Do we need a new history of American political democracy? This is the question that we are to consider. My answer to this question is yes. My paper sets forth the reasons for this opinion.

Before embarking upon a discussion of American history directly, I must first place before you my views concerning the purpose of history in general terms. It is often said that history must be rewritten for each succeeding age. Societies of historians, I assume, are prepared to take for granted that today there is probably a more general awareness than ever before that mankind is indeed facing a new age. It is an age which fills us with forebodings of troublous times but not with confidence of our capacity to meet its challenge. The age before us poses, I think, questions unique in terms of our own intellectual attitudes. Our immediate intellectual heritage is based upon factors such as belief in the individual, emphasized by the Reformation; hope of human perfectability, stemming from the Age of Reason; a conception of progress tied in with Darwinian evolution; and a confidence that any problem can be solved if time and brains and money can be organized. This latter faith is erected upon the happy history of our own country and the triumphs of nineteenth century Europe rather than upon the dimmer, darker, and bloodier pages of human history over a vastly longer span of time. We face the future with at least the suspicion that our immediate past may be a happy interlude rather than the prelude of still better times to come through the inevitable march of progress.

At any rate, the fact that a group of historians, in 1948, pauses to consider the need for a new history is, in itself, an acknowledgment that one volume is closed and that a new and different one remains to be written. The closing chapters of the present age must conclude by recognizing that there are central issues for which we have found
no tolerable solution. The issue of peace and war partakes more of the tragic qualities of life and death than of a question to be rationally resolved by human will and economic resources. Science appears to us today as a Frankenstein rather than as the means to freedom or peace or understanding. The course of industrialization has produced national economies which make total warfare both possible and unbearable, and has brought periods of peace marked by cyclical depressions so recurrent as to be almost routine. Moreover, the revolt of Asia brings to world attention leaders and peoples whose cultures are based upon values different from those of the western nations. The force of superstition becomes a factor of significance. The rate of human fertility must be reckoned with. In other words, noneconomic and nonrational elements must be brought into the equation of rational analyses when the problems of these areas are considered.

From the standpoint of American history there is one factor more than any other which suggests that we are facing a period marked by new problems. This factor is the very great relative weight of American power with respect to the rest of the world. Our unique present-day position is, of course, not a matter surprising to a group of historians. The significance of this rapid development, however, is to be found in the heavy responsibilities which such power entails. Whereas in the past it may be said that our chief preoccupation has been with curbing the abuses of political power and with seeking avenues of a nongovernmental sort for expressing individual and social purposes, now within a brief span of years there has been both an increase in our national power and a concentration upon the state as the exponent of this power. It has been possible to delay such tendencies upon the domestic front, but as our internal affairs become more and more involved with foreign policy, it becomes increasingly difficult to escape at home the forces which abroad have made for nationalization of industry. I am not arguing that we have become the victims of an inevitable trend toward socialization; I am stating that rivalry for power is expressed through political institutions in very great degree and that the issues are turning upon how to use this power on an international scale. These are different questions from those of the nineteenth century where the claimants for power sought their objectives with much less attention to govern-
ment as a means to their ends. The political theory most germane in the writing of political history was that which emphasized the restraint of power and the protection of the individual. The problems before us now may require positive use of power as a means of preserving the rule of law not simply within our own constitutional framework but on a larger scale and perhaps under less auspicious conditions.

Conventional historiography is based upon the tradition of which Adam Smith, Thomas Jefferson, and John Stuart Mill were common exponents. Their values could be expressed through the same general vocabulary of ideas, and their conceptual schemes embraced the range of historical phenomena with which our scholars dealt during the last century. The new history, I submit, will be written with a rather different vocabulary and will probably be based upon conceptual schemes unorthodox to most of us here. If the new historians are not actually influenced by thinkers such as Malthus, Freud, and Durkheim, they will at least be affected by the premises which such men have brought forward. The next generation of historians can hardly be satisfied with the optimistic view of human nature, the reliance upon human reason, and the belief in progress which have provided a philosophy of history in our own past. In some theological quarters the war has brought about the rediscovery of sin. In the social sciences the concept of *anomie* gains greater attention. Cultural anthropology provides evidence of a much broader range of human motivation than is sustained by our experience under the social and familial institutions of our acquisitive society. I can do no more here than suggest that, as our domestic policies become more evidently intertwined with foreign affairs, our intellectual attitudes and our scholarly presuppositions will also be broadened. Historians, together with other social scientists, will have to base their thinking upon a more inclusive view of man and his universe. American history will be less focused on the nation as the nation becomes engrossed in world affairs. Scholars will have to alter their sights, and their assumptions concerning human nature must be as wide-ranging as is our knowledge concerning the varied patterns of basically different cultures. In other words, a more sophisticated understanding of human behavior is called for. Much history has been written in heroic terms, with great emphasis upon the great leader. Much
History has also been written in very impersonal terms with great emphasis upon economic forces and social movements. Critics have expressed dissatisfaction, on occasion, with both approaches. Perhaps, as our knowledge of contemporary society increases through a greater understanding of individual and social psychology, of group behavior, of social tensions and of community structure, we may develop better ways for analyzing past experience. Historiography should benefit as the broad front of the social sciences is advanced.

History is written and rewritten because men wish to see the relevance of past experience in relationship to the problems of their own generation. If you accept this statement, together with my assumption that we are facing a new age, it follows that the historical research of recent decades has little vitality for the future.

The touchstone for historical writing is not accuracy nor objectivity, but relevance. The problem of the historian is always that of emphasis and selectivity, and the criterion that he applies, whether consciously or not, is that of relevance. This, of course, is a highly subjective act, but it is an act conditioned by a milieu within which the historian operates. This problem of relevance and of emphasis and selectivity has frequently been a problem which the historian has not been forced to face directly. It has often been masked for practical purposes by the paucity of the records available to him. The rediscovery of the past through the finding of new sources of information has kept generations of historians happy and industrious, but such veins may now have been mined to the point of diminishing returns. Historians will be increasingly concerned with the problems which are created, not by fragmentary and limited documentary data, but by records so extensive as to be overwhelming.

The answer to this dilemma cannot be found through a refinement of archival methods nor through the gadgetry of microfilms and other mechanical contrivances. The key to the record and the guide through the tonnage of documents is the historian’s judgment of what is relevant. What is it that needs to be said?

Here the historian is not thrown back upon intuition or mystical clairvoyance. The test of relevance has, in fact, been met time and again by our ablest and most influential historians. They have been
prompted in part by the prevalent attitudes of their time which suggest at least some of the things which need to be reinterpreted or better understood. The most penetrating thinkers are partly the exponents of their own times and, more importantly, the sensitive reactors to their environment. A clear illustration is Frederick Jackson Turner; and the point which I wish to emphasize here is not what he said but the time during which he said it. His paper on “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” was presented in 1893. He spoke at that point in American development when we had come to a keen awareness of our destiny as a great continental power. We were realizing our indigenous strength as a nation and we could take full pride in the distinctive characteristics which brought this about. Turner hit upon a hypothesis which gave fresh relevance in the 1890’s for all that had transpired in the preceding century. As the SSRC Committee on Historiography has recently stated:

More significant in the long run in changing concepts of historical method was the very fact that Turner had dared to advance explicitly not only a new principle of selection, but also a full-fledged hypothesis to guide the investigation and interpretation of historical facts.¹

It is upon such thinking that the writing of history must be founded. Great history comes in response to the needs of its own time, gives the past relevance in terms of these needs, and advances hypotheses which help to bring order and meaning to the problems of the present and of the emergent future. Great historians look both backward and forward; in their interpretation of the past and in their concern for discovering its relevance for the present they help to clear the contemporary minds for the tasks immediately ahead. Their function is fulfilled if they perform this duty for their own generation. As historians their work is not ageless; it is rather as literary artists that the work of some takes on a timeless quality.

It is sentimental, I think, to argue that Thucydides, for example, has anything of importance to say for the twentieth century; yet he is a great historian. As Shotwell has written:

... our interest in the world he described is different from that which it stirred in Thucydides, and if the narrative ultimately tires us, it is possible that our weariness is caused less by what is told then by what is left unsaid. Nothing so tires a

¹ Theory and Practice in Historical Study. A Report of the Committee on Historiography. Social Science Research Council (New York, 1946), 44.
traveller as to miss the goal of his journey. We can stand long miles of dusty tramping if we are reassured from time to time by glimpses of the delectable mountains. The same is true of mental journeys; fatigue is largely a matter of frustration. And so with Thucydides. The tale he tells is not what we wish most to hear.\textsuperscript{2}

The classical importance of Thucydides, from the standpoint of historiography, lies in his effort to report fact and eliminate fable and in his success in recording the events that were grounded upon evidence regarded as trustworthy. His lasting contribution was made in terms of historical method.

American historians within the last generation or two have relied mightily upon method as their distinctive contribution. Discussions of historiography have turned largely upon the methods which promote objectivity and upon the value of scholarly detachment in the analysis of events. Full acknowledgment must be made of the extent to which bias and special pleading have been reduced in the writing of history. This is no small contribution, but it is not enough in itself. Two factors should be noted. In the first place, a very heavy price has often been exacted in the name of detachment. Some scholars have succeeded in remaining objective by immersing themselves in minutiae. Their concern for neglected aspects of history has at times led them into byways which deserved to be neglected because they were unimportant. A specialist in the unimportant has little difficulty in maintaining a reputation for objectivity. His detachment is unsullied because he is removed from the important currents of the world.

There is a second aspect of objectivity in the writing of history which may be the cause of more concern as we look ahead. We face a period in world history wherein scholars themselves may be forced to choose sides. Whether they can succeed in differentiating between their functions as scholars and as citizens remains to be seen. From the standpoint of historiography, the problem might be translated into these terms: Thucydides, as a historian of antiquity, faced a different world from that of St. Augustine in the declining years of the Roman Empire. It was possible for Thucydides in his day to be both influential and detached. St. Augustine in his time reacted very differently despite his interest while a young man in scholarship and the ancient world. He turned his historical learning to the ideological

\textsuperscript{2} James T. Shotwell, \textit{The History of History} (New York, 1939), I, 199.
battle of his time between paganism and Christianity. The learned men of his day and of succeeding generations fought on the side of righteousness. To what extent any parallelism holds with our own time may be debatable. We are, nevertheless, in the midst of an ideological warfare with an inimical philosophy and system, and the environment of scholarship will be affected thereby. It is evident that a central value of our system is intellectual freedom and pursuit of truth. The more specific question is the extent to which freedom can be promoted by scholarly detachment and truth equated with scientific objectivity. An easy answer cannot be provided by arguing that objectivity is an end in itself or that it insures the discovery of what is historically true. Our more thoughtful students of historiography now content themselves with the conception of "relative objectivity." Truth, I submit, involves a determination of what evidence is relevant and what is not. My assumption is that the historian has something to say. He has a message whether he admits this explicitly or not, and having something to say he must leave many things unsaid. If he has nothing to say that is meaningful to his own age, we condemn him as a mere antiquarian. The essence of truth lies not only in the assertion of what is right but also in the rejection of error. This is part of the responsibility of the historian. If he will speak, he must call upon his powers of judgment. Since history offers a structure for our understanding of the past it involves more than accurately reporting isolated events. The historian in writing a book must create a pattern. It is not enough to carry out separate analyses in test tubes.

The essential method of science is well illustrated by the success of physicists in determining the structure of the atom. Similarly, the biologist can proceed by the minute examination of living tissue. Rigorous methods of examining historical evidence may also be characterized as scientific, but such methodology provides only a partial answer to the needs of historiography. Great historians, whatever their refinement of method may be, must also bring to their work the interpretative skills of the artist and the synthesizing capacities of the philosopher. A great historian must be mindful of his readers' interests, and these interests, unless they are merely literary, reflect the pangs and hopes of contemporary life.

My argument may be summed up by stating that I regard history
as essentially dynamic. Bold and imaginative historians have come forward time and again to clear away traditional concepts and to make the past freshly potent in thinking about problems of the present. Their task is to restate what has gone before so that thoughtful men in dealing with the problems confronting them can meet these oncoming forces of change with the added confidence which flows from a sense of kinship with the past. The function of history is not a painstaking eventual record of prior events to the end of pigeonholing all the bits and pieces of recoverable experience. If it were, the best historical writing would be done with the Hollerith machine. We are fortunate that this device was not available to the systematic historians of the German nineteenth century school. As exponents of their statically conceived and rigidly organized society, they labored tirelessly. Their efforts reflected the conceptual scheme upon which their intellectual life was based, and we now have evidence that historical change is a more dynamic process than they were able to envisage.

The task before us is to understand, as best we can, the dynamics of our own society and to see in what terms American history can be conceived in order to meet the needs that are upon us. In order to provoke some discussion of this question, I shall advance a conceptual scheme for your consideration. This may be summed up in two words: challenge and change.

The challenge is a new one for us as a nation. It is the challenge of a world competition between ourselves and the Soviets for leadership. Challenge is not new in our history. It has come in the past largely in democratic terms. The challenge before us was to develop the productive capacity of an almost unpeopled continent, and to do so through institutions of freedom, competition, and divers forms of organization that called for the co-operative effort of peoples drawn from old and diverse cultures. This challenge has been met in a way that would surprise even so sanguine a believer in his fellowman as Thomas Jefferson, but in the process we have been overtaken by other forces which have created a much greater challenge and on a wider stage.

In terms of historical understanding, we are woefully unprepared at the present time. We have done a reasonably good job in interpreting our institutions to ourselves, but we are ill-prepared for
interpreting ourselves to other people. We have not yet defined those elements in our own history and in our own institutions which can be exported so that people of very different cultures may understand our motivations and our hopes, our strengths and our essential weaknesses. Mentally and spiritually, much of mankind is isolated from the American dream and even more from the American reality. American historians must rethink both, so that by weighing ourselves and our past in relationship to foreigners and their past, we may at least open up channels of communication. Our historians have done a good job in interpreting us to ourselves and we have some sense of our national development as a part of Western, and particularly European, civilization; but it is not this experience which is most relevant for the future. It is rather the parallelism between Western civilization, particularly our own, and Eastern civilization, particularly that of Russia.

My second key word is change. This must be thought of politically in terms of the shift in populations in China, India, and southeastern Asia, now more restive than at any time in modern history. It must be thought of in technological terms, with respect to new sources of power opened up by physics and the synthetic materials and new substances created by chemistry and the biological sciences. These technological changes bring in their train political and sociological consequences. These consequences, moreover, will be felt, not in nineteenth century terms of colonization or frontier expansion, but rather in conjunction with population pressures and shifted political interests.

In this world of challenge and change, we find men seeking both direction and the reassurance of religious or ideological faith. They will not be content with cold treatises, however systematic their arrangement of historical information; they will demand more, and if history cannot fulfill its part, a mythology of history will be written.

This has, of course, already been done and we may expect more to follow. In fact, the distortion of history was a deliberate Nazi policy and continues as a propaganda device for the Soviets. The Muse has been routed from her ivory tower, and you may choose your metaphor in deciding whether, in Moscow, Clio has become a street-walker or a bureaucrat. We can agree that in this country the Muse
of History is a career woman; henceforth our task is to see that she does a good job.

At the risk of belaboring my metaphor, I would insist that she cease to be a social butterfly or, to speak more bluntly, that the time for conventional social history is over. Some years ago I remember being told soberly by a distinguished social historian that the place of soap in American history had been much neglected. It is hard to imagine this same historian today urging a G. I. graduate student to write his doctoral dissertation on soap as a social institution (the subject will doubtless receive adequate attention anyway as a long footnote on the critical history of radio which yet remains to be written). What I have said of social history, narrowly conceived, may also be said of economic history written in deterministic terms. Charles Beard rectified a historical distortion when he wrote his Economic Origins of the Constitution. It came as a useful correction of historical focus at the time that the book appeared. It was a scholarly contribution to the debunking of history, and this debunking took place appropriately enough in the twenties when American complacency stood in need of such therapy.

We stand at the opposite pole of complacency today. We are ready for historians who will bring to their writing moral conviction and a world view. The one-volume condensation of Toynbee is symptomatic of the popular hunger for a broad view of the past that provides a sense of continuity. I believe that the new history will be written with a strong philosophical emphasis. If historians are fearful of bold hypothesis, the task of interpreting the past as an aid to facing the future will fall into the hands of men less qualified to perform a duty that must be done. In fact, we may very well be in for a period highly unfavorable to the writing of history in the calm and detached spirit of traditional academic historiography. What has been usual with historians in recent decades and what has been acceptable to the public may face a profound change. The scattered monographical studies, carefully and painstakingly prepared by individuals pursuing their own intellectual interests, will attract less scholarly or public attention. If historians do not adapt themselves to the changed times, their profession will lose the prestige which it has enjoyed in this country. The nineteenth century already appears

as a golden age of American historical scholarship. If it is to have a rebirth in the last half of the twentieth century it cannot be in the same terms that won it acclaim heretofore. I am not saying that historians should huckster to popular taste but rather that, if they are to maintain their influence, they must think in terms of new hypotheses and consider standards of relevance appropriate to the times. As the problem appears to a student of government, therefore, my effort here is to suggest ways whereby historical research may develop.

Bearing in mind the factors of challenge and change which confront us, I propose to discuss particularly four aspects of American political history. These aspects relate to political power and to the place of administrative organization, of scientific advance, and of military strength. These topics are of central importance for our generation, and in all of these topics the historical viewpoint has much to offer.

Our political history has been written largely on the assumption that representative government provided the basic norms of politics and that the objectives of good government should be life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It would seem to me that a new appreciation of American history might be gained if we saw our own national development more clearly as one segment of mankind's effort to evolve means of political control. The task of politics in the United States has been to establish a union and to discover sufficient agreement to develop a continental, and latterly a world power, without sacrificing the diversity which is basic to freedom and tolerance. The rulers of Russia have likewise faced a continental jurisdiction and a highly diversified population. Our task has been to tame a wilderness and build an industrial order through the exploitation of national resources. Their task has been to train and industrialize a primitive society, much of it at a tribal level. The present rulers of Russia have discovered the limitations of doctrinaire Marxist theories. As Elton Mayo recently stated:

They realized that they were merely at the beginning of an exceedingly difficult undertaking—that of forcing Russia to become a single complex community and not a collection of ill-assorted and widely different social groups. Whereas Tsarism, by police methods, had forced upon Russia the semblance of community, the new rulers determined, by methods not greatly different, to force unity and community
to develop from within—to become a reality of cooperation, and the word Russia more than a mere name for northeastern Europe and northern Asia.⁴

In our own history we have perhaps taken too much for granted the existence of "community" and "the reality of cooperation." What have been the factors within American experience that have created these basic conditions which we have been able so often happily to take for granted? How has our party system, for example, operated so as frequently to blur sharp disagreement on vital issues? How have local politicians contributed to the creation of national co-operation? Some historians have presented a picture of a debating society where intellectual differences are given more attention than the irrational communal bonds which make social life possible. American politics is much more than a series of presidential campaigns, tariff debates, labor-management conflicts, reform movements, scandals and abuses. Social historians have done much to correct such superficiality of treatment. Political historians could go much further than they hitherto have in clarifying for us the forces which have made possible the co-operative system that is the United States of America. And in this process of rewriting our history, they may be prompted in their search for the relevant factors by an awareness of the contrast offered by Russian experience. Moreover, in seeking the key elements for explaining our own relatively successful evolution of a large-scale co-operative effort, they may also hit upon the elements that must enter into co-operation in international terms.

American history, I think, has been oriented too much to the study of conflict and disagreement. Its true accomplishment is union and co-operation. Our history books tell us of the struggle between Federalists and Republicans; the "Era of Good Feeling," we are told, was ill-named; Jacksonian Democracy was a great upsurge of protest; the war between the states has long held the imagination of historians. This bloody aberration has been much more fascinating, apparently, than the more highly significant victories along the road to reunion.⁵ The discontents voiced by the populace are better


⁵ The admirable volume by Paul Buck, entitled The Road to Reunion, is a notable exception to this statement. It brings into clear focus a highly relevant viewpoint.
documented than the welding together of groups and interests into the most productive economy that the world has ever seen. Political power has, in fact, been an enormously constructive force in our history; yet its dangers and abuses are more fully recorded than its creative side. It is curious to recall that Ostrogorski was so blinded by his preconceptions that, after an exhaustive study of American political institutions, he arrived at the conclusion that God took care of drunkards, little children, and the United States of America; yet many students of American political democracy have essentially no more to offer in their interpretation of our past. The historian should be able greatly to augment our understanding of the nature of government by illuminating for us the sources and conditions of political power both within the state and between states. What can rulers effectively accomplish? What have been the conditions that have made power effective?

It is all the more important to understand in historical terms our relative success in building a co-operative system, since we face at the present time the task of accommodating within our institutions three developments which may pose difficulties for American political democracy. Is there any wisdom from the past that will enable us more effectively to deal with centralized administration, with military affairs, and with scientific development? These phenomena raise questions which are not new in human experience, but they are questions which have not loomed large for the United States until recent years.

History has seldom been written with sufficient attention to operational and managerial problems. It has often been written with attention focused upon great leaders but without the wealth of detail that enables the reader to understand clearly just how such men went about their day-by-day tasks. We are told more about the mind and the emotions, the philosophy and the faith of great men than we are about their operating methods. We can find books, for example, on Lincoln as a man or as a philosopher politician, or father and husband; but to understand Lincoln as an administrator we must read between the lines of his numerous biographies. A few years ago, I spent some time canvassing biographical literature, looking for data of this sort in the lives of statesmen. The findings were meagre. Pringle's admirable biography of Taft, for example,
reveals Taft as judge and as politician, but it does not pretend to focus upon Taft as an organizer and executive. Philip Jessup's excellent biography of Elihu Root\(^7\) gives a clear picture of Root's dealings with Congress but offers virtually nothing upon his relations with his administrative subordinates or co-workers. My conclusion, after surveying quite a number of volumes was twofold: (1) that biographers did not include in their conceptual scheme of research the relevant questions for dealing with administrative relationships; and, (2) that the records available to them probably revealed inadequately the information needed for analyzing how executive functions were performed. But, of these two reasons, the first, I think, is more important.

When historians ask the relevant questions of their data, they generally succeed in finding at least partial answers. If, for example, a biographer used the concepts presented by Chester Barnard in his *Functions of the Executive*, he would find leads that would be most rewarding. Biographers have been immensely influenced by the conceptual scheme of Sigmund Freud; historians have been influenced by the conceptual schemes of Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, and other great thinkers who have advanced fundamental hypotheses with respect to nature, to society, or to human personality; but, by and large, it seems to me American history has been written within the conceptual scheme of nineteenth century individualism and eighteenth century rationalism. Nationalism has provided another fundamental schema. What would be our picture of American history if, for example, a frame of reference were applied which envisaged society as a co-operative system and which recognized the great weight of irrational factors? The work of Elton Mayo and Lloyd Warner, for instance, has yet to be reflected in historical research. Administrative history, in the terms applied here, would envisage concepts such as those developed by more forward-looking social psychologists and social anthropologists as well as by our most sophisticated students of business and governmental organization. It would enable us better to understand how men have worked together as social beings in those co-operative undertakings which we call government and industry.

The future, I assume, will bring a continuing development of

\(^7\) Philip C. Jessup, *Elihu Root* (New York, 1938).
administrative machinery for the accomplishment of social purposes. For a peaceful future there must be international organization on an unparalleled scale. The threat of war will likewise necessitate powerful and centralized organization. Thus, reliance upon large-scale organization for the management and direction of human relations seems inevitable. Joined with this development we may expect a continuing concern with science and politics. These are more likely to provide the determinants of policy than are the forces conventionally regarded as economic. Thus, what is scientifically attainable, militarily feasible, and politically desirable, is likely to outweigh what is economically sound in terms of either a business balance sheet or a balanced national budget.

The place of bureaucracy, the role of science and technology, and of the military, now stand at the forefront of attention. How can we deal with these factors so that the needed public functions may be carried out and popular control maintained? It is obviously not the function of the historian to answer such a question, but the past may have more that is relevant than has been offered thus far. For example, in Channing's six volumes of American history only two pages are devoted to science, and administrative problems are dismissed with a few pages on the abuse of party patronage. There is an ample description of the Civil War, but problems of civil-military relationships are largely left to the reader's own inferences. This illustration is not offered in criticism of a great historian; it demonstrates rather that research is never-ending, and that scholars must constantly go back to the past if they would satisfy our desire for obtaining perspective concerning current problems.

Excellent illustrations may be drawn from Pennsylvania history. A former colleague of mine, Louis Hartz, has recently published a history of public enterprise in Pennsylvania in the last century. The following paragraphs are quoted from a letter that he wrote after reading an earlier draft of this paper.

If one went back to Pennsylvania history with a set of relevant questions in mind, surely the problem of state action in economic life would be of first importance. What would be discovered would be that the state, from the Revolution to the Civil War, embarked upon a series of economic experiments of very considerable magni-

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tude and that these have been almost entirely neglected by the corps of state historians.

Some of the most important lessons can be learned from the administrative history of the state. Great economic enterprises appeared, but the state was unable to meet the administrative tasks which accompanied them. Charter policy was hectic because the legislature insisted upon assuming too much control of it; mixed enterprise policy broke down because the state failed to provide adequate techniques for the selection of government directors on corporation boards, so that state interests were never completely represented; public works policy broke down because of the failure of the state to recognize that an independent administrative service was needed for such a large undertaking. The late forties and fifties witnessed a remarkable disenchantment with public administration, which discredited the whole idea of state economic action. There was, during the late period, the beginnings of a more modern approach to administration, recognized as necessary by Governor Porter and others, but it appeared too late to be effective. By the time of the Civil War the state had liquidated most of its mixed enterprise and public works policies. The breakdown of administration here is of clear relevance to the administrative tasks we confront now in this country.

The period prior to the Civil War in Pennsylvania witnessed a succession of technological developments which completely transformed the daily lives of the people. How did they approach this? One of the first things to be noted is that the state did not adopt a hands-off attitude. When private individuals were unwilling to finance the new techniques, the state either helped them do it or did it herself. The first of these policies was illustrated in the bounties and subsidies which it often gave to inventors and budding manufacturers, especially during war periods as during the Revolution or the War of 1812 when the growth of production was essential. The policy of outright financing by the state alone is demonstrated in the public works area when it built the first successful railroads in the state and the largest canal system in the state, patterning its activity to some extent on British experience with these problems. Subsequent technological improvements soon made the state enterprises obsolete, which meant from one angle a great loss of money but from another angle merely that the government had succeeded, by its intervention, in accelerating the pace of technological advance. Another thing to note is that technological change soon showed the state that it lived in a world of other states: the growth of new means of transportation linked Pennsylvania more tightly with other parts of the country, and the whole problem of interstate relations both in the realm of promotion and control appeared in a new and more important light.

These comments by Hartz, based upon his thorough research into Pennsylvania history, suggest the wealth of material which can be exploited in order to get a better understanding of past experience as it relates to present problems.

The effects of technological change and the contributions of scientific research are among the major determinants of American history. Yet the history of science has been a relatively neglected field of study in the United States, as Michael Kraus points out in his *History of American History*. Perhaps the most persuasive approach
to this subject is that of James B. Conant in his recently published lectures *On Understanding Science*. From the historical standpoint these lectures have been so pertinently discussed by Jacques Barzun in a recent review that the following excerpts are offered. He states that Conant's

... plea for an historical approach to scientific ideas and his enunciation of principles governing the "tactics and strategy of science" argue a general murkiness of mind on the part of the public. We are laden with the products and tinctured with the jargon of science, but laymen and scientists alike have ignored its spirit and history. ... Science, which as we keep saying is one of the most amazing births of the human spirit, has not been, in our time at least, an object of humanistic contemplation.

In urging that it should become so, Mr. Conant is going against the whole academic and industrial tradition. His small unassuming book, with its aptly chosen instances and its strong personal note, amounts to a manifesto, and it may mark an epoch in the cultural history of the twentieth century. For if science should come to be taught historically as he proposes (though at present there are not six people in the country who could so teach it) the result within a generation would be the end of our major superstitions—that science is only careful common sense; that only science is true; that it progresses evenly and forms a harmonious whole; that great scientific ideas never go beyond the evidence; that scientific "laws" explain phenomena; that science is untouched by mundane and muddled things like philosophy and letters; that scientists are dispassionate fellows who always welcome new truths and drop old ones at the touch of an odd fact; that facts are facts, and that you may know them by their family trait of being cold, hard, and stubborn.

The history of science that Mr. Conant advocates is reflective history, that is, the history of changing concepts in the several sciences, coupled with a moralizing study, so to speak, of great scientists and great experiments.9

A fresh approach to military affairs as part of the American political democracy is also needed. Military and strategic considerations have always been an aspect of foreign policy, but the interrelationship is now closer and more obvious. Wars have always greatly affected the ways and institutions of peace but their impact upon economic and social life has vastly increased. Today, nationalistic competition can be carried on by the methods of cold war, by warfare in psychological and economic terms. Civil-military relations now have a new importance, and our own history should have much to contribute to a better understanding of both the soldier's function and the citizen's duty.

The history of American military policy yet remains to be written. No field of policy today is more crucial, and yet American scholars,

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despite their interest in wars carried on by this country, have given little attention to military policy as such. Our military past needs to be revivified for the present generation, so that we may better understand the place and function of the military in a free society. The relevance of military history today needs no defense. The War Department has a young and able group of historians writing the history of World War II. This large task is to be completed within five years. The scholars thus trained should provide the historical profession with a nucleus of technically competent men who may be very influential in coming decades. The attention of historians is passing far beyond campaigns and military operations to an examination of the full implications of total war.

In conclusion, the case for renewed attention to the history of American political democracy can briefly be summarized. Political history, in explicit or implicit terms, is fundamentally concerned with political power. In the United States it presents the record of political power operating through democratic institutions. Our own preoccupation today must be with the phenomena of power. As a human and governmental problem it is as old as history, but its urgency now flows from the crisis of our times. This crisis is not simply one of current events, but of the decades recently past and the decades immediately ahead. This crisis is the product of historical forces which have long antecedents. Henry Adams has argued that “the movement from unity into multiplicity, between 1200 and 1900, was unbroken in sequence, and rapid in acceleration. Prolonged one generation longer, it would require a new social mind.” This need foretold with Adams’ remarkable perspicuity is now upon us. The question, indeed, is whether or not we have the powers of intellect and imagination to pull through. The dispersing effects of multiplicity verge upon chaos in several parts of the world. In other areas, naked power has been resorted to for imposing order at enormous human cost. In our own country, the great problem is how to organize power so that it may cope with the other power aggregates abroad in the world, and yet, at the same time, remain compatible with the tradition of freedom. If we are to develop a social mind capable of dealing with these questions, we must necessarily place great store in history and in all the other fields of learning that deal with human problems. There is some evidence for the hope that his-

tory and political science and, indeed, all the social sciences, can be
drawn closer together by the common necessity of understanding
better the nature of power and the methods of achieving social co-
operation. It is interesting to note that John Gunther, in his travels
to collect data for *Inside America*, constantly raised the question:
“What are the basic and irreversible sources of power—social power,
economic power, political power?” At the same time, a distinguished
historian, Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, also raised similar ques-
tions in his research into the Puritan oligarchy.\(^\text{11}\)

There is bound to be much concern with the organization of power
in the contemporary world. The strength of ideologies will be tested.
Bureaucratic and military organization will be of increased impor-
tance, and technological change will necessitate continuing social
adjustment. In such a period of challenge and change, the relations
of power and freedom are crucial, but the relevance of history for
promoting better understanding of these problems is all the greater
since the crises of today, urgent though they be for us, are but
another chapter in the story of human experience.

*Carnegie Corporation of New York*  
PENDLETON HERRING

**AGENDA**

*For Discussion of Mr. Herring’s Paper*

I

Mr. Herring presents a critique of the work of American political his-
torians. The first part of the discussion will be devoted to the following
points which he makes:

1. The basic interpretive concepts used are too simple and ignore much
   of present-day knowledge of human behavior.

2. These concepts likewise are provincial, written in terms of American
   intellectual isolation without reference to general political knowledge
   gained from study of other political developments, and dominated by
   a specious nineteenth century optimism.

3. In studying the basic machinery of democracy, the party system, we
   have spent too much energy on the study of conflicts, which to a large
   extent are sham battles, and have failed to grasp the co-operative,
   constructive side of party power.

4. We do not know how our democracy has functioned because we have no realistic concept of how parties function, of where power lies, of how government is administered, of how attitudes toward scientific discovery and technological advance are created for government or of how military policy has been or may be developed. In these days when government is called upon to assume vast responsibilities, particularly in fields of scientific, technological, and military operation, is too little historical data available?

5. Is Herring right in placing such emphasis upon relevance, particularly relevance to contemporary problems? Is the historian, on the contrary, responsible for studying the past in terms of what concerned the past, rather than in terms of contemporary and future problems?

II

As one of the purposes of this conference is to consider as many new possibilities of thought and research in the field as time will permit, it is hoped that the conferees will present their individual views as to the most fruitful approaches to the problem of more effective work in the field of the history of American political democracy.

Relevance*

The discussion of Mr. Herring's paper revolved around his plea for relevance as the historian's guide in settling his problems. There was much doubt expressed about the implications of this device. Historians recognize the fact that many of their associates in the social science field, concerned as they are with contemporary analysis and prediction, wish history to assume a role particularly helpful to them. They appear to cast history as an encyclopedia topically arranged so as to supply the most possible information most quickly to those studying contemporary problems. Such a purpose for history was defended, but on the other hand it was contended that historical writing dominated by such relevance is not the real task of the historian.

There were likewise fears in the way, fears that this doctrine of relevance might cause the historian to seek to justify current public policies and even tempt him to become propagandist. Examples were cited to show how past attempts to use the principle of relevance had produced history so distorted by contemporary emotionalism as to be practically worthless today. Herring's illustrations of what he meant by relevance were described as merely his personal choices and it was suggested that the choices of other historians could be equally valid. Such interpretation of relevance would not bring any real consensus regarding proper objectives.

It was quite evident that most of the conferees would give but limited acceptance to relevance, and rather felt that the historian was responsible

* Synopsis of discussion of Mr. Herring's paper.
for re-creating the various epochs of the past and interpreting them as growing out of and contributing to those which precede and follow. Historians should try to be as independent of the present as possible. It was asserted that history really depended largely upon the evidence of the past which happened to survive; that much of this evidence was preserved because pedantic antiquarians had wandered about promiscuously collecting evidence guided only by a quixotic sense of irrelevance. Apprehension was voiced that certain standards of relevance which seemed to be fixed ideas on the part of publishers, foundations, and university authorities might destroy a source of historical insight.

Those arguing most strongly for historical independence maintained that relevance had some influence in shaping the working hypotheses which were essential to historians, but preferred to believe that there were other influences essential to the selection of these concepts basic to the historian’s work. One conferee deplored the stimulus which this doctrine of relevance would give to the introduction of “presentism” into history. He held that the historian’s task was to study each of the epochs of the past in terms of its totality of interests and activities and thereby to determine the significance of its achievements, not just to pick and choose according to present standards of importance. Succeeding generations of historians would inevitably find in these epochs phases insufficiently covered and would then seek data to throw light on these dark spots. As a result, substantial contributions would be made continually and properly, undistorted by the false perspective of “presentism.”

If there was any consensus, it was that relevance had an important role to play but that there were various types of relevance. Long range, carefully considered relevance had value, whereas hasty, carelessly chosen criteria based upon the startling things of the moment might be harmful. It was admitted that a certain amount of relevance was inevitable, that there were bound to be varieties of problems, in the selection of some of which relevance would dominate and rightly so. The main danger to be avoided was any attempt to go all-out for relevance.

In the course of the discussion Mr. Herring clarified his views by this statement:

“I am not talking about ‘presentism.’ It is a new word, and I welcome it, but the point I have in mind is that it seems to me—and there I leave it to you as historians—that we are turning a corner, entering into a new period, where we have to ask again some of the questions that were so well asked, so well dealt with, and so well answered in our own great historical tradition.

“I am not suggesting that we follow any one single fixed frame of reference. Those points that I made . . . were just concepts that occurred to me that might have some relevance, if you grant that there are more perplexing problems ahead of us now in determining what is important. I realize that no man’s framework is going to be accepted by others.”