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*The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1838–1956: A History* by James Heartfield (review)

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understanding of therapeutics at the time. He contends that we should not be swept away by our era's faith in science. The same contextual factors that determine the success of a drug today applied to, say, blood-letting in the eighteenth century and earlier—including the social role of the physician that therapy helps to create; the national and cultural settings of medicine; the institutional settings of the therapy in question, especially whether public or commercial; and the idiosyncratic characteristics of the patient or populations on which the therapy acts.

In his final sentence, Rosenberg urges us to “think with as well as about therapeutics,” by which he appears to mean that the contextual factors considered to be necessary for a drug's success can be illuminated in historical research. Indeed, we can learn much about physicians, patients, and societies in studies of the performances—whether clinical trials, newsworthy breakthroughs, or advertising campaigns—contrived to exhibit the curative effects of new medicines. This collection helps to show that the historiography of pharmaceuticals has already proceeded far down that path.

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*The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1838–1956: A History.* By James Heartfield (New York, Oxford University Press, 2016) 486 pp. \$65.00

This book is a substantial, detailed organizational history of the anti-slavery movement established by British abolitionists with the ambition of achieving “universal emancipation” after the apparent end of slavery within the Empire in the 1830s. Heartfield brings context, and assessment, to the public positions and actions of the organization's leaders in his discussions of the issues that they addressed. The book follows the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society's (hereinafter BFASS) engagement with chattel slavery and various forms of unfree labor regimes in both the Americas and Africa before and under European imperial rule, as well as the slave trade across the Atlantic, the Arab trade in the Indian Ocean, and internal African slave trade. The chapters about the twentieth century explore BFASS attempts to persuade the League of Nations and the United Nations to define and monitor slavery and other unacceptable labor practices and press for their abolition.

The characteristic approach of the BFASS was a partial break from the forms of action adopted by the earlier British anti-slavery movement, which had combined “agitation” (propaganda and petitioning to mobilize public sentiment and influence policymakers) with memoranda and direct lobbying. The BFASS relied almost entirely on trying to work closely with officials and politicians in the Foreign and Colonial Offices, translating these methods to international bodies in the twentieth

century. BFASS methods never guaranteed the desired outcome, even in relation to the British government. Ending the shipping of indentured laborers from India, China, and South East Asia to colonial economies took decades, though some improvement of conditions occurred aboard ships.

Heartfield concludes that collaboration with government probably made abolitionists more likely to accommodate official concerns that limited the success of their initiatives. The BFASS committee became enthusiastically imperialist, believing that British territorial control would strengthen their “influence.” But this anti-slavery positioning came at a cost in the twentieth century. The issues of slavery and forced labor became less salient for the British government and less amenable to reformers in international bodies. The BFASS was left stranded by the rise of anticolonial sentiment, unable or unwilling to make common cause with colonial nationalists. The book effectively narrates the eventual marginalization and declining arc of the BFASS.

Despite the book’s rich detail, it focuses narrowly on the organization. Its limits are due to the fact that its most important source is the official BFASS paper, *The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*. The larger history of the British anti-slavery movement is sometimes skewed because the BFASS was not always at the center of it. Other organizations were occasionally responsible for elements of popular mobilization. Moreover, during the American Civil War and, to an extent, the Congo reform campaign in the early twentieth century, local groups emerged to assume the burden. The book does not include phases of transnational anti-slavery, such as Black Atlantic reformist networks, if they largely bypassed, or experienced uneasy relations with, the BFASS.

Heartfield’s study, with its heavy reliance on one mode of the BFASS’ communication with the public, can provide only fragments of the BFASS’ communications history. Integrating political science work on lobbying could have prompted some more reflection on the tools that the BFASS employed to change policy.

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*Clerical Households in Late Medieval Italy*. By Roisin Cossar (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2017) 232 pp. \$49.95

This book is mainly about clerical households in northeast Italy in the fourteenth century, with a special emphasis on Venice and Bergamo. The late Shona Kelly Wray’s study of notarial records in Bologna—*Communities and Crisis: Bologna during the Black Death* (Boston, 2009)—provides a constant touchstone for this book. Most of its data comes from a survey of more than 100 wills by priests, this number obtained from a sample of about 10 percent of the abundant notarial documents surviving in the Venetian archives. Cossar also consulted estate inventories