

GROUP ONE : THE HUTUS AND TUTSIS



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HISTORY OF THE TUTSIS AND THE HUTUS

I. THE AFRICAN DIVIDE



Africa in 1884: The Berlin Conference



Africa Today

The colonization of Africa had a severely negative impact on both the continent and its people. By the mid 1800s, the western powers had established colonies all along the African coast. Africa provided a source of cheap labor, raw materials and new markets for these countries, which were going through the Industrial Revolution. These colonizing powers, however, began to compete with each other over control. They decided to hold a conference to set up ground rules for colonizing Africa. In 1884, leaders from 14 colonial powers, including the United States, Belgium, Portugal, Germany and Spain, held the Berlin Conference where they divided the continent of Africa into 50 countries and claimed them for themselves. These divisions were made arbitrarily and without any consideration of the common culture, history and language shared by different groups of African people. As a result, two things occurred: people of common ethnic groups were separated by arbitrary national borders and warring ethnic groups were brought under the same government. The map of Africa remains largely the same as when it was divided in 1884 - a major source for many of the continent's conflicts today.

The region that became the country of Rwanda was given to Germany. German colonists arrived in Rwanda in the 1890s and found a centrally governed and efficiently run country made up of people who shared a common culture, language and religious beliefs.

After World War I, Belgium gained control of Rwanda.



Belgian colonists in Rwanda



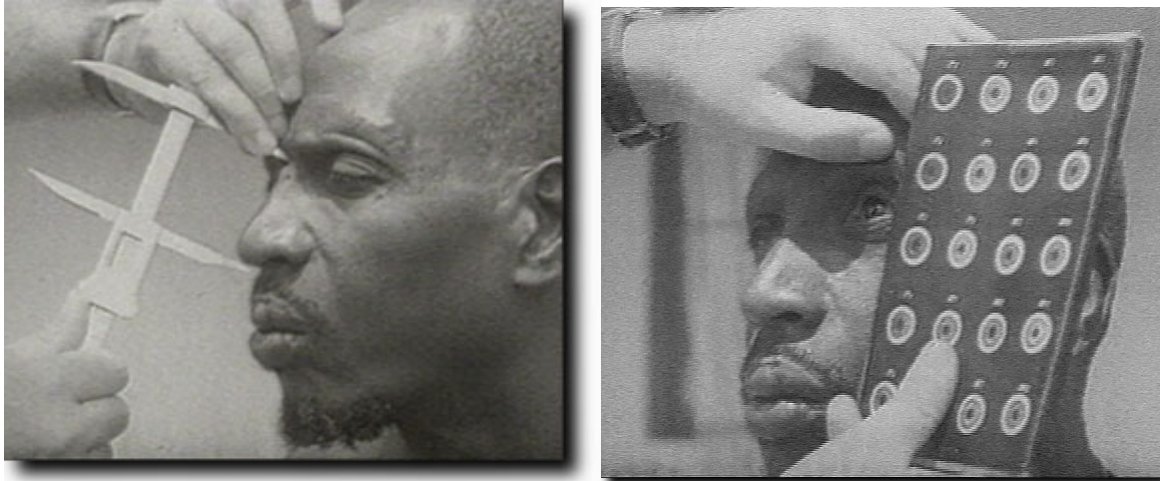
Rwandan culture and schools before colonization



II. RACIAL CLASSIFICATION AND COLONIALISM

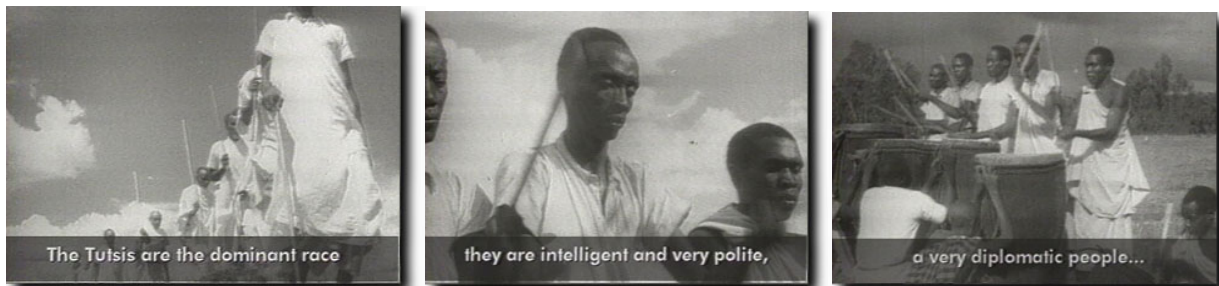
In order to strengthen their control, the Belgian colonists divided Rwanda's unified population into three distinct groups: Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa.

In order to do this, the colonists created a strict system of racial classification. Both the Belgians and the Germans, influenced by racist ideas, thought that the Tutsi were a superior group because they were more "white" looking.



The size of the nose and the color of the eyes were factors that determined whether a person was classified as Hutu, Tutsi or Twa.

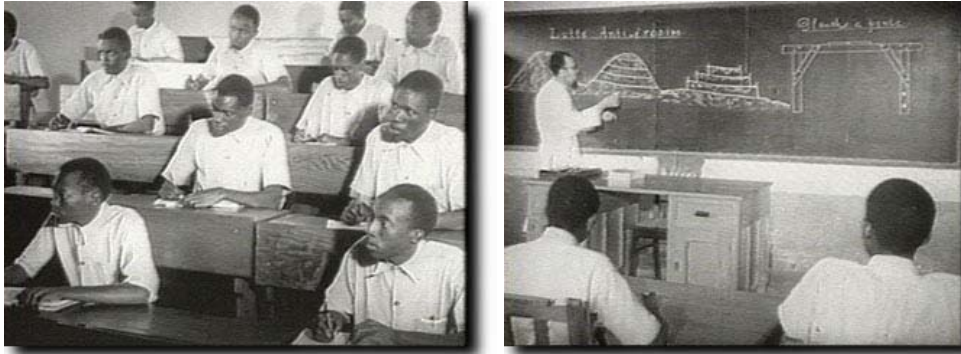
The colonists believed that the Tutsi were natural rulers, so they put only Tutsis into positions of authority and discriminated against Hutus and Twa.



Even though prior to colonization, the people of the region that became Rwanda lived together, the Belgian colonization put one group above the others.

III. DISCRIMINATION AND COLONIALISM LEADS TO TENSIONS

The Hutus, who make up about 85% of Rwanda's population, were denied higher education, land ownership and positions in government. By the 1950s, their resentment had grown.



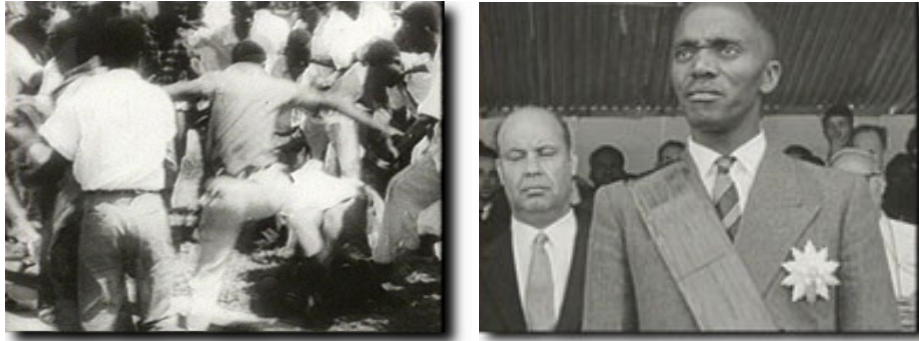
Only Tutsis could attend school under the Belgian colonization.

Tutsis, who were in power, also began to feel resentment. They resented the colonial rule of the Belgians and wanted to be even more independent. After World War II, Tutsi elites grew impatient and became more aggressive in their pursuit of independence.

The Belgians feared that their colonial rule was coming to an end. Some colonial rulers felt that by favoring the Hutu and trying to take back some power from the Tutsi, they could remain in power longer.

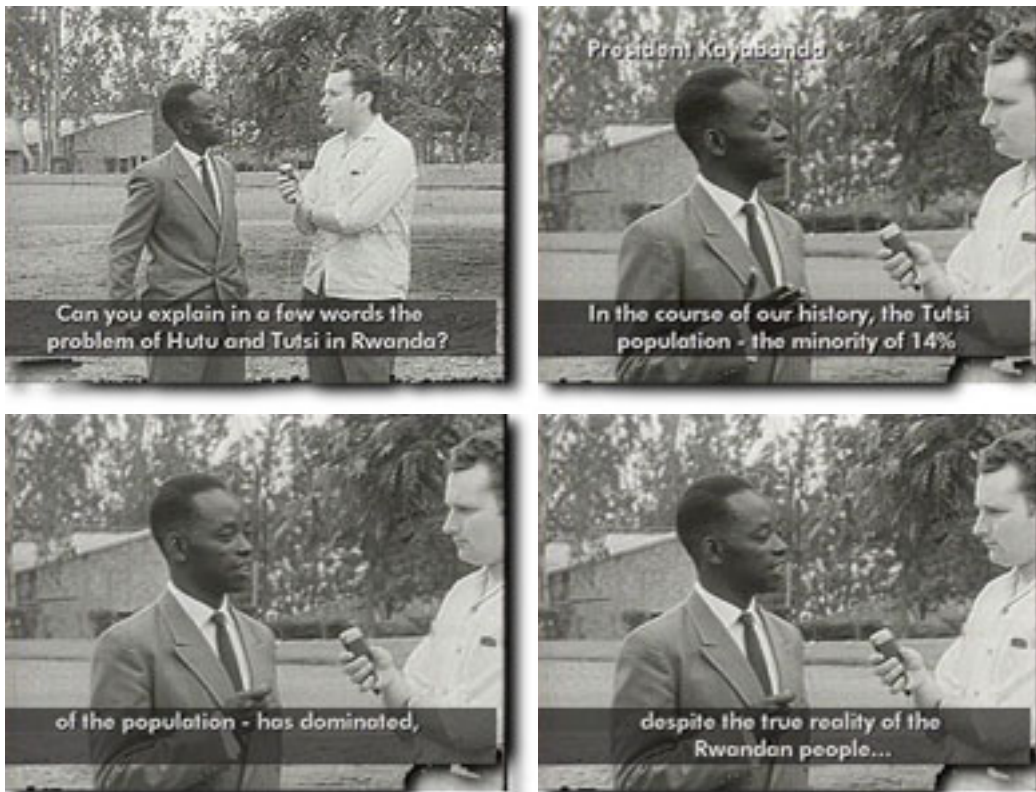
IV. INDEPENDENCE AND HUTU RULE

In 1959, violence between the Tutsi and Hutu erupted. Hutus overthrew Tutsi rule, declared an independent republic and elected the first Hutu president, Greg wa Kayabanda. Mass killings of Tutsis occurred during the transition to Hutu rule, hinting at things to come.



The Hutu-led government used the same system of racial oppression that existed during colonialism, except that now they were in control.

Even though the Hutus had suffered from this identity classification, they kept it in order to use it against the Tutsi who had once used it against them.



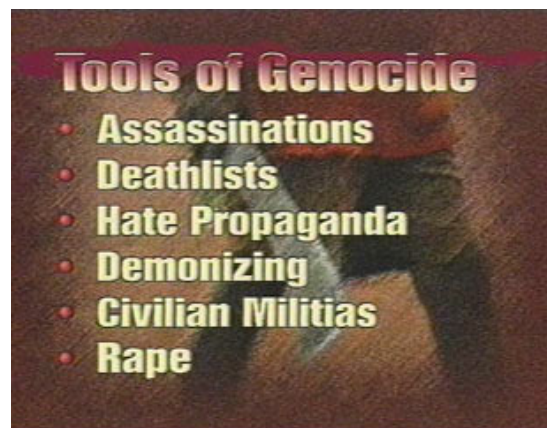
V. TOOLS OF GENOCIDE

Rising tensions based on racial divisions and the oppression of some groups of people set the stage for the horrific events that occurred in 1994. Hutu officials began preparation to carry out a massive genocide of the Tutsi minority. They trained and armed militias and gave arms to civilians. They distributed lists of people who were to be targeted and killed. Messages of hate were broadcast over the radio, encouraging the killing of Tutsi and opponents to the Hutu regime. The messages portrayed Tutsis as evil cockroaches and rats.



The killings began the night that Rwandan President Habyarimana was killed when his plane was shot down near Kigali Airport. The President's own supporters, Hutu extremists, are believed to have orchestrated the attack in order to prevent the President from signing peace agreements although the exact circumstances have never been determined.

Hutus used different "tools" or methods to carry out the genocide: assassinations, deathlists, hate propaganda, demonizing, civilian militias, and rape. Almost one million people were killed during 100 days of genocide. The United Nations "estimated that at least a quarter-million women were raped" during the genocide. (Tina Rosenberg, *Editorial Observer; New Punishment for an Ancient War Crime*, N.N. Times, 5 Apr. 1998, at § 4, 14).



REVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) Why did the Belgians create a rigid system of racial classification?
- 2) Which group of people did the Belgians think were a superior group? Why did they think they were a superior group?
- 3) Which group declared an independent republic in 1959?
- 4) What was the name of the first Hutu president?
- 5) Did the Hutu leadership end the system of racial classification?

TALKING POINTS

- Rwandans shared a common culture and had an organized government structure before the colonists arrived.
- Belgian and German colonists divided the people of Rwanda into 3 different racial classifications: Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa.
- The Belgians thought that the Tutsis were a superior people because they were more “white.”
- After independence, the Hutus gained power and oppressed the Tutsis, using the same racial classification that was used against them.
- The genocide was planned and carried out through orchestrated public opinion campaigns using radio, television, newspapers, and other hate propaganda.

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The Rwanda Commemoration Project: Genocide In Our Time

First They Came for the Jews

First they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out
because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for the Communists
and I did not speak out
because I was not a Communist.
Then they came for the trade unionists
and I did not speak out
because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for me
and there was no one left
to speak out for me.

Pastor Martin Niemöller, 1945