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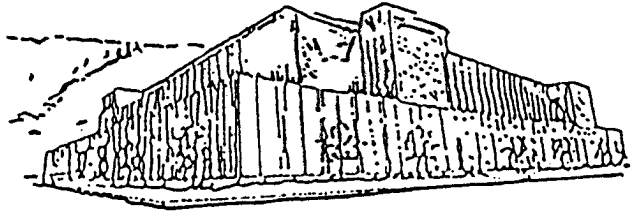
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**William Appleman Williams:
Progressive, Consensus, New Left Historian**


by

Bradley J. Fogo

**B.A. The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1992
presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts
The University of Montana
1996**

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History

William Appleman Williams:
Progressive, Consensus, New Left Historian (104 pp.)

Director: Michael S. Mayer *MSM*

This thesis explores the life and work of William Appleman Williams. It focuses upon the first half of Williams' career, from the completion of his doctoral dissertation in 1950 to the publication of his seventh book in 1969.

Williams produced his most innovative and influential work during this period of his career. He attacked the United States as an imperialist power, deplored the inequalities and alienation bred from corporate capitalism, and advocated socialism. In doing so, Williams established his national reputation as a historian, spurred a wave of revision within the field of diplomatic history, and helped inform a young generation of radicals who came of age during the 1960s.

Most historians associate Williams' scholarship with the "new left" of the 1960s. In several respects this association makes sense. Williams' most important books appeared in the 1960s. Moreover, they contained several of the ideas characteristic of new left thought, and were seminal texts for new left scholars and radicals. However, to characterize Williams as simply new left is incomplete. For one thing, the core of arguments that established Williams as a leading new left historian did not develop out of the 1960s but rather were products of the initial post-war years. Moreover, what made Williams an interesting historian, and what makes him a particularly interesting historical figure, are the ways that his work intersected three of the premier schools of American history -- progressive, consensus, and new left. For while Williams was an early new left historian, his work uniquely incorporated facets of both progressive and consensus historiography.

Recently, a number of historians have worked to break down the distinctions between the "conservative" 1950s and the "radical" 1960s. Williams, however, is often neglected in such analyses. Instead, intellectual historians point to some of the premier social and cultural critics of the 1950s as harbingers for the radicalism of the 1960s. To exclude Williams from a discussion of the new left overlooks a major source of radicalism as it developed throughout the initial post-war decades.

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**Introduction - William Appleman Williams:
"A Survey of the Territory"¹**

In March of 1990, at the age of sixty-eight, William Appleman Williams died of cancer in Newport, Washington. His death marked the end to the prolific career of a self-professed radical historian. Over the course of some thirty years, Williams established himself as one of the premier revisionist scholars of American diplomatic history. As his obituary in *The New York Times* noted, Williams "challenged prevailing views of American history, deploring the United States as an imperialist power pressing its economic and ideological will around the world."² Williams spent the majority of his career teaching at three American universities: The University of Oregon from 1952 to 1957, The University of Wisconsin between 1957 and 1968, and Oregon State University from 1968 until his retirement in 1986. In the process, he published eleven books, wrote dozens of articles, editorials, and book reviews, and trained over thirty-five doctoral students.

Although Williams remained productive throughout his entire career, he is remembered primarily for the work that he produced in the 1950s and the 1960s. During these initial post-war decades, Williams made his most significant contributions to American historiography. In particular, The Tragedy of American Diplomacy, published in 1959, and The Contours of American History, published in 1961, were his most important, influential,

¹ This title is taken from the first chapter of The Roots of the Modern American Empire: A Study of the Growth and Shaping of Social Consciousness in a Marketplace Society (New York: Random House, 1969).

² Peter B. Flint, "William Appleman Williams Dies: Gadfly of Foreign Policy Was 68," The New York Times, Thursday, March 8, 1990, p. D25.

and widely read books.³ Together these works marked the culmination of Williams' scholarship in the 1950s and defined the fundamental themes and theses that he reiterated throughout the rest of his career. Moreover, Tragedy and Contours established Williams' national reputation as a revisionist historian and offered two of the earliest "new left" interpretations of American history.

In Tragedy , Williams traced the evolution of American foreign policy throughout the twentieth-century. He argued that since the 1890s American leaders, believing that the economic well-being of the United States and the viability of American institutions and traditions depended upon the perpetual expansion of international markets, aggressively pursued the development of what Williams described as an "informal empire."⁴ Rejecting traditional forms of imperialism, the United States sought the economic control of diverse regions of the world. Williams contended that the "open door" policy, established by American leaders during the initial years of the twentieth-century in an attempt to establish economic access to the China market, defined the strategy for such control. Through investments and trade fostered by an alliance between the Federal Government and American multi-national corporations, the United States pursued financial domination of first Cuba and the Philippines, then China, Central America, and, by the end of the Second World War, of the world.

This "imperial anti-colonialism," Williams continued, produced tragic consequences. The pursuit of an informal empire embodied "conflict within

³ William Appleman Williams, The Tragedy of American Diplomacy (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1959); Williams, The Contours of American History (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1961).

⁴ Williams, The Tragedy of American Diplomacy, p. 66.

and between America's ideals and practices."⁵ According to Williams, American leaders pursued foreign policy with a high degree of moral self-righteousness. They believed that the United States' economic expansion would promote freedom, democracy, and self-determination throughout the world. The realities of American policy, however, undermined such lofty objectives. Williams stressed that the economic growth of the United States exacerbated disparities of wealth and undermined self-determination -- particularly in underdeveloped nations. Pointing to Cuba, Central America, China, Mexico, and the Middle East, he argued that American diplomacy benefited only the elite of the developing world at the expense of the exploited majority. This in turn deterred freedom and democracy and fueled revolutionary situations that often led to violence and war. Subsequently, the "open door" strategy frequently demanded armed interventions by the United States in order to maintain the order and stability necessary for an economic empire.

Furthermore, Williams contended that the United States' determination to control economic markets limited policy options concerning other industrial powers -- particularly the Soviet Union. American leaders perceived the Soviet Union as the primary threat to the United States' informal empire; after all, revolutionary socialism was the antithesis to international capitalism. Therefore, Williams argued ever since the Bolshevik revolution the United States sought to undermine the power and influence of communist Russia. This led first to the policy of non-recognition in the 1920s and then to the policy of containment in the years following the Second World War. Williams thus concluded that the United

⁵ Ibid, p. 40.

States' determination to control economic markets was primarily responsible for the Cold War.

In The Contours of American History, Williams departed from diplomatic history and presented an overview of the entire American experience. Contours divided the history of the United States into three major eras: the ages of mercantilism (1740-1828), of laissez-nous faire (1819-1896), and of corporate capitalism (1882-1960s). According to Williams, the theme connecting these epochs of the American past was expansion -- first across the North American continent through an ever-extending western frontier and then throughout the world with the development of an informal empire.

As he did in Tragedy, Williams decried the costs of American expansion. He documented its impact upon indigenous peoples throughout the world and stressed that the growth of the United States in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries came at the expense of Native American cultures. Contours, however, presented a more extensive analysis of what Williams considered the domestic ramifications of expansion. He argued that throughout the eras of American history the frontier, both continentally and internationally, undermined the development of a true American community. Williams equated community with loosely defined forms of socialism: a "Corporate" or "Christian Commonwealth" whose citizens achieved "a true wholeness and identity" through communal responsibilities and commitments to social welfare.⁶ As Williams envisioned it, such ideals or derivatives of such ideals were displaced by an American capitalism based upon private property, excessive individualism, and corporate profits. From the initial years of the American republic

⁶ Williams, The Contours of American History, p. 481.

through the Cold War, the frontier nurtured capitalism in the United States; it provided a source of economic growth and development and thus served as an escape hatch through which the United States avoided confronting the domestic inequalities, social alienation, and spiritual bankruptcy that Williams deemed characteristic of American capitalist society.

The Tragedy of American Diplomacy and The Contours of American History together embodied the basis of Williams' approach to "doing history."⁷ In addition to defining the major themes of his career, Tragedy and Contours exemplified what Williams considered the purpose of professional historical scholarship. Both works developed out of his conviction that the historian had a responsibility to locate and explain the origins of contemporary problems in order to help provide solutions for the future. As he stated in the introduction to Contours, the historian should "help us understand ourselves and our world so that each of us, individually and in conjunction with our fellow men, can formulate relevant and reasoned alternatives and become meaningful actors in the making of history."⁸ Both Tragedy and Contours were products of such present-mindedness. Where the former developed out of the assumption that contemporary American diplomacy was fundamentally flawed, the latter stressed the domestic shortcomings of American society. Both histories sought explanations for the essential problems that, according to Williams, plagued the United States in the 1950s.

In addition, Tragedy and Contours introduced Williams' alternative vision for America. Where Tragedy concluded that the most important

⁷ Citation from William G. Robbins' "Doing History Is Best of All. No Regrets," from Redefining the Past: Essays in Diplomatic History in Honor of William Appleman Williams, ed. by Lloyd C. Gardner (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1986).

⁸ Ibid, p. 19. From such quotations it becomes painfully evident that Williams' work preceded the women's movement.

question challenging the United States was "how to sustain democracy and prosperity without imperial expansion," Contours asserted that the primary objective of Americans should be the development of a true community.⁹ Williams thus contended that the final frontier for the United States should be the creation of what he described as a semi-isolationist, "decentralized" socialism. Although he refrained from explaining how such a system could be achieved, or how it would work, Williams argued that the United States had the potential to create "the first truly democratic socialism in the world."¹⁰

From the initial publication of The Tragedy of American Diplomacy and The Contours of American Diplomacy, Williams' approach to history engendered a host of criticisms. Throughout the 1960s and the 1970s, from contemporary reviews to retrospective evaluations, in editorials, articles and books, his arguments were subjected to intense, often partisan, scrutiny that ultimately discredited much of the analysis presented in both histories. Quite simply, Williams' work did not withstand the test of time.

Critics attacked Williams on a number of fronts. They characterized his writing style as crude and acerbic and pointed out that his narratives were riddled with factual mistakes and even basic spelling errors. Critics further accused Williams of forcing his expansionist synthesis upon history, neglecting evidence that ran counter to his arguments, and selectively piecing together information out of context in order to support his theses. Moreover, Williams' work was characterized as elitist and simplistic. It focused primarily on a small handful of policy-making leaders and ignored the

⁹ Williams, The Tragedy of American Diplomacy, p. 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 488.

"masses" of American history; it neglected the role of foreign powers in determining American diplomacy; and, it depicted historical actors as excessively rational beings, single-mindedly committed, without doubts or reservations, to the extension of American borders. In addition, Williams' call for an American socialism was dismissed out of hand as sentimental, unrealistic, and lacking in conception and direction.¹¹

Criticisms aside, Williams' work had a profound impact upon American historiography -- most directly within the field of diplomatic history. His arguments, in particular those presented in Tragedy, spurred a wave of revisionism within the discipline by fundamentally challenging the ways in which his contemporaries perceived foreign policy and by offering alternative insights into the nature of American diplomacy.¹²

For one thing, Tragedy attacked conventional wisdom regarding the Cold War. Williams' history appeared at a time when most Americans accepted the bipartisan, Cold War consensus, which held that a belligerent Soviet state, determined to export Bolshevism abroad, initiated the Cold War and forced the United States to formulate the policy of containment in order to protect freedom and democracy throughout the world. As one critic

¹¹ For the best critical overview of Williams' work in general see Richard Melanson's "The Social and Political Thought of William Appleman Williams," Western Political Quarterly, 31 (1978), pp. 409-419. For attacks upon Williams and the "Wisconsin School" see Robert J. Maddox's The New Left and the Origins of the Cold War (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973) pp. 13-38 and Robert Tucker's The Radical Left and American Foreign Policy (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1971). For specific book reviews see Foster Rhea Dulles' "Review of The Tragedy of American Diplomacy," American Historical Review, (July 1959), p. 1022, Oscar Handlin's "Review of The Contours of American History," Mississippi Historical Review, XLVIII (March 4, 1962), pp. 743-45, and Herbert Aptheker's review of Contours, "American Development and Ruling Class Ideology," Studies on the Left, 3, 1 (1963), pp. 97-105.

¹²As Williams defined revisionism in an address to the American Historical Association, "The revisionist is one who sees basic facts in a different way and as interconnected in new relationships." Cited from "Confessions of an Intransigent Revisionist," reprinted in A William Appleman Williams Reader, ed. by Henry Berger (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1992).

claimed, Williams' assessment of the Cold War offered an "inverted mirror image" of such orthodoxy.¹³

Furthermore, Tragedy departed from "realist" interpretations of diplomacy that dominated scholarship in the 1940s and 1950s. Realists, in general, focused upon geopolitics and dismissed economic motivations in their assessments of foreign policy. Realist criticisms concentrated upon the policy making process and found American diplomacy too emotional and idealistic, too prone to short-sightedness, and at the mercy of cumbersome institutions and an under-informed public opinion. Realist scholars nonetheless upheld the Cold War consensus and often provided celebrated accounts of American leaders. Many supplemented their analyses of foreign policy with suggestions of the most effective ways to combat Soviet Communism.¹⁴

In upending Cold War orthodoxies and challenging realist scholarship, Tragedy became a seminal text for a young generation of diplomatic revisionists who came to prominence during the 1960s and into the 1970s. This new left revisionism, spearheaded by a number of Williams' graduate students, upheld and expanded upon the central themes introduced in Tragedy. In particular, Williams' assertion that economic factors played a primary role in foreign policy, his insights into the strategies and contradictions of the "open door," and his arguments pertaining to the Cold War became standard assumptions for new left interpretations of modern American diplomacy.¹⁵

¹³ Tucker, The Radical Left and American Foreign Policy, p. 28.

¹⁴ For the definitive example of "realist" scholarship see George Kennan's American Diplomacy: 1900-1950 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951).

¹⁵ The most prominent of Williams' students included Walter Lafeber, Lloyd C. Gardner, and Thomas J. McCormick.

Although Williams is acknowledged primarily for his impact upon diplomatic historiography, his work influenced scholars working in other fields of history. Moreover, it informed and reflected the concerns and ideals of the student new left. The publication of Tragedy and Contours established Williams as one of the academic godfathers of the new left in terms of diplomatic history but also within the broader range of intellectual radicalism that blossomed during the 1960s. The critical nature of both texts, their iconoclastic present-mindedness, and Williams' call for a socialist future provided inspiration and direction for a generation of revisionists and radicals who came of age in the 1960s and condemned the United States as a racist, imperialist power stratified by disparities of wealth and tranquilized by consumerism and conformity. As Clifford Solway contended in an early analysis of new left radicalism, "Curiously enough, Williams' great impact on younger radicals... isn't always clear. It shows up in footnotes to scholarly polemics as a kind of unstated universal acknowledgment that he was the builder of the house they live in."¹⁶

Williams' influence upon the new left, if not entirely "clear," largely resided in the ways that both Tragedy and Contours departed from the "consensus" histories of the 1950s that new left scholars found excessively patriotic, and recalled the work of an earlier generation of progressive historians. And yet, what made Williams an interesting historian, and what makes him a particularly interesting historical figure, are the ways that his work intersected all three schools of thought -- progressive, consensus, and new left. For while Williams was an early new left historian, his work

¹⁶ Clifford Solway, "Turning History Upside Down: A Radical Neo-Marxian Interpretation of America's Past has been Educating Many of the Young to New Historical Insights and Now is Poised to Infiltrate the Textbooks of the Seventies," Saturday Review (June 20, 1970) p. 62.

uniquely incorporated facets of both progressive and consensus historiography.

During the 1940s and 1950s, while Williams pursued graduate studies at the University of Wisconsin and taught at the University of Oregon, consensus history eclipsed the work of an earlier generation of progressive historians. The ascension of the consensus school marked a major transition in modern American historiography. Consensus historians rejected the fundamental themes and theses of progressive history and in the process introduced a new paradigm through which to understand the American past. Where progressive historians held that conflicts between America's democratic and capitalist elements -- the "people" against the "interests" -- fueled the historical record, consensus interpretations stressed the uniformities of a liberal tradition in the United States. They argued that a healthy fusion of capitalist and democratic elements devoid of fundamental conflicts endured throughout all eras of American history.¹⁷

Consensus historians, moreover, departed from progressive assumptions regarding the purpose of historical scholarship. Working throughout the initial decades of the twentieth century, progressive historians held that contemporary social struggles continued to divide the United States' economic and democratic traditions; therefore, progressive

¹⁷ For the best examples of "progressive" history see Charles Beard's An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1913) Beard's The Rise of American Civilization: Volumes I & II (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927) and Vernon Parrington's Main Currents in American Thought: Volumes I & II (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1927). For definitive "consensus" histories see Daniel Boorstin's The Genius of American Politics (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), Louis Hartz's The Liberal Tradition in American Political Thought (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1955) and Richard Hofstadter's The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948).

history, in general, explored the nature of past conflicts in order to raise public awareness and subsequently to provide future direction for the ultimate ascension of democracy in the United States. In contrast, consensus histories of the 1950s often reflected post-war assumptions that America, at least in comparison to other industrial nations, did not embody significant socio-economic divisions or conflicts. Although there were notable exceptions to such generalizations, consensus history thus developed out of the presentist desire to preserve rather than change American institutions and traditions.¹⁸

New left historians of the 1960s rebelled against consensus on several fronts. The new left accused consensus historians of distorting the historical record with homogenized versions of the past that ignored political, social, and economic divisions and obscured the diversities of the American experience. In this regard, it recalled the work of progressive historians. Furthermore, the new left assailed the consensus school for offering celebrated accounts of history that were imbued with a present-mindedness aimed towards preserving a contemporary, capitalist status quo and countered with disparaging accounts of American history that critics characterized as "Marxist," "neo-Marxist," and "neo-progressive".¹⁹

Williams was, first and foremost, an early new left historian whose radical theses challenged consensus history and helped define the historical

¹⁸ For a concise expression of progressive present-mindedness see the introduction to James Harvey Robinson's The New History: Essays Illustrating the Modern Historical Outlook (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1912). In regards to the consensus school see Boorstin's The Genius of American Politics and Conyers Read's "The Social Responsibilities of the Historian," American Historical Review, LV (January 1950).

¹⁹ For an overview of new left historiography see the introduction to Barton Bernstein's Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968). See also, Irwin Unger's "The 'New Left' and American History: Some Recent Trends in United States Historiography," American Historical Review, LXXII (July 1967) pp.1237-1263, Christopher Lasch's "The Cold War Revisited and Revisioned," New York Times Magazine (January 14, 1968) and Solway's "Turning History Upside Down."

revisionism and political radicalism of the 1960s. Both Tragedy and Contours were, in part, "neo-Marxist" and "neo-progressive." Williams' emphasis upon economic factors in determining diplomacy and shaping history, his disgust with the inequality and alienation produced by American capitalism, and his call for a socialist future, placed his work within the progressive and Marxist traditions. He shared with progressive historians, furthermore, an admiration for the United States' democratic elements and a tendency towards isolationism. Moreover, Williams identified with and was influenced by the two deans of progressive historiography -- Frederick Jackson Turner and Charles Beard.

Williams' affinity for progressive historiography was rooted in his mid-western background. Born and bred in a small farming community in Iowa, he had roots with the "people" and claimed to have learned at an early age the nature of American "interests." Furthermore, Williams received his formal training as a historian in the years following the Second World War at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, a center of the progressive school. Although the war marked the rise of consensus history, Madison remained an enclave of progressive scholarship. There, Williams trained under a number of "neo-Beardian" historians and was imbued with the spirit of progressive history.

Williams developed both Tragedy and Contours within what he considered the essence of Beard's work. He was drawn primarily to Beard's approach to "doing history" and sought to emulate the progressive's attempt to achieve a working synthesis of the American past. The present-mindedness that defined all of Williams' major publications in the 1950s and 1960s reflected the work of Beard and other progressive historians. In an article written just prior to the publication of Tragedy, Williams, revealing

his own aspirations as a scholar, celebrated Beard as a historian who "committed himself to educational and pragmatic efforts designed to increase his fellow citizens' understanding of history's casual forces, and to instruct them in the use and control of such forces to build a better society."²⁰ Williams, like Beard, was a macro-historian with commitments to the present. And like Beard, he attempted to provide alternatives to contemporary problems by defining the "long-term generalized" patterns of American history.

To characterize Williams' new left scholarship as merely "neo-Marxist" or "neo-progressive" however, is incomplete. Although Williams allied his work with the progressive school, and while he was a seminal figure for the new left, he remained, in several respects, a consensus historian. Williams departed from progressive assumptions regarding the conflict-ridden nature of American history. Rather, his revisionism stressed the broad-based agreements, shared assumptions, and compromises behind American diplomacy and expansion. According to Williams there were no conflicts founding the United States' will to cultivate the North American continent and to extend its frontier abroad through the development of an informal empire.

Williams' relation to the consensus school was important. Although his work, in particular Tragedy and Contours, was associated with the cultural and intellectual radicalism of the 1960s, neither one of these texts were a product of the 1960s. Rather, the major theses and themes of Williams' career were rooted firmly in the initial post-war years. It was during the late 1940s and into the 1950s that he pieced together, through a number of

²⁰ William Appleman Williams, "Charles Austin Beard: The Intellectual as Tory-Radical," in American Radicals: Some Problems and Personalities, ed. by Harvey Goldberg (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1957) p. 106.

publications, the arguments presented in Tragedy and Contours. Simply, Williams' new left scholarship developed within an era of American intellectual history when consensus defined historical scholarship.

This is a key distinction to make for it sheds light, in part, upon the origins of the new left. Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, a number of historians worked to break down the distinctions between the "conservative" 1950s and the "radical" 1960s -- to locate the roots of the intellectual and cultural radicalism of the 1960s in the years directly following the Second World War. Scholars such as Richard Pells, Maurice Isserman, and Todd Gitlin, for instance, have located in the 1950s several sources of the new left as it emerged out of the old left.²¹ These intellectual and cultural historians point to some of the premier social and cultural critics of the 1950s -- for example, C. Wright Mills, William Whyte, Dwight MacDonal, David Riesman, and Herbert Marcuse -- as harbingers of the radicalism that erupted during the 1960s. Working upon the assumption that radical criticisms of the United States' economic, political, and diplomatic institutions did not exist in the initial post-war years, historians have largely ignored Williams' scholarship. However, to exclude Williams from a discussion on the origins of the new left overlooks a major source of radicalism as it developed throughout the initial post-war years. Williams' combination of consensus and progressive historiography, to a large degree, illustrates how a strand of the new left came together and evolved through the 1950s and into the 1960s.

²¹ For example, see Pells' The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), Isserman's If I Had A Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987), and Gitlin's The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage (New York: Bantam Books, 1987).

In all, William Appleman Williams remains a compelling subject for the student of history, if not so much for the enduring nature of his arguments, than rather because of his relation to contemporary schools of American historiography and post-war intellectual trends. Now approaching the turn of the century, an assessment of the validity of Williams' work approaches the anachronistic. The heated arguments that he and the new left sparked in the 1960s and fanned throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s no longer burn brightly. Therefore, the study which follows chooses not to focus upon Williams the historian, but to rather treat the revisionist as an historical figure, a subject to locate within the predominant intellectual and historiographical trends of the twentieth-century.

What follows is an intellectual analysis of the first half of William Appleman Williams' career. It focuses upon the work that Williams did up until his departure from the University of Wisconsin in 1968 for Oregon State University. I choose this time period for a number of reasons. First, 1968 proves a useful line of demarcation in Williams' career. Upon leaving Madison, his status as one of the major players in the profession diminished considerably. Although he went on to publish extensively throughout the 1970s and 1980s, he achieved neither the notoriety nor the influence he did for the work that he produced in the 1950s and 1960s. The books Williams' published while at Oregon State, moreover, primarily reiterated the themes and theses that he developed throughout the first half of his career. A study of his later work becomes redundant. Furthermore, Williams' scholarship of the 1950s and 1960s is historically significant for its relationship to post-war intellectual and cultural trends. To analyze the work of these decades is to trace a strand in the development of the new left and to observe how it emerged from the initial post-war years.

This essay is divided into four chapters. The first chapter provides a biography of Williams' life and career, from his early years growing up in Atlantic, Iowa, through his departure from Madison in 1968. Drawing primarily from the biographical information that Williams provided in his own writings and in a number of interviews, this chapter highlights and chronicles the major events of his life. It also locates the pre-academic experiences that influenced Williams' career as a revisionist historian and introduces his relationship to the University of Wisconsin's progressive and radical traditions in the 1950s and 1960s.

Chapter two provides an overview of early post-war intellectual, and, in particular, historiographical trends. Such background is necessary, for one thing, to establish the context in which Williams developed the core arguments of his career. This chapter integrates a number of secondary intellectual and cultural histories with the work of some of the premier post-war intellectuals and the scholarship of both progressive and consensus historians. It argues that the war, in general, ended the intellectual radicalism of the 1930s and signaled the end to the predominance of progressive historiography. Subsequently, the war introduced a new era of consensus where American intellectuals accepted if not celebrated the economic, political, and diplomatic institutions of the United States. Through an exploration of the shift from progressive to consensus historiography, this chapter also establishes the background necessary for an analysis of how Williams' work related to these schools of history.

The third chapter of this essay introduces the work Williams produced during the 1950s and 1960s. It traces the evolution of his major arguments from his first book, Russia-American Relations in 1952 to his final, major publication, The Roots of the Modern American Empire in 1969. By doing so,

this chapter associates Williams' scholarship, implicitly, with the 1950s and subsequently traces a strand of new left radicalism through the initial post-war decades.

Finally, chapter four provides an analysis of Williams' work. Drawing upon the arguments of the previous three sections, this chapter explores Williams' relation to the progressive, consensus, and new left schools.

Chapter I - Biography: The Influential Years

William Appleman Williams was born on June 12, 1921 in Atlantic, Iowa, a farming community fifty miles east of Omaha, Nebraska. Williams recalled that he enjoyed "a good family life, a solid childhood, [and] a warm home."¹ When he was seven, however, his father, William Carleton Williams, a pilot in the Army Air Corps, died in an airplane crash during war game exercises in Oklahoma. The young Williams spent the rest of his childhood and adolescence with his mother, Mildred, and his grandparents, Maude and Porter.

Williams often stressed the impact that an upbringing in Atlantic had upon his work as a revisionist historian. He recalled fondly the fact that he was raised, like most others in Atlantic, as a member of an extended family. Williams remembered his mother and grandmother as "liberated women;" they founded a home life that stressed hard-work, devotion, and perseverance. Their actions led the young Williams to conclude that "if you are committed to something then you act."² A strong family served as the foundation for a "network of interlocking communities" that included "a civil community based on a political economy of agriculture, manufacturing, and commerce" and "a primary peer group of approximately thirty children that related to similar groups in play, sports, music, and the local educational environment."³ Atlantic, as Williams remembered it, was organized by class but devoid of privilege, characterized by prejudices but free from racism.

¹ William G. Robbins, "Doing History is Best of All. No Regrets," from Redefining the Past: Essays in Diplomatic History in Honor of William Appleman Williams, ed. by Lloyd C. Gardner (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1986) p. 4.

² Mike Wallace, "An Interview with William Appleman Williams," Radical Historical Review, v.22 (Winter 1979-1980) p. 69.

³ *Ibid*, p. 69.

There, he studied hard, played sports, worked summers as a farm-hand, and learned, as he fondly recalled, "how to say 'no' to myself in the name of community."⁴ In all, Williams located in Atlantic the communal responsibilities, meaningful jobs, and intimate relationships that he would later consider compromised by American capitalism.

Nonetheless, Williams discovered at a young age "the direct relationship between the fluctuations of the business cycle and the conditions of life for the farmer."⁵ Growing up during the 1930s he experienced "firsthand, the impact -- economic and psychological -- of depression" in the rural Midwest.⁶ He witnessed the "fear and fatigue" of downtrodden farmers "driven off the land by the whip of the economic marketplace," and felt the impact of local industries going bankrupt, never to reopen.⁷ Furthermore, the young Williams "made the realization of the international nature of agriculture." Working summers loading trains with exports, he "learned early and at first hand how the farm was tied into the world marketplace."⁸

Williams was a successful student and athlete. He left Atlantic at the age of seventeen to attend Kemper Military Academy in Booneville, Missouri on a basketball scholarship. In 1941, after two years at Kemper, Williams received a congressional appointment to the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, where he spent three years studying engineering and preparing

⁴ Ibid, p. 265.

⁵ William Appleman Williams, The Roots of the Modern American Empire: A Study of the Growth and Shaping of Social Consciousness in a Marketplace Society (New York: Random House, 1969) p. xxi.

⁶ William Appleman Williams, "My Life in Madison," from History and the New Left: Madison, Wisconsin, 1950-1970, ed. by Paul Buhle (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990) p. 265.

⁷ Williams, The Roots of the Modern American Empire, p. xxii.

⁸ Ibid, p. xxii.

for a career as an officer in the United States Navy. He volunteered for the Navy's Amphibious Corps in 1944 and served as an executive officer on a landing ship in the South Pacific. A year later, during a naval engagement, he suffered a wound that ended his tour of combat. He was subsequently transferred to Corpus Christi for medical attention, recuperation, and new training to become a naval flier.⁹

Like his years in Atlantic, both his education at Annapolis and his military experiences were sources of pride for Williams. He considered his college and military years influential to his later development as a radical historian. First, the military pushed Williams to strive for personal excellence; he recalled studying with "high-powered people" who were "taken very damn seriously." "We were being trained," he remembered, "to become captains of ships of the line, and that is no small matter. So we were taken seriously and lots was expected of us."¹⁰ Moreover, the military taught Williams how best to approach confrontations; this he relied upon throughout his highly criticized career in academia. As he explained in an interview in the late 1970s:

Over the years I've come to realize the extent to which one of the benefits of being trained in the Naval Academy and being in the regular navy, was to avoid personalizing an issue. You can, as the executive officer of a ship, get really chewed out by a captain if you do something that would even risk putting the ship in danger. There's very little personalization of basic confrontation....There were issues to be confronted and differences to be clarified and consequences to be accepted. But then you went from there.¹¹

⁹ See Williams' "My Life in Madison," p.266. See also Wallace's "An Interview with William Appleman Williams," p. 67, and Robbins' "Doing History is Best of All. No Regrets," p. 4.

¹⁰ Wallace, "An Interview with William Appleman Williams," p. 67.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 73-74.

In addition to learning about such "power relationships," Williams discovered his initial bearings as a critic of American diplomacy in the South Pacific. As he later explained, "we all knew Japan was defeated before the bomb was dropped, and saw absolutely no point in the second bomb."¹²

Although he located important aspects of his intellectual development in Atlantic, Annapolis, and the South Pacific, it was during his fifteen month service at Corpus Christi after the war that Williams "consciously became a radical."¹³ There, he discovered the distance between American myths and American realities. As he pointed out in a personal memoir, Corpus Christi "offered a classic example of the interrelationship between large corporations (industrial, agricultural, and energy), the military, a reactionary religious hierarchy, and local businessmen and politicians -- all in the context of class, racial, and sexual confrontations between chicanos, blacks, and whites."¹⁴ Within this setting, Williams, along with a small handful of fellow Annapolis graduates, became involved in the fledgling post-war civil rights movement. He discovered both the techniques of direct action activism and the reactionary potential of American society through his attempts to integrate the flight line and to work for "economic and social justice" for African-Americans.¹⁵ After receiving a "couple of beatings," an eviction from his apartment in the middle of the night, and constant "harassment from the FBI," Williams decided to end his military career and wrote a three page letter of resignation.¹⁶ The Navy rejected his efforts, and instead, he

¹² Ibid, p. 67.

¹³ Robbins, "Doing History is Best of All. No Regrets," p. 5.

¹⁴ Williams, "My Life in Madison," p. 266.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 266

¹⁶ Williams elaborated upon these events in both interviews and writings; however, he never provided a specific or detailed account either of his civil rights activities or the abuse he encountered from the F.B.I.

received orders of transfer to the Bikini Islands "to see if you could in fact hit a beach after you've bombed it with nuclear weapons."¹⁷ Williams suffered reoccurring problems from an earlier war wound on route to his new assignment however. Subsequently detained in San Francisco, he spent the final thirteen months of his military service in "various naval hospitals."¹⁸

Williams received his discharge from the Navy in 1947. After entertaining job offers from both Lockheed and General Electric, he decided to return to school and study history at The University of Wisconsin. Williams' desire to study history emerged from the culmination of his experiences growing up during the depression in the upper midwest and his service in the United States Navy. "It was history," he later explained, "because I really did want to try and make sense out of what the hell was going on -- the bomb and all that. I figured from my education and my reading, that history was the best way to figure out the way the world ticked."¹⁹ The University of Wisconsin attracted Williams because, for one thing, his mother was teaching third grade in Wisconsin. Perhaps more important, "at that point," he recalled, "Wisconsin had the best history department in the country."²⁰

Because of his limited background in history and his low GPA from the Naval Academy, Williams was accepted to Wisconsin on probation and was required to take a semester of undergraduate history courses. Nonetheless, he took to the study of history "like a fish to water."²¹ "A graduate student who worked thirty hours a week to supplement the GI Bill,"

¹⁷ Wallace, "An Interview with William Appleman Williams," p. 68.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 68.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 70.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 70.

²¹ Wallace, "An Interview with William Appleman Williams," p. 70.

Williams initially studied contemporary Russian history; however, he soon became frustrated by a lack of primary source material regarding the Soviet Union and naturally gravitated towards the study of American-Russian relations. Thus, he embarked upon a career as a diplomatic historian.²²

At the University of Wisconsin, Williams trained as a historian at one of the premier "progressive" academic institutions in America.²³ Home to the "Wisconsin Idea" of progressive education and government and to such progressive figures as historian Frederick Jackson Turner, politician Robert Lafollete, and economist John R. Commons, the University of Wisconsin served as one of the primary centers of progressive thought in the decades that bridged the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the years following the Second World War, while the consensus school buried progressive historiography, the University at Wisconsin became an enclave of progressive thought. As Paul Buhle contended in comparing the University's post-war scholars with East Coast intellectuals, "Madison intellectuals, with all their internal variety, were another species. Their experience was not predominately one of deradicalization," for at Wisconsin, "respect for [Charles] Beard's courage, his anti-state views, and his foreign policy criticism helped produce a major dissenting historical perspective in the very depths of Cold War culture."²⁴

Wisconsin's post-war, progressive tradition was centered in the University's history department. There, such "neo-Beardian Progressive historians" as Merle Curti, Merrill Jensen, Howard Beale, Fred Harvey

²² Ibid, p. 71.

²³ The following discussion of The University of Wisconsin is drawn primarily from Paul Buhle's History and the New Left: Madison, Wisconsin, 1950-1970, both from Buhle's introductory history of Madison and from a number of the memoirs of "Madisonians" who contributed to this oral history.

²⁴ Buhle, History and the New Left, p. 7.

Harrington, and William Hessestine offered a counterpoint to the dominant trends in post-war historiography. As Herbert Gutman, a near contemporary of Williams as a graduate student at Wisconsin, recalled:

History was essentially past politics to these scholars. Grass-roots Progressives themselves, they had no patience with Stalinist "popular" vulgarizations. And they -- all of them -- had a deep commitment to civil liberties, to open discussion, in a time of liberal surrender and communist duplicity. That counted a great deal when so many intelligent people surrendered too easily to the 1950s and the "New America".²⁵

These scholars encouraged revisionist scholarship and critical appraisals of American history. In the process, they trained a young generation of historians who went on to challenge consensus history and contributed to new left historiography of the 1960s. In addition to Williams and Gutman, historians such as Harvey Goldberg, John Higham, Warren Sussman, Gar Alperovitz, and Gabriel Kolko studied at the University of Wisconsin in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Madison, as Williams remembered, provided a setting for one "to be an intellectual and political activist in the academic and the general community." In addition to Wisconsin's progressive tradition, which remained "alive and well" in the 1950s, and the "university's commitment to intellectual excellence," Williams recalled other factors that contributed to his revisionist's world view. He stressed the intellectual activism of GIs "going to school [who] were knowledgeable in the way of the world and highly motivated" and contended that "as a group they were outspoken in the classroom and in seminars. They sustained an active dialogue about intellectual, social, and political affairs." Moreover, Williams pointed out that Wisconsin served as the transplanted home for several children of old-left,

²⁵ Herbert Gutman, "Learning About History," from Buhle's History and the New Left, p. 48.

East Coast parents. These "red-diaper babies", he asserted, provided "a powerful yeast in the Madison brew;" for, "in general they were intelligent, willing to work hard, and proud bearers of an activist tradition." Overall, Williams remembered that The University of Wisconsin "created an interplay between students and faculty that has been largely forgotten in all the talk about the silent generation of the 1950s and the activism of the 1960s."²⁶

Williams supplemented the progressive education that he received at Wisconsin in the summer of 1948 by attending a Socialist economics seminar conducted by the Labour party in Leeds, England. There, he studied under economist A.J. Brown, "the shrewdest and toughest liberal in the English tradition," and "was confronted with the central problems posed by Left liberals and socialists coming to power for a capitalist political economy headed for collapse."²⁷ The experience had a profound effect upon Williams, who found himself thinking for the first time "about decentralization as part of a program for the left."²⁸

In 1950, back at Wisconsin, Williams earned his doctorate by completing a thesis exploring the career of Raymond Robins, an American progressive who worked for the Red Cross Commission in Russia during the Bolshevik Revolution and who urged American recognition of the fledgling Communist regime throughout the 1920s.²⁹ In the years following his graduate work, Williams took temporary appointments at Washington and Jefferson College, Bard College and Ohio State University. During this time,

²⁶ This paragraph's citations are taken from Williams' "My Life in Madison," pp. 266-269.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 267.

²⁸ Wallace, "An Interview with William Appleman Williams," p. 72.

²⁹ William Appleman Williams, "Raymond Robins and Russian-American Relations: 1917-1938," Phd. Dissertation (The University of Wisconsin, 1950).

he expanded his dissertation into an overview of American relations with Russia and the Soviet Union. In 1952, he published the revised dissertation as his first book, American-Russian Relations: 1781-1947.³⁰

Williams taught at The University of Oregon from 1952 until 1957. In Eugene, the young academic further developed his skills as a historian by publishing over twenty articles for an assortment of magazines and journals. In 1956, moreover, he edited The Shaping of American Diplomacy: Readings and Documents in American Foreign Relations, 1750-1955, a large volume of primary documents put together for a historical series sponsored by Rand McNally.³¹ In addition, while at Oregon, Williams discovered "how to teach large numbers of kids in classes," and nurtured a passion for the classroom that became a hallmark for his work and career.³²

Williams received an offer from his graduate alma mater in 1957. Although hesitant to leave his tenure track position at Oregon, he accepted after some coaxing from Fred Harvey Harrington, one of his old mentors at Wisconsin. Recently appointed to the Vice-presidency of the University and soon to become Madison's President, Harrington hand-picked his former student to fill the position he vacated as the department's diplomatic historian. After Harrington sweetened the deal by \$400, Williams accepted.³³

Back at Wisconsin, Williams embarked upon the most celebrated decade of his career. William Robbins described the ten years that Williams spent teaching at the University of Wisconsin (1957-1967) as "some of the

³⁰ William Appleman Williams, Russian-American Relations (New York: Rinehart, 1952).

³¹ William Appleman Williams, ed. The Shaping of American Diplomacy: Readings and Documents in American Foreign Relations, 1750-1955 (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1956).

³² Wallace, "An Interview with William Appleman Williams," p. 75.

³³ Robbins, "Williams Appleman Williams," p. 10.

most creative and productive years by an American scholar."³⁴ In addition to consistently producing articles and book reviews, Williams published five books -- Tragedy (1959), Contours (1961), The United States, Cuba and Castro (1962), The Great Evasion (1964), and The Roots of the Modern American Empire (1969) -- and trained over 35 doctoral students.³⁵ These publications established Williams' national reputation as a revisionist historian and marked his most significant contributions to American historiography. Furthermore, several of the graduate students Williams trained at Wisconsin went on to enjoy prolific careers within the field of diplomatic history.

In addition to beginning the most fruitful period of his career, Williams quickly established himself as one of the leading academic figures for the Madison left. From the late 1950s through the end of the 1960s, in light of the civil rights movement, the Cuban revolution, the escalation of the Vietnam war, and ever-increasing student enrollments, Madison's progressive tradition turned increasingly radical. Williams, as one former student described him, "was a commanding figure" amidst the radicalism that blossomed in Madison during the 1960s.³⁶ For one thing, beginning in 1959, he served as the faculty advisor for *Studies on the Left*, an early new left quarterly published by a number of his students. Furthermore, Williams was active in the anti-war movement. He organized a number of town meetings regarding the war, lined up speakers for a radio program called "Vietnam on

³⁴ Ibid p. 11.

³⁵ William Appleman Williams, The United States, Cuba, and Castro (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1962); Williams, The Great Evasion: An Essay on the Contemporary Relevance of Karl Marx and on the Wisdom of Admitting the Heretic into the Dialogue about America's Future (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964). Williams prolific decade at Wisconsin included an expanded second edition of Tragedy published in 1962 and the publication of the second edition of Contours published in 1966 with a new introduction.

³⁶ Peter Wiley, "Radicalized History," from Buhle's History and the New Left, p. 192.

the Air," participated in a 40-mile march of protest to a munitions dump outside of Madison, and spoke at Madison's Vietnam "Teach-in" in 1965.³⁷

The notoriety enjoyed by Williams during his years at Wisconsin had a negative side as well. His work was often subject to scathing criticism. Foster Rhea Dulles referred to Williams as a "perverse historian"; Oscar Handlin deemed Contours an "elaborate hoax," "altogether farcical" and reminiscent of "the literary striving of unskilled freshmen;" and, *Time* magazine concluded that if Williams was in fact an influential historian then "the shortcomings of U.S. education derive from more important factors than cramped classrooms and low teacher salaries."³⁸

Beginning in 1960, furthermore, Williams work drew the attention of HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee). Suspicious of Williams because of Tragedy and the fact that he published in political journals such as *Science and Society*, *Monthly Review*, and *The Nation*, HUAC subpoenaed the manuscript for Contours. After months of being played "like a yo-yo" (as Williams recalled, HUAC used to issue notices to report only to cancel by way of telegram after he had boarded a train for Washington) he finally "settled" with HUAC after a ten minute appearance before the committee. Williams' problems did not end, however, for he soon discovered that "they sent my

³⁷ For an account of Madison's anti-war movement see Tom Bates' Rads: The 1970 Bombing of the Army Math Research Center at the University of Wisconsin and Its Aftermath (New York: Harper Collins, 1992). For a copy of Williams address to Wisconsin's "Teach-In," see, "Our Leaders are Following the Wrong Rainbow," published in Teach-Ins: U.S.A., Reports, Opinions, Documents, eds. Louis Menash and Ronald Radosh (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967) pp. 45-54.

³⁸ Foster Rhea Dulles, "Review of The Tragedy of American Diplomacy," American Historical Review, July, 1959, p. 1022; Oscar Handlin, "Review of The Contours of American History," Mississippi Historical Review, XLVIII (March 4, 1962) pp. 743-45; *Time* magazine book review, "Loaded History: Review of The Contours of American History," *Time*, LXXVIII, No.1 (July 7, 1961) pp. 68-69.

name over to the IRS. And the IRS worked me over for the better part of fifteen years."³⁹

Williams went on sabbatical to research and write The Roots of Modern American Empire in 1967. During this time, he settled in Newport, Oregon to write and often frequented the archives at Oregon State University in Corvallis. One year later, Williams decided to accept a position at Oregon State. A number of factors contributed to his decision to leave Wisconsin for the less prestigious halls of Oregon State. First, Williams became disillusioned with the "random and nonsocial violence" of the new left in the second half of the decade.⁴⁰ The Oregon coast provided an escape from the daily confrontations instigated by Wisconsin's increasingly violent anti-war movement. Williams desired, furthermore, to teach undergraduate students. His perpetually over-filled graduate seminars had become a burden; and, by 1967, he believed that he "had trained students that were as good if not better than I was, and so why string it out?"⁴¹ In addition, by the late 1960s, Williams had tired of the pressures demanded by a major university and longed to explore other aspects of life beyond his professional career. Moreover, he was drawn to Oregon for aesthetic reasons. He longed for a chance to live, once again, on the Pacific coast and enjoy the space and solitude of a rural lifestyle.

Williams' move to Oregon State signaled the end to the most prominent period of his career. Although he remained a prolific scholar while at Oregon State, his work largely reiterated the theses and themes that he developed during the 1950s and the 1960s. Furthermore, while Williams served a one year tenure as the president of the Organization of American

³⁹ Williams, "My Life In Madison," pp. 77-78.

⁴⁰ Williams, "My Life in Madison," p. 270.

⁴¹ Cited from Robbins' "Doing History is Best of All. No Regrets," p. 15.

Historians in 1980 his influence within the field diminished considerably after leaving Wisconsin. As he recalled, at Oregon State, academia became "less and less...the essence of my life." Rather, the revisionist spent the final stage of his career surf fishing, developing his skills as a photographer, playing pool, and putting "down roots in a community."⁴²

⁴² Ibid, p. 15

Chapter II - Post-war Intellectual and Historiographical Trends

Most historians associate the scholarship of William Appleman Williams with the cultural and intellectual radicalism of the 1960s. In several respects, this association makes sense. Williams' most influential books appeared in the 1960s and quickly became seminal texts for the new left. However, the core of arguments that established Williams as a leading new left academic did not develop out of the 1960s but rather were products of the initial post-war years. The major themes and theses of his career evolved through the work that he published during the 1950s. That evolution was all the more telling for, although the 1950s marked a particularly fruitful period in American intellectual history, they were not years often associated with radical thought.

The following pages explore the predominant intellectual trends of the 1950s in order to provide background for an analysis of Williams' work. Such background is necessary for a number of reasons. First, this chapter establishes the intellectual context of Williams' early scholarship. Recent historians have found continuity between the 1950s and the 1960s. They have located the intellectual origins of the new left in the initial post-war years; however, most intellectual and cultural historians have overlooked Williams in such analyses. The pages that follow, therefore, highlight the post-war intellectual environment in order to set up the next chapter that, by examining Williams' major arguments, traces the origins of new left radicalism through the 1950s and into the 1960s. Furthermore, this background chapter is essential for an analysis that, in part, links Williams' revisionism to the 1950s -- particularly in regard to the professional historical scholarship of that decade. Therefore, after sketching the broad intellectual

trends of the 1950s, this chapter focuses upon the respective rise and decline of consensus and progressive historiography after the Second World War and explores the central tenets of these two schools of thought.

Intellectual and cultural historians have concluded that the Second World War marked a period of transition in American intellectual thought. Although there are exceptions to such generalizations, historians argue that throughout the years following the war, American intellectuals rejected Karl Marx, Charles Beard, the far left, and progressive historiography. Instead, the post-war years witnessed the rise of "consensus" intellectual scholarship. A departure from turn of the century progressivism and depression-era radicalism, consensus, or post-war liberal, thought largely embraced American economic, political, and diplomatic institutions, programs, and policies.¹

Consensus thought embodied a number of fundamental assumptions shared by American intellectuals in the years following the war. First, consensus intellectuals rejected radical thought. As Daniel Bell described it, the post-war years witnessed the "end of ideology."² Throughout the 1950s, intellectuals once allied with the left during the 1930s dismissed Marxist

¹ For a summary of post-war intellectual and cultural trends see Richard Pells' The Liberal Mind in A Conservative Age (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), Godfrey Hodgson's America In Our Time: From World War II to Nixon, What Happened and Why (New York: Vintage Books, 1976) chapter 3, Maurice Isserman's If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987), Norman Graebner's The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), Larry May's Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), John Patrick Diggins' The Rise and Fall of the American Left (New York: W.W Norton and Co., 1992) and Stephen J. Whitfield's The Culture of the Cold War (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

² Daniel Bell, The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the 1950s (New York: Harper and Row, 1960).

ideologies that "had lost their truth and their power to persuade."³ A number of factors contributed to this development. Stalin's show trials of the 1930s, the great purges, the Nazi-Soviet Non Aggression Pact, and Soviet expansion into Eastern Europe after the war discredited Russia's Communist party among intellectuals. Furthermore, the Holocaust, Nazi aggression, and Stalinism all shook intellectual faith in the power of the masses. Russian Communism and German Fascism together gave rise to skepticism among American intellectuals in regards to powerful national governments and utopian political philosophies. In all, as Bell concluded, "For the radical intellectual who had articulated the revolutionary impulses of the past century and a half, all this has meant the end to chiliastic hopes, to millenarianism, to apocalyptic thinking -- and to ideology. For ideology, which was once the road to action, has come to be a dead end."⁴

Moreover, the threat of international communism after the war led most intellectuals to support their nation's involvement in the Cold War. Consensus thought upheld the standard assumptions of Cold War orthodoxy -- in particular, that the Soviet Union determined to export communism abroad, that this posed the main threat to America and the free world, and that it was the responsibility of the United States to counter and contain the expansion of international communism.⁵

³ Ibid, p. 402.

⁴ Ibid, p. 393. Although several American intellectuals moved away from past commitments to Marx after the war, this trend was predominant amongst the "New York" intellectuals, primarily those associated with Partisan Review such as James Burnham, Dwight MacDonald, Phillip Rahv, William Phillips and Lionell Trilling. For a discussion of the "deradicalization" of such thinkers see James Gilbert's Writers and Partisans (New York: Wiley Co., 1968) and Terry Cooney's The Rise of the New York Intellectuals: Partisan Review and Its Critics (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).

⁵ For the most definitive expressions of Cold War orthodoxy see George Kennan's "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," Foreign Affairs XXV, No. 4 (July, 1947) pp.566-82. See also Kennan's Memoirs: Volume I (Boston: Little and Brown Co., 1967) chapters 9-15, Walter

In addition, a number of domestic factors shaped post-war thought. The exponential economic growth and technological modernization spurred by the war discredited Marxist prophecies of an impending proletarian revolution brought on by the internal contradictions of capitalism. The liberating features of the Second World War and post-war prosperity furthered the belief that a mixed, expanding economy raised standards of living, leveled class tensions, and fostered equality. Consensus intellectuals thus accepted the central tenets of the New Deal and the Fair Deal. They held that the role of the federal government was to provide a limited welfare state and to promote economic growth. As Arthur Schlesinger Jr. declared, "Keynes, not Marx, is the prophet of the new radicalism."⁶

Moreover, the legacies of communism and fascism bred new respect among intellectuals for the United States' political institutions and traditions. As opposed to the single-party state, the gulag, and the concentration camp, American intellectuals upheld the virtues of civil liberties, democratic pluralism, and due process of law.⁷

In all, anti-communism, containment, as well as a reverence for America's political system and free-enterprise economy characterized post-war, consensus thought. As Richard Pells has contended, in adopting consensus views, several American thinkers became "celebrants of their native land."⁸ Intellectual standard bearers such as Arthur Schlesinger Jr.,

Lippman's The Cold War (New York: Harper and Row Co., 1947) and James Burnham's The Struggle for the World (New York: J. Day Co., 1947).

⁶ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1949) p. 183.

⁷ In addition to Schlesinger's The Vital Center and Bell's The End of Ideology see Seymour Lipset's Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics (New York: Doubleday, 1959), David Potter's People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1954) and John Kenneth Galbraith's The Affluent Society (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958).

⁸Richard Pells, The Liberal Mind in A Conservative Age, p. 31.

Daniel Bell, Lionell Trilling, Seymour Lipset, and Reinhold Niebuhr moved away from radical thought and enlisted in the Cold War. In front of the classroom and within the pages of books and articles published in journals and magazines as diverse as *Time*, *Commentary*, *Fortune*, *Partisan Review*, and *The New Republic*, these thinkers warned of the evils of Soviet Communism and espoused an "American way of life." They sought to prevent "the totalitarian infiltration of Western political life."⁹ In doing so, they became spokesmen for post-war American liberalism and defenders of the political and economic institutions of the United States.

While many intellectuals emerged from the Second World War as advocates for an American way, the war did not eliminate critical scholarship in the United States. Turning away from economic, political, and diplomatic criticisms, intellectuals focused upon cultural and social issues to produce the most disparaging analyses of America in the post-war era. Of course, critical analyses of modern culture existed well before the 1940s. However, the social and cultural changes facilitated by the war led to a resurgence of this type of scholarship. Writers such as Dwight MacDonald, William Whyte, David Riesman, C. Wright Mills, and Herbert Marcuse, leveled their criticisms of the United States at American middle class values, and the conformity and mindless consumerism bred from post-war prosperity. These thinkers decried the increasing lack of an aesthetic quality of life in the United States; they concluded that the rise of white collar jobs and the proliferation of the American suburb, together with the material comforts of automobiles, televisions, washing machines, and lawn mowers, left Americans alienated, "other-directed," and devoid of compelling, high culture.¹⁰ As Maurice

⁹ Ibid, p. 100.

¹⁰ For example see David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), William Whyte's *The Organization Man* (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1956),

Isserman declared, "In the 1930s mass culture was denounced as the opiate of the working class; in the mid-1950s the debate of mass culture had become the opiate of formerly radical intellectuals."¹¹

Consensus thought not only characterized ways in which intellectuals perceived contemporary institutions, events, and policies. It also marked new interpretations of the American past. As post-war intellectuals moved away from Marx and the left, American historians, in general, dismissed Charles Beard and progressive historiography. Throughout the 1940s and into the 1950s, a young generation of consensus historians challenged the premises of progressive history, introduced new interpretations of the American experience, and in the process, redefined the purpose of professional historical scholarship. The defeat of fascism, the threat of communism, and the apparent vitality of American institutions led historians to reject the assumptions of progressive thought and instead to offer historical "explanations of America's political ingenuity, economic success, and social stability in the 1950s."¹²

Progressive historians such as Beard, Frederick Jackson Turner, Vernon Parrington, and James Harvey Robinson dominated the field of history throughout the first half of the twentieth-century. Together, Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" and Beard's An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution established the fundamental

C. Wright Mills' White Collar (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), Dwight MacDonal'd's Against the American Grain (New York: Random House, 1952) and Herbert Marcuse's Eros and Civilization (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

¹¹ Isserman, If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left, p. 98.

¹² Richard Pells, The Liberal Mind in A Conservative Age, p. 162.

themes and theses of progressive historiography.¹³ Turner's "frontier thesis", first presented to the American Historical Association in 1893, held that throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries an ever-extending frontier across the North American continent distinguished the United States from its European antecedents. The frontier nurtured America's unique traditions and institutions. Where East Coast cities harbored the aristocratic, commercial, conservative, and manufacturing characteristics reminiscent of the "Old World," "the frontier settlement advanced and carried with it individualism, democracy, and nationalism."¹⁴ Turner clearly allied himself with the later, as he enthusiastically concluded:

The result is that to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil; and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom -- these are the traits of the American frontier.¹⁵

Similar to Turner's work on the frontier, Charles Beard's An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution stressed the historical divisions between America's "personalty" or financial class, "the holders of state and continental securities," and the "realty" class made up primarily of small, debt-ridden farmers of western regions.¹⁶ While Turner focused upon the frontier, Beard's most recognized contribution to progressive historiography examined the American constitution. Beard argued that the primary

¹³ Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," American Historical Association, Annual Report for the Year 1893, (Washington, 1894). Charles Beard, An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1913).

¹⁴ Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," p. 35.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 37.

¹⁶ Beard, An Economic Interpretation of the Constition, p. 23.

motivation behind the adoption of a national constitution came from a personalty class that felt its property rights were left unprotected by the Articles of Confederation. Thus Beard contended that the constitution was essentially "an economic document," written and ratified by America's financial elite in order to maintain power and avoid "the attacks of leveling democracy."¹⁷

Where Turner's work on the frontier and Beard's economic interpretation of American history established the primary themes of progressive history, Beard's The Rise of American Civilization and Vernon Parrington's Main Currents in American Thought provided the most extensive presentation of what David Noble has described as "the progressive paradigm."¹⁸ Both of these epic works, each a two volume overview of the entirety of American history, held that from colonial times through the guilded age and into the twentieth century perpetual conflicts fueled the development of the United States -- conflicts between Jeffersonian democrats and Hamiltonian aristocrats, the feudal South and the capitalist North, the yeoman farmer and the urban financier, the laborer and robber baron, isolationist and imperialist. The Rise of American Civilization and Main Currents in American Thought assumed, in accordance with the frontier

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 152-188.

¹⁸ Charles and Mary Beard, The Rise of American Civilization: Volumes I & II (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927); Vernon Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought: Volumes I & II (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927). David Noble has published extensively on both progressive and consensus historiography. For example, see Noble's The End of American History: Democracy, Capitalism, and the Metaphor of Two Worlds in Anglo-American Historical Writing, 1880-1980 (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1985). See also Noble's Historians Against History: The Frontier Thesis and the National Covenant in American Historical Writing since 1830 (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1965), The Progressive Mind: 1890-1917 (Chicago: Rand and McNally, 1971), and, "The Reconstruction of Progress: Charles Beard, Richard Hofstadter, and Postwar Historical Thought," from Larry May's Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).

thesis and the economic interpretation of the constitution, that throughout all eras of American history forces representing an indigenous democracy battled with a transplanted European capitalism for predominance in the United States.

However, where Turner and Parrington bemoaned the passing of the frontier and the demise of rural democracy in light of industrialization, Beard's progressivism looked optimistically to the future and the ultimate ascension of the democratic ideal in the United States. For Beard, history was progress. He conceded that capitalist elements had thwarted the development of democracy throughout the past and that industrialization had produced inequalities and suffering. However, with reform and rationalization, claimed Beard, the American industrial order promised a future where "an invulnerable faith in democracy...[would rise] to a position of commanding authority" and that the "undistinguished masses" would enjoy "an ever wider distribution of the blessings of civilization -- health, security, material goods, knowledge, leisure, and aesthetic appreciation."¹⁹

Assuming that contemporary democracy still struggled against a capitalist elite, Beard contended that the purpose of the historian was to explore the nature of past conflicts in order to explain the fundamental problems of the present and provide direction toward a democratic future. Such present-mindedness became an integral component of the progressive paradigm. "The distinguishing mark" of the progressive historian, wrote Morton White, was "an anxiety to convert the present into a more decent future" for "their study of history was not motivated by nostalgia for the past, but rather concern for the future."²⁰ James Harvey Robinson, a colleague of

¹⁹ Beard, The Rise of American Civilization, p. 800.

²⁰ Morton White, Social Thought in America (New York: Viking Press, 1949) pp. 50-52.

and co-author with Beard, described the present-mindedness of progressive historiography.

Society is to-day engaged in a tremendous and unprecedented effort to better itself in manifold ways. Never has our knowledge of the world and of man been so great as it now is; never before has there been so general good will and so much intelligent social activity as now prevails. The part that each of us can play in forwarding some phase of this reform will depend upon our understanding of existing conditions and opinion, and these can only be explained, as has been shown, by following more or less carefully the process that produce them. We must develop historical-mindedness upon a far more generous scale than hitherto, for this will promote rational progress as nothing else can do.²¹

Overall, progressive historiography reflected the historical environment in which it developed. Progressive history, as John Higham contended, "gave a sense of depth to the social struggles which historians in the early twentieth century observed all around them."²² Stressing the divisions and conflicts of the past while allying themselves with America's democratic elements, progressive historians sought, through professional historical scholarship, to help reform the present.

By the end of World War II, American historians began to reject the progressive paradigm. Scholars such as Richard Hofstadter, Louis Hartz, and Daniel Boorstin dismissed progressive historiography and focused their interpretations of American history not upon conflict, but rather, on consensus.²³ Where progressive historians accented the tensions of the past,

²¹ James Harvey Robinson, The New History: Essays Illustrating the Modern Historical Outlook (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1912) pp. 23-24.

²² John Higham, "The Cult of the American Consensus," Commentary XXVII (February, 1959) p. 94.

²³ Richard Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1948); Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in American Political Thought Since the Revolution (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1955); Daniel Boorstin, The Genius of American Politics (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953).

consensus historians "emphasized the enduring uniformities of American life, the stability of institutions, the persistence of a national character" and argued that the history of the United States embodied a healthy fusion of capitalist and democratic elements.²⁴ In the introduction to his The American Political Tradition, published in 1948, Richard Hofstadter defined the post-progressive era of American historiography. As he contended, "the fierceness of the political struggles" chronicled by progressive historians "has often been misleading." Rather, he continued, throughout the American past "the major political traditions have shared a belief in the rights of property, the philosophy of economic individualism, the value of competition; they have accepted the economic virtues of capitalist culture as necessary qualities of man."²⁵

The definitive example of consensus history was the work of Daniel Boorstin -- in particular, his The Genius of American Politics. Boorstin based his history upon the curious fact that the United States "has never produced" a great political philosopher and has never embraced a utopian, political philosophy. Instead, he located consensus in the American tradition of "givenness." Boorstin's understanding of "givenness" embodied three central characteristics. First, he contended that American values such as liberty, equality, and democracy were "in some way automatically defined...by certain facts of geography or history peculiar to us."²⁶ Second, "givenness" assumed that these values were implicit in the institutions of the United States. And third, these factors were responsible for "the continuity and homogeneity" of

²⁴ John Higham, "Beyond Consensus: The Historian as Moral Critic," p. 613.

²⁵ Richard Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition, p. viii.

²⁶ Daniel Boorstin, The Genius of American Politics, p. 8.

American history, for "givenness" embodied the values common to all Americans.²⁷

Boorstin located consensus in "the givenness" of the United States' traditions, values, beliefs, and institutions; similarly, Louis Hartz identified an all encompassing liberalism that defined American history. Hartz, another consensus historian of the 1950s, contended that because the United States lacked a feudal past, it thus remained impervious to both socialism ("the hidden origin of socialist thought...is to be found in the feudal ethos") and to fascism. Instead, Americans developed "a liberal way of life."²⁸ Hartz loosely, yet persistently, equated American liberalism with Lockean notions of individuality and private property, democracy, and middle class prosperity. Like Boorstin, he concluded that there had been no fundamental conflicts in American history. However, Hartz's assessment of "Americanism" was less than salutary. Rather, he pointed out that such a liberal tradition bred conformity and unanimity of opinion that at times approached tyranny. He thus concluded that, "Ironically, liberalism is a stranger in the land of its greatest realization and fulfillment."²⁹

Despite Hartz's skepticism, most consensus histories reflected the broader tendencies of post-war intellectuals to praise American values and beliefs. For one thing, consensus thinkers such as Boorstin, Seymour Lipset, David Potter, and Oscar Handlin praised America's "liberal tradition."³⁰

²⁷ Ibid, p. 9.

²⁸ Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America, pp. 6-9. For another example of a skeptical, consensus history see also Richard Hofstadter's The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

²⁹ Ibid, p. 11.

³⁰ See Lipset's Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics, David Potter's People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character, Oscar Handlin's The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1951), and Boorstin's The Americans: The Colonial Years (New York: Random House, 1958).

"Givenness," according to Boorstin, was synonymous with "genius." It fostered pragmatic, conservative, and stable values and institutions. Such ideals and traditions insulated Americans from the emotionalism and "idolatry" at the root of European political philosophies such as nazism, fascism, and communism.

Moreover, consensus historians "displayed," as John Higham pointed out, "attitudes often found in conservative quarters."³¹ Where progressive historians, in general, allied themselves with "the common man" and the democratic elements of the past, consensus historians reappraised the virtues of "mass democracy."³² For example, post-war biographies of the democratic heroes of progressive scholarship -- such as Nathaniel Bacon, Roger Williams, and Andrew Jackson -- stressed the lawlessness, intolerance, and demagoguery of these figures.³³ Moreover, traditional "enemies" of progressive history -- the John Winthrops, Alexander Hamiltons, and John D. Rockefellers -- received more sympathetic interpretations by consensus era historians.³⁴ Indeed, although there were exceptions, post-progressive historians often scorned America's "populist" elements while embracing the more "conservative" figures of the past.

As Jesse Lemisch claimed, by offering "celebrations of the past," consensus historians formulated their historical interpretations with a

³¹ John Higham, "Beyond Consensus: The Historian as Moral Critic," p. 613.

³² Ibid, p. 613.

³³ Ibid, pp. 613-14. For examples of such "conservative" scholarship see Allen Simpson's "How Democratic Was Roger Williams," *William and Mary Quaterly* XIII (January 1956) and Wilcomb E. Washburn's *The Governor and the Rebel: A History of Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia* (Chapel Hill, 1957).

³⁴ See, Edmund S. Morgan's *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (Boston: Little Brown, 1958), Broadus Mitchell's *Alexander Hamilton, Youth to Maturity, 1755-1788* (New York: Macmillan 1957), and Allan Nevins' *Study in Power: John D. Rockefeller*, 2 volumes (New York: Scribner, 1953).

considerable degree of present-mindedness.³⁵ However, consensus history, in general, rejected progressive assumptions that history should be studied in order to facilitate contemporary change; instead, the presentism of consensus historians developed out of the desire to preserve American institutions and traditions, particularly in light of the apparent threat of Soviet Communism. As Boorstin (a Marxist in the 1930s) described such consensus methodology while testifying before HUAC in 1953: "I do feel the most effective way to fight communism is -- the one effective way in which I may have the competence is by helping people to understand the virtues of our institutions and their special values as these emerged from our history, and I have tried to do that."³⁶

In his presidential address to the American Historical Association in 1950, Conyers Read elaborated upon such presentist motivations. Entitled, "The Social Responsibilities of the Historian," Read's paper argued that the post-war years marked "an age of transition from laissez-faire to a planned society in which we will either be ruled by a dictatorship or by a government democratically controlled." Read called upon historians to dedicate themselves to the latter. He contended that, "Total war, whether it be hot or cold, enlists everyone and calls upon everyone to assume his part. The Historian is no freer from this obligation than the physicist." Read urged historians not to dwell upon past tensions and divisions but instead to "recognize certain fundamental values as beyond dispute. For these values

³⁵ Jesse Lemisch, On Active Service in War and Peace: Politics and Ideology in the American Historical Profession (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1975)

³⁶ Cited from Lemisch's On Active Service in War and Peace, p. 67.

we must define as precisely as may be and must be defended against all assaults, historical or otherwise."³⁷

In sum, consensus historians challenged the themes, theses, and purposes of progressive history. Where progressive historians saw conflict, consensus historians found cohesiveness; where progressive historians stressed the divisions bred by economic and democratic interests, consensus historians posited a unique, all-embracing American liberalism; where progressive historians allied themselves with mass democracy, consensus historians distrusted mass movements; and, where progressive historians trumpeted the need for change and reform, consensus historians often sought the preservation and perpetuation of American institutions. Such differences resided in the fact that both progressive and consensus historiography reflected the particular historical moments that produced them. As Richard Pells argued, after World War II, "when perpetual social strife no longer seemed quite so laudable," American historians "reinforced the notion that the current vitality of the United States flowed from its distinctive environment and traditions."³⁸ While some consensus historians found the continuities of American history repugnant, most took pride in their nation's past.

In all, the early post-war years marked a time of consensus, of conservative liberalism, and of anti-communism. Nonetheless, historians have pointed out that despite rejections of Marx and Beard, the old left, and progressivism, the 1950s fostered the origins of new left radicalism. Just below the surface of the predominant intellectual and cultural trends of the

³⁷ Conyers Read, "The Social Responsibilities of the Historian", American Historical Review, LV (January 1950) p. 282.

³⁸ Richard Pells, The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age, p. 148.

1950s lurked an uneasiness with the American way, misgivings about consensus, and anxieties about the Cold War. By the 1960s, such undercurrents blossomed into a new left which challenged the assumptions upheld by the leading post-war intellectuals. Most historians locate the origins of the new left within the work of radical nomads such as Dwight MacDonal and C. Wright Mills. They argue, furthermore, that the new left emerged as a product of the social and cultural portraits constructed by William Whyte, David Riesman, and Herbert Marcuse. While historians concede that such radical stirrings were part of the 1950s, they maintain that the early post-war years nonetheless lacked radical attacks upon American political, economic, and diplomatic institutions. As Richard Pells concluded, "nothing better illustrates the intimate connection between the two decades that the extent to which the radicalism of the 1960s was primarily cultural rather than political."³⁹ However, such conclusions overlook the work of William Appleman Williams.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 403.

Chapter III - The Work of A Revisionist Historian

Although neglected by most intellectual historians of the post-war era, William Appleman Williams produced his most important and influential work during the 1950s and 1960s. Between the publication of his first book, Russian-American Relations, in 1952 and The Roots of the Modern American Empire in 1969, he wrote 4 books, 37 articles, 7 book reviews and edited a two volume series on the history of American diplomacy. With these publications, Williams developed the fundamental ideas of his career. He established his national reputation as a radical, revisionist historian by identifying and attacking the United States as an imperialist power, by deploring the inequalities and alienation bred from corporate capitalism, and by advocating socialism.

What follows is a survey Williams' revisionism as it developed during the initial post-war decades. This is not an analytical chapter. Rather, the following pages introduce Williams' major arguments as they appeared chronologically from 1952 to 1969. In doing so, this chapter illustrates the fact that his scholarship was, in large part, a product of the 1950s. It traces, moreover, the evolution of a strand of new left radicalism through the "conservative" 1950s and into the "radical" 1960s. Furthermore, these pages provide an overview of Williams' work that is necessary for an analysis that places Williams within each of the progressive, consensus, and new left traditions of American historiography.

William Appleman Williams' professional career began in 1950 with the completion of his doctoral dissertation, "Raymond Robins and Russian-

American Relations: 1917-1938."¹ The study examined the career of Robins, a progressive politician who served as a member of the Red Cross Commission in Russia during the Bolshevik revolution and advocated American recognition of the Soviet Union during the 1920s. In this work, Williams introduced a core of arguments that, once refined and developed, he presented in his first book, American-Russian Relations: 1781-1947.²

American-Russian Relations argued that throughout the nineteenth century the United States and Russia shared amicable relations. This changed however during the 1890s when the United States attempted to establish the "open door" in China. According to Williams, American leaders deemed Russia as "the principal enemy" to their plans of establishing economic access to the Far East.³ Such an assumption was "basically unsound" he explained, for "at no time" did Russia present "serious" competition "in the markets of either China or Manchuria." Anti-Russian sentiments, moreover, led the United States to support Japan in the Russo-Japanese war. This decision resulted in the "failure of a policy designed to pre-empt Asia as an American market," for the war upset the balance of power in the region by expanding Japanese influence in Manchuria and catapulting Russia towards revolution.⁴ Williams concluded that a combination of "tragic" elements -- America's determination to establish economic control of Asian markets and an unwavering "Russophobia" among presidential administrations -- guided American-Russian relations into the twentieth-century.

¹ William Appleman Williams, "Raymond Robins and Russian-American Relations: 1917-1938, Phd. Dissertation (The University of Wisconsin, 1950).

² William Appleman Williams, Russian-American Relations (New York: Rinehart, 1952).

³ Williams, American-Russian Relations, p. 42.

⁴ Ibid, p. 47.

Any chance for the United States to develop a constructive relationship with Russia, he continued, was lost in 1917. According to Williams, the Bolshevik Revolution turned anti-Russian sentiments into "a bitter antagonism toward Soviet-Russia."⁵ First of all, foreign policy makers -- in particular, Woodrow Wilson, Charles Evans Hughes and Herbert Hoover -- shared a common "disdain for the economic system of the Soviet Union" and condemned Bolshevism as morally reprehensible.⁶ Furthermore, these leaders continued to perceive the Soviet Union as the primary threat to the United States' economic interests in China. This resulted in the Wilson administration's attempt to destroy the Bolshevik regime by supporting Russia's counter-revolutionary forces and committing American troops to Siberia. Failing to undermine the consolidation of communist power, Wilson adopted a policy of non-recognition -- the hallmark of American-Russian relations throughout the 1920s.

Although the United States formally recognized the Soviet Union in 1933, Williams still regarded America's Soviet policies throughout the 1930s as "tragic." He argued that the Roosevelt administration never sought "meaningful collaboration with the Soviet Union."⁷ According to Williams, Roosevelt could have, by strengthening diplomatic and economic ties with the Soviets, countered the expansion and aggression of Japan and Germany in the years leading up to the Second World War. However, blinded by ideology and convinced that the Soviet Union remained the primary threat to the open door in China, American leaders failed to assert the leadership missing among allied powers during the rise of fascism in the 1930s.

⁵ Ibid, p. 177.

⁶ Ibid, p. 229.

⁷ Ibid, p. 254.

In the final chapter of American-Russian Relations, Williams analyzed the diplomacy of the Second World War and the initial years of the Cold War. He found the Roosevelt administration guilty of not fully cooperating with Stalin during the war. By promising, yet not providing either a second front or a post-war loan, Roosevelt exacerbated Soviet suspicions of the West. Both the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, furthermore, failed to acknowledge the Soviet Union's "minimum security demands" in Eastern Europe.⁸ Instead of granting Stalin a "sphere of interest" on his western border, the United States, irrationally fearing the spread of communism, resorted to the policy of containment. This, Williams concluded, capped a half-century of inflexible, disingenuous, and ultimately, ineffective policies towards Russia.

In all, Russian-American Relations introduced a core of arguments that Williams elaborated upon throughout his career. First, he stressed the primacy of economic factors in determining foreign policy. Williams located the origins of modern diplomacy in the 1890s when American leaders formulated the "open-door" policy as a means to stimulate a depressed economy through exports. Subsequently, the United States pursued foreign policies in order to sustain and expand American economic activity. Therefore, the inter-war period, contrary to historical orthodoxy, was not a time of isolationism; rather, expansion through the pursuit of international markets characterized American diplomacy between the wars. This significantly restricted negotiations with the Soviet Union prior to, during, and following the Second World War. Finally, Williams concluded that the extension of American economic interests throughout the world forced the issues that led to the Cold War.

⁸ Ibid, p. 263.

During the 1950s, Williams explored the theses introduced in American-Russian Relations in greater depth. Although the twenty-two articles that he published throughout these years ranged from "Reflections on the Historiography of American Entry into World War I" to "The Historical Romance of Senator Neuberger's Election," Williams' revisionism developed around three basic themes.⁹ First, he examined the economic and ideological foundations of modern American diplomacy as they emerged in the 1890s and evolved into the twentieth century. Three articles in particular developed this theme: "Brooks Adams and American Expansion," "The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy," and "On the Restoration of Brooks Adams."¹⁰ Second, in four articles, "The Legend of Isolationism in the 1920s," "Latin America: Laboratory of American Foreign Policy in the 1920s," "China and Japan: A Challenge and a Choice in the Nineteen Twenties," and "A Note on American Foreign Policy in Europe during the 1920s," Williams attacked the myth that isolationism characterized the inter-war years. In the process, he explored the expansion of American economic power after the First World War and elaborated upon the strategies and contradictions of American diplomacy.¹¹ Third, Williams attacked America's

⁹ William Appleman Williams, "Reflections on the Historiography of American Entry into World War I," Oregon Historical Quarterly, LVII (September 1956) pp. 274-279; Williams, "The Historical Romance of Senator Neuberger's Election," Oregon Historical Quarterly, LVI (June 1955) pp. 101-105.

¹⁰ William Appleman Williams, "Brooks Adams and American Expansionism," New England Quarterly, XXV (June 1952) pp. 217-232; Williams, "The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy," Pacific Historical Review, XXIV (November 1955) pp. 379-395; Williams, "On the Restoration of Brooks Adams," Science and Society, XX (Summer 1956) pp. 247-253.

¹¹ William Appleman Williams, "The Legend of Isolationism in the 1920s," Science and Society, XVIII (Winter 1954) pp. 1-20; Williams, "Latin America: Laboratory of American Foreign Policy in the 1920s," Inter-American Affairs, 11 (Autumn 1957) pp. 3-30; Williams, "China and Japan: A Challenge and a Choice of the Nineteen Twenties," Pacific

Cold War policies in a number of articles published in *The Nation*.¹² Within the pages of this political weekly, he held the United States responsible for instigating the Cold War and forcing the Soviet Union to pursue repressive domestic and international policies.

Overall, with the articles that he published following American-Russian Relations, Williams developed the component parts for a synthesis of contemporary American foreign policy. He presented this synthesis in his most famous book, The Tragedy of American Diplomacy.¹³

Like Williams' previous publications, Tragedy located the origins of modern American diplomacy in the 1890s. During this "crucial decade," Williams wrote, "Americans developed a broad consensus in favor of an expansionist foreign policy."¹⁴ This was the result of two primary factors. First of all, in reaction to the "panic of 1893," business leaders, politicians, and intellectuals concluded that foreign markets were essential to absorb surplus manufactured goods and to provide raw materials for American factories. Second, most Americans, according to Williams, understood the "economic and social upheavals" of the 1890s in relation to Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis. American leaders recognized the "implicit" recommendation in Turner's assertion that the United States' democratic ideals and traditions were products of the western frontier, and therefore, sought to sustain

Historical Review, XXVI (August 1957) pp. 259-279; Williams, "A Note on American Foreign Policy in Europe in the 1920s," Science and Society, XVII (Winter 1958) pp. 1-20.

¹² For example, see William Appleman Williams, "Moscow Peace Drive: Victory for Containment?," The Nation, 177 (July 11, 1953) pp. 28-30; Williams, "Cold War Perspectives -- A Historical Fable," The Nation, 180 (May 1955) pp. 458-461; Williams, "Babbit's New Fables," The Nation, 182 (January 7, 1956) pp. 3-6; Williams, "Great Boomerang: The Irony of Containment," The Nation, 182 (May 5, 1956) pp. 376-379; Williams, "Taxing for Peace," The Nation, 184 (January 19, 1957) p. 53; Williams, "The American Century, 1941-1957," The Nation, 188 (February 21, 1959) pp. 149-153.

¹³ William Appleman Williams, The Tragedy of American Diplomacy (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1959).

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 29.

democracy "by turning abroad for new frontiers."¹⁵ Overall, Williams concluded, these beliefs -- that prosperity and democracy depended upon the expansion of foreign markets abroad -- defined the worldview or "Weltanschauung" for generations of American foreign policy makers, from Theodore Roosevelt to John Foster Dulles.

Foregoing traditional forms of imperialism, Williams continued, the United States pursued foreign markets through what he described as "imperial anti-colonialism."¹⁶ John Hay's Open Door Notes of 1899 established this unique approach to empire. Based upon "free trade" and equal access to markets, the open door "was designed to establish the conditions under which America's preponderant economic power would extend the American system...without the embarrassment and inefficiency of traditional colonialism."¹⁷ Beginning in the 1890s, the United States applied the open door first in the Far East, then in Central and South America, the Middle East, and, by the end of the Second World War, throughout the world.

Although the strategy for pursuing an "informal empire" developed in the initial decades of the twentieth century, the 1920s marked "the coming of age of the open door policy."¹⁸ Williams attributed the maturation of American foreign policy to Herbert Hoover's "concept of a co-operative capitalistic economy."¹⁹ As Secretary of Commerce between 1921 and 1928, Hoover sought to rationalize America's industrial economy by establishing "a harmony of interests" between government, big business, and labor. This corporate organization facilitated the internationalization of American

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 11.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 23.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 37.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 80.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 95.

business. It coordinated the legislation, research, and capital necessary to promote overseas economic expansion. Moreover, American leaders applied these corporatist beliefs "to the world scene." They sought a "community of ideals, interests, and purposes" with other industrialized nations in order to promote and maintain the international peace and stability required for free trade.²⁰

Unfortunately, Williams continued, the open door expansion of the United States embodied a number of contradictions that created misguided policies with tragic consequences. First of all, combining ignorance with arrogance and moral self-righteousness (a combination bred from Christianity and an unwavering faith in nineteenth-century liberalism), American leaders believed that the open door would promote democracy, self-determination, and freedom throughout the world. However, the United States' corporate expansion, more often than not, subverted such lofty objectives -- particularly in "underdeveloped" nations. Pointing to Cuba, Mexico, China, the Philippines, and a number of Central and South American countries, Williams illustrated how the open door created dollar-dominated markets that exacerbated disparities of wealth, depleted natural resources, and stunted economic diversification.

Furthermore, because the open door depended upon peace and stability, the United States assumed an "essentially conservative character" and sought "to preserve the existing order" amidst the "broad revolutionary challenges" of the twentieth-century.²¹ This took the form of supporting counter-revolutionary groups in "frontier countries" with economic and military aid and at times led to direct armed interventions by the United

²⁰ Ibid, p. 84.

²¹ Ibid, p. 83.

States. Ironically, Williams pointed out, the economic impact of the open door only exacerbated revolutionary situations throughout the world. American leaders therefore continually struggled to counter the realities bred by their own policies. The end result was "tragic", for in order to protect the open door the United States was too often forced to undermine the self-determination, welfare, and freedom of foreign nations.

Williams contended, moreover, that the United State's pursuit of the open door undermined any chance of developing a constructive relationship with the Soviet Union. Foreign policy makers, in addition to fearing the revolutionary potential of communism, perceived state socialism as the antithesis to their objectives of free and open markets. The United States initially sought to isolate the Soviet Union through the cordon sanitaire in Eastern Europe and non-recognition. Unfortunately, non-recognition limited American policy options. This was most evident during the 1930s, when, even after formally recognizing the Soviet Union, the United States hesitated to work with the Russians in order to counter and perhaps contain the expansion of German National Socialism and Japanese militarism.

Finally, Williams concluded that the United States' desire to extend the open door after World War II instigated the Cold War. America entered the Second World War ("the war for the American frontier") to protect its informal empire from fascist aggression. Following the war, American leaders intended to re-establish and further the open door throughout the entire world. The Roosevelt and Truman administrations, fearing the return of depression, considered this necessary in order to sustain war-time levels of production, and to thus insure prosperity and protect democracy. The United States was therefore unwilling to accept the extension of Soviet power into Eastern Europe. After attempting to force the open door upon Russia with

economic and atomic power, the Truman administration resorted to containment and subsequently initiated the Cold War.

In the final chapters of Tragedy, Williams summarized the failures of the open door and provided advice for a new American foreign policy. He contended that, in order to avoid further unrest in the developing world and, more urgently, to prevent nuclear war, the United States needed to replace the "Weltanschauung" of the open door with the "conception...that America's political and economic well-being depend" not upon expansion, but rather "the rational and equitable use of its own human and material resources at home and in interdependent co-operation with all other peoples of the world."²² Such a new world view would promote self-determination and freedom and, moreover, facilitate a "relaxation of the Cold War" by encouraging an American-Soviet "detente." "Once free from its myopic concentration on the Cold War," Williams concluded, "the United States could come to grips with the central problem of reordering its own society...so that the labor and leisure of its own citizens are invested with creative meaning and purpose."²³

Following the publication of Tragedy, Williams turned his attention to American expansion prior to the 1890s. He had provided cursory summaries of the colonial and early national roots of contemporary foreign policy in both American-Russian Relations and Tragedy. Moreover, he traced the expansion of the United States throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in The Shaping of American Diplomacy (1956), a two volume set of foreign policy documents and articles. In an article that appeared just prior to

²² Ibid, pp. 209-210.

²³ Ibid, p. 211.

the publication of Tragedy, "The Age of Mercantilism: An Interpretation of the American Political Economy 1763-1828," Williams introduced the first chapter for a generalized overview of expansion through the entire American experience -- an accomplishment completed in 1961 with the publication The Contours of American History.²⁴

Contours located the origins of the United States in British mercantilism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Williams understood mercantilism as "a corporate organization of society" where the "state had an obligation to serve society by accepting and discharging the responsibilities for the general welfare."²⁵ The Earl of Shaftesbury exemplified this mercantilist commitment to community. However, Williams stressed, "the weltanschauung of mercantilism" included the belief that "the chief way for a nation to promote or achieve its own wealth and happiness was to take it away from some other country."²⁶ These fundamental precepts -- corporate responsibility sustained by expansion through imperialism -- took hold in the American colonies and subsequently defined "the attitudes, assumptions and ideas" of the founding fathers.²⁷

According to Williams, mercantilism guided the development of the United States from independence until 1828. Throughout this period, American leaders remained committed to "the morality of a corporate society and the political economy of a balanced mercantilist state."²⁸ Such mercantilist ideals were "generally accepted" in every region of America.

²⁴ William Appleman Williams, "The Age of Mercantilism: An Interpretation of the American Political Economy, 1763-1828," The Williams and Mary Quarterly, XV (October 1958) pp. 419-437; Williams, The Contours of American History (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1961).

²⁵ Williams, The Contours of American History, p. 41.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 41.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 115.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 99.

These beliefs forged responsive and responsible state governments; moreover, they created a national constitution that equipped the federal government with the legislative power to provide "the various things wanted by the farmer and the mechanic as well as by the landed and commercial gentry."²⁹ Unfortunately, Williams continued, such admirable characteristics were offset by two factors. First, mercantilism was based upon private property and therefore created a society stratified by inequitable distributions of wealth. Furthermore, the United States increasingly came to rely upon frontier expansion in order to underwrite prosperity and thus lighten corporate responsibility. In the decades following the American Revolution, the corporate ideal of mercantilism devolved into "the thesis that wealth and welfare hinged upon expansion."³⁰ Williams concluded that this facet of mercantilism "weakened the sense of community and made it difficult to establish a check on private and group property interests that undercut the general welfare."³¹

In the years following the election of Andrew Jackson, "laissez-nous faire" emerged as the predominant "Weltanschauung" in the United States. Williams argued that during "the age of laissez-nous faire" Americans rejected corporate government, and instead, believed that "individualized free competition in an open and fair society would produce specific happiness and the general welfare."³² The Western frontier played a central role in laissez-nous faire, for it supplied a source of economic opportunity and space for economic growth. According to Williams, this was unfortunate. For one thing, western expansion dislocated native cultures. Moreover, the frontier

²⁹ Ibid, p. 123.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 232.

³¹ Ibid, p. 189.

³² Ibid, p. 246.

further undermined corporate ideals by promoting self-interest over social responsibility. And, Williams continued, laissez-faire engendered the Civil War, first because unbridled expansion forced a clash over slavery and state's rights, and second because marketplace ideals left American leaders, particularly in the North, unable to compromise and work together. "Lacking a creative vision of community," Williams argued, "laissez faire was weak in an essential respect: it provided no basis upon which to deal with evil in a non-violent way. Its solutions were persistently aggressive and acquisitive."³³

The "weltanschauung of laissez-faire" nonetheless persevered through the decades following the Civil War. Its adherence to cut-throat competition facilitated industrialization. However, the inefficiency of industrial laissez-faire led to increasingly more extensive periods of depression and social unrest. In the 1890s, American leaders concluded that in order to save capitalism "the political economy had to be extensively planned, controlled, and coordinated through the institution of the large corporation."³⁴ The Republican victory over the "narrowly laissez-faire" Democrats in the presidential election of 1896 signaled the political triumph of this belief and thus initiated "the age of corporate capitalism."³⁵ During this final era of history, Williams concluded, the corporation became the "most powerful element" in the American "system," one which "crossed every economic, political, and social boundary, affected every branch of government, and permeated every aspect of the individual's life."³⁶

³³ Ibid, p. 285.

³⁴ Ibid, pp. 350-351.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 343.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 346.

The development of corporate capitalism was guided by what Williams referred to as the "Weltanschauung of the progressive movement."³⁷ Throughout the initial decades of the twentieth century, progressive politicians, labor leaders, intellectuals, businessmen, and religious leaders "remained loyal to private property and accepted the basic features of the corporation order."³⁸ The programs initiated by progressives, from the Social Gospel to the New Deal, were attempts to sustain the corporate system with piecemeal reform. Williams regarded this as negative, for such neo-mercantilist "paternalism" perpetuated tremendous disparities of wealth, alienation, rash consumerism, and conformity. Furthermore, the "progressive weltanschauung" assumed that corporate prosperity could be sustained only through expansion. Repeating the arguments presented in The Tragedy of American Diplomacy, Williams traced the evolution of this belief and the "tragic" policies that it engendered from the "open door notes" to the Cold War.

Overall, Williams argued that, from the "age of mercantilism" to "the age of corporate capitalism," the United States had sustained a capitalist society with perpetual expansion. This fundamental "contour" was problematic for a number of reasons. By relying upon "expansion as the means of controlling faction and at the same time providing some measure of welfare," Americans escaped the responsibility of creating a "democratic and equitable, straightforward, and loving...community."³⁹ Instead, the frontier supported an oligarchic order based upon private property, inequality, and alienation. The expansion of the United States, moreover, dislocated Native American cultures, oppressed indigenous peoples

³⁷ Ibid, p. 449.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 401.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 489.

throughout the world, and recklessly pushed the world towards nuclear annihilation. Williams concluded by asserting that the United States needed to escape the "frontier-expansionist" legacy through "the creation of a socialist commonwealth."⁴⁰ "That opportunity," he wrote, "is the only real frontier available to Americans in the second half of the 20th century."⁴¹

Williams followed the publication of The Contours of American History with two considerably shorter books -- The United States, Cuba, and Castro (1962) and The Great Evasion (1964).⁴² In the former, Williams used the "open door" synthesis to explain the Cuban Revolution and urged American leaders to pursue a rapprochement with Castro. Ultimately, he suggested using Cuba "to effect a general breakthrough on controlled and inspected disarmament" with the Soviets.⁴³ In the latter, Williams, as one critic claimed, "gained his reputation as a radical" by espousing the "relevance" of Karl Marx to the United States. In doing so, Williams explored the domestic side of American expansion and elaborated upon his hopes for a decentralized, socialist future.⁴⁴

According to Williams, Marx was pertinent to the American experience for three primary reasons. First of all, Marx had claimed that capitalist nations, in order to expand the marketplace, pursued imperialist foreign policies. As Williams argued in his previous publications, "such

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 488.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 488.

⁴² William Appleman Williams, The United States, Cuba, and Castro (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1962); Williams, The Great Evasion: An Essay on the Contemporary Relevance of Karl Marx and On the Wisdom of Admitting the Heretic into the Dialogue about America's Future (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964).

⁴³ Williams, The United States, Cuba, and Castro, p. 171.

⁴⁴ David W. Noble, "William Appleman Williams: Universal Capitalism, Universal Marxism, or American Democracies, 1955-80." p. 133.

expansion...is directly and explicitly relevant to an understanding of American foreign relations."⁴⁵ Specifically, Marx had described the three forms of imperialism practiced by the United States: colonialism ("the seizure or conquest of empty, or lightly populated, real estate and the subsequent transfer of other people into the area"), administrative colonialism ("the effective control by an outside minority through force and the threat of force of alien territory and population"), and economic imperialism (where "a backward or undeveloped region or society" is dominated by foreign capital).⁴⁶

Second, Marx's assertion that capitalism "created increasing proletarianization and increasing misery" was applicable to the United States.⁴⁷ For one thing, American foreign policy had "increased unemployment, underemployment, and other economic and social and psychological characteristics of misery" throughout the developing world.⁴⁸ Domestically, Williams continued, there were several indications of economic misery. He maintained that the distribution of income in the United States had not changed since the 1920s, the purchasing power of the middle class and lower income families had not increased dramatically, and the majority of farmers, African-Americans, and women suffered continued economic discrimination. And, despite post-war economic growth, there remained "between 35 and 50 million human beings who exist under conditions of severe deprivation and outright poverty."⁴⁹ What appeared as post-war prosperity and affluence, moreover, was tied directly to Cold War

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 32.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 40.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 56.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 57.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 23.

defense budgets and government subsidies; it was therefore misleading. Overall, Williams concluded that, "American capitalism has never since 1861 functioned effectively enough to decrease economic misery over any significant period of time, save as it has been stimulated by war or cold war."⁵⁰

Finally, Williams stressed that "Marx did not define misery in exclusively economic terms."⁵¹ "The additional, and equally important, feature of misery," he pointed out, "concerned the alienation of man -- socially from other men, individually from himself, and historically from his own true nature."⁵² Alienation was a predominant characteristic in American society: the corporation bred uniformity; "cybernated production" (the increasing mechanization and automation of industry) created a dehumanizing workplace; private property sustained social divisions while promoting "uncreative" consumerism. According to Williams these realities fostered juvenile delinquency, "mental disturbances," and "sexual promiscuity;" in general, they created "egoistic" Americans who were politically apathetic and anti-social. Overall, American capitalism, in accordance Marxist criticisms, failed "to create and sustain an ethical and equitable community."⁵³

As he did in Contours, Williams concluded that the United States needed to transcend the failures of its past and present by pursuing a socialist future. In the final chapter of The Great Evasion, Williams elaborated upon this assertion. He maintained that, first, Americans had to discontinue equating private property with freedom. "The point is not that we must

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 83.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 72.

⁵² Ibid, p. 101.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 124.

abandon our possessions," he wrote, "but rather that we must re-define the possessions as incidental to our functions as humans."⁵⁴ Next, Williams continued, it was necessary for the United States to "undertake the planned, controlled, and co-ordinated movement into full cybernated production."⁵⁵ This would not only "reduce property to an incidental," but also increase efficiency, and foster equitable distributions of wealth. Because "a true community is more easily obtainable...in small rather than in large units," Americans needed to "decentralize" the existing political and economic systems. Williams argued that this could be done by dividing the states into "eight to ten" regional communities "established as economic and political units grounded in their own co-opertively owned and controlled cybernated productive systems."⁵⁶ In all, Williams concluded, this form of decentralized socialism was the only hope for attaining a true American community.

In the years following the publication of The Great Evasion, Williams returned to the study of American expansion. He went on sabbatical during the academic year 1967-68 to research and write The Roots of the Modern American Empire. In this, his final major contribution to American historiography, Williams argued that the "open-door" policy (and therefore, contemporary foreign policy in general) was the product of "the fundamental assumptions, analyses, and beliefs" of America's "agrarian majority" during the nineteenth century.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 174.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 174.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 175.

⁵⁷ William Appleman Williams, The Roots of the Modern American Empire: A Study of the Growth and Shaping of Social Consciousness in a Marketplace Society (New York: Random House, 1969).

The arguments presented in Roots were adaptations of Williams' previous insights into American expansion. The movement across the North American continent during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was instigated and led by agrarians in search of "more land to sustain and advance their commercial agriculture." Moreover, farmers, "individually and collectively, large and small," demanded "overseas markets to absorb the surpluses they produced."⁵⁸ "Agriculturists" became increasingly more "articulate" and "militant" exponents of expansion abroad in the decades following the Civil War. After agricultural exports helped pull the United States out of depression in the 1870s, "metropolitan leaders" began to realize "the importance of the overseas market in the functioning of the entire economic system."⁵⁹ By the 1890s, "the traditional farm emphasis on overseas expansion as the strategic solution to the nation's economic and social problems" had contributed to the "Weltanschauung" of industrial, political, and intellectual leaders. Subsequently, in light of the panic of 1893, the United States embarked upon an aggressive foreign policy in pursuit of international markets.

Furthermore, Williams argued that the "social consciousness" that accompanied American expansion had agricultural origins. Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, an integral component of the expansionist world view was formulated at the grass-roots level by various agricultural spokesman" well before the 1890s. Throughout the initial decades of the nineteenth-century, American farmers rejected mercantilism and accepted "the principles of the political economy of laissez-faire" as defined by Adam Smith.⁶⁰ "Agricultural businessmen" therefore equated freedom, democracy,

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 50.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 21.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 60.

and individuality with "a free marketplace economy."⁶¹ According to Williams, such an equation deterred American farmers from pursuing radical political and social change during periods of depression; instead, overseas expansion abroad became the answer to economic stagnation at home. Furthermore, agriculturists committed to the self-determination of the marketplace "fought hard to make certain that American expansion was not institutionalized in the form of traditional colonialism."⁶² "The marketplace conception of the world" led farmers to believe that the expansion of American capitalism would nurture freedom, prosperity, and democracy throughout the world.⁶³ This belief, Williams concluded, became the fundamental, tragic, assumption behind America's "open door empire."

Overall, The Roots of the Modern American Empire marked the culmination of Williams' first two decades as a professional historian. In an autobiographical introduction to Roots, he reflected upon his career to date. Beginning as a graduate student in the late 1940s, Williams had explored Russian-American relations between the First and Second World War. He soon realized that this period did not fully explain "Russian-American involvement" and therefore expanded his study to include the nineteenth century and the years following the Second World War. Subsequently, Williams concluded that the 1890s marked the beginning of modern American diplomacy. Following American-Russian Relations, he explored American foreign policy through the twentieth century, and pieced together the "open door" synthesis presented in Tragedy. Williams discovered in the course of this study that the economic and ideological components of the

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 15.

⁶² Ibid, p. 45.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 450.

open door predated the 1890s. That realization inspired an examination of expansion through the entire history of the United States, and resulted in the publication of The Contours of American History.

The conclusions that Williams made during his first decade as a historian led him to advocate alternatives to "marketplace expansion." In the years following Tragedy, he turned to Karl Marx and argued that the only way the United States could transcend its imperialist legacy was through massive economic, political, and social restructuring and the development of decentralized, socialist communities.

Finally, during the 1960s, Williams "came to see the expansionist outlook that was entertained and acted upon by metropolitan American leaders during and after the 1890s was actually a crystallization in industrial form of an outlook that had been developed in agricultural terms" during the nineteenth-century.⁶⁴ This conclusion led to The Roots of the Modern American Empire and signaled the end to Williams' most influential years as a professional historian.

Throughout the years following Roots, Williams continued to publish extensively.⁶⁵ The work he produced during the 1970s and into the 1980s, however, failed to achieve the notoriety of his previous publications. For one

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. xv.

⁶⁵ During the 1970s and 1980s Williams published two new books, America Confronts a Revolutionary World: 1776-1976 (New York: Morrow, 1976) and Empire as a Way of Life: An Essay on the Causes and Character of America's Present Predicament Along with a Few Thoughts about an Alternative (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). In addition, he published a series of book reviews in Some Presidents: Wilson to Nixon (New York: New York Review, 1972) a volume of eighteen short works as History as a Way of Learning (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974) and a textbook entitled Americans in A Changing World: A History of the United States in the Twentieth Century (New York: Harper and Row, 1978). Furthermore, Williams published a number of articles and even worked briefly as a columnist for the Salem Statesman Journal and the Portland Oregonian.

thing, Williams largely reiterated the theses that he established and developed during his first decades as a historian. While working at Oregon State, he became less of a research historian and, instead, focused his career upon teaching undergraduates. Williams' later publications thus continued to apply the open door synthesis to American diplomatic history, to attack the United States' imperial worldview, to condemn the shortcomings of corporate capitalism, and to promote loosely defined forms of decentralized socialism. Overall, during the final years of his career, Williams relied upon the arguments that established him as an innovative, revisionist historian in the 1950s and 1960s.

Moreover, Williams' later writings were less refined, less historical, and more polemical than his earlier publications. His indictments of American imperialism, as one critic claimed, turned increasingly "personal" and "pedantic."⁶⁶ As Williams concluded in his final book, Empire as A Way of Life, "Whatever its benefits or rewards, empire is expensive. It costs a very great deal of money. It kills a large number of human beings. It confines and progressively throttles spontaneity and imagination. It substitutes paranoid togetherness for community. It limits the play of the mind. And even, at the rudimentary marketplace level it becomes self-defeating."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ John Lukacs, "Review of Empire as a Way of Life," New Republic, 31 (Oct. 11, 1980) p. 32.

⁶⁷ Williams, Empire as a Way of Life, p. 221.

Chapter IV - William Appleman Williams: Progressive, Consensus, New Left Historian

William Appleman Williams was one of the intellectual godfathers of the new left. With the work that he produced during the 1950s and 1960s, Williams distinguished himself from the predominant intellectual trends of the 1950s and helped nurture the cultural and intellectual radicalism that erupted during the 1960s. His work departed from the conservative liberalism of the early post-war era, spurred a wave of revisionism within the field of diplomatic history, and inspired a young generation of radicals who came of age in the 1960s.

Williams is, as such, an appropriate subject for the intellectual historian. The fact that he is neglected by most intellectual and cultural historians obscures a telling example of how a strand of new left radicalism developed through the decades following the Second World War. Williams is particularly relevant to the task of breaking down distinctions between the "conservative" 1950s and the "radical" 1960s. Simply, his work exemplifies continuity between the post-war decades. Williams' scholarship embodied a major source of dissent within the historical profession that was established in the 1950s and evolved through the 1960s. In fact, Williams developed the majority of the arguments that defined his career between 1950, when he received his doctorate, and 1961, when he published The Contours of American History. In all, his scholarship illustrates what Maurice Isserman referred to as "the continual process of unfolding" between the initial post-war decades.¹

¹ Maurice Isserman, If I Had a Hammer, p. xiii.

When examined from an intellectual historian's perspective, moreover, Williams' revisionism transcends the broad characterization of, simply, new left. His work was informed by several of the themes, theses, and methodologies of both progressive and consensus historiography. Williams pioneered a new left perspective on history; yet his scholarship incorporated both the progressive and consensus traditions.

Drawing upon the information provided in the previous three chapters, the following pages explore Williams' relation to progressive, consensus, and new left historiography. This chapter identifies aspects of his work that are characteristic of these different schools of thought. It does not pretend, however, to provide a comprehensive analysis of Williams' revisionism. One could explore each of Williams' influences and arguments, dissect their sub-arguments, and find a near endless amount of correlations to progressive, consensus, and new left history.² Such a task transcends the scope of this study. Instead, the following pages explore the most relevant facets of Williams' career and scholarship. In doing so, they highlight the nature of one historian and provide insight into the origins of the new left.

Williams as Progressive Historian

William Appleman Williams was, in several respects, an heir to the progressive school of American historiography. Although he began his training as a professional historian in 1946, a time when the consensus school had displaced progressivism, Williams' scholarship upheld and embodied many of the fundamental assumptions of progressive thought. In particular,

² Such an examination is particularly challenging in regards to influences. An attempt to highlight all of the people that informed Williams' scholarship is an assignment approaching the impossible, for Williams acknowledged virtually everyone with whom he came into contact during these decades, from helpful librarians to Spinoza.

the present-mindedness that guided all of his major publications, his emphasis on economic factors in determining history, the implicit isolationism that colored his attacks on foreign policy, his sympathy for the "democratic elements" of the past, and his reliance upon Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, distinguished Williams as a neo-progressive historian. A number of factors shaped Williams' progressivism -- primarily, his upbringing in Atlantic, Iowa, his education at the University of Wisconsin, and his respect for and emulation of progressive historian, Charles Beard.

Born and bred in Atlantic, Iowa and educated at the University of Wisconsin, Williams' intellectual development was the product of middle-west, progressive traditions. Henry Steele Commager described this region of "the American mind" as the "middle border" -- an intellectual environment that "produced Lester Ward and Frederick Turner, Vernon Parrington, Charles Beard, Simon Patten, John R. Commons, and so many others that broke through the neat patterns of thought which the wise men of the East designed for them."³ This "middle border" shaped Williams' intellectual consciousness. For one thing, growing up in Iowa during the depression, he developed an affinity with the hardships endured by the American farmer. He thus realized at an early age the tensions between the "people" and the "interests" and allied himself with the former. Atlantic, moreover, represented to Williams a truly democratic community, one distinct from the urban centers of the East Coast. Finally, as Joseph Siracusa has speculated, during his youth, "Williams imbibed the agricultural community's

³ Henry Steele Commager, The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Character Since the 1890s (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950) p. 237.

traditional noninterventionist outlook, which almost always has viewed the wisdom of political overseas entanglements with considerable suspicion."⁴

The kinship with progressivism that Williams' "middle border" background nurtured was furthered at the University of Wisconsin. There, he trained at the center of mid-west, progressive thought and learned history from a number of progressive historians -- most notably, Merle Curti, William B. Hesseltine, Merrill Jensen, and Fred Harvey Harrington. Although he acknowledged the influence of Madison's progressive historians upon his work, Williams associated his scholarship most clearly with the dean of progressive history, Charles Beard.

Early in his career, Williams published two articles on the life and work of Beard.⁵ Both articles defended Beard in light of criticisms leveled at the progressive in the years following the Second World War. Through these assessments, Williams presented the fundamental assumptions that guided his own approach to the study of history.⁶

Williams was drawn to Beard for a number of reasons. First, he stressed the progressive historian's commitment to the present. "Beard studied history," Williams pointed out, "to equip himself to comprehend and change his own society: to understand the direction and tempo of its movement, and to pinpoint the places at which to apply his energy and influence in an effort to modify both aspects of its development."⁷ Such

⁴ Joseph Siracusa, New Left Diplomatic Histories and Historians: The American Revisionists (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1973) p. 25.

⁵ William Appleman Williams, "A Note on Charles Austin Beard's Search for a General Theory of Causation," The American Historical Review, LXII (October 1956) pp. 59-80; Williams, "Charles Austin Beard: The Intellectual as Tory-Radical," in American Radicals: Some Problems and Personalities, ed. by Harvey Goldberg (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1957).

⁶ Moreover, Williams acknowledged his respect for Beard in The Contours of American History and in several other articles published during the 1950s.

⁷ Williams, "Charles Austin Beard: Intellectual as Tory-Radical," p. 303.

purpose of scholarship, to locate and explain the origins of contemporary problems for insight into future alternatives, was a facet not only of Beard's work, but of progressive historiography in general.⁸ And, for Williams, it was the guiding principle to the study of American history -- what he referred to in the introduction to The Contours of American History as "History as a Way of Learning." "History's great tradition," he explained, "is to help us understand ourselves and our world so that each of us individually and in conjunction with our fellow men, can formulate relevant and reasoned alternatives and become meaningful actors in making history."⁹

Moreover, Williams embraced Beard's attempt to achieve a synthesis of the entire American experience. He contended that in order to understand contemporary problems it was necessary, as Beard had done, to define the "long-term generalized" patterns of the past. Employing a defense that he used against attacks upon his own work, Williams explained that "Beard's over-all interpretations...are extremely difficult to destroy, whereas specific aspects of their analyses can be seriously modified or disproved." Such was the price of achieving synthesis. As Williams continued: "It was not that Beard ignored or monkeyed with evidence, for he was fanatically honest. But he tended, in his concern and haste to find clues for the present, to work with his hypothesis instead of from it. But for Beard specific mistakes were of far less concern than the validity of his general analysis of American history."¹⁰

Among the host of influences that contributed to Williams' scholarship, Charles Beard was, at least during the 1950s and the 1960s, the

⁸ See the analysis of progressive historiography in chapter II.

⁹ Williams, The Contours of American History, p. 19. Williams reiterated a similar philosophy of history in the introductions and conclusions to The Tragedy of American Diplomacy and The Roots of the Modern American Empire. See, respectively, "History and the Present Crises" and "Notes on the Relevance of History."

¹⁰ Williams, "Charles Austin Beard: Intellectual as Tory-Radical," p. 302.

most prominent. Every one of Williams' major publications throughout these decades sought to locate in the past the sources of contemporary problems and to use history to advocate policies and directions for the future. Furthermore, Williams attempted to achieve this objective by constructing a number of general, historical syntheses. As a graduate student in the late 1940s, he studied history in order to understand "the crises connected with the Cold War" and therefore set out to "place the Cold War in the perspective of the long sweep of Russian-American involvement."¹¹ Williams retained this initial commitment to the present throughout the early post-war decades. In Tragedy, he constructed a synthesis of twentieth-century American diplomacy in part to "prompt the United States to undertake a fundamental review and critique of its own domestic and foreign policies."¹² In Contours, he presented a general overview of American expansion as "a way of learning, a way of mustering knowledge, courage, and will to break free of the past."¹³ And, in Roots, Williams stressed the "relevance" of understanding the agricultural origins of foreign policy to "the enormous task of making sense out of our contemporary predicament, and to the work of formulating and acting on positive and creative alternatives to that unhappy situation."¹⁴

Beyond his general adherence to progressive present-mindedness, Williams' scholarship included a number of elements that paralleled the work of Beard and other progressive historians. For example, although Williams departed from Beard's economic interpretation of history in several respects, he accepted the progressive's "emphasis on the importance of

¹¹ Williams, The Roots of the Modern American Empire, p. xii.

¹² Williams, The Tragedy of American Diplomacy, p. 11.

¹³ Williams, The Contours of American History, p. 6.

¹⁴ Williams, The Roots of the Modern American Empire, p. ix.

economics" in shaping history.¹⁵ Both The Contours of American History and The Roots of the Modern American Empire were largely based upon Williams' understanding of "marketplace capitalism" and the attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs that it promoted. Both works also focused on inequitable distributions of wealth under capitalism and upheld Beard's insistence that "economic conflict and development is unending, and that it must constantly be analyzed, whatever the organization of society."¹⁶

Furthermore, Williams' analyses of diplomacy revolved around the primacy of economic factors in determining foreign policies. As Beard had done in The Idea of National Interest and The Open Door at Home, Williams stressed that American foreign policy was, to a large degree, a quest for new markets and investment opportunities abroad needed to facilitate the growth of the American economy.¹⁷ This economic determinism predominated Williams' analysis of the United States' approach to the Soviet Union in American-Russian Relations and became an integral component of his more sophisticated analyses of the "weltanschauung" of expansion presented in Tragedy, Contours, and Roots.

Williams also shared with Beard and the progressive tradition a tendency towards isolationism. Throughout American-Russian Relations, Tragedy, and Contours, Williams attacked the United States for its involvement in the armed conflicts of the twentieth-century, from the Spanish-American War to the Cold War. He praised, moreover, such "isolationists" as William Borah, Robert Lafollette, and Hiram Johnson. In

¹⁵ Williams, "A Note on Charles Austin Beard's Search for a General Theory of Causation," p. 76.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 76.

¹⁷ Charles A. Beard, The Idea of National Interest (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1934) chapters 4,5, and 7; Beard, The Open Door at Home (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1934) chapter 10.

this regard, Williams' scholarship reflected the isolationist sentiments prevalent in the mid-west between the First and Second World Wars and through the 1950s. More specifically however, he espoused the isolationism of Beard. Williams condemned, as had Beard, American leaders for pursuing foreign policies as a means to alleviate periods of depression and social unrest. And, like Beard, he advocated a reorganization of the United States' economic institutions to free America from the need for pursuing international markets.¹⁸

Beyond stressing the role of economics in history and advocating isolationism, Williams shared with the progressive tradition a commitment to the democratic process and a disdain for economic elites. He embraced Beard's attempt to "unmask in his writings the self-deceptions and public fabrications" of American politics.¹⁹ Throughout all of his major publications, moreover, Williams allied himself with those excluded from economic prosperity and political representation -- particularly, the American farmer and laborer. Furthermore, he continually trumpeted the virtues of small, representative communities as alternatives to the economically stratified, anti-democratic, American state.

In addition to his admiration for Beard and his acceptance of several progressive theses, Williams identified himself as a neo-progressive by embracing the work of Frederick Jackson Turner. Williams not only accepted Turner's frontier thesis, he based much of his career upon it. Williams' analyses of contemporary American diplomacy, his synthesis of American history, and his insights into the agricultural origins of the open door policy, were all based upon Turner's thesis that the United States' economic

¹⁸ For examples of Beard's isolationism see his The Open Door at Home, chapter 12 and A Foreign Policy for America (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1940) chapter 5.

¹⁹ Williams, "Charles Austin Beard: Intellectual as Tory-Radical," p. 299.

prosperity and democratic traditions were products of the western frontier. According to Williams, most historians overlooked the "primary importance of expansion in [Turner's] argument."²⁰ Williams, on the other hand, recognized that the term "frontier" was static and therefore misleading; it obscured "the expansionist thrust that acquired the sequence of frontiers" throughout American history."²¹ Thus, Williams understood Turner as the originator of the "frontier-expansionist" thesis which held that only continued expansion could "sustain the dynamic relationship between...prosperity, democracy, and domestic well-being and order."²²

Williams realized the importance of Turner's thesis to American diplomacy early in his career. While researching Russian-American Relations, he discovered that during the 1890s American leaders "applied the frontier-expansionist thesis to the problems of the late nineteenth and twentieth century"and subsequently established the "open-door" policy in an attempt to perpetuate American expansion beyond the North American continent.²³ In the years following Russian-American Relations, Williams explored "the role of the frontier thesis in the making of twentieth-century foreign policy."²⁴ This examination culminated with The Tragedy of American Diplomacy. Here, while researching, he realized that "Americans had thought in terms of, and had acted on, the central ideas of Turner's frontier thesis long before Turner had been born."²⁵ This conclusion inspired both The Contours of American History and The Roots of the Modern American Empire.

²⁰ Williams, The Roots of the Modern American Empire, p. xii.

²¹ Ibid, p. xiii.

²² Ibid, p. xiv.

²³ Ibid, p. xiv.

²⁴ Ibid, p. xv.

²⁵ Ibid, p. xvi.

In several important respects, Williams' scholarship of the 1950s and 1960s sustained the progressive tradition in American historiography. Williams was a middle border intellectual who studied history as a means to advocate change; he stressed the importance of economics in determining the past; he recommended isolationism as an alternative to expansionism; he sympathized with the United States' democratic elements and he attacked the inequalities bred from American capitalism. In addition, Williams based his analysis of American expansion on Turner's frontier thesis. However, while Williams' reliance upon Turner further associated his scholarship with progressive history, it also, in part, distinguished him from the progressive tradition. For Williams' "frontier-expansionist" interpretation of history embodied several characteristics shared by the consensus school of American historiography.

Williams as Consensus Historian

Although Williams embraced several progressive themes, he was, in several respects, also a consensus historian. When he arrived at the University of Wisconsin in 1948 to begin his graduate studies, progressive historiography was under attack by a young generation of consensus historians. The consensus school, spearheaded by scholars such as Daniel Boorstin, Oscar Handlin, and Louis Hartz, largely eclipsed progressive scholarship in the years following the Second World War.²⁶ Despite the fact that he studied at Wisconsin, an enclave of post-war progressivism, Williams took part in the national turn towards consensus historiography.

²⁶ See chapter II.

Like other consensus historians, Williams departed from progressive history by rejecting "the progressive paradigm."²⁷ He dismissed the assumption that perpetual conflicts between capitalist and democratic elements characterized American history. Instead, Williams stressed "the extraordinarily deep and broad economic, social, and political agreements which have characterized the overwhelming majority of policies and programs pursued in America since colonial times."²⁸ Where Daniel Boorstin linked such consensus to the inherent "givenness" of American ideals and institutions and where Louis Hartz attributed consensus to the United States' "liberal tradition," Williams found consensus in what he referred to as the "Weltanschauung" or worldview of American expansion.

Williams understood "the concept of Weltanschauung" to mean a "definition of the world combined with an explanation of how it works." "Every sane adult," he wrote in the introduction to The Contours of American History, "has such an inclusive conception of the world which cuts across and subsumes personal motives, group interests, and class ideologies."²⁹ Later in his career, Williams acknowledged that he learned about "Weltanschauungen" from "the Germans," particularly Dilthey, Hegel, and Marx.³⁰ He concluded from these thinkers that in "an organic world...separate parts are in reality always internally related to each other" and that "an ostensibly positivistic fact is in truth a set of relationships with all other facts and therefore with the whole."³¹ Working from such

²⁷ For a description of the progressive paradigm see chapter II.

²⁸ Richard Melanson, "The Social and Political Thought of William Appleman Williams," Western Political Quarterly, 31 (1978) p. 397.

²⁹ Williams, The Contours of American History, p. 20.

³⁰ William Appleman Williams, "Confessions of an Intransigent Revisionist," from A William Appleman Williams Reader, ed. by Henry Berger (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1992) p. 343.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 340.

assumptions, Williams set out early in his career to discover "a set of internal relations that would make it possible to conceptualize the organic sense of reality entertained by American policy makers (and, by indirection, by the American body politic)."³² In doing so, he pieced together what he claimed were the component parts of "America's conception of the world."³³

According to Williams, the worldview shared by most Americans embodied a combination of Turner's frontier thesis, the political and economic philosophies of Adam Smith and John Locke, and Christian morality.³⁴ He contended that, historically, Americans believed that democracy, freedom, and prosperity were contingent upon continental and international expansion. They defined these virtues, moreover, in relation to Adam Smith's "marketplace capitalism" and Lockean notions of individuality; therefore, freedom and equality were synonymous with private property, economic growth, and competition. Americans backed these beliefs and ideals with Christianity and assumed that their society and its growth and expansion were justified by God and therefore righteous. Williams concluded, overall, that throughout the eras of American history a moralistic commitment to expansion in order to nurture marketplace capitalism defined "the fundamental assumptions, analyses, and beliefs of the great majority of the people of the United States."³⁵

Based upon this understanding of an American "weltanschauung," Williams' three major publications of post-war decades, The Tragedy of American Diplomacy, The Contours of American History, and The Roots of the Modern American Empire were consensus histories. In each, particularly

³² Ibid, p. 342.

³³ Williams, The Contours of American History, p. 172.

³⁴ Williams, The Roots of the Modern American Empire, p.23.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 23.

Contours, Williams acknowledged political struggles, radical dissent, and social unrest; however, all three of these histories subverted conflict to the coalitions, shared assumptions, and compromises bred from the United States' "broad consensus on expansion."³⁶ Williams argued that, from independence to the Cold War, most Americans -- conservatives, liberals and reformers, Northerners and Southerners, Virginians and New Englanders, industrialists, agriculturalists, imperialists and so-called isolationists -- shared, in some fashion, the component parts of the expansionist worldview. In Tragedy, Williams found consensus among "all segments of American leadership" between 1890 and the 1950s, for they shared the "Weltanschauung of the open door."³⁷ Contours traced the evolution of American expansion through the "Weltanschauungen" of mercantilism, laissez-faire, and the progressive movement; "the consensus" behind the worldviews guiding these three stages of expansion, he concluded, "was impressive."³⁸ Finally, in Roots, Williams explored "the consensus on expansion that had been so largely created by agriculturalists" during the nineteenth century.³⁹

Although Williams shared with other historians in the post-war era a conception of the past that stressed consensus over conflict, his scholarship remained distinct from the predominant historiographical trends of the 1950s. Most consensus historians either celebrated or else remained ambivalent about the broad-based agreements of the past. Williams' consensus histories, on the other hand, cast scathing indictments upon American traditions, values, and beliefs. For Williams, America's worldview of expansion was nothing to praise, honor, or defend. Rather, he continually

³⁶ Ibid, p. 35.

³⁷ Williams, The Tragedy of American Diplomacy, p. 207.

³⁸ Williams, The Contours of American History, p. 270.

³⁹ Williams, The Roots of the Modern American Empire, p. 35.

stressed the alienation and inequality bred from American capitalism, the impact of American expansion upon indigenous peoples throughout the world, and the shallowness of American morality. Where Daniel Boorstin depicted consensus as a product of "genius," Williams condemned it as "tragic." Such reproach distinguished Williams from the consensus school and, moreover, established him as an early, new left historian.

Williams as New Left Historian

The new left historiography that emerged out of the 1950s and burgeoned during the 1960s defies precise definition. Like the broader intellectual and cultural radicalism of the 1960s, new left history, as Allen Matusow noted, developed "without an adequate ideological framework" and is thus best understood in terms of its radical characteristics.⁴⁰ Drawing upon the progressive and Marxist traditions, the new left rejected American liberalism and the United States' involvement in the Cold War; new left historians departed from the consensus school by recognizing and stressing the inequality, poverty, and social conflicts bred from American capitalism, the mindless consumerism, alienation and racism perpetuated by American institutions and traditions, and the imperialistic nature of American foreign policy. Moreover, the new left imbued its history with a present-mindedness aimed at "the re-education of America to make it see both past and future in a

⁴⁰ Allen J. Matusow, The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s (New York: Harper and Row, 1984) p. 309. This discussion of new left historiography is drawn primarily from the introduction to Barton Bernstein's Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), Irwin Unger's, "The 'New Left' and American History: Some Recent Trends in United States' Historiography," American Historical Review, LXXII (July 1967) and Christopher Lasch's "The Cold War, Revisited and Revisited," New York Times Magazine (January 14, 1968).

very different way, as expressions of a redeeming New Reality demanding to be realized."⁴¹

In many ways, William Appleman Williams was an early new left historian. His scholarship embodied, for one thing, several of the critical theses of new left historiography. Furthermore, a generation removed from the radicals who came of age in the 1960s, Williams inspired the work of some of the most prominent members of the new left. Finally, his revisionism not only informed and influenced students of history but also helped shape and reflected the concerns and ideals of the broader spectrum of political radicals in the sixties. According to Clifford Solway, Williams occupied "the special, soulful niche of Great Teacher -- an authentic campus hero, the kind whose work is consumed ritualistically, then discussed, solemnly and forever, over coffee and doughnuts in the morning, beer and pizza at night."⁴²

Much of what allied Williams with the progressive tradition also distinguished his scholarship, by the early 1960s, as new left. The critical present-mindedness that pervaded his work, his moralistic attack upon American institutions and traditions, and his acceptance of Beard's foreign policy criticisms, were all integral facets of new left historiography. Although he departed from the progressive thesis regarding the conflict-ridden nature of the past, an assumption upheld and expanded upon by other new left historians, Williams acted, in many ways, as an intermediary between the progressive and new left schools. In general, he sustained the essence of progressive scholarship through the initial post-war years and helped pass it on to the radicals of the 1960s.

⁴¹ Clifford Solway, "Turning History Upside Down," Saturday Review (June 20, 1970) p. 15.

⁴² Ibid, p. 62.

Williams most direct and significant contribution to the new left came in the field of diplomatic history. In American-Russian Relations and The Tragedy of American Diplomacy he presented the fundamental arguments that became standard assumptions for the new left's analyses of American foreign policy. Both texts were arguably Williams most innovative and important works, for they were written and researched in the late 1940s and 1950s -- well before the initial stirrings of new left radicalism. By depicting America as an imperialist power, stressing the role of economics in the making of foreign policy, arguing that the United States forced the issues that created the cold war, and focusing upon the impact of American policy in the underdeveloped world, American-Russian Relations and The Tragedy of American Diplomacy attacked the conventional wisdom of the 1950s regarding the foreign policies of the United States.

Williams' work resonated throughout the field of diplomatic history and nurtured a wave of revisionism during the 1960s. "It is scarcely an exaggeration," Robert Maddox wrote in a critical review, "to say that much of the existing revisionist, or 'new left' literature on [American foreign policy] amounts to little more than extended footnotes on interpretations Williams first put forward."⁴³ First of all, Williams directly influenced a number of graduate students whom he trained while teaching at the University of Wisconsin. Among the most notable of Williams' students were Walter Lafeber, Lloyd C. Gardner and Thomas McCormick. Lafeber's The New Empire and America, Russia and the Cold War, Gardner's Economic Aspects of the New Deal and Architects of Illusion, and McCormick's China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893-1901 all upheld and applied

⁴³ Robert J. Maddox, The New Left and the Origins of the Cold War (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1973) p. 13.

Williams' understanding of open door imperialism to various eras of American diplomatic history.⁴⁴ Furthermore, as Bradford Perkins noted, Williams' work influenced other new left, diplomatic historians, particularly those who attacked America's involvement in the Cold War. Gar Alperovitz's Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam, David Horowitz's The Free World Colossus, and Barton Bernstein's "American Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Cold War," to name but a few, all expanded upon arguments that Williams introduced in American-Russian Relations and Tragedy.⁴⁵

Beyond diplomatic history, Williams' work included arguments and analyses that influenced new left historians working in other fields. For example, according to Christopher Lasch, "the concept of corporate liberalism, which has contributed so much to the reinterpretation of American progressivism, comes directly from Williams."⁴⁶ Williams' criticisms regarding the anti-democratic and imperialistic nature of the American corporation and his assertion that progressive reform, from the late twentieth-century to the New Deal, did not radically change American political or social institutions, but rather only helped to preserve the United

⁴⁴ Walter Lafeber, The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1880-1898 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963); Lafeber, America, Russia and the Cold War (New York: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 1967); Lloyd C. Gardner, Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965); Gardner, Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy, 1941-1949 (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970); Thomas J. McCormick, China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893-1901 (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967).

⁴⁵ Gar Alperovitz, Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam, The Use of the Atomic Bomb and the American Confrontation with Soviet Power (New York: Vintage Books, 1970); David Horowitz, The Free World Colossus: A Critique of American Policy in the Cold War (New York: Hall and Wang, 1965); Barton Bernstein, "American Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Cold War," from his Politics and Policies of the Truman Administration (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970).

⁴⁶ Christopher Lasch, "William Appleman Williams On American History," Marxist Perspectives, 3 (Fall 1978) p. 118.

States' corporate-capitalist system introduced a core of arguments that became general theses for new left historians. Specifically, such assertions departed from "liberal democratic consensus" interpretations that praised the "flexibility," the "discontinuity with the immediate past," and the "accomplishments" of the New Deal.⁴⁷ In Russian-American Relations, Tragedy and Contours, Williams inverted this analysis and stressed the New Deal's historical continuity, its ideological inflexibility and its failure to end the depression.⁴⁸

By sustaining the progressive tradition, attacking American diplomacy, and criticizing corporate liberalism, Williams made his most notable contributions to new left historiography. Other facets of his revisionism, however, reflected and informed the radicalism of both historical scholarship and the student new left.⁴⁹ He was, for instance, new left in his understanding and use of Marx. Like the radical students of the 1960s, Williams' Marxism departed from the old left's dogmatic and doctrinaire commitment to communist theory.⁵⁰ Williams used Marx, rather, primarily

⁴⁷ Quotations from Barton Bernstein's "The New Deal: The Conservative Achievements of Liberal Reform," from Bernstein's Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968) p. 263. As Bernstein points out, the most notable "consensus" accounts of the New Deal include Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s The Crises of the Old Order (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1957), Carl Degler's Out of Our Past (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), and William Leuchtenburg's Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940 (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

⁴⁸ For examples of new left interpretations that followed Williams see Barton Bernstein's "The New Deal: The Conservative Achievements of Liberal Reform," and "America in War and Peace: The Test of Liberalism," both from his Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History. Bernstein's work exemplifies the new left's rejection of New Deal liberalism and was, as he noted, directly influenced by Williams.

⁴⁹ For overviews of the student new left see Todd Gitlin's The 1960s: Years of Hope, Days of Rage, Maurice Isserman's If I Had A Hammer, Kirkpatrick Sale's SDS (New York: Random House, 1973), Irwin Unger's The Movement: The History of the American New Left, 1959-1970 (New York: Dodd and Mead, 1974), and Edward J. Bacciocco's The New Left in America: Reform to Revolution, 1956-1970 (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974).

⁵⁰ For a discussion that compares the old and new left's use of Marx see John Patrick Diggins' The Rise and Fall of the American Left, pp. 231-238. See also Maurice Isserman's

for his analysis of the alienation and conformity perpetuated by corporate capitalism. In The Great Evasion, for example, Williams overlooked Marxist notions of class struggle, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the labor theory of value. He focused instead on "the humanistic socialism of the early Marx."⁵¹ Indeed, throughout The Great Evasion, as noted in a review by Eugene Genovese, Williams ignored "most of the work of the mature Marx" (like Das Kapital) and concentrated upon "the problems of alienation discussed in his youthful" publications.⁵²

Furthermore, Williams' analysis of American society and culture contained several of the theses and themes characteristic of new left radicalism. Poverty, racism, consumerism, conformity and the "dehumanization" bred from "cyberneted production" were issues championed by student radicals in the 1960s. Although Williams examined these phenomena in the context of Marx, most of his arguments were drawn from other post-war scholars who influenced the new left. Williams' criticisms of American society and culture, particularly those presented in Tragedy, Contours and The Great Evasion either directly incorporated or mirrored the work of scholars such as William Whyte, C. Wright Mills, Herbert Marcuse, and Michael Harrington.⁵³

If I Had A Hammer, pp. 114-123, and Todd Gitlin's The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage, pp. 109-126.

⁵¹ Irwin Unger, The Movement, p. 7.

⁵² Eugene Genovese, "William Appleman Williams on Marx and America," Studies on the Left, VI (Jan-Feb. 1966), p. 76. For an example of how Williams' Marxism reflected that of the student left see Thomas Hayden's "Port Huron Statement," and "A Letter to the New (Young) Left," both reprinted in Mitchell Cohen and Dennis Hale's The New Student Left: An Anthology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

⁵³ In Tragedy, Williams acknowledged Mills' White Collar. In The Great Evasion he cited and drew extensively from Harrington's The Other America: Poverty in the United States (New York: Macmillan Press, 1962) and Marcuse's One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

Williams' analysis of American diplomacy also informed the student new left's understanding of foreign policy -- particularly in regard to Cuba and Vietnam. His "open door" synthesis gained stock during the 1960s, for it provided both the arguments and language that student radicals used to attack American failures in both of these nations. Moreover, Williams' sympathies for the Mexican, Bolshevik, Chinese, and Cuban revolutions reflected what Allen Matusow described as the new left's "romantic sense of identification with Third World revolutionaries" such as Castro, Che Guevara, and Ho Chi Minh.⁵⁴

Just as many of Williams' arguments and analyses were new left, so was his alternative vision for America. His assertion, introduced in Contours and elaborated upon in The Great Evasion, that the United States should establish regional, socialist communities was part of the new left's emphasis on "decentralization."⁵⁵ Skeptical of the large bureaucratic states established by capitalists and communists alike, Williams shared with student radicals the desire to create "true communities" at the local level. His claim, furthermore, that decentralized socialism would foster a "truly human community," "beautiful instead of ugly," one that facilitated "human relationships" and allowed "men and women" to "define their own identity...outside the confining limits of property and the bruising and destructive dynamics of the competitive marketplace," reflected the new left's definition of a moral society.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Matusow, The Unraveling of America, p. 326. For a more balanced account of the new left's identification with such revolutionaries see Todd Gitlin's The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage, pp. 261-274.

⁵⁵ See Maurice Issersman's If I Had a Hammer, p. 118.

⁵⁶ Williams, The Great Evasion, p. 176. For a discussion of the new left's sense of community see Gitlin's The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage, chapter 5.

Finally, Williams distinguished himself as a new left historian through his intimate involvement with Madison's student radicals and his participation in both the civil rights and anti-war movements. He served, for one thing, as an academic advisor for *Studies on the Left*, an early new left publication established by several of his students. Moreover, throughout the 1950s and the 1960s, he actively protested segregation, racism, and the United States' involvement in Vietnam. Such activism was an integral component of the new left. Taking direct action to combat "injustice," as Todd Gitlin noted, distinguished new left radicals from the old left's tendency to simply debate and discuss issues.⁵⁷ As Williams reflected upon his activism, "There are moments when serious protest promises consequences, and in those instances, I have signed my name, written a private letter, walked the streets, or sent my money."⁵⁸

In sum, several facets of Williams' work and career established him as a leading new left historian in the 1960s. Drawing largely from the progressive tradition, he vigorously and continuously attacked American expansion and foreign policy. He stressed the inequalities of marketplace capitalism, deplored the racism of American society, and bemoaned the alienation created by a corporate economy. Furthermore, Williams departed from the old left's dogmatic understanding of Marx, loosely espoused Marx the humanist, and advocated the pursuit of a "moral" society through the development of decentralized, socialist communities. Finally, Williams furthered his association with the new left by participating in protests against racial segregation and the Vietnam war.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the new left's activism see Gitlin's *The Sixties: Year of Hope Days of Rage*, chapter 4. See also Maurice Isserman's *If I Had A Hammer*, chapter 5.

⁵⁸ Williams, "Confessions of an Intransigent Revisionist," p. 339.

In all, William Appleman Williams was an early new left historian whose scholarship incorporated elements of both progressive and consensus history. First of all, Williams inherited and accepted several themes of progressive historiography. He studied history as a means for advocating reform, he stressed the importance of economics in determining the past, and he upheld America's democratic elements while attacking most economic and political elites. Moreover, Williams emulated progressive historian Charles Beard, embraced the work of Frederick Jackson Turner, and espoused isolationism as opposed to continued American expansion.

However, despite his affinity with progressive history, Williams rejected the notion that perpetual conflicts fueled the historical record. He found consensus throughout American history in the worldview of expansion. In this regard, Williams departed from the progressive tradition and, like other historians of the 1950s, stressed the agreements, compromises, and common assumptions of the past. And yet, while most consensus scholars accepted, if not celebrated, the United States, Williams assailed American institutions and traditions. In doing so, he distinguished himself as a leading new left historian. Williams' criticisms of American diplomacy, his rejection of corporate capitalism, and his call for a moral, decentralized socialism informed and reflected the ideals and beliefs of a young generation of radicals and revisionists who came of age during the 1960s.

Conclusion

Between 1950 and 1968, William Appleman Williams established himself as a leading new left historian. He did so by drawing largely from the progressive tradition of American historiography and by incorporating important ideas of consensus history. During the 1950s, Williams developed his combination of progressive and consensus thought and molded it into a new radical analysis that by the early 1960s gained national recognition. This process illustrates the thesis of recent cultural and intellectual historians that the 1950s served as a seedbed for the radicalism of the following decade.

Williams' progressivism was a product of his middle-west roots and his education at the University of Wisconsin. Through directly sharing in the hardships of a small-town, agricultural community during the great depression, he developed, at a young age, an intimate appreciation for several of the themes and theses of progressive historiography. This intuitive attraction to the progressive tradition was nurtured at an intellectual level in the years following the Second World War at Wisconsin. There, Williams studied history under a number of renowned progressive scholars. Upon receiving his doctorate in 1950, he entered the historical profession allied with the progressive school's isolationism, its disdain for economic elites, its affinity with the "common people," and its moralistic present-mindedness.

The progressive historians who predominated the field in the first decades of the twentieth-century, used their scholarship to address and influence the social struggles, inequalities, and reform movements of industrial America. Williams' progressivism, on the other hand, focused upon the events and issues of the post-Second World War era. He therefore turned his attention to what he regarded as the fundamental problems

associated with the United States' involvement in the Cold War. His revisionism evolved to address the "tragedy" of foreign policy in general and the shortcomings of American mass culture and society. In direct relation to the progressive school, Williams sought to use history in order to understand and help remedy what he considered were the most pressing issues facing the United States in the post-war era.

Williams' kinship with the progressive school set him apart from the predominant intellectual and historiographical trends of the 1950s. For one thing, his disparaging analyses of foreign policy and his attacks upon corporate liberalism emerged at a time when most intellectuals jettisoned radical criticisms of American economic, political, and diplomatic institutions and became advocates for and defenders of New Deal liberalism and the United States' involvement in the Cold War. This move towards consensus and conservative liberalism resonated through the field of professional historical scholarship. Consensus historians rejected the assumptions of progressive historiography and often celebrated the virtues of American ideals. Moreover, several of the leading consensus historians constructed their work with a present-mindedness aimed at preserving, rather than changing, contemporary institutions.

Although the critical theses that Williams developed during the 1950s emerged at odds with the decade's conservative intellectual trends, he shared with consensus historians a rejection of the progressive paradigm. Williams, like Daniel Boorstin and Louis Hartz, departed from progressive theses regarding the conflict-ridden nature of history, and instead focused upon the common attitudes and beliefs of the past. Williams located consensus in what he considered the predominant worldview of most Americans. And yet, while sharing the consensus approach, he established himself as an early

new left historian by condemning the United State's broad-based agreements and shared assumptions.

As Bradford Perkins noted, Williams' scholarship "made a rather modest splash" during the 1950s, however, "within a few years it was definitely in the mainstream."¹ Williams' iconoclastic present-mindedness, his criticisms of American foreign policy and his rejection of the political institutions, economic organizations, and social practices bred from corporate liberalism, informed the new left that emerged and developed during the 1960s. For one thing, his scholarship helped instigate a wave of revisionism within the historical profession. Moreover, Williams' work gained stock amongst a young generation of students whose radical consciousness was shaped by the civil rights movement, the Cuban revolution, the Vietnam war, the rediscovery of poverty in the United States, and the conformity and alienation of a middle-class America.

Overall, the first half of William Appleman Williams' career illustrates how a strand of new left radicalism developed through the 1950s and the 1960s. Most intellectual and cultural historians neglect Williams and the "Wisconsin School," and instead, focus upon the "deradicalization" of the early post-war era. They contend that, in the years following the Second World War, in light of the horrors of Stalinism and Nazism, the threat of communism, and the apparent vitality of the United States' economic and political institutions, intellectuals rejected Marx and Beard, the old left and progressive historiography. This turn away from the Marxist and progressive traditions in turn gave rise to an era of consensus. Historians point out however that, despite the intellectual conservatism of the 1950s, the seeds of

¹Bradford Perkins, "The Tragedy of American Diplomacy: Twenty-five Years After," p. 1.

new left radicalism were sown in the social and cultural criticisms of post-war culture and society.

While such generalizations are helpful to understanding the broad patterns of post-war thought, they do not apply to Williams. He did not partake in the deradicalization of the 1950s. Rather, Williams inherited and sustained progressive radicalism through the initial post-war years. He did so by re-formulating a number of progressive ideas within the intellectual constructs of the 1950s. He modified facets of both progressive and consensus history and developed them into a radical synthesis. By the early 1960s, Williams' unique combination of these two seemingly incongruous schools of thought was characterized as new left.

As such, Williams is a particularly relevant subject for the intellectual historian. His work not only provides insight into the origins of the new left, but also exemplifies what historians have concluded were "the essential continuities between the postwar years and the 1960s."²

²Richard Pells, The Liberal Mind in A Conservative Age, p. 402.

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