Informal Ambassadors: American Women, Transatlantic Marriages, and Anglo-American Relations, 1865-1945

Dana Cooper

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Informal Ambassadors

American Women, Transatlantic Marriages, and Anglo-American Relations, 1865–1945

Dana Cooper
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Informal Ambassadors: American Women, Transatlantic Marriages, and Anglo-American Relations, 1865–1945

DANA COOPER
Informal Ambassadors

American Women,
Transatlantic Marriages,
and
Anglo-American Relations, 1865–1945

Dana Cooper

The Kent State University Press
Kent, Ohio
Once an Empire, now democratic,  
Whose Emperors, always pragmatic,  
Used political wedding  
More than war for the spreading  
Of Austria. (Most diplomatic.)  
—Holger Martin

Let others wage war; you, happy Austria, marry!  
—King Matthias Corvinus
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**Chronology**

1836  Birth of Joseph Chamberlain, the son of a manufacturer, in Camberwell, London,

1837–1901  Victorian era, the reign of Queen Victoria

1849  Birth of Lord Randolph Henry-Spencer Churchill in Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire, England

1854  Birth of Jennie Jerome, the eldest daughter of financier Leonard Jerome and his wife, Clara Hall, in Brooklyn, New York

1855  United States passes the Nationality Act, which states that American citizenship was based on a husband’s nationality, not a wife’s

1859  Birth of George Nathaniel Curzon in Kedleston Hall, Derbyshire, England

1861–65  American Civil War

1864  Birth of Mary Crowninshield Endicott, the daughter of William Crowninshield Endicott Sr., in Salem, Massachusetts

1870  Birth of Mary Victoria Leiter, the daughter of Levi Z. Leiter, in Chicago, Illinois

1871  Birth of Charles Richard John Spencer-Churchill, the 9th Duke of Marlborough

1874  Marriage of Jennie Jerome to Lord Randolph Churchill, son of the 7th Duke of Marlborough, making her Lady Randolph Churchill

Lady Churchill gives birth to her first son, future British prime minister Winston Churchill
1877  Birth of Consuelo Vanderbilt the only daughter of William Kissam Vanderbilt and Alva Smith Vanderbilt, and the granddaughter of the shipping and railroad mogul, Cornelius Vanderbilt, in New York City

1879  Birth of Nancy Witcher Langhorne, daughter of Chiswell Dabney Langhorne and Nancy Witcher Keene, in Danville, Virginia

Birth of William Waldorf Astor, the son of the extremely wealthy William Waldorf Astor and Mary Dahlgren Paul, in New York City

1880  Lady Churchill gives birth to her second son, John Strange Spencer-Churchill

1885–89  President Grover Cleveland appoints William Endicott, Mary’s father, secretary of war

1887  British-American Fisheries Conference held in Washington, D.C., attended by Joseph Chamberlain, chief plenipotentiary

1888  Secret engagement of Joseph Chamberlain and Mary Endicott in the spring

Marriage of Mary Endicott to Joseph Chamberlain

1895–99  Venezuelan Boundary Dispute

1895  Marriage of Mary Victoria Leiter to George Nathaniel Curzon, the 1st Marquess Curzon of Kedleston

Marriage of Consuelo Vanderbilt to Charles Richard John Spencer-Churchill, the 9th Duke of Marlborough, making her the Duchess of Marlborough and Winston Churchill’s cousin by marriage

Death of Lord Randolph Churchill

1896  Mary Curzon gives birth to her first daughter, Mary Irene Curzon

1897  Marriage of Nancy Langhorne to Bostonian Robert Gould Shaw

1898  Curzon is appointed viceroy of India and created Baron Curzon of Kedleston; Mary becomes Baroness Curzon and vicereine of India

Mary Curzon gives birth to her second daughter, Cynthia Blanche Curzon

Nancy Langhorne Shaw gives birth to her first son, Robert Gould Shaw III

1898  Spanish-American War
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<tr>
<td>1899–1902</td>
<td>Boer War (South Africa)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1899–1905</td>
<td>Lady Churchill founds and edits the <em>Anglo-Saxon Review</em></td>
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<td>1899</td>
<td>In response to the Boer War, Lady Churchill organizes the American Amazons</td>
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<td>1900</td>
<td>Marriage of Lady Churchill to George Cornwallis-West</td>
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<td>1901–10</td>
<td>Edwardian era, the reign of King Edward VII</td>
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<td>1903</td>
<td>Divorce of Nancy Langhorne and Robert Gould Shaw</td>
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<td>1904</td>
<td>Vicereine Curzon gives birth to her youngest daughter, Alexandra Naldera (Baba) Curzon</td>
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<td>1905</td>
<td>Curzon resigns as viceroy of India</td>
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<td>1906</td>
<td>Marriage of Nancy Langhorne to Waldorf Astor, making her Lady Waldorf Astor</td>
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<td>Following her death in London, Mary Curzon is buried the Curzon home at Kedleston.</td>
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<td>Separation of Consuelo and the Duke of Marlborough</td>
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<td>1907</td>
<td>The United States passes the Expatriation Act: any American woman marrying a foreigner must assume the nationality of her husband and relinquish her American citizenship</td>
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<td>Lady Astor gives birth to her first child with Lord Astor, William Waldorf Astor, the 3rd Viscount Astor</td>
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<td>1909</td>
<td>Lord Astor makes an unsuccessful bid for election to the House of Commons as a Conservative from a Plymouth constituency</td>
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<td>Lady Astor gives birth to her only daughter, Nancy Phyllis Louise Astor</td>
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<td>1910–36</td>
<td>Georgian era, the reign of King George V</td>
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<td>1910</td>
<td>Lord Astor wins a seat in the House of Commons.</td>
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<td>1912</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lady Astor gives birth to Francis David Langhorne Astor</td>
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<td>1914–18</td>
<td>World War I</td>
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<td>1914</td>
<td>Divorce of Lady Churchill and Cornwallis-West</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Death of Joseph Chamberlain in London</td>
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1916  Lady Astor gives birth to Michael Langhorne Astor

Marriage of Mary Endicott Chamberlain and Reverend William Hartley Carnegie

1917  Marriage of George Curzon and Grace Hinds, daughter of the U.S. minister to Brazil

1918  Marriage of Lady Churchill and Montague Phippen Porch, a member of the British Civil Service in Nigeria.

Lady Astor gives birth to her youngest child, John Jacob Astor

1919  Lord Astor serves in the House of Commons until his father's death, when he becomes a Lord and thus a member of the House of Lords

Lady Astor runs for and is elected to the seat Waldorf vacated

1920  With the Nineteenth Amendment, American women attain suffrage

1921  Divorce of Consuelo and the Duke of Marlborough

Marriage of Consuelo and French lieutenant colonel Jacques Balsan

Death of Lady Churchill; and burial in the Churchill plot at St. Martin's Churchyard, Bladon, Oxfordshire, England

1922  Lady Astor's seven-week speaking tour of the U.S., Canada, and England

The United States passes the Cable Act, which states, "Any woman marrying an alien ineligible for citizenship shall cease to be an American citizen."

1924  Austen Chamberlain, Mary Endicott's stepson, becomes British foreign secretary

1925  Death of George Curzon in London

1926  Annulment of the Vanderbilt-Marlborough marriage

1928  Suffrage granted to all British women over twenty-one years of age through the Representation of the People Act

1931  The United States amends the Cable Act to allow American women to retain their citizenship after marrying aliens ineligible for American citizenship

1936  Death of Reverend William Carnegie
<table>
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<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Neville Chamberlain, Mary Endicott’s stepson, becomes prime minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Lady Astor leaves Parliament at her husband’s urging</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The United States’ War Brides Act is passed</td>
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<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Death of Lord Astor, after which Lady Astor largely withdraws from public life</td>
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<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td><em>The Glitter and the Gold</em>, Consuelo Balsan’s insightful but not entirely candid autobiography, ghostwritten by Stuart Preston, is published</td>
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<td>1956</td>
<td>Death of Jacques Balsan</td>
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<td>1964</td>
<td>Death of Lady Astor at Grimsthorpe, in Lincolnshire, England, and burial at Cliveden</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Death of Consuelo Balsan in Southampton, Long Island, New York, and burial in Saint Martin’s Churchyard, Bladon, Oxfordshire</td>
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Introduction
An Extraordinary Galaxy of American Women

Let’s simply recognize that anyone following [Secretary of State Hillary] Clinton will have very big pumps to fill.

—Anne-Marie Slaughter

The position of women within the field of diplomacy has changed significantly in recent years. Three recent U.S. secretaries of state—Madeleine Albright, Condoleezza Rice, and Hillary Rodham Clinton—have been women. As evidence of the last’s worldwide influence, the so-called Hillary effect has been cited as opening doors for women as diplomats, at home and abroad, as more women serve as representatives to and for the United States than ever before. In 2010, some twenty-five female ambassadors—an all-time high—were posted in Washington, D.C. While women remain a conspicuous minority of the nearly two hundred accredited ambassadors in the nation’s capital, the five-fold increase of female ambassadors to the United States since the late 1990s is remarkable. Furthermore, more than forty women currently represent the United States to other nations. The sudden increase has been described as its own diplomatic coup.1

The world has remarked repeatedly upon the impressive trio of American women who have recently served as secretaries of state. Their individual and collective power in advancing American interests and championing women’s rights has not gone unnoticed at home or overseas, by men or women, young or old. One American teenager recently asked his reporter mother, “You mean a man can be secretary of state?” Barely a decade after Madeleine Albright became the first female U.S. secretary of state, the position was described as “the women’s spot—a safe expected place for women to be.” Anne-Marie Slaughter, professor of politics and international affairs at Princeton University and former director of policy planning
for the State Department, argues that “women are particularly well-suited to nurturing relationships, marshaling cooperation and conducting tough negotiations,” thus, making them ideal for diplomatic endeavors. “Given that women are far less likely to be able to use coercive power than men are,” observes Slaughter, “we have been skilled for centuries at getting others to want what we want.” Thus, if we pursue the premise that truly adept diplomats are masters of the so-called art of letting you have my way, then the majority of, if not all, diplomats should be women.

And yet, that Secretaries Albright, Rice, and Clinton are women still garnered considerable attention, highlighting a latent underpinning of diplomacy, to wit, that while women might be ideally suited for diplomatic work, their fitness as diplomatic leaders remains dubious. “Women’s traditional, unpaid work,” Katherine Hughes maintains, “was and is necessary to the practice of diplomacy abroad and because of this that work was coopted by the institution.” Until 1972, the Foreign Service forced female officers to resign their posts following matrimony; at the same time, it encouraged men to marry. Not only did marriage ostensibly make a man a more stable, dependable employee, his wife became an unofficial asset to his career. A woman’s work inside the home—tending to details in the alleged private sphere—made it possible for her husband to pursue the official side of diplomacy outside of the home. Thus, because diplomatic wives were busy performing such important, but “informal,” tasks as organizing dinners, supervising the staff and/or servants, calling on the wives of other leaders, and socializing on an unofficial level with local acquaintances, male diplomats could devote their full attentions to the formal aspect—mediation and negotiating—of their job as international liaisons. The conceptions of man/woman, public/private, and formal/informal diplomacy as opposites remained fixtures of the collective mind at the State Department well into the twentieth century.

Such conceptions about the suitability of men’s abilities and women’s activities have long gone unquestioned within the diplomatic world. As Joan Scott asserts, “gender becomes a way of denoting ‘cultural constructions’—the entirely social creation of ideas about appropriate roles for women and men . . . [and] is a way of referring to the exclusively social origins of the subjective identities of men and women.” Thus, sex differences determined what role a man or woman could assume within the diplomatic world; consequently, a gendered categorization determined their respective poli-social tasks.

Rarely have wives played such intimate roles as they have in diplomacy and foreign affairs, and yet remained so overlooked. Historian Catherine Allgor argues, “The diplomat’s work is more like the classic stereotype of women’s work—subtle, diffuse, contingent, dependent on the intuitive reading of character. . . . Such realities of diplomatic life make the study of gender in this context particularly profitable.” This perspective may help explain why historians seldom consider the in-
formal side of diplomacy in general, and wives in particular, which stems from the reality that entertaining and related efforts are exceedingly difficult to discern or quantify. Rarely does archival information reveal the efforts of diplomatic wives behind the scenes (after all, they are working behind the scenes), though diplomats occasionally remarked that their spouses could be “exceedingly useful on the social end.” But such an investigation can challenge scholars’ assumptions about diplomacy, marriage, and women overall. Utilizing such an approach and questioning the supposed line separating public and private spheres—a line that Linda Kerber and other scholars have seen as limiting our understanding of women in history—appears hazy at best. Under this microscope, the personal becomes political, thus infusing a host of relationships once viewed as “private or merely social,” as Cynthia Enloe puts it, “with power, usually unequal power backed up by public authority.”

Although women have without question been integral to the functionality of diplomacy since its inception, female faces in diplomatic circles have rarely been brought to the forefront, as historians have seldom considered what they “have seen out of the corner of their eye, if they saw it at all.” But what if historians simply refocused the lens through which they traditionally view diplomacy by following Emily Rosenberg’s call to analyze “power systems from various perspectives situated on the periphery”? As diplomatic wives have played such a critical role in diplomatic operations, and diplomacy revolves around the relationships between countries, then the wives of international marriages between powerful nations obviously take on new meaning for historians. Thus, such a shift in perspective is not as drastic as some historians might initially presume; as Rosenberg suggests, “A peripheral view comes less from where we stand than from the critical questions we frame.” In that vein, this book regards the wives in Anglo-American marriages as critical figures in Anglo-American diplomatic history, in a manner of speaking, moving them from the periphery, to the center.

American-Born, British-Wed Wives

In reviewing one of the most vital relationships in American diplomacy, that between the United States and the United Kingdom, historians find a significant cohort of women to evaluate as crucial to that alliance. While the special relationship goes almost unquestioned in the twenty-first century, such a rapport would have been difficult, if not impossible, for either Americans or Britons to imagine in the early nineteenth century. While diplomatic historians have emphasized a variety of events in explaining the Anglo-American rapprochement, they only occasionally mention the numerous transatlantic marriages that bound these two countries during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Despite the many books
and articles that have mentioned the topic of transatlantic marriages, the subject typically receives perfunctory consideration, a side issue within the larger and (traditionally defined) more significant issues at hand. Nonetheless, these marriages united wealthy American heiresses and British aristocrats in significant numbers between 1865 and 1920. Howard Temperley notes that no fewer than sixty peers married American women between 1870 and 1914. According to Charles S. Campbell, “more than seventy Americans had married titled Britons by 1903; more than a hundred and thirty by 1914.” Bradford Perkins’s numbers also support Campbell’s. In writing this book, I have documented 588 marriages between American heiresses and members of the British peerage, barons, and landed gentry between the American Civil War and World War I. Whatever the precise number one settles on, it is indisputable that a significant number of transatlantic marriages pledged British and American families to one another at the turn of the twentieth century.

If the exact number of these marriages is in dispute, so is their influence on Anglo-American relations. Campbell argues that they created “an extraordinary galaxy of American women married to British governmental leaders. One might almost stop with that in explaining the rise of friendly feelings between America and Britain.” In a later work, he went even further, asserting that “such trans-Atlantic unions doubtless had wide influence on policy.” But not all diplomatic historians agree. Perkins argues that while these marriages advanced contact between elite American and British social circles, “the political importance of these marriages was not great, for in very few cases . . . did the husband gain a leading position.”

A historical debate thus exists as to the influence of transatlantic marriages on Anglo-American relations. Historians will be hard-pressed to present irrefutable evidence demonstrating that these marriages helped to transform policy or relations; however, they can examine the activities of American-born, British-wed women, their subsequent lives in Great Britain, and public perceptions of them and their nuptials on both sides of the Atlantic that influenced Anglo-American relations, at a key moment in history. More fully exploring the lives of women allows for a consideration of not only the shift in international public opinion regarding them and their marriages but also their informal international impact. In considering their personal activities, public associations, political affiliations, and decision making, this work erases the line between the alleged public space and private life of both men and women as it concerns Anglo-American relations during the period at hand.

Specifically, it considers five particular marriages that span the period from the end of the Civil War through World War II. Beyond simply presenting the compelling narratives of these unions, this book also does for transatlantic marriages what Kati Marton has done for presidential ones in considering “husbands and wives at the precarious intersection of power, love, and marriage.” The five
marriages profiled here present the varied ways American women dealt with their British husbands and new families; an unfamiliar culture and people; success or failure of their marriages; adaptation or resistance to English life; and personal decisions to discard, maintain, and intermittently negotiate their individual and collective American identities in Britain. While each of the marriages ended differently, it is notable that all five women chose to be buried in Great Britain.

Jennie Jerome’s vows to Lord Randolph Churchill in 1874 marked the beginning of the “age of trans-Atlantic marriages in high places.” Through her marriage, her husband’s political career, her personal relationships with influential Britons, and her son Winston’s political career, Lady Churchill used her position in England to advance British-American unity and worked steadfastly to improve Anglo-American relations. In her private and public life, Lady Churchill found a way to retain her American heritage while taking a leading role in London’s poli-social circles.

Just as Lady Churchill molded her son and husband’s political careers for Anglo-American interests, so did the second American-born, British-wed woman considered here. When Mary Endicott married Joseph Chamberlain in 1888, few Americans or Britons could have anticipated the level of personal or professional influence she would have on him. Following their wedding, Joseph’s political speeches took on a decidedly pro-Anglo-Saxon tone, largely as a result of his nuptial treaty with Mary. As a reserved but incredibly kind woman, Mary stepped smoothly into her new roles as political wife, stepmother, and international social secretary for her American and British families. In her nearly seventy years in England, through her vast transatlantic correspondence, she sought to lessen the distance between Boston (her birthplace) and Birmingham (her adult home) and bring her Anglo-American families closer together. As a drawing-room diplomat, she proved that private hostessing could have significant public ramifications.

Though not a political activist like Lady Churchill or a social butterfly like Mary Chamberlain, Mary Victoria Leiter found her own way to influence British attitudes toward Americans. As the compliant political wife of George Nathaniel Curzon, she represented the soft power side of America and American women not only to England but to India as well. Following a five-year secret engagement, the couple married in 1895. Four years later, Lord Curzon became Viceroy of India. For the next six years, Lady Curzon frequently traveled alone between India and England, acting as George’s personal ambassador and political emissary, relaying his plans for India to his fellow Members of Parliament and keeping George abreast of political developments in London. Her subservient demeanor was a feminine facade that masked a keen political mind and fiery temperament. Her loyalty to George knew no bounds—even when it cost him his career and her life.

Shortly after the love match between George and Mary Curzon, another American woman entered into a transatlantic marriage, but not by choice. Consuelo
Vanderbilt, the great-granddaughter of Cornelius “Commodore” Vanderbilt, married the 9th Duke of Marlborough in November 1896. The marriage epitomized the socioeconomic exchange of dollars for dukes so common in these marriages. Until this point, most transatlantic marriages met with fanfare on both sides of the Atlantic. Shortly after this miserable union between two people who never loved one another, Anglo-American public opinion turned decidedly against such ties. Consuelo’s marriage may have ended in divorce, but her life in Britain afterward demonstrates the power American women held as envoys in influencing transatlantic ideals.

Finally, the most famous, and in some circles infamous, American woman to enter an Anglo-American marriage was Nancy Langhorne Shaw. Her 1906 marriage to William Waldorf Astor coincided with the steady decline in transatlantic marriages, even as she became the most candid consul and famous American woman in British history. As the first woman to take a seat in the British Parliament, in 1919, she used her political connections—public and private—with leading men and women in the United States and Britain. More than any other woman on either side of the Atlantic before her, Lady Astor challenged discrimination toward women in politics, confronted head-on stereotypes about Americans, and—for better and for worse—influenced Anglo-American relations during a crucial time in the nations’ shared history.

A close examination of Anglo-American marriages reveals a broad spectrum of pursuits and possibilities. As a British wife, Lady Randolph did all she could under the guise of traditional women’s work—hosting dinners and instigating dialogue between critical individuals—both in her home and through her attendance of Parliament meetings to promote positive perceptions amongst Britons. Over the course of her life abroad, she slowly united other American-born, British-wed wives as a collective legion of women who promoted a united Anglo-Saxon identity and ameliorated Anglo-American relations. Mary Endicott Chamberlain continued these efforts as a member of the American Amazons and in her own right by pursuing professional meetings and important dinners with American ambassadors to Britain. The extensive correspondence of both Mary Endicott Chamberlain and Mary Leiter Curzon established an elite Anglo-American network of leaders on both sides of the Atlantic. But all of these women’s activities remained chiefly behind the scenes and were thereby shielded from public criticism, as their labors were conventional, voluntary, and deemed appropriate under the facade of elite women’s work, which mimicked the traditional duties and expectations of diplomats. While Lady Consuelo Marlborough’s initial impact as an American-born, British-wed wife began in this protected category, like Lady Churchill and Mary Chamberlain, she exhibited her greatest influences after her marriage had ended, as she pursued more overtly political opportunities, much like Lady Nancy Astor, as the two gradually
dedicated their endeavors to improving the lives of women. Their individual and collective activities abroad shaped the perspectives of Anglo-Americans on both sides of the Atlantic while cracking a glass ceiling of sorts by redefining who could act and how one could serve as an informal ambassador.

**Poli-Social Marriages**

While historians may disagree as to the importance of transatlantic marriages, both Britons and Americans commented frequently on the participants. In the beginning decades of this marital trend, most Americans were “pleased when [they heard] that another American girl had entered the exclusive circle of the British aristocracy.” American heiresses were often very rich, exceptionally beautiful, and exceedingly well trained in elite social behaviors. In the words of one Briton at the turn of the century, “It must be very hard . . . for a bachelor from the other side, whatever prejudices and affections he brings across, to keep from trying to marry an American girl.” For example, after her marriage to Joseph Chamberlain in 1888, Mary Endicott Chamberlain attended a Town Hall meeting with her husband in his home constituency of Birmingham. Following the meeting, Mary exited the building to shouts of “Three cheers for our American cousin!” In many cases, Britons responded approvingly regarding intermarriage with their “American cousins.”

As one analyzes British political leaders and the women they married, a significant difference from American government leaders becomes apparent: British leaders relied on their wives throughout their careers, an alliance they candidly reflected upon in personal letters and diaries. Before Lord Salisbury became prime minister in 1885, he openly acknowledged the importance a wife would play in his political life. In one journal entry, he wrote: “I have come to the conclusion that I shall probably do Parliament well if I marry, and that I shall certainly [make] nothing of it if I do not.” Georgina Alderson, whom he married in 1857, proved quite an asset to his political career. She organized her calendar around his activities and responsibilities, monitored his exercise and sleep schedule closely, and entertained guests in their home while he worked at the House of Commons. She often sat in the Ladies’ Gallery, waiting for her husband to finish his tasks, a commitment that often resulted in their walks home together at dawn. Such a hands-on, involved, and visible partnership was quite the exception in American political circles in the same period; hence, a transatlantic marriage opened doors for conspicuous women such as Jennie Jerome, who reveled in her front-and-center, poli-social status in England, a position unlikely for her had she married an American. But in the context of transatlantic marriages, in which American women played much more decisive roles in their husbands’ careers, and in diplomatic circles, in which women’s work
was necessary and pivotal to international relations, an unprecedented combination of opportunities provided American-born, British-wed women the chance to successfully shape Anglo-American perceptions and relations.

Clearly, British politicians considered successful marriage with the right women key to prominent governmental careers. Selecting a woman intimately familiar with the game of politics could significantly aid a leading official, as in the case of Viscount Henry Palmerston, who married Emily Lamb. Having grown up in political circles, much like Mary Endicott Chamberlain, Emily became Palmerston’s confidante; he often shared with her private details of the political wrangling of the House of Commons. Utilizing the practice of the salon, a significant social weapon both Liberal and Conservative political wives in Britain employed through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Emily entertained men and women in her drawing room. Acting as her husband’s unofficial political manager, Emily (like Mary Curzon) held as much inside knowledge and as many valuable personal contacts as any other politician of the period. Henry Asquith, prime minister from 1908 to 1916, described Emily as “an active and most efficient co-partner in Palmerston’s fortunes.”

While ambassador to Paris in the 1930s, Lord Tyrell observed of leading wives, “A woman with the right personal gifts who married a diplomat . . . [is] invaluable to the public service and one can think of many Ambassadors and Ministers in the past, who have owed a great part . . . of the success of their best work to their wives.” Thus, the women in this study prove they were both the diplomats and the wives, the very people whose implicit social activities repeatedly open international political doors.

British politicians have long recognized the power of a talented and witty hostess-wife. But in the same manner that she could aid her husband, a British political wife could also act as a detriment to his career. If she lacked familiarity with political intrigue, if she chose not to entertain frequently, or if she took no pleasure socializing with other politicians and their wives, her husband’s career reflected her perceived reluctance. When future prime minister Arthur Balfour considered marriage to Margot Tennant, Queen Victoria expressed her disappointment with her home secretary’s choice, pronouncing Margot “unfit for a Cabinet Minister’s wife.” While she did not outline her objections to Margot and did not provide Balfour any suggestions, Victoria clearly deemed a certain type of woman as the ideal politician’s wife. The selection of a wife, as something of a nongovernmental official, has long been an important decision for British government officials.

The wives of British politicians in general and of prime ministers specifically “played a part which was very much an extension of the social role they would have fulfilled in England.” Exhibiting this, Lady Jennie Churchill maintained that “Englishwomen have a much greater opportunity than their American sisters to engage in public and political affairs,” a realization that may have surprised more
than one American-born, British-wed wife. According to Lady Churchill, an “Englishwoman occupies nearly all her working hours with meetings and functions of various kinds, many of them of a semi-public nature.” Based on her upbringing in the United States and adult life in Britain, Lady Churchill argued that Englishwomen directly influenced politics, “whereas [such influence was] so limited among American women as to be inappreciable.”

Despite the rigidities of the British class system, more opportunities existed for women to exert political and social influence than in the ostensibly egalitarian United States.

Accordingly, British political marriages hold great significance for our examination of American diplomatic history. Unlike their sisters across the Atlantic, the wives of American politicians had few opportunities to exert influence on their husbands’ careers. An American wife married to a British politician at the turn of the twentieth century, however, enjoyed tremendous opportunities for international influence, which proved especially true for both Lady Churchill and Lady Curzon, as they represented the United States not only to England but also to their particular outposts (Ireland and India) as a result of their husbands’ political assignments. Consequently, the consideration of Anglo-American marriages, and specifically the activities and contacts an American woman gained through her marriage to a British politician, opened the door for these women to serve as informal ambassadors—entertaining in the same manner as American diplomats, and specifically their wives, while making valuable personal and professional contacts, similar to British political wives.

Unfortunately for the participants in transatlantic marriages, the public often viewed these unions as simple exchanges of money for titles—loveless transactions of capital for class—epitomized in 1896 by the garish wedding and disastrous marriage of Consuelo Vanderbilt to the 9th Duke of Marlborough. In the years following the Civil War, a number of American men, such as Consuelo’s father, made sizable fortunes well in excess of hundreds of millions of dollars. While these families had the wealth to earn elite status on an economic level, old-money families resisted the intrusion of the nouveau riche into their tightly knit circle. Consequently, many of the newly wealthy left the United States for London in pursuit of social acceptance, seeking, and in many cases buying, marriages for their daughters to noblemen of Britain in a near desperate attempt to, as Greg King has described, “prove they were both respectful of and equal to their European models.”

Not surprisingly, these young women’s decisions to renounce their American democratic heritage and republican virtues for the title of “lady” left a sour taste in the patriotic mouths of many American citizens. As historian Milton Plesur asked, “Was not Europe the home of monarchies, despotisms, colonialism, and destitute dukes searching for American heiresses—in short, everything that the United States abhorred?” To earn social acceptance in elite American circles via
the stamp of British aristocratic approval was anathema for the majority of Americans. From the democratic perspective of the United States, a titled American was not an American at all.

This same period witnessed great economic growth in the United States while the landed wealth of the British aristocracy endured a quick and significant decline. Not surprisingly, British aristocrats believed Americans literally buying their way into London's high society threatened centuries of Britain's landed wealth and political dominance. There remained a tendency in British society to regard the big spenders from the United States as uncouth. Given these circumstances, it is little wonder that the public perception of Anglo-American marriages shifted over time from approval to aversion.

Women's Work, Man's Job

Just as Anglo-American marriages resulted from an array of motivations on both sides of the Atlantic, a serious study of transatlantic marriages and their influence on Anglo-American relations reflects an abundance of recent developments in diplomatic history. Chiefly, it intersects with women's history as a cross-fertilization of social and cultural history, as Thomas Zeiler has urged historians to reconsider “transnational (essentially, nonstate) interactions across borders.” Just as Allgor argues that the “the marriage of women's history to the mainstream political narrative has revealed that gender is a primary category of historical analysis,” the same can be said of women's history and diplomatic narrative. Undoubtedly, the process of diplomacy has long revolved around dinners, drinks, and discussion. Women, and wives specifically, have held claim to traditional duties related to domesticity and hospitality regardless of country or historic period. Hence, the procedure of diplomacy falls under the category of women's work, but history has long regarded the process as a man's job.

Thus, a central question of this book is that of who was considered eligible as a diplomat in the late nineteenth century and what type of background, education, and training such a position required beyond the proverbial pale, male, and from Yale criterion. Attachés were expected to be well educated and well versed in the behavior and language of diplomacy. Their children often dined with the politically influential, knew the proper utensils for any course of a lengthy meal, were fluent in other languages (most often French), spoke intelligently and congenially, and exhibited flawless deportment with ease. Notably, elite Americans provided this exact training for their sons and daughters, but for very different reasons. While elite Americans taught their children such lessons eventually to fulfill different expectations—sons to do; daughters to marry—the outcome was
the same. As our American-born, British-wed women received the guidance and preparation suitable for future diplomats, they were at least as savvy and adept in high poli-social circles as their American brothers and British husbands. Though they did not hold the title “diplomat,” they had received the same instruction and demonstrated the same traits and conduct required of ambassadors.

This gendered perspective of diplomatic representation, broadly defined, and Anglo-American relations, specifically, opens the door to analyzing women’s wider influence within diplomatic history. Scott’s challenge for scholars to reconsider “the history of politics and the politics of history” remains especially relevant for diplomatic historians and historians of women to rethink “war, diplomacy, and high politics” where it applies to international relations. But such investigation cannot be performed with a traditional approach, as Rosenberg has pointed out, by searching for women in diplomatic history, as there are very few “exceptional women” who have served in official diplomatic capacities. Rather, she urged historians to examine situations in which women pressed “the possibilities of the socially constructed women’s spheres to the limit, all the while helping redefine their boundaries” and revisit the idea from a gendered perspective. But this book makes it be possible to merge Rosenberg’s two ideas—the exceptional woman, as well as women doing women’s work—and reevaluate one of the longest and most complicated relationships in U.S. history. By considering the politically complex, economically motivated, and diplomatically charged marriages of truly exceptional American women who married into the highest levels of British poli-social circles and then acted just as elite/diplomatic wives would, should, and could in the midst of an evolving Anglo-American relationship, we are able to do just that.

New and Old Views of Diplomatic History

Such an analysis of women’s work as it pertains to diplomatic history dovetails with the emerging focus on cultural diplomacy to emphasize the cultural commonalities between various societies. Cultural diplomacy analyzes the differences in cultures and how these differences can help or hinder relations between countries and serves as a powerful lens through which to examine such aspects of diplomatic relations as “social affinities, comparative analysis, cultural conceptions, psychological influences, local traditions, and unspoken assumptions.” Thus, as Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht argues, “culture affects nations and global systems as much as, if not more than, power and economic interests.” This approach to diplomatic history is particularly valuable in assessing the idea of a special cultural connection between the United States and Great Britain as well as challenging stereotypes of typical American and British traits and behavior.
Informal diplomacy, an academic cousin to cultural diplomacy, also plays an important role in this particular study of Anglo-American marriages. Catherine Forslund defines informal diplomacy as “any exchange between citizens or groups of citizens from two or more nations outside the boundaries of the official governmental institutional apparatus (ambassadors, ministers, secretaries, et al.).” The leading persons representing the United States to Great Britain in any period are the diplomats and ambassadors dispatched to London. But in an increasingly globalized world, where people of all countries frequently come into contact with one another, these informal interactions help shape conceptions of other nations and peoples. Hundreds of American women married British aristocrats, political leaders, and military officers during this period. Many of these women were the only Americans some Britons ever personally met. As a result, these women served as informal ambassadors for the United States, living their lives abroad and acting as personal advertisements for what Americans believed and what the United States represented. Whether American women made a negative or positive impression, Britons formed personal opinions and implemented public decisions toward the United States in this period largely based on these American women. Clearly, this role carried immense influence for those willing to embrace such a position.

Closely related to the idea of informal diplomacy is the significance of unofficial ambassadors. Recent works, such as Donna Alvah’s *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and the Cold War, 1946–1965* (2007) and Zeiler’s *Ambassadors in Pinstripes: The Spalding World Baseball Tour and the Birth of the American Empire* (2006), enforce the idea of nongovernmental actors as potential and influential representatives for the United States overseas. As Alvah argues, the military encouraged families “to act as ‘unofficial ambassadors’ in their everyday activities among local people in foreign countries . . . [as they] could help foster good relations with residents of foreign countries.” Likewise, Zeiler contends that in an era of a new world economy and “the constant pressure of Anglo-American globalization and the ‘soft power’ of U.S. business and other transnational contacts,” such as Anglo-American marriages, “held the promise of imperial rewards.” As recent diplomatic scholarship suggests, a host of players outside the employ of the U.S. Department of State were now eligible to influence overseas perceptions of Americans and America. While the notion of unofficial ambassadors is a slippery slope, and by no means does one international trip accredit an individual as an informal diplomat, the proposition that untrained, uneducated, and often did—potentially influence foreign relations has gained significant ground among historians of foreign relations.

In assessing informal and unofficial means of international influence, the individual and collective opinion of a people and populace is critical. By shaping individual personal opinions, American-born, British-wed women helped mold a wider body of public opinion. Public opinion has long been important in studying
diplomatic relations between two countries. According to Thomas A. Bailey, public opinion has long shaped basic foreign policy; thus, “sprouting from the fertile soil of experience, they represent the needs, interests, and hopes of people.”50 In this period, Americans held a variety of opinions about the British. On the one hand, many Americans proudly considered themselves Anglophobes, detesting the former mother country and everything that it represented. On the other, many described themselves as Anglophiles, people who cherished a shared heritage with Great Britain and valued the “special relationship” that Americans had with their British cousins. While several historians have characterized the late nineteenth century as an era of either extreme Anglophilia or Anglophobia, these two sentiments existed side by side, albeit generally among different groups of Americans.51 For the most part, lower- to middle-class workers, immigrants, and specifically Irish and German Americans held anti-British attitudes while upper-middle-class to wealthy Americans of British descent held pro-British opinions. These public sentiments influenced American politics: the Anglophobes generally voted Democratic (largely due to Irish- and German-American constituents) while Anglophiles typically voted Republican. Still, no openly pro-British politician in the United States could have been elected in the nineteenth century.52 This reality is best evidenced by an executive decision to keep Mary Endicott’s engagement to Joseph Chamberlain a secret, lest President Cleveland lose his 1888 reelection bid, as Mary’s father served as Cleveland’s secretary of war, a position that facilitated his daughter’s meeting with Chamberlain. Even during this period, public opinion on international issues strongly influenced American domestic politics and foreign relations. Consequently, as important as what these women did with their Anglo-American unions was what people on both sides of the Atlantic perceived they did through their transatlantic marriages.

While this study uses a variety of subfields of diplomatic history, readers should note that this project examines foreign relations—not foreign policy. The difference, while subtle, is important. To study foreign relations means to examine the specific associations, contacts, connections, and interactions between two or more countries. By contrast, foreign policy focuses more exclusively on the strategies, principles, and procedures involved in pursuing a course of action with one or more nations. Clearly, these two elements of diplomacy influence one another. As Thomas G. Paterson explains, “historians of American foreign relations try to study the combination of factors that has produced an American foreign policy, an American participation in the world.”53 In analyzing transatlantic marriages, this study examines relations between Great Britain and the United States within a given period and how these women, acting as informal ambassadors for the United States, changed, altered, or affected the way Britons and Americans saw one another. Consequently foreign policy, in terms of tracking specific lines of dialogue between formal British and American diplomats, functions as a limited consideration here.
Overall, this study pursues the concept of hard versus soft power. Hard power, which Joseph S. Nye defined as “co-optive behavioral power—getting others to want what you want,” has long been the ultimate purpose of diplomacy. Just as Slaughter acknowledges women’s preference of persuasion over pressure, Nye argues for the superior yet gentle prowess of “soft power resources—cultural attraction, ideology, and international institutions,” hardly new concepts for diplomatic historians. This seemingly simple categorization of diplomatic acts through “attraction rather than coercion or payments” unifies some of the latest trends in diplomatic scholarship—transatlantic, gender, cultural, and informal considerations—to examine one of the oldest and most complex relationships in history.

In many ways, transatlantic marriages constitute a very old method, perhaps the oldest, of diplomacy. For centuries before Anglo-American marriages became the nuptial trend of choice in the late nineteenth century, feuding kingdoms had practiced international marriages for the benefit of their territories. Numerous kings and queens from rival nations married their sons and daughters to one another to achieve cease-fires, as acts of good faith in treaties, to gain more territory, or protect their own kingdom from invasion, which supports Enloe’s claim that that “empires rose and fell according to which marriage schemes succeeded and which failed.” The union of Ferdinand to Isabella marks one of the earliest strategic European nuptials, just like the marriages of Queen Victoria’s children, all of whom married, not of their own accord, the daughters and sons of necessary European allies. While Victoria and Albert enjoyed a marriage based on true love, they did not allow their children to do the same, instead utilizing the unions for the benefit of the British Empire.

The Anglo-American marriages examined in this book illustrate the oldest form of diplomacy unfolding in the modern world. These marriages held great potential for British-American relations at the turn of the twentieth century. Thus, Germany, France, Italy, and even Ireland watched them closely. Clearly, many European nations worried that Anglo-American marriages, amid a “potent imperial ideology [based on] the racial affinities of Anglo-Saxonism and the Anglo-American ‘special relationship,’” might alter the delicate power balance between England and continental Europe. In the United States, immigrants such as Irish and German Americans issued critical statements about these unions as their own dislike for Britain brought concern that their new country had grown too close to the evil British Empire. Potentially closer relations between the United States and Great Britain could eventually spell disaster for immigrants’ home countries and for immigrants themselves in the United States, who could do little but stand by and wonder what such a large number of marriages between wealthy American women and powerful British policymakers might mean for the transatlantic world.

Just as many scholars have noted but given little serious consideration to the practice of transatlantic marriages, so did many people on both sides of the Atlantic
during the period under review. One newspaper, for example, wrote dismissively of one of these unions: “Her waist, 20 inches; her inheritance, $20 million.” For the majority of publications critiquing these marriages, the American heiresses were nothing more than a nineteenth-century version of Paris Hilton—a silly little rich girl famous for simply being rich—and who had discarded her American identity for nothing more than a bankrupt duke who was much more interested in courting her father, his lawyer, and his personal banker than her exclusively. But a serious investigation of Anglo-American marriages reveals that there is much more to the story; this is the sort of investigation that this book undertakes.

After a discussion of the major factors that transpired following the American Civil War that made transatlantic marriages popular and desirable for American women, British men, and Anglo-American families on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, this book explores five distinct case studies that represent the overall pattern for American women who married British men in this period. While these specific American-born, British-wed women are closely analyzed regarding their activities and efforts on behalf of Anglo-American relations, they are representative of more than five hundred women of the same birth and nuptial category who lived abroad as informal ambassadors for their homeland and whose every word and deed held significant ramifications for the emerging special relationship based on their own personal and professional relationships.

The final chapter and the conclusion consider the myriad factors that lead to the decline and ultimate legacy of Anglo-American marriages. Chapter 7 analyzes the perceived “American invasion” of Great Britain and the various reasons that public opinion turned against Anglo-American relations at the turn of the century. Both Britons and Americans expressed strong attitudes condemning these marriages, each for their own reasons. While Anglo-American marriages still occurred after 1900, as did Lady Astor’s, the number declined significantly in the wake of intense scorn. The last chapter presents all final conclusions concerning Anglo-American marriages.

These women surprised their families, both British and American, as they exhibited an extraordinary degree of agency in a period that clearly placed women outside the boundaries of politics and diplomacy. Without the formal title of “diplomat” or membership in Parliament, they exerted an incredible amount of influence in the male-dominated arena of foreign affairs and international politics. They served as informal ambassadors who worked to improve relations at the turn of the twentieth century and played important roles in terms of influencing foreign relations. Furthermore, they demonstrated keen abilities to demasculinize the traditionally male world of diplomacy as on a daily basis they acted as ambassadors posted to a foreign country. Their positions as the wives of leading members of the British aristocracy provided them with unprecedented access to the eyes and ears of individuals at the highest level in Great Britain, the very decision-makers
who formulated and implemented foreign policy with their home country. During the period under consideration, the United States and Great Britain began to view one another less as adversaries and more as allies. Consequently, these women deserve recognition for the crucial roles they played at a critical time of international relations and certainly give new meaning to the phrase “foreign affairs.” In a period that did not afford women the right to vote, through their transatlantic marriages, they skillfully and successfully blurred the lines of public politics and private lives. Without formal education in politics or foreign policy or the title or staff provided to a diplomat or ambassador, these women created a unprecedented degree of agency within a world that would have undeniably recoiled at the idea of a female diplomat or politician. Both collectively and individually, they functioned as pseudo-diplomats between their country by birth and country by marriage.

Based on the connections established between diplomatic and women’s history, our examination turns to the overall trend of transatlantic marriages and five specific women involved in such unions. These women had all the tools for success as both diplomats and diplomatic wives: elite background, extreme wealth, social connections, superb beauty, exquisite etiquette, knowledge of a foreign language, and congenial personalities. Based on the demands and duties placed on diplomats and their wives since the nineteenth century, historians can clearly view Anglo-American marriages as having created a transatlantic and transnational network of politically charged and diplomatically significant unions. Utilizing a biographical approach, as Molly Wood has done, this method “gives historians a tool by which to challenge some of the common assumptions about women’s behavior, motivations, and activities” while also answering Zeiler’s call to observe “non-state and public actors on the international stage.” These women walked the fine line between their American and British loyalties. Like so many diplomats and wives before them, they lived under an international spotlight. People on both sides of the Atlantic monitored their every action, association, and friendship. As a result, scholars can examine these women as informal ambassadors as part of the larger picture of Anglo-American history.

By overlapping and fusing diplomatic history with gender and women’s studies and finding the intersections among these disciplines, this book demonstrates that not only could women act as ambassadors, even during a period in which they could not apply for State Department employment, but they influenced Anglo-American relations to a degree never before considered by historians. As Rosenberg has surmised, this work “linger[s] at the intersections, walking the borders to analyze from the outside in” to authenticate the roles, efforts, and activities of American women who married into the highest social and political circles of Britain, where they lived their lives abroad as informal ambassadors.