

# H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXIII-37

Elisabeth Piller. *Selling Germany. German Public Diplomacy and the United States, 1918-1933*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25162/9783515128513>.

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 INTRODUCTION BY WILLIAM GLENN GRAY, PURDUE UNIVERSITY
 

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Over the past decade, the international history of the interwar years has crackled with excitement. Daniel Gorman charted the “emergence of international society”; Patricia Clavin explored the League of Nations’ economic legacy; Oona Hathaway and Scott Shapiro revisited the Kellogg-Briand Pact; and Julia Irwin presented the American Red Cross as a harbinger of “humanitarian awakening.”<sup>1</sup> Today one can scarcely imagine the diplomacy of the 1920s without considering the economists, jurists, nurses, and athletes who populate these landmark studies. We should also remember the professors and travel agents, as Elisabeth Piller explains in her pathbreaking work on interwar cultural diplomacy. The present roundtable features expert and well-considered reviews of Piller’s first monograph, *Selling Weimar*, a revised version of her 2017 dissertation.<sup>2</sup>

All four reviewers agree that Piller’s book breaks significant new ground, giving contours to a period in German cultural diplomacy that has drawn remarkably little attention. As Brian Etheridge observes, the cultural policies of Wilhelmine Germany (1888-1918) and the Third Reich (1933-1945) toward the United States are relatively well-studied – with the scholarship emphasizing a certain German ponderousness or malevolence.<sup>3</sup> Piller’s story is more positive in tone: she finds that the Weimar Republic (1918-1933) successfully implemented strategies to enhance Germany’s public image in the United States.

How did Weimar Germany make up lost ground in the 1920s following the cultural debacle of World War I? Piller stresses the centrality of Berlin’s Foreign Office, and in particular the Cultural Department established in 1919/20. Reviewer Frank Trommler is skeptical, wondering how “the most conservative and anti-democratic arm of the German government” deserves this credit. Charlotte Lerg sees more nuance in Piller’s argument: German diplomats wisely kept a low profile while nurturing “a loose group of upper middle-class, educated, mostly male members of the elite who re-envisioned German foreign policy along cultural parameters.” By refraining from huffy table-pounding and instead engaging quietly with receptive audiences – German-Americans, college professors, and American tourists – Weimar’s representatives were all the more effective in advancing revisionist aims.

Trommler acknowledges that Piller’s work has expanded beyond previous institutional histories of well-known cultural organizations, ranging from the Carl Schurz Society to the Academic Exchange Service (later known as DAAD). “No comparably comprehensive study of Weimar’s cultural relations with the United States exists,” Trommler affirms. He is less certain whether Piller’s discussion of tourism – her “most original chapter” – falls under the rubric of public diplomacy. Lerg, too, flags the problem of terminology and regrets that Piller does not distinguish more clearly between *cultural* and *public* diplomacy at the outset.

Jessica Gienow-Hecht presents an overwhelmingly positive review of *Selling Weimar*, praising the work’s “great courage, verve, persuasion, and stylistic beauty.” Piller’s subtle and compelling linkages between political agents and civil society

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Oona Hathaway and Scott Shapiro, *The Internationalists: How a Radical Plan to Outlaw War Remade the World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017); Julia Irwin, *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation’s Humanitarian Awakening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> See also Benjamin G. Martin and Elisabeth Marie Piller, “Cultural Diplomacy and Europe’s Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939: Introduction,” *Contemporary European History* 30, 2 (May 2021): 149-63.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview, see the voluminous writings of Frank Trommler, starting with *Kulturmacht ohne Kompass. Deutsche auswärtige Kulturbeziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Köln: Böhlau, 2013).

represent a “significant step in the historiography of international cultural relations.” Gienow-Hecht observes, quite rightly, that Weimar democracy became more respected abroad than at home; and that “Weimar culture shone brighter than did Weimar politics, abroad and at home.” In that sense, the main achievement of German diplomats was simply to stay out of the way and let the fascination of Weimar sell itself – a point also suggested by Lerg and Trommler. One might almost detect a prelude to the “attitude of reserve” [*Haltung der Zurückhaltung*] diagnosed by Johannes Paulmann in the West Germany of the 1950s.<sup>4</sup>

Weimar diplomacy’s deft handling of German-Americans, outlined clearly in Brian Etheridge’s review, certainly points in this direction. “German officials across the board demonstrated great sensitivity in understanding the delicate standing of German Americans in [post-1918] America,” Etheridge notes, to the point that Piller even speaks of “de-ethnicization.” After 1945, similar sensibilities would prevail on a much larger scale, as this author can attest in the case of ethnic Germans in Brazil. In retrospect, one wishes Weimar diplomats had spoken a bit more confidently and insistently about the success of their soft-touch cultural diplomacy in the United States. Perhaps then the Third Reich would have known better than to mobilize ethnic Germans against many a government in South America, Eastern Europe, and yes, the United States?

One final aspect of Piller’s book merits attention. It is a hybrid trans-Atlantic product in its own right, being an English-language monograph published by a German academic press (Franz Steiner in Stuttgart). Other German presses, such as de Gruyter Oldenbourg, are also publishing widely in English now. The appeal for European authors is clear enough; English-language books will travel more widely. But scholars in the US and UK should take note as well, for German presses are fast and often not as strict about word count. If Piller’s book is any indication, we can anticipate a surge of high-quality research from Germany as more authors choose this hybrid route for publishing dissertations.

#### Participants:

**Elisabeth Piller** is Assistant Professor of Transatlantic and North American History at Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg in Germany. She works on US and German foreign policy and transatlantic relations in the nineteenth and twentieth century. She is the author of *Selling Weimar. German Public Diplomacy and the United States, 1918-1933*, published in January 2021, as well as articles and chapters in *Diplomatic History*, the *Journal of Contemporary History*, *Contemporary European History*, the *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* and a number of edited collections. She is currently working on her second book *The Good Samaritan of all the World. US Humanitarians, Postwar Europe and the Making of the American Century*, exploring US humanitarian aid and transatlantic relations during the early Cold War.

**William Glenn Gray** is an associate professor of history at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. Since his first monograph, *Germany’s Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949-1969* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003), he has published articles and book chapters on various facets of German foreign relations, including *Ostpolitik*, arms sales, nuclear exports, European integration, and the Deutsche Mark. His monograph *Trading Power* (Cambridge, forthcoming 2022) draws this material together into an interpretation of German grand strategy from Adenauer to Schmidt. His current book project is entitled “Continental Giants: West German Capitalism and Brazil’s Development Dictatorship, 1949-1990.”

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<sup>4</sup> Johannes Paulmann, *Die Haltung der Zurückhaltung: Auswärtige Selbstdarstellung nach 1945 und die Suche nach einem erneuerten Selbstverständnis in der Bundesrepublik* (Bremen: Wilhelm u. Helene Kaisen-Stiftung, 2006).

**Brian Etheridge** is Professor of History at Kennesaw State University. He is author of *Enemies to Allies: Cold War Germany in American Memory* (2016) and co-editor (with Kenneth Osgood) of *The United States and Public Diplomacy: New Directions in Cultural and International History* (2010).

**Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht** is a historian for international and American history and Chair of the Department of History at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies, Freie Universität Berlin. Her first book, *Transmission Impossible: American Journalism as Cultural Diplomacy in Postwar Germany, 1945-1955* (Louisiana State University Press, 1999), was co-awarded the SHAFR Stuart Bernath Prize and the Myrna Bernath Prize. Her second book, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850-1920* (University of Chicago Press, 2009, 2012) has won the Choice Outstanding Academic Title Award and is currently being translated into Chinese. Jessica Gienow-Hecht's research focuses on the role of culture in international history. Based on archival research performed in the United States, Europe and Latin America, her next project seeks to understand the link between humanitarianism, interventionism, gender and self-representation in U.S. foreign relations since the Spanish-American War.

**Dr. Charlotte A. Lerg** is assistant professor of American Cultural History and Transatlantic Studies at Ludwig-Maximilian University Munich where she also serves as managing director of the Lasky Center for Transatlantic Studies. Holding an MA in Modern History and Philosophy from the University of St. Andrews and a PhD in History from Tübingen University, she has also taught at the Universities of Münster, Jena, and Bochum and held a 6-month fellowship at the John W. Kluge Center (Library of Congress) as well as a fellowship at the German-Historical-Institute in Washington DC. Her research and her publications focus on cultural- and intellectual history of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century with a particular interest in the history of higher education, historiography, public history and visual culture. Her book *Universitätsdiplomatie. Prestige und Wissenschaft in den transatlantischen Beziehungen 1890-1920* (Göttingen: V&R 2019) explores the role of U.S. universities in the development of cultural diplomacy. She is also editor of *HIC. International Yearbook of Knowledge and Society* (first issue forthcoming with De Gruyter 2022).

**Frank Trommler**, Professor em. of German and Comparative Literature at the University of Pennsylvania, has published about modern German literature and cultural history as well as about German-American cultural relations. Among his publications are *America and the Germans* (1985), *The German-American Encounter* (2001), *Weimars transatlantischer Mäzen; Die Lincoln-Stiftung 1927 bis 1934* (2008). He is author of the comprehensive study, *Kulturmacht ohne Kompass. Deutsche auswärtige Kulturbeziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (2014).

REVIEW BY BRIAN ETHERIDGE, KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY

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As Elisabeth Piller points out at the beginning of her excellent new book on German public diplomacy during the Weimar period, Gustav Stresemann, the German politician who would perhaps become most associated with Germany's future republic, blamed poor German public diplomacy for the impending American entry in the Great War in 1917. She argues that Germany's failure in this regard constituted one of the 'central lessons' for Weimar's leaders, and she points out that the echoes of their initiatives to address this shortcoming still reverberate today. After reading her book, one can only conclude that it is a shame that it has taken so long for this story to garner the attention it deserves.

The regrettable fact of the matter is that other chapters in the story of German public diplomacy in the United States have received far more attention than Weimar's, and for an easily understood reason: the stories of the regimes before and after have been captivating narratives. The regime of Wilhelm II and its clumsy efforts to capitalize on German *Kultur* have been ridiculed by scholars as ineffectual at best and downright disastrous at worst.<sup>5</sup> On the other end, Americans were, and to an extent remain, deeply terrified by the seemingly disruptive and transformative power of the Third Reich's propaganda activities.<sup>6</sup> Bookended by farce on one end and horror on the other, the Weimar story has been largely lost. Even the post-World War II period has received a good amount of attention, as scholars have been intrigued by how the Federal Republic has sought to deal with its Nazi past and rehabilitate its image.<sup>7</sup>

But Piller makes a strong case as to why Weimar's part of the story deserves greater scrutiny. She argues that the German reputation in the United States underwent a remarkable transformation during the 1920s—not unlike what happened after World War II—and that this was in large part due to intentional image work, and not just a happy collateral effect of the strengthening economic relationship. Perhaps more importantly, she underscores the fact that there are important areas of continuity that run through the Weimar period into the Third Reich and beyond, particularly when it comes to understanding the broader panoply of considerations and institutions involved in conducting statecraft in the modern world.

The book is organized into three parts. The first covers events from the end of the war to period of stabilization in the early to mid-1920s. The author's primary theme here concerns the efforts of German officials to break through the 'cultural blockade' that they felt had been imposed on them by the victorious Allies to keep Germany in a subordinate status. These officials keenly felt a sense of isolation and condemnation at the Paris Peace conference, and opposition to the outcome of the peace deliberations was nearly universal in the defeated country. Largely because of the steep financial demands placed on the new German republic, as well as an accurate perception of American interest in a stable and prosperous Europe for its own goods, Weimar officials from the beginning saw the United States as an essential ally in overturning the Versailles settlement.

As Piller points out, Weimar officials also benefited from the developing rift between the United States and Germany's erstwhile adversaries. In particular, American officials were increasingly disturbed by French efforts to enforce the most

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<sup>5</sup> Frank Trommler, "Inventing the Enemy: Germany-American Cultural Relations, 1900-1917," in *Confrontation and Cooperation: Germany and the United States in the Era of World War I, 1900-1924*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schröder (Providence and Oxford: Berg, 1993), 99–125.

<sup>6</sup> Clayton D. Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors: America's Crusade against Nazi Germany* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996); Brett Gary, *The Nervous Liberals: Propaganda Anxieties from World War I to the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Brian C. Etheridge, *Enemies to Allies: Cold War Germany and American Memory* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016); Jacob S. Eder, *Holocaust Angst: The Federal Republic of Germany and American Holocaust Memory Since the 1970s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

draconian parts of the Versailles settlement. When the United States eventually became involved in the reparations issue, the developing economic relationship between it and Weimar led to warmer cultural relations. During this period, then, Piller credits German officials with appropriately recognizing the importance of the United States. But as she takes great pains to point out, public diplomacy alone could not drive the rapprochement—it simply sought to strengthen a relationship brought about by other considerations.

The second part of the book deals with the efforts by German officials to take advantage of these shifting winds to improve Germany's image in the United States. These officials also sought to avoid the perceived mistakes of their predecessors, and Piller demonstrates that they developed an effective *Amerikapolitik* to shape favorable impressions of Germans. This section in many ways is really the meat of the book: it describes the time that Weimar officials found their greatest successes in influencing American public opinion.

In this section, Piller focuses on three main targets for image development: German Americans; American academics; and American tourists. Piller highlights the fact that Weimar officials understood that the image of Germany was inextricably tied to German Americans, and that favorable impressions of their German-American neighbors could lead to generous American estimations of their homeland, just as improving views of the Fatherland could translate into better treatment of German Americans in the U.S., and so they understood that they had to figure out how to engage this group constructively. The most important decision in this context, Piller argues, was discouraging German Americans from actively agitating in the United States on behalf of German interests. Despite their recognition that Germany's fate depended on American goodwill, German officials across the board demonstrated great sensitivity in understanding the delicate standing of German Americans in postwar America. While some argued for a muscular mobilization of the German diaspora, more thoughtful officials prevailed in encouraging the further assimilation of German Americans into American society, in large part because they understood that positions of influence in American society were primarily reserved for 'Americans.' Piller goes so far as frame public diplomacy under Ambassador Friedrich Wilhelm von Prittwitz und Gaffron as "de-ethnicization" (202). In the process, she argues, German officials transformed German Americans from targets to partners in the effort to strengthen the bonds between the United States and Germany.

The second challenging group was American academics. Academia was particularly important because it represented both a resource and an opportunity. After the war, Germany's academic infrastructure was still largely intact, and German officials reckoned that Germany's prodigious knowledge industry could be leveraged to return Germany to its prior position of prestige. But here too, the wreckage of the Great War created great obstacles. Following the cessation of hostilities, American academics froze out their German counterparts, a fact against which German professors complained bitterly. As a result, German officials pivoted away from professors and toward students, ramping up efforts to increase student exchange with America, both in order to send suitable ambassadors of German culture to the United States and to host American students at welcoming German institutions. Still, while there was a perceptible shift from professors to students, German officials continued to undertake measures to strengthen relations between scholars, a move that was able to gain some traction by the mid-1920s. The problem with all of this activity, however, was that the benchmark for success was pegged to 1913, and not 1919—and it seemed increasingly unlikely to embittered Germans that they were going to be able to reclaim their place of prominence before the war.

The third section covers German efforts to promote American tourism to Germany. As with its strategies concerning the previous two groups, the German approach to American tourists evolved over the 1920s. Immediately after the war, German officials struggled to attract Americans to the fatherland, as they competed with other European powers for American attention, and sought to overcome their own self-imposed obstacles to welcoming Americans to their country. But after conditions improved in the mid-1920s, and especially following a more concerted official effort to stimulate American interest, American tourists began to flow into Germany again. As Piller points out, tourism, unlike the previous two areas of emphasis, was more easily able to sidestep residual concerns about German propaganda, largely because Americans viewed it as a nakedly commercial enterprise. Also, too, as time wore on, German officials came to understand that Americans could be persuaded more effectively through tourism than other means. Significantly, Piller argues, the official advertising campaign encouraged Americans to visit a non-differentiated 'Germany' that simultaneously retained all

of its old-world charm and yet was the most modern and therefore ‘Americanized’ European nation. The primary shortcoming of this approach, however, was that German officials neglected to champion its form of government, and thus failed to garner support for the republic when it could.

After the Great Depression hit, and Germany’s political landscape gradually tilted toward extremism, German public diplomacy was only able to maintain a superficial façade of German-American friendship. And once Adolf Hitler took power in 1933, Nazi officials cast aside some of the hard-earned lessons of their predecessors, most notably their cautious approach to enlisting German Americans on behalf of German foreign policy objectives, lest they raise the specter of meddling in American internal affairs again. Still, however, the Nazis did not throw everything away. With willing American partners, they continued to promote student exchange with America, and they continued to successfully court American tourists to German lands, all in an effort to ‘normalize’ the New Germany. Piller argues convincingly that these are important areas of continuity that have been overshadowed by the more sensationalistic efforts of Joseph Goebbels and his Nazi propaganda ministry.

Overall, this is a nuanced and tightly-argued book. Piller offers an essential corrective to our understanding of the Weimar period of German-American relations<sup>8</sup>. And in recovering these German ideas and voices of the 1920s, she deepens our understanding of the roots of modern German statecraft. This is the primary strength of the book, then: it simultaneously recovers and reframes the contributions of Weimar officials. She makes a convincing case that, without her study, we would have an impoverished understanding of both the specific period under discussion and the importance of that period to the larger story.

As with any book, there are areas where the treatment could be strengthened. Piller provides such nuance in her treatment of World War I, the 1920s, and the 1930s that the assessment of German-American relations and understandings before the war comes across as a little too flattened: she makes reference, for example, to a “once-admired nation of ‘thinkers’ and ‘poets’” before the war (40), when there is ample scholarship on the diverse and contested ways in which eighteenth and nineteenth-century Americans understood German Americans and therefore Germanness.<sup>9</sup> The structure of the book strikes this reviewer as odd in places: the use of “backdrop” sections and a “reflections” postscript disrupt the flow, especially since they are not deployed uniformly across the book.

But these are minor quibbles. On the whole, Piller has written a fine book that reclaims an important part of the story of German-American relations. It is a significant historical work that deserves a broad readership on both sides of the Atlantic.

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Wala, “Reviving Ethnic Identity : The Foreign Office, the Reichswehr, and German Americans during the Weimar Republic,” in *German-American Immigration and Ethnicity in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Wolfgang Helbich and Walter D. Kamphoefner (Madison: Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies, 2004), 326-342.

<sup>9</sup> For essays on the complexity of these images, look in Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh (eds.), *America and the Germans : An Assessment of a Three-Hundred-Year History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); Henry Geitz, Jürgen Heideking, and Jürgen Herbst (eds.), *German Influences on Education in the United States to 1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); David E. Barclay and Elisabeth Glaser-Schmidt (eds.), *Transatlantic Images and Perceptions: Germany and America Since 1776* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

## REVIEW BY JESSICA C.E. GIENOW-HECHT, FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

Selling nation states is certainly in vogue.<sup>10</sup> In the past 20 years or so, from Morocco to Myanmar, governments the world over have inaugurated cost-intensive campaigns to craft and improve their countries' images abroad, often enlisting advertising firms that focus exclusively on image management. The recent rise of the concept of 'nation branding' in politics and advertising has initiated a flood of academic and semi-academic research projects.<sup>11</sup> European and American think tanks and academic institutes such as the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy in Berlin analyse and advise how states represent themselves and communicate with others, either in an effort to improve current images or, quite simply, put countries on the map.<sup>12</sup>

Historians know well that these practises have been around for much longer. Thus, Elisabeth Piller's title, *Selling Weimar* evokes *Selling the American Way*,<sup>13</sup> Laura Belmonte's nuanced 2010 analysis of U.S. cultural propaganda during the early Cold War.<sup>14</sup> In the last three decades, we have seen a rich yet not exhaustive body of scholarship on nation states' image management since the early modern period which is too vast to summarize here.<sup>15</sup>

Piller's focus on the German-American interwar relationship starts with a simple observation and a question. In an effort to avoid errors committed in the past (i.e. leaving cultural relations and hence image campaigns entirely to private actors), Weimar German decision makers bent over backwards to create cultural divisions within the context of foreign policy making and diplomacy. Her question is what these newly appointed civil servants and their extended partners did, after the Treaty of Versailles, and in the midst of the turbulent 1920s, to regain the trust of precisely the nation that, on the one hand, was primarily responsible for German defeat but, on the other, seemed so central to Germany's future well-being? To answer this query, Piller offers three themes, which at first appear to be chronological, yet in fact represent different fields in their own right, marking the interwar period.

During the first five years following the war, Piller observes, civil servants were mostly concerned with the analysis of political context and cultural possibilities. They realized that given Weimar's international isolation, the principal goal of German diplomacy – revision of the Versailles Treaty – did not yield a particularly large group of partners who were willing

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<sup>10</sup> Many thanks to Connor Ruby for editing an earlier version of this review.

<sup>11</sup> For a review, see Jessica Gienow-Hecht, "Nation Branding: A Useful Category for International History," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 30:4 (2019): 755-779.

<sup>12</sup> Gienow-Hecht, "Nation Branding: A Useful Category for International History," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 30:4 (2019): 775-779.

<sup>13</sup> Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> By way of a sample, see Nick Cull, *The Decline and Fall of the United States Information Agency: American Public Diplomacy, 1989-2001* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Wally Olins, "Branding the Nation – The Historical Context", *Journal of Brand Management* 9:4 (2002), 241-48; Marieke Bloembergen, *Colonial Spectacles: The Netherlands and the Dutch Indies at the World Exhibitions, 1880-1931* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006); Lee Alan Dugatkin, *Mr. Jefferson and the Giant Moose: Natural History in Early America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).



to negotiate with Germany. Their conclusions led German decision makers to a program of *rapprochement* with the United States that was incredibly visionary but also ridden with problems.

As Piller shows in the central chapters of her book, it took half a decade for the public diplomacy program to take off and much of this was due to relative reservations of U.S. American policy makers. We know that in the 1920s, the latter were mostly concerned with domestic affairs.<sup>16</sup> As a result, the revolving door of foreign relations yielded, for the most part, U.S. American bankers, producers, advertising agents, and representatives from the field of culture. What is more, this constellation provided the young German republic with an opportunity to develop a series of strategies and instruments that gave an enormous boost to German-American relations between 1924 and 1929, along with an array of informal mediators: German-Americans in the U.S., for one, moved from target groups to brokers of public diplomacy. In the same vein, German university professors and students received free tickets to study and lecture at U.S. institutes of higher education. While this was seemingly the best German policy, it backfired when these professors did not follow diplomatic protocol. Most importantly, both German and U.S. tourists formed a buoyant highway of cultural diplomacy, fueled by massive and astutely placed advertising campaigns, sponsored by German tax Reichsmarks. One of my favorite illustrations is Jupp Wiertz's modern-traditional advertising poster "Germany Wants to See You," dated 1926, featuring a Fritz-Lang-like vision of German medieval architecture surrounded by an avalanche of state-of-the-art automobiles.

The Great Depression marked the end of that period, and it is not hard to see why. Cultural exchange and display became more difficult as did the preponderance of increasingly state interest-centered diplomacy. "Submerged Under a Nazi Wave?" is the title of the book's last chapter, echoing previous scholarship. No doubt, 1933 formed a turning point, when the era of the first German state-based on the rule of law ended and the Nazi dictatorship took off. Yet, quite a few scholars have questioned such neat discontinuity<sup>17</sup> and so does Piller. She notes, for example, that American tourists, which were one of the backbones of German-American relations, seemed to have no reservations spending their vacations in a liberal country recently turned illiberal. Similar to many interwar authors drawn to Berlin,<sup>18</sup> one may add, quite a few displayed a disturbing sense of naiveté.

In the end, Piller concludes, Weimar's strategy of public diplomacy was successful, so much so that the state seemed more attractive to international than to domestic audiences. Readers cannot but muse the possibilities of a domestic policy that might have been on par with international projection. Instead, National Socialist propagandists took up the reins where Weimar left them, continued to use the campaign's successful tenets and, in many ways, managed to camouflage much of the domestic catastrophe for years to come. In this vein, the previously mentioned 1926 slogan "Germany Wants To See You" has an ominous, almost cynical ring to it. But there is another side that is well worth considering: Many of the Cold War cultural diplomats we have come to know – most prominently Shephard Stone, one of the most influential architects of

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<sup>16</sup> Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919-33* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010 [1984]); Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> Detlev Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik: Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1987); Michael Hau, "Constitutional Therapy and Clinical Racial Hygiene in Weimar and Nazi Germany," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 71, 2(2016): 115-143; Geoff Eley, "How Do We Explain the Rise of Nazism? Theory and Historiography," in Shelley Baranowski et al. (eds), *A Companion to Nazi Germany* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 15-32.

<sup>18</sup> Oliver Lubrich (ed.), *Travels in the Reich, 1933-1945: Foreign Authors report from Germany* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010); David Radavich, "Genre Intersections in Thomas Wolfe's *I Have a Thing to Tell You*," *The Thomas Wolfe Review* 40:1-2 (2016): 7-179.

post-World War Two German-American cultural relations – spent some of their formative years on precisely that transatlantic highway built by Weimar public diplomacy in the 1920s (Stone received his Ph.D. in Berlin, in 1932).<sup>19</sup>

*Selling Weimar* clearly fills a gap. Piller's catalogue of questions and answers operates in a frame of research projects dedicated to that transatlantic highway, flanked by authors such as Kurt Düwell, Frank Trommler, and many others who have focused on the sciences and the arts in the context of cultural foreign policy after 1871.<sup>20</sup> More importantly, though, Piller ventures an analysis pertaining to the continuities across 1932/33 that she manages to argue with great courage, verve, persuasion, and stylistic beauty, based on a wealth of sources drawn from archives, both public and private, in Germany and the U.S.

This is by all means a piece of work that we will consider for a long time to come – and will do so for at least three reasons: First, and this is a note for practitioners reading this review, *Selling Weimar* shows the failures and opportunities of exchange in times of political non-communication. The success of Weimar's cultural diplomats was based on the fact that their work suffered no interference from other political branches of government while, at the same time, receiving heavy support from the civil sector – individuals such as financier Max Warburg, industrial tycoons Carl Duisberg and Robert Bosch, and academic Julius Moritz Bonn--ideal conditions, as it turned out, for the creation of a viable public diplomacy. Second, that story, Piller shows, stretched from the Wilhelminian Empire deep into the Third Reich and, indeed, beyond 1945. Third, curiously, while we know much about Weimar culture and Weimar diplomacy, up to now we have not had much of a clue about Weimar public diplomacy, much less, indeed, than about the periods before and after. Because of this, historiography has missed a central piece of introspection linking the pre-World War One to the post-World War Two era. To put it bluntly, America seemed incredibly important to Weimar planners. So important that they harnessed their job to non- and semi-state actors, including the Institute for Cultural Relations (ifa) in Stuttgart which, one hundred years later, bestowed a prize for best dissertation to Elizabeth Piller's manuscript, in 2018.<sup>21</sup>

My squabbles are minor and they revolve around three different sets of key themes running through the book: the trajectory of state and non-state actors; the inner contradiction between the display of Weimar culture and Weimar politics; and the contextualization of *Selling Weimar* in the larger history and historiography of nation marketing. First, while it may be true that the German Foreign Office did not pay attention to informal diplomats around 1900, the Kaiser certainly did: so much so that he turned to the Prussian ministry of culture to enable his vision of national cultural diplomacy. And while some of the resulting policies, including academic exchange, did more harm than good, others proved long-lasting. Musical diplomacy, for one, seamlessly survived the war and created much good-will both after World War One and Two.<sup>22</sup>

Second, Piller's argument that Weimar public diplomacy remained fragile and dependent on informal actors is convincing, but it was precisely that strategy that has proven to be incredibly successful. Not only did Weimar shine brighter abroad than at home; more precisely, Weimar culture shone brighter than did Weimar politics, abroad and at home. What is more, a

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<sup>19</sup> Volker Berghahn, *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe: Shepard Stone between Philanthropy, Academy, and Diplomacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> Frank Trommler, *Kulturmacht ohne Kompass: Deutsche auswärtige Kulturbeziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2014); Kurt Düwell, *Deutsche auswärtige Kulturpolitik seit 1871: Geschichte und Struktur; Referate und Diskussionen eines interdisziplinären Symposions* (Köln: Böhlau, 1981).

<sup>21</sup> Laureats 2018, ifa Research Awards, <https://www.ifa.de/en/research/research-award/#section2>.

<sup>22</sup> Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Toby Thacker, *Music after Hitler, 1945-1955* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007); David Monod, *Settling Scores: German Music, Denazification, & the Americans, 1945-1953* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

similar situation continues to mark the Federal Republic's public diplomacy today.<sup>23</sup> We need to think more about what that discrepancy between culture and politics means as it did not merely mark 1920s transatlanticism but also other moments in global history – think, for example, U.S.-British cultural relations prior to Pax Americana in the 1890s or the close superpower cultural exchange in the face of the height of the Cold War in the 1960s.<sup>24</sup> In each of these cases, cultural relations thrived despite (or perhaps because of) both domestic crises as well as international political estrangement.

Third, Piller's effort to contextualize her findings in the book's conclusion is well taken – how, she asks, did Germany's public diplomacy differ from that performed by others? Yet, the real issue is this: Most *everyone's* effort to 'sell the nation' expanded significantly, after WW I. Indeed, the representation of the nation became a principal task of governmental agencies throughout Europe, North America, and Asia. Germany, Britain, Italy, Japan, China, France, the United States, and others devised strategies and offices charged with the job of managing and promoting the image of their nations the world over.<sup>25</sup> What is more, the rise of the advertising industry after World War One also gave a boost to state image management. Nations – both liberal and illiberal – transformed, increasingly, into goods to be marketed abroad by a multiple set-up of actors, including commercial agencies, governmental divisions, and the civil service sector. That is the story that we actually know little about. *Selling Weimar*, that is, is part of a much larger picture that invites not only inter-state comparison but an assessment of what it means when governments and people, both liberal and illiberal, collectively begin to perceive and market the nation abroad.

This is a great book that marks a significant step in the historiography of international cultural relations. Piller links the political history of bilateral relations to the story of interwar civil society efforts of mutual understanding on the part of artists, intellectuals and tourists – two factors that hitherto have often been treated separately, and for good reason.<sup>26</sup> No doubt, *Selling Weimar* will advance the discussion regarding the international cultural diplomacy along with the methodological take on both state and non-state archives.

What we see here is a multitude of different actors, advertising agents, travel agents, bankers, governmental officials and many others in Weimar Germany, all of whom shared one intention: to *regain*, as Piller puts it, a positive affiliation with the United States. Today, we all know that during the four years between 2016 and 2020, the German-American relationship has been a rocky affair. Even though some scholars may be inclined to consider that bond yesteryear's research, I cannot recall any such top-down challenge in my entire lifetime, not even in the context of NATO dual track, Iran-Contra, and the Easter marches. Piller's monograph reminds us that no international relationship – least of all the one between Germany and the United States – merely consists of political leaders, strategies and criteria. And it is a smart thing to remember that now because we need that relationship.

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<sup>23</sup> Gienow-Hecht and Friedrich Kießling, eds., *Die Marke Deutschland in der Welt*, special edition, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 45, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Christopher Hitchens, Akira Iriye

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> Guido Müller, *Europäische Gesellschaftsbeziehungen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg: Das Deutsch-Französische Studienkomitee und der Europäische Kulturbund* (München: Oldenbourg, 2005).

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 REVIEW BY CHARLOTTE A. LERG, LUDWIG-MAXIMILIANS UNIVERSITÄT MUNICH
 

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Elisabeth Piller takes a fresh look at German-American relations during the Weimar Republic and makes a compelling argument for the importance of taking culture seriously in the history of diplomacy. She convincingly explains that alongside more established categories like economy and alliance politics, which have dominated scholarship on the issue,<sup>27</sup> cultural parameters were key for transatlantic relations during the interwar years. Further, the period proved pivotal for the formation of strategies, networks, and practices that would remain relevant throughout the twentieth century and beyond.

The book opens with an exploration of the aftermath of the “public relations disaster of the [First World] war” (29) which in three ways provided the basis for the developments that followed. First, the experience highlighted for contemporaries that previous German strategies and attempts to win hearts and minds (especially of the Americans) had failed; second, Germany’s defeat left the country with little real international power, forcing its leaders to explore and develop alternative avenues (16 and 115-116); and third, Germany had to negotiate the deeply rooted U.S.-suspicion of anything that could remotely be considered propaganda, an aspect more thoroughly explored in a later chapter (119-123).

In line with her book’s mixed approach of cultural and political history, Piller draws on a wide array of sources from official and government institutions as well as personal papers and published material including a plethora of ephemera. The latter, such as brochures, pamphlets of speeches, information bulletins, etc., emerge as key material for research at the intersection of diplomatic and cultural relations. It is here, “outside – albeit usually in close touch with – the German foreign policy establishment” (29), that Piller identifies her key actors: a loose group of upper middle-class, educated, mostly male members of the elite who re-envisioned German foreign policy along cultural parameters. She fittingly dubs them “peaceful revisionists” (17), a term that poignantly captures the ambivalence of the new foreign policy approach they favoured: For all its long-term ramifications and longevity that might make it seem modern and progressive, it nevertheless has to be understood as flowing from the historical moment of German defeat and international isolation, which many contemporaries, often regardless of their political predilection, experienced as humiliation. This led them to seek rehabilitation in one way or another.

Having thus set the scene and explained the overall framework, the study in turn considers three distinct periods in the development of a distinct German public diplomacy towards the United States during the Weimar Republic. The early period to 1924, which was still limited by economic duress and the immediate post-war challenges, often proved frustrating for the advocates of new foreign policy strategies. Things changed during the second half of the 1920s, the “founders’ period of German Public diplomacy” (31), as Piller maintains and to these years she devotes the main part of her analysis structured along three case studies: German-Americans, Academia, and Tourism. Finally, part three considers how the Great Depression and the rise of National Socialism affected and changed the newly established practices and recently formed structures. Notably, by chronologically extending her analysis into the late 1930s as well as inserting a brief overview over earlier German cultural diplomacy attempts during the Wilhelmine era, Piller provides an encompassing picture of continuities and ruptures. She successfully highlights the changes within certain lines of traditions. For example, while German-Americans played an important role throughout, especially for those circles focused on “Germandom” (*Deutschtum*), there was a distinct difference in how they were approached and (not) courted in the 1920s as opposed to the

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<sup>27</sup> Studies on transatlantic relations during the interwar period include: Michael Wala, *Weimar und Amerika. Botschafter Friedrich von Prittwitz und Gaffron und die deutsch-amerikanischen Beziehungen von 1927 bis 1933* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2001); Peter Krüger, “Germany and the United States 1914-1933. The Mutual Perception of Their Political System,” in David E. Barclay and Elisabeth Glaser-Schmidt, eds., *Transatlantic Images and Perceptions: Germany and America since 1776*, edited by (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 171-190; Daniel T Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009). More generally on the dominance of economic and political history in transatlantic relations see for example, Mary Nolan, *The Transatlantic Century. Europe and America, 1890-2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

1930s. The ‘peaceful revisionists’ were acutely aware of the challenges presented by attempting to rein in German-Americans.

While this attitude was also informed by a certain degree of elitism they shared with their Wilhelmine predecessors, early National Socialist policies embraced German-American clubs in their own brand of *Deutschtum* ideology. Thus, this study highlights that it very much depended on who was at the helm of liaising efforts. In academia, which constituted a central arena for German cultural diplomacy from the start in the early years of the twentieth century all the way through to the Cold War, we can observe a number of fundamental changes such as, for example, a redirected focus from professorial exchange to student exchange. It thus mirrors a more general turn to youths as historical actors. Tourism, the third field examined in depth, presents a particularly intriguing example and, arguably, the one that is most originally Weimarian. After all, it was only gradually that a German holiday became feasible for Americans beyond the moneyed elites that had made up the lion’s share of transatlantic leisure travel in the years preceding the First World War.

While other examples for the ‘selling’ of Weimar Germany like, for example the literary or the musical scene, or other material and performative manifestations of German art, sport or nature enthusiasm, as well as technological innovation (which is only partially located within the folds of academia), the three case studies Piller focuses on are well-deliberated. They compellingly illustrate the particular challenges of public diplomacy, especially for a defeated ‘world power’ that was struggling as a young republic vis à vis an old republic that was emerging as the newest world power. Each example makes an important point in its own right: the mixed blessings of ethnic alliances across the Atlantic had to be negotiated carefully; the promising, old academic networks were plagued by the complex and encrusted elite-structures within the German university system; while tourism was a newly professionalizing kind of transatlantic entanglement that repositioned economic, political and cultural stakeholders within a new set-up.

Piller directly addresses the question of whether these approaches in Weimar foreign policy were characteristic of the new republican system and concludes that the focus on culture does indeed make it distinct from both Wilhelmine and National Socialist foreign policy. She also highlights how advocates at the time held out a more diligent and carefully measured approach in foreign relations as something that the “democratic age” required (16). However, while contemporaries may have argued along these lines, it may be worth asking if it was really the changed approach or the changed culture that made the difference. After all, projecting a national image through culture had certainly emerged earlier and was not necessarily a republican feature. A case in point may be the prominence of world’s fairs during the last third of the nineteenth century and the amount of money governments but also non-governmental associations invested in displays.<sup>28</sup> Thus, it may have been that republican, slightly more humble, Weimar Germany simply elicited more sympathy than the imperial pomp of the Wilhelmine era. There were indeed key actors among American political and cultural elites who very much wanted to be able to like this new Germany, as Piller remarks: “American internationalists in their search for a stable and peaceful world order...tremendously aided Germany’s peaceful revisionists” (387). Nevertheless, she is right to emphasize the high level of organisational and official structures that only emerged in the 1920s and enabled an encompassing cultural foreign policy rather than the individual, isolated incidents or personal endeavours that had been the hallmark of earlier periods.<sup>29</sup>

A little more conceptual and terminological clarity could have made the particular and novel character of the culture-driven strand of Weimar foreign policy even more palpable. The titular ‘public diplomacy’ is used almost synonymously with ‘cultural diplomacy’ while both are casually contrasted to propaganda. Yet, public diplomacy moves closer to propaganda when we consider how easily those structures could be operationalized to veil the rise of National Socialism. The intense discussion following World War One over the power of public opinion, the nature of propaganda and the potential of

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<sup>28</sup> Eugene Jr. Provenzo, *Culture as Curriculum. Education and the International Expositions (1876-1904)* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Kurt Düwell, *Deutschlands Auswärtige Kulturpolitik* (Köln: Böhlau, 1976); Karl-Heinz Füssl, *Deutsch-Amerikanischer Kulturaustausch im 20. Jahrhundert: Bildung, Wissenschaft, Politik*. (Frankfurt: Campus, 2004).

public relations, shines up occasionally but never serves as a cue for thorough conceptual reflections. This might be a missed opportunity since the notion of ‘public’ diplomacy highlights the very aspects that Piller identifies as unique for the Weimar approach: it consciously acknowledges the public as the addressees, rather than foreign diplomats. Nevertheless, the fact that “American society as whole paid relatively little attention to Germany” (387) seems to highlight that both diplomacy and culture remained an elite discourse as did, by and large, cultural diplomacy. Public diplomacy, however, widens the scope to include aspects that may on first sight be considered beyond the realm of (high) culture, like tourism.<sup>30</sup>

Methodologically the emphasis on culture as well as the multitude of source types suggest a certain leaning towards more recent approaches propagated in new diplomatic history.<sup>31</sup> The focus on actors who were not strictly diplomats yet not entirely removed from diplomacy either also points into that direction, although Piller refrains from clearly positioning her work within any one theoretical framework. This open approach allows for the fruitful combination of political and cultural history parameters. In a readable style, Piller throughout the book dextrously weaves together her argument with concrete examples and in-depth knowledge of the wider context.

The book demonstrates that an approach to Weimar history via public diplomacy is just as rewarding as it was for studies of the Cold War, which pioneered and, for the longest time, dominated this field.<sup>32</sup> Thus, thanks to the rich body of sources it draws on *Selling Weimar* methodologically broadens our understanding of German-American relations during the interwar period. Moreover, it furnishes a valuable reminder that the time between 1918 and 1933 ought to be understood as a distinct moment in transatlantic relations rather than only the aftermath of one and the prelude to another war.

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<sup>30</sup> For an encompassing evaluation of the history of German cultural diplomacy see Frank Trommler, *Kulturmacht ohne Kompass. Deutsche auswärtige Kulturbeziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Köln: Böhlau, 2014).

<sup>31</sup> For an elaboration on the New Diplomatic History approach, see Giles Scott-Smith and Kenneth Weisbrode, “Editorial,” *Diplomatica* 1.1 (2019): 1–4 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/25891774-00101001>

<sup>32</sup> Jessica Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried, “The Model of Cultural Diplomacy. Power, Distance, and the Promise of Civil Society.” *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy*, edited by Gienow-Hecht and Donfried (New York: Berghahn, 2010): 13-29.

## REVIEW BY FRANK TROMMLER, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

As Weimar's relationship with the United States has been studied predominantly through economics, Fordism, and Americanism,<sup>33</sup> Elisabeth Piller's monograph about German cultural diplomacy of this period is a welcome corrective. Following the recent trend of concentrating on culture and cultural relations as underappreciated forces in international history,<sup>34</sup> Piller uses neglected or unknown archival material for her thesis that the growing rapprochement of the two countries after the confrontations of World War I owed more momentum to Weimar's public diplomacy than has hitherto been recognized. Pointing to American willingness to engage with the United States' former enemy, Piller locates activities that can be rightly subsumed under the term culture though contemporaries often preferred to call them propaganda even if it was not of the offensive kind. This indicates the larger strategy for which Piller fully credits the foreign Ministry, the *Auswärtige Amt*, whose initial reform in 1919/20 included the creation of a cultural department. This strategy favored caution, omitting the nationalist boosterism that had become so fateful in the first years of the war and exposed German Americans to terrifying assaults from all sides.

Piller contextualizes her study with an extensive summary of mostly known but pertinent details of Wilhelmine Germany's outreach towards the United States before and during World War I, which are pertinent insofar they represented the strategy of nationalist boosterism which the postwar republic had to avoid in order to gain international acceptance. However, she does not discuss works such as H. P. Falcke's study of 1928, *Vor dem Eintritt Amerikas in den Weltkrieg. Deutsche Propaganda in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika 1914/1915*, or Adolf Halfeld's *Amerika und der Amerikanismus*<sup>35</sup> that would have given some insight into the public discussion in Weimar.

In the first part she elucidates with new archival sources how German officials between 1919 and 1924 responded to the cultural blockade that the allies had erected against German 'Kultur,' specifically science (*Wissenschaft*), as the French championed international networks that excluded Germans (and Austrians). Yet she does not discuss the nationally most publicized event when the visit of a famous German writer was seen as reassuring Americans of the close ties between the two countries. Gustav Frenssen, who was well known at that time, was received even by President Warren Harding in 1922 and met with writers such as H. L. Mencken, Theodore Dreiser and Ludwig Lewisohn, in appreciation of their continuous sympathies with Germans and their culture.<sup>36</sup>

Following the established practice of structuring Weimar's history according to three phases (the unsettled postwar period 1919-23, the consolidation phase 1924-1929, the crisis years 1929-33), *Selling Weimar*, as the book title goes, became more

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<sup>33</sup> Well-known examples are Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919-1933* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); *Amerikanisierung: Traum und Alptraum im Deutschland des 20. Jahrhunderts*, eds. Alf Ludtke, Inge Marssolek, and Adelheid von Saldern (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> Akira Ikiye, "Culture and Power: International Relations as Intercultural Relations," *Diplomatic History* 3:2 (1979): 115-28; Klaus Roscher, "Ideen, Weltbilder, Normen und Handlungsrepertoires: Die kulturelle Wende in den Internationalen Beziehungen," in *Politikwissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft: Theorien, Methoden, Problemstellungen*, ed. Birgit Schwelling (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2004): 231-52.

<sup>35</sup> Horst P. Falcke, *Vor dem Eintritt Amerikas in den Weltkrieg. Deutsche Propaganda in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika 1914/1915* (Dresden: C. Reissner, 1928); Adolf Halfeld, *Amerika und der Amerikanismus. Kritische Betrachtungen eines Deutschen und Europäers* (Jena: Diederichs, 1927).

<sup>36</sup> *Das Amerika der Autoren: von Kafka bis 9/11*, eds. Jochen Vogt and Alexander Stephan (Munich: W. Fink, 2006).

of a feasible project for German officials once Gustav Stresemann, the foreign minister from 1923 to 1929, dominated the foreign policy towards the Western allies after 1925 and encouraged the use of cultural diplomacy.

These years of official and private ventures of cooperating with American organizations and of attempts to assuage public opinion constitute the meat of Piller's thesis that Weimar's public diplomacy towards the U.S. was a more important factor in the reconciliation of both countries than historians have conceded. She rates student exchanges, academic diplomacy, and various welcoming ventures such as the Carl Schurz *Vereinigung* in Berlin, which in its increasingly nationalist orientation should not be confused with the democratic Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation in Philadelphia, as most successful, provides new insights into what she calls academic diplomacy, crowned with the ceremony of bestowing honorary doctorates on Stresemann and the American ambassador Jacob Gould Schurman by the University of Heidelberg in 1928. Student exchanges through the newly created Academic Exchange Service, forerunner of the *Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst* (DAAD, German Academic Exchange Service) and the Institute of International Education receive exhaustive treatment, with new information beyond the standard works by Brigitte Schröder-Gudehus, Volkhard Laitenberger and Kurt Düwell.<sup>37</sup>

Piller attributes equal success to the promotion of tourism of Americans visiting Germany, presenting the most original chapter under the title "Germany Invites You! Tourism Promotion as Public Diplomacy." This chapter, though only vaguely subsumable under public diplomacy, provides insights into a new kind of tourist promotion that reflected Weimar's successful striving for modernity, a feature usually not associated with the politics of the Foreign Ministry on Berlin's Wilhelmstrasse.

In the third part of the book, which concerns the crisis years of 1929-33, Piller points out that the avoidance of propaganda and direct appeals to the German-American minority in the official endeavor was successful in demonstrating continuity when the American public reacted with shock to the rise of the Nazis in the 1930 election. This constituted an increasingly precarious strategy, especially when in 1933 anti-Semitism and an authoritarian takeover became official policy. Still, Piller is able to show that the continuous use of instruments and strategies that had been developed before 1933 also guided the first steps of the Nazi government in its efforts to present some kind of normalcy on the international stage. Expanding on this continuity beyond 1933 is an intriguing assessment that has not been done before to such effect. The author's concluding insights into the period after 1933 present a more instructive contextualization of Weimar's cultural diplomacy than her first chapter on Wilhelmine Germany.

*Selling Weimar* is a catchy title that conveys the broad sweep of Piller's approach to Weimar's *auswärtige Kulturpolitik*, as the German term goes. The subtitle "German Public Diplomacy and the United States, 1918-1933," however, raises the question of whether the term public diplomacy, which was officially created by the U.S. State Department in the 1980s, does justice to what she delivers with her focus on the *Auswärtige Amt*. The broad sweep notwithstanding, Piller credits the cultural diplomacy of these years more or less to the *Amt*, projecting its agency in most contact areas, primarily using the terms 'Foreign Ministry' or 'Germany.' A conceptual problem of the study is its lack of detailed discussion on the inner workings of the German Foreign Ministry.

Piller's book credits the most conservative and anti-democratic arm of the German government with creating the face of Weimar democracy in democratic America. Without a discussion of this paradoxical constellation, important issues remain unaddressed, especially the fact that it was not 'the Foreign Ministry' that created the policies of restraint and sensitive handling of the explosive issue of the German minority in the U.S. but rather the diplomats of the embassy and consulates who observed American reactions first-hand, far away from Berlin's Wilhelmstrasse. Piller rightly highlights the critical memoranda of ambassadors Otto Wiedfeldt, Adolf Georg Otto von Maltzan and Friedrich Wilhelm von Prittwitz and

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<sup>37</sup> Brigitte Schröder-Godehus, *Deutsche Wissenschaft und internationale Zusammenarbeit 1914-1928* (Genova: Dumaret & Golay, 1966); Volkhard Laitenberger, *Akademischer Austausch und auswärtige Kulturpolitik. Der Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst (DAAD) 1923-1945* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1976); Kurt Düwell, *Deutschlands auswärtige Kulturpolitik 1918-1932. Grundlinien und Dokumente* (Köln/Wien: Böhlau, 1976).



Gaffron, yet omits a closer analysis of the composition and status of the responsible department, the *Kulturabteilung*, within the ministry, not mentioning its head, Hans Freytag. She does not clarify the administrative origins of cultural diplomacy, an English term whose latitude does not fully correspond with the official German term *auswärtige Kulturpolitik*. In those years this term was strongly associated with the ministry's primary mission of propagating the revision of the Versailles Treaty and providing support of German minorities in other countries. Piller asserts the ministry's agency by declaring the restraint—not to do what was done wrong before—as its most important policy decision concerning the cultural diplomacy towards the United States (199 f.). Not doing something might be the appropriate policy in certain situations but as an official agenda it does not suffice as explanation for the work of a ministry of proud bureaucrats and diplomats who traditionally denigrated cultural affairs.

Conferring full agency to an abstract entity 'Foreign Ministry' makes it difficult to recognize the private actors who took important organizational initiatives. Piller features some of them but does not clarify the dynamics of non-governmental relations in the cultural realm, which include the issue of transnational exchange and transfer that recently has become a crucial determinant of innovative research in this realm.<sup>38</sup> What the Rockefeller Foundation and Carnegie Endowment practiced in the support of the sciences and social work in Europe had a strong impact on German-American cultural relations and merited further discussion in the book. The case of the Rockefeller Foundation and its classified sponsorship of a younger democratic elite through the Lincoln-Stiftung in Germany between 1927 and 1934 throws light on the leading role of the Prussian Ministry of Culture under its head, Carl Heinrich Becker, who practiced more cultural diplomacy with France and the United States than any official in the *Auswärtige Amt*.

A closer look at Becker's frustrating struggle with the academic establishment also leads to skepticism as to whether a professoriate which in its majority displayed open hostility against Weimar's democracy and contempt of American culture should be graced with the term academic diplomacy. The German-American celebration at Heidelberg University in 1928 stands out as a rare exception to the rule, made possible by both Stresemann and Schurman and their liberal meeting of minds. The student exchange programs, including internships in American companies (*Werkstudentenprogramm*), owed their existence to several outstanding organizers, Reinhold Schairer who led the *Wirtschaftshilfe der Deutschen Studentenschaft*, Werner Picht who turned the *Heidelberger Akademische Austauschstelle* into the *Akademischer Austauschdienst* (AAD), and Adolf Morsbach who shaped the DAAD into the leading mediating organization of cultural exchange and diplomacy (*Mittlerorganisation*), all of whom were dedicated to improving services for foreign students who experienced an unwelcoming climate at German universities.

Piller provides valuable information about the growth of these non-governmental organizations but maintains the larger agency of the Foreign Ministry. The real feat of the ministry was its setting the stage for the prevailing form of German cultural diplomacy through non-governmental organizations without curtailing certain activities of the cultural department and the embassies. This unplanned constellation provided flexibility for DAAD, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and – later - the Goethe Institute, though not without internal battles between bureaucrats and cultural practitioners. If one looks for an organizational agenda in the realm of official cultural contacts, this rather haphazard empowerment of *Mittlerorganisationen* became the legacy of the Weimar ministry throughout the twentieth century, increasingly connecting budget and political control, forcefully during the Nazi years, and more decentralized within the democratic structures of the Federal Republic.

No comparably comprehensive study of Weimar's cultural relations with the United States exists. Piller has made a vast array of archival material available, an enormous achievement that will inspire further work on this neglected angle of German-American relations. In order to do justice to this broad panorama, one might be tempted to turn to the term cultural diplomacy after all and understand it in all its vagueness, comprising non-governmental and private as well as official actors from ambassadors' honorary degrees to the promotion of tourism. Future work that highlights an array of actors and

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<sup>38</sup> Jessica Gienow-Hecht, "Interested in a Serious Relationship? Die Marke Deutschland im internationalen Kontext," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 45:4 (2019): 580-96.

opening interpretive space for the neglected dynamics of cultural interchange would help correct the picture that the Foreign Ministry with its understaffed cultural department was the central or even sole actor.

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 RESPONSE BY ELISABETH PILLER, ALBERT-LUDWIGS-UNIVERSITÄT FREIBURG
 

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I would like to thank H-Diplo and Thomas Maddux in particular for organizing this roundtable, the reviewers for their generous consideration of my work and Will Gray for writing the introduction. That so many scholars took the time and effort to engage so deeply with my book is both a humbling and exhilarating experience.

I started writing *Selling Weimar* based on an apparently simple observation: in 1919 German-American relations had reached an unprecedented low point. The war and immediate post-war period had engendered suspicion, resentment, even hatred on both sides of the Atlantic. Yet, just ten years later, American and German observers alike agreed that German-American relations were truly amiable, indeed, that they had ‘never been better.’ How did this remarkable rapprochement unfold, I wondered, and what had Weimar-era actors (state and non-state) done to facilitate it? How had they tried to restore the sympathy and support of the United States, a country which—as Allied creditor—was in a unique position to help them achieve Germany’s central foreign policy goal: the revision of the Versailles Peace Treaty. Scholars have grappled with these questions before, of course, albeit mostly from an economic and financial perspective. German foreign minister Gustav Stresemann, for example, systematically and ultimately successfully courted the United States for its financial support.<sup>39</sup>

By contrast, *Selling Weimar* focuses on Weimar Germany’s activities to rebuild cultural relations in the hope of improving the German image abroad, especially the efforts that were aimed at German-Americans, American universities, and American tourists. In doing so, it makes three larger historiographical contributions. First, it moves historical attention from economic to cultural relations and helps understand the ensuing rapprochement not only as a consequence of shared economic interests but also of a successful German public diplomacy. Second, by delving into the continuities and discontinuities of public diplomacy from Wilhelminian to Weimar to Nazi Germany it shows that Weimar Germany embraced a ‘republican foreign policy’ that was substantially different in both its means and aims from the Wilhelminian and the Nazi era.<sup>40</sup> Finally, *Selling Weimar* foregrounds the centrality of the United States to Weimar ambitions and underlines the modernizing impact of US ascendancy on German and European diplomacy.

By and large, these points seem to have come across successfully, although I agree that certain events or developments would have warranted more detailed treatment. I fully concede Brian Etheridge’s point, for example, that US images of Germans in the nineteenth century warrant more extensive study and I share Frank Trommler’s opinion that Gustav Frenssen’s 1922 trip to the United States would be a fascinating subject of study. That said, I want to elaborate on two issues that seem to demand further explanation.

#### *Peaceful Revisionists*

The first issue concerns the group of actors who are at the very heart of *Selling Weimar*. Trommler suggests that I have overstated the significance of the German Foreign Ministry in my analysis while simultaneously downplaying other, more critical, actors like the Prussian Ministry of Culture or non-state actors. This is an important point that reflects longstanding

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<sup>39</sup> Manfred Berg, “Germany and the United States: The Concept of World Economic Interdependence,” in Carole Fink and Axel Frohn, eds., *Genoa, Rapallo, and European Reconstruction in 1922*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 77-93; Berg, *Gustav Stresemann und die Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika. Weltwirtschaftliche Verflechtung und Revisionspolitik, 1907–1929* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1990).

<sup>40</sup> Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik der Republik von Weimar* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985).

discussions in the field of international history.<sup>41</sup> However, I do not think that this criticism is fully merited. *Selling Weimar* does indeed take transnational connections and non-state actors very seriously. As Jessica Gienow-Hecht points out in her review, the book covers “a multitude of different actors, advertising agents, travel agents, bankers, government officials and many others in Weimar Germany.” In fact, many of the non-state actors that Trommler would have liked to have seen more of, such as Adolf Morsbach or Reinhold Schairer, are quite extensively covered (mentioned 34 and 42 times respectively). The same is true to some degree for their American partners.<sup>42</sup> My ambition was never to privilege state over non-state actors but to find a meaningful way to study their interactions and common projects. To this end, I foregrounded a group of ‘peaceful revisionists’: a group of mostly bourgeois, mostly male educators, diplomats and businessmen who were committed to forging closer ties with the United States. In analyzing their efforts, I focus on those individuals with the strongest interest in and influence on shaping German *Amerikapolitik*, often irrespective of their position in academic or diplomatic pecking orders.

With regard to the Foreign Ministry, for example, I paid substantial attention to lower-rung officials such as German consuls in the United States or mid-tier *Amerika*-experts in Berlin. It was precisely because public diplomacy was a new and fairly unprestigious field of foreign policy at the time that these ‘lesser figures’ could play an important role. It is for that reason, too, that *Selling Weimar* neglects otherwise prominent officials like Hans Freytag (head of the Foreign Ministry’s cultural department after 1926). By all available evidence, Freytag simply had comparatively little bearing on Germany’s cultural *Amerikapolitik*. It is worth re-emphasizing that *Selling Weimar* is *not* a study of the Foreign Ministry (or any of its departments) but of a loose group of US-focused peaceful revisionists inside *and* outside the Wilhelmstrasse.

That said, Trommler is certainly correct to note that *Selling Weimar* “credits the cultural diplomacy of these years more or less to the *Amt* [the German Foreign Ministry], projecting its agency in most contact areas.” I do indeed accord a strong and often central role to German diplomats and, I believe, for very good reason. For one, the Foreign Ministry *was* crucial. Public diplomacy required comparatively lavish funds and the Wilhelmstrasse increasingly possessed such funds—if never to the extent necessary or desirable. The new German constitution also gave the Reich (rather than the states) sole authority over international representation and the Foreign Ministry and its missions had the necessary transatlantic infrastructure and connections to this end. Of course, German public diplomacy as well as the transatlantic rapprochement of the 1920s could be studied differently. As the work of the reviewers shows—Etheridge on intellectuals and writers as ‘memory diplomats’, Charlotte Lerg on professors and university presidents, Gienow-Hecht on German musicians and journalists, and Trommler’s own 700-page study of Germany’s international cultural relations in the twentieth century—a more exclusive focus on non-state actors is deeply rewarding.<sup>43</sup> Yet for the broader set of questions that *Selling Weimar* asks, such an

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<sup>41</sup> See for example, Thomas W. Zeiler, “The Diplomatic History Bandwagon: A State of the Field,” *Journal of American History* 95:4 (March 2009): 1053–1073, as well as the responses by Jessica Gienow-Hecht and Kirstin Hoganson in the same issue.

<sup>42</sup> *Selling Weimar* pays attention to the Carnegie Endowment as well as the Institute of International Education and draws heavily on recent works on these matters: see Malcolm Richardson, Jürgen Reulecke, Frank Trommler, eds., *Weimars transatlantischer Mäzen: Die Lincoln-Stiftung 1927–1934. Ein Versuch demokratischer Elitenförderung in der Weimarer Republik* (Essen: Klartext, 2008); Katharina Rietzler, “Before the Cultural Cold Wars: American Philanthropy and Cultural Diplomacy in the Inter-War Years,” *Historical Research* 84:223 (February 2011): 148–164; Helke Rausch, “US-amerikanische ‘Scientific Philanthropy’ in Frankreich, Deutschland und Großbritannien zwischen den Weltkriegen,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 33:1 (2007): 73–98; Judith Syga-Dubois, *Wissenschaftliche Philanthropie und transatlantischer Austausch in der Zwischenkriegszeit. Die sozialwissenschaftlichen Förderprogramme der Rockefeller Stiftungen in Deutschland* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2019); Tomás Irish, “Peace through history? The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s inquiry into European schoolbooks, 1921–1924,” *History of Education* 45:1 (2016): 38–56; see also Elisabeth Piller, “A Tumultuous Relationship: Nicholas Murray Butler and Germany in the Era of the Two World Wars,” *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 67 (Nov 2020): 71–100.

<sup>43</sup> See Brian Etheridge, *Enemies to Allies: Cold War Germany and American Memory* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016); Jessica Gienow-Hecht, *Transmission Impossible: American Journalism as Cultural Diplomacy in Postwar Germany, 1945–55* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999); Id., *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850–1920*

approach seems of only limited use. For example, in order to assess the (dis-)continuities of German foreign policy and trace the formation of a genuinely novel ‘republican foreign policy’ in the Weimar era, attention to the *Auswärtiges Amt* is paramount; and in order to grasp why a conservative and disinterested Foreign Ministry came to adopt a vast new infrastructure and understanding of public diplomacy, it makes sense to focus on the efforts of diplomats. In all, studies that focus more exclusively on non-state initiatives or the Prussian Ministry of Culture would be highly desirable; but they could not answer all the questions *Selling Weimar* asks.

In this context, I would also like to respectfully disagree with Trommler’s contention that *Selling Weimar* “credits the most conservative and anti-democratic arm of the German government with creating the face of Weimar democracy in democratic America,” without apparently acknowledging this paradox. True, I credit diplomats and other groups with representing the Weimar Republic abroad, and I do note that they generally failed to advertise its democratic character. However, the striking thing is not that mostly conservative diplomats eschewed a more clearly ‘democratic’ representation of Weimar Germany but that left-liberal ‘peaceful revisionists’ often acted in a similar way. Even prior to 1933, the German Academic Exchange Service sent German students to the United States (as ‘national ambassadors’ no less) who were openly hostile to the Republic; in the same vein, the German Tourism Information Office in New York City, which was easily the most effective German promotional body of the 1920s, never advertised Weimar Germany as being particularly democratic—despite the fact that they knew it would ‘sell’ in the United States. Even the level of commitment of those who sought to promote a ‘new Germany’ abroad, including Prussian Minister of Culture Carl Heinrich Becker or German Ambassador to Washington Friedrich von Prittwitz und Gaffron, was often tempered by other priorities.<sup>44</sup> As *Selling Weimar* shows, it was the central shortcoming of Weimar public diplomacy—a shortcoming not limited to diplomats—that when facing a choice between advancing a democratic image of Germany and advancing the revision of the peace treaty, many German contemporaries invariably chose the latter.

#### *Culture and Politics in the Interwar Period*

This leads me to a second point, raised by Gienow-Hecht, about the intersection of culture and politics in international relations. As she points out, history abounds with examples where close cultural relations did not translate into political accord. So what, if anything, did Weimar public diplomacy have to do with postwar transatlantic rapprochement and what may it tell us about the nexus between culture and politics? My findings suggest that cultural and political rapprochement did indeed go hand in hand in the 1920s, and that public diplomacy decisions at times mattered greatly. It is the book’s long-range focus, including its discussions of pre-1918 and post-1933 initiatives, that offers particularly valuable insights in that respect. For example, I show that in the 1920s diplomats and Germanism enthusiasts abandoned their earlier aggressive stance toward German-Americans and treated them not as German agents on US soil but as a potentially sympathetic, entirely American group. They thereby avoided one of the most serious transatlantic irritants of Wilhelminian days and took a substantial step toward closer relations with the United States. Just how critical this decision was is apparent from US outrage over Germany’s renewed ethnic outreach after 1933.

If *Selling Weimar* thus demonstrates the political impact of distinct cultural policy decisions, the overall success of public diplomacy in the 1920s owed to its close alignment with Weimar’s larger foreign policy priorities and subsequent efforts to consider US ‘psychology’ whenever possible. As German diplomats, professors, tourist boosters and industrialists went in search of US financial and political support, they anticipated and accommodated US wishes every step of the way. It was

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(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Charlotte Lerg, *Universitätsdiplomatie. Wissenschaft und Prestige in den transatlantischen Beziehungen, 1890–1920* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019); Frank Trommler, *Kulturmacht ohne Kompass. Deutsche auswärtige Kulturbeziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2013); I would also like to point to Tara Windsor, “Dichter, Denker, Diplomaten: German Writers and Cultural Diplomacy after the First World War” (PhD, University of Birmingham, 2013).

<sup>44</sup> On Prittwitz see Michael Wala, *Weimar und Amerika. Botschafter Friedrich von Prittwitz und Gaffron und die deutsch-amerikanischen Beziehungen von 1927-1933* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2001).

only within this much larger context that Weimar efforts to win the sympathy of US students or tourists unfolded their political potential. Whereas Wilhelminian public diplomacy had often rung hollow or insincere to Americans in light of Germany's otherwise quite aggressive international politics, the 1920s saw significant agreement between Weimar's amiable words and its deeds, at least with regard to the United States. While cultural affinities do not automatically fashion political accord, the alignment of political and cultural pursuits can yield exponential results.

While the connection between culture and politics might never be fully determined, it is equally important to wonder why contemporaries came to believe in (and tried to capitalize on) such a connection in the first place. In fact, I would strongly second Gienow-Hecht's point that *Selling Weimar* needs to be understood within a broader landscape of nation-selling attempts in the 1920s and 1930s. Weimar efforts were part of a larger European and ultimately global transformation of diplomacy.<sup>45</sup> Germany was but one of many countries to adopt extensive public diplomacy efforts in the interwar period. In 1918 hardly a European country had an official department devoted to cultural matters or a national institution devoted to student exchange; by 1939 nearly all of them did. In understanding this sweeping transformation, historians can point to nineteenth century trends, the impact of Great War propaganda and the rise of the advertising industry. Yet as *Selling Weimar* demonstrates, they should also consider the ascendancy of the United States and the intense European rivalry for US funds and favor just when the new world power was withdrawing (politically and militarily) from the continent. The European belief in public diplomacy was partly born out of dealing with a United States that could be reached by few other means. Competing European efforts to this end (as *Selling Weimar* shows with regard to France and Germany) set off a transnational dynamic of mutual observation, imitation and innovation that drove public diplomacy initiatives across Europe.<sup>46</sup> In this way, US ascendancy helped reshape a key aspect of European diplomacy after the Great War. As Lerg points out in her review, the "period between 1918 and 1933 ought to be understood as a distinct moment in transatlantic relations." It is my hope that *Selling Weimar* will spark more work on that distinct moment and on the not always apparent reverberations of US power in Europe.

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<sup>45</sup> Ben Martin and Elisabeth Piller, "Cultural Diplomacy and Europe's Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: Introduction," *Contemporary European History* 30:2 (May 2021): 149-163.

<sup>46</sup> See also Zsolt Nagy, "National Identities for Export: East European Cultural Diplomacy in Inter-War Pittsburgh," *Contemporary European History* 20:4 (2011): 435-53; Elisabeth Piller, "The Transatlantic Dynamics of European Cultural Diplomacy: Germany, France and the Battle for U.S. Affections In the 1920s," *Contemporary European History* 30:2 (2021): 248-264.