HARVARD Kennedy School BELFER CENTER | 50 YEARS OF RESEARCH, POLICY, AND LEADERSHIP

Applied History Network Newsletter

December 2025

The December 2025 issue of the Applied History Network Newsletter spotlights member-contributed news items for more than 600 leaders in the Applied History movement across 70 institutions.

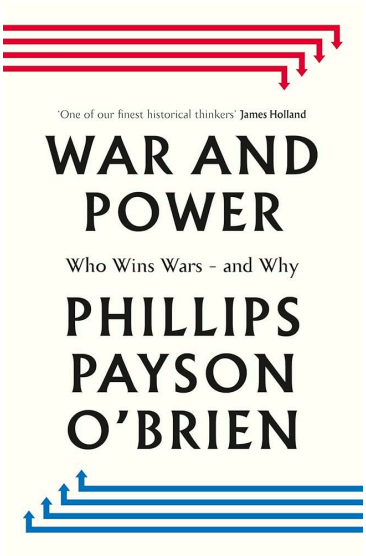
This newsletter is prepared by the Applied History Project at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center and edited by Ivana Hoàng Giang and Aristotle Vainikos.

If you would like to submit an item for next month's issue, please email it to aristotle_vainikos@hks.harvard.edu with the subject "January Applied History Update" before February 5.

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

O'Brien Brings the Lessons of War to Contemporary Conflicts

In his new book, *War and Power: Who Wins Wars—and Why*, **Phillips Payson O'Brien** (Professor of Strategic Studies, University of St. Andrews) argues that the decisive factors in major conflicts are not military skill or heroism but "logistics, productive power and—ultimately—the size of the respective economic bases." As **Brendan Simms** (Professor of International Relations and Director of the Centre for Geopolitics, University of Cambridge) writes in his *Wall Street Journal* review, "Attrition, not maneuver, is what really matters." O'Brien introduces nuance to his

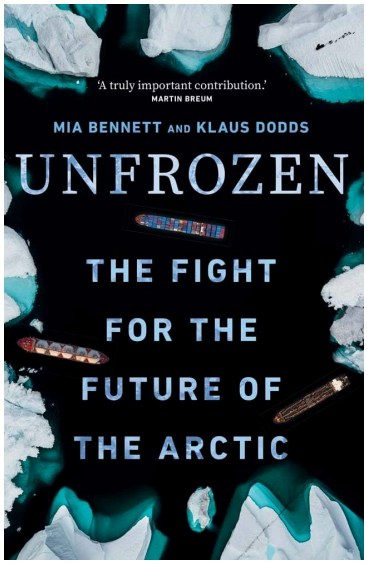


argument. First, the connection between economic strength and geopolitical heft is not a given. “Germany and Japan became productive giants in the 1970s and 80s and remain significant manufacturing centers today, but for historical and cultural reasons lack the corresponding military capacity.” Second, he stresses the importance of alliances. The great conflicts of the past were “primarily coalition wars,” including the Napoleonic Wars and the two world wars, and relationships among allies are crucial. “Britain and the U.S. proved themselves adept at coordinating allies, not least because London yielded leadership to Washington voluntarily.” In contrast, Germany “was unfortunate in its ally Austria-Hungary in World War I, which one observer likened to ‘being chained to a rotting corpse.’” Third, in a proposition that Simms finds less convincing and somewhat contradictory, O’Brien questions the idea of Great Powers, pointing to the US defeat in Vietnam, the Soviet collapse in Afghanistan, and the failure of the war on terror, all of which ended with the survival of the smaller power. And today, “Nearly four years into Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin still struggles to impose his will on his much-smaller neighbor.” To outline the dynamics of the next possible global conflict involving the US and China, O’Brien returns to his central thesis: “America might perform reasonably well in the opening stages but could eventually be overcome as China’s far superior manufacturing capacity is brought to bear.” Simms concludes, “Mr. O’Brien’s book is an interpretation, but also a warning.”

Bennett and Dodds Link Arctic Warming to Geopolitical Instability

Unfrozen: The Fight for the Future of the Arctic by **Mia Bennett** (Associate Professor of Geography, University of Washington) and **Klaus Dodds** (Interim Dean, Faculty of Science and Technology, Middlesex University, London) examines the Arctic’s transformation “from a remote wilderness to a central theater in global power competition.” **Jean-Thomas Nicole** (Policy Advisor, Public Safety Canada) writes in *The Cipher Brief*, “What makes *Unfrozen* particularly powerful is its refusal to romanticize the Arctic. Instead, it presents a sobering portrait of a region caught between melting ice and rising tensions, where cooperation is faltering and extractive ambitions are accelerating.” The authors argue that rapid warming is not only an environmental concern but also a destabilizing force. “Melting ice is unlocking access to resources and shipping lanes… undermining infrastructure,

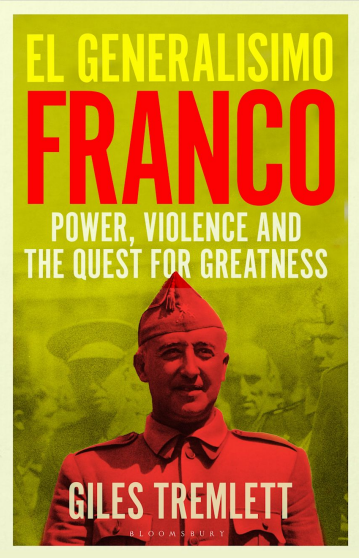
threatening ecosystems, and accelerating geopolitical friction." In short, "climate change multiplies strategic risk." Assessing the book as a significant contribution, Nicole states, "Bennett and Dodds bring a unique blend of field-based research, policy engagement, and interdisciplinary analysis… to offer a nuanced and accessible account of the Arctic's transformation," underscoring "that the Arctic is a bellweather for the future of international cooperation, environmental resilience, and geopolitical stability." Among the book's strengths is its examination of Arctic governance, infrastructure, and Indigenous communities. Significantly, the breakdown of Arctic diplomacy and the decline of high-level engagement among the eight members of the Arctic Council following Russia's invasion of Ukraine has raised the risk of "unilateral action, reduced transparency, and increased militarization." Russia, "which controls half the Arctic's landmass and two-thirds of its population, emerges as the dominant actor," while China "asserts itself as a 'near-Arctic state,' building icebreakers, research stations, and strategic infrastructure." Nicole continues, "Russia's militarization of the North Sea route, China's ambitions through its 'Polar Silk Road,' and NATO's renewed Arctic posture signal a shift toward hard security priorities." The current administration's threats to Greenland and its deployment of additional Space Force assets to Pituffik have further accelerated tensions. Nicole concludes, "The authors blend history, science, and strategy with clarity and urgency." For Applied Historians, Bennett and Dodds make a compelling case that creative solutions for Great Power competition will need to encompass the Arctic theater.



Tremlett Defines Franco as the Archetypal Dictator

El Generalisimo: Franco: Power, Violence and the Quest for Greatness by **Giles Tremlett** (historian, author, journalist) examines Spain's military dictatorship under Francisco Franco, who ruled from the end of the country's civil war in 1939 to his death in 1975. Tremlett's portrayal is unsparing. As **Gerard DeGroot** (Emeritus Professor of History, University of St. Andrews) writes in *The Times* , Franco "saw himself as a new conquistador, a man who would rejuvenate Spain by promoting its exceptionalism, banishing the poisonous influence of outsiders. However, isolation turned Spain into an economic disaster and a pariah." While he might easily be reduced "to a cartoon villain or a mediocrity," he was formidable in his ruthlessness and an example of "otherwise mediocre men—toxic personalities unsuited to

ordinary politics"—to whom nations often turn in times of decline. The army was his vehicle to power. Through "'ambition, military competence… violence, unbounded self-esteem, clear-headedness, a sinuous ability for self-interested scheming and a naturally untrusting, authoritarian nature,'" he became, at age 33, the youngest general in Europe. "Franco rose in the army not because he was a brilliant commander, but rather because he was a stern disciplinarian who possessed a cold-blooded talent for cruelty." Once in control, he attempted to turn Spain into an autarky. However, the country could not sustain isolation and only with economic aid from the International Monetary Fund and the construction of US military bases in the late 50s and early 60s did living standards return to pre-civil war levels. "Although he deeply regretted the reasons for the economic turnaround, he took full credit for it. His governing strategy had always been to blame misfortunes on others, claim full credit for successes and never admit to a mistake." Concluding, DeGroot writes, "Franco was not an anomaly, he was a type. We have seen his type too often." History continues to resonate.



**This section, currently written by Anne Karalekas, was inspired by Paul Kennedy and his wide experience in writing book reviews.*

Applied History Analyses of the Month

"The End of the Longest Peace?" by **Graham Allison** (Co-Chair, Harvard's Applied History Project; Professor of Government, Harvard Kennedy School) and **James A. Winnefeld, Jr.** (former Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff) in *Foreign Affairs*

In an article which has since been picked up by leading outlets, Allison and Winnefeld examine the reasons for today's anomalous period of peace, and consider what factors might lead to its end. Three numbers characterize the present peace, they write: 80 years without great power war, an achievement not matched

since Rome; 80 years since nuclear weapons were used; and 9 nuclear states, a situation that world leaders in the 1950s or 1960s would have deemed inconceivable. The logic of mutual assured destruction (MAD), "creative diplomacy" around nuclear weapons, and various "multilateral arrangements" promoted peace and economic growth. But "long-wave geopolitical cycles do not last forever," Allison and Winnefeld warn. Amnesia about war, renewed great power competition and "economic leveling," and America's overextension abroad but paralysis at home all threaten this peace.

The article showcases the power of Applied History to help illuminate even anomalous phenomena. On the one hand, putting our geopolitical moment into long historical context makes it possible to admire the feat that these last 80 years represent—offering "reasons to give thanks" this year, as **Peggy Noonan** (columnist, *The Wall Street Journal*) put it . On the other, it allows the authors to sound a timely alarm about the delicacy of today's peace. Analyzing "the factors that history shows contribute to the violent end of a major geopolitical cycle" clarifies the systemic pitfalls that great powers, including the US, would desire to avoid but which may be easily forgotten. In reviewing the last eight decades to identify reasons for peace, the article also informs policymakers and the public about what is required to extend the current cycle, highlighting both structural factors (e.g., MAD) and human decisions that require constant upkeep (e.g., diplomacy and alliance management).

This month, Allison also argues on *Across the Aisle* that even as the US faces MAD with China, that "doesn't mean we can't still be rivals—doesn't even mean that ultimately one of us might succeed relative to the other—just not by military conflict," as during the Cold War.

"Germany's New Old Nuclear Dilemma" by **Marina Henke (Professor of International Relations and Director of the Centre for International Security, Hertie School) in *Engelsberg Ideas***

Henke reviews episodes from West Germany's nuclear diplomacy during the Cold War for clues on how Berlin might execute its current strategic "pivot." She argues that Germany has long confronted the same dilemmas: "existential risk" of Russian invasion and doubt about American protection. Cold War Chancellors, she claims, wielded Germany's "nuclear latency"—the capability to go nuclear and ambiguity about whether they would do so—as a "bargaining tool" to preserve America's support and Germany's relevance in nuclear discussions. In three examples of

nuclear diplomacy from the 1960s, nuclear ambiguity did not always accomplish Berlin's objectives, but did enhance Germany's status, promote alliance unity, and make Soviet leaders cautious.

Henke's analysis is a good example of drawing and developing lessons from an historical analogy. After establishing the Cold War analogy by explaining the continuity in Germany's policy challenges, Henke highlights a solution (nuclear ambiguity) that successive Chancellors implemented but which has been largely foregone today. She then examines *how* the policy had been implemented, and to what effect. Henke states plainly that the German playbook of nuclear ambiguity produced both successes and failures; it was not, and will not be, a silver bullet for Berlin. Her balanced exploration of the historical lesson demonstrates that Applied History can prompt imagination about conceivable policy options, without erasing the nuances that make historical insights different from ironclad laws.

Publications of Note

"A Republic—If You Don't Throw it Away" by **Niall Ferguson** (Co-Chair, Harvard's Applied History Project; Senior Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution) in *The Free Press*

Ferguson challenges concerns about the health of the US republic by arguing that, with time, republican government becomes a tradition that is hard to extinguish. Pointing to examples like Venice (1,000 years as a republic) and Carthage (600 years), Ferguson hypothesizes that republics generally die young—about 20 years—or last for centuries. In particular, he claims, the US Constitution is exceptional due to the separation and limitation of power that it implemented, principles learned from the Founders' careful study of other republics across history.

"The Fog of McNamara" by **Fredrik Logevall** (Faculty Mentor, Harvard's Applied History Project; Professor of International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School) in *Foreign Affairs*

Reviewing *McNamara at War* by **Philip Taubman** (Lecturer, Stanford's Center for International Security and Cooperation) and **William Taubman** (Professor of Political Science Emeritus, Amherst College), Logevall argues that Defense Secretary Robert McNamara's experience in government is analogous to—and holds lessons for—other unelected officials: "if more high-level officials were prepared to resign for their convictions, citizens would be assured that those who remain truly believe in what they're doing." Logevall applauds the Taubmans' work as the long-awaited "big book on McNamara and Vietnam." Logevall also spoke about Kennedy's decision-making and legacy with **Paul Lay** of *Engelsberg Ideas* and **Martin di Caro** of the podcast *History as it Happens*.

"The World According to Henry Kissinger" by **John Bew** (Senior Fellow, Harvard's Belfer Center; Professor of History and Foreign Policy, King's College London) in *The Observer*

Reviewing *Henry Kissinger: An Intimate Portrait of the Master of Realpolitik* by **Jérémie Gallon** (Senior Director for Europe, McLarty Associates) and translated by **Roland Glasser** , Bew assesses the book as "a plea for Europe to get a grip on foreign policy and to learn from the Kissingerian style – and indeed to relearn the history of European diplomacy that Kissinger so well understood. To make the necessary leap, warns Gallon, Europe will also have to escape a foreign policy based on ethical homilies and the avoidance of hard choices."

"White House National-Security Strategy Reflects Vance's Thinking" by **Robert Zoellick** (Senior Fellow, Harvard's Belfer Center; former US Trade Representative, Deputy Secretary of State, and President of the World Bank) in *The Wall Street Journal*

Zoellick argues that the White House's new National Security Strategy envisions a return to the geopolitics of the pre-WWI era—"a competition among nation-states with spheres of influence, cultures of greatness, and nationalized economies"—and, at best, seeks to accomplish what Theodore Roosevelt did in "dominating" the Americas while "mediating balances of power" in Asia and Europe. But, Zoellick warns, the Strategy overlooks what America learned later in the 20th century: that

instability abroad threatens America directly, so that alliances and “win-win economic ties” are essential for US security.

“‘Collective Security’ Is on Life Support” by **Stephen Walt** (Professor of International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School) in *Foreign Policy*

Walt proposes four varieties of “collective security”: a system exemplified by the League of Nations in which countries renounce war, arms control agreements as a type of “security regime” that limits the scope of competition, neutral peacekeeping, and military alliances for “collective defense.” He argues that although collective defense worked well in the Cold War because allies agreed about the Soviet threat and stakes of war, the West’s current discord over values and the danger that Russia poses will naturally strain NATO.

“The Old New Cold War Is Dead. Long Live the New Old Cold War: The Political Logic of Trumpian Strategy” by **Adam Tooze** (Professor of History, Columbia University) in *Chartbook*

The Trump administration’s 2025 National Security Strategy takes aim at Europe because “The enemies of the European far-right are their enemies,” Tooze argues. “In the old Cold War - the one that ran between 1945 and 1989 - it was after all completely common place for the US to opine strongly about European domestic politics and to intervene in non-too-subtle ways.” Tooze asks whether “the new new Cold War is the old Cold War? The Trump administration wants to wind the clock back to the 1950s and have the strong, authoritarian, post-fascist currents of that era win the day? I would take that as a first approximation.”

“How Important is Harmony along Downing Street?” by **Jon Davis** (Director of the Strand Group, King’s College London) in *Civil Service World*

Recounting King's College London's decade-long collaboration with His Majesty's Treasury to analyze the institution's history since WWII, Davis argues that "successful economic policymaking" in the UK requires "'constructive, creative tension'" between the Prime Minister and Chancellor, rather than smooth relations. Revisiting the Treasury's history, from the Thatcher era to Johnson's premiership, also helps illuminate challenges and opportunities that may arise amid the institution's current reorganization, he says.

"The Deep History Behind America's Greenland Gambit" by **James Graham Wilson** (Supervisory Historian, US Department of State) in *Engelsberg Ideas*

As Trump again announces his interest in acquiring Greenland from Denmark, Wilson reminds readers that US attempts to purchase Greenland extend back to before WWI, when Greenland was considered as part of a three-way swap with Denmark and Germany. In each case, Wilson writes, the US found that it could fulfill its "strategic requirements" through "patient negotiations" with Denmark rather than force, culminating in the 1951 Defense of Greenland treaty. It remains to be seen whether Trump reaches the same conclusion, he adds.

"Trump's Dated Strategy is Putting Us on a Path to World War III" by **Greg Grandin** (Professor of History, Yale University) in *The New York Times*

Observing the central role that the Monroe Doctrine plays in Trump's new National Security Strategy, Grandin argues that the phrase, which is "neither treaty nor law," has been stretched over time to connote unilateralism, in contrast to Monroe's original intent of positioning the US "as part of a common community of New World nations." To a Latin American audience, the concept has become negatively associated with US occupation and coups, Grandin warns, thanks to the US's history of interventionism justified by the Doctrine.

"The Most Awful Responsibility: Truman and the Secret Struggle for Control of the Atomic Age" by Alex Wellerstein (Associate Professor, Stevens Institute of Technology) published by Harper Collins

In his most recent book, Wellerstein challenges traditional narratives about nuclear weapons during the Truman years. Specifically, Wellerstein boldly asserts, "Not only did Truman not take part in the decision to use the bomb, but the one major decision that he did make was a very different one." In exploring Truman's hands-off approach in the leadup to Hiroshima and Nagasaki and his subsequent struggle with the military over control of the country's nuclear weapons, Wellerstein makes the argument that "Truman was possibly the most anti-nuclear American president of the twentieth century."

"The 'Free World' Is at Peak Disunity" by Hal Brands (Distinguished Professor of Global Affairs, Johns Hopkins SAIS) in *Bloomberg*

Although "his negotiating style is rough," Trump's desire to rebalance America's relations with allies is comparable to episodes from the Cold War in which the US demanded more buy-in from Europe (e.g., threatening to withhold military aid to West Germany unless Bonn paid more for US troops stationed there) or took disruptive unilateral actions (e.g., ending Bretton Woods), Brands argues. But this time, Brands suggests, Trump's "transactional, illiberal ethos is undermining shared values," too, and unproductively threatening to disengage America entirely.

"Ukraine–Russia Peace Plans: Historical Lessons, Operationalising Criteria, and Comparative Assessment" by Nik Hynek (Professor, Charles University) and Michal Senk (Doctoral Candidate, Charles University) in *Peacebuilding*

Aiming to illuminate the factors essential for a sustainable peace in Ukraine and to offer inspiration from history, Hynek and Senk examine eight peace settlements since 1905, from the Treaty of Portsmouth that ended the Russo-Japanese War to

the accords that ended the First Chechen War in the 1990s. In addition to reasoning from analogies, the authors retrace the recent history of the war in Ukraine, seeking to identify gaps in the previous round of diplomacy (the Minsk Agreements) that failed to prevent a second Russian invasion.

"AI's Future May Be Written in Railroads' Past" by **Adrian Wooldridge** (columnist) for *Bloomberg*

Wooldridge points to several parallels between the ongoing spending spree by AI companies and the buildout of railroads during the second half of the 19th century, including the role of "buccaneers" (today's AI CEOs) who shamelessly evangelize the new technology and the prevalence of "extravagant financial engineering." He argues that although financial busts causing considerable short-term pain are inevitable in the AI era, the long-term "economic pluses" will be worthwhile, just as railroads eventually boosted productivity, increased connectivity, and lowered supply chain costs.

"The Arsenal of Democracy: Keeping China Deterred in an Age of Hard Choices" by **Eyck Freymann** (Hoover Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution) and **Harry Halem** (Senior Fellow, Yorktown Institute and Policy Exchange) in *Texas National Security Review*

Building on the recent publication of their book *The Arsenal of Democracy* , Freymann and Halem put today's technological changes in warfare in the context of previous "technological offsets," which, they assess, demand that governments, industry, and allies share "a common operating picture of the deterrence system." Today, they say, this means remembering the essential historical role that tactical surprise and surveillance, deep munitions stockpiles, and streamlined logistics have played in war.

"Avoiding an American Suez" by **Nikolas Neos** (Associate Research Fellow, Harvard's Belfer Center) in *Engelsberg Ideas*

Identifying similarities between Britain's ill-fated expedition to reclaim the Suez Canal from Egypt and a conceivable US defense of Taiwan, Neos argues that the US should learn from Britain's fate: that fighting far from home over territory that one's opponent sees as inseparable makes a reputation-harming outcome likely. Although he acknowledges that the US remains much more powerful than Britain was in 1956 and that international pressure played a large role in Britain's withdrawal, he highlights the countries' similar fiscal constraints and thus vulnerability to backlash in the markets.

Interviews and Speeches

Mitter Looks at the Coming "Chinese Decade" on *Frames of Space* Podcast

Rana Mitter (Chair and Professor of US-Asia Relations, Harvard Kennedy School) argues that China's influence is likely to grow over the coming decade as it continues to meet the world's booming demand for new technology, from affordable data centers to the green energy solutions that power them. "In all those areas," he says, "you can make a very plausible case that the Chinese project is underway, and the Western project is currently underpowered." Reflecting on China's economic development over recent decades, Mitter observes that construction cannot be the sure engine of growth that it has been, as buildings sit empty and China's demographics weaken. While China may hope that AI can become the next source of economic growth, Mitter notes that the jury is still out.

Gaddis Breaks Down "Grand Strategy for Dummies" on *Compendium: A History Collection*

John Lewis Gaddis (Professor of Military and Naval History, Yale University) defines grand strategy as "just common sense," which "is like oxygen. The higher you go, the thinner it gets," as leaders lose touch with realities on the ground. Soviet intelligence indicated "that Hitler was about to attack in June of 1941, but Stalin was

so invested in continuing this nefarious relationship that he had formed with Hitler back two years earlier in the Nazi-Soviet pact [that he was] disinclined to hear inconvenient advice." Lest listeners assume "that kind of blindness" was characteristic only of authoritarian states, Gaddis points out: "Look what happened to us six months later." He says, "there were pretty good indications that the attack was going to come at Pearl Harbor. But we did not expect that… so, we didn't even bother to translate the decoded intercepts that indicated Pearl Harbor."

Lepore Shares Lessons from "Intellectual Hero" Charles Beard amidst University-Government Clashes on *The Good Fight*

As WWI broke out, **Jill Lepore** (Professor of American History, Harvard University; Professor of Law, Harvard Law School) recalls , "Beard, who actually supported the U.S. entry into the war, strongly opposed the loyalty oaths" intended to build domestic support to stop the Germans. "When two of his colleagues were fired for refusing to sign them, he resigned in protest." Lepore argues this "is a good illustration of a principled engagement with the idea of free inquiry and of higher education and of the importance of the study of the American past, especially in times of political crisis, when the trial of ideas and the world of democracy are in question." Lepore concludes, "my point in telling this tale is that I do not think this is a new dilemma. It is not as though we are living in some uniquely strange time. There is always a tension between the university and the state."

Gavin Cautions Policymakers Against Historical Determinism on *School of War*

"In the summer of '45, Herbert Hoover is distributing a memo that's getting a lot of popularity," which said, "'this idea of fighting a war with Japan to unconditional surrender is just madness,'" **Frank Gavin** (Distinguished Professor, Johns Hopkins SAIS) explains . "'Japan has no tradition to do a liberal democracy, and you're going to risk extraordinary bloodshed in order to try to achieve an unattainable aim.' Well, you know what? It turned out Hoover was wrong. America gets very lucky that the emperor after the second bomb accepts a modified version of unconditional surrender." Had the US accepted Hoover's conclusion from history without also considering contemporary context, the war's end and Japan's transition to a

constitutional democracy (and one of America's most important allies) may have come much later, if ever.

Hankins Argues Trump is Not Applying Lessons from Classical Western Civilization on *UnHerd* Podcast

James Hankins (Visiting Professor, University of Florida's Hamilton School) disagrees with host **Freddie Sayers'** suggestion that the Trump administration is "almost at odds with some of those values of Western tradition" and simultaneously "is the one that is ushering in new institutes like the Hamilton School, which are designed to teach the Western canon." He argues: "I don't think Trump is necessarily helping people who want to reform Western culture." Hankins adds that "at Harvard, certainly," Trump's "blunt instrument" has "been more destructive than constructive." Hankins says "you have to distinguish" the classical education movement that dates back to the 1990s and "is not coextensive" with MAGA. "Certainly, Trump himself is not setting a good example for a movement which is trying to reestablish virtue."

Freeman and Guelzo Agree on Resonating Power of US's Founding Documents on *The Weekly Show with Jon Stewart*

"We're coming up on 2026," **Joanne Freeman** (Professor of History, Yale University) says , "and those kinds of anniversaries are reckoning moments." Americans can acknowledge that the founding documents' ideas "matter, even if the people who created them didn't live up to them," she argues. "They mattered to future generations," as demonstrated by the fact that "the Declaration of Independence has been used and reused and reused in places around the world." **Allen Guelzo** (Professor of Humanities, University of Florida's Hamilton School) adds that "the trajectory of this American idea is always in motion. We are always discovering new ways of opening this up." Instead of yielding to dictators who are "happy to say" that "Americans make a great deal out of all these wonderful things" but "don't live up to it," Guelzo declares "the American revolution is not over" and that "we are still in process. We are still discovering what is in the marrow of these ideas."

Gage, Blight, and Freeman Conclude “America at 250” Course at Yale

Concluding this one-time-only course co-taught by Yale faculty **David Blight** (Professor of History and African American Studies) and **Joanne Freeman**, **Beverly Gage** (Professor of History) acknowledges many Americans in 2026 may say, “This country is a mess, I don’t want to celebrate it.” Nevertheless, she argues, “that was also the case, as Barbara Jordan said in 1976, when the country was coming off Watergate and the conflicts of the 1960s and was in the midst of one of the great economic crises of the 20th century. It was true in 1926 [when the US] had just come out of World War I and out of a global flu pandemic, and was in the midst of ferocious fights about immigration and race and women’s rights. And it was certainly true in 1876 on the National Centennial when the country was just a decade out from the Civil War.”

Schadlow and Heinrichs Identify Continuity and Change in National Security Strategy

Speaking on the Hudson Institute’s *Brussels Sprouts* podcast, **Nadia Schadlow** (Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute) and **Rebeccah Heinrichs** (Senior Fellow and Keystone Defense Initiative Director, Hudson Institute) argue that Europe must come to terms with Trump’s divergent perspective on nationhood and sovereignty. Given Trump’s antipathy to the EU and its role in slowing European rearmament, Schadlow says, European capitals must get comfortable again with explaining that “the nation-state is important and what it means to be a nation.” Heinrichs sees the Strategy’s emphasis on civilizational ideas as no different from the ways that previous administrations have shoehorned domestic policy priorities into international diplomacy, but argues that NATO should ideally limit its concerns with partner nations’ domestic politics.

Ashford Compares US Power Projection in Europe vs. in Latin America in *The Foreign Affairs Interview*

As the world's first nuclear power, the US's Cold War "policy emphasized heavily preventing any nuclear proliferation, friendly or otherwise," argues **Emma Ashford** (Senior Fellow, Stimson Center). Declining to intervene in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 because of "potential risk of nuclear exchange" with the USSR also meant "a risk of proliferation" by other European countries fearing the US may not come to their aid, either. As post-Cold War unipolarity fades, the US has "to get back to accepting that some proliferation risk is the cost of doing business in this world of competing great powers." On the other hand, "the one place America has never [relinquished] the notion of spheres of influence is the Western Hemisphere." Ashford points to Trump's immediate predecessors: "George W. Bush's administration was implicated in a coup in Venezuela. Bill Clinton invaded Haiti. So, we've always had this sort of special status for the Western Hemisphere."

Brinkley "Puts Trump's 2025 in Historical Context" with Terry Moran

Terry Moran (journalist) asks how to assess, at the end of 2025, Henry Kissinger's 2018 thesis that "Trump may be one of those figures in history who appears from time to time to mark the end of an era." **Douglas Brinkley** (Chair in Humanities and Professor of History, Rice University) agrees with Kissinger: Trump's second administration has been a "dismantlement of that Cold War order which had the advantage of bringing Americans together with a common foe… Trump's come in and just kind of wiped all of that out or would like to." As for how he built his domestic political base, Brinkley says "in retrospect, it was" Ross Perot's anti-NAFTA movement "that's had a lot of legs and Trump has been able to capitalize on that" with the US's backlash against globalization.

Keller Recommends EU Look Beyond US and China for Future of Trade at The Capitol Forum's 2025 Trade & Competition Policy Forum

China's accession to the WTO "hasn't worked out," argues **Kevin Keller** (Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard's Belfer Center; Visiting Fellow in East Asian Legal Studies, Harvard Law School), despite American and Chinese hopes at the time that "'if we can get these protocols in place, we can settle this and… have a

peaceful mutually beneficial trade relationship.'" Keller summarizes the challenge with an anecdote from a Chinese official, who "described negotiating with the United States as trying to give a haircut to an impatient child… whenever the scissors got close to his head, the kid kept wrenching his head around." So, "what does that mean for the EU?" Keller recommends: "focus on the rest of the world." The EU could build leverage, becoming "less susceptible to the whiplash that can come with working with US officials" by bolstering "expertise and trade relationships with these other countries around the world."

Jobs and Opportunities

Applications are Open for the Clements Center for National Security's 2026 Summer Seminar in History and Statecraft

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 2026 Summer Seminar , held from July 12 to July 17. 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 22, 2026.

Project Updates

Andrew Porwancher Awarded 2025 Theodore Roosevelt Book Prize

Congratulations to **Andrew Porwancher** (Associate Professor, University of Oklahoma; former Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard's Belfer Center), who won The Theodore Roosevelt Association's 2025 Theodore Roosevelt Book Prize for his *American Maccabee: Theodore Roosevelt & the Jews*.

Applied History Quote of the Month

"I have come across men of letters who have written history without taking part in public affairs, and politicians who have concerned themselves with producing events without thinking about them. I have observed that the first are always inclined to find general causes, whereas the second, living in the midst of disconnected daily facts, are prone to imagine that everything is attributable to particular incidents, and that the wires they pull are the same as those that move the world. It is to be presumed that both are equally deceived."

Alexis de Tocqueville

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