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"Changing the Topic: Diplomatic History and the Historical Profession"

Barbara Weinstein, New York University

I am delighted to have been invited, as the new president of the AHA, to address some remarks to the SHAFR membership and initiate a conversation about ways in which SHAFR and the AHA can strengthen their relationship to the mutual benefit of both organizations. It is in this spirit that I am sharing with you some of my thoughts on the changing composition of the historical profession and what it might imply for historians of diplomacy/foreign relations.

The January 2007 issue of AHA Perspectives included an intriguing article by Robert B. Townsend, academic data analyst extraordinaire, entitled “What’s in a Label? Changing Patterns of Faculty Specialization since 1975.” It was also, for historians in certain fields, a very sobering article. As a Latin Americanist I was stunned to see that my field’s share of the historical profession had declined precipitously between 1975 and 1990 and that even after a slow but steady recovery over the last 15 years, its percentage as of 2005 remained below the 1975 level.

Latin America aside, in general, the data indicated that the shifts in geographic specialization were actually quite small; the distribution of academic jobs by region of study has changed remarkably little over the last thirty years. What the statistics did reveal, however, were significant changes in topical specialization. Some topics—for example, women/gender and cultural history—experienced dramatic increases in their percentages of the profession, while others—intellectual, economic and diplomatic/international—showed sharp declines. (Townsend gathered data using all related terms for each field.) For the members of SHAFR, no doubt the most arresting and disturbing of these trends is the decline in the proportion of diplomatic/international historians, who made up 7 percent of listed faculty in 1975 and only 3.1 percent in 2005. The percentage of departments listing at least one faculty member specializing in diplomatic/international history fell from 75 to 46 percent in those thirty years.

Even for those of us who work in other topical fields, a shift of this magnitude should give us pause. To be sure, first we need to figure out what the numbers mean: we need to ask the question Rob Townsend posed in the title of this article: “What’s in a label?” Do these numbers reflect a real decline in the percentage of historians researching and teaching about diplomacy/foreign relations, or do they indicate, first and foremost, a change in labeling? But our consideration of the “What’s in a label?” question shouldn’t end there: we need to ask whether changes in labeling indicate superficial alterations to keep up with academic fashion or a more profound re-thinking of categories and approaches.

Unfortunately, once we start inquiring into a label’s meanings, we leave the terrain of hard and fast evidence and shift to the shaky ground of speculation. I would assume, for example, that at least some of the decline in the percentage of diplomatic historians reflects a sense in the profession that other labels carry more prestige or expand job opportunities. Some scholars may continue to do what we might describe as diplomatic history or history of foreign relations and simply refrain from calling it that. But I have no data beyond anecdotal evidence to support this claim.

There are two ways in which a topical field can decline in terms of its percentage of the profession: those previously in that field adopt a new topic of specialization, or new entrants to the profession favor other fields (partly in response, presumably, to those fields being emphasized in job announcements). To make matters more complicated, there is also the factor of multiple topical specializations. If you look at directories of history departments, you will see that many scholars...
display no topical label at all. This seems to be especially true of my fellow Latin Americanists, who almost always list Latin America, their period of concentration (colonial/modern), and then the specific country or subregion (Mexico, the Andes), but only rarely a topical area. Historians in other fields, on the other hand, may list two, three, four topical areas. In these cases, one label that is very likely to appear these days is “cultural.”

The increasing popularity of the “cultural history” label, which can be adopted by almost anyone except the hardcore economic or demographic historian, surely indicates not just a shift in methodology or object of study, but in academic vogue. If we take a look at the core faculty in the history department at Indiana University—43 historians—we discover that slightly over half (22) include cultural as one of their topical fields. But only 2 of those 22 indicate cultural history as their sole topical interest; of the other 20, 12 list “social and cultural” and 8 list “intellectual and cultural.” Certainly, some of those historians listing “cultural” as one of their topical fields do study something we would all identify as “culture” and do adopt a particular interpretive approach associated with cultural history, but I think many of the self-identified cultural historians adopt this label in part because it currently has cachet and has the additional attraction of being a protean category that almost anyone can claim. In contrast, diplomatic history appears to be not nearly so fashionable and may pose the additional “disadvantage” of not being particularly mutable. In other words, there are seemingly endless themes that can be glossed as cultural history, but what we regard as diplomatic history or history of foreign relations tends to be more fixed and finite. And given current fashions, if a historian is doing anything that can be remotely defined as cultural history, he/she is likely to claim that label, but only someone very directly and explicitly engaged in the history of foreign relations is likely to label him or herself that way.

There is some good news in this for SHAFR and the larger field of diplomatic/foreign relations history. Cultural history may have grown by leaps and bounds over the last thirty years, but it is a field with little coherence, a label that’s an empty signifier, whereas diplomatic history/foreign relations has suffered a relative decline, but those who identify with this topical field are more likely to be grounded in some common questions and share certain research methods and objectives. Therefore, those concerned about the field’s shrinkage (at least as a percentage of the profession—absolute numbers may have gone up because of the increase in the total number of historians) might focus not so much on rescuing the reputation of diplomatic history, which is still a major topical field that outpaces both religious and economic history, but on cultivating a more expansive notion of the field of “foreign relations” so that it can more easily encompass scholars working on transnational history and on topics such as colonialism and globalization.

To do so would require engaging with the issues that have led many scholars to refuse the “foreign relations” or “diplomatic history” label even as they conduct research that could comfortably fit within that framework, and here I think there is more in play than just a matter of academic fashion. Once again, we might consider the “surge” (if you’ll forgive the language) in cultural history. Even though new cultural historians have leveled very serious critiques at both social and intellectual history, there are still many historians (and not just at Indiana) who list their topics of specialization as “social and cultural” or “intellectual and cultural.” In contrast, I could not find a single case (though I might have missed it—this was not a very scientific survey) of “diplomatic and cultural” or “foreign relations and culture,” despite these combinations being every bit as intellectually viable as the previous ones. I would hazard a guess that the absence of such pairings reflects a lingering and excessively narrow conception of foreign relations history that sees it solely as the study of specific “official” actors operating within a limited socio-political framework that excludes considerations of gender, culture, race/ethnicity, and class. And this despite all the recent work on cultural diplomacy, on constructions of public opinion, on the gendered and racialized aspects of foreign relations, on the significance of transnational networks that transcend official venues.

Why the study of foreign relations continues to be seen by some as divorced from these other robust tendencies in the field of history is a bit of a mystery to me. It may be that precisely what gives this topical field an unusual degree of coherence may inhibit its capacity to accommodate a more expansive vision of its field of study. But I suspect that among some younger historians, a particular type of diplomatic/foreign relations history that many of them consider “old-fashioned” or even retrograde has come to stand in for the entire topical field, leaving them reluctant to take on the “foreign relations” label. In addition, they may see it as an academic identity that limits rather than expands their options on the job market.

It should be apparent that I have been assuming throughout this discussion that the statistics in the Townsend article are worrisome for those with an intellectual stake in the field of diplomatic/international history (a category certainly not
restricted to practitioners). The problem, however, should not be exaggerated, since it is arguable that much of the decline is indeed a result of re-labeling and not a wave of rejection of foreign relations as an object of study, something that would be nearly tragic under current circumstances. Still, labels are a form of language, and having lived through the linguistic turn, most of us recognize that language is not “just words.” The fact that the percentage of departments with at least one self-declared diplomatic/international historian has dropped by over a third is a statistic of some significance.

How this trend should be addressed, or reversed, is a matter that escapes my analytical capacities, but I do have one specific suggestion that harkens back to my original purpose in writing this article. That is for historians of foreign relations to engage more actively in the annual AHA meetings. I realize that the holding of a separate mid-year SHAFR conference means that the AHA meetings are not the principal site for the presentation of work on the history of American foreign relations. However, the AHA is the ideal location for attracting new audiences and young scholars who may have a certain conception of the field that could be dismantled by one brilliant paper presentation or stimulating roundtable discussion. And for those who have been discouraged in the past when a panel has been rejected, or who feel that the program is dominated by social- and cultural-themed panels, let me emphasize that a deliberate effort has been made in recent years to expand the number of sessions and to diversify the offerings as much as possible. New formats—roundtables, workshops, poster sessions, book discussions, pre-circulated papers—also lend themselves to the kind of intense exchanges among panelists and with the audience that we usually associate with smaller conferences. So my parting suggestion is to expand the presence of SHAFR and the visibility of those who do the history of foreign relations at upcoming AHA meetings as a small step toward expanding the contours of the field.
"Review of Victoria de Grazia’s *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe*"

Daniel T. Rodgers, Department of History, Princeton University

In a book as filled with vividly crafted stories as Victoria de Grazia’s *Irresistible Empire*, readers will have their own favorite vignettes. Mine is the story of Richard W. Boogaart, a Kansan, owner and operator of supermarkets in Kansas and Mexico City, who was Nelson Rockefeller’s agent in Italy in the winter of 1957. “He was tall and broad, with large hands and feet, and his slow gestures and pleasant face exuded quiet self-confidence,” de Grazia writes. “They would have guessed that he was American even if he hadn’t been wearing a cowboy hat against the raw February drizzle.” (376) Brushing his Cadillac past Milan’s small, cramped produce stores, crowded bakeries, and butcher shops as if they were seedy, small-time cattle farms cluttering up the space the big spreads needed, he was looking for vacant lots on which to build gleaming new supermarkets. Boogaart, the food distribution missionary, could have jumped right off the pages of a Graham Greene novel. When he and Rockefeller’s International Basic Economy Corporation were done, the supermarket chain they had founded had blossomed into one of Italy’s largest.

This story of the way in which modern, U.S.–style food marketing came to Italy is one of the dozens of extraordinary vignettes to be found in de Grazia’s immensely learned, ambitious, and original history of European consumer patterns in the twentieth century. She opens with the story of the novelist Thomas Mann, the Old World chronicler of decadence and enervation, signing his name in late 1928 to the founding charter of Munich’s new Rotary Club. She paints a vivid picture of the Leipzig trade fair, where in the late 1920s thousands of manufacturers exhibited their wares in a market ruled by small batches and specialized production, radically unlike the mass-market, brand-name system of production that Henry Ford and others were pioneering. Her chapter on the post-war European consumer revolution opens with the army of sales agents that fanned out across France in 1968 with the goal of putting a box of Ariel, Procter & Gamble’s newest laundry detergent, into the hands of every urban housewife. With hundreds of such telling details and a powerful synthetic framing, de Grazia has written a history of shifting and colliding consumption patterns that in its breadth, subtlety of argument, and intellectual engagement has not been seen since Simon Schama’s *The Embarrassment of Riches*. For historians of modern consumer capitalism, this is an indispensable book, no matter what their national specialty.

For historians of international and comparative history, on the other hand, *Irresistible Empire* poses more of a puzzle. Boogaart’s mission to Milan is the material out of which a history of the U.S. commercial conquest of the world might well be written. American consumer goods did pour out across the world in the twentieth century. In the thirty years after 1945, an army of Levis, Coca-Cola, and ball-point pens, and with them a new sense of universal norms and standards of living, invaded war-prostrated Europe. The mundane, de Grazia insists, was transformative: brand-name goods, packageable and predictable movie stars, and not the least, washing machines and laundry detergents.

The oddity of de Grazia’s account of the Rockefeller mission to Milan is that it comes so late in this large, densely packed book. For the first 300 pages of *Irresistible Empire*, the sales agents of American consumer capitalism beat on Europe’s doors, but they are astonishingly ineffective at conquering its habits and institutions. Rotary, she shows, was taken up by the central European aristo-bourgeoisie as another marker of culture and status; when a group of genuine American Rotarians, straight off the pages of *Babbitt*, showed up in Dresden in 1931 to sing the clubs’ anthem, “R-O-T-A-R-Y,” their hosts could not conceal their astonishment. Edward Filene’s mission to sell Europeans on the chain store idea in the 1930s, de Grazia shows, shattered on shopkeepers’ resistance. European magazine advertisements turned more prosy, to be sure, in the manner favored by the J. Walter Thompson agency; Gillette razor blades (like the ones George Babbitt began his day
with) dominated the disposable razor blade market; American movies washed over Europe in the early 1920s until quotas
began to stem the flood. But de Grazia herself is much more interested in describing the ways in which Italian and German
fascists built successful film counter-industries that co-opted Hollywood’s formulas for their own, sharply distinctive
purposes.

At almost every turn, from the 1920s through the early 1950s, she shows, the penetration of U.S.–style marketing systems
was contested and incomplete, “erratic [and] often obstructed.” (5) And that was, she insists, because U.S. and European
consumer patterns after 1920 were rooted in fundamentally distinctive forms of capitalism. The “bourgeois regime of
consumption” (10) that prevailed in Europe was a cultural system yoked to caste and status, in which goods were agents of
class- and locally bounded solidarism. “Everything” in the European pattern of consumption before 1945 was different from
the pattern in the United States, she writes: from the size of markets to the modes of distribution, the notions of profit, and
“the very concept of the consumer.” (105) Scales were small and ambitions were restrained; upscale department stores
catered to the wealthy; the working-class, tied to a “culture of poverty” (106), shopped at the local corner store, made do
with mended clothes, and when they got more income spent it all on a slightly better cut of meat. Goods in this regime
divided populations rather than homogenized them; “they produced new sources of differentiation and exclusion rather
than making standards more homogeneous and accessible.” (107)

In a culture of consumption framed like this, de Grazia suggests, it was not Ford or Filene, with their visions of overflowing
cornucopias for everyone, who captured the mass imagination. It was Nazism, a system of “command consumption” (125)
that married the efficiencies of Fordist production to the ugliest status resentments of a shopkeeper culture. Through the
first two thirds of de Grazia’s book, virtually all her chapters end up in the vortex of Nazism. It was, she seems to suggest,
the logical outcome of the European regime of consumption: the historical end of that line. In meta-contrasts like these, in
de Grazia’s pitching of her account as nothing less than a “transatlantic clash of civilizations” (10), Graham Greene links
arms with Max Weber. The novelist’s gift for detail fuses with the macro-sociologist’s penchant for distinct, quasi-static,
and virtually incommensurable ideal types.

The result, I suspect most readers will feel, is a brilliantly contradictory book. The title, the preface, and the chapter
subtitles all run in one direction: the relentless advance of the U.S. “Market Empire.” The actual argument for the first two-thirds of the book runs along a different line altogether, toward ideal types so different that only the exhaustion and defeat of outright war opened the way for the habits and ideals of mass consumption to take hold. Even then, de Grazia’s treatment of the period of high imperial ambitions on the part of U.S. corporations after the Second World War stresses the persistence of the older cultural regime. She notes the hesitancy of Marshall Plan officials to encourage consumer ambitions, the “protracted and fraught” (401) struggles between supermarketers and shoppers, and the resistance of entrenched habits. The U.S. commercial hegemony was barely launched, she suggests, when in the 1970s others began to overtake it. The French retail giant Carrefour outmaneuvered U.S. supermarketers in Latin America and outsells Wal-Mart in China. The American advance through Europe was, in short, irresistible yet fraught with massive obstacles, almost a century in the making yet evanescent, peaceful in its means of persuasion yet utterly dependent on its rivals’ military defeat.

There are difficulties on both sides of this oddly splayfooted argument have troubles, and Weber’s ghost haunts both. The long shadow of his influence has affected comparative history for a long time, turning tendencies into quasi-totalizing types and then conflating types with nations at the expense of all the contest and diversity they contain. These are common moves in the field of international studies, but they misread both the highly complex inner divisions of nations and the relations between them. At a certain altitude of analysis, consumption standards were sharply different in Europe and the United States throughout most of this period. But a step closer in, and the differences within the United States and the nations of Europe confound the easy labels.

“Nothing marked American consumer culture’s precocious development more than the wide consensus that had emerged by the 1920s that all its citizens partook more or less of the American Standard of Living,” de Grazia writes, echoing the convictions of many Europeans of the time. (100) By that standard, however, the cash- and commodity-poor American South was literally another country. Retail sales per capita in the South in 1930 were half the level of the industrial Northeast. In the heart of the cotton belt in 1930 there was one automobile for every 13 people, one radio for every 30 or more, and one telephone for every 60. 1 The red-clay, barefoot South of the 1920s and 1930s, where race and class were
indelibly etched onto the space of the local crossroads store, sustained a consumption regime more different from the urban North than Mann’s world was from Babbitt’s.

Even in the heart of Babbitt territory, in Muncie, Indiana in the 1920s, the Lynds’ reported, all you needed to do to tell a family’s class position was to see whose light was on at 6 AM, when working-class shifts began. White working-class families in 1920s Chicago shopped at the local store for the same reasons that Milan housewives did: because they lived close by and transportation was expensive, because they felt a tie of ethnic solidarity with the owner, because they could argue in their own language with him, because he would give them credit. The family budgets of unskilled wage earners in Chicago show expenses for bananas, cherries, and biscuits, but there wasn’t a bed per person in half the households. A generation later, in the early 1940s, when the modern revolution in mass consumer habits was clearly taking hold, California state experts on the standard of living circulated three different model budgets: one appropriate for an executive’s family, one for a clerk’s, one for a wage earner’s. The wage earner’s family was assumed to eat more than the executive’s family but almost never to have a dinner guest. It was expected to buy its car used rather than new, to own a radio but not a phonograph, to make do with four times less lipstick and without any nail polish at all, to go on day excursions rather than the executive family’s two-week rental-cottage vacation. Even in the land of mass consumption, the lines of class were deeply etched. Goods divided Americans, just as they divided Europeans. 2

By the same token, the “Market Empire” of mass consumption had its entrepreneurs and innovators from the beginning in Europe as well as the United States, chafing at the regime of the small shopkeepers. Brand names, de Grazia notes, were as deeply seated in European commerce as in the United States in the 1920s. European department store innovators, who had battled the shopkeepers since the late nineteenth century, were quick to see the market to be captured in chain and “five-and-dime” outlets: Prisunic, Monoprix, Epa, Marks & Spencer, British Home Stores. One of the odd (and powerfully homogenizing) quirks of Irresistible Empire that this rare appearance of English referents underscores is the virtual absence of Britain from de Grazia’s history of European consumption. Britain was the site of the Lever Brothers’ brand-name empire, home of a middle class as brash and pushy as anything in Babbitt’s Zenith, birthplace of the cooperative store and its distinctive labor/consumer politics, site of the 1920s “homes-for-heroes” campaign to build an entirely new standard of housing for the working class, a public program to raise general standards of the living that (for all its failures) had no counterpart in the United States until the New Deal rural electrification project and the FHA.

Even supermarkets were not an American innovation. Boogaart was in Milan in 1957, rather than in Germany or England or Switzerland, because the market for mass-distribution food shops was, the Rockefeller people thought, already saturated there, dominated by European innovators and capital networks. The U.S. government, de Grazia tells us, sponsored a full-scale, fully stocked “American Way Supermarket” in Rome for the 1956 meetings of the International Congress of Food Distribution. But if this was empire—as, in a way, it was—it was an empire that from the beginning had its organizers and collaborators all across the older consumption regimes.

What we might better say, I think, is that the “Market Empire” was from the outset a multiply located, transnational presence. The dream of a democracy of goods was not born in the United States. It was hardly present there as anything approaching a reality until the 1950s, just about the time when Boogaart was prowling through Milan. 3 Expansion of that empire of mass-distributed goods has been the project now of some governments, now of others. It was momentarily the project of the U.S. government in Europe in the generation after 1945. But the face it wears (American, multinational, or universal) is always to some degree a disguise, a veil drawn across the networks of a particular kind of highly mobile transnational, flexible capitalism. The globalization literature heralds those networks’ power and allure, as if they were wired into the deepest human desires. De Grazia’s achievement is to map out instead, with exceptional power and subtlety, the resistances those networks of commerce generate and the resentments they incite, the specificity of their contexts, and the power of the preexisting systems of goods and statuses that they must overturn. Irresistible Empire is a rarity in an age of hyped-up book marketing: a book vastly deeper and better than its title.


"Review of Victoria de Grazia’s Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe"

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Irresistible US

Victoria de Grazia’s *Irresistible Empire* examines U.S. cultural influence in Europe during the twentieth century. She argues that the modern consumer revolution, born in America, became the wedge for a growing cultural hegemony that transformed work, pleasure, values, and even identity in Europe. Drawing on years of research in diverse archives, de Grazia has crafted an absorbing narrative that is driven by the stories of dozens of specific individuals and organizations, stories that spanned what she on one occasion refers to as the “White Atlantic.”

De Grazia’s clear and colorful prose is as stunning as her research. I kept pausing to savor and jot down phrases and examples that were just too well turned to skim past quickly. She describes the United States, for example, as a “great imperium with the outlook of a great emporium.” She portrays the extension of the Rotary Club movement as “small-town America hobnobbing with the aristo-bourgeoisie” of Europe, and her account of the dilemmas involved in translating into different languages the concept of Rotary “brother” and the organization’s occupational classification system reads as high comedy. Prepare for a few inserts into your lecture notes, SHAFR compañeros/as y Brüder.

Despite—or because of—the book’s virtues, however, the title seems inexplicable. Irresistible? Empire? Neither of these words seems to fit this admirable book. De Grazia suggests that Europeans often resisted Americanization. Moreover, her invocation of the word “empire” may connote the kind of heavy-handed “cultural imperialism” framework that her nuanced presentation adroitly avoids.

These two words may have been a marketing ploy. “Irresistible” suggests that the acceptance of U.S. influence was both inevitable and voluntary—a standard trope of the kind of exceptionalist interpretation (which this book is not) that is attractive to the Barnes and Noble crowd. The term “empire” has had a popular renaissance in the last four years that would have surely have amazed William A. Williams. Williams and his followers were constantly under attack for their use of the “e” word to describe the “American Way of Life.” Now, however, the word is ubiquitous, invoked routinely by both those who celebrate U.S. power and those who wish to condemn it. In the “recent nonfiction” section of bookstores, “empire” may be as prevalent on covers as, say, “well-being.” Taken together, the two words in the title have a pleasing ring: if the United States operates an empire, then at least let it be an irresistible one. It is appropriate that a book about the global spread of “market capitalism” should be so well packaged.

Enough grumbling about the title, however. If it attracts an audience to this book, should anyone complain? Unlike the title, the book portrays cultural interaction with a complexity that few scholars have matched.

It has remarkable strengths. De Grazia is a fine story-teller, and her chapters add depth and texture to the complicated processes that may be called Americanization or modernization. She analyzes how America’s “Market Empire” propelled changes in twentieth-century Europe by examining the spread of a number of specific “social inventions” of America’s
“consumer democracy”—corporations and their ethic of “service capitalism,” the Rotary Club movement, mass advertising and distribution, public opinion polling, Hollywood films, supermarkets and other consumer industries. The much vaunted and admired American “Standard of Living”—a concept fashioned alongside the production and sales innovations that made more goods available faster and to more people—gradually wooed Europeans away from their older craft-based economies and their flirtations with various versions of command economies. She also examines interconnections and cross-flows, as groups of Americans and Europeans exchanged ideas about social and economic organization and shared their practices with each other.

Calling into question any single or simplistic framework for cultural interrelationships, de Grazia shows that Europeans simultaneously accepted and resisted various aspects of “Americanization.” The allure of American products and the resistance to their possible social consequences helped define the values and the ideologies that established fault-lines within European politics. Americans were both irresistible and abhorrent. Their reception depended on the time, place, and circumstances in which Europeans encountered them. Moreover, De Grazia’s study seems to amplify a point made by Richard Pells and others: while America may have helped transform Europe, the transformation itself promoted in Europe an idea that America was “not like us.” For example, the fast food and slow food movements (which in some quarters became simplified icons for America vs. Europe) both took definition from one another.

De Grazia also describes how some processes and habits that came to be identified with America sprouted simultaneously or even first in Europe. Department stores featuring international and especially imperial products and large-scale marketing, for example, emerged in both Europe and the United States, and their entrepreneurs traded techniques and ideas. J. Walter Thompson spread into Europe in the interwar era, popularizing major American brands and affecting European marketing practices. But Europe also had advertising that grew from its own traditions of poster art. Similarly, although America tilted toward the model of “sovereign consumer” while Europeans leaned toward the model of “social citizen,” political platforms of the late 1940s on both sides of the Atlantic (from the New Deal to the Italian Constitution of 1948) emphasized an active social role for the state. De Grazia also notes that in recent decades America has declined as a center of the market revolution, as globalized capital—much of it Europe-based—has denationalized economic processes. Her work on these subjects is comparative and transnational history at its best.

Irresistible Empire also suggests some general thoughts about transnational cultural history. De Grazia’s in-depth research, often in highly unusual archives, illuminates all kinds of cultural and economic interactions and is an important corrective to international histories that focus only on state policy. Still, she could have expanded her account by dipping into government documents from the various “informational” agencies that tried to affect politics and culture in Europe. In “Enduring Freedom: Public Diplomacy and U.S. Foreign Policy” (American Quarterly, 2005) Liam Kennedy and Scott Lucas ask whether the recent scholarly emphasis on culture sometimes unwittingly provides cover for American power by slighting the efforts of government to shape cultural agendas. This article might well be read as a supplement to de Grazia’s book.

The U.S. government is the elephant that lives almost invisibly in world that de Grazia presents. Its promotional activities on behalf of the American way figure briefly in her discussion of the Marshall Plan. But as work by Scott Lucas, Laura Belmonte, Kenneth Osgood, and many others shows, the overt and covert governmental efforts to carry out “psychological warfare” (or “public diplomacy,” as it came to be known after the 1960s) comprised a major building block of U.S. Cold War strategy for decades. Western European countries, America’s most important trading partners and allies, became primary targets of this offensive to win hearts and minds.

To claim that these initiatives helped shape the “irresistibility” of American life in various ways is not to portray Europeans as dupes. Studies show that propaganda often fails to shape anyone but those already so inclined. Nevertheless, if it is important not to claim too much for government propaganda, it would be fatuous to imagine that the substantial U.S. support given to cultural “friends,” often through supposedly independent facades that even now are not all known, had no effect on Europeans. Historians must weigh the possible effects of well-funded, government-designed campaigns to “advertise” America, especially when presenting advertising as one of the major attributes of America’s “Market Empire.” Kennedy and Lucas warn that presenting cultural interactions within a transnational space in which the state has
disappeared risks “glossing the workings of state power across national borders.” State-funded campaigns to contribute money and media exposure to some groups while disrupting and discrediting other groups may have affected the balance between resistance and irresistibility.

That caveat aside, I believe this book will make a fine teaching vehicle because it raises large issues related to both public life and to the making of history. De Grazia implicitly argues, for example, that America’s global power in the twentieth century rested primarily on the idea that America had created a middle-class lifestyle for most of its citizens. The promise of a high “Standard of Living” for the masses—explored in one of the book’s most valuable chapters—constituted the real American Revolution. If America had an irresistible magnetism, it stemmed from the country’s apparent ability to feed, clothe, and educate most of its diverse people and then to provide them with the leisure time to buy exciting new products and have fun. Is this America—the land of confidence and promise, of social mobility and a broad middle class—still here and still thriving? De Grazia’s book provides no direct answer; it neither glorifies nor bashes contemporary America. But in these days of calls for better “public diplomacy” and “soft power,” her book may contribute to a discussion of what America symbolized to the world in the past and what it symbolizes today. Is it possible to recover America’s global magnetism, for example, in the context of domestic trends toward greater inequality, declining standards of living and health, aging infrastructure, public anxiety, and what Kevin Phillips calls the “de-enlightenment” of the population?

Finally, Irresistible Empire implicitly raises other significant issues related to language and discourse in the writing of history. De Grazia does not deeply engage the methodological terrain or interpretive dilemmas arising from the use of words such as Americanization, modernization, resistance, empire. Historians may use such words, of course, but readers should also continually problematize the discursive backgrounds with which they may be associated. De Grazia’s text (like the past itself) is open and rich enough to stimulate discussions about method and theory, and readers may take from it a diversity of meanings. Irresistible Empire. Or maybe not.
April 2007 Newsletter

"Simply Irresistible"

A Review of Victoria de Grazia’s *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe*

Brian Etheridge, John D. Winters Endowed Professor, La. Tech University

In the interest of full disclosure, I have an admission to make. I am a sucker for “lumpers,” those historians who, in the formulation of John Gaddis, seek to “deliver themselves of sweeping generalizations that attempt to make sense out of whole epochs . . . [and] reduce the sheer untidiness of history to neat patterns that fit precisely within the symmetrical confines of chapters of books.”

De Grazia’s subject is one of the biggest and most controversial of current times: the Americanization of Europe. Her focus is on the growth of the American consumer society, which she refers to as “the rise of a great imperium with the outlook of a great emporium.” To make sense of this phenomenon, she develops the concept of Market Empire, which she calls “an empire without frontiers” and others have described as an “empire by invitation” and the “empire of fun.” The most salient features of this empire are the interlocking and mutually supportive social institutions and cultural values that were exported along with its goods—namely, a civil society, American business norms, visions of democratic practice, and the firm belief that the spread of the empire contributes to international peace.

De Grazia traces the advance of the Market Empire by outlining a “transatlantic clash of civilizations” in which the American apostles of the consumer revolution are juxtaposed with the European defenders of bourgeois commercial practices. By the end of the century, she concludes, a “new transatlantic dialectic fostered by America’s consumer revolution” had come into being. She shows the large forces at work within this dialectic by relating the history of the spread of Rotary International, efforts to impose an American standard of living on Europe, the rise of American chain stores, the growth of American marketing and advertising, and the conquest of European cinema by Hollywood.

It is obvious that de Grazia is a gifted historian in her prime. Her breadth of knowledge is staggering. In researching this impressive work she visited archives in the United States, Germany, Italy, France, and Switzerland, and she appears comfortable in all of these national contexts. What is more, she has mastered a number of subjects related to her overall research agenda. She appears equally at home talking about chain stores and Hollywood, as sure of herself discussing Frank Woolworth as Erich Pommer. Moreover, her grasp of the written word is dazzling. Only a true wordsmith could intermingle slangy words like “cockamamie,” “control-freak,” and “oddball” with GRE-prep words like “dudgeon” and “divagations” without sounding hackneyed and/or contrived. (I am not embarrassed to say that I had to break out the dictionary on more than one occasion.) If I have one reservation about assigning this book to graduate students, it is that her style could complicate my teaching of basic historical writing. De Grazia writes with such authority and felicity that I
I am afraid some students will try to mimic her, most likely with disastrous results. If I assign the book, I must be prepared to repeat to my beguiled students, “Yes, but you’re no Victoria de Grazia.”

My fears about students’ misguided and clumsy attempts to copy her style are more than counterbalanced by her exemplary craftsmanship, however. At many points throughout the book I was reminded of *A Midwife’s Tale*, in which Laurel Thatcher Ulrich masterfully contextualizes thin documents to tell a rich and significant story. I thought that this enviable ability was most evident in the first chapter on Rotary International. This chapter is written so gracefully, especially at the beginning, that it would be easy to miss how much work went into it. With vivid descriptions and absorbing insights, it contrasts Duluth and Dresden, Sinclair Lewis and Thomas Mann, *Babbit* and *Buddenbrooks* to set up the differences between America and Europe. The rest of the chapter explores the fascinating expansion of Rotary across the Atlantic. A thorough look at the sources from which this mini-masterpiece is fashioned highlights how much imagination and creativity went into its creation. Just seeing how it was put together was worth the price of admission.

In fact, her writing is so mesmerizing and she is such a good storyteller that one can find oneself following along without being fully aware of what she is doing or how she is doing it (I am reminded, strangely enough, of George Kennan, who had a different but also very persuasive style). Since she is a “lumper” and covers such a large span of time with her book, failing to wake up and critically engage her work would translate into a failure to take advantage of one of the greatest contributions that lumpers have to offer—namely, that they provide an admirable departure point for discussing how and where current and future scholarship can build on, challenge, and otherwise revise the ways in which the subject has been synthesized.

In that spirit, I would like to raise a few issues that future scholars may choose to address. In the introduction, de Grazia lays out the big picture and familiarizes her readers with her integrative idea of Market Empire. After setting the macro-level stage, she then moves on to several case studies to flesh out how this Market Empire works. It is an interesting and almost necessary move, since tackling the entire phenomenon would be too much for one book or one lifetime. Yet I wish that she had returned more explicitly to the concept of Market Empire throughout the body of her book.

Her strategy of moving immediately from the macro level to case studies also deflects attention away from other significant developments. The effects of World War I and World War II are mentioned and are always, it seems, looming in the background. But the introduction and the narrative paint an almost fatalistic picture of the Market Empire’s inexorable movement through Europe, which raises a question that, while impossible to answer, is worthy of consideration: would Americanization have proceeded without these cataclysmic events in European history? How central were the two world wars to America’s eventual domination of Europe?

On a related matter, while I applaud her focus on non-state actors, which certainly has not been the norm in foreign relations history, I wonder if policymakers are perhaps too absent in this narrative. She begins with an anecdote about Woodrow Wilson, but then she largely ignores American policymakers and American foreign policy, despite the amount of research that has been done on the relationship between private and public interests (such as the whole notion of corporatism). American policymakers make brief appearances in her discussion of the post–WW II world, but it is worth noting that the Republicans of the 1920s were also aggressive in encouraging business interests abroad.

Other questions regarding periodization and content come to mind. Why does she concentrate so heavily on the interwar years? Again, by her own admission, Americanization reaches its zenith after World War II. Why spend so much time on the years before it? And why ignore the sixties and the seventies almost entirely? Her choice of case studies also raises questions. Why these particular “social inventions”? Why not a chapter on American clothing or American music? Why not a whole chapter on fast food?

Other reviewers have noted that the first six chapters follow a fairly standard pattern. A particular “social invention” is introduced, its American supporters are outlined, its European detractors are described, and finally Nazi Germany is presented as the only credible form of resistance to its spread. Are the differences between the American innovators and the European resisters as stark as de Grazia suggests? In many of these industries there was a greater degree of cross-fertilization than she lets on. Take Hollywood, for example. De Grazia admits that Hollywood was populated by
Europeans such as Billy Wilder, Fritz Lang, and Fred Zinnemann. Yes, they were Americanized to a degree, but their Europeanness also influenced their films.

De Grazia’s overall narrative structure and argument also raise questions about resistance. That the Nazi regime emerges as the most effective form of resistance is both ironic and troubling. As Max Friedman points out in another review, positioning Nazi Germany as primarily anti-American ignores the true nature of the murderous regime. But there has always been true resistance to mass society, and that resistance has manifested itself at all levels and in all regions. What de Grazia attacks with the pen has been and continues to be assaulted with the sword, whether it be in Middle America, Middle Europe, or the Middle East. How else does one understand the Days of Rage, the Red Army Faction or 9/11? It is in relation to this notion of domestic resistance that I think an extended discussion of the sixties would have been a most welcome addition to the book. I also think it is very important to emphasize here that diverse groups in the United States have criticized large-scale capitalism and mass consumerism since their inception, which points up a real irony: much of what Europeans have regarded as quintessentially “American” has been viewed as perniciously “anti-American” by America’s rural population. Put simply, there is evidence that the process De Grazia describes is a far more complex phenomenon than her trans-Atlantic clash of civilizations allows.

Finally, I think this question is worth asking: when compared to its eighteenth and nineteenth century ancestors and its twentieth-century rivals, is the modern consumer society that bad? Because consumerism’s deficiencies are so obvious, I think we have a tendency to romanticize the past. Consumerism offers a numbing standardization of goods and services often targeted at the most vulgar level, but it also provides a great deal to the masses that was unavailable before. Consumer society simply would not work if consumers did not buy cheap goods from Woolworth’s or Kmart. And while cheap, standardized goods and services may not necessarily represent the good life (especially for elites), they often have represented a better life for people who did not have access to these kinds of goods before. To paraphrase a now-famous political question: are we better off now than we were one hundred years ago? Surely it depends on how the “we” is defined, but many alive today would probably answer “yes” (which in itself might mean that American standards of the good life have triumphed).

In sum, de Grazia’s *Irresistible Empire* is an indispensable work for those who would seek to wrestle with the modern, globalizing world. It is an amazing piece of historical scholarship, immensely valuable on many different levels, and it establishes an agenda for future works on the complicated relationship between the United States and Europe. It is, like the empire it describes, simply irresistible.


April 2007 Newsletter

"The Other Side of Consumer Politics"

A Review of Victoria de Grazia’s *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe*

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It is an honor to participate in a roundtable discussion of Victoria de Grazia’s stunningly erudite *Irresistible Empire*, which is one of the best books ever published in the burgeoning field of consumer history and certainly the most important work to examine the interactions among mass consumption, domestic life, and foreign relations. This is the kind of book that scholars of consumer society should be writing: bold, explicitly comparative, empirically rich, and analytically rigorous. Too often terms like “Americanization,” “consumer culture,” and “mass consumption society” obscure more than they reveal. By defining her analytical framework so clearly and grounding her book in detailed case studies, de Grazia makes her arguments both bold and firmly rooted. At the same time, because her choices of topics are often surprising (as in the brilliant opening chapter on Rotary Clubs in the United States and Europe) or else re-visit from fresh perspectives topics that we thought we knew (such as advertising or the Marshall Plan), *Irresistible Empire* is wonderfully imaginative. It is also beautifully written, with finely wrought sentences making de Grazia’s powers of observation seem all the richer.

Consisting of interwoven case studies that proceed chronologically, *Irresistible Empire* offers a series of extraordinary windows into the society, economics, and politics of both the expanding American imperium and the European host regions. Without ever underestimating American commercial might, de Grazia confirms that “Americanization” has been a complex process with many unintended consequences and shows that while many aspects of American consumer culture were impossible to resist, as the title suggests, they were also desirable goals for ordinary Europeans. De Grazia rejects overly simplistic narratives of American hegemony, along with claims that Europeans were able to Americanize on their own terms, picking and choosing the characteristics they admired while rejecting the rest. For example, her examination of the Rotary Club phenomenon in America and Europe, highlighted by an instructive comparison of the Duluth and Dresden branches, demonstrates that while Europeans adapted these clubs for their own purposes, they also created new—and distinctly American—styles of rituals and social capital.

One of the many wonders of the book is that de Grazia is attentive to nuance and complication in each of her disparate case studies, yet she weaves them together into a coherent argument or, more precisely, set of arguments. Each of the cases demonstrates what she labels the five characteristics of the American “Market Empire” (6-9): (1) the determination that other nations had “limited sovereignty over their public space”; (2) the inexorable exportation of America’s civil society alongside its goods; (3) a parallel exportation of “norms-making,” which made the “American Standard” seem both universal and compulsory; (4) a certain kind of democratic ethos that valued middle-American sociability over traditional modes of solidarity; and (5) an “apparent peaceableness” that masked the hegemonic intentions of what de Grazia calls an “imperium disguised as an emporium.”

As these themes suggest, de Grazia zeroes in on the politics embedded in the nature of the American commercial relationship with Europe, a relationship that generally did not express itself in an explicitly political argot. She does this in a number of ways: by noting that American diplomacy was often geared toward commercial ends; by demonstrating the
ways in which the American nation-state played a role in facilitating “Americanization,” often serving as the handmaiden of business enterprises; and, most important, by arguing that the economic change engendered by America’s commercial empire necessarily catalyzed changes in the social, legal, and cultural structure of European societies, changes that can only be categorized as political.

De Grazia’s book is tough-minded but for the most part scrupulously fair, based as it is on the judicious reading of many sources in many languages. The one area where I felt this scrupulousness broke down was in her often one-sided depiction of American consumer democracy, in which the emphasis was on the former rather than the latter. (She also appears to deny that it is possible for the two to work in tandem, for consumer politics to act in the service of democratic politics, but I will discuss that later.) In the introduction, which begins with an analysis of a speech that Woodrow Wilson gave to the “World’s Salesmanship Congress” in 1916, de Grazia notes that Wilson “infused contemporary statecraft with a strikingly modern consumer sensibility.” (2) Wilson’s complex foreign policy is here reduced to one component of his vision; too much weight is accorded to one speech given at a sales convention. In this section and elsewhere de Grazia conflates Wilson and Ford. To be sure, Wilson saw commerce as the key to democratic development, but Ford envisioned Europe as an unbounded region, whereas Wilson famously proposed self-determination for the peoples of Europe and elsewhere as a way to prevent future wars.

It may seem unfair to offer critiques of a book that does so many things so superbly. Yet for the purposes of furthering our understanding of the history of “America’s Advance” through Europe, I offer the following additional critiques. Most of these suggestions have to do with topics omitted from the book—topics that would, I believe, provide a fuller context for an understanding of the politics of the interactions among United States, Europe and consumer society.

One issue is chronological. De Grazia focuses on the period roughly from the Great War to the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. This is certainly a legitimate choice, because it allows her to explore the interaction between the incipiently Fordist (and eventually post-Fordist) American economy and what she felicitously calls Europe’s “old regime” of “bourgeois consumption,” which eventually became a Europe that was “as much a consumer society as the United States.” (463) It would have been useful, however, to reflect on the pre-history of this relationship. The nineteenth century witnessed a vibrant trans-Atlantic traffic in commercial goods, performers, reformers (among them abolitionists, temperance advocates, and suffrage proponents), and organizations. We can quibble about whether the United States was a fully formed “consumer society” in this period, but there is no doubt that commercial and organizational exports shaped European culture well before Henry Ford exported his famed assembly line. One of the more intriguing of these exports, the National Consumers League, founded in the United States in 1899, inspired sister groups in almost every European country well before the Rotary Club went abroad. La Ligue sociale d’acheteurs, for example, was founded in France in 1902 and was quickly followed by consumer leagues in Switzerland (1906), Germany (1907), Spain and Italy (between 1906 and 1908), and Belgium (1911). Many consumer activists of the Progressive Era—Maud Nathan, Florence Kelley, Jane Addams—went to Europe frequently and considered themselves part of an international reform community.1

And this leads to what is to my mind the most significant shortcoming of *Irresistible Empire*. Although de Grazia demonstrates the multifaceted nature of the politics of consumption, she unnecessarily limits her conception of what counts as consumer politics. This is because her focus is so heavily on the producers, as it were, of politics: governments, industry, business organizations, advertisers. She does not pay enough attention to those who shaped consumer politics from the other end. When de Grazia refers to the “consumer-citizen” (as Chapter Seven is entitled), she ignores the many significations of this phrase—significations that Lizabeth Cohen elaborates upon in *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York, 2003). As de Grazia uses it, the phrase “consumer-citizen” suggests that the latter is inevitably subsumed by the former. In other words, consumers and citizens sit on opposite poles of the polity, the former acting in private, self-interested ways and the latter behaving in a solidaristic, public-spirited manner. Most telling in this regard is the short shrift that de Grazia gives to consumer activism—efforts to exercise citizenship through consumption that go some way toward breaking down the private/public divide between the two. Other than the epilogue on the “slow food” movement, there is little discussion of either consumer activism (a term mentioned only late in the book in regard to the American Esther Peterson [450]) or the consumer movement (mentioned briefly on pp. 374-75), two American models of consumer politics and ultimately two influential European exports that were very different from
the dominant model of commercial hegemony. De Grazia mentions boycotts, another nineteenth-century trans-Atlantic development, relatively infrequently (I noted mention of them on pp. 137, 180, 222, 300, 209, 401, although the term does not appear in the index) and does not describe them in depth. It is hard to know whether boycotts were simply less common in Europe or whether they escape her gaze because they represent another side of consumer politics, the consumer embracing a political role. (Of course, we must keep in mind that the politics of boycotters, in the United States and in Europe, were not always commendable; the Nazis’ anti-Jewish boycott was perhaps the most popular boycott campaign in the period that de Grazia covers.) Consumer activists worked the middle ground between what de Grazia calls “the European vision of the social citizen and the American notion of the sovereign consumer” (342), and more attention to this group might have led to a more multifaceted understanding of citizen consumers. These groups were particularly attentive to the problem that Georg Simmel set out: “a growing distance in genuine inner relationships and a declining distance in more external ones” (quoted by de Grazia on p. 27). Although de Grazia touches on green anti-consumerist thought and practice in her excellent account of slow food, there is little discussion here of environmental politics as a trans-Atlantic phenomenon. Nor is there discussion of the politics of consumer protection and representation.2 These aspects of consumer politics were transnational too; indeed, in 1960, the transnational relationship was formalized with the establishment of the International Organisation of Consumers Unions (IOCU), known today as Consumers International (CI).

This is not to suggest that it was a level playing field, or that the actions of consumer activists nullified the powerful forces of commerce that de Grazia treats. It is understandable that a scholar centrally concerned with questions of power would make the determination that consumer movements had little impact in slowing or shaping the commercialization of twentieth-century Europe. Although at the end of the book de Grazia briefly discusses “critical consumption” as a phenomenon of the 1990s (466), to my mind she is insufficiently attentive to consumer activism, considering that it was another of the forces set in motion by the processes of commercialization that she analyzes so powerfully.


Thank you all for the generosity of your comments as well as your tactful and pertinent criticisms. Since I am by formation a Europeanist, I conceived of *Irresistible Empire* as relevant first and foremost to twentieth-century European history, only to have to turn to scrutinize the power of U.S. consumer culture in the place it was born, in the U.S. itself.

In fact, *Irresistible Empire* is a double history. Its central problematic is driven as much by the need to explain the catastrophic decline of Europe as a center of great power as by the need to explain the rise of the United States as a great power. The two stories became completely intertwined. The novelty is that I tell this as a story of butter as well as guns, arguing that the emerging mass consumer society which we in the United States take more or less for granted as we write its history was deeply obstructed in early twentieth-century Europe, and these barriers were lifted only by huge and sustained pressure from the new global hegemon, the United States. This pressure mounted across the decades and was exercised through an unusual combination of civil society, state, and corporate institutions; it was speeded by armed conflict, and it eventually became effective through wide collaboration on the part of new alliances forming in the aftermath of war and the defeat of indigenous conceptions of mass consumer society. For the purposes of my argument, American power operated in the realm of material culture: its centerpiece, the high standard of living. It embodied a particular kind of consumer democracy, one that was widely inclusive, based on access through money to an expanding market and driven by the mass production and distribution of innovative goods vaunted for creating a strong sense of sociability and reinforcing what I call a “democracy of recognition.” This is a particular kind of democratic participation, one that permitted people to act or perform as if they were basically similar. For much of the twentieth century, it represented no small progress. If I were to be more emphatic about certain themes of the book, I would explain more clearly the interplay in the development of consumer culture between war-making and peacetime, and the specially privileged place that Europe has occupied in the scheme of American global hegemony. I would also want to clarify to younger critics a point that I took for granted because when I first went to Europe in the 1960s, the society was on the cusp of such huge changes: namely that up until five decades ago, most Europeans lived in a very different material culture, which at least outwardly we would regard as deep poverty; that the institutions of modern consumer society have a history in Europe just as in the United States; and that this history is not simply an unfolding of a natural history of material life.

All this is to preface the salience of your concerns, which I have broken down into four points. The most vexed question bears on whether the United States is appropriately characterized as an empire and how its consumer culture is bound up with its imperial disposition. Another question involves resistance: whether Europeans were as pliant as the word “irresistible” suggests and whether in discussing consumer culture I have given too short shrift to the democratic dimensions of American consumer activism at home and abroad. A third concern is whether I have properly identified differences between the United States and Europe and whether the trends I have identified as being manifestations of U.S. hegemony are not universal dimensions of modernization and/or globalization, playing themselves out across the Atlantic at different times and with different modalities. A fourth concern—or rather hesitation, expressed by Brian Etheridge as he so generously calls attention to the narrative style of the book, involves the methodology of the book and the cases on which its arguments rest.

To grapple with the first question: clearly, *Irresistible Empire* doesn’t stand on whether readers agree that what I describe
is an empire. In the worst case, the title could simply be considered irrelevant, a question of clever packaging. Or it could be taken as a provocation. Or it could be taken seriously, but the cases don’t prove it. Admittedly, had the book come out a decade ago, I would have given it a different title. Probably I would have drifted around the word “hegemony,” which once had its own allure. Or I might have used the word “consumer culture,” now over-consumed. Titles are supposed to be attractive and perhaps give an heuristic jolt! That said, when I first conceived of the central problem of the book two decades ago—the originality of the U.S. exercise of global power from the perspective of Europe—American imperialism was very much on my mind. The word “empire” was current, at least among radical historians, in the wake of William Appleman William’s *Empire as a Way of Life*, and after the U.S.–backed coup in Chile there was widespread global discussion of U.S. “cultural imperialism,” a term I never took to. As an unrepentant Gramscian, my problem was hegemony. And the mighty United States of the early twentieth century, coming into contact with a Europe whose closed empires were causing it to explode with conflict, was as powerful an international hegemon as Great Britain in the process of establishing the Pax Britannica over the crumbling structures of non-western empires in Africa and Asia, or the Napoleonic Empire as it confronted with its new regime of codes, institutions, and ideals the failing absolutist regimes of the turn-of-the-eighteenth-century European continent.

As I finished the book, the problem of empire had returned with a vengeance and with far different implications from the 1960s-1970s populist usage (which liberals and conservatives never accepted). Empire is on the political agenda, in analyses of the unilateral exercise of American power, the significance of the occupation of Iraq, the nature of the power exercised by global institutions like the IMF, World Bank, and the humanitarian mission of NGOs. Empire is also on the historian’s agenda as global history, post-colonial studies, and the field of International Relations cope with a proliferation of empires, not just the venerable western models from Rome and Spain to Great Britain, but also the Qing and the Japanese, the Ottoman, Russian, and Soviet. The result is all kinds of cross-fertilization. There is more and more emphasis on the “soft” dimension of the Roman Empire, for example—on the transfer of the so-called Roman package (e.g., aqueducts, markets, coliseum); on the processes of the “Romanization” of Gaul; and on the distinctly different kinds of sovereignty exercised with respect to other collectivities, ranging from princely alliances to outright enslavement. Meanwhile, in the case of single empires, like Great Britain’s, historians find more and more movement—e.g., from informal to formal and vice versa—accompanied by different levels of violence and different claims for legitimacy. So the concept of empire is up for grabs, not just because we want or don’t want the United States to be an empire, but because the concept of an “empire,” understood as a closed, single-centered sovereignty, with a clear distinction between metropolis and periphery, and assuming a contrast of interests between ruler and ruled, a single kind of resource behind it, and one coherent mission has come under more and more scrutiny.

That said, I spoke of the United States as imperial in a specific way, as a “market empire,” to underscore that in its claims to promote a global free market, it was ever more buttressed by a highly intricate and articulated institutional network, composed of civil society circuits as well as corporate enterprise and national governmental agencies, in addition to international agencies that I did not address, like the IMF, the GATT and the World Bank, which are deeply involved in defining consumer standards by their policies on fiscal restraint, debt payment, tariffs etc. That made its exercise of power special with respect to other imperial formations.

Opening with Woodrow Wilson, I did indeed conceive of the president as an informal imperialist, a debated but respectable position in U.S. historiography. That did not at all preclude his fervently believing in national sovereignty. To respond to Larry Glickman’s concern, the sovereign nation-state was for Wilson, as I see it, an all-important container, but the model state within a world of states would be open to the very kind of institutions that the early twentieth-century United States had the duty and capacity to supply globally. That is what face-to-face diplomacy, as well as free trade, was about. But then it was always the goal of free-trade imperialists to leave local institutions more or less intact. The problem, as we know from the venerable work of Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher on the “Scramble for Africa,” is that “free trade imperialism” has a way of rotting out local institutions by offering unattainable models, encouraging indebtedness, promoting corruption, and stirring up rebelliousness, at which point the locals are blamed for their incapacity to maintain the law and order required for global trade, and the way is open for new and different levels of regulation and intervention, whose models come from the metropolis. Clearly Wilson could not have foreseen the so-called K-Mart State of the 1990s, which sought to make formerly more or less effectively sovereign units safe for international capital by outsourcing large
dimensions of local policy, tolerating the undercutting of local cultural solidarities, and effectively diminishing local democracy. Even so, Wilson well understood the flexible forms of governance, as well as the critique of closed empire, that were indispensable to making the world safe for American “business democracy,” and he began to prepare American business for that happy destiny by building up the Department of Commerce’s external capacities at the same time as taking on the closed empires of Europe.

Clearly, the lens of consumer culture, broadly defined, doesn’t contemplate the whole range of innovations exported by the United States. What I wanted to underscore was the unusual synchronization of impulses from civil society, corporate enterprise, and state agencies. Dedicating more attention to governmental mediation and coordinating devices, as Emily Rosenberg suggests, would not change the story. I think her concern is whether a well-conceived national policy would refurbish U.S. “soft power” today, as cultural diplomacy becomes a buzz word in policy circles and new study programs abound. In other words, could the United States today restore its old hegemony by using less force and more consent? My history suggests not: Joseph Nye’s notion of “soft power” is not the same as mine. I am talking about hegemony, of which persuasion is a part, to the degree that it reflects broad national consensus around a global vision. When cultural diplomacy works, as it did, say, in the 1950s, with “Satchmo playing the world” (Penny Van Eschen), it was as an adjunct or coordinator of other flows. In sum, cultural diplomacy is like packaging; it is only as good as the capacity of the American model, based on the higher standard of living, to offer globally the promise of that higher standard of living. If the United States rose to new challenges, presenting itself, say, as a model of global cooperation capable of spearheading policies to address global warming and creating institutions dedicated to the equitable redistribution of global resources, and if Americans rallied enthusiastically behind state policy, generating a wide new consensus for a global new deal in the conviction that the United States truly had a winning way of life, then, perhaps, cultural diplomacy would be a very effective tool.

Was the empire “irresistible”? Emily Rosenberg and Dan Rodgers make the point that it wasn’t. The surprise is rather that Europe took so long to be persuaded. And Larry Glickman makes another point: that within the United States, there was powerful resistance to American consumer culture; indeed, it was built into the consumer culture. Accordingly, he sees me as giving short shrift to the dialectic that would have American consumer movements emerging at the same time as U.S. consumer culture, thereby universalizing the anti-corporate consumer culture that in today’s world lies behind “critical consumption.”

Here we are dealing with two criticisms that are subtly linked by a notion of resistance as individual agency. This is a distinctly American or Anglo-American conception, now deeply embedded in a radicalist social history that never paid much mind to how the hegemonic structures within resistance take place or to how these structures drive as well as deeply condition the conception of alternatives. If we find resistance, then everything is OK; power is somehow defanged. The title was intended to have a touch of irony: the author’s little joke was to recall Brecht’s The Irresistible Rise of Arturo Ui, the play presenting Hitler’s ascent as predictable and stoppable, so that the title has often been translated as “The Resistible Rise.” “Irresistible” has yet another double sense. On the part of the United States, the push outward could not be explained only on economic grounds, its economy depending relatively little on exports compared to Europe’s. But the vision of market was inexorably expansive by the nature of the market’s size and complexity and by the competition, creativity, and communication systems required to operate on it. If I were to add now another important dimension, it would be the religious afflatus behind Manifest Destiny as interpreted by Anders Stephenson. Irresistible abroad: yes, but with huge resistance to the model and especially to all of the transformations required for the model to take. It took the European catastrophe for the American model to pass: in the meantime, all kinds of alternatives were thrown forward—all, including the Nazi New Order’s Grosswirtschaftsraum, with its incessant reference to the Monroe Doctrine and its claim to offer Europe a high standard of living, conditioned by America’s ascendancy. Ditto for the Soviet bloc, pushed by American pressure to an untenable model, “to catch up and surpass,” starting in the Khrushchev era, spending hugely on military and foreign competition and for that reason, too, unable to adapt its inflexible planning system.

In principle, Larry Glickman’s National Consumer League, founded in 1899, could well fit into my story, though I would add it to the hegemony side of the equation. U.S. consumer democracy is a peculiar institution: there are so many other kinds of democracy, as well as citizenship. I see it as narrower in its concept of human rights, tolerant of inequality, and
uniquely trusting in market forces, at the same time as it is clearly part of a vast movement to mitigate them. I have no difficulty arguing that American hegemony was dialectical, introducing dominant as well as oppositional forces as it reproduced its institutions within other societies. My point is that it challenged a very different concept of social democracy, and for most decades, starting at the outset of the nineteenth century, it attached itself mainly to Catholic and Conservative movements as a weapon against the socialist left. From the 1960s, American-style consumerism, in the figure of Ralph Nader as well as Esther Peterson, found an echo in so-called radical parties with libertarian agendas as well as among conservative policymakers who used it to deflect the democratic organization of consumers.

More generally, one point of Irresistible Empire is to deflect social historians from looking for a usable past in a good consumer society. I am resolutely not against mass consumption: quite the contrary. My major critique of early twentieth-century European societies was that they forbade it to the mass of their citizens, whereas the United States held out that promise. As a progressive, I far prefer the new regime to the old regime of consumption. And by the last quarter of the twentieth century, citizens of Western Europe enjoyed high levels of consumption. But did that make the region more democratic? Did it mean that consumer activism is the only effective or legitimate form of opposition? If I ended the book with a brief reflection on Slow Food, it was to suggest that so-called critical consumption as an oppositional movement of something less than vast impact arises out of a new mix of trends not dependent only on American movements, though the Slow Fooders themselves recognize the potential contribution of American social movements to their cause. The point can’t be that consumer movements are the modern-day equivalents of the socialist movements of the last century. To start, Alice Waters, bless her, is no Karl Marx.

The most anguishing part of writing on such a big scale is that I mostly prefer the worm’s eye view to the bird’s eye view. How to deal with the myriad of acts of complicity, adventure, pleasure, or distaste that accompany a first encounter? Ethnographers are good at capturing processes categorized under the names of “creolization,” “hybridization,” etc., that are consistent with broad strokes of the canvas of hegemony. Business historians too are adept at calculating transfers of best practice. As goods, institutions, etc., go local, they lose their names; they become naturalized. That is part of the process. That said, these phenomena have origins, and my effort here has been to root them in the circuitry through which they were transferred. Hence, if this is called international history, it is a history of American hegemony, and the power of the United States to shape the direction and substance. It is not the story of what Dan Rodgers offhandedly calls “networks of highly international flexible capitalism.” That implies an unacceptably Tom Friedman-esque vision of markets, as if they were not deeply inflected by nation-states or other collectivities. It is U.S. liberal historiography’s vision of the “international” as a level playing field. If nothing else, this view ignores the most important problem (after the exploitation of labor) posed by the great theorists of capitalism, from Adam Smith and Marx to Polanyi: namely, that capitalism is deeply inflected by power and particularly by the cultures, institutions, and regulations of states and other collectivities.

Whether Europe and the United States are as different as Irresistible Empire maintains boils down to a huge problem, which is not comparison in itself, but the different conceptions of class and stratification that lie behind the very definition of the American standard of living and that inflect how we ourselves, as historians, conceive of class. Relative poverty is not the issue: solid works like Peter Shergold’s Working Class Life, which compared Pittsburg, U.S.A and Birmingham, England at the turn of the century, demonstrated that certain groups of American and British workers enjoyed comparable standards of living. But nothing effectively contradicts Werner Sombart’s observations (and before him De Tocqueville’s) that standards were conceived as well as lived differently, depending on prevailing notions of class hierarchy. If we cannot avoid the conclusion that the United States was different because of the awful legacy of slavery; we cannot avoid the conclusion that most of Europe was different because of the legacy of feudalism. Dan Rodgers points out all sorts of indices demonstrating that there are significant numbers of poor in the United States and that the rural South, with its population of poor whites and especially poor blacks, was as poor as many parts of Europe. It is well known that the poverty line is a statistical fiction. In response to Rodgers, let me simply note that it sounds right that in the 1930s South on average only 30 out of 1000 people had an automobile, compared to 222 as the national average. But compare those figures to 9 out 1000 in Italy, 25 in Germany; and 56 in Great Britain in 1938.

Such precise measurements are an exercise in positivism that contemporary Europeans rightly ridiculed. It is the genius of American consumer culture to imagine the market as inclusive—in principle, it did not exclude African-Americans,
however poor or segregated they were. Americans used the term “consumer” freely; many groups spoke "as if" the American masses were consumers. In Europe they did not; the term “consumer” was rarely used in its modern sense down to the 1950s. In Europe, the shift was not simply a function of higher individual incomes; it was the result of a shift of regime, coming out of new arrangements of production on the large scale made possible by the European community and state intervention to support the consumption of modal goods now recognized as basics of civilized life, like housing, the small-cylinder car, the refrigerator, the washing machine. Institutions offering credit made it possible to reallocate relatively small incomes. That Europe should now have wide swaths of middleclass is a relatively recent phenomenon.

In conclusion, let me respond briefly to Brian Etheridge’s flattering comments about the style of the book. American culture has a wide puritan streak that sees style and substance not just as distinct but detracting from one another. It was a big shift for me to put a premium on narrative power, since my original love was comparative history, which put a premium on economy of structure, clarity of concepts, citation of authority, and framing of evidence. The first study that went into this book, on cinema, was an exercise in comparison, looking at how the cinema establishments of three continental powers—Germany, France, and Italy—responded to Hollywood, the variables being intellectuals, the state, and the cohesiveness of the cinema sector. But comparison couldn’t render complicated circuitries of power, so I radically de-structured the presentation, shifting to a form of histoire croisée. High-powered narrative comes at a cost; it stylizes argument, and it conceals meaningful gaps, lapses, and silences so as to create a false impression of seamlessness. The upside is that it renders complicated transfers, mimicking the language that protagonists themselves used to construe and bridge the great divide between the United States and Europe. Their exchanges, by speaking not just to national rivalries but also to binary thinking, male one-upmanship, disorientation, and pleasure, yield a more complex modeling of motives and effects. Writing is a lonely process in the best of cases, and writing a long book often friendless; having to choose between speaking to my imaginary audience about my academic antagonists (and friends) and sharing with them the foibles and dilemmas of people in the world about which I was writing, I chose the latter.

American culture pretends transparency, and I have constantly been asked who wears the black hat, who the white? Europe or America? Or is consumer culture good or bad? I am not one for the post-modern ironic stance; my commitment is to illuminate the intertwining of pleasure and dread in a hegemony combined of consumer culture and an ever more massive array of military materiel. If there is a message to take away, it is that, ultimately, the American hegemony deep-sixed certain alternative ways of imagining the distribution and enjoyment of social abundance. At the same time it was clearly better than many of the prevailing alternatives. But the system it ordained over the last century is now unsustainable. The US, once the biggest producer and consumer of practically everything, now has competition. And the terrain is not just markets, but the many other claims on the earth’s resources, including the those of future generations. To rise to that challenge requires as radical an imagination about the problem of needs and global governance as the revolutionary vision of globalizing mass consumption pioneered out of the United States in the early twentieth century.
April 2007 Newsletter

"Clio and me: the story of a diplomatic historian who became provost”

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Editors Note: The following essay derives from a speech given by Dr. Hogan to the Iowa City Foreign Relations Council

I am going to spend most of my time here describing the evolution of my scholarship over the last thirty years, and then I am going to discuss how my study of politics and diplomacy informs my work as a provost. As many of you probably know, I did my graduate work at Iowa, and while I was doing my dissertation, I got interested in the evolution and nature of the modern state system that emerged between the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. This system was spawned by the forces of modernization, particularly industrialization, and was increasingly characterized by large-scale, well organized, and often very powerful private structures, organizations, and interest groups, including organized agriculture, organized labor, and especially organized business, which was often denounced as “the trust” or “the monopolies.” These developments were happening in virtually every modern society in the world, and different countries reacted in different ways. Governments grew larger in order to deal on an equal footing with these private concentrations of economic and political power, and in some countries the result was a form of statist domination—sometimes on the left, as under communism, and sometimes on the right, as under fascism.

The United States, on the other hand, pursued what we might call a middle way between the political economy of the nineteenth century, which was unregulated, fragmented, and characterized by small producers operating in local markets, and the modern trend toward concentrations of economic power operating in vast national and international markets. Following this middle way, government would grow larger and would have the authority to promote the public good and regulate the economy; but at the same time, efforts would be made to limit the size and scope of government power. This would be done by officially recognizing the rights of organized private groups to regulate their own affairs in a responsible fashion and by promoting a pattern of enlightened collaboration among these groups and between them and the government to guarantee order, stability, and progress. In this sense, the middle way aimed to reconcile the modern trend toward organized capitalism and state power with the traditional values embedded in American political culture, such as localism, privatism, volunteerism, and individualism. In this kind of a system there is always a certain tension—between public power and private power, between individualism and the group, between volunteerism and regulation. And at
different times the pendulum has swung more toward one side than the other, depending on circumstances and the administration in power. But as a country we have remained pretty much in the middle ground over the last hundred years or so. Or at least, this is what I discovered in the course of my research on diplomacy and state-making in the first half of the twentieth century.

Inspired by my two mentors, Ellis Hawley and Lawrence Gelfand, I focused in my first book on American efforts to rebuild the world economy after the First World War, from the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 through the late 1920s. I tried to show how the evolving middle way shaped the formulation of American foreign policy and the kind of global economic order the Americans wanted to create—notably, their efforts to develop largely private, voluntary, and cooperative structures that would help regulate international oil, for example, or develop global communications markets, or resolve a host of thorny issues ranging from the problem of German reparation payments to the regulation of American loans that would help rebuild war-devastated Europe.

Diplomatic history may not be the first field of study people think of when they think “exciting.” But the 1970s were an exciting time to be working on the history of the 1920s. The 1970s saw the beginning of what would become a revisionist movement among historians that would overturn the older view of Republican foreign policy as reactionary and isolationist. Indeed, in this work the 1920s emerged as a transitional decade in which the United States remained very active in international affairs and Republican policymakers revealed a surprisingly progressive global vision.

It was also an exciting time for me because the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library was just down the road from Iowa City, and Hoover’s papers, which had remained sealed until his death in 1964, had recently been opened. I was among the first historians to delve into the Hoover archives, and they were a gold mine. As secretary of commerce under Presidents Harding and Coolidge, Hoover was in fact one of the principal shapers of American international economic policy after World War I. He was the first of three presidents I studied over time—the others being Truman and Eisenhower—and all three saw their historical reputations revised and upgraded in the years after they left the White House and their papers became available to historians.

Hoover lived to be ninety years old, and he liked to brag that he had “outlived the bastards,” meaning his opponents in Congress, who blamed him for the Great Depression, and Roosevelt, who soundly defeated him in 1932. The Democrats, of course, laid the country’s misery on Hoover’s shoulders and mocked his 1928 campaign ads that promised “a chicken in every pot” as evidence of his shortsightedness and his failure to act. After enjoying a reputation as an effective leader for most of his career, Hoover saw his popularity plummet as the Depression grew deeper. There is an old story that Hoover once asked Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon for a nickel to call a friend, and Mellon replied, “Here’s a dime—call up all your friends.” Hoover left office in disgrace, and his poor reputation stuck, carried forward in the history books for two generations.

The conventional textbook picture of Hoover was that of a coldhearted, reactionary Republican who cared more about the banking interests than the welfare of the people. But the truth is another story. Far from being a reactionary, Hoover was a Republican Progressive who had voted for Theodore Roosevelt and the Bull Moose party in 1912. His humble beginnings as an orphan from West Branch, Iowa, prepared him to identify with the aspirations of the people, and his Quaker background equipped him with a strong sense of ethics, including a strong work ethic that helped him become a very successful
mining engineer. He turned failed mining operations all over the world into profitable operations, along the way earning a reputation as the “doctor of sick mines,” not to mention a tremendous personal fortune. When World War I broke out, however, he put that life behind him and devoted himself to public service, for which he refused to accept any compensation.

Hoover first became the head of the Commission for the Relief of Belgium, which saved an estimated ten million people from starvation in that devastated country during the early years of the European War. When the United States entered the war, President Wilson tapped Hoover to head the Food Administration. In that role he established a reputation for organizational genius and efficiency as well as for dedication to public service. And after the war, he ran the American Relief Administration, the U.S.-sponsored relief effort that in some ways set a precedent for the Marshall Plan. Hoover became known as the “The Great Humanitarian,” a title he deserved and that unfortunately fell under the shadow of his disastrous departure from the presidency, four years into the Great Depression.

But let me come back to Hoover’s role in shaping international economic policy after the war. As secretary of commerce, he became the central figure in efforts to implement the middle way I described earlier. He believed that through measures of voluntary cooperation and self-regulation, industrial and banking leaders could increase efficiency, raise living standards, and afford workers the kind of meaningful participation in vital decisions that was essential for industrial democracy. The government certainly was to play a part in regulating economic activity, but if this was done right, voluntary cooperation among responsible private groups would alleviate pressure for the kind of rigorous state intervention that would only foster waste and undermine the traditional values—such as volunteerism, privatism, and individualism—that supposedly undergirded American democracy.

When it came to international affairs, Hoover and his fellow Republicans were not isolationists. They wanted to cooperate in European recovery after the war, but they were unwilling to involve the United States in political complications or entanglements of the sort that Woodrow Wilson had envisioned with the League of Nations. They were convinced, instead, that the approach they were following at home could also work in the international arena. In other words, cooperation among American and multinational businessmen could achieve stability and prosperity by allowing disinterested private experts to regulate the international economy and by avoiding preferential and state-sponsored programs that were economically wasteful and politically dangerous. Their formula for postwar aid to Europe, therefore, involved private programs organized by financial experts uncommitted to the political policies of their governments. And so, from the first Hoover-authored proposal for managing European reconstruction in 1921 to the Dawes Plan in 1924 and the Young Commission in 1929, Hoover and other Republicans insisted that the public interest would be best served by pursuing private, economic solutions as opposed to public, political ones. The 1924 commission headed up by Chicago banker Charles Dawes, for example, brought together financial experts from Belgium, France, Britain, Italy, and the United States to develop a nonpolitical solution to the problem of German reparations and to do so in cooperation with the treasury departments of the countries involved.

Unfortunately, these solutions ultimately failed, both in foreign and domestic policy, and the perfect balance of private and public power that Hoover envisioned soon gave way to Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, which tipped the scales more toward the state.

When I finished my book on Hoover and the 1920s, it seemed logical to jump from the first postwar
decade to the second, from the 1920s to the 1940s. In fact, I ended up doing two books on the post-World War II period—one about the Marshall Plan and another about Harry Truman and the origins of the national security state we live in today. I found, for one thing, that the two postwar eras were different but were also linked in ways that hadn’t been fully appreciated. And I found striking similarities between President Hoover in the earlier period and Presidents Truman and Eisenhower in the later one.

Like Hoover, Truman was a self-made man from a humble background, having grown up working on the family farm. And, like Hoover, he left the White House almost in disgrace. Indeed, Truman may have been the most unpopular president of the twentieth century, less popular even than Nixon at the height of Watergate. Even though he shocked everyone by winning the election in 1948, the anti-Truman slogans of the Dewey campaign continued to resonate with most of the American people, who still believed that “to err was Truman.” By 1952, stymied by the Korean conflict and McCarthyism, Truman was ridiculed and whipped around by the Republicans on their way to a landslide victory for Eisenhower.

But, as with Hoover, history has been relatively kind to Harry Truman. Historians always liked Truman, really. But now it is also in the general consciousness that Truman is considered, if not one of our great presidents, then one of the near-great presidents, largely for his successful record in foreign policy. A similar wave of revision also helped to elevate Eisenhower’s reputation in the years after he left the White House. During Eisenhower’s administration, the Democrats made fun of him for his bumbling press conferences—he could not seem to string a coherent sentence together. They pictured him as a dithering old man who did nothing but play golf and sleep through his presidency. Actually, Ike was a pretty good golfer—in fact, he was allegedly the first president or former president to score a hole-in-one during a golf game. But his talent didn’t impress his opponents. He was portrayed as addle-brained and not in charge of his own administration, which was dominated instead by Cabinet secretaries like the very aggressive Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, whom Churchill once described as “the only case I know of a bull that carries his china shop with him.”

Eisenhower differs from the other two presidents I have mentioned because he was, in fact, popular throughout his administration, in spite of rhetoric from the other side. But that rhetoric did affect the way historians saw Eisenhower through the 1960s and 1970s, when they bought into Kennedy’s description of the Eisenhower team as the Geritol generation, headed by a president who was ill throughout his administration; spent more time on the golf course than in the Oval Office; loved the rich but ignored the poor; and was neither a good nor an effective leader. Again, time has changed that perspective—and Eisenhower, too, is now widely viewed as a pretty good president who presided over eight years of peace and prosperity.

In fact, when Ike’s papers were unsealed it became clear that he dominated his administration and his Cabinet meetings. Suddenly historians could see what a skillful negotiator and diplomat he had been, what an able and effective leader, and what a world-class manager. It is true he wasn’t a gifted speaker, but he was a gifted writer—in fact, he had been a speechwriter for General Douglas MacArthur, who was generally regarded as a brilliant speaker. Eisenhower was the architect of his own major speeches, including the one in which he coined the phrase “the military industrial complex” and the famous “cross of iron” speech, from which I borrowed the title of my third book.
Eisenhower’s notes from Cabinet and National Security Council meetings reveal an active mind and a strategic thinker who had a philosophy about government and how to organize economic and social life in America that fits squarely within the formula of the middle way that I have been describing. Eisenhower didn’t add to the New Deal, but neither did he subtract from it; he accepted the role of the modern state as he had inherited it, along with many of the economic regulations and social programs that came out of the New Deal, and he focused like Hoover on trying to maintain the balance between private rights and responsibilities and the modern tendency toward statism. His outlook was more progressive than Hoover’s, and more conservative than Truman’s, but all in all he was much more of a middle roader than Senator Robert Taft of Ohio and other conservatives in the Republican party, who turned out to be the real bane of Eisenhower’s administration.

Which brings me back to Truman, who is the president I’ve spent the most time with, you might say. I first got to know Truman while researching my book on the Marshall Plan, which in many respects ought to be called the Truman Plan. When World War II ended, Truman, Marshall, and other American leaders confronted problems very similar to those that had confounded Hoover and the recovery planners of the 1920s. And they built on some of the same strategies. Like their predecessors, for example, they encouraged European self-help and redoubled efforts to reduce reparations, fix exchange rates, and make currencies convertible. They believed these measures would permit individual initiative and normal market mechanisms to integrate economies and stimulate growth. They also tried to use the same kind of public-private partnerships and expert authorities that had been used in the 1920s. To administer the Marshall Plan, for example, Congress established the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA), staffed by the “best brains” from business, labor, agriculture, and the professions. The ECA epitomized the kind of public-private partnership and power-sharing that had come to characterize the middle way: it was semi-autonomous, semi-public, semi-private, a group of individuals working together to implement public policy.

Of course, in the wake of the New Deal, the government played a much larger role in the second American effort to rebuild Europe than it did in the first—after all, government money fuelled the Marshall Plan. And, in the end, where the planners in the 1920s failed, the Marshall Plan succeeded. Still, comparing the first and second postwar periods in this way makes it easy to begin to see them less as completely distinct epochs in modern history and more as parts of an evolving balance between public and private power that shaped American policy at home and abroad. This balance did not evolve without a struggle, and it is this struggle that began to capture my attention in this and my next book.

Truman believed that the Marshall Plan would one day come to represent the beginning of a “new era of mutual cooperation” for the benefit of peace and prosperity worldwide. But the plan’s opponents, like Senator Taft, were not so sure. They represented an older, isolationist tradition in American diplomacy, and they were convinced that Marshall aid would aggravate existing shortages at home, entangle the United States in European affairs at a time when tensions there could spark another war, and lead to the rise of statism, in this case a militarized state that would undermine individual rights and subvert democracy.

Indeed, in tracking the debates over the Marshall Plan, I was struck by two convictions that ran through
arguments on both sides. The first was the conviction that things were changing—emerging policies were breaking with past practice, not only with American foreign policy but with economic and institutional policies as well. The second was the conviction that bad policies could put the United States on a slippery slope to a garrison state dominated by military leaders and devoted to military purposes. Both sides understood that a peacetime national security state was in the making, and both saw the need to guard against the potentially corrosive effects of this process on the American way of life.

This led me to my next major book, which is called A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954. This book examined the emergence, during Truman’s administration and the first Eisenhower administration, of a national security state where none had existed before, and again, dealt with the fascinating subject of the balance between public power and private rights. Let me talk about it briefly.

Although there are lines of continuity linking the two postwar periods, there is also no doubt that things were different after 1945. For most Americans, the peace was more precarious and the United States more vulnerable than ever before. They could no longer count on friendly powers to carry the burden of battle while they prepared. Nor could they count on the great ocean barriers to ensure their security in an age of long-range bombers, aircraft carriers, and atomic missiles. To most Americans, moreover, the Soviet Union had emerged from the Second World War as a dangerous aggressor; the United States was the only power able to contain the Soviet threat; and containment required the kind of entangling alliances and permanent defense establishment that earlier generations had abhorred. Guided by these convictions, American policymakers began to discard the last remnants of the country’s prewar isolationism. They talked more expansively about the national interest, used the phrase “national security” more frequently than ever before, and engineered a rapid expansion of American power into every nook and cranny of the world.

Much of this is discussed in my book on the Marshall Plan, but in A Cross of Iron I shifted focus drastically so that foreign policy and diplomacy were not the center of my attention but the backdrop to a new era of state-making in the United States—indeed, one of the most profound economic, political and institutional transformations in American history. It was during the first ten years of the Cold War, after all, when the same national security imperatives that drove Americans from the old isolationism to the new internationalism also forced them to build a national security state at home. They created a large, permanent standing army for the first time in American history. They unified the armed forces, expanded the defense budget, harnessed science to military purposes, and forged new institutions, many of which, like the National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency, are now among the best known and most powerful organs of government. During the Hoover administration, Secretary of State Henry Stimson had shut down the state department’s code-breaking operation, purportedly with the declaration that “gentlemen do not read each other’s mail.” Now, Americans were building the CIA.

You can see this transformation in the architectural face of the federal government. The Old Executive Office Building, next to the White House, was once large enough to house the Army, Navy, and State departments, but now became the new home of the National Security Council. The State Department grew to such proportions that it required a building of its own, and the armed services, which now included a third branch, took up residence in the newly built Pentagon, a massive five-sided labyrinth.
with nearly eighteen miles of corridors, more than six million square feet of office space, and as many daily inhabitants as most small towns. The CIA eventually earned a new building, too, as did the Atomic Energy Commission, while dozens of other defense and security agencies either sprouted new facilities or squeezed older agencies from the spaces they had occupied for years. As these institutions of national security expanded in size and stature, older departments, once the major depositories of federal power and prestige, were quickly eclipsed, as were the political agendas they represented. National security affairs now began to dominate the budget and control the agenda of a government that had given little time or money to such matters only a decade earlier. After shrinking in the first years of the postwar period, defense spending began to grow as a proportion of the budget while nondefense expenditures started to decline. By 1960, defense and international programs consumed the largest share of the federal budget and accounted for nearly all of a burgeoning national debt.

In sum, fighting the Cold War seemed to require peacetime military and diplomatic initiatives that departed from American tradition, and this possibility led some to ask if it was worth the cost, not just in dollars or lives but in the freedoms they held dear. These Americans resisted the new initiatives, usually in the name of tradition, while a second group, though hardly indifferent to tradition, tried to reshape the way Americans thought, both about their role in world affairs and about the new initiatives and institutions that national security appeared to demand. The struggle between these two groups, which runs through my book, was fundamentally a struggle to shape the nation’s political identity and postwar purpose.

On one side of the national security debate stood the critics of American policy, mostly conservatives in the Republican party, who subscribed to a story of American greatness based on the republican ideology of the Founding Fathers. According to this traditional narrative, freedom-loving men and women had fled the oppression of the Old World, rebelled against the abuses of monarchical governments and military authorities, and founded a new republic with a constitution that constrained the state, divided authority, and guaranteed civilian over military leadership. As these conservatives saw it, both the welfare state that had emerged with the New Deal and the warfare state that was now taking shape imperiled the very traditions and institutions that had made American great. As the power of the state grew, they believed, so did the danger that it might be used recklessly.

On the other side of this debate stood the Truman administration and its supporters. They, too, borrowed from a traditional cultural narrative, but one that celebrated American exceptionalism and American destiny, and they adapted this narrative—we might call it the narrative of manifest destiny—in a way that made room for the important postwar responsibilities that now fell to the United States. The result was a new ideology of national security that celebrated America’s leadership of the free world as a sacred mission thrust upon the United States by divine Providence.

Of course, it is unfair and simplistic to present these two sides of the argument as black and white. President Truman himself was often pulled in different directions by the growth of the national security state. No one was more responsible for this important development than Truman, and yet no one was more convinced that national security needs, however urgent, could wreck the budget, militarize society, threaten civil liberties, and undermine the social programs that had grown out of the New Deal. Much the same was true of President Eisenhower. Truman and Eisenhower believed it was their job to
reconcile older ways of thinking with the new ideology of national security, to merge the country’s
democratic traditions with its global obligations. In short, they worked to create but contain the national
security state so it didn’t corrupt the traditional values embedded in American political culture, such as
privatism, individualism, self-reliance, localism, and democracy. Their efforts, in my view, largely
determined the size and shape of the national security state for the next half century.

That is an overview of the issues I have wrestled with for thirty years—issues having to do with the
nature of the modern state, the politics, political culture, and ideology of state-making, and the role of
the United States in world affairs. I have loved it. But along the way I became a department chair, and
then a dean, and then a provost, and with each step I’ve had to put my scholarship a little further back on
the burners. That has been hard for a research scholar who has devoted so much of himself to this
work. So I have thought a lot about the connections between the two lives I have led and how the
lessons I have learned from my research can matter to the work I do now.

I am tempted to begin by saying that a life spent studying politics is a life spent preparing to be provost.
Actually, I will say that. It’s true. First, if nothing else, studying foreign policy and state-building keeps
you always in mind of the importance of being politic and diplomatic in the process of university-
buidling. You certainly can’t forget how difficult it is to manage a large institution, or how necessary it
is to make it a collective enterprise rather than an individual one. The precarious balance between
authority focused at the center and authority distributed among largely self-governing units, the struggle
to move the institution forward while protecting individual interests and freedoms: these are definitely
familiar concepts in a university setting! You are reminded of how much more effective it is to manage
through the organization rather than on top of it, particularly at a university like Iowa, which has such a
healthy tradition of shared governance.

Second, and in the same vein, it is easy to find parallels between the great machinery of state-making
and the smaller but still formidable machinery of university-building when it comes to the importance of
collaboration and partnerships, such as those between the public and private sectors. Truman and
Eisenhower, I said earlier, sought “to merge the country’s democratic traditions with its global
obligations.” Public universities also have democratic traditions to maintain, even as we meet our
obligations to the states that support us, to our students, and to society at large. In this time of growing
demands on state coffers, we find ourselves increasingly turning to other sources of support. The largest
of these is increased tuition, and those increases, if not carefully managed, could threaten the democratic
foundation of access to higher education in this country. For that reason and others, we look, too, to new
sources of revenue, such as increased philanthropy and the opportunities afforded by technology
transfer, licensing, and partnerships with business and industry. It is a constant balancing act to ensure
that we simultaneously protect our core educational mission, play out our key role in the global
advancement of knowledge, and participate in the economic development of our state.

Third, anyone in a leadership position can and should take valuable lessons from public leaders like
Hoover, Truman, and Eisenhower. For example, all of them led by finding excellent colleagues and
giving them freedom to excel. Here at Iowa, appointing excellent deans and department chairs who
know their stuff and will uphold the interests of their individual units in ways that serve the university is
clearly one of my most important responsibilities. Without trying to suggest that I have successfully
mastered them all, I could cite a long list of other leadership qualities the presidents I’ve studied have modeled: extraordinary management and organizational skills, a strong work ethic, mastery of the art of negotiation, devotion to public service, and the ability to think strategically, for instance. Not to mention the ability to grow a thick skin!

Fourth, as is the case in most any field, spending many years devoted to scholarly inquiry opens your mind to the great variety of questions to be asked and the different paradigms to be deployed. As editor for fifteen years of Diplomatic History, the journal of record for diplomatic historians, and as president of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, I observed and tried to foster new influences on our field. I believe we cannot grow as scholars, or as people, or as university administrators, without constantly exploring and honoring new perspectives, and valuing diversity in all its forms.

And finally, you can’t study international relations your whole life, and people who understood America’s connection to and deep involvement in the world, without developing an acute appreciation of the need to internationalize the American university. This means being as aggressive as we can be in promoting study abroad experiences for our students, recruiting the best and brightest international students and scholars, encouraging international exchanges at the faculty level, building internationalism into our curriculum, and urging our students to study foreign languages and to learn about the customs, culture, and traditions of other people around the world. Empowering our students to think critically and function successfully in a global society is a cornerstone of an excellent liberal arts education and a cornerstone of our future success as a nation.

Now, I don’t mean to suggest that my colleagues from fields other than diplomatic history are somehow less prepared than I was to become effective administrators. After all, no matter what your field of study, you can hardly have a career in academia without gaining an appreciation for the value of such things as diplomacy, diversity, and the ability to juggle multiple demands on time and resources. But I do think that my scholarship, fortuitously, has given me a particularly valuable perspective on the work I do now.

Clio, you know, was the Muse of History. I invoked her name in the title of this piece—well, maybe in a bit of an attempt to borrow some mythological cachet—but also because I feel lucky to have been “inspired,” shall we say, to pursue a career that has been so constantly engaging, and that has brought me to the (challenging! but) wonderfully rewarding work I enjoy today.
Charles Soutter Campbell, Jr., 1911-2006

Charles Campbell, Professor of US Diplomatic History at the Claremont Graduate University [formerly the Claremont Graduate School] from 1958 to 1985, died on August 17, 2006 at Friends House in Santa Rosa, California.

Campbell was born in Essex Fells, New Jersey and completed his B.A. at Yale University in 1933. Following a two-year stint in the Yale-in-China program in Changsha, Hunan – where he was a teacher of English and History – he returned to New Haven for graduate studies under his mentor Samuel Flagg Bemis. He completed his Ph.D. in 1938 and his well-received dissertation – *American Business Interests and the Open Door in China* – appeared in the November 1941 edition of *Far Eastern Quarterly*.

From 1938 to 1940 Campbell was an Adjunct Professor of Economics at the American University in Beirut, Lebanon. For the years 1940-1945 he served the U.S. Department of State as a Foreign Service Officer in the American Embassy in London where he worked for US Ambassador John G. Winant. It was here that he met Anne Margaret Howson, who was at the time a decipher clerk on the Enigma project at Bletchley Park. Ms. Howson’s father was English and her mother Australian. The two were married at Henley on Thames in June 1944 and in 1945 they moved back to Beirut, where Campbell taught one more year at the American University. In 1946 he took a position in the History Department at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, where he stayed until 1958, with only a brief interruption in 1956, when he accepted a one-year appointment at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

He came to Claremont in 1958 to join a small but exceptional faculty of American historians that included Douglass Adair and John Niven. In 1961, while William Appleman Williams was on leave, Campbell agreed to teach for him at the University of Wisconsin, and in 1977-1978 he was Visiting Professor at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, England. He then returned to Claremont and was at the Graduate University until 1985. He continued to offer classes at adjoining Claremont McKenna College after his official retirement.

Professor Campbell’s remarkable career, in addition to the teaching and government positions indicated above, included his dedicated guiding of graduate students to their Ph.D.s and the publication of numerous books and articles that represented an acknowledged impact on the history profession.

Yale University Press published a refined and expanded rendition of his dissertation in 1951, entitled *Special Business Interests and the Open Door Policy*. By carefully documenting the influence domestic interests exerted on U.S. diplomacy, the study became a seminal inspiration for a post-war generation of Diplomatic Historians. Campbell was also a prominent student of American-British relations. His *Anglo-American Understanding, 1898-1903* (Johns Hopkins Press, 1957, reprinted by Greenwood Press in 1980) remains a standard study of the topic, and his later work, *From Revolution to Rapprochement: The United States and Great Britain, 1783-1900* was published by Wiley in 1974 for its series “America in the World.”
Campbell’s most ambitious project was his study of post-Civil War diplomacy, *The Transformation of American Foreign Relations, 1865-1900* (Harper and Row, 1976). A result of several years of thorough research, the book reflects a commitment to primary source scholarship and addresses with matchless clarity and persuasiveness the more contentious issues raised by historians about this revolutionary period.

While Campbell’s scholarly work will continue to be important to the profession, of equal significance was his teaching. The overused adjective unique legitimately applies to his seminars. Students encountered the first day a syllabus unlike any other they had seen. There were no books indicated, no lengthy instructions; rather a list of questions that were to be answered during each week’s three-hour meeting. The questions were presented in a general chronological order. There was no correct answer to any of them, as can be judged from a typical favorite of his: “When did the Spanish-American War become inevitable?” And Campbell brought no lecture notes or books into the seminar room with him; only a box of note cards.

All students were to submit a typed answer to the question – not to exceed one page – for each seminar meeting; the answer had to be substantiated with accurate data and sound analysis. One student in each class session was responsible for presenting a report addressing the question and, of course, was immediately challenged by all the others once general discussion began. It became obvious during class meetings that answering these questions was not easy! And woe to the unprepared student, or the student who sought the easy route of sweeping through a textbook rendition of the issue. For the week between each session students roamed the documents section of the library, met with one another, reviewed as much literature as possible, and, too often, let other assignments lapse. The result was always a spirited, often memorable, class. And Professor Campbell (whose measured answer to the question we all awaited with nervous anticipation) inserted the most pointed queries during our deliberations and shepherded the discussion with subtle expertise.

Beyond his seminar teaching, Campbell was an accessible mentor, particularly for his thesis students. However, approaching him could lead to some demoralization. One of his students remembers submitting what he thought was the final version of his doctoral dissertation. Two weeks’ later, the student asked Professor Campbell what he thought of the presumably finished work. The answer was, “I have some comments, but then I always do.” It took another six months of labor to produce the version which Campbell approved. Still, the ordeal paid off: the dissertation was accepted for publication as written. No higher compliment can be paid to the great teacher’s exacting standards and benevolent attention to launching his students on their professional careers. Although always at work on his own research and writing, he remained constantly alert to his students’ needs (and occasional tardiness). Moreover, he retained contact with his former students long after they had left his tutelage, and he savored their successes.

Professor Charles S. Campbell Jr. lived a long and productive life. He will be sorely missed by his friends, colleagues, and former students. He is survived by his son Patrick and daughter-in-law Faith Campbell of Glen Ellen, California, and by three grandchildren.
Richard W. Leopold (1912-2006)

Richard W. Leopold, a prominent diplomatic historian whose teaching and scholarship guided students and colleagues during an illustrious career, died of natural causes Thursday, November 23, 2006 in Evanston, Illinois. He was 94.

Among the hundreds of former students identifying Leopold as a mentor who profoundly affected their lives are former Sen. George McGovern (D-SD), former Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo), Rep. Jim Kolbe (R-Az), former assistant secretary of state Phyllis Elliot Oakley, historian John Morton Blum (Sterling Professor of History Emeritus at Yale), journalist Georgie Anne Geyer, and television and motion picture producer/writer/director Garry Marshall. Kolbe wrote, “I used to say with great pride that I learned American diplomatic history at the feet of one of the greatest scholars in the United States -- Dick Leopold. I knew that statement would not be challenged in or out of academic circles. . . [He] believed that being a teacher and a mentor was a lifetime commitment, and for those who responded, it became a lifetime of friendship.” McGovern noted, “I believe that every thoughtful student who studied under Professor Leopold’s direction would agree that this country has produced no more dedicated and competent professor. He has not only mastered his field but he has had a lifetime passion to convey his knowledge and insight to his students.” Marshall recalled his difficulty answering long essay questions in final exam blue books and how Leopold “allowed me to answer with dialogue scenes rather than prose writing and graded me on content rather than style. It helped me tremendously and I think my early Bismarck dialogue aided me in writing sitcoms and movies for a living.”

The second son of Harry Leopold Sr. and Ethel Kimmelstiel, Richard Leopold was born on January 6, 1912 on the upper west side of Manhattan. He attended the Franklin School before enrolling in 1926 at Phillips Exeter Academy where he graduated cum laude in 1929. He then went on to Princeton University, graduating with highest honors and Phi Beta Kappa in 1933.


During World War II, he was commissioned as a naval officer and worked at the Office of Naval Records and Library in Washington, where he devised a unique system -- used long thereafter -- for organizing materials relating to ongoing naval operations. After the war, he returned to Harvard for two years before joining the Northwestern University faculty in 1948. Over the subsequent three decades there, Leopold was instrumental in Northwestern’s successful effort to build one of the finest collection of American history scholars ever assembled at a single institution of its size. In addition to Leopold, the 1950s roster included Ray A. Billington, Arthur S. Link, and Clarence L. Ver Steeg. Leopold and Link became especially close collaborators, producing Problems in American History (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1952, 1957, 1966, 1972), among many other works. In addition to hundreds of articles,

At the height of the Vietnam war protests in 1968, Leopold led the successful effort to prevent Northwestern from dismantling its Naval ROTC program, even though virtually all other comparable academic institutions were doing so. He made a three-fold case in favor of retaining the program. First, it benefited the nation. He was concerned about the potential need to mobilize quickly in times of war; he was also concerned about a military whose officer ranks came exclusively from the service academies and the limited perspectives they offered. Second, the program benefited the university. He noted the many noteworthy program participants who had enriched the university and who would have been unable to attend Northwestern without the NROTC’s financial support. Third, he argued that NROTC helped the students who participated. He was unmoved by those who argued that the program itself somehow proved the academy’s support for a controversial war or “the teaching of killing.” In his faculty address that turned the tide of the debate in favor of retaining the program, he said: “We do not ban the teaching of nuclear physics because someone might make a bomb; we do not avoid the study of Marxism because the student might become a Communist; and we do not discourage the study of sexual deviants because the student himself might become one.” Many of the program’s graduates went on to become career officers; some rose to the rank of admiral.

In 1969, Leopold was tapped to head an independent investigation into Francis L. Loewenheim’s charges against the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library. Loewenheim claimed that the FDR Library staff had withheld certain documents in connection with his research and further asserted that the American Historical Association, Organization of American Historians, and National Archives had thereafter covered up his resulting charges. After a year-long investigation, the joint AHA-OAH committee that Leopold chaired issued a 447-page report, *Final Report of the Joint AHA-OAH Ad Hoc Committee to Investigate the Charges Against the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Related Matters* (Washington, DC: American Historical Association: 1970). Contrary to Loewenheim’s allegations, the Report concluded that there had been no conspiracy and that the professional bodies charged with investigating the original complaint had simply been ill-equipped to deal with the vicious and unprecedented assault that Loewenheim and his lawyer had launched against a group of academics.

Leopold served on numerous governmental advisory committees, including those for the Secretary of the Navy, State Department, Army, Marine Corps, Atomic Energy Commission, CIA, and Library of Congress. He was also a member of the Editorial Advisory Committee for *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* and of the board of directors for the Harry S. Truman Library Institute. He was president of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations in 1970 and of the Organization of American Historians in 1976.

In 1984, Leopold’s former doctoral students established the OAH’s Richard W. Leopold Prize, which is awarded biannually. In 1990, former students, colleagues, and friends established the annual Richard W. Leopold Lectureship at Northwestern in his honor. This year’s lecturer was Samantha Power. In 1997,
more than 230 former students collectively endowed the Richard W. Leopold Professorship in American history at Northwestern.

He is survived by a nephew, John P. Leopold, who lives in Centennial, Colorado. Plans for an early 2007 memorial service are underway. A former student, Steven J. Harper, has written Leopold’s biography, which Northwestern University Press has tentatively scheduled for publication in the fall of 2007.