

HISTORY OF THE TUTSIS AND THE HUTUS

EARLY RWANDA



<http://www.clarku.edu/activelearning/ima/oes/anton/rwandalocation230.oif>

Rwanda had been home to the Twa pygmies for hundreds of years when the Hutu migrated to the area. Later, the Tutsi migrated to the same area. The Twa were forest hunters, the Hutu were farmers, and the Tutsi raised cattle. The Tutsis were about 15% of the population, but raising cattle made them wealthy. The king of the region was a Tutsi, and Tutsis were viewed as higher-class than the Hutu and Twa. But the Tutsis and Hutus also married each other and become very similar. They soon shared the same language, religion, and kinship systems. Some Hutu became wealthy and were accepted as Tutsi. So while the Hutus and Tutsis came from different areas, they were becoming one group.

EUROPEAN INVADERS

By the mid-1800s, European countries had taken over most of Africa. However, these European countries started to compete with each other over who could control different areas.

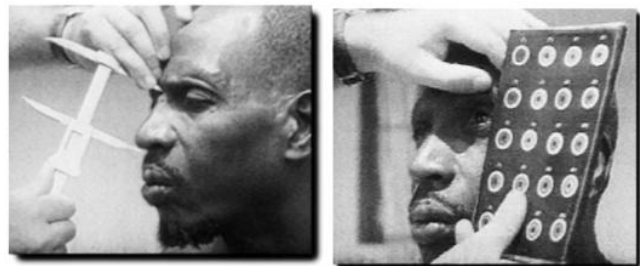


In 1884, leaders from European countries met in Berlin, Germany, and decided which European powers got to control different parts of Africa. Their goal was to divide up resources so they could keep peace between Europeans. The land that became the country of Rwanda was given to Germany. But after Germany lost World War I, Belgium gained control of Rwanda.

The *Belgians* decided to officially classify everyone native to Rwanda into three groups: Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. The Twa were very different in appearance and culture from the other groups. But dividing the Tutsi and Hutu was a little harder, especially since there had been years of intermarriage.

Belgian: a person from Belgium

The Belgians thought that the Tutsis were a superior group because they were a little more "white" looking. Many Tutsi had long thin noses and slightly lighter eyes than Hutus. But physical differences proved hard to measure. Since Tutsis were the wealthy cattle owners, the Belgians ended up defining "Tutsi" as anyone with more than ten cows or a long, thin nose.



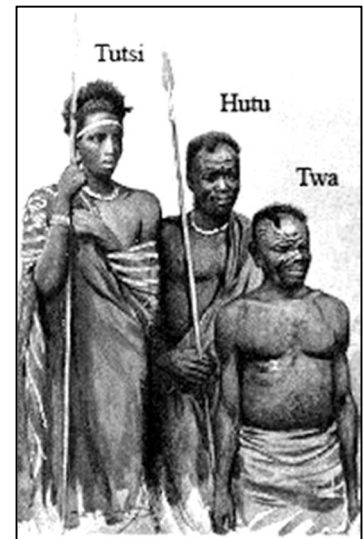
Photos: Amnesty International Film *Forsaken Cries*, 1997

The Hutus were about 85% of Rwanda's population. But since the Belgian colonists believed that the Tutsis were natural leaders, they replaced regional Hutu chiefs with Tutsi chiefs. Only Tutsis were allowed to attend schools set up by the colonists and only Tutsis could participate in the colonial government. Hutus did hard physical work on plantations and in mines. And they were often treated harshly by Tutsi supervisors. The Twa, only about 1% of the total population, were considered the lowest class. They moved deeper into the forests to avoid Belgian rule and discrimination as much as possible.

BELGIAN RULERS SWITCH LOYALTIES

By the 1950s, the Hutus were totally sick of Belgian rule and of being treated as “inferior” by the Tutsis. This probably did not surprise the Belgian rulers. But there was a surprise coming for them. The Tutsis, who had more power than Hutus, were also getting angry. They were tired of being ruled by the white Belgians. They wanted to be independent of their European rulers. So the Tutsi started working to push Belgium out.

The Belgians didn’t want to lose control of their money-making colony. Some Belgian rulers came up with the idea of getting help from the Hutus. They decided to suddenly start giving the Hutus more power. They thought maybe the Hutu would help them keep power over Rwanda if they treated the Hutu better. Of course, this just upset the Tutsis more.



<http://criancasinvisiveis2.blogspot.com/2009/10/tutsi-x->

INDEPENDENCE AND HUTU RULE

In 1959, a violent struggle began between the Tutsis and Hutus. The Hutus took control away from the Tutsi leaders. But the Hutus also threw out the white Belgian rulers. The Hutus declared independence and elected the first Hutu president. During this time of fighting, Hutus killed more than 20,000 Tutsis. Around 150,000 Tutsis escaped the country and became refugees.

Not all Tutsis left Rwanda. But life in Rwanda would never be the same for those who stayed. After so many years of Tutsis and their Belgian supports treating Hutus unfairly, the Hutus were angry with the Tutsis. Tutsis were kicked out of government positions. School enrollment was very limited for Tutsis. Job discrimination was common. And Tutsis were openly criticized as bad people.

To gain public support for their treatment of the Tutsis, the Hutu government spread the idea that Tutsis came to Rwanda long after the Hutus arrived. The government stated that even though Tutsis had lived in Rwanda for hundreds of years, they were actually outsiders and had no right to be in Rwanda.

In December of 1962 and January of 1964, armed groups of Tutsi refugees entered Rwanda. The Rwanda’s Hutu government leaders responded by killing more than 10,000 Tutsi men, women, and children, including local Tutsis who were helping the refugees.

Although tensions between the Tutsis and Hutus never really went away, life in Rwanda was fairly peaceful in the 1970s and 1980s. Discrimination against Tutsis still existed, but it was not as severe. Rwanda’s economy was strong, earning good profits by exporting coffee and tea. But in the late 1980s, coffee and tea prices around the world dropped. Rwanda’s economy started having major problems. People were losing their jobs. The mood inside the country was one of worry and frustration.

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

Tutsi refugees wanted to return home to Rwanda. Rwanda’s Hutu government said “no.” The government stated that Rwanda did not have enough land or enough jobs for so many people. The Tutsis would have to stay out.

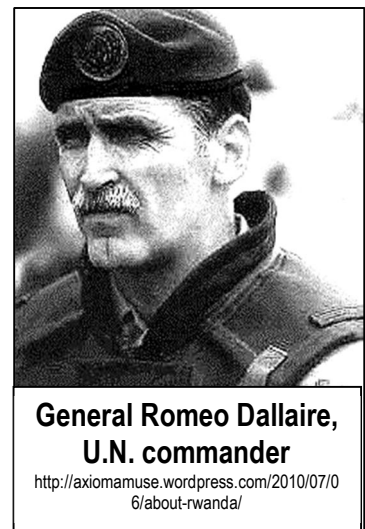
Tutsis was to take back power in Rwanda and go back to the days when Tutsis mistreated the Hutu people.

By April, 1994, tensions were running high between Rwanda's Hutus and Tutsis. On April 6, the plane of Rwanda's president was shot down near the airport and he was killed. The president, a Hutu, was trying to work together with Tutsi leaders to keep peace in the country and to give rights to all people. The Hutu accused the Tutsis of shooting down the plane. But it is very possible that Hutu extremists may have killed their own president to keep him from signing peace agreements with the Tutsi.

GENOCIDE

Within hours, the country burst into violence. Governments around the world turned away from the violence. The Hutu leaders did not want the United Nations soldiers there, so they killed 10 of them hoping to scare the United Nations into leaving. It partly worked, because the United Nations pulled out half of their soldiers.

The Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines encouraged Hutus to use any weapons they could find to kill Tutsis and anyone else who got in their way. The station even broadcast names, addresses, and car license numbers of Tutsis, telling listeners to go and kill the people. Some churches and schools were trying to provide a safe place for Tutsis. As the radio station found out about these places, they broadcast names and locations of those churches and schools and told listeners to go kill the Tutsis seeking safety in these places. General Dallaire, the United Nations commander, asked the United Nations to find a way to jam the radio's signal so their messages could not be heard.



No country sent help. Neither the United Nations nor any country tried to jam the radio station's hate messages and instructions on how to murder people. No country sent people to save victims.

Every day for over three months, Tutsis - and anyone who tried to protect Tutsis - were hunted, tortured, and massacred. Hutu soldiers were not the only ones doing this. Hutus were told to attack their Tutsi neighbors and friends. Regular people picked up machetes and guns and killed each other. According to witnesses, even Hutu children, women, and old people helped hunt down and murder Tutsis. By the end of the murders, almost one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus had lost their lives. Three-fourths of the Tutsis in Rwanda were dead.

The genocide formally ended when Tutsi-led troops overpowered the extremist Hutu militias.

Adapted from The Genocide Teaching Project lesson plan designed by American University Washington College of Law students Sarah Hymowitz and Amelia Parker, <http://www.wcl.american.edu/humright/center/rwanda/lesson.cfm> with additional information from "Ethnic Violence in Rwanda," Notre Dame Magazine, Summer 2008. <http://magazine.nd.edu/news/1154-ethnic-violence-in-rwanda/> and "Bystanders to the Rwandan Conflict & Genocide: Current state of research" by Christopher Kayumba & Dr. Jean-Paul Kimonyo, The Living History, Sweden, http://www.levandehistoria.se/files/Bystander_in_Rwanda.pdf

J.Hall, Sept. 2012