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STUDENT ACADEMY AWARDS 2008  
BEST DOCUMENTARY

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CRYSTAL HEART AWARD  
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**OFFICIAL SELECTION**  
ROCKY MOUNTAIN WOMEN'S  
FILM FESTIVAL

**OFFICIAL SELECTION**  
SEATTLE HUMAN RIGHTS FILM FEST  
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

**can  
mercy  
restore  
what  
genocide  
destroyed?**

Could you forgive a person who murdered your family? This is the question faced by the subjects of *As We Forgive*, a one-hour documentary on the lives of two Rwandan women coming face to face with the men who slaughtered their families during the 1994 genocide. Struggling to live again as neighbors, the subjects of this film discover the power and the pain of radical reconciliation.

DIRECTED BY LAURA WATERS HINSON  
NARRATED BY MIA FARROW

**as we forgive**

**DISCUSSION GUIDE**



### DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

On a trip to Rwanda in 2005, I heard a story that astonished me even more than the nation's devastating 1994 genocide. Beginning in 2003, the Rwandan government began releasing from prison tens of thousands of genocide murderers who had confessed to their crimes. With an overwhelming backlog of court cases, Rwanda's leaders saw little choice for full justice and turned their sights instead to reconciliation. When I heard this, I wondered, "Can this even be true? Is it possible for survivors of genocide to forgive the killers?" This question haunted me so much that I decided to spend the next year raising funding for a documentary that would explore the lives of ordinary Rwandans who were on a journey to forgive the neighbors who'd slaughtered their families.

Upon returning to Rwanda in the summer of 2006, I realized the need to tell multiple sides of the story. Every survivor had experienced profound trauma and horror, but I was surprised to find that so had some of the killers. Many claimed to be pressured by extremist government militias to kill or be killed. Almost all the murderers I met told me that a spiritual darkness descended on Rwanda, transforming them into "animals"--killers with no soul. I came away from those interviews struggling to define these people, for I could not hate them like I'd wanted to. They committed unthinkable atrocities, but I wondered if, put in their shoes, with no education but vicious government propaganda, might I have done the same? I was humbled to see such glimmers of humanity in the eyes of these executioners.

Beyond the stories of genocide, however, I wanted to explore the concept of reconciliation from two different perspectives: that of a survivor who had forgiven and one who had not. I discovered two incredible Rwandan women who would become the subjects of *As We Forgive*. The first was Rosaria, a widow who had lost her four children, husband, siblings and parents during the genocide. The only person she had left was the unborn child in her womb, a daughter she later named Cadeaux or "gift." Rosaria had forgiven Saveri, the man who

viciously murdered her sister and her four nieces and nephews. When I met Saveri, he had just completed a new home for Rosaria, which he called a "practical sign" of his remorse.

Paralleling this story was another extraordinary survivor named Chantale. Her father's murderer, John, had recently been released from prison for having confessed publicly to his crime, but he had not yet approached Chantale to ask for forgiveness. What unfolds is the film's tension-filled climax, as the two characters encounter one another on camera for the first time since John killed Chantale's father in the genocide.

Producing this documentary was the most transformative experience of my entire life. I looked into the eyes of genocide murderers and saw humanity staring back—a stark reminder of the dualism of our nature, a nature longing for ultimate reconciliation. Even more, I barely scratched the surface of grasping the pain of these survivors, yet they were teaching me about forgiveness. Today I continue to wonder, if survivors of genocide are capable of reconciling with perpetrators who destroyed their families, how much more hope is there for the rest of the world?



**Laura Waters Hinson**  
Director, *As We Forgive*

### HISTORY OF THE 1994 GENOCIDE

#### Hutu and Tutsi: One Culture, Not Two Tribes

The horrors of Rwanda's 1994 genocide were preceded by a complicated ethnic and colonial history. Prior to colonization, the Kingdom of Rwanda was a relatively peaceful country inhabited by two distinct classes of people, the Hutu and Tutsi (in addition to the Twa, a small minority class). Rather than existing as separate tribes, the Hutu and Tutsi shared the same culture, language and land. The distinction between them was mainly socio-economic: the Tutsi were cattle and landowners, and the Hutu were land workers, owning few cattle. In fact, in pre-colonial Rwandan culture a Hutu could *become* a Tutsi simply by owning more cattle and joining the upper class. Many Hutu and Tutsi intermarried, a reality that complicated the later ethnic cleansing sprees that would sweep Rwanda in the 1960s, 1970s and 1990s.

#### Belgian Colonization

In 1916, Rwanda fell under first German, then Belgian rule. In a divide and conquer tactic, the Belgian colonists chose to favor the Tutsis, who were the perceived leaders in the country. Issuing identity cards to all Rwandans, which classified them as Hutu or Tutsi, the Belgians used the Tutsi minority to rule over the Hutu majority. The use of favoritism and identity cards slowly eroded relationships between the two groups, leading ultimately to their lethal opposition.

#### An Inauspicious Independence

In a surprising policy reversal, the Belgians decided to leave the Hutu majority in power upon Rwanda's independence in 1962. Emerging from three decades of colonial oppression, the Hutu leadership began blaming Tutsis for the years of repression. During the 1960s and 1970s, several genocides were carried out against Tutsis, resulting in tens of thousands of refugees fleeing to the neighboring countries of Uganda, Tanzania and Congo. During this time, a covert band of Tutsi refugees living in Uganda began to form a militia known as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), under the leadership of Rwanda's current President Paul Kagame. The RPF's aim was

#### RWANDA FACTS

**Capital:** Kigali

**Population:** 10 million

**Size:** Roughly the size of Maryland

**Official languages:** Kinyarwanda, French, English

**Government:** Republic

**Per capita income:** \$355 (based on nominal GDP)

**Religion:** 56% Catholic, 26% Protestant, 11% Seventh-Day Adventist, 4.6% Muslim



to secure the right of refugees to return to their homeland. A peace agreement was signed between the RPF and then President Habyarimana, but did little to help the continued social unrest. When a plane carrying President Habyarimana was shot down in April 1994, the years of tension between Hutus and Tutsi exploded into total chaos.

#### The Genocide Ignites

Within hours of the president's assassination, the extremists in the Hutu government ordered an unofficial militia group of 30,000 soldiers called the Interahamwe to carry out the systematic slaughter of all Tutsis and moderate Hutus. Blaring radio propaganda targeting the Tutsis as sub-human "cockroaches," the Interahamwe used the Tutsis' own identity cards to find and murder them. Rampaging across the country, hundreds of thousands of ordinary Hutus were swept into the violence and oftentimes pressured or forced to kill their own neighbors and families. Executions continued for 100 days, until the RPF crossed the Rwandan border and conquered the capital city of Kigali, overthrowing the Hutu regime. By that time, it is estimated that between 800,000 and 1 million Rwandans had been slaughtered. Anywhere from 500,000 to 1 million people had physically taken part in the killings.

### RWANDA TODAY: RECONCILIATION

#### Rwanda's Reconciliation

In the weeks following the genocide, approximately 120,000 people were arrested for perpetrating the killings. At this time, it was estimated that only ten Rwandan lawyers remained in the country. With a prison system built to hold only around 10,000 inmates, it became clear that it would take over 150 years to officially try all those incarcerated. With little hope for full justice, Rwandans eventually turned to a different solution: reconciliation.

#### Killers Let Loose

In 2003, Rwandan President Paul Kagame announced that the government would begin releasing more than 40,000 genocide prisoners who had confessed to their crimes. To bring about justice and reconciliation on a grassroots level, the government reestablished a traditional community court system called "Gacaca" (pronounced *gah-chah-chah*).



President Paul Kagame

#### Gacaca: "Justice on the Grass"

The Gacaca courts allow individual villages to hold trials for returning prisoners, giving victims an opportunity to hear the truth of how their families were killed. Oftentimes confessing prisoners are allowed to return home without further penalty, although many are given community service sentences, and in some cases, killers are convicted and sent back to federal prison. Meeting each week under trees in each community across the country,

#### RESTORATIVE JUSTICE . . .

Much of what The Rwandan National Unity and Reconciliation Commission is doing is built upon the concept of restorative justice, which emphasizes repairing the damage caused by crime and engaging victims *and* offenders in cooperative justice. In Rwanda, this means allowing genocide killers the opportunity to confess to their victims and seek forgiveness. Offenders are also able to make physical restitution by participating in work projects aimed at restoring their victims' lives or community.

Gacaca courts have helped promote reconciliation by giving perpetrators a chance to confess and ask for forgiveness, while victims have learned the truth about their loved ones' death.

#### A Movement of Reconciliation

While Gacaca has served as the first step toward national reconciliation, there have been many other efforts to help Rwandans achieve peace since the genocide. The Rwandan National Unity and Reconciliation Commission and many development and faith-based organizations have engaged communities in reconciliation workshops where survivors and ex-prisoners meet together to hear one another's stories and attempt to reconcile. Additionally, the terms "Hutu" and "Tutsi" have been officially banned from public use in an effort to promote Rwandan unity. The government conducts reintegration and "re-education" camps for returning prisoners, and has built in a curriculum promoting Rwandan unity in public schools. These steps, along with President Kagame's push for economic growth and poverty reduction, have helped Rwanda rebuild at an impressive pace in the 15 years since the genocide.

### SELECTED INDIVIDUALS FEATURED IN AS WE FORGIVE



#### Rosaria

Rosaria lost her husband, four children, parents and all seven siblings in the genocide, only narrowly escaping with her own life after sustaining machete wounds that left her paralyzed in one hand. Months later, Rosaria

discovered she was pregnant with a child she conceived with her husband just before the war broke out. She named her infant daughter Cadeaux, meaning “gift,” as she was the only thing remaining in Rosaria’s life. Years later, Rosaria engaged in a reconciliation workshop where she was approached by a former neighbor, Saveri, who asked her forgiveness in killing Rosaria’s sister and her four nieces and nephews.



#### Saveri

Remorseful after his murder of Rosaria’s sister and her four small children, Saveri confessed to his crimes while in prison in an effort to seek what he called “deliverance.” After being

released from prison, Saveri returned to his village and began regularly visiting Rosaria, pleading with her for forgiveness. Rosaria eventually reconciled with Saveri, and even offered him a job on her land so he could feed his family. Later, Saveri joined a local house-building project to build a new home for Rosaria as hers was destroyed in the genocide.



#### Chantale

When a local reconciliation counselor proposed to her the idea of meeting her father’s murderer, John, Chantale—paralyzed by the grief of losing 30 members of

her family—could not bear to think of it. Only after weeks of deliberation did Chantale agree to meet John, face-to-face, in a mediated counseling session. Though John begged Chantale for forgiveness during this first encounter, she was not yet ready to forgive. It would not be until months later, after a reconciliation workshop and much healing, that Chantale would finally be able to forgive John.



#### John

Participating in an early genocide in 1992, John was broken by the experience of beating a man to death. Once apprehended for his crime, John encountered reconciliation

counselors in prison and learned the importance of confession and repentance. When he was released from prison, John feared running into the daughter of the man he had killed. But after encouragement from a local reconciliation counselor, he finally asked Chantale for a chance to meet. After the encounter took place, John remarked that a tremendous weight had been lifted from his shoulders.



#### Gahigi

Losing an astounding 142 members of his family in the genocide, Pastor Stephen Gahigi found post-genocide Rwanda nearly unrecognizable and bereft of all his friends and neighbors.

After a life-changing spiritual experience, Gahigi says he was “overcome” by a calling from God to minister to the killers in his local prison. At first, the prisoners feared he was coming to seek revenge, but eventually Gahigi won their trust and was able to extend forgiveness to some of the murderers of his family, and also to teach hundreds of prisoners about the power of confession, repentance and seeking forgiveness from their victims.



#### Joy

As the president of her class at a school for genocide and AIDS orphans in the North Province of Rwanda, 15-year-old Joy credits much of her success to her mother’s extension of

forgiveness to those who had murdered her family. Today, Joy and her fellow students no longer use the words ‘Hutu’ and ‘Tutsi’ to describe themselves, but instead believe in a unified Rwanda.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree with the Rwandan government's decision to release the genocide prisoners? Could there have been a better alternative?
2. What are the limitations of seeking full "justice"? Can mercy and justice operate together? How might the concept of forgiveness be incorporated into the United States' justice system? What are some ways we might incorporate restorative justice into our own system of punishment in the U.S.?
3. Could the Gacaca Court and The Rwandan National Unity and Reconciliation Commission serve as a model in any way for countries currently in a state of conflict or post-conflict? In what ways is the Rwandan situation unique and perhaps not replicable in other contexts?
4. Do you identify more with Rosaria, who participated in a reconciliation workshop and found healing through forgiving the murderer? Or with Chantale, who resisted the idea of meeting with John, her father's murderer?
5. Consider the quote by Voltaire, "No snowflake in an avalanche ever feels responsible." After hearing the murderers, Saveri and John, explain their reasons for participating in the genocide, did your opinion of them or the crimes they committed change?
6. In the story of Pastor Stephen Gahigi, who lost 142 family members in the genocide, what factors do you believe allow him to work compassionately with the killers in prison?
7. Does hearing stories of radical forgiveness in Rwanda shed different light on areas in your own life where it has been either hard to forgive or hard to ask for forgiveness?

## TAKE ACTION

# BECOME A LIVING BRICK



### Become a Living Brick | [livingbrickscampaign.org](http://livingbrickscampaign.org)

*As We Forgive* has developed a new viewer action campaign, called Living Bricks, to enable viewers to get involved in Rwanda's reconciliation process. Living Bricks equips repentant genocide perpetrators with the tools to build much-needed housing for their victims' families, establishing new villages where former killers and survivors live together again as neighbors through practical reconciliation.

For more information on how you and your community can get involved in Living Bricks, visit: [www.LivingBricksCampaign.org](http://www.LivingBricksCampaign.org)

### Host A Screening | [asweforgivemovie.com](http://asweforgivemovie.com)

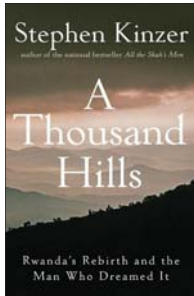
If you and other audience members have been inspired by Rwanda's reconciliation movement, consider hosting your own screening of the film in your community. After showing the film, prompt discussion on how reconciliation and forgiveness might apply to situations in your own local community.

For more information on hosting your own screening, visit [www.asweforgivemovie.com](http://www.asweforgivemovie.com).

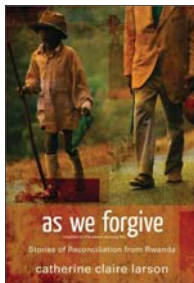
### RESOURCES

To learn more about Rwanda's genocide and reconciliation movement, check out the following books, films and websites:

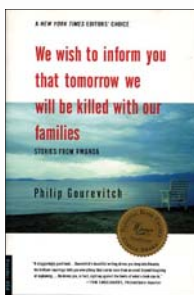
#### Books



**A Thousand Hills:  
Rwanda's Rebirth and the  
Man who Dreamed It**  
by Stephen Kinzer



**As We Forgive:  
Stories of Reconciliation from  
Rwanda** (based on the movie)  
by Catherine Claire Larson



**We Wish to Inform You that  
Tomorrow We Will Be Killed  
With Our Families:  
Stories from Rwanda**  
by Philip Gourevitch



**Left to Tell: Discovering God in the  
Midst of the Rwandan Holocaust**  
by Immaculee Ilibagiza

#### Movies

**Ghosts of Rwanda**  
PBS Frontline (documentary)

**Sometimes in April**  
HBO Films  
[www.hbo.com/films/sometimesinapril](http://www.hbo.com/films/sometimesinapril)

**Beyond the Gates**  
A Michael Caton-Jones Film/BBC Films  
[beyondthegates-movie.com](http://beyondthegates-movie.com)

**Hotel Rwanda**  
United Artists, Starring Don Cheadle  
[www.unitedartists.com/hotelrwanda/intro.html](http://www.unitedartists.com/hotelrwanda/intro.html)

#### Websites

**The Triumph of Evil: How the West ignored warnings  
of the 1994 genocide and turned its back on the  
victims**  
PBS Online  
[www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil)

**Official Website of the Republic of Rwanda**  
[www.gov.rw](http://www.gov.rw)