APPLIED HISTORY

March 2-3, 2018
Stanford University

A SEMINAR ARRANGED BY
AXEL AND MARGARET AX:SON JOHNSON FOUNDATION
BELFER CENTER, HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL
HOOVER INSTITUTION, STANFORD UNIVERSITY
For some time, the majority of academic historians have tended to shy away from questions of contemporary interest, especially to policy-makers, but also of interest to students interested in policy issues.

Previous generations were less shy of such questions. Writing in 1939, the great Oxford philosopher of historian R. G. Collingwood made the case for applied history succinctly. “True historical problems arise out of practical problems,” he argued. “We study history in order to see more clearly into the situation in which we are called upon to act. Hence the plane on which, ultimately, all problems arise is the plane of ‘real’ life: that to which they are referred for their solution is history.”

If historians decline to address current issues, then those making policy will be denied the benefit of historical perspective. Writing in the Atlantic in 2016, Graham Allison and Niall Ferguson made the case for establishing a White House council of historical advisers, analogous to the council of economic advisers. Their argument was that decision-making in Washington (and not only there) would be improved by a more systematic effort to take the lessons of history into account.

In the hope that other historians share the view that there is more to be learned from history than merely “how to make new mistakes” (in A.J.P. Taylor’s phrase), we are holding what we hope will be a series of conferences devoted to applied history.

What sort of questions will the conference address? The following are the ones to be addressed by speakers and commentators:

1. What lessons can a modern democracy learn from the fall of Roman Republic?
2. Are recent developments in American politics unprecedented, or is Trump merely populism revisited?
3. Is deep economic or political reform possible in the People’s Republic of China?
4. Did the United States learn the right lessons from defeat in Vietnam?
5. How far are major historical discontinuities explicable in terms of climatic change?
6. Are cryptocurrencies likely to replace fiat currencies in the foreseeable future?
7. How much of a Potemkin superpower is Putin’s Russia?
8. What can we learn from past attempts to learn from the past?
9. Can we learn anything of the Cold War that is relevant to the world in 2018?
10. How might 20th-century globalization unfold?
11. Does rising inequality matter?
12. What does history suggest will come of the recent upsurge in Islamist-inspired violence?
13. How can a country fight an ideology?

In each case, the paper’s author will seek to answer the question with the help of historical evidence, and in particular the use of analogies and comparisons.

The conference will be a joint venture between the Hoover Institution, the Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation, and the Belfer Center at Harvard’s Kennedy School. The conference papers will subsequently be published in a book with the title Applied History.
8:00 AM  BREAKFAST AND REGISTRATION
9:00 AM  Welcome and opening remarks by Niall Ferguson
9:15 – 10:00 AM  Undead Rome: The Decline, Fall and Afterlives of the Roman Empire
Presenter: Tom Holland | Commentator: Peter Frankopan | Chair: Niall Ferguson
10:00 – 10:45 AM  Is Trumpism Merely Populism Revisited?
Presenter: Eric Rauchway | Commentator: Daniel Sargent | Chair: Niall Ferguson
10:45 AM  BREAK
11:15 – 12:00 PM  The China Story
Presenter: Frank Dikötter | Commentator: Arne Westad | Chair: Robert Zoellick
12:00 – 1:30 PM  LUNCH
Discussion with Aaron O’Connell and Fredrik Logevall:
Déjà Vu All Over Again? Vietnam, Afghanistan, and the Search for Lessons in History
Chair: Graham Allison
1:30 – 2:15 PM  The Ecological Origins of Economic and Political Systems
Presenter: Stephen Haber | Commentator: Ian Morris | Chair: Peter Frankopan
2:15 – 3:00 PM  Kicking Away the Ladder? Cryptocurrencies in Historical Perspective
Presenter: Tyler Goodspeed | Commentator: Barry Eichengreen | Chair: Michael Bordo
3:00 PM  ADJOURN
4:45 – 5:45 PM  Tour of Hoover Archives (optional)
Eric Wakin
5:45 – 6:30 PM  Is Putin’s Russia a Potemkin Power? Leadership Succession and Russian Foreign Policy
Presenter: Christopher Miller | Commentator: Stephen Kotkin | Chair: Amir Weiner
6:30 – 7:30 PM  RECEPTION
7:30 – 9:30 PM  DINNER
8:00 AM  BREAKFAST

9:00 – 9:45 AM  The History of the Future
Presenter: Matthew Connelly | Commentator: Christopher Clark | Chair: Mary Sarotte

9:45 – 10:30 AM  Thinking Historically: A Cold War Historian’s Reflections on Policy
Presenter: Francis Gavin | Commentator: Marc Trachtenberg | Chair: Arne Westad

10:30 AM  BREAK

11:00 – 11:45 AM  How Might 21st-century Deglobalization Unfold?
Presenter: Stefan Link | Commentator: Norman Naimark | Chair: Marc Trachtenberg

11:45 – 12:30 PM  Same As It Ever Was: The History of Inequality and Mobility
Presenter: Gregory Clark | Commentator: Glen O’Hara | Chair: Harold James

12:30 PM  LUNCH
Discussion with Philip Zelikow and Robert Zoellick:
Applied History in Washington since c. 2000

1:30 – 2:15 PM  Wine and Winning: From Muhammad to the Islamic State, a Tangled Relationship
Presenter: David Cook | Commentator: Emile Simpson | Chair: Sean McMeekin

2:15 – 3:00 PM  Defeating an Idea: What the Cold War Can Teach Us About How States Fight Ideologies
Presenter: Jeremy Friedman | Commentator: John Bew | Chair: Philip Zelikow

3:00 PM  ADJOURN
Presenters, Commentators and Chairs

Graham Allison  
Douglas Dillon Professor of Government, Harvard Kennedy School

John Bew  
Professor of History and Foreign Policy, King's College London

Michael Bordo  
Visiting Distinguished Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University

Christopher Clark  
Regius Professor of History, University of Cambridge

Gregory Clark  
Professor, University of California, Davis

Matthew Connelly  
Professor of History, Columbia University

David Cook  
Associate Professor, Rice University

Frank Dikötter  
Chair Professor of History, University of Hong Kong

Barry Eichengreen  
Professor, University of California, Berkeley

Niall Ferguson  
Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University

Peter Frankopan  
Professor of Global History, Oxford University

Jeremy Friedman  
Associate Professor, Harvard Business School

Francis Gavin  
Giovanni Agnelli Distinguished Professor and the Director of the Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs, Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs – Johns Hopkins SAIS

Tyler Goodspeed  
Senior Economist, Council of Economic Advisers

Stephen Haber  
Professor, Stanford University

Tom Holland  
Historian

Harold James  
Professor, Princeton University

Stephen Kotkin  
Professor, Senior Fellow, Princeton University/Hoover Institution

Stefan Link  
Assistant Professor, Dartmouth College

Fredrik Logevall  
Laurence D. Belfer Professor of International Affairs, Harvard University

Sean McMeekin  
Professor of History, Bard College

Christopher Miller  
Assistant Professor of International History, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy

Ian Morris  
Willard Professor of Classics, Stanford University

Norman Naimark  
Robert and Florence McDonnell Professor, Senior Stanford University Fellow, Hoover Institution, Freeman Spogli Institute, Stanford University

Aaron O’Connell  
Associate Professor, University of Texas at Austin

Glen O’Hara  
Professor of Modern and Contemporary History, Oxford Brookes University

Eric Rauchway  
Professor of History, University of California, Davis

Daniel Sargent  
Associate Professor, University of California, Berkeley

Mary Sarotte  
Professor, Johns Hopkins University

Emile Simpson  
Junior Fellow, Harvard Society of Fellows, Harvard University

Marc Trachtenberg  
Research Professor of Political Science, University of California at Los Angeles

Eric Wakin  
Deputy Director, Director of Library & Archives, Hoover Institution, Stanford University

Amir Weiner  
Associate Professor of History, Stanford University

Arne Westad  
ST Lee Professor of US-Asia Relations, Harvard Kennedy School

Philip Zelikow  
White Burkett Miller Professor of History, University of Virginia

Robert Zoellick  
Chairman, AllianceBernstein
ORGANIZATION

AXEL AND MARGARET AX:SON JOHNSON FOUNDATION

President: Kurt Almqvist

Project Leader: Mattias Hessérus
Director of Logistics and Planning: Alexander Nyquist
Project Coordinators: Andreas Gür, Erik Ramsgård

BELFER CENTER, HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL

Douglas Dillon Professor of Government and Co-Director of Applied History Project:
Graham Allison

Research Assistant and Applied History Project Coordinator: Arjun Kapur
Ernest May Fellows in History and Policy: David Allen, Alexandra Evans, Jason Kelly,
Benjamin Rhode, Calder Walton

HOOVER INSTITUTION, STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Senior Fellow: Niall Ferguson

Associate Director of Research Operations: Denise Elson
Research Assistant: Alice S. Han