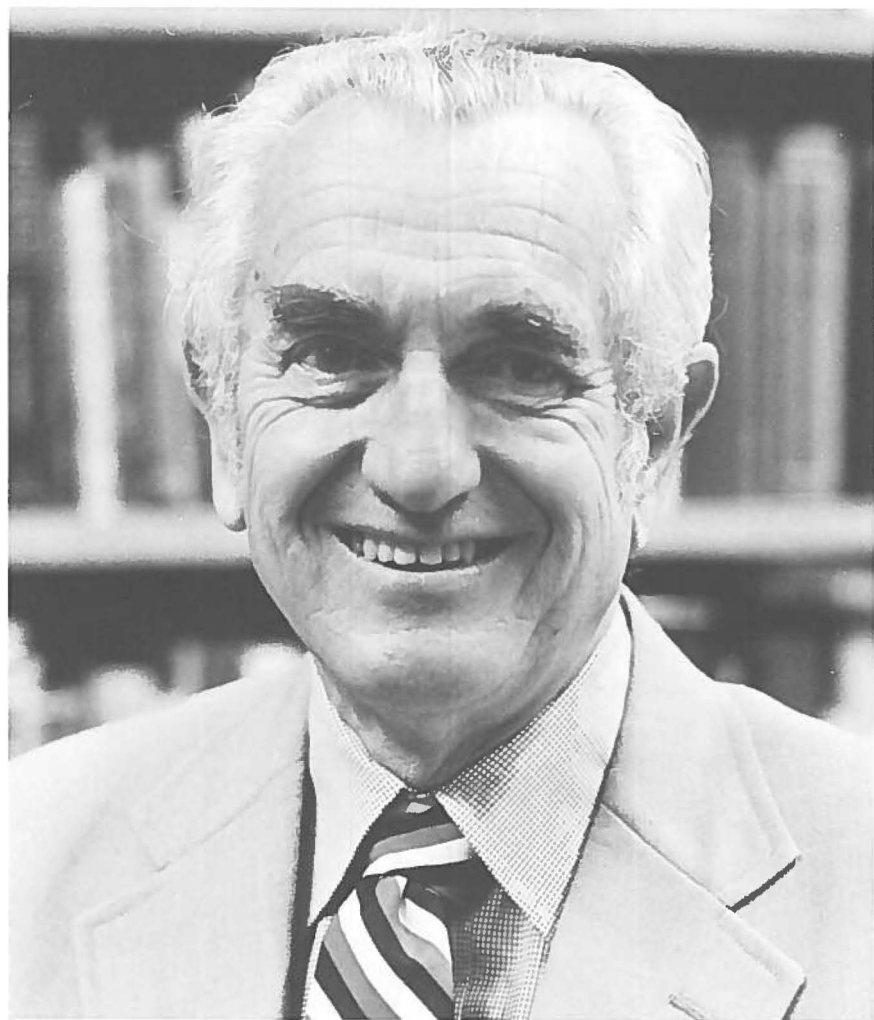


CARL N. DEGLER
PRESIDENT

AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

1986



Carl N. Degler, president of the American Historical Association, has enjoyed a career with few parallels in the recent history of the profession because of its remarkable range. Having written a doctoral dissertation at Columbia University on the labor history of the Jacksonian period, he has gone on to publish articles and books on southern history, race relations, the history of women and the family, the election of 1896, the career of Herbert Hoover, the work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman--and a synthetic overview of all American history.

Born in New Jersey in 1921, Degler did his undergraduate work at Upsala College. Having entered with the intention of pursuing a legal career, he encountered a gifted teacher of American history, Henry F. Arnold, and joined the History Club. By the time that he graduated from Upsala, Degler had changed his mind about his career goals and had decided to become a historian. After service in World War II, he went on to obtain the MA and PhD at Columbia.

With a happy experience at one small, liberal arts college in his background, Degler went from Columbia to Vassar College, where he was to spend sixteen years. There his interest in women's history manifested itself, and he wrote a pioneering article about Charlotte Perkins Gilman that antedated the rebirth of feminism by several years. And there he gave the lectures that formed the basis for Out of Our Past, his first book. In this work he demonstrated his considerable abilities as a synthesizer, providing interpretations, such as the New Deal as the Third American Revolution, that have done much to shape the literature in the years since its original publication.

At this point in his career, he came to the attention of David Potter, then one of the most eminent historians in the discipline. Potter reviewed Out of Our Past and conceived so strong a respect for the younger man that he invited Degler's participation in a textbook project. After this was completed, Potter was instrumental in Degler's going to Stanford University in 1968, where he has been ever since. Since 1972, he has been the Margaret Byrne Professor of American History.

At Stanford, Degler's career has blossomed. In 1971, he published Neither Black Nor White, a comparative study of Brazilian and American slavery. This book enjoyed the rare distinction of winning the Beveridge Prize, the Bancroft Prize, and the Pulitzer Prize. Two years later he published The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century in which he argued the case for continuing southern distinctiveness. In 1977 Place Over Time appeared, based on the Fleming lectures he had earlier delivered at Louisiana State University. In this work, too, he argued the brief for continuity in the southern experience. In 1980 he published At Odds: Women and the Family from the Revolution to the Present, the culmination of his longstanding interest in women's history. As with so much of his previous work, At Odds had a substantial impact on the nature of the subsequent discourse in its field.

In the course of his distinguished career, Professor Degler has earned many honors and much recognition. This year he joined a list that includes C. Vann Woodward, John Hope Franklin, and Arthur Link by achieving the presidency of the Southern Historical Association

and the American Historical Association while also having been president of the Organization of American Historians. He is perhaps unique in having been president of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association, too. In 1973-74, he was Harmsworth Professor of American History at Oxford University. His fellowships have come from the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, and the Stanford Humanities Center, to cite the most prestigious.

Renowned as a scholar, Degler has also been highly esteemed by his students at Vassar and at Stanford. Moreover, the graduate students he has trained at Stanford reflect his own wide range of interests: they have worked on such varied topics as southern history, women's history, intellectual history, and quantitative methods. Those who have studied with him can attest to the fact that he brings to their work nearly the same zest that he brings to his own.

Perhaps the truest gauge of Carl Degler's devotion to the discipline of history is the way in which he has spent his presidential year. He made it a point to spend many weeks on the road, visiting as many and as diverse a set of institutions as time and energy (his seems boundless) would permit. Taking his presidency to be more than a ceremonial position, he set out to discuss the state of history teaching with as many of its practitioners as humanly possible. In this, as in much of his historical scholarship, he demonstrated his faith in democratic possibilities.

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