

Sources and Concept of Postwar Cultural Diplomacy

WELLES, MACLEISH AND FULBRIGHT AS ARCHITECT-EXEMPLARS OF EARLY POSTWAR CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

By Richard T. Arndt

Author: *First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*

It is chastening, dwelling on my title, to conclude that the sources and the original concept of American cultural diplomacy matter more to our discussion today than what US cultural diplomacy has become in the last two decades. Its steady drift into the clutches of the ill-defined Public Diplomacy, best understood as what its alumni remember that USIA used to do, darkens the postwar fortunes of the cultural diplomatic idea designed by Welles, MacLeish, Fulbright and dozens of others, articulating, formalizing and building on nearly two centuries of enlightened private activity. Those who wish to pursue that gentle, persistent and near-fatal drift will be interested in my book on the subject or in a close reading of Frank Ninkovich's warnings in his groundbreaking *Diplomacy of Ideas* (1980), the first searching look at diplomatic history through the lenses of its cultural dimension. For today, I shall limit myself to discussing the early design, before it was taken over by the advertisers, the spin-meisters and the PR men and transformed into an impoverished and crippled cousin of the US style of propaganda.

After the 18th-century Parisian adventures of Franklin, Jefferson and their private-sector friend Tom Paine, cultural diplomacy would remain until 1938 in the domain of the American private world, with an occasional assist from government. While his notion of "philanthropy" is only part of the picture, the story may be traced most easily in Merle Curti's history of US philanthropy abroad. Curti's compendium reminds us that the idea of an American overseas outreach, growing from the strain of thought which Akira Iriye has identified as Cultural Internationalism and energized by the church-taught notion of stewardship, lay just below the surface of US relations with the world.

The leap to world power status of the new republic at the turn of the twentieth century documents, as most recently related by the late Warren Zimmerman, depicts the well-intentioned rise of a benign and generous American hegemony, an empire of a new kind. In conceptual terms, its indispensable cultural diplomatic core was John Hay's handling of the Boxer Indemnities; this unprecedented channeling of debts and reparations incurred by war into exchange between the antagonists of students and scholars, jointly administered by both nations, remained the beacon of the American approach to cultural diplomacy until the last two decades of that century.

In 1919, the national habit of American private cultural diplomatic outreach and exchange rose to a new level, documented by Curti, surely in response to the US rejection of the League of Nations and its multilateral mechanisms for global cultural interchange. The rejection occasioned the establishment in the U.S. of *two* private League-related Committees for Intellectual Cooperation, one in New York under James T. Shotwell and one emanating from the Pan American Union in Washington under the leadership of Leo S. Rowe; these were intended to relate directly to Geneva and to the other national committees established by participating governments all around the globe. Shaped by a century and a half of proliferant individual efforts like those of the missionary-educators, the overseas merchants and the US military, with no more than sporadic government involvement, there followed a vast expansion of private activities. The remarkable burgeoning of 1919 brought dozens of new internationalist institutions to life, centered in New York City . The most important of these were Stephen Duggan's Institute of International Education; the Georgetown School of Foreign Service--to which Duggan commuted in its first year; the American Council of Learned Societies, set up to relate to the Union des Académies in Brussels; and Barnard Dean Virginia Gildersleeve's success in extending the work of the American Association of University Women overseas. To these must be added numerous hyphenated societies like Henry Goddard Leach's American-Scandinavian group or Edward Bok's Netherlands-America Society. By 1923, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, hero of European World War I relief, was pressing a reluctant Congress and a distracted president to channel part of all foreign debt reflows into exchanges; in Belgium and Finland , he had left behind substantial bilateral exchange programs funded in part by repayments of US war debts. His ambitious idea would have channeled a portion of all foreign debt into student exchanges, up to \$100 million per year in each country. But his update of the Boxer Indemnities failed to impress an isolationist Congress and by the time Hoover entered the White House himself, the idea was overshadowed by the rise of totalitarianism and threats to the US economy. His idea had to await the parliamentary maneuvers of Rhodes-scholar J. William Fulbright and Hoover 's wartime deputy H. Alexander Smith a quarter-century later.

The sudden outburst of bidirectional exchange programs in the 1920s aimed at linking foreign intellectuals with their US counterparts. It was primarily aimed at Europe, no surprise if we consider the debt to Europe acknowledged by a century of US students abroad and by the new universities they staffed--15,000 Americans studied in Humboldt's Germany alone, among them Daniel Coit Gilman and Andrew White. The balance of trade in ideas and science throughout the 19th century tilted heavily to Europe : early US exchanges were less a matter of giving than getting. Later, gratitude for these early educational gifts and their contribution to the growth of US universities helped motivate Americans to repay the debt. Early American cultural diplomacy was a North Atlantic affair.

The tides soon swept it to the western shores of the southern Atlantic . New Deal foreign policy was shaped most persistently by Latin-Americanist Sumner Welles, Undersecretary of State--Deputy Secretary in today's world. Roosevelt himself remembered his own cultural diplomatic visit to wartime Naples for George Creel's Committee on Public Information; later, as a young member of Wilson 's government, he had watched helplessly as a shortsighted Congress abolished CPI and its foreign outposts, good and bad. With the help of journalist Drew Pearson, Welles designed the New Deal's Good Neighbor Policy, based on proven respect for the nations of the southern hemisphere, with promises of mutual security, non-interventionism and lowered

tariffs. US intervention in Europe in 1917 had quietly ignored the other half of the Monroe Doctrine's pledge--to stay out of European affairs. But Latin America was still seen as "America's backyard," however much the phrase offended the citizens of the southern hemisphere. Secretary Cordell Hull reminded his deputy that a diplomacy of cultures, even when Latin America was the real priority, had at least to *appear* to reach out to the entire world.

The strategic importance of the southern hemisphere was certainly a factor—only the British fleet secured the Atlantic south of the Panama Canal. Historically heavy immigration to Latin America from Germany, Italy and even Japan worried the strategists; thousands of survivors of the scuttled *Graf Spee* had melted into the Argentine landscape. With Europe about to burst into flames, circumventing communication routes were a necessity for the U.S., which would have to rely on cooperative governments to the south; James Forrestal undertook with Pan American Airways the clandestine building of strategically-placed air-strips in Brazil. And the Axis powers were said to be waging an unprecedented propaganda war in Latin America, even if few US diplomats saw any evidence of effect and even if some even suggested that the heavy-handed Axis approach was already counter-producing.

Latin America above all provided the indispensable ingredient for an effective cultural diplomacy: among its elites, there was readiness, indeed eagerness, for the idea of cultural exchanges with the Colossus of the North, for which Latin Americans had been pleading since the era of Bolivar and Francisco Miranda.

Welles' team in State was led by Stephen Duggan's son Laurence and outside advisor Leo Rowe, Wharton School economist directing the Pan American Union, today's Organization of American States. The policy of Good Neighborhood had a heavy cultural dimension.. The creation of State's Division of Cultural Relations could not be put in place until 1938; it grew from and was shaped by laboratory-style experiments clustered around the various Inter-American Conferences sponsored by the Inter-American movement and the PAU; Welles upgraded US participation in conferences in Montevideo (1933), Buenos Aires (1936), and Lima (1938). The new Division used the recommendations of these conferences to sway Congress. The Division was built on the idea of honest intellectual *exchanges*, a word denoting the equal status of both partners north and south. The models, suggested by the Latin nations, were rough translations of the vigorous French 19th century cultural diplomacy launched by Bonaparte, with its Jesuit antecedents reaching back to the 16th century, and to a lesser extent of the educational practices of Britain's empire. Even pre-Bismarck Germany, following up on Humboldt's voyages, had played an important role in scientific exchanges, especially in Brazil.

Welles and his team made sure that the cultural effort aimed at the southern hemisphere was construed, by State and Congress, as part of a worldwide effort. In fact the crisis situation in Europe and the Far East precluded long-range cultural programs—Africa had not yet entered the discussion. There were US cultural offices in Spain and Portugal, in various parts of the Near East including Tehran, and in China, where Harvard's John King Fairbank was cultural officer, alongside other prominent university figures like Princeton Persianist T. Cuyler Young in Tehran, Yale archeologist Frank E. Brown in Beirut, Penn Sanskritist Norman Brown in Delhi, Turkologist Donald Webster in Ankara, and in 1945 Princeton classicist Charles Rufus Morey in Rome. In 1940, with much of the world at war, the experiment's largest investments went south of the US border.

The Division of Cultural Relations, led by Hull's friend the Colorado internationalist Ben

Cherrington, began in May 1938 with a budget of \$27,000 and moved slowly upwards, within the benign and cooperative framework established by Welles. Its operative verbs were *facilitate*, *coordinate* and *supplement*. Welles proclaimed proudly, to a meeting of American intellectual leaders in May 1938, that the office would do no more than 5% of the work, leaving the brunt of efforts to the private world. Welles and the Division studied various models; Cherrington quickly set off for a three-month journey through Latin America, about which he knew next to nothing.

Foreign cultural practices were well known to experienced US diplomats like Welles. Less universalist than the French model, formalized in 1923 and heavily funded, the more modest British version translated the educational practices of empire into more benign global terms with the creation of the British Council in 1934. The three Allies agreed that to fight the lies of the Axis they needed only to tell the truth. There was to be neither propaganda nor counter-propaganda, in the areas spared from hot war; the truth was enough. A more tenacious model in the U.S. was CPI's work in World War I—CPI had built on the military model, its titles, and its naval communications system; USIS posts in the field were led by a Public Affairs Officer, who commanded an Information Officer and a Cultural Affairs Officer. CPI's program was an amiable jumble of journalists, PR men, and intellectuals. Everywhere its cultural offices were staffed, by agreement of all agencies in Washington, with energetic young academics from the universities, for the most part regional specialists.

Into this mix in 1940 the impatient FDR, seeing war as the only priority, injected the irrepressible young Nelson Rockefeller, with the broadest of mandates. Rockefeller promptly alienated State's diplomats by setting up, as one of them said, an alternate State Department for Latin America. With a fat budget from Roosevelt, imported dollar-a-year talent from his New York office, and the world's deepest pockets, Rockefeller created a vigorous program in the field even more muddled than Creel's. In conceptual terms, it was the virtual opposite of what Welles and Duggan had designed: it was not binational, but unidirectional, with US teachers moving south and Latin students moving north; it was not balanced--Latinos were eager to come north but few Americans wanted to spend much time in the south; it translated and published vast amounts of American books for the south but few for the north; it supported NGO programs where available but was eager to go it alone when deemed necessary; it set up unsustainable binational cultural centers, with small libraries, all over the southern continent; it established English-language teaching institutes everywhere, which were left to fend for themselves after 1919; and it was wide open to commercial uses and even intelligence-gathering, whereas Welles had kept commerce at arm's length and built a firewall between the cultural services and the intelligence-gatherers, intent upon fostering honest intellectual relationships between universities and their scholars. Welles also expanded technical assistance exchanges in 1938, which produced 700 exchanges per year during the first ten years; while US experts taught in the south and counterparts learned in the north, generous US educators worked their magic and these programs produced substantial gains. Welles had built a classic cultural exchange program, honest, reciprocal and long-term, designed admittedly for a world at peace and specifically for the postwar era; the Rockefeller style instead, designed for wartime, looked dynamic, creative and very busy--it was short-term cultural activity in thrall to "telling America's story," informing Americans about their neighbors only as a by-product. That its glamour appealed to Congress is no surprise.

After the war, cultural diplomacy entered a forty-year period of gradual takeover by the

nationalists and propagandists, waving the banners of Public Diplomacy--today's euphemism for the US style of propaganda. It was first called "information" by Creel invented in 1917, specifically to avoid the word "propaganda"; and Rockefeller revived the CPI "circus" in the 1940s with the help of Elmer Davis and "Wild Bill" Donovan.

In State, Yale historian Ralph Turner had been recruited in 1942 and was leading thoughtful discussions about how an American cultural diplomacy should be practiced. From his post as Librarian of Congress, Archibald MacLeish and his friend Carl Milam, head of the American Library Association, helped colorful Division-chief Cherrington wrestle with the design of a decent American cultural diplomacy for the postwar world. Turner was skilled enough to remind the culturalists that culture was a factor in foreign relations, hence part of foreign policy; he was also the first to pose the question of multilateral activities, which he reasoned could touch certain sectors closed to bilateral intervention, but which would have to mesh closely with bilateral activities. He got Welles' permission to observe the London meetings of the exiled Allied ministers of education in the spring of 1943 and saw in these discussions about the rebuilding of postwar Europe the seeds of a multilateral cultural diplomatic organization; he convinced Welles to send a formal delegation to London in 1944, chaired by the new young Arkansas Congressman J. William Fulbright and including Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish. UNESCO was in gestation.

MacLeish took over the Division in January 1945, a major step downwards from his post at the Library of Congress. Logic suggests that either he, FDR or both men saw this Assistant Secretaryship as a vital post for the future of US foreign relations. MacLeish was given specific authority to incorporate the work of three wartime agencies: Rockefeller's Latin American programs, Davis' OWI, and—a detail historians forget—Donovan's OSS. He set to work, first absorbing Rockefeller's programs, then beginning the assimilation of Elmer Davis' Office of War Information and its 13,000 employees. But the death of FDR on April 12 left him dangling; he remained through August when Truman and Secretary Byrnes finally replaced him with William Benton.

"America's Salesman," as Benton is often called, tilted to the allegedly policy-relevant but unidirectional "informational" dimension of diplomacy, and information began its slow march to dominance over the longer-range bidirectional cultural programs. The struggle between propaganda and culture moved into higher gear.

In 1945 however the Atlanticist vision was firmly in place, even if Welles had left State, felled by political maneuvering based on an alcohol-fed indiscretion, and Laurence Duggan had soon followed. Fulbright, comfortably established in the Senate, was looking for a way to democratize the Rhodes experience which had refocused his life. And MacLeish was in charge of cultural diplomacy, defined as broadly as he liked.

Against this backdrop, it is revealing to look at a snapshot of the thinking in 1945. Three key texts of MacLeish, the Fulbright program itself, and the creation of UNESCO show the straightforward cultural internationalist vision of these visionaries. Taken together, men like MacLeish foresaw a postwar world in which bilateral and multilateral cultural diplomacy would form a continuum. Fulbright's program would soon extend to the world, although its funding base in war-surplus sales meant it originally focused in non-Axis Europe and in the British colonies. It took Smith and Mundt to make Fulbright a global program—both sponsors were Republicans: Karl Mundt was a son of the China missions, and Smith had served as Hoover's deputy for European war relief in the first war.

These visionaries spelled out a cultural internationalist Atlanticist vision, designed to help Europe rebuild, then to provide an extendable area of cooperative prosperity for which educational linkage and organic growth would slowly put in place a global infrastructure. The goal: a cumulative process aimed at embracing all other countries, as they achieved the political, economic and educational maturity to play their role in a global system. Its implicit and explicit rhetoric projected the slow but natural growth of freedom, democracy, respect for human rights, prosperity and, in time, peace.

MacLeish may have won three Pulitzer prizes, but his government papers are reticent. Still, three published texts reveal his thinking in clear detail. First, there is his Introduction to *The Cultural Approach*, by his staffers Ruth McMurry and Muna Lee, a pathfinding document on cultural diplomacy published in 1947. The book went to press in the summer of 1946; MacLeish's six-page preface reflects his close supervision of the book's evolution as the most coherent statement about cultural diplomacy ever published in any nation. He defended the unfortunate cliché "cultural relations," because it spells out the idea that "the world's hope for peace, which is another way of referring to the world's hope for survival, is directly dependent on the mutual understanding of peoples." He then puts forth a new definition of "information," reversing Creel: instead of *concealing* propaganda, information in its positive sense would turn education to the service of the nation and of humankind. MacLeish knew the communications world from his long years as Senior Editor of *Fortune* and he knew the business world as well. He speculated on the benefits to the world if the global media were to set out to educate not obfuscate, to teach not spin, to tell whole not partial truths. Traditional diplomacy overlooked international communications. But cultural relations gave nations unprecedented power to correct foreign stereotypes. Thanks to the British Council, "no literate European will ever again refer to the English as a nation of shopkeepers." Any foreign ministry is an office "of international understanding, the principal duty of which is the duty to make the understanding of peoples whole and intelligible and complete. Until the practice accords with the duty the work will be inadequately done." MacLeish was calling for America to be the storehouse and protector of Western culture, sharing its intellectual wealth with the world.

A second insight into MacLeish comes from an unlikely place, a musty study of State's administrative structure published in September 1945. Although MacLeish left State in August, the document reflects his vision in unmistakable terms. First, it calls for the cultural division to handle its own Congressional relations, instead of relying on State's designated officer—who happened to be MacLeish's best friend Dean Acheson. MacLeish knew Congress needed a great deal of education; he was prepared to do it and knew no one else could. Second, the report insisted that cultural relations must be maintained in peace as well as in war, avoiding the 1919 abolition of CPI. The value of cultural diplomacy having been demonstrated beyond doubt, by all the great powers, the office had to expand. Third, the report insisted that bilateral needs and programs be defined before multilateral organizations were built so that both will mesh. Fourth, it called for coordination with all other government agencies, with State managing all legal and administrative questions. Finally, the report stated boldly and unequivocally that State's cultural relations offices were ready to play a central role in helping carry out US aspirations. Taken together, the report's recommendations would have created a powerful body within State; designed to carry out a rich, flexible, coherent and multi-agency component of diplomacy;. With MacLeish at its head, anything was possible.

The third document produced stunning and visible results, within a decade. Few remember that MacLeish was the intellectual architect of German and Japanese recovery. As chair of a task force called together in May 1945, a chair he retained well into 1947, he designed a policy for rebuilding Germany that would serve as well in Japan. The "Long-Range Policy Statement for German Reeducation" (SWNCC 296/5) undergirded one of the greatest cultural diplomatic victories of history. Published in June 1946 and renewed the following year, the document made education the base for reconstruction. "The reeducation of the German People can be effective only as it is an integral part of a comprehensive program for their rehabilitation. The cultural and moral reeducation of the nation must, therefore, be related to policies calculated to restore the stability of a peaceful German economy and to hold out hope for 'reconstruction of German cultural life,'" work that can only be done by the Germans themselves. Overcoming the Nazi heritage will involve restoring "those cultural contacts which will foster the assimilation of the German people into the society of peaceful nations." The plan had the good fortune to fall into the hands of General Lucius Clay, US High Commissioner in Germany; he in turn had the good luck to discover the wisdom of Indiana University president Herman B Wells and put him in charge of reorientation. Thanks to these three men, German reconstruction was an unprecedented cultural diplomatic triumph, followed soon by a parallel effort in the vastly different context of Japan.

Another insight into the spirit and temper of 1945-46 is Fulbright's global exchange program, launched in the Fall of 1946. It quickly went operational, and expanded further once the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 stabilized it and completed its reach. Experiments in the Fall of 1948 in China and Burma moved Americans abroad and by the Fall of 1949 Europe was receiving large contingents of US students and scholars. From there, Fulbright's exchanges raced ahead. Yet, despite its impressive global reach, its academic integrity and its airtight defenses against propaganda, the Fulbright Program alone could not fend off the encroachments of the informationists, who needed only time to control the entire panoply of programs created by a decade spent spelling out Welles' and MacLeish's visions of cultural and informational diplomacy.

The final insight comes from the birth of UNESCO, but in the interests of time I shall not go into the sad story of the US creation, so thoroughly analyzed by Frank Ninkovich, who noted the contradictions which would soon explain the negligence leading up to the disastrous US departure in 1984. Still in 1946 UNESCO was an integral part of the Atlanticist cultural internationalist structure put in place by men like Welles, Fulbright and MacLeish, with the help of Ralph Turner. The decay of formal government programs lay a few decades downstream, but the clash of ideas in the late 1940s make it clear, in hindsight, that the cultural internationalist vision was condemned to now-familiar recurrent and ever-descending cycles of hope and despair.

The greatest triumphs of postwar cultural diplomacy, before its propagandizing rivals absorbed it, were the re-education of Germany and Japan, primarily educational and cultural victories. The success would never be equaled, even by the Soviet implosion, where cultural diplomacy played the central role because the paranoid Soviets would not accept anything which remotely smacked of propaganda but where the followup from the U.S. was a pallid shadow of what had been put in place for Germany and Japan by a happy synthesis of public and private resources, US and German. The gradual and inexorable decline of the postwar vision of the cultural internationalists, under the pressure of the info-prop public diplomats, meant that US cultural

policy overseas was increasingly subsumed by an agency which had no understanding of its needs and capabilities. The focused bipartisan and trans-governmental attacks on the German and Japanese educational problems would never be replicated. Foreign cultural policy slowly drifted towards its rendez-vous with McCann-Erickson and brand-naming.