THE NEW LEFT HISTORIANS
AND THE HISTORIOGRAPHY
OF THE COLD WAR

by

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Chapter I of this thesis attempts to place the New Left historians in the perspective of twentieth-century American historiography. In doing this, one finds that in precise historiographical terms a straight line extends from the Progressive school of historians, particularly Charles Austin Beard, his analysis of foreign policy and his view of the historian as a student of history, to today's radical historians. This relationship between Beard and the New Left historians' interpretations of the origins of the Cold War is essential to a full understanding of New Left scholarship. Hitherto, this relationship has been glossed over with glib comments or ignored altogether. Though the New Left historians' radical scholarship constitutes to a considerable degree a reaction against the sterility and complacency that they find so pervasive in their predecessors' work, the New Left's interpretation of the Cold War is not something put together in protest against Vietnam. It is actually the latest expression of dissent within American historiography.

Chapter II tries to answer the question whether the New Left historians as students of history have made any substantial contribution to the historiography of the origins
of the Cold War. The New Left writers have made two major contributions to Cold War historiography. First, the New Left historians have questioned the adequacy of the orthodox view which interprets American policy as primarily a defensive response to an aggressive Soviet Union bent on world domination. In view of the available evidence, this conclusion is no longer tenable. Second, the revisionists have emphasized the decisive effect of the atomic bomb played in the origins of the Cold War.

In addition, the New Left historians have emphasized that it was Washington, not Moscow, which had the choice of alternatives in the immediate post-world War II period. In their judgement, the United States was determined to use its predominant economic and atomic power in a vain effort to compel Russia to accept America's Open Door view of the world. Very simply stated, the Open Door view holds that American policy makers, at least since the latter part of the nineteenth century, have dogmatically believed that American prosperity and democracy are dependent upon continuous and ever increasing economic expansion. The Open Door theory has formed the very basis of the New Left's radical interpretation of the whole American diplomacy.

Although it is too early to give a definitive
answer concerning the veracity of the New Left's Open Door theory, it is evident that an interpretation closer to the realities of that period will evolve from a synthesis of the New Left historians' and their predecessors' analyses of the origins of the Cold war.
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CHAPTER I

NEW LEFT COLD WAR HISTORIOGRAPHY IN PERSPECTIVE

In the field of American historiography there have been two major groups of historians during the last fifty years. Charles Austin Beard exemplified the Progressive historians who dominated the profession in the 1930s and early 1940s.1 Shortly after the Second World War, however, some historians rejected the progressive interpretation of American history, which stressed class division and conflict, and replaced it with an interpretation emphasizing homogeneity and consensus.2 Though the post-Beardian consensus historians are still well entrenched in the discipline, it is evident that during the 1950s a new radical school of American historians, commonly labelled the New Left, emerged to challenge the consensus account of the American past. Barton J. Bernstein


2For two valuable views of the consensus historians, see ibid., Skotheim, ed., The Historian and the Climate of Opinion (Reading, Mass., 1969), pt. II.
has rendered a useful definition of this group.

Though defying precise definition and lumping together those who believe in objective history with those who do not, the term does denote a group of various 'left' views - whether they be Marxist, neo-Beardian, radical, or left-liberal. As an introduction to the major concern of this thesis, which will be the New Left historians' contribution to the historiography of the origins of the Cold War, this chapter will restrict itself to a brief examination of the historiographical roots of these historians. This is undertaken in the belief that such an analysis will contribute to a more thorough understanding of the New Left historians which in turn will facilitate a better understanding of their controversial interpretation of the origins of the Cold War. As Walter LaFeber has noted; "they (the New Left historians) are perhaps better studied through their view of history rather than their call to politics". He contends that this is the case because of their "widely-varying relationship" to the term, New Left.

If one accepts LaFeber's contention, one finds

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that, in historiographical terms, the New Left historians' view of history is remarkably similar to that of people like Charles Austin Beard. Perhaps the new radicals' conception of the role of the historian and his purposes in society similarly explains in large part the changes they have wrought in interpretation. The following writers, despite their differences in interpretation, might be considered the major New Left Cold War historians: Barton J. Bernstein, David Horowitz, Thomas G. Paterson, Gabriel Kolko, Lloyd C. Gardner, Walter LaFeber, Gar Alperovitz and William Appleman Williams.5

Before examining the historiographical roots of the New Left historians, it is helpful to describe the initial reaction of the dominant consensus historians to the new revisionist reading of the American past. To a remarkable extent, the consensus laden American Historical Association has been slow to recognize the achievements of this new school of radical writers especially in such

5 Though there are many historians who might be considered New Left, this paper is concerned solely with those radical historians, who may now be considered the first generation of New Left Cold War historians. Those radical historians considered here are specialists in American foreign policy and specifically the origins of the Cold War. This distinction is made because other New Left historians have somewhat different historiographical roots than the foreign policy writers. In this regard see "New Radical Historians in the Sixties: A Survey", Radical America, IV, No. 8-9 (Nov., 1970), 81-106. Also helpful is Irwin
controversial areas as the origins of the Cold War, which Norman A. Graebner has called "the most enigmatic and elusive international conflict of modern times". Until quite recently, the consensus historians seemed content either to ignore New Left historical scholarship or to dismiss it with derogatory remarks. They appeared to be following the advice given by Louis Hartz, a respected consensus historian, regarding Charles Beard.

Historians have openly assailed Beard . . . . But after all is said and done Beard stays alive, and the reason for this is that, as in the case of Marx, you merely demonstrate your subservience to a thinker when you spend your time attempting to disprove him.7

Oscar Handlin did not ignore New Left writing. On the contrary, his review of William Appleman Williams' The Contours of American History became almost representative of the consensus historians' attitude toward the New Left's reexamination of American history. Handlin wrote that

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in evaluating this book, one cannot exclude the possibility that it was intended as an elaborate hoax, that its author has been enjoying himself by ingeniously pulling the leg of his colleagues.⁸

David Donald even objected to "publishing a manuscript by Irwin Unger on historians of the New Left". He objected "on the ground that the historians whose work he discussed were not of sufficient consequence to merit extended consideration in the pages of our major professional journal".⁹ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., went so far as to "blow the whistle" on historical revisionism concerning the origins of the Cold War.¹⁰ Evidently the consensus historians were satisfied to dismiss the New Left historians as unworthy of engaging in scholarly debate.

On examination it becomes apparent that Handlin's,


Donald's and Schlesinger's attitude to revisionist historiography is directly related to their view of history and the historians' role in society. Thus, their negative reaction to New Left historiography is not surprising when one perceives the pessimism inherent in the consensus view of history. Warren Susman, in his excellent article on American historical writing, cogently analyzed the relationship between the consensus historians' view of history and its effect on their historical writing. He noted that in 1940, the approximate year the consensus historians began to emerge as a distinct school, "a singularly antihistorical spirit" appeared "among the leading figures of our intellectual life".11 Susman further commented that "the study of history as a discipline has again become major literature, frequently superbly written and compiled".12 As examples, he cited the works of Schlesinger, Allan Nevins, and Samuel Eliot Morison. He specifically quoted Schlesinger's view of history, written in 1949.


12Ibid., 261.
History is not a redeemer, promising to solve all human problems in time; nor is man capable of transcending the limitations of his being. Man generally is entangled in insoluble problems; history is consequently a tragedy in which we are all involved, whose keynote is anxiety and frustration, not progress and fulfillment. It was Susman's opinion that, in the works of the historians noted above and most historical writing since World War II, we look in vain for a vision of the past which will enable us to remake the present and the future. Here ideology is specifically rejected. Here we find a history which offers a reinforcement of current moral values and no effective challenge to the decision makers within the social order who do most frequently operate in terms of some view of history, some ideology.

The post-Bocardian historians' view of history as elucidated by Schlesinger in 1949 has changed very little. For example, as recently as the American Historical Association's 1970 convention, Oscar Handlin reiterated what in


effect was still the consensus view of history when he decried the modern "decay from within" and cautioned against "making ourselves useful in the solution of society's everchanging problems". His reference to "decay from within" was clearly directed at the New Left historians. Handlin had explicitly decreed that any involvement in present day issues was out of bounds for the legitimate historian.

Despite the addition of a shiny scientific veneer in the 1950s, consensus history was buffeted by serious criticism in the late 1950s and 1960s. Much of this criticism, which came from somewhat unexpected areas, was directed at the rigidity and sterility that had become the main features of consensus scholarship.

In an article written in 1959, "The Cult of the 'American Consensus': Homogenizing Our History", John Higham warned of the dangers of "The conservative frame of reference" and how it "creates a paralyzing incapacity to deal with the elements of spontaneity, effervescence, and

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16 Forrest McDonald has referred to his fellow historians' improved methods of gathering data that took place during the 1950s as a "factual explosion."
violence in American history". While he criticized certain aspects of the historiography of the Progressive historians Vernon Parrington and Charles Austin Beard, he concluded that "we pay a cruel price in dispensing with their deeper values: an appreciation of the crusading spirit, a responsiveness to indignation, a sense of injustice".

C. Vann Woodward also was critical of the consensus historians when in 1960, he commented on the effect of contemporary events on historical interpretation. He went so far as to predict that the "avalanche of events" which has so completely revolutionized our world since 1945 would inspire, even necessitate, extensive revisions in the writing of American history. "The present generation of historians", he argued, "has a special obligation and a unique opportunity" to challenge accepted versions of history from their unique perspective.


18 Ibid.


20 Ibid.
As this thesis will attempt to substantiate, it is readily apparent that Woodward's plea for a reinterpretation of American history in view of the cataclysmic events since 1945 went largely unheeded by any others than the new radical historians of the 1960's. The consensus historians have indeed assumed the role assigned to them by Woodward. "If historians assume an intransigent attitude toward reinterpretation, they will deserve to be regarded as antiquarians and their history as irrelevant." 21

The serious criticism consensus history encountered from Woodward continued when Higham renewed his earlier criticism in a 1962 article entitled "Beyond Consensus: The Historian as Moral Critic". In this stinging attack, he stated that

now that stability rather than change has become the national objective, what values can pass the pragmatic test? Only what is smugly enmeshed in the texture of American experience has clearly proved its practical worth. Deprived of an active commitment to progress, the pragmatic approach tends to endorse sheer success and survival. Having lost its critical edge, pragmatism has tended to deteriorate into retrospective piety.22

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21 Ibid., 18.

In 1960, Richard Hofstadter, who had been instrumental in developing the interpretation of American history that stressed homogeneity and consensus, acknowledged the limitations of consensus history in his book, The Progressive Historians. He accepted that consensus history had met with serious and sound criticism when he conceded that among the chapters of the past of which the consensus thesis had failed to make sense were the Revolution and the Civil War. In addition, Hofstadter might have cited the Cold War and, indeed, the entire consensus account of twentieth-century United States foreign policy.

To all intents and purposes, the mainstream historians remained deaf to the criticism hurled at them by Higham, Woodward and Hofstadter. Their failure to heed this criticism compelled Woodward, in his 1970 Presidential Address to the American Historical Association, to repeat his warning, first made in 1960, for historians to listen to "criticism of the guild, whether it comes from artists, scientists, or philosophers, or from our own students". To do otherwise, he argued, "would appear to be singularly


perilous at this time". In his most biting barb, Woodward criticized the consensus historians for their "efforts to please popular taste and court popular esteem". This "tended to encourage the qualities of blandness and banality complained of by the critics of history". He also acknowledged that

ours is essentially an age of disjuncture, not of community. Indifference to these conditions and insensitivity to any light that the world of art or science or philosophy may throw upon them would be a disservice to the craft.

Yet the consensus historians, for the most part, persisted in interpreting the American experience in a manner that can only be described as complacent and affectionate. Since Samuel Eliot Morison's Presidential Address of 1950, little had changed in the consensus analysis of American history that would render his comments of that year inaccurate. He noted with satisfaction a decided change of attitude toward our past, a friendly, almost affectionate attitude, as contrasted with the cynical, almost hateful one of young intellectuals in earlier years.

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25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 721.
27 Ibid., 725.
As noted, Woodward questioned the adequacy of such an outlook for challenging historical scholarship. Though he opposed "an instrumentalist view of historiography" which "regards history as an instrument of political or social action", Woodward clearly advocated a reexamination of the first principles of the craft of history.29

The consensus historians' complacency became so apparent that it was even discussed by journalists who were largely unfamiliar with American historiography. Clifford Solway observed that their historiography exuded a perfect certainty about how things were, are, and should be, not to mention a galling complacency about the objectivity of their own account of recent events.30

Nowhere was this more unmistakable than in the liberal-consensus explanation of the Cold War, specifically their reaction to the containment policy which formed the cornerstone of Washington's post-1945 foreign policy.31


31 George Kennan delineated the foreign policy which came to be known as containment.

The list of Cold War literature by such scholars as Dexter Perkins, Herbert Feis, John Lukacs and John
In their interpretation of this area of American diplomatic history, Higham's comments about the tendency of consensus historians "to endorse sheer success and survival" have special relevance. 32

During the 1950s, their interpretation came to be accepted as the orthodox interpretation. Very briefly, the historians of that period "accepted the notion of Soviet aggressiveness as valid and of Western firmness as necessary". 33 With this frame of reference, it naturally followed that they considered Washington's containment policy as not only necessary but the nation's most successful postwar decision. Herbert Feis, for example, justified the American adoption of the containment policy with the observation that "the western allies were standing out against both Soviet expansionism and Communist social ideals". 34

Spanier focusses on the containment policy as the backbone of post 1945 foreign policy. The memoirs and papers of statesmen such as President Harry Truman, Secretaries of State James Byrnes and John Foster Dulles also attest to this.

32 Higham, "Beyond Consensus," 620.


It should be emphasized here, as Graebner has noted, that the orthodox historians "tended to accept the Cold War orthodoxy laid down by United States and British officials in speeches, writings, memoirs, communications, and recorded conversations between 1945 and 1950". In effect, these historians were able to, and did, "draw heavily on the research undertaken by those politicians who felt obliged to defend their views". This casts considerable doubt on the objectivity and independence of the orthodox account of this era of American history.

The certainty inherent in orthodox Cold War historiography becomes even more manifest when the writings of such recent orthodox scholars as Charles B. Marshall, Dexter Perkins, and David Rees are briefly considered.


They have, despite the changed perspective of the 1960s and the availability of new archival material, persisted in viewing "the Soviet Union as an expansive force and . . . Stalin as the exponent, not of Russian security, but of the Communist program".38 In fairness, Graebner has qualified his statement by noting that these scholars did not "laud every American decision or accept the rationale of every official utterance".39

However, the consensus historians' almost whole-hearted acceptance, throughout two decades, of Washington's account of the Cold War had serious repercussions for their history. "Having lost its critical edge (italics mine)",40 consensus Cold War scholarship almost became indistinguishable from official United States Cold War foreign policy. Neither this occurrence nor the loss of their "critical edge" was accidental. Several historians during the 1950s, among them a president of the American Historical Association, were forthright in calling on scholars to abandon the stance of critical reflection. They advocated instead a kind of


39 Ibid.

40 Higham, "Beyond Consensus," 620.
history that would serve the American national interest in the struggle with a hostile Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{41} It was the mainstream historians' acceptance of this recommendation that severely undermined orthodox Cold War historiography. Having associated themselves so closely with Washington's position, any criticism of official American foreign policy was necessarily translated into unwarranted criticism of their writings.

Dexter Perkins' 1954 article, "American Foreign Policy and its Critics", is illuminating in this regard because it reveals the defensive posture underlying the orthodox analysis of American foreign policy stretching from 1898 to 1954. For example, while the author rejected what he labelled partisan criticism, he lauded criticism "which flows from special knowledge and reflection and which stimulates a deeper understanding".\textsuperscript{42} As examples of such lofty criticism, he mentioned the work of Hans Morgenthau in his book, In Defense of the National Interest,

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{41}Conyers Read, "The Social Responsibilities of the Historian," American Historical Review, LV (January, 1950), 283.
\item\textsuperscript{42}Dexter Perkins, "American Foreign Policy and Its Critics," in Alfred H. Kelly, ed., American Foreign Policy and American Democracy (Wayne State Univ., 1954), pp. 85-86.
\end{itemize}
and George Kennan's *American Diplomacy*. It is sufficient to note Kennan's view of American participation in world affairs.

I see the most serious fault of our past policy formulation to lie in something that I might call the legalistic-moralistic approach to international problems. This approach runs like a red sk in through our foreign policy of the last fifty years.

Despite Perkins' own warm welcome to the right kind of criticism, apparently even Kennan's remarks, not withstanding his credentials, were too much for Perkins. He decided that his hearers would conclude that "they (American statesmen) have not always been as wrong as Professor Morgenthau and Mr. Kennan suggest." Perkins

43 George Kennan and Hans Morgenthau are members of the so-called realist school. For a survey of the realists see Christopher Lasch, "The Cold War, Revisited and Revisioned," *N. Y. Times Magazine*, January 14, 1968, pp. 26-35.


45 See Christopher Lasch's excellent article on George Kennan, "The Historian as Diplomat," *The Nation*, November 24, 1962, pp. 348-353.

reached this conclusion even though Kennan's and Morgenthau's criticism was anything but scathing. They only censured American policy for being too legalistic and unrealistic.

Though Perkins alone wrote these words, the attitude they revealed came to represent the stand of an entire school of historians on America's conduct of the Cold War. His lack of critical insight, as reflected in this article, is characteristic of consensus historiography. Recognition of this is essential if one is to acquire a meaningful perspective on New Left Cold War history. The New Left's interpretation must be understood in relation to the orthodox position. This is necessary inasmuch as New Left radical scholarship, particularly their interpretation of the origins of the Cold War, constitutes to a considerable degree a reaction against the sterility and complacency that they found so pervasive in their predecessors' work.

In addition to the outrageous confidence exhibited by the historians of the 1950s in relation to their interpretation of the Cold War, evidently they are equally convinced of the correctness of their conception of the historian's function. The following exchange between the

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47 Harry Howe Ransom's review of David Horowitz, The Free World Colossus: A Critique of American Foreign Policy in the Cold War, Saturday Review, November 6, 1965, p. 34, also reveals this complacency.
radical Arthur Waskow and Woodward very succinctly illustrates this point and captures the difference in their conception of the historian.48 This is sufficient at this time. In his condemnation of the radical historians' concern with "relevance", Woodward stated that

history is not an ideology . . . it is an intellectual process, a discipline that is still going. Its future and its true functions are to cleanse the story of mankind from the deceiving visions of the purposeful past.49

Waskow responded that

every committed historian ought to be a radical . . . . The radical historian has the duty to examine the seeds of change so that they do not become defeated alternatives.50

Schlesinger's view of history, already quoted, separates the two views even more starkly. His outlook identifies a passive, static role for the historian.

48 This exchange occurred at the 1970 meeting of the American Historical Association in Washington, D.C. See Commonweal, XCI, January 16, 1970, 469.

This is somewhat unfair to Woodward because he is more a progressive than a consensus historian. However, his remarks are useful at this stage because they neatly crystallize the difference in the New Left's conception of the historian.


50 Ibid.
The consensus historians' idea of history certainly affected their attitude towards the historian and his function in society. Their ideal was that of a neutral, detached scholar whose first consideration was objectivity. As Oscar Handlin, Arthur Meier Schlesinger, Samuel Eliot Morison, Frederick Merk, Arthur Meier Schlesinger, Jr., and Paul Herman Buck have pointed out in the Harvard Guide to American History, most American historians today . . . agree with the scientific historians . . . that objectivity, even if unattainable, must stand as the historian's ideal. Accordingly, they forego all single-valued or dogmatic theories of history and subject theory itself to the perpetual counter-check of facts.\(^5\)

This conception of history precluded any involvement by the historian in the great issues of his day. Such participation would clearly undermine the much admired historical objectivity.\(^5\)

One can readily understand why the establishment historians, convinced in both their interpretation of the American past and their conception of the historian, were reluctant to come to grips with New Left scholarship. But notwithstanding their determined effort, the dominant school of American historians can no longer disregard the work of

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\(^5\)Clearly, historians were not to make themselves directly useful in the solution of society's problems.
those new revisionists. Both events and the New Left's analysis have conspired to make this impossible. These factors have recently brought about an increased awareness within the profession of the radical left's critique of United States foreign policy in particular.\textsuperscript{53} However, although the profession is increasingly engaging the New Left in scholarly debate, it has yet to offer anything more than a cursory explanation of why the New Left historians emerged in the 1960s.

In so doing, they have relied upon one of two explanations to account for the appearance of the New Left. Very briefly stated, these are that the New Left historians either are childishly rebelling against their elders or are dismissed as a product of the turbulent 1960s. Often the former and the latter are synthesized.

According to this scenario, the 1960s in the United States, in striking contrast to the placid 1950s, was a period of extreme social and political unrest. Traditional social and political values were questioned and rejected by such militant left groups as Students for a Democratic Society, the Black Panthers, Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee, and the Vietnam Moratorium Committee. During this "time of rampant social criticism, when American verities seem precarious," writes Jerold Auerbach, "the past no less than the present falls under scrutiny." He continues that present issues guide research into the past; historians call upon the past to speak to present needs; strident demands are heard for a 'new' or 'usable' past.

In their emphasis upon the turbulent 1960s, the profession has often confused the New Left historians with the New Left movement that rocked the last decade. For a good survey of the New Left movement, see Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau, The New Radicals, A Report with Documents (New York, 1966). See also James O'Brien, "Beyond Reminiscence: The New Left in History," Radical America, IV, No. 4 (July-August, 1972), 11-48.

Though Jerold S. Auerbach's "New Deal, Old Deal, or Raw Deal: Some Thoughts on New Left Historiography," The Journal of Southern History (February, 1969), pp. 18-30, is concerned with the New Left's thoughts on the New Deal it is helpful because it reveals the conscious attitude toward radical scholarship.

Ibid., p. 18.
From these comments and those that follow it is apparent that Auerbach has related the growth of a new radical group of American historians to the climate of the protest of the 1960s against "racism, imperialism, liberalism, the power elite, bureaucratic centralization, and the very nature of corporate capitalism". Also explicit in his analysis of the new radical historians is his belief that they have succumbed to the perils of present-mindedness, in that they have allowed issues such as the Vietnam War to distort their interpretation of the American past. Their view of history thus derives from their search for a usable past which renders their reading of American history ahistorical.

In his assertion that the revisionist historians have subordinated the past to present needs, Auerbach has struck a similar note to Irwin Unger. The latter wrote the first major essay on the young dissident historians of the 1960s. In relating their emergence to "a younger generation's protest against the status quo", Unger criticized their "exploitation of the past for purposes of present reform". He obviously believes that the New Left historians'
deep concern with the issues that convulsed the United States in the 1960s is incompatible with the detachment necessary for good historical scholarship. Lacking the alleged political neutrality of the consensus historians, Unger vigorously condemns the New Left's excessive present-mindedness because "it suggests a contempt for pure history, that has not enlisted in the good fight". Very simply then, the new radicals' interpretation of the origins of the Cold War can be dismissed as a distortion of the historical record. Conveniently, the orthodox account of the Cold War remains intact.

Auerbach's and Unger's point of view is of some importance. The radical historians have indeed been greatly influenced by the tumultuous events of the last decade. The Vietnam War in particular has deeply affected their historical writing.

Barton J. Bernstein has addressed himself to this very point. "During the early sixties," he notes, "the conservative consensus began to break down". For himself

59 Ibid., p. 155. The myth that the consensus historians were objective in their judgements is still alive. For a useful corrective, see the still relevant article by William L. Neuman, "Historians In An Age of Acquiescence," Dissent, IV (Winter, 1957), 64-69. Also invaluable is David Eakins, "Objectivity and Commitment," Studies on the Left, I (Fall, 1959), 44-53.
and other young radicals, "the rediscovery of poverty and racism" and "the criticism of intervention in Cuba and Vietnam" had far-reaching results. It "shattered many of the assumptions of the fifties and compelled intellectuals to re-examine the American past". From these events, and mainly from the writings of younger historians, "there began to emerge a vigorous criticism of the historical consensus". 60

Gabriel Kolko has also addressed himself to this question.

For a growing number of Americans the war in Vietnam has become the turning point in their perception of the nature of American foreign policy, the traumatising event that requires them to look again at the very roots, assumptions, and structure of a policy that is profoundly destructive and dangerous. 61

It is also evident that the New Left historians are very dissatisfied with both "the historical judgement of their elders and with the current state of American civilization". 62 William Appleman Williams has serious doubts

60 Bernstein, New Past, p. ix.


concerning the validity of the consensus approach to history. He asserts that, during the late 1940s and 1950s, fearful Americans turned "to history for an explanation of their predicament and a program (if not a panacea) for the future". In his considered judgement, the historians of that period only too willingly obliged. Thus, "Clio became involved in another of her many affairs with a society in search of reassurance and security".

It does not follow, however, that, because the New Left scholars are disenchanted with the historical findings of their elders, they are engaged merely in infantile rebellion. On the contrary, their radical analysis of American history, particularly their writings on the origins of the Cold War, is of real significance in American historiography. Hopefully it will be established in another part of this paper that this new radical interpretation is in part the result of newly available archival material and a new perspective.

However, equally important is the New Left's conception of the role of the historian and his purposes in


64 Ibid.
society. Their conception of the historian's role is similar to that of Charles Austin Beard. He saw himself as a student of history and not as a historian. The former is interested in using history as a means to an end while the latter is interested in history as an end in itself. 65

For the most part the establishment historians have overlooked this factor in their appraisals of New Left scholarship. If this is not remedied, it is impossible to place the New Left historians accurately in historical perspective, because all of their writing has been influenced by their view of the historian. Because of their shortcomings in this area, the consensus historians have missed the challenge that the New Left historians have made to the traditional role of the historian. Rather than examining whether or not the New Left's idea of the historian is of any worth, the more conservative historians have merely concluded that the radicals are guilty of being too present-minded. 66 In so doing they have conveniently disregarded the exciting possibilities inherent in the New


66 See Unger's "Commentary on the New Left" for this point of view.
Left idea of the historian as a student of history. They are content to dismiss the new revisionists as propagandists.

That the post-1945 historians should dwell upon the events of the 1950s and its changed climate of opinion, in their explanation of the emergence of the New Left historians, is not surprising. Most modern historians accept that there is an intimate relationship between a historian's work and the climate of opinion in which he does his work. As Benedetto Croce observed, "every true history is contemporary history". 57 This statement has special relevance to the writing of American history, for every generation of American scholars has reexamined and reinterpreted the past in terms of its own time.

However, despite its strengths, this emphasis on the New Left as a product of their age fails to explain how the events of the 1960s could possibly have influenced the writing done by William Appleman Williams in the 1950s. This is most significant because Williams, who might aptly be called the dean of the New Left historians, wrote books and articles in the 1950s which later came to form the theoretical framework of the radical scholarship of the

The influence of Williams on his students and others is easily discernible. The reasons for this are obvious. In Williams' interpretation, they found a coherent explanation of how the United States found itself in the tragic situation of the 1960s.


69 Lloyd C. Gardner, Gar Alperovitz, and Walter LaFeber were students of Williams. Alperovitz was an undergraduate in Williams' course at the University of Wisconsin; LaFeber, who wrote his thesis there under Fred Harvey Harrington, did not take a formal course with Williams but assisted in his course and acknowledges his influence. Cited in Barton J. Bernstein, ed., Politics and Policies of the Truman Administration (Chicago, 1970), p. 5.

David Horowitz has recognized the pioneering work of Professor Williams on p. 16 of Corporations and the Cold War (New York, 1969).

In this respect see also Lasch's "The Cold War, Revisited and Re-Visioned," and Ronald Radosh "Making the World Safe for America," review of Gabriel Kolko's The Politics of War 1943-1945 (New York, 1968), and The Roots of American Foreign Policy, The Nation, October 6, 1969, pp. 350-351. In these reviews Radosh criticized Kolko because he did not acknowledge his considerable debt to William Appleman Williams.
Their acceptance of Williams' scholarship had widespread results. The young radical historians of that decade came to reject the liberal consensus interpretation of American history, not merely because it was the scholarship of a more conservative older generation which represented the status quo, but because Williams' two books, *American-Russian Relations, 1781-1947* (1952) and *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959), offered a more realistic, plausible account of how the United States became involved so extensively around the world. The latter study in particular was a lucid book which accounted for American globalism and the American empire. A young New Left writer has written that Williams' analysis, principally his revelation of the central role of expansionism in American history has made it possible for radicals to argue persuasively that American involvement in Vietnam was not an aberration, but rather a logical culmination of America's history.70

Contrast this view with that expressed by the orthodox Ernest R. May in *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power*.71 Though it is a study of

70 Cited in "New Radical Historians in the Sixties," 92.

American foreign policy during the 1990s, it advanced a view that the United States had greatness thrust upon it, which is remarkably similar to that put forward by the orthodox school in their explanation of the Cold War. American leaders "were at most only incidentally concerned about real or imagined interests abroad".\(^{72}\) Compared to this, Williams' interpretation of this period and United States twentieth-century foreign policy was more satisfactory to the emerging radicals in explaining how the United States acquired the empire that was all too visible in the 1960s.

From his students' perspective, it cannot be overemphasized that Williams' realism was infinitely superior to the orthodox account of how the United States accidentally came to preside over a vast empire.\(^{73}\) Perhaps this is even more true of the period after 1945. According to the orthodox scenario, a reluctant Washington, innocent of the intricacies of international power politics, had world

\(^{72}\text{Ibid., 95.}\)

\(^{73}\text{David Horowitz has accepted Williams' analysis of the Yalta accords because it is more firmly based on the actual course of events. This is one small example of the influence of Williams. See Horowitz, "Revisionist Tales of Negotiations with the Communists," Ramparts, June 29, 1968, pp. 49-54.}\)
leadership thrust upon it unwillingly after World War II. George Kennan, the celebrated realist, has directed himself to the question of America's alleged innocence in the diplomatic arena. He found that the answer lay in Washington's legalistic-moralistic approach to international problems. Kennan has elaborated that to the American mind, it is implausible that people should have positive aspirations, and ones that they regard as legitimate, more important to them than the peacefulness and orderliness of international life.

The belief that the United States was an innocent, essentially isolationist nation has long formed the basis of Cold War orthodoxy.

In contrast to this explanation, Williams has advanced the view that Washington eagerly sought to assume world leadership in this period. He is worth quoting at some length. He contends

that the United States had from 1944 to at least 1966 a vast preponderance of actual as well as potential power vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.

An appreciation of the

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74 This contention is central to Cold War orthodoxy. As already noted, it is found in the works of such writers as John Spanier, John Lukacs, Dexter Perkins and Herbert Feis.

75 Kennan, American Diplomacy, p. 83.

76 Williams, Tragedy, p. 208.
relative weakness of the Russians ... does confront all students of the cold war, be they academicians or politicians or housewives, with very clear and firm limits on how they can make sense out of the cold war if they are at the same time to observe the essential standards of intellectual honesty. For power and responsibility go together in a direct and intimate relationship. 77

Williams continues that

a nation with the great relative supremacy enjoyed by the United States between 1944 and 1962 cannot with any real warrant or meaning claim that it has been FORCED to follow a certain approach or policy. Yet that is the American claim. 78

The consensus view of United States domestic history lent further impetus to the writings of Williams. The consensus image of America pictured a unique democratic nation, devoid of class conflict, and free from imperialism, united in a broad domestic and foreign policy consensus. The nation, as celebrated by such consensus historians as Louis Hartz and Daniel Boorstin, somehow seemed at odds with the America the young radicals confronted in the late 1950s and 1960s. 79

77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 For an excellent review of their literature see Skotheim, ed., Climate of Opinion.
In comparison to this interpretation, Williams' view, emphasizing the roots of United States expansion and its economic dependence on such expansion exerted great influence on his students. That it did can be seen in the reception accorded his seminal study, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*. That study provided the framework on which the young radical historians of the 1960s built their controversial analysis of American diplomacy.

In this regard a young revisionist has written that "his (Williams') books, most notably *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, have offered a wealth of insights and suggestions for further research".80 Thus, his students, and others as well, have seized upon Williams' interpretation as a basis of enquiry and expanded upon it in their own studies. One need only examine the historical scholarship of Gardner, Alperovitz, Bernstein, Kolko, Paterson, and Horowitz to confirm this.

In view of Williams' considerable influence on his students, any explanation of the New Left historians as merely a reflection of their climate of opinion is inadequate because it ignores the fact that he wrote important studies during the 1950s that eventually formed the core of revisionist Cold War historiography.

To do so is also to ignore the fact that in precise
historiographical terms a straight line extends from the
so-called Progressive school of historians, particularly
Charles Austin Beard and his analysis of foreign policy
and his view of the historian, to today's radical historians.

This relationship between Beard and the New Left's
critique of twentieth-century American foreign policy is
essential to a full understanding of New Left scholarship.
Hitherto this relationship has been glossed over with glib
comments or ignored altogether. The New Left historians'
interpretation of the Cold War is not, therefore, something
put together in protest against Vietnam. It is actually the
latest expression of dissent within American historiography.
Though the new dissenters have gone beyond Beard, their work

According to Irwin Unger, the New Left historians,
in particular William Appleman Williams, owe very little to
Beard. Unger does qualify this by noting that perhaps
they are obligated to Beard in the area of "recent American
foreign policy."

In Unger's opinion Williams has only acknowledged
the following debt to Beard because it befits his bell-
"It . . . seems appropriate in view of all the bigoted and
career building attacks, acts of purification in the form
of misrepresentation, and even smart alec criticism by sup-
posed aristocrats, to acknowledge formally my respect for
and indebtedness to Charles Austin Beard." Williams,
Contours of American History, p. 490. Walter LaFeber has
also praised the tradition of Charles Beard in American
diplomatic history. In so doing he has assaulted those
historians who "since 1945 . . . have been preoccupied with
knifing Beard with one hand and using the other hand to
pen caricatures of a unique unblemished Republic which
became a world empire with little conscious human inter-
vention." LaFeber, "The Conscious Creation of a "World
is greatly infused with both his view of the historian's role and to a lesser extent his foreign policy analysis.  

The key contemporary figure in this historiographical chain is indisputably William Appleman Williams. He is the link connecting the New Left historians and Charles Austin Beard. An appreciation of their relationship largely explains the New Left scholars' conception of the historian and their general approach to foreign policy. Professor Williams fulfilled much the same role of great teacher for the radical left as Beard, to a lesser extent, did for him.

A detailed examination reveals that, in many respects, Williams is writing from a Beardian perspective, especially in the area of foreign policy. He has recognized this debt in a personal article entitled "Charles Austin Beard: The Intellectual as Tory-Radical". In his judgement, "There are few short analyses . . . which match the quality of Beard's treatment of foreign affairs in The Rise of American Civilization" and "It is even more

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Solway in his article, "Turning History Upside Down," recognized the link between Beard and the New Left historians.

82 The New Left historians have "gone beyond" Beard in that they are more heavily indebted to Karl Marx. When the new revisionists have made much of Marx, it is more often the early "soft" Marx, who speaks of "alienation," rather than the "hard" Marx of Das Kapital, with its class struggle and progressive "immiserization of the proletariat."
difficult to name a volume that is more rewarding in insights and suggestions than The Idea of National Interest." 83

According to the dean of the New Left historians, the Progressive Beard stressed the following three points in his analysis of foreign policy.

(1) it is intimately connected with domestic affairs, (2) empires are not built in fits of absent-mindedness, and (3) expansion does not in and of itself solve problems, and often complicates and deepens them. 84

The New Left diplomatic historians' obligation to Beard in this respect is considerable. They too have emphasized, in varying degrees, these same three factors in their radical counter-interpretation of United States foreign policy. Though they have stressed much more than Beard the demands of capitalism in the making of American foreign policy, they are still writing within his shadow. 85

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83 Williams, "Intellectual As Tory-Radical," p. 305.

84 Ibid.

85 This is analyzed in Horowitz, ed., Corporations and the Cold War and Kolko, The Limits of Power.
It was Beard who first fully exposed the degree to which expansionism has been a persistent and continuing feature of American history. In so doing he was perceptive enough not to limit his study of American expansion to territorial expansion. In *The Idea of National Interest*, Beard established that a national interest, as interpreted by most American statesmen, is a material interest. Unfortunately for the Republic, in Beard's judgement, the Hamiltonian conception of national interest triumphed too often. Beard defined this as meaning the consolidation of commercial, manufacturing, financial and agricultural interests at home, the promotion of trade in all parts of the world by the engines of diplomacy, the defence of that trade by a powerful navy, the supremacy of the United States in the Western Hemisphere, and the use of military and naval strength in the rivalry of nations to secure economic advantages for citizens of the United States.

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86 Beard focused on expansionism in his *The Idea of National Interest* (New York, 1934). His fear of expansionism inspired his *The Open Door at Home* (New York, 1934).

87 Henry Wallace, "Beard: The Planner," *The New Republic*, January 2, 1935, p. 225. This article succinctly shows that Beard was conscious of more than just territorial expansion. As Wallace has noted, Beard was aware of imperialism. He defined it as "an effort on the part of the dominant industrial and financial forces of a nation to send its surplus capital and commodities abroad in preference to raising the standard of living of its people at home."

In Charles Beard's judgement, as long as the Hamiltonian idea of national interest was adhered to by Washington's foreign policy makers, the Republic would be committed to a diplomacy which ostensibly seeks the welfare of the United States by pushing and holding doors open in all parts of the world with all engines of government, ranging from polite coercion to the use of arms. 89

The New Left historians have come to a similar, though more radical conclusion. The new revisionists have driven home the remarkable extent to which expansionism has long been an enduring characteristic of American history. Starting from this perspective, the New Left has necessarily arrived at an interpretation of American foreign policy that differs remarkably from their predecessors. The New Left, like Beard, have also demonstrated, in a more sophisticated manner, the considerable extent to which Washington's foreign policy has deliberately long flowed from domestic requirements.

Sophisticated or not, it was Beard who observed that "domestic affairs and foreign relations are intimately associated with each other. Often both are but different aspects of the same thing." 90 This view significantly

89 Beard, Open Door, p. vii.
90 Beard, National Interest, p. 311.
affected Beard's analysis of American diplomacy. It enabled him to grasp the domestic pressures underlying the formulation of American foreign policy. It played an equally important role in the New Left diplomatic writings. They have focused upon the intimate relationship between American diplomatic and domestic policies. Thus Williams has concluded that

a re-examination of the history of twentieth-century American foreign relations (and the relationship between foreign policy and the domestic economy) offers the most promising approach to such a reconsideration of our assumptions.91

This approach has proved fruitful for Williams and the entire school of New Left diplomatic historians. Their examination of the reciprocal relationship between foreign and domestic policy has led to their controversial Open Door theory of American diplomacy. This theory, as promulgated by Williams, holds that since

the Crisis of the 1890's, when Americans THOUGHT that the continental frontier was gone, they advanced and accepted the argument that continued expansion in the form of overseas economic (and even territorial) empire provided the best, if not the only way to sustain their freedom and prosperity.92

91 Williams, Tragedy, p. 9.
92 Ibid., p. 21.
The New Left writers, as a group, are convinced that American diplomacy, if it is to be realistically understood, must be viewed in the context of their Open Door theory. In this regard, Williams has argued persuasively that the history of American diplomacy throughout the twentieth-century has been the history of the Open Door policy. "To stabilize the world in a pro-American equilibrium" has been the minimum objective of United States policy; "to institutionalize American expansionism" its optimum goal. The Cold War, in Williams' view, must be interpreted as the latest phase of a continuing effort to make the world safe for American capitalism. This policy was consciously and deliberately embarked upon because American statesmen believed that American capitalism needed ever-expanding foreign markets in order to survive.

A similar explanation was previously expounded by Beard. He was so convinced of the veracity of the Open Door thesis that he wrote The Open Door at Home in an attempt to end just such American dependence upon ever-expanding markets. For this reason Beard asked the following question:

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93 Ibid., p. 212.

94 See Lasch, "Cold War, Revisited and Re-visioned," pp. 29-32 for an excellent analysis of Williams' Open Door interpretation.
Was it really possible, by any policy and action, to find ever-expanding foreign outlets for the ever-increasing "surpluses" of agricultural produce, manufactures, and capital, especially in view of the increasing competition of other great powers for the same markets?95

Beard's definitive answer was "no". Consequently, in *The Open Door at Home* he maintained the view that the only way to assure peace and prosperity was to develop technological and consumer frontiers at home and forget about the world frontier.96

Beard's writings on the wisdom of creating an open door at home are eloquent testimony to his belief that the United States and its leaders were erroneously and dangerously convinced that the nation's economy demanded expanding foreign markets.

Beard's observation that empires are not built in fits of absent-mindedness also occupies a central place in the writings of the New Left diplomatic historians. Though Williams wrote the following, he is echoing a belief held by his New Left colleagues as well as Beard:

neither contingency nor madness is absent from history, but the vast majority of significant figures on the stage of history act consciously and purposefully (if usually routinely) within

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95 Beard, *Interest*, p. 552.

their conceptions of the world. 97

The New Left writers' entire body of scholarship irrefutably supports this outlook. Walter LaFeber has stated that

it is odd that historians who worry most about keeping the American story clean for Cold War purposes and free from the Beardian interpretation are reluctant to give their ancestors credit for the brilliant debates, detailed blueprints, and the sound structuring which created one of the largest and most successful empires in world history. 98

In crediting their ancestors with consciously creating a world-wide empire, the New Left are clearly travelling the same path as Charles Beard.

The dissenting historians of the 1950s and 1970s are even more firmly in the Beardian tradition when it comes to their conception of the purposes of the historian and his role in society.

First, consider Beard's view of history and the historian through the eyes of Professor Williams, in whose estimation, as earlier indicated, Beard pictured himself a student of history and not a historian. This is not only Williams' opinion but that of the American historical

97 Williams, Contours, p. 21.

98 LaFeber, "Conscious Creation of a 'World-Wide Empire'", 104.
profession as well. The distinction between them is of the utmost importance. As Williams indicates, the student's emphasis is "on his study as a means", unlike the historian, who considers "his work as an end itself".99

Accordingly Beard, in the words of Williams, studied history to equip himself to comprehend and change his own society; to understand the direction and tempo of its movement, and to pinpoint the places at which to apply his energy and influence in an effort to modify both aspects of its development.100

Now consider Williams' own view of history and the historian as enunciated in the chapter on "History as a Way of Learning" in The Contours of American History.

The purpose of history is not to explain our situation so that we can settle down as what C. Wright Mills has called Cheerful Robots in This Best. Possible of All Worlds.101

In Williams' considered opinion, history's great tradition is to help us understand ourselves and our world so that each of us, individually, and in conjunction with our fellowmen, can formulate relevant and reasoned alternatives and become meaningful actors in making history.102

100 Ibid.
101 Williams, Contours, p. 19.
102 Ibid.
Contrast the above view of the historian with that expressed by Oscar Handlin in 1971 when he cautioned historians against "making ourselves useful in the solution of society's everchanging problems". Obviously the true historian was not to participate in the making of history. Such involvement would undermine his objectivity.

The New Left historians could not accept this image of the historian and his role in society any more than Beard. The significance of this is considerable. For example, in Williams' view, history thus freed could become a way of learning, of breaking the chains of the past. Decades earlier, Beard had advanced a similar view. His "Written History as an Act of Faith" provided what was, in effect, a defense for the use of historical scholarship in the cause of reform.

This view of the historian in conjunction with their foreign policy assumptions created several related problems for the radicals, as it had for Beard. Williams' "Charles Beard: the Intellectual as Tory-Radical" is

103 Handlin, Newsweek, p. 58.
104 See the preface and conclusion in Williams', Contours.
extremely valuable in this respect. Williams' thoughts are fundamental in clarifying these so-called related problems. The New Left's and Beard's view of the historian and foreign policy forced them to develop a concept of Weltanschauung. Williams has defined it as a "definition of the world combined with an explanation of how it works".\textsuperscript{106} Williams' assertion that this was necessary for Beard again acts as a mirror-image of why it was also necessary for himself and the New Left. Williams suggests that

both as a student of history and as an acting citizen it was vital for him (Beard) to comprehend the system of ideas which first rationalize, and in turn further motivate, imperial expansion.\textsuperscript{107}

It naturally follows that the new revisionists were compelled to develop a conception of the world. Williams' explanation of why this was vital for Beard reveals why it was also necessary for the New Left.

This study was of key importance to Beard, for if he could come to grips with the general view of the world that was held by the expansionists, then he could attack it more directly and effectively.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{106} Williams, \textit{Contours}, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{107} Williams, "Tory-Radical," p. 305.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
The New Left historians' notion of Weltanschauung revolves around their so-called Open Door theory of American history. Very simply stated, the Open Door view holds that American policy makers, at least since the latter part of the nineteenth century, have dogmatically believed that American prosperity and democracy are dependent upon continuous and ever-increasing economic expansion.109 The Open Door theory has formed the very basis of the New Left's radical interpretation of the whole of American diplomacy.

In addition, the New Left is convinced that this Open Door view of the world has launched the United States on its imperialistic course. The objective of New Left scholarship, in the words of Gar Alperovitz, is to get to the root of the interventionist tradition so that the idea of expansion, of intervention - and the idea that "freedom" requires both - no longer weaves comfortably into the basic fabric of our society - so that ordinary people are free to see that their interests are not the same as those of the business and government institutions which now sustain the old ideology.110

Beard also attempted to get to the root of American interventionism and expansionism in his much maligned Open

109 See Williams, Tragedy, pp. 52-83 and pp. 229-243 for a detailed examination of the Open Door theory.

110 Alperovitz, Cold War Essays (New York, 1970), p. 120.
Door at Home. In this book, Beard offered an alternative program for the United States. It provided for the
most efficient use of the natural resources and industrial arts of the nation at home in a quest for security and a high standard of living.\textsuperscript{111}

Beard's alternative society was to be a collectivist democracy. He was convinced that this was the direction in which history was moving. It was to this end that he directed such scholarship. In this regard, Beard would no doubt have agreed with Alperovitz's determination that the "only point of investigating the past is to learn how to deal with the future".\textsuperscript{112}

In the view of Alperovitz and the New Left, the future can best be dealt with if an alternative is provided that will free America from its reliance on the Open Door. If this is to be done,

ways must be found to speak intelligently to the great majority of Americans, and, with patience and commitment to the long haul, to offer a creative alternative to ideas which so many have held for so long.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{111}Beard, Open Door, p. vii.

\textsuperscript{112}Alperovitz, Cold War Essays, p. 113.

\textsuperscript{113}Ibid., pp. 120-121.
New Left Cold War historiography is written with this alternative in mind. Revisionist scholarship is the first step in creating an alternative to what they construe as American imperialism.

This rationale animates the work of Gabriel Kolko. He states that

by understanding the meaning of that period (1943-1949) we comprehend our own decade in microcosm and the challenges we face in breaking the paralyzing grip of a thirty-year-old crisis in international relations over the future of all mankind. 114

Kolko is of the opinion that "in viewing the genesis of the challenge of our time we hold a mirror to ourselves, the problems we confront, and the source of our malaise". 115

David Horowitz has also written with an interest in the future. "Every war generates myths that serve to justify and perpetuate it, and the cold war has been no exception." 116 The distortion of reality by these myths has created a public consensus that imposes serious restraints on future flexibility. The myth of American innocence in the Cold War must be set straight. Unless


115 Ibid.

116 Horowitz, From Yalta to Vietnam (Middlesex, 1967), p. 11. Also published as The Free World Colossus.
the myths of two decades of cold war can be replaced with premises more firmly rooted in reality... the prospects for peace will grow dim.\textsuperscript{117}

This would severely inhibit the New Left's creation of an alternative American society.

A similar motivation has subtly underlined the writings of Walter LaFeber. In \textit{America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1966}, LaFeber has deplored the United States' post-1945 foreign policy because of its preoccupation with anti-communism. He has also warned of the dangers inherent in unchecked executive power. In conclusion, he has called for a radical new appraisal of American foreign policy to assess "the ends for which that power could most profitably be used".\textsuperscript{118} It almost goes without saying that such an analysis would contribute immeasurably to the creation of a new America. LaFeber has noted that this "would be a Promethean - or Sisyphean effort".\textsuperscript{119}

Though the New Left diplomatic historians are vitally interested in creating a new society in America, they are quite vague about its shape. Unfortunately, even Williams, who is the most helpful in this regard, has

\textsuperscript{117}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118}LaFeber, \textit{Cold War}, p. 259.
\textsuperscript{119}Ibid.
written very little in this area.\textsuperscript{120}

As Michael Meeropol has stated in his article "W. A. Williams' Historiography", the principle underlying Williams' positive program for a new America is clear:

the majority of Americans must be presented with something new to look at so their choices will no longer be circumscribed with a hundred years of imperial consciousness.\textsuperscript{121}

If the Americans are presented with a new conception of freedom, "they have the chance to create the first truly democratic socialism in the world".\textsuperscript{122} This is the task at which the New Left Cold War historians, as a group, have directed their efforts.

The New Left diplomatic historians' conception of the historian as student combined with their approach to foreign affairs has led them in this direction. In so doing it has raised several questions. For example, is the Open Door Weltanschauung that they attribute to American policy makers since at least the latter part of the nineteenth-century accurate? If not, what is one to make of their


\textsuperscript{121}Michael Meeropol, "W. A. Williams' Historiography," Radical America, IV, No. 6 (Aug., 1970), 29-53.

\textsuperscript{122}Williams, Contours, p. 488.
elaborate interpretation of the origins of the Cold War? Is it possible that their Weltanschauung has resulted from their radical desire to change America in the direction of socialism? Williams has stated that

if we can understand . . . history as a prelude to accepting it, and accept it as a prelude to changing those ideas and policies, then . . . America can give the other . . . peoples of the world a chance to make their own history by acting on our own responsibility to make our own history.123

An attempt will be made to deal with these questions in the process of assessing the New Left historians' Cold War scholarship.

123Williams, Modern American Empire, p. xxiv.
CHAPTER II

THE NEW LEFT HISTORIANS AND THE COLD WAR

This chapter will try to answer the question, whether the New Left historians, as students of history have made any substantial contribution to the historiography of the origins of the Cold War? It is important to recognize that the New Left writers are writing as students of history. This awareness then allows one to focus on their analysis rather than on the question of whether or not they are guilty of present-mindedness or even other more serious violations of historical scholarship.¹

However, it is first necessary to outline briefly their immediate predecessors' interpretation as still accepted in such widely used textbooks as John Spanier's American Foreign Policy Since World War II (1967) and John Lukacs' A History of the Cold War (1961). This interpretation has been succinctly and somewhat crudely presented

¹The assessment of New Left Cold War historiography undertaken in this chapter is of a limited nature. It is concerned with what may be considered the New Left historians' most important contributions to Cold War literature.
by Henry Pachter as follows:

After World War II the Soviet Union tried to expand its power through military conquest and Communist uprisings in as many countries as possible.

But it was restrained by vigorous counteraction of the Western powers which "contained" the Soviet advance by measures of mutual assistance short of war.

Fortunately, United States' opinion had abandoned isolationism and America now was ready to assume its responsibilities as a great world power dedicated to the principle of collective security. 2

Formulated during the late 1940s and early 1950s, an era of rapidly deteriorating Soviet-American relations, the orthodox interpretation renders American policy moral, defensive and almost passive in the face of remorseless Soviet expansion. 3 Consequently, they accepted as proper the American rejection of any agreement on spheres of influence and the development of a counter strategy, containment. 4 In general, it is against this point of view that the New Left historians have struggled. Perhaps even


3 Members of the orthodox school now often contend that the Cold War resulted from the failure of both sides. Louis J. Halle, The Cold War as History (London, 1967) emphasizes historical determinants.

more important, the radical historians have also struggled against their predecessors' detached conception of the historian. In the former's opinion, the latter's view of the historian has not served them nor the profession particularly well. According to the new revisionists, it allowed the orthodox historians to uncritically accept the containment doctrine. This is significant because the New Left's view of the historian (as critic) is similarly intertwined with their analysis of the Cold War.

Any meaningful assessment of the New Left historians' contribution to the historiography of the origins of the Cold War must first consider the work of the early revisionists. Among these were P. M. S. Blackett, Edward Carr, Walter Lippmann, and Henry Wallace. This assessment is necessary to determine the extent of the New Left historians' contribution, whether the new revisionists have

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merely recast old views in a new way.

Each of these writers has rejected one or more aspects of Cold War orthodoxy. Yet they are not in complete agreement. Carr, then an assistant editor of The Times, wrote an editorial on November 5, 1944, which produced the first indication of support for what later became the New Left's interpretation in the 1960s. This editorial is of considerable value to the New Left historians because it defended Russian predominance in Eastern Europe before the Churchill-Stalin spheres of influence agreement was made public. The new revisionists were later to adopt this point of view. The editorial went out of its way to link the Soviet presence with a previous western act, the German invasion of 1941.

Russia, like Great Britain, has no aggressive or expansive designs in Europe. What she wants on her Western frontier is security. What she asks from her Western neighbors is a guarantee, the extent and form of which will be determined mainly by the experience of the past twenty-five years, that her security shall not be exposed to any threat from or across their territories. Admittedly she is unlikely to regard with favor intervention by other Great Powers in these countries.

But Great Britain has traditionally resisted such intervention in the Low Countries or in the vicinity of the Suez Canal, and the United States in Central America - regions which these two powers have properly adjudged vital to their security. It would be incongruous to ask Russia to renounce a similar right of reassurance; and it would be foolish as well as somewhat...
hypocritical, to construe insistence on this right as the symptom of an aggressive policy. Essentially British and Russian interests in this respect not only do not clash, but are precisely the same.  

Carr's acceptance and defense of the idea that a postwar Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe was to be expected and constituted no threat to Western security was fully developed by Walter Lippmann in *The Cold War* (1947). Lippmann perceived the existence of a Russian problem but he rejected the official American plan for solving it.

Perceptive as Carr's and Lippmann's analysis of the post-war European situation was, perhaps Henry Wallace advanced the most persuasive statement of the revisionist case, to that date, in his long open letter of July 25, 1946 to Harry Truman. Wallace raised several fundamental questions to which the New Left historians have returned.

How do American actions since V-J Day appear to other nations? I mean by actions the concrete things, like $13 billion for the War & Navy Departments, the Bikini tests of the atomic bomb and continued production of bombs, the plan to arm Latin America with our weapons, production of B-29's and planned production of B-36's and the effort to secure air bases spread over half the globe from which the other half of the globe can be bombed. I cannot but feel that these actions must make it look to the rest of the world as if we were only paying lip service to

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peace at the conference table.

These facts rather make it appear either (1) that we are preparing ourselves to win the war which we regard as inevitable or (2) that we are trying to build up a predominance of force to intimidate the rest of mankind. How would it look to us if Russia had the atomic bomb and we did not, if Russia had 10,000-mile bombers and air bases within 1,000 miles of our coastlines, and we did not?

Long before the new revisionists emerged, Wallace asserted, in his letter to Truman, that United States - Russian relations broke down for two reasons: first, because the Defence Department acquired air bases close to the Soviet Union, and, second, because of the United States monopoly of the atom bomb. Wallace's contentions were later to occupy a central place in the works of such major New Left historians as Gar Alperowitz and David Horowitz.

The assertions made by Wallace also found a central place in Blackett's Fear, War and the Bomb, written in 1948. Written before the publication of later documents, some of which vindicate its conclusions to a remarkable degree, Blackett cogently developed four major contentions upon which the New Left would later extensively rely in its analysis of the origins of the Cold War.

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First, since the casualty figures showed that most of the fighting in the war was done by the Red Army on the eastern front, Russia's sensitivity about her western land frontiers must be appreciated. Second, as Japan was already thinking in terms of surrender by July 1945, and the Americans did not intend to invade before November, the haste to drop the first atom bomb on August 6 becomes comprehensible only in view of Stalin's determination to bring the Soviet Union into the war on August 6 - with, presumably, the intention of making the same gains in eastern Asia as he had in eastern Europe. Therefore Japan had to be compelled to surrender to the Americans alone, and so "we conclude that the dropping of the atom bombs was not so much the last military act of the second world war, as the first act of the cold diplomatic war with Russia now in progress." Third, the American (Baruch) Plan for controlling atomic weapons ensured the weakening of Russia's military and economic position. Finally, the obvious Soviet solution both to America's atomic bomb monopoly and to the doctrine of "instant and condign punishment" contained in the Baruch Plan must be to advance her

9 Blackett, Consequences of Atomic Energy, p. 127.
effective frontiers as far from Russia as possible.  

 Implicit in Blackett's analysis were two arguments which have proved invaluable to the New Left's interpretation. First, if Russia's position in Europe in 1945 could be understood in the light of her experience of repeated invasions from the west, her consolidation of that position after 1945 should be equally understood in the light of Hiroshima, of America's new and apparently permanent air bases, and of the Baruch Plan. Second, the Truman administration's decision after Roosevelt's death not to accept the validity of the Russian position in Eastern Europe was the result not of any new Soviet acts during the crucial period April 1945-January 1946 but of an American reversal of policy. In effect, what had changed was not Soviet policy but the western view of it, due possibly to pressure exerted by the State Department and the new members of the Truman cabinet, who were militant anti- communists and had rejected Roosevelt's wartime attempts to conciliate Russia.


11 David Horowitz in his book, From Yalta to Vietnam (Middlesex, 1967) has emphasized the effect of Truman's changes in his cabinet on American foreign policy. See pp. 51-62.
Walter LaFeber, for example, has demonstrated through detailed documentation how much of the Cold War anxieties and of America's responses were due not to Russian actions but to America's interpretation of them. New Left writers like Williams, Alperovitz, Horowitz and LaFeber also concur with Blackett's contention that United States policy toward the Soviet Union dramatically shifted after Truman became President. This change in policy began with Truman's "get tough" speech to Molotov concerning Russia's attempt to lower an iron fence around Poland. A surprised Molotov, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, replied, "I have never been talked to like that in my life." "Carry out your agreements," the President said, "and you won't get talked to like that." It is evident from this brief account that the new revisionists have relied to a great extent on Blackett's book, Fear, War and the Bomb (1948).

However, Blackett's cogently written book has a major flaw. If Blackett was correct, and if it was the United States and not the men in the Kremlin who refused to cooperate, the reasons for this decision are not made immediately apparent by Blackett. What would cause the American government to reach such a fateful decision?


Fear and dislike of dictatorial governments might be one reason, but as the New Left historians have emphasized, these existed outside the communist camp, and their number was likely to increase in places like Spain and Greece. A second possibility, fear of a Russian invasion of Western Europe, which was prominent in orthodox interpretations of the origins of Cold War, was not taken seriously by the Truman administration. George Kennan, architect of the containment theory, has substantiated this viewpoint. In May 1965, at a lecture delivered at the Graduate Institute of International Studies at Geneva, Kennan stated that

it was perfectly clear to anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of the Russia of that day, that the Soviet leaders had no intention of attempting to advance their cause by launching military attacks with their own armed forces across frontiers.

Such a procedure, he pointed out,

fitted neither with the requirements of the Marxist doctrine, nor with Russia's own urgent need for recovery from the devastation of a long and exhausting war, nor with what was known about the temperament of the Soviet dictator himself.14

Yet, orthodox historians have maintained that only resolute American action by means of the containment doctrine saved Western Europe from Soviet aggression.  

Another reason for Washington’s refusal to cooperate with Russia in the immediate postwar period might have been American fear of communism. However, as Isaac Deutscher, a teacher of the New Left generation, has shown in his biography, Stalin: A Political Biography (1949), the Soviet leader proved himself to be one of the most conservative leaders in the world. Stalin’s record of non-cooperation with the communist leaders of China and Yugoslavia, Mao and Tito, supports Deutscher’s contention. The idea that the Soviet statesmen was a promoter of communist expansion outside Russia, at that time, is not supported by the available evidence.  

15 In the orthodox interpretation, the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine form the backbone of the "containment doctrine".

16 Kolko has written extensively about Stalin’s conservatism. In regard to Eastern Europe, for example, Kolko contends that the communization of that region constituted Russia’s reaction to hostile Western policies rather than the unfolding of Stalin’s design. "In fact we now know," Kolko writes in his The Politics of War (New York, 1968) that the Russians...had no intention of Bolshevizing Eastern Europe if--but only if--they could find alternatives" (p. 619). In a broader context, Kolko notes that "The Americans and British saw the emergence of the Left as related in some vital way to Russia rather than to the collapse of capitalism and colonialism throughout the world." According to Kolko, it is ironic that "the two genuinely popular Communist parties to take power--in Yugoslavia and China--did so over Soviet objections and advice, and were
The New Left historians have emphasized that the Soviet approach to East European governments varied. In Rumania, a country whose troops had actually invaded Russia in support of Hitler, the Soviets first attempted to govern with the Communists in a minority. Two weeks after Yalta, however, Stalin brutally demanded that the Communist party obtain power within two hours to restore order or Russia would "not be responsible for the continuation of Rumania as an independent state". On the other hand, the Soviets supervised elections which allowed a non-Communist government to gain power in Hungary, suffered an overwhelming defeat in elections in the Russian-controlled zones of Austria, held elections in Bulgaria, which satisfied British if not American officials, and acquiesced in the coming to power of an independent, non-Communist government in Finland, a nation against which the Russians had fought a bloody war in 1939-1940, if that government would follow a foreign policy friendly to Russia. Historical events, particularly the two German invasions, led Stalin to place Poland in the same category as Rumania, not Finland.17

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17 LaFeber, Cold War, 1945-66, p. 17.
The orthodox interpretation has attributed to Russia a policy of inexorable expansion. In so doing, they have too often overlooked the significance of the immediate postwar period which is essential to a meaningful analysis of the Cold War. In addition, non-revisionist historians have simply dismissed this crucial 1945-1946 period as the prelude, a shrewd Soviet plan to allay American suspicions until the American Army evacuated Europe, to the later consolidation and expansion of Russian power in east-central Europe. Bernstein has commented that, "from this perspective, however, much of Stalin's behaviour becomes strangely contradictory and potentially self-defeating." 18

Isaac Deutscher first developed this viewpoint. If Stalin had indeed intended to create puppets rather than an area of "friendly governments," why, Deutscher asks, did he "so stubbornly refuse to make any concessions to the Poles over their eastern frontiers?" 19 Similarly, it is difficult to understand Stalin's demand for reparations from Bulgaria, Hungary, and Rumania if he eventually planned to seize control of these nations. It logically follows that, if Stalin had decided to turn Eastern Europe into a

satellite of the Soviet Union, he would not have to concern himself with either reparations or the Polish issue. With these nations as satellites of Moscow, Stalin would have a free hand.

If American fear of communism in 1945, dislike of police states, nor fear of a Soviet attack on western Europe determined American policy toward Moscow, what did? Thus the question remains, why did the Truman administration, in 1945 or 1946, decide not to negotiate with Russia but rather seek to compel the Soviet Union to abandon Eastern Europe as the New Left historians have charged? To make their challenge to the orthodox interpretation credible, the New Left historians need a motive for such precipitate American action. That motive is the idea of the Open Door as developed by the major New Left writers. It is here that the New Left historians have made their major contribution to the historiography of the origins of the Cold War.

The influential New Left historian who has done most to develop and promote the idea of the Open Door and a revisionist interpretation of the beginnings of the Cold War is William Appleman Williams. He has argued persuasively that the history of American diplomacy throughout the twentieth-century has been the history of the Open Door policy. "To stabilize the world in a pro-American equilibrium" has been the minimum objective of United States
policy; and "to institutionalize American expansion" its optimum goal. The Cold War, in Williams' view, must be interpreted as the latest phase of a continuing effort to make the world safe for American democracy and American capitalism, a phase in which the United States found itself increasingly cast as the leader of a worldwide counter-revolution. This policy was consciously and deliberately embarked upon, Williams argued, because American statesmen believed that American capitalism needed ev expanding foreign markets in order to survive. Eastern Europe was obviously a prime area for American economic expansion. Accordingly, the fundamental motive in Washington's Cold War policy, as shown by Williams, was a persistent effort to force Moscow to accept America's concept of itself and the world. The United States was

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22 In the opinion of the New Left historians, the central dynamic of American diplomacy since the 1890s has been an ever increasing domestic economy that demanded a continual search for foreign markets combined with a lowering of foreign tariffs (the Open Door). The Cold War was the apotheosis of this inevitable development.

Though the New Left school of historians are in agreement on the above, they can be divided into at least two groups. The determinist members such as Gabriel Kolko and David Horowitz are convinced that the internal structural requirements of a mature capitalistic America, more than the defects of personality, are responsible for Washington's expansionist foreign policy.

However, others, such as William Appleman Williams,
determined to expand the Open Door principle of trade and investment into areas under Soviet control.\textsuperscript{23}

Williams maintained that, during the early years of the Cold War, the United States had "a vast proportion of actual as well as potential power vis-à-vis the Soviet Union". The United States "cannot with any real warrant or meaning claim that it has been FORCED to follow a certain approach or policy".\textsuperscript{24}

Lloyd C. Gardner and Walter Lefeber, have given more emphasis to the importance that simplistic and misguided ideas or ideals may be unrelated to the nature of America's economic system. Whatever their particular emphasis, the New Left historians are in agreement that American foreign policy has defended the capitalist old order and opposed leftist movements around the world.

\textsuperscript{23}Kolko, in his \textit{The Politics of War and The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954} (New York, 1972) has revealed the remarkable extent to which U. S. policy in Eastern Europe was governed by economic considerations.

\textsuperscript{24}Williams, \textit{Tragedy}, p. 208. As Lasch has pointed out, it is helpful to compare this with a statement by Schlesinger, a defender of Cold War orthodoxy: "The Cold War could have been avoided only if the Soviet Union had not been possessed by convictions both of the infal-

In questioning the orthodox view that United States postwar policy was primarily a response to remorseless Soviet expansion, the New Left historians, led by Williams, have made a major contribution to the history of the Cold War. This questioning has given the revisionists new perspectives. It has enabled them, in part, to return the controversy surrounding the origins of the Cold War to the diplomatic arena. It has remained for the New Left historians to emphasize that, in 1945 and after, the United States and not the Soviet Union had the luxury of alternatives. For example, the United States held vast economic and atomic power advantages in relation to Russia. How the American government chose to use these advantages would undoubtedly have a decisive effect on the future of Soviet-American relations. As a result, as the New Left historians have convincingly established, policy decisions made in Washington to preserve and expand the Open Door in the critical period after the war, not Moscow, were largely responsible for the breakdown of the wartime coalition.

25 In addition to these American power advantages, Russia had been devastated by World War II. See Isaac Deutscher, "Myths of the Cold War," in David Horowitz, ed., Containment and Revolution (London, 1967), pp. 13-14.

26 To see the Cold War according to Gardner simply as part "of an action-reaction syndrome in which one side or the other was totally justified, or for which neither side was responsible, oversimplifies matters." Gardner rather suggests, given our ignorance of much of Soviet policy, that Washington was more responsible "for the way
Perhaps a word from Dean Acheson, a major architect of America's Cold War policy, is illuminating in this respect. "As long as there is a great disparity of power which makes negotiations seem to be unnecessary to one side, that causes them to believe that they can accomplish their purposes without it".27 Granted diplomacy is interaction among powers, but in certain situations such as the immediate World War II period as Acheson has pointed out unwittingly, the predominant power, in this case the United States, is apt to forego genuine negotiation because it is convinced that it can accomplish its objectives without it. Such were the circumstances in the immediate post-war period.

Possibly this is why Lippmann's test to determine Soviet intentions regarding Europe was never put into operation. The withdrawal of the Red Army was the test of Soviet conduct and purpose. This action would drastically alter the balance of power, the Kremlin would appreciate this, and the United States therefore

in which the Cold War developed . . . /Because7 it had much greater opportunity and far more options to influence the course of events than the Soviet Union, whose situation in victory was worse in some ways than that of the defeated countries" Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy, 1941-1949 (Chicago, 1970), p. 317.

27Cited in Horowitz, Yalta to Vietnam, p. 243.
must expect it to exact the highest price it can obtain for what would be a deep reduction of its present power and influence in Europe, or, if it means to conquer Europe, to obstruct any settlement which meant that the Russian armies must evacuate Europe. 28

Unfortunately, as the New Left historians, aided by Lippmann's perceptive criticism of containment, have established, the United States, dealing from a position of unassailable superiority, was in no mood to compromise. Instead of the course advocated by Lippmann, American officials launched a diplomatic offensive to prevent Russia from consolidating or expanding her sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and to compel her to contract it. The continuance of the Open Door was at stake. In this effort, Washington policy makers were supported by America's overwhelming economic and atomic strength. 29

In his America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1966, Walter LaFeber has recorded how the United States attempted to employ its vast economic supremacy to force Russia to accede to American demands for an open world. 30 According

28 Lippmann, The Cold War, p. 44.

29 See Lippmann's Cold War for a brilliant critique of the containment doctrine and how that policy was doomed from its inception.

30 Kolko, in his The Limits of Power, is in agreement with LaFeber. In Kolko's judgment the United States "emerged from the war self-conscious of its new strength and confident of its ability to direct world reconstruction along lines compatible with its goals." The objectives of Washington's policymakers were "to restructure
to LaFeber's brilliant analysis, the United States built its initial post-World War II foreign policy upon four major assumptions. Washington officials first assumed that foreign policy grew directly from domestic policy and not primarily from outside pressures. The spectre of another depression haunted American officials. This led to a second assumption that the post-1929 quagmire had been lengthened and partly caused by high tariff walls and regional trading blocks which had prevented the natural flow of foreign trade. Free flow of exports and imports was essential. Third, the United States, quadrupling its production while other major industrial nations suffered severe war-time damage, wielded the requisite economic power to establish this desired economic community. Finally, Washington policy makers determined to use this gigantic economic power. Unlike the 1930s, the United States would not sit on the sidelines for it could not afford to do so.31

A week after Japan was defeated, Secretary of State James F. Byrnes affirmed that initial American postwar policy was based upon these four assumptions. Noting that

the world so that American business could trade, operate, and profit without restrictions everywhere." Limits of Power, p. 2.

"our international policies and our domestic policies are inseparable," he maintained that "our foreign relations inevitably affect employment in the United States. Prosperity and depression in the United States just as inevitably affect our relations with the other nations of the world." The Secretary stated his "firm conviction that a durable peace cannot be built on an economic foundation of exclusive blocs . . . and economic warfare. (A liberal trading system) imposes special responsibilities upon those who occupy a dominant position in world trade. Such is the position of the United States." With his declaration that the American government was determined to reorder the world, he gave a warning as well as a policy assumption that "in many countries throughout the world our political and economic creed is in conflict with ideologies which reject both of these principles. To the extent that we are able to manage our domestic affairs successfully, we shall win converts to our creed in every land."32 The United States implemented this goal with resolve.

American officials hoped that they could achieve the

desired results through such international agencies as the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These agencies would, if successful, guarantee the integrity of the Open Door. American officials were confident that these agencies "would minimize exclusive and explosive nationalism and maximize economic and political interchange." It was not without significance for Soviet security in Eastern Europe that American economic power automatically assured the United States control of these supposedly international agencies.

It would appear that the New Left historians' Open Door theory is upheld by the available historical evidence. As an example, President Truman moved rapidly to implement the multilateral approach inherent in the Open Door. He secured Congress's renewal of the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act of 1934, a powerful lever in lowering tariff walls at home and abroad. However, one major doubt disturbed American officials: would all the former Allies, primarily Britain, France and Russia, play the game according to American rules? By 1946, Great Britain and France had for the most part given the appropriate answers. The

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33 Lloyd C. Gardner's, Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy (Madison, 1964) and LaFeber's Cold War, 1945-1966, develop these points in detail.

34 LaFeber, Cold War, 1945-1966, p. 17.
obstacle to American plans for an open world, not surprisingly, was the men in the Kremlin. The Soviet Union refused to play the game according to American rules. It was largely for this reason that the United States could not develop its multilateral approach for the world through the hoped for international agencies. 35

Another problem inherent in Washington's Open Door policy was its determination to retain an exclusive American sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere. A State Department memorandum of late June 1945 informed Truman that although spheres of interest did in fact exist in both Eastern Europe (Churchill-Stalin agreement) 36 and the Western Hemisphere, "basic United States policy has been to oppose spheres of influence in Europe. American policy must be attuned to events in Europe as a whole." 37

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35 Washington's Open Door vision of the world had other far reaching ramifications for United States foreign policy. As Kalko has noted, the necessary conclusion of this vision "was the belief that socialism, state ownership, and Third World economic development were fundamentally inimical to American global objectives" Limit of Power, p. 13.

36 For a more detailed analysis of the Churchill-Stalin agreement, see Martin H. F. Bengnings of the Cold War (Bloomington, 1966) and Gar Alperovitz, Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam (New York, 1985).

This policy statement revealed the contradictory nature of American diplomacy. The revisionists have properly stressed this dilemma. Though the United States was opposed to spheres of interest in Europe, it acted to secure its own sphere of interest in the Western hemisphere. Washington achieved this objective through Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, formulated by Senator Vandenberg and Assistant Secretary of State Nelson Rockefeller. Article 51 provided for collective self-defense through special regional organizations to be formed outside the United Nations, but under the principles of the Charter. Senator Vandenberg typified the American approach. He wanted the best of both worlds — exclusive American power in the New and the right to exert American power in the Old. 38

Such American resolution, in support of the Open Door, assured Soviet-American hostility. Understandably Russia refused to accept America's concept of the world. Soviet acceptance of the Open Door would probably have meant American economic domination of Eastern Europe. Therefore, as some of the early critics of the containment policy, in particular Wallace, Lippmann and Blackett, have pointed out, the Russians refused to play the game according

38Lafeber, Cold War, 1945-1966, p. 11.
to American rules, and, instead of being contained, they struggled to escape from the iron curtain which from their side looked like capitalist encirclement.

New Left historians, aware of the implications of the Open Door to Soviet security in Eastern Europe, have considerably expanded this explanation. They have shown that the American concept of open-world diplomacy crashed against Stalin's major area of concern, Eastern Europe. As early as 1941 and 1942, when the Nazi army approached Moscow, Stalin insisted to Western officials that postwar Soviet security demanded Russian predominance in Eastern Europe, especially Poland and Romania. It was to be expected then, as the revisionists have indicated, that Stalin would refuse to abandon this hope, regardless of the American threat, whether economic or atomic, in the better period after 1943 when the Red Army had repulsed the German army at Stalingrad.

The Russian Premier did not accede to American demands for an open world for he could not afford to do so. Rather he constructed Soviet postwar policy on the assumption that it was necessary to maintain Russian freedom of action in Eastern Europe, an area Stalin deemed essential to Soviet security. He relied less on the formalities of

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39 Anthony Eden has confirmed that Stalin asked for recognition of his June 1941 frontiers as early as the following December. Cited in Thomas, "Cold War Origins," II, 191-192.
the United Nations Charter than had the United States (Article 51). He accomplished Soviet security in a more ruthless manner, through the Red Army's occupation and consequent communization of Eastern Europe. Extreme personal ambition and Marxist Doctrine partly accounted for Stalin's policies in this area. But the great Russian demand for security and economic rehabilitation made this policy imperative. Stalin was in a predicament. In order to recover quickly economically, he would require American capital, since the United States possessed the only abundant capital resources in the world. Walter LaFeber has accurately described Stalin's dilemma:

To obtain those funds, however, Stalin would have to loosen his control of Eastern Europe, allow American political and economic power to flow into the area, and consequently surrender what he considered to be the first essential of Soviet security.40

Washington was aware of, and attempted to capitalize on, Stalin's problem. It was partly for this reason that Averell Harriman, a principal United States policy maker and American ambassador to Moscow, recommended a get tough policy with Russia. He advised that such tactics would compel the Soviet Union to follow the American interpretation of the issues in dispute like Poland, the United Nations

40 LaFeber, Cold War, p. 14.
veto, and reparations. Because the Russian government "needed our (economic assistance) ... in their recon-
struction," and because Stalin did not wish to break with Washington, Harriman was convinced Truman "could stand firm on important issues without running serious risks."

As early as January 1944, Harriman had emphasized that "the Soviet Government places the utmost importance on our cooperation" in providing economic assistance; and he had concluded that "it is a factor which should be integrated into the fabric of our overall relations." After an early policy dispute in which General George Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff, and Secretary of War Henry Stimson recommended caution, Truman opted for Harriman's policy.

Having made his decision, the President decided to bring the Polish issue to a solution favorable to the United States. Truman resolved to enforce his interpretation of the Yalta agreement, regarding representation in the restructured Polish government, even if it wrecked the United Nations. He later explained that this was the test of Soviet cooperation. If Stalin would not adhere to his agreements, Truman reasoned that the United Nations was

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doomed. "Our agreements with the Soviet Union so far...

. . . (have) been a one-way street." That could not con-
tinue, Truman informed his advisers that "if the Russians
did not wish to join us, they could go to hell." 42

The President's militant mood was evident in his

April 23, 1945 talk with Molotov. 43 Truman warned that
economic aid would depend wholly upon Russian behaviour in
executing the Yalta agreement. The new President acted in
such a manner even though some American officials believed
the Yalta agreement was open to two interpretations.
Admiral Leahy had remarked to President Roosevelt that the
agreement was "so elastic that the Russians can stretch it
all the way from Yalta to Washington without ever techni-
cally breaking it." Roosevelt replied, "I know, Bill - I
know it. But it's the best I can do for Poland at this
time." 44 Why then did Truman insist on strict Soviet ad-
herence to the American interpretation when the agreement
was so vague? 45 The New Left historians have charged that
Truman adopted his uncompromising attitude because the
extension of the Open Door into Eastern Europe was involved.

42 Ibid., pp. 26-27.

43 For Truman's lecture to Molotov on that occasion, see footnote 13 in Chapter II of this paper.


45 See Herz's book, Beginnings of the Cold War, for an excellent analysis that clearly reveals the vagueness of
Nevertheless, by the time the Potsdam Conference convened in July 1945, the United States and Russia had reached agreement upon the question of representation in the Polish government. During the summer and autumn the American government, had however had tried to reduce Soviet control by using relief materials and equipment required by the Poles to compel Poland to accept, as the State Department said, "a policy of equal opportunity for us in trade, investments and access to sources of information." American policy makers were clearly convinced, as Kolko has stated, that "there was still hope of using American economic power to reintegrate Poland into the West by one means or another? However, this policy of economic pressure failed before it began.

Washington's sudden termination of lend-lease to Russia, six days after V-E day, further provoked Stalin's hostility. Though the President later insisted this curtailment was mistaken policy-making by subordinates, his memory was faulty. Truman had been repeatedly warned, by the two subordinates most closely involved, of the probable effect of such action on relations with Russia. The

the Yalta agreements. He concluded that they were definitely open to two interpretations.

46 Department of State, Potsdam, I, 715, 784-785.

47 Kolko, Politics of War, p. 403.
evidence supports the New Left historians' contention that the government was following Harriman's advice and was seeking to use American economic supremacy to achieve diplomatic ends. 40

American policy makers appear to have pursued a strategy similar to that followed in the lend-lease matter, with regard to Russia's request for an American loan. Stalin's application for a six billion dollar loan in January 1945 was met with a familiar American response. The State Department refused to discuss the matter unless, as Ambassador Averell Harriman stated, Stalin became more receptive to American demands in Europe. Following congressional approval, Truman had already cut off Lend-Lease aid. Now, three months later, Stalin again requested an American loan for one-billion dollars. Mysteriously, the

40 For Truman's later explanation of the stoppage of lend-lease, see Truman, Memoirs, Vol. I, 225. See Bernstein, Politics and Policies, pp. 17-20 for the New Left historians' contention that Truman's later recollection was inaccurate.

Alperovitz makes the point that "a limitation on Lend-Lease followed logically from the view that American diplomacy could gain if the Soviet Union were more dependent upon economic assistance. Alperovitz concludes that "This would increase America's economic leverage." He then quotes Deane to the effect that such American action would "make the Soviet authorities come to us" Atomic Diplomacy, p. 36. In this regard, see also Kolko, The Politics of War, p. 397.
United States government lost this request, but it was discovered after the disastrous Foreign Ministers Conference of December 1945. On March 1, 1946 the State Department offered to discuss the loan if the Soviets would in return pledge "non-discrimination in international commerce" by accepting membership in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Unfortunately, from the Soviet point of view, membership in these agencies, controlled by American personnel and capital, required the Russians to open their records and territory. This necessitated Russian surrender of its major strategic asset, secrecy. On March 13, 1946, the Soviets officially announced a Five-Year Plan to rebuild heavy industry and to ensure "the technical and economic independence of the Soviet Union", as the official Russian announcement phrased it. Two days later Stalin bluntly refused the American offer.

49 As Williams notes in his Tragedy of American Diplomacy, pp. 210-212, the American government's loss of the Soviet loan request "does not speak to the point of how the leaders could forget the request even if they lost the document."


51 Lefeber, Cold War, pp. 22-23.
The Open Door dream of the United States suffered another defeat. The Soviet leader could not afford to allow American economic predominance in an area he considered vital to Russia's security. This would have been the net result if he had accepted Washington's terms for a loan.

If American economic power, through cut-back of lend-lease and the abortive United States loan to Russia, could not penetrate and expand the Open Door principle of trade and investment into the Soviet sphere of interest, perhaps another force was available to drive the Russians out of Eastern Europe. The not-so-hidden stick behind American economic coercion was the atomic bomb.

The revisionists, notably Gar Alperovitz, have advanced this proposition. He has attributed Soviet-American hostility to the period of atomic diplomacy from March to August, 1945 which led to Potsdam and the decision to drop the bomb on Japan. Alperovitz's documentation in support of his radical reinterpretation is striking.

52 It is interesting to note here that Kolko is in disagreement with his radical colleagues concerning the reasons behind the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan. Kolko argues that "Mechanism prevailed. No one seriously explored any of the options--neither Japanese surrender, nor delay, withholding the bomb." However, Kolko does conclude that "the United States could have won the war without the Russians and without the atomic bomb," The Politics of War, pp. 565-67.
Secretary of State Byrnes stated in 1947, "I believed the atomic bomb would be successful and would force the Japanese to accept surrender on our terms." But the fact that the United States was determined to end the war against Japan before Russian entry on August 8, rather than the November 1 invasion date, has been affirmed and reaffirmed in a much more decisive manner. "Though there was an understanding that the Soviets would enter the war three months after Germany surrendered", Byrnes has testified, "the President and I hoped that Japan would surrender before THEN." And, even more straightforward, "We wanted to get through with the Japanese phase of the war before the Russians came in." Moreover, more recently, in a television documentary on January 5, 1965, Byrnes admitted that Stalin was not informed of the details of the atomic bomb at the Potsdam Conference for a specific and far-reaching reason. The Secretary and President Truman did not want to encourage the Russians to enter the war against Japan. At the same time, Byrnes had decided not to cooperate with the Soviets in the early stages of nuclear


development. This evidence apparently has supported the revisionists' contention that the Truman Doctrine and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization were devised before Soviet aggressiveness was proved and before Stalin had done anything except use the Yalta decision to reinforce his spheres-of-influence agreement with Churchill. 56

Again, like several other New Left historians, Alperovitz has interpreted Truman's got tough lecture to Molotov as evidence of a dramatic shift from Roosevelt's more conciliatory policies. But, in his overall interpretation, Alperovitz discloses the profound influence of Blackett. In his concern to account for Truman's shifts in policy from his Molotov speech to Hopkins' conciliatory mission to Moscow, between April and August 1945, he has discovered the answer in the atomic bomb. Alperovitz has established, fairly conclusively, using documents not available to Blackett, that "from any rational military point of view, Japan was already defeated", 57 and actively pursuing surrender terms. General Eisenhower has stated that

I told him (Truman) I was against it (the dropping of the atom bomb) on two accounts. First, the Japanese were ready to surrender and it wasn't necessary to hit them with that awful thing. Second, I hated to see our country be the first

57 Alperovitz, Atomic Diplomacy, p. 105.
to use such a weapon.\footnote{\textit{Newsweek}, "Ike on Ike", Nov. 11, 1963 p. 107.}

Evidently the bomb was not dropped for military considerations, to defeat Japan, and thus to save thousands of American and Japanese lives, as orthodox historians like Feis have argued. Further doubt is cast upon the orthodox interpretation by the fact that President Truman did not even consider it necessary to ask the opinion of the military adviser most directly concerned. This was none other than General MacArthur, Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in the Pacific. He was simply informed of the weapon shortly before it was used at Hiroshima. MacArthur stated on numerous occasions before his death that, like Eisenhower, he believed the atomic bomb was completely unnecessary from a military point of view.\footnote{Cited in Alperovitz, \textit{Atomic Diplomacy}, p. 239.}

Why then did Truman, as the New Left historians have stressed, not try one or more of the following alternatives? The three most likely were guaranteeing the position of the Japanese Emperor (and hence making surrender conditional), seeking a Russian declaration of war (or announcement of intent), or waiting for Russian entry into the war. As no invasion of the Japanese mainland was planned
until November 1, the United States government certainly had the necessary time to try one or all of these alternatives. Truman was also aware that the Japanese had sent out peace feelers and that the main obstacle to surrender was the Japanese insistence on maintaining the position of the Emperor. The President could wisely have changed the terms of surrender in an effort to save American lives. Indeed, after the bombs were dropped, Japan was allowed to retain the monarchy.

Yet the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Japan, not once, but twice. Why then did the Truman administration drop the bombs, in view of these other alternatives? The answer, according to Gar Alperovitz, lies primarily in Europe. Determined to undo the Churchill-Stalin agreement, and thus expand the Open Door into Eastern Europe, but unable to achieve this with his get tough speech, the Molotov interview, or a conciliatory approach, the Hopkins mission, or even through economic pressure in the ending of Lend-Lease, Truman decided to rely on America's master card, the atomic bomb. In order to do this, the President had to wait until the atomic bomb had been properly tested. Truman was convinced, in his own words, that "if it explodes, as I think it will, I'll certainly have a hammer on those boys!"60

60Ibid., p. 130.
One major obstacle hindered Truman's atomic diplomacy, and this was the delay in the construction of the atomic bomb. It was for this reason that Truman delayed another Big-Three meeting until as near the bomb's testing time as possible. When the meeting could be postponed no longer, the President was successful in his effort to leave all important decisions regarding Eastern Europe to the foreign ministers' meeting in September after the bombs had been dropped.

There is little doubt that the bomb had a decisive effect on Truman's thinking. He remarked to Stimson that the weapon "gave him an entirely new feeling of confidence." The bomb had a similar effect on Byrnes. The Secretary's advice to Truman was quite straightforward. "The bomb might well put us in a position to dictate our own terms" and "make Russia more manageable in Europe." Contrary to the orthodox interpretation, it is quite evident that the atomic bomb profoundly influenced the way American officials viewed political problems. Or, as Admiral Leahy has neatly phrased it, "one factor that was to change a lot of ideas, including my own, was the atom bomb."  

61 Conference of Berlin, II, 1361 fn.
62 Truman, Memoirs, I, 87.
63 Leahy, I Was There, p. 429.
The New Left historians do not lack for evidence to support their thesis that the United States dropped the bomb because President Truman agreed with Byrnes' assessment that using the bomb would advance other American policies. For example, it would enable the United States to exclude Russia from the government of occupied Japan, and it would end the war before the Russians could gain a hold in Manchuria. Forrestal noted in his diary a conversation with Byrnes, "Byrnes said he was most anxious to get the Japanese affair over with before the Russians get in, with particular reference to Dairen and Port Arthur. Once in there, he felt it would not be easy to get them out."\(^6^4\) Not without significance, in making such an assessment, is the fact that Russia had been guaranteed rights to be in Dairen and Port Arthur, by mutual agreement at Yalta. Another reason why the United States bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and perhaps the most important, Washington was convinced it would make the Soviets more manageable in Eastern Europe, and thus aid the American government in its effort to keep the Open Door intact.\(^6^5\)

\(^6^4\) Cited in Horowitz, *Yalta to Vietnam*, p. 55.

\(^6^5\) See footnote 62 in Chapter II of this paper for Byrnes' statement in this regard.
American efforts to pressure the Russians to accept Washington's image of the world did not end here. On August 18, 1945, in the perceptible wake of the atomic bomb, Byrnes publicly charged that the Bulgarian elections were not being conducted democratically. The Secretary stated the government was not "adequately representative of important elements . . . of democratic opinion" and that its arrangements for elections "did not insure freedom from the fear of force or intimidation."65 As a result, the elections here and in Hungary were postponed. It is not unreasonable to conclude that the atomic bomb had the desired American impact on Russia. Alexander Berth, a British reporter in Russia, later wrote that

the significance of Hiroshima was not lost on the Russians. It was clearly realized that this was a new fact in the world's power politics, that the bomb constituted a threat to Russia . . . . Everybody . . . believed that although two (atomic) bombs had killed or maimed (the) . . . Japanese, their real purpose was, first and foremost, to intimidate Russia.67

Byrnes' statement, according to one historian of Russian affairs, marked the beginning of "the tragic impasse in Soviet-American relations."68

65 Cited in Bernstein, Politics and Policies, p. 36.


United States proposals for the control of atomic energy, both the original Acheson-Lilienthal plan and the Baruch plan submitted to the United Nations were not conducive to Soviet-American cooperation. As Horowitz and Kolko have pointed out, the distinctive feature of the Baruch Plan was the fact that the United States would make no concessions. It enabled the United States to continue expanding its nuclear stockpile and developing its weapons, until an effective and foolproof international control and inspection system was in operation. Then, and not before, would the United States surrender its own nuclear stocks to an international commission which would regulate all atomic energy development for peaceful purposes in all nations. In fact, the Baruch Plan guaranteed the United States a nuclear monopoly for some years. Thus, it left the United States with the option of using the bomb to coerce or even blackmail the Soviet Union. The Joint Chiefs of Staff clearly perceived the advantage of nuclear monopoly to the United States.

We should exploit (the nuclear monopoly) to assist in the early establishment of a satisfying peace. . . . It will be desirable for international agreements concerning the atomic bomb to follow the Europeans peace treaties and definitely to precede the time when other countries could have atomic bombs.

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Under the terms of the Baruch Plan, the Soviet Union was being asked to accept completely a Western arrangement that entailed opening its borders, its target areas and its military secrets, and to trust Washington, with its absolute weapon, not to take political or military advantage of the difficulties that would undoubtedly ensue. Clearly, the Baruch Plan did endanger Russian security, at least in its early stages. In his letter to Truman of July 1945, Wallace objected to the Baruch approach.

We are telling the Russians that if they are "good boys" we may eventually turn over our knowledge of atomic energy to them . . . . But there is no definite standard to qualify them as being "good" nor any specified time for sharing the knowledge.71

On the other hand, if George Kennan was right and Russia would disintegrate upon opening its borders to the West, as he predicted in his containment theory, this would preclude the Soviet Union from ever receiving atomic information. This consideration, that the Communist Party would be undermined if Moscow accepted the American Baruch Plan, was very much in the minds of the men who drafted the proposals.

In the Hearings in 1954, Oppenheimer states that at the time (1946) he did not expect the Soviet Union to accept the plan, because he thought that if they did so and opened their frontiers and freely admitted Western inspection the Soviet system as it existed would collapse. Exactly the same view was expressed to me in New York in 1946 by the late Lord Inverchapel, then the British Ambassador in Washington. I am surprised now, as I was then, that it was considered realistic diplomacy to ask the Soviet Union voluntarily to accept a plan which, in the views of its author and the American and British Governments would lead to the collapse of the system.  

The United States adopted this plan despite Henry Stimson's belief that he considered "the problem of our satisfactory relations with Russia as not merely connected with but as virtually dominated by the problems of the atomic bomb." He warned that

those relations may be perhaps irretrievably embittered by the way in which we approach the solution of the bomb with Russia. For if we fail to approach them now and merely continue to negotiate with them having this weapon rather ostentatiously on our hip, their suspicions and their distrust of our purposes and motives will increase.  

The Truman administration ignored Stimson's advice. Russia rejected the Baruch Plan and Soviet-American relations were indeed perhaps "irretrievably embittered".

72 Cited in Horowitz, *Yalta to Vietnam*, p. 270.

It is quite apparent that Washington's atomic diplomacy failed in its principal objective "to make Russia more manageable in Europe" and thus to preserve and expand the Open Door. And, whatever the truth in the revisionists' analysis that the United States was committed to, and attempted to secure the Open Door through atomic and economic pressure, it is important to recognize one point, that the replacement of non-communist premiers in east European governments and the general tightening up of Stalinist control which culminated in the expulsion of Tito from the Cominform in 1948, all followed the era of atomic diplomacy which the New Left historians, Alperovitz and Horowitz in particular, have emphasized. The orthodox interpretation of the origins of the Cold War, however, has continued to downplay or simply to ignore the impact which America's sole possession of the atomic bomb had on both Russia and on Washington's policies toward the Soviet Union in the crucial 1945-1946 period. New Left historians have given this aspect of the Cold War much needed emphasis.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

The New Left historians' dissent from their predecessors' interpretation of the origins of the Cold War stems in no small measure from their conception of the historian as student. This view has forced them to formulate an interpretation of the origins of the Cold War by virtue of its central role in twentieth-century history. Convinced as they are that the "only point of investigating the past is to learn how to deal with the future" they must of necessity be concerned with what they conceive to be the paramount issue of this century.¹

This outlook has also compelled them to adopt a conception of the world and how it operates. Obviously the most important question is whether or not their Open Door theory of American diplomacy is correct. Have they merely settled on the Open Door theory as an explanation of twentieth-century American history so they can then proceed with the business of creating an alternative society in America? At this point, it is too early to give a definitive answer. At the very least, however, the New Left historians

¹Gar Alperovitz, Cold War Essays (Garden City, N. Y., 1970), p. 113.
have presented a thought provoking analysis of the origins of the Cold War. No longer can there be any doubt that considerable historical evidence exists to support their Open Door theory.

The new revisionists, supposedly blinded by Marxist doctrine, economic determinism and historical present-mindedness, have to a greater extent than the orthodox historians critically examined the root causes of the Cold War. This has resulted in two major contributions. First, the New Left historians have questioned the adequacy of the orthodox view which interprets American policy as primarily a response to the thrust of inexorable Soviet expansion. In view of the available evidence, this interpretation is no longer acceptable. Second, the New Left historians have given much needed emphasis to the decisive effect of the atomic bomb in the dynamics of the Cold War.

In addition, as the New Left has emphasized, it has largely been forgotten or misrepresented that the United States had the choice of alternatives in the immediate post-World War II period. As already noted, the American government possessed predominant power, both economic and atomic. It follows, as Williams has stated, that "power and responsibility go together in a direct and intimate relationship". Therefore, Washington, more so than Moscow, had it in its power whether or not to cooperate.

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This is essential to a genuine understanding of the origins of the Cold War. Unfortunately, as the New Left historians have argued, it appears that the United States chose to use its power in a vain effort to compel Russia to accept the Open Door.

Certainly, as students of history, the new revisionists have raised a few disconcerting questions for those who are committed either to the orthodox view of the Cold War or to the orthodox view of the historian. Most prominent among these is the question: how did the United States become so extensively involved around the world? The orthodox historians' explanation that the United States accidentally acquired an empire, if acknowledged at all, is simply no longer tenable in view of the evidence to the contrary unearthed by the New Left historians. Even more damaging to the orthodox historians is how could they have arrived at such an erroneous explanation given their objective conception of the historian's function?

The New Left historians' contribution is not, as is often charged, mere rhetoric fired by their militant opposition to American foreign policy. On the contrary, the new revisionists much maligned dissent from America's foreign and domestic policies, combined with their Beardian view of the historian, has perhaps enabled them to perceive the origins of the Cold War in a manner closer to the actual
realities of the period.

Moreover, their interpretation is continually evolving. This is due in large part to the work done by Gabriel and Joyce Kolko. Though the Kolkos' colleagues also perceive the Cold War as resulting from America's global Open Door view of the world, the Kolkos have taken another step. For example, Kolko explicitly states that he and his wife "have not written a book about the 'Cold War'" because that "egregious term ... burdens one's comprehension of the post-war era with oversimplification and evokes the wrong questions."³ The Kolkos instead contend that

the larger, more significant context for understanding postwar history is the entire globe and the revolution, the counter-revolution, and the great, often violent, interaction between the United States, its European allies, and the vast social and economic transformation in the third World that is the defining fact of our world.⁴


⁴Ibid.
"To locate true motives and isolate real objectives," the Kolkos believe that one must separate as well as interrelate the problems of Russia, England, Western capitalism, and the revolution in much of the world in the overriding context of the United States' expansion and advancement of its national interest.  

The continuing efforts of the New Left writers in this area make it evident that they have accepted the challenge handed to the historical profession by Frederick Jackson Turner, in his Presidential Address, to the American Historical Association, in 1910. 

A comprehension of the United States today, an understanding of the rise and progress of the forces which have made it what it is, demands that we should rework our history from the new points of view afforded by the present. 

Possibly, this has been the New Left historians' greatest contribution to date. The New Left historians have unquestionably reworked American history from the perspective of the 1950s and 1970s as their predecessors did from that of the 1940s and 1950s. Perhaps an interpretation that is closer to the truth than any that exists now will emerge from a synthesis of the orthodox and the New Left's analyses of the Cold War.

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5 Ibid., p. 5.

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