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Introduction by James McAllister

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Introduction by James McAllister, Williams College

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An eleven year old George Kennan began keeping a diary on January 1, 1916. At the very start of the diary he wrote “In this simple, little book, A record of the day I cast; So I afterwards may look back upon my happy past” (684). Due to Kennan’s remarkably lengthy and prolific career as a policymaker, diplomat, and scholar, as well as the undeniable impact he has had on the direction of American foreign policy during the Cold War, historians have long been attracted to studying his thoughts and actions. No one could ever plausibly claim that Kennan has been ‘understudied’ and his two volumes of memoirs also offered many personal insights into his inner thoughts.<sup>1</sup> However, with the publication of Frank Costigliola’s edited collection of Kennan’s diaries from the period between 1916 and 2004, there is little doubt that scholars will continue to be fascinated by the complexities of Kennan’s life and career. It is a life that was certainly not simple and, despite all of his accomplishments and honors, the diaries make it abundantly clear that happiness was never Kennan’s dominant mood.

Assessing the merits of an edited collection of diaries is not an easy task since, as Walter Hixson notes in his review, even authors of studies on Kennan like himself will not be familiar with the entire body of the diaries from which Costigliola had to make very difficult choices on what to publish. Nevertheless, he argues that “If you want to find the real Kennan, put the Long Telegram, the X-article, and the Policy Planning Staff papers aside and pick up Costigliola’s beautifully marshalled diary entries.” Thomas Schwartz concludes that “Costigliola has done an excellent job in trying to bring out the many dimensions of George Kennan and the era in which he served.”

The only possible area of disagreement among the reviewers concerns the extent to which Costigliola introduces and frames the diary entries. Hixson praises Costigliola for adopting a minimalist approach that “gives us marvelous access to Kennan while refraining from forcing himself onto the scene.” In contrast, Clayton Koppes suggests that Costigliola could have been more active in commenting on Kennan’s often ugly views concerning non-whites and non-Christians. In his view, “It is as if there is an unspoken agreement to overlook the unseemly eruptions of a beloved uncle at the Thanksgiving dinner table.” The point of contention here, of course, is not that Kennan’s views on these subjects were underemphasized in the selections made by Costigliola. As Koppes’s own review makes clear, *The Kennan Diaries* is filled with numerous entries documenting Kennan’s dismal and prejudiced reflections on a seemingly endless collection of groups.

The ongoing debate among scholars over the ‘real’ George Kennan, a debate which surely predated the publication of these diaries, will surely not be resolved any time soon. President Barack Obama may not need a George Kennan to deal with the problems of

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<sup>1</sup> George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967); and George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1950-1963* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972).

international relations, as he recently claimed<sup>2</sup>, but there is little doubt that Kennan will be an indispensable figure for historians and aspiring grand strategists. Thanks to the publication of *The Kennan Diaries*, there is little doubt that these debates will become more productive and of even greater complexity.

H-Diplo/ISSF thanks Professor Costigliola and all of the reviewers for their contributions to this important debate.

### Participants:

**Frank Costigliola** is professor of history at the University of Connecticut. His recent books include *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton, 2012); *The Kennan Diaries* (Norton, 2014); and (with Michael J. Hogan) *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941* (Cambridge, 2014). His latest publication is "'I React Intensely to Everything': Russia and the Frustrated Emotions of George F. Kennan, 1933-58," forthcoming in *The Journal of American History*.

**Walter L. Hixson** is the author most recently of *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013) and several previous works, including *The Myth of American Diplomacy: National Identity and US Foreign Policy* (Yale University Press, 2008), *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (St. Martin's Press, 1997), and *George F. Kennan: Cold War Iconoclast* (Columbia University Press, 1989). Hixson, distinguished professor of history, University of Akron, is working on a foreign policy textbook to be published next year by Routledge.

**Clayton Koppes** is professor of history at Oberlin College, where he teaches courses in U.S. history since 1877, including "US(SR): Comparative Cold Wars." He is the author (with Gregory D. Black) of *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (Free Press, 1987) and *JPL and the American Space Program* (Yale, 1982). He is writing a history of American movie censorship from the 1890s to 1968 and is the author of "The Real Ambassadors: The Cleveland Orchestra Tours the Soviet Union, 1965," in Simo Mikkonen, ed., *Art and Diplomacy: East-West Cultural Exchanges During The Cold War* (Ashgate, forthcoming).

**Thomas Schwartz** is a Professor of History and Political Science at Vanderbilt University. He is the author of the books *America's Germany: John J. McCloy and the Federal Republic of Germany* (1991) and *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (2003), and with Matthias Schulz, the edited volume, *The Strained Alliance: US-European Relations in the 1970s*, (2009). He is currently working on a biography of former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger entitled *Henry Kissinger and the Dilemmas of American Power*.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/28/opinion/what-would-kennan-say-to-obama.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/28/opinion/what-would-kennan-say-to-obama.html?_r=0)

Review by Walter Hixson, University of Akron

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In 1993 an eminent diplomatic historian grumbled, “There are too many books about George Kennan,” adding that historians (myself included) were guilty of exaggerating his importance.<sup>1</sup> Another generation has passed yet the studies on Kennan keep on coming—articles, policy assessments, biographies, and now a 700-page tome extracted from Kennan’s diaries. And let’s not forget the memoirs and autobiographies (yes, plural—when you live 101 years a single memoir or a single autobiography will not suffice).

Kennan has been called many things—a “national treasure,” an “organic conservative,” a “cold war iconoclast”<sup>2</sup>—but however we choose to see him we never seem to get our fill of Mr. X. New generations of students, journalists, and historians cannot resist him any more than we could in generations gone by.

Although I’ve sometimes criticized John Gaddis’s work and his authorized biography of Kennan, the more I think about it the more I’ve come to conclude that Gaddis was right: Kennan, in the final analysis, was a great *teacher*. I know I will never have a more stimulating teacher on U.S. foreign policy than George Frost Kennan. Going through Kennan’s papers at Princeton as a hungry young graduate student in the early 1980s I received an incomparable history lesson, daily doses of critical thinking, penetrating analysis, profound insight, and deep despair. Kennan offered, and still offers, riveting instruction in the history of American diplomacy, of Russia and the Soviet Union, and, as he put it, of “the decline of the West.”<sup>3</sup> These are the reasons we cannot stop reading and writing about him—because we learn and he makes us think.

In this superbly edited collection, Frank Costigliola has done an enormous service: making the “real George Kennan” (with apologies to Lloyd Gardner), stand up.<sup>4</sup> Costigliola faced the challenge of boiling down twelve research boxes of diary entries into a single volume. He was up to the task. In this volume I rediscovered the Kennan I had come to know through six years of close study.

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<sup>1</sup> Warren I. Cohen, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations (Vol. IV): America in the Age of Soviet Power, 1945-1991* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 264.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Hoffmann described Kennan as a “national treasure,” quoted in Walter L. Hixson, “In Memorium,” SHAFR Newsletter (March 2003); Anders Stephanson called Kennan an “organic conservative” in his *Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); see also Hixson, *George F. Kennan: Cold War Iconoclast* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Martin F. Herz, ed., *Decline of the West? George F. Kennan and His Critics* (Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Center, Georgetown University, 1978).

<sup>4</sup> Lloyd C. Gardner, “James V. Forrestal and George F. Kennan: Will the Real ‘Mr. X’ Please Stand Up,” in *Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), 270-300.

What Costigliola does so well here is to let Kennan do the talking. The editor offers a concise yet spot-on Introduction establishing that he knows his subject well. Costigliola touches on the most important themes in Kennan's life, from the lonely, motherless childhood to the seemingly ageless hypochondriac who kept on living, writing, and thinking clearly, virtually to his last day in March 2005. Costigliola effectively organizes the diary into ten chapters, isolating appropriate time periods and homing in on well-chosen phases of Kennan's life. The editor's introductions to each chapter are sparing but efficient. Costigliola thus gives us marvelous access to Kennan while refraining from forcing himself onto the scene.

While I find little to criticize in Costigliola's organization of the material, I have not gone through all the diaries myself. Hence I do not know what he chose to exclude. No doubt some difficult decisions were made. There is new and often fascinating information but little that is revelatory. For example, Kennan's musings about the sexual frustrations of monogamy and frequent bouts of lust (well into his august years) are most interesting but hardly uncommon. Whatever his drives and actions might have been (ever the Victorian he does not 'tell all' in the diaries), Kennan maintained his marriage to Annelise for nearly *seventy-four* years.

On the subject of diplomacy, Kennan repeatedly and boldly shared his iconoclastic views with the public rather than confining them to his private diary. In truth he gloried in the controversies he generated while claiming to be shocked and appalled by the reaction to them. He wrote so much about himself and his life that we have already come to know him quite well.

The diaries are thus like an exquisite after dinner cognac rather than the main course. That said, it is a fine Russian tradition to start the party by throwing back a shot of the hard stuff, thus the novice student of Kennan might well begin with the diaries and carry on from there to gain a full appreciation. The 700-pages of entries notwithstanding, the diaries often deliver mere glimmers of his often-devastating insights into what he viewed as a deeply flawed national foreign policy.

No one can sum up Kennan's thought in a few words . . . but what the hell, I will give it a try:

George F. Kennan hated communism as much as he loved Russia. He was devoted to his country, which he loyally served, but he could not stomach (literally, as he suffered for years from bleeding ulcers) its apparently unshakeable mythological conviction that it was destined to lead the world and to intervene all over it. So convinced was Kennan that America had no answers for the rest of the world (let alone for its own culture and politics) that beginning about the time of NATO's creation he frequently counseled U.S. disengagement from foreign affairs.

Kennan likened the United States of America to a brontosaurus—a large and powerful prehistoric beast, with a madly thrashing tail wreaking havoc and destruction, unfettered by the impulses emanating from its hapless little brain. It was a breathtaking conclusion for the 'father of containment' to draw, but that he did.

Kennan loved the Europe of old, Germany not the least, and he could not bear to see it divided, needlessly and for much longer than it should have been. When the division finally came to an end he thus did not find cause to celebrate. He accurately predicted that a new Russian ‘time of troubles’ as well as a revival of the cold war lay ahead. Moreover he was thoroughly disgusted by the national narcissism evidenced in the victory celebration in the United States.

Kennan abhorred American militarization, opposed most postwar U.S. interventions, and maintained a consistent and intensely spiritual revulsion to nuclear weapons—“an indignity of monstrous dimensions—offered to God!” He was absolutely certain that these weapons would one day soon deliver on their apocalyptic promise. Lest we scoff, recall that he has been right before, if inaccurate on the timing of matters. It’s not over until it’s over.

Kennan loved the outdoors, whether it was riding his old fashioned bicycle amid a haze of automobile exhaust, or working on his Pennsylvania farm, or strolling across the bucolic campus of Princeton’s Institute for Advanced Study. He thus bitterly lamented the inexorable destruction of the natural world, yet another unforgiveable human sin.

Kennan could not abide the ever more rapid pace of modern life and he had nothing but contempt for its shallowness and conveniences. Americans and other peoples were so addled by gadgets and technology that they could not hope to see the forest for the trees. Thus democracy was an illusion and only a government directed by a counsel of wise men (he did say men), replete with severe restrictions on individual freedom, offered even a glimmer of hope for the future. He did not expect it to happen, of course, but looking at the putrid cesspool of Washington politics today, can we really fault him for proposing an alternative?

Kennan was, in the final analysis, a cultural pessimist of the first order. As such he had absolutely no business articulating a new direction in national foreign policy in the wake of World War II, yet that is precisely what he did. He then spent the rest of his life trying to create space between himself and “the dreadfully hackneyed subject of ‘containment’” (651).

Kennan could not escape containment in life and he will not in death, either. Despite all the ink that has been spilt on it, the ‘doctrine of containment’ nonetheless obscures more than it illuminates about its progenitor. If you want to find the real Kennan, put the Long Telegram, the X-Article, and the Policy Planning Staff papers aside and pick up Costigliola’s beautifully marshaled diary entries. You will hold in your hands the essential source on Kennan for a long time to come.



Review by Clayton Koppes, Oberlin College

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*Beyond Containment: George F. Kennan and ‘the various non-wasps’*

George Frost Kennan has become the *beau idéal* of American diplomacy, so revered that he received a presidential shout out. Quizzed about whether he has a grand strategy for foreign policy, Barack Obama retorted in January 2014: “I don’t really even need George Kennan right now.”<sup>1</sup> Few figures in American diplomacy achieve the posthumous esteem of being singled out by a president as unnecessary. Scholars retorted that Kennan was exactly the sort of guru Obama needed, but they disagree on what he represents. Niall Ferguson, an apologist for empire, advanced the Kennan of Cold War grand strategy; Frank Costigliola, a critic of United States foreign policy, invoked the Kennan of restraint.<sup>2</sup> In the search for a usable past, Kennan has reached almost mythic proportions.<sup>3</sup>

Most assessments of Kennan focus on his role as the author of the containment doctrine and what he may or may not have meant by it, his analysis of the Soviet Union, and his later role as a critic of U.S. policy. It is time to take a broader view and examine Kennan whole. It is particularly timely to consider twin elements of his thought that have been largely overlooked: his attitudes towards non-whites and non-Christians, and his authoritarian outlook. My analysis of the diaries builds on themes sketched in my review essay on the Gaddis biography: “Solving for X: Kennan, Containment, and the Color Line.”<sup>4</sup> As a major foreign policy intellectual and influential policy advisor, Kennan is important for himself. More broadly, an assessment of his thinking brings to the fore questions of race and difference in the making of American foreign policy and how scholars have approached those questions. I argue that Kennan’s crafting of containment, approach to the Third World, and authoritarian attitudes in the United States are linked to his hierarchical view of peoples, which, in turn, reflect a deeply felt personal need for order. In a more complete perspective, Kennan’s legacy takes on a darker hue, and his relevance to Obama’s multi-cultural America and a post-colonial world recedes.

Two recent major works make it possible to assess Kennan more completely. In 2011 John Lewis Gaddis published his Pulitzer Prize-winning, but not uncontroversial, *George F.*

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<sup>1</sup> Obama quoted in David Remnick, “Going the Distance,” *The New Yorker*, Jan. 27, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Costigliola, “What Would Kennan Say to Obama?” *New York Times*, Feb. 27, 2014; Ferguson quoted in Bernie Quigley, “George Kennan on the decline of American power,” *The Hill*, Feb. 28, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> This essay is based on the voluminous published sources by and about Kennan; I have not attempted to evaluate the published diaries in comparison with the manuscript originals. I wish to acknowledge the helpful comments from Phyllis Bixler, Marko Dumancic, Gary Reichard, James Siekmeier, and Nicholas Warner in the preparation of this essay.

<sup>4</sup> Clayton R. Koppes, “Solving for X: Kennan, Containment, and the Color Line,” *Pacific Historical Review*, 82 (February 2013), 95-118.

*Kennan: An American Life*.<sup>5</sup> Gaddis made extensive use of Kennan's diaries, which are an invaluable source for understanding the revered diplomat. The publication of *The Kennan Diaries*, ably edited by Frank Costigliola, expands the enormous body of published Kennan materials. Gaddis finds the diaries the most sustained act of self-examination since Henry Adams. They offer abundant evidence of Kennan's often melancholic, frequently dyspeptic, sometimes apocalyptic, state of mind. Readers may come to varying opinions about whether they are heavier on self-analysis or self-justification. The diaries need to be read as an extended performative act in Kennan's bid for immortality.<sup>6</sup>

As a young diplomat, he dreamed of making "the very pillars of the State Department tremble as I walked through the ringing corridors."<sup>7</sup> This diary entry captures his vanity and desire for influence. After various embassy positions in Europe, he served as head of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff from 1947 to 1949. He held two ambassadorships – Moscow in 1952, which was disastrous; and Belgrade from 1961 to 1963, which was largely unhappy. His legacy flows from his pen, in government service and outside. From 1952 until his death in 2005, he made a new career as a historian, public intellectual, memoirist, and diarist. Without that remarkable half-century of work, he would be regarded as an important, but secondary, figure in Cold War diplomacy. He would not be a candidate for the distinction of being "America's leading Cold War diplomat" or "a nation's conscience."<sup>8</sup> Kennan thirsted for power but had to be content with being a prophet.

Reflecting their positions on American foreign policy, scholars divide on whether to emphasize Kennan in power or as prophet. Gaddis argues that containment "illuminated the path" that led the international system away from "self-destruction" to an era that "removed the danger of great-power war, revived democracy and capitalism, and thereby enhanced the prospects for liberty beyond what they ever before had been."<sup>9</sup> Contra Gaddis, Costigliola once described Kennan's "Long Telegram" of 1946, which made him a celebrity within the government, as a "phantasmagorical" document. Costigliola's preferred Kennan is skeptical of "any global mission" and advances a "cautious, realistic,

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<sup>5</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> George F. Kennan, Frank Costigliola, ed., *The Kennan Diaries* (New York, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Kennan quoted in Costigliola's introduction to *The Kennan Diaries*, p. xxxii. Later references to the diaries will be made in the text.

<sup>8</sup> The appellation of "leading Cold War diplomat" appears on the book jacket of *The Kennan Diaries*. John Lukacs, a close friend, calls him "a nation's conscience" in *George Kennan: A Study of Character* (New Haven, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 694.



and honorable foreign policy.”<sup>10</sup> Both Costigliola and Gaddis recognize Kennan’s belief that the United States should become “a model by perfecting its own institutions.”<sup>11</sup>

Scholars have been reluctant to examine Kennan’s views of people of color and have approached accusations of anti-Semitism gingerly. For those who valorize Kennan as a historical figure and, even more, those who see him as a guide to the present, his views on people of color are often unacknowledged. Fareed Zakaria is one of the few reviewers of the diaries to engage frontally with what he terms Kennan’s racism. He points out that the diplomat’s remarks about people of color “always have a sharp and derisory edge.”<sup>12</sup> Kennan did not hide his views; although they come out more strongly in the diaries, they surfaced in his writing and some public statements. Gaddis acknowledges that Kennan’s views about African Americans at times echoed those of antebellum plantation owners and seemed to endorse Afrikaners’ policy of separate development. David Mayers was one of the first scholars to ponder Kennan’s views about people of the Third World and Jews. Walter Hixson and Anders Stephanson have noted Kennan’s views in chapters that tend to stand apart from Kennan’s overall outlook. Nicholas Thompson addresses suspicions of anti-Semitism. Fourteen reviewers assessed the Gaddis biography in *Journal of Cold War Studies* and H-Diplo in more than one hundred pages but gave Kennan’s views of non-whites and non-Christians only a few lines. In his evocative, admiring introduction to the diaries, Costigliola avoids the subject.<sup>13</sup> It is as if there is an unspoken agreement to overlook the unseemly eruptions of a beloved uncle at the Thanksgiving dinner table. The diaries make this evasion untenable.

To understand Kennan’s hierarchy of peoples, begin with the North Sea. He thought the countries lapped by this frigid ocean represented the apogee of civilization. The only hope for civilization, he wrote in 1982, came “under the guidance of a body politic made up of people heirs to the traditions and habits, the capacities for self-restraint, and self-discipline and tolerance that have developed historically, in close association with the Christian faith, in and around the shores of the North Sea.” Admiring their “firmly disciplined society,” he ranked the British as “the greatest of peoples of post-fifteenth century Europe – this, at least, in their literary and scholarly upper-class” (668). The British crown was the “inimitable civilizational ideal” (587). Kennan was fond of ‘national character’ arguments, often linked to a sort of climate determinism. His wife, Annelise Sorensen, was Norwegian,

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<sup>10</sup> Costigliola, *Roosevelt’s Lost Alliance: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton, 2012), 412.

<sup>11</sup> Costigliola, “Introduction,” xxv, xxvi.

<sup>12</sup> Fareed Zakaria review of Kennan diaries, *New York Times Books Review*, Feb. 21, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 605; David Mayers, *George F. Kennan and the Dilemmas of US Foreign Policy* (New York, 1988), esp. chap. 11; Walter Hixson, *George F. Kennan: Cold War Iconoclast* (New York, 1989); Anders Stephanson, *Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989); Nicholas Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War* (New York, 2009); *Journal of Cold War Studies*, XV (issue 4, 2013), 153-245; H-diplo, XIII (April 16, 2012), 2-46.

and they usually spent summers in Norway. Outside Europe's northern orbit, he grew uncomfortable. Traveling to Italy in 1984 at his wife's behest, he found its "contemporary inhabitants . . . less interesting and less attractive" than those of any great European country. (554) Order, restraint, discipline – these are key concepts for Kennan. He found them to be increasingly fragile as he encounters "emotional" peoples in the global South.

In March 1950, Kennan made a long trip to Latin America. His extensive observations reveal fundamental elements of his attitudes and policy recommendations. Climatic determinism and national character arguments received full play. Nowhere else, he said, "have nature and human behavior . . . combined to produce a more wretched and hopeless environment for human life." He found Latin Americans "emotional" and "seething with hatred and indignation about this or that," living in a world of "anarchical make-believe," and "conspicuously lacking" in "the more constructive virtues" (242-3). Mexicans were physically unattractive (he accurately noted the health problems that beset many poorer Mexicans) and lacked the indispensable quality of restraint. Mexico City was "disturbed, sultry, and menacing," the economy of Caracas was "feverish" and "debauched," and Rio de Janeiro was "noisy" and "repulsive." Any redeeming qualities among Latin Americans could be traced to their European colonizers. Brazilians had acquired a "gentleness" from their "humane and cosmopolitan" Portuguese "founding fathers" (245-6). He applauded Trinidadians' "relaxation and self-respect and placidity," which he attributed to British rule, in contrast to the "violent characteristics" of people colonized by Spain. (345) Racial characteristics troubled him, particularly intermarriage. Uruguayans were "spared the racial problem" and benefitted from the Italian influence "which seems so healthy and constructive for South American cultures" (246). "Extensive intermarriage," particularly with blacks, "produced other unfortunate results" that doomed human progress. He was relieved to land in Miami, where he was greeted by Americans' "basic reliability and decency and common sense" (246). His observations might be written off as a particularly nasty case of culture shock, except for the perdurance of such attitudes across time and place.<sup>14</sup>

Kennan assembled his policy recommendations in a prolix document (of 25 printed pages) that combined his enduring themes – anticommunism, the special status of the United States, avoiding moral judgment about other regimes, and a 'realist' approach to foreign policy. Kennan grounded his approach in the assertion that the United States was a great power with "our world responsibility."<sup>15</sup> Smaller countries should respect U.S. interests, whether they liked them or not. In effect, the U.S. exercised a trusteeship for the world. He was preoccupied with preventing communist inroads in the hemisphere, although he took some comfort in Latin American communists' "indiscipline" by contrast with their

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<sup>14</sup> Quotations that do not appear in the diaries are from Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 381-86, and "Memorandum by the Counselor of the Department (Kennan) to the Secretary of State" in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 2: The United Nations, The Western Hemisphere 1950* (Washington, 1976), 601 (hereafter "Memorandum by the Counselor.")

<sup>15</sup> "Memorandum by the Counselor," *FRUS*, 601.

European counterparts. He fused containment (although he did not use that term) with the Monroe Doctrine, for he saw President Monroe and his successors as preventing “precisely that which the communists are now attempting to achieve.” Kennan thought Washington should tell Latin Americans that the U.S. had protected their independence for a century and intended to continue to do so. The U.S. should offer “what perhaps no great power has ever held out to neighboring smaller powers” – respect for their sovereignty and renunciation of the use of force, but only so long as those countries did not become “the seats of dangerous intrigues against us.”<sup>16</sup> Skeptical of multilateralism, he thought the U.S. should retain the right of unilateral action. The U.S. should “desist from all sorts of moralizing” about Latin American governments. “As Gibbon might have said,” it was better “to remain ignorant.” Kennan recognized with equanimity that “harsh governmental measures of repression may be the only answer.” He doubted U.S. institutions were applicable to “these confused and unhappy societies” to the south. While he thought the U.S. should set an example, its experience was mostly “unique” and probably had little use in Latin American countries, who had little aptitude for democracy. He prescribed “self-confident detachment,” based in the confidence that Latin Americans needed the U.S. more than Washington needed them, and (channeling the Italian philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli) it was better “to be respected than to be liked or understood.”<sup>17</sup> Gaddis Smith terms this the “Kennan Corollary” – a Cold War updating of the Roosevelt Corollary.<sup>18</sup>

He subsequently appreciated President John F. Kennedy’s handling of the Cuban missile crisis. Kennan justified the actions of the president, whom he admired, as an expression of the Monroe Doctrine and considered Kennedy’s performance “masterful.” (Kennedy consulted Kennan a remarkable fourteen times while he was president, although not during the Cuban missile crisis.) Perhaps Kennan saw Kennedy’s stance as a nuclear-tipped codicil to the Kennan Corollary. For scholars such as Barton Bernstein, the diplomat’s stance on the missile crisis raises broader questions about Kennan’s attitudes towards nuclear weapons when he was in government service.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “Memorandum by the Counselor,” *FRUS*, 621.

<sup>17</sup> “Memorandum by the Counselor,” *FRUS*, 602, 603, 606, 607, 615-18, 621-23.

<sup>18</sup> Gaddis Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine* (New York, 1994), 73; see also Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (New York, 2012), 24-25. After quoting some of the milder passages from his memorandum, Kennan in his memoirs added an exculpatory paragraph “lest a false impression be created” about his views on “the tragic element in Latin American civilization.” Latin Americans were not developing nuclear weapons and, as “the European motherlands” and the United States abandoned the values he treasured, might prove to be “the last repository and custodian of humane Christian values.” He began to appreciate “the human ego” in “its Latin American manifestations: spontaneous, uninhibited, and full-throated.” Latin Americans’ emotionality was now dressed in a more positive guise. See Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950* (New York, 1967), 483.

<sup>19</sup> Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, p. 566; Barton Bernstein, “Analyzing and Assessing Gaddis’s Kennan Biography: Questionable Interpretations and Unpursued Evidence and Issues,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, XV (2013), 176.

Some members of the Policy Planning Staff found Kennan's document, which was classified secret, to be distasteful. Dean Acheson limited its circulation in the State Department. To Latin Americans, Kennan's memorandum epitomized those aspects of Washington's policy they neither liked nor respected. Visiting the United States in 1989, President Carlos Andrés Pérez of Venezuela cited Kennan's memorandum (by then declassified) as a prime example of U.S. ignorance and arrogance.<sup>20</sup>

Kennan's Latin American memo helps place some of his longstanding views in context, in particular his attitudes towards intervention in other countries. In his hierarchical views of nations, the great powers had pride of place; they arranged the world. Smaller countries were important not for themselves but for how they affected the strategic balance of the super powers. The United States, upholding its unique role as practically a guarantor of civilization, retained the right of unilateral action. If Third-World countries rebuffed America's "generosity and helpfulness," Washington should retreat to "withdrawal and long silence" (445). Even Third World leaders thought this position a fantasy. When Kennan laid it out to Julius Nyerere in Dar es Salaam in 1967, the Tanzanian President responded with "high amusement." With the savvy of someone who had led his country to independence, Nyerere said the U.S. could not withdraw from Africa "even if it wished to do so." (446) Kennan's skepticism about U.S. intervention (which was by no means consistent) stemmed in part from his sense that formerly colonized peoples did not show the deference the imperial powers were owed.

Although 'national character' arguments did not loom as large for Kennan when he discussed East Asians, he was deeply concerned about maintaining American influence in Asia in the late 1940s and 50s. The erosion of Western influence in Indonesia troubled him in the late 1940s. He wholeheartedly endorsed sending American troops to Korea in June 1950, although he later expressed some reservations about moving troops beyond the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. He was particularly concerned that the U.S. was not providing enough support for Taiwan. He considered the People's Republic of China's military intervention in Korea "an affront of the greatest magnitude" and said "we owe China nothing but a lesson." He applied the familiar trope of irrationality to American adversaries, notably Mao Zedong and the other leaders of the People's Republic of China. They were "excited, irresponsible people" who could not be relied on. (291) Kennan eventually favored a back-channel approach to the Soviet Union as a step toward a Korean armistice. When Hamilton Fish Armstrong, editor of *Foreign Affairs*, interpreted U.S. policy towards East Asia in 1950 as the application of containment to that region, Kennan did not dissent. (295) Although at times he seemed to accept Viet Minh control of all of Vietnam, believing the French were

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<sup>20</sup> Carlos Andrés Pérez, "The Latin American Debt Crisis," Henry E. and Nancy Horton Bartels World Affairs Lecture, Cornell University, Sept. 28, 1989. I am indebted to James Siekmeier for directing me to Perez's remarks.

fighting a futile war, he nonetheless judged that American military action in Korea had “saved Southeast Asia.” (296) <sup>21</sup>

When the American war in Vietnam failed to preserve those beachheads, Kennan eventually came out in opposition to President Lyndon Johnson’s continuing escalation. In his celebrated testimony before Congress in 1966, Kennan did not call for immediate withdrawal, only for a pullback to enclaves (General James Gavin’s discredited theory). Barton Bernstein notes that Kennan did not criticize the American war as imperialistic;<sup>22</sup> given his views of empire, this would have been out of character. Nor did the father of containment want his doctrine to be associated with a losing war. He denied containment’s paternity for the war; others detected a family resemblance.

Kennan synthesized his views about the Third World in a bleak *tour d’horizon* in 1952. He employed many of the same tropes he used in discussing Latin America. He saw opposition to the West as “irrational” and “erratic,” the product of a “childish” and “fanatical” desire to assert self-importance. “Local popular leaders” could not discuss issues “in calm and rational terms.” He told Acheson and fellow Sovietologist Charles Bohlen: Leadership rested on “the bizarre frames” of “these dreadful characters” like “an old dress suit on a wooden scarecrow.” (306) Their “hysterical and childish nationalism” was almost as bad as these nations’ “going communist.” Kennan was prepared to write off much of the Third World, but with an important proviso: if the West needed critical facilities, such as oil fields, and had enjoyed long use of them, the West should take steps to control them “by force of arms, if need be” (302-3). He called for Western control of places like Abadan and Suez, which were crucial for the West but important to the locals only for their “artificially inflamed” *amour propre*. (307) In 1952, Kennan described statements by Iran’s leader Mohammad Mossadegh as “Bolshevik in tone, spirit and content,” not to mention defiled by “debasement and medievalism.”<sup>23</sup> In 1956 Kennan criticized President Dwight Eisenhower for selling out the British and French over Suez. The diplomat persistently objected to other nations’ control of oil fields, whether in Venezuela or in the Middle East. All that mattered in these places was “military strength, backed by the resolution to use it.”<sup>24</sup>

Trips to Africa confirmed his sense that races should be kept separate, that blacks lacked the capacity for self-government, and that majority African rule imperiled whites. He liked Afrikaners’ humor, religiosity, and vigor. He confessed: “I have a soft spot in my mind for

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<sup>21</sup> Wilson Miscamble, *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy, 1947-1989* (Princeton, 1992), 274-77. See also Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam* (New York, 2012), 221.

<sup>22</sup> Barton Bernstein, “Analyzing and Assessing Gaddis’s Kennan Biography: Questionable Interpretations and Unpursued Evidence and Issues,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, XV (2013), 176.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Mayers, *George F. Kennan and the Dilemmas of US Foreign Policy*, 253-54, and Stephanson, *Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy*, 168.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Mayers, *George F. Kennan and the Dilemmas of US Foreign Policy*, 253-54



apartheid, not as practiced in South Africa but as a concept.”<sup>25</sup> He disliked apartheid’s harsher humiliations and came to see it as outmoded. But he favored continuing a policy of “separate but equal” without “forced homogenization.” (447) Africans’ aspirations left him cold. “So little do I see the justification for these demands, so strange are they to my own way of thinking, that I have to ask myself whether I have not missed something,” he wrote in 1986. (570) Nonetheless he remained steadfast in his views. When Nelson Mandela, the leader of the African National Congress, was released from prison in 1990, Kennan said he knew of “no pearls of wisdom that have fallen from his lips, or any other evidences of great nobility or high statesmanlike qualities on his part.” (606) Mandela’s address before Congress rekindled his aversion to mixing foreign policy and domestic politics. Mandela’s speech would be simply an occasion “to curry favor with black voters . . . just another manifestation of American domestic political posturing.” (606-7). Unlike North Sea peoples, the African majority lacked the “civic self-discipline,” sense of history, and “understanding for the reality of tragedy” necessary for self-government. (571) He saw only disaster in the “mingling of the races,” particularly for white South Africans who would be dominated “by a large African majority” (607). In his alarm over what blacks might do to whites, he failed to consider what whites had done to blacks. He could not imagine that Mandela and his colleagues, their philosophy honed by imprisonment and the tragedy of apartheid, were capable of statesmanship and generosity towards their oppressors.

Backward peoples could be redeemed by a benign imperialism, especially as exercised by the British. Kennan told an English audience in 1957 that empire imposed not “the faintest moral responsibility”; imperialism was “simply a stage of history(.) . . . a natural and inevitable response to certain demands and stimuli of the age.” In Wisconsin (frigid like North Sea countries), his ancestors had made the land productive, unlike the “lazy, violent, improvident people” of the colonized South. <sup>26</sup> Vacationing on Barbados in March 1988, he sensed an imperial idyll. The British “shaped the lives of what must have been as little as two or three generations back a population of African slaves,” he said. (587) The British converted them to Anglicanism, “bequeathed to them” systems of education and justice, and “taught them cricket to absorb as much as possible of the old Adam in the men.” Eventually the British, though retaining a governor general, “turned them loose, to govern themselves” (587).

Is this cricket? Kennan failed to note that the British did not simply happen upon Barbadians in a condition of servitude but began “shaping their lives” by enslaving Africans and transporting them to the island. Barbadians were “turned loose” only after fighting for their freedom – a struggle that included slave revolts, such as that of 1816, which the British suppressed with heavy loss of life, and deadly anti-British riots in the 1930s. For Kennan, British tutelage brought progress to Barbadians, from cricket to self-government.

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Hixson, *Cold War Iconoclast*, 251.

<sup>26</sup> George F. Kennan, *Russia, the Atom, and the West* (New York, 1957), 170; George F. Kennan, *The Cloud of Danger* (New York), 74.



Kennan was continually frustrated that Third-World peoples saw the United States as “imperialists or neo-colonialists.” He concluded in 1996 that most of Latin America, Africa, and southern Asia displayed “exploitative attitudes towards us,” had no respect for the U.S. position in the world, and were “devoid of any gratitude or appreciation for what we may give them” (653). He knew from reading Edward Gibbon’s classic account of the demise of the Roman empire that empires could not indefinitely rule people against their will – a lesson he applied to the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe. But Kennan was little interested in acquiring local knowledge; he often derided local inhabitants as people without history. If one of the critiques of U.S. foreign policy has been its failure to comprehend indigenous cultures, Kennan did not offer guidance. His focus remained on the great powers.

His concerns about the threats represented by people of color found a parallel in the United States, but with the difference that the problems he saw could not be ignored. Unchecked immigration, marriage between races, and malign cultural influences were destroying his vision of the country. Kennan’s idea of perfecting American institutions did not extend to support for the ‘rights revolution’ of the 1940s onward. It seems, rather, to have heightened his alarm. In 1951 he visited California (a state he always disliked) and sensed a bleak future because the state was becoming “a Latin American country.” If democracy survived in the Golden State, it would be based on “the interaction of an emotional populace and a stirring, heroic type of popular leader.”<sup>27</sup> Oppressed by another visit to California in 1978, he believed the United States was losing its British-derived constitution and “political ideals.” He wanted to shear off the country’s “Latin fringe” of California, Texas, and Florida. The “Latin, Levantine, African, and Oriental elements” were turning the country into “a vast polyglot mass . . . one huge pool of indistinguishable mediocracy and drabness” (507-8).

His alarm about environmental degradation (for which he was often praised) had a strongly racial tinge. In 1982 he wrote that the United States, though 20 percent overpopulated, had at least stabilized its birth rate. “It is the others -- the Mediterraneans, the Moslems, the Latinos, the various non-WASPS of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the not-quite-3<sup>rd</sup> worlds – who are destroying civilization with their proliferation, our civilization as well as theirs” (544). In 1984 he proposed to effectively end immigration to the United States through “greatly strengthened” border controls. (555)

Controlling the country’s African American population perennially troubled him. Positive interactions with black people surprised and pleased him, as when a taxi driver rang his doorbell and returned an umbrella that had been forgotten in the car.<sup>28</sup> Kennan mused in 1938 that the vote should be taken away from African Americans, believing that would encourage white benevolence towards blacks; as the results of denying voting rights had already demonstrated, it was perverse to imagine benevolence would flow from an act of

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<sup>27</sup> George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950* (New York, 1972), 82-83.

<sup>28</sup> Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove*, 239.

discrimination. (He also wanted to take the franchise away from “non-professional women” and from naturalized citizens, whom he described as “bewildered semi-digested new arrivals.”) Believing the African American “neither understands nor respects” the American system and thus could not compete, he proposed measures to restrict the black population to rural areas. In a public address in 1968 he said authorities had shown “an excess of tolerance” in dealing with urban riots and proposed locking offenders in special jails beyond the reach of the press and the courts.<sup>29</sup> In 1982 he imagined reclaiming land in order to develop a “semi-rural, semi-industrial form of life” for “the redundant metropolitan ghetto populations” (556).

Kennan’s concern about maintaining a homogeneous population extended to Jews, whom he often viewed with stereotypical suspicion. Nicholas Thompson notes that he usually painted Jews in “dark, shadowy colors.”<sup>30</sup> In 1943, upon his return from Nazi Germany, he issued a stark warning about “the Jewish problem in our country” in a letter to his sister. When a society found itself “bewildered with Jewish penetration,” he said, certain “primitive” feelings were bound to be aroused. “Jewish methods of competition . . . and Jewish pressure” disturbed the usual American modes of conduct. If Jews “congregated in large numbers within the body of a non-Oriental people,” he said, they inevitably touched off reactions that rendered them “a social problem.” Jews should not be blamed for that; it was simply the working of history. But failing to face the problem “represents, after a fashion, a triumph for Hitler,” he told his sister. He concluded: “To blind ourselves to the problem . . . is the beginning of the same thing.”<sup>31</sup>

As a diplomat in Riga, Prague, and Berlin in the 1930s and early 1940s, he encountered Jews who were trying to escape to the United States. He appears to have assisted some with immigration matters. On another occasion, when a Jewish immigration applicant was turned away at the Prague embassy in 1939, Kennan said he decided “to face the music and go home.” Kennan reacted with fury when the State Department considered giving priority to some Jewish refugees in 1942 for a voyage home instead of to him and his fellow diplomats interned in Germany. He blamed his close call on a perpetual nemesis – American Congressmen who were trying “to please individual constituents.”<sup>32</sup> In 1942 he would not have known about the Holocaust, but Nazi Germany’s anti-Semitic policies would have been evident.

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<sup>29</sup> Gaddis, 116, 611; Ben C. Wright, “George F. Kennan: Scholar-Diplomat, 1926-1946” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin at Madison, 1972), pp. 216-221; George F. Kennan, *After Vietnam: An Address by the Honorable George F. Kennan on the occasion of the celebration of the Prelude to Independence at the eighteenth-century Capitol Williamsburg, Virginia* (Williamsburg, Va., 1968), 9.

<sup>30</sup> Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove*, 238.

<sup>31</sup> Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove*, 238.

<sup>32</sup> Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove*, 237.

Suspensions of anti-Semitism and his avoidance of the issue while a diplomat quietly haunted his reputation in later years. He describes a murky episode in 1989 when “the very Jewish firm of Straus & Farrar” (593) withdrew from a proposal to publish his diaries from the 1930s. He thought the firm reached that decision because he did not criticize the Nazis in his diaries – a stance he thought would have been futile at the time. “I have never been anti-Semitic,” Kennan said, “but I must admit that this episode brought me as close as I have ever been to becoming one (sic).” (594) His silence on the issue continued. “He knew what was going on,” said his Jewish son-in-law Walter Pozen. “And he never wrote a word about it; he never wrote a single word about it.”<sup>33</sup>

How Kennan’s attitudes towards Jews affected his policy positions invites analysis. In 1948 he, along with many fellow diplomats, opposed U.S. recognition of the state of Israel. Subsequently he often criticized the intensity of U.S. support for Israel, along with offering more general critiques of Middle Eastern policy. This, according to him, was another case of domestic politics overwhelming national interest. (620)

To Kennan, “any white Christian from a northern climate was hardworking, noble, and admirable,” says Thompson.<sup>34</sup> Almost. They fared better than most in Kennan’s hierarchy of peoples, but even they were often relegated to a status similar to what the ill-tempered American journalist H. L. Mencken called the ‘booboisie.’ Kennan regularly chastised them for all manner of shortcomings – environmental degradation, reliance on automobiles, materialism, ignorance, loose morals, pornography. Who could not agree with some of these laments? But lacking empathy, he attributed these societal shortcomings to individuals’ character flaws, failing to reflect on the forces that fed these trends or the possibility that ordinary people’s desires may have been different from his but no less legitimate. David Remnick acknowledges Kennan’s “chilly, and chilling, brand of elitism.”<sup>35</sup> John Lukacs, who deeply admired Kennan, conceded his views of people were often “caricatures” and failed to account for others’ sincerity.<sup>36</sup> Kennan knew some policies he favored would require “the most ferocious dictatorship,” so he confined some of these ideas to his diary. He candidly proposed a presidentially appointed “council of state” to help raise policy making above popular passions. He justified these measures with his belief that “the ‘people’ haven’t the faintest idea what is good for them” (556).

Spontaneous popular action troubled him even when it brought to fruition what might have been his apotheosis – the collapse of communism and Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. He may have disliked the Cold War-era regimes in Eastern Europe, but they kept order. He apparently did not engage with Eastern European intellectuals. Like his fellow

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<sup>33</sup> Pozen quoted in Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove*, 239.

<sup>34</sup> Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove*, 237.

<sup>35</sup> David Remnick, “Watching the Eclipse,” *The New Yorker*, Aug. 11 and 18, 2014, 52.

<sup>36</sup> Lukacs, *George F. Kennan*, 132.

foreign-policy realist Henry Kissinger, he ridiculed the press and politicians for lionizing Andrei Sakharov and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Soviet dissidents, who were “largely Jewish,” raised the old problem of interfering in other countries’ internal affairs. (542) Kennan wisely distrusted American ambitions to remake other societies, but this outlook bled into an innate skepticism about human rights. He scoffed at the 1975 Helsinki Declaration of Human Rights, little realizing how useful Eastern Europeans would find it for cracking Soviet control. (To be sure, the Helsinki Declaration’s utility surprised many other policy makers, including Leonid Brezhnev.) In 1989 when the world was transfixed watching the Berlin Wall come down and communism shatter across Eastern Europe, Kennan found the events “of minor interest to me” (602). He spent his time mostly watching tennis on television.

He had predicted it all in the late 1940s, he said. Now it was happening too fast and for the wrong reasons. Europe was being convulsed by “spontaneous outbreaks of impulse on the part of poorly informed and unreflective people,” he said. “There is no longer any sort of central control over the march of events in Europe” (613). German unification – the cornerstone of his rearrangement of Cold War Europe in the 1950s -- should wait for a decade while security arrangements were perfected. Mistrusting popular action, Kennan wanted containment to be unwound in a more stately saraband.

By 1989 the world he had known and the order it provided was disintegrating. The imperial world with its racial hierarchies had long since disappeared, except for South Africa, though apartheid was living on borrowed time. In the United States, the racial subordination he had known had been upended. Now the bipolar Cold War, which for all its brinkmanship had brought a certain order, was giving way. Containment was becoming a historical artifact.

Or perhaps containment took on new meaning as Eastern European countries sought shelter under the NATO umbrella in the 1990s. He tried to rally opposition to NATO’s expansion because he thought it took advantage of a temporarily weakened Russia and would prove to be provocative.<sup>37</sup> Great power relations were primary. Always skeptical of NATO, he had wanted to keep it strictly *North* Atlantic; he had opposed admitting Italy and Turkey. In his celebrated, controversial Reith lectures in 1957, he had advocated a unified, demilitarized Germany with little attention to German opinion; he was vigorously denounced in the *Bundestag*. In the 1990s, the wishes of smaller countries, which had chafed under Soviet domination and felt ill served by containment, were secondary.

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<sup>37</sup> Suggestive of Kennan’s appeal across the ideological spectrum, Katrina vanden Heuvel, editor of *The Nation*, repeats his strictures of 1998 against NATO expansion and fears for a new Cold War. See *Washington Post*, Sept. 9, 2014. Remnick notes that “every diplomat and scholar who thinks about Russia thinks about Kennan.” See Remnick, “Watching the Eclipse,” *The New Yorker*, Aug. 11 and 18, 2014, 52.

The sources of Kennan's worldview invite speculation. He was, of course, a man of his times, and his views were once widely held, although they were never universal.<sup>38</sup> Many people changed their outlook in the crucible of the African American freedom movement and the surge of liberation from imperial rule in the Third World. Ironically, engagement with political processes – the very pressures that Kennan saw as polluting decision making – caused many policy makers to refine their views, whether because of expediency or conviction. He did not bend.

The intensity of Kennan's hierarchical views, which go beyond the usual framework of policy judgments, appears to reflect deeply felt personal needs. Isaiah Berlin, the British philosopher and man of affairs, who knew him well, said: "All that he has written – his attitudes, his influences, springs from his inner personality, more so than in the case of more . . . conventional people."<sup>39</sup> Robert Jervis has noted a strong connection between Kennan's personal demons and his approach to policy.<sup>40</sup> Costigliola, who has called for a closer examination of how personal lives affect political constructs, might have used the diaries to push further in his introduction.<sup>41</sup> Scholars inevitably are drawn to considering whether the tragic events of Kennan's childhood shaped his melancholic personality. His birth mother died when he was two months old; a distant father and disagreeable older women in the house did not compensate.

The diaries transmit his depression, which mounted later in life. When he was busy in government service, particularly at the Policy Planning Staff, the tone is that of a busy, influential man happily going about very serious work. Crises may have been grave, particularly during the Korean War, and he fears World War III may be imminent, but when he was in government service the diaries do not have the same self-pitying tone evident in later years. The later diaries convey recurrent anxiety about his standing in an elite hierarchy and his thirst for reassurance. Miserable as an undergraduate at Princeton, the young man from Milwaukee felt like an outsider. Presidents and secretaries of state who consulted him got high marks, whether or not they followed his advice. He basked in Kissinger's approval and said, "Henry understands my views better than anyone at State ever has."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Acheson referred to Detroit as "the dark city" and counseled the Kennedy administration not "to pander to the dark and delirious continent of Africa." Quoted in Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, 2001), 152.

<sup>39</sup> Berlin quoted in Costigliola, "Introduction," xxxii.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Jervis review of Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, in H-diplo.

<sup>41</sup> Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliance*.

<sup>42</sup> Kennan quoted in Nicholas Thompson, "Kissinger, Kennan, and Cain," *The New Yorker* (online blog), Nov. 15, 2011.

Fear of disorder was ever present. Kennan longed for an earlier period of history, describing himself as a man of the eighteenth century. He may not have meant this literally but it conveyed his sensibility. In the eighteenth century of his imagination, the passions were restrained by the elite. Foreign policy was made in perfumed chanceries, boundaries were redrawn at will, and countries appeared and disappeared at the whim of the great powers. Authoritarian governments controlled the unruly populace. Kennan chose German chancellor Otto von Bismarck's European order for his last major historical work. As he grew older, Kennan's Presbyterian faith reinforced his sense of human sinfulness. He found Afrikaners compatible partly because they, too, were steeped in Calvinism. He did not absorb the egalitarianism of the Gospels or, still less, liberation theology. His was not a religion of ecstasy but of order and control.<sup>43</sup>

Kennan valorized discipline and self-restraint – stereotypically manly virtues. To the surprise of some reviewers, the diaries include occasional sexual fantasies (the diaries are ambiguous on the line between fantasy and consummation). Although he recognized in younger years the dynamism that sex conveyed, he increasingly feared that sex brought destruction. “It is, above all, in conflict with civilization,” he said, “with order, with reason, even with human dignity” (610). Love might temporarily relieve sex of “its sordidness.” But primarily “this urge remains the chaotic, anarchic force . . . leaving everywhere a trail of shame and frustration in its path” (611). The chaos he feared in 1989 was generated in part by Eastern Europeans' desire to indulge themselves “in the fleshpots of the West.”<sup>44</sup> By 1994 he saw the U.S. in the grip of “unrestrained decadence” (637). The latest expression was the “weird” attempt “to claim for homosexuality the status of a “proud, noble, and promising way of life” (637).

Kennan used the term “penetration” with its unmistakable sexual overtones in writing about the threats he saw from the Soviet Union in the 1940s and from Jews in the United States in 1943.<sup>45</sup> Immigrants who are people of color penetrate U.S. borders. Sex and race combine to present the fearsome prospect of racial mixing. Kennan may not always use the term containment, but the imagery of controlling threats is ever present. Kennan's containment may reflect not only a political calculus but a personal imperative.

The Kennan that emerges from the diaries, amplified by his writing and other documents, is not only conservative (as many commentators have noted) but authoritarian, scarred by prejudice toward those who are non-white and non-Christian, and at best inconsistent about the use of force abroad. Is such a figure still valuable in the search for a usable past?

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<sup>43</sup> On Kennan and religion, see James C. Wallace, “Contained? The Religious Life of George F. Kennan and Its Influence,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, XV (2013), 196-215. Wallace makes the distinction that Kennan was a Presbyterian but not a strict Calvinist.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 675.

<sup>45</sup> Costigliola notes Kennan's suggestive use of the word “penetration” in his “‘Unceasing Pressure for Penetration’: Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan's Formation of the Cold War,” *Journal of American History*, 83 (March 1997), 1309-39.



His most enduring legacy is his prophetic appeal in later years to pull back from nuclear madness. He rightly cautioned the West, and particularly Americans, against a smug triumphalism after 1989, although that message was clouded by his alienation from the United States, which stemmed to a significant degree from his dismay at his “polyglot” country. (507) Even as he branded the policy that defined an age – containment – he stood at odds with the thrust of history. Containment offered an answer, though still a highly contested one, to the question of how to deal with the Soviet Union after World War II. Kennan did not know how to address the other great question confronting postwar American foreign policy – how to approach the Third World and people of color. He did not understand that his country’s ‘rights revolution’ from the 1940s onward was critical for democracy at home and to American leadership abroad – and that this endeavor offered a powerful, if incomplete, example to the rest of the world. He failed to grasp what drove ordinary people, and particularly people of color, to rebel against the imperial world he knew and to assert rights that fundamentally changed the United States. Obama may not need Kennan, but the renowned diplomat who was unnerved by his country’s “vast polyglot mass” assuredly needed what Obama represents.

Review by Thomas A. Schwartz, Vanderbilt University

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In the early 1980s, while still a struggling ABD, I remember hearing that foreign policy “wise man” George Kennan had designated the historian John Lewis Gaddis as his biographer. *Strategies of Containment* was already something of a canonical text, so this honor for Gaddis was not a huge surprise. Not long after I also remember hearing, far more informally, that Gaddis would have access to Kennan’s detailed journal, one in which the great man had even written about his dreams! This immediately caused me to have a bad case of historian’s envy, as the Cold War wise man of my own research, John J. McCloy, wrote little and was probably one of the least introspective leaders one can imagine. But after reading this remarkable compilation of the Kennan diaries by the University of Connecticut’s Frank Costigliola, I am prepared to say that that there can be too much of a good thing. The diaries are both fascinating and cringe-worthy, an extraordinary account of the centenarian’s life, but with all his internal demons and complicated personality on display.

George Kennan is such an icon of American foreign policy that the book has already attracted a large number of reviews, most of them drawn to the more politically-incorrect aspects of Kennan’s writings. The worst example of these was David Greenberg’s in the *New Republic*, with the unfortunate, although likely click-inducing headline, “U.S. Cold War Policy was designed by a Bigot: George Kennan’s diaries reveal just how much he hated America.”<sup>1</sup> As sensationalist and over-the-top as this headline was, the review itself makes a number of valid arguments, especially concerning Kennan’s frequently expressed unhappiness, dislike, and even contempt for the United States and its people, especially, although not exclusively, some ethnic and racial minorities. Kennan was certainly an elitist and flirted with very anti-democratic ideas, a characteristic that was far more common among Washington officials of that time than we often acknowledge. But that is not the entire story of his life by any means, and Costigliola has done an excellent job in trying to bring out the many dimensions of George Kennan and the era in which he served.

A roundtable like this should focus more on Kennan’s views on foreign policy, but it is important to recognize that these diaries chronicle far more than assessments of international politics. Indeed, they tell the story of a life, in all its messiness, grandeur, and tragedy. On one level it is an impressive story. Although Kennan would probably react angrily to this, there are times when I thought what he needed was a guardian angel like Clarence in *It’s a Wonderful Life*, to tell him Jimmy Stewart-like, that he really had a wonderful life! Kennan’s life outwardly contained all the hallmarks of what most of us would consider success – a long-lasting marriage, warm relations with his siblings, children and grandchildren who clearly loved and honored him, and many friends all over the world, as well as incredible professional success and recognition as a diplomat, historian, and public intellectual. Yet the diary is replete with Kennan’s laments about his failures and shortcomings, and how little he accomplished. The tone of some diary entries can be

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<sup>1</sup> *The New Republic*, April 19, 2014, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/117174/george-f-kennans-diaries-reviewed> Accessed August 23, 2014

so unrelentingly depressing and downcast that one of the most stunning moments for me comes not long after the communist hold on Eastern Europe had collapsed and Kennan's ideas on containment had been vindicated. On March 12, 1990 he writes, "I am probably the most widely honored person, outside the entertainment industry and the political establishment, in this country" (608). Of course Kennan quickly added that "my role is to sustain other people's illusions," and it is clear that not only did Kennan disdain Cold War triumphalism, but he disdained any personal triumphalism as well.

Perhaps Kennan's depressing tone should not be that surprising. John Gaddis begins his biography by noting that the first thing Kennan said to him on the subject was that "The greatest tragedy of human existence ... is that we do not all die at the same time as those we love."<sup>2</sup> His false belief that his own birth caused the death of his mother haunted him, and he struggled as well with staying faithful to his long-suffering wife Annelise. Costigliola treads gently around such subjects, noting where it may have affected Kennan's career as well as commenting on some of Kennan's implied references to this situation. It is to Costigliola's credit that he also brings out Kennan's Christian faith, which is certainly helpful in understanding his personal struggle with temptation and sin. Outside of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, whose Presbyterian faith is often criticized and even ridiculed by writers for its supposed influence on his hardline Cold War beliefs, I can think of no other prominent American official from this era whose religious ideas have been explored, even though historians frequently emphasize the importance of religion in the early Cold War. In one particularly eloquent passage, Kennan reflected on Good Friday in 1980 about the "amazing exception" to the fact that "most human events yield to the erosion of time," but that had not been the case with Jesus Christ, "a man, a Jew, some sort of dissident religious prophet...crucified in the company with two common thieves" (525). In one of his last books, *Around the Cragged Hill*. Kennan wrote about his faith as well as his views of human nature, and it is clear they influenced his approach to diplomacy and statecraft.<sup>3</sup> He believed that "a central feature of the human predicament' was the conflict between man's animalistic urges and his desire to "redeem human life" by "lending to it such attributes as order, dignity, beauty, and charity."<sup>4</sup> Man's own soul, in Kennan's words, constituted the "field of battle" for such a struggle, words that cannot help but remind us of

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<sup>2</sup> John Gaddis, *George Kennan: An American Life* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 3.

<sup>3</sup> I want to thank Professor Wilson Miscamble, whose own book on Kennan as head of the Policy Planning Staff remains the best study of those years, for this reference. Wilson D. Miscamble, C.S.C. *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy 1947-1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> George Kennan, *Around the Cragged Hill: A Personal and Political Philosophy* (New York: Norton, 1993), 17-18. Characteristically Kennan defended his use of the politically-incorrect term "man" as a synonym for mankind, remarking, "I see in this usage no occasion for apology."

the frequent invocation by other, more secular Cold warriors, that the conflict with communism was a struggle “for the soul of mankind.”<sup>5</sup>

Of course it is not necessary to have a belief in original sin or skepticism about human nature to adopt the standpoint which Kennan did toward international politics. But it does help to understand his fairly consistent critique of American foreign policy. At a dinner party in September 1956 Kennan surprised a guest by describing his views as “isolationist.” He realized later he should have explained that his isolationism was rooted not in any belief in the wickedness of the world and the need to defend America from it. Rather he was someone who distrusted “the ability of the United States Government, so constituted and inspired as it is, to involve itself to any useful effect in most foreign situations” (360). One reason for this was the excessive influence of domestic politics in America’s approach to foreign policy, which Kennan discusses eloquently in his most famous book, *American Diplomacy 1900-1950*. But in his diary he was even more caustic, arguing that the flaw wasn’t solely in the political system but in Americans themselves. “The reason we will never have wise and able conduct of our foreign relations is that the qualities essential to this, an understanding of history and of human nature, are simply incompatible with Americanism. To be an American is to distrust these things. To know them is to become de-Americanized” (349). Although at one point Costigliola describes this as a “loyalty to the United States as he thought it should be,” (xxxix) it seems clear that Kennan’s alienation from his country was one of the defining elements of his life.

Kennan’s skepticism about American power runs throughout his career. Even at the height of postwar American dominance in 1948, Kennan wrote “we Americans must realize that we cannot be the keepers and moral guardians of all the peoples in this world. We must become more modest, and recognize the necessary limits to the responsibility we can assume” (211). Later this caution certainly made him a prophet when it came to such episodes as the escalation of the war in Vietnam, and his testimony before the Fulbright foreign relations committee in 1966 would, as Costigliola notes, prove “pivotal in widening and in making respectable opposition to the Vietnam war” (439). Earlier in his career Kennan also proved prophetic in evaluating the Korean conflict. In one of the only mistakes I found in the book, Costigliola incorrectly dates General MacArthur’s Inchon landing as July 15 rather than September 15, 1950 (264). Ironically enough, this makes Kennan’s insight, expressed in his diary on July 21, 1950, that the United States should not advance north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel so as not to “frighten the Russians into action” even more insightful (264). As much as Kennan later claimed that his approach to containment was misapplied, it is clear in the Korean episode that he recognized how important it would be to avoid the idea of “rollback” and maintain the status quo of containment.

For all the wisdom and insight which Kennan did have into the limits of American power, it is worthwhile to point out one of his more glaring misjudgments. Kennan badly misread America’s postwar policies toward Germany, convinced that the occupation was

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<sup>5</sup> One thinks immediately of Melvyn Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: the United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007).

corrupting, that “building up West Germany as a more or less permanent state” would lead to war, and that the whole NATO project of providing military security to Western Europe was misguided (233). Kennan seems never to have appreciated the enormous fear and insecurity which West Europeans had in the shadow of Soviet power, at one point rather blithely dismissing the “irrationalism of the French, who are supposed to be the most rational of peoples” (222). His disdain for the United States and its depraved popular culture and commercialism seems to have blinded him to the role American power played in furthering such processes as European integration and unity, and making possible the process of reconciliation between Germany and its European neighbors. Instead, Kennan was determined to see the United States “disengage” from central Europe, as his Reith lectures in 1957 proposed. A few years later Kennan mentions getting into a “vigorous argument” with Jean Monnet, the father of the European Union, who valued the American role in stabilizing and protecting Europe as it sought unity (417). Kennan doesn’t record what the argument was about, but my guess is that Monnet had the better of it.

Frank Costigliola has done a masterful job in making available George Kennan’s extensive writings and diaries in a succinct volume. He has also made it possible for historians to have a much better sense of the man, warts and all. This book allows us to recognize some of the connections between Kennan’s personal philosophy and the diplomatic policies he advocated, while reminding us that George Kennan was a very human mix of intelligence, ambition, and emotion. It is a tribute to both Kennan’s writing and Costigliola’s careful editing that one finishes the book with a sense of having lost an aging friend, cranky and difficult as he may have been.

Editor's Response by Frank Costigliola, University of Connecticut

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I want to thank Walter Hixson, Clayton Koppes, and Tom Schwartz for reading *The Kennan Diaries* so carefully and for offering their appraisals of the life and writings of this seemingly protean figure. Their commentary reminds me of the 100th birthday celebration of George F. Kennan held at Princeton University in February 2004. In an auditorium filled with hundreds of academics, journalists, students, and other fans-of-Kennan, speakers ranging widely in perspective each explained why the man's writings or life exemplified their particular point of view. This wish projection perhaps reached its height when then Secretary of State Colin Powell lauded Kennan, who had spent decades castigating American idealism, for his supposed dedication to that standard. It is a testament to Kennan's century-old heart that he did not suffer an attack right then and there.

As Walter Hixson predicts, we will likely go on reading, writing, and debating about Kennan. Indeed, in the year since the publication of the *Kennan Diaries*, significant analyses of him have appeared in Greg Herken's *The Georgetown Set*, Kaeten Mistry's *The United States, Italy, and the Origins of the Cold War*, and in David Milne's *Worldmaking: The Art and Science of American Diplomacy*.<sup>1</sup> The continued interest is not surprising: Kennan wrote so much and so engagingly, addressed the profoundest issues, made and chronicled foreign policy history, fostered and then criticized the Cold War, was intensely emotional as well as intellectual, pursued seriously even his pastimes of farming and sailing, and, not least, espoused idiosyncratic, often infuriating opinions. His life spanned not just the twentieth and a smidgen of the twenty-first<sup>†</sup> centuries, but also the eighteenth if we take seriously his conceit of being a man of that earlier era. Spurred by a relentless ego and the conviction that his ideas had lasting relevance, he sought influence not only during his lifetime but afterward as well. He wanted us to continue reading him and talking about his ideas, and he made that possible by writing, writing, and more writing – close to 340 archival boxes worth at Princeton's Mudd library and still more in State Department records at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, MD. Whether all this scribble is, as Tom Schwartz suggests, too much of a good thing is a matter of taste and perspective.

Also a matter of perspective is Clayton Koppes's trenchant, unrelenting criticism, which is mostly warranted in terms of specifics. Nevertheless, while Kennan's stubborn and nasty prejudices were certainly egregious, they did not constitute the whole man. Nor do they obviate the relevance today and in the future of certain of Kennan's ideas. Koppes is correct in characterizing my introduction as largely laudatory, though I do refer in the editor's note to Kennan's "prejudices with respect to race, ethnicity, and gender." (xlv) (I should have

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<sup>1</sup> Gregg Herken, *The Georgetown Set: Friends and Rivals in Cold War Washington* (New York: Knopf, 2014); Kaeten Mistry, *The United States, Italy, and the Origins of the Cold War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014); David Landes, *Worldmaking: The Art and Science of American Diplomacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015),



also included his nasty remarks regarding sexual orientation.) My strategy was not to belabor his faults in the introduction, but rather to allow readers to judge for themselves based on the actual diary entries.

It bears emphasis that the editing process required selecting for publication less than ten percent of the 8,000+ pages of original diaries. That reduction required wholesale cutting, more cutting, then deleting, and finally paring; I read through the material 4 times in getting it down to a publishable length. The entries that survive are there because I deemed them important or illustrative. I purposely chose to include entries that documented Kennan's deplorable racism, misogyny, homophobia, anti-Semitism, antediluvian narrow-mindedness, and general crankiness. So it is relatively easy for Koppes or other reviewers to sift out the egregious remarks and dismiss Kennan as a bigot. To his credit, Koppes also went through other published sources on Kennan to document the strategist's failure to understand or empathize with America's 'rights revolution' or the increasingly diverse ethnic makeup of the nation. (Kennan probably would have been skeptical that a second-generation Italian-American could properly edit his diaries.)

Despite these and other blind spots and faults, Kennan remains not only an important historical figure but also a strategist with a perspective relevant for the twenty-first<sup>t</sup> century. This is not, obviously, because Washington might benefit from following Kennan's prejudiced and outdated views on human rights or on diplomacy with nations in Africa, Asia, or Latin America.

Kennan is relevant and significant because he addressed the most persistent problem in U.S. foreign policy – not defeating terrorism or besting rival nations, but rather checking the impulse to intervene around the globe. He questioned the assumption widely held by policy makers that the United States could (and can) remake other nations in the American image. Unlike the vast majority of U.S. leaders, Kennan was relatively immune to the malady of Wilsonianism. (As the eminent foreign relations historian Walter LaFeber puts it, “Wilsonianism began as a policy and turned into a disease.”)<sup>2</sup> Kennan defied the consensus, evidently subscribed to even by President Barack Obama, that the exceptionalism and extraordinary power of the United States entitle it to manage global affairs and intervene with military force, including unmanned drones, throughout much of the world. Kennan, especially after 1948, was skeptical about the feasibility and the value of a Pax Americana. Nor, despite some lapses, was he committed to American empire. He doubted that Americans had the ideological tools, temperament, or wisdom to guide or reshape other nations. Indeed, a beneficial byproduct of his deplorable prejudice against nations not bordering on the North Sea was that he was acutely aware of the cultural divergences that made it difficult for the United States to work its will in other nations. Such skepticism has recently been borne out by the damage wrought by the United States, despite some good intentions, in Afghanistan, Libya, and Iraq. It is fitting that in one of his last public statements, the 99-year-old spoke out against the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

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<sup>2</sup> Walter LaFeber email to the author, January 6, 2015.

Koppes is correct that Kennan never did understand the importance to the United States of bringing into the mainstream the diverse ethnic groups making up the nation. We can all appreciate that the Pentagon and other U.S. foreign policy agencies are becoming ever more diverse in terms of personnel. (Consider the remarkable career of Afghan immigrant and former ambassador to the UN Zalmay Khalilzad.) Such welcome and needed diversity does not change the fact, however, that the United States continues to wage what amounts to neo-imperial wars in far-flung countries. What Kennan did understand was that such ventures were likely to yield counterproductive if not disastrous consequences.

Kennan also stood apart from conventional leaders in his long-standing and vigorously argued campaign against the nuclear arms race. What other prominent Cold Warriors transformed themselves into opponents of the deadly weapons competition? In the late 1970s, Kennan's doppelganger-rival and nuclear arms expert Paul Nitze publicly led the charge for building up America's armaments. Nitze recanted his faith in nuclear weapons only near the end of his life. Neither Secretary of State Dean Acheson, who died in 1971, nor President Harry Truman, who died in 1973, seems likely to have come out against the arms race, even if they had lived longer. And who in the foreign policy establishment, aside from Kennan, spoke out so early (February 1966) and so strongly against the Vietnam War? Who of those leaders present at the formation of NATO would still be around in the 1990s to warn that expanding the alliance eastward would prove dangerous, because the Russians would feel cheated and grow discontented with the post-Cold War settlement?

It is in that extraordinary, 101-year life span that we find the source for much of the mystique of Kennan's persona. With an outlook molded in the first third of the twentieth century and clung to with an elitist, stubborn pride, Kennan became, increasingly, an observer from a time long past. The perspective that outrages us with his backward-looking prejudice also provides us with a timely critique of our society: an America increasingly degraded by pointless consumption, personal disconnection, technological disruption, speed, and war. Kennan, especially in his post-State Department years, remained the intellectual who thought otherwise – and therein lies what is both appealing and appalling.