Introduction

The Habsburg Empire and the United States in Transnational Perspective

This is a book about the relationship between two of the world's most famously diverse countries: the United States and the Habsburg Empire. That relationship has not received much scholarly attention, in large part because the two countries did not have the kind of relationship that has traditionally attracted diplomatic historians.[1] There are very few treaties

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[1] On U.S.-Habsburg relations before World War I, see Rudolf Agstner, "From Apalachicola to Wilkes-Barre: Austria(-Hungary) and Its Consulates in the United States of America, 1820–1917," *AHY* 37 (2006): 163–80; Merle Eugene Curti, "Austria and the United States, 1848–1852: A Study in Diplomatic Relations," *Smith College Studies in History* 11, 3 (1926): 137–206; Harry Hanak, "Die Einstellung Grossbritanniens und der Vereinigten Staaten zu Österreich(-Ungarn)," in *Die Habsburgermonarchie in System der Internationalen Beziehungen*, vol. 6/part 2, *Die Habsburgermonarchie, 1848–1918*, ed. Adam Wandruszka (Vienna, 1993), 539–85; Alison Frank, "The Petroleum War of 1910: Standard Oil, Austria, and the Limits of the Multinational Corporation," *AHR* 114, 1 (2009): 16–41; Nicole Slupetzky, "Austria and the Spanish-American War," in *European Perceptions of the Spanish-American War*, ed. Sylvia L. Hilton and Steve J. S. Ickringill (Bern, 1999), 181–94; Donald S. Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America: A Study of Sectionalism and Foreign Policy, 1848–1852* (Columbia, 1977); and the document collection by Erwin Matsch, *Wien-Washington: Ein Journal diplomatischer Beziehungen, 1838–1917* (Vienna, 1990). Studies related to World War I and the Paris Peace Conference include Victor S. Mamatey, *The United States and East Central Europe, 1914–1918: A Study in Wilsonian Diplomacy and Propaganda* (Princeton, 1957); Betty Miller Unterberger, *The United States, Revolutionary Russia, and the Rise of Czechoslovakia* (Chapel Hill, 1989); Gerald H. Davis, "The Diplomatic Relations between the United States and Austria-Hungary, 1913–1917" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1958); Carol Jackson Adams, "Courting the 'Vassal': Austro-American Relations during World War I" (Ph.D. diss., University of Alabama, 1997); Arthur J. May, "Woodrow Wilson and Austria-Hungary to the End of 1917," in *Festschrift für Heinrich Benedikt*, ed. Hugo Hantsch and Alexander Novotny (Vienna, 1957), 213–42; Jon D. Berlin, "The Burgenland: The United States and the Burgenland, 1918–1920," *AHY* 8 (1972): 39–58;

between the two governments, trade between them was relatively small, and, with the exception of World War I, they never went to war with one another. What they did have was a series of conflicts over diplomatic norms, a multitude of legal problems stemming from the migration of several million people back and forth between the two countries between the 1870s and World War I, and, of course, the crisis of the war itself. These conflicts had a dramatic effect on both American and Habsburg political culture, and the clashes between their contrasting approaches to managing their diverse populations contributed decisively to the transition in international politics from the post-1815 Great Power System to the post-1919 nation-state system. Their relationship demonstrates the international and transnational aspects of the construction of sovereignty.

Historical accounts of both countries offer long-standing narratives about the domestic sources of their governments' sovereignty. For the United States, a Lockean conception of natural rights and a social contract is written into the Declaration of Independence, bolstering the claim that the U.S. government derives its legitimacy exclusively from the consent of the governed. For the Habsburg Empire, the conventional wisdom for decades was that the empire collapsed because the government oppressed the empire's constituent national groups, which could not get along and actively sought the independence that was eventually achieved via the 1919 Paris Peace Conference.[2] More recently, scholarly accounts have stressed the importance of the Habsburg government's inability to provide basic services during the strain of World War I in decisively eroding domestic support for Habsburg sovereignty.[3]

These domestically focused narratives do tell us a great deal about American and Habsburg sovereignty, but they do not tell the whole story. Sovereignty does indeed derive in part from the consent of the governed, but it also comes from the recognition of its legitimacy from other governments in the international system; governments look to ensure their survival not only through domestic support, but through

Frederick Dumin, "Self-Determination: The United States and Austria in 1919," *Research Studies* 40, 3 (1972): 176–94; and James M. Smallwood, "Banquo's Ghost at the Paris Peace Conference: The United States and the Hungarian Question," *East European Quarterly* 12, 3 (1978): 289–307.

[2] Classic accounts of domestic collapse that are still in scholarly use include Oscar Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago, 1929); and A. J. P. Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1809–1918* (Chicago, 1948).

[3] Maureen Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I* (New York, 2004).

international support as well.[4] This study focuses on these international aspects, concerning itself primarily with how the Habsburg government first gained and then lost U.S. recognition of its legitimacy. When the U.S. government and its allies withdrew their support for Habsburg sovereignty during World War I and transferred it to new Central European governments that had been conceived in racial-national terms, a fundamental change in the nature of the international political system occurred.

The Habsburg Empire, commonly known as Austria-Hungary after its dramatic reorganization in 1867, was home to a population whose members conversed in German, Magyar (Hungarian), Czech, Slovak, Polish, Italian, Romanian, Ukrainian, various South Slavic idioms (Serbo-Croatian, Slovene), and Yiddish. Multilingualism was common, and recent scholarship has clearly demonstrated that language use was not equivalent to identification with the racial-national community.[5] Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Orthodox and Uniate Christians, and Muslims abounded. Each of the dozens of territories that made up the empire brought its own history, political traditions, and economic system. In addition to seeking the support of its citizens and subjects, the Habsburg government bolstered its legitimacy by carefully cultivating international support.[6] At the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the Habsburg government led the way in creating the Great Power System, in which member governments were recognized as legitimate by all of the other governments in the system. The five Great Powers in the system – Austria, Prussia (later Germany), Russia, France, and Britain – were supposed to use their

[4] Stephen Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, 1999); see also James J. Sheehan, "The Problem of Sovereignty in European History," *AHR* 111, 1 (2006): 1–15.

[5] See, among numerous others, Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge MA, 2006); and Jeremy King, "The Nationalization of East Central Europe: Ethnicism, Ethnicity, and Beyond," in *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present*, ed. Maria Bucur and Nancy M. Wingfield (West Lafayette, 2001), 112–52.

[6] On the political culture of the empire, see Gary B. Cohen, "Neither Absolutism nor Anarchy: New Narratives on Society and Government in Late Imperial Austria," *AHY* 29 (1998): 37–61; Cohen, "Nationalist Politics and the Dynamics of State and Civil Society in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1867–1914," *Central European History* 40, 2 (2007): 241–78; Waltraud Heindl, "Bureaucracy, Officials, and the State in the Austrian Monarchy: Stages of Change since the Eighteenth Century," *AHY* 37 (2006): 35–57; Lothar Höbelt, "Parliamentary Politics in a Multinational Setting: Late Imperial Austria," working paper, *Center for Austrian Studies*, University of Minnesota, 1992; and Daniel L. Unowsky, *The Pomp and Politics of Patriotism: Imperial Celebrations in Habsburg Austria, 1848–1916* (West Lafayette, 2005). For a brief but persuasive assessment of Habsburg success in the international community, see Paul W. Schroeder, "The Luck of the House of Habsburg: Military Defeat and Political Survival," *AHY* 32 (2001): 215–24.

power to guarantee the territorial integrity of the smaller states and to resolve any conflicts that developed, tasks at which they were largely successful.[7] Citizenship was based on territory: all the people living on the land within a government's jurisdiction were citizens or subjects of that government. At Vienna, representatives also articulated a new set of diplomatic rules and norms that were designed to facilitate the maintenance of the system; key to this arrangement was the division of tasks among central foreign ministry staff, diplomatic corps, and consular services. The Habsburg government used the Great Power System and its diplomatic culture to protect its claims to sovereignty over the diverse range of individuals who resided on its territory. The Habsburg central government also used the system to create and maintain the politically based citizenship categories of "Austrian" and "Hungarian" that facilitated the goal of uniform application of the law to the empire's inhabitants, and the Habsburg central government – especially the emperor – enjoyed widespread loyalty and support.[8] As other governments engaged in practices that upheld Habsburg sovereignty, they reaffirmed the Habsburg government's authority to categorize its citizens in political terms.

The United States was not a participant in the Congress of Vienna, and so it was not invested in the diplomatic culture of the Great Power System. Indeed, many Americans throughout the nineteenth century rejected as un-American the diplomacy and especially the specific ceremonies, protocols, and practices that characterized the Great Power System. It became increasingly clear to U.S. officials, however, that they were going to have to participate in the system if they wanted to achieve American economic and political goals. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the United States gradually became integrated into the Great Power System, and conflicts with the Habsburg government about the rules of the system helped to further that integration. Until Woodrow Wilson's administration began in 1913, the Habsburg government was successful in these conflicts, knitting the United States more thoroughly into the system and thus securing

[7] Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848* (New York, 1994).

[8] On Habsburg citizenship categories, see Benno Gammerl, "Subjects, Citizens and Others: The Handling of Ethnic Differences in the British and the Habsburg Empires (late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century)," *European Review of History* 16, 4 (2009): 523–49. On loyalty to the crown, see King, "Nationalization"; Unowsky; and Laurence Cole and Daniel L. Unowsky, eds. *The Limits of Loyalty: Imperial Symbolism, Popular Allegiances, and State Patriotism in the Late Habsburg Monarchy* (New York, 2007).

continued American recognition of legitimate Habsburg sovereignty. In the United States, characterizations of diplomacy as un-American were gradually – although not fully – eclipsed by the idea that compliance with diplomatic norms was civilized behavior.

Like the Habsburg Empire, the United States had a diverse population, and it only became more so as the nineteenth century progressed. In addition to native-born whites, there were multiple waves of immigrants from Europe, the British dominions, and Asia, plus Native Americans, African slaves and their descendants, and former citizens of Mexico and Spain. The founding principle of the United States, of course, is that all men are created equal, but the arrival of more and more people, whether as slaves or as voluntary migrants, prompted many Americans to rethink that promise of equality in an effort to hold on to their own political power. Americans began to develop their own language of racial difference, first to justify taking land from Native Americans and enslaving Africans and then to exclude a wide variety of immigrants from entering the country or becoming naturalized U.S. citizens, prevent newly freed African Americans from exercising full citizenship, and, later, justify overseas colonization.[9] These conceptions of racial difference were increasingly expressed in scientific terms, naturalizing them and imbuing them with significant cultural power. Racial categories were also tied to political culture, with contemporary thinkers arguing that certain biological groups, through genetics and acquired habit, had an innate propensity to liberty and democratic institutions, whereas others were made to be dependent, continually bowing to authority. In this line of thinking, a homogeneous national community of people capable of self-government was a prerequisite for the successful functioning of democracy.[10] By the 1890s, a key, powerful group of Americans adopted these ideas and came to see the United States as an Anglo-Saxon nation that needed to be homogeneous for its superior government to function.

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[9] For an overview, see Barbara Young Welke, *Law and the Borders of Belonging in the Long Nineteenth Century United States* (New York, 2010); see also Chapter 5.

[10] See, among numerous others, Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876–1917* (New York, 2000); Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*, rev. ed. (Cambridge MA, 1986); Paul Gordon Lauren, *Power and Prejudice: The Politics and Diplomacy of Racial Discrimination* (Boulder, 1996); Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven, 1997); Lloyd E. Ambrosius, "Woodrow Wilson and The Birth of a Nation: American Democracy and International Relations," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 18, 4 (2007): 689–718; and John S. Haller, *Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes toward Racial Inferiority, 1859–1900*, rev. ed. (Carbondale, 1995).

Through their experiences at home and abroad, private American citizens and officials of the U.S. government gradually worked out what it meant to be white, and they were aided in their efforts by European colonial powers and, especially, by similar processes occurring in the settler colonies of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Canada.[11] Working out the narrower definition of Anglo-Saxon, however, was done through contact with the millions of European migrants who came to the United States, and a significant number of these came from the Habsburg Empire.[12] In dealing with European migrants, Americans worked out new categories that later would be considered ethnicities, but which they articulated in terms of race, putting as much distance between, for example, a Pole and a German as there was between an African and an American Indian. These categories were directly at odds with the political citizenship categories that the Habsburg government applied to its citizens.

Had Habsburg migrants to the United States stayed in their new home, those categories of racial nationalism might not have held as much salience back in Europe. However, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a time of massive international movement, driven by changes in technology and the economy that made such movement more accessible to a wide range of people. Some Austrian and Hungarian citizens were truly immigrants, making permanent homes in the United States, but approximately half returned to the empire. Short-term travel was also more affordable, prompting a rise in the number of people who were traveling for brief visits to relatives, to conduct business, for educational purposes, or merely for recreation.[13] Most of the travel between the United States and Europe was done without passports or visas, which meant that an individual's citizenship status was not clearly marked and was thus open to question whenever he or she crossed an international border.[14] U.S. officials in the Bureau of Immigration, where scientific categories of racial nationalism had a firm institutional hold, used those categories to

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[11] Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge, 2008); and Paul A. Kramer, "Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World," *AHR* 116, 5 (2011): 1348–91.

[12] Specific numbers are difficult to determine, due to the statistical categories the Bureau of Immigration used. See Chapter 5 and Mark Wyman, *Round-trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880–1930* (Ithaca, 1993).

[13] Christopher Endy, "Travel and World Power: Americans in Europe, 1890–1917," *DH* 22, 4 (1998): 565–94.

[14] John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State* (Cambridge, 2000).

mark people from the Habsburg Empire, rather than using the political citizenship categories employed by the Habsburg government. Racial-nationalist ideas in the United States had considerable power, and they could manifest in economic and social discrimination or in actual violence, as well as in everyday public discourse. These ideas and experiences shaped migrants' understanding of race, citizenship, and identity, often sharpening their association with and acceptance of racial-nationalist categories. The movement of people from the Habsburg Empire to the United States and back again provided a conduit for ideas about racial nationalism and the specific categories adopted by the U.S. government to make their way back to the Habsburg Empire, where they contributed to the development of national identities at the expense of Habsburg political citizenship. By the time World War I began, those categories had gained considerable salience in the Habsburg Empire, although the desire for independent national states was confined to a relatively small number of activists.[15]

Neither the American acceptance of Great Power diplomatic culture nor the increasing salience of racial-nationalist categories in the Habsburg Empire was produced exclusively by the U.S.-Habsburg relationship, but they were significantly influenced by that relationship; they were certainly not purely domestic phenomena. However, the specifics of the U.S.-Habsburg relationship were crucial to the end of the Great Power System and the transition to the post-1919 Paris system. Whether he intended it or not, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson became the figure most closely associated with the idea of "self-determination" during World War I and the Paris Peace Conference, and the hopeful national activists of Central Europe made their appeals for recognition of their sovereign claims in terms they thought he would accept. Polish, Czechoslovak, and Yugoslav groups presented their claims to sovereignty to Wilson, his staff of postwar planners, and the American public in racial-national terms, arguing for the biological homogeneity and clearly defined borders of the community they claimed to represent and stressing the fitness of that community for democratic self-government. These groups were not alone in doing so: nationalist leaders from all over the world converged on Wilson in Paris to make similar claims.[16] At the time, however, it was only in Central Europe that such claims were successful. Their success signaled to other hopeful leaders that

[15] See, among others, Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848–1948* (Princeton, 2002).

[16] Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York, 2007).

the key to international recognition lay in claims to represent clearly defined racial-national communities. Existing governments also received a push to articulate their legitimacy in racial-national terms, facilitating shifts from state-protected individual rights to the identification of majorities and minorities as distinct and quite likely permanent groups within the population.[17] With the Paris Peace Conference, the norms of the international political system shifted: in the earlier Great Power System, the internal structure of governments could vary while the international community protected governmental legitimacy and territorial claims. In the post-1919 Paris system, the legitimate governments in the system needed to be democratic, capitalistic, and representative of a single national community.[18]

The Central European nationalists who were successful in obtaining Wilson's recognition and support were able to do so for two reasons. First, a key aspect of the Great Power System's diplomatic culture had been shut down. In that culture, it was normal for countries at war to break diplomatic relations with one another, suspending the ongoing process of legitimizing sovereignty by removing members of the diplomatic corps from their posts in enemy countries. That is what happened during World War I. As diplomatic channels closed down, the last remaining connection among the warring states was between the United States and the Habsburg Empire. Before the United States entered the war, Wilson made the decision not to receive the newly arrived Habsburg ambassador, Count Adam Tarnowski. With that choice, the aspect of Great Power diplomatic culture that perpetuated mutual recognition of legitimate sovereignty was gone, and the Habsburg government lost its ability to communicate with the Wilson administration and to make a case there for its continued existence. Nationalists then had a monopoly on Wilson's attention.

Second, when determining the details of his peace proposal – the Fourteen Points – and during negotiations in Paris, Wilson chose to circumvent the State Department and instead use The Inquiry, an independent team of experts, to inform his decision making. The State Department

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[17] Eric D. Weitz, "From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions," *AHR* 113, 5 (2008): 1313–43; and Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878–1938* (New York, 2004).

[18] For decades, scholarship on the Paris Peace Conference focused on Western efforts to block the spread of communism in the wake of the war. The classic study is Arno J. Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918–1919* (New York, 1967).

had developed in tandem with the Great Power System, and its personnel and methods were largely committed to the norms of that system. By going around it, Wilson had greater freedom of action. His team of experts was primarily made up of academics, the preponderance of whom were geographers. The most important qualification for membership was enthusiasm for Wilson's publicly stated ideas, and so it was a group in favor of radical change. Many of them were quite young, and although they all had advanced degrees, none of them had made the Habsburg Empire a focus of study.[19] If the State Department was the American institutionalization of the Great Power System, the Inquiry was a group that had thoroughly internalized – or, in some cases, developed – the teachings of scientific racism, and they sought to apply those ideas in Central Europe. They operated on the problematic assumption that each individual person had a single racial identity that was manifested in the language he or she spoke; this way of thinking did not leave space for grappling with the reality of multilingualism in Central Europe, and it suggested that neatly corralling individuals into their proper national communities would be relatively simple.[20] By selecting the Inquiry over the State Department, Wilson's eventual support for ending Habsburg sovereignty in favor of nationalist successor states was almost guaranteed.

Securing international recognition and actually exercising sovereignty on the ground are two different things, however, and the successor governments had their work cut out for them, especially because the homogeneous, nationally conscious, and united populations they claimed to represent did not exist, nor were the physical boundaries of their sovereignty clear.[21] The new states did not spring immediately into existence when Emperor Karl abdicated in November 1918. The U.S. government was important in bolstering the successor governments' sovereign claims and reinforcing their social and physical borders in the years immediately after the war, although it took some time for various agencies of the U.S. government to reach a consensus on those borders. The crucial action

[19] Lawrence E. Gelfand, *The Inquiry: American Preparations for Peace, 1917–1919* (New Haven, 1963); and Neil Smith, *American Empire: Roosevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization* (Berkeley, 2003).

[20] My understanding of this process is informed by the discussion of simplification and legibility in James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, 1998).

[21] On the uncertainty of borders, see, among others, Peter Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium im Tschechischen Politischen Diskurs, 1880–1938* (Munich, 2010); and Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914–1948* (New York, 2009).

came from the State Department. Although the diplomatic channels of the Great Power System had been shut down with the war, the consular channels, through which governments protected the lives and property of their citizens abroad, remained open, albeit in modified form. Neutral countries took over consular protection duties in belligerent countries. For most of the war, the United States was the neutral power with the largest consular presence, and its representatives assumed many of these duties, operating ten countries' consular services in all belligerent countries, in addition to protecting its own citizens.

The undertaking was massive because the war had left thousands of people stranded away from home as transportation networks shut down. Dealing with the myriad issues that arose made it very clear to State Department employees that unregulated international movement could become an administrative nightmare in a time of crisis. Although consuls had worked hard to determine legal citizenship status for those who claimed U.S. citizenship before the war and to provide protection to them if they were entitled to it, the war demonstrated that it would be much easier for consuls to do their work if people who crossed borders had passports and visas. Such paperwork would clearly mark an individual's citizenship status. The consul's task would be simplest if each individual's political citizenship aligned with his or her racial identity, making a visual assessment of the individual's citizenship claims significantly easier. Getting a passport would add a hurdle to international travel, keeping more people at home, where their physical location would align with their citizenship and racial identity, too. For those who still aimed to travel, visas would regulate the length of their stays, again urging people back home and helping consuls determine cases of expatriation. Passports had been introduced as a wartime measure in Europe, and the State Department successfully advocated for their continued use after the war. By requiring passports, the U.S. government helped the new successor states – as well as preexisting governments – more thoroughly define their social and territorial borders.

Finally, the U.S. Bureau of Immigration had an important role to play in reinforcing the borders of the new nations.[22] As the Paris Peace Conference and then the treaty ratification process dragged on, the Bureau of Immigration was busy sending people back to Europe, deporting people considered dangerous and repatriating prisoners of war and civilian internees. At first, Immigration actions muddied the waters,

[22] The bureau was replaced with the Immigration and Naturalization Service in 1933.