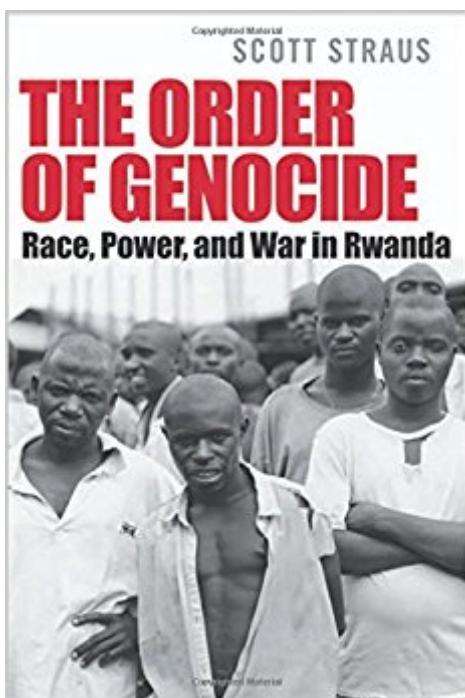


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# The Order Of Genocide: Race, Power, And War In Rwanda



## Synopsis

The Rwandan genocide has become a touchstone for debates about the causes of mass violence and the responsibilities of the international community. Yet a number of key questions about this tragedy remain unanswered: How did the violence spread from community to community and so rapidly engulf the nation? Why did individuals make decisions that led them to take up machetes against their neighbors? And what was the logic that drove the campaign of extermination? According to Scott Straus, a social scientist and former journalist in East Africa for several years (who received a Pulitzer Prize nomination for his reporting for the *Houston Chronicle*), many of the widely held beliefs about the causes and course of genocide in Rwanda are incomplete. They focus largely on the actions of the ruling elite or the inaction of the international community. Considerably less is known about how and why elite decisions became widespread exterminatory violence. Challenging the prevailing wisdom, Straus provides substantial new evidence about local patterns of violence, using original research—including the most comprehensive surveys yet undertaken among convicted perpetrators—to assess competing theories about the causes and dynamics of the genocide. Current interpretations stress three main causes for the genocide: ethnic identity, ideology, and mass-media indoctrination (in particular the influence of hate radio). Straus's research does not deny the importance of ethnicity, but he finds that it operated more as a background condition. Instead, Straus emphasizes fear and intra-ethnic intimidation as the primary drivers of the violence. A defensive civil war and the assassination of a president created a feeling of acute insecurity. Rwanda's unusually effective state was also central, as was the country's geography and population density, which limited the number of exit options for both victims and perpetrators. In conclusion, Straus steps back from the particulars of the Rwandan genocide to offer a new, dynamic model for understanding other instances of genocide in recent history—the Holocaust, Armenia, Cambodia, the Balkans—and assessing the future likelihood of such events.

## Book Information

Paperback: 296 pages

Publisher: Cornell University Press; 1 edition (July 17, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0801474922

ISBN-13: 978-0801474927

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #91,197 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #18 in Books > History > Africa > Central Africa #58 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > African #60 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Africa

## Customer Reviews

"Straus examines the 1994 Rwandan genocide through a social science lens . . . and his approach yields interesting new insights. . . . Particularly compelling is his comparison of killers in Rwanda with those of the Holocaust."<sup>1</sup> •Foreign Affairs "Scott Straus ranks among the finest of the scholars writing in genocide studies. The Order of Genocide is fair-minded, important, and rigorous. Drawing on more than two hundred interviews that he conducted with convicted Rwandan killers, and on many other sources, Straus builds a dynamic process model seeking to explain why and how ordinary people could be mobilized to murder their neighbors in the Rwandan genocide."<sup>2</sup> •African Studies Review "The Order of Genocide will be an enduring contribution to our understanding of the Rwandan genocide as well as to theories of ethnic violence and genocides more generally. Although his methods and findings will certainly interest scholars of genocides, violent conflicts, and African area studies, Straus does not obscure his work in specialist language."<sup>3</sup> •Nations and Nationalism "Straus's writing is lucid, the structure of the book is well thought out, and jargon is avoided, making The Order of Genocide accessible to anyone interested in the subject. A must-read for those interested in politics and violence."<sup>4</sup> •Journal of Peace Research "Straus's study is comprehensive, thorough, and cogently and carefully argued. It is altogether an impressive work that is compulsory for specialists and invaluable for students. Straus is a former journalist and his writing is a model of clarity and economy."<sup>5</sup> •Perspectives on Politics "Straus shows tenacity and courage in explaining the unthinkable—how otherwise ordinary people could imagine, conceive, and carry out genocide."<sup>6</sup> •Genocide Studies and Prevention "Scott Straus has written a path-breaking book that will command the attention of scholars of the Rwandan genocide and of collective violence. The combination of an engagement with and application of theories of collective violence, a deep knowledge of Rwanda, sophisticated methodology, and extraordinary field research has produced an account that brings us closer than ever to understanding what produced this tragic event. Not only does The Order of Genocide rank as one of the best books ever written on the Rwandan genocide, it is a major contribution to comparative politics and theories of violence."<sup>7</sup> •Michael Barnett, University Professor of International Affairs and Political Science,

Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University "Scott Straus's examination of the Rwanda genocide takes us to a new level of understanding of mass killing as a social and political phenomenon. The author's attention to social-science theory, his extensive use of hundreds of interviews with perpetrators, and his careful analysis of the historical and geographical determinants of the Rwandan events make this book an unusually important contribution to the burgeoning field of genocide studies." •Norman M. Naimark, author of *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in 20th Century Europe* "The onset of the Rwandan genocide, its dynamics, and the individual motivations of its perpetrators can be best explained, Scott Straus finds, by the combined effects of an ongoing civil war, high levels of state power (and the attendant social pressure), and the existence of a system of ethnic classification •rather than mass feelings of ethnic antipathy, nationalist beliefs, or radio propaganda. With its cogent theorization, multi-method approach, rich micro-level data, and careful attention to causal mechanisms, *The Order of Genocide* is a decisive step forward in the social scientific study of a phenomenon that has been notoriously resistant to systematic approaches." •Stathis N. Kalyvas, Arnold Wolfers Professor of Political Science, Director, Program on Order, Conflict, and Violence, Yale University "The Order of Genocide is a real addition to what we know about the Rwandan genocide. Scott Straus describes the local organization of genocide •for example, information on the size of groups of attackers and the roles played by 'elite' and 'thugs.' He also profiles the perpetrators themselves in examining what moved them to act. The quotes from the perpetrators enrich the statistical data enormously and make the book come alive." •Alison Des Forges

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great book

Raw and unforgiving glimpse into the lives of people whose existence is ruled by violence and suffering.

This was a gift for my daughter, who has a Masters degree in Holocaust and Genocide, and is working on another in Military History. She was pleased with it.

This book is a must read. This book brings up something new about the Rwandan Genocide. Most importantly, pay attention to the methodology used in testing hypotheses.

Book in great condition, thanks.

Solid Product. Solid Service. Enough said.

In *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda*, Scott Strauss seeks to revise the consensus understanding of the Rwandan genocide. In particular, Strauss argues that conceptions

of the Rwandan genocide have focused too heavily on the rhetoric of Hutu genocidal agitators. He contends that doing so has obscured the contextual backdrop, i.e., the instruments of genocide and the circumstances that put them into use. To support his argument, Strauss takes a methodological approach and engages in a comparative study of the dynamics of genocide across five Rwandan communes. As well, he interviews 230 imprisoned genocidaires and interrogates them regarding their experience as genocide perpetrators to test the validity of consensus views regarding causes of the genocide. The Order of Genocide is a valuable contribution to the historiography of the Rwandan genocide. Strauss' critiques of the various understandings of the genocide are convincing and his own interpretation of the event is compelling. However, some of Strauss' arguments, particularly those regarding the role of ethnicity in genocide, are deeply misled. Myths enshrouded the Rwandan genocide in the immediate aftermath of the event. Among the most deceptive of these myths was the notion that the genocide was the result of tribal hatred. With this, the complex political framework behind the genocide is obscured. In its place appears a pre-political, anti-historical happenstance turned violent. This view overlooks the role that the state played in the genocide, Straus points out, while it also ignores the ethnic groupings in Rwanda and the European origins of Rwandan ethnic racialization (p. 18-22). Scholarship dispelled many of these misconceptions in the years following the genocide in the creation of what Straus calls the "New Consensus." Yet not all was cleared up. The New Consensus pointed out the role of ethnicity and nationalism in the genocide, the political agents who directed the genocide, and the genocidal plot that preceded the event, but their conclusions were hastily constructed (p. 31-32). Too many questions were left unanswered, Straus argues, such as the how and why of the violence, the how and why of the mass mobilization, the rationale for killing, and the how of the emergence of the genocide itself (p. 33-34). The genocide in Rwanda was a perfect storm, but the New Consensus only accounted for a handful of the total factors that culminated in the event. Paramount in Straus' argument is circumstance. The assassination of President Habyarimana re-ignited the civil war. War was the mechanism that shifted the bureaucratic mobilization of genocide into gear. The risk of losing sovereignty was real and, in fact, the Hutus did lose power at the civil war's end. In this uncertain environment, a justifiable rationale for killing "security" was established and state sanction and involvement legitimized the killing. More so, the war introduced specialists, i.e. the military and militias, into the fold, and the potential level of violence was thus exponentially increased (p. 7). War, Straus argues, was the keystone to genocide. Any ethnic violence that had occurred in the past had, in fact, also coincided with a political struggle for power. Why genocide did not happen during previous periods of ethnic

violence was because the state in the past was interested in promoting stability, and this was not the case during the genocide (p. 198). War may be an extension of politics, but civil war is its breakdown. Yet the state did not breakdown; it was instead weaponized. Rwanda's rather unique tradition of broad-based labor mobilization gave the genocidal authorities the men they required to decimate the Tutsi population. On this point, Straus makes a profound contribution to the historiography of the Rwandan genocide. Previously, the high level of civilian involvement was written off as a product of cultural obedience—a highly problematic notion with its roots in the misguided orientalist tradition. Prior to European imperialism, Rwandan civilization formed a system in which peasants had relatively close connections to a local authority figure, whom in turn was but a stone's throw or two away from a central government authority. This micro-level bureaucracy proved useful to the Rwandan government over history, whether for crop harvests or for public works projects. European's reinforced this structure upon colonization and its bolstered form remained in place after independence. It was not blind obedience that inspired compliance; rather it was the close proximity to authority that compelled it and tradition that justified its existence (p. 210-13). This is the labor infrastructure with which the hardliner hijacked Rwandan state had at its disposal. As Straus argues, "The state turned what could have ended as limited ethnic killing and crowd violence into genocide" (p. 201). Straus's micro-comparative survey of the mobilization of violence across Rwanda convincingly supports this argument. Genocide occurred across Rwanda, but it did not occur everywhere in the country and it began on later dates in different regions. Straus's micro-comparison bridges the knowledge gap on the question of why this was the case. Put simply, whether or not genocide occurred in a particular area was contingent on Hutu hardliners gaining control—at the very least, profound influence—of the local government. Violence was the hardliner mean of persuasion. Some local mayors were sympathetic to the hardliners and quickly obliged. Others resisted and were forced to change their views, be killed, or hedge their unfavorable bets on fleeing the region and escaping with their lives. In regions sympathetic to hardliners, the genocide commenced quite soon after the Habyarimana's assassination. Contrary to the New Consensus conception, the resistance was, indeed, in some instances quite real: it took over a week, for example, for the genocide to commence in the Musambira commune (p. 81). The picture depicted here is quite different than that put forth by the New Consensus, in which radicals in government took control and the Hutu population quickly sprung into genocidal actions upon the orders of their government, inspired both by a deep-seated hatred against Tutsis and a gratifying feeling that accompanies their obeying an order—this is a caricature, but it is nonetheless the view that Straus is arguing

against. It is from this point that Straus takes his argument too far. In discussing the Hutu genocidal conception of Tutsis, in which “Tutsi” was equated with “enemy,” Straus questions whether or not this was evidence of preexisting ethnic hatred, and then promptly answers “no” (p. 173). On this, Straus is wrong. If a group of people are judged to be an enemy purely on the basis of their ethnicity, then that itself answers the question of whether or not there was preexisting ethnic hatred. Genocide itself presupposes ethnic hatred; it is, in fact, a core component of genocide, as defined by the United Nations. Straus’s point here is that not all of the genocidaires verbally expressed vitriolic hatred for Tutsis, which may be true, but, in the case of genocide, actions speak louder than words. The problem Straus attempts to tackle in this work is a practical one. He is more concerned with the principal mechanisms of genocide, and he delineates them well. However, that there existed mechanisms of genocide presupposes an ideational racial machinery oiled with antipathy integrated into the framework of Rwandan culture and society. He calls them “ideational factors,” but these are not mere factors; rather, they are foundational components of genocide, particularly in the case of Rwanda (p. 9). Straus’s misunderstanding here is deep, and it’s quite surprising too, considering how strong his other arguments are. Fortunately, why this is the case is revealed by the author himself, though quite unintentionally. He lays out the foundation of this misconception his methodology: he relies on interviews with the 230 imprisoned genocide perpetrators, 210 of which pleaded guilty when they were charged; he then asked these genocidaires questions regarding why they killed, what the reason for genocide was, how they rationalized genocide, and so on (p. 155-66). This is highly problematic, particularly so considering that Straus conducted these interviews eight years after the genocide occurred. This sample size is incredibly small relative to the total number of genocide perpetrators, yet Straus takes his findings to be valid for all genocidaires. Straus’s sample, even, is skewed heavily toward the unextraordinary genocidaire. He seems to forget that thousands of Hutus—“arguably those most responsible for the genocide and the blood-thirstiest of the bunch”—fled Rwanda after they were defeated by the RPF. Indeed, one would hope that he forgot, because he does not even acknowledge the hardliner flight from Rwanda, which is a damnable pedagogical oversight in this instance. But the problems with his research method continue. The fact that most of his interviewees pleaded guilty further obscures the validity of his research. That they pleaded guilty at the very least conveys some sort of acknowledgement of wrongdoing, especially considering that these men had been imprisoned for years, which gives plenty of time for them to both introspect and revise their memories of the genocide. More so, they plead guilty, so they will be released at some point.

Considering that they would presumably live under a Tutsi regime when they are released, it is easy to infer that they would be less inclined to discuss any ethnicity based antipathy against the Tutsis, and all the more so since the Tutsi regime has banned any references to ethnic difference. To make all of this worse, Straus simply trusts his sources on their word. He claims to address this problem with triangulation, but then he Â¢triangulatesÂ• using the words of more prisoners, which is not triangulation (p. 6). This is investigative naÂfÂ vetÂ©. It is made even worse by the fact that he acknowledges that most of his interviewees lied to him when he questioned them about sexual violence and that he understands that rape and sexual violence definitely happened during the genocide, regardless of the the genocidaires say. When asking his interviewees about ethnic hatred and motivation for the genocide, however, and when they respond to him that they do not hate Tutsis and that they had Tutsi friends before they killed them on basis of the fact that their status as Tutsi made them an enemy, he concludes that ethnic hatred was unimportant in the Rwandan genocide (p. 128). That Straus did not catch the methodological contradiction here is surprising, to say the least. By no means is *The Order of Genocide* a perfect study. On the whole, its argument is convincing and some the evidence is compelling. Straus makes a significant contribution to the historiography of the Rwandan genocide and to genocide studies in general in this work. Unfortunately, Straus seems to have a misunderstanding of the role of ethnicity in genocide, and his highly problematic prisoner interview method convinced him further of his misconception. As a result, sizable portions of this work are simply not good and could even be misleading to an uninformed reader. Nonetheless, for what Straus gets right in *The Order of Genocide*, it is important reading.

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