

*“World Community Failed Rwanda”
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Using newly declassified government documents and dozens of interviews, the September 2001 issue of The Atlantic Monthly contains an article (see pages 84-108), “Bystanders to Genocide: Why the United States Let the Rwandan Tragedy Happen,” that documents the activities within the U.S. Government during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Among other things, the author, Samantha Power, documents not only that the United States decided not to send troops, but it led efforts to remove what UN peacekeepers were in Rwanda and to block an authorization to send UN reinforcements, it refused to use its technology to jam the radio broadcasts that encouraged and directed the *Interahamwe* (the Kinyarwanda name used by the killing groups), and it even resisted using the term “genocide” when describing the events in Rwanda “for fear of being obliged to act”.

Perhaps more saddening than Power’s conclusion that “the U.S. government knew enough about the genocide early on to save lives, but passed up countless opportunities to intervene,” is the fact that most Rwandans do not have access to this article.

Only with the building of the Kigali Public Library and other institutions and mechanisms to make the outside world accessible to Rwandans can we hope that such vital information reaches those who are most affected by it. When scholarly and cultural exchange is truly a global activity, not only will humans be less likely to commit atrocities (Philip Gourevitch and others list extreme ignorance and superstition as one of the main causes of the Rwandan genocide) but the horrors of the most remote places in the world will be revealed to all, eliminating the justification for inaction that “we did not know.”