

Confronting Genocide: Never Again?

Student Text



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Cover includes images by the United Nations, the National Archives, and Justin Vidamo (CC BY 2.0).

We wish to thank the staff of the Confronting Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Futures project of the Museums Association of Namibia, the German Lost Art Foundation, and the Ethnologisches Museum of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin for their invaluable assistance with the development of online materials for this curriculum.

We wish to thank the African Studies Center K-16 Education Program at Boston University for their support of this edition.

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How Can We Prevent Genocide?



Above, a billboard in Yerevan, Armenia suggests that the Holocaust could have been prevented if the international community had done more to recognize and prevent the Armenian Genocide. Below, protest signs at an event in 2019 in North Carolina ask citizens to commit to "Never Again." The world has sadly seen many instances of mass atrocity and genocide, despite efforts to educate and motivate people to stop it. This reading explores why.

Introduction: Never Again?

Note on Disturbing Content

This reading contains content that may be upsetting for readers. It refers to physical and psychological violence, including persecution, mass killing, intense hatreds, trauma, and sexual violence. Texts and images might be particularly intense for students with a personal connection to the topic. It is important to be sensitive to your classmates and the ways in which this content might be a difficult topic to study.

Myanmar (formerly called Burma) is located in Southeast Asia and is home to about 250 ethnic groups. In March 2022, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that the United States had determined that the military in Myanmar had committed genocide in 2016 and 2017. The target of the crimes was an ethnic group called

the Rohingya. Rohingya are Muslims and made up about 2 percent of the population in Myanmar at the time. Because Myanmar does not recognize Rohingya as citizens, the population of about one million people is the largest stateless group in the world. They have suffered extensive discrimination in Myanmar.

After a series of Rohingya attacks on police checkpoints launched in protest of that discrimination, the Myanmar military began a campaign of extreme violence against the Rohingya. The military killed thousands of people, burned hundreds of villages, and raped thousands of women and girls. The majority of Rohingya now live in refugee camps in Bangladesh.

Since 2017, violence in Myanmar continues. In the past sixty years, the military has overthrown the government multiple times, most recently in February 2021. Since that military coup, at least 1,600 people have been killed by security forces and



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Rohingya children in a refugee camp in Bangladesh in 2018.

half a million are internally displaced (forced from their homes but remaining in the country). The same generals responsible for the genocide now run the country.

The type of horror described above came to be known as “genocide” following the Nazi murder of twelve million civilians (including six million Jews) during World War II. When the war ended and Allied forces liberated the Nazi concentration camps, the world was shocked and horrified by the Nazi crimes. Pledging that such an event would never occur again, leaders worldwide signed the Genocide Convention.

In spite of these pledges, recent events in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere demonstrate that the promise of “Never Again” has been broken time after time. During the twentieth century alone, more than forty million people were killed in genocides. What are the root causes of genocide? How has the international community tried to prevent genocide? Why has it failed to keep the promise of “Never Again”? What is the United States’ role? What actions have local leaders and community groups taken to prevent mass violence? How do communities recover from genocide?



Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his wife, Yoo Soon-taek, lay a wreath at the Rwanda Genocide Memorial Museum in Kigali, Rwanda, January 29, 2008.

In the pages that follow, you will explore reasons for and responses to genocide. Part I explores the history of efforts to deal with genocide. Part II examines seven case studies of genocide and the local, international, and U.S. response to each case. Ultimately, you will formulate your own ideas about how people should prevent and respond to genocide.

“Never again is a clarion call to moral action. It is for all people in all places in all times. Let us write a new history for humankind.”

—Ban Ki-moon, former UN Secretary-General, February 28, 2011

Note on the Scope of this Text

This text focuses on one type of killing of civilians: genocide. In its strict legal definition, genocide refers to widespread murder and other acts committed by governments or other groups with the intent to destroy—in whole or in part—a national, racial, religious or ethnic group. Scholars and others are debating whether other acts of mass killing and destruction should be called genocide as well. Most genocides have been perpetrated by governments, but it is important to note that government involvement is not necessary for genocide to occur. There have been other kinds of mass killing. Civilians have been targeted for political reasons and during wartime, for instance. This text is not meant to ignore these other tragedies, but rather to focus on the particular issue of genocide and how the world has attempted to cope with this repeating problem.

Confronting Genocide: Never Again?

Teacher Resource Book

TEACHER RESOURCE BOOK

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Orientation and Compelling Questions

Objectives

Students will: Gain familiarity with the problem of genocide.

Communicate ideas with classmates.

Construct “compelling questions” and “supporting questions” with classmates.

Prepare to work thoughtfully on this challenging topic.

Resources

“Compelling Questions” image slideshow, available at <www.choices.edu/genocide>

“Developing Compelling Questions” (TRB-8)

Notes

This activity should take place before students have read Part I of the text.

This activity puts students in charge of their own inquiry, which has its potential pitfalls. Some teachers may initially feel uncomfortable with the seeming lack of “control” they have over the lesson. We recommend teachers see the role of coach rather than instructor-judge as a good model for this lesson. The purpose of the lesson is not for students to come up with the “best” question but to learn how to formulate questions and to engage them in their own learning.

In the Classroom

1. View Images—Post printed versions of the slideshow around the room, or display the slideshow on students’ screens. Ask students to view the images, writing questions on sticky notes, the board, or a collaborative digital document. Encourage students to pose all kinds of questions, including questions they may feel are too simple, such as “What is happening in this picture?” Students should be able to see and, if desired, respond to each other’s questions. Note that the slideshow includes images related to events that the UN has not declared to be genocides.

2. Journal Responses—Give students about ten minutes to journal individually about the im-

ages. If your students would like a prompt, here are some: Pick one or two images that resonate with you and write about your reactions to them. Are there similarities you notice in several of the images? What are they, and why might they exist? What do you hope to learn in this unit on genocide?

3. Create Compelling Questions—Divide the class into small groups and distribute “Developing Compelling Questions” to each group. Students will work together to develop three-to-five overarching, open-ended (“compelling”) questions based on the ones they and their classmates wrote in the first part of the lesson. Groups should be sure to create questions that interest the members of the group.

4. Conclusion—Bring the whole class back together and ask groups to share some of their questions. Did any groups have the same questions? Is there consensus on two or three questions that the whole class would like to explore during the unit? Have students note them down so that they can return to them throughout the unit. Do students have any theories about responses to their questions? What types of information would they need in order to answer their questions?

Extra Challenges

1. Circle Back—As students work through the unit, return regularly to the images and the students’ questions. Students will find as they do the readings that some of the images begin to gain context and they can refine or begin to answer their compelling questions. You might consider asking students to continue to use journals throughout the unit to express their ideas and/or to follow their own thinking. Do their answers to the compelling questions change as they learn? What additional research would they like to do?

2. Images as Sources—At the end of the unit, ask students to consider how the images in this lesson informed their understanding of the events about which they read. What did they learn or understand by looking at the images that they did not through reading text about the events? How would an historian use the images? Can images be misinterpreted or mislead researchers?

Developing Compelling Questions

Instructions: Follow the steps below with your group to create three-to-five compelling questions based on the images related to genocide and your journal responses.

1. A compelling question has no easy answer. It asks something you personally find interesting. It involves different kinds of historical inquiry. For example, it could ask you to consider economics and politics, or geography and culture. Here is an example of a good compelling question:

When did Americans gain their liberty?

Why is this a good question? To answer it, you need to consider a number of different angles. What is liberty? What is an American? Do you have liberty? Does the fact that this question is written in the past tense mean something? Could you change a word in the question and therefore highlight some similarities to other events or time periods? You and your classmates might be able to discuss this question for an entire class period and not come to a conclusion with which everyone agrees. That is a compelling question.

2. A supporting question helps to get to the bottom of a compelling question. Answers to supporting questions are more factual and narrow in focus. They are not as open ended or complex as compelling questions. Here are some examples of supporting questions that would support the compelling question above:

When was the American Revolution? When did President Abraham Lincoln issue the Emancipation Proclamation? When did women receive the right to vote?

3. Look again at the questions you and your groupmates posted about the images related to genocide as well as what you wrote in your journal. With your group, choose five or six of the questions and divide them into the two categories: compelling and supporting. Be sure you choose questions that you and your groupmates find interesting. Fill in the boxes below with your questions. If some of your supporting questions directly support your compelling questions, draw arrows or use different colored highlighters to indicate the connection.

If you do not have three compelling questions yet, work with your supporting questions to turn them into compelling questions, or design new compelling questions from scratch. Remember to formulate questions that you and your group members have an interest in.

Compelling Questions

Supporting Questions