



Loung and her father share a happy moment before the Khmer Rouge enter the city. Source: All screen captures are from *First They Killed My Father*.



Loung watches the soldiers march into the city from the balcony of her home.



Loung and her family marching on the road out of Phnom Penh to an unknown destination.

# TEACHING CAMBODIAN GENOCIDE THROUGH FILM

By Benjamin Harris

## *First They Killed My Father*

Directed by Angelina Jolie  
Jolie Pas Production Company and Netflix,  
2017

136 minutes, color  
Available on Netflix

Students in my world history class sat in silence as the film credits started to roll. We had just started a unit on the Cold War, and I decided to integrate the film *First They Killed My Father* about genocide in Cambodia.<sup>1</sup> Directed by Angelina Jolie (who spent time working in Cambodia to film the popular *Tomb Raider* movies and has been a Cambodian citizen for a decade) and produced by Jolie and Cambodian director Rithy Panh for Netflix, my hope was that the story of five-year-old Loung (played by Sareum Srey Moch), her family's removal from their middle-class Phnom Penh home in April 1975, and the travails of forced labor camps, family separation, violence, and death at the hands of the Khmer Rouge would resonate with my students. When I asked for impressions, one student stated with surprise, "I can't believe this is the first time I've learned this!" Another asked, "Why can't we do this more?" My initial reaction was to believe the student wanted to watch movies in class instead of "doing history." The more I thought about his comment, however, the more I realized the power of film as a vehicle for student understanding, captured in the question posed by historian Paul Weinstein: "Think about which has made a greater impression on the mass consciousness, myriad scholarly studies of the Normandy invasion or Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*?"<sup>2</sup> Following this positive experience, I was determined to use film as a teaching tool to help students better understand broad and significant topics in Southeast Asia.

Many teachers utilize films in their social studies courses knowing how much of their students' awareness of global events is shaped by online videos and images. However, there is an abundance of research on the problematic nature of showing films to students that lack historical understanding, as it can lead to skewed or inaccurate views of what actually happened.<sup>3</sup> Noting these pitfalls (and the stereotypical view of history teachers utilizing film), I opt to show this film to engage my students in authentic thinking about complex topics like war, culture, human rights, and genocide that they might not otherwise understand.<sup>4</sup>

It is important for students to understand a basic and verifiable historical generalization about the 1947–1991 Cold War: the historical event, although multilayered, was fundamentally an ideological clash whose major protagonists—Western liberal democracies led by the US and its allies, and the Communist USSR and its allies—both used a number of strategies, ranging from propaganda to proxy wars. The Cold War resulted in the dissolution of totalitarian Communism in much of the world and a substantial increase in varying levels of freedom for people in former Communist bloc nations. In this struggle, both sides engaged in actions that had unintended consequences, including civilian deaths, and results that inadvertently strengthened the power of their ideological enemies.

*First They Killed My Father* opens to scenes of American planes secretly bombing the jungles of Cambodia, despite President Richard Nixon's pledge to "scrupulously respect the neutrality of the country" in an attempt to prevent Vietcong guerillas from moving into South Việt Nam. The carpet bombing, the death of thousands of innocent Cambodians, and Cambodian General Lon Nol's support of the United States in the fight against Communism led to the chaos that ultimately unleashed the Khmer Rouge.

The focus on Loung Ung's story begins in Phnom Penh in April, just before the arrival of the Khmer Rouge. Streets normally busy with vendors, Buddhist monks, and neighborhood residents seem eerily quiet. Suddenly, the Khmer Rouge arrives to triumphant music, and the residents cheer on the soldiers and wave flags. Inside the home, Loung's father Pa (played by Kompheak Phoeung) cautions a fellow police officer that, with the Khmer Rouge on the outskirts of the city and since America abandoned the country, "Who knows what will happen to Lon Nol [and his supporters] if they get this far?" His warning foreshadows events to come. The Ung family, like all others, quickly pack "only the essentials" (though Loung's oldest sister, Keav [Sreyneang Oun], manages to throw in the girls' red New Year's dresses), and the family joins the long ranks being ushered out of the capital city to the countryside. Along the way, Loung witnesses former officers of Lon Nol's



The Ung family, along with hundreds of others, arrive at a Khmer Rouge labor camp.



In the camp, they plant, grow, and harvest food for the army, while they are fed a starvation diet of scraps.



The soldiers come for Loung's father.

government shipped away—presumably to be killed—and the discrimination of foreigners. After three days of walking and enduring heat, thirst, hunger, and Khmer Rouge checkpoints, the family is met by Loung's Uncle Leang, who takes them to a nearby village. Here, the family learns the true reason for the evacuation of Phnom Penh and other cities, and the emergence of Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea. As a middle-class, educated man and former police officer, Pa is a target for the Khmer Rouge, who worked to create a classless, agrarian society. Fearing what might happen should Pa's identity be discovered, the family decides to leave, only to be picked up by the Khmer Rouge and taken to a forced labor camp.

As a small child, Loung is understandably upset as her possessions are confiscated by the Khmer Rouge and she is forced to dye her clothing black and cut her hair short to match all others. For the next few years, Loung and her family are forced to work in the rice paddies, and subjected to malnutrition, disease, and ultimately loss. The most poignant moments occur when Loung's older brothers and sister are reassigned to child labor camps and when Pa is ordered by Khmer Rouge soldiers from the camp. Realizing his fate, he hugs his children and tells them everything will be all right. With his head held high, he walks from his family for the last time. After such loss, Loung's mother forces three of the four remaining children (the youngest, Geak, is too small and weak to leave) to flee in the hope that separation will prevent further tragedy.

Loung and her sister find a child labor camp and claim to be orphans. The camp's supervisor, Met Bong, takes interest in Loung, and she is trained as a child soldier to fight against an ever-present threat by neighboring Việt Nam. Learning of the death of her mother and youngest sister, Loung throws herself into her military training; gains experience with setting landmines; and participates, though begrudgingly, in the frequent propaganda sessions. Vietnamese attacks create opportunities to escape the camp and the Khmer Rouge, and by the end of the film, Loung reunites with her siblings in a refugee camp.

## Cambodia's 1975–1979 Genocide

**U**nder the rule of Prince Norodom Sihanouk in the 1960s, Cambodia remained neutral during the Việt Nam War. By the late 1960s, the Communists in Việt Nam began to use eastern Cambodia as a transportation hub for supplies bound for Việt Nam and established the Central Office for South Việt Nam (COSVN) in the Cambodian sanctuaries. The United States carried out heavy carpet-bombing campaigns in Cambodia to stop Communist supply lines. Sihanouk was removed from power in a military coup led by US-backed Lieutenant General Lon Nol in 1970.

During this time, the Cambodian Communists, known as the Khmer Rouge (French for Red Khmer) and led by Pol Pot, gained new recruits and support, and later began attacks on Lon Nol's army. By 1975, the Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot's leadership captured the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh and established Communist rule in Cambodia.

The Khmer Rouge began to empty cities and towns in an attempt to eliminate any capitalist and intellectual movements from urban areas. Educated people in the country had to work with their hands in the fields. If they resisted, they were tortured and executed in various Killing Fields. The prison S-21 was particularly brutal. Of the 14,000 prisoners that entered S-21, only seven are known to have survived. For citizens that were not tortured and executed, political and civil rights were abolished, labor camps created, and minority groups heavily persecuted. All citizens worked long days as unpaid laborers, living in communes on minimum rations. Between executions, overwork,



A display in the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh. Source: © Shutterstock. Photo by Thanachet Maviang.

starvation, and disease, millions of Cambodians died.

Although a subject of historical debate, occasionally race, ethnicity, and class (in a non-Marxist sense) seemed to be a factor in who Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge killed. At specific times, the French-educated elite Khmer Rouge killed Non-Khmer Cambodians (e.g., ethnic Vietnamese and Muslim Chams) at much higher rates than the dominant Khmer majority, although a majority

of Khmers died in the genocide.

The Cambodian Genocide Program at Yale University estimates that 1.7 million people, roughly 21 percent of the entire population of the country, were killed by the Khmer Rouge from 1975 to 1978, with other sources placing the number well over two million.

The Khmer Rouge fell in 1979, when the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia and captured Phnom Penh. The Khmer Rouge leaders retreated into western Cambodia and maintained control of some areas. The Khmer Rouge was part of a coalition government that fought against the Vietnamese for the next decade. After Việt Nam's 1989 departure, the Khmer Rouge experienced mass defections, the capture of key leaders, and the death of Pol Pot. By December 1999, the Khmer Rouge essentially ceased to exist. ■

Sources: Adapted from Michael G. Vann, "Comparative History of Genocide in Southeast Asia: Using Cambodia and East Timor in Asian Civilizations and World History Survey Courses," *Education About Asia* 20, no.1 (2015): 21–27, <https://tinyurl.com/2mp869hx>; and D. R. SarDesai, ed., *Southeast Asian History: Essential Readings* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2013).





Loung and her sister pretend to be orphans and are taken in at another camp.



Loung is recognized by the KR as strong and smart, and is sent to a military training camp.



Loung learns that her mother and baby sister were taken by the soldiers.

*To add context, instructors could assign students to conduct research on historical interpretations that support, extend, or contrast with the film's depiction of the emergence of the Khmer Rouge and genocide.*



Prince Norodom Sihanouk in 1967. Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/yj5ubuez>.



Cambodian Prime Minister Lon Nol at a press conference in Saigon in January 1971. Source: *Stars and Stripes* website at <https://tinyurl.com/7wsesm63>.



Pol Pot. Source: *Nostalgia Central* website at <https://tinyurl.com/3u73yxx6>.

My students have very limited background knowledge of Southeast Asia, so before viewing the film, I try to contextualize events in three areas: the evolution of Khmer civilization through the creation of Democratic Kampuchea, the Cold War, and the Indochina wars. Despite its rich history, my students know next to nothing about Cambodia before viewing this film. There is limited information on the ancient Khmer people and Angkor Wat, and one three-line sentence about Pol Pot and genocide in my students' textbook, so I supplement with excerpts from accessible texts by David Chandler and Robert Dayley.<sup>5</sup> Students are more familiar with the nature of the Cold War but struggle to understand why Communism was considered such a threat to the United States, and we spend time discussing the Domino Theory, the policy of containment, the Non-Aligned Movement, and proxy wars.

Considering the ages of my students, I do not go into detail regarding the historiography of Communism in Cambodia, but this could certainly make for fruitful areas of research and discussion with advanced students and undergraduates. Like William Shawcross's book *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia*, the film presents a well-known narrative about the emergence of the Khmer Rouge. In 1969, Nixon and National Security Affairs adviser Henry Kissinger authorized a secretive bombing campaign in eastern Cambodia on areas with few military targets. Intended to destroy the headquarters of Việt Cộng soldiers directing operations against the US military in South Việt Nam, Operation Menu (as the bombing campaign was nicknamed) had the adverse effect of driving Cambodians to support the Communists.<sup>6</sup> To add context, instructors could assign students to conduct research on historical interpretations that support, extend, or contrast with the film's depiction of the emergence of the Khmer Rouge and genocide. One example might be to frame questions around the role of ideology. To what extent did Marxist ideology contribute to genocide? Many Cambodian students like Pol Pot studied the teachings of Lenin and Marx in France and returned to their country with specific plans to contribute to "more far-reaching and fundamental changes than attempted by previous revolutionaries."<sup>7</sup> Another question might be asked about China's role in catalyzing the Communist Party of Kampuchea (Khmer Rouge). Despite his nationalism, and somewhat due to his desire to remain neutral in the geopolitical events taking place between the United States and Việt Nam, Prince Norodom Sihanouk managed the *Government Royal d'Union Nationale du Kampuchea* (GRUNK) after his removal from power by General Lon Nol. Real power within this coalitional government flowed from China, however, which provided money and resources to support the Communist insurgency in Cambodia. Encouraging students to engage in scholarly conversation is an essential skill. Not only does it help students develop critical thinking skills, but it also adds important nuances to their understanding of events depicted in the film.

Greater knowledge of the Cold War paves the way for my students to consider the third context: conflict in Indochina, particularly the US war in Việt Nam. Due to state curriculum standards and time constraints, Việt Nam unfortunately gets very little attention in high school classrooms, and misunderstanding abounds. I have made extensive use of resources in previous editions of *Education About Asia* articles, particularly those suggested by Raymond A. Marcus in his essay "Exploring the Việt Nam War."<sup>8</sup> Once students discuss the myriad causes and effects of US involvement in Việt Nam (and Southeast Asia) and have developed historical context, we screen the film.

Many teachers provide students with a list of questions to answer as students watch a film. I have found this activity to be problematic, as it diverts student attention and they are more focused on getting the "right" answers than engaging with the story arc. Instead, students read a short summary of the film before I divide them into small, collaborative groups and assign each a particular theme to consider as they watch: war and violence, culture, and human rights and genocide. I direct these small student groups to ask questions about their themes (for example, sometimes it is necessary



Running from the Khmer Rouge, Loung realizes that the people around her are being blown up by the land mines that she helped plant.



Loung is reunited with her young brother and sister in a Vietnamese-run refugee camp, then with her older brothers in a Red Cross camp.



Luong sees a captured Khmer Rouge soldier. He reminds her of her father and all the violence in her life.

to describe cultural elements or define the term “genocide”) and require that they write and briefly present on preconceived ideas of how their themes might be presented in the film.

At its heart, *First They Killed My Father* is a story of violence and war brought about by the Khmer Rouge. My students are not unaccustomed to seeing violent movies, though there is an immediate understanding that violence perpetuated in this film toward innocents is anything but entertaining. Like many Cambodians that were forced from their homes into the countryside, Loung and her family must quickly confront death along the road as people unable to walk, the sick, and the elderly are left to die. Those with education, Buddhist monks, and anyone sympathetic to the ousted Lon Nol government are singled out and executed. In the labor camp, malnutrition and disease take a heavy toll. While walking along a river, Loung and a small group of prisoners find a body hung up and decomposing on the riverbank. Loung pushes the corpse with a stick and the girls watch without emotion as it floats downstream. After, the girls enter the water to bathe. Lastly, despite her young age and small stature, Loung is sent for military training in a child soldier camp, where she learns to fire a rifle, prepare land mines, and charge at fictitious Vietnamese soldiers with a bayonet. As one of “Angkar’s children,” Loung is told, she is “free from stain” for any killing done in the name of the Angkar and revolution.

The experiences with violence were understandably traumatic but become commonplace. In large part, this has to do with the ideology of the Khmer Rouge. Regularly, Loung and her family are called “blood suckers” and “parasites that ... should be shot and killed.” As is the case with other incidents of human rights abuse and genocide, defining “the other” allowed the Khmer Rouge to deport those from the city to labor camps, and any attempt to defy the Angkar was considered anti-Revolutionary and would result in punishment. During a propaganda session one evening, Comrade Khoeun discloses that Comrade Sun tried to obtain Western (French) medicine to cure his son of fever and diarrhea. For his disloyalty, he was “reeducated,” tied to a tree, and punished. The systematic discrimination, violence, and killing of nearly a quarter of the Cambodian population provides opportunity to discuss with students the process of genocide.<sup>9</sup>

The film’s depiction of violence creates a marked contrast with the rich Cambodian culture that existed prior to invasion and deportations. Loung’s story depicts a culture that seemingly disappeared in a short number of years. In the beginning, there is joy and laughter. Loung’s siblings dance to music (in Khmer) in the living room of their home, and the Ung family shares a fine meal. This will be the last time the family knows comfort. Only in dreams and flashbacks that occur throughout the movie does Loung recall life before the Khmer Rouge: the table prepared with delicious food for the Cambodian New Year, traditional dancing, fireworks, and celebration. For prisoners of the Khmer Rouge, food is rationed to small amounts of rice, insects, snakes, and the occasional chicken that can be found in deserted villages. Likewise, “Western” possessions are confiscated and rejected, as they are considered part of imperial and feudal society. All Cambodians are made to wear black clothing with the traditional red *krama* (scarf). There is no individuality expressed in Pol Pot’s Democratic Kampuchea.

As with all films, *First They Killed My Father* is not without problems, which deserve some consideration within the classroom. Students tend, not unreasonably, to regard Cambodia’s rule by the Communist Khmer Rouge as a totalitarian state that killed a vast number of its own citizens and maintained control through fear and brutal treatment. The backward trajectory to the Year Zero cut Cambodia off from the rest of the world, and the Khmer Rouge forced agrarian collectivization on those able to survive. The film accurately depicts the authoritarianism of the Khmer Rouge, the ideological conformity, and the many ways in which enemies were purged from society. It is less clear, however, why the Vietnamese became the principal enemy toward the end of the film, particularly since both countries were experiencing Communist revolutions after decades

*Loung and her family must quickly confront death along the road as people unable to walk, the sick, and the elderly are left to die.*





As adults, Loung and her siblings return to the ruins of a Cambodian temple to honor their family members and the thousands of others who suffered or were killed by the Khmer Rouge.

*It is praiseworthy that all filming was done in Cambodia instead of a Hollywood set, the actors are all Cambodian.*

of French control. During reeducation sessions, Loung and other child soldiers shout praises to the Angkar, repudiate Western ideas, and always learn about the dangers of the Vietnamese. Interestingly, the English subtitles don't adequately catch the use of the Khmer term *Youn*, used by the cadres of Khmer soldiers to describe their Vietnamese enemy. The term was originally derived from the Sanskrit *Yavana* and denoted a serious foreign threat. In Democratic Kampuchea, Youn suggested savagery and reinforced long-held myths about the barbarity and ruthlessness of the Vietnamese toward the Khmer people. Given the perceived danger, Loung's military training consists of burying land mines in the forest to keep the "Youn enemy" away. Toward the end of the film, however, she watches with horror when Cambodian refugees are maimed and killed as they run from the Khmer Rouge through the same forest toward the

protection of Vietnamese soldiers.

The singular perspective of this film on a child's daily struggle to survive means that larger geopolitical events are overshadowed. My students see Communism as an ideology and do not always recognize the long-standing ethnic and cultural differences between peoples in Communist countries, nor see how such differences can result in violence, as was the case in the seven-month 1969 USSR-PRC undeclared war. Recognition of culture and ethnicity adds a new level of historical complexity that helps students understand Cambodian-Vietnamese Cold War-era violence.

Situated between Việt Nam and Thailand, Cambodia was occupied at times by both countries, only to have its borders largely restored during French colonial rule. Pol Pot was concerned with the "burden of the past" and the hegemonic status of Vietnamese Communists. As Sok Udom Deth points out in a superb *EAA* article, Pol Pot became "increasingly intolerant of Việt Nam's perceived domination" of Southeast Asia. His increased paranoia ultimately led to clashes along the border and in the Gulf of Thailand, political purges, and the execution of Khmer officials suspected of cooperating with the Viet Minh.<sup>10</sup>

Another concern is the film's story arc, which concludes with Loung's reunification with siblings in a Vietnamese refugee camp and a final scene reminiscent of *Schindler's List* that depicts the remaining Ung family members praying in front of a Buddhist temple. This does not necessarily detract from what is a highly subjective storyline to begin with, but it is important not to leave students "with the comfortable idea that a very bad story has come to a good end."<sup>11</sup> After all, in 1979, the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia to overthrow the Khmer Rouge and established the People's Republic of Kampuchea, a Vietnamese-dominated Communist government, for the next ten years.

Though I do not utilize Ung's memoir with my students in class due to time constraints, several scholars have raised questions about the text that could be equally applied to this film adaptation. For example, Bunkong Tuong asks whether the story provides a true historical and cultural representation of events.<sup>12</sup> This asks too much of a film specifically shot to tell the story through the eyes of a young child. It is praiseworthy that all filming was done in Cambodia instead of a Hollywood set, the actors are all Cambodian (there is no Western savior in this story), and the entire story is in the Khmer language with English subtitles. Moreover, the power of this film is its sole focus on Loung's experiences. Tragedy is personalized in a way that creates empathy and understanding from students that have little knowledge of events that unfolded in Southeast Asia.

Additionally, the concern raised about the film's lack of historical comprehension invites opportunity to discuss with students the craft of history. A cinematic preface states that the film is based on a true story, and for that reason, many are likely to take the film at face value. My students get the bulk of their information from video content, and there is little discernment of fact from fiction. We can encourage historical inquiry by teaching students to critique the representation of events in film as we do with other types of historical sources.<sup>13</sup> I ask students to compare and corroborate Loung's account with digital documentation from the Southeast Asia Digital Library and Yale University's Cambodian Genocide Databases, which contain stories of young children that survived the Khmer Rouge.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, there are opportunities to pair documentaries with *First They Killed My Father* to help students develop deeper understanding and to practice making sense of film as a historical source of information.

There are several documentaries appropriate for the high school and undergraduate classrooms. One of the very best is *My Cambodia*, produced for the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE). At only eighteen minutes and created specifically for a teenage audience, *My Cambodia* is powerful intellectually and emotionally. There is also a free curriculum guide for teachers available on the SPICE website. The documentary depicts the return of Khatharya Um to the country she fled forty years prior in the wake of Khmer Rouge violence. It complements Loung Ung's story in the depiction of the horror of depopulation from Phnom

Penh, family separation and hard labor, and the violence perpetrated toward Cambodians. It also provides actual footage of locations such as Tuol Sleng Prison, the former Tuol Svay Prey High School in Phnom Penh that was turned into a torture center, and the mass graves of Choeung Ek “Killing Field” on the outskirts of the city. The visual imagery and Um’s recollections can be difficult for some students but serve a specific and important purpose. “[The Killing Fields] evoke ... such painful memory,” Um states. “It’s very difficult for many of us Cambodians ... [b]ut it is important to share the history, because the worst that could happen is that no one remembers this.”<sup>15</sup>

*My Cambodia* is fantastic not only for its historical context and imagery but also because it helps students understand how Cambodians have emerged from the Zero Years. Um provides a fascinating and candid discussion of her emotional burden as a refugee and survivor living in the diaspora and the fear that such places of tragedy are becoming tourist sites. Equally important, *My Cambodia* provides a glimpse beyond the tragedy of genocide to see the beauty of Cambodia that was not exterminated—a vibrant culture displayed in art, Buddhist temples, the archeological wonder of Angkor Wat, and a rich, complex history.

The approach to teaching about Cambodia via film—providing historical context, collaborative writing, screening the film, and historical comparison with a variety of source materials—requires a good deal of time and preparation, and I am forced to make choices about how to prioritize the required curriculum. Nevertheless, I find that my students are consistently engaged as they watch *First They Killed My Father* and have greater interest in discussing complex questions, practice crucial intellectual skills, and come away with a much better appreciation for and deeper historical knowledge about Cambodia (and Southeast Asia). ■

## NOTES

1. The film is an adaptation of Loung Ung’s memoir *First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000).
2. Paul B. Weinstein, “Movies as the Gateway to History: The History and Film Project,” *The History Teacher* 35, no. 1 (2001): 1.
3. Renee Hobbs, “Non-Optimal Uses of Video in the Classroom,” *Learning, Media and Technology* 31, no. 1 (2006): 35–50; Scott Alan Metzger and Yonghee Suh, “Significant or Safe? Two Cases of Instructional Uses of History Feature Films,” *Theory and Research in Social Education* 36, no. 1 (2008): 88–109.
4. Jeremy Stoddard, “Film as a ‘Thoughtful’ Medium for Teaching History,” *Learning, Media and Technology*, 37, no. 3 (2012): 271–288.
5. David Chandler is considered the preeminent authority on Cambodia. See David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007); Robert Dayley and Clark D. Neher, *Southeast Asia in the New International Era*, 6th ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2013).
6. William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 1987).
7. Steve Heder, “Racism, Marxism, Labelling, and Genocide in Ben Kiernan’s ‘The Pol Pot Regime,’” *South East Asia Research* 5, no. 2 (1997): 101–153; Andrew Mertha, *Brothers in Arms: Chinese Aid to the Khmer Rouge, 1975–1979* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).
8. Raymond A. Marcus, “Exploring the Việt Nam War: A Teacher’s Resource Essay,” *Education About Asia* 11, no. 1 (2006): 32–37. See also Mauricio Borrero and Tuan A. To, “Integrating Việt Nam into World History Surveys,” *Education About Asia* 20, no. 1 (2015), 28–32.
9. Gregory H. Stanton, “The Ten Stages of Genocide,” *The Genocide Education Project*, accessed January 7, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/kt57mc8u>.
10. Ben Kiernan, “Myth, Nationalism, and Genocide,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 3, no. 2 (2001): 187–206; Sok Udom Deth, “The Rise and Fall of Democratic Kampuchea,” *Education About Asia* 14, no. 3 (2009): 26–30.
11. Gertrud Koch, “‘Against All Odds’ or, the Will to Survive: Moral Conclusions from Narrative Closure,” *History and Memory* 9, nos. 1–2 (1997): 393–408.
12. Bunkong Tuon, “Inaccuracy and Testimonial Literature: The Case of Loung Ung’s *First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers*,” *Melus* 38, no. 3 (2013): 107–125.
13. Jeremy Stoddard and Alan S. Marcus, “More than ‘Showing What Happened’: Exploring the Potential of Teaching History with Film,” *The High School Journal* 93, no. 2 (2010): 83–90.
14. Robert Carmichael, *When the Clouds Fell from the Sky: A Disappearance, a Daughter’s Search, and Cambodia’s First War Criminal* (London: Mason–McDonald Press, 2015); Chanrithy Him, *When Broken Glass Floats: Growing Up under the Khmer Rouge* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000).
15. *My Cambodia*, directed by Risa Morimoto (New York City: Edgewood Pictures, 2014). Available on the Stanford Program on Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE) website. See the sidebar on this page for more information.

## My Cambodia

STANFORD PROGRAM ON  
INTERNATIONAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL  
EDUCATION (SPICE), 2014  
EIGHTEEN MINUTES, COLOR  
<https://tinyurl.com/6kjs2d8>



Khatharya Um’s emotional visit to the Choeung Ek “Killing Field.” Source: Screen capture from the film.

In 1975, with the flames of civil war advancing toward Cambodia’s capital city, a young refugee named Khatharya Um fled the country on the eve of its takeover by the Khmer Rouge. In the four years that followed, an estimated two million people—about 25 percent of Cambodia’s population—died from disease, starvation, forced labor, imprisonment, and execution. *My Cambodia* follows Khatharya Um—now a Professor of Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley—nearly forty years after her escape as she travels back to Cambodia and explains both the genocide’s history and its profound legacies.

*It’s very difficult for many of us Cambodians.  
Those memories don’t go away . . .  
But it is important to share the story,  
because the worst that could happen  
is that no one remembers this.*  
—Professor Khatharya Um

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