

*Julia F. Irwin*

# Connected by Calamity: The United States, the League of Red Cross Societies, and Transnational Disaster Assistance after the First World War

## ABSTRACT

This article analyses the development of organised relief for global natural disasters in the years after the First World War, c. 1919–1932. It does so by telling two concurrent humanitarian narratives, one focused on a transnational institution, the other on the international affairs of a single nation-state. First, it examines the emergence of the United States as a key figure in global disaster relief at this time. Here, it pays close attention to the transnational connections that American citizens, voluntary associations, and government agencies forged with people in other nations through disaster aid. The article then traces the origins and rise of the League of Red Cross Societies as a leading institution of voluntary transnational disaster assistance during the 1920s and early 1930s, thus recovering the untold history of the organisation's earliest disaster relief operations. Analysing these narratives in tandem and considering the links between them, I argue, offers important new perspectives on the history of transnational disaster relief at a key stage in its historical development, the interwar years.

*Keywords: Disasters, Disaster Assistance, American Red Cross, League of Red Cross Societies*

The decade or so after the First World War represented an important moment in the history of 20<sup>th</sup>-century global disaster relief. As the crises caused by war diminished, many humanitarians turned their attention and resources to peacetime health and social welfare issues. While some focused on combating famine and epidemics, resettling refugees, or improving public health, others concentrated on sudden, so-called “natural” catastrophes—humanitarian crises caused (at least in part) by earthquakes, tropical storms, floods, and other geological or meteorological phenomena. Although the origins of this historical trend can be dated to at least the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the post-war years marked a distinctly new chapter in its evolution. In the 1920s and early 1930s, the question of how to respond to natural disasters in other nations became a matter of increasing worldwide concern.

One response was the creation of a novel transnational relief network—the League of Red Cross Societies—designed in part to contend with this specific category of emergency wherever it might occur. Founded in 1919, the League of Red Cross Societies united all willing national Red Cross Societies in a new federation, dedicated to the provision of humanitarian assistance during times of peace. Among the mandates charged to the League of Red Cross Societies Secretariat was to facilitate, co-ordinate, and develop the disaster relief activities of League of Red Cross Societies member Societies. Early League of Red Cross Societies leaders took this responsibility to heart. By the late 1920s, they had built the League of Red Cross Societies into an established and active player in the field of global disaster aid. Renamed as International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in 1991, the association remains a world leader in the fields of disaster assistance, prevention, risk reduction, and disaster law to this day. Its advent in the post-First World War era thus marked a crucial early chapter in the history of organised transnational disaster relief.

At the same time, the 1920s and early 1930s constituted an equally critical period in the history of United States foreign disaster assistance. In these years, American citizens and the United States government began providing disaster relief to other countries more frequently and more extensively than they ever had in the past. While United States involvement in this sphere of humanitarian action had been on the rise ever since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the range and scope of United States disaster relief efforts in the post-First World War era was truly unprecedented. In the interwar years, the United States first became one of the world's leading providers of bilateral disaster assistance, a status it retains to this day. It was a nation with the resources and will to deliver considerable financial and material relief rapidly across the globe, and a nation deeply cognisant of the strategic and diplomatic benefits to be gained from those activities.

This essay takes as its starting point these two concurrent humanitarian narratives, one focused on a transnational institution, the other on the international affairs of a single nation-state. Examining these narratives in tandem, I argue, offers important new perspectives on the history of global disaster relief at a key stage in its development, the interwar years. Admittedly, I am not the first to investigate this subject. The late historian John F. Hutchinson is widely regarded as a pioneer in this field. His most significant contribution to the history of global disaster assistance came in the form of a magisterial two-part article, published in the early 2000s, which traced in meticulous detail the rise and fall of the International Relief Union, an ill-fated interwar-era experiment in intergovernmental disaster relief.<sup>1</sup> First proposed in 1921, the International Relief Union

1 John Hutchinson: Disasters and the International Order: Earthquakes, Humanitarians, and the Ciraolo Project, in: *The International History Review* 22:1 (2000), pp. 1–36; John Hutchinson: Disasters and the International Order II: The International Relief Union, in: *The International History Review* 23:3 (2001), pp. 253–298.

was founded in 1927 but came into effect only in 1932, once a sufficient number of governments had ratified its Convention. Plagued from the start by financial difficulties and by the fierce opposition that it provoked from several countries (particularly the United States, which never became an International Relief Union member), the organisation was all-but defunct by the Second World War. In an earlier monograph, Hutchinson also recounted the post-war formation of the League of Red Cross Societies. Though it did not address the League of Red Cross Societies' role in disaster relief in any great detail, this book nonetheless provided an invaluable account of the high-level negotiations and disputes that surrounded the creation of this federation.<sup>2</sup> Together, these studies paint a detailed portrait of the internal workings and politics of these key interwar-era transnational disaster relief institutions.

While Hutchinson's work on the International Relief Union and League of Red Cross Societies speaks most directly to the post-First World War history of organised global relief for natural disasters, historians Bruno Cabanes, Keith David Watenpaugh, Kimberly Lowe, and others have studied related aspects of international aid, health, and welfare in the 1920s and early 1930s. Collectively, their research and writings shed light on the context and contours of humanitarianism more generally during these years, and on the fundamental transformations the field was undergoing at this time.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, their work describes how systems of organised international humanitarianism, which had emerged in the previous century, became more bureaucratized, more professionalised, and more global in scope during the post-war years. As Bruno Cabanes has recently argued, the post-First World War period was "a decisive turning point in the redefinition of humanitarianism."<sup>4</sup> It marked an era in which aid "became increasingly organised around transnational networks" and—most pertinently for this study—the moment at which *natural* catastrophes first began to trigger "humanitarian intervention beyond

2 John Hutchinson: *Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross*, Boulder 1996, pp. 279–345.

3 Some relevant contributions to this discussion are Paul Weindling (eds.): *International Health Organisations and Movements, 1918–1939*, Cambridge 1995; Iris Borowsky: *Coming to Terms with World Health: The League of Nations Health Organisation, 1921–1946*, Frankfurt am Main 2009; Michael Barnett: *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*, Ithaca 2011, pp. 76–95; Kimberly Lowe: *The Red Cross and the New World Order, 1918–1924*, New Haven, 2013; Bruno Cabanes: *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918–1924*, New York 2014; Davide Rodogno: *Beyond Relief: A Sketch of the Near East Relief's Humanitarian Operations, 1918–1929*, in: *Monde(s). Histoire, Espaces, Relations* 2:6 (2014), pp. 45–64; Keith David Watenpaugh: *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism*, Berkeley 2015. Refer also to Kimberly A. Lowe's article "The League of Red Cross Societies and International Committee of the Red Cross: a Re-Evaluation of American Influence in Interwar Internationalism" in the present volume.

4 Bruno Cabanes: *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918–1924*, pp. 3

national borders” on a regular basis.<sup>5</sup> The interwar years, as he and other scholars demonstrate, represented nothing less than a formative moment in the history of modern humanitarianism—and, by extension, modern disaster aid.

This existing scholarship lays important foundations for studying the development of global disaster assistance in the post-First World War period; nonetheless, some significant gaps remain. First, beyond John Hutchinson’s work on the International Relief Union, historians have paid relatively little attention to organised relief for sudden natural disasters as a specific category of humanitarian action. Historians of interwar-era humanitarianism have focused predominantly on long-term, systemic crises such as famine, epidemics, and child welfare rather than on rapid-onset emergencies caused by earthquakes, tropical storms, or floods.<sup>6</sup> Although a number of works recount the history of responses to particular natural catastrophes, few offer more comprehensive, long-range analyses of the systems and structures of global disaster relief. A second, related point is that the existing scholarship has largely neglected the important and influential role that the League of Red Cross Societies started to play in the field of disaster relief during these years. For all its value, John Hutchinson’s work—focused, as it is, on internal institutional politics and on the International Relief Union—ignores the actual disaster relief efforts that the League of Red Cross Societies Secretariat and member nations orchestrated during the 1920s and early 1930s. Other historians of the International Red Cross Movement, likewise, have overlooked the federation’s expanding roster of transnational disaster assistance operations.<sup>7</sup> Third, the extant literature has little to say about United States involvement in interwar-era global disaster assistance, despite the prominent role that this nation had begun to play in this arena.<sup>8</sup> It discusses neither the extensive transnational connections that American voluntary organisations and United States citizens forged with the wider world through their programmes of disaster relief, nor the United States’ working relationship with the League of Red Cross Societies.

To better understand the history of global responses to sudden natural catastrophes, further research into each of these areas is essential. Analysing these issues is important not only for historians of the interwar years, moreover, but for scholars of later periods as

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 4, 244.

6 See the sources mentioned in footnote 3 above.

7 Bridget Towers: *Red Cross Organisational Politics, 1918–1922: Relations of Dominance and the Influence of the United States*, in: Weindling (eds): *International Health Organisations and Movements*, pp. 36–55; Caroline Moorehead: *Dunant’s Dream: War, Switzerland and the History of the Red Cross*, New York 1999; David Forsythe: *The Humanitarians: The International Committee of the Red Cross*, Cambridge 2005; Kimberly Lowe: *The Red Cross and the New World Order, 1918–1924*.

8 In his now classic book, Merle Curti discussed United States responses to several foreign natural disasters; however, there have been no real systematic attempts to update his work. Merle Curti: *American Philanthropy Abroad: A History*, New Brunswick 1963, pp. 339–360.

well. During the past two decades, historians and political scientists have produced a rich body of literature on the foreign aid regime that emerged in the post-Second World War years. Carol Lancaster, David Lumsdaine, Olav Stokke, and other international relations scholars have endeavoured to explain why developed democracies and international agencies began to give substantial amounts of aid to less-developed countries during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They attribute this historical trend to a mixture of factors, including domestic politics, diplomatic machinations, economic motivations, and moral convictions.<sup>9</sup> This article certainly does not dispute their findings; indeed, it echoes many of their arguments, yet it also applies them to a slightly earlier period. Accordingly, it serves as a modest reminder that the aid regime that developed after 1945 did not materialise *de novo*. It had well-developed roots in the interwar period, and indeed long before it.

In the pages that follow, I endeavour to contribute to this scholarship through a study of United States international disaster relief, League of Red Cross Societies transnational disaster relief, and the links between them. My focus is on the years 1919–1932, the period in which both the United States and the League of Red Cross Societies first emerged as important players in global disaster assistance, and also the era before the International Relief Union began to operate.<sup>10</sup> I begin with a discussion of how and why the United States became a leader in this humanitarian field during this time. I then turn to an overview of the post-First World War origins of the League of Red Cross Societies and its growing involvement in disaster relief. Here, I pay close attention to United States interactions with the League of Red Cross Societies, analysing the relationship between a nascent transnational disaster relief institution and one of its key national members at a foundational moment in the history of global disaster assistance. Studying these subjects provides a fuller, more detailed picture of the interwar era evolution of global disaster relief. At a more fundamental level, this article also serves as a meditation on the relationship between transnational, international, and national humanitarian action, and demonstrates the importance of examining humanitarian history on these multiple planes.

9 David Lumsdaine: *Moral Vision in International Politics: The Foreign Aid Regime 1949–1989*, Princeton 1993; Carol Lancaster: *Foreign Aid: Diplomacy, Development, Domestic Politics*, Chicago 2007; Olav Stokke: *The UN and Development: From Aid to Cooperation*, Bloomington 2009.

10 Due to space, I do not discuss the United States or League of Red Cross Societies relationship with the embryonic IRU. Readers interested in this history are encouraged to consult John Hutchinson's scholarship.

## United States International Disaster Assistance

During the 1920s and early 1930s, the United States stood out as one of the world's leading providers of global disaster relief. This fact may come as a surprise, given that the post-First World War United States is commonly characterised as an isolationist nation. But although the U.S. government may have eschewed formal, interstate political commitments (including, most obviously, participation in the League of Nations), Americans engaged in international affairs through a variety of other channels—among them bilateral disaster aid.

U.S. involvement in foreign disaster assistance was not entirely new or without precedent. As several books and articles have recounted, the U.S. government and its citizens had occasionally responded to natural catastrophes in other countries prior to the First World War.<sup>11</sup> But while the United States had become increasingly influential in this field of humanitarian action since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the years after the First World War saw a dramatic escalation in the frequency and magnitude of its foreign disaster relief operations. Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, the U.S. government, the American Red Cross, and private American citizens provided substantial relief—in the form of money, material aid, logistical support, and person-to-person assistance—to more than two-dozen countries affected by earthquakes, tropical storms, and other natural hazards. In the wake of many of these disasters, the United States contributed more aid to the afflicted country than any other nation—sometimes, more than all other nations combined. In order to fully understand the history of global disaster assistance, it is essential to appreciate the central role that this single nation played in it.

To be sure, the United States certainly did not respond to any and every natural disaster that occurred in the interwar world—nor did its citizens feel they should. At this time, it was widely believed in the United States (as in much of the international community) that responsibility for providing disaster relief ought normally to rest with the government and civil society of the country in which the calamity occurred. Only on rare and extreme occasions, when the needs of sufferers greatly overwhelmed the capacity of a nation to minister to them, should foreign governments and their citizens intervene, and then

11 Merle Curti: *American Philanthropy Abroad: A History*; Salvatore LaGumina: *The Great Earthquake: America Comes to Messina's Rescue*, New York 2008; William Tilchin: Theodore Roosevelt, Anglo-American Relations, and the Jamaica Incident of 1907, in: *Diplomatic History* 19:3 (1995), pp. 385–406; Julia Irwin: *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening*, New York 2013.

only with the express consent of the affected government. Disaster relief was regarded, as one American Red Cross leader put it, as “primarily a national responsibility” and “only secondarily an international problem.”<sup>12</sup>

Notwithstanding these beliefs about sovereignty and domestic responsibility, Americans in the 1920s and early 1930s judged numerous foreign catastrophes momentous enough to warrant their assistance. By far, the event that triggered the most considerable U.S. response in these years was the 1923 Great Kanto earthquake in Japan, one of the most devastating disasters the world had ever witnessed.<sup>13</sup> In response to that catastrophe, the United States ultimately contributed over twenty million dollars worth of cash, supplies, and military assistance—an extraordinary sum at the time, and nearly two-thirds the amount given by all other countries combined.<sup>14</sup> This was not the only sizeable American foreign disaster relief effort in these years. The United States made major relief contributions following floods in China in 1924 and 1931, hurricanes in Cuba in 1926 and the Dominican Republic in 1930, and an earthquake in Nicaragua in 1931.<sup>15</sup> Smaller amounts of American aid reached the victims of natural catastrophes in numerous other locations, among them Albania, Armenia, Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Greece, Haiti, Jerusalem, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Mexico, New Zealand, Newfoundland, Persia, Switzerland, Turkey, and Venezuela. Disaster assistance, in short, carried U.S. influence to the far corners of the globe.

To a great extent, these U.S. relief efforts were accomplished by the voluntary sector. In the 1920s and early 1930s, the U.S. government had no permanent or official foreign relief infrastructure of its own. Instead, it depended heavily on private citizens, charitable organisations, and corporations to raise funds and deliver aid on the nation’s behalf. The principal U.S. voluntary disaster relief organisation in these years—and the

- 12 Ernest Bicknell to Robert Olds, March 1, 1924, Box 677, Series 2, Record Group 200, American National Red Cross Collection, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD, United States.
- 13 J. Charles Schencking: *The Great Kanto Earthquake and the Chimera of National Reconstruction in Japan*, New York 2013.
- 14 Vice-Minister of Home Affairs, Japan, to Lt. Co. Burnett, February 1924, Central Decimal File (CDF) 894.48, Record Group (RG) 59, Records of the United States Department of State, NARA.
- 15 Ernest Bicknell to Secretary of State, August 14, 1924, CDF 893.48, Records of the United States Department of State, NARA; Castle, Department of State, to American Consul at Hankow, August 19, 1931, Correspondence File (CF) 848, Diplomatic Posts Pre-1936, China, RG 84, Records of United States Foreign Service Posts (hereafter FS/NARA); Frank Kellogg to Enoch Crowder, October 24, 1926, CDF 837.48, RG 59; American Red Cross, “Santo Domingo Hurricane, Statement as of October 2, 1930,” Box 713, American National Red Cross Collection, National Archives and Records Administration; American National Red Cross, “Managua Earthquake: Official Report of the Relief Work in Nicaragua after the Earthquake of March 31, 1931,” Box 714, American National Red Cross Collection, National Archives and Records Administration.

one the government relied on most—was the American Red Cross. Founded in 1881 and chartered by the U.S. Congress in 1900 and 1905, the American Red Cross was charged with several responsibilities, including “carry[ing] on a system of national and international relief” in the wake of peacetime disasters.<sup>16</sup> In the decades after its founding, as Marian Moser Jones and myself have shown, the American Red Cross responded to an increasing number of foreign crises and gradually developed its role in U.S. overseas assistance. It was only during the First World War, however, and particularly after the United States entered into that conflict in 1917, that the American Red Cross truly became a dominant organisation in this field. By the early 1920s, thanks largely to its relief activities in the war, the American Red Cross had come to be recognised as the premier institution of U.S. foreign assistance.

In the post-war era, as a consequence of this new status, the American Red Cross began to respond more regularly, systematically, and liberally to overseas natural catastrophes.<sup>17</sup> Most often, American Red Cross aid took the form of cash donations, sent either to the Red Cross Society of the affected nation or, when no such sister society existed, to trusted government officials or private agencies.<sup>18</sup> Sometimes, the American Red Cross sent material relief as well, usually in the form of medical and surgical supplies. Following some major disasters—including Cuba in 1926, the Dominican Republic in 1930, and Nicaragua in 1931—American Red Cross personnel went to the scene of the disaster to serve as advisers on relief operations. In this capacity, they oversaw aid distributions, counselled local governments and Red Cross Societies on the methods and principles of disaster assistance, and worked with local actors to develop plans for rehabilitation and reconstruction.<sup>19</sup>

While the American Red Cross was the interwar-era United States’ principal voluntary disaster relief association, it was not the only part of the private sector involved in administering the nation’s foreign disaster aid. American monetary and material contributions for overseas relief came predominantly from private citizens rather than the state. Many U.S. citizens gave through the American Red Cross, while others donated through their churches and synagogues or through other charitable organisations.

16 Congressional Charter of the American National Red Cross, 1905, (33 Stat. 599–602).

17 Marian Moser Jones: *The American Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal*, Baltimore 2012; Julia Irwin: *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation’s Humanitarian Awakening*, pp. 185–208.

18 Ernest Bicknell to John Dougherty, November 21, 1922, Box 719, American National Red Cross Collection, National Archives and Records Administration.

19 Henry Baker to James Fieser, November 13, 1926, Box 703, American National Red Cross Collection, National Archives and Records Administration; ARC Press Release, September 6, 1930, Box 713, American National Red Cross Collection, National Archives and Records Administration; Ernest Swift to the American Red Cross, April 10, 1931, CDF 817.48, Records of the United States Department of State, NARA.



American banks and corporations, too, often contributed large sums of money to foreign disaster relief operations. When a hurricane struck Cuba in 1926, for example, the banking magnate Dwight Morrow organised a relief committee in New York that ultimately raised the impressive sum of 200,000 Dollars for Cuba. The United Fruit Company, J.P. Morgan & Company, and several other major firms made sizeable contributions to his campaign.<sup>20</sup> Logistical support also came from the private sector, with U.S. commercial shipping lines and—by the late 1920s—Pan-American Airways frequently donating space on their ships and planes to carry American material aid overseas.<sup>21</sup> Finally, a vast web of American missionaries, businessmen, and other expatriates worked and lived abroad during the 1920s and early 1930s, populating the United States’ expansive informal empire. When disasters struck in or near their adopted communities, these individuals frequently volunteered to raise funds and deliver relief. In response to 1931 floods in China, for instance, dozens of American Protestant missionaries helped distribute food to displaced refugees, while the famed U.S. pilot Charles Lindberg provided free aerial surveys of flooded districts.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, when an earthquake struck Bulgaria and Greece in 1928, personnel of the U.S. philanthropy Near East Relief who were stationed in the region travelled to Sofia and Athens to participate in emergency aid operations.<sup>23</sup> American voluntarism, bolstered by American financial power and cultural expansion, thus formed the backbone of U.S. global disaster assistance.

But if U.S. foreign disaster relief flowed principally through private channels, the state was by no means removed from this process. During the 1920s, the U.S. government and American civil society often worked in a close and dynamic partnership, a relationship that Emily Rosenberg, Brian Balogh and others have described as the “cooperative state” or the “associational state.”<sup>24</sup> In many realms of 1920s public policy, U.S. authorities looked to voluntary associations and corporations to achieve their goals; they tended to believe, moreover, that these institutions could achieve desirable public ends more effectively

- 20 Dwight Morrow to President Machado, November 4, 1926, CDF 837.48, Records of the United States Department of State, NARA.
- 21 ‘The Use of Aeroplanes for Disaster Relief in U.S.A.’, in: League of Red Cross Societies Monthly Bulletin 16 (August 1935), in: Publications of the International Federation, Archives of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva, Switzerland.
- 22 Representatives of the American Mission Boards in China to Herbert Hoover, August 24, 1931; Wirt Hallam to Henry Stimson, September 23, 1931; both CDF 893.48, Records of the United States Department of State, NARA.
- 23 H.C. Jaquith to Trojan Kodding, May 24, 1928, CF 848, Bulgaria, Diplomatic Posts Pre-1936, FS/NARA; Laird Archer to G. Howland Shaw, April 27, 1928, CDF 868.48, Records of the United States Department of State, NARA.
- 24 Emily Rosenberg: *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890–1945*, New York 1982; Brian Balogh: *The Associational State: American Governance in the Twentieth Century*, Philadelphia 2015.

than the government. In return—and in order to assure that the state's objectives were met successfully—U.S. government and military officials also influenced, facilitated, and encouraged those private sector efforts in multiple ways.

This associational form of governance, a defining feature of U.S. domestic and foreign affairs in this era, exerted a clear and profound influence over the character of U.S. overseas disaster assistance. For example, many active and retired members of the U.S. Armed Forces and State Department served on the American Red Cross's governing Central and Executive Committees, giving these government voices significant sway over American Red Cross decision-making. State Department personnel also provided the American Red Cross with up-to-date information about disaster-stricken countries, established and maintained lines of communication between the American Red Cross and foreign governments, and helped to negotiate the terms of the association's overseas assistance. On the ground in disaster-stricken countries, U.S. ambassadors and consular officials provided additional support, helping to distribute and publicise the aid that the American Red Cross, American missionaries, U.S. corporations, and other U.S. citizens had contributed. Finally, the Presidents of the United States in these years regularly appealed to the U.S. public on the American Red Cross's behalf, urging American citizens to give to the organisation in the wake of foreign cataclysms.<sup>25</sup>

For all the value that policymakers placed in voluntary relief efforts, however, the U.S. government's role in foreign disaster assistance was not entirely limited to promoting the efforts of the voluntary sector. In the case of some foreign disasters, the U.S. government and military intervened directly, dispatching supplies, ships, and personnel to the affected country. The nation's sprawling formal empire—which included such overseas territories as Puerto Rico, Guantánamo Bay in Cuba, the Panama Canal Zone, and the Philippines—provided bases around the world from which to launch military relief activities, as did contemporary sites of U.S. military occupation like Haiti and the Dominican Republic. As a result of the tremendous expansion of U.S. naval and air power during the First World War, the U.S. War Department also maintained large fleets of ships and, increasingly, airplanes in various parts of the world, which it could quickly mobilise for relief and rescue operations. On an *ad hoc* basis, U.S. government officials utilised these resources for foreign disaster assistance.

The U.S. response to the 1923 Great Kanto earthquake marked the most significant of these more formal state interventions. Two days after the quake occurred, U.S. President Calvin Coolidge instructed his Secretary of War to launch a military assistance operation. Within a few days, five ships from the 38<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Division of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet had arrived in the waters near Tokyo and Yokohama, the cities at the epicentre of the quake.

25 Marian Moser Jones: *The American Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal*; Julia Irwin: *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening*, pp. 185–208.

Joining their crews was a contingent of over a hundred U.S. Army officers, enlisted men, engineers, physicians, and nurses, dispatched from their station in the nearby Philippines, then a U.S. territory. Together with the staffs of the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo and several U.S. consulates, they carried out the U.S. government's emergency relief efforts for Japan, an enterprise that lasted well over a month and cost an estimated eight million Dollars in U.S. military funds.<sup>26</sup> For a government that customarily delegated foreign disaster assistance to the voluntary sector, this was a rather extraordinary undertaking. And yet, it was not a one-time incident. When a hurricane struck Cuba in 1926, the U.S. War Department ordered ships from Florida and the U.S. military base at Guantanamo Bay to proceed to the scene with relief supplies.<sup>27</sup> After a 1930 hurricane in the Dominican Republic, likewise, the Secretary of War sent a small commission of soldiers, three U.S. Navy planes, and a U.S. destroyer from neighbouring Haiti (then under U.S. military occupation) to deliver relief.<sup>28</sup> Thus, although the U.S. government typically looked to the private sector to carry out foreign disaster relief on the nation's behalf, it could—and did—assume a more active role.

As the preceding paragraphs attest, the *ability* of U.S. voluntary associations, private citizens, and government officials to provide liberal and rapid disaster relief abroad was a direct result of the United States' recent ascendancy as an economic, political, military, and cultural world power. The wealth of the United States, the distribution of American soldiers and citizens throughout the world, the preponderance of American naval and air power—each of these factors made it possible for the United States to become a leader in global disaster assistance. But if these enabling elements are clear, the *motivations* that compelled Americans to take up this mantle remain to be discussed. Presumably, many in the United States donated money, material aid, time, and energy to foreign disaster assistance for the simple reason that they felt a moral, a spiritual, or a humanitarian obligation to help others. And yet, while not discounting the sincerity of such beliefs, it is also important to recognise that the interwar-era United States administered foreign assistance for reasons other than pure altruism. For all parties involved, providing disaster relief abroad also served vital U.S. national interests.

- 26 James Fieser to William Phillips, September 8, 1923, CDF 894.48, Records of the United States Department of State, NARA; Commander in Chief of United States Asiatic Fleet to Chief of Naval Operations, October 1923, CF 848, Diplomatic Posts Pre-1936, Japan, FS/NARA; McCoy, Narrative Report of American Relief Mission to Japan, November 9, 1923, Decimal File 400.38, Bulky Files 1917–1925, RG 407, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, NARA (hereafter AG/NARA); Cyrus Woods to Secretary of State, September 6, 1923, CF 848, Diplomatic Posts Pre-1936, Japan, FS/NARA; McCoy to AG, Oct 10, 1923, Decimal File 400.38, AG/NARA.
- 27 Sheridan Talbott, Report "Hurricane of October 19–20, 1926, Isle of Pines, Cuba," November 19, 1926, CDF 837.48, Records of the United States Department of State, NARA.
- 28 Ernest Swift to James Fieser, September 19, 1930, Box 713, American National Red Cross Collection, National Archives and Records Administration.

The provision of rapid, generous, and effective assistance in the wake of foreign catastrophes had the potential, in the words of one U.S. diplomatic official, to “advance the interests of the United States” in two major ways.<sup>29</sup> First, by providing disaster relief abroad, the U.S. government and its citizens could help to restore stability within affected foreign nations, facilitate the resumption of normal economic and diplomatic relations between those nations and the United States, and re-establish conditions favourable to U.S. business interests in the region. Given the United States’ position as the world’s leading economic power in the 1920s, it is understandable that such concerns motivated officials in the U.S. Departments of State and Commerce, U.S. embassy and consular agents, heads of corporations, and American Red Cross leaders to provide disaster relief abroad. With striking regularity, these figures defined American aid as a critical factor in the quest to “restore the fields to productivity,” boost “commercial and industrial activity,” and “bring order out of chaos” in disaster-affected regions.<sup>30</sup> Aiding other countries, quite simply, was good for U.S. strategic and financial concerns in those nations as well.

The second benefit that the United States stood to derive from its foreign disaster assistance was in its use as a tool of public diplomacy. Delivering aid in the wake of natural catastrophes, as many Americans recognised, offered a way to win the hearts and minds of foreign civilians and their leaders. U.S. ambassadors and consuls regularly lauded disaster relief for its ability “to strengthen [...] friendly relations” with the United States and for “encouraging a kindlier feeling toward Americans” on the part of aid recipients.<sup>31</sup> This was not just wishful thinking. The recipients of American aid often voiced their gratitude to the United States as well, praising the “noble Nation” for such things as its “efficient aid and opportune cooperation and assistance” and for the “humanity and philanthropy for which America stands so valiantly.”<sup>32</sup> While many such expressions of appreciation were likely no more than platitudes, the sheer frequency of these remarks suggests that Americans often succeeded, at least temporarily, in fostering better diplomatic relations through disaster relief.

29 Division of Far Eastern Affairs, statement on Yantse Valley, China, floods, August 16, 1931, CDF 893.48, Records of the United States Department of State, NARA.

30 Lester Schnare to Secretary of State, November 25, 1922, CDF 893.48, Records of the United States Department of State, NARA; Hanna to Swift, June 25, 1931, Box 714, American National Red Cross Collection, National Archives and Records Administration; Swift to Trujillo, Box 713, American National Red Cross Collection, National Archives and Records Administration.

31 Alvin Adey to John Barton Payne, October 8, 1921, Box 717; Lester Schnare to China Central Committee of ARC, Shanghai, October 1, 1922, Box 719; both American National Red Cross Collection, National Archives and Records Administration.

32 A. Doxiadis to R. Skinner, April 25, 1928, CF 848, Diplomatic Posts Pre-1936, Greece, FS/NARA; Rafael Trujillo to Herbert Hoover, September 20, 1930, Box 713, American National Red Cross Collection, National Archives and Records Administration; H. Nishimura to Cyrus Woods, October 21, 1923, CF 848, Diplomatic Posts Pre-1936, Japan, FS/NARA.

Together, the complementary desires to protect American financial and political interests abroad and to enhance the United States' image in the world—coupled with at least some genuine humanitarian concern—explain why the interwar-era United States made foreign disaster assistance a priority and one of its global responsibilities. To attain these varied objectives, the U.S. government relied on and partnered with the voluntary sector while also beginning to play a more active part in administering relief itself, processes made possible thanks to the international economic, political, and cultural position of the United States in the post-First World War world. Bilateral disaster relief, then, represented an integral element of interwar era U.S. international and transnational relations. It provided an avenue for U.S. citizens, voluntary agencies, and government officials to interact with the international community while serving a broad array of American national interests.

## The League of Red Cross Societies, the United States, and Transnational Disaster Assistance

During the 1920s and early 1930s, while the United States was emerging as a leading provider of bilateral disaster relief, a novel transnational network, dedicated to coordinating voluntary disaster assistance throughout the world, was simultaneously taking form. Within a decade of its conception, this federation—the League of Red Cross Societies—would become established as both the peacetime arm of the International Red Cross Movement and a leading force in global disaster relief. But what, if any, was the relationship between these concurrent processes? In what ways do these two historical narratives—the former state-centred, the latter transnational—intertwine?

Far from mutually exclusive, these humanitarian origins stories are in fact intimately connected. For just as the interwar-era United States played a dominant role in the delivery of global relief, it also exerted enormous sway over the nascent League of Red Cross Societies, and over the shape of transnational disaster assistance more broadly. John Hutchinson has convincingly shown how staunch U.S. opposition to the International Relief Union played a critical part in the International Relief Union's on-going struggles and eventual failure as an intergovernmental relief organisation.<sup>33</sup> American hostility toward the International Relief Union, however, should not be taken as evidence that the United States was fundamentally opposed to transnational disaster relief, or that Americans wanted to remain outside this emerging sphere of humanitarian action. To

33 John Hutchinson: *Disasters and the International Order: Earthquakes, Humanitarians, and the Ciraolo Project*, pp. 1–36; John Hutchinson: *Disasters and the International Order II: The International Relief Union*, pp. 253–298.

the contrary, interwar-era Americans proved willing, even eager, to take part in organised transnational assistance *so long as* it was in a form they approved, a point that has not received adequate attention in the existing historiography. Specifically, American Red Cross leaders and U.S. government officials worked quite closely with the League of Red Cross Societies in its voluntary disaster assistance efforts throughout the interwar years. In turn, the League of Red Cross Societies' success in the field of transnational disaster relief was due in no small part to the considerable support that it received from the United States.

In the space that remains, I trace the rise of the League of Red Cross Societies and its growing involvement in the field of disaster assistance in the 1920s and early 1930s. In so doing, I begin to recover the untold history of some of the federation's earliest relief operations. Throughout, I call attention to the federation's close partnership with the United States in these years, highlighting the ways that the United States cooperated with and helped shape this budding transnational disaster relief network.

Prior to the First World War, humanitarian aid for the victims of natural disasters was not formally organised on a global scale. Customarily, the obligation to respond to catastrophes caused by natural hazards fell to the government and voluntary society of the nation in which they occurred. While some countries delegated responsibility for both domestic and foreign disaster relief to their national Red Cross Societies, the Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross did not yet include peacetime or civilian aid as part of its mission; its role was limited to providing neutral aid to wounded soldiers during wartime.

Transnational disaster relief operations were not entirely new to the post-First World War years, of course. From time to time, catastrophes occurred that were of such magnitude as to trigger an external response, such as earthquakes in Lisbon (1755), San Francisco (1906), and Messina (1908). In these cases, willing governments delivered assistance to the stricken country through diplomatic or military channels, while voluntary associations, churches, Red Cross Societies, and private citizens provided their own forms of aid.<sup>34</sup> As the growth of the International Red Cross movement and the increasing involvement of some governments in disaster relief during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries suggests, moreover, the elements required for a global relief system had already begun to take form before the First World War.

And yet, there still existed no international agencies specifically devoted to coordinating, promoting, or administering such a global humanitarian action. This situation began to change in 1919 with the formation of the League of Red Cross Societies, an organisation which the American Red Cross—as a function of the power, influence, and financial might that it had achieved during the First World War—played a critical role in

34 John Hutchinson: *Disasters and the International Order: Earthquakes, Humanitarians, and the Ciraolo Project*, pp. 1–36.

shaping. The League of Red Cross Societies was the brainchild of the wartime head of the American Red Cross, Henry Davison. During the First World War, Davison had come to regard the International Committee of the Red Cross's mission to aid wounded soldiers as too narrowly focused. He conceived of a new federation of the world's national Red Cross Societies, dedicated to improving public health, combatting epidemics, and assisting the victims of natural catastrophes. In late 1918 and early 1919, working with the Red Cross Societies of other Allied nations and with the active support of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, Davison took swift and assertive steps to make this idea a reality. By 5 May, 1919, less than six months after the signing of the Armistice, he and the representatives of the British, French, Italian, and Japanese Red Cross Societies had drafted and signed the Articles of Association that formally established the League of Red Cross Societies.

Significantly, the Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross had not endorsed this action. Incensed at Davison's brash attempts to wrest control over the International Red Cross Movement, and already contemplating an expansion of Red Cross peacetime responsibilities themselves, International Committee of the Red Cross members initially refused to recognise the new Red Cross federation. The controversy would persist for nearly a decade. Though the two bodies gradually developed some avenues of cooperation, it was not until 1928 that they achieved a truly meaningful rapprochement, agreeing to co-exist as autonomous yet complementary bodies under the auspices of a new structure, the International Red Cross. In the meantime, though, Davison and his associates moved forward with their plans to organise the League of Red Cross Societies. They staffed its Secretariat with scientific and medical experts, began to develop health and welfare projects, and invited other national Red Cross Societies to join the new federation. Davison and other American Red Cross leaders also committed several million Dollars to the League of Red Cross Societies during its first few years of operation, the lion's share of its initial funding. In March 1920, the League of Red Cross Societies convened its first General Council meeting, bringing together representatives from twenty-seven of its now thirty member societies. The League of Red Cross Societies had begun operations.<sup>35</sup>

By and large, the advent of the League of Red Cross Societies garnered broad approval among both American Red Cross leaders and U.S. diplomatic officials, for two key reasons.<sup>36</sup> First, the League of Red Cross Societies' approach to transnational humanitarianism—limited, as it was, to facilitating and co-ordinating the work of

35 John Hutchinson: *Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross*, pp. 279–345; Bridget Towers: *Red Cross Organisational Politics, 1918–1922*, pp. 36–55; Kimberly Lowe: *The Red Cross and the New World Order, 1918–1924*, p. 135; Julia Irwin: *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening*, pp. 143–166.

36 For American criticisms of the League of Red Cross Societies, however, see Julia Irwin: *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening*, pp. 161–166.

the world's national Red Cross Societies—fit well with contemporary U.S. political and cultural sensibilities. These prevailing ideologies, as discussed previously, prized voluntarism and associationalism, favouring those forms of international engagement that did not require sizeable governmental resources or commitments. Second, as a result of their early patronage and involvement in organising the League of Red Cross Societies, and due to the influence that the American Red Cross continued to exercise in League of Red Cross Societies affairs, American Red Cross leaders held significant control over the federation's governance throughout the interwar period. From the federation's founding in 1919 until 1944, the Chairman of the American Red Cross served simultaneously as League of Red Cross Societies President.<sup>37</sup> During the interwar years, moreover, four different American Red Cross leaders served as League of Red Cross Societies Secretaries-General.<sup>38</sup> Many other American Red Cross personnel worked for the League of Red Cross Societies Secretariat (then in Paris) or as League of Red Cross Societies field representatives, especially in the Western Hemisphere. This bureaucratic arrangement gave the United States a commanding voice in this ostensibly transnational organisation. For these reasons, American humanitarians and government officials proved quite willing to forge a close partnership with the League of Red Cross Societies during the 1920s and early 1930s. Accordingly, as they built up their nation's own programme of bilateral disaster assistance, Americans would simultaneously cooperate with the League of Red Cross Societies to develop its system of transnational disaster relief.

One of the League of Red Cross Societies' founding purposes, according to its Articles of Association, was "to furnish a medium for co-ordinating relief work in case of great national or international calamities."<sup>39</sup> At the first League of Red Cross Societies General Council meeting in 1920, members confirmed this mission when they passed a Resolution instructing the Secretariat to "maintain for the member societies a rapid service of information regarding calamities and disasters in order to insure the immediate mobilisation of every possible form of assistance."<sup>40</sup> Armed with this directive, the League of Red Cross Societies Secretariat soon took its first steps toward overseeing and assisting the disaster relief efforts of the world's national Red Cross Societies. It would take several years, however, before the federation really became relevant in this sphere.

37 Henry Davison (1919–1922), John Barton Payne (1922–1935), Cary Grayson (1935–1938), Norman Davis (1938–1944).

38 Tracey Kittredge (1927–1930), Ernest Bicknell (1931), Gordon Berry (1931–1932), Ernest Swift (1932–1936).

39 League of Red Cross Societies, Articles of Association, Box 55, American National Red Cross Collection, National Archives and Records Administration.

40 Resolutions adopted at the General Council, in: *Bulletin of the League of Red Cross Societies* 1:9 (1920), in: Archives of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva, Switzerland.



In early League of Red Cross Societies disaster relief initiatives, significantly, the United States and its Red Cross Society tended to assume a commanding leadership role. When a November 1922 earthquake in Chile led the League of Red Cross Societies Secretariat to issue one of its first calls for international disaster aid, for instance, the American Red Cross immediately responded by wiring 10,000 Dollars to the Chilean Red Cross, more than any other League of Red Cross Societies member nation.<sup>41</sup> The Belgian Secretary-General of the League of Red Cross Societies, René Sand, was subsequently pleased to note that “a number of other Red Cross Societies have followed the example of the American Red Cross in making contributions for Chilean relief.”<sup>42</sup> When the American Red Cross responded to Japan’s Great Kanto earthquake the following year, likewise, League of Red Cross Societies publications praised it for giving “more than any other individual foreign agency” and for the “speed with which [its aid] arrived and was distributed.”<sup>43</sup> The United States clearly played a disproportionate role in these early League of Red Cross Societies initiatives. Nonetheless, these operations represented an important first step in the development of the federation’s organised transnational disaster relief.

By the mid-1920s, as the League of Red Cross Societies became more established and as its involvement in war-related humanitarian crises subsided, federation leaders started to focus more attention and resources on natural catastrophes. A significant move in this direction came in April 1924, when the League of Red Cross Societies General Council created a specialised bureau dedicated to disaster aid. The League of Red Cross Societies Secretariat entrusted this new Relief Division “with the collection of documentation, with the communication to national Societies of the information which may be useful to them, and with the facilitation of the efforts of those Societies in carrying on their own work and co-ordinating their activities one with the other.”<sup>44</sup> Once constituted, the Relief Division’s staff expanded League of Red Cross Societies disaster co-ordination activities greatly. They undertook studies of international relief problems and prepared an official Relief Manual, an attempt to standardise universal principles and best practices of disaster relief.<sup>45</sup> They also increased such activities as issuing appeals on behalf of stricken countries,

41 Licross to ARC, November 16, 1922, Box 719, American National Red Cross Collection, National Archives and Records Administration.

42 René Sand to Ernest Bicknell, November 28, 1922, Box 719, American National Red Cross Collection, National Archives and Records Administration.

43 League of Red Cross Societies Information Circular, Third Year, No. 5 (March 1, 1924) in: Archives of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva, Switzerland, p. 17.

44 League of Red Cross Societies: The League of Red Cross Societies, Paris 1925, Box 63, American National Red Cross Collection, National Archives and Records Administration.

45 League of Red Cross Societies: Disaster Relief and the Red Cross: The Handling of Domestic Disasters, Paris 1924, Box 10, P/Entry 78: League of Red Cross Societies Records, 1919–1999, RG 200, American National Red Cross Collection, NARA (hereafter League of Red Cross Societies/NARA).

disseminating up-to-date information on international disasters to League of Red Cross Societies member Societies and their governments, and working with national Red Cross Societies to improve their disaster response capabilities.<sup>46</sup>

After the formation of the Relief Division, the United States remained one of the federation's most active member nations, giving regularly and liberally to League of Red Cross Societies disaster relief appeals and working closely with the League of Red Cross Societies Secretariat. At the same time though, as the League of Red Cross Societies became more effective in its mission of co-ordinating transnational disaster assistance, it began to depend less heavily on the United States to carry out its operations. The League of Red Cross Societies response to an August 1925 cyclone in northern Europe, a storm that caused significant damage and flooding in Holland and Belgium, marked an important point of departure in this regard. In the aftermath of the disaster, the Relief Division immediately sent its Associate Director and the League of Red Cross Societies Secretary-General to The Hague, charging them with investigating conditions and determining the need for an international appeal. Relief Division personnel, meanwhile, cabled news of the disaster to various national Red Cross Societies and circulated subsequent updates. These appeals brought in contributions not only from the American Red Cross, but also from Brazil, Estonia, Greece, Japan, Latvia, Sweden, and the Vatican. Reviewing the success of this operation, League of Red Cross Societies leaders proudly proclaimed that, "a stronger feeling of unity bound together the different national organisations", and identified "the Relief Division as the co-ordinating factor."<sup>47</sup>

By 1928, the year that the International Committee of the Red Cross and League of Red Cross Societies formalised their respective spheres of operation, the latter had cemented its position as a co-ordinator of voluntary global disaster assistance. More than ever before, the federation's relief appeals represented truly transnational undertakings. In that year, when a major earthquake struck Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey, the Relief Division collected a substantial aid fund from some twenty-nine national Red Cross Societies, distinguishing the appeal as the most successful to date.<sup>48</sup> While American Red Cross leaders contributed 30,000 Dollars, a relatively large sum, they also reported

46 League of Red Cross Societies, Report to Chairman of the Board of Governors, May and June 1924 and Interim Report to Board of Governors, May 1-August 31, 1925; both Box 45, League of Red Cross Societies/NARA. League of Red Cross Societies, Activities of Secretariat, July 1—Sept 30, 1926, Box 30, League of Red Cross Societies/NARA.

47 League of Red Cross Societies: The Floods in Holland and Belgium, Paris 1926, p. 37, Box 10, League of Red Cross Societies/NARA.

48 League of Red Cross Societies: The League of Red Cross Societies, Paris 1929, Box 63, American National Red Cross Collection, National Archives and Records Administration; Paul Draudt and Max Huber, to the Presidents and Members of the Central Committees [of all national societies], June 19, 1928, Box 709, American National Red Cross Collection, National Archives and Records Administration.

the “novel and welcome experience” of finding “that the contributions of the American Red Cross do not exceed the contributions of all other Red Cross societies combined. This is as it should be”, American Red Cross leader Ernest Bicknell asserted, “and I hope it is indicative of the beginning of a better order. There can be no doubt whatever”, he concluded, “that the League of Red Cross Societies is responsible for this new and significant development.”<sup>49</sup>

Thus, less than a decade after its creation, the League of Red Cross Societies had become an autonomous and effective institution in the field of voluntary transnational disaster assistance. By the time the International Relief Union came into force in late 1932, the League of Red Cross Societies had organised Red Cross relief efforts following earthquakes, tropical storms, and floods in Armenia, Asia Minor, the Azores, the Balkans, Belgium, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, France, Holland, Hungary, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Persia, Roumania, Serbia, and the West Indies.<sup>50</sup> Its Secretariat had become a recognised authority in the study of natural disasters and their prevention, and had taken concerted steps to develop the disaster relief capabilities of many national Red Cross Societies. Although the International Relief Union’s experiment in *intergovernmental* disaster assistance quickly proved unsuccessful, *voluntary* transnational disaster assistance, as undertaken by the League of Red Cross Societies, continued to fare well. During the next decade (and beyond), the League of Red Cross Societies went on to develop and refine its efforts in this humanitarian field, while the American Red Cross remained an active and influential player in its burgeoning sphere of global disaster relief operations.

## Conclusions

This essay has traced the origins and rise of the League of Red Cross Societies as a leading institution of organised transnational disaster assistance and the United States’ simultaneous emergence as a leader in global disaster relief, and it has analysed the intersections between these synchronous historical narratives. In so doing, it has worked to recover the histories of two neglected yet critical players in global disaster assistance at a crucial stage of its 20<sup>th</sup>-century development. Even as the United States began to deliver bilateral disaster aid on an unprecedented scale during the 1920s and early 1930s, it has

49 Ernest Bicknell to T.B. Kittredge, June 21, 1928, Box 709, American National Red Cross Collection, National Archives and Records Administration.

50 Compiled from various reports to the League of Red Cross Societies Board of Governors, Box 45, and reports of the League of Red Cross Societies Activities of Secretariat, Box 30, both League of Red Cross Societies/NARA; and League of Red Cross Societies Bulletins and Information Circulars, Archives of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva, Switzerland.

argued, Americans did not reject transnational disaster assistance outright. Rather, in partnering with the League of Red Cross Societies, the nation pursued a distinct—albeit limited—form of transnational humanitarian engagement: one that enabled the United States to maintain significant control over their expanding bilateral relief efforts, and one that was based on voluntary, associationalist forms of assistance rather than obligatory, statist ones. Americans, in other words, participated in, and helped give shape to, a system of transnational disaster assistance that closely aligned with their own national ideals and which seemed best poised to further their own national interests. Given the rising importance of overseas disaster assistance to U.S. foreign relations in these years, it is only logical that the United States became so actively involved and invested in the emerging field of transnational disaster relief as well.

Throughout, this essay has also endeavoured to emphasise the interplay between national, transnational, and international humanitarian action. Recognising the preponderant influence of the United States in interwar-era global disaster relief alludes to a critical historiographical point: even as we undertake histories of humanitarianism that are transnational in their scope and focus, we must take care not to neglect or ignore the power and presence of nation-states—particularly those, like the United States, that wielded significant power and influence over the systems and structures of international humanitarianism. To fully understand the history of 20<sup>th</sup>-century global disaster relief—or of any other type of global humanitarian activity—it is essential to analyse both transnational organisations, actors, and processes, and the international activities of specific countries and their populations.

**Julia F. Irwin** is an Associate Professor of History at the University of South Florida. Her research focuses on humanitarian aid in 20<sup>th</sup>-century United States foreign relations. She is the author of *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening* (Oxford 2013). She is now writing her second monograph, *Catastrophic Diplomacy: A History of U.S. Responses to Global Natural Disaster, 1900–1975*.