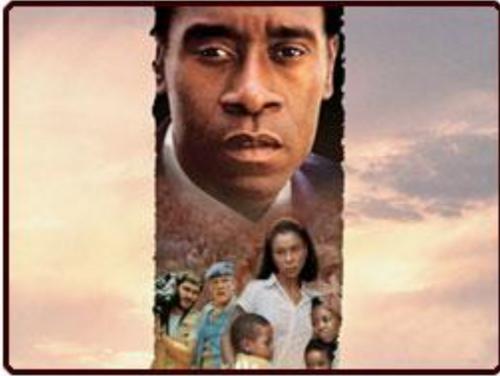


Hotel Rwanda



Hotel Rwanda

Overview

The decades following Rwanda's independence from Belgium in 1962 saw growing ethnic tensions and periodic violent attacks and reprisals between Rwanda's Hutu majority and its Tutsi minority. Thousands of Tutsis fled into exile in neighboring countries and in 1990 a failed invasion by a Tutsi rebel exile group sparked a civil war that officially ended in August 1993.

On April 6, 1994, the Rwandan president, a Hutu, was killed when his plane was shot down over Kigali airport. Hutu politicians blamed Tutsis for the president's death and within hours, loosely organized Hutu militia groups known collectively as the *Interhamwe* began mobilizing across Rwanda. In a preplanned campaign, these Hutu gangs killed roughly 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus over the course of 100 days. And, in full awareness of the situation, the international community did virtually nothing to halt the slaughter.

Hotel Rwanda tells the true story of one man's courage in the midst of this genocide.

Paul Rusesabagina, a manager at a Belgian-owned luxury hotel in Kigali, Rwanda's capital, is as skilled at pleasing the hotel's (mostly white) guests as he is at currying favor with the Rwandan army officers who frequent the hotel bar and the local businessmen with whom he deals.

Paul, a Hutu, is married to a Tutsi and his children are considered mixed. When the mass killings begin, Paul's Tutsi neighbors rush for safety to his house. Reluctantly, Paul takes them in and bribes a Rwandan army officer to allow him to bring them to the hotel. This is only the beginning of the flood of refugees to come to the hotel. In total, the number of Tutsis and moderate Hutus sheltering in the hotel and its grounds would rise to over 1,000.

As the violence worsens, the UN withdraws most of its peacekeeping force (there to implement the Arusha Accords that ended the civil war), leaving roughly 300 soldiers behind. Foreign governments send in troops, but only to evacuate their citizens, many of whom are guests at the hotel. The head of

the UN peacekeeping force, distraught over the withdrawal of his troops, tells Paul to look at himself from a Western perspective to try and understand why the international community has abandoned them: "You're black. You're not even a nigger. You're an African."

Paul holds firm, and through his connections, his guile, and his courage, he manages to save not only himself and his family, but also 1,268 innocent people.

Historical Accuracy

The history of the peoples of Rwanda and its neighboring countries is complex and disputed, so inevitably this movie contains some simplifications.

For instance, a conversation between a journalist and a Rwandan at the hotel bar gives the impression that there were no social distinctions between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda before Belgian colonial rule. The reality was not so simple.

Prior to Belgian colonial rule, it seems that there were distinctions between Hutu and Tutsi, but they were primarily economic rather than racial. The Tutsis were the aristocracy and the Hutu were the common people. It was not impossible to change status, and "become" a powerful Tutsi (which means "rich in cattle") or an ordinary Hutu. The Belgians heavily favored the Tutsis and exacerbated and codified the formerly flexible divide between the two groups. For a good explanation of the genocide and what led up to it, see the [History section](#) of the Human Rights Watch Report, [Leave None to Tell the Story](#).

Ethical Issues and Discussion Questions

1. At the beginning of the film, Paul places far greater value on protecting his family than protecting his neighbors. But as the film progresses his sense of obligation to his neighbors and his countrymen deepens. Indeed, rather than abandon the refugees he is sheltering, he sends his family to safety while he stays behind.

Is his decision the morally right one? In making decisions, how much weight should one give to the welfare of one's family compared to the welfare of one's neighbors? How much weight should governments give to the welfare of foreign peoples compared to that of their own citizens?

2. The UN Colonel tells reporters that his troops are "peace-keepers," not "peace-makers." By UN mandate, UN troops were permitted to use their weapons only in self-defense. If the Colonel had disobeyed orders and authorized his troops to fire on *Interhamwe* fighters, would he have done the right thing?

3. Do you agree that racism played a role in the international community's failure to act to stop the genocide, as the UN colonel says? The film makes no mention of other possible contributing factors, such as the disastrous U.S. humanitarian intervention in Somalia in 1993, less than a year before,

which ended after a U.S. helicopter was shot down and the bodies of U.S. soldiers were dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. Does this justify the U.S. and the UN's refusal to intervene?

4. The film shows that there was a close relationship between the French and Hutu governments, even while the killings were going on. On the tenth anniversary of the genocide, Rwanda's president accused the French of consciously training and arming the Hutus, knowing that they would massacre Tutsis. The French deny this, yet it is indisputable that France was the Rwandan government's number-one supplier of weapons. Does this fact alone make France more culpable for the genocide than the rest of the international community? How should responsibility be allocated for what happened, both inside and outside Rwanda?

How has the international community, in particular Belgium, France, the United States, and the UN, faced up to the question of responsibility and blame in the years since the genocide?

5. In 2005, world leaders formally adopted the **Responsibility to Protect** [R2P]—the duty to intervene in when national governments fail to fulfill their responsibility to protect their citizens from atrocious crimes—and in 2006 the UN Security Council passed [Resolution 1674](#), which commits the Council to protect civilians during armed conflicts. Do you agree that under certain circumstances, R2P should override sovereignty? Can you cite any examples where R2P has been or should be implemented?

Carnegie Council Resources

[What Does "International Justice" Look like in Post-Genocide Rwanda?](#)

Aloysius Habimana, Rwandese League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights, Rwanda
"The [UN] Tribunal can make a difference for the future of human rights in Rwanda by exposing the truth of the genocide: It was not a result of ancient, tribal hatred, but rather a carefully planned exploitation of ethnic differences by rulers seeking to hold onto their power." (*Human Rights Dialogue*, Spring 2000)

[Global Governance and Genocide in Rwanda](#)

Anthony F. Lang, Jr.,

In this review essay, Lang writes: "Read together, [these books] make a fairly convincing case that the UN was indeed responsible for failing to stop the genocide in Rwanda." (*Ethics & International Affairs*, Spring 2002)

[A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide](#)

Samantha Power

Why did the United States largely ignore the Rwandan genocide and yet devote endless time to the contemporaneous Bosnian crisis? According to Samantha Power, the reason is "politics, politics, politics." (Public Affairs Talk, April 2002)

[Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda](#)

Lt. Gen. Romeo Dallaire, former UN Commander

Dallaire recalls the agony of not being able to take action to halt the Rwandan genocide because he lacked the requisite authority as well as manpower and equipment. In essence, he lacked the support of the international community. (Public Affairs Talk, January 2003)

[Bearing Witness to Genocide: Rwanda, Darfur, and the Implications for Future Peacekeeping Operations](#)

Lt. Gen. Romeo Dallaire, former UN Commander

In 1994, General Dallaire was the commander of the UN Assistance Mission to Rwanda and powerless to stop the massacre of 800,000 people, who were slaughtered in 100 days. Yet just as in Rwanda, the UN is reluctant to use the word "genocide" to describe Darfur. (Public Affairs Talk, February 2005)

[Whither the Responsibility to Protect? Humanitarian Intervention and the 2005 World Summit](#)

Alex J. Bellamy,

This article examines how consensus was reached on the responsibility to protect, given continuing hostility to humanitarian intervention expressed by many (if not most) of the world's states and whether the consensus will contribute to avoiding future Kosovos and Rwandas. (*Ethics & International Affairs*, Summer 2006)

Outside Links

[Hotel Rwanda Official Movie Site](#)

[Paul Rusesabagina: No 'Ordinary Man'](#)

National Public Radio interview with Mr. Rusesabagina. (April, 2006)

<http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/>

The Responsibility to Protect-Engaging Civil Society project works to advance Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and to promote concrete policies to better enable governments, regional organizations and the UN to protect vulnerable populations.

Books

[*An Ordinary Man: An Autobiography*](#)

Paul Rusesabagina, 2006

[*Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*](#)

Romeo Dallaire and Samantha Power, 2004

[*We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*](#)

Philip Gourevitch, 1998