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Introduction by Christopher Endy, California State University, Los Angeles

With over a hundred oral history interviews, archival research at every presidential library from Truman to Reagan, and 504 pages of footnoted text, Nicholas J. Cull's new book represents a landmark statement on the history of the United States Information Agency (USIA). Cull sets out to serve two audiences at once: both government practitioners of public diplomacy and diplomatic historians. This dual mission reflects Cull's own position at the University of Southern California, where he directs a professional graduate program in public diplomacy. As befits his academic home, Cull's book conveys an intimate understanding of leadership and politics within the USIA. According to the reviews in this roundtable, his ability to narrate the USIA's institutional history accounts for the book's major strengths. At the same time, Cull's top-down institutional focus also emerges as the root of most of the reviewers' critiques. Much like the USIA itself, Cull's book sets an ambitious agenda, generates high expectations, and garners significant praise. Also like the USIA, however, Cull's efforts fail to satisfy all in its target audience.

Thanks to the level of detail and the narrative sweep, it is tempting to call the results of Cull's research definitive. Certainly it seems unlikely that any future book on the USIA will match the scope and narrative authority of Cull's book. His chapters, organized by presidential terms, address the USIA's internal operations and its relations with other parts of the U.S. government, particularly its run-ins with Congress and the State Department and its struggles to control the Voice of America radio network. As Kenneth Osgood notes in a review full of valuable historiographic context, Cull's book is especially welcome for pushing scholarly understanding beyond the 1950s, the point at which most existing scholarship on U.S. public diplomacy stops.

Writing a truly definitive history of the USIA, however, was never Cull's goal. He warns in his preface that "the focus on the view from Washington has necessarily been at the expense of the perspective from the field and the day-to-day working practices of the agency" (xvii-xviii). His attention to the USIA's top echelons also leads Cull, by his own admission, to downplay the USIA's work with libraries, cultural centers, people-to-people exchanges, and surveys of foreign public opinion.

Instead, Cull's main purpose is to determine what the USIA did well and where it fell short of its mission and potential. The USIA was not perfect, Cull concludes, but his overall account accentuates the agency's positive side. Cull's primary criticism of the USIA is that it spent too much time trying to project messages and not enough time listening to what foreigners had to say. At the same time, he stresses that the more fundamental shortcoming in U.S. Cold War public diplomacy came from the rest of Washington. Congress, the State Department, and the White House too often marginalized USIA activities and created foreign policies with insufficient input from those in the USIA who knew best how to win hearts and minds around the world.

Several reviewers, especially Osgood, take issue with Cull's emphasis on the effectiveness of the USIA. Osgood breaks down some of the episodes that Cull uses to justify the USIA's success, such as the agency's response to John F. Kennedy's assassination. After Kennedy's death, the USIA received an emergency fund of \$8 million to reassure the world of U.S. stability. Osgood wonders whether historians can declare the USIA's post-assassination program a success when it seems likely that world opinion would have been sympathetic to the United States anyway. He concludes by amplifying a point that Cull recognizes but does not emphasize extensively: in the end, the ability of the United States to win Cold War allies on key issues such as the Vietnam War or nuclear weapons deployment in 1980s Europe had far more to do with the substance of U.S. policies than with the activities of the USIA.

Like Osgood, Laura Belmonte and Susan Carruthers also take a more critical position than Cull on the USIA. Belmonte and Carruthers both observe that Cull fails to consider the role of gender and sexism in the creation and conduct of U.S. public diplomacy. Cull's focus on narrating the USIA's history as recorded in top-level archives means that some controversial topics receive more attention than others. USIA leaders worried intensely over the global embarrassment of the United States' Jim Crow system, and Cull's archive-driven method allows him to convey policymakers' efforts to grapple with the challenge of domestic racism. In contrast, USIA leaders spent much less time thinking about gender inequality, despite strong evidence of sexism within the organization. Cull's view from the top, as Belmonte and Carruthers note, replicates the USIA's blind spot on questions of gender.

Notwithstanding Cull's own qualifiers on the limits of his top-down method, the reviewers point to other areas in which a wider range of perspectives could have improved his story. Richard Fried, in a review otherwise full of praise, suggests that more attention to workplace sociology could help explain the USIA's persistent rifts with the State Department. Michael Krenn argues that the USIA's far-flung field offices deserve more credit for initiating some of the agency's more successful programs. Krenn also calls attention to the USIA's collaboration with non-government groups such as museums, philanthropic organizations, and businesses, which all remain on the margins of Cull's study. Belmonte and Krenn both wish that Cull had given more attention to the specific content of USIA cultural programs, a critique that reflects Belmonte and Krenn's own expertise in the cultural history of U.S. Cold War diplomacy. One of the most common laments is that Cull did not do more to study the foreign reception of USIA projects. Belmonte for instance argues that Cull's brief epilogue is not enough to prove that the USIA can stake a claim to "victory" in precipitating the fall of the Soviet bloc in Europe.

In fairness to Cull, Belmonte also notes that he is already at work on a follow-up book that will address in more detail the end of the Cold War and the USIA's own demise in 1999. Given the unarguable importance of Cull's first volume, and Cull's own receptivity to criticism (as seen in his author's reply in this roundtable), this second book promises to represent another major historiographic event.

Participants

Nick Cull is Professor of Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles where he directs the Masters Degree in Public Diplomacy. He was born in the United Kingdom and educated at the University of Leeds for both BA and PhD. In addition to the book under discussion, he is the author of *Selling War: British Propaganda against American Neutrality in the World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) and (with James Chapman) *Projecting Empire: Imperialism in Popular Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009) and some sixty chapters, essays, reports and edited volumes on aspects of media and communication history. He is president of the International Association for Media and History. He is presently concluding a sequel to his Cold War public diplomacy book

Laura Belmonte is Associate Professor of History and Director of American Studies at Oklahoma State University. She earned her doctorate at the University of Virginia, where she worked with Melvyn Leffler. She is author of *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008) and editor of *Speaking of America: Readings in U.S. History* (Belmont: Thomson Learning, 2007), a two-volume anthology. Her current research explores the intersections of U.S. foreign relations and HIV/AIDS.

Susan L. Carruthers is Associate Professor of History at Rutgers University, Newark, New Jersey. Her research centers on questions of war, representation, and identity construction. She is the author of *Winning Hearts and Minds: British Governments, the Media and Colonial Counterinsurgency* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995); *The Media at War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) and *Cold War Captives: Imprisonment, Escape, Brainwashing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). Her articles have appeared in journals including *American Quarterly*, the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, *International Affairs*, and *Millennium*. She has also recently contributed a number of essays on cinema and the Iraq war to *Cineaste*.

Richard M. Fried teaches Recent U.S. History at the University of Illinois at Chicago. His most recent books are *The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming! Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) and *The Man Everybody Knew: Bruce Barton and the Making of Modern America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005). His experiences in "public diplomacy" include two Fulbright lectureships, in Spain and Vietnam

Michael L. Krenn is currently the chair of the Department of History at Appalachian State University. He received his Ph.D. from Rutgers University in 1985. He has written five books, including *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945-1969* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), *Fall-Out Shelters for the Human Spirit: American Art and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), and *The Color of Empire: Race and American Foreign Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Press, 2006). He is currently at work on several projects, including a study of the role of the Smithsonian Institution in American cultural diplomacy

Kenneth Osgood is associate professor of history and director of the Larkin Symposium on the American Presidency at Florida Atlantic University. He is the author of *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006), which won the Herbert Hoover Book Award. He has also co-edited three books: *The Cold War after Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* (with Klaus Larres) (Lanham: Rown & Littlefield, 2006); *Selling War in a Media Age: The Presidency and Public Opinion in the American Century* (with Andrew K. Frank, forthcoming 2010); and *The United States and Public Diplomacy: New Directions in Cultural and International History* (with Brian C. Etheridge, forthcoming 2010). In 2006-7, Ken was the Visiting Mary Ball Washington Chair at University College Dublin. He has received fellowships from the Mershon Center for International Security Studies and the Institute for Global Conflict and Cooperation.

As we near the tenth anniversary of the Department of State's absorption of the United States Information Agency (USIA), Nicholas Cull gives readers a fine overview of the agency's tangled history. The first archive-based narrative to examine USIA's complete lifespan, Cull's work is a valuable addition to a growing literature of monographs and memoirs addressing the role of public diplomacy in the post-World War II era.¹ Cull's treatment of the events since the Kennedy administration is particularly welcome.² Anyone familiar with the mammoth amount of primary documentation on U.S. propaganda activities will be awed by Cull's fusion of materials from the National Archives, the USIA Historical Collection, the State Department, presidential libraries, universities, and more than 100 interviews with agency veterans. Cull's prodigious research, clear writing, and sweeping scope are quite impressive.

He begins by sketching out some definitions, parameters, and objectives. He first explicates the origins and meanings of the term *public diplomacy*, now the term of choice for America's information and cultural activities abroad. He identifies five core components of public diplomacy: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, and international broadcasting. He intentionally highlights policymaking elites "at the expense of the perspective of the field and the day-to-day working practices of the agency." (xvii). While Cull chooses to address extensively USIA's challenging relationship with Voice of America, he merely glosses over other elements of the agency's history such as its research work, exchange programs, libraries, and cultural centers. Such decisions are prudent (and necessary, even in a 503-page book). When readers cross passages that beg for further elaboration or the incorporation of more key actors, it is a testament to the richness of the material that Cull has assembled. Many future scholars will pursue avenues of inquiry at which he has only hinted.

After tracing pre-World War II roots of the USIA, Cull follows the circuitous path of U.S. information and cultural activities from 1945 to the end of the Cold War. He provides nice composites of important figures like William B. Benton, George V. Allen, C.D. Jackson, Edward R. Murrow, and Charles Wick. He illuminates a seemingly endless chain of bureaucratic reorganizations, budget vacillations, and clashes with Congress. Embedded throughout are wonderful tidbits about a wide range of topics including the agency's role in fostering the growth of American Studies programs abroad, its pioneering uses of television and satellite broadcasting, and its efforts to combat Soviet disinformation about

¹ Recent examples include Kenneth S. Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006) and Wilson Dizard, *Inventing Public Diplomacy: The Story of the U.S. Information Agency* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004).

² Several excellent studies have explored U.S. propaganda programs in the early Cold War era. See, for example, Walter F. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); W. Scott Lucas, *Freedom's War: The American Crusade Against the Soviet Union* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); and Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin: America's Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947-1956* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

the origins of AIDS. Cull's examination of USIA films and filmmakers like Bruce Herchensohn, James Blue, George Stevens, Jr., and Charles Guggenheim is also first-rate.

Cull provides nuanced treatment of USIA's failures and successes. Little Rock and Sputnik sent USIA operatives scrambling to restore America's international prestige. The U-2 crisis, the Bay of Pigs, and the Iranian hostage crisis exposed serious weaknesses in the agency's ability to shape international perceptions of the United States as well as structural impediments that severely limited USIA officials' input in the foreign policymaking process. In one of the book's strongest points, Cull explicates the complicated role of USIA in the Vietnam War. He offers powerful examples of the agency's failure to forge a productive partnership with the South Vietnamese regimes or to "win the hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese people. Nor did the agency persuade the war's critics of the sagacity of America's crusade in Southeast Asia.

Throughout the volume, Cull rightly laments the fact that public diplomacy has usually been "seen as a tool for the enactment of foreign policy rather than as a dimension of foreign policy-making as a whole." (38) Agency directors rarely enjoyed access to the National Security Council and met frequent stonewalling from the State Department. Ironically, the agency's limited role in the creation of U.S. foreign policy did little to shield it from anti-American attacks aimed at U.S. Information Service (USIS, the agency's name abroad) outposts around the world, episodes Cull vividly describes.

But USIA's responses to the Cuban Missile Crisis, the JFK assassination, the 1965 U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic, and the Soviet destruction of KAL 007 demonstrated how well the agency could provide consistent, compelling information worldwide. USIS films like *John F. Kennedy, Years of Lightning, Day of Drums* (1964) and *Thanksgiving in Peshawar* (1983) proved that "propaganda" films could be artistically innovative and emotionally engaging ways to reach millions of foreigners. Voice of America's (VOA) coverage of Watergate, the Three Mile Island nuclear accident, and the Iran-Contra affair illustrated that the radio network's critical role as a source of objective global news – even when the stories shone unflattering light on the United States. Cull provides ample coverage of the furors that arose whenever USIA officials attempted to strong-arm VOA into serving varied political agendas. VOA leaders proved stalwart defenders of the principles articulated in their 1960 Charter, precepts enshrined into law in 1976.

While one understands Cull's rationale for limiting his analysis to top-level administrators, it is nonetheless disappointing that this massive volume devotes little attention to the workplace culture of USIA. One is left wondering what the typical USIA official did on a daily basis, whether in agency headquarters or in the field. Cull briefly mentions the agency's lackluster record of fostering racial and gender equity among its employees, but provides almost no information from the perspective of people of color and women who worked for USIA. While scholars like Mary Dudziak, Michael Krenn, and Penny Von Eschen have done a great deal to elucidate how race and racism informed U.S. propaganda

programs and affected those whom they employed³, Cull misses a prime opportunity to assess how gender and sexism shaped American information and cultural materials and infused the workplace culture. This is particularly unfortunate given the fact that USIA remained male-dominated for decades. In March 2000, 1,100 women won a class-action lawsuit against USIA and Voice of America, the radio broadcasting arm of the agency. The women claimed that they were denied employment opportunities while working at the agency between 1974 and 1984. After a twenty-three year legal battle, the USIA and Voice of America settled the suit for \$508 million – the largest award for job discrimination in U.S. history. While Cull traces the progression of the lawsuit, he never grapples with the larger implications of a biased U.S. ideological offensive. Would, for example, propagandists and propaganda (terms I do not use pejoratively here) more attuned to broader racial and gender dynamics have been more effective in shaping global attitudes? The question goes unasked – and unanswered.

Cull's superficial treatment of the content and impact of U.S. information and cultural programs is also understandable but lamentable. Given USIA's mission of "telling America's story to the world," Cull could spend a bit more time explaining the core elements and overarching themes of that nationalist narrative. His sporadic mentions of agency programming on issues like race, religion, and culture do not offer a coherent overview of the images of Americans and American life that USIA hoped to instill in foreign audiences. Nor does one get a clear sense of how and why USIA shifted the content of its international materials over the course of the Cold War. Finally, while Cull concedes his omission of field operations, one continually wonders how foreign audiences responded to USIA appeals as well as how field officers may have deviated from directives sent by Washington-based administrators.

Charles Wick ranks among the most effective – and controversial – of those administrators and Cull provides a solid recounting of Wick's directorship of USIA. A close friend of Ronald Reagan's, Wick enjoyed a level of support from the president that few of his predecessors experienced. Wick proved highly successful in securing congressional funding and in revitalizing the agency. The positive impact of initiatives like anti-communist joke books, Radio Martí - a station aimed at Castro's Cuba - and *Let Poland Be Poland* - a pro-Solidarity television program -, vexed Wick's detractors. But the exposure of blacklisting and nepotism within the agency gave Wick's critics plenty of ammunition. Yet neither these scandals nor the revelation that Wick taped phone conversations without the knowledge of those with whom he was speaking shook Reagan's confidence in Wick's leadership.

In the book's concluding passages, Cull's analysis of the role of USIA in ending the Cold War is rather terse. After bluntly declaring it "moot" to consider the impact of public diplomacy, Cull provides a mere two paragraphs substantiating his claims that U.S. information and

³ Mary Dudzaik, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Michael L. Krenn, *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945-1969* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998); and Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

cultural efforts behind the Iron Curtain succeeded. Cull then segues abruptly to the demise of USIA in 1999. Although he is writing a forthcoming book on the agency's last decade, one still wishes that he had integrated a more nuanced, exhaustive assessment of the agency's effect on the Cold War into this project. These quibbles aside, Cull has made an invaluable contribution to our knowledge of the Cold War and U.S. propaganda. His book will be the seminal text on USIA for years to come.

“Without the Cold War, what’s the point of being an American?” John Updike’s Harry Angstrom muses in *Rabbit at Rest*.¹ And without the Cold War, what was the point of a U.S. Information Agency (USIA)? By the late 1990s, many legislators could no longer see one. With the Soviet bloc defunct, and McDonald’s doing brisk business in downtown Moscow, why waste money “telling America’s story to the world”? Following the collapse of communism, History had come to a full-stop. America was indisputably top nation—and everyone knew it.² The “indispensable nation,” as Madeline Albright termed it, could duly dispense with its Information Agency.

Nicholas J. Cull offers a tragic emplotment of the USIA’s story: a eulogy to those “few hardy souls” whose valiant efforts to expand enthusiasm for America were consistently underappreciated and then terminated in their prime. Thus at the very moment of victory—a triumph that owed much to the information warriors’ efforts—the Agency was disbanded in 1999. Cull views this as an act of monumental folly, albeit leavened by hubris on the Agency’s part. Having presented itself as a strategic anti-Soviet investment in its annual appropriation battle, the USIA fell victim to its own success. The great unwisdom of this dismantling, Cull insists, became clear on September 11, 2001. Al Qaeda’s attacks revealed the urgent need for America to win friends and influence insurgents in the Muslim world (484). Thereafter, the indispensable nation became the indefensible nation: a “homeland” vulnerable to attack; and a state that adopted emergency measures increasingly hard to defend.

More than a decade in the making, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency* is not only a protracted lamentation for an Agency axed but also a prodigiously researched labor of love. The preface points out that the book is based on extensive archival forays, supplemented by more than one hundred interviews with agency veterans and serving staffers. But even if Cull hadn’t drawn attention to his tireless search for sources and subjects, his diligence shows. The result is a volume crammed with local color and colorful characters that moves along at a jaunty clip. For readers seeking a compendious account of the USIA’s fitful rise and precipitous demise this study will prove invaluable: a definitive institutional history, exhaustive in its coverage of bureaucratic maneuverings, missions espoused, and mandates reversed.

Cull presents his study as “the biography of an idea: the idea that America needed a permanent apparatus to explain itself to the postwar world.” (xiii) It’s an idea to which he is wholeheartedly committed, lauding public diplomacy’s potential to inject the “human

¹ This quotation from John Updike’s *Rabbit at Rest* (New York: Knopf, 1990) also introduces the epilogue to Stephen Whitfield’s *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 231.

² English readers will likely recognize that I’m here paraphrasing the final chapter of W.C. Sellar and R.J. Yateman’s classic, *1066 And All That* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1930), entitled “A Bad Thing”—with reference to America’s assumption of world power after 1918. Others could be forgiven for believing this a parody of Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

dimension” into the foreign policy calculus. Evidently, however, many in Washington failed to endorse this premise. Hence the USIA’s untimely end, and hence persistent controversy over every aspect of its existence throughout its lifetime. If America’s Cold War propaganda agency was (as Cull suggests) fathered by Stalin—and, we presume, an American mother whose profession was shrouded in distaste—it’s no surprise that the resulting infant was passed around several foster homes before finding a permanent institutional base.³ But the Agency’s inauguration in 1953 hardly marked the end of strife over where an organization dedicated to winning adherents and stigmatizing foes fit in the great bureaucratic scheme of things. As Cull shows, relations between the State Department and the USIA were persistently strained and frequently combative. While the former was keen to ensure that official policy was vigorously promoted overseas, the Agency resented undue pressure to toe the line. Policymakers’ heavy-handed intrusions compromised the USIA’s preferred posture of semi-detachment from the state. But needless to say, no USIA director wished to be semi-detached in fact, only in appearance. Another recurrent strain of Cull’s account thus details their ongoing efforts to insert what Eisenhower dubbed the “P-factor” into policy-making (for “P” read “psychological”—or, if you will, propaganda.).

Such wrangling, Cull makes plain, was only to be expected given the Agency’s ill-defined mandate. This vagueness of purpose left the Agency’s poorly demarcated boundaries vulnerable to challenge by expansionists from without and secessionists from within. The USIA’s most important operating unit, the Voice of America (VOA), constantly sought greater distance if not outright independence from the USIA, replicating the latter’s own struggles with State. More surprising, perhaps, is the profound hostility the Agency encountered from legislators. Persistent antipathy ensured that the annual budget appropriation battle was often bloody and never less than bruising.

Why such domestic antagonism toward an entity designed to promote America’s positive image abroad? Cull attributes it in part to Americans’ “natural reticence” over propaganda—a term so pejoratively overburdened that nervous liberals dared not speak its name.⁴ Clearly, however, a propagandist by any other name did not smell much sweeter. Euphemisms like public diplomacy did little to freshen the air. Nor was it merely (or predominantly) liberals who took umbrage at the USIA. Lawmakers routinely assailed the Agency from all sides. To critics, the USIA was variously deemed guilty of doing too much or too little, of being too brash or too understated, of telling the world a partial story or of telling the story partially. In an age of self-conscious muscularity, the instruments of what was not yet called “soft power” appeared alarmingly squidgy; their results woefully resistant to quantification. As Edward R. Murrow (USIA director from 1961-63) put it, “No cash register rings when a man changes his mind.” (190) If personal epiphanies occurred inaudibly, and VOA broadcasts themselves were frequently inaudible thanks to Soviet jamming, how could cost-conscious legislators ever be certain that the USIA was delivering

³ Cull’s first chapter details the pre-history of the USIA, detailing the numerous organizations that succeeded the Office of War Information after its termination in August 1945.

⁴ I borrow this phrase from Brett Gary, *The Nervous Liberals: Propaganda Anxieties from World War I to the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

sufficient bang for the buck? Moreover, if the VOA wasn't loudly trumpeting *official* views, many questioned the point of financing the global distribution of impartial news.

The Agency accordingly found itself squeezed. Cold War liberals consistently sought more emphasis on people-to-people initiatives: an Agency that would listen as well as tell. Illiberal Cold Warriors, meanwhile, preferred to suppress speech rather than cultivate communication. Their *modus operandi* included pulling "subversive" materials from USIA information offices and issuing subpoenas to Agency/Voice personnel, many of whom, as foreign citizens, were particularly vulnerable to charges of "un-Americanism."

Although the most notorious such episodes occurred during the USIA's infancy, which coincided with McCarthy's heyday, battles over the Agency's remit and utility were neither restricted to the early Cold War nor simply another manifestation of that era's overheated excess. Over its lifespan, the Agency's charter was repeatedly revised, yet tensions remained. As Cull demonstrates, Cold War strategists and lawmakers fundamentally disagreed over what the Agency was *for*—or whether it should exist at all. Was it the USIA's job to promote specific U.S. policy objectives or to increase America's stock of that least stable of currencies, "goodwill"? That it was intended to accomplish both ends, and often considerably more, generated much operational friction. Many expected the Agency to be (somehow) a neutral advocate of U.S. policy while others looked to enlist it in tactical "psychological" support of covert operations. The USIA thus played a supporting role in the CIA's ouster of Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, "labeling the Guatemalan government as communist inspired." (121) It mystified events in Iran, the Dominican Republic, and Grenada as they successively experienced U.S. interventions, covert or overt. It attempted to muffle the Kennedy administration's role in the disastrous Bay of Pigs operation, and for well over a decade, the USIA actively participated in the Vietnam War, selling "pacification," villagization, and obscuring exactly what the Phoenix Program entailed: namely, a program of mass killing.

Cull attributes the USIA's ills largely to a combination of myopia and institutional amnesia. Cold Warriors failed to appreciate a well-worn lesson from World War II: that white propaganda requires an impregnable "firewall" to separate it from grey and black misinformation and deception activities. In the absence of such institutional compartmentalization, the credibility of openly attributable outlets, like the VOA, risks contamination. Alternatively, we might understand these tensions as reflective of the conflicted character of U.S. grand strategy itself. At bottom, the National Security Council (NSC) and successive administrations never decisively resolved whether Washington's objective was to bring down the Soviet bloc or to moderate attitudes within the Kremlin such that, while there might still be a USSR, a state of Cold War would no longer exist.

For forty-five years, policy oscillated between frontal assault and subtle pressure, and the USIA bore unmistakable signs of this struggle. Was the Agency essentially an instrument of war or a facilitator of dialog? Both? Neither? It varied. And precisely because the Agency's existence was tightly bound to the central postwar preoccupation of U.S. foreign relations—only a minority of policymakers embracing the "idea for all time" that Cull's biography explores—few spoke up for the USIA once America's chief nemesis expired. The

Agency's "Victory and Strange Death, 1989-99" occupies just three pages of five hundred. Yet there's surely little strange about the death of an institution that was (as Cull demonstrates and his title intimates) so inextricably linked to the Cold War that Stalin could be regarded as its "founder" (493). More curious is the fact that the USIA managed to outlive the USSR by eight years before the plug was pulled.

Cull thus critiques the Agency's East-West orientation but nevertheless replicates it: one of several ways in which his approach suffers not only from an excess of detail but from excessive proximity. The structure of a year-by-year chronicle leaves scant room for sustained critique. But if the latter finds little space in this narrative it's because Cull sees little *fundamental* to criticize, other than the obtuseness of those who failed to recognize the USIA's potential as the nation's "great communicator." He approaches his task as an unabashed advocate of public diplomacy, a connoisseur of its practice, and confidant of its practitioners. As such, his outlook is colored by a basic approbation for what his interviewees did, shaded only by regret that they didn't always do it better—often through no fault of their own.

This authorial identification assumes multiple guises. We see it in Cull's unreflective adoption of Agency language. Like his sources, he refers to the North Vietnamese and Viet Minh as "the enemy." Women in the Agency appear not to have been regarded much more favorably. Throughout the book, only one receives repeated mention, the VOA's Philomena Jurey. Gender discrimination, Cull tells us, became another fractious internal issue, resulting in, and aggravated by, a class action suit mounted by several female USIA employees in 1977. When he characterizes this legal battle as "the agency's equivalent of *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* in Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*," a "legal time bomb" that successive "USIA directors inherited and lived around... like an ugly piece of furniture," he doesn't just reproduce his sources' bias (376). His jaundiced tone compounds it.⁵

If the USIA's top echelon didn't think too much of having women tell America's story, how did they conceive "the world" to whom their efforts were addressed? Cull is less illuminating on this score. Did Agency personnel literally understand the Cold War as a "battle for *men's* minds"? One might imagine so. Yet on occasion USIA initiatives actively sought to stoke consumerist desires among Soviet women, who were believed to chafe against communism's abnegation of their femininity.⁶ It's reasonable to ponder, then, how (and how far) the Agency conceived its audience as segmented along gendered and generational lines. The book's dust-jacket shows a gap-toothed Guatemalan boy beaming

⁵ Cull mentions this case in passing twice. We never do learn the outcome or what day-to-day consequences a decade-long legal battle had for USIA workplace culture.

⁶ Planning the 1959 American National Exhibition in Sokolniki Park, Moscow, USIA strategists fought hard with Soviet authorities for the right to give away free cosmetic samples, but the latter adamantly refused, fearing a "stampede... dangerous to life and limb"; Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: Macmillan, 1997), 189. (Cull covers the Sokolniki exhibit but doesn't draw particular attention to its gendered dimensions; 164-69.) That Soviet officials did, in fact, aspire to cultivate a communist model of female consumption is clear; see Susan E. Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Krushchev," *Slavic Review* 61, ii (Summer 2002): 211-52.

over a USIA comic book depicting “El Nuevo Presidente de los EE. UU.,” John F. Kennedy. But the theme isn’t pursued, and we learn rather little about how USIA personnel thought about whatever it was they thought they were doing, and how their thinking shifted over time.

Cull makes no bones about his book’s selective emphasis. His focus is squarely on Washington at the expense of the USIA’s outposts “in the field,” South Vietnam aside. Himself an advocate of the Agency’s role in “listening”—that is, channeling others’ views of the U.S. into the feedback loop—he nevertheless concentrates almost exclusively on its work of national amplification. He is careful not to make excessive claims. Consider this study a building block, he insists, upon which others will erect layers of country-studies and specialized monographs. (xix) However, by refusing to interrogate a central category—“the world” to whom “America’s story” was addressed—Cull forecloses a critical avenue of enquiry, exhibiting the same stigmatism that afflicted Washington during the Cold War and thereafter. For Cull, “the world” is a transparent given: everywhere that isn’t America, but which America is simultaneously on top of—or should be, if the USIA were doing its job effectively. Not only does he fail to see this externalization as symptomatic of the Agency’s shortcomings, he endows “the world” with sentience. Thus, at various points, we find the world “turning its attention” or “holding its breath.” The author’s infinite patience for bureaucratic splits finds its obverse in a willingness to lump everyone else together.

Like his Agency informants, Cull simultaneously thinks too much of America and too little of “the world.” His tone is dolorous because he regards this as a tale of promise squandered. Overinvestment in the USIA as a strategic Cold War weapon led to its neglect as a vehicle for American internationalism. Believing that the United States has an inspirational story to offer, he finds much to praise in the Agency’s work of binding self-inflicted wounds and rebutting Soviet “libels” alike. It successfully defused communist propaganda on U.S. race relations by stressing civil rights advances, and turned Watergate into an effective “civics lesson for the world.” (488) But by obsessing over the “East-West map,” USIA personnel ignored other crucial cartographies, most particularly “the West-Middle East map,” which Cull elides with “the Islamic world.” (496) Thus his conjecture: “had more resources and attention been devoted to long-term information in the 1990s, the United States might not have faced a war on terror on quite such a scale in the first place.” (500)

As a champion of both public diplomacy in general and America’s entitlement to preeminence in particular, Cull sidesteps the issue of why foreigners didn’t always respond positively to USIA initiatives, or indeed to the United States. Conceiving America as a fundamentally “Good Thing” makes it hard to understand why others wouldn’t share this basic predisposition—unless their minds had been tainted by communists, jihadists or other rabid “anti-Americans.” Whether the category “anti-Americanism” can help illuminate why “the world” doesn’t always approve the ways in which Washington wields power seems unlikely. Rather, the very notion of “anti-Americanism” is symptomatic of an entrenched American tendency to conflate political objections to U.S. policies with prejudicial attitudes towards Americans. It is, of course, congenial for many Americans to imagine that foreigners who “hate America” are either consumed by envy or just don’t get

it. But perhaps critics of U.S. policy, far from not getting it, get it all too well? Viewed more critically, Washington's eagerness to "fix the world" (as Cull puts it) looks far too much like a desire to *fix* the world—in wholly self-serving ways.

And viewed critically, a study of the USIA that finds little objectionable in the Agency's supportive role in the Vietnam War ("swept up in the spirit of can-do-ism that drove the military and political architects of the war" (495)), in the cover it provided for numerous "regime changes," or in the bucketfuls of whitewash it applied to Watergate isn't so much an exercise in propaganda history as in propaganda. That Cull positions himself as a sage counselor, offering the mandarins of American power "seven lessons" for self-improvement, begs larger questions about what and whom propaganda history is *for*, and about the practice of scholarship understood as a complement to state authority.

Cull's authorial mission might be summed up as: speak truth unto power, and urge power to adopt a "strategy of truth." But the truth, as Oscar Wilde once noted, is rarely plain and never simple. No state gets to be "top nation" without a thoroughly besmirched copybook. In the interests of extending and perpetuating American hegemony, U.S. leaders have a long record of fabricating *casus belli*: from the sinking of *The Maine* in 1898 to the atrocity stories of World War I, from the Gulf of Tonkin incident to the spurious WMD claims of 2003. In short, of lying—knowingly and repeatedly. All this makes Cull's insistence on Americans' aversion to propaganda hard to credit, except as a form of denial. (499) What such coyness amounts to, if not a crime, is certainly an obfuscation of crucial dimensions of "America's story:" the story of a rapacious power remarkably successful in sustaining its own sense of innocence, but far less adept at selling this vision of virtue to "the world."

What's not to like about this labor of love, a thorough, painstaking history of the United States Information Agency (USIA) under that and its other trade names? There is a growing literature on the USIA and American self-presentation abroad. The strength in this lineup lies in the Eisenhower years, as covered by Laura Belmonte and Kenneth Osgood.¹ However, Cull's study goes the route, from the World War II incarnations of American "information" programs such as the long-lived Voice of America, through various predecessor agencies to the USIA, and ending with the latter's abolition in 1999. This is an authoritative study. The research that went into it bumps the needle up to somewhere between "thorough" and "extreme."

Nor is this organizational history alone. The USIA was a stormbird often buffeted by hostile political winds. The shifting political context in which the agency functioned is visible throughout the book. There were issues at home about what the nation's information program should look like, and there were political issues from home that the USIA had to interpret to the world. There are bureaucratic wheels, and wheels within them, and there are personalities who sought to give direction to the machine. Cull provides mini-biographies of the key players, and given the heavy emphasis many presidential regimes placed on the nation's presentation of self, these were often people of moment and interest—William B. Benton, C. D. Jackson, Edward R. Murrow and Charles Z. Wick most prominent among them.

The USIA variously pondered, explained, expressed and reflected many aspects of the society it represented abroad. Hence, Cull's story takes in a wide variety of developments at home and abroad, in such a way that the book's reach is expansive and earns it membership in an emerging genre one might term "postwar studies," books that lay out the social and cultural dimensions of the "American Century." This book can bunk nicely on the same shelf with Lisabeth Cohen's *A Consumer's Republic* and Wendy Wall's *Inventing the American Way*.² These books take up the topic of consumerism in varying degrees. Cull's does so least of all, but the U.S. standard of living was obviously a card to be played, subtly if possible, by the nation's salespeople. There were both rewards and risks. The American cornucopia awed the Soviets whenever it could be emptied out for them. A notable instance was the 1959 Moscow exhibit, scene of the famous Nixon-Khrushchev "kitchen debate." This remarkable juncture was equivalent to the Soviet pugilist willingly, if unknowingly, dropping his glove to permit a gratuitous punch. "Frankly," high-ranking USIA official Abbott Washburn confessed, "we do not really understand why the Soviets agreed" to swap exhibits, given the likely impact of the U.S. show "among a people who are

¹Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

²Lisabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Wendy L. Wall, *Inventing the "American Way": The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

still far short of consumer goods.”³ (One half-wonders if the reciprocal American dropped glove was the invitation enabling Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev to visit the U.S. that fall.) The Soviets said “*nyet*” to giveaways of anything but souvenir pins and samples of Pepsi, but Moscow fair personnel soon realized that to “distribute” *verboten* materials, they needed only to turn their backs--and the items swiftly walked off (165). At a later show, “Recreation-U.S.A.,” in Irkutsk, an RV that was larger than “many Soviet homes” dazzled Siberians. (325) Yet, as Cull’s research amply demonstrates, some USIA strategists sought means to emphasize America’s “culture” in order to disabuse foreign audiences of the notion that its citizens were mere materialists, so the USIA sometimes walked a tightrope. (279)

Cull offers not just a history but a guide to practitioners of public diplomacy. There is ample criticism of gaffes, false starts and sub-par performance in the USIA’s Long March, but it comes from a well-wisher, not a nay-sayer. Cull is not stingy with advice on how best to transact public diplomacy in the post-USIA era. He makes clear his belief in the importance of the product USIA was selling. His conclusion offers both a bird’s-eye view and “lessons,” and in a riff on the long-term imbalance between spending on the military versus on public diplomacy, he reemphasizes the importance of USIA’s mission: “One less aircraft carrier or a couple of fighters here or there would not have been missed by the Pentagon but their cost, if diverted to public diplomacy, would have contributed to a different sort of strength and enhanced a no less necessary resource against future conflict: understanding of and sympathy for the United States around the world. Doubling the resources currently devoted to public diplomacy would be a good start.” (500)

Cull offers a breezy sampling of U.S. public diplomacy prior to the Cold War. The traces go back a long way, though they are not deeply rutted and were often laid down by private rather than governmental vehicles. The first major rehearsal for public-diplomacy-as-we-know-it arrived with the Committee on Public Information in 1917, which, despite its brief life, worked strenuously both to create its own version of the American message and to edit those from other sources. FDR’s administration increased governmental efforts to propagate “information” to both domestic and later foreign audiences. World War II saw the appearance of a number of founts of information ranging from high-level explanations of national policies down to cultural and “good will” exchanges. Harold Lasswell warned in 1945 of a potential “cultural armaments race between America and Russia.” (30) This valuable treatment of early theory-and-practice nicely bookends the closing, forward-looking treatment of public diplomacy in the new century.

As Cull brings out consistently, and reemphasizes in his conclusion, the United States “has a longstanding and pervasive suspicion of government information and an associated reluctance to spend money on such work.” (499) Indeed, the first fifteen years of the Cold War were dotted with near-death experiences worthy of the “*Perils of Pauline*”: slashed or endangered appropriations, complaints about the contents of this or that foreign exhibition or about emphases in Voice of America (VOA) broadcasting. McCarthy’s charges

³Memorandum, Abbott Washburn to Robert E. Cushman, July 20, 1959, Series 407, Richard M. Nixon Papers, NARA, Laguna Niguel.

were just the tip of the iceberg.⁴ “Propaganda” carried heavy baggage in the nation’s discourse of democracy. It is salutary to be reminded several times in this book how Soviet spending dwarfed that of the United States. (52, 400)

Overall, Cull’s assessment of the USIA’s performance is guardedly positive. Post-“Wall” testimony suggests that Eastern Europeans paid close heed to their radios, and exhibition-goers could sense that the people on the other side of the Curtain lived better than they did. The author notes that U.S. information programs could sometimes reduce damage from potential disasters (like Watergate), and exports of culture displayed the nation’s “soft power.” (482-3) This seems a plausible conclusion, argued as well as possible from fugitive evidence about the impact of USIA programs behind the Iron Curtain. The USIA obviously groped for feedback--a pity the Soviets weren’t open to more Gallup polling. Some gambits and projects worked better than others. The U.S. pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World’s Fair was a popular success. The 1959 Moscow exhibit was another—U.S. Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson predicted that it would be “worth more to us than five new battleships” (163).

This reviewer is left with quibbles by way of criticism. The demise of USIA could use more attention, though at the 500-page mark the author might be excused for eliding any death scenes. So perhaps could the sociology of USIA. The author’s conclusion notes the “disdain of the old school State Department types for their new colleagues” transferred in from USIA. (502) Their differing functions or daily work agendas might explain the disparagement, but one wonders if the two cohorts contained different social types. How “old school” was the State Department in 1999? Presumably it had come a long way from the “Christian gentlemen” present at the creation of the Foreign Service.⁵ How different were the public diplomatists?

Relatedly, a tendency sometimes creeps in that walls off journalism (information) from advertising (sales), particularly early in the story, and may exaggerate the operational gap between them. Many admen had journalistic backgrounds. Bruce Barton and his partner Roy Durstine both started in the print media. Where better than Madison Avenue to seek ideas for “selling” the American story? Barton (who deplored most of the apparatus of the Cold War state) dined out on his premise that the best way to win Soviet hearts and minds was to bombard them with Sears catalogs. Given his background in advertising, one might predict the inclinations of William B. Benton, Assistant Secretary of State for Public and Cultural Relations under Truman, but what role then did his experience as an administrator at the University of Chicago play? And did the fact that C.D. Jackson’s career lay with Time-Life explain the difference between his operating style and Benton’s when he directed public diplomacy under Eisenhower?⁶

⁴On USIA’s precarious early years, see also Laura Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008)

⁵Martin Weil, *A Pretty Good Club: The Founding Fathers of the U.S. Foreign Service* (New York: Norton, 1978), 9.

⁶The most intriguing of ex-admen to populate these pages may have been Edwin Lansdale, famous for his swashbuckling, unorthodox aid to the Philippines Government in fighting the Huk rebellion and, less successfully, to the South Vietnamese. Lansdale makes a cameo appearance (125). His black propaganda on

The literature of “McCarthyism” often depicts the USIA and its sub-programs (notably the Voice and the overseas libraries) as prominent victims of Senator Joe McCarthy and his junketeering sidekicks Roy Cohn and G. David Schine. And so they were. Political attacks on the libraries prompted some fearful custodians to remove copies of Thoreau’s *Walden*, deemed “downright socialistic,” from their shelves. One USIA employee wrote from Rome lamenting that McCarthy “single-handedly refutes the case we are trying to prove--that America is politically mature, and ripe and ready for world leadership.” He did “more to harm the good cause of America abroad than the United States Information Service has been able to do to help it in all the nine post-war years.”⁷

While the damage looks one-directional, one wonders to what extent the USIA, in its role as witness to the souring of opinion abroad, channeled it back Stateside, targeting opinion leaders at home much as it endeavored to do with its programs abroad. Fears that America’s standing in the world was suffering eventually influenced the belief emergent among the political elite, including some Republican Senators, that McCarthy had become a menace. This was one of many instances revealing a growing American global-mindedness--an important, if not always reliable nutrient for the USIA.

Cull treats another episode showing the role of global consciousness, the juncture in the 1960 presidential campaign at which America’s standing abroad became an election issue. This was the heyday of the William Lederer and Eugene Burdick novel *The Ugly American*, which, thanks to the morphing of the intended meaning of its title, soon came to cover the embarrassing antics of not just professional diplomats but all American travelers abroad. This concern with the misbehavior of itinerant Americans began as early as 1952, as Cull notes. Late in the book, the author declares: “Public Diplomacy Is Everyone’s Business.” That injunction was heard frequently in the ‘50s and ‘60s (even before *The Ugly American’s* 1958 publication). Cull includes the various public exchange programs hitched at times to the USIA’s wagon--the Fulbright program, People-to-People--and the USIA’s connection with pamphlets which beseeched Americans going abroad to have a care for local sensitivities in their travels. (57, 103, 138, 173) The coverage of these themes is probably quite adequate, but this reader would have appreciated further attention to the phenomenon of “global-mindedness.”

All in all, however, this plum of a book is an engaging, rewarding *tour de force*.

behalf of the Diem regime ran in the face of efforts by USIA professionals to purvey “straight” information. Vietnam generally was the largest cross USIA had to bear.

⁷John Kenneth White, *Still Seeing Red: How the Cold War Shapes the New American Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 116; “Johnny” to “Pete,” March 21, 1954, Folder 88-1, Adlai E. Stevenson MSS, Illinois State Historical Library.

Nicholas Cull has slain the hydra. In the past few years many scholars, myself included, have sallied forth into the ill-lit and twisting caverns that make up the archival record of America's propaganda machinery in an effort to discover some controlling force, some unifying ideology, some larger canvas by which to understand the multi-headed beast that was America's public diplomacy since World War II. The line of attack has varied. Some have come at the beast using specific time periods and/or presidencies as their point of departure, most notably Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda battle at Home and Abroad* (2006); and Laura Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (2008), which examines the Truman and Eisenhower years. Others focus on a particular program: the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe, for example, have been the focus of a number of good studies (Gary Rawley, Robert Pirsein, David Krugler, Arch Puddington, and Alan Heil). An interesting array of studies has looked at U.S. propaganda efforts in relation to specific nations (Giles Scott-Smith, Netherlands, France, and Britain; Reinhold Wagnleitner, Austria; Jessica Gienow-Hecht, Germany) or regions (James Vaughn, the Middle East). Still others examine specific mediums of the U.S. propaganda effort: jazz and rock and roll music (Penny Von Eschen and Uta Poiger), dance (Naima Prevots), and even my own foray into the world of abstract expressionist art. And another approach has been to focus on a particular issue addressed by American propaganda. Most notable have been those works looking at how the United States dealt with the ticklish issue of race relations (Mary Dudziak, Cary Fraser, Thomas Borstelmann, Brenda Gayle Plummer, and many others). This lopping at the heads of this hydra has certainly resulted in mountains of information and insights. But with new heads sprouting left and right, a certain amount of confusion was nearly inevitable. Cull's solution has been to forego parrying this or that program, time period, medium, or geographical location and instead stab directly into the heart of the monster—the United States Information Agency (USIA).

To be sure there have been previous attempts to study the USIA, but most of these have been sketchy affairs, recollections by former employees, or barely more than institutional histories. Cull's study is monumental in every sense of the word, encompassing research in the Library of Congress, National Archives, eight presidential libraries, five other major archives, and nearly 100 oral interviews. Starting with the precursors to the USIA, the author takes us president-by-president, organization-by-organization, year-by-year, director-by-director, and program-by-program through the history of America's premier propaganda office in painstaking detail. Yet, Cull provides more than simply a 500-page encyclopedia entry. Threading through the names, acronyms, and dates are several significant strands of thought by which the author attempts to make sense of the sprawling and often controversial propaganda program initiated by the United States during the Cold War.

The bureaucratic context for the establishment, life, and death of the USIA is often dry ground to till. The acronyms pile up pretty fast and furious, particularly in the opening chapters that set the groundwork for the agency's appearance in 1953. Nevertheless, a

clear understanding of the bureaucratic matrix in which the agency existed is absolutely essential if we are to fully grasp the successes and failures of the USIA. Cull covers the familiar ground—the battles between State and USIA over control of the propaganda machinery and influence with the White House and the often grinding and vicious wars with Congress for funding (the author’s skewering of Joseph McCarthy and his band of “zealots” is particularly entertaining (85-86))—but goes beyond this to illustrate that even within the agency fights often erupted. These included issues both big (the mission of the agency) and small (such as picking a new name for the revamped organization in 1977). Cull uses these firefights to illustrate some important notions about America’s public diplomacy in the Cold War period, namely that the “constituent elements of public diplomacy are often incompatible” and that the nation, “is at its heart a skeptical participant in public diplomacy.” (498-99) The first point suggests that despite all of the offices, programs, publications, and so forth, America’s public diplomacy was hardly monolithic. There was constant bickering over the purpose of the agency—was it to advocate for particular U.S. government policies; was it to serve as an overt agent of subversion against the communist bloc; was it to show the “real” America to an often suspicious world? More than simply creating confusion, Cull argues that these diverse constituencies could work against one another, inflicting damage on the entire propaganda program. The second point clearly illustrates one of the biggest problems facing America’s public diplomacy program—the fact that the U.S. government and people have rarely given their unabashed support to the effort. Suspicions about the very word “propaganda” were starting points, but other factors quickly entered into the picture: debates over what was and was not “American”; concerns over the “patriotism” of many of the participants (particularly true of the cultural diplomacy program); and always looming overhead, criticisms of the amounts of money spent on something that did always produce tangible results.

Somewhat ironically, therefore, the USIA was always an agency in search of a voice. Interest in its work waxed and waned, reaching its highest levels of influence during the mid-1950s into the early-1960s and then dying a slow, painful death over the next three decades. Since many in the government—particularly in the Department of State—were dubious about the agency’s work, it struggled to have a place at the policy making table. Edward Murrow’s intense anger about “being left in the dark during the planning of the Bay of Pigs invasion” was but one example of the USIA left to explain a foreign policy initiative of which it had no prior knowledge or input. (190-196)

Cull also places the USIA within the context of the evolving Cold War. At first glance that may seem a strange observation; after all, most of the studies on U.S. public diplomacy are generally located within the Cold War. A problem with too many of these studies, however, has been the tendency to briefly sketch out the historical context and then dig right into this or that example of public diplomacy—an exhibit; a tour; a program. Too often this results in the feeling that these propaganda efforts were somehow apart from the whole; that while the world turned, officials in the USIA and elsewhere went on devising their plans and turning out position papers regardless of what was occurring. Cull offers a useful corrective by first setting out the events of the Cold War in some detail and then suggesting ways in which the USIA attempted (not always successfully) to play a role in these on-going

occurrences. In short, the history of the USIA is interwoven into the history of the Cold War in a fashion that has not always been seen in the existing literature on America's public diplomacy in the post-World War II period.

Finally, Cull offers an insightful conclusion to his work, summarizing not only the successes and failures of the USIA but also drawing interesting and sometimes controversial conclusions of his own about the future of public diplomacy in America's foreign relations. This section is nothing less than a call for a "serious and sustained debate over the role of public diplomacy in international relations and for scholarship and civic engagement to support this debate." (500) For many of us who have studied U.S. Cold War public diplomacy the tendency to develop a very deep pessimism is natural. Chronicling failure after failure, fiasco after fiasco, missed opportunity after missed opportunity—it wears on a person. Cull does not ignore the failures of America's public diplomacy, but he also believes that we can learn from them and make public diplomacy a vital and credible part of the day-to-day workings of the nation's foreign policy. In a world where real communication between nations and peoples often seems strained at best, this is a heartening declaration.

Faced with such a monumental work, it seems almost petty to offer up criticisms, but a few need to be made. First, the top-down approach of the book, while allowing Cull to make some interesting observations about the directors of the USIA, does tend to leave a good bit out of the picture. The public affairs officers who toiled in the field are sometimes painfully absent in the panoramic story Cull presents. While one can certainly agree with the author's conclusion that the success of the USIA was often dependent on the strength and vision of its director, it could not have survived without the valuable input and suggestions received from the field. Just as the USIA did not work in a vacuum, neither did its directors. In fact, as many researchers have discovered, the impetus for any number of programs or exhibits actually came from those working abroad. Second, the absence of non-governmental actors is troubling. Cull is clear—his focus is on the USIA. However, that agency could not have carried out its work, particularly in the field of cultural diplomacy, without the support and resources of other entities. The Smithsonian Institution, for example, had a long and contentious relationship with the USIA, yet is mentioned just a handful of times. Clearly, the two needed each other in carrying out programs of cultural exchange and exhibitions, but they also had very different views on the purpose of those programs. Philanthropic organizations, museums, and businesses often worked side by side with the USIA, but their work is mostly invisible in Cull's volume. Third, the cultural diplomacy side of the USIA's work often gets pretty short shrift. Some of the more famous examples, such as the "Family of Man" exhibit and the world's fair of 1958, are mentioned and Cull does not ignore the controversies that arose concerning America's international cultural programs. Too often, however, these are treated as mere sidelights. Set off under their own subheadings within chapters, the cultural programs are not always as seamlessly interwoven into the entirety of the USIA program as they might be. And finally, the assessment of the impact of all of those programs is uneven. To judge the successes and failures of America's public diplomacy one has to be able to provide some relatively detailed analyses of foreign public opinion and/or changes in a foreign nation's view and

policies. It is the bane of those who study public diplomacy—trying to come up with some tangible way to measure the impact on the public.

Anyone who has jostled against the hydra that was America’s public diplomacy program deserves our admiration and congratulations—particularly when they have done so successfully. Cull has performed the time-consuming and strenuous task of hacking his way through the multitude of “heads” of the U.S. propaganda effort, driving straight to the heart of the beast to give us what will likely be the definitive history of the USIA. But before the rest of us put away our shields and swords, I would suggest that we consider the criticisms enumerated above and realize that there is still much to be done on this complicated issue. After all, the hydra may be dead—but anyone who remembers the classic movie *Jason and the Argonauts* might recall that there is the little matter of those darned teeth of the hydra from which so many other challenges arose.

When I first started researching the history of U.S. propaganda during the 1990s, how I longed for a good, comprehensive account of America's Cold War propaganda agency. Some general histories of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) and the Voice of America (VOA) existed, but most had been written by former employees of those agencies.¹ Their accounts reflected the values and beliefs of authors who saw themselves as having served on the front lines of the Cold War. Closer to memoirs than scholarly monographs, they were not based on extensive archival research and so were useful, but only to a point.

Nicholas Cull's magisterial history of the USIA is therefore a sorely needed account that fills a colossal gap in the historical literature. Scholars all too casually use the word "prodigious" to describe the research of books they review, but Cull's book truly matches this description. Thoroughly grounded in the widest range of declassified documents from the 1940s through the 1980s, Cull's history is based on research in more than a hundred manuscript collections in fifteen different archives. The book also benefits from interviews and correspondence with 112 "veterans" of the USIA and other agencies, as well as research in dozens of periodicals, published primary sources, and the pertinent secondary literature. At a time when the subfield of diplomatic history seems only to reward and praise "international history" using foreign archives, Cull's work serves as a powerful reminder that extensive research in U.S. archives on America-centric topics remains vitally important to assess many neglected but crucially important issues relating to U.S. foreign relations. Moreover, for Cull, a British historian, this *is* a work of "international history" based on "foreign" archives – itself a fact that highlights the artificiality of our subfield's growing obsession with foreign archives.²

Beautifully written, Cull's lively narrative is enriched with many telling anecdotes, illuminating details, and richly textured portraits of the key players. Although a massive book – with more than 500 over-sized pages – the style is swift, engaging, and often

¹ See for example, John W. Henderson, *The United States Information Agency* (New York: Praeger, 1969); Alvin A Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation: American Propaganda, Soviet Lies, and the Winning of the Cold War* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1995); Thomas Sorensen, *The Word War: The Story of American Propaganda* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); Fitzhugh Green, *American Propaganda Abroad: From Benjamin Franklin to Ronald Reagan* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1988); Wilson Dizard, *The Strategy of Truth: The Story of the U.S. Information Service* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1961); Robert Ellsworth Elder, *The Information Machine: The United States Information Agency and American Foreign Policy* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1967).

² Spirited defenses of continuing to approach U.S. foreign relations as *national* history are made by Fredrik Logevall, "Politics and Foreign Relations," *Journal of American History* 95:4 (March 2009); and Robert J. McMahon, "Toward a Pluralist Vision: The Study of American Foreign Relations as International and National History" in Michael J. Hogan, ed. *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 35-51. See also the convincing defense of the continuing need to incorporate the study of domestic politics into the history of U.S. foreign relations in the introduction to Andrew L. Johns, *Vietnam's Second Front: Domestic Politics, the Republican Party, and the War* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, forthcoming 2010); and Fredrik Logevall and Campbell Craig, *America's Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, forthcoming 2010).

engrossing. Cull masterfully weaves the history of the USIA into the larger story of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War. He traces the agency's hand in virtually every major issue and crisis that faced American policymakers in the postwar era, adding significantly to our understanding of domestic issues, such as the Watergate scandal and the Civil Rights movement; major international crises, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Berlin crisis; covert operations, such as the failed Bay of Pigs invasion and the overthrow of the Guatemalan and Iranian governments; and U.S. foreign interventions large and small, such as the Dominican intervention and the Vietnam War. Encyclopedic in its coverage, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency* will become an essential resource for readers interested in public diplomacy history, and, indeed, the history of U.S. foreign relations writ large.

Merely singing this book's many praises would not make for a compelling roundtable discussion, however, so I offer the thoughts below not so much to criticize this fine piece of work as to clarify its contribution – to contextualize the book within the historiography, to propel the future research agenda forward, and to raise some concerns about aspects of the author's interpretation. I am motivated in part by a belief that for these roundtables to be effective we need to do less cheerleading and more discussing. I trust the author and my readers will take my comments in that spirit.

Cull's study engages a fast growing body of literature on the role of public diplomacy – encompassing propaganda and cultural diplomacy – in American foreign relations. With a few exceptions, much of this literature analyzes the early Cold War during the 1940s and 1950s. Most of it also focuses on the public diplomacy campaigns sponsored by the United States, particularly those operations that targeted Europe or the Soviet Union.³ With most of the scholarship focusing on the European theater of U.S. public diplomacy, the Third World has gone virtually unexamined by scholars, despite the fact that it emerged as the

³ Even though public diplomacy has become an important foreign policy tool for many states, only a handful of studies have explored the public diplomacy activities of countries other than the United States. Britain has been the exception, here, as several studies have explored facets of British propaganda and public diplomacy. For example, see: Nicholas J. Cull, *Selling War: The British Propaganda Campaign against American "Neutrality" in World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Gary D. Rawnsley, *Radio Diplomacy and Propaganda: The BBC and VOA in International Politics, 1956-64* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), Paul Lashmar and James Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War 1948-1977* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1998); Tony Shaw, *British Cinema and the Cold War: The State, Propaganda and Consensus* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2006); Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist: The Information Research Department* (London: Routledge, 2007); Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001). Other exceptions include: Gary D. Rawnsley, *Taiwan's Informal Diplomacy and Propaganda* (New York: Palgrave, 2000); Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda*, 3rd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Philip M. Taylor, *Global Communications, International Affairs and the Media Since 1945* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2007); Brian C. Etheridge, "The Desert Fox, Memory Diplomacy, and the German Question in Early Cold War America," *Diplomatic History* 32:2 (April 2008): 207-238; Peter L. Hahn, "The United States and Israel in the Eisenhower Era: The 'Special Relationship' Revisited," in Kathryn C. Statler and Andrew L. Johns, eds. *The Eisenhower Administration, the Third World, and the Globalization of the Cold War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 225-244.

priority “target area” of Cold War propaganda in the mid-1950s and remained a top concern ever since.⁴

In this context, three issues have dominated historical analysis.⁵ First, the issue of cultural imperialism – or cultural transfer – has loomed especially large in scholarly debates. Numerous studies have explored the extent to which U.S. government agencies facilitated the intrusion and expansion of American consumerism and popular culture, some stressing the “Americanization” or “coca-colonization” of Europe, others emphasizing European agency in assimilating and adapting American culture to suit their needs.⁶ A second strand of scholarship – written in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union – has focused on U.S. psychological warfare behind the Iron Curtain. Much of this work seeks to explain the role of culture, ideology, and propaganda in spelling the demise of the Soviet empire.⁷ The third strand of analysis has explored the so-called “state-private” network, or the largely covert links between the U.S. government and private groups in sponsoring various cultural and propaganda programs. Some have argued that the American state co-opted

⁴ Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 113-150. A noteworthy exception is James R. Vaughan, *The Failure of American and British Propaganda in the Middle East, 1945-1957: Unconquerable Minds* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁵ For a compendium of recent work that explores new directions in public diplomacy history, including its international, cultural, and political dimensions, see the forthcoming edited collection by Kenneth Osgood and Brian Etheridge, eds. *The United States and Public Diplomacy: New Directions in Cultural and International History* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, forthcoming 2010). An essay by Nicholas Cull (on USIA film) will appear in this volume.

⁶ For an overview of this literature, see Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, “Cultural Transfer,” in Hogan and Paterson, eds., *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 257-278. Also see a 2000 roundtable in the journal *Diplomatic History* that flushed out the terms of this debate: Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, “Shame on US?: Academics, Cultural Transfer, and the Cold War -- A Critical Review,”; Richard Pells, “Who’s Afraid of Steven Spielberg,”; Bruce Kuklick, “The Future of Cultural Imperialism”; Richard Kuisel, “Americanization for Historians”; and John W. Dower, “‘Culture,’ Theory, and Practice in U.S.-Japan Relations,” all in *Diplomatic History* 24 (Summer, 2000): 465-528. Key works include Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Richard H. Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American culture since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997); Ralph Willett, *The Americanization of Germany, 1945-1949* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1989); Rob Kroes, *If You’ve Seen One, You’ve Seen the Mall* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Richard F. Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, *Transmission Impossible: American Journalism as Cultural Diplomacy in Postwar Germany, 1945-1955* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999); Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); William Hitchcock, *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Stability in Europe, 1945-1954* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁷ Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1997); Scott Lucas, *Freedom’s War: The American Crusade Against the Soviet Union* (New York: NYU Press, 1999); Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback: America’s Secret War behind the Iron Curtain* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000); Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin: America’s Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947-1956* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000).

these private groups and subverted democratic ideals, while others paint a more benign picture of state-private collaboration.⁸

Cull's specific contribution to these debates is mixed, in large part because he does not engage the literature directly. Cull's study neither speaks directly to the main debates that have animated the field thus far, nor shifts the debate to a new front. His is narrative history at its finest, but readers wanting to know more about these issues will have to reach their own conclusions. On the one hand, Cull does a tremendous service by breaking the story of U.S. propaganda out of the early Cold War period and extending it into the 1960s and through the 1990s. He greatly enriches our understanding of U.S. public diplomacy by exploring the USIA's activities during the Vietnam War era, during the period of détente, and during Reagan's "Second Cold War." Cull also extends his analysis beyond Europe to include a rich and detailed discussion of U.S. public diplomacy in the Third World, thus providing a most welcome reminder that the USIA's propaganda offensive had a global reach.

Invariably in a study of such sweeping scope, some facets of the agency's activities get more attention than others. Cull emphasizes the agency's intersection with high policy, so he is mostly concerned with the agency's leadership and how the agency responded to major Cold War crises. He also focuses on the USIA's endless bureaucratic turf wars, its struggle to exert an influence on policymaking, its stormy dealings with Congress, and its troublesome relationship with its most recognizable "tool," the Voice of America. He gives comparatively less treatment to the USIA's extensive cooperation with private enterprise, its daily propaganda about everyday life in the United States ("Americana"), its extensive use of gray or "unattributed" propaganda, and its exchange programs and library initiatives.⁹

⁸ Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2000); Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress of Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (New York and London: The Free Press, 1989); Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and Post-War US-European Relations* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2001); Giles Scott-Smith and Hans Krabbendam, eds. *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe, 1945-1960* (London: Frank Cass, 2003); Hugh Wilford, *The CIA, the British Left and the Cold War: Calling the Tune?* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Helen Laville and Hugh Wilford, eds. *The US Government, Citizen Groups and the Cold War: The State-Private Network* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); Tony Shaw, *Hollywood's Cold War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007); Volker R. Berghahn, *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001); W. Scott Lucas, "Mobilizing Culture: The State-Private Network and the CIA in the Early Cold War," in Dale Carter and Robin Clifton, eds. *War and Cold War in American Foreign Policy, 1942-62* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 83-107; Osgood, *Total Cold War*.

⁹ Cull analyzes the USIA's cooperation with private groups in more detail in "Public Diplomacy and the private sector: the United States Information Agency, its predecessors and the private sector," in Laville and Wilford, eds. *The US Government, Citizen Groups and the Cold War: The State-Private Network*, pgs. 210-226. On exchange programs, see Giles Scott-Smith, *Networks of Empire: The U.S. State Department's Foreign Leader Program in the Netherlands, France, and Britain, 1950-1970* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2008). On propaganda about everyday life, see Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

Somewhat surprisingly, Cull notes major propaganda themes – the heart of the agency’s operations – but he rarely analyzes them in depth. Although he does not say as much, the consistency of the agency’s message over 46-year history is striking. With some minor variations in emphasis, the USIA harped on variations of the same propaganda themes from its creation in 1953 until its collapse in 1999. It stressed such themes as the spiritual vitality, diversity, and richness of American culture; the American commitment to peace and disarmament; U.S. gains in science and technology, including achievements in outer space exploration; the dynamism and resiliency of the U.S. economy; and the superiority and effectiveness of the American democratic political system. Its overarching mission remained relatively static as well: it defended specific U.S. foreign policies, it presented the American way of life favorably, and it combated communism and neutralism. Some new themes cropped up now and again – terrorism, for example, emerged as a theme in the 1980s – but by and large the same messages dominated U.S. propaganda output for five decades. This relatively static nature of the USIA’s ideological message gets lost in Cull’s vibrant and upbeat narrative, which perhaps puts more emphasis on change over time than the agency’s own actions warranted. Many of the changes instituted by individual directors, chronicled in rich detail by Cull, merely altered the agency’s tactical operations along the margins.

The Carter years stand out as a possible exception, since for a brief moment the agency altered its mission to embrace two-way communication, supporting the cultural education of Americans as well as the persuasion of foreigners. The agency temporarily renamed itself the International Communication Agency to highlight this new “two-way mandate.” Yet even so, its foreign propaganda, including its emphasis on human rights, continued to operate within a familiar thematic and ideological framework.

Analytically, Cull’s history reads like an insider’s account. In tone and attitude, little separates Cull’s archive-based account from the “memoir-ish” histories previously written by veteran practitioners of public diplomacy.¹⁰ This is a laudatory history of the USIA, one that concludes with a decidedly favorable assessment: “U.S. public diplomacy had been an important tool for minimizing disasters like Watergate, managing relationships with allies, blocking the enemy’s ability to win, and holding the imagination of the developing and nonaligned world until the American system had decisively passed the Soviet.” (482-3) While not uncritical of the agency’s shortcomings and failures, Cull, like those who were “in the business,” accepts without question the Cold War mission of the USIA, the intrinsic value of public diplomacy, and the overall effectiveness of the USIA’s activities. He laments the times when the USIA was shut out of policymaking or deprived of sufficient funds (that is, most of the time). He takes it for granted that the USIA’s propaganda had an impact, and a generally positive one at that.

Such assumptions underpin Cull’s assessment of the USIA’s successes and failures. The book assumes, rather than demonstrates conclusively, that the USIA had an impact, that it made tangible “achievements” (a word Cull uses often) to the conduct of American foreign

¹⁰ See footnote 1. Also see Richard T. Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2005).

policy. To illustrate the point, consider two issues that Cull posits as examples of USIA effectiveness: its efforts to deal with the aftermath of John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963, and its actions during the 1980s to reduce European opposition to Ronald Reagan's planned deployment of intermediate range nuclear forces (INF) in Europe.

In November 1963, when news of Kennedy's assassination hit, the USIA went into overdrive. Edward R. Murrow, the famed television correspondent then serving as the agency's director, managed to secure an emergency \$8 million appropriation from Congress to launch a crash program to deal with the news. The Voice of America, which was under the USIA's control, "pulled off the greatest feat of continuous reporting in its history" by staying on the air almost continuously for five days. (225) Through other media – various publications and two outstanding documentaries (one on JFK the other on LBJ) – the agency worked to reassure international audiences that the United States would weather the storm and honor its commitments. USIA propaganda labored to introduce the new president, Lyndon Johnson, to the world. It also struggled to counter growing suspicions Kennedy's death resulted from a vast rightwing conspiracy. Such activities, Cull concludes triumphantly, "demonstrated what a properly funded communications machine armed with a powerful message could achieve." (228)

Yet it is worth asking: what did the USIA *actually* achieve? It managed to secure an unusually sizable appropriation from a typically stingy Congress? It managed to broadcast for an unprecedented number of hours? It produced two watch-able documentaries in record time? These may have been impressive bureaucratic and technical achievements, but they hardly speak to the amazing potential of public diplomacy. What minds were changed? Here Cull notes that the agency managed to garner sympathy from the world in the aftermath of the tragedy in Dallas, but concedes that such "a surge of sympathy for the United States ... could have been expected." (229) On the most irksome issue facing the USIA, persistent rumors that a rightwing conspiracy lay behind Kennedy's death, Cull notes that despite the USIA's efforts the agency found it "difficult – and in some cases – impossible to persuade" many overseas observers. (232) So, in terms of influence, we actually see very little *tangible* evidence of USIA effectiveness. Indeed, so far as we know, the agency may have achieved very little with its extra \$8 million.

We see a similar pattern emerge in Cull's treatment of the INF issue. Reagan's proposed deployment of intermediate range missiles in Europe touched off a firestorm of criticism on the continent. Cull credits a USIA public diplomacy campaign with softening public opposition to the INF and creating space for sympathetic European officials to endorse the deployment. "A step had been taken that compelled the Soviets to return to the negotiating table and in retrospect looks like the critical winning move in the Cold War confrontation," he writes. (427) Yet again we see very little *concrete* evidence that the public diplomacy campaign had any impact. No surveys of public opinion or other data are presented to argue the point.¹¹

¹¹ Cull's footnotes reveal that he relies on interviews and recollections by US officials to substantiate his claims – hardly unbiased or convincing sources for such matters.

Am I demanding too much? Perhaps. This is already an ambitious, sweeping and comprehensive study that makes an important contribution any way you look at it. But the examples above – I could have used others – highlight the importance of looking closely at the evidence when judging the effectiveness of public diplomacy campaigns. Absent such evidence, scholars making claims about effectiveness leave readers with a stark choice: either accept those claims on faith, or approach them with a healthy dose of skepticism.

Evidence in support of the skeptical perspective can also be seen in what Cull labels the USIA's "most spectacular failure": the Vietnam War. Cull tells the detailed and fascinating story of the USIA's propaganda work during the war, one which makes an important contribution to the vast literature on Vietnam.¹² Under the leadership of USIA Director Carl Rowan, the agency moved swiftly to stake out a claim in the ongoing war in Southeast Asia to bolster its position within Johnson's administration. Cull tallies some successes, such as the agency's effectiveness in inducing enemy defections (itself a controversial claim that may raise the eyebrows of many a Vietnam specialist). But by and large Cull emphasizes the agency's failure in Vietnam. He chronicles numerous tactical and strategic blunders of Rowan's USIA, beginning with the director's failure to counsel LBJ to limit American involvement, and extending to its utilization of the term "Viet Cong" and its sidelining of the Saigon government's communication apparatus, both of which tended to affirm the nationalist credentials of the enemy. Yet in highlighting the agency's mistakes in Vietnam, Cull concedes that the real culprit, the essence of US failure to win hearts and minds, had nothing to do with propaganda and everything to do with policy. "As the Vietnam War demonstrated," he writes, "the best and most skilful public diplomacy in the world cannot save a flawed policy, but a flawed policy can compromise the best-established public diplomacy." (496)

Here Cull hints at a larger truth that emerges from his narrative but cuts against the grain of his recurring claims of agency "achievements": the USIA's successes and failures often had more to do with the merits of a given policy than with the agency's public diplomacy, however skillfully employed. Some critical readers may very well wonder why the policy gets blamed when the USIA failed, but the public diplomacy gets the credit when the policy succeeded.

As I have argued elsewhere, to begin the process of assessing systematically the effectiveness of U.S. public diplomacy campaigns we need detailed case studies that take into account the relationship between policy and propaganda, as well as other factors.¹³ Such studies may refine, revise, or augment Cull's conclusions, but for years to come his book will remain *the* essential starting point for anyone wanting to know anything about America's Cold war propaganda agency. *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency* is a deeply impressive study, worthy of tremendous praise. This is a book that

¹² Other important studies of U.S. public diplomacy during the Vietnam War include: Robert J. Kodosky, *Psychological Operations American Style: The Joint United States Public Affairs Office, Vietnam and Beyond* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007) and Caroline Page, *U.S. Official Propaganda During the Vietnam War, 1965-1973: The Limits of Persuasion* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996).

¹³ Kenneth Osgood, "Total Cold War Roundtable Review: Author's Response," H-Net Roundtable Reviews Vol. VII <<http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/TotalColdWar-OsgoodReply.pdf>>.

someone needed to write, and we are fortunate that Nicholas Cull took up the task with skill and grace. Historians writing on any aspect of postwar American foreign policy would be well-advised to consult the pertinent sections of this book for insights into the ever-present propaganda war. Regrettably, the book may not have the impact it deserves so long as Cambridge University Press continues to price it at an extortionate \$125 per copy. That is too bad, because it is a work that should be widely read.

*"What Have I Done?"*¹

I am grateful to Thomas Maddux and Chris Endy for their hard work in putting this roundtable together and to Laura Belmonte, Susan L. Carruthers, Richard Fried, Michael Krenn, and Kenneth Osgood for their patient reading and thoughtful responses to my book. It is a strange experience to be the subject of a roundtable like this. Scholarly reactions to any new book come so sparsely that the experience of reading five in one day is oddly unsettling, like getting a year's worth of sweets, and vitamins and medicine in a single multicolored blended draft. I will return to these reviews for measured doses in the future, to systematically extract the steers as future projects take shape. I am of course delighted that my book is variously thought "seminal," "definitive," a hydra-slayer, and "the essential starting point." Fried is kind enough to ask: "What's not to like about this labor of love?" Well, some reviewers have their suggestions on this point and I would certainly agree with Osgood about the crazy cover price.

Before engaging the points raised in these reviews, it might help to say something further about the circumstances in which this book was written, not to fish for additional kudos or sympathy but to cast a little more light on the reasons for my choices. As my reviewers acknowledge, sources were scattered and many had to be declassified especially for this project. In fact the entire archive group dedicated to USIA – RG 306 – was closed for the first two or three years of my research owing to delays in the relocation of the archives from downtown. I tunneled into the subject from the presidential library system, which strengthened my bias towards the senior management perspective. On completion of the manuscript in 2006 it became clear that whatever my series editors felt, my publisher was hoping for a shorter book. The publisher demanded and obtained drastic cuts. The final version represents 60% of the original, with the largest cut being the five final chapters taking the story through the death of USIA and the unhappy course of U.S. public diplomacy in the George W. Bush administration. Several readers are unhappy with the brevity of the account of USIA's demise. I share their dissatisfaction and promise a full and frank examination of this subject in the sequel.

As the rest of the book was tightened, hard choices had to be made especially regarding some of the side issues in U.S. public diplomacy. I fear that some of the details lamented by reviewers of state-private partnerships, the role of ordinary people, and so forth were trimmed at that time. Also, the publication of works by other scholars enabled a lighter touch. My reading of Richard T. Arndt's magisterial history of U.S. cultural diplomacy *The First Resort of Kings* (which oddly only Osgood acknowledges and then only in passing) certainly focused some of my choices.² Arndt's book deals at length with the day-to-day doings of public diplomats in the field, cultural programming and American libraries and it

¹ Line spoken by Col. Nicholson (Alec Guinness) in David Lean (dir.) *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957).

² Richard T. Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005).

would have been a poor use of the space granted to me to reinvent his wheel. Krenn notes that my comments on cultural diplomacy often seem to be added in their own sub-headed section rather than integrated into the main flow of the history. This is for a good reason. From 1953 to 1978 cultural diplomacy was administered not by USIA but by the Department of State. USIA was merely employed to conduct cultural work in the field. This meant that debates over cultural diplomacy were actually marginal to the main concerns of successive directors of USIA. While certainly relevant to the story, they literally figure in the archive as a parallel story.

My intent writing this book was to provide an authoritative piece of narrative history that would act by way of a map or a bridge to enable other researchers to go into the archives and pursue the bilateral studies, case studies, thematic explorations, audience research or comparative analysis more effectively. I chose a rigid chronological structure – administration by administration – to allow each chapter to be read as a self sufficient unit and more readily integrated into single presidency studies of American foreign policy. I also hoped that scholars beginning the process of constructing accounts of the public diplomacy of other nations might find my study to be a valuable model. In this last regard I feel duty bound to chip in on Belmonte's note that public diplomacy 'is now the term of choice for America's information and cultural activities abroad' to add that the term is very widely used internationally and beyond the English-speaking world and that an awareness of this interest was one of the motivations for my work. My own interest in USIA is a part of this internationalization. As Osgood is kind enough to note, I am not an American, I am British, and have been a small part of the process of filtering the lessons of U.S. public diplomacy into the diplomatic practice of the United Kingdom.³ I see public diplomacy as a much broader process than a mere device of American hegemony. I see it as a cluster of practices which any actor attempting to communicate across a frontier can and should use.

My focus on the administration of USIA meant that my narrative would necessarily be biased towards the issues and themes which made the people at the top 'sit up and take notice' and which generated paper-trails and memories. Sometimes these overlap with the issues that historians care about today – like race – sometimes they do not. This also means that the narrative is skewed towards crises: external and internal. I tried to ensure that the public diplomacy dimensions of the Cold War set pieces like Guatemala, Cuba and KAL 007 were presented in full and sought also to chart the internal difficulties. The director's files of the agency dwell on the running battle with Voice of America, *faux pas*, and budget battles and provide little illumination of the quiet success stories like the International Visitor Program. For the most part, the issues which the reviewers say get short shrift in this book also got short shrift in the original archives and in the recollections of the veterans that I interviewed. One issue deserves further comment: gender bias.

Carruthers and Belmonte both raise the question of the Hartman Case: the long running sexual discrimination suit which ended in 2000 in a massive judgment against VOA and USIA. The conclusion of this case is dealt with in my unpublished Clinton administration

³ My 2007 report for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office – *Public Diplomacy, Lessons from the Past* – will shortly be published by the Figueroa Press of Los Angeles.

chapters, but its minor role in the Cold War narrative is certainly worthy of their comment. In my defense, I found no significant archival material relating directly to the case and this was not an issue which interviewees of either gender sought to speak about. Other subjects like inter-agency politics, editorial independence or their relationship to foreign policy were raised frequently without my prompting. On the occasions when I pressed the issue and attempted to find out more about the case at Voice of America I found a view (perhaps exaggerated) that the abuses of the Hartman case were focused in the conduct of the language branches where the 'foreign culture' of the broadcasters-in-exile had run rife for years. Many of the plaintiffs were discriminated against in their initial hiring and hence didn't become part of the VOA institutional culture. I was also told that part of the reason the USIA defense in the case was so monumentally unsuccessful was that a senior employee had lost or allowed the destruction of key files when the first round of the case had gone USIA's way. My sense at the time was that none of this seemed especially pertinent to the wider history of USIA's Cold War, but I can see that in the context of a study focusing explicitly on the role of gender in U.S. public diplomacy it would make a fascinating and necessarily central case.

Carruthers also raises my neglect of female characters. While this reflects the archive and demography of senior appointments in the agency I can see a methodological flaw in my research: the process of recruiting interviewees for the oral research skewed towards male retirees, probably because the active network was mainly male. The group of senior VOA veterans who were collectively a major source even dubbed their lunch group ROMEOS (retired old men eating out). My forthcoming study of post-Cold War public diplomacy will contain rather more female characters than the present volume if only because from the mid-1990s onwards women became increasingly significant in the leadership of U.S. public diplomacy. Evelyn Lieberman directed VOA and then served as the first Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy for President Clinton. Charlotte Beers, Margaret Tutwiler, Patrician Harrison, Karen Hughes and Coleen Graffey all played prominent roles in the Bush 43 years, and now the Obama administration has Judith McHale at the helm of public diplomacy. This record has led some to speculate that U.S. public diplomacy practice may be identified with women and that women officers may now be directed to that area rather than other fields of foreign policy. All of this suggests that, Belmonte's excellent recent book notwithstanding, there is scope for a detailed study of the complete role of women and gender in U.S. public diplomacy from the Committee on Public Information (CPI) to Hillary Clinton. In the unlikely event of a second edition, my priority for revisions would certainly be to broaden the treatment of gender.

I would dispute Belmonte's claim that I neglect black USIA personnel. There are detailed treatments of the work of directors Carl T. Rowan, John Reinhardt and officers including John Twitty. I also believe that the book does not skimp on the issue of racial themes within U.S. public diplomacy. The subject of race recurs from the Civil Rights era, through the Angela Davis case and into the 1980s. There are detailed treatments of racially themed movies including *The March* on the March on Washington and the Oscar-winning *Nine from Little Rock*. Race is integrated into the Voice of America story through discussion of the broadcasting of jazz and coverage of news of the Civil Rights movement. It is part of the exhibitions story with the notorious case of the Brussels World's Fair. I felt that any more

exploration of the subject would unbalance the narrative. I am confident that scholars of race as a component in public diplomacy will be able to jump into the text through the index and I look forward to what their taking to ball forward on this important issue.

Carruthers' elegant review reaches some startling conclusions. I am surprised that she reads me as a champion of "America's entitlement to preeminence" and that the book can be considered "not so much an exercise in propaganda history as propaganda." Her title speaks of spin and the logic of her allusion to Marvell is that because "world" and "time" are short it is, if not a "crime", "certainly an obfuscation" to write at such length about U.S. public diplomacy without taking a moral position on the "rapacious power" of America. Her view is that American public diplomacy failed because America was for the wrong thing or doing the wrong thing. I have my views on America's role in the world but it never occurred to me to frame my book around the sins or otherwise of American power – explicitly dissident American scholars like Noam Chomsky or Nancy Snow have already done that – rather I chose simply to systematically unpack the story of the supply side of American propaganda, to map the inter-relationships between the constituent parts of the machine that the United States built to wage the Cold War, and preserve the words and thoughts of the people who conducted the campaign so that contemporary and future historians might have the evidence to decide wider matters for themselves.

Carruthers explicitly and some others implicitly suggest that I have absorbed rather too much of the perspective of my subject. Perhaps it is a variant on Stockholm Syndrome, or what American diplomats call 'client-itis' or the British Empire dubbed 'going native.' Am I an analogue to the character Colonel Nicholson (played by Alec Guinness) in David Lean's *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), so caught up in the business of completing the task in front of me that I miss its wider moral implications? Have I been the dupe of a 'bad thing?' Should I exclaim 'What have I done?' and trigger a demolition of the whole thing? The phrase 'labor of love' recurs in these reviews, raising the issue of who or what I may love. I certainly cared about the people I met during my research – one or two became close friends – and as a result I felt a mounting burden to splice their story into the wider narrative of Cold War America. There were days when a desire to set the record straight 'for them' got me out of bed or even across the Atlantic for research. Perhaps that is love, but I feel I have an even stronger attachment to a more abstract vision of communication as a pathway to international understanding and within this to international broadcasting, cultural diplomacy and international exchange, though my preference is for the British incarnations – the BBC World Service, British Council and Wilton Park – rather than the American. To be explicit, I believe that all actors at an international level should practice public diplomacy. I would like to hear more voices in the international conversation than are heard at present and were heard in the past. I believe that a historian has a duty to balance. For me my obligation was not to balance the activities of the U.S.A. with those of the U.S.S.R. (I attempt do this in a forthcoming chapter for the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*).⁴ I felt that balance meant ensuring that I gave an equal hearing to political appointees from all parties, to professionals from all of public diplomacy's warring sub-

⁴ Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Wested, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

professions, and to a range of groups and individuals working within USIA. The narrative may indeed smack in places, as Osgood suggests, of the old genre of USIA insider-accounts, but no insider has been as inclusive, giving a hearing to both the right-wing Bruce Herschensohns and the liberal Bernie Kamenskies of the story.

In its final sentences Carruthers' review slips into subtle misrepresentation. While it is true that I speak of an American aversion to propaganda in the sense of a government role in the media, I present this as a condition of the American people/legislature rather than the executive branch. Her comments set up an easily-demolished straw man claim of a monolithic U.S. aversion to propaganda. It is precisely because of the executive branch's serial abuse of communication that the people and legislative branch are so skeptical of a government role in the media. In any democracy a foreign adventure will require a propaganda campaign to sell it to the people. It is a feature of American democracy that the right combination of calls for patriotism and slurs against the enemy seem to prompt a widespread suspension of critical faculties. USIA, its forebears and its descendants suffer in part as a result of the 'morning after' regrets of America's domestic propaganda binges. Finally, contrary to Carruthers' claim, it is not my perception as author that my prime lesson is to urge a strategy of truth. I do not think that America's first need is to speak more truth or otherwise. Rather, I conclude my book by saying that America's first need is to listen.

In 1995 I set out to build a sturdy bridge into a then obscure part of America's Cold War past. I am rewarded by the indications that my efforts were not wasted and I look forward to colleagues using that bridge to work towards both better international history and better public diplomacy.

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