



HARVARD Kennedy School
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Applied History Project Newsletter

November 2024

The November 2024 issue of the Applied History Network Newsletter spotlights member-contributed news items for more than 200 leaders in the Applied History movement across 50 institutions.

This newsletter is prepared by the Applied History Project at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center and edited by Jason Walter and Ivana Hoàng Giang.

If you would like to submit an item for next month's issue, please email it to igiang@hks.harvard.edu with the subject "December Applied History Update" before Wednesday, January 8.

Special Announcement

University of Georgia Seeks Applications for Professor in Applied History

The Department of History at the University of Georgia invites applications for a tenure-track open-rank position in Applied History with an anticipated start date of August 1, 2025. This professor will develop course offerings in Applied History, including "Introduction to Applied History," and direct the new Applied History Certificate program, which trains students to use historical analysis in contemporary public policy and decision-making. Requirements include teaching undergraduate and graduate courses (two in each semester); mentoring and advising students; and

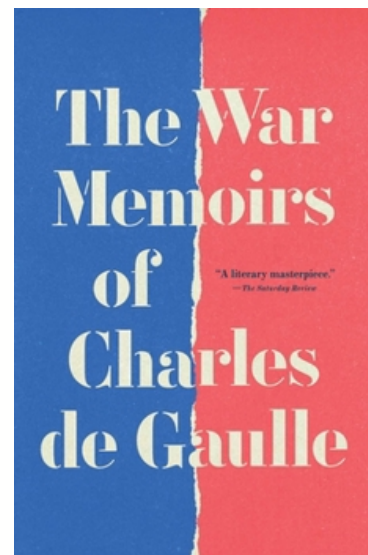
maintaining an active scholarly research and publishing agenda. For more information, see the job posting [here](#).

Latest History Books Illuminating Today's Headline Challenges and Choices*

De Gaulle's Memoirs, Like the Man, Remain "Admirable" and "Infuriating"

The War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle, first published in three volumes between 1954 and 1959, have been reprinted in a single tome of nearly 1,000 pages. Writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, **Andrew Roberts** (Bonnie and Tom McCloskey Distinguished Visiting Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution; Visiting Professor, War Studies Department, King's College, London) [frames](#)

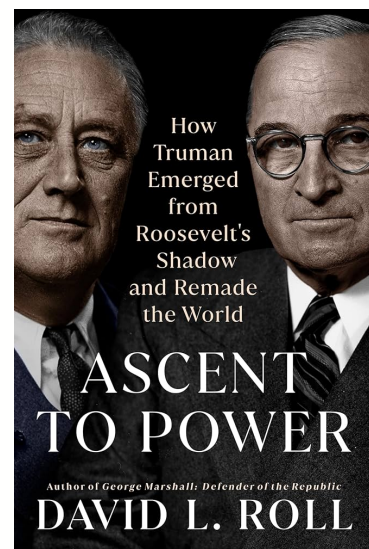
the book with two points relevant to Applied History: First, de Gaulle's memoirs are "virtually useless as objective history," since he "... does not attempt – indeed, does not even begin to pretend to attempt – to write anything other than his own story, regardless of the facts." Second, de Gaulle's grandiose perspectives on himself and on France echo today. Referencing de Gaulle's quote, "France cannot be France without greatness," Roberts explains that "The past seventy years of French history, even the posturings of the current president of La République, should be seen through the prism of politicians trying to live up to that phrase." Anglophobia saturates de Gaulle's version of history. "For much of the memoirs, the war that de Gaulle describes is the one he waged against Churchill, Roosevelt, and Gens. Dwight Eisenhower and Leonard Gerow, as well as against French generals and politicians who he feared might replace him." He downplays "the English-speaking peoples' contribution to the liberation of his country." For example, "it was on France alone that the burden fell of containing the Reich,' as though the French did any such containing beyond building the Maginot line." Although Roberts critiques the style and manner of de Gaulle's writing, including "poetical rhapsodies



about the changing of the seasons” and statements like “the national resolve, more powerful than any formal decree, openly appointed me to incarnate and lead the state,” stating that they would have provoked ridicule if written by an American or British statesman, he commends the memoirs. “De Gaulle’s supposedly verbatim memory for conversations that took place more than a decade before might be suspect, but his poetic reconstruction of some of the most iconic moments of 20th-century history is sublime. So do read this remarkable book, but as literature rather than history.”

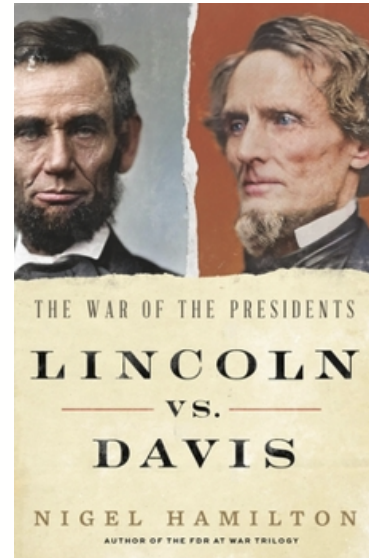
Roll Measures Truman’s Grasp of the Presidency

Ascent to Power: How Truman Emerged from Roosevelt’s Shadow and Remade the World by **David Roll** (Attorney, Author) is “a thoroughly researched narrative” that describes “a journeyman politician who became president while being ‘utterly unprepared’ for the job,” [writes Robert W. Merry](#) (Journalist, Historian) in the *Wall Street Journal*. The storyline is familiar, Roll’s theme is emphatic: “The decisions were bold... their impacts profound.” Despite his early anxieties about assuming the office, Truman possessed “a steely resolve, a zest for the challenges of life and an underlying confidence in his own sturdy judgment.” In Churchill’s words, he was “a man of immense determination. He takes no notice of delicate ground, he just plants his foot down firmly upon it.” Roll characterizes Truman as “‘politician to the core’ to whom ‘the lure of the presidency was irresistible.’” Beginning with his rejection of Roosevelt’s efforts to placate Stalin—“I’m tired of babying the Soviets”—and continuing through a succession of foreign policy decisions, including the Marshall Plan, the Berlin airlift, NATO, and the reconstruction of Germany and Japan, in addition to domestic policy initiatives that transitioned the country from a wartime to a peacetime economy and introduced civil rights reforms, Truman’s legacy “was immense.” Roll does not overlook his mistakes, sometimes the result of rash decisions, and counts getting bogged down in the Korean War among them. Merry concludes with a lesson that resonates with Applied Historians: “Presidential leadership hinges primarily on decision-making.”



Hamilton Assesses Two Presidents as Commanders in Chief

Lincoln vs. Davis: The War of the Presidents by **Nigel Hamilton** (Historian; Biographer, *JFK: Reckless Youth* and *The Mantle of Command*) is a study of the leadership and decision making of Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis in the first two years of the Civil War. As **Louis P. Masur** (Board of Governors Professor of American Studies and History, Rutgers University) [writes](#) in the *Washington Post*, “Hamilton portrays Davis as more effective than Lincoln, at least to start,” labeling him “vacillator in chief” for his refusal to dismiss General George B. McClellan and to emancipate the slaves. In contrast, Davis emerges as clear-eyed and decisive, recognizing that while the Union had more resources, the South possessed a defensive advantage, which General Robert E. Lee employed successfully at Manassas and in Richmond. Quoting Hamilton, “In truth...Lincoln had really no idea what he must do to win the war.... But Davis had had no idea how to win the war, either.” Masur’s commentary will interest Applied Historians: “These thoughts capture a truism – much of what we think about the past comes from understanding it backward. Neither Lincoln nor Davis, in the moment, knew what might work or what needed to be done or how to do it... Hamilton is keenly attuned to the way hindsight can both enlighten and obscure, and he peppers the narrative with questions and retrospective speculations, sometimes excessively so.” As the war went on, Lincoln relieved McClellan and, after moving through other generals, settled on George Meade. He also changed his mind on slavery, and in January 1863 issued the Emancipation Proclamation. Meanwhile, in “a colossal error of judgment,” Davis acquiesced to Lee’s invasion of Maryland in September 1862, and “his military background and sense of loyalty kept him from relieving several key generals of command, to the detriment of the Confederate war effort.” Concluding, Masur writes that the book reveals many qualities that distinguished Lincoln from Davis, “but none more instructive than this: Over the course of four years, Lincoln grew into the job of president and commander in chief, whereas Davis remained set in his ways. This sweeping dual biography succeeds in dramatizing the reasons one triumphed and the other failed.”



**The inspiration for this section of the Applied History Network Newsletter comes from Paul Kennedy. In an email chain triggered by his review in the Wall Street Journal of Nicholas Mulder's Economic Weapon, he wrote, "I must confess that I enjoy doing these 'history that illuminates the present' book reviews for the general reader and international businessman. They are rather different in nature from the more scholarly pieces I would do in, say, The International History Review ." He went on to explain: "For many years, when I was still at the University of East Anglia in the U.K., I was one of the two main anonymous [!] book reviewers of all books in history and politics for The Economist. Although it was tough going because you didn't know what was the next book that arrived in your mail, it was incredibly challenging. 'Your task,' the book review editor demanded, 'is to explain in not more than 650 words to an IBM executive flying from Boston to Atlanta why a new biography of Bismarck is worthwhile—or not.'"*

Publications of Note

Ferguson and Rincon-Cruz Explore Power of Betting Markets as Predictors of Elections in *The Wall Street Journal*

While polls performed badly for the third election cycle in a row in 2024, an unlikely data source proved to be a more accurate predictor of the presidential election: betting markets. As **Niall Ferguson** (Co-Chair, Harvard's Applied History Project; Milbank Family Senior Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution) and **Manny Rincon-Cruz** (Co-founder, FourWinds Research) [point out](#) in *The Wall Street Journal*, this is not a new source of insight. While early betting markets in the 19th and early 20th century suffered from over-regulation, the authors note that a betting pool set up by economists at the University of Iowa—the Iowa Electronic Markets—outperformed polls 75% of the time from its founding in 1988 to 2008. Polymarket's accuracy in predicting a Trump victory is only the latest manifestation of betting markets' performance, with Ferguson and Rincon-Cruz predicting that markets will cement their dominance over pollsters in 2028.

Tooze Urges a Post-Bidenism Reality Check in *London Review of Books*

What legacy does the four-year period of Bidenism leave? **Adam Tooze's** (Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Professor of History, Columbia University) [answer](#) is two-fold. First, "the actual pivot of Biden's strategy" relates to Asia: "It is with regard to China that we see the Biden team coordinating global alliances including Nato, AUKUS and the Quad like no administration since Reagan or George H.W. Bush." However, the second lesson of Bidenism is that "those alliances expose the US to entanglements and unexpected crises." Between Ukraine, the Middle East, and East Asia, Tooze warns, "we should be under no illusion: there has been nothing like this level of threat since the dangerous final phase of the Cold War in the early 1980s." Given the end of Bidenism, the United States should replace "all the gestures to historical grandeur" in its past successes with the harsh reality that the threats could have easily led to devastation back then as they can today. "If nothing better emerges in the coming years, the outlook is for a grim escalation of tension between a changing world and a vision of American power that, though technologically sophisticated, is in political terms increasingly anachronistic."

Walt Argues a "(Modest) Decline" of the United States "Might Not Be that Bad" in *The Ideas Letter*

Is the United States really in decline? **Stephen M. Walt** (Robert and Renée Belfer Professor of International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School) [says](#) assessing power depends on the analogies chosen: "If one's starting point is an unusual moment like 1945 or 1992, when America's power position was artificially high, then a sense of relative decline is inevitable." On the other hand, the United States' economy, demography, military, and geography today—as in the past several decades—remain "formidable assets that no other country possesses." Although the US retains persistent advantages, Walt argues, "An end to unchecked US primacy would be good for the United States and the rest of the world alike." The past few decades have "cast considerable doubt" on US leadership. Walt cites mistakes in the Vietnam War, the War on Terror, US interventionist regime changes, "open-ended NATO expansion," and evidence of poor US economic leadership in 2008. But, Walt says,

ignoring “global institutions that have helped states manage—however imperfectly—their relations and address big global problems for more than seventy-five years” is not the solution, either. “The recent histories of Argentina, Venezuela, and Great Britain remind us that bad government can do enormous damage even to countries with many advantages, and Americans may be about to experience something similar.”

Wilson Chronicles Paul Nitze’s Accomplishments in *America’s Cold Warrior*

William Inboden’s (Director, University of Florida’s Hamilton Center) [review](#) of *America’s Cold Warrior* by **James Graham Wilson** (Supervisory Historian, Global Issues and General Division, US Department of State Office of the Historian) highlights the critical role Paul Nitze played in shaping US national security from the dawn of the Cold War to its conclusion. Through a career marked by persistence, expertise, and adaptability, Nitze embodied a new figure in American statecraft: the national security professional. Wilson underscores how Nitze’s contributions—spanning NSC-68, which operationalized Cold War containment, to his leadership in arms control under Reagan—helped institutionalize a professionalized national security apparatus in the United States. Nitze’s career, balancing force with diplomacy and spanning both Democratic and Republican administrations, offers a compelling lesson for today: sound policymaking requires not just strategy but a cadre of experts dedicated to serving national interests across political divides.

Mulder Reviews Anderson’s *Disputing Disaster* and its Lessons from WWI for Global Order Today

Nicholas Mulder (Assistant Professor of Modern European History, Cornell University) [identifies](#) three “historical insights [that] have an obvious urgency today given the interstate war in Ukraine, escalating regional conflict in the Middle East, and rising global tensions between the US and China” in **Perry Anderson’s** (Distinguished Research Professor of History and Sociology, University of California, Los Angeles) *Disputing Disaster: A Sextet on the Great War*. According to Anderson, the causes of World War I can be traced back to three factors. First, “the

Ottoman Empire was neither invited to the Congress of Vienna nor admitted to the inner circle of European powers.” Second, the disappearance of small-state confederations in central Europe meant fewer “shock absorbers dampening Great Power rivalry.” Lastly, “the Vienna system was unable to manage the results of uneven economic growth in the late 19th century,” leaving a rising Berlin on course for collision with the ruling British empire. Mulder argues, “A systemic and long-term perspective offers our best hope of confronting the deficiencies in our international order that proved so cataclysmic 110 years ago.”

Brands Explores Precedents for Biden’s Economic Warfare Strategy in *Bloomberg*

Hal Brands (Henry A. Kissinger Distinguished Professor, Johns Hopkins SAIS) [argues](#) in *Bloomberg* that President Biden's longest-lasting legacy will be his expansion of economic warfare against America's great power adversaries. Dating economic warfare from Athens’ trade embargo on Sparta and the 1941 US oil embargo against Japan, he draws parallels between Joe Biden’s current foreign policy and historical precedents. During the Cold War, Brands notes, the US used economic measures not only to contain the Soviet Union militarily but also to limit its economic growth, exemplified by policies that isolated the USSR from the global economy. Post-Cold War, the US hoped economic entanglements would foster a lasting international peace, but rising challenges from Russia and China have led to a return of economic warfare. Brands warns that Biden’s tactics can backfire as China and Russia adapt to a changing international system.

Lepore Chronicles America’s Journey Toward “The Artificial State” in *The New Yorker*

In “The Artificial State,” **Jill Lepore** (David Woods Kemper ‘41 Professor of American History, Harvard University) [examines](#) how American politics has been overtaken by predictive algorithms and digital infrastructure, eroding democracy and trust in government. From the 1960s, when the Kennedy campaign employed the “People Machine,” to Cambridge Analytica’s manipulation of Facebook data in 2016, Lepore details how automated political tools have replaced human deliberation with

calculation, isolating citizens from political decision-making and amplifying polarization. Drawing parallels to earlier moments of technological optimism—like Stewart Brand’s vision of the personal computer empowering the people—Lepore argues that those promises have instead centralized control of politics in the hands of private corporations. Lepore reminds readers of historical examples like the end of feudalism and the overthrow of monarchy that demonstrate how collective will, paired with hard choices, can reclaim governance systems from those who distort them. Lepore suggests that the path to the revival of democracy in the age of the artificial state begins with acknowledging the problem: democracy, once built on human engagement, has been outsourced to machines. Reversing course will demand deliberate reinvention rooted in democratic ideals.

Gewirtz’s *Never Turn Back* Published in Paperback

Could the Chinese authoritarian crackdown of the late 1980s have been avoided? According to **Julian Gewirtz** (Deputy Coordinator for Global China Affairs, US Department of State), history could have turned out differently. In *Never Turn Back: China and the Forbidden History of the 1980s*, newly [published](#) in paperback, Gewirtz chronicles the ideas that the cautious opening of Chinese society in the early 1980s gave birth to, giving readers a history of the era and the debates—particularly between Deng Xiaoping and reformer Zhao Ziyang—that led to its end. Ultimately, he argues, a more liberal path for China was, and still is, possible: “It is possible to imagine a China, even one ruled by the CCP, that rehabilitates Zhao Ziyang, praises the debate and contestation of ideas that characterized the 1980s, and even apologizes publicly for the violence of June 1989... It is possible to imagine China once again experimenting with meaningful political reforms, increasing the independence of the judiciary and the media, and giving ordinary people a greater say over the country’s direction.”

Freeman Underscores Two Telling Similarities between the Elections of 1800 and 2024 in *The Atlantic*

“The presidential election of 1800 was a crisis of the first order, featuring extreme polarization, wild accusations, and name-calling,” **Joanne Freeman** (Class of 1954

Professor of American History and American Studies, Yale University) [writes](#), making it clear that “We’re not looking at a replay of the 1800 election; history doesn’t repeat itself.” Nonetheless, Freeman draws two significant similarities between these presidential elections, which are more than two centuries apart. Today, as in 1800, the specter of violence looms, to which Freeman says, “The unfortunate truth is that democratic governance is often violent.” The second parallel is the candidates’ “proposed solution to the electoral turmoil after the contest’s close.” Freeman takes from this comparison not fear and anxiety, as she says was expressed on November 5, but optimism. The nation’s democratic institutions carried on for more than 200 years after that electoral firestorm—there must also be hope today. But, Freeman says, this hinges on civic participation based on our basic constitutional procedures. “Democracy isn’t an end point; it’s a process. This election is our opportunity to pledge our allegiance to that process—to the constitutional pact that anchors our nation. The choice is ours.” Freeman also [spoke](#) with **Lindsay M. Chervinsky** (American Presidential Historian; Executive Director, George Washington Presidential Library, Mount Vernon) at the Jay Heritage Center about Chervinsky’s book *Making the Presidency: John Adams and the Precedents that Forged the Republic*, featured in the September edition of the Applied History Project Newsletter.

Schake Argues Politicizing the Military Weakens It in *The Atlantic*

Facing potential mutiny in 1783, George Washington reprimanded Alexander Hamilton for encouraging the Army to rebel, writing that an “army is ‘a dangerous instrument to play with.’” “In this,” **Kori Schake** (Senior Fellow and Director of Foreign and Defense Policy Studies, American Enterprise Institute) [argues](#), “as in so much else, President-Elect Donald Trump does not share Washington’s sensibilities.” Trump would not be the first US commander-in-chief to use the military for domestic purposes—one predecessor being Washington himself, organizing a militia to quell Whiskey Rebellion violence near the end of his presidency. Although Washington expressed caution, he still used US military force domestically. Today, we have already seen Trump talked down from invoking the Insurrection Act but still deploy National Guard troops in his first term. “Donald Trump may not understand these stakes the way that George Washington did,” Schake notes, so if he follows in Washington’s footsteps, Trump may cross the line near the end of his presidency as Washington did. In *PBS Firing Line*, Schake also [emphasized](#) the importance of maintaining “the 250-year unbroken record of the American military staying out of

the politics of our governance in democracy.”

Freymann Explores the Limits of Economic Deterrence Against China

Eyck Freymann (Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University) [examines](#) the evolving role of economic deterrence in US-China relations. Freymann contextualizes Washington’s efforts to threaten “Russia-plus” sanctions in a Taiwan contingency within the broader history of statecraft, comparing them to Cold War-era doctrines like Eisenhower’s “massive retaliation.” He argues that while the concept of “economic mutually assured destruction,” threatening Xi Jinping’s grip on power, has merits, it faces significant challenges, including China’s ability to endure economic shocks and exploit global trade networks to mitigate sanctions—feats that Russia has been able to pull off despite a withering volley of sanctions from the US and its allies following the invasion on Ukraine. Still, Freymann cautions that economic threats alone cannot sustain deterrence, and the US must maintain a flexible toolkit of policy responses to ensure it can maintain the status quo in Taiwan.

Klass Applies History of US-China Sub-Diplomatic Relations

Reviewing **Kazushi Minami’s** (Associate Professor, Osaka School of International Public Policy, Osaka University) recent book *People’s Diplomacy: How Americans and Chinese Transformed US-China Relations During the Cold War*, **Anatol Klass** (Former Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, 2022-2024, Harvard’s Belfer Center; Postdoctoral Fellow, Columbia-Harvard China and the World Program) [picks up](#) on Minami’s central question about whether sub-diplomacy impacts diplomacy or whether diplomacy impacts sub-diplomacy. Harkening back to 1970s rapprochement and “people’s diplomacy,” Klass argues that “the historical record suggests that people’s diplomacy is highly susceptible to the political headwinds of US-China rivalry, and that ephemeral political tensions easily undo hard-won victories in the cultural and academic realms.” Minami chronicles US-China exchanges in the 1970s, which “followed roughly the same trajectory: the grand ambitions of non-state actors at the start of the 1970s were stymied by the contentious politics of the decade’s middle years, until the ascension of Deng

Xiaoping in late 1978 finally aligned their schemes with the economic and political ambitions of the Party-state, allowing for breakthroughs.” Drawing out this pattern, Klass remains skeptical about whether the relationship between high-level diplomacy and interpersonal exchanges has been reciprocal since the 1970s. According to Klass, the crucial lesson is that “Now more than ever, we must recognize that cultural exchange with China is not divorced from the politics of the moment, but is intimately tied to the ebbs and flows of Sino-American competition.”

Laiq Explores History of Silicon Valley Influence in Washington

Writing for *The Hill*, **Nur Laiq** (Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy and Technology & Geopolitics Fellow, Harvard’s Belfer Center) [examines](#) Silicon Valley’s long-standing entanglement with American politics, challenging the myth of tech’s apolitical stance. Tracing the roots of outreach by Silicon Valley to politicians in Washington in the 1980s, Laiq explains how tech titans like Steve Jobs and Robert Noyce leveraged government investment and deregulation to expand markets for personal computers, mirroring today’s lobbying efforts for artificial intelligence and space commerce. By the 1990s, Silicon Valley had forged deeper ties with Washington, notably drafting Bill Clinton’s 1992 national technology policy—an inflection point in American history where tech shaped national priorities to align with its commercial interests. In light of this history, Laiq’s call for greater transparency and accountability in tech-policy interactions underlines the enduring and not-unprecedented significance of this relationship for America’s economic and technological future. Laiq also spoke on [WBUR](#) and [Bloomberg TV](#) about the same subject, tracing US technology policy’s history and how the incoming Trump administration will fit into it.

Interviews and Speeches

Bew Reflects on Experience Applying History to Policymaking

Having just stepped down after five years as chief foreign policy advisor to successive British Prime Ministers, **John Bew** (Professor in History and Foreign Policy, King's College, London) [spoke](#) with **Andrew Roberts** (Roger and Martha Mertz Visiting Research Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution) about how he sought to bring history into the policymaking process. Discussing his experience in Downing Street as the war in Ukraine broke out, Bew explained that he tried to build a "multifaceted" approach to helping Ukraine, centered on an alliance system. The diplomacy of Lord Castlereagh, British Foreign Secretary during the Napoleonic years, served as an example. When faced with the problem of defeating Napoleon, Bew argues, Castlereagh provided a "diplomatic masterclass of building these coalitions." He was a figure who struggled with how to "preserve a sense of enlightenment and a certain set of values and also order... in a world where great power politics is happening"—the same questions that face policymakers today.

Sarotte Emphasizes the “Outsized Impact” of Decisions Made in “Punctuational Moments” Throughout History in *Engelsberg Ideas Podcasts*

“Punctuational moments are when contingency comes to the fore, and dramatic change is possible,” [says](#) **Mary Sarotte** (Visiting Fellow, Harvard's Applied History Project; Marie-Josée and Henry R. Kravis Distinguished Professor of Historical Studies, Johns Hopkins SAIS), identifying the post-Cold War years as one such moment. “The 1990s were the moment of the greatest nuclear disarmament and destruction since the invention of the atomic bomb.” With many “potential outcomes” possible after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Sarotte says there was a “new possibility for cooperation.” “Sadly,” however, Sarotte laments, “if you look at all the timelines coming out of that moment, we’re on one of the darkest.” Perhaps at a future “punctuational moment,” policymakers may more thoughtfully forecast an equivalent of “Russia is not always going to be this weak” and take measures, such as NATO enlargement, “in a more face-saving manner for Russia” or a counterpart with whom future relations would be of increasingly high stakes.

Nye Outlines Soft Power's Continued Importance in *El País* Interview

Joseph Nye (Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus, Harvard Kennedy School) [reminds](#) readers that soft power is “the ability to affect others to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment.” Having famously coined the term early in his career, Nye spoke with *El País* about what the reelection of Donald Trump—then just a possibility—would mean for American soft power. While it eventually helped the US win the Cold War, Nye notes that “U.S. soft power goes up and down.” A peak in the 1950s turned into a decline in the 1960s and 1970s as the US became more involved in Vietnam, before recovering by the end of the Cold War and declining again as the US embarked on the Global War on Terror. While the election of Trump would “lead to a very bad four years,” Nye argues that this does not mean that American soft power will be nullified. “We’ve had internal conflicts before, and they have an effect on American soft power, but it’s worth noticing that what attracts others is not just government policies. It’s also civil society”—an area where the US still presents an attractive model for most of the globe.

Zoellick Declares the End of the EU's “Holiday from History” on the *Global Exchange*

Robert Zoellick (Senior Fellow, Harvard's Belfer Center; Chairman, AllianceBernstein) and **Derek Burney** (Former Canadian Ambassador to the United States) appeared on the *Global Exchange* [podcast](#) with **Colin Robertson** (Vice President and Fellow, Canadian Global Affairs Institute) to discuss expectations for how the US will manage alliances after January 20. Zoellick begins by underscoring that the “real question” in Trump 2.0 is about “the pressure on Europe to expand its own defense capacity, including perhaps even technical advisors in Ukraine,” especially considering Trump's goal to close the US security umbrella. Zoellick says, “this is the end of the European Union's holiday from history.” Robertson agrees that Zoellick's evaluation of European defense applies to Canada as well: “Maybe we've [also] been taking a holiday from history. I think that's probably the case.” At the same time, Zoellick applies recent history to argue it will remain difficult for Trump to separate Canada from the United States. The relationship previously faced tensions on issues that “were pretty sharp,” according to Zoellick. Still, the journey from the US-Canada Free Trade Agreement to NAFTA “was an integration process that's now

been running about 30 years, 34 years, and it's really transformed a whole series of economic ties and relationships." That integration should not be taken for granted. Despite Trump's intent to destroy NAFTA, Zoellick says, "it was interesting to me that they really couldn't do it because the ties had been too deep. So, they said they had to renegotiate that at the end of the day. I hope that will be part of the story here."

Mitter Sees Opportunity for 19th-Century Dealmaking with China and Russia

Rana Mitter (S.T. Lee Professor of US-Asia Relations, Harvard Kennedy School) [discussed](#) the implications of Donald Trump's election victory on the Chatham House *Independent Thinking* podcast, arguing that Trump's likely turn away from the green energy transition will give China an historic opportunity to consolidate its leadership in green technologies and international leadership on climate policy. He also argued that in his second term Trump may settle for a 19th century spheres of influence policy vis-à-vis China and Russia as a middle ground between confrontation and a grand bargain, avoiding unnecessary escalation without compromising American commitments to allies. Mitter additionally spoke on the BBC's "History Extra" podcast, where he [drew](#) a parallel between President Trump's efforts and Chinese Emperors' efforts to control their sprawling bureaucracies and argued that Trump may try to restore a semblance of Andrew Jackson's spoils system for staffing the government.

Westad Explores the Contingencies of China's Transformation on Bloomberg's *Odd Lots*

In a recent episode of the Bloomberg *Odd Lots* podcast, **Arne Westad** (Elihu Professor of History, Yale University) [discussed](#) his new book, *The Great Transformation: China's Road from Revolution to Reform*, co-authored with **Chen Jian** (Hu Shih Emeritus Professor of History and China-US Relations, Cornell University). Westad uses a historian's lens to challenge simplified narratives about China's evolution from a centrally planned economy to a global powerhouse. He highlights the Cultural Revolution as a chaotic and brutal period that paradoxically laid the groundwork for future market liberalization, with entrepreneurial activity

emerging in defiance of the Communist Party's control—conditions that continue to shape political and economic dynamics in Xi Jinping's China. Westad also examines how China's 1970s pivot to the United States, motivated by fears of Soviet aggression, provided a foundation of security that enabled economic reform, eventually leading to it becoming the global economic powerhouse it is today.

Kotkin Explains Strategic Challenges in Second Trump Term

In an interview for *Foreign Affairs*, **Stephen Kotkin** (Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution and Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies) [explores](#) the implications of Donald Trump's reelection for US foreign policy. Drawing on the history of American foreign policy in the 20th century and especially during World War II, Kotkin highlights how adversaries like Russia and China have begun to see American decline as an inevitable trend in history. However, he argues that the unpredictability of a second Trump term may challenge those assumptions. Reflecting on US commitments and capabilities in the 21st century, Kotkin underscores the urgent need for revitalizing America's defense industrial base and economic competitiveness, warning that the gap between commitments (of which the US seems hungry for more) and capabilities is likely to widen further.

Radchenko Outlines Putin's Affinity for Stalin on *Reader's Corner*

Speaking on Boise State Public Radio, **Sergey Radchenko** (Wilson E. Schmidt Distinguished Professor, John Hopkins SAIS) [analyzed](#) Putin's attraction to Stalin and the parallels between the start of the Cold War and today. When asked about revelations in his new book—*To Run the World*—from old Russian and Soviet archives, Radchenko says “it was interesting to figure out what drove Stalin, what really was... behind Soviet foreign policy at that moment. And I discovered that it was very imperialistic.” The Soviet Union “thought they were entitled” to parts of Europe and Asia because of the simple fact that they had the strongest army on the continent; yet beyond power itself, “what [Stalin] valued even more was the legitimacy of power. And he wanted American recognition” of a sphere of influence. Bringing the conversation to the present, Radchenko notes that this desire for recognition continued “from Stalin to Gorbachev to Putin,” manifesting today in

Putin's justification for the invasion of Ukraine. While NATO never agreed not to expand to eastern Europe, "Putin finds it useful to argue that NATO enlargement was something that broke faith... he's trying to basically say, well, you know, NATO and the West, they're trying to undermine Russian security. They are not recognizing Russia's legitimate sphere of influence." Putin "very much shares in that old tradition" of Russian imperialism, Radchenko concludes, emphasizing the importance of recognizing this amidst debates over NATO enlargement and Western provocation.

Miller Explores History of Semiconductors with Applied History Study Group

Christopher Miller (Professor of International History, Tufts Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy) spoke to the Harvard Kennedy School's student Applied History Study Group about the semiconductor supply chain, how Taiwan came to dominate the sector, and what his training as a historian did to prepare him for the research in his book, *Chip War*. Miller argued that the most transformative technologies are the ones that find vast markets rather than those that are most scientifically impressive. Cars, for example, were transformative "not because one was made, but millions." Yet this is something that the field of history has ignored, instead focusing on great scientists and ideas and the political and social dynamics that affect what's researched. Transitioning to the history of the chip industry, Miller noted that the Chinese translation of his book excised the chapter about the USSR's chip industry—something he found ironic because they now "risk falling into the same trap" as the Soviets: "spending a lot of money on things that don't get them ahead," ceding the chip race to the US.

Walton Outlines Continuity in Soviet and Modern Russian Influence Operations

In his interview on *Open Book*, **Calder Walton** (Assistant Director, Harvard's Applied History and Intelligence Projects; Former Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard's Belfer Center) [joins](#) **Anthony Scaramucci** (Former White House Communications Director) to discuss his book *Spies: The Epic Intelligence War*

Between East and West. Walton underscores how the Soviet Union's mastery of disinformation—rooted in the legacy of Stalin's "active measures"—offers enduring lessons for understanding contemporary intelligence threats, explaining that Russia's strategy of exploiting societal divisions, particularly in the US, has a long history that is now supercharged by today's social media environment. He draws a direct line between Soviet-era tactics and modern operations led by Russia's intelligence services, such as the creation of troll farms and targeted disinformation campaigns. However, Walton argues that Russia's intelligence services also suffer from systemic weaknesses in analysis and truth-telling to decision-makers, creating vulnerabilities for the regime even as they pose serious threats to the US and its allies. For policymakers, Walton argues, the lessons of history are clear: combating disinformation and safeguarding national security require vigilance, adaptability, and an understanding of the enduring playbook used by adversaries to destabilize open societies.

Tworek Illuminates Similarities Between Media Environments of 20th and 21st Centuries

Speaking on the Centre for International Governance Innovation's *Policy Prompt* podcast, **Heidi Tworek** (Professor of International History and Public Policy, University of British Columbia) [explores](#) the striking historical parallels between early 20th-century media monopolies and today's digital platforms, offering lessons about the enduring roles of infrastructure, power, and influence in global communications. Tworek explains how news agencies like *Reuters* once dominated the flow of information, creating central "bottlenecks" for newspapers and radio—concentrations of control even more significant than Google and Meta's influence today. She highlights Germany's early investment in wireless telegraphy as a political tool to bypass British-controlled undersea cables, a competition with direct relevance to modern debates on 5G networks and undersea internet infrastructure. Tworek also warns of the risks of state overreach, recounting how Weimar Germany's heavy-handed media regulation inadvertently enabled Nazi propaganda—a stark lesson about well-intentioned policies with unintended consequences. By connecting these historical patterns to current concerns like generative AI, TikTok bans, and news reliability, Tworek shows that today's challenges around media control and trust are neither new nor insurmountable. Understanding the past, she argues, can help prevent policymakers from panic-driven decision-making about contemporary challenges—such as disinformation and fake news—as they safeguard

communication systems and democratic ideals in the digital age.

Bridges Explains Shifting Trends in the Power of Infrastructure over People's Lives on *Axess Television*

Justin Oliver Webb (Former North America Editor, *BBC*) [interviewed](#) **Mary Bridges** (Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard's Belfer Center) last month on *Global Axess Television* about her first book, *Dollars and Dominion: US Bankers and the Making of a Superpower*. "It's not as if companies didn't matter before," according to Bridges. Today, however, "the types of infrastructure they're building and the way that infrastructure affects our day-to-day lives and how we relate to our governments really does seem like an important difference" between past and present. Since the emergence of markets in human civilization, Bridges explains the historical record warns not "to underestimate the power of nation-states, particularly, flexing jurisdictional muscle," and that "territoriality still matters." However, especially with such a stark example as Elon Musk's rejection of Ukraine's request for Starlink's support in its war against Russia, Bridges finds that "it does seem like the dynamics get reconfigured as our lives become increasingly mediated by infrastructure." Bridges worries "about people's direct control over the infrastructure that gets built" and recommends careful accounting of infrastructure investments as they become more abstracted into global financial markets.

Jobs and Opportunities

Panel and Paper Proposals: Arizona State University Policy History Conference 2025

The Institute for Political History, the Journal of Policy History, and the Arizona State University Center for American Institutions are hosting the Policy History Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina at the Hilton Charlotte Uptown Hotel from Wednesday, June 4 to Saturday, June 7, 2025. Since 2002, the Policy History Conference has

provided an interdisciplinary forum for presentations and roundtable discussions on policy history topics and recent policy history research, bringing together academy scholars, independent scholars and graduate students to share their research. The conference is currently accepting panel and paper proposals on all topics regarding American political and policy history, political development, and comparative historical analysis. Complete sessions, including two or three presenters with chair/commentator(s), and individual paper proposals are welcome. More information can be found [here](#); the deadline for submission is December 31, 2024.

Applications for the Clements Center for National Security's 2024 Summer Seminar in History and Statecraft Now Open

The [Clements Center for National Security](#) at the University of Texas at Austin seeks applications from advanced doctoral students in history, political science, or related fields interested in careers in either academia or policymaking for their 2025 Summer Seminar, held from July 13 to July 18. The seminar will feature in-depth discussions with top scholars, senior policymakers, and intelligence officials, as well as sessions devoted to academic publishing and strategies for approaching the academic and policy job markets. Participants will explore the relationship between historical insights and national security policymaking. This program is open to non-UT students only. The Clements Center will cover all travel and related expenses for participants. Visit the [Summer Seminar page](#) to learn more about the program and for application details. Applications are due by Sunday, February 23, 2025.

Applied History Articles of the Month

[“Is America the Next Soviet Union?”](#) – Harold James, *Project Syndicate*, November 28, 2024.

Do analyses that “compare Trump to Gorbachev, whose reforms shattered the USSR,” forewarn Soviet-style decline for the United States? **Harold James** (Professor of History and International Affairs, Princeton University) answers, “Today’s Russia certainly hopes so.” He argues, “Trump’s policy agenda, if enacted, will inevitably sow the seeds of a new wave of discontent, protest, and conspiracy theorizing”—a dynamic potentially mirroring the Soviet Union ahead of its collapse. James warns that the United States’ waning democratic institutions, big spending as “key to electoral success and social stability,” and leadership by “an insider who casts himself as an outsider, as someone who will break the system” may lead the country toward a downfall like that of the USSR, in which “Abrupt, rapid change only led to disruption, with all those harmed by it joining the next cohort of the alienated.”

[“Trump’s victory will change America. But Europe can have a different future”](#) – Mark Mazower, *Financial Times*, November 16, 2024.

Analogies comparing Trump to 1930s fascists likely failed to resonate with US voters, **Mark Mazower** (Ira D. Wallach Professor of History, Columbia University) argues, because Americans know little about Europe’s violent mid-century history. “Unlike the US, most European nations have had direct experience in living memory of warfare, coups, juntas or forcible seizures of power that have helped forge a consciousness of the fragility of democracy.” The shared trauma of European societies in WWII and its aftermath has built “a sense of a public commons.” Absent these experiences, the US has undergone sharp polarization in its political landscape, featuring the rise of Trump’s immense popularity today.

[“With Friends Like These: World War II Advisory Efforts and the Origins of Sino-U.S. Competition”](#) – Tommy Jamison, *War on the Rocks*, November 15, 2024.

The United States got China wrong in the 1940s, **Tommy Jamison** (Military Historian; Assistant Professor of Strategic Studies, Defense Analysis Department, Naval Postgraduate School) writes, because its “biases,” “prejudices,” and “chauvinistic U.S. attitudes” hindered cooperation and deterrence in the World War II Indo-Pacific theater. “In an era of ‘America First’ nationalism and reflexive suspicion toward China” today, overcoming historical ignorance of US-China cooperation in World War II is an important step to prevent “giving offense through naivete” or

“duplicating knowledge that already exists,” according to two recent books Jamison reviews in this article—Sara B. Castro’s *Mission to Mao* and Zach Fredman’s *The Tormented Alliance*.

[“Why Democrats Should Proceed to the Center With Caution”](#) – Julian E. Zelizer, *Foreign Policy*, November 8, 2024.

“The fact that Trump has grown his coalition feels like a rebuke of what Democrats have stood for since the 1960s.” Yet, **Julian E. Zelizer** (Malcolm Stevenson Forbes, Class of 1941 Professor of History and Public Affairs, Princeton School of Public & International Affairs) warns that before today’s Democratic Party gives in to pressures to move to the middle, it should heed lessons from the Democratic Leadership Council’s rebuilding efforts after the 1984 election. According to Zelizer, the problems that centrist policies can create are twofold: “First, it can result in a party leaving behind traditions that remained at the heart of its appeal to most supporters. Second, they can dissuade parties from the hard work of really reimagining their ideas and constituencies in bold ways that are usually essential to realignments.”

Applied History Quote of the Month

“We ought not to look back, unless it is to derive useful lessons from past errors, and for the purpose of profiting by dear bought experience. To enveigh against things that are past and irremediable, is displeasing; but to steer clear of the shelves and rocks we have struck upon, is the part of wisdom.”

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