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Showcasing U.S. History in Iran and American Public Diplomacy's Limitations, 1950–1965

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Abstract

This article reflects on American actors' use of the United States' history and heritage to engage with Iranian audiences in the 1950s and 1960s. In focusing on the United States Information Education and Exchange (USIE) during the 1951–1953 Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis and the Smithsonian's initial mid-1960s exhibits in the country, the paper makes three key claims. First, how factors beyond a desire to use American history as a vehicle to promote norms, values, and ideas persuaded USIE and Smithsonian officials towards these types of schemes. Second, the limited and problematic nature of the historical narratives peddled. Finally, how policies attempting to showcase American history and heritage highlights American public diplomacy in Iran's wider failings.

Keywords: Cold War; Public Diplomacy; Public History; US-Iran Relations.

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In February 1959, the United States Information Service (USIS) in Iran marked the 150-year anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth, unveiling a life-size bust of the former President's head at the University of Tehran's campus entrance. They hoped such a striking temporary obelisk would foster student curiosity. A small U.S. Embassy exhibit complemented this commemoration. The display, comprising thirteen 1.5-meter panels, included images of mid-twentieth century American rural and urban landscapes, with selected quotes from Lincoln's speeches pasted around these pictures. One instance, which showcased American economic achievement, comprised an image of Wall Street, accompanied by an excerpt from a July 27, 1848, House of Representatives speech, where the then Senator proclaimed, "in leaving the people's business in their own hands, we cannot be wrong."[1]

U.S. officials' crafting and hawking of American history to persuade and attract Iranian audiences was not atypical. During the Cold War's early and middle stages, USIS figures appropriated past events to communicate and project the democratic and economic benefits to Iranians of siding with the United States against the Soviet Union. In ensconcing their promotion of American-led development in U.S. heritage, agency officials sought to underline both the United States' longstanding commitment to achieving these goals, and the country's supposed place at the vanguard of a teleological, Hegelian journey towards modernity. Scholars have hitherto overlooked the application of historical themes as a basis for public diplomacy, which Thomas Cauvin would regard as an example of 'public history' in foreign policymaking prior to the conceptualization of the term in the 1970s.[2] Indeed, most examinations of Cold War-era American public diplomacy reflect on art displays, and the broadcasting of twentieth century United States culture to overseas audiences via Hollywood films without considering the themes and ideas underpinning these endeavors.[3]

This article, therefore, addresses this gap, illustrating the pivotal role American history and heritage plays in underpinning U.S. public diplomacy in Iran. The analysis focuses on the two instances during the Cold War era where officials turned to these types of policies to engage with Iranian audiences. The paper first discusses the book translation program and mobile film unit endeavors of the United States Information Education and Exchange (USIE) during the 1951–1953 Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis. Its officials had operated in all U.S. embassies and consuls from 1948 onwards.[4] The Truman administration sought to prevent attempted Soviet expansion. In 1946, for example, USSR military forces stationed in the country's northwest Azerbaijan province since a joint Anglo-Soviet occupation during the Second World War refused to withdraw. Iran-U.S. protestations to the fledgling United Nations failed to resolve the dispute. After the then Iranian Prime Minister, Ahmad Qavam, threatened to embargo oil supplies to the USSR, however, the Soviets departed.[5] The article subsequently examines the Smithsonian initial exhibits during the mid-1960s. The U.S. government, during this period, had asked the institute to preside over all overseas displays in countries of geostrategic importance like Iran. The nation, neighboring the Soviet Union to its north and east, possessed a ruler, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who feared the USSR desired to use Iran as a platform to exert its influence across South Asia, the Persian Gulf, and the Arab world.[6]

The focus on each in turn enables the article to draw parallels between how USIE Iran and the

1. USIS Iran to the USIA, February 10, 1959, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, Iran, Record Group 306 (RG 306), The National Archives at College Park, Maryland (NACP); USIS Iran to the USIA, February 18, 1959, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, Iran, RG 306, NACP.

2. Thomas Cauvin, "The Rise of Public History: An International Perspective," *Historia Critica*, 68/1 (2018): 3-26.

3. David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Walter Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945–1961* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997); Ross Melnick, *Hollywood's Embassies: How Movie Theaters Projected American Power Around the World* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2024); Toby Miller, Freya Schiwy, and Marta Hernández Salván, "Distribution, the Forgotten Element in Transnational Cinema", *Transnational Cinemas*, 2/2 (2012): 197–215; Francis Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999).

4. Jason C. Parker, *Hearts, Minds, Voices: US Cold War Public Diplomacy and the Formation of the Third World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

5. Louise Fawcett, "Revisiting the Iranian Crisis of 1946: How Much More Do We Know?", *Iranian Studies*, 47/3, (2014): 379–99.

6. United States Interests and Objectives in Respect of the Near East (NSC 155/1), July 14, 1953, White House Office, NSC Series, Policy Papers, Abilene, Kansas, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

Smithsonian, despite their differing functions and status, applied United States history to their public diplomacy. The analysis not only reveals the near-identical rationales behind their efforts, but also the deep-rooted issues which negated their ability to appropriately interact with Iranian audiences. Scholars, for instance, have largely concentrated on the work of the United States Information Agency (USIA), the USIE's successor. These analyses, undertaken by prominent scholars in the field like Nicholas Cull, Kenneth Osgood, and Shawn Parry-Giles, discuss the organization's origins, in conjunction with its Soviet propaganda rebuttals, cultural centers, and educational exchange programs to promote American culture to foreign publics.[7] Works on the Smithsonian, likewise, focus more on domestic proceedings, specifically how curators have historically used exhibits to peddle ideas of empire, and accounts of the United States' origins which overlook the non-white peoples' roles and perspectives.[8] Studies, such as those of Ariella Aisha Azoulay and Jeremy Coote, have also investigated their contested acquiring and appropriating of display objects, as well as the contemporary debates surrounding the repatriation of items.[9] Even Richard Arndt, a former diplomat stationed in Iran during the 1970s, who provides a holistic account of twentieth century American cultural diplomacy, neglects to reflect on the ways U.S. officials peddled their nations' heritage.[10]

Analyses of public diplomacy, more broadly, tend to reflect on how U.S. policymakers framed and presented both American Cold War policies, combined with the supposed threat of Soviet-inspired communism, to foreign publics. Whereas Laura Belmonte concentrates on the State Department's linking of United States policy to the upholding of values like democracy and consumerism, Steven Casey focuses on the justifications for the U.S.-led international intervention during the Korea War. Both scholars, however, view American public diplomacy within the framework of the superpower struggle.[11] Even broader accounts of U.S. cultural policies and encounters with overseas publics—which include those written by Frank Ninkovich and Michael Krenn, as well as Nancy Snow and Nicholas Cull's recent Routledge handbook on the topic—do not address how ideas of American history have underpinned U.S. cultural diplomacy.[12]

American public diplomacy activities in Iran, more broadly, have not been discussed in sufficient depth, as have discourses of U.S.-Iran cultural interactions more broadly. Works focusing on the 1950s and 1960s, for example, concentrate on instances of high political tension. Historians have considered how American involvement in the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis and the ensuing August 1953 coup resulted in the United States becoming the dominant western power in the country.[13] Scholars have also reflected on U.S. President John F. Kennedy's tense relationship with the Shah. From the early 1960s, the White House provided military and economic aid for Iran, in exchange for political and social reforms. The Iranian monarch, however, refused to acquiesce to the Kennedy administration's demands for democracy and human rights reforms. He instead launched his own domestic program

7. Nicholas Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy During the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence, KS: Kansas University Press, 2006); Shawn Parry-Giles, "The Eisenhower Administration's Conceptualization of the USIA: The Development of Overt and Covert Propaganda Strategies", *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 24/2 (1994): 263–76.

8. Ariella Aisha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso Books, 2019); Jeremy Coote, "Archaeology, Anthropology and Museums, 1851–2014: Rethinking Pitt-Rivers and His Legacy", *Museum History Journal*, 7/2 (2015): 126–34.

9. James Cuno, "Culture War: The Case Against Repatriating Museum Artifacts", *Foreign Affairs*, 93/6 (2014): 119–29; Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).

10. Richard Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005).

11. Laura Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia, Penn: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Politics, Propaganda and Public Opinion, 1950–1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

12. Michael Krenn, *The History of United States Cultural Diplomacy, 1700-Present* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); Frank Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Nancy Snow and Nicholas Cull, *Routledge Handbook on Public Diplomacy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

13. Mark Gasiorowski, *US Foreign Policy and the Shah: Building a Client State in Iran* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience in Iran* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

and purged his government of U.S. allies.[14] Analyses of Soviet-Iran dealings, in comparison, cover cultural issues. Studies have explored the Soviet All-Union for Cultural Ties Abroad's links with Iranian left-wing intellectuals, and the USSR Embassy in Tehran inviting musicians, dancers, and sporting figures to perform in the country.[15]

1 Government Restrictions; Institutional Failings

The promotion of American history and historical figures through the book publication program and the mobile film units stemmed from Iranian governmental restrictions imposed on USIE public diplomacy. Initial schemes targeted Iranian civil servants, rural leaders, and youths under 25-years old. Officials not only sought to dissuade Iranians away from advocating communist views, but also assisted the Shah in turning the country into an anti-Soviet bulwark.[16] Despite fearing communist invaders from the north, the emerging left leaning Tudeh Party preoccupied the USIE. The Shah's 1949 outlawing of the communist group had failed to stymie its rise. Reports to the State Department estimated the party's membership at roughly a million, mainly comprised of students, academics, and disgruntled factory workers.[17] USIE endeavors included the establishing of a bilateral exchange program, via the fledgling Fulbright scheme, to encourage emerging political and business figures to work or study in the United States. Officials dedicated most of their efforts, though, to working with Iranian media outlets, either supplying anti-Soviet stories to the press, or seeking to steer the content of Iran's fledgling radio stations.[18] They also established a library in Tehran, within the U.S. Embassy compound, and founded the Iran-America Society, a bilateral organization under USIE auspices which provided English teaching to Iranians eager to learn the language.[19]

The ensuing Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis, however, resulted in the Iranian government restricting the USIE. The diplomatic standoff began in April 1951, when the newly installed Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, nationalized the Iranian oil industry, which the British-backed Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had hitherto controlled.[20] The UK government instead resorted to imposing economic sanctions on the country. They refused to trade with Iran, persuaded other Western nations to the same, and used the Royal Navy's Persian Gulf fleet to blockade Iranian oil refineries.[21] Despite the United States government initially distancing themselves from the dispute, the Iranian authorities characterized U.S. actors and organizations as ardent supporters of British policy. Civil servants and politicians, notably, halted the Embassy section's attempts to engage with Iranians via local radio. In January 1952, officials persuaded Radio Tehran and the Armed Forces Radio, the only two broadcast-

14. David Collier, "To Prevent a Revolution: John F. Kennedy and the Promotion of Democracy in Iran", *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 24 (2013): 456–75; James Goode, "Reforming Iran During the Kennedy Years", *Diplomatic History*, 15/1 (1991): 13–29; Roland Popp, "Benign Intervention? The Kennedy Administration's Push for Reform in Iran", in: Manfred Berg and Andreas Etges (eds) *John F. Kennedy and the 'Thousand Days': New Perspectives on the Foreign and Domestic Policies of the Kennedy Administration* (Heidelberg: Universitatvelag Winter, 2007), 197–220; April Summit, "For a White Revolution: John F. Kennedy and the Shah of Iran", *Middle East Journal*, 58/4 (2004): 560–75.

15. Nodar Mossaki and Lana Ravandi-Fadai, "A Guarded Courtship: Soviet Cultural Diplomacy in Iran from the Late 1940s to the 1960s", *Iranian Studies*, 51/3 (2018): 427–54; James Pickett, "Soviet Civilization Through a Persian Lens: Iranian Intellectuals, Cultural Diplomacy and Socialist Modernity, 1941–55", *Iranian Studies*, 48/5 (2015): 805–26.

16. The National Security Planning Board's report to the National Security Council, December 21, 1953, National Security Council Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

17. Draft of the Iran country plan, January 2, 1952, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), Record Group 59 (RG 59), NACP.

18. General report on Iran-America Society (January 1 – March 31, 1953), April 19, 1953, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP; USIS country plan for Iran, June 3, 1953, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

19. Iran-America Society Quarterly Review (October – December 1953), April 10, 1954, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

20. Jack Taylor, *Oil Nationalism and British Policy in Iran" The End of Informal Empire, 1941–53* (London: Bloomsbury, 2024).

21. Steve Marsh, 'Anglo-American Relations and Labour's "Scuttle" from Abadan: A "Declaration of Dependence?', *The International History Review*, 35/4 (2013): 817–43.

ers operating in the country during the early 1950s, to broadcast *English by Radio*. The program's self-explanatory remit aimed to develop listeners' linguistic capabilities through the reading out of vocabulary lists, often based around a particular theme or topic, with these words subsequently included in a short story. Presenters initially stated the account in Persian, before providing an English translation. Iranian staff working for the Embassy, due to their language proficiency, wrote program scripts with USIE guidance. In November 1952, however, the government ordered the show's cancellation due to the United States' associations with Britain.[22] They also limited the Embassy's library operations. Officials had opened the center in Tehran in 1950, the first public-facing lending facility available to the capital's citizens. The library provided copies of current affairs magazines like *Time*, *Life*, and *Newsweek*, and a range of English language books. Iranian officials forbade the center from advertising, as well as frequently inspecting the premises, which thereby discouraged existing members from visiting.[23]

Whereas the USIE's book translation program emerged because of Iranian governmental restrictions, its roving mobile film unit endeavor materialized due to the shortcomings of previous policies. The agency, crucially, had hitherto failed to effectively use movies to promote American cultures and values in Iran. In November 1952, USIE officials put together short, eight–to-twelve-minute programs which supposedly revealed the typical lives of working-class American men residing in the northeast United States. The U.S. Embassy expected these short excerpts, shown on newsreels in cinemas prior to movie screenings, to resonate with urbanite males working in factories in Tehran, Esfahan, Tabriz, and Mashhad. USIE targeted this societal group, despite their socially conservative reputation, to stem any potential spread of communist ideas which they judged to have spread among western European working-class communities. These documentaries, however, antagonized audiences. Viewers, who mostly experienced inferior living standards, could not relate to the relative prosperity the American working-class characters depicted in these films seemingly enjoyed. The programs, Embassy officials surmised, portrayed "average Joes" operating advanced machinery in their workplaces, driving "state-of-the-art automobiles", and living in large homes with modern household appliances. These observations, in conjunction with the American workers depicted wearing collared shirts and suit jackets, led audience members to conclude that the documentaries portrayed senior management officials, not blue-collar workers. Many religiously observant, conservative viewers also expressed their discomfort with screenings showing American men courting and romancing unmarried women. After a three-month campaign, USIE officials concluded that, due to widespread Iranian wealth inequalities, films which showcased superior living standards in the United States, even unintentionally, only served to foster popular resentment towards the United States.[24]

Bureaucratic and financial constraints, likewise, impeded subsequent film-related endeavors. In February 1953, U.S. Embassy officials asked State Department permission to present a range of recent Hollywood movies at the annual Tehran Film Festival. The event, which the Iranian government had run since 1950, attracted many leading political, business, and media figures. As the Soviet and Eastern Bloc embassies had significantly contributed to past festival programs, USIE sought to "redress the balance." Officials asked the State Department to lobby the Motion Picture Association of America, the body representing the major studios, to provide the rights for at least eight movies. They wanted to show the productions twice daily throughout May, to audiences of 900–1000 people. The films requested included blockbusters like *An American in Paris*, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, and *Quo Vadis*. The Embassy also pushed for any productions involving prominent actors of the period, including Errol Flynn, Danny Kaye, Ingrid Bergman, and Katherine Grayson.[25] Despite State Department protestations, the Motion Picture Association of America refused to provide the film rights at an affordable

22. U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, November 16, 1952, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

23. USIE semi-annual evaluation report (1 December 1952 – 31 May 1953), September 12, 1953, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

24. U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, January 19, 1953, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

25. U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, February 5, 1953, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

rate, claiming that doing so would detrimentally impact Iranian cinema ticket sales and, thereby, studio revenue.[26]

Despite these failings, developments within Iran enabled officials to capitalize on their competitors' misfortunes. Since the British Council's 1934 opening of its Tehran office, the UK Foreign Office-backed agency had provided a regular series of instructional films for Iranian engineers and farmers. The UK government's subsequent refusal to accept the Iranian oil industry nationalization, and its imposition of an oil embargo, triggered a wave of attacks on British Council offices and properties, forcing the agency to withdraw from Iran in November 1952.[27] The lack of a state-backed equivalent to the British Council's film program persuaded the USIE to try and offer a similar service. The seeming absence of domestic and international private sector competitors also swayed their decision-making. From the economic embargo's outset, key film distributors like Encyclopedia Britannica and Coronet increasingly judged the Iran market as unprofitable. Having hitherto dominated the film market, particularly in the field of educational documentary, inflationary pressure and a collapsing currency had made operating in the country unviable for these companies.[28]

2 Showcasing American History and Heritage

The USIE's chief in Iran, Charlemagne Edward Wells, spearheaded both the book program and the mobile film unit endeavor. He had worked at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran at the Second World War's outset as a liaison officer between the then Ambassador, Louis Dreyfus Junior, and the Iranian government.[29] Wells viewed the former as a scheme which circumvented legal restrictions on foreign cultural activities. He presumed that both the Shah's inner circle and Mossadegh's acolytes paid little attention to Iranian publishing houses. As diplomatic conventions protected the Embassy library from Iranian governmental policy, moreover, Iranian users could borrow translated works without official recriminations.[30] For this endeavor to work smoothly, the USIE head judged American histories, and biopics of prominent figures, as the only viable genres of works for translation. Any program related to American literature, Wells argued, must either showcase the United States' heritage or encourage popular criticisms of the Soviet Union. As a 1949 parliamentary decree prevented foreign agencies from discussing or referencing other countries, ideologies, or groups—to prevent Iran from becoming "a center of a propaganda war"—the USIE could only focus on the first.[31]

The views of Donald Wilbur, a self-anointed "Iran expert" working for Franklin Publications, provided the USIE with ample justification for their stated approach. While conducting research in Iran for his PhD thesis, an analysis of Ancient Persian languages, Wilbur had also moonlighted as an intelligence officer. In 1942, the Office of Strategic Services, the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) previous iteration, asked him to monitor the German and Italian consulates in Iran and the Persian Gulf. Wilbur maintained his intelligence career after the Second World War's end, providing the State Department with information on Iranian popular opinion during the 1946 Azerbaijan Crisis.[32] Franklin Publications, desiring to enter the Iran market, had commissioned Wilbur to write a report

26. U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, April 18, 1953, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

27. British Council Tehran to British Council Head Office (London), October 26, 1952, British Council Papers, BW 49/14, The UK National Archives at Kew, Richmond.

28. J. Cook (Motion Picture Officer, USIE) to U.S. Embassy (Tehran), undated, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

29. U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, June 2, 1953, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

30. U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, June 22, 1951, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

31. U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, May 29, 1953, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

32. U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, January 28, 1953, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

on the Iranian literary scene. The publisher proceeded to distribute the final copy to both USIE figures in Iran and their State Department superiors in Washington. Most of the commentary criticized the Iranian literary scene. Wilbur, in the first few pages, had bemoaned the lack of Iranian knowledge on displaying books. While Tehran had 12 prominent bookstores, each stocking 4000–20,000 works at any one time, sellers did not promote themselves, or their books, in newspapers or on the radio. He proceeded to claim as only around 20% of Iran's 16,000,000 population could sufficiently read and write, the literary market provided limited profitable potential. Wilbur estimated that only roughly around 20,000 people, mostly young, college-educated individuals residing in Tehran or other large provincial cities habitually read books. Many had confined themselves to national histories and had little appreciation of non-Iranian works.[33] Despite inadvertently critiquing the USIE's desired policy, its officials used Wilbur's subsequent thoughts as a basis for their book translation program. As current affairs magazines like *Time and Newsweek* had proved particularly popular with Iranians, Wilbur urged Franklin Publications to supply biographies and autobiographies, especially those centered on individuals who had overcome significant obstacles to achieve success. These should include biopics on "great" Americans such as George Washington and Ulysses Grant, as well as notable living figures like Dwight D. Eisenhower. Wilbur, likewise, urged his employer to supply more books to Iran which extolled the virtues of US history and heritage. In his visits to the twelve bookstores in Tehran's urban area, he claimed only one in the province of Shemiran, north of the capital, displayed or sold any American historical works. Due to the low literacy levels in Iran, any translated American publications catering for the country's readers should not be overly verbose or technical, accessible to as wide a range of people as possible.[34]

Wells, having previously engaged with the country's elite, argued for U.S. public diplomacy initiatives to focus on engaging with more prosperous, urban Iranians. For the mobile film units, however, he made an exception, thanks to the absence of private sector and foreign competition. Again, the potential to avoid governmental ire contributed to his thinking. Yet, Cold War concerns more greatly influenced the USIE chief than domestic proceedings. Since the Azerbaijan Crisis, senior Embassy figures, as well as the USIE, regarded Khuzestan in southwest Iran, and the northwest Azerbaijan province, as geostrategically vital. The former contained most Iran's oil reserves, while the latter bordered the Soviet Union. Both areas contained sizeable non-Persian populations. Whereas Khuzestan had a large Arab minority, numerous Azeris and Kurds resided in Azerbaijan. These groups' detachment from the wider populace, combined with the governing authorities' seeming disinterest in their plight, alarmed the USIE. Officials feared that the Soviet Union would exploit this seeming neglect, using these regions as a springboard to eventually destabilize the country.[35]

USIE accordingly purchased two portable projectors and accompanying screens, as well as two ex-military vehicles, to tour Azerbaijan and Khuzestan respectively. Although seeking to gain popular support for economic development and infrastructure construction programs, officials stocked each truck with a several historical American films. The approach here marked a radical departure from standard American endeavors in other developing nations. Their USIE counterparts serving in South Asian and African posts, convinced the 'village' served as a site for Cold War economic progress, more obviously promoted how U.S.-led modernization efforts facilitated marked increases in living standards.[36] In Iran, however, USIE officials maintained that audiences would deem any outright extolling of American endeavors as "propaganda", so employed history as a tool to subversively influence village communities.[37] The production titled *Ohio Town* clearly encapsulated this approach.

33. Advisory memorandum for Franklin Publications authored by Donald Wilbur, September 23, 1953, USIS Telegram and Pouch Messages (1952–1955), Records of the United States Information Agency, RG 306, NACP.

34. Donald Wilbur to Franklin Publications, October 31, 1953, Reports on the USIS in Iran, Records of the United States Information Agency, Iran, RG 306, NACP.

35. U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, February 4, 1953, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

36. Nicole Sackley, "The Village as Cold War Site: Experts, Development, and the History of Rural Construction." *Journal of Global History* 6, no. 3 (2011): 481–504.

37. U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, May 8, 1953, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

The program charted the development of a fictional Midwestern town, from the first European settler communities to its mid-twentieth century iteration. The highly idealized narration—emphasizing the settlement's importance to agricultural production—sought to resonate with rural audiences. The film paid particular attention to the documenting of improvements in farming practices, and how this facilitated the town's development and prosperity.

3 USIE Perspectives: The Issues Undermining Their Public Diplomacy Initiatives

Developments in Iran and the United States from the summer of 1953, however, resulted in both the book translation program and mobile film units' cessation. The newly elected President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, adopted a different, more confrontational approach to ending the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis. He ordered the Central Intelligence Agency to work with their British counterparts to help discredit and depose Mossadegh, viewing the Prime Minister as a Soviet sympathizer. Agency propaganda emphasized his power-hungry nature, most notably his attempts to hold on to office at all costs, as well as his eagerness to overthrow the Iranian monarchy. The joint US-UK campaign's success in undermining and discrediting Mossadegh provided the impetus for the Shah to dismiss the Prime Minister. On the 15 August 1953, the Iranian monarch issued a decree, replacing Mossadegh with a close confidante, the pro-Western Fazlollah Zahedi. Mossadegh's refusal to leave office triggered a constitutional crisis. American and British officials responded by paying pro-monarchists to demonstrate against Mossadegh, on the grounds he was instigating a coup against the Iranian monarchy. These protests snowballed, destabilizing the country, and culminated in Mossadegh's removal from office.[38]

The political changes in Iran culminated in the Shah adopting a more direct form of rule, with a succession of prime ministers from Zahedi onwards who acquiesced to his demands and possessed pro-American sympathies. USIS, now encountering far less governmental resistance, pursued bolder, interventionist endeavors. They not only abandoned the mobile film unit scheme, but terminated the book program before a single translated copy was made available in an Iranian bookstore or the U.S. Library in Tehran.[39] Officials, among pursuing other schemes, instead provided funding, technical support, and programming content for Radio Tehran, while also working with volunteer groups to steer and shape extra-curricular activities for Iranian youths.[40] The expansion of the U.S.' cultural program in Iran also dovetailed with the Eisenhower administration placing a greater emphasis on this facet of diplomacy. After commanding the Allied forces in Europe during the Second World War, the now President had come to appreciate the merits of policies which steered popular views and did not cost lives. Eisenhower and his advisers also recognized that the greater accessibility of media and information had made foreign publics much more politically aware and active.[41]

Upon entering office, Eisenhower established the Jackson Committee, a body comprised of State Department figures, presidential advisors, and intelligence officials. The body collectively analyzed and evaluated American cultural initiatives, with their final report calling for a State Department-run

38. Memorandum prepared in the Directorate of Plans, campaign to install a pro-western government in Iran, Central Intelligence Agency, March 8, 1954, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1952–1954, Iran, 1951–1954; Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (New York, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004); Ali Rahnema, *Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran: Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers and Spooks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

39. U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, September 3, 1953, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

40. USIS Iran to the USIA, May 14, 1957, Telegram and Pouch Messages (1957), Records of the United States Information Agency, Iran, RG 306, NACP; USIS Iran to the USIA, August 22, 1957, Telegram and Pouch Messages (1957), Records of the United States Information Agency, Iran, RG 306, NACP; USIS Iran to the USIA, April 14, 1958, USIA Telegram and Pouch Messages (1958–61), Records of the United States Information Agency, Iran, RG 306, NACP.

41. Osgood, *Total Cold War*; Parry-Giles, 'The Eisenhower Administration's Conceptualization of the USIA', 265.

agency to preside over American cultural and propaganda campaigns.[42] Eisenhower responded by expanding and institutionalizing USIE branches, establishing the United States Information Agency (USIA) in August 1953. Reporting to the State Department, this institution strove to explain and advocate US policies to overseas audiences; provide information about American officials and initiatives to foreign publics; foster cultural and economic ties between the peoples and businesses of America with their overseas counterparts; and advise the US government on how foreign peoples will receive American policies and overtures.[43] The USIA maintained a formal presence in cities across the globe. It oversaw and coordinated all cultural activities, with the department being institutionalized and provided with greater autonomy from US embassies and consulates. The agency would often strive to achieve its objectives through exhibitions showcasing the American way of life, translating US books and Hollywood films into foreign languages and by offering English language teaching courses. All USIE offices in embassies worldwide were replaced with branches of the standalone United States Information Service (USIS), which reported to the United States Information Agency (USIA) in Washington DC. [44]

The examination of American attempts to showcase the United States' history and heritage to Iranian audiences in the early 1950s highlights many of the broader issues which blighted their efforts to engage with Iranian peoples. Examining the perspectives and views of the USIE mobile film unit endeavor, notably, reveals their purveying cultural chauvinism. Officials regarded Iranians living in the villages of Azerbaijan and Khuzestan as unenlightened, detached from modernity. Embassy figures, reflecting on the popular reception of mobile film units, claimed, without proof, that viewers "had hitherto never seen movies", and that they frequently referred to USIE-employed projectionists as "wizards." The novelty of these film showings consequently charmed audiences, who appeared to marvel more at the technical achievement of audio-visual movements on screens than with the documentaries' underpinning messages.[45] Embassy figures, equally, dismissed the qualities of their locally employed staff. Despite governmental restrictions preventing Americans from accompanying the mobile film units, they accused the Iranian projectionists and drivers of using the film showings as an excuse to fraternize with local peoples, and conduct private dealings.[46] Unsubstantiated frustrations with their Iranian workers compelled Embassy officials to produce a written guide governing staff behavior. The new manual ordered all drivers and projectionists to submit a record of each community visit, and of audience numbers for all USIE films. Although local staff still selected the villages, they could only select the places from a pre-approved Embassy list. The document also prohibited staff from making impromptu visits to Tehran and forbade them from engaging in "elaborate conversations" with any Iranians they encountered while working for the USIE.[47]

USIE views of Azerbaijan and Khuzestan's landscapes and climates cemented their prejudices. Officials frequently referred to these localities as "inhospitable, unhealthy and unviable", despite figures having never visiting these regions.[48] The cold winters and "excessive snowfall" apparently rendered travel impossible, while the hot summers, particularly in southwest Iran, immobilized daily life. The U.S. Embassy deemed Azerbaijan and Khuzestan as "uncivilized", thanks to their rugged terrains, and the absence of wide, paved roads. They also judged the regions as part of the Soviet Union's sphere of influence, with local populations unreceptive to American-led endeavors. When citing the numerous incidents involving elementary schoolchildren at mobile film unit showings pulling out power cords

42. The report of the President's Committee on International Information Activities (the Jackson Committee), June 30, 1953, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1952–1954, National Security Affairs, Volume II, Part 2.

43. Ibid.

44. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*.

45. U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, January 7, 1953, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

46. Ibid.

47. U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, March 4, 1952, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

48. U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, January 7, 1953, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

and adjusting switches, the USIE accused the youths of communist agitation. Officials also alleged that the local bus drivers, who apparently forced travelling film units off narrow roads and into dead ends, of working for the USSR.[49] Azerbaijan and Khuzestan's relative autonomy from Iranian governmental control, combined with both regions' large non-Persian populations, convinced officials that communist ideas had spread in these regions. The former's geographic proximity to the Soviet Union and its 1940s military incursions also affected American opinions.[50] Yet American consular framing of these spaces as hostile pre-date Cold War tensions. U.S. diplomats working in Iran during the Second World War, for example, contrasted the modernity and "civilized" Iranian city life with "rural barbarism." They also presumed numerous German and Italian spies operated across Iran's sparsely populated mountains and deserts.[51]

The USIE, as this suggests, refrained from obtaining feedback from target audiences on any of their endeavors. Of course, Iranian governmental restrictions on foreign actors monitoring domestic views prevented Americans operating in the country from compiling surveys, polls, and questionnaires.[52] Regardless, officials viewed proceedings via solely a Cold War lens. They failed to realize that rural audiences, wrestling poverty, limited infrastructure, and the wider difficulties of countryside living, prioritized their daily lives and interests over international events. An unnamed U.S. Embassy official expressed such sentiments in a January 1953 telegram to the State Department, wondering whether most rural Iranians "preferred medicines and bread to films peddling abstract values through the charting of American history."[53] Despite seeking to appeal to a more urban, literate, and prosperous audience, similar issues blighted the book translation program. Officials failed to elucidate how books on key American historical figures appealed to an Iranian audience, nor the values and ideas they sought these works to communicate to readers. Equally, as roughly a third of the populace possessed the literary skill to engage with such works by the early 1950s, such a scheme could only reach certain societal subsets, notably the urban middle classes and university students. Members of both groups did not wholly reflect the cultural and social diversity of Iranian society, bringing the scope of U.S. public diplomacy into question. These issues did not just blight the book translation program, undermining other USIE schemes, and its successor, the USIS, which began operating after August 1953. Gordon Winkler, a former State Department employee who worked in the U.S. Embassy in Tehran during the 1970s, argued that all public diplomacy endeavors before and after his stint in Iran "preached to the converted." As many prominent Iranians controlled a disproportionate amount of the country's wealth and possessed considerable influence, the agency hoped for the "trickling down" of their views and perspectives to the wider populace. Their detachment from wider society, however, prevented the exchange of any values these Iranians supposedly picked up from Persian translations of American works. Indeed, Winkler proceeded to lament the USIS' focus on what historian James Bill later referred to as "the shrub" of upper-class Iranians, who refused to engage with their contemporaries in the ways the agency envisaged.[54]

Loy Henderson, the U.S. Ambassador to Iran from 1951 to 1954, shared Winkler's view, particularly with regards to the book translation program. He deemed the endeavor a futile exercise, con-

49. U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, January 2, 1952, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

50. Draft of USIE country plan, January 2, 1952, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

51. A. David Fritzlan, interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, May 29, 1990 The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Arlington, Virginia, https://adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Fritzlan,%20A.%20David.toc.pdf (accessed July 3, 2024); Clinton L. Olson, interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, April 17, 1996, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Arlington, Virginia, https://adst.org/OH%20TOCs/OLSON,%20Clinton%20L.toc.pdf (accessed July 3, 2024).

52. Draft of the Iran country plan, January 2, 1952, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

53. U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, January 7, 1953, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

54. Gordon Winkler, interviewed by Dorothy Robins Mowry, March 23, 1989, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Arlington, Virginia, https://adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Winkler,%20Gordon.toc.pdf; James Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of US-Iran Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988).

sidering the small proportion of Iranian society who could engage with translated American works. The Ambassador proceeded to lambast Iran's literary scene. Henderson criticized publishers for not distributing works appealing to children and young adults, and for putting together unattractive "uniformly dull" book covers. As publishers seemingly did little to promote their books, or the reading of literature more broadly, he urged the USIE to rethink their strategy. The provision of English language textbooks, Henderson argued, would have a far greater impact. These texts, he argued, "are easy to read", and can effectively reach "marginally literate audiences", while also exploiting the seeming wider Iranian demand to learn the English language.[55]

4 The Smithsonian Institute, and the Showcasing of American History in Iran: Same Problems?

USIS officials dedicated the next decade to shaping youth culture, Iran's education system, and influencing the views of the Iranian populace against Soviet-inspired communist ideas. U.S.-based actors promoting of American heritage and culture recommenced in 1965, with the Smithsonian's entry into the Iranian cultural scene. The State Department, eager to ease USIS workloads and under Federal pressure to put together a global exhibits program, had asked the institute to preside over all U.S. government-sanctioned displays globally.[56] Previous USIS exhibits in Iran had reflected the agency's wider work, with picture displays related to American military superiority, scientific progress, and socio-economic developmental expertise.[57] William Anderson, the Smithsonian-appointed official presiding over Iranian exhibits, seemingly sought to adopt a different strategy. Before joining the agency, he had worked as an animation artist in Walt Disney Productions' New York office, while also painting in his spare time. Both the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan and the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington purchased Anderson's works, displaying them in their galleries. Prior to his Iran posting, he had worked for USIS in their Vienna and Bonn offices, as an exhibit curator and motion picture officer respectively.[58]

Anderson's first exhibit of fifteen paintings by twentieth century Native American artists marked a significant thematic departure from USIS operations. Whereas the government-affiliated organization had concentrated more on asserting American economic and military prowess, Anderson initially sought to showcase American heritage and landscapes. Although the seeming popularity of the western movie genre among Iranian cinemagoing audiences undoubtedly influenced him to showcase these works, a 1961 Ford Motor Company-sanctioned display also shaped his decision making. The automobile manufacturer, eager to enter the Iran market curated two painting collections, titled "Face of America" and "Sports and Diversions." Both collections comprised of sixty pieces, and reflected the magazine's promoting of nationhood, automobile use, and travel narratives.[59] The automobile manufacturer first displayed the works between October 10–21, 1960, in the University of Tehran's auditorium, placing the paintings in the Tehran Chamber of Commerce's main hall the following month. Ford, in telegrams to the State Department, noted the "universally complementary and enthusiastic"

55. U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, November 24, 1952, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP; U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, March 27, 1953, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

56. U.S. Embassy (Tehran) to the Department of State, May 21, 1954, Records of the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP

57. Comments on exhibits for use at Athens PAO conference, April 25, 1961, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, Iran, RG 306, NACP; Background material for cultural affairs conference in Beirut (November 28 – December 1, 1962), November 7, 1962, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, Iran, RG 306, NACP.

58. Leonard Marks (Director, USIA) to USIS Iran, December 12, 1966, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, Iran, RG 306, NACP; United States Information Service circular, January 30, 1967, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, Iran, RG 306, NACP.

59. Rebecca Dean Swenson, "Brand Journalism: A Cultural History of Consumers, Citizens, and Community in Ford Times" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2012).

Iranian responses towards the paintings, and their potential in engaging with the wider public.[60]

The Native American exhibit paintings consisted of works from Pueblo, Navajo and Apache artists from New Mexico and Arizona produced in the 1910s and 1920s. They mostly portrayed harvest and hunting ceremonies, as well as of game and wild animals. Despite these tribal communities mostly residing on Federal government-imposed reservations, the works hankered to their historic nomadic practices. The artists also employed traditional American brush and spray techniques.[61] The Smithsonian hosted the exhibition in the University of Tehran's main auditorium, to attract college-level students and interested Faculty. Despite their dismissive remarks towards the depictions of Native American culture, Anderson regarded this exhibit as "wholly successful", with an estimated 10,000 viewers. The display's seeming popularity encouraged the Smithsonian to showcase the paintings in USIS branch posts in Abadan, Esfahan, and Shiraz.[62]

Despite these strategic shifts, the issues which blighted the USIE's use of American heritage to engage with the Iranian public also undermined the Smithsonian's efforts. The institute did not capitalize on the Native American exhibit with subsequent, similar displays. The correspondence suggests that the problems stemmed from the wishes of executives, who appeared to envision a radically different public diplomacy strategy to officials working in countries like Iran. Institute officials in Washington notably vetoed a State Department-suggested audio-visual display, titled 'Diffusing Knowledge', which examined the history of American weather forecasting and scientific progress. The institution maintained that most exhibit-viewing Iranians lacked the intellectual capacity for such content.[63] As this suggests, officials made no effort to use exhibits to engage with a wide cross section of Iranian society. The Smithsonian did not proactively garner visitor feedback. The Shah's outlawing of foreign actors' surveying and collating of Iranian public views partly impeded officials. Yet staff also frequently dismissed Iranian feedback, suggesting they possessed little interest in collating popular responses to exhibits.[64] The agency only monitored the number of visitors to displays, collecting lists to send to the USIA in Washington. Officials marked displays attracting over 5,000 people as "excellent." between 1,000 and 4,999 as "adequate." and any with viewers in the three figures and lower as "inadequate."[65]

The Smithsonian accordingly focused on seeking to garner the attention of senior politicians, academics, and business figures. Although Anderson pledged to provide "female friendly" exhibits, he never specified what he meant—no subsequent Smithsonian exbibits in Iran explicitly referenced, or touched upon, women's issues, or promoted gender equality.[66] Anderson instead indulged the Shah's interest in space travel, preferring to engage with Iranian elites. He supplied Iran-America Society branch posts with photo panels highlighting American ventures beyond the Earth's atmosphere, like the Syncom satellite.[67] The Smithsonian official also ordered the building of a scale model of Gemini, NASA's second human extra-terrestrial program, to showcase in the University of Tehran's Geophysics Institute for three weeks.[68] Both events acted as supports for a larger exhibit, "U.S. Progress in Space Science." which the Iran-America Society in Tehran hosted in April 1964. The event celebrated Ariel II's successful launch into orbit. The satellite, which NASA constructed in collaboration with the British government's Science and Engineering Council, aimed to monitor cosmic radiation. The

60. USIS Iran to the USIA, December 15, 1960, Telegram and Pouch Messages (1958–1963), Records of the United States Information Agency, Iran, RG 306, NACP; Pouch message to USIS Iran, January 12, 1961, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, Iran, RG 306, NACP.

61. Highlights report for April 1965, May 27, 1965, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, Iran, RG 306, NACP.

62. USIS Iran to the USIA, March 11, 1965, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, Iran, RG 306, NACP.

63. Emerson Waldman to David Nalle, March 10, 1966, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, Iran, RG 306, NACP.

64. Report on the Iran-America Society, May 19, 1953, U.S.-Iran Cultural Relations (1950–1954), RG 59, NACP.

65. Exhibit program listings, December 31, 1963, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, Iran, RG 306, NACP.

66. Country assessment report for the year 1964, February 8, 1965, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, Iran, RG 306, NACP.

67. Highlights report for October 1965, October 30, 1965, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, Iran, RG 306, NACP.

68. USIS Iran telegram, January 11, 1966, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, Iran, RG 306, NACP; Highlights report for March 1966, March 30, 1966, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, Iran, RG 306, NACP.

display encompassed four photo panels, depicting Ariel II's construction and the extensive Anglo-American cooperation belying the project. A science documentary, *Destination Man*, which charted American efforts to land on the Earth's moon, accompanied the photo panels. The Shah, along with the Prime Minister, parliamentary officials, and senior military figures toured the exhibit. Iran TV documented the event, analyzing each photo panel in turn as a platform from which to proffer broader reflections on the United States' space program.[69]

5 Conclusion

The discussion in this article of the two key instances American organizations—the USIE and the Smithsonian—peddled historical narratives of the United States to the Iranian public during the Cold War highlights three hitherto overlooked themes which shaped twentieth century American public diplomacy. First, the piece illustrates the extent U.S. actors reactively employed these kinds of endeavors, rather than proactively seeking to foster greater mutual understanding with Iranian audiences. While governmental restrictions forced USIE officials to put together the book translation and mobile film unit programs, institutional failings resulted in the Smithsonian's Native American exhibit. Second, the article reveals how USIE and Smithsonian officials displayed a collective disinterest in engaging with the Iranian populace. Both organizations failed to garner feedback for their endeavors. Officials demonstrated a far greater willingness to interact with a minority of elites than to promoting and educating Iranians about the United States' history and heritage, regardless of the period or the global context. Finally, and more specifically, the main body discussion underlines the limited scope and reach of efforts to promote American heritage in Iran, with efforts confined to a few problematic episodes which skirted over the complexities of the pasts presented. Book translations notably focused on the achievements of supposed prominent figures from the U.S.' past, notably male politicians. When the Smithsonian used their Native American exhibit to move beyond these representations, they celebrated the culture without referencing the wider popular and governmental attempts to marginalize American Indian communities.

All these elements not only expose the problematic underpinnings of U.S. public diplomacy in Iran, but also better explain its negligible impact on both affecting popular Iranian perceptions of the United States, and on strengthening U.S.-Iran relations. Officials who worked for the United States Information Service in Iran, later in the 1960s and through to the close of the 1970s, critiqued the agency's inability to galvanize Iranian audiences. They collectively present the image of a metaphorically impotent field agency unable to predict the Iranian Revolution, adeptly respond to the Shah's ousting, or deal with the subsequent concentration of governing power among Iran's Islamic clergy.[70] The article's focus on the promotion of American history and heritage, therefore, provides an initial inquest into the factors which belied these issues, providing a more nuanced account of U.S.-Iran relations during the Cold War and beyond.

69. USIS Iran to the USIA, April 25, 1964, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, Iran, RG 306, NACP; USIS Iran to the USIA, May 11, 1964, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, Iran, RG 306, NACP.

70. Victor L. Stier, interviewed by G. Lewis Schmidt, March 26, 1990, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Arlington, Virginia, https://adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Stier,%20Vic.toc.pdf (accessed February 14, 2025); Jack Shellenberger interviewed by G. Lewis Schmidt, April 21, 1990, Arlington, Virginia, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, https://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Shellenberger,%20Jack.toc.pdf (accessed February 14, 2025).