

Media Coverage of the Rwandan Refugee Crisis

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What happened?

- Tutsi minority was historically dominant over Twa minority group and Hutu majority
 - German and Belgian colonizers exploited the Tutsi monarchy to enforce their rule, imposing ethnic identification cards to further solidify divisions
- 1959: Hutu uprising ends the Tutsi monarchy and tens of thousands of Tutsis flee the country
- 1990: Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) made up of exiled Tutsis invades Rwanda
- 1993: **both sides agree to a peace deal, allowing Tutsi refugees to return to Rwanda and the formation of a Hutu-RPF coalition government**
- September 1993-March 1994: the coalition government is slow to be formed, and the extremist Radio Mille Collines begins calling for attacks on Tutsis
- April 6, 1994: **President Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and President Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi are killed when their plane is shot down**
 - both presidents are Hutus
 - Hutu extremists blame the RPF for the attack and start organized mass killings the same night
 - RPF accuses Hutus of shooting down the plane to justify a Tutsi genocide

continued:

- April 7, 1994: Radical members of the Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR), along with members of the extremist Hutu militia groups known as the Interahamwe, begin organized mass killings of Tutsis and moderate Hutu officials
- UN peacekeeping troops there, under monitoring mandate, do not intervene
- April 8, 1994: RPF launches an offensive to recapture the capital city of Kigali and resumes the civil war but allows fleeing Tutsi refugees to settle behind RPF lines
- **April 30, 1994: tens of thousands of refugees escape to Tanzania, Burundi, and Zaire (DR Congo)**, with 250,000 people—mainly Hutus fleeing the RPF— cross into Tanzania in one day

UN Security Council does not use the word ‘genocide,’ so the UN is not legally obliged to act against the perpetrators

- July, 1994: RPF overtakes Kigali
 - Hutu government flees to Zaire along with a wave of refugees
 - cholera ravages refugee camps in Zaire, killing thousands
 - Tutsis continue to be killed in refugee camps

continued:

- August, 1994: new Rwandan government consents to an international tribunal administered by the UN Security Council
- **November, 1994: UN Security Council establishes an international tribunal within the framework of prosecuting perpetrators of a genocide**
- December 12, 1995: UN Tribunal for Rwanda publicizes eight indictments for genocide and crimes against humanity
- **November, 1996: refugees start to leave en masse from Zaire**
 - the Rwandan government prohibits arrests of suspected perpetrators of genocide
- December, 1996: trials begin for Hutus suspected of being involved in the 1994 genocide
- **February 26, 1997: UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan fires the chief administrator and deputy prosecutor in the Rwandan criminal trials due to mismanagement and inefficiency**
 - at this time, the court has indicted 21 suspects

White Mainstream Media Coverage during 1994

- The majority of the press focuses on **America's role** in the crisis
- Mention of refugees is limited, and when they are, it is **refugee children**
- Large focus on **U.N.** sending troops
- Many **estimations** when it comes to the deaths, and numbers of refugees
- Most articles are not on the front page, but **buried** farther back in the paper
- Interestingly, the **LA Times** published much more about refugees and the crisis than the other sources and had much **more detailed** articles about the genocide



The New York Times Coverage during 1994

According to Vassar databases, the New York Times published 134 pieces about Rwanda, including pictures and articles.

- Foreign involvement in Rwanda
 - “More **U.N. Troops** for Rwanda”
- Examination of **colonial remnants** in Africa
 - “France clutches tenaciously to military presence in Africa”
- Humanitarian approach of focusing on **children**
 - **Emotional appeals** to a Western audience
 - “Amid War, Rwanda Evacuates Orphans”
 - “We Must Do More to Heal Rwanda’s Children; U.N. Forces on Call”
- Critique of the **lack of American intervention**
 - “Pentagon Chief Visits Rwanda to Review the U.S. Relief Effort”



Coverage during 1994

According to Vassar's database, during 1994 **not many articles** about the Rwandan refugees made the front page, in fact, there were hardly any.

- When there was a front page article, it was focused on the **U.S. involvement** in the crisis
- Refugees mentioned only to highlight how the U.S. was helping them
 - **"U.S. relief organizations** are collecting contributions to assist in the Rwanda refugee effort"
- June 2, 1994 headline: **"US to help** evacuate thousands in Rwanda."
- **Clinton:** "very moved by the terrible travesty of more than 1 million refugees teeming out of Rwanda"
- Perpetuating Western dependency
 - **blessing of foreign aid, helplessness of Rwandan children**
- More emotion-based appeals centered around children
 - **UNICEF worker teared up** when seeing all these children
 - **"Children of the Camps"**; focus on suffering of refugee children

Los Angeles Times Coverage during 1994

In 1994, the LA Times posted many descriptive, front page articles about the Rwandan crisis, and many of these articles **highlighted the refugee crisis**.

- Press specifically states that “the current estimated refugee population in the zone is **1.5 million**”
- June 4, 1994: “**no international effort** has been able to stop” the genocidal killing
- Critical of world’s lack of response
 - “But in Rwanda the world has done little more than shed a tear and **shrug helplessly**”
- Articles specifically addressing the refugee crisis in addition to coverage of U.S. and U.N.
 - comparatively non-U.S. centric perspective
 - ”Hundreds Die as Cholera Sweeps **Rwanda Refugees** Africa”
 - “Clinton Boosts Aid for **Rwanda Refugees** Disaster”

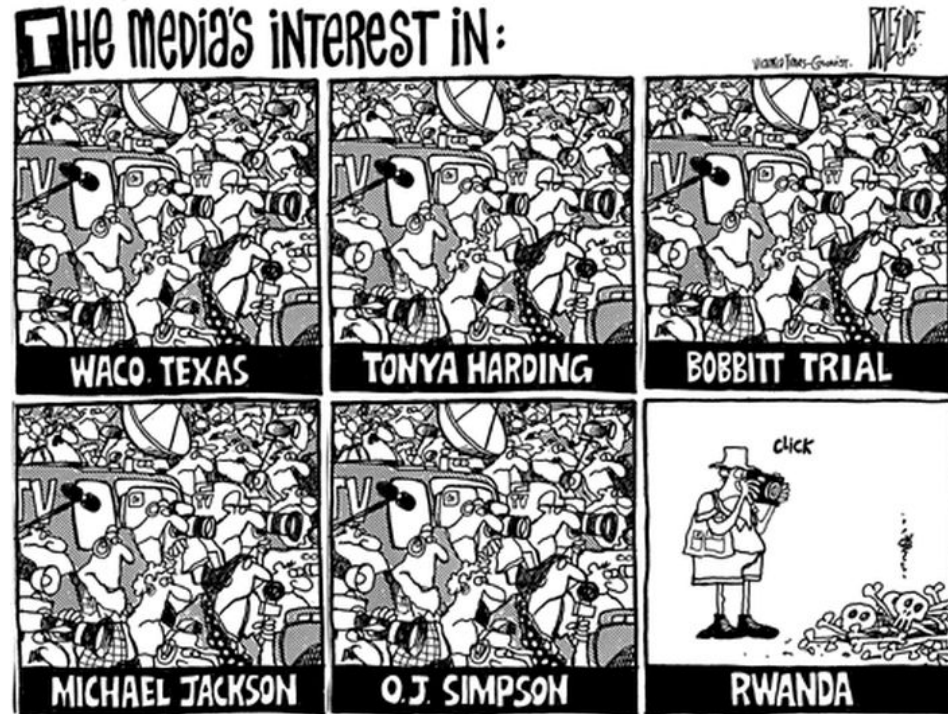
The Washington Post Coverage during 1994

According to Vassar's database, in 1994 there were numerous articles about the Rwandan crisis, but they were mostly all **focused on the U.S. and U.N. involvement.**

- The headlines were packed with what the U.S. was doing, and **lacking** in descriptions of the actual refugee situation. The headlines are numerous:
 - **“U.S. and U.N. Rush Relief** to Rwandans; Cholera, Logistics Hamper Aid Effort”
 - **“U.S. to Send 4,000 Troops** to Help Relief Efforts)
 - **“U.N. Urges** Rwandans to Go Home”
 - **“U.S. Airdrops** Food as Rwandans Start to Return Home; Relief Workers, **U.S. Officials** Disagree on Effort's Effectiveness”
 - **“U.S. Army** Pumps Water, but Rwandans Still Dying of Thirst”
- A few headlines mentions refugees, but only children: **“Orphans** of the Rwandan Storm” and “A Tearful Trek On Tiny Feet; 'Every Step Hurts' for **Children** Fleeing Rwandan Maelstrom”

African-American Press Coverage during 1994

- These presses **strongly feature** the Rwandan refugee crisis.
- They **devote attention** to the crisis in the early pages of the paper, and do not bury it in the back.
- Certain papers take an **activist stance**, calling for more aid of the refugees.
- **Racial criticisms** are launched against the US government in their handling of the crisis.



- African-American publication based in Georgia
- **extensively covered the activity of refugees** in and out of Rwanda before, during, and after the genocide
- news of Rwandan refugees in **important and featured location**
 - emphasis specifically on refugees beyond political climate
- actively covered U.S. aid work
- **criticism of U.S. and white** mainstream media outlets
 - retrospective pieces in years after Rwandan genocide



Coverage during 1994

- covered U.S. governmental aid work during 1994
- definitive stance regarding Rwandan crisis
 - called for an **increase in aid** by the common person
 - also called on government for increased involvement
 - tracked levels of foreign involvement and intervention
 - continuation of similar articles throughout the 1990s
- coverage of **criminal indictments** in U.N. international tribunal
 - detailed, specific accounts at each stage

^{NEW} Pittsburgh Courier Coverage during 1994

- **boldly launch criticism** toward the African-American community in 1994
 - “Even though it is one of the most catastrophic episodes in world history, African-Americans seem to be showing scant political and humanitarian attention to the horrific events occurring in the African country of Rwanda.”
- criticism also pointed at U.S. government and UN for **lack of response regarding refugees**
- specific focus on **refugee flows** to neighboring countries such as Zaire (DR Congo)

Overall Media Coverage Post-1994

- **detached and distanced** style of reporting
 - refer to refugees as a **“river” of people**, or a **“tide flowing back to Rwanda”**
 - few articles humanized refugees
 - some humanizing pieces existed, but not published until **4 years after initial crisis**
- surprisingly **wide in scope** with some outlets writing new articles about the situation day after day.
 - majority of articles featured a few pages into these papers
 - many refugee-centric pieces were first section news in the **“Foreign News”** portions.
- three major areas of focus
 - Refugees and the political situations of other countries
 - UN involvement with aid
 - Return of refugees to Rwanda

White Mainstream Media Topics Post-1994

Refugee Status in Other Countries/UN Involvement

- Zaire/Congo's political instability and civil war created a radically dangerous environment for the many refugees who "dug in" and "set up camp" there in the years following the genocide
- Media outlets focused on "missing refugees" and rumors of "Dead Zones" (areas of the jungle that military troops were allegedly taking refugees and killing them en masse)
- Lens of many U.S. based news outlets vilifying foreign governments and viewing the UN as savior figures - seen as an extension of the U.S.

Refugees Returning to Rwanda

- Media attention focused at the government of Zaire/Congo forcing refugees back to Rwanda - physical violence/at gunpoint - and subsequent fleeing of refugees "into the brush"
- Articles written through a lens that the fear of returning to Rwanda due to potential retribution was a baseless rumor
- Articles focused on both the instability caused in Zaire/Congo by these refugees as well as the potential "chaos" returning home would cause for Rwanda's infrastructure

African-American Media Coverage Post-1994

Pointed Criticism of American Role in Rwanda

- Barbara Reynolds at the **Atlanta Daily World** wrote that the mainstream media should have humanized the Rwandan genocide more, similarly to how it treated Kosovo, citing race as the cause for the different treatment
- Articles at the **New Pittsburgh Courier** discuss the silence of black America
 - "Rwandan genocide did not correspond to what we knew or thought we knew about Africa... difficult to comprehend..we decided that silence was the best option"

Calls to Action

- The **Chicago Defender** printed articles with the intent of gaining lasting relief for Rwandan refugees
- Focus on both immediate aid and long-term solutions for Rwandan refugees
- Reaction to the U.S. and U.N.'s highly criticized inaction during and in the immediate aftermath to the Rwandan genocide

Glossary

Tribal Warfare: initial descriptions of the conflict, discouraging early intervention

Civil War: period of general violence as ethnic tensions rose after Rwandan independence and the formation of the RPF

Massacres: attacks perpetrated by civilian armed militias trained by the Rwandan army as well as guerrilla armies on both sides

Campaign of Slaughter: the initial deaths following the death of President Habyarimana as well as subsequent attacks on Tutsis

Killings: smaller attacks mostly on non-Tutsis, including international peacekeepers

Genocide: the eventual name for the 100 days of slaughter starting April 6, 1994

Repatriation: the return of Rwandan refugees, mostly Tutsis, from neighboring countries such as Zaire (DR Congo)

Syllabus: Media Coverage of the Rwandan Refugee Crisis

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