

# Seven Questions on... Public Diplomacy

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**Editor's note:** *"Seven Questions On..." is a regular feature in Passport that asks scholars in a particular field to respond to seven questions about their field's historiography, key publications, influences, etc. It is designed to introduce the broader SHAFR community to a variety of perspectives for a given field, as well as serving as a literature and pedagogical primer for graduate students and non-specialists. AJ*

## 1. What drew you to this field and inspired you to focus on your specific area of public diplomacy?

**Nicholas Cull:** I was drawn to the field of public diplomacy because it sits at the convergence of my two great academic enthusiasms: international history and media/cultural history. My initial specialization was in Anglo-American relations largely because my foreign languages were not strong enough for primary research (I'm dyslexic and turns out that isn't just a problem in English) so I worked on the role of propaganda and public diplomacy in the transatlantic Special Relationship. I've especially enjoyed working on the films and images created for the campaigns I've studied. The oral history dimension of my work has also been very rewarding, although sadly that methodology has run its course for scholars of the mid-Twentieth Century.

I've broadened my interests from a Ph.D. focused on British public diplomacy in the US during the early stages of World War Two to work on the history of US public diplomacy around the world, on the theory of public diplomacy and, for the past decade or so, on the public diplomacy battle over Apartheid in South Africa. My idea with this last project was to do something in which NGOs and international organizations took a lead, and the case of Apartheid delivers on that. I also hoped that I'd be looking at an issue separate from the Cold War but I have found that Cold War politics is central to Apartheid and its end should be considered in some measure a posthumous victory for Eastern Bloc foreign policy.

**Jessica Gienow-Hecht:** First off, I do not consider myself a scholar of public diplomacy. "Public Diplomacy" is the term that the US foreign service most commonly uses for its activities. That job is typically performed by specific divisions staffed by people trained for the job, located in or outside of foreign offices, including the U.S. state department. It entails a government's communication to people—as opposed to political decision makers—in foreign lands. It's an Anglophone word creation and does not even translate easily in many other languages, including my own.

While part of that description does appear in my work and research, I feel that this is, really, a conceptual limitation to agents on the state's payroll when, in fact, their domestic interaction with, outsourcing to and confrontation with nongovernmental actors does not allow for such line. Rather, there is a high degree of osmosis between the public

and the private sector—and it is precisely that osmosis which brought me to the field. I am, originally, a cultural historian who recognized, at one point, that I could not write the story I wanted to write—about Jewish émigrés in the U.S. military government in Germany during and after World War II—without resorting to the ideas, discussions, literature, and methodologies provided by diplomatic historians. I then turned to the history of cultural diplomacy because Mel Leffler—who did not work in the field—along with pioneers in the study of culture and diplomacy such as Akira Iriye, Frank Ninkovich, Emily Rosenberg, encouraged me to do so.

In those days (read: the early 1990s), there was not much talk about "public diplomacy" in the jargon of diplomatic history yet; the more common term was "cultural diplomacy" and even that was, for the most part, relegated to a minority of scholars, many of them young like myself. To this day, I feel that for all the efforts to delineate and provide workable definitions the terminology of cultural and public diplomacy, along with competing terms such as soft power and more recent conceptual forays such as reputational security (Nick Cull), nation branding or image management remains malleable. Not because we have not done our homework but because, as countless scholars laboring in the vineyard of literature and cultural studies remind us, definitions relating to culture, notably cultural change, do not lend themselves easily to normativity. Nick Cull and I have been amiably squabbling over definitions for years. Still, I do like that term better than "public diplomacy," at least when it comes to my own work. Thus, please do allow me to use that term in our conversation.

**Autumn Lass:** I come from a family of teachers and veterans/civil servants. Those two influences merged and brought me to public diplomacy. When I started college, I wanted to continue that legacy of public service. So, I double majored in political science/history. I took political science classes primarily focused on politics, public affairs, campaigning, and foreign/international relations. And, for the history degree, I gravitated toward classes that focused on diplomacy and military history because I was naturally more interested in them. By the time I was a senior, I had grown frustrated with my nonhistory political science colleagues. There appeared to be little historical understanding of their approach to politics and the government. By the time I graduated, I was firmly camped in the history of diplomacy and domestic politics. During my graduate coursework, I was fascinated with how governments "teach" their citizens to agree/support their policies especially foreign policy since Americans have so little understanding of global affairs. The use of truth and facts to craft particular domestic campaigns to garner support for foreign policy intrigued me.

Since I come from a family of teachers, I've always been interested in teaching and its influence on individuals and

their opinions. So, because of my background in politics and public opinion, I was captivated by how hard the government worked to subtly craft, control, and change public opinion on diplomacy-related issues, especially during the Cold War. The more I studied and researched the government's attempts to create an "educated public" on matters related to diplomacy the more I realized this was where my intellectual passions lay.

Ultimately, a teacher knows the best techniques to shape the minds of their students. A teacher knows the images, stories, and best approaches to reach their students. A teacher knows when to push hard and when to go easy. Teachers must learn and adapt methods and messaging as time passes and students change. As I studied and researched more, I came to see governments as a type of teacher and citizens as a type of student.

**Elisabeth Piller:** Growing up in Germany, I was always very interested in the culture of the Weimar Republic (1918-1933). As a teenager, I read all the major literary works of the period as well as the published diaries and memoirs of many of its most important authors and politicians. My sister, who is seven years younger than me, claims that she did not know she had a sister until she was about ten. That's obviously an exaggeration but I did spend a lot of time reading in my room. When I went to college in the United States, I added the U.S. dimension and became very interested in transatlantic relations—and it's a fascination that has never left me. I first started writing about the intersection of transatlantic culture and politics in my B.A. thesis, which was about the German writer Klaus Mann and an émigré literary magazine he edited in New York City in 1940-41. Back in Germany, I wrote my M.A. thesis on U.S. humanitarian aid to Germany immediately after the World War I and then wrote my Ph.D. dissertation, which became my first book, on Weimar Germany's public diplomacy toward the United States. I wanted to know how Weimar Germany used its remaining cultural assets to revive U.S. sympathies after World War I, and I focused on academic relations, tourism, and ties to German Americans, among other things.

Apart from an interest in Weimar culture and transatlantic relations, what ultimately drew me to the field of public diplomacy is the range of different historical actors involved: tourists, students, authors, musicians and many others. For me, public diplomacy stands out as a historical subject because it is not only directed at an international public but also, at least in large part, made by the public. Public diplomacy allows us to study foreign policy elites as well as a range of other actors such as tourists or students, who often get short shrift in "traditional" diplomatic histories. The informal foreign policy of non-state actors is endlessly fascinating to me, and public diplomacy is a wonderful way to study it.

**Giles Scott-Smith:** I think it was for various reasons. Firstly, looking at it from the perspective of neo-Gramscian IR, it came from an interest in the connections between ideas and power, culture and politics (hegemony etc). Secondly, from becoming intrigued by the ways in which the study of public diplomacy can change your views on international relations (and international history) in general. Thirdly, my entry into public diplomacy was through studying exchange programmes, not through so-called "fast media" (radio/tv/social media etc). Studying public diplomacy—and particularly the function and influence of exchange

programmes—was a way for me to escape the abstractness of IR theory and get back to the everyday stories of people, which is what I wanted.

## 2. Which scholars do you see as having laid the groundwork for the study of public diplomacy?

**NC:** Public diplomacy began life in its modern meaning as an American euphemism for international propaganda in the context of the mid-1960s. I personally believe it has evolved its own democratic characteristics and approaches, but suspect Congress just wants a cheap and effective global advertising campaign. Just as the practice of public diplomacy grew from propaganda so its scholarship grew from the foundational work done by historians of propaganda. Both my bachelor's and doctoral degrees are from the University of Leeds (UK) in the 1980s where Nicholas Pronay and Philip M. Taylor were doing pioneering work on the history of propaganda. Taylor was especially important for producing institutional histories of British propaganda campaigns in the Great War and interwar periods, and a wonderful overview of the whole history of propaganda in wartime called *Munitions of the Mind*, which remains a standard starting point in the field. Pronay and Taylor were affiliated with a wonderful organization called the International Association for Media and History (IAMHIST) where I found a wider intellectual home. My mentors within that organization included David Culbert and David Ellwood, and I often published in IAMHIST's *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*.

Considering the US Cold War experience specifically, key work was done by retired practitioners themselves who wrote about public diplomacy, partly out of an awareness that mainstream scholarship was neglecting it. Hans N. Tuch's book *Communicating with the World: US Public Diplomacy Overseas from 1990* was especially influential. Richard Arndt, Alan Heil and Wilson Dizard also did invaluable work. Both the practice and scholarship of public diplomacy came to be dominated by Joseph Nye's work on Soft Power, for better or worse.

There was a reason why the US scholarship of public diplomacy was underdeveloped. Its chief agency in the US—the United States Information Agency (1953-1999)—operated under the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948, which was eventually read as preventing the domestic distribution of USIA materials, lest they interfere with domestic American politics. This made it difficult to access USIA archives and films. George H. W. Bush corrected some of this and work could begin. It is also worth saying that because USIA was an independent agency the State Department Historical Branch initially saw most of its work as beyond the scope of the *FRUS* series. Since the State Department assumed control of public diplomacy in 1999 this has been retroactively corrected with helpful companion volumes on public diplomacy appearing for each Cold War presidency.

The usual march of the thirty-year+ frontier in diplomatic studies produced some excellent work on the 1940s and 1950s. Jessica Gienow-Hecht showed the way working on media in the US occupation of Germany. I think that the work of Walter Hixson, Ken Osgood and Laura Belmonte on the Eisenhower years has helped up especially well. I decided not to focus on the beginning phase but to work on a history of the entirety of USIA. My 2008 book *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency* was explicitly intended to provide a big picture map that others could fill

in as archives and interests broadened. It is wonderful to see that happening.

**JGH:** When it comes to the restricted meaning of public diplomacy and its academic study, I think among the most notable ones were and continue to be, above all, Frank Ninkovich, Akira Iriye, plus, in the next generation, Nick Cull, Louis Clerc, and Giles Scott-Smith, as well as all those listed below under (6).

**AL:** It is hard to pick just a few of the Mount Rushmore-type scholars of public diplomacy. In the broader sense of public diplomacy, I would identify Melvin Small's *Democracy and Diplomacy*; Frank Ninkovich's *The Diplomacy of Ideas*; Emily Rosenberg's *Spreading the American Dream*; Alan Winkler's *The Politics of Propaganda*; and Nicholas Cull's, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency* as scholars who pioneered the way for public diplomacy.

Within my narrower field of propaganda and public diplomacy, many excellent scholars have paved the way. Some of the scholars I relied on as the starting points for much of my research and writing include Walter Hixson, Wilson Dizard, Michael Hogan, David Krugler, Kenneth Osgood, Steven Casey, Laura Belmonte, and Nancy Bernard.

**EP:** One of my pet peeves is people who roundly condemn the "old" diplomatic history. A lot of older scholarship contains more public diplomacy and pays more attention to the public than we give it credit for.

But in terms of really being ahead of their time and giving public diplomacy a prominent place, I would point to Emily Rosenberg's *Spreading the American Dream*, Frank Costigliola's *Awkward Dominion*, and Frank Ninkovich's *Diplomacy of Ideas*, all written in the 1980s. This period also saw new and more sophisticated studies of propaganda, including Philip Taylor's influential *Projection of Britain* (1981).

**GSS:** I think a distinction is here needed between the history of public diplomacy and more theoretical approaches that came out of Communications and PolSci early on. For US history, the classics were written largely by practitioners, with authors such as Hans Tuch, Richard Arndt, and Wilson Dizard coming to mind, with historians Susan Brewer, Nick Cull, and Ken Osgood providing excellent contributions. For British public diplomacy (British Council), historian Alice Byrne has produced a lot of valuable work. For theory, I would say the groundwork was laid back in the 1940s and 1950s when the likes of Harold Laswell, Paul Lazarsfeld, and Ithiel de Sola Pool established foundational principles that linked communications, social psychology, and technology. More recently, Eytan Gilboa and James Pamment have been influential. There is also the seminal *The Cultural Approach* by Ruth McMurray and Muna Lee published in 1947, an excellent foundation for comparative analysis.

### **3. Discuss how the field has evolved to include different approaches to analyzing public diplomacy.**

**NC:** Public diplomacy as an activity uses many approaches—broadcasting, education, film and so forth—and as one might expect there are many disciplinary approaches to its study. While bibliometrics suggest that history still leads the way, the IR and communication studies approaches run a close behind. Scholars in cultural studies, psychology, management/branding and other fields are also contributing. The historical field has a number of conversations. There is output around the presentation of race and gender by the US, work on specific regions and

bilateral relationships (I've been involved in US-Spanish as well as US-South African); there is scholarship on particular methods such as radio/TV, film, expos/world's fairs and exchange. There is work around particular eras. Gregory Tomlinson wrote well on the golden era of USIA under Edward R. Murrow.

**JGH:** The answer to this question very much depends on the country under consideration. Since our audience here will mostly focus on the United States, I shall do the same but hasten to add that stories vary greatly among other states.

When research on cultural and public diplomacy took off in the 1990s, culture still featured very much as a tool of state power. Scholars studied governmental programs, agencies, statements, bureaucratic infighting and considered culture, for the most part, as an instrument of power. Decentralizing the narrative conceptually, spatially and temporally has, in my opinion, offered some of the most exciting vistas in the field of diplomatic history, for at least three reasons:

For one thing, learning from cultural studies and integrating race, gender, religion, psychology and many other conceptual lenses into the scholarship, has shown us just how little state policy crafted in Washington, D.C., mattered to teams and agents on the ground between Baghdad and Berlin, Copenhagen and Cape Town. It has also demonstrated the vast gap between original intentions, the implementation of policy, and the final outcome or results. Perhaps more so than trade agreements and political treaties, cultural policy has a way of changing shape, often starkly so, as it meanders from top officials' vision of, say, information, reeducation, or "winning the hearts and minds" to a group of school teachers and students in Central Africa, journalists in southeastern Europe, or religious congregations in the Middle East.

For another, the decentralization of the state as a variable of analysis has revealed that culture does not echo policy and that, in fact, the job profile of a "diplomat" is far broader than we have previously known (leading Karen Ahlquist to ask, in a 2010 *Diplomatic History* review, "Who Is a Diplomat?"). Instead, we have come to realize that culture and actors in charge of its projection/consumption at that, can really take a life on their own, can hail from any field. There are moments in U.S. history in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, where political relations with one or more other nation states were reserved, strained, perhaps dormant or even nonexistent—while cultural relations thrived. The Anglo-American relationship in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or escalating super power tensions in the 1960s testify to the viability of culture's independent course, far from the power houses in Moscow and Washington (see Dana Cooper's marvelous study on the 500+ transatlantic marriages after 1840 or Peter Schmelz' fascinating work on informal musical exchanges between German and Soviet composers at the height of the Cold War).

Third, the gaze has broadened quite considerably. While much of the early literature focused on the United States and the cold war state, today scholars study the U.S. cultural diplomacy across the centuries and in comparison, with other states. In the process, they have noted how late the U.S. state and its bureaucracy came engage with public/cultural diplomacy abroad. And they have uncovered the extent to which U.S. Cold War cultural diplomacy was, both in temporal as well as in regional comparison, really, an exception rather than the norm—late, reactive, unilateral and for all the obsession with "dialogue" perpetually obsessed with coming out on top.

**AL:** Public diplomacy has evolved into a type of multiverse. Instead of a singular line of analysis on overseas propaganda or information campaigns of one government to the citizens of another, PD now has multiple lines of analysis and inquiry. It is the blending of studying public affairs and foreign affairs. It has moved beyond exploring official infrastructures of public diplomacy and now studies the exportation of culture and values, unofficial infrastructures of PD like citizen groups and NGOs, nontraditional messaging, and various mediums like art, film, music, architecture, sports, museums, comic books, and even religion. The evolution of the study of public diplomacy highlights the complex approaches governments use to shape the minds of citizens and mold their opinions. Governments go to great lengths—both officially and unofficially—to control the messaging and the relationships it makes to influence the public. Now, it not only examines “national” populations but also “global” populations.

**EP:** I think the field has evolved quite a bit, especially away from state actors. Much of the early scholarship began by looking at official institutions, particularly the relevant sections of the U.S. State Department and European foreign offices, and tried to assess their efforts to reach foreign publics. Indeed, at this early point, in the 1980s, the main interest was in propaganda in the narrow sense. This focus was then broadened to include large semiofficial organizations that were either state-funded or had very close ties to the foreign policy establishment, including the Institute of International Education, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Alliance Française, the Goethe Institut, and many others. The scholarship on national representations at the World’s Fair, especially in the 1990s and 2000s, also provided important impetus for thinking public diplomacy more broadly.

In recent decades, scholars have increasingly begun to consider actors quite apart from official or officious foreign policymakers. As far as U.S.-German relations are concerned, Jessica Gienow-Hecht does this incredibly well in *Sound Diplomacy*. In essence, she writes a history of German public diplomacy in the nineteenth century United States that gives little weight to official actors but instead emphasizes the agency and interest of conductors and musicians themselves. She shows that there is considerable public diplomacy outside of “public diplomacy” and offers a model for how to write about public diplomacy beyond state actors (and the twentieth century).

However, I also enjoy scholarship that brings together state and nonstate actors and explores their relationship. For example, Charlotte Lerg’s book on University Diplomacy traces the competition and cooperation between state and nonstate actors (ministries, university presidents, monarchs, professors) in U.S.-German university relations. I also greatly enjoy the work of Liping Bu and Whitney Walton, who place students and universities at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy but also detail the involvement of American officials.

**GSS:** Hard question, because of its scope. Do we include soft power, cultural diplomacy, nation branding here? For some, public diplomacy (active) can be considered as the operationalisation of soft power (passive), which is a simplistic but useful categorisation. Soft power is of course also motivational and has an influence on behaviour, but the point is that public diplomacy is often about the actors and their techniques for carrying out influence operations. Joseph Nye introduced the soft power concept around 1990 and it became a classic term for the US-led post-Cold War era. Nation branding, which was a way to cash in

on the “soft power boom” by making it internationally competitive, followed in the late 1990s mainly through consultants Wally Olins and Simon Anholt. Nation branding is about generating soft power through a merger of public diplomacy and commercial advertising techniques. Public diplomacy as a term has been around since the mid-1960s, and Nick Cull has provided a useful taxonomy that maintains the distinction with soft power and nation branding but includes the following: listening; advocacy; international broadcasting; exchanges; and cultural diplomacy. Again, some would argue that cultural diplomacy is a separate distinct space of activity and not a subfield because culture—file under “slow media”—allows for multiple fields of interpretation and does not fit the less nuanced approaches of media/communications research (focused on “fast media”).

#### **4. What are some of the challenges faced by scholars working in the field?**

**NC:** The archives of USIA–RG 306—have not been well maintained perhaps because of the long years sheltered by the Smith-Mundt Act, but each new work moved things forward. An ideal public diplomacy text should have material from both archives in the sending country and in the receiving country too, to chart impact. Such works are doubly complex to write. A wholly separate issue is that despite the centrality of issues of propaganda and disinformation to our lives today, scholarship has lagged and other subfields of US foreign relations such as secret intelligence make a bigger splash. Scholars working across disciplines can find that they are welcome until resources run short and then they are no one’s baby.

**JGH:** This question puzzles me since it seems to imply that there are challenges unique to scholars working in the field of public/cultural diplomacy. Most challenges I can think of—learning new languages, grappling with recognition, or the interdisciplinary balance act—are difficult to assign squarely to this field exclusively. I can think of two things that appeared, for some time, to affect students of diplomatic history focusing on cultural/public diplomacy to a greater extent: One is the job market. Hiring for a position in diplomatic history used to entail an expectation that the successful candidate would be able to both teach and research hard power or at least sound state leadership. That pressure seems to have eased somewhat.

The second point may be coined, in a gesture to Perry Miller, “The Historian’s Dilemma”: The subfield of public/cultural has been enormously successful. We have come a long way since that 1994 SHAFR convention where an attendee (my age, my peer, no less), conceded, in a somewhat jovial style, that as long as us culturalists would get “two to three panels” each year, we’d be fine, happy, and marginal. Twenty-five years later, the program of the annual convention reveals a burgeoning amount of papers dedicated to the role of culture, milieu, and identity, both formal and informal, in U.S. foreign relations.

I don’t think that’s a challenge per se. But I do believe that the study and teaching of policymaking—how to develop a strategy, how to craft a policy—continues to be important, indeed vital, and, also, at the core of what we, as diplomatic historians need to provide. This applies, in particular at a time where international crises and confrontations, coupled with a general public inertia regarding the world beyond Daniel Immerwahr’s “logo map,” let us perceive and worry about a lack of leadership, a sense of political insecurity, a reluctance to make decisions, be they tough, smart or simply overdue.

**AL:** One challenge we face as public diplomacy scholars is the growing belief that public diplomacy may be a concept/tactic of the past. With the increasing role of NGOs, world organizations, and supranational organizations, some believe public diplomacy is no longer as relevant or powerful. For the United States—especially after 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror—the role of public diplomacy has been questioned. The belief or disbelief in public diplomacy relevancy and power is vital to our field.

Another challenge public diplomacy scholars face transitioning into the 21<sup>st</sup> century figuring out how to truly decipher the power of social media and the Internet, analyze its uses, and assess its influences in public diplomacy. While social media has made the world a smaller place and information more readily accessible, it has also created an incredibly fragmented public. As diplomacy plays out live on YouTube, Instagram, and even TikTok, historians must grapple with how to properly and accurately incorporate social media into our field.

Finally, with the growing trends in internationalism/globalism and comparative studies, there has been a decline in those who study the intersection of public opinion, foreign policy, and American domestic politics. While these newer trends add depth and complexity to the study of public diplomacy, there is still a need to interrogate the various ways the American government uses its public diplomacy tactics on its citizens. I would argue that the current diplomatic landscape, growing concerns about disinformation and “fake news” (both official and unofficial), and the role of social media in diplomacy, studies analyzing domestic politics, and public diplomacy are incredibly relevant and still leave a lot to be explored.

**EP:** For a long time, I would say, one of the biggest difficulties was archival material. Not that there is a lack of archival resources in general, but in terms of official document collections, which are often the first step in thinking about a new research project, the subject is comparatively little covered, especially for the pre-1945 period. For example, neither the official German foreign policy documents (*Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik*) nor the American documents (*Foreign Relations of the United States/FRUS*) traditionally contain much on public diplomacy. At the time they were compiled, the subject did not seem important enough or high enough on the political agenda to warrant inclusion. It was assumed not to be on the “official mind,” even if a deep dive into the diplomatic archives showed this to be untrue. Indeed, it has happened to me that records that looked absolutely spectacular in a finding aid from the 1960s had been culled in the 1970s or 1980s because they were considered of little political relevance at the time. The release of *FRUS* volumes on public diplomacy, 1917 to 1972, from 2014 onward truly marks a new era in this regard.

Still, there’s so much to discover and so much archival material to unearth. For example, while writing my own book, I was able to consult the records of the German Tourist Office at the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park. There are hundreds and hundreds of boxes on German tourism promotion from 1925 through the 1940s, which were confiscated by the United States when it entered the war in 1941. In addition, and as a sort of insider tip to the loyal readers of *Passport*, the records of the Institute of International Education—the chosen instrument for U.S. student exchanges since 1919—have recently become available at the Rockefeller Archive Center (which also has a very attractive fellowship program). As many scholars have shown, American student relations are an incredible

resource for understanding America in the world.

A second challenge is that the study of public diplomacy is often seen as a softer kind of diplomatic history. This is obviously much less true today than it was, say, thirty years ago, but one still often finds oneself having to explain the relevance of one’s project, especially if one is working not on “propaganda” (which has the aura of importance and effectiveness) but on cultural diplomacy. So I think this continues to be a challenge, especially for early career researchers who have to position themselves in the field and make a convincing case for the relevance of their subject.

**GSS:** If I’d been asked this 15+ years ago I might still have said that relevance was an issue, but I think we are past that now. It used to be the case that research had to ensure its relevance in the eyes of skeptics by proving that public diplomacy actually achieved definable outcomes. Some saw it as a field empty of worth and a hype that needed puncturing, but that was because judgement was based on identifiable outcomes alone, rather than on the examination of processes. If you view international relations through public diplomacy, instead of seeing public diplomacy as no more than a disposable addition to international relations, there is no need any more to have to argue for relevance. There is now widespread acceptance across international history and IR that ideas and images are important, that public-private partnerships lie at the heart of most foreign relations activities, and that social networks can influence outcomes. The “practice turn” of IR has brought the two fields together in a way that allows for the detailed study of behaviour in all areas of diplomacy. Nevertheless, there is still the challenge to link public diplomacy research to broader trends in international history, to ensure that it engages with current questions and does not become self-referential.

**5. What are some of the significant questions in the field that you feel need to be addressed in greater detail or, alternatively, which questions need to be reconsidered by contemporary scholars?**

**NC:** The obvious challenge for the study of public diplomacy is the overemphasis on the US experience and especially the Cold War. I think we need to push back into the first half of the twentieth century and move forward into the post-Cold War period. In my own teaching I now spend more time on World War One as I see key features like the use of atrocity stories as very relevant to our world today. Bilateral and micro studies are especially welcome. In my own work I am trying to break out of the idea of Soft Power as commonly understood, with its emphasis on promotion by the most successful countries, and instead I am positing an enduring connection between reputation and security. My idea of Reputational Security draws attention to the ways in which a country’s reputation has helped and hurt in international relations, and points to how nations have not only sought to project the best possible image but also to engineer the best possible reality, through reforms driven by foreign opinion. The best US case of this dimension of Reputational Security is the way in which Eisenhower and Kennedy responded to Soviet propaganda about American racism not just by sending out the jazz bands documented by Penny Von Eschen but by using federal muscle to make the US less racist. This is what Mary Dudziak called the Cold War imperative behind federal civil rights. There are so many cases of Reputational Security thinking to explore right back through history to the ancient world. I was thrilled in the fall of 2023 to be able to compare notes at a conference in Amsterdam for historians of early

modern public diplomacy and learned that the Dutch of the Golden Age most certainly had a concept of reputation as a dimension of international success or failure.

**JGH:** I think we need to ask our sources and ourselves more systematically and honestly, what strategies, visions, concepts, and goals related to cultural and public diplomacy “work”—and what does not work. Here, I am not merely referring to intentions that make sense on paper but implementation and reactions, as difficult as they may be to measure.

As historians, I believe, we can make a significant contribution to the discussion pertaining to the current recession of liberal regimes. One common attitude among liberal public diplomats is the expectation that if you drop specific key words couched in dialogue—liberty, equality, self-determination etc.—people will somehow “get it.” Liberalism’s core values shine by example and who can argue with that? But if we are to believe the numerous political indexes—Economist Democracy, Bertelsmann Transformation, Freedom House etc.—the fact of the matter is that globally, the number of full democracies and with it, liberalism at large (not capitalism) is in decline. Most democracies grapple with the challenge of populism, waning acceptance, or outside threat.

The question we need to ask, then, is if liberalism is such a great idea, why is it such a tough sell? Something is evidently not working out in liberal public/cultural diplomacy and we need to ask ourselves what and why that is. Either, there is something wrong with the product of the liberal state itself. Or, there is something wrong with the “selling” of the product, at home and abroad. My hunch is that for a variety of reasons, liberal states fail to market themselves well in the long run. Historians can peruse and assess long-term and past strategies of public diplomacy, in the United States and beyond. They can ask questions relating to the implementation and reaction, operation and feasibility. Comparative history, more knowledge about more countries, both liberal and illiberal, will help us find better answers to what works—and what does not.

**AL:** What is the relationship between civics, education, and public diplomacy?

How was public diplomacy used and developed in early modern times? While we traditionally associate PD with the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond, it has existed for much longer. How was it developed and used before the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

Continued and deeper examination of citizen groups, religious organizations, and the works of nonprofits as domestic agents or liaisons for the governments.

What is the relationship between public diplomacy and social media/Internet? How has PD changed as the Internet/social media has made information more readily available? What problems does the unfiltered growth of information pose to public diplomacy?

How has public diplomacy used and/or combated disinformation and fake news—both domestically and overseas?

What is the relationship between public diplomacy and influencers/celebrity diplomacy?

As the world becomes increasingly smaller and more interconnected, what role does public diplomacy play in international or supranational organizations like NATO, the United Nations, the European Union, or the

World Economic Forum? In other words, how do these organizations approach public diplomacy since they often view large portions of the world as their public?

**EP:** I think this continues to be the question of whether and how public diplomacy actually “works” and how to trace its success or failure. Of course, public diplomacy does not matter only when it is effective, but we cannot simply ignore the question either. In particular, I think we need to pay more attention to the failure of achieving desired results, e.g. when exchange students start resenting the United States, and to leave more room for nuance. In a Cold War mindset, for example, public diplomacy often appeared as a zero-sum game. International audiences could either like the United States and embrace freedom, or they could like the Soviets/Communism—but people don’t work that way. I recently wrote an article on German students who studied in the United States in the late 1920s and 1930s. Back then, Americans hoped (and believed) that these German students would return from the United States with a more democratic and “American” mindset, but they usually did not. Most of them ended up sincere and devoted fans of the United States—and convinced National Socialists. There needs to be more nuance in how we tell these stories.

I also think there could be more scholarship on U.S. soldiers as public diplomats. While there has been important work on this, the “new” military history and the “new” diplomatic history remain, at least to my mind, more separate than they should. Since diplomatic history has grown more interested in informal actors and military history has opened up to cultural and social history this seems a great opportunity.

**GSS:** The first concerns US-centricity. The field has expanded its geographical scope a lot in the past decade or so, but as studies of the historiography have shown, the bulk of the research is still US-based or US-focused. Over the past ten years Chinese and other scholars have produced many studies of public diplomacy “with Chinese characteristics.” While some of this work can be rather dry statistically-driven analysis, the most interesting work has been critiquing how public diplomacy/soft power have basically developed as US fields and are heavily infused with US cultural assumptions of how international relations should work. In particular, public diplomacy and soft power have had a heavy democratic ethos baked in, with a focus on open societies, freedom of movement and exchange, and equality of opportunity. This has been changing as others come to the party, diluting the connections with a liberal world order. Nation branding, on the other hand, does not seem to have any evident built-in moral compass, reflecting its more commercial origins. But in general the Asia-Pacific has become a very interesting region for research on public diplomacy/cultural diplomacy/soft power/nation branding, with studies of Japan and South Korea in particular at the centre of that.

A second has to be the impact of technology. There has been a running debate on to what extent, if at all, new forms of information communications technology have changed the precepts and/or practices of public diplomacy. Has technology, though primarily the internet and social media, changed the very basis for what public diplomacy is about, and who is carrying it out? Certainly social media has “democratised” the sharing of information (I say this with some caution), making it harder to control the message. But technology has also revolutionised the cultural sphere as well, as Natalia Grincheva’s work on museums has shown.

**6. For someone wanting to start out in public diplomacy, what 5-8 books do you consider to be of seminal**

**importance—either the “best” or the most influential titles?**

**NC:** I wrote my book *Public Diplomacy: Foundations for Global Engagement in the Digital Age* (Polity, 2019) explicitly to provide a short and inexpensive one-stop introduction to the field. It is historically grounded. There are a number of valuable handbooks on the field. Eytan Gilboa’s *A Research Agenda for Public Diplomacy* for Edward Elgar might be of especial interest to historians seeking a pathway into the field. For those looking to chart the overall evolution of US public diplomacy the best starting point is certainly Jack Hamilton’s *Manipulating the Masses: Woodrow Wilson and the Birth of American Propaganda* (LSU, 2020) which covers the Great War. On the interwar reentry of the US into cultural diplomacy we have Frank Ninkovich’s *The Diplomacy of Ideas* and the more recent Justin Hart, *Empire of Ideas* explore the Second World War and its aftermath. My own two volumes on USIA—*The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* and *The Decline and Fall of the United States Information Agency: American Public Diplomacy, 1989-2001*—cover the USIA era. Historians working on post-9/11 should begin with Rhonda Zaharna’s *Battles to Bridges: US Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy after 9/11*. The authors mentioned in previous answers will also spark fresh approaches.

**JGH:** That’s a tough call since there is so much great material out there but I’ll try. My top titles are: Nick Cull’s masterful *The Cold War and the U.S. Information Agency* (2009), Laura Belmonte’s great read, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (2010), Neil Rosendorf’s *Franco Sells Spain to America* (2014), Justin Hart’s *Empire of Liberty*, Michael Krenn’s eminent *The History of United States Cultural Diplomacy: 1770 to the Present Day* (2017). For the diversity of approaches, consider Kenneth Osgood and Brian Etheridge’s systematic edited volume, *The United States and Public Diplomacy: New Directions in Cultural and International History* (2010). By all means, do peek at non-U.S.-centric examinations, e.g. the edited volumes by Johannes Paulmann, *Auswärtige Repräsentationen: Deutsche Kulturdiplomatie nach 1945* (2005); and Louis Clerk, Nicolas Glover, Paul Jordan, *Histories of Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding in the Nordic and Baltic Countries* (2015), as well as early modern studies such as Helmer Helmers’ essay, “Public Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe” (*Media History*, 2016). Finally, consider yourself invited to the impending convention of the symposium cycle, “Culture and International History,” specifically designed for younger scholars, in 1999 ([https://www.scriptsberlin.eu/newseventsmedia/news/2024\\_Conference\\_UncertainBoundaries.html](https://www.scriptsberlin.eu/newseventsmedia/news/2024_Conference_UncertainBoundaries.html)). If you can’t make it to Berlin, in December 2024, consider the resulting publication series at Berghahn Books, since 2003, *Explorations in Culture and International History*, <https://www.berghahnbooks.com/series/explorationsincultureandinternationalhistory>

**AL:** There are so many great historians in the field of public diplomacy. It is hard to choose just a few. I’ve included:

Laura Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War*.

Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Politics, Propaganda, and Public Opinion, 1950-1953*.

Penny von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*.

Jessica Gienow-Hecht, *Transmission Impossible: American Journalism as Cultural Diplomacy in Postwar Germany, 1945-1955*.

Justin Hart, *Empire of Ideas: The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy*.

Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad*.

Marc Selverstone, *Constructing the Monolith: The United States, Great Britain, and International Communism, 1945-1950*.

**EP:** Again, I can speak mostly to transatlantic relations and to cultural diplomacy and would recommend the following to get started:

Christopher Endy, *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

Jessica Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850-1920* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009).

Justin Hart, *Empire of Ideas: The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Reinhold Wagnleitner, *CocaColonization and the Cold War. The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria After the Second World War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

Robert Young, *Marketing Marianne. French Propaganda in America, 1900-1940* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

**GSS:** Difficult question! I think I’d want the following:

Nick Cull, *Public Diplomacy: Foundations for Global Engagement in the Digital Age* (Polity, 2019)

Craig Hayden, *The Rhetoric of Soft Power: Public Diplomacy in Global Contexts* (Lexington, 2012)

Ilan Manor, *The Digitalization of Public Diplomacy* (Palgrave, 2019)

Caitlin Schindler, *The Origins of Public Diplomacy in US Statecraft: Uncovering a Forgotten Tradition* (Springer, 2018)

Xin Liu, *China’s Cultural Diplomacy: A Great Leap Forward?* (Routledge, 2020)

**7. For someone wanting to teach a course on public diplomacy or add public diplomacy elements to an existing course on U.S. foreign relations, what core readings and/or media would you suggest?**

**NC:** I think that the key is not to feel limited to written sources. Many of USIA’s short films are already on YouTube and the National Archives, in collaboration with an NEH grant funded team at Dartmouth, are adding more all the time. It is also possible to access USIA materials via some of the presidential libraries and as supplements to FRUS volumes. I’ve found some of the most productive for class discussion are the Oscar nominated *Five Cities of June* from 1963 and Oscar-winning *Nine From Little Rock* from 1964. The great USIA film on the March on Washington *The March* is now restored and easy to access but sadly the family of MLK have removed the scenes of Dr. King’s

speech in order to protect their intellectual property. If teaching the bicentennial why not take a couple of minutes to view the Vincent Collins psychedelic animation *200* from 1975 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZ3EdI5mz08>]. Psychedelia in the nation's service!

**JGH:** My foremost advice to teachers of the history of public diplomacy would be to focus on both theory and practice. Feel free to pick from the list of volumes listed above or assign any other essay or volume from the rich literature in the field. More importantly still, and in line with my post under (4), invite practitioners on location or by Zoom, either from the State Department, from anyone of the U.S. (or even other) embassies around the world, or from nongovernmental organizations and foundations labouring in the field of U.S. foreign relations. They can be retired (typically more talkative) or active (typically more up to snuff with what's going on right now). At the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin, I once invited Dr. Martina Kohl who was the cultural affairs specialist at the U.S. embassy in Germany and for nearly 30 years in charge of public diplomacy. Martina started out by telling students "how an embassy works"—something students had no clue about—then proceeded to demonstrate the significance of that operational chart for the planning and limitations of her division. At Freie Universität Berlin, we repeatedly host, next to the usual suspects, ambassadors and their staff from countries as diverse as Burundi, Romania, Iraq, and Oman, to simply get a feeling of how much, for all the strategic plans and pamphlets, cultural communication and representation mattered and continues to matter to them (or not) in their daily routine. We also plan team assignments such as the preparation of a program, a campaign or an event in order to craft a public diplomacy strategy for a specific country and discuss the same at mock-conventions. If none of this works for you, do assign at least Yale Richmond's insightful recollection, *Practicing Public Diplomacy* (2008). All of this is another way of saying: The history of public diplomacy is, among other things, very much about talking to people in foreign lands but, also, about the limits of its realization and transformations in the process of implementation. To grasp this dilemma, it pays off to combine academic analysis and hands-on practice introspection.

**AL:** *Core Readings:*

Frank Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: US foreign policy and cultural relations, 1938-1950*.

Kenneth Osgood and Brian Etheridge, eds., *The United States and Public Diplomacy: New Directions in Cultural and International History*.

Michael Krenn, *The History of United States Cultural Diplomacy, 1700-Present*.

Melvin Small, *Democracy and Diplomacy: The Impact of Domestic Politics on U.S. Foreign Policy, 1789-1994*.

Nancy Snow and Nicholas Cull, *Routledge Handbook on Public Diplomacy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

Andrew Johnstone & Helen LaVille, *The US Public and American Foreign Policy*.

*Media/Other Sources:*

The National Museum on American Diplomacy

**EP:** I have a few favorite articles that work well with

students, often asking them to think not only about public diplomacy but about transatlantic cultural relations more generally. This includes Christopher Endy's article on Travel and World Power (1998), Whitney Walton's article on Internationalism and the Junior Year Abroad (2005), and Paul Kramer's article on International Students and U.S. Global Power (2009); all of them published in *Diplomatic History*. In terms of primary sources, scholars should definitely use the *FRUS* volumes I was referring to earlier, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917-1972, Public Diplomacy*.

Finally, I would like to recommend one primary source from the 1920s that simply blew me away. It is an early and really brilliant reflection of the foreign policy impact of American tourism:

Hiram Motherwell, "The American Tourist Makes History," *Harper's Magazine* (Dec. 1929): 70-76.

**GSS:** For books I'd go with the list above! But if you are looking for other media, I'd recommend delving into the history of the World Fairs/Expos, there are plenty of good documentaries available on YouTube that explore some of the earlier Expos in detail. Expos are a fantastic example of everything coming together in one site, for a single period of time, with numerous participants. Great case studies for explaining the importance of public/cultural diplomacy/soft power/nation branding to students. For instance, Montreal's Expo '67: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P40N4hnHpsE>.