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Review of "A Samaritan State Revisited: Historical Perspectives on Canadian Foreign Aid" edited by Greg Donaghy and David Webster

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Greg Donaghy and David Webster, eds. *A Samaritan State Revisited: Historical Perspectives on Canadian Foreign Aid*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2019. Pp. 377.

For a great many years, the topic of Canadian aid and notions of humanitarianism were limited primarily to the halls of political scientists and development experts. Here, however, we know that it's now the historian's turn. *A Samaritan State Revisited: Historical Perspectives on Canadian Foreign Aid* is a collection of essays edited by David Webster and the late Greg Donaghy that seeks to clarify the long and complex history surrounding the various iterations of Canada's aid program. As the title implies, this work is a response to the critical book *A Samaritan State?: External Aid in Canada's Foreign Policy* written by Keith Spicer, a book that in part reflects an understanding of the selfish, strategic aspects of giving aid.¹ Like its predecessor, *A Samaritan State Revisited* notes the persistent myth of Canada having pursued an aid policy strictly along humanitarian grounds – a desire, first and foremost, to alleviate the suffering of the world's poor. Several authors work to demonstrate how Canada's aid agenda was “never purely humanitarian but was always an instrument of the Canadian state” (p. 104).

As Donaghy and Webster explain in their introduction, the historical analyses of Canadian aid remain lacking, reflecting a challenging, “complicated business, shaped by a broad range of forces, both internal and external.” The goal of this volume and its many authors is to examine and clarify Canadian aid history, “while bringing Canada into global conversations on the history of development” (p. 1). Born from a symposium hosted by Global Affairs Canada and the history departments of Bishop's and Carleton Universities in 2016, this book is the result of a group of scholars ready to take on a topic that was difficult to research without modern means and accessibility.

This book is an effective blend of themes following a chronological framework that succeeds at both delivering a complex history and maintaining cohesion. For example, the first part of this collection explores the origins and early patterns of organisation that shaped Canadian aid in the early post-war world. Each chapter

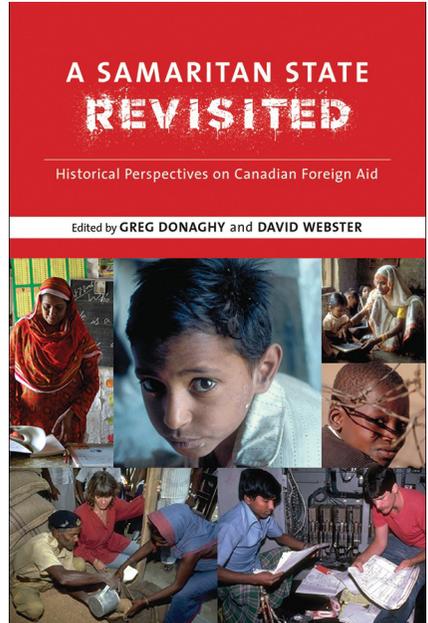
¹ Keith Spicer, *Samaritan State?: External Aid in Canada's Foreign Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966).

delivers detailed and complimentary perspectives and topics that help synthesise a range of unexplored factors pertaining to early Canadian aid history. The book contributors successfully pivot from macro-level analyses of aid to individual case studies. In the case of the Colombo Plan and the early Canada-India aid relationship, capitalist “market-driven interest were built into Canadian aid programming from the very beginning” (p. 31).

Some contributions to the collection prefer an internal perspective on the structure of Canada’s early aid administration by examining some of the key figures involved, including aid officials like T. J. Brook, Nik Cavell and Orville Ault, each with their own leadership style that propelled Canadian aid into new and provocative areas. Another example is a section devoted to Hugh Keeleyside, who “heightened existing Canadian preference for multilateral channels, while positioning Canada as a leading proponent of the UN’s technical assistance system.” Later, Lewis Perinbam is identified as an “anti-bureaucrat” but also one who sought alliances with the powerful in Ottawa to advance CIDA’s agenda (pp. 75 and 179). The authors in this section help demonstrate how the aspirations and ideological motivations of individuals can help shape the aid landscape.

On the topic of trade, diplomacy and development in the mid-to late twentieth century, many contributors engage with topics surrounding the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Indeed, this topic bears fruit when exposing the drawbacks of Canadian aid, including in Ryan Touhey’s contribution that noted how Ottawa’s Colombo Plan became increasingly tangled in “Pakistan’s animosity towards India” (p. 105). In the later sections of the book, readers are exposed to further topics, including imagery, social mobilisation and the decline of Canada’s aid agenda.

What all these contributions represent, however, is that the greatest strength of this book is also its greatest weakness. Aid



history is remarkably difficult and multifaceted, emerging from various types of primary and secondary sources on which historians rely. It is not something that can be synthesised into a single tome, nor was Canada's overall aid program itself understandable to the general public.

Faced with such a challenge, however, the editors and contributors have done a magnificent job refining such a topic into a series of categories best suited to ensure each chapter complements each other. As Dominique Marshall notes in the conclusion, "the history of Canadian foreign aid has recently come into its own for many reasons" (p. 334). Indeed, the reasons stem from former CIDA workers afraid of their work disappearing and the emergence and growth of archives geared towards aid and aid giving agencies. New and provocative arguments can be made, with only a sample having been featured in this book.

In this refreshing take on Canadian humanitarianism and aid history, *A Samaritan State Revisited* is an essential read for those seeking to understand this complex and often misunderstood area of Canadian history. It is accessible and readable by undergraduate and graduate students alike. There are, by nature, limitations to what can be covered in this single, ambitious book. Indeed, with such a remarkable and detailed history of the subject of Canadian aid, this book could not devote too much space to any single area of the program. However, the future looks bright for a history that is surprising interactive and still being written to this day.

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