

OFFICERS - 2016

*President*

DAVID ENGERMAN  
Brandeis University

*Vice President*

MARY DUDZIAK  
Emory University

*Executive Director*

AMY SAYWARD  
Middle Tennessee State University

COUNCIL

(terms end on 31 December of year listed)

ROBERT BRIGHAM, 2016  
Vassar College

ALAN MCPHERSON, 2016  
University of Oklahoma

PENNY VON ESCHEN, 2016  
Cornell University

PETRA GOEDDE, 2017  
Temple University

PAUL KRAMER, 2017  
Vanderbilt University

TERRY H. ANDERSON, 2018  
Texas A&M University

AMY GREENBERG, 2018  
Pennsylvania State University

GRADUATE STUDENTS SERVING  
ON COUNCIL

AMANDA BOCZAR, 2017  
University of Kentucky

AMANDA C. DEMMER, 2018  
University of New Hampshire

PAST PRESIDENTS SERVING ON  
COUNCIL

MARK PHILIP BRADLEY, 2016  
University of Chicago

FREDRIK LOGEVALL, 2017  
Harvard University

TIM BORSTELMANN, 2018  
University of Nebraska

DIPLOMATIC HISTORY

*Editors*

NICK CULLATHER  
Indiana University

ANNE FOSTER  
Indiana State University

*PASSPORT: The Society for Historians of  
American Foreign Relations Review*

*Editor*

ANDREW L. JOHNS  
Brigham Young University

All persons interested in the history of  
U.S. foreign relations are eligible to become  
members of SHAFR. Annual dues are \$50.00 for  
regular members and \$20.00 for unemployed  
and student members. Please note that the  
unemployed rate is only available for two  
consecutive years; after this time, the regular  
member rate applies. Retired members should  
pay the regular member rate. All payments  
should be made to Oxford University Press and  
must be made in U.S. dollars drawn on a  
U.S. bank.

# DIPLOMATIC HISTORY

THE JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIANS

OF AMERICAN FOREIGN RELATIONS

Volume 40, Number 4, September 2016

EDITORS

Nick Cullather, *Indiana University*

Anne Foster, *Indiana State University*

ASSISTANT EDITORS

Amanda Koch, *Indiana University*

Catalin Cristoloveanu, *Indiana University*

Chris Eichstedt, *Indiana University*

BOARD OF EDITORS

Mary Dudziak, *Emory University* (2016)

Michaela Hoenicke-Moore, *University of Iowa* (2016)

Jason Parker, *Texas A&M University* (2016)

Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *University of Kentucky* (2017)

Simon Rofo, *University of London* (2017)

Kathryn Statler, *University of San Diego* (2017)

Marc Frey, *Universität der Bundeswehr München* (2018)

Naoko Shibusawa, *Brown University* (2018)

James Siekmeier, *West Virginia University* (2018)

Editorial Matters: Please visit [http://www.oxfordjournals.org/our\\_journals/dh/for\\_authors/](http://www.oxfordjournals.org/our_journals/dh/for_authors/) for manuscript submission instructions. Manuscripts should be typed and double-spaced, with double-spaced endnotes, and submitted online. Style should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style* (16th ed.). The editors are the final arbiter of length, grammar, and usage. Since the essays are reviewed anonymously, the author's name and affiliation should appear only on a separate cover sheet and authors should avoid any identifying text references. No manuscript will be considered if it is concurrently under consideration by another journal or is soon to be published elsewhere.

The author is encouraged to submit relevant graphics (photographs, maps, charts, line drawings, cartoons) with the manuscript. The author is responsible for obtaining permission to publish any copyrighted material.

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Armenian mandate. While Republicans sympathized with the Armenians they urged Americans not to confuse "the humanitarian and material aid we ought to extend and the political control we ought to avoid." Charging the Republicans with turning the mandate into a partisan issue, the *New York Times* suggested its rejection might have one beneficial result; as Americans were obviously unwilling to live up to their "expressions of Christian sympathy," their illusion they were "the most moral, altruistic and beneficent people on the face of the earth" would hopefully be dispelled.<sup>125</sup> The Armenian Question forced Americans to redefine the nation's ethos and encapsulated the internal conflict over its world role. Ultimately, the debate over the definition of the nation, one driven by American interests or a "community of interest," assuming limited international responsibilities or Wilson's more extensive brand of internationalism, was won by his congressional opponents. It was Armenia's misfortune that Wilson was unable to persuade Congress to approve a mandate, thereby translating American concern into a political commitment. Deprived of protection, Armenian independence was short-lived, crushed between Bolshevik expansion and Turkish nationalism.

The mandate debate served as the high water mark of the project to establish an "Anglo-American colonial alliance." When the United States moved into the Near East after World War II to replace British troops and prevent Greece and Turkey falling into the Soviet sphere, Secretary of State Dean Acheson described it as a "novel burden far from our shores."<sup>126</sup> In fact, the "burden" was a legacy of the one rejected after World War One. However, when the United States moved into the region after World War Two, it was as a hegemon rather than in equal partnership with the British Empire, as Lawrence, Kipling, and their fellow schemers had hoped.

125. "Testing our Altruism," *New York Times*, May 26, 1920, 2.

126. James Chace, *Acheson: The Secretary of State Who Created the American World* (New York, 1998), 167.

## The Spirits of '76: Diplomacy Commemorating the U.S. Bicentennial in 1976\*

In April 1975 President Gerald Ford opened the yearlong commemoration of the United States' Bicentennial by addressing a Patriots' Day ceremony in Concord, Massachusetts, where 200 years earlier Minutemen had taken aim at British Redcoats and fired "the shot heard round the world" that began the American Revolution. Ford glossed over the fact that the Vietnam War was drawing to an ignominious end even as he spoke, but he could not ignore the tens of thousands of demonstrators nearby. Organized by the People's Bicentennial Commission (PBC), a New Left group, they heckled the president, waved banners, and called for another American Revolution that would rekindle the spirit of '76 by sweeping "new Tories" from power. Such protest forced Ford to acknowledge that the Revolution's 200th anniversary punctuated a turbulent era in U.S. history marked by not only social discord and political scandal at home but also military defeat and instability abroad that combined to leave the United States divided, dispirited, and unpopular in the world. Yet he, too, insisted that the Bicentennial could rejuvenate the nation. By recalling "the principles of this Republic, forged by our forefathers in the Declaration of Independence," principles of "liberty and freedom" and "human rights" that had since "revolutionized the world," the anniversary would remind Americans and non-Americans alike of what made the United States great. "The volley fired here at Concord two centuries ago, 'the shot heard round the world,' still echoes today," the president concluded. As if to illustrate that the commemoration could foster "reconciliation" both at home and abroad, Ford then participated in a joint wreath laying ceremony with Sir Peter Ramsbotham, the ambassador of Great Britain, the United States' enemy in the 1770s and estranged ally in the 1970s. Ford placed a wreath at the base of the nearby Minuteman Statue; Ramsbotham laid his at the graves of British soldiers buried in Concord's cemetery.<sup>1</sup>

\*I would like to thank Seth Center, David Langbart, Jonathan Nashel, Kathleen Rasmussen, Kelly Shannon, Alexander Wieland, Thomas Zeiler, and *Diplomatic History's* anonymous readers for their valuable contributions to this piece.

1. Gerald R. Ford, "Remarks at the Old North Bridge, Concord, Massachusetts," April 19, 1975, Public Papers of the Presidents. Edward T. Linenthal describes the scene in Concord in *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields* (Urbana, IL, 1991), 41-44.

Such international commemorations footnote the history of the Bicentennial, which in turn hardly appears in international histories of the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> Yet U.S. public diplomacy commemorating the occasion amounted to one of the more significant such campaigns in U.S. history. For one, the campaign's scope was enormous: prepared over the course of a decade and conducted for more than one year, the effort ultimately reached not a single country or region but much of the world. For another, the Bicentennial provided an underappreciated source of U.S. soft power in the seventies, when so many other, harder measures of U.S. strength packed less punch. Henry Kissinger characterized the 1970s as "years of upheaval," and diplomatic historians generally agree that the decade was unusually challenging for U.S. foreign policymakers, as defeat in Vietnam coupled with economic malaise and global change to damage the country's image and alienate the United States from even its closest allies.<sup>3</sup> Yet despite all of that, a liberating memory of the American Revolution and its associated texts—the Declaration of Independence, especially—remained alive and well in the world two centuries later. That legacy invested the country with durable prestige, and U.S. public diplomats drew upon it to spread the "idea of America" in an attempt to repair the nation's stained reputation.

The Bicentennial is noteworthy as well because one can trace the evolution of U.S. public diplomacy over the course of the campaign's lengthy history, which reveals how officials struggled to cope with the United States' downturn. Somewhere along the way it dawned on U.S. public diplomats that the United States was in no position to preach to others about the blessings of liberty in the post-Vietnam world. As the United States' credibility gap widened, its foreign relationships suffered, and the "shock of the global" rippled, they therefore adapted the celebration of American independence to the interdependent world developing in the 1970s. Fortunately for them, the transnational history of the American Revolution proved applicable to that new, more modest mission. Rather than simply lecturing about what the Revolution had done for the world, U.S. public diplomats also listened to what the world had done for the United States. That is, they invited their colleagues from Britain, France, and other countries

with historical ties to the United States to participate in a mutual "rediscovery of our common roots," thereby turning what well could have been a monologue about American heritage into a multinational dialogue about the shared past as it pertained to the present. Which is to say that the Bicentennial emerged at the nexus of several intersecting public diplomacies, as not only American but also non-American officials commemorated 1776 to further their nations' complementary as well as competing interests in 1976. Conducted by more than one hundred foreign governments that observed the anniversary, most of those public diplomacies targeted Americans. Going as it did against the outflow of American culture, which usually receives the lion's share of scholastic attention, that inflow speaks to the extent to which geo-cultural as well as geopolitical and geo-economic dynamics diversified during the transformational 1970s.<sup>4</sup>

For all those reasons, diplomacy commemorating the Bicentennial is historically significant in and of itself. But this essay also seeks to contribute to the growing body of work connecting historical memory and international relations. Over the last several decades diplomatic historians have contributed to the field's "memory boom" by discovering how personal memories affected the work of foreign policy practitioners, how the public recalled past international events, and also how competing collective memories of events such as World War II shaped subsequent international affairs.<sup>5</sup> Recently, diplomatic historians have begun to draw more concrete links between the production of memory and the exercise of international power. In a 2008 essay published in this journal, for example, Brian Etheridge coined the term "memory diplomacy" to describe a process whereby public diplomats and other international actors—state and non-state, foreign and domestic—instrumentalized competing narratives about the past in direct support of foreign political objectives.<sup>6</sup>

2. Studies of the Bicentennial's domestic phase include John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ, 1994); Christopher Capozzola, "It Makes You Want to Believe in the Country": Celebrating the American Bicentennial in the Age of Limits," in *America in the 70s*, eds. Beth Bailey and David Farber (Lawrence, KS, 2004); Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2007). Examinations of Bicentennial-themed U.S. public diplomacy are limited to Seth Center, "Confronting Decline: The Resilience of the U.S. Conception of America's Role in the World, 1968-1975" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2011), 105-139; Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (New York, 2008), 351-358.

3. Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston, MA, 1982); Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston, eds., *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (New York, 2008), 3-5; Niall Ferguson, et al., eds., *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA, 2010).

4. Several U.S. diplomatic historians identify the seventies as key years of transformation, including Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Policy in the 1970s* (New York, 2015); Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton, NJ, 2012), 3, 18. Public diplomacy scholarship over-studies U.S. output at the expense of non-U.S. efforts, including those targeting the United States, according to Kenneth A. Osgood and Brian C. Etheridge's edited anthology assessing the state of the subfield: *The United States and Public Diplomacy: New Directions in Cultural and International History* (Boston, MA, 2010), 10-11. Recent examples include Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia, PA, 2008); Susan A. Brewer, *Why America Fights: Patriotism and War Propaganda from the Philippines to Iraq* (New York, 2009); Justin Hart, *Empire of Ideas: The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York, 2013).

5. Representative examples of each school of thought include Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers* (New York, 1986); Emily S. Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American Memory* (Durham, NC, 2003); Marc Gallicchio, ed., *The Unpredictability of the Past: Memories of the Asia-Pacific War in U.S.-East Asian Relations* (Durham, NC, 2007). For a historiographic overview, see Robert D. Schulzinger, "Memory and Understanding U.S. Foreign Relations," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, eds. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, 2nd ed. (New York, 2004), 336-52.

6. Etheridge, "The Desert Fox, Memory Diplomacy, and the German Question in Early Cold War America," *Diplomatic History* 32, no. 2 (2008): 207-38.

By way of refining that scholarship, I would like to propose here that such actors also engaged in a related but distinct process I call "commemorative diplomacy," and during not just the American Bicentennial in 1976 but also the 40th anniversary of the end of World War II in 1985, the bicentenary of the French Revolution in 1989, and a host of other such internationally-attuned retrospectives too numerous to list here.<sup>7</sup> Distinguishing between memory diplomacy and commemorative diplomacy as forms of public diplomacy may seem Talmudic. But a sizeable specialized literature is dedicated to domestic commemorations precisely because they follow their own peculiar customs and play crucial roles in the production of public memory. Typically performed on the anniversaries of significant historical events, commemorative ceremonies usually entail pre-programmed rituals—making speeches, dedicating monuments, designating landmarks, and so forth. At the domestic level such public commemorations serve as a sort of secular religion whereby nations "worship themselves through their pasts, ritualizing and commemorating to the point that their sacred sites and times become the secular equivalent of shrines and holy days," according to John R. Gillis. Commemorations are therefore far from unimportant just because they customarily follow a routine. Because commemorations bring recollection and recollectors together, Paul Connerton writes, they serve as a primary means by which collective memory as well as national identity are conveyed, contested, and sustained, producing the affective bonds that breed loyalty to the "imagined community" identified by Benedict Anderson, while also engendering public debate about how best to mark the past. And because such contests speak to the present as much as the past, historians study the politics of memory that go into commemorations to better understand how domestic political power is won and lost, distributed and exercised.<sup>8</sup>

Heretofore that study has been limited to the domestic scene. But historical memory does not stop at the border—scholars now speak of the existence of "regional," "transnational," "cosmopolitan," or even "global" memory in the cases of major historical events such as the American Revolution. The politics of memory flow beyond the water's edge, and it does not require much of a leap to

7. U.S. President Ronald Reagan and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl stirred controversy in 1985 when they clumsily promoted German-American reconciliation by marking the anniversary of World War II's end at a Bitburg cemetery containing the graves of SS members. Bernard Weinraub, "Reagan Joins Kohl in Brief Memorial at Bitburg Graves: Visit Stirs Wide Protests," *New York Times*, May 6, 1985, A1, A9. The commemoration of the French bicentenary outside France was "substantial and enthusiastic" in both "scale and intensity," resulting in some 7,500 events held around the globe. Steven Laurence Kaplan, *Farewell, Revolution: Disputed Legacies, France, 1789/1989* (Ithaca, NY, 1995), 5, 362.

8. John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ, 1994), 19; Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York, 1989), esp. ch. 2, "Commemorative Ceremonies," 41–71. See also Bodnar, *Remaking America*; David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, eds., *America's Sacred Space* (Bloomington, IN, 1995); Linenthal, *Sacred Ground*; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London, 2006).

imagine how commemorative processes operate at the international level. The actors (public diplomats as opposed to public officials) and rituals (diplomatic etiquette demands the giving of official gifts, the visiting of VIPs, and the like) may differ somewhat, but the underlying politics are similar. Whereas public officials orchestrate commemorations to do the state's bidding at home, public diplomats instrumentalize them to pursue the national interest abroad. That is, commemorative diplomacy provides another means by which nation-states exercise and compete for power on the world stage. To draw from Max Paul Friedman and Padraic Kenney's description of history's application to world politics generally speaking, commemorative diplomacy entails the performance of orchestrated rituals that deploy "narratives about the past designed to help win" geopolitical arguments and struggles in the present. Backstage political negotiations determine what physical forms those narratives take and, once set, such commemorative gestures seek diplomatic objectives. Just as domestic commemorative activity mobilizes historical memory on behalf of the nation's identity, for example, commemorative diplomacy can attempt to establish or reestablish a nation's brand as perceived by others, i.e., its image in the world. Or commemorative diplomacy can, if need be, recall the histories that peoples share in an effort to strengthen the affective bonds that underwrite such imagined *international* communities as bilateral alliances or multinational organizations. Or, finally, it can weaponize history "in the struggle for symbolic capital" identified by Duncan Bell, wielding the past "to acquire legitimacy for one's own side while delegitimizing the opposition."<sup>9</sup> Diplomacy commemorating the United States' Bicentennial in 1976 pursued each of those objectives in one way or another. As such, it offers an ideal case study for exploring how commemorative diplomacy operated on the world stage and why that process should interest diplomatic historians.

#### THE UNITED STATES' LOST LUSTER

The United States' predicament in the 1970s left even the nation's chief booster dispirited. For two decades after World War II the United States generally enjoyed a "great reservoir of goodwill" that provided a source of U.S. strength in the world, according to a United States Information Agency (USIA) study. American prestige reached a postwar high following the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy, when polls indicated that 84 percent of West Germans and 66 percent of Great Britons held favorable impressions of the United States. Within a decade those figures plummeted to new lows, however, reaching 37 percent in Britain and 45 percent in West Germany in 1971 and 1973, respectively. And those were bright spots compared to France, where only 32 percent favored the United States. Such data led USIA Director James Keogh

9. Max Paul Friedman and Padraic Kenney, eds., *Partisan Histories: The Past in Contemporary Global Politics* (New York, 2005), 1–3; Duncan Bell, ed., *Memory, Trauma and World Politics: Reflections on the Relationship between Past and Present* (New York, 2006), 11, 15–19.



to acknowledge in 1974 that the United States had lost much of its former "luster as a land of liberty and opportunity."<sup>10</sup>

The attitudinal "disaster" was a product of the many well-documented setbacks that the United States suffered during the late 1960s and early 1970s—economic recession and nuclear parity, industrial stagnation and urban decay, Watergate and post-civil rights social tension—that combined to make the country look weak, divided, and in decline in the eyes of others. Foremost among them was the Vietnam War. President Lyndon B. Johnson's escalation of U.S. involvement starting in 1964-65 enjoyed little support within the international community. Just five Pacific allies sent supporting troops, and most of those were only token forces. Intervention by the United States, a great Western power, in the affairs of a small Asian nation touched off antiwar protests in North America and Western Europe against what demonstrators claimed was a morally unjust war. Widespread during Johnson's tenure, such demonstrations became somewhat less common once Richard Nixon assumed office in 1969 pledging to end the war. However, Nixon's Christmas bombing of North Vietnam left the United States "even more isolated internationally than in the worst days of the Johnson administration," writes George Herring. The December 1972 bombings of Hanoi and Haiphong killed over 1,600 civilians and damaged a Hanoi hospital, drawing condemnations from across the world. "Even allies must call this a crime against humanity," declared Hamburg's *Die Zeit*. From Stockholm, Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme issued a statement likening the bombing to the worst atrocities committed by the Nazis.<sup>11</sup>

Criticism abated with the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973 and the ending of the war in April 1975. But the lost war in Vietnam did lasting damage to the United States' international reputation. Washington's ultimate inability to defend Saigon led other allies to question the credibility of U.S. security guarantees. More to the point, the Christmas bombing reaffirmed the impression already made by the use of such chemical weapons as Agent Orange, the commitment of such atrocities as the My Lai Massacre, and much else besides that the United States waged an immoral, inhumane, neocolonial war of oppression in

10. Leo Crespi, "Public Opinions Trends Abroad Affecting U.S. Foreign Policies," August 9, 1973, S-23-73, box 33, Special Reports, 1953-1997, Office of Research, U.S. Information Agency Records (hereafter USIA), Record Group 306 (hereafter RG 306), U.S. National Archives (hereafter USNA); Max Kaase and Andrew Kohut, *Estranged Friends? The Transatlantic Consequences of Societal Change* (New York, 1996), 55; "How a Troubled America Puts Best Foot Forward Abroad: Interview with James Keogh, Director, United States Information Agency," *U.S. News & World Report*, September 30, 1974, 37-40.

11. Carl E. Davis, "British Perceptions of the United States at the Bicentennial of Independence," Foreign Service Institute's Senior Seminar in Foreign Policy, 18th sess. (1975-1976), 5-10, Ralph Bunche Library, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C.; George C. Herring, "Fighting Without Allies: The International Dimensions of America's Failure in Vietnam," in *Why the North Won the Vietnam War*, ed. Marc Jason Gilbert (New York, 2002), 82, 91-92. Only Australia, Thailand, South Korea, New Zealand, and the Philippines sent troops.

Southeast Asia. That impression was particularly harmful not only because it came during an age of decolonization but also because the United States had purported to stand for something else since winning its War of Independence from the British Empire. As historian Gordon S. Wood has argued in *The Idea of America* and elsewhere, the American Revolution gave voice to principles—national self-determination, individual freedom, and human equality foremost among them—that gave the United States an idealistic identity and influenced world history for the next two centuries. "The noblest ideals and aspirations of Americans—their commitments to freedom, constitutionalism, the well-being of ordinary people, and equality...—came out of the Revolutionary era," Wood writes.<sup>12</sup>

To be specific, the Declaration of Independence articulated a "language of rights" that "animated movements for independence, autonomy, and liberation around the globe," turning the United States into a "symbol of liberation to others," according to historian David Armitage. Revered as "scripture" in the United States, the Declaration operated to associate America with human freedom in two respects. First, it advanced collective liberation by establishing a template of national self-determination that would be followed to some degree by over one hundred other declarations of independence issued by newly sovereign states after 1776. (Twenty-eight were issued between the end of World War II and the Bicentennial when, quantitatively, the Declaration achieved its greatest relevance.)<sup>13</sup> Second, as Wood writes, the Declaration "set forth a philosophy of human rights" that gave the Revolution universal appeal. Thomas Jefferson's adumbration of "self-evident...unalienable Rights" articulated much of the grammar underlying the modern human rights talk that emerged first in the 1940s and again in the 1970s. Together with the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, the American Declaration of Independence invented human rights insofar as those texts first gave direct political expression to the modern conception of human rights as natural, equal, and universal. As Lynn Hunt insists, "there would have been no concept of human rights in the West" without the vocabulary first voiced in those early documents.<sup>14</sup>

12. Gordon S. Wood, *The American Revolution: A History* (New York, 2002), xxiii; Wood, *The Idea of America: Reflections on the Birth of the United States* (New York, 2011), 2-3. Fredrik Logevall charts the damage done to U.S. credibility in *Choosing War: The Last Chance for Peace and the Escalation of the War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA, 1999), xviii, 376-81.

13. David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 3, 104, 110; Armitage, "The Declaration of Independence in World History," in *Declaring Independence: The Origin and Influence of America's Founding Document*, eds. Christian Y. Dupont and Peter Onuf (Charlottesville, VA, 2008), 31, 33-34; Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York, 1997); Albert P. Blaustein, Jay A. Sigler, and Benjamin R. Beede, eds., *Independence Documents of the World*, 2 vols. (New York, 1977).

14. Wood, *American Revolution*, 57; Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York, 2007), 15, 21; Lynn Hunt, "Paradoxical Origins of Human Rights," in *Human Rights and Revolutions*, 2nd ed., eds. Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, Greg Grandin, Lynn Hunt, and Marilyn B. Young (Lanham, MD, 2007), 4.

By the 1970s, however, it was clear that the United States did not always live up to its professed ideals. That disjuncture could be traced to the Revolution, too, which advanced national self-determination but also endowed Americans with the sense that they had a special, liberating mission to perform in the world. To be sure, that missionary spirit did help freedom ring in many cases. Yet it also nourished an imperialist outlook that spurred the United States to impose its conception of liberty on others, sometimes at gunpoint. To diplomatic historian William Appleman Williams, writing in 1976, recent U.S. behavior in Chile and East Timor as well as Vietnam all reenacted the tragedy of American foreign relations: the United States honored its "historical commitment to the revolutionary right to self-determination" only when and where it was expedient to do so.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, to its many critics, the United States, having matured over two centuries from a revolutionary regime into the world's hegemon, appeared "as a white supremacist power" that everywhere sought "to stamp out the ardor for change" welling up from below as well as "to put down wars of liberation started by the colored race," historian Richard Morris observed. U.S. public diplomats took note of such perceptions. "Worldwide, fundamental questions are being raised about the stability and decency of American society," the USIA's Michael Schneider conceded in 1973.<sup>16</sup>

#### SPREADING "THE IDEA OF AMERICA"

In Vietnam, then, the United States surrendered a significant amount of the very thing, soft power, it needed to compensate for its relative decline in the post-Vietnam era. U.S. public diplomats thus looked to the 200th anniversary of the American Revolution as an opportunity to rebrand the United States. After defending the war before the world court of public opinion for the better part of a decade, U.S. public diplomats, like many Americans at the time, were eager to put Vietnam behind and talk about something, anything else. The Bicentennial offered a "pivot" away from Vietnam, an opportunity to change the subject and go on the offensive. "We were turning a page," Schneider recalls. By forgetting the "bad war" and remembering the good works the Revolution performed in the world,

15. William Appleman Williams, *America Confronts a Revolutionary World: 1776-1976* (New York, 1976), 9. Several historians trace the roots of America's missionary zeal to the Revolution, including Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT, 2009); Jeremi Suri, *Liberty's Surest Guardian: American Nation-Building from the Founders to Obama* (New York, 2011), 35; and Wood, *Idea of America*, 2-3. Erez Manela addresses international responses to the gap between Woodrow Wilson's rhetoric and actions regarding self-determination in *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York, 2007).

16. Richard B. Morris, *The Emerging Nations and the American Revolution* (New York, 1970), xii; Michael Schneider to Harold Schneidman, memo, July 12, 1973, Bicentennial Planning 1973, box 142, Subject Files, Historical Collection, RG 306, USNA.

U.S. public diplomats tried "to convey the message that [America] was basically a good society."<sup>17</sup>

Preparations began in July 1966 when President Johnson signed legislation creating the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, a federal oversight agency. Nominally responsible for the entire Bicentennial, the ARBC actually focused on domestic arrangements, generally leaving overseas preparations to experts in the USIA and the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Developed by officials bullish about the Revolution's heritage as well as the United States' horizons, the earliest plans sounded as if they came from a Cold War-era propaganda handbook. Major national commemorations at the time customarily featured international expositions, like world's fairs, where foreign countries erected pavilions to honor whatever occasion was being marked. Following precedent, the ARBC originally called for a "Festival of Freedom" to be held in Philadelphia in 1976 that, at a projected cost of \$1.5 billion, would expressly celebrate the country's "achievements." A USIA staffer envisioned a Bicentennial that showcased "the advantages of free economic and social systems" over "communist domination," effectively saying to foreigners, "Folks, you ain't seen nothin' yet!" Even the USIA's James Mocer, who would prove to be among the most circumspect public diplomats, regarded the Revolution's memory as a major asset for the United States even as U.S. prospects dimmed. It was easy to lose sight of "the idea of America" in an age of growing doubt, Mocer acknowledged in 1971. Yet he reminded his colleagues that the "powerful influence of the vision of liberation, opportunity, and new beginnings, the *leitmotiv* of the ceaseless process of revolutionary change set in motion by the Americans of 1776" remained vibrant two centuries later.<sup>18</sup>

Some of the USIA's Bicentennial output reflected that confidence. The agency's press service distributed pamphlets covering U.S. history and governance and dedicated special issues of its flagship magazines *Horizons USA*, *America Illustrated*, and *Dialogue*, whose issue was titled "The Idea of America, 1776-1976," to the anniversary. The highlight of USIA television and film coverage was *Salute by Satellite*, which beamed live feeds and prerecorded material to TV stations across the world, enabling viewers to vicariously participate in the

17. Michael Schneider, interview with the author, Dec. 16, 2013, Washington, DC. Joseph S. Nye, Jr. defines soft power in *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York, 1990), 31-32, 267n; Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York, 2004), x, 5-8. Some scholars see an inverse relationship between hard and soft power. See Cull, *Cold War and USIA*, 334; Matthias Schulz and Thomas A. Schwartz, *The Strained Alliance: U.S.-European Relations from Nixon to Carter* (New York, 2009), 371.

18. American Revolution Bicentennial Commission (ARBC), Report to the President, July 4, 1970, Bicentennial Report 1970, box 142, Subject Files, Historical Collection, RG 306, USNA; Darrell I. Drucker, draft paper, Nov. 13, 1972, Bicentennial Planning 1970-1972, box 142, Subject Files, Historical Collection, RG 306, USNA; James Mocer, paper, March 17, 1971, Bicentennial Planning Overseas, box 382, American Revolution Bicentennial Administration Records (hereafter ARBA), Record Group 452 (hereafter RG 452), USNA.

festivities held across the United States on July 4th, 1976, including the parades and fireworks on Washington's National Mall. The agency's Information Centers Service dispatched travelling exhibits, including "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness: The Formation of the United States." Reproduced in 1,700 copies and seven languages, the display depicted the colonial and early national period, underscoring "the fundamental concepts which have motivated this country for the past 200 years."<sup>19</sup>

Weaponizing history, USIA aimed the Bicentennial's liberative message at captive audiences trapped behind the Iron Curtain. Soviet-American détente rested in part on cultural exchange agreements like the one in which the Soviet Union agreed to host a major Bicentennial exhibition in 1976 in exchange for the United States welcoming an exhibit marking the 60th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1977. But détente did not preclude the superpowers from waging cultural Cold War any more than it stopped them from spying on or pointing nuclear weapons at one another. As the National Security Council's Helmut Sonnenfeldt explained, détente was merely "an instrument to protect our interests and... a means to restrain Soviet efforts to damage them."<sup>20</sup> That is not to say that the administration was enthusiastic about waging ideological warfare against the Soviet Union—"We're not in the business of trying to provoke revolutions," said USIA director Keogh, whose predecessor Nixon reportedly fired for doing just that—or embracing human rights: Ford refused to meet author Alexander Solzhenitsyn in 1975 and Kissinger once dismissed the negotiations that would lead to that year's Helsinki Accords as "meaningless." But the administration faced growing pressure to take a harder line against the Soviets. Battling Ford for the Republican Party's nomination in the 1976 election, Ronald Reagan hammered the president for doing business with the Kremlin, thereby turning détente into a political liability for Ford, who banned his staff from using the word. Meanwhile, Republicans and Democrats in Congress, including the sponsors of 1974's Jackson-Vanik amendment, were calling more and more attention to the lack of human rights in the Soviet Union and arguing that the United States should do more to promote them.<sup>21</sup>

19. "USIA and the Bicentennial Celebration," April 7, 1976, USIA - Report on Bicentennial Activities, Bicentennial Subject File, box 71, John O. Marsh Files, 1974-1977, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, MI (hereafter FPL); Cull, *Cold War and USIA*, 351-58.

20. Helmut Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, memo, October 15 1973, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1969-1976, vol. E-15, part 2, Western Europe 1973-1976, ed. Kathleen B. Rasmussen (Washington, DC, 2014), doc. 36. The November 1977 Soviet exhibit in Los Angeles drew 310,000 visitors in only nineteen days despite competition from a nearby exhibit depicting the plight of Jews in the Soviet Union. Ed Meagher, "Russian National Exhibition Concludes 19-Day L.A. Run," *Los Angeles Times*, November 30, 1977, 10-11.

21. "Muted Voice of America," *Time*, December 16, 1974, 81; Michael Cotey Morgan, "The Seventies and the Rebirth of Human Rights," in *Shock of the Global*, 237-50; Kenneth Cmiel, "The Emergence of Human Rights Politics in the United States," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (Dec. 1999): 1231-50.

Although U.S. public diplomacy would not offer a full-throated defense of human rights until Jimmy Carter took office in 1977, the USIA exhibition, "America: The Land, the People, the Idea," touted a proto-human rights agenda when it opened in Moscow's Sokolniki Park in 1976. Also known as "USA - 200 Years," the multimedia display introduced visitors to the country's "underlying philosophical concepts." Each of the exhibit's sections addressed one of three themes. The first featured a panoramic travelogue, "America the Beautiful," produced by Walt Disney Studios that took guests on a tour of the U.S. landscape. A photographic collection illustrating the diversity of the American people comprised the second. But the "heart of the exhibit"—oversized reproductions of the Charters of Freedom, the Declaration, U.S. Constitution, and Bill of Rights—appeared in the final section, which traced the historical development of the "idea" of the United States from 1776 to 1976. The USIA hoped that the net effect would be to leave Soviet attendees with the "feeling that contemporary America is deeply rooted in its democratic traditions and that this society represents the culmination of 200 years of creativity and enterprise." A presidential message printed in the exhibit's accompanying brochure put a finer point on that thesis: "The idea that political power stems from the people and that government's function is to protect the rights of those people was a revolutionary concept in 1776; it remains of the greatest importance to Americans to this day."<sup>22</sup>

"America" became a "sensation," drawing 270,000 visitors in just 28 days, including Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov, who made a surprise appearance. Attendees braved "five-hour waiting lines and two bomb scares" just to get inside, the *New York Times*' Moscow correspondent reported. No doubt the opportunity to watch the Disney film or to listen to a "bank of stereo headphones that played modern jazz and rock music" drew many attendees. More still came to receive their complimentary Russian-language copies of the Declaration, Constitution, and Bill of Rights, souvenirs that came in a plastic bag—"a valued commodity in Moscow in itself," the *Times* noted—along with the brochure, a Bicentennial lapel pin, and a record of American pop music. But some, perhaps including Sakharov, went to see the exhibit's history lesson about the "political freedoms" unleashed by the Revolution. To be sure, some guests questioned tour guides as to just how many rights Americans really enjoyed, pointing out that the right to work was guaranteed in the Soviet constitution but not in the U.S. Constitution. But considering that undercover police were presumably within earshot, the guides were shocked to hear as many or more openly bemoan the lack of such rights in the Soviet Union. U.S. officials were equally surprised to find notes addressed to the White House, Congress, or the Voice of America that guests secretly stuffed into every available "nook and cranny of the pavilion"

22. Keogh to Brent Scowcroft, memo, May 25, 1976, and attached USIA working paper, n.d., USIA, box 20, Presidential Agency Files, National Security Adviser's Files (hereafter NSAF), FPL; Presidential message, April 19, 1976, 4/15/76-4/21/76, box 3, ME (Executive), Subject File, White House Central Files, FPL.

throughout each day. Most were from people seeking help emigrating from the Soviet Union. Others asked for the release of an imprisoned loved one. One man sought a copy of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In any event, USIA veterans "had not witnessed such excitement over an American exhibition in the Soviet Union since the first one in 1959," i.e., since the American National Exhibition, famous as the site of the Kitchen Debate. In fact, "America" sparked such excitement that Soviet officials reportedly tried to disrupt it: police harassed those waiting in line to get in; the bomb scares turned out to be hoaxes, fabricated by authorities to deter visitation, or so U.S. diplomats claimed.<sup>23</sup>

#### COMMEMORATING INDEPENDENCE IN AN AGE OF INTERDEPENDENCE

The Bicentennial's celebratory tone fell on deafer ears in the United States, however. A worsening economy spelled the cancellation of the costly Philadelphia expo in 1972, leaving the festivities without a focal point. The ARBC's plans came under heavy attack, as well. To many civil rights leaders, celebrating U.S. history ignored the fact that African Americans, Native Americans, and other groups had historically been denied the "self-evident" rights Jefferson proclaimed. "[I]f the Bicentennial is some kind of self-congratulatory celebration, it is frivolous and meaningless to the black community," Rep. Charles Rangel of New York declared. "If they're going to have a party, we're going to be there to blow the birthday candles out," promised American Indian Movement co-founder Clyde Bellecourt. Meanwhile, the PBC, in addition to staging demonstrations like the one in Concord, alleged that President Nixon had stacked the ARBC with political cronies who were busy selling off the "Buy-centennial" to the highest bidders. First aired in the summer of 1972, the PBC's allegations of official mismanagement gained traction as the Watergate scandal unfolded. Under mounting public pressure, Congress acted in December 1973 to replace the discredited ARBC with a new federal planning outfit, the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA). Directed by former U.S. Navy secretary John Warner, the ARBA quickly overhauled the Bicentennial into a more diverse and less centralized affair by reaching out to racial and ethnic groups and encouraging localities to stage their own commemorative events without much direction from Washington. Primarily a cost-cutting move of expedience, decentralization also implicitly acknowledged that "one historical narrative could not tell the whole nation's story," writes historian Christopher Capozzola, thereby freeing the federal government from having to take sides in all sorts of historical squabbles.<sup>24</sup>

23. "Successful Exhibition of U.S. Ends in Soviet," *New York Times*, December 14, 1976, 12; Office of Research and Assessment, "USA-200 Years' Exhibit - Soviet Visitor Reactions," May 27, 1977, R-10-77, box 45, Research Reports, 1960-1999, RG 306, USNA.

24. "Why Should the Indians Celebrate Bicentennial?" *The Ledger* (Lakeland, Florida), March 16, 1975, 3B; Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 234-35; Capozzola, "It Makes You Want to Believe," 32, 34-35.

U.S. public diplomats continued their preparations as that domestic controversy unfolded, and they, too, concluded that bombastic advertisements of the American Way were unlikely to receive a favorable hearing in the post-Vietnam world. To conduct business as usual, to act as if nothing had changed, and to continue to propagate overoptimistic portraits of the United States that glossed over the country's well-publicized problems would only strain credulity and thus fail to capitalize on the Bicentennial's potential to win friends and influence people abroad. "Clearly the present temper of the world ill accords with a pious hagiography of the American Revolution," Mocerri concluded. As such, he urged planners to resist the temptation "to engage in an orgy of self-congratulatory and bombastic Fourth of July rhetoric and moralistic posturing."<sup>25</sup>

Rather, in an era in which U.S. prestige was falling, international institutions were rising, and global issues were proliferating, U.S. public diplomats adapted by situating the American Revolution, indeed the entire American experience, in a global context. The Bicentennial could and should speak to the interdependent world of the 1970s, they believed. Mocerri, for one, recognized "that, from the vantage point of 1776 and much, if not all, of our subsequent history, the American experience emerges from and remains indissolubly linked" with the wider world, Europe especially, through the exchange of ideas and the movement of peoples. As such, the Bicentennial could strengthen "cooperative relationships" and increase mutual understanding by fostering "dialogue" about the past in order to discover "multinational solutions" to some of the modern problems humanity commonly faced. Meanwhile, any "institutional linkages" broken over the last several years could be repaired, and that, too, would work to strengthen the United States' foreign relationships. All told, if structured properly the anniversary would reaffirm "the American commitment to the proposition that, just as *independence* summoned the thirteen colonies of 1776, *interdependence* challenges the community of nations in 1976," declared the USIA.<sup>26</sup>

Sharing the United States' story with the world required identifying, and commemorating, "areas of commonality." That is, U.S. public diplomats attempted to bring "out points of comparison, relevance and shared experience with other nations," underscoring not only what the United States gave to them but what they gave to the United States, wrote Schneider in 1973. As the State Department's Bicentennial coordinator, L. Arthur Minnich, a historian who once taught at Lafayette College, well knew, the historical record provided ample material

25. James Mocerri, paper, March 17, 1971, Bicentennial Planning Overseas, box 382, ARBA, RG 452, USNA.

26. James Mocerri, paper, March 17, 1971, Bicentennial Planning Overseas, box 382, ARBA, RG 452, USNA; Department of State to All American Diplomatic and Consular Posts, airgram CA-3370, July 19, 1971, ARB Overseas Posts: CA-3370, box 1, State Department Bicentennial Records (hereafter SDBR), Entry 1118A, General Records of the U.S. Department of State, Record Group 59 (hereafter RG 59), USNA; Mildred Marcy, paper, April 30, 1971, Bicentennial Planning Overseas, box 382, ARBA, RG 452, USNA; USIA circular CA-2353, Dec. 20, 1973, USIA/USIA, box 396, RG 452, USNA. Emphases in the original.



from which to draw such commonalities. International at the creation, the American struggle for independence from the British Empire drew nourishment from European Enlightenment thinkers. Moreover, France, Spain, and other foreign governments and individuals assisted the rebelling colonists, aid that made "an important – perhaps decisive – contribution to American independence."<sup>27</sup>

Although it had little to do with the Revolution per se, immigration history provided another area of commonality. Coming to regard multiculturalism as a source of American strength, Bicentennial planners described the United States as a "nation of nations," a nation "built by immigrants and strengthened by refugees." Public diplomats identified the immigrant experience as common ground on which Americans and non-Americans could embark on a mutual "rediscovery of our common roots." That is, by validating "the contributions made by many cultural and ethnic migrations of people" to the United States, the anniversary could promote the type of "cross-cultural communication" that bettered "inter-cultural understanding" in a world grown more interconnected than ever before. As the State Department declared in 1975, "Our national heritage has been developed upon important contributions from peoples of all parts of the world, and the interdependence of peoples the world over in successfully dealing with critical world problems is a controlling fact" of geopolitical life.<sup>28</sup> Therefore the department reminded its overseas posts that the "multi-ethnic foundation of our heritage provides a strong base" for international events commemorating the history of outmigration to the United States, especially where ethnic ties to the U.S. society were stronger than historical ties to the American Revolution.<sup>29</sup>

#### AN "INVITATION TO THE WORLD"

The U.S. Department of State issued an "invitation to the world" welcoming the international community to participate in the United States' birthday. If the cancellation of the Philadelphia expo left foreign participants confused as to what to

27. Michael Schneider to Harold Schneidman, memo, July 12, 1973, Bicentennial Planning 1973, box 142, Subject Files, Historical Collection, RG 306, USNA; Schneider interview; L. Arthur Minnich, "Bicentennial Commemoration: Heritage, Department of State Activities," May 29, 1973, CU's Role in the Bicentennial – 1970-1976 (General) II, box 1, SDBR, Entry 1118A, RG 59, USNA; Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "International at the Creation: Early Modern American History," in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley, CA, 2002), 103-22.

28. James Mocer, paper, March 17, 1971, Bicentennial Planning Overseas, box 382, ARBA, RG 452, USNA; Mildred Marcy, paper, April 30, 1971, Bicentennial Planning Overseas, box 382, ARBA, RG 452, USNA; American Revolution Bicentennial Commission Report to the President, July 4, 1970, Bicentennial Report 1970, box 142, USIA Historical Collection, RG 306, USNA; "The Bicentennial Commemoration and the Department of State," February 14, 1975, CU's Role in the Bicentennial – 1970-1976 (General) II, box 1, SDBR, Entry 1118A, RG 59, USNA. The Smithsonian Institution titled its foremost Bicentennial exhibit "A Nation of Nations." See Peter C. Marzio, ed., *A Nation of Nations: The People Who Came to America as Seen Through Objects and Documents Exhibited at the Smithsonian Institution* (New York, 1976).

29. Department of State to All Diplomatic Posts, airgram A-5052, June 20, 1974, Bicentennial Legislation 1973-1976, box 142, USIA Historical Collection, RG 306, USNA.

do and when and where to do it, the State Department, like the ARBA, presented decentralization as an opportunity for non-Americans to locate those "areas of commonality" for themselves. Since no stage-managed exposition could possibly encompass the entire history of international relations with the United States, the department encouraged foreign countries to develop commemorations that organically reflected their "past and present relationships with the United States."<sup>30</sup> Extending such a broad invitation opened the Bicentennial to wide interpretation, prompting a transnational dialogue among several competing public diplomacies about the United States, its history, and its role in the world. Friends and foes, past and present, observed the Bicentennial from multiple perspectives, and they marked the anniversary in ways that reflected their experiences and served their agendas. As a result, the historical memory of 1776 became a diplomatic football in 1976, when memory contests, ordinarily limited to the domestic scene, spilled beyond the water's edge.

Opponents of the United States did not receive invitations. But that did not stop them from calling attention to the disjuncture between the United States' contemporary behavior and the celebration of its revolutionary heritage. Fidel Castro's Cuban government dismissed the Bicentennial as "deceitful propaganda" inasmuch as it conveniently overlooked "the dozens of Yankee marine landings in Latin American countries." Havana thus called for hemispheric solidarity against "Yankee imperialism."<sup>31</sup> The newly established Lao People's Democratic Republic publicly burned commemorative stamps printed by the pro-American Kingdom of Laos prior to the monarchy's December 1975 fall. As a Lao communist newspaper explained, the new regime burned the stamps to recognize the fact that while the United States may have once struggled for "independence and freedom" from the British Empire, U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia demonstrated that the United States had since developed into an imperialist Goliath that "barbarously" crushed national self-determination efforts. As such, the Bicentennial was nothing more than "noisy propaganda" promulgated by U.S. authorities in an attempt "to cover up their perfidious nature."<sup>32</sup>

No country was better qualified to judge the correspondence of the United States' words and deeds than the reunified Socialist Republic of Vietnam, so renamed on July 2, 1976, just prior to the Bicentennial's climax. Vietnam's 1945 declaration of independence was among the 28 such declarations issued since the end of World War II. Written by Ho Chi Minh, who as a young man living in

30. Department of State to All Diplomatic Posts, airgram A-5341, June 21, 1973, CU's Role in the Bicentennial – 1970-1976 (General) II, box 1, SDBR, Entry 1118A, RG 59, USNA.

31. Havana International Service radiobroadcast, June 28, 1975, FBIS-LAT-75-127, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports*, 1974-1996.

32. TOHAK 44, February 24, 1976, February 16-25, 1976 - Latin America TOHAK (3), box 30, Trip Briefing Books and Cables of Henry Kissinger, 1974-1977, NSAF, FPL; Vientiane to Secretary of State, tel. 1611, July 6, 1976, Foreign Countries – General, July 4, 1976 Weekend, box 2, SDBR, Entry 1118A, RG 59, USNA; "Siang Pasason Comments on Bicentennial," July 7, 1976, FBIS-APA-76-132, *FBIS Daily Reports*.

Paris in 1919 drew inspiration from Woodrow Wilson's talk of national self-determination, the document began by quoting Jefferson's famous lines—"All men are created equal," and so forth—in support of Ho's broader anticolonial message: "All peoples on earth are born equal; all peoples have the right to live, to be free, to be happy." Ho's faith in American ideas appeared misplaced, not to mention tragic, three decades later, however, when Hanoi sardonically wished the United States a pleasant "bicentennial anniversary of great U.S. imperialism," as the United States had been wresting "freedom and happiness away from other peoples" since 1776.<sup>33</sup>

At least 102 countries—literally from A-to-Z, Andorra to Zaire—did accept invitations to join the Bicentennial, however, leading the ARBA to enthuse: "Foreign participation in the celebration was so diverse, so widespread and so interwoven with the Bicentennial tapestry that it made the celebration truly worldwide." To be sure, diplomatic courtesy obligated countries that sought a working relationship with the United States to observe the superpower's milestone birthday, lending a pro forma quality to some of the congratulatory messages foreign heads of state sent and the token gestures foreign governments made. Not to mark the occasion represented a breach of etiquette. A clear signal of opposition to the United States and its role in the world, such an insult promised to negatively affect bilateral relations moving forward. And few countries were willing to pay the price that might come from failing to perform the customary commemorative rituals, small symbolic acts that could have significant political repercussions. Not only that but the United States' national holiday presented a valuable commemorative diplomacy opportunity to non-U.S. officials as well, serving as a stage to make a diplomatic statement, a pretext to talk with U.S. leaders, and/or a vehicle to improve ties with Washington. One rule held firm: the bigger and better the commemorative gesture, the extent to which it stood out among those made by others, the more that stood to be gained politically. Yet standing out was no mean feat in 1976 when Americans were "saturated. . . with a Bicentennial bevy of [visits by and gifts from] kings, queens, and presidents," observed *New York Times* foreign affairs correspondent C.L. Sulzberger.<sup>34</sup>

Ranging from modest to grand, observances did indeed reflect "past and present relationships with the United States," as the State Department predicted they would. Smaller countries with looser relationships emphasized their ethnic connections to the United States. Delegations representing more than three dozen countries participated in the Smithsonian Institution's 1976 Festival of American Folklife, for example. Held annually on the National Mall in Washington, that

summer's festival featured an expanded "Old Ways in the New World" section in which groups from Ghana, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Poland, and elsewhere demonstrated their ethnic contributions to America's multicultural salad bowl. Meanwhile, 224 sailing vessels, featuring 16 historic tall ships, from 30 nations gathered in New York Harbor on July 4, 1976, for Operation Sail '76, a nautical parade that passed the Statue of Liberty, symbolic of the United States' historical openness. Televised overseas and across the United States, the scene epitomized "the entwined histories of the world's peoples," or so organizers claimed.<sup>35</sup>

On the other end of the commemorative spectrum, major U.S. allies without useable ties to the American Revolution invented new traditions designed to score diplomatic points with Washington. Closed to the outside world in 1776, Japan nevertheless showered the United States with gifts in 1976, such as constructing a new theater atop Washington's John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts that continues to host audiences today. West Germany ignored what every American schoolchild knew about the past, that Hessian mercenaries fought against the colonists during the Revolutionary War, and looked forward instead, capitalizing on Germany's reputed technical excellence to fund the construction of the Albert Einstein Planetarium inside the Smithsonian's new Air and Space Museum, a major attraction since opening on the National Mall in July 1976.<sup>36</sup>

#### "THE WORLD OF FRANKLIN AND JEFFERSON"

France and Britain possessed the clearest historical links to the Revolution, and the Bicentennial's recollection of them sought to strengthen the affective bonds that crossed the Atlantic. U.S.-Western European relations worsened on Nixon's watch, bottoming out during the Yom Kippur War of October 1973, when Europe refused landing rights for American planes resupplying Israel, prompting what historians Matthias Schulz and Thomas Schwartz call the most serious crisis in transatlantic relations between the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 and 2003's Iraq War. The many roots of the crisis went well beyond the Yom Kippur War, extending to the fallout from the Vietnam War, which fueled anti-Americanism throughout much of the region, forced otherwise friendly foreign leaders to distance themselves from Washington, and empowered those already critical of the United States. Likewise, Western European opposition to such U.S. actions as the Christmas bombing made a "devastating impression" on the American president, Kissinger noted, leaving a residue of mistrust that only stoked Nixon's growing antipathy toward European integration.<sup>37</sup> Coupled with Nixon's frosty personal relationships with West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, French President Georges Pompidou, and British Prime Minister Edward Heath, Europe's apparent determination to

33. "Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Vietnam," September 2, 1945, reprinted in Blaustein, et al., *Independence Documents*, II: 761-765; Dieu Binh, "U.S. Capitalism's Self-Lamentation on the Occasion of Its Bicentennial Anniversary," *Nhan Dan*, January 22, 1976, FBIS-APA-76-017, *FBIS Daily Reports*.

34. ARBA, *The Bicentennial of the United States of America: A Final Report to the People*, vol. I (Washington, DC, 1977), 215; C.L. Sulzberger, "Not Well Enough To Be Bored," *New York Times*, May 16, 1976, 157.

35. ARBA, *Final Report*, I: 226, 229; Zaretsky, *No Direction Home*, 164-70.

36. ARBA, *Final Report*, I: 216-17, 233.

37. Schulz and Schwartz, *Strained Alliance*, 363; minutes of Senior Review Group Meeting, January 31, 1973, *FRUS*, vol. E-15, part 2, doc. 5.

assert greater autonomy from the United States caused Washington to rethink its support of European unity. U.S. officials regularly blamed "French insistence upon independence in the defense and economic fields," which could be traced back to Charles de Gaulle's 1966 decision to remove France from NATO's integrated military structures, for European-American conflict. But it was Heath's 1973 decision to decouple Britain from the United States in order to join the European Economic Community (EEC) that caused alarm in Washington about the future of the Atlantic alliance. In the wake of Heath's move, a State Department study observed that Western European governments, thanks to their assertion of greater "independence from Washington," were becoming "acutely conscious of fundamental economic, political, and diplomatic interests which they share with each other but not with the US."<sup>38</sup>

Concerned that European unity was coming at the expense of transatlantic unity (and thus U.S. interests), U.S. officials resolved to stress what united the members of the Atlantic community rather than what divided Europe from the United States. Beginning with December 1973's NATO ministerial meeting in London, Kissinger emphasized European-American strategic and economic "interdependence" and also reaffirmed U.S. support of European unification on the condition that such unity was not "measured in terms of its distance from the US." Such (relatively) conciliatory statements from U.S. leaders became more commonplace once Nixon resigned in August 1974. President Ford was much more sympathetic to European concerns than his predecessor and also more willing to make concessions to strengthen the alliance, agreeing for example to a European proposal to hold, in 1975, the first meeting of what would evolve into the G-7 summits, key mechanisms for coordinating the policies of the industrialized nations. As such, Ford has received credit from diplomatic historians for presiding over a noticeable improvement in transatlantic relations marked by the "rebuilding of mutual trust and confidence."<sup>39</sup>

The realization of common interests and the development of multilateral institutions to coordinate them drove the transatlantic rapprochement. But public diplomacy had a role to play as well in changing the tone, in rebuilding that air of "mutual trust and confidence." Or, as Kissinger phrased it, in creating "a new sense of emotional commitment at a time when a new generation had no emotional or intellectual attachment to the concept of Atlantic unity."<sup>40</sup>

38. Analytical Summary of a Study Prepared by the Ad Hoc Interdepartmental Group for Europe, n.d. [April 1973], SRG Meeting - NSSM 166 US-France Bilateral Issues 4/24/73, box H-67, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Richard Nixon Presidential Library (hereafter NPL), Yorba Linda, CA; Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, memo, November 24, 1973, Misc. Docs, Tels, Etc., 1975, folder 5, box 13, Records of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, RG 59, USNA.

39. Scowcroft conveyed a summary of Kissinger's remarks to Nixon in a memo dated Dec. 12, 1973, *FRUS*, vol. E-15, part 2, doc. 44; N. Piers Ludlow, "The Real Years of Europe: U.S.-West European Relations during the Ford Administration," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 15, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 136, 139; Schulz and Schwartz, *Strained Alliance*, 365.

40. Scowcroft to Nixon, memo, Dec. 12, 1973, *FRUS*, vol. E-15, part 2, doc. 44.

The Bicentennial's emphasis on rediscovering the interdependence inherent in the exchange of people and ideas placed Franco-American relations in a positive light. France and the United States shared a storied revolutionary history—a "sentimental tradition," Nixon once remarked—and the Bicentennial's recollection of that happy past presented an opportunity to "turn the page on an unhappy period" in Franco-American relations.<sup>41</sup> Such French Enlightenment thinkers as Montesquieu influenced the United States' Founding Fathers, for instance, and France provided crucial diplomatic, financial, and military assistance to the fledgling United States. The United States' oldest ally, France became the first nation to recognize U.S. independence in 1778 when it signed treaties of alliance and of amity and commerce with the United States. Benjamin Franklin signed both deals, and he became the first American minister to be received by a foreign government when he presented his credentials to the French court in 1779. Securing France's allegiance proved to be a major coup for the colonists in their fight against the British Empire because it opened the way for the French loans, supplies, troops, and naval support that poured into the United States to aid George Washington's beleaguered Continental Army. Without the French fleet led by Admiral Comte de Grasse that fought the Royal Navy offshore and the French forces commanded by Comte de Rochambeau that fought the Redcoats on land, the Americans might not have been able to secure the British surrender at Yorktown in 1781, the decisive battle in the War of Independence. Nor did Franco-American revolutionary history end there, for the American Revolution went on to help inspire the French Revolution and the liberating principles it unleashed in the world. Some French veterans of the Revolutionary War, such as the Marquis de Lafayette, who formed a lasting friendship with General Washington while serving on Washington's staff, took republican principles with them when they returned to France, helping to foment revolutionary activity there. And Thomas Jefferson, who succeeded Franklin as American minister to France in 1785, helped draft the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789 while serving in Paris.

"The World of Franklin and Jefferson," a major Bicentennial exhibition, underscored that rich history of transatlantic interdependence. Developed by Charles and Ray Eames, the legendary design team behind the USIA's greatest success, 1959's American National Exhibition in Moscow, the exhibition traced American history from Benjamin Franklin's birth in 1706 to Thomas Jefferson's death in 1826. Primarily intended as an alliance-building device among European countries well-connected to Revolutionary history, the display situated the United States' early development within an international context, demonstrating how the Enlightenment influenced Franklin, Jefferson, and their peers; how foreign affairs

41. Memoranda of Conversations between Nixon and Georges Pompidou, June 1, 1973, Beginning May 27 (1973), box 91, Memoranda for the President, President's Office Files, Staff Member & Office Files, White House Special Files, NPL; Melvin Laird to Nixon, Jan. 23, 1973, *FRUS*, vol. E-14, part 2, doc. 304.

affected the young nation's struggle for autonomy; and how the Revolution, the Declaration, and the Constitution all resonated beyond U.S. shores. As an official explained, the USIA hoped to leave visitors with the impression that the Revolution was the property of all humankind, that it was the product of eighteenth-century intellectual discoveries "made in both [the] Old World and [the] New [that] crossed and re-crossed national boundaries." Specifically, the exhibit sought to convey the message that the Enlightenment's "living ideas" about natural law, human rights, and republicanism were "so powerful" as not only to animate the Revolution in 1776 but also to spread across the world thereafter, having the effect of promoting, in Jefferson's words, "the general good of mankind."<sup>42</sup>

Visitors entered the exhibition through an atrium adorned with portraits and figures representing the transatlantic network of people—John Locke, Edmund Burke, Joseph Priestley, and others—surrounding Franklin and Jefferson, whose fertile mind "was a product of European scholarship and American pragmatism," according to the exhibit's catalog. Following an illustrated timeline that traced historical developments on both sides of the Atlantic, visitors entered rooms dedicated to Franklin's and Jefferson's scientific and political accomplishments, which earned the former an "international reputation," and to the documents—the Declaration, Constitution, and Bill of Rights, reproductions of which were included—that continued to inspire. An epilogue devoted to the United States' continental expansion paid special attention to Jefferson's 1803 purchase of Louisiana from France and suggested, by means of paintings depicting the West's wide-open vistas, that American democratic principles entered a corresponding phase of export.<sup>43</sup>

"The World of Franklin and Jefferson" premiered in Paris in 1975. ARBA administrator John Warner declared the exhibit's two-month stay at Paris's Grand Palais "an immediate and overwhelming success, both in terms of attendance and press reaction." Fifty thousand people toured the display, reportedly setting an attendance record for a foreign show in a French museum. *Le Monde* hailed the Eameses' work as an aesthetic "model" that told "the history of liberty," a story with universal appeal. Noting the exhibit's rich documentation of Franklin's diplomatic mission to Paris from 1776 to 1785 to secure French support for the colonists' cause; of Jefferson's, whose end coincided with the 1789 start of the French Revolution; and of George Washington's close friendship with

Lafayette, *L'Express* welcomed such testimony to the historic Franco-American alliance.<sup>44</sup>

French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, a descendant of Revolutionary War veteran Count Charles d'Estaing, took "full advantage of . . . the U.S. Bicentennial to manifest his desire for a major expression of French-U.S. amity," the U.S. embassy in Paris reported. As France's ambassador to the United States Jacques Kosciusko-Morizet explained, Giscard took "a special interest in this occasion since it marks not only the 200 years of independence of the United States but also the 200 years of friendship between France and America." Giscard won France's May 1974 presidential election necessitated by Pompidou's death, becoming the last of three Western European Atlanticists who took power in the first half of that year. Harold Wilson, who formed a Labour government in March following the defeat of Heath's Conservative Party in the U.K. general election, and Helmut Schmidt, who became West German chancellor in May after Brandt's sudden resignation, were the others. Together, Wilson, Schmidt, and Giscard oversaw a dramatic improvement in transatlantic relations. Giscard breathed fresh air into Franco-American relations, according to the U.S. embassy. Unlike de Gaulle and Pompidou, Giscard evidently concluded that France could not establish "leadership in Europe through confrontation with the United States." He thus "moderated the anti-American style of his Gaullist predecessors, and adopted a conciliatory stance." Although Giscard would continue the Gaullist pursuit of French "independence and authority" in the world, his "new spirit of compromise" represented one of the more promising developments in Franco-American relations since de Gaulle became president in 1959, and the embassy recommended taking steps "to buttress the interdependence that binds us together."<sup>45</sup>

Giscard visited the United States in 1976, a trip timed to coincide with the Bicentennial. Kissinger welcomed Giscard's visit as a sign of the dramatic improvement in bilateral relations that had taken place since 1974, which the secretary of state numbered among the French president's "most striking foreign policy accomplishments."<sup>46</sup> Giscard's goodwill tour—important "for emotional reasons," he said—began in Washington, where he met President Ford and addressed Congress, and continued with stops in Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Louisiana. At each stop, Giscard capitalized on France's impeccable historical credentials not only to reset Franco-American relations but also to remake France's image

42. David Paul to Schneidman, memo, February 26, 1973, Exhibits, American Bicentennial, 1976, box 142, Subject Files, Historical Collection, RG 306, USNA.

43. "The World of Franklin and Jefferson: An American Bicentennial Exhibition," catalog, [1975], box 142, Subject Files, Historical Collection, RG 306, USNA. The Eameses made three accompanying films that take viewers on a tour of the exhibit and its Paris opening. Charles and Ray Eames, *The World of Franklin and Jefferson*, vol. 3 of *The Films of Charles & Ray Eames* (Pyramid Media, 1991).

44. John Warner to Marsh, memo, August 15, 1975, and enclosed summary of press coverage, [1975], Exhibit - "The World of Franklin and Jefferson" (2), box 66, Marsh Files, 1974-1977, FPL; Summary of press comments, [1975], Exhibit - "The World of Franklin and Jefferson" (3), box 66, Marsh Files, 1974-1977, FPL. From Paris, the exhibit travelled to Warsaw, London, and Mexico City.

45. Paris Embassy to Secretary of State, tels. 2935, February 4, 1975, and 5534, March 4, 1975 [electronic records], RG 59, Access to Archival Databases (AAD), USNA; ARBA, *Final Report*, 222.

46. Kissinger to Ford, draft memo, May 1976, Country File - France (1), box 1, NSC International Economic Affairs Staff: Files, NSAF, FPL.



in the United States, where a poll showed that only 35 percent of Americans considered France an ally. Giscard met French Americans in Louisiana. He visited Philadelphia's Independence Hall. He presented France's official Bicentennial gift, "The Father of Liberty," a *son et lumière* (sound and light) spectacle installed at George Washington's Mount Vernon home honoring Washington's close friendship with Lafayette, a gesture supposed to symbolize the long history of bilateral amity. Most notably, Giscard partook in ceremonies commemorating the Battle of Yorktown, where French troops helped secure American independence. There the French president dedicated plaques and kiosks—all gifts from the French government—marking the historic route generals Washington and Rochambeau took to Yorktown in 1781. And Giscard visited the newly constructed Yorktown Victory Center, where he said that the battle's memory would "forever remind us, friends to this day, of what we can accomplish together in the name of liberty."<sup>47</sup> Some journalists dismissed Giscard's trip as a mere public relations stunt, "more *son* than *lumière*," remarked one wag. But Giscard defended it, telling NBC's *Meet the Press* that his visit had helped reestablish a bilateral "relationship based on mutual respect and understanding."<sup>48</sup>

Like Giscard, British Prime Minister Harold Wilson sought improved ties with the United States. According to historian John Dumbrell, Wilson's predecessor lacked "the instinctive pro-Americanism of other British prime ministers," and Heath's 1973 decision to join the EEC opened a rift in the Anglo-American alliance. Soon after taking office in 1974, however, Wilson's foreign secretary, James Callaghan, in a thinly veiled reference to Heath's Europeanism, publicly rejected "the view that Europe will emerge only out of a process of struggle with America." Determined to put the "special relationship" back together, Whitehall regarded the Bicentennial as an opportunity to do just that. The only problem was that the Bicentennial did not so easily lend itself to British fence-mending efforts. French remembered their ancestors' victory over Britain in the American War of Independence as a great national triumph, and Giscard could rather easily wheel out happy memories of the 1778 alliance, Lafayette, or Yorktown to highlight Franco-American *fraternité* two centuries later. But many Britons ranked the Revolutionary War as a humiliating defeat, one that dealt a major blow to the British Empire. For them, the Bicentennial not only served as an unwelcome reminder of British loss but also cast Britain as the villain in the United States' national imagination, a role traditionally performed by King George III and the

Redcoats.<sup>49</sup> Could the United Kingdom observe the Revolution's anniversary in a way that contributed to Anglo-American solidarity but also respected British prestige? If so, how? By memorializing the Tea Act of 1773? By honoring the Boston Massacre? By erecting a statue of George III? Suitable options were clearly limited.

Instituted in 1972 by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to plan Britain's commemoration, the British Bicentennial Liaison Committee (BBLC) attempted to find a solution. Committee members agreed that Britain's observances should feature a "main manifestation" and also on the criteria for selecting what came to be known internally as the "centerpiece." The United Kingdom's major gift to the United States ought to be "permanent," "prestigious" and "visible," something uniquely "British" that would nevertheless symbolize the historic links that knitted the two countries together.<sup>50</sup> Beyond that, however, members disagreed about what form the gift should take. Drifless, without much direction from above, the BBLC had made little headway by the time Heath left Downing Street.

The arrivals in office of Wilson and Callaghan—who would become prime minister in April 1976 following Wilson's abrupt resignation—injecting a new sense of urgency into the committee's deliberations. In 1974, the BBLC approved an overall plan of action including exhibits, academic exchanges, performing arts tours, and other commemorative gestures—including Ambassador Ramsbotham's participation in the 1975 Patriots' Day ceremonies—that comprised the largest Bicentennial observance by any foreign country.<sup>51</sup> Then, in early 1975, the committee selected the "centerpiece," endorsing the ambassador's proposal to present Congress with an original copy of Magna Carta, the charter forced on the king of England by feudal barons in 1215 that challenged absolute monarchical authority and asserted political and personal liberties. Magna Carta had the advantage of being widely respected in the United States as an antecedent of the U.S. Constitution, Ramsbotham noted, and gifting it would observe the Bicentennial without directly referencing the American Revolution. Moreover, an FCO official hastened to add, presenting the charter to Congress would place Britain in the best possible light, reminding Americans that the U.S. "legislative system derives from the Mother of Parliaments."<sup>52</sup>

49. John Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations in the Cold War and After* (London, 2001), 73–85. The Bicentennial encouraged British and American scholars to reflect upon differing interpretations of the causes and consequences of the American Revolution. See Ian R. Christie and Benjamin W. Labaree, *Empire or Independence, 1760–1776: A British-American Dialogue on the Coming of the American Revolution* (New York, 1976); H. C. Allen and Roger Thompson, eds., *Contrast and Connection: Bicentennial Essays in Anglo-American History* (London, 1976).

50. Foreign and Commonwealth Office Records, Minutes of the 3rd British Bicentennial Liaison Committee (BBLC) Meeting, July 5, 1973, FCO 26/1423, The National Archives of the UK (hereafter TNA).

51. Leslie Boas to Merrick Baker-Bates, Sep. 6, 1974, FCO 26/1634, TNA.

52. Ramsbotham to R. S. Scrivener, January 3, 1975, FCO 26/1735, TNA; R. N. Dales to A.G. Rucker, November 11, 1974, FCO 26/1735, TNA. On the charter's influence on international law, see J. C. Holt, *Magna Carta*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1992), 21.

47. Ford-Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, May 17, 1976, Memoranda of Conversations, NSAF, FPL; Giscard's summary schedule, May 12, 1976, 5/17–20/76 - France - President Giscard d'Estaing (11), box 19, Presidential Briefing Material for VIP Visits, NSAF, FPL; "Remembrance at Yorktown," *New York Times*, May 20, 1976, 9.

48. "The French-American Connection," editorial, *Washington Post*, May 23, 1976, 32. A transcript of Giscard's May 23, 1976, appearance on *Meet the Press* is in 5/17–20/76 - France - President Giscard d'Estaing (9), box 19, Presidential Briefing Material for VIP Visits, NSAF, FPL.

In June 1975 Wilson's cabinet approved the BBLC's recommendations calling for the original copy of Magna Carta to be permanently loaned to the United States. According to the plan, British parliamentarians would ceremonially present the document to U.S. lawmakers. The charter would then be displayed for one year in an ornate showcase located in the Capitol's Rotunda. Thereafter, the original copy would move to the U.S. National Archives for permanent display and safe-keeping. But the showcase containing a replica Magna Carta designed by renowned goldsmith Louis Osman would stay in the Rotunda, where it remains to this day with a plaque informing visitors of its origins. Because Magna Carta would compete with the Rotunda's only other freestanding artifacts—copies of the Declaration and Constitution—the English text would attract “enormous attention,” Ramsbotham predicted.<sup>53</sup>

In June 1976 British parliamentarians presented the original copy of Magna Carta to U.S. congressmen in a Capitol ceremony stage-managed to present history as a unifying force. A combined delegation of British and American lawmakers headed by the speakers of the houses of lords and commons, Lord Elwyn-Jones and George Thomas, and Speaker of the House Carl Albert and Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield entered the building as a U.S. Marine Corps band played the U.K. and U.S. national anthems. Once assembled in the Rotunda, the lawmakers listened to the “Ballad of Magna Carta.” According to Ramsbotham's report on the day's events, the ballad's lyrics, which referenced the rule of law as a guard against arbitrary power, were supposed to remind American listeners, without mentioning Watergate, that Britain had provided the United States with a blueprint of a constitutional government that had recently demonstrated its endurance yet again. Speakers offered the expected tributes to the English charter's influence, including Elwyn-Jones, who said that Magna Carta's progeny, the Constitution, “had proved its soundness and vitality.” The ceremony dramatically concluded when a British honor guard clad in bearskins and red tunics opened the showcase to reveal Magna Carta before being relieved by a U.S. counterpart. Ramsbotham described the scene in his report: “As the American Guard took station the contrast in uniform and drill seemed to symbolize the New World taking over from the Old the role of chief protector of the rights and liberties of free men.” Based on enthusiastic U.S. reactions—Albert hailed the event as the single “most significant part of our Bicentennial celebration,” the White House called it a “brilliant stroke”—Ramsbotham declared Magna Carta's gift a major public relations success. Giving the charter to the United States strengthened Anglo-American intimacy, he claimed, demonstrating that the special relationship rested on not just shared national interests but “common history” and ideals.<sup>54</sup>

53. Cabinet Office Records, Cabinet Conclusion CAB 128/56/27, June 12, 1975, TNA; Ramsbotham to FCO, tel., June 9, 1975, FCO 26/1735, TNA.

54. Ramsbotham to Anthony Crosland and enclosed British embassy (Washington) summary report, July 1, 1976, FCO 82/677, TNA; Kissinger to Ford, memo, July 2, 1976, 7/7-11/76 - Great Britain - Queen Elizabeth (11), box 20, Presidential Briefing Material for VIP Visits, NSAF, FPL.

To judge by such official reports filed in the immediate afterglow of the fireworks' red, white, and blue glare, it would appear that public diplomacy commemorating the United States' Bicentennial, whether occurring in the Capitol's Rotunda or Concord's graveyard, had successfully buried the differences of the past, be they those of the 1770s or the 1970s. From the U.S. embassy in London came word that the Bicentennial “exceeded all expectations” in the United Kingdom. All sectors of society “from the metropolis to small villages, from the queen to small farmers” reportedly marked the occasion, stressing “the ties of history” that stretched across the Atlantic. British opinion of the United States was so high in the summer of 1976 as to “touch upon euphoria,” according to the embassy, an especially impressive achievement given how low opinion had been just a few years earlier. All told, the embassy concluded, the anniversary “significantly moved [the] UK closer to [the] US.”<sup>55</sup>

London's cable was among hundreds of cables that poured into Washington from overseas posts after July 4th, 1976. A handful of arriving telegrams described Independence Day protests of one sort or another—a conference in Algiers denouncing U.S. imperialism, an anti-American demonstration in Copenhagen, a Kuwait City editorial critical of U.S. foreign policy. Yet those cables were dwarfed by many more reporting that, overall, foreign support was much greater than even U.S. diplomats anticipated. The diplomatic community routinely observes national holidays, the Fourth of July included, with receptions, speeches, and ceremonies. U.S. embassies almost uniformly found that foreign observance of the United States' landmark 1976 anniversary far exceeded the norm, however. Attendance by host government officials at Fourth of July receptions was much higher than usual. Overseas TV and radio stations broadcast, often in prime time, Bicentennial programs prepared locally or received by satellite from the United States. The press published innumerable congratulatory editorials, stories, and special supplements. Foreign governments collectively staged thousands of well-attended commemorative events. The U.S. image consequently “enjoyed some of its best moments in quite awhile” in countries such as West Germany, where more than 4,000 commemorative events exposed “an enormous” segment of the population to “a flood of positive information about the United States,” thereby raising “esteem of the US...to the highest it has been in years.” The Bicentennial “revitalized the German-American relationship and enhanced [the] climate for U.S. public diplomacy,” the Bonn embassy concluded.<sup>56</sup>

The State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs summarized the field reports in a memorandum to the acting secretary of state, who

55. London Embassy to USIA, tel. 12929, Aug. 18, 1976, S-45-77, box 38, Special Reports, RG 306, USNA.

56. Collected by Minnich, the cables are in Foreign Countries - General, July 4, 1976 Weekend, box 2, SDBR, Entry 1118A, RG 59, USNA, including Algiers to Secretary of State, tel. 1709, July 8, 1976; Kuwait to Secretary of State, tel. 3270, July 10, 1976; Copenhagen to State Department, airgram A-63, July 16, 1976; USIA Lima to USIA, msg. 23, Aug. 26, 1976; Bonn to Secretary of State, tel. 12513, July 26, 1976; USIS Bonn to USIA, msg. 90, July 26, 1976.

learned that the Bicentennial's reception proved that there was "still a deep reserve of good will toward the United States." The commemoration successfully refocused "the attention of countless millions of people on basic American values and achievements and resulted in an overwhelming outpouring of affectionate congratulations." That was true even in Western Europe, where "relations with us have been cool" but where "the Bicentennial gave rise to indications of friendship and better relations in the future." In sum, the event "undoubtedly improved the general environment for the conduct of foreign policy. It has opened some new doors and established some new points of contact which our Missions may be able to develop successfully in the future." Kissinger sent a follow-up telegram to all U.S. diplomatic posts relaying the gist of the positive feedback received by Washington. "The outpouring of interest and affection for the United States is truly heartwarming. We should be greatly encouraged," Kissinger wrote.<sup>57</sup>

To be sure, the Bicentennial's effect seemed far less spectacular with the passage of time. A comprehensive survey of Western European public opinion taken by the USIA in July and August 1976 but not released until months later showed that the celebration had a negligible impact. Fifty-seven percent of West Germans and 38 percent of French expressed high opinions of the United States, and those figures represented noticeable jumps from 1973. But only 34 percent of Britons held the United States in high esteem, a small *drop* from the previous low recorded in 1971.<sup>58</sup> What accounted for the disparity between that study's findings and the glowing anecdotal reports that poured into Washington from abroad? After crunching the data for two years, Leo Crespi, the USIA's top analyst, finally concluded in 1978: "One can easily imagine that almost all the opinions the [field] officers heard or read were by way of offering congratulations to the US on the occasion of her 200th birthday. But birthday felicitations need not add up to fundamental favorable orientations." In other words, public affairs officers got swept up in the patriotic fervor and allowed themselves to believe that the Bicentennial had magically solved the United States' image problem, when in fact it had not. Citing the cable from London as Exhibit A, Crespi concluded that all the Fourth of July rhetoric caused officers "to view foreign public opinion through rose-colored glasses," which only accentuated their preexisting

national and professional biases that manifested in a tendency to file overoptimistic reports placing U.S. public diplomacy in the best possible light.<sup>59</sup>

By the time Crespi issued his evaluation it was clear that the Bicentennial had not solved the United States' woes. The nation's domestic malaise lingered, anti-Americanism still flourished in Iran and elsewhere, and U.S.-Western European relations slumped again on Carter's watch, demonstrating once again that even the best and brightest public diplomacy can do only so much to counteract ineffective or unpopular foreign policies. The Bicentennial, then, may not have been the quick fix that U.S. officials hoped it would be. But it did provide a rare bright spot in an otherwise dispiriting decade for the United States, a welcome moment to forget about the bad war in Vietnam and reflect instead on the good works the American Revolution performed in the world. It represented an attempt, however much in vain, by U.S. public diplomats to rebrand the United States in the eyes of the world, to recapture some of the country's moral authority, its soft power, lost in Indochina. As did 1959's American National Exhibition in Moscow, considered a crowning achievement of U.S. public diplomacy, it touched not only the Soviet Union but also France, Britain, and at least 99 other countries in part because U.S. public diplomats (wisely, one could argue) adapted what well could have been a hubristic paean to American exceptionalism—to American independence—to the more interdependent geopolitical climate developing in the 1970s. And, finally, it exemplified the operability of a kind of public diplomacy—commemorative diplomacy—that may be more common than we realize to judge by the international community's ongoing commemoration of the centennial of World War I.<sup>60</sup> For all those reasons, the Bicentennial should take its place among the most significant U.S. public diplomacy campaigns.

57. William K. Hitchcock to Acting Secretary of State Charles Robinson, July 23, 1976, box 2, SDBR, Entry 1118A, RG 59, USNA; Secretary of State to All Diplomatic Posts, tel. 192693, August 4, 1976 [electronic record], RG 59, AAD, USNA.

58. Office of Research, "European Views of the United States in Mid-1976," October 28, 1976, R-20-76, box 44, Research Reports, 1960-1999, RG 306, USNA. The report claimed that "the level of positive opinion was at or near twenty year lows." However, the study took the agency's last previous study, conducted in March and April 1972 on the heels of Nixon's "widely-applauded" trip to China, as its baseline because, as a footnote stated, comprehensive measurements were taken neither "when controversies about U.S. involvement in Viet Nam were at their peak" nor "in the period dominated by Watergate."

59. Crespi, "Trend Measurement of U.S. Standing in Foreign Public Opinion" (draft oral presentation), June 1978, S-26-78, box 39, Special Reports, RG 306, USNA; Crespi to Curt Gorder, memo, August 10, 1977, S-45-77, box 38, Special Reports, RG 306, USNA.

60. Henry Chu, "Skirmishes Flare over WWI Centennial Plans," *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 2013.