

Beyond Genocide, and the relationship of the individual to events of mass atrocity.

Let me begin my very brief comments with a sincere thank you to Williams College, and especially Cantor Bob Scherr, the Music and Theater Departments for their creative collaboration of this installation and the month of cultural activities dedicated to genocide awareness.

I also want to note that my gift is as a manuscript illuminator, not as a public speaker, so I will try to keep my comments and observations to the point, and memorable enough that you will have some relevant and transformational information to digest in your mind after the opening.

Genocide is a unique human behavior in the annals of the history of armed conflict. Genocide is a unique concept in the consciousness of mankind in that there was no single word to describe the terrible manifestation of human barbarity of mass slaughter until only after WWII.

The path of understanding of the concept of genocide was conceived by the tireless work of Raphael Lemkin, an international lawyer who singlehandedly coaxed the young United Nations General Assembly to create the resolution of prevention and punishment of the crimes of genocide in, 1948.

An international judicial body permanently established to examine and prosecute crimes against humanity and genocide was not created until decades after the cold war.

International accountability issues arising from the mass atrocities of Bosnia and Rwanda propelled the United Nations Security Council to create ad hoc tribunals to hold individuals accountable for these crimes. At this juncture in international law and punishment of genocide and crimes against humanity it became clear that a permanent international criminal court should be established.

In 1994 the International Law Commission presented to the Un General Assembly the statutes for the International Criminal Court which was finalized and adopted at the "Rome Conference" in 1998. The statute responsible for the creation of the ICC is popularly known as the "Rome Statute". It was not until 2002 that the 60th state to ratify the statute was signed. This critical number initiated the legitimacy of the International Criminal Court, and its first temporal jurisdiction began on July 1st, 2002.

What does the role of the International Criminal Court have to do with our every day lives, and why would genocide legislation or legislation punishing the perpetrators of crimes against humanity be important for the average citizen to understand. I want to make this point perfectly clear, genocide is a crime which every human being need develop an understanding of. Genocide is a crime to which any one of us can fall victim to. Genocide is a crime, as long as it exists anywhere, can claim you or I as its next potential victim. Until we, as a world nation, develop adequate and effective legislation which punishes genocide and until, we as individual nations develop adequate and effective education which assists in prevention of genocide each and every one of us is threatened by the hydra head of genocide.

So this is where my job begins, prevention through education. When I began to work Beyond Genocide in 2001. I knew little to nothing about the history of genocide, and was summarily overwhelmed with the thousands of mass atrocities to sort through in gaining an understanding of the countries, perpetrators and victims involved. A middle ground estimate of numbers of human beings victimized by mass atrocity, according to RJ Rummel, genocide statistician and scholar, is 700 million human beings.

Where could I gain any ground in understanding how to crystallize and commemorate so much atrocity. After one year of research into the history of genocide I developed the alphabetical master list which I work from to (forgive the term) execute each individual illumination. As the series grows, my knowledge base and comprehension of genocide, its history and contemporary areas of scholarly research also grows. In addressing an audience of college students, my responsibility to you is to help you gain a personal understanding of and relationship to genocide in world history. The sublime and sacred beauty of the illuminated manuscript brings into focus the legacy of genocide civilization by civilization. The painful reality of genocide on the ground, the raw and flesh ripping horror of any single individual's victimization is reconciled with the tenderness and vulnerability of paper, paint and the timeless genre of manuscript illumination.

In creating a circle of connection with the conception of the International Criminal Court and my own work, I encourage each one of you here, today, to decide for yourself that understanding genocide is important for each one of us. It is personally important to the individual because as long as genocide exists anywhere on the planet any one of us could be the next potential target. With this understanding, it is for the sake of humanity that we create the legal and educational tools needed to eliminate genocide around the world. Today, the international judicial bodies draw closer in their ability to overcome the stumbling blocks of genocide legislation and punishment. Most recently the concept of "The Responsibility to Protect" (otherwise known as R2P) has shifted the barrier of state sovereignty as a license to kill to recognize that the state itself has the frontline responsibility to protect its own people.

The "Responsibility to Protect" resolution was adopted unanimously by the 150 heads of state meeting at the UN General Assembly 60th Anniversary World Summit in 2005. But it has a long way to becoming genuinely embedded in the international consciousness and to become operationally effective as policy and to be incorporated as rule of law which will be effective in various situations with appropriate policies and responses.

With the work of Beyond Genocide it is my privilege to share with you all of the fascinating developments of current and historic achievements in genocide prevention and to broaden our collective understanding of the history and legacy of genocide throughout the ages.. It is my gift and responsibility to present to you the vast loss to humanity which genocide represents to us all. I hope that this effort helps each of you come a little closer to enlightenment.

Amy Fagin
20th Century Illuminations
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