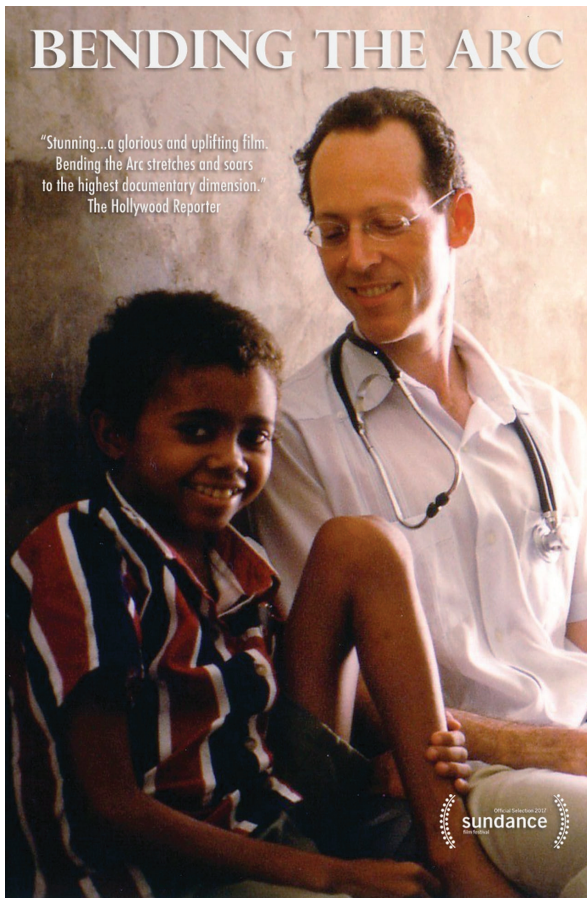


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Bending The Arc Discussion Guide

Director: Pedro Kos & Kief Davidson

Year: 2017

Time: 102 min

This is the debut feature film from this directorial team, though you may know Kief Davidson from:

The Ivory Game (2016)

A Lego Brickumentary (2014)

Open Heart (2013)

Kassim the Dream (2008)

The Devil's Miner (2005)

FILM SUMMARY

What would it be like to offer universal healthcare to every human being who needed it? These are the kind of big questions a trio of budding healthcare professionals and activists—Paul Farmer, Jim Yong Kim and Ophelia Dahl—hoped to answer when they decided to venture to Haiti in 1983. They set off with hopes of making an impact on the lives of those needlessly suffering from treatable diseases like tuberculosis, and eventually HIV/AIDS. With great reverence, Pedro Kos and Kief Davidson's *BENDING THE ARC* recounts the incredible story of how these three compassionate souls took it upon themselves to build self-sustaining healthcare services for people who had long been deemed "unsustainable" or "too expensive" by the medical community at large.

With little more than ambition to bring the same level of healthcare to the Haitian people as they would expect for their own families back home, the trio managed to pull together the necessary resources for real health clinics in underserved communities. In the process, they solved the pivotal problem of staffing by controversially training ordinary Haitian villagers to become healthcare professionals themselves. Their unorthodox methods for success in treating rampant disease ended up becoming a replicable model—the community health model—that could, and would, be applied to other situations around the globe. From there, their efforts expanded to Peru, where they successfully suppressed an MDR-TB epidemic, treating dying patients against official World Health Organization policy. They also traveled to Rwanda, where the team helped rebuild the country's medical system from the ground up in the wake of the genocide.

Making brilliant use of on-the-ground archival footage and interviews with all the key players, *BENDING THE ARC* makes a strong case for staking a moral claim for medical justice and never backing down.

FILM THEMES

Setting out to change how healthcare is deployed in rural communities in third-world countries with almost no experience in the field was an outright crazy thing to attempt. That didn't stop Paul Farmer, Jim Yong Kim, Ophelia Dahl, and their small team that revolutionized how people access healthcare in Haiti, Peru, Rwanda, and beyond.

ALL HUMANS ARE HUMAN

The phrase is repeated several times throughout *BENDING THE ARC*, but it never loses its power. No matter what race, no matter what country of origin or what village they call home, no matter how privileged or financially successful, the physicians and activists at the heart of this movement believe all humans have the right to a healthy life. People should not have to suffer from treatable diseases just because some other person thinks they are not worth the time, energy, and money it might cost to treat them.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MORAL IMAGINATION

Back in the 1990s, the philosophers Mark Johnson and Patricia Werhane developed the term "moral imagination" to describe "the ability to think outside the box and envision ways to be both ethical and successful—alternatives that many people cannot even imagine." Though the term had yet to be coined, what Farmer, Kim, and Dahl were doing to solve the tuberculosis crisis in Haiti and beyond was just this—using moral imagination. They went directly against the medical community's suggestions, knowing that their patients deserved better.

THE COMMUNITY HEALTH MODEL

What made Farmer, Kim, and Dahl's initiative so successful was their utterly simple, but nonetheless groundbreaking tactic of training ordinary Haitian (and later Peruvian and Rwandan) villagers to become healthcare professionals themselves. Together these individuals formed a network of nurses that visited patients multiple times a day to ensure they took their medication and catered to their many medical needs along the difficult road to recovery. The plan became known as the massively influential community health model.

SYSTEMIC CHANGE

For decades this team of medical activists created their own systems for medical treatment, bending the rules of the broader medical community to their moral will. Now, with success in their sails, they are able to have more influence over how medical systems are developed and implemented. In early 2012, President Barack Obama nominated Jim Yong Kim to become the next president of the World Bank, "one of the most critical institutions fighting poverty and providing assistance to developing countries in the world today" according to Kim himself. On April 16, 2012, the World Bank officially elected him as its new president. From this vantage point, Kim has been able to make sweeping systemic changes from within the systems themselves.

"I do not pretend to understand the moral universe, the arc is a long one. . . . But from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice."

Theodore Parker

"To me, this is about hope and it's about rejecting despair and cynicism."

Dr. Paul Farmer

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. Prior to seeing BENDING THE ARC, had you heard of Paul Farmer, Jim Yong Kim, or Ophelia Dahl before? What did you learn about them?
2. Were you aware of how these life-threatening diseases were being fought in Haiti, Peru or Rwanda? What was your opinion of these countries before seeing the film?
3. Farmer, Kim, and Dahl heartily believe in universal healthcare for all. Why do you think this idea is often argued against?
4. The film makes use of wonderfully candid new interviews with its subjects. Were there any moments of these interviews that stood out for you?
5. Had you ever heard the term “moral imagination”? What does it mean to you?
6. Why do you think it was so hard for Farmer, Kim, and Dahl to convince the global medical community of their validity?
7. Do you think the community health model could work in more thoroughly developed countries?
8. Why do you think it was such a big surprise for Jim Yong Kim to have been elected the president of the World Bank?
9. Why do you think that the global medical community has long thought of citizens from countries such as Haiti, Peru or Rwanda as generally not worth the investment of medical resources to treat them?
10. What kinds of changes would you like to see in the systems you deal with for your own healthcare?

NOTES:

FILM FACTS:

- BENDING THE ARC had its world premiere at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival. It went on to have a successful run on the festival circuit, screening at the Miami Film Festival, San Francisco International Film Festival, Montclair Film Festival, and Traverse City Film Festival.
- In 1983, Paul Farmer, Jim Yong Kim, Ophelia Dahl, each barely out of their teens, met in Haiti and formed a friendship based on ethics and a shared vision for universal health care for the underserved. Together, they developed the community health model in order to treat diseases like tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, saving millions of lives in the developing world.
- Following in the wake of their success in Haiti, in 1987, Paul Farmer, Jim Yong Kim, Ophelia Dahl, Thomas White, and Todd McCormack founded Partners In Health, a non-profit health organization with a mission “to bring the benefits of modern medical science to those most in need of them and to serve as an antidote to despair.”
- According to [HealthGrove](#), the annual mortality rate in Peru radically decreased from 28.1 per 100,000 people in 1990, to just 7.4 per 100,000 people in 2013. However, Peru remains the South American country most affected by tuberculosis.
- In the mid-90s, the Partners in Health team ventured to Peru at the behest of Farmer’s Bostonian friend Father Jack Roussin. They were invited with hopes that they would be able to tackle tuberculosis in the South American country. When Roussin himself was struck down by multidrug-resistant strain of the disease, research efforts went into overdrive, tackling the outbreak head-on.
- [UNAIDS](#) reports that in 2016, there were between 17.8 million and 21.1 million people living with HIV in eastern and southern Africa, though between 2010 and 2016, the number of AIDS-related deaths in the region fell by 42%. And since 2010, there has been a 56% decline in new HIV infections among children in the region.
- On March 23th, 2012, U.S. President Barack Obama nominated Jim Yong Kim to become the next president of the World Bank, and just weeks later, on April 16th, the World Bank officially elected him as its next president. In 2016, Kim was re-elected as the World Bank president for a additional five-year term.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Donate** to [Partners in Health](#). The organization was founded by Ophelia Dahl, Paul Farmer, Jim Yong Kim, Todd McCormack, and Tom White with the mission to provide a preferential option for the poor in health care.
2. **Support** international health organizations like [IntraHealth](#), who help train and improve the performance of health workers and strengthen the systems in which they work.
3. **Help** train the next generation of health workers. [The University of Global Health Equality](#) began as an aspiration of Partners in Health and now has the opportunity to shape the future of healthcare professionals.
4. **Advocate** for policy initiatives that reflect the most pressing issues in the fight to address poverty. Join groups like [Results](#) and push for specific policies and legislation to address poverty by equipping people to engage in grassroots advocacy.

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.