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**Matt J. Schumann and Karl W. Schweizer.** "The Revitalization of Diplomatic History: Renewed Reflections." *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 19.2 (2008): 149-186. DOI: 10.1080/09592290802096174. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09592290802096174> .

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**W**hither diplomatic history? Once occupying a position of centrality and prestige in the historical profession, its practitioners lament that it is seen as outdated, bigoted, and irrelevant in the wake of epistemological challenges, not simply from political science, but other historical fields, post-1945.

In their reflections on diplomatic history of the past, present, and future, Matt Schumann and Karl Schweizer join others in echoing that familiar lament<sup>1</sup>, while offering solutions as to how diplomatic history can make itself more inclusive, and thus beneficial, to colleagues in neighboring fields. Its resuscitation, they argue, lies in a return to the Grand Tradition—a tradition in European historical scholarship that has its roots in the principles of Renaissance humanism, the Enlightenment, and Leopold von Ranke's history "*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*." With pressure on the field from abstract, theory-driven epistemology of political science on the right, and activist-driven concerns of social history from the left, diplomatic history needs to rediscover itself as an independent, politically moderate field, receptive to new ideas, while never forgetting to appreciate contingency and the human condition.

Basing themselves in European and British historical writing, Schumann and Schweizer begin their analysis of the state of diplomatic history in the larger profession with a

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<sup>1</sup> See the introduction to *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (1<sup>st</sup> edition). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), David Reynolds, "International History, The Cultural Turn and the Diplomatic Twitch." *Cultural and Social History* 2006 (as well as responses to Reynolds in *Cultural and Social History* by Patrick Finney and Anthony Best), and also Michael J. Hogan, "The 'Next Big Thing': The Future of Diplomatic History in a Global Age." *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 28 Issue 1 (January, 2004).

discussion of the Grand Tradition's origins, and its crystallization in the contributions of Herbert Butterfield.<sup>2</sup> Butterfield was an eminent and versatile British historian who wrote on an array of subjects—history and Christianity, and the historical novel, among them—while largely concentrating on the theory, practice, and pedagogical potential of diplomatic history. The significance of Butterfield lay in his desire to eliminate all general or abstract ideas in the construction of historical narrative, lest systemic analysis in the Social Sciences oversimplify international patterns of political behavior to the neglect of the larger issues of the human condition. He viewed human conflict “not as the melodramatic clash between good and evil but a more tangled admixture on all sides that so often has disproportionately colossal consequences.” (160) Furthermore, Butterfield saw *all* history as having diplomatic elements, due to the tensions caused by power and ambition amid a vast, complex matrix of human activity, subtly touched by the subtle influence of divine Providence. It is upon these traditions of historical scholarship that Schumann and Schweizer base their subsequent discussions of the challenges to diplomatic history—and its decline as an historical field—by political science and social history, and what might be done about it.

On this note, the authors advise pragmatism for diplomatic history's current ills: “adopting and exploiting the epistemological principles of neighboring fields—engaging critics [of diplomatic history] in their own language, yet demonstrating the applicability of diplomatic history's traditional methods for solving problems well outside their original scope.” (172) Diplomatic historians should have a better appreciation of the works of Michel Foucault, Benedict Anderson, and Edward Said. Imagining communities and Others, after all, are never far from negotiation and the exercise of power, the primary concerns of diplomatic history. And, while the game theory of political scientists is not meant to offer a means of prediction, consideration of the likelihood of diplomatic action based on greater knowledge of its practitioners' available options encourages an appreciation for the counterfactual as a check against inevitability and linearity. Furthermore, Schweizer and Schumann recommend that historians view diplomatic negotiation as a wider field of human activity “far from a formal process restricted to state-level representatives in a formal setting,” and instead rethink it as “*any* social activity oriented towards the attainment of an individual's particular goals.” (173) Therefore, “the subjects of social history become the subjects of diplomatic history, and the traditional tools of diplomatic history can be adapted as easily to people representing their own interests as to people representing the interests of nations.” (Ibid) Such pragmatism would allow diplomatic historians to act as epistemological diplomats among their colleagues, for eschewing petty politics for association with sympathetic scholars in neighboring fields would allow them also to write better diplomatic history.

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<sup>2</sup> “The Revitalization of Diplomatic History” is a further exploration of ideas expressed in an earlier article in *Diplomacy and Statecraft* on the value of diplomatic history and why Butterfield matters by Schweizer and Jeremy Black. Karl W. Schweizer and Jeremy Black, “The Value of Diplomatic History: A Case Study in the Historical Thought of Herbert Butterfield.” *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 17, 617-631. 2006.

In general, these suggestions are sound, and their reminder that history is complex, and fraught with contingency, is welcome. In so far as social historians and newer scholarship on foreign relations have sometimes chided traditional diplomatic history for not “bringing in the other side”—the marginalized, and the oppressed—marginalization and oppression does not preclude motive on all sides, oppression and marginalization, notwithstanding. Both classic and very recent scholarship on the British Empire and Native Americans before the American Revolution are good examples of how Native Americans (until recently seen as an oppressed group of people) were, at least at first, far from mere victims, and also diplomatic players in their own right, often negotiating for survival not only with Europeans, but other Native American groups.<sup>3</sup>

This article also highlights some underlying questions: what is diplomatic history? What is foreign relations history? Those who refer to themselves as “diplomatic historians” in the United States have advocated more study of the history of “foreign relations,” a term that they understand to be broad, which includes, but which is not restricted to, diplomacy.<sup>4</sup> This blurring of terms can be problematic as regards the authors’ assessment of the challenge to diplomatic history from social history, particularly in American academia. Schumann and Schweizer curiously restrict that assessment to critiques by feminists and gender historians, while giving class, and certainly race, short shrift. Furthermore, they barely acknowledge the development of foreign relations history in the United States (itself a reaction to some of those very same critiques), and recent trends toward seeing United States history per se in a more global context, much of which would actually reinforce their argument. The more general trend toward the globalization of American history was an important theme in Michael Hogan’s 2004 presidential address at the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR), and he proposed a pragmatic outreach similar to Schumann and Schweizer. It is largely for that reason that Cynthia Enloe’s *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* does not make any direct references to either Callières or Clausewitz (184, fn 107): it is not specifically a work of diplomatic history. Enloe’s

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<sup>3</sup>See Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1659-1812*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992) and *Facing East From Indian Country: A Native History of Early America*. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2003), Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years’ War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Vintage, 2001) and *The War That Made America: A Short History of the French and Indian War* (Penguin, 2006), and Sandra Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), and Camilla Townsend, *Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma*. (Hill and Wang, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Peter P. Hill has suggested seeing foreign relations, diplomacy, and foreign policy as three separate, but nonetheless closely related entities, given that diplomatic historians very often use them interchangeably: “foreign relations’ is the larger set of connections between a nation and foreign elements within the larger international sphere, of which diplomacy is one set of actions. Foreign policy speaks to perceptions and understanding of a nation’s place in the world.” See Hill, “The Early National Period, 1775-1815.” *A Companion to American Foreign Relations*. (Blackwell Publishing, 2004). P.49.

training is not in diplomatic history, even if diplomacy in the form of diplomatic wives comprises one of her chapters. *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases* is gender history in an international context, of the kind Hogan describes. As such, Schumann and Schweizer's critique of social history, while duly noted, in so far as there are still social historians who disparage diplomatic and foreign relations history for being elitist, appears somewhat outdated. Perhaps the real issue now is not so much feminists and social historians who wish to destabilize diplomatic history out of ignorance of what the field actually entails, as it is feminists and social historians who are seeing their work in a more global context, and diplomatic historians, all of whom are talking past each other.<sup>5</sup>

And yet, it is this recent blurring of "foreign relations history" and "diplomatic history" that make Schumann and Schweizer's plea for pragmatism and the Grand Tradition valuable. Their epistemological outlook is helpful at a moment when "the history of foreign relations, broadly defined" might well accommodate traditional and newer scholarship with both approaches enriching each other. While Hogan has stated that there is room for traditional diplomatic history within the big tent of foreign relations history, it is also true that much of the newer scholarship encourages "not privileging the nation state" and to eschew "what one clerk said to another." As such, more traditional diplomatic history, or at least appreciation for it, could conceivably get lost in the shuffle of seeking non-traditional examples of diplomacy. By broadening the definition of "diplomacy" to "any social activity oriented towards the attainment of an individual's particular goals" (173), they effectively encourage diplomatic historians to pay attention to both.

Also, this broadness of definition might encourage historians in general to further contemplate the nature of diplomatic action over the *longue durée*. Doing so would also require historicization and thinking about chronology: while the nation state and the diplomat may seem limiting, particularly to twentieth-century specialists (and SHAFR is certainly dominated by twentieth-century specialists who focus on the post-1945 period, particularly the Cold War), this is not necessarily the case for those who study the eighteenth century, where both the diplomat and the nation state were new.<sup>6</sup> It also requires pondering about the nature of the relationship between culture and power,

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<sup>5</sup>In Michael Hogan's words, "It appears that other historians, quite on their own, have come to see the importance of international relations and an international perspective on their own inquiries. The bad news is that we have not done enough to hitch ourselves to this rising star." Michael J. Hogan, "The 'Next Big Thing': The Future of Diplomatic History in a Global Age." *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 28 Issue 1 (January, 2004). P. 8.

<sup>6</sup>On the newness of diplomacy, see Felix Gilbert, *To The Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), Linda Frey and Marsha Frey, "'The Reign of the Charlatans is Over': The French Revolutionary Attack on Diplomatic Practice." *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Dec., 1993), and Hamish Scott, "Diplomatic Culture in Old-Regime Europe" in Hamish Scott and Brendan Simms, eds., *Cultures of Power in Europe During the Long Eighteenth Century*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

which is greater than some vague notion of culture being a “cause” of policy.<sup>7</sup> Here, perhaps, scholars would find an opportunity to revisit classic scholarship like that of Callières and Clausewitz in conjunction with the work of those like Benedict Anderson, Edward Said, and Michel Foucault, if they haven’t already. And even in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, both the nation state and diplomacy are at different stages of development, owing to time and space. How, after all, are nations formed, and on what basis? While there is a system—or systems—of international power politics, how do new states seek to join it? Furthermore, how do those who will not work within any such system advance their aims? These are certainly questions for diplomatic history, broadly defined. As such, an appreciation of The Grand Tradition, but with more contemporary sensibilities, could indeed help diplomatic history become, in the words of Lynn Hunt, “the next big thing.”<sup>8</sup>

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—Commissioned for H-Diplo by Diane N. Labrosse

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<sup>7</sup> See Emily S. Rosenberg, “Considering Borders.” *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations (Second Edition)*. Edited by Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). The issue of culture and diplomatic history has also been brought up by David Reynolds, in “International History, The Cultural Turn and the Diplomatic Twitch.” *Cultural and Social History* 2006 (as well as in responses to Reynolds in *Cultural and Social History* by Patrick Finney and Anthony Best). Recently, cultural historians have also been considering power. Michael Meranze, in an article entitled “Culture and Governance: Reflections on the Cultural History of Eighteenth-Century British America.” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, Volume LXV, Number 4, October 2008, which contemplates how cultural historians might bring power back into their discourse by rethinking culture itself. This is certainly imperative for eighteenth-century Atlantic historians dealing with slavery.

<sup>8</sup> Hogan, p. 2.