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**Writing to Change the World**

*Stowe lecture focuses on genocide*

**By Howard McEwen**

"So you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war," Abraham Lincoln said to Cincinnati native Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the book that made real for many the injustice of slavery.

Stowe's words inspired a great change in the minds of many regarding humans as chattel. The Mercantile Library honors her legacy next week with its annual Harriet Beecher Stowe Lecture, "Writing to Change the World."

Journalist Samantha Power, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for her book, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, will speak on her work and travels through a country wiped clean of undesirable and defenseless peoples.

"Because of her writing to change the world and because at the Mercantile Library -- which we consider the literary center of Cincinnati -- we see the need to continue the work Stowe did," says Dale Brown, vice president of the library's board of directors. "We look for speakers who are writing for themselves to change the world or writing about people who have changed the world."

Power's book looked at the 20th century through the lens of genocide. Her book ranged from the Ottoman Empire's slaughter of a million Armenians during the First World War to Saddam Hussein's murder of 100,000 Kurds and the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo.

More recently, Power traveled to Darfur. Her *New Yorker* article on this region of the east African nation of Sudan, "Dying in Darfur," won the 2005 National Magazine Award for best reporting. The article opens with the story of a mother named Amina, whom she met in a refugee camp in 2003. Amina and her husband were living a semi-prosperous life as herders. They had six children.

Then one day the Sudanese Air Force bombed her village. Her husband disappeared while traveling. Then came the *janjaweed* -- mounted marauders funded and semi-controlled by the Sudanese government. Her oldest son, 10-year-old Mohammed, was killed while trying to defend one of the community's wells, the lifeline of this village that clings to the edge of the Sahara desert. After the skirmish, Amina found her son's head. She couldn't locate his body.

"I took my child's head, and I buried him," Amina told Power.

Amina escaped with her remaining children to Chad, where she lives in poverty as a refugee.

The Genocide Intervention Network estimates that 400,000 people have been killed and 3.5 million have been displaced in Darfur. Power is one of a few journalists informing the public about the 21st century's first genocide.

"Samantha Power is as responsible as anybody in what we know as the tragedy in Darfur," says Albert Pyle, the Mercantile Library's executive director. "She was on the story early and stayed on it. She writes to change minds, and that's what we're looking for."

The conflict began in 2003. In 2004 the three major networks aired 26 minutes of Darfur coverage, according to the Tyndall Report, which monitors network news. In June 2005, Darfur came under heavier aerial and ground attacks. During that time, the networks and 24/7 cable news channel aired 126 segments on Sudan, compared to 485 segments dedicated to Jennifer Wilbanks, who achieved Warholesque fame as the "Runaway Bride."

Here's the hard thing about understanding what's happening in Darfur: It doesn't fit any preconceived media templates.



**Samantha Power, author of a book on modern genocide, speaks next week at the Mercantile Library. Samantha Power**

One template is that problems in the Muslim world are dominated by religion -- Jew versus Arab or Arab versus Christian. In the Sudan, governing Arab Muslims and Sudan's Christian minority have made peace.

The killing in Darfur is a race war. The Arab Muslim government of Sudan is cleansing its Darfur region of the black or African Muslims who occupy it. They are assisted by the Arab nomads, the *janjaweed*.

Another template is of strife between the Sunni and Shia sects. In Sudan, most Muslims are Sunni, whether Arab or black.

A final media template is that U.S. involvement in the Middle East and elsewhere is driven by corporate interests and oil reserves. The Sudan has \$2 billion in oil revenue. Chevron discovered the reserves in the 1970s but has been unable to tap them because of U.S. trade prohibitions until the civil war ends.

Although the media hasn't helped, Pyle says it's important that people understand what is going on in Darfur.

"We all share a responsibility when genocide is in the offing," he says. "Everybody must know about it and what actions we must take. This requires an informed citizenry."

Power's lecture will be in the library's reading room at 7 p.m. June 6. The cost is \$20 for library members and \$25 for all others. Reservations are required and can be obtained by calling 513-621-0717. ©

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