

Darfur: A Distant Third Priority

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Cyrus proposes incorporating more human rights education into the United States' education system, beginning at an early level. By starting with education, the United States could adopt a stronger stance on universal human needs, which includes human rights such as education and vital necessities, into its foreign policies. With a stronger dedication to human rights in U.S' foreign policies, the country could better prevent/lessen the effect of genocides, such as in the one in Darfur. [Abstract by editor]

While ethnic diversity and religious differences are part of the conflict, Darfur is really another example of the human consequences of public policy institutions that perpetuate disparity among nations in the potential for satisfaction of universal human needs. Often, these universal human needs, which Abraham Maslow artfully postulated in pyramidal form in his Theory of Human Motivation, are referred to in contemporary discussion of global politics as “human rights.” Comparison of Maslow’s theory to the rhetoric of modern foreign policy documents reveals “human needs” and “human rights” to be the same thing (Maslow 153). Of special importance in Maslow’s work, is the concept of *prepotency*. “What this means specifically is,” Maslow writes, “that in the human being who is missing everything in life in an extreme fashion, it is most likely that the major motivation would be the physiological needs rather than any others” (Maslow 156). He simplifies, “a person who is lacking food, safety, love and esteem, would hunger for food more strongly than anything else” (Maslow 156). Documents like The Foreign Assistance Act of 1976, for example define “internationally recognized human rights” as including attention to the “denial of the right of life” (www.usaid.gov). Former Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance noted, in the early seventies, that the United States would promote as policy the right to be free from “governmental violation of the right to such vital needs as food, shelter, healthcare and education” (Cohen 228). During his Presidency, Jimmy Carter focused the nation on this principle and its role in American Foreign Policy. In fact, his 1977 Inaugural Address mentioned the need for the United States to distance itself from the Nixon and Ford legacies by adopting a “commitment to human rights” which “must be absolute” (Cohen 216). His later statements seemed to pull directly from the language used by Maslow twenty years earlier. President Carter cautioned, “A peaceful world cannot long exist one third rich and two thirds hungry” (Cohen 228). These conscionable words, uttered by a President at the public podium of the free-world, feel on an American constituency exhausted by the pain of Vietnam and the paranoia of McCarthy-ism. Listening in agreement, were young so-called “idealists” of their times, who wanted badly to believe that human rights would, indeed

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become the yardstick by which our great nation evaluates the way we behave overseas. This promising clarification of purpose from a new Commander in Chief, while, one year prior, the Parisian paper, *Le Monde*, published its findings that 800,000 had been killed *so far*, since the Khmer Rouge had seized power in Cambodia in 1975 (Power 120). The simultaneity of promises and perpetration is astounding.

It is 2008, now, seven years after the unthinkable fall of New York's Twin Towers, and the subsequent mobilization of the hunt for Al-Qaeda and "Operation Iraqi Freedom." There are still hopes for the reconciliation for what is *said* about the American value of preservation of human rights and what *exists*, in terms of political machinery geared to the human rights purpose. The repetition has become nauseating. It seems each generation has its public figures voicing the ideal, and each generation has its own human rights atrocity with which to contend. Our Colonist ancestors had the Trail of Tears. Our immigrant great-grandparents had the Turkish slaughter of Armenians. Our Grandparents often fought in the Second World War and absorbed the horrors of the Holocaust for which "genocide" would be forever named (Power 79). Our parents had Vietnam, inseparable from Cambodia. Our younger teachers had Bosnia. In the conscious memory of my twenty-five years, have occurred catastrophic, governmentally generated, conflicts in Rwanda, Srebrenica, Kosovo, of course Hussien's Iraq, Bin-Laden's Afghanistan, post-Mobutu Congo, and as you read this, Darfur, Sudan, and Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwean reign of intimidation. So, it appears there are actually more frequent "human rights situations" as Condi Rice recently called them in the *New York Times*, than generations to claim them. Things are worsening.

Since the Sixties, our parents have been hailed as the youthful harbingers of popular movements. Many social gadflies had fostered positive change in the human rights sphere long before bra burning and Dr. King, but that generation created the expectation that young college students were responsible for generating the kind of popular movements that can actually change policy domestically and abroad. Those same protestors, those "hippies" or "squares" and everyone in between are looking to us, their children to see how we might shoulder the burden. The process is almost imperceptibly slow. We have largely grown frustrated at best, disillusioned on average and sometimes aggressive and isolationist at worst. We are not really handling it well.

The comment by some of my peers in the American community of concerned citizens is "Why Us?" Why does the U.S. have always to respond to human rights issues? It is my feeling that the very nature of this statement illustrates Malsow's presence in the stalemate of social conflict. American news is dominated with stories of the campaign race, yet many of my contemporaries can't really distinguish the Republicrats from the Democrans. My friend, Josh Dyer, who is completing his fourth year of service in the United States Military, was sitting on my couch as we flipped channels, when we landed on CNN's coverage of the recent Democratic Primary Debates in North Carolina and Indiana. Dyer, as we call him, is from Indiana, and thinks he will go into the family welding business if he manages to avoid Stop Loss from the Army. He confronted me and my habits of bringing up political significance, "why should I vote? They all say the same thing and do something different. Waste of my time, really." So, to the pundits and pollsters who dissect super delegate gains in the Mid-Western region, I ask if I really have a valid answer for my friend as to why that vestige of participation still matters.

The American airwaves are rife with complaints about gas prices and home foreclosures and healthcare and infrastructure. Today's American is struggling to literally *feed* their families.

Getting a college education is simply out of reach for many Americans, much less finding a job with benefits, and building savings and assets with which to retire. So I empathize. Some of us are operating in the lower levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs. Can we be expected to attempt to exert enough pressure through picketing and letter-writing to bring human rights onto equal footing with money and a sense of safe distance from those that are different than us? What, besides voting, will pull the category "Other," up from its position as a distant third priority after National Security and Economics, on the list Jack Donnelly posited in Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice. "Other," is the third and last group of items for consideration. "Other," the classification of consequences in which human rights are included, is our last priority when questioning whether to intervene in a government out of whack like the one in Sudan (Herrera). It is not so much that we, the young that Samantha Power named "the Iraq Generation," are lazy, uninformed or shirking responsibility. We are ourselves consumed with our own prepotencies of need.

So, while I feel the constraints of my own Maslovian struggle, and believe that most of my contemporaries are voicing their apathy from that struggling place, I don't really buy the "why do we always have to police the world" argument because we don't. The United States does not police the world in any human rights sense. We police the world's petroleum. We police burgeoning capitalist markets that might threaten to one day compete with our own. We police our perceived and acculturated "enemies" and the infinitesimal likelihood that they may be harboring weapons with one tenth the destructive capability of our own cache. The reality is, the American NON-intervention in matters of foreign policy that have at their core the pure protection of human rights, is the rule, not the exception (Power). Those of my friends, who are bristling, are knee-jerking from the failure that is the "War on Terror." Non-reaction in other governments' affairs, when nothing is at stake but other human lives, is The American Way.

There is a misconception circulating about what it means to "take action" on behalf of human rights in Darfur. The misconception is born of the same kind of either/or rhetoric used by President Bush when he said, after 9/11 "You're either with us, or with the Terrorists." The misconception is that taking action in places like Darfur is inextricably linked with the use of American military force. As Samantha Power points out, foreign policy that holds human rights in as high esteem as National Security and Economic political strategy is not always synonymous with sending in American troops to do their country's idealist's dirty work. Power notes:

While a greater integration of regard for human life during Rwanda would have yielded military intervention to shore up the beleaguered U.N. peacekeeping force on the ground, a cost-benefit analysis that included regard for human consequences in advance of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, would, in my judgment, have resulted in a decision not to go to war (Power 624).

Americans forget that the benefits of the inclusion of human rights at the top of the list of priorities in American Foreign Policy reform would be extended to our own citizens.

I realize the inherent risk, here, in pigeonholing myself as what one of my colleagues refers to as "a rainbow gazer." An idea of American Foreign Policy reform that restructures the terms to what is best for the many over the long term, versus what is lucrative for the few right now, sounds so inclusive that it is susceptible to being shot down as foolish, unrealistic, or perhaps my least favorite label, "nice." I understand the wide berth I am giving to those who

may chime in here with some sort of retort about preservation of human lives and universal dignity as being a fantasy and a neo-Utopian vision not at all indicative of the “way it is.” To them I respond with this: I am no longer interested in discussing the “way it is.” I wish now to engage the periphery people who have evolved beyond the discourse of what we are accustomed to, into the vernacular of possibility. For, like my friend Dyer, exasperated with reinvention of the wheels of an inoperative apparatus of representative Democracy, remaining conceptually entrenched in the Foreign policy models of a bygone era with patterns of genocidal destruction as monument to their ineffectual nature, is frankly, a waste of my time. Admittedly, the avenue that I am about to proffer is not “rainbow gazing” because it will take additional generations, likely additional genocide to see to fruition. No mere armchair idealist is ready for the arduous task of cleaning the global policy slate, scrapping what we once accepted as appropriate measures of cost and reward, and starting anew.

If American Foreign policy is to adopt, finally and unwaveringly, the unbiased and uncompromising protection of the rights of the members of the world community to possess, pursue and satisfy their universal human needs, the American government must begin by reforming the education system. The collective voice of the people of Darfur as illustrated in Darfur Diaries, speaks to the universal need for access to some kind of education. This sentiment is echoed so strongly that certain of Maslow’s successors in Humanistic Psychology evaluated the right to education as one of the basic needs intrinsic to human existence. In his essay, “Human Needs and Political Education,” Christian Bay gives credence to the education-as-need idea when he states that “there is probably a kind of basic need, in addition to Maslow’s five, that should be postulated: a need for perceived personal freedom, or sense of efficacy or power to influence the course of one’s life” (Fitzgerald 9). Kareem, a Darfurian relocated to an Abeche, Chad Refugee camp, distills the sentiment to its essence. “There is no life without education” (Marlowe 39). Human needs awareness must become curricula for American schools starting in early childhood. This may dismantle the inherent fear of “the other” that causes our current foreign policy structure to view human rights and national security as mutually exclusive.

It is now widely accepted that the window of cognitive influence in children’s brain development is from birth to around seven years old. This statement has tremendous power when we ask ourselves what we are imparting to children through our current education system, or lack thereof, in terms of foreign policy, at that age, foreign policy being respect and curiosity about other people. That is to say, in role playing psychological focus groups, a three year old cannot perceive dishonesty and deception while a five year old can (pbs.org). What happens during those two years? We start to influence the future of foreign policy by dismantling what Maslow called “the very common preference for familiar, rather than unfamiliar things, or for the known rather than the unknown” which is displayed in the extreme of the adult spectrum as genocide (Maslow 160). In her remarks at the White House Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development on July 26th, 2001, Laura Bush alluded to the possibilities for social change inherent in early education. She quipped:

Before President Bush and I married, we had a couple of theories on raising kids. Now we have a couple of kids and no theories. But one thing we know for sure: What a child experiences from day one to grade one has a direct and profound impact on his future, and on our future (whitehouse.gov).

Interesting is the disconnect between Mrs. Bush's remarks and the tendency of our government to devalue the work of Early Childhood Educators by paying them, and K-12 teachers, considerably less than professionals with comparable education and responsibilities like nurses, field engineers, public accountants and software designers and developers (nea.org). Still, there most certainly are talented, loving and visionary Early Childhood educators in this country, who dedicate themselves for reasons that transcend a less than modest salary. Sad, then, that many of them will see their graduates sucked into the educational mire that is Mr. Bush's "No Child Left Behind" Act. Again, such vast differences appear in the values that are professed in the public eye and the American values that are upheld with legislative standards.

While it could be assumed that the span between, what I will call "the education of understanding" that could occur with a thorough reformation of current American models, and the implementation of an American Foreign Policy that counts the preservation of human lives and human rights as top priority, is a wide and unrelated gap, several members of the community of discourse about foreign policy have also postulated that the paradigm shift needed to begin to make human rights the axis upon which all other political decisions are made, must begin at an earlier, and less individualistic stage of life than today's policy makers can claim. In Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice, Jack Donnelly writes:

A human rights policy must be part of, not tacked onto or draped over, a country's overall foreign policy if it is to achieve either domestic or international legitimacy or effect. Difficult decisions must be made about the weight to be given to human rights, and they need to be made as a matter of principle, and as early as possible (Donnelly 248).

Indeed, in Abeche Refugee camp, Darfur Diaries tells us, one of the most immediately expressed values for the survivors of the Government of Sudan's genocidal sprees, is to deal with the problem of their children's fractured education. Rebuilding schools was such a priority, that they began it with no supplies, no protection from the elements and volunteer teachers instructing groups of children sitting in the sand (Marlowe 25). These scenes of tenacious preservation of the right to learn, to understand, underway even as the violent conflicts that precipitated them rage on, mere miles in the distance speak volumes to the role of education in what Desmond Tutu called "the way out" of violence and bloodshed on political terms (Daly ix). That way out has become known as "Reconciliation" and modes of it have been successfully unfolding in post-Apartheid South Africa as well as beginning in Rwanda. Education that embraces differences and uncensored historical investigation are its hallmarks. In their work introducing the power of this forward-looking movement, Reconciliation in Divided Societies, Erin Daly and Jeremy Sarkin, agree that "public education is perhaps the most important way for a new dispensation to promote its values and gain legitimacy" (Daly 248). They also advocate the making of "important decisions about process and substance," that speak to multiculturalism and diversity (248). The largest clue about exactly how to do this is from Daly, who is a member of the American Society of International Law, and from Sarkin, Senior Professor of Law at the University of Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa. They remark eloquently, that, "making education inclusive and subjecting history to debate signals that everyone within the

polity does and should have a stake in the society and that all have a meaningful role” (248). Some education programs have already begun this process.

Recently, I had the poignant good fortune to discover one such entity, working to reform foreign policy by building education models that answer to the idea of reconciliation. Facing History and Ourselves delivers classroom strategies, resources and lessons that inspire young people to take responsibility for their world (facinghistory.org). Facing History’s harnesses the power of the Internet and partners with school systems, universities and ministries of education worldwide (facinghistory.org). Facing History’s work is based on the premise that we need to—and can—teach civic responsibility, and social action to young people, as a way of fostering moral adulthood (facinghistory.org). Facing History presented an evening in Denver, Colorado with humanitarian Carl Wilkens, the only American to remain in Rwanda during that country’s 1994 genocide. During his presentation, Wilkens embodied the spirit of reconciliatory education when he said, “We really are one race. The human race. Anything that tries to redefine that, I want no part of.” Facing History also recognizes the gravity of changing our main concern when it comes to the way we teach our children. “If we do not educate students for dignity and equity, then we have failed both them and ourselves” (facinghistory.org). I can recall my own experience with the kind of pedagogy that groups like Facing History facilitate. As a sixteen year old history student, I was invited to participate in a Socratic Seminar at the Aspen Institute. My participant peers and I read texts that included Dr. Martin Luther King’s “Letters from a Birmingham City Jail,” and Machiavelli’s *The Prince*. We discussed with each other concepts like basic human depravity and civil disobedience. We were not lectured to; we were moderated by, a wonderful and selfless teacher, Bill Cathers, who employs the Socratic Method in his own teaching in inner-city Los Angeles. If, during our academic conversation, we experienced disparaging views or an impasse in understanding, Mr. Cathers would gently navigate us through to a place of reconciliation by asking more questions, tough questions whose answers revealed the very belief system of those that spoke them. I will never forget the experience for it was one of the most valuable of my academic live. I refer to it, mentally, whenever I am challenged by experiences in work and university that force me to see others’ opinions and ways of operating in the world as natural, even essential, when they are diametrically opposed to my own. It is effective, if not necessary to teach methods and habits of human acceptance, no merely idealize them. In his visionary work *Education and the Significance of Life*, Jiddu Krishnamurti underscores the dependence that the political bodies that define, instill and uphold global standards for human rights, have on the kind of education to which we subscribe:

Our present education is geared to industrialization, its principal aim being to develop efficiency and we are caught in this machine of ruthless competition and mutual destruction. If education leads to war, if it teaches us to destroy or be destroyed, has it now utterly failed? (Krishnamurti 13)

Perhaps those of us who had the tremendous educational privilege of sitting in that philosophic circle, many of whom with which I still associate and call upon for answers, some of which have

become doctors, lawyers, psychologists, artists, and yes, teachers, *are* deserving of the label “rainbow gazers.”

In an age dominated by genocidal violence whose catastrophe can only be matched in disbelief by the impotent paralysis of governments, including the United States Government, charged with the responsibility of responding to it in a way which ensures that it won't once more occur, maybe gazing upon rainbows is not such a bad practice. For it is the young who retain the ability to see distinct bands of beautiful color where the cynical see only conformity and shades of gray.

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