

# The Holocaust



**Date:** 1941-1945

**Perpetrators:** Nazi Germany and collaborators (Italy and Nazi-occupied territories in Europe)

**Motive:** Like many anti-Semites in Germany, Adolf Hitler blamed the Jews for the country's defeat in World War I. Hitler was obsessed with the idea of the superiority of the "pure" German race, which he called "Aryan". This would be the beginning of the "Final Solution", a systematic extermination of people that Hitler and the Nazis considered "undesirable"- Jews, Romas (Gypsies), Jehovah's Witnesses, and the disabled.

**Campaign:** Between 1941 and 1944, Nazi German authorities deported millions of Jews from Germany and the Third Reich territories. World War II provided Nazi officials the opportunity to confine Jews in the horrendous living conditions in ghettos under the pretext that they posed a threat to Germany. Beginning in June 1941, Einsatzgruppen and Waffen SS units, with support from the Wehrmacht, murdered Jews, Roma, and others in mass shootings, which continued throughout the war. In late 1941, Nazi officials opted to employ an additional method: stationary gas chambers. The vast majority of the Jewish population were sent to extermination camps at Belzec, Chelmno, Sobibor, Treblinka, and Auschwitz-Birkenau, where they were murdered primarily by poison gas. Some able-bodied Jewish deportees were temporarily spared to perform forced labor in concentration camps in Nazi-occupied Poland and the Soviet Union. Most of these workers died from starvation and disease or were killed when they became too weak to work. The Germans attempted to disguise their intentions, referring to deportations as a resettlement program, but from 1942 onward, deportation for most Jews meant transit to killing centers and death. In the final months of the war, SS guards moved camp inmates on "death marches", where concentration camp prisoners were forced to march over long distances and extremely harsh conditions. By the time the war ended on May 7, 1945, the Nazi regime and their collaborators had murdered more than six million Jews, Roma, Slavic ethnic groups, and others.

**International Response:** While the Polish government-in-exile managed to raise awareness of the Jewish genocide by December 1942, this did not result in any action by Allied nations to either stop the ongoing slaughter or absorb refugees. Rather, the Allies focused their efforts exclusively on conducting military campaigns in order to defeat the Third Reich. After the war, a series of military tribunals called the Nuremberg Trials were conducted by the Allied forces to punish those responsible for the Holocaust. The trials legitimized the concept of crimes against humanity, where prominent members of Nazi Germany who planned, carried out, or otherwise participated in the Holocaust were prosecuted for war crimes. In the decades since the Holocaust, some national governments, international bodies and world leaders have been criticized for their failure to take appropriate action to save millions of European victims of the Holocaust. Such intervention, particularly by the Allied governments, might have saved substantial numbers of people and without the diversion of significant resources from the war effort.

# Cambodian Genocide



**Date:** 1975-1979

**Perpetrators:** The Khmer Rouge, led by dictator Pol Pot

**Motive:** The Khmer Rouge guerrilla movement was founded in 1960. The movement's leader, Pol Pot, was an admirer of Chinese communism. He envisioned a new Cambodia deconstructed to a primitive "Year Zero," where all citizens would participate in rural work projects and Western innovations would be destroyed. To achieve the "ideal" communist model, the Khmer Rouge mandated all Cambodians work as laborers on collective farms; anyone who opposed this system would be eliminated. This list of potential opposition included intellectuals, doctors, lawyers, monks, Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, and ethnic Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai citizens of Cambodia.

**Campaign:** Under the threat of death, Cambodians were forced from their homes to the countryside. The ill, disabled, old, and young incapable of making the journey were killed on the spot. People who refused to leave and anyone who appeared to oppose the new regime were also killed in mass purges. All political and civil rights of citizens were abolished. Those who survived became unpaid laborers who worked for endless hours. They were forced to live in public communes, similar to military barracks, with constant food shortages and rampant diseases. Virtual slave labor, starvation, injury, and illness caused many Cambodians to become incapable of performing physical work, after which they were executed and placed in mass graves. These graves held hundreds of skeletal remains from Khmer Rouge execution grounds, known as "killing fields". Approximately 3,314,768 people, an estimated 25% of the population, lost their lives in Pol Pot's regime.

**International Response:** The conditions of genocide continued until Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978 and ousted the Khmer Rouge government. Cambodia was in ruins- the economy failed under Pol Pot, and all professionals, engineers, technicians, and planners who could potentially reorganize the country had been killed in the genocide. In 1991, a peace agreement was finally reached. The nation's first democratic elections were held in 1993. Bringing the perpetrators to justice has proven to be a difficult task. Many suspected perpetrators were killed in the military struggle with Vietnam or eliminated by Khmer Rouge itself. In 1997, Pol Pot was arrested by Khmer Rouge members; a "mock" trial was staged, and he was found guilty. He died of natural causes in 1998.

# Mayan Genocide



**Date:** 1982-1984

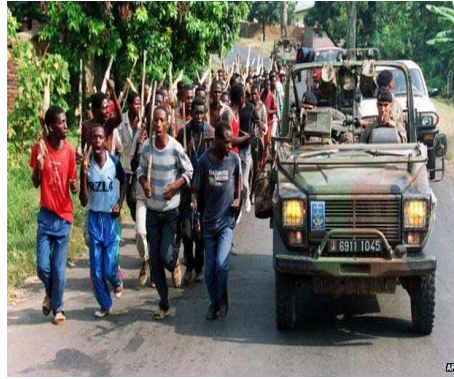
**Perpetrators:** Guatemalan Army, especially under Dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, and local militias

**Motive:** In the 1970s, the Maya began participating in protests against the repressive government, demanding greater equality and inclusion of the Mayan language and culture. In 1980, the Guatemalan army instituted "Operation Sofia," which specifically targeted the Mayan population, who were believed to be supporting and hiding members of the guerilla movement, and began a campaign of killing and kidnapping Mayan peasants.

**Campaign:** The army destroyed 626 villages, killed or forced the disappearances of more than 200,000 people and displaced an additional 1.5 million, while more than 150,000 were driven to seek refuge in Mexico. Forced disappearance (*desaparecido*) policies included secretly arresting or abducting people, who were often killed and buried in unmarked graves. In addition, the government instituted a scorched earth policy, destroying and burning buildings and crops, slaughtering livestock, tainting water supplies and violating sacred places and cultural symbols. Catholic priests and nuns also often faced violence as they supported the rights of the Mayan people. Many of these actions were undertaken by special army units and private death squads. The violence faced by the Mayan people peaked between 1978 and 1986.

**International Response:** Peace talks were set up by the UN in 1991, suspended in 1993, and resumed in 1994 after a new democratic government that removed the military from power in Guatemala. A peace agreement was finally signed in 1996; the U.N. launched the Historical Clarification Commission (CEH), to investigate the atrocities of the civil war. Even though the army was "unable" to provide its records for the period 1981-1983, U.N. commissioners travelled through Guatemala and collected 9,000 witness statements, protected by a UN confidentiality agreement. Their report, entitled 'Guatemala: Memory of Silence', presented evidence that clearly revealed a government policy of genocide carried out against the Mayan Indians. In June 2001, 1,771 charges of genocide and crimes against humanity were brought against Efraín Ríos Montt; his policies were issued during the height of the genocide's brutality. In 2013, he was convicted and sentenced to 80 years in prison; he is the first former head of state to be convicted of genocide by a court in his own country.

# Rwandan Genocide



**Date:** April to July 1994

**Perpetrators:** Members of the Hutu ethnic majority, Hutu Power government of Rwanda

**Motive:** About 85% of Rwandans are Hutu, but the Tutsi minority has long dominated the country. In 1959, the Hutus overthrew the Tutsi monarchy; tens of thousands of Tutsis fled to neighboring countries. Tutsi exiles formed a rebel group, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which invaded Rwanda in 1990 and fought until a 1993 peace deal was agreed. On the night of 6 April 1994 a plane carrying Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana was shot down, killing everyone on board. Hutu extremists blamed the RPF and immediately started a well-organized campaign of slaughter.

**Campaign:** Begun by extreme Hutu nationalists in the capital of Kigali, the genocide spread throughout the country with staggering speed and brutality. Hutu extremists set up radio stations and newspapers which broadcast hate propaganda, urging people to "cut the tall trees", meaning kill the Tutsis. The names of those to be killed were read out on radio. Ordinary citizens were encouraged by the Hutu Power government to kill any Tutsi they found. Lists of government opponents were handed out to militias who killed them along with their families. Militias set up roadblocks where Tutsis were slaughtered, often with machetes, which most Rwandans kept around the house. Neighbors killed neighbors; some husbands even killed their Tutsi wives, saying they would be executed if they refused. By the time the Tutsi-led Rwandese Patriotic Front gained control of the country in early July, as many as 800,000 people- mostly Tutsi- were dead and many more displaced from their homes.

**International Response:** The United Nations and Belgium had forces in Rwanda but they left after 10 Belgian soldiers were killed. France, allied with the Hutu government, sent troops to establish "safe havens" but were accused of not doing enough to stop the slaughter. Almost two million people have been tried in local courts for their role in the genocide, while the ring-leaders were tried at the United Nations. At the time, a person's identification card had their ethnic group listed on it, but it is now illegal to talk about ethnicity in Rwanda. The government says this is to prevent more bloodshed, but some say it prevents true reconciliation and is just putting a lid on tensions, which will only boil over again in the future.

# Bosnian Genocide



**Date:** 1992-1995

**Perpetrators:** Army of *Republika Sprska* (Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina), Scorpions (Paramilitary)

**Motive:** In April 1992, the republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina declared its independence from Yugoslavia after the political rise of Slobodan Milosevic, who stoked discontent between Bosnian Serbs and their Croatian, Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) and Albanian neighbors. Bosnian Serbs wanted to be a Serbian-dominant state in the Balkans, but Bosniaks made up the majority of the population. The Serbs formed a paramilitary group, the Army of *Republika Sprska*, which they declared to be the “Greater Serbia” separatists envisioned.

**Campaign:** In May 1992, Bosnian Serb forces launched a bombardment of Bosnia’s capital, Sarajevo. They attacked Bosniak-dominated towns in eastern Bosnia, forcibly expelling Bosniak civilians from the region in a brutal process later identified as “ethnic cleansing.” Ethnic cleansing differs from genocide in that its primary goal is the expulsion of a group of people from a geographical area and not the actual physical destruction of that group, even though the same methods—including murder, torture and forcible displacement—may be used. The U.N. declared three towns- Srebrenica, Zepa, and Gorazde- as “safe havens” to be protected by international peacekeeping forces. On July 11, 1995, Bosnian Serb forces advanced on Srebrenica, where they separated the Bosniak civilians. The women and girls were bussed to work camps, while the men and boys were murdered. Estimates of Bosniaks killed by Serb forces at Srebrenica range from around 7,000 to 8,000.

**International Response:** The international community began to respond forcefully to the ongoing conflict in 1995, after the Serbs refused to comply with U.N. ultimatums. With Serbia’s economy crippled by U.N. trade sanctions and its military forces under attack by NATO in Bosnia, Milosevic agreed to enter peace negotiations that November. The U.N. worked to ensure the perpetrators of the Bosnian genocide were brought to justice. The U.N. Security Council prosecuted the Bosnian Serb military commander Ratko Mladic and others for genocide and crimes against humanity. Slobodan Milosevic was charged with genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in 2002; he served as his own defense lawyer and died in his prison cell in 2006 before the conclusion of his trial.

# Darfur Genocide



**Date:** February 23, 2003 – Ongoing/Current

**Perpetrators:** Janjaweed militias, Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), & Sudan Liberation Army (SLM)

**Motive:** The ongoing conflict in Sudan's Western Darfur Region developed from several factional disputes. The first is between the Khartoum national governments and two rebel groups in Darfur: the Justice and Equality Movement and the Sudan Liberation Army. The second conflict is between the Christians, animists, and Arabs. Khartoum is predominantly made up of ethnic Arab Muslims while groups of Christians and animists live in the south. The Khartoum government under General Omar al-Bashir wished to create a more Islamic-based government that was opposed by the southern groups and led to civil war. Finally, an ethnic conflict between those who claim black 'African' descent and those who claim 'Arab' descent in Darfur has been persistent.

**Campaign:** Initially, the rebel groups JEM and SLM formed in February 2003 due to Darfur's "political and economic marginalization by Khartoum". However, in April of 2003, the rebel groups attacked the military airfield and kidnapped an air force general. In response, the Khartoum government armed militia forces to eliminate the rebellion, resulting in mass violence against the citizens in Darfur. The Janjaweed systematically burn villages, loot economic resources, and torture civilians. Attacks on Darfuri villages commonly begin with Sudanese Air Force bombings followed by Janjaweed militia raids. All remaining village men, women, and children are either murdered or forced to flee. Dead bodies are tossed in wells to contaminate water supplies and entire villages are burned to the ground. According to Amnesty International, the government has also used chemical weapons against civilians. Over 480,000 people have been killed, 2.8 million people are displaced, and more than 4.7 million Darfuris rely on humanitarian aid.

**International Response:** In March 2009, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir for directing a campaign of mass killings against civilians in Darfur; however, the Sudanese government has refused to turn him in. On July 9, 2011, South Sudan became the world's newest country. While this is a major step toward ending the violence in Sudan, civilians across Sudan remain at risk. Systematic violence against the people of Darfur continues on a new political landscape altered by the independence of South Sudan.