

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Anyone for whom the name Burundi evokes more than a Lilliputian entity in the heart of Africa must look back to the events of 1972 with a sense of horror and consternation. In a matter of a few weeks tens of thousands of human beings were systematically slaughtered, in what in retrospect can only be described as the nearest equivalent offered by Africa of a "final solution." Yet, despite the magnitude of the Burundi tragedy, the reaction of the Africanist community—both in Europe and in the United States—has been one of almost total indifference. For some Burundi seems too marginal to warrant serious attention; for others the lack of reliable background information about the events of 1972 is often cited as a pretext for looking the other way; for others still the Burundi tragedy is dismissed as a purely internal problem, magnified out of proportion in order to deflect public attention from the really critical issues posed by the threat of white supremacy in southern Africa.

Whatever the case may be, we think that it is our responsibility as intellectuals and Africanists to convey to the attentive public as dispassionate and realistic a picture of the Burundi situation as we can, and in so doing to provide a basis for informed judgment. A first step in this direction was made in December of last year, in Brussels, when Jeremy Greenland and I took the initiative in organizing a Conference on Burundi that would provide a forum for ventilating opinions on a variety of issues related to the events of 1972. As a follow-up to this conference, and thanks to the kind cooperation of Paula Barker, we decided to make available to the readers of *Issue* several articles dealing with the background of the 1972 crisis and its outcome. The articles by Greenland and Weinstein were read by the authors at the Brussels conference; the others have appeared elsewhere in a more extensive version. We hope that in the light of these contributions the image of Burundi can enter the consciousness of the American Africanist community in a more compelling and dispassionate form than has usually been the case in the past.

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