HELPING HUMANITY

american policy and genocide rescue

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For Marisha
Partner, Adored Wife
And (someday soon)
Mother of our Children

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Charts and Tables

List of Relief Agencies and Abbreviations

Name	Abbreviation
American National Red Cross	ANRC/ARC
Central Cuban Relief Committee	CCRC
Emergency Rescue Committee	ERC
International Committee of the Red Cross	ICRC
National War Fund	NWF
Near East Relief	NER
Office of Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation Operations	OFFRO
Polish War Relief of the U. S. A., Inc.	PWR
United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration	UNRRA
War Refugee Board	WRB

Introduction

Genocide stalked the twentieth century, killing tens of millions around the globe. While previous centuries certainly did not want for genocidal events,[1] the revolutionary instability of fascism and communism, and the more mundane forms of totalitarian, dictatorial or imperial rule took more lives than all of the century's bloody wars combined. Quite naturally this century also witnessed a growing determination to exterminate genocide itself, especially in the liberal West. Humanitarians joined academics, and by the end of the century a new multi-disciplinary field, called genocide studies by its practitioners, emerged to study this problem. The search for a cure proved problematic, and genocide continued into the twenty-first century. The scholarly needs of the advocate and the historian are perhaps not congruent, and genocide historiography has covered topics unevenly. Several general weaknesses exist in the current rescue literature: genocide deniers and victims' groups have often dominated discourse, especially in the public's imagination; almost all works examining rescue have considered extremely narrow case studies; much of the literature falls into one of two dialectics—either America did not rescue, or America could not rescue; philanthropy as an agent of rescue is often not acknowledged, or, if it is, not explored. Broad case studies that evaluate genocide rescue as part of wider public policy issues, strangely enough, rarely surface. This work seeks to address these weaknesses.

What has America done to stop genocide?[2] This study explores that very controversial question. Starting in 1895, as America came of age in the world of the Great Powers, several case studies will offer insight into America's complicated foreign policy reactions to genocide. The value of war, diplomatic pressure and protests, state supported philanthropy, and criminal prosecutions as agents of rescue are examined throughout this work. Events that appear to be great humanitarian crises in retrospect will be introduced in the context of contemporary experiences, so that one may grasp just how deadly the world was when America was asked to respond to genocide. Genocide may have killed

more than war (although there was often a relationship between the two), but disease killed more than genocide. Starvation and malnutrition also resulted in untold misery and death. The context of events must receive a full hearing in history. The resulting narrative argues that America carefully balanced competing policy considerations based on an understanding of what was possible in a dangerous world.

The world witnessed many grave humanitarian crises in this period, and the author has selected case studies that illustrate the breadth of America's reactions. This study will start with the Cuban insurrection, 1895-1898. Although typically absent from rescue studies, one might argue that the suffering on Cuba attracted significant attention from two administrations, and, therefore, merits investigation from the perspective of rescue. Diplomatic pressure, applied with growing intensity from the start of the crisis, turned into open threats as the situation progressed. By the end of 1897 the U.S. State Department had organized an aid campaign to feed the Cubans, and, in 1898, war ended the suffering on the island. Most students of American interwar diplomacy acknowledge that America's casualties in World War I had a pronounced limiting impact upon American actions before World War II (including the Nye Committee investigations into "blood merchants" and the proposed Ludlow Amendment). Fewer historians recognize that 1898 had a similar impact upon President Woodrow Wilson. American concerns over casualties, and philanthropy in the face of genocide, resurfaced repeatedly in American actions during both World Wars. In 1898 one can see the development of policy trends that would remain consistent with American actions for a century.

These trends became especially apparent during the Ottoman Empire's World War I genocide. The Armenian Tragedy (only later did the term genocide become part of the lexicon) generated intense interest in America. World War I shocked a nation that watched as millions died in war, organized atrocities, and starvation, and in the end America attempted to fight a crusade more than a simple war. Wilson's America reacted to the conflict with a mixture of idealism and opportunism. American resources, the realities of geography, and Wilson's foreign policy goals all prevented armed intervention on behalf of the Armenians, but American diplomats, missionaries, and philanthropists engaged in an extensive campaign designed to save those who could be saved. America emerged from the conflict with a newfound maturity as a nation, especially cognizant of the dangers inherent in war and disappointed with the results of its efforts in Armenia. Most of all, Americans as a group regretted the decision to fight in Europe.[3] These concerns would inform policy decisions in future crises.

The interwar years brought new horrors to the world. By the 1930s American interests had been refocused on the Great Depression, but international instability still concerned President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Stalin launched a program to proletarianize Soviet peasants. Millions died, although many in America did not seem aware of the suffering. Hitler's anti-Semitic campaign did attract significant attention, as did Japan's actions in Asia. The difficulties of Germany's unwanted population were part of this international instability, as were perceived Soviet attempts to export communism and Japanese colonial grabs.

Overall, American policy sought to create a fine balance between American security needs and competing humanitarian concerns, but American security, especially economic security, remained the primary importance during this era. By 1938 FDR, at least, realized that America needed to prepare for the coming contest with Germany, but Americans remained complacent. Nineteen forty was the true crisis year—the defeat of France was something of a shock, and America began to prepare for war in earnest, but America's ability to project power remained limited until 1943, and its increase then was generally relative to the decline in Axis strength. During the 1930s and 1940s, a militarily weak America reacted to genocide quite cautiously, but react it did.

The post-World War II generation witnessed its share of genocide as well. The nuclear arms race of the Cold War complicated foreign policy, and a brutal communist government in Cambodia emerged to represent the archetypical genocidal regime at a time when the American public had no stomach for international adventures. The dying continued for years. The end of the Cold War seemed to offer a chance to use military power and international cooperation to end genocide, but several efforts to intervene proved less than successful. Indeed, a clear solution to genocide had not emerged by the time that Barack Obama became president.

Several American rescue campaigns featured enthusiastic responses to the tragedies at hand. How is it possible that a state which mistreated significant fractions of its own population, especially the Amerindians and blacks, and, after 1898, committed atrocities in a bitter pacification campaign in the Philippines, could have worked to save lives during the vast humanitarian crises that the world faced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? This apparent dichotomy is not as important as it might first seem. The Indian Wars had ended only with Wounded Knee in 1890, but America's Indian policy had long had a philanthropic component. The campaign to Americanize the Amerindians only increased with the 1887 Dawes Act. While modern observers might recognize the human tragedy implicit in such a policy, contemporaries of the event acted from a sense of charity and compassion. Many Americans thought that they were helping (civilizing) the Amerindians. Jim Crow did not operate from any sense of compassion, but found justification in the theories of racial science which enjoyed significant credibility[4] before Hitler forced the world to reevaluate its ideas. Importantly, actions toward blacks and Amerindians in the first half of the twentieth century did not lead to the types of massacres inherent in the case studies examined in this work. The atrocities that America's army inflicted upon the Filipinos found significant condemnation in America, and included the cashiering of Brigadier General Jacob Hurd Smith.[5] These atrocities resulted in casualties that, while important, seem numerically insignificant when compared to the tens of thousands who lost their lives in Cuba, and the far greater number of victims in Armenia, the Ukraine, the World War II genocides, Cambodia, and Rwanda. Hence events which by modern standards represent significant moral quandaries did not pose great difficulties for most contemporary American observers. One might also remember that America was not attempting to create, or

operate within, a utopia on earth, but rather to respond to what, by American standards, were unjustifiable events.

If America tended to try to help people suffering from genocide in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, why is it that modern observers seem so unaware of this fact? This study will argue that state supported philanthropy as a response to genocide is a neglected aspect of American foreign policy. Rescue literature tends to ignore philanthropy, although some recent studies have recognized its importance in certain areas. However, contemporaries were well aware of these campaigns, which raised voluntary funds amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars in 1898, hundreds of millions of dollars during World War I, and over a billion dollars during World War II. Some children mailed the president quarters to help; others raised money through recitals and bake sales. Local committees in every state, and frequently every county within some states, worked diligently to raise funds. In some cases philanthropy was organized or coordinated by the federal government. At other moments private agencies raised the funds, but government officials played important roles, especially in distribution efforts. In the era of miniscule federal budgets, voluntary philanthropy often existed as a de facto extension of government policy. This would be especially true in the case studies examined by this work.

This study also argues that America's response to genocide reflected a careful balance of competing policy needs. This resulted in a situation in which rescue never could have, nor should have, become the predominant policy goal, but, nonetheless, humanitarian concerns often enjoyed considerable attention and support. The intent here is neither to write an apology for American actions nor to diminish the suffering of the victims of genocide. America did indeed make the wrong decision on several occasions, and at other moments vacated the moral high ground for political or economic advantage. Jews and Armenians suffered terribly under the assault of Hitler and the Ottomans. One cannot, and should not, deny these base crimes. But the perpetrators did not torment in a vacuum, and Americans would not have been aware of the fine distinction that makes some crimes genocide, while others become something else. Hence this study seeks to examine the countless other victims who died because of the ideological constructs of evil men, or because of cruel states willing to watch people die in an attempt to retain a decaying empire. Hitler's attack upon the Jews will be placed back into the context of broader racial policy so that the deaths of Hitler's gentile victims might be explained. Stalin's attempt to proletarianize the peasants will be discussed in broad rather than exclusive terms, as will the events that occurred within the Ottoman Empire during its dying days.

An attempt will be made to recontextualize genocide. In 1996, the keynote speaker at the fifth annual Franklin & Eleanor Roosevelt Distinguished Lecture, Ambassador William J. vanden Heuvel, rejected scholars who "write and talk with barely a reference to the colossal military struggle known as World War II" when discussing the Holocaust.[6] Rescue occurred in a complex world, and one needs to discuss possibilities within the framework of that world. A necessary accompaniment is an exploration of the definition of genocide. There has been a tendency to narrow the definition of genocide to the point where it only encom-

passes one or two events, but recent trends seem to reject this idea. Indeed, genocide is a word lacking a definition—or perhaps a word with multiple definitions. Second, America's ability to end genocide will be questioned. Did America possess the key to ending suffering for countless millions? Third, what did America actually do in these circumstances? In 2004 John Lewis Gaddis, a prominent scholar of American foreign policy, wrote of the "care social scientists had taken in recent years to ensure that their theories bore little connection to reality."[7] With this criticism in mind, this study will focus on an explanation of events that encompasses the possible as understood by contemporaries of the events.

This study began, in a very primitive form, as a conference paper.[8] The author, as a master's student at the University at Albany, State University of New York, started out to prove that America had a long history of ignoring genocide—only to find that the evidence supported a more nuanced view. This work is the greatly expanded product of a somewhat impetuous attempt to discuss America's confusing relationship with genocide. The danger in offering nuanced interpretations of rescue policy is that hate groups and genocide deniers might selectively use quotations found on the following pages to bolster their causes. Any such use of this work can only be derived from gross decontextualization of the author's remarks. The case studies presented by this study, the Cuban Insurrection, Armenian Tragedy, Terror-Famine, Japanese atrocities, German racial policy, and the Cambodian Genocide were not accidental. In each case one can see the guilt of the state written large in the blood of its victims.

Can these events be examined on the same moral level? Israel Charny, genocide scholar and general editor of the *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, offers the following thought:

> Although human thought and speech is oriented, not entirely without reason, to concepts of *more* and *less*, *strong* and *weak*, and so on of polarized comparisons and dichotomies, it is proving of the utmost importance to guard against such coins of speech leading to implications, even if unintentional, that the suffering, tragedy, or degree of evil inflicted on any one people was somehow *more* than or *less* than that suffered by other people. Although it is natural for every human being first to experience more vividly and passionately hurt and outrage over one's own loved ones and compatriots, at the core, the value of all human life must be accorded equal status. [italics in original][9]

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Notes

1. William D. Rubinstein, *Genocide: A History* (New York and London, 2004), 1-124.

2. Please see chapter 1 for definitions of genocide.

3. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 4:1 (March, 1940): 102.

4. For an example of these racial ideas, see Eugene S. Talbot, *Degeneracy: Its Causes, Signs, and Results* (New York, 1901), 92-103.

5. David L. Fritz, "Before the 'Howling Wilderness': The Military Career of Jacob Hurd Smith, 1862-1902," *Military Affairs*, 43:4 (December 1979): 186-90.

6. William J. vanden Heuvel, "America, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Holocaust." Keynote address of the fifth annual Franklin & Eleanor Roosevelt Distinguished Lecture, held Oct. 17, 1996 at Roosevelt University in Chicago. <http://newdeal.feri.org/feri/wvh.htm> (August 1, 2010).

7. John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Cambridge and London, 2004), 76.

8. "Responding to Massacre: America and the Continuity of Diplomacy, 1915-1945" (paper presented at the 2002 World War II Conference at Siena College, June 6-7, 2002).

9. Israel Charny, "Comparative Study of Genocide," in *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, edited by Israel Charny (Santa Barbara, Denver, and Oxford, 1990), 9-11.