think I always loved the study of history, even at New York City’s Bronx High School of Science, where one of my social studies teachers introduced me to historical revisionism by questioning in class the high opinion in which the textbooks then held President Woodrow Wilson. By the time I entered the City College of New York (CCNY) in the fall of 1962, I was already thinking, some friends tell me, about a career teaching history. I also fell in love with Political Science, which quickly became my minor.

Academic matters, however, were not my top priority at CCNY. They seldom are for undergrads age 17-21, something I tried with mixed results to remember during my years teaching them. I was nevertheless able to amass a respectable “B” overall grade point average, with sufficiently high grades in History to get me into Phi Alpha Theta, the History Honor Society. I also began to consider in my junior year where to apply for graduate work, and whether to do so in History or Political Science, as my interest in international relations spanned both disciplines. That some of my History professors thought I belonged in a Political Science program while some of my Political Science professors thought I belonged in a History program did not exactly provide me with a clear answer to this question.

Then in 1965 and 1966 I took two courses that settled the matter in favor of History and that had a profound effect on my professional life. In both I was heavily influenced not only by two superb and exceptionally dynamic professors, but also by the expansion and Americanization of the war in Vietnam. They were heavily influenced by that war as well.

Bernard Bellush, a former undergrad himself at CCNY during the politically tumultuous 1930s as well as a World War II vet and a political activist, taught the History Department’s senior seminar for majors in the fall of 1965. Although his scholarship had focused on President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, the massive expansion of the U.S. military commitment in Vietnam during that year led him to choose a foreign policy theme for our research papers and discussions: the ways in which past presidents had attempted to influence public opinion to support going to war. Jim Watts, a much younger professor who had recently been hired, taught the course on the history of U.S. foreign policy. Given what was occurring in Vietnam, he devoted the beginning of each class to an open and often lengthy as well as highly spirited Q&A session about the war.

My relationship with these two professors did not end with my graduation from CCNY in 1966. I maintained contact with each of them throughout my years in graduate school at the University of Wisconsin and then teaching at the University of Vermont, where Bernie Bellush’s daughter Gerry became one of my students in the early 1970s. In the early 1980s I edited a
microfiche series of Cold War documents for Jim Watts, and on his invitation returned to CCNY for a guest lecture in the 1990s. Both professors became and remained dear friends as well as mentors until their deaths in 2007 and 2011.1

Before taking their courses I had been a standard Cold Warrior. With my Political Science minor I had fully imbibed the 'Realist' school approach of Hans Morgenthau and George Kennan and the subsequent need to 'contain' Communism. Bellush and Watts challenged that worldview (So, ironically, did Morgenthau and Kennan themselves).

I became an opponent of the Vietnam War, albeit a moderate one at this point. That would change during my ensuing years as a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin. And as happened with so many historians of my generation, the war would have an enormous impact on my career, ideas, and indeed, on all aspects of my life.2

One reason for that impact is the culture in which my generation had grown up and the education we had received prior to the mid-1960s. Most of us were raised during the 1950s on a patriotic and Wilsonian internationalist interpretation of U.S. history and the United States' role in the world, one reinforced during our early college years by the 'Nationalist' approach to American foreign relations. The Kennan/ Morgenthau 'Realist' interpretation to which we were introduced in both Political Science and History courses admittedly challenged that approach,3 but neither seemed capable of explaining the Vietnam War as we saw it and protested against it. Indeed, policymakers consistently used Realist as well as Nationalist approaches to justify their military intervention in Southeast Asia, the specific critiques of the war by Kennan and Morgenthau notwithstanding.4 And the incredible, constantly growing gap between administration rhetoric and the hideous reality of that war forced many of us into a major reconsideration of the entire American role in the world. In a bizarre way, Louisiana Senator Russell Long summarized that reconsideration when, during a 1968 Senate Foreign Relations Committee televised hearing on Vietnam, he asked Secretary of State Dean Rusk whether we were the 'good guys' or the 'bad guys.' Rusk’s answer was, in a sense, irrelevant: simply to have asked such a question would have been inconceivable a few years earlier, and its enunciation aptly summarized the rethinking that was taking place.

Vietnam thus forced us as students to question what we had previously been taught regarding the foundations of U.S. foreign policy by the standard interpretations. That William Appleman Williams provided us with a new framework for such questioning is if anything a gross understatement, and we (especially but far from exclusively at Wisconsin) devoured his work as we re-examined the entire history of U.S. foreign relations.

Vietnam also played a major role in my choice of early research topics at Wisconsin and my later fusion of military and diplomatic history, as I tried to figure out how something so insane could have occurred. That led me back not merely to the origins of the Vietnam War itself, but farther back, to the origins of the Cold War (of which the Vietnam War was a part) in the 1917-18 Russian Revolutions for my Master’s thesis and to Anglo-Soviet-American military as well as diplomatic

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1 See my tribute to Bellush and Watts in the CCNY Alumnus (Oct., 2014), 13


4 Kennan and Morgenthau publicly critiqued the Vietnam War and what they viewed as gross abuse and misuse of their approaches to international relations. See in particular Kennan’s 1966 testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Supplemental Foreign Assistance, Fiscal Year 1966-Vietnam, 89th cong., 2nd sess., 331-430.
conflicts during World War II for my doctoral dissertation—a military-diplomatic fusion boldly highlighted in both Vietnam and World War II and one I have maintained throughout my academic career.5

Wisconsin was already a hotbed of antiwar sentiment and actions when I arrived there in the fall of 1966 (I selected Wisconsin on the advice of one of my CCNY professors—Jim Watts if I remember correctly—who believed I needed a good dose of the midwestern-Frederick Jackson Turner-frontier approach to balance the very eastern urban approach I had received at CCNY). But there would be a dramatic escalation of those antiwar sentiments and actions over the next four years, culminating in a series of violent confrontations between students and both the Madison Police Department and the Wisconsin National Guard. Trying to be a serious graduate student amidst all of this (as well as the ‘sex, drugs and rock & roll’ ethos of the late 1960s) was, shall we say, challenging.

Ironically, I knew little of the university’s early antiwar history when I first applied there—or of the very important role some members of its History Department had played in it. I also knew embarrassingly little about Williams himself, one of the key professors in that movement and the scholar many call the ‘father’ of New Left diplomatic history. For while my undergraduate education at CCNY had been excellent, it had not really prepared me for graduate-level study—at Wisconsin or anywhere else. I consequently struggled a bit during my first year in Madison, a situation I made worse by taking one final exam early in order to attend a close friend’s mid-January wedding in New York. Partially for that reason I ended that first semester with two B final grades, and did not receive a teaching assistantship for my second year of study. But that opened an incredible and career-altering opportunity to teach my own course a few years later.

At Wisconsin you had to be first admitted to the graduate college and then accepted into a specific seminar, one whose professor would be your academic adviser and mentor. Interestingly, my first choice had been the seminar in European diplomatic history, then taught by Robert Koehl, and my second the seminar in Twentieth Century US foreign policy, then taught by John DeNovo (Williams taught the seminar in pre-1900 US foreign policy—a time period that did not then interest me). Koehl rejected me but DeNovo did not, and that is how I became a graduate student specializing in U.S. rather than European diplomatic history. That rejection, Koehl later told me, had resulted from my mediocre and poor grades in the three languages I had studied at CCNY (Spanish, French and German), and his realization that, not being a ‘natural’ with language, I would struggle enormously with European diplomatic documents. He was of course correct, and he thereby did me an enormous favor for which I remain deeply grateful.

I actually wound up studying with three very different U.S. diplomatic historians at Wisconsin: DeNovo, Williams, and Robert Freeman Smith, who taught both DeNovo’s and Williams’ courses in 1966-67 when both were on leave. I spent that first year trying to adjust to graduate study and produce a credible Master’s Thesis in Smith’s seminar. I also tried to compensate for my previous ignorance about Williams by devouring his writings—most notably The Tragedy of American Diplomacy, The Contours of American History (still my favorite), The Great Evasion and, in light of my MA thesis topic on the US response to the Russian Revolutions of 1917-18, his first book on U.S.-Russian relations and even his doctoral dissertation at Wisconsin on Raymond Robins.6 Then in the fall semester of 1967 Williams returned to the campus and I took his course in the history of U.S. foreign policy before 1900 (and with it his graduate student discussion group at 8 AM!). I was surprised to find not the fire-breathing radical I had expected as the author of those works but instead a very soft-spoken revisionist who had by that time become sharply critical of some New Left behavior on campus. That led to a fascinating confrontation at the beginning of one class when Williams, who had been quoted in a local newspaper as labeling


the New Left “a bunch of orangutans,” found on his lectern when he walked in a stalk of bananas and on the blackboard in large letters the words “orangutan power.” His first response was to laugh, and then to read aloud his letter to the newspaper complaining about its misquoting of him on many points—but not his “orangutan” attack on the New Left, which he verified, for what he labeled its anti-intellectual “frontier’ behavior. That effectively ended the confrontation.

My adviser John DeNovo also returned to Madison at this time and taught a proseminar in which we read and critiqued new publications in the field, most notably the first volume of Kennan’s memoirs that for me revealed the moralism beneath his supposed realism regarding the Soviet Union.7 While Williams taught me to look for domestic and economic sources of U.S. diplomacy (as well as his habit that I inherited of taking off his jacket and rolling up his sleeves at the start of every lecture), it was DeNovo in seminar, in office conversations, and in his always subtle and understated comments on my papers who helped to teach me the craft of historical research and writing (previously I had not even heard of a split infinitive), while also showing exceptional personal concern for my well-being, all of which I later tried to emphasize with my own students. Never, however, did he attack or try to dissuade me from the revisionist conclusions I often drew from the material I was reading. DeNovo, along with Robert Ferrell, had been graduate students of Samuel Flagg Bemis at Yale, and as numerous former Ferrell students who became my friends, including Theodore Wilson, J. Garry Clifford and Arnold Offner, told me, their experiences with Ferrell echoed mine with DeNovo. Whether because of Bemis, or despite of and in reaction to what we as graduate students had all derisively labeled his ‘Flagg waving’ writings, both professors taught us how to be historians without attacking our interpretations, which differed dramatically from theirs.

In my fourth semester at Wisconsin I took the dreaded ‘prelims’ (for ‘preliminary exam,’ or ‘comprehensives’ as they were called at other universities), an all-day exam you had to pass before being admitted to the Ph.D. program and allowed to pursue a doctoral dissertation. One began studying months in advance for that exam, usually reading at least a book a day, for you were expected to have mastered all of U.S. history and its historiography. That was of course an impossible assignment, as the more you know the more you realize how little you actually know (In retrospect I now think one of the aims of the exam was to teach us that important lesson). To make matters even more difficult, I had to study for and take the exam in the spring of 1968 amidst the Tet Offensive, President Lyndon Johnson’s decision not to seek reelection, and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., followed in June by assassination of Robert Kennedy. How I managed to do so and pass that exam as well as fulfill all the other requirements for a doctoral degree I still do not know. Wisconsin was a ‘sink or swim’ graduate program—relatively easy to get into but very difficult to complete successfully. Indeed, of the twelve students in my twentieth-century U.S. foreign policy seminar in 1966, only three of us went on to earn a Ph.D. at Wisconsin.

Two other Wisconsin professors had an enormous influence on my career and ideas: Edward “Mac” Coffman, who taught U.S. military history, and George Mosse, a brilliant, provocative and utterly spell-binding lecturer whose courses in the Cultural History of Europe had at least as great an influence on me as any of my U.S. history courses. To this day I use the interpretation of Fascism that he provided in class as well as his writings.8 Taking Coffman’s course in U.S. military history, which I also loved, was a logical complement to my diplomatic history specialization and interests, and it had enormous unexpected consequences for me.

In the year after I took Coffman’s course and passed prelims, the History Department at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee asked if he had a graduate student who could teach two sections of U.S. military history to its ROTC students. All of his graduate students were otherwise employed, so he asked my adviser, who was his colleague and friend, whether any of his graduate students might be interested and available. DeNovo, who had taken pity on me and gotten me employment in the University Archives when he found out I was driving a taxicab to make ends meet, immediately recommended me.

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7 George F. Kennan, Memoirs, 1900-1950 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967).

8 See, for example, George L. Mosse, The Culture of Western Europe: the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, an Introduction (Chicago: Rand McNally 1961), and The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964).
did not feel qualified on the basis of one military history course to teach this subject, but both professors encouraged me to accept the offer and promised to help me out whenever I needed it.

That became my first university teaching position. It also led me to my doctoral dissertation topic. For in teaching the U.S. military history course I became fascinated by the intense but then under-researched Anglo-Soviet-American conflicts during World War II surrounding Operation OVERLORD, the 1944 invasion of northern France, and what seemed to me the questionable but commonly accepted conclusion that the American position in this ‘second front’ controversy had been based on ‘purely military’ factors. Coffman and DeNovo both saw this as a good topic that would enable me to combine my interests in military and diplomatic history, and I spent the spring and summer of 1969 reading the existing secondary literature that dealt with this issue and with the main characters, as well as their memoirs and the published primary material available. I then made use of a Ford Foundation Research Grant I had received from the university to pursue archival and manuscript research in the National Archives and the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, New York, and the Henry Stimson papers at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut.

Unbelievably, that grant of a little more than $3,000 supported me through nine months of such research, followed by three months of writing back in Madison (actually on a farm outside Madison where I retreated after a bad medical reaction to being tear-gassed outside DeNovo’s office my first day back in early May, 1970). In the meantime, and equally unbelievable given the already tight and shrinking job market, I obtained a tenure-track position at the University of Vermont (UVM), with a whopping salary of $9,500 and the temporary rank of lecturer until I completed and defended my dissertation, at which time I would be recommended for promotion to assistant professor. I have always credited my success in obtaining this position to the fact that I could teach military as well as diplomatic history, and the fact that I was succeeding at Vermont another and a very beloved Wisconsin History Ph.D. as well as a student of Williams -- Henry Berger.

In that first year at Vermont I somehow managed to complete a draft of my dissertation, revise it as suggested by DeNovo, Coffman, and Koehl, and teach five different U.S. history courses, four of which I had never previously taught. In retrospect, my only explanation as to how I could do all of that is that I was only 25 years old and had apparently unlimited energy and stamina.

I also discovered in that year just how much I loved to teach, and how much students apparently loved my classes. My chair soon nicknamed me ‘Stoler the Enroller’ after seeing how quickly my courses over-enrolled. Teaching was clearly my calling—not just a job—and apparently what I had been born to do.

Scholarship was another matter. Indeed, I had originally considered publication to be just something I had to do in order to get tenure and continue teaching, and never did I dream that my scholarship would be so extensive and well received.

My early involvement in the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) may have had something to do with that unexpected aspect of my career. DeNovo, I believe, had been a founding member of SHAFR in 1967, for he both explained the new organization to his graduate students that fall and strongly encouraged us to join. I quickly did so and became a regular at its annual conferences that began in 1975. Held on university campuses in which we were housed in shared dorm rooms, these conferences allowed me to meet many of the senior scholars whose books I had already read and many younger scholars (such as Mark Gilderhus), who would become dear friends—and those experiences apparently helped to light a scholarly fire in me. Furthermore, in fusing U.S. diplomatic and military history I had hit upon a relatively unexplored area of growing interest to the historical profession.
It was also an area of interest to the armed forces as they tried to understand and deal with their defeat in Vietnam. Three years after the 1977 publication of a revised version of my doctoral dissertation. I consequently received a totally unexpected invitation, first to give a guest lecture and then to be a visiting professor in the Strategy and Policy Department of the Naval War College in Newport, RI. There I found an entire department of historians and political scientists, both civilian and uniformed, who thought historically in the same ways I did and who team-taught an exceptionally rigorous and required course (instituted by 1972-1974 War College President Admiral Stansfield Turner). With readings that included Thucydides, Carl von Clausewitz and Alfred Thayer Mahan, to name but a few of the assigned authors, the course examined the relationship between national policies and military strategies from the Peloponnesian Wars to the American war in Vietnam. The result was one of the most intellectually stimulating and rewarding years in my career, and one that forever changed my previous, Vietnam-era negative view of the armed forces. Indeed, the navy captain with whom I team-taught seminars within that course, Marino Bartolomei, became a dear friend.

That year also provided me with the strategy/policy intellectual framework for what would become my most important work, *Allies and Adversaries*—an analysis of how the World War II Joint Chiefs of Staff viewed their British and Soviet allies as well as how they developed their strategy to defeat the Axis powers on their own terms rather than those of their allies. The volume won the 2002 Society for Military History’s Distinguished Book Award that I received at its 2003 annual conference, ironically held in Madison that year and hosted by my former graduate school roommate and dear friend Richard Zeitlin, who had by then become the director of the Wisconsin Veterans Museum.

Before completing that volume, however, I accepted an offer from John Milton Cooper, Jr., who had joined the Wisconsin History Department after my departure for Vermont, to write a brief biography of soldier-statesman George C. Marshall for a new biographical series he was editing. I’m convinced Mac Coffman had something to do with that invitation, as he did with the hiring of another DeNovo graduate student, Larry Bland, to edit Marshall’s papers. Mac was also responsible for introducing me to Marshall’s authorized biographer Forrest Pogue, who became an unofficial adviser on the project while Larry guided me through the key documents at the Marshall Library in Lexington, VA. The success of my ensuing 1989 biography as well as my previous work led to invitations to teach at first West Point and then the Army War College and Military History Institute. After my early retirement from the University of Vermont in 2007, it also led Marshall Foundation President Brian Shaw to ask me to succeed Larry Bland, who had tragically died, as editor of the two remaining volumes of the Marshall Papers—one of which covered his 1947-49 tenure as secretary of state and won SHAFR’s Link-Kuehl Prize for documentary editing.

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12 I also completed at this time two volumes: *Allies in War: Britain and America Against the Axis Powers, 1940-1945* (London: Edward Arnold, 2005)—a diplomatic and military history I had been asked and had agreed to write as part of a new series on modern wars; and with Justus Doenecke, *Debating Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Foreign Policies, 1933-1945* (Lanham: Roman and Littlefield, 2005)—as part of an existing series of “debating” volumes on controversial issues in US history. My brief Marshall biography eventually found its way onto the recommended Professional Reading Lists of the Army Chief of Staff and the Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

13 As with many of my works, I did not complete either of these volumes alone. Far from it. Former Eisenhower Library Director Daniel Holt served as the managing editor, with Sharon Stevens remaining as associate editor until illness forced her retirement and Mame Warren was hired first to assist and then to replace her. Also serving on the editorial team were historian Anne Wells of the...
My Marshall biography and ensuing works were also heavily influenced by a seminar I team-taught in the early 1980s with University of Vermont Religion Department chair and friend Luther Martin on the political and religious thought of Reinhold Niebuhr—the theologian Kennan would call “the father of us all.” After that course I understood why. I also understood why Walter LaFeber in his Cold War history had first brought Niebuhr to his readers’ attention and why many years later Andrew Bacevich in a new edition of Niebuhr’s *The Irony of American History* would label it “the most important book ever written on U.S. foreign policy.” That volume, as well as many of Niebuhr’s other works used in that seminar (including *Moral Man and Immoral Society, The Nature and Destiny of Man,* and *Children of Light and Children of Darkness*) would have an enormous influence on my scholarship as well as my teaching—and indeed my views on history and on life.14

So did participation in a fascinating series of colloquia held during the 1980s and 1990s with Russian and British colleagues, in all three countries, on the World War II Grand Alliance. With the Soviet Union first liberalizing and then collapsing during those years I found myself denounced at the first 1986 colloquium in Moscow as a “bourgeois falsifier” (followed by attempted censorship of my work), but then described just a few years later as a “foremost bourgeois authority” on Allied strategic disagreements, and finally after the Soviet collapse as simply a “foremost authority,” all without changing a single word that I had written.15

So what were the major influences on my work? Clearly my professors, both graduate and undergraduate. In retrospect, my dynamic undergraduate mentors taught me how to teach, while my graduate professors taught me what to teach as well as how to be a scholar. Just as clearly another major influence was the Vietnam War, which enormously affected all of my work, made me a revisionist, and altered my entire view of U.S. history. That view was further altered in equally unexpected but very different ways by my ensuing time at the Naval War College, as well as other military institutions; by numerous colleagues and friends; and by Reinhold Niebuhr, whose work tempered my naïve youthful optimism about human nature and what was possible.

That odd combination of influences was of course never planned—further evidence for the validity of the cliché that life is what happens in between plans. But it led to a synthesis in my work of Revisionist and Realist schools of thought, a synthesis I had ironically first proposed in the 1970s for a textbook project but one that reviewers claimed was not possible. I like to think that my scholarship and teaching over a fifty-year career illustrate that they were wrong.

Mark A. Stoler is professor emeritus of history at the University of Vermont, where he taught from 1970-2007 and where he received a number of teaching as well as scholarly awards. He has authored, co-authored, or edited twelve books as well as numerous articles and book chapters primarily in U.S. diplomatic and military history, two of which have won national

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14 I first became aware of Niebuhr’s importance to US foreign relations at Wisconsin in the late 1960s while reading the first edition of LaFeber’s *America, Russia and the Cold War, 1945-1966* (New York: Wiley, 1967), which is now in its tenth edition and which contains the Kennan quote. Andrew Bacevich’s quote comes from his introduction to the new edition of Niebuhr’s *The Irony of American History* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), i.e. *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932), *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (1941), and *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (1944) were all originally published in New York by Charles Scribner’s Sons.