

## BERNATH LECTURE

What Happened to the New Left? Toward a  
Radical Reading of American Foreign Relations\*

For the past two decades, even before Charles Maier's now well known indictment of our field, historians of foreign relations have been wringing their hands, furrowing their brows, and anguishing over what we do and where we're headed.<sup>1</sup> For the most part, and especially in the past few years, the often-virulent dialogue has centered on the issue of methodology as partisans of traditional, narrative history have attacked those who are adapting theories from social history and literary criticism such as gender, postmodernism, or heuristics to their studies of foreign relations. As Frank Costigliola, Anders Stephanson, Frank Ninkovich, William Walker, Kristin Hoganson, Bob Dean, Laura Belmonte, and others have attempted to broaden the parameters of the field by studying culture, language, and gender in the diplomatic arena, they have been excoriated by traditionalist historians in print, on the H-DIPLO "discussion" list, and in casual conversation.<sup>2</sup>

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1. See Charles Maier, "Marking Time: The Historiography of International Relations," in *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, ed. Michael Kammen (Ithaca, 1980), 355–87. Prior to Maier's essay, both Alexander DeConde and David Patterson pondered "what's wrong" with the field in the SHAFR *Newsletter*, May 1970 and September 1978.

2. See, for instance, Frank Costigliola, "Unceasing Pressure for Penetration: Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan's Formation of the Cold War," *Journal of American History* 83 (March 1997): 1309–39, and "The Nuclear Family: Tropes of Gender and Pathology in the Western Alliance," *Diplomatic History* 21 (Spring 1997): 163–83; Frank Ninkovich, "No Post-Mortems for Postmodernism, Please," *Diplomatic History* 22 (Summer 1998): 451–66; Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, 1998); William Walker, "Drug Control and the Issue of Culture in American Foreign Relations," *Diplomatic History* 12 (Fall 1988): 365–82; Robert Dean, "Masculinity as Ideology: John F. Kennedy and the Domestic Politics of Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History* 22 (Winter 1998): 29–62; Laura Belmonte, "A Nation Most Appealing: American National Identity, Propaganda, and the Cold War, 1945–1959," in progress, and "Don't Hate Me Because I'm Cultural: A Young Scholar Looks at Our (Mine) Field," paper delivered at 1999 conference of American Historical Association, Washington, DC; among those critics of the new methodology, William Stueck, Reid Rozen, Tom Nichols, David Kaiser, and others writing on H-DIPLO stand out for the vehemence with which they attack historians practicing new methods of inquiry.

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I do not wish to ruminate about that methodological debate here (though I will comment on it briefly below) but to raise another issue that I believe is more important to the practice of diplomatic history: *ideology*. Namely, I would argue that the attack on methods is a thinly disguised assault on what has become the “Left” in our field. Where Robert Berkhofer suggests that contextualism is a methodology, I would broaden the framework to suggest that methodology, furthermore, *is* ideology.<sup>3</sup> The *way* we examine our subjects goes a long way in determining *what* our conclusions will be. As any quantum physicist will tell you, observation is inherently disruptive. Ergo, those who use postmodern theory or gendered language to analyze the conduct of America’s global affairs are likely to take a critical view of U.S. behavior in the world. Like white males who cry “reverse discrimination,” traditionalists and conservatives in the field are complaining that the postmodernists and culturalists have established a “hegemony” in diplomatic history. In its most virulent form, many traditionalists argue, as Sally Marks of Rhode Island College put it, that “those determined to pack their departments with exponents of the new history are short-sighted, lemming-like, intolerant, irresponsible, and shortchanging students (and anything else appropriate one can think of).”<sup>4</sup> Thus, the current debate over theories and methods is another part of what Anders Stephanson termed the “containment of ideology” in a critique of John Gaddis’s work in 1993.<sup>5</sup> For their part, historians who use social and cultural theories also claim victimhood, finding the need to defend their methods in as many venues as possible. Both have it wrong.

Indeed, traditional, conservative, and/or narrative historians have little if anything to complain about. Their works dominate the field, they publish in volume, they get jobs and promotions. But those on the cultural left are not shut out either. Books and articles on gender and foreign policy are published regularly; articles in *Diplomatic History* and elsewhere trumpeting these new theories are common; proposals for major conferences featuring new approaches stand a better chance at acceptance than traditionalist panels; and younger scholars taking social and cultural approaches have not been shut out of an increasingly tight job market.<sup>6</sup>

If any particular group or approach is conspicuously absent from the mainstream in our field, it is the economic or structural Left, the descendants of the New Left of the 1960s one could maintain. The New Left, so widespread and popular just over a generation ago, has virtually disappeared from the landscape of diplomatic history, swept away by an ideological counterrevolution from the right and an abandonment from today’s so-called left. But, as Bill

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3. Robert Berkhofer, *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (Cambridge, MA, 1995), 31–36.

4. Marks on H-DIPLO, 9 October 1998, re. Hiring of Diplomatic Historians.

5. Anders Stephanson, “Commentary: Ideology and Neorealist Mirrors,” *Diplomatic History* 17 (Spring 1993): 285–95.

6. See sources cited in note 2.

Walker pointed out in his address at the Thomas Paterson tribute conference, “we should take pride in the achievements of earlier revisionist generations.”<sup>7</sup> That, apparently, is not yet happening. In the 1990s, only about 10 percent of the articles in *Diplomatic History* have focused on economic or material aspects of U.S. foreign relations, and of those I would only include Emily Rosenberg’s presidential address as having a leftist cast. Just three of the fifteen essays on methods and theories in the study of foreign relations in the Mike Hogan-Tom Paterson collection, *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, deal with economic or materialist issues (Louis Perez on dependency; Tom McCormick on world systems theory; and Hogan on corporatism).<sup>8</sup> A library search for books on arms sales, the World Bank, or the military-industrial complex will come up with few, if any, works written by historians. Even a perusal of the syllabi on Nick Sarantakes’s fine website for diplomatic historians (admittedly not a scientific sample) reveals that the most popular authors assigned are Bill Brands, Melvyn Leffler, John Gaddis, and others while only Walter LaFeber appears from the New Left, and that more likely for *The American Age* than for a monograph. Indeed, to the current generation of young scholars and graduate students, the New Left is something of a relic, or to use Ross Perot’s favorite analogy, similar to the crazy aunt who everyone whispers about but who isn’t taken seriously. It’s time to change that. The New Left revolutionized and modernized the study of diplomatic history and is as vital, even more so I would argue, today as in the 1960s. Indeed, the analysis and conclusions reached by New Left authors in a previous generation remain effective guides to the study of American foreign policy not just for the Cold War, but for all of U.S. diplomatic history.

#### THE RISE OF THE NEW LEFT

The New Left emerged, or maybe more appropriately erupted, onto a field dominated by an increasingly stale debate over idealism vs. realism and stifled by a consensus on the virtue of America’s role in the world. It benefited from some of the sharpest minds in the historical profession and then from a large-scale hunger on the part of Americans to learn more about the nation and the system that was waging a destructive and immoral war against the people of Vietnam. Building on the work of Charles Austin Beard and beginning with the publication of William Appleman Williams’s *Tragedy of American Diplomacy* in 1959, New Left authors proliferated and arguably dominated the field for the next decade or so. Many of the titles they produced became widely read and may be considered classics in the field: *The New Empire* and many versions of *America, Russia, and the Cold War* by Walter LaFeber; *Economic Aspects of New Deal*

7. William O. Walker, “I’m Not a Revisionist, But . . .”: An Inquiry into the Prospects of Revisionism,” paper delivered at Thomas G. Paterson Tribute Conference, Storrs, CT, October 1998.

8. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, eds., *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (New York, 1991).

*Diplomacy and Architects of Illusion* by Lloyd Gardner; Arno Mayer's amazing books on World War I and its aftermath and equally amazing works on World War II and its aftermath by Gabriel and Joyce Kolko; Thomas McCormick's *China Market*; Gar Alperovitz on *Atomic Diplomacy*; Joan Hoff Wilson on business and foreign policy; books and essays by Carl Parrini, Marilyn Young, Martin Sklar, Carl Oglesby, Barton Bernstein, and Thomas Paterson; an awesome body of work from Noam Chomsky.<sup>9</sup> Though a diverse group of scholars, New Left authors shared a commitment to analyze the economic, materialist (domestic) forces conditioning American foreign policies, most importantly the Open Door; to question corporate and presidential power; to counter claims, in the Cold War era, of monolithic communism and Soviet aggression; and to critically examine claims of American beneficence and goodwill in the world. Many New Left works embodied all those traits, but others, such as Alperovitz, did not stress economics but may be included because their work diverged so markedly from the official stories being produced by historians willing to apologize for American power.

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9. Among those authors and works associated with the New Left, some of the best-known include William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York, 1972), *The Roots of the Modern American Empire* (New York, 1969), *The Contours of American History* (Cleveland, 1961), *Empire as a Way of Life* (New York, 1980), *America Confronts a Revolutionary World, 1776–1976* (New York, 1976), *American-Russian Relations, 1781–1947* (New York, 1952), *The United States, Cuba, and Castro* (New York, 1962), *The Great Evasion: An Essay on the Contemporary Relevance of Karl Marx and the Wisdom of Admitting the Heretic into a Dialogue about America's Future* (Chicago, 1964), and as editor, *From Colony to Empire: Essays in the History of American Foreign Relations* (New York, 1972); Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansionism, 1860–1898* (Ithaca, 1963), *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945–1996*, 8th ed. (New York, 1997), *The Panama Canal: The Crisis in Historical Perspective* (New York, 1978), *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States and Central America* (New York, 1983), *The Clash: A History of U.S.-Japan Relations* (New York, 1997), and “War: Cold,” *Cornell Alumni News* 71 (October 1968): 24–29; Gabriel Kolko, *Main Currents in Modern American History* (New York, 1976), *The Roots of American Foreign Policy: An Analysis of Power and Purpose* (Boston, 1969), *The Politics of War: The World and United States Foreign Policy* (New York, 1968), and with Joyce Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945–1954* (New York, 1972); Joyce Kolko, *America and the Crisis of World Capitalism* (Boston, 1974); Lloyd Gardner, *Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy* (Madison, 1964), *Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy, 1941–1949* (Chicago, 1970), *Safe for Democracy: Anglo-American Response to Revolution, 1913–1923* (New York, 1984), and as editor, *Redefining the Past: Essays in Diplomatic History in Honor of William Appleman Williams* (Corvallis, OR, 1986); Arno Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917–1918* (New Haven, 1959), and *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918–1919* (New York, 1967); Thomas McCormick, *China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893–1901* (Chicago, 1967), and *America's Half-Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War and After* (Baltimore, 1995); Joan Hoff Wilson, *American Business and Foreign Policy, 1920–1933* (Lexington, KY, 1971); Marilyn Young, *The Rhetoric of Empire: American China Policy, 1895–1901* (Cambridge, MA, 1968); Carl Parrini, *Heir to Empire: United States Economic Diplomacy, 1916–1923* (Pittsburgh, 1969); Jerry Israel, *Progressivism and the Open Door: America and China, 1905–1921* (Pittsburgh, 1971); Martin Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890–1916: The Market, the Law, and Politics* (New York, 1988); N. Gordon Levin, *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America's Response to War and Revolution* (New York, 1968); Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam* (New York, 1965); Thomas G. Paterson, *Soviet-American Confrontation: Postwar Reconstruction and the Origins of the Cold War* (Baltimore, 1973); and Noam Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins* (New York, 1970), and *At War with Asia* (New York, 1970). I would also like to thank Noam Chomsky, Walter LaFeber, Marilyn Young, and Lloyd Gardner for discussing aspects of the New Left in diplomatic history with me via phone conversations and e-mail.

The New Left clearly influenced countless scholars in our field, changed the way we do diplomatic history, and helped facilitate the growth of new approaches to the field such as corporatism, world systems theory, and dependency theory. In the work of scholars like Mike Hogan and Bruce Cumings we see the inheritors of the New Left. In my own case, the New Left has had a tremendous impact on my studies and my career. The first books I read in grad school – in a diplomatic history course taught by Bill Walker, who was covering for Marvin Zahniser at Ohio State that semester – were *Tragedy* and *The Politics of War*. Coming from an undergraduate background where I studied Greek and Roman history these books were truly eye-opening! Subsequently, I read LaFeber, McCormick, Jerry Israel, N. Gordon Levin, and many others writing in a similar vein, as well as more traditional authors such as Samuel Flagg Bemis, Thomas Bailey, George Frost Kennan, and John Lewis Gaddis. But I had been taken in by the systemic and critical approach of the New Left, which had confirmed some fuzzy thoughts I had about the nature of American power in the world during the Vietnam era, and I decided to study diplomatic history as a result.

Since then, my enthusiasm for the New Left has only grown, but I've been just as disturbed over the past two decades by the trend away from doing the kind of histories pioneered by Williams and his posse. Historians still produce works critical of America's global actions and some, though a diminishing number, still examine economic foreign policy. In the main, however, the Left in diplomatic history has been contained and not a little bit rolled back. Conventional wisdom, basking in Cold War triumphalism and weighty studies of national security, has virtually returned to the earliest interpretations of U.S. foreign relations, claiming that American leaders acted globally (albeit, sometimes, aggressively) in pursuit of legitimate strategic objectives or to counter dangerous global trends (especially communism) or to promote American values abroad. Examinations of "hegemony," "empire," or of the "military-industrial complex" are noticeably absent. Amid this self-proclaimed post-revisionist synthesis, I want to ponder the question "what happened to the New Left?"<sup>10</sup>

#### RIGHT SUPREMACY AND THE CULTURED LEFT

When I think of those historians in our field who are most recognized by both their colleagues and the public generally, they are all conservative or at least "mainstream" scholars, defenders or apologists for every U.S. administration since FDR: John Gaddis, of course, and Melvyn Leffler have both won the Bancroft Prize and have access to the pages of the establishment's in-house organ *Foreign Affairs*. Stephen Ambrose and Robert Dallek are regular talking heads on various PBS programs, as is Michael Beschloss. On H-DIPLO, the

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10. John Gaddis, "The Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis on the Origins of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 7 (Summer 1983): 171–90.

electronic discussion list for the field, conservatives, many on the government dole who post multiple messages daily, assault practitioners of the new methods and critics of the American Century even as one of their own, William Stueck, blasts them for failing “to launch a systematic counterattack on the view that race, class, and gender are the three fundamental categories of historical analysis.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, H-DIPLO, supposedly an open forum for debating issues of foreign relations, has become something of an electronic version of *Commentary*, where the far right debates the center right over the propriety of U.S. behavior in the world, and critics of American diplomacy rarely any longer even see fit to contribute. Even young apologists for the establishment like Douglas Brinkley and Tim Naftali have access to the *New York Review of Books* and *New York Times*. Indeed, privilege has its membership.

This triumphalism and conservative hegemony over the field of diplomatic history – “right supremacy” I like to call it – has probably been the biggest factor in the demise of the Left over the past generation or so. To a not insignificant degree, this is probably a product of international trends in the aftermath of Vietnam and attached to the demise of liberalism, when Ronald Reagan and George Bush dramatically increased military spending, brought back Cold War rhetoric reminiscent of John Foster Dulles, took on the Soviets via proxies (who later would become Taliban) in Afghanistan, invaded Panama on the sham pretext of cutting off the supply of drugs to the United States, and, despite American and world condemnation, subverted leftist governments in Latin America while training and supplying murderous juntas that slaughtered and “disappeared” hundreds of thousands of their own, most notoriously in Guatemala.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, on the Communist side, the emergence of the reformist Mikhail Gorbachev gave temporary hope for a new socialism and, possibly, real global cooperation and meaningful detente, but the Soviet system was probably too badly decayed for *perestroika* to work. Thus, by the late 1980s and early 1990s, Reaganism, and Thatcherism, were riding high, the Sandinistas were out of power and the FMLN in El Salvador was laying down its arms, the Wall had fallen, and the Kremlin was collapsing.

But even before that turn of events, even prior to Gaddis’s proclamation in his 1983 *DH* article that revisionism was dead, few scholars were still producing critical economic analyses of American foreign policies and concepts like “empire by invitation” were replacing studies of hegemony.<sup>13</sup> Few talked about the *consequences* of American policies abroad on local peoples. Even amid controversial Reagan-Bush foreign policy decisions, in the Middle East and Latin America in particular, historians did not respond as they had in the

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11. Stueck on H-DIPLO, 26 September 1997, re. AHA Panels.

12. On the most recent revelations concerning Guatemala, see the website of the National Security Archive, at <http://www.seas.gwu.edu/nsarchive/>.

13. The concept of “empire by invitation” was developed by Geir Lundestad, see *America, Scandinavia, and the Cold War, 1945–1959* (New York, 1980), and quickly picked up and adapted by Gaddis and others.

Vietnam era by producing a spate of revisionist works. Since then, Gaddis first and then Leffler have emerged as the spokesmen for the field, offering versions of history that differ markedly from the New Left and gaining broad acceptance. Indeed, when they surveyed the field in a *DH* historiographical essay in 1993 Randall Woods and Howard Jones contended that the Gaddis/Leffler “national security approach” was not only the most prevalent interpretation but the right one.<sup>14</sup> This trend, I think, is most unsatisfying. While Gaddis and Leffler, and others who write like them, do make certain allowances for American errors, their work can border on court history. Indeed, conservative diplomatic historians in general share a warm and fuzzy relationship with American power. As I ponder the field I am reminded of Noam Chomsky’s powerful query in his essay “The Responsibility of Intellectuals” in 1969: “The question ‘What have I done?’ is one that we may well ask ourselves, as we read, each day, of fresh atrocities in Vietnam – as we create, or mouth, or tolerate the deceptions that will be used to justify the next defense of freedom.”<sup>15</sup>

Why do the ranking scholars in our field bring Chomsky’s plea to mind? I don’t here need to go into a deep discussion of Gaddis and Leffler. Mike Hogan, Bruce Cumings, Bill Walker, and Anders Stephanson, among others, have already critiqued their work, and better than I could in any event.<sup>16</sup> But I do want to speak to Gaddis’s and Leffler’s most recent efforts that show their coziness to power and reveal the inconsistencies in their thought. Leffler, as we know, argues that American policymakers, with a preponderance of prudence, acted in defense of a “political economy of freedom” and shut down the Soviet threat. But his ideas cannot be easily pigeonholed. Over the past two decades, Leffler has become something of the Leonard Zelig of the field, changing his interpretations on a fairly consistent basis from his earlier, quasi-New Left ideas, to *Preponderance*, where he praises the wisdom of the American establishment, to his more critical introduction to *Origins of the Cold War*, which he co-edited with David Painter, to his dialogue with Bill Walker in *DH* and the *SHAFR Newsletter*.<sup>17</sup>

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14. Howard Jones and Randall B. Woods, “Origins of the Cold War in Europe and the Near East: Recent Historiography and the National Security Imperative,” *Diplomatic History* (Spring 1993): 251–76.

15. Noam Chomsky, “The Responsibility of Intellectuals,” in *American Power and the New Mandarins*, 323–66.

16. Michael Hogan, “State of the Art: An Introduction,” and Bruce Cumings, “Revising Postrevisionism,’ Or, The Poverty of Theory in Diplomatic History,” both in *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941*, ed. Michael J. Hogan (New York, 1995), 3–19, 20–62; William Walker, “Melvyn P. Leffler, Ideology, and American Foreign Policy,” *Diplomatic History* 20 (Fall 1996): 663–73; Stephanson, “Ideology and Neorealist Mirrors.”

17. See Melvyn P. Leffler, *The Elusive Quest: America’s Pursuit of European Stability and French Security, 1919–1933* (Chapel Hill, 1979), *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, 1992), *The Specter of Communism: The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917–1953* (New York, 1994), as editor, with David Painter, *Origins of the Cold War: An International History* (New York, 1994), “The American Conception of National Security and the Beginnings of the Cold War, 1945–1948,” *American Historical Review* 89 (April 1984): 346–81, and

Leffler, oddly it would seem, admits that “no one [in official circles] feared Soviet military aggression” in the late 1940s and that the most vexing issues facing U.S. policymakers – the dollar gap, reconstruction in Western Europe, dealing with Germany and Japan – “were not the making of the Soviet Union.”<sup>18</sup> After Bill Walker pointed out the inconsistency of waging a costly and aggressive Cold War against an enemy that posed no imminent threat, Leffler elaborated on his argument: “The point of my writings is **not** that American actions were a ‘realistic response to Soviet initiatives,’ ” he asserted, “but that they were an understandable and prudent response to the *multitude of opportunities that the Kremlin had to aggrandize its power*. No where . . . do I say that the Kremlin would have used its power to take advantage of all these opportunities. My argument is that U.S. policymakers feared that these trends could play into Stalin’s hands.”<sup>19</sup> What precisely does he mean? If American initiatives were *not* a realistic response to Soviet actions (and therefore they are presumably unrealistic) how can they be “understandable and prudent”? How does building a series of worst-case scenarios based on a *potential* threat of Soviet behavior and consequently militarizing the American economy and culture and containing or repressing democratic movements abroad and at home constitute an “understandable and prudent” policy? American actions, if one is to accept Leffler’s own premise of the Soviet *non*-threat, were reckless, imprudent, and more than a little irrational.

Leffler, though ultimately validating American power in the early Cold War, does employ some critical analysis and nuance to his work. Gaddis, however, presents a much more triumphal interpretation of America’s Cold War exploits, sort of a “hallelujah choir” for the empire. This is not terribly surprising if one has read Gaddis’s work from his earlier efforts to the present. I recall reading *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War* while a grad student and having an ambivalent response until he concluded, Arthur Schlesinger-like, that U.S. actions or overtures to the Soviet Union were moot because Stalin’s personal pathologies made compromise impossible. From there, Gaddis began experimenting with new methodologies and language and, in *Strategies of Containment*, as Anders Stephanson observed, “move[d] diplomatic history closer to the advice factories of political science, the mirror of power par excellence.”<sup>20</sup> By 1993, with communism in Europe disintegrated and the West triumphant, he not only elaborated on his analysis of Stalin’s responsibility for the Cold War

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“Strategy, Diplomacy, and the Cold War: The United States, Turkey, and NATO, 1945–1952,” *Journal of American History* 71 (March 1985): 807–25.

18. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 163, 358–59.

19. Walker, “Melvyn P. Leffler”; Melvyn P. Leffler, “Ideology and American Foreign Policy” [response to Bill Walker] in *SHAFR Newsletter* 28 (September 1997): 31–38, emphasis in original, my bolding.

20. Gaddis, *The United States and Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1947* (New York, 1972), and *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York, 1982); see also Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., “Origins of the Cold War,” *Foreign Affairs* 46 (October 1967): 22–52; and Stephanson, “Ideology and Neorealist Mirrors.”

in his SHAFR presidential address but essentially indicted the New Left en masse for being apologists for the Soviet Union and Uncle Joe, a theme taken up most recently by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who, in defending Elia Kazan's role as informer in the McCarthyite period, charged that critics of Kazan should be denounced "for the aid and comfort they gave to Stalinism." In his most recent work, *We Now Know*, that line of thought reaches its apex, or nadir depending on one's perspective.<sup>21</sup> The title, Gaddis claims, is conditional and temporal, as in "this is what we now know so far," but the arguments in the book seem definitive, as in "we now know this to be true." Gaddis claims that recent works based on newly opened archives in former Communist nations have proven that Soviet aggression, conditioned by Stalin's personality, made Cold War inevitable and compromise impossible.

To agree with Gaddis would be easy, as Richard Nixon might have said, but it would be wrong. There are problems with his approach. The number of Soviet, Eastern European, and Chinese documents so far declassified and accessible is minuscule. It is also ironic that so many scholars, who cautioned against believing anything coming out of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, now take any document that adds weight to their argument as gospel. More pointedly, many scholars, using documents from the same sources that Gaddis claims attest to Soviet perfidy and imperialism, reach quite different conclusions. David Fogelsohn, working on an earlier period, shows that the Cold War arguably began in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution and World War I as the Americans attempted to oust the new regime. Michael Jabara Carley, as Lloyd Gardner observes, uses Soviet documents "to bolster the case that Stalin's foreign policies were essentially pragmatic responses to a world riven by ideological confrontation." And, in a 1996 *Foreign Affairs* overview of histories based on the ex-Communist archives, Melvyn Leffler comes close to conceding that the New Left had it right a generation ago, that Stalin, albeit ruthless and repressive in certain circumstances, was pragmatic, defensive, and not adventurous in international affairs. And the best source on the new collections, the *Bulletin* of the Cold War International History Project, has published a series of articles over the years that add a great deal to our understanding of the early Cold War years but do *not* offer a definitive version of that era, an "official story" that is not open to challenge or interpretation.<sup>22</sup>

21. John Lewis Gaddis, "The Tragedy of Cold War History," *Diplomatic History* 17 (Winter 1993): 1-16, and *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York, 1997); Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Hollywood Hypocrisy," *New York Times*, 28 February 1999.

22. David Fogelsohn, *America's Secret War against Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1920* (Chapel Hill, 1995); Michael Jabara Carley's work is discussed in "Lloyd Gardner's Cold War Essay," a piece that began as a review of *We Now Know* but became a consideration of the early cold war, on H-DIPLO website, <http://h-netz.msu.edu/~diplo/Gardner.htm>; Leffler, "Inside Enemy Archives . . ." *Foreign Affairs* 75 (July/August 1996): 120-35. Unquestionably the best source of information about documents from the ex-Communist states is the *Cold War International History Project* [CWIHP], which puts out the *CWIHP Bulletin* in both print copy and on its website at <http://cwihp.si.edu/default.htm>. In fact, I recently had my first experience using some of the documents on the CWIHP website. While preparing an article on the Vietnam War, I made

To steal and adapt Warren Kimball's line from some time ago, one wonders if *We Now Know* is much more than "orthodoxy plus (new) archives," for indeed Gaddis's conclusions vary little from his previous effort: the United States used the A-Bomb for a "simple and straightforward reason" – to end the hostilities quickly and avoid a massive loss of American lives if a land war in Asia were to occur – while, on 8 August, the Soviet Union entered the Pacific theater in an "undignified scramble to salvage an unexpectedly unpromising situation." Americans, with "little imperial consciousness or design" and anti-imperialist traditions, finally gained "the self-confidence necessary to administer imperial responsibilities" in the later 1940s to combat the Soviet threat. The United States, which "had played an even more decisive role in defeating Japan than the Soviet Union had in vanquishing Germany," had a right to shut out the USSR from the Japanese settlement in response to earlier expressions of "Stalin's unilateralism."<sup>23</sup>

And so it goes: despite some differences, the Chinese had inordinate influence over Ho Chi Minh; Castro, probably a closet Bolshevik from the first, was a knockoff of both Mao and Ho, climbing aboard the bandwagon of history toward world revolution, driven by the Marxist-Leninist ideologies; the Soviets, believing that capitalism was on the ropes, rejected involvement in the Bretton Woods system despite American efforts to integrate the Communist states; and "we will never know for certain what Stalin or Mao might have done with a nuclear monopoly."<sup>24</sup>

But what of countervailing evidence or counter interpretation? Is Stalin's "undignified" entry into the Pacific War more worthy of criticism than an atomic attack on Hiroshima? Did it really take American policymakers nearly a half-century to develop the "confidence" to hesitantly construct an empire? Was the U.S. role in the Pacific truly more determinative than that of the Soviet Union – which lost about twenty-five million people and countless farms and factories while tearing the guts out of the *Webrmacht*, especially when compared to the comparatively minimal American losses? Did American multilateral dreams at Bretton Woods really include the USSR? Ho taking direction from the Chinese? And while it's true that we don't know what Stalin or Mao might have done with a nuclear monopoly, we do now know what happened on 6 August 1945!

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extensive use of documents regarding Chinese relations with Vietnam during the war. Rather than showing Ho Chi Minh accepting directions from Mao, they reveal that the PRC was trying to coerce the Vietnamese into avoiding negotiations to end the war and trying to create friction between Vietnam and the Soviet Union. Ultimately, Chinese pressure led Ho to move closer to the Soviets, even supporting the 1968 Czech invasion, and to distance his country from the PRC. "The Vietnam War: Capitalism, Communism, and Containment," in *Empire and Revolution: The United States in the Third World since 1945*, ed. Mary Ann Heiss and Peter L. Hahn (Columbus, OH, forthcoming). For another outstanding source of documents see the National Security Archive website at <http://www.seas.gwu.edu/nsarchive/>.

23. Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 87, 56, 38–39, 157.

24. *Ibid.*, 162–63, 179–80, 192, 111.

In describing *We Now Know*, I think Lloyd Gardner got it right. “Gaddis resolves old Cold War question marks by positing Stalin as the demiurge that contains within himself power to unleash a revolutionary force of eager zealots with the expressionless gaze of a brutish power. Stalin the brutal realist accounts for . . . the Iron Curtain, while the romantic revolutionary . . . drive[s] the Soviet state toward the goal of world revolution.” Ultimately, Gaddis revives, unintentionally or not, the old canard from the 1940s and 1950s about the “international communist conspiracy.” Gaddis’s explanation, Gardner concludes, “finally accounts for nearly everything that happened – and permits Western policies to be seen as a normative response to the threat of the ‘other.’”<sup>25</sup> After reading *We Now Know*, it’s fair to ask whether the book was written by a historian. Far too often Gaddis overlooks larger patterns such as American expansion and its attendant need for markets, raw materials, and investment; he does not address changes or fluctuations in Soviet actions, or is dismissive of them; he either dismisses or fails to understand the systemic needs and motivations of all sides; he does not perceive larger structures – ideological, political, cultural, material – that shape policies and behavior by all parties to the conflict. His work, however, is virtually canon among many in the field, and there is not much of a Left to respond to it.

While Gaddis, Leffler, and others have redirected the field away from the revisionism of the 1960s and 1970s and toward a common, if not consensus, interpretation of the “wisdom” of American policymakers acting against the ideologically driven Communist threat, there has not been an extensive “left” to offer a strong rebuttal. Although the triumphalism of the past two decades has been a principal factor in the movement away from New Left revisionism, the emphasis on the methods and theories of social and cultural history by what passes for today’s “Left” diplomatic historians has contributed to the state of the field just as much. Where the Left in the 1960s studied the systemic nature of American expansion, especially the domestic economic forces behind it, today’s critical work in the field tends to focus on issues such as gendered language, postmodern constructions of the state, ideology, emotions, and other less tangible matters than trade, investment, or deficits, for example. In our field, this follows a larger trend in American history generally. The major journals, *Journal of American History* and *American Historical Review*, have only rarely published articles about foreign relations over the past decade, apparently preferring studies of bathing and posture. In the *JAH*, for instance, there have been three articles by diplomatic historians in the 1990s: Andrew Rotter on gendered images of South Asia, Eileen Scully on sex markets in China, and Frank Costigliola on George Kennan’s gendered language. These are a far cry from the New Left of the 1960s, which is especially ironic because Rotter and

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25. Gardner’s Cold War Essay, H-DIPLO website.

Costigliola both wrote outstanding first books on foreign policy that made extensive use of economic analyses.<sup>26</sup>

Today, however, there is about as much chance of getting an article on economic foreign policy published in one of the major journals outside the field as of me being the keynote speaker at a conference of The History Society, even if I am a well-dressed Sicilian Marxist. All kidding aside, the emergence of this new group is testament to the status anxiety of many in the field, including some of our best known practitioners like Walter LaFeber and Lloyd Gardner, who use more traditional historical methods. But at the same time, the leadership, including Eugene and Elizabeth Genovese and Marc Trachtenberg, is quite conservative, at times virulently so and, as I said above, there is most often a link between attacks on methodology and ideology. In fact, Trachtenberg complains that “increasingly, the old ideal of historical objectivity is dismissed out of hand. The very notion of ‘historical truth’ is now often considered hopelessly naive. Instead, the tendency is for people to insist that all interpretation is to be understood in essentially political terms. If objectivity is a myth, how can our understanding of the past be anything but an artifact of our political beliefs? Indeed, if all interpretation is political anyway, then why not give free rein to one’s own political views? Why not use whatever power one happens to have to ‘privilege’ one’s own brand of history?”<sup>27</sup> As I read these words attacking new methods, they are eerily similar to countless attacks I have read in the past by conservative historians analyzing the New Left.

Having said that, it’s equally clear that the current trendy alternative to this conservative triumphalism – cultural and gender studies – fails to adequately explain the nature of American foreign relations. These new approaches that focus on gender and language and similar conceptions do have some merit, and the conservative attack on them is in good measure an attack on their conclusions, which are critical of power. But gender assumptions and choice of words are principally a good starting point for analysis rather than conclusive in their own right. Certainly, American policymakers, overwhelmingly male and products of privileged backgrounds in most cases, were predisposed to think, act, and talk in a certain way, and it adds to our understanding of foreign policies if we examine the cultures from which these men came and the way they looked at the world. It seems, however, that masculine ideologies or language, which are artificially constructed and reflect larger values, tend to be *instruments* of policy rather than agents. That is to say, if one wants to demonize a perceived

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26. Articles in the *Journal of American History* concerning foreign policies, broadly conceived, include Costigliola, “Unceasing Pressure for Penetration,” Andrew Rotter, “Gender Relations, Foreign Relations: The United States and South Asia, 1947–1964,” (September 1994), and Eileen Scully, “Taking the Low Road to Sino-American Relations: ‘Open Door’ Expansionists and the Two China Markets,” (June 1995); Costigliola’s first book was *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919–1933* (Ithaca, 1984), and Rotter’s was *The Path to Vietnam: Origins of the American Commitment to Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, 1989).

27. Marc Trachtenberg, “The Past Under Siege: A Historian Ponders the State of His Profession – and What to Do About It,” *Wall Street Journal*, 17 July 1998.

threat or an enemy, it is an effective strategy to describe that person or group or nation in feminine, weak terms. Thus, as Rotter pointed out, U.S. policymakers spoke of the Indians in feminine terms while Pakistanis were considered more masculine. But isn't the prima facie cause of America's Indian problem the threat of neutralism on Nehru's part? So a tilt toward Pakistan makes great sense for political reasons but it's easier to explain and promote using cultural ideas like gender. Likewise, in a paper given at the January 1999 AHA conference, Costigliola described a tour of California by George Kennan to rally support for containment. He received the most positive responses when he spoke before "stag gatherings of businessmen." In San Francisco, however, Kennan's audiences, under the "maternal wing" of local organizers, were filled with "pretense, jealousies and inhibitions," and were "easy meat for Soviet agents of every sort" – terms associated with feminine or homosexual characteristics. "Politically," he concluded, "these people are as innocent as six year old maidens."<sup>28</sup> Again, however, it seems that the salient point here is that Kennan's criterion for manliness and femininity is one's support of containment; the words used to describe the individuals thus fall in line with the policies advocated. Language reflects material and class interests and, without that component as part of an analysis, we get a terribly incomplete picture.

Kristin Hoganson, in *Fighting for American Manhood*, a study of gender politics in the origins of the wars of 1898, takes a similar approach. She studies the machismo of TR, the role of women in the political process, and the gendered language of the establishment and the media, and concludes that one of the principal reasons for war in Cuba and the Philippines was a desire to reclaim America's virility and martial spirit. Hoganson's argument is intriguing, at times compelling, but, once more, I wonder how important the thought and language of political leaders, businessmen, ministers, and editorialists is compared to the material interests involved in finding a way out of the economic morass of the 1890s. It is hard to find explicit issues of political economy or class in Hoganson's opaque work, in large part because all motivating factors share equal billing.<sup>29</sup> But isn't *class* one of, if not the, principal factors in developing one's culture? Are not the men who make foreign policy sons of privileged backgrounds, well educated, well-to-do, sophisticated, at least compared to most Americans, well connected, commercially minded? Don't those *class* attributes mean anything? Aren't individuals just as – more I would contend – likely to agree on policies when their material interests intersect than when they happen to be the same gender?

I don't mean to bash advocates of this approach; indeed, I think that Costigliola and Rotter, as well as Frank Ninkovich and William Walker, who

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28. Frank Costigliola, "Culture, Emotion, and Language: New Approaches to Diplomatic History," paper delivered at 1999 conference of American Historical Association, Washington, DC.

29. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*.

all use these new methodologies to some extent, are superior historians. But these studies of culture and ideology often omit the class backgrounds of policymakers, overlook the economic imperatives conditioning their prescriptions for American action, ignore the material relationships between business, the state, and elites in other lands, pay no heed to the idea of power. Indeed, I would argue that the best studies of the culture or ideology of American foreign policy would include Gardner's *Architects of Illusion*, Kolko's *The Roots of American Foreign Policy*, or Richard Barnet's *Roots of War*, all of which see the class backgrounds of the "wise men" of foreign policy as a major characteristic of their culture, indeed of the culture of the entire Establishment.<sup>30</sup> But, from this culturalist left we rarely see that element considered and thus get only a fragmented view of policy, one that tends to emphasize the means used to justify American actions, rather than explain the reasoning behind them in a holistic manner. It should be instructive that the world's leading linguist and one of its most astute critics of empire, Noam Chomsky, does not himself merge these disciplines; indeed he finds them of little use, a diversion from an accurate rendering of the past. "While left intellectuals discourse polysyllabically to one another," he charges, "truths that were once understood are buried, history is reshaped into an instrument of power, and the ground is laid for the enterprises to come."<sup>31</sup> Indeed, just as the "right supremacy" historians are elitist, materially, the cultural left is equally so, intellectually. It needn't be that way.

#### A RADICAL READS DIPLOMATIC HISTORY

Just as Bertolt Brecht showed how history would be remembered differently if related by a worker rather than a bourgeois intellectual, the history of U.S. foreign relations reads, or sounds, quite different when given a revisionist interpretation. We tend to forget that not that long ago, such radical readings of U.S. foreign policy were not uncommon. Most recently, in the Vietnam era and during the fight against Reagan's interventions into Central America, large percentages of Americans – over two-thirds in most polling – believed that the U.S. war in Vietnam was not only a mistake but also "morally wrong" and, a decade or so later, were strongly opposed to the wars against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and support of the reactionary regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala. A revisionist, materialist, critical reading of American foreign relations over the past two centuries is as valid, as needed, today as it was a generation ago. As such, a brief survey of American diplomatic history from a radical perspective may be in order here.

30. Gardner, *Architects of Illusion*; Kolko, *The Roots of American Foreign Policy*; Richard Barnet, *Roots of War* (New York, 1972).

31. Noam Chomsky, *Year 50: The Conquest Continues* (Boston, 1993), 286; in an e-mail response to a question about the use of cultural and linguistic approaches to the study of foreign relations, Chomsky railed against such methodology. "On 'left cultural studies' and the rest," he contends, "there are of course variations, but most of it is, in my opinion, intellectually absurd, morally ridiculous, self-serving and careerist, and extremely harmful – at least for people concerned with such matters as freedom and justice." Chomsky e-mail to author, 3 March 1999.

Well before there was anything like a New Left in diplomatic history to examine the materialist motives and actions of American policymakers, there were economic imperatives driving America toward an expanded role in the world, and we sometimes find recognition of this in curious places – like the writing of Samuel Flagg Bemis. Though he never put it in such terms, Bemis’s overall thesis – American successes from European distresses – showed that American diplomats were as exploitative, cynical, backstabbing – and effective – as their counterparts across the Atlantic as they pursued a new nation and a new system based on the free movement of goods and capital and most favored nation agreements, along with reform, to create global economic partners.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the hallmark of Independence-era foreign policy, John Adams’s “Model Treaty for Alliances,” could have been used a century later as a model for the Open Door as it urged a “Commercial Connection, i.e., make a Treaty to receive her [French] ships in our Ports [and] let her engage to receive our Ships into her Ports.”<sup>33</sup> Could Cordell Hull, James Baker, or Robert Rubin quibble with such sentiments?

Into the nineteenth century, materialist concerns continued to dominate America’s expanding role in foreign affairs. Whether it be continental – such as the extermination of Natives and theft of Indian lands or using violence to acquire Spanish or Mexican lands, or international – sending Commodore Perry’s fleet to Japan, making plans to take Cuba at Ostend, supporting filibusters in Central America, buying Alaska, and so forth, the United States was motivated by materialist factors such as gaining new agricultural lands, extending the “slavocracy,” gaining natural resources, finding markets, and penetrating areas for capital investment. Indeed, American leaders did not even have to choose this direction, for it was their “manifest destiny” to eliminate red and brown people and violate the national sovereignty of other lands.<sup>34</sup>

When, in the aftermath of the Civil War, American farmers and workers began to produce far more goods than the domestic market could absorb, the United States embarked on a wide path to empire.<sup>35</sup> As a diplomatic official explained in 1898, “it seems to be conceded that every year we shall be confronted with an increasing surplus of manufactured goods for sale in foreign

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32. Samuel Flagg Bemis, *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (Bloomington, IN, 1957). While Bemis must be spinning in his grave at this association with the New Left, I don’t necessarily agree with Michael Hogan’s description of Gaddis as the “new Bemis.” Bemis did multi-archival research and was willing to examine material motives in diplomacy. Of course, their triumphalism over the alleged virtues of American leaders is similar. Hogan, “State of the Art: An Introduction,” in *America in the World*.

33. In Walter LaFeber, *The American Age: U.S. Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad*, vol. 1, *To 1820* (New York, 1994), 21–22.

34. Williams, *The Roots of the Modern American Empire*, and *From Colony to Empire*, William Earl Weeks, *Building the Continental Empire* (Chicago, 1996); Thomas Hietala, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca, 1985); Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA, 1981); Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian Hating and Empire Building* (Minneapolis, 1980); LaFeber, *The Clash*.

markets if American operatives and artisans are to be kept employed the year around. The enlargement of foreign consumption of the products of our mills and workshops has, therefore, become a serious problem of statesmanship as well as of commerce.” John D. Rockefeller thought likewise, observing in 1899 that “dependent solely upon local business, we should have failed years ago. We were forced to extend our markets and to seek for foreign trade.”<sup>36</sup> Such market concerns merged with a growing sense of American power; Secretary of State Richard Olney boasted, for instance, that “the United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition.”<sup>37</sup> At the turn of the century, then, the United States was confident, indeed aggressive, as it approached new areas of the globe.

At the outset of the twentieth century, the connections between “statesmanship” and “commerce” were becoming closer than ever. As John Hart’s brilliant examination of American policy during the Mexican Revolution showed, an interlocking group of American bankers who were also Democratic party leaders *and* investors and landholders in Mexico shaped the U.S. response to the Villa and Zapata movements, while, more generally, these cutting-edge capitalists were instrumental in determining overall foreign policy. As soon-to-be President Woodrow Wilson observed in 1907, “since . . . the manufacturer insists on having the world as a market, the flag of his nation must follow him, and the doors of nations which are closed against him must be battered down. Concessions obtained by financiers must be safeguarded by ministers of state even if the sovereignty of unwilling nations be outraged in the process.”<sup>38</sup>

As it turned out, the safeguarding of concessions and outraging of sovereignty became benchmarks of American diplomacy from 1900 forward. In China, Russia, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, and elsewhere American policymakers forced open doors for private investment and markets, intervened in the domestic affairs of independent nations, or sent American troops to foreign lands to establish “order,” thus giving rise to Will Rogers’s famous quip that “I was shocked the other day – I actually saw a Marine on American soil.” One of those Marines, General Smedley Butler, left one of the more compelling critiques of U.S. imperialism, calling himself a “racketeer, a gangster for capitalism.” During his thirty-three years in the Marines, Butler

helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen

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35. Williams, *The Roots of the Modern American Empire*, LaFaber, *The New Empire*.

36. State Department paper in Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States* (New York,), 292; Rockefeller in Williams, *The Great Evasion*, 35.

37. In Thomas G. Paterson, J. Garry Clifford, Kenneth J. Hagan, *American Foreign Policy: A History since 1895* (Lexington, MA, 1995), 4.

38. John Mason Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley, 1987), see esp. chap. 7 and 9, Wilson quote at 276.

Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is long. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers 1909–12. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras “right” for American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested . . . Looking back on it, I feel that I could have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three continents.<sup>39</sup>

And what of the “Great War” to make the world “safe for democracy”? I am still taken with the work of Charles Tansill, a revisionist if not a leftist, and Scott Nearing, an unapologetic socialist, who examined and revealed the economic underpinnings of American diplomacy during the Wilson years. With American trade with Britain and France running thousands of times greater than with Germany, the United States becoming a creditor nation, J. P. Morgan and Robert Lansing brokering loans to the Allies, and an emerging left to be contained, it seems easy to understand just what Wilson meant by “democracy.” Lansing, for his part, was explicit, warning that if the United States did not bail out the British and French, the United States would suffer “restriction of output, industrial depression, idle capital, idle labor, numerous failures, financial demoralization, and general unrest and suffering among the laboring classes.”<sup>40</sup>

In the so-called isolationist interwar years, as William Appleman Williams pointed out, American business and political interests continued to grow abroad, increasing both America’s economic role and influence globally.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, the U.S. response to German aggression in Europe provided New Dealers with the rationale to create finally a permanent government spending program, based on military needs, to end the Depression and to create a new economic order. During the war and in its aftermath, as the Kolkos especially detailed, American policymakers were developing military strategies with an eye toward postwar economic hegemony and aggressively pursuing political arrangements that extended economic clout into all points along the globe while containing forces abroad and at home that might challenge American power and its military-industrial complex.<sup>42</sup> Speaking with a candor that

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39. Smedley Butler, “War Is a Racket,” on Grover Furr’s web page at <http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/butleri.html>. See also Hans Schmidt, *Maverick Marine: General Smedley D. Butler and the Contradictions of American Military History* (Lexington, KY, 1987).

40. Charles C. Tansill, *America Goes to War* (Boston, 1938); Scott Nearing, *Dollar Diplomacy* (New York, 1925); Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy*, and *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking*; Lansing in Paterson et al., *American Foreign Policy*, 91.

41. Williams, “The Legend of Isolationism,” in *Tragedy of American Diplomacy*.

42. Kolko, *The Politics of War*, and Joyce Kolko, *The Limits of Power*; Williams, *Tragedy*; Paterson, *Soviet-American Confrontation*; Frank Kofsky, *Harry Truman and the War Scare of 1948: A Successful Campaign to Deceive the Nation* (New York, 1993); McCormick, *America’s Half-Century*; on the need for containment at home against forces of democracy see especially Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, 1988); Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New

was typical for him but rare for U.S. policymakers, George Frost Kennan admitted in 1948 that “we have 50 percent of the world’s wealth but only 6.3 percent of its population. . . . Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships that will allow us to maintain this position of disparity.”<sup>43</sup>

As the “American Century” entered its second half, then, the United States was on a crusade to extend capital and conquer global markets. Through government spending programs like military aid and the Marshall Plan, political-economic leaders created a new and extensive reliance in other lands upon American economic support, which in turn provided markets and anti-democratic political alliances so that the United States controlled 50 percent of the world’s trade and had developed cooperative economic and military agreements with a group of “our sons of bitches,” one could say. At the same time, U.S. business and government leaders were establishing corporative economic arrangements at home and trying to export such ideologies abroad, thereby creating transnational political and financial institutions that would, in time, surpass the state or democracy as the driving force in American diplomacy. With NSC-68 and the outbreak of war in Korea, American hegemony got a huge boost, now possessing a rationale for permanent military buildups, anti-Communist interventions everywhere, and proxy wars throughout the Third World. NSC-68, along with the Red Scare, provided a dynamic one-two combination to American democracy, making any dissent against the military Keynesian state appear to be disloyal and rigidly confining reform along mainstream, non-threatening lines and into established political channels.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, recognition of this new order, and protest against it, came from an ironic source, President and General of the Army Dwight Eisenhower, who, in his famous farewell address, warned against “the acquisition of unwarranted influence . . . by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.” Eisenhower, less-known, also indicted conformity among intellectuals in the service of the state, lamenting

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York, 1989); Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W.E.B. DuBois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War* (Albany, 1986); Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: The Autobiography of an African American Communist* (Chicago, 1978); and Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor* (New York, 1995).

43. Kennan in PPS 23, 24 February 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, cited in John Hart, *Empire and Revolution: Americans in Texas since the Civil War* (Berkeley, forthcoming).

44. See the sources cited in note 42 above; also Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947–1952* (New York, 1987); Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1981 and 1990); Benjamin Fordham, *Building the Cold War Consensus: The Political Economy of U.S. National Security Policy, 1949–1951* (Ann Arbor, 1998); David Schmitz, *Thank God They’re On Our Side: The U.S. and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921–1965* (Chapel Hill, 1999); Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston, 1998); Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York, 1988); Robert Buzzanco, *Vietnam and the Transformation of American Life* (Boston, 1999); Walter LaFeber, “The Tension between Democracy and Capitalism during the American Century,” *Diplomatic History* 23 (Spring 1999): 263–84.

that “the free university, historically the fountainhead of free ideas and scientific discovery, has experienced a revolution in the conduct of research. . . . [A] government contract becomes virtually a substitute for intellectual curiosity.”<sup>45</sup> If one considers how little historians have critically examined foreign policies since Eisenhower’s administration using economic, materialist frameworks, then Ike’s point is well made. Ironically, though New Left historians have done an outstanding job of studying the economic motives and consequences of diplomacy up to the beginning of the Cold War, the subsequent generation of scholars has done much less in analyzing foreign relations after the 1950s, the period when New Left analyses become most valid. Radical revisionists had it right but that school of history seems to have faded when it was most legitimate, most needed.

As a historian whose particular interest is the Vietnam War, I found this most troubling. Though there is no shortage of books critical of that war – and Vietnam in large measure helped give birth to the New Left – there are only a few economic analyses of the conflict in Indochina. Yet American policy in Vietnam from the decision to intervene to the subsequent failure there was directly tied to U.S. economic interests. Whether, as Andrew Rotter, William Borden, and Lloyd Gardner showed, early U.S. involvement was part of a larger goal of preserving Japanese capitalism by providing Tokyo with resources and markets from Southeast Asia, or later, as Gabriel Kolko most notably has demonstrated, Americans waged war in Vietnam to maintain their nation’s credibility as capitalist hegemon, material forces were crucial to Washington’s decision making on Vietnam. Indeed, my current research project shows that most directly.<sup>46</sup>

By examining America’s global economic concerns in the 1960s, especially its balance-of-payments [BOP] deficits and recurrent gold shortages under the Bretton Woods system, I have found that financial leaders – Treasury officials, government economic advisors, Wall Street – had deep misgivings about the continuing war in Vietnam and that they saw it as the principal cause of economic instability on an international scale. Throughout the Vietnam War, the world economic system was in frequent turmoil, especially as the so-called dollar gap was weakening the dollar and causing greater deficits, prompting Treasury Secretary Henry Fowler early on to acknowledge that the war in Southeast Asia was damaging the economy. By 1966–67, as BOP deficits grew, gold, fully convertible for dollars per Bretton Woods, continued to flow out of the United States, and Britain devalued the pound, a full-blown economic crisis emerged. The Europeans, especially the French, charged that America was

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45. “Eisenhower’s Farewell Address to the Nation,” 17 January 1961, worldwide web, <http://mcdadams.posc.mu.edu/ide.htm>

46. Rotter, *The Path to Vietnam*; William Borden, *The Pacific Alliance* (Madison, 1984); Lloyd Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam: From World War II through Dienbienphu* (New York, 1988); Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: The United States, Vietnam, and the Modern Historical Experience* (New York, 1985).

exporting its Vietnam-induced inflation overseas, and they refused to accept the war as a justification for the global crisis. Meanwhile, the deficits grew, \$7 billion for 1967 alone, and the Europeans continued to withdraw gold, nearly \$1 billion worth in the first two weeks of March 1968 with the prospects of greater losses imminent. Lyndon Johnson, facing the crisis of Tet in Vietnam and a reinforcement request from his generals that would cost over \$25 billion extra, lamented that his career, the Western alliance, and the U.S. military establishment would all “go down the drain.”<sup>47</sup>

The alliance and military survived much better than Johnson. In a 31 March speech to the nation, he announced limited reinforcements for Vietnam, curtailed bombing above the 20th parallel, discussed the world monetary crisis, and stressed the need for a tax surcharge. At the end of his address he stunned the nation by withdrawing from the 1968 campaign.<sup>48</sup> Although the war in Vietnam would continue for five more years, Johnson was admitting failure in early 1968. The United States could no longer use its military and economic power in the same, often unrestrained, fashion that it had in the generation after World War II. The BOP deficit continued to grow. Without a tax bill, the administration faced back-to-back budget deficits of over \$20 billion. And, as Arthur Okun, chair of the council of economic advisers, emphasized, unless the world financial community regained confidence in the dollar, the “*consequences for prosperity at home are incalculable.*”<sup>49</sup>

The American financial community likewise understood just how seriously the war was affecting the economy. Walter Wriston, the president of Citibank, told a group of European financial leaders in January that it would be possible to overcome the monetary crisis without changing the gold standard, but “the chances would be greater if the Vietnamese war ended.” Roy Reiersen, senior vice-president and chief economist at the Bankers Trust Company on Wall Street, complained in March that Vietnam had caused domestic inflation and had unduly burdened the BOP position. In an address amid the Tet and gold crises, a partner at Saloman Brothers, Sidney Homer, observed that “military setbacks in Southeast Asia will surely intensify attacks on the dollar.” Vietnam had not alone caused the economic crises of the 1960s, Homer went on, but it had “aggravated our problems and in a sense frozen them.” In a report to investors, Goldman, Sachs economists simply explained that reduced spending

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47. Note of President’s Meeting with Wheeler and Abrams, 26 March 1968, Tom Johnson’s Notes, folder: March 26, 1968 – 10:30 a.m., Lyndon B. Johnson Library [LBJL], Austin, TX.

48. President’s Speech of 31 March 1968, *Public Papers of the President: Lyndon B. Johnson* (Washington, 1969), 1:469–76.

49. Okun to LBJ, 27 April 1968, subj: Weekly Balance of Payments report, Okun to LBJ, 23 May 1968, subj: What Fiscal Failure Means, both cited in Robert Buzzanco, “The Vietnam War and the Limits of Military Keynesianism,” paper delivered at 1997 conference of American Historical Association, New York.

in Vietnam “could contribute significantly to the solution of many of the problems currently plaguing the U.S. economy.”<sup>50</sup>

Most strikingly, the venerable chair of the Federal Reserve System, William McChesney Martin, offered an alarming public analysis of America’s economic future. Speaking to financial leaders amid the March crisis, he admonished that “it’s time that we stopped talking about ‘guns and butter,’ it’s time that we stopped assuming that we are in a ‘little war’ in Vietnam, and face up to the fact that we are in a wartime economy.” Because of “an intolerable budget deficit and an intolerable deficit in our balance of payments,” Martin predicted “either an uncontrollable recession or an uncontrollable inflation.” The combination of Vietnam and BOP deficits had put the United States, Martin feared, “in the midst . . . of the worst financial crisis since 1931.” The Fed chair, by the spring of 1968, had become increasingly frustrated with Johnson’s attempts to pay for Vietnam and the Great Society without a tax increase. Writing to a relative shortly after the uproar over his public pronouncements, he complained that “I have been trying for the past two years to make the point on ‘guns and butter’ and the cost of the Vietnam war, economically, without too much success but I think in due course the chickens will come home to roost.” By late 1968, Martin could only lament that the surtax was “18 months late. . . . Guns and butter [are] not attainable in wartime.”<sup>51</sup> The Bretton Woods system and military Keynesianism – which had driven economic growth in the Cold War – had been dealt a serious blow by the Vietnam War, and the United States would henceforth have to negotiate its hegemony and economic influence with Western Europe and Japan.<sup>52</sup>

The military and economic upheavals of the late 1960s and early 1970s, so the story goes, ushered in a “Vietnam syndrome” in which the United States was constrained in world affairs and the “lessons” of the war in Indochina were repeatedly invoked to attest to American restraint and noninvolvement in

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50. Address by Walter B. Wriston, 17 January 1968, and paper by Roy L. Reierson, 4 March 1968, Fowler Papers, box 82, folder: Domestic Economy: Gold, 1968 [1 of 2]; address by Sidney Homer, 20 March 1968, Fowler Papers, box 88, folder: Domestic Economy: Gold Crisis, Meeting with Central Bank Governors [1 of 2], “Hope and Trouble,” report by Goldman, Sachs and Company, 8 May 1968, Fowler Papers, box 78, folder: Domestic Economy: Economic Data, 1968 [2 of 2], all at LBJL.

51. Summary of Martin’s Remarks before the Economic Club of Detroit, 18 March 1968, Papers of William McChesney Martin, box 80, folder: Miscellaneous Appearances, FRB, March 1968; Martin’s extemporaneous remarks before the American Society of Newspaper Editors, 19 April 1968, Martin Papers, box 81, folder: Miscellaneous Appearances, FRB, April–May 1968; Martin to Pamela Graham, 2 May 1968, Martin Papers, box 81, folder: Miscellaneous Appearances, FRB, April–May 1968; Martin in notes of Business Council meeting, 17–20 October 1968, Henry Fowler Papers, box 178, folder: Government – Committees/Councils, all at LBJL.

52. “The economic consequences of the escalating Vietnam War so exacerbated the dollar drain, the trade imbalance, and the maladies of the civilian sector,” according to Thomas McCormick, “that significant tariff cuts [as in the Kennedy Round] ironically did less to help American exports than it did to open the American market to ever-more-competitive capitalists from Germany and Japan.” *America’s Half-Century*, 128.

crucial international issues. There is, however, one major problem with the so-called Vietnam syndrome – it never existed! Indeed, U.S. leaders were never “handcuffed” by the legacy of Vietnam and continued to act aggressively and destructively in foreign affairs from the 1970s to the present. The Nixon and Ford administrations, with popular support, immediately and repeatedly violated the Paris Peace Accords by supporting the corrupt Thieu regime’s efforts to continue the war and repress domestic enemies, all the while justifying their involvement with bogus claims that POWs and MIAs were being held by Hanoi.<sup>53</sup>

By the mid-1970s American bloodlust was back as Nixon, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan reinvigorated the Cold War. The United States helped oust the elected leader of Chile, supported the Indonesian invasion and genocide in East Timor, and first supported and then withdrew sponsorship of Iraqi Kurds, leading to a Baathist slaughter of twenty-five thousand or more and Henry Kissinger’s explanation that “covert operations is not missionary work.”<sup>54</sup> By decade’s end, Americans were calling for the heads of Iranian mullahs, ignorant of the legacy of 1953 in Tehran, and supporting an Olympic boycott in protest of Soviet involvement in Afghanistan. At home, to prop up the military-industrial complex after post-Vietnam budget cuts, Nixon and Carter dramatically increased foreign military assistance and arms sales abroad, especially to Third World dictators.<sup>55</sup>

The Nixon-Carter buildups served as prologue to the horrors of the Reagan years. One cannot in just paragraphs or pages describe the foreign policies of the Reagan administration, its exponential increases in military spending at the expense of people’s needs, its antidemocratic behavior abroad, its support of the grossest violations of human rights, its subversion of legitimate nationalist or leftist governments. Suffice it to say that the 1980s should serve in years to come as a laboratory for New Left-type analyses of American foreign relations as the various components of such a revisionist critique – military Keynesianism, intervention, violations of human rights on a mass scale, hegemony, unconstitutional actions, imperial and anti-democratic policies – can be examined with only minimal effort.<sup>56</sup>

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53. Kolko, *Anatomy of a War*; Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945–1990* (New York, 1991); H. Bruce Franklin, *M.I.A., or, Mytbmaking in America* (New Brunswick, 1993).

54. See Chomsky, *Year 501*.

55. Michael Klare and Cynthia Arnson, *Supplying Repression: U.S. Support for Authoritarian Regimes Abroad* (Washington, 1981), see especially Tables V, VI, IX, X, and XI; see also Lewis Sorley, *Arms Transfers under Nixon: A Policy Analysis* (Lexington, KY, 1983).

56. See, for instance, LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, and “The Last War, the Next War, and the New Revisionists,” *democracy* 1 (1981): 93–103; Noam Chomsky, *Turning the Tide: U.S. Intervention in Central America and the Struggle for Peace* (Boston, 1985), and *Year 501*; Raymond Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit: U.S. Policy and El Salvador* (New York, 1984); Theodore Draper, *A Very Thin Line: The Iran-Contra Affairs* (New York, 1991); Kevin Phillips, *The Politics of Rich and Poor: Wealth and the American Electorate in the Reagan Aftermath* (New York, 1991); Jennifer Harbury, *Bridge of Courage: Life Stories of the Guatemalan Companeros and Companeras* (Monroe, ME, 1995), and the National Security Archives website on Guatemala (note 12).

In the 1990s, the “liberal” Bill Clinton administration has followed Reagan’s lead and maintained a hegemonic and aggressive approach to foreign relations. Whether it be the expansion of trade on issues such as NAFTA or Chinese representation in the World Trade Organization (WTO), the continued political war on Cuba, or military aggression in Iraq or Bosnia, Clinton has upheld the political-economic interests of the American elite globally. Despite the “end” of the Cold War, military budgets are rising for the benefit of, as the defense analyst and retired Colonel David Hackworth puts it, “the Three Generals: General Dynamic, General Electric, and General Motors.” Not coincidentally, it is major corporations like those above that have spearheaded Clinton’s efforts to expand NATO, an alliance that for the past decade has had no real enemy and no real mission, unless of course maintaining military spending at unnecessarily high levels is precisely its intended mission.<sup>57</sup> Even more, as I write this, NATO bombs are falling on Yugoslavia in defense of the Albanians of Kosovo. But one need not apologize for the atrocities of Slobodan Milosevic to criticize the American attacks. Indeed, Clinton has been quite selective in his defenses of “human rights,” his justification for intervention in Kosovo. He sat on his hands while perhaps a million Tutsi in Rwanda were slaughtered by Hutu, and he has maintained an embargo of Iraq that contributes to the death of thousands of children each month, while using the United Nations arms inspectors in Baghdad to spy for the United States as well. In Serbia, as in Cambodia in the early 1970s, it is more likely that the American intervention will contribute to greater attacks on ethnic groups and unleash even more bloodshed in an already devastated area.

Clearly, the kind of diplomatic histories written in a previous generation by William Appleman Williams and his followers remain vital today. Ironically, as historians have become more conservative, the need for radical analyses is greater than ever. As we face a new century, indeed a new millennium, there is much for diplomatic historians to do in order to produce a more comprehensive and critical history of American foreign relations.

#### TOWARD A (NEW?) LEFT, OR WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

There is a story – perhaps apocryphal, but if it isn’t true it should be – concerning Vladimir Lenin, who was approached one day in Switzerland by a young revolutionary who confessed feelings of inadequacy because he had not done enough for “the struggle” and asked the exiled Bolshevik what he could do – to which Lenin replied, “be as radical as reality itself.” Considering the reality of the people and events we study, Lenin’s advice is appropriate, and with that in mind, I’d like to offer a few ideas about where diplomatic historians

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57. David Hackworth, “The War Business,” 2 February 1999, Hackworth website, <http://www.hackworth.com/2feb99.html>; on corporate support for NATO expansion see Molly Ivins, “Expansion of Western Alliance Just Makes Arms Folks Happy,” 30 April 1998, *Sacramento Bee* website; on increases in military spending by Clinton, see Associated Press stories of 23 and 24 September 1998 and 21 January 1999, <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline>.

might be headed and some recommendations for historians who want to critically examine American foreign relations.

*Material interests matter most.* While it is useful and stimulating to study new approaches to diplomatic history, historians should return to the foundation of politics among nations, namely economic/material interests. Indeed, the search for trade and markets has been the greatest impetus to interaction between states. Material discourses not only have contributed to economic relations but they are also the principal means of transmittal for literacy, languages, diseases, food, work habits, gender roles, political systems, forms of labor, and types of warfare, to name a few of the crucial needs of any society. Indeed, the basic structures of every major society in some way may be directly linked to traits acquired via markets. Material interests have thus been the *prima facie* cause of interaction between nations for several millennia and continue to be so today.<sup>58</sup> Countries, or at least the “cutting-edge Capitalists” (to use John Hart’s term) who determine foreign policy, act to maintain or expand existing economic privileges and opportunities or to defend those they perceive to be threatened. Their interests are tangible – raw materials, capital investments, transnational corporations, factories, trade and distribution routes, regimes friendly to their corporatist ideologies – and they will act accordingly if they perceive that these material stakes can be increased or are at risk. While considerations of national security, grand strategy, cultures, and gender roles, for instance, may be valuable, they too are products of the long history of relationships among different peoples, prompted by the search for markets. To this day, the need for markets and raw materials and areas for capital investment remains a principal cause of foreign policies, and even concepts that may appear to be non-economic, such as anticommunism or credibility, generally have a materialist basis. Powerful countries, such as the United States, must maintain power by preventing other nations or systems from succeeding and thereby providing an alternate model of development.

Not only do material interests have a preponderant influence in shaping relations between states, but they also serve as a principal factor in maintaining the *domestic* economy and stability at home. Just as NSC-68 established a permanent military economy, today’s defense budgets are crucial to economic growth, especially in the Reagan and Clinton years. Unfortunately, diplomatic historians have done only limited work in this area, but it is crucial to any study of foreign relations.<sup>59</sup> Data collected by the Center for Defense Information, an organization of retired military officers concerned with defense budgets, found

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58. See, for instance, Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (New York, 1984); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Politics of the World-Economy: The States, the Movements, and the Civilizations* (New York, 1984), *Historical Capitalism* (New York, 1995), and *After Liberalism* (New York, 1995); Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, 1985), and *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past* (Boston, 1996).

59. There are exceptions to the overall lack of work on arms sales or the domestic economic benefits of military spending. On weapons sales, see, for instance, Chester J. Pach, *Arming the Free*

that the total cost of the Cold War in official military spending was over \$13 trillion; in reality, the amount was probably higher, for other budgeted items often have a military purpose. As a matter of fact, in 1997, a year in which a “peace dividend” was allegedly being reaped, about half the \$13.6 billion in foreign aid was military in nature. Ironically, the biggest recipients of this foreign-cum-military aid were countries with higher-than-average standards of living and the two biggest recipients, Israel and Egypt, are also two of America’s largest arms customers.<sup>60</sup>

The impact of such military spending on the economy at home is massive. By maintaining a military Keynesian state for the past half-century, American leaders have been able to use public monies and amass huge budget deficits to prop up a particular class of industrial and financial elites, while introducing anti-Communist hysterias at regular intervals to manufacture public support for arms buildups and interventionist foreign policies.<sup>61</sup> Thus, during George Bush’s tenure as director of Central Intelligence, the so-called B Team was brought in to write alarmist reports of Soviet capabilities that, along with the rants of the Committee on the Present Danger, served as prologue to the massive military budgets of the Reagan years. Likewise, in 1991, Franklin Spinney, a Pentagon budget analyst, candidly observed that the JCS’s strategy for two wars at once was “just a marketing device to justify a high budget.”<sup>62</sup> Such devices, apparently, still work, for Bill Clinton last year recommended a \$110 billion increase in Pentagon spending over the next six years, although there are no major enemies on the horizon, except of course for whichever “new Hitler” is emerging at an opportune moment. In addition to bigger “defense” budgets at home, the Clinton team remains the world’s biggest arms dealer. Between 1988 and 1996, the United States sold nearly \$100 billion in weapons to developing countries, while in 1996 total sales amounted to over \$11 billion, with over \$7 billion of that to Third World governments.<sup>63</sup> And what is the consequence of such sales? In Anatolia, Turkish government forces raid a Kurdish village, ransacking and looting homes and then setting them ablaze, killing livestock, and loading a group of already-bloodied men into their helicopters. Where did the Turks get their Black Hawk and Cobra helicopters, F-16s, tanks

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*World: The Origins of the United States Military Assistance Program, 1945–1950* (Chapel Hill, 1991); on the domestic need for military spending see, among others, Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War*, vol. 2; Fordham, *Building the Cold War Consensus*; and Kofsky, *Harry Truman and the War Scare of 1948*.

60. Military spending statistics from Center for Defense Information [CDI] website, <http://www.cdi.org/issues/milspend.html>; see also Joan Whelan’s report for Council for a Livable World on “Foreign Aid and the Arms Trade: A Look at the Numbers,” also on CDI website.

61. On the militarization of American life, see, among others, Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s* (New Haven, 1995); Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (New York, 1995); and Stephen Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore, 1991).

62. William Hartung, “Military-Industrial Complex Revisited: How Weapons Makers are Shaping U.S. Foreign and Military Policies,” *Foreign Policy in Focus* website, [http://www.foreignpolicy-infocus.org/special\\_reports.html](http://www.foreignpolicy-infocus.org/special_reports.html).

63. See sources in note 57; see also Associated Press article, 15 August 1997, on weapons sales.

and armor, missiles, guns and land mines? From Washington DC!<sup>64</sup> Though that episode occurred in Turkey in the 1990s, it could have taken place in Guatemala, Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador, Nicaragua, South Korea, South Africa, Egypt, Israel, Iran, or countless other settings in the past fifty years.

*Stop the Evasion.* As intellectuals trying to examine the motives and consequences of an aggressive, militarized foreign policy, American historians tend to overlook certain theoretical or ideological examples that may prove useful, particularly Marxist-Leninist thought. William Appleman Williams, not surprisingly, had some opinions about that. Though *Tragedy* and his extended essays on empire are his best-known works, his 1964 book on Marx, *The Great Evasion*, deserves to be taken just as seriously. The subtitle is still relevant today: *An Essay on the Contemporary Relevance of Karl Marx and on the Wisdom of Admitting the Heretic into a Dialogue about America's Future*. As Williams saw it, "of all the evasions in which Americans have indulged themselves, the most serious one is very probably their persistent flight from any intellectual and moral confrontation with Karl Marx." Marx, as Williams pointed out, believed that "the real task of bourgeois society is the establishment of the world market . . . and a productive system based on this foundation."<sup>65</sup>

As Marx pointed out, the property relations of society determine the form of social relations. Writ broadly, property relations between classes in a particular state, or between classes in different nations, will determine the nature of a society's relations with the rest of the world.<sup>66</sup> In the contemporary era, with the emergence and dominance of transnational corporations over the state and national economies, studies of international property relations can yield compelling and useful truths about the nature of foreign policies. Perhaps Marx's theories and labor can be usefully employed as well. "The whole form of the movement of modern industry depends . . . upon the constant transformation of a part of the labouring population into unemployed or half-employed hands."<sup>67</sup> Indeed, global competition among workers serves well the interests of the transnational corporations. Supranational institutions like the European Community or World Bank/IMF or the WTO, or regional pacts like NAFTA tend to pit workers in different nations against each other while global capitalists move their operations to the areas where labor is cheapest. A worker in Youngstown, Ohio, for instance, might have seen his job moved to Mississippi in the 1970s, then to Mexico in the following decade. Mexican workers in the *maquiladores* along the border in turn have seen their wages drop substantially since the passage of NAFTA and their jobs exported to Indonesia or Vietnam, for instance. So long as there are underdeveloped nations and desperate

64. John Tirman, *Spoils of War: The Human Cost of America's Arms Trade* (New York, 1997), 3–6.

65. Williams, *The Great Evasion*, 18–19; see also Eric Hobsbawm, "Marx and History," in *On History* (New York, 1997), 157–70.

66. Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," in *Marx on Economics*, ed. Robert Freedman (New York, 1961), 6–7.

67. Marx, "A Critique of the Gotha Programme," *ibid.*, 175.

workers, this cycle that Marx observed well over a century ago will continue. Meanwhile, American workers, who benefited from the military-industrial complex with high wages in the aftermath of World War II until the Vietnam War era, have seen a sharp drop in standard of living. Though we may shy away from such terms, there is clearly a growing proletarianization of labor across the globe, with workers getting less and corporations gaining more, as Marx suggested so many years ago.

Historians would do well also to take seriously the writings of Lenin and Nicolai Bukharin. Lenin argued that national industrial and financial elites, with their own class interests holding priority over “national” interests, wielded sufficient influence to determine foreign policies in sovereign states. Citing the economic crises of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he maintained that overproduction was causing economic distress that, if not curbed, could lead to social instability and perhaps revolution. Capitalists therefore had to expand beyond state borders in search of markets and areas for capital investment and in that process created a “world system of colonial oppression and of the financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of the population of the world by a handful of ‘advanced’ countries.” Anticipating the type of “globalization” that has become a popular object of study in the 1990s, Lenin already noticed that “monopolist capitalist combines, cartels, syndicates and trusts” were dividing up, first, their home markets and, eventually, the markets of the world. By 1914, the year of the outbreak of the Great War, colonial powers controlled lands with a total population of over 1.6 billion people and a lion’s share of the most vital natural resources needed for industrial society.<sup>68</sup>

Bukharin, complementing Lenin’s work, offered a nuanced analysis of the “internationalisation of capital,” as he termed it. Writing during the Great War, he understood the role of state funding of capitalist expansion and, predating Dwight Eisenhower by nearly a half-century, discussed the “militarisation of the entire ‘national economy.’” Moreover, he could recognize already the means by which investors and state officials in one country – through the purchase of foreign stocks or bonds, subsidization of development projects, establishment of transnational banking institutions – could globalize their class interests. In such ways, Bukharin explained, there is a “transfusion” of capital from the state to the transnational level. “Capital flows into foreign factories and mines, plantations and railroads, steamship lines and banks; it grows in volume; it sends part of the surplus value ‘home’ where it may begin an independent movement; it accumulates the other part; it widens over and over again the sphere of its application; it creates an ever thickening network of international interdependence.”<sup>69</sup> What is so outrageous in these analyses that makes it inappropriate for American scholars to adapt their work? Might not a historian studying the

68. Vladimir Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Beijing, 1975), 5–6, 79.

69. Nicolai Bukharin, *Imperialism and World Economy* (New York, 1966), 40–42.

influence of the business class in foreign policy, or global organizations like the World Bank or the IMF, use these theories profitably? Why are American intellectuals virtually alone in evading Marxist ideas? Shouldn't we, as we enter a new millennium, once again think about admitting these heretics into a dialogue on the future of the United States and the international system?

*Class and Race Still Count.* It is ironic, in fact amusing, that critics of cultural studies in foreign policy argue that "class and race" are politically correct requirements for the study of diplomatic history. In fact, culturalists and postmodernists have not done an adequate job of making the connections between foreign policies, markets, or international institutions and the effect they have on class and race, yet this should be a principal consideration in any study of international history. Scholars talk about "America" at length but generally overlook "Americans." The populist rocker Bruce Springsteen eloquently thought about this in his elegy to Youngstown, Ohio, "these mills they built the tanks and bombs/That won this country's wars/We sent our sons to Korea and Vietnam/Now we're wondering what they were dyin' for."<sup>70</sup> Diplomatic historians are quite successful in writing books about the processes of policymaking, the context of such decisions, the competing ideas and interests involved in developing policy, but tend to end their works at the point at which decisions are made and executed. But what about the impact of American behavior on people, on particular classes or races, on the mill workers in Youngstown?

On one level, it would be beneficial to study the class consciousness of financial and corporate managers across state lines, to comprehend the links between elites in different states and how they collaborate to benefit their own interests. Concepts like "imperialism" or "hegemony" are incomplete unless the cooperation of corporate leaders and collaborators is brought into the equation. As Tom O'Brien's powerful work on American businesses' attempts to bring capitalist cultural influences into Latin America in the early twentieth century showed, it required the cooperation of local elites to facilitate the emergence of a new capitalist work ethic, and, contrary to the concept of "empire by invitation," local workers and farmers often rejected this cultural imposition and even some elites assumed the mantle of populism against the U.S. firms.<sup>71</sup> Even a powerful nation like the United States cannot simply impose its will on other nations without the support or at least acquiescence of ranking business interests in those nations. One need look no further than Cuba and Vietnam to see the way this works: in Cuba, the local elite fled to Miami and Havana remains to this day opposed to American control. In Vietnam, the myrmidons put in power by the United States had no legitimacy and could not

70. Bruce Springsteen, "Youngstown," *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, Columbia, 1995.

71. Thomas O'Brien, *The Revolutionary Mission: American Enterprise in Latin America, 1900-1945* (New York, 1996).

suppress the nationalist will of the people. But in Mexico, as John Hart's work shows, American capitalists controlled about three-fourths of the resources of that nation and worked closely with Mexican elites to develop a political economy and government compatible with their material interests, thus creating the basis for strong economic relations and cheap labor on both sides of the Rio Grande.<sup>72</sup>

More importantly, diplomatic historians should be willing to study the links between foreign policies and the workers, farmers, peasants, and other underdeveloped classes of the world. "America" may seem powerful and wealthy, with global interests and growing profits, but what about "Americans," and what about the other peoples of the world affected by U.S. policy? As globalizing tendencies grow, profits and stock prices soar but a major factor in such economic growth has been, Ned Riley, the chief investment officer at BankBoston admitted, "that labor costs remain in the cellar."<sup>73</sup> This is the latest phase in a trend begun in the aftermath of Vietnam and the "oil shocks" of the 1970s, when multinational corporations, especially financial, exponentially increased. Capital knows no nationality and dollars, often literally, went south in increasing amounts in the following decades. The number of U.S. banks with branches overseas rose tenfold between 1965 and 1974 and their assets increased by 1,400 percent. At the same time the number of foreign banks with Wall Street branches doubled, with their assets increasing by 600 percent. The so-called Eurodollar market, unregulated by the state and not restrained by domestic currency markets, flourished, rising from \$36 to \$80 billion between 1967 and 1969 alone. Multinational financial institutions sensed that a domestically based manufacturing economy was losing steam and emphasized global capital investment in areas where lower labor costs and hospitable climates for foreign investment offered a better return than the home market.<sup>74</sup> This concentration on foreign holdings came with a significant "downsizing" of the labor force and driving down of wages at home. Over the past few decades, workers have seen a major decrease in their standards of living at the same time that military spending and foreign aid have dramatically grown. Meanwhile, international organizations like the IMF required that governments invoke austerity measures and repress labor further as a precondition for assistance or bailouts. This amounted to a class war on an international playing field with transnational "haves" profiting from the growing poverty of "have nots" around the world.

There are clear racial aspects to this economic evolution as well, again both at home and abroad. From the onset of the Cold War, the need for a stable and "loyal" work force to maintain a militarized economy dependent to some degree on exports manifested itself in anti-labor legislation like the Taft-Hartley and Landrum-Griffin Acts. But such laws weighed heavily on blacks, who worked

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72. Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico and Empire and Revolution*.

73. In *New York Times*, 30 March 1999.

74. Buzzanco, "The Vietnam War and the Limits of Military Keynesianism."

primarily in blue-collar jobs and saw union organization as their best means of economic progress.<sup>75</sup> By cracking down on labor and simultaneously redbaiting African-American spokespersons like Paul Robeson, Harry Haywood, W. E. B. DuBois, and even Martin Luther King, Jr., government and private interests were able to prevent the emergence of alternatives to the Cold War.<sup>76</sup>

This convergence of class and race took on greater meaning globally as well, with production often shifting to the Third World where brown, black, and yellow workers earned only fractions of what a company would have to pay Caucasians in the developed world. With *maquilas*, sweatshops, and virtual slave camps, global corporations have more control over more places than ever, and are building their enterprises on the backs of the poor and generally non-white workers of the world.<sup>77</sup> This, naturally, leads to serious inequities in development. According to United Nations statistics, only about 4 percent of farmers in Third World nations even owned any literature on agriculture techniques, just 20 percent had access to a radio, 5 percent saw a daily newspaper, less than .5 percent had telephone lines or a computer, and only .05 percent had Internet access.<sup>78</sup> Already suffering, it is these very people whose lives are further depressed when economic calamity – such as the recent currency crises in Mexico, Asia, and Brazil – strikes. George Kennan's postwar concerns about maintaining the U.S. "position of disparity" were apparently unfounded; Americans comprise about 6 percent of the world's population but use up over 25 percent of its resources. To study foreign policy in its full context, such issues should be considered.

*Democracy, and the Consequences of Foreign Policy.* In the recent *DH* roundtable on "The American Century," Tony Smith gloats in America's triumph in World War II and the Cold War, professing that it "has resulted for much of the globe in a fundamental reorganization of political power in a morally positive direction."<sup>79</sup> Fortunately, Walter LaFeber's ruminations on the contradictions between capitalism and democracy served as an antidote to such Orwellian claims and pointed out the hazards involved in moralizing about American foreign policy. As LaFeber points out, "democracy" was defined selectively by American leaders, and "the most durable and productive key for unlocking the motivations of U.S. foreign policy since the 1890s has been Washington officials' belief that a global system based on the needs of private capital, including the protection of private property and open access to markets, could best protect the burgeoning American system and its values, including its own version of democracy at home."<sup>80</sup> This democracy, as the New Left so compellingly

75. Gerald Horne e-mail to author, 2 March 1999.

76. See the sources cited in note 42.

77. See, for instance, Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (Berkeley, 1999); and Global Exchange website, <http://www.globalexchange.org>.

78. UN data in e-mail posted on DemocracyU mailing list, 18 March 1999.

79. Tony Smith, "Making the World Safe for Democracy in the American Century," *Diplomatic History* 23 (Spring 1999): 173.

80. LaFeber, "Tension between Democracy and Capitalism."

pointed out, involved the expansion of capitalism around the globe and promised certain reforms at home.

In reality, however, the United States has grossly violated the concepts of democracy on a massive scale in its international affairs. One cannot here detail the specific instances where the United States suppressed movements for nationalism or democracy or propped up murderous juntas whose only qualification was their intimacy to American corporate power. One cannot chart in a few lines the number of lives lost or ruined in the ruthless expansion of capitalism across first a continent and then the oceans. Photographs or anecdotes cannot reveal destruction of the environment in the name of capitalist "progress." Visions of slaughtered Indians, slave ships on the Middle Passage, beheaded Filipino insurgents, lynched African-American World War I veterans, women and children in a mass grave at My Lai, peasants killed by graduates of the School of the Americas at El Mozote, the victims of the "secret" bombings of Cambodia, and a staggering arms race and military-industrial complex do not even begin to tell the full story of the violations of democracy committed in the name of the American flag. Indeed, it is striking that the two regions where there has been the most capitalist and least Communist influence, Africa and Latin America, are the most underdeveloped and have some of the most repressive regimes in modern times. To study American foreign policy without examining its fundamentally antidemocratic nature and the consequences of its actions, or to boast of its moral probity, is simply an obscenity.<sup>81</sup>

*Ideology and Culture are Important.* Having spent more than a few pages criticizing studies of culture and ideology, I would like to contend that they are, in fact, essential to understanding American foreign policy, but only if used carefully and comprehensively. Ideology and culture are social concepts that can encompass the major values and characteristics of a nation, but they must include the material basis of that society. One cannot study U.S. culture or the ideology of American policymakers without understanding the nature of the capitalist system they have created and the class interests at stake in their decisions. To analyze their use of language or their concepts of gender may be interesting, but it offers a mere insight into their overall worldview. Material interests, however, can transcend boundaries of gender, race, or nationality. In contemporary times, the United States has never had a consistent ideological approach to the world. It has variously supported groups antithetical, it would seem, to American culture, such as Iraq in the 1980s, or swung its support against former allies in favor of other groups antithetical to American interests, such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia against Iraq in the 1990s. It has supported "strongmen" when they advocated American interests, such as Manuel Noriega, and

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81. See Chomsky's voluminous writings on this point; see also Abraham Lowenthal, *Exporting Democracy: The United States and Latin America: Themes and Issues* (Baltimore, 1991).

then disavowed them on the pretext that they were undermining the moral fabric of American society. Ideology and culture, when divorced from the economic and class interests that help them develop, are slippery concepts that leave unresolved more questions than they answer.

But, if used holistically, with considerations of the economic imperatives and class issues involved in decision making, ideology or culture can add rich texture to our work. Perhaps a rediscovery of Gramsci would be most welcome on this count, for ideology and culture are most often invoked to convince the mass of people that a particular policy is in their interests. This “manufacturing of consent,” as Walter Lippmann coined it, is crucial to the execution of American diplomacy. Without a substantial and informed citizenry, policy elites have a free field to conduct their affairs in any way they please in America’s name, and they call it democracy. To analyze the way in which cultural images and ideological symbols are used to manufacture this consent – using feminine terms to describe Indians, convincing workers that foreign labor rather than global corporations are the enemy, invoking the flag to question the loyalty of dissenters – is, however, essential to understanding American diplomatic history. Culture and ideology tend to flow from material interests and material relationships, and they can be used to convince even those who have no stake in the maintenance of such interests and relationships that they should support national policy.

What then, to get back to my original question, happened to the New Left, and is there hope for a renaissance of critical, materialist studies in diplomatic history? The New Left, though not as influential as it was in the 1960s, is still with us. LaFeber, Kolko, Gardner, Bruce Cumings, and others remain impressively productive and there are younger scholars following in their footsteps. As issues of global connections among corporations, labor, and peoples’ movements grow, the study of foreign policy will have to account for them, and the type of analyses common in the 1960s will return. It is inevitable that historians will again consider the material factors driving policy and the moral consequences of “a society gone mad on war,” as Martin Luther King described it.

Issues of class and race will have to be discussed, for Caucasians and Americans constitute a minority of the world’s population and cannot maintain their relative affluence at the expense of the masses without risking a global reaction. The fight against sweatshop labor, for instance, has linked well-to-do students in South Bend, Indiana, and Durham, North Carolina, with peasants in Ho Chi Minh City and Jakarta; because of NAFTA, labor officials from Washington and Mexico City are recognizing their common interests; leftist activists, the Pope, and corporate CEOs all argue for an end to the U.S. embargo against Cuba; both Serbs and Kosovars send clandestine email messages to supporters around the globe amid the bombs and destruction being visited upon them. Clearly, the world is more interdependent than ever and the nature of those connections must be studied. Nothing less than people’s lives are at stake and it does no good, either intellectually or practically, to dwell on the

alleged triumph of one system over another. Historians can, and should, do their work with a moral passion and a critical and honest eye toward the past, and this will have to lead them back to the work of William Appleman Williams and others like him. As Oskar Lafontaine, the German finance minister recently deposed by the neoliberal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, poignantly explained, “the heart isn’t traded on the stock market yet, but it has a home. And it beats to the left.”<sup>82</sup>

As one surveys American diplomatic history, it is important to look for that heart, as the New Left did. The New Left, of course, was far from perfect. Indeed, I would take issue with the very concept of the essential text in the field. U.S. diplomacy was not a “tragedy” as I see it, but a roaring success. Given the assumptions and goals that U.S. policymakers had regarding America’s place in the world and its rights to hegemony, it would seem that there was no real alternative for them to take. They were not flawed men heading inexorably toward a tragic fate, but conscious agents of their own material and cultural interests, engaging the world and profiting from it as much as they could. The New Left, it seems, believed there was a different way, a humane foreign policy based on global democracy and cooperation. It seems that they, like traditionalists, had at least some faith in an American exceptionalism. Some claimed that the New Left was exceptionalist in another way, that it saw America as exceptionally or uniquely evil,<sup>83</sup> but the United States was not and is not now exceptionally evil. It is typically evil, like any other powerful empire in history.

This is important to remember as one considers America’s “mission” and its behavior in world affairs. At all points along the globe the United States has left tracks, and as we ponder the future of diplomatic history I often think about Frederick Douglass’s passionate oratory in July 1852 when, talking about the debate over slavery, he proclaimed that “it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced.”<sup>84</sup>

For historians of foreign policy, that’s not a bad place to start.

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82. In *New York Times*, 15 March 1999.

83. Ronald Steel, “Did Anyone Start the Cold War,” *New York Review of Books*, 2 September 1971, NYRB website, <http://www.nybooks.com>.

84. Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July,” on worldwide web, [http://douglass.speech.nwu.edu/doug\\_410.htm](http://douglass.speech.nwu.edu/doug_410.htm).