# Requiem for a Field: The Strange Journey of U.S. Diplomatic History

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U.S. Diplomatic History no longer exists. Not as a hiring category in higher education, at least. About a decade ago, United States and the World History subsumed U.S. Diplomatic History. This essay is about that transformation. Why did it happen and what did it change? My goal is to identify some useable generalizations about how the field now works, so that interested readers can develop their own opinions about where we should go next.

Three claims organize this requiem. The first is that the field has tended to reflect the politics of the time. The reason is not hard to comprehend because the United States became the most powerful empire in human history at a time when history became an organized profession. At the risk of egregious oversimplification, we might use generational stereotypes to signpost how the conversation about U.S. foreign relations history evolved over time. For instance, Baby Boomers are often accused of taking their differences seriously, and that generation's scholarship generated diametrically opposed interpretations of American power. In contrast, Generation X historians shrugged off these categories, authoring a "New Diplomatic History" that was less political and more ironic. An earlier interest in social change morphed into an obsession with methodology. Now, as Millennial scholars make their imprint on the field, the conversation about American power is growing more critical. As we'll see, today's historians are attacking foundational American beliefs in ways that reflect their disillusionment with liberalism—and their apathy toward American hegemony.

The essay's second and third claims flow from these crude stereotypes. For much of its history, U.S. Diplomatic History was plural but not very diverse. This plurality arose from the fact that diplomatic historians disagreed profoundly about capitalism, leading them into camps that judged US foreign relations differently. Yet these arguments—or perhaps the fact that most participants were white middle-aged straight men—made the field cohesive. Today, the field is more diverse and less plural. Fewer diplomatic historians are white cisgender men. In fact, only a handful still identify as diplomatic historians. Yet the field's burgeoning diversity papers over the fact that its leading voices tend to see the world through the same political lens. Today, most U.S. and the World scholars treat capitalism, nationalism, and liberalism critically, and suggest that the United States should not play a role in world affairs because its track record is abysmal. In ways that are exciting—and perhaps problematic—the field now exists to criticize U.S. power.

### The Past

How did we get here? Forty years ago, U.S. diplomatic historians told two different origins stories about the field. The more popular tale focused on the exploits of those who had stormed the ivory tower after the 1950s. This story always started in Madison, Wisconsin. Working under the aegis of William Appleman Williams (1959) and Fred Harvey Harrington, a coterie of graduate students, most prominently Walter LaFeber, Thomas McCormick, and Lloyd Gardner (1976), authored a much-heralded master narrative about the tragedy of American diplomacy, and this master narrative came to dominate the field of U.S. Diplomatic History. Although historians studied diplomacy before this intervention, they did so without the pretense of synthesis. The Wisconsin school—or the New Left as it is commonly called—changed this. You could accept or reject its thesis but no one could ignore its power.

The New Left argument was simple enough. Contrary to public perception, the United States had not been dragged kicking and screaming from its isolationist ways into international politics in the 1940s. Rather the United States had sought out overseas markets greedily for over a half century, using informal imperialism to open doors for U.S. businessmen and other American interest groups. This argument denaturalized American capitalism, presenting its spread as contingent and political, and the New Left thesis struck a chord with general readers by affirming the belief that Cold War propagandists could not be trusted. Against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, U.S. diplomatic historians became truthtellers, unafraid to skewer the shibboleths of liberals who blamed all unrest everywhere on the Soviet Union. When McCormick (1971) laid out the first formal agenda for the field in the early 1970s, he framed this kind of "structural" analysis as an antidote to the study of foreign affairs.

McCormick saw the Wisconsin school as *revising* a second, less sexy origins story, rooted not in the exploits of young boomers but in the collaboration between U.S. Diplomatic History and the U.S. government. Before the 1960s, some historians enjoyed access to American officialdom, lending their expertise to the war effort against world fascism and then joining the fight against world communism. This arrangement turned a handful of historians into philosopher kings. For example, George Kennan (1956, 1958) made strategy for the U.S. State Department before retiring to Princeton to write influential diplomatic histories about World War I. He exemplified this dynamic. Similarly, Hans Morgenthau (1948), who corresponded regularly with U.S. secretaries of state from his perch at the University of Chicago, invented the field of International Relations by presenting U.S. Diplomatic History as raw material for the "scientific" study foreign affairs. For these collaborators, the line between history and political science barely existed since knowledge was only useful if it possessed a real-world application.

If McCormick's call to arms put these self-proclaimed realists on the defense, they did not stay there for long. To the contrary, they defended their collaboration with the U.S. government while laying claim to features of the New Left. Memorably, when Bancroft-winning historian John Lewis Gaddis (1983) announced the arrival of *post*-revisionist

synthesis, he coopted McCormick's structural approach, acknowledging the methodological merits of studying the United States as an empire. U.S. foreign relations, Gaddis argued, had to be seen holistically. However, Gaddis derided the New Left for its anti-capitalist sophism. Since all great powers were empires, he reasoned, comparison did not have to be critical, and he frequently observed that Soviet imperialism was worse than the American alternative (Gaddis, 1997). After authoring a synthesis of Cold War strategy—uprooting key features of New Left orthodoxy—Gaddis (1982, 2005) crafted a grand strategy program at Yale University that examined the difficulties facing powerful people, winning accolades from a sitting president and consternation from colleagues in higher education. By the time Germany reunified and the Soviet Union collapsed, the chasm between these rival approaches felt insurmountable because the two sides exemplified contemporary partisan discourse so elegantly.[1]

It fell on Michael Hogan's shoulders to weave these perspectives into a coherent tapestry. As editor of *Diplomatic History*, the field's journal of record, he published a series of influential edited volumes that pulled together these rival origin stories, and, in the process, unfurled a longer narrative about the history of U.S. foreign relations history. For Hogan (1996; 2000; Hogan and Paterson, 1994, 2004), the disagreements between revisionists and post-revisionists originated in the earliest days of the historical profession. Afterall, before the social and cultural turns—before the creation of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) in 1967—*everybody* was a diplomatic historian. The field, Hogan argued, began as a conversation between nationalists and progressives at the dawn of the twentieth century, so that is where the field's true origin lay. Whereas Samuel Flagg Bemis (1926) and Dexter Perkins (1933) explored the ingenuity of early American elites by studying their diplomacy through European eyes, progressives like Charles and Mary Beard (1927) emphasized and probed the malleability of early American politics. The former approach propped up nationalism and the latter deflated its tropes, establishing the template for all subsequent scholarship.

This initial divide, Hogan believed, explained the conflict between realists, revisionists, and post-revisionists in his time. Whereas historians like Ernest May (1986) and Geir Lundestad (1986) respected elites, authoring tomes that explained how policymakers should use history, Williams and his cohort criticized elites, implying that their ambitions betrayed the spirit of the American heartland. The two sides used archives differently and disagreed on whether the past offered useable lessons or dire warnings, and Hogan, as a product of this impasse, saw potential syntheses everywhere. From his perch at *Diplomatic History*, he needled rivals like Gaddis—whom he charact-erized as Bemis 2.0—while championing a revolving door of "next big things" that promised to settle that day's implacable interpretative divide. For example, his initial answer to post-revisionism was corporatism. In Hogan's mind (1987), studying the way government bureaucracies aided American businessmen shed light on capitalism's efflorescence.

But synthesis was elusive. One reason was that diplomatic historians defined the subject at the center of the field differently. Some scholars focused on the state, or the individuals who designed and implemented public policy. Others looked to the nation, or the cultural and social practices that delimited group behavior by shaping self/other perceptions over time. For example, Williams's *Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1956) was about the nation, or the invisible forces that allegedly made the United States do certain things during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In contrast, Gaddis's *Strategies of Containment* (1982, 2005) is about the state, evaluating how a series of presidential administrations implemented a single strategic doctrine during the Cold War. Cited as exemplars of the revisionist and post-revisionist traditions, respectively, these works focused on different objects, similar enough to sustain debate—since the nation and state feel so inextricable—yet distinct enough to make consensus impossible.

Equally important was the field's Janus-face. Until the end of the Cold War, its members mostly wrote about the causes and effects of public policy, and many important policy questions could only be answered by looking at the home front. For example, when Lyndon Johnson sent half a million Americans to Vietnam, he was embroiled in political considerations, therefore many of the diplomatic historians trying to explain that act felt compelled to look for answers in Johnson's White House. However, other equally essential questions—especially those related to the effects of American policy—necessitated research elsewhere and a different kind of narrative style. The tension between these approaches was generative and baked into the revisionist and post-revisionist divide. So long as diplomatic historians continued to ask different kinds of questions, Robert McMahon (1990) explained, they would require a pluralist attitude toward the United States and the world. Lasting consensus was not as interesting as long walks on the border between rival perspectives.

Finally, revisionists and post-revisionists interpreted American motives differently. As mentioned, historians in the latter camp tended to emphasize international context to argue that the United States should be judged against the actions of its rivals. Washington was not always good, but it was better than most. Those in the former camp accentuated domestic context, measuring Washington's behavior against the country's professed values. While not always evil, the United States was rarely what it claimed to be. As the choice between these mindsets became circular—pitting students of strategy and capitalism against each other in a never-ending debate about the origins of the Cold War—adjustments became necessary. By 1980, Charles Maier (1980; Responses, 1981) was blasting the field as dull, predictable, and parochial.

If U.S. Diplomatic History emerged from a debate over its own origins, it changed when younger scholars lost interest in that past. By 1997, Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffmann (1997) could declare the emergence of an approach she called the New Diplomatic History. Like revisionism and post-revisionism, this school aspired to look systemically at the United States in the world. However, it paid more attention to nongovernmental actors and foreign influences that affected life inside the United States. The goal, Cobbs explained, was to shift attention from the way Americans influenced the world to the way the world changed Americans. This required a new "lens," or an approach that deemphasized those who helmed government bureaucracies in the United States. Some early examples of scholarship in this vein focused on civil rights (Anderson, 2003; Dudziak, 2001). Antiracist activists traveled widely and engaged overseas audiences regularly, and their diplomacy provided a new way to see the U.S. footprint abroad. Another widely discussed topic was gender, specifically the way language shaped perceptions about masculinity and command (Hoganson, 2000). Both approaches extended the insights of Michael Hunt's magisterial *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (1987), which explored how American nationalism delimited U.S. interactions with the world. For Cobbs and others, Hunt's work was a torch, illuminating a historiography that took ideas as seriously as economics and politics.

Literary Studies expanded the methodological possibilities of this change. During the 1990s, *American Quarterly* emerged as an alternative to *Diplomatic History*, especially for scholars working in the field of American Studies. Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease's *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (1993) became a prism for this shift, embraced by some as coeval to Williams's *Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959). Kaplan and Pease presented realism as a language of power, not a reflection of the world as it is. If the nation was an artificial

intellectual container, then marginalized individuals could be imagined protagonists in a high stakes fight against cultural homogenization. Inspired by this insight, the Cultural Left pushed past the New Left's perceived limits. While the latter unsettled capitalism during the 1960s, the former now targeted nationalism, accentuating the premise that many New Left historians held on to their civic pride as they blasted U.S. elites, letting criticism of East Coast capitalists double as a defense of Midwestern virtue. In contrast, the Cultural Left implicated more people in the project of American empire by deconstructing nationalism, which suggested that the United States was motivated equally by greed, racism, and sexism. No one was innocent.

These changes bore fruit with Odd Arne Westad's *The Global Cold War* (2005), a Bancroft-winning examination of American and Soviet interventions in the Third World, which used the ideology of modernization—and a remarkable number of overseas archives—to rethink how the superpower contest affected people on the periphery of American and Soviet power. In Westad's hands, modernization theory became an explanatory catchall, and the publication of *The Global Cold War* marked a transition for the field. With wars raging in Iraq and Afghanistan, New Diplomatic History felt urgent and appropriate, and diplomatic historians began interrogating not just the actions of U.S. elites but the assumptions and institutions that buttressed U.S. hegemony. Hunt (1991)—Westad's mentor—had anticipated this shift in a prescient comeback to Maier's criticism (1980), imploring colleagues to adopt a globalist outlook that looked at the United States from the outside-in. By exploring ideology internationally, Hunt argued, diplomatic historians could liberate the field from those who would use geopolitical context to defend imperial hubris. For people ensconced in this discussion, Westad's triumph was the realization of Hunt's clarion call—and proof that the field was finally achieving its full potential.

This moment was especially exciting for those who guided SHAFR after 1967. Just before Westad published *The Global Cold War*, Hogan used his SHAFR presidential address (2003) to revisit Maier's claims (1980) explicitly. Focusing on the relationship between diplomatic history and American Studies, he singled out Kaplan, Emily Rosenberg, Nathan Citino, and Matthew Connelly for special praise, scholars who recognized the power of language and told stories with evidence from overseas archival repositories. Hogan made a humble request:

> My plea is to be as open and as inclusive as possible, to further diversify [*Diplomatic History*], and to make it truly a journal of record that competes not only for the best work on traditional subjects but also for new work by scholars who have not been trained in the history of American foreign relations but who are nonetheless contributing to the internationalization of American history. (Hogan, 2004: 20-21).

Five years later, Thomas Zeiler (2009), who succeeded Hogan as one of the editors of *Diplomatic History*, unfurled a SHAFR-sized "mission accomplished" banner on the pages of the *Journal of American History*. He framed U.S. Diplomatic History as a clearing house, or a safe place to interrogate dichotomies like domestic/international, theory/empiricism, and security/culture. Multiarchival, multilingual research was the new norm, and young diplomatic historians were turning attention to the way non-American (often non-state) actors navigated the systems that American elites claimed to dominate. References to cultural theorist Edward Said, once uncommon at SHAFR gatherings, abounded now, and the study of diplomacy had become inextricably entwined with the study of race and gender. These transformations, Zeiler argued, explained why SHAFR had become a "well-endowed, expansive organization with nearly two thousand members from thirty-four nations," and a field poised to shape new forums like H-Net, where "H-Diplo boasts over four thousand subscribers, making it one of the five largest list servers among the 180 in the [that] system." With the United States embroiled in a war against terrorism, the time had come for the historical profession to jump on the U.S. Diplomatic History bandwagon. "You are us," Zeiler announced (2009: 1054).

Many diplomatic historians recoiled from Zeiler's words, recognizing that he was eliding unresolved tensions. Whereas Hogan implored colleagues to embrace the Cultural Left—partly so that diplomatic historians remained relevant in the fast-changing present—Zeiler suggested that the wider profession, inured by cultural and social history, needed to revisit diplomacy and war, since current events highlighted the importance of both. "Yes, the field has changed in recent years," Hoganson countered, "but that does not make [U.S. Diplomatic History] the grand marshal of the parade" (2009: 1087). Similarly, Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht (2009) insisted that the field's rejuvenation arose from its synergy with those pushing *against* the field's traditional emphasis on war and peace. Without rejecting Zeiler's characterizations, Hoganson and Gienow-Hecht pushed a different conclusion, emphasizing that "good" scholarship explored the way Americans interacted with other people in contact zones overseas. These interactions, often ambiguous and open-ended, suggested that U.S. Diplomatic History was experiencing a renaissance because diplomacy was growing less central to diplomatic history.

Other historians attacked the premises on which Zeiler's assessment rested. For example, Fredrik Logevall (2009) asked why so many people equated progress with internationalization and diversification. In his estimation, collaboration with the Cultural Left was making it harder to talk earnestly about American politics. The field needed to recenter on domestic affairs, he argued, so that it could contribute to much-needed conversations about responsible statecraft. Conversely, Mario Del Pero (2009) lamented the field's internationalization and diversification as too slow to diminish its obsession with the United States. Despite appearances to the contrary, U.S. diplomatic historians still believed everything revolved around Washington, and this belief fueled a self-satisfied methodological regression that generated little more than dull summaries of things written by people in the past. The latest trends, Del Pero argued, were "leading in the directions of fragmentation, rigidity, and less dialogue" (2009: 1081-82), a criticism that doubled as a critique of Gen X navel gazing. With everyone clamoring after the next new thing, New Diplomatic History was stymying the emergence of a master synthesis on par with the classic scholarship of Williams and Gaddis.

This conversation came to a head quickly. In the months before the 2009 SHAFR annual meeting, H-Diplo conducted a poll that asked whether SHAFR should change its name to something less American, and Rosenberg used the conference to propose rebranding *Diplomatic History* as *Diplomatic and Transnational History*, reasoning that the later title captured the spirit of this new scholarship—and bridged the growing divide between diplomatic history and American Studies. When nothing happened, Connelly organized a riposte to Zeiler's argument at the 2010 OAH annual meeting, claiming that U.S. Diplomatic History was now thwarting the maturation of a new field about the transnational world. For this new field to thrive, U.S. diplomatic historians had to repudiate their identity as Americanists (Connelly, et al, 2011).

If Zeiler's assessment was triumphalist, Connelly's response proved divisive. "An element of silliness pervades a core aspect of this vision," McMahon wrote afterwards. Afterall, SHAFR had been formed to study U.S. foreign relations and border walking had generated the insights that Connelly praised. "If an object of study possesses sufficient importance to warrant an organization of scholars committed

to its investigation, then it strikes me as curious . . . to attack it for not investigating a different subject" (Connelly, et al, 2011: 7). Even Hoganson, sympathetic to all transnational things, rejected Connelly's call to arms, and Citino astutely asked whether other scholarly communities like Middle East Studies might be inadvertently colonized by Connelly's vision of a totalizing transnational past (Connelly, et al, 2011: 12-16). If everyone was a globalist now, could a historian have expertise in just one place—or would that work be considered illegitimate?

This impasse exposed important tensions. Controversially, Connelly was proposing a new origins story for the field. He did not care about Wisconsin's boomers or Maier's criticisms, nor did he see SHAFR as the field's rightful institutional home. In Connelly's mind, the conversation that mattered started in 1997, when faculty at New York University—led by Thomas Bender (2002)—organized the La Pietra conference to unshackle historiography from the nation. This project reflected the globalizing impulses of the 1990s, and SHAFR, which Connelly characterized as provincial (2011), had no seat at that table. To the contrary, at La Pietra and afterwards, urbane historians of migration, trade, and the environment had placed a self-consciously post-national frame around the United States, provincializing U.S. politics by casting aside disciplinary boundaries. This scholarship not only repudiated the premise that the United States was unique; it worked toward a democratic transhistoriography that encompassed everything everywhere all the time. Whereas the Cultural Left blasted American empire, this work obscured its existence, and for Connelly, a better field would materialize from this historiography—and maybe even a better world (Bayley, et al, 2006).

On the other side of the debate, two things were true. First, U.S. Diplomatic History was gone, replaced by a category called United States and the World. For those just entering the field in those years, this was a fascinating development. With employment opportunities coming under a different aegis, job candidates, especially in the United States, danced warily with job committees, each probing the other for insight into what this transformation signified. In ways that mapped onto Citino's observations, some departments welcomed United States and the World, squeezing new geographic breadth from aspiring faculty, but others criticized post-nationalism as a potential threat to local knowledge. Second, the line separating politics and pedagogy blurred as the United States and the World took root. By the early 2010s, almost everyone who belonged to the field embraced diversity and inclusion, yet no one seemed to know whether transnationalism could be a method of study and an object *to* study. For better or worse, organizing followed slowly from criticism, and Connelly's prophesy of a new field did not materialize. Just as Facebook failed to bring democracy to the Middle East, post-national consciousness did not create a new profession.

### The Present

Who won the debate? Probably Paul Kramer. Writing in the *American Historical Review* (2011) after the Zeiler-Connelly hullabaloo, Kramer shifted the conversation from methodology to politics. U.S. Diplomatic History, he argued, existed to critique American empire. Treating all American actions as imperial helped diplomatic historians—irrespective of their aloofness from the La Pietra conference—comprehend the United States' true place in the world. With considerable subtlety, Kramer wrote post-revisionism out of existence by equating the field's growth with the work of the New Left and Cultural Left. He buttressed this move with an extensive typology, outlining his preferred topics and subtopics of inquiry, and explaining why American imperialism resembled European imperialism despite claims to the contrary. Kramer's central thesis was that the effects of US foreign relations mattered more than the semantics of its elites. Like Hoganson and Gienow-Hecht, he equated good scholarship with the study of interactions in contact zones, since those spaces revealed how power worked in practice and how it was contested over time. By studying connections and interactions, historians might author that master synthesis that Del Pero characterized as elusive.

Kramer's intervention struck a chord. Today, United States and the World History, the field formerly known as U.S. Diplomatic History, is defined by the study of American empire. Although empire has been the field's central analytical tool for forty plus years, the latest work is distinguished by an emphasis on connection and interaction. Compared to a decade ago, scholars working in this historiographical space are more alive to the entropy—to the multi-directional, totalizing nature of politics—that is inherent to all claim-making. Entropy explains change and power without making either seem inevitable or simplistic. The field's definition of contact zones has broadened from borderlands to urban spaces, international organizations, and multinational corporations. But this focus on entropy has only grown since Kramer's 2011 intervention. The approach allows Americans to see themselves in a world they made and appreciate how fundamentally their world-making ambitions changed U.S. society. It has also pushed scholars to interrogate more and more of the concepts they take for granted. If every category is inherently entropic, no idea can be intrinsically stable, meaning that no truth exists outside a struggle for power. Everything is contested all the time.

This premise has spurred three interlocking insights about American empire. The first is about entanglement. When Americans have inserted themselves into faraway lands, they have almost always piggybacked on the efforts of others. Emily Conroy-Krutz (2015, 2022) has brought this process to life brilliantly in her histories of American overseas missionaries. Even as her subjects insisted upon the distinctiveness of their work, they expanded their reach by collaborating with the Europeans they pilloried. On the ground in far-off places, Americans borrowed ideas and goods from colonial officials and merchants, protecting white privilege as they rode these same transnational circuits. Moreover, on the ground, American influence almost always arose through relationships with indigenous peoples. While U.S. interlopers rarely exerted dominion over those they encountered abroad, they frequently changed the way locals wielded resources, fueling unrest that affected everyone differently. Invariably, this unrest spurred new kinds of (equally entangled) interventions, and a host of religious and racial hierarchies have persisted not because of their stability but because of their malleability.

A second insight is about denial. Like all imperial projects, the United States has fostered connection while asserting difference, and Americans have been unusually invested in the premise that they are unlike those they encounter abroad. Knocking down American exceptionalism—a shared pastime of the New Left and Cultural Left—has given way to work about *how* Americans denied their imperial tendances. Daniel Immerwahr (2020) has walked this line expertly, lingering on the slippages between different regimes of liberal exceptionalism. For example, the tradeoffs (and frustrations) of an overtly racist colonialism at the turn of the last century helped energize development as a rhetoric of difference and power in the decades that followed. In turn, the contest over development—the Cold War itself—encouraged the efflorescence of a rights revolution that was then devoured by neoliberalism, and so on and so forth. These conversations, when considered up-close, were messy. They unfolded in asymmetrical settings. There were too many stakeholders to talk of beginnings and endings, and the participants often behaved in fascinatingly counter-intuitive ways. But when considered holistically, the takeaway is obvious: If entanglement explains how change happens, denial reveals why.

A third insight is about government. No institution has had more capacity for organized violence in modern times. As scholars have turned increasingly to themes of entanglement and denial, attention has shifted from the upper echelons of state authority, where grand strategy is often conceptualized, to government's middle and lower levels, where it is implemented and revised. This shift has brought a new cast of characters to the fore, and it has prompted earnest debates about previously ignored topics. Disagreements about presidents have turned into disputes about the relative authority of the State Department's legal advisor and the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel, and whole books are now dedicated to bureaucracies that earlier historians barely noticed. Megan Black (2018), for example, has skillfully used the Interior Department's work managing natural resources to pinpoint how Americans wielded scientific and environmental expertise to attain the benefits of empire without the burdens of imperialism. Shifting the focus from high diplomacy to mid-level rulemaking has put the mundanity of empire in sharper relief—and illuminated the worldwide reach of American bureaucratic authority.

The Cultural Left's critique added complexity to U.S. Diplomatic History, but it also reinscribed a culture-capital dichotomy that many historians find problematic today.

Today, these three insights saturate the historiography. A field dominated previously by impassioned debates about republican virtue is characterized now by knotty inquiries into law, capitalism, security, migration, and transportation. This work has rendered asymmetrical overseas relationships more complex, and it has done so by foregrounding the constancy of negotiation and debate. While unequal structures have guided the way Americans interact with each other and the world, these structures have rarely stayed still for long, mostly because the individuals helming U.S. institutions have taken such pride in their own ignorance. They refuse to see the antecedents and implications of their work. As this insight has grown familiar, an older emphasis on the design of U.S. policy has given way to a new emphasis on the consequences of U.S. power, or as Hoganson (2021) explained so beautifully in her SHAFR presidential address, transnational history has taken a spatial turn. Today, most diplomatic historians accept the premise that interactions explain change over time, and while the field covers a startling array of themes—from gender and sexuality to development and decolonization—and evinces a deep interest in spatiality—the field's leading voices talk about the processes at the heart of their work in a strikingly uniform way.

This transformation has softened older disagreements. Compared to a decade ago, SHAFR historians are quicker to acknowledge themselves as North Americanists. However, they have accepted that label without slipping into the parochialism feared by Connelly and the others. Westad's breakthrough, in retrospect, created the impression that any aspiring graduate student could pick up a half dozen languages and hop between continents to mine their archival riches, emerging with a radically omniscient reinterpretation of our planet's past. That mindset has not scaled easily, partly because it relied on an urbancentrism problematized by events and sociologists like Saskia Sasson (2001). In the past decade, declarations about stillborn fields have morphed into authentic curiosity about the places where Americans have inserted themselves. For example, historians like Lien-Hang Nguyen (2012), Pierre Asselin (2013), David Biggs (2012), Michitake Aso (2018), and Christopher Goscha (2016)—individuals who have successfully used Vietnamese perspectives to reframe U.S.-Vietnam history—have not created new fields so much as built bridges between SHAFR and Southeast Asian Studies. Their work is not post-national; it is collaborative. Arguably, they are following in the footsteps of their subjects by entangling themselves with the regions they study.

This shift has changed the way scholars examine most of the field's major themes. For example, economic development has been a prominent topic for more than twenty years, but the conversation once unfolded in separate subdisciplines, so that Americanists like Michael Latham (2000), tackling development through the eyes of U.S. officials, rarely engaged Africanists like Frederick Cooper (1996), who used development to historicize decolonization. Today, that chasm has closed. Most historians agree that development formed from contestation on unequal terrain, and that that contestation changed every participant differently. One masterful example of the new consensus is David Engerman's (2018) history of the Cold War in South Asia, which simultaneously revealed the impact of Indian economic aid on the superpower contest while tracing how that aid changed the workings of Indian statehood. Similarly, Amy Offner (2019) has shown how collaboration between U.S. economic experts and their Latin American counterparts laid the foundation for the United States' repudiation of the welfare state. Both Engerman and Offner show that knowledge traveled multiple directions—not outward from Washington—and that interactions on the ground adjusted everyone's assumptions.

The same insight animates the work of area specialists. Priya Lal (2015) and Alden Young (2017), for instance, have engaged development from Tanzanian and Sudanese perspectives, respectively, authoring works about economic diplomacy and expertise that converge on the same processes studied by Engerman and Offner. This scholarship has shown how universal claims are used locally. Studying development is this manner has uprooted the premise that local people were passive victims of foreign oppression. The truth is more interactive. Postcolonial states, whose legitimacy often arose from international recognition (and the resources derived from apperception), wielded developmental concepts to exercise power over the people in their borders. According to Young, these actions were not that different than the imperialism displaced by decolonization. Stephen Macekura and Erez Manela's argument (2018; Macekura, 2015) that development history has now entered a second wave—when research on the origins, uses, and effects of economic knowledge mingle together—doubles as a call for more collaboration with area experts. Collaboration is the new normal.

If the history of development is entering a second wave, the history of capitalism has probably entered a third. No concept has been more foundational to the field. The New Left, inaugurated by Williams, then elaborated by LaFeber (1963, 1995), Rosenberg (1982, 2004), and Frank Costigliola (1984), among others, explained the politics of capitalism by equating U.S. foreign relations with the pursuit of new markets, cheap labor, and raw materials. When the Cultural Left denaturalized nationalism thirty years later, it did so without uprooting that earlier argument. Kaplan's point was that race and gender determined who belonged to the nation and that this difference-making process affected U.S. foreign relations as much as the pursuit of markets. The Cultural Left's critique added complexity to U.S. Diplomatic History, but it also reinscribed a culture-capital dichotomy that many historians find problematic today. For Alex Beasley (2022), Peter James Hudson (2017), Laleh Khalili (2020), and Jayita Sarkar (2022), capitalism *is* a cultural construct. Born from the vagaries of white settler colonialism, capitalism reinscribes settler racism by dispossessing communities and commodifying their interactions.

Like new work on development, this insight is interdisciplinary. It rests upon Nancy Frazier's reminder (2009) that while capital accumulation has always involved the exploitation of labor—the truth at the heart of Marxism—that exploitation has manifested with racialized intensity in imperial settings. Hudson's work probes this dynamic by looking at the collusion between Wall Street banks and

American policymakers. However, he does not portray Caribbean elites as passive victims of dollar diplomacy. Like Lal and Young, Hudson shows that local elites gamed the system even as new regulations reinforced old assumptions. This same tension is central to Beasley's scholarship about the oil embargoes of the 1970s, when U.S. companies drew closer to the overseas leaders who defied the U.S. government. These corporations buttressed U.S. power haphazardly, employing anti-Arab racism at home while clamoring for more oilfields abroad. Jessica Levy (2022) uses a comparable insight to explain Coca-Cola's response to the antiracist social movements of the 1960s. On the turn of a dime, the company claimed diversity as its raison d'être, championing Black businessmen to prop up racial capitalism. Dispossession accelerated after decolonization because business elites co-opted diversity so easily.

The literature about gender and sexuality has evolved similarly. In 1997, Costigliola published a landmark gendered analysis of Kennan's writings (1997), arguing that emotion shaped realism, and that insight has expanded in several directions in the past decade. On the one side are scholars like Glenda Sluga (2021), Katharina Rietzler (2021), and Sylvia Bashevkin (2018). Sluga has masterfully recovered the unsung diplomatic work of women in centuries past. Despite their exclusion from official diplomacy, women often shaped the cultural spaces around diplomatic work. Rietzler, similarly, has illuminated the transatlantic philanthropic networks that supported women's international thought, and Bashevkin has studied the way women led well-funded bureaucracies like the State Department. Madeleine Albright, Hillary Clinton, Jeanne Fitzpatrick, Nikki Haley, Samantha Powers, Condoleezza Rice, and Susan Rice are inheritors of an unsung tradition and complex subjects who have wielded gender counterintuitively. Rather than opining about how men and women use power, this scholarship has further illuminated gender's fluidity and its effects on perception and interaction.

On the other side are historians like Laura Prieto (2013), David Minto (2018), Sarah Bellows-Blakely (2020). In her work on Philippines-United States relations, Prieto has employed what she calls a "glocul" approach, using gender to explain the experiences of Filipino women who interfaced with colonial structures at the turn of the twentieth century. Her work has opened avenues to consider the way women's activism abroad affected the suffrage movement in the United States. In comparable ways, Minto has traced the work of gay activists, charting the rise of a transatlantic queer public sphere that connected Europe to North America. In both places, reforms followed from transatlantic gay solidary. However, Bellows-Blakely argues this same insight differently. Like Levy (2022), she asks why solutions to gendered discrimination have so often reinforced neoliberal capitalism, encouraging victims to "lean in" within for-profit labor markets that only ever expand. Even as international organizations welcomed new voices into the fold in the 1980s—framing conference gatherings and joint-statements as proof of solidarity—these interactions tokenized radical feminists by defanging their critiques of capitalism.

The conversation about rights has followed a comparable trajectory. In the same way Costigliola helped inaugurate a debate about gender, Samuel Moyn (2010) provoked a wide-ranging discussion about rights by attacking the premise that their history can be stretched unproblematically to the dawn of Western civilization. In truth, Moyn argued, rights have always been political. Rights advocacy has involved constant argument and our current truths rest upon the ruins of earlier utopian convictions. Although not every historian has endorsed all Moyn's conclusions, the literature is a far cry from its earlier teleological self. Thanks to Sarah Snyder (2011, 2018), we now know that rights advocacy affected the Cold War's endgame. We also know why so many foreign policy bureaucracies changed after the antiracist and antisexist social movements of the 1960s. Barbara Keys (2014), meanwhile, has shown how rights talk changed Democrats and Republicans during the 1970s, fueling the rejuvenation of American exceptionalism after Vietnam, and Laura Belmonte (2020) has documented how gay activists interacted with other transnational rights movements. As Mark Bradley's superb synthesis (2018) underscores, today's conversation about rights is astonishingly diverse, encapsulating everything from the rights of animals to the rights of plants.

Not surprisingly, this conversation has spurred an interest in law, since rights require some legal pretense to be enforceable. In the United States, government asserts that individuals possess the right to life, property, and self-expression—the trifecta of liberal freedom—and government exists to secure and protect those rights through police action and military force. Abuse is curtailed, the argument goes, because the executive is checked by an autonomous judiciary and legislature, and law materializes from the interplay between the branches of federal government. This premise has manifested differently over time. Benjamin Coates (2016), for example, has explored how American lawyers used international law to rationalize US imperialism after the Spanish-American War. From the outset, the legal profession functioned as an incubator and insulator, bringing together lawyers to define civilization—always in terms of liberal freedom—while pushing them to believe that voluntary adjudication and international tribunals might spread civilization without colonization. While Coates uses this insight to historicize Woodrow Wilson's embrace of the League of Nations, Allison Powers (2018) lingers on the contradictory history of international arbitration. According to the legal theorists who worked inside these tribunals, foreign states did not just violate international law when they ignored treaties about war and peace; they violated international law by implementing domestic policies that limited the profitability of foreign investments. In this respect, international tribunals—and the law made therein—made US property rights universal. Yet this approach backfired, since people within the affected territories eventually used these same tribunals to scrutinize the unrest arising from US economic penetration. By claiming the civilizing mission as their own—shifting attention to their rights of life and self-expression—critics destroyed the premise that American property was always sacrosanct. A tool that legitimized capitalism turned against its maker.

The same generalization applies to international organizations in twentieth century. On the one hand are historians like John Thompson (2015), Or Rosenboim (2017), Trygve Throntveit (2017), and Stephen Wertheim (2020). After World War I, American lawyers, who often moonlighted as public intellectuals, toyed with different formulas to advance American interests through world organization, and each author has illuminated a part of that effort, probing why so many elites believed that international institutions would naturalize American national interests. On the other hand are scholars like Susan Pedersen (2015), Mark Mazower (2012), Amy Sayward (2017), Mary Ann Heiss (2020), and Ryan Irwin (2012). This effort did not work. In the same way Powers' characters turned tribunals against dollar diplomacy, international institutions functioned as entrepots, bringing together voices that were as likely to blast American racism as reinforce American liberalism. Monica Kim's (2019) history of interrogation rooms—as intimate spaces where liberalism met imperialism—revels in this tension, as does Ilya Gaiduk's (2012) retelling of the Cold War, which explains how and why the United Nations became so central to superpower diplomacy. Despite a cycle of optimism and pessimism, law has always been a tool of U.S. power, pushing liberal notions of freedom out into the world while forcing Americans to confront their shibboleths.

Religion has been a similarly fruitful theme, fostering new scholarship that connects the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If Ian Tyrell (2010) established Protestant

missionaries as transnational actors—showing how they explained planetary endeavors like civilization to church-going Americans—Ussama Makdisi (2008) and Conroy-Krutz (2015) have extended this insight by tracing how missionaries interacted with consular officials and local people in the places they sought to convert. Simultaneously, Andrew Preston (2012) has used religion to reintroduce a litany of powerful, lawyerly leaders as men of faith. Christianity illuminates the logic of what David Milne (2015) calls American "worldmaking," showing how liberal freedom has cohered through supposedly existential threats like the Native Savage, the Black Jacobin, the Communist, the Terrorist. By drawing connections across epochs, religion invites scholars to reassess assumptions about change, continuity, and the cultural might of proselytization.

The most recent scholarship has only complicated this already complex tapestry. For example, Katherine Moran (2020) and Michael Cangemi (2022) have focused on Catholics rather than Protestants, reminding readers that the United States' ascendance happened within a world dominated by Spain. Tensions between Spanish- and English-speaking Christians have shaped religiosity in the United States. Meanwhile, Lauren Turek (2020) has shown how evangelical lobbyists asserted authority over the U.S. government during the late twentieth century. Others are turning attention to the subtle ways that embassies have functioned as mediums of religious representation, guiding the ways ideas and individuals interact overseas. Christina Davidson (2020) uses Black churches to look at the transnational connections among Black Christians in the American hemisphere, and Melissa Borga (2022) has considered U.S. refugee care through a religious lens. Both Davidson and Borga employ interdisciplinary methods by probing the public-private partnerships that affect the religious lives of marginalized people. In liberal settings, a burgeoning commitment to religious diversity—to self-expression in all forms—has propped up private property and state authority by making government the de facto intermediary in debates about religious expression.

Interdisciplinarity has changed the conversation about decolonization too. Like gender, rights, and religion, decolonization is newly relevant, and a host of previously sacred assumptions have fallen by the wayside.

Interdisciplinarity has changed the conversation about decolonization too. Like gender, rights, and religion, decolonization is newly relevant, and a host of previously sacred assumptions have fallen by the wayside. For example, the once hard line between state and nonstate is porous, and relatively few scholars accept the premise that independence ended decolonization. The revolution against empire originated from a desire to create a world of reciprocal recognition. For those inspired by theorists like Franz Fanon, that revolution is incomplete so long as recognition is denied. Rediscovering this truth has spurred historians to reframe "postcolonial" as a political category, devoid of temporal significance, which has renewed an interest in the way juridical statehood intermingled with past sovereignties involving federations, leagues, and pan-collectives of religion, class, and race. Political theorist Adom Getachew (2019), for example, has resurrected the worldmaking ambitions of Black nationalists, while Brad Simpson (2012) has done something similar with self-determination, explaining how that concept empowered and constrained the people wielding it. Frederick Cooper (1997) once called this tension the "dialectics of decolonization," and United Nations has become a microcosm to analyze how the south's fight against the north elided struggles for recognition *within* the south. Solidarity was a language to oppose and exert power, and with admirable subtlety, Lydia Walker (2019) and Elisabeth Leake (2017) have brought this dialectic to life in their histories of South Asia and United Nations, showing how minorities within landed states fought against those who took control of the state after decolonization.

By probing this tension, recent scholarship has eviscerated the refrain that containment tragically delimited decolonization. Historians instead linger on the way leaders experimented with options larger and smaller than the nation state. The result is a tale of contestation on unequal terrain. For instance, Masuda Hajimu (2015) has shown how East Asian leaders used anticommunism to cast aspersions on sovereignty movements inside their newly won territories, shoring up their authority by stoking U.S. anticommunism. This Faustian bargain globalized the Cold War and it rarely ended well. Conversely, Cindy Ewing (2021) has used postcolonial constitutions to explain why South and Southeast Asian legal theorists nestled their claims within legal jargon inherited from Europeans and Americans. Their efforts enlarged and diversified international society but circumscribed their assertions about postcolonial freedom. Christy Thornton (2021) has rooted this story in an earlier time, studying how Mexican leaders used the League of Nations to advocate for the functional realization of their economic sovereignty, and Christopher Dietrich (2017) has examined why this tradition was forgotten and then rediscovered by postcolonial nationalists after the 1950s. Although political freedom and economic autonomy were always entwined, the relationship between these projects came in-and-out of focus as partisans jostled for influence in asymmetrical, ever-changing international institutions.

Race is yet another topic that has brought new voices to the fore. Arguably, the rise of New Diplomatic History rested on pioneering work about African American diplomacy by Carol Anderson (2003), Brenda Gayle Plummer (1996), Gerald Horne (1985), Michael Krenn (1999), Kevin Gaines (2006), and Penny Von Eschen (1997). This diplomacy, so important in the region that Paul Gilroy (1995) calls the Black Atlantic, saw individuals—from Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells to Louis Armstrong and Nina Simone—explain U.S. race relations to foreigners. This effort shaped the way outsiders interpreted the promise and peril of U.S. power, and interest in African American diplomacy has only proliferated in recent years. For example, Brandon Byrd (2020) has traced how African Americans interacted with the legacy of the Haitian Revolution after Reconstruction, squeezing new complexities from Black international thought during the Jim Crow era, and Keisha Blain (2018), focusing on Black nationalist women in the mid-twentieth century, has shown how alliances among people of color were established and maintained across national borders. John Munro (2017) has recovered the intellectual labor of Black communists, Nicholas Grant (2017) has done the same with Black antiapartheid activists, and Sean Malloy (2017) has put the Black Panther Party in transnational context. In some respects, the Black Lives Matter movement is an extension of this tradition, and a reminder that African American activists have a long history of explaining American racism overseas.

This scholarship has enriched our understanding of the transnational color line. Seminal work by Marilyn Lake and David Reynolds (2012) explained how and why white supremacy manifested throughout the English-speaking settler world. As Bob Vitalis (2017) argues, African Americans were among the first to recognize this system for what it was. Race was not a propaganda tool or afterthought in debates about money; it was foundational to white nationalism, white knowledge, and white power. As such, race determined U.S. foreign policy. Yet the slippages matter as much as this fundamental truth. The same African American diplomats who championed antiracist Pan-Africanism tried to uplift indigenous Africans in name of American modernity. Lingering on this contradiction, Blain (2018) has noted that antiracism did not always serve anti-imperialism, and

Desmond Jagmohan (2022) has recovered the hard-nosed calculations of leaders like Booker T. Washington. Since nonwhite people experienced most interactions as a form of warfare in the United States, contesting white power involved performance, deception, and discipline. In this respect, the color line was a system of power and a thinking tool that generated both freedom claims and marshal virtues. The mutually constitutive nature of these projects suggests why some freedom fighters became authoritarian in victory.

If African American Studies has informed new work about race, Asian American Studies has affected scholarship about migration similarly. Much of the recent work has humanized imperial entanglements by looking at intimate social spaces. Jana Lipman (2020), Ji-Yeon Yuh (2004), Catherine Choy (2003), Kori Graves (2020), Deborah Kang (2017), and Ellen Wu (2013) have created subtle portraits of Korean wives and children, Filipino nurses, Vietnamese refugees, and Chinese activists. Others like Carl Bon Tempo (2022) and Amanda Demmer (2021) have focused on government efforts to rationalize the flow of people over borders. The premise that individuals needed documents while traveling was not a foregone conclusion in the mid-nineteenth century, and this tradition took root differently in the transatlantic and transpacific worlds (McKeown, 2008). As Madeline Hsu (2000) has argued, migration and exclusion were flip sides of a larger story about state capacity in North America and East Asia. Whereas the Civil War and Meiji Restoration created centralized governments in the United States and Japan, the Opium Wars and Taiping Rebellion did the opposite in China, establishing the context around Chinese migration in the Pacific world. For Mae Ngai (2021), this tale historicizes racial capitalism. The same gold rushes that gave Anglo-Americans so much financial power fueled the racialization processes that led to Chinese exclusion in white settler societies. Capitalism generated the unrest it sought to control, and this unrest coalesced into a global language about citizenship and exclusion, all unfolding against the backdrop of the Qing dynasty's decline.

These histories of race and migration have changed traditional topics like strategy and diplomacy. Synonomous once with great power politics, strategic history now includes nonstate actors whose politics defied government authority. In their recent volume about American grand strategy, Elizabeth Borgwardt, Christopher Nichols, and Andrew Preston (2021) frame the fight against disease as coeval to the fight against communism, an insight that resonates in the context of the recent Covid-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, Susan Colbourn (2022), Aileen Teague (2019), and Emily Whalen (2020) have elaborated the style of diplomatic history that Westad pioneered twenty years ago. Their work lingers on the implementation of foreign policy in Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. Just as Colbourn reintroduced the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as an interactive political space—one that changed Americans and Europeans equally (albeit differently)—Teague and Whalen have explored Mexico and Lebanon as borderlands where multiple grand strategies intermingled. Within these places, well-crafted plans crumbled because relationships were so entangled. Yet strategists kept strategizing, and their efforts changed communities in unexpected ways.

New scholarship about war has relied on these same tropes. Military history, which used to study force on the battlefield, now lingers on the way militaries interface with societies. Recent scholarship has looked at base towns, testing sites, exchange programs, and nontraditional battlefields, and scholars have folded legal, intellectual, and cultural history together in excitingly original ways (Heefner, 2012; Mitchell, 2021). For example, Brian Delay (2008) has looked at the Mexican American War through indigenous eyes and he is now using the arms trade to rethink how Americans make war. Aaron O'Connell (2012) has used culture to reinterpret familiar military institutions, tossing aside the hard line that used to separate soldiers and noncombatants. Aaron Hilter (2020) and Zach Fredman (2022) have blown up narratives about the Second World War—a conflict that truly launched the United States' worldmaking ambitions—by looking at noncombatant American soldiers in the United States and China. This work creates a new way to see U.S. power at home and abroad. At the same time, John Krige and Naomi Oreskes (2014) have used war to reexamine the material sinews of American hegemony, untangling the relationship between the military industrial complex and scientific advancement, and Kate Epstein (2014) has used command technology—weapons produced in a fraught relationship between the state and private sector—to explain how knowledge has been produced and disseminated. And Mary Dudziak (2012) has taken on the most fundamental question of all: How can a country so committed to waging war be so aloof to its costs?

This question organizes what Stuart Schrader (2019) has called *anti*-security studies. If the New Left and Cultural Left problematized capitalism and nationalism—in that order in the 1960s and 1990s—this new project has set its eyes on liberalism. So long as liberals equate freedom with life, property, and self-expression—and use the state to actualize this trifecta—the United States will be an instrument of endless warfare everywhere. The problem arises from the pairing of rights and security in the liberal mind, and the fact that that pairing has always existed in the context of capitalism. Schrader has studied this process by explaining military-police partnerships during the Cold War, extending earlier insights from Alfred McCoy (2009), and Tej Nagaraja (2020) has asked hard questions about the New Deal. So often celebrated by historians, the New Deal safeguarded liberal freedom by inventing social, farm, and financial security, which presaged national security's emergence as the ballast of the Free World. The warfare state did not *betray* the welfare state—the former emerged from the latter—and once freedom and security metastasized as one project, life outside the capitalist ambit became a conceptual impossibility for liberals. In other words, most Americans are aloof to the costs of war because their understanding of freedom is a form of warfare.

## The Future

What is next for the field? The claims that felt radical in Kramer's 2011 manifesto are now part of the air we breathe, and, not surprisingly, the latest scholarship remains focused on the American empire. For example, many historians are starting to build bridges with scholars of Indigenous America. Considering foreign affairs through indigenous eyes situates the critique of liberalism in a longer history about settler colonialism, allowing the field to think outside the twentieth century. For Aziz Rana (2010), the processes detailed by Schrader and Nagaraja have their true origins in the U.S. Constitution. The freedoms enjoyed by American citizens have spurred relentless expansion because liberal rights have historically inhered through the creation or reformation of states on a supposedly barbarian frontier. This project may have reached its apex after the 1940s, when U.S. leaders embraced world supremacy as a reasonable policy objective, but the history of indigenous Americans reminds us that these contradictions arose from colonial settlement. Over the centuries, U.S. state-making has relied on exclusion and subjugation, as well as universal law, universal development, universal institutions, and universal rights. One argument has united every epoch: Since Americans possess freedom—defined as life, property, and self-expression—their government must reorder societies so others can be more like them.

If indigeneity puts this argument in context, environmental history suggests its effects on the planet. This is another area where the field might grow. The United States fueled its ambitions by removing massive amounts of lumber and carbon from nature, and it has employed an array of technologies—from canals and railways to dams and drills—to help its citizens realize their freedom. In the shadow of

American empire, farmland has been standardized, and enormous metropolises have brought people together within sprawling for-profit marketplaces supported by unfathomably complex commodity chains. This system often feels too complex to comprehend, and it now defies the control of any one government. Yet scholars like Laleh Khalili (2020) are making inroads by charting the infrastructures that move technology, capital, people, and cargo around the world. Similarly, Julia Irwin (2021) is using disaster relief to trace this project's haphazard spread. For better or worse, the United States has been a symbol for all those who believe that true autonomy follows from nature's subjugation, and more than any other entity, the US government has nurtured a legal and economic environment that equates the dominion of land with freedom. The net result has been a world war against biodiversity—resulting in the elimination of non-commodified space from the planet. With climate change now posing an existential threat to humanity, the consequences are apparent.

Perhaps this planetary crisis will energize the field. Or maybe it will pull us apart. If you listen closely, you can hear some anxiety along the edges of United States and the World History. While historians employ a strikingly uniform vocabulary to talk about entanglement and power today, Del Pero's synthesis is as elusive as ever. In fact, the concept now offends some scholars. For example, when Immerwahr proffered his synthesis of the field, exposing the hidden history of U.S. empire, Kramer's clapback was unforgiving. Immerwahr, he wrote, was reinscribing the ignorance of empire by treating denial as a topic worthy of discussion, committing a sin called "nationalist transnationalism." In Kramer's words, "If going 'global' simply [means] enlarging U.S. national histories . . . then U.S. historians could venture 'abroad' without ever really leaving 'home.'" The "best histories of the United States in the world" must be "generated by scholars positioned either 'outside' of U.S. history or in the rich interstices between the United States and the rest of the world." (Kramer, 2018: 930-931; Immerwahr, 2019)

The claim isn't new, and the field's leading voices have tended to explain the stakes by revisiting the great debate of 2010. For Erez Manela (2020), most disagreements prove that Connelly was right all along. SHAFR's myopic emphasis on the United States has kept scholars from historicizing an object he calls "international society." On the other side of this claim, Logevall and Daniel Bessner (2020) continue to defend the centrality of the United States. Because the American nation-state is not going anywhere—because it has only gotten stronger in the past half century—historians are obliged to recognize its existence. Like the rivalries of yesteryear, these opposing sides answer big questions differently: Whose politics matters most? Which institutions constitute national identity, which ones subvert it, and how does one's perspective determine one's perception of the choice? However, equally interesting is the fact that the partisans now see themselves responding to changes in a marketplace they do not control. For all sides, the objective is self-preservation. Whereas Connelly once implied that transnationalism would prime a better world into existence, Manela's argument comes with a healthy dose of realpolitik, and Logevall is unapologetically defiant: If historians no longer care about wise diplomacy and good government, they are complicit in the alternatives.

In this respect, the field's lingering tendency to see itself methodologically has obscured a fundamental change. U.S. and the World History has moved U.S. Diplomatic History to the left. Arguably, the field has become an incubator for what Paula Chakravartty calls "radicalism without consequence" (2021)—an epitaph that could easily double as a moniker for the decade just past. The Millennial Left has eviscerated liberalism as an instrument of racial capitalism, exposing American institutions as cladding for American imperialism. However, unlike their midcentury counterparts, today's Left has not tried to posit an alternative philosophy of power. Like characters from a Thomas Wolfe novel, speaking truth is always enough. This approach may prove problematic since the apparatus buttressing so much of the recent scholarship does not differentiate consent from coercion. When power is conceptualized as inherently malfeasant, the only options on offer become acquiescence or annihilation, which suggests that Logevall might have a point. Many of his colleagues *do* see wise diplomacy and good government as oxymoronic fictions of an unjust status quo. Logevall's critics might retort that a post-liberal future is better than our neoliberal present—but that assumption could be wrong. And if the field's historiography reflects the era in which it is written, our future colleagues might surprise us: They might have something positive to say about American hegemony.

**The End**

U.S. Diplomatic History emerged because of the timing and the political climate in the United States after the Second World War, but the field's growth cannot be separated from the simple fact that the American empire—at its height—was the most powerful political entity in human history. It made the world we live in today, and its past is implicated in most of the problems we will face tomorrow. Since the mid-twentieth century, scholars have interacted differently with this fact. The field rocketed to prominence because the New Left challenged U.S. exceptionalism during the 1960s. When the Soviet Union collapsed, a younger cohort invented New Diplomatic History, dabbling with an assortment of sources, methods, and perspectives that remade SHAFR as a welcoming depot for all those writing about the United States and the world. In the context of the War on Terror, U.S. and the World History then pulled off an unhostile takeover of U.S. Diplomatic History, and historians have adopted a surprisingly uniform vocabulary to talk about American empire since the early 2010s.

Today, entanglement and denial dance together thematically on canvases saturated by different kinds of bureaucratic authority. Regardless of the topic, the American empire's rule-making power is almost always presented as ubiquitous and contested. As historians have gotten better at writing about entropy, they have attacked American power writ large, exenterating liberalism with the same enthusiasm past generations reserved for capitalism and nationalism. The field's future will probably depend on where the American empire goes next. Again, scholarship has tended to reflect the politics of the time, and with the effects of climate change more apparent every year—with the accumulated legacies of racism and sexism growing ever more noxious—it is easy to imagine a future like our present, where historians bundle imperialism-racism-capitalism-liberalism together to argue the United States as an instrument of forever war.

Yet it is also possible to imagine a different future, especially in the context of the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Authoritarianism is becoming unhinged. Rights are a problematic basis for freedom, but if Isaiah Berlin can rehabilitate Niccolò Machiavelli as the herald of pluralist tolerance, liberals can surely defend their assumptions from critics on the Left. Timothy Snyder (2015), Adam Tooze (2015), Jill Lepore (2018), and Stephen Kotkin (2014, 2017)—even "traditional" diplomatic historians like Melvyn Leffler (2017)—are fascinating because of the steps they have made in this direction. The beauty of historiography is that individual voices matter. Ultimately, the conversation we choose to have as colleagues will determine the road we travel together as a field. We will become whatever *you* decide.

Note:
1. For a fuller picture of postrevisionist tradition, see Geir Lundestad (1986) and Melvyn P. Leffler (1992).

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