

Chapter Three

FINDING WALTER LAFEBER IN THE RECORDS

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During the fall of 1975, Walter LaFeber taught a Freshman Seminar on presidential power and US foreign policy since 1940. I was among the fortunate fifteen new Cornellians admitted into that class. While we were busy with our research papers in November and early December, LaFeber was travelling in Asia as a speaker for the United States Information Agency (USIA). Four decades later, while working as an archivist at the National Archives, I discovered in USIA files the reports about LaFeber's visit sent back to Washington by US diplomats in Tokyo, Bangkok, and Singapore.

Walter LaFeber was a committed and energetic historian. Not only did he use the records and materials in the National Archives, the presidential libraries, and other manuscript collections, but he also literally came to be *in* the files. He was a creator and subject of significant US government records as a result of his membership on the Department of State's "Advisory Committee on 'Foreign Relations of the United States'" and his role as a speaker for USIA. To both of these endeavors, LaFeber brought his characteristic wit, erudition, and humility, as well as his expertise and intellect. Records on both activities either already are or will eventually be in the National Archives.

As with any good historian, Walter LaFeber's scholarship is grounded in a broad range of archival and manuscript holdings. A review of the citations and bibliographies to *The New Empire*, *Inevitable Revolutions*, and *The Clash*, as well as the other books and articles discussed elsewhere in this volume, reflect long hours of research in the primary sources. Even *America*,

Russia, and the Cold War, which is more of a synthesis than a research tome, reflects time spent researching in the records.

An inveterate user of government records working on subjects for which most of the documents start out as classified, LaFeber recognized that access to the documents was imperative in order to learn what policymakers thought and did and how policy was implemented. He was, therefore, very concerned about government secrecy and worked both publicly and behind the scenes for openness and access to the records which he believed was vital to the writing of good history. And he fully appreciated that good history was vital to creating an informed public, which was the very foundation for good citizenship as well as the essential to holding government officials accountable for their behavior.

LaFeber's commitment to those beliefs inspired his service on various committees, which benefited the larger historical community, and by extension the general public. He served on the "Advisory Committee on 'Foreign Relations of the United States'" (known today as the Advisory Committee on Historical Diplomatic Documentation, or more commonly, the HAC) from 1971 to 1974, the last year as chair. He represented the American Historical Association and was the first of the so-called "New Left," or revisionist, foreign policy historians appointed to the committee.² He brought to the committee different historical perspectives just as the Historical Office was beginning to deal with significant new problems in compiling and printing the series *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS), the official documentary record of US foreign policy.³ Among the most notable of these problems was how to include in the FRUS series documents from the other agencies increasingly involved in the making of US foreign policy in the early years of the Cold War, especially the National Security Council (NSC) and

the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The committee's meeting minutes demonstrate that LaFeber actively participated in those meetings.⁴

On July 20, 1971, on behalf of the Secretary of State, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs William D. Blair, Jr., under whose purview the Historical Office fell, sent letters inviting three scholars to join the committee for four-year terms, replacing others whose appointment had expired. Walter LaFeber was among those invitees.⁵ At the time, the committee met once a year on the first Friday in November. LaFeber accepted and began his term by attending his first meeting on November 6, 1971, the fifteenth annual meeting of the committee. That he accepted indicates the importance of the work, as LaFeber did not relish such committee duties. The discussion covered a variety of topics relating to the work of the Department of State's Office of the Historian, then referred to as "HO" but now as "OH," primarily the compilation and publication of FRUS volumes. Among them were the implications of the recent announcement by the White House of its interest in special documentary projects on the Korean War, the 1958 Lebanon crisis, and the Cuban Missile Crisis. The committee also discussed the discontinuance of publication of *Current Documents*⁶, clearance/declassification issues, and HO staffing levels.

The discussion about declassification of documents relating to covert American involvement in the 1948 Italian elections was perhaps LaFeber's first in-depth involvement with an issue that would take more and more of his time in the years after he left the committee.⁷ Other clearance issues involved the unresponsiveness of the Department of State's desk officers and other agencies, especially the Department of Defense, the new involvement of the White House/National Security Council as the compilations moved into the late 1940s after establishment of the NSC, and the problem of incorporating CIA documents. LaFeber

understood that the integrity of FRUS depended on unhindered access by the official historians to the underlying sources.

Throughout LaFeber's tenure on the committee, those same issues persisted even as new ones arose and intensified. The new matters included access to materials at the presidential libraries, the pace of publication of the FRUS volumes, and the inclusion of documents relating to covert activities and other intelligence documents. Continuing issues included the Executive Order on declassification of US Government records,⁸ HO's deteriorating relationship with the NSC, the growth and increasing complexity of the volume of records to be searched and edited, records management, office budget, and technical editing.

LaFeber's service on the committee culminated in 1974, when he served as chair. He was unanimously elected for that position by his fellow committee members. During his year at the head of the table, the committee dealt with many of the same problems as in prior years and new issues expanded the list. Among those continuing problems, the issue of NSC documentation proved especially vexing. A major new subject of discussion related to an effort to meet the presidentially-mandated goal of publication no more than twenty years after the date of the documents chosen for inclusion. The Historical Office proposed a major reconception of the series under which the volumes would be compiled in trienniums, rather than the traditional annual approach that dated back to the first volume covering 1861. This change was supposed to gain time, reduce duplication of effort, improve efficiency, and lead to more focused compilations.

LaFeber took a keen interest in this proposal, expressing serious reservations. He noted that it would lead to fewer overall pages (and thus fewer documents) being published and had the potential of slowing rather than expediting access to the records themselves. To make up for the

decrease in the number of documents printed, the Historical Office was considering the issuance of microform supplements containing additional, unedited documents. Ultimately, the office adopted both the triennium approach and the issuance of microfiche supplements.⁹ Another issue that came up was the revival of *Current Documents*, something LaFeber went on record as favoring.

One matter that came up only incidentally was the major change in the Department of State's central recordkeeping system instituted between 1973 and 1974. Since the FRUS compilers worked on records that were twenty to twenty-five years old, the new records system did not yet affect their work. Still, at least one historian in State's OH worried about the potential consequences of the coming change. Later, that new system would create myriad problems and headaches for the Department of State's historians, the committee, and the record keepers at the National Archives.

In 1974, Carol Laise served as the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs and oversaw the Historical Office. She was one of relatively few women in the Foreign Service and at the time was the highest ranking woman in the Department of State, the first ever to serve at the assistant secretary level. Through his work on the committee, LaFeber struck up a friendship with her. She sensitized him to the lowly position women had in the Department of State. Even though their contact did not continue, he later noted that "she pioneered the trail that other women began to fill in the Foreign Service."¹⁰

LaFeber sent the committee's annual report to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger on December 26, 1974. Given his later criticism of the Secretary, the irony of LaFeber corresponding with Kissinger is profound. In his cover letter, LaFeber called FRUS "unsurpassed by any other governmental series for its importance and distinction" but he noted

that the series was “at a crucial turning-point.” Hitting the most important issue, he stated that if declassification problems were “not immediately solved,” the series “will be severely damaged and lose the proud position and influence it now enjoys within the world academic community.”¹¹

The report, largely written by LaFeber, went into more detail and adopted some alarming language. After noting that FRUS “has been distinguished for its thoroughness and honesty in presenting the record of American diplomacy,” the report warned that the “series is now in grave danger.” Rather than shrinking the gap from the date of the creation of the documents to the date of publication in FRUS to the presidentially mandated twenty years, it was growing and stood at twenty-six years. Making matters worse, this delay stood in the way of scholarly access to the records themselves, as opening of the files to researchers was then tied to publication of FRUS. Additionally, the declassification of documents was growing more difficult and plans were afoot that could lead to a significant decrease in the number of documents published.

To mitigate the problems, the report made eight recommendations, the most important of which were:

- because the “fundamental problem is the failure of governmental agencies, and especially the National Security Council, to declassify documents,” the “Secretary of State must intervene if necessary to ensure that other government agencies, and the National Security Council in particular, expedite the release of documents” to meet the deadlines for publication;
- the bureaucratic mechanisms for oversight of the classification and declassification of records should be revised, including strengthening the role of the Interagency Classification Review Committee, the establishment of a formal advisory committee composed of representatives of several academic organization, much like the FRUS committee;

- the essence of chosen documents not cleared for publication should be incorporated using other documents and the omitted documents should be identified for ease of later access;
- The FRUS volumes should be compiled in trienniums, but at then-current level of seven volumes per year; in other words, twenty-one volumes per triennium;
- The committee should hold a second meeting each year in April.¹²

Assistant Secretary Laise forwarded the committee's report to Secretary of State Kissinger, echoing the concerns of the committee in her cover memorandum. She noted that the delay in publication "is contrary to our commitment to enlarge public understanding . . . ; it affects our credibility with the non-governmental foreign affairs community, academia, and the Congress; and it adds to our burdens under the Freedom of Information Act." She stated bluntly that "[t]he prime reason for this deteriorating situation is our inability to obtain timely declassification action" from other agencies, especially the NSC, and that Secretary Kissinger's "personal intervention" was required. Laise wrote that there was need for a "new attitude" and improved machinery for declassification. The latter could be solved by empowering the Department of State's Council on Classification Policy. She attached a draft response to LaFeber and recommended authorizing the Council on Classification Policy to "decide" internal conflicts on classification/declassification matters. Kissinger agreed, scribbling "except for NSC material" next to his approval.¹³

Two-and-a-half months after receipt of the committee's report, Kissinger sent LaFeber a letter that the Historical Office prepared for him to sign, what can only be considered a pro-forma response. Still, it is significant that at this time matters such as the committee's annual report were addressed to the secretary of state and staffed for his personal attention and reply. Today, the chairman submits the annual report to the Office of the Historian, which manages

distribution and follow-up. Kissinger thanked LaFeber for a “thoughtful report” and agreed that publication of FRUS must be sped up. He had, therefore, directed that steps be taken to increase the pace of declassification, including conveying his concerns to the other agencies involved through the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs. Kissinger noted that other recommendations required further study. He did not inform LaFeber of his refusal relating to NSC materials.¹⁴

At the time, LaFeber was satisfied with his committee experience. Years later, however, he noted that the “top people” at the Historical Office “blew much smoke (read: misled us)” and confessed that not a lot of progress had been made solving the problems faced in compiling FRUS. He cited in particular that there were still clearance problems and the delay between the dates of the documents and the date of publication continued to grow.¹⁵ Those issues persist to this day. Indeed, the target date for publication of FRUS volumes is now set at thirty years after the date of the document’s issue, and largely due to clearance problems, that target is virtually never met.

Richard Immerman, another contributor to this volume, served on the committee, by then commonly referred to as the HAC, from 2009 to 2021 and as chair from 2010 to 2021. He noted the following about LaFeber’s work on the committee,

Both the HAC and FRUS underwent dramatic transformations following Walt’s tenure. The HAC grew in size and representation, and the number of its meetings increased to four times a year. Likewise, the number of FRUS volumes more than doubled for each presidential subseries, and as did the scope of the volumes. In 1991, moreover, Congress enacted the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, thereby statutorily empowering the HAC and mandating that FRUS provide a “thorough, accurate, and reliable” history of the United States foreign relations. OH compilers, consequently, gained access to a

broader range of federal records. Yet the challenges the HAC has continued to confront are the same that Walt identified and anticipated, most notably the interagency review process, standardization of the declassification guidelines among the departments and agencies, and the timeliness of publication. Walt helped establish the precedents that we followed.¹⁶

Even after leaving the committee, LaFeber's concern with records, declassification, and the National Archives continued. Much of that work took place out of public view in various academic and other meetings. In 1980, however, he publicly criticized plans for the National Archives, then a component of the General Services Administration (GSA). Admiral Rowland G. Freeman, head of GSA, proposed a scheme to disperse many records housed in the Washington, DC area to Archives facilities around the country. Among other things, Freeman described those plans as an effort to bring the records to citizens. The plan led to both internal rebellion and outside pressure.

The proposal and professional reaction to it were reported in a *Washington Post* article in late December 1979. LaFeber responded with a letter to the editor published under the heading "Leave the Archives Alone." The "policy will make it impossible to do historical research in many subjects," he pointed out, "unless the researcher has the funds to travel around the country."¹⁷ In a line cut from the letter by the *Post* before publication, LaFeber referred to the Admiral's plan "as one of idiocy." He added that at a recent meeting of the American Historical Association, many of the historians in attendance agreed with that characterization and no one objected or dissented.¹⁸ Privately, he joked, "If a battleship steams down Lake Cayuga to zero in on" his home, the author of this chapter would know the full story.¹⁹

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In the fall of 1975, shortly after his term on the advisory committee ended, LaFeber once again found himself in service to a US government agency, this time on a trip for the United States Information Agency (USIA) as part of its “Volunteer Speakers” program. Under that program, American experts from a wide range of fields travelled abroad to share their expertise with foreign audiences. Speakers included musicians, artists, actors, writers, scientists, anthropologists, mathematicians, historians, government officials, and others. Coming so soon after the fall of Saigon, it is not clear what motivated USIA to choose LaFeber, a noted critic of US foreign policy, for this trip, although it is important to note, that the agency chose speakers who reflected a wide range of opinions. Indeed, LaFeber’s motivations for undertaking the tour are perhaps even less clear. The primary purpose of the trip to Japan was to participate in an academic symposium on post-World War II Asia.²⁰

This trip explains why the Freshman Seminar I was taking then doubled up on sessions early in the semester and then had a long period without meeting to work on our major research papers. The course, on the relationship between presidential power and American foreign policy, focused on the period since 1940, but also looked back to earlier events that illustrated issues that continued to resonate in US foreign policy. The fifteen students allowed into the course knew they were in the big leagues when they received a significant reading assignment to complete for the first seminar session.

LaFeber was among the least pretentious people I ever met. During the first class he made it clear that while “Professor LaFeber” was acceptable, he preferred “Mr. LaFeber”; “Dr. LaFeber” was definitely out. The seminar (History 203), which met once a week for two hours, was the setting for the first of many times I would hear LaFeber discuss John Quincy Adams or Willard Straight when explaining more modern aspects of American foreign policy. In addition

to our readings, there were several writing assignments, including a major research paper that was based on original research in primary sources. Grammar, syntax, and style counted, too. To aid in our writing, LaFeber directed that we familiarize ourselves with the guidance in *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White. My copy of that small book from that seminar has traveled with me ever since and sits on my desk to this day. Undertaking this class for freshmen, with its emphasis on writing, is just one more example of LaFeber's commitment to teaching. While there was a teaching assistant, LaFeber graded the multiple papers each student wrote, providing copious comments about content and style. Whatever skill I have as a writer stems largely from what I learned in that seminar.²¹

Only later did I learn the real reason for the hiatus in seminar meetings from reading a file of USIA records in the National Archives; LaFeber was on a trip to East and Southeast Asia sponsored by that agency. While the texts of his talks are not available, the reports by his official hosts indicate that he discussed US foreign policy in the 1920s and the 1970s. His class lectures from the time covered those topics, too, albeit for a different audience.

In the class lectures, LaFeber countered the idea that the United States was disengaged and isolationist during the 1920s. Indeed, the title of his primary lecture on the 1920s was "Interventionism Called Isolationism."²² He explained that while the United States was not as active a participant as it had been during World War I, it was certainly more involved internationally than it had been before the war. Rather than relying on its political position, let alone its military might, the US used its economic and financial power to change the world; the flag followed commerce. While that may not have been involvement in a conventional foreign policy sense, the US was nevertheless an engaged and influential actor on the international scene.

As for the 1970s, that was more current events than history, but LaFeber still brought his critical thinking to the subject. He explained that American policy makers were adjusting to the US position in a post-Vietnam world. Despite the breakup of the domestic consensus on foreign policy, even in a diffuse world the United States was still a, if not the, major player. With the rise of nationalism, US power was declining but it still wanted to maintain political and economic stability in order to contain Soviet expansionism and deal with new political and economic blocs. With the end of the war in Vietnam, American relations with other nations in Southeast Asia took on more importance.

LaFeber's first stop was Thailand. In Bangkok, LaFeber spoke at the universities of Chulalongkorn and Chiang Mai. Several months later, the USIS (United States Information Service) post in Bangkok provided this summary of LaFeber's November visit.²³

DR. WALTER LA FEBER, NOLL PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AT CORNELL UNIVERSITY, LECTURED ON FOREIGN POLICY BEFORE MEMBERS OF THE POLITICAL SCIENCE AND HISTORY FACULTIES IN HIS LECTURES, HE CONTRASTED U.S. FOREIGN POLICY DURING THE IMMEDIATE POST WORLD WAR I PERIOD WITH THE 1970'S. HE PORTRAYED THE UNITED STATES AS A RESPONSIBLE WORLD POWER ADJUSTING TO THE NEW POLITICAL REALITIES IN INDOCHINA AND INTERESTED IN THE MAINTENANCE OF FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH THAILAND. IN HIS FORMAL PRESENTATIONS AND IN SOCIAL GATHERINGS, DR. LA FEBER SERVED TO SUPPORT THE POST'S FIRST AND THIRD OBJECTIVES REGARDING THE RESILIENCY OF CURRENT U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND FUTURE RELATIONS WITH THAILAND.²⁴

The Bangkok post had invited him to speak to support its work demonstrating US interest in maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship with Thailand and to explain American ability to “formulate positive and responsible foreign policies” in the current international environment.²⁵ The reporting officer wrote that LaFeber predicted that the US would not revert

to isolationism. Rather, it would continue its engagement in the world, including Southeast Asia after the debacle of Viet Nam. LaFeber received pointed questions from his audiences on the latter point, to which he responded by citing “several examples of recent US foreign policy moves in Europe, Latin America and S.E. Asia which reflected . . . the ability of American foreign policymakers to formulate new policies in response to world developments.” An earlier message indicated that LaFeber was particularly “effective in the discussion period following his presentation. He handled tough questions candidly and sincerely.”²⁶

Following Bangkok LaFeber visited Singapore. During his stay there, he met with Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials to discuss current US foreign policy and lectured and discussed analogies of American foreign policy in the 1920s and 1970s at the University of Singapore history department and with a group of career officers in the Singapore Armed Forces. He met with the ministry officials on a Saturday. The USIS post there sent the following summary:

CORNELL HISTORIAN WALTER LA FEBER SPENT TWO DAYS IN SINGAPORE COGENTLY EXPLAINING - THROUGH HISTORICAL COMPARISONS - BASIS AND BACKING FOR AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY. HE STRESSED IN PRECISE, PERSUASIVE, AND CONFIDENT MANNER THAT U.S. IS BOUND TO CONTINUE INVOLVEMENT IN WORLD AFFAIRS AND THAT BROAD CONSENSUS BETWEEN EXECUTIVE, LEGISLATIVE, AND PUBLIC APPLIES TO MOST MAJOR FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES. HIS SOMETIMES SKEPTICAL BUT ALWAYS KEENLY INTERESTED AUDIENCES-COMPOSED OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, ACADEMICS AND MILITARY OFFICERS - RESPONDED EXTREMELY WELL TO DR. LA FEBER, WHO IS FIRST-RATE VOLUNTEER SPEAKER.²⁷

In the more detailed report, the embassy’s Public Affairs Officer (PAO) noted that “[f]ew speakers have so precisely supported [post] objectives.” He reported that LaFeber explained that the United States was so involved in the world that it could not withdraw even if it wanted to and

that on major foreign policy issues there was “remarkable consensus” amongst the administration, Congress, and the public. The report also noted that audiences respected LaFeber’s candor, noting that he was “[a]rticulate, persuasive, and very well prepared”, “impressive in his formal remarks and the discussions that followed,” and “never evaded a question.” The PAO closed his report stating “The speaker was extremely effective, the subject was interesting, and the audience responded well – what more could we ask for? La Feber would be welcome back to Singapore any time.”²⁸

LaFeber concluded his November trip with a visit to Tokyo. While there, he spoke primarily to other academics but also to some businessmen and professionals. The USIS post in Tokyo reported the visit this way:

LAFEBER EVALUATION MAILED JANUARY 19. EVALUATION READS “DR. LAFEBER IS AN EXTREMELY GOOD SPEAKER. ARTICULATE, CONCISE, AND PROVOCATIVE, HE SET FORTH STIMULATING ANALOGIES BETWEEN US FOREIGN POLICY OF THE 20’S AND THE 70’S. WHILE MAINTAINING HIS CREDIBLE ACADEMIC POSITION, HE WAS VERY SUPPORTIVE OF US FOREIGN POLICY, PARTICULARLY WITH THE US-JAPAN RELATIONSHIP. AUDIENCE RESPONSE WAS EXCELLENT. THE DISCUSSION SESSION WAS LIVELY AND RIGHT ON THE OBJECTIVES.”²⁹

As any student who took a class with LaFeber can attest, the high praise of his expertise, presentation, and demeanor in the USIA reports is not an exaggeration. The reports may even understate the reality. His genius as a lecturer was his ability to convey to a big audience large amounts of important information in a manner that made it feel like he was speaking only to you in an intimate conversation. Given his public criticism of contemporary US foreign policy, some of the assessments of his talks are perplexing. It is difficult to square LaFeber’s stated positions with comments such as he believed that a “broad consensus between executive, legislative, and

public applies to most major foreign policy issues,” that “he was very supportive of US foreign policy,” or that he believed the US was a “responsible world power.” LaFeber seldom pulled his punches; perhaps this was his polite Midwestern way of avoiding embarrassment for his hosts.

Many years later, LaFeber still had pleasant memories of this trip to the Far East. He especially remembered that the audience in Singapore was particularly sharp. LaFeber’s work for USIA did not end there. In 1987, for example, he did some work for the Voice of America, then a part of USIA.³⁰

LaFeber’s move into scholarship on the Cold War and other topics more current than those covered by *The New Empire* forced him to confront the broader issues of records in general and the specific matter of classification/declassification of documents. He received an insider’s first-hand view of those issues while serving on the FRUS committee, when submitting his own Freedom of Information Act requests, and when working on academic committees concerned with the issue. Strongly believing that citizen access to records of their government was important for the survival of democracy, he was one of the scholars who pressed government agencies to be more open.

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Unlike the other contributors to this volume of essays, all of whom are academics, I have spent my entire professional career in government service at the National Archives, for most of those years working in one way or another with foreign affairs records. While I always planned to major in history, my thoughts about a post-college career took me away from that field. Long before he gently ordered me to stop calling him “Mr. LaFeber,” Walt helped me chart my journey into archival work. That Freshman Seminar and another seminar I took the next year with political historian (and Walt’s close friend) Joel Silbey were major catalysts. Those classes,

additional LaFeber and Silbey classes, and those with other professors in the History Department, opened up history in a way I had never before seen or experienced and set the stage for a major change.

Landing a Federal Summer Internship at the National Archives one summer was the final catalyst. While not working with foreign affairs files, the attraction of working with the original records was visceral and immediate. After that interest became manifest, Walt made clear the importance of archives, archival work, and knowledgeable archivists to the success of historians and other users of the records, clearly stating the value of such work. After securing a permanent position at the National Archives upon graduation, I relied on Walt as a sounding-board for the next forty-one years, and he unfailingly provided support, encouragement, assistance, and feedback. We corresponded regularly and I benefited from those exchanges. That said, what I learned in his classes was particularly important to my two decades directly involved with the archival appraisal and scheduling of foreign affairs and intelligence records and continues to be so in my subsequent archival work.³¹ In turn, over the years, I was able to assist Walt, and his students, with their research in the records; assistance he was always kind enough to acknowledge in his publications.

Notwithstanding his critiques of US international behavior and reputation for speaking truth to power, LaFeber maintained contacts with senior policy makers holding opposing views, some of whom were his former students. In one case, his connection with a very senior official on the staff of Secretary of State George Shultz was instrumental to the success of a major project involving the scheduling of the records of the principal officers of the Department of State. Without the involvement of that official (not a Cornellian), the project would not have gone forward. Walt's willingness to involve himself in such behind-the-scenes actions helped to

nurture my career, but also reflected his understanding of the importance of the records and the archives.

Coincidentally, just as I began full-time work at the National Archives, *PROLOGUE*, the journal of that agency, published an article by LaFeber entitled “‘Ah, If We Had Studied It More Carefully’: The Fortunes of American Diplomatic History,” a historiographical overview of the development of the field of diplomatic history in the United States up to that point. He noted at the time that “I wrote the essay as sort of ‘old home week’ – it gave me an opportunity to say some things about my old teachers – Bailey and Harrington – that I had long wanted to say.”³²

As might be expected for an article published in a journal sponsored by an archival organization, embedded in his essay LaFeber commented on the importance of records-based research. He noted how the opening of new records and manuscript collections led to new perspectives on events as previously portrayed only by the media and memoirs of participants. The use of new records helped to create a “robust” field of study. As he noted years later, “everything we do is really based on the records.”³³ That statement is “eye candy” to an archivist and the best kind of affirmation.

Beginning with the then-widespread assessment that the field of diplomatic history as moribund, LaFeber sketched out in his inimitable way the development of the field of American foreign relations. The message that he delivered was that obituaries proclaiming the death of diplomatic history as a field of study were premature. Rather than being a field marking time and past its prime,³⁴ since the 1960s there had been significant developments. There was a new interest in the relationship of domestic and foreign policies, especially regarding the questions of executive power, economics, civil rights, and social conditions.³⁵ There was an understanding that the examination of US overseas interests requires the examination of more than just the

formal diplomatic exchanges and treaties between countries. There was the use of social science methods. There was a realization that American foreign policy had to be understood as it developed as part of the world system. Those and additional developments in the study of American foreign relations since then have proved him correct. The field of diplomatic history was (and is) alive and well and continues to change. Walter LaFeber was at the heart of that, as the co-authors of the following chapters make crystal clear.

Endnotes

¹ Opinions are those of the author and do not reflect those of the National Archives and Records Administration or any other agency of the US Government. Portions of this chapter originally appeared in the author's National Archives Text Message blog post "Historian in the Records:" <https://text-message.blogs.archives.gov/2021/03/22/historian-in-the-records/>.

² By 1970, there was a recognition that the members of the advisory committee were not representative of the historical profession. See Richard W. Leopold, "A Crisis of Confidence: Foreign Policy Research and the Federal Government," *The American Archivist*, Vol. 34, (April 1971), pp. 139-155. This article is Leopold's presidential address to the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) in December 1970.

³ FRUS is the official documentary record of US foreign policy. It is a selection of documents from the files of the Department of State, the White House, and other agencies compiled by the State Department's Office of the Historian. Besides providing the text of important foreign policy documents, it also includes source citations that indicate the location of the original documents. In this way, FRUS serves as a guide to the location of additional documents on the same and related subjects not selected for publication.

⁴ Discussion of the Committee's work comes from its minutes which will eventually be deposited in the National Archives. See the Office of the Historian website at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus-history/documents>. See also the official history of the Office of the Historian: William B. McAllister, Joshua Botts, Peter Cozzens, and Aaron W. Marrs, *Toward "Thorough, Accurate and Reliable": A History of the Foreign Relations of the United States Series* (Washington, DC: US Department of State, Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, 2015), 177-208.

⁵ Acting Assistant Secretary of State William D. Blair, Jr., to Walter LaFeber, July 20, 1971, file PR 10 Foreign Relations of US, 1970-73 Subject-Numeric Files, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, USNA. The HAC now meets four times a year.

⁶ This series, published under various titles, presented, on a near-contemporary basis, public foreign policy messages, addresses, statements, interviews, press briefings and conferences, and congressional testimony. The series began in 1950 with *A Decade of American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1941-1949*. In 1957, the Department of State published *American Foreign Policy, 1950-1955*. Thereafter, it issued annual volumes entitled *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents* for the years 1956 through 1967. The Department of State resumed the series in 1983 with the publication of *American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1977-1980*. In 1984, the annual volumes resumed with the publication of *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents 1981*. The last published volume covered 1991, at which time publication ceased.

⁷ For the significance of the 1948 Italian elections, see Walter LaFeber, *The American Age: United States Policy at Home and Abroad since 1750* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), p. 459.

⁸ Successive presidents have issued executive orders governing the declassification of federal records. At the time of writing, the current one, issued by President Barack Obama on December 29, 2009, is Executive Order (E.O.) 13526.

⁹ The first triennium covered the 1952-54 years. That structure eventually gave way to compilations based largely on presidential administrations; the microfiche supplements gave way to electronic-only volumes.

¹⁰ Walter LaFeber to David Langbart, December 14, 2019. All communications from LaFeber to the author are in the author's possession.

¹¹ Walter LaFeber to Henry Kissinger, December 26, 1974, P750062-1407, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/P-Reel Printouts, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, USNA.

¹² Annual Report (1974) of Advisory Committee on "Foreign Relations of the United States," P750062-1408, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/P-Reel Printouts, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, USNA. When reconstituted by legislation in 1991, the Committee was mandated to meet four times a year in recognition that once was not enough.

¹³ Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs to the Secretary of State, March 4, 1975, P750062-1412, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/P-Reel Printouts, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, USNA.

¹⁴ Henry Kissinger to Walter LaFeber, March 8, 1975, P750062-1404, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/P-Reel Printouts, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, USNA.

¹⁵ Walter LaFeber to David Langbart, January 29, 1989.

¹⁶ Richard Immerman to David Langbart, September 21, 2022.

¹⁷ "GSA Chief Gives Archivists a Geography Lesson," by Thomas Grubisich, *The Washington Post*, December 22, 1979, A5. Walter LaFeber to the Editor, *The Washington Post*, January 19, 1980, A14.

¹⁸ Walter LaFeber to the Editor, *The Washington Post*, January 1, 1980. Copy in author's possession.

¹⁹ Walter LaFeber to David Langbart, January 20, 1980.

²⁰ USIA to USIS Tokyo, Telegram 21221, September 2, 1975, file: LaFeber, Walter 1976, Entry P-73: VOLUNTEER SPEAKERS FILES, 1968-1981, Office of the Associate Directorate for Programs, Office of Program Coordination and Development, RG 306: Records of the United States Information Agency, USNA. Among other scholars considered but who were unavailable were John L. Gaddis, Akira Iriye, and Ernest May. LaFeber's seminal article on early 1940s policy towards Indochina was about to be published. See Walter LaFeber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina, 1942-1945," *The American Historical Review*, 80 (December 1975), pp. 1277-1295.

²¹ Years later LaFeber commented that the seminar "remains one of the most satisfying I have taught. It was a good class and there were indeed great arguments in that class." Walter LaFeber to David Langbart, September 18, 1993.

²² History 314 Syllabus, Spring 1977. Discussion of the class lectures is based on spring 1977 History 314 lecture notes in the author's possession.

²³ USIS posts were the USIA's field operations offices.

²⁴ USIS Bangkok to USIA, Message No. 16, April 12, 1976, Volunteer Speaker – Dr. Walter LaFeber, file: LaFeber, Walter 1976, Entry P-73: VOLUNTEER SPEAKERS FILES, 1968-1981, Office of the Associate Directorate for Programs, Office of Program Coordination and Development, RG 306: Records of the United States Information Agency, USNA.

²⁵ The English-language newspaper the *Bangkok Post* carried a notice for LaFeber's talk at Chulalongkorn University on November 13, 1975 (p. 5). The notice said he was conducting a seminar organized by the Faculty of Political Science entitled "Historical Analogies: American Foreign Policy in World Politics - A comparison of the so-called 'multipolar world' of the 1920's and 1970's." My thanks to Professor Tamara Loos for locating this notice.

²⁶ USIS Bangkok to USIA, Message No. 16, April 12, 1976, Volunteer Speaker – Dr. Walter LaFeber and US Embassy Bangkok to USIA, Telegram 1916, file: LaFeber, Walter 1976, Entry P-73: VOLUNTEER SPEAKERS FILES, 1968-1981, 20

Office of the Associate Directorate for Programs, Office of Program Coordination and Development, RG 306: Records of the United States Information Agency, USNA.

²⁷ USIS Singapore to USIA Washington, Message No. 42, November 24, 1975, Program Evaluation of Volspr Dr. Walter LaFeber, file: LaFeber, Walter 1976, Entry P-73: VOLUNTEER SPEAKERS FILES, 1968-1981, Office of the Associate Directorate for Programs, Office of Program Coordination and Development, RG 306: Records of the United States Information Agency, USNA.

²⁸ USIS Singapore to USIA Washington, Message No. 42, November 24, 1975, file: LaFeber, Walter 1976, Entry P-73, RG 306: Records of the United States Information Agency, USNA.

²⁹ Embassy Tokyo to USIA, Telegram 1139, January 29, 1976, and "Speaker Evaluation Sheet", January 19, 1976, file: LaFeber, Walter 1976, Entry P-73: VOLUNTEER SPEAKERS FILES, 1968-1981, Office of the Associate Directorate for Programs, Office of Program Coordination and Development, RG 306: Records of the United States Information Agency, USNA.

³⁰ Walter LaFeber to David Langbart, October 9, 1987, and August 31, 2016.

³¹ Only a very small percentage of all US Government records are permanently preserved in the National Archives. The decisions on what to preserve and when the records will be transferred to the National Archives are made through the appraisal and scheduling process.

³² Walter LaFeber, "Ah, If We Had Studied It More Carefully": The Fortunes of American Diplomatic History," *Prologue*, 11, no. 2, Summer 1979, pp. 120-131. Thomas Bailey supervised Walt's MA at Stanford and Fred Harvey Harrington directed his doctoral studies at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Walt's comment that Bailey's lectures were "beautifully organized, spiced with telling anecdotes, well researched, and magnificently presented" applied equally to his own (p. 123). Walter LaFeber to David Langbart, October 28, 1979.

³³ Walter LaFeber to David Langbart, April 8, 2001.

³⁴ The classic critique of the field at the time is Charles S. Maier, "Marking Time: The Historiography of International Relations," in *The Past before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, ed. Michael Kammen (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 355-382.

³⁵ This was presaged, in of all places, a 1950 Department of State publication entitled *OUR FOREIGN POLICY*. The first sentence reads "There is no longer any real distinction between 'domestic' and 'foreign' affairs."