



BOOKS

Lessons Yet Unlearned

The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century

Richard T. Arndt, Potomac Books, 2005, \$45.00, hardcover, 556 pages.

REVIEWED BY CYNTHIA P. SCHNEIDER

Richard B. Arndt's *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, the product of more than a decade's work, could not be more timely. Had its lessons on "best practices" (and worst) in cultural diplomacy only been heeded, we might well have averted failures in our recent public diplomacy initiatives, documented in so many recent studies.

Instead, U.S. policy-makers have repeatedly committed many of the mistakes Arndt catalogs here: confusing diplomacy with advertising, appealing only to one sector of the targeted population (i.e., youth), and ignoring the intelligentsia and opinion leaders. These are not new problems by any means, but they have undermined our intense efforts since 9/11 to attain the "respect and praise" of the world, to use Thomas Jefferson's words.

As he skillfully chronicles the ups and downs of cultural diplomacy over the past century, Arndt leaves no doubt that he views its overall course as a decline. He weaves into

Arndt, a retired USIA officer, is refreshingly blunt about the disdain with which the Foreign Service community traditionally has regarded cultural diplomacy.



his narrative thoughtful discussions of key themes, including the tension between long-term and short-term goals and results; Americans' historic ambivalence about the role of the intelligentsia; and the perpetual debate within the government about where the institutional responsibility for cultural diplomacy belongs.

Consider the distinction between propaganda and cultural diplomacy. Arndt reminds us that, as Charles Thompson commented in the 1940s, "The technique of propaganda is generally similar to advertising; it seeks to impress, to 'press in.' The technique of cultural relations is that of education ... to 'lead out' ... [Its] goal is something deeper and more lasting, the creation of a state of mind properly called 'understanding.'"

Arndt concedes that many Americans doubt the utility of cultural engagement because of the difficulty of assessing its "value." But how do you measure the impact of experiencing Louis Armstrong jamming, seeing Twyla Tharp dancing, or studying in a U.S. university? In fact, America stands alone in seeking quantifiable results from such endeavors; other countries, notably postwar France and Germany, have taken for granted the critical role of cultural expression and relations, both in communicating about themselves and in understanding others.

Arndt, a retired USIA officer, is refreshingly blunt about the disdain with which the Foreign Service community traditionally has regarded cultural diplomacy. I experienced this attitude first-hand in 1998 as ambassador to the Netherlands, when my public affairs officer proudly told me, "We don't do culture; we do policy." (This was in line with the prevailing USIA orthodoxy of the 1990s that "policy," with supposedly more measurable results, had more value than cultural affairs.) She looked utterly baffled when I explained that with everyone else in the embassy doing policy, I wanted some people working on culture, too!

One of the most bittersweet aspects of Arndt's narrative is the contrast between the almost miraculous success of so many cultural diplomacy initiatives, carried out by dedicated cultural affairs officers on a shoestring budget, and the gradual dis-



mantling of cultural diplomacy. (Both political parties share responsibility for this state of affairs, for it was in 1999, during the Clinton administration, that the United States Information Agency was absorbed into the State Department.)

If Karen Hughes, State's new under secretary for public diplomacy, reads this beautifully written book, she will see that successful public diplomacy lies not in promoting democracy, but in allowing others to experience freedom of thought through the strength and diversity of creative expression in America. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. Rather, we need both to "tell America's story" (in Edward R. Murrow's phrase) and to listen to the stories of other nations.

Cynthia P. Schneider is a Distinguished Professor in the Practice of Diplomacy in the School of Foreign Service, and the Pfizer Medical Humanities Initiative Fellow in Residence at the Public Policy Institute, both at Georgetown University, where previously she was an associate professor of art history. She was appointed by President Clinton to serve as U.S. ambassador to the Netherlands (1998-2001).

Lest We Forget

In the Aftermath of Genocide: The U.S. Role in Rwanda

Robert E. Gribbin, iUniverse, Inc., 2005, \$23.95, paperback, 307 pages.

REVIEWED BY DANE F. SMITH JR.

Passivity in the face of the 1994 Rwanda genocide, in which Hutu extremists slaughtered over 800,000

*With welcome candor,
Gribbin concedes that
neither he nor other
diplomatic experts on the
region foresaw the
Rwandan holocaust.*

Tutsis and "moderate" Hutus, remains a major blot on the record of the Clinton administration. *In the Aftermath of Genocide: The U.S. Role in Rwanda*, published under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, is a major contribution to understanding that holocaust and its aftermath.

Robert Gribbin has spent many years in East and Central Africa, first as a Peace Corps Volunteer and then as a diplomat fanatically committed to in-country travel. While he was not in Kigali during the actual genocide, he had three directly related Foreign Service assignments, as Rwanda desk officer (1977-1979), deputy chief of mission (1979-1981) and as ambassador (1995-1999).

As Gribbin documents, the fact that Washington and Paris were working at cross-purposes in Africa hampered the international community's ability to respond to the crisis. Deeply disturbed by the ascendance of the Anglophone-led Tutsi rebel force (the Rwandan Patriotic Army) over the Francophone Hutu regime committing the slaughter, France

played an unhelpful, even malign role. The French National Assembly even went so far as to issue a report proclaiming that "American links to Uganda and the RPA lay somehow at the heart of the tragedy."

For his part, Gribbin dismisses Operation Turquoise, the belated French intervention in southwest Rwanda of June 1994, as having had little impact on ending the genocide (which was already winding down by then) and as allowing Hutu forces to escape into Zaire. As he scathingly notes, "less pretension and more honesty would serve [France] — and history — well."

Gribbin concedes that neither he nor other diplomatic experts on the region foresaw the Rwandan holocaust. He also acknowledges his error in assuming that the Rwandan government that took power following the genocide would not carry out long-term military operations alongside rebel soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo — formerly Zaire — whither the Hutu hard-liners had fled. (In fact, that support enabled Laurent Kabila to seize power in Kinshasa in 1997.) Such welcome candor lends even more credibility to his well-documented case that the U.S. provided no assistance to Kabila or the forces supporting him, despite numerous accusations and press accounts to the contrary emanating from France and other quarters.

Gribbin also aims heavy artillery at what he terms "the humanitarian industrial complex" — the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the phalanx of NGOs concerned with refugees and human rights, and their patrons in the Department of State. His unhappiness stems from the unwillingness of the "complex" to work harder to



The American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) offers

retired American diplomats as expert speakers on the vital role of the U.S. Foreign Service in promoting American interests worldwide. These highly

experienced professionals can address key U.S. concerns including:

- Middle East, South Asia, and other regions.
- Global issues including; terrorism, security, trade and economic development, and the environment, etc.

If you wish to become an AFSA speaker, please contact Tom Switzer: Tel: 800-704-2372; ext. 501, or e-mail: switzer@afsa.org

WWW.COLEAD.ORG

Get Involved!

Support Constructive American Engagement in World Affairs

Support funding for Diplomacy, Foreign Aid, the Peace Corps, and International Organizations:



- Write to your Congressman or Senator
- Work with the foreign affairs community and COLEAD member organizations
- Advance American diplomacy

The Coalition for American Leadership Abroad (COLEAD)

Attention: Harry Blaney
2101 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20037
Tel: (202) 944-5519 E-mail: colead@afsa.org

facilitate the repatriation of Hutu refugees in the Congo, rooted in a failure to understand that these unhappy victims were not being permitted to return to Rwanda by the leaders who controlled their camps. The magnitude of that misjudgment was exposed when more than 600,000 Hutus cascaded back into Rwanda in four days in November 1996, once Kabila and his Rwandan allies had broken the hard-liners' grasp. (The generally successful Rwandan reabsorption of these refugees marked one of the signal achievements of the Tutsi-led government of Paul Kagame.)

At times, the dual approach of interspersing a personal account of the author's time in the region into chapters of detailed policy analysis leads to a loss of focus. For example, a brief chapter on a visit to the mountain gorillas and the fate of the family dogs, while presumably intended to give the reader a break, interrupts the flow between analysis of the justice system for genocide perpetrators and the refugee problem. (Then again, perhaps that is inevitable in a work which forms part of an ADST series of "memoirs and occasional papers.") I also found Gribbin's final "reflections" duplicative of conclusions clear from a narrative already rich in analysis.

However, these are small flaws in a thoroughly readable account, interesting in its detail and incisive on the issues. It should be required reading for all students of Africa's Great Lakes region and the general subject of genocide. ■

Retired FSO Dane F. Smith Jr. served as ambassador in Senegal and Guinea, and is currently an adjunct faculty member at American University.