

Study and thought questions related to

That the World May Know: Bearing Witness to Atrocity by James Dawes

1. Once again we encounter the humanitarian disaster in Goma and the genocide in Rwanda, and there remains so much to consider. Review what Dawes says about General Dallaire in the chapter titled *Genocide* and how he describes Dallaire's reaction both in the moment and now in the years afterward to the genocide and the part that he played. What are your reactions in general and more specifically through the lens of the Dunant/Nightingale philosophical debate.
2. Dawes notes on pages 8-9 that, "...giving voice can also be a matter of taking voice." And "This contradiction between our impulse to heed trauma's cry for representation and our instinct to protect it from representation –from invasive staring, simplification, dissection – is a split at the heart of human rights advocacy." Indeed. How does Dawes appear to address this dilemma in the book? What are your thoughts about how to address this issue? Who has a right to tell the stories of human suffering? Who has the responsibility to tell the stories of human suffering?
3. Consider the title of the book. This recent article by Deborah Dunn ([Bearing Witness: Seeing as a Form of Service](#)) effectively summarizes many of Dawes' messages. Dunn offers numerous nuanced cautions, and presents some good suggestions specifically in reference to study travel through universities. She encourages us to "think about service in which students do not descend from on high, but rather come alongside." What do Dawes and Dunn mean by the phrase 'bearing witness'? How would [Teju Cole](#) respond to these two authors? How do you?
4. As a follow-up to the two questions above, to what extent does the idea of 'bearing witness' apply to aid workers (both international and national) in places like Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Yemen? To what extent should aid workers tell or not tell the stories those in the affected communities to their friends and family? On Facebook or other social media?
5. Early in the semester we Skyped with Jordanian 'Moody' Shabeeb, a communications manager for CARE, USA stationed in Amman, Jordan. His job, in part, is to craft messages for CARE for distribution to the rest of the world. How would Dawes advise him as he does his job?
6. From Dawes we learn that words matter, language matters. On page 223 he quotes Hong Ying, "*Everything I narrate / seems to have lost its meaning.*" And then on the next page this from Gilbert Holleufer, "*The language disincarnated, it disembodied reality, and they [the affected community] know it. They know we are disembodifying their reality, we are dissolving it into words.Humanitarian language is part of the threat they have.*" Reflect on how the media depicted the humanitarian crisis that you researched for class (or any of the others presented by your classmates). What language was used to describe the situation and the lives of those in the affected community? How does this language affirm -or not- the points Dawes is trying to make?
7. Find and present some examples that throughout his book Dawes provides us with of the issues embedded in the question above.
8. On pages 12-13 Dawes quotes Michael Maren in *The Road to Hell*, "*The starving African exists as a point in space from which we measure our own wealth, success, and prosperity, a*

darkness against which we can view our own cultural triumphs. And he serves as a handy object of our charity. He is evidence that we have been blessed, and we have an obligation to spread that blessing. The belief that we can help is an affirmation of our own worth in the grand scheme of things." The Atlantic [article](#) by Teju Cole mentioned above describing the "white savior industrial complex" is a restatement of Maren's observation. Both Cole and Maren owe debt to a thinker more from my generation, the Austrian philosopher and social critic Ivan Illich. In an [address](#) to the Conference on InterAmerican Student Projects (CIASP) in Cuernavaca, Mexico, on April 20, 1968 Illich raises the issue of doing unintentional harm, "... *the Peace Corps spends around \$10,000 on each corps member to help him adapt to his new environment and to guard him against culture shock. How odd that nobody ever thought about spending money to educate poor Mexicans in order to prevent them from the culture shock of meeting you?*" Given the above, and thinking back to our discussion about 'force multipliers' and the inherent political nature of all (or at least most) 'do-gooderism', how do we answer with more sensitivity the question that comes to many of our minds as we look at the struggles around the world and ask, "What can I do about it?"

9. One of the first wisdoms of sociology is that everything is connected to everything else. Anthropologists call this cultural integration. When doing a functional analysis the social scientist looks at the social phenomena in question and probes deeply into not only the obvious and manifest functions that are present -what the phenomena in question is intended to do and what impacts on the major institutions and groups of the society- but also and aggressively the many unintended (both positive and negative) latent consequences of this phenomena. On page 16 Dawes asks, "*How do we weigh the unforeseen and often unforeseeable negative results of our humanitarian interventions?*" Does Dawes offer any answers to this important question? What are your answers to this question?

10. Using the language of cultural disintegration that I presented in lecture and learning from the many examples we talked about, what do you think Dawes would give as advice to journalists and humanitarians -especially communications directors tasked with telling stories- as they deal with the affected community living within 'disintegrated' cultures in the midst of conflict and/or reconstruction?

11. How does reading this book inform or otherwise impact how you are dealing with the assignment to create a PSA video about some issue we have discussed in class?

12. There is a sentiment that appears in many faith traditions (Judaism, for example) which is captured on page 145 where Dawes quotes Mark Brayne, "...*it's not about changing the world; it's about changing the square meter you're standing on.*" How would both you and Dawes respond to [this video](#)?

13. Dawes' book and many of the questions above may be difficult for some of you because they implicitly ask you to imagine lands far off (Syria, etc.). How can some insights you've encountered -and questions that you have been asked to consider- in this book help you to reflect on your role as a local citizen and the many traumas (related to sexism, racism, classism, heteronormativity, and other forms of marginalization) that exist both within your own life and the lives of those around you here at Elon, Alamance Country, and the US in general?

14. Dawes mentions many books, authors, and articles in most chapters. Did you find yourself looking up information on any of them? Have you checked any out online or read any of the works he mentions? If so, what are they and why did they catch your interest?

15. Would you recommend ***That the World May Know*** to anyone? If so, why and also what general background information might a reader need to know to more fully appreciate some of the discussions and arguments? If you would not recommend, why not? (Elisabeth Wright)

16. This [review](#) by Listoe is critical of Dawes on several fronts and unfavorably compares him with Susan Sontag. He says, “But what in Sontag comes across as a fierce thinking and re-thinking of her subject here feels, at times, like an unseemly nonchalance.” Read Listoe’s review and comment on what you agree and disagree with in what he says.

17. Part of the cannon in social science research methods is the so-called [Hawthorne Effect](#) otherwise known as the *observer effect*. Very simply stated, this refers to the universal social phenomena that people tend to alter their behavior when they are aware they are being watched. Those using ethnographic methods, either direct observation and especially with participant observation, must bear in mind that those being studied. In the *Storytelling* chapter Dawes talks about this effect as it relates to journalists (both photo and print), and details the 1971 executions in Dhaka. Based on what you have learned so far in this course, did Riboud do the right thing and for the right reason? How can we use some of the insights in this chapter to more deeply understand the responsibilities (and rights??) of those tasked with telling stories about the various humanitarian crises we have studied? What are the issues a ‘comms officer’ must address as she/he communicates to the ‘outside world’ images and stories of the affected community?

18. I have written the above questions based on my reading of the book and my approach to our class, and thus they present my perspective. What study or thought questions would you add to the list above based on your reading and perspective(s)?