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Art of the Cold War: How the United States and France Depended on Whistler's Mother, the Mona Lisa and Georgia O'Keeffe to Strengthen Relations

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ART OF THE COLD WAR:
HOW THE UNITED STATES AND FRANCE DEPENDED ON *WHISTLER'S MOTHER*, THE
MONA LISA AND GEORGIA O'KEEFFE TO STRENGTHEN RELATIONS

By

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To my Grandpa who instilled a love of history in me at a very early age.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	vi
ART TAKES THE STAGE.....	1
METHOD AND HISTORIOGRAPHY	6
METHOD	6
HISTORIOGRAPHY.....	7
AMERICA HAS CULTURE?	12
<i>ADVANCING AMERICAN ART</i>	16
PLANNING THE EXHIBIT	16
AMERICAN ART ON DISPLAY.....	19
ART RETURNED	20
FRANCE'S FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC FRUSTRATIONS	26
<i>MONA LISA THE DIPLOMAT</i>	34
<i>MONA LISA THE CELEBERTY</i>	34
<i>MONA LISA GOES TO WORK</i>	36
<i>MONA LISA RETIRES</i>	42
<i>WHISTLER'S MOTHER IN MOURNING</i>	44
THE CRASH	44
AN EXHIBIT IS THE SOLUTION	48
AN INVESTIGATION AND RELATIONS	52
THE ART OF DIPLOMACY	56
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	59
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	65

ABSTRACT

Since the post-modernist turn in academic history, there has been an increasing interest in cultural diplomacy particularly in regards to the Cold War. Yet one area rarely explored by historians is the manner in which the United States and France used art exhibits for cultural diplomatic purposes. This study discusses three exhibits at length-- *Advancing American Art*, *Mona Lisa*, and *Whistler's Mother*. These exhibits illustrate the varied reasons that fine art became intertwined with the two countries' political dealings with one another. Of particular interest are the historic events surrounding these famous art exhibits. During these cultural exchanges, art almost literally took on a diplomatic role in relations between the American and the French governments.

ART TAKES THE STAGE

From the period immediately following the Second World War through the 1960s, both the United States and France used art as a means of cultural diplomacy. Each country had its own needs for cultural diplomacy and both turned to art. What follows is the story of how and why the two countries chose art to represent themselves to each other and how they received that representation.

While other art exhibits took place during this time, three stand out. The first was *Advancing American Art*. Created by American artists, including the famous Georgia O'Keeffe, the U. S. State Department hoped that the exhibit would show the world the artists' great skill in modern art and thus demonstrate America's ability to produce high culture.¹ The exhibit contained works of abstract expressionist art. Second was the *Mona Lisa* exhibit, sent from the French to the Americans in the early 1960s. The *Mona Lisa* became in essence a French diplomat to the American people. Finally, the Whistler's Mother Exhibit traveled to Atlanta, Georgia the same year, following the tragic loss of life of many of Atlantans in a plane crash. The exhibit was intended to symbolize sorrow for the event and friendship between the two nations. The French government lent the painting along with another titled *Mary Magdalen with the Night-Light* to the city of Atlanta.²

This study examines these exhibits because, unlike many other exhibits during that period, they were planned and executed directly by the French and American governments. While other art exhibits were in fact government sponsored through groups such as the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), civilians also planned them for non-diplomatic purposes. I focus attention on the actions of the governments involved, not necessarily on movements and trends in the art world.

I chose these three art shows because they are both famous and infamous. The planning for these events was in some ways as critical as their execution. *Advancing American Art's* demise is as important for the reader as its intended diplomatic purpose. I explore each exhibit in depth in the following chapters. Often, scholars wrote little on these events, which is important

¹ Ben Shahn, Irene Rice Pereira, Mitchell Siporin, Nahum Tschacbasov, and Werner Drewes are examples of other artists in the exhibit.

² "France to Lend 2 Louvre Masterpieces" *The New York Times* January 11, 1963.

to note as they impact the story of diplomatic relations. Art exhibits rarely receive mention even in books that examine cultural diplomacy between these two countries in the period 1945-1965. This study intends to rectify this oversight.

Until the twentieth century, few countries besides the United States had a political system that gave citizens sufficient power and sway over their government to enable them to influence how it dealt with another nation. To create strong alliances, nations realized that they must not only woo governmental officials, but also win over the hearts and minds of the people.³ This change in approach came during a period when mass media, in the form of newspapers, radio, and by the 1960s television, were making the world smaller. Mass communication thus allowed governments to figuratively enter people's homes and potentially change their opinions. These new technologies became weapons in the Cold War cultural battle.

Following the defeat of Germany in 1945, France became the preeminent political and military power on the European continent. Thus for the United States to assist in building a strong and stable Europe able to resist Soviet encroachment, France would be an indispensable partner. Despite an extensive history of differing political priorities, France and the United States knew that they needed each other to accomplish their diplomatic goals in the period from the end of the war through the 1960s.⁴ To make the partnership work, both countries would have to engage in a charm offensive with the other.

Both France and the United States developed programs that would present a positive image of the country and its ideals to the other. Many areas of civilized society were candidates for cultural exchange, such as dance, music, sports, and cinema. Art exhibits in particular became a means of cultural competition. During the Cold War, the United States and France sent art exhibits to each other. Three examples of exhibits stand out due to their renown and bearing on diplomatic relations between the two countries.⁵

³ Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 33.

⁴ After the 1960s, each country was still a valuable resource to the other but France had become such a strong economic power in Europe that it no longer saw the United States as high of a priority than before. For examples of this, note the arm's length that each country held the other starting in the Johnson administration.

⁵ Examples of their bearing on relations include a tribute to the dead from flight 007, the Mona Lisa discussion in the middle of talks on the French nuclear program and the Bretton Woods System, and finally the position of high culture the United States was attempting to ensure.

These three exhibits are examples of American and French cultural diplomacy during the Cold War, but they also represent more than just art. While the exchange of art was important, for its own sake, even more so was the exchange of ideas. The art exhibits gave non-diplomats more than just a chance to see art, but the occasion to see another culture and to promote the way of life of that nation. Diplomats gained from these exhibits opportunities to discuss important issues in relations between the two countries and the rest of the world.⁶

Diplomats were not the only target audience for these exhibits. New forms of media covered these events and ensured that the art and spectacle of the exhibits reached those not physically present. Through these exchanges, the citizens of each nation learned more about the other nation, thus strengthening bilateral ties. During the Cold War, the three art exhibits mentioned above became critical to relations between France and the United States. Though little explored by historians, the *Advancing American Art*, *Mona Lisa*, and *Whistler's Mother* exhibits became, in effect, Cold War diplomats.

The criterion for choosing the exhibits for this study was that each one had direct ties to the governments of France and the United States. Not merely funded by each nation, each side's government supervised and implemented them.⁷ There are other examples of art diplomacy, such as CIA funded exhibits, but non-government groups controlled these.⁸ Diplomats, not artists planned the exhibits highlighted here, which led to much confusion and turmoil. Meant to be symbolic, each exhibit played a specific diplomatic role. *Advancing American Art* was meant to show the world that America had developed a "high" culture and thus to change the way that the rest of the world viewed Americans. For France, sending the *Mona Lisa* was an opportunity for France to reemphasize its role as the capital of culture and show that Americans could appreciate the finest of cultural icons. Finally, the *Whistler's Mother* exhibit was intended to express to the American people France's sorrow after a tragic loss of American life.

⁶ One example of this is that Andre Malraux, the French minister of culture and President John Kennedy discussed the Bretton Woods System at the *Mona Lisa* opening. They also discussed the history of friendship between the two countries and their shared interests.

⁷ Frances Stoner Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*

I unearth little new evidence in this study.⁹ There are no recently declassified documents or personal interviews to draw from. Instead, I seek to offer a new approach and perspective on these exhibits. Previous scholars have studied the smaller details of each of these events. They focused on the reception or on the personalities surrounding the exhibit.¹⁰ None of them, however, have treated these events as the transnational diplomatic dealings that they were. These exhibits had foreign policy implications for each nation. Instead of viewing each event individually, I link these three events in order to examine the broader themes of how and why art was used in French and American diplomatic relations during the period from 1946 to 1963. The central question explored in this study is “why art?” The answer is that France and the United States chose art to demonstrate that each had a developed culture and used that cultural currency to gain power and influence. During the exhibits, the art became diplomatic ambassadors of culture, literally and figuratively, thereby leading diplomats and general citizens to experience the art of each country in a different setting and fostering mutual understanding.

Many scholars have written about cultural diplomacy over the past twenty-five years, but few have looked at art. Why not? The answer to that question is complex. One reason is that art historians normally do not delve into the use of art as diplomacy. Rather, they pose different kinds of questions than do other historians. When these exhibits are explored in print, the broader question of why art was chosen as an ambassador of culture between France and the United States has not been fully explained. Other authors have stated why art was important to diplomatic relations, but they have not then crossed into the art world to examine why artistic expression was important for these governments and how a shift in the art world during the Second World War may have played a role in art after it.

While I propose answers to these questions, there are obvious limitations to this study. Limitations on time and funding prevented me from exploring the many archives in France that might shed light on the French motivations and expectations for their exhibits. Few, if any, scholars of these exhibits explored these locations that might render a more detailed telling of

⁹ New discussions include discussion of the Whistler's Mother exhibit, looking at art as cultural diplomacy between the United States and France during the period.

¹⁰ Margaret Leslie Davis, *Mona Lisa in Camelot How Jaqueline Kennedy and Da Vinci's Masterpiece Charmed and Captivated a Nation* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2008), 33; and Herman Lebovics *Mona Lisa's Escort: André Malraux and the Reinvention of French Culture* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), 9.

these stories. Due to these restrictions, the bulk of primary and secondary sources focus on the United States' motivations and expectations for the exhibits.

In addition to the inability to explore French archival documents, few digitized or microfilmed French sources are available. Many scholars benefit from digitized newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Times* (London). When viewing the American reception of these exhibits, I was also able to benefit from them. Unfortunately, there is currently no access to such digitized French newspapers from the 1940s until the early 1960s. Gaining access to microfilmed copies of French newspapers besides *Le Monde* also proved difficult.

Despite the limitations placed on this study, I have tried to make the most of the sources available to me. I hope that this is just the beginning in a long series of studies into how art exhibits were used by the French and American governments as a new kind of diplomacy. My thesis calls for a closer look at how art exhibits were used as a means of cultural diplomacy during the Cold War, but also for scholars to probe the French archives for additional answers to the question, “why art?”

METHOD AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Method

The methodology used for this study is straightforward. I employ primary and secondary documents to tell the story of these art exhibits and their international implications. This transnational diplomatic history examines art in the role of "diplomat."¹¹ While I discuss cultural diplomacy, I do so from a diplomatic and not a cultural approach. Art history concerns the artwork itself, the artists, and why they created certain pieces.¹² Art history also looks broadly at artistic movements.¹³ I approach this history with a wide angled lens, hoping to capture as much information about the exhibits and their surrounding history as I can.

The analysis in this study relies on primary source documents, such as letters and papers from the Smithsonian records of the *Advancing American Art* exhibit, to contemporary newspaper clippings about the *Mona Lisa* and *Whistler's Mother* exhibits. Secondary sources support the remaining material. These sources come from both the areas of history and art history. In order to fill this gap in the historiography of Franco-American relations, art takes center stage. I hope that this fusion between diplomatic/political history and art history will generate more interest about the role art has played in diplomacy during the Cold War.

Like many other diplomatic historians, I consider cultural diplomacy as a subset of public diplomacy.¹⁴ The actual differences between the two are subtle, but for the purposes of this study, the later encompasses more categories, such as printed political materials for the consumption of citizens. Cultural diplomacy is when a government, to influence the thoughts and perceptions held by citizens of another country, directly uses culture. One primary goal of cultural diplomacy is to target the entire population and not just governmental representatives. For this reason, I place it under the category of public diplomacy.

¹¹ For a complete discussion on method and doing transnational history, see Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006). The *Mona Lisa* was given actual diplomatic standing as a person, not a painting.

¹² Margaret Lynne Ausfeld, and Virginia M. Mecklenburg, *Advancing American Art: Politics and Aesthetics in the State Department Exhibition 1946-48* (Montgomery, AL: Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, 1984), 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Belmonte, *Selling the American Way*, 7.

Looking at actual art exhibits, their planning, and the important events surrounding them is in many ways a novel approach to diplomatic history. Few books view art exhibits and not the art itself as a transnational exchange of ideas and culture. Just as important as the type of art sent or its prestige are the countless planning meetings and correspondence between the different parties involved. Viewing these documents was critical to my method.

Historiography

To enhance and emphasize American culture, the United States employed many forms of cultural diplomacy, including music, dance, cinema, and art. In recent years, these areas have gained notice in the historical community for their diplomatic implications. Indeed, in the last twenty years, diplomatic historians have begun to include cultural diplomacy in their studies. The historical literature on this topic is now moderately substantial.

Despite the growing interest in the topic, much of the scholarly literature on the Cold War ignores cultural diplomacy. Books such as Andre Fontaine's *History of the Cold War*, the series of John Gaddis' Cold War histories, and others portray the economic, military, and political struggle of the Cold War without mention of cultural diplomacy.¹⁵ Moreover, these books focus more on the bipolar struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union than on relations between the Western allies. The emphasis is on the traditional aspects of diplomacy and cultural diplomacy is simply absent.

This trend has begun to change in the past twenty years, however, as some scholars began to examine other aspects of American-French relations. Richard Kuisel, for example, analyzes the economic and commercial exchanges between the United States and France during the Cold War. While Kuisel also shows a deep American involvement in France during the period, he overlooks government-controlled exchanges of culture. He emphasizes how the United States influenced daily life and commerce in France following the Second World War, but says little

¹⁵ André Fontaine, *History of the Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Korean War, 1917-1950* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968); and John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), x.

about how the United States also sought to obtain France's endorsement as a cultural leader. Instead, he limits his scope to how the business world influenced French culture.¹⁶

Laura Belmonte, in *Selling the American Way*, explores how the American government used American culture to combat negative foreign perceptions of the United States.¹⁷ She is one of the few authors who expressly studies American art and how the American government used *Advancing American Art* to try to show American high culture to the rest of the world. She places primary emphasis on radio and television through such programs as Radio Free Europe, while also touching on American high culture.¹⁸

Cold War Holidays by Christopher Endy demonstrates the importance of tourism between the United States and France for both the French economy as well as for shaping French perceptions of Americans.¹⁹ The impressions American tourists left on French citizens became stereotypes that American diplomats tried to replace with a positive image of the United States in France. The United States government believed that presenting a positive image was crucial for building a strong alliance and to ensure the continuance of democracy in France, thereby serving American interests in the region.²⁰

The cultural turn has also informed works that deal with the United States' relations with countries other than France. Cultural diplomacy between the United States and the Soviet Union are explored in Peter Carlson's *K Blows Top: A Cold War Comic Interlude Starring Nikita Khrushchev America's Most Unlikely Tourist* and Nicholas Sarantakes' *Dropping the Torch: Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott, and the Cold War*.²¹ *K Blows Top* examines cultural diplomacy and tourism, between the United States and the Soviet Union. It chronicles Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's trip to the United States in 1959 and highlights the U.S.

¹⁶ Richard Kuisel, *Seducing The French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 2.

¹⁷ Belmonte, *Selling the American Way*, 7.

¹⁸ Ibid. Radio Free Europe was an American propaganda radio station that broadcast throughout Europe including behind the Iron Curtain. The mission of this station was to discourage communism from forming in certain countries.

¹⁹ Christopher Endy, *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 2.

²⁰ Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War*, 7.

²¹ Peter Carlson, *K Blows Top: A Cold War Comic Interlude, Starring Nikita Khrushchev, American's Most Unlikely Tourist* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), vii; and Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, *Dropping the Torch: Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott, and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 13.

administration's efforts to portray the United States in a positive light through American culture.²² *Dropping the Torch* shows how both the United States and the Soviet Union used the Olympics to compete on the world stage as one aspect of cultural diplomacy.²³

Penny Von Eschen's *Satchmo Blows up the World* discusses music used as cultural diplomacy during the Cold War.²⁴ This book has a smaller focus than some of the broader books on cultural diplomacy. It investigates how the American State Department used jazz as an ambassador to the world during the Cold War. In addition to changing the ways in which foreigners perceived American culture, it also changed the way they saw racism in America. Showing a predominantly African American cultural expression exposed the depth of American culture.

Alessandro Brogi's *A Question of Self Esteem* examines the role that prestige played in relations between the United States and France until the late 1950s.²⁵ In it, he postulates that Charles de Gaulle, along with other French leaders during that period, used the historical prestige of France as a weapon against the Soviet Union. It is clear in the use of the phrases "civilized" or "uncivilized" to describe each nation.²⁶ This carefully crafted wording was intended to put France's place as a leader of high culture into greater relief.

While current scholarship pays greater attention to cultural diplomacy as a whole, historians often ignore specific examples of art. The postmodern movement in American historiography is responsible for the proliferation of books on culture. Incorporating culture into traditional fields, such as military and diplomatic history, has since become commonplace.²⁷

Current historiographies concerning the events surrounding the 1963 exhibit focus on one of two personalities. The popular history, *Mona Lisa in Camelot*, examines the exhibit as a whole. But due to the brevity of the book, it focuses on the contributions of first lady Jacqueline

²² Carlson, *K Blows Top*, xii.

²³ Sarantakes, *Dropping the Torch*, 13.

²⁴ Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 13.

²⁵ Alessandro Brogi, *A Question of Self-Esteem: The United States and the Cold War Choices in France and Italy, 1944-1958* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 17.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 17.

²⁷ See James M. Banner Jr., *A Century of American Historiography* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010) for more details.

Kennedy, and parts of the story that have the National Gallery at the center.²⁸ This study does not give a full portrayal of the events of the exhibit such as its creation and its time in New York. More visitors viewed the painting in New York than at the National Gallery because it hung there longer.²⁹ *Mona Lisa's Escort*, the other book specifically on the topic, tells the story of the development of the Cultural Ministry, *Mona Lisa* exhibit, and the ministerial career of André Malraux.³⁰ Only the first chapter of the book is devoted to the actual exhibit.

One notable tale of cultural diplomacy during the Cold War, the *Mona Lisa's* voyage to the United States, receives very little attention when compared to other events. The leader of the Soviet Union during the Kennedy administration was Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971). His visit to America in 1959 and the boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games are two episodes historians have often written about.³¹ The two major books on the topic of the *Mona Lisa's* trip are *Mona Lisa in Camelot* by Margaret Leslie Davis and *Mona Lisa's Escort: Andre Malraux and the Reinvention of French Culture* by Herman Levbovics. Davis' book offers a popular account of the exhibit. The center of the book is the role Jacqueline Kennedy played in the *Mona Lisa* exhibit. Lebovics' book focuses on Malraux and his contribution to French culture as France's cultural minister. Both books emphasize individual figures while still telling the story of the exhibit. One central debate between these two books is who conceived of the idea for the *Mona Lisa* to come to the United States. Davis describes Mrs. Kennedy as pushing Malraux to bring the painting. Lebovics attributes the idea to *Washington Times* reporter Edward T. Folliard. Both books provide the same account of events but place either the First Lady or Malraux as being at the center of the story.

One weakness in both works is the failure to show a connection with larger events which coincided with the trip planning stages and the actual trip itself. Two examples of this are the meeting in which Mrs. Kennedy mentions the *Mona Lisa* to Malraux. This mention of *Mona Lisa*

²⁸ Davis, *Mona Lisa in Camelot*, 33.

²⁹ "'Mona Lisa' Opens Run In New York: 'Lady' From France Has Some Not-So-Ladylike Fans". *The New York Times*, New York, N.Y., February 8, 1963.

³⁰ Harvey Levenstein, *We'll Always Have Paris: American Tourists In France Since 1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), xi.

³¹ For additional information on these topics, see Peter Carlson's book *K Blows Top*. Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, *Dropping the Torch: Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott, and the Cold War* (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 13.

occurred during a meeting on important international monetary negotiations. Another example is the American president's speech at the opening of the exhibit when he directly states his opinions on the future of France's nuclear program. This speech and his opinions on it were central to relations between the two countries in 1963. These links are absent from both books, thereby leaving a gap in the diplomatic historiography about the exhibit.

Exploring these gaps or disagreements in the historiography is essential because they hinder our understanding of why the French government wanted to bring the *Mona Lisa* to the United States. Did Malraux or a whim of Jacqueline Kennedy bring the *Mona Lisa* to the United States? This question remains unanswered because evidence from French governmental archives has yet to be brought to light.³²

Many authors have described the contributions of cultural diplomacy generally and specifically as it applies to the art world. Francis Saunders' *The Cultural Cold War: the CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* deals with the contributions of the American government to the development of art in post-1945 Europe.³³ Belmonte's *Selling the American Way* examines the same topic with greater emphasis placed on the part of the U.S. State Department.³⁴ The message of both the books is similar: the U.S. government played a large role in the development of culture both in the United States and abroad. This influence was a deliberate effort on the part of the U.S. government to spread American ideals and thereby help to win the Cold War. An important corollary overlooked by these books is how other countries, particularly American allies, were also trying to spread their ideas and culture.

There is currently only one book on the *Whistler's Mother* exhibit. It is a local history which focuses more on the individuals lost to the plane crash than anything else. In the entire book, there is only one paragraph that mentions anything about French artwork coming to Atlanta and there is no discussion about reception.³⁵ It overlooks connections between the plane crash and international relations. No sort of historical context connects the crash with larger historical themes and events. This greatly limits the value of the book.

³³Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 1.

³⁴ Belmonte, *Selling the American Way*, 7.

³⁵ Abrams, *Explosion At Orly* 204.

AMERICA HAS CULTURE?

In 1947, the U.S. government had serious concerns about the country's international image, worried that the rest of the world saw America as bereft of "high culture." When people of other countries thought of the United States, images of cowboys and Indians sprang to mind, not artists or philosophers. In response, U.S. officials concluded that to prove its all-around superiority and to compete with the Soviet Union, the United States had to become world renowned for the arts. But, in order to do so, it had to obtain the "seal of approval" from France, widely seen as the international gatekeeper of culture and sophistication. Accomplishing this goal would not be easy.

The United States had exited the Second World War in a commanding position. Development of the atomic bomb and a mighty conventional force made it the most militarily powerful country in the world. The American economy had also rebounded from the Great Depression and became the most productive in the world. Voltaire once said that, "with power comes great responsibility."³⁶ The United States embodied Voltaire's assertion, as it became responsible for helping to shape the world economy through the Bretton Woods System, which included the establishment of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the U.S. dollar as one of the two reserve currencies for this new system.³⁷ In addition, American-provided Marshall Plan aid was, according to most scholars, was an essential step in the recovery of Western Europe.³⁸ The United States was also a founding member of the United Nations and a permanent member of its Security Council.

Yet along with this great power and influence came major political challenges. Many people in the rest of the world thought of the United States as a militaristic backwater country, which used force, and not persuasion to advance its ideas. "Militaristic" was a recently-coined negative adjective applied to the United States after its incredible military mobilization in the

³⁶ Voltaire *Œuvres de Voltaire*, Volume 48.

³⁷ For a discussion of how the United States helped to shape the international monetary system, see Francis J. Gavin, *Gold Dollars, & Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations 1958-1971* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 7.

³⁸ Providing a contrary view Alan S. Milward, "Was the Marshall Plan Necessary?," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (April 1989), 231-252.

Second World War.³⁹ Indeed, many in the world feared that for the United States, might made right. Such fears needed to be dispelled if the United States were to win hearts and minds.

Another challenge emanated from some of America's long-time allies. Europeans envisioned the United States as a young country – even in the 20th century-- without the centuries of history needed for great culture and history to emerge. Some American films helped to cement this international opinion of Americans. Hollywood's caricatured depictions of cowboys and Indians, as well as powerful and influential gangsters and country bumpkins, prevailed in the minds many foreigners.⁴⁰ In addition to the exaggerated images created by Hollywood productions and foreigners' condescending views of American culture, another hurdle stood in the way: many Americans' behavior. Christopher Endy depicts the appalling behavior of some Americans abroad.⁴¹ Scenes of alcohol-fueled destruction of property overseas bred more disdain for Americans.⁴² None of these images of Americans held by foreigners meshed with American highbrow culture. Indeed, the foreign critiques of American culture in the years following the Second World War are seemingly endless.

In short, much of the “civilized” world looked down on American culture.⁴³ This image problem would need to be resolved before the country could truly command the role of a “civilized” nation. Touting itself as the heir to ancient Grecian Republic ideals, the United States was in many ways a highly-respected Western civilization -- except in the realm of culture. The White House, the State Department, and the Pentagon recognized this problem and tried to devise ways to resolve it.⁴⁴

Standing in contrast to this negative cultural appraisal of American culture was Paris. For hundreds of years, Paris was the cultural capital of the world. Other major cities, such as Berlin, Prague, London, New York, and Vienna, were centers of culture, but none rivaled the

³⁹ Endy, *Cold War Holidays*, 2.

⁴⁰ Whitney Walton, *Internationalism, National Identities, and Study Abroad: France and the United States, 1890-1970* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 71.

⁴¹ Endy, *Cold War Holidays*, 2. For an account of the “collateral damage” the allies inflicted on Europe, see William I. Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom : A New History of the Liberation of Europe* (New York: The Free Press/Simon and Schuster, 2008).

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ “Civilized” world refers to Western Europe.

⁴⁴ For more information about strategies for changing the perceptions, see Bellmonte who discusses the topic at length in her book.

allure of Paris. Art in particular captured the essence of high culture in France, which wore it as a badge of honor. Not only did France prize the artists of her past, but also current artists who were the pioneers of new techniques and styles. Paris' status the world's cultural capital seemed secure.

Yet this status would soon slip away, as the allure of the City of Lights could not prevent a wartime cultural exodus. During the Second World War, many artists worldwide left for New York and transformed it, by war's conclusion, into the new capital of the cultural world. Though notable exceptions, like Pablo Picasso, continued to paint in France during the war, the vast majority of successful and moneyed French artists fled to New York.⁴⁵ Despite the great cultural appeal of Paris, safety took precedence in the minds of many artists.

Artists who escaped to the United States brought with them their knowledge and expertise in modern art. Once arrived, they forged ties with American artists, thereby creating a larger and more renowned American-centered artistic community. With their European counterparts largely unable to continue their artistic endeavors, American artists flourished throughout the war.⁴⁶

By the end of the war, New York had supplanted Paris as capital of the art world.⁴⁷ This newfound supremacy in the art world encouraged the United States to prove to the French that the country as a whole also had a thriving culture. France in particular was targeted because it was the cultural gatekeeper. Recognition from the French in cultural matters was the official seal of approval for the rest of the world. Impressing France by showing great artistic talent and appreciation of art would greatly aid the overall American goal of showing the world that American culture was of the highest order, which was an important step in winning the Cold War.

The United States had never before been viewed by the rest of the world as a center of culture, particularly in the realm of great art. An official who would later be charged with the

⁴⁵ For more information on Picasso's war years, see Amy L. Drewel, "Picasso in World War II: The Man Not the Myth," unpublished paper, 2011.

⁴⁶ Notable exceptions are artists who chose to produce artwork that was pleasing to the German government thereby shielding them from official harassment.

⁴⁷ Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 3.

Advancing American Art exhibit remarked in a letter to a gentleman opposing the exhibit, “I think your impression that American art is not taken too seriously abroad is correct.”⁴⁸ Created solely to alter that impression and influence a more respected view of America as a whole, the State Department sent the *Advancing American Art* abroad.

Following the Second World War, both France and the United States adapted to their new roles in both political and artistic arenas. The United States militarily, politically, and artistically held the spotlight. But even with this new authority, some European nations looked down on the United States due to its short history and its apparent lack of "high culture." The United States approached these areas of concern with a head-on approach through cultural diplomacy as early as 1946.

⁴⁸ “Mr. Loy W. Henderson to Richard H. Heidel,” November 22, 1948, Documents 441.-442, *Advancing American Art* records, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

ADVANCING AMERICAN ART

Planning the Exhibit

The year 1946 is important in understanding the origins of the Cold War. In the beginning of the year, the American diplomat George F. Kennan composed the "Long Telegram," a document that would set the course for U.S. strategy for much of the Cold War.⁴⁹ Also in early 1946, Winston Churchill gave his famous Iron Curtain speech in which he christened the divide between the West and the East.⁵⁰ Tensions between the East and West were slowly ratcheting up during this period. It was in this climate of escalating tensions that the story behind the *Advancing American Art* begins.

The spring of 1946 witnessed a slow demilitarization of the American way of life. The Second World War was over and veterans were able to return home to their families and friends. There was no longer a need for Victory Gardens and women slowly left the temporary jobs they held during the war, giving way for the influx of newly unemployed soldiers. In Europe, the rebuilding efforts were under way, as the war-torn countries began the slow process of reestablishing some measure of stability. Both sides of the Atlantic had their work cut out for them.

Also during the war, the United States came to the forefront of the cultural world. New York replaced the historic European capitals of London, Berlin, Paris, and Prague as many artists fled the war in Europe.⁵¹ For many Europeans in particular, this development was surprising. Prior to the war, America was viewed by Europe as a consumer-driven and often militaristic society, not one which enjoyed culture and sophistication. The United States, for its part, tried to dispel that view and thus invested large sums of money in creating artwork, particularly artwork that furthered the country's political message. Anti-Hitler and anti-communist works were well subsidized. Many artists from Europe fled to the United States and particularly to New York

⁴⁹ Ernest R. May, ed. *American Cold War Strategy: Interpreting NSC '68* (Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 1993). and U.S. Department of State, "The Charge in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State," February 22, 1946, *Foreign Relations of the United States* [hereafter FRUS] 1946, vol. 6 (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 19) 695-709.

⁵⁰ Winston Churchill, "Iron Curtain" Speech. Fulton Missouri March 5, 1946. See Fraser Harbutt, *The Iron Curtain: Churchill, America and the Origins of the Cold War* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁵¹ Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, 3.

City during the war.⁵² By war's end, New York was the home to the newest forms of art, including modern art such as abstract expressionism.⁵³ The United States' diplomatic efforts in the late 1940s and early 1950s centered on promoting a positive image of a benevolent and refined America, which was adamantly opposed to communism. One exhibition of art, *Advancing American Art*, placed those two values at odds.

During the spring of 1947, the promulgation of the Truman Doctrine both reflected and increased Cold War tensions.⁵⁴ General George C. Marshall was appointed secretary of state at the beginning of 1947, and it would be on his watch that the State Department's venture into the art world would come into conflict with goals of some American politicians. In June 1947, Gen. Marshall announced the Marshall Plan, an aid package intended to stimulate the European economy and help the continent rebuild from the war.⁵⁵ In the fall of that same year, the House of Representative's Sub-Committee on Un-American Activities began its investigation of the film industry. Here the issue was not so much the subjects of the films as it was the political affiliations of particular individuals associated with the film industry. While the content of the films was studied, the true intent of the hearings was to seek out these who had allegedly participated in the American Communist party and publically punish them.⁵⁶

With conflict about communism brewing both at home and abroad, the American government saw it as imperative to change the world's impression of American culture. A division within the State Department developed a program in 1946 that purchased American modernist art and assembled it into an exhibit.⁵⁷ Artists represented in the exhibit included the celebrated American artist Georgia O'Keeffe.⁵⁸ The goal of the *Advancing American Art* exhibit was to alter the world's perception of American culture and American art.⁵⁹ According to Michael Krenn, the intent of the exhibit was obvious: "From such exhibition, the foreign

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ See John Lewis Gaddis, "Was the Truman Doctrine a Real Turning Point?," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (January 1974), 386-402.

⁵⁵ George C. Marshall, "Marshall Plan" Speech. Harvard University, June 5, 1963.

⁵⁶ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, x.

⁵⁷ The office within the State Department was disbanded immediately following the exhibit.

⁵⁸ Others included Ben Shahn, Irene Rice Pereira, Mitchell Siporin, Nahum Tschacbasov, Werner Drewes, etc.

⁵⁹ For additional information about the goals of the exhibit, see the exhibit papers located currently in the Smithsonian Institution.

audience would learn that America was not simply a leading economic and military power but was also assuming a commanding position in the field of culture.”⁶⁰

This goal of the altering the world's perception of American art came to fruition before the exhibit had scarcely left the United States. According to its own internal documents, the State Department noted the success of the exhibit in France.⁶¹ “The French art weekly, *Arts* in its issue of November 22, 1946, which discussed the exhibition, stated that the United States and England by concentrating their efforts on singling out the most recent trends, had been enabled ‘to give to their paintings vigorous aspect, which has changed the summary idea that had been generally held’ that American and British art were without progressive force.”⁶² Here, both the United States and Britain received compliments for their excellence in the art world. As stated above, the French author of this piece did not believe either country possessed a distinct high culture, but that viewpoint shifted due to recent art shows held by both countries.⁶³ The article noted favorably the use of the new style of artwork by the Americans. This one example shows the progression from just emulating an art form originating in another country versus honing a style and making it a unique specialty.

The U.S. State Department wanted people throughout the world to have a favorable impression of the United States, especially in the creative realm. According to its own statement of purpose, “Within the Department of State’s broad program of international information and cultural relations, aimed at producing a better understanding in foreign countries of American thought in all its aspects, whether politics, science, education, literature, music, art, or scholarship, the exhibition of American works of art constitutes a small but important activity.”⁶⁴ Thus, art fit into this purpose. This same objective led to the establishment of lending libraries throughout the world.⁶⁵ These libraries would, in the subsequent years, become the center of censorship debates held by Senator Joseph McCarthy(Rep.-Wisconsin).⁶⁶ The intention was that artwork from *Advancing American Art* would decorate these libraries and embassies upon

⁶⁰ Michael L. Krenn, *Fall-Out Shelters for the Human Spirit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2005) 29.

⁶¹ Memorandum On Art Program of the Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs Department of State, February 16, 1947, Document 453-456 Smithsonian Archives.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Belmonte, *Selling the American Way*, 7.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

completion of the exhibit so that the art could continue to show the United States in a favorable light.

As noted above, documents like the Long Telegram, sentiments like the heightening of Anti-Communist feeling in the United States, and initiatives like the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan provided the origins for the Cold War. *Advancing American Art* took place in the middle of these important events, thus one of the main goals of the exhibit was a product of this environment. As Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs William Benton explained in April 1947, “Exhibitions of this kind also make an impact among Communists overseas because they illustrate the freedom with which and in which our American artists work.”⁶⁷

He reiterated an earlier State Department statement on *Advancing American Art* that declared, “Only in a democracy where the full development of the individual is not only permitted but fostered could such an exhibition be assembled.”⁶⁸ The concept that freedom existed in the United States in such a large abundance that art could thrive seems alien to the circumstances surrounding the end of the exhibit and beginning of the McCarthy era, but that was an intended purpose for the show. The United States saw that showing the world that it was a society that was militarily, politicallly, economically, and culturally developed was vital to combating the Soviet Union and the Communist threat. These objectives, however, were impeded by individuals with conflicting agendas such as the hearst media empire, which sought to sell papers and place their political agenda above the art exhibit.⁶⁹

American Art on Display

The first stop outside of the United States for the art was France, traditional home to world culture. For the artists and creators of the exhibit, France was home to what was widely considered the most sophisticated, and hence most demanding, audience. Again, Krenn notes, “The larger, with the addition of a group of 35 American watercolors, was sent to Paris in response to a cable from the American delegation to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) requesting that the paintings be made available for the

⁶⁷ Krenn, *Fall-Out Shelters for the Human Spirit*, 4.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ The Hearst media empire sat at the center of the negative publicity over the art exhibit. These papers tried to use negative publicity for the exhibit as a platform to launch their conservative candidate for congress.

international exhibition of art held in Paris during UNESCO month, November 1946.”⁷⁰ State Department officials hoped that the exhibit would begin on a high note with a welcoming reception from the French public.

Once in France, the exhibit did, in fact, flourish. Art magazines from around the world acclaimed the exhibit.⁷¹ The State Department received requests for the exhibit to come to most countries on the map. But despite this enthusiastic reception, troubles for the exhibit lay ahead. Back in the United States, the Hearst news media industry began pressuring congressional representatives to put an end to the exhibit.⁷² President Harry Truman even became involved in the affair. Truman held traditional views on art and had especially no love for modern art, and he made these feelings known.⁷³ In addition, the beginning of the Cold War prompted his concerns over artists’ potential ties to international communist parties. Once the Hearst Corporation caught the attention of legislators, it marked the end for the exhibit. *Advancing American Art* returned to the United States in disgrace. Legislators and the American public found the exhibit unseemly in both style and content. Such paintings as *Circus Girl Resting*, the only semi-nude in the group, angered a conservative public whose sense of propriety did not allow for such paintings.⁷⁴ Acclaim abroad did not translate into esteem at home.

Art Returned

Advancing American Art drowned in a storm of congressional and popular criticism. State Department employees who worked on the project soon found themselves out of jobs.⁷⁵ Congressional representatives slashed the budget for art, deciding that the American government should leave artistic ventures to non-government entities. Despite the intense criticism that ended the exhibit, many Americans wanted to express their support for it. In the letter that would fire the head of *Advancing American Art*, the author made clear that “The exhibitions have been well received abroad. For example, the *Art News* selected the Department’s exhibitions as

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Richard Heindel to LeRoy Davidson,” April 1, 1947, Document 469, *Advancing American Art* records Smithsonian Institution.

⁷² Littleton and Sykes, *Advancing American Art*, 19-56.

⁷³ Maurice Winograd, “Truman on Art” *The New York Times*, November 2, 1952.

⁷⁴ Littleton and Sykes, *Advancing American Art*, 56-66.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

the most significant modern show of the year.”⁷⁶ A man from Minnesota felt the need to write in and express his view: “I think the State Department should feel Proud of these exhibitions.”⁷⁷ A handwritten piece of paper attached to one of the letters simply states, “This is but one of many indications of support on the Art program.”⁷⁸ Thus, while not all of the treatment of the exhibit was negative, the vast majority was indeed critical.

The United States government and the Hearst media empire both took negative stances on the exhibit. Their view prompted the historian Laura Belmonte to write that, “The similarity between this position and Nazi and Soviet attacks on “degenerate” art obviously eluded the critics of ‘*Advancing American Art*.’”⁷⁹ The *New York Journal* was the major mouthpiece for the Hearst conglomerate, headed by William Randolph Hearst, in 1947. Based in New York, this newspaper, which had a wide circulation, was one of many newspapers throughout the country owned by the media mogul. Hearst’s plan for this story was to create public anxiety and thereby help the careers of Republican politicians who were running for office the next year. In addition to the newspaper coverage, Hearst also wrote to specific congressional representatives and encouraged them to take action against the State Department. A letter written by a group of concerned veterans from Nevada, highlights the role of the Hearst Corporation. The group stated, “Even as William Randolph Hearst enjoys freedom of the press, we expect freedom of expression in the field of art.”⁸⁰

These concerned citizens were not worried about the cost of the art or the government becoming involved with art exhibits. Their main concern was that the State Department had buckled under pressure from Hearst and other conservatives. The letter goes on to say, “The Hearstian diatribes against modern art are only too reminiscent of similar attacks by Hitler. It is with shame and anger that we witness the retreat of the State Department before the press attacks

⁷⁶ “Richard Heindel to LeRoy Davidson,” April 1, 1947, Document 469, *Advancing American Art* records, Smithsonian Institution.

⁷⁷ “Syd Foossum to George Marshall,” May 27, 1947, Document 486, *Advancing American Art* records, Smithsonian Institution.

⁷⁸ “Richard Heindel to Robert McBride,” April 16, 1947, Document 472, *Advancing American Art* records, Smithsonian Institution.

⁷⁹ Belmonte, *Selling the American Way*, 7.

⁸⁰ “The American Veterans Committee Chapter 558 to George Marshall,” June 3, 1947, Document 484, *Advancing American Art* records, Smithsonian Institution.

of Hearst by withdrawing the State Department Traveling Exhibit of American Art.”⁸¹ The group of veterans even made a suggestion as to what the State Department should do to rectify the situation. They wished to convey to the State Department that they “...Vigorously protest the act of the State Department in cancelling the tour of the Traveling Exhibition, and request that the Exhibition again be placed on tour to acquaint the other countries of the world with the progress of art and democracy in art in the United States.”⁸²

Here again there is an undercurrent of the battle against Communism, but also a reminder about the war against Germany during the war two years before. With other groups ready to condemn the exhibit as being un-American, this group of veterans stood up to the State Department and the Hearst newspapers to state that the un-American act of the exhibit was the choice to end its tour. This opinion was rare when compared to the screaming newspaper headlines, editorials, and letters of criticism received by the State Department. In the domestic battle of ideas, anti-communism seemingly triumphed over freedom of ideas.

Newspapers were not the only institution to savage the exhibit. An official government investigation occurred after public pressure. According to Littleton and Sykes “The first stage in that scrutiny began early in March at the hearings of the subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations charged with reviewing the State Department’s budget proposals for 1948.”⁸³ The committee concluded that the expenditures on *Advancing American Art* were irresponsible and therefore needed swift action. As a disciplinary action, the State Department received a budget cut partly as retaliation for the exhibit.

Another condemnation of the exhibit took place even before *Advancing American Art* went overseas. John Taber, Chairman of the Committee on Appropriations, thought it prudent to write a letter to Secretary of State Marshall about the exhibit. In it, he stated, “It is to my impression that American art is not taken too seriously abroad. It is also my brief that American art is under-estimated abroad. The dispatch to foreign countries, under the auspices of the State

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Littleton and Sykes, *Advancing American Art*, 19-56.

Department of whimsies and oddities and inferior paintings could lower the prestige of American culture considerably.”⁸⁴

This letter was one of many. Another letter, received by Mr. Richard Heindel, of the Division of Libraries and Institutes within the State Department, stated that, “I am deeply interested in your work and anxious that the world will not get the idea from State Department exhibitions that our art is just as jazzy and slapstick as the type of American music best known abroad.”⁸⁵ At heart of these criticisms was the belief that modern art is unrefined at best and crude at worst, and thus it would reflect a poor image of America to the rest of the world.

One source dissatisfied with the style and content of the exhibit opined that, “The paintings are a travesty upon art.”⁸⁶ A vaguely threatening letter sent to Secretary of State Marshall remarked that “It would seem to me that it was about time that the anti-Culture Relations program of the State Department should be put to an end, and I wonder if that may be accomplished by action of the Department or if a rescission bill is necessary?”⁸⁷ The author of the letter was a congressional representative, which gave his warning more weight, as the House of Representatives controlled the budget for the United States government, including the State Department. Control of the purse strings thus gave the House of Representatives considerable leverage over White House policy, which critics of modern art in that body could use to get their way.

The coup de grâce for LeRoy Davidson, the man in charge of the exhibit, came in the form of the letter firing him. In it, his boss, Mr. Heindel, delivered the bad news: “I regret to inform you that I have orders to abolish the position of Visual Arts Specialist in the Division of Libraries and Institutes, held by you, effective April 30, 1947, and to accept your resignation, which I understand you have offered orally on several occasions if it would benefit the

⁸⁴ “Mr. Heindel to Mr. Henderson,” November 5, 1946, Document 438, *Advancing American Art* records, Smithsonian Institution.

⁸⁵ “Mr. Henderson to Mr. Heindel,” December 2, 1946. Document 443, *Advancing American Art* records, Smithsonian Institution.

⁸⁶ “John Taber to George Marshall,” February 4, 1947, Document 444, *Advancing American Art* records, Smithsonian Institution.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Department's cultural program, to take effect April 30, 1947."⁸⁸ Continuing in the letter, Heindel describes the fate of the department within the State Department by predicting, "Without this position it is difficult to see how the Division can perform anything but activities looking to the liquidation of the Art Program."⁸⁹

This prediction proved to be the case. Even though the tone of the letter was one of melancholy, sprinkled throughout were compliments such as, "However, my colleagues and I are proud of the work you have done."⁹⁰ Finally, he discussed the goals for the exhibit with a short statement on the accomplishments of *Advancing American Art*. He wrote that "You may recall with pleasure such varied things as the 1945 award to the Department 'for the most significant modern Exhibition' by Art News, and the commendation of the Magazine of Art for the work done by the Department in connection with industry in extending the public relations level for American painting to include the entire world."⁹¹ While ordered to fire LeRoy, Heindel thought that the exhibit still exuded positive public relations to France in spite of its recall.

Indeed, *Advancing American Art* had received critical acclaim from the art world for American artists and raised the prestige of the American artist around the world. In addition to this accomplishment, the exhibit had also improved the public perception of the United States in the areas in which the exhibit visited before its recall. While these goals were met on only a small scale due to the exhibit being brought back to the United States, the recognition for these small accomplishments became one of the greatest rewards for those working on the exhibit.⁹²

Although *Advancing American Art* suffered greatly from political and artistic criticism, it did have a positive effect on the way in which American art was received abroad. After this governmental attempt at sending art exhibits overseas failed, it was decided under pressure from specific congressmen, the American public, the president, and some within the State Department that the U.S. government would no longer directly try to purchase or ship American art to other countries for display. Instead, private entities would send exhibits but the government was

⁸⁸ "Richard Heindel to LeRoy Davidson," April 1, 1947, Document 469, *Advancing American Art* records Smithsonian Institution.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² For more information on *Advancing American Art* see Amy Drewel's unpublished work entitled "*Advancing American Art*." Today the exhibit is known to be one of the primary examples of American art censorship.

entirely out of that business.⁹³ But while American art was no longer being sent overseas for exhibits by the American government, other countries were sending their art to the United States. That practice was mutually beneficial, as it showed the accomplishments of other countries and that the United States could appreciate art. The American government happily played the role of host for art such as *Whistler's Mother* and *Mona Lisa*.

America's art goals were first to show its appreciation of French art and second to impress the French with the talent of American artists. The spotlight shifted to American gentry and wealthy classes, who were knowledgeable about art, history, and culture. *Advancing American Art* would be the last overtly funded art exchange taking American art overseas. Instead, covert actions would send American art abroad for foreign view. In the later years of the Cold War, modern art became a way the United States could contrast American freedom of expression with the Soviet's rigid socialist realism style of art. The Soviet style, with its utilitarian and constrained appearance, became the perfect foil for the American abstract expressionism, whose emphasis is on emotions and concepts. The State Department no longer funded exchanges showing these differences; instead, the CIA would covertly influence the creation and appreciation of this art.⁹⁴

⁹³ The American government did continue to finance art exhibits but it did so in covert ways. See Saunders *The Cultural Cold War*.

⁹⁴ More information on the role of the CIA, its support and manipulation of modern art, and the exhibits between Soviet and American style art can be found *ibid*.

FRANCE'S FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC FRUSTRATIONS

Following the Second World War, France faced many important challenges, both foreign and domestic. Among these military, economic, and political challenges that abounded immediately after the end of the war were that of national reconstruction, countering the effects of "Americanization" on French culture, and calming unrest in the French Union, France's colonial empire.⁹⁵ These internal issues directly influenced French foreign policy and particularly its relations with the United States.

The Second World War left France severely scarred militarily, economically, and physically. The rapid fall of France in June 1940 and the subsequent advent of the Vichy puppet government drove down national morale. After the end of the war, large sections of France were without adequate housing, electricity, and food.⁹⁶ Rebuilding efforts were at the forefront of the plan to get France back up and running. Another concern for France was the demise of many of its industries during the war.⁹⁷ The German invasion hobbled French manufacturing and agriculture and took years to regain pre-war numbers.

Tourism was always a large industry in France and once the rebuilding and clean up began, tourism resumed.⁹⁸ The French government recognized the vital role tourism money would play in rebuilding the nation.⁹⁹ To accommodate tourists, cultural and sightseeing sites were some of the first locations restored. Also rapidly restored were hotels and restaurants.¹⁰⁰ So that visitors to the country would not be inconvenienced by the food shortage, France enacted a plan of food vouchers, which ensured that foreign diners would not be left hungry.¹⁰¹ Tourists eating steak dinners was a source of resentment among many French men and women, however, as food rationing lasted into the 1950s.¹⁰²

⁹⁵ Irwin Wall, *The United States and the Making of Postwar France 1945-1954* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 5.

⁹⁶ Endy, *Cold War Holidays*, 2.

⁹⁷ Donald and Petie Klandstrup, *Wine and War: The French, the Nazis, and the Battle for France's Greatest Treasure* (New York: Broadway, 2002), 4.

⁹⁸ Endy, *Cold War Holidays*, 2.

⁹⁹ For figures see Endy, *Cold War Holidays*.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Another major blow to French morale was the loss of French colonies. Rebellion in Indochina led to fighting starting soon after the end of the Second World War. The First Indochina War (1946-1954) consumed additional resources France desperately needed for rebuilding domestically.¹⁰³ Beginning in the mid-1950s, conflict in Algeria brought to light more problems for France.¹⁰⁴ Reluctant to let go of its colonies even in the face of international disapproval, France faced difficult diplomatic decisions before eventually conceding to Algerian independence in 1962.¹⁰⁵

Political instability posed another problem for France, as it had plagued the French government since the fall of the monarchy at the end of the 1700's. This instability continued in the post-war period.¹⁰⁶ Even as rebuilding efforts continued, other nations viewed France as extremist and unstable. This negative perception did nothing to advance its foreign policy agenda.

The 1960s were a period of conflict in diplomatic relations between the United States and France. A series of disputes strained relations between the two countries. They often adopted “beggar thy neighbor” economic policies, which were intended to help their own country, but at the expense of the other.¹⁰⁷ Though the intended purpose of American post-war strategy toward France was to help French interests, the result was pain for the French economy.¹⁰⁸

Marshall Plan money, tourism, and American business ventures led the French to resent the United States' influence on their country. One notable area of resentment for France centered on American industries such as Coca Cola, which began to compete with local businesses.¹⁰⁹ Protests against Coke came in response to both the feeling of colonization between the French and to the disruption of a native industry.¹¹⁰ At dinner, it was traditional for

¹⁰³ Irwin Wall, *France, The United States, and the Algerian War* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 4.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ William J. Shirer, *The Collapse of the Third Republic: An Inquiry into the Fall of France in 1940* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1969), 2.

¹⁰⁷ Dietmar Rothermund, *The Global Impact of the Great Depression 1929-1939* (New York: Routledge, 1996). This book employs the beggar thy neighbor concept in the context of the Great Depression. It is also applicable to the Cold War as well.

¹⁰⁸ Endy, *Cold War Holidays*, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

French people to order wine. When people began to order Coke instead, it brought down French wine sales.¹¹¹ Industries that had suffered losses from the war was not about to suffer more losses at the hands of American industry. According to *Wine and War*, "wine is not just a beverage or commercial product to be poured from a bottle. It is much more than that. Like the flag...it goes to the country's heart and soul."¹¹² The American-made product did not do that.¹¹³

The French Communist Party (PCF) also complicated American-French relations. Since the end of the monarchy, the political spectrum in France had vastly widened. During the Second World War, the communists had fought valiantly for the French Resistance, earning them great gratitude from France. Because of their wartime heroics, the PCF made a significant mark on postwar politics, giving France the second largest Communist party in Western Europe.¹¹⁴ In light of the PCF's political strength and the severe winter that hit Europe in 1947, the American government worried of a communist overthrow or continued growth and spread of communism outside of France. The existence of a strong communist party in France influenced the ways in which the United States government dealt with the country because keeping France from becoming communist was one of America's top priorities when dealing with the French, thus giving away a bargaining chip.¹¹⁵

Charles de Gaulle headed one of the two French governments in exile during the Second World War. Proud, determined, and nationalistic, de Gaulle came out of the Second World War

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Guilbaut, *New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, 10.

¹¹³ It should be noted how often news stories about the United States and American diplomats made the newspapers in France. The main French newspaper *Le Monde* often ran stories such as: "Des Bombardiers Britanniques Auraient Perce en Septembre les Défenses Américaines." *Le Monde*, January 8, 1963; "Incendie à L'Empire State Building," *Le Monde*, January 10, 1963; "La Force de Frappe Atlantique: La France Pourrait Expérimenter d'Ici A 1965 une Bombe H dans l'Arcguoek des Gambier," *Le Monde*, January 10, 1963; "La Force De Frappe Occidentale, Washington Attend De L'Europe Qu'elle Surmonte Don 'Particularisme,'" *Le Monde*, January 2, 1963; "La Rentrée Parlementaire aux Etats-Unis: M. Kennedy A Gagne la Première Bataille," *Le Monde*, January 11, 1963; "La Réponse du General de Gaulle A l'Offre de Polaris Laisse la Porte Ouverte A des Discussions Ultérieures." *Le Monde*, January 4, 1963; "Le Chef de l'Etat Recevra Vendredi l'Ambassadeur des Etats-Unis," *Le Monde*, January 4, 1963; "Le Président Kennedy Est Décide A Diriger l'Alliance Occidentale Sans Trop s'Occuper des Objections Eventuelles des Allies," *Le Monde*, January 3, 1963; and "Les Restaurateurs Vont Bénéficier des Mêmes Facilités Fiscales Que les Hôteliers," *Le Monde*, January 8, 1963. These are just a few examples of news stories in the days around the Mona Lisa exhibit discussing Americans or American issues. This is unusual because there are almost as many articles concerning the Americans as about domestic issues in *Le Monde*.

¹¹⁴ Wall, *The United States and the Making of the Postwar France*, 4.

¹¹⁵ The strategy of containment attempted to prevent the spread of Soviet power and influence outside the borders of the USSR. Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*.

with precise ideas of the position France should hold internationally. After the quick and demoralizing defeat in June 1940, France lost considerable international stature. While France ended the war as one of the victorious allies and later became a founding member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949, France did not have the same level of influence as it had before the war.¹¹⁶ The loss of its colonies further eroded France's image as a world power. For hundreds of years, the world viewed Paris as the cultural capital of the world.¹¹⁷ Other cities such as Prague, London, and New York held important cultural elements but none rivaled the allure of Paris. During the war, many French artists had left for New York, and by the war's conclusion, New York was the new capital of the cultural world.¹¹⁸ In response to this changed international climate, de Gaulle wanted France to regain its stature through military, political and cultural strength. Yet these goals often clashed with the United States goals for Western Europe.

While de Gaulle became France's provisional president after the war, he soon resigned over the issue of power sharing.¹¹⁹ After years on the political sidelines, he returned to power once more in 1958 in order to deal with the Algerian War. By the 1960s, de Gaulle was tired of what he saw as America's condescending attitude toward his country.¹²⁰ The French appreciated American aid in both world wars, but it also placed the French nation in the position of dependent. France needed to show resilience and independence; something it could not do when acting constantly in favor of American interests. De Gaulle was figuratively combative with the American government both during the war and after.

The Bretton Woods system was one area in particular where the United States and France held conflicting views.¹²¹ De Gaulle believed the system worked in the favor of the Americans and often pointed this out. With the U.S. dollar being one of the two reserve currencies of the system, the Americans had the advantage of being easily able to buy goods from other countries

¹¹⁶ Following the war, the British were exerting more control over Europe. Before the power was divided between France, Germany, and Great Britain, but after, the latter had more power. P.M.H. Bell, *France and Britain 1940-1994: the Long Separation* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 1997).

¹¹⁷ Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, 5.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ He wanted a strong executive in the new system. Instead, more power was granted to the legislature.

¹²⁰ U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, 1961-1963 Vol XIII Western Europe and Canada* (Washington DC: USGPO), 249.

¹²¹ Francis J. Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, & Power The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958-1971* (Chapel Hill NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 7.

but then pressuring these same countries not to exchange the dollars for gold.¹²² One potential flaw in this system is that the United States did not have enough gold to cover all its creditors were they to cash in their dollars.¹²³ Under the presidency of de Gaulle, France frequently threatened the Americans by threatening to cash in its dollars for gold and effectively creating a run on the bank.¹²⁴

As mentioned earlier, the issue of Algerian independence also held great importance for relations with the Americans. Like other Western countries, the United States was encountering tensions with Middle Eastern and African nations because of its close ties to France. Other nations thought that France should grant Algeria independence.¹²⁵ They saw the continuation of the war to be pointless, believing that it would only increase instability in the region and deplete French resources, which France could be devoting to NATO. In the end, it was pressure from the United States that led France to give Algeria its independence.¹²⁶

Another frequent concern for both France and the United States was the French nuclear weapons program. The French began work on a nuclear program immediately after the Second World War, as some of the scientists who worked on the American and British project were French.¹²⁷ By 1960, France obtained atomic weapons.¹²⁸ While this guaranteed international standing for France, it worried the United States.¹²⁹ Though France was still rebuilding from the war, it did have nuclear weapons, ensuring the country global attention and influence.

The Americans feared a third major nuclear power because they would not have control over it.¹³⁰ While a French nuclear arsenal would add another nuclear power to the Western alliance, the Americans were concerned the two countries might be unable to coordinate when and under what conditions a nuclear weapon would be used. President John Kennedy saw that it would be difficult for the Western nations to present a strong united front toward the Soviet

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Wall, *France, The United States, and the Algerian War*, 4.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Gabrielle Hacht, *The Radiance of France: Nuclear Power and National Identity after World War II* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1983), 5.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Union if there were two nuclear powers attempting to implement contradictory policies.¹³¹ For this reason, the Americans preferred the United States to be the sole Western nuclear power. The French representative, however, stated that France would be open to a “convergence with the U.S. in military and economic affairs—with probably some formula of association.”¹³² In short, the French assured Washington that they would proceed in their goal of establishing a French nuclear weapons program, but after its development they would closely ally with the United States and default to the American’s decision of when or if to use it.¹³³

Despite this assurance, French nuclear weapons remained a concern for the United States. In May of 1962, a meeting between President Kennedy and French Minister of Culture André Malraux occurred on the heels of a French nuclear accident.¹³⁴ During a French nuclear test conducted in the Sahara Desert, a seal failed and irradiated more than one hundred bystanders.¹³⁵ The accident led to lengthy debates between the Kennedy and Malraux concerning the French nuclear program.¹³⁶

Important meetings between the French and Americans also occurred during the Cuban Missile Crisis. November 1962 was a difficult time in American relations with the Soviet Union and Cuba. The Cuban Missile Crisis had tested the United States’ resolve, but the Americans did not blink.¹³⁷ Seen as a victory for the Western nations, the French were eager to congratulate the American president.¹³⁸ In a meeting between de Gaulle and the American secretary of state in December 1962, the Frenchman said, “The successful outcome had been result of President’s ‘firmness and lucidity.’”¹³⁹ As the meeting continued, “De Gaulle said he did not know how things now stand but essential objective had been reached of withdrawal missiles and bombers.”¹⁴⁰ He then insinuated that, “if world war had resulted, France would have been at the

¹³¹ *FRUS*, 1962. Vol. XIII, 249.

¹³² *FRUS*, 1962 Vol. XIII, 261.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ The meeting was held on May 11, 1962, the accident occurred on May 1, 1962.

¹³⁵ Hacht, *The Radiance of France*, 7.

¹³⁶ *FRUS*, 1962. Vol. XIII 249.

¹³⁷ This is the popular interpretation of the events. The truth behind them has always been up for debate. Some place weight on the Soviet restraint and the Americans willingness to concede the missiles in Turkey.

¹³⁸ *FRUS*, 1962. Vol. XIII, 261.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

side of the United States.”¹⁴¹ While this meeting was characterized as “friendly, if not cordial,” not all meetings in the following few months would enjoy the same tone.¹⁴²

During this time of extensive concern for the place of France in the world community, France's domestic concerns and East-West Cold War tensions, cultural diplomacy may seem to some as only a minor element in the larger international drama. However, cultural diplomacy was at the center of these relations more often than scholars give it credit. Art might seem initially like an odd choice to become a virtual ambassador for France to the United States during a period full of conflict; but it appeared to be just the solution. De Gaulle accorded the arts as a high priority. In 1962, he named Malraux as the minister of culture.¹⁴³

Malraux, a long time close friend and trusted advisor to de Gaulle, embraced the job. He made many large plans for the promotion of culture throughout France.¹⁴⁴ While his job consisted of seeing to domestic cultural concerns, de Gaulle often sent Malraux on diplomatic meetings and asked him to carry out high priority tasks.¹⁴⁵ In failing health by 1962, de Gaulle wanted to have a friend he could trust in high-level meetings as opposed to others who held diplomatic titles, but little loyalty to the French head of state.¹⁴⁶

In addition to the concern placed on culture due to de Gaulle's friendship with the minister of culture, there was also a priority placed on regaining France's position as a world-renowned cultural icon.¹⁴⁷ Promoting French culture would be an important way to increase tourism to the Hexagon, but it would also augment France's international prestige. While the country was losing its position as a world power, it was trying to distinguish itself as a regional leader in continental Europe.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, France saw itself at the forefront of efforts to unify Europe economically and politically.¹⁴⁹ Once again, becoming the center of world culture would

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Lebovics, *Mona Lisa's Escort*, 9.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, 4.

¹⁴⁸ Wall, *The United States and the Making of the Postwar France, 1945-1954*, 5.

¹⁴⁹ See Jeffrey Glenn Giauque, *Grand Designs and Visions of Unity: The Atlantic Powers and the Reorganization of Western Europe, 1955-1963* (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2001); and Aurélie Éliisa Gfeller, *Building a European Identity: France, the United States, and the Oil Shock, 1973-74* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012).

do much to help achieve this goal. The most famous area of the arts held by France before the war had been in art. Paintings in particular became a natural cultural ambassador and symbol for the French nation to the world, and particularly to the United States.

The post-war period was an uncertain time for France. Rebuilding and attempts to regain a position of prominence in the international community led to both internal turmoil and clashes with the United States over diplomatic matters. At the center of these tense relations begins two stories of art exhibits. The French intended to show the Americans and the world that France was once again a mighty nation through the exhibits. France, and de Gaulle in particular, no longer wanted to feel subordinate to American opinions and policies. The *Mona Lisa* and *Whistler's Mother* exhibits were a way for France to remind the world of its previous place of cultural superiority and these two exhibits were an attempt to regain it.

MONA LISA THE DIPLOMAT

Mona Lisa the Celebrity

The fall of 1962 saw French newspapers figuratively up in arms.¹⁵⁰ Experts at the Louvre insisted that she could not travel; the French government argued that she must.¹⁵¹ Malraux, the French minister of culture, denounced the Louvre's allegations of her poor condition and possible damage as exaggerations.¹⁵² Newspapers at both ends of the political spectrum insisted that she should not go abroad.¹⁵³ The topic of this emotional response was not a queen, head of state, or movie star. In 1962, the French announced that the *Mona Lisa* would voyage to the United States for display.¹⁵⁴

A trip for a woman of her age would be difficult and dangerous, but the French government needed their most famous celebrity to serve as ambassador to the United States at this critical time in its relations with the Americans. This would be the *Mona Lisa*'s first experience as a Cold War diplomat. The *Mona Lisa* was an instrument of cultural diplomacy for France during her exhibit in the United States and it was the goal of the French government to send the *Mona Lisa* in order to improve relations with the Americans.

Da Vinci's masterpiece, the *Mona Lisa*, or "Joconde," has a mysterious history few have explored. Some authors have written a brief history of the painting to accompany pamphlets, books on Da Vinci, or art history textbooks.¹⁵⁵ Standalone books on the *Mona Lisa* often examine her painting, suspicions surrounding her theft, debates as to the identity of the model, and brush strokes that befuddle artists and scientists to this day, but few works tell of the events surrounding her intentional absences from the Louvre.¹⁵⁶

Before 1963, the *Mona Lisa* had spent most of the twentieth century hanging inside the Louvre. Prior to her placement of prominence within the Louvre, the painting graced such areas

¹⁵⁰ "France Will Lend 'Mona Lisa' to U.S." *The New York Times*, December 8, 1963.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² "President Attends Debut of 'Mona Lisa': Kennedy Attends 'MONA LISA' Debut More Certain Risks All Pictures Removed". *The New York Times*, January 9, 1963.

¹⁵³ Davis, *Mona Lisa in Camelot*, 33.

¹⁵⁴ "France Will Lend 'Mona Lisa' to U.S." *The New York Times*, December 8, 1962.

¹⁵⁵ Sherwin Nuland, *Leonardo da Vinci* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

¹⁵⁶ Two do discuss this topic: Davis and Lebovics.

of celebrity as the Palace of Versailles and Napoleon's bedroom.¹⁵⁷ Painted by Leonardo Da Vinci at the beginning of the 1500s, he carried the painting with him when he left what is today Italy for France.¹⁵⁸ Not long after the painting arrived in the country, it was acquired by the French monarchy and has been held by the French government ever since.¹⁵⁹ Originally acquired as part of the French royal art collection, she had been outside of France only once since Da Vinci brought this canvas with him to France in the 1510s.¹⁶⁰ In 1911, the *Mona Lisa* was stolen and taken back to Italy, the place of her birth.¹⁶¹ The Louvre displayed the painting for a short period following the paintings recovery in 1913. During the Second World War, the painting resided in two secret locations in the French countryside, along with the other most valuable and celebrated pieces of artwork from the Louvre.¹⁶²

During the war, the French underground used the symbol of the *Mona Lisa* as a rallying point.¹⁶³ One underground radio broadcast stated that the *Mona Lisa* was safe and still smiling for the French people.¹⁶⁴ That was how the underground was able to let the people of France know that the painting was still safe and had not fallen into the hands of the Germans. If the *Mona Lisa* was safe, maybe France still had hope.

After the war, she returned to her home inside the Louvre and remained there until December of 1963 when she would be called upon by the French government. *Mona Lisa* was to become a cultural attaché. After hasty arrangements by the Louvre, the National Gallery, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the *Mona Lisa* would leave for the United States. During her visit, she would not just hang on the walls of the museums, but resume her role as a symbol of France. Throughout the trip, she was treated as visiting royalty, with American secret service protection, a Marine escort, and entourage including Minister Malraux and the director of the Louvre.¹⁶⁵ The painting was treated by the U.S. government as a person and an actual diplomat.¹⁶⁶

While no hard proof explains why the *Mona Lisa* came to the United States, there is compelling circumstantial evidence. Malraux, the trusted advisor and aid of de Gaulle, attended

¹⁵⁷ Davis, *Mona Lisa in Camelot*, 33.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Lebovics, *Mona Lisa's Escort*, 9.

¹⁶⁶ Davis, *Mona Lisa in Camelot*, 33.

a meeting in the United States to discuss the Bretton Woods system.¹⁶⁷ At the conclusion of that meeting, First Lady Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy came into the room and had a conversation with Malraux.¹⁶⁸ In that conversation, Mrs. Kennedy suggested that France might bring the *Mona Lisa* to the United States for a visit.¹⁶⁹ Malraux agreed that it would be a good plan and told Mrs. Kennedy that he would bring the painting. It is not certain if he was serious at that point. The French did have a stake in improving relations with the Americans and an art exhibit may have sounded like a good idea to the French minister of culture. After the loss to New York of the title, "Cultural Capital of the World," the minister of culture may have believed in showing the historic cultural treasures owned by Paris to contrast the new culture in New York.¹⁷⁰

Mona Lisa Goes to Work

At a press conference following the meeting on the Bretton Woods system, a journalist asked Malraux if he would bring the *Mona Lisa* to the United States.¹⁷¹ Malraux agreed that the idea had merit and announced his intention to show the painting in America.¹⁷² After the announcement, Malraux returned to Paris and informed the Louvre that the *Mona Lisa* would be going abroad. This news shocked the staff charged with the protection and condition of the painting.¹⁷³ They did not think that the painting, damaged by war, theft, and overzealous art patrons, could survive the ordeal of traveling on a boat to New York.¹⁷⁴

News that the historic painting might voyage abroad surprised the immediate supervisor of the *Mona Lisa*.¹⁷⁵ Her concerns were not only for the painting being stolen, but also for the damage that might result from changes in humidity levels or vibrations.¹⁷⁶ The painting was hundreds of years old and after the theft at the beginning of the twentieth century, the wooden

¹⁶⁷ Ibid and, Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, & Power*, 7.

¹⁶⁸ Davis, *Mona Lisa in Camelot*, 33.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 5.

¹⁷¹ Davis, *Mona Lisa in Camelot*, 33.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

backing of the painting developed a bend.¹⁷⁷ If that bend were to increase, large sections of the paint could simple flake off, permanently destroying the painting.¹⁷⁸

Louvre officials did not keep silent with their concerns. Accounts quickly appeared in French newspapers describing the planned visit to America and its potential for disaster.¹⁷⁹ One of the most treasured symbols of France was under attack by her own government--at least that is how French newspapers recorded the situation. Newspapers in the United States joined in the criticism. The *New York Times* wrote, "Suggestions of the "*Mona Lisa*'s" temporary departure from France already have caused a stir there. The French Academy of Fine Arts and other groups have opposed moving the painting from the Louvre."¹⁸⁰

Despite these concerns, there were powerful countervailing pressures that favored the trip. The might of the French government was behind the decision to take the painting on tour. De Gaulle thought the idea a lovely one.¹⁸¹ American newspapers soon changed their tone from one of excitement to one of concern. They, too, became worried about harm that might befall the priceless painting. Even with this change in attitude of the media, most Americans still wished to see the *Mona Lisa*. Kennedy administration officials loved the idea and eagerly sought a closer relationship with France. Americans wanted to see the *Mona Lisa* on their soil, thus it was time for the museum officials in both France and the United States to devise a way to make the visit a reality.¹⁸²

While Louvre officials expressed shock, workers at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. reacted to the news in horror.¹⁸³ They would soon be responsible for safeguarding arguably the most recognizable painting in the world. Fears of ruining this iconic work compelled them to side with Louvre officials in suggesting that the painting not come to the United States, a fight also lost by the American gallery. Hastily, work began on creating brochures for the exhibit and designing a backdrop, which could display the painting in a grand way. Soon the Metropolitan Museum of Art asked if they, too, could host the painting since she would be traveling through

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ "France Will Lend '*Mona Lisa*' to U.S.," *The New York Times*, December 8, 1962.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Davis, *Mona Lisa in Camelot*, 33.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

New York harbor on her way to and from the transport ships. The French and American governments agreed that the painting would also be shown at that location.¹⁸⁴

Kennedy administration officials went to work planning events that would be grand enough for visiting royalty. Indeed, the painting would be treated like a visiting sovereign.¹⁸⁵ Once in the harbor, the crate would disembark from the ship alongside French government officials, including Malraux and Louvre representatives.¹⁸⁶ A group of American Marines would then escort the crate.¹⁸⁷ A Secret Service motorcade would next transport the painting once it reached land.¹⁸⁸ An agent would be placed inside the cargo truck along with the painting to prevent theft or accidental damage.¹⁸⁹ After arrival in Washington, the crate would be taken to a vault deep within the National Gallery where humidity levels would be checked and the painting would be inspected for damage.¹⁹⁰ The *Mona Lisa* would then rest in the deep vault until the grand opening.¹⁹¹ Nothing would be left to chance.

Notwithstanding these meticulous preparations, an added complication arose, as planning for the *Mona Lisa*'s visit coincided with the Cuban Missile Crisis.¹⁹² Thus in November of 1962 the Kennedy administration was dealing with both an international security crisis and trying to plan for an important and unprecedented foreign art exhibit. Work on the exhibit subsided while the administration dealt with this emergency. After the crisis ended, the planning for the *Mona Lisa* exhibit resumed.

The weeks and months of careful planning paid off. The American people greeted the *Mona Lisa* warmly upon her arrival in the harbor.¹⁹³ Once in D.C., curators pronounced her condition excellent. While the actual exhibit went off without incident, the dinner and opening ceremony in her honor experienced problems. The director of the National Gallery believed it to

¹⁸⁴ "France Will Lend 'Mona Lisa' to U.S.," *The New York Times*, December 8, 1962.

¹⁸⁵ Davis, *Mona Lisa in Camelot*, 33.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *FRUS*, 1962. Vol XIII, 261.

¹⁹³ Davis, *Mona Lisa in Camelot*.

be the worst day of his life, as all the planning for these events went awry.¹⁹⁴ The *New York Times* reported, “To the French critics who had protested lending the picture to the United States, Mr. Malraux had a ready answer tonight: “When upon my return (to France) some peevish spirits will ask me on the rostrum, ‘Why was the ‘*Mona Lisa*’ lent to the United States? I shall answer: ‘because no other nation would have received her like the United States.’”¹⁹⁵ Malraux was clearly proud of the exhibit.

The National Gallery was flooded by a sea of onlookers on the opening day of the exhibit. Thousands of people viewed the painting during its stay in the National Gallery. This contrasted greatly with the night before. Articles appearing in the *New York Times* stated that those who attended the opening “could not see because of reflections from high-powered television lights. They could not hear because the public address system was not working.”¹⁹⁶ The official opening of the exhibit was a disaster, but one rectified well before the public viewing in the morning.

After the painting's time at the National Gallery, it was time for the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The *Mona Lisa* exhibit opened to long lines of eager patrons. According to the *New York Times*, “The *Mona Lisa*” was viewed by 1,077,521 persons during the 26 days it was on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.”¹⁹⁷ Throngs of schoolchildren crammed into the gallery to get a glimpse of the painting.

Americans raved about the *Mona Lisa*'s trip to the United States. The *New York Times* reported, “Reproductions are being sold at the museum at a lively rate. Almost every visitor carries one away thereby to recollect their emotion in tranquility. The old enchantress is making new conquests.”¹⁹⁸ While newspapers noted the uptick in visitor numbers at the museum, so did the French government. It acknowledged the increased number of museum patrons in a diplomatic cable stating, “the National Gallery saw a considerable number of people: in less than

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ “President Attends Debut of ‘*Mona Lisa*’: Kennedy Attends ‘*Mona Lisa*’ Debut More Certain Risks All Pictures Removed”. *New York Times*, January 9, 1963.

¹⁹⁶ Davis, *Mona Lisa in Camelot*, 33.

¹⁹⁷ “1,077,521 Saw ‘*Mona Lisa*’”. *The New York Times*. New York, N.Y., March 6, 1963.

¹⁹⁸ “‘*Mona Lisa*’ Opens Run In New York: ‘Lady’ From France Has Some Not-So-Ladylike Fans”. *The New York Times*, February 8, 1963.

two days, the number of visitors is as high as 30,000."¹⁹⁹ French newspapers reported the exhibit from start to finish including the positive reception of the Americans.²⁰⁰

The warm American reception of the painting made it to the highest levels of the French government. A diplomatic cable from French ambassador to the United States Hervé Alphand reported the American appreciation for the painting's visit. According to *Le Monde*, "The speech on this occasion by Mr. Malraux produced a profound impression on the American public."²⁰¹ The tone of the message from Washington to Paris was of a celebratory nature. The French representatives believed that the Americans were pleased with the exhibit and thought that this exhibit France had formed a favorable impression on the American people. The cable continued,

Whatever the merit of this masterpiece, one cannot help but be surprised by the public obsession and mystical atmosphere... Some raise their head, marked by an obvious respect, some women cry. As for the press, despite the newspaper strike in New York, it could not be better...²⁰²

The French were pleased with the newspaper coverage of the art exhibit and the papers seemed pleased with cultural diplomacy.

Newspaper articles touted art exchange as a form of diplomacy. One stated, "Art has now become an instrument of the new diplomacy. In fact, almost everything has become part of the new diplomacy: art, trade fairs, student exchanges, sports events, and wandering crooners

¹⁹⁹ " *La National Gallery connait une affluence considerable: en monis de deux jours, le nombre des visiteurs s'est eleve a 30,000.*" M. Alphand, Ambassadeur de France à Washington, à M. Couve de Murville, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, January 11, 1963, Document 16, Documents Diplomatiques Français 1963 Tome 1, 2000.

²⁰⁰ "12000 Personnes ont Defile Devant 'la Joconde,'" *Le Monde*, January 11, 1963; "En Présence de MM. Kennedy et Malraux: Le Tout-Washington A Fait Sa Cour A 'la Joconde,'" *Le Monde*, January 10, 1963; "Le Président Kennedy et M. Malraux Inaugurent A Washington l'Exposition de 'la Joconde,'" *Le Monde*, January 9, 1963.

²⁰¹ "Les discours prononcé a cette occasion par M. Malraux a produit une profound impression sur le public américain. Ce dernier, averti des le mois de décembre de la vendu de la Joconde et rendu conscient, notamment par l'attitude de son président, de la valeur exceptionnelle du chef-d'œuvre et de la signification du geste accompli par la France, était saisi depuis un certain temps d'une sorte de fièvre. Celle-ci se manifesta, lors de l'arrivée du tableau, par de nombreuses interventions d'Américains, plus impatients de le voir que disposes a comprendre l'impossibilités de l'exposer avant la cérémonie du 8 janvier." Ibid.

²⁰² "Quel que soit le mérite de ce chef-d'œuvre, on ne peut s'empêcher d'être surpris par l'obsession du public et l'atmosphère pour ainsi dire mystique qui règne dans la salle d'explosion. Les uns lèvent la tête, empreints d'un respect évident, certaines femmes pleurent. Quant a la presse, en dépit de la grève des journaux de New York, elle ne saurait être meilleure, qu'il s'agisse de l'emplacement, de l'espace et des termes choisis pour décrire et louer l'initiative française," Ibid.

and ballet dancers.”²⁰³ Yet while some journalists saw the use of cultural diplomacy as a welcome addition to the diplomatic arts, others looked at it with displeasure. An opinion piece voiced this disdain by opining, “In the days of the old diplomacy, it would have been regarded as an act of unthinkable vulgarity for a Government to appeal to public opinion. Diplomacy was private, professional and precise. Now it comes out of a television set.”²⁰⁴ Regardless of opinion, the public favored cultural diplomacy and the *Mona Lisa* had become a diplomat in her own right. News coverage of the exhibit was not limited to American and French journalists. Other international newspapers picked up the story including the *Times* of London. During the preparations for the exhibit and the exhibit itself, there were many articles documenting the excitement and concerns.²⁰⁵

While the fears of Louvre employees were mostly for naught, there was one incident during her diplomatic mission which placed the *Mona Lisa* in jeopardy. One night while she was on display at the Metropolitan Museum, a sprinkler system malfunctioned and briefly sprayed the painting with water. No one reported the incident to the press at the time and the memoirs only revealed in the 2009.²⁰⁶ Fortunately, the experience left the painting unharmed and guards were quick to alert other employees, thereby ensuring the painting’s safety.

The visit to America finally came to an end, and the *Mona Lisa* was repacked into her crate and shipped back to France. Upon arrival, she underwent close inspection by Louvre staff and pronounced in perfect health to great relief of government officials, French and American museum staffers, and the news media.²⁰⁷ The *Mona Lisa* had finally made it back home to the Louvre. A crisis had been averted.

²⁰³ Davis, *Mona Lisa in Camelot*, 55.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ "First-Class Cabin For Mona Lisa," *The Times* of London, December 15, 1962; "Million Americans See Mona Lisa." *The Times* of London, March 5, 1963; "Mona Lisa Arrives In U.S." *The Times* of London, December 20, 1962; "Mona Lisa Draws Record Crowds." *The Times* of London, February 16, 1963; "Mona Lisa For U.S. Soon?" *The Times* of London, December 11, 1962; and "The Mona Lisa." *The Times* of London, December 20, 1962.

²⁰⁶ Christina Ruiz, “How the *Mona Lisa* almost Came to a Watery End,” *The Art Newspaper* www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/How-the-Mona-Lisa-almost-came-to-a-watery-end/17322 06 May 2009.

²⁰⁷ Davis, *Mona Lisa in Camelot*, 33.

Mona Lisa Retires

The Mona Lisa's diplomatic mission to the United States was not her last. The *Mona Lisa* went on to visit both China and the Soviet Union during trying times in the 1970s.²⁰⁸ After her return from that joint visit, French officials decided that she would retire from diplomatic life and return to her wall at the Louvre for good.²⁰⁹ During her diplomatic voyages, she saw a Soviet spaceship take off, was assaulted by an angry handicapped Chinese patron, crossed paths with *Whistler's Mother* thousands of miles from their home, been the guest of the Kennedy family, and, most importantly, successfully fulfilled her role as a diplomat for her beloved country. The *New York Times* reported the iconic painting's return to her usual place, "Paris, March 12—The *Mona Lisa* slipped quietly back into the Louvre today after three months in Washington and New York."²¹⁰

The excitement and good feelings generated by *Mona Lisa* soon came to an end. After the spectacular exhibit, Franco-American diplomatic relations soured. Concerns about the Bretton Woods system and the French dream of an autonomous Europe with France as the leader remained unsolved through meetings or the art show.²¹¹ In 1966, France withdrew from NATO's integrated military command. In that respect, the *Mona Lisa* exhibit made little difference in Franco-American relations. There were limits to even her great celebrity.

These ups and downs were not limited to Franco-American relations. For the Kennedy family, the exhibit marked both a high and low point in their lives. Jacqueline announced later that spring that she was pregnant with their third child, and the First Lady closely oversaw plans for a ministry of culture.²¹² Unfortunately, all this was not to last. The autumn of 1963 brought first the death of the Kennedy's child after one day of life, followed by the assassination of President Kennedy in November.²¹³ The photos from the *Mona Lisa* exhibit show the Kennedys in a hauntingly happier time. Jacqueline Kennedy, in her pink gown so often photographed on

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ "The *Mona Lisa* Is Back In the Grande Gallerie," *The New York Times*, March 13, 1963.

²¹¹ Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, & Power*, 7.

²¹² Davis, *Mona Lisa in Camelot*, 55.

²¹³ Ibid.

the night of the painting's debut at the National Gallery, rivaled the grace and beauty of the painting.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art and National Gallery fared much better. For years after both exhibits, both the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Gallery received higher numbers of visitors.²¹⁴ This increased attendance was a direct result of the exhibit. Other art museums across the country also received more visitors than usual.²¹⁵ The exhibit had made the American public interested in art. Two people in particular were responsible for this new interest in art: *Mona Lisa* and Jacqueline Kennedy.²¹⁶

Nearly fifty years after the exhibit, interest remains for the topic. In the past few years, new parts of the story have come to light, such as the sprinkler incident.²¹⁷ Though many questions have been answered about the exhibit, some remain. “Whose idea was it to send the exhibit?” “What were the exact goals set by the French government for the exhibit?” It is only with a new approach to the subject that these questions may be answered. Giving credit to *Mona Lisa* for her role as a diplomat is how these questions will finally be satisfactorily answered.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Christina Ruiz, “How the *Mona Lisa* almost Came to a Watery End.” *The Art Newspaper* www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/How-the-Mona-Lisa-almost-came-to-a-watery-end/17322 06 May 2009.

WHISTLER'S MOTHER IN MOURNING

The Crash

On June 3, 1962, Air France Flight 007 crashed upon take-off at the Paris-Orly Airport.²¹⁸ The victims included 129 passengers and crew, including one crew member who succumbed to injuries days later.²¹⁹ Two crew members survived what was then the largest single airplane disaster and what has since become the third worst in history.²²⁰ This tragedy garnered international attention, especially in the city of Atlanta.²²¹ One hundred and six of the passengers were residents of Atlanta in Europe for an art tour.²²² Out of the carnage of the crash, the art at the center of the tragedy became a compassionate envoy to the bereaved.

The crash took the lives of many of Atlanta's foremost leaders in the artistic community.²²³ Most of those killed were members of Atlanta's high society known for their patronage of the arts. Among those who lost their lives were members of the Berry family, whose distant relations had founded Berry College, family members of Coca-Cola businessmen, and the leadership of the Atlanta Art Association which had spearheaded the tragic trip.²²⁴ Planned the year before in conjunction with American Express, it became a low cost way for Atlanta's high society to tour Europe.²²⁵ At a time where the cost of jet travel was still prohibitive for most, this trip offered rates hundreds of dollars below the traditional airfare and the chance to see Europe.²²⁶ The three-week trip had many itineraries for those attending to choose from.²²⁷

²¹⁸ Abrams, *Explosion At Orly*, x.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Of the two, one was interviewed by the media later while the other was said to have been so traumatized by the event that she would not speak to reporters (Abrams). They were in parts of the plane that were shot away from the other wreckage and therefore escaped the worst of the explosion and fire.

²²¹ Front pages of newspapers around the world, including the main Atlanta newspapers, showed the burning wreckage of the plane. For more information on foreign and domestic news coverage of the event see Abrams.

²²² The majority of those on the plane were Americans as the chartered plane's other stops were in various cities in the United States.

²²³ Abrams, *Explosion At Orly*, x.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ The Atlanta Arts Association's origins are at the beginning of the 20th century. It encompassed more than just artwork, but also had ties with the Atlanta symphony, various theatre organizations and the art school. The High museum was one of its benefactors created at the time of its inception.

²²⁶ Abrams, *Explosion At Orly*, 20.

²²⁷ Ibid.

Art played a prominent role in the trip. The Louvre, Musée d'Orsay, and many other museums throughout the United Kingdom and continental Europe were on the itineraries.²²⁸ Most travelers chose the itineraries that were closest in nature to the traditional "Grand Tour" of Europe. Art held a place of prominence for the "Grand Tour."

Unlike the American view of Europe from the standpoint of the "Grand Tour," Europeans see America and particularly Atlanta as hotbeds of art appreciation. Atlanta's reputation contributed the negative perception given to the United States as a whole. Before 1962, Atlanta was seen internationally as being in the midst of racial tension in America.²²⁹ With the Civil Rights movement in full swing, the southern portion of the United States appeared uncultured and bigoted in the eyes of the rest of the country and the world. Atlanta appeared to those outside the United States as just another American outpost of little cultural significance. To these observers, the whole was indeed just the sum of its parts.

At the beginning of the 20th century, some in Atlanta recognized a need for the arts. Historically, the city had not seen much use in them.²³⁰ Plaguing the area was an impression of the arts as being unmanly. For this reason, the arts had not had the same nurturing in Atlanta as they had in other parts of the United States.²³¹ The Atlanta Art Association was one of the organizations created to instill culture in Atlanta. They believed that changing Atlanta's image was crucial for the long-term health of the city.

Membership in the Atlanta Art Association was required for those traveling with the group to Europe. This requirement was a huge help to their overall organization numbers and their coffers. The years prior to the trip were meager ones for the organization. Despite the lack

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 5.

²³⁰ A good comparison would be to St. Louis. With an art museum, frequent theatre productions at the Muny, and symphonic activities, St. Louis in the 1960s had many more cultural institutions.

²³¹ An obvious example of nurturing at this time was New York. References to this tendency to feminize the arts are seen in *Explosion at Orly* as well as in the character of Ashley in *Gone with the Wind*. While the fictional reference from the middle of the 1800s might not seem like a correct portrayal it does tend to mesh with the descriptions other authors have given. More research on this topic might prove fruitful. *A Way Down South: A History of Southern Identity* by James C. Cobb and *Judgment and Grace in Dixie: Southern Faiths From Faulkner to Elvis* by Charles Reagan Wilson discuss the construction of masculinity in the south during the 20th century. An often overlooked element of this is the role the arts played.

of funds, ideas for its future abounded.²³² A large building project would be approved upon the return of many of the association's members, which would add additional square footage for more artistic endeavors. The trip was therefore crucial to the Atlanta Art Association's future.

For those taking the trip, luxury awaited them. Stays at four-star hotels and frequent dining at top-rated Michelin restaurants would be in addition to viewing some of Europe's most prized historic and artistic attractions.²³³ Accounts by surviving family members state that those on the trip enjoyed themselves greatly.²³⁴ The London *Times* would later report, "The 121 American passengers had arrived in Paris on May 10. Forty-five of them toured Britain, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy as a group and returned to Paris."²³⁵ It seemed as though the plans for the trip had come to fruition.

However, this fruit would soon turn bitter. Tragedy struck as the Air France flight (a Boeing 707) attempted to take off from Orly airport. The French government was pressed for answers about the cause of the crash the next day.²³⁶ The final cause of the crash was determined to be a combination of aircraft malfunction and human error.²³⁷ These conclusions were reached after exhaustive investigations by both the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and French authorities.²³⁸ While other Boeing 707s had crashed due to mysterious circumstances around the same time, no link was found. "The commission said it was 'highly improbable' that Capt. Roland-Paul Hoche, the pilot, had incorrectly adjusted the stabilizer trim before departure from his parking station. Rather, it said, it was 'more inclined' to consider a breakdown of the electric motor system as the cause."²³⁹ In 1969, the families of victims won a lengthy legal battle. The family members suing received \$5 million in a settlement. Sixty-two family members collected the money.²⁴⁰

There were only two survivors of the crash. The London *Times* reported that "Two air hostesses escaped with shock and slight injuries after being hurled from the rear section of the

²³² Abrams, *Explosion At Orly*, 20. For more information on the organization's finances and plans for expansion.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ "130 Killed in Airliner Take-Off Crash," *The Times*, June 4, 1962.

²³⁶ "French Pressing Jet-Crash Inquiry," *The New York Times*, June 5, 1962.

²³⁷ "Survivors of 62 Killed at Orly in '62 Crash Share \$5-Million," *The New York Times*, August 24, 1969.

²³⁸ "French Pressing Jet-Crash Inquiry," *The New York Times*, June 5, 1962.

²³⁹ "130-Death Crash Held Avoidable," *The New York Times*, February 21, 1965.

²⁴⁰ "Survivors of 62 Killed at Orly in '62 Crash Share \$5-Million," *The New York Times*, August 24, 1969.

plane into some bushes. Three hours after the crash a steward was found alive in the wreckage, but he later died in the hospital of his injuries."²⁴¹ All others perished.

The death of over one hundred of Atlantians was a massive shock to the community. Reports of "Hundreds of Atlantians, some of whom said they had heard about *The Journal's* extra on television, drove into the city to buy copies. Additional policemen were called up to handle a traffic jam that developed along Forsyth Street in front of the Atlanta Newspapers, Inc. building."²⁴²

Explosion at Orly, a local history book on the crash, gives context to the number of passengers lost: "Thirty-three individuals aged twenty-one and under orphaned; twenty others in that age group lost their mothers. Forty-six adults lost one or both parents; nineteen men and two women lost their spouses; five sets of parents, fifteen widowed mothers, and six fathers lost their children. At least 104 people lost siblings."²⁴³ Loss and grief permeated the city. While those directly affected by the crash were mourning, the rest of the city and much of the world sent their condolences.

Reception in other parts of the United States to the disaster was somber. Atlanta in 1962 was in the middle of the Civil Rights movement. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was participating in sit-ins throughout the city and chose to cancel them out of respect to the dead.²⁴⁴ Malcolm X was one individual who did not see the plane crash in the same light. He stated at a rally "I got a wire from God today... Many people have been asking, 'Well, what are you going to do?' And since we know that the man is tracking us down day by day to try and find out what we are going to do, so he'll have some excuse to put us behind his bars, we call on our God. He gets rid of 120 of them in one whop... and we hope that every day another plane falls out of the sky."²⁴⁵ This remark gave Malcolm X national exposure for the first time. Upon being asked of his opinion on Malcolm X's comment. King carefully replied, "If the Muslim leader said that, I

²⁴¹ "130 Killed in Airliner Take-Off Crash," *The Times*, London Jun 4, 1962; and "Air Crash Survivor Dies in Hospital," *The Times*, London June 5, 1962.

²⁴² "Atlanta Is Stunned by Loss Of Many Cultural Leaders" *The New York Times*, June 4, 1962.

²⁴³ Abrams, *Explosion At Orly*, 184.

²⁴⁴ Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Year 1963-1965* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999).

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 14.

would certainly disagree with him."²⁴⁶ Even with racial tension tearing at the fabric of Atlanta society, the city mourned.

At the Atlanta Art Association office, "telegrams from around the world" arrived.²⁴⁷ "One was from President and Mrs. John F. Kennedy, another from Martin Luther King Jr."²⁴⁸ In addition to the telegrams sent to Atlanta, Washington also received condolences from "Charles de Gaulle, Pope John XXIII, German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, and other world leaders."²⁴⁹ The French condolences were noted. "In a message to President Kennedy, President de Gaulle: 'Profoundly moved by the catastrophe at Orly Airport in which American citizens perished. I would like to express to you, Mr. President, as well as to the families of the victims, my profound condolences and would like you to accept the heartfelt sympathy of the French people."²⁵⁰ Following the remarks by the French president were those of the French ambassador. The newspaper stated, "Herve Alphand, the French Ambassador, said in Washington he would do what he could to help families of the victims."²⁵¹

With these condolences came a need for action. The question often asked by those sending condolences was what they could do to help.²⁵² Given this sudden and profound loss, the city needed an outlet for its grief. One large structure in which to house all of Atlanta's artistic endeavors seemed to be the agreed upon solution. An outpouring of support and money allowed this concept to come to fruition. *Explosion at Orly* states that while these calls of support were flooding into Atlanta Art Association, few people were present to answer the phone.²⁵³ Most had perished on the plane.

An Exhibit is the Solution

As the city of Atlanta mourned, France felt the need to send Atlanta something as a memorial. As mentioned earlier, France and the United States had strained relations due to

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 14.

²⁴⁷ Abrams, *Explosion At Orly*, 162.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Robert Alden, "De Gaulle Expresses His Grief On American Jet-Crash Deaths" *The New York Times*, June 6, 1962.

²⁵¹ Atlanta Is Stunned by Loss Of Many Cultural Leaders" *The New York Times*. June 4, 1962.

²⁵² Abrams, *Explosion At Orly*, xi.

²⁵³ Ibid.

differing political agendas in Europe at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s.²⁵⁴ A tragedy of this scale and scope was fraught with potential negative implications for relations between the two countries. Following the crash, some grand gesture of compassion and sympathy was needed to assuage the grief of those affected by the accident, and to ease the tense relations between Paris and Washington.

The French government decided that the best way to remember those lost in the crash was to send an exhibit art to Atlanta. "Two more famous paintings from the Louvre are to be sent to the United States as a loan from the French government," announced *the New York Times*.²⁵⁵ "Whistler's Mother" and "The Night Lamp" by Georges de la Tour would be on view at Atlanta's Municipal Art Museum.²⁵⁶ The reason for the exhibit was clear. "The loan is being made in homage to the 130 members of an Atlanta art association who were killed in an air crash outside Paris in June 4, 1962."²⁵⁷

In February 1963, the exhibit came to Atlanta.²⁵⁸ Fanfare greeted the paintings along with the presence of the French ambassador to the United States. The paper told of "Dr. W. B. Bryan, director of the Atlanta Art Association, gestures enthusiastically after uncrating 'Whistler's Mother,' which is on loan as a tribute to association members killed in plane crash in Paris last year."²⁵⁹ The presence and remarks of the French ambassador were of particular note.

"French-American relations were in good shape in Atlanta today when Herve Alphan, French Ambassador to the United States, presented 'Whistler's Mother' to the Atlanta Art Association for the beginning of the painting's official visit from the Louvre," stated the *New York Times*.²⁶⁰ Meant to be a brief memorial to those who lost their lives in the crash, the exhibit was an opportunity for cultural diplomacy between the two countries. The French ambassador and the *New York Times* reporters expressly state this. "Pointing out that the picture's title is 'Arrangement in Gray and Black,' Mr. Alphan said he liked to think that this represented an American understanding that things were not all black and white and that there were many

²⁵⁴ Status in the international community, the fate of French colonies, the French nuclear program, NATO, and the Bretton Woods System to name just a few.

²⁵⁵ "France to Lend Atlanta 2 Louvre Masterpieces," *The New York Times*, January 11, 1963.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ "Atlanta Unveils French Art Loan," *The New York Times* February 11, 1963.

²⁵⁹ "Another Visit From France," *The New York Times*, February 9, 1963.

²⁶⁰ "Atlanta Unveils French Art Loan," *The New York Times* February 11, 1963.

nuances between the extremes. This, he added, is true of human relations as well as of paintings."²⁶¹ The article continued: "the Ambassador's allusion was obviously intended as a comment on the recent political differences between France and the United States over conflict involving Britain's entry into the Common Market."²⁶²

Given that the itinerary of tragic trip mostly consisted of viewing art, the French government decided that it would be a fitting memorial. Thus, the *Whistler's Mother* exhibit was conceived. The painting had toured the United States three decades before without incident. *Explosion At Orly* claims that the *Mona Lisa* exhibit came about as a result of the plane crash as well; however, that exhibit had been planned two months before the crash.²⁶³

On February 11, 1963, the *Atlanta Constitution* positioned the *Whistler's Mother* exhibit front and center in the paper.²⁶⁴ An article appeared on page one of the newspaper dealing with the opening of the exhibit. But though the article appeared on page one and continued on page thirty, the actual length of the article was short. An ad for the new movie *Sodom and Gomorrah* took up more page length in a previous day's paper than did the presence of the painting or the French ambassador to the United States, suggesting that the exhibit was not worth the extra column inches.²⁶⁵ The exhibit was to last for six weeks and consisted of the painting *Whistler's Mother* and *Mary Magdalene With the Night-Light*.²⁶⁶ Only two subsequent articles even mentioned the exhibit. One was about a newscaster who had covered the exhibit and consisted of her short biography.²⁶⁷ The other article, titled "Live French Beauty Steals Show from Painted Ladies," discussed the French ambassador's wife and her fashion tastes.²⁶⁸

Scholars who wish to study the exhibit would likely want to see what the Atlanta newspapers wanted to say; however, they mostly stayed quiet about the showing, particularly when compared to other newspapers in the United States and Canada. The absence of response from Atlanta on the exhibit being held in its midst is not unusual when we take into account the region's traditional views of masculinity and the arts. The arts association in Atlanta was

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Abrams, *Explosion At Orly*, xi.

²⁶⁴ "Art, French Envoy Are Hailed by Atlanta" *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 11, 1963 p.1 & 18.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ "France to Lend Atlanta 2 Louvre Masterpieces," *The New York Times*, January 11, 1963.

²⁶⁷ Ibid,

²⁶⁸ "Live French Beauty Steals Show From Painted Ladies," *The Atlanta Constitution* February 11, 1963.

comprised of mostly women.²⁶⁹ The arts and particularly appreciating art was feminized in southern culture, and therefore viewed as unmanly.²⁷⁰ That may account for the absence of its discussion in the paper. More exploration into southern masculinity and the arts needs to take place before the question can be answered definitively.

Accounting for the appearance of newspaper articles on European and American affairs, it cannot be argued that the absence of newspaper coverage on the exhibit had anything to do with isolationism.²⁷¹ What can be surmised is that the arts did not have as high a standing in Atlanta as they did in other places.²⁷² More detailed articles appear in other papers from around the country and Canada.²⁷³ The *Lewiston Daily Sun* out of Maine published a short but detailed article on the exhibit.²⁷⁴ So did papers in Toledo, St. Petersburg, and Lakeland, Florida.²⁷⁵ The *Miami News* had more coverage of the exhibit than did the *Atlanta Constitution*. The *Miami News* had many articles leading up to the exhibit and on the day of its unveiling.²⁷⁶ *The Sun*, a newspaper circulated in Vancouver, British Columbia also covered the exhibit.²⁷⁷

This dearth of local newspaper coverage of the *Whistler's Mother* exhibit makes gauging reaction to the event difficult but not impossible. According to other sources, such as the *New York Times*, the exhibit was well attended and well received.²⁷⁸ The attention given to the French ambassador and his wife showed many of the assets the French were trying to display to the Americans. French Ambassador Hervé Alphand and his wife Nicole Alphand received high praise in the newspaper articles, particularly in regards to her sense of the arts fashion. France was trying to regain its position at the pinnacle of fashion. Mrs. Alphand did not disappoint, as she donned stunning attire for the *Whistler's Mother* gala.²⁷⁹ Even with the success of the exhibit

²⁶⁹ Abrams, *Explosion At Orly*, xi.

²⁷⁰ For another example of this, see *Gone With the Wind* the book and the character of Ashley Wilkes. Comments like this are made about him and his family

²⁷¹ See the world news section of the *Atlanta Constitution*, where numerous articles discuss foreign affairs and France in particular.

²⁷² Cities such as St. Louis and New York had thriving arts appreciation during this time while Atlanta did not.

²⁷³ There are dozens of papers that covered the exhibit. The ones cited are just a small sample.

²⁷⁴ "Atlanta Is Elated Over Prospect of Displaying 'Whistler's Mother,'" *The Lewiston Daily Sun*, January 11, 1963.

²⁷⁵ "Envoy Denies France Seeks Atomic Status: Alphans Says Rift On Market To Have No Effect on NATO," *Toledo Blade*, February 11, 1963; "Visiting Ladies" *St. Petersburg Times*, February 6, 1963; and "Whistler's Mother Painting To Be Shown In Atlanta," *Lakeland Ledger*, January 25, 1963.

²⁷⁶ "French Tribute: Whistler Portrait Lands In Atlanta" *The Miami News*, February 10, 1963.

²⁷⁷ "Whistler's Mother Goes to Atlanta" *The Sun*, February 4, 1963.

²⁷⁸ "Atlanta Unveils Art Loan" *The New York Times* February 11, 1963.

²⁷⁹ "Live French Beauty Steals Show From Painted Ladies" *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 11, 1963.

for both the Americans and the French, there remained potential diplomatic minefields on the horizon with the crash investigation.

An Investigation and Relations

Recent differences of opinion between the American and French governments had slowly eroded relations between the two countries. As referenced earlier in relation to the *Mona Lisa* exhibit, both countries found the relationship advantageous and used art to help facilitate it.²⁸⁰ Along with the Air France plane crash arose even more delicate issues. The crash left some in Washington concerned about its cause, and they wanted to make sure that it had in fact been an accident.²⁸¹ If it were not an accident and an intentional act, it would harm relations between the countries. FBI agents quickly determined that no foul play was involved with the crash. Because a planeload of Americans perished on board a foreign plane owned and crewed by only members of that nation, the FBI was obliged to investigate.²⁸² Pointing fingers of blame also led to sensitive legal and diplomatic concerns. If it were determined that Air France was negligent, France would incur the wrath of many Americans. To a lesser extent, pilot error could also reflect poorly on France, as some might suspect that French pilots were poorly trained. Tourist travel, an important revenue stream for France, might be adversely affected by the bad publicity. Tourists from across the globe, and American tourists in particular, might view the crash as a reason to avoid travel to France.²⁸³ With the tourism industry accounting for a large percentage of the French GDP, the crash could greatly damage the country's economy.²⁸⁴

In addition to the French government's concerns, the American government worried about repercussions from the accident. Air France flight 007 was a Boeing 707 manufactured in the United States by an American company. A failure in design or construction would hurt the company's reputation and drive down sales, which in turn could harm the U.S. economy. Boeing also held extensive defense contracts, which were valuable to the American government given the escalation of the conflict in Vietnam. If an investigation detected a design flaw culpability

²⁸⁰ They both needed the approval of the other in matters of culture.

²⁸¹ Abrams, *Explosion At Orly*, xi.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ "End of the Runway," *The New York Times*, June 5, 1962.

²⁸⁴ For exact figures and extensive commentary, see Endy, *Cold War Holidays*.

and liability would fall on Boeing, a major employer and force in the American post war economy.

Finally, all aeronautic development companies had a stake in the results of the crash investigation. Everyone in the industry from research and development to construction to the airlines could see huge losses if the result of the crash was determined to have resulted from a design flaw in the aircraft.²⁸⁵ With the other accidents involving the same type of plane in the years leading up to the Air France crash, the possibility of this crash stemming from aircraft failure was high.²⁸⁶ With jet travel still in its infancy, a major fault with plane construction could keep passengers off the aircrafts and cripple the blossoming industry. Articles appeared discussing peoples' fears about air travel in the days following the crash and assuring them that there was no more risk, and in fact less risk, taking a plane than any other form of transportation.²⁸⁷

Both governments eagerly anticipated for the results of the investigation into the cause of the crash.²⁸⁸ When it was finally determined to be due to a combination of several factors, enough time had elapsed to calm the fears of air passengers and the odds of such conditions replicating themselves proved so unlikely that these fears were no longer problematic for the airline industry. Though Air France was sued, the lawsuit was for much less of an amount than what it could have been had a structural fault been found.²⁸⁹ With the media's attention focusing on other events, such as the United States' deepening involvement in the Vietnam War and the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the \$5 million lawsuit was not front-page news.²⁹⁰ Accounts of the suit appeared several pages deep in the *New York Times*, with other stories greatly overshadowing it.

The French government determined, however, that it was important to recognize and memorialize the dead by sending the *Whistler's Mother* exhibit. France recognized that through compassion for the loss of life, it had the opportunity to show itself as supportive to both the

²⁸⁵ Other aircraft manufactures had already suffered this fate.

²⁸⁶ Abrams, *Explosion At Orly*, 20.

²⁸⁷ "End of the Runway," *The New York Times*, June 5, 1962. Article written in response to people with fears of flying after the crash.

²⁸⁸ "French Pressing Jet-Crash Inquiry," *The New York Times*, June 5, 1962.

²⁸⁹ Abrams, *Explosion At Orly*, and "Survivors of 62 Killed at Orly in '62 Crash Share \$5-million," *The New York Times* August 24, 1969.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

United States people and to art. Those lost in the crash were participating in cultural exchange by touring France and therefore the French government saw it as a good opportunity to continue this cultural diplomacy by sending works of art to the United States. As mentioned above, the *Mona Lisa* exhibit had been planned months before the crash.²⁹¹

With the idea of sending artwork already in mind, France selected *Whistler's Mother* to tour the United States. Painted by American artist James McNeil Whistler in 1871, this famous painting of his mother became a world-renowned work when exhibited in 1872 at the Royal Academy.²⁹² In 1891, the French government bought the painting from Whistler for \$800 to be placed in the Luxembourg Palace.²⁹³ Since then, the painting has often traveled to the United States for exhibition. The painting was well preserved and the perfect choice for the Louvre to send.²⁹⁴

An entertaining moment occurred as the *Mona Lisa* exhibit and the *Whistler's Mother* exhibit overlapped each other's visit to the United States. The *New York Times* reported, "Washington, Feb 10—One of the great moments of history took place the other day when the *Mona Lisa* passed *Whistler's Mother* on the Jersey Turnpike. The old lady was on her way down to Atlanta, and the young woman was going up to New York, both by courtesy of President De Gaulle."²⁹⁵

Appreciation for art in Atlanta actually gained significance after the crash of Flight 007. Newspapers noted this by saying, "The association has just completed the most intensive membership drive in its history, built around the theme, 'art is a family affair.' Its financial support has never been greater."²⁹⁶ Contributions poured in from throughout the world. "One of the major plans afoot is a 'living memorial' to the lost members--a \$1,500,000 private campaign

²⁹¹ This is not the opinion of ill-informed scholars. They believe that both exhibits were the result of the crash. There are no primary sources to support their conclusion.

²⁹² "Whistler's Mother," *Totally History*, totallyhistory.com/whistlers-mother/

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ At the time of the exhibit, *Whistler's Mother* was located inside the Louvre. Today it can be found in the Musée d'Orsay.

²⁹⁵ "Mona Lisa Approach to Diplomacy," *New York Times*, N.Y., February 11, 1963.

²⁹⁶ "Air Crash Spurs Atlanta Culture: Art Group Intensifies Work After 124-Member Loss," *The New York Times*, Sep 16, 1962.

for erection of a building to house the Atlanta School of Art."²⁹⁷ It seemed that there was a positive aspect to this dark and tragic cloud.

Because of memorial gifts totaling over 15 million dollars, a new home for the Atlanta's art was constructed in memory of those who perished.²⁹⁸ The French government presented its gift of a Rodin sculpture to the museum during the ribbon cutting in 1968.²⁹⁹ Thanks to the memories of those who perished, the arts became an integral part of Atlanta society, offering opportunities for future generations to view major works of art.

In the end, the exhibit was a success. The *New York Times* ended its coverage of the exhibit by saying, "Workmen prepare to crate '*Whistler's Mother*,' which has been viewed by nearly 120,000 persons in the six weeks [the] painting has been on loan to the Atlanta Art Association."³⁰⁰ There was great interest in the painting both because of the publicity associated with the *Mona Lisa* exhibit and due to the exhibit being held in association with the memorial.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ "*Mona Lisa* Approach to Diplomacy: Maybe the Old Days of *Whistler's Mother* Were Better Criticized Diefenbaker Effect Of Bad Manners Why She's Smiling". *The New York Times*, February 11, 1963.

²⁹⁹ Ibid. Auguste Rodin (1840-1914) is widely credited as the father of modern sculpture.

³⁰⁰ "Returning to France" *The New York Times*, March 27, 1963.

THE ART OF DIPLOMACY

Cultural diplomacy and art in particular influenced relationships between the United States and France from the years immediately following the Second World War through the 1960s. Scholars nonetheless devote little attention to art exhibits between the United States and France for their role in diplomatic dialogue. The inclusion of *Advancing American Art*, *Mona Lisa*, and *Whistler's Mother* into the narrative is the first step in rectifying this neglect.

Debates over the fate of the Federal Republic of Germany, French colonies, the Bretton Woods system, and the direction of the Cold War led to many disagreements between Paris and Washington.³⁰¹ To smooth over these differences, both turned to public diplomacy and specifically cultural diplomacy. One of the areas of cultural diplomacy these countries chose was the promotion and exhibition of great art. Historians often highlight these disagreements and areas of dispute, not the areas agreement and compromise. These art exhibits show a side of the story rarely discussed. They show how France and the United States used their own cultures to engage in peaceful negotiations. Art highlighted their similarities even when politics emphasized their differences.

Though art as a means of cultural diplomacy, particularly between the United States and France during the Cold War, is under represented in the literature, it still begs the question: "so what? Why does the exchange of art between these two countries matter?"³⁰² *Advancing American Art*, the *Mona Lisa*, and *Whistler's Mother* are not just examples of these art shows, but are truly more. These exhibits gave American and French diplomats an opportunity to change perceptions of each country abroad.³⁰³ In addition to this, the exhibits themselves have both domestic and international legacies that must be understood if we are to arrive at a true and complete picture of their diplomatic significance. Yet before definitive conclusions can be reached, French archival sources must be consulted.³⁰⁴ Questions concerning French motivations remain, however, a matter of speculation on until French primary sources are added to our current knowledge of the topics.

³⁰¹ Wall, *The United States and the Making of the Postwar France*, 5.

³⁰² This question might be asked when the context of the entire Cold War is considered.

³⁰³ An example is the *Mona Lisa* exhibit.

³⁰⁴ Few if any French archives have been explored on these three topics. The personal papers of de Gaulle, Malraux, the internal archives of *Le Monde*, the Louvre, and the records from the Council of Ministers are all sources that could be mined for information but have been neglected.

Legacies of these exhibits are complex to assess. Each had implications for both politics and art in France, the United States, and the rest of the world. The intent of this study is not to introduce these events to the world or bring to light previously unknown documents, but to encourage those studying these events to look at them in a different light and point to new avenues of research. The *Advancing American Art*, *Mona Lisa*, and *Whistler's Mother* exhibits are premier examples of American and French cultural diplomacy and should be viewed as such.

The changing American political climate during the *Advancing American Art* exhibit makes its eventful recall understandable. President Kennedy had ended the Cuban missile crisis only two months before the beginning of the *Mona Lisa* exhibit. President de Gaulle was overhauling cultural programs, ending the Algerian War, and experiencing health problems during the exhibit. Finally, the *Whistler's Mother* exhibit coincided with American Civil Rights struggles and French need for tourists.³⁰⁵ These details place the exhibits in both domestic policy history and their foreign relations. In so doing, these events add pieces to the larger puzzle of diplomatic relations between the United States and France during that time.

The question "why was art used as a means of cultural diplomacy between the United States and France during the Cold War" is answered. Both countries wanted to be viewed by the rest of the world as bastions of culture. The United States wished to gain credit in modern art as well as to dispel negative stereotypes of Americana held by foreigners. Sending an art exhibit seemed to be the best way to do that. France wished to regain its role as an international political power. France saw regaining its place as home to the arts as a top priority. In doing so, it could increase tourism and regain its former political position in world affairs. Therefore, diplomatic art exchanges were able to facilitate continuing dialogue between the two countries and advance each country's goals for public diplomacy.

Historians view Radio Free Europe and the Olympics as obvious propaganda projects; yet art also played an instrumental role in French-American diplomacy during the long East-West competition. It is the intent of this work to show art's contribution to diplomacy. The art became the embodiment of its home country, taking on both the literal and figurative role of ambassador for France and the United States.

³⁰⁵ Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*; and Endy, *Cold War Holidays*, 2.

The story of how and why France and the United States chose art to represent themselves to other nations and how other countries received their cultural diplomacy has not been written. Further research into the role of art in these nations' cultural diplomacy strategies needs specific attention. Without additional attention, the effectiveness of these strategies cannot be fully measured.

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