

H-Diplo | Robert Jervis International Security Studies Forum

Forum (43) on the Importance of the Scholarship of Robert Divine

11 July 2023 | PDF: <https://issforum.org/to/jf-43> | Website: rjissf.org

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“American History is Divine”
by H. W. Brands, University of Texas at Austin

In the early 1980s the precinct judge in the Austin neighborhood where I voted was Barbara Divine. Her duties were to ensure that the voting was fair, which involved keeping the advocates of the different candidates from approaching too near the polling place proper. A charming woman in other circumstances, she was formidable in enforcing the voting laws.

Yet she allowed herself an exception. As she greeted the voters, she handed out bumper stickers. These advertised no candidate. In fact most of the recipients were uncertain *what* they advertised. The bumper stickers said, “American History is Divine.”

Some of the neighbors caught on. Bob Divine was a regular presence in the neighborhood, walking his dogs in the early morning. He was the lead author of a new textbook on American history, coauthored with Timothy Breen, George Frederickson and Hal Williams. The publisher was promoting the book, *America Past and Present*, with the bumper stickers.¹

I was one of Bob’s students at the time, and also one of those neighbors. My two older children, Margie and Hal, were very young, and I would push them in a stroller around the neighborhood. They were delighted to pet Bob’s dogs, and even more tickled to climb on a carousel horse that Bob and Barb had on the front porch of their house. When I would walk over to deliver chapters of my dissertation, they would clamor to come along. Perhaps they associated the company of historians with fun—not a common connection. At any rate, Margie majored in history as an undergraduate, and Hal went on to become a very successful historian in his own right.

And the textbook became a major presence in its crowded field. At a time when social history ruled the historical profession, *America Past and Present* adopted a narrative approach, highlighting individual men and women, celebrated and obscure, to capture the imagination of students all over the country. Of the four authors, Bob was the best-positioned to appreciate the challenges facing teachers of survey courses in American history. Timothy Breen taught at Northwestern, George Frederickson at Stanford, and Hal Williams at Southern Methodist. At none of those three private universities is such emphasis placed on very large classes of students who don’t take any other courses in American history—or history of any kind. The state of Texas has long mandated two semesters of American history for all undergraduates. In consequence, the survey courses at the University of Texas are filled with engineering students, chemists, pre-meds and mathematicians. Very many of them look upon their history requirement as an annoyance to be dealt with as painlessly—and mindlessly—as possible.

Yet they’re as susceptible to a good story as anyone. This realization informed the philosophy of *America Past and Present* and helped explain the book’s success in the marketplace. Over time it was adopted at scores of universities, colleges and, increasingly, community colleges. At the community colleges it became something of a bible. Community colleges have always relied heavily on adjunct professors, and *America Past and Present* ensured a consistency of coverage and approach over dozens or scores of sections.

Times change. Bob retired from teaching in the late 1990s. Not long thereafter he asked me if I would like to take over for him with the book. From the beginning, responsibility for chapters had been divided into fourths, with Bob’s quarter carrying the story from the 1920s to the present. He warned me that his was the

¹ Robert A. Divine, George M. Fredrickson, T. H. Breen, and R. Hal Williams, *America Past and Present* (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Co.,1984).

part of the book that required the greatest rewriting with each new edition, since the present is a moving target. But I was pleased to be asked and delighted to accept.

George Frederickson retired about the same time Bob did. Ariela Gross took over his section, on the antebellum period and the Civil War. Hal Williams died in 2016, after which I assumed responsibility for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Timothy Breen continues to cover the colonial and early national period.

Several editions ago we changed the title. *America Past and Present* became *American Stories*. The book had always told stories, connected by the central theme of American identity—what it meant, how it changed, how it shaped those who called themselves Americans. But the marketing folks at our publisher wanted to make this more explicit. We authors didn't object.

Bob didn't mind. Of if he did, he didn't mention it. I know that he was happy that the book carried on, into its tenth or twelfth generation of undergraduates. He taught tens of thousands face-to-face during his forty-two years at UT, and tens of millions through his textbook.

I like to believe that Bob would think we're doing justice to the vision he and his founding authors shared. As to whether we rate Barb's verdict, I'd prefer not to say. Barb was a tough cookie, and Divine is a high standard.

In the essays that follow, three other of Bob Divine's students share their memories of him and his work. John Lewis Gaddis reflects on being a graduate student with Bob in the 1960s. Mark Lawrence describes being brought to the University of Texas as Bob's successor. Mitch Lerner identifies the characteristics that unified Bob's teaching and his writing.

Contributors:

H. W. Brands holds the Jack S. Blanton Sr. Chair in History at the University of Texas at Austin. He taught at Vanderbilt and Texas A&M before returning to UT, where he received his doctorate. His books include *The First American* (Doubleday, 2000) and *Traitor to His Class* (Doubleday, 2008), which were finalists for the Pulitzer Prize in biography, and, more recently, *Our First Civil War* (Doubleday, 2021) and *The Last Campaign* (Doubleday, 2022).

John Lewis Gaddis is Robert A. Lovett Professor of Military and Naval History at Yale University, where he teaches courses on the Cold War, grand strategy, biography, and historical methods. His most recent books include *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (2002), *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (2004), *The Cold War: A New History* (2005), *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (2011), and *On Grand Strategy* (2018). Professor Gaddis co-founded and was the first director of Yale's Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy. He is also a recipient of two undergraduate teaching awards, the National Humanities Medal, and the 2012 Pulitzer Prize for biography.

Mark Atwood Lawrence is Professor of History at the University of Texas at Austin and Director of the LBJ Presidential Library and Museum. His books include *The End of Ambition: The United States and the Third World in the Vietnam Era* (Princeton University Press, 2021), *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History* (Oxford University Press, 2008), and *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam* (University of California Press, 2005).

Mitchell B. Lerner is Professor of History and Faculty Fellow at the Mershon Center for International Security Studies at The Ohio State University, where he is also Director of the East Asian Studies Center. He has been a fellow at the Miller Center for Public Affairs at the University of Virginia; an Association for Asian Studies Distinguished Speaker; and held the Mary Ball Washington Distinguished Fulbright Chair at University College Dublin. He is currently associate editor of the *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, and the president-elect of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations.

“Robert A. Divine, 1929-2021: A Reminiscence”
by John Lewis Gaddis, Yale University

October 16, 1963: “This is a well-written report, but you focus too much on the factual contents of the books, and do not give much critical analysis of the authors’ techniques and interpretations.¹ Avoid summarizing in future reports; instead concentrate on analyzing the book.” B+.

October 30, 1963: “You give a good, concise summary of Japanese-American relations in this period, but you do not comment on the books and their value. I want more of an historiographical essay in which you analyze and evaluate the contributions of the books; rather than a summary of the subject they cover.” B.

November 13, 1963: “Good. Try to give more of your own evaluation of the author’s interpretation.” A-.

November 27, 1963: “Good.” A-.

December 11, 1963: “Very good.” A.

Whew! The students in Dr. Divine’s fall 1963 seminar on the history of American foreign relations had to write a five to ten page book report every two weeks. As his comments on mine suggest, they had to be critical. We weren’t allowed to get by with letting him know what Tyler Dennett, or Paul Varg, or Thomas A. Bailey had said: he knew that already. He wanted to know what *we* thought about what they’d said, and that was pretty exhilarating for a first-semester graduate student who’d only recently made up his mind that he wanted become a historian in the first place.

“You want to do what?” his parents exclaimed. “Why not something practical like running the ranch, or the drugstore, or becoming a librarian?” But it didn’t rain often enough to keep the ranch going, he didn’t have the skills for the drugstore, and he was bored stiff doing library science. So he put his foot down, announced that he was going to graduate school, and that he’d do it at the only place in the known universe—for a kid from a small town in Texas—where that might be possible. That’s how I wound up, in Austin in 1963, in the diplomatic history seminar of Dr. Divine.

I’d only vaguely heard of him as an undergraduate, and had taken none of the courses he’d offered at that level. I didn’t have any clearer idea, either, of what a seminar was until I walked in on the first day, found a seat at the big table in Garrison Hall, lit a cigarette as all the other students at that moment were doing, and tried to stay cool by blowing smoke at the ceiling while wondering what all of this was going to be like. What it was like—this is the only word that really describes it—was “electric.”

This big energetic guy swept in, probably just off the phone from Washington we assumed. He sat down, spread out his notes, tilted back in his chair at an alarming angle, and began talking at an even more alarming speed. I later discovered that this was because he’d grown up in Brooklyn and studied at Yale, mysterious places where people did that sort of thing. He’d spin out ideas at twice the rate of any regular Texan, while we scrambled to take notes with one hand, while waving the other one in the air to get our questions answered, while at the same time trying to avoid setting each other on fire with all the ashes we were flinging around. That was the atmosphere—crackling—and we left the room at the end of each seminar excited, exhausted, and sometimes singed.

¹ This essay first appeared in *Passport* 52: 3 (January 2022): 69-72. The H-Diplo editors thank *Passport*’s editor, Andrew L. Johns, for his kind permission to re-publish it here.

We soon learned the secret: that Dr. Divine's metabolism worked faster than anybody else's. Only that could have allowed him to take the time he did for us—grading our papers, rewriting lectures, updating bibliographies, making himself available in office hours—while still publishing new books almost annually, chairing the History Department, and maintaining a normal family life. It was pretty amazing.

As time went on, though, I also learned that Dr. Divine had a remarkable capacity for calm, reassurance, and long-term vision. I discovered this on the dismal day, in 1966, when I completely blew my oral examination. He was unperturbed, negotiated a pass with the other examiners on the grounds that perhaps the candidate would amount to something anyway, and then claimed ever afterward that he'd forgotten the event entirely.

He then allowed me to pick a dissertation topic so broad that it would never have been approved in the current era of micro-monographs, and turned me loose. He'd check periodically to make sure I was on the right track, he always answered my questions promptly, and he'd write gentle comments on my drafts like "vague," or "awkward" (but never "crap!" or worse, as I've been known to inflict on my own students). Somehow, without appearing to prod or pressure, he got me from orals to dissertation defense in two years.

At which point, he took another big chance. I'd been on fellowship most of this time, but had never taught. I told him I thought I should before going on the job market. He said "OK," and immediately put me down for a full-scale lecture class—not a discussion section, not a seminar—on the history of the United States since 1865. This strikes me, in retrospect, as a great risk for all concerned, not least for the 50+ students I found myself in front of. But it went fine, despite the average grade I gave having been C. I learned from this that I loved teaching—that I could create my own occasional crackles in the classroom. But I'd had an excellent role model.

The mentoring didn't stop after I left Austin. I was surprised, looking back over our correspondence, at how much help Dr. Divine gave me in transforming the dissertation into a book, a process that took four years. When it finally came out, he noted neutrally that "it bears only a passing resemblance to the original dissertation." He was right about that, and along with my editor, Bill Leuchtenburg, deserves the credit for making that happen. They'd conspired secretly, I suspect, to keep me going.

Shortly thereafter, Dr. Divine invited me to do my next book in a series he was editing, and not long after that he became "Bob," a critical transition in any mentor-mentee relationship. Another important milestone came in the mid-1970s, when he started sending *me* drafts of *his* articles and books to comment on.

My correspondence with Bob had memorable moments:

May 17, 1967: "To whom it may concern: Mr. Gaddis is a serious and mature scholar who can be relied on to use archival materials with care and discrimination."

October 2, 1968: "The university here is in full swing again, with over 31,000 students....Yet no one seems to be really grappling with the issue of enrollment limitation."

August 15, 1969: "There is always a danger in trying to perfect a manuscript. This is a laudable idea up to a point, but I have seen too many promising scholars grow old and grey putting the final touches on their dissertations."

July 21, 1972: "I found the Democratic convention stimulating, if exhausting, and was delighted with McGovern's victory....His candor contrasts so strikingly with Nixon's guile that I believe he has a better chance than the pundits are giving him."

May 3, 1973: “I was very pleased to hear that *Foreign Affairs* will print your AHA paper. I wouldn’t worry about being co-opted by the Establishment yet, but when you are asked to take part in a Council on Foreign Relations seminar, then I will begin to wonder.”

And so it went: the advice was always better than the political predictions.

I’m often asked whether I regret not having done my graduate work at one of the more “prestigious” universities thought to cluster along the east and west coasts. My answer has always been “not in the slightest,” because I believe the training I got in Austin was as good as I could have received anywhere—and certainly, during the 1960s, more *serene* than it would have been at Harvard, Columbia, Cornell, Berkeley, or even Yale.

It’s been a big surprise, then—but also a great privilege—to have wound up as a professor at the university where Bob Divine was a student. I’ve even learned to talk a little faster. But I’m also proud, and extremely grateful, to have been a student at the university where Bob Divine was my professor. For that, as a poet once said, made all the difference.

“A Tribute to Bob Divine”
by Mark Atwood Lawrence, University of Texas at Austin

Like many young historians of my generation, I first came to know Robert A. Divine as precisely what his surname implied—a superhuman abstraction. I read one of his books—*Since 1945: Politics and Diplomacy in Recent American History*—in an especially formative course I took as an undergraduate Stanford, one of the classes that got me thinking about a scholarly career of my own.¹ In graduate school at Yale a few years later, I came to understand the monumental role Professor Divine had played in the development of my chosen field, US diplomatic history. I discovered that he, along with a handful of contemporaries, had helped found the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR), whose annual meeting had become a staple of my nascent career. Two of his books—*The Reluctant Belligerent: American Entry into World War II* and *Eisenhower and the Cold War*—were cornerstones of my reading lists for my comprehensive exams and shaped my own approach to analyzing presidential decisions.²

It was thus with some trepidation that I shot an email to Professor Divine—I’m sure I didn’t presume to call him “Bob”—in 2001 to ask whether he might have time for lunch one day soon. I had just moved to Austin to become assistant professor in the Department of History at the flagship campus of the University of Texas. Bob had retired from the department a few years before, but most of my new colleagues thought of me as Professor Divine’s replacement since I was the department’s first bona fide diplomatic historian since his departure. I was keenly aware of the Texas-sized boots I’d be trying to fill.

I was reassured when Bob accepted my invitation and we met for lunch at Manuel’s, a casual Mexican place a little northwest of downtown. From the moment we shook hands, he revealed himself to be a down-to-earth, warm, genuine man who enjoyed talking about bowling, baseball, mutual friends, and life in Austin as much as about weighty historical topics. When he did turn to research and writing, it was usually to ask me about *my* background and *my* projects. How had my interests developed? What was I working on? It quickly became clear to me why Bob’s former PhD students—a few of whom I’d gotten to know by this point—so enthusiastically sung his praises. Bob’s humility and generosity, combined with understated command of his field, made him almost too good to be true as a mentor and colleague. He would play both roles for me.

A challenge was to reconcile my impression of Professor Divine, the exalted scholar, with my impression of Bob, the genial, self-effacing retiree I came to know over innumerable tacos as our one-off rendezvous at Manuel’s morphed into a routine of meetups over the years that followed. Before long, though, it dawned on me that there was no paradox at all. The qualities that made Bob such an appealing person—his humility, gentle sense of humor, and curiosity—were precisely the same ones that made him a first-rate historian. Though his books had the virtue of concision, all of them displayed a keen sense for the complex individuals at the center of his narratives. Bob brought larger-than-life figures like Franklin D. Roosevelt and Dwight Eisenhower to life as authentic people with emotions, strong points, and weaknesses, doing their best to grapple with unprecedented dilemmas. While many historians in the 1960s and 1970s passed strong moral and political judgments about their subjects, Bob offered fair-minded assessments anchored in empathy for the historical actors he studied and steered clear of the scholarly controversies that dominated diplomatic history in the post-Vietnam era. His was a humane brand of scholarship at a moment when much of the academy leaned toward activism and stark moralizing.

¹ Robert A. Divine, *Since 1945: Politics and Diplomacy in Recent American History* (New York: Wiley, 1975). For more on my formative years, see Mark Atwood Lawrence, “A Career of Chapters,” H-Diplo/RJISSF “Learning the Scholar’s Craft” Series, March 10, 2023, <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28443/discussions/12442679/h-diplo-essay-511-lawrence-learning-scholars-craft>.

² Divine, *The Reluctant Belligerent: American Entry into World War II* (New York: Wiley, 1965), and *Eisenhower and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

All of these qualities are especially evident in the book of Bob's that I happened upon relatively late but came to regard as his finest: *Blowing on the Wind: The Nuclear Test Ban Debate, 1954-1960*, an elegant chronicle of the controversies surrounding the development of thermonuclear weapons as Americans became aware of the dangers they posed to human health and the environment.³ As in all his books, Bob paints sharp portraits of the powerful men who constitute his main cast of characters. He memorably likens Atomic Energy Commission Chair Lewis Strauss to America's second president, John Adams; both men were "pompous, shrewd, patriotic but often mean, petty and unpredictable." The eminent scientist Edward Teller was, wrote Bob, "a brooding man with dark, luxuriant eyebrows, a fierce will, and a deep, doomsday voice." The Southerner James Killian, who became President Eisenhower's chief science adviser in 1957, "spoke with a soft drawl that masked a steely resolve and a tough intellect."⁴ The book deftly narrates the interplay among men who come across not as mere bureaucrats making policy choices but as human beings prone to pride, rivalry, error, and fear.

Yet *Blowing on the Wind*—as the echo of Bob Dylan's 1962 song implies—casts its net beyond elite policymakers and scientists. More than Bob's other books, this one delves into the roles of social movements, public opinion, and the media. To be sure, Bob was hardly the first to situate a history of elite decision-making within broad social currents. But *Blowing on the Wind*, without explicitly touting its innovations, helped lay the groundwork for the study of questions that would draw enormous interest from later historians. How did disagreements among government officials reflect and draw strength from debates within the population at large? How did anxieties about nuclear fallout lead growing numbers of Americans to question their government's management of national security? How did dissent rooted in worries about health and the natural world influence American politics and feed into the social rebellion associated with the 1960s? Bob's book remains essential reading for any serious student of these important matters.

More characteristic of Bob's body of work is the balance and fairness with which he pursues these themes, a refreshing reminder of what scholarship can look like absent the political activism that so often pervades scholarly writing. That's not to imply criticism of scholarship anchored in a concern for social justice. On the contrary, contemporaries of Bob's who wrote in that vein made monumental contributions to the development of the field, and Bob himself took a bold interpretive position in a later analysis of America's wars that he provocatively entitled *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace*.⁵ But *Blowing on the Wind* manages to highlight the urgency of debates surrounding nuclear fallout during the 1950s without taking a definitive stand on the matter. Instead, readers are left to weigh conflicting points of view and arrive at their own conclusions. Bob's preface conveys the humility that made him such an endearing scholar and person. "I have tried to tell the story dispassionately," he wrote, "with sympathy for those who felt bewildered by a new and unknown danger and with understanding for those who went to extremes in reacting to the peril." It is a tale, he added, "without heroes or villains."⁶

However reluctant Bob may have been to identify heroes in history, I have no reservation about naming one among historians. Selfishly, I'm grateful to Bob for providing encouragement and good cheer at a critical point in my own career. Getting to know him has been a highlight of my years at the University of Texas. More broadly, I am profoundly grateful to Bob, as I know many others are, for doing so much to establish a vibrant field of study and for offering such an impressive model of intellectual integrity. But what really sets Bob apart was his ability to be so many things at once—a warm and generous man who was also a giant among scholars.

³ Divine, *Blowing on the Wind: The Nuclear Test Ban Debate, 1954-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁴ Divine, *Blowing on the Wind*, 11, 14, 171.

⁵ Divine, *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2000).

⁶ Divine, *Blowing on the Wind*, xiii-ix.

“Divine Inspiration”
by Mitchell B. Lerner, The Ohio State University

I first met Bob Divine in 1991, just a few weeks after I had enrolled in the PhD program in American Studies at the University of Texas. I had arrived in Austin intending to study 1960s American political culture, but a professor in one of my classes that first semester required us to do a long historiographical paper on a field that was related to our chosen course of study but not directly within that field. I suggested writing about the literature of modern American diplomatic history. The professor agreed, adding, “You should go talk to Robert Divine. You know Bob Divine, of course, right?” I had literally never heard the name “Bob Divine” in my life, but I was a 23-year old graduate student trying to impress a professor. “Of course I know him,” I replied. “Good,” came the response. “His office is on the first floor. You should go talk to him. He knows every book ever written on the topic.”

I immediately climbed down two flights of stairs in Garrison Hall in search of this alleged human library. Open arrival, I was thrilled to discover that his office lights were still on, so I nervously knocked on the door. Bob invited me to sit and then stared at me in silence—almost stone-faced—as I introduced myself and explained my assignment. I am fairly loquacious by nature anyway, and as a nervous new graduate student in the presence of an esteemed professor, I rambled on for what seemed like hours. Bob just sat there, staring at me, silent and bereft of expression until I finally wrapped up my lengthy monologue. He paused for a second, and then got right to the point. “Yes, I can help. You should get started by reading the classics.” He paused. “Start with William Appleman Williams’ *Tragedy of American Diplomacy*.”¹ Paused again. “You probably know *Tragedy*, right?” I had never heard of *Tragedy of American Diplomacy* in my life, but I was a 23-year-old graduate student. “Of course I know it,” I said. “But...I would be happy to read it again.” Bob nodded and then reached into a drawer where he apparently stored an infinite number of copies of bibliographies that he had compiled for his seminars, which included approximately every book that had ever been written on American diplomatic history. After handing a few reading lists to me (which I think combined to total more pages than Henry Kissinger’s memoirs), he recommended a few specific books as a starting point (Lloyd Gardner’s *Architects of Illusion* and John Lewis Gaddis’ *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War*, if I remember correctly, along with *Tragedy*) and told me to come back in a few weeks and we could discuss them if I wanted.² The whole conversation lasted roughly 30 minutes, which consisted of 28 minutes of me babbling and two minutes of Bob assigning me readings; this turned out to be a model that would be replicated consistently over the next ten years of our relationship. Our different methods of communication proved to be no obstacle, though. After a few months of readings and one-on-one discussions, I knew that I would be moving into a new field and that I would be working with a new mentor.

That first meeting encapsulated Bob Divine as both a historian and a person. He was always scholarly and dignified, and—despite his enormous list of accomplishments—quiet and humble. He never displayed the slightest hint of arrogance or personal bias; indeed, I can count on one hand the number of times he expressed to me a forceful opinion (except, of course, for his passionate hatred of passive voice sentences). He wasted words in neither his writing nor his conversation, both of which were filled with more wisdom in a paragraph that I usually dispense in a week, and were marked by fewer tangents and irrelevancies than I offer in almost every clause. His mentorship style, like his written work, was direct and thorough but never heavy-handed. Bob knew pretty much everything about diplomatic history, but he wasn’t there to force his thoughts on you; he saw it as his job to provide you with the right source and point you in the right direction. What happened next was up to you.

¹ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988).

² Lloyd C. Gardner, *Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy, 1941-49* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970); John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-47* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972).

He was the same, I should note, in his undergraduate teaching. I had the privilege of serving as his teaching assistant on multiple occasions, and his classes always had extensive reading lists, high academic expectations, and huge enrollments. He also taught me the most important teaching lesson I ever learned. One day, a student asked him a question about a very small detail from the Japanese internment during World War II. It was the kind of marginal point that almost no one would know off the top of their heads, but this was Bob Divine, so I happily awaited the imminent deluge of knowledge. Instead, Bob paused for a second, and then replied: “That’s a good question. I don’t know the answer but I will find out for next class” (a promise that he fulfilled the next week). I had just started teaching at the time as well, at a small school outside of Austin, and that exchange shaped my perspective immensely. If Bob Divine—BOB DIVINE!—could admit to a hundred students that he didn’t know something, I needed to stop trying to be an encyclopedia and just be more of a person. At some point later, I reminded Bob of that classroom exchange, and he responded that “being a historian doesn’t mean you know everything. It just means you know how to find it.” I have harkened back to those words many times in the two decades since I left Austin.

This combination of dispassionate analysis and brevity of prose marked not only his teaching style but was also at the core of just about everything that Bob wrote. His books are typically short, focused, and analytical, bereft of flowery language, ideological axes, or partisan judgment, and rooted in a realist critique that lamented the many variables of politics and emotion that hindered the strategic calculations of American policymakers to the detriment of the nation. His *Reluctant Belligerent*, a short study of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s diplomacy in the early years of World War Two, became a staple of American history survey courses even while it pulled no punches in its blistering critique: “American foreign policy was sterile and bankrupt in a period of great international crisis,” Bob concluded. “Although it was the single most powerful nation on the globe, the United States abdicated its responsibilities and became a creature of history rather than its molders,” actions that “imperiled its security and very nearly permitted the Axis powers to win the war.”³ In *Eisenhower and the Cold War*, Bob needed less than 200 pages to advance the growing cause of Eisenhower revisionism, arguing that the president’s ability to resist multiple domestic pressures and embrace a policy of restraint that advanced American interests was being overlooked by a generation eager for action and action now.⁴ In *The Illusion of Neutrality*, he traced the rise and fall of the complicated and often-self-interested coalition at the heart of American neutrality legislation in the 1930s, an effort he deemed to be both against the best national interests and the almost-inevitable byproduct of deeply entrenched American values; through these neutrality efforts, he concluded, “the American people attempted to escape from the reality of the world scene,” with severe consequences for themselves and the world.⁵

For me, though, the work that best encapsulates Bob Divine is one that has attracted a relative dearth of attention: *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace*.⁶ The book remains the only one of Bob’s many works that I have ever used in a class. The title actually comes from a collection of essays about World War II that was edited by Harry Elmer Barnes, although Barnes attributed the phrase to Charles Beard (making this, I would note only half-jokingly, perhaps the only sentence ever written about American diplomacy that those three scholars would have agreed upon!). It is a short book, one based on a series of lectures that Bob gave at Texas A&M in the 1990s, but it reflects the author’s fundamental views about American foreign policy on a broader level than any other publication of which I am aware.

Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace takes the position that the US was constantly fighting wars, even while most Americans regard their nation as one of particularly peaceful and ethical values. In three separate chapters that examine the nation’s entry into twentieth-century wars, the conduct of those wars, and the resolutions of those wars, Bob searched for an explanation to this apparent contradiction, and contemplated its larger

³ Robert A. Divine, *The Reluctant Belligerent: American Entry into World War II* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966), 158.

⁴ Divine, *Eisenhower and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

⁵ Divine, *The Illusion of Neutrality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), ix.

⁶ Divine, *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000).

ramifications for the nation. In Bob's recounting, the idealism and naivete of the American public emerge as the true culprits in his own version of the "Tragedy of American Diplomacy." Americans never accepted the idea of war as a normal and even inevitable state, instead seeing it as immoral aberration to be avoided if possible and turned into a crusade when it was not, leaving policymakers unable to advance more realistic positions of calculated self-interest, which led to ensuing public disillusionment and withdrawal when their idealistic objectives proved unreachable. The book leads readers through all the major twentieth century conflicts, with a brevity and incisiveness that is classic Bob Divine, who takes less than 100 pages to summarize a century's worth of American conflicts. Throughout the tale, Bob offers a constant refrain: American moralism and unwillingness to accept the practical realities of the international world delayed American engagement, shaped American strategy and expectations, and hindered successful resolution. In the end, he concludes in words that I think perfectly reflect both his overall scholarship and his personal *Weltanschauung*: "War, rather than being an exceptional event, is in fact the norm in international affairs. The American mistake was the idealistic belief that peace was the normal human condition and that all the United States had to do to achieve it permanently was to defeat the current threat to its well-being."⁷

The question of whether I agree with Bob's assessment is irrelevant. What matters here is that *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace* is thoughtful and critical, tempered and provocative, learned and beautifully succinct. It is, in short, everything that Bob Divine himself represented, and I am lucky to have had those things to guide me throughout the early years of my career.

⁷ Divine, *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace*, 85.