

# The Publishing Scene

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An information fall-out is settling over the land. Pages are crumbling, libraries bursting at their seams as scholarship faces the same problem that threatens the human race—too much of it for the space available. In this respect, Gutenberg was shortsighted, which may explain why students get nearsighted. We have developed a generation of researchers who read chiefly on microfilm; to “crank out a book” is no longer a mere figure of speech.

We live, moreover, in an age of historical exhaustiveness, preserving yesterday's newspaper along with incunabula, as though history must be immortalized before the apocalypse makes it obsolete. Until recent years the solution to this problem—not the problem of history, but of keeping history intact—fell equally on the shoulders of the facsimile reprinters, who published for those daring scholars who would rather turn pages than the handle of a machine, and the microfilm companies, which restored the book to its rolled-up-parchment beginnings—history winding back on itself with the aid of technology. Neither solution was a very happy one. The full-size reprints only added to the space problem, while the reels of film added to the eye problem. Meanwhile, new books and periodicals are decanted from the presses in stupefying quantities—the U.S. Government alone publishes some 20,000 documents a year. If history sinks, it will be from its own weight.

It is reassuring, therefore, to learn that technology has stepped in with what promises to be the final solution: a printed page so drastically miniaturized (on film) that as many as ten books can be stored on one four-by-six-inch card. Microfiche publishing began a couple of decades ago when the film people started experimenting with a process that discarded spools in favor of flat reproduction, achieving thereby both added convenience (“No need to wind through 100 feet of film to find the report you want,” boasts National Cash Register's Microcard Editions) and an even greater compression of material. During the past ten years, this industry has, so to speak, grown larger by making its product smaller. More than fifty micropublishers are listed in the current *Literary Market Place*; there are few major libraries in the country that do not have a microform collection and the necessary machinery for using it, and duplicate archives in miniature are springing up

where none could possibly have existed before.

“Microform” is the generic term that covers the various methods of print-to-film transference. The oldest of these is microfilm, and the granddaddy of this technique is University Microfilms (see THE PUBLISHING SCENE, SR, Feb. 19, 1966), with its treasure trove of Ph.D. dissertations, its vast collection of British historical and literary documents, and its “print on demand” system whereby a reader can have books made to order from film. Microcard, on the other hand, is just what it sounds like—a film “card” that contains, on the average, sixty book pages. The cards can be opaque or transparent, the latter being known as microfiche. The advantage of this process is that the reader-printer that enlarges the card will also supply you at the press of a button with a copy of the page you are reading. The most widely used of the new techniques, microfiche reduces the original document anywhere from one-fifth to one-twentieth of its original size, enabling the equivalent of 10,000 pages to be stored in less than two inches of drawer space.

Ultramicrofiche, as noted above, puts up to ten books on a card, and a strange collection they sometimes are. One NCR “ultra” includes Einstein's *Relativity*, Muhammad Hafiz's *Select Odes*, Huygens's *Opuscula posthuma*, and the *Upanishads*.

Not surprisingly, several blue-chip corporations have gone into micropublishing, staking out various documentary lodes of high assay. In addition to National Cash Register, other recent entries are Bell & Howell, the 3M company in Minneapolis, and Leasco Data Processing. Leasco, for example, sells a \$20,000-a-year package of SEC reports on American corporations. The



more broadly based NCR offers, among other things, the *U.S. Supreme Court Records and Briefs*, sixty-six volumes of the *New Masses*, and thousands of specialized periodicals. If you want a complete file of the *Cape Argus* (a South African newspaper) on microfiche, they'll sell it to you for a mere \$10,478.

Professional groups (the American Bar Association, the Institute of Paper Chemistry) have utilized microform as a do-it-yourself means of preserving and distributing material from their own archives. Among the independents, Readex in Washington, D.C., and The Lost Cause Press in Louisville, Kentucky, helped pioneer the business, both companies dating back to the mid-1950s. Readex President Albert Boni is one of the few links the industry has with conventional publishing, but the company itself is vastly different from the old Boni & Liveright that challenged the establishment in the 1920s with the works of Dreiser and O'Neill. Readex today is the unofficial microform publisher to Her Majesty's Government in England (*Hansard's British Parliamentary Debates*) and, with fine impartiality, it also microprints most publications of the U.S. Government.

Libraries are the principal users of microform publishing; but in the case of some institutions, far from solving the space problem, it has added to it. The New York Public Library, for example, catalogues the original book or periodical as well as the microreprint. One reason: most readers still prefer the book to microform if they have a choice. In addition, the Library is microfilming its own collection, thus compounding the difficulty.

The range of material is vast. A *Guide to Microforms in Print* lists more than 15,000 titles currently available, and it is far from complete. Few titles are sold individually, however, as publishers offer collections grouped by subject matter. For example, The Lost Cause Press, which specializes in hard-to-find books on early American history and literature, particularly about the West, boasts a current inventory of 12,500 volumes. A hand-picked selection of 537 books on “The Plains and the Rockies” will cost you about \$8,000.

Will microform make books obsolete? Not at this price. But for the scholar, it may make travel obsolete. With history entombed in a few dozen file drawers at any one of several locations—and this is literally what is happening—the search for knowledge, at least in the physical sense, is simplified. No more junkets to the Bodleian or the British Museum. Or even the Library of Congress. Is that bad?

**THE ROOTS OF THE MODERN  
AMERICAN EMPIRE:**

**A Study of the Growth and  
Shaping of Social Consciousness  
in a Marketplace Society**

**by William Appleman Williams**

*Random House, 547 pp., \$15*

ONE OF THE MOST CHERISHED and firmly held self-images of Americans is their view of themselves as descendants of a freedom-loving people who cast off the yoke of empire and set themselves to build a model democracy for all the world to envy and emulate. Wary of entangling alliances and alert to the potential of the North American continent, they looked to expansion within its limits. Only in the twentieth century, during two world wars, did Americans reluctantly emerge out of isolationism into a major international role and, even then, only one that was consistent with anti-colonial traditions, serving the cause of freedom for all peoples.

This simplistic portrait of Uncle Sam has long been known to be a caricature by all who have more than an elementary knowledge of American history. Unfortunately, until recently the vast majority of Americans were not college-educated and possessed only an elementary knowledge. Even on the college level there has been an

unwillingness to characterize American foreign policy as interventionist, imperialist, or anything but freedom-seeking. Historians who dealt with American interventionism tended to date it from the end of the nineteenth century, and to treat it either as an aberration or as the imposition of an expansionist policy by a small but powerful industrial-financial élite in the Northeast. Only Marxist analysts stressed the imperialistic nature of American foreign policy, arguing that it was inherent in capitalism.

Now a non-Marxist American historian, William Appleman Williams, offers a densely documented argument that American foreign policy has been imperialist in nature and in practice from the beginnings of the American Revolution; that it was not imposed upon the people by a small élite but was widely accepted and applauded by the majority of Americans, and that it originated in the early agrarian economy of the South, Middle West, and West. "The roots of the Modern American Empire," Williams argues, are to be found not in the counting houses of New York or the factories of New England, but on the plantations and prairies.

Williams states that "marketplace difficulties encountered after 1740 . . . defined the substance of the quarrel between the American colonies and the British metropolis." The colonists equated the "freedom they needed to solve their economic problems" with

the "freedom and independence they desired in their personal and social affairs." A free marketplace came to be considered the ultimate expression of a free society, a guarantor of individual freedoms.

In 1785, in his letter to John Jay, Thomas Jefferson wrote: "Our people are decided in the opinion that it is necessary for us to take a share in the occupation of the ocean, and their established habits induce them to require that the sea be kept open to them . . ." Jefferson had no doubts of the consequences of a policy of freedom of the seas: "Frequent wars without a doubt . . . Our commerce on the ocean and in other countries must be paid for by frequent war."

Williams traces the expansionist policies of Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Jackson, motivated by American agricultural production in search of overseas markets and constantly spurred by the growth of the United States, southwest through the Louisiana Purchase, north towards Canada, west to the Oregon Territories and Alaska, and southwest with the revolution in Texas. He analyzes the economic causes of the Civil War, the war with Mexico, and the major worldwide expansion of American influence resulting from the war with Spain in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Throughout this study Professor Williams quotes at length from farm journals and legislative debates in the states. The mass of material, much of it new, overwhelms the reader. It is heavy going, but worth every bit of the concentration it requires.

The essential theme of his argument appears early in the book: "American farmers had been responsive as early as the end of the eighteenth century to all the main lines of argument advanced by [Adam] Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*. They had taken his insistence that a free marketplace economy was essential to political and social freedom, and integrated it with the individualistic side of John Locke's philosophy. That produced an equation that causally linked the free marketplace with freedom per se." Williams asserts that this theory was stimulated by an American "evangelical righteousness" which "created a powerful psychological drive that was quickly characterized by the protagonists themselves as America's manifest destiny to lead and reform—if not rule—the world. Already justified because it was necessary and fruitful, expansion became inevitable because it was the expression of a divine logic. The concept of The City on a Hill thus became The Empire of the Globe."

Williams distinguishes between the imperialism of American foreign policy

