



The Devil Came on Horseback Discussion Guide

Director: Ricki Stern, Anne Sunderberg
Year: 2007
Time: 85 min

You might know this director from:

Let Them Wear Towels (2013)
Knuckleball! (2012)
Burma Solder (2010)
Joan Rivers: A Piece of Work (2010)
The End of America (2008)
The Trials of Darryl Hunt (2006)

FILM SUMMARY

In 2004, former U.S. Marine Captain Brian Steidle become an unarmed observer with the African Union to monitoring a ceasefire in Darfur, Sudan. All he has was a camera, a pen, and some paper. During Captain Steidle's 6 months in Sudan, he took over 1,000 photographs and filled many journals with accounts of the brutality, mass rape, and genocide that the people of Darfur were being subjected to.

Upon his return the U.S., Stiedle begins raising awareness about the genocide in Darfur, sure that the American people will be outraged by the scope of the violence and send help. Alas, even though the U.S. government recognizes the violence in Darfur as genocide, even though they have a moral obligation under the Genocide Convention to take action, no military intervention is sent.

THE DEVIL CAME ON HORSEBACK is a stunning, tense account of the Darfurian genocide from the perspective of one who was there, inside the violence and terror, and yet outside of it as well. Though Stiedle was hired to be an impartial witness, his humanity would not allow him to watch silently, but instead, urged him to become a vocal advocate for the Sudanese people, bringing their plight to the minds and hearts of the American public. From burned villages in Darfur to political rallies in Washington, the film considers the elements of genocide and forces us to consider our own complicity in the violence.

FILM THEMES

Brian Steidle, a middle-class American and ex-Marine Captain, was hesitant to be the focus of the film, but filmmakers Ricki Stern and Anne Sunderberg convinced him that the best way to tell the story was through him.

GENOCIDE: WHAT'S IN A NAME?

'Never again.' So many thoughtful, powerful people have said those words. Never again would a genocide be allowed to happen. Opinion columnists in The New York Times' and the Wall Street Journal were the first in the media to call the slaughtering of civilians in Darfur a genocide, but the news desks were hesitant. The reluctance of major news sources to use the word "genocide" might have slowed or reduced the amount of aid sent and the feeling of urgency to intervene. Using words like "conflict" or "war" in a way removes the imbalance of power that "genocide" contains, and this small difference serves to diminish public awareness or concern of the victims of such violence.

RAPE AS A TOOL OF WAR

The Janjaweed used rape as a tool of war, as part of their battle strategy. Nearly 1/3 of female refugees report to having been sexually abused by armed militias. Many of these women are at increased risk of assault, since it is often their job to collect firewood and herd sheep outside of the camp. Then, once they are raped, they are often left by their husbands and shamed by their communities. The Janjaweed used rape to destroy the social networks of community, and thereby weakened the power of the village to resist invasion.

CONSCIENCE OF THE WITNESS

"Once they know what it's really like, they'll send help," Captain Brian Steidle expressed many times thought the film. Motivated by a moral obligation to take action, he believes that other Americans will too. In part, it is his conscience that motivates him to resign from the African Union because they are not doing enough to help, and it is his conscience that drives him to share his documents with the media and speak at hundreds on universities, as well as to participate in this documentary about his experience in Darfur.

THE BATTLE FOR NATURAL RESOURCES

The Janjaweed began killing black Africans along an oil pipeline in the region of Darfur in order to gain more control and access to oil. The region, already scarce of many essential natural resources like water and food, became a battleground for oil. Historically, entire communities and cultures were moved, murdered, or made to live in contaminated environments due to capitalist desires to empower a few, whether governments or corporations. The Sudanese people continue to be murdered by their government – this time for gold, and the deaths are not limited to black Darfuris.

"I was just taking pictures with my camera the whole time, you know, just thinking, we could end this right now. If we had a mandate to defend these people, and if I was looking through a scope instead of looking through the lens of my camera. These people could return to their village and they'd be safe."

Brian Steidle

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

NOTES:

1. What do you think is the significance of calling the violence in Darfur a genocide, rather than a civil war?
2. Do you think prosperous and stable countries have a moral obligation to intervene in conflicts abroad?
3. Do you think the genocide in Darfur could have been stopped much sooner than it was? What allowed the conflict to go on for so long, the death toll to rise so high?
4. How do you feel about your own country’s policy toward refugees?
5. Is religious and racial tolerance being taught in your home country? How could it be taught better?
6. The United Nations and the International Criminal court both recognize war rape as a war crime and a crime against humanity. Amnesty International asserts that rape should not be discussed as a by-product of war, but rather a strategy within war. What do you think the importance of these categories are?
7. What do you think the value of unarmed witnesses are? How could they be empowered, if not necessarily armed? Have you ever been a witness of injustice? If so, how did your conscience react?
8. Sudan split into two countries, Sudan and South Sudan, in 2011. However, conflicts continue, largely along sectarian lines. Do you think that Sudan, or other countries, should continue to subdivide until every sect has its own country?
9. Much of the violence in Sudan has been fought over control of natural resources. Do first world countries have a moral obligation to reduce their consumption of natural resources and possibly lessen the threat of civil wars elsewhere? Do you often think about where your resources come from and if wars are being fought over them?
10. How powerful is the weapon of rape, and how so? What does it destroy?

FILM FACTS:

- An estimated 300,000 were people murdered during the genocide in Darfur.
- Over 3 million people have been displaced, 300,000 in 2013 alone.
- The killings began in 2003 and continue today. The genocide in Darfur is known as the first genocide of the 21st century.
- Sudan is the geographically the largest country in Africa and has a population of 7.5 million.
- Sudan gained its independence from Great Britain in 1956 and subsequently suffered through decades of difficult civil wars.
- While the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005 did much to quell the North-South War, it did little to address the ongoing trouble in Darfur.
- In 2008, the United Nations and the African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) launched a combined mission in Sudan promising 26,000 troops with a mandate to protect civilians.
- UNAMID only sent 9,000 troops, and they were poorly equipped to address the problems that the Sudanese people faced.
- In 2009, the International Criminal Court issued a warrant for the arrest of Sudanese President, Omar Bashir. The Sudanese government have not yet turned him over.
- 1 in 3 female refugees report having been the victims of rape or other forms of sexual violence.
- Today's fighters in Sudan are better trained and far better equipped than the Janjaweed were 10 years ago. Though many in this new Sudanese military are former Janjaweed, they are under tighter government control. They continue their wave of ethnic cleansing, using many of the same techniques they used a decade ago.
- As recently as June, 2014 the government in Khartoum has used bombs to destroy civilian and humanitarian sites, which has been condemned by the U.S. and Canadian governments.
- The UN children's rights and relief organization (UNICEF) has argued that, due to over a decade of conflict in the region, an entire generation of Darfuris are at risk of being lost. Many of the refugees from Darfur, 60% of whom are minors, will have neither the skill nor the knowledge they need to be productive members of their community.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share this film. Consider hosting a film screening so that you can inform or motivate people in your community.
2. Help women refugees take control of their own stories and their own futures by donating to [Global Grassroots](#).
3. Lobby your elected officials to help pass the Sudan Peace, Security and Accountability Act. The Act demands action to protect those at risk, create a sustainable peace and hold Sudanese President Omar alBashir accountable for his war crimes and continued crimes against humanity.
4. Visit [3 Generations](#) and support survivors of atrocities like the genocide in Darfur by hearing their stories.

We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.