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Subject: Some Good Books . . .

Posted by [elektrartig](#) on Tue, 20 Apr 2004 21:56:09 GMT

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but gut-wrenching, so beware. I've been on an African kick this winter: Philip Gourevich, *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families* -- A powerful account of the genocide in Rwanda, in which 800,000 Tutsis and "moderate" Hutus were hacked to death in 100 days, the reaction of (read: abandonment by) the international community, the heroic efforts of local UN commander Romeo Dallaire and those few of his troops who were not withdrawn after the violence started, and the ambivalent role after the slaughter ended of aid organizations, which were basically shielding and supplying the murderers, allowing them to pose a threat to Tutsis in eastern Congo/Zaire (abutting western Rwanda) and to the new Rwandan government. Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* -- One of the finest books I have ever read, and a book that should be read by every American who has ever given more than two seconds thought to the circumstances in which America should intervene in foreign mass murders. We say "Never Again", but genocide has occurred repeatedly this century -- Armenia, Cambodia, Iraq, Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo. The author documents how, over and over again, bureaucrats and politicians of both parties have, at best, done nothing (with few exceptions) to prevent ethnic slaughter. Whether you ultimately agree with her thesis or not, she makes a powerful argument that the US should do more, up to and including the use of military force, if necessary. This book has me doubting many -- most? -- all? -- of my foreign policy preconceptions. You won't be able to sleep at night, but it has to be read. Paul Theroux, *Dark Star Safari: Overland from Cairo to Cape Town* -- I am not a big Theroux fan, but this is a sad and funny description of his overland journey down the eastern coast of Africa. Having (one learns in the book) taught many years earlier in Malawi, Theroux finds both joy in meeting interesting and friendly people but ultimately more sorrow in the corruption and lawlessness, and resulting decay, he repeatedly encounters. Contemplating these developments, he develops a hypothesis that international aid is doing more harm than good. Not as good a book as the other two, but well-written and on the other hand it's a somewhat lighter read.

Tempest and Pi Construction Pix

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Subject: Re: Some Good Books . . .

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Wed, 21 Apr 2004 14:53:26 GMT

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Interesting. Lots of unrest there, has been for decades. Centuries even, yes? It's hard for me to understand. But I guess once blood has been spilled, resentments spread and grow like a virus.

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Subject: Re: Some Good Books . . .

Posted by [Manualblock](#) on Tue, 18 May 2004 00:58:47 GMT

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Just finished the Theroux book. Seems he has a real beef with the international aid community. It is big business and self-promoting philanthropists abound everywhere in the third world. The bigger the budget the less they accomplish. Bottom line, during colonial times there were roads and basic infrastructure, schools and hospitals. The indigenous peoples think differently and have a different agenda that will not adapt, the only hope is assimilation, let's get real. The resources are there. Tribal feuds extend deep into time, look at Bosnia. We invade only when the prospect of financial gain exists, look at Iraq.

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Subject: Re: Some Good Books . . .

Posted by [elektratic](#) on Wed, 19 May 2004 10:13:52 GMT

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What was interesting to me was that the NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) came off poorly in all three of the books. Theroux, as you say, both detests them personally, portraying them as jerks, and makes a convincing argument that international aid simply fosters corruption and discourages Africans from helping themselves. Philip Gourevitch clearly suggests that the NGOs abetted the Hutu interahamwe after the RPF took Kigali by funneling aid to camps controlled by Hutu Power and then refusing to recognize or deal with the consequences -- that Hutu Power was using that aid to continue to massacre Tutsis in eastern Congo and northwest Rwanda and threaten the new Rwandan government. NGOs figure less prominently in Samantha Power's book, but she does suggest that the NGOs' suspicion of the US was so great that they would rather permit genocide to continue to occur than to recommend or urge the use of military force to stop it. Only after Srebrenica did they hold their noses and do so.

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