991. Among the crimes listed was genocide.

The court spent several years gathering the evidence necessary to list those responsible for alleged war crimes. More than 160 Serbs were indicted. However, even when they had been accused, other Serbs refused to give them over to appear before the tribunal, which they regarded as a foreign plot to harm Serbia. As of late 2005, the highest-ranking Serbs accused of crimes, including Ratko Mladic, remained at large.

However, a number of lower-ranking officers were arrested and tried for their crimes, and a large number received prison sentences. Just as important, the courts provided a public forum for an extensive and exhaustive search for the truth. Presenting evidence in courts requires high standards. Also, the defense has the opportunity to tell its side of the story—to explain what it believes happened. The defense can also question witnesses or refute evidence. In the end, a trial is an opportunity to give the world something that often remains elusive about genocide—the truth. And the truth is essential for those who committed acts of genocide and those who suffered from it. Only when the truth is established can justice be done, wrongs addressed, and any kind of reconciliation begun.

A trial also gives history the terrible but irrefutable details.

On July 17, 1995, according to a tape played in court, a Colonel Popovic called his commander to say that 1,200 captives had been shot to death.

“Hello, it’s Popovic, boss,” he said. “Everything has been brought to an end. That job is done. No problems. I am here at the place. Can I just take a little break, take a shower? Basically that all gets an A. The grade is an A.”

Later that night, Popovic tried to reach his commander to report that another group had been executed. “Tell the general I finished the job. I was there on the spot,” he said. “It was horrible, horrible.”

Intervention in Kosovo

The Balkans would not stay quiet. Largely because of U.S. leadership, NATO had brokered a truce among the warring factions around Bosnia. The deal had many critics, and hatred and dissatisfaction persisted in the region, but it was also a true peace.

In the southern part of Serbia is Kosovo, a province that holds deep historical and cultural meaning for the Serbs. However, it also contains a sizable minority of Albanians. As with many groups in the Balkans, the Albanians desired their own state, in this case independent of Serbian rule. The peace deal in 1995, however, did not recognize a separate Albania, and a group of rebels, called the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) formed. The KLA was a tiny band of determined Albanian men. They began making small attacks against Serb forces. When Serb police officers were murdered, Serb forces under the direction of Slobodan Milosevic moved into the region. Milosevic was a familiar figure in Yugoslavian politics and had served as president of Serbia during the bloody wars of the early 1990s.

Each atrocity against the Serbs was met with violence against the Albanian population. In a bid to rout out and capture KLA members, the Serb forces set villages aflame and drove the population into the countryside.

The startling images of yet more destruction and refugees in the Balkans provoked a far deeper response from NATO than in the early 1990s, when NATO made many threats but failed to carry them out. For one, the Kosovo situation could inflame the entire region, including Greece, a member of NATO. And this time, world opinion had shifted. After seeing massacres in Rwanda and Srebrenica, people were far more willing to use force to stop genocide. It had seemed to work in 1995 when NATO finally used credible force against the Serbs.

In January 1999, a group of forty-five Albanians were executed by Serbs and left in a ravine. This time, an American named William Walker was on the scene within twenty-four hours. He saw the bodies and confirmed the massacre. A month later, U.S. and European diplomats sat down with Serbian representatives outside Paris. They said the Serbs had to withdraw and accept the presence of an international peace force that would monitor the region. The Serbs rejected the offer.

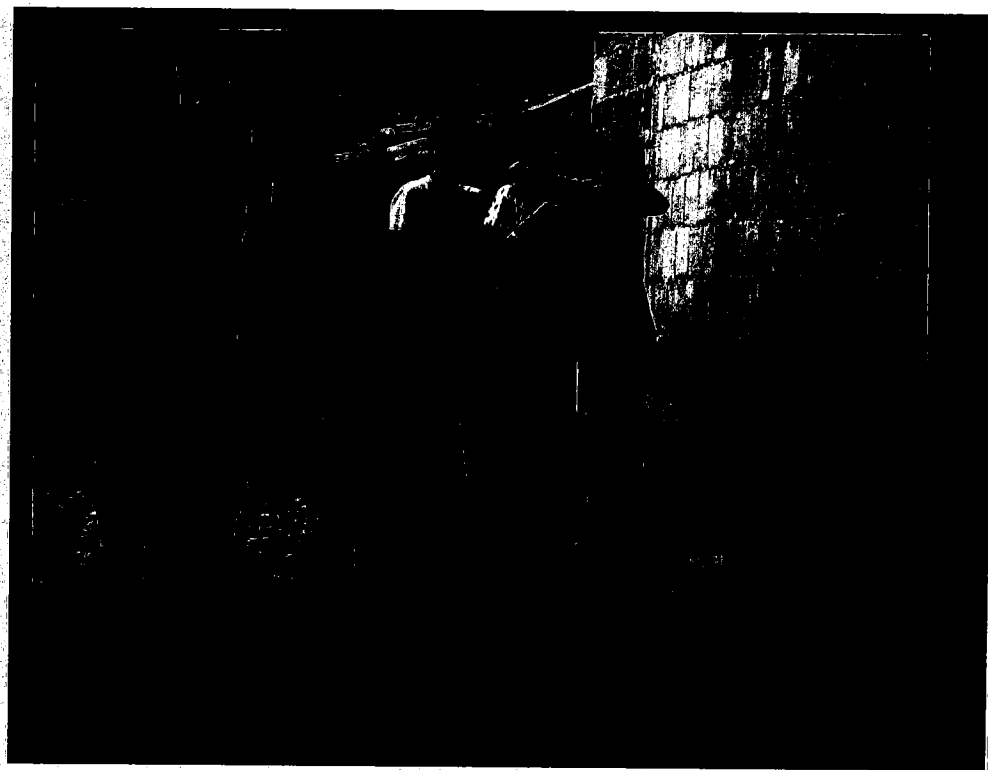
On March 24, 1999, NATO jets roared into the air and began dropping missiles and bombs on the Serb forces. The next day, President Clinton justified the attacks to a national television audience. He invoked the language of genocide.

We've seen innocent people taken from their homes, forced to kneel in the dirt and sprayed with bullets; Kosovar men dragged from their families, fathers and sons together, lined up and shot in cold blood. We learned some of the same lessons in Bosnia just a few years ago. The world did not act early enough to stop that war, either. And let's not forget what happened—innocent people herded into concentration

camps, children gunned down by snipers on their way to school, soccer fields and parks turned into cemeteries; a quarter of a million people killed, not because of anything they have done, but because of who they were.

In the following weeks, even as NATO airpower carried out strikes, the Serbs went on a massive offensive. They flushed out every Albanian, sending them into headlong flight. More than 1.3 million Kosovars fled. The air strikes continued. After seventy-eight days, Milosevic, facing unrest among his troops and a collapse in support among Serbians, surrendered. More than 50,000 NATO troops entered Kosovo, and more than 1 million Kosovars returned to their homes to pick up the pieces and resume their lives.

At the beginning of 2006, Kosovo technically remained part



of Serbia, but it was effectively independent under a UN administration. Since November 2005, Serbian and Kosovar leaders have engaged in UN-sponsored negotiations to determine the future of the province. That future, at this point, is still very unclear.

Legacy of Failure

Despite the success of intervention in Kosovo, the international community's legacy in Srebrenica, as well as in Rwanda, Cambodia, and during the Holocaust, is largely one of failure. "Srebrenica crystallized a truth understood only too late by the United Nations and the world at large: that Bosnia was as much a moral cause as a military conflict," the United Nations secretary general, Kofi Annan, wrote in a 1999 report. "The tragedy of Srebrenica will haunt our history forever."

In almost every case of genocide in the twentieth century, world leaders have avoided taking the difficult steps necessary to prevent or stop it. The pattern has been one of denial, excuses, and then repeated apologies—after the atrocities have occurred. Then there is an assurance of "never again." Samantha Power called it "the world's most unfulfilled promise."

Several organizations appeared in the late 1990s dedicated to educating the public about genocide, observing states that are in danger of descending into genocide, and lobbying to halt genocide where it has appeared. Genocide Watch, founded in The Hague, Netherlands, in 1999, describes eight stages of genocide. The first three stages involve the separation of a group into distinct groups, what the organization calls an "us vs. them" mentality. Then one group is identified as being unclean, sinister, or destructive, which permits many average or

indifferent people to regard the group as something less than human.

The next two stages concern organization. Genocides never "just happen," they require an enormous amount of planning and coordination. Units must be armed with weapons and trained how to use them. Once these plans are in place, certain individuals take opportunities to whip up hatred against the other group. This can include formal laws to separate the group from the rest of society or a violent targeting of moderates who urge some kind of reconciliation.

In the sixth and seventh stages, the group is targeted for destruction. This can include the creation of death lists (as in Rwanda) or some kind of formal identification of the group (such as Jews being forced to wear yellow stars). This is often followed by a forced relocation or confinement to ghettos. Once the group has been isolated, identified, and an apparatus created to kill them, the extermination stage can occur.

The final stage of genocide, according to Genocide Watch, is denial. Bodies are buried or burned, and camps are dismantled. The perpetrators deny that genocide ever occurred. They say it was isolated, random violence, or they blame the victims for bringing the genocide on themselves.

By identifying how genocides occur, Genocide Watch and other groups can attempt to spot genocide before it occurs. This theoretically can allow other parties to take measures that prevent the genocide and thus save thousands or millions of lives. These measures include condemnation, economic sanctions, political pressure, and assurances that those who commit the genocide will ultimately be held responsible.

Many say that the new International Criminal Court will be the forum to ensure that perpetrators of genocide never get away with their crimes. This will provide an important lesson

for the future: If you commit genocide, you will be unable to flee. Any nation that gives you refuge will come under international pressure. Eventually, your crimes will be exposed to the world and you will be punished.

As Kofi Annan put it, the court serves a vital function of justice. "People all over the world want to know that humanity can strike back. That whenever genocide, war crimes or other such violations are committed, there is a court before which the criminal can be held to account, a court that puts an end to a global culture of impunity."

There are many criticisms of the court, one of which is that the wheels of justice move so slowly that actually capturing suspected perpetrators of genocide and trying them is extremely difficult. The former presiding judge of the Yugoslavia war crimes tribunal, Gabrielle Kirk McDonald, once pointed out that it has traditionally been "easier to go to prison for killing one man than for killing 100,000."

A last resort to prevent genocide is the use of force, but this complicates the issue enormously. Once the decision to use force is made, matters often spin out of control. Bombs and bullets cannot be taken back. Combat always is marred by mistakes, and civilians may be injured or killed. And, of course, the soldiers sent into action become targets. If soldiers are killed or wounded, public support for the operation may collapse.

Still, if there is one lesson learned since the early 1990s, it is that force or the credible threat of force appears to be a necessary part of any strategy to prevent or stop genocide. Columnist Anne Applebaum noted, "Sanctions and embargoes have never really worked against mass murderers, and humanitarian military intervention does not target the people who deserve it most. Only by holding individuals accountable, will crimes against humanity be stopped. The perpetrators

themselves need to be personally frightened."

The debacle in Bosnia and the role the United States had to play to secure peace convinced many people—especially Americans—that force is the only credible way to prevent genocide and the United States is the only nation that can pull it off. Unfortunately, the supporters of intervention have collided with the International Criminal Court. Since U.S. soldiers are stationed in places all over the world, many believe that U.S. soldiers could be accused of committing war crimes and tried at the court. Critics of the court say that these prosecutions will be inspired by American enemies who have a grudge or who want to limit American power. The United States, they argue, has a unique role in the world to guarantee security and stability. It was U.S. soldiers who saved Bosnia and Kosovo, they say, not the International Criminal Court.

How then, can genocide be prevented? At the beginning of this book, we discussed how people can view themselves as different from others—and how this can devolve into genocide. Some argue that the solution to this is to simply identify everybody as being part of the same group. Two individuals from Boston and New York may identify themselves as living in different cities, but ultimately they consider each other Americans. The French and Germans see one another commonly as Europeans. Why not, say some, rise above all groups and recognize that we are all people—all members of the same species? We are, they say, "citizens of the world." This view may help promote a more peaceful world, say critics, but it still doesn't get to the root of the challenge—preventing genocide before it happens and stopping it where it has.