

H-Diplo ESSAY 193

Essay Series on Learning the Scholar's Craft: Reflections of Historians and International Relations Scholars
14 February 2020

The Historian's Quest

<https://hdiplo.org/to/E193>

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“Mr. Gardner, please come to see me in my office this afternoon at four o'clock if that is convenient.” It was mid-term time in the fall of my sophomore year at Ohio Wesleyan University. The summons was from Dr. Henry Clyde Hubbart, whose book, *The Older Middle West, 1840-1880*, published in 1936 had established him as the indisputable senior figure in the History Department.¹ The course was American Constitutional History, a traditional prerequisite for law school. Normally, it was only open to seniors. I had gained admission as a sophomore through the intervention of another professor, David Jennings, who feared that Hubbart would not continue to teach in retirement. So, I was pretty nervous about this command appointment, all the more so because my exam book was the only one Hubbart had not given back during class time. What did that mean? I feared the worst.

“Mr. Gardner,” Professor Hubbart began that afternoon, looking solemnly at the ‘bluebook,’ and turning pages one at a time. It seemed forever before he looked up. “Mr. Gardner, what are you going to do with your life?” “I hope to go to law-school.” He put down the bluebook. “There are plenty of good lawyers, you should become a historian.”

I had never thought about that. My parents had *certainly* never thought about that. From grade school when we were permitted to choose books from a small shelf in the back on the glass, I had always chosen books like King Arthur's Knights of the Roundtable. High school history was usually taught by the coaches or people nearing retirement. But college had been different—totally different. Jennings had finished one lecture with a quip about the Congress of Vienna, “I saw Death along the way, it had the face of Castlereigh.” I was hooked forever. What did that mean? How did it sum up the aftermath to the French Revolution and Napoleon? I wanted to know that and a whole lot more. When it appeared that I might actually decide to go to graduate school and seek a position in academia, my Dad summed up their mixed feelings: “Some of those professors at Ohio State make five figures.” Whatever they had feared for my future welfare, for me it meant abandoning the notion of becoming a central Ohio Perry Mason. I fretted some about that, but Hubbart's words had hit their mark.

History majors seeking honors were required to write a thesis. My senior thesis was a study of Woodrow Wilson's Mexican policy. I didn't know it then, but it set me on a path that I would follow for my entire career: pursuing the American response to revolution from pre-World War I Mexico to the post-Cold War Middle East. For the first time, I really got into the documents, the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, which is still the first place American diplomatic historians go to research a topic. It has always been clear to me from that initial experience that publishing the diplomatic record is essentially a vote of confidence in the nation's future.

Even as arguments grew about what is left out, the series actually got better and better in the Cold War. Many, many years later I was named to the advisory committee on the series, and came to a great appreciation for the historians in the State

¹ Henry Clyde Hubbart, *The Older Middle West, 1840-1880* (New York: D. Appleton, 1936).

Department's Historical Office who compiled the documents. They counted on us to help them with their battles over declassification, always a struggle. Two figures stand out during this ongoing battle for more openness: Richard Immerman and Warren F. Kimball. Their work and that of others on the advisory committees should be recognized by all scholars as vital to the preservation of the record not just for historians but for the public interest.

But that's getting more than a bit ahead of the story. On the advice of Professor Jennings, I had listed Wisconsin as a school on my application for a Woodrow Wilson graduate fellowship. Actually, I knew very little about the Wisconsin faculty—or indeed, about any faculty anywhere! I had watched Henry Steele Commager on a Sunday television program, *Omnibus*, and delighted in his presentations, and so had listed Columbia as well. But the Woodrow Wilson people offered Wisconsin. Once arrived in Madison in the fall of 1956, I heard for the first time about the 'Turner Thesis,' and how it tracked the development of American society and politics in response to the unique challenges and opportunities of the frontier. Nowadays one can see an exhibit on Frederick Jackson Turner's classes in the Wisconsin Historical Society.

Yet there was also the proud heritage of the 'Wisconsin Idea,' and how academia and state government had worked together in the Progressive Era. The spirits of Turner and Robert M. LaFollette walked the corridors of Bascomb Hall those days. And of course, the Wisconsin History Department was also well known as a Beardian enclave in an Age of Consensus history. All this came together rapidly in a series of experiences in seminars, lecture courses, and (maybe most of all) exchanges with two new friends.

For a time I was torn between continuing in diplomatic history and pursuing intellectual history with Merle Curti. My double undergraduate major, History and English, did point in that direction. Curti was a towering figure and an accessible teacher, while Fred Harrington, the foreign policy mentor, was in the last stages of moving into administration. Eventually, of course, he became president of the University of Wisconsin. He made it a point to say, however, that he would finish out his teaching with a few of us. He called Walter LaFeber, Thomas McCormick, and myself into his office to tell us that—separately. I did not know this was happening until after the interviews. But something else had happened. William Appleman Williams had arrived during my second year and the three of us were all his teaching assistants. Harrington had brought his student back to UW, and let him loose on undergrads and grads alike. At least that was how it seemed as Williams set up his office filled with books by economists, sociologists, cultural critics, etc. This was not exactly your 'traditional' diplomatic history environment.

My master's thesis with Harrington had been on Franklin Roosevelt and European colonialism. It was pretty straightforward 'realist' history, like my study of Wilson and Mexico. Harrington had even had to ask me: where's the economics? But it seemed to me that now I had no choice to make between diplomatic and intellectual history, because Williams taught diplomatic history *as* intellectual history. He was finishing *The Tragedy of American Diplomatic History* in his first years in Madison. His lectures were all about ideas and how policy elites made sense out of the world, and what conditions they responded to at home as the American economy matured in the late nineteenth century imperialist era. Williams fit into the Turner-Beard tradition, but he was also a consensus historian—if one looked closely at what he was saying, and would say even more clearly in two later books, *The Contours of American History* and *The Roots of the American Empire*.²

To the consternation of many on the left, moreover, Williams always had more than a few kind words for the American conservative tradition from John Quincy Adams to (Oh, my God!) Herbert Hoover. We three, Walt, Tom and I, tried to puzzle out what was coming next in his lectures, often without success, as we sought to answer undergraduates' questions after class. Then we had a bright idea. We would ask Bill and his wife to dinner at one of our apartments and "psych" him

² William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomatic History*; *The Contours of American History*; and *The Roots of the Modern American Empire: A Study of the Growth and Shaping of Social Consciousness in a Marketplace Society*. *Tragedy* has come out in many editions, starting in 1959 published by the World Publishing Company, Cleveland, Ohio. The most recent is published by W.W. Norton, New York, 2009. *The Contours* was first published in 1961 also by The World Publishing Company. A new edition edited by Gregg Grandin was published in 2011 by Verso in New York. *Roots* was published in 1969 by Random House in New York.

out. We did and he did—provide some answers, that is. But it was an ongoing process. We were all influenced in some ways; we all offered resistance in some ways.

It was an exciting time as the three of us and our wives bonded in a lifelong professional and personal relationship. The three of us would collaborate on a diplomatic textbook, *Creation of the American Empire* (1973), and two edited volumes with Williams, *From Colony to Empire: Essays in the History of American Foreign Relations* (1972) and *America in Vietnam: A Documentary History* (1989).³ *America in Vietnam* provided an organizing structure for the course I developed on the war, a course that drew as many as one-hundred students or more for several years. From today's perspective, of course, Vietnam is no longer the climax of an era, but a prelude to an era of perpetual war, with the United States replaying Britain's role after World War I. All that was made clear by Secretary of Defense James Mattis's aversion to "body counts" in the Afghan War. Mattis wanted the practice ended. "You all know of the corrosive effect of that sort of metric back in the Vietnam War," he told journalists after declining to release the estimated numbers of Islamic State fighters in a bombing raid. "It's something that has stayed with us all these years."⁴

More about the overlap later. I should pause here for a moment, however, to say it was not just Williams who shaped my graduate thinking and future scholarship. Fred Harrington's example did not fade from my thoughts or writing with active voice and pinpointing interest groups. Merle Curti taught one to think about patterns of American thought—the counterpart to Williams's interpretations. And especially there was Philip D. Curtin, whose "Expansion of Europe" program detailed the intellectual and mechanical deep springs of imperialism from the mercantilist-adventurer era to the industrial age, when colonial rivalries and domestic political unrest combined to produce a terrible reckoning of war and revolution.

My doctoral thesis was originally entitled "American Foreign Policy in a Closed World, 1933-1945." How I wish now I had kept that title when it was published as a book in 1964. Instead I chose the wimpy (and perhaps worse, boring) title, *Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy*.⁵ My reasoning was that I did not wish to say that economics was the only factor that counted in New Deal diplomacy, while at the same time trying to integrate my research into what was already known (and what was left out) in early studies of Roosevelt's diplomacy. Five decades on, *Economic Aspects* remains the only single volume history of New Deal diplomacy that attempts such a synthesis.

I finished in three years' time, with only the final typing to do as I had decided not to employ a typist both because we couldn't really afford it, and because I made editorial changes as I went along. After one year teaching at Lake Forest College, and three years in the Air Force, I was hired at Rutgers in the fall of 1963. I quickly developed strong relationships with Warren Susman—a brilliantly clever and witty intellectual historian from Wisconsin—and Richard P. McCormick—who presided over a multi-voiced group of Americanists with skill and patience. If I was constantly engaged with Susman's unorthodox approaches to reopening supposedly settled issues, McCormick's loyalty to Rutgers and New Jersey were reassuring as the 1960s opened deep fissures between faculty, and between students and administration—commencing at the 1965 Vietnam "Teach-In."

Susman believed we were on track to recreate the Wisconsin department on the east coast. Perhaps we did in a surprising fashion. Rutgers was either the third or fourth "Teach-In." Michigan was first. This novel idea of how to protest the

³ The books Walt and Tom were working on in graduate school became the basis for a new understanding of American imperialism at the end of the nineteenth Century. They are justly recognized as such: Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963) and Thomas McCormick, *China Market: America's Quest for Information Empire, 1893-1901* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967).

⁴ Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "U.S. Retreats on Publicizing Body Count of Militants Killed in Afghanistan," *New York Times*, 20 September 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/20/us/politics/military-body-count-afghanistan.html>.

⁵ Lloyd Gardner, *Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964).

undeclared war in Vietnam soon spread nationwide. The Rutgers teach-in proved to be one of the nation's most famous or notorious, depending upon your views of the war and the proper role of faculty outside the classroom. That attention focused on Eugene Genovese's peroration in which he declared that unlike most of his colleagues on the stage that night, as a Marxist and a socialist he did not fear the impending Vietcong victory, he welcomed it!

Genovese had said at the outset of his talk that he did not regard the teach-in as an enlarged classroom; and he was careful also to say that he taught the history of the South and the Civil War in order to stay away from contemporary politics in the classroom. None of that made any difference to the response, with the governor of the state facing a re-election campaign calling the president of the university to find out what in hell was going on at Rutgers. Fifty years later a visiting lecturer at Rutgers who had studied the fall-out from that April night in 1965, told his audience that pressure on the administration to 'Rid Rutgers of Reds' had continued for many months. The real heroes of that time of troubles were four great historians, Richard McCormick, Henry Winkler, Peter Charanis, and Provost Richard Schlatter.⁶

I was on leave during much of that time with a grant to study the impact of war and revolution on Anglo-American policy before, during, and after World War I. Over succeeding months and then years the Vietnam War drew into its vortex 'Establishment' elders that climaxed first with Lyndon Johnson's retirement, and then the Nixon years until it finally ended in a humiliating defeat with helicopters pulling up the remnants of the American half-million and a few Vietnamese loyalists off the rooftop of the American Embassy in the final scenes of the war.

I had started work on the new book to go back to the Progressive Era and come forward to World War II. But at the same time, I had devoted time to several essays for different conferences that ultimately were published in 1970 as *Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy, 1941-1949*. Almost 25 years later I pursued some of the same themes in *Spheres of Influence: The Great Powers Partition Europe from Munich to Yalta*.⁷ By that time Vietnam, and the whole Cold War, had ended—and with it many of the 'history wars' that had been waged. And I had learned that there was no such thing as American exceptionalism—from any standpoint, or school of thought.

Along the way my work had also found a place among a very select group—the 'Borgians.' These were/are people touched by the example and friendship of Dorothy Borg, the doyenne of East Asian studies for years at Columbia University, with more being added even after her death several years ago. She invited me to participate in what was a path breaking example of historians from two sides, in this case the United States and Japan, studying in depth the march to war in the Pacific, then published as *Pearl Harbor as History*.⁸ That experience has shaped my career ever since 1969 when we met at a country hotel and conference center near Mt. Fuji and debated the presentations. She had assembled a group led by Norman Graebner that included Richard Leopold as well as younger scholars. My assignment was the Commerce and Treasury Departments, but getting to know Dorothy, whose books I had read and studied with great admiration proved the biggest reward.⁹

⁶ Perhaps the final irony of the Rutgers teach-in was the late career ideological shift rightwards by Genovese, who would argue for forgiveness for the role he and his colleagues had played that night.

⁷ Gardner, *Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy, 1941-1949* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970); Gardner, *Spheres of Influence: The Great Powers Partition Europe from Munich to Yalta* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994). Ivan Dee was a foremost publisher for many years. I am greatly indebted to his editorial skills as well.

⁸ Dorothy Borg and Shumpei Okomoto, eds., *Pearl Harbor as History: Japanese-American Relations, 1931-1941*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973)

⁹ Borg's two books on American policy towards China and Japan are *American Policy and the Chinese Revolution, 1925-1928* (New York: Macmillan, 1947) and *The United States and The Far East Crisis of 1933-1938: From the Manchurian Incident through the Initial Stage of the Undeclared Sino-Japanese War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

In 1973, in part because of the influence of the Pearl Harbor conference on my approach, I applied for a Guggenheim Fellowship to finish research in England on Anglo-American relations at the critical moment in global history when what was then called The Great War became the prelude to another Great Age of Revolution. I believed that it was necessary to see it through the eyes of policymakers in the two countries, one a declining power the other an ascendant, as the old order collapsed and the revolutionary era began. It was ten years before I finished that project.¹⁰

When it came out I was in Helsinki Finland in the Fulbright Bi-Centennial Chair of American Studies. In preparation for this assignment I had blocked out several lectures I then developed into chapters of a shorter book on the Wilsonian tradition in foreign policy.¹¹ The year ended with a lecture tour of West German Universities, where I explored these themes once again. By now I felt beholden to many, many scholars, and my approach had become much more internationalist. The field was rapidly changing—as it very badly needed to—both vertically and horizontally. New questions needed to be asked and answered. Voices unheard before had to be listened to. But while domestic ‘political history’ seemingly fell out of favor as a narrow, cramped, way of looking at the past, foreign policy scholars seemed to me to be adjusting fairly skillfully to the New History.

But that question is beyond my objective in this essay. I took part in the writing of several textbooks, including a general history of the United States, *Looking Backward: A Reintroduction to American History* (1974) with William L. O’Neill—none of which had any great success commercially, but did help me in the sense of clarifying issues through the process of researching and writing about them.¹² Students who used this book probably never noticed that on the back cover O’Neill’s face was superimposed on Richard Nixon’s head, and mine on Dwight Eisenhower’s. Ah, well, it was probably a fitting cover for a book that appeared near the end of the time of the traditional textbook. And there were also a series of international projects, for example, on various aspects of Russian-American-British relations in World War II that were very much the heir of *Pearl Harbor as History*. We met several times with a panel of Russian scholars in Moscow and in the United States to discuss Russian-American relations in World War II, even as the Cold War ended. At once of these meetings we were astounded when the Russians asked for an opportunity to discuss the blank pages in Soviet historiography. And they did! The American side was led throughout by my Rutgers colleague and dear friend, Warren Kimball, whose skills as a conference organizer, as well as an interpreter of World War II diplomacy, remain the standard.¹³

And so I continued in that vein to study Vietnam as a natural follow-on to the American response to colonial revolutions in the Cold War era. What had begun with my senior thesis on Wilson and Mexico now became, *Approaching Vietnam: From World War II through Dienbienphu* (1988).¹⁴ British records for the period were just becoming available and starting at the beginning of the war was essential to understanding the dynamics of how the war developed from Dwight D. Eisenhower’s 1954 falling dominos to Johnson’s fateful 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. But the main stimulus to my Vietnam writing actually came from Rutgers graduate students who approached me about teaching a full course on the war at the undergraduate level instead of making it a chapter in the later Cold War years. Their argument was I could not just devote a lecture or two to Vietnam. They were right: it was time to confront the roots of the conflict and the final outcome. My work

¹⁰ Gardner, *Safe for Democracy: The Anglo-American Response to Revolution, 1913-1924* (New York: Oxford University Press: 1984)

¹¹ Gardner *A Covenant with Power, America and World Order from Wilson to Reagan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

¹² Gardner *Looking Backward: A Reintroduction to American History* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974).

¹³ Anyone wishing to understand American World War II diplomacy should begin with Kimball’s book, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

¹⁴ Gardner *Approaching Vietnam: From World War II through Dienbienphu* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988).

on the course also led to my being asked to serve as the principal historical consultant on the New Jersey Vietnam Memorial. Working with veterans of the war was a deeply rewarding experience, especially since it had originated in their activities and desires for such a memorial. I sat with these veterans as they discovered that there were many Vietnam Wars, depending upon when an American serviceman served in Vietnam, and where

Robert Divine at the University of Texas interpreted *Approaching Vietnam* as just that, a prelude to Johnson's fear of another, 'Who Lost Korea?' assault on Democrats. He invited me to give a presentation for his undergraduate seminar. After that he wanted to know where I was going next on Vietnam? Nowhere, I said. There were not the archival sources available yet. But Divine was not easily dissuaded from his purpose in having me come to Texas. He took me over to the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, and pulled out a few files from various parts of the collection, including, I remember, the McGeorge Bundy files when he served as National Security Adviser. That moment was the beginning of *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam*. The book came out in 1995, more than a decade after *Safe for Democracy*. It was of particular interest to me while doing research at the Johnson Library to encounter the contribution of the views of Turnerian scholar Walter Prescott Webb on Johnson's outlook. In 1937 the young Webb had published *Divided We Stand: The Crisis of a Frontierless Democracy*. The roots of Johnson's Great Society programs could be found there as Johnson also sought to expand the New Deal to Southeast Asia with things like the Mekong River dam project.¹⁵

Seen from that perspective, the Vietnam tragedy that engulfed Johnson also brought into its terrible clutches the so-called "Best and Brightest." It was not simply a question of whether Johnson reversed Kennedy's position, but the power of belief in technological solutions to the world's political problems. After *Pay Any Price* came out I was encouraged by archivists, and the director, Harry Middleton, at the Johnson Library to organize conferences on the Vietnam War to address these issues. These resulted in three books co-edited with Ted Gittinger, a Vietnam veteran and archivist at the library, who became a good friend.¹⁶

It turned out that I was not quite finished with Vietnam, yet, even as Middle Eastern crises became the central focus of American policy and new military strategies— including the new drone warfare that demonstrated once again Americans were willing to wager a great deal on technology as a way to update and correct counterinsurgency's shortcomings exposed in the Vietnam War. I did so in collaboration with my old friend Marilyn Blatt Young. I had first gotten to know Marilyn as a fellow contributor in a volume of essays edited by Barton J. Bernstein.¹⁷ (The price of that volume in hardback, which I just noticed in preparing for this essay, was \$6.95). We had back to back essays. Hers focused on the last decades of the nineteenth century. My essay was an attempt to suggest that the then popular "realist" critique of Wilsonian diplomacy

¹⁵ Walter Prescott Webb, *Divided We Stand: The Crisis of a Frontierless Democracy* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1937). Webb's correspondence with Johnson available in the LBJ Library includes his contributions to Johnson's inaugural program in 1965 and the space program. But *Divided We Stand*, seems to foretell the Great Society program, as LBJ appeared in Washington as a young member of Congress and supporter of the New Deal.

¹⁶ Gardner and Ted Gittinger, *Vietnam: The Early Decisions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), *International Perspectives on Vietnam* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000) and *The Search for Peace in Vietnam* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004).

¹⁷ Barton J. Bernstein, ed., *Towards a New Past* (New York: Pantheon, 1968); Marilyn's most famous book is *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: Harper, 1990) of course, but she had planned to collaborate with me one more time on the final chapter of the planned Cambridge History of the Vietnam War before her untimely death.

really did not come to terms with reality. It was after publication of this volume that Marilyn and I became good friends and then in recent years co-editors of two collections of essays.¹⁸

It was Mark Favreau at the New Press who suggested we collaborate on editing two volumes of essays on how Vietnam was a prelude to the Iraq Wars. He was an excellent editor, and he then encouraged me to strike out solo on books about America's attempts to re-do the old Ottoman Empire area through what National Security Adviser and then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice liked to describe as 'muscular Wilsonianism.' In the new century I wrote four short books about the muscular Wilsonian policy in the Middle East, all of which were published by the New Press.¹⁹

Even as I wrote these the familiar themes of Anglo-American efforts to re-channel European colonialism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries kept intruding into the narrative. In 2006 at the height of national discontent over George W. Bush's failed declaration of "Mission Accomplished" in the second Iraq War, it was striking that the president would feature Graham Greene's novel of the early 1950's, *The Quiet American*, as exerting a baleful influence on American public opinion and distrust of American motives. Speaking to the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention in August 2007, Bush called out the novelist for depicting American policy as both naïve and deadly in its consequences, as represented by a CIA covert operator, Alden Pyle. If enough people believed Graham Greene's version of history, especially in its recent presentation as a film, and stopped believing in the American mission, Bush warned the Veterans, then it could indeed unnerve the nation at this critical moment in "Operation Iraqi Freedom," and lead to disaster in the Middle East. Hence Greene's portrait of Alden Pyle must be replaced with a narrative of American policy in Asia that would support the Iraq effort, demonstrate that the nation's policy was neither naïve nor destructive as the novelist had falsely portrayed it, and rally the country against pulling out of Iraq before the enemy was defeated.²⁰

It was a truly remarkable moment in presidential oratory, and a dramatic commentary on fears about challenges to the ideology of "Muscular Wilsonianism." Perhaps it was the first time that an American president had suggested that a novel held the key to defeat or victory in a war, but it was also a startling admission that the ideological link between Vietnam and Iraq had to be addressed if only to correct the record and create a "useful past" as a foundation for the continuing American mission to make the world safe for democracy. In addition to writing about how America's Longest War had actually stretched into what might now be called 'The Fifty Years War (and counting),' I delivered a paper at the Transatlantic Studies Association that sought to explore a seemingly odd couple's agreement on why the 2003 invasion had become necessary to end Saddam Hussein's threat to the world's peace and well-being.

The pairing of George W. Bush and Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair was indeed striking as a sort of refutation of Graham Greene's dark view of the likely consequences of Vietnam. It was well-known that Johnson had pleaded with Prime Minister Harold Wilson to send even a company of Scotch Bagpipers to show support on the ground for the American war effort. Like Bush's plea that Americans ignore doubters about the justification for the invasion (even if Saddam permitted inspectors free rein to look for Weapons of Mass Destruction), Blair now feared a loss of confidence in American leadership worldwide. In a 2004 speech to his home constituency, he sought to tamp down dissent with this comment about a test of wills. "Inspectors would have stayed but only the utterly naïve would believe that following such a public climb down by the U.S. and its partners, Saddam would have cooperated more." Perhaps the real fear he had come out in a jocular comment in a

¹⁸ Gardner and Young, *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam, Or How Not to Learn from the Past* (New York: The New Press 1997), and *The New American Empire; a 21st Century Teach In of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: The New Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Gardner, *The Long Road to Baghdad: A History of U.S. Foreign Policy from the 1970s to the Present* (New York: The New Press, 2008); *Three Kings: The Rise of an American Empire in the Middle East After World War II* (New York: The New Press, 2009); *The Road to Tahrir Square: Egypt and the United States from the Rise Nasser to the Fall of Mubarak* (New York: The New Press, 2011); and, finally, *Killing Machine: The American Presidency in the Age of Drone Warfare* (New York: The New Press, 2013).

²⁰ "Transcript of President Bush's Speech at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention," *New York Times*, 22 August 2007.

speech to Congress. His middle son, he explained, had cautioned him to remember Lord North's fate. "He was the British prime minister who lost us America." He acknowledged in several speeches and confidential exchanges that he, Blair, did indeed believe that it was a key part of his job not to "lose" America.²¹

In a sense, therefore, I was now looking at the culmination of what I had written about in *Safe for Democracy*. Post 9/11 debates were not just about missiles in the hands of people like Saddam Hussein, of course, but the internal threat to American liberties. Al- al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden had done more than orchestrate a horrific attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, he had succeeded in creating a lasting legacy of fears at airports and other public places. At the same time, the government's response raised new concerns about the privacy of personal communications—the fear that Big Brother was looking over your shoulders, everyone's shoulders. Yet it was not a new fear, despite the furor of the debate over Edward Snowden's expose of the way the National Security Agency had been listening in on conversations. The government had been bringing charges against other government whistleblowers who dissented and went public with their dissents, such as Daniel Ellsberg who leaked the classified history of the war, the so-called 'Pentagon Papers.' That question had never really been resolved in the courts because of the illegal break-in at Ellsberg's doctor's office. Now it was Thomas Drake, an National Security Agency (NSA) code developer who in recent years had leaked to the press the extent to which the NSA had transformed itself into a freewheeling semiautonomous detective agency with the apparent capacity of peering into private lives. Obviously, this was not an easy question, or set of questions, because protecting the citizenry from foreign attack is the primary purpose of all governments. Yet the peril to the citizenry is also present in the powers granted to government agencies, going back to the 1947 National Security Act that created the Central Intelligence Agency. President Harry Truman had feared creating something that could evolve into an American gestapo. The aftermath of the 9/11 bombings and the use of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) court to obtain secret warrants to search phone records recalled the days when CIA head of counter-intelligence James Jesus Angleton sent teams to the New York post office to open mail to and from the Soviet Union. I joined the debate with *The War on Leakers: National Security and American Democracy, from Eugene V. Debs to Edward Snowden*.²²

I returned again to the Wilson era in an essay called "The Geopolitics of Revolution," which offers this quotation from Walter Lippmann: "We are living and shall live all our lives now in a revolutionary world. This means among other things a world of restless experiment."²³ That statement I suppose explains my quest as a historian, to understand that revolutionary world as best one can as the break-up of the European Empires and the rise of the United States as the self-proclaimed leader of the 'Free World' confronts the challenges of past, present and future. In this essay I talked a lot about how American leaders used railroads to knit together the politics and economics of the nation in the late nineteenth century to and how they sought to apply that strategy in dealing with the Bolshevik Revolution. I was also concerned there with the 1916 Paris Economic Conference that American leaders feared would result in the creation of economic blocs and alliances after the Great War, and divide the world into rival centers, shut the United States out of postwar markets, and revive the danger of military competition. Hence, before the Bolshevik Revolution there were efforts to negotiate trade deals with Russia to prevent that from happening, to prevent the newest democracy, it was said, from following Great Britain and France into a pact that would discriminate against the United States. None of these plans came to fruition as the Bolshevik Revolution reset the agenda. If one looks at the aftermath of the war and so-called 'Isolationism' of the 1920s and 1930s, the chapter

²¹ The article, "A Damned High Wire," is published in *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* (Spring 2005, Supplement): 43-62.

²² See also Gardner, "The Challenge of Journalism and the Truth in our Times: James Risen, Judith Miller and National Security Reporting," forthcoming in Kaeten Mistry & Hannah Gurman, eds., *Whistleblowing Nation: The History of National Security Disclosures and the Cult of State Secrecy*, forthcoming, Columbia University Press.

²³ Gardner, "The Geopolitics of Revolution," in Thomas W. Zeiler, David K. Ekbladh, and Benjamin C. Montoya, eds., *Beyond 1917: The United States and the Global Legacies of the Great War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

argues that events before the United States even entered the war ought to be considered as well as Wilson's failed crusade for American participation in the League of Nations.

Ah, well, it always begins with a question the historian wants to answer, doesn't it?

Today's diplomatic historians will have no easy time in writing about the foreign policy of the Trump Era—will it mark a dramatic change from traditional policies that were written in codes that everyone could decipher? For example, will there be the kind of documentation in government archives we have counted on for answers from the very beginning? It may well be that there will be no agreed-upon records of meetings, no source but one. And that one will not be written down. Major events will play out with but one voice to be heard, and that one leaving a record like a smoke writer in the sky. I gave another paper recently at a Transatlantic Studies Association meeting on Donald Trump and the post-modern presidency. What struck me then back then, 2018, was that Trump had told *London Times* reporters in an interview after he was elected that, yes, he would continue to use Twitter for announcements and policy statements because it was the only way to get outside the filters imposed by the media. And there are no real press conferences any more, and no press briefings by his press secretary. As he flees across the White House lawn to a waiting helicopter, he makes policy on the run. George Orwell could not have anticipated a more likely scenario, perhaps, had he had an inkling of the power of social media in world politics. We have entered, as Kellyanne Conway, the loyalist of Trump advisers, put it soon after the president's inauguration, a new world of "alternative facts."

I certainly do not want to conclude on such a dark note. I am not a cynic or a pessimist. The basic structure of our institutions does not seem to be endangered, certainly not yet. Over the span of a lifetime in the search for answers,²⁴ I have been blessed with the friendship of so many people, only a few named here. But in addition to those above, I would add Col. Paul Miles, because for many years now he and I have held a two-party seminar semi-weekly at the Alchemist and Barrister restaurant in Princeton. Finally, there have been the Rutgers undergraduate and graduate students. Thank you all for what you have taught me about history and friendship.

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²⁴ My pre-law career never really ended, as I took time away from diplomacy, war and revolution, to write a book, *The Case that Never Dies: The Lindbergh Kidnapping* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004 and 2012). The second edition advances a theory of the case that gnawed at me from the outset when I first started serious research on the "Crime of the Century." It will settle no arguments, but perhaps offer new ways of explaining what happened on that night of 1 March 1932.