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History in the Era of Theory, Methodology, and Multiculturalism: New Configurations for the Discipline

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The Revolution in Historical Studies since 1960

The discipline of history is broad in scope by any definition and unique in its concentration on the factor of time, which itself can be seen to have many dimensions. During the past generation, the study of history has expanded dramatically in its scope and in the range of its approaches to time. This revolution in historical studies has taken place quietly, but it is nonetheless pervasive and significant.

Peter Novick, in a 1988 book entitled *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession,* made innovative use of the traditional techniques of the historian—leafing through documentary archives—to reveal some unheralded patterns of change in historical studies. He studied the letters, speeches, book reviews, and notes of historians working in the United States since 1886, when the American Historical Association was founded. He focused on the twists and turns in the debate about whether history could be an objective science or whether it was dominated by the subjective impressions of historical authors. In the concluding chapters to that study, Novick noted the collapse, in recent years, of an apparent consensus among historians that had been dominated by agreement on the main lines of political history. Instead, as he noted in a chapter entitled "There Was No King in Israel," the contending perspectives of women's history, black history, and social history led to an impression of the fragmentation of historical studies. (Novick 1988, 573–629).

Novick's detailed and subtle analysis is a great contribution to the history of history. Through it, for instance, entering graduate students

can learn where they fit into the range of debates and specializations in historical studies. But I prefer to interpret the last thirty years of historical studies not in terms of fragmentation of a consensus but as a methodological and theoretical revolution accompanied by rapid expansion of the scope (geographical, thematic, and temporal) of historical studies. Biology had its revolution with the breaking of the DNA code; physics and chemistry had earlier revolutions with the development of quantum mechanics; economics had its revolution with the development of macroeconomics. History has had not one but several such innovations concurrently: here I present them as five overlapping dimensions of the revolution in historical studies.

One dimension of the revolution stemmed from the establishment of federally supported area-studies programs after World War II. These centers set history in the context of interdisciplinary study of Latin America, Russia and Eastern Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. New courses, new journals, and substantially expanded literatures grew for each of these areas. There were to be no more "people without history."[1]

A second dimension came with the rise of interdisciplinary, social science approaches to history. This included work inspired by the late E. P. Thompson's 1963 *The Making of the English Working Class,* a sort of "history from the bottom up" that privileged the viewpoint of artisans and wage workers and, in the hands of other authors, of the crowd and peasants (Rudé 1964; Tilly 1964). Works in African-American history gained wider attention in the era of the civil rights movement. The new economic history arose based on neoclassical economic theory and quantitative testing of hypotheses. The new social history arose, equally quantitative and sometimes equally theoretical. Feminism brought a new critique to history and an expanded literature on women's history. Political history too became more theoretical and more quantitative (Blassingame 1972; Conrad 1957; Thernstrom 1969; Tilly and Scott 1978; Formisano 1971). Overall, the social science dimension to history brought adoption into history of formal methodology (especially quantitative techniques), formal theory (neoclassical and Marxian economics, Parsonian and Marxian sociology, psychoanalysis, and feminism), and explicit identification of standpoints: working-class history, feminist outlooks, African-American outlooks, third world viewpoints.

A third dimension to the revolution in historical studies centered on advances in cultural studies. American studies arose as an interdisciplinary linking of history and literature; the rise of deconstructionism and other developments in literary theory soon had new impact on historical studies. Studies in popular culture were reinforced by the new social history.[2] Anthropology, with its foci on kinship, culture, and social structure, provided a framework utilized first by historians of third world areas; then Clifford Geertz became a guru to the historical profession in general, and echoes of his Balinese cock-fight showed up in analyses of the American heartland (Vansina 1966; Geertz 1973). Art history, long centered on Europe, especially in Renaissance and early modern times, began to extend its scope to other regions and times. Ethnomusicology, developed earlier for study of areas beyond the limits of European cultural dominance (in contrast to the studies of elite European musical traditions), came to provide a framework for study of music in general.[3] Studies in several subfields of cultural history are still gaining momentum and are moving toward linkages and recognition of each other's advances.

Yet another dimension of the change in historical studies centered on biological and environmental history. The field of historical demography expanded sharply, first with work on Europe, then on the United States, and then on regions throughout the world. Studies in nutrition, disease, and other aspects of biological history began to be conducted in greater numbers. Beyond human biology, historians also undertook study of other elements of the environment—plants, animals, land, and the atmosphere.[4]

The fifth and encompassing dimension of the revolution in historical studies came with the elaboration of global frameworks. Most history is still done in the national framework. The area-studies movement and its extension of historical studies to all corners of the world, while in one sense extending the national framework, still served to set the groundwork for interpretation at the global level. With William McNeill's 1963 *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community,* professional historians began to involve themselves in world history.[5] In an analogous but distinct trend, historical sociologists began more comparisons of national and regional units, responding in part to the growing impact of Max Weber on sociology (Moore 1966). In addition, certain issues—war,

environment, and disease—commonly spilled over national limits and readily elicited global approaches to their analysis. In the United States, domestic social pressures by minority communities led eventually to what we now know as a multicultural approach in United States history. Similarly, and beyond our North American island, strife and debate over decolonization, the cold war and then its end gave impetus to a global approach to history (Nordquist 1992; Bradley Commission 1988). It has not proved easy, however, to develop a global conceptualization of historical change rather than one based on the summation of separate national histories. Global analysis is more than the comparison of separate national units, and it is more than the impact of General Motors, McDonald's, and Elvis Presley on the world. It is instead the interaction of all regions of the world in a single system—so that it may be helpful to think in automobiles of Hyundai, in food of the spread of Thai cuisine, and in music of Nigerian-born Sade, who sings her songs in cabaret style with American themes to a cosmopolitan British audience of European, African, and Asian ancestry.

I have made some effort to order these developments, but one may equally say that they came all on top of one another. The recent Nobel prizes awarded to Robert Fogel and Douglass North are based on their theory-based work in quantitative economic history conducted in the 1960s and 1970s. Andre Gunder Frank—who, in the same period, set forth a thesis of Latin American underdevelopment that sparked an important debate on interaction in modern world history—criticized, in a recent talk at Northeastern University, the work of both Fogel and North for interpreting economic history narrowly within the limits of the United States or Western Europe (Frank 1968; Frank and Gillis 1993). That is, we still have much to do in working out the mutual implications of the many new developments in historical studies.[6]

Constraints on the Study of History

So far, this is the story of a wonderful expansion and deepening in historical research—in documents, methods, theories, standpoints, and interpretations. Debate and dispute necessarily result from the range of new work.

But these remarkable developments took place within a set of severe constraints. The profession of history was in demographic decline during most of this time—among students and faculty members both. And while the research was changing dramatically, the institutions for the study and the teaching of history changed very little. An equally severe constraint was that the philosophy of historical studies changed rather little.

Demographically, historical studies underwent a boom during the 1960s during a period of rapid construction of colleges and universities. Undergraduate student enrollment peaked in about 1970 and then declined—partly because the baby boomers passed through college age but also because greater flexibility in the curriculum led to relaxation of the traditional requirements for U.S. history and Western civilization courses that had employed so many college history teachers. Many new doctoral programs opened up in the 1960s, and new Ph.D.s focused particularly in social history. But the market for history Ph.D.s collapsed suddenly in 1975, so that 600 a year were employed rather than the previous 1,200.[7]

Ironically, then, at the moment of greatest creativity and advance in historical research, demoralization came to dominate graduate education. Faculty members, seeking to avoid the prospect of training students who would never find work and exhausted by the strain of reading 200 dossiers for each replacement of a retiring colleague, put little energy into doctoral programs. Undergraduate programs suffered less, but in an era when book publishers focused mainly on competing versions of shiny textbooks, the logic of product differentiation dominated: moving the chrome strips was a safer tactic than marketing a whole new design, much less introducing an Edsel. The emphasis in teaching remained centered on synthesis of established facts rather than on presentation of new research results.

Under these conditions, some basic assumptions of historical studies continued to govern, even though they were contradicted by most of the good new work. History remained organized at the national level or within continental regions. Political history still retained its hegemony in the informal hierarchy of historical fields. Historians dabbled in adjoining disciplines but without taking formal training in their method or theory. Historians of Europe were assumed to take the lead in interpretive and

theoretical work; historians of the United States were assumed to do the most thorough and critical empirical studies; historians of other regions were assumed to be filling in local gaps for their region.

Historians of the United States met among themselves and not with historians of other regions; the Americanists met by time period and subdiscipline. The American Historical Association, the big meeting designed to attract all historians, remained dominated first by historians of Europe (meaning Western Europe) and then by historians of the United States.[8] The numerous historians of Africa and the various regions of Asia went instead to their respective area-studies meetings, so that their work appeared quite marginal from the perspective of one attending the AHA. When historians of Europe began to learn the relevance of anthropology to history, they went straight to the anthropologists for coaching, thus bypassing the work of a generation of historians of Africa who had built up substantial experience in using anthropological approaches and materials in studies of history (Sabean 1984; Vansina 1978).

The old rigidities are now challenged, but they are not gone. Hiring of historians is still done by nation or region. Book reviews are still organized in the same way: thus, the *American Historical Review,* which gives the most comprehensive set of reviews of any historical journal, still does not have a section on world history.

New Directions: Consolidating the Advances in Historical Studies

Having discussed on one hand the strengths and innovations of recent work in history, and on the other hand the weaknesses and rigidities in the discipline, let me offer some comments on current directions in historical studies and attempt to tie these comments to library resources so that we may link the study of history to the discussion of the gateway library. My examples will be based on activities at Northeastern University, and I do hope that they will have some generality.

First, Northeastern University has just approved a new doctoral program in history, with a focus on methodology and global history. Candidates will specialize in world history, United States history, and European history, and all will include global dimensions in their studies and their dissertations.[9]

In methodology, we emphasize formal interdisciplinary training. Each doctoral candidate must identify a methodological specialization, a set of courses to develop skills in that area, and a faculty committee to oversee his or her methodological training (of the three faculty committee members, one is likely to be outside the history department). Thus, an economic historian would take a year of graduate courses in economics, a social historian would take graduate courses in sociology, and a cultural historian would take graduate study in such disciplines as literary theory, anthropology, art history, or musicology. In addition to developing these specializations, doctoral candidates will participate in a multidisciplinary seminar intended to develop both their strength in their own field and their basic literacy in a wide range of historical methodologies.

This approach is a direct challenge to the established tradition among historians of entering interdisciplinary work by doing a smattering of reading in adjoining disciplines rather than by taking formal training in new methodologies. The Northeastern history department had steadily increased its emphasis on methodology in recent years, and this program was the logical next step. My own commitment to this relatively rigorous approach to methodology comes from having spent half a career as an economic historian of Africa and observing the rudimentary level of that literature, since the great majority of scholars who call themselves economic historians of Africa have no training in economics.

Our focus on global history has both global and national dimensions. First and most boldly, we seek to provide comprehensive training in world history for specialists in that growing field. These doctoral students will perform analysis and interpretation of global patterns in history. Our intention is to involve young scholars in world history at the beginning of their career rather than restrict them to national history until mid-career. This means that we must establish the character of a dissertation in world history—a study that is monographic and based on primary research but that centers on interactive or comparative study of at least two regions. Our program will produce graduates who are prepared to teach world history, both because they have taken world history courses and because they have been supervised in the teaching of world history.

In addition, doctoral students who center on national history in the United States, in Europe, and in other regions will include a significant

global dimension to their studies. Thus, a study in French social history would address interactions of French social structure with global economic trends and comparisons of social change in France and in other countries.

In a second major area of activity, the Northeastern history department launched a major project in revising the undergraduate history curriculum during the 1994–1995 academic year. This project was undertaken with the support of the National Endowment for the Humanities and with the collaboration of six other Boston-area institutions of higher education.[10] In a set of twelve lectures and workshops, we focused on introducing new research results into undergraduate teaching, with an emphasis on new trends in methodology and world history. We wrote a comprehensive history curricula for each of our seven institutions. In so doing, we focused not just on revising the introductory survey course but on upper-division courses and the full range of courses for history majors.

The preparations for this program include a daunting but stimulating project: surveying recent research advances in many areas of history. We are finding, for instance, that the field of cultural history includes numerous subfields organized around distinct regional and disciplinary viewpoints: cultural studies focused on recent England, cultural history centered on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, popular culture studies in the United States, plus studies in cultural anthropology, in folklore, in art history, in architectural history, in ethnomusicology, and in literary theory. Considering the contributions and the linkages of these subfields should lead to the discovery of some exciting opportunities for undergraduate learning. The focus on new research results has the potential for giving students the impression of being at the cutting edge of historical research and debate rather than of struggling to assimilate a backlog of established fact.

Both of these projects require heavy and imaginative use of library resources. We at Northeastern are fortunate to have benefitted from a recent and dramatic expansion in the scale and quantity of our library resources, which has given substantial encouragement to our new ventures in graduate and undergraduate education. In 1991 the new Snell Library opened, providing us with the largest physical plant among university libraries in Boston; a major and permanent increase in the

library budget provided us with the basis for building a strong collection in history.

It was impressive to see how, within two years, student habits of library usage changed and improved. Quiet study in a roomy and sound-absorbing atmosphere replaced the din of the overcrowded old facility. Rates of book circulation easily doubled, and student papers became more densely documented. Students learned the online catalog system rapidly. Reference librarians, stationed prominently in the foyer between the catalog terminals and the circulation desk, are now kept very active. In the second-floor media library, students readily view assigned videos held on reserve for their classes.

At least one library modification had an unexpectedly positive effect. To simplify shelving, journals were consolidated over wide topical areas and given simplified call numbers.[11] Thus, for history, all history journals—with Library of Congress call numbers beginning with C, D, E, and F—were given the simple call number C and shelved alphabetically within that category, both in the Periodical Room and in the stacks. I well remember my initial reaction to this innovation, which was irritation—a typical historian's response to any change in the organization of familiar documents. Rapidly, however, I warmed to the modification because it was consistent with the growing trend to connections across fields of history. Journals on U.S. history were no longer isolated from those on Latin America, Africa, and Europe. Journals on political history might be shelved next to those on cultural history; journals on local history might be shelved next to those on global history. Now I saw linkages across regional and topical fields that had previously escaped my notice, and I could send students to browse through journals in the expectation that they would find similar connections.[12]

For the undergraduate curriculum project, we turned for help to the library staff. My initial hope was to create a separate collection, including books and journals containing a broad selection of major recent research advances, through which participants in the project could browse for inspiration during the year of our deliberations.[13] But it was impractical to pull so many volumes off the regular shelves during the academic year, and in any case library technology had developed greatly. Our solution is to prepare an annotated, online bibliography of recent advances in

historical research, which may be accessed directly at Northeastern or by modem from remote locations. Users will consult the works either at Northeastern or at other libraries in the Boston Library Consortium. Preparation of this bibliography requires the energies of both historians and librarians—the former to select the entries and write the annotations, and the latter to assist in searches and to format and implement the bibliography.

At both graduate and undergraduate levels, our initiatives in the teaching of history will lead us to explore new possibilities in the library. Even as the frontiers among the disciplines are eroding, our students will have to learn the disciplinary map in sufficient detail to locate the methodological and empirical segments of the literature. Students will have to learn to read across the disciplines and to locate materials in a range of related disciplines.

The frontiers of historical research and interpretation have spread far beyond the nineteenth-century focus on political history and official texts. "Evidence" now includes many categories beyond written text—oral testimony, music, archaeological remains. The final product of historical research now also goes beyond written text—film, video, audio. As part of this change, theorists have generalized the terms *text* and *document* so that they may include any sort of evidence. One notable index of changing approaches of historians is that the *American Historical Review* now includes film reviews as a regular feature.

Training history students to use the new library technology presents itself with increasing insistency as we attempt to bring them to the frontiers of current research. Graduate students, by long tradition, have been required to master traditional library skills and to learn foreign language skills as part of their training. More recently, we have begun to require that graduate students develop a range of computer skills—word processing, databases, graphics, and in some cases statistics. By the same logic we should require students to become adept at a range of new library techniques. So far, we have instructed our students simply to go and learn: to utilize library databases in association with citation indices, to collect newspaper citations through CD-ROM indexes, and to utilize the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN), a national bibliographic database, to search for archival holdings. The problem with this hands-on, self-help approach is that the students may not use these tools to best advantage. Our library has short courses to introduce its resources, and we will clearly have to move to ensure that all our graduate students and our more energetic undergraduates benefit from these courses.[14]

The Place of History in a Redrawn Disciplinary Map

The discipline of history has a dynamic of its own—as seen recently in the ups and downs of demand for courses, the rise of public history, and the interactions among fields (for example, quantitative social history and popular culture). But historical scholarship also reflects the dynamics of the disciplines with which it is closely associated—social science and humanities disciplines, as well as environmental and biological studies. Each of these show a development, in recent times, toward broader and more interconnected styles of inquiry, highlighted by a rising importance of theory and databases.

History, as it used to be, threatens to be swallowed up in the transformations of the disciplines surrounding it. My guess, however, is that in the wake of this ongoing reorganization of intellectual and academic life, the discipline of history will reemerge with a recognizable approach and character. I was trained in the 1960s both as an Africanist and as a cliometrician, a new economic historian. I watched as the field of economic history moved from history departments to economics departments. For a time it seemed that hypothesis testing would be the only way to do economic history. Indeed, hypothesis testing remains central in that field. But I watched as the economists who stayed with the subject gradually became more like historians: their writing style improved; they began to season their bold and decisive analyses and to tarry with nuances, with the specificities of one situation or another, with the ironies of timing (Wright 1978). Consider again the case of Douglass North, who began his career with hypothesis testing on American materials in which institutions were only constraints at the edge of his system. He then moved to a study of European development in which institutions

became the key to growth and then to a study that is really philosophy of history (North 1966, 1981, 1990; North and Thomas 1973). His Nobel Prize was awarded really for the first stage of his career.

The new disciplinary frontiers will be different and more permeable than the old: we will read journals across what were once disciplinary lines, use each others' research techniques, and apply each others' theories. But I think that when the dust settles from this particular set of transformations, the study of history will still be, recognizably, the offspring of historical studies today.

One side of the historian's task will be a continuation of the traditional role of guardian and synthesizer of the evidence and teller of nuanced tales of the past. There will still be narrative history, and historians will remain the specialists at combining diverse categories of evidence into stories constructed with a focus on the passage of time.

The new side to the historian's role will be that of synthesizer of methodology. Historians taking on this new function will address their topics by mediating among the theoretical and methodological alternatives and by combining them or alternating among them artfully in interpreting the historical record to provide a comprehensive and, hopefully, realistic view of the past. Historians may be masters of few of the academic trades they will ply but journeymen at many of them. And as history in the past was tied closely to the traditional library, so will history in the future be tied to many dimensions of the transformed library.

Notes

1. In the United States, federally funded area-studies centers were established beginning in the 1950s. Major area-studies journals were founded during and after World War II, such as *Slavic Review* (1941), *Journal of Asian Studies* (1941), and *Middle East Journal* (1947). The main journal in Latin American history, *Hispanic American Historical Review,* was launched at the end of World War I, in 1921, while the *Journal of African History* was founded late, in 1960. The "people without a history" form part of the title of Eric Wolf's (1982) interpretive overview of modern world history.

2. The leading journal in American studies, the *American Quarterly,* was founded in 1949. On literary theory, studies in popular culture, and their combination in the historical literature, see Eagleton (1983), Gans (1974), and Sabean (1984).

3. The main impact of new methodology in art history and ethnomusicology came some years later than for the fields discussed above. See Vansina (1984), Johnson (1988), Blum, Bohlman, and Neuman (1991). In the last few years the *Musical Quarterly,* founded in 1915, has published a substantial number of articles written from an ethnomusicological perspective.

4. For historical demography in Europe see Laslett (1966); in the United States see Gordon (1973). For other areas, work proceeded more slowly: see Manning (1990). On biological history see Kiple and Himmelsteib King (1981). On environmental history see Cronon (1983) and Crosby (1986).

5. Philip Curtin (1964) is perhaps the best example of a scholar working in area studies (on Africa) who saw his work explicitly as a contribution to world history.

6. Peter Burke has written a book-length assessment of the interaction of history and other social sciences, focusing not only on recent and dramatic changes in historical studies but also on two centuries of change in the relations between history, sociology, and other fields. Burke's 1980 edition focuses on sociology; his 1992 edition addresses social sciences and culture studies more broadly.

Other reflections on interactions among the disciplines have appeared recently, especially for studies beyond Europe and North America. See, for instance, Bates (1993) and Cooper et al. (1993).

7. Figures as reported by the American Historical Association. Contractions in various subfields of history proceeded at different paces: African and Middle East history had tightened up in earlier years, but new and replacement positions continued to be offered in African-American history.

8. A summary categorization, by panel, of papers presented at the American Historical Association meetings of 1983 and 1991 showed that, in each case, about 75 percent of the panels and papers were focused on the United States and Western Europe (modern and medieval), while some 25 percent were focused on other areas of the world. More than half the latter group consisted of presentations on Eastern Europe and on Latin America. Africa, Oceania, the ancient world, and Asia (East, Southeast, South, Central, and West) were thus almost totally absent from sessions of the AHA.

9. This new program builds on the university's well-established M.A. program, which has particular strength in public history.

10. "Mainstreaming Methodology and World History for Undergraduates in History," supported by the Higher Education Division of the National Endowment for the Humanities (September 1994–June 1995; grant no. EH21745). Participating institutions, in addition to Northeastern, are Roxbury Community College, Wheelock College, Simmons College, Boston College, Tufts University, and University of Massachusetts at Lowell.

11. In the previous facility, all bound journals were held on closed stacks. It was a thrill to find them on open stacks—and also to find that they were relatively undamaged precisely because they had been held on closed stacks.

12. The enlarged category of history journals could not, however, be all-inclusive: journals in economic, social, and demographic history are classified under "H."

The old historians' technique of searching far afield for relevant materials thus retains their relevance.

13. My notion was inspired directly by the browsing library set up each summer for more than a decade in the Newberry Library Summer Institute in Quantitative History: this collection in social and quantitative history had introduced me and scores of other historians to the expanding social history literature.

14. The university is setting up short courses in computer skills. Library short courses are equivalent to these.

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3

Realizing the Virtual Library

Anthony Appiah

I hardly ever go to a library. But the libraries at Harvard University are among the major resources for my work as a teacher and researcher. I access them sitting at home or in the office, connected by modem, at all hours of the day or night. I can use them the way I do for a simple reason: the HOLLIS databases contain most of the books I use, organized in ways that make it possible for me to find them. The real books can be delivered to me and returned by my research assistants: what I need, when I am deciding what to read, is the virtual trace of the book in the database. If the system also made available online the *Philosopher's Index* and the MLA bibliographies, I could do almost all the journal searches I wanted, too: and if I could take the articles off the system (with a reasonable copyright charge), I would. I am delighted that the library makes possible what it does, in as transparent a way as possible for this user and look forward to more of the same: using even more of the resources of Widener Library while hardly ever going there.

One thing more I would like to see is online access to journal articles—not abstracts alone, but the articles themselves. This would add enormously to the utility of the library as a support for my research: I could read more of them, browse more (and not randomly as I now do on paper but using searches for key words), and could quickly follow up references. The difference in the quantity of time spent on research would make possible a qualitative difference in the kind of work I could do. It used to be a serious scholarly project to collect all the recent literature on a subject. To do it one needed the help of expert reference librarians or a great knowledge of the field. Now, with the bibliographic resources available and the fact that they are stored in machine-readable and thus