

# H-Diplo

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**Special Forum on Gender and Sexuality in American Foreign Relations.”** *Diplomatic History* 36:4 (September 2012): 695-772

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- “Now You Are Alone:” Anticommunism, Gender, and the Cold War Myths of Hede Massing and Whittaker Chambers” by Veronica A. Wilson
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Review by **Petra Goedde**, Temple University

*Diplomatic History*’s recently published forum, “Gender and Sexuality in American Foreign Relations” provides a welcome opportunity to take stock of how this approach has fared in foreign relations history over the past two decades. It is hard to believe that it has been eighteen years since the publication of the first such forum, entitled “Culture, Gender, and Foreign Policy: A Symposium.”<sup>1</sup> Katherine Sibley

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<sup>1</sup> “Culture, Gender, and Foreign Policy: A Symposium,” *Diplomatic History*, vol. 18, No 1 (January 1994): 47-124.

who organized the current forum and wrote the introduction, and Laura McEnaney, who was one of the authors in 1994 and has returned here as a commentator, both make reference to it, thus inviting the question of how gender analysis has evolved within the field. In the 1994 symposium, McEnaney reminds us, the cultural approach was still highly contested, as Bruce Kuklick demonstrated with a dismissive commentary. In the current forum no such sparks fly, and that might be an indicator of how much the field has come into its own, or a missed opportunity for a frank and open debate about the “cultural turn” in foreign relations history.

What can be said with certainty is that critics today have to argue from a very different position than they did in 1994. The field of foreign relations history has widened significantly since the 1990s and its practitioners have received training in a much broader array of fields and methodologies, including, social, cultural, environmental, ethnic, labor, and cultural history. By way of illustration I would like to return to the somewhat prophetic statement by another commentator in the 1994 symposium, Anders Stephanson, who predicted that “as the thirty-year rule carries us further into the moment of transnational economies and mass culture, diplomatic history will decreasingly be about the history of diplomacy.” He also reminded readers of the “long crisis” in diplomatic history, which in his view was “as much about laggard methods and approaches as it is about the relevance and boundaries of what we study.”<sup>2</sup>

Diplomatic history has indeed become much less about the conduct of diplomacy and much more about larger processes of transnational exchange, and the “laggardness” in methodology is no longer a problem in foreign relations history either. In fact, no one talks about a crisis in diplomatic history anymore. To the contrary, the field appears to be more vibrant today than two decades ago. The current energy comes in part from the opening of the field to new methodologies, including cultural and gender studies. In a way, foreign relations history has finally caught up with the rest of the historical profession in the kinds of questions it asks and the kinds of methodologies it applies.

This transformation has been driven by both outsiders and insiders. Among the outside forces were historians of culture, gender, race, and area studies, who discovered transnational history for their own field. Laura McEnaney, who specializes in U.S. women’s history, is one of those historians. She describes her own position as on the “friendly periphery” of the field.<sup>3</sup> As those on the margins or outside the field pushed in, some “insiders” pushed out. They were diplomatic and intellectual historians, such as Akira Iriye and Michael H. Hunt, who were not afraid to venture into the methodological

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<sup>2</sup> Anders Stephanson, “Commentary: Considerations of Culture and Theory,” *Diplomatic History*, vol. 18, No 1 (January 1994), 108.

<sup>3</sup> Laura McEnaney, “Personal, Political, and International: A Reflection on Diplomacy and Methodology” *Diplomatic History* 36 (September 2012): 769.

periphery of the field. They did much to propel diplomatic history into the twenty-first century and return it to the center of historical inquiry.<sup>4</sup>

The articles and commentaries in the current forum reflect these rather far-reaching transformations. They do so in different ways and with different measure of success. The first, by Veronica Wilson, offers a re-assessment of the life of Hede Massing, a former spy who came to national prominence in the United States through her testimony against Alger Hiss in 1949. Wilson is passionate about rehabilitating Massing's life. She succeeds in what she sets out to do, namely to "restore some of Massing's voice that has been silenced by male commentary and inattention" (699). Yet in order to do so, Wilson actually has to discount much of Massing's own self-representation, which she carefully established in her autobiography *This Deception*. As Wilson notes in the most insightful passage of the article, Massing, confirmed cold war stereotypes in her memoirs: "sexist beliefs about female irrationality and emotionalism and psychoanalytic explanations of communism as a haven for maladjusted individuals who could not succeed in capitalist society and flouted bourgeois political and gender roles" (714). Wilson faces an uphill battle in showing Massing's agency in determining her own personal and political path.

While on its own terms, Wilson's article provides an astute and largely convincing argument, it might not be the best choice for a forum on gender and sexuality in American foreign relations. Wilson does not link her primary subject to the larger context of American foreign relations. She could have made those connections more explicit, but that would have taken her argument in a direction she might not have wanted. As a result, her findings, while of great relevance to women's historians, have limited utility for historians of foreign relations. This article misses an opportunity to showcase the usefulness of gender as a category of analysis for foreign relations history.

Naoko Shibusawa's article is the most heavily theoretical of the three and in that sense it follows Anders Stephanson's call for more theory in foreign relations history. The article uncovers key linkages between conceptualizations of gender and empire. Empire, of course, has traditionally been one of the core themes in diplomatic history. But recently a new generation of foreign relations historians has rediscovered empire as an area of historical research, exploring it through the lens of race, class, and gender.<sup>5</sup> Shibusawa

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<sup>4</sup> See Iriye, *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War, 1941-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); and Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> Besides Shibusawa, those include Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: Ma: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the rise of the new Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

offers another dimension to that school of thought by exploring how debates about homosexuality within the United States reflected broader concerns about the role of Americans in building and securing empire. Her findings are not path-breaking but rather add nuance to the current debate about the contours of American empire, a debate that pits those who long to return to a state-centered geopolitical way of writing about empire against those who explore the personal, political, domestic and transnational implications of empire.<sup>6</sup> Shibusawa and others are firmly situating gender analysis within the heart of that debate.

Frank Costigliola's article, in turn, makes a compelling case for the central importance of gender and sexuality in the forging and maintaining of the special Anglo-American relationship during World War II. His approach might ultimately do the most to persuade those who are still critical of gender analysis in foreign relations, because he works closely with sources familiar to traditional diplomatic historians as well as sources new to them. He shows that the wartime alliance between Britain and the United States rested on much more than mere power politics and national interest. Pamela Churchill's sexual exploits during the war demonstrated the constant blurring of the personal and political, turning her into a key architect of that "special relationship" between the United States and Great Britain. Costigliola's article, as well as the book from which it is drawn, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances*, show how the application of gender as a category of analysis alters traditional themes about war and diplomacy and how personal interactions shape the political climate of state-to-state relations.<sup>7</sup> The masterful analysis offered here is probably the clearest indication of how far we have come since the mid 1990s.

Rosenberg and McEnaney had to work hard to persuade their readers that gender mattered. Costigliola can build on their work to focus on real relationships in real time that had real implications for political outcomes. Whether "intransigent revisionists" (Kuklick) or other sceptics are persuaded by these three articles remains unclear. They either chose not to comment in this forum or were not asked to.<sup>8</sup> The two scholars who did offer commentaries, Robert Dean and Laura McEnaney, are themselves practitioners of the cultural approach and thus well qualified to provide thoughtful critiques. The result is a well-rounded and largely friendly debate, which might be the best indicator yet that gender has become an integral part of foreign relations history.

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<sup>6</sup> Among the former are most prominently Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Price of American Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004); Charles Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and its Predecessors* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Frank Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Bruce Kuklick, "Commentary: Confessions of an Intransigent Revisionist about Cultural Studies," *Diplomatic History* 18 (Winter 1994): 122, 124.

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