

Transcript of full Jacqueline Murekatete interview

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As a child in Rwanda, Jacqueline Murekatete was taken to an orphanage after her parents and six siblings were killed in a genocide. At age 9, she was brought to Queens by an uncle who adopted her. She studied at [Stony Brook University](#), then transferred to [New York University](#), where she earned her B.A. in political science. Murekatete, 23, who now lives in Brooklyn, travels to schools to speak about tolerance, and plans to go to law school to study international human rights law.

Q: What inspired you to become an activist?

Murekatete: I think my activism began when I was a sophomore in high school, in [Queens Village](#). After listening to a speech by a Holocaust survivor, David Gewirtzman, who lived in Great Neck, I wrote him a letter. He said I should go on the road and speak with him. I felt I had a duty as a survivor to speak for those who could never speak for themselves because over a million people had been murdered in Rwanda's genocide.

My parents and my siblings, my aunts and uncles, were killed, not because they were criminals, not because of anything they had done, but because of their ethnicity. They were Tutsis living in a country which believed that being Tutsis was a crime deserving of death.

Q: Who were your civil rights heroes?

Murekatete: I didn't learn about [Martin Luther King](#) or Ghandi or [Elie Wiesel](#) and Simon Wiesenthal, the Holocaust survivors, until I moved to Queens. I was definitely very much inspired because they stood up to all kinds of violence, they fought for something they believed in despite the environment they lived in, despite the fear they could be killed.

Q: What are you most proud of?

Murekatete: I don't think I'm proud of anything, but I'm definitely glad I've been given this opportunity to speak out, without fearing any type of retribution. I'm happy with the reception I get from people, especially the young people. I always get letters from them telling them how encouraged they were to speak out about all types of injustice, from bullying to racism.

Q: What are you doing these days?

Murekatete: We speak about international injustices as well as those in the students' own community, including racism and anti-Semitism. Right here in America, innocent people suffer from hatred based on race, religion or ethnicity.

I'm also working on a human rights project for Miracle Corners of the World [a nonprofit group founded by Eddie Bergman, a [Northport](#) High School graduate). I have helped raise half the money for a \$200,000 community center in my old village in Rwanda, where survivors of the genocide that ended 14 years ago live next to the perpetrators.

While the genocide ended 14 years ago, the consequences of that genocide are daily realities for survivors.

If the survivors speak out, they fear being murdered. For a long time, I felt if I went back I would go crazy. I would spend my whole life being bitter and angry. But I plan to go back this summer.

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