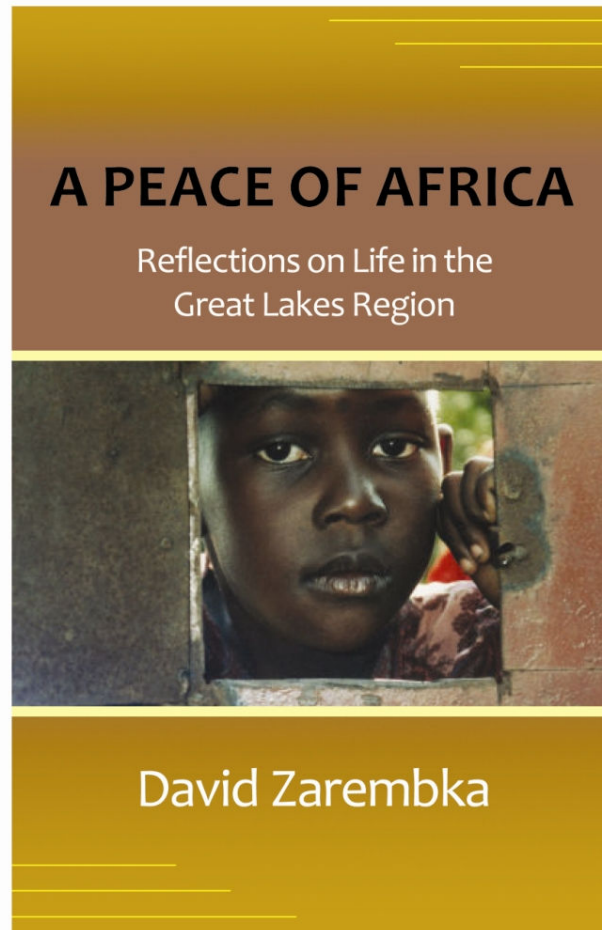


A Peace of Africa: Reflection on Life in the Great Lakes Region

By David Zarembka

Group Discussion Guide



Overview of book:

Whether entering war zones, volunteering during elections, or working in a refugee camp, author David Zarembka insightfully explains the Great Lakes region of Africa with its warts and glory. *A Peace of Africa: Reflections on Life in the Great Lakes Region* is a book that explores life adventures on the ground through experiential knowledge and observations. Through personal experience with his Kenyan family, friends, and colleagues, Zarembka captures the essence of cultural and societal issues and skillfully deciphers the differences between African and American culture that frequently escape casual visitors and expatriates alike.

By weaving personal stories with historical narratives, *A Peace of Africa* explores how the Great Lakes region of Africa went from optimism at the time of independence to the conflict, corruption, wars, and genocide that have engulfed the region since then.

As a Quaker and a peacemaker, Zarembka has been deeply involved in Africa for more than forty-five years. Zarembka analyzes current situations and offers bold solutions to make the area prosperous. The

book describes the successes of his peacemaking work there and gives an underlying rationale on how peace and reconciliation can be achieved in the Great Lakes region.

About the author:



Since 1998, David Zarembka has been the Coordinator of the African Great Lakes Initiative of the Friends Peace Teams. He currently lives in Lumakanda in western Kenya. David has decades of experience in Africa.

In 1964 after his junior year in college, he took a year off to teach Rwandan refugees in western Tanzania. He then returned to finish his BA in African History at Harvard College. After graduation he joined the Peace Corps in Tanzania and Kenya for two years. David then became the founding Head of the Mua Hills Harambee Secondary School in Machakos District, Kenya. Today the school has over 450 students.

On returning to the United States in 1971, he received his MA from the University of Pittsburgh in International and Development Education. He was the founder of a number of organizations in Pittsburgh including an alternative high school, a retail food co-op, a wholesale food co-op, a housing coop, and a group home for girls. David later moved to Yellow Springs, OH and then the Washington, DC area and began doing home repair which provided a livelihood which allowed him to pursue peace and social concerns activities. This allowed him to begin the African Great Lakes Initiative (AGLI) of the Friends Peace Teams and to visit the Great Lakes region two times per year for about a month each time.

David was instrumental in introducing the Alternative to Violence Project (AVP) into Rwanda (2001), Burundi, (2002), Kenya (2003), and Congo (South Kivu) (2005). He also organized the development of the Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) program in Rwanda and Burundi and its expansion into Congo (North Kivu) and Kenya. Other activities that he helped initiate are the Friends Women's Association Kamenge Clinic in Bujumbura, Burundi, an orphans program and technical school in Bududa, Uganda, and a summer workcamp program in the region.

He is the editor of the African Great Lakes Initiative's publication, *PeaceWays—AGLI*. Copies are posted on the AGLI webpage, www.aglifpt.org. David has written numerous articles for the *Friends Journal* and other Quaker publications.

David is married to Gladys Kamonya. He has three children, Joy and Tommy Zarembka and Douglas Kebengwa, who help him with the AGLI program. David and Gladys are members of Bethesda (MD) Monthly Meeting, but now attend Lumakanda Friends Church.

David writes, "When I was eighteen and had to sign up for the military draft, I realized that peacemaking did not include military service as I would be unable to kill or prepare to kill another human being. I realized at that time that this would make me in opposition to the conventional wisdom in the United States and that my lifetime would be spent working on other alternatives. The Friends Peace Testimony fit directly into my concerns so I have been involved with Friends in peacemaking ever since. I have always been concerned, not with individualism, but community issues of conflict, war, genocide, and peace,

reconciliation, and healing. I prefer, not the heights of governments and leadership, but the common, grassroots concerns of ordinary people and communities.”

Discussion questions for groups:

Section 1 — Understanding the Context

Chapter 1 From Genocide to Relief

Do you think you would be able to resist the pressure of your government and neighbors to do that which is against your conscience? Would you participate in order to save your spouse? Children? Parents? Friends? Would you kill if the alternative was to be killed?

Do you blindly obey?

Describe a situation where you were clearly the superior? When you were clearly the inferior? Relate your feelings in each situation.

Is self-preservation a basic of human nature over the preservation of others?

Chapter 2 My Heroes

Which of the four people described in this chapter do you feel is a “hero?” Why?

Why do you think the international response to the Rwandan genocide was so weak and ineffectual?

What are the psychological difficulties of being the first in your community to challenge the prevailing culture?

What are the implications when the maternal death rate in this region of Africa is 500 times greater than the United States?

What lessons did you receive from Gakemba’s story?

Section 2 — Understanding the Cultures

Chapter 3 Cultural Adaptation

Would you feel comfortable just dropping in for dinner unannounced at a friend’s house?

How much decision making do you give to your children, grandchildren, and other children?

How valuable is your personal space to you? How would you feel in a society where you are constantly watched by children and others?

Is society based on cooperation or competition?

How will you feel when you stand out from everyone else? Are you comfortable with who you are?

What strikes you as good or as bad in the culture of dying as described in this chapter? Is burying the actual body an important value for you?

How has your culture changed over your lifetime? Is this for the better or for the worse?

Chapter 4 Culture, Tradition and Change

When asked, “Where are you from?” what do you reply?

Is land and its resources something you “own” or you “use” during your time on earth?

What is your identity? List them in order of importance for you.

What would be needed for women in the United States to develop the kind of solidarity described in this chapter? Why don’t men do this?

Chapter 5 Visit the Great Lakes Region

If you have not visited sub-Saharan Africa, are you hesitant, afraid to visit? If so, can you explain the origins of your fears? If you have visited, can you remember how you felt before you went? How did the reality of visiting change your perceptions?

Consider the differences between “a guest” and “a stranger.”

How will you feel when you say “No” to someone who has asked you for money? Do you think they will reject you?

When you are in a culture which treats time more elastically, will you feel calmer or more anxious? Why?

How will the Africans see you? Can you put yourself in their shoes, observing you?

Have you met any East and Central Africans in the United States? Have you talked to them about their experiences in Africa? If so, what did they say? What are their feelings about the United States? Do they want/plan on returning to their homeland?

Chapter 6 Poverty and Wealth

Can you put yourself into a society where money itself is a scarce commodity? Can you conceive of being without funds to buy what you need? Could you go for a day, a week, or a month, with no pocket money (or credit card)?

Does the informal economy still exist in the United States? Will the recent economic downturn increase the informal economy?

Do you know people who make extra money on the side to cover their expenses? What do they do?

Do you think you could survive in the economic situation described in the book? Can you place yourself in a culture where items are given and received without putting any monetary value on them?

Is the author correct when he states that Americans like to look wealthier than they are? Is the pursuit of the American Dream a myth?

How do you think you will feel when you become friendly with someone whom you think is much poorer than you are?

Contrast the consumer society with one in which many people provide for themselves from their surroundings. Would the system of giving described in this chapter be possible in the United States? Why or why not?

Chapter 7 The Mirage of Tribe in Africa

Do you agree or disagree with the author that the various genocides described in Africa early in the Twentieth Century are connected with the Holocaust?

Can you envision a time, long ago, when there was so much land and so few people that the concept of a place belonging to a “tribe” or nation did not exist?

Should countries and states be based on ethnicity? Why or why not?

What is the different between “tribalism” and the ethnic discrimination practiced in the United States?

What do you think “tribe” means?

How can you reconcile the fact that you might not think that “tribe” or “ethnicity” is important when you are in a culture that considers this of prime importance?

Chapter 8 Perceiving Other Customs

Does American culture to some extent have the equivalent of “bride price?” Of “dowry?”

What are the benefits/drawbacks of having the “bride price” be a transaction between the groom’s family and the bride’s family?

What is your opinion of polygamy? How is it different from the serial monogamy required by law in the United States?

What would happen if you lived in a culture where no one can essentially get divorced? Was the United States much like this a few generations ago?

Are you for or against male circumcision? Female circumcision?

What are the ethics of HIV/AIDS pushing out funding for family planning? If abortion is illegal, what implications does this have for family planning?

Section 3 — Understanding Peacebuilding

Chapter 9 Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities

How many of the nineteen items in the Harvard Traumatic Questionnaire (page 165) have you experienced? Can you image experiencing some of these?

Do you agree or disagree with the six principles of the Healing and Rebuilding Our Community program?

Could you publicly stand up and forgive someone who killed your family member? Why or why not?

Does trauma in a society increase domestic violence? Which comes first, societal trauma or personal trauma?

Chapter 10 My Theology of Peacemaking

Do you think people are genetically programmed for revenge when they are victimized?

Are there examples in the Bible where current definitions of genocide, human rights violations, and crimes against humanity occurred? What was the consequence of these?

What in your background allows you to trust others? To be suspicious of others? Do you trust certain types of people more than others?

If you had survived the Rwandan genocide, could you trust anyone, even members of your family?

What does it say about your world if you cannot trust anyone?

Does someone have to ask for forgiveness before you can forgive him or her? If so, how can you tell it is sincere? If not, will it have any influence on the perpetrator?

Do you believe in “the transforming power?” That anyone can change and become good no matter what they previously did? If so, what are the implications for the current prison system? If not, why not?

Chapter 11 The Post Election Violence in Kenya

If the author had been one of the “targeted groups,” do you think he would have felt differently about the post election violence?

In a crisis situation, why is communication with the outside world so important?

Considering the vast need, the relief the Quakers gave was miniscule. Was it worth it? Could the funds have been better used for other things? If yes, give examples.

How can a person act responsibly if the person is not clear about the situation? Is it better to do something or wait for more clarity?

Which of the nine interpretations of the post election violence do you agree with? Which are most important? Which don't you agree with?

Section 4 — Understanding the Role of the West.

Chapter 12 Media Projections of Africa

How has the media shaped your view of Africa? Do you think the media depiction of Africa is fair to Africans?

Why is conflict in Africa reported as “ancient tribal hatreds” in media reports? What can be done about this?

How are over reporting and under reporting of deaths important in media coverage of events in Africa? What can you believe?

How are these reports used to support military interventions by the Western powers, their client states in the region, or the United Nations?

Why is “good news” rarely reported on in the US media? What kind of events are highlighted and which are ignored by the media?

Why are programs on animals and natural wonders in Africa so popular and prominent in the media?

Chapter 13 The Reputation of International NGOs

Are Africans justified in their suspicions about international non-governmental organizations?

Which is your favorite picture of the eight children on Christmas Day?

Are Americans generous or not generous to those who have suffered a major catastrophe?

How would you feel if you were a victim of a disaster and promised various kinds of relief that never arrived? How would you feel if you could see it being stolen and sold for profit by others?

If you were an aid worker, how would you respond to the dilemma of feeding starving people who are controlled by those who have just committed a genocide?

Why do you think US foundations contribute so little money to a country like Burundi?

How would you handle the problem of wage differences between local Africans and expatriates? Are the author's solutions workable? Are they fair?

Should NGOs pay sitting allowances? If not, how can this practice be stopped?

What could you do to push NGOs to reform as outlined in the book?

Chapter 14 Corruption

How does putting the blame for corruption on the Africans protect those expatriates who are benefiting from that corruption?

Are you surprised by the explanation of how bribery works? That there is an international network of bribing agents?

Is oil wealth going to benefit the average Ugandan? What can be done to make the proper use of the proceeds from the extraction of valuable resources? Does the same thing happen in the United States?

Should foreign countries be allowed long term leases to put large areas into crop production to feed their home populations?

Have you given or sent money to individuals that was supposed to be used for community purposes? If so, what happened?

Would you support a campaign to clean up Swiss banks and close down offshore banking? How?

Chapter 15 Elections

If elections are rigged, is the result democracy?

How much "rigging" is allowed before an election becomes illegitimate?

How can the advantage of the ruling party be neutralized?

What happens when the government loses, but declares that they have won? What can the international community do about this?

Why don't African leaders want to give up power?

If elections are rigged, what can a person do to get a change in government? Is armed rebellion a solution? Are mass demonstrations an effective means to change a government?

Summary

What aspect of the book was the most eye-opening for you? What was the most naïve?

Do you think the Great Lakes region of Africa will move towards prosperity or continue with destabilizing conflict?

What were the main weaknesses of the book?

Would you recommend this book to others? Would it be useful for someone visiting Africa for the first time?