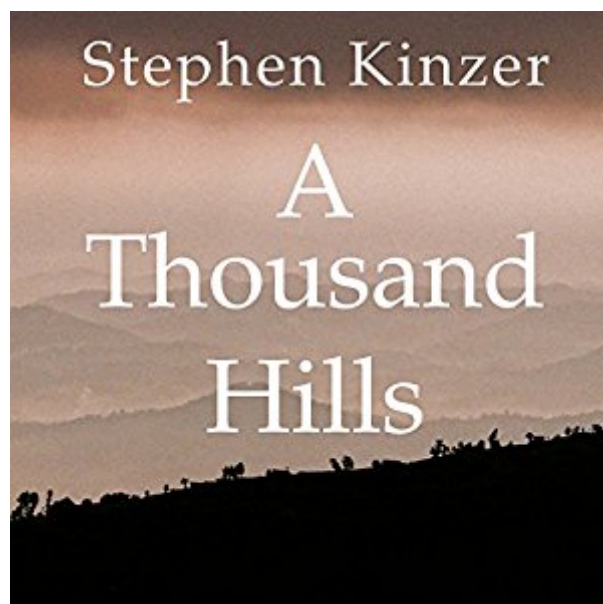


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A Thousand Hills: Rwanda's Rebirth And The Man Who Dreamed It



Synopsis

Paul Kagame grew up as a wretched refugee. He and a group of comrades, determined to force their way back home after a generation of exile, designed one of the most audacious covert operations in the history of clandestine war. Then, after taking power, they amazed the world by stabilizing and reviving their devastated country. Now, as President Kagame, he's obsessed with a single outlandish dream: to make Rwanda the first middle-income country in Africa, and to do it in the space of a single generation. *A Thousand Hills* tells Kagame's tumultuous life story, including his early fascination with Che Guevara and James Bond, his years as an intelligence agent, his training in Cuba and the United States, the dazzlingly original way he built his secret rebel army, his bloody rebellion, and his outsized ambitions for Rwanda. It is the adventure-filled tale of a visionary who won a war, stopped a genocide, and then set out to turn his country into the star of Africa. Like Ishmael Beah's best-selling *A Long Way Gone* and Greg Mortenson's *Three Cups of Tea*, this book recounts the thrilling and uplifting tale of a man who defied the odds to lift himself and his country out of misery toward a more promising future.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I read this book in preparation for trip to Rwanda later this year. Mr. Kinzer has done exhaustive research into the history of Rwanda from the early 20th century through the present. From the time of Belgian colonialism, the rise of the RPF in Uganda and the genocide to an a fair presentation of Paul Kagame's mission to bring peace, reconciliation and prosperity to Rwanda post genocide.

Although Rwanda has a long way to go, according to the author, they are on the right track - largely thanks to Paul Kagame. The author is highly critical (rightfully so in my opinion) of the Clinton Administration, the UN and France in particular in the role either ignoring or aiding the genocide. Highly recommended for anyone interested in the history of Rwanda and the current state of affairs in the country.

President Paul Kagame is a man who inspires a wide range of emotions in those who meet him. Some like me admire him...Others hate him. Certainly many in French diplomatic circles see him as the devil clothed in Anglophone robes. In the Africanist analytical world, he is either Rwanda's greatest hope or its mortal danger. Certainly his enemies have reason to fear him even as his friends love him. Both enemy and friend know that the wise respect him. I first met then Vice President and Defense Minister Major General Paul Kagame in the fall of 1994 when he was struggling to put the shattered country of Rwanda back together. Some were wont to describe him as a "war lord" even as one could buy T-shirts with his picture on them with the phrase "Free at Last!" at Kigali's international airport. General Kagame was serious, determined, and it was clear that he was a strong man. What remained to be seen was whether he would become another "Big Man" in African politics or rise above that label to be a truly great African leader. Like no other author so far, Stephen Kinzer offered us a peak inside the complexity named Paul Kagame. Kinzer enjoyed unprecedented access to the President of Rwanda and provided a colorful and insightful biography of the man. Like any good interlocutor, Kinzer understands that listening is the best technique for the interviewer. He offers Kagame's own words to the reader allowing the subject of this biography to speak on his own behalf. That is not only fair, it is probably critical to understand this man who spent much of his life fighting the status quo--and ultimately winning. According to Kinzer, Kagame's early life as a refugee in Uganda hardened him into the typical angry young man found in a life surrounded by poverty. Early on in his youth he became friends with Fred Rwigyema. Together they later would become co-founders of the Rwandan Patriotic Front. But first they would join Museveni's 40-man National Resistance Army in Uganda and overthrow Obote. When Rwigyema fell in the first few days of the RPF's 1990 invasion of Rwanda, Kagame resigned from the US Army Command and General Staff College to take command and reorganize the RPF. He and the RPF went on to win a military victory they did not really desire, sparking a genocide for which they could not be blamed. Despite Kagame's military prowess, I found Kinzer's chapters on the post-war period from 2000 on to be the most illuminating because they concentrate on Kagame's role as President of Rwanda. At the same time, they provide great hope for the country's future and portents of possible

disaster. President Kagame is indeed Rwanda's greatest hope. At the same time, he is his own greatest nemesis...I would recommend this book to anyone interested in Africa, small wars, reconciliation, and development. Kinzer's prose is easy to read and entertaining. His narrative is insightful. The Paul Kagame I knew came to life when I read this book. The full review is posted on Small Wars Journal Blog at [...] Thomas (Tom) P. Odom LTC US Army (ret) Author, *Journey into Darkness: Genocide in Rwanda* (Texas A & M University Military History Series)

Stephen Kinzer, former Times correspondent, has written a curious book about Paul Kagame, current leader of Rwanda. Kinzer's approach is to tell Kagame's story from the beginning and then let Kagame, in his own italicized words, comment on the ideas and incidents that Kinzer has highlighted. This makes for a nice balance of author and subject but more often than not Kinzer seems uncertain whether Kagame's particular approach is really as wonderful as Kinzer desperately wants it to be. Why is Kinzer so eager to see Kagame succeed? That's a simple enough question to answer. The Rwandan genocide was a horrendous event and one can only feel sympathy for the Rwandan people and wish them well in overcoming the disastrous effects of that gruesome episode. One also senses a real affection for Kagame on the part of Kinzer who undoubtedly views him as an immensely heroic (even romantic?) figure. A true guerrilla leader/statesman in the mold of Che Guevara. A man who also bent history to his own will. One of the most remarkable revelations in this book is that fact that foreign diplomats posted in Kigali are often at odds with their home governments in how to deal with the overtly authoritarian and at times repressive actions of Kagame's government. When Kinzer interviews these diplomats the same rationale seems to emerge: we don't like everything Kagame is doing but it seems to be working so let's not rock the boat. Kinzer also makes short work of critical analysts from organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch who according to Kinzer, are short-sighted and may even have an anti-Kagame bias. This is not to say that Kinzer himself is totally on board with the Kagame Way. Far from it. He asks all the right questions about all the appropriate issues, but his bias is always to give Kagame the benefit of the doubt. In fact he gives more than a benefit: he ends up suggesting that the Kagame Way might be the most appropriate way for the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa. What would this mean? Basically a shift away from democratically elected governments to one party, 'enlightened' authoritarianism. Highly aggressive population control schemes, coupled with an emphasis on education, particularly of the technical kind. It also means state involvement in all aspects of the economy as well as hyper-security measures that are designed to undermine any

organized resistance to the state's control. In other contexts, these measures would be reviled by the international community: in Rwanda the diplomats note that the streets are clean, that there is no visible crime in their particular neighborhoods and that the people are industrious, punctual, and polite. (What's there for a foreigner not to like?) Given what Rwanda has been through it is hard to argue that what exists there now is much better than what went on before. It is also hard not to admire Paul Kagame. He is 'serious' (a 'serious' word in Rwanda), and fearless and does seem to be in the mold of other enlightened strong-men like Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore and Mahatir of Malaysia. Whether there are other Kagames waiting in the wings of other African nations is highly doubtful. The best hope is that young politicians in other African countries will see that Kagame is offering a way that is not totally dependent on the 'kindness of strangers' i.e. foreign aid, and a way that stresses hard work and honesty over corruption and greed. As for enlightened despotism: well let's hope that the world and Mr. Kinzer believe that even Africans deserve better.[...]

I have had three working trips in national parks in Rwanda in the past four years. The people who I know there are kind and wonderful in contrast to the brutality that we know occurred there from 1959 culminating with the major genocide and civil war in 1994. Paul Kagame is amazing as a leader and perhaps at times overly controlling. But this book tells the story of President Kagame and the unlikely circumstances that led him from being a refugee to head of state. I think most Rwandans dread the day when there is a transition to other leadership because he has guaranteed 21 years of stability after more than 35 years of painful civil conflicts. Rwandans overwhelmingly voted to let him have a third term as President. Let's hope his careful guidance to a democratic election in the future works and the temptation to be more than a President continues to be suppressed. Kinzer lays out the journey of this amazing leader very thoughtfully.

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