

Genocide

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"[G]enocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group." (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)

I have always been very interested in human rights issues. In my life I have never been put down or discriminated against for any characteristic or belief of mine. When we first learned about the Holocaust in middle school, I knew that what had happened was horrific and very sad, but I did not imagine that there had ever been any other crimes against humanity at such a large scale. Then, during my sophomore year in high school, we spent a lot of time learning about human rights issues, and focused on the Rwandan genocide, looking at where hate like this comes from, how the hate spreads, and how it is nearly impossible for justice to be brought about afterwards. After spending a lot of time thinking about this, doing a lot of research and hearing a survivor of the Rwandan genocide speak, I still wanted to know more about these crimes. Why do they happen? How do they work? Why are my beliefs not discriminated against? What can I do? I actually think that asking what I can do is sort of foolish. As a 17-year-old, I do not think that there is anything I can do to stop mass murder, but I am hopeful that by learning about it and spreading knowledge, I might help to lead to some resolution or even help those affected by it. During my research for this project, I learned about many more acts of genocide that I had not even heard of before. Knowing that crimes like this have occurred, and many of them relatively recently, and that not many people know about them, made me upset. I think I was upset by it because so many people were affected and I felt powerless to help. Though people devote their lives to defending human rights, events like these still occur.

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Genocide is an issue of human rights. It is easy to understand that genocide is bad and should be stopped, but how genocide starts and spreads can be very complicated. It is also hard to bring justice about after a crime against humanity. There is evidence of genocide from as long ago as the third century B.C., although there has been the murder of specific groups of people for a very long time (January). The term 'genocide' was not invented until after WWII. Raphael Lemkin invented the word from *geno-*, which in Greek means "group" or "tribe," and *-cide*, which is Latin for "killing" (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum). WWII was the first time the world had ever seen genocide at that large of a scale, and many people all over the world acknowledged the atrocities that occurred during the Holocaust and said that it would never happen again; that we as human beings would not allow crimes against humanity like this to occur again (Samantha Power). Genocide often comes from hate or discrimination that is deeply rooted in a country's history. This deeply rooted hate is what makes these situations so hard to understand—it removes someone on the outside from the situation so much

because they do not understand the hate. I am interested in understanding how, from the perpetrator's perspective, an act of genocide seems like an affective and 'right' thing to do, and how those in charge convince people that what they are doing is right. To try and understand this I researched the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, the Cambodian genocide, and the Indonesian Killings.

In 1933, Adolf Hitler, the head of the German Workers Party, took control of the German government as the chancellor of Germany (History.com). The German Workers Party believed that Germany needed a strong government and rejected Jews, because they wanted to create peace for Germany, and Jewish people were not a part of this peace (Spartacus Educational). After World War I, Germany had economic problems and needed a capable leader. Hitler blamed Jewish people for problems and gained support. He wanted to create a superior Aryan race and make space for this race to live. He wanted to make the world a place for the German people to inhabit completely.

Anti-Semitism, the discrimination of Jews, existed in Europe for a long time. In the 1500s, Martin Luther, a German priest, said that synagogues and Jewish schools should be burned, and it was commonly believed that Jews could be blamed for any bad thing that happened (January). Hitler was interested in German nationalism, and as a young man his hatred towards Jews grew, along with his belief that Jewish people were not German. Once Hitler was in power he used propaganda to spread his ideology. One very influential type of propaganda was movies. These films portrayed Jewish people as "subhuman creatures infiltrating Aryan society." Some films, such as *The Eternal Jew* (1940), showed how bad Jews were and that they were not needed in society, while others such as *The Triumph of the Will* (1935) promoted and celebrated Hitler and the National Socialist movement ('Nazi Propaganda'). I think that as humans we can be easily persuaded by information presented to us, and thinking about how today the media influences our lives so much, I think that I can understand how people would start to believe propaganda shown to them in forms of movies or books.

In 1994, tensions were high between Rwanda's two main ethnic groups, the Hutus and the Tutsi. The terms 'Hutu' and 'Tutsi' had been a part of Rwandan culture for a long time, but not until the Europeans were colonizing Africa did conflict between the two ethnic groups become a problem—prior to colonization, the two groups spoke the same language and practiced the same traditions. The Europeans favored the Tutsi people; even though they were the minority group they were richer and had many advantages. Identity cards were issued so that it could be known who belonged to which group (BBC News). When Europe was leaving Africa, the Tutsi king of Rwanda died. A Hutu president was put into place. The president died in a plane crash and Hutu extremists blamed it on the Tutsi. Hutu extremists, who had been preparing for the slaughter of Tutsi people, used this event as reason to start the killings. About 800,000 people were murdered in just 100 days (January).

In the 1970s, Cambodia was in the midst of a civil war. In 1975 the Khmer Rouge, a communist group who believed that Western ideas of capitalism were bad for people, seized power from the government (January). The leader of the Khmer Rouge, Pol Pot, wanted to create a system like Chinese Maoist-Communism because he wanted to create a pure society without greedy capitalist ideas (World Without Genocide). He believed that they had to rid the mostly-Buddhist country of anyone who objected to this idea (World Without Genocide).

The objective of Indonesian killings was the opposite of that which the Khmer Rouge had in Cambodia: to rid the country of all communists. In 1965 a military dictatorship took power and murdered all people who agreed with communist ideals, as well as all Chinese people in the country. I did not know about the killings in Indonesia before I started my research for this project, and only learned about the crime from the documentary *The Act of Killing*. Finding information about this situation was very difficult. After the killings ended, the dictatorship was still in power. "It was this feeling of wandering into Germany 40 years after the Holocaust, only to find the Nazis still in power." (bangkokpost.org). I looked on the CIA website and found no information about the events, and found very little information on other websites such as the BBC country profile. I think it is very interesting how hard it was to find information on this event.

In studying the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, the Cambodian genocide, and the Indonesian Killings, I have noticed a few similarities: economic or political issues, and the creation of groups of 'us vs. them' or 'good vs. bad.' I have also noticed that these things create fear in people in order to make them cooperate with what those in charge are saying.

In the genocides I studied, I noticed that every country had some sort of economic trouble. WWI and the stock market crash affected Germany economically. In Rwanda, "Hutu extremists...blamed the entire Tutsi minority population for the country's increasing social, economic, and political pressures" (unitedhumanrights.org). Cambodia believed that communism was the best government system, while Indonesia wanted to fix their problems by ridding the country of communism. From what I have learned, economic issues are part of what helps the leaders who want or support genocide rise to power. People want these problems to be solved and will support someone who offers a solution. It is instinct to look out for one's self and for one's own survival. Therefore, when times are bad and someone offers a solution that would benefit you, it can seem appealing. The issues that a country is having can cause fear in its people, and leaders who use this fear to their advantage are able to get people to agree with their ideas. When it is a case of life or death, many people will follow a corrupt leader if it means they will get to live.

Propaganda was used a lot in the Holocaust and in the Rwandan genocide. In the Holocaust, newspaper, posters, and radio were used to promote the Nazi party. In Rwanda, Radio Télévision des Mille Collines (RTLM) was used to spread hatred towards the Tutsi people and referred to them as cockroaches. A sort of 'us vs. them' mentality was created by this propaganda. People would see themselves as good, and doing the right thing, and see those who they were getting rid of the 'them' as bad. In this they dehumanized the group they were getting rid of, and I think that they did this to make it easier to get rid of these people—then they are not killing other human beings, rather something less than themselves. Even if one thinks they are doing something 'good' by getting rid of the 'bad,' killing another human being is scarring. In Indonesia, gangsters who murdered thousands of people would go out at night and use drugs to get their minds off of what they were doing (*The Act of Killing*). I think this is a sign that they know that what they are doing is not right.