

Survivor calls hate speech the language of genocide

Lecturers discuss what conditions lead to the Rwandan genocide and the Holocaust, as well as how to prevent further atrocities

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News Staff

When Dr Tharcisse Seminega and his family emerged after hiding in a dark underground room for over a month, their skin had been deprived of sunlight for so long they were nearly unrecognizable. But, it was because of their hiding spot that Seminega and his family survived the genocide of Tutsis that occurred in Rwanda in 1994.

On 1 February, Seminega and Len Rudner of the Canadian Jewish Congress presented a talk entitled "Lessons from Hatred. Genocide: Beyond Terror, Systematic Mass Destruction," organized by Hillel, the Jewish students' association on campus, as part of International Week.

Seminega told his family's story of survival, and both men discussed reasons why genocides occur and the lessons that people can learn from them. They also drew comparisons between the Rwandan genocide and the Holocaust.

The night Seminega's family escaped from their home to go into hiding, a friend came to warn him that someone was coming to kill him. He was surprised to learn that when the militia arrived at his house, one of Seminega's colleagues had come with them to identify him as a Tutsi.

"You were wondering why you just became the enemy overnight," Seminega said, recalling the fear as his family fled to hide in horrid conditions—situation Rudner paralleled

with the Nazi targeting of the Jews.

Seminega explained that before Belgian colonists arrived in the 20th century, the land was occupied by three groups (the Batwa, the Hutus and the Tutsis) who lived in relative peace. But the newly arrived colonists favoured the minority Tutsis above the other groups, and when Rwanda finally gained independence in 1962, the previously repressed Hutus came into power with an axe to grind against the Tutsis. Tensions escalated until 1994, when the government began killing the Tutsis, Seminega said.

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LEN RUDNER

"The conflict was misrepresented and distorted," Seminega said of the government propaganda, circulated prior to the genocide. According to Seminega, the government told Hutus to kill Tutsis, so that the Tutsis wouldn't kill them first.

While Seminega spoke about the Rwandan genocide, Rudner focused on the Holocaust during World War II. In



JAMES CHAULK

HARROWING TALES Tharcisse Seminega recalls his terrifying time spent hiding from militias in Rwanda during the 1990s

2004, he visited Majdanek, a Holocaust concentration camp in Poland. There he saw the same weeds that grew in his own garden, leading him to believe that the atrocities can be committed anywhere.

"If the same weeds can grow in Majdanek as grow in my own garden, then how can I imagine the evil that grew in this place can grow nowhere else?" Rudner asked.

Rudner said that his studies of diaries written by Nazi special police battalions revealed terrifying truths

about the genocide.

"What was frightening was the ordinariness of their days. 'We went to work. It went well,'" Rudner quoted from the diaries.

Additionally, Rudner quoted an SS officer who knew of no Nazis who were killed for refusing to execute Jews, despite popular opinion to the contrary. They did it, Rudner said, because they saw nothing wrong with killing Jews.

Rudner argued that people who want to spread hate use language as

their weapon.

"Jews were referred to as lice, bacteria, vermin; in Rwanda, the Tutsis were referred to as cockroaches," Rudner said, noting that for this reason, the lessons from the Holocaust and Rwandan genocide must extend beyond "never again."

"Hate speech must not find protection in this country. A person's right to speak must be balanced against another person's right not to be the target of hateful speech," Rudner concluded.

CAMPUS CRIME BEAT

Compiled by Mike Otto

BYSTANDERS DODGE SAAB STORY

At 6:10pm on 29 January, Campus Security assisted bystanders near Newton Place who pulled a woman off 112 Street. The woman was seen running around in traffic and in front of cars, in an apparent attempt to invite harm upon herself. The artful dodger was promptly taken to the hospital

and was left there for treatment and assessment.

CRASHING THEIR CASH CACHE

Around 31 January, roughly \$200 in cash was grabbed from an office in the basement of the Mechanical Engineering Building. The crooked culprits made off with the stolen bills by slicing the lock off a cabinet and prying their way inside. There were no other signs of forced entry into the room.

CONSTABLE ACTS ON A HUNCH

At 12:39am on 2 February, a constable on patrol noticed a vehicle parked the

wrong way on the side of the road, north of the Fine Arts Building.

He called the vehicle's information in and, sure enough, it had earlier been reported stolen. The Edmonton Police Service was contacted and the vehicle was towed.

A LESS SUBTLE KIND OF THIEF

On the morning of 2 February, a number of vehicles were burglarized while parked at Foote Field. One car's contents were swiped via a broken window, and another two had items jacked from the glovebox. The perpetrator also attempted to crack open a truck with a

pry tool, but was ultimately unsuccessful in his quest for more loot.

The items that were stolen from the first car were found by 5-0 in the parking lot of the Balmoral Club a short time later.

HELP WITH A GYPSUM REJECTION

At 4pm on 2 February, a sketchy old fellow approached a female student in Lister Hall, and made enquiries about her academic career and future professional plans. More specifically, he asked what subject she was studying, and if she had ever considered the exciting world of drywalling as a

possible career path.

Given that the University has no such specialization program and has no plans to hand out drywalling degrees, the answer should be obvious. The young woman began to feel uncomfortable and left the area. Another female student reported a similar encounter later in the day.

The man in question is a roughly 50-year-old Caucasian with grey hair, and wearing a dark blue or black toque and green pants. Anyone one who spots the man, or has any information, is encouraged to call Campus Security at 492-5050.



Exhibit A



Exhibit B

One of these was drawn by a famous artist.

The other was drawn by a Gateway illustrator

GATEWAY
Illustration

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Contest is only open to students currently enrolled at a Canadian post-secondary institution. The good news is it's available for a very limited time, so your odds of winning are awesome.

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