

Ten Americans doing great things for Pakistan

[Michael Kugelman](#) | 17th January, 2013



Over the last few years, the experiences of Americans in Pakistan have been quite memorable — for all the wrong reasons.

The actions of our government representatives in the country — from a certain [Mr. Davis](#) to those [Navy SEALs](#) in Abbottabad — have produced heaps of hostility. Yet more unsettling is how private American citizens have run into trouble. We've been enmeshed in scandal (think [Greg Mortenson](#)), detained (remember those [photo-](#)

[snapping Chicago hip hop singers?](#)), and abducted ([development worker Warren Weinstein's captivity](#) has now lasted nearly 18 months).

Even giving lectures can be perilous. Several years ago, the scholar Clifford May [had a shoe thrown at him](#) during a presentation at Karachi University.

Making matters worse are the powerful media narratives and hostile public opinion that constantly call into question American motives and actions. (It often seems every US aid worker in Pakistan is reflexively assumed to be a CIA agent.)

Despite this all, many Americans are making remarkable contributions to Pakistan. I present, in alphabetical order, 10 of these people here. They're not motivated by any sense of duty arising from ancestral ties (on that note, I've [written](#) previously on the efforts of Pakistani-Americans). Rather, they're simply driven by an abiding interest in and concern for Pakistan. Some names here will be familiar, others less so. Yet, they all deserve equal recognition.

1. [Lorraine Adams](#)

A Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist, Adams has [spoken](#) of her love for Pakistan's people, culture, and fashion (she wore a Pakistani dress at her wedding). She has served as an ambassador for [Bags for Bliss](#), an NGO that empowers rural Pakistani women by teaching embroidery. Adams is now immersed in a project rarely pursued by Americans — she's writing a novel about Pakistan, set in Lahore.

2. [Medea Benjamin](#)

Though this [Code Pink](#) activist's tactics are sometimes questionable (last year she [disrupted](#) John Brennan's controversial Wilson Center speech), the determination with which Benjamin opposes drones strikes in Pakistan is remarkable. Last year, shrugging off great security risks, she joined Imran Khan's anti-drones peace march. She has [written of her encounters](#) with civilian drone victims during the march.

3. [James Bernstein](#)

A medical doctor-turned-entrepreneur, Bernstein's [Eniware](#) company is developing inexpensive and portable sterilisation technology that would allow medical equipment to be sterilised when energy isn't available. Pakistan is one of the target countries — and such an innovation could be invaluable in a nation with widespread power deficiencies and immense public health challenges.

4. [Ethan Casey](#)

A travel writer and journalist, Casey has authored two acclaimed non-fiction books on Pakistan (Ahmed Rashid and Mohsin Hamid, among others, have [offered](#) rave reviews). The work of Casey, who has spent extensive time in Pakistan (including a semester at BNU), is neither starry-eyed nor deeply cynical — the dominant characterisations of much of the then on-scholarly American writing on Pakistan.

5. Teresa Lister

Many Americans engage with Pakistani Fulbright students (after all, [Pakistan constitutes the scholarship's largest program](#)). However, Lister took the exchange to new levels. After hosting students in America, she visited them in Pakistan. She chronicled her trip in a [CNN blog post](#), which describes her joy when offered the gift of a goat in a small Sindh village. Lister plans to return to Pakistan soon.

6. [Jacqueline Novogratz](#)

The track record of Novogratz's [Acumen Fund](#) is impressive enough. The Fund, which uses [patient capital](#) to invest in businesses that help the poor, has contributed [about \\$15 million](#) to housing, health, water, and agriculture projects in Pakistan. Yet, it also enjoys a sterling reputation — young Pakistanis (so I'm told) regard Acumen's Pakistan office as a highly coveted and even hip place to seek employment.

7. Anne Reese

This psychologist's work in Pakistan began in the 1990s, when she signed on with the NGO [Rozan](#) to set up the first program in Pakistan dealing with child sexual abuse. Later, she left for a career with the US State Department. However, most impressive to me is that after her

retirement, she was asked to return to Pakistan — and she did, making several extended trips in recent years to run training programs for Rozan.

8. Cynthia Ritchie

She's participated in a variety of humanitarian projects in Pakistan, from flood relief and health care efforts to the reconstruction of high schools and women's health clinics. Ritchie has [said](#) she finds much in common between Pakistan and her native American South, and she now hopes to produce media projects that promote positive relations between Americans and Pakistanis.

9. [Todd Shea](#)

For years, he was a struggling musician. Then, after seeing television images of the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, he flew to Pakistan to help with relief efforts. He's been there ever since, running a hospital he opened several years ago. Through his humanitarian work and [collaborations with top Pakistani musicians](#), he's arguably become the most visible and admired American living in Pakistan.

10. [Silbi Stainton](#)

Unlike many development organisations, the Colorado-based [Marshall Direct Fund](#) focuses not on building schools in Pakistan, but on sustaining them — through investments in teacher training, scholarships, uniforms, and meals. Stainton, who directs MDF, will soon be heading up a new subsidiary — Peace of the Action, which aims to link Pakistani women entrepreneurs with the global market.

The implication from these brief portraits is clear: While relations between Islamabad and Washington may be floundering, relations between common Pakistanis and Americans are flourishing.



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