

Introduction

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In the course of over ten years of research and debate sponsored by the Bairati Center for Euro-American Studies at the Universities of Turin and Eastern Piedmont on the political, social, and intellectual dimensions of transatlantic relations in the twentieth century, the idea of an Atlantic community has often loomed in the background, either as a historical and geographical space marked by significant exchanges and interactions of ideas and policies, or as a political and cultural construct overlapping with “the West” during the cold war. The protean character and vague contours of this idea account for both its ubiquity in public discourse and the relative lack of scholarly interest in its definition. Historians on both sides of the Atlantic have often resorted to the slippery, ambiguous notion of an Atlantic community as a convenient narrative device—many have assumed it as the obvious, natural framework of their research—but by and large, they have failed to consider it as a legitimate and relevant subject of inquiry. Yet recent developments inside and outside academia suggest that it is time to take this notion seriously.

The end of the cold war prompted a massive discussion about relations between the US and its Western European allies, which in many respects implies a closer and more profound look at the cultural and intellectual dimensions of the Atlantic liaison. While early triumphant accounts of the victory of what once was called the Free World hardly contributed to a critical and detached perspective, subsequent, more sober assessments of the present state and future challenges of “the West” have urged policy makers, commentators, and scholars to deal with issues that were usually taken for granted or conveniently ignored amidst the fog of war. Throughout four decades of East-versus-West ideological warfare, Western elites had invariably insisted that, in addition to the *negative* appeal of anticommunism, a *positive* common denominator was necessary to win the hearts and minds of world public opinion. Now, with the demise of the Soviet threat, redefining the meaning and rationale of the Atlantic partnership is seen as vital to its very survival. However, the post-cold war world has made this search for common ground more difficult than ever, due to diverging foreign policy agendas and expectations at the level of public opinion on both sides of the

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Atlantic. Meanwhile, in the global arena, the emergence of new powers and the rise of local and global issues along the North-South axis, which are alien to the East-West oriented, state-based perspective of the Atlantic club, have contributed to speculations about an impending “end of the West.” On the other hand, the resilience of Atlantic institutions in a post-cold war order marred by widespread instability and terrorist threats could suggest that the Atlantic community indeed embodied not only common interests but also a shared identity, which apparently did not fade away with the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Asking whether or not we are witnessing just another family quarrel in the relations between the US and its European allies or if we are, in fact, on the verge of a deep transformational crisis with unpredictable consequences is beyond the scope of this work.¹ The present effort was undertaken by historians most, though not all, historians of American foreign relations—who assume different points of view and methodological perspectives to discuss one of the issues emerging from the current state of transatlantic affairs, namely, the role that culture, intellectuals, and policies played in the definition of the Atlantic community. The point here is to consider this notion as a cultural construct, as the outcome of a deliberate effort to “invent” it, *and* as the product of genuine historical forces, policies, and events. Is the sense of “we-ness” based on shared traditions and values a mere rhetorical device aimed at legitimizing interests and policies, or is it rather a constitutive part of these interests and policies? Is it the expression of a “hegemonic” design by the US toward its allies? How do cultural and historical factors combine with political and security considerations to define the membership of this international “community”? And to what extent is this community “Atlantic”? What is the relationship between a “community” that is historically, geographically, and politically situated and the universalistic values it advocates? What is its relationship with notions—the West, Western civilization—that are often used interchangeably in political discourse? And finally, can we simply dismiss the Atlantic community as a mere by-product of the cold war, or is there something more to be said about it?

These questions are now on the floor not only because it is somehow easier to discuss them after the end of the cold war and because they seem more relevant in the present, troubled situation of the Atlantic order. Two major developments in historical studies during the last decade—the impact of the “cultural turn” of so-called diplomatic history and the rise of the Atlantic history paradigm—also played a role. In fact, they form the major driving force behind this project.

The study of the history of American foreign relations, which had long been a stronghold of methodological conservatism, is now going through a time of change and openness to cutting-edge trends in the profession at large. While celebrations of a “renaissance” may be slightly optimistic, it is unquestionable that the days when the field was “marking time” are gone.²

A major consequence of the culturalist influence on historical research writ large has been to undermine the primacy of political history. Depending on the attitude toward such history and the role of the state, works related to the new interest in culture, ideas, and foreign policy by diplomatic historians as well as by scholars from other fields follow approximately three major directions. First, historians retaining the traditional focus of the field on “power,” as well as on states and national elites as the major players in international relations, have incorporated “culture” and/or “ideology” as a vehicle of domestic and international influence or “hegemony.” Second, the cultural turn is being interpreted as an opportunity to rescue the agency of transnational actors from the oblivion of traditional state-centered historiography. Recent studies have brought to light how private and nongovernment organizations, associations, foundations, and other players affect international relations with varying degrees of interaction with states and official diplomacy. Finally, a sort of middle road is being opened by scholars who believe that the significance of the state is a major concern for diplomatic historians, but at the same time expose the limits of old-school, US-centered narratives and call for an “internationalization” of the field by relying on non-US sources and assuming non-US vantage points in order to bring into the picture multiple, previously ignored perspectives.

Such a schematic account is hardly an accurate picture of the state of the field, but it helps explain why historians—who for many years have either contributed to the construction of the Atlantic community, dismissed it as cold-war rhetoric, or considered it irrelevant to their research—are now interested in the notion and in a position to decode it.³

For those who are interested in the interplay between national identity and foreign policy and the role of ideas as constitutive elements of hegemonic projects at the national and international levels, a closer look at the construction of the Atlantic community offers plenty of food for thought. First, a reading of archival sources—an article of faith among diplomatic historians—that take “culture” seriously reveals how often the latter influenced the worldviews and the very decisions of policy makers “present at the creation” of the Atlantic order. Subjective assumptions about history, geography, status, and national identity have come together in the definition of prevailing notions of national interest, which were usually presented, and have often been studied, as the outcome of rational-choice reasoning. Likewise, as Andrew M. Johnston brilliantly argues, nation-states “contain two competing subjectivities, one as states-like-other-states, with a common interest in sovereignty and security” and the other as nations that “are built around particularist identities . . . constantly articulating images of themselves, in their history texts, political speeches, popular culture, and so on, in order to create the social unity needed to mobilize power for the state, and to differentiate between inside and outside, us and them.” In a context in which states follow a rational-choice approach to power and security and nations are constantly negotiated and contested as “imagined communities,”

foreign policy is best understood as a combination of both processes: the outcome of state bureaucracies operating under utilitarian assumptions believed to be universal as well as the particularist “desire to satisfy unstable internal arguments about the character of the nation itself.”⁴

In fact, the construction of an Atlantic community provides a quite extraordinary repository of rational considerations about national interest and security, as well as symbols and metaphors that are integral to those considerations. However, this notion was by no means unchallenged in the 1940s, a time when different views of the postwar order were competing for power on both sides of Atlantic. How and to what extent did the Atlantic community gain power and influence in the US and Europe? This is when the Gramscian notion of hegemony—by now a classic in culturalist diplomatic history enters the stage. The Atlantic community first responded to state rationality and national subjectivity in the US, the new hegemonic power whose national identity was being reconfigured in the 1940s as “a state that belonged to a political-economic community of liberal-capitalist states.” At the same time, it also reflected profound transformations and contingent political agendas across the Atlantic. First, the idea of an international community of nations sharing not only political, economic and security interests but also traditions, values, and world-views made US entanglement in European affairs at least acceptable, if not altogether exciting, to the American public. Henry Luce’s quest for US leadership of “the West” as part of the global pursuit of the American century is a case in point.⁵ Second, the projection of a communitarian, consensual link among like-minded peoples and nations across the Atlantic alleviated European fears of an American “empire” and contained Americanization within the framework of Western civilization. Third, defining the West as a transatlantic community contextualized the cold-war order within the centuries-old, familiar narrative of the East-West divide and made sense of the relations between “the West and the rest” in a truly globalized context. Finally, this notion was flexible enough to allow European allies of the US to see membership in the Atlantic club as respondent to specific national needs.

From this perspective, the culturalist approach, often criticized on the grounds that it mostly shed light on context and representations, seems in fact to be equipped to tackle the issues of power and the role of states; at the same time, it illuminates the interaction between the latter and nonstate actors. Discussing the role of culture and intellectuals implies a close look at civil society, which is crucial for understanding how cultural constructs are shaped, circulated, and contested. As Edward Said wrote in *Orientalism*, “culture . . . is to be found operating within civil society, where the influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other persons works not through domination but by what Gramsci calls consent.”⁶ The focus of this work on culture and intellectuals is based on this understanding of the relationship between culture and power.

The cultural turn has been instrumental to the call for the internationalization of historical studies. The trend is especially evident in US history and is now percolating in the study of American foreign relations. The active involvement of diplomatic historians in the La Pietra project of the Organization of American Historians is telling evidence of the field's positive reaction to the quest for a pluralist and decentered approach to American power stemming from a general critique of old nationalist, insular narratives. At the same time, such internationalization, with a few notable exceptions, seems to be more of a noble dream than a consolidated practice for two major reasons. Multiarchival research is hindered by the fact that access to archives varies dramatically if we compare the situation in the US with that of other nations; furthermore, acquiring in-depth knowledge of the histories, cultures, and languages of different countries is no easy task. What we have, then, is the risk of "methodological regression,"⁷ or international history on the cheap. Furthermore, in the specific case of transatlantic relations at mid-century, the quest for internationalization has to deal with the American "preponderance of power" at all levels. As Marilyn Young put it, "de-centering America is a good thing. But it does not of itself create a world free of its overwhelming military and economic power, and it is crucial to remember the difference or the effort to de-center American history will run the danger of obscuring what it means to illuminate."⁸ This is all the more so if we consider America's influence abroad during the 1940s. Accordingly, this volume assumes the Atlantic community as a predominantly American product, but it also tries to illustrate how its construction was affected by international and transnational processes and how it was received in specific national cases.

A final assumption behind this project is that the Atlantic community is *not* only a cultural construction but also a political reality based on long-term historical trends and specific policies. The hegemonic power of this notion does not automatically deprive it of any concrete historical significance. It is worth recalling that Said warned that "there were and are cultures and nations whose location is in the East, and their lives, histories, and customs have a brute reality obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West." In his discussion of Western uses of history and geography in forging the Orient, he insisted that "there is no use in pretending that all we know about time and space, or rather history and geography, is more than anything else imaginative. There are such things as positive history and positive geography . . ." ⁹ Likewise, we might wonder if there is a "real" Atlantic community and what are its constitutive elements, its boundaries, and the practices that connect its members.

In fact, this project also stems from the booming interest in Atlantic history of the last decade. To some extent, Atlantic history is informed by some of the trends described earlier, namely, the critique of an exclusive focus on the nation-state, the attempt to bring in transnationalism, and finally, the quest for an interdisciplinary effort, especially in the fields of

history and cultural studies. To put it very simply, this approach posits that the Atlantic and its basin in Europe, Africa, and the Americas are parts of a historical and geographic unit of analysis within which a centuries-old exchange network of men, ideas, and goods has generated a “system,” or a set of interrelated systems, that is crucial for understanding the economic, cultural, and political history of the Atlantic area.¹⁰

If and to what extent the emergence of this paradigm can contribute to understanding transatlantic relations in the twentieth century, however, remains to be seen. Indeed, the outpouring of scholarship on the Atlantic world largely ignores contemporary history for two main reasons. The first has to do with the genealogy of Atlantic history, which has been primarily defined by historians of the transatlantic slave trade, colonial societies in the Americas, and empires. The methodological consequences of this imprinting are self-evident: the nation-state, for example, is certainly not a major concern for practitioners of this field, yet it is fundamental for the study of twentieth-century transatlantic relations.

The second problem, I believe, has to do with presentism. During World War II and the early cold-war years, a very different strain of Atlantic history had emerged out of concerns that had more to do with the international political context than with the inner dynamics of the historical profession. When Columbia historian Carlton Hayes, in his address as president of the American Historical Association in 1945, advocated an “Atlantic community” perspective on US history against what he saw as the narrow parochialism of the profession, he explicitly drew on Walter Lippmann’s idea of the Atlantic world as a community of nations sharing both the values of “Western civilization” and security interests. Ten years later, Robert Palmer and Jacques Godechot attempted to make a sweeping generalization of their Atlantic paradigm from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. They saw the cold war as a moment when the US and Europe were finally coming together again after the long disaffection that had followed what Palmer defined as the era of democratic revolution. As they wrote in 1955, “there will be a renewal in the future and a development, not only of an Atlantic diplomatic alliance but also of a Western or Atlantic civilization.”¹¹

I believe that the present reluctance among historians to apply the Atlantic history framework to the twentieth century reflects a widespread uneasiness with the presentism of that strain of Atlantic history, which was informed by an idea of Western civilization that “owed more to NATO than it did to Plato.”¹² This uneasiness is largely justified. In fact, history and cultural studies of the last decade have been successfully incorporating areas and perspectives like Africa and its relation to Europe and the Americas, Latin America, and the Caribbean, slavery and race, class and other previously ignored issues. Thanks to their efforts, the field is now more inclusive and diverse than ever. At the same time, we might now wonder if and to what extent we can move past the ghosts of the cold war and approach transatlantic relations in the twentieth century from a critical,

rather than apologetic, Atlantic perspective. The point here is not to “set the record straight,” that is, to rescue some “authentic” Atlantic/Western civilization from the oversimplified, distorted grand narrative that Norman Davies has defined “the Allied scheme of history.”¹³ Rather, the point is to verify whether an Atlantic history paradigm can contribute to understanding transatlantic relations in the twentieth century. Single contributions by scholars working on different topics and adopting different methodologies suggest that to some extent, the Atlantic basin can be seen as a unit of analysis far beyond the threshold of the early nineteenth century, the end of empires, and the wave of independence in the Americas.

At the geopolitical and economic levels, Rafe Blaufarb has shown how the collapse of the Spanish Empire in the Americas triggered a competition among European powers and the US for influence and access to markets. This had significant implications for the distribution of power—at the international level among the major players involved and at the domestic level within the new Latin American republics. The impact of this “Western Question” on the Atlantic world, at least for the first half of the nineteenth century, deserves further investigation.¹⁴ The integration within this world throughout the nineteenth century was obviously weakened by the decline of the slave trade, the rise of nation-states, and the divide between American republics and European monarchies. Still, trade continued to provide a major vehicle of integration in the Atlantic basin. Starting in the 1820s and 1830s, commercial treaties allowed for the participation of Latin American nations in the world economy and provided a bridge over the ideological divide between Restoration and republicanism, while the introduction of steam engines paved the way toward a revolution in transatlantic transportation and communication.¹⁵

During the second half of the nineteenth century, developments within the US helped shape what Daniel Rodgers has described as a North Atlantic landscape. As steamships made transatlantic travel affordable to middle- and upper-class American tourists, their Grand Tour experience helped erode the old Republican vision of the opposition between the New World and the Old. Meanwhile, post-Civil War economic growth further integrated the US into a “North Atlantic economy” in which similar developments typical of modern industrial societies and the exchange of goods, capital, management, and production techniques provided several common links between the US and Europe. “Late-nineteenth-century Essen, Manchester, Lille and Pittsburgh were not merely similar phenomena, not merely parallel independent developments. They were all part of the furiously expanding world market . . . What struck those who traversed the industrial regions of the Old and the New Worlds was not their difference but their extraordinary sameness.”¹⁶ These developments might be usefully tackled as part of the broader issue of distinct but analogous “trajectories of modernization” within the “Atlantic system,” although efforts in this direction are infrequent.¹⁷

Finally, with turn-of-the-century Anglo-American rapprochement, “identities of opposition gradually gave way to narratives of compatibility” between the US and Europe in international relations as well. Charles Kupchan has argued that the early decades of the twentieth century saw a transition from “militarized rivalry” to “peaceful coexistence,” which was an important step toward the “cooperative security” inaugurated in the 1940s.¹⁸

While these assumptions inform the choice to discuss the “Atlantic community” mostly, though not exclusively, from the perspective of culture and ideas, they by no means reflect the methodological orientations of all the contributors to this volume. In fact, *Defining the Atlantic Community* brings together scholars from varied backgrounds and methodological approaches who offer different, and at times divergent, perspectives on the notion of Atlantic community.

The first part focuses on American policy makers, intellectuals, and their ideas, with an emphasis on how domestic factors and internal developments shaped an Atlantic vision of Europe within the US. Ronald Steel discusses the crucial role that leading columnist and public intellectual Walter Lippmann played in the construction of Atlantic community as a concept that reinterpreted US relations with Europe and redefined the West as a US-led “sphere of influence.” Frank Ninkovich assesses postwar US attitudes and policies toward Europe in the light of prewar intellectual traditions of US foreign policy; he argues that nineteenth-century liberalism, more than Wilsonianism, accounts for the US tendency to situate relations with Europe within a global framework. Emiliano Alessandri explores how religion contributed to the cultural construction of the Atlantic community and argues that “Christian Atlanticism” as a religious interpretation of American internationalism should not be dismissed as a by-product of the cold war. Finally, Marco Mariano discusses the Atlantic community as a metageographic concept illustrating a shift in the *place* of the US in world affairs—a shift that tracked changes in national identity in wartime America.

The second part is devoted more closely to the interaction between the New World and the Old, as it deals with policies and narratives—mostly, but not exclusively, originating in the US and targeting Europe—that were relevant to the construction of a “European Atlantic community.” Maurizio Vaudagna analyzes ideas about and policies on “social protection” as a constitutive element of the Atlantic community during World War II, and emphasizes how Western powers struggled to “steal the thunder” of social security from antidemocratic traditions of social welfare. David Ellwood situates the conceptualization of the Atlantic community within the context of American geopolitical grand narratives and compares its effectiveness with that of the Marshall Plan as a vehicle of US “soft power” in Europe throughout the postwar years, with a coda on contemporary developments in transatlantic relations. Giles Scott-Smith looks at the activism

of intellectuals engaged in the battleground of ideas in the early cold-war years. He focuses on the case of Congress for Cultural Freedom as a vehicle for the exercise of US hegemony in Europe and for the nurturing of a transatlantic elite within the context of “American empire.”

Finally, the third part examines how the idea of Atlantic community was received, negotiated, and contested outside the US by discussing four national cases located in very different positions along the center/periphery spectrum of the Atlantic world. Kathleen Burk discusses Britain as the *primus inter pares* among the European allies of the US who looked with skepticism at the American idea of Atlantic community, and shows how the British evolved the belief that their national interests would be best served if Britain acted as a bridge between two worlds, rather than as a member of an integrated Euro-American entity. At the opposite end of the Atlantic spectrum, Mario Del Pero explains that Italy sought acceptance within the Atlantic club as an “emancipative bond,” that is, a source of security that was crucial to restoring its sovereignty after fascism and the defeat in World War II. Yuichi Hosoya illustrates how mutual security concerns gradually led the US and Japan toward an arrangement that virtually transformed the latter into an outpost of “the West” in the Far East/Pacific region in the context of the global cold war. Finally, Loris Zanatta, arguing from the South Atlantic viewpoint of Argentina, discusses how Juan Domingo Peron tried to develop a “third position,” that is, a Catholic, Latin, and Hispanic alternative to the Anglo-Saxon Atlantic community.

NOTES

1. For an exhaustive view of the current debate on transatlantic relations, see John Ikenberry, “Explaining Crisis and Change in Transatlantic Relations: An Introduction,” in *The End of the West? Crisis and Change in the Transatlantic Order*, ed. Jeffrey Anderson, John Ikenberry, and Thomas Risse (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).
2. Charles Maier, “Marking Time: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations,” in *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, ed. Michael Kammen (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980).
3. See Valerie Aubourg, Gerard Bossuat, and Giles Scott-Smith, eds., *European Community, Atlantic Community?* (Paris: Soleb, 2008); and Tiziano Bonazzi, ed., *Quale Occidente: Occidente perché* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2005) as demonstrations of the increasing interest in the subject, especially among European scholars of US history.
4. Andrew M. Johnston, *Hegemony and Culture in the Origins of NATO Nuclear First-Use, 1945–1955* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 9–10.
5. Nikhil Pal Singh, “Culture/Wars: Recoding Empire in a Age of Democracy,” *American Quarterly* 50 (September 1998): 479–80.
6. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 7.
7. Mario Del Pero, “On the Limits of Zeiler’s Historiographical Triumphalism,” *Journal of American History* 95 (March 2009): 1081.

8. Marilyn B. Young, "The Age of Global Power," in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 291.
9. Said, *Orientalism*, 5, 55.
10. Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). See also David Armitage, "Three Concepts of Atlantic History," in *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, ed. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002); Allison Games, "Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenger and Opportunities," *American Historical Review* 111 (June 2006): 741–57; William O'Reilly, "Genealogies of Atlantic History," *Atlantic Studies* 1 (2004): 66–84.
11. Quoted in Bernard Bailyn, "The Idea of Atlantic History," *Itinerario* 20, no. 1 (1996): 28.
12. Armitage, "Three Concepts of Atlantic History," 14.
13. This seems to be the focus of David Gress, *From Plato to NATO: The Idea of the West and its Opponents* (New York: Free Press, 1998). Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 22–25 provides an insightful look at the instrumental use of "Western civilization" on the idea of Europe.
14. Rafe Blaufarb, "The Western Question: The Geopolitics of Latin American Independence," *American Historical Review* 112 (June 2007): 742–63.
15. Marcello Carmagnani, *L'Altro Occidente* (Turin: Einaudi, 2003), 131–40; Paul Butel, *Histoire de l'Atlantique de l'antiquité à nos jours* (Paris: Perrin, 1997), 243–47.
16. Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 44.
17. Hans-Jürgen Puhle, "Trajectories of Western Modernization Around the Atlantic," in *Atlantic History: History of the Atlantic System 1580–1830*, ed. Horst Pietschmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002).
18. Charles Kupchan, "Atlantic Order in Transition: The Nature of Change in US-European Relations," in *End of the West?* 116.