

API-701 Reasoning from History

Fall 2006
Monday and Wednesday, 2:40-4:00p.m.
Land Auditorium

Professor Alexander Keyssar
617-495-1042
Alex_Keyssar@harvard.edu
Office hours: TBA
Taubman-418, KSG

PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

This is not a history course (although you may learn some along the way) but a course about historical reasoning. Its focus is on the ways in which policy makers can, do, and should make use of history in their professional lives.

Policy makers, in fact, utilize some form of historical reasoning all the time. Politicians, diplomats, and advisors all draw inferences from the past. So do social scientists. In our daily lives, historical reasoning is a critical component of what passes for “common sense.” Moreover, beliefs about history – often unexamined and sometimes inaccurate – commonly shape debates about public issues.

Yet trying to understand and articulate what actually happened in the past—even to you yesterday, let alone to long ago wages and prices, social conditions, or “the balance of power”—is a very tricky business. Philosophers, for many years, have engaged in intricate debates about how to define, evaluate, compare, or explain historical facts.

The core goal of this course is to permit you to become more self-conscious, reflective, and skilled at utilizing history and historical reasoning. The course reviews some common traps in historical reasoning and suggests ways of avoiding them. It compares historical reasoning to other modes of analysis and is designed thus to strengthen your ability to analyze both particulars and contexts.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The following books contain required reading and may be purchased at the COOP or other local bookstores or ordered over the Internet. (Please note that only portions of some books are actually assigned, a fact that you may want to consider when deciding which books to buy.) These books are also on reserve at the Kennedy School library.

Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers (Free Press paperback)
Alexander Keyssar, The Right to Vote (Basic Books paperback)
Michael A. Bernstein, A Perilous Progress (Princeton University Press paperback)

Louis A. Perez, Jr., Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy (The University of Georgia Press)
 E. H. Carr, What is History? (Vintage paperback)
 John Gaddis, The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past. (Oxford paperback)
 William Polk, Understanding Iraq. (HarperCollins)

Readings marked with an asterisk are in the course pack available at the Kennedy School Course Materials Office in Room BG-6 on the ground floor of the Belfer building. Readings marked with a double asterisk ** are available on the course web page.

Each student will be required to submit several short papers, as indicated in assignment lists below, and to take a take-home final examination. Grades will be based one-third on the short papers, one-third on the final exam, and one-third on the instructor's assessment of the quality (not quantity) of individual class participation.

1. Introduction (September 13)

R. Neustadt, E. May, Thinking In Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers. New York: The Free Press, 1986. (Preface and Chapter 1)

E.H. Carr, What is History? New York: Vintage Books, 1961. (Chapter 1)

2. Comparing the Present to the Past: The Use of Precedents and Analogies (September 18, 20)

R. Neustadt, E. May, Thinking In Time (Chapters 2-5)

John Dower, "Is the U.S. Repeating the Mistakes of Japan in the 1930's?" *History News Network*, 30 June 2003.*

Henry Kissinger, "Lessons for an Exit Strategy," *Washington Post*, 12 Aug. 2005: A19.**

George W. Bush, "President Commemorates 60th Anniversary of V-J Day," *The White House*, 30 Aug. 2005.*

David Bernstein, "A Price of Fighting Terrorism" *Washington Post*, 10 Aug. 2006: A23.**

Also: Bring to class, for discussion, a recent newspaper or magazine article or column that utilizes an analogy to analyze a contemporary issue or to make a case for a particular policy.

Written Assignment: due September 27 and to be discussed in class on September 27. Write a short paper (not more than 3 pages) discussing the most vivid or important history (or presumptions about history) that you carry around in your own head. Add to this a brief biography of not more than 250 words. These papers are required but they will not be graded.

3. Analogies and Precedents, continued (September 25, 27)

E.H. Carr, What is History? (Chapter 3)

R. Neustadt, E. May, Thinking In Time (Chapter 8)

Additional Assignment: Come to class on September 25, having engaged in some research on the history of one of the following words or phrases: “terrorist,” “insurgent,” “empire,” “fascism,” “globalization,” or “democracy.”

4. Placing Individuals and Noticing Individual Histories (October 2, 4)

R. Neustadt, E. May, Thinking In Time (Chapters 9, 10, 11)

Assignment: The class will be divided into groups, and each group will make a presentation (not more than 10 minutes in length) “placing” (in biographical and institutional context) one of the following individuals: Andrew Stern, Michelle Bachelet, Hans A. von Spakovsky, Elliot Abrams, Michael Chertoff, or Mahmoud Abbas.

5. Placing Institutions (October 11. October 9 Columbus Day, no class)

R. Neustadt, E. May, Thinking In Time (Chapter 12)

Michael Bernstein, A Perilous Progress: Economists and Public Purpose in Twentieth-Century America. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. (Chapters 4 and 5)*

6. Issue Histories: 1: Voting Rights and Procedures (October 16, 18)

Alexander Keyssar, The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States. New York: Basic Books, 2000. (Chapters 1 and 3 (pp. 54-61 only), Chapters 4 and 7 (pp. 244-55 only), Chapter 8).

R. Neustadt, E. May, Thinking In Time (Chapter 6)

Film: Mississippi Burning (and some discussion of what we learn and don't learn about history from films)

Written Assignment: due October 20. Write a short paper (3-5 pp.) of the following type. Suppose that you held a staff position with a member of a state legislature (or in a governor's office), and you were asked to prepare a short memo to help him/her figure out what position to take regarding legislation that would require all voters to present government-issued photo IDs in order to cast their ballots. (Such legislation has already been adopted in some states.) What would you want your boss to know about the history of voting rights as he or she prepared to vote on that legislation? How would the history matter? Does the particular state in which you are living affect how you would approach this issue?

7. Issue History: 2: How Far Back Should You Go? (October 23, 25)

W. Polk, Understanding Iraq. New York: HarperCollins, 2005.

Group Exercise for October 25: The class will be divided into groups, and each one will make a ten minute presentation dealing with the following issues. One of the arguments of Polk's book is that a knowledge of the history of Iraq might have led American policy makers to adopt a different course of action in recent years. Do you agree with that? How far back into the past do you think policy makers ought to have had some knowledge of the history of the region? Each group should submit a two-page written outline of its argument.

Film: The Battle of Algiers

8. Evaluating and Using History (October 30, November 1)

R. Neustadt, E. May, Thinking In Time (Chapters 13 and 14)

E.H. Carr, What is History? (Chapter 4)

Dennis Trinkle and Scott Merriman, The History Highway (pages 24-34)

9. Issue Histories: 3: Collective Memory and Conflicting Histories (November 6, 8)

Louis Perez, Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2003. (Chapters 3-9).

Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, Condoleezza Rice, Chair, Report to the President. Washington. July 2006.**

Film: Memories of Underdevelopment

Written Assignment: due November 13. You have just landed a plum job as special adviser to a high ranking official in the U.S. government (or another government of your choosing). Your boss has learned that you took this remarkable course at Harvard about historical reasoning for policy makers. He/she asks you to read the July, 2006 report of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba. You are then asked to write a memo indicating whether or not knowledge of the history of Cuba (and its relations to the U.S.) might alter the policy recommendations contained in the CAFC document. If so, what aspects of that history (and the collective memory of different actors in the drama) might matter; and how would they matter? Your memo should not be more than five pages long. (5 pages.)

10. Historical Thinking and Other Modes of Analysis (November 13, 15, 20, 22)

Keyssar, Alexander. 1993. "Labor Economics and Unemployment: An Historian's Perspective," in William Darity, Jr. ed., Labor Economics: Problems in Analyzing Labor Markets, Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, p. 59-74.*

Carter, Susan B. and Stephen Cullenberg. 1996. "Labor Economics and the Historian," in Economics and the Historian, Berkley: University of California Press, p. 85-121.*

Michael Bernstein, A Perilous Progress (Chapters 1, 6 and epilogue).

Paul Pierson, "The Study of Policy Development," *The Journal of Policy History*, 17(1), 2005: pp. 34-51.**

If possible: Paul Pierson, Politics in Time. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. (Chapters 1 and 3)

John Gaddis. The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Historical Thinking and the Law: Readings to be announced.

11. Trends, Reversals, and Hard to Imagine Futures (November 27, 29)

Jeffrey G. Williamson, "Globalization, Labor Markets and Policy Backlash in the Past," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 12(4), 1998, pp. 51-72.**

John Gray, "The World Is Round" *The New York Review of Books*, 11 Aug. 2005: pp. 13-15.*

KSG Case Study C94-82-435: The Secession Crisis in America (A).*

12. Learning Some History on the Run: An Exercise (December 4, 6)

You will be given a topic in class on Monday and asked to dig up as much relevant history as you can by class on Wednesday

13. Summary, conclusion (December 11)

FINAL EXAMINATION: The final examination will be a take-home essay that will be due at the end of reading period.