

Rise and Stall? Casting a critical eye to the Applied History Manifesto's revival of Applied History

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(Image from: https://lotr.fandom.com/wiki/Council_of_Elrond- an artistic interpretation for the advocated Council of Historians?)

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Introduction:

Looking back from 2020, it appears the second decade of the twenty-first century was a popular time for various historians to cry crisis, and create a programmatic manifesto demanding sweeping change to academic history lest a perceived deficiency of current practice see the discipline consigned to its own proverbial dustbin.¹ Somewhat lost in the cacophony of newly published competing manifestos, gliding under the radar was Graham Allison and Niall Ferguson's throwing into the ring of their 2016 *Applied History Manifesto*. This manifesto articulates and endorses their *Applied History Project* underway at the Harvard Kennedy School, presenting it as something urgently required at two levels. First, in the policy realm, to save America's weak foreign policy from spurious advice by social scientists and secondly in the public realm, to resolve the history deficit.²

These goals embody the definition of Applied History; the use of historical study to guide and influence current policymaking. It is something I'm a fervent believer in, but perhaps not in the specific way Allison and Ferguson promote, nor indeed in some of its previous iterations under other would-be champions. You see, Applied History in fact has a rich pedigree of failing to take off stretching back to the early-twentieth century. This time, the exact solutions to the issues Allison and Ferguson's latest Applied History effort has been proposed to rectify are at once unprecedentedly ambitious in the long history of Applied History, with Ferguson demanding a Presidentially formed Council of Historians to advise the Whitehouse on policy issues directly,³ yet also Applied History as is envisaged here has seemingly never been more bereft in terms of the practical elements to actually achieve this goal, and its revival. Things such as a full methodology, academic engagement and a theoretical framework which Applied Histories previous iterations had in bucketful's have been streamlined this time around as to potentially undermined Applied History's already controversial academic integrity.

¹ Mark Donnelly and Claire Norton, *Doing History* (Abingdon, 2011), 58-63; Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, (Cambridge, 2014), 1; Suzannah Lipscomb, 'A Code of Conduct for Historians', *History Today*, 64 (2014).

² Graham Allison and Niall Ferguson, *Applied History Manifesto* (Harvard Kennedy School Applied History Project, 2016), 8.

³ <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/09/dont-know-much-about-history/492746/>, accessed 9 April.

A justification for this bold and bare vision has not been offered, and to date there has been no history written on the rise and stall of Applied History. While this essay holds no aspiration to rectify that history deficit, it does offer a comparative analysis of Allison and Ferguson's latest attempted revival alongside three key previous attempts to seek an explanation and justification, if any, for its streamlining call. The movement is compared with Benjamin Shambaugh's original 1920s version, selected due to it being the original call for an Applied History as well as its greatest success. It is joined by Richard Neustadt and Ernest May's 1980s movement as they are referenced as providing the foundations of the current revival by Allison and Ferguson,⁴ thus the comparison will be able to highlight continuities and differences in interpretation from two threads of Applied History who share a direct link. This is joined lastly by Peter Stearns drive also during the 1980s which offered a very different, and far more complex approach to the method than Neustadt and May or Allison and Ferguson envisaged.

This essay focuses on US Applied History as it is far more predominant over there as a concept than in other areas of the world. It begins with a comparison of the wider contexts in which each revival and version of Applied History was advocated, to highlight the need for a dual crisis of historical study within both academic history, and the wider public that is needed to be perceived for Applied History to be born or reborn as persistently as it has been. It will then move to analyzing the dissemination of each movement and their reception before moving on to frame Applied History's internal tension between its academic and public elements. Finally, it will compare methodologies to highlight the somewhat radical and paradoxical nature of Allison and Ferguson's latest revival of Applied History.

The dual crisis; the wider context for the birth or rebirth of Applied History:

The wider context which informed each of the various Applied History movements is remarkably similar. It points towards a requirement that for each movement, there needs to be a typically connected, dual crisis within academia and within the general public regarding the place and importance of historical study, or at least a popular perception of this, that can be preyed upon those advocating the need for Applied History to justify their aims.

⁴ Allison and Ferguson, *Applied History Manifesto*, 1.

Shambaugh's particular crisis was the decline of the traditional 'elite history' at the turn of the 20th century, that of courts, kings and high politics, and the growing interest of the expanding middle classes in a history that justified and reinforced their nationalism.⁵ This was the 'public crisis' element that then influenced and was influenced by the concurrent academic 'history crisis' at the turn of the 20th century in the US and Europe where there was a growing and widespread demand for an expansion of the areas that historical study covered (A wish for more than political or biographical histories) and the adoption of an empirical social science approach in how history was researched and written.⁶

However, there was no single vision articulating the details of how these demands should be met, and so Shambaugh had a gap to exploit. He formulated and implemented his own vision of an Applied History, that dealt with state-legislature and policy analysis for an increasingly nationalist public.⁷ His Applied History justified itself as a social science through his offering of historical case studies to provide evidence to analyze current policy needs as highlighted by his use of a Wisconsin town's experience with the private energy market to highlight the limits, challenges and pitfalls of Iowa state government's supported drive toward free market competition in the provision of electricity to its residents.⁸

The same combination of interlinked public and academic crisis was also present between 1972 and 1989 for Stearns Applied History as well as Neustadt and May's version of the movement. There was grave concern during this period about the lack of jobs for History graduates, in 1976-7 there were only 700 jobs for the 1200 new PHD holders. Likewise, and somewhat related was the drastic decline in BA History enrollment, from 45,000 in 1971 with History's popularity ranked as foremost among the social sciences, to 16,000 in 1983, with History now second to bottom in popularity.⁹ This sparked concerns in academia about the longevity of the History discipline and for particularly Stearns it fueled

⁵ Rebecca Conrad, *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundations of Public History* (Iowa City, 2002) 3.

⁶ Georg Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown, 2005), 31.

⁷ Conrad, *Benjamin Shambaugh*, 4.

⁸ Benjamin Shambaugh, 'Regulation of Urban Utilities in Iowa', *Iowa Applied History Series*, 1 (1912), 17-19.

⁹ Robert Townsend, 'Precedents: The Job Crisis Of The 1970s', *Perspectives on History*, 35 (1997), 1-4.

his drive to foster new ideas about how History might have an 'ongoing utility' to stem its perceived decline.¹⁰

A linked consequence to this academic crisis, was of course a wider public one. This came in the form of a fear about an overall decline in historical knowledge among policymakers and other social scientists, with controversial wars like Vietnam becoming polarizing blunders in the public mind. Stearns himself argued that the 'poor batting average' of policy forecasts in getting things correct highlighted this.¹¹ This was a sentiment shared by Neustadt and May who presented these controversial recent case-studies, such as the Vietnam war, whose current deep public opposition to it,¹² May argued was actually avoidable through a better use of history from policymakers which would have given them more than just a very simplistic rendering of the Korean war analogy to work off in regard to preparing for, and heading off domestic political fallout to the unforeseen events of the conflict.¹³

Allison and Ferguson have launched the newest Applied History revival in a strikingly similar context in 2016 to that in which Stearns, May and Neustadt operated in. There is a perceived history deficit among the public and policymakers. An example given by Ferguson is found with President Obama's assumption that ISIS is like Al Qaeda and should be fought in a similar manner. Ferguson however puts forward that the use of Applied History would have highlighted it is similar more to the Russian Bolsheviks due to its political program.¹⁴ Alongside the similar perception of a public history deficit causing failed policy, is the perception that history is under threat again academically. The gap between PHD students and available jobs is the greatest extent it has ever been with 1150 PHD graduates in 2015 for only 500 job offers¹⁵. Ferguson, much as his forerunners in the 1970-80s has seen this as heralding History's doom as a discipline. In a speech entitled 'The Decline and Fall of History'

¹⁰ Peter Stearns and Joel Tarr, 'Curriculum in Applied History: Toward the Future', *The Public Historian*, 9 (1987), 120.

¹¹ Peter Stearns, 'Applied History and Social Science', *Social Science History*, 6 (1982), 220.

¹² Keith Beattie, *The Scar That Binds: American Culture and the Vietnam War*, (New York, 1998), 1.

¹³ Richard Neustadt and Ernest May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decisionmakers* (New York 1986), 108-110.

¹⁴ Allison and Ferguson, *Applied History*, 2-3.

¹⁵ Dylan Ruediger, 'Another Tough Year for The Academic Job Market In History', *Perspectives on History*, 55 (2017), 2.

he indeed alludes to History's share of undergraduate degrees dropping from 2.2% in 2009 to 1.7% in 2016.¹⁶

The pattern here overall implies that Applied History movements require a concoction of public and academic crisis in traditional history, which can be linked to policy failures of the recent past. If these circumstances are met, Applied History can justify its existence. It may also explain why Applied History has never succeeded thus far as it is reliant on their being a crisis, as soon as things improve the clamour for Applied History dissipates. Neustadt and May's movement for instance printed their Applied History manifesto in their 1986 book *Thinking in Time* based around the program they ran out of the Harvard Kennedy School and within the first few years, against the backdrop of the dual crisis this had garnered positive reviews in major press outlets, academic journals,¹⁷ and from those associated with policy development who had enrolled in the program.¹⁸

Try, try and try again; Dissemination, success and reception:

May and Neustadt's aim was rather simple, working to end the perceived History jobs crisis, they wanted to show the utility and necessity of history in a way that was pragmatically exploitable and easy. They wanted to train policymakers in the study of History and show how it can be used through a comparatively simple practice based on making historical analogies to current situations and then interrogating their worth.¹⁹ Through this simple technique they hoped to attract a large audience to the Applied History Movement, who could all partake in its utility, raising its profile and use among as wide a pool of policymakers as possible, who may not have had the time or inclination to delve deeply into the study of history as was traditionally required. They technically succeeded here through this, even managing to secure Federal funding to develop their program for export to other institutions.²⁰ Despite this though, their movement stalled due partly to the

¹⁶ Niall Ferguson, 'The Decline and Fall of History', (Washington, 2016), 11.

¹⁷ The New York Times, 16 March 1986, 11; William Barnes, 'Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers by Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May'. *The Public Historian*, 9 (1987), 181-183; Gaddis Smith, 'Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers by Richard E. Neustadt, Ernest R. May', *Foreign Affairs*, 64 (1986), 1115.

¹⁸ Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, 295.

¹⁹ Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, 296.

²⁰ Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, 292.

slow uptake and a failure to gain permanent academic endorsement, but also as the perception of their being a dual academic and public crisis of history passed. Their foundations would subsequently be commandeered by Allison and Ferguson around 30 years later when those conditions reared their head again in common perception.

Shambaugh's had a very similar earlier experience to this. Despite some positive attention,²¹ and indeed state-funding for his 1920s Applied History project,²² which met Shambaugh's more modest aims of having Applied History wielded by existing academic historians to 'review' and analyze the plans of state officials, rather than May and Neustadt's vision of creating a new class of historian-policymakers in state and federal government who used Applied History in their everyday lives to help craft state legislature directly.²³ However, Shambaugh's version was not influential enough to survive the state budget cuts of 1929 in response to the Great Depression.²⁴ This highlights even when Applied History has seemingly 'made it', by getting an element of government attention, achieving or nearly achieving their aims, as both May and Neustadt with their historian-policymakers and Shambaugh did with Applied History being used by existing historian to advise state policymakers, it does not mean Applied History has achieved a sustainable or stable footing.

So far Allison and Ferguson's movement has generated little attention from academics or policymakers, which bodes ill in comparison to their forebears. Only Stearns movement, which ran concurrently with Neustadt and May's, provides some solace for them as he too received little attention beyond generating a limited level of constructive criticism in academic journals,²⁵ even from his immediate colleagues who had their doubts about its feasibility.²⁶ The lack of influence his movement wielded is made clear by Stearns himself who expressed disappointment at the lack of student interest in his Applied History

²¹ Charles Beard, 'Applied History by Benjamin F. Shambaugh,' *Political Science Quarterly*, 30 (1915) 1-2.

²² Alan Schroder, 'Applied History: An Early Form of Public History', *Public Works Historical Society Newsletter*, 17 (1980) 3-4.

²³ Benjamin Shambaugh, *Applied History* (Iowa City, 1914), 7.

²⁴ Conrad, *Benjamin Shambaugh*, 85.

²⁵ Wilbert Achenbaum, 'The Making of an Applied Historian: Stage Two', *The Public Historian*, 5 (1983), 40-41.

²⁶ <https://www.uh.edu/socialwork/about/faculty-directory/a-achenbaum/>, accessed 29 March 2019.

program.²⁷ Worryingly though for Allison and Ferguson, Stearns' movement had no 'flagship book' for the general public as Shambaugh, May and Neustadt had published which appears to have generated wider interest. Instead Stearns had been primarily academic in nature, just as Allison and Ferguson's currently is.

Stearns though for all his lack of public engagement had uniquely of all these Applied History movements sought to create the most academically sound rendition yet. He sought to train historians as policymakers steeped in a complex methodology that bridged both academic history and the quantifying models of the social sciences, fluency in both was expected from his students.²⁸ This he deemed would allow Applied Historians to compliment and compete with social scientists,²⁹ while also providing jobs for historians.³⁰ It was the most ambitious revival compared to all others here, particularly in terms of its self-declared difficulty to master.³¹

Allison and Ferguson's current Applied History revival though, has neither the courting of the wider public of Neustadt and May, or the academically zealous and complex nature of Stearns, or indeed even the happy middle ground between them of Shambaugh's very first conception of Applied History. Their movement has stalled, partly because it has ignored academia entirely. They have no real academic journal presence, criticism or otherwise and while they do have as May and Shambaugh did, their own 'flagship book' for the general public,³² it has not been well received as its ancestor's work had. This is due to a combination of its subject being the controversial Henry Kissinger, it containing Ferguson's own controversial political beliefs manifested within the book and the criticism of his writing from other History professors.³³ All this may have maligned its potential influence which is an issue as nearly all of Ferguson's Applied History work is hosted in the popular press,³⁴ far

²⁷ Stearns and Tarr, 'Curriculum', 117.

²⁸ Peter Stearns and Joel Tarr, 'Applied History: A New-Old Departure', *The History Teacher*, 14 (1981) 520.

²⁹ Stearns and Tarr, 'Curriculum', 124-125.

³⁰ Stearns and Tarr, 'Applied History', 518.

³¹ Stearns and Tarr, 'Curriculum', 118.

³² <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/11/kissinger-ferguson-applied-history/417846/>, accessed 18 April 2019.

³³ All epitomized in <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/15/kissinger-1923-to-1968-the-idealist-niall-ferguson-review-biography>, accessed 1 April 2019.

³⁴ For instance, a comparison of the probability of the USA and China following the path of the 1914 Great powers, and with Athens and Sparta is found in the Times-

from the academic and policymaker circles he has stated he wishes³⁵ to convince. While the decision to avoid academic engagement is probably influenced by Ferguson's skepticism of academic history, both in the wider context of its perceived decline, but also his belief in it being self-absorbed,³⁶ it does present a stumbling block from getting the right recipe of public and academic acceptance that the two previous somewhat-successful movements of Shambaugh, and Neustadt and May had managed, particularly as Ferguson's aim for a History Council at the White House, is uniquely ambitious and so requires all the support and influence he can garner.

Janus faced: The conflicting nature of Applied History:

This need to balance the interests and influence of academia with non-academics speaks to the Janus-faced nature of Applied History. It must appeal firmly to both realms if it is ever to be successful in a sustainable way as it needs both academic recognition and respect of its utility, but also public acceptance from both policymakers and their constituents who can be convinced of its value and so create the audience, or consumers of an Applied History method.

Instead of an even-handed approach though, successive Applied History movements have tilted favoring one group or another depending upon how best it was thought to achieve their aims. In this way Applied History can embody the tensions within all historical traditions between the values of its unbiased scientific aspirations and its political functions.³⁷ The latter of course arguing that the aiming to fulfill the former makes Applied History prone to bias, the misuse of history, and lacking the nuanced complexity to be academically rigorous, while the latter views academic history as too complex and arcane to be effectively employed by policymakers who often have to make quick-fire decisions.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/as-trump-and-xi-spar-an-ancient-trap-awaits-both-bzssvxz60>, Accessed 28 March 2019; A comparison of the Bitcoin bubble and its prospects was compared with the 1637 Tulip bulb bust in the Boston Globe-
<https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2017/12/11/bitcoin-bubble-about-burst/TCR1WobvBOBYQummrpXQ1H/story.html> Accessed 28 March, 2019.

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³⁶ Seen in his criticism that footnotes have become the measure of scholarship. Peter Beck, *Presenting History: Past and Present* (Basingstoke, 2012), 26.

³⁷ Iggers, *Historiography*, 23.

All Applied History movements have relied upon Thucydides interpretation of traditional history as circular and being often repetitive in event, to justify and legitimize their movements specific presentation of Applied History.³⁸ This affiliation is targeted and marketed at historians, who are more likely to be familiar with Thucydides' work, to show that Applied History is not merely an upstart social science or off-shoot of the 1970s Public History movement,³⁹ but that it has a venerable lineage in its own right and is worthy of respect. Allison and Ferguson indeed use this to emphasize combatively that it is conventional historians who have lost their way, not those seeking to use Applied Historians.⁴⁰ Something guaranteed to alienate conventional historians, who do not see history as a circular progression of broadly similar events, but instead as a 'dense tangle of phenomena which were, and which might have been'.⁴¹ This view naturally makes historians suspicious of Applied History as it seems to be a revival of either an older, disputed historical tradition, or represents a 'dumbing down' of historical complexity in a way that invites the dreaded 'presentism'. Allison and Ferguson's endorsement would thus grate to many in academia whose convincing might help the movement take off.

Instead Ferguson appears to favor trying to garner influence with the other Janus-face of Applied History, the general public. This is seen by the invocation alongside Thucydides of Winston Churchill and his comment that 'the longer you can look back, the further you can look forward',⁴² this doesn't merely reinforce through a better know celebrity figure, Thucydides' stance, but also it seeks to associate Allison and Ferguson's movement with Churchill's statesman mythos,⁴³ and popularity,⁴⁴ which is helpful in

³⁸Gail King and Peter Stearns, 'The Retirement Experience as a Policy Factor: An Applied History Approach', *Journal of Social History*, 14 (1981), 595; Allison and Ferguson, *Applied History Manifesto*, 2;, and Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, 246.

³⁹ A common mistake made by Robert Weible, 'Defining Public History: It is possible? Is it necessary?', *Perspectives om History*, 46 (2008), 1.

⁴⁰ Allison and Fergusons, *Applied History*, 8.

⁴¹ Seymour Mandelbaum, 'The Past in Service to the Future', *Journal of Social History*, 11 (1977), 193.

⁴² Allison and Ferguson, *Applied History*, 2.

⁴³ Churchill's influence with the political culture is highlighted by the unveiling, with much pomp, of his bust within the Capitol building. The ceremony was heavily attended by Congress and Senate leaders. <https://www.voanews.com/a/winston-churchill-statue-dedication-us-capitol-who-roger-daltrey/1788246.html>, accessed 5 April 2019.

⁴⁴ More than 30,000 Americans visited Morgan Libraries Churchill exhibit, some were even moved to tears. <https://winstonchurchill.org/publications/churchill-bulletin/bulletin-050-aug->

presenting Applied History as a legitimate policy-tool to decisionmakers and policymakers whose support is needed as the consumers of Applied History, and of course for Allison and Ferguson's goal of a History Council to advise the Whitehouse to be implemented. This is further helped by the simplified Thucydian vision of history being one policymakers are more likely to appreciate as they see history, in contrast to historians, as a source of stability and fact in the face of a myriad of complex policy options as it represents, however wrongly or rightly, a 'known' example of what may happen.⁴⁵ Indeed, policymakers and public officials are already very familiar with the use of applying popular history to justify or explain their positions to their constituents in a way that resonates.⁴⁶ Allison and Ferguson then are tailoring history at the expense of its academic roots, to suit the conceptions of policymakers.

This is the first of two radical departures from most previous movements. Their recognized forebears Neustadt and May, who while also concentrating predominantly on courting policymakers, as seen in the justification for their simplified analogy-based methodology which was designed to be sympathetic to the 'busy' nature of policymakers,⁴⁷ yet due to this subsequently was criticized and mocked by academic historians who felt May and Neustadt's case-studies for policymakers lacked objectivity and epitomized the dangers of bias and presentism, due to their methods simplicity meaning it lacked the academic rigour to legitimize it.⁴⁸ While the general public was seen as key by May and Neustadt to securing the success of their Applied History, they did try and placate their academic critics by conceding that many historians do not recognize Thucydides' circular history. Instead though May and Neustadt simply articulated the concept of a common populist history which claimed that an experience acquired from the past can give guidance to the present.⁴⁹ They thus portrayed their call for an Applied History as a modernizing substitute that was

[2012/exhibition-takes-new-york-by-storm-as-crowds-are-moved-to-tears-by-churchills-speeches/](https://www.bbc.com/news/culture-49888888), accessed 5 April 2019.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Yaacov Vertzberger, 'Foreign Policy Decisionmakers As Practical-Intuitive Historians: Applied History and Its Shortcomings', *International Studies Quarterly*, 30 (1986), 225.

⁴⁷ Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, 15.

⁴⁸ Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, 14.

⁴⁹ Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, 247.

also separate to history's traditional claim of being a complex tangle of events, factors, people and decisions.⁵⁰

This rather conciliatory tone to academics might have been due to the influence of ongoing historical debates at the time. Allison and Ferguson had the advantage in 2016 of writing in the aftermath of the so-called 'linguistic turn' which Neustadt and May directly grappled with. This was the postmodernist critique of empirical and science-aspirational history. It particularly promoted an awareness that the writer's context displaced, the 'historical fact' they based their analysis on.⁵¹ This interpretation undermined Applied History's claim to be able to use the events of the past to inform the present, as it implied they were far removed from their 'happening', by their re-interpretation, and so were more fictional story than scientific case-study,⁵² and thus irrelevant to policymakers.⁵³ In this context, the attempted bringing onside and attempted conciliation with other conventional historians, could have shored-up any questions around Applied History's legitimacy arising among the public or policymakers who may be informed by the post-modernist critique, as support for Applied History could have been voiced by more conventional historians to ease the worries of policymakers and the public that Applied History by aspiring to be scientific was instead flawed and full of biases.

This coincidentally explains why Stearns concentrated on building a complex methodological and theoretical cannon for Applied History, to ensure its legitimacy and objectivity is beyond reproach by academics and hard to assail by post-modernist academics, unlike Neustadt and May's version,⁵⁴ and thus try satisfying conventional history's aspiration for attempted objectivity. Stearns ultimately failed though, the only solution he advocated was that by exposing Applied Historians, to large amounts of conventional history he might resolve concerns surrounding their objectivity through

⁵⁰ Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, 248.

⁵¹ 'Gabrielle M. Spiegel Presidential Address', *American Historical Association*, 2 January 2009.

⁵² Hayden White, *Metahistory: the historical imagination in 19th century Europe*, (Baltimore, 1973), 428-431; Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, 1971), 259.

⁵³ Ewa Domanska, 'A conversation with Hayden White', *The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 12 (2008) 9.

⁵⁴ Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, 15.

borrowing conventional history's ethics.⁵⁵ This by implication tied the success of Applied History for Stearns and Neustadt and May to their being accepted by conventional historians as a means to legitimize their movements credentials. This acceptance though was not forthcoming. Instead the empiricists, who made up most academic historians,⁵⁶ were already pre-disposed to rejecting Applied History. The empiricist historian Geoffrey Elton had previously laid the foundation for historians criticism when he had attacked those aiming to apply history by arguing that a 'real historian' never forced questions upon their material.⁵⁷ This view would spread to most historians of all shades,⁵⁸ as they articulated their concerns surrounding how Applied historians might even maintain the basic objectivity required of historians, a charge epitomized by Stanley Hordes' critique of two Applied Historians working in the private sector who in describing their research roles in terms of foremostly being advocates for their companies, fatally undermined their own credibility as historians as they had a clear agenda to what they now did.⁵⁹

A radical streamlining:

That Allison and Ferguson make no mention of questions surrounding objectivity and its nature in their own recent manifesto should be a concern for Applied History. It's part of their streamlined interpretation of what Applied History is, by hoping to simply sidestep the academic issues and methodologically questions that previous renditions had to grapple with. However, their hollowing out of Applied History in this way, while also paradoxically having the most ambitious aims yet (A Whitehouse Council) is rather at odds with itself but is not the only inexplicable revision they have made. Their other radical departure is in the methodology department where they claim to use Neustadt and May's book as their foundation. If this were the case, they would be using the several different practices May and Neustadt identified for the correct application of Applied History in a way that aimed to

⁵⁵ Stearns, 'Applied History and Social Science', 221-222 .

⁵⁶ Beck, *Presenting History*, 21.

⁵⁷ Quentin Skinner, 'Sir Geoffrey Elton and the Practice of History', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 7 (1997), 307.

⁵⁸ Robert Crowcroft, 'The Case for Applied History', *History Today*, 68 (2018), 4 .

⁵⁹ Stanley Hordes, 'Does He Who Pays the Piper Call the Tune? Historians, Ethics, and the Community', *The Public Historian*, 8 (1986) 53.

tackle its perceived objectivity deficits.⁶⁰ Instead though, Allison and Ferguson simply advocate a small section of May and Neustadt's method and cheekily state to 'find a historian' if the similarities and differences for a historical case-study become too complex and questionable to be of easy use to a policymaker.⁶¹ It is this very 'call a historian' card that allows Ferguson to justify ignoring ethical questions as the assumption is to simply turn to someone who has already been trained and steeped in conventional historical study if things get difficult. Stearns and May by contrast actually created methods that were to be applied by historians and policymakers respectively combining their existing skill-sets with the other. This difference reflected their Public History Movement affiliations of May and Neustadt,⁶² by integrating history-trained individuals in non-academic settings. This drew criticism though as even trained historians like Henry Kissinger who extolled their history credentials once outside the academic context,⁶³ were consumed by practical concerns which resulted in the academic, objective vision of history so wanted by Stearns and May to disappear in favour of the typical careless approach they originally intended to 'fix'.⁶⁴

Allison and Ferguson's Applied History though detaches itself from the Public History affiliation of their predecessors and inspirations as instead they envision their method being implemented by existing academic historians, based at universities who sit on their vaunted Historians Council,⁶⁵ a distinctly separate body from other policy-advisers, who May and Neustadt would have attempted to integrate too. In this way Allison and Ferguson can thus theoretically maintain academic rigor and lay claim to a greater degree of objectivity by simply pointing out that they are using conventional historians as advisers, instead of seeking to teach history to policymakers and policy to historians as Stearns, Neustadt and May all hoped to do. In this way Ferguson has something of Shambaugh's original

⁶⁰ Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, 13.

⁶¹ Allison and Ferguson, *Applied History*, 5.

⁶² Stearns and Tarr, *Curriculum*, 2; Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, 21; For Public History See, Robert Weible, 'Defining Public History: Is it possible? Is it necessary?', *Perspectives on History*, 46, 1-5.

⁶³ <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/11/kissinger-ferguson-applied-history/417846/>, accessed 18 April 2019.

⁶⁴ Vertzberger, 'Foreign Policy Decisionmakers', 241.

⁶⁵ <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/09/dont-know-much-about-history/492746/>

conception about it though, as Shambaugh in practice used university-based historians to scrutinize and advise on the plans of policymakers.

This however, makes the second paradox of Ferguson's Applied History apparent as while shunning academia in his pursuit of reviving Applied History, Ferguson unlike his direct forebears seeks an academic, and somewhat by comparison, elitist revival, instead of bringing history to the wider pool of policymakers and officials, and so reviving the study of History as a vaunted discipline.

A final radical methodological departure to the latest Applied History movement is that Allison and Ferguson have removed the safeguards advocated by their forbears that Applied History should be in the realm of contemporary history as the further back analogies are sought, the more fraught their use.⁶⁶ Instead Allison and Ferguson advocate as broad a comparison base as desired, for instance comparing Brexit to Henry VIII's decision in 1532 to leave the Catholic fold,⁶⁷ this combined with the lack of attention to ethical questions, based on the arguably misplaced assumption that professional academics within a political setting will not be pressured, or tempted to eschew their objectivity in favour of simple solutions shows a distinctly populist and anti-academic slant to the current rendition of Applied History.

Conclusion:

This essay is by no means an exhaustive comparison of Applied History movements. Due to spatial limitations much has been left unsaid on the technical differences and development of methodological tools or the differing levels of support from their faculties each revival has received. Nor has there been an attempt to explore Britain or Germany's Applied History movements,⁶⁸ which might have shed an international context on the influences and differences of Allison and Ferguson's revival. However, despite this limited scope, there is enough evidence to draw several conclusions regarding this latest Applied History revival. Primarily that it is at once radically ambitious in its aims to achieve Applied History through a presidentially endorsed Council of Historians, while at the same time

⁶⁶ Stearns, 'Applied History and Social Science', 221.

⁶⁷ The Times 8 November 2018, 1.

offering a far more limited methodology and theoretical framework than previous movements had hoped to create. It raises questions as to the seriousness and sustainability of Allison and Ferguson's revival, particularly when far more fleshed out and less controversial movements such as Shambaugh's failed. Secondly, the latest revival radically eschews conventional academia in favour of a populist approach, heavily influenced by Niall Ferguson's attitude towards academic historians. This is the first time an Applied History movement has attempted this, and so far it appears to have comparatively not worked. Finally, this streamlined revival of Applied History is currently at a stall, in both comparison to its earlier counterparts and especially by its own self-set goals. After four ventures into the breach, armed with varying scopes in ambition and practice, during the requisite dual crisis and yet still being rebuffed perhaps indicates Applied History is destined for a more modest role on the academic and policy fringes, based in a few select universities, complimenting, but never replacing those 'spurious' social scientists.

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