

# 2013 Summer Reading Program Overview for Facilitators

Cultural and Intellectual Community Program Council (CICPC)

The webpage for the Summer Reading Program is: <http://fye.pages.tcnj.edu/summer-reading/>

This is the website that students have been directed to. It contains the letter from President Gitenstein about the book, the essay assignment, and directions for submitting the essay.

The following resources have been compiled by CICPC to help facilitators lead effective discussion sessions.

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## I. Theme Description: 2013-2014

*Constructing the Past* is the theme for CICPC sponsored programs in 2013-2014. The past is known by the memories of it, individual and collective. It is defined by professional historians, everyday people, governments, private corporations, and all kinds of groups, agencies, and institutions. It is not a 'fixed' series of events that all would agree on if only the evidence were before them. Constructing the past is something we all do, every day of our lives. Yet various conflicting definitions of the past are not all 'equal.' Whatever definitions come to prevail affect us all.

## II. Summer Reading Selection:

The Big Truck that Went By, By Jonathan Myerson Katz

*Summary of the Book:* Quoted from *The Big Truck that Went By*

Homepage: <http://thebigtruck.tumblr.com/>

Jonathan Myerson Katz is a writer and reporter. The only full-time American news correspondent stationed in Haiti during the January 2010 earthquake, he stayed on to cover the aftermath and flawed recovery that followed. That fall, he broke the story that UN peacekeepers had likely caused (and were covering up their role in) a massive postquake cholera epidemic that has since killed thousands of people.

On January 12, 2010, the deadliest earthquake in the history of the Western Hemisphere struck the nation least prepared to handle one. Jonathan M. Katz, the only full-time

American news correspondent in Haiti, was inside his house when it buckled along with hundreds of thousands of others. In this visceral first-hand account, Katz takes readers inside the terror of that day, the devastation visited on ordinary Haitians, and through the monumental—yet misbegotten—rescue effort that followed.

More than half of American adults gave money for Haiti, part of a global response that reached \$16.3 billion in pledges. But three years later the effort has foundered. Its most important promises—to rebuild safer cities, alleviate severe poverty, and strengthen Haiti to face future disasters—remain unfulfilled. How did so much generosity amount to so little? What went wrong?

The Big Truck That Went By presents a hard hitting investigation into international aid, finding that the way wealthy countries give today makes poor countries seem irredeemably hopeless, while trapping millions in cycles of privation and catastrophe. Katz follows the money to uncover startling truths about how good intentions go wrong, and what can be done to make aid “smarter.”

Reporting at the side of Bill Clinton, Wyclef Jean, Sean Penn, Haiti’s leaders and people, Katz also creates a complex, darkly funny, and unexpected portrait of one of the world’s most fascinating countries. The Big Truck That Went By is not only a definitive account of Haiti’s earthquake, but of the world we live in today.

### III. Book Reviews:

*From the Boston Globe:*

On the day in January 2010 that Port-au-Prince was leveled by an earthquake, which claimed as many as 316,000 lives, Jonathan Katz was waiting for a phone call.

That call, from AP headquarters officially concluding his 2½-year assignment in Haiti, never came. Instead, after narrowly escaping the ruins of his own house as it came crashing down around him, Katz stayed on for an additional year to report on the aftermath of the earthquake and the success and failures of the efforts to rebuild the fallen capital.

Katz details what he experienced and learned in “The Big Truck That Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left a Disaster Behind,” which is part memoir, part reportage. The book offers wrenching tales of the suffering of ordinary Haitians and a devastating account of good intentions gone awry.

In the days after the tragedy, good will flowed: Private American citizens donated \$1.4 billion, and the world spent \$5.2 billion on relief efforts. In addition, tens of thousands of military personnel and volunteers arrived from around the globe to help in the recovery.

And yet, despite all of those resources, much of the aid proved inappropriate, even counterproductive at times. Katz eloquently describes the reluctance of foreign donors, governmental and private, to channel funding through Haitian governmental institutions because of concerns about corruption. Not only did this undermine the government's authority in the eyes of its people, it prevented programs developed by Haitians and suited for Haitians from being carried out in favor of those designed by foreigners.

For example, one major problem was what to do with the more than 1 million people made homeless by the quake. Squatter camps in and near the ruined capital, often built on flood plains and lacking the most basic infrastructure and sanitation, were being legitimized, even encouraged by aid groups who were using them as distribution points for water and other supplies.

Mike Godfrey, a USAID worker with decades of experience in disaster relief, tried unsuccessfully to explain to the foreign Samaritans that their efforts were harmful. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, 600,000 people had left Port-au-Prince for the rural countryside. He pointed out that by distributing aid at the rural tent cities instead of at separate distribution points the groups were pulling masses in, fostering a situation that was dangerous on several levels and one that would hamper longer-term recovery.

Noting that most of these groups had very little personal knowledge about Haiti, Godfrey noted at one meeting of the responders: "How can you continue to function when there isn't a person who's been here for more than three weeks, and the chairman arrived yesterday."

One of the most distressing legacies of the foreign presence in Haiti was the reemergence of cholera 10 months after the earthquake after not having been seen there for more than a century. Cholera has killed more than 7,500 Haitians to date, and sickened 6 percent of the population. It was most likely brought to the island by Nepalese troops manning a UN outpost above the Artibonite river, whose sewage continued to flow undisturbed into the river months after the epidemic started, as Katz found when visiting the outpost.

Katz succeeds in transporting the reader straight into the midst of the events he describes so eloquently, without attempting to gloss over the harshness of everyday life in Haiti, both before and after the earthquake. He provides excellent background information on the country and its society, and his arguments are balanced and nuanced. Katz successfully describes the difficulties and contradictions of being a privileged foreigner trying to do some good in the face of such overwhelming need, which continues to this day.

*Dennis Rosen, a pediatric lung and sleep specialist who practices in Boston, has made three trips to Haiti since the 2010 earthquake as a medical volunteer worker. He can be reached at [dennis.rosen@childrens.harvard.edu](mailto:dennis.rosen@childrens.harvard.edu).*

*From the Huffington Post: 'Big Truck' details disastrous Haiti aid effort*  
NAHAL TOOSI | January 21, 2013 12:24 PM EST | AP

After two and one-half years in Haiti, Jonathan Katz was preparing to leave the impoverished but endlessly intriguing nation in January 2010. His next reporting assignment: Afghanistan. Then, a massive earthquake ripped apart his house, his plans and the lives of Haitians all around him.

So Katz, then an Associated Press reporter and the only full-time American correspondent in Haiti, wound up staying to chronicle the aftermath of the temblor. Life in Afghanistan may have been more uplifting.

In "The Big Truck That Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster," Katz eloquently blends personal anecdotes and Haitian history with in-depth reportage to show how one catastrophe led to so many more, and how, three years later, Haiti has barely moved forward.

At the heart of the book lies the question, does foreign aid actually work? Or, to paraphrase Katz, whatever happened to that \$20 you sent to help the people of Haiti? The answers are not inspiring, and they should make people seriously think twice about donating to an international aid organization.

For people who live or work in conflict zones where non-governmental organizations and U.N.-linked aid groups operate, Katz's findings may not be that surprising, simply a reaffirmation of depressing truths. But the ordinary reader will likely be shocked to learn of some of the tricks of the aid trade.

For one thing, pledging money isn't the same as giving money, but governments around the world were quick to ignore that distinction when issuing their press releases about how they would save Haiti. Instead, billions of dollars pledged to help the quake-struck nation have yet to materialize, and the U.S. is no saint in this regard.

The billions promised to Haiti also included significant amounts in debt relief. But it's strange to count this as "aid," Katz argues. After all, for people living in rubble and scrounging for food, it's meaningless to hear that their government doesn't have to pay back money it didn't have in the first place.

When countries do give money, much of it goes to international aid organizations – the Red Crosses, the Save the Whatevers – whose spending habits are difficult to trace and often questionable. Such groups frequently spend extraordinary amounts on their own administrative costs, money that doesn't get anywhere near suffering Haitians.

Huge chunks of aid funds are spent on everything from SUVs to personal security guards to luxury hotel suites, not to mention many, many plane tickets, because, after all, aid workers are a peripatetic bunch. Many spend only a few weeks in a disaster zone, and the

constant change in personnel means tremendous time is wasted getting newcomers up to speed.

An international aid worker who spends more than two years in a troubled country such as Haiti is what counts as exceptional. So much for institutional memory. Or getting to understand the people and what they need.

Even more direct government spending yielded some gems, Katz found. Why did the earthquake prompt the U.S. Coast Guard to spend \$4,462 on a deep-fat fryer, Katz asks, noting that figure is years of income for the average Haitian. Then there was the \$18,000 contract the U.S. Navy signed for a jungle gym from a Georgia company – which it could have bought for one-third the amount online.

Many of the contracts signed post-quake were with non-Haitian companies, which is understandable to a degree considering the lack of capacity in the struggling country. But, Katz argues, "it's misleading to call such spending 'money for Haiti,' especially when it gives the impression that any Haitian could have misappropriated or even profited from it. If anything, much of the money was a stimulus program for the donor countries themselves.'

But what to do with your \$20? Give it to the Haitians themselves? Katz, in effect, argues yes. Do research, find groups that have long-standing experience in Haiti with people who speak the local languages and actually understand the situation on the ground.

Katz also questions the conventional wisdom that the Haitian government is too corrupt to be entrusted with more of the money. He raises legitimate concerns about how people define corruption in Haiti and whether the definition is so broad that it is an impediment to strengthening the government in the long term.

Katz argues that the Haitian government has been so left out of the loop, and received so little direct aid, that it has not had a chance to prove its worth. It's a vicious cycle: The fact that so much of the money goes to groups outside the government keeps it from ever gaining strength, ability or the confidence of its people.

Sadly, this was the case long before the earthquake – aid groups have long proliferated in Haiti while the government is barely functional. The situation begs the question: Is their longevity in Haiti something aid organizations should boast of? After all, if they'd done their job, would they even need to be there anymore?

"The Big Truck That Went By" is hardly a statistical analysis or a mere policy book. It probably could have devoted a hundred more pages to the question of aid and remained riveting. Instead, Katz elegantly uses personal anecdotes and the stories of Haitians

whose lives were turned upside down to paint a portrait of a struggling yet beguiling country.

He also includes dollops of history for the novices among us, background that anyone with a rosy view of U.S. intervention should read carefully. In one of the most interesting sections, Katz describes investigating what led to the cholera outbreak in Haiti months after the earthquake, proving almost beyond any doubt that the illness was imported by U.N. troops – something for which he says the world body has yet to be held accountable.

One hopes that the policymakers involved in helping Haiti read this book and take it to heart. The people of Haiti certainly deserve better than what they've been getting.

#### **IV. Possible Discussion Topics:**

Below are some possible discussion topics accompanied by key passages from the text.

Complicated role of the journalist: Reactions to his covering the news instead of helping victims.

“I have thought a lot about those hours after the earthquake, my responsibilities in that moment. I knew people who made different choices: A freelance photographer friend, an American named Ben Depp, had left his cameras for a pickax. That night I believed that my greatest responsibility was to report the news, so the outside world might comprehend the scale and urgency of the crisis and send help.” (p. 27)

Importance of Political Stability: How did political instability contribute to the destructive power of the earthquake and ineffectiveness of relief efforts?

- Deforestation and migration to the cities (p. 42 and p. 49: “The shoreline slums grew, encroached on the National Palace, and climbed the surrounding mountains. Because there was no regulatory body to oversee construction, the masses built shacks of crumbling sand-based concrete supported by a few strands of rusted steel wherever they could find space.”)
- Corruption and lack of oversight (e.g., “Nobody knows now many died as a result of the earthquake. The foreign powers deferred to the Haitian government, but it had no way to count. It didn’t even know how many people had lived in the quake zone.” p.70; Example of the collapse of the school, La Promesse, due to lack of building codes and oversight: “The school fell...because it was not built properly. It wasn’t built properly because there was no agency to compel the owner to follow a safety code. (In the end, there was not even a court system clean or competent enough to prosecute him). There was no stable government to maintain such an institution or enforce such a code, because Haiti had spent the last century being torn apart by political factions, a bloody U.S. occupation, dictatorships, and disasters.” p. 11)

- State of the hospitals (e.g., “Years of systemic rot and bureaucratic malfeasance had left the General Hospital with a reputation as the place where people went to die. Rats ran through operating rooms exposed to the elements.” p. 160)
- Personal security (e.g., “Clercilia had taken a turn for the worse. Fearing he’d get mugged if they went out in the dark. Her father waited for morning. After the sun rose, he wrapped her in a yellow blanket and set out for the hospital. He emerged from the hospital a short time later...her lifeless body was stiff and sealed inside a plastic bag”, p. 235-236)
- Post-quake camps (e.g., “The settlements grew also because responders had removed almost none of an estimated 33 million cubic yards of earthquake rubble, first distracted by security concerns and then unable to deal with complicated land tenure issues, including identifying where the rubble could go,” p. 96-97)

There is the opportunity to link to personal experiences with Hurricane Sandy. How did political stability help in the US?

Pros and Cons of foreign intervention in Haiti: What worked and what did not.

“Obama observed with admiration that ‘countless lives [had] been saved’ by the provision of medical aid and water in the weeks after the quake. But he neglected to mention that thousands had later been killed by a disease almost certainly introduced by the reckless negligence of United Nations peacekeepers, who continued to refuse responsibility. The American president also made no reference to the fact that the underlying structural circumstances that had allowed the earthquake to be so destructive had been largely shaped by policies emerging from the Oval office where he sat. Obama was silent on the ways in which the meddling of his State Department had hastened the political crisis that Haiti found itself in one year after the destruction of the capital.” (p. 264)

How did the worldview of foreigners undermine efforts in Haiti?

- Race and class
  - p. 234 on the pipe leak that led to the cholera outbreak: “A villager was swimming a few yards away. “It—it does not mean it is from the base,” he said. “The people here, they swim in the river. They bathe in it.” He pointed to the swimming man. “They—you know how they are.”
  - p. 239 on beliefs about the AIDS epidemic: “In 1983, the CDC published guidelines about a newly discovered disease called AIDS. It identified four groups of carriers: homosexual men, intravenous drug users, hemophiliacs...and Haitians....As late as 2010, a New York disc jockey still

felt comfortable saying on the air that he was not HIV positive because he didn't "mess with Haitian girls".

- Views on what is considered corruption  
“Those who accuse Haiti of corruption often use the term in indefensibly broad ways. A diner paying a waiter for a better table, a traffic cop shaking down a driver for \$1, importers colluding on prices, and an official routing humanitarian aid into a private account can all be called ‘corrupt’, but finding an instance of one says little about the likelihood of another. Moreover, practices condemned as corruption in one context are accepted in another. U.S. congressmen routinely sponsor bills that benefit companies that lobby them and then leave office to make millions working as lobbyists or for the companies themselves.” (p.127)

How can so much aid not make a difference?

- “Most of the money pledge by foreign governments had never been meant for Haitian consumption. As humanitarian relief spending continued to trickle through 2010, adding up in the end to \$2.43 billion, in the end at least 93 percent would go right back to the UN or NGOs to pay for supplies and personnel, or never leave the donor states at all.” (p. 204)
- Issues concerning how much money was really needed to make a profound impact:  
“The supposition –shared from Port-au-Prince camps to North American living rooms—was that if the money wasn't making a difference on the ground, someone must have stolen it...But this view was based on some mistaken premises. The first was that \$16.3 billion would necessarily have been a transformative sum. It paled in comparison not only to U.S. spending on the war and reconstruction of Iraq --\$806 billion estimated through 2011—but simple stateside infrastructure projects. It had cost \$20 billion just to maintain roads and trains for ten years in Maryland.” (p. 203-204)
- Who is really helped by humanitarian aid?  
“Huge logistical operations cost money, especially when they involve nuclear-powered aircraft carriers and tens of thousands of personnel. But it's misleading to call such spending “money for Haiti”, especially when it gives the impression that any Haitian could have misappropriated or even profited from it. If anything, much of the money was a stimulus program for the donor countries themselves.” (p.205)



- Should Americans stop giving to aid organizations?  
 “It’s important to give wisely. Dig deeper to find organization with long experience in the affected region. Find people who speak local languages and have strong local ties that will help ensure they understand what is needed, what is available, and to whom the help should go.” (p. 278)

How to fix Haiti?

“In the years before the earthquake, foreigners often talked about two ways to ‘fix Haiti.’ In the first, the Western powers would build a new country piece by piece: roads, neighborhoods, agriculture, industry, police, legislature, and so on....The second was an even sicker joke: Drop a nuclear bomb and start over.” (p. 109)

## V. Additional Resources

Disaster Capitalism to the Rescue: The International Community and Haiti After the Earthquake

Please locate the document in the Summer Reading Guide folder or [click here](#).

“The author discusses the testimony of former U.S. President Bill Clinton on the negative impact of the removal of tariffs on imported rice on farmers in Haiti and the plan of Haitian Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive for the reconstruction of the country. The Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC) whose members including Clinton and Bellerive, belongs to international institutions is created by the U.S. State Department. The Haiti Senate voted to allow the IHRC to lead in the recovery efforts.”  
<http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/52343024/disaster-capitalism-rescue-international-community-haiti-after-earthquake>

Haiti Reconstruction: Factories, not Fields

Please locate the document in the Summer Reading Guide folder or [click here](#).

“At the March 31 "International Donors Conference Towards a New Future for Haiti," held at UN headquarters in New York, Haitian journalist Michèle Montas presented the results of the Voices of the Voiceless Forum, which held discussions with Haitian peasants, workers, and small merchants in March. [...] in official reconstruction plans, agriculture would integrate Haiti more deeply into the global capitalist economy.”  
<http://law-journals-books.vlex.com/vid/haiti-reconstruction-factories-fields-211508983>

‘We Bend, but We Don’t Break’: Fighting for a Just Reconstruction in Haiti

“The agony of the people of Haiti, struggling to survive the dual disasters of an earthquake and a cholera epidemic, has been highlighted by the mass media with much of the focus on the work of the international aid groups. But what has been completely blacked out is the outpouring of local community-based assistance, which, as Beverly Bell reminds us in this article, has been the bedrock of Haitian collective resilience and resourcefulness in the face of adversity.”

(<http://www.twinside.org.sg/title2/resurgence/2010/242-243/world1.htm>)

Please locate the document in the Summer Reading Guide folder or [click here](#).

May 26, 2013, Salon piece by Jonathan Katz:

[http://www.salon.com/2013/05/26/the\\_medias\\_warped\\_coverage\\_of\\_post\\_disaster\\_haiti\\_partner/](http://www.salon.com/2013/05/26/the_medias_warped_coverage_of_post_disaster_haiti_partner/)

This article by the author of the summer reading text suggests that the media provided coverage after the quake that exaggerated several post-disaster myths: disease, violence, and panic.

PBS Online Newshour Backgrounder:

[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin\\_america/haiti/history.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin_america/haiti/history.html)

This link provides a detailed history of Haiti.

New York Times article: The Charitable-Industrial Complex

[http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/27/opinion/the-charitable-industrial-complex.html?hp&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/27/opinion/the-charitable-industrial-complex.html?hp&_r=0)

This article describes “Philanthropic Colonialism” and suggests that we need to rethink how we seek to improve the state of people around the world.

## **VI. How to lead a good discussion**

This is a nice resource from Yale University. Please locate the document on the Summer Reading Resource Site ([fspfaculty.pages.tcnj.edu/summerreading](http://fspfaculty.pages.tcnj.edu/summerreading)) or use the link below.

From: [http://www.yale.edu/graduateschool/teaching/forms/papers/discussion\\_leading.pdf](http://www.yale.edu/graduateschool/teaching/forms/papers/discussion_leading.pdf)