


BOOK REVIEW

Competition for Hearts and Minds: Cold War Public Diplomacy

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Jason C. Parker. *Hearts, Minds, Voices: U.S. Cold War Public Diplomacy and the Formation of the Third World*. New York, United States: Oxford University Press, 2016. 240 pp., \$34.38 hardcover (ISBN: 978-0190251840).

The concept of “public diplomacy” was coined in the United States in the 1960s. Former diplomat Edmund Gullion and his colleagues at Tufts University preferred it to the more established concept of “propaganda” because the latter carried negative connotations. Since then, the public diplomacy concept evolved into how it is used today—often termed “new public diplomacy”—with more emphasis on transparency, two-way communication, and shared objectives.

Jason Parker’s *Hearts, Minds, Voices* contributes to the burgeoning “new public diplomacy” literature. It argues that the Cold War began as an ideological showdown between two superpowers, before evolving into an informational competition to win the hearts and minds of and help construct the identity of the so-called Third World. The ideological Cold War necessarily dominated US and Soviet foreign policies, as well as their public diplomacy agendas. In the Third World, however, the main priorities were the interrelated issues of racism, colonialism, economic development, and nonalignment. These common concerns created solidarity and an imagined community for the decolonizing, non-white, non-European, emerging nations—based on a transracial Bandung spirit. *Hearts, Minds, Voices* explores how US Cold War public diplomacy competed with the Soviet and emerging nations’ public diplomacies to influence the (re)creation of that imagined community.

The book offers three main contributions to existing research. First, many scholarly works focus on transatlantic (i.e., US–European) outreach activities during the Cold War. Parker, however, focuses on the evolution of (US) public diplomacy in non-European countries, where it eventually realized and accounted for the importance of local sensitivities and priorities. The new public diplomacy literature, inspired by corporate public relations scholarship, normatively advocates this. Foreign stakeholders are not merely passive target audiences; instead, they possess interests that produce a two-way exchange of deeds, words, and rhetoric (see, e.g., [Fitzpatrick 2007](#)). Through incorporating these often overlooked stakeholders, Parker showcases the evolution of US Cold War public diplomacy from ex post, one-way crisis management to ex ante, participatory consensus-building—particularly under Edward Murrow’s leadership.

Second, the book places the various Cold War–era public diplomacies, as well as their overall foreign policy directions, within a larger historical context. This yields a fuller picture of the background against which states implemented,

changed, evolved, and competed over public diplomacy policies that employed communication-based activities, such as international broadcasting and cultural programs, aiming to influence foreign publics. Existing literature, for example, contains depoliticized aspects of public diplomacy (for exceptions, see [Sevin 2017](#); [Pamment and Wilkins 2019](#)). Parker, however, illustrates how public diplomacy and politics intersect. The United States employed public diplomacy to achieve security-related foreign policy goals, including in the areas of development (e.g., US aid to developing regions and the communication of it), decolonization, and race (i.e., relations and communication with newly established countries and their publics, who historically had asymmetrical relations with white, Western people). Although not explicitly discussed in the book, these intersections, in effect, suggest how public diplomacy belongs not only to the realm of persuasion or attraction, but also to that of inducement (e.g., economic incentives that “buy” hearts and minds) and coercion (e.g., representational force).

Third, the book provides readers with a solid understanding of how outreach campaigns evolved as part of the US psychological warfare and propaganda arsenal to become a distinct tool within the diplomatic toolbox. Parker traces what later came to be called US public diplomacy programs to the early years of the Cold War—when information campaigns aimed to win the hearts, minds, and loyalty of both enemy soldiers and foreign publics, alongside other warfare efforts. These campaigns fall into two overlapping categories: the “black” propaganda operations, involving covert disinformation (conducted by the newly created Central Intelligence Agency), and the “white,” verifiable, journalistic information campaigns, undertaken by the United States Information Agency. At the outset, the jurisdictional lines between these and the other, related organizations responsible for such operations—along with the definitions between “black” and “white”—were not as clear as they are today. The obfuscation between these categories carries somewhat throughout the book, as the author often leaves it to the reader to distinguish between “public diplomacy” and “propaganda”; indeed, Parker uses the two terms—along with “psychological warfare” and “intelligence operations”—interchangeably. The boundary between “warfare” and “diplomacy” therefore remains somewhat blurry, a possible reflection of the Cold War.

Public diplomacy is both interdisciplinary and, academically, an emerging field of study. Thus far, communication studies, particularly work in public relations and the media, prevail in the field. International relations and diplomatic studies experts, in contrast, have expressed only marginal interest in diplomacy’s public dimension. Although he does not engage public diplomacy literature much, including work lying at its boundaries (e.g., coercive and manipulative propaganda or anti-diplomatic, psychological warfare), Parker is one of the few historians to buck this trend. He consequently helps situate public diplomacy within the international political realm—not as an add-on, but as a vital element of the foreign policy apparatus. Future studies can complement *Hearts, Minds, Voices* by examining the Soviet Union or nonaligned states’ public diplomacy initiatives during the Cold War. They might also delve more into the local archives of Third World states to explore how the masses and elites there perceived US Cold War outreach activities, augmenting Parker’s ego-perspective accounts with an alternative perspective.

References

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