

H-Diplo ESSAY 230

Essay Series on Learning the Scholar's Craft: Reflections of Historians and International Relations Scholars

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I owe a debt of gratitude to Thomas Jefferson and others who meant when they wrote of a democratic education; a chance for all to get the education they needed to be good citizens, and to avoid being slotted by age or social (class) status.

On Becoming Me

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On *Becoming Me*. I can't think of a better title. Being an historian is an essential, but not the only, part of ME. I'm writing this professional obituary during the COVID-19 pandemic which drives home the tenuousness of 'normal.' I cannot imagine that my rather peculiar and idiosyncratic stumbling into becoming a professional teacher-historian will be inspiring or even interesting to others—except perhaps my seven grandkids.

I bowled and pizza'd my way through high school in Yonkers, New York, compiling an overall average of about 82. My strongest subject was how to find ways to cut class. But in 1953, going to college was not yet the routine expectation of every middle class, suburban family. SAT's meant little. For some reason, Villanova appealed to me—ironically, perhaps, because the West Point cheating scandal had brought the school a talented football player, Gene Filipski.

I left Villanova in two years after realizing that analytical geometry was not my forte (I got a 57 in the final). Two years later, I earned a certificate in philosophy from St. Jerome's College in Kitchener, Ontario, which then functioned primarily as a Roman Catholic minor seminary. Why St. Jerome's? To sample what it would be like to be a priest? Why not? At 19 or 20 years old, no decision is a decision. I concluded I did not want to be a lonely priest without family, but going there was critical. Ten hours of Latin a week for two years; a powerful if indirect grammar lesson of immense value. I had no French (required in Ontario), so no degree from St. Jerome's. But in my two years there I developed what little self-discipline I have; and philosophy was (and remains) a wonderful intellectual challenge.

I was looking for a vocation. But that would take time.

Villanova let me come back to earn a BA in liberal arts. But the price seemed unfair. Whatever few courses I needed, the killer was a public speaking course, offered only in two sequential semesters. I begged and pleaded to no avail. Grumpy old Father Sullivan firmly said (bless him in retrospect) 'the rules are the rules.' There for two semesters, I took a full load (for fun) of political science and history, history, history.

Then reality intervened. This was the Eisenhower era (1958), with the draft still operating. From a family of Navy types, avoiding two years of digging latrines required going into the Navy's reserve officer training program, and spending three years wherever they sent us (I was newly married), which was duty on an LST (an ocean-going ship, 384 ft. long) stationed in San Diego and then Japan. Just as that commitment was coming to end, the Navy sent out a routine letter calling for

volunteers to extend on active duty to teach at the Naval Academy. Saved! I could again postpone making a career decision. That I had only a BA in liberal arts was then, for the Navy, no problem. If you can't do, then teach.¹

Four years and two children later, when my extensions were over, I was ABD in diplomatic history (almost colonial history, but that's a different story) from Georgetown—the only graduate history program in the Washington-Baltimore area which admitted any applicant who was already teaching history at the college level. I drove 70 miles twice a week to attend evening classes and get home to my family. Therein lay a significant difference between my formative years as an historian and almost all the historians I know. I never played in the grad student bullpen. I never was a TA, ideally learning from an accomplished historian. I was teaching on my own, full-time for four years. I never had the time to hang around the history department at the Academy; I worked at home (which gave me the unanticipated privilege of growing up with my kids). The give-and-take of learning was, for me, quite solitary.

No surprise that, when I left, I had little awareness of the historiographical controversies that were beginning to swirl. Moreover, in 1961-65 when I was at Georgetown, the graduate faculty itself had not become caught up in the intellectual and cultural challenge presented by what came to be labeled the New Left. Having chosen diplomatic history, without question the most influential professor I had was William M. Franklin, then the director of the State Department Historical Office, who taught part-time at Georgetown. His dedication to the documentary history of U.S. foreign policy (he was general editor of the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, and edited many of the Second World War volumes) was contagious. His experiences as a Foreign Service Officer were fascinating. Bill was laconic, gentle, and demanding; and not much interested in theories. In Joe Friday's phrase, "Just the facts, ma'am, just the facts."² Little wonder that I later ended up spending twelve years on the State Department's historical advisory committee. It was like going home. Georgetown had another attraction. It was in Washington, DC, where the archives sat, waiting for miners; and where I met my most enduring friend. It was wonderfully convenient during my two-year post-doc at Georgetown (my thesis director, Jules Davids, was on leave, so I taught his undergrad classes).

One small but crucial inspirational event in 1965; I was awarded The Hammond Prize from Phi Alpha Theta, the National Honor Society for students and professors of history, for an article that came from my MA thesis.³ Five hundred dollars was a tidy sum back then, but much more important, it buoyed my (and my wife's) confidence that I was on the right ship, sailing in the right direction.

Three years at the University of Georgia offered department politics, civil rights marches, some anti-Vietnam War rumblings, and another dear, longtime friend. My dissertation on Lend-Lease was published in 1968, but no promotion to tenure as I had failed to demonstrate "institutional loyalty."⁴ Fortunately, Joe Huthmacher, the professor at Georgetown who had suggested Lend-Lease as a dissertation topic, had moved on to Rutgers where he chaired the history department in New Brunswick. He suggested I apply for an opening at the Newark campus, and my thirty-two year relationship with Rutgers began.

I cannot recall who wrote a review of my lend-lease book that congratulated me for not giving the "New Left revisionists" any support. I had no idea what they were talking about. But two years later I published "Lend-Lease and the Open Door" in

¹ The Navy played a role in what I became. I remained active in the Navy's intelligence reserve program for 23 years, interacting with some very smart, fascinating folks.

² Not exactly what Jack Webb said, but close enough; <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/just-the-facts/>.

³ Warren F. Kimball, "Dieckhoff and America: A German's View of German-American Relations, 1937-1941," *The Historian* 27 (February 1965): 218-243.

⁴ Kimball, *The Most Unsordid Act: Lend-Lease, 1939-1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969, 2019).

the *Political Science Quarterly*.⁵ In all too lengthy footnotes (a persistent fault) I tried to analyze the debate. In the text I concluded that the Lend-Lease Act negotiations “indicated a basic American respect for the sovereignty and national pride of the British, while those leading to the Master Lend-Lease Agreement found American officials far more eager to remake other nations in the American image”—leaving me on all three-sides of the fence.

Perhaps those long footnotes caught the attention of the *American Historical Review*'s editors; perhaps some scholar with an oar in the troubled waters put my name in. All I know is that they asked me to do a review article on three books that engendered the arguments and the ugliness of the ongoing debate over United States policies and actions as they related to the origins of the Cold War; hence the review article's title (suggested by a colleague at Rutgers-Newark), “The Cold War Warmed Over.”⁶ From the vantage of nearly fifty years, the intensity and emotions of those times seem less important than the simple lesson—new ideas all too often threaten established views, with reactions that, in this case, went so far as to question the patriotism of revisionists. Talk about the Cold War on the home front. So it was that the editor of the *AHR* passed on suggestions, some from senior scholars, on how I might revise my review article. None questioned my facts; all related to emphasis and interpretation. I declined; another request came. In a gesture of support I have never forgotten, three historians of my generation jointly wrote a letter to the editor criticizing the attempts to influence my findings. The review was published as submitted. Without having written an extensive, serious research piece on the origins of the Cold War, I became an ‘expert’—and a veteran.

At that point my education took a positive turn; Lloyd Gardner, the diplomatic historian at Rutgers-New Brunswick, suggested that I might wish to teach his diplomatic history graduate seminar with him. The seminar, always full with an ample supply of smart, motivated students, inspired me. I learned much from them and their research, and from the books so many of them have and are publishing. Perhaps the nicest unexpected side-benefit came when I was the outside examiner for one of the seminar students who returned home to get his degree so he could teach there. He earned his degree; I had a stunningly beautiful winter trip to Tampere, Finland.

But I was unquestionably the longest student in the seminar. For what is now some three-plus decades I have argued, challenged, and interacted with Lloyd Gardner, who became my deep, close friend—personal and professional. That relationship became a powerful intellectual influence in my professional life. In his word, I was his ‘contrarian,’ still a student in his seminar.

It was Lloyd, I once recalled, “who told me, years later, that I took a huge chance in choosing to edit the Churchill-Roosevelt correspondence, rather than churning out a few monographs. During the twelve years, in the pre-computer world, it took me to find, catalog, copy and comment on all their exchanges, I wrote a small book about the Morgenthau Plan, some articles about diplomatic history, a few book reviews, and that long review that was a little controversial. But none of those would have impressed deans or promotion committees, so I guess I did take a chance. It was just too fascinating to ignore.”⁷

Serendipity stepped in when the Churchill/Roosevelt Correspondence was published in the summer of 1984, “summer” being the key word. My three volumes (edited with extensive commentaries) got a front page review in *The New York Times*

⁵ Kimball, “Lend-Lease and the Open Door” in the *Political Science Quarterly* LXXXVI (June 1971), 232-259.

⁶ Kimball, “The Cold War Warmed Over,” *The American Historical Review* 79:4 (October 1974): 1119-136. The books reviewed were John L. Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (1972); Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power* (1972); Robert J. Maddox, *The New Left and the Origins of the Cold War* (1973).

⁷ Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence, 1939-1945*, 3 vols., edited with commentaries (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/roosevelt-and-churchill>, published as “Taking a Chance: Editing the Churchill-Roosevelt Correspondence,” *Finest Hour: The Journal of Winston Churchill* [hereafter *FH*] 157 (Winter 2012-2013), 58-62. My thanks to Wm. Roger Louis who persuaded me to give the talk that became the article.

on July 11th. “Roosevelt-Churchill Letters Depict Tensions” could hardly have been a headline surprise, but the editors found it more newsworthy than much else that was happening. (A one sentence squib reporting the National League victory in the 55th All-Star baseball game was the only exception.) It was a slow news week, and I was the beneficiary.

In the aftermath of my Andy Warhol fifteen minutes of fame, I took what the correspondence had taught me about all sorts of political and personal relationships during the Second World War, digging more and more deeply into what all that meant—to me, and for history. I published over 50 essays in various journals and collections which, taken in their entirety, sum up my corpus. Just a few titles capture the world I worked to understand, and how I tried to explain it: “Wheel within a Wheel: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the Special Relationship”; “The Ghost in the Attic: Churchill and the Anglo-American Special Relationship; and “The Sheriffs: FDR’s Postwar World.”⁸

Anglo-American relations; Churchill-Roosevelt; the Grand Alliance with Stalin and Soviet Russia; great power relationships during the Second World War. For over a decade I thought, wrote, and spoke about those leaders and the war they fought and, more important, the peace they constructed.

Amidst all that I put together two books, each different yet integrally related. *Forged in War: Roosevelt, Churchill and the Second World War*;⁹ (wonderfully, the British edition had it *Churchill, Roosevelt*) summarized wartime diplomacy and, most important after winning the war, planning for the peace, a theme that came to be my main focus.

The Juggler: Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman is, for me, my most thoughtful contribution to scholarship.¹⁰ It sounds like just an FDR study, but it is more than that. Roosevelt operated on a world-wide theater. The challenges he confronted were vast and varied. First winning the war against true evil, Nazi Germany, was the sine qua non. But from the start (before Pearl Harbor) he was thinking of how to restructure the world after victory. *Forged in War* contextualized and chronicled what *The Juggler* demonstrated, that Roosevelt’s vision was global and practical.

All that was advanced by a path-breaking ten year project, bringing together historians of the Second World War from the Soviet Union (later Russia), the United Kingdom, and the United States. At six conferences in Russia, England, and America, a group of historians worked hard to rise above differing political perspectives and develop a joint history.¹¹

⁸ Kimball, “Wheel within a Wheel: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the Special Relationship” in Robert Blake and Wm. Roger Louis, eds., *Churchill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 291-307; “The Ghost in the Attic: Churchill and the Anglo-American Special Relationship,” in Alan P. Dobson and Steve Marsh, eds. *Churchill and the Anglo-American Special Relationship* (Routledge: London and New York, 2017), 10-18; “The Sheriffs: FDR’s Postwar World,” in David Woolner, David Reynolds, and Warren F. Kimball, eds., *FDR’s World: War, Peace, and Legacies* (New York: Palgrave, 2008), 91-121.

A few more, if I may: Kimball, “The Bomb and the Special Relationship,” *Finest Hour* 137 (Winter 2007-2008) 37-42; Kimball, “The Incredible Shrinking War: The Second World War—Not (Just) the Origins of the Cold War,” *Diplomatic History* 25:3 (Summer 2001), 347-365; Kimball, “United States Economic Strategy in World War II: Wartime Goals—Peacetime Plans” in Kimball, ed., *America Unbound* (New York: St. Martin’s Press/Roosevelt Institute, 1992), 139-157; Kimball, “Dr. New Deal: Franklin D. Roosevelt as Commander in Chief” in Joseph Dawson, ed., *Commanders in Chief: Presidential Leadership in Modern Wars* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993): 87-105; Kimball, “Stalingrad: A Chance for Choices,” *The Journal of Military History* 60 (January 1996): 89-114; Kimball, “Churchill, the Americans, and Self-Determination,” in Arnold A. Offner and Theodore A. Wilson, eds., *Victory in Europe 1945: From World War to Cold War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 213-231.

⁹ Kimball, *Forged in War: Roosevelt, Churchill and the Second World War* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1997).

¹⁰ Kimball, *The Juggler: Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

¹¹ David Reynolds, A. O. Chubarian, and Warren Kimball, eds. *Allies at War: The Soviet, American, and British Experience, 1939-1945* (New York: St. Martin’s Press/Roosevelt Institute, 1994) [Russian language edition (Moscow: Nauka, 1995)]. It was a project

Coming during the now threatened era of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, those gatherings promoted access to Soviet era archives which proved essential in our reevaluation of wartime diplomacy and postwar planning.

I began my second major archival journey in 1990 when I was appointed to the State Department's Historical Advisory Committee (HAC). That committee had long struggled to promote declassification of the archival record of U.S. foreign policy, but Cold War fears and bureaucratic cautiousness blocked their effort. Obtaining access and clearances had proven impossible, until 1991, when Congress passed legislation that forced open the archives to HAC members. I served on that committee for over twelve years—nine as chair, then on a special project writing what became the “Future of *FRUS*” initiative.¹² Declassification was never a war. Wars end (even the United States' wars do eventually). Declassification is a never-ending struggle in any democratic republic. It is Prometheus waiting for Heracles.

Fulbrights to Spain and Australia, a wonderful year at Cambridge, plus shorter fellowships and conferences throughout Europe, had all combined to broaden my perspectives. Ongoing conversations with other foreign scholars particularly David Reynolds and Alan Dobson, close friends since they were relatively newly minted Ph.D.s—who were tilling the same fields as mine were crucial to expanding my understanding of how formative nationalism is for international relationships.

In 2001, after forty years as a professional academic historian, I retired from Rutgers, but not from history and archives.

I took on constructing a history of the United States Tennis Association. It was not the huge departure it might seem from what I had studied for those forty years, though it had its own unique differences.

I'd had a long and deep relationship with the U.S. Tennis Association since the late 1970s. I ended up on the USTA's board of directors for four years. The details don't matter. But some USTA folks wondered if I'd be interested in writing a history of the Association. No, I replied, but once again, I couldn't resist asking, what kind of archival record is there? They're in the warehouse was the reply. I was appalled to find them stored, unprocessed, in a big unheated and not air-conditioned garage (warehouse), full of silverfish chewing away and mice comfortably snuggled up to minutes of the USTA board and executive committee. I told them that the Association could “no longer afford to manage its records as if it were a Mom & Pop store.” They engaged a consultant, hired an experienced archivist, and a year or so later had a real archive; and I had my treasure trove.

The research and organizing of the manuscript was a huge challenge. Everything I had written for some fifty years had built on a framework of previous research and writing. There was no such skeleton for me to start with. There were lots of books about playing tennis but none about the U.S. Tennis Association itself. I had to find and arrange the bones, hang a body on them, then provide proper clothing. It was wonderful! It was hard. The project took longer than it should have, but in 2017 *Raising the Game* was published.¹³ I had satisfied my curiosity.

The end. Not quite.

that calls for its historian, although the passage of time may prevent that. In this small footnote, let express my personal thanks for what the late Oleg Alexandrovich Rzheshesky did to promote archival openness. He is missed.

¹² See William McAllister, et al., *Toward “Thorough, Accurate, and Reliable”: A History of the Foreign Relations of the United States Series* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, 2015), 322-24.

¹³ Kimball, *The United States Tennis Association: Raising the Game* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2017).

In spring 2019, I had the privilege of occupying the Jones Professor Chair of History at Wofford College, a gentle oasis of liberal arts education in the northwest corner of South Carolina. Sixteen soon-to-graduate-history majors had to take my seminar, “Making Peace in the Middle of a War.” *FRUS* volumes, documents, questions. I was home again.

This is all about me, which is a little embarrassing. But it ain’t over ‘til the fat lady sings—or my knees give out.

Warren F. Kimball, author of *Forged in War*, *The Juggler*, and books on the Morgenthau Plan and the origins of Lend-Lease, edited the three-volume collection of the Churchill-Roosevelt correspondence (with commentaries). He has published over 50 essays on Churchill, Roosevelt and the era of the Second World War. Robert Treat Professor emeritus at Rutgers University, he was Pitt Professor at the University of Cambridge, 1987-1988, and Mark Clark Distinguished Visiting Professor of History at The Citadel, 2002-2004. He is a former president of SHAFR. His institutional history, *The United States Tennis Association: Raising the Game*, was published in December 2017. He was Jones Distinguished Professor at Wofford College (Spartanburg, SC) in spring 2019. He thanks Jackie and Sally, both of whom read, listened, and commented on it all.