

Historiographical Schools

Nationalist School-This school was created during the period after the American Revolution and during the creation of the New Republic. Its most famous writer is George Bancroft. It stressed the creation of the United States as an experiment in republican forms of government. It stressed the American national identity as one based upon the values of freedom, natural rights, and open economic competition.

Progressive School-This school was created during the beginning of the 20th century and the Progressive political movement. Its most famous writers were Charles and Mary Beard. They argued that the Constitution of the United States had been formed by the upper class of merchants, bankers, lawyers, and landowners in order to create a strong centralized government to protect their wealth. The Constitution then became a counter revolution that allowed the upper class to create a federal government that would place economic decision making at the federal government level where the American aristocracy could dominate decision making.

Consensus School-This school was created during the 1950s and the height of the Cold War. Its most famous writer was Bernard Bailyn. Bailyn argued that the United States was formed more out of a common ideology than due to its divisions. He pointed to the Founding Fathers as having inherited a British Whig tradition of politics. The Whigs believed that the English Stuart monarch family were always out to steal land, taxes, and political power from the nobility and middle class. The Whigs believed the only way to protect against such tyranny was through a constitutional form of government that checked and balanced the monarchy. And the government had to be established and run to protect the natural rights of the citizens.

New Left-This school was created during the tumultuous 1960s. There is no one great writer. But the movement has been associated with a group of writers from various backgrounds including ethnic minorities, working class communities, women, gay writers, and immigrants. The New Left argued that the United States was formed during the Revolution by various groups, class, ethnic groups, and gender groups. Throughout US history, these groups have various points of view. The dominant and most powerful group tends to try to marginalize or neglect the points of view of other more marginalized groups. So, the purpose of the historian is to resurrect the history of forgotten groups like African Americans, Native Americans, women and gay individuals.

Post Modernism-This school was created during the 1970s and is still having an effect today. Post modernists also do not have a single prominent writer. They stress that society is a social construction. This means that societies create their realities through the language and literary symbols they use to define their identity. Post modernists try to pick out the key values and stories about a society's accepted history. For example, American history is usually described as a story about progress. Post modernists then try to show the contradictions or tensions with this story from the context that surrounds its creation. A postmodernist history then tries to recreate the history from a more problematized viewpoint.