

A Roundtable Discussion of Nick Cullather's *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Hunger in Asia*

Erez Manela, Amy Sayward, David Ekbladh, Meredith Oyen, and Nick Cullather

Roundtable on Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World*

Erez Manela

Not long ago, AHA president Linda Kerber famously declared that now “we are all historians of human rights.”¹ Well, I am not sure about that. But increasingly it does seem that we are all, at least those of us involved with the study of the United States in the world, historians of development. The history of postwar development and modernization programs has been one of the fastest growing, most exciting fields of inquiry among international historians of late. It fits neatly with, and indeed has had an important role in propelling, the rapidly expanding interest of international historians in U.S. relations with the global south, in the role of non-state actors (including various UN bodies and philanthropic organizations such as the Rockefeller and Ford foundations), and in the history of an interrelated complex of global problems such as poverty, hunger, disease, and population that, until quite recently, were rarely broached by members of our guild.

Given the great vitality of this field of inquiry at present it is easy to forget how recent much of this interest is. It began with an interest in the ideologies of development, primarily modernization theory, with Michael Latham's pioneering work, *Modernization as Ideology*.³ Other studies on the ideology of development, again principally from the U.S. perspective, followed from Nils Gilman, David Engerman, David Ekbladh, and others, with Odd Arne Westad's recent work expanding the frame to look also at the Soviet pursuit of development abroad and, indeed, reframing the Cold War as a superpower battle for the global south.⁴ The literature now includes detailed investigations

of modernization as a policy and practice and also encompasses the role of international organizations, with Matthew Connelly's recent exposé of the history of global population control seamlessly weaving ideology and practice, state and non-state actors into a rich, compelling narrative.⁵ The field, barely in existence a decade ago, has now become mature enough to require historiographical reviews and even synthetic texts, with Latham again leading the way.⁶

Into this vibrant conversation comes Nick Cullather's fascinating account of the United States' war on poverty in Asia. This book has been eagerly anticipated by those who have followed the articles that Cullather published in the course of his work on this project, and it does not disappoint. It is sophisticated and nuanced in its analysis, prodigiously researched, and provides a richly detailed, densely packed narrative. It builds on the insights of previous authors on the history of U.S. development aid but also pushes the cutting edge quite a way forward. It deserves to be—and no doubt will be—universally read and assigned by anyone interested in U.S. foreign relations, the Cold War, and twentieth-century international history.

While other scholars have recently looked at U.S. food aid policy in the 1960s, Cullather paints on a much larger canvas. His book is of the myth-busting variety, and the myth he takes aim at is that of the green revolution. The mythical narrative goes something like this. Countries of the global south (with India as exhibit A) had suffered famine since time immemorial, and the condition was growing progressively worse in the twentieth century as Third World populations “exploded.” But a Malthusian disaster was averted due to the ingenuity of scientists headed by agronomist Norman Borlaug

(one of only six people, Wikipedia tells us, to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the Congressional Gold Medal, not to mention the Padma Vibhushan, India's second highest civilian honor). Borlaug and his collaborators, having worked for decades to perfect high-yield seed varieties (HYVs) for staples such as wheat and rice, finally managed, as a result of yet another Indian famine in 1966, to break through peasant inertia and bureaucratic resistance and bring about the adoption of their seeds in south Asia, transforming India overnight from a famine-prone, nutritionally deficient, grain-importing country to one of agricultural abundance, or at least self-sufficiency. The myth of the green revolution—a term coined in 1968 by USAID director William Gaud—not only lionized Borlaug and his collaborators but also became a holy grail for the international development community, cited as an inspirational model, if not as a specific blueprint, for latter-day modernizers from Bill Gates to Bono.

Bill and Bono may have to find another narrative to hang on to, as Cullather takes the green revolution story apart piece by piece. For the U.S. scientists and especially for their supporters in and out of government, he tells us, HYVs were not so much about fighting hunger as about winning hearts and minds in the Third World, helping usher in the “demographic transition” that would slow the growth of poor populations, and helping emerging states better control farmers by making them dependant on external inputs of seeds, fertilizer, machinery, and logistics. For officials in the “developing world”—a term that itself betrays the hegemonic nature of the development narrative that Cullather sets out to question—the new techniques promised more yields that could be siphoned out

of the countryside to feed the cities and support industrial development. And finally, the much advertised success of the green revolution was in fact very partial and came at a steep price. The HYV rice IR-8, for example, succumbed to leaf rust in Sri Lanka, and even where yields did increase the benefits were often unevenly distributed, sowing conflict in villages and trouble for modernizing elites.

The book, though not long, is densely packed, ranging widely across time, space, and theme. The story covers much of the twentieth century, takes us from the United States to Mexico to much of Asia, and deals with the scientific and intellectual underpinnings of development as well as the unfolding of programs on the ground. Not least, the book highlights the importance of hitherto obscure characters in the history of development. We learn a lot about Borlaug and his collaborators, of course, and the usual suspects of modernization history—Walt Rostow, Max Millikan,

et al.—get their due. But there is also Wilbur O. Atwater, who at the turn of the twentieth century discovered and popularized the concept of the calorie, standardizing the measurement of the nutritional value of different foodstuffs and thus

revolutionizing the thinking about global food supply as well as about individual nutrition. We learn about Albert Mayer, New Deal civil engineer and urban planner-cum-community-development impresario, whose work in India in the 1950s Cullather covers in some detail; and about Wolf Ladejinsky,

who was instrumental in affecting land reform in U.S.-occupied Japan and later advocated similar measures elsewhere to modernize rural societies in the global south. They are all compelling actors in the drama of U.S. postwar efforts in international development, and they deserve a place of honor alongside Rostow et al. in any future accounting of this history. Moreover,

Cullather, though apparently using only English-language sources (it is not easy to say with certainty, given Harvard University Press's regrettable decision to omit a full bibliography), deserves praise for fleshing out the role of South Asian actors and institutions in this story, showing them as full participants in the drama with a complex diversity of positions and roles.

The book covers not only the story of the development and implementation of HYVs but also explores other experiments in international development, in India and elsewhere, including community development, land reform, and dam building. This breadth is illuminating but also creates some narrative difficulties. The story of the development of HYVs, for example, whose beginnings in Mexico in the early 1940s are brilliantly recounted in Chapter 2, is not picked up again until Chapter 7, with the food crisis in India in the mid-1960s. And the book's scope also raises some questions that are not fully answered. Reading about Borlaug, Mayer, Ladejinsky, and the dam builders in successive sections, the reader is left wishing to know more about their interconnections. Did they interact with each other, either in person or in print? Did they view themselves as engaged in complementary projects

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or incompatible ones? Chapter 4 in particular, which focuses on U.S. dam-building projects in Afghanistan's Helmand Valley, is fascinating but feels rather unrelated to the rest of the book, except in a very general way.

Cullather's argument is subtle and complex. While certainly critical of U.S. development projects, he eschews simple genealogies that plot straight lines to postwar development from earlier U.S. (or other) imperial projects or racial hierarchies. Rather, he is careful to note that many of the postwar reformers, to the extent that they expressed their thoughts in such sweeping terms, earnestly sought to break away from imperial and/or supremacist models. He also avoids the simplistic but oft-repeated argument that development efforts inevitably faltered because they were based on sweeping, universalist theories and failed to take into account local circumstance and knowledge. In fact, Cullather shows that this critique was already common in development circles in the 1950s and explicitly theorized by figures such as Mayer, who was an advocate of cultural pluralism and sought to immerse himself in local contexts. Indeed, experts involved in international development often took every opportunity to express their disdain for abstract theorizing and to celebrate practical solutions that came from experience in the field; theirs was the sort of attitude popularized by the 1959 bestseller *The Ugly American*, whose eponymous hero was a practical-minded engineer who eschewed theory and rhetoric in favor of a hands-on, problem-solving approach.

Of course, even if most of Cullather's protagonists are cleared of the charges of imperialism, racism, or universalism, their records are far from unblemished. The story, again to Cullather's credit, is complex, but if there is one recurring critique it is that development impresarios in the Age of High Modernism put too much faith in the ability of "experts" to devise "win-win" technocratic solutions that would marginalize political struggle and differences. The green revolutionaries did not ignore politics altogether; on the contrary, they became quite adept at locating political opportunities and pressure points in Washington, New Delhi, and elsewhere to advance their agenda. But they defined the central issue as a technocratic rather than political one. Hunger was a problem of the ratio of food supply to population, isolated from broader contexts such as social hierarchies that excluded some groups from the

right to proper nutrition or property regimes and government policies that favored cash crops over food or city over country. For the green revolutionaries, politics were an obstacle, regrettable if unavoidable, on the road to technocratic solutions to the problem of hunger.

The analysis is compelling, but even as one is impressed with Cullather's reasoning one can hear the developmentalist rejoinder—this argument, after all, is hardly a new one in those circles. In global health circles, for example, it is often expressed as a conflict between the vertical and the horizontal approaches to health problems. The vertical approach, following the lead of scientific medicine since (at least the advent of germ theory (though its roots are more ancient), views disease as a discrete problem caused by identifiable pathogens and assumes that the goal of public health campaigns is to separate pathogen and human—i.e., to disrupt transmission. This approach gave rise to the well-known eradication campaigns of the postwar period, from malaria to polio to, most famously, smallpox. The counter-argument, the horizontal or social medicine approach, is similar to Cullather's critique. Disease, it contends, is a complex phenomenon with myriad social causes, and any project to eradicate a specific pathogen that ignores the broader contexts (hunger, poverty, social exclusion, lack of healthcare infrastructure, etc.) will fail even if it succeeds in disrupting transmission, since it would simply leave the disadvantaged vulnerable to other diseases and indignities.

A typical verticalist retort is to concede that the horizontalists are right in principle; in the end, all social ills are connected and, ideally, one should seek to eradicate not just one disease but all of them, along with hunger, poverty, and (in the favored example of one convinced verticalist I know) traffic accidents. But, they add, if we were to wait to tackle any single social problem until we could to tackle all of them we would be left paralyzed by our own inadequacy or mired in utopian schemes. One can almost hear the green revolutionaries retort to Cullather's charge: yes, we isolated the problem, and yes, our success was only partial, and yes, there were unintended consequences. But had we not done it that way we would either have done nothing at all, or we would have tried to do much more, with perhaps a greater measure of coercion and even greater unintended consequences.

Though Cullather does not put it in these terms, the developmentalist gamut he presents can be broadly divided into two overlapping but distinct schools, the technocratic and the social reformist, with the plant scientists and dam builders in the first school and the community developers and land reformers in the second. The first school is based on the search for techno-scientific solutions, apolitical and, at least in principle, universally scalable. The second approach, on the other hand, focuses on socio-political rather than technical solutions, attempting to change social, legal, and economic structures that undergird poverty and hunger. But while Cullather's focus on the green revolution means that his primary criticism is directed at the technocrats, the story he tells appears to suggest that, at different times and places, all of the above approaches were tried and all failed to meet expectations, whether because of contradictions in the theory itself, gaps between theory and implementation, or both.

Cullather's book, then, seems to follow the script of much of the recent work on the history of development, that of history as cautionary tale. It is a venerable tradition and an important one, but sometimes I wonder whether it is all we historians can offer. It might be insufficient, especially if we aspire to have the history we write shape the present and the future—as Cullather clearly does. If all history can be is a cautionary tale, if all historians can do is detail the inadequacies of the past, what constructive lessons can we impart to present and future policymakers? One endorsement on the book's jacket copy suggests that reading it should bring us to rethink international development entirely, to start over with a clean slate. But if historians cannot pronounce anything in the past a success, even a partial one; if the message of history is that everything already tried has failed, policymakers will ask, What is the way forward? It may well be that we should be content to remain critics, keeping a studied distance from the halls of power. But if so we must recognize the result: namely, the abandonment of the arena of policy influence to economists. Now there is a real vision of doom.

Whatever the policy implications, Cullather's book and others like it have made invaluable contributions to our understanding of postwar U.S. and international history. They have focused on the consequence of regions that have until recently stood on the far margins of the narrative. They have brought to

light the significance of institutions and actors—global philanthropies, international organizations, expert networks—that have been, by and large, similarly neglected. And they have fleshed out in scintillating detail stories that until recently we have been unable to view except through the foggy lens of myth-making or the distorting mirror of partisan polemics. But there is much more to do. Not least, we need to globalize the story of international development, to date told largely from the perspectives of U.S.-based actors, fleshing out the roles of the Soviet Union, China, and various European states, among others. The recent surge of dissertations and books on topics related to the history of international development shows that much, indeed, is already being done. If nothing else, this work should give Bill and Bono pause.

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Notes:

1. Linda K. Kerber, "We Are All Historians of Human Rights," *Perspectives* 44/7 (October 2006).
2. Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill, 2000).
3. Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, 2004); David C. Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (Cambridge, MA, 2004); David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton, 2010); Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, UK, 2005).
4. Bradley Simpson, *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S.-Indonesian Relations, 1960-1968* (Stanford, 2008); Amy L. S. Staples, *The Birth of Development: How the World Bank, Food And Agriculture Organization, And World Health Organization Have Changed the World 1945-1965* (Kent, OH, 2006); Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Cambridge, MA, 2008).
5. David Engerman and Corinna Unger, "Towards a Global History of Modernization," *Diplomatic History* 33/3 (2009): 375-385; Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca, 2011).
6. Kristen L. Ahlberg, *Transplanting the Great Society: Lyndon Johnson and Food for Peace* (Columbia, MO, 2008).

An Intellectual History of Development

Amy L. Sayward

Those of us who read Nick Cullather's recent articles in the *American*

Historical Review ("The Foreign Policy of the Calorie"), *Diplomatic History* ("Miracles of Modernization"), and the *Journal of American History* ("Damming Afghanistan") have been eagerly awaiting the book that would bring all of these ideas together between one set of covers.¹

The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia does not disappoint. In this volume we have a sweeping intellectual history of Americans' ideas of development grounded in a set of representative examples from U.S. efforts to "develop" Asia during the Cold War. Cullather is not alone in his endeavor to understand the theories that lay behind U.S. development efforts abroad in the twentieth century. In just the past year we have seen the publication of Michael Latham's *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* and David Ekbladh's *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order*.² This recent outpouring bespeaks the urgency that international historians are attaching to developing a holistic understanding of this set of theories that had so many specific, local impacts around the globe after the Second World War. Cullather certainly moves us toward that goal.

From the beginning, Cullather is engaged in the enterprise of intellectual history. He defines development as "a new type of international politics . . . where the demands of nations for security and prestige connect with the most personal of needs, for health, work, and food" (ix), and he vividly illustrates how American leaders' fears and their need to understand what had happened in the wake of Mao's successful revolution helped to define development efforts for the next twenty years. At the center of these efforts was food. Americans believed food and agriculture to be their particular areas of expertise, and

they defined hunger and poverty as a threat to international stability in the Cold War rather than simply a "given" in human society. To combat that threat, U.S. policymakers—in collaboration with Asian leaders and a large body of transnational experts

The power of the idea of development derived in part from the ways in which it reinforced American ideas of mission and exceptionalism and from the ways that it addressed Americans' desire to play a positive role in the world. It led commentators to further the myths of the "green revolution" (despite its failures) and the universally applicable development model as part of their historical memory.

from a variety of agencies, foundations, and non-governmental organizations—sought to create development showcases that could serve as universal templates for bringing modernity to the peasantry of Asia and winning their Cold War allegiances. These

development bureaucrats focused on achieving a balance between population and food supplies, on modifying the psychology of the peasant, and on building modern nation-states in which new, indigenous governments could project their power into and onto rural areas through agricultural development.

The power of the idea of development derived in part from the ways in which it reinforced American ideas of mission and exceptionalism and from the ways that it addressed Americans' desire to play a positive role in the world. It led commentators to further the myths of the "green revolution" (despite its failures) and the universally applicable development model as part of their historical memory. These myths persist: Cullather identifies vestigial remnants of them in the Obama administration's recent actions and intonations about the solutions to problems in Iraq and Afghanistan. Because of the tenacity of the idea of development, he is very careful to debunk the myths associated with it in order to reclaim the historical reality of the contested, messy, and conflicted story of agricultural development efforts in Asia. Indeed, he illustrates the complete failure of Cold War development experts "to settle on a single, consensus model of rural development" (5). They disagreed about the appropriate model, the ultimate goal, and the appropriate means of measuring the success of agricultural development. But if Cullather eschews the triumphal story of the green revolution's success, he also avoids the pessimistic narrative that urges the abandonment of

development efforts. Instead, he says that the development policymakers and workers “went to Asia seeking adventure and a chance to fulfill their generation’s responsibility to confront poverty. . . . They brought running water, new knowledge, and sometimes prosperity, but they also supervised the disruption or displacement of thousands of people” (6).

Like other scholars, Cullather introduces the reader to the “long history” of development, which was launched well before President Truman announced his Point Four program and the United Nations created its specialized agencies to promote economic development. *The Hungry World* begins with Wilbur Atwater’s 1896 calorimeter, which reduced food to universally measurable calories and made food supplies subject to scientific planning by governments. U.S. Food Administrator Herbert Hoover appeared to be putting Atwater’s ideas into practice during World War I; moreover, the future President embedded in the American consciousness the idea that its international security was tied to its ability to manage the global food supply in a rational way. The new Rockefeller Foundation, which had played a supporting role in Belgian relief, made similar linkages, as did the League of Nations and FDR: the League of Nations issued international nutritional reports; Roosevelt made “freedom from want” a war aim and convened the first meeting of the Food and Agriculture Organization; and the Rockefeller Foundation sought to use science to transform Mexican agriculture during World War II, with the aim of creating a model that could be implemented throughout what came to be called the Third World.

At the center of Cullather’s chapter on the Mexican Agricultural Program (MAP) is the central dilemma of agricultural development: “how, or even if, improved agriculture translated into an improved society” (57). While MAP’s original goal was to raise farmers’ incomes and living standards, the solution offered by the Rockefeller Foundation and Norman Borlaug—improved agricultural efficiency through high-yield crop varieties and disease control—seemed to be responding to a problem that did not exist, as the Mexican government had chosen to import cheap food from the United States in order to focus on export-oriented agriculture. By the end of the project, the foundation’s enunciated goal had been transformed into

national agricultural self-sufficiency, which favored commercial producers and did not further the original goal of increasing the standard of living for farmers. However, in light of the Cold War and growing concerns about the race between food and population growth, the painful trade-offs involved in the Mexican model were conveniently forgotten, and MAP became “a reassuring template to guide [American] actions in Asia” (69).

By defining Asia’s problem as hunger, which “could be relieved through organization and applied research” (70), American policymakers regained a sense that they had an answer to the Cold War dilemma posed by a Maoist China in the 1940s—agricultural development. Point Four addressed this discrete problem, and the leaders of the newly independent nations of Asia accepted development as the path toward modernity. But which developmental path would lead to modernity? Was it the community development model championed by the Ford Foundation and Albert Mayer in India, which sought to improve the components of village life through external, expert interventions that would in turn lead to voluntary participation by the newly motivated peasants? By 1957, the Indian model seemed to be failing, but these community development ideas were later resurrected in South Vietnam’s strategic hamlet projects, a CIA project in the Philippines, and the Peace Corps. Was the land reform model the road to development? Under U.S. agricultural attaché Wolf Ladejinsky, the land reform program in Japan seemed to present a compelling case, but elsewhere in Asia, land reform ran up against entrenched interests. Ultimately, the goals of rural development were defined as yields, resources, and revenues rather than “the renovation of the peasant [and] the enhancement of the status, health, productivity, and allegiance of villagers and tenants,” which had been the focus of both the rural development and land reform strategies (106).

Much more impressive in their visual impact were the multipurpose, TVA-style dams of the 1950s, which Cullather sees as symbols of the “heroic age of development.” These dams, which had a strong hold on the imaginations of the world’s leaders and development technocrats, fit with national development plans as well as key state-building themes, including “the legitimacy of rules, the reach of central authority, the tending of borders and populations, and the training of elites” (113).

Afghanistan was certainly a state in need of building in the postwar period, so it is not surprising that it garnered its own TVA equivalent, the Helmand and Arghandab Valley Authority (HAVA), complete with a suburban-style planned community (Lashkar Gah) ninety miles outside of Kandahar, meant to house and settle the area’s nomadic Pashtuns. Cold War and development imperatives (especially Khrushchev’s 1955 economic offensive) overruled early and persistent concerns about the dam’s viability and its usefulness to the area’s development, but ultimately the development efforts collapsed under their own weight. While other dam projects did not fail as spectacularly as the HAVA, none met their initial expectations, and all raised new questions and problems not initially imagined. Nonetheless, dams continued to hold their own in the development imagination.

Technology—a rhetorical argument in the form of an object—was certainly at the center of the damming efforts of the HAVA, but it also took center stage with the International Rice Research Institute’s IR-8 dwarf rice, which similarly made the demarcation between modernity and tradition visible in the landscape. Development advocates believed that the sight of such technology in action would help peasants develop their own faith in development. The technocrats of Ferdinand Marcos’ Philippines and those fighting for the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese both hoped that IR-8’s dark green shoots would help peasants see “the redemptive power of science and economic growth” (161). Instead of serving as an alternative to Communist development, IR-8 became the centerpiece of the newly consolidated Vietnam’s rural reconstruction program.

India occupied center stage in the development thinking and planning of the 1960s, as both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations defined poverty as a strategic threat and sought to showcase India’s development as a distinctly Western and democratic alternative to the Soviet model. As in Mexico, they focused on India’s “hunger” as the problem that needed international aid to solve. Cullather casts the U.S. decision to focus on hunger as a narrative strategy, because much like Mexico’s exports under MAP, India’s agricultural exports (especially jute) were booming in the 1950s and providing much of the currency for the country’s industrialization as well as its food imports from Southeast Asia (in addition to Public

Law 480 imports). For supporters of Jawaharlal Nehru's strategy of industrial development, jute exports and food imports helped to free India of the agricultural vestiges of British mercantile policy. For supporters of agricultural self-sufficiency, increased wheat cultivation (using new dwarf varieties) could free India from the specter of famine. The Chinese attacks along India's northern frontier in October 1962 were a severe blow to supporters of Nehruvian industrialization and its third five-year plan. The death knell for industrialization came in 1964, with Nehru's death and the ascension of Lal Bahadur Shastri. Shastri declared a food crisis, which by definition required increased budget allocations for agriculture. It also meant economic liberalization, fewer resources for industrialization, a retreat from nonalignment, and the abandonment of even the appearance of a redistributive agenda in the countryside. According to Cullather, these changes seemed to dissolve much of the sense of national unity and mission that had united the country since independence.

The Shastri government's agricultural reform project (which focused on prices, credit, fertilizer, and contraceptives) shared its top-down effort to renovate socially and psychologically the countryside with IR-8 and HAVA promoters. Following the 1965 war with Pakistan, Shastri used his increased political power to further his agricultural reforms. In turn, the Johnson administration used the 1966–67 Indian famine (which was defined by American statistics rather than actual deaths) and its short-tether policy as leverage to gain greater liberalization of India's economy from new Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, to share the burden of international aid with a broader consortium of donors, and ultimately to turn famine into an opportunity to exercise America's global leadership. But in place of the mythic tale of dwarf wheat saving millions of lives from famine, Cullather presents a history full of nutritional, economic, and political trade-offs that fits well with his definition of development. The "tidal wave of wheat" (232) that inundated India in 1968 highlighted those trade-offs. And while development planners frantically sought to define the year as "a necessary moment of culmination" (233), they were also (consciously or not) burying the memories of the political struggles that accompanied development in Asia. As wheat flooded onto the continent's markets, clashes between social classes, the dislocation of

small farmers, and the political costs of backing development (exemplified by the ouster of Ayub Khan in Pakistan) emerged as major problems. By the mid-1970s, other analysts (most notably Amartya Sen) had begun efforts to redefine the causes of famine from Malthusian races between food and population to social breakdowns and gender inequality that deprived people of access to food supplies.

Reading *The Hungry World*, I was struck by a sense of *déjà vu*. During the Fall 2010 semester, Dr. Conrad C. Crane, director of the U.S. Army Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, visited Middle Tennessee State University and presented the counter-insurgency strategy that he had worked to develop with General David Petraeus in 2006 as part of crafting a new Army and Marine Corps manual on irregular warfare to direct military efforts in Iraq. As he discussed the nature of irregular warfare, he talked about how "the war" varied from place to place in the same region and from time to time even in the same place. He constructed a tremendously complex model that struck the historians in the audience as the closest representation of the historical experience of warfare we had seen. In fact, it was so complex that the conclusion that the military thinkers drafting the manual came to was that they had to teach American soldiers *how* to think—not *what* to think. Only if they could critically and appropriately respond to the fluid situation in front of them could U.S. military forces hope to accomplish the goals that their civilian leadership had set for them.

Similarly, Cullather introduces us to an incredibly complex picture of the vast social, economic, and political changes that swept the world in the wake of World War II. He challenges us to think more critically and creatively about the "bold new experiment in mankind's relationship to each other and to the land" that was simplistically labeled "development" both at the time and in many histories written since (x). He is unwilling to have us abandon the goal of improving the lives of the world's people, but neither is he willing to believe for a second that such a goal can be accomplished without understanding the local context and history of an area or the trade-offs that are involved in the international politics of development. There are no universal models, no one-size-fits-all, and that is the moral of Cullather's story.

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Notes:

1. Nick Cullather, "The Foreign Policy of the Calorie," *American Historical Review* 122 (April 2007): 337-64; idem, "Miracles of Modernization: The Green Revolution and the Apotheosis of Technology," *Diplomatic History* 28 (April 2004): 227-54; idem, "Damming Afghanistan: Modernization in a Buffer State," *Journal of American History* 89 (September 2002): 512-37.
2. Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca, 2011); David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton, 2010). Other recent books on Cold War development efforts include Michael Adas, *Dominance by Design: Technological Imperatives and America's Civilizing Mission* (Cambridge, MA, 2006); Amy L. S. Staples, *The Birth of Development: How the World Bank, Food and Agricultural Organization, and World Health Organization Changed the World, 1945-1965* (Kent, OH, 2006); David C. Engerman, Nils Gilman, Mark H. Haefele, and Michael E. Latham, eds., *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (Amherst, 2003); Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, 2003); and Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill, 2000).

**Let them Eat Development:
A Review of Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia***

David Ekbladh

Modernity and the development that is its handmaiden need to be fed, literally. Characteristic of the impersonal relationships that are said to define modern interactions is the food supply. In the high-tech, industrial society brought by modernity, people tend to be insulated from the sources of their sustenance. Sustaining sprawling populations demands a highly productive agricultural sector. Indeed, the theorists and policymakers who pushed development programs understood that the transformation they sought was predicated on supplying their societies with abundant food.

This meant changing the countryside. One can think of all the resources (particularly publicity) modernizing states have expended on such efforts. The Soviet Union's collectivization agriculture and "Virgin Lands" schemes or the

plans of the Marxist regime in Ethiopia—just to name a pair—made the transformation of rural life a *sine qua non* of a new society. This sort of transformation of food production in the service of a developmental vision was hardly exclusive to the political left. It characterized most of the big, bold modernization projects of the era; including many U.S. sponsored modernization programs in the Cold War.

Nick Cullather has enhanced some of the most incisive of his articles that have graced the *Journal of American History*, the *American Historical Review*, and *Diplomatic History* in recent years to explain how American-led attempts to make food more accessible were a means to further U.S. strategy in the Cold War. He shows how the mission of offering more calories to people became a technical question to be solved by the generous application of the blessings of science and technology—dams, “miracle rice,” and expert knowledge. For American planners, abundant food would clear the way for modern, high-tech, industrial societies. More immediately, full stomachs would lessen the appeal of those offering another vision of the future—communists.

By making the realities of food production a question of yield subject to technical answers, thorny social and political issues such as land tenure could be avoided. By enhancing the food supply experts hoped to synthesize a “social catalyst” that they could control (240). However, as Cullather notes, too often this concoction slipped from their grasp, loosing unpredicted and unintended consequences.

One quick aside: for many scholars, agriculture is often equated with plant cropping. However, scholars might turn their gaze on another critical part of the food supply—animals. Husbandry and fisheries and their modernization are also important and contentious parts of development programs. International bodies have a tradition of focus on this issue. Take one prominent NGO, Heifer International, which has long seen the provision of livestock and the improvement of herds as a means to lift people into a more prosperous

life. Of course, this effort impacts people’s (and animals’) lives in dramatic ways and has profound economic and ecological impacts.

The Hungry World ranges widely, as it must. By its nature food production was linked to or dependent on many other nodes of the development process. A chapter on Afghanistan pulls the narrative back to explore some of the supports necessary to the transformation of agriculture—large-scale irrigation programs often centered on multipurpose dams. Cullather explores attempts, centered on Helmand Province, to install the dams that would provide the water that was to remake the countryside. Here, as in so many other places, the law of unintended consequences struck. The dams brought salination to the soil and sedimentation to the rivers. Ecological problems fed instability that eventually brought

One of the strengths of the book is his exegesis on the rise of the calorie to international influence; another is his discussion of the strands of agricultural development that came together in Mexico in the 1940s and would serve as a basis for the “green revolution.” He steps away from a focus on governments to see the vital importance of nonstate actors, particularly agriculturalists and foundations.

down the Afghan government that had sponsored the programs.

Attempts to utilize IR-8, the much-heralded “miracle rice,” as a strategic asset in Vietnam also ran into hard realities. The rice had emerged

from the Ford Foundation-funded International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines, and the Americans were hoping that it would be a magic bullet in their attempts to pacify the countryside in South Vietnam. As it turned out, the shot went wide of the mark, as fighting made the pacification benchmarks of increased rice production hard to achieve. Attempts to use the rice as an olive branch by offering its bounty to North Vietnam also ran into the hard reality of unintended consequences. Rice cultivation does not respect political and ideological boundaries. Not long after IR-8 was introduced in the South, it had found its way to paddies in the North.

The book’s center of gravity, like many development efforts Cullather describes, lies in India. By exploring the relationship between American advocates of agricultural reform and their Indian counterparts, Cullather reveals how food is yoked to the application of power in both international and local politics. Amartya Sen has established that famine is a political event, but

Cullather explains just how political it can get with the case of the food shortage in India’s state of Bihar in 1966.¹ The possibility of famine produced an opportunity for Lyndon Johnson to pose as India’s savior and reap desperately needed good publicity in the midst of the Vietnam War. It was also useful in Delhi, where the ruling Congress Party used the crisis to cow political rivals in the state (228-29).

On the subcontinent and elsewhere in Asia the Americans were able to establish fully both their modified crops and the new techniques needed to grow them. By the late 1960s they could declare a “green revolution” of rising crop yields. But here again the unforgiving law of unintended consequences intervened. Bursting granaries often highlighted social and political inequalities. More food stoked fears of out-of-control population growth and explosive urban expansion. Many regimes in Asia that put great faith in the promise of the “green revolution” were beset by civil unrest and political instability in the years that followed.

During the 1960s and 1970s the “green revolution” itself became one more in a long line of unanticipated problems that undercut many accepted assumptions behind modernization. In this Cullather has not just challenged the standard story that the “green revolution” was an unfettered success but has offered a prescient reminder that such far-reaching yet intimate transformations of societies will necessarily touch cultural and political nerves, leading to unexpected reactions.

Cullather does not succumb to simple condemnation of this strain of developmentalism. He makes the astute point that “hunger—along with terrorism, migration, climate, and narcotics—belong to an ever-larger category of international issues for which a search for technical fixes serves as a substitute for serious engagement” (270). In a world where buzzwords such as “sustainability,” “ownership,” and “entrepreneurship” are slung around casually as answers to numerous complicated and nagging development problems, this is a jigger of sense that many development and policy communities would do well to imbibe.

While the book cannot claim to exhaust utterly the subject matter it engages (it is doubtful that any single book could), Cullather has produced an excellent, original work that not only extends the scholarly pale on modernization and development but also extends the realm of international history. Nevertheless,

with its focus on the Cold War the book brushes up against a conceptual boundary of inquiry on the topic. Cullather reinforces much recent work that sees development as one of the primary means that all sides used to wage the struggle.² However, the need to modify food production to bring it in line with the needs of a modern society and international economy was a battle being waged long before containment became a strategic doctrine, and many groups and governments continue this slog long after the fall of the Soviet Empire.

Good swaths of the transnational progressive movement were invested in transforming rural life and, by so doing, enhancing the supply of food. One example is the work of a nineteenth-century German agricultural reformer, Friedrich Wilhelm Raffeisen, which was carried to the United States to aid in efforts to contain rural troubles and the radicalism that could spring from them. Finding these ideas useful at home, American and international activists grappling with China's food problems and recurrent famines brought them to Asia.³

This is not to imply that Cullather is not aware of such activity or does not explore the "prehistory" of agricultural development before the Cold War. Quite the contrary. One of the strengths of the book is his exegesis on the rise of the calorie to international influence; another is his discussion of the strands of agricultural development that came together in Mexico in the 1940s and would serve as a basis for the "green revolution." He steps away from a focus on governments to see the vital importance of nonstate actors, particularly agriculturalists and foundations. He notes the tremendous impact of the Rockefeller Foundation in these prewar years, which preceded the Ford Foundation's enormous investments during the Cold War.

Still, the complicated history and awkward present of development efforts should call into question the primacy of the Cold War in understanding the evolution of development, along with other powerful global trends. Undoubtedly the cold warriors honed the use of development as part of a grand strategy to contain the appeal of communism. But the urge to reform societies with many of the means deployed in the middle decades of the twentieth century predates the Cold War. While particular approaches and ideas have waxed or waned and strategic imperatives have come and gone,

the use of development by activists and policymakers as a means to implement their visions has never entirely ebbed.

Today, when policy entrepreneurs like Jeff Sachs urge greater investments in development with shiny promises of follow-on technological breakthroughs that will liberate poor nations from their "poverty traps," they stir the echoes of Cold War-era promises. But rock-star economist Sachs and fellow advocate and actual rock star Bono are not just heirs to Cold War ideas. They are part of a longer tradition of developmentalism. Sachs takes particular delight in presenting development as the product of apolitical technical fixes, an idea that undoubtedly makes him popular among donors and governments.⁴ One particular component of his efforts, the Millennium Village, bears more than a passing resemblance to the "community development" that Cullather discusses and that entranced many people during the Cold War. However, it also has much in common with rural reform in the progressive era. Talk of a new "green revolution" for Africa and beyond speak to the appeal of a process that Cullather shows is poorly understood. Dams dropped down in Afghanistan in the 1950s and 1960s by an earlier generation of American and international aid workers remain a hinge for development efforts and a strategic asset that NATO forces struggle to protect today. These projects remind us that development has deep roots and will continue to serve the pressing needs of military strategy, humanitarianism, governmental legitimacy, and other imperatives that lie well beyond the strictures of the Cold War.

Many actors, particularly nonstate groups, were invested in developmentalism before the Cold War and remained passionate afterwards. The continued use of the calorie as a means to developmental ends reminds us that the Cold War grafted itself onto longer trends in development, not vice versa. In fact, depending on the question being asked and the perspective taken, the Cold War begins to shrink. It becomes a moment of intense focus for particular variants of development. But it is one moment. Even within the historical confines of the conflict, development ideas were bent and sometimes broken by pressures that were not the specific products of that geopolitical struggle.

Considerable work is brewing that reframes our understanding of the emergence of developmental ideas that ruled the day in the Cold

War and continue to echo down to the present. The reform activities by American colonial officials in the Philippines and the actions of nongovernmental actors deepen our appreciation of the historical depth of the spectrum of ideas that fed post-World War II modernization efforts.⁵ From important angles, rather than being the font of globe-straddling development ideas, the Cold War can appear to be a passing rationale for the longer urge to development that characterizes modern life.

Of course none of this devalues the fresh and remarkable analysis Cullather has presented on the subject. *The Hungry World* is a worthy culmination of over a decade of work and a timely reminder of the perils of one of the more powerful forces on the world scene.

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Notes:

1. See Amartya Kumar Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (New York, 1981).
2. See Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, (New York, 2005); David Engerman, "The Romance of Economic Development and New Histories of the Cold War" *Diplomatic History* 28 (Jan. 2004): 24-54; Michael Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca, NY, 2010).
3. Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 321, 327-328; China International Famine Relief Commission, *Herr Raffeisen among Chinese Farmers, 1922-1934* (reprint, 1935, Cambridge, MA: DaCapo, 1980).
4. For a recent statement of Sachs' vision see Jeffery Sachs, *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet* (New York, 2008).
5. See, for example, Julia Irwin, "Humanitarian Occupations: Foreign Relief and Assistance in the Formation of American International Identities, 1898-1928" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2009); Theresa Ventura, "American Empire, Agrarian Reform and the Problem of Tropical Nature in the Philippines, 1898-1936" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2009).

Review of Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia*

Meredith Oyen

Like many middle-class American children in the 1980s, I first discovered hunger through Michael Jackson. The charity single "We Are the World"—itself only one of many

such efforts—opened many young eyes to famine in Africa and to the notion that Americans might be able to do something to prevent it. As Nick Cullather ably shows in his new book, long before the “me generation” realized that children went to bed hungry in Ethiopia (and that we should therefore eat all our broccoli), the United States government was actively engaged in waging war on hunger in Asia.

In *The Hungry World*, Cullather aims to dissect the roots and spectacular growth of the so-called “green revolution”—the effort to end hunger through agricultural innovation and high-yield rice and wheat crops—and

in the process, he unpacks a far more complicated history of the international politics of development work. By taking a long view of the evolution of development policies, Cullather is able to explain the differences between the mythology surrounding the work and the reality of its limited achievements. He

also establishes how U.S. officials, scientists and philanthropists came to see hunger and world poverty not simply as humanitarian concerns but as actual threats to the peace and stability of the international system. This fear eventually became engulfed in Cold War diplomacy, helping that conflict reach into areas of human experience that would seem far removed from its central antagonisms.

Cullather’s story is deeply embedded in the idea of American exceptionalism. From his starting point with the discovery of the calorie as a unit of measuring human food needs to his closing musings about the Obama administration’s promotion of a second green revolution, he addresses themes of hunger, rural poverty, and poor agricultural yields as problems the United States was uniquely equipped to solve. Between President Truman’s announcement of Point Four and the late 1960s, the United States made an all-out effort to solve these problems, with the focus on the potentially volatile population of rural Asia. Cullather explains

that the United States pursued three simultaneous goals in Asia: ending hunger by addressing the output and distribution problems that resulted from a perception that the population had outstripped the food supply; transforming the mindset of peasants to make them fit more easily into an American, democratic model of rural life; and building and improving nations by helping them establish better control over their own resources (7). Throughout this effort, the international network of reformers engaged in the work operated under the assumption that American-style models and technologies held solutions for

the problems of malnourished or impoverished peasants, if only the latter could be trained to understand them.

Having firmly established that one of his aims was to correct the mistaken notion—wherever it might occur—that development work began only in the 1940s, Cullather starts off with a foray into the science of food production and the resulting understanding of how diets differ

by country, which in turn leads to the “discovery” of a “world food problem.” Citing Malthusian-style concerns about food scarcity and a growing population, he finds the roots of the green revolution in Asia in rhetoric from the interwar period, where “the imperative of balance, centrality of Asia, and the solutions offered by intensified grain production and birth control” had already come together to create an agenda for future foreign aid endeavors (25). From there, Cullather examines the Mexican Agricultural Program (MAP) and its role as a model for helping Asia. As it turns out, the program also became an object lesson on the dangers of getting too tied to “models” for development work without regard for their applicability to other times and places or even their legitimacy within the environment for which they were originally created. MAP developed new strains of wheat designed to be hardy enough to survive any encounter in Asia, but the program was also an attempt to recreate New Deal policies abroad. The mismatch

between programs and problems becomes a recurring theme in the book, as aid officials repeatedly attempted to come up with a universal solution to local problems, then discovered again and again that transferring technology from Tennessee to Mexico to Central Asia was not a recipe for instant success.

The next two chapters show aid officials still pushing to transfer domestic American programs abroad. The first chapter centers on community development and land reform projects, and the second on a Tennessee Valley Authority-type dam project in Afghanistan. The projects described in the first chapter tried to recast village life by reforming how peasants related to one another; the dam project endeavored to define national boundaries by helping a nation assert control over its resources. The discussion of American efforts to build a dam as a way of building a nation in Afghanistan is of particular interest, given present-day efforts at nation-building in that country, although it raises concerns that once again, more idealism and energy are going into the project than careful consideration. The faith in the transferability of any of these ideas from the United States to other locations was rooted at least in part in the idea that “development fit social problems into a novel concept of time, asserting that all nations followed a common historical path and that those in the lead had a moral duty to aid those who followed” (75). Each recipient of U.S. aid could be at a different place along the timeline of development, and it was up to the United States to use its expertise to find ways to speed up modernization.

Subsequent chapters address Food for Peace wheat shipments to India and the development and spread of “miracle” dwarf rice in the Philippines and South Vietnam. Both projects offer Cullather plentiful opportunities to address how the politics of the Cold War served to shift conceptions of containment in South Asia from armaments to agricultural projects. In each case, American aid provided a model for development that did not require communist revolution, in direct contrast to the examples provided by the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China. In these instances public perception of the work was of the utmost importance, as “U.S. officials considered their ability to display the fruits of modernity to be a powerful weapon against communism” (161). The struggle between simply doing good work

The novelty of placing development and foreign aid at the centerpiece of the discussion of foreign relations forces the reader to rethink U.S.–Indian relations during these years. Although it is understandable that the book should focus on the agricultural science projects developed in India and Southeast Asia, East Asia receives short shrift in the overall discussion of U.S. development projects, aside from a short discussion of how land reform was embraced as a democratic (and not just potentially socialistic) policy goal.

and getting visible credit for it is also evident in the following chapters as the book addresses the difficult tradeoff in India between the politics of famine and the nation's effort to develop industry and become a self-sufficient producer of wheat. Given the focus on India in the book, it would be useful to see a stronger comparison between British imperial policies and U.S. development programs; the idea of both being colonial undertakings of a sort is evident enough, but aside from a reference to how the British had once defined famine in India, Cullather does not compare the two efforts. The contrast between them could be defined more explicitly.

Finally, *The Hungry World* discusses the backlash against the green revolution efforts, arguing that "the domestic consensus behind development had always rested on a jury-rigged alliance of self-interest, strategic anxiety, and faith in the unique capacity of the United States to engineer progress" (253). As that faith gave way under the strain of the Vietnam War and a weakened domestic economy, support for the international development program eroded. Increasing skepticism that the green revolution had actually revolutionized anything of real importance—or at the very least, had made a strong impact on hunger in Asia—fed that gnawing doubt and led to greater efforts to achieve the much-talked-about goal of delinking development goals and political or diplomatic objectives. Racing quickly through another forty years of effort, the book ends with a caution about trying once again to end hunger in Africa through increased agricultural productivity, a project Cullather believes no more likely to succeed than earlier efforts in Asia.

This book is meticulously researched, drawing upon records from individual participants, nongovernmental organizations, and government bureaus and agencies. Cullather's experience researching both colonialism in the U.S. relationship with the Philippines and U.S. intelligence work serves him well, as he offers a clear sense of how deeply these development programs were intended to reach. In addition to describing U.S. international engagement, Cullather also does an admirable job of keeping track of domestic political developments and addressing the connections between public support and foreign aid. His conclusions are consistently thought-provoking, in part because of the specter of current policy and in part because the economic and agricultural development work

he describes is not often a part of traditional histories of the Cold War in Asia.

Beyond the impressively detailed account of both the personalities and projects engaged in the development effort, one of the book's greatest strengths is Cullather's focus on the contrasts between image and outcome. By placing the whole of the development project into the prism of Cold War battles for credibility and the effort to "win hearts and minds" across Asia, he reminds us that the Cold War in Asia was as much centered on psychological campaigns as it was on military ones. The perception of India as a line of containment after the "fall" of China is particularly striking in this regard, given the tumultuous nature of the relationship between Nehru's government and U.S. administrations. The novelty of placing development and foreign aid at the centerpiece of the discussion of foreign relations forces the reader to rethink U.S.–Indian relations during these years. Although it is understandable that the book should focus on the agricultural science projects developed in India and Southeast Asia, East Asia receives short shrift in the overall discussion of U.S. development projects, aside from a short discussion of how land reform was embraced as a democratic (and not just potentially socialistic) policy goal.

Similarly, some discussion of the big picture of development work beyond the agricultural programs and as it evolved over the course of various administrations would be useful in framing the discussion for an audience uninitiated in this history. Some readers will also be left wanting to know even more about how the actions and achievements of these green revolutionaries were utilized in U.S. information work in South Asia and elsewhere. The efforts of the United States Agency for International Development come through clearly, but the book mentions the United States Information Agency only twice and is thus less clear on the extent to which that agency championed the success of the wheat program in India, the "miracle" rice in Southeast Asia, or the commitment to the Helmand dam to audiences outside these countries.

These omissions notwithstanding, this exciting study offers some cautions and lessons for current lawmakers, historians of foreign relations, and (of course) international pop stars. Referencing the new impetus for development led by Bill Gates and Bono,

Cullather suggests with a degree of exasperation that interested people and organizations are in danger of repeating the missteps of the past, especially in the oft-repeated refrain that feeding the hungry should be divorced from politics. He writes that "hunger—along with terrorism, migration, climate, and narcotics—belongs to an ever-larger category of international issues for which a search for technical fixes serves as a substitute for serious engagement" (270). Better understanding of past "solutions" to these problems—no matter how incomplete—can complicate and enlarge our understanding of American diplomatic history as well as promote a more reality-based approach to public policy that moves beyond short-term scientific solutions and charity songs.

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Author's Response

Nick Cullather

Passport readers may recall that in April 2011, a legend of nation-building in Afghanistan came crashing down when *60 Minutes* revealed that Greg Mortenson was a fraud. Before he became a famous philanthropist Mortenson had been a mountaineer. His mega-bestseller *Three Cups of Tea* described how, after a failed attempt to climb K2, he had stumbled into the Pakistani village of Korphe and been nursed back to health by warlike but caring tribespeople. To fulfill a promise to the villagers, he returned to the United States and raised money for a school for girls. His efforts bore fruit, and his one-man foundation, the Central Asia Institute (CAI), soon built dozens of schools in the Taliban-ridden valleys of Afghanistan and Pakistan with funds raised by American schoolchildren. *60 Minutes* charged that the K2 story was fabricated, the schools were either nonexistent or empty, and that Mortenson used CAI as his "personal ATM."¹

It was the second such exposure in less than a year. In December another documentary triggered investigations of the microfinance establishment, an assortment of private lenders and charities who provide small loans—often only a few hundred dollars each—to destitute and mainly female entrepreneurs. In Bangladesh and India, microfinance had been hailed as a breakthrough, releasing the business talent of half the population.

Its inventor, Mohammad Yunus, won a Nobel Peace Prize for stimulating “economic and social development from below.” Inquiries, however, have shown that microfinance banks charged ruinous interest rates and paid lavish salaries to bank officers. Yunus now stands accused in his home country of being little more than a loan shark.²

These cases came to mind when I read Meredith Oyen’s reference to Michael Jackson’s simple appeal, Amy Sayward’s description of Conrad Crane’s warning that field commanders had to be taught “how to think,” and Erez Manela’s insightful comparison of verticalist and horizontalist tendencies in developmentalist thought. As each of the commentators observes, progress depends on how you tell the story.

Development closes the divide between simple ambition and complex realities by filling it with fables. To mobilize donors and constituencies in many countries at once and to sustain that effort for years or even decades, modernizers need a compelling narrative. A good story links verticalist and horizontalist impulses, explaining why a single solution in one place can be a universal answer to larger problems. It reconciles seemingly conflicting strategic and humanitarian goals through a unifying idea. Schools would prevent terrorism, Mortenson explained, since literate girls would

grow up to be educated mothers who would never allow their sons to take up arms. Micro-loans attacked poverty, the “root cause” of terrorism, according to Yunus. Bankers and free markets would “put poverty in the museums.”³ They weren’t trolling for idealists or the gullible. Shrewd players—such as General Petraeus and Warren Buffett—bought these claims.

Manela is right. It does little good for historians to debunk these myths. They tend to debunk themselves. Even if they don’t collapse as spectacularly as Mortenson’s, they decompose once the ambitions and assumptions sustaining them go away. When researching *The Hungry World* I was initially surprised to find that development practitioners were so aware of the fables they were spinning or that were being spun about them. Plant breeders joked about the “miracle rice fairy tale” and land reformers acknowledged that their work relied on a fragile “reform mystique.” It had to be so; as Barbara Ward explained, “these are days for poetry, not statistics.”⁴

What I try to do in *The Hungry World* is explain why certain poetics had such powerful appeal at particular moments, how a story could unite Lyndon Johnson, Indira Gandhi, Pope Paul VI, and a flock of agencies and experts behind a sweeping plan of action that would transform half a continent. I carefully

avoided conclusions about success or failure, since those judgments can have meaning only within a narrative of progress, either a leftover parable from the development decades or a story I might invent myself. My unwillingness to reach a hand into history and pull out a winning strategy disappoints most audiences I speak to, and in their disappointment I feel the temptation that must have snared Greg Mortenson. History can hold lessons, I believe, but not in the form of models from the past that can be repeated in the future. The chief lesson is to keep a critical eye on the story of development, and to be aware that it is just a story.

I am deeply grateful to all the commentators for their thoughtful observations and to the editors of *Passport*.

Nick Cullather is Associate Professor of History at Indiana University.

Notes:

1. “Greg Mortenson,” *60 Minutes*, April 17, 2011, <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7363068n>
2. Amy Kazmin, “Small Loan, Big Snag,” *Financial Times*, December 2, 2010, p. 11.
3. Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Lecture, December 10, 2006, http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2006/yunus-lecture-en.html.
4. Forrest Hill, Oral History, April 20, 1973, Ford Foundation Archives, p. 85; *Hungry World*, pp. 102-3.

Diplomatic History Needs You!

Tom Zeiler, the editor of *Diplomatic History*, and Nate Citino, the book review editor, are interested in publishing more reviews of non-English-language books in the journal, and we welcome your ideas. We feel that doing so would help to promote the internationalization of the journal and of SHAFR, trends that have been gathering momentum for the last several years. Reviewing more non-English books, and publishing reviews by non-US scholars, would raise the overseas profile of the journal and would, we believe, help to attract more article submissions from outside the US. One-fifth of the articles published in *DH* during 2010 were written by non-US scholars, and we would like to encourage further submissions from abroad.

Beyond expanding our membership roster (a goal of the Membership Committee) and increasing article submissions, we also see international reviews as an important opportunity for intellectual exchange between US and non-US scholars. Including more scholarship from abroad would help to connect US foreign policy historians with those who have regional expertise in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, as well as with those who study themes -- such as gender, culture, immigration, human rights, capitalism, and the environment -- in an international context.

DH has reviewed non-English language books before, but in order to do so on a more regular basis our editorial office will need your help. We will need to be alerted to significant books that deserve to be reviewed, and we will need suggestions of qualified reviewers who work in another language but are capable of writing a professional review in English. Any other suggestions would be most helpful. Thank you!