



A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis

By David Rieff

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Timely and controversial, *A Bed for the Night* reveals how humanitarian organizations are often betrayed and misused, and have increasingly lost sight of their purpose. Drawing on firsthand reporting from war zones around the world, David Rieff shows us what aid workers do in the field and the growing gap between their noble ambitions and their actual capabilities for alleviating suffering. He describes how many humanitarian organizations have moved from their founding principle of neutrality, which gave them access to victims, to encouraging the international community to take action to stop civil wars and ethnic cleansing. By calling for intervention, humanitarian organizations risk being seen as taking sides in a conflict and thus jeopardizing their access to victims. And by overreaching, the humanitarian movement has allowed itself to be hijacked by the major powers. Rieff concludes that if humanitarian organizations are to do what they do best - alleviate suffering - they must reclaim their independence.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Noted journalist Rieff (*Slaughterhouse: Bosnia and the Failure of the West*) presents a painful, urgent and penetrating discussion of a crisis most of us didn't even know existed and yet which cuts to the heart of the West's role in some of the most violent world events of the past decade. He will shake readers' complacency about the relief work done by organizations like Oxfam, CARE and Doctors without Borders, crushing the belief that humanitarian aid is a panacea for all the world's ills. Rieff rejects "the false morality play" that, in any given conflict, there are victimizers and innocent victims, and that it is always clear who is who. In Rwanda, for instance, he reports that aid workers went into refugee camps threatened with cholera-but the "victims" they helped, the Hutu refugees, were in fact the killers who had committed, and were planning to resume, the genocide of the Tutsis. Rieff's despair over such incidents is palpable, but his rage is reserved for the Western governments that fund, and exploit, the aid organizations. In his most potent chapters, Rieff excoriates the U.S. and its European allies for hiding behind a "fig leaf" in Bosnia and Rwanda, offering humanitarian aid in lieu of taking effective, i.e., military, action, to end genocide. Rieff shows how humanitarian organizations have colluded in their own exploitation by Western donor governments, as they have become confused about their mission and purpose. Originally, he explains, these groups were independent, politically neutral agents, with the limited goal of bringing relief in famine or war. But simply bringing relief-and making no change in the political and economic realities that create need-can be frustrating work. Hoping to increase their effectiveness, some aid organizations have espoused larger goals, such as human rights or even opposing oppressive governments-as in the war in Afghanistan, in which aid groups took orders from the U.S. and in effect became part of the military effort that brought down the Taliban. Much of what Rieff says will be unpalatable particularly to some on the left-for instance, his assertion that development aid creates dependency in recipient countries and that humanitarian aid is a latter-day version of the "white man's burden"; and his conviction that wars-including the war in Afghanistan-can be necessary and just. None of his criticism of humanitarian groups diminishes his admiration for those he calls "the last of the just" for their dedication and courage in aiding the needy. Still, he writes of the current state of the world, "I see little if any empirical basis for optimism." Readers may share his despair, but they will come away from this passionate, eloquent argument with a distinctly clearer understanding of the complex moral issues facing humanitarian aid in a world filled with brutality and suffering.

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From Library Journal

Rieff, a veteran journalist and author of several books (*Slaughterhouse: Bosnia and the Failure of the West*), has been a "witness" to several world human disasters (e.g., AIDS and the civil wars in Africa; ethnic cleansing in Bosnia) and has many doubts that the world can become an international community, such as Woodrow Wilson envisioned. His criticism of "independent humanitarianism" is that the movement is both politically naive and too vulnerable to political power. Humanitarian organizations respond to human rights concerns by applying the doctrine of political neutrality and ignoring the political context of world crises, which, Rieff argues, has often resulted in greater losses of life. He cites the Red Cross's efforts in World War II to save the lives of Allied and Axis POWs while ignoring the Nazi mass murder of Jews and other minorities. He also discusses in great detail the more recent genocidal campaigns in Somalia and Rwanda, demonstrating how efforts by the United States, the United Nations, and humanitarian organizations to lessen suffering ignored the cause of the killing "a government whose *raison d'etre* was the infliction of suffering." In addition, he analyzes the Serbian ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and implies that were it not for NATO military action and U.S. support of this, the results would have mirrored the fiascos in Africa. Finally, he discusses the U.S. war against the Taliban in Afghanistan and the humanitarian effort accompanying it, and

he concludes that without eliminating the Taliban, attempts to diminish human suffering would be at best irrelevant. An opinionated, provocative dissent from consensus views. For most academic and larger public libraries. Jack Forman, San Diego Mesa Coll. Lib
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From [Booklist](#)

Rieff, a journalist who has covered wars and refugee crises around the world, offers a controversial look at the effectiveness of humanitarian organizations, which have increasingly been drawn into the politics behind some of the disasters for which they provide relief. Rieff highlights the continued inequities in wealth throughout the world, despite the growing sense of connection provided by the Internet, a global economy, and mass migration. He also examines the endless stream of wars and conflicts that call on assistance from humanitarian organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Doctors without Borders. As the groups move beyond reacting to crises to attempting to prevent them, they have become ensnared with national and commercial interests, making it difficult to maintain their neutrality and effectiveness. Drawing on his own experiences in Bosnia, Rwanda, Sudan, Afghanistan, and other hot spots, Rieff struggles to maintain a balance between a critical examination of the efforts of relief groups and growing cynicism of their ability to help those in crisis. *Vanessa Bush*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Leta Welter:

Now a day individuals who Living in the era everywhere everything reachable by talk with the internet and the resources within it can be true or not need people to be aware of each information they get. How a lot more to be smart in getting any information nowadays? Of course the answer is reading a book. Looking at a book can help men and women out of this uncertainty Information specifically this A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis book because book offers you rich data and knowledge. Of course the details in this book hundred per cent guarantees there is no doubt in it everbody knows.

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Mary Summers:

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