



## Distant Witness

*Andy Carvin*

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## **Distant Witness** Andy Carvin

The series of Arab uprisings collectively known as the Arab Spring is a flashpoint in history — perhaps the biggest we've seen since the collapse of the Soviet bloc 20 years ago. It's also been a stunning revolution in the way breaking news is reported around the world — and who controls the news.

In this book, NPR social media chief Andy Carvin — “the man who tweets revolutions” — offers a unique first-person recap of the Arab Spring. Part memoir, part history, the book includes intimate stories of the revolutionaries who fought for freedom on the streets and across the Internet — stories that would have never been recorded before the days of social media.

From the early weeks of the Tunisian revolution through the fall of the Libyan regime, Carvin became known for unflinching, real-time depiction of conflict. His work is reinventing how people experience the news. No longer merely consuming it, they participate in it, interacting with the very people on the ground engaged in the uprisings. Like Mosaab Elshamy, a young Egyptian pharmacy student who found himself caught in the most perilous fighting in Cairo's Tahrir Square. Like Sami Ben Gharbia, the Paul Revere of Tunisia, who mobilized his country to protest via the Internet. Like Amina Arraf, a Syrian blogger whose reported kidnapping shook the foundations of the Arab Spring. And like Mohamed Nabbous, a Libyan tech geek who became the country's first independent journalist in over a generation — and stared death in the face just hours before NATO air support bombs began to fall.

Controversial, visceral and timely, this book distills the Arab Spring's most important moments with these portraits of bravery: heroes who fought for freedom by embracing new technology to spread the true story of their revolution.

## **Distant Witness Details**

Date : Published January 2013 by CUNY Journalism Press (first published December 20th 2012)

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Author : Andy Carvin

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## From Reader Review Distant Witness for online ebook

### Greg says

I never knew that reading tweets, retweets and hashtags could be so compelling. Andy Carvin has done a wonderful job looking at a new medium of information and communication, and told that story using his own narrative and the voice of the medium itself.

The result is a document both of an amazingly important time in international geopolitics (the Arab Spring that saw citizen-led rebellions in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain) and a platform that allows the voices of the people involved to be heard around the world.

Carvin was a masterful curator during the time of the uprisings, filtering the noise and helping to bring credible first-hand voices into the conversation, and he has proven equally skilled at looking back and recognizing the unprecedented nature of a revolution lived by those on the ground and witnessed by the rest of us in a way that had never been done before.

Distant Witness chronicles news - the Egyptian uprising in Tahrir Square, the Libyan rebellion through to the eventual capture and killing of Moammar Ghadafi, and also the particularities of that news on Twitter - identifying weapons and the saga of the "Gay Girl in Damascus" hoax. You won't find these stories elsewhere.

I am sure Andy Carvin would admit that his book is just the beginning of a larger conversation, but it's an amazingly useful one with lessons that journalists should be aware of as they cover future conflicts.

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### Samar Dahmash Jarrah says

A very unique look at the Arab Spring. How twitter played a role.

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### Carrie says

This is a must-read. Not only does it shed light on the ways in which social media is helping to spark revolution and transform journalism, it is also an incredibly compelling read that I think would be interesting to anyone.

I follow Andy Carvin on Twitter and have long enjoyed and admired his work, and I was thrilled when I got to meet him this year at ISOJ in Austin. This book helped me appreciate even more his pioneering use of new media forms. It was also interesting that as compelling as it was to read tweets about the Arab Spring in real time, it wasn't until I read the book tying together all those disparate 140-character messages with context, I didn't really have as good of an understanding of what was going on there.

Frankly, I wish we saw more of Andy's writing style in other foreign reporting - by writing with great humanity and compassion about the individual characters he met via social media, and by explaining in first person the emotions he experienced while bearing witness to some unspeakable horrors, he helps bring the

story alive in a way that much standard war reporting does not.

Finally, this piece helps to illustrate to those who still doubt how great journalism and its very essence, verification, can be practiced in social media forms. It is not an all-or-nothing equation in which one tool or practice negates all the value of the others, but you have to be a fool to not realize how valuable these tools can be.

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### **Maureen Alley says**

Fantastic book. Great insight on how Andy used Twitter, YouTube and Facebook to see the insides of the Arab Spring. Inspirational, educational and heartbreaking.

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### **Ehab Zahriyeh says**

<http://www.nydailynews.com/blogs/page...>

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### **Ryan Olson says**

Wow! It's really all I can say about Distant Witness. Andy Carvin has written a tense thriller based on actual events during the Arab Spring and how the use of Twitter opened a whole new method of reporting the news. This is an eye opening account of the events occurring in the Middle East and is far more educational than any news report. I loved this book! If you're at all interested in learning more about the Middle East and the conflicts there, this the book for you. You'll come away with a better understanding of what's really going on there.

I highly recommend reading this in its digital format which allows for a very integrated, interactive experience.

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### **Courtney Cook says**

\*goodreads winner\*

I really really enjoyed this book. At first I had to get used to reading paragraphs and twitter feed together. Once you get through that it gives a real time experience. I cannot comprehend the face that people wee on their smart phones when getting year gassed. It shows the strength and pure heart of these revolutionists.

This book really helps you relate to what happened thousands of miles away. Anyone interested in Arab revolutions would enjoy this immensely.

Two thumbs up.

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### **Steven says**

A pioneering and thorough study of how to practice journalism through social media. Author Carvin, working for National Public Radio in Washington, covered the Arab Spring conflicts in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria from his home by using carefully cultivated sources among the activists and citizen journalists who were tweeting and shooting YouTube videos on the ground in those countries. Carvin demonstrates how to work the story reliably through such sources. More than that, his book reproduces tweets that put readers into the midst of the exhilaration and horror of the conflicts. You can't get closer to the action than the perspective of an activist with a rock in one hand and a cell phone in the other. At one point the author finds himself cloaked in tear gas in the middle of an actual Cairo demonstration and realizes that he could have covered the action better from a position above the chaos and confusion in the "virtual helicopter" of his Twitter account.

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### **Thomas says**

Very good, very focused book about the Arab Spring viewed strictly through a social media/citizen journalism lens. This is not an inclusive or complete view of the revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa, but it's a perfect study in what now amounts to first-person reportage in the social media era. Carvin is the "first person" in this case, but for every revolution in this book, he's sitting in front of a computer thousands of miles from the action. To my reading, Carvin never loses sight of the fact that the real "first person" activists are risking their lives, and in some cases losing them, to get him and the world information. If you've been asking "What then must we do?" this book is certainly not the answer -- but it might help you understand what the question means today.

In particular, this book contains a fascinating play-by-play on the uncovering of the "Gay Girl in Damascus" hoax. The hoax is just one example of why it's important to remember who the real combatants and victims are in the Arab Spring, and why a book like this should never be considered a "real" account of the revolutions on the ground, but should be viewed as a media history. As such, it's deeply and powerfully affecting. Its limitations reflect our limitations as observers who, twenty or even ten years earlier, would never know any of the details social media conveyed about these events.

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### **Hilde Rayani says**

A very good book covering arab spring and how the twitterjungle works. I really enjoyed it a lot. Thank you Acarvin for writing this book. A very important book for the many "distant witnesses" around the world.

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### **Julie says**

Fantastic. Breathtaking. Impels the reader to keep going, even though the end is known. Moves you to want to get involved and help others achieve peaceful communities. Inspirational.

Thank you, Andy, for bringing a remote story to life. I am struck by the thought that your capturing the

stories of ordinary people living through historic events is a profound contribution to not only their people, but indeed the whole world.

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### **Lance Agena says**

See full version of my [Distant Witness](#) notes.

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### **Rasika says**

BRILLIANT!!!! SIMPLY BRILLIANT!!

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### **Barbara says**

Let me start by saying that this is an incredible book, unlike anything I have ever read before. Not only is it innovative, it is marvelously effective in conveying a complex story.

Andy Carvin is the new media guy for NPR. He has been on Twitter as long as it has been around. But, very early in 2011, Andy became fascinated with the uprising in Tunisia. Relying on folks he knew from his travels, and then, their friends, Andy started re-Tweeting what they were doing, saying and hearing during the Arab Spring. He worked carefully to know his sources, gauge their credibility and verify the facts.

Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya and Syria are each treated in a separate chapter.

But, Andy's book is only half made up of Tweets from the frontlines of each uprising. He has inserted continuity and context, helping the reader to understand what is happening, what it means and who will be impacted. He has teased out true stories that will stay with you for a long time.

The book includes a "dramatis personae" in the front, but the characters became so vivid so quickly, I barely used it. Andy also has included a link to every Tweet referenced, as well as blogs, video streams and YouTube. This is one very thoroughly documented book.

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