

## INDERJEET PARMAR

The University of Manchester

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# “Mobilizing America for An Internationalist Foreign Policy”: The Role of the Council on Foreign Relations

### THE ROLE OF THE COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

This article attempts to examine the processes by which the United States was transformed from an “isolationist” power to an “internationalist” one in the World War II period, focusing on the role of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), an influential and controversial foreign policy organization.<sup>1</sup> In focusing on an organization, I certainly imply that the transformation process was not driven purely by the logic of world events – Nazi domination of Europe or Japanese aggression – but also by concerted efforts by people dedicated to a set of principles and ideas about America’s place in the world –

1. It is clear, however, that the internationalist-isolationist dichotomy is too simplistic; it has been demonstrated, notably by corporatist historians (on whom more below), to be at odds with the historical record. It is also of some importance, however, to take seriously the fact that the participants in the seismic foreign policy shift that did occur – even if there were interconnections and continuities between the two eras – categorized the past as “isolationist” and the future as “internationalist.” Their reading of the past – or at least of the interwar years – that they had all lived was that it was blighted by isolationism, even if the Hoover and other administrations had encouraged private bankers and others to engage in various international efforts. Their hopes, or rather strategies, for the future were pinned on globalism as the guiding star of U.S. foreign policy, but only after the spectre of isolationism – as an organized force, an intellectual current, even, perhaps, as a prejudice or as common sense – had been exorcized. “Isolationism” may not withstand the test of history, but it was real because the main political actors of the day *believed* it to be so, and their political strategies were constructed on such beliefs. See the following studies of the CFR: Lawrence Shoup and William Minter, *Imperial Brain Trust* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977); Robert D. Schulzinger, *The Wise Men of Foreign Affairs: History of the Council on Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); G. William Domhoff, *The Power Elite and the State* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1990); Inderjeet Parmar, “The Issue of State Power: The Council on Foreign Relations as a Case Study,” *Journal of American Studies*, (1995); for an extreme right-wing view, see Phoebe Courtney, *Nixon and the CFR* (New Orleans: Free Men Speak, 1971).

ideas which challenged the isolationist status quo, sought to undermine it and to ultimately replace it with an internationalist consensus.

Founded in 1921, the Council on Foreign Relations was the result of a series of meetings, originally convened during the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, between British and American advisors. Led by individuals such as Whitney Hart Shepardson, Thomas Lamont, and Isaiah Bowman, the Council aimed to establish a reputable, scientific organization to bring together men from government, industry, finance, and academia, to build an alliance of men of action and the world of scholarship.<sup>2</sup> Such an alliance was, it was thought, an essential basis for a wise national foreign policy and an informed citizenry. The CFR was a “liberal internationalist” organization dedicated to building the foundations of a globalist U.S. foreign policy led by a strong federal executive branch and backed by a constructive and educated public. Although a private organization, the CFR acted as a “parastate” body, loyal to the state and dedicated to public service. Its funding came, in part, from the recently-founded great philanthropic expressions of Progressivism, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation. Establishing its internationally-renowned quarterly review, *Foreign Affairs*, in 1922, the Council achieved a respected position in the official and unofficial discussion of foreign policy. The outbreak of the Second World War in Europe brought the Council – through the *War and Peace Studies* project – close to the heart of the official foreign policy-making apparatus.<sup>3</sup>

### PRIVATE AGENCY AND PUBLIC POWER

The Council’s members were selected on the basis of their expertise or experience in foreign policy matters: Wall Street lawyers, international financiers, industrialists, government officials, and Ivy League university academics and presidents. A coalition of such forces in the United States in the early twentieth century was a profound development; its impact on the scope of both domestic and foreign policy was profound and far-reaching.<sup>4</sup> The CFR’s formation was emblematic of far deeper tendencies in American society that became apparent with the rise of the Progressive movement and the social engineering experiments of World War I.<sup>5</sup> There was a flowering of re-

2. Shepardson was a lawyer by training; advisor to the Army Department in Paris 1919; director of CFR 1921–1966; Lamont was a partner in J.P. Morgan and Co., and a leading Anglophile; Bowman was a geographer and, later, president of Johns Hopkins University. *The Council on Foreign Relations. A Record of Twenty Five Years 1921–1946* (New York: CFR, 1947), 7. In the early 1970s, former Council chairman and Wall St. banker, lawyer, and diplomat, John J. McCloy, told the *New York Times* during a bitter internal dispute that academics had become monastic: “They need the Council,” he said, “the way the Greek philosophers needed the Agora – a place where they can walk among practical men and keep in touch with reality.” See John B. Judis, “Twilight of the Gods,” *The Wilson Quarterly* (1991): 46.

3. See above, fn. 1.

4. Eldon J. Eisenach, *The Lost Promise of Progressivism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), is an excellent source for the profound developments referred to.

5. Ronald Schaffer, *America in the Great War. The Rise of the War Welfare State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

form-oriented organizations, professional associations, academic societies, and university institutions that were largely animated by the desire to use scientifically-derived knowledge to improve the quality of life of Americans, to alleviate poverty and social distress, to reform politics and government, and to transform the way Americans viewed themselves and their country's role and place in the world. As Eldon Eisenach argues, such organizations took on "the characteristics of 'parastate' institutions," claiming to stand for the "collective ends of the national community." Their own self-concept constituted them as "the 'authentic nation,'" while the existing political parties and their institutions, it was charged, stood for narrow, selfish, and sectional interests. Consequently, parastates shunned electoral politics because of its domination by corrupt demagogues and condemned legislatures for their parochialism. They tended to favor the extension of executive authority, however, as a vehicle for a broader, global view of American society, economy, politics and foreign affairs.<sup>6</sup>

The parastates' "statist" proclivities were aptly summarized by one advocate who wrote that "The state must be no external authority which restrains and regulates me, *but it must be myself acting as the state in every smallest detail of life.*"<sup>7</sup> According to this viewpoint, the "good citizen" was "'state-oriented' in the sense of seeking to achieve a large public good in his actions in every sphere of life." The existence of such a spirit in the United States was of vital importance particularly during World War I. The parastates – churches, universities, reform organizations – mobilized Americans by the tens of thousand to assist the war effort: George Creel's Committee on Public Information, for example, mobilized 150,000 private citizens to promote the war, while the American Protective League galvanized 250,000 volunteers to identify anti-war and other "un-American" elements in that society. The clergy, as Ray H. Abrams demonstrates, also served the war effort with enthusiasm, forging the unity of the church and state, legitimizing the actions of both.<sup>8</sup>

Private agencies were taking the problems of American society, politics, economy, and culture seriously. Furthermore, they were both studying society through the emerging techniques of academic social science and mobilizing politically. In so doing, they became associated with agencies of the federal government that were relatively powerless to deal with the complex and deep-seated problems of early twentieth-century America. The gradually emerging alliance or cooperation between private groups and public power brought into focus the necessity of mobilizing public opinion on a range of issues outside the framework of the main political parties.<sup>9</sup> The public opinion that the Progressive groups sought to mobilize necessarily transcended party affiliations and organizations, and defined social and other problems as "American" problems and not as local or sectoral or sectional. Progress-

6. Eisenach, *Lost Promise*, 131. 7. *Ibid*

8. Ray H. Abrams and other material cited in text, see Carol S. Gruber, *Mars and Minerva. World War I and the Uses of the Higher Learning in America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 4–6.

9. See the special issue of *Business History Review* (12 [1978]), esp. Ellis W. Hawley's article, "The Discovery and Study of a 'Corporate Liberalism.'"

sivism was, in this view, a movement that sought to redress the stark realities of American political life: locally-based political constituencies, provincial in attitude and antinational in effect, a national politics of pork barrel and patronage that made nearly impossible effective national reform and hindered the development of a strong federal executive power.

The weaknesses of American political parties and the fragmented character of its federal-level institutions helped generate a demand, and the necessary forces, for building consensus and coherence in national life which was clearly in the interests of the federal executive. Yet, any steps towards building a viable set of national institutions required the mobilization of public opinion. It was here that the interests of the executive branch and the parastates interlocked particularly well. The parastates' outlook on public opinion differed from that held by elected politicians. To progressives, *authentic* public opinion could only be formed after the "proper" information had been presented and discussed under the guidance of an enlightened elite. As Progressive intellectual, Franklin Giddings of Columbia University opined,

the legitimate and rightful appeal is always from any dissent of the governed now to that . . . consent which, we have sufficient reason to believe, will be freely given when all the facts are clearly seen, and when the reason and conscience of the governed [are] fully awakened and matured.

Indeed, the progressive elite was the source, it was claimed, of the most advanced ideas which were to be disseminated to "those immediately below them to organize and direct society." Thus, the parastates' public opinion mobilizations served to enhance support for their reformist goals and federal authority and institutional reach while simultaneously undermining the institutions of the status quo.<sup>10</sup>

The antiparty and antilocalist rhetoric of Progressives in relation to domestic politics had its counterpart in the realm of foreign policy. Progressives argued that, in foreign relations, America's institutional inadequacies led to weakness, incoherence, foreign mistrust, and a failure to develop a truly patriotic international policy. If America was to take its "rightful" place in the world and to fulfill its mission (whether defined religiously, scientifically, industrially or racially) to lead the world, the nation had to be united; furthermore, it would be necessary to develop a modern political and administrative system.<sup>11</sup> If politics was to stop "at the water's edge," only a modern attitude and institutional structure would suffice. To achieve the momentum for a

10. Eisenach, *Lost Promise*; Giddings cited in Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order 1877-1920*, 3d ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 234.

11. Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream. American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 8. As Priscilla Roberts points out in a review article, in relation to foreign affairs, Establishment men sought to "allay their own social and status concerns, impose a certain set of values upon their own country." They sought, Roberts argues, "a psychologically satisfying cause around which they could attempt to unite their somewhat apathetic countrymen, thereby imposing their own ideals upon what frequently seemed an unresponsive citizenry" ("'All the Right People': The Historiography of the American Foreign Policy Establishment," *Journal of American Studies* [1992]: 432-33).

more internationally engaged and bipartisan foreign policy, Progressives took aim at the principle institutional support for isolationism, the party machine. In the meantime, Progressive organizations sought to mobilize public opinion – the conceptualization of which they pioneered – as a force in its own right, to increase interest in foreign affairs, and to strengthen the hand of the federal government.<sup>12</sup>

The Council on Foreign Relations emerged from a background more particularly shaped by America's experience of global warfare and the failure of the U.S. Senate to ratify American membership in the League of Nations. The CFR represented a continuation of the progressive/parastate tradition in the realm of foreign affairs at a time when domestic progressivism had declined as a politically vigorous force. Foreign affairs, however, provided an ideal setting for continuing the progressive parastates' initiative because it was already more insulated from party politics and dominated by a highly educated, cosmopolitan elite. Additionally, foreign affairs parastates were well-connected with their internationalist counterparts in the press and radio, the federal executive branch, churches, universities, and other reform organizations.

I propose here to explore and test the effectiveness of the Council in public opinion mobilization. With the exception of the work of Michael Wala, scholars have focused more of their attention on the impact of the Council on *policy-making* in Washington, DC. More often these scholars are out to prove or disprove the notion that the organization was a "ruling class" vehicle that dominated the foreign policy process in the 1939–1945 period.<sup>13</sup> Yet,

12. Eisenach, *Lost Promise*, 76. It is clear that certain elitist aspects of progressivist ideology combined with the transformation of the United States by war and imperialism were strong factors in the growing perception among elites as to the importance of public opinion. As Robert Hilderbrand argues so cogently, Progressivism's emphasis on the "popular foundations of power," as well as a deep "concern for sound administration," led to "efforts to guide and influence" popular attitudes. Allied with an expanding vision of America's global role, Progressive ideology became a powerful force favoring the "education of the public" so they may be led by the "wise," as the sociologist Edward Ross put it. Walter Lippmann elaborated the new orthodoxy in his 1922 essay, "Public Opinion," arguing that in the absence of adequate education, "the common interests very largely elude public opinion entirely." He suggested that a new political science was required to systematically study the real world and to make the facts known to government and public alike. The new political scientists would constitute, he believed, a modern priesthood, "an independent, expert organization for making the unseen facts intelligible to those who have to make the decisions." Robert Hilderbrand, *Power and the People. Executive Management of Public Opinion in Foreign Affairs, 1897–1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 4–5, 55; Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 310, 31. Joseph Alois Schumpeter notes that

the typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field. He argues and analyzes in a way which he would readily recognize as infantile within the sphere of his real interests. He becomes a primitive again. (*Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* [1943; London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1987], 262);

13. Shoup & Minter; Schulzinger; Domhoff (as in fn. 1). Michael Wala's welcome study is a notable exception to the rule. He demonstrates the CFR's role within the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, an organization devoted to mobilizing public opinion, on which more below. See his, *The Council on Foreign Relations and American Foreign Policy in the Early Cold War* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1994).

as former Secretary of State Dean Acheson suggested, there may be something “uniquely and typically American” in private groups of citizens volunteering to agitate publicly for a progovernmental foreign policy, especially when such policies were not, he claimed, “directly beneficial to themselves or their group.” As to the effects of such private action, Acheson suggested that the meetings held and bulletins circulated at private expense “reach the mind, or at least the attention, of innumerable others – and all this effort eventually came back to affect the several hundred people in Washington who would write and enact . . . the law.”<sup>14</sup> While Acheson’s claims of disinterested citizens should be regarded cautiously, he did raise points of immense interest to students of political power: what is the character of such private groups? How truly private are they? And, most importantly, what do these groups’ activities tell us about “how power works” in a democratic society? The implications of the CFR case for pluralist, corporatist, statist, and Gramscian understandings of power will be considered in the conclusions of this article.

### THE CFR AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF PUBLIC OPINION

There was a dual purpose in the CFR’s efforts in the realm of public opinion management. First, the Council was interested in data-collection, the gauging of opinion in different sectors of society. Secondly, the Council was interested in opinion-mobilization, crafting its tactics according to its target audience.

The elitism of the Council’s membership was paralleled by the elitism of its mission to “enlighten” and “educate” public opinion. The leaders of the Council saw themselves as the kind of independent scientific experts Lippmann had called for. According to an internal report, Whitney Shepardson, one of the founders of the Council, and Lionel Curtis, his British collaborator, believed that, “Right public opinion was [*sic*] mainly produced by a small number of people in real contact with the facts who had thought out the issues involved.”<sup>15</sup> In 1937, the Council’s executive director, Walter Mallory, explained that

the Council tries to attain its ends by using a rifle instead of a shotgun – by working with selected leading individuals and trusting that these will be assisted to right decisions themselves and will in turn, through their influential positions, affect the opinion and action of the masses.<sup>16</sup>

The Council leadership perceived its mission as one of identifying and focusing activities on key leadership segments of American society, the so-called opinion-formers and, occasionally, the attentive public, as the initial step to-

14. Acheson, *Present at the Creation. My Years at the State Department* (New York: WW Norton and Co., Inc., 1969), 240–41.

15. Michael Dockrill, “Historical Note,” *International Affairs* 54 (1980): 665.

16. Walter H. Mallory memorandum, “Project for Popular Education in International Affairs Proposed by the Carnegie Corporation,” in Council on Foreign Relations File-Foreign Relations Committees 1937–1940, Carnegie Corporation Archives, Columbia University, New York.

wards the education of the population as a whole. Although always a small minority of the population, the attentive public, according to Rosenau, “clearly plays a crucial role in the process of democracy.” It is these “small blocs of opinion-holders,” V. O. Key, Jr. argues, who “often energize – or brake – the machinery of state,” making the winning of this bloc of critical importance during periods of intense political conflict.<sup>17</sup> It was a central tenet of Council philosophy and practice that the American citizenry was perceived to lack the levels of deference that allowed elites to rule unchallenged. Their principal duty, in their own eyes, was to study the necessary means of overcoming such nondeferential attitudes in order to make public opinion “*an instrument of foreign policy*.”<sup>18</sup> Council leaders never took public opinion for granted: in complacency they saw only the danger of the reemergence of isolationism in the post-World War II era.<sup>19</sup>

The *fear* of a return to isolationism must not be underestimated. It is a constant feature of Council discussions – in and out of government – about the nature of the postwar world. At the center of postwar hopes, for leaders of the Council, was a strong and effective Anglo-American alliance. Yet, as one of their number, Robert Blakely, argued in late 1942, U.S. public opinion would not sustain any exclusive alliance or any concept like “Federal Union” with Britain. Public opinion, it was believed, “viewed with misgivings” such notions of “Anglo-American domination of the postwar world.”<sup>20</sup> Hence the emphasis in Council deliberations of broader concepts and structures of international organization such as “internationalism” and the “United Nations.” Council leaders also anticipated the problems with public opinion they might provoke if they appeared to be suggesting ways that the United States might control the world. Isaiah Bowman, for example, noted the need to simultaneously ensure U.S. power and to “avoid conventional forms of imperialism.”<sup>21</sup>

In spite of this genuine concern about the proper molding of public opinion, however, the elitist spirit of the Council usually (but not always) made it rather timid in moving too boldly among the “masses.” Indeed, one of the chief criticisms of the Council by those – such as Brooks Emeny of the Cleveland World Affairs Council – who would convert the masses by working for internationalism in America’s midwestern isolationist heartland – was pre-

17. I. N. Rosenau, *Citizenship Between Elections. An Inquiry Into the Mobilizable American* (New York: The Free Press, 1974), 4; V. O. Key, Jr., is cited on xxxiii of Rosenau.

18. CFR, Report of the Executive Director 1947–1948, 31; emphasis added.

19. Colonel George Fielding Eliot, military correspondent of the *New York Herald Tribune* and Council participant in the official War and Peace studies program, argued this precise point in 1944 when he suggested that “On the finding of satisfactory solutions to the problems it [public opinion “enlightenment”] involves may depend the whole course of our future” (Eliot memorandum, “Means of Securing Sustained Popular Support For American Participation in Postwar International Organization,” Nov. 20, 1944, P-B90, War and Peace Studies Files, CFR Archives, New York).

20. Robert Blakely memorandum, “Is American Opinion Ready for Participation in a United Nations Organization?,” Dec. 4, 1942, 2, in Record of Groups (RG), “The United States and the United Nations in War and Peace,” Study Group, CFR Archives.

21. Shoup and Minter, *Imperial Brain Trust*, 169–70.

cisely that the CFR seemed too “limited to Manhattan” and a small and self-satisfied local membership.<sup>22</sup>

Given the nature of the Council and its self-perception as a kind of university of international affairs, it is all the more surprising that quite sustained attempts *were* made to establish regional committees on foreign relations across the United States from the late 1930s onward.<sup>23</sup> More naturally, the Council used its educational program to target Ivy League university students and young instructors as they were seen as future leaders of government, business, and academia. More intermittent and hesitant steps were taken during the war to contact church leaders and farmers’ representatives to try to ascertain the state of opinion in these areas of American life for policy purposes. For the “attentive” and “opinion-forming” publics, CFR produced a journal, *Foreign Affairs*, along with a number of other publications, most of which could be found on international relations course reading lists across America.<sup>24</sup> The Council has also been connected, despite disclaimers to the contrary, with more popular organizations – such as the Foreign Policy Association (FPA) – and with single-issue opinion-mobilization groups such as the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. Finally, the leading individuals of the Council established other popular or single-issue organizations – the Century Group and Fight For Freedom – to campaign for a declaration of war by the U.S. government.<sup>25</sup>

### The Universities

Between 1936 and 1942, conferences were held at the CFR’s New York City headquarters and financed by grants from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Their aim was to provide a bridge between foreign policy “old hands” and the emerging elite from key universities.<sup>26</sup> The fundamental goal was to focus the attention of serious students on the practical aspects of U.S. foreign policy, specifically the problems facing the adoption of an *internationalist* foreign policy. Organizing “Conferences for University Men” was seen as a key step towards gaining extra ground for “internationalism” in the late 1930s as war looked increasingly inevitable.

The Council took a long view of the impact of the conferences, believing that training young men to “think straight” in 1940 was vital as “the younger

22. Brooks Emeny, president of the Cleveland Council on World Affairs, to J. D. Rockefeller Jr, Aug. 14, 1944, RGIII 2 Q, Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller (World Affairs), Box 4, Folder 29, Rockefeller Archives Center, Pocantico Hills, North Tarrytown, NY.

23. Schulzinger, *Wise Men*, x; 245–46.

24. Nathaniel Peffer (Columbia University), “Memorandum on Carnegie Corporation Grants in the Field of International Relations,” Apr. 17, 1944, in Carnegie Corporation Grant Files, Box 187, International Relations; Columbia University.

25. The FPA, founded in 1918, was originally called “The Committee on Nothing at All” and included Charles Beard among its leading members; the CDAAA was organized in the spring of 1940, as was the Century Group; the FFF was formed in April 1941.

26. CFR, Conference for University Men on “Neutrality and Collective Action,” Feb. 6–7, 1936, 3 in CEIP Papers, Boxes 354–356, Folders 64202–64218, Columbia University; hereafter cited as conferences followed by the appropriate date and page number.



generation alone will shape the formative years that ensue." And focusing on young academics and senior students, the Council argued, would be highly useful because "whatever they assimilate during a conference becomes a part of their outlook, is incorporated in their lectures, and thereby has far reaching influence." As Mark Chadwin notes, by 1940 university students were the most pacifistic section of American society, with thousands of undergraduates signing the so-called Oxford pledge and demonstrating against war. The Columbia University Peace Committee, for example, declared that 80 percent of the students were against arming belligerent powers and 50 percent did not want U.S. armed forces to increase in number.<sup>27</sup> The Council was, therefore, making its intervention in the increasingly controversial debate on war, peace, and U.S. national interests, within a student community susceptible to influence from various directions.

The conference themes were fully integrated into a practical world-view that was characteristic of Council thinking: three focused on neutrality and its alternatives, one on "Alternative Trade Policies," and another more broadly on "The Bases of American Foreign Policy." The students were selected by respected figures in academia such as Professor James W. Angell at Columbia, William L. Langer and John H. Williams at Harvard, De Witt C. Poole at Princeton, and Nicholas J. Spykman at Yale. These and other academics selected seventeen students from the above-named universities for the first conference. Later conferences included students from the University of Pennsylvania, Johns Hopkins, Amherst, Brown, Dartmouth, Swarthmore, Chicago, Cornell, and others. Student representatives usually numbered around fifteen for a two-day conference at which they would be addressed by various foreign policy experts, bankers, government officials from the State and Commerce departments, newspapermen, and business leaders. At the December 1936 conference, for example, sessions were addressed by (among others) the Hon. Francis B. Sayre, assistant secretary of state and author of "America Must Act" (1936); Eugene P. Thomas, president of the National Foreign Trade Council" and Henry Chalmers of the Commerce Department's Foreign Tariffs Division.<sup>28</sup>

Prior to the conferences the students were sent a reading list recommending about one thousand pages of relevant publications – some for and against intervention and some quite neutral.<sup>29</sup> Accompanying the preparatory materials for one of the conferences was a series of statistical tables on U.S. imports and exports flows, composition by commodities, and such, compiled from mainly official sources. These tables were notable because a Council man had added a series of observations below most tables in an effort to clarify certain aspects of the data presented. While the observations made were accurate enough, the nature of the comments suggests a great deal of anxi-

27. CFR, Conferences March 14–16, 1940, CFR Archives, P. 6; Mark Lincoln Chadwin, *The Hawks of World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 9.

28. CFR, Conferences, 1936, 4; and *New York Times*, Apr. 20, 1940. CFR, Conferences 1936, 5–6, Appendix C.

29. CFR, Conferences 1936, 3.

ety about the students' statistical skills or, more probably, fear that students might miss the importance of certain data that constituted a key part of the internationalist argument.<sup>30</sup>

The role of the students at the two-day conferences was to listen to formal and informal talks, engage in question and answer sessions, and discuss and debate during the meetings and meal breaks. At dinner on the second evening, selected students would speak on behalf of the contending "factions" among their number.<sup>31</sup> All of the mainstream views on foreign policy were represented at each of the conferences, including "isolationism/economic nationalism," usually in a minority capacity, however. Almost 50 percent of students – at nearly all five conferences – favored the status quo, i.e., the established policy of the U.S. administration. In March 1940, for example, of the fifteen students, four supported immediate U.S. intervention into WWII, four supported isolation, and seven held a "wait and see" policy of flexibility.<sup>32</sup>

To evaluate the impact of the conferences, the Council asked for the opinions of participating students and the noncouncil experts and practitioners. The Council also drew its own conclusions as to the state of students' knowledge (or lack thereof) and the beneficial effects of the meetings.

On the whole, the reports of all participants were favorable. Stanley Hornbeck of the Far Eastern section of the State Department wrote that many of the students came to the conferences with misconceived notions, "knowing" things that were not true, having been "captivated by certain slogans." The conference, however, had put them straight on the "difference between easy theorizing about the 'ideal' and stern wrestling with the factors of practicability and of possibility in the carrying on and conducting of human relationships." Even more than this, the conferences served as a listening post for the government, because they indicated what the American public would "stand for" in policy terms.<sup>33</sup> Nathaniel Peffer of Columbia University

30. For example, beneath the table on "Percentage Distribution of U.S. Export Trade by Continents of the World," it is observed that "Europe is by far our best customer, taking about one-half of our total exports. A loss of this market, whatever the reason, would be well-nigh irremediable." Below the table "Exports of Important Commodities in Relation to Production, 1929 and 1934" derived from Francis B. Sayre's book, *America Must Act*, it states: "About 60 percent of the cotton crop and more than one-third of the tobacco crop depend on foreign markets. Well over 30 percent of printing machinery and slightly under that percentage of agricultural machinery are sold abroad." And finally, the longest observation of all beneath a table entitled "Total Annual Production of Movable Goods and Proportion Exported," it states

It is frequently stated that our export trade absorbs but a small proportion of national production. The above trade shows that on an average the proportion is 10 percent. This may appear as an inconsequential amount. Yet it should be interpreted in light of two facts: (a) Economists state that a range of 15 percent in national production is the difference between a severe depression and a boom. (b) Some industries are far more dependent than others on exports. This figure, 10 percent, is the average for all industries. (CFR, Conferences, vol. 3, 1–8)

31. CFR, Conferences 1936, 4. 32. CFR, Conferences 1940, 5.

33. CFR, Conferences 1936, Appendix C, 4.

thought the conference idea was “excellent . . . [and] should be repeated.” Thomas Lamont, a J.P. Morgan and Co. partner, felt that the conference had forced the younger men “to revise their estimates” as to the nature of U.S. foreign policy.<sup>34</sup>

Later conference reports reiterated similar sentiments on their impact on students’ attitudes. In April 1937, one Council man remarked that he was encouraged by

The realistic point of view which almost all the university men adopted . . . Usually . . . the response of student groups in sessions of this sort is much more “idealistic” and divorced from appreciation of what humans can accomplish in the world as we find it.

The students’ speeches at that conference, however, he concluded, “reflect a keen appreciation of the objectives and methods of American foreign policy.”<sup>35</sup>

The conference reports also charted the changing attitudes of students as German militarism became more menacing. By the February 1939 conference, students had rejected the Neutrality Acts as a hindrance to a “sensible” policy, even though there was no consensus as to what should supplant them. By March 1940, not a single man accepted the so-called Gerald Nye-Walter Millis interpretations of America’s reasons for entering the Great War, that is, the idea that it was the vested interest of U.S. big business allied with British propaganda that pushed/pulled the United States into hostilities. The Council did not take all the credit for this conversion of student opinion – it did allow for George Gallup’s suggestion that “men were influenced more by events than by propaganda.”<sup>36</sup> Council leaders were clear, however, of the need to “properly” interpret events.

Students’ responses were overwhelmingly positive about the nature, content, and style of the conferences. Such positive feelings and many other assumptions of this group of the east coast’s youthful elite, were summed up by the letter of Malcolm K. Wilkey, a senior in government from Harvard, in June 1940. After suggesting how important the 1940 conference was in developing “straight thinking,” he went on to say that he had become “more interventionist than before, and now I think absolutely the best thing to do is

34. *Ibid.*, 6; 5–6. 35. CFR, Conferences 1937, 6.

36. Yet, not all developments pointed in the same “positive” direction. There was occasionally great frustration among Council leaders at the levels of student ignorance too. In July 1941, Norman Davis, head of the American Red Cross, CFR director, and confidant of President Franklin Roosevelt and of Secretary of State Cordell Hull, complained to Nicholas Murray Butler of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, that

The [university] men this year literally shocked us by their factual ignorance of American foreign relations. I need hardly tell you that the Conferences put in several good licks in this respect. But the experience makes one wonder just what the universities are doing in their courses on international relations. (CFR, Conferences 1940, 5)

Letter, Davis to Butler, July 29, 1941 in Box 355, Folders 64323–64342, IV Organizations, CEIP papers.

to declare war on Germany.” Then he went on to comment on his somewhat conventional view of how public opinion was formed, failing to realize, however, that a great deal of hard work went into attempting to mobilize public opinion: there was nothing automatic about the masses following elites, blindly or otherwise.<sup>37</sup> Certainly, CFR leaders were never so complacent, and public opinion polls, before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, never showed more than 21 percent of the population in favor of U.S. belligerence.<sup>38</sup>

The impact of the conferences was felt in several ways. One young instructor gave an informal report to his social science colleagues upon return to campus and reported that “they felt there had been something gained for all of us.” One Professor Helmreich noted in 1938 that it was “curious how many times I have been able to work points raised at the Conference into my classroom discussions this past week.” But perhaps the most telling comment on the April 1938 conference was from an instructor who not only claimed that the sessions “brought us all down to earth,” but added that

Certainly, I think that the Conference did what the State Department crowd presumably hoped that it would do; namely, it gave us all more trust in what the State Department is doing and hence makes us less prone to criticize. If we do continue to criticize the Department, I think at least all of us who were present . . . will criticize with more understanding.<sup>39</sup>

The attempt to mobilize opinion, therefore, according to this student, had been successful.

The influence of these conferences continued, therefore, well beyond the confines of the sessions themselves and of the relatively small number of students directly involved. As Dean Acheson noted, private efforts in pursuit of public ends are a vital part of the American “political” process; while their effects may not always be felt in Washington, DC, they do reach “the mind, or at least the attention, of innumerable others.” That is how this Council on Foreign Relations initiative must be viewed: as an attempt to generate a climate of opinion within the student body through specially selected groups of seniors and instructors.

37. He stated,

When I saw that nearly all the older [Council men] who participated were for various shades of intervention, then I felt that it would not be long before public opinion in general reflected their views. For as one of the history professors here [Harvard] said when asked what the masses thought about a question at a certain time, “The masses never think. They only follow certain leaders.” The older men at the conference represented various parts of American life most intimately connected with and thinking about U.S. foreign policy. Their expressed opinions carry the most weight with other leaders and directly and indirectly with the public at large. Hence it seemed to me then that the public would soon be thinking with the leaders after the usual time lag. (CFR, Conferences 1940, 15–16)

38. Chadwin, *Hawks of World War II*, 197.

39. “Final Report of the Conferences for University Men,” July 13, 1938, Box 355, IV Organizations, Folder 64219, CEIP Papers, 3 – IP.

The Council further enhanced the potential for influence by collating the students' speeches at the concluding session of the conferences and distributing them to hundreds of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's university and college-based "International Relations Clubs" around the United States, where they formed the foundations for broad discussions on the practicalities of America's foreign relations. Reports of the student conferences were also published in the campus newspapers of all the major participant universities.<sup>40</sup>

The conferences had a number of other longer term effects on several of the participating students. Six students, for example, went on to be nominated and selected for full membership of the Council. Two of these six – Payson Wild of Harvard and William Diebold Jr. of Swarthmore – went on to participate in the Council's highly secretive "War and Peace Studies" research project – which produced a "blueprint" for postwar U.S. foreign policy – in the State Department during World War II. Information on three other students shows that one (Roger Maynard) joined J.P. Morgan and Co.; another (Francis T. Williamson) joined the State Department as a foreign service officer in 1944; and Charles P. Kindleberger went on to become an international economist and author of two dozen books.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, Kindleberger went on to write, albeit a near half-century later, one of the key texts justifying American global hegemony, *The World in Depression*. It was the lack of a hegemonic power managing the world economy that had been a principal cause of the great depression, Kindleberger argued, a line that was dominant in CFR (and other) circles in the 1930s, and which was manifested in the *Grand Area* concept developed by the Council during its period of State Department incorporation during World War II. Interestingly, the Council memorandum that defined the Grand Area – the regions of the globe designated as vital to the American economy – was cowritten by William Diebold Jr., a Conferences for University Men participant.<sup>42</sup>

The effects of such programs are always difficult to gauge, but a concerted attempt was being made to mobilize bias, to set an agenda, and, therefore, to tell students what and how to think about America's foreign relations. Nathaniel Peffer's conclusion was a little understated when he wrote in 1942 that the conferences "appear to be worthwhile," especially as the students seemed so influenced as a result, with several going on to take up positions in the foreign policy apparatus. Secretary of State Cordell Hull, as the Council learned in 1938, was personally very interested in the conferences, partic-

40. "Final Report on the Conferences for University Men," May 25, 1937, in Boxes 354–356, Folders 64202–64218, IV Organizations, CEIP papers.

41. *Who Was Who in America*, vols. IV, V, VII; CFR membership list, CFR, *A Record of Twenty Five Years*; CFR, *Appendices, The War and Peace Studies of the Council on Foreign Relations 1939–1945* (New York: CFR, 1946).

42. Charles Kindleberger, *The World in Depression 1929–1939* (London: Penguin Press, 1973); for the "Grand Area" concept, Memorandum E-B34, Arthur R. Upgren and William Diebold Jr., "Methods of Economic Collaboration: Introductory. The Role of the Grand Area in American Economic Policy," July 24, 1941, War-Peace Studies Files, CFR Archives, New York; see also Shoup and Minter, *Imperial Brain Trust*.

ularly in relation to “undergraduate reactions, [and] their angle of approaching American foreign relations.” Secretary Hull, State Department officers reported, frequently and unofficially discussed the conferences with his colleagues and regarded them as “outstanding of their kind.”<sup>43</sup> This initiative shows that *persuasion* and *education* were at the heart of the Council’s agenda, in conjunction with a supportive State Department, that *engineering consent* within a key segment of public opinion was vital to the CFR.

The Council’s understanding of public opinion formation and the strategic role of the brightest students informed its practice almost twenty years before the publication of Elihu Katz’s and Paul Lazarsfeld’s study, “Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications,” which emphasized the vital role of “opinion leaders.”<sup>44</sup> Such a strategy was to be further applied in the Council’s plans for reaching regional elites across several leading American cities in the 1930s and 1940s.

### The Regions

The original idea for regional committees on foreign relations came from the directors of the Carnegie Corporation in 1937 as part of their interest in “adult education.” Frederick P. Keppel, president of the Carnegie Corporation, asked the CFR’s executive director, Walter H. Mallory, to develop a plan to implement the idea. One early supporter of this initiative, Phillips Bradley, a political scientist at Amherst, argued that the existing work in the area of foreign relations education was limited and propagandistic. He argued “that the continued existence of our own institutions depends on a recognition that education of public opinion is essential. There is no reason why the dictatorial regimes should have a monopoly of effective methods.” The proposed project, he concluded, would be vital in creating “public support for an intelligent foreign policy.”<sup>45</sup> The Carnegie Corporation gave the CFR \$37,500 in 1938 to establish a number of regional committees on foreign relations.<sup>46</sup> Their aim was to “aid in stimulating greater interest in foreign affairs on the part of community leaders in widely separated areas.”<sup>47</sup>

Initially, seven committees were established in Cleveland, Denver, Des Moines, Detroit, Houston, Louisville, and Portland (Oregon). By 1944–1945 there were twenty committees with 927 members in all, in cities across America, including Birmingham, Los Angeles, Seattle, Salt Lake City, St. Paul–Minneapolis, Tulsa, and St. Louis.<sup>48</sup>

43. Peffer, “Memorandum,” 10, “Final Report on the Conferences for University Men,” Folders 64244–64246, CEIP Papers.

44. See Katz and Lazarsfeld (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1955). Elihu Katz & Paul Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence. The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications*.

45. Memorandum, Mallory, “Project for Popular Education in International Affairs Proposed by the Carnegie Corporation,” Nov. 1, 1937; memorandum, Bradley to Keppel, Sept. 21, 1937, 8, Carnegie Corporation archives, CFR file, Foreign Relations Committees 1937–1940, Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection, Butler Library, Columbia University.

46. Annual Report, Carnegie Corp. (NY: Carnegie Corp, 1938).

47. CFR, *A Record of Twenty-Five Years*, 48.

48. Percy W. Bidwell, “A Seven-Year Survey of An Educational Project in International Relations 1938–1945,” Box 127, Council on Foreign Relations, Carnegie Corporation Papers.

According to Percy Bidwell, organizing secretary of the committees, an educational program conducted by Council-led regional committees would address the problem of a lack of knowledge of foreign affairs. As always, Council policy was drawn up with one central objective: to enhance the role of the United States in the postwar world. "The United States," Bidwell emphasized, "because of its predominant economic and military strength, has an unparalleled opportunity to participate decisively in shaping the postwar world." The role of the committees was to develop local community leadership groups for the constructive discussion of American foreign policy that would promote globalism and to criticize, undermine, and, ultimately, eliminate isolationist tendencies.<sup>49</sup>

The membership of regional committees was "confined to men [no women] who occupy positions of leadership in their communities"; their numbers were kept deliberately small to aid frank discussion; their composition reflected their communities although representation of labour and farmers was acknowledged to be a little thin.<sup>50</sup> The Council's report for 1942–1943, when there were seventeen regional committees, indicates the socio-economic nature of their membership: the largest single occupational group was composed of 206 businessmen – including Charles E. Wilson, president of General Motors – which constituted about one-third of the total. Educators, such as Professor John Condliffe of the University of California, Berkeley, made up 16 percent and lawyers comprised 15 percent. Despite "sincere attempts to enlarge them," the smallest groups were made up of fifteen trade unionists (2.3 percent) and eleven farmers (1.7 percent).<sup>51</sup>

Financed by generous annual grants from the Carnegie Corporation (reaching almost \$170,000 by 1945), the committees were gradually built and expanded in the immediate prewar and war years. The Council first selected a small executive committee in each city and paid a \$250 annual honorarium to the secretary-rapporteur to meet minor expenses and to liaise with the New York Council. The Council gradually knitted together the programs of the

49. Bidwell, intro. to *Community Education in Foreign Affairs* (New York: CFR, 1946), iii–viii.

50. Bidwell, "A Seven-Year Survey," 3, Box 127, Council on Foreign Relations, Carnegie Corporation Papers.

51. The membership also contained many national politicians, including representatives from Birmingham, Alabama (John Newsome), and Louisville, Kentucky (Emmet O'Neal), and at least one U.S. Senator, Homer Ferguson of Michigan. In the Los Angeles committee, there were two major figures from Hollywood, Frank Capra and Walt Disney. From the world of journalism there were numerous columnists, editors and proprietors including W. W. Waymack. The rest of the membership consisted of bankers (8.5 percent), local government officers (4.5 percent), clergy (3.9 percent) and physicians (2.5 percent). According to one regional committee secretary, the relative absence of labor representation was not entirely due to Council elitism, but also had to do with "suspicion on the part of labor leaders that they will lose caste with the rank and file workers if they associate too closely with business and industrial leaders." Whatever the reason, though, Council men were quite ambivalent about those who were not considered "respected leaders" because in their scheme of things it was such leaders from whom a kind of "trickle-down" internationalism would penetrate the masses. "Report to the Carnegie Corporation on the Work of the Foreign Relations Committees of the Council on Foreign Relations during the 1942–43 Season," Box 127, Carnegie Corporation Papers. Appendix to 1943–1944 CFR Report to the CC; and Table III of same report.

regular committees, sent out important and respected speakers and organized an annual national two-day conference in New York. Francis P. Miller, the first Council organizer of the committee program, and then Bidwell, who succeeded him, would regularly tour the committees and meet their leaders and members, to “discover how effectively they were attaining the aims for which they were established.” The committees also wanted New York’s guidance in the formulation of study plans and selection of discussion leaders, which Bidwell favored because it would allow him to compare the reactions of the committees on common topics at regular intervals.<sup>52</sup>

The annual conferences were a vital opportunity for the Council to solve outstanding administrative problems, to “nationalize” the work and outlook of the regional committees, and to invite appropriate policy-makers to address the committee men. In 1944, for example, Benjamin V. Cohen, general counsel for the Office of War Mobilization, led a discussion on “Problems of Demobilization and Foreign Policy” and Dean Acheson, assistant secretary of state, examined the problems associated with establishing a new international organization. Bidwell argued that, because the representatives of twenty cities were participating, such discussions were effectively national in scope: “From these sessions they carried back new ideas and new points of view which they communicated in reports to their Committees.” In addition, the committee men who gathered in New York developed a “strong *esprit de corps*” and began to view their efforts as part of a nationwide, and not purely local project.<sup>53</sup> The Council also, for several years, published and circulated annual regional committee reports, “Some Regional Views on Our Foreign Policy”; these reports were replaced with more specific surveys in 1944. In 1945, the Council began compiling a survey of local activities in international relations “with a view to making the results available to the Department of State, for the use particularly of its Office of Public Information.”<sup>54</sup>

The regional committees studied America’s foreign policy problems from a practical point of view. While prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the committees had focused their attention on the “isolation or intervention” question; after the attack, inter-Allied relations and “the question of our participation in the task of postwar reconstruction” became the dominant issues.<sup>55</sup> During 1943, the committees attempted “to define the true interests of the United States,” closely paralleling the Council’s attempts to do likewise under the auspices of the State Department.<sup>56</sup> In 1944, Cordell Hull gave permission to members of the State and Treasury departments to visit the committees “as a part of their official duties,” so important was their work considered as war neared its end.<sup>57</sup>

52. Bidwell, “Report on Work of Foreign Relations Committees, Season 1941–42,” Box 127, Carnegie Corporation Papers. For more on Miller’s life and convictions, see his autobiography, *Man From the Valley. Memoirs of a Twentieth-Century Virginian* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971).

53. Bidwell “Seven-Year Report,” 4–5. 54. *Ibid.*, 5.

55. Bidwell, “Committee Report 1941–42,” 2.

56. Bidwell, “Committee Report 1943–44,” 5.

57. CFR, “Annual Report, Report of the Executive Director 1944–45,” 14.



Judging the success of the Council's regional committees' program is not a simple task. In March 1940, Percy Bidwell had complained to Rockefeller Foundation official S. H. Walker that, "there is a certain air of unreality about the discussion of American public opinion in most of the study groups of the [New York] Council, since they are drawn too much from one locality and from one economic level."<sup>58</sup> The committees on foreign relations were set up in order to rectify this problem. By 1945, Bidwell believed that the committees had been highly successful because they provided a forum for busy men to learn about U.S. foreign relations through discussions and functioned as "a training school for national service." He pointed out that the ex-chairman of the Detroit committee, William Knudsen, was now director of the Office of Production Management; and that Will H. Clayton, the first chairman of the Houston committee had been appointed Assistant Secretary of State. Other members had taken up positions in the Office of War Information, Office of Strategic Service, and the State, War, and Navy departments. According to Bidwell, the local committee members had demonstrated through their organization of, and attendance at, hundreds of meetings that the committees had become important parts of the communities in which they operated. It was not only the thirty to forty members in each city who benefited: "indirectly, through many channels, the ideas and opinions which are generated and clarified at the meetings spread through each of the twenty communities." The local newspaper editors who participated in discussions wrote editorials reflecting the committee sessions. "Committee members, bankers, lawyers, physicians, clergymen, educators, state and city officials in daily contact with scores of their fellow townsmen, [gave] wide circulation" to committee conclusions. To Bidwell, the committees had been entirely successful in "guiding American opinion in a critical period in our national life."<sup>59</sup>

Independent reports that are available, especially from the local committee secretaries, tell much the same story: that the committees were highly beneficial to their members and, through them, in the community at large. Edwin F. Gay, the retired but tireless academic and head of the Harvard Business School, was an active founding member of the Los Angeles committee, as well as being heavily involved with the Defense Committee of the California Institute of Technology, the Huntington Library, and Mount Wilson Laboratory. In addition to lecturing from prowar positions to Caltech alumni, he conceived of the idea of coordinating a universities' postwar foreign policy planning committee.<sup>60</sup>

Dr. R. A. Tsanoff of the Houston committee reported in 1942 that his group had helped evolve "intelligent judgement" among its members, and that their meetings were of "unique and irreplaceable worth" and had, "through numerous social channels," major influence in the city and its environs. Mr. J. Van Dyke Norman, Louisville committee secretary, suggested that "our own

58. Record of Interview, Mar. 27, 1940, RG1 Series 100, International Box 97, Folder 874, Rockefeller Archives Center.

59. Bidwell, "Seven-Year Report, 6-7.

60. Herbert Heaton, *A Scholar in Action: Edwin F. Gay* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 237-41.

membership derives a great deal from our discussion meetings"; unfortunately, he left the question of broader influence unaddressed.<sup>61</sup>

Conducting a review of the Carnegie Corporation's grants to several foreign policy organizations and initiatives, Nathaniel Peffer emphasized that some of the committees on foreign relations were "thorough and substantial" in their procedures and effects, while some were more "perfunctory." The local meetings, he suggested without substantiation, were "too much . . . just an occasion to listen to a speech and ask questions," and the results had not, therefore, been proportional to the investment of Carnegie funds.<sup>62</sup> A more upbeat assessment, however, came after a tour of the committees by Allen W. Dulles, the lawyer, diplomat, and Council leader, in 1940. He had been delighted by the work done by the committees and by the fact that they had unanimously backed official American support for Britain and France.<sup>63</sup>

The State Department also took a different view from Peffer's, suggesting in 1944 that the CFR conduct an "Inquiry on Minimum American Commitments to a Postwar Security System" with two purposes in mind: first, to gain a summary of the view of all local committee members; and secondly, "to get their estimate of probable reaction of persons in their communities."<sup>64</sup> Even a postwar assessment of the Committees (in 1952) concluded that the State Department saw them very positively "in the forming and supporting of sound foreign policy."<sup>65</sup> During World War II, the State Department's attitude towards unofficial foreign policy groups was to "discreetly guide [them] . . . in channels which seem to the Department to be useful and away from schemes which the Department feels are dangerous or Utopian." The importance of the regional committees, from this perspective, was shown by the desire on the part of the State Department to try to manipulate committee discussions and, indirectly, local public opinion. As Assistant Secretary of State Hugh Wilson suggested to his colleague, Breckenridge Long, in mid-1940, the CFR should regularly

send a man here on current questions. This man could talk with the proper people in the State department, preparing a memorandum on his own which would not be attributed to the Department, and circulated for the confidential information of the men on the selected [Committees on Foreign Relations'] list. We could arrange with Mr. [Francis P.] Miller that the men on the selected list would not be notified that this was State Department material.<sup>66</sup>

As the original organizing secretary, Francis P. Miller, wrote in his memoirs, the committees were important "listening posts to sense the mood of the

61. Bidwell, "Committee Report 1941-42, 8. 62. Peffer, "Memorandum," 11.

63. Letter, Dulles to Miller, n.d., Carnegie Corporation Grant Files; Committees on Foreign Relations 1937-1940.

64. "Report to the Carnegie Corporation of the Work of the Committees on Foreign Relations of the Council on Foreign Relations during the 1943-44 Season," 4, Box 127, Carnegie Corporation Papers.

65. "Memorandum for Counsel of Carnegie Corporation," 14-15, June 30, 1952, Carnegie Corporation Grant Files, 1946-1955.

66. Letter, Wilson to Long, July 13, 1940; memorandum, Charles W. Yost, Division of Special Research, to Leo Pasvolsky, April 14, 1942, 1.

country . . . [as well as playing] . . . a unique role in preparing the nation for a bipartisan foreign policy."<sup>67</sup>

W. Harold Dalgliesh's 1946 survey of committee members' opinions as to the successes and failures of the committees yielded an overwhelmingly favorable response. There was some dissent too, however: one wrote that "Our Council is a group of well-fed gentlemen of the socially [*sic*] elite who listen politely, quiz the speaker gently and go home . . . As a group our Council plays no part in community life." This member appears to have missed the point: local committees were not supposed to function *as groups* in local life; they were designed to reach key contact men – respectable leaders – who would then act *as individuals* in their respective spheres of life, spreading the internationalist gospel. Quiet conversations, not boisterous rallies, were the *modus operandi* of the Council's committee program. The vast majority of committee members, however, were very positive as to the effect of their group on local opinion. Members from San Francisco and Los Angeles reported, for example, that though they were small in number, their members were "men who get around" and exert influence informally. One member claimed that since the Los Angeles committee consisted of many radio commentators, academics, and public discussion group leaders, it had widespread influence. The Salt Lake City committee reported that "the whole tone of our relations to foreign countries has changed materially . . . since this Committee was established."<sup>68</sup>

The committee program, therefore, represented a major part of the CFR's public opinion mobilization strategy, reaching as it did local notables and their associates in selected regions and cities. As the State Department attitude to these committees clearly demonstrates, they were perceived, at the very least, to be a very useful means of opinion-gathering and for the unofficial dissemination of official policy thinking. The role played by the CFR within the universities was therefore applied across America among national and local businessmen, professionals, and the media, that is, among strategically-placed groups with community standing. In the case of the newspaper editors and radio commentators, the Council reached highly influential individuals through whom it could disseminate its ideas. The Council was mobilizing opinion; in addition, it was educating particular groupings to exercise leadership in their own areas of life, in their own spheres of influence. As they did not bar isolationists from membership, the committees played an important role in persuading many of them that their ideas and attitudes were obsolete.

The State Department attempted overtly and covertly to influence the committees or to set their agenda to conform to official thinking, with the active

67. Miller, *Man From the Valley*, 87.

68. Memorandum by Dalgliesh, Apr. 1946, CC Grant Files, CFR, Foreign Relations Committees 1946–1949, 9–12; Box 529A. Charles E. Lindblom, several decades later, noted that in the flow of political communications from corporate and governmental bureaucracies, a key role was played by subordinate groups and strata. Thus, the CFR viewed its local committees as another stepping stone to reaching local elites, their associates and their social and economic "inferiors." See Lindblom, *Politics and Markets. The World's Political-Economic Systems* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977), 227.

cooperation of the Council's leaders. In addition, the CFR used its regional committees to supply the State Department with regular information regarding the evolution of opinion in the regions and as sounding boards for sensitive ideas within the administration. Again, there is strong evidence here of a state agency attempting to construct a bipartisan constituency supportive of its own thinking through the use of a nominally private (but friendly) group.

### GROUP OPINION AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The Council on Foreign Relations also made a number of other attempts to gauge and influence public opinion through a study group on "Foreign Policy and Public Opinion" in 1943–1944. The original aim of the study group, according to Percy Bidwell, was to explore group attitudes, specifically focusing on the churches, organized labor, farm organizations, and business groups. The Council was interested in the results of such work for purely practical purposes: "to make progress in finding out what specific commitments, what pledges in advance, the American people will stand for," in relation to the postwar settlement. Members of this study group included Richard S. Dickey, a special consultant to Cordell Hull, whose work focused particularly on foreign policy public opinion; Malcolm W. Davis of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and of the Office of Strategic Services (Research and Analysis branch); Dr. Lyman Bryson, director of education at Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS); Nicholas Roosevelt, assistant to the publisher of the *New York Times*; and Oswald Garrison Villard, editor of *The Nation*. The aim of this group to cross-check with other public opinion "knowledgeables" the ideas and information provided by the sectional representatives. The attendance of Richard Dickey suggests the importance attached to this initiative by official foreign policy makers, and the attendance of Wayne Johnson (Democratic National Committee treasurer), a regular visitor to the White House, ensured that the lines of communication stretched to the very pinnacle of political power in the country.<sup>69</sup> The study group never achieved its objectives of reaching labor and business – faltering after briefly examining church and farm organization opinion in 1944.

### Churches and Foreign Policy

The CFR was interested in the declaration on world peace – "The Six Pillars of Peace" – by the Commission to Study the Bases of a Just and Durable Peace of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ (FCCC), and the joint "Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant Declaration on World Peace" by the FCCC, the National Catholic Welfare Conference, and the Synagogue Council of

69. Bidwell, letter to George Gallup, American Institute of Public Opinion, Dec. 24, 1943, CFR RG, vol. XV 1943/44 A. "Foreign Policy and Public Opinion." Dickey's function was to research foreign policy public opinion and to liaise with private organizations. See Wilbur Edel, "The State Department, the Public and the United Nations Concept, 1939–1945" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1951), 153.

America. The CFR specifically wanted to know the practical impact of the declarations especially as to whether the religiously-minded would prefer a system of alliances, or an updated league of nations as the basis of postwar security; whether churchmen would accept the American use of "force against aggressors" and the reduction of tariffs to promote international trade.<sup>70</sup>

In the opening meeting of the study group, chaired by George Gallup, Percy W. Bidwell explained to the churchmen, editors, and foreign policy experts, that all the American plans for a world organization "would be useless if not acceptable to Mr. and Mrs. John Q. Citizen." Bidwell then noted that official and unofficial policy elites feared that, while the majority of Americans "agree *in principle* that this country should not revert to isolationism after this war," they may not be so supportive of *specific* commitments.

Dr. Luman Shafer spoke on behalf of the Commission on a Just and Durable Peace. The Commission was, according to Mark G. Toulouse, "vitaly connected" with the name of its chairman, John Foster Dulles, under whose leadership it became remarkably influential. Dulles, along with fellow Commission member and leading theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, led the FCCC in a *realpolitik* direction, urging the adoption of concrete proposals which could be used "to make an impact on actual [foreign] policy decisions by educating public opinion." Indeed, Dulles had met with FDR a week after the launch of the Commission's peace aims statement – "Six Pillars of Peace" – to assure him that the statement would be fully discussed in the churches and that he would try to crystallize public opinion behind postwar international cooperation. Shafer explained to the CFR study group that his organization's statement had been purchased by hundreds of thousands of people. He emphasized that his Commission aimed to "prevent a postwar lapse into disillusioned isolationism." He warned the group, however, that his members were not interested in any international police force "used by a military alliance to maintain the *status quo*." If this were to happen, he argued, the churches would become pacifistic and politically aloof after the war.

Reverend R. A. McGowan, a member of the Committee on Economic Life of the Catholic Association for International Peace (CAIP), spoke of the Catholic view of international affairs as having been principally influenced by their more recent migration from Europe. Catholics, he argued, were more intensely patriotic because of "their fear of losing through alliance or other entanglements with Europe any of the freedom which America has given them." Catholics who stayed on the East Coast, as opposed to those who moved West, he argued, were more anti-European and isolationist. He also pointed out that with the exception of "a few oblique persons," Catholic pacifism was almost nonexistent, and that there would be little objection "to the use of force against aggressors," as long as it occurred within the framework of international organization and law. The CAIP's work, according to historian George Q. Flynn, represented "the most sophisticated and consistent at-

70. "The Attitude of Religious Bodies towards the Participation of the United States in the Postwar Settlement," Study group meeting, Feb. 8, 1944, p.1; in CFR RG, vol., XV 1943/44. FCCC was founded in 1908.

tempt by a Catholic group to form a religious attitude on foreign policy questions," its main concern being with "educating Catholics on the need for international cooperation." The CAIP was highly influential among young Catholics, having established eighty-seven Catholic Peace Clubs (CPC) in colleges and universities across America by 1937, which had been officially endorsed by President Roosevelt. The CPCs were antipacifist, and the CAIP had seen to it that they criticized and boycotted a pacifist and communist-led nationwide "peace strike" in schools and colleges in April 1937. McGowan himself rejected the Neutrality Laws as "defective and dangerous," irresponsible, as failing to distinguish between aggressor and victim, and for refusing presidential discretion in an enormously complex issue-area.

According to Miscamble, Catholic isolationism was of great concern to foreign policy makers, especially FDR, who consistently sought "to bolster those Catholics supporting his policies," with the aim of tilting Catholic opinion "in his own favor before it might be turned to influence him."<sup>71</sup>

Reverend Kelsey Regen, minister of the First Presbyterian Church, Durham, North Carolina, commented upon the disillusionment and cynicism in his part of the South regarding international relations. Later, in a letter to Bidwell, Regen suggested that the FCCC and other groups needed to eschew generalities about peace and adopt a more practical approach. "We need an approach," he argued, "that will say in effect: 'isolationism means this, and this, and this' and 'collaboration means this and this and this' – giving specific proposals and their possible consequences."<sup>72</sup> Mr. Charles Zukoski, vice-president of the First National Bank (Birmingham, Alabama) generally agreed with Regen but reassured the group that the South's traditional friendliness towards England ensured great interest in "postwar collaboration with that country."<sup>73</sup>

The role of the group was to try to measure the pulse of the church community. As George Gallup had stated at the beginning of the meeting, the study of public opinion was vital "in enabling our leaders to become better aware of prevailing attitudes on current questions." This is an excellent example of the very concrete functions of the Council: consulting with church leaders about the politics of public opinion among the religiously-inclined about their propensity for internationalism and for the use of force in international relations. The CFR brought in a range of influential religious bodies and representatives, many of whom were in direct contact with the U.S. president already, to further examine the nature of the commitments that they could expect from particular policies. The CFR, therefore, assisted the state (FDR and the State Department), which was highly interested in church

71. Mark G. Toulouse, *The Transformation of John Foster Dulles. From Prophet of Realism to Priest of Nationalism* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 49, 63, 61, 68; George Q. Flynn, *Roosevelt and Romanism. Catholics and American Diplomacy, 1937–1945* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976), 7–9, 19; Wilson D. Miscamble, "Catholics and American Foreign Policy from McKinley to McCarthy: A Historiographical Survey," *Diplomatic History* 4 (1980), 235.

72. "Foreign Policy" study group, first meeting, Feb. 8, 1944, 1–6; letter, Regen to Bidwell, February 10, 1944.

73. "Foreign Policy" study group, first meeting, Feb. 8, 1944.

opinion and sought to keep it under surveillance and under control, showing a level of proactivity not normally associated with FDR's administration (specifically in the foreign affairs area).

### Organized Agriculture and Foreign Policy

This group was led by W. W. Waymack, editor of the Des Moines *Register and Tribune*, a midwesterner long-involved with the problems of the region's agriculture – having served on several private and governmental commissions – and the study of foreign policy. (Indeed, he won an award from the American Farm Bureau Federation – AFBF – for services to agriculture in 1944). He was also a highly accomplished writer, having won the Pulitzer Prize for distinguished editorial writing in 1937, and was appointed special adviser to the State Department in 1942. Bidwell was especially keen, therefore, to hear Waymack's estimate of farmers' attitudes on the issues of an international police force and U.S. tariff reduction. His newspaper had been a champion of internationalism in the Midwest for many years, as noted by Christiana Campbell in her fine study of the AFBF.<sup>74</sup>

The farm-region spokesman surprised the study group by arguing that internationalism had become a key force among farmers across America, as measured by majority support for antitariff positions and for an international police force. He described how several organizations – the American Farm Bureau Federation, the Farmers' Union, the National Grange – had come out in favor of internationalism. Waymack believed that even though these organizations covered only a portion of farmers, their leaders "are often able to impress their ideas upon members through organizational propaganda and farm journal opinion." Campbell shows that the AFBF's policy had shifted remarkably on the tariff question by quoting its president, Edward A. O'Neal of Alabama, in 1940, arguing that farmers, along with everyone else, had failed to appreciate the fact that America's rise from a debtor to a creditor nation "called for a new foreign policy." The "extraordinarily influential" AFBF, as Campbell calls it, also backed FDR's rearmament program by 1940 and supported the extension of aid to Britain and its allies. The position, however, in terms of policy making, favored FDR. Campbell concludes that the president's political skills in manipulating numerous contending forces were so clear that "the ultimate" influence lay with the political and governmental apparatus. Nevertheless, the AFBF had done a remarkable job in the educational field. As Waymack emphasized, farmers' opinions had shifted remarkably since 1942 – the result of a great educational effort among them by state and country farm bureaus.<sup>75</sup>

After this meeting the group never met again, and this line of activity ap-

74. Letter, Bidwell to Waymack, January 13, 1944, "Foreign Policy and Public Opinion" study group file; Christiana McFadyen Campbell, *The Farm Bureau and the New Deal: A Study of the Making of National Farm Policy 1933–40* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), 149.

75. "Foreign Policy" study group, second meeting, Apr. 25, 1944, 1–5; *ibid.*, Campbell, *Farm Bureau and the New Deal*, 141, 154, 193. According to *Fortune* magazine, the AFBF was "a private lobby sponsored and supported by the government to influence . . . the country's first semi-official lobby" (see "The Farm Bureau," June 1944, 157–58).

peared to come to a close. However, the reports of the church and farm discussion leaders were used by the Council, especially in their policy-formation functions in the State Department. The principal role of this particular study group was for Council members, and others connected with foreign policy formation, to *gather* intelligence, to listen to what clergy and farm organizations were saying about *specific* postwar U.S. commitments and to question some of their representatives. Such intelligence could then be passed through the War and Peace Studies project, Richard Dickey, and other channels, to official policy makers to be used by them in shaping the form and perhaps even the content of their public pronouncements.

Once again the foreign policy establishment's deep-seated concern about isolationism becomes clear. Such concern was genuinely warranted, especially among the Protestant clergy where pacifism was particularly strong.<sup>76</sup>

### THE COUNCIL AND PRESSURE POLITICS

The Council, though it claimed to be nonpolitical, attempted to rally the "mass public," especially in the period immediately following the fall of France in May 1940. These efforts in the area of mass appeals are interesting, first, because the Council had previously (and patronizingly) left the molding of "mass opinion" to "lesser" individuals and organizations and, second, because of the pivotal cooperation (to say the least) of President Roosevelt in the Council's efforts. Although the CFR was never "officially" connected with mass initiatives, it is clear, as Michael Wala suggests, that "the strikingly high number of prominent Council members who participated . . . does not allow one to regard such participation as merely 'private functioning'."<sup>77</sup>

There were four principal attempts by the Council to influence public opinion, mainly in the period immediately after the collapse of France in the face of the German *blitzkrieg* in May 1940 and up to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, which are considered below: the "Summons" initiative; the "Century Group"; the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies (CDAAA); and Fight For Freedom.

Attempts to rally mass opinion began through a group of the Council's leading members – Francis P. Miller, Stacy May, Winfield Riefler, Whitney Shepardson, G. F. Eliot, among others – in alliance with a number of non-CFR individuals.<sup>78</sup> Meeting in early June 1940, this group decided to urge an

76. Donald B. Meyer, *The Protestant Search for Political Realism* (Berkeley: UCLA Press, 1961).

77. Wala, *The Council on Foreign Relations*, 171. On the question of the Council's politics, Thomas Bailey, without substantiation, endorsed the CFR's oft-declared neutrality by suggesting that the organization was "non patriotic," "definitely non-partisan," and absolutely opposed to the politics of "pressure or propaganda" (Bailey, *The Man in the Street*, 294). This section of the article subjects such claims to closer scrutiny, by using excellent archives-based secondary analyses, particularly Chadwin's, *Hawks of World War II*; Wala, *The Council on Foreign Relations*; and Schulzinger, *Wise Men*. Such secondary sources, considered in combination with the original unpublished evidence presented above, allow for the testing of the competing theories mentioned at the beginning of this article.

78. Chadwin is the source of evidence for the section below unless otherwise indicated.



immediate American declaration of war on Germany. The group issued a "Summons to Speak Out," signed by thirty influential Americans, including Walter Millis, who had written a "revisionist" history of World War I that had strengthened isolationism during the interwar period.

Most of the country's major newspapers carried the "Summons" as a news story or, in one case – *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* – considered it worthy of editorial comment. Mark Lincoln Chadwin notes in his detailed monograph, *The Hawks of World War II*, that the "Summons" was not given the prominence hoped for by the CFR group because of Italian aggression against France the previous day, which obviously dominated the press on June 10, 1940. Nevertheless, the Italian aggression was condemned in the press by many, including those who called for greater aid to Britain. In addition, several papers carried a full-page advertisement placed by playwright Robert E. Sherwood, who was acting under the auspices of the FDR-backed and inspired Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies (led by William Allen White), demanding that the United States "Stop Hitler Now."<sup>79</sup> In that context, Chadwin suggests, it may be argued that the Council's "Summons" had a strong effect, especially as "thirty citizens of accomplishment and reputation were willing to affix their names to a plea for war."

But these Council "war hawks" did not stop with this "one-ad campaign" for intervention and war. Recognizing that public opinion was not ready for a war declaration, a few members of the "Summons" group continued to meet in order to "bring America to her senses." This new group became known after the New York club in which it met – the Century – and had three main objectives: first to persuade the public of the necessity of "all aid short of war" to Britain, that is, the transfer of 50 to 100 U.S. naval destroyers (*a demand suggested by FDR himself* in talks with White on June 29, 1940, which White relayed to the professional internationalist activist, Clark Eichelberger who, in turn, passed it on to the Century Group).<sup>80</sup> Second, through a program of news releases, circular letters, and radio addresses, they planned to attack the fallacies they saw in isolationism, which they called "'the orthodox American dogma'." Finally, they advocated a number of policy options to the government designed to culminate in America's entry to the war.

One of the chief criteria for Century Group membership was political influence and connections to be used in the service of interventionism. The Group included individuals with access to President Roosevelt – Dean Acheson, Herbert Agar (editor, *Louisville Courier-Journal*), and Robert Sherwood – and to the Republican leader, Wendell Willkie – Lewis Douglas and Allen Dulles. Will Clayton, the Texan cotton-broker and Committee on Foreign Relations member and, later in the war, assistant secretary of state, also played

79. Wala, *The Council on Foreign Relations*, 173–76. White was a prominent Republican and influential editor of the (Kansas) *Emporia Gazette*. White's name, as head of CDAAA, was suggested to Eichelberger (a CFR member, Republican, and professional internationalist) by State Department official Joseph C. Green after consultation with FDR.

80. Wala, *The Council on Foreign Relations*, 177; and also Walter Johnson, *The Battle Against Isolation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1944), 91: the "destroyers-bases" deal, according to Johnson, was, "the President's idea, not White's."

an important role. A large proportion of the Group's members were professional writers, editors, or publishers – including Elmer Davis of CBS radio (and later head of the Office of War Information) and Henry Luce of *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune* fame – which meant that the message and the media were almost as one.

Acting like a professional and well-disciplined force, the leaders of the Century Group assigned tasks to each individual in order to achieve their objectives. After a meeting on July 11, 1940, Henry Luce and Henry Coffin (president of the New York-based Union Theological Seminary) met with Secretaries Hull and Stimson, Francis Miller set up a coordinating office, and Lewis Douglas began to liaise more closely and formally with White's committee and with Wendell Willkie. White's role was of the utmost importance in ensuring that Willkie did not make foreign policy a partisan issue. FDR, White wrote in his autobiography, "talked in utmost confidence with me and let me talk in turn confidentially with Wendell Willkie, which I did and I hope with some effect. At least," he concluded, "we kept the foreign issue out of the [1940 presidential election] campaign" – an excellent example of the power of some groups to organize certain issues out of politics.<sup>81</sup>

From its small headquarters, Miller established contact with editors and journalists, including Ralph McGill of the *Atlanta Constitution*; W. W. Waymack of the *Des Moines Register and Tribune*; Barry Bingham of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*; Dorothy Thompson, Walter Millis, and Ernest K. Lindley of the *New York Herald Tribune*; William Hessler of the *Cincinnati Inquirer*; and a host of others. These contacts gave "news coverage and editorial expression to interventionism, as well as providing information about changes of public opinion in confidential letters to the New York office."

Having focused on a "destroyers-bases deal" as the most urgent of the immediate tasks, the Century Group and White's committee sent several members to talk with FDR with two memoranda urging official action. An obviously supportive FDR gave approval for the Group's "radio program of education" and further suggested "that a radio address by General Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Force in the first World War and

81. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 643. The CDAAA was not a spontaneous or even fully private organisation, even though the original idea for it came from a J. P. Morgan partner, Thomas W. Lamont. There was always "close cooperation with the Roosevelt administration . . . [the] main objective . . . [being] not to convince the administration to change its policy or even to modify it [but] to convince public and Congress" to back American belligerence. As White noted, "I never did anything the President didn't ask for, and I always conferred with him on our program." (See Wala, *The Council on Foreign Relations*, 174–79). White's notion of service to the President was further illustrated when he, as head of the CDAAA, rejected the use of American naval convoys to escort lend-lease aid being transported to Britain:

When the President is for [the convoys], I'm going to support them, of course. But I do not believe that our organization should keep nagging him and needling him. . . . I don't think our organization is doing any service to the President in building up public sentiment that will force his hand. (*Autobiography*, 642)

White obviously did not know, or at least he does not reveal, that he had been selected by FDR and his aides for that precise purpose.

the nation's most revered military figure would be helpful." FDR appeared fearful, in part, of the legalities of a destroyer transfer to Britain, although he did favor such a move, despite a 1917 law prohibiting the sale of destroyers to belligerents. While FDR began the political process of enacting a destroyers-bases agreement in the cabinet, the Century Group and White's committee began a program of broadcasts, newsletters, advertisements, and rallies "to condition public opinion to the idea . . . and, thereby 'make it politically possible for Roosevelt to act.'" The Century Group persuaded Pershing to make a radio broadcast, which was scripted by Herbert Agar and Walter Lippmann. Pershing's broadcast received very favorable national press coverage and was seen by Francis Miller as "the turning point in our efforts to create a public opinion" favourable to presidential action.<sup>82</sup> Pershing received over seven hundred letters from the general public in response to his speech, 75 percent of them positive. The *New York Herald Tribune* printed a front-page photograph of Pershing being congratulated by Secretary of State Cordell Hull, while the *New York Times* published the story under the headline, "Pershing Warns U.S. to Aid Britain by Sending 50 Destroyers Now."

The Century Group also arranged for a number of other broadcasts, including one by Admiral William H. Standley demanding the transfer of destroyers; and another by Colonel William Donovan urging compulsory military service in the cause of peace. The Group also promoted the visits of leading British churchmen, educators, trade unionists, and women.<sup>83</sup>

While it is difficult to measure the influence on public opinion of the Century Group's propaganda campaign, one thing is clear: that by mid-August, at the height of their campaign, the opinion polls showed that 62 percent favored the sale of destroyers to England, as opposed to 53 percent in mid-July.<sup>84</sup> As Robert Schulzinger argues, once the ground had been prepared with the public, press, and the opposition leader, FDR could safely announce the destroyers-bases agreement on September 3, 1940.<sup>85</sup>

As the 1940 presidential election approached, FDR distanced himself from the Century Group, and the newly-formed isolationist America First Committee began to "expose" the Century's interventionism and influence. Century members, however, wanted to further their cause of "awakening" the American people to their true interests. William Agar was assigned the task of mobilizing Catholics for interventionism; Bishop Henry W. Hobson and Henry Van Dusen (dean of the Union Theological Seminary, New York) would work with Protestants; Will Clayton with big business; Van Dusen among students; and Ernest Hopkins and Henry Wriston among college presidents. Katherine Gauss Jackson and Helen Everitt were assigned to work on women's magazines and organizations. This program was based on the view expressed by Herbert Agar that politicians "appear to insist on a 'public de-

82. Miller, *Man from the Valley*, 98, 101.

83. Chadwin, *Hawks of World War II*, 91-94.

84. *Ibid.*, 104.

85. Schulzinger, *Wise Men*, 71. According to Walter Johnson, the importance of the work of the CDAAA and the FFF should not be minimized: "They aided greatly in crystallizing public sentiment for the release of the destroyers" (*Battle Against Isolation*, 117).

mand' before they are willing to lead, [therefore] we believe we must do everything in our power to create such a demand." The Group, however, was not content to merely promote interventionism, it was also keenly aware of the necessity of criticizing, undermining, ridiculing, and eliminating isolationism everywhere in the United States. The work among Roman Catholics sought to split that community's isolationist consensus. The group's spokesmen denounced the America First Committee as a "Nazi Transmission Belt." Their women's section attacked female student isolationism and pacifism on the campuses. Their business section propagandized the National Association of Manufacturers, and also attacked outspoken isolationist Henry Ford as a "profoundly ignorant man'." During the debates on Lend-Lease in the Senate, Century Group member Ulric Bell (who later joined the Office of War Information's domestic propaganda efforts) tried to identify isolationists – falsely in this case – with Mussolini and antisemitism.<sup>86</sup>

Despite these activities, however, the Century Group was frustrated by its lack of influence on genuine grass-roots opinion, and determined to form an organization that would galvanize America for war. In April 1941, the Fight For Freedom (FFF) was born, claiming that it "has no political affiliation, no connection with any group or special interest in society." Its members included college presidents, professors, labor leaders – A. Philip Randolph, for example – authors, actors, journalists, lawyers, businessmen, and government officials. Hamilton Fish Armstrong, editor of the CFR's journal, *Foreign Affairs*, was especially active in this organization. One month after its launch, FFF had 273 local chapters in sixty-five cities, with state-wide organizations in nine states. The national committee instructed local chapters to keep subversion out and to recruit clergymen, the young and the ethnic minorities of occupied nations. FFF also established links with over 650 small town newspapers that agreed to take a weekly story from the organization.

The FFF was especially successful in its bid to win the support of organized labor. By publicizing its support of collective bargaining, the virtues of FDR, and a strike of 1,700 machinists in San Francisco in May 1941, and recruiting (through Democratic National Committee Treasurer Wayne Johnson) Dan Tobin of the Teamsters' Union, FFF found itself inundated with union members. Through its Labor News Service, FFF sent weekly articles to shop stewards and union newspapers. By October 1941, at least twenty-one union executives and sixteen-hundred shop stewards were participating in the Neutrality Laws repeal campaign.<sup>87</sup>

The Century Group, the CDAAA, and the Fight For Freedom were part of a highly active and well-connected movement, particularly in the New York area. While they did not succeed in their central aim – to force the United States to declare war – they were successful in influencing the making of, and public promotion of, key *steps* toward war – the destroyers-bases agreement,

86. RG 208 – Records of the Office of War Information (Records of the Office of Facts and Figures, Decimal File of the Director 1941–1942, 330–340, Box 15, National Archives, College Park, Maryland). For World War I parallels, see Ronald Schaffer, *America and the Great War. The Rise of the War Welfare State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

87. Chadwin, *Hawks of World War II*, 180–84.

in particular. They were also effective as an anti-isolationist propaganda body, casting doubt on notions of continental impregnability and on the democratic credentials of isolationist leaders. As a force in the shaping of public opinion, their influence must not be underestimated. They were a critical group in preparing the public mind for war. Thanks to the invaluable work of Chadwin, and, more recently, of Michael Wala, a key social and political force in U.S. pressure politics has been rescued from the obscurity assigned to it by the other main works on the Council of Foreign Relations.<sup>88</sup> As Chadwin concludes, the warhawks familiarized and educated the public with warlike positions, vitally aiding the president when the time for policy changes finally arrived.<sup>89</sup>

### The Pivotal Role of the State

Of equal interest are President Roosevelt's methods for keeping himself informed of the currents of private opinion and activity. As Arthur Schlesinger noted, FDR consistently aimed to "check and balance information acquired through official channels by information acquired through a myriad of private, informal, and unorthodox channels and espionage networks."<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, the State Department often mobilized private organizations to campaign for official policy goals. As Mark Nadel and Francis Rourke argue in an excellent essay on bureaucracy, the State Department has long resorted "to organizing outside group support itself." In fact, they suggest, the State Department

can be extremely adroit in organizing pressures to which they seem to be responding but which they are in fact initiating. The organization of such apparent pressure-group activity thus provides a means by which these agencies can conceal their own central role in the policy process. The initiative appears to lie with the outside organizations, but the activities of these external groups are actually instigated by the agency itself.<sup>91</sup>

The state used the CFR's "front" organizations to engage in the mobilization of *mass* public opinion, including labor unions. Given the CFR's predominantly business-class leadership, its FFF initiative, in particular, suggests its ability and willingness to develop a concrete politics for its time.

88. Schulzinger might have been expected to make a little more of Chadwin's findings than he does. Shoup and Minter, on the other hand, focus purely on *policy-making* as the key aspect of CFR power. They do not seem to appreciate that the nature of U.S. democracy is such as to require its "leaders" to *organize* the "consent of the governed."

89. Chadwin, *Hawks of World War II*, 271, 273.

90. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Coming of the New Deal*, cited by Mark V. Nadel and Francis E. Rourke, "Bureaucracies," in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds., *Handbook of Political Science, Volume 5, Governmental Institutions and Processes* (London: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1975), 377.

91. Nadel and Rourke, "Bureaucracies," 394. Edel supports this view when he notes that the cooption of numerous CFR men into the wartime State Department was as much "with an eye to their influence in private circles as well as [with] . . . their special knowledge of foreign affairs" (Edel, *The State Department, the Public & the United Nations Concept, 1939-1945*), 163.

### The Importance of the CFR

The role of parastate organizations in American politics has been fundamental, particularly during the twentieth century, and their strength reflects the significance of the voluntarist tradition. Universities, churches, women's organizations, trade unions, and several other types of organization offered their services to their society and state particularly, but not exclusively, during wartime. The Progressives' notion of civic duty and virtue, of being part of an "elect" people with a higher destiny, of being essentially superior, found expression in a crusading spirit in domestic and foreign affairs.<sup>92</sup>

Formed at the very end of the progressive era, the Council on Foreign Relations carried on such traditions and attitudes, in its own measured and "moderate" tone, into the 1920s and beyond. It was extremely successful in institutionalizing Progressive values and methods and expressed them in language acceptable to the times, and assisted the official makers of U.S. foreign policy. It became by the 1930s and 1940s, the central institution of the American foreign policy establishment that bridged the "public" and "private" sector divide.

The CFR-state relationships outlined in this article suggest how seriously American officials took that organization and its potential and capabilities. The Conferences for University Men were clearly of major importance to members of the administration because, as Hornbeck of the State Department recognized, they constituted not only a site for political persuasion but also because they served as "listening posts" for the government. They were an "ear to the ground" for the administration, albeit among the elite of the younger generation, an important source of intelligence, so vital to the framing of public statements and foreign policy. In addition, of course, the conferences confirmed the "truthfulness" of the internationalist path for most student participants in the hard-headed language of American national interests and in the idealistic American tradition that emphasized the necessity of shouldering the burdens of global responsibility and leadership. These students were among the class expected to take up future leadership positions in business, government, law, and academia. As even "conservative" functionalist sociologist Talcott Parsons argues, the educational system is the means by which "individual personalities are trained to be motivationally and technically adequate to the performance of adult roles . . . [and] . . . of the commitments and capacities which are essential prerequisites of their future role performance."<sup>93</sup>

Similar observations are relevant with reference to the regional Committees on Foreign Relations which, as discussed above, acted as "listening posts" for the administration. In the committees-state relationship, however, there

92. Robert Harrison, *State and Society in Twentieth-Century America* (London: Addison, Wesley, Longman, 1997); see also Edward A. Tiryakian, "American Religious Exceptionalism A Reconsideration," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 527 (1993): 40–57.

93. For more on the elitist functions of education, with the emphasis on how schools and universities engrave the dominant culture in the minds and personalities of the young (especially within the elite), see Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996). Parsons quote cited by Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (London: Quartet Books, 1973), 215.

were State Department plans to manipulate members of local committees to receive policy documents/discussion papers attributed to the Council but which were actually official, or at least officially-inspired, State Department memoranda.<sup>94</sup> As Chadwick Alger demonstrates through research on “external bureaucrats” in U.S. foreign policy, State Department relationships with such outsiders are more often motivated by the desire to

transfer . . . internal bureaucratic perspectives to the outside . . . [and] . . . since the external bureaucrat is likely to be influential in his private area of activity and one whose words are widely circulated, he provides a useful communication link to a wider public.<sup>95</sup>

An even stronger case for instrumentalism may be made in relation to the state-FFF relationship, which Chadwin details. White House aides were in daily contact with FFF officers, while some cabinet members privately encouraged the FFF’s promotion of U.S. belligerence against Germany. On at least four occasions, the White House actually instructed the FFF to take specific actions to further administration policies.<sup>96</sup> This was in addition to FDR’s support for the Century Group’s and the CDAAA’s program of prowar radio broadcasts, and his suggestion that a speech by General Pershing would be “helpful.”

This evidence does not square with notions of an all-powerful CFR and a weak state led by politicians with little independence of thought or policy. At the heart of the relationship was a strong state with its plans and goals; and an important private group which realized that the state/administration could only pursue its globalist agenda if public opinion could be educated and mobilized. The CFR was used by the administration to privately advance a program that was officially endorsed and supported. Council men, particularly Norman Davis, were strongly animated by a feeling of loyalty to the state and by the desire to find solutions to the problems of state in a manner that was socially responsible. They espoused a philosophy of national interests – that excluded no-one explicitly – that privileged no class, region, or economic sector. In fact, Davis stressed the importance of such an attitude – of “loyalty to the state” – in those very words in his commencement address at the University of Georgia in 1930 (which must be one of the most rarely used phrases in American history).<sup>97</sup> This way of looking at the state and society, akin to a feeling of *noblesse oblige*, summed-up at least part of the subculture of the Council on Foreign Relations, and therefore its attitude towards the internationalist foreign policy of Franklin Roosevelt.

94. See letter, Wilson to Long, July 13, 1940, RG 59, Decimal File 81.43, Council on Foreign Relations, National Archives.

95. Alger, “The External Bureaucracy in United States Foreign Affairs,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 7 (1962): 61–62.

96. Chadwin, *Hawks of World War II*, 201–6.

97. Speech by Davis, University of Georgia, May 18, 1930, in Catalogued Correspondence, Nicholas Murray Butler Papers, Columbia University. Davis admonished those men of education who “minimize their obligation to the State.” We must, he said, “be loyal to certain objects in life and one of our loyalties should be the State.” To Davis, even publishing a memoir on his various governmental experiences was considered “unethical.” Letter to N. M. Butler, April 14, 1939.

While the CFR and the state intersected in myriad ways, decision-making power rested in the hands of officials. And it was their pragmatism and political skills that finally determined the manner of America's progress toward becoming a globally-oriented power. The CFR's role was essentially cooperative, not competitive. There were areas of disagreement over tactics, not over the long-term trajectory of the United States as a global power. In short, there was a division of labor between the state and the Council, with the administration committed to a steady policy of interventionism in world affairs but politically unable – in a nation that wanted to stay out of war – to publicly declare its true intentions and aspirations. The Council, however, as a private organization was not bound by such constraints; it, or its ad hoc bodies, could call for a declaration of war largely as it pleased. Council men did not fight congressional or presidential elections. In their own minds, their role was to act as a vanguard, the advanced troops, missionaries almost, for a new conception of America's global role and responsibilities and for the concrete steps that, they believed, needed to be taken by the administration in order to realize that new conception.

What has been outlined above is a highly interactive relationship between the state and a private organization in which the flow of influence, in the strong sense, radiated out from the state to the Council and through the Council (and its organizations) to a broader public. But such individuals as Francis Miller and Whitney Shepardson were not dupes or robots; they were active, self-motivated, thinking, critical and independent individuals who, by whatever process, had come to believe that America's hour – or as Henry Luce put it, its century – had come. Some of them believed that they were prophets ushering in a new age of benign American influence in a dangerous world. They decided to take action to promote their cause; but they were influenced in their tactics by an understanding of “how power works” in the United States, that is, through the generation of a public debate and the mobilization of public opinion prior to effective action by state managers (though, in this case, the process began with encouragement from state managers).

## THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The foregoing provides an opportunity to assess the applicability of a variety of existing explanations of “how power works” in the United States. Here I compare what pluralists, corporatists, statists, and Gramscians would expect to find in the historical record with the evidence garnered from the CFR case.

Orthodox pluralists would expect to find strong evidence of powerful, fiercely independent private interest groups dominating the political process in their attempts to influence malleable state actors with few discernable independent interests or goals.<sup>98</sup> While the evidence from this

98. Robert Dahl, *Who Governs?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961); Arthur F. Bentley, *The Process of Government* (Bloomington, IN: Principia Press, 1935); David Truman, *The Governmental Process* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1967).



study provides substantial support for the notion of private group power, pluralism fails to account for the degree to which the American state acted independently to either promote its interests through a private organization or to provide covert support for prostrate private action. Second, pluralism cannot explain the degree to which the CFR, an organization with large-scale business support and a highly prestigious leadership and membership, cooperated so actively with and deferred so readily to the state. The CFR did act in a manner private interests classically do in pluralist theory, by making appeals to elite and mass opinion. Such appeals, however, were hardly ever contemplated or implemented *without prior reference to the wishes and consent of the Roosevelt Administration*. This was the case, at one level of intensity or another, with practically every CFR initiative discussed above, most notably in relation to the regional committees, the Century Group and the Fight For Freedom. A view of politics, therefore, that focuses on politics as group *competition*, cannot explain why the state and the CFR could cooperate so effortlessly. It is the conclusion of this study that pluralism fails to provide an adequate account of the activities of the CFR or of the American state.

Given the close interconnections between the state and the Council, the corporatist synthesis associated with Michel Hogan merits serious consideration. Emerging from roots in New Left historiography, corporatism posits that the twentieth century has witnessed the rise of large-scale corporations, functional groups, and governmental bureaucracies that became increasingly intertwined particularly during the Progressive era. The state, corporations, and other groups such as organized labor and agribusiness, cooperated to address the problems that eluded the market, collaborating through an "organizational sector" above party competition, market imperatives, and even narrow economic interests. According to Hogan, such was the level of "interpenetration" between the various interests and the state in the corporatist system that it is "difficult to determine where one sector leaves off and the other begins" though corporatists still privilege private group power vis-à-vis the state.<sup>99</sup> Corporatist analysis would, therefore, expect to find a very close relationship between the CFR and the state, particularly because of the CFR's close links with corporations, banks, and agribusiness. There is a great deal of evidence in this study to suggest the efficacy of a corporatist analysis. State-CFR collaboration bridged the "public-private" divide in every area of mutual interest and advantage: in the university work, the regions, and in pressure politics.

Yet, corporatists do not recognize the importance of the CFR to the development of a new consensus within and between corporatist blocs and on the development of a new foreign policy orientation for the United States. Corporatism lacks an analysis of the intellectual activists who reflected, defined, explained, and took advantage of the great structural changes that form the

99. Michael Hogan, "Corporatism: A Positive Appraisal," *Diplomatic History* 10 (1986): 363; see also Hogan's *The Marshall Plan. America, Britain and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

core of the corporatist perspective.<sup>100</sup> Second, the corporatist view of the state remains bound by “weak-state” considerations. The CFR was an important organization of corporatist forces but, in its relationship with the state, it was clearly subordinate to the official makers of foreign policy. Corporatism fails to account for the power of the state which this study emphasizes. It is concluded, therefore, that while corporatism enjoys a number of advantages over orthodox pluralism, and ought to be further developed to take account of the CFR’s role, it fails to provide an adequate account of the activities of that organization or of the state.

The statist view, as expounded by Skocpol, Krasner, and Mann, privileges the state and criticizes “society-centered” theories. Focusing on the autonomy of the state as the sole guardian of the *national interest*, in an international environment of armed and dangerous states, statist reverse the conventional way in which state manager-private interest group relations have been conceived.<sup>101</sup>

The power of the American state clearly increased significantly due to the Great War and the New Deal, especially with respect to information-gathering and -dissemination capacities, collective expertise, and higher levels of popular legitimacy. In the person of FDR, elected to four consecutive terms of office, and of his Cabinet and other appointees, there was a continuity of leadership across the 1930s and 1940s and a certain long-term political trajectory, if not vision, guiding the administration. Nowhere was this more apparent, than in the field of foreign affairs, under the direction of Cordell Hull. As historian Michael Hunt argues in *Ideology and Foreign Policy*, executive power this century has overshadowed the power of Congress and impeded public debate. If Hunt’s conclusion is taken to apply more accurately to post-1945 America, then we may turn to Robert Hilderbrand’s similar conclusion regarding the rise of executive power in foreign affairs for the 1897–1921 period. In the Progressive era – of which the CFR was a clear descendant – the penchant of reformers was for a Hamiltonian concept of positive government, “a national government directing the destinies of the nation at home and abroad.”<sup>102</sup>

Statism, therefore, would predict that the American state would not only be highly proactive in its attempts to mobilize public opinion, but would be the *most powerful* force in that sphere of activity. In its relationship with the CFR, therefore, statist would expect the state to prevail over a private inter-

100. Hogan neglects the CFR in his latest work too; see his *A Cross of Iron. Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State 1945–54* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

101. Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Peter B. Evans, Theda Skocpol, et al., eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Stephen Krasner, *Defending the National Interest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

102. Hunt, *Ideology and Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 178; Hilderbrand, *Power and the People*, 5; the quote in the text is from William E. Leuchtenberg, “Progressivism and Imperialism: The Progressive Movement and American Foreign Policy, 1898–1916,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 39 (1952–1953): 500–502.

est group. There is, as the historical evidence shows, substantial evidence to support that view, most notably with regard to the CFR's regional committees and its "pressure" politics. The Roosevelt administration was not content, as is often suggested, to wait passively upon public opinion; rather, it played an active role in transforming it.

By vesting so much power in the state, however, statism negates what in this case study has been shown to be a vital aspect of power in a democratic society: the freedom to organize privately, to propagandize publicly around a specific program, and to attempt to influence public opinion. This is an important aspect of any democracy, and maybe even more significant in the United States where state *legitimacy* has traditionally been weak, even if state *power* has inexorably increased. In this case, the legitimacy of a respectable private group was used by state managers to promote official policy and policy ideas. It was apparent that the American state could not act alone in forging a new world order or in changing America's relationship to global politics. The American state had to mobilize its social support base in order to help construct a globalist consensus in the face of fierce opposition. *The CFR performed a necessary function that the State Department could not overtly perform itself because of Congressional opposition to "official propaganda" within the United States.* It did, therefore, depend on nonstate actors. This should not, however, be read as a fundamental retreat from statism's emphasis on "state power" because, even within conditions of "dependence" the state was not merely another actor in the political order, seeking support for its ideas and policies in a "free market of ideas."

The second problem with the statist model, in common with both pluralism and corporatism, is that its view of power is "power over" not "power shared" between CFR and the state. In this case, however, the relationship was essentially cooperative as it operated within a mutually agreed division of labor, which statism does not address. Neither the CFR nor the state, according to the historical evidence, actively tried to force the other do to something it would not otherwise have done. In fact, the Council spent much of its time trying to *enable* the state to do what it had already decided to do, after active encouragement, not *diktat*, from the state.

Such a relationship is difficult to explain within an unqualified statist framework. A Gramscian perspective, however, that focuses on "state spirit" and bridges the public-private divide is more compelling. The notion of state spirit, of a feeling among certain leading figures and organizations that they bear a grave responsibility to promote an historical process through positive political and intellectual activity, bears a striking resemblance to parastates, as Eisenach uses the term. Parastates saw themselves as epitomizing the state and state interests in their everyday lives, possessing an acute sense of their duty to promote the "national good," which explains the CFR's "enabling" role with regard to foreign affairs.

The role of intellectuals, of course, is of central interest to Gramscian thought, as is the need for political activists to construct consensus out of the myriad of conflicting interests that characterize complex societies.

While Gramscian thought is highly sensitive to long-term structural change, it remains acutely aware of the role of conscious actors in the making of history.<sup>103</sup>

The Gramscian perspective concerning state power and the political role of private organizations allows a great measure of state autonomy *and* political space for ideological mobilization by private elites. Most interesting, compelling, and persuasive is Gramsci's notion of hegemonic projects which emanate from intellectual and political leaders in capitalist societies that attempt to harmonize a wide variety of interests behind a national program, in this case globalism/internationalism. Gramsci's ideas emphasize the state's political and ideological power – as opposed to the conventional Marxist focus on economic – to construct and reconstruct society, politics, and economy in the light of changing conditions and crises of social order. The state, Gramsci contends, tries to educate the people in a variety of ways, often through collaboration with other social forces. The government of democracies is conducted with “the consent of the governed – but with this consent organized . . . The State does have and request consent, but it also ‘educates’ this consent, by means of the political and syndical associations; these, however,” he concludes, “are private organisms, left to . . . private initiative.”<sup>104</sup> Gramscians would expect to find in this study strong evidence of proactive state agencies and private “ruling class” organizations attempting to generate the necessary elite and popular authority for a major reorientation of America's foreign policy, through the forging of a new political and ideological consensus that had the capacity to attack, undermine, and marginalize, if not to eliminate, the forces of the “old order” of isolationism. Thus, the collaboration of state and CFR – in the universities, regions, and in pressure politics – may be explained as part of a solution to a growing crisis of the social order, the addressing of which required vigorous and fresh initiatives and ideas to unite the forces of “progress” behind a program of domestic reform and global responsibility, from which the whole “historical bloc” (and, therefore, society) would benefit, as would the state from its enhanced popular authority.

It seems then that the Gramscian theory of power comes closest to explaining the nature of the relationship between the CFR and the American state. Although corporatist and statist perspectives are more effective than orthodox pluralism, they are still inferior to Gramscian analysis. The Gramscian perspective incorporates all the critical elements in play in this case: (1) intellectual hegemony is required prior to fundamental political change, such as the shift from isolationism to internationalism; (2) the struggle for such hegemony is largely in a small number of private hands, the people who generate and disseminate new thinking in an attempt to make it the “common-

103. Gwyn A. Williams, “The Concept of ‘Egemonia’ in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci: Some Notes on Interpretation,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 21 (1960): 587.

104. Joseph V. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought. Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 27; Walter L. Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution. A Study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory* (Berkeley: UCLA Press, 1980), 203–4; for the source of the quotations, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Selections From the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 259–60.

sense” of the age; (3) the state must educate the public and generate consent both independently and in cooperation with private elites; (4) there is in every successful challenge to the status quo a “state spirit” that motivates the leading figures and organizations, which the parastates clearly manifested; and (5) public opinion construction is central to any project for change.

What most clearly renders the Gramscian analysis superior to its rivals is the fact that they examine power in American society too narrowly as “power over” someone else. In contrast, the Gramscian notion of “state spirit” transcends the public-private “divide” and allows for the flow of information, ideas, and influence in both directions. It sums up in a very fundamental way the attitudes, outlook, and actions of the Council on Foreign Relations. The CFR was precisely a type of parastate organization which played a key role in mobilizing Americans for globalism, animated by a spirit of service to society and state.