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# A Superpower Apologizes? President Clinton's Address in Rwanda

Jason A. Edwards

*Bridgewater State University*, [j3edwards@bridgew.edu](mailto:j3edwards@bridgew.edu)

Thomasena Shaw

*Bridgewater State University*, [thomasena.shaw@bridgew.edu](mailto:thomasena.shaw@bridgew.edu)

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## A Superpower Apologizes? President Clinton's Address in Rwanda

**Jason A. Edwards**

Associate Professor

Department of Communication Studies

Bridgewater State University

[Jasonedwards57@hotmail.com](mailto:Jasonedwards57@hotmail.com)

**Thomasena Shaw**

Assistant Professor

Department of Communication Studies

Bridgewater State University

[Thomasena.shaw@bridgew.edu](mailto:Thomasena.shaw@bridgew.edu)

### **Abstract**

*The failure to intervene in Rwanda was one of the greatest foreign policy mishaps of Bill Clinton's presidency. In March 1998, Clinton made an extended tour of the African subcontinent with a stop in Rwanda. During his brief visit, the president attempted to repair the image of the United States among Rwandans and the broader international community. Clinton used three primary image repair strategies: democratization of blame, corrective action, and transcendence. Despite his emphasis on the important lessons that the world could learn from the Rwandan genocide, we argue that his rhetorical choices ultimately undermined his larger mission and led to the mixed response he received from pundits, politicians, and policymakers.*

### **Introduction**

On April 6, 1994, a plane carrying the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi was shot down over the central African nation of Rwanda. The assassination of these political leaders was a signal to Rwanda's Hutu led majority government to begin committing genocidal atrocities against the minority Tutsis. In a little over 100 days an estimated 800,000-1 million Rwandans lost their lives in the genocide. During this time period, the United States, the United Nations, and other nation-states did nothing to stem the violence. U.N. Secretary General Boutros-Boutros Ghali publicly castigated the international community for its inaction and implored the U.N. Security Council to do something. As he noted at a press conference in the early stages of the genocide, "All of us are responsible for this failure. It is genocide which has been committed. More than 200,000 people have been killed, and . . . the international community is still discussing what ought to be done" (Meisler, 1994, p. A6). Five years later, a genocide panel looking into the inaction of the United Nations came up with a similar finding when it stated "incompetence of the United Nations, coupled with the political paralysis of the United States and other powers, led to the failure to stop the murder of as many 800,000 Rwandans" (Lynch, 1999, p. A29). The reason why the United States did not intervene can be traced to the Clinton administration's foreign policy failure in Somalia – the scene of a disastrous U.S. military intervention in 1993, where 18 American soldiers and an estimated 500 to 2,000 Somalis were killed during a peacekeeping mission in Mogadishu. Because of that foreign policy debacle the administration issued strict guidelines about committing the United States to further peacekeeping missions. Rwanda was the first test of that policy. The Clinton administration, fearing another Somalia, did little to intervene or convince other nations to put their troops in harm's way (Preston & Williams, 1994). Stephen Pope (1999) summarized the criticism leveled at the Clinton administration suc-

cinctly when he stated “the United States leadership and the entire international community, especially Belgium, France, and the United States, failed completely in their responsibility during this tragedy” (p. 8). Considering President Clinton actively promoted the United States as the “indispensable nation” America’s failure to intervene in Rwanda certainly harmed its image as a world leader and defender of civilization - particularly in the eyes of Rwandans and Africans.

Four years after the genocide, President Clinton made a groundbreaking trip to Africa where he wanted to introduce the “American people to a new Africa” (French, 1998). Clinton’s six-nation trip was the most extensive tour of Africa undertaken by an American president and the first trip by a U.S. president since Jimmy Carter (French, 1998). Part of Clinton’s trip was a stop in Kigali, Rwanda. During this three and a half hour visit (he never left the airport because of security concerns), the president visited with genocide survivors, met with Rwandan national leaders, and delivered an address meant to repair America’s image and attempt to rebuild relations with Rwanda, the United States, and the international community. Ultimately, we argue that while Clinton’s address was meant to outline lessons that could be learned from the genocide, his rhetorical choices undermined his larger efforts, leading to a mixed response from pundits and politicians.

Clinton’s Rwandan address deserves scholarly merit for several reasons. First, the essay adds another interesting dimension to Benoit’s image repair theory by arguing that Clinton engaged in the rhetorical strategy of democratization of blame, which we maintain can be another form of denial. Second, while there have been a number of image repair studies that explore how political figures have employed the strategies, most i) focus on the politician’s character failings rather than a specific policy issues (see Benoit & McHale, 1999; Blaney & Benoit, 2001; Dewberry & Fox, 2012), and ii) few examine the success or failure of their efforts in an international context (for exceptions see Wena, Yu, and Benoit, 2009, 2012; Zhang & Benoit, 2004, 2009). This essay addresses those omissions in scholarship. Finally, while Clinton’s rhetorical choices may have ultimately undermined his overall purpose and altered the legacy of the presidency and the international community at that time; they also offer insights into the challenges involved in attempting to negotiate a nation’s image internationally, especially when mistakes have been made.

Having outlined the purpose and contributions the essay makes, we provide the reader with a theoretical discussion of image repair theory, before using it to examine President Clinton’s Rwanda address. Finally, we draw implications from the analysis.

### **Image Repair Theory**

Communication scholars have paid significant attention to the rhetorical dimensions of attempts by politicians, corporations, governments, and entertainers to repair their image for many years (see Benoit, 1995a, 1995b, 1997; Benoit & McHale, 1999; Dewberry & Fox, 2012; Moody, 2011; Welsh & McCallister-Spooner, 2011; Stein, 2008, 2010; Wena, Yu & Benoit, 2009, 2012; Zhang & Benoit, 2004, 2009). One of the foundational aspects of image repair theory is the rhetorical genre of apologia. According to Ware and Linkugel (1973) apologia is a speech of self-defense, typically because someone has accused another of various acts of wrongdoing. When confronted with an attack on one’s character and/or policy, Ware and Linkugel reasoned that rhetors could use four strategies to repair damaged ethos: denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence. Ware and Linkugel’s ideas have more recently been subsumed into image repair research. Benoit (1995a) asserted that creating and maintaining one’s image is a primary communicative activity. Moreover, if that image has been damaged in some way then a

response, an attempt at image repair, is essential to a rhetor. In composing his theory, Benoit offers a typology of five general approaches, with multiple sub-strategies, rhetors might use to rebuild their image.

In Benoit's (1995a) work the first general strategy is denial. Denial can come in two forms. *Simple denial* is where the speaker clearly states they did not commit the act they were accused of committing. The second form, *shifting the blame* (also known as victimage), concedes the action occurred but moves the responsibility for its occurrence to another party. Both of these strategies allow a speaker to deny wrongdoing.

The second broad category supplied by Benoit is evading responsibility, which contains four specific rhetorical postures. Provocation occurs when the speaker claims the offensive action was the result of responding to the negative actions of another; in essence, they were provoked, and therefore responsibility does not lie with them, but with the person who invited their response. A second strategy for evading responsibility is *defeasibility*, which happens when the person argues that events outside of their control caused the action. In attempts to evade responsibility speakers also might argue that the wrongful act was *accidental*, and thus not their fault. Finally, sometimes speakers will claim they had *good intentions* when they committed the act in an attempt to evade responsibility. Ultimately, all four of these strategies represent attempts to avoid taking responsibility for an offensive act, thus repairing, at least in part, the damage done to an image.

Benoit's third category, reducing offensiveness, contains the most sub-strategies for image repair: six. The first of these, *bolstering*, takes place when the speaker extols virtuous and good qualities they possess in an attempt to engender positive feelings toward them while simultaneously making the action they committed seem less offensive. Secondly, an accused person or group can argue the offense was not as offensive as it is made out to be, thus *minimizing* its damage. Speakers can also *differentiate* the offensiveness of an act by comparing it to other, far more aberrant and distasteful actions. Rhetors can also attempt *transcendence* by placing the action in a broader more positive light. Fifth, the accused can turn the tables and *attack the accuser's* credibility and motives, thus making their offense even viler than the one committed by the speaker. The final method of reducing offensiveness is *compensation*, because it attempts to reimburse the victims of the offense, although this does not necessarily come with an admission of guilt.

The fourth category of image repair strategies available to speakers is corrective action, and like denial it comes in two forms. In the first form the accused offers to *repair* any damage that resulted from the offending action. Sometimes this involves charitable giving, volunteering, or even seeking professional assistance. In the event that the action's damage cannot be reversed, speakers can take a second form of corrective action whereby they enumerate plans to *prevent the recurrence* of the offending act. Both of these strategies show a willingness to materially participate in the repair of an image, but again, neither necessarily accompanies an admission of guilt.

The admission of guilt, or *mortification*, is the final image restoration category explicated by Benoit. This is when a speaker takes full responsibility for their actions and apologizes to those damaged by the offense. Often, admissions of guilt are accompanied by other strategies from the other categories, and when done well by a speaker an image can be quickly repaired. In the case of President Clinton's Rwandan visit/address we argue that while the president did achieve some success by employing several of these strategies, his rhetoric undercut his reconciliation efforts.

## President Clinton's Address in Rwanda

President Clinton used a number of different strategies in his Rwandan image repair discourse. These strategies included mortification, transcendence, corrective action, and defeasibility. President Clinton embarked on a 12 day “upbeat tour” tour of several African nations with growing economies and strengthening democracies in March 1998. He delivered his Rwanda address during a three and a half hour stop-over on the tarmac at Kigali airport on March 25<sup>th</sup> 1998. He began with the traditional pleasantries, thanking the Rwandan President, Vice-President, and some genocide survivors for graciously greeting him and his U.S. delegation. Clinton then noted his primary purpose was to:

Pay the respects of my Nation to all who suffered and perished in the Rwandan genocide. It is my hope that through this trip, in every corner of the world today and tomorrow, their story will be told; that 4 years ago in this beautiful, green, lovely land, a clear and conscious decision was made by those in power that the peoples of this country would not live side by side in peace. (p. 495).

Clinton then proceeded to recount, albeit briefly, the composition of the genocide and how it was “not spontaneous or accidental” but rather a policy “aimed at the systematic destruction of a people” (p. 496). The Rwandan genocide demonstrated people’s capacity for evil, something Clinton asserted “we cannot abolish ... but we must never accept it. And we know it can be overcome” (p. 496). This rhetorical history and Clinton’s underlying tone suggested to those in attendance that the international community had made a “conscious decision” to not assist in stopping the genocide. Despite this inaction, however, Clinton implied that he, and the international community, may have learned some transcendent lesson for future U.S.-Rwandan nations: the United States must “overcome” its own political inertia so his promise of “never again” was more than empty rhetoric.

In the next section of his address, Clinton (1998) stated:

The international community, together with nations in Africa, must bear its share of responsibility for this tragedy, as well. We did not act quickly enough after the killing began. We should not have allowed the refugee camps to become safe havens for the killers. We did not immediately call these crimes by their rightful name: genocide. We cannot change the past, but we can and must do everything in our power to help you build a future without fear and full of hope (p. 495).

On the surface, it appears as if Clinton was using the strategy of mortification because he accepted, on behalf of the international community, blame for allowing the Rwandan genocide to leap out of control. As the leader of the United States and the implied leader of the international community, Clinton attempted to make the case that the entire world, including his administration (although he never singled out the United States for responsibility), failed to stop the deadly atrocities. However, we contend that Clinton engaged in a faux form of mortification. Mortification requires the rhetor admit blame for their specific actions. Clinton made no mention the mistakes the United States made regarding the Rwandan genocide. Instead, we maintain the president engaged in the strategy *democratization of blame* (Barnett, 2002). Democratization of blame involves spreading the blame across various rhetors, which makes everyone (not a specific entity) responsible for the offending act. In a sense, it is another strategy of (or akin to) denial because it appears as if the rhetor takes responsibility for their actions, but at the same time admits to no specific guilt. They deny any specific kind of wrongdoing. Clinton also stated “The international community, together with nations in Africa, must bear its share of responsibility for this tragedy” with the “we implied blame could be spread to every major power within the interna-

tional community, along with the United States. While it is laudable that the president admitted a foreign policy mistake, the 'sharing' of responsibility made Clinton's supposed confession a diffusion of any responsibility for American inaction. As the supposed world leader, the United States has a greater obligation to lead on global issues. In the above passage, he suggested that all countries can behave equally, that each has as much ability to stop global problems when they arise. In essence, the president denied the capacity of the United States to truly exert international leadership on this kind of issue. In doing so, he implied America cannot prevent future atrocities, and undermined the ability of Rwanda and other nations torn apart by mass atrocity to build a future "without fear and full of hope." Thus, Clinton's pledge to "never accept" genocide was severely undermined by his own words.

In that same passage, Clinton moved from democratization of blame into a strategy of transcendence by arguing that "we"—the United States, international community, and Rwandans—must move forward to "build a future without fear and full of hope." Indeed, transcendence appears to be the dominant strategy of Clinton's Rwanda address. On several occasions he attempted to take his audience out of its current position and paint a picture where a peaceful and prosperous future lies ahead for Rwanda if its people work in concert with the international community. Here, Clinton attempted to place the Rwandan genocide in a more positive light, providing an opportunity for Rwandans and the international community to learn valuable lessons from this tragedy. Clinton (1998) stated:

We owe to those who died and to those who survived and who loved them, our every effort to increase our vigilance and strengthen our stand against those who would commit such atrocities in the future, here or elsewhere. Indeed we owe to all the peoples of the world who are at risk because each bloodletting hastens the next as the value of human life is degraded and violence becomes tolerated . . . we owe to all the people in the world our best efforts to organize ourselves so that we can maximize the changes of preventing these events. And where they cannot be prevented, we can move more quickly to minimize the horror. So let us challenge ourselves to build a world in which no branch of humanity because of national, racial, ethnic, or religious origin, is again threatened with destruction because of those characteristics of which people should rightly be proud. Let us work together a community of civilized nations to strengthen our ability to prevent, and if necessary, to stop genocide. (pp. 496-497)

At the end of his address, Clinton (1998) advanced similar transcendent lessons about the Rwandan genocide. He noted:

And so I say to you, though the road is hard and uncertain and there are many difficulties ahead, and like every other person, who wishes to help, I doubt we will not be able to do everything I would like to do, there are things we can do. And if we set about the business of doing them together, you can overcome the awful burden that you have endured. You can put a smile on the face of every child in this country, and you can make people once again believe they should live as people were living who were singing to us and dancing for us today. That's what I believe. That is what I came here to say. And that is what I wish for you. Thank you and God bless you. (p. 499).

Throughout both passages Clinton attempted to weave the lessons of Rwandan genocide into a larger vision of what Rwanda, with help from the international community, could accomplish in the future. Clinton appeared to be stating that, while the genocide was a tragic event, the history of that event does not need to dominate the destiny of this nation. It demonstrated the capacity for evil that men have. Now that capacity is recognized and we can use it to build a better

future for Rwanda, Africa, and the world. The world owes a debt to those who died in the genocide and its accompanying survivors to be vigilant by identifying potential hotspots and engage in actions that would prevent this kind of tragedy again from occurring because these acts of violence ultimately tear at the fabric of the community humanity we all share. The world owes a debt to the genocide survivors and to humanity to “overcome the awful burden” of violence, putting in place mechanisms where people can work, live, and play together so that all may prosper on this small planet.

In some respects, Clinton’s transcendence was reminiscent of John F. Kennedy’s American University address in 1963. In that address, Kennedy (1963) attempted to build a bridge of peace with the Soviet Union by reducing the tension and “re-humanizing” the Soviets to some degree (see Kimble, 2009). The most famous line from that address, which has been repeated in other speeches and films was, “in the final analysis our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s future. And we are all mortal.” Indeed, Clinton’s transcendence was ‘Kennedyesque.’ For Clinton, the Rwandan genocide provided the opportunity for Rwanda and the international community to move forward together, not separated by ethnic and tribal tension as it was before the genocide, united in a common humanity where the future was bright for all Rwandans regardless of “national, racial, ethnic, or religious origin.”

Clinton’s message of transcendence, however, was undermined by other aspects of his address. For example, Clinton asserted he had a lack of control and information regarding the events within Rwanda. The president stated, “it may seem strange to you here . . . but all over the world there were people like me sitting in offices, day after day after day, who did not appreciate the depth and speed with which you were being engulfed by this unimaginable terror” (p. 497). In this passage, Clinton attempted to distance himself from charges that in 1994 his administration and other international leaders (such as U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan who attempted to apologize for the United Nations inaction during the Rwandan genocide), actually had much more information regarding the genocide but did nothing to stop it. However, Clinton’s claim of ignorance lacked credibility and belied the evidence from other sources. It is incomprehensible that a nation as powerful as the U.S., with its extensive and sophisticated network of satellites and intelligence, failed to understand the scope of the Rwandan genocide. Rather, looking back it seems clear that political exigency, not ignorance, was what caused America’s inaction. After the foreign policy debacle of Rwanda, the domestic political failure of healthcare, Clinton did not want to give ammunition to his Republican opponents who were castigating him as a weak and feckless leader. The lack of action within Rwanda also demonstrated the low priority sub-Saharan Africa received in the Clinton White House in the first term of his presidency. African countries were not part of America’s dominant set of national interests, thus they did not get the policy attention they deserve.

Additionally, Clinton’s claim he did not understand the depth and speed of the genocide runs contrary to accounts from various sources. For example, Alison DesForges (2000), a Human Rights Watch consultant, asserted US officials knew “two days, not two weeks, after the slaughter began on April 6” (p.141). Similarly, Harvard University Professor Samantha Power (2002) in her book *A Problem from Hell*, noted the Clinton administration did have knowledge of the rapidly deteriorating situation in Rwanda. Canadian General Romeo Dallaire (2003), who was in charge of the U.N. peacekeeping force within Rwanda immediately prior to the genocide, claimed he sent several reports to the United Nations about the escalation of ethnic conflict in Rwanda. Certainly, those reports would have been passed onto the U.N. Security Council and the

American Ambassador to the U.N. who could have contacted the president. While it is possible the president and "international community" did not appreciate the "speed" and "depth" of the Rwandan genocide, their inaction certainly cost time and, ultimately, lives. The situation was also hampered by limits placed on the United Nations Security Council (and the US military forces) to intervene, which clearly demonstrated weakness inherent in the international community's ability to deal with issues concerning ethnic cleansing and genocide at that time.

The final strategies Clinton employed were specific corrective actions he pledged the United States would take to ensure Rwanda could recover from the genocide, and measures to prevent its occurrence. First, the President directed his administration to "improve, with the international community, our system of identifying and spotlighting nations in danger of genocidal violence" so preventative measures can be taken to arrest any potential violence (p. 497). Second, the United States pledged to be the first nation to contribute \$2 million to Rwandan Genocide Survivors Fund so that genocide survivors and communities could find the care they need. Third, Clinton pledged more than \$30 million to a Great Lakes Judicial Initiative to create conditions for an "impartial, credible, and effective" judicial system to be built that would gain the respect of Rwandans, Burundi, Uganda, and other nations within Central Africa. Additionally, Clinton renewed America's support for an International Tribunal on the Rwandan Genocide, while pledging to assist Rwandan officials to try those responsible for war crimes. Finally, the president asserted that a permanent international court should be created to deal with crimes such as genocide, instead of a special tribunal that had to be set up by the United Nations. A permanent court furthered Clinton's transcendent ideals of humanity being judged by the same standards regardless of their origin.

Some of Clinton's corrective actions did assist with Rwanda's healing in the aftermath of the genocide. The Great Lakes Judicial initiative did lead to improved conditions in the judicial systems in Rwanda and Burundi. Moreover, it assisted in supporting the Gacaca court, which has been the primary place where perpetrators of the genocide have been prosecuted. However, the Clinton administration failed in its efforts to push for a system that would spotlight countries susceptible to genocidal violence. Indeed, between 2003 and 2004, less than 5 years after Clinton's address, it is estimated that as many as 300,000 people died in Darfur, a drought-prone region of western Sudan. (The Bush administration was quicker to label the situation as genocide despite UN uncertainty about whether it was or wasn't at the time.)

Indeed, the United States also did not move to create the permanent genocide tribunal that Clinton proposed. Instead, genocide trials are still either prosecuted under special tribunal (e.g. the Gacaca Court) or given special attention at the International Criminal Court within The Hague. At the time of this writing, few advances have been made to create a system that would prosecute individuals for genocide and no systematic prosecution for the crimes in Darfur have begun. To date, the United States (under the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations) has not pushed the issue at the United Nations either.

### **Audience Reception of Clinton's Address**

Although we have no polling data to evaluate Clinton's rhetorical efforts in Rwanda, press accounts indicate that reviews of Clinton's address were mixed at best. For example, Constance Freeman, Director of African Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington stated one of the "high points" of the trip was Clinton's meeting with survivors of the genocide, stating that "if this trip is nothing else but symbolism, it was well worth it" (Condon, 1998, p. A1). Davis (1998) claimed that the sustained applause from the crowd gathered at



the airport that day was as though “the country released a huge sigh of relief that, finally, the unacceptability of genocide had been acknowledged” (p.11B). Additionally, Clinton appeared visibly moved when interacting with survivors; Rwandans also appreciated that he agreed with Rwandan President Pasteur Bizimungu’s assertion that the genocide resulted not from ancient tribal differences, but from a “clear and conscious decision” by extremist political leaders (Strobel, 1998, p. A1). Bizimungu (1998) called the visit, “an elegant statement of your condemnation of the genocide, a sign of solidarity with the victims and a challenge to the international community to work to stem the recurrence of genocide” (para. 2). Tito Rutaremara, who survived political violence in Rwanda in 1959, 1962, 1967 and 1994, stated “Having the leader of the whole world coming to small Rwanda, it is a big difference.” He also stated that the United States “should have stopped the genocide” (Strobel, 1998, p. A1). An article in the *Financial Times* stated, “President Clinton’s Africa safari...has not only raised the profile of a marginalized continent...It has proved a salutary learning experience from Mr. Clinton. It has brought home to him the enormity of Africa’s problems and the inadequacy of the US response” (Educating Bill, 1998, p. 19).

Clinton’s address was also disparaged by many. Yael Aronoff (1998) argued that while Clinton’s apology exhibited genuine empathy, “It does not do enough to ensure that future genocides will be prevented or ended (p. A25). Theology professor Stephen Pope (1999) accused Clinton of word manipulation, castigating his apology as “superficial sentiment as a means of damage control, it amounted to an alibi for unconscionable negligence and even active obstruction of what any decent person would recognize as a duty to protect people from being massacred (p.8). A *Boston Globe* editorial called the apology “incomplete” and “misleading,” and London’s *Guardian* newspaper labeled the apology disingenuous, that “Non-intervention was US policy, not an oversight” (Ryle, 1998). In 1994 a *New York Times* article claimed that Kofi Annan’s aides admitted privately that “The Americans said no...It was fresh after Somalia, and the Americans were not going to have it” (McKinley, 1998). The greatest criticism came in a report issued by the United Nations Genocide Panel in December 1999 asserting the president’s apology did little to ease the US and UN’s culpability in the 1994 massacre, labeling apologies made by Clinton and a similar one made by Secretary General Kofi Annan in May 1998 as “inadequate” (Lynch, 1999, p.29). Clinton’s main goal was to repair the damage done by American and international inaction. However, despite his best efforts and intentions to make amends to the people of Rwanda and ensure a similar atrocity would never happen again – his efforts fell short and were met with lukewarm reviews by the international press.

## Implications

In this essay, we analyzed President Clinton’s attempts to repair the image of the United States and the international community with an address given before a Rwandan audience in 1998. We argue that the president’s purpose was undercut by the rhetorical choices he made. From this analysis we can draw several implications.

First, we maintain that democratization of blame should be added as a strategy of denial to image repair theory. Rhetors who democratize blame for their actions attempt to spread responsibility to multiple rhetors and/or factors leading to their specific behavior. Those that employ the strategy successfully may be able to extricate themselves from the situation. Based on some press accounts, there were some Rwandans who accepted Clinton’s attempts at reconciliation because of this strategy. Indeed, it can be an effective strategy for some rhetors.

More importantly, although we deem this address to be unsuccessful we argue that it does serve three important purposes. Initially, just because a rhetor may fail at their larger rhetorical goal, it does not mean they are not worthy of study. In fact, there are great lessons to be learned in failure. Frobish (2007) asserted some of the most important rhetorical lessons can be found in the rhetorical inadequacy of famous rhetors. Indeed, Clinton's failed attempt at image repair illustrates what *not* to do in image repair and reconciliation. Kim, Avery and Lariscy (2009) found that the most effective strategies with image repair were full apologies with healthy doses of mortification and corrective action. Rhetors, when they admit past transgression, should fully come clean as to that specific wrongdoing, even if it causes short-term pain. Girma Negash (2006) noted that a full reckoning of mistakes was really the only way to move past indiscretion to build a more positive present and future with individuals and communities.

Additionally, Clinton's rhetoric left an important legacy for the presidency. His tour of Africa, particularly his Rwanda address, began a tradition within American foreign policy rhetoric that Edwards (2008) termed confessional foreign policy. Confessional foreign policy is where a president acknowledges past mistakes by his administration or past administrations. In doing so, confessional foreign policy can help symbolically remove impediments caused by past wrongdoing. It serves to reset relationships between the United States and affected countries and/or regions. President Clinton's confessions in Africa were the first by a president to admit foreign policy wrongdoing, particularly on foreign soil. The Clinton administration proceeded to continue its confessional foreign policy by admitting mistakes past administrations had committed in Guatemala and Greece. President George W. Bush employed a confessional foreign policy strategy by acknowledging American wrongdoing with its policies toward Hungary, Africa, and Egypt during the Cold War. President Obama has also admitted injustices committed by the United States against South American countries, the Middle East, India, Pakistan, and Europe (Edwards, forthcoming). Thus, while we have argued Clinton's rhetorical choices undermined his larger message of contrition, it did provide a precedent for future presidents to recognize America's checkered foreign policy past that offered new rhetorical ground to (re)build relationships across the globe.

Finally, it could be argued that Clinton's Rwanda rhetoric can be caused a sea change in international discussions of preventing genocide and mass atrocity. In 1999, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan began a campaign to get nation-states to discuss and resolve tensions between interfering in a nation's sovereignty and the larger goal of protecting human rights. In 2000, at the behest of the U.N., Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien created the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) to outline a broader framework for humanitarian intervention. In 2001, ICISS released its final report entitled *Responsibility to Protect*. In this report, ICISS argued that states have a responsibility to protect civilians from crimes against humanity, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and genocide with military force if necessary.

Over the past decade, the Responsibility to Protect doctrine (R2P) has been debated and negotiated by the international community. As a concept, at the 2005 World Summit, all nations agreed to language enshrining the R2P doctrine as a principle that nation-states should attempt to live up too (Bain, 2010; Bellamy, 2006, 2009; Benjamin, 2010; Evans, 2009). However, putting this concept into practice has proven more difficult. Certainly, the intellectual heft of R2P was not enough for the international community to prevent the atrocities in Darfur, despite it being called a genocide by the United States and other nations. However, it has served as justification to protect civilians in Kenya in 2007-2008, Libya in 2011 and potentially in Syria in 2013 (Cotler & Genser, 2011; Zenko, 2013). We do not claim that President Clinton's address directly

led to the creation of R2P, but it was part of the initial sea change that the international community has taken regarding the ideas of sovereignty and the responsibilities of nation-states. We also do not claim that genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and ethnic cleaning will now suddenly go away because of this enlightened sea change. Domestic politics and the national interests of states, including America, will still rule many of their decisions to act. However, the fact that there has been movement to ameliorate the problem of genocide, even at the intellectual level should offer some small celebration for those who value human rights, equality, and the protection of citizens. President Clinton's address marks the beginning of a conversation and debate that continues and will continue for us to "work together as a community of civilized nations to strengthen our ability to prevent, and if necessary, to stop genocide" (Clinton, 1998, pp. 498).

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