

The Bosnian Genocide

What is genocide?

Genocide is the intentional killing of a particular group to destroy that national, ethnical, racial, or religious group.

First Stage: Classification

During classification, the group that is targeted is identified first. After that, the targeted group is separated from everyone else by being labeled for their beliefs or race. They are distinguished from non-targets with the labels given to them by the targeting party/perpetrators. Even the perpetrators distinguish themselves, and make it seem as though they are superior to the targeted group.

In the Bosnian Genocide, the Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) and Croats were sought out, identified, labeled, and killed for their beliefs by the Serbs and Bosnian Serbs. In 1991, Yugoslavia had split into three smaller countries: Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia. The conflict between the ethnic groups began once the three countries declared their independence from each other. In 1992, Yugoslavia merged with the republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Afterwards, the Bosnian Serbs believed themselves to be superior to all of the non-Serbs. They had also believed that the land of Bosnia was rightfully reserved for them. They thought that “Bosnia was a greater Serbia” for the Serbs only. Serbian forces put together a campaign of “ethnic cleansing” in the same year. There were three specific groups involved in the genocide: Bosnian Serbs (Orthodox Catholic Christians), Bosniaks (Sunni Muslims), and Bosnian Croats (Roman Catholic Christians). The new, Serbian leader, Slobodan Milosevic, rose up in power in 1980’s after the previous communist leader, Josip Tito. Milosevic was driven by his religious hatred and hunger for power.

The classification part of the genocide affected the victims because it revealed the ones who were targeted, which then led to their quick deaths in huge numbers. The Bosniaks and Croats may have lost strength and hope amongst friends who were put into a different category and then separated from them. The classification was what helped the perpetrators target the non-Serbs in the invaded areas.

Second Stage: Symbolization

Symbolization is where the perpetrators of the genocide label the targeted group physically with symbols related to their beliefs.

For example, in the Bosnian Genocide, the Serbs labeled the Bosniaks and Croats with their religious symbols. The symbol of Islam for the Bosniaks and the symbol of Roman Catholicism for the Croats. They also gave the targeted groups names, such as “Bosniaks”, “Muslims”, and “Croats”. Civilians in Bosnia were labeled in separate categories as Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks. The discrimination among the groups was evolving and was intensified by the new leader, Slobodan Milosevic. This stage was one of the earliest and key moments leading up to the genocide.

This stage in genocide affected the victims through essentially tagging them and marking them for future murder. The Bosniaks and Croats did not appreciate being labeled like this and lots felt fear for what fate had chosen for them at that moment. The Serbs wanted to first find them, make them suffer, and then at last kill them. Also, as the Serbian forces and other Serbs would see that people were non-Serbs, they would then treat them differently, as if they were not human, because of all of the propaganda made on them that portrayed them as bad things that should not be there to live. It also even frightened the victims, because they almost all knew of their imminent death, because of the labels/symbols forced to be made into their clothing for the world to see, for the Serbs to find later, torture, and eventually kill. Again, like classification, the first of genocide, symbolization revealed the target in the genocide more vividly for their long-time enemies and they would fear being caught for having the label of their religion on them. The Serbs made the Bosniaks and Croats fear even their own beliefs because of the situation they were in for their religion. They cursed at themselves for revealing their beliefs and allowing them to be labeled. The victims of the Bosnian Genocide really suffered from all of this and were impacted hugely because of the fear the Serbs had injected in them. They had wanted to run off, but it was too late for that. Restrictions for the Bosniaks and Croats were soon coming by the controlling hand of the invading Serbs, caught in their violent acts.

Third Stage: Dehumanization

Dehumanization is when the perpetrators alienate the targeted group; they make them not feel welcome there. During this portion of the genocide, the victims are portrayed as animals; as things that are not human and are not worthy of even living. This can also help the perpetrators by teaching the victims to overcome the automatic human revulsion against murder, they make it seem as though it is not even murder, just removing worthless beings that should not live. That is what they believed and that is what they thought.

In the Bosnian Genocide, the Bosniaks and Croats were seen as toxic and destructive to the “purity” of the Serbian religion. To add on to the dehumanization of Bosniaks and Croats, Serbian forces would also advertise propaganda to make them feel like they did not belong in their own country. They were often perceived as “aliens” or just simply “others”. There were also hate speeches about the non-Serbs conducted by the government-controlled media, who also portrayed the non-Serbs as rude, mean, selfish, and evil to make them seem as outcasts; as non persons. There were even hate radio stations. All of this propaganda was used against the Bosniaks and Croats to portray them as though they were not even human at all and that they did not deserve to live among the Serbs. The Serbs believed that they were pure and did not want to be “infected” and become impure by the non-Serbs in their minds.

The dehumanization stage of the Bosnian Genocide affected the targeted non-Serbs with the propaganda created and all of the hate driven towards them. The victims were then seen as animals by others and so they were not treated as humans were. They were not allowed into places and were not allowed to go out after a certain time in some areas conquered by the Serbs. The victims simply lost hope in the others who did not see past the lies of propaganda and hate-media. Due to this, the non-Serbs felt degraded from who they once were because of the abuse and embarrassment they had endured.

Fourth Stage: Organization

The organization stage of genocide is when the government that is conducting the genocide begins to gather weapons, troops, vehicles, and anything else that could help them with completing the task. The armies are trained and armed with weapons, preparing for the mass murders, while the government finalizes their plans for the genocide. This is where pretty much everything is readied for the genocide, but there is still a stage of preparation within the genocide.

Now, the organization for this particular genocide is quite complex. When the Bosniaks and Croats decided to secede themselves, the Serbs acted in violence. The actions done by the Serbs in Bosnia had to have been planned. During World War II, the Serbs held Bosniaks and Croats in 677 concentration camps and centers, all under their control. The creation and takeover of those concentration camps must have taken lots of organization from the invading Serbians. The Serbians also had to organize for the siege of Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, and this alone killed many. They had to have organized to create a military blockade for the capital of Bosnia, their enemies' country. Another show of organization within this genocide, is how the Serbians shelled, bombed, and pillaged cities. Then they ran through the streets of those cities and slaughtered any non-Serbs, consisting of Bosniaks and Croats.

The organization in this genocide really impacted the victims because this was the stage where the perpetrators would start to be ready to conduct the genocide and so it was just preparation to what would come, in the later stages. It was siege and control. The victims lost what they had, were quickly invaded, and put into one of many concentration camps. The victims were not entirely impacted during this stage, but they were to be later in. This stage was just more preparation for the genocide and the victims were affected by the later stages, but this stage is what made those later stages happen, because it was just preparation for them.

Fifth Stage: Polarization

During polarization, we see public humiliation and dehumanization reach an all time high as well as new restraints against the victims; any ideas to break the victim's last bonds were used. Ultimately, the Bosniaks, Croatsians, and pretty much all of the non-Serbs were, now in this stage of polarization, separated from the Serbs of Bosnia. The group of non-Serbs were driven away from the Serbs for the Bosnian Serbs' "protection".

In Bosnia, the list of titles the Bosnians, Croatsians, and non-Serbs were deemed stockpiled while the Serbian forces started to come up with new ways to break apart their victims even more. Laws soon came into effect to break up any current marriages between Serbians and non-Serbs and to prevent future ones from occurring. Ultimately it had reached a point where Serbians and non-Serbs were not allowed to speak or make eye contact with each other. Had you violated this law and you had the potential to be executed on spot. Victims now had to restart their lives with a new partner and had restraints on who they could spend the rest of their lives with. A small portion of the victims also faced an unjust death for violating an unjust law. Overall, social interaction between non-Serbs and Serbs had been restricted and they were prohibited from marrying someone of the other "group". There was no absolute interaction between the two parties; it had ceased. And this obviously has some huge negative impact on the victims involved in this.

Bosniaks and Croatsians were impacted pretty hard by this whole separation between them and others. They lost the strength and hope they would have found in others, like their friends and family, but they were also Serbs and so they were forced to be separated. They were impacted by losing their companions and being left behind to die from the separation. They would lose their loved ones who were of the opposite group and would feel like there was no need to live no more. The Serbians had truly taken many of the non-Serbs' hope with this stage, making many of those who lost ones they loved just give up in the end and not care what happened to them no matter what it was that was done to them.

Sixth Stage: Preparation

Preparation consists of the perpetrators guiding the victims down the line of death; with all this build up, we land in the middle of all previous steps and mass execution.

During the Bosnian Genocide, men, women and children were being transported everywhere throughout the country and cycled through labor camps and concentration camps. Throughout all the many different stops the cable cars were told to go to, orders came in specifying new camps and new restrictions on current camps. All camps became gender specific and new “Rape camps” were built.

For the victims, this ultimately tore apart any last family members that were still together and brought an increase of death numbers. Many family trees stood incomplete due to a random surge of disappearance throughout family members. Thousands of unplanned pregnancies started to pop up and hundreds of delivered babies were never documented.

Seventh Stage: Extermination

Extermination is the largest stage in a genocide and is the act that deems it a “true” genocide. This is the process of the eradication and elimination of the race/religious group that the previous six stages have been preparing for.

In the Bosnian Genocide, from August, 1992 to June 1995 approximately 3000 non-Serbs were killed by Serbian forces. Portions of the number are split up and divided between: public fear, unjust murders, concentration camps and the small efforts of retaliation from the Bosnian crowd when Serbian powers started to rise.

At the start of July, 1995 Serbian forces began “ethnic cleansing ” on the mixed populations they had been preserving for three years now. The killings were swift and subtle, but lasted for the duration of the month. The starting place for the genocide was around four or five thousand dead, but that number slowly rose up to eight thousand killings a day. From there the line that described the number of killings per day fluctuated down and up. No official number nor date was found for highest number of deaths in one day. Through complex averages and corpse investigation world wide sources were able to conclude that approximately one hundred thousand Bosnian Serbs, Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats were murdered.

Eighth Stage: Denial

Denial is the stage in which we witness the perpetrators try and cover up what they have done. Actions similar to: removing the bodies, assassinating and survivors, denying the genocide and blaming the victims have been taken with genocides before the Bosnian.

In the Bosnian Genocide, little actions were taken to deny what the Serbian forces had done, but some steps were taken. After July all secret Serbian army militia was ordered to burn bodies and clothes. The leader of the Serbian forces, Radovan Karadzic, also went in hiding for ten years as a Bosnian doctor and was later found and sentenced to forty years in prison the count of genocide.

It also seems that with how little information there is on this specific genocide, it almost worked. The main reason behind denial is for the perpetrators to not get caught and not to be remembered, when today, very few people know about this genocide. This almost puts deceased victims to shame if we can't remember what they were fighting for.

What Can We Learn From The Bosnian Genocide?

The Bosniaks and Croats had suffered a great loss to their people, while some had accepted their fate, others had a thirst for revenge for the Serbs violent acts of hatred toward them and their people. Lots of the surviving perpetrators were assassinated by Bosniaks and Croats, while others were sought out and charged for their crimes by the ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia). Over the next twenty years after the genocide, more than 160 individuals were charged with crimes they committed during the whole conflict within the former Yugoslavia, which was then Bosnia, Slovenia, and Croatia. One of the main perpetrators of the genocide, Slobodan Milosevic, the leader of Yugoslavia at the time who led the Serbs into Bosnia to conduct the genocide, served as his own defense lawyer. There were long delays in the trial because of his poor health, and in 2006, Milosevic was found dead in his prison cell. We think that these events of genocide have absolutely affected/impacted countries in how they respond to the genocide now. The leaders of countries will see these mass killings, look at their own people whom they lead, and not want anything like that to happen to them. Leaders would never want any intentional mass killings to happen to their people, they would want to protect them and so they would understand and feel for those who had to undergo that kind of pain - watching their own people slaughtered before them by others whom they had no wanted conflict with or no quarrel with them. These kinds of events in genocide have certainly changed the ways people look at this kind of stuff - from people living out on the streets to the President of the United States, everyone would understand how horrible genocide can be for anyone because of the cruelty and brutality that would be done to their beloved people in their own country. No one wants that and almost no one wants to perpetrate that kind of behavior. We need to have better security with each other and make love contagious, so the fighting/conflict may stop for once and there could be peace at last amongst our people. We must accept each other.

Croatia was invaded in 1991 by Serbian forces to protect the 12% of Orthodox Serbs.

The two groups of Serbs and non-Serbs have been supposedly fighting since 1054.

The Serbs and Bosnian Serbs did not agree with the beliefs of the Bosniaks and Croats, so there was of course conflict and war between them. At the time of the genocide, there was a war brewing still among the conflicting parties.