

CAMBODIAN GENOCIDE TOOLBOX FOR TEACHERS

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What? From 1975-1979 the Khmer Rouge Communist regime murdered approximately 1.5 million to 2 million people including 97% of Buddhist monks, 8,000 Christians, and half of the Cham Muslim population.

Why? Before its independence in 1953 Cambodia was a French colony. Prince Sihanouk tried to keep Cambodia neutral during the U.S. Vietnam War. However, he and his government's corruption and exploitation of the peasants created simmering unrest that was exploited by the Khmer Rouge communist guerillas. When Sihanouk was overthrown in a pro-Western coup, he encouraged revolt. Due to pressures caused by heavy U.S. bombing of Vietnamese targets in Cambodia (up to 150,000 Cambodians were killed with more displaced and traumatized) and Cambodian mistrust of the Vietnamese (Vietnamese refugees entered the country), and economic collapse, the Khmer Rouge were able to seize power in April 1975.

How?

The Khmer Rouge immediately began an ideological murder campaign to revert Cambodia back to an idealized agrarian society. Anyone associated with the West, city dwellers, professionals, intellectuals, officials, those seen as political, religious, or ideological threats, non-Khmer ethnicities, were targeted. People were divided into "Old" or "Base People" (idealized farmers from ancient times) and "New People" (those who were not countryside farmers). Cities were systematically emptied, families were separated, and people were forced into the countryside to villages or camps run by Base People. Meals were eaten communally, and children were sent to forced labor or militarized. Affection and humor were forbidden. People were encouraged to inform on each other. Mismanagement and the killing of doctors led to mass starvation. 21% of the population will die in what became known as "the killing fields".

TERMS

Domino Theory: U.S. Cold War fear that countries in SE Asia would fall "like dominos" to communist aggression.

Khmer Rouge: Radical communist movement in Cambodia.

Pol Pot: Leader of the Khmer Rouge.

Lon Nol: Prime Minister of Cambodia. His military campaign against Khmer Rouge guerillas will unravel and strengthen Khmer Rouge support.

Kampuchea: Khmer Rouge name for Cambodia, the "People's Republic of Kampuchea".

Angkar: Communist ideology ("the organization") that supplants Buddhism as the religion. Loyalty to *Angkar* replaces all other loyalties – to family, to village to religion.

Pravatrup: Khmer Rouge-required "biographies" allowing them to identify and target potential opponents.

Killing Fields: Mass graves in the Cambodian countryside.

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.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. How did U.S. military strategy in fighting the Vietnam War empower the Khmer Rouge?
2. What responsibility did Prince Norodom Sihanouk have in empowering the Khmer Rouge?
3. What are the dangers of extremist ideologies?
4. What were the risk factors and triggers for genocide to occur in Cambodia?

RESOURCES

The Cambodian Genocide A Short History (1975-1979): Cohen Center's succinct history of the genocide.

<https://www.keene.edu/academics/cchgs/resources/documents/cambodian-genocide/download/>

Cohen Center website links: <https://www.keene.edu/academics/cchgs/education/for-teachers/resources/>

- USC Shoah Foundation: 5 testimonies of survivors of the Cambodian Genocide with additional resources.
- University of Minnesota: Historical overview with links to sites and survivor testimonies that include Yale University, Tuol Sleng Museum, and survivor sites. There is also information on the legacy of the genocide, post atrocity justice, and coping with trauma.
- Association for Asian Studies: Resources for using the film *First They Killed My Father*, the story of Loung Ung.
- USHMM case study: Tools utilizing USHMM resources including testimonies and an exhibit.
- From Sideshow To Genocide: Includes stories of the genocide, history overview, and suggested resources.
- The Digital Archive of Cambodian Holocaust Survivors: Photographs and survivor stories.
- Tuol Sleng and the Cambodian Genocide: Cornell University's documentation and research site includes Khmer Rouge and Its Leaders, S-21 Prison (Tuol Sleng), Victims, Survivors' Stories, newspaper reports, periodicals, arts and literature and films.

Lesson Links:

- What led to the genocide:
<https://www.bcsd.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=29127&dataid=60523&FileName=10.10%20SQ%207%20What%20led%20to%20the%20Cambodian%20genocide.pdf>
- Rise and Fall of Khmer Rouge:
<https://asiapacificcurriculum.ca/learning-module/rise-and-fall-khmer-rouge-regime>
- Pol Pot and the Cambodian Genocide (6th & 7th Grade):
<https://facdis.wvu.edu/files/d/b057f1f6-a30f-42cf-b7e3-6cb54e526cdb/facdis-pol-pot-cambodia-genocide-2.docx>

Documentary Films:

- **S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine:** A unique documentary on the notorious S-21 prison, today the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, with testimony by the only surviving prisoners and former Khmer Rouge guards. A survivor confronts his captors.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ESkb3YCRBE>
- **Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia:** Report of Khmer Rouge the atrocities and effect of U.S. bombing during the Vietnam War. Disturbing documentary, shot on site less than a year after the Khmer Rouge downfall, depicting the shocking situation and recent history of Cambodia.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAM7smXmU2M>
- **Duch, Master of the Forges of Hell:** In 2009, Duch became the first leader of the Khmer Rouge organization to be brought before an international criminal justice court. Rithy Panh records his unadorned words, without any trimmings, in the isolation of a face-to-face encounter. At the same time, he sets it into perspective with archive pictures and eye-witness accounts of survivors. In the aftermath, where survivors and perpetrators continued living together. Rithy Panh, survivor and filmmaker, focuses on representations of the perpetrator. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Co-ldEILBE>