

US Network TV Covers Liberia's Ebola Crisis - Without Liberian Voices

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

On **60 Minutes**, **CBS** reporter [Lara Logan](#) ([11/9/14](#)) presented a dramatic and emotional account of the fight against Ebola at one treatment facility in Liberia. But there was just one problem: Liberians didn't speak on the broadcast.

Former **New York Times** correspondent Howard French weighed in on **Twitter** as the broadcast aired, and collected his thoughts on **Storify** ([11/9/14](#)) under the headline "Africa Without Africans, Brought to You by **60 Minutes**."

As he put it:

There's a large literature of what's meant by Africa w/out Africans. Common examples come from journalism that quotes just diplomats + aid workers + foreign experts of one kind of another. Usually, they'll throw in a quote from a taxi driver or an anonymous market worker to cover their, you know...

Indeed, the focus of Logan's reporting was the US medical workers who had traveled to Liberia to care for the sick—"more than 2,000 Americans leading the response," anchor Scott Pelley explained in his introduction, "and more on the way." The segment was based on life at one treatment center run by the International Medical Corps, with **CBS** focusing on the American doctors and nurses treating the sick.

There's no doubt that they are brave; one doctor speaks of the "global citizen's responsibility" to act, and a nurse who speaks very plainly about the chance she could get sick and die: "I'm OK with that, because I'd rather be here helping than home and safe."



But Americans aren't the only ones risking their lives to treat Ebola patients. Logan explained that "most of the staff here are Liberian, and to lift their spirits they mark every new shift with hymns." That narration is

accompanied by footage of singing African health workers, while Logan continues:

The stigma of the disease is so great, many of them say they're treated as outcasts when they commute back home every day. But in here, the Americans who work with them call them heroes.

Logan even shows Liberian workers suiting up:

In sweltering heat and often 100 percent humidity, they cover every inch of their bodies in plastic and rubber armor. They're so hard to recognize, they wear their names on their foreheads.

But she sits down with one of the American doctors to ask: "How tough is it wear that suit?"

At one point, Logan expressed a desire to include Liberian voices: "We want to talk to some of the patients, but you have to keep your distance."

There's been plenty of criticism of US media coverage of Ebola for focusing on the slim threat to Americans while thousands of Africans have died. **60 Minutes** didn't do that at all. But it represented a different kind of media problem: The show traveled to the scene of the crisis—and chose to portray it through American eyes. As French put it, "It's the erasure of Africans from history, in this case their own history, and to reserve meaningful thought and agency to whites."

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