

# RESISTANCE, AGENCY, AND EMPOWERMENT

## Defining Genocide

### Standards:

**CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy:** RH.9-10.3 Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

**CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy:** RH.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

### Lesson Objectives / Student Outcomes

Students will analyze cases of genocide using the UN Convention.  
Students will investigate patterns of genocide.

### Materials

- Internet access
- [Stages of Genocide: A Toolkit for Educators](#)
- [Resistance, Agency, and Empowerment Unit Slide Deck](#), Day 1

### Differentiation

*The Content, Literacy, Inquiry and Citizenship Project* has these videos available that students can watch instead of reading the handouts.

[American Indian Genocide](#)

[Cambodian Genocide](#)

[Rwandan Genocide](#)



## Lesson Plan: 50 minutes

Ask students what they already may know about human rights, genocide, and the United Nations. That can help lead and guide your conversation about Raphael Lemkin (slide deck) and the creation of the word 'genocide'. Go through the convention and have students analyze the language-check for understanding.

Divide the class into small groups and assign each group a different topic using these readings from Stages of Genocide:

- Cambodian Genocide
- Guatemalan Genocide
- The Holocaust
- Genocide of Native Americans
- Genocide in Rwanda

Students should read each case and highlight examples of events that meet the UN Genocide Convention requirement. As a group, they should prepare to share a basic summary of their topic and explain how it is a genocide, based on the UN Genocide Convention.

### Formative and/or Summative Assessment

Exit Ticket: Students meet with someone from a different topic and develop two ways the topics are similar, using the UN Genocide Convention.

### Glossary:

crimes against humanity: According to the International Criminal Court, crimes against humanity are acts committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population

discrimination: unfair treatment of different categories of people, often based on "race," religion, ethnicity, age, or gender.

ethnic cleansing: the forced removal, by mass expulsion or killing, of a group from a given territory (with the purpose of making it ethnically homogenous).

euphemism: a mild or indirect word used to hide or soften the truth (e.g. "passed away" instead of "died") Euphemisms are often used by genocide perpetrators to cover their actions and crimes



extremist: a person who holds fanatical political or religious views and supports radical action to achieve their goals

hate speech/symbols: speech or symbols that threatens or expresses prejudice against a particular group

mass atrocity: large-scale and deliberate attacks on civilians

moderate: a person who is able to compromise, meet in the middle, or see both sides of an argument

perpetrator: a person who does an illegal or harmful act. In the context of genocide, a perpetrator is someone who orders, assists, or engages in the act of killing

propaganda: misleading or biased information used to promote a certain point of view

repression: subduing, restraining, or limiting someone, often by force.

stereotype: a widely held but unchanging and oversimplified image or idea of a certain group of people; stereotypes are sometimes based on a kernel of truth, but are often false.

victim: a person hurt or killed as a result of a crime or other event. In the context of genocide, a victim is a person who belongs to a targeted group



## Bibliography

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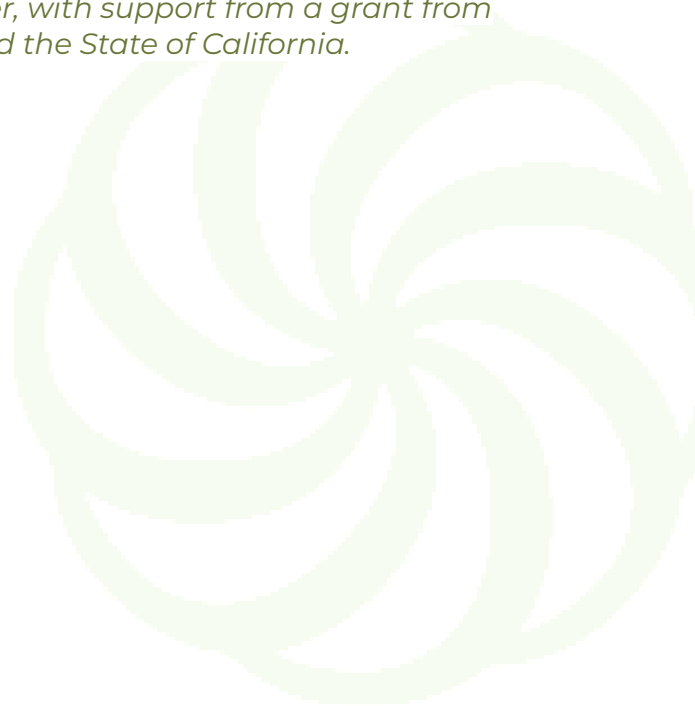
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*This curriculum was developed by Cynthia Martinez, a GenEd Teacher Fellow with The Genocide Education Project. It is part of a project of the California Teachers Collaborative for Holocaust and Genocide Education, established by the JFCS Holocaust Center, with support from a grant from the Marin County Office of Education and the State of California.*





# CAMBODIAN GENOCIDE 1975-1979

**T**he Cambodian Genocide was the killing of approximately 1.7 million to 2.2 million people by the Khmer Rouge (KR) regime from 1975 to 1979.

The genocide arose from the regime's attempt to create an agrarian society based on communist principles. Those targeted included anyone that the KR felt threatened these ideals, including people with different political views, the educated class, and people of different ethnicities or religions, who were banned from speaking minority languages and practicing religious customs under the regime.

Cambodia is a country in Southeast Asia bordering Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. The majority of its population identifies as Khmer, an ethnic group with its own language and culture. Before gaining independence in 1953, Cambodia was a French colony for nearly a century. Norodom Sihanouk ruled the country following independence, a period which coincided with the Vietnam War. During this time, Vietnamese refugees flooded into Cambodia and U.S. bombing campaigns killed 50,000 to 150,000 Cambodians.

Attempting to regain power after he was overthrown by a pro-western military coup in 1970, Sihanouk encouraged his followers to revolt. The communist Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, responded by taking up arms against the government, initiating a civil war. The bombing by the Americans and the mistrust of the Vietnamese helped Khmer Rouge forces to grow, and with over 700,000 members, the group successfully took over Cambodia in April 1975. The Khmer Rouge was very well organized; within hours of invading the capital, Phnom Penh, it immediately began removing people from their homes and instituting discriminatory policies to create its new communist "paradise" called Democratic Kampuchea.

According to the KR's beliefs, many people were considered "class enemies" of its agrarian revolution or agents of imperialist powers. The regime divided society into two groups: "Old People" and "New People." Old People were peasants who lived in the countryside; this group was idolized and considered trustworthy. New People included nearly everyone else: city dwellers, intellectuals, people of non-Khmer ethnicities, and religious people, including Buddhist monks who the KR identified by their robes. Even people who wore glasses or spoke a second language were targeted, as the regime believed them to be educated or have connections outside Cambodia.

Upon taking power, the Khmer Rouge systematically emptied urban areas, separating families and forcing people into the countryside. Now at the bottom of the KR's supposed classless society, the New People received far harsher treatment than the Old People. Professionals, including teachers, doctors, and former government officials, were murdered right away.

## BASIC FACTS

### Targets:

Wide variety of people targeted, including:

- Urban dwellers
- Intellectuals and those with advanced education
- Former government officials
- Ethnic minorities

### Perpetrators:

- Khmer Rouge
- Leadership: Pol Pot, communist leader of the Khmer Rouge military and political organization

### Results:

- More than 1.7 million people killed (20 percent of population)
- 11-year occupation by Vietnam
- Unstable governments, guerrilla war, and famines

Additionally, the regime abolished all rights for those not killed immediately. It closed schools, factories, and hospitals and banned radios and music. The remaining population was forced to perform slave labor in the “killing fields,” communal farms where many died from exhaustion, malnutrition, and disease. These deaths were the direct result of the harsh conditions imposed by the Khmer Rouge.

In addition to enslaving its own population, the KR created prisons for the torture and killing of perceived enemies, and even publicly marked some people for death (people in the Eastern Zone, for example, had to wear a blue scarf that meant they would be killed). Anyone who wasn’t designated an ethnic Khmer peasant was targeted, and those perceived to be unsupportive of the regime’s policies and actions were deemed enemies. There was no room for any type of moderate. In addition, the KR targeted religious groups: it murdered 97 percent of Buddhist monks, 8,000 Christians, and half of the Cham Muslim population. The genocide ended in early 1979 when the Vietnamese Army invaded Cambodia and defeated the Khmer Rouge. As a result of the Khmer Rouge’s anti-imperialist worldview and opposition to U.S. intervention, many western academics opposed to the Vietnam War minimized or denied the crimes of the KR.

Cambodia today still suffers effects from the genocide. Its industry, education systems, healthcare, and commerce were all but destroyed by the Khmer Rouge, so the country faced many difficulties as it rebuilt in the wake of the atrocities. In 2018, a UN-backed international court found two former Khmer Rouge leaders guilty of genocide. The ruling has been the only genocide conviction to date for the atrocities in Cambodia.

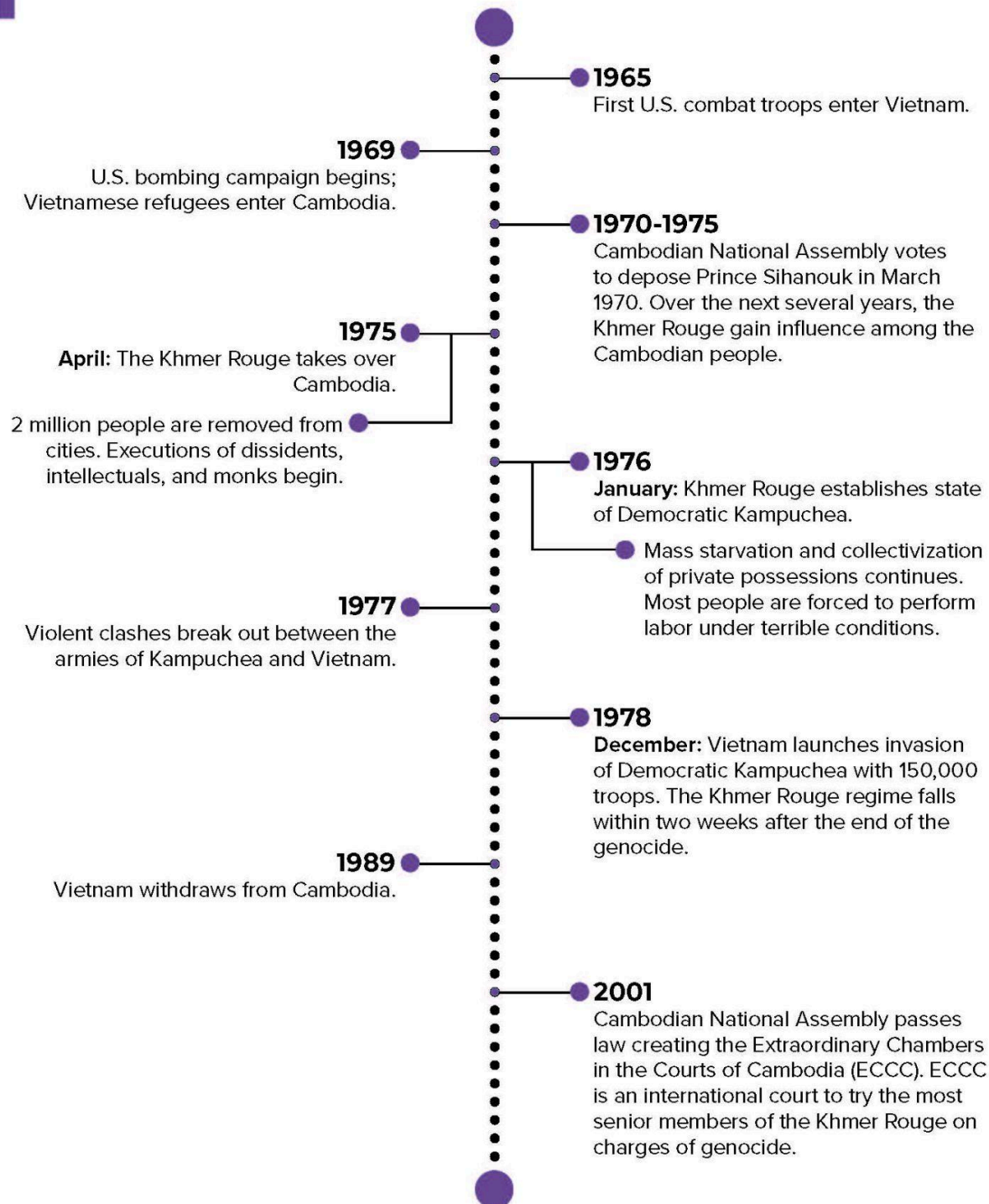


Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum at the site of a former Khmer Rouge prison.

*Credit: Bjorn Christian Torrissen (via Wikimedia Commons)*



# CAMBODIAN GENOCIDE: TIMELINE



# GUATEMALAN GENOCIDE 1982-1983

**D**uring the Guatemalan Genocide, the Guatemalan government attempted to destroy the country's Mayan population. During the civil war from 1960 to 1996, more than 200,000 people were killed, mostly by the country's armed forces. The Guatemalan army and paramilitaries persecuted Indigenous communities, union leaders, students, religious people, and other civilians claiming that they formed a subversive 'internal enemy.' The height of the genocide took place between 1982 and 1983, during which tens of thousands of Mayas were killed.

Guatemala is a small country in Central America, bordered by Mexico, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. It is located at the center of what used to be the powerful Mayan empire. After Spanish Conquistadors arrived in the 1500s, the Maya were treated poorly and often enslaved. In the centuries that followed, most of the Mayan peoples ceased to exist and with them their way of life and their religion.

As a result of colonization, the racist belief that people of Spanish descent (Ladinos) were superior to those of indigenous heritage persisted through the centuries. Mayan groups were easily distinguished from Ladinos because of their distinct cultural traits, including languages and clothing. As a result, Mayans suffered under a system of discrimination and persecution for centuries, during which they could not access services in their own languages and had limited access to healthcare, education, and basic services.

In 1944, a revolutionary junta took power and ushered in the Guatemalan Revolution. Over the next decade, the government enacted social and agricultural reforms which improved living standards for some of the Indigenous population. These reforms distributed unused farmland and allowed workers to go on strike. Guatemala's largest landowner, the American-owned United Fruit Company (UFC), lobbied against the reforms. Because its projects in Guatemala accounted for 25 percent of UFC's total production, these reforms meant that the company would lose both control and revenue. The government of the United States supported the company, viewing the reforms as a step toward communism.

In 1954, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) backed a military coup in Guatemala. During the coup, the CIA established a secret radio station to broadcast anti-government propaganda and U.S. pilots bombed strategic points in the capital, Guatemala City. The coup led to the overthrow of democratically-elected leader Jacobo Árbenz and restored the rights of the United Fruit Company.

## BASIC FACTS

### Targets:

- People of Mayan ethnicity, including peasants, students, and community leaders

### Perpetrators:

- Guatemalan military and paramilitary forces
- Leadership: General Efraín Ríos Montt, president of Guatemala from 1982-1983

### Results:

- Approximately 80,000 Maya killed
- 626 villages destroyed
- Over 150,000 refugees fled to Mexico



During the military dictatorship that followed the coup, many leftist guerrilla groups rose up in the countryside. This uprising led to the brutal 36-year civil war that provided the cover for genocide. Launched in the early 1980s, “Operation Sofia” was the Guatemalan government’s plan to eliminate the Mayan population, whom it accused of supporting the rebels. With the help of paramilitary ‘death squads,’ the army destroyed much of the Mayan region as it attempted to root out the leftist opponents that were supposedly being hidden in Indigenous communities. Operation Sofia was part of a campaign to destroy Mayan life in the villages and to “re-educate” the surviving Indigenous population.

Although Indigenous groups comprised more than half of Guatemala’s population, the government often expressed racist anti-Indigenous sentiment which encouraged troops to treat the Mayan population with brutality. Some propaganda stated that Mayas were animals. Others accused Mayan communities of supporting the guerrilla fighters and infecting the country with their communist ideas. The government drew up lists of Mayan leaders to be eliminated and publicly questioned people’s loyalty. They used informants to spy on villages and spread propaganda that the Maya were planning to overthrow the government. Applying a “scorched earth” policy, the army burned buildings, killed livestock, and desecrated cultural symbols. 626 Mayan villages were destroyed in the operation.

Some historians refer to the events in Guatemala between 1982 and 1983 as the “Silent Holocaust.” During this short period, the government massacred, tortured or “disappeared” (kidnapped and likely killed) approximately half of the 166,000 Mayan men, women and children who were killed during the entire civil war. Entire Mayan communities were massacred and tortured, including thousands of sexual assaults against women.

Many became refugees in southern Mexico and other neighboring countries, and 1.5 million were internally displaced. The civil war officially ended in 1996 with the signing of peace accords. A part of the treaty gave perpetrators amnesty, legal protection from being punished for their crimes, and many of the leaders of the genocide are now powerful members of government. Many perpetrators have denied that they did anything wrong; they claim that the killing was part of a civil war and there were casualties on both sides. Today, the Maya face continued discrimination, human rights abuses, and a renewed government policy of taking over native lands and evicting villagers.



Women from the Ixil community (a Mayan people) celebrate after General Efraín Ríos Montt is convicted of genocide.

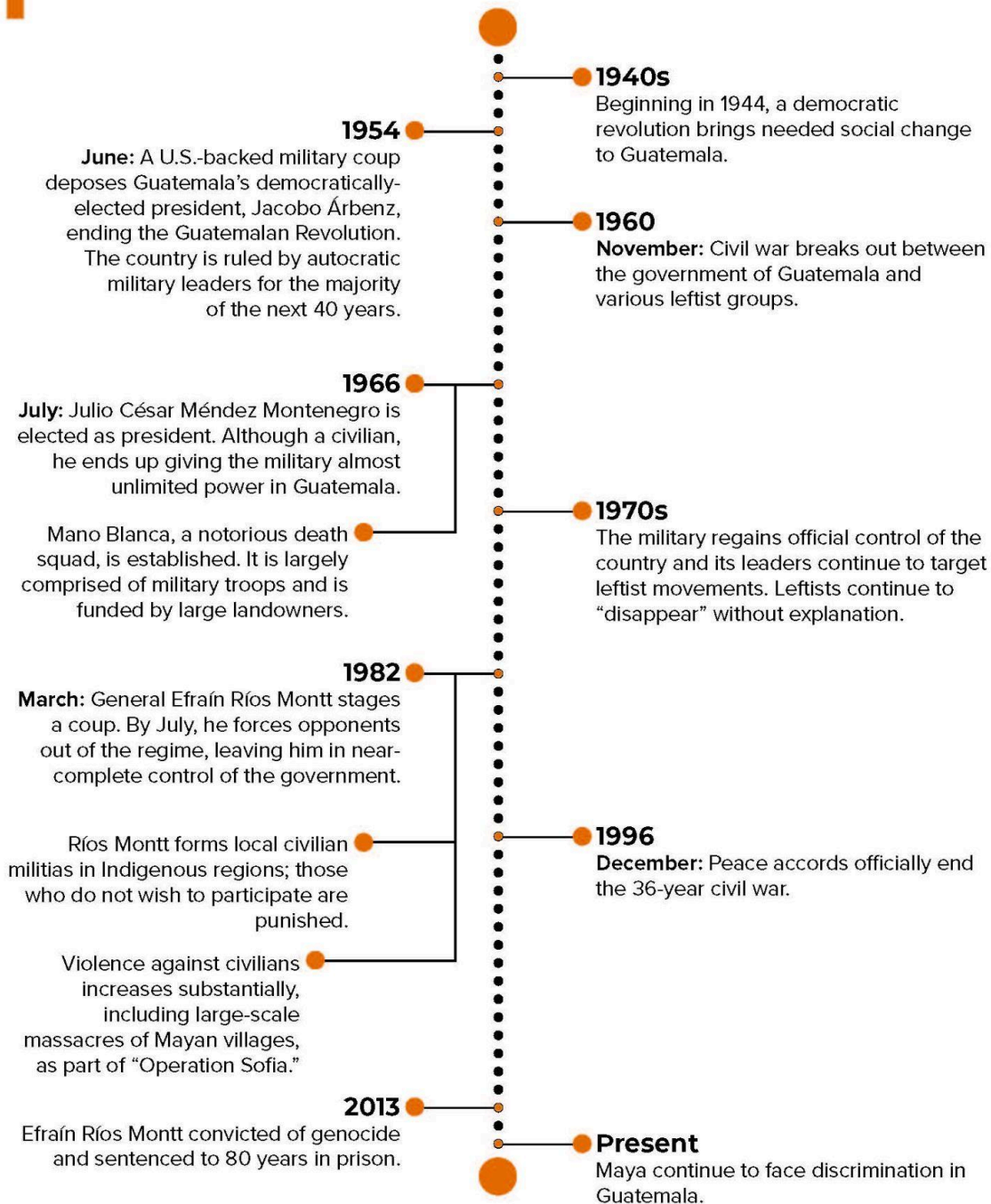
*Credit: Elena Hermosa/Trocaire (via Wikimedia Commons)*



Guatemalan army carries out 'scorched earth' policy on a Mayan village.

*Credit: World Without Genocide*

## GUATEMALAN GENOCIDE: TIMELINE



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## GUATEMALAN GENOCIDE: KEY TERMS

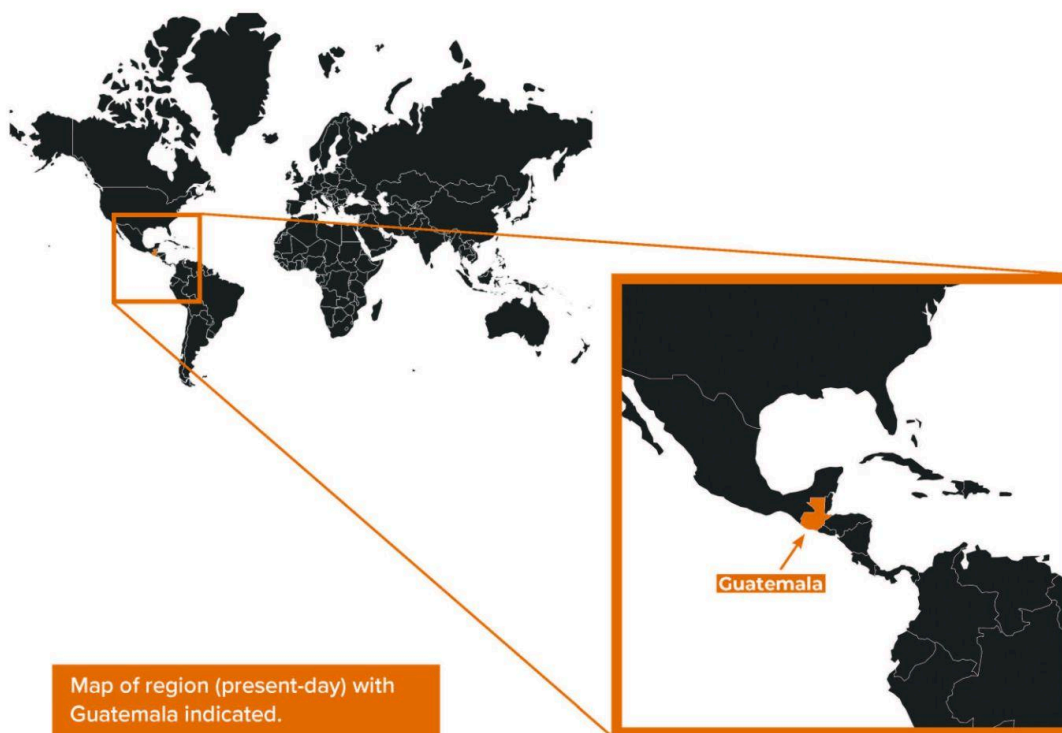
**Cold War:** period of hostility between two power blocs, led by the United States and the Soviet Union, respectively. During the Cold War (1945-1990), the U.S. took a strong stance against communism and any country that it perceived to be a Soviet ally.

**disappeared:** when a person is secretly kidnapped or abducted by the state (or an organization working for the state) and no information about their fate or whereabouts is revealed to their friends and loved ones.

**junta:** a military or political group that rules a country after taking power by force.

**paramilitary:** a force whose function and structure is similar to the military; however, paramilitary groups are not part of the state's official military forces.

**scorched earth:** military strategy of destroying anything that might be useful to the enemy (e.g. houses, crops, livestock, etc.).





# THE HOLOCAUST 1933-1945

The Holocaust was the planned, deliberate attempt to destroy Europe's Jewish population by Germany's Third Reich. Six million Jews and five million others were killed during the Holocaust. Jews were the main target of Nazi persecution; however, Roma ("Gypsies") were also targeted for destruction by the Nazis. Policies of the Third Reich were based on extreme racism that categorized everyone on "racial" grounds. In an attempt to create a strong and "racially pure" Germany, the Nazis also targeted other groups, including: gay men, communists, Jehovah's Witnesses, people with physical or mental disabilities, and Slavic peoples. As Germany gained control of territory in Europe and Northern Africa between 1933-1945, more people became subject to Nazi persecution.

Although Europe is home to people of many ethnicities and religions, it has a long history of prejudice against Jews (antisemitism). As a result, Jews were often viewed as distinct from the rest of the community. Before the nineteenth century, this prejudice was directed toward Jews as a minority religious group. During the late 1800s, however, the false idea that Jews are a distinct biological race gained popularity. This idea heavily influenced the Nazi Party, who believed that "Aryans" (Germanic peoples) were racially superior and that the Jews and members of certain other groups were subhuman. They also believed that the Jews were a "threat to the purity of German blood" and discouraged association between Jews and non-Jews.

When the Nazis were democratically elected in Germany in 1933, they immediately acted on these prejudices. They quickly banned other political parties, including communists and moderate socialists, so that they could control the country without opposition. The Nazis conducted a massive propaganda campaign to persuade non-Jewish Germans to view the Jews as different and dangerous, often comparing them to vermin. Over the next several years, the Nazis instituted laws which stripped Jews of their citizenship and other important rights, including their right to work in certain professions and the right to marry "Aryans." These laws also established who was officially considered a Jew. Jewishness was not determined by religion, but instead by biological heritage. This meant that even if someone had converted to Christianity or never practiced Judaism, they would still be considered a "full Jew" if they had three Jewish grandparents.

Additional laws made people the Nazis had classified as Jewish stand out from the general population. All Jews had to have 'J's stamped on their passports, change their middle names to Sara (for women) or Israel (for men), and in some places, wear identifying badges such as a yellow Star of David. The government created the SS, a security force, to enforce its racial laws and to run its complex system of concentration and extermination camps. It also created the Gestapo, a secret police force responsible for eliminating perceived threats to the Nazi state.

## BASIC FACTS

### Targets:

- Jews
- Roma and Sinti
- Slavs, including Poles and Russians
- Gay men
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- People with disabilities

### Perpetrators:

- National Socialist ("Nazi") government of Germany
- Leadership: Adolf Hitler, Führer (leader) of Germany
- Collaborators (non-Germans who chose to help the Nazis)

### Results:

- 6 million Jewish people and 5 million others killed
- Creation of the UN Genocide Convention
- Creation of the state of Israel
- Destruction of almost all Jewish communities in Europe



World War II began in Europe when Germany invaded Poland in September 1939. The Nazis used the war to expand their territory to provide more *Lebensraum*, or living space, for ethnic Germans. As their territory grew, the Nazis drastically increased the number of Jews under their control, leading to increasingly drastic plans and methods for keeping Jews separate from the rest of the population. The violence steadily progressed into genocide: some Jews were killed by people in their villages, sometimes by their neighbors. Many were imprisoned in ghettos, then deported to extermination centers, where they were murdered with poison gas upon arrival; others were deported to concentration camps and used as slave labor until they died. The Nazis also killed many people under the cover of war, often by using the *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing squads). These squads followed behind the German army to kill Jews, Roma, communists and other supposed “enemies of the Reich.” Toward the end of the war, the genocidal methods also included death marches as Allied troops neared the camps. Forced to flee from liberating armies, many died from exhaustion or starvation during the marches. The genocide finally ended when Germany surrendered to the Allies in May 1945.

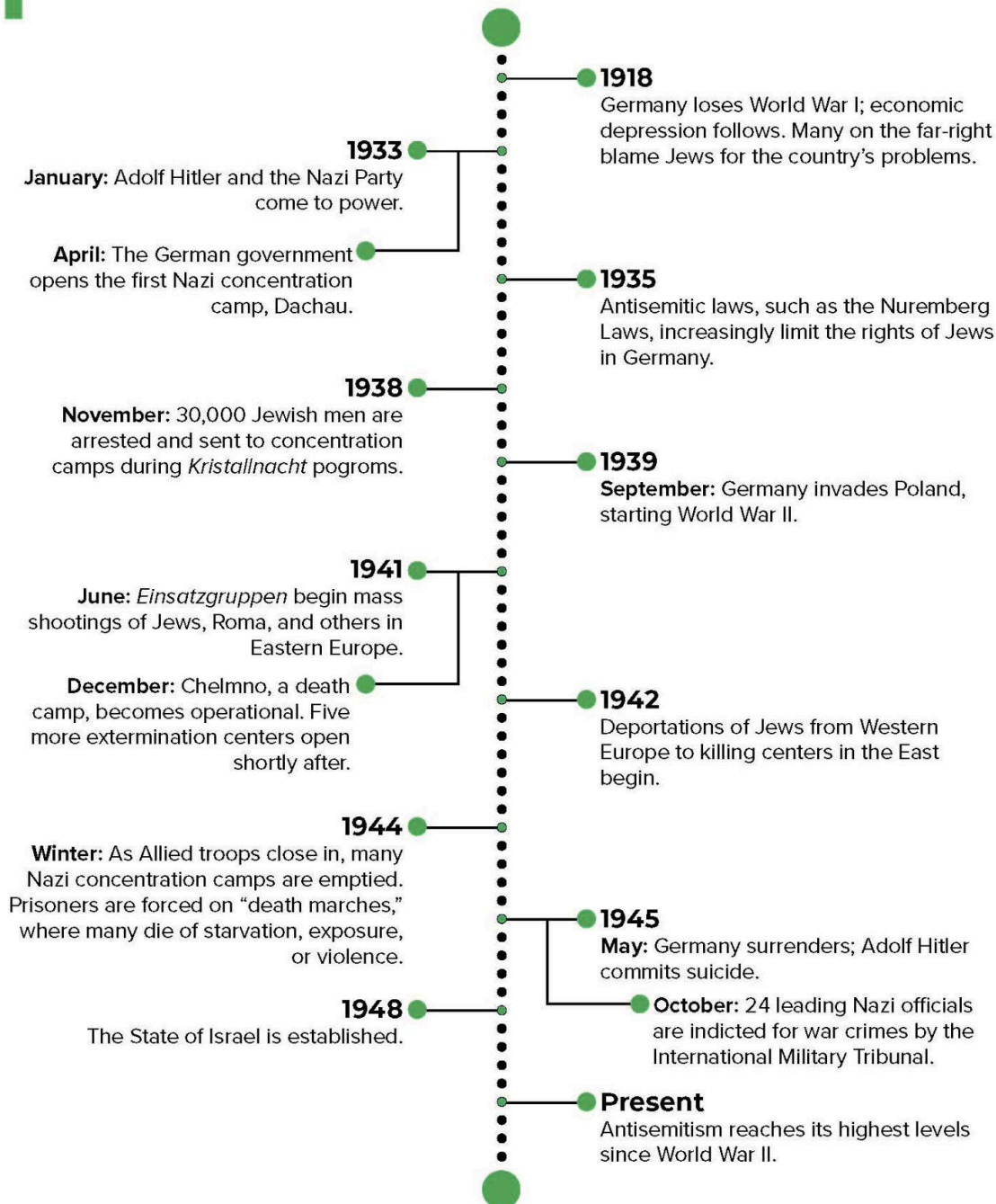
By the end of the genocide, nearly two-thirds of Europe's Jews and one-quarter of Europe's Roma had been killed. Between two and three million Soviet prisoners of war and two million non-Jewish Poles died at the hands of Nazis and their collaborators. Today, white supremacists, neo-Nazis, and others deny that the Holocaust happened or suggest that its death tolls are grossly exaggerated. They often make extensive efforts to discredit Holocaust survivors and historians of the genocide.



A group of Hungarian Jews arrives at Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp, summer 1944.

Credit: German Federal Archives (via Wikimedia Commons)

# THE HOLOCAUST: TIMELINE



## THE HOLOCAUST: KEY TERMS

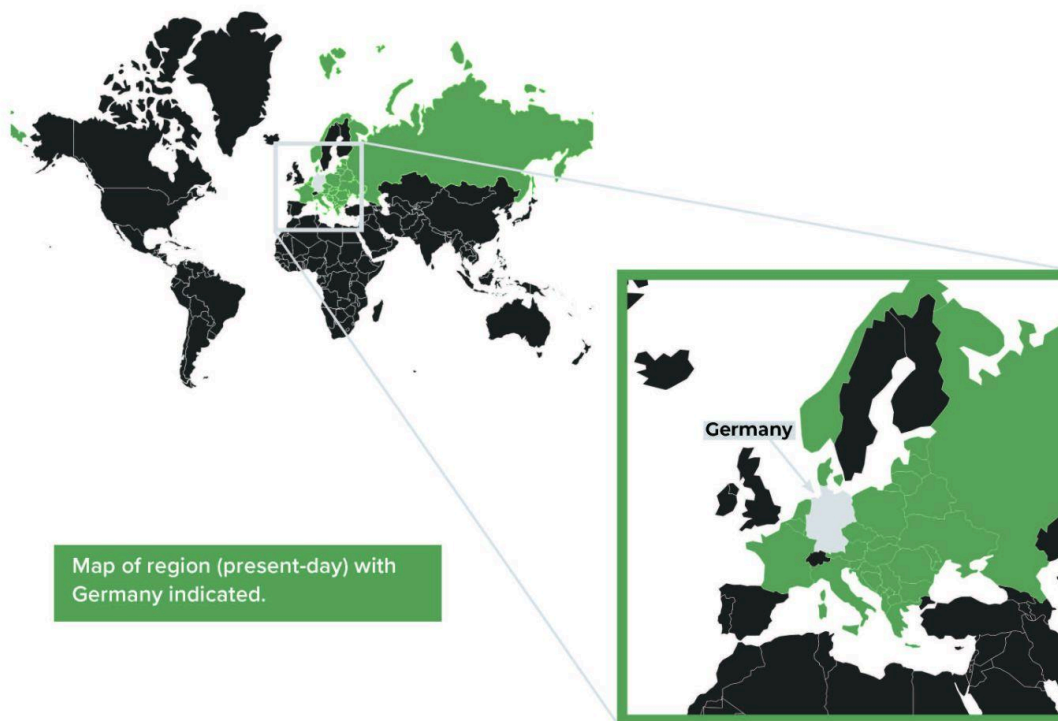
**antisemitism:** prejudice or discrimination against Jewish people.

**Aryan:** a term referring to people of Indo-European heritage. According to Nazi ideology, Nordic peoples, which included Germans, were the “purest” people of the “Aryan race.”

**concentration camp:** a place where victims were imprisoned and forced to do slave labor. Concentration camps were part of the Nazi policy of “extermination through labor” whereby prisoners worked until they died—usually as a result of exhaustion, starvation, or disease.

**extermination camp:** a place where victims were killed upon arrival, usually by poison gas. The Nazis created and ran six extermination camps during the Holocaust: Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, Chelmno, and Majdanek.

**Roma and Sinti:** traditionally nomadic groups who migrated from India during the 1100s. These groups are sometimes referred to as “Gypsies,” but this is now considered to be a derogatory term.





# GENOCIDE OF NATIVE AMERICANS 1607-1968\*

According to moderate estimates, 50 to 60 million people lived in the Americas when Christopher Columbus arrived in 1492. An estimated eight to ten million lived in what is now the United States. By 1900, 80 percent of the Indigenous population of the Americas had died. Diseases brought by the Europeans caused a large number of Native American deaths; however, violence against Native populations also contributed to the large death toll. In many cases, this violence was directed by colonial governments and settlers.

As soon as European colonization in what is now the United States began, settlers made distinctions between themselves and the “Indians”—the Indigenous inhabitants of the land. The colonists referred to Native Americans as *reds*, indicating that they were different because of the color of their skin. Not only did the Native Americans look and dress differently than the Europeans, but they also had different languages, customs, and religious practices. Most European settlers believed that they were superior to Indigenous peoples and often described people from Native tribes as “savages,” “barbarians,” or wild animals.

The American Revolution marked a decline in relations between the white settlers and the Indigenous population. Some tribes supported Great Britain during the Revolutionary War, so after the United States won independence, Indigenous peoples were considered traitors regardless of whether they had supported the British or not. Over the next century, U.S. government policy toward Native Americans moved from assimilation to separation. Before the 1820s, the government pushed tribes to give up their cultural practices and integrate into white American society. Later it pursued a policy of segregation, separating Native Americans from the rest of the population or physically removing Indigenous peoples from their land.

One of the reasons the U.S. government moved to separate and remove Native peoples was because the ideal figure of the farmer—someone who worked and lived off of the land—was central to America’s new identity. As a result, the desire for land and westward expansion intensified throughout the 19th century. According to government officials, the Native American inhabitants of the land were preventing the United States from becoming a large empire. Occasionally the government would negotiate treaties for land with tribal bodies, but in many cases, it encouraged settlers to use violence against the Indigenous inhabitants and take the land by force. Government officials armed militias and warned settler populations that if they did not kill the Indigenous peoples first, the Indigenous peoples would kill them.

Hoping to survive, some tribes attempted to assimilate into white society, adopting new ‘American’ customs and practices. The Cherokee were one tribe that attempted to assimilate by adopting European customs. Despite this, the law continued

## BASIC FACTS

### Targets:

- Indigenous peoples of what is now the United States

### Perpetrators:

- United States government and military
- Settlers and colonizers

### Results:

- Estimated 7.7 million to 9.7 million Native Americans killed by 1900
- More than 10,000 Native Americans killed on the Trail of Tears

\* Dates indicate first British settlement in what is now the United States to the passage of the Indian Civil Rights Act

to discriminate against the Cherokee and other Indigenous groups, including banning them from testifying against whites or publicly protesting their living conditions.

In 1829, gold was discovered in Cherokee territory and the following year, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act. Under this act, the U.S. president could initiate treaties with Native American tribes that took tribal lands in the east in exchange for land in the west. This process was voluntary at first, but when tribes refused to leave (including the Cherokee), the government began removing them by force.

In 1838, approximately 16,000 Cherokees still remained on their land in the east. The government responded by sending 7,000 troops to their homes and forcing them to leave. They were not allowed time to gather any supplies or belongings, so they began the 800-mile march west toward what is now Oklahoma with nothing but the clothes on their backs. This forced removal—or ethnic cleansing—of the Cherokee and other tribes is often referred to as the Trail of Tears. Approximately 46,000 Native Americans were forced from their homelands in this way and close to 4,000 Cherokees died, primarily from cold, disease, or starvation. More than 6,000 Native Americans from other tribes also died on forced westward marches.

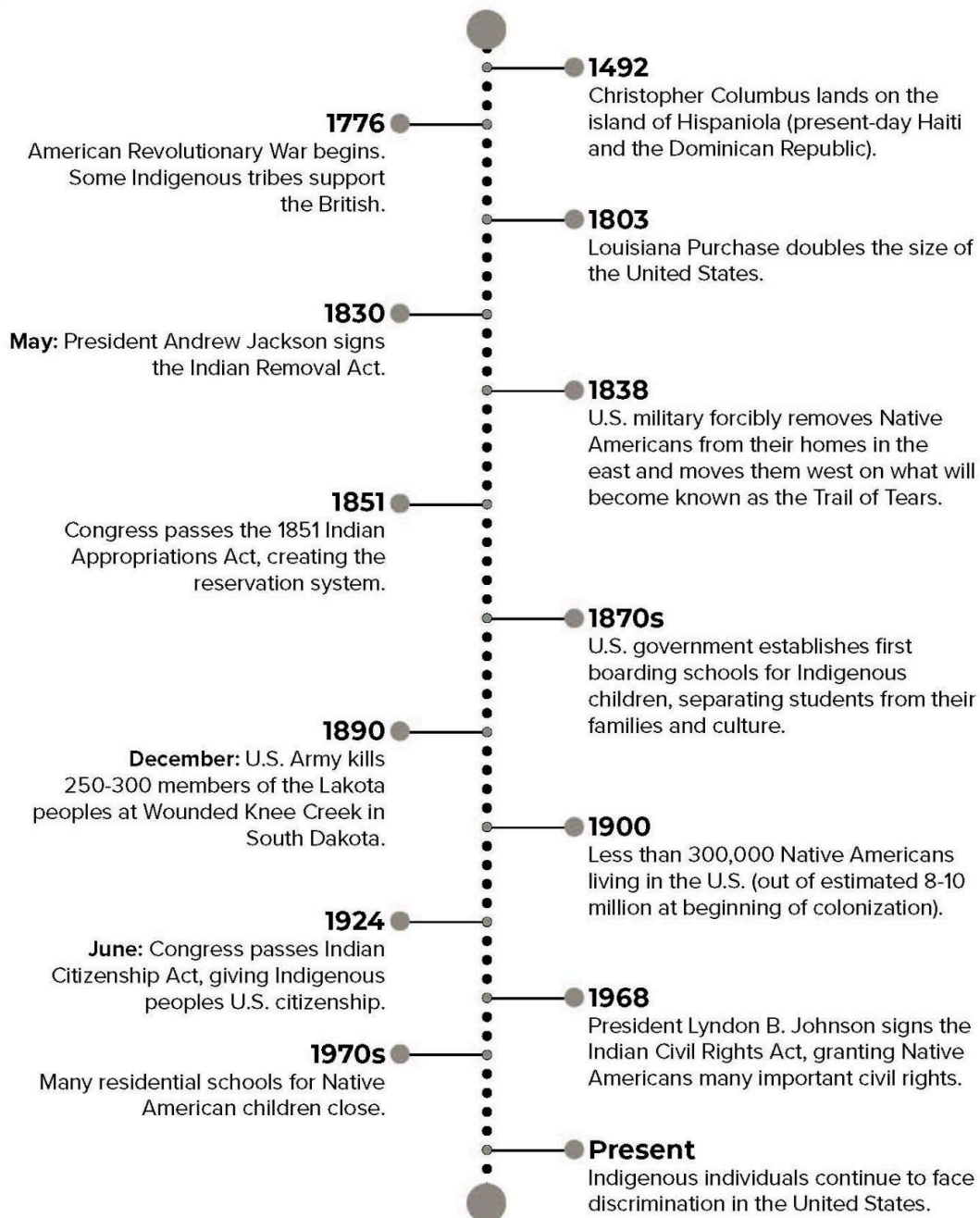
The Trail of Tears is one example of genocide, but there were many other genocidal policies and actions initiated against the Indigenous population of the United States. The U.S. government maintains it did not pursue a policy of genocide, and as a result, the history of Indigenous genocide has been left out of history textbooks and federally-funded museums. As a result of this historical revision and the legacy of these racist policies, many Native Americans today still suffer from the effects of the genocide and centuries of persecution.



*The Trail of Tears*, painting by Robert Lindneux, 1942.



# GENOCIDE OF NATIVE AMERICANS: TIMELINE



## GENOCIDE OF NATIVE AMERICANS: KEY TERMS

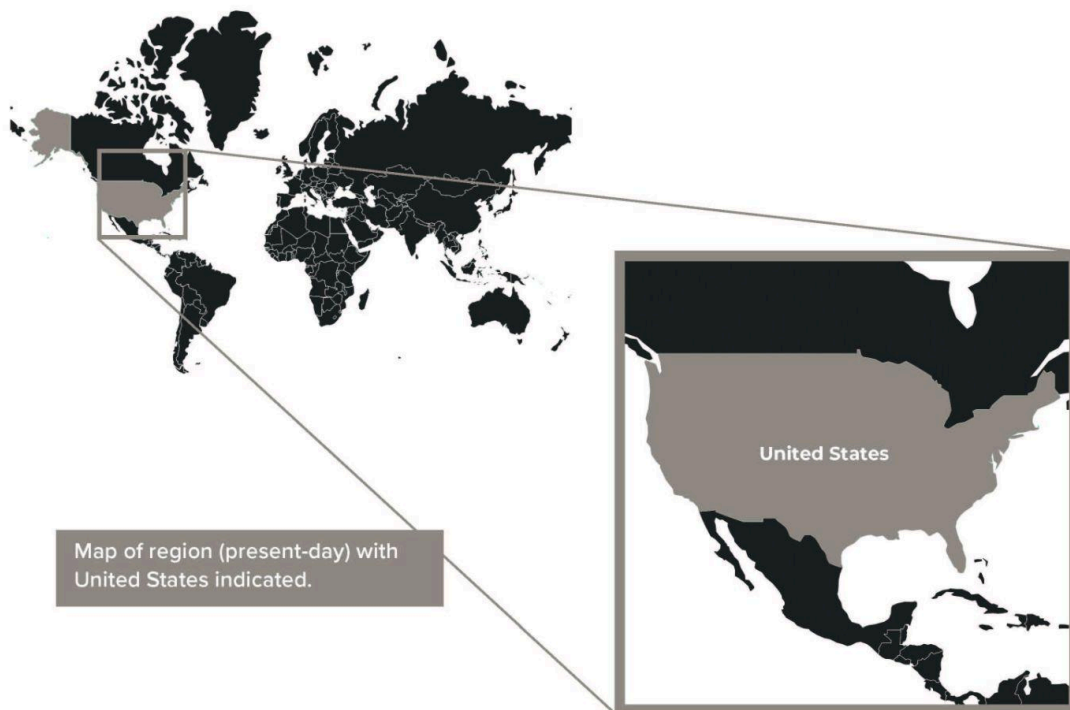
**assimilation:** the process by which a person or minority group adopts the language or culture of a dominant group in society.

**colonization:** the process by which one group or country takes political and economic control of other territory. This process is usually accompanied by the introduction of settlers from the dominant country to their 'new' territory.

**ethnic cleansing:** the forced removal, by mass expulsion or killing, of a group from a given territory (with the purpose of making it ethnically homogenous).

**Indigenous peoples:** groups of people which are native to a given territory.

**segregation:** the enforced separation of groups in society, usually along racial or ethnic lines.



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# GENOCIDE IN RWANDA 1994

The Rwandan Genocide was the destruction of Tutsi and moderate Hutu people in Rwanda by members of the Hutu majority. It was planned by Hutu political elites and carried out by the media, militia, and everyday people. The killing lasted one hundred days, from April through July of 1994. In this short period, close to one million people were murdered out of a pre-genocide population of more than seven million.

Rwanda is a small country in the Great Lakes region of East Africa. A majority of the population were either Hutu (85 percent) or Tutsi (14 percent). Before colonization, these two designations simply distinguished farmers (Hutu) and cattle herders (Tutsi), but in the 1900s under colonial rule, these labels were solidified and turned into ethnic categories. Before this transformation, people could move freely between the Hutu and Tutsi groups; however, when European powers ruled colonial Rwanda, they determined who belonged to which group based on “racial traits,” deciding that Tutsi were taller, thinner and lighter skinned than Hutu — and therefore racially superior. The Belgian colonial administration maintained this false racial hierarchy by establishing a system of ethnic identity cards that legally distinguished individuals as belonging to a certain group. In reality, there was no such “racial” distinction between the Hutu and Tutsi.

These same rulers also deepened the divide by favoring Tutsis in schools and leadership positions, which made many Hutu resentful of their Tutsi neighbors. When Rwanda became independent in 1962, a Hutu elite gained political control of the country and began discriminating against Tutsis. In the following decades, violence forced more than 300,000 Tutsi into exile in Uganda and neighboring countries. Refugees trying to return to the country were rebuffed, and in 1990 a civil war began when an armed Tutsi refugee group, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), advanced into Rwanda. In the midst of the civil war that followed, preparation for genocide began. Hutu leaders ordered machetes, trained militias, and incited hatred against the minority group through an extensive campaign of anti-Tutsi propaganda. Radio and print media called Tutsis cockroaches and snakes. Hutu extremists killed politically moderate Hutu officials and community leaders.

Despite this climate, the government and the RPF reached an accord in 1993 to share power between Hutu and Tutsi. But on April 6, 1994, before the agreement was implemented, the Rwandan president's plane was shot down. Tutsi were blamed for the assassination and this became the pretext for genocide. Almost immediately, a previously agreed upon signal went out over the radio; Hutu leaders drew up and shared death lists; and members of the machete-wielding *Interahamwe* militia erected and guarded roadblocks. Those who tried to get by without a Hutu identity card were killed. Many Tutsi fled to churches for safety, but most priests were unwilling to offer protection. Perpetrators also carried out a

## BASIC FACTS

### Targets:

- Tutsi
- Politically moderate Hutu

### Perpetrators:

- Leadership: Hutu extremists
- Media, particularly radio and newspapers
- *Interahamwe* paramilitary groups

### Results:

- Approximately 800,000 people killed
- More than 2 million refugees fled to neighboring countries
- 250,000 to 500,000 women raped
- First & Second Congo Wars



campaign of rape to torture and spread HIV to Tutsi women and girls. Despite the unfolding violence, the United Nations pulled out most of its peacekeepers. Most of the killing was done with machetes and clubs.

The genocide ended when the RPF defeated the government and won the civil war. Many Hutus fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo and their continuing activities have led directly to the First and Second Congo Wars. After the genocide, Rwanda was traumatized and economically devastated. Since the violence, the Rwandan government, now led by a mix of moderate Hutu and Tutsi, has effected a remarkable turnaround in many ways, with positive developments in education, women's roles, and new methods of justice. It developed a system of community-based justice known as *Gacaca* courts to deal with the large number of genocide perpetrators. This system, however, has many critics, and many difficulties remain in the country. Perpetrators and their supporters outside Rwanda spread denial by characterizing the 100 days of genocide as a civil war with equivalent casualties on both sides, rather than what it actually was: a carefully planned genocide under the cover of a civil war.



A Hutu man and a Tutsi man visit a cemetery where 6,000 victims of genocide are buried.

*Credit: Jon Warren/World Vision*



Photographs of genocide victims at the Genocide Memorial Centre in Kigali, Rwanda.

*Credit: Adam Jones, Ph.D (via Wikimedia Commons)*

## GENOCIDE IN RWANDA: KEY TERMS

**Gacaca courts (pronounced ga-cha-cha):** community-based court system set up to process the large number of perpetrators following the Rwandan Genocide. Unlike the traditional legal system, the *Gacaca* system focuses on reconciliation and community rebuilding, rather than just jail sentence-based punishment.

**Interahamwe:** Hutu paramilitary group that participated in the genocide. *Interahamwe* translates to “those who attack together.”

**paramilitary:** a force whose function and structure is similar to the military; however, paramilitary groups are not part of the state’s official military forces.

**peacekeepers:** a force, overseen by the United Nations, of soldiers and volunteers who monitor peace processes in areas of conflict. All peacekeepers are members of their own country’s military working for the United Nations, as the UN does not have its own army.

**Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF):** political and military movement formed in Uganda in 1987 with the aim of helping Tutsi refugees return home to Rwanda. The RPF eventually overcame the genocidal government of Rwanda, thus ending the genocide. It is now the ruling political party of Rwanda.



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