



1. To rescue more children from war and Nazi oppression.
2. To give them safe refuge in the United States.
3. To provide for the children already here under our protection.

**T**hese children are refugees from various Nazi-dominated countries who fled to unoccupied France. They have memories no child should have.

But they can smile again, now. Life holds something more for them than the misery and despair of a concentration camp . . . and slavery in a Nazi labor battalion later.

A few weeks ago they arrived in free America, under the sponsorship of the United States Committee for the Care of European Children.

But many more, just like these youngsters, are waiting for the miracle of rescue. The way for their escape is still open, via Lisbon, *if we act quickly.*

### How You Can Help

- \$1.50 a week—(or \$75) will see a refugee child from Marseilles to Lisbon.
- \$3.00 a week—(or \$150) will put two such children on the dock at Lisbon, bound for America.
- \$6.00 a week—(or \$300) will pay for the ocean passage of a child.
- \$10.00 a week—(or \$500) will meet the full cost of bringing a child to a new home somewhere in free America.
- \$15.00 a week—(or \$750) will bring a brother and sister from Marseilles to New York.
- \$20.00 a week—(or \$1,000) will pay all the expenses of a brother and sister from France to Freedom; or will help us to assure proper care for ten children already here during the coming year.

## YALE AND THE OXFORD CHILDREN A PIONEERING EVACUATION PROGRAM

Yale's involvement in American wars is well-memorialized on campus — few Yalies forget the haunting beauty of the names carved into the Woolsey Rotunda. However, in this essay, Katharine Spooner '16 explores a war effort by the University that receives far less commemoration: the Yale-Oxford children's evacuation program. Operated in the height of World War II, the program fostered Oxford-affiliated mothers and children in Connecticut, offering them safety yet garnering criticism for its perceived elitism. Spooner's analysis reveals that neither the praise nor reproach of the program is without merit, and her careful research sheds light on this controversial operation.

By Katharine Spooner, TD '16  
Edited by Katie Shy and Eva Landsberg

## YALE AND THE OXFORD CHILDREN

“About commencement time, June 1940, an idea was born,” wrote the 1940-1941 *Yale Alumni Magazine*: the settlement of children and their mothers from Britain’s two leading universities, Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>1</sup> Following some discussion over that summer, the latter institution rejected Yale’s offer, leaving Reverend Sid Lovett, then chaplain of Yale College and future Master of Pierson College, responsible for “the settlement of seventeen mothers with thirty-seven children belonging to them and thirty-three unattached youngsters.”<sup>2</sup> Shortly after, the Yale Faculty Committee for Receiving Oxford and Cambridge Children was created.

Of course, the idea of evacuating children from wartime Britain and resettling them in the United States was not unique to Yale. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt chaired the United States Committee for the Care of European Children (USCOM), which brought six thousand children across the Atlantic in the early months of the war and at the beginning of the Blitz from 1940 to 1941.<sup>3</sup> While significantly smaller than the national British evacuation plan that saw over a million children from inner city areas removed to the countryside, the Committee took responsibility for its charges, in most cases, throughout the Second World War.<sup>4</sup>

However, Yale’s program was distinguished by having a great deal of autonomy over placing the children in foster homes and establishing a specific exchange system with a partner university. Even today, the decision to cater to only Oxford dons and professors’ children has led to much speculation. British newspapers have run pieces on what they have portrayed as “a grand eugenic scheme,” and just two years ago, the author of the novel *Pantheon* claimed his research showed “ideas that we would now recoil from and regard as horribly close to Nazi-ism mainstream among British and American intellectuals in the pre-War period.”<sup>5</sup> This paper aims to debunk much of the sensationalism, and, indeed, inaccuracy of these statements.<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless the claims surrounding the Oxford evacuation program only emphasize the distinctiveness of the evacuation program, and I would argue that they are tokens of its success. It was a program that garnered praise from people including Eleanor Roosevelt and Queen Elizabeth; a complex plan that rescued children from danger and introduced them to everything that American life offered.<sup>7</sup> The Yale Committee, nonetheless, faced challenges, particularly during the early stages of the program, and I hope to give a balanced and candid perspective on Yale and “the Oxford Children.”

### **METICULOUS PREPARATION, JUNE 1940-1941**

The Yale Faculty took an independent approach from the start, both by initiating the evacuation program and by setting up the Yale Faculty Committee, which included a broad range of faculty members from Reverend Lovett (“Uncle Sid” as he was affectionately known) to Professor Samuel Hemingway, Master of Berkeley College, and John Fulton,

Sterling Professor of Physiology.<sup>8</sup> Under the auspices of this Board, complete with its own private offices at 12 Hillhouse Avenue, Lovett wrote to the dons of Oxford and Cambridge in June 1940.<sup>9</sup> Recognizing the urgency of the situation, Lovett sent a letter addressed “To the members and wives of the Faculty of the University.”<sup>10</sup> Though the United States was not yet part of the war, Lovett emphasized the fear that Great Britain would be invaded: “Even if this invitation is not accepted at the present it is well worthwhile to make the offer. With the probability that the attack on England will start within a few weeks it is necessary, if we are to accomplish anything, that this action be immediate.”<sup>11</sup> If there was any opposition from Yale faculty to the evacuation plans, then the official documentation does not catalogue it, and, in any case, all but prompt objections would have come too late, as the first batch of children and their mothers sailed on board the *SS Antonia* from Liverpool the following month, in July 1940.<sup>12</sup> This gave little time – just a span of three weeks – to the Yale Faculty Committee to sufficiently prepare, but they diligently took to the logistical tasks and immediately sought financial donors.

Before progressing further, one might ask how such quick agreement was reached across either side of the Atlantic. How, for example, could one of the fellows at Balliol College so easily decide to contribute to the program, let alone allow his four children to leave England indefinitely?<sup>13</sup> The answer lies in the trust between Anglo-American faculty and the friendships that existed – and still exist – between the two countries. Looking at the correspondence between professors, the familiarity between them is clear, and several letters begin “I hope you are keeping well.”<sup>14</sup> One of the Yale Faculty Committee members, Professor Fulton, had particularly strong links with Oxford, having taught at Magdalene College in the 1920s, where he developed his theories on neurophysiology, and would later return to pick up a D.Sc.<sup>15</sup> In my interview with Judith Schiff, Yale’s Chief Research Archivist, she raised, unprompted, these connections between academics, noting that Yale faculty may have chosen Oxford as it was “easier for academics to make connections than try to figure it out cold.”<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the English academics placed a tremendous amount of trust in Lovett’s Committee, especially considering that such a large group of children made the initial crossing.

The depth and breadth of donations and enquiries about the program shows American confidence in the Yale Faculty Committee, as well as, on a wider scale, their sympathy for the plight of British children, who faced such an uncertain future in the early years of the war. At a national level, the US Committee for the Care of European Children received most of its funds from the government, as would be expected from a program run out of the Children’s Bureau. Large corporations, such as Kodak Film and Motion Exchanges, also financed their own exchange programs, but worked in close conjunction with the National Committee, who monitored the casework and visa requirements.<sup>17</sup> The Yale program, however, sought to exert nearly complete autonomy, as Lovett asked for sponsorship and

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soon built a \$25,000 fund, not only to see out the war but also its aftermath: “to enable us to do a better job in some future emergency.”<sup>18</sup> The ominous hint of future wars emphasizes how seriously Lovett took the evacuation plans. Keen to establish the foundations of an emergency fund, he set up a partnership with the National Savings Bank, situated on Orange Street, which handled all financial transactions during the war, and whose statements were carefully kept and catalogued by the Committee.<sup>19</sup> By separating their evacuation program financially from the National Program, Lovett and his team had much greater control over the logistics of the program, from the choice of foster parents to the schooling that the children received.

It was this desire for autonomy that truly differentiated the Yale evacuation project from the national program. Lovett took the first steps of liaising with the Oxford professors, and he later set out his reasoning in a formal letter to the National War Fund: “The primary purpose, obviously, was and still is to provide the threatened families of England with a safe haven where their children, out of the earshot of guns, beyond the reach of starvation and the horrors of invasion, could live and thrive and grow up to be good citizens of the commonwealth of nations.”<sup>20</sup> This impassioned statement tugged at American heartstrings as an appeal to bring children to the “safe haven” of New Haven. The Yale Committee emphasized the close Anglo-American ties in an internal memorandum, which stated that “these children were sent, not into the blue to be ticketed and moved about like little checkers on a checker board, but as friends and the friends of friends; as neighbors.”<sup>21</sup> While perhaps grandiose in its aims, the program was extremely dedicated in its execution and set two goals: on a practical level to prepare for the children’s arrival, and, in a broader sense, to foster close US-UK relations. Given that the United States remained uninvolved in the conflict during the summer of 1940, and was watching from afar as Britain retreated the bulk of its land army from Dunkirk, it is interesting that the Committee’s goal was so plainly set out in the program’s founding aims.

The project’s uniqueness did not go unnoticed, as one member of the US Committee for the Care of European Children archly commented on “the peculiar nature of the Oxford Cambridge children evacuation program.”<sup>22</sup> Over the summer of 1940, exchanges between the National and Yale Committees documented the unwillingness of the US Committee to cede complete control to its junior counterpart. One letter from the US Committee suggested that, “in addition to a member of the board of directors of the children community center, the Executive Director (of the National Committee) also serve on the Yale Faculty Committee either as a member or as an advisory member.”<sup>23</sup> Although the Yale Committee worked against the odds to obtain the initial visas, it triumphantly told the US Committee in 1943 that “after nearly three years of trial and error, effort and accomplishment, a third and developing purpose has become to carry on the project in such a way as to make its experiments meaningful and its findings significant in the development of the

whole field of care of evacuated children.”<sup>24</sup> Even at this mature stage of the evacuation program, the Committee still sought to give the project a more meaningful purpose. This motivation was clear from the outset – in fact, even in the month of preparation before the children arrived.

## **THE DIVINITY SCHOOL RECEPTION: A PATH TOWARDS FOSTER HOMES**

Very quick planning ensured that when the group of children reached New Haven (after the eight-hour train trip from Montreal) they would be warmly welcomed at a reception.<sup>25</sup> Their arrival, on the afternoon of July 17, 1940, was celebrated across campus, with journalists flocking to interview the evacuees. The University issued an official statement: “Less than a month ago the Yale Faculty [Committee] was formed and offers were sent to Oxford and Cambridge to take one hundred children and mothers from each for the duration of the war.”<sup>26</sup> The journalists of the *New Haven Courant* wanted a punchier news story and set about interviewing the children on what they thought of the United States, and, as one reporter noted, “experience of Hollywood enabled them to give what the boys assumed were perfectly satisfactory accounts.”<sup>27</sup> The opening reception took place on the Sterling Divinity Quadrangle, where a broad welcome banner proclaimed, “To our English friends, we heartily welcome you to the Sterling Divinity Quadrangle of Yale and we hope that your stay with us will be a pleasant experience for you.”<sup>28</sup>

The Yale Faculty Committee had planned more than just celebrations and had already assigned each child to one of the four divinity school dormitories. The Yale Faculty Committee memorandum notes solemnly that all the children would live in “Hopkins, Bushwell, Bacon [or] Brainerd.” Their stay would be temporary until foster homes were finalized.<sup>29</sup> One can only imagine what the children, raised in the quadrangles of medieval Oxford colleges, would have made of the sturdy red brick of the federal-inspired Divinity School. They were probably kept busy by the highly structured daily schedule they had to follow during their stay. The little details of their course of stay had been meticulously planned, perhaps to the point of inanity. The schedule did not leave a minute unaccounted for during each evacuee’s day, as boys and girls were occupied with activities, meals and “reflection time” from their “7:00 am rising” to “8:30 pm lights out for boys and girls.”<sup>30</sup> While veering towards the obsessive, the details were thoughtful and reflected the sincerity of the Committee’s aims; for example, mothers who were observed to be on friendly terms in the opening afternoon reception were subsequently grouped together.<sup>31</sup>

Although, as Ann Spokes Symonds recounted, “hardly any of us children were aware of the fact that Mr. Byron Hacker, the Director of the Children’s Center, and his staff of assistants were undertaking their investigations during this time, matching up children with the most suitable hosts and deciding on allocations,” the Yale Faculty Committee was

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acutely mindful of the immediate task at hand: finding the children foster homes.<sup>32</sup> After their arrival, the “children were observed and sensitively interviewed” during the first two weeks of their stay at the Divinity School. The Children’s Center staff also took detailed notes about the children’s temperament and health.<sup>33</sup>

Lovett ensured that the children were placed under the care of two Yale doctors, whose names and credentials were proudly included in the Yale University official statement: “Dr. Grover Powers, Professor of Pediatrics, and Dr. Edward Wakeman, Assistant Clinical Professor of Pediatrics, in the Yale Medical School.”<sup>34</sup> It was these two men who brought up the need for the group to be covered by some kind of basic insurance, both for practical reasons – three mothers were heavily pregnant – and on the simple grounds that the war could last indefinitely. Unfortunately, several insurers, including the esteemed Connecticut Hospital, flatly rejected coverage applications.<sup>35</sup> Acquiring insurance became the first logistical hurdle that the team faced, and Lovett later recalled his frustrations after meeting with yet another prospective insurer: “Dr. Grover Powers and some of us sat down with an insurance man [...] as I remember the interview, he said it was both impossible and not financially feasible to make any such arrangements in this site.”<sup>36</sup> The Committee, nonetheless, quickly found a solution by breaking the group of mothers and children into three sections: “mothers alone, attached children, and unattached children.”<sup>37</sup> The Committee’s correspondence with insurers from across the state of Connecticut demonstrates its persistence in solving the first true test for the Oxford Children project.

What ultimately proved a greater difficulty and required detailed assessment was sifting through the applications of hundreds of couples who had written to the Committee asking to foster one or more children. Some wrote from as far away as Boulder, Colorado. Others wrote with insistent demands: “My husband and I,” specified Eleanor Brockway, “are very interested in adopting a British child; preferably a boy under six years of age.”<sup>38</sup> In total, I counted no fewer than two hundred letters of this kind, excluding the patient replies from the secretary of the Committee, Ms. Marjorie Dawes, and returned questionnaires.<sup>39</sup> Americans from across the country were clearly struck by the need to look after what the newspapers advertised as the “little refugees.”<sup>40</sup> I also suspect, however, that some childless couples thought Britain would lose the war, and therefore perceived the program as an informal adoption project, as suggested from the letter of one applicant, stipulating that that “the youngster must be of English or Scotch descent and must be a Protestant.”<sup>41</sup> Lovett was aware of the challenges that came with picking foster parents, not least when the mother was accompanying the child, and anxiously wrote in an internal note: “the problem of placement presented psychological as well as numerical considerations [...] the wisdom of keeping our group somewhat geographically centered precluded our use of many homes at some distance from New Haven.”<sup>42</sup>

Distant placements were ruled out so that a process of close examination and super-

vision could commence. Lovett stipulated, “All prospective homes and foster parents were subject to interview by child placement workers.”<sup>43</sup> In addition, the Committee conformed to the National Children’s Bureau practice and kept detailed notes on the particulars of prospective parents’ lives, including their occupations, religion, education backgrounds, salaries, employers, and even character recommendations from neighbors.<sup>44</sup> The questionnaires seem similar to what one might expect today for a foster family assessment, although leaving a blank space for one’s “mental state” to be described seems a slightly outdated, blunt means of questioning, as does the space under “how many servants, if any?”<sup>45</sup> The resulting pairings between children and foster parents undoubtedly formed one of the greatest successes of the program, and one can credit this careful preparation.

The problem of allocating children to foster parents was made easier than there being fewer children than anticipated. In late June, Lovett received a letter from Fulton’s primary contact at Cambridge “indicating that no Cambridge contingent is to be expected in the future.”<sup>46</sup> Although the Yale Faculty Committee had originally been told that “Cambridge planned to send a group in the near future,” it was relatively unperturbed by the end of the Cambridge plans, and still chose to retain the Committee’s full title: “The Yale Faculty Committee for receiving Oxford and Cambridge children.” This perhaps reflected their continuing openness to Cambridge should the British university have changed its stance on the project.<sup>47</sup>

People found different explanations for why Cambridge did not put its children through the evacuation program. Sir Montague Butler, then the Master of Pembroke College, supposedly remarked, “this (the evacuation) might be interpreted as a privilege for a special class.”<sup>48</sup> I shall touch further upon his answer, which has been explored by other historians, when I examine whether there was an ulterior motive behind the program; however, Cambridge’s rejection does not appear particularly surprising given the origins of the program. The bulk of Professor Fulton’s contacts were at Oxford, as it was the university at which he had taught in the prewar years; indeed, the meetings involving parents were conducted at Oxford’s Rhodes House and news of the program frequently filtered “word by mouth” around the Oxford Colleges.<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, the program originated at Oxford, and depended on the close ties between three Rhodes scholars: Professor Fulton of Yale, and Professors Hugh Cairns and Howard Florey of Oxford.<sup>50</sup>

## IMPRESSIONS OF NEW ENGLAND

Amid “a heat wave of unprecedented torridness,” the children had a splendid and exciting start to life in America. Nothing, reported *The Yale Alumni Magazine*, “could break the morale of our overseas friends.” The article went on to praise “the fine courtesy and patience of our English guests.”<sup>51</sup> The reports on how they adjusted to American life include some fascinating eyewitness accounts, as the “English guests” observed everyday life in the

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United States with an outsider's perspective. Felicity Hugh-Jones wrote in a letter home to her parents: "We have plenty of things to do [...] sunbathing, playing, swimming, reading, eating (meals mostly consist of fruit, milk and ice-cream) and sleeping [...] If it weren't for the fact that you both aren't here it would be heaven."<sup>52</sup> In their first month in the United States, the children were pampered, if not a little spoiled. For the first time, they tasted and drunk "varieties of ice-cream and Coca-Cola," as well as vanilla birthday cake.<sup>53</sup> Some of the earliest memories of the evacuees included being driven in an "open-topped car" on expeditions to the nearby Madison Beach, going on trips to Hollywood movies, and learning to play the quintessential American sports of baseball and basketball.<sup>54</sup> Their immersion into American life was not just a matter of interacting with the adults and staff, but also becoming young American consumers, intrigued by the rich assortment of goods and food. The young British citizens were among the first outsiders to see thriving 1940s America, as the nation climbed out of the Great Depression and its economy rapidly expanded.

The work of Lovett's team continued once their charges were settled into their new homes and experiencing new foods and hobbies; in some ways, the Committee took even more responsibility, as its members wrote tireless letters not only to get children into local schools, but often to request scholarships so the children could enroll at some of the nation's most prestigious prep schools. Children won places at schools as far away as St. Albans in Washington D.C. and as familiar and close as Hotchkiss, the high school of many Yalies, in Lakeville, Connecticut.<sup>55</sup> A Mrs. Dayton also dealt with the frictions and complaints that arose from some querulous evacuees. Her notes on the young Jean Cooke, for example, who "refused to bathe, is dirty and untidy, and is far from cooperative," show her trying to resolve the issue, offering several suggestions to help remedy Jean's behavior.<sup>56</sup> A more alarming case was that of Virginia and Stephen Cooke, who, under the care of Mrs. Sutton, became increasingly withdrawn as their foster mother experienced severe depression and mood changes.<sup>57</sup> The Committee made several reports on whether the siblings should be withdrawn from the household and sent social workers into the home in order to assess the children's mental state (as well as that of the foster mother).<sup>58</sup> The intervention resulted in the children's earlier-than-planned return home to Oxford in November 1944.<sup>59</sup> Yet this case marks a rare instance of concern with a foster family and shows the Committee was aware of problems within foster families and methodically documented the children's welfare in their annual health reports.

The bulk of the letters to Mrs. Dayton actually reveal individual success stories. Many letters, from either foster parents or British children, share happy memories. One child, Josephine Burn, cheerfully wrote to her parents back in blitzed England: "This is all like a holiday, really, an awfully holly holiday."<sup>60</sup> Though her British, upper-middle class colloquialisms were still present in her writing, her formal education would have been

Americanized, as she attended a New England elementary and middle school. The majority of the evacuees attended private schools and frequently went on to great success in university. In her 2010 article commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the Yale-Oxford program, Schiff writes about the evacuees' experience of tertiary education after they had spent a few years stateside, towards the end of the war or slightly later. Two students, she notes, "entered Oxford, two entered Mount Holyoke, and two – Stephen Handfield-Jones and John Marchant – entered Yale as part of the Class of 1945."<sup>61</sup> Astonishingly, several students retained close connections with Yale in high school, as "one boy played on the soccer team captained by George H.W. Bush '48 at Andover," and another "roomed with William F. Buckley Jr. '50" at Millbrook School.<sup>62</sup> Even under certain duress, such as the time when Bobby Franklin's class was "studying the American Revolution, (and) we Brits felt somewhat *personae non gratae*," the children did not seem to suffer, despite their sudden uprooting from British schools, and there is evidence that they thrived on their scholarships in their new schools.<sup>63</sup>

The mothers of the group, encouraged by the Yale Faculty Committee, also integrated into American life and often found rewarding work. Some became volunteers at local charities, others worked directly for the Red Cross in the war effort, and one, Mrs. Levens, even qualified as a high school freshman English Literature teacher.<sup>64</sup> Their cases were all documented by the Faculty Committee, who treated the mothers to the same annual medical examination and interview as the children. That said, many mothers bade an early farewell to their American families and returned to England, often leaving their children behind.<sup>65</sup> Their return was not prompted by a mismatch in foster families or other negative factors, but usually to play a role in the British war effort, which they perhaps felt some guilt for abandoning. Mrs. Cooke, for example, returned to help European refugees settle in Oxford, while Mrs. Hull assisted her husband in a physics lab.<sup>66</sup> Her move back to Britain highlights the academic background of the group and illustrates why so many of the children later attended renowned universities on both sides of the Atlantic.

The Yale Faculty Committee oversaw the children's health, and it was fortunate that Lovett had insisted on an insurance plan, which was finally secured for the entire group in July 1940. Several children contracted measles the following month and were quarantined and forced to prolong their stay at the Divinity School.<sup>67</sup> There remains a detailed catalogue of medical bills – at least thirty were issued in the first year of the children's residence, including the princely charge of \$20 for one child's chest X-ray.<sup>68</sup> The annual medical examinations detailed everything, from vaccination history to psychiatric state; these reports also depict the thoroughness of the care that the children received.<sup>69</sup> The system of monitoring remained in place throughout the war, as the Committee kept detailed lists of everything from passport applications for the children to financial reimbursements to foster families.

## **“TIES THAT BIND”: THE RETURN HOME AND AFTERMATH**

In the spring of 1944, one memorandum, circulated among Committee members, mentioned “the general assumption that by the end of September next year, the war in Europe will have ended.”<sup>70</sup> The Committee was, of course, right, and now that the Allies looked set to win, returning the children, many of whom had reached adolescence, became a question of when rather than if. Some children and mothers, as the Committee also noted, had already travelled back, making the perilous journey across the U-Boat ridden Atlantic.<sup>71</sup> Although the majority of children remained, they and their parents realized the war was ending as reports filtered back of Mussolini’s defeat.<sup>72</sup> While the journey home, simple and convenient through New York to Liverpool or Southampton, was easy for the Committee to organize, dealing with the psychological family ties proved harder. The *Yale Alumni Magazine* and other news sources had taken to affectionately calling the children “our pilgrims,” and many foster parents found it difficult to liaise with the children’s real parents about final travel arrangements.<sup>73</sup> Some parents in Oxford requested that their children at least finish the school year, so as not to disrupt their education, while others, eager to be reunited, wanted their offspring back immediately after Victory in Europe Day, May 1945.<sup>74</sup>

The Committee’s responsibilities formally ended once the children disembarked from the ship at the English port. Yet close ties were to last for decades after the program with both members of the Yale Committee and foster parents, as evidenced by reunions held in Oxford and continued correspondence between foster parents and children.<sup>75</sup> The psychological impact of their return home, however, produced many challenges, including that of reuniting with a natural family of whom they had little or no recollection. While some parents were impressed by their children’s transformation, the stark differences between America and the postwar England of ration books and bombsites caused problems of readjustment. One evacuee, Ann Macbeth, later recalled this feeling of dislocation: “English winter, rationing, school uniforms, 1066 and all that, Latin, French, a new baby sister. Home.”<sup>76</sup> Her perception of England as a duller, less exciting place must surely have irked her parents, and many parents themselves were quick to realize the differences; Mrs. Symes wrote to her daughter’s foster parents, noting that “young people in America have such a gay time that the quiet dullness of a home in Bath, for instance, would not at all be satisfying.”<sup>77</sup> There is little evidence of the parents offering direct praise for the foster families, and when they did the comments were often backhanded. For example, Lady Ethel Florey wrote, “I do congratulate you on keeping the children so fresh and simple,” but added that “Paq’s appearance is a bit of a shock with rings, necklaces, high heels etc.,” before expressing her hope that “no doubt it will disappear altogether when she goes back to school.”<sup>78</sup>

In contrast to the Yale Faculty Committee’s role in all preceding stages in the program, the group played no part once the children were home in England, and one wonders

how Lovett, having so successfully bridged the transition for the children in 1943, could have eased their return home a few years later. Given the ongoing contact between foster parents and parents, the American generosity did not evaporate once the war had finished; rather, it is clear that the Committee considered their work done once the children had returned, to the extent of closing their savings account at the National Bank.<sup>79</sup> Ambitions to bridge future conflicts were clearly over, although whether from optimism about the course of world events or weariness after five years of hard work remains unclear.

Once the Committee's logistical responsibilities had abated, ties were primarily maintained through foster parents and the group of British parents, and this perhaps proved the most significant challenge on the children's return, whose concept of home had changed. One mother, confiding to a foster parent, wrote: "at the moment he talks about 'at home' referring to this house and yours equally [...] he calls us both mother impartially and sometimes calls me by your name. So that it seems as if he is finding it possible to slide from one background to another without being conscious of any violent change."<sup>80</sup> Her comment might strike the reader as wistful and sad, but it also proves how children and their foster parents had become throughout the war, and is therefore a testament to the strength of the Yale-Oxford program, including Dr. Fulton's encouragement of communication between parents and foster families.<sup>81</sup>

The letters continued after the war. Correspondence from both sides of the Atlantic was sophisticated and perceptive, as one would expect given the academic underpinning of the program. One parent eloquently summarized their child's return to English life: "they miss everything in America, their friends, schools, and their sports, but they realize that they have come back to their own, where they belong."<sup>82</sup> This mother's remark suggests that American homesickness was a passing phase.

And how did the children themselves, the objects of the "development of the whole field of care of the evacuated child" feel?<sup>83</sup> Had they become the "ambassadors of goodwill" as Lovett had intended?<sup>84</sup> The answer is yes and no. Many of the children developed an appreciation for the United States that lasted throughout their lifetimes. Aside from the handful that remained in the States to complete university or naval academy, the children had to change and assimilate back into British life when they went home, and this in itself was deeply disconcerting. The children had grown, and the appearance of urban England had vastly altered due to the relentless bombing of the Blitz, followed by the V-1 and V-2 rockets in 1944. England was, as Helen Somerset, one evacuee, candidly put it, "looking shabby and the people dull and tired."<sup>85</sup> Families and communities that had seen out the war at home must have had difficulty accepting these American adolescents with their "fashionable plaid coats" and even ridiculous "painted toenails."<sup>86</sup> These differences must have seemed even more glaring at their new schools.

In the United States, the Committee took much credit for the educational progress

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of the children; they would have been less impressed by the children's view of school in England. One parent reported to a foster parent that the children "were 'down' in Latin and mathematics," adding ungraciously that "they came up rapidly and took the places in their forms that they would have had, had they not gone to America."<sup>87</sup> The children, however, described the English system of education disdainfully and appeared to defend their American experience. Katherine Johnston commented, "they don't know how to run schools in England [...] the United States is the only place where they do it properly."<sup>88</sup> In the playground, the boys were forced to "answer to Yank or America," an insult that only changed once they readopted English accents.<sup>89</sup>

Children who had been evacuated within England were forced to adapt on their return, but the few thousand sent to the States had a much greater challenge. Bobby Burn recalled that "the taunt of 'Yank! Yank! Yank!' at the Dragon School made me adopt an Oxford accent pretty quickly."<sup>90</sup> A prestigious American prep school education was not enough to prevent a wary reception, contrasting strongly with the reception they had received as foreigners in the States. When it began its work, the Committee could not have anticipated that the greatest challenge the children would face was a difficult return to their English families and schools. Many seemed to experience a kind of survivor's guilt. One evacuee, Elizabeth Symon, later recounted, "My contemporaries wondered why I had gone to the States. But the choice had not been mine to make."<sup>91</sup> Although the bullying from their peers was triggered by the children's American-sounding accents, it may have had deeper underpinnings. The UK and the US had swapped their roles as global superpowers, with the war leaving Britain near destitute and dependent on rationing for basic foodstuffs, clothing and petrol well into the 1950s. By contrast, the United States, with its booming postwar economy, had already entered the unprecedented era of consumer goods, such as the refrigerator and the television. Many in Britain had caught glimpses of the America's newfound wealth from watching Hollywood reels at the flicks, and three million G.I.s had passed through with their "candy, coca-cola, cigarettes, and nylon."<sup>92</sup> The G.I.s had impressed English children, but less so some of their parents, who regarded them as "overpaid, oversexed, and over here." While adults were more tolerant of the returning children, the cruelty of the playground put pressure on them to assimilate quickly.<sup>93</sup> These issues were inherent to the situation, however, and there was nothing the Committee could have done to prevent them.

Others remained grateful for the generosity of the Committee and the foster parents. Queen Elizabeth (the late Queen Mother) personally wrote to many of the host families, with her letter beginning, "I wish to mark, by this personal message, my gratitude for the help and kindness you have shown to the children who crossed the sea from the United Kingdom many months ago."<sup>94</sup> It seems fitting that the US hosts received some recognition – from a monarch no less – having opened "their doors and hearts" to the eighty-eight

young strangers.<sup>95</sup> With the outbreak of war, the children's physical safety was paramount. Although much attention has focused on the Committee's role in addressing the children's psychological needs and preparing them for their return, not enough has been paid to the host families themselves. At a reunion several decades after the evacuation, Helen Macbeth commented that: "despite loving us as their own children, they nevertheless built up, even in me who did not remember Oxford, an excitement to go home [...] I don't recollect that it ever occurred to me it might be a sad thing to say goodbye. Only as an adult was I to learn what it meant to my American foster-parents."<sup>96</sup> This selflessness on the part of Macbeth's hosts went beyond the anything that the Committee could prescribe.

## THE "REAL" REASON BEHIND THE OXFORD CHILDREN

The Yale-Oxford program achieved Lovett's initial goals, and in doing so showed the Committee to be diligent and thoughtful. In reaction to this success, or what might be termed today as a "feel good" story, some historians have looked for other, more veiled motives for the project. The Yale-Oxford program has been dubbed an experiment in eugenics: taking children from academic parents, and isolating them in the United States, potentially for the long-term if the war extended long enough. These critics, many of whom have written newspaper articles and even books on the topic of eugenics at the turn of the twentieth century, point to circumstantial evidence. While known for his theories on monetary values, a Yale Professor, Irving Fisher, had founded the national American Eugenics Association in 1922, whose offices at 12 Hillhouse Avenue (now demolished) were just a few doors down from the Yale-Oxford Program headquarters. Other Yale professors and alumni had intimate connections to the eugenics cause: Professor Charles Davenport assembled pedigree charts of families, while Yale psychologist, Robert Yerkes compiled a census study that recorded traits such as feeble-mindedness. Others known to favor eugenics at Yale included the president of the university, James Angell, the football coach, Walter Camp, and the dean of the Medical School, Milton Winternitz.<sup>97</sup>

Although Yale faculty were linked to the eugenics movement, none appears to have been directly involved with the Yale Oxford program. More questionable is why the offer to evacuate children was only extended to the families of Oxford and Cambridge professors, when many other children in the university towns would have benefitted. Following Cambridge's rejection of the invitation, there was a possibility for the program to take a wider cohort of children. The rejection itself has also sparked debate. It seems that the Master of Pembroke College, who turned down the offer, sensed something untoward about the program, with his hint that Yale wanted a "special class."<sup>98</sup> In recent years, after the publication of *Pantheon*, Sam Bourne's bestseller fictional account of the Oxford children, British newspapers have pondered such ulterior motives. In 2012, the *Telegraph* excitedly asked, "Was Yale hoping to save the offspring of the British academic elite, protecting those 125

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children because it saw them as a future leadership class especially deserving of preservation?” Although it adopts a sensationalist tone, the *Telegraph* traces the links between the known eugenicists at Yale, highlighting Fisher’s role in founding the American Eugenics Association.<sup>99</sup>

Perhaps the most damaging aspect of the article is the claim by Professor Gaddis Smith, Larned Emeritus Professor of History, that Yale documents “show there was some discomfort at the discovery that one of the Oxford mothers was ‘a Jewess.’”<sup>100</sup> This may explain why I was banned from inspecting the contents of three files in the Manuscripts and Archives Library. If these files contain evidence of anti-Semitic attitudes within the Yale community, and specifically, the Yale-Oxford program, this would be highly embarrassing. It would not show that the Yale Oxford program had eugenic aspirations, but would nevertheless tarnish its reputation. By allowing the program to be equated with the hatred that has come to define the Nazis, its moral purpose would be put in doubt, even though anti-Semitism was depressingly commonplace in the United States. For the same reason, the *Telegraph*’s implication that anti-Semitism is evidence for eugenics is unjustified.

It would do this paper a disservice to overlook the fact that certain files in the Yale-Oxford collection are closed. This obstruction encourages the notion that the Yale-Oxford program has something to hide. In November 2014, I emailed Professor Smith to ask what he had seen in the archive. I also contacted one surviving evacuee, Ann Spokes Symonds, and Sam Bourne, the author of *Pantheon*. I hope to hear back from at least one of them, but without their input, I can only note that while anti-Semitism was widespread, if the Yale-Oxford program was actually an organized exercise in eugenics, one might suppose that evidence would have been found in the remaining seventeen boxes at the Manuscripts Library. On the evidence available, the project was true to the goals set out in Lovett’s first public announcement on the Yale-Oxford project.

### **FINAL REFLECTIONS: THE SUCCESS OF A WARTIME TRANS-ATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP**

The Yale-Oxford program was, in many ways, ahead of its time. The structure and organization of the program, from its rapid start in June 1940 to the final child’s return home, is impressive, particularly when considering that the bulk of communication was limited to letters that took several days to cross the ocean. The program also showed the best of American values. At one of the darkest moments in twentieth century history, the evacuees would never forget the generosity and kindness of their carefully chosen foster parents. If some children had bad experiences, no accounts of these experiences exist, and the complaints registered in private letters and recollections seem quite minor, usually relating to homesickness. They pale in comparison to the complaints of British children

evacuated from urban slums to countryside farms in the same period.<sup>101</sup>

It is likely the program's success that makes it a target for criticism. Certainly, allegations of a eugenic plot make for dramatic newspaper stories: an Ivy League university hypocritically submerged in anti-Semitic practices during the War. Yet these claims are unsubstantiated, and we are left speculating about why Yale has forbidden part of the archives to be accessed.

Helping a group of children, however, involved a selection process. Although it was both natural and practical for the children of Oxford professors to be participants – the group of former Rhodes scholars at Yale had existing friendships that they could call upon within a critical period of time – this excluded children from other backgrounds and geographic areas who could otherwise have participated. Perhaps a parallel can be drawn with the restricted places for Yale admission today, where selection is not questioned. The applicants with Yale connections and who are only a few years older than some of the Oxford evacuees have better odds of admission compared to those without legacy. While this does not make them any less deserving of a place than, for example, an applicant who has never set foot in New Haven, it does show an inherent selection bias. In a similar way, the thousands of British children evacuated to the countryside in the United Kingdom were no less deserving than the few thousand who crossed the Atlantic and, more specifically, the eighty-eight who made it to Yale. Forms of academic criteria were and are essential before one can fall under the protective wings of Mother Yale: the University helped the children of academics in the Second World War, and, through its complicated admission process today, continues to help young people with ability. The Yale-Oxford program, with its financial aid, unwavering support for the parents in Britain, and its extensive vetting of host families can be viewed as an early precursor of today's admission program. While it took the shadow of global war to prompt the evacuation program, if Yale ever witnessed the “future emergency” that Lovett anxiously predicted, I am confident that the University would do its part to help the young people of the future.<sup>102</sup>

## NOTES

1. “News and Events.” *The Yale Alumni Magazine*, New Haven CT, (1940-41).

2. Ibid.

3. “Administrative and Financial Files,” 1940-1948, Box 1, Faculty Committee on Receiving Oxford and Cambridge Children, Yale University, Records (RU 195). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. [hereafter cited as Faculty Committee.]

4. Kjersti Ericsson and Eva Simonsen, eds., *Children of World War II: The Hidden Enemy Legacy*, (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2005).

5. Sam Bourne. “Interview: Sam Bourne Talks About Pantheon.” *Crime Fiction Lover*, 2012. <http://www.crimefictionlover.com/2012/02/interview-sam-bourne-talks-about-pantheon/>.

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6. Reflecting the controversial nature of this topic, access to several records in the Faculty Committee on Receiving Oxford and Cambridge Children, Yale University, Records, (RU 195) Manuscripts & Archives, Yale University Library, remains restricted. Although I sought to obtain permission to access these files, particularly those containing correspondence between members of Yale faculty, my request was denied. Katharine Spooner, email, November 19, 2014.

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8. "Affidavits," 1945 Box 1, Folder 1, Faculty Committee.
9. "Financial and legal papers," 1941-1952, Box 2, Folders 22-23, Faculty Committee.
10. "Reports," 1940-1944, Box 5, Folder 42, Faculty Committee.
11. "Affidavits."
12. "Cunnard White Star Limited: Correspondence," 1945, Box 2, Folder 16, Faculty Committee.
13. "Oxford University Evacuation," Box 3, Faculty Committee.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Judith Schiff, in discussion with the author, November 8, 2014.
17. "Children's Bureau: Correspondence and Memoranda re: Department of Labor Standards," 1940-1942, Box 2, Folder 11, Faculty Committee.
18. "National War Fund," Box 3 Folder 30, Faculty Committee.
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21. "Correspondence," Box 1, Faculty Committee.
22. "Children's Bureau."
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24. "Statistics," 1940-1945, Box 11, Folder 38, Faculty Committee.
25. Anne Spoke Symonds, *Havens Across the Sea, A Wartime Journey from Oxford* (New York: Mulberry Books, 1990), 47.
26. "News and Events." *The Yale Alumni Magazine*, New Haven, CT (1940-41).
27. Symonds, *Havens Across the Sea*, 27.
28. Ibid., 48
29. "Initial Reception," 1940, Box 3, Folder 26, Faculty Committee.
30. Ibid., Perhaps their days were deliberately so busy as to prevent homesickness.
31. Ibid.
32. Symonds, *Havens Across the Sea*, 27.
33. "Files on Sponsors, non-sponsors and English Guests," Faculty Committee.
34. "Reports and Disbursements," Box 4, Faculty Committee.
35. "Insurance," 1941-1943, Box 3, Folder 24, Faculty Committee.
36. Ibid.
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38. "Adoption Home Study," Box 4, Folder 38, n.d., Faculty Committee. Library.
39. Ibid.
40. Symonds, *Havens Across the Sea*, 47.
41. "Possible Sponsors," Box 14, Folders 9-10, Faculty Committee.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. "Sponsors Registration Forms and Correspondence," 1940, Box 16, Folder 31, Faculty Committee.
45. Ibid.
46. "Cambridge Correspondence and Memoranda," 1940-1941, Box 2, Folder 6, Faculty Committee.
47. Ibid.
48. Jonathan Freedland, "The Plot to Create Britain's Super Race," *The Telegraph*, February 12,

2012. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/9076693/The-plot-to-create-Britains-super-race.html>.

49. "Baliol College," Box 1, Folder 4, Faculty Committee.
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51. "News and Events." *The Yale Alumni Magazine*, New Haven, CT (1940-41).
52. Symonds, *Havens Across the Sea*, 51.
53. Ibid. 52.
54. Ibid. 51.
55. "Files on Sponsors, non-sponsors and English Guests."
56. "Summaries of Children," Box 28, n.d., Faculty Committee.
57. Ibid.
58. "Quarterly Reports on Children," 1940-1945, Box 11, Folders 33-35, Faculty Committee.
59. Ibid.
60. Symonds, *Havens Across the Sea*, xx.
61. Judith Schiff, "Yale's Foster Children." July/August 2010, *Yale Alumni Magazine*. <https://www.yalealumnimagazine.com/articles/2909/yale-s-foster-children>
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68. "Medical Bills: receipts," 1942-1945, Box 3, Folder 29, Faculty Committee.
69. "Lovett, Sidney: personal file," 1940-1942, Box 10, Folder 26, Faculty Committee.
70. "Oxford Parents," 1944-1946, Box 10, Folders 28-32, Faculty Committee.
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84. "Lovett, Sidney: personal file."
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**TITLE IMAGE**

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