

EMILY BAUGHAN. *Saving the Children: Humanitarianism, Internationalism, and Empire*. Berkeley Series in British Studies. Oakland: University of California Press, 2022. Pp. 314. \$85.00 (cloth).  
doi: 10.1017/jbr.2023.116

Humanitarian intervention is never simply about saving biological life. Take Save the Children, for example, the subject of Emily Baughan's *Saving the Children: Humanitarianism, Internationalism, and Empire*, which focuses on British humanitarianism in the half-century after the First World War. Dorothy Buxton, one of the organization's founders and a key figure in its early years, framed its activities not as a solution to the world's problems, but as "a gateway to forms of political action" that could achieve that end goal (208). Structural reform, in other words, was her ultimate aim. Yet her sister, Eglantyne Jebb, saw things differently. From the moment she took over from Buxton in the early 1920s, Jebb transformed Save the Children into something more "nonpolitical" (95, 154). Aid should be impartial, she argued; indeed, the act of intervention by itself marked a significant contribution to building a better world. Yet such outward "non-politics" (11) belied more complicated motives for Save the Children's actions. As Baughan explains, the children Jebb hoped to "save" were also to be remade as "future citizens of a new international order" (19).

This debate over what humanitarianism could and should be took place over a relatively short time period—Save the Children was founded in 1919; Eglantyne Jebb died in 1928—but its outcome set the tone for the organization's interventions in the succeeding four decades. In *Saving the Children*, Baughan uses the method of institutional history to narrate a much broader story of aid, internationalism, empire, and Britain's changing world role in the twentieth century. The book begins in post-First World War Europe and the various schemes Save the Children employed to make "good" adults (145) from the child refugees it helped in Russia and Greece. From there, Baughan shows how the organization expanded its operations into Africa—through the 1931 Conference on the African Child at Geneva and its interventions in Ethiopia in the same decade—before reflecting on the impact of the Second World War on its internationalist ambitions.

The 1940s was a period of significant change for Save the Children. Not only did the war bring the organization into closer collaboration with the British state, but, as Baughan outlines in one of the most insightful sections of her book, the consolidation of imperial control in the 1950s also drew it much deeper into the day-to-day practices of colonial governance. The ends of empire likewise had a long-lasting impact on the British nongovernmental organizations. Baughan concludes *Saving the Children* in West Africa and the first globalized humanitarian crisis in Biafra in the late 1960s. Baughan frames this as an ending: in the tensions that emerged between Save the Children's aging staff (many of them former colonial officers and officials) and the new generation of aid workers it employed from the Global South; in the return to older forms of reductivist imagery used to promote the humanitarian campaign; and in the outmoded attitudes British aid workers exhibited towards local staff.

As in her excellent article on international adoption ("International Adoption and Anglo-American Internationalism, c. 1918–1925," *Past & Present*, no. 239 [2018]: 181–217), Baughan is at her best when illuminating the personal experiences that constitute an organization like Save the Children. There is much to admire in her biographical sketches of Trinidad-born social worker Peggy Antrobus and Nigerian nurse and health worker Remi Domingo, both of whom operated in the tense spaces between their Western-derived conceptions of welfare and the visible racial discrimination they encountered while working for Save the Children. Similarly, Baughan deftly pieces together Save the Children's rediscovery of empire in the postwar period and its role in consolidating imperial control through case studies from Malaya, Somaliland, and Kenya.

Her approach is not always successful, however. At times, the disparate components of her narrative fall short of forming a cogent argument. For example, in chapter 2, the relationship between the story of child refugees and the framing of children's rights hints at a profound conclusion, but it is implied rather than explained. Similarly, concepts like "biopolitical nationalist child welfare" (50) are useful but need to be explored further. I was also less than convinced by Baughan's conclusion that Biafra marked an ending for Save the Children. To me, it marked an important moment of acceleration for the organization. The shift that she describes in that context, from paternalistic imperialism to benevolent internationalism, formed the basis for the organization's expansion in the decades that followed. The relationship Save the Children's leadership cultivated with the British government in the late 1960s also had significant payoffs in the long term. Money mattered, too. The massive increase in income Save the Children enjoyed as a result of the Biafran crisis allowed it to employ more staff and, equally importantly, placed it on a good footing when the opportunity arose to implement long-term development programs in post-crisis Nigeria and, later, independent Bangladesh.

*Saving Children* is nonetheless an important book. It adds nuance to historians' understanding of how British conceptions of humanitarianism, poverty, and welfare were developed, and it can be read alongside recent work on those subjects by Anna Bocking-Welch, Georgina Brewis, Matthew Hilton, Tehila Sasson, Caroline Shaw, Agnieszka Sobocinska, and Andrew Thompson. As do those scholars, Baughan also has something important to say about the role of non-state actors in shaping British attitudes to the outside world. She shows that non-governmental organizations were involved in both sustaining empire and contributing to Britain's transition from imperial to postimperial power. Scholars in development studies, sociology, and the wider modern British studies community will find much to interest them in that contribution. And although Baughan sounds frustrated—and, indeed, a little jaded—by the contemporary humanitarian sector, so, too, should her practitioner colleagues. In this moment after the COVID-19-related lockdowns, when many nongovernmental organizations have entered a period of deep introspection about the purpose of Western intervention in the Global South, her concluding words seem rather apt: "The aid industry cannot forge a new future until it reckons with its past" (215).

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JOANNA BOURKE. *Birkbeck: 200 Years of Radical Learning for Working People*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. 656. \$45.00 (cloth).  
doi: 10.1017/jbr.2023.117

For the historian of education, reading institutional histories is an occupational hazard. Sometimes the only published source for material that would otherwise be lost or unobtainable, they are unavoidable, no matter how problematic. Ranging from the superficial and self-congratulatory to the impossibly tedious and detailed, there are many that manage to be both smug and dull. To make matters worse, it is a genre that has few expert practitioners. Most institutions—even those that celebrate their research excellence in other fields—appear content to appoint eager amateurs to write their histories. Enthusiasm, diligence, or simple willingness seem to count more than expertise. Even the better books are frequently narrow in their focus, asserting the uniqueness or importance of the institution without ever truly comparing it to any others.