From the Chancery: Final Thoughts

Andrew L. Johns

ne last time, with apologies to (the now retired) sportswriter Peter King as per usual.

1. I think that on 3 March 2024, I submitted my resignation as *Passport* editor to SHAFR president Mitch Lerner (who is also my predecessor as editor...a little serendipity), effective as of 31 January 2025.

2. I think that I remember the first time the notion of editing *Passport* came up. Mitch Lerner came and spoke at the Kennedy Center for International Studies at BYU in January 2011 and gave a terrific lecture. Afterwards, at lunch at a hilariously mediocre Thai restaurant, Mitch mentioned that he was planning to step down as editor and wondered if I had any suggestions for a replacement. We talked about several possibilities, and then I said that I might be interested in being considered. The rest, as they say, is history.

3. I think that the list of people who I need to thank for their contributions to *Passport* over the past fourteen years is longer than I have for this column...but I would be remiss and exceptionally ungrateful if I did not mention Julie Rojewski, our production editor who has now endured and outlasted both Mitch's and my tenure as editor; Allison Roth, our longtime copyeditor who retired in December 2023; Vaneesa Cook, who took over as copyeditor and has been just terrific; my assistant editors David Hadley, Zeb Larson, Brionna Mendoza, and Addie Jensen, each of whom has made my job easier (and congrats to Addie for defending her dissertation in June 2024 and starting her tenuretrack job at Montana State this fall); the scores of authors who have graciously participated in roundtable reviews on their books, the presses that provided review copies of books; and the hundreds of SHAFR members and other scholars who have written reviews and essays for Passport over the years. On that last point, the support that I have received from most SHAFR members has been gratifying and has made Passport that much better. I will miss those interactions tremendously and genuinely hope that SHAFR will support my successor even more vigorously.

4. I think that the field of U.S. foreign relations has experienced significant centrifugal forces over the past several decades. That has produced some excellent scholarship (e.g. internationalization, greater breadth and depth of topics, recognizing more complex and diffuse influences on the making and implementation of policy) and has also led in some questionable directions (e.g. decentering the role and influence of the United States to a nearly ahistorical degree, a disdain bordering on marginalization for "traditional" diplomatic and political history and historians). But it strikes me that a little centripetal force might not be the worst thing to try and bring the scattered and disparate elements of our field back into closer contact. To be sure, the expansion of the field is largely a good thing, but at times the eclectic nature of the conference program can make it seem like we are a hundred smaller subfields lacking much in the way of connective tissue, and conversations among those distinct groups seem to happen only infrequently. We tend to get siloed into our specialties and few of us look at the 30,000 foot view in the way that Walter LaFeber, Thomas Bailey, or George Herring were able to do. Honestly, I am not sure how to make that a reality-the "Seven Questions on..." column in *Passport* attempts to generate interest in those directions-but it is certainly a goal worth pursuing.

5. I think that academia is mired in a number of competing existential crises at the moment, each of which has the potential to cause unprecedented chaos, controversy, and calamity in our

profession. Political interference from state legislatures on both sides of the ideological spectrum, declining (vanishing?) job prospects, a lack of understanding (both within and beyond the academy) of what "academic freedom" actually should mean, and severe economic challenges are only a few of these concerns. Not the least of the problems, however, is the inability of some arrogant academics to accept ideas, beliefs, or people who fall outside of their myopic ideological and experiential spectrum... or to accept the fact that their perspective on the world may not, in fact, be the correct one. As Socrates (and, of course, Bill and Ted) observed, "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing." Recognize that a Ph.D. does not convey omniscience. A little humility can go a long way.

6. I think that the decision by MIT and other universities to end the practice of requiring diversity statements as part of applications for faculty positions is an excellent development in the on-going struggle to protect free expression in the academy. Diversity statements are compelled speech that act as a *de facto* litmus test, tend to enforce and encourage ideological homogeneity, and pose a direct threat to academic freedom. I also think that SHAFR's conference presentation proposal system should remove even an optional diversity statement from the process for the same reasons.

7. I think that, along the same lines, the decision by Harvard and other universities to end the practice of issuing statements on political, social, and other public issues and adopting institutional neutrality is outstanding and long overdue. I have advocated restraint on this point for years, not only for departments and universities, but also for professional organizations in academia (particularly for SHAFR). Even a supermajority vote by an organization does not represent everyone's perspective; people can express themselves individually with exceptional ease in other venues with the proliferation of social media platforms and the internet.

8. I think that SHAFR's decision to move the annual conference back to the end of June–when it was held traditionally until a couple of years ago–is a good one. Not only does the earlier weekend conflict with Father's Day and the final round of the U.S. Open, but anyone teaching on the quarter system (many of the universities on the west coast, for example) found themselves unable to attend the conference the past several years due to the conflict with finals or graduation.

9. I think that I have enjoyed about 98.3% of the past fourteen years as editor of *Passport*.

10 I think that the temptation to emulate Michael Corleone at the end of *The Godfather* by settling all my accounts (rhetorically, not with Rocco Lampone)–naming names and providing details relating to that other 1.7%–in this column is nearly irresistible.



I could go on, but I will restrain myself. To quote Jimmy in *8 Mile*, however, "Don't ever try to judge me dude. You don't know what...I've been through."

11. I think that discretion being the better part of valor, with a strange sense of solidarity with the classification regime at State, the CIA, et. al, and in keeping with the advice I have gotten from people I trust and respect, I have reluctantly redacted most of my previous comment. As Tyrion Lannister said, "Sometimes nothing is the hardest thing to do."

12. I think that the cost of travel and accommodations at the Toronto conference demonstrates pretty convincingly that a European-based SHAFR conference is a bad idea. In theory, sure– let's go to London or Berlin or Madrid or Sydney or (as Tom Zeiler advocated for years) Havana. In reality, though, few graduate students, contingent faculty, or even tenure-track faculty without endowed chairs or lacking robust research accounts have access to the thousands of dollars of travel funds that would be required to attend a conference at these destinations. Plus, the costs to the organization itself would be significant and prohibitive, which is highly problematic given the current state of SHAFR finances-I mean, we may not be back at the Renaissance in Arlington after 2025 due to rising expenses. Other options-like SHĂFRsponsored panels at European (or Asian or South American) conferences-make far more financial sense, particularly given the economic factors at play for the organization and for its members. But let's definitely think about going back to the west coast before too long; SHAFR has only been west of the Mississippi River three times in nearly fifty years. I hear Vegas is nice...

13. I think that Mitch Lerner's tenure as president of SHAFR was outrageously successful in the face of serious economic obstacles and major organizational turnover and personnel changes. And that SHAFR-themed Hawaiian shirt he procured for his presidential address? Priceless.

14. I think that I say this a lot, but one more time for those in the back not paying attention: SHAFR needs to do anything and everything that it can to resurrect the Summer Institute program... wait, what was that? We found a way to bring the Summer Institute back? That is the best news I have heard since I found out that the 2025 PCB-AHA conference will be in Las Vegas. Seriously, this is an outstanding development, one that will benefit not only the participants in future Summer Institutes but also SHAFR as an organization. Good luck to Michael Brenes and Alvita Akiboh in 2025–let's hope that this will be the beginning of a long and uninterrupted run of successful Institutes.

15. I think that SHAFR's creation of the Walter LaFeber-Molly Wood Distinguished Teaching Award is an outstanding decision, and I am proud to have played a small part in making that a reality. I only met Walt a couple of times at conferences, although he gave probably the best lecture I have ever heard back in 2006: an hourlong *tour de force* in his home state of Indiana that synthesized about 250 years of the history of U.S. foreign relations seamlessly, expertly, and without a single note in sight or syllable out of place. Simply astonishing. His influence on the field–not only with his scholarship but also in terms of his legacy with scores of graduate students he advised and thousands of Cornell undergraduates he exposed to his perspectives on the past in his courses—is nearly incalculable. But I am beyond thrilled that Molly Wood (an alum of the first Summer Institute in 2008) has been recognized for her unending, tireless, and unselfish devotion to teaching during her career at Wittenberg University (much of the time in the face of nearly insurmountable odds due to adverse circumstances); as a long-time member of—and one of the driving forces behind— SHAFR's Teaching Committee; and as the inaugural teachingcentered member of Council. Molly truly cares about her students, about her colleagues, and about furthering SHAFR's mission to teach the history of U.S. foreign relations (something which is too often overlooked by members focusing primarily on scholarship), and I am thrilled that the organization can honor her commitment in this way. You should go donate to the (tax deductible) prize fund.

16. I think that Richard Immerman will do an excellent job as SHAFR's new Executive Director. His experience with the organization is nearly unrivaled, and he will be an important voice advising Council and guiding the organization as SHAFR navigates the perilous financial, cultural, professional, and political challenges that it is facing currently and will certainly encounter over the next several years.

17. I think that whoever replaces me as *Passport* editor will do a terrific job. SHAFR has scores (if not hundreds) of talented, creative, and intelligent members who would thrive in this position, and my successor will probably turn my tenure as editor into a distant and forgotten memory with their insights and innovations. I look forward to seeing how *Passport* evolves in the coming years.

18. I think that I need to publicly thank a number of people in SHAFR for their support and encouragement over the past two decades. As I wrote over five years ago in this column, most of my closest friends are members of the organization (and I'm still not sure what that says about my lack of a life the other eleven months and three weeks of the year), and the sense of camaraderie and friendship that permeates and transcends the Renaissance and other conference sites is overwhelming. In no particular order and with apologies for anyone I have left out (there are definitely scores of people in that category), my heartfelt gratitude to David Anderson, Lori Clune, Tom Schwartz, Brian Etheridge, Molly Wood, Kimber Quinney, Jason Parker, Jeremi Suri, Marc Selverstone, Kelly McFarland, Heather Dichter, Kelly Shannon, Mitch Lerner, David Schmitz, Ken Osgood, Andrew Preston, Kara Vuic, Bill Miscamble, Chester Pach, Kyle Longley, the late George Herring, and Kathryn Statler. The extremely short list of people on the diametrically opposite side of the spectrum is addressed above in #10.

19. I think that I will miss being as deeply involved with SHAFR as I have been for the past two decades, but I am leaving on my own terms. Neil Gaiman wrote, "What do I do now? I don't know. Fade away, perhaps." That about sums it up. I wish the organization and its members continued success going forward.

20. I think that's it. I'm out.