



# The Contours of American History

*William Appleman Williams*

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## **The Contours of American History** William Appleman Williams

William Appleman Williams was one of America's greatest critics of US imperialism. *The Contours of American History*, first published in 1961, reached back to seventeenth-century British history to argue that the relationship between liberalism and empire was in effect a grand compromise, with expansion abroad containing class and race tensions at home.

Williams was not the first historian to identify the United States as an imperial power, yet he was unique in linking domestic disquiet to the long history of American expansion, which he traced back to England's Glorious Revolution. Reaching deep into thirteenth century British history to identify the motor contradictions of what eventually would become known as liberalism, Williams presents a wholly original interpretation of US history; one where the story of the United States is the story of capitalism.

Coming as it did before the political explosions of the 1960s, Williams's message was a deeply heretical one, and yet the Modern Library ultimately chose *Contours* as one of the best 100 nonfiction books of the 20th Century. This fiftieth anniversary edition will introduce this magisterial work to a new readership, with a new introduction by Greg Grandin, one of today's leading historians of US foreign policy.

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