

Lesson 3

Genocide and the Global Response

Rationale

The purpose of this lesson is to explore genocides that have taken place during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries including the Cambodian Genocide, the Rwandan Genocide, the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust. It also explores the world's response to genocide and some of the reasons for global silence in the face of mass atrocities. Students are introduced to the paintings of a Holocaust survivor and explore the theme of indifference as it relates to the artist's work and the plight of the Jews during the Holocaust. Students then engage in research on other cases of genocide in order to further understand the factors that have prevented the world community from responding more forcefully to these atrocities.

Objectives

- Students will analyze the art of a Holocaust survivor and discuss the theme of indifference as it relates to the Holocaust.
- Students will investigate examples of world indifference and resistance to helping the Jewish people during World War II.
- Students will conduct research on genocides during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.
- Students will investigate patterns of global unresponsiveness to genocide.

Age Range

Grades 10–12

Time

45–60 minutes or 1–2 class periods for Part I; time for Part II will vary

Requirements

Handouts and Resources:

- [Background on Background on the Yashinski Poem and Fritz Hirschberger Paintings](#)
- ["Indifference" Painting](#)
- [Artistic and Poetic Interpretations](#)
- [The Last Supper at Evian OR The Fish Stinks from the Head](#)
- [About The Last Supper at Evian OR The Fish Stinks from the Head Painting](#)
- [Global Indifference to the Holocaust](#)
- [Background and Resources: Armenian Genocide](#) (one for each student)
- [Background and Resources: Cambodian Genocide](#) (one for each student)
- [Background and Resources: Al-Anfal Campaign, Iraq](#) (one for each student)
- [Background and Resources: Bosnian Genocide](#) (one for each student)
- [Background and Resources: Rwandan Genocide](#) (one for each student)
- [Reasons for Global Unresponsiveness To Genocide](#) (one for each student)

Other Material:

- Board/Smart board, markers, LCD or overhead projector
- Books and web access for student research (optional)

Key Words

Al-Anfal campaign
Atrocity
Auschwitz
Betray
Communist
Concentration camp
Convention
Deportation
Disappeared
Displacement
Emigrate
Ethnic cleansing
Evacuate
Execution
Extermination
Final solution
Genocide
Immigrant
Immigration
Indifference
Institutional
Intervene
Intervention
Isolation
Holocaust
Khmer Rouge
Killing center
Legislation
Massacre
Nonintervention
Nazi
Perpetrate
Persecution
Propaganda
Quota

Techniques and Skills

analyzing visual art, brainstorming, case study, connecting past to present, cooperative group work, critical thinking, historical understanding, large and small group discussion, reading skills, research skills, using the internet, writing skills

Advanced Preparation

- Reproduce handouts as directed above.
- Prepare the [“Indifference” Painting](#), [Artistic and Poetic Interpretations](#), [The Last Supper at Evian OR The Fish Stinks from the Head](#) and [About The Last Supper at Evian OR The Fish Stinks from the Head Painting](#) to be projected for class viewing.

Procedures

Part I (45–60 minutes)

1. Project the painting [“Indifference”](#) by Fritz Hirschberger, excluding the heading title so that only the painting is viewed. During this part of the lesson, do not reveal the title, accompanying text or any background information. Engage students in a discussion by asking some of the following questions:
 - What are your immediate thoughts and feelings upon seeing this painting? What mood does it evoke?
 - What do you think is taking place in this scene? What event or situation might be depicted?
 - Who do you think the people in the painting might be? What do you notice about their appearance (form, clothing, etc.)? What do you think is happening to them?
 - What do you notice about the background?
 - Where and when do you think the scene in the painting may have taken place? What was going on in the world at that time?
 - Why do you think the artist chose these colors? How do they make you feel?
 - What do you think the artist is trying to tell us? What artistic elements does the artist use to get his message across?
 - What do you think an appropriate title for this painting might be?
 - If you could ask the people in the painting a question, what would it be?
 - What other questions does this painting evoke for you?
2. Explain to students that the painting was created by the artist Fritz Hirschberger, who was a Holocaust survivor. Project the [Artistic and Poetic Interpretations](#) and tell students the poem that accompanies the painting was written by Edward Yashinski, a Jewish poet who also survived the Holocaust but died later in a Communist prison in Poland. Ask for a volunteer to read the poem aloud. Ask students how they feel the poem relates to the painting, and if it changes their earlier impression of the image.
3. Tell students that Hirschberger titled his painting “Indifference,” which is a word that also appears in the poem. Ask students what the word indifference means (lack of interest or concern), and pose the following questions:
 - Why do you think Hirschberger chose the word indifference for the title of his painting?
 - How does the painting depict or capture the feeling of indifference?
 - Do you agree with the sentiment in the poem that one should fear indifference more than death and betrayal? Why do you think the artist and poet may have felt this way?
 - Hirschberger and Yashinski were both Holocaust survivors. What experiences do you think they may have had with indifference?

Tell students that the painting is based upon a photograph taken by the Nazis at the death camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and that it suggests the isolation and hopelessness of the Jewish situation during the Holocaust. Provide additional information as appropriate from [Background on the Yashinski Poem and Fritz Hirschberger Paintings](#).
4. Ask students for examples of indifference on the part of individuals during the Holocaust (e.g., most did not protest or resist the Nazis, and did not shelter, hide, feed, or protect the victims). Ask if it is also possible for nations to act with

Key Words (cont.)

Refugee
Relocate
Repatriation
Repression
Resettle
Signatory
Slaughter
Sovereign
Survivor
Systematic
Unresponsiveness
Zionist

indifference, and solicit examples (e.g., most did not publicly condemn the slaughter of Jews, admit significant numbers of refugees, or challenge Hitler until mass extermination was already well under way).

- Project [The Last Supper at Evian OR The Fish Stinks First from the Head](#), which is another painting from Fritz Hirschberger's Sur-Rational Paintings collection. Allow students to discuss what they think the painting depicts and what the significance of the title is. After some discussion, project [About The Last Supper at Evian OR The Fish Stinks First from the Head Painting](#) and ask for volunteers to read it aloud. Highlight the way in which the painting demonstrates world indifference to the plight of the Jews at the beginning of the Holocaust. Distribute the [Global Indifference to the Holocaust](#) to each student and read together, which offers three additional examples of world indifference or resistance to helping the Jews during the Holocaust.
- Read aloud or project on board/smart board the following description of indifference by Eli Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor, celebrated writer, activist, and Nobel Peace Prize awardee:

"[Indifference is] a strange and unnatural state in which the lines blur between light and darkness, dusk and dawn, crime and punishment, cruelty and compassion, good and evil."

Ask students to reflect silently on this quote and to think about why much of the world remained silent and indifferent during the Holocaust. Instruct them to record their thoughts as a journal entry short essay. Invite volunteers to share their responses aloud and explore with students some of the possible reasons for silence and indifference. Conclude the lesson by reading aloud the following passage from Wiesel's *Night*:

"Watchman, what of the night? So many victims in so many places need help. We need above all, to be shaken out of our indifference—the greatest source of danger in the world...For, remember, the opposite of love is not hate but indifference. The opposite of faith is not arrogance but indifference; the opposite of art is not ugliness but indifference. And the opposite of peace is indifference to both peace and war—indifference to hunger and persecution, to imprisonment and humiliation, indifference to torture and persecution."

NOTE: Though it is beyond the scope of this lesson to provide a detailed analysis of the reasons for global indifference and silence during the Holocaust, you may want to explore some of the following themes with students as a follow-up to your discussion: Isolationism, xenophobia/anti-foreign sentiment, immigration policy/anti-immigrant sentiment, institutional and individual anti-Semitism, distancing/dehumanization of victims, disbelief/unwillingness to face facts, limited interest in international issues, exclusive interest in domestic matters, "realpolitik," narrow individual political interests, concern for economic well-being.

Part II (time will vary)

- Explain to students that we are going to discuss genocides that have taken place during the 20th and 21st centuries. Ask them how they would define genocide in their own words. Explain that in 1948, the United Nations defined **genocide** as any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, including:
 - killing members of the group;
 - causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
 - deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
 - imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and
 - forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.
 Record this definition on the board/smart board so students can refer to it during the lesson.
- Ask students if they are aware of examples of genocide that have occurred in the 20th and 21st centuries and list their responses on the board/smart board or chart paper. For each example offered, ask students if they know what actions the world took (or failed to take) in response, and chart their ideas. Tell students that the organization Genocide Watch cites examples of genocide or mass murder in over 70 countries (see Genocide Watch at www.genocidewatch.com/genocide-and-politicide). Point out that in most of these cases, the world community failed to intervene to prevent the genocide or to halt it before killing on a massive scale had taken place.

3. Tell students that they will be working independently or in small groups to learn about one example of genocide and to explore global lack of responsiveness. Depending upon the time available and the ability level of your students, select one of the following methods for conducting research:
 - Divide the class into five groups and assign each group one of the following case studies: the Armenian genocide (1915–1923) the Cambodian genocide (1975–1979), the Al-Anfal genocide in Northern Iraq (1987–1988), the Bosnian genocide (1992–1995), and the Rwandan genocide (1994). Provide class time for groups to conduct research over a period of several days.
 - Ask students to choose one of the above case studies and to conduct research independently or with a partner for homework. Allow approximately one to two weeks for students to complete their research and to write a brief report.
 - Assign independent research on one of the above case studies (or another example of genocide) as an optional or extra credit assignment. Allow students one to two weeks to complete their research and to write a brief report.
4. Distribute the following handouts, which provide background information as well as web resources for investigating the five examples of genocide noted above.
 - [Background and Resources: Armenian Genocide](#)
 - [Background and Resources: Cambodian Genocide](#)
 - [Background and Resources: Al-Anfal Campaign, Iraq](#)
 - [Background and Resources: Bosnian Genocide](#)
 - [Background and Resources: Rwandan Genocide](#)

Instruct students to consult at least three sources as they conduct their research, and to write a research paper that includes the following information: (a) a summary of what occurred; (b) response by the world community before, during and after the genocide; (c) reasons why the world failed to intervene to prevent or halt the genocide; (d) in retrospect, actions that the world community might have taken to prevent or halt the genocide.

5. Set aside class time for students to present their research and to answer questions from their classmates. Keep the discussion focused on factors that kept the world community from taking decisive action to prevent or halt each case of genocide. Encourage students to note similarities across each example and to highlight patterns that emerge regarding the global response to genocide. In order to learn more about the global unresponsiveness to genocide, students can refer to [Reasons for Global Unresponsiveness to Genocide](#) handout and other online resources they can find.
6. Conclude the lesson by asking students what they think the United Nations, United States and other countries should do to prevent or halt current and future instances of genocide. Ask students to consider what individuals can do to pressure the world community to act.

Background on the Yashinski Poem and Fritz Hirschberger Paintings

About the “Indifference” Painting

The poem by Edward Yashinski—a Jewish poet who survived the Holocaust only to die in a Communist prison in Poland—suggests the isolation and hopelessness of the Jewish situation. The image is based upon the photograph on the right taken by the Nazis at Auschwitz-Birkenau. It raises questions about Holocaust representation. It is an effective painting, but whose image is it—the artist’s? The Nazi’s? Does the artistic interpretation of a photograph help to redeem it? Note the victims in this image are women and children. During the Holocaust, 1.5 million Jewish children were killed. Thus, the focus on children helps to answer the question of why the Jews were targeted. According to the racial ideology of the Nazis, their crime was simply being born a Jew.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-74237-004/CC-BY-SA

About the Artist

Fritz Hirschberger was born in 1912 in Dresden, Germany to a Jewish father and a Catholic mother, who raised him as a Jew. In October 1938 Fritz and his family were arrested and, with thirty minutes notice, deported to Poland. When Hitler attacked Poland in 1939, Hirschberger fought the Nazi invasion with a Polish artillery unit and later fled to the Soviet Union after the collapse of the Polish army. He was arrested in the Ukraine and sentenced to 20 years in a Soviet prison near the Arctic Circle for having “illegally entered the country” and for being a member of a Zionist organization. Following Hitler’s invasion of the Soviet Union, Hirschberger was classified as a political prisoner and was released in 1941 to serve in the Polish army, where he fought in the Middle East, North Africa, Italy, and Germany. He was decorated five times by the British and Poles. Hirschberger was the only member of his family to survive the Holocaust. Following the war, he studied art in London and married a woman named Gisela, who was an old friend from Dresden. They eventually moved to the United States, where Fritz pursued a career in both manufacturing and painting. In 1991, he was awarded the Bronze Cross by President Lech Walesa of Poland. Fritz Hirschberger died in 2004.

About the Fritz Hirschberger Sur-Rational Paintings

The paintings “Indifference” and “The Last Supper at Evian or The Fish Stinks from the Head” are a part of a collection that represent an attempt by the artist, a Holocaust survivor, to depict what he and his family went through during the period from 1938 through the end of World War II in 1945. He invented the term Sur-Rational which means beyond the reasonable. The entire Sur-Rational series tells stories through the combination of painting with text based on the medieval German “moritat” or song of “deadly deed.” The lyrics of the moritat were usually based on a heinous crime and performed by strolling minstrels in combination with illustrations painted on a banner, similar to comic strips of the contemporary era. Hirschberger’s paintings are not “factual,” but do contain historical references and are intended to make a strong metaphorical impact. They ask questions of the viewer that demand to be answered.

Style of the Paintings

Hirschberger paints in a style that is derived from the German expressionism tradition of the 1920s and also from what is termed a “naïve” or primitive style. The figures sometimes appear cartoonish, but are subverted by the seriousness of the themes. The paint used is transparent, an effect that is heightened by glazing with an oil-based medium. Color plays an important role in these works. Purples and reds are dominant—colors one would not expect in paintings about the Holocaust—and give the work a religious quality. Many of the works explore the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in the form of Jesus (the Jew) as well as saintly figures. In a sense, the paintings in this series might be taken as a modern iconography about the passion of the Jewish people.

Do the Paintings Accuse?

Occasionally, commentators accuse the artist of being unforgiving or placing too much blame for the Holocaust on the Church. In fact, the first exhibition of these paintings was supported by the Archbishopric of Dresden, Germany. Some of the strongest supporters of the exhibit have been Catholic Colleges and seminaries. This is probably because of the Papal Encyclical, “We Remember,” from 1998, which admits Christian failure during the Holocaust. Hirschberger’s paintings, however, do speak to an essential truth: that had Jesus been alive in 1943, he would have wound up at Auschwitz, as he had four Jewish grandparents and was, according to Nazi law, a racial Jew. However, the artist asserts that the paintings are not anti-Christian. They merely pose difficult and troubling questions that have to be thought through and answered. Hence, the paintings become the basis for conversation or dialogue.

Text and art by Fritz Hirschberger are from “Fritz Hirschberger: Sur-Rational Paintings” and reprinted with permission of the Regis Foundation, Minneapolis, MN. Visit <http://chgs.umn.edu/museum/exhibitions/surRational/> to view the entire series of paintings. For more information, contact the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies: Dr. Stephen Feinstein, Director, tel: (612) 626-2235, email: feins001@umn.edu, web: <http://www.chgs.umn.edu>.

“Indifference” Painting

by Fritz Hirschberger



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Artistic and Poetic Interpretations



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“Fear not your enemies,
for they can only kill you.
Fear not your friends, for
they can only betray you.
Fear only the indifferent,
who permit the killers and
betrayers to walk safely
on the earth.”

—Edward Yashinski, Yiddish poet who survived the Shoah
only to die in a Communist prison in Poland.

Poem excerpted by Edward Yashinski from Haskel Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers' Keepers?: The Public Response of American Jews to the Holocaust, 1938–1944* (Bridgeport: Hartmore House, 1985).

The Last Supper at Evian OR The Fish Stinks from the Head

by Fritz Hirschberger



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About The Last Supper at Evian OR The Fish Stinks from the Head Painting

The title of this painting derives from an old Greek proverb and suggests that the problem of indifference to the plight of the Jews originated from world leaders.

Delegates from over thirty nations met at Evian, France, from July 6–14, 1938 to find a solution to the plight of the “involuntary immigrants” (Jews who had fled Nazi Germany to save their lives). With the exceptions of Denmark and the Netherlands, the refugees were either refused admittance or only accepted in small numbers under limited quotas. The Dominican Republic offered to take in 100,000 Jews, but only 645 refugees actually arrived on the island. (Ironically, the Dominican Republic agreed to admit the Jewish refugees in part as compensation for a 1937 order that led to the slaughter of 25,000–30,000 illegal immigrants from Haiti, and which was considered to be an act of genocide by some).

The Evian conference represents a critical turning point in Hitler’s policy toward the Jews. It confirmed his suspicion that the rest of the world would not act with force to protect them. Emigration for German and Austrian Jews soon became difficult, and Nazi plans later turned from the removal of Jews to the “Final Solution”—extermination.

Text from “Fritz Hirschberger: Sur-Rational Paintings” and reprinted with permission of the Regis Foundation, Minneapolis, MN. Visit <http://chgs.umn.edu/museum/exhibitions/surRational/> to view the entire series of paintings.

Global Indifference to the Holocaust

The following are just a few examples of world indifference during the Holocaust or outright resistance to the rescue of European Jews from the Nazi onslaught.

The USS St. Louis — The USS St. Louis, one of the last ships to leave Nazi Germany before the war, set sail for Cuba in May 1939. The 937 Jewish refugees on board each carried a valid visa for temporary entry into Cuba. Unknown to them, their landing permits, issued by the corrupt Cuban director of immigration, had already been invalidated by the Cuban government and the passengers were refused entry. The refugees appealed to the United States, but were refused admittance due to a restrictive immigration policy and a reluctance to interfere with Cuban affairs. After waiting for 12 days in the port of Havana and off the Miami coast, the boat was forced to return to Europe. Fearful of returning to Germany, the passengers pleaded with world leaders to offer them refuge. Belgium offered to take in 200 refugees and the British, French and Dutch governments each agreed to grant temporary asylum to the refugees until homes in other countries could be found. With the German occupation of Western Europe in the ensuing years, most of the former passengers once again fell under Nazi rule and were subject to anti-Jewish legislation. A fortunate few succeeded in emigrating or escaping, but by the end of 1941 it became virtually impossible for Jews to flee the continent. Starting in 1942, the Nazis began deportations from Western Europe to the killing centers in the east.

Wagner-Rogers Legislation — Legislation was introduced in the United States Congress in 1939 by Rep. Robert Wagner to admit a total of 20,000 Jewish children over a two-year period above the refugee quota applicable at the time. The legislation was inspired by similar efforts by the Dutch and British government to save Jewish children from Nazi terror. The legislation was amended in committee to admit the 20,000 children only if the number of Jewish refugees admitted under the regular quota was reduced by 20,000. The bill died in the House after the sponsor withdrew his support for the bill in frustration.

Bermuda Conference — As the Germans advanced through Europe, more Jews and others who were targets of Nazi racial policies came under Nazi control. By 1943 the war had created millions of refugees in Europe. The Bermuda Conference, jointly sponsored by the United States and Great Britain, was held in April 1943 to discuss solutions to the refugee problem. When the Conference finally wrapped up its 12 days of secret deliberations, very little had been achieved. The delegates' list of proposals included: the decision "that no approach be made to Hitler for the release of potential refugees;" suggestions for helping refugees leave Spain; and a declaration on the postwar repatriation of refugees. Even though the conferees decided to keep their report secret, they did make it clear to the press that most of the proposals submitted to the conference had been rejected. Following the conference, one Jewish organization took out a three-quarter page advertisement in *The New York Times* with the headline "To 5,000,000 Jews in the Nazi Death-Trap Bermuda Was a 'Cruel Mockery.'"

Sources:

American Experience: America and the Holocaust, PBS, www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/holocaust/

Immigration Policies, Jewish Virtual Library, www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/grobim.html

SS St. Louis by Blechner, Anthony, www.blechner.com/ssstlouis

Voyage of the St. Louis, United States Holocaust Museum, www.ushmm.org/stlouis

Background and Resources: Armenian Genocide

1915–1923, Cumulative Civilian Death Toll: 1.5 million

In 1915, the government of the Ottoman Empire turned against a segment of its own population through a plan to systematically decimate its civilian population of Armenian people. Historically, though the Armenian people had been subjected to ongoing religious intolerance that included unjust treatment, inequitable tax rates and diminished legal and civil rights, they continued to thrive, attaining higher levels of education and wealth than other groups. Resentment over the success of Armenians was commonplace, and when international events precipitated a position of insecurity and weakness in the Ottoman Empire, the resentment and prejudice toward the Armenian population made them a primary target.

Most sources agree that there were about two million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire at the time when the genocide began. The genocide began with the ruling government arresting and executing several hundred Armenian intellectuals. After that, Armenian people were removed from their homes and sent on death marches through the desert without food or water. Most of the atrocities were carried out during World War I between the 1915 and 1918, when the Armenian people were subjected to deportation, expropriation, abduction, torture, massacre and starvation. Women and children were abducted and abused and the entire wealth of the Armenian people was stolen. There was a short period of calm at the end of World War I, and then the atrocities resumed between 1920 and 1923, when the remaining Armenians were subjected to further massacre and removal.

At the time of the Armenian Genocide, there were some accepted international rules and customs of war to protect civilian populations, but none of these covered a government's treatment of its own people. Only after World War II were aspects of such treatment covered in the United Nations Genocide Convention (UNGG).

Web Resources

- The Armenian Genocide (United to End Genocide), <http://endgenocide.org/learn/past-genocides/the-armenian-genocide/>
- Armenian Genocide (History), www.history.com/topics/armenian-genocide
- Armenian Genocide Testimony Series (USC Shoah Foundation), <https://sfi.usc.edu/content/30-days-armenian-genocide-testimonies>
- Armenian Genocide (Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, University of Minnesota), <https://cla.umn.edu/chgs/holocaust-genocide-education/resource-guides/armenia>
- Remembering the Armenian Genocide (*The New Yorker*, April 21, 2015), www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/remembering-the-armenian-genocide

Background and Resources: Cambodian Genocide

1975–1979, Cumulative Civilian Death Toll: Nearly 2 million

In 1975 the Communist Party of Kampuchea, known as Khmer Rouge (KR), defeated the U.S.-backed Khmer Republic under the leadership of Lon Nol and seized control of the country's capital, Phnom Penh. At first, many Cambodians welcomed the overthrow of the corrupt Lon Nol government. However, the KR soon began a ruthless campaign to reconstruct Cambodia into a collective of farms according to the Chinese communist agricultural model of Mao Zedong.

Under threat of death, the residents were forced to relocate to the countryside where they would live in communes and work as unpaid laborers under impossible conditions. Those who refused to leave their homes or didn't vacate quickly enough (including the sick and elderly) were killed. Factories, schools and hospitals were shut down and people were stripped of all civil rights. Religion was banned and temples were destroyed. Music and radios were forbidden. Anyone perceived to be in opposition—including doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other educated and professional people—were eliminated along with all “un-communist” elements of Cambodian society. People were shot for simply knowing a foreign language or wearing glasses and were discouraged from forming personal relationships or expressing affection. The country was “cleansed” of Vietnamese, Chinese and Thai nationals as well as Muslims and Buddhist monks. Children were taken from their parents and placed into forced labor camps, where they were “reeducated.”

In 1978 Vietnam invaded Cambodia to stop Khmer Rouge border attacks and defeated the murderous regime in two weeks. By that time, nearly two million people had died from execution, starvation, disease and exhaustion, making the Cambodian genocide one of the most devastating in human history.

Web Resources

- Cambodia 1975 (Peace Pledge Union), www.ppu.org.uk/genocide/g_cambodia.html
- Cambodia: 1975–1979 (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), www.ushmm.org/confront-genocide/cases/cambodia/introduction/cambodia-1975
- The Cambodian Genocide (United to End Genocide), <http://endgenocide.org/learn/past-genocides/the-cambodian-genocide/>
- Cambodia: Oral Histories and Biographies (The Mekong Network), www.mekong.net/cambodia/oral_hst.htm
- Cambodian Genocide (World Without Genocide), <http://worldwithoutgenocide.org/genocides-and-conflicts/cambodia>
- Cambodian Genocide Program (Yale University), <https://gsp.yale.edu/case-studies/cambodian-genocide-program>

Background and Resources: Al-Anfal Campaign, Iraq

1987–1988, Cumulative Civilian Death Toll: 182,000

The Al-Anfal campaign was an organized attempt by the Iraqi regime under Saddam Hussein to stamp out Kurdish efforts toward political independence. At the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the Kurdish region in northern Iraq was the scene of an attempt by Iranian forces allied with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan to capture Iraqi territory. Iraq had already begun to use chemical weapons in 1987 to battle the Kurdish opposition, and this brutal repression became an organized and institutionalized genocide in 1988 that took place in eight stages.

Throughout the Al-Anfal campaign, the Iraqis used chemical weapons and heavy bombardments to slaughter civilian populations. The operation also involved the destruction of villages, mass executions and deportations of civilians including women and children. Those who sought medical attention in the urban centers for the treatment of exposure to chemical agents were rounded up and “disappeared.”

In all an estimated 182,000 Kurds lost their lives and/or disappeared as a result of the genocidal campaign. In addition, hundreds of thousands of Kurdish civilians were displaced from their homes as approximately 4,500 villages were destroyed. The most widely publicized incident occurred in the Kurdish town of Halabja, where on March 16, 1988 an estimated 5,000 men, women and children lost their lives as a result of poison attack. Over 10,000 were wounded and to this day suffer the effects caused by exposure to chemical agents.

Web Resources

- Kurdish Genocide (The Kurdish Project), <https://thekurdishproject.org/history-and-culture/kurdish-history/kurdistan-genocide/>
- Anfal Campaign and Kurdish (Kurdistan Regional Government, Representation in the United States), <https://us.gov.krd/en/issues/anfal-campaign-and-kurdish-genocide/>
- Genocide in Iraq: The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds (Human Rights Watch), www.hrw.org/reports/1993/iraqanfal/
- Kurds at the Crossroads (Frontline, PBS), www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/iraq203/crossroads03.html, www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/iraq501/events_anfal.html

Background and Resources: Bosnian Genocide

1992–1995, Cumulative Civilian Death Toll: 100,000

Bosnia is one of several small countries that emerged from the division of Yugoslavia, a country created after World War I and composed of ethnic and religious groups that had long been bitter rivals—the Orthodox Christian Serbs, Catholic Croats and Muslim Albanians. After the death of the Communist leader, Tito, in 1980, Yugoslavia went through a period of political chaos that resulted in the rise of the Serbian leader, Slobodan Milosevic, who used religious hatred to gain power and quickly ignited conflict between Serbs and Muslims.

After Bosnia—a mostly Muslim nation—declared independence in 1992, Milosevic launched an attack. Innocent civilians were gunned down in the streets of the capitol city, Sarajevo, including over 3,500 children. As the Serbs gained ground, they systematically rounded up and executed Muslims, mass raped women and girls, forced boys and men into concentration camps, and relocated entire towns. In addition, Muslim mosques and historic architecture were destroyed. The term "ethnic cleansing" was coined to describe the reign of terror being waged by Milosevic and the Serbian forces.

Beginning in 1993, after failed diplomatic efforts, the U.S. and NATO launched air strikes against the Serbs, who retaliated by taking hundreds of U.N. peacekeepers as hostages and turning them into human shields. During one brutal episode, the infamous General Ratko Mladic led the systematic slaughter of nearly 8,000 men and boys between the ages of twelve and sixty in the "safe haven" of Srebrenica.

In 1995 a massive NATO bombing campaign and the advancement of Muslim and Croat troops led ultimately to a peace accord. By this time, however, an estimated 100,000 civilians had been systematically murdered, more than 20,000 people were missing, and two million people had become refugees.

Web Resources

- The Bosnian War and Srebrenica Genocide (United to End Genocide), <http://endgenocide.org/learn/past-genocides/the-bosnian-war-and-srebrenica-genocide/>
- Bosnia-Herzegovina (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), www.ushmm.org/confront-genocide/cases/bosnia-herzegovina
- Bosnian Genocide (History), www.history.com/topics/bosnian-genocide
- Bosnian Genocide (World Without Genocide), <http://worldwithoutgenocide.org/genocides-and-conflicts/bosnia>
- Timeline: Bosnia-Herzegovina; Milosevic's Yugoslavia (BBC News), www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17212376, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/in_depth/europe/2000/milosevic_yugoslavia/default.stm

Background and Resources: Rwandan Genocide

1994, Cumulative Civilian Death Toll: 800,000

Rwanda, a small country in Central Africa, is comprised of two main ethnic groups, the Hutu and the Tutsi. Although the Hutus make up approximately 90% of the population, the Tutsis were placed in a more privileged position by the colonial Belgian rulers and dominated the Hutu peasants for decades. Following independence from Belgium in 1962, the Hutu majority seized power and exacted reprisals on the Tutsis through systematic discrimination and violence. As a result, over 200,000 Tutsis fled to neighboring countries and formed a rebel guerrilla army, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).

In 1990 the RPF invaded Rwanda, which resulted in a peace accord that established a power sharing arrangement between the Hutus and Tutsis, an agreement that left Hutu extremist factions bitter. In 1994 Hutu President Habyarimana was assassinated when his plane was shot down near Kigali airport. Rwanda erupted immediately into violence as Hutu extremists began executing Tutsi leaders and moderate Hutu politicians. The killings spread to the countryside, where Hutu forces carried out the mass extermination of Tutsi civilians, mostly with machetes and clubs. The Rwandan state radio, controlled by Hutu extremists, further encouraged the killings by broadcasting non-stop hate propaganda and identifying the locations of Tutsis in hiding.

Some of the worst massacres took place in churches and hospitals, where Tutsi civilians sought safe haven. Hutu civilians were forced to kill their Tutsi neighbors and Tutsis were forced to kill their own family members. After just over a month, the Red Cross estimated that half a million Tutsis had already been slaughtered, with the rate of killing reaching 10,000 per day. Bodies were now commonly seen floating down the Kigara River into Lake Victoria.

Following the murder of ten members of a Belgian peacekeeping force, Western countries evacuated its personnel, leaving the Rwandans virtually alone to deal with the murderous Hutu militia. The killings ended only when armed Tutsi rebels, invading from neighboring countries, defeated the Hutus and halted the genocide in July 1994. By then, over one-tenth of the population—an estimated 800,000 people—had been killed. In the aftermath of the genocide, hundreds of thousands of Hutu refugees fled into eastern Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo). The violence and its memory continue to affect the region.

Web Resources

- The Rwandan Genocide (United to End Genocide), <http://endgenocide.org/learn/past-genocides/the-rwandan-genocide/>
- The Rwandan Genocide (History), www.history.com/topics/rwandan-genocide
- Genocide in Rwanda (United Human Rights Council), www.unitedhumanrights.org/genocide/genocide-in-rwanda
- Rwanda (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), www.ushmm.org/confront-genocide/cases/rwanda
- Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda (Human Rights Watch), www.hrw.org/report/1999/03/01/leave-none-tell-story/genocide-rwanda
- Rwandan Genocide (World Without Genocide), <http://worldwithoutgenocide.org/genocides-and-conflicts/rwandan-genocide>

Reasons for Global Unresponsiveness to Genocide

Despite the promise of “never again” following the Nazi Holocaust and the approximately 140 signatories to the Genocide Convention, instances of mass slaughter and genocide have occurred numerous times since World War II without adequate intervention by the world community. Though the reasons for nonintervention are complex and vary across situations, the following ideas represent recurring motivations that may provide insight into the problem of global unresponsiveness. A broad articulation of reasons is followed by more specific motivations for five instances of genocide during which the U.S. and the world community did not intervene until hundreds of thousands or even millions of deaths had already occurred—Cambodia, Northern Iraq, Bosnia, the Armenian population and Rwanda. Though an in-depth analysis is beyond the scope of this resource, it is hoped that the detailed listing will provide themes that can be expanded upon in class through further research and investigation.

Political/Economic Factors

- The inviolability of state sovereignty and unwillingness to interfere in what are considered to be the internal matters of an autonomous nation remain sacrosanct principles.
- Political leaders often reason that nonintervention carries no political risk while intervention brings a high risk of public disapproval.
- Political leaders often interpret societal silence as indifference and fear a lack of public support for intervention.
- Political leaders will often base their decision to intervene on national interests; where there are no political or economic interests, it is frequently considered imprudent to intervene.
- The use of armed force is often deemed acceptable only as a last resort; to protect vital national interests; where winning is certain; and where public support is present.

Moral/Ethical Factors

- Sometimes economic or political interests in a country—even one with a genocidal regime—outweigh moral concerns; intervention may be seen as jeopardizing national interests.
- Arguing moral imperative over national interest is sometimes seen as out of the mainstream.
- The label of genocide is frequently avoided for fear of a moral imperative to act.
- There is sometimes a belief that it is premature or unethical to intervene while information and intelligence are still being gathered, and before there is a “complete picture.”
- There is often a fear that intervention will make things worse for the victims.
- Individual nations are often unwilling to risk the lives of their soldiers.

Public Awareness and Interest

- Individuals and citizen groups with influence do not organize, dissent, and apply public pressure with enough magnitude to force political action.
- Mainstream media coverage often reflects national priorities and public “appetite,” which contributes to a lack of public awareness and sense of urgency.
- There is often a limited expatriate community locally that can represent the interests of the targeted population.

Flawed Assumptions

- There is sometimes an assumption that Western style diplomacy and peace talks will work, and that official heads of state are credible negotiators (even though they may be part of a genocidal regime).
- A related assumption is that official heads of state are rational actors and will not inflict gratuitous violence upon civilian populations.

- There is often an erroneous belief that a conflict is two-sided, rooted in ethnic or religious “feuds” that have long histories, and are therefore inevitable and unpreventable.
- Sometimes there is a belief that intervention will make things worse for the victims.
- The scope and brutality of genocidal crimes are often unbelievable to authorities, who may deny or question the veracity of refugee claims and reports of atrocities.
- The Holocaust is often the yardstick against which other alleged genocides are measured-situations that are not perceived to be on the same scale are often downplayed.
- Sometimes situations are wrongly categorized as war and genocidal violence is understood to be the “collateral damage” of war; it is often difficult for people to believe that mass murder of a group is a primary aim rather than a consequence of conflict.
- Sometimes the victims of genocide are blamed for bringing on their own repression.
- Sometimes military intervention is seen as the only solution and “soft intervention” or sanctions are dismissed as ineffective.

Reference

Power, Samantha (2002). *“A Problem from Hell”: America and the Age of Genocide*. New York: Perennial.