

## Frank Costigliola

**Part A of this application presents my preliminary thoughts about the diary. Part B, which begins on page 5, addresses the specific questions posed by the Kennan Diaries Project.**

### A. Overview of the Diary

The approximately 20,000 pages of George F. Kennan's diary stand out as one of the most significant still unpublished archival treasures pertaining to the United States and to international relations. The diary reveals in sharp detail the personal life and the political, philosophical, and spiritual concerns of America's most famous diplomat. The journal records how a cosmopolitan, relentlessly honest, sometimes blinkered, "organic conservative" critiqued the changes ripping through the United States and Europe from the 1920s to the end of the century. Though Kennan took pride and joy in much about his life and his surroundings, especially aspects of the natural world, he could also be critical – most relentlessly about what he regarded as his own shortcomings in personality and effectiveness. Editing this diary so as to bring the inner life and thought of Kennan to a wide audience would be an exciting endeavor. The first step in undertaking the project is measuring the scope and focus of the diary.

My "letters are quite different from the diary notes," Kennan informed his friend, John Lukacs, in 1986. While the letters tended "to be more political and intellectual," the diary remained "more personal." Despite this disclaimer, Kennan *did* write about foreign policy issues in the diary – but mostly when feeling frustrated by his failure to influence the

direction of the U.S. Government. There is detailed commentary on foreign policy for the years 1944-45, when Kennan felt his warnings about the Kremlin were being ignored; 1949-50, when he grew dismayed about the growing militarization of the Cold War; and the early 1980s, when he feared that, despite his warnings, nuclear war was becoming unavoidable. In contrast, the years 1946-48, the time of Kennan's seminal influence on U.S. policy, stand out as a barren period for the journal. Readers of the diary searching for Kennan's reactions to, for instance, the stock crash of 1929 or the outbreak of World War II, will have to look instead to his letters or to his other writings. The journal entries for 1929 stop with June, as do those for 1939; the single listing in 1941 is for 31 August. When Kennan was in Rome with Sumner Welles in February 1940, he "finished a think piece on the general situation in Europe" – but the security-minded diplomat did not include that memorandum in his diary.

Despite such reticence, the diary offers some poignant commentary on epochal events. For instance, Kennan, walking through Prague the night after the appeasement at Munich had been announced, observed "real sorrow and bitterness in the faces of the passersby, and it was no night to be heard talking French or English in the streets." Two weeks later, "young [John F.] Kennedy showed up," needing help with transportation in a region now under the Nazi boot. A hiatus from October 1980 to February 1981 renders the journal silent on Ronald Reagan's election and inauguration. As if to make up for the gap, the diarist penned dialogue for a lengthy imagined conversation that began with President Reagan's asking: "Kennan, are you patriotic?" Perhaps the most surprising reticence follows the dissolution of the Soviet Union on 25 December 1991. Though this must have been a memorable day for the author of the "Mr. X" article, it sparked no stand-out commentary. Kennan noted his seeing on television "Gorbachev giving his resignation speech, in which

he conceded that the Soviet Union had come to an end. The lowering and removal of the Soviet flag over the Kremlin was also showed. A historic moment, if there ever was one!”

The relative paucity of political commentary, especially during the periods of Kennan’s greatest influence on U.S. policy, requires that the editor of the published diary supply full but succinct annotations so as to render the volume useful and attractive to a variety of Kennan buffs, to other educated lay readers, and to scholars in fields beyond foreign/international relations history. The introduction to the volume should also make clear that understanding the context of Kennan’s masterful strategic thought mandates attention to the complexities of his personal world.

Most of this magnificent diary focuses on Kennan’s inner life, on his critiques of societal developments, and on what he discerned with his acute senses. Some passages soar into the realm of lasting literature. Kennan could craft scenes like the most gifted of playwrights. Sprinkled through the diary are beautifully phrased descriptions: of persons he had known well; of someone he might have spotted from a speeding train; of locales with which he felt a mystical connection (“the city talks to me personally,” he affirmed of pre-World War II Hamburg); or of cultural milieus, such that of rural Russia or coastal Norway. This sojourner, who characterized himself as a temporal and spiritual expatriate, wrote movingly about those few times and circumstances that enabled him to feel at home. In addition to the separate “dream diary” kept from 1964-77, Kennan included in his regular journal accounts of strange and not-so-strange dreams. The diary is shot through with delightful nuggets, such as the moment in 1937 when Stalin’s motorcade raced past Kennan’s car. As the dictator and the diplomat each looked out his window, neither would accord the other a flash of recognition.

Kennan's awesome descriptive power stemmed not only from his discernment and his literary genius but also from his extraordinary empathy and imagination. In counting barges on the Elbe River, the dutiful consul also observed a sick woman being carted off in an ambulance. He later mused: "Who shall say that this story is of any less significance than the freight statistics?" The diarist imagined the "experience" of inanimate objects – buildings, streets, or cities – that captured his attention. He wondered how the Dena River "felt" as it arose in the Soviet Union and then coursed to the sea across regions of diverse cultures and ideologies. Kennan's empathy did not, however, extend to all peoples and places. He had little patience for what he saw as the disorganization and indolence of many inhabitants of Central America. In the diary he lashed out at the unkempt, apparently unthinking college students – "worse than Hottentots or Zulus" – who, noisily protesting the Vietnam War, did not measure up to his standards for proper behavior.

Much of the diary consists of detailed travel descriptions, only a small portion of which appear in *Sketches from a Life*. En route to Europe or elsewhere, Kennan could shed quotidian obligations. "Princeton, with its never ending pressures . . . is a poor place for diaries." His dislike for the crowds and bustle at airports ("Why are all these people traveling?" he grouched as he and Annelise boarded a packed plane) no doubt contributed to the doleful tone of some entries.

The very first pages of the journal document the tramp to Europe of a twenty-year old practicing vivid yet disciplined prose. Settling into his third-class cabin aboard a beat-up steamer, he discovers: "My God! We are with a bunch of deportees!," including a "bearded, consumptive old devil who looks like Santa Claus out of a job in Constantinople." In Italy he exchanged translations of "Yes, We Have No Bananas" with a friendly young native.

Kennan laid out his adolescent philosophy: “The only virtue is strength, the only fault weakness.” The youth was already trying to reform himself by becoming “more equable in temper and disposition.” That particular aim would remain a lifetime source of self-recrimination. A half-century after the trip to Europe, he lambasted “Kennan, the enthusiast – Kennan, the entertainer,” who “takes over before I can control him.”

Kennan’s brilliance, hard work, and ability to project rational thought and empathic imagination beyond the confines limiting most other Washington officials powered his spectacular rise in the state department. In the mid- and late 1940s, he crafted far-sighted policy recommendations. Ironically, his long-range strategic vision also sentenced him to decades of frustration. The diary documents how Kennan met opposition and even some ridicule for his 1957 Reith lectures recommending that the superpowers disengage from central Europe, his 1966 Senate testimony against the Vietnam War, and his early-1980s proposals for tamping down nuclear rivalry and the Cold War. Despite a cool reception from governments, Kennan developed an immense public audience in Europe and in the United States.

How to position himself with regard to his actual and potential audience remained a central concern from the 1940s through the 1990s. “I am a teacher,” he affirmed on several occasions. He also saw his role as “that of the prophet. It was for this that I was born.” Kennan did indeed become a prophet, one with honor at home and abroad but, sadly for him, not much decisive influence, particularly not after 1948. Entry after entry in the diary document his concern to influence top level people in the media and in government who might help implement his ideas about foreign policy and domestic affairs.

From the 1930s to the end of his life, Kennan deplored what he saw as the excessive individualism, reliance on automobiles, and commercialization of U.S. society. He wanted to encourage organic, long-lasting relationships, both of people in communities and between humans and their natural environment. In a 1977 diary entry Kennan wrote that “modern urban-industrial man is given to the raping of anything and everything natural . . . . He rapes the sea; he rapes the soil; he rapes the natural resources of the earth. He rapes the atmosphere. He rapes the future of his own civilization.” Despairing that democracy alone could ever correct these fatal tendencies, he advocated modifying the American system by having the President appoint a Council of State of highly respected wise men who might provide the needed alternative counsel. To build support for his ideas he devoted precious time to public speaking and to writing op-ed essays for the *New York Times*, and articles for *Foreign Affairs*, the *New York Review of Books*, and other popular outlets. Even when making his position on an issue known just for the record, “there was always,” he confessed in the diary, “the sneaking hope that someone might be influenced.”

Kennan made all this effort while agonizing over twin concerns: his limited influence and his limited time. After a spate of articles, interviews, and speaking engagements in 1981-82, he bemoaned, as he had done before and would do again, the “total failure . . . of this rather pathetic effort to affect governmental policy.” Discouraged and exhausted, Kennan would repeatedly resolve to insulate himself from the incessant pressures of fulfilling the duties of a public intellectual. Time and again, however, he would relent and decide to remain engaged. He found it difficult to relinquish his ambition for wider influence and his sense of obligation to others. With the approach of his ninetieth birthday – 16 February 1994 – he totted up the apparently meager results of his latest television

appearances and publications. He appreciated the heart-warming displays of popular sympathy and affection on both sides of the Atlantic. “But, as usual, no one in any of the governments, or in the press and media for that matter, has paid the faintest attention to what I said. Yet another reason to make February 16th the cut-off date” for further public life, he affirmed. Despite this decision and notwithstanding the strains of travel and work for someone in his tenth decade and suffering heart problems and arthritis, Kennan found it impossible to refuse all the honors and invitations still pouring in. A few weeks after the birthday, the diarist despaired that while this attention was gratifying, “all this means no serious thinking, no serious reading, a life full of froth and no substance. And what a pity.” “I could do better,” the ninety-year old admonished himself.

In endeavoring to “do better,” Kennan set down his political and personal philosophy in *Around the Cragged Hill*. He hoped the book might influence future generations. Concern with his posthumous audience also induced Kennan to arrange for an authorized biography to be written by John Lewis Gaddis, an historian who, the diary makes clear, held his trust, respect, and affection.

“Doing better,” a central concern throughout Kennan’s life, was part of his rationale for keeping the diary. He repeatedly resolved to write more frequently and to record “things of real significance.” He valued the journal also as a venue for expressing “the real ‘me,’ as distinct from the mind alone or the various things I seem to mean to other people.” He hoped that he might be able to keep his problems “sorted out . . . if I put myself to the discipline of recording them” in the diary. Yet he had “so much other writing to do” that the diary, saved for after-dinner or other odd moments, was often neglected. But not abandoned. Always the scholar and ever mindful of mortality, Kennan prodded himself:

“The days go by. They are numbered; and the number is not large. Are they to be wholly lost - whisked away behind one into oblivion, like a paper-handkerchief carried away by the wind from the deck of an ocean-linger? Then, they are truly lost, and with them – life itself. Should one not better brave the weariness, scrawl away a bit each evening in defiance of the old weary body longing for bed?” In his last decade, having sadly concluded that “there is no one – literally and relentlessly no one with whom my problems can be shared,” he treasured the diary as a confidant. As the end approached, the journal became for him an anchor, something solid to hold onto as he felt his physical and intellectual powers slipping away.

Kennan intended the diary for others as well as for himself. He occasionally addressed “my observant reader.” On his 77th birthday, worrying, as he often did, that nuclear holocaust was becoming nearly inevitable, he mused that the diary “might be more important in the light of posterity (assuming that there will be any posterity) than anything else I am doing these days.” He understood that if his journal was “ever to be of use to anyone at all, someone will someday have to edit it.” Said editor would have to comb through “the long reaches of sleep-dulled humdrum . . . [to] find an occasional vivid sentence that throws some light on the atmosphere and aspect of the time.” Despite Kennan’s modesty and despite some repetition in the diary (notably in the detailed logs of his sailing excursions in Norwegian waters in the 1960s-80s), the editor of this unique treasure will have the joy of selecting from a rich trove of “vivid sentences” and thoughtful, moving commentaries.

## **B. Questions posed by the Kennan Diaries Project**

### **1. Format**

I have in mind a single volume of approximately 600-700 pages. The edition should be pitched to Kennan buffs, scholars of U.S. and international history, and last, but not least, general readers. The published book should have an inviting look in terms of font and page layout and contain attractive photographs. A model in terms of appearance is the recently published edited journal of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Unlike the Schlesinger volume, however, the Kennan diary would have extensive annotation. Though the annotations cannot eclipse the diary, they should be sufficient to identify the persons and events mentioned by Kennan. Annotations are also needed to alert readers to other writings by Kennan or to published works that elucidate what he was doing during certain periods, notably 1946-48, when the diary is largely silent. Of crucial importance also is a thematic index so that readers can trace the development of Kennan's thoughts, concerns, and projects.

While Kennan's personal perspective, concerns, and commentary are remarkably consistent over the decades, the breakdown of chapters in the published volume could follow the outline of his public activities. One possibility is as follows:

Introduction

ch. 1, 1924-33: the young Princetonian's travels to Europe, his later study in Berlin, and posting in Riga

ch. 2, 1933-37: Kennan's setting up the embassy with Bullitt and subsequent experiences in Moscow and Vienna

ch. 3, 1938-44: Kennan's World War II experiences back in the States, in Prague, Berlin, Bad Nauheim, and Lisbon

ch. 4, 1944-48: Kennan's rise to become policy planner in the state department, 1944-48

ch. 5, 1949-53: Kennan's increasing discomfort with the policy and mood in Washington and then in Moscow

ch. 6, 1954-59: Kennan as historian, his Reith lectures, and reactions to the Berlin crisis

ch. 7, 1960s: Kennan as ambassador to Belgrade, as historian, and as critic of both the Vietnam War and most anti-war protesters

ch. 8, 1970s: Kennan as historian and societal critic

ch. 9, 1980s: Kennan as historian, societal critic, and champion of the movement to reduce the risks of nuclear war

ch. 10, 1990-2004: Kennan as persistent prophet and critic and as an intellectual increasingly focused on spiritual concerns

## **2. Qualifications**

I have researched and written on nearly every period of history covered by Kennan's 80-year diary. My research has focused on U.S. relations with Europe, the region of Kennan's lifelong primary concern. (In the 1960s-80s, Kennan did travel also to Africa, Japan, and China, as the diary attests.) As one can see from the attached cv, I published a

book on U.S. relations with Europe from 1919-33 and a book on U.S. ties with France from 1940-91. A book to appear in January 2012 deals with Anglo-American-Soviet diplomacy from 1941-46. I have also published an article on Kennan and the Moscow embassy from 1933-1946 and an article on Anglo-American-French diplomacy and the reunification of Germany in 1989-90. Also included with this application is an essay on Kennan I wrote for the Newsletter of the Institute for Advanced Study. Though short, this essay was based on newly available archival material from Kennan's personnel file at the Institute as well as his papers in the Mudd Library.

I have read much of the Kennan diary and have made a start in reading the other new material in Kennan's papers. I feel that I am beginning to understand Kennan and that I can sympathize, even empathize, with him in many respects. That said, if I should be so fortunate as to be selected to edit the diary, I would approach that task with the appropriate scholarly distance.

As Kennan stressed, his diary was above all a personal statement. In addition to his razor-sharp analytical intelligence and his sensitivity to the spiritual dilemmas of human existence, Kennan displayed, particularly in the diary, complex, deep emotions. Elucidating the links between the emotional and the rational aspects of thought, particularly as those links can influence foreign relations history, has been a major objective of my scholarship for the past 15 years. My forthcoming (January 2012) book on World War II diplomacy, my articles in *Diplomatic History* in 2004, 2008, and 2010, and my essay in the *Journal of American History* in 1997 all focus on how the intersections of personal and political relations have affected international diplomacy. In terms of editing, I am taking the lead in producing

a completely revised edition of Michael Hogan's collection of historiographical essays, *America in the World*, to be published by Cambridge.

While most of the Kennan diary is written in English, there are many pages, particularly some dating from the 1920s-30s, that are in German. I can read German easily, as I spent two years studying there. I would have to get the pages in Russian translated. I also lived for six months in Norway, a country whose natural beauty and rush to modernize moved Kennan to alternate wonder and despair.

A final matter, of possible relevance, relates to Kennan's love of the land, particularly his farm in East Berlin, Pennsylvania. In his last years, when that farm had become too much for him, he fantasized about escaping from Princeton to a little homestead in northern New England, where he could "settle down to a life of doing the small chores: cutting the firewood, feeding the chickens, baking bread, and carrying water to the horse. Nothing, to me, could sound more inviting." From 1973-98, I carved out of Rhode Island woodland a 20-acre "homestead," with assorted farm animals including a milk cow and a big garden. From this experience I know a bit about the chores and the joys of a way of life that held such meaning for Kennan.

### **3. Plan of Work**

I have begun research for a biography of Kennan. If I am selected for the Kennan Diary Project, I would put the biography aside while I devote my attention to the diary.

Doing the diary before the biography is, moreover, the logical order. I am devoting most of Summer 2011, when I am a Director's Visitor at the Institute for Advanced Study, to reading about Kennan. I will be on sabbatical leave for January-December 2012. I have no other significant writing obligations for those 12 months. I expect that in these 15 months (summer 2011 plus calendar 2012) I could make a good start on the diary venture. I project a completion date of December 2014.

My strategy would be to read (or re-read) the entire diary, noting what passages seem most important or illustrative and noting what needs to be annotated. (For a discussion of the major themes of the diary, please see part "A" of this application.) I would then have a rough idea of the proportion between the potential diary material and the available space in 600-700 published pages. I would work with Mudd Library regarding possibly publishing online additional selections from the diary. If I am selected for this project, I would enhance my editing expertise and skills through involvement with the Association for Documentary Editing, particularly by attending relevant workshops and other meetings.

#### **4. Why Undertake this Project**

I am fascinated with the personality, sensibility, and work of George F. Kennan. I am intrigued by the challenges of understanding this brilliant, complex, on occasion contradictory person: a deeply decent man who could be shockingly insensitive, a public official with astounding insights and some blinkered vision. While Kennan in his diary criticized the United States almost constantly, he would also, less frequently, admit to feelings not far different from what Robert Oppenheimer had exclaimed to him during the 1954 loyalty hearing: "God dammit, I happen to love this country!"

Like many people, I admire Kennan. His brilliant mind, originality, wide-ranging concerns, sense of responsibility, self-discipline, work ethic, honesty, decency, and civility make him a model for any generation. He remains a pivotal figure in American diplomatic history. Much of his strategic thinking remains relevant. Kennan's commitment to environmentalism and to scholarship, as well as to diplomacy, make him an especially appealing figure. Some other traits, such as his elitism and his readiness to fault certain groups, tarnish his luster, but do not render him any less significant.

Two driving elements in Kennan's persona – his relentless work ethic and his nearly as relentless self-criticism – impelled the centenarian to achieve so much and to reach even higher. The creative tension of those driving forces imparts to Kennan's diary a dramatic appeal that persists throughout this eight-decades-long record.