

Speak Rwanda Julian R. Pierce

About the book

Speak Rwanda is Julian Pierce's debut novel about the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Pierce chooses not to see from the largely observational role of international workers, but instead focuses on the genocide from 10 different Rwandan perspectives. Amongst the characters are Tutsi victims and Hutu *genocidaires*, civilians and soldiers, adults and children. By choosing these intertwining narratives, Pierce is able to present both the intense violence of the genocide and the reactions and motivations for perpetrators, victims and bystanders. For both Silas Bagambiki and Augustin Makizimana, taking part in the killings is a means to personal gain by asserting power and identity. When Agnes Mujawanaliya, a Hutu nurse, witnesses the slaughter of innocent neighbours she is compelled to risk her life and offer medical assistance to victims. We also see the genocide through the eyes of two RPF soldiers who are struggling with their desire for vengeance against Hutu killers and the need to rebuild Rwanda after the genocide. The story of Innocent is particularly poignant, showing how the destructive force of the genocide can force even children to make stark choices in order to survive. Through the eyes of 10 different fictional characters, Pierce demonstrates both the harrowing violence of the genocide and its unavoidable impact on all areas of Rwandan life. Whilst *Speak Rwanda* remains a work of fiction, it bears testament to the horrors of the extremist racial violence that took at least 800,000 lives in 100 days in 1994.

About the Author

Julian Pierce is an American writer who has worked and travelled throughout Africa. *Speak Rwanda* is his first novel.

Discussion Questions

Please note that some of these questions will act as spoilers for the book.

1. why does the author choose to show both the Hutu Power ideology, and personal motivations, as reasons for participation in the genocide?
2. what are the effects of portraying the violence of the genocide in graphic and harrowing detail, as the author does several times?

3. on pages 258-259, why does Stephen react so angrily to a journalist's tactless question, and what is the broader meaning of this incident?
4. from the redemption of some characters, and punishment of others, how does the author see Rwanda's prospects for the future?

You can use HMDT resources to find out more about the Rwandan Genocide

<http://www.hmd.org.uk/genocides/rwanda>

Read a Freddy Mutanguha's story of survival

<http://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/survivor-stories/rwandan-testimony-freddy-mutanguha>

Or find out how Jean Paul Samputu uses music to campaign for reconciliation and forgiveness <http://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/dance/jean-paul-samputu>.