
Led by a Franco-Brazilian team of scholars in the humanities, social sciences, arts and literatures, this joint research project is developing a digital platform for Transatlantic Cultural History to be published in four languages. In a series of essays exploring cultural relations between Europe, Africa, and the Americas, it presents a connected history of the Atlantic space since the 18th century, highlighting the cultural dynamics of the Atlantic region and its crucial role in the contemporary process of globalization.

Cultural Diplomacy from Propaganda to Soft Power

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North America - South America - Caribbean - Europe - Africa - North Atlantic - South Atlantic

The Atlantic Space Within Globalization - The Consolidation of Mass Cultures - The Steam Atlantic

Either directly or through the non-governmental institutions and actors, states have also played a role in shaping transatlantic cultures. Americanization, Cultural Cold War, South-South Diplomacy: since the end of the 19th century, cultural diplomacy and soft power objectives have helped redefine the Atlantic region.

The transnational approach of this project should not preclude taking into account the active role of governments. In recent history, many countries around the Atlantic have attempted to promote their national interests —whether political, economic or strategic— through cultural policies directed at other areas throughout the region. These initiatives, of varying nature and scope, have been by turns direct or indirect, transparent or concealed, aiming either at immediate or long-term effects. This diversity gives rise to a number of conceptual and semantic difficulties for transnational analysis, to the point where "cultural diplomacy" has been labeled "one of the most confusing terms"¹ in modern-day international relations. In the aftermath of 9/11, American diplomat Richard Holbrooke wrote that "public diplomacy," "public affairs," and "psychological warfare," in spite of their fine points of difference, really boiled down to propaganda.² In France, "*action culturelle*" has long been the preferred term, although "diplomacy of influence" has been increasingly used in recent years, and may seem to be an approximation of Joseph Nye's "soft power" concept, which has dominated the discussion since the end of the Cold War. A [recent report for the European Parliament](#) alternates between the terms "cultural relations" and "cultural diplomacy," noting that while the latter is privileged by political institutions, the former is favored by cultural institutions and actors. Under these various labels, however, state policies aiming more or less deliberately at influencing values and ideas circulating in the Atlantic region have played a major role since the end of the 19th century.

Thus, state actors (e.g. diplomats and public media) tend to work with semi-public or para-state organizations (e.g. cultural institutes, and schools) as well as private institutions (e.g. foundations, museums, film production companies). Government-led policies, often labeled as "cultural policy" or "cultural diplomacy," are readily associated with the French tradition that emerged in 1883 when the [Alliance Française](#) centers were created, staffed in great part by Ministry of Education personnel. This policy was reinforced in the 1930s and 1940s on the strength of its expanding network of French *lycées* and became truly institutionalized after World War II, when the "cultural attaché" position was created to provide logistical and financial support to French musicians or the translation of French-language books on behalf of the Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs.

The term "cultural relations" is usually defined as all "organic and natural" exchanges³ between nations through their cultural and social actors. Yet even institutions subjected to governmental supervision, such as the BBC or the British Council in the United Kingdom, have adopted this label. This kind of interactions also involves scientific, academic and intellectual networks, long favored by the Latin American nations to strengthen both regional cooperation and international prestige (i.e., Buenos Aires'

Scientific Congress in 1898 and Santiago de Chile's Medical Congress in 1902, as well as Brazil's active participation in the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation as early as 1924).

In most cases, the national interest (understood as prestige, influence, or cooperation) is promoted more or less explicitly, under different forms, and through various state, para-state and private actors and institutions. This convergence of initiatives is commonly observed in U.S. diplomatic efforts, for example: in 1948, the Pan-American Union, New York's Museum of Modern Art and the Ministry of Education of Venezuela's new president, writer Romulo Gallegos, could count on funds from the Rockefeller family to organize an *Exposición Interamericana de Pintura Moderna* in Caracas. It was then up to United Fruit to subsidize the show's travels across Latin America. Entries under this heading will attempt to shed light on the conditions, forms and goals of cultural interactions, in particular the articulation between state policies and private actors. The idea is to trace actual circulations of the messages, works and ideas promoted abroad, and to identify target audiences, whether or not they were actually receptive.

Chronology will necessarily determine the weight accorded particular countries at any given point. Considered as a forerunner of cultural policies through its [Alliances](#) and the notion of [Francophonie](#), France has never stopped believing in culture as a tool for influence and cooperation, although the means dedicated to it have decreased in recent decades. Like Canada, France also conceives of culture as a strategic line of defense: the "cultural exception" that France often tries to impose in transatlantic trade deals is akin to the cultural exemption clause negotiated by Canada under NAFTA, which caused legal disputes with the U.S. over medias as diverse as a country music television network, a sports magazine and a bookstore chain. The [UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions](#), adopted in 2005, reflects this approach, and beyond it, the widely-shared feeling, around the Atlantic region in particular, that globalization sometimes looks like a forced [Americanization](#) that needs to be curbed. A fairly significant part of the cultural history of the 20th century deals with the consequences of, and reactions arising from, a North American standardization of culture through deliberate propaganda as well as through the market economy. This issue seems to us to be one of the unifying themes linking the articles of this section.

Should we then speak of "cultural imperialism" or "informal empire"? In 1941, U.S. media mogul Henry Luce encouraged his countrymen to enter World War II and assume a leading role on the international scene. According to Luce, "American jazz, Hollywood movies, American slang, American machines and patented products [were], in fact, the only things that every community in the world, from Zanzibar to Hamburg, recognizes in common."⁴ What he described was a process that actually began as early as the 1910s: the shaping up of an "[American Century](#)" which has taken center stage in American culture and diplomacy.



Poster of the Ibero-American Exhibition of Seville in 1929

Source : [Servicio de Archivo, Hemeroteca y Publicaciones](#)

As a matter of fact, this so-called [Americanization](#) took shape long before World War II, and focused on the American "hemisphere." It opposed European influences, including "Latin" and "Iberian" perspectives (the relevance of which was celebrated in 1929 at Seville's Ibero-American exhibition), but also German initiatives, especially in the 1930s, toward countries hosting sizable German-speaking communities (Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Colombia). These competing discourses on race, nation and identity outlined cultural and ideological configurations in the Atlantic region. [Ibero-Americanism](#) and Latin-Americanism were transoceanic and linguistic, pushing back the shores of the Atlantic all the way to Paris and Madrid, whereas Washington's [Pan Americanism](#) was regional and political and turned the Atlantic into a cultural divide.

At the same time, countries such as Argentina, Brazil and Chile were elaborating their own cultural diplomacies, trying to turn to their advantage the attention they received from both sides of the Atlantic, and trying to define and project a certain image on the international scene. As the emerging power of the American continent, defined by José Vasconcelos as the land of a cosmic and universal *raza*,⁵ Mexico used culture as diplomacy as early as the 1910s.

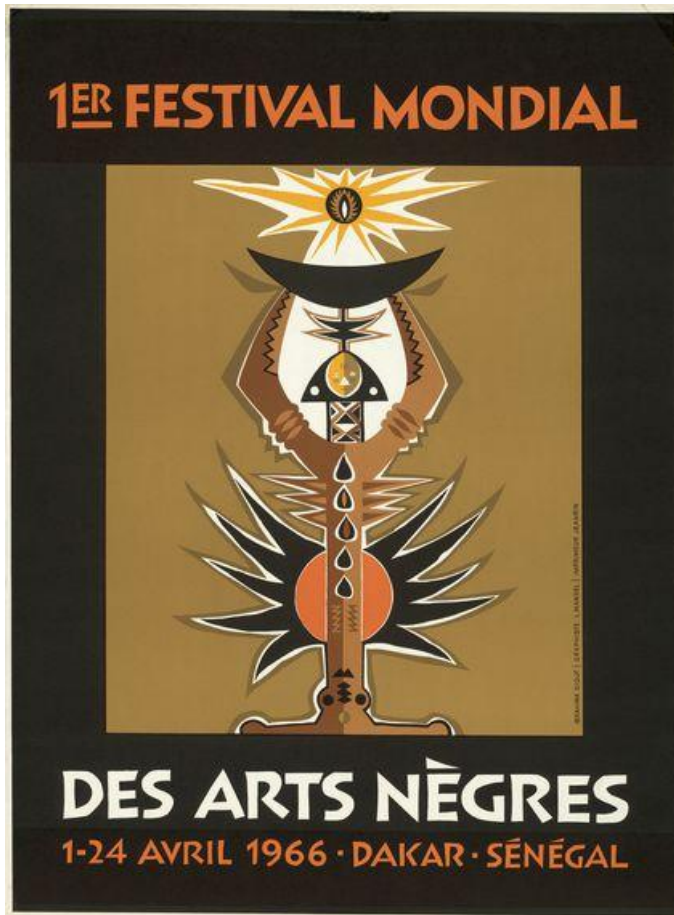
Overlapping this panorama for several decades, the Soviet Union's cultural strategy relied on the power of mass media as early as the 1920s and gained strength in the so-called "Cultural Cold War,"⁶ a term which encompasses, at times, the possibility of rapprochement. In 1958, the Lacy-Zarubin agreement was the first Cold War treaty signed by the USSR and the US, and it dealt specifically with cultural and educational issues as part of the thaw between the two nations. One year later, the new Cuban regime opened the *Casa de las Américas* (inaugurated, with a certain sense of irony, on the fourth of July), whose purpose was to strengthen relations between Havana and the rest of Latin America, and to promote Cuba's literature and arts throughout the world. These initiatives contributed to softening the diplomatic isolation imposed on the island by Washington. It can thus be identified as an early example of South-South cultural

diplomacy.

[Foundation and aims of the Casa de las Americas](#)

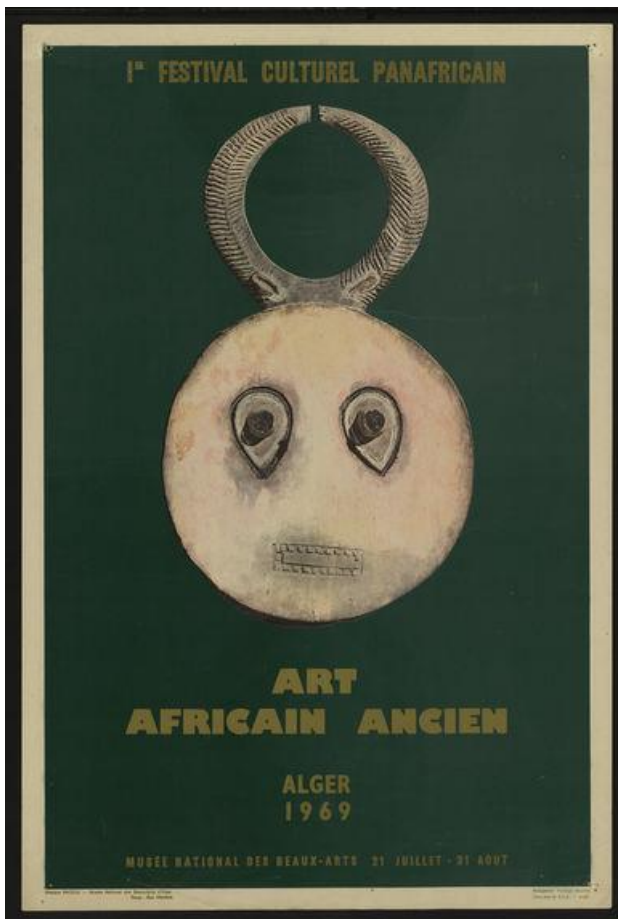
[Source : YouTube](#)

In the wake of Africa's decolonization movement, *the Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres* (Dakar, 1966), the *Festival Panafricain* (Algiers, 1969) and the [World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture \(Lagos, 1977\)](#) welcomed sizeable delegations not only from African nations, but also from the United States and Latin America. Brazil's participation in Dakar signals the Ministry of Foreign Relations' intentions to make Africa a new target for its cultural diplomacy. Thus, in the decades between the Russian Revolution and the end of the Cold War at least, all major nations in the Atlantic region devoted substantial efforts to diplomatic influence through culture.



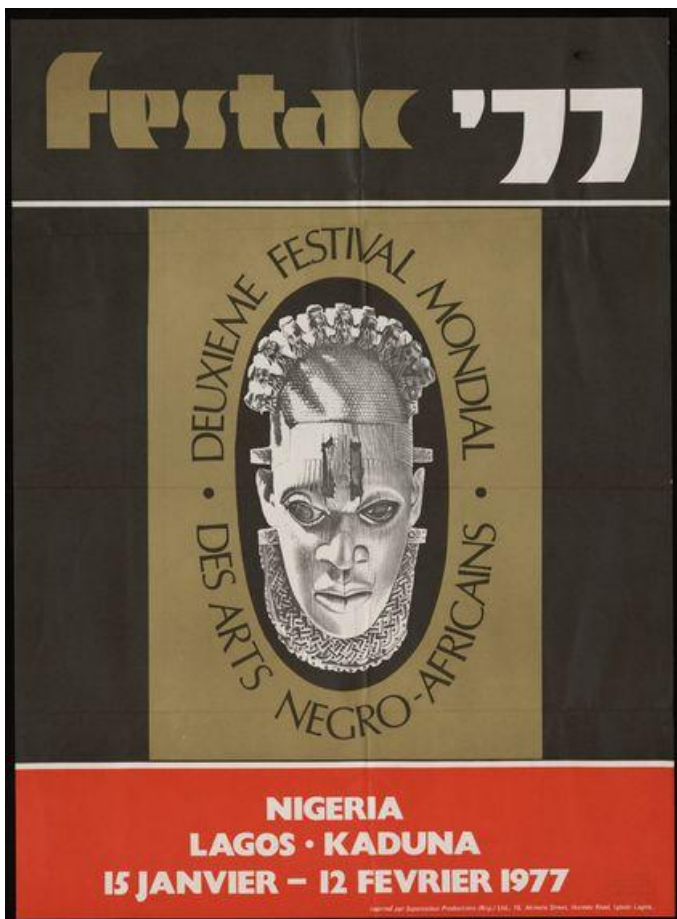
Poster of the 1st World Festival of Black Arts held in Dakar in 1966

Source : [Musée du quai Branly](#)



Poster of the 1st Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers in 1969

Source : [Musée du quai Branly](http://www.musee-branly.fr/)



Poster of « Festac'77. Second World Festival of Negro-African Arts » in Lagos in 1977

Source : [Musée du quai Branly](#)

By dismantling its main "public diplomacy" agency in 1999, the United States seemed to consider momentarily that the end of the Cold War was rendering propaganda useless. As far as the Atlantic region is concerned, cultural industries have probably become the main agents of influence. "Diplomacy" and culture now belong to the realm of trade agreements, raising questions about the regulation of giant internet companies and the logic of free trade. As a matter of fact, the concept of "nation branding" has been adopted by many countries (Spain, England, or South Africa, for example) who are now tempted to define their policy of influence in the form of advertising strategies. As mass culture undergoes a process of commodification, the "identity" of nations is a selling point for publics now envisioned as potential tourists.

1. Jessica Gienow-Hecht, "What Are We Searching For? Culture, Diplomacy, Agents, and the State," in *Searching For a Cultural Diplomacy*, eds. Jessica Gienow-Hecht, Mark C. Donfried (New York, Oxford : Berghahn Books, 2013), 3.
2. Richard Holbrooke, "Get the Message Out," *Washington Post*, October 28, 2001, B07.
3. Richard T. Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005), xviii.
4. Henry Luce, "The American Century," *Life*, February 17, 1941, 61-65.
5. José Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cósmica. Misión de la raza iberoamericana. Notas de viajes a la América del Sur* (Madrid: Agencia Mundial de Librería, 1925).
6. Giles Scott-Smith and Hans Krabbendam (eds), *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe 1945-1960* (London: Frank Cass, 2003); Patrick Justus Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

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[See on Zotero](#)

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