

“Bridging Gaps in the Study of Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy”

**SATURDAY JANUARY 10, 1998
Aqueduct Conference Center, Chapel Hill, N.C.**

There has been much discussion in recent years about a so-called "CNN Effect." What kind of impact does press coverage have on American foreign policy? Has, for example, press coverage of humanitarian disasters pushed the United States into military intervention? The way in which public opinion, the press, and the foreign policy establishment interact with one another is a broader issue which has for some time aroused interest among social scientists.

At the same time, there has been growing debate in the humanities about the nature of some of the assumptions which underlie our discussion of public opinion. What, for example, do we mean when we refer to “the public”? Do opinion polls themselves influence public opinion? How should the public role be conceptualized? How do arguments made in the public sphere influence - or get influenced by - arguments made in the technical sphere? Are there normative notions of good argument? Should debates over foreign policy be held up against these?

This conference will not necessarily answer all of these questions. It will, however, bring together persons from communities that examine foreign policy and the public in distinctly, sometimes radically, different ways. A dialogue between scholars and practitioners who operate on very different assumptions, should reveal new approaches to tough issues and in so doing, make future cross- and inter-disciplinary work more feasible and productive.

Schedule

8:00 - 8:45 Registration and Continental Breakfast

8:45 - 9:00 Welcome

9:00 - 10:30 Roundtable 1: The Social Science Study of the Public Role in American Foreign Policy.

Ole Holsti's new book, *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy*, may be the single most comprehensive analysis and assessment of the impact foreign policy has had on public opinion - and vice versa. At this roundtable, Professor Holsti will review the conclusions and the conceptual underpinnings of his work. A discussion will follow, led by two notable young scholars of what might be called "Public Argument Studies." David Cheshier and Erik Doxtader will question Professor Holsti regarding his conception of the public, how a “public” is called into existence on particular issues, and the implications of his research. The purpose here is to engage in a conversation about the theoretical constructions of the public in Holsti's work.

Moderator: *Thomas J. Hynes, State University of West Georgia*

Presenter: *Ole Holsti, Duke University*

Questioners: *David Cheshier, Georgia State University and
Erik Doxtader, UNC-Chapel Hill*

10:30 - 10:45 Break

10:45 - 12:15 Roundtable 2: Public Argument and the Study of Foreign Policy

Tom Goodnight's work on "argument spheres" has had a seminal influence on the study of public argument. His focus on how standards for the evaluation of argument change within different contexts, and the way contemporary argument styles place real public discourse at profound risk, has shaped the field over the last decade. Professor Goodnight will briefly review his analytical method and concerns. He will then be engaged in discussion by two scholars, one from History and one from Political Science. This will expose the gap between the way scholars in the Social Sciences and in the Humanities address some of these issues. Several important questions will be asked. Can "argument studies," subjective and interpretive as they are, be intellectually rigorous? The traditional means of assessing the role of the public has been quantitative; can "argument studies" draw valid conclusions equally with history and political science?

Moderator: *Carol Winkler, Georgia State University*

Presenter: *G. Thomas Goodnight, Northwestern University*

Questioners: *Michael Hunt, UNC Chapel Hill and Timothy McKeown, UNC Chapel Hill*

12:15 - 1:30 Lunch

1:30 - 3:00 Roundtable 3: Methodological Implications in the Debate over the "CNN Effect".

Practitioners in the media write for the public, at least in theory. At the same time, however, it is clear that the foreign policy establishment makes assumptions about the way the public thinks. These assumptions shape decisions. Those involved in framing foreign policy must also make assumptions about the way the public will respond to those decisions. The presenter at this roundtable, Warren Strobel, an author with both practical and academic experience of the issues of concern to us, will discuss his own work. He will also comment on the gap between academic assumptions and those made by the foreign policy establishment. He will be questioned by two Social Scientists whose purpose it will be to draw links between their own experiences and insights and those of the morning's presenters.

Moderator: *Richard H. Kohn*

Presenter: *Warren P. Strobel, The Washington Times*

Questioners: *Peter Feaver, Duke University and Richard Sobel, Harvard University*

3:00 - 3:15 Break

3:15 - 4:45 Roundtable 4: Bridging Gaps: Do We Really Have Something to Say to One Another?

Dr. Mattox, a retired foreign service official, has extensive real-world experience with the issues and concerns discussed earlier in the day. The research of Professors Lutz and Griffin is grounded in case method and ethnographic field study. All three will discuss whether the day's proceedings have paved the way for the creation of more productive research agendas involving the study of the public. Dr. Holsti will be offered the last word and an opportunity to reflect on the day's conversation in terms of his own research and conception of the public.

Moderator: *Cori Dauber, UNC - Chapel Hill*

Panelists: *Henry Mattox, U.S. Foreign Service (Retired) and NC State University, Catherine Lutz, UNC Chapel Hill, and Clifford Griffin, North Carolina State University, and Ole Holsti, Duke University*