

*The American Revisionists: The Lessons of Intervention in World War I.* By Warren I. Cohen. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967. Pp. xv, 252. Notes, index. \$7.95.)

The author treats revisionism both in a historical sense and as a debate engaged in by scholars seeking to shape American foreign policy. Although Cohen traces revisionism in the writings of five men—Harry Elmer Barnes, Charles A. Beard, C. Hartley Gratton, Walter Millis, and Charles C. Tansill—he neither commends nor condemns their ideas.

The seeds of revisionism were sown in liberal periodicals such as *The Nation* and *The New Republic*. By 1924 revisionism found its champion in Harry E. Barnes who, within a year, was convinced that France and Russia were equally responsible for the war and more blameworthy than either Austria or Germany. When the American Legion, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Daughters of the American Revolution denounced him, he goaded them with more revisionist articles.

By 1926 the revisionist controversy focused on the American intervention of 1917. Barnes and others denounced the pro-English influences which they alleged had duped Wilson. Although the United States entered the war for altruistic reasons, they claimed that Wilson was the victim of his pro-English associates and that during the war he had served as the "tool of the interests."

Hartley Gratton's book, *Why We Fought* (1929), revealed the shifting focus of revisionism. He contended that Wilson's ambition to be a messiah through peace activities demanded entrance into the war. Gratton saw no moral reason for intervention and concluded that America fought for cash and commerce.

In the early 1930's, Charles A. Beard argued that war had many causes and that international capitalism was the best hope for peace. His revisionism, expressed in *The Idea of National Interest* and *The Open Door At Home*, was based on the thesis that national interest lay in a high standard of living for all citizens and an economy that was conducive to individual and social virtues. He supported the Neutrality Acts of the mid-1930's in the hope for continuing peace.

Walter Millis contended that the United States stumbled into war in 1917 and that any resort to force was futile. He accused the American people of creating the intervention sentiment which forced entrance into the war. He questioned the validity of the Neutrality Acts of 1935 and 1936, and he saw dangers in their mandatory application in future wars. Whereas Beard wanted mandatory enforcement of neutrality, Millis urged flexibility. In the debate generated by the neutrality laws few Americans defended the 1917 intervention. Beard, in *The Devil's Theory of War*, rejected the idea that submarine warfare caused American intervention and blamed the "total military and economic situation." He demanded an embargo on trade and travel and advocated feeding hungry Americans, not warring Europeans. As Europe drifted toward war Millis viewed the world situation without alarm and sought American acceptance of England's appeasement policy.

Charles C. Tansill, in *America Goes to War* (1938), viewed United States foreign policy of 1914-1917 as a struggle between British realism on the one hand and American idealism on the other. He blamed Edward House and Robert Lansing for Wilson's blundering intervention and concluded that the foreign policy was designed to preserve the British Empire. Tansill warned that America should not intervene again for the same purpose. Barnes shouted that if the United States made war again democracy was doomed, but Millis favored a rational intervention. Shortly before the Japanese bombers rained their bombs on Pearl Harbor, Barnes wrote that American entrance into the Pacific war was "sheer national idiocy."

Cohen has done a scholarly job of presenting the controversial views of these five historians at a time when America's foreign policy is again under scrutiny. His book deserves a wide reading.

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*F.D.R.'s Undeclared War, 1939-1941.* By T. R. Fehrenbach. (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1967. Pp. 344. Index. \$6.50.)

Fehrenbach's readable account of Roosevelt's efforts to align the United States with Great Britain is designed for a popular audience. Although it is filled with interesting, if often arguable, judgments about the American position and the policies of other major powers before Pearl Harbor, it is based entirely on published materials and adds nothing to our factual knowledge of the period.

Fehrenbach accepts the thesis that an isolationist-minded America was brought to its senses by a President who awoke earlier than most of his countrymen to the dangers the United States would face in a Hitler-dominated world, and who used his superb political skills to change America's course. In developing this thesis, Fehrenbach, like others before him, overestimates both Roosevelt's vision and the magnitude of the gap between his views and those of the public.

Roosevelt, as his wartime consensus diplomacy was to show, shared the general American aversion to power politics and failed to understand its essence. He resorted to idealistic and moralistic pronouncements about the war and America's role not because he wished to lead or to mislead the public, but quite simply because he believed them. The President was, of course, better informed than the public about events in Europe and Asia, more aware of how they might adversely affect American aims and interests, and more confident that the United States could intervene to good effect, if necessary. He recognized somewhat earlier than most that American security depended on the maintenance of Great Britain and the defeat of Hitler and he was not wedded to the concept of unilateralism in foreign affairs, but he was also not prepared to throw America's full weight into the balance at any time before Pearl Harbor.