



Applied History Network Newsletter

July 2026

The July 2026 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 "August Applied History Update" by September 4.

Applied History Analyses of the Month

[“What the Definitive Book on Empires Says About America Today”](#)
by **Charles King** (Professor of International Affairs and Government, Georgetown University) in *The New York Times*

King emphasizes the enduring lessons from Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* not only for American politics but also for the practice of historical analysis. He argues that knowing history helps above all with “measuring” the present. “Praising our own times as a golden age, or mourning them as uniquely bad, are recipes for either disastrous overconfidence or paralyzing despair.” King writes that Gibbon believed historical study offers insights but not definite “truths,”

and while “analogies are the first refuge of the bewildered, they can also be traps.” For today’s readers, he argues, Gibbon’s main takeaway is that seemingly small changes to bedrock laws and norms can accumulate to cause catastrophe.

King’s piece helps transmit Applied History insights from a classic work of history and notes its influence in the shaping of our own society: America’s founding fathers considered Gibbon “necessary reading.” Moreover, King illuminates the value of studying history by succinctly describing the habits of mind, or sensibility, that reading about the past imparts. He highlights openness to counterarguments, skill in synthesizing information, and readiness to “confront” unfamiliar decisions and behavior. In his summary: studying history “requires that we think like grown-ups, drawing conclusions that we know will change when the available evidence does.”

Thanks to Kenneth Weisbrode for noting this publication.

“[The American Example](#)” by Philip Zelikow (Senior Fellow, The Hoover Institution) in *The Freedom Frequency*

Zelikow highlights four periods in the last 250 years in which the US redefined itself and its role in the world, serving each time as a model for other countries: as a beacon of liberty after the Revolution, newly free and industrialized country after the Civil War, defender of democracy in the World Wars, and proponent for commerce and justice during and after the Cold War. He argues today’s digital age and falling trust in democratic government herald another transition and proposes ten ideas for how America might again inspire others. They include appropriately regulating new technology, recommitting to alliances with like-minded countries, and showing that government can “get stuff done.”

Zelikow’s piece demonstrates the use of history to guide strategy amid uncertainty. To contest what he sees as a thriving “post-American” narrative, Zelikow poses the question: what can we learn not just from past failures, on which we often focus, but also from past successes? By examining what the US did in similar historical cases after which we were proud of how we acted, he draws concrete suggestions for managing today’s challenges constructively. The piece provides a foundation for the Hoover Institution’s larger ongoing [project](#) that seeks to offer new ideas, vision, and policy recommendations for the country.

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

Mandelbaum Asks What Is Exceptional about US Foreign Policy

In *The American Way of Foreign Policy*, **Michael Mandelbaum** (Professor Emeritus of American Foreign Policy, Johns Hopkins' SAIS) argues that US foreign policy is “an international outlier.” It is “unusually ideological, unusually economic, and unusually democratic.” Specifically, Americans tend to support spreading American values abroad, disdain mercantilism, and demand that public opinion inform foreign policy—in contrast to the “small circle of officials” that oversee foreign relations in other countries.

[Reviewing](#) Mandelbaum's “wise” book in *The Wall Street Journal*, **Tunku Varadarajan** (Nonresident Fellow, American Enterprise Institute) acknowledges these tenets have applied to varying degrees over time and contends Trump's current foreign policy—with emphases on transactionalism and protectionism—poses additional challenges to them. But, he concludes, they may continue to give the country a comparative advantage: “As the U.S. prepares to face a mercantilist, expansionist and almost scornfully undemocratic China—whose foreign policy might be said to be the exact opposite of our own—this advantage could prove priceless.”

**MICHAEL
MANDELBAUM**
THE
**AMERICAN
WAY OF
FOREIGN
POLICY**



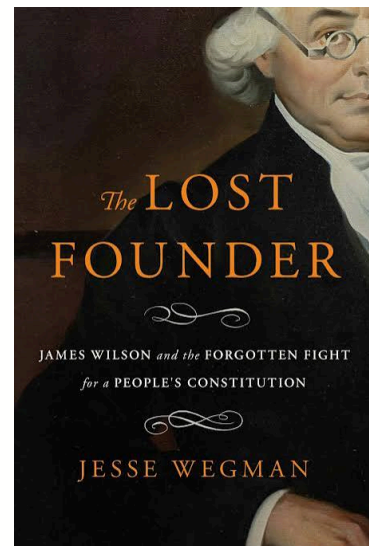
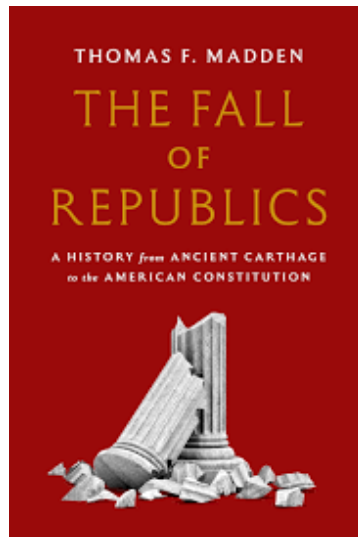
Wegman and Madden Account for the Deliberate Limits on American Democracy

Claire Rydell Arcenas (Associate Professor of History, University of Montana) [reviews](#) two recent books linked by their examination into the origins of America's republican form of government. In his profile of James Wilson—who penned the Constitution's opening words, “We the People”—**Jesse Wegman** (Senior Fellow, Brennan Center for Justice) reveals the Founders' antipathy to direct democracy,

driven by the negative impression that popular movements such as Shay's Rebellion had made on them. Wilson, the greatest exponent of direct elections, was deemed an "extremist" by his peers and died forgotten—hence the title of Wegman's book, *The Lost Founder*. **Thomas F.**

Madden (Professor of History, St. Louis University) shows the additional role that studying ancient history played in the Founders' preference for a "balanced republic." They feared a "tyranny of the people" of the kind that occasionally emerged in Greece and Rome, he explains in his "lively and capacious" *The*

Fall of Republics. As Arcenas recounts: "The Constitution, to be sure, was the product of men who had their gazes fixed squarely on the past, men raised on the writings of ancient thinkers, like Polybius and Cicero, who favored republican government, though they feared the crowd."



**This section was inspired by Paul Kennedy and his wide experience in writing book reviews.*

Featured Commentary

World Order

[“The Middle East Needs Its Own Helsinki Act”](#) by Alexander Stubb (President of Finland) and **Frank-Walter Steinmeier**

(President of Germany) in *The Financial Times*

The Presidents of Finland and Germany argue that a milestone diplomatic achievement from Europe's Cold War history—the Helsinki Final Act—can inform peace negotiations in the Middle East today. The experience of Helsinki teaches, first, that “you do not need trust to begin a process,” they write. It also shows that “all relevant actors” must be participants (countries involved with Helsinki came from NATO, the Warsaw Pact, and the non-aligned bloc) and offers “ideas for structured dialogue, issue-based cooperation, and confidence-building measures.” Amid gridlock in current negotiations, two world leaders turn to history to conceptualize a path forward.

"The Global Crises Andy Burnham Cannot Escape" by John Bew (Professor of History and Foreign Policy, King's College London; Senior Fellow, Harvard's Belfer Center; Distinguished Visiting Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution) in *The New Statesman*

Bew argues that new British Prime Minister Andy Burnham will find it difficult to reallocate time from foreign policy to domestic policy the way he intends. Bew claims that foreign policy decision-making has becoming increasingly centralized, and it is the arena in which the PM's orders translate most directly into action. Bew thus recommends Burnham take a harder look at Britain's approach to the world: good manners and automatic deference to the rules-based order no longer buy relevance, which is now measured in military, industrial, and technological power. What Burnham needs is statecraft, “instrumentalizing the tools of state power with the intention of getting your way,” Bew writes.

"China, the US, and Europe in the Era of Xi and Trump" by Rana Mitter (Chair in US-Asia Relations, Harvard Kennedy School) for the Academy of Social Sciences

Delivering the Academy's Annual Lecture, Mitter characterizes the US-China relationship as one of “competitive anti-liberalism” in which both superpowers “regard liberalism...as the problem that needs to be solved, as opposed to a tool to a better world”—a new situation in the late modern era, he says. He offers a

periodization of Chinese political thought and notes the major historical milestones that shape China's view of its deserved role in the world. But alongside these structural and historical factors, Mitter highlights the important "politics of personality" directing current US-China relations under Presidents Donald Trump and Xi Jinping.

["America, the Once Global Nation"](#) by Odd Arne Westad (Professor of History and Global Affairs, Yale University) in *Foreign Policy*

Throughout its 250-year history, America has been "remaking the world in its image," but Westad warns the future will be built by American "denial and omission more than design." He argues that American choices about influence and intervention in the world are explained by its own historical experience—a legacy of racism, for instance, made America reluctant to support anti-colonialism—and interests—for example, opening lucrative markets. Those choices have "produced a counterreaction" in the US that Westad calls not isolationism, but instead a "widespread disengagement from overall currents in the world": Americans against immigration, apathetic to inequality, and dubious of climate change science. Instead of American hegemony, Westad predicts the world order will increasingly be one of "economic diversity and great power multipolarity."

["The Return of the Great Powers' and 'The Coming Storm': Old Divisions Renewed"](#) by Robert D. Kaplan (Distinguished Senior Lecturer, University of Texas at Austin's School of Civic Leadership) in *The Wall Street Journal*

Kaplan reviews two recent additions to the Applied Historian's bookshelf: **Brendan Simms's** (Professor of International Relations and Director of the Centre for Geopolitics, University of Cambridge) *The Return of the Great Powers* and **Odd Arne Westad's** *The Coming Storm*. The books are linked by their unsentimental treatment of war, peace, and power, Kaplan argues. For Simms, he writes, great power status is predicated on cold hard metrics about demographics, nuclear weapon arsenals, economic heft, and military reach rather than soft power. Kaplan applauds Westad's big idea: the "highest morality" in political decision-making is to prevent war between the great powers. Kaplan endorses the similarities between

today's geopolitics and those of the pre-WWI era, as Westad details, but notes that modern realities such as social media and AI further compress decision time and shape strategy.

Military

"The Military and the Republic: What America's Armed Forces Can—and Cannot—Do for Democracy" by Charles Q. Brown, Jr. (former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), Peter Feaver (Professor of Political Science and Public Policy, Duke University), and Andrew Kragie (attorney) in *Foreign Affairs*

Reflecting on America's 250th birthday, the authors argue that America's unique history of civil-military relations remains an underappreciated facet of the nation's past. They note that the Declaration of Independence indicted King George III for empowering the military over civil authorities. Washington took the lesson to heart, deferring throughout the Revolutionary War to the Continental Congress, despite the delays it created. Two centuries later, Eisenhower's famous farewell address instructed voters, not generals, to check the military-industrial complex. The lesson, the authors write, is to resist the temptation to use the military to solve all political problems: "if you ask too much of the military, you risk the entire enterprise."

"War Has Become Pointless" by Stephen M. Walt (Professor of International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School) in *Foreign Policy*

While he acknowledges wars will still occur, Walt argues that war is becoming "increasingly pointless." He notes the "unimpressive" record of war since WWII—from the US's failures or stalemates in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq; to the Soviets in Afghanistan; to Israel's wars in its region. The US's wars "left the country worse off than it would have been had it never fought them," he concludes. Walt posits that nuclear weapons, modern nationalism ("which encourages societies to fight like tigers against a foreign aggressor"), globalization (which makes it "possible

for states to become richer without expanding”), and the proliferation of small arms and improvised weapons are major reasons for the senselessness of war.

“[Trump’s Iran Blunder Shows Strategy Can Defeat Firepower](#),” by Hal Brands (Distinguished Professor of Global Affairs, Johns Hopkins’ SAIS) in *Bloomberg*

Brands highlights historical cases where overmatch in military strength failed to compensate for the lack of a coherent strategy—the Athenian navy in the Peloponnesian War, Napoleon’s misadventure in Russia, the US in Vietnam—to reveal why Trump’s management of the war in Iran has failed to yield desired outcomes. Brands argues Trump succumbed to the “short-war illusion,” fueled by a deficit in strategic empathy, and so neglected essential worst-case planning. He concludes that the war in Iran is the latest example of Trump’s “disdain for the strategic art.” This month, Brands also [published](#) *Geopolitics of AI*, an edited volume with contributions from historians including **Peter Feaver**, **Seth Center** (Senior Fellow, Johns Hopkins’ SAIS), and **Lawrence Freedman** (Emeritus Professor of War Studies, King’s College London).

“[History Holds a Crucial Key in the Navy’s Fight Against Drones](#)” by Anand Toprani (Assistant Professor of Strategy and Policy, US Naval War College; former Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard’s Belfer Center) and Michael Dennis (Assistant Professor of Strategy and Policy, US Naval War College) in *RealClear Defense*

Observing the renewed importance of fielding cheap defensive weapons that can take out an opponent’s incoming missiles or drones, Toprani and Dennis recommend studying the history of the proximity fuse. Produced in the millions by the US in the midst of WWII, the proximity fuse made it possible to target German V-1 missiles or Japanese kamikaze planes without deploying aircraft. The authors offer a concrete solution to a major challenge by drawing on ideas from “a very similar problem in the past.” This month Toprani also [wrote](#) with **John Lehman** (former Secretary of the Navy) about lessons from the 1980s for US defense acquisition.

“[‘Band on the Run’ Review: An Army Far From Home](#)” by **James Romm (Professor of Classics, Bard College) in *The Wall Street Journal***

Reviewing *Band on the Run* by **Robert O’Connell** (military historian), an account of the March of the Ten Thousand in the 400s BC, Romm commends the book for offering “unique insight into the meaning of history, the moral problem of military dominance by one culture over others and the corrosive effect—in the Hellenic world as elsewhere—of the allure of money.” O’Connell casts the March, led by Xenophon, as a “civilizational tragedy” that set a precedent for mercenary military service, Romm writes. The book improves historians’ understanding of the March by contesting Xenophon’s “glaringly incomplete” interpretation of it as a “heroic saga of survival.”

“[Has the Russian-Ukraine War Reached a Turning Point Favoring Ukraine?](#)” by **Simon Saradzhyan (founding director) for *Russia Matters***

Saradzhyan evaluates the increasingly cited claim that the war in Ukraine is turning in Ukraine’s favor. Reviewing data between 2022 and 2026 on territorial gains, drone inventories, casualties, and economic strength, he assesses that the war is not at a turning point. But he notes that historical turning points are usually difficult to identify except in retrospect. For example, FDR described Stalingrad as the turning point of WWII in a 1944 letter to Stalin—one year after the battle ended.

US Foreign Policy

“[The 3 R’s of America’s Home Hemisphere: Republics; Revolutionaries; and the ‘Rithmetic of Politics](#)” by **Robert Zoellick (Senior Fellow, Harvard’s Belfer Center; former US Trade**

Representative, Deputy Secretary of State, and President of the World Bank) at Aspen Strategy Group

Delivering the Aspen Strategy Group's annual Ernest May Lecture, Zoellick recounts the history of US foreign policy in the Western Hemisphere. He concludes that “US global concerns have continually reverberated in our home region” and that some of America’s greatest strategic thinkers, including Secretary of State William Seward, understood that friendly relations in the hemisphere must be a priority for US policy. He also shows that similar approaches to the Americas have recurred in US foreign policy over time, such as the Good Neighbor idea first explored by Henry Clay in the 1820s and revived by FDR over one century later.

[“Ronald Reagan and the End of the Cold War”](#) with commentaries by **Jeffrey A. Engel (Professor of History and Director of the Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University) and **Fritz Bartel** (Associate Professor of International Affairs, Texas A&M’s Bush School), and reply by **William Inboden** (Executive Vice President and Provost, University of Texas at Austin) in the *Journal of Cold War Studies***

Opening with a comparison between Reagan's crusading anticommunism and Trump's transactionalism, this dialogue reexamines whether Reagan's grand strategy ended the Cold War, or if he inherited its decline. Engel grants that Reagan reinforced the US arms buildup and catalyzed arms reduction measures, but neither Engel nor Bartel considers US policy to be the primary driver of the Soviet Union’s internal changes and Gorbachev’s rise. Defending lines of argument first advanced in his book about Reagan, *The Peacemaker*, Inboden affirms that the Soviet system was pushed. It did not simply fall. He maintains that structural decay opened the door—but that Reagan’s prescient, contrarian assessment that the USSR was vulnerable inspired the US policies that delivered the final “shove.”

["The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of the Monroe Doctrine"](#) by **Joseph Ledford (Assistant Professor of Security Studies and Director of Research at the Clements Center for National Security,**

University of Texas at Austin; Griffin Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution) in *Engelsberg Ideas*

Ledford sorts the history of America's implementation of the Monroe Doctrine into three periods: US as "good neighbor," "bad neighbor," and "ugly neighbor." FDR's aptly titled Good Neighbor policy prioritized cooperation among American nations, whereas Teddy Roosevelt's namesake corollary to the Doctrine sanctioned military intervention in Latin America (bad neighbor) and America's Cold War strategy meant supporting unsavory regimes in the region (ugly). Asking the counterfactual question, "Would the US have behaved any differently over the last two centuries if the Monroe Doctrine had never been conceived," Ledford concludes it is unlikely. American interests are and always have been bound up in the Western Hemisphere, and "forced to choose between ideals and security, decision-makers will elect the latter," he argues.

["How America's Founding Inspires Its Strategy in the World"](#) by Daniel Fried (Distinguished Fellow) for the Atlantic Council

Fried argues that values and traditional national interests have long been intertwined parts of US foreign policy. Presidents from Wilson to Truman to JFK have espoused a "free-world strategy" that draws from the principles in the Declaration of Independence to make the defense and diffusion of freedom abroad a key US policy objective, he writes. Fried interprets the end of the Cold War as evidence for the importance of preserving a focus on values in foreign policy. While Kissinger's and Nixon's realist support for regimes without popular backing—namely, the Shah's Iran—ultimately backfired, Carter and Reagan prioritized the promotion of human rights and democracy, hastening victory in the Cold War.

Global Economy

["Welcome to the Age of the Profit Dollar"](#) by Adam Tooze (Professor of History, Columbia University) in *The Financial Times*

Tooze disputes conventional wisdom about the historical continuity behind the US dollar's reserve currency status—"to speak of a reserve currency itself risks anachronism," he argues. In fact, "the dollar system has been repeatedly reinvented." Today, "it is once again in a new and volatile configuration, quite different from that of 15 years ago let alone the 1940s." Since the surge in private foreign investors buying US assets is funding America despite the country's fiscal deficits, Tooze proposes we are in the era of the "hedge fund," "billionaire," or "profit" dollar. This month, Tooze also [spoke](#) about British PM Andy Burnham's "New Manchesterism" and [discussed](#) US economic history on *Ones & Tooze*.

[“From ‘Polycrisis’ to ‘Polytunity’: the Future of Geopolitics”](#) with **Yuen Yuen Ang (Chair Professor of Political Economy, Johns Hopkins University) for World Economic Forum’s *Radio Davos***

During Summer Davos in Dalian, China, Ang spoke about China's successful efforts to reframe increasing turbulence in world order as an opportunity to "fundamentally rethink...China's role in the global economy" beginning in 2016. As an indicator, she points to the evolving significance of the Five-Year Plan as a guide for China's development. Before 2016, "it was as if you were driving straight ahead, autopilot, with some adjustments every five years." Those Plans were operating under an "old growth model." In the 14th and latest 15th Plans, the government has played a more active role pushing the country to take a "right turn" toward advanced manufacturing and higher consumption.

[“Trump’s Contradictions Mangle a Complex History of US Trade”](#) by **Alan Beattie (senior trade writer) in *The Financial Times***

To diagnose the deficits in Trump's tariff policy, Beattie examines the main motives for—and outcomes of—tariffs in US history. Citing trade historian **Douglas Irwin** (Professor in Economics, Dartmouth University), he notes that tariffs can have one of three contrasting rationales: raising government revenue, restricting foreign competition, and incentivizing trade reciprocity. Alexander Hamilton's tariffs, which Trump has praised, primarily served to raise revenue, not prop up manufacturing, he argues. Protectionist tariffs came later in the 19th century—and had unexpected side effects, as Trump is learning in real time. Trump's trade policy, Beattie concludes, "is

a shambles because he's trying to achieve the three Rs and several other targets at once."

US Politics

[“JFK and the American Century”](#) with **Fredrik Logevall (Professor of History, Harvard University; Professor of International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School; Faculty Mentor, Harvard’s Applied History Project) at the Jaipur Literature Festival London**

Logevall discusses his book *JFK: Coming of Age in the American Century, 1917-1956*, arguing that JFK’s personal interests in history and statecraft as a young adult merged with his ambitious disposition and appreciation for public service to inform his political aspirations and style of leadership. Logevall unpacks the discrepancies between Kennedy’s private view that North Vietnam could not be stopped with the expansion of military aid to South Vietnam during his presidential tenure. He argues that it was a fear of appearing weak on communism domestically more than anything else that shaped his decision-making.

[“William McKinley”](#) by **Karl Rove (columnist; former Deputy Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor to President George W. Bush) for *In Pursuit***

Noting that the Gilded Age was one of the most polarized periods in US history, Rove reminds Americans that it was the “conciliatory Ohioan” William McKinley who broke the political stalemate “by recognizing that all Americans must be given the opportunity to share in the Declaration of Independence’s promises.” McKinley supported Black suffrage, defended Catholic Americans and immigrants, and even campaigned among Southern veterans. Rove draws the lesson that “Leaders ease division not by splitting the difference, but by giving respect to all, even across old, deep divides.”

[“Finding Hope in History”](#) by Doris Kearns Goodwin (Pulitzer Prize-winning author and presidential historian) at the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library

On the opening of the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library, Goodwin considers the value of history for policymakers facing today’s challenges: it provides perspective, lessons, and “most importantly” hope. “History gives me confidence” that we can emerge from difficulty, she adds, drawing on insights from researching Abraham Lincoln, FDR, and others. She compares the political climate in the days of Teddy Roosevelt with ours today: technological revolution, high wealth inequality, increased immigration, and political violence. In such conditions, there is much to learn from Roosevelt’s style of leadership, she argues, including his boundless energy, willingness to make (and learn from) mistakes, and response to tragedy.

[“Democracy 250: Myth, Memory and the American Story”](#) with Lindsay Chervinsky (Executive Director, George Washington Presidential Library at Mount Vernon), Leah Wright (Associate Professor of History, Johns Hopkins University), and moderated by Eugene Scott (journalist; former Resident Fellow, Harvard’s Institute of Politics) for Harvard’s Ash Center and Johns Hopkins’ SNF Agora Institute

On the country’s 250th birthday, historians Wright and Chervinsky respond to what Chervinsky describes as today’s perception of an “immovable and unchangeable”—perhaps even “completely broken”—American experiment by recalling periods of greater turmoil for US democracy. The founders “were really just throwing spaghetti against the wall and trying to see what stuck” in “a period of tremendous innovation and reform, and they fully expected future generations to do the same,” Chervinsky says. Wright concludes that “Democracy is fraught. It is not static. It is not easy. It is something that is constantly being remade and redone.”

["58 Years of Attacks on the Media by Powerful Leaders Trying to Deflect Criticism, From Nixon to Trump"](#) by **Heather Hendershot (Professor of Communication Studies and Journalism, Northwestern University) in *The Conversation***

To offer recommendations for today's news media amid falling public trust and continuing criticism by political leaders, Hendershot retraces the tension between the Nixon administration and the media in the 1970s. She argues that pushback to political pressure by leading voices in the newspaper industry, the major networks' resistance to Nixon's demands, and the media's commitment to continued reporting on controversial topics (as in the 1971 release of the Pentagon Papers) preserved the press's independence. But she also notes a key difference from today: in contrast to today's splintered media, just three nightly news shows competed for viewers in the 1970s, making "carefully balanced reporting" a "business imperative."

Historians Reflect on the Legacies of America's Founders in New Hoover Essay Collection

Beginning with an essay by **Condoleezza Rice** (Director, Stanford's Hoover Institution; former Secretary of State) on Alexander Hamilton, the "Founders & Fellows" series [illuminates](#) the contributions of the "architects of the American experiment" and presents lessons from their lives. In July, **Stephen Kotkin** (Visiting Scholar, Harvard's Applied History Project; Senior Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution), **Jim Mattis** (former Secretary of Defense), and more wrote on Ben Franklin, James Madison, Gouverneur Morris, John Laurens, Benjamin Rush, Alexander Hamilton, Gershom Seixas, and Lafayette.

Historical Analysis

["The Death of History,"](#) by **Niall Ferguson (Co-Chair, Harvard's Applied History Project; Senior Fellow, Stanford's Hoover**

Institution) and John-Clark Levin (Head of Research, Kurzweil Technologies) in *The Free Press*

Ferguson and Levin reckon with the challenge AI-enabled social media feeds pose to historians, policymakers, and consumers. “As the algorithmic age takes Holocaust denial mainstream, historians must admit a bitter defeat,” they write. Whereas historians were once able to dispute inaccurate narratives with book-length responses or reasoned debates, today’s online peddlers of “anti-history” move too rapidly and care too little about fact. This month, Ferguson also [wrote](#) a short reflection on Henry Kissinger’s “quintessentially American” life.

[“Does Policy History Have a Future?”](#) by **Jennifer Burns** (Professor in US History, Stanford University) in H-Pol

In remarks delivered at the 2026 Policy History Conference Plenary, Burns highlights reasons for optimism about the future of the study of policy history in America. She notes a resurgence in civics education, to which policy historians can contribute, and the appetite for Applied History as a source of solutions to current political challenges. She calls on Applied Historians to turn more attention to domestic politics; for instance, she proposes “studying Nixon’s 1969 proposal for a Family Assistance Plan” that evolved into today’s Earned Income Tax Credit. Burns expects more progress in policy history will emerge from policy schools, civics centers, “applied history initiatives,” and think tanks than from traditional history departments.

[“The American Experiment at 250: History, Higher Education, and the Road Ahead”](#) with **Beverly Gage** (Professor of History, Yale University) discussing with **James B. Milliken** (President, University of California)

Gage notes the value of encountering Americans from all walks of life (referencing the road trip which anchors her latest book, [This Land Is Your Land](#)) and argues that studying history can offer similar benefits: “Part of what the study of history is about is making these leaps of curiosity or empathy into a world and a set of worldviews that is different from your own.” Today’s “political battles,” she suggests, “have really encouraged people to look to the past to try to figure out what are the right parallels

or examples that we can draw from.” Yet “anxiety” about America’s future is not novel, she says—Americans have always worried that the country is straying from its “founding principles.”

Network Updates

Applied History Expands at King’s College London

The [Engelsberg Applied History Programme](#) recently selected its sixth cohort of undergraduate fellows at King’s College London (KCL). Funded by the Ax:son Johnson Foundation, the fellowship programme is based at the Centre for Statecraft and National Security in the Department of War Studies and works to introduce undergraduates to methods and approaches to Applied History. The fellowship groups meet once every two weeks where one student examines a contemporary question of international politics through a historical lens. The group also discusses assigned readings related to the philosophy of history and historiography.

Moreover, **Andrew Ehrhardt** (Lecturer in Foreign Policy and Director of Research & Programmes, Centre for Statecraft and National Security, KCL) and **Giuseppe Paparella** (Lecturer in East Asian Security, KCL) will be offering the first Applied History course at KCL this fall. Titled the *Uses and Abuses of History in Policymaking*, the undergraduate course will examine how historical knowledge and historical skills can be used to better understand the policymaking process. Students will learn how certain historical analogies—for example, Munich or Vietnam—have been used and misused by practitioners and they will weigh up counterfactuals to better understand the various causes and outcomes of major international events.

Applied History Quote of the Month

“To be ignorant of what occurred before
you were born is to remain always a
child.”

– **Marcus Tullius Cicero**, M. Tulli Ciceronis Orator Ad M. Brutum (46 B.C.E)
[Hubbell, trans.]

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