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Branden Little

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THE HUMANITARIAN MOBILIZATION OF AMERICAN CITIES FOR BELGIAN RELIEF, 1914-1918

BRANDEN LITTLE

From the First World War's outbreak in 1914 until its bitter conclusion in 1918 (and for many years thereafter), the residents of American cities large and small energetically participated in humanitarian relief programs designed to combat the suffering created by industrialized killing in Europe. Until recently scholars of the First World War have generally ignored the humanitarian dimensions of American "involvement" in the war. Historians are now systematically investigating the contours of humanitarian relief in the war, and are also establishing the centrality of American humanitarianism to the United States' wartime experience. The American commitment to humanitarianism generally and to Belgian relief specifically awakened Americans to the horrors of modern warfare, encouraged their ever-widening intervention for the purpose of mitigating distress, and accelerated the unravelling of their government's policy of neutrality. Humanitarianism conditioned the United States' decision for war, shaped its trajectory, and inspired President Woodrow Wilson's war aim of protecting "small nations" such as Belgium and Serbia from the depredations of invading forces¹. Whereas emergent humanitarian-oriented studies focus mostly on the foreign relief operations of humanitarian organizations, relatively little research has exposed the homefront *networks* that supported these organizations although they are vitally important to

¹ WILSON W., *The War Message of President Woodrow Wilson*, Washington, D.C. 1917, p 19.

recognize because they undergirded field activities². Humanitarian networks provided their agents in Europe and the Near East financial and administrative support, functioned as recruiting agencies for foreign relief committees, and proclaimed their universal commitment to alleviating war-induced distress.

This article examines America's humanitarian mobilization from 1914 to 1918 by focusing on the urban networks that sustained the American-led Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB) in its unprecedentedly vast nation-feeding campaign for German-occupied Belgium and France. It is the first scholarly publication to focus on the domestic apparatus the CRB forged to project American aid and influence abroad. Previous histories of the CRB have emphasized its leadership, the diplomatic complexities of aid in wartime, and the daily experience of CRB officials inside Belgium, but have overlooked its support network within the United States³. Unearthing these homefront humanitarian structures in the United States demonstrates that American cities were linked by a densely interconnected web of professional and social associations that facilitated a rapid and sustained nationwide response to aiding Belgium. Investigating American cities and their engagement with foreign relief further reveals the ideological and practical underpinnings of America's humanitarianism and the nation's wartime cultural transformation that originated in the summer of 1914.

Belgium and American Cultural Mobilization

Lacking deep cultural bonds between their two peoples, Americans nevertheless found reasons to come to the aid of the Belgians. The Belgian army's

- ² Exceptions include GRANICK J., "Waging Relief: The Politics and Logistics of American Jewish War Relief in Europe and the Near East, 1914-1918", *First World War Studies*, 2014; IRWIN J.F., "Teaching 'Americanism with a World Perspective': The Junior Red Cross in the U.S. Schools from 1917 to the 1920s", *History of Education Quarterly* 53.3, 2013, p 255-79.
- ³ DEN HERTOOG J., "The Commission for Relief in Belgium and the Political Diplomatic History of the First World War", *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 21.4, 2010, p 593-613; WESTERMANN Th., "Touring Occupied Belgium: American Humanitarians at 'Work' and 'Leisure', 1914-1917", *First World War Studies*, 2014; an exception is LITTLE B., "Band of Crusaders: American Humanitarians, the Great War, and the Remaking of the World", Ph.D. dissertation, U.C. Berkeley, 2009.

stalwart defense of the fortress town Liège against a massive German assault combined with the unjustifiable killings of Belgian civilians and the arsonous burning of the medieval university library at Louvain by invading soldiers painted a ghastly picture of German barbarity that shocked many Americans. Newspapers read widely in the United States portrayed Belgium as a modern Sparta, and its King, Albert, as equivalent to King Leonidas whose three hundred soldiers sacrificially defended Western Civilization from an invasion by an Eastern horde at Thermopylae⁴.

In the summer of 1914, reflexive expressions of American sympathy for the plight of the Belgians consisted primarily of small donations of money, food, and clothing to the Belgian embassy. A wide array of mostly unaffiliated Belgian relief committees instantaneously appeared across the United States as well. This spontaneous charitable reaction by American society revealed its customary humanitarian response in the wake of natural disasters that had produced acute temporary destitution and widespread homelessness. Even without solicitation many Americans anticipated Belgian needs owing to their recognition of the *disaster* of war⁵.

By autumn 1914, a crisis concerning Belgium's inadequate food supply concentrated American humanitarian attention. Starvation loomed because German soldiers destroyed or captured much of Belgium's foodstuffs and livestock, and the British government erected a naval blockade to prevent importation of any matériel that might fall into the invader's hands. Not all Americans favored aiding Belgium or were convinced hyperbolic reports of atrocities were genuine, but few could disagree that the relatively small, but most highly industrialized and densely populated nation in Europe would exhaust its food supply within a matter of weeks unless dramatic steps were taken.

The question then arose: would Americans use their status as neutrals to the advantage of noncombatants who might starve without foreign assistance? In October 1914, Herbert C. Hoover, an American businessman and mining

⁴ DE SCHAEFDRIJVER S., "Twentieth-Century Thermopylae: Liège 1914 and the U.S. Public", *Bulletin d'information du Centre liégeois d'Histoire et d'Archéologie militaires*, t. IX, fasc. 8, October-December 2005.

⁵ IRWIN J.F., "The Disaster of War: American Understandings of Catastrophe, Conflict, and Relief", *First World War Studies*, 2014.



Political cartoon depicting Uncle Sam bringing clothes and food to needy Belgians with a German sentry seated in the background, 1914.



Herbert C. Hoover, Chairman of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, 1915.

engineer residing in London, provided the best answer with his establishment of the Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB). After securing the blessing of the major neutral powers and Belgian representatives, and the sanction of the belligerent governments of Britain, Germany, and France, Hoover created the CRB to import food and ensure its distribution within German-occupied Belgium. A newly improvised, neutral humanitarian agency, the CRB assumed the responsibility to feed an entire nation of 7.3 million, and subsequently enlarged its mandate in April 1915, to victual nearly two million residents of occupied northern France. Belgium, Britain, and France agreed to pay for the vast majority of foodstuffs, and American volunteers arranged its procurement and distribution within Belgium. As the CRB secured the diplomatic, financial, and administrative basis for its operations within Europe, it also arranged systems for global food procurement and encouraged the formation of committees throughout the world to support its activities.

CRB offices in London, Rotterdam, and New York orchestrated the global humanitarian operations that sustained occupied Belgium and France. Its skeletal administrative and supervisory staff of less than one hundred Americans volunteering at any one time in its three major offices and in German-held communities made the CRB wholly reliant on indigenous counterparts to distribute food. The *Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation* and the *Comité d'Alimentation du Nord de la France* expanded already existing charitable distribution channels, relied on nearly 10,000 local committees, and mobilized a humanitarian "army" of more than 70,000 Belgians and French civilians to distribute the CRB-imported food. CRB agents located in port cities stretching from Buenos Aires to Bergen, Rangoon to San Francisco, superintended more than 2,000 shipments of grains, flour, lentils, peas, beans, rice, animal fats, and forage on a chartered fleet of dozens of CRB-flagged vessels. A network of approximately 2,000 committees numbering tens of thousands of volunteers across the Anglophone world and among the Belgian diaspora facilitated this effort that ultimately disbursed \$895 million worth of food between November 1914 and August 1919⁶. Their unrelenting activities generated a steady flow of private contributions including in-kind services and gifts of money, food, and clothing to the CRB and the Belgian government.

⁶ GAY G.I., *The Commission for Relief in Belgium: Statistical Review of Relief Operations*, Stanford, Stanford Univ. Press, 1925, p 65-69.

Dynamics of American Mobilization for Belgian Relief

Formed in London, the CRB encountered formidable opposition as it established a beachhead in America in October–November 1914. Since August other claimants had emerged for America’s charitable expressions including the Belgian Relief Fund (BRF) administered by Emmanuel Havenith, Belgian minister in Washington, and Robert W. de Forest, New York financier-philanthropist and American Red Cross executive. Havenith railed publically against Germany for its brutal invasion of Belgium and stimulated a flurry of donations to help Belgian refugees. Its delayed entrance in the American field of Belgian relief and its adherence to strict neutrality set the CRB at an initial public relations disadvantage because it did not repeat electrifying atrocities stories. But the CRB’s diplomatic agreements secured first-hand by Hoover in London and its avowed neutrality proved to be the CRB’s strongest assets that enabled it to outmaneuver its competitors and monopolize Belgian relief activities within the United States. The BRF’s denunciation of Germany voided any genuine prospect of it securing analogous agreements that the CRB had obtained to permit feeding operations behind German lines. At best the BRF would nominally support hundreds of thousands of Belgian refugees and those clinging to a narrow coastal strip of unoccupied Belgium, but the CRB would feed millions who languished in occupied Belgium.

Convincing Americans that the CRB provided “stricken” Belgium its best hope of relief proved a daunting early challenge overcome with a dynamic domestic committee network and effective media relations strategy that emphasized the CRB was the exclusive channel by which aid to Belgium could be delivered. Lest the popular but false impression persist that envisions American interest in wartime affairs as a predominantly East Coast phenomenon, cities and towns across the United States found Belgian relief a compelling cause to support with expressions of solidarity and donations of time, money, food, and clothing⁷. Hoover’s and many CRB officials’ strong ties to California further ensured that the CRB would prioritize fundraising activities beyond the Eastern Seaboard. Tracing the early stages of the CRB’s chapter formation indicates that large American cities and nationwide associations played critically important roles in the humanitarian mobilization of American society.

⁷ LITTLE B., “An Explosion of New Endeavors: Global Humanitarian Responses to Industrialized Warfare in the First World War Era”, *First World War Studies*, 2014.



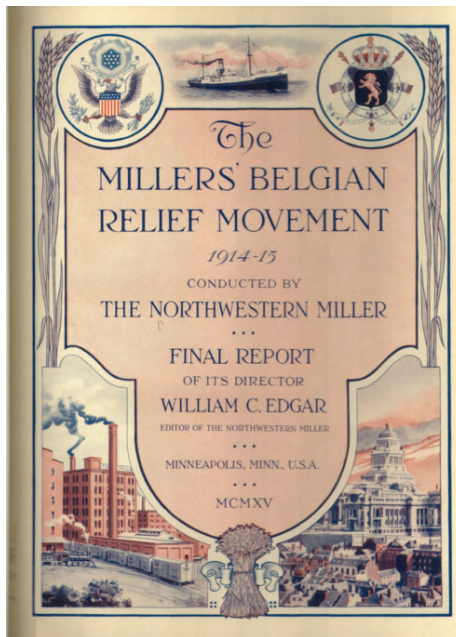
CRB officials in Brussels atop their headquarters at 66 Rue des Colonies with the Cathedral of Saint Michael and Gudula featured in the background, 1915. Tracy B. Kittredge (mentioned in the article) is sitting in the center of the first row.



American volunteers displaying items for sale at the Belgian Relief Shop in New York City, 1914.



SS *Camino*, a ship filled by Californians with contributions for Belgian relief. It was popularly dubbed the “California Ship”, December 1914.



A report featuring the contributions of the *Northwestern Miller* and Minneapolis, Minnesota residents to Belgian relief, 1915.

New York City served as the CRB's nerve center in the United States between 1914 and 1917. The New York office orchestrated national fundraising and publicity campaigns, supervised state and local chapters, and concurrently managed the collection and transshipment of donations abroad from seaports in New York and New Jersey. In 1914, Hoover appointed his friend and affluent fellow engineer Lindon W. Bates as director of the New York office. Bates and his energetic wife Josephine were prominent New York elites who participated in professional and social networks that spanned the country⁸.

Josephine, as the self-designated head of the CRB's Women's Division, used her connection to the Federation of Women's Clubs and its 8,000 officers to form a national chain of CRB committees and to stimulate fundraising projects. Other entrenched women's associations – secular and religious, liberal and conservative – also rallied to Belgian relief and made the cause of the Belgians their own. By December 1914, the CRB boasted a membership in its Women's Division of six million. Within seven weeks the CRB had also chartered 32 ocean-going ships filled with food and raised \$10 million in an era when many major city banks possessed less than \$200,000 in capital and many smaller town banks operated with ten times less⁹. Numerous American CRB chapters formed in 39 of 48 states, Hawaii, Alaska, the Philippines, and the District of Columbia; women chaired twelve state organizations. Encouraged by their peers, the President, governors, and mayors, committee members in these disparate locations raised money, purchased items, and collected donations of food and clothing. Volunteers dedicated countless hours to managing Belgian relief activities in their communities, and some even devoted their labors full-time without compensation, like the majority of CRB officials working overseas.

Administratively it made sense to direct CRB activities from New York because it functioned as the United States' financial capital and as a major transatlantic entrepôt. New York also possessed state-of-the-art telecommunications systems that aided chapter-wide coordination, featured a major rail terminus at the port of New York for transcontinental shipping, and housed

⁸ Lindon Bates to Hoover, December 31, 1914, Folder 1, Box 10, Commission for Relief in Belgium Records, 1914-30, Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Stanford, California (HI) (hereafter CRB).

⁹ Josephine Bates to Lou Henry Hoover, January 6, 1915, Box 12, Lou Henry Hoover Subject Collection, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

the largest national news and public relations agencies that facilitated dissemination of stories on CRB activities. Many of America's richest financiers and philanthropists lived in New York and made generous contributions to Belgian relief. This concentration of assets made New York an indispensable nexus for Belgian relief. Most urban centers featured similar facilities also, which ensured their vital coordinating role at a regional level. San Francisco and Oakland, California and Seattle, Washington certainly mirrored New York as sophisticated, large, seaport cities that made meaningful contributions to Belgian relief in the Western United States, but nothing rivaled New York's centrality to CRB operations in the United States.

The New York office conferred considerable autonomy on state and local chapters. Part of the reason for this laissez-faire approach reflected Hoover's belief that "ordinary" Midwesterners and Westerners distrusted America's Eastern "aristocracy" and would not support a nationwide relief effort headquartered on Wall Street. Hoover's views revealed much about inchoate American nationalism in 1914 and the ways in which regional identity and state citizenship mattered more to most Americans than their allegiances to the wider country. Accordingly, CRB publicity deemphasized the New York headquarters' leadership role, and focused on the relationship of individual states and cities to Belgian relief. CRB officials in New York also permitted decentralized decisionmaking because of their belief that with a modicum of guidance local committees could unleash their creative energies. "Just how the undertaking should be approached in your State is, of course, for you to determine", one CRB official informed a chapter secretary¹⁰. Chapters outside the United States, moreover, remained fairly independent, formed often by the mining engineers associated with Hoover, sympathizers in the British Commonwealth, and Belgian expatriates.

The CRB heavily invested in its supporting machinery and entered into an effective business contract with communities across the United States and the world. Volunteers, donors, and journalists expected the CRB to inform them about how contributions were being used. Notifying donors on which ship their goods were expected to sail such as the SS *Camino* encouraged meticulous recordkeeping and transparency at all levels. It also consumed a tremendous amount of administrative attention by the New York office¹¹. Keeping

¹⁰ William L. Honnold to Lulie Henning, September 16, 1916, Folder 10, Box 247, CRB.

¹¹ John B. White to William F. Badé, November 24, 1915, Folder 2, Box 231, CRB.

local officials and vendors abreast of the latest directives, methods, schedules, and compensation for shipping goods to seaports where they would be stockpiled and transported overseas enhanced efficiency and improved results, even though no system could predict or enforce restrictions on what gifts the CRB would receive. The CRB understandably desired to systematize donations and eventually preferred cash gifts rather than randomly donated items, so that it could procure bulk cargoes of grains and other foods, thereby optimizing its shipping capacity and achieving economies of scales with its expenditures.

As the CRB's American network enlarged, it became ever more complex to administrate because nearly every new committee, chapter, speaker, and volunteer created a chain of communications – telegrams, letters, phone calls, visits – that required responses from the New York office. Requests by local chapters suggested to CRB officials what the needs of the local chapters were, and what types of information Americans demanded in exchange for their participation. A paper trail formed for every item donated from such seemingly trifling, tiny items as a knit muffler to railcars filled with tons of wheat, from nickels to \$10,000 checks. All donors received letters of appreciation. Fully aware of the insufficiency of private donations to purchase food for millions dwelling in occupied lands, Hoover nevertheless thrived on the volume of small contributions, which he understood were an indication of America's heart for Belgium.

Even as it delegated many routine functions to local committees the New York office retained control over critical areas such as publicity. The publicity department enlisted prominent politicians' endorsements, paid the salaries of many speakers, and employed management and publicity advisors to ignite statewide and local activities. It also manufactured and disseminated motion picture films, lantern slides, subscription cards, and other props to support public lectures, chapter work, and popular publications. Use of film revealed the CRB secretariat wholly embraced the latest technology to capture the public's imagination (and money), but also showed much of America to be far less modern than the CRB presupposed – many rural communities such as Indian reservations in the American Southwest and in farming towns in rural Iowa, South Dakota, and West Virginia could not play films and preferred old-fashioned Aristotelian oratory. CRB officials were at first slow to think in cinematic frames of reference and to stage crews to capture unfolding events including the unloading of relief ships in Rotterdam, but encouraged by the



A *Rocky Mountain News* story featuring an embroidered flour sack symbolizing Belgian gratitude for the contributions of Denver, Colorado residents, November 1917.



Hunger, a U.S. Food Administration Poster encouraging continued American sacrifices to save Belgium and to also feed the Allied armies, 1917.

enthusiastic responses by many big-city audiences to their initial multimedia displays they would do so and turn relief into a pageant.

To mobilize public sympathies and donations, CRB chapters routinely deputized professional and fraternal associations using personal connections such as Herbert and Lou Henry Hoovers' ties to the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce and Stanford University. Banking officials in California took their cues from William H. and Ethel S. Crocker who were leading figures in San Francisco banking and the founders of a statewide CRB committee, to launch collection drives at banks in the Bay Area, Los Angeles, and Sacramento¹². Likewise, commercial organizations oftentimes developed into hubs of Belgian relief activity because the CRB enlisted the support of one thousand such groups and their membership usually included a community's leading businessmen who encouraged one another to offer meaningful in-kind and cash contributions. The Grand Rapids Association of Commerce became the center for donations in Michigan that it shipped en masse to New York. The CRB also promoted fraternal connections between American and Belgian industries, encouraging glass blowers in Philadelphia to aid "their brother mechanics" in Hainaut who were unemployed¹³. Newspaper owners and editors including Charles F. Scott (*Iola Daily Register* of rural Iola, Kansas) and William C. Edgar (*Northwestern Miller* of metropolitan Minneapolis, Minnesota), were frequently key members of business associations and set their papers' editorial tone also with corresponding influence as opinion-makers in their communities. Scott and Edgar, moreover, were distinguished by their highly publicized tours of Belgium in 1914 and subsequent speaking engagements that kept Belgian relief a centerpiece of American communal gatherings throughout the war¹⁴.

Close ties between the CRB and major universities provided further leaven for city and statewide mobilization. University towns such as Berkeley, California and Princeton, New Jersey were focal points of CRB-associated

¹² Grace Maletton to Hoover, October 25 and November 1, 1915, Folder 1, Box 230, CRB.

¹³ John A. Gade to Edgar T. Rickard, April 6, 1917; Rickard to Gade, April 4, 1917, Folder 24, Box 314, CRB.

¹⁴ Scott to Bates, January 16, 1915; CRB to Scott, n.d. (Feb.) 1915; Scott to Hunt, November 18, 1915, Folder 1, Box 247, CRB; SCOTT, "The Succor of a Nation", *Proceedings of the 28th Annual Convention of the Kansas Bankers Association*, May 11-12, 1915, Topeka, H. M. Ives and Sons, 1915.

public lectures because many veteran CRB officials such as Tracy B. Kittredge of the University of California returned to their alma maters to enlist support and recruit professors of Romance languages and undergraduates possessing business experience and exposure to Europe. Sororities and fraternities sold miniature Belgian flags and Christmas cards at Berkeley in 1915-16. Their infectious enthusiasm spread to area residents who persuaded local movie theaters to host Belgian relief galas and to show CRB films for free¹⁵. Fundraising modalities included bazaars, auctions, music recitals, and sales of flowers and flags. At these events artistically adorned letters from Belgian schoolchildren, and similar evidences of Belgian gratitude including embroidered flour sacks confirmed that additional donations would be enthusiastically received. Marshalling widespread interest by engaging national, state, and local leaders along with political, civic, religious, and labor organizations, the CRB utilized Kittredge and a small army of lobbyists to amplify messages featured in advertisements at the cinema and in newspapers¹⁶. Illustrated presentations of lantern slides impressed journalists and attendees from San Diego to Stockton and in hundreds of other communities across California. Donations flooded the CRB after these events. University-oriented community activities in Illinois and other states achieved similar results¹⁷.

The Geopolitical Implications of American Humanitarian Mobilization

From its inception the CRB challenged U.S. neutrality by investing American society in Belgium's survival. Through their charitable donations and benevolence Americans became acquainted with the financial and humanitarian sacrifices involved in modern war. Germany's forced deportations of Belgian laborers, its inexplicable torpedoing of CRB ships that possessed safe-conduct passes from the German Admiralty, and the revelations of the Zimmerman Telegram in early 1917, which indicated Germany was seeking to widen the war by attacking yet another neutral power, the United States, convinced

¹⁵ "University Plans War Relief Work", *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 15, 1915; "U.C. Women to Sell Belgian Relief Tags", *San Francisco Examiner*, December 3, 1915; "Active Campaign for Belgian Relief Fund", *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 27, 1916.

¹⁶ "Sacramento to Hear Plight of the Starving in Belgium", *Sacramento Union*, December 14, 1915; "Belgian Relief Expert Proves Interesting Speaker", *Palo Alto Times*, December 14, 1915.

¹⁷ "Dr. McClenahan's Mission", *New York Times*, December 24, 1914; see also Folder G, Box 629, CRB.

many Americans that military intervention was a necessary measure to restore Belgian independence and protect American security. Americans, Hoover often argued, were not pro-German or pro-Allied, but pro-Belgian¹⁸. The CRB did not seek to inflame American opinion against Germany as did the BRF, the National Security League and other defense preparedness groups. But as it struck a delicate balance between championing a victim's rights and identifying a perpetrator, the CRB commanded America's attention, keeping the fate of Belgium at the forefront of the national interest¹⁹. Eventually many Americans believed that "saving" Belgium required its military liberation. Belgian relief had helped to unravel American neutrality.

Upon the U.S. declaration of war on Germany in April 1917, the American people remained engaged in humanitarian endeavors. Although hundreds of privately established war relief organizations had formed in American cities since the war's beginning, Belgian relief monopolized American humanitarian attention until 1917, when the American Red Cross' (ARC) wartime expansion transfixed the nation's attention. The ARC's membership campaign skillfully utilized the nationwide chapter structure established by the CRB to re-channel American interest toward soldiers' medical relief²⁰. ARC membership rapidly swelled to an astounding 33 million people – approximately one third of the nation's population. The ARC's medical mission to aid wounded soldiers, however, did not diminish American support for Belgian relief. Americans opened their wallets for Belgium even after a flurry of new demands such as Liberty Bonds compelled their subscription²¹. Together the CRB and ARC collaborated on fundraising and clothing drives for Belgium, and shared office spaces in New York and personnel in Washington and in Europe. Belligerency necessitated the replacement of American CRB officials from occupied Belgium and France with neutral Dutch and Spanish officials. Meanwhile Americans continued directing CRB procurement and shipping

¹⁸ Hoover memorandum, February 6, 1915, Folder 2, Box 3, CRB.

¹⁹ Hoover speech, January 27, 1917, Folder 6, Box 8, CRB.

²⁰ Ernest P. Bicknell to Howard Swan, February 17, 1917, Box 858, Group 2, American Red Cross Records, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland; ARC Appeal on Behalf of the CRB, March 4, 1918, Folder 1, Box 59, CRB.

²¹ Hoover to Newton D. Baker, October 3, 1917, Folder 10, Box 6; Gray to Rickard, February 11, 1918, Folder 16, Box 218; USFA Dept. of Public Information, July 12, 1918, Folder 5, Box 59; William B. Poland memorandum, February 11, 1921, Folder 42, Box 7; all CRB.

operations from London, New York, and Washington²². Hoover remained chairman of the CRB and relocated from London to Washington as director of the newly created U.S. Food Administration (USFA) charged with enlarging food production in the United States²³. Hoover employed a segment of the CRB's leadership to establish the USFA, and its offices were adjacent to the CRB's in Washington. This relocation from New York further signaled the concentration of power in the nation's wartime capital and that Belgian relief would become a war measure²⁴.

Belgian relief remained a national priority. In April 1917, at precisely the same time it initiated war mobilization plans, the U.S. government accepted the entire financial obligation for Belgian relief that had heretofore been subsidized by Belgium, Britain, and France²⁵. Americans understood that Belgian liberation inspired their nation's military policy and plans. They were bombarded with official directives and informational campaigns from agencies such as the USFA, which deputized American housewives to conserve food to continue provisioning Belgium and also supply the swelling ranks of the U.S. military and its allies. They were encouraged to purchase war bonds with graphic posters that evoked German outrages in 1914. Hoover encouraged enlisting soldiers to donate their civilian clothes to Belgians at recruitment centers, and American shipyard workers were incited to greater productivity with images of "suffering in Belgium"²⁶. Enthusiastic crowds in Salt Lake City, Utah and Cheyenne, Wyoming, among other cities, celebrated the national tours of Belgian military missions in July 1917 and May 1918. In an address to a receptive audience in San Francisco, the chief of the Belgian mission declared that President Wilson's overture to defend "small nations" was of the utmost consequence to international security²⁷. CRB veterans on the

²² Vernon Kellogg to CRB New York office, March 12, 1917, Folder 1, Box 32, CRB.

²³ CRB Press Release, February 4, 1917; Hoover notes from Colonel Edward M. House meeting, February 13, 1917, Folder 6, Box 8, CRB.

²⁴ Lucey to Hoover, February 6, 1917, Folder 9, Box 32; Kellogg to Prentiss N. Gray, September 7, 1917, Folder 3, Box 232; James A. Healy to Ben S. Allen, March 14, 1919, Folder 1, Box 225; all CRB.

²⁵ Gay, 65.

²⁶ H. M. Bollinger to CRB, February 21, 1918; Arrowsmith reply, February 26, 1918, Folder 3, Box 239, CRB.

²⁷ Major Leon Osterreith remarks, n.d., May 1918, Folder 5, Box 1, Gustavus T. Kirby Papers, HI.



Remember Belgium, a U.S. War Bonds Poster invoking memories of Germany's invasion of Belgium, 1918.



Speaker of the House James B. "Champ" Clark Buys Forget-Me-Not Flowers for Belgian relief in Washington, D.C., March 1918.

USFA staff concurrently solicited the support of prominent women including Wilson's wife, Edith, and Eleanor Roosevelt, whose husband was the under-secretary of the navy and future U.S. president. Their participation along with the wives of nearly every senior U.S. official in a Forget-Me-Not flower sale for Belgian relief in Washington, D.C. in March 1918, conveyed the importance of Belgium to America's crusade in Europe²⁸.

Conclusions

America's wartime humanitarian mobilization drew great strength from the severity of Belgium's desperation and the special position occupied by the United States as a neutral power able to mitigate another nation's distress. Even as the United States marched to war in 1917, America's commitment to Belgian relief never waned. In fact, the ongoing mission to "save" Belgium powerfully eroded American neutrality and shaped the contours of the nation's belligerency. The extended overseas deployment of the CRB's relief administrators also anticipated the deployment of U.S. forces and the ARC's auxiliary medical establishment in 1917-18. Although it is customary to emphasize the expeditionary character of American intervention in the First World War, it is nevertheless vital to understand how these monumental enterprises were sustained in foreign fields. The interconnected linkages between American communities through innumerable associations – chambers of commerce, women's clubs, and universities to name a few – formed the supporting structures for Belgian relief. These intertwined professional and social networks represented the sinews of the CRB that stretched globally and connected tightly to nearly every city in the United States.

²⁸ Vernon Kellogg to Hoover, October 19, 1918; Charlotte Kellogg to Poland, n.d., December 1918 (?); Vernon Kellogg to Hoover, January 6, 1919, Folder 2, Box 32, CRB.