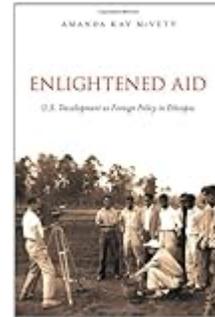




Amanda Kay McVety. *Enlightened Aid: U.S. Development as Foreign Policy in Ethiopia.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. 312 pp. \$74.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-979691-5.



Reviewed by Julia Irwin (University of South Florida)

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Commissioned by Seth Offenbach (Bronx Community College, The City University of New York)

Julia Irwin's review of Amanda Kay McVety's *Enlightened Aid: U.S. Development as Foreign Policy in Ethiopia*

Just over a decade ago, in a *Diplomatic History* research note, Nick Cullather issued an appeal to scholars of U.S. foreign affairs, and particularly to those working on U.S. relations with the global South. Diplomatic historians, he urged, must begin to treat development as history—must, in other words, employ historical methodologies to study modernization, foreign aid, and overseas assistance.[1] In the twelve years since, the call has been answered. Thanks to the work of such scholars as David Ekbladh, David Engerman, Nils Gilman, Corinna Unger, and Cullather himself, the history of U.S. international development has matured into a rich and vibrant field. Even so, opportunities for novel research are far from exhausted. Of particular value moving forward will be works that are more global in scope, broader in chronological span, and more thoroughly transnational in framing.

Amanda Kay McVety has achieved each of these aims in her *Enlightened Aid: U.S. Development as Foreign Policy in Ethiopia*. McVety's monograph, as its subtitle sug-

gests, centers on U.S. economic, technical, and military assistance to Ethiopia from the late 1940s through the early 1970s. But it does much more than this. *Enlightened Aid* begins with a wide-ranging survey of more than two centuries of western European and U.S. ideas of progressive change. Its chapters on U.S.-Ethiopian aid explore the motivations of both American policymakers and Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie, contextualizing this transnational analysis with insightful discussions of Cold War geopolitics, nationalism, and European imperialism in Africa. McVety concludes in the present day, advancing a critique of twenty-first-century development policy while offering recommendations for reform. *Enlightened Aid*, then, is far more than a narrow case study of bilateral, Cold War-era foreign aid. It is a sweeping intellectual history of the concepts of progress and development, an indictment of foreign aid for its historic inability to improve lives, and an analysis of the links between technology and global power. Finally, by focusing on a country and a continent that have been rela-

tively understudied in scholarship on U.S. foreign relations, McVety expands the geography of diplomatic history in important directions.

As the foregoing overview attests, *Enlightened Aid* is far-reaching in its chronology and subject matter. In some respects, in fact, it reads like three books in one. After a brief introduction, the first two chapters provide a genealogy of the ideology of modernization. Chapter 1 takes a tour through Scottish, British, Continental, and American philosophies about progressive change, starting with eighteenth-century thinkers and economists Adam Smith and David Hume. These men, principal figures in the Scottish Enlightenment, formulated theories that defined economic growth as the key to both individual and social progress. Their writings would profoundly influence nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British and U.S. notions of development and progressive change. Yet as McVety shows, Hume's and Smith's ideas did not endure in their pure form. Malthusian and Social Darwinian theories, together with the dramatic technological innovations spurred by the Industrial Revolution, transformed the way American and British intellectuals and policymakers understood social change and development. By the mid-nineteenth century, flush with a faith in their technical, biological, and cultural superiority, these individuals had come to believe that they had both a right and a duty to promote change in other, less "civilized" or advanced parts of the globe. By the early twentieth century, emerging cultural trends—including a growing confidence in scientific experts and an increasing willingness to see the state as a positive good—further bolstered U.S. and British leaders' convictions about their responsibilities to improve other nations. Western economic and technical experts, supported by an active and technologically superior state, would drive progressive change to the world.

Having traced this prehistory of theories of modernization and development, McVety in chapter 2 slows down to concentrate on economic growth theories of the interwar period and the Second World War era. In these years, policymakers in an increasingly powerful United States paid closer attention to the interconnectedness of the global economy. As they did, they came to the conclusion that promoting economic development in one nation yielded benefits for all. Confident in humankind's ability to control nature and effect change, U.S. citizens and government officials united to bring the presumed benefits of capitalist development to the world. Of course, as McVety notes, the Soviet Union put forward a very different set of views on global development in

these years, posing a clear challenge to the U.S. model. Rapid and dramatic Soviet technological and military advances suggested an alternative path to progress, one that made U.S. claims to superiority appear dubious. As competing capitalist and communist visions of progressive change came to a head after World War II, the stage was set for a great Cold War contest, a battle for the "underdeveloped" states of the global South.

After providing this thorough grounding in the intellectual history of development and progress, and with imperial and Cold War contexts now well established, McVety shifts gears in the next four chapters to her focused case study of U.S. development aid in Ethiopia. It is in this part of the book that McVety develops her central thesis: that economic and technical aid, while quite successful as a tool of diplomacy, failed miserably as an instrument of development and social betterment. Chapter 3 grounds this study with a consideration of how and why Ethiopia (and, by extension, Africa and the Middle East) came to be seen as vital to postwar U.S. security interests. At the same time, the chapter examines why Ethiopian leader Haile Selassie regarded U.S. development aid as so essential to his individual and national aspirations. U.S. leaders recognized the strategic value of an independent and developed ally in the region, while fearing that poverty and underdevelopment would breed communism unless alleviated. Selassie, on the other hand, recognized that technological and military improvements would help him maintain power, both within Ethiopia and vis-à-vis other nations. U.S. development aid, as McVety illustrates, thus appeared a mutually beneficial arrangement.

Chapter 4 moves on to examine the birth of U.S. governmental assistance to Ethiopia under President Harry Truman's Point Four Program. Publicly proposed during Truman's 1949 Inaugural Address, the Point Four Program became the first U.S. technical assistance program for the underdeveloped world. McVety traces the conceptualization of Point Four, its passage into law, and its implementation in the early 1950s. She takes an in-depth look at heated debates over the shape of Point Four in the United States. There, policymakers and public citizens grappled with aid's simultaneous definitions as an altruistic act, as a diplomatic tool, and as a means for promoting mutual security. She also explores the enthusiasm for U.S. aid within developing nations, whose leaders understood assistance as a means for achieving their own objectives.

Chapter 5 turns to a consideration of U.S. assistance

on the ground in Ethiopia during the Eisenhower administration, from 1952 to 1960. The Point Four Program (later renamed the International Cooperation Administration) funded a series of educational, agricultural, and technological assistance activities in these years, projects undertaken in close cooperation with the Ethiopian government. Very quickly though, as McVety argues, the program became more overtly political and increasingly focused on military, rather than technical or economic, assistance. Ongoing ideological struggles with the U.S.S.R., Gamal Abdel Nasser's increasing nationalism in Egypt, and the start of African decolonization combined to influence these shifts in U.S. development policy. Meanwhile, Selassie, whose authority was eroding in this rapidly changing geopolitical environment, continued to recognize loyalty to the United States (and resulting U.S. support) as his best hope of clinging to power.

In the 1950s, McVety contends, development aid served diplomatic and strategic interests far more than it succeeded in improving standards of living. By the end of the decade, U.S. economist and political theorist Walt Rostow had come to the same conclusion. His philosophies influenced the incoming Kennedy administration to renew the earlier focus on pure development, rather than military assistance, while simultaneously implementing a more radical program of change in the world. This attempt at reform is the subject of chapter 6. No longer could the United States limit its focus to economic development, Rostow argued; it must promote social, cultural, and political transformations as well. Declaring the 1960s to be "a decade of development" for the global South, the Kennedy administration spearheaded a bold new commitment to long-term, comprehensive aid with the 1961 Foreign Assistance Act. Yet within a few short years, McVety demonstrates, this idealistic vision had failed to lift people out of poverty, in Ethiopia or in other parts of the world. U.S. congressional, military, and State Department leaders continued to treat aid as a political tool, used to secure Selassie's alliance and cooperation. Selassie, meanwhile, embraced U.S. assistance to prop up his rule, but refused to undertake any meaningful agricultural or democratic reforms. Most Ethiopians remained deeply impoverished. Moreover, they grew increasingly frustrated with Selassie's absolute rule. In 1974, these tensions would produce the revolution that ended Selassie's emperorship and marked the start of thirteen years of military rule under the Derg.

More than two decades of U.S. aid, McVety concludes, thus failed to produce real improvements in Ethiopian

lives. If anything, bilateral assistance only made conditions worse. McVety's final chapter expands on this judgment through an analysis of U.S. aid policies and philosophies since the 1970s, culminating with a slate of policy recommendations. McVety critiques IMF structural adjustment programs of the 1980s, more recent democracy promotion efforts, and foreign aid in general. She argues that none of these policies have fulfilled their promise of lifting nations out of poverty. Instead, building on the arguments of several contemporary development thinkers, she contends that real economic growth must come from within impoverished countries. She recommends that the United States and other wealthy nations assist this process by curbing their own domestic agricultural subsidies, supporting global disease eradication, promoting entrepreneurship, and encouraging poorer countries' investments in infrastructure and education. Only in this way, she maintains, can global poverty be reduced effectively.

Enlightened Aid, then, is at once a history of the philosophy of development, a case study of the failures of U.S. aid in Ethiopia during the Cold War, and a manifesto for a new global development policy. While the book's multiple purposes and subjects are arguably one of its strengths, they are in some ways its greatest liability as well. The focus on evolving philosophies of development in the first two chapters, while intellectually sound, feels disconnected from the case study of Ethiopia. It would have been helpful to examine characters or events that illustrate the links more clearly. The last chapter, which jumps very quickly from the 1970s to present-day policy concerns, spends surprisingly little time discussing Ethiopian famine in the 1970s and 1980s. This seems like a missed opportunity for analysis and historical critique. Finally, while McVety has done an admirable job incorporating Haile Selassie's perspectives and highlighting how his objectives differed from those of U.S. policymakers, the paucity of other Ethiopian voices limits the book's potential as a transnational study. In sum, the book is so far-reaching that its main subject—U.S. aid in Ethiopia—feels underdeveloped (no pun intended).

These criticisms aside, McVety has written a very smart book, one that moves both development studies and Cold War history in valuable new directions. She demonstrates that ideologies of modernization and progressive change, often treated as more recent worldviews, have a very long history. She shows, too, how less powerful nations influenced Cold War geopolitics in important ways. Selassie's use of U.S. aid for his own purposes is a prime example of the tail that wagged the

metaphorical dog. Finally, her urge to reconsider contemporary aid practices is an important one. Assistance fails, she argues, because it invariably serves as a political instrument, rather than as an agent of change. Only by making a commitment to promoting change from within poorer countries can wealthier nations finally translate

their benevolent intentions into real results.

Note

[1]. Nick Cullather, "Development? It's History," *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 642.

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