

A Quick History of Cambodia

- Cambodia was inhabited by humans at least 40,000 years ago.
- Cities developed along the coast centuries before the birth of Christ.
- In the 8th century Cambodia began to consolidate into a Kingdom.
- In its heyday, it was a powerful kingdom that dominated much of the mainland of Southeast Asia.
- In 1863, Cambodia became a “protectorate” of France.
- In 1953 the country was granted its independence again.

- However, the country was also ruled over by Thailand and then Japan during World War II.
- In 1955 the Vietnam Conflict began, 1st with France, and then with the U.S. (1965)
- Cambodia declared neutrality during the Viet Nam conflict.
- ...however, the Viet Cong (North Vietnamese) infiltrated Cambodia and set up a supply trail (the Ho Chi Minh Trail) inside the borders of Cambodia.
- During this time (from 1963) the Cambodian's that were members of the Khmer Rouge were allies of the Viet Cong.
- In an effort to close the supply trail, the United States extensively bombed the trail, even though Cambodia was neutral, thus killing many Cambodians and destabilizing the Cambodian government at the same time.
- US soldier also began incursions into Cambodia to fight the Viet Kong.

- When the United States withdrew from the war, South Vietnam collapsed while the Khmer Rouge then moved to take control of the government of Cambodia.
- In 1975 they formally took control and called their new state *Democratic Kampuchea*.
- At first, many Cambodians felt the Khmer Rouge would offer more political stability than they had had recently, and they also felt that the quality of their lives would improve under the new regime.

Khmer Rouge

- *Khmer* : Inhabitants and/or language of Cambodia.
- *Rouge* : Red (referring to Communism).
- This regime lasted 3 years in Cambodia.
- It sought to outdo all other new communist regimes that had come before including Stalin's Russia and Mao's China.
- The Khmer Rouge turned their entire country into a social experiment.
- The Khmer Rouge came to power in 1975.
- To build their new society they emptied their cities.

- The people living in the cities were expelled to the countryside.
- Overnight, all Cambodians were required to be peasants, workers, or soldiers.
- All commerce and private enterprise were abolished.
- Markets and every shop and restaurant were closed.
- The Khmer Rouge purged the population of all those considered, “the enemy of the people.”
- They end up causing the death of 2,000,000 Cambodians ...
- ...or over $\frac{1}{4}$ of the entire population of the entire country.

Khmer Rouge

- Members of the Khmer Rouge wore a simple uniform to project an air of simplicity and solidarity with the country's peasantry.
- Their uniform were black shirts and pants, a red and white checkered scarf, and plain sandals.

- What happened after the Khmer Rouge took over was something mostly unknown to the outside world.
- Indeed, secrecy would be the hallmark of the Khmer Rouge, especially of their leader.

Pol Pot

- Pol Pot lived from 1925 to 1998.
- His real name was Saloth Sar.
- He was born into a farming family.
- However, he cut himself off not only from his family, but his entire prior life.
- The Cambodian communist party was founded in 1960 and by 1963 Pol Pot became its General Secretary.
- In 1975 he became its Prime Minister when the Khmer Rouge took control of Cambodia and he held that position until 1979.

Khmer Rouge

- Most of the organization's recruits were young.
- Boys and girls 12 years old or younger.
- The young recruits were cut off from their family, along with society in general.
- The Khmer Rouge would go on to form a generational divide.
- The young would become killers of the society they were taught to turn against.
- Little was known of the Khmer Rouge's ruling body as like Pol Pot, they remained "out of the limelight."

- The ruling body called themselves *Angkar*
- ...or *Organization*.
- In one of the propaganda phrases that *Angkar* used for themselves they referred to themselves as “*mother and father of the people*”.

Khmer Rouge's Goals?

- The mobilization of the countryside.
- A “giant leap” into the future of industrialization.
- An emphasis on productive increases of agriculture.
- An attempt to surpass the communist models of Stalin's Russia and Mao's China.
- However, the methods that they went about these goals led to ferocious revolutionary violence!

Khmer Rouge's Goals Put Into Action

- Cities were viewed as “tainted.”
- Cities were full of “impurities.”
- Cities were filled with “deviations.”
- Cities were full of persons with a lapse of the virtues that were associated with pheasants living in the countryside.
- Therefore, the cities were slated for annihilation.
- There was an order that the cities be emptied in 24 hours.
- This meant everyone ...
- Up to and including patients in hospital beds! (20,000 patients)

- 60% of the entire country (4,500,000 out of 7,500,000 persons) were exiled from their earlier place of resident.
- Former city dwellers went sent to the countryside.
- They were called “The New People.”
- This was considered a derogatory term and they were viewed as less healthy and less virtuous than the peasants and thus were kept separate.
- “The New People” were treated very poorly and were moved again and again from one part of the country to another.

Chosen for Execution

- The educated.
- Cambodians who could speak a foreign language.
- Those who wore glasses.
- Buddhists.
- Muslims.
- Catholics.
- Cambodian-Chinese.
- Cambodian – Vietnamese.

The Executions

- Most executions were carried out with primitive tools ...
- ...the garden hoe in particular.
- The Khmer Rouge executioners prided themselves on being polite to their victims.
- This was to show that the execution was not “personal,” and was not carried out with any hatred.
- The execution was just being done for the purity of revolution.

Prisons

- Those Cambodians persecuted but not immediately executed with sent to prisons.
- Sent to these prisons were men, women, children, and mothers of these children.



The Killing Fields of Cambodia

- Pits where the executed were thrown into were called the Killing Fields and they covered the countryside.

Khmer Rouge Regime

- At least 2 million died out of the Khmer Rouge's policies: killings, hunger, abuse.
- The Khmer Rouge wanted to cut Cambodia away from the rest of the world with the goal of the country being totally self-sufficient.
- Within one week of coming to power all currency (money) was abolished.
- All the land in the country was taken over by the government.
- Cambodians were forced to work, live, and eat in a collective.
- All Cambodians were forced to dress in all black.

- Religion, writing, and education all but disappeared.
- Only arranged marriages that were approved by Khmer Rouge officials were allowed.
- Individualism was seen as something to be overcome for the good of the new Cambodia society that the Khmer Rouge sought to create.

The Results?

- The collapse of agriculture.
- Mass starvation that even led to cannibalism.
- Overworked and sick people.
- The Khmer Rouge leadership took these failures as a sign that their plans were somehow being sabotaged.
- The snake started eating its own tail ...
- The party turned on itself and began purging within its own ranks.
- The Khmer Rouge then made the mistake of starting a border armed conflict with Vietnam (which was now a united communist country).

- Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978.
- How do you think the United States and most other western nations responded???
- The Vietnamese overthrew the Khmer Rouge in 1979.
- Vietnam set up a puppet government that broke with the Khmer Rouge and denounced their crimes.
- However, after their removal from power, guerrilla Khmer Rouge factions retreated into the jungle and continued to fight against the new government until 1992.

The United Nations

- In 1993 the United Nations tried to stabilize the country.
- To do so, they had to allow the Khmer Rouge party candidates to run for elections to finally bring piece to the nation.
- Hun Sen, of the Cambodian People's Party, has been Cambodia's prime minister since 1985.
- He is the longest serving prime minister in Cambodia's history.