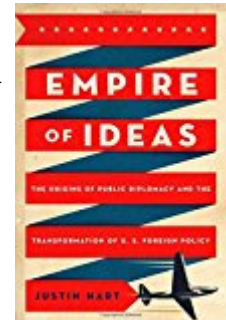




Justin Hart. *Empire of Ideas: The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 296 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-977794-5.



Reviewed by Frederick Black

Published on H-War (November, 2013)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

The period 1936 to 1953 marks a significant turning point in U.S. history on a variety of levels. With World War II as the main event during those years, the course of American involvement on the world stage looked vastly different at the end of the war than it did in advance of the conflict. Justin Hart traces the evolution of this change in *The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy*. More important though, Hart focuses on how the United States communicated and made specific efforts to influence the world's perception of the country. He uses the phrase "the American century" throughout the book to refer to the postwar world in which the United States held such a dominant position.

As one might expect, in each of his six chapters, Hart traces the chronological and winding path on which bureaucracy and politics intersected to produce themes and messages. The epilogue concludes with a discussion of the creation of a separate agency, the United States Information Agency (USIA), in August 1953, whose purpose

was to carry on the mission of explaining and advocating U.S. policies abroad.

Because Hart's account begins before U.S. entry into World War II, it may seem odd to many readers that the early phases of American public diplomacy focused on Latin America, as opposed to either Europe or Asia. In fact, Hart highlights President Franklin D. Roosevelt's prewar approach to foreign policy as one emphasizing "multiculturalism," admittedly a more modern term, and cultural exchanges among Western Hemisphere nations. As American war entry drew closer and eventually became inevitable, a corresponding shift in vision occurred to one in which the U.S. role in the world extended beyond just the Western Hemisphere. As part of this shift, cultural diplomacy efforts expanded into global initiatives directly linked to the advancement of overall American foreign policy objectives.

The Office of War Information played a central role in not only reinforcing themes and messages during the war, but also laying the founda-

tion for postwar public diplomacy efforts. As the world transitioned from a shooting war to a cold war, so did the American foreign policy apparatus. The standoff between West and East, headlined by the United States and the Soviet Union, “significantly amplified concerns about foreign perceptions of the U.S.” In a key shift from the prewar role of public diplomacy, after 1945 “safeguarding the image of ‘America’ became a political and economic imperative, not just a cultural issue” (p. 108).

Hart holds up the period from early 1948 to mid-1949 as “the golden age of the Truman administration’s Cold War policy making” (p. 142). For somewhat obvious reasons, this period also corresponds with the shift from European primacy of focus to one where Europe and Asia shared the attention of American policymakers. With the summer 1949 victory of Mao Zedong’s Chinese Communist Party, followed by the summer 1950 North Korean attack into South Korea, the Truman administration faced a very different landscape. These challenges to the American image came less than two years after significant and highly visible successes in Europe, such as the Marshall Plan and the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). From an information perspective, the Asian events in 1949 and 1950 resulted in an urgent need for the administration to explain the significance of these events and reassure friendly audiences both at home and abroad.

The final chapter deals with the impact of Senator Joseph McCarthy on public diplomacy. Titled “An Unfavorable Projection of American Unity,” this chapter explores how the specter of McCarthyism appeared to outside entities. With perhaps an ironic connection to current affairs in Washington DC, this section begins with a description of the significant change in the political climate, from “bipartisan foreign policy consensus” before the Chinese Communist victory and the Korean War outbreak to “a new, hyperpartisan at-

mosphere in which Republican criticism of American Cold War strategy became strikingly common” (p. 178). Adding McCarthyism to this new atmosphere made the job of public diplomacy agencies much more difficult. Hart describes the catch-22 dilemma in which the State Department found itself and the corresponding damage to the American image worldwide. On the one hand, “if McCarthy was wrong, it looked bad;” on the other hand, “if he was right, it looked worse” (p. 179). The McCarthy hearings along with the Republican Party gaining control of the White House and the Senate in 1953 resulted in the eventual transfer of the public diplomacy apparatus from the State Department to an independent agency status.

The depth of Hart’s research shines through in the almost forty pages of notes and the twenty-three pages of bibliography. Academics looking to research or teach on this topic, or any closely related subject, would do well to spend some time reviewing the range of primary and secondary sources cited in this book. Because the topic is of primary interest to probably only a small fringe of historians or foreign policy academics, the average reader will likely not find it incredibly appealing. Researchers or practitioners in the bureaucratic politics arena though should definitely read this book, as the evolution of the public diplomacy apparatus provides an outstanding case study in the intricacies of bureaucratic politics and the link between politics and image.

of time from

,
his book,

ly
the concept of

·
·
U.S
T

is used

-

where

.

.

uses each of the six chapters to

where

of

for

the w

h

though

w

h

in

w

e

.

.

...

(p. 108).

time

.

of the book

Hart

the

the chapter

. The shift went

the victory by

s

.

that

d

“C

”

.

Any a

a topic

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

Citation: Frederick Black. Review of Hart, Justin. *Empire of Ideas: The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. November, 2013.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=38684>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.