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Public Diplomacy & the Newseum [1]

For a field that is predicated on communication, we public diplomats don't always do as good a job as we could in communicating what is public diplomacy to the public that we serve. As such, it remains an ongoing challenge for the field to create awareness of what public diplomacy is and what it entails.

I recently visited the Newseum in Washington, DC. The Newseum is a veritable museum of the Fourth Estate, interactively chronicling the history of the communication of information. The Newseum's mission is "to help the public and the news media understand one another better" as well as to "raise public awareness of the important role of a free press in a democratic society". In the seven-level, 250,000 square ft museum, the history of journalism and the relationship between media and society are methodically evaluated and analyzed. Since opening, the Newseum has become one of the most popular attractions in Washington.

Unfortunately, for a museum that so deeply dissects the diffusion of ideas, there is nary a word about public diplomacy. To be sure, the museum touches on figures important to public diplomacy such as George Creel and his work with the Committee on Public Information (CPI) and Carl Rowan and his work with United States Information Agency (USIA). In addition, microphone memorabilia from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) is included among its section on the impact of radio on the dissemination of information. Meanwhile, in its section honoring journalists slain in the line of duty, the Newseum includes RFE/RL journalists among those it memorializes.

The museum devotes a whole section to the doyen of American public diplomacy, Edward R. Murrow. In this section, there is a moving video on the life of Murrow, as narrated by public radio host and biographer Bob Edwards, which mentions Murrow's work with USIA and briefly notes the films that USIA produced for global audiences under Murrow's stewardship. There are even a few of Murrow's effects, such as the seal from Murrow's office when he ran the show at USIA.

On the whole, the story of American public diplomacy is largely missing from the Newseum. This absence presents a golden opportunity for the public diplomacy community to work with the Newseum to design an exhibit on public diplomacy.

An exhibit that chronicles American public diplomacy could showcase the history of public diplomacy and the advocacy work of the CPI and USIA. It could provide the public with the framework to understand the differences between diplomacy, public diplomacy and propaganda.

Such an exhibit could help document the cultural diplomacy efforts of those like Willis Connover through his program "Jazz Hour" , or the role of *The Family of Man* as a successful American cultural diplomacy outreach, as well as focus on the many others who did so much to contribute to American public and cultural diplomacy efforts abroad, yet whose

work remains largely unknown to the American public. Moreover, an exhibit highlighting American cultural diplomacy could help educate audiences about the vital role that cultural projection played during the Cold War.

The exhibit could examine international broadcasting outlets like the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. It could also examine the role played by government-supported broadcast networks in communicating information. Meanwhile, the exhibit could outline issues like the Smith-Mundt Act and describe why outlets like VOA and RFE/RL remain behind the firewall and how such situations can be construed as antiquated in light of the modern media landscape.

Over the years, the Newseum has played host to a number of public diplomacy events such as CPD's event "A New Public Diplomacy" and the 60th anniversary celebration of Radio Free Europe, but it has yet to host a full-scale exhibition on public diplomacy. If we are to broaden the overall understanding of public diplomacy, then popular locations like the Newseum offer perfect locales to communicate such ideas. The old USIA slogan was "Telling America's Story"; if we are to successfully tell the world America's story, then we must come up with creative ways of communicating to American audiences how our story is told globally.