

NOT THEIR FIRST RODEO: THE GERMAN GENOCIDE IN NAMIBIA

Script

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INTRODUCTION: starts on a black screen

TEXT ON SCREEN fades into view

“From 1904 to 1907 the tribes in South West Africa, especially the Hereros, fought a heroic but futile war against their German masters.”¹

MUSIC ‘The Necrobase’ by AfterInfinity

TEXT ON SCREEN:

Germany only apologised in 2021.

114 years later.

After WWI.

After the Holocaust.

After Nazi Germany.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall.

After 80,000 became 15,000.

After the concentration camps were dismantled and forgotten.

After the railroad was finished.

After the novels glorifying the slaughter sold 400,000 copies.

After the science of race been dismissed.

After Shark Island claimed 80% of all who set foot on it.

After Namibian independence.

After the Herero and Nama peoples demanded reparations in 2006.

After historians spent decades arguing over whether to even call it genocide.

¹ Bridgman, *The Revolt of the Hereros*, p. 1.

TITLE CARD *Not their first Rodeo - Holocaust before the Holocaust*

SUBTITLE CARD *The Herero and Nama Genocide*

MUSIC dramatic

OPENING, fades in

NARRATOR:

In the late nineteenth century, under the leadership of Otto van Bismark, the German Empire cast its eye to Africa. In an attempt to keep in line with the other colonial powers.

But they were late to the party.

So they settled on a vast, ancient land in on the West coast.

They called it *German South West Africa*.

MUSIC sombre, building slowly

NARRATOR:

The Herero and Nama peoples had lived on this land for generations.

They kept cattle, which was the sacred foundation of their way of life.

They had laws, chiefs, and traditions.

And then, the Germans arrived.

TITLE CARD *THE OMAHEKE – Germany's First Genocide*

NARRATOR:

[on screen and spoken] 'After a slow start [the] German colonial administration gradually intensified its grip on people and territory.'²

They started overtaking their laws and their commerce.

The Germans ruled with an iron fist.

They introduced a "dual legal system" which 'did not permit African authorities to pass judgement on "whites"'.³

And yet, German courts rarely punished crimes committed against African people.

² Zimmerer, 'Colonial Genocide', p. 325.

³ Zimmerer, 'Colonial Genocide', p. 325.

White settlers, ‘referred to black Africans as ‘baboons’ and treated them accordingly.’⁴

“Their horses and even their oxen” had more value than the natives.⁵

MUSIC tension building

NARRATOR:

African land was stripped from them.

Then came the railroads.

MUSIC swells

NARRATOR:

Cutting straight through Herero territory, construction companies seized ownership of wide strips of land on either side of the tracks. Land and cattle were forcefully taken.

According to Bridgman, the Herero “had so many reasons for rebelling that it might be more profitable to ask why they had not acted sooner.”⁶

MUSIC releases

TITLE CARD: *JANUARY 1904*

NARRATOR:

On the 12th of January 1904, the Herero held an uprising.

The uprising was relatively peaceful.

[on screen and spoken] “in contrast to the rumours at the time, the Herero did not kill women, children, foreigners or missionaries.”⁷

However, the German response was immediate, and visceral.

MUSIC tenses again

NARRATOR:

Military commanders telegraphed Berlin demanding that “the Hereros be disarmed, ruthlessly punished, and made to do forced labor on the railroads.”⁸

⁴ Bridgman, *The Revolt of the Hereros*, p. 62.

⁵ Bridgman, *The Revolt of the Hereros*, pp. 62-63.

⁶ Bridgman, *The Revolt of the Hereros*, p. 57.

⁷ Zimmerer, ‘Colonial Genocide’, p. 326.

⁸ Bridgman, *The Revolt of the Hereros*, p. 86.

[on screen and spoken] “The Germans [were] filled with fearful hate and a frightful thirst for revenge, [...] a blood thirst, against the Hereros.”⁹

One German official defended the position, saying that “Colonisation is always inhumane. It must ultimately amount to an encroachment on the rights of the original inhabitants in favour of the intruders.”¹⁰

MUSIC ‘Hunter’ by Afterinfinity – after the last line, the song climaxes with its silence.

TITLE CARD *General Lothar Von Trotha*

NARRATOR:

Command passed to General Lothar von Trotha – a man known for colonial campaigns in East Africa and China, who was described as a protégé of the highest military circles in Berlin.

In a letter that October, von Trotha made his intentions plain. He believed, that “the Herero must be destroyed as a nation.”¹¹

Calling it a racial war.

Before even setting foot in the colony, he issued orders that African combatants were to be shot without trial.

MUSIC gets intense and dark

NARRATOR:

After the Battle of Waterberg in August 1904 the German soldiers forcefully drove the Herero eastward.

Into the desert.

Into the Omaheke.

MUSIC sombre and light + **WIND SOUNDS**

NARRATOR:

[on screen and spoken] “German troops pursued the fugitives and *deliberately* drove them into the waterless areas, which they then sealed off against the return of fugitives, in order to let them die of thirst.”¹²

⁹ Bridgman, *The Revolt of the Hereros*, p. 86.

¹⁰ Bley, *South-West Africa Under German Rule*, p. 68.

¹¹ Bley, *South-West Africa Under German Rule*, p. 164.

¹² Zimmerer, ‘Colonial Genocide’, p. 327.

Women were not to be shot. Instead, shots were fired above their heads to force them to keep running. Away from the water.

A survivor recalls: “We hesitated to kill Herero women and children, but the Germans spared no one. They killed thousands and thousands. I saw this slaughter for day after day.”¹³

MUSIC swells

TITLE CARD *THE CAMPS*

MUSIC reaches a climax

IMAGES archival photographs, Shark Island, the Namibian coast]

NARRATOR:

Those who survived the desert were sent to concentration camps.

Travelling to the camps on trains akin to the Holocaust.

There were five concentration camps (Konzentrationslagern) across the territory.¹⁴

[on screen and spoken] “Rations were minimal, consisting of a daily allowance of a handful of uncooked rice, some salt and water.” The Herero were not used to rice, and “the uncommon diet was the cause of many deaths. Disease was uncontrolled.”¹⁵

The camp on Shark Island, off the coastal town of Lüderitz, had the worst conditions...

Eighty percent of those sent there never left.

MUSIC swells again

NARRATOR:

Survivors were tattooed with the letters *GH - Gefangene Herero*. Imprisoned Herero.

Of a Herero population starting at approximately 80,000... By 1906, only 15,000 remained alive.

[on screen and spoken] “*The Herero people as such was annihilated.*”¹⁶

...

The Nama people rose up against their German invaders in October 1904.

¹³ Bridgman, *The Revolt of the Hereros*, p. 126.

¹⁴ Erichsen, ‘Concentration camps were used by the Germans in South West Africa’.

¹⁵ Erichsen, ‘Concentration camps were used by the Germans in South West Africa’.

¹⁶ Stone, ‘White Men with Low Moral Standards?’, p. 34.

Their fate mirrored the Herero's.

Of a population estimated between 15,000 and 20,000, only 9,800 remained alive by 1911.

MUSIC sparse, minimalist, building slowly in the background

NARRATOR:

After Imperial Germany lost the First World War, South West Africa was given to South Africa... Where they had a continued, brutal history of a state-enforced apartheid...

The victims, and the killers, of the Genocide... Faded into a memory.

MUSIC builds again

NARRATOR:

Despite calls for reparation, another genocide committed by Germany, and Namibian independence...

MUSIC stops

NARRATOR:

[on screen and spoken] Germany only apologised in 2021.

[on screen and spoken] Over 100 years too late. Not one person who witnessed the genocide alive to witness the apology.

CLOSING TITLE CARD - black screen

TEXT ON SCREEN, appears slowly, one line at a time

Between 1904 and 1908, an estimated 65,000 Herero and 10,000 Nama were killed.

The German government formally recognised the killings as genocide on 28 May 2021.

Reparations negotiations between Germany and Namibia are ongoing.

The Herero and Nama peoples continue to seek justice.

CREDITS roll over silence, or (if rights allowed) 'Windhoek' by Billy Woods

END