

Name: _____ Class: _____

President Clinton's Remarks in Kigali on the Rwandan Genocide

By President Bill Clinton
1998

Bill Clinton served as the 42nd President of the United States from 1993 to 2001. He gave this speech on March 25, 1998, after visiting Rwanda for the first time since the 1994 genocide. Rwanda has two major ethnic groups: the Hutus and Tutsis. Hutu extremists led the killings, and they murdered almost one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus over a three-month period. This killing constituted a crime against humanity: genocide. Genocide is defined as the deliberate murder of a large group of people, especially those of a particular ethnic group or nation. The United States, the United Nations, and other world powers have been harshly criticized for failing to act to stop the genocide. U.S. officials claimed to be unaware of the extent of the killing at the time, however, since the event, this claim has been proven false. As you read, take notes on how President Clinton characterizes the different groups and individuals involved in the genocide.

[1] Thank you, Mr. President.¹ First, let me thank you, Mr. President, and Vice President Kagame,² and your wives for making Hillary and me and our delegation feel so welcome. I'd also like to thank the young students who met us, and the musicians, the dancers who were outside. I thank especially the survivors of the genocide and those who are working to rebuild your country for spending a little time with us before we came in here.

I have a great delegation of Americans with me, leaders of our Government, leaders of our Congress, distinguished American citizens. We're all very grateful to be here. We thank the diplomatic corps for being here, and the members of the Rwandan government, and especially the citizens.

I have come today to pay the respects of my nation to all who suffered and all who perished in the Rwandan genocide. It is my hope that through this trip, in every corner of the world today and tomorrow, their story will be told; that four years ago in this beautiful, green, lovely land, a clear and conscious decision was made by those then in power that the peoples of this country would not live side by side in peace.

During the 90 days that began on April 6, in 1994, Rwanda experienced the most intensive slaughter in this blood-filled century we are about to leave - families murdered in their home, people hunted down as they fled by soldiers and militia, through farmland and woods as if they were animals.



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1. At the time of this speech, the President of Rwanda was Pasteur Bizimungu. He became president immediately after the genocide and remained in office until 2000.
2. Paul Kagame was the leader of the military response that ended the genocide in 1994. He served as vice president and Minister of Defense from 1994 to 2000, when he became President of Rwanda.

- [5] From Kibuye³ in the west to Kibungo⁴ in the east, people gathered seeking refuge in churches by the thousands, in hospitals, in schools. And when they were found, the old and the sick, women and children alike, they were killed--killed because their identity card⁵ said they were Tutsi or because they had a Tutsi parent, or because someone thought they looked like a Tutsi, or slain like thousands of Hutus because they protected Tutsis or would not countenance⁶ a policy that sought to wipe out people who just the day before, and for years before, had been their friends and neighbors.

The government-led effort to exterminate Rwanda's Tutsi and moderate Hutus, as you know better than me, took at least a million lives. Scholars of these sorts of events say that the killers, armed mostly with machetes and clubs, nonetheless did their work five times as fast as the mechanized gas chambers used by the Nazis.

It is important that the world know that these killings were not spontaneous or accidental. It is important that the world hear what your president just said; they were most certainly not the result of ancient tribal struggles. Indeed, these people had lived together for centuries before the events the President described began to unfold.

These events grew from a policy aimed at the systematic⁷ destruction of a people. The ground for violence was carefully prepared, the airwaves poisoned with hate, casting the Tutsis as scapegoats⁸ for the problems of Rwanda, denying their humanity. All of this was done, clearly, to make it easy for otherwise reluctant people to participate in wholesale slaughter.

Lists of victims, name by name, were actually drawn up in advance. Today, the images of all that haunt us all: the dead choking the Kigara River, floating to Lake Victoria. In their fate, we are reminded of the capacity in people everywhere not just in Rwanda, and certainly not just in Africa, but the capacity for people everywhere, to slip into pure evil. We cannot abolish that capacity, but we must never accept it. And we know it can be overcome.

- [10] The international community, together with nations in Africa, must bear its share of responsibility for this tragedy, as well. We did not act quickly enough after the killing began. We should not have allowed the refugee camps to become safe haven⁹ for the killers. We did not immediately call these crimes by their rightful name: genocide. We cannot change the past. But we can and must do everything in our power to help you build a future without fear, and full of hope.

We owe to those who died and to those who survived who loved them, our every effort to increase our vigilance and strengthen our stand against those who would commit such atrocities in the future here or elsewhere.

Indeed, we owe to all the peoples of the world who are at risk because each bloodletting¹⁰ hastens¹¹ the next as the value of human life is degraded and violence becomes tolerated, the unimaginable becomes more conceivable. We owe to all the people in the world our best efforts to organize ourselves so that we can maximize the chances of preventing these events. And where they cannot be prevented, we can move more quickly to minimize the horror.

3. a city in Rwanda

4. a city in Rwanda

5. Identity cards were issued to Rwandans starting in 1933 during the period of Belgian colonial control. The identity cards showed a person's ethnic group. During the 1994 genocide, those found with Tutsi on their identity cards were killed.

6. **Countenance (verb)** to accept or support

7. **Systematic (adjective)** describes something done as part of a plan

8. A "scapegoat" is a person or group unfairly blamed for a problem.

9. **Haven (noun)** refuge or shelter

So let us challenge ourselves to build a world in which no branch of humanity, because of national, racial, ethnic, or religious origin, is again threatened with destruction because of those characteristics, of which people should rightly be proud. Let us work together as a community of civilized nations to strengthen our ability to prevent and, if necessary, to stop genocide.

To that end, I am directing my administration to improve, with the international community, our system for identifying and spotlighting nations in danger of genocidal violence, so that we can assure worldwide awareness of impending threats. It may seem strange to you here, especially the many of you who lost members of your family, but all over the world there were people like me sitting in offices, day after day after day, who did not fully appreciate the depth and the speed with which you were being engulfed by this unimaginable terror.

- [15] We have seen, too – and I want to say again – that genocide can occur anywhere. It is not an African phenomenon¹² and must never be viewed as such. We have seen it in industrialized Europe. We have seen it in Asia. We must have global vigilance. And never again must we be shy in the face of the evidence.

Secondly, we must as, an international community, have the ability to act when genocide threatens. We are working to create that capacity here in the Great Lakes region,¹³ where the memory is still fresh.

This afternoon in Entebbe,¹⁴ leaders from central and eastern Africa will meet with me to launch an effort to build a coalition¹⁵ to prevent genocide in this region. I thank the leaders who have stepped forward to make this commitment. We hope the effort can be a model for all the world, because our sacred task is to work to banish this greatest crime against humanity.

Events here show how urgent the work is. In the northwest part of your country, attacks by those responsible for the slaughter in 1994 continue today. We must work as partners with Rwanda to end this violence and allow your people to go on rebuilding your lives and your nation.

Third, we must work now to remedy the consequences of genocide. The United States has provided assistance to Rwanda to settle the uprooted and restart its economy, but we must do more. I am pleased that America will become the first nation to contribute to the new Genocide Survivors Fund. We will contribute this year \$2 million, continue our support in the years to come, and urge other nations to do the same, so that survivors and their communities can find the care they need and the help they must have.

- [20] Mr. President, to you, and to you, Mr. Vice President, you have shown great vision in your efforts to create a single nation in which all citizens can live freely and securely. As you pointed out, Rwanda was a single nation before the European powers met in Berlin to carve up Africa.¹⁶ America stands with you, and we will continue helping the people of Rwanda to rebuild their lives and society.

10. "Bloodletting" is the killing of individuals during a war or conflict.

11. **Hasten (verb)** to cause another action to occur more quickly than it might happen on its own

12. **Phenomenon (noun)** a situation whose cause may not be understood

13. The African Great Lakes region includes the countries of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda.

14. a city in Uganda

15. **Coalition (noun)** an alliance

16. The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 was held by European imperial powers to divide up sections of Africa and regulate colonization. This conference led to negative long-term consequences for African nations, and the actions of Belgian colonists are credited with intensifying the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic divide.

You spoke passionately this morning in our private meeting about the need for grassroots¹⁷ effort in this direction. We will deepen our support for those grassroots efforts, for the development projects, which are bridging divisions and clearing a path to a better future. We will join with you to strengthen democratic institutions, to broaden participation, to give all Rwandans a greater voice in their own governance. The challenges you face are great, but your commitment to lasting reconciliation¹⁸ and inclusion is firm.

Fourth, to help ensure that those who survived in the generations to come never again suffer genocidal violence, nothing is more vital than establishing the rule of law. There can be no peace in Rwanda that lasts without a justice system that is recognized as such.

We applaud the efforts of the Rwandan government to strengthen civilian and military justice systems. I am pleased that our Great Lakes Justice Initiative will invest \$30 million to help create throughout the region judicial systems that are impartial, credible, and effective. In Rwanda these funds will help to support courts, prosecutors, and police, military justice and cooperation at the local level.

We will also continue to pursue justice through our strong backing for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.¹⁹ The United States is the largest contributor to this tribunal. We are frustrated, as you are, by the delays in the tribunal's work. As we know, we must do better. Now that administrative improvements have begun, however, the tribunal should expedite cases through group trials, and fulfill its historic mission.

[25] We are prepared to help, among other things, with witness relocation, so that those who still fear can speak the truth in safety. And we will support the War Crimes Tribunal for as long as it is needed to do its work, until the truth is clear and justice is rendered.

Fifth, we must make it clear to all those who would commit such acts in the future that they too must answer for their acts, and they will. In Rwanda, we must hold accountable all those who may abuse human rights, whether insurgents²⁰ or soldiers. Internationally, as we meet here, talks are underway at the United Nations to establish a permanent international criminal court. Rwanda and the difficulties we have had with this special tribunal underscore the need for such a court. And the United States will work to see that it is created.

I know that in the face of all you have endured, optimism cannot come easily to any of you. Yet I have just spoken, as I said, with several Rwandans who survived the atrocities, and just listening to them gave me reason for hope. You see countless stories of courage around you every day as you go about your business here—men and women who survived and go on, children who recover the light in their eyes remind us that at the dawn of a new millennium there is only one crucial division among the peoples of the Earth. And believe me, after over five years of dealing with these problems, I know it is not the division between Hutu and Tutsi, or Serb and Croatian and Muslim in Bosnia, or Arab and Jew, or Catholic and Protestant in Ireland, or black and white. It is really the line between those who embrace the common humanity we all share and those who reject it.

17. "Grassroots" describes a movement to create change led by the people who seek change, not individuals in power.

18. **Reconciliation** (*noun*) the return to friendly relations

19. International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda was an international court established by the United Nations Security Council in order to judge people responsible for the Rwandan Genocide.

20. **Insurgent** (*noun*) a rebel or revolutionary

It is the line between those who find meaning in life through respect and cooperation and who, therefore, embrace peace, and those who can only find meaning in life if they have someone to look down on, someone to trample, someone to punish, and, therefore, embrace war. It is the line between those who look to the future and those who cling to the past. It is the line between those who give up their resentment and those who believe they will absolutely die if they have to release one bit of grievance. It is the line between those who confront every day with a clenched fist and those who confront every day with an open hand. That is the only line that really counts when all is said and done.

To those who believe that God made each of us in His own image, how could we choose the darker road? When you look at those children who greeted us as we got off that plane today, how could anyone say they did not want those children to have a chance to have their own children? To experience the joy of another morning sunrise? To learn the normal lessons of life? To give something back to their people? When you strip it all away, whether we're talking about Rwanda or some other distant troubled spot, the world is divided according to how people believe they draw meaning from life.

[30] And so I say to you, though the road is hard and uncertain, and there are many difficulties ahead, and like every other person who wishes to help, I doubtless will not be able to do everything I would like to do, there are things we can do. And if we set about the business of doing them together, you can overcome the awful burden that you have endured. You can put a smile on the face of every child in this country, and you can make people once again believe that they should live as people were living who were singing to us and dancing for us today.

That's what we have to believe. That is what I came here to say. That is what I wish for you.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which TWO of the following best identify the central ideas of this speech?
 - A. Rwanda has not made progress towards reconciliation since the genocide, and it is urgently needed.
 - B. Lives are at risk because there are many countries where genocide could take place.
 - C. The United States is committed to supporting the delivery of justice after the genocide and to rebuilding Rwanda.
 - D. Ethnic divisions have often led to conflict in nations during the 20th century.
 - E. European colonialism was a significant cause of the ethnic tension that led to the Rwandan genocide.
 - F. While Rwanda was devastated by the genocide, the country will ultimately recover successfully.

2. PART B: Which TWO phrases from the text best support the answers to Part A?
 - A. "We have seen, too – and I want to say again – that genocide can occur anywhere. It is not an African phenomenon and must never be viewed as such." (Paragraph 15)
 - B. "Events here show how urgent the work is. In the northwest part of your country, attacks by those responsible for the slaughter in 1994 continue today." (Paragraph 18)
 - C. "The United States has provided assistance to Rwanda to settle the uprooted and restart its economy, but we must do more." (Paragraph 19)
 - D. "As you pointed out, Rwanda was a single nation before the European powers met in Berlin to carve up Africa." (Paragraph 20)
 - E. "I know that in the face of all you have endured, optimism cannot come easily to any of you. Yet I have just spoken, as I said, with several Rwandans who survived the atrocities, and just listening to them gave me reason for hope." (Paragraph 27)
 - F. "And believe me, after over five years of dealing with these problems, I know it is not the division between Hutu and Tutsi, or Serb and Croatian and Muslim in Bosnia, or Arab and Jew, or Catholic and Protestant in Ireland, or black and white." (Paragraph 27)

3. Which statement best explains why President Clinton begins his speech with a description of the events of the Rwandan genocide?
- A. He wants to exaggerate the level of destruction that occurred.
 - B. After receiving extensive criticism, he seeks to provide context for his administration's lack of action.
 - C. The audience of the speech includes the international community, who may not understand what happened.
 - D. Scholars have inaccurately compared the Holocaust and Rwandan genocide, and he wants to provide an objective account of events.
4. PART A: What does the phrase "the unimaginable becomes more conceivable" most closely mean as it is used in paragraph 12?
- A. When extreme violence occurs once, it becomes more likely to happen in the future.
 - B. The international community did not imagine what was happening in Rwanda.
 - C. The Rwandan Genocide invented new killing methods for targeting hated groups.
 - D. Nothing like what happened in Rwanda has ever occurred on the continent of Africa before.
5. PART B: Which detail from the speech best supports the answer to part A?
- A. "Lists of victims, name by name, were actually drawn up in advance." (Paragraph 9)
 - B. "Today, the images of all that haunt us all: the dead choking the Kigara River, floating to Lake Victoria." (Paragraph 9)
 - C. "We did not immediately call these crimes by their rightful name: genocide." (Paragraph 10)
 - D. "Let us work together as a community of civilized nations to strengthen our ability to prevent and, if necessary, to stop genocide." (Paragraph 13)
6. How does President Clinton characterize himself in paragraph 14? How might this characterization affect the varied audience of his speech?

7. Describe what President Clinton means when he says there is a “line” that divides the world (Paragraphs 27-28). Cite evidence from the text.

Discussion Questions

Directions: *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. Do you agree with the claim that Clinton makes about how the world is divided? Why or why not? How would you modify his position?

2. President Clinton describes his need to “pay his respects” and for the world to “bear a share of responsibility” at various points in his speech. To what extent is this speech an apology? Based on what you have read, which individuals or groups do you believe owe apologies to the people of Rwanda?

3. In the context of this speech and the Rwandan genocide, what are the effects of prejudice? Consider the ways that multiple prejudices intersected in this situation. Cite text evidence as well as your prior knowledge.

4. In the context of this speech and the Rwandan genocide, what can we learn from tragedy? How can what we learn be put to use for the future after a tragic event occurs?

5. President Clinton describes the actions taken by the Hutu perpetrators of the genocide as well as the lack of action by the international community. Considering both of these groups and how their actions contributed to the loss of life in Rwanda, why do people do bad things?