GENOCIDE CASE STUDY: RWANDA

(1) In 1994 approximately 800,000 Tutsi were killed in Rwanda at the hands of their Hutu neighbors. The Hutu took up arms against the Tutsi in beginning in April of 1994 and for 100 days slayed the Tutsi with machetes, guns, and other crude weapons. This was one of the worst acts of violence that the world had ever seen since the Jewish Holocaust during World War II. This was genocide.

(2) Genocide, according to the 1948 Genocide Convention is any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethничal, racial or religious group, as such: Killing members of the group; Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of the life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. In other words, genocide is trying to eliminate a group, whether it is by death or converting children over to the “dominant group”.

(3) Genocide according to the United Nations is a violation of human rights and according to the U.N. Genocide Convention the United Nations must act to prevent or stop genocide when and where it is happening. This poses the question then – why does genocide continue to happen? The United Nations passed the genocide resolution with the intention to stop another Holocaust from happening, as it was passed in the wake of the Jewish Holocaust. But since then there have been numerous other genocides that have occurred including: The Bosnian Genocide in the former Yugoslavia, the Cambodian Genocide, and the Rwandan Genocide.

(4) The Rwandan Genocide has brought particular worldwide criticism to the United Nations, and also the United States for the failure to intervene in Rwanda. Especially, since the United Nations has promised over and over to act, the United Nations (and the United States) had ample evidence to suggest that this was going to happen in Rwanda, and this genocide was the result of colonization and de-colonization.

(5) During the decades of the “Scramble for Africa” Germany claimed Rwanda. When the Germans got to Rwanda, in the late nineteenth century they were shocked by what they saw. Rwanda was made up by three groups of native peoples – the Hutu, the Tutsi, and the Twa. The Germans, and later other Europeans, saw these peoples as very distinct groups, but they seemed to be living harmoniously side by side. All three groups were homogenous (the same) regarding culture and language. People lived and worked side-by-side and even intermarried between the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. The Europeans were baffled and began to racialize (classify based on racial features) the three groups. This was the root of the deadly division between the Hutu and the Tutsi. The Hutu made up almost 90% of the population and the Twa a mere 1% of the population. They were now mis-labeled as “tribes” which is a label never used before in Rwandan history.

(6) So who were the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa, before the Europeans arrived? The word “Tutsi,” which apparently first described the status of an individual—a person rich in cattle—became the term that referred to the elite group as a whole and the word “Hutu”—meaning originally a subordinate or follower of a more powerful person—came to refer to the mass of the ordinary people. The identification of Tutsi pastoralists as power-holders and of Hutu cultivators as subjects was becoming general when Europeans first arrived in Rwanda at the turn of the century, but it was not yet completely fixed throughout the country. Rulers of small states embedded in the larger nation, important lineage heads and some power-holders within the central state hierarchy exercised authority even though they were people who would today be called “Hutu.” Another
physical difference thought to play a role was that the Tutsi were described as by the Europeans as being taller and more slender with “fine features”, while the Hutu were shorter and stockier and “course featured”.

(7)  Most people married within the occupational group in which they had been raised. This practice created a shared gene pool within each group, which meant that over generations pastoralists came to look more like other pastoralists—tall, thin and narrow-featured—and cultivators like other cultivators—shorter, stronger, and with broader features. Although it was not usual, Hutu and Tutsi sometimes intermarried. The practice declined in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the gap widened between Tutsi elite and Hutu commoners, but rose again after Tutsi lost power in the 1959 revolution. With the increase in mixed marriages in recent decades, it has become more difficult to know a person’s group affiliation simply by looking at him or her. Some people look both “Hutu” and “Tutsi” at the same time. In addition, some people who exhibit the traits characteristic of one group might in fact belong to the other because children of mixed marriages took the category of their fathers, but might actually look like their mothers. During the genocide some persons who were legally Hutu were killed as Tutsi because they looked Tutsi.

(8)  The Twa, a people clearly differentiated from Hutu and Tutsi, formed the smallest component of the Rwandan population, approximately 1 percent of the total before the genocide. Originally forest dwellers who lived by hunting and gathering, Twa had in recent decades moved closer to Hutu and Tutsi, working as potters, laborers, or servants. Physically distinguishable by such features as their smaller size, Twa also used to speak a distinctive form of Kinyarwanda. While the boundary between Hutu and Tutsi was flexible and permeable before the colonial era, that separating the Twa from both groups was far more rigid. Hutu and Tutsi shunned marriage with Twa and used to refuse even to share food or drink with them. During the genocide, some Twa were killed and others became killers.

(9)  When the Germans had control of Rwanda they imposed Indirect Rule, which meant that the Germans allowed the Rwandans a lot of autonomy or the ability to act independently. This caused some disruption to the Rwandans, but nowhere near the scale of what was to come. In 1916 the Belgians gained control of Rwanda from Germany as a result of World War I. The Belgian employed Direct Rule in Rwanda, which severely altered the balance in Rwanda. The Belgians saw that it was in their best interest to officially make the Tutsi “Tribe” the ruling class in Rwanda. And the movement between Hutu and Tutsi that once existed was no more. The lines between the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa were strong and rigid. The Hutu began to greatly resent their Tutsi neighbors, because of the favoritism being expressed towards them by the Belgians. Tensions began to escalate more and more between the Hutu and the Tutsi as the Belgians stayed longer.

(10)  In the 1950s Belgium began to get pressure from the United Nations (U.N.) to relinquish (give up) their Rwandan colony. In 1959 Belgian officially granted independence to Rwanda. Belgium all but left the country in the hands of the Rwandans. There was a feeble attempt to put in place a new government. The Belgians appointed both Hutu and Tutsi to the new government that was to be put in place. And while some may have thought that this would symbolize a new Rwanda where Hutu and Tutsi were equals, it was anything but. The Hutu, still resentful of the Tutsi, saw this as an opportunity to seize power. The Tutsi were afraid that their time as “king of the hill” had passed. The division between the two groups only grew deeper as the distrust between them continued to fester.

(11)  The Hutu continued to gain power in Rwanda. Over a period of several years, the Parmehutu leaders, who were based in the south, eliminated Hutu rivals as well as the once powerful Tutsi and created what was in effect a single party state. By the end of the first decade of the republic, however, they were increasingly
challenged by Hutu from the north who saw that all rhetoric about Hutu solidarity notwithstanding, the southerners were monopolizing the benefits of power. In the face of this growing split between Hutu of the north and Hutu of the south, “Public Safety Committees” and other groups began a campaign of intimidation and assaults on Tutsi in early 1973. Some attributed the attacks to southerners who hoped to minimize differences with northerners by reminding them of the common enemy; others laid them to northerners who hoped to create sufficient disorder to legitimate a coup d’état by the army, an institution dominated by northerners. Regardless of which group had initiated the campaign, the tactic was clear: seek to resolve differences among Hutu at the expense of the Tutsi.

(12) In July 1973, General Juvénal Habyarimana, the most senior officer in the army, took power, promising to restore order and national unity. He established the second republic in what was at the time a bloodless coup, although some fifty of the most prominent leaders of the first republic subsequently were executed or died in prison.

(13) Habyarimana rules with force and many Tutsi fled in terror, seeking refuge in neighboring Burundi. However, the Tutsi do return with their newly formed militia – The Rwandan Patriotic Force (RPF). There was a semi-violent civil war in Rwanda, between the Hutu (Rwandan Armed Forces (RAF)) and the Tutsi (RPF) – a war which was unimaginable before colonization and de-colonization. The long lasting effects of Belgian’s Rule and created divisions in Rwanda were evident at this point.

(14) Tensions continued to mount. There was one attempt at peace – the Arusha Accords. This document was signed by both Hutu and Tutsi representatives and was intended to set-up a new government which was represented by both groups. However, this peace was never going to work. While the Arusha Accords were being signed Habyarimana was signing the largest arms deal in Rwandan history with a French Company. The Rwandans were buying guns, grenades, and other weapons to arm the Hutu. When asked why they needed to arm the Hutu, Habyarimana’s regime responded by saying that the Hutu needed to protect themselves. The western countries (Europe and the United States) did not question this any further and the weapons continued to be distributed among the Hutu.

(15) Then everything culminated into terror on April 6, 1994. Juvenal Habyarimana and the Hutu president of Burundi boarded a plane which was shortly shot down and both presidents were dead. For a short time there was speculation around the world that the Hutu shot the plane down for an excuse to begin the genocide, but evidence has surfaced which proved that this was an assassination perpetrated by the Tutsi. The Tutsi wanted to eliminate Habyarimana, to get him out of power, because they had no power as long as he was around.

(16) In the months prior to April the Tutsi were required to “register” themselves with the government. This was a way for the Hutu to know just who was Tutsi and where the Tutsi citizens lived. The airwaves were also filled with anti-Tutsi propaganda which called for the elimination of the Tutsi from Rwanda – Rwanda was to become “Hutuland”. If not in name, in reality.

(17) The assassination sparked the beginning of the genocide. In revenge for the assassination, and to fulfill their goal of having a Tutsi-free country, the Hutu armed themselves with guns, machetes and clubs and set out to cleanse the nation of all Tutsi. Most Tutsi that were killed were either slayed with the machetes or clubbed to death. No Tutsi was safe – not man, woman, or child. Neighbors killed neighbors, husbands even killed wives and countless Tutsi witnessed their murder of their family members. Nowhere was safe for a Tutsi in Rwanda in April 1994 – not even a church. The goal of the Hutu was to cleanse Rwanda of all Tutsi. The result was genocide.
(18) The Tutsi pleaded for the western powers to help, but the United Nations and the United States refused to step in. Some claimed that this was Civil War and not genocide; therefore it was not their responsibility. Others said that these were isolated acts of genocide, rather than genocide and therefore did not need to step in. One thing is for certain; when the killings began the foreigners in Rwanda left quickly and left those asking for help to fend for themselves. The western media barely even covered the story of Rwanda – the death of Jackie Kennedy Onassis (wife of late U.S. President John F. Kennedy) and the O.J. Simpson chase and murder trial by far trumped the story of Rwanda. Without media coverage it was difficult to get the sympathy of people around the world and very few knew that there were hundreds of thousands of people who needed their help.

(19) Without western intervention the killers continued to kill and for 100 days they continued to massacre Tutsi, some of which they had known for years and their children had gone to school together. After 100 days there were 800,000 Tutsi dead. Bodies were left in the street in some places. Some of those bodies chopped to pieces that they were unrecognizable. Others were put into mass graves and in the years following the genocide those graves were dug up and the bones were given a “proper” Tutsi burial.

(20) This event left the world wondering how neighbors could turn on each other and how the world could let this happen. There is no doubt that the United Nations knew what was happening. But there was always a political excuse of why not to act. There were a few “peace-keepers” sent in. But these peacekeepers were very ill-supplied and ordered not to act, so they just watched hundreds of thousands of people get killed.

(21) Today the Tutsi still live with the memory of what happened to them less than two decades ago, as they try to pick up the pieces of their lives. Many of the perpetrators (killers) of the genocide have been arrested and jailed. There are still on-going trials to decide how these men will be punished. But the fact of the matter is that some of them will be released from prison some day and will return home and they will live, again, next to Tutsi – and they will have to admit that they killed the families of some of those Tutsi neighbors. Rwanda will continue to try to build itself up from this horrific event, but there are many wounds to be healed. There is a feeling of betrayal that needs to be overcome – both the betrayal of the Hutu and also of the western world who refused to help.

(22) Since the genocide ended there have been a few more isolated murders. This incident has been officially recognized as genocide and the United States and United Nations has apologized for not intervening. The words never again were said after the Holocaust, and then again after Rwanda. But yet this is happening again in nearby Darfur.

Parts of this reading are adapted from Alison Des Forges’ book Leave No One to Tell the Story
GENOCIDE CASE STUDY: RWANDA
Question-Mini Activities

Directions: Read each question – mini activity carefully and answer, respond, or complete fully. Each question will be completed differently, so make sure that you read carefully and follow the instructions. Answer any question that asks for “just an answer” in complete sentences. REMEMBER TO WRITE EVERY ANSWER IN YOUR OWN WORDS!!!!

Paragraphs 1 - 4

1. Where is Rwanda?

2. Define “genocide”

3. According to the United Nations Genocide Convention what is the responsibility of the U.N. when there is a genocide?

4. In FOUR sentences, based ONLY on paragraphs 1 – 4, make a prediction about what this reading will discuss. Be as specific as possible.

Paragraph 5

5. Draw a three slide cartoon which depicts how the “Scramble for Africa” changed Rwanda.
Paragraphs 6 - 8

6. Below, describe in two sentences, each, the following groups:
   a. TWA
   b. HUTU
   c. TUTSI

7. Using as much detail as possible, draw an appropriate picture which would show the physical characteristics and economic differences of the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa.

   HUTU  TUTSI  TWA

8. Draw a pie graph which shows the population distribution between the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa in Rwanda.

Paragraph 9

9. Define Indirect Rule

10. Define Direct Rule
11. Draw TWO charts or diagrams. The first will show the social hierarchy / political power of the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa before Belgium came, the second will show the social hierarchy / political power after Belgium came.

Paragraphs 10 – 11

12. Write a detailed newspaper headline which tells the fate of Rwanda after the Belgians relinquish control of the country.

13. In no less than four sentences explain what happened in Rwanda right after Belgium left the country.

Paragraph 12 – 13

14. Chronicle the rise of Juvenal Habyarimana and the groups in Rwanda, following his gain of power on a timeline.

Paragraph 14

15. In no less than three sentences explain what the Arusha Accords was and why it ultimately failed.
Paragraph 15

16. Create a magazine cover which showcases the assassination of Habyarimana – either from the Hutu perspective or from the Tutsi perspective.

Paragraph 16 – 17

17. Write a minimum six sentence journal entry from the perspective of a Tutsi during the genocide. Include scenes that you think that they saw and emotions that you think that they may have felt.
Paragraph 18 – 22

18. Draw a picture of the United Nation’s or the United State’s response to Rwanda, during the killings in 1994.

19. In your opinion, was it the responsibility of the United Nations or the United States to respond to the pleas of the Tutsi? Or were they justified in not acting? Explain, with detail, your opinion.

20. In no less than three sentences explain what has happened in Rwanda post-genocide.