

Hotel Rwanda

The Cast

PAUL RUSESABAGINA . . . Don Cheadle

COLONEL OLIVER Nick Nolte

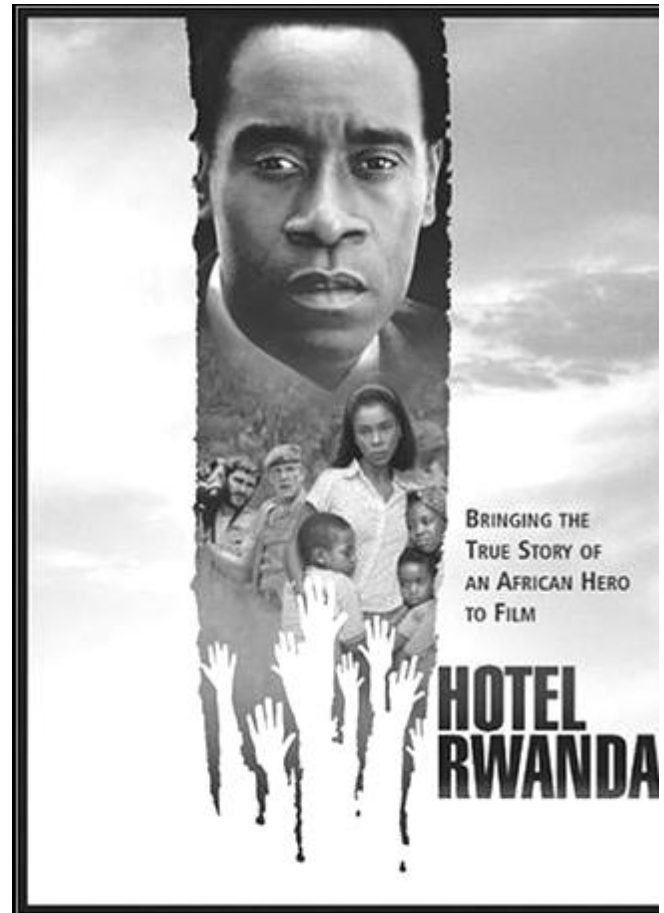
TATIANA Sophie Okonedo

Directed by Terry George. 110 minutes.
2004.

In 1994 in Rwanda, a million members of the Tutsi tribe were killed by members of the Hutu tribe in a massacre that took place while the world looked away. "Hotel Rwanda" is not the story of that massacre. It is the story of a hotel manager who saved the lives of 1,200 people by being, essentially, a very good hotel manager.

The man is named Paul Rusesabagina, a man of quiet, steady competence in a time of chaos. This is not the kind of man the camera silhouettes against mountaintops, but the kind of man who knows how things work in the real world, who uses his skills of bribery, flattery, apology and deception to save these lives who have come into his care.

Hotel managers would make excellent diplomats. They speak several languages. They are discreet. They know how to function appropriately in different cultures. They know when a bottle of scotch will repay itself six times over. They know how to handle complaints. And they know everything that happens under their roof, from the millionaire in the penthouse to the bellboy who can get you a girl.



Paul is such a hotel manager. He is a Hutu, married to a Tutsi named Tatiana. He has been trained in Belgium and runs the four-star Hotel Des Milles Collines in the capital city of Kigali. He does his job very well. He understands that when a general's briefcase is taken for safekeeping, it contains bottles of good scotch when it is returned. He understands that to get the imported beer he needs, a bribe must take place. He understands that his guests are accustomed to luxury, which must be supplied even here in a tiny central African nation wedged against Tanzania, Uganda and the Congo. Do these understandings make him a bad man? Just the opposite. They make him an expert on situational ethics. The result of all the things he knows is that the hotel runs well and everyone is happy.

Then the genocide begins, suddenly, but after a long history. Rwanda's troubles began, as so many African troubles began, when European colonial powers established nations that ignored traditional tribal boundaries. Enemy tribes were forced into the same land. For years in Rwanda under the Belgians, the Tutsis ruled and killed not a few Hutu. Now the Hutus are in control, and armed troops prowl the nation, killing Tutsis.

There is a United Nations "presence" in Rwanda, represented by Canadian Colonel Oliver. Oliver--steady, wise, cynical and a master of the possible--came to Rwanda as a peacekeeper, and now there is no peace to keep. He sees what is happening, informs his superiors, asks for help and intervention, and is ignored. Paul Rusesabagina informs the corporate headquarters in Brussels of the growing tragedy, but the hotel in Kigali is not the chain's greatest concern. The nations of the world are united in their indifference toward Rwanda. It finally comes down to these two men acting as free-lancers to save more than a thousand lives they have somehow become responsible for.

Colonel Oliver makes a considered choice in ignoring his orders and doing what he can do, right now, right here, to save lives.

Paul Rusesabagina intuitively understands that only by continuing to act as a hotel manager can he achieve anything. His hotel is hardly functioning, the economy has broken down, the country is ruled by anarchy, but he puts on his suit and tie every morning and fakes business as usual -- even on a day he is so frightened, he cannot tie his tie.

He deals with a murderous Hutu general, for example, not as an enemy or an outlaw, but as a longtime client who knows that the value of a good cigar cannot be measured in cash. Paul has trained powerful people in Kigali to consider the Hotel Des Milles Collines an oasis of sophistication and decorum, and now he

pretends that is still the case. It isn't, but it works as a strategy because it cues a different kind of behavior; a man who has yesterday directed a mass murder might today want to show that he knows how to behave appropriately in the hotel lobby.

How the 1,200 people come to be "guests" in the hotel is a chance of war. Some turn left, some right, some live, some die. Paul is concerned above all with his own family. As a Hutu, he is safe, but his wife is Tutsi, his children are threatened, and in any event, he is far beyond thinking in tribal terms. He has spent years storing up goodwill and now he calls in favors. He moves the bribery up another level. He hides people in his hotel. He lies. He knows how to use a little blackmail: Sooner or later, he tells a powerful general, the world will take a reckoning of what happened in Kigali, and if Paul is not alive to testify for him, who else will be believed?

Hotel Rwanda is not about hotel management, but about heroism and survival. Rusesabagina and North both rise to the challenge.

BY ROGER EBERT / April 19, 2004

Assignment: After viewing the film *Hotel Rwanda*, and reading the article *Conspirators, Killers, and Victims*, as well as the Rwanda Chronology, answer the following questions:

1. When do you suspect the problem between the Hutus and Tutsis originated? Discuss.
2. How could the genocide have been prevented?
3. After the violence had erupted, how could further escalation have been prevented?
4. How effective (or ineffective) was the U.N. response to the Rwandan Genocide? Discuss.
5. Is the situation in Rwanda a problem which might be applicable to other countries in Africa (i.e., Nigeria)? If so, where?