

The Aid Worth of a Human Being According to Geography

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Abstract

The author focuses on the effects of the media towards the conflict in Sudan. The lack of media attention towards the genocide in Darfur, not to mention the abundance of mistakes within the erratic coverage, is performing a disservice to the Darfurian people and the world. Specifically, the disparity in Aid and media attention towards U.S. domestic issues and foreign issues such as Darfur is a cause for concern. The argument is evaluative and presents an idea that the media should focus more on policies and ways to help to Darfur, then entirely on the emotions surrounding Darfur.

Despite the erratic coverage of the genocide in Darfur by the U.S. media, the conflict itself is steadily moving along. With the recent expulsion of 16 aid organizations, the situation in Darfur has worsened. Celebrities have attempted to attract the distracted eyes of the media back to Darfur with emotion especially, Mia Farrow with her twenty-one day fast, but issues closer to America still dominate news coverage and the pattern of domestic issues overshadowing African issues continues. The disparity in aid between conflicts abroad and domestic issues pertaining to the United States is unfair, especially in the case of Darfur. Although the media's coverage of Darfur is increasing, the coverage features the same mistakes made in previous African issues, thus the presentation needs to be changed, or else the genocide will continue.

Unfortunately, a gap exists between humanitarian aid directed towards Darfur compared to the amount of aid generally given to America's domestic issues. In the case of Hurricane Katrina, over 91 billion U.S. dollars and counting were directed towards the disaster, while in the case of Darfur, a mere 1.3 billion dollars have been raised (Bjorseth 20-21). To some there is nothing unfair here. A natural disaster on American soil destroyed millions of homes, displacing millions of peoples, and thousands died even with warning. The events were tragic; there is no argument there. The issue one may see in the aid disparity is that despite the similarities between Darfur and Katrina: Famine, water contamination, initial lack of government assistance, even race. Katrina is given more media coverage and more aid. A notable difference between Katrina and Darfur is the number of lives affected. Katrina took nearly 2000 U.S. citizens' lives, while the genocide in Darfur recently surpassed 400,000 deaths ("United Nations and Darfur"). If aid were proportionate with regard to the amount given to Katrina to lives taken, Darfur would have already passed a trillion dollars in aid, but it has yet to reach a tenth of a single percent of a trillion. The economic numbers do not seem to parallel the human numbers in Darfur. According to these figures, for each life lost in Darfur, from U.N. estimates, there is 3,250 U.S. dollars in aid, while for each

life lost in Hurricane Katrina, there is 45,500,000 U.S. dollars (Bjorseth 20). If America sees itself as the world power, plus the world's protector, and according to our country's Constitution that all men are created equal, then the money in aid should presumably be equal for each life lost. Since there is an inequality in aid, the cause to this inequality, to some, is wrong.

The American government cares more for the lives of their own citizens than for the lives of Darfurians. As controversial as that sounds, when looking at the money invested in humanitarian issues domestic and abroad through a capitalistic perspective, the statement contains credence. According to Nobel Prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, the War in Iraq costs Americans nearly 720 million dollars per day (Lydersen). A war with the intention of protecting the American public amasses over half the money Darfur garners through six years, in one day. Since 2001, no American lives have been lost on American soil due to terrorist attacks (Lydersen). The money seems to be working for us, so why do we not spend money protecting the lives of others in Darfur, where hundreds lose their lives every day from terrorist attacks? The money the United States uses for protection works, the lack of lives lost to terrorism proves this. This means if more money buys protection for Darfurians, fewer lives will be lost to genocide. Arguably, the American government cares more for their citizens than other countries' citizens. This is part of geopolitics; give some to the world, but for America, nationalism takes precedence. The American government cares enough for the lives of its citizens that the country's drug enforcement agency, the DEA, gives Columbia over two billion dollars a year in order to help prevent cocaine from eventually getting to the United States (Sweig 21). Columbia receives more funds from the United States each year than Darfur has received in the entirety of the genocide so far. In Three Cups of Tea, a New York Times bestseller, by Greg Mortenson, he describes his encounter with the Pentagon number crunchers and the way Washington sees everything through numbers (Mortenson 137). Then Washington should possibly see the unjust numbers in the case of Darfur, should they not? If an American wants to look at Darfur in a numbers way, two billion is given to Columbia every year, while Darfur has yet to reach that mark in six years despite the deaths of nearly half a million people and the proclamation after the Holocaust of "never again" (Prendergast 6). The lack of aid given to Darfur is not entirely the United States government's fault, nor should it be. The U.S. media has great control over the actions of the U.S. public, and coverage of the genocide has so far been somewhat unproductive.

U.S. media coverage of the genocide in Darfur generally focuses on what is happening in Darfur, rather than focusing on ways to help or links to domestic issues, which leads to less action. Focus on the genocide does raise awareness but is flawed with regard to the media because of the lack of policy or urgency presented in the coverage. A study on a two-year period, from 2003 to 2005, of articles in The New York Times relating to Darfur found that 50.5 percent of articles were plain news articles on what is happening in Darfur, specifically the atrocities (Kim 88). This aligns with previous mistakes of Africa fatigue, a term describing affluent nations' tiring of atrocities in Africa because of the often overbearing emotional nature of the issues (Prendergast 164). In the same study, words that build confidence in an audience such as "peace", "resolution", and "talks" were mentioned less than nine percent of the time (Kim 90). Without a feasible proposal or recognition of a possible end, the media often falls short of convincing the audience to act.

Another important word that is mentioned less than seven percent of the time is "American" and of importance during the two year time period, "Bush" (Kim 90). The media made another error in not attaching the issue to the American public. As seen in numerous Gallup polls, Americans' primary worries are domestic, and if global issues do not affect the United States, Americans do not take notice (Saad). The media can fatigue the American public easily, as seen in a Gallup poll citing that a majority of Americans became sad from images of the War in Iraq in the first year ("War Emotion Trends"). Without a domestic link, one would believe the urgency for nationalistic Americans is lower, and without

a link to the American public, the media makes Americans not stakeholders in the genocide. Though in the past, even having a stake in an African issue such as Somalia has not kept the American media from scaring away the public.

The American media seems to unfairly determine the actions of the largest economy in the world when Africa cries for help. In 1993, a year before the Rwanda Genocide of 800,000 innocent human beings, the American media perpetuated a hopeless image of Africa after the Black Hawk Down incident in Somalia (Wheeler 120). The negative coverage scared the public. In a traditional democracy the public determines the actions of a state. Since the majority, according to the media, feared what could happen in Rwanda, the U.S. watched as nearly a million people died. The U.N. sent little aid to Rwanda, prompting Roméo Dallaire, the Canadian General in charge of the U.N. force sent in to protect the foreign officials in Rwanda (not the citizens of Rwanda), to question "Are we all human, or are some more human than others? If we believe that all humans are human, then how are we going to prove it? It can only be proven through our actions" (Slovic). Roméo Dallaire's qualm is the lack of help or even attention given to the near million who died. The people misplaced by the Janjaweed of Northern Sudan are worth millions less, according to the amount of aid disparity between Darfur and Hurricane Katrina. The actions of the U.S. public and media show that some believe they are more human than others by donating more to the Western world than the East (Bjorseth 20-21).

Coverage of Darfur in popular media creates a hopeless image of the situation, which is the wrong way of covering African conflicts as learned from Somalia 1993. The other extreme in incorrect coverage is Rwanda. The western media downplayed the atrocities taking place (Thompson 89). At the height of the killing, the U.S. media was not there (Thompson 90). Darfur has experienced both already unfortunately. At the height of the killing in 2004, the United States' enormous media gave Darfur 26 total minutes of coverage (Prendergast 160). Unjustly, daily celebrity gossip shows air on all major networks. The media is possibly not assuming its role in fulfilling the proclamation of "never again" after the Holocaust. Twice now it has failed in informing the public fully of genocide, and without awareness, knowing something exists, the ability to create policies becomes difficult. The media's effect on Darfur has so far been a series of ups and downs. While raising awareness at points, overall it has diminished the U.S. public's potential on the genocide, much as it did in Rwanda.

Supporters of the media will argue that without attention directed towards Darfur by celebrities like George Clooney, the Sudan genocide would have been nearly untouched like the Rwanda Genocide (de Waal 54). This does not mean Darfur has been treated fairly by the media compared to domestic disasters. The lack of aid still exists and the depiction of Africa is still clichéd in the mainstream media, with a focus on the gore and violence of the genocide, and a present lack of addressing solutions (M, K.). Political pundits on the national news channels still take shots at humanitarian workers for asking for aid to situations abroad, instead of working to improve the American infrastructure. The debate exists at every presidential debate as to which presidential candidate will improve America the most. We rarely see the presidential candidates addressing issues that do not affect America directly.

Another argument in the defense of the media is the focus on the War in Iraq. America sees the War in Iraq as the most important issue facing America (Saad). Therefore, the American media will inform the public on what they care about most. The media might need to change their goals, though, and not focus on what the public wants most but what the public needs the most in order to better the world. The media should not be part popularity contest. The U.S. media needs to inform the public of issues that are injustices to all, as Dr. Martin Luther King said, "An injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." There is an unjust amount of aid given to the conflict in Darfur because of the amount of lives lost compared to other issues. The injustice lies in the amount of aid compared to the lives lost. The idea

sounds cruel, because every life is priceless, but in a capitalist, money driven society there seems to be a price to life. A problem has presented itself for America in the treatment of African issues seen in the amount of aid. The problem is that according to the amount of aid given between Darfur and Katrina as one obvious example, the American life is worth more. A nation created under the pretence that all men are created equal should reconsider the way it has treated African issues, specifically Darfur, because as many have argued before, it is morally reprehensible. The main contributor to Africa fatigue and neglect towards issues abroad is the American media. As the media has shown neglect and overdosing in the past to issues such as Rwanda and Somalia; it has shown again in Darfur how it can be detrimental when used incorrectly. The rhetoric of the media must carry into policy and acknowledge issues that do not just economically affect the United States.

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