



## Committee on Conscience

"Genocide in Africa: The Business and Politics of Race, Tribe, and Power."

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"Perpetrators in the Holocaust, Cambodia, and Rwanda: 'The Evil That Men

Do...'"

I'm going to devote the balance of my presentation to Rwanda, where, as many of you know, some 500,000 to 800,000 ethnic Tutsis were massacred in 1994 in three months of concentrated slaughter.

I was in Rwanda during that period and had some vivid eye-witness impressions, which I'll share with you, but before I do so, I want to make a couple of general observations about Africa as a whole. Rwanda has achieved a stature in our historical memory of the last decade, appropriately so, as a unique crime. It was a state-orchestrated genocide now widely recognized in the press and in the councils of governments around the world and in any number of excellent books that have been published in the last several years, a calculated mass slaughter orchestrated on high by what was then the Hutu-dominated Rwandan state.

In that sense, Rwanda seemed to belie the widespread stereotype that many Americans and Westerners in general have about Africa. When we think about ethnic conflict, there's a widespread sense that Africans are killing each other because of exotic ancient hatreds, inscrutable animosities that seem not to adhere to any recognizable logic. Rwanda, by contrast, clearly organized from on high, carried out by tens of thousands and possibly hundreds of thousands of ordinary men, as Christopher Browning would put it. That is an accurate conception of Rwanda.

The point I'd like to leave you with is that that does not make Rwanda unique in Africa. All of Africa's conflicts are orchestrated from on high. All of

Africa's ethnic massacres have a recognizable logic to them. They are barbaric, they are evil, but they are not exotic. In my own book, I examine ethnic conflicts in Liberia, in Zaire Congo, in South Africa, in Sudan and Uganda, in addition to Rwanda, and in each case, as in Rwanda, you have tyrants struggling to hold on to power, manipulating grievances, magnifying grievances, deploying ethnically based police and militias using hate-filled propaganda to mobilize people on behalf of a cunning and avaricious political aspirant.

Ethnic conflict in Africa all across the continent, as in Rwanda, is a product of tyranny, and it's very important to remember that.

Another point to bear in mind -- a great deal of attention in recent years devoted to Rwanda has focused on the failure of the West, including the United States, to intervene, to stop the massacres. When the opportunity to do so was at hand, indeed the Clinton administration failed deplorably, as Samantha Powers has documented compellingly in her new book, which I commend to you all and as Philip Gourevitch likewise has documented dismayingly in his book.

The United States counseled the United Nations not to intervene, indeed essentially blocked the United Nations from intervening to stop the massacres in 1994. Deplorable as that is, I would only add that that failure of the United States in 1994 is of a piece with a long history of engagement in Africa where our error, if it can be categorized as that, was not so much a failure to intervene to save lives as enlightened Westerners, but on the contrary, to actually contribute to the problems that have given rise to ethnic conflict, and specifically a century-long

history of backing tyrants and backing financial interests that have contributed to the problems that have yielded widespread ethnic conflicts across Africa.

So those two points I would leave with you before I turn to Rwanda. Rwanda was unique in many ways, but the element of political calculation was not among them nor, in my view, was the depth of evil. So let me turn then to Rwanda.

My wife and I were in Rwanda in May and June of 1994, and we had an opportunity to come to appreciate many of the elements of genocide in Rwanda that bear striking parallels with what Christopher Browning has just described in Nazi Germany; many parallels in Rwanda, not the least of which was the existence of tyranny.

In the case of Rwanda, the fundamental story line, the fundamental plot line in Rwanda was an ethnically based, lawless tyranny of Hutu-dominated -- lawless tyranny struggling to hold onto power, and using ethnicity and targeting an ethnic group as a means of mobilizing political and military support for the purposes of holding on to power.

The head of state in 1994, a man named Juvenal Habyarimana, was killed in a plane crash on April 6, 1994, and that death, now widely believed to have been perpetrated by his own allies, triggered the genocide, and over a period of barely a hundred days, just three months, as I say, some 500,000 to 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and a limited number of Hutus accused of collaborating with Tutsis were slaughtered, mostly by machete.

It was a low-tech mass slaughter perpetrated by tens of thousands of ordinary men, one of the unique features of the Rwandan genocide; the participation of tens if not hundreds of thousands of mostly peasants, many of them illiterate, most of whom had never killed before, most of whom had no record of criminal activity, who were somehow mobilized into what were called the Interhamwe militia. These were essentially death squads, village-based death squads, who, over a period of days managed to go very much like police reserve battalion 101, from village to village, door to door, herding ethnic Tutsis -- men, women, and children -- taking them into the banana groves and hacking them to death with machetes, and in some cases, hammers and clubs with nails in them - - horrifically barbaric mass slaughter carried out face to face, hand to hand.

Let me just draw a couple of the parallels with the Nazi genocide, some of which have been highlighted by Mr. Browning. Indeed, he has spoken of and written about the participation of ideologues, managers, and ordinary men. Certainly in my own research, and based on the reporting I did at the time and since in Rwanda, all three elements played key roles in Rwanda.

There was an element of ideology, what was called Hutu power. Many key players in the Rwanda genocide were scholars and intellectuals who produced an elaborate racial ideology with roots in the Belgian colonial era. There's a long history of racial ideology going back over a period of a century that was adapted into a hate-filled ideology perpetrated primarily by radio, and there's a very vivid parallel with the Nazi era. There's a man currently on trial in Tanzania named Ferdinand Nahimana, who was essentially Rwanda's Goebbels. Some

of you may have seen a piece over the weekend by Marlee Simons in *The New York Times* on the trial of the propagandists. It's called the Propaganda Trial in the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, in which three individuals who are responsible for creating and broadcasting radio propaganda are on trial for war crimes and inciting genocide. So there was that element. There were ideologues, there were propagandists, there were virulent racists who played a key role in creating the ideology that underlay the genocide in Rwanda.

Then there was a second layer. Mr. Browning would call them the managers. I actually refer to them in my own book as middle management of the genocide, and I have a chapter in my book about a gentleman named Jean-Paul Akayesu, who was tried for genocide and convicted in the first international conviction for Genocide in an international trial in history. (Bear in mind that at the time of the Nuremberg trials, there was no criminal statute for genocide either in domestic or international law.)

Jean-Paul Akayesu was the first man convicted of genocide in an international trial. Mr. Akayesu was a small-town mayor, 44 years old, no history of bigotry, no history of criminality, no history of political activism of any kind, who at the time of the genocide actually opposed the killings for the first two weeks, and then famously, in an act of what appears to be opportunism and political calculation of his own political advancement, seemed to detect which way the wind was blowing in Rwanda and made a calculation that he was going to join up with the death squads.

He famously put on a camouflage jacket, stood on a platform with the leader of one of the death squads and said, "I'm with them," and with that, his entire community of Hutus immediately joined the fray and participated in the killing of some 2,000 ethnic Tutsis in this tiny rural village of Taba in remote western Rwanda.

I write about Mr. Akayesu. Most of you've probably never heard of him. He's a very small figure in the big scheme of things, by no means a senior figure in the genocide. He personified what came to be understood as the middle management of the genocide in Rwanda, and that's one of the parallels that is worth highlighting Rwanda: by all accounts, and certainly I experienced it firsthand, Rwanda is a rigidly hierarchical society.

The Rwandan state, going back to the Belgian era, and this is embedded in its culture, is organized down to the last province, the last commune, the last village, and the last block of huts in a rigidly based hierarchy that made it possible for ordinary peasants to be mobilized into efficient killing squads in a matter of days.

Another element again analogous to the history of Germany and pointed out by Mr. Browning, when you use the term "culture," the culture of obedience -- very much in evidence in Rwanda during the genocide, with deep roots in Rwandan culture, and Jean-Paul Akayesu personified that culture. He made the calculation that it was in his interest to follow the leaders of the Hutu party, and as soon as the mayor of this small village made a decision to go along with the

genocide, all the Hutus in his village immediately joined, and there was virtually no dissent.

I had my own small experience, which is stuck in my mind – of returning to Rwanda for a couple of weeks in 1998, in part to cover the Akayesu trial. I visited some of the prisons in Rwanda where more than 100,000 Hutus accused of participating in the genocide -- accused of being *genocidaires* as they're called – were then, and are still mostly living in appallingly overcrowded, disease-ridden, stench-filled prisons across the country. I cannot describe to you how horrendous these conditions are. Overpowering stench of filth and sweat overcomes you when you walk into these prisons, and you go into the sleeping dormitories, where tiny slits of light barely illuminate the sort of chicken coop-style decks that the prisoners sleep on.

And as your eyes adjust, you suddenly realize there are dozens of eyes surrounding you, a lone white boy, wandering into one of these prisons. I was being guided around this prison by one of the accused killers, a leader of one of these death squads who had been in prison for four years with no prospect of a trial any time soon, and I asked him, as an American would be inclined to ask, "Isn't there any violence in this place?"

Here are all these accused mass murderers trapped in this jail like snakes in a bottle. "Is there ever any violence?" My guide looked at me and said, "No, no, there's no violence in here. Violence is prohibited."

All these mass murderers -- if they're prohibited from participating in violence, there's no violence. He seemed to require no further explanation, and the explanation was given me without a hint of violence. It really is a chilling culture of obedience in Rwanda, and it's impossible to explain the killing without that.

I would add another element of the Rwandan culture, and this is analogous to ethnic conflicts across the continent, critical to understanding ethnic conflict in Africa, at any rate, and that is the culture of impunity. Rwanda was a lawless state dominated by what was in a sense a mafia enterprise. The Rwandan state was essentially a criminal enterprise. It was involved in all sorts of criminal rackets, from weapons smuggling and diamond smuggling to marijuana cultivation; the severing and sale of mountain gorilla arms and legs.

The head of state, Juvenal Habyarimana, had two brothers-in-law: one was the manager of the central bank; the other was the manager of the black market. Between them, they were able to take a cut off every single hard currency transaction taking place in their country. So essentially a lawless state, a mafia enterprise.

We think of tribalism as being exotic. Tribes in Africa are really no different than ethnic groups all over the world. The big difference is that in a lawless state, in a lawless environment, where the law of the jungle reigns, ethnicity is a badge of protection.

Ethnicity is a source of legitimacy for leaders, but it is a source of protection and vengeance for those who, in the absence of legitimate law enforcement and legitimate institutions of justice and accountability, depend on ethnicity for their own protection. Very important to remember the culture of impunity.

Now, let me just, in the brief time I have left, draw a couple of important distinctions between the genocide in Rwanda and the genocide in Europe. Very important to remember that not all genocides are alike, and in the case of Rwanda -- although indeed it was a genocide, as I say, hundreds of thousands of ethnic Tutsis deliberately targeted for extermination -- the historical context in which the genocide occurred in Central Africa is fundamentally different than the historical context in Central Europe.

As Stephen Heder was pointing out at lunch when we were talking earlier, the Tutsis were not the Jews of Africa. Philip Gourevitch, who many of you who have studied this will be familiar with his in many ways excellent book, is one who is inclined to characterize the Tutsis as the Jews of Africa. My own opinion, and indeed that of many specialists in the region, is that he got it wrong in that regard. You were saying it might be more accurate to say the Tutsis were the Vietnamese of Africa.

The Tutsis were in Rwanda and neighboring Burundi historically a dominant class dating back to the colonial era. They were elevated to a position of privilege in a system which you find in analogous examples across the continent, a system of indirect rule.

The Tutsis, a minority of barely 15 percent of the population, dominated the vast majority of Hutus for nearly a century on behalf of the Belgian colonizers. They were viewed as collaborators with colonial rule, elevated to positions of economic and bureaucratic advantage and military advantage, and up through well into the 1990s in neighboring Burundi, Tutsis dominated the Hutus in a system that was often characterized as apartheid-like military domination.

So whereas in Central Europe, the Jews were never armed; whereas in Central Europe, there was no Jewish conspiracy, there was no history of Jewish domination, there was no aspiration of Jewish domination, in Rwanda and in Central Africa generally, a long history of Tutsi domination. To put it in its crudest, simplest terms historically, the Tutsis were the bad guys.

There were stereotypes and envy and, importantly, fear of the Tutsis that the Hutu propagandas exploited. There was bigotry. It is impossible to characterize the genocide in Rwanda without referring to bigotry, but it was a bigotry born of history, born of an experience of domination and exploitation, which the propagandists in Rwanda were able to use to their own advantage. And looking just across the border at Burundi, neighboring Burundi, there had in fact been Tutsi-perpetrated genocides.

Genocide -- I use the word advisedly. It is a word that has been used to characterize the murder of between 100,000 and 200,000 Hutus in Burundi in 1972. Tens of thousands more murdered in 1988, and then as recently as 1993 some 30,000 to 50,000 Burundian Hutus slaughtered by Burundian Tutsis in 1993, a year before the genocide in Rwanda.

So if you could try to imagine as a parallel if in Central Europe in the 1930s, Austria was a Jewish-dominated military dictatorship in which Jews had slaughtered tens of thousands of Austrians in the decades prior to 1939, that would be a closer parallel to what happened in Rwanda.

I won't take it much further than that except to say that the lesson to infer from that is not that genocide didn't occur, not that Hutus weren't accountable for the genocide, but it raises questions about the moral and maybe even legal culpability of the Tutsi military leadership that in 1990 embarked on an ethnically based uprising, armed uprising, against the Hutu dictatorship in Rwanda. It was entirely foreseeable that an ethnically based armed uprising in Rwanda would lead to widespread mass slaughter of innocent Tutsi civilians, for which that insurgency lacked the wherewithal to protect them.

That's significant not so much on moral grounds, but for those, including the United States, including, alas, my colleague Philip Gourevitch, for whom I have great respect for but who became something of an apostle for the Tutsi military dictatorship, embracing them as victims of genocide -- failed to see how that Tutsi dictatorship, leadership, once it ceased power in 1994, wound up embarking on one military campaign after another in neighboring Zaire, where we've now seen between one and two million civilian casualties in what is now Congo.

So I'll leave you with that thought. Genocide, yes, but not all genocides are alike.