

Column1 Are Hutu and Tutsi Different "Ethnic Groups"?

Hutu and Tutsi inhabit Rwanda and Burundi in Central Africa. There are no significant linguistic or religious differences between them and they both live in mixed settlements, however, violent ethnic conflicts have erupted between these groups.

The divisions between these groups are based more upon social class than ethnicity. In the pre-colonial era when they were ruled as a kingdom, a large share of the ruling class was Tutsi, while most Hutu were in the lower class.

When Germany and Belgium colonized both countries in the early 20th century, they treated Tutsi and Hutu as different races. Tension heightened between the two groups due to several factors including: 1) institutionalization of a Tutsi-dominated political system as a tool for colonial rule, and 2) discrimination against Hutu. Previous studies have revealed that ethnic identity in terms of Tutsi and Hutu was much less important before colonization.