The Genocide

In 100 days in 1994, almost a million people were killed

There are two major ethnic groups in Rwanda—the majority Hutus and the minority Tutsis—and they've long been at odds.

In April 1994, a few months after the end of a civil war between the two groups, violence erupted again when a plane carrying Rwanda's president, a Hutu, was shot down. Hutu extremists blamed Tutsi rebels and immediately began a campaign of slaughter.

In about 100 days between April and July, some 800,000 men, women, and children—mostly Tutsis—were killed. Villages were leveled, many people were hacked to death with machetes, and entire families were wiped out. As many as 2 million Rwandans fled to neighboring countries.

The genocide came to an end when Tutsi rebels overthrew the Hutu government and a cease-fire was declared. The United Nations and wealthy countries like the U.S. were criticized for not doing enough to stop the massacre.

Today, the Rwandan genocide is often brought up as a reminder of what can happen if the world doesn't step in to fight brutality. Says genocide survivor Jacqueline Murekatete: "Indifference is what enables such violence to happen."

—Alessandra Potenza

red-brick buildings, Uwayesu could hardly believe how far he'd come from his days as a beggar. It took him a while to adjust to life in Boston. (He tried lobster and didn't like it, and he was disturbed to find so many homeless people on the streets in a wealthy nation.) But he says he's finally gotten used to living here.

After graduation, he plans to return to Rwanda, which has made a remarkable turnaround and today has one of Africa's fastest-growing economies (see Times Past, p. 18). He and his fellow countrymen are working hard to honor the painful memory of the genocide, yet move beyond it.

"I don’t see the future of Rwanda through the past," Uwayesu says. "I see that Rwanda has overcome the history of genocide. It's now moving ahead."

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