

BOSNIAN GENOCIDE TOOLBOX FOR TEACHERS

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instigated by Serbia's nationalistic president Slobodan Milošević. Officially, a genocide occurred in Bosnia in and around Srebrenica in July 1995. Radovan Karadžić's Army of the Republika Srpska (Bosnian Serb break-away "republic") under the command of Ratko Mladić, and supported by Milošević, slaughtered 8372 Bosnians in July 1995. Although the courts only recognized this mass murder as genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes were committed by Serbian forces throughout the conflict that pitted Serb nationalists against Croatian nationalists. Bosnia was caught in the middle.

How?

Yugoslavia was a federation of multiethnic and diverse Republics, Bosnia more than any other. Yugoslavia had remained neutral during the Cold War (US vs. USSR) and balanced its position between NATO and the WARSAW PACT. As the Cold War ended, new geopolitical realities had to be navigated. Germany reunited in 1989 and countries formerly under the Soviet "Iron Curtain" breathed new life. The United States, fearing that the collapse of the Soviet Union would lead to the collapse of Yugoslavia, preferred to try to maintain the status quo (in a nuclear weapons world) by preserving both states. There was fear (wrongly) of yet another unified German state. The United States and the Europeans (except for Germany) would support whoever promised to keep the status quo and Yugoslavia intact as their focus shifted towards Iraq.

Multi-party elections came to Yugoslavia in 1990 and nationalism and national identity grew increasingly important. Ethnonational parties collaborated to gain the upper hand over the League of Communists that had controlled the country. Once they won the elections, and formed a coalition government, the power struggle began. Serbs did not want Bosnia or Croatia to become independent nations and break away from Yugoslavia. Within Yugoslavia, Serbs, along with other Orthodox Christian groups, such as Montenegrins and Macedonians, made up the ethnic majority. Within Bosnia and Croatia, Serbs were a minority group. The only truly ethnic homogenization at that time was in Kosovo. The fear of being a minority, even though perceived ethnic differences between people were slight, became fertile ground for nationalists. National grievances (many rooted in the devastating years of World War II) began to re-emerge while simultaneously, the Soviet Union began to collapse. The new order that emerged pushed people to gravitate towards ethnic nationalist parties spewing narratives of victimization and revenge.

As Yugoslavia began to disintegrate in the face of the formerly taboo nationalisms, the West banked on Serbian Communist leader Slobodan Milošević and his promise to keep Yugoslavia intact.

Why?

As nationalists asserted their power and fed narratives of victimization, Europeans were focused elsewhere. Concerned about the reunifying Germany, they were suspicious of and rejected Germany's warnings about emerging nationalist leaders. Indeed, despite German support of human rights reforms and political reforms in Croatia, Europeans were suspicious and remembered that Croatia had been an ally of Nazi Germany. Without a unified European response (the U.S. delegated the issue to them), Milošević took advantage of this power vacuum to begin Serb wars of nationalism and expansion under the guise of "preserving Yugoslavia".

TERMS

Balkanization: A term used to describe fragmentation of a region into competing hostile identities such as ethnic, cultural, national, or religious. Although the hatreds were not “old and ancient” in the Balkans, but something new and provoked by nationalists, the term was internalized by Western powers to justify their lack of will to intervene.

Sephardic Jewry: Spanish Jews who were forced to convert to Catholicism or face expulsion from Spain after 1492. Many Jews fled the Spanish Inquisition in a great diaspora and found safe haven in Bosnia and Herzegovina which was one of the few territories in Europe that welcomed Jews. This community was annihilated during the Holocaust.

Slav: The largest European ethnolinguistic group speaking various Slavic languages mainly inhabiting Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe.

Bosnian and Bosniak: People who identify themselves with Bosnia and Herzegovina as their ethnic state who share a common Bosnian ancestry, culture, history and language. Serbs living in Republika Srpska and Muslims living in Bosnia are geographically and legally Bosnian. Bosniak specifically refers to Bosnian Muslims.

Ustaše: Croatian fascist and ultranationalist organization active, as one organization, between 1929 and 1945. The Black Legion militia was active during World War II in Independent State of Croatia and consisted largely of Bosnian Muslim and Croat refugees from eastern Bosnia. It became known for its fierce fighting against the Chetniks, the Partisans, and massacres against Serb civilians.

Handschar Division: A Nazi SS military formation founded 1943 consisting mostly of Bosnian Muslims. The division fought against communist-led Yugoslav Partisan resistance forces in the Independent State of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and parts of Serbia. They swore loyalty to Hitler and the Croatian wartime leader Poglavnik Ante Pavelić. It earned a reputation for brutality and savagery, not only during combat operations, but also through atrocities committed against Serb and Jewish civilians. In 1943, the division was the only SS unit to mutiny (in France) and by 1944 large numbers of non-German members deserted.

Jasenovac: A concentration and extermination camp established in 1941 by Independent State of Croatia in occupied Yugoslavia during World War II. It was operated by the Ustaše Supervisory Service and targeted mainly Serbs, Roma, and Jews; but also Croat and Bosnian Muslim political dissidents,

Chetniks: Serb paramilitary during World War II that terrorized Croats in areas where Serbs and Croats were intermixed, Muslims, and Communist-led Yugoslav Partisans and their supporters. They committed mass atrocity crimes in their attempt to create a “Greater Serbia.” They collaborated with Axis powers when it benefited them.

Ethnic Cleansing: Not a legal term but used (often by Serb nationalists) to describe a policy of systematic, forced removal of ethnic, racial, and religious groups from a given area, with the intent of making a region ethnically homogeneous. Perpetrators can be accused of a war crime, a crime against humanity or the crime of genocide.

European Community (EC): An economic association formed in 1957 by Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Its goals were to foster a common trade policy that would eliminate trade barriers and promote a high level of integration and cooperation in the aftermath of World War II. In 1993, the European Community was replaced by the European Union.

Paramilitary: A military organization whose structure, tactics, training, subculture, and function are similar to those of a professional military, but which is not part of a country's official or legitimate armed forces.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO): Formed in 1949 in response to the threat posed by Soviet Russia, it is a political and military security alliance of countries from North America and Europe.

International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY): A United Nations court of law that dealt with war crimes that took place during the conflicts in the Balkans in the 1990s.

Genocide: One of the three crimes of mass atrocity (war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide) it is defined as: Any of the following acts undertaken with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such. (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Femicide: The murder of women by men because they are women.

KEY PEOPLE

Josip Broz Tito: Born to a Croat father and a Slovene mother, Tito would become the head of the Communist Party in Yugoslavia. As leader of the Yugoslav partisans during World War II he gained control of Yugoslavia and became the country's post war (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) prime minister, president, and marshal. After breaking with Joseph Stalin, Yugoslavia was expelled from the Soviet Cominform. After brutally imposing Communism he worked to create workplaces controlled by workers' councils who would share the profits. Wavering between centralized and decentralized power he chose to delegate power to the Republics of Yugoslavia while suppressing nationalism under the banner of "brotherhood and unity". He is remembered as both an authoritarian dictator and a beloved figure of national unity. He tried to maintain peaceful coexistence while maintaining order. Upon his death in 1980, it became clear that his cult of personality had held the country together.

Slobodan Milošević: A Serb nationalist, he became the leader of the Serbian Communist Party after Tito's death. In 1990 he became the president of Serbia. While presenting himself as the successor to Tito and pretending to share the same goals of Yugoslav unity, his real goals became Serb nationalism, Serb expansion and dominance, and ultimately "ethnic cleansing" of competing nationalities and ethno-religious groups.

Franjo Tuđman: A Croatian nationalist, historian, and antisemite, he became the president of Croatia in 1990 and worked for a "Greater Croatia". He led Croatia in its war of independence. As a former member of the Yugoslav Partisans of World War II he worked to separate Croatian identity from the Ustaše, the Croatian fascist and ultranationalist organization that sided with Hitler. Described as an authoritarian leader, accusations of war crimes followed his leadership during the wars in the 1990s.

Alija Izetbegović: A Muslim, he became the first president of the newly independent Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992. In his writings, he tried to reconcile Western-style progress with Islamic tradition and called for a Muslim spiritual revival. His opponents claimed he was advocating for a radical Muslim state. Although some of his writings could be interpreted that way, he spoke and acted in favor of a pluralistic Bosnia and Herzegovina. Navigating the post 1990 elections which brought nationalists to power in Serbia and Croatia, he stated, "Choosing between Milošević and Tuđman is like choosing between leukemia and a brain tumor".

Radovan Karadžić: An orthodox Christian from Montenegro, he rejected Izetbegović's election and attempted to stop Bosnia and Hercegovina's independence by establishing an autonomous Bosnian Serb state of "Republika Srpska" in 1991. Backed by Serbia's Milošević, he armed Bosnian Serb paramilitaries in preparation for "ethnic cleansing" of Bosniak Muslims and Croats.

Ratko Mladić: Military leader of the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) who will be most responsible for the genocide of Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica in 1995. He was convicted of crimes against humanity and genocide and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Radislav Krstić: Deputy Commander of the Drina Corps of the Army of Republika Srpska, he was in charge of the Srebrenica genocide. Krstić becomes third person ever convicted of genocide and sentenced to 46 years in prison (reduced to 35 after appeal) where he is attacked by three Muslim prisoners.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM?

- What are the dangers of religious nationalism?
 - Why are victimhood narratives so dangerous?
 - What was the process of escalation that led to the Bosnian genocide? How might the international community have interrupted and prevented mass atrocities?
 - What are the risk factors and warning signs of genocide and mass atrocity crimes?
 - Should the United States support autocratic dictators who wish to help us meet our foreign policy agendas?
 - How can multiethnic, multi-religious, pluralistic societies thrive?
 - Why is justice and accountability important in post-genocidal societies?
 - The Dayton Peace Accords ended the killing but cemented difference and dysfunction. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Dayton Accords?
 - What is the danger of not having an agreed upon history?
 - How does confronting the past help us to confront prejudices, fear, nationalism, and hate? How does wrestling with difficult history help to build resiliency?
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LESSON PLANS AND VIDEOS:

Remembering Srebrenica <https://srebrenica.org.uk/information/external-resources>

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/countries/bosnia-herzegovina>

C-Span Classroom: <https://www.c-span.org/classroom/document/?18063>

Educate Against Hate:

<https://www.educateagainsthate.com/resources/remembering-srebrenica-pshe-resources/>

Choices Program: <https://www.choices.edu/curriculum-unit/confronting-genocide-never/>

Frontline: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/karadzic/>

USC Shoah Foundation: Visual History Archive of Testimonies

<https://sfi.usc.edu/collections/bosnia-herzegovina>

Frontline: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/the-trial-of-ratko-mladic/transcript/>

Center for Peacebuilding from Bosnia and Herzegovina: <http://unvocim.net/>
