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978-1-107-00146-6 - *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations Since 1941*: Second Edition

Edited by Frank Costigliola and Michael J. Hogan

Excerpt

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## I

### Introduction

Frank Costigliola and Michael J. Hogan

Although Michael J. Hogan had commissioned the essays in the first edition of *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941* (1995), he was not entirely satisfied with the outcome. The primary problem lay not with the authors, whose essays were excellent, but with the state of the literature they were reviewing.<sup>1</sup> That scholarship was “not always sophisticated” in terms of its conceptual design or methodology. Hogan wanted to see “exciting new work on the cultural aspects of diplomacy and warfare.” He also believed that “diplomatic historians need[ed] to evaluate the role of gender in foreign policy, as well as race.” They should “write more comparative history as well as more international history,” he suggested, and could broaden the study of non-state actors “to include ethnic, racial, religious, and women’s groups, as well as business and labor organizations.” In addition, history should encompass matters relating to the economy, the environment, and human rights and, at the same time, address the “equally pressing ... need for more broad overviews.”<sup>2</sup> An ambitious agenda!

Now, nearly twenty years later, it is time to revisit the original agenda, in collaboration with a coeditor, to see how far the field has come and what still needs to be done. This is the purpose of this second edition, which revises the original essays in light of recent literature and adds new essays as well. We are happy to report that according to two high-profile appraisals, much of the original agenda, however ambitious, has been realized. Thomas W. Zeiler (2009) and Erez Manela (2011) both concur that historians are pursuing, and indeed going beyond, the new topics and approaches urged in the first edition of this volume.

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On the other hand, and despite George C. Herring's magisterial *From Colony to Superpower* (2008), which certainly qualifies as a "broad overview," there has not yet emerged a widely accepted synthesis that can account for these new topics and approaches and thus replace William Appleman Williams's *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959). As Mark Philip Bradley (Chapter 2) and Andrew J. Rotter (Chapter 3) remind us in the present volume, *Tragedy* erected an ideological and topical framework that would continue to inspire (or infuriate) historians for decades after its publication. Indeed, Williams's work remains influential well into the twenty-first century, no doubt partly because of its erudition, iconoclasm, inexhaustible freshness, and discernment of basic patterns in U.S. foreign relations, but also because the proliferation of new topics and approaches does not easily lend itself to a sweeping and competitive synthesis. The centrifugal intellectual forces now at work in the field stand in contrast not only to the integrative thrust we see in Williams's work, but also to the centering institutional focus of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR). SHAFR's international membership, well-attended annual conference, prestigious journal (*Diplomatic History*), magazine (*Passport*), online presence, and array of prizes and fellowships have fostered a vibrant forum conducive to dialogue and diversity. SHAFR celebrates and promotes a common professional identity without preventing vigorous debate or covering over serious disputes within the field.

Indeed, even as scholars such as Zeiler and Manela celebrated recent intellectual developments in the field, they and others differed in how they envisioned the shape and future of that growth. In "The Diplomatic Bandwagon: A State of the Field," the lead article in a *Journal of American History* forum, Zeiler celebrated the "era of innovation among historians of American foreign relations."<sup>3</sup> "Clearly," he asserted, "diplomatic history is in the driver's seat when it comes to the study of America and the world."<sup>4</sup> He explained that the field was advancing along three avenues while holding fast to a key strongpoint. The innovations were a renewed engagement with ideology, a more international approach, and an emphasis on culture and identity. While praising this change, Zeiler also cautioned that diplomatic history must not abandon its "core mission of studying state-oriented diplomacy." Even "when internationalizing their research, historians of the United States must remain cognizant of the state as they stay wedded to the forces of society and culture."<sup>5</sup>

Although agreeing on the intellectual vibrancy of the field, other participants in the *JAH* forum pushed back against Zeiler's emphasis on

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the state and on what they perceived as his triumphalist tone. “It’s a Mass Movement, Not a Parade,” Kristin Hoganson titled her rejoinder.<sup>6</sup> Mario Del Pero cautioned that self-congratulation could slide toward exceptionalist insularity.<sup>7</sup> Like Del Pero, Jessica Gienow-Hecht offered a perspective from outside the United States. She remarked that too many U.S.-based historians remained unaware of scholarship generated by historians in other countries.<sup>8</sup> Fredrik Logevall cautioned that zealous efforts to decenter the metropole could distort the history of the twentieth century. Despite the influence of other nations, it was the United States, after all, that had done the most to shape many international developments.<sup>9</sup>

Celebratory in a different register was Manela, who proclaimed that the first decade of the twenty-first century had witnessed “radical, perhaps unprecedented transformations” in the field. He attributed this progress to “a sea change in how a new generation of historians who study U.S. interactions with the wider world sees their field, and how the discipline of history as a whole views it.”<sup>10</sup> Whereas Zeiler pointed to the field’s focus on the state as the source of its enhanced relevance for the discipline of history, Manela emphasized instead its focus on the international. He explained that the study of history, having absorbed the cultural turn, was now embarked on the transnational turn. “American historians as a whole have increasingly been seeking to transcend the nation,” he wrote. They were “eager to frame their investigations in ways that go beyond the borders of the nation.” With more and more historians stressing the international, historians of foreign relations “find themselves working at the cutting edge of the profession.”<sup>11</sup>

According to Manela, the new vistas for research included, first, the agency of people outside the United States, particularly those in non-Western lands, in shaping U.S. actions and what happened in the United States. Second was the role of non-state actors, such as nongovernmental organizations, corporations, and transnational activists, in changing the international environments in which nation-states operated. Third was the attention paid to the international dimensions of such key areas of human endeavor as family planning, food production, disease control, and environmental relations.

The second edition of *America in the World* demonstrates that, since 1995, more scholars have taken up an agenda similar to that outlined by Manela. These historiographical essays also reveal the advances celebrated by Zeiler. They go far toward answering the call made in the introduction to the first edition. Many of the historians in our field are already

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adept at negotiating the cultural and transnational turns. It is likely that much of future scholarship will pursue these and other developments.

Nevertheless, innovations in methodology and topic are not the only path to excellence. Much of the best work published since 1995 deals with topics and rests on methodologies that are not new. This volume testifies – as does the array of scholarship displayed at SHAFR conventions, in *Diplomatic History*, and in the books published by university and trade publishers – to the healthy diversity in approaches to foreign relations history. Political, economic, and military topics retain their crucial importance and wide popularity. Some of the most exciting new scholarship has reinvigorated seemingly worn-out topics with a fresh approach or methodology. SHAFR has retained its appeal by adhering to a welcoming, big-tent tradition. Finally, it can be eye-opening to consider what historians and students actually read – to look, for instance, at which articles in *Diplomatic History* have been downloaded the most.<sup>12</sup>

It is to be expected that newer topics in the field, such as global consumption, human rights, and international communications, should employ research and writing techniques that reflect the cultural and transnational turns.<sup>13</sup> It follows that mainstays of foreign relations history, such as top-down studies of the nation's wars and of U.S. relations with regions of the world, often adhere to more traditional modes of scholarship. Nevertheless, it remains striking that scholarship in almost every aspect of our field is feeling the winds of change.

In reviewing the literature on World War II published since 1995, Mark A. Stoler (Chapter 4 in this volume) first stresses the huge volume that continues to pour forth and, second, notes the tendency of historians to slight the actual war as they look for the origins of the postwar conflict between the superpowers. With much of the new work focusing on biography, it is not surprising that some of it examines the impact on diplomacy of personality, emotional thinking, and cultural assumptions. The public uproar in 1995 over the display at the Smithsonian of the *Enola Gay*, the plane that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, drew attention to the ongoing cultural struggle over the meaning of America's past. In a deft and dispassionate analysis, J. Samuel Walker (Chapter 5 in this volume) disentangles the often heated debate over the mix of factors that led President Harry S. Truman to drop the atomic bomb. Another long-running debate is over how the Cold War started and which nation bore more of the responsibility for initiating the struggle. In Chapter 6, Curt Cardwell examines the impact of the flood of new documents and the shift toward considering not just what the United States and

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the Soviet Union did, but also the roles played by China, Eastern and Western Europe, and the Global South. Some of the newer scholarship has sought to downplay the Cold War as the governing paradigm for the 1945–91 period by emphasizing instead North-South issues and globalized trends, such as concern with population growth, disease control, and mass consumption.

As is the case with World War II, literature on the Vietnam War continues to pour forth. The books and articles cover so many topics and take such different perspectives, Robert K. Brigham reports in Chapter 8, that there are no easily categorized schools of thought. Nor is there any overarching synthesis. Instead, there is a rich profusion of studies, including top-down political and military analyses as well as culturally inflected transnational accounts. Historians are looking at individual villages, South Vietnamese soldiers, Viet Minh cadres, Buddhist monks, Western reporters, and other groups. The many thousands of telephone conversations of Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard M. Nixon, and Henry A. Kissinger, other U.S. archival sources, the opening of archives in Vietnam, and material from the former Soviet bloc now available through the Cold War International History Project make for a uniquely rich trove of primary sources. It is little wonder that the Vietnam War attracts so many scholars. The proliferation of source materials also characterizes study of the presidencies of Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon. Whereas Eisenhower left detailed records about the process of his decision making, his three successors left thousands of recorded conversations. To these sources the best historians are adding research in multinational archives. In Chapter 7, Stephen G. Rabe assesses the literature marking the shifts in reputation of these four presidents. Each felt, in his own way, imprisoned by the Cold War, and none of them, Rabe concludes, could free himself or his foreign policy from its constraints. With regard to approach, Rabe notes that while “historians of Cold War presidents have been aware of” and have used the “analytic tools of language, gender, race, religion, and ethnicity ... the most influential studies in the field remain ... studies of people and power.” Power, of course, lies at the heart of most foreign relations, including those that draw on the supposedly natural power differentials expressed through gender, race, or ethnicity.

The historiographical essays on U.S. relations with Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia and Africa emphasize the huge array of topics and the increasing availability of non-U.S. archival sources. In Chapter 9, Mark T. Gilderhus and Michael E. Neagle applaud the fading away of

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triumphalist views of U.S. relations with Latin America, the new documentation on the Cuban missile crisis, the opening of other archives, and the growing use of cultural and transnational approaches to assess the full range of interactions across borders. In Chapter 10, Douglas J. Little similarly notes the turn to cultural and transnational approaches as historians try to understand the consequences of U.S. political, economic, and military policies in the Middle East. Shaping those policies, Little reminds us, are the “basic continuities that guided every occupant of the Oval Office during the Cold War and beyond ... oil, Israel, and containment.” Mark Atwood Lawrence (Chapter 11) evaluates the literature on Asia and Africa as a synecdoche of the overall picture of U.S. relations with the world. He assesses the debate over whether Washington’s Asian and African policies during the Cold War were fundamentally assertive in trying to spread America’s ideology and economic system, or basically defensive in trying to counter threats to global stability. Lawrence notes the efforts of scholars to trace the agency of Asian and African governments in shaping U.S. policy, as well as the ways in which “official decisions are embedded in broader social and cultural currents.” He also delineates the shifting emphases of presidential administrations and the emergence, by the 1970s, of human rights as at least a lip-service concern of policy makers.

Topics of historical inquiry differ in the degree to which they invite, or require, a transnational, culturally informed approach. The chapters by Thomas “Tim” Borstelmann, Jonathan Reed Winkler, Bradley R. Simpson, and Emily S. Rosenberg all discuss scholarship that reflects the cultural and transnational turns and that includes in the mix of analytical factors the agency of non-state actors and of persons and institutions outside the United States. Borstelmann (Chapter 15) delineates the differences among world, comparative, global, and transnational history while introducing the emerging literature on migration, diasporas, and changing notions of territoriality. He points out that in the post-Cold War world, “globalization realigned daily lives around the world and reoriented many of the questions that historians of U.S. foreign relations have asked.” Winkler (Chapter 13) lays out a wealth of barely touched research topics dealing with international communications, transportation, data and scientific exchanges, and trade controls. He also mentions the cross-border efforts to control populations, protect the environment, and develop agriculture.

Human rights and terrorism, Simpson (Chapter 12) explains, “traverse the realms of policy, ideas, culture, and activism.” Here, too, lies a treasure

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of unexplored topics including the negotiations that led to (or blocked) various UN human rights covenants, the surge in human rights talk in the 1970s, the roles of executive branch agencies and the U.S. Congress, the hundreds of nongovernmental human rights organizations, the impact on the Cold War of the Helsinki process, and, not least, “the ideological, political, and military rationale for U.S.-sponsored ‘human rights wars.’” Like human rights, terrorism invites attention to the role of non-state actors and to the growing importance of symbolic, highly visible politics made possible by the pace and ubiquity of global communications. Historians have thus far done little work on U.S. counterterrorism policy, the impact of terrorism on domestic society, or how other nations have perceived U.S. actions as terrorism. Nor have historians fully explained how Americans’ understanding of terrorism has changed over time.

In Chapter 14, Rosenberg looks at the literature on the cultural and economic phenomenon of mass consumption. She focuses simultaneously on the globalization of consumption and on the differentiation of products within that earth-straddling movement. All this could have political consequences, as was graphically demonstrated by the popular pressures that helped tear down the Berlin Wall.

As the myriad of topics in these essays suggest, the field of foreign relations history is becoming increasingly rich and diverse. Inadequacies and blind spots of course remain. But consider the trajectory since 1995, when the first edition of this volume reiterated the prevailing concern that foreign relations history somehow had to return from “margin to mainstream” of the historical discipline.<sup>14</sup> Some two decades later, that history has indeed returned to a “mainstream” that itself has been transformed. What must be preserved in all this change is a cultural/political phenomenon Gienow-Hecht described in her *JAH* response to Zeiler: “Diplomatic historians may harshly criticize and violently disagree with each other, but ... they have kept on talking and have not broken into a myriad of antagonistic satellite societies and conventions. That effort to maintain a dialogue across analytical disagreements ... is diplomatic history’s – and diplomacy’s – greatest asset and one that could inspire the entire profession.”<sup>15</sup>

## Notes

- 1 While the field was known for decades as U.S. diplomatic history, many scholars have come to designate themselves as historians of U.S. foreign relations, the United States in the world, or the United States and the world. Those venturing away from a U.S.-based focus can label their field international



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history. In this essay we use the term “foreign relations history” with the assumption that it encompasses cross-border interactions of every possible description.

- 2 Michael J. Hogan (ed.), *America in the World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 163–64. In his 2003 SHAFR presidential address, Hogan expanded on this call for a broader, more sophisticated approach. See Michael J. Hogan, “The Next Big Thing,” *Diplomatic History* 28 (January 2004): 1–21.
- 3 Thomas W. Zeiler, “The Diplomatic Bandwagon: A State of the Field,” *Journal of American History* 95 (March 2009): 1053.
- 4 Ibid., 1055.
- 5 Ibid., 1072.
- 6 Kristin Hoganson, “Hop off the Bandwagon! It’s a Mass Movement, Not a Parade,” *Journal of American History* 95 (March 2009): 1087–91.
- 7 Mario Del Pero, “On the Limits of Thomas Zeiler’s Triumphalism,” *Journal of American History* 95 (March 2009): 1079–82.
- 8 Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, “What Bandwagon? Diplomatic History Today,” *Journal of American History* 95 (March 2009): 1083–86.
- 9 Fredrik Logevall, “Politics and Foreign Relations,” *Journal of American History* 95 (March 2009): 1074–78.
- 10 Erez Manela, “The United States in the World” in Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr (ed.), *American History Now* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 201.
- 11 Ibid., 203.
- 12 In 2011, the top five were: a nearly thirty-year-old article on “The Post-Revisionist Synthesis” by John Lewis Gaddis; an essay on 9/11 by Melvyn P. Leffler; an article on “Anime and the Globalizing of America” by Andrew C. Mckevitt; a piece on Truman’s decision to drop the bomb by J. Samuel Walker; and an article on using the senses as an approach to foreign relations by Andrew J. Rotter. Gaddis’s essay, a perennial favorite, had more downloads than the total of the second and third most popular articles. *Diplomatic History* 2012 *Annual Report*, p. 15.
- 13 For a “how-to” handbook on various approaches and methodologies, see Frank Costigliola and Michael J. Hogan (ed.), *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 3rd edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- 14 Hogan, “The Historiography of American Foreign Relations: An Introduction” in Hogan (ed.), *America in the World*, 165.
- 15 Gienow-Hecht, “What Bandwagon? Diplomatic History Today,” 1086.



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# The Charlie Maier Scare and the Historiography of American Foreign Relations, 1959–1980

Mark Philip Bradley

The Charlie Maier Scare began in 1980. In many ways its grip on the historiography of American foreign relations persists to the present day. In an essay for the *Past Before Us*, a panoramic assessment of contemporary American historical scholarship, Harvard historian Charles S. Maier wrote:

The history of international relations (including here American diplomatic history as well as that of other countries) cannot, alas, be counted among the pioneering fields of the discipline in the 1970s. At universities and among the educated public that reads and helps to produce serious historical scholarship, diplomatic history has become a stepchild. Promising graduate students are tempted by the methodological excitement attending social history. The output of mature scholars has been intermittent. Seminal and rich works indeed have appeared. Still, there has been no wave of transforming research during the 1970s comparable to the sustained output on American slavery or labor or the prenational American experience.... For historians of American foreign relations there was no catalytic book comparable, for example, to E. P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*.<sup>1</sup>

The reverberations of Maier's comments unleashed what can only be considered a thirty-year panic among historians of American diplomacy. Maier tapped into an escalating unease and dread about the future of the field. The social history train, the new trinity of race, class and gender, and, soon, the cultural turn seemed to leave diplomatic historians in the dust. Replacement lines were no longer a sure thing. Opportunities to publish were drying up, as were book prizes. The "best" graduate students, as Maier suggested, were looking elsewhere. Or so go the dominant memories of those dark decades.

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To suggest the “crisis” was entirely produced by Maier’s essay is of course hyperbole. The existential panic had, and has, larger and varied causes. And despite the shock value of Maier’s opening lines, the critique he offered of the field was exceptionally measured. But it nonetheless stuck, and, for many, it stung. Indeed in the years that followed, the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations’ flagship journal *Diplomatic History* sometimes read as a sustained refutation of Maier’s claims: almost as many articles have appeared in it that reference and reflect upon his essay as those that deal with George Kennan’s Long Telegram.<sup>2</sup>

The focus of Maier’s concern, in his words, the era of “marking time,” is the writing of American foreign relations history in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>3</sup> But from our remove how does that twenty-year slice of the historiography now look? How did the field unfold in real time over that period? What were the politics and sociology of knowledge that produced it? Was there a crisis? Did it end? And more broadly, what are the implications of the historiography of the 1960s and 1970s for our practice today?

To begin to address those questions requires a look back at what scholars of American diplomatic history were writing and reading in the 1960s and 1970s. A retrospective examination of the field reveals considerable vigor and innovation. A host of major book prizes – among them Pulitzers, Bancrofts, the American Historical Association’s Beveridge and Dunning prizes, and National Book Award finalists – were awarded to what decades later remained seminal works: Felix Gilbert’s *To the Farewell Address* (1961); Walter LaFeber’s *The New Empire* (1963); Bradford Perkins’s *Castlereagh and Adams* (1964); Dorothy Borg’s *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933–38* (1964); Robert L. Beisner’s *Twelve Against Empire* (1968); N. Gordon Levin’s *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics* (1968); John Lewis Gaddis’s *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War* (1972); Martin J. Sherwin’s *A World Destroyed* (1975); and Christopher Thorne’s *Allies of a Kind* (1978). Inexplicably off the radar of prize committees but just as interpretatively field-defining and iconoclastic in their approaches were William A. Williams’s *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959); Arno Mayer’s *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking* (1959); Ernest R. May’s *Imperial Democracy* (1961); Akira Iriye’s *After Imperialism* (1965); Lloyd C. Gardner’s *Economic Aspects of the New Deal* (1964); Thomas J. McCormick’s, *China Market* (1967); Marilyn B. Young’s *Rhetoric of Empire* (1968); Joan Hoff Wilson’s