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In 2013 the American Embassy in Austria and the Austrian Embassy in the U.S. celebrated 175 years of U.S.-Austrian relations with brochures and exhibits.1 With the U.S. Congress intent on promoting American tobacco sales in the Habsburg Empire, the first ministers were exchanged only in 1838. In other words, the young revolutionary United States and the ancient reactionary Habsburg Empire did not have official diplomatic relations -- apart from beginning consular relations -- for the first fifty years of American history. The American relationship with ‘Austria’ in general and the Habsburg Empire (the Austrian Empire, the Dual Monarchy since 1867) has been a stepchild of American and Austrian scholarship for a long time. This was largely due to “the revolutionary tradition of a New World republic [jarring] with the conventions of an Old World monarchy,” as William D. Godsey suggests in this review of the book in this forum.

While various aspects of the U.S. relationship with the other great powers of Europe prior to World War I has been thriving,2 American ties with the Habsburg Monarchy have been wilting in the doldrums of scholarly attention for a long time, as all three reviewers in this forum agree. Characteristically, in his magisterial survey of U.S. foreign policy, George C. Herring barely touches on U.S.-Habsburg relations, thus reflecting the poverty of U.S.-Habsburg relations scholarship.3 Scholars concentrating on the foreign policy of the late Habsburg empire define it from the perspective of European great power politics, or the trajectory of ‘decline and fall’, or write the social or institutional history of the Dual Monarchy’s Foreign Office and pay scant attention to relations with the U.S.4 Some dissertations have been written on U.S. policy towards the Habsburg lands during the

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1 For a handsome 99-page (largely) visual history of the relationship, see U.S. Embassy Vienna, Austria, 175 Years U.S.-Austrian Diplomatic Relations (Vienna, 2013); the pictures collected for the brochure were also the source of a travelling exhibit sent around Austria. The Austrian Embassy in Washington dedicated a special issue of its regular news magazine to the occasion; see Austrian Information 66 (Summer/Fall 2013).


World War I era, and some travel accounts have been written that shed light on wider relations between the United States as a rising industrial power and the Habsburg empire as a declining European great power. If we agree with Donna Gabaccia’s recent contention that immigration studies are a worthy subject for diplomatic historians, immigration to the U.S. of millions of subjects from the Habsburg Monarchy open up a wide field of study. In fact, the massive emigration flows to the U.S. from the various Habsburg “crown lands” on the eve of World War I have received renewed attention lately, less so the political relationship between the two states. This lacuna of scholarship on U.S.–Habsburg relations is surprising giving the severe destabilization that ensued in East Central Europe after the collapse of the Monarchy in the waning weeks of World War I – a disequilibrium in European politics that became one of the major causes for the outbreak of World War II. This vacuum of power in the region opened the doors for both the Nazi and Soviet dictatorships in subsequent years to establish their dominance and keep the region under an iron boot until 1989.

Nicole Phelps’s ambitious new book, *U.S.-Habsburg Relations from 1815 to the Paris Peace Conference*, based on her University of Minnesota-Twin Cities dissertation, thus enters

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9 See the hitherto unpublished detailed quantitative social history by Annemarie Steidl/Wladimir Fischer/James W. Oberly, *The Transatlantic Migration Experience: From Austria-Hungary to the United States, 1870-1950*; I’m thankful to Annemarie Steidl for providing me with a copy of the manuscript.

Phelps’s book is highly attentive to the practices of nineteenth-century diplomacy, yet also refreshingly innovative in its methodology – dealing with sovereignty and identity issues applied to the field of diplomatic and transnational history. Phelps spends the entire first chapter defining the rules and norms of “the Great Power System” pioneered by Habsburg diplomacy as a means “to protect its claims to sovereignty over the diverse range of individuals who resided on its territory” (4). In an age of rising nationalism, the Habsburg emperor, presiding over a multinational empire consisting of 11 different ethnic groups, defined the citizenship of its subjects in political terms. Conversely, American citizenship was defined as race-based since Anglo-Saxons were struggling to incorporate new “ethnic” immigrants into their national polity. The reviewers in this forum all make reference to the complex “identity politics” in Phelps’s work.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the U.S. joined this ‘Great Power System’ as defined in the Congress of Vienna (1814/15), thereby reaffirming territorial sovereignty as its basis (23). The U.S. only slowly began to adopt the rules and norms that defined this Great Power System. As Justus D. Doenecke sensibly implies, the Habsburg diplomats acted as midwives in “integrating the United States into this diplomatic culture of the Great Power System.” A well-defined diplomatic and consular system and central foreign ministries were constituent parts of this System, as were the ceremonial and social aspects of modern diplomacy. The “Regelmént of 1815” defined the ranks in diplomatic missions and the “equality of rank signaled that two countries had a mutual understanding of the nature and relative importance of their relationship” (35). The isolationist and egalitarian position of the new American Republic considered this European system run by aristocrats as “un-American” (39) and only slowly adopted its practices. Phelps’s argument is that even though conflicts in the nineteenth century between the Habsburg Empire and the U.S. often revolved over “diplomatic form” (40). Yet when the U.S. increasingly adhered to the norms of the Great Power System on the prodding of Habsburg officials, they also reinforced Habsburg legitimacy. One might say that the Habsburg diplomats – following in the footsteps of the great Habsburg diplomats Count Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz and Prince Klemens von Metternich -- acted as trailblazers of inventing modern diplomatic practice.

Phelps devotes two chapters to the development of the American consular system in Austria. This is not a sexy topic for diplomatic historians, but Phelps shows how important this field is for U.S.-Habsburg relations in the nineteenth century. All three reviewers would agree with this contention. While consular services began by facilitating international trade and assisting merchants and sailors oversees, consuls soon covered much wider agendas than commercial affairs. As migration from the Habsburg lands increased from the crown lands to the U.S., so did remigration. American consuls soon had to deal with the protection of American citizens who returned to their native lands. Some were arrested for crimes they had committed before their emigration, many others were pressed by Habsburg authorities into military service, especially on the eve of, and during, World War I. American consuls often grappled with citizenship issues, especially the problems of dual citizenship. As travelling became cheaper and more comfortable, thousands of emigrants from the Monarchy returned to their native lands for business or personal reasons. This, as
much as any other reason, convinced states that their citizens needed travel documents (e.g., visas and passports). Conversely, Austro-Hungarian consuls increasingly had to provide legal counsel to immigrants from the Monarchy to the U.S. in workers’ compensation cases or in the settlement of estates (112). The strengths of Phelps’s chapters on the development of the consular services, based on exhaustive archival research both in Viennese and Washington national archives, are her compelling case studies and cameo portraits of individuals who clamored for help from the diplomatic community. She also confirms Gabbacia’s contention that immigration is part and parcel of foreign relations as migrants frequently crossed the Atlantic in both directions with the convenience of modern steamship travel, often becoming politically active too.

Phelps’s analysis concludes with as severe a critique of Wilsonian diplomacy during World War I as Wilson scholarship has produced in years. President Woodrow Wilson was no friend of traditional European diplomatic culture and closed down the channels of U.S.–Habsburg diplomacy by refusing to see the newly arrived Habsburg Ambassador Count Tarnowski in 1916. While the Habsburg government lost its ability to communicate with the Washington authorities, nationalists from the various constituent ethnicities of the Monarchy that were vying for statehood beleaguered the White House and gained “a monopoly on Wilson’s attention” (8). Wilson cut the State Department out of contributing to his peace proposals for the Paris Conference in 1919. The academic experts of ‘The Inquiry’ gained the upper hand instead. These academics (none of whom had specific expertise on the Habsburg Monarchy) were, however, infused with the turn-of-the-century teachings of scientific racism and applied these ideas to Central Europe. They aimed at creating presumably mono-lingual nation states in a territory that was characterized by the multi-linguality of the people inhabiting these lands. The Wilson administration then bolstered the sovereign claims of the successor states to the Habsburg Monarchy and thus became one of the “gravediggers of the Habsburg Monarchy” (219-20). Phelps surely will spark new interest in Wilson’s fateful diplomacy regarding East-Central Europe.

Phelps’s sophisticated volume “admirably fills a major gap” (Doenecke) in nineteenth-century transnational history; her monograph does not “face a challenge to justify itself” (Roberts). The reviewers are right in pointing out omissions such as a bibliography at the end of the book, especially since much of the literature that Phelps cites on U.S. – Habsburg relation is obscure. Some important episodes such as high-level visits (Godsey) and the Ancona affair (Doenecke) are not addressed in the book. But Phelps’s book is bound to spark further research in nineteenth-century diplomatic practice, as well as new interest in the consular services. Her critical perspective on Woodrow Wilson as the “gravedigger” of the Habsburg Monarchy and the destabilizer of Central European politics is alone worth the price of the book and surely will spark further lively scholarly discourse.

Participants:

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and the Society for Historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, and she serves as president of the Alpha of Vermont chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. Her current research focuses on the U.S. Consular Service in the long nineteenth century.

**Günter Bischof** is a native of Austria and a graduate in English and History of the Universities of Innsbruck, New Orleans, and Harvard (Ph.D. ‘89). He is a University Research Professor and the Marshall Plan Professor of History and Director of CenterAustria at the University of New Orleans; in the summer of 2014 he directed the 39th UNO International Summer School in Innsbruck, Austria. He served as a visiting professor at the Universities of Munich, Innsbruck, Salzburg, Vienna, LSU, the Liberal Arts University in Moscow, and the Economics Universities of Vienna and Prague, as well as Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He is the author of *Austria in the First Cold War, 1945/55* (1999), and *Relationships/Beziehungsgeschichten: Austria and the United States in the Twentieth Century* (2014), as well as co-editor of the series *Contemporary Austrian Studies* (23 vols) and *TRANSATLANICA* (7 vols). He also coedited another 20 books on topics of international contemporary history (esp. World War II and the Cold War in Central Europe), among them most recently *The Vienna Summit and Its Importance in International History* (Harvard Cold War Studies Series 2014). He serves as a member of the board of the Botstiber Institute for Austrian-American Studies.

**Justus D. Doenecke** is Professor Emeritus of History at New College of Florida. Among his books are *In Danger Undaunted: The Anti-Interventionist Movement of 1940-1941 as Revealed in the Powers of the America First Committee* (1990); *From Isolation to War, 1931-1941* (with John E. Wilz, 3rd ed.; 2002); *Storm on the Horizon: The Challenge to American Intervention, 1939-1941* (2000); *Debating Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Foreign Policies* (with Mark A. Stoler, 2005); and *Nothing Less Than War: A New History of American Entry into World War I* (2011). He is currently writing a study on American debates concerning US engagement in World War I, the Paris Peace Conference, the League fight, and the 1920 presidential election.

**Timothy Mason Roberts** is the author of *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism* (University of Virginia, 2009), and co-editor, with Lindsey DiCarli, of *American Exceptionalism*, 4 vols. (Pickering & Chatto, 2012). He is working on a study of American and French imperialism during the nineteenth century.
Although American relations with most major powers-- Britain, France, Russia, China, Japan-- have been repeatedly examined, there have been few, if any, comprehensive treatments of United States interaction with the Habsburg monarchy. In some ways, this circumstance is quite surprising. Austria-Hungary, or the Dual Monarchy as it was also called after 1867, was geographically Europe’s second largest country, possessing a population of close to fifty-three million people. It was so multinational that official languages included German, Hungarian, Czech, Polish, Ukrainian, Croatian, and Italian; unofficial ones were Serbo-Croatian, Slovak, Ruthanian, Bosnian, and Yiddish. The Habsburg Empire was also multireligious. Although in eighty percent of the population was Latin Catholic, other traditions included Eastern Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, and Islam.

Now Nicole M. Phelps admirably fills a major gap. Her study begins in 1815, when one great peace conference, the Congress of Vienna, was convened, and it ends with the calling of another major peace gathering, the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. The work covers in turn the diplomatic culture of the Great Power System, the integration of the United States into this system, the role played by consuls in both countries, the experience of Habsburg nationals living in America, the role played by the United States in the dissolution of the empire, and the efforts of successor states to secure international, including American, support for their boundaries.

The prose is clear, the research thorough. Extensive use is made of American and Habsburg diplomatic archives, the contemporary press, and scholarly monographs, articles, and doctoral theses. The result is a well-crafted work that is bound to be definitive on its subject.

Phelps’s treatment of the Great Power System in particular deserves wide reading. Created in 1815 at the Vienna Conference, the system avoided Europe-wide warfare for about a hundred years. Before then, indeed from the outbreak of the Thirty Years War in 1618, extensive conflict was usually the European norm. The Westphalian System, so Phelps notes, embodied a Hobbesian world, in which states, perceiving each other as enemies, would fight to the death. In contrast, Vienna created a Lockean culture, wherein states treated each other as rivals, not as enemies engaged in a major zero-sum game. Under this new system, the five Great Powers-- Austria (later Austria-Hungary), Prussia (later Germany), Russia, France, and Britain-- used their leverage to guarantee the territorial integrity of smaller states and to resolve any conflicts that could develop. Each of the Great Powers agreed to recognize each other’s right to exist as an independent sovereign state, to remain aloof from another’s domestic affairs, and to cooperate in maintaining the peace. In this system, diplomats played a crucial role, especially the ambassador, a post at first reserved only for the five Great Powers. Phelps’s description of the protocol surrounding ambassadorial appointments is particularly fascinating as is the rationale behind such ceremonies as presenting one’s credentials to a foreign court.
As Phelps notes, it took decades before the United States, a republic amid monarchies, became absorbed into the system. The U.S. maintained a tradition of political and military isolation combined with commercial expansion and ideological support for nationalist movements. Hence, the Habsburgs perceived that American enthusiasm for Hungarian leader Louis Kossuth in 1851-52 undermined the United States’ claims to territorial sovereignty and hence its integrity as an empire. Similarly, friction arose in 1885 when Secretary of State Thomas F. Bayard appointed the inexperienced Anthony Keiley, a prominent contributor to the Democratic Party, as U.S. envoy. Keiley had married a Jewish woman and had done so in a civil ceremony, two factors that made him *persona non grata* to the Habsburg court. Controversy surrounded the wife of Theodore Roosevelt’s ambassadorial appointee, Bellamy Storer, for she sought to intervene in Vatican matters and royal courtships. Woodrow Wilson and his Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, harbored contempt for the Great Power System, perceiving it as “slavish devotion” to dangerous balance-of-power politics and failing to appreciate its “cooperative and community building aspects” (99).

The book contains much detail on the increasingly important consular service, particularly between 1880 and World War I, a time when huge numbers of ‘New Immigrants’ entered the United States. Many of these people came from the Dual Monarchy and often voyaged back and forth to Europe multiple times. Frequently they were single men who sought temporary employment overseas and who, having earned sufficient income, returned to their native land. Frequently matters concerning identification, residency, and citizenship became subject to controversy. Problems were compounded because all Habsburg males were subject to conscription. As so many immigrants were laborers, it is not surprising that the empire established consulates in such far-reaching industrial hubs as Chicago, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Cleveland, and St. Paul.

On this matter of immigration, Phelps finds crucial differences of perspective. Whereas the Dual Monarchy defined all subjects as either Austrian or Hungarian citizens, the Bureau of Immigration (unlike the State Department) rejected these two categories of Habsburg identity. Rather it added additional classifications, labeling peoples (then seen as races) as Bohemians; Poles; “Hebrews”; Serbs and Bulgarians (a single classification); and Slovenes and Croatians (a single classification). This practice, writes the author, undermined Habsburg legitimacy and fostered exclusionary racial nationalism.

Little wonder Phelps challenges the conventional wisdom concerning the empire’s collapse, namely the claim that its oppression of the constituent nationalities within its ranks caused its breakup. Rather she places much responsibility on President Wilson. The concluding sentence in the book reads: “The Habsburg central government’s commitment to diversity, consensus, and political citizenship [that is citizenship based on geography not ethnicity] had no place in a Wilsonian world of conformity and immutable and all-important racial identity” (281). By refusing to receive the Habsburg ambassador, Count Adam Tarnowski, on the eve of American entry into World War I, Wilson cut the monarchy off from any ability to convince Washington that the empire should be preserved. Such isolation was compounded when Wilson favored the Inquiry, Wilson’s study group for the peace conference, over the State Department, for Colonel E.M. House’s task force lacked a single
expert on the empire as a whole. Acting on the assumption that “every individual had a single identity derived from biological and manifested in the use of a single language,” the Inquiry assumed that democracies were always peace loving, that democratic government was only possible in racially homogeneous societies, and that each individual belonged to a single racial group. By taking this stance, it ignored “reality within the Habsburg Empire, where individuals spoke multiple languages and selected identities opportunistically” (236).

In advancing this claim, Phelps finds that well into World War I, few Czechs sought an independent state. Rather they wanted the kingdom of Bohemia to have equal status with Austria and Hungary. In such a Triple Monarchy, the Czech language would be legal equally with German, the civil service would be bilingual, and the number of Czech-language schools would greatly increase.

Some matters could receive further elaboration. Phelps notes that in September 1915, Wilson asked Vienna to recall Konstantin Dumba on the grounds that the empire’s ambassador had used a private American citizen, a journalist named James F.J. Archibald, as an intermediary in his effort to foster strikes among Habsburg subjects working in U.S. defense plants. The matter really goes further than Phelps indicates, for Count Stephan Burián, the Dual Monarchy’s Foreign Minister, had instructed Dumba to warn its subjects that it was an act of treason, punishable by imprisonment or death by hanging, to work in any factory that manufactured war materiel for the empire’s enemies. When news of these documents reached the American public, understandably provoking much anger, Dumba revealed his absolute genius for bad judgment by further admitting that he had subsidized foreign-language newspapers.

Phelps’s book has one curious omission, a failure to discuss the Ancona incident. On November 7, 1915, a German submarine flying the Austrian flag sank the Italian ship Ancona near Sardinia. Of twenty-seven lives lost, nine were American. On December 7, Wilson permitted Secretary of State Robert Lansing to send a virtual ultimatum to Vienna. Demanding an indemnity, prompt disavowal, and punishment of the U-boat captain, he practically accused the Austro-Hungarians of murder. Soon Lansing told Wilson that the United States might have to sever diplomatic relations with the empire, an event that would probably trigger war. On December 28, Burián rescued the situation. Although he defended the motives of the submarine commander, he promised Washington that he would honor the safety of passengers and crew on merchantmen; he also pledged an indemnity and the punishment of the U-boat captain.

In regards to the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy, one wonders what options were open to the Wilson administration. Could forceful presidential leadership have preserved the empire? How could Wilson have convinced his public that such a policy was in the national interest at the very time the United States was at war with the government of Emperor Karl? In short, a plausible counter-scenario is needed, for once the momentum of nationalism held sway in the spring of 1918, particularly among such subject peoples as the Italians, Poles, Czechs, and South Slavs, it would have been difficult to curb it.

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The book needs a bibliography, particularly given the rich variety of citations. All in all, however, we are fortunate to have such a fine study.
The circumstances surrounding the ball given on 22 February 1843 by the United States envoy in Vienna, Daniel Jenifer, in celebration of George Washington’s birthday manifested the ambiguities of U.S.-Habsburg relations that were never entirely to fade away. Though the American republic had by that time existed for more than half a century, the fact that its envoy was hosting a gala affair at which “archdukes were present” was “a new occurrence for Vienna.” The high regard for Washington, which was apparent on the invitation with its lithograph portrait and in the white marble bust surrounded by flowers in a place of honor in Jenifer’s lodgings, raised eyebrows in Habsburg high society. The revolutionary tradition of a New World republic jarred with the conventions of an Old World monarchy. But that representatives of that society turned out at the event in large number and that the Chancellor’s wife, Princess Metternich, herself did the honors according to the usages of the day testified not only to a normalization of relations, but also to the gradual absorption of the U.S. and its diplomats into the post-Congress of Vienna international order, and its rules and practices. These and other aspects of U.S.-Habsburg relations are the focus of the study under consideration here, which has the merit of being the first attempt at a general survey of relations between the two states. That they only briefly shared the historical stage as great powers – for a few years in the early twentieth century – accounts in part for the previous neglect.

Official relations began with the establishment of a U.S. consulate at the port of Trieste in the year 1800. A matching Habsburg consulate across the Atlantic – in New York City – followed in 1819. In the initial decades, state-to-state relations remained at the consular level. It was not until 1829 that the powers agreed to their first treaty, one of commerce and navigation, which in turn provided the impetus for taking up proper diplomatic relations, with the exchange of envoys delayed until 1838. Relations ended nearly eighty years later, in the spring of 1917, following the U.S. declaration of war on the German empire, Austria-Hungary’s principal ally. Official conflict between the U.S. and Austria-Hungary ensued in December 1917. When the world war ended less than a year later, the Habsburg Monarchy had vanished from the map. Scholarly coverage of the more than one hundred years of U.S.-Habsburg relations, primarily in the form of a few articles and doctoral theses, has been episodic at best. In piecing together a different picture, the author has had recourse to unpublished diplomatic correspondence in both U.S. and Austrian archives. The footnotes indicate that most of the material examined dates from the last decades before 1917, with particular emphasis on the twentieth century. Unfortunately, the volume lacks a comprehensive list of the manuscript sources consulted and a bibliography, deficiencies surely attributable not to the author, but to cost-saving considerations by the publisher. The want of a bibliography is particularly regrettable given that second and subsequent mentions of a work in the notes of the individual (seven) chapters are merely to the author’s name (often without relevant page numbers). On the reader’s part, this

1 A first-hand description of the event (and the quotations) found in Státní oblastní archiv v Třeboni, pracoviště Jindřichův Hradec (Czech Republic), Czernin Family Papers, unpublished diary of Count Eugen Czernin (22 February 1843), vol. 1842-1844, p. 274.
entails a lot of page-flipping back and forth.

Because it is divided into two distinct parts, each with its own methodology and chronology, the study does not in fact offer an integrated history of U.S.-Habsburg relations over time. The approach of the first third (approximately 100 pages) is conventional diplomatic history with heavy stress on the forms and customs of high politics. The first chapter is meant as an introduction to the changing diplomatic culture between the 1648 Peace of Westphalia and the 1814-15 Congress of Vienna, though its simplifications and generalizations sometimes miss the mark. [“A foreign minister might sit in his office and launch a war against some distant country without really considering the consequences, but he could not shoot an ambassador standing in his office with the same detachment” (26). The account of political relations between Washington and Vienna from the exchange of envoys in the 1830s to the break of 1917 rests primarily, if not exclusively, at least to the 1880s, in the literature. Hence the emphasis tends to be on the contention that intermittently beset relations that has hitherto drawn most scholarly attention, rather than on any structural continuities or common interests that might have underlain them over the longer term. Before the crisis of the First World War, the severest test of the relationship came during the revolution of 1848-49 when U.S. diplomatic representatives acted in ways that were distinctly unfriendly, if not downright hostile, to Habsburg interests in Hungary. Secretary of State John M. Clayton empowered one agent to recognize the revolutionary regime there if it were determined “that Hungarian independence was viable” (56). Even the rout of the insurgents did not dim American enthusiasm for them or their cause, whose essence, as the author rightly points out, was little understood on that side of the Atlantic.

The “height of U.S.-Habsburg relations” (87) is plausibly reported to have come in the early twentieth century at a time when regular diplomatic intercourse between the two states reached ambassadorial rank and both powers sent unusually able and well-intentioned representatives (Baron László Hengelmüller for Austria-Hungary and Frederick C. Penfield for the U.S.). Though the focus in this part of the book is heavily on the interactions of diplomats and statesmen, a number of well-known, high-level visits and contacts surprisingly find no mention. In the early 1890s, the later Habsburg heir presumptive, the archduke Francis Ferdinand, passed through the United States on a world tour, an experience that is said to have inspired his ideas for a federal solution to the problems of government in his own future realms. And in 1910, the emperor Francis Joseph received former President Theodore Roosevelt in what was probably the only encounter ever between senior leaders of the two countries. More fundamentally, however, the story offered here of U.S.-Habsburg relations virtually factors out what, according to the author, had originally been their defining moment: commerce had conditioned the establishment not only of consular, but also diplomatic relations. On the one hand, we are told with little supporting evidence that trade relations between the U.S. and the Habsburg Monarchy “were not particularly significant” (109); on the other, we learn that the U.S. vice-consul in Trieste claimed responsibility in 1911 for having generated millions of dollars in U.S.-Habsburg trade over the previous decade (114). What goods or products were the object of exchange remains as unclear as the presumably changing scale of commerce between the two states between 1800 and 1917.
To be fair, the author has succeeded in putting her finger on what toward the end of the nineteenth century became the central issue of U.S.-Habsburg relations: the mass movement of people back and forth across the Atlantic as transport became faster and cheaper. Here Phelps picks up on more recent inter- and transnational historical approaches that have gotten beyond the bounds of traditional high politics. Nearly two-thirds of the text is concerned with various aspects of immigration – primarily as they impacted (or failed to impact) the respective diplomatic establishments. The perspective in this section of the book becomes resolutely consular, even as the envoys and their immediate staffs were increasingly taken up with the issue, as Ambassador Hengelmüller is known to have complained. By 1914, the United States maintained consular posts in the Habsburg Monarchy in Trieste, Vienna, Prague, Budapest, Reichenberg/Liberec, Fiume/Rijeka, and Carlsbad/Karlovy Vary. Because of the frequent return to their homeland of Austro-Hungarian immigrants to the United States, these entities became ever more occupied with conflicts arising from uncertain citizenship status and the claims of the Habsburg military on all able-bodied men of a certain age. Such cases “dominated the consular agenda at Vienna and Budapest” (128).

In North America, by contrast, problems related to the protection of lives and property in an environment often hostile to the newcomers dominated the consular agenda. Yet until long past 1900 the Austro-Hungarian consular presence there was grossly inadequate to the task, a point that could have been made more compellingly. Only in the last years before the First World War did the imperial and royal foreign ministry reinforce the longer standing offices in New York, Chicago, and Pittsburgh with ones in Cleveland, Denver, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and St. Louis, but even then “there were significant populations of Austrian and Hungarian citizens who lacked local consular representatives” (164). For the general context of the argument, it would have been helpful here to have been given overall figures on such immigration and a breakdown on numbers and location of Austro-Hungarian migrants in the United States. The author does show that Habsburg consuls were conscientious in making the best of the situation, often under adverse conditions.

One irritant they faced was the failure of some U.S. agencies to classify immigrants according to the categories of citizenship valid in the Habsburg Monarchy – either Austrian or Hungarian – that they of course scrupulously observed. The U.S. Bureau of Immigration was especially known to apply its own racial or ethnic categories. How its practice thereby “undermined the legitimate sovereignty of the Habsburg government” (196, also 211) in any meaningful or significant way remains unclear, however. Recent scholarship has in fact shown that nationalism was neither as virulent nor presented an existential threat to the Habsburg Monarchy before the closing phase of the world war.² More generally, this study

tends to contrast a Habsburg Monarchy depicted as a relative haven of tolerant “diversity” (245) with a United States portrayed as a hotbed of racism (“infused with racial prejudice and xenophobia” (149) in a methodologically doubtful way: contrasting the views of supranational Habsburg foreign ministry personnel with those current in broader U.S. society. After all, many of Hitler’s racial fantasies were a product of the dark side of fin-de-siècle Vienna.³ Even after the United States and Austria-Hungary were at war, the Wilson government proved more reluctant than its allies to recognize the national movements in exile that were intent on breaking up the Habsburg agglomeration. One question that would deserve further consideration concerns whether U.S. policymakers ever subscribed to the idea, current in international politics since at least the nineteenth century, that the Habsburg Monarchy was a ‘European necessity’ – essential to the balance of power in central and eastern Europe. The implicit abandonment of that idea by several key powers by 1914 opened up the possibility of a constellation that did not include the Habsburgs long before the U.S. had “given up on Austria-Hungary” (219).⁴ But a work of historical scholarship should raise questions as well as answer them.


This book studies the relationship of the United States, the first nation-state in the Americas, established on the bases of popular sovereignty and race-based citizenship, and the Habsburg Empire, formed after the First Congress of Vienna in 1515 and loosely organized around the ethnic, religious, and linguistic communities of Central Europe. U.S.-Habsburg relations until the latter’s dissolution in 1918 were distant and largely uneventful, save the mid-nineteenth-century controversy of Lajos Kossuth and the U.S. declaration of war in 1917. American relations with the several European states that emerged from the Habsburg dissolution became subsumed in the U.S.-Soviet confrontation during the Cold War. Unlike other studies of modern U.S. foreign relations, U.S.-Habsburg relations did not serve as ‘roots’ of important latter-day U.S. alliances or tensions.¹

Thus, Nicole Phelps faces a challenge to justify this monograph exploring a century of U.S.-Habsburg relations. Yet she effectively traces how the U.S. State Department officials brought American diplomacy towards conformity with the rituals and practices of the Great Power system at least until the administration of Woodrow Wilson. She also shows how Austrian diplomats, grudgingly acknowledging rising American prominence, struggled to cope with American peculiarities. These included the State Department’s surprisingly limited influence in U.S. foreign policy-making, the reluctance of the national government to interfere with the U.S. states’ treatment of Habsburg expatriates, and, most important to the book’s argument, the spillover into U.S. foreign policy of racist attitudes that were viral in American society and government. In this emphasis the book extends the argument of Michael Hunt, who three decades ago wrote, “Americans...fixed race at the center of their world view...as an important ingredient in a demonstrably successful foreign policy no less than in the established domestic order.”²

The book begins with a discussion of the culture of Great Power diplomacy. The reliance of its aristocratic practitioners on personal relationships cultivated over long periods of service and attention to titles and gestures strikes the modern reader as arcane. Phelps shows that the system struck American statesmen during and even after the Jacksonian era, especially elected officials, the same way. Reflecting both American disdain for European protocol and the European powers’ embarrassment at the ordinary social backgrounds of U.S. ministers in Europe, the United States had no diplomat accorded the rank of ambassador until Thomas Bayard was appointed Ambassador to Great Britain in 1893.


Nonetheless, U.S. statesmen, in search of European acknowledgement of American power (though deployment of that power was confined to the western hemisphere), could not disdain the diplomatic culture of the world’s leading governments. In the midst of the controversy over the interest of the administration of Zachary Taylor in recognizing Hungarian independence in 1849-1850, for example, Secretary of State Daniel Webster chided the Austrian chargé d'affaires in Washington, Johann von Hülsenmann, after Hülsenmann protested directly to President Millard Fillmore, neglecting Great Power protocol. Later, President Theodore Roosevelt similarly resolved a controversy over the recall of the first U.S. ambassador to Vienna, Bellamy Storer. Roosevelt broke with the American precedent in diplomatic quarrels, namely sharing the controversy with the press in order to stoke public criticism of a European empire, and instead spoke confidentially with the Austrian minister according to “tactics accepted in the Great Power culture of diplomacy” (99). Roosevelt was on a “mission” to have the United States treated as a Great Power (95). Likewise, while the practice reflected American interest to regulate the flow of immigrants to the United States, U.S. officials took over consular services of other belligerent countries as long as the United States remained neutral during World War I, as a confirmation of Great Power status.

While Phelps thus suggests that both the United States and Austria showed expedience in forging relations with the other, it seems Austrian officials had more at stake in the relationship, and had to wrestle more with alien institutions than did their American counterparts. The Kossuth affair, for example, arose after Congress published correspondence revealing President Taylor had gone so far as to send a diplomat, A. Dudley Mann, to the Habsburg Empire to assess whether the United States should recognize a Hungarian republic. Then Congress invited Kossuth, whom a U.S. naval ship had rescued from asylum in the Ottoman Empire, to visit Washington as its official guest. When Hülsenmann protested, Webster published the famous “Hülsemann Letter,” ridiculing Habsburg pretensions to threaten the United States with economic sanctions. In response the Habsburgs severed diplomatic relations, renewing them in 1853, and only after Webster had died. In the process of this conflict Hülsenmann realized not only the fundamental problem for Austria that Americans supported Hungarian nationalism, but that American partisan politics could create wedges in U.S. foreign relations – regarding Kossuth, Whigs and conservative southerners opposed Democratic interest in material American assistance to Hungary.

Later Habsburg officials, following Hülsenmann’s example, also tried to manipulate American political practices. Like those of other Eurasian empires in the early twentieth century desperate to conscript men into the military, they had to negotiate both the American practice of naturalization and the doctrine of jus soli, or citizenship accorded on the basis of place of birth, contradictory to European doctrine of jus sanguinis, meaning citizenship accorded on the basis of one’s father’s citizenship. This conflict was acutely felt when numerous Europeans, having immigrated to the United States and become citizens, then returned home for business, to visit families, or, in some cases, to call for revolution. Meanwhile, beleaguered Habsburg consuls learned that under the federal system the U.S. national government, and particularly the State Department, had little inclination or
authority to protect foreign citizens from labor exploitation or violent crime committed within any U.S. state. Habsburg consuls resorted to directly contacting U.S. state governors and facilitating lawsuits by aggrieved Austro-Hungarians, and in 1911 - punctuating their engagement of American political culture - considered a public campaign to fight for justice, though with little success.

Phelps’s central argument, indeed, is that the important American institution of race was one that Austrian officials ultimately could not mitigate or master, and that American racial attitudes and policies caused the empire’s dissolution. By the turn of the twentieth century, U.S. law organized American society simplistically into two racial groups, ‘white’ and ‘black.’ Immigrants, some more slowly than others, largely became assimilated into the ‘white’ race (many Chinese immigrants, formally deemed a ‘yellow’ race by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1927, were excluded beginning in 1882). Social Darwinists applied evolutionary theory to ethnic groups, helping to justify the U.S. taking of Spanish colonies in 1898 and the Roosevelt Corollary in 1904 as the policies of a Great Power. American insistence on organization of postwar Europe in accordance with race-defined ‘nations,’ Phelps argues, doomed any chance of polyglot Austria-Hungary’s persistence. Contrary to Madisonian political theory that large diverse countries were more stable, Wilsonian self-determination sought a Europe of “states that included the smallest number of minorities possible” (264).

In this provocative argument Phelps perhaps relies too much on American racial ideology as an explanatory device for her conclusion. She claims that “the Wilsonian rhetoric of World War I and the Paris Peace Conference gave...authorization” to the ethnic cleansing that happened in twentieth-century Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and even Germany (278). While the U.S. Bureau of Immigration, established in 1891, did utilize “racial-national” categories to document the origins of immigrants, these categories, as Phelps acknowledges, were fluid, and were established variously on linguistic, religious, or territorial bases (213). They were certainly no less constructed than the “political categories Austrian and Hungarian” to which Habsburg authorities tried to cling, despite their being first imagined, along with terms like ‘German,’ ‘Czech,’ and ‘Italian,’ long before, during the 1848 Revolutions (218). In other words, the American role in reconstructing post-Habsburg Central Europe does not seem uniquely artificial or determinative of an Americanized racial hierarchy taking root there.

Nonetheless, Sovereignty Transformed is an important book. Overall it represents the best kind of the new ‘transnational’ history, showing not only comparisons between two countries quite different in location and political culture, but also previously hidden connections or linkages in their historical trajectories.

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3 Gong Lum v. Rice, 275 U.S. 78 (1927).
My thanks to Tom Maddux for organizing this roundtable and to the participants for their engagement with my work.

Taken together, the reviews demonstrate that the U.S.-Habsburg relationship included more than previous scholarship suggested and that, even then, I left out a lot of stuff. I definitely agree that there is considerable room for other scholars to examine aspects of U.S.-Habsburg relations. It was never my intention to be exhaustive, nor to produce “an integrated history of U.S.-Habsburg relations over time,” to use William Godsey’s phrase. My study looks at three distinct groups—diplomats, consuls, and policy makers—whose members spoke and acted in official capacities, though their interests and actions were not often aligned or coordinated. Their activities over time helped to build a relationship between the United States and the Habsburg Empire, and their lack of alignment created opportunities for change in that relationship. My study is not an integrated history because there was more than one thing going on, and the relative importance of each group’s activities changed over time.

The book does not encompass all aspects of U.S.-Habsburg relations. Godsey very kindly points out that authors do not have absolute control over many aspects of their work, including bibliographic and citation style, and the title is ultimately under the publisher’s control as well. For marketing purposes, book titles tend to nationalize, globalize, or otherwise expand, and in this particular instance, suggestions for a more nuanced title that reflected my chosen emphasis on diplomatic practice, citizenship, and race did not carry the day. Godsey is definitely right to point to economics as an important aspect of U.S.-Habsburg relations, and I would strongly encourage others to pursue research projects in that area. Alison Frank’s article on a 1910 conflict regarding Standard Oil provides an excellent example of how economic conflicts within the U.S.-Habsburg relationship can shed light on broader historical developments and provide an opportunity to refine historians’ methodologies.1

As I conducted my research in State Department and Habsburg foreign ministry archives, I came across several other episodes that merit further investigation. Among the State Department records, there is, of course, correspondence about tobacco production and sales, which was an important issue in generating a formal U.S.-Habsburg diplomatic relationship. Later in the nineteenth century, the issue that generated the most paperwork in State Department diplomatic files had to do with tariff rates on cottonseed oil. The Habsburg government classified cottonseed oil as a non-edible oil and thus assessed a higher tariff than that applied to olive oil and other edible oils. U.S. cottonseed oil producers — organized in a variety of state and national “Cottonseed Crushers” associations — lobbied State Department officials to negotiate a reduction in the tariff rate. Understanding that dispute would take a researcher far beyond foreign ministry documents and into materials produced

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by other government entities and private organizations and businesses.

I saw records related to trademark disputes and smuggling, not to mention the hundreds and hundreds of consular reports detailing the products of the empire and potential sales opportunities for American products. There were numerous property disputes involving Austrian and Hungarian citizens in U.S. overseas possessions and resulting from the 1914 occupation of Veracruz, Mexico. The records of the U.S. Alien Property Custodian (APC) during World War I could also form the basis of research projects focused either on the experiences of individual people or on the development of American administrative capacity. The APC records that made it into the State Department files list hundreds, if not thousands, of Austrian and Hungarian citizens who died during the war and either left property in the United States or bequeathed property to people in the United States. In some cases, the amount involved was considerable — thousands of dollars — while many involved less than a dollar, but were still thoroughly documented by APC officials. Labor was the most important economics-related thing moving back and forth between the United States and the Habsburg Empire, and I do write about that in my book, but a work that researches the movement of money and merchandise between the two countries would make a significant contribution to our understanding of the turn-of-the-century economy.

My research focused primarily on material found in State Department and Habsburg foreign ministry archives, but another aspect of the U.S.-Habsburg relationship that deserves scholarly attention is the portrayal of the Habsburg Empire in the American press and vice versa. With recent efforts to digitize newspapers and periodicals, this kind of project is becoming more and more feasible, although an individual researcher would still need to put realistic constraints on an investigation, given the large amount of material available and the variety of languages in which it was written. The media coverage could be an object of study in and of itself, or it could be used as a case study to try and understand the relationship among what is written in newspapers, public opinion, and political action. That enigmatic relationship kept me from drawing more on media resources in my study, but those primary sources definitely deserve scholarly attention.

A study of U.S.-Habsburg relations could also focus exclusively on the years of World War I. Indeed, the two dissertations on U.S.-Habsburg relations that were completed prior to my own took this approach, and I believe that one of them is on its way to becoming a monograph. Given that existing scholarship — as well as what is covered in the extensive literature on World War I more generally — and with an eye on the word count, I opted to limit the amount of space I gave to the war years in my book. There is much more in my dissertation, including the Ancona situation. In my book, I note that the war saw U.S.-Habsburg “disputes over the rights of neutral citizens to travel on the seas [i.e., submarine warfare problems], the right of companies in neutral countries to supply belligerents, and

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2 Gerald H. Davis, “The Diplomatic Relations between the United States and Austria-Hungary, 1913-1917” (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1958); and Carol Jackson Adams, “Courting the ’Vassal’: Austro-American Relations during World War I” (PhD diss., University of Alabama, 1997).
the ability of diplomats representing belligerent governments in neutral countries to communicate with their governments” (223). The submarine and supply issues were not markedly different than those between the U.S. and German governments, and so I left them out of the book in favor of the communications issue, which was very different and, in fact, the cause of the key rupture in U.S.-Habsburg relations. With the diplomatic messages surrounding the Ancona, Count Stephan Burián, the Habsburg Foreign Minister, was attempting to keep the United States out of war with Germany, a task with which he was successful, at least over this particular incident. However, he was also attempting to separate Austria-Hungary from Germany in the eyes of key Wilson administration officials, and he failed to accomplish that goal. The Ancona incident contributed to Woodrow Wilson’s perception of Austria-Hungary as a “vassal” of Germany.3

Professors Godsey and Justus Doenecke raise questions about Wilson, asking if he saw the empire as “a European necessity” and if presidential leadership could have changed the outcome of the Paris Peace Conference in favor of the continuation of the empire. In describing the war to the American public, Wilson pointed to ‘Old Diplomacy’ as a cause of the war, and his vision of that Old Diplomacy included not only secret treaties, but balance-of-power politics and, I would argue, the ceremonial aspects of the post-1815 Great Power System. I don’t think he thought about the empire in geopolitical terms, as European statesmen had done for centuries, earning it the title of ‘European necessity.’ I think the empire was more of an abstract concept to him, and perhaps when it did have concrete elements, it was primarily part of the immigration problem. Short of a radical and complete change of position, I do not think that President Wilson could have made different decisions at the Peace Conference itself. The important American decisions for the fate of the empire were made earlier than that, and not often with an eye toward their ultimate implications for Habsburg sovereignty. The way Wilson framed the war rhetorically — against Old Diplomacy and the governments of the Central Powers — left him little opportunity to advocate for the continued existence of a multinational state in Central Europe or even to invite representatives of the Central Powers to participate in the peace talks. His key decisions were to refuse to receive a new Habsburg representative after Ambassador Konstantin Dumba’s recall and to use the Inquiry rather than the State Department to generate policy and postwar planning ideas; those decisions meant that advocates of a Central Europe organized around racial nationalism were the only people Wilson heard. If I went looking for an American decision that, if altered, might have resulted in continued U.S. support for a multinational Habsburg state, I think I would have to point to Theodore Roosevelt’s decision to run as a third-party presidential candidate in 1912, which is what brought Wilson to the White House. Even if the Republicans had won, though, a great deal would have hinged on how the Republican president managed the members of his party who favored immigration restriction.

That counterfactual brings me to my last point, which is that I do not wish to overstate the

role of the United States in the end of the Habsburg Empire. Timothy Roberts writes that my argument is “that American racial attitudes and policies caused the empire’s dissolution” (emphasis added). Those attitudes and policies contributed to the end of Habsburg sovereignty, but they were definitely not the sole causal factor. In my book, I draw on Stephen Krasner’s work to argue that sovereignty derives in part from the consent of the governed and in part from the recognition of legitimacy by other governments in the international system. Much Anglo-American scholarship has pointed exclusively to domestic causes of the Habsburg collapse, and one of my goals in my book is to show that the erosion of domestic support for Habsburg sovereignty is not the whole story. The international community mattered as well, and my study aims to understand how members of that community representing the United States came to uphold and then reject Habsburg legitimacy. Decades of interaction on the part of government officials and migrants helped to shape categories of identity and conceptions of sovereignty in both countries, but those interactions took place alongside numerous others. U.S.-Habsburg interactions were crucial to the specific way the peace agreements came out at the end of World War I, but they are not the only factor of importance.
