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**KIRKUS
REVIEWS**

Kirkus Reviews

January 15, 2006

SECTION: NONFICTION

LENGTH: 325 words

HEADLINE: THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN;
Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good

BODY:

A contrarian argument that humanitarian assistance seldom produces the desired results -- and may even further poverty and hunger.

Former World Bank economist **Easterly** has perhaps chosen an unfortunate title for his latest book, but there's a point to it. "Here's a secret," he writes: "anytime you hear a Western politician or activist say 'we,' they mean 'we whites' -- today's version of the White Man's Burden." The humanitarian aid that moves from the First World to what **Easterly** calls the Rest almost always goes to the wrong places, a tragedy all its own given the magnitude of the macro-problem -- namely, as he notes, that nearly three billion people live on less than two dollars a day each.

Given this, top-down solutions that assume that only free markets can generate wealth are illusory, though that wishful thinking is understandable. More useful, Easterly writes, are top-down incentives to nurture good governments and isolate bad ones (although, as he notes, "aid shifts money from being spent by the best governments in the world to being spent by the worst"), while encouraging aid clients to develop social norms against crime, corruption and predation, and for property rights. More useful still are bottom-up solutions of various kinds; one of the most interesting that Easterly proposes is simply that "development vouchers" be given to the extremely poor, who may then redeem these at aid agencies in exchange for vaccinations, feed, drugs, medical attention, tools, seeds, food or whatever they might find most useful at the moment. In other words, imagine, Easterly proposes, giving the needy a voice in addressing their needs.

Easterly's is not the only recent portrayal of humanitarianism in crisis (see David Rieff's *A Bed for the Night*, 2002), but it is unusual in suggesting solutions as well.

Publication Date: 3/20/2006 0:00:00

Publisher: Penguin Press

Stage: Adult

ISBN: 1-59420-037-8

Price: \$27.95

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LOAD-DATE: January 11, 2006