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**Guy Aiken. "Feeding Germany: American Quakers in the Weimar Republic."** *Diplomatic History* 43:4 (2019): 597-617. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhz027>.

**J. Charles Schencking. "Giving Most and Giving Differently: Humanitarianism as Diplomacy Following Japan's 1923 Earthquake."** *Diplomatic History* 43:4 (2019): 729-757. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhz025>.

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U.S. humanitarianism in the era of the Great War has received significant historical attention over the last decade.<sup>1</sup> Guy Aiken's and J. Charles Schencking's recent articles in *Diplomatic History* make a notable contribution to this scholarship. Focusing on two case studies of U.S. aid in the early 1920s, they show how humanitarian engagement became a major aspect of U.S. foreign relations even, and especially, in an allegedly isolationist time.

Aiken's article focuses on the U.S. child-feeding program in Weimar Germany, which was administered by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a Quaker relief organization founded in 1917. Based on material from the AFSC and German archives as well as contemporary publications, Aiken sketches the difficult genesis of this aid program for post-World War One Germany. While semi-official U.S. humanitarian organizations like the American Red Cross (ARC) or the American Relief Administration (ARA) undertook relief and reconstruction efforts all over post-war Europe, the U.S. public and Congress balked at aiding the former enemy. Responding to reports of German deprivation, it was thus the American (and British) Quakers that took on the unpopular task of feeding German children from mid-1919 to 1924. With the financial and logistical support of ARA director and future president Herbert Hoover, the AFSC child-feeding initiative soon grew into one of the largest U.S. humanitarian programs of the time. Over the course of the early 1920s, it reached a

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the origins of humanitarianism, 1918-1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Clotilde Druelle-Korn, *Feeding Occupied France during World War I: Herbert Hoover and the Blockade* (London: Palgrave, 2019); Julia Irwin, *Making the World Safe: the American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Branden Little, "Band of Crusaders: American Humanitarians, the Great War, and the Remaking of the World", PhD diss., (University of California, Berkeley, 2009); Friederike Kind-Kovacs, "The Great War, the Child's Body and the American Red Cross," *European Review of History* 23:1-2 (2016): 33-62, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13507486.2015.1121971>; Daniel Maul, "The Rise of a Humanitarian Superpower: American NGOs and International Relief, 1917-1945," in *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Transformation of the Contemporary World*, eds. Jerónimo, Miguel Bandeira and José Pedro Monteiro (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2018): 127-145; Elisabeth Piller, "American War Relief, Cultural Mobilization and the Myth of Impartial Humanitarianism, 1914-17," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 17:4 (2018): 619-635, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781418000270>; Davide Rodogno, "The Near East Relief humanitarian politics and practices in the aftermath of the First World War," in *The Emergence of Humanitarian Intervention*, ed. Fabian Klose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Melanie Tanielian, *The Charity of War, Famine, Humanitarian Aid, and World War I in the Middle East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017); Keith Watenpaugh, *Bread from stones. The Middle East and the making of modern humanitarianism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

total of five million undernourished German children. In Germany it became known and loved as the *Quakerspeisung* and “a new word even entered the German language: gequackert, ‘to (get) Quakered’” (597).

The *Quakerspeisung* stood out not only for its size and its success but also for the ambitions that underlay it. Against the backdrop of recent German-American enmity, the American child-feeding program in Germany was always about more than humanitarian objectives. The AFSC treated the program as a rare chance to work towards German-American reconciliation and saw the feeding of the ‘enemy children’ as a great peace-building endeavor (603). These ambitions overlapped with the more immediately political aims of Hoover, who hoped to use food aid to stabilize the fledgling German Republic and fortify its citizens against political radicalism. While some of these developments are better known than the article suggests (599),<sup>2</sup> Aiken argues convincingly for the significance of a private organization like the AFSC. When state and semi-official organizations like the ARA and ARC lacked the public mandate to act, a small, enthusiastic NGO could have a disproportionately large impact. Moreover, Aiken rightly points to the *Quakerspeisung*’s seminal role in the emergence of ‘modern humanitarianism’ (600). At a time when relief was still often determined by sympathies or ethnic ties, the AFSC (like Save the Children in Britain) advocated the image of the universal child, whose deservingness rested on proven need rather than political constellations. At the same time, as Aiken shows, the AFSC’s supporters also considered it both sufficiently American (unlike German-American groups) and versed in the politics of neutrality to undertake the difficult mission to the former enemy (605). In all, it was these unique qualities that allowed the AFSC to pursue an otherwise unpopular program and help ‘save Germany’ (598).

Still, the most intriguing part of Aiken’s article points to the contradictions and unintended consequences of this high-minded endeavor. While the Quakers employed a lofty rhetoric of peace and reconciliation, their actions betrayed distinctly American assumptions. Just as they portrayed themselves as politically neutral, the AFSC also espoused—and tried to convert Germans to—American liberal values. Indeed, as Aiken notes, the fact ‘that the two positions sat alongside each other so easily indicates just how convinced most Americans were at the time that their values were self-evident and universal’ (614). Moreover, Aiken suggests that U.S. aid, given with such internationalist intentions, might have had quite the opposite effect among Germans. For all the spontaneous gratitude that the *Quakerspeisung* evoked, a defeated and impoverished Germany’s encounter with U.S. power, prosperity, and magnanimity also fed German feelings of humiliation and resentment (613, 617).

Schencking’s article, too, explores American aid after the First World War. Focusing on the large-scale U.S. disaster relief in response to Japan’s great Kanto earthquake in 1923, he places U.S. aid in the broader context of Japanese-American relations, paying attention not only to how much—but also to how—Americans gave.

Schencking convincingly demonstrates the significant scope of U.S. disaster aid to Japan in 1923. Within just a few weeks’ time, Americans donated \$11.8 million to the American Red Cross. This amount was eight times larger than the donations of all other countries combined and, even more notably, was in terms percentage of GDP higher than any other American disaster relief program abroad, before or since. (734) But U.S. aid to Japan stood out not only for its massive scope but also

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Strickland, “American Aid to Germany, 1919-1921,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 45:4 (1962): 256-270, <http://content.wisconsinhistory.org/cdm/ref/collection/wmh/id/44946>; Charles Strickland, “*American Aid for the Relief of Germany 1919-1921*,” unpublished Master’s thesis, University of Wisconsin (1959); more recently: Mary Elisabeth Cox, “‘Hunger Games’ or How the Allied Blockade in the First World War Deprived German Children of Nutrition, and Allied Food Aid Subsequently Saved Them,” *Economic History Review* 68:2 (May 2015): 600-631, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ehr.12070>; Tammy M. Proctor, “An American Enterprise? British Participation in US Food Relief Programmes (1914–1923),” *First World War Studies* 5:1 (2014): 29-42, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19475020.2014.906317>; Elisabeth Piller, “German Child Distress, American Humanitarian Aid and Revisionist Politics, 1918-1924” *Journal of Contemporary History* 51:3 (July 2016): 453-486, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009416637416>; just published: Mary Elisabeth Cox, *Hunger in War and Peace. Women & Children in Germany, 1914-1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

for its different handling. Rather than following usual patterns and establishing tight U.S. oversight, the ARC left the distribution of the aid almost entirely to Japanese authorities.

To explain why Americans “gave most and gave differently”, Schencking uses Japanese and American historical newspapers, diplomatic records, ARC material and personal papers. As he shows, the motivations of U.S. donors ranged from humanitarian compassion, civic pride and solidarity with a former ally to hopes for business opportunities. Still, the one overarching theme in the elite, press, and public discourse was the desire to further peaceful relations with a Pacific rival and to do so using non-traditional foreign policy tools. As Schencking notes, “Americans saw opportunity in the ruins of Japan not just to alleviate suffering, but also to secure tangible economic and political benefits” (738). And yet, contemporaries realized that this strategy rested not only on the scale but on the modalities of aid. Schencking highlights the paramount role played by Cyrus Woods, U.S. Ambassador to Japan. Woods, too, recognized the unique opportunity of disaster relief to improve Japanese-American relations. At the same time he understood that success depended on taking into account Japanese psychology and especially the lingering resentment of the Japanese over racial inequality. It was for this reason that Woods convinced the ARC and Washington to provide the Japanese with near exclusive control over U.S. aid. In this way, the “Japanese were made to feel as if they were active participants rather than passive recipients of America’s generosity” (741). What is more, U.S. officials publicly explained this step, which contrasted sharply with the tight control the ARC exercised over U.S. aid in post-war Europe, by stressing the highly organized nature of Japanese society and the great confidence they placed in it (746). In this way, potentially offensive ‘alms’ became an expression of solidarity and esteem. The Japanese, for their part, were now able to project onto U.S. humanitarian aid what they desired: “status, recognition, acceptance” (750).

Ultimately, U.S. disaster aid in 1923 was more important for its motivations than for its long-term results. While U.S. giving notably improved Japanese-American relations in the very short run, the Immigration Act of 1924, which included special anti-Japanese provisions, virtually erased its positive effect.

The two articles work well together and, while employing different approaches, illustrate that studying humanitarian involvement is an excellent way to write broader histories of U.S. foreign relations. While humanitarian aid has long been recognized as a tool of U.S. official and semi-official foreign policy, the articles broaden the cast of actors involved in U.S. foreign relations. Schencking shows how donors across the United States embraced aid as a way to shape international politics, while Aiken highlights the crucial role of small, private organizations in a difficult (post-war) situation. Together, they map how a large and diverse cast of Americans—from ambassadors and congressmen to mid-Western farmers and American Legionnaires—involved themselves in, and made sense of, world affairs after the Great War.

Moreover, both articles engage with a number of broader issues that will be of particular interest to historians of humanitarianism and historians of international relations alike. First, they illustrate the many hopes and ambitions that are bound up in giving (and receiving) aid. Humanitarian relief can seem like a way to build peace, to fight Bolshevism, to improve a national image, to create new markets, or to solve international conflicts. Importantly, this applies not only to the level of state actors, but also to donor *and* recipient publics. In fact, it is one of the most rewarding features of both articles that they recognize the complex dynamics of aid relationships and look at the attitudes of beneficiaries. As they show, beneficiaries, too, attach concrete hopes and aims to foreign aid and tend to project their own desires—of status, of recognition, of a ‘special relationship’—onto them. Aid, in other words, comes with high—and frequently unrealistic—expectations. Moreover, aid relationships rest on unspoken assumptions and implicit hierarchies. Even the most idealist humanitarian work can be premised on the idea that the United States occupies an exceptional and in many respects superior role in the world; even the most lofty humanitarian giving comes with expectations of recipient gratitude; and beneficiaries might experience even the kindest and humblest humanitarian mission as quasi-imperialist interference and a national humiliation. For this reason, both papers point not only to the ephemeral nature of goodwill created through aid (if broader foreign policy does not align with it) but also to its unintended consequences, indeed, the damage it may do. As they show, the ‘goodwill’-rhetoric and great expectations that tend to accompany humanitarian aid can make disappointments between two countries all the more severe. Acknowledging the emotions, hierarchies and unspoken assumptions of aid is among the greatest merit of both articles.

This is not to say that I agree with all of the articles' conclusions. For example, Aiken's assertion that the Quaker child feeding 'saved Germany' raises serious methodological problems because his main source (German official expressions of gratitude) must be approached with great caution. Given the situation of the early 1920s, such official pronouncements might have spoken more to Germany's prevalent desire to improve relations with the United States than to any actual effect of U.S. child-feeding programs.<sup>3</sup> With regard to Schencking's paper, I wonder whether the hands-off approach, which Americans adopted toward 1923 Japan (but not post-war Europe) not only reflected their desire to accommodate Japanese psychology but was also owed to the different types of emergencies at hand? In other words, does undernourishment in an economically disintegrating country like post-war Austria not demand a different, and differently organized humanitarian response than a one-off disaster in an otherwise intact country like Japan?

Such issues are not intended to detract from the articles' accomplishments but rather to prompt scholars to think more systematically about how best to gauge the effect of aid programs and to call for more comparative and transregional scholarship. In this respect, it is well to consider Schencking's intriguing afterthought of a "U.S. humanitarian century, 1917-2016." While one might disagree with his particular periodization (is 1917 not too late? Is it possible to make historically accurate predictions about 2016 just yet?), there is a real need to think more broadly about the United States' rise to a humanitarian superpower. After a decade of vibrant scholarship on the history of (U.S.) humanitarianism, a new synthesis on U.S. aid in the world (succeeding Merle Curti's *American Philanthropy Abroad*) seems urgently called for.<sup>4</sup> Ideally, such a study would incorporate the merits of Aiken's and Schencking's articles: be transnational and comparative; use foreign language sources; pay attention to 'average' donors, to smaller humanitarian groups, and to beneficiaries; and take seriously the power relations and emotions that underpin humanitarianism.

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<sup>3</sup> In the particular case of Germany, Aiken's article would have profited from an engagement with Mary Cox's 2016 anthropometric study. As she shows, American aid did, indeed, 'save' German children. See Cox, "Hunger Games."

<sup>4</sup> Merle Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad: A History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963).