

The Return of the *Longue Durée*: An Anglo-American Perspective¹

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Abstract: Since the 1970s, most historians in the anglophone world have worked on time-scales of between five and fifty years. This narrow focus represented a retreat from the longer periods generally covered before the late twentieth century and also served to cut them off from wider reading publics and to deprive them of the influence on public policy and global governance they had once had. This article surveys the causes and the consequences of this retreat and proposes a solution for the crisis of confidence and of relevance it has created. It argues that a return to what Fernand Braudel in *Annales* (1958) had classically termed the *longue durée* is now both imperative and feasible: imperative, in order to restore history's place as a critical social science, and feasible due to the increased availability of large amount of historical data and the digital tools necessary to analyse it.

Keywords: *longue durée*; Braudel; *Annales*; historiography, digital history; micro-history; Big History.

For in truth the story that is told in your country as well as ours, how once upon a time Phaethon, son of Helios, yoked his father's chariot, and, because he was unable to drive it along the course taken by his father, burnt up all that was upon the earth and himself perished by a thunderbolt,— that story, as it is told, has the fashion of a legend, but the truth of it lies in the occurrence of a shifting of the bodies in the heavens which move round the earth, and a destruction of the things on the earth by fierce fire, which recurs at long intervals.

(Plato, c. 360 BCE)²

C'est la peur de la grande histoire qui a tué la grande histoire.

(Edmond Faral, 1942)³

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² Plato, *Timaeus*, 22C-D.

Historians are notoriously vagabond creatures: more than most other scholars, it seems, we like to make turns. Over the last fifty years, the anglophone historical profession—often in tandem with other historians around the world—has taken a variety of such turns. Perhaps the primal move was the social turn, towards history «from the bottom up» and away from the history of elites to the experiences of ordinary people, the subaltern, the marginalized and the oppressed. Then there was the linguistic turn—a movement adopted from analytic philosophy which historians adapted to their own purposes.⁴ The linguistic turn led to a cultural turn and a revival of cultural history.⁵ Since then, there has been a series of turns away from national history, among them the transnational turn, the imperial turn and the global turn.⁶ Many of these historiographical movements were surely turns for the better. Some might judge them to have been turns for the worse. But enthusiasts and sceptics alike could not ignore the troping of intellectual advance in the language of «turns». So frequent and so unsettling was all the talk about turns that the *American Historical Review* recently convened a major forum on «Historiographic ‘Turns’ in Critical Perspective» to survey the phenomenon. Most of the contributors to that conversation concluded it was time to stand still for a while, in order to see

³ Quoted in «Préface», in Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris, 1949), xiv.

⁴ Richard Rorty, ed., *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method* (Chicago, 1967); Gabrielle M. Spiegel, ed., *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn* (London, 2005); Judith Surkis, «When Was the Linguistic Turn? A Genealogy», *American Historical Review* 117, 3 (June 2012): 700–722.

⁵ Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley, CA, 1999); James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O'Malley, eds., *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present, and Future* (Chicago, 2005).

⁶ Ulf Hedetoft, *The Global Turn: National Encounters with the World* (Aalborg, 2003); Antoinette Burton, ed., *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking With and Through the Nation* (Durham, NC, 2003); Winfried Fluck, Donald E. Pease, and John Carlos Rowe, eds., *Re-framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies* (Hanover, NH, 2011); Durba Ghosh, «Another Set of Imperial Turns?», *American Historical Review*, 117, 3 (June 2012): 772–793.

where all this movement had brought historians and to decide where they might want to go next.⁷

To speak of scholarly movements as «turns» implies that historians always travel along a one-lane highway to the future, even if the road is circuitous with many twists and bends to it. The authors of this article have both been guilty of promoting the language of turns: one of us recently offered a genealogy of the «spatial turn» across the disciplines generally; the other has surveyed the prospects for an «international turn» in intellectual history more specifically.⁸ Yet here we want to move away from talking about turns to a development that we believe to be even more fundamentally transformative. In this case, our subject is not a turn but a significant *return* to an older mode of historical analysis: the return of the *longue durée*.⁹

The *longue durée* as a temporal horizon for research and writing largely disappeared for a generation before coming back into view in recent years. As we hope to suggest, the reasons for its retreat were sociological as much as intellectual; the motivations for its return are both political and technological. Yet the revenant *longue durée* is not identical to its original incarnation: as Pierre Bourdieu classically noted, «ces retours sont toujours apparents, puisqu'ils sont séparés de ce qu'ils retrouvent par la référence négative ... a quelque chose qui était lui-même la négation (de la négation de la négation, etc.) de ce qu'ils retrouvent».¹⁰ The new *longue durée* has emerged from the negation of its negation into a very different ecosystem

⁷ Judith Surkis, Gary Wilder, James W. Cook, Durba Ghosh, Julia Adeney Thomas, and Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, «AHR Forum: Historiographic 'Turns' in Critical Perspective», *American Historical Review* 117, 3 (June 2012): 698–813.

⁸ Jo Guldi, «What is the Spatial Turn?» (2011), <http://spatial.scholarslab.org/spatial-turn/>, accessed October 1, 2013; David Armitage, «The International Turn in Intellectual History», in Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge, 2013), 17–32; also in Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn, eds., *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History* (New York, 2014), 232–252.

⁹ See also David Armitage, «What's the Big Idea? Intellectual History and the *Longue Durée*», *History of European Ideas* 38, 4 (December 2012): 493–507; Jo Guldi, «Digital Methods and the *Longue Durée*», in David Theo Goldberg and Patrik Svensson, eds., *Humanities and the Digital* (Cambridge, Mass., 2014).

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris, 1992), 228.

of intellectual alternatives. It possesses a dynamism and flexibility earlier versions did not have. It also has greater critical potential, for historians, for other social scientists, and for policy-makers. The origins of this new *longue durée* may lie in the past but it is now very much oriented towards the future.

In some fields, broad historical time-scales never went away: for example, in historical sociology or in world-systems theory.¹¹ However, as we hope to show, in the field of history, the *longue durée*—associated at first with Fernand Braudel and the *Annales* school of historians, but soon more widely diffused—flourished and then withered away before returning with fresh purpose, renewed vigor, and the promise of even greater impact. The aims of this essay will be to show why the *longue durée* retreated before its recent return; to explain why it has come back; to analyze the nature of its revival; and, finally, to ask how the return of the *longue durée* might change the questions historians ask, while giving us a greater sense of purpose and a wider range of audiences—academic and non-academic, public and institutional, social-scientific and policy-oriented—for our work as scholars and teachers. We draw our examples mostly from the English-speaking world but we believe that our argument has relevance for historians more generally at a time when short-term horizons constrict the views of most of our institutions: among them, governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), corporations, and increasingly even our universities.¹²

We argue that his return to the *longue durée* is now not only feasible: it is imperative. It is feasible because of unprecedented availability of materials, along with the tools to make sense of them. Unlike in the past, there is no lack of data, and no lack of texts for historians to work upon. Mass-digitized databases have already made reams of paper available. Analytical

¹¹ See, for example, Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York, 1984); Richard E. Lee, ed., *The Longue Durée and World-Systems Analysis* (Albany, NY, 2012).

¹² More broadly, see David Armitage and Jo Guldi, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

tools, likewise, are no longer a problem. For example, digital tools have a natural fit with such questions, for the tools scale over time—which is the case with Google N-grams—and they scale over space—which is the case with geo-parsers, for example.¹³

A return to the *longue durée* is also imperative because many short-range histories have only a limited impact on the surrounding discipline, let alone among non-historians. They may contribute another brick to the wall of knowledge without formulating a turning-point of consequence to the rest of the field or explaining their significance to general readers and citizens. It can often be unclear how representative such studies are of any particular nation's history, let alone of the history of modernity as a whole. By contrast, *longue-durée* history allows us to step outside of the confines of national history to ask about the rise of long-term complexes, over many decades, centuries, or even millennia: only by scaling our inquiries over such durations can we explain and understand the genesis of contemporary global discontents.

What we think of as «global» is often the sum of local problems perceived as part of a more universal crisis, but the fact of aggregation—the perception that local crises are now so often seen as instances of larger structural problems in political economy or governance, for example—is itself a symptom of the move towards larger spatial scales for understanding contemporary challenges. Those challenges also need to be considered over longer temporal reaches as well. In this regard, the return of the *longue durée* has also an ethical purpose in the sense of proposing an engaged academia trying to come to terms with the knowledge production that characterizes our own moment of crisis, not just within the humanities but across the global system as a whole.

¹³ Matthew L. Jockers, *Macroanalysis: Digital Methods and Literary History* (Urbana, 2013) and Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (New York, 2013), offer parallel arguments for literary analysis using digital tools.

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The original *longue durée* was itself the product of a «crise générale des sciences de l’homme», as Fernand Braudel put it in the opening words of the 1958 *Annales* article in which he launched the term. The nature of the crisis was in some ways familiar in light of twenty-first-century debates on the future of the humanities and social sciences: an explosion of knowledge, including a proliferation of data; a general anxiety about disciplinary boundaries; a perceived failure of cooperation between researchers in adjacent fields; and complaints about the stifling grip of «un humanisme rétrograde, insidieux» might all have contemporary parallels. Braudel lamented that the other human sciences had overlooked the distinctive contribution of history to solving the crisis, a solution that went to the heart of the social reality that he believed was the focus of all humane inquiry: «cette opposition ... entre l’instant et le temps lent à s’écouler». Between these two poles lay the conventional time-scales used in narrative history and by social and economic historians: spans of ten, twenty, fifty years at most. However, he argued, histories of crises and cycles along these lines obscured the deeper regularities and continuities underlying the processes of change. It was essential to move to a different temporal horizon, to a history measured in centuries or millennia: «l’histoire du longue, même de très longue durée».¹⁴

The ambition of Braudel and many of the historians of the *Annales* group who followed him in his quest was to find the relationship between agency and environment over the *longue durée*. This built upon a tendency visible within most histories of the eighteenth and nineteenth century—and, indeed, long before—to presume that the work of the historian was to cover

¹⁴ Fernand Braudel, «Histoire et Sciences sociales. La longue durée», *Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales* 13, 4 (October-December 1958): 725–753.

hundreds of years, or at most a few decades. In the quest to make those earlier endeavors even more rigorous, indeed falsifiable, through the acquisition of quantitative fact and the measured assessment of change, conceptions of the *longue durée* were not unchanging. For Braudel, the *longue durée* was one among a hierarchy of intersecting but not exclusive temporalities that structured all human history. He had classically described these time-scales in the preface to *La Méditerranée et le Monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (1949) as the three histories told successively in that work: «une histoire quasi-immobile» of humans in their physical environment; a story «lentement rythmée» of states, societies, and civilisations; and a more traditional «l'histoire événementielle» treating those «oscillations brèves, rapides, nerveuses», events.¹⁵ Appropriately, many of the features of the *longue durée* remained stable in Braudel's accounts: it was geographical, but not quite geological, time; if change was perceptible at this level, it was cyclical rather than linear; it was fundamentally static not dynamic; and it underlay all other forms of movement and activity.

By 1958, Braudel's increasingly adversarial relationship with the other human sciences had impelled him to include a wider range of *longue-durée* structures. Now the *longue durées* of culture such as Latin civilization, geometric space, or the Aristotelian conception of the universe, had joined physical environments, enduring agricultural regimes and the like. These were human creations that also exhibited change or rupture in moments of invention and supersession by other worldviews or traditions. They lasted longer than economic cycles, to be sure, but they were significantly shorter than the imperceptibly shifting shapes of mountains and seas, or the rhythms of nomadism and transhumance. These not quite so long *durées* could be measured in centuries and were discernible in human minds not just in natural landscapes and the human interactions with them.

¹⁵ Braudel, «Préface», in *La Méditerranée et le Monde méditerranéen*, xiii.

Braudel admitted that his earlier reflections on the *longue durée* arose from the depressing experience of his wartime captivity in Germany in 1940–45. They were in part an attempt to escape the rhythms of camp life and to bring hope by taking a longer perspective—hence, paradoxically, his frequent use of the imagery of imprisonment in his accounts of the *longue durée*.¹⁶ When he theorized the *longue durée* in 1958, he had come to believe that it was fundamental to any interdisciplinary understanding and that it offered the only way out of post-War presentism. His immediate motives were as much institutional as intellectual. Not long before the article appeared, Braudel had assumed both the editorship of *Annales* and the presidency of the famed VI^e Section of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, both in succession to Lucien Febvre after his death in 1956. He had to justify not merely the existence but the primacy of history among the other social sciences, particularly economics and anthropology. In this competitive context, where prestige and funding were at stake as much as professional pride, «la longue durée est pour [Braudel] la carte maîtresse—et en fait la seule—qui lui permet de revendiquer pour l’histoire, à côté des mathématiques, un rôle de fédérateur des sciences de l’homme».¹⁷ This agenda also dovetailed neatly with the rise in France of futurology—the forward-looking counterpart to the *longue durée*—which Braudel’s friend Gaston Berger was promoting in his capacity as director general of Higher Education at the

¹⁶ Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929–89* (Oxford, 1990), 33; Paule Braudel, «Braudel en captivité», in Paul Carmignani, ed., *Autour de F. Braudel* (Perpignan, 2001), 13–25; Peter Schöttler, «Fernand Braudel als Kriegsgefangener in Deutschland», in Fernand Braudel, *Geschichte als Schlüssel zur Welt. Vorlesungen in Deutscher Kriegsgefangenschaft 1941*, ed. Peter Schöttler (Stuttgart, 2013), 187–211. Braudel’s lectures in the camps have been reconstructed as «L’Histoire, mesure du monde» (1941–44), in Fernand Braudel, *Les ambitions de l’Histoire*, ed. Roselyne de Ayala and Paule Braudel (Paris, 1997), 13–83.

¹⁷ Giuliana Gemelli, *Fernand Braudel e l’Europa universale* (Venice, 1990), 246–300; Maurice Aymard, «La longue durée aujourd’hui. Bilan d’un demi-siècle (1958–2008)», in Diogo Ramada Curto, Eric R. Dursteler, Julius Kirshner, and Francesca Trivellato, eds., *From Florence to the Mediterranean and Beyond: Essays in Honour of Anthony Molho*, 2 vols. (Florence, 2009), II, 559–560 (quoted).

same time as he was supporting the VI^e Section and engaged in creating the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme that Braudel would soon lead.¹⁸

Braudel ranged *l'histoire événementielle* against the *longue durée* not because such history could only treat the ephemeral—the «écume» and «lucioles» he notoriously disdained in *La Méditerranée*—but because it was a history too closely tied to events. In this respect, it was like the work of contemporary economists who, he charged, had harnessed their work to current affairs and to the short-term imperatives of governance.¹⁹ Such a myopic form of historical understanding, tethered to power and focused on the present, evaded explanation, and was allergic to theory: in Braudel's view, it lacked both critical distance and intellectual substance. His solution for all the social sciences would be to go back to older models and problems, for example, to the treatment of mercantile capitalism by Marx, the «genius» who created the first «vrais modèles sociaux, et à partir de la longue durée historique». In short, even fifty years ago, Braudel himself was already recommending a return to the *longue durée*.²⁰

Anglophone historians of the generation immediately after Braudel's began to move away *en masse* from *longue-durée* models as appropriate modes of scholarship. That retreat from questions of scale and the new *longue durée* that has returned in recent years are a story about fears very much like Braudel's own. For example, in the United States, the post-War G. I. Bill had led to an explosion of graduate programs in all fields, including History. The training time for the Ph.D. was expanded from three to six years, and often extended even beyond that. By the late 1970s, when a new generation of American graduate students came of age in a

¹⁸ Gaston Berger, *Phénoménologie du temps et prospective* (Paris, 1964); Fernand Braudel, «Gaston Berger, 1896–1960», *Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales* 16, 1 (January-February 1961): 210–211; Gemelli, *Fernand Braudel e l'Europa universale*, 301–362; Jenny Andersson, «The Great Future Debate and the Struggle for the World», *American Historical Review* 117, 5 (December 2012): 1417–1418.

¹⁹ A charge immediately rejected by Witold Kula, «Historie et économie. Le longue durée», *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 15, 2 (March-April 1960): 294–313.

²⁰ Braudel, «Histoire et Sciences sociales», 735, 751.

professionalized university setting, «the academic labor market in most fields became saturated, and there was concern about overproduction of Ph.D.s.», reported the National Science Foundation: «The annual number of doctorates awarded rose from 8,611 in 1957 to 33,755 in 1973, an increase of nearly 9 percent per year».²¹

Historians of this generation began to rethink their relationship to archives and audiences, in a quest both for collective professional independence and individual success in an increasingly competitive field. The need to specialize became ever more acute. Archival mastery became the index of specialization and temporal focus became ever more necessary. In the earliest years of doctoral training in the American historical profession, a thesis could cover two centuries or more, as had Frederick Jackson Turner's study of trading-posts across North American history or W. E. B. Du Bois's work on the suppression of the African slave-trade, 1638–1870.²² A recent survey of some 8000 history dissertations written in the United States since the 1880s shows that the average period covered in 1900 was about seventy-five years; by 1975, that had fallen to about thirty years. Only in the twenty-first century has it rebounded to between 75 and 100 years, as evidence of the more general return to the *longue durée* we diagnose and advocate in this essay.²³

²¹ Lori Thurgood, Mary J. Golladay, and Susan T. Hill, «U.S. Doctorates in the 20th Century: Special Report» (National Science Foundation, June 2006), 7: <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/nsf06319/pdf/nsf06319.pdf>, accessed October 1, 2013.

²² Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Character and Influence of the Indian Trade in Wisconsin: A Study of the Trading Post as an Institution* (Baltimore, 1891); W. E. B. Du Bois, «Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the United States» (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1895); Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870* (New York, 1896).

²³ Benjamin Schmidt, «What Years Do Historians Write About?», *Sapping Attention*, May 9, 2013: <http://sappingattention.blogspot.com/2013/05/what-years-do-historians-write-about.html>, accessed October 1, 2013.

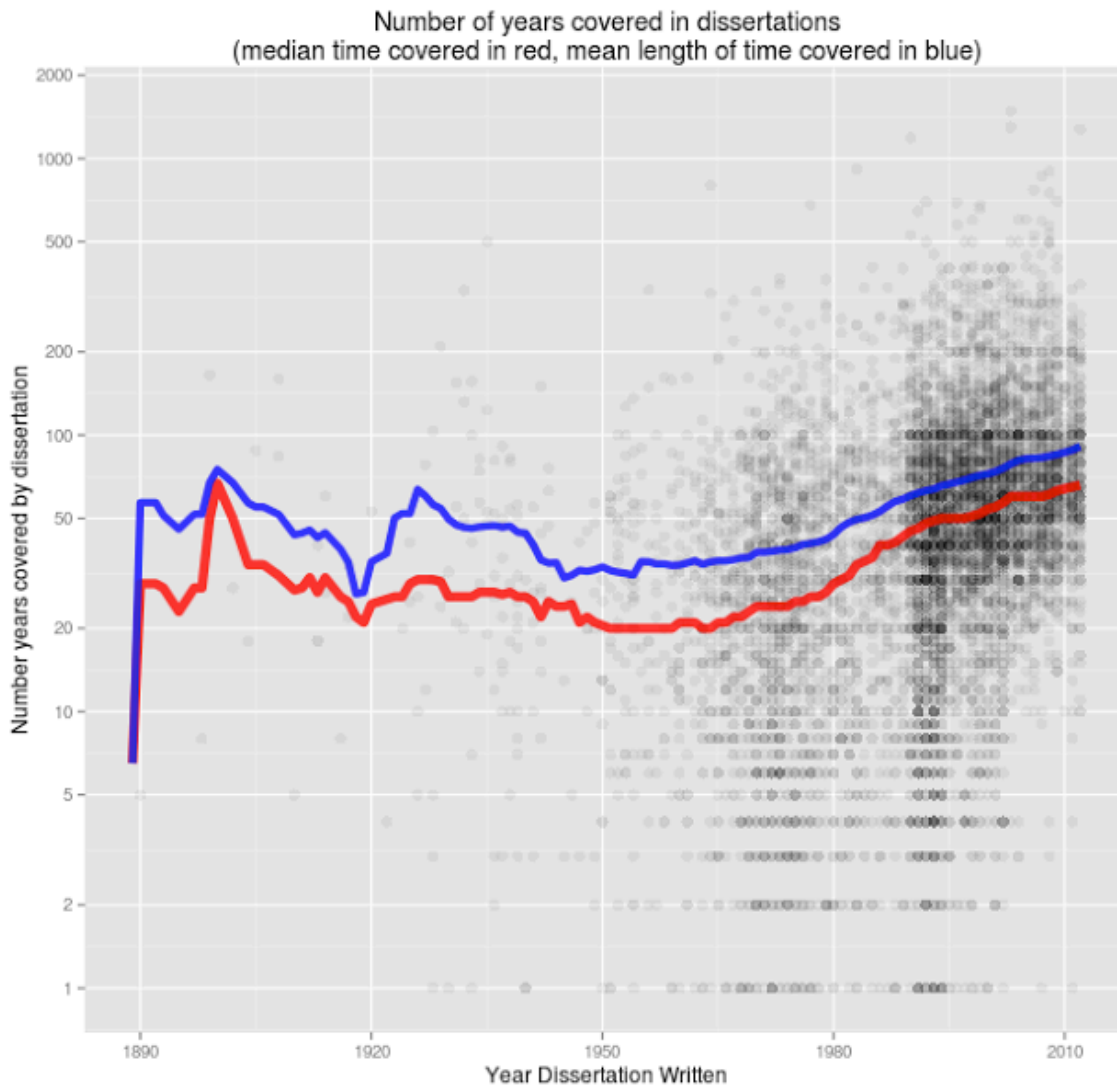


Fig. 1: Number of years covered in History dissertations in the United States, c. 1885–2012: Benjamin Schmidt, «What Years Do Historians Write About?», *Sapping Attention*, May 9, 2013.

Anxiety about specialization—about «knowing more and more about less and less»—had dogged the rise of professionalization and expertise, initially in the sciences but then more broadly, since the 1920s. Only in the 1980s did historians on both sides of the Atlantic begin to complain that specialization had created acute fragmentation in their field.



Fig. 2: Usage of «... more and more about less [and less]», 1900–90: Google Ngram viewer.

«Historical inquiries are ramifying in a hundred directions at once, and there is no coordination among them ... synthesis into a coherent whole, even for limited regions, seems almost impossible», the Americanist Bernard Bailyn observed in his 1981 Presidential address to the American Historical Association (AHA). «The Challenge of Modern Historiography», as he called it, was precisely «to bring order into large areas of history and thus to reintroduce ... [it] to a wider reading public, through synthetic works, narrative in structure, on major themes».²⁴ Shortly afterwards, in 1985, another former AHA President, the French historian R. R. Palmer, complained of his own field, «Specialization has become extreme ... it is hard to see what such specialization contributes to the education of the young or the enlightenment of the public».²⁵ And in 1987 the young British historian David Cannadine similarly condemned the «cult of professionalism» that meant «more and more academic historians were writing more and more academic history that fewer and fewer people were actually reading». The result, Cannadine warned, «was that all too often, the role of the historian as public teacher was effectively destroyed».²⁶ Professionalization had led to marginalization. Historians were increasingly cut

²⁴ Bernard Bailyn, «The Challenge of Modern Historiography», *American Historical Review* 87 (1982): 2, 4, 7–8.

²⁵ R. R. Palmer, «A Century of French History in America», *French Historical Studies* 14 (1985): 173–174.

²⁶ David Cannadine, «British History: Past, Present—And Future?», *Past and Present* 116 (August 1987): 176, 177.

off from non-specialist readers as they talked only to one another about ever narrower topics studied on ever shorter time-scales.

Peter Novick, in his moralizing biography of the American historical profession, *That Noble Dream* (1988), saw the 1980s as the moment when it became clear that fragmentation was endemic and «there was no king in Israel». The anthropological turn, with its emphasis on «thick description»; the export of micro-history from Italy via France; the destabilization of the liberal subject by identity politics and post-colonial theory; the emergent «incredulité à l'égard des métarécits» diagnosed by Jean-François Lyotard: these were all centrifugal forces tearing the fabric of history apart.²⁷ Yet jeremiads like those from Bailyn, Palmer, Cannadine and Novick may have missed the central point: the disintegration of the profession was parasymptomatic of a larger trend, the triumph of the short *durée*.

Short-*durée* thinking was driven less by theory than by the professional and economic realities of the academic job market after 1968. As we shall see, a generation with limited prospects on the job market increasingly defined itself by its mastery of discrete archives. As young historians simultaneously infused their archival visits with the politics of protest and identity that formed so vast a part of its milieu, anglophone historians widely adopted the genre of microhistory; the result was historical volumes of astonishing sophistication. Yet microhistorians rarely took the pains to contextualize their short time horizons for a common reader; they were playing in a game that rewarded intensive subdivision of knowledge. In a university more intensively committed to the division of labor, there was ever less room for junior faculty to write tracts aimed at a generalist audience, or for the deep temporal perspective which such writing required. And there was the rub: the requirements of the profession

²⁷ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The «Objectivity Question» and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, 1988), 577–592; Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne. Rapport sur le savoir* (Paris, 1979), 7.

thwarted the political ambitions of a generation. Political commitments did not *cause* irrelevance, as Novick has unkindly suggested. But rather a generation of historians were unable to make good on their political commitments of transforming the American mind due to the economics of their guild. They were hampered like some mythological victim shackled to a chariot drawn forward by blind lions. Ultimately, the trauma of this imprisonment was deflected into the form of intellectual and moral identification with the blind beasts running the show, where baby-boomer historians whose own lives were bound up with labor and feminist movements warned their own graduate students that without specialization they would never get a job. Irrelevance resulted when generations of historians reproduced the short *durée* without knowing quite why they were doing so.

The resulting «Age of Fracture», as the American intellectual historian Daniel Rodgers has called it, was defined centrally by the contraction of temporal horizons: «In the middle of the twentieth century, history's massive, inescapable, larger-than-life presence had weighed down social discourse. To talk seriously was to talk of the long, large-scale movements of time». By the 1980s, modernization theory, Marxism, «theories of long-term economic development and cultural lag, the inexorabilities of the business cycle and the historians' *longue durée*», had all been replaced by a foreshortened sense of time focused on one brief moment: the here and now of the immediate present.²⁸ The unintended consequence of microhistory, deprived of its long context, was to make even inquiries rich and theory and driven by brave questions largely irrelevant to non-experts due to the shortness of the time span that constrained the researcher's attention.

Shorter time scales had, of course, a literary place before they influenced the writing of professional history. From Plutarch's parallel *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* to Samuel

²⁸ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011), 255.

Smiles' *Lives of the Engineers* (1874–99), biography had formed an instructive moral substrate to the writing of history, often focusing on a purportedly diachronic category of «character» visible in these exemplary life-stories. An emphasis on short-term history also erupted wherever history was called in to help decide between long-term visions in conflict with each other. According to Lord Acton, the beginnings of documentary history first appeared around 1830, pioneered by Michelet, Mackintosh, Bucholtz, and Migne. The acquisition of documents and the turning over of church and local archives were bound up with a desire to settle the legacy of the French Revolution, whether to understand it as «an alien episode» and rebellion against natural authority or instead as «the ripened fruit of all history».²⁹ A revolution in documents resulted, where the historian's role changed from narrative artist and synthesizer to politic critic settling controversial debates with the power of exact readings of precise documents. Institutional history, in this role, took up the task of interpreting the liberal tradition, worked out through such targeted studies of pivotal moments as Elie Halévy's *L'Angleterre en 1815* (1913). Short-term histories often focused on journalistic exposition, particular controversies and disputed periods, for example, the poet Robert Graves's *The Long Week-End* (1940), a meditation on the fading utopianism present at the beginning of the First World War revisited from the perspective of distance at the start of a second war.³⁰ These works mostly emerged before the professionalization of historical research or came from the hands of unaccredited writers.

Yet never before the 1970s had an entire generation of professional historians made so pronounced a revolt against *longue-durée* thinking, as scholars born during the baby-boom rejected a style of writing typical of relevant, engaged historians in the generation just before

²⁹ John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton, *Lectures on Modern History* (London, 1906), 14.

³⁰ Elie Halévy, *Histoire du peuple anglais au XIX^e siècle, I: L'Angleterre en 1815* (Paris, 1913); Robert Graves, *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918–1939* (London, 1940).

their own. The works of Marxist historians, from E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) to Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (1974), recovered the experiences of the repressed as a *longue-durée* adventure, borrowing techniques from the study of folklore like the examination of ballads, jokes, and figures of speech in order to characterize working-class and slave culture and widespread attitudinal tensions between subaltern and elite.³¹ That willingness to characterize grand moments shifted in the early 1970s in the work of social historians of labor like Joan Wallach Scott and William Sewell who narrowed their focus with examples of work that focused upon a single factory floor or patterns of interaction in a neighborhood, and imported from sociology habits of attention to individual actors and details.³² The task of understanding shifted from generalizations about the aggregate to micropolitics and the successes or failures of particular battles within the larger class struggles. This led to the charge that social history had abandoned all interest in politics, power, and ideology, leading its practitioners instead to «sit somewhere in the stratosphere, unrooted in reality».³³

This wholesale renunciation of the big questions and large scales that had long informed social history was in part an Oedipal revolt against the intellectual patriarchs who dominated conferences, monologued through the questions raised by younger historians, and jokingly dismissed the new history as a pedantic exercise. The historian of modern Germany Geoff Eley has memorialized this moment in his autobiographical account *A Crooked Line* (2005), from the perspective of a British child of the post-War baby-boom faced with a

³¹ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974).

³² Joan Wallach Scott, *The Glassworkers of Carmaux: French Craftsmen and Political Action in a Nineteenth-century City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974); William Sewell, Jr., *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge, 1980).

³³ Tony Judt, «A Clown in Regal Purple: Social History and the Historians», *History Workshop Journal* 7, 1 (Spring 1979): 84–85 (on Scott and Sewell, among others). Judt was, however, critical of the effects of Braudel's *longue durée* on the «dismantl[ing] of the historical event altogether. One result of this is a glut of articles about minute and marginal matters ...»: *ibid.*, 85.

tightening job market and fighting alongside his peers for their professional positions with a new approach to the archive. According to Eley, the cultural turn was a kind of personal liberation for younger historians who «bridl[ed] against the dry and disembodied work of so much conventional historiography», for whom theory «resuscitated the archive's epistemological life». The rebellion of young historians against old here parallels, in terms of rhetoric, the anti-war, free-speech, and anti-racism youth movements of the same moment in the late 1960s and 1970s: it reflected a call of conscience, a determination to make the institution of history align with a more critical politics. Talking about the «big implications» of this reaction, Eley is direct: historians of his generation took their politics in the form of a break with the corrupted organs of international rule, those very ones that had been the major consumers of *longue-durée* history for generations before.³⁴

The major weapon used in this battle was an attention to local detail, a practice derived from the urban history tradition, where German and British city histories frequently narrated labor altercation as part of the story of urban community. Indeed, the increasing emphasis on the extremely local experiences in the work of historians such as Gareth Stedman Jones and David Roediger allowed exactly such an examination of race, class, and power in the community that allowed the historian to reckon as contingent the failures of working-class movements to transform the nation.³⁵ Exploiting an arcane archive became a coming-of-age ritual for a historian, one of the primary signs by which one identified disciplined commitment to methodology, theoretical sophistication, a saturation in historiographical context, and a familiarity with documents. Gaining access to a hitherto unexploited repository signaled that

³⁴ Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor, 2005), 129–130.

³⁵ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford, 1971); Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1983); David R. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991).

one knew the literature well enough to identify the gaps within it, and that one had at hand all of the tools of historical analysis to make sense of any historiographical record, no matter how obscure or how complex the identity of its authors.

A typical movement was a new kind of micro-history that abandoned grand narrative or moral instruction in favor of focus on a particular event: for example, the charivaris of Natalie Zemon Davis or the cat massacres of Robert Darnton.³⁶ Micro-history had originated in Italy as a method for testing *longue durée* questions, in reaction to the totalizing theories of Marxism and the *Annales* School, and in search of what Edoardo Grendi famously called the «exceptionally ‘normal’» («eccezionalmente ‘normale’»³⁷). Its method of analysis was not inherently incompatible with temporal depth, as in a work such as Carlo Ginzburg’s study of the *benandanti* and the witches’ sabbath which moved between historical scales of days and of millennia.³⁸ Nor was microhistory originally disengaged from larger political and social questions beyond the academy: its Italian roots included a belief in the transformative capacity of individual action «beyond, but not outside, the constraints of prescriptive and oppressive normative systems».³⁹ However, when transposed to the anglophone historical profession, micro-history produced a habit of writing that depended upon shorter and shorter time-scales and more and more intensive use of archives. In some sense, the more obscure or difficult to understand a particular set of documents, the better: the more that strange archive proved the writer’s sophistication within a wealth of competing theories of identity, sexuality,

³⁶ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (Stanford, 1975); Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1984).

³⁷ Edoardo Grendi, «Micro-analisi e storia sociale», *Quaderni storici* 35 (1977): 512. See, more generally, Jacques Revel, ed., *Jeux d’échelles. La micro-analyse à l’expérience* (Paris, 1996); Paola Lanaro, ed., *Microstoria: a venticinque anni de L’eredità immateriale* (Milan, 2011); Francesca Trivellato, «Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?», *California Italian Studies* 2, 1 (2011): <http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/0z94n9hq>, accessed October 1, 2013.

³⁸ Carlo Ginzburg, *Storia notturna. Una decifrazione del sabba* (Turin, 1989).

³⁹ Giovanni Levi, «On Microhistory», in Peter Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge, 1991), 94.

professionalism, and agency, the more the use of the archive proved the scholar's fluency with sources and commitment to immersion in the field. A suspicion towards grand narratives also fuelled a movement towards empathetic stories of past individuals with whom even non-professional readers could identify; such «sentimentalist» accounts risked the charge of «embracing the local and personal at the expense of engagement with larger public and political issues» even as they earned their authors fame and popularity beyond the academy.⁴⁰

With a few exceptions, the classic works of the cultural turn concentrated on a particular episode: the identification of a particular disorder within psychology, or the analysis of a particular riot in the labor movement, for instance.⁴¹ Almost every social historian experimented in some sense with short-*durée* historical writing to engage with specific forms of institution making, each filling in a single note in the long story of labor, medicine, gender, or domesticity. The cases of psychological diagnoses followed a particular model, each study's periodization constrained to coincide with the life of the doctors involved with original work—the diagnosis of hysteria, the fad of mesmerism, or the birth of agoraphobia, or Ian Hacking's discourse in *Mad Travelers* (1998) on fugue states which departed from a twenty-year medical tradition suddenly deprived of its «ecological niche».⁴²

⁴⁰ Mark Salber Phillips, *On Historical Distance* (New Haven, 2013), 205–206.

⁴¹ For example, R. B. Rose, «The Priestley Riots of 1791», *Past and Present* 18 (November 1960): 68–88; John Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales, 1790-1810* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983); Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-century England, c. 1714-80* (Manchester, 1993); Ian Haywood and John Seed, eds., *The Gordon Riots: Politics, Culture and Insurrection in Late Eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, 2012).

⁴² Ian Hacking, *Mad Travelers: Reflections on the Reality of Transient Mental Illnesses* (Charlottesville, 1998); Ilza Veith, *Hysteria: The History of a Disease* (Chicago, 1965); Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France*. (Cambridge, Mass., 1968); William J. McGrath, *Freud's Discovery of Psychoanalysis: The Politics of Hysteria* (Ithaca, 1986); Rachel Maines, *The Technology of Orgasm: «Hysteria», the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction* (Baltimore, 1998); Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*, trans. Alisa Hartz (Cambridge, Mass., 2003); David Trotter, «The Invention of Agoraphobia», *Victorian Literature and Culture* 32, 2 (September 2004): 463–474; Mark S. Micale, *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008).

Biological time-scales of between five and fifty years became the model for field-breaking work in history. The micro-historians achieved the feat of having revolutionized historical writing about unions and racism, the nature of whiteness, and the production of history itself. Indeed, a flood of doctoral dissertations since that time has concentrated on the micro-local as an arena in which the historian can exercise her skills of biography, archival reading, and periodization within the petri-dish of a handful of years. In the age of micro-history, it was these minimalist dissertations that were most likely to impress a hiring committee, and advisors urged young historians to narrow, not to broaden, their focus on place and time, trusting that serious work on gender, race, and class comes most faithfully out of the smallest, not the largest, picture. Yet, according to Eley, the project of politically-engaged social history was largely a failure, due precisely to this over-concentration on the local: «With time, the closeness and reciprocity ... between the macrohistorical interest in capturing the direction of change within a whole society and the micro-histories of particular places—pulled apart». Eley even contrasted local social history with another politically-oriented history, that from the *Annales* tradition, which much like his own project promised a «total» critique of history of the present.⁴³

The retreat to the short *durée* was not confined to social history, or indeed to the American historical profession. At around the same moment, Quentin Skinner was leading a charge among intellectual historians against various long-range tendencies in the field—most notably, Arthur Lovejoy's diachronic history of ideas and the canonical approach to «Great Books» by which political theory was generally taught—in favor of ever tighter rhetorical and temporal contextualization. The contextualism of the so-called Cambridge School focused almost exclusively on the synchronic and the short-term settings for arguments treated as moves

⁴³ Eley, *A Crooked Line*, 184, 129.

in precisely orchestrated language-games or as specific speech-acts not as instantiations of timeless ideas or enduring concepts. The contextualists' original enemies were the Whigs, Marx, Namier, and Lovejoy, but their efforts were construed as an assault on anachronism, abstraction, and grand theory more generally. Yet Skinner's own effort in 1985 to promote «the return of grand theory» in the human sciences was beset by the paradox that many of the thinkers who inspired or represented this *revanche*—among them, Wittgenstein, Kuhn, Foucault, and Feyerabend—expressed «a willingness to emphasize the local and the contingent ... and a correspondingly strong dislike ... of all overarching theories and singular schemes of explanation». Reports of the return of grand theory seemed exaggerated in the 1980s: far from returning, it was retreating into the twilight like Minerva's owl.⁴⁴ It was not until the late 1990s that Skinner himself returned to longer-range studies—of Thomas Hobbes in a tradition of rhetoric extending back to Cicero and Quintilian; of neo-Roman theories of liberty derived from the *Digest* of Roman law; and of conceptions of republicanism, the state, and freedom in post-medieval history—that foreshadowed a broader return to the *longue durée* among intellectual historians.⁴⁵

From the late 1970s through the late 1980s, broad swathes of the historical profession had entered a period of retreat into short-*durée* studies across multiple domains, from social history to intellectual history, nearly simultaneously. Tension between the historian's arts of *longue-durée* synthesis and documentary history or biography is nothing new. Hesitance

⁴⁴ Quentin Skinner, «Introduction: The Return of Grand Theory», in Skinner, ed., *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, 1985), 12.

⁴⁵ Quentin Skinner, «The Vocabulary of Renaissance Republicanism: A Cultural *longue-durée*?», in Alison Brown, ed., *Language and Images of Renaissance Italy* (Oxford, 1995), 87–110, pointed towards Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1996); Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998); Skinner and Martin van Gelderen, eds., *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 2002); Skinner, «A Genealogy of the Modern State», *Proceedings of the British Academy* 162 (2009), 325–370; and Skinner and van Gelderen, eds., *Freedom and the Construction of Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 2013). Compare Darrin M. McMahon, «The Return of the History of Ideas?», in McMahon and Samuel Moyn, eds., *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History* (New York, 2014), 13–31; Armitage, «What's the Big Idea?».

towards wildly speculative histories was a matter of the documentary turn since Lord Acton, and even the historians of the *Annales* school took pains to distinguish themselves from sloppy or messy characterizations and abstractions. Yet never before this period had an entire generation of historians made so pronounced a rebellion against long-range analysis, with such enduring and widespread effects.

Of course, *longue-durée* history never disappeared entirely from the publishing lists of university presses. However the combination of archival mastery, micro-history, and an emphasis on contingency and context, powered by a suspicion of grand narratives, a hostility to whiggish teleologies, and an ever-advancing anti-essentialism, determined an increasing focus on the synchronic and the short-term. The stress on case-studies, individual actors, and specific speech-acts gradually displaced the long-run models of Braudel, Namier, Mumford, Lovejoy, and Wallerstein with the micro-history of Darnton, Davis, Eley, and Sewell. Within a generation, the field was dominated by the micro-historical, event-based history on the short *durée*. Barely a decade ago, a French historian of America noted dyspeptically, «[a]n approach in terms of *longue durée* might seem old-fashioned today when postmodernism pushes scholars towards fragmented and fugacious inquiries, but it remains an asymptotic ideal we may tend toward, without being able to reach it some day».⁴⁶ But the old-fashioned can quickly become the new-fangled. The *longue durée* is no longer so unapproachable; its full promise is now within reach.

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⁴⁶ Jean Heffer, «Is the *Longue Durée* Un-American?», *Review* 24, 1 (2001): 137.

To return to the *longue durée* the best way to go forwards may be to look back. In general, the major histories of the ancient and medieval West stood by theology, geography, and cosmology in their attempts to narrate holistic syntheses over broad scales of time. For Thucydides, Herodotus, and Augustine, history was an attempt variously to discern the threads unifying biographical studies of character with anthropological and geographical studies in foreign cultures. They were long in their time scale insofar as their aim was an explication of universal knowledge. With Hegel, that orientation towards the long and universal progress of nations received the imprint of enlightenment, a new moral purpose grounded in the shape of the nation-state, where the study of global history would help each nation to discern its cosmic place in the revelation of divine will through material reality. Exactly such a project for understanding the global, moral purpose of the nation infused most twentieth-century national forms of history with Macaulay and Michelet, where the long view could be used to contextualize progress variously towards empire, revolution, liberalism, aristocracy, and democracy.

By the twentieth century, the *longue durée* (although generally not, of course, under that name) offered a canonical tool for writing revisionary history in the service of reform. For example, assembling long-range comparisons helped Fabian historians like R. H. Tawney, John Hammond and Barbara Hammond, and Beatrice Webb and Sidney Webb to aid in the reimagining of socialist Britain as the extension of ancient beginnings. In the kernel of medieval parish government, argued the Webbs, lay the root of modern participatory, representative government and a modern welfare state. In the early modern struggles between export-oriented

pastoralists and sustenance-oriented poor farmers, argued Tawney, lay a precedent for modern struggles against landlordism in the age of advanced capitalism and land reform.⁴⁷

Long-range history was a tool for making sense of modern institutions, for rendering utopian schemes comprehensible, and for rendering revolutionary programs for society thinkable. Indeed, Tawney's career exemplifies the activist agenda of long-term thinking by historians of that generation. Sent to China by the League of Nations in 1931, he authored an agrarian history of China that sounded strangely similar to his histories of Britain, wherein the drama between landlord and peasant comprised the ultimate pivot of history and signalled the immediate need for rational land reform.⁴⁸ In this way, history allowed Tawney's arguments, so pertinent to the era of the People's Budget and Land Reform in Lloyd George's Britain, to be generalized around the world. A universal truth of class dynamics around land, narrated as a *longue-durée* history seen through lenses ground by Marx and the American political economist and land-tax reformer Henry George, could be brought to bear on specific national traditions and its truth tested and persuasively argued for in different regions. Such applications were very different from those Braudel would later condemn among his own contemporaries for being excessively presentist, uncritical about power, and evasive about fundamental questions of causation and explanation.

The later retreat to the short *durée* among professional historians had the effect of cutting them off from earlier conversations with utopians, reformers, and ultimately international administrators that the stress on the *longue durée* had facilitated and encouraged. In the immediate postwar period, a series of new institutions began wrestling with the question

⁴⁷ Beatrice Webb and Sidney Webb, *English Local Government*, 9 vols. (London, 1906–29); J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer, 1760-1832: A Study in the Government of England before the Reform Bill* (London, 1911); R. H. Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1912).

⁴⁸ R. H. Tawney, *A Memorandum on Agriculture and Industry in China* (Honolulu, 1929); Tawney, *Land and Labour in China* (London, 1932).

of international development. The administrators of those institutions often looked to history when they attempted to position a major shift in policy. Among the greatest debates of this moment was whether to continue the program of radical redistribution of land, as a midway approach to Communism, that the British Empire had been forced to execute in Ireland and had entertained in Scotland and at home through the People's Budget and the postwar Land Nationalization schemes. Land reform measures were almost immediately enacted by a newly independent India. Within the United Nations, land reform was touted as a peaceful path to reform midway between Soviet Communism and American capitalism.⁴⁹ In all of these debates, histories of land use, private property, and agricultural policy played a major role. Among them were works by Tawney, Joan Thirsk, and other British historians who established the significance of peasant commons and the tragedy of the enclosure movement in the generation before E. P. Thompson began writing on similar subjects.⁵⁰

The institutions of international development looked to history to supply a roadmap to freedom, independence, economic growth, and reciprocal peacemaking between the nations of the world. For example, John Boyd Orr, founding director of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, began his career by publishing a retrospective history of hunger that began with Julius Caesar's conquest of Britain and ended with improving relationships between farm laborers and landlords with the Agriculture Act of 1920.⁵¹ By the 1960s, economic historians like David Landes had retooled the study of the history of the

⁴⁹ Amit Hazra, *Land Reforms: Myths and Realities* (New Delhi, 2006); A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi, Saturnino M. Borras, Jr. and Cristóbal Kay, eds., *Land, Poverty and Livelihoods in an Era of Globalization: Perspectives from Developing and Transition Countries* (London, 2007); Paul Readman, *Land and Nation in England: Patriotism, National Identity, and the Politics of Land, 1880-1914* (Woodbridge, 2008); Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman, eds., *The Land Question in Britain, 1750-1950* (London, 2010).

⁵⁰ For example, Thomas Edward Scrutton, *Commons and Common Fields: or, The History and Policy of the Laws Relating to Commons and Enclosures in England* (Cambridge, 1887); R. H. Tawney, «The Rise of the Gentry, 1558-1640», *Economic History Review* 11, 1 (1941): 1-38; Joan Thirsk, «The Restoration Land Settlement», *Journal of Modern History* 26, 4 (December 1954): 315-328.

⁵¹ John Boyd Orr, *A Short History of British Agriculture* (London, 1922).

Industrial Revolution in direct support of Green Revolution policies, promising a future of abundant riches on the back of a history of constant invention.⁵² And in the 1970s, theorists of land reform like the agrarian economist Elias Tuma and the British geographer Russell King turned to *longue-durée* history, synthesizing the work of historians as they consulted for the organs of international policy by contextualizing present-day land reform in light of seven hundred centuries of peasant struggle for participation in agrarian empire dating back to ancient Rome.⁵³

There was plenty of *longue-durée* history of land policy for them to work with. As the founders of the United Nations debated appropriate interventions in the Global South to put the world on a peaceful path to world order, followers of Henry George, who were still numerous on both sides of the Atlantic, turned to the *longue durée* to offer an account of history that read landlord monopoly as the signal crime in modern history and popular ownership of land as its necessary antidote. Georgist histories appeared in the 1940s and 1950s, establishing narratives of the American agrarian tradition since Thomas Jefferson. Georgist historians labored to make clear the tide of abuses by landlords and the necessity of populist government holding these land grabs at bay. In this vein, Alfred Noblit Chandler published his *Land Title Origins, A Tale of Force and Fraud* (1945), a history of the expanded powers of capitalists over land in that traced the problem to the railway barons who were George's contemporaries and to their power over land-grant colleges.⁵⁴ Similarly, Aaron Sakolski published *Land Tenure and Land Taxation in America* (1957), in which he offered an intellectual history of America based on the long story of successive amendments to property law, pointing to a long history of debates over

⁵² David Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present* (London, 1969).

⁵³ Elias H. Tuma, *Twenty-six Centuries of Agrarian Reform: A Comparative Analysis* (Berkeley, 1965); Russell King, *Land Reform: A World Survey* (London, 1977).

⁵⁴ Alfred N. Chandler, *Land Title Origins, A Tale of Force and Fraud* (New York, 1945).

the history of ownership in land through Henry Maine, Fustel de Coulanges, Max Weber, and G. R. Geiger.⁵⁵ Ultimately, he reasoned, the injunctions about land were the reflection of a conception of justice, and that justice had at its core a set of spiritual and religious values where participatory access to land was the direct reflection of a doctrine that valued every human, rich and poor alike. Sakolski wrote, «The early Christian church fathers were imbued with the ancient Hebrew traditions, and their concept of justice as related to landownership followed along the same lines».⁵⁶ All the way back to biblical times, moral precedents could be found for challenging the accumulation of capital among landed elites, and these precedents were now packaged as a precedent for legal action on the national and international scale.

These debates made for a climate where disciplinary historians understood themselves as working in part for an audience of civil servants and social scientists who used historians' *longue-durée* perspective as material for public reform. From Tawney in the 1930s through to the 1980s, professional historians writing about land issues, both in the West and in India, entered the *longue durée* to engage this material and raise larger questions about institutional actors and public purposes. Their scholarly work constituted a conversation between disciplinary history and the institutions of international governance, ranging over centuries with the help of close readings of particular documents, events, and characters, leaning heavily on the work of other scholars in the field. For scholars who came of age in the 1950s and 1960s—the very generation against whom Eley and Sewell rebelled—*longue-durée* history had been a tool for persuading bureaucrats and making policy.

⁵⁵ Paolo Grossi, *An Alternative to Private Property: Collective Property in the Juridical Consciousness of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago, 1981); George Raymond Geiger, *The Theory of the Land Question* (New York, 1936).

⁵⁶ Aaron M. Sakolski, *Land Tenure and Land Taxation in America* (New York, 1957), 13; compare Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), 57–87.

The classical *longue durée* of social historians like Tawney, using their sense of the deep past of institutions and movements to persuade their readers about the need for social change, was being appropriated into a «dirty *longue durée*» in the hands of think-tanks and NGOs. In this dirty *longue durée*, non-historians dealt with an impoverished array of historical evidence to draw broad-gauge conclusions about the tendency of progress. They rarely acknowledged secondary sources or earlier traditions in thinking about the period or events in question. Typically, they dismissed Marxist or other leftist perspectives out of hand, offering an interpretation of history that vaguely coincided with free-market thinking, faith in technological progress, and the future bounty promised by western ingenuity. There are older precedents, of course, to the dirty *longue durée*, bound up with popular history in its role in popular instruction, going back at least to Charles Dupin's *Commercial Power of Great Britain* (1825) and extending through the popular histories of technology of the 1850s, for example.

That history can be used to promote a political bias is nothing new. Yet political and institutional conditions must align for any new genre to come into being. In the post-War United States, with the expansion of NGOs, the broadening of American hegemony and institutions of transnational governance like the United Nations and the World Bank, the conditions were set for a wide class of consumers of *longue-durée* history, hungry for instruction about how to manage tremendous questions like famine, poverty, drought, and tyranny. As baby-boomer historians retreated from direct engagement with these issues into the micro-history of race and class, long-term history became the domain of other writers without the historian's training – some of them demographers or economists employed by the Club of Rome or the Rand Corporation, others psychologists, biologists, self-proclaimed futurologists, or other historical amateurs writing for a popular audience in the era of the alleged «population bomb» and «limits

to growth».⁵⁷ Dirty *longue-durée* history blossomed, but historians were not the ones with their hands in the dirt.

International governance's demand for useful historical stories incentivized the production of impossibly inclusive large-scale syntheses. The demands for historical understanding, and indeed the leaps of rationality and abstraction executed with historical data, grew larger and larger. The most fantastic of these claims were made by the physicist turned systems-theorist and futurologist, Herman Kahn, who promised to settle debates about resource use, environmental catastrophe, and consumption by examining long-term trends in world history. Kahn and his collaborators charted streamlined historical data on population growth since 8000 BCE against prophecies of future technological improvement and population control, and concluded by foreseeing a post-industrial world of «increasing abundance».⁵⁸

⁵⁷ See, for example, Paul R. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York, 1968); Erich Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanized Technology* (New York, 1968); R. Buckminster Fuller, *Utopia or Oblivion: The Prospects for Humanity* (London, 1969); Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York, 1970); Norman Borlaug, *Mankind and Civilization at Another Crossroad* (Madison, WI, 1971); Herman Kahn et B. Bruce-Briggs, *Things to Come: Thinking about the Seventies and Eighties* (New York, 1972); George Leonard, *The Transformation: A Guide to the Inevitable Changes in Humankind* (New York, 1972); Donella Meadows, et al., *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York, 1972); Adrian Berry, *The Next Ten Thousand Years: A Vision of Man's Future in the Universe* (New York, 1974); Mihajlo Mesarovic and Eduard Pestel, *Mankind at the Turning Point: The Second Report to the Club of Rome* (New York, 1974); Herman Kahn, William Brown, and Leon Martel, *The Next 200 Years: A Scenario for America and the World* (New York, 1976); Wayne I. Boucher, ed., *The Study of the Future: An Agenda for Research* (Washington, DC, 1977); Ervin Laszlo, et al., *Goals for Mankind: A Report to the Club of Rome on the New Horizons of Global Community* (New York, 1977).

⁵⁸ Paul Dragoş Aligică, *Prophecies of Doom and Scenarios of Progress: Herman Kahn, Julian Simon, and the Prospective Imagination* (New York, 2007); Andersson, «The Great Future Debate and the Struggle for the World», 1416.

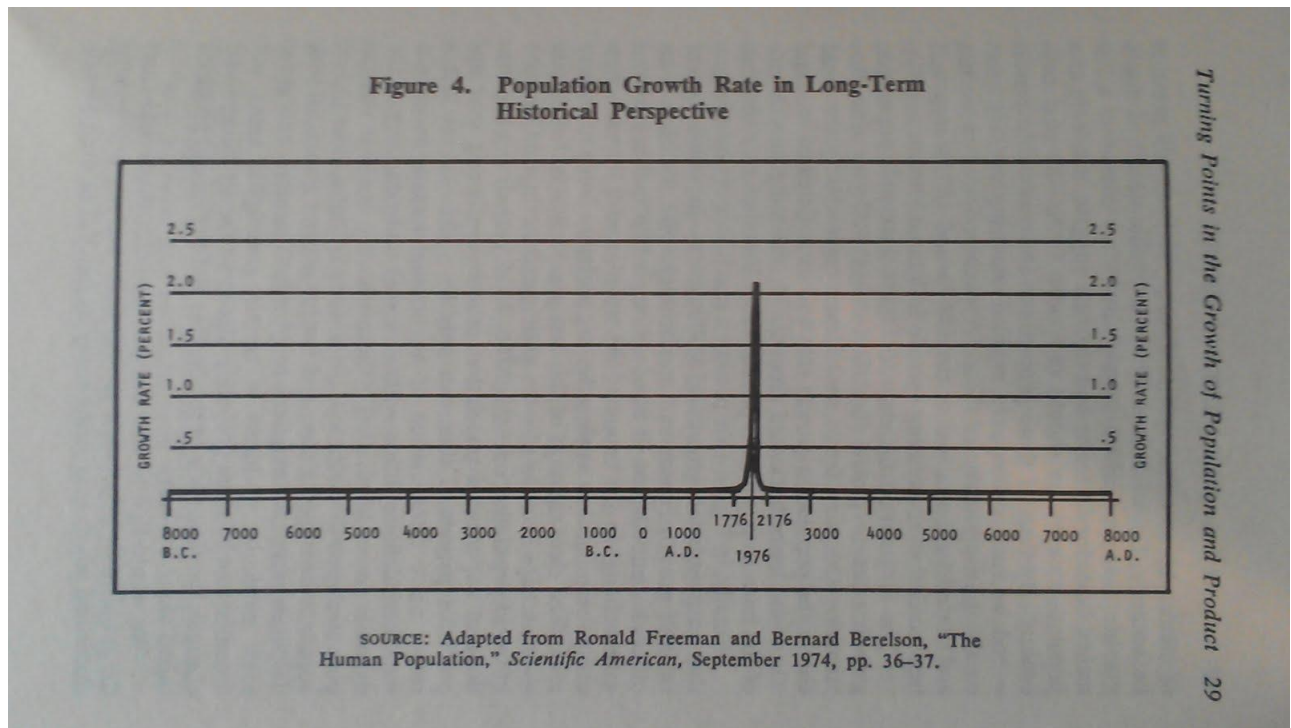


Fig. 3. «Population Growth Rate in Long-Term Historical Perspective»:

Herman Kahn, William Brown, and Leon Martel,

The Next 200 Years: A Scenario for America and the World (New York, 1976), 29.

Equally dramatic were the historical claims made by the chiefs of individual agencies about their own discipline. In 1970, for instance, William D. Clark, Director of Information at the World Bank, gave a speech that framed development economics in terms of world-historical shifts. His conclusion, ill founded upon historical data, urged the importance of development economics relative to any other policy program of the time: «This is not likely to be known as the Nuclear Age, or the Space Age, or the American Century, or the Era of the Common Man», proclaimed Clark: «It is going to be known as the Development Age, the age in which two-thirds of the world's population revolted against their customary but no longer tolerable

conditions». Civil rights in America, Clark said, would be seen by historians as a «minor skirmish» in comparison with that great question.⁵⁹

By the end of the 1970s, this tendency to go long began to look tarnished, something grubby that no self-respecting historian would do. Furthermore, those historians still left in the *longue-durée* game were subject to pressures to report to readers divided by the impossibly conflicting opinions typical of the international scene during the Cold War. Consider the experience of Caroline Ware, author of the *History of Mankind*, a multi-volume project commissioned by UNESCO and developed between 1954 and 1966. Ware's volume, submitted to civil servant reviewers of the nations represented by UNESCO, was subjected to an ideological tug-of-war between Russian and French readers, Protestant and Catholic reviewers, all of whom lobbied UNESCO for revisions that would reflect their own national and ideological understandings of world history. For someone working on behalf of an organ of international governance such as Ware, the success of the project depended upon making a synthesis that both Communists and Capitalists could agree with, and that task proved simply insurmountable. The lobbying for content was such that the project's staff were driven to near desperation of ever writing a synthetic history capable of working within the frame. Caroline Ware herself wrote in a letter that «it is not possible to write a history of the 20th century».⁶⁰ Such dispiriting experiences of writing for the organs of international government tarnished the genre of long-range history still further. Ware's frustration with rhetorical appeasement was something their micro-historian colleagues in the archives could avoid entirely. These

⁵⁹ William D. Clark, «Creating Political Will», in Colin Legum, ed., *The First U.N. Development Decade and Its Lessons for the 1970's* (New York, 1970), 148.

⁶⁰ Quoted by Grace V. Leslie, «Seven Hundred Pages of 'Minor Revisions' from the Soviet Union: Caroline Ware, the UNESCO *History of Mankind*, and the Trials of Writing International History in a Bi-Polar World, 1954–66», Panel, «The Global Dimensions of U. S. Power: Rethinking Liberal Internationalism at the Midcentury», meeting of the American Historical Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, 3 January 2013; on the UNESCO project more generally, see Gilbert Allardyce, «Toward World History: American Historians and the Coming of the World History Course», *Journal of World History* 1, 1 (1990): 26-40.

experiences, and many others like them, provided a major rationale for a generation of historians to retreat from *longue durée* history in general.

By and large, after this episode, historians as a cohort declined to engage with futurists, leaving dirty *longue-durée* history in contradistinction to micro-history as the tool of journalists and pundits, hardly a science at all, rarely assigned in the classroom, and almost never debated or emulated. Works of micro-history have expanded our understanding of peasant lives, the variety of psychological impulses, public and private, and the constructedness of human experience. But they have also largely abandoned the rhetorical practice, in their writing of history, of a larger moral critique available to non-historians as a source for alternative social formations over the *longue durée*.

In an era of ideological divisiveness, social scientists like James C. Scott and William Sewell effectively retreated from the engagement with organs of international government. Social scientists became increasingly sceptical that the institutions of international development could be ideologically neutral or effective as the promises of modernization theory withered and died across the globe from Latin America and Southeast Asia, especially after the Vietnam War.⁶¹ Their bibliographies, in contrast with those of the previous generation, would accordingly be increasingly filled with publications in peer-reviewed journals not with contributions to the ballooning grey literature of international organs. Their retreat was wholesale: they did not consult for the World Bank, and they did not write *longue-durée* history designed to be consumed by the leaders of governmental institutions. As historians, anthropologists, and sociologists stopped writing for the institutions of world government,

⁶¹ Frederick Cooper and Randall M. Packard, eds., *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*. (Berkeley, 1997); Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (New York, 2002); Nils, Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, 2007).

economists took their place.⁶² Beyond history departments, the consequences of losing this audience of influential organizations has expressed itself in many other ways. A creeping science-envy within the social sciences more generally, leading to modelling; a focus on game-theory and rational actors—in short, a retreat to the individual and the abstract, not the collective and the concrete. A policy-driven focus on case-studies migrated from law schools (where it had been established in the nineteenth century) to business schools and political science departments, where history is little assigned for the future bureaucrats filling the civil service. They accumulate statistics without the perspective of history or historiography, benefitting little from the revolutionary critiques of identity theory and epistemology that history underwent over the last forty years. The baby-boom generation did much for the ability of historians to understand the world, but it did so at the cost of the ability of historians to speak back to the institutions of governance.

Seen in this light, much of anglophone historiography from roughly 1968 to 2008 can be cast as a evidence of a moral crisis, an inward-looking theorization of identity against commenting to contemporary global issues and alternative futures. In that era, historians turned away from their former role as the advisors of policy and the prophets of national and international or civic and social cooperation. Instead, they took upon themselves a metaphysics of injustice, written in terms of race, class, and gender, and honed it through commentaries on the professions—on the peculiarities of psychology, marriage, and law, for instance. While they refined their tools and their understandings of social justice, they simultaneously inflicted upon their discipline habits of microscopic attention that culminated in a sense of practical

⁶² John Markoff and Verónica Montecinos, «The Ubiquitous Rise of Economists», *Journal of Public Policy* 19, 1 (January–March 1993): 37–68.

irrelevance, of the historian as astronomer in a high tower, distanced from a political and economic landscape.

Part of this crisis was an increasing reluctance on the part of historians to enter the fray of international relations and public policy in the role of professional advisor. Historians of the generation of Sewell and Darnton commented far less frequently on political events than the contemporaries of Tawney or Lewis Mumford. Instead, the role of advising citizens and policy-makers on the utopian possibilities of long-term change was largely ceded to colleagues in Economics departments, with the resulting dominance of newspaper headlines and policy circles by theories that idealize the free market, taking little to nothing from the moral lessons that post-colonial and social historians have drawn from the histories of empire and industrialization, public health and the environment.⁶³

By the 1990s, Michael Bérubé and others academic commentators in the US complained about the increasing irrelevance of history and other humanities disciplines and looked nostalgically back to the New York intelligentsia of the 1950s and the active role played by historians and literary critics in the public sphere.⁶⁴ Staring down the record of our more engaged ancestors, it looked to many colleagues as if the humanities had simply abandoned the public altogether. By the end of that decade, a younger generation of historians, just under the cusp of the baby boom, began to reopen the question of the *longue durée*. Many of them were

⁶³ Markoff and Montecinos, «The Ubiquitous Rise of Economists»; Gerald D. Suttles and Mark D. Jacobs, *Front Page Economics* (Chicago, 2011); C. A. Bayly, Vijayendra Rao, Simon Szreter, and Michael Woolcock, eds., *History, Historians and Development Policy: A Necessary Dialogue* (Manchester, 2011); Pamela Cox, «The Future Uses of History», *History Workshop Journal* 75, 1 (Spring 2013): 125–145.

⁶⁴ Elegies for this moment include Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York, 1987); Michael Bérubé and Cary Nelson, eds., *Higher Education under Fire: Politics, Economics, and the Crisis of the Humanities* (New York, 1995); Richard A. Posner, *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003); Jules Chametzky, «Public Intellectuals—Now and Then», *MELUS* 29, 3/4 (Autumn–Winter 2004): 211–226; Jo Guldi, «The Surprising Death of the Public Intellectual: A Manifesto», *Absent* 1, 2 (2008): <http://archive.org/details/TheSurprisingDeathOfThePublicIntellectualAManifestoForRestoration>, accessed October 1, 2013.

ancient and medieval historians by training, for whom silence on topic of long time spans was particularly painful. Recently, medievalist Daniel Lord Smail has led the charge into a dialogue with evolutionary biology, opening up questions about the periodization of human identity and consumerism, among other topics.⁶⁵

Questions of «world history» and «big history» widened the scope of narrative and began to incorporate an environmentally-minded retelling of history, in which human events were contextualized against a longer life of natural processes. A return to the *longue durée*, founded in part upon discontents with the failures of micro-history, thus began its swing, and with it a moral rethinking of historians' place in the university and in the world beyond. In addition to these moral reasons, two technological factors began to work at the activities of historians in their offices. The first is that we have larger numbers of archives at our disposal, and the second is that we have more tools.⁶⁶ Quite independently of moral laws or global climate debates, both of these factors began to drive historians to consider longer and longer time periods.

In the last decade, evidence for the return of the *longue durée* can be found across the intellectual landscape. A Latin Americanist notes of his field that «it became unfashionable to posit theories about ... historical trajectories over the very long-run», but change is now in the air: «Now the *longue durée* is back». A European cultural historian tells his colleagues at a conference, «all of us are ... invested, more or less explicitly, in a *longue durée* of sexuality». And a professor of American Studies remarks of her discipline, «Anyone in literary studies who has looked recently at titles of books, conferences, research clusters, and even syllabi across the

⁶⁵ Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (Berkeley, 2008).

⁶⁶ For instance, Google Book Search, Archive.org, Hathi Trust, and Project Gutenberg; Joanna Guldi, «The History of Walking and the Digital Turn: Stride and Lounge in London, 1808–1851 », *Journal of Modern History* 84, 1 (March 2012): 116-144.

field cannot have missed two key words ... that are doing substantial periodizing duty for literary and cultural criticism»: one is geographical (the Atlantic world), the other «a chronological unit, the *longue durée*».⁶⁷ Recent works have placed the Cold War and migration, the Black Sea and the Arab Spring, women's spirituality and the history of Austria, German orientalism and concepts of empire, into the perspective of the *longue durée*.⁶⁸ And even a cursory scan of recent arrivals on the history bookshelves turns up a host of long-range histories, of around-the-world travel over 500 years; of the first 3000 years of Christianity; of genocide «from Sparta to Darfur» and guerrilla warfare «from ancient times to the present»; of the very «shape» of human history over the last 15,000 years; and of a host of similar grand topics directed to wide reading publics.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Jeremy Adelman, «Latin American *Longues Durées*», *Latin American Research Review* 39, 1 (January 2004): 224; Thomas W. Laqueur, «Sexuality and the Transformation of Culture: The *Longue Durée*», *Sexualities* 12, 4 (July 2009): 418; Susan Gillman, «Oceans of *Longues Durées*», *PMLA* 127, 2 (March 2012): 328. More generally, see Barbara Weinstein, «History Without a Cause? Grand Narratives, World History, and the Postcolonial Dilemma», *International Review of Social History* 50, 1 (April 2005): 71–93; Penelope Corfield, «The Big Picture's Past, Present and Future», *The Times Higher* (27 July 2007): 14; David Christian, «The Return of Universal History», *History and Theory* 49, 4 (December 2010): 6–27; Donald A. Yerxa, «Introduction: History on a Large Scale», in Yerxa, ed., *World History and the History of the West: Historians in Conversation* (Columbia, SC, 2009), 1–12.

⁶⁸ Matthew Connelly, «The Cold War in the *Longue Durée*: Global Migration, Public Health, and Population Control», in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 2009), III, 466–488; Dirk Hoerder, «Migrations and Belongings: A *Longue-Durée* Perspective», in Emily S. Rosenberg, ed., *A World Connecting, 1870-1945* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012), 444–467; Julia Clancy-Smith, «From Sidi Bou Zid to Sidi Bou Said: A *Longue Durée* Approach to the Tunisian Revolutions», in Mark L. Haas and David W. Lesch, eds., *The Arab Spring: Change and Resistance in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO, 2013), 13–34; Alexander A. Bauer and Owen P. Doonan, «Fluid Histories: Culture, Community, and the *Longue Durée* of the Black Sea World», in Ruxandra Ivan, ed., *New Regionalism or No Regionalism?: Emerging Regionalism in the Black Sea Area* (Farnham, 2012), 13–30; Laurence Lux-Sterritt and Carmen M. Mangion, «Gender, Catholicism and Women's Spirituality over the *Longue Durée*», in Lux-Sterritt and Mangion, eds., *Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality: Women and the Roman Catholic Church in Britain and Europe, 1200-1900* (Basingstoke, 2011), 1–18; William M. Johnston, *Visionen der langen Dauer Österreichs* (Vienna, 2009); Suzanne L. Marchand, «Orientalism and the *Longue Durée*», in Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship*. (Cambridge, 2009), 1–52; Jörn Leonhard, «Introduction: The *Longue Durée* of Empire: Comparative Semantics of a Key Concept in Modern European History», *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 8, 1 (Summer 2013): 1–25.

⁶⁹ Joyce E. Chaplin, *Round About the Earth: Circumnavigation from Magellan to Orbit* (New York, 2012); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (London, 2009); Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven, 2007); Max Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present* (New York, 2012); Ian Morris, *Why the West Rules—For Now: The Patterns of History, and What They Reveal About the Future* (New York, 2010); Morris, *The Measure of Civilization: How Social Development Decides the Fate of Nations* (Princeton, 2013).

Indeed, big is back across a spectrum of new and revived modes of historical writing. Grandest of all is «Big History», an account of the past stretching back to the origins of the universe itself.⁷⁰ More modest in scope, because it includes only the human past, is the still remarkably expansive «Deep History» which spans some 40,000 years and deliberately breaks through the entrenched boundary between «history» and «pre-history».⁷¹ And more focused still, yet with perhaps the most immediate resonance for present concerns, is the history of the Anthropocene, the 200-year period (starting with the Industrial Revolution) in which human beings have comprised a collective actor powerful enough to affect the environment on a planetary scale.⁷² The time-scales of these movements are, respectively, cosmological, archaeological, and climatological: each represents a novel expansion of historical perspectives, and each operates on horizons longer—usually much longer—than a generation, a human lifetime, or the other roughly biological time-spans that have defined most recent historical writing.

The arrival in the past five years of mass digitization projects in the libraries and crowd-sourced oral histories online announced an age of easy access to a tremendous amount of archival material. Coupled with the constructive use of tools for abstracting knowledge—such as the Google N-gram, the wordle, and Paper Machines—these digital tools invite scholars to

⁷⁰ Cynthia Stokes Brown, *Big History: From the Big Bang to the Present* (New York, 2007); Fred Spier, *Big History and the Future of Humanity* (Chichester, 2010); David Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History*, new edn. (Berkeley, 2011). The questions treated in Harriet Swain, ed., *Big Questions in History* (London, 2005), are «big» in the sense of general, not because they necessarily encompass large expanses of time or space.

⁷¹ Andrew Shryock and Daniel Lord Smail, eds., *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present* (Berkeley, 2011); Smail and Shryock, «History and the Pre», *American Historical Review* 118, 3 (June 2013): 709–737.

⁷² Dipesh Chakrabarty, «The Climate of History: Four Theses», *Critical Inquiry* 35, 2 (January 2009): 197–222; Chakrabarty, «Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change», *New Literary History* 43, 1 (2012): 1–18; W. Steffen, J. Grinevald, P. Crutzen, and J. R. McNeill, «The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives», *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, 369, 1938 (January 31, 2011): 842–867; Fredrik Albritton Jonsson, «The Industrial Revolution in the Anthropocene», *The Journal of Modern History* 84, 3 (September 2012): 679–696.

constantly try out historical hypotheses across the time scale of centuries.⁷³ The nature of the tools available and the abundance of texts renders history that is both *longue-durée* and simultaneously archival a surmountable problem. In law and other forms of institutional history, where the premium on precedent gives *longue-durée* answers a peculiar power, we shall probably start to see more of such work sooner rather than later. New tools that expand the individual historian's ability to synthesize such large amounts of information open the door to moral impulses that already exist elsewhere in the discipline of history, impulses to examine the horizon of possible conversations about governance over the *longue durée*. Scholars working on the history of law have found that digital methods drive them to answer questions of longer scale: for example, the Old Bailey Online, covering the period 1673–1914—the largest collection of subaltern sources now available in the English-speaking world—or Colin Wilder's «Republic of Literature» project which, by digitizing early-modern legal texts and linking the text-based information to a gigantic social networking maps of teachers and students of law, aims to show who drove legal change in early modern Germany, where many of our first ideas of the public domain, private property, and mutuality emerged.⁷⁴

Faced with these two frontiers, one of moral duty and the other of technological opportunity, historians need to begin a conversation about what it means to think in terms of centuries rather than decades. We need to highlight particular digital techniques and their application to questions of periodization suitable to graduate training. We need to hold up new exemplars and a new theory of trans-temporal history that would understand what constitutes a persuasive and meaningful interrogation into the meaning of epochs. This would be grounded in an understanding of what consists of skillful curation in the subfields that have successfully

⁷³ <http://books.google.com/ngrams>; <http://www.wordle.net/>; <http://papermachines.org/>, accessed October 1, 2013.

⁷⁴ <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/>; <https://sites.google.com/site/colinwilder/>, accessed October 1, 2013.

dealt with *longue durée* questions, of the abstracted relationship between the large and the small, and finally of the various tools that can help the process of synthesis.

Particular subfields have different relationships to national and international bureaucracies and social movements, but in all cases we can point to *longue durée* studies that hold promise. Laborers in the field of public health are lucky enough to have Allan Brandt and Robert Proctor's books on the cigarette holocaust in the United States.⁷⁵ Political economy has likewise been well served over longer timescales, which a new generation of scholars are beginning to take seriously. The powerful history of Adam Smith and capitalism prepared by Fredrik Albritton Jonsson bridges what were traditionally separate fields—colonial bioprospecting, the history of science, and Malthusian arguments in the history of the official mind—to foreground a century-long running debate between natural historians, optimistic about an era of unlimited abundance, and pessimistic political economists, determined that a Presbyterian God had ruled against the poor.⁷⁶ In a parallel amalgam of ecology and economics, Alison Bashford has combined histories of population, eugenics, agriculture, and geopolitics into a global study of the surprising resilience of neo-Malthusianism well into the age of the dirty *longue durée* in the 1970s.⁷⁷

Less fortunate with regard to the *longue durée* are social and cultural movements, which despite the attention they have received from historians, have had remarkably few champions contextualizing historical events into their longer context in a way that dramatizes events for average readers. For social movements, the scholar must look back to 1980 for a

⁷⁵ Allan M. Brandt, *The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall, and Deadly Persistence of the Product that Defined America* (New York, 2007); Robert Proctor, *Golden Holocaust: Origins of the Cigarette Catastrophe and the Case for Abolition* (Berkeley, CA, 2011).

⁷⁶ Fredrik Albritton Jonsson, *Enlightenment's Frontier: The Scottish Highlands and the Origins of Environmentalism* (New Haven, 2013).

⁷⁷ Alison Bashford, *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth* (New York, 2014).

book as widely known by radicals as Howard Zinn's history of labor.⁷⁸ When we look for more recent syntheses, such as Peter Marshall's histories of radicalism or John Curl's magnificent work on cooperatives, it is non-professional historians who have done most to break new ground; more likely on the lips of urban organizers is the work of a journalist like Mike Davis or a fellow organizer like Beryl Satter.⁷⁹ Social movements interested in identity and sexuality must likewise look back in time for treatments of the topic over time like those by John Boswell and William Leach, where the major syntheses stopped being written after about 1980.⁸⁰ The rest of our work—sadly, all the piles and generations of it—is less likely to be encountered by members of the reading public or even journalists. Our most hard-fought debates over race, class, and unions are at their most relevant when read by masters student who leave to become organizers; without the aid of *longue-durée* positioning and synthesis aimed at a popular audience, they are indigestible to first-year students, non-specialists, and members of the public.

There are different standards of success embodied in this call to arms. An author like Zinn remains widely cited by social activists and alternative media. Historians of another generation such as R. H. Tawney aimed instead for a readership among a general bureaucratic elite, who used history to ponder the wider frontiers of international policy and stake claims more daring than those of political scientists, constrained by theory and social science. What is common to both is their confidence in the genre of history to command stories persuasive to readers whose actions matter, whether because of the privilege and expertise of those readers (in

⁷⁸ Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York, 1980).

⁷⁹ Peter H. Marshall, *Nature's Web: An Exploration of Ecological Thinking* (London, 1992); Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (Oakland, CA, 2010); John Curl, *For All the People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America* (Oakland, CA, 2009); Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London, 1990); Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London, 2006); Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America* (New York, 2009).

⁸⁰ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago, 1980); William Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union: The Feminist Reform of Sex and Society* (New York, 1980).

the case of Tawney), or because of their number, organization, and cause (as for Zinn). Alternative futures became the purview of futurists and science-fiction writers only when historian gave up the field. We hope that a return to the *longue durée* will evoke courageous engagements within the subfields with the whole variety of precedents for public writing, from within the historical profession and from without.⁸¹

With these opportunities and challenges in mind, the recent return to *longue durée* as a key to environmental engagement bears examination. *Longue-durée* history has appealed especially to environmentally-minded historians. Nothing about the technologies of digital archives forces *longue-durée* environmental history to take on questions of biology. Digital history rather offers up more opportunities to understand the evolution of modern institutions, an opportunity missed by devotees of the Anthropocene. Historians like Smail and Chakrabarty have invoked the *longue durée* to analyze the relationship between pollution and environmental devastation and our changing agency in our natural environment going back to the Anthropocene.⁸² From the long perspective of *longue-durée* work in the tradition of Tawney and Mumford, entering a dialogue with the departments of biology, is an indirect purpose in comparison with history's ability to directly speak to the policy-makers and activists who deal with climate governance. A *longue-durée* history of species biology has an ironically sidelined moral purpose in comparison with more pressing issues of memory, for instance recalling the state's power to create and destroy common property in land and water. In this age of global warming and coming wars over land and water, surely histories of class struggles over land and water are needed now more than ever, but we have few examples to which to turn.

⁸¹ Armitage and Guldi, *The History Manifesto*.

⁸² Guldi, «Digital Methods and the *Longue Durée*».

That narrative move to larger scales relates directly to the availability and analysis of «big data» and the pressing questions of whether we go long or short with that data. There are places in the historical record where that decision—to look at a wider context or not—makes all the difference in the world. The need to frame questions more and more broadly determines which data we use and how we manipulate it, a challenge that much *longue-durée* work has yet to take up. The power offered by *longue-durée* frames is that of magnificent persuasion, of opening up conversations about social change, its potential, and its limitations. We should not make the mistake of reducing the *longue-durée* merely to biological questions or the desire to attract the attention of our colleagues in the hard sciences.

We ourselves have used digital methods to expand the confidence of a historian excerpting one episode from its long context, and to more accurately synthesize the history of transnational social movements over centuries. In Jo Guldi's work on the history of walking, Google Book Search was utilized to test and extend the claims of Walter Benjamin and Richard Sennett about the behavior of strangers on the public street in the nineteenth-century city. After beginning work on the history of the rivalry between private property and common property systems since 1870, she began working with digital tools that aggregated commonly-formed words into timelines showing the rise and fall of different concepts. This work eventually led to the creation of a digital toolbox, *Paper Machines*, which she released with collaborator Christopher Johnson-Roberson in 2012. In her experience, both the cheap tool – Google Book Search – and the more expensive tool – *Paper Machines* – offer «macrosopes» that offer a window on long-term change, grounded in quantitative analysis of words in their context, which can generate new hypotheses for the researcher and provide characterizations of

long periods, aiding the researcher's confidence in her characterizations of periods and places.⁸³ This quantitatively-based confidence, based on the algorithmic analysis of masses of information about cultural thought or a particular government institution. Macroscopes thus act as an intellectual stimulus to making claims about the *longue durée*, grounding every characterization in verifiable and comparable characterizations of place, institution, discourse, or period, which the skillful historian weaves together into a richly contextualized background against which her archival research may the more powerfully be set.

Other historically-minded scholars have taken a more quantitative turn, using the accumulation of data to make *longue-durée* arguments. For example, recent work by the economist Thomas Piketty and his collaborators compares the relative fortunes of inequality in capitalism worldwide since the Industrial Revolution, foregrounding the dynamic reduction in income equality around the world since the era of Reagan and Thatcher.⁸⁴ These quantitative analyses are impressively focused deployments of hard data, and they undoubtedly bear upon public debates in exactly the way we hope a relevant study of the *longue durée* would. They also raise important questions about whether the research they are built upon is generalizable to other studies. Are these studies, like the ill-fated quantitative turn of the 1970s, individual research laboratories aimed at one-off theses, supported with numeric data acquired at vast cost and not generalizable to other topics? Or will quantitative digital researches follow other tools of the digital humanities, manufacturing tools for identifying aggregate change over time, where

⁸³ Guldi, «The History of Walking and the Digital Turn»; Guldi, «Digital Methods and the *Longue Durée*»; <http://www.papermachines.org/>, accessed October 1, 2013; compare Shawn Graham, Ian Milligan, and Scott Weingart, *Big Digital History: Exploring Big Data Through a Historian's Macroscope* (London, 2014).

⁸⁴ Thomas Piketty, *Les hauts revenus en France au XX^e siècle: inégalités et redistributions, 1901-1998* (Paris, 2001); Piketty et Emmanuel Saez, «Income inequality in the United States, 1913–1998», *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118, 1 (February 2003), 1-41; A. B. Atkinson and Piketty, eds., *Top Incomes over the Twentieth Century: A Contrast Between Continental European and English-speaking Countries* (Oxford, 2007); Atkinson, Piketty, et Saez, « Top Incomes in the Long Run of History », *Journal of Economic Literature* 49, 1 (2011), 3-71; Piketty, *Le capital au 21^e siècle* (Paris, 2013).

a single faculty project such as N-grams or Paper Machines can revolutionize classroom practice across the disciplines, putting powerful new forms of analysis into the hands of the masses?

Similar questions of how scholars of the *longue durée* work with archives and tools are all the more important in issues of representation of subalterns and developing nations, in a world dominated by Anglophone conversations and nationalist archives. Where funding for digital documents is linked to nation-building projects (as it is in most places), digital archives relating to women, minorities, and the poor risk not being digitized, or where it digitized, being unfunded. Just as books need correct temperature and humidity lest they decompose, so digital documents require ongoing funding for their servers and maintenance for their bits. The strength of digital tools to promote *longue-durée* synthesis that includes perspectives other than that of the nation state rests upon the ongoing creation and maintenance of genuinely inclusive archives.⁸⁵

Questions such as these draw deeply from the traditions of microhistory with its fixation on how particular and vulnerable troves of testimony can illuminate the story of slavery, capitalism, or domesticity. And indeed, questions about how to preserve subaltern voices through the integration of microarchives within the digitized record of the *longue durée* form a new and vitally important frontier of scholarship. That immense labor, and the critical thinking behind it, deserves to be recognized and rewarded through specially-curated publications, grants, and prizes aimed at scholars who address the institutional work the *longue-durée* microarchive. This is another form of public work in the *longue durée*, one that aims less at public audiences and books with high sales or reading among bureaucrats than in the careful marshalling of

⁸⁵ Compare Emma Rothschild, «The Future of History», in Karl Grandin, ed., *Going Digital: Evolutionary and Revolutionary Aspects of Digitization* (Stockholm, 2011), 280-294.

documents, objects, stories, resources, and employment to create the microarchival structure for macrohistorical stories of import.

The moral stakes of *longue durée* subjects – including the reorientation of our economy to cope with global warming and the integration of subaltern experience into policy—mandates that historians choose as large an audience as possible for all of the human experiences about which historians write—including (but not limited to) problems of environment, governance, capitalism, exploitation, and psychology. *Longue-durée* history is rightly deployed to allude to the Anthropocene when it becomes necessary to persuade an audience of the fact of a long-term relationship between humanity and the planet, and in particular to the atmosphere, delicate ecosystems, and constrained natural resources. But it may equally persuade us of the long struggles about the legacy of capitalism towards injustice, as did Tawney and Mumford, or over the governance of the environment, as Denis Cosgrove and John Gillis have done more recently.⁸⁶

In the era of *longue-durée* tools, when experimenting across centuries becomes part of the toolkit of every graduate student, conversations about the appropriate audience and application of large-scale examinations of history are becoming part of the fabric of every history department. We should not constrain them to the mere Anthropocene or the merely Marxist, but we would be wise to take instruction from the utopian aspirations of both those genres, and to welcome back a key of writing history that takes seriously an ambition to reconfigure public discourse and to reorient policy.

The return of the *longue durée* is intimately connected to changing questions of scale. In a moment of ever-growing inequality, amid crises of global governance, and under the

⁸⁶ Denis E Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination* (Baltimore, 2001); John R. Gillis, *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History* (Chicago, 2012).

impact of anthropogenic climate change, even a minimal understanding of the conditions shaping our lives demands a scaling-up of our inquiries. As the *longue durée* returns, in a new guise with new goals, it still demands a response to the most basic issues of historical methodology—of what problems we selected, how we choose the boundaries of our topic, and what tools we put to solving the question. The power of memory can return us directly to the forgotten powers of history as a discipline to persuade, to reimagine, and to inspire. Renaissance historian Constantin Fasolt has argued that thinking about early modern civic institutions was largely premised on what he calls an attitude of «historical revolt».⁸⁷ In light of this, the new historians of the *longue durée* should be inspired to use history to criticize the institutions around us and to return history to its mission as a critical social science.⁸⁸ History can provide the basis for a rejection of anachronisms founded on deference to longevity alone. Thinking with history—but only with long swathes of that history—may help us to choose which institutions to bury as dead and which we might want to keep alive.

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⁸⁷ Constantin Fasolt, *The Limits of History* (Chicago, 2004), 19.

⁸⁸ Compare David Armitage, *Civil War: A History in Ideas from Rome to the Present* (forthcoming); Jo Guldi, *The Long Land War: A Global History of Land Reform, c. 1860-Present* (forthcoming).