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## Considering John Lewis Gaddis's Kennan Biography: Questionable Interpretations and Unpursued Evidence and Issues

John L. Gaddis, 2011, George F. Kennan. *An American Life*, New York,  
Penguin Press, xi, 800 p.

**Barton J. Bernstein**

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# NOTE CRITIQUE

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## KENNAN, GADDIS ET BERNSTEIN

### *Une introduction*

Si les divisions disciplinaires ou une absence de curiosité pour l'historiographie de la Guerre froide ont tenu nombre de lecteurs de cette revue éloignés des travaux et de l'action de Barton J. Bernstein, John L. Gaddis et George F. Kennan, ces propos liminaires entendent réduire cette distance. Pour ce faire, ils saisissent les enjeux transdisciplinaires du débat que nous poursuivons en publiant cet essai détaillé du premier sur la biographie que le deuxième a consacré au troisième: *George F. Kennan. An American Life*.

Si la critique méticuleuse fonde l'éthos des sciences sociales comme de la recherche historique, elle semble devoir se porter en priorité sur ce qui prétend lui échapper et entend revêtir une valeur exemplaire. En ce sens, le sujet, l'auteur et la réception de cette biographie appellent à un examen critique approfondi de l'ouvrage : Kennan (1904-2005) a été diplomate, intellectuel, éminence grise puis critique de l'endiguement du communisme, porte-parole de la tradition réaliste en théorie des relations internationales, à la fois comme praticien et historien de la diplomatie, enfin observateur aigü de ses contemporains tout au long du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle ; l'auteur de cette biographie est professeur d'histoire militaire et navale à l'université de Yale et représentant emblématique de l'école post-révisionniste dans l'historiographie de la guerre froide depuis les années 1970<sup>a</sup> ; l'ouvrage enfin, est en projet depuis trente ans, il a été couronné du prix Pulitzer pour la biographie et l'autobiographie en 2012 et de plusieurs autres prix dont le Arthur Ross Book Award du Council on Foreign Relations qui récompense le meilleur ouvrage de l'année sur les questions de politique étrangère et de relations internationales.

a *John Lewis Gaddis, 1972, The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947, New York, NY, Columbia University Press. Nous définissons plus loin les enjeux de la controverse entre les historiens révisionnistes et ceux qui se disent post-révisionnistes.*

Ce n'est certes pas la première biographie du personnage<sup>b</sup> et le texte que nous avons le plaisir de publier n'entame pas le débat sur l'ouvrage de Gaddis. Bien au contraire, il fait suite à de multiples recensions et tables rondes<sup>c</sup> avec un objectif bien précis : poursuivre le débat sur une figure cardinale de l'histoire américaine, de l'histoire de la guerre froide, et un observateur du siècle pour la majeure partie de sa longue vie. Pourquoi alors l'avoir poursuivi ici, en redonnant la parole à une voix qui a déjà eu l'occasion de s'exprimer et d'échanger avec l'auteur sur ces questions<sup>d</sup>? Qu'il nous soit permis d'offrir quatre réponses à ces questions.

D'abord, à travers Bernstein et Gaddis, c'est le débat entre deux écoles historiographiques sur l'histoire de la guerre froide qui se poursuit. En effet, Barton Bernstein, professeur d'histoire à l'université Stanford depuis cinq décennies, compte parmi les fondateurs de l'école dite révisionniste qui, dans les années 1960, a mis en avant le rôle d'une politique étrangère américaine agressive dans les origines de la guerre froide<sup>e</sup>. C'est contre cette interprétation des origines de la Guerre froide que Gaddis a pris position depuis quatre décennies.

Ensuite, Bernstein suggère des pistes de recherches ultérieures sur le personnage de Kennan et sur la question plus large et plus fondamentale des conditions de possibilité de l'exercice de la vocation d'intellectuel à l'âge nucléaire. En ce sens, l'issue de la controverse historiographique a des implications majeures pour la sociologie des intellectuels contemporains et illustre la fécondité d'une approche interdisciplinaire à travers l'exercice de la biographie ou de sa critique. Ainsi, Bernstein pose les jalons pour une meilleure compréhension des rapports entre Kennan et le co-directeur du projet Manhattan, J. Robert Oppenheimer, qui éclaireraient également l'évolution des vues de Kennan sur la politique nucléaire. Il révèle la curiosité intellectuelle de Kennan et ses échanges intenses avec des radicaux dans les années 1950 sans oublier de rappeler les efforts de l'intellectuel-diplomate pour s'attirer les faveurs de la CIA et du FBI de J. Edgar Hoover.

Par ailleurs, dans la page et demie qu'il leur a consacré dans le *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Gaddis a éludé bon nombre des critiques que Bernstein lui a adressées. Ce dernier les élabore donc dans ces pages, comme en appel à une réponse.

- b Une bibliographie datée de 1997 recensait près de 180 études sur Kennan et ses écrits. S'y ajoutent depuis 18 thèses et de multiples ouvrages et articles d'après David C. Engerman, «The Kennan Industry», *Chronicle of Higher Education Review*, 25 novembre 2011, disponible à l'adresse suivante : <<https://chronicle.com/article/The-Kennan-Industrys-Next/129797/>>.
- c Voir en particulier la table ronde organisée par H-diplo, consultable à l'adresse <<http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XIII-24.pdf>> ainsi que le dossier du *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 15-4, de l'automne 2013.
- d Voir Barton J. Bernstein, 2013, «Analyzing and Assessing Gaddis's Kennan Biography», *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 15-4, p. 170-182 et la réponse globale de John Gaddis, «Reply to the commentaries», p. 241-245, en particulier p. 243-244.
- e Parmi les autres représentants marquants du révisionnisme, on compte Gar Alperovitz, Gabriel Kolko et William Appleman Williams. L'ouvrage (collectif) fondateur de Barton Bernstein à cet égard s'intitule, *Politics and Policies of the Truman Administration* (Quadrangle Books, 1970), et en particulier son essai «American Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Cold War». Plus tard, il a écrit des essais marquants sur l'interprétation de la crise des missiles de Cuba.

Enfin, Bernstein développe des critiques absentes du débat conduit jusqu'alors qui renvoient à des questions fondamentales d'éthique de la biographie. Alors que certains critiques mentionnent et déplorent un « accord tacite »<sup>f</sup> entre le biographe et son sujet, Bernstein découvre que cet accord était en fait écrit et plusieurs fois reconduit. Il en expose les termes à partir d'un document inédit qu'il a découvert dans le fonds d'archives George Kennan à l'université de Princeton.

Benoît Pelopidas

## CONSIDERING JOHN LEWIS GADDIS'S KENNAN BIOGRAPHY Questionable Interpretations and Unpursued Evidence and Issues\*

Historian John Lewis Gaddis, working intermittently during about three decades on his authorized biography of George F. Kennan, has produced a lengthy, often eloquent volume. Predictably, it has won praise and prizes. The book is broadly researched. But it is not a volume that usually quarrels openly with other interpreters, or even generally notes competing views, and it often ignores troubling evidence and significant events.

Gaddis, clearly liking and respecting George Kennan, and his wife, Annelise Kennan, promised a biography of George, but often avoids getting deeply into possibly unsettling personal issues involving the two Kennans or their relationship with their four children. Adding to the author's problems, Gaddis seems to have found himself at odds with Kennan's own politics by about the 1980s, and sometimes before, so the book often tilts quietly against Kennan's views in those later years and often fails adequately to explain Kennan's own thinking on such matters, even though Kennan deemed his positions on those subjects as important.

Yet, the author also implies that there was always, from the beginning of their biographer-subject relationship in about 1981-1982, great trust and no arrangement for pre-publication review of the book manuscript. Gaddis stresses in various ways—on pages x and 683—that, though an authorized biographer, he had “the complete freedom to say [in print] what [he] pleased.” The only problem with that impressive claim is that it seems to be basically untrue.

In September 1999, and also earlier in March 1990, and apparently in their original legal agreement in 1982, they signed a formal contract that gave George Kennan, or his designated executor, if George was dead, the legal right to review the entire manuscript, and provided a stipulated mechanism for binding arbitration if there was any disagreement about anything in the pre-publication manuscript (“Memorandum of Understanding,” box 15, Kennan Papers, MC 076, Seeley Mudd Library, Princeton University).

f David C. Engerman, «*The Kennan Industry*», *art.cit.*

\* Some portions of this review-essay appeared in a symposium published the *Journal of Cold War Studies* (15-4) in fall 2013 but many parts of this considerably longer essay have been crafted, or substantially rewritten, for this journal.

Whether, and if so, how, that legal agreement was used, and whether there was some later waiver of the stipulated right of pre-publication review/arbitration arrangements, is not clear. But Gaddis's remarkable omission of any mention, or even hint, that there was such a significant legal arrangement, should leave most readers, regardless of whether they like or dislike the book, uneasy about its author and about his failure to acknowledge publicly that there was such a contract.

In his book, Gaddis chose not to discuss his methodology, or even usually his tactics, in researching and conceiving, and then in writing, the biography. He heavily relied upon interviews, doing many, including well over 15 hours with George Kennan himself. Perhaps not surprisingly, Gaddis in his interviews with Kennan seldom probed deeply, or critically, whereas in interviews with others—for example, with Paul Nitze, George Ball, McGeorge Bundy, diplomat Elbridge Durbrow, and Princeton historian Arthur Link—Gaddis's questions were sometimes far more critical of Kennan. The interview transcripts, though in many cases somewhat rewritten after the interviews, are available in the Gaddis collection of interviews, in MC 256, at Mudd Library and generally on line.

Obviously, Gaddis and Kennan had growing disagreements on foreign policy as the book project proceeded. Gaddis greatly preferred, and still prefers, the foreign-policy and nuclear-weapons positions of President Ronald Reagan, whereas Kennan thought that the Reagan military buildup and frequently the president's rhetoric were a menace. In addition, Kennan, then about age 99, strongly opposed, in late 2002 and early 2003, President George W. Bush's move toward war against Iraq (see below section 12), but Gaddis seemed ambivalent about the Bush Doctrine, and reportedly even crafted some words for a partly pro-war speech made by Bush in 2005.

While politically at odds with Kennan in the 1980s, and afterward, and sometimes before, Gaddis is generally admiring, and often deeply protective, of the Kennan of the earlier period—of the 1940s and early 1950s. The result, in part, is that troubling evidence for that earlier period is overlooked, or at least goes unmentioned, and various pro-Cold War interpretations often dominate the treatment of Kennan in about 1941-1952, without Gaddis adequately meeting, or sometimes even acknowledging, the challenges provided by some *severe* pro-Cold War views expressed by Kennan in that period. Kennan's advocacy of what seems to have been "atomic diplomacy" in 1946 is entirely ignored in the volume, and the important problem of whether Kennan fully understood Soviet objections in 1946-1947 to the Baruch Plan for international control of atomic energy is sidestepped. Kennan's brief willingness in 1947 to consider preventive war gets tucked into only a few lines (p.374) in this 698-page volume.

Surprisingly, Kennan's thinking about certain major issues and events—including, notably, the Cuban missile crisis, the Vietnam War, and the war against Iraq—receives remarkably skimpy attention, and actually the book provides no concern, not even a skimpy mention, in the case of the 1956 Suez crisis. Thus, various major interpretive matters are ignored. For some reason, Gaddis also never even mentions that Kennan publicly supported Eugene McCarthy, over LBJ, in 1968, or that Kennan was deeply aggrieved by what he felt were the weak positions on foreign policy and the cruelly insensitive positions on loyalty-security policy taken by the Democrats in 1956.

Probably less surprisingly, issues involving Kennan's long-hidden relationship with the FBI and his relationship with the CIA are treated gingerly, and certainly without probing concern (especially p.317-319, p.354-355, p.496-497, p.607, p.611). Gaddis also seems relatively insensitive to Kennan's own attitudes toward African-Americans, and to many third-world countries and often their non-white peoples.

The result, of Gaddis's strategies of presentation and of avoidance, on many policy issues and events, is a book that omits much, soft-pedals some important themes and issues, and frequently ignores substantial evidence and major questions. Consequently, much remains to be carefully examined and to be interpreted by others, undoubtedly helped in part by Gaddis's well-written but dubiously conceived book, in the quest to understand the very complicated and often elusive George Kennan.

Such a quest, in ways not made adequately clear by Gaddis, involves focusing on Kennan not primarily because of his formal roles as a foreign-policy adviser or maker within the US government. His roles in those linked activities generally were not greatly influential. He is important mostly for his publicly expressed thought, for his frequent contributions to the public dialogue over time, for his roles—variously as yea-sayer or nay-sayer—on major issues. Those public roles include his significant, and controversial, contributions in *American Diplomacy 1900-1950* (Chicago University Press, 1951). Those contributions to thinking about the nature of America, its past diplomacy, and the alleged need for “realism” and the minimization, if not seeming eschewal, of moral/legal standards in assessing and defining foreign policy.

Though Kennan developed a considerable reputation as an historian, and *American Diplomacy* became a classic or near-classic, Gaddis shows little interest in analyzing that book as written history or in generally assessing Kennan's other volumes of history. Kennan later termed *American Diplomacy* an “old pot-boiler,” but it is impossible to determine from Gaddis's own book whether Kennan was sincere, or being falsely modest, in that assessment and what Gaddis himself, as a major historian, thinks (Kennan quoted by Gaddis, p.606). The fact that Kennan seemed eagerly to send the book to J. Robert Oppenheimer (letter from Kennan to Oppenheimer, October 4, 1951, Kennan papers box 37) strongly suggests, at least in 1951, that Kennan was basically proud of the volume.

Because Kennan has often been linked conceptually as a “realist” with Reinhold Niebuhr and Hans Morgenthau, and sometimes also with Walter Lippmann, despite the Lippmann-Kennan seeming differences in 1947-1948 on containment, it is very surprising, and deeply dismaying, that the published biography pays virtually no attention to the issues of intellectual relationships of Kennan with these three notable “realists”. Basically, the book has virtually no interest in such intellectual history, and rather narrowly sticks to the biographer’s self-designated, rather restricted enterprise of narrative and interpretation, which generally avoids significant intellectual history and usually social history, too.

For Gaddis to have omitted so much, to have ignored important issues and events, and thus to have tilted the book strongly in particular directions, and away from so many significant matters, is impossible to justify on reasonable grounds. As an author, he might claim that a reviewer, and critic, should simply review the book that was written, and not the book that should have been written, but that kind of claim, by a book author, seems inadequate in this particular case. A biography of 698 pages of text, and one that subtitles its story “An American Life,” cannot, by any reasonable intellectual defense, justify so much avoidance of troubling evidence and of important issues.

### I. Uneasily interpreting the young Kennan

In describing young Kennan upon graduation from military school in 1921, Gaddis points to a yearbook picture of “a smiling and self-confident [17-year-old] in a track suit [who had] taken athletic honors in that sport as well as in football, hiking, and tennis”, and who was an accomplished swimmer and diver (p.22). But Gaddis never mentions that Kennan, by his own recollection, was then about 130 pounds (Interview by John Gaddis with George and Annelise Kennan, December 13, 1987, p.4-5; available in MC 256); nor does Gaddis, after suggesting the likely meaning of such demonstrated athletic prowess, provide any information about the actual size of the graduating class or of the school itself. What would athletic honors mean if the number of boys in the school’s graduating class was, say, only about 98, and if about 35 were on the football team and about 10 to 12 on the tennis team? Too often, Gaddis fails to provide necessary context in parts of his biography, and thus leaves his readers seriously under-informed.

For example, Gaddis notes that George failed his initial entrance exam to Princeton and had to take parts a second time, and may well have been the last student admitted to the entering class in 1921, not being informed of his actual admission until he reached Princeton in about September that year. But his cousin Charles also was a Princeton student at about the same time, so it seems important for Gaddis to tell readers (he does not) whether Charlie, also from Wisconsin, had similar academic problems in gaining admission to Princeton.

Unfortunately, in Gaddis's book, he actually believes that George's sister (Jeanette), many decades later as an aged adult, could recall fully in *verbatim* form an approximately 85-word, back-and-forth conversation in about 1911, that she at age 9, and George at age 7, had on the subject of suicide (p.17). Why not instead exercise reasonable judgment as an historian, and give up the illusion of such precisely accurate memory, although the substance of that claimed recollection may be accurate?

At Princeton, according to at least one family member interviewed by Gaddis, George's sometimes expressed sense of loneliness and gloom may have been partly punctured by the presence in the rather small, all-male student body of his cousin Charles and by another Milwaukee-based youngster, who was the friend of sister Jeanette. Whether such relationships by George with Charles and Jeanette's friend developed for George in the Princeton years are never considered in the biography. If they did develop, that is meaningful. If not, the reasons why are presumably also interesting.

Unfortunately, in treating the Princeton years, Gaddis, on at least one occasion in the book, embroiders well beyond the available evidence. In an August 24, 1982, interview with Gaddis (the text is in MC 256), Kennan recalled from his first day at Princeton being poorly treated by a fellow student. "I asked the boy the time—did he have the time? He took a puff on his cigarette, and let it all out, and then he looked down at his watch and then gave it to me." That brief narrative, for Gaddis, was "creatively" converted into: "The young dandy took a puff on his cigarette, blew some smoke, and then walked away" (p 26-27).

Maybe he was a "young dandy," or perhaps not. It's not what George claimed 61 years later. Nor, in George's 1982 version, did that Princeton student walk away. To embroider thusly, as Gaddis apparently does, seems both unnecessary and less than responsible. Should readers automatically trust biographer Gaddis on other descriptions in his extended narrative, or should possibly 20 or 25 similar items be checked against the claimed sources?

In his first year at Princeton, George had to take remedial Latin, according to Gaddis (p.24). In view of the substantial evidence that George's father liked Latin, and actually used it in conversation, and that George's step-mother had formally taught Latin at Ripon College before marrying George's father, George's need for a remedial course in the subject would seem to warrant some serious attention by a biographer—especially because there is persuasive evidence that George later found learning modern languages, including, notably Russian and German, rather easy and even joyful<sup>1</sup>. Had young George perhaps so resented his step-mother that he chose, knowingly or not, to flub on Latin, and end up in the remedial course? That is a line of inquiry, even if necessarily speculative, that apparently did not interest Gaddis.

1 Cf. George F. Kennan, 1967, *Memoirs, 1925-1950*, Boston, Atlantic Little Brown, p.23-35.



Using young Kennan's lengthy travel diary on his 1924 summer in Europe, Gaddis devotes almost four pages to that trip, thereby taking up nearly a quarter of the book's 16 pages on Kennan's Princeton-period years. But, aside from such peculiar disproportion, strangely, Gaddis omits various significant aspects of the trip in Europe. Consider, for example, Gaddis's omission of young Kennan's apparent envy, and strained, supercilious contempt, when George (in his diary for early August) reported on how one of his companions, another college lad, fit so comfortably into the social activities, including the dancing and apparent flirting, on one of the ships, while George awkwardly kept his distance and poured his hurt feelings of inadequacy into the words of jealous disdain in his diary. Or, to cite a very different omission by Gaddis, from George's August 14 diary: "I seldom take a violent dislike to people but I did to one man on board [the ship]. He is a typical dago [...] He is talkative in a weak, ignorant furtive, sneering way. Well—God help him." Those different entries, as well as others, suggest important themes about young George Kennan, and they probably warranted thoughtful consideration, not silent omission, by Gaddis in the biography.

At Princeton, very surprisingly, George did not do very well academically; he placed only slightly above the middle of his class. His Princeton transcript, with "1" being the highest grade and "7" the lowest in those years, indicates that he had an overall 2.72 average (out of 7.0) for his full four years by the time of graduation in 1925. He ranked, at graduation, 83<sup>rd</sup> in a class of 219, according to that transcript, in the archives at Mudd Library.

How can that low ranking be explained, and what does it mean? Surprisingly, Kennan never received better than a "3" in history, and he sometimes received "4" and "5" grades in that subject. Dismayingly, none of that seems to have significantly interested Gaddis, though he had a copy of Kennan's transcript, and thus could have discussed what it reveals or what Gaddis believed it means about Kennan as an undergraduate student.

## 2. Problems in studying George's early personal life

Apparently largely at the suggestion of George's wife, Annelise, Gaddis decided to write a full biography, richly involving George's personal life, and not simply dealing with his political and policy-related life (p.x). Such an expanded conception of the book project required, among other matters, some attention to George's romantic life, and even to his female involvements before his 1931 marriage to Annelise.

In his biography of Kennan, Gaddis seems often uneasy when dealing with George's romantic, or possibly romantic, involvements. In briefly discussing George's relationship in the late 1920s with a somewhat older German woman, Charlotte Bohm, who also had another strong romantic interest, Gaddis very briefly notes that Kennan's troubled relationship with Bohm led to George's going to a psychiatrist. But that is mentioned, on pages 55-56, in simply a few lines, drawn mostly from Gaddis's December 13, 1987, interview with Kennan.

That interview (in MC 256) is somewhat peculiar, because Gaddis, though the interviewer, did not ask any useful, or thoughtful, questions about the relationship with Charlotte. And in his book, Gaddis omits—strangely, it seems—that George later concluded, as he explicitly told Gaddis in their December 13, 1987, interview, that Charlotte, during their relationship, had also very probably been the “mistress” (my emphasis) of her boss, for whom she worked as a secretary. That is far more than what Gaddis simply, if not evasively, called her “seeing another man” (p.55).

In dealing with George’s late 1920s engagement to Eleanor Hard, and her later breaking their engagement, Gaddis seems often uncertain about interpretive matters. He notes, perhaps appropriately, that George, when discussing the relationship in the 1980s in an interview with Gaddis, stated he got over the broken engagement in “three days.” But Gaddis also notes that George’s sister, Jeanette, recalled in a 1980s interview that George had given Eleanor an engagement ring. That suggested that there was far more to the story than George recalled, or at least recounted to Gaddis.

Possibly because Gaddis was uncertain about whose version to trust, and because he apparently never queried George on this perhaps still sensitive subject, Gaddis simply presents both versions in his book. He does also include an arresting excerpt, in a September 1928 letter to Jeanette, from the time right after the broken engagement, in which George told her: “[T]hese last few months [...] witnessed far greater and more important experiences in the life of G.F. Kennan than have been described in his letters to his parents. Since I saw you last I have finally passed the big turning-point and I feel, for the first time in my life, that I have just about found my place in the world” (p.46).

Thoughtful readers, interested in problems of biography, in the use of sources, and in Gaddis’s treatment of these issues in dealing with George Kennan’s early romantic life, as he came further “of age,” may want to study pages 45-46, and Gaddis’s interviews with George Kennan and his sister Jeanette (in MC 256), and that September 1928 letter (reportedly in the Kennan Papers).

About 62 years after that broken engagement, Eleanor Hard reportedly informed an inquiring historian (not Gaddis) in 1990-1991 that she had told her mother, well after George Kennan became a noted success, that they would have been entirely incompatible if they had married. To Gaddis, that statement merits quotation, but without his using any critical judgment (p.46). Yet, it is worth pondering whether such a statement by Eleanor Hard in distant old age, after Hard’s long marriage to another man, and with her son (Anthony Lake, President Clinton’s national security adviser from 1994 to 1997) rather well known, would have been likely to say something else that was likely to appear in print. Does her statement from 1990-1991 really have any likely evidential value?

In turn, curiously, Gaddis apparently never interviewed Eleanor (Hard) Lake. Nor does he mention that she, unlike Annelise, went on to become a sometime author, writing in the 1940s about such subjects in American life and problems as dealing with old age and military men and venereal disease. Might Eleanor, with such intellectual interests, if married to George, have broadened him and made him able, at an empathetic level, better to understand American life than did Annelise, who was Norwegian-born and -raised? Might such speculation, if brief, have had some place in such a lengthy biography?

### 3. Kennan, Gaddis, and the early cold war: nuclear issues

Much has been written about Kennan's February 1946 "Long Telegram" and about his July 1947 "X" article, and undoubtedly far more remains to be said, in probing fashion, about Kennan's thinking in that period about US policy and possible war. Some of the analysis, in focusing on that approximately year-and-a-half period, should involve using at least two important archival documents on the A-bomb that Gaddis never mentions, and possibly he never found them in his research.

The first document is Kennan's approving commentary, dated September 16, 1946, in the George Elsey Papers (Truman Library), on the lengthy Clark Clifford-George Elsey memorandum on the Cold War. In Kennan's September memorandum, he recommended preparing for atomic warfare and biological warfare. The second document is a summary (in the Bernard Baruch Papers, at Princeton) of November 8, 1946, by Franklin Lindsay, a member of the Bernard Baruch staff, indicating Kennan's suggested US tactics in obliquely threatening the USSR with war in order to push the Soviets to accept the Baruch Plan. To omit both of these documents greatly impoverishes the study of Kennan in the early postwar years, and in particular the dealing with A-bomb problems.

Significantly, in speaking at the Air College in April 1947, in the question-and-answer session, Kennan discussed a possible US atomic attack on the USSR. He hoped it would not be done, he said, but thought that the Soviet economy could be effectively crippled by "ten good hits with atomic bombs," and that there would not be a serious loss of life in the USSR, "or loss of the prestige or reputation of the United States as a well-meaning or humane people." He greatly preferred that a US nuclear attack if conducted, would be against industrial targets, and thought that "the bombing of civilians [should be done only] if it becomes a vital necessity" (Kennan lecture, "Russia's National Objectives," April 10, 1947, box 298, Kennan Papers).

In that same question-and-answer session, Kennan stated that preventive war, initiated by the US, could be considered, if the war-making capacity of the Soviet economy was "developing at a rate considerably faster than that of ourselves." Nearly 30 years later, in 1976, when a young historian (C. Ben Wright) published such material, from that previously unknown 1947 transcript, Kennan, in a burst of apparent anger, sought to pummel the historian publicly and falsely charged him with misquoting and misu-

sing that 1947 evidence. That young historian was basically correct, but Gaddis, while obliquely acknowledging that 1976 dispute, chose in his biography not to dwell upon Kennan's 1947 comments about A-bomb attacks and preventive warfare (p.374)<sup>2</sup>.

It is true, as Gaddis notes, in quoting a Kennan letter in the early 1980s to McGeorge Bundy that Kennan, in looking back, said, "what a fiery hard-liner I was in those days!" (*ibid.*). Unfortunately, Gaddis, in quoting from that letter, fails to acknowledge that Kennan was not commenting on his 1947 statement, but on a 1946 memorandum he had written on the A-bomb.

#### 4. The under-explored relationships and issues: Kennan, others, and Oppenheimer

Gaddis's book, though promising a full biography of Kennan, is remarkably skimpy on the subject of his personal relationships. The volume is far better, when discussing Kennan and other key people, in presenting Kennan's political or policy differences with, for example, Dean Acheson and John Foster Dulles; but the book does very little with George Kennan's relationships with his four children, and even his dealings over 73 years with his wife, Annelise.

How much the two Kennans, in such a long marriage, trusted one another, and in what ways, is left obscure. Did Annelise, like many women of her generation, simply choose quietly to accept George's apparent occasional straying toward other sexual relationships, and did she will not to know? Or were there recriminations by her, and open disputes between the two Kennans on such matters? Did George, with the deep sense of sin that he often expressed in his writings, occasionally feel compelled to confess to her? Or did he settle for his diary entries, which could usually be oblique? Did Annelise have access to his diary?

In Gaddis's volume, there is something on George's personal dealings with his foreign-policy associates, the ambassador W. Averell Harriman and with Charles Bohlen, like Kennan a Soviet expert. But, unfortunately, those interesting relationships are never presented in full form. Much is omitted by Gaddis, and possibly not known by him.

Within the book, the private Kennan—his personality, his temperament, his passions and dislikes, his quirkiness and anxieties, and his frustrations—tends to be presented most often by drawing upon Kennan's interesting diaries. They are emotionally rich, and often seem very revealing, though it is difficult to determine at times whether they are to be taken literally, or how they are to be reasonably interpreted. Sometimes, it seems, Kennan's diaries are the place for the emotional outpourings that he could not otherwise control, and thus the diaries indicate parts, but only parts, of who he is, and

2 Cf. C. Ben Wright, 1976, "Mr. 'X' and Containment", *Slavic Review*, 35-1, p. 1-31.

what he feels, but as a result the diaries may also sometimes overstate matters. The difficult task, for the careful historian, is to responsibly integrate those diaries entries, and the emotions they seem to reveal, with the rest of Kennan's life and even to explain in the biography the process of interpretation in dealing with difficult evidence.

Judging from Gaddis's volume, and from other published sources, as well as archival materials and interviews, Kennan's relationship with the physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, director of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University, was close and intense—and often heavily trusting. It was a relationship of strong mutual admiration and of great mutual respect. They first met in 1946, became personally and politically much closer in 1949-1950, and it was Oppenheimer who invited Kennan to become a member of the prestigious Institute (p.407-409).

Kennan and Oppenheimer, though from very different social backgrounds (Oppenheimer was Jewish and the son of a German-born father), were also men who shared much and had both attended elite US universities—notably, high intelligence, substantial arrogance, the capacity to suggest magisterial authority, and an impatience with people who seemed to be less sensitive and less intelligent. Both men had somewhat hidden personal lives, were emotionally quite brittle, and lived at least part time in or near psychological depression. Both men were less than faithful to their wives, greatly loved words, and deployed prose styles that commanded accolades but were often baroque. Each man, in his speaking and writing, could seem initially lucid and intellectually powerful and significantly inspiring, and yet the seeming clarity often shifted toward mistiness, when listeners or readers sought to understand precisely what had been stated.

Each man, perhaps too often, seemed to prefer the convoluted to the straight-forwardly didactic in prose, and they lived parts of their lives in such similar ways—obliquely, jaggedly, and puzzlingly. Oppenheimer often felt tortured, and was probably mostly self-tortured, and Kennan did not let himself escape fully from frequent bursts of deep dismay, painful self-doubt, and more than occasional self-laceration. Such similar sensibilities undoubtedly helped weld the friendship between these two men of substantial intellect.

Unfortunately, in a greatly missed opportunity, Gaddis did not choose to explore the Kennan-Oppenheimer relationship, in both personal and political ways, in significant depth. When Gaddis dealt with their thinking about nuclear weapons, and especially about the H-bomb issues in 1949-1950, he misunderstood some key matters (p.377-379). He failed, for example, to understand that, in October 1949, when Oppenheimer and the majority of his colleagues on the Atomic Energy Commission's (AEC) General Advisory Committee (GAC) opposed the development of the H-bomb, they were actually reversing the pro-development policy they had endorsed for about two-and-a-half years. In early 1947, they had formally recommended a US effort to seek to develop thermonuclear weapons, though they had apparently expected, in 1947, that the advance to a thermonuclear weapon, if it was possible to build such a bomb, would be rather slow.

In October 1949, when basically reversing themselves on the H-bomb issues, the GAC members at the meeting had significantly urged further US expansion of its already substantial atomic-bomb stockpile, the building of even larger nuclear bombs (the so-called “booster,” about 20 to 40 times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb), and the effort to develop a capacity for radiological warfare (RW). Because Gaddis apparently did not know of these proposals, he did not understand that much of the GAC’s recommended program was not congruent, but really markedly at odds, with Kennan’s own emerging thinking, in 1949-1950, about nuclear weapons.

In spring 1954, Kennan testified as basically a character witness in the painful Oppenheimer loyalty-security hearing in a then-closed, AEC formal inquiry. Unfortunately, in briefly discussing Kennan’s appearance before the AEC’s loyalty-security board, Gaddis errs on a few minor matters, such as who was asking particular questions (p.499-500). Somehow, Gaddis confused an AEC commissioner with a Personnel Security Board member, and perhaps Gaddis did not really understand the nature of the loyalty-security hearing itself.

Far more troubling, Gaddis fails to understand that the agile, skilled “prosecutor” Roger Robb, later a federal judge, significantly outmaneuvered Kennan in the hearing, and thereby greatly undercut the value of Kennan’s pro-Oppenheimer testimony. Whether or not Kennan himself adequately understood what happened, and that he had been shrewdly undercut, remains unclear in Gaddis’s book. The problem, for Gaddis, in dealing with this subject, is that he apparently did not know enough about the Oppenheimer case, Oppenheimer’s great vulnerability because of his earlier suspected Communist involvements, and the actual loyalty-security standards being used by the loyalty-security board and by AEC in this high-level case (p.496, p.499-500).

There is a substantial published literature on all these related issues—the H-bomb’s development and the controversy, the GAC’s October 1949 proposals, Oppenheimer’s 1930s leftwing and suspected communist politics, and the troubling 1953-1954 loyalty-security case—that Gaddis apparently chose not to use or possibly did not know.

## **5. Suez, colonialism, and Kennan’s crisis of confidence in November 1956**

In his biography of Kennan, Gaddis never mentions Kennan’s pained analysis of the 1956 Suez crisis, and what Kennan judged as President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s unacceptable mistreatment of Great Britain, France, and Israel. Some of the salient evidence on this appeared in Kennan’s November letter, published in the *Washington Post*, November 3, 1956. Kennan’s analysis, rooted partly in his great distaste for General Nasser, revealed much about Kennan’s thinking about the Middle East, his insensitivity to issues of colonialism, and his strong sense of personal and intellectual alliance with Western Europe, and frequently its colonial policies in the Middle East.

In view of Eisenhower's overwhelming re-election in November 1956, and thus what Kennan believed was the disregard of his own anti-Dulles and anti-Eisenhower critiques, Kennan was thrown into deep pessimism, as his diary in parts of November discloses. Kennan felt that he had been repudiated, wrongly, by the American voters and by others. Angered and hurt, he poured into his diary the pain of what he felt was his rejection. The US had become, he complained, "Nixon's America." Adding to the pain, Kennan learned from poet Stephen Spender that many of the British Laborites had been appalled by the British government's involvement in the attack on Suez.

In one foolish burst, Kennan, in his November 7<sup>th</sup> diary, stated that war involving the US and USSR was likely to occur over Suez, and he decided that he (at age 52) would seek a US military commission as an officer, because civilians were not properly respected in wartime. At another juncture that month, with the likelihood of any such war receding in his judgment, Kennan decided that he should simply retreat from any role as a public commentator, and critic, on U.S. foreign policy. Why not become, he asked himself in his pained diary entry on November 11, "completely the forgotten man?"

In view of Kennan's expressed thinking in that period, his obvious anguish and sense of hurt, and his seemingly feverish outpourings in his diary over the course of some days, one wonders how Gaddis, in a volume both on personal biography and on policy beliefs, could entirely omit all that—so meaningful to Kennan in 1956—from a nearly 700-pages book on Kennan.

### 6. Kennan, "disengagement," and the brickbats and confusion

In late 1957, while in the U.K. as a special visiting professor at Oxford, Kennan gave, on the BBC, the distinguished Reith lectures, which were heard by a large, and growing, radio audience. The markedly prestigious lectures had, in then-recent years, featured, among others, Bertrand Russell, Arnold Toynbee and Oppenheimer.

Notably, in those well-publicized lectures, Kennan addressed the problems of Germany and Eastern Europe, and the Soviet presence in East Germany and in much of Eastern Europe. He boldly proposed what was termed "disengagement"—mutual withdrawal by the US and the USSR from Germany, allowing Germany to be neutralized militarily, and apparently including more substantial US military withdrawal in Europe and USSR withdrawal back to the USSR itself.

Gaddis skillfully links Kennan's general proposals to his long-term concerns, and emphasizes that Kennan's conception depended heavily on trusting the Soviets. What Kennan did not anticipate, and Gaddis seems justifiably dismayed by Kennan's failure of anticipation, is that Kennan's "disengagement" pronouncement unleashed a fusillade of public criticism. There were harsh verbal assaults by prominent Europeans, by former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, and by ex-President Harry S. Truman, among others.

Acheson's assault, both clever and mean-spirited, was designed to make clear—to Europeans, especially to West Germans, and to Americans—that Kennan did not speak for the Democrats, who were then out of power in the US.

Gaddis himself, in his presentation of the issues and his summary of key parts of the dialogue, seems to side heavily with Acheson and his fellow-critics, though Gaddis seems surprised, and dismayed, by the tone of Acheson's nasty attack.

Strangely, Gaddis chose not to emphasize that Kennan, in defending himself in print, delayed nearly a year before replying publicly to Acheson's spirited, and energetic, attack in *Foreign Affairs*. Possibly Gaddis thought it was also unimportant that Kennan's long-time fellow expert, Charles (Chip) Bohlen, had privately concluded that Kennan's disengagement thinking was ill-conceived, and therefore Gaddis omits Bohlen's negative judgment (Avis Bohlen to Charles Thayer, April 16, 1958, Thayer Papers, Truman Library).

Nor, for some reason, was Gaddis interested in the claim by Kennan that he had intentionally, in his Reith lecture, been unclear about whether he was sketching US withdrawal only from Germany or from the entire European continent. Pressed by a friendly critic on this subject, Kennan in February 1958 privately acknowledged that he had been unclear in his lecture, though he acknowledged that he actually preferred US withdrawal from the continent (Kennan to Frank Altschul, February 11, 1958, box 1, Kennan Papers).

Kennan's somewhat ambiguous, and thus unclear, statement on that significant subject is very meaningful. In effect, as with his famous 1947 "containment" essay, where containment had seemed significantly to include US military power, Kennan had failed, in his Reith lecture, to be explicit on a major issue in promoting his own conception. What does it mean that he had not chosen, in December 1957, to forthrightly tell his large radio audience that he was being unclear on this crucial subject of the nature of a US withdrawal?

Might it be that Kennan had not recognized his lack of uncertainty in December 1957, when he publicly spoke on the issue, and only recognized his lack of clarity later? Or had he willfully in December chosen to obscure, to his audience, this crucial matter of the nature of the suggested US withdrawal?

Quite possibly, the archival evidence, in Gaddis's view, is simply inadequate to resolve this set of questions. But should not an attentive biographer inform his readers of these serious interpretive problems, and not choose the strategy of what is, in effect, silence and thus avoidance?

## 7. Problems in organization, in research, and in analysis

Some of Gaddis's problems created by his limited research, his lack of intellectual curiosity, his near-indifference to George Kennan's relationship with his children, and the difficulties in organizing the biography become readily apparent in chapter 21, entitled "Kennedy and Yugoslavia: 1958-1963." It runs 36 pages from page 538 to 573, but the promised coverage



of “Kennedy and Yugoslavia” does not really emerge for about ten pages, until page 548, and the chapter probably needed serious reshaping, or a new title, or both sets of revisions.

In that poorly organized chapter, Gaddis briefly mentions the marriage, apparently in March 1958, of the Kennans’ oldest child, daughter Grace, who was born in 1932. Gaddis notes that the two elder Kennans, in Europe in early 1958, paid for their daughter’s Washington wedding, and Gaddis uncritically reports that the two Kennans could not afford to travel to the US for the wedding, so they were absent from the Washington ceremony (p.542).

Such an explanation—they could not afford the trip—seems notably lame, and remarkably unconvincing. The most likely explanation is that there were severe strains between the elder Kennans and daughter Grace, or that the March 1958 marriage was, for some reason, hurriedly rushed. None of this is even considered in print by Gaddis.

Adding to the interpretive problems, but unfortunately not discovered by Gaddis, because he apparently did not do the necessary research, George Kennan informed Adlai Stevenson at about the time of Grace’s marriage that he could not really remember much about the groom, Charles K. McClatchy, whom George had met, probably only once, and that was at a Stevenson party (Kennan to Stevenson, Feb. 19, 1958, Stevenson papers, box 47, Mudd Library). Doesn’t that cry out for more research, and then some explicit interpretation, by the official biographer of George Kennan?

The groom, a reporter and an heir to the powerful McClatchy newspaper chain, offered political advantages to Kennan, though Gaddis apparently never discovered this. In early 1961, when George Kennan was desperately hoping for a foreign-policy position in the new Kennedy administration, it turns out that McClatchy was working in January 1961 behind the scenes to snare a position for Kennan, and McClatchy indicated that the ambassadorship to Yugoslavia would be suitably attractive (William Blair<sup>3</sup> to Stevenson, Jan. 5, 1961, Stevenson Papers, box 47).

What role the McClatchy backing played in Kennan’s appointment is unclear, and because Gaddis seems never to have uncovered this archival material, he apparently had no reason to wonder or to investigate. Why Gaddis never even used the Stevenson papers—the source for many of the statements in this section of this essay—is something of a mystery. They have long been open in the Mudd Library, at Princeton, which also houses the Kennan collection, much of which Gaddis used.

3 Blair was at the time a recent law partner and sometimes an aide to Stevenson.

## 8. George Kennan and Gaddis's severe neglect of his subject's intellectual speculation and intellectual curiosity

Perhaps the greatest failure of Gaddis's biography is the book's lack of concern with, and thus significant inattention to, intellectual history involving Kennan. Partly as a result, Gaddis never adequately discusses Kennan's own wide-ranging intellectual curiosity, nor even indicates anything about the kinds of intellectual relationships that Kennan, at least at times after the mid-1950s, maintained with the notable sociologist and sometime socialist David Riesman or the ardent pacifist and anti-nuclear critic A.J. Muste, the editor of *Liberation*.

Any reader of Gaddis's biography, without also working through Kennan's bulky correspondence files (at Princeton), would not be prepared to find interesting, thoughtful, and sometimes sustained correspondence between those two men and Kennan. Gaddis's book, strangely, never even mentions either man.

Significant insight into the scope of Kennan's wide-ranging curiosity, and his tolerance for discussing interesting ideas with people he regarded as intellectually responsible and socially respectable dissidents, is suggested by his involvement with Riesman, and more briefly with two of Riesman's allies, the socialist-humanist psychiatrist and social-critic Erich Fromm and the longtime socialist stalwart Norman Thomas, who was a Princeton graduate (like Kennan).

In summer 1959, Riesman, sharing with Kennan fears about the nuclear-arms race and strong distaste for Eisenhower's foreign policy, sent Kennan an early draft of Fromm's "Socialist Manifesto." Though that document's optimism about the human capacity, and Fromm's rejection of a bleak view of the human condition, greatly separated Fromm and Thomas, and in many ways Riesman himself, from Kennan, the retired diplomat nevertheless invited the three men to spend a politically and intellectually intensive few days in August 1959 at his Pennsylvania farm to discuss ideas.

Afterward, in his diary, Kennan wrote, both critically and affectionately, about the three men and their ideas. He concluded that all three men were profoundly decent, and humane, individuals. But, to Kennan, socialism was markedly at odds with his own politics, his individualistic temperament, and his anti-egalitarian values. Gaddis, who had substantial rights to quote Kennan materials, could have drawn revealingly, in his book, on Kennan's September 6, 1959, diary entry on that August visit and his characterization of the three men.

In the mid-1960s, Muste and Kennan briefly carried on a rather brisk dialogue, by mail, on the nature of the communist threats in Asia, issues in World War II history, and the dangers in contemporary US foreign policy. It was a respectful, and sometimes probing, discussion between two very different men, with often markedly different politics. What is striking is that Kennan seemed sufficiently curious, and significantly tolerant,

that he was willing to participate in such an analytical discussion with someone who operated far outside his normal orbit.

Unfortunately, nothing in Gaddis's biography ever even suggested these aspects of Kennan's interests, and the range of his significant intellectual, and often political, curiosity. By systematically omitting such important evidence, Gaddis presents a rather narrow Kennan, one who is generally limited to the kinds of issues and people who have long interested Gaddis himself, in his own books and essays on foreign policy.

### 9. Gaddis, Kennan, and the 1962 Cuban missile crisis: ignored events and issues

Perhaps as troubling, and certainly very inadequate, is Gaddis's remarkably brief treatment of Kennan in the Cuban missile crisis. The subject receives only about a paragraph and half of narrative and discussion (p.566). Gaddis omits how Kennan (the ambassador to Yugoslavia) actually learned about the crisis, how Kennan explained and assessed the crisis in October 1962, and how he later interpreted the Soviet placing of missiles in Cuba and the nature of the actual settlement of the crisis.

Gaddis never even mentions anything about the lecture Kennan gave on October 27 to the US embassy staff and spouses in Belgrade to justify President Kennedy's apparent handling, in that week, of the crisis. Kennan's October 27<sup>th</sup> speech notes ("Briefing for Americans") are in his papers (box 164) at Princeton, but those substantial notes are never even mentioned by Gaddis. In his talk, Kennan, in line with a State Department advisory cable, apparently placed the American response to the Soviet missiles in the justifying context of the Monroe Doctrine and suggested—dubiously, it would seem to many—that Cuba in 1962 was in the US sphere of influence.

In a way, by using history uncritically, Kennan was, in effect, justifying US imperialism. He easily ignored, and thus quietly overrode, the issues of the Cuban government's rights and the conception of Cuban sovereignty in 1962.

In his October 27, 1962, lecture at the embassy, Kennan apparently likened the missile crisis to the challenges by Hitler's Germany in the late 1930s, and judged JFK's response to the Soviet missiles in Cuba as necessary. Kennan denied that the Soviet emplacement of missiles in Cuba could be compared to the US emplacement of missiles (Jupiters) in Turkey, because Turkey, by his argument, was not in the Soviet sphere of influence, whereas Cuba, according to Kennan, was still in the US sphere. Kennan also emphasized that he condemned Fidel Castro, calling him, in what seems hyperbolic rhetoric, "one of the bloodiest" dictators the world had seen in the postwar years.

Gaddis does not consider in the book whether over the years, as Kennan became more anti-nuclear, he might have retreated from his mid-1960s judgment of the handling of the missile crisis. Nor does Gaddis even note that Kennan for some time, even after the October 1962 crisis, seemed puzzled by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's motives for putting missiles in Cuba, but that Kennan also came to conclude—as he indicated to Gaddis in a September 4, 1984, interview—that Khrushchev was propelled to act, at least partly, in an effort to gain removal of the US Jupiters from Turkey and that the final US-USSR settlement had eliminated those Jupiters (“Meet the Press Transcript,” Aug. 18, 1963, p. 9, Kennan Papers)<sup>4</sup>.

### 10. Kennan, Gaddis, and the Vietnam war: neglected issues and unmentioned events

Probably far more surprising, and perhaps more dismaying, is Gaddis's very sketchy handling of the complicated subject of Kennan and Vietnam. For some reason, Gaddis chose not to go back to Kennan's analyses in 1946-1949, while on the staff of the National War College and then as head of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff (PPS), to examine and discuss Kennan's consideration of the problems in Indochina.

Strangely, Gaddis generally skips over Kennan's thinking in the 1950s about Indochina, and disregards Kennan's apparently muted and somewhat ambivalent public support, in 1964, (“A Fresh Look at Our China Policy”, *New York Times Magazine*, Nov. 22), for the American intervention. The result, of avoiding so many relevant sources, is that Gaddis's brief focus in the biography on Kennan's December 12, 1965 op-ed piece in the *Washington Post* and Kennan's February 1966 Congressional testimony is without adequate interpretive context.

No reader of Gaddis's very brief segment on Kennan and Vietnam, if not having other knowledge, would know that Kennan, in 1966, was not a full-blown critic of the US involvement in the Vietnam war. Kennan publicly proposed that the US retreat to defensible enclaves in Vietnam, and Kennan also warned about a precipitous US withdrawal from Vietnam<sup>5</sup>.

It should be important, for a biographer of Kennan, to seek to explain why Kennan publicly opposed a precipitous withdrawal. That required understanding Kennan's seeming concerns about US power and prestige.

4 Cf. George Urban, 1976, “A Conversation with George Kennan,” *Encounter*, 1976, p.38, and Gaddis 1984 interview with Kennan, in MC 256.

5 Cf. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Supplemental Foreign Assistance Fiscal Year 1966–Vietnam*, 89<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., p.329-342.

Gaddis, for some reason, avoids seeking to present a well-developed, carefully textured narrative and useful analysis of Kennan's thinking about Vietnam over time. Such avoidance by Gaddis means, among various omissions, that Kennan's later Congressional testimony in 1967 on the subject of the Vietnam war and his 1968 public support for Eugene McCarthy go entirely unmentioned in the biography.

## II. Dealing with the student left, the CIA, and FBI

In 1967-1968, Kennan publicly pummeled the student far left in the US for its politics, its uncivil behavior, and really for its lack of respect for authority. Gaddis generally seems sympathetic to Kennan's critique (p.607-611).

In that chapter, Gaddis very briefly notes the 1960s public exposé (he misdates it by a year)<sup>6</sup> that the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), including *Encounter*, the CCF's flagship magazine, had long been secretly subsidized by the CIA (p.607). While acknowledging that Kennan had long known of that secret CIA relationship, Gaddis for some reason never asks whether Kennan publicly admitted that he had long known of the secret funding, and whether he discussed the subject with liberal acquaintances, who were outraged to discover that there had been such funding. If there were such discussions, how did those acquaintances respond? If there were no such discussions, did Kennan seek to avoid the subject?

Loosely related to the issues of the CIA is Kennan's longtime efforts to maintain very friendly relations with J. Edgar Hoover's FBI. Unfortunately, despite the bulky files (in the FBI records in Washington, and generally in Kennan's Papers) on that relationship, Gaddis never really probes or makes any significant attempt to discuss, in its important dimensions, many aspects of that Kennan-FBI relationship (esp. p.496-497, p.611, p.659).

Kennan, whether acting sincerely or not, made substantial efforts to court Hoover and to please the FBI. There are important questions: Did Kennan truly respect Hoover, or was Kennan mostly being so friendly because he feared Hoover and the FBI? Did Kennan in the 1950s connect Hoover to McCarthyism, which Kennan openly deplored? In the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, did Kennan recognize how much, and how easily, Hoover's FBI violated US laws and threatened American citizens?

These are not unimportant issues, but apparently Gaddis never asked Kennan about any of these questions, in their many hours of (now-unavailable) on-the-record interviews, and Gaddis, in his book, bypasses these interpretive matters.

6 Cf. letter by George F. Kennan et. al., 1966, *New York Times*, May 9.

## 12. Kennan, Gaddis, and the Iraq war: Kennan's dissident thinking

In October 2002, an aged George Kennan, still articulate and intellectually attentive, spoke on contemporary US foreign policy to reporters (Jane Mayer, in *The New Yorker*, Oct. 14 & 21, 2002; and Albert Eisele, in *The Hill*, Sept. 25, 2002<sup>7</sup>). Kennan condemned the developing move by President George W. Bush to go to war in Iraq, without even adequate Congressional authorization. Gaddis apparently regarded Kennan's analysis, in possibly the aged man's last public statement on a major issue, as so unimportant that the entire subject receives fewer than about 25 words in the 698-pages biography (p.690).

Kennan contended, in the interview with Eisele, that the Constitution and the US tradition are "quite sufficient" to deal with true threats to America. Kennan in October 2002 also warned, presciently, about the dangers of war and the likelihood of the unexpected occurring in war. The history of military matters, and of the US experience, he contended in his interview with Eisele, showed that "you might start in a war with certain things on your mind as a purpose of what you are doing, but in the end, you found yourself fighting for entirely different things that you had never thought of before." War, Kennan stated, "has a momentum of its own and it carries you away from all thoughtful intentions." Among the dangers, he emphasized, is that, "You never know where you are going to end."

Even this brief summary, running at least four times as long as Gaddis's entire treatment of Kennan's October 2002 statements, suggests the richness of Kennan's thought on the then-imminent war. Those published 2002 sources can be usefully supplemented by also using what Gaddis entirely omits and never even mentions—Kennan's private February 2003 statement. It is quoted in John Lukacs's 2007 book, *George Kennan, A study in Character* (Yale University Press, p.187-188), and was mailed initially as a letter by Kennan to his nephew (Jeanette's son), Eugene Hotchkiss III, then the retired president of Lake Forest College.

Regardless of biographer Gaddis's own attitudes on the US war in Iraq, the subject of that U.S. war is important, and Kennan certainly thought so. But basically to place the entire treatment of Kennan on Iraq in fewer than 25 words, as Gaddis does, seems greatly unfair to Kennan himself and to the obligation of biography, and especially of a chosen biographer, in this unsettling case.

7 The article is now available at <<http://hnn.us/articles/997.html>>.

### 13. The challenging task of understanding George Kennan

Kennan chose John Gaddis, upon Gaddis's own ardent request, as Kennan's authorized biographer in the early 1980s. If Kennan had lived longer (even beyond 2005, when he died at age 101) and read the biography in near-final draft, would he have felt adequately interpreted and properly presented? Would Kennan have still selected Gaddis as his authorized biographer? Or, as seems likely, would a disappointed Kennan have concluded that Gaddis had not sought adequately to understand Kennan as a morally inspired nuclear critic, as a public foe of Reagan and Bush policies, and perhaps strangely as both a spirited opponent of the Iraq war and an ardent opponent of Eisenhower's anti-colonial policy in the 1956 Suez crisis?

Such questions suggest a useful perspective in assessing the published biography, and its substantial limitations and apparent strengths. Such questions may also help indicate some of the research and various analytical paths that later scholars may wisely choose to pursue in their own quest to understand the complicated, and sometimes convoluted, George Frost Kennan<sup>8</sup>.

He could seem at time a somewhat mercurial man, and a man of very strong feelings and of very firm convictions, but enterprising analysts, reaching beyond Gaddis's book, will still have to seek to understand those feelings and convictions, their interconnections, and what remained significantly changing, and what was nearly or minimally unchanging, in Kennan's values, perceptions, and policy analyses. That involves, among other issues, Kennan's often uneasy understanding of America and of his own life as an American, and sometimes as a profoundly alienated one.

Why, an enterprising analyst might well ask, did Kennan generally feel more comfortable thinking about the USSR or Germany, and often so uncomfortable in thinking generously about the United States? Was he not often using higher moral standards for judgment of the US? Was he not employing "exceptionalism" in a particular way?

8 Readers of this essay may wish also to read Professor Gaddis's published response in the *Journal of Cold War Studies* (Fall, 2013, p.243-244), to my critique, in that Journal issue, of Gaddis's Kennan book. Gaddis's printed response, to my dismay, did not deal with the *large substantive* issues—taking up about nine of my 13 printed pages—involving crucial evidence and major interpretations that I had discussed in regard to significant problems involving Kennan and Gaddis's peculiar neglect or otherwise inadequate treatment of key subjects—atomic diplomacy, Vietnam, the Cuba missile crisis, and Iraq. Instead, Gaddis chose in his recent response to focus on only a few sentences on other matters in my *JCWS* essay, and on what generally seem comparatively small issues. In doing so, he managed, besides properly correcting me on a matter involving Gaddis and his own politics in 2002-2005 on Iraq, once more to misunderstand the American social-economy history of the 1920s-1950s, Kennan's place in America in terms of social class and the domestic political economy, and Kennan's own restricted and sometimes skewed perspective on such subjects.

And why as a conservative, born into a well-to-do-Milwaukee family, educated at Princeton, and spending the first half of his adult life in the Foreign Service, did he express such disdain for democracy, the hurly-burly of US politics, and the aspirations and hopes of ethnic groups and racial minorities? Were his significantly anti-democratic politics the attitudes in many ways of a combination of his own temperament, and of his social class, and of his particular upbringing, education, and socialization?

He was far more articulate than his Foreign Service counterparts, far more widely published than they, and also far more likely to cite Burke, or Gibbon, but were Kennan's attitudes about expertise, democracy, and the need for elite guidance in US foreign policy—themes he often expressed—markedly different in substance from what many of his contemporaries in the Foreign Service felt and believed, but normally chose not to state in public? Might it be that Kennan in his beliefs was more typical, on these issues, than many biographers of Kennan have recognized? Did his use of quotable rhetoric, and his flair for arresting writing, possibly obscure the important issues of similarity to his Foreign Service counterparts?

Kennan sought at times to be a teacher as well as a prophet. Like the unhappy but eloquent Henry Adams, Kennan lamented—often eloquently—his seeming failures, and his limited influence on his own world. Like Adams, Kennan was also a man who felt better suited to an earlier age, but Kennan, more than Adams, left his mark—sometimes for good purposes, and sometimes not—on his own extended time. Kennan's mixed legacy, like his complicated life, remains a serious challenge for scholars and others to analyze and to assess in the difficult process of understanding him and, also, his America.



