

The Rwandan Genocide

Rafael Medoff

New York Times, January 10, 2014

To the Editor : Re “Rwanda’s Shrouded Nightmare” (Op-Ed, Jan. 10) :

Michael Dobbs contends that the possibility of intervention by the United States in the 1994 Rwanda genocide was hampered by an absence of “stronger intelligence” about the killings and the challenges of trying to “make sense” of what was happening in Africa.

Samantha Power suggested otherwise in her Pulitzer Prize-winning book, “A Problem From Hell.” Ms. Power, now the United States ambassador to the United Nations, reported that within weeks after the mass murder began, the Clinton administration — and the public — had ample information about it. The killings began on April 7 and continued until well into July. As early as April 23, a New York Times editorial stated, “What looks

very much like genocide has been taking place in Rwanda.”

Ms. Power showed that the main obstacle to American action was not lack of information but political considerations. She cited a memo from a Defense Department official reporting that the State Department was “worried” that acknowledging that genocide was underway “could commit [the United States] to actually ‘do something.’ ”

She also quoted Susan E. Rice, then director of Africa affairs for the National Security Council, asking in one discussion among policy makers, “If we use the word ‘genocide’ and are seen as doing nothing, what will be the effect on the November [Congressional] election?”

RAFAEL MEDOFF

Director, David S. Wyman

Institute for Holocaust Studies