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A SCIENCE OF AMERICAN HISTORY

The prospect of a science of history that would chart the past and enable the future to be projected has invariably intrigued the historian. Technically, this would leave history unencumbered by its mass and the historian concerned only with lines of development delineated by historical science. With the road map of the future before him, the status of the historian would grow as indispensable counselor of politicians and statesmen, bringing the science of human development to bear upon their deliberations. Henry Adams imagined a situation in which state and church, capital and labor, and all other important social groupings and institutions would ask anxiously of the historian: Am I justified in history and will I live on?

The movement toward a science of history, which had its most significant development toward the last two decades of the nineteenth century, coincided with the professionalization of historical study. Throughout most of the nineteenth century and before, history had been the province of those who regarded it as primarily a branch of literature. The best of the literary historians did no injustice to the muse, since they were as discriminate in their use of sources as they were careful in their stylistic presentation. The last quarter of the century witnessed the development of professionally trained American historians, many of whom attended German graduate schools. These historians were in-

clined to associate the development of a science of history with the growth of professional prestige and aspired to a utilitarian history in an increasingly practical era. They were less interested in attracting and entertaining a relatively large reading public than were their predecessors, such as Francis Parkman and William Hickling Prescott. Indeed, the strain of romanticism which had attracted the public to early nineteenth-century historiography was considered by the professional historian to be superfluous, if not unsuited, to a scientific era.

Scientific historiography had broader ambitions than narrative pace, dramatic presentation, or a large readership—goals considered somewhat unimportant compared to the discovery of a law, such as Darwin's in biology, that would unify all human history.

Although the heyday of scientific history was the late nineteenth century, the belief that there was law in history, even if not necessarily scientific law, existed earlier. George Bancroft wrote of God as manifest in American history, and national destiny as controlled by his law. "The movements of humanity are governed by law," Bancroft said, and "the character of science attaches to our pursuits." Even in the literary histories of Parkman and John Lothrop Motley, the triumph of the Anglo-Saxon, the Protestant, and democracy over the non-Anglo-Saxon, the Catholic, and monarchism was, if not exactly determined by historical law, inherent in the unfolding of events.

Toward the middle of the century, the ideas of Jeremy Bentham and Auguste Comte began to influence American historiography and made themselves apparent, particularly in the work of Richard Hildreth, John W. Draper, and, somewhat later, Henry Adams. Hildreth's *History of the United States, 1497–1789,* which was published around 1851, was background for a more comprehensive effort to create "an Inductive Science of Man" in accordance with the principles of Benthamite utilitarianism. Comte's positivism and Henry T. Buckle's theory of the relation between environment and human evolution had important influence upon John W. Draper's *Intellectual Development of Europe* as well as on Draper's work in American history.

The scientific historiography of the late nineteenth century reflected these earlier patterns. John W. Burgess, with a doctorate from Göttingen and an interest in scientific history, wrote of God's will in history manifest in the victory of the North in the Civil War. The Newtonian universe of John Fiske, who was a popularizer of scientific history, if somewhat more complex than the world which "the Lord's Remem-

brancers" described for Puritan readers, was nonetheless "Providentially" determined. Fiske's God was a master mechanic governing through natural law rather than by direct, personal intervention, as did the God of the Puritan historians. The Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, and democrat were no less triumphant in the deterministic sequences of these writers than in the more leisurely teleology of Parkman and Motley. Certain hypotheses which were applied to American history by scientific historians during the twentieth century—regionalism, sectionalism, and geographic determinism; the frontier theory; economic determinism—were at least anticipated by earlier nineteenth-century historians. Finally, fact-finding and the intelligent, accurate, and discriminate use of sources, essentials of scientific historiography, were not altogether wanting in earlier American historiography.

But there were also important differences between the older historiography and the newer scientific pattern which grew out of the cumulative impact of developments in nineteenth-century science. Lyell's *Principles of Geology,* Lamarck's theory of development, and Von Baer's law in embryology were preliminary to Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), which rooted man in nature and biological evolution and encouraged the study of mankind along naturalistic lines. Equally revolutionary discoveries were made in physics, particularly in thermodynamics, which resulted in the integration of biology and physics, the organic and inorganic, in a common energy system representing the primal force of an interrelated universe.

Thought, too, was a form of energy, as Henry Adams pointed out. Gustav Fechner, a year after the publication of Darwin's epic work, announced that man's mind could be studied scientifically and measured quantitatively, establishing in effect the science of psychology. In 1874 Ernest Brucke in his *Lectures on Physiology* developed the theory of the living organism as a dynamic system governed by the laws of chemistry and physics. Brucke exerted an important influence on Freud, who in the 1890's began to evolve a dynamic psychology which, according to Calvin Hall, "studies the transformations and exchanges of energy within the personality." The aspiration of late nineteenth-century scientific history was to create a physiobiological synthesis embracing mankind and the stars. The mechanistic world systems evolved by European scholars like Edward Buchner, Jacob Moleschott, Wilhelm Ostwald, Ernst Haeckel, and Herbert Spencer had their counterparts among American historians in the work of John Fiske and Henry

Adams. To these men, history represented a continuum with the universe of nature and, like nature, was supposedly governed by law.

It is understandable, therefore, that Charles McLean Andrews wrote retrospectively of this era as a time when the historian pursued "his experiments just as does the investigator in the scientific laboratory."

As a preliminary methodological step, the historian, like the scientist, had to assemble the facts. In gathering data, the scientific historian made a particular point of deriving facts from original sources, a technique which was stressed by their German mentors, Bluntschli and Erdmannsdorffer among others, in whose seminars they studied. As has been pointed out before, this was by no means an original development, since earlier American historians like Bancroft and Hildreth were not inclined to play fast and loose with historical data. What scientific methodology contributed at this time was less the kind of factual accuracy which the best of the earlier historians took for granted than a mystique about historical data in which the facts would yield meaning to the impartial historian, provided that his researches were sufficiently painstaking. As monograph succeeded monograph, it was half expected that as a result of so much diligent research into narrow segments of the past a historical law inherent in the data of history would emerge as a result of the additive process alone.

Second, the scientific historians had implicit faith in the comparative method enabling them to classify data "to the fullest extent possible." The comparative method had been used by Cuvier in zoölogy, Lyell in geology, Muller in philology, and was now being applied to history. In 1874, Sir Henry Maine predicted that this method would open a new world to the historical investigator "and that not an isolated world, a world shut up within itself, but a world in which times and tongues and nations which seemed parted poles asunder, now find each one its own place, its own relation to each other, as members of one common primaeval brotherhood."

Employing the comparative method, scientific historians discovered seeming similarities among American, German, and English institutions, leading to the conclusion that these institutions had a common origin among prehistoric Aryan peoples whose very existence the scientific historians postulated rather than proved. American institutions were derived supposedly from this original race as a consequence of Aryo-Teutonic migrations from an original Aryan homeland to Germany; thence to England by Anglo, Saxon, and Jute invaders in the

seventh century; and ultimately to New England by the Puritans in the seventeenth century. The United States therefore was regarded as the latest homeland of the Aryo-Teutonic peoples who deposited the Aryan institutional seed upon New England's shores. History, concluded Herbert Baxter Adams, most ardent proponent of the Teutonic hypotheses, "should not be content with describing effects when it can explain causes. It is just as improbable that free local institutions should spring up without a germ along American shores as that English wheat should have grown here without planting."

As Adams' statement indicates, analogies borrowed from biology were crucial to the theory of the Aryo-Teutonic theory of the origin of American nationality. Racial continuity among the Aryo-Teutonic peoples insured the recapitulation of the original Aryan political heritage in each new homeland. The first generation of American scientific historians, committed to the theory of the Aryo-Teutonic origins of American nationality, wrote in terms of the biological evolution of the Aryan institutional "seed": its being "transplanted" to Germany, England, and the United States; "germinating" into the institutions of the New England town and the New England states; and, finally, into the Constitution of the United States. More than one scientific historian saw the American Constitution as the culmination of Aryan political evolution.

The stronghold of this theory was Herbert Baxter Adams' seminar at Johns Hopkins. It was also taught by Moses Colt Tyler and Andrew D. White at Cornell and by Albert Bushnell Hart at Harvard. Through the widely read histories of John Fiske, the Teutonic theory became familiar to general readers. So wide has been the acceptance of Teutonism, wrote Charles McLean Andrews, "and so strongly installed is it in the minds of both students and readers that it might seem more bold than discreet to raise the question regarding the soundness of the theory."

Scientific history in the late nineteenth century was also influenced by discoveries in the field of physics. "If the historian," wrote Henry Adams in 1876, "will only consent to shut his eyes for a moment to the microscopic analyses of personal motives and idiosyncracies, he cannot but become conscious of a silent pulsation that commands his respect, a steady movement that resembles in its mode of operation the mechanical operation of nature herself." One of the aims of Adams' *History of the United States during the Jefferson and Madison Administrations*

was to grasp this "silent pulsation," to ascertain the natural laws underlying the development of the American nation between 1800 and 1817, and to predict lines of future national evolution. Adams assumed that there was linear progress in history that was not only measurable in the past but predictable in the future. "With almost the certainty of a mathematical formula, knowing the rate of increase of population and of wealth [the American people] could read in advance their economical history for at least a hundred years." The "movement of thought," continued Adams "was equally well defined"; "the character of people and government was formed; the lines of their activity were fixed."

Despite the great expectations of those who tried to make a science of history, the late nineteenth-century attempt to apply the laws of the physical and biological universe to history yielded no impressive results. Critics soon pointed out that there was no necessary continuum between nature and society and that, even if there were, the laws applicable to one field are not necessarily applicable to the other. In addition, the comparative method, a mainstay of scientific history, began to be recognized as a device of dubious value to the historian. Analogies, wrote Edward Channing, between American institutions and the institutions of the primitive Germanic tribes were not identities, nor were analogous institutions descended from one another. "The argument," said Channing, "that because a New England town and a German village were each surrounded by a defensive wall, the one is descended from the other, proves too much. A similar line of argument would prove the origin of New England towns to be the Massai enclosure of Central Africa." Slowly but surely, critical scholarship undermined the main props of the Teutonic theory of the origins of American institutions. Within a very few years, the Teutonic hypothesis survived mainly as a historical archaism, cropping up occasionally, and as late as 1921, in unexpected places like James Truslow Adams' *History of Southampton*.

Henry Adams' attempt to apply the laws of physics to history was equally unproductive. It is true that Adams' history has been much read and much admired, but mainly for reasons other than its scientific pretensions. Nevertheless, Adams persisted in the effort to discover law in history. In 1909, by substituting devolution for Darwinian and Spencerian evolution, Adams premised a theory of history upon the second law of thermodynamics that Lord Kelvin had propounded in the middle of the nineteenth century. According to Kelvin, the universe was declining progressively in energy, and Adams, who considered thought a form

of energy, concluded that mankind was becoming increasingly incapable of responding creatively to environmental challenge. Despite the fact that, at the time of the writing of "The Rule of Phase Applied to History," the second law of thermodynamics was held invalid by most physicists, Adams made it the basis of calculations leading to the conclusion that by 1921, or at the latest 1924, thought would have reached the limit of its possibilities and mankind would descend rapidly into chaos.

Adams' application of "the rule of phase" to history represented the dying gasp of the late nineteenth-century effort to establish a science of history based on the laws of biology and physics. Adams pronounced what amounted to an epitaph on this movement when he wrote in 1910 that the idea that history was "a process of mental evolution . . . controlled, like the evolution of any series of chemical or electrical equilibria, by one general formula" left "no followers, no school, no tradition."

In the present century the effort toward a science of history continued sporadically and with the bulk of the members of the historical profession unconvinced. William M. Sloane, in 1912, comparing history and the natural sciences with respect to predictability, argued that the sciences which claimed to be the most exact achieved "at best but a more or less close approximation to prediction, a higher or lower degree of probability." History, Sloane went on to say, might match or approximate the probability of the natural sciences if research revealed enough of the factual background. A few years later, Edward Cheyney revealed six inherently moral, as distinct from mechanical or biological, historical laws: the law of the continuity of history, the law of impermanence in history, the law of the interdependence of mankind, the law of the inevitability of democracy, the law of the necessity of free consent to government, and the law of moral progress. Cheyney also believed that once the historian grasped the laws of history he could act "with the same intelligence and precision and anticipation of success as the physicist, engineer, and cattle breeder." The last important effort to establish a science of history was by the Marxists, who, mainly in the 1930's (there had been earlier efforts in this direction), attempted to hitch American development to their universal dialectic, again without success and without significant following.

Opposition to the principle of historical law by the bulk of the historical profession derives from the belief that the great diversity of factors

entering into a given historical situation makes prediction or extensive generalization impossible. It is also argued that the data of nature are static and repeatable and may be stated in terms of law, whereas the data of history are progressive and unrepeatable and permit of no easy formulization. Finally, there are some historians, fewer in number than those taking the above positions, who view historical knowledge as inherently subjective—so subjective, in fact, as to provide insubstantial foundation for presumably objective historical law.

The foundation stone of the scientific history of the Teutonists was the fact. The latter, in addition to being immutable, allegedly possessed a natural order. Consequently, when the disciples of the so-called "New History," about 1910, challenged not only the ordering of the facts but also "the being of a fact," they mounted a two-sided attack upon the scientific concepts of their predecessors.

Writing to Frederick Jackson Turner in 1910, Carl Becker recalled that when he was Turner's student, the latter had given him to understand "that no one . . . knew 'exactly what happened,'" and Turner replied that he had wanted to accomplish just that. In questioning "the being of a fact" and by describing the fact "as not planted on the solid ground of fixed conditions" but as being "itself a part of the changing currents, the complex and interacting influences of the time, deriving its significance as a fact from its relation to the deeper-seated movements of the age," Turner was challenging the very foundation of scientific history as evolved by the Teutonists. Because, if the facts were not fixed immutably, then the superstructure that derived from them—comparative method, historical evolution, and biological basis of institutional continuity—inevitably collapsed. To Becker, the "facts of history whatever they once were" were "only mental images or pictures which the historian makes in order to comprehend it." The continuity of history, Becker concluded, was largely subjective with the historian.

Such extreme historical relativism, however, ruled out the possibility not only of historical law but also of true historical knowledge. Neither Becker nor Turner pushed this position to its ultimate and, from the point of view of historiography, totally negative conclusion. Instead, Turner, in his presidential address to the American Historical Association in 1910, used relativism as a springboard for attacking not "the being of a fact" but those who derived historical law from a priori evidence and exploited history for "justificatory appendices." The pathway of history, Turner warned, "is strewn with the wrecks of 'known

and acknowledged truth' . . . due not only to defective analyses and imperfect statistics, but also to the lack of critical historical methods, of insufficient historical mindedness . . . to failure to give due attention to the relativity and transience of the conditions from which . . . laws were deduced."

Although the historian could not tell for certain what went on in the past, continued Turner, he could at least try honestly to find out. This required conscientious effort to understand the material of history and, along with such an effort, use of the hypothesis (more tentative than historical law) to guide the historian's probings. In formulating and refining the hypothesis, the historian would be aided by concepts derived from the social sciences: economics, sociology, psychology, and anthropology. The gist of Turner's statement is that, if history could not be made into a science, it might at least be infiltrated, through the formulation of hypotheses, by allied disciplines for the purpose of finding truer understanding.

The hypothesis, if less ironclad than historical law, was still more a commitment to a given point of view than simple induction from facts. It assumed that the process of inquiry in historical research began less with a problem of interpretation presented by a body of empirical data and more with theory whose validity had been established. Theoretically, then, the hypothesis committed the historian more to a point of view than the "neutralist" claim that the facts of history "speak for themselves" and that the narration of events without reference to a specific philosophy of history precluded bias. In practice, however, it is difficult to say whether the conscious use of a hypothesis made for greater or less bias. The pledges of impartiality that adorn the prefaces of historical studies are not always honored in their texts, and historians who deliberately avoid a philosophy of history do not by virtue of that fact strip off personal prejudices.

It cannot be said that the major historical hypotheses have lived up to the expectations of the disciples of the "New History." In the last fifty years or so major hypotheses in American history adopted as determinants first the frontier, then economics, geography, section, and region, and, finally, the city. These hypotheses, certainly in their more sweeping statements (substantial exegetical literature has emerged as to what Turner and Beard really meant), have not withstood the corrosion of criticism.

The frontier hypothesis, given classic expression by Turner in 1893,

argued that to our own day "American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explains American development." Subsumed under this major hypothesis were several corollary theses: that "the sanative influences of the free spaces of the West were destined to ameliorate labor's condition, to afford new hopes and new faith to a pioneer democracy and to postpone the problem" of the class struggle; that "the most important effect of the frontier has been in the promotion of democracy here and in Europe"; that "the frontier is productive of individualism . . . [which] from the beginning promoted democracy."

Not until the late 1920's did the frontier hypothesis come under heavy attack. At that time, Charles A. Beard and Louis M. Hacker criticized it for minimizing such factors as urbanization and industrialization, class and economic forces. Carter Goodrich, Sol Davison, Murray Kane, and Fred Shannon demonstrated during the next decade that the frontier was not the "safety valve" for eastern workers in periods of depression, as Turner had implied. Also, in this period, Benjamin Wright, Jr., argued that democratic development in America was less the result of the impact of the frontier than the consequence of an over-all nineteenth-century democratic trend that embraced western Europe as well as the United States. In 1941 Turner's terminology and concepts were examined vigorously by G. W. Pierson and were found to be most imprecise. "In what it proposes," concluded Pierson, "the frontier hypothesis needs painstaking revision. By what it fails to mention, the theory today disqualified itself as an adequate guide to American development."

The classic application of the economic hypothesis to a major historical event is Charles A. Beard's *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution,* which was published in 1913. Until very recently this volume appeared to have withstood time and historical criticism a great deal better than did the frontier hypothesis. Not that historians failed to recognize weaknesses of detail in the thesis and in its monistic view of human motivation. Indeed, Beard himself in the 1935 edition of his work, as well as in his other writings, attempted to meet and reconcile some of the criticisms that had been made. But for many, Robert E. Brown's line-by-line analysis of Beard's work—concluding with the indictment that "if historians accept the Beard thesis . . . they must do so with the full knowledge that their acceptance is founded on an 'act of faith' not

an analysis of historical method, or that they are indulging in a 'noble dream' not history"—was something of a revelation.

To Beard, the economic interpretation of history was "as nearly axiomatic as any proposition can be." If, said Beard, you were to find that "men owning substantially the same amounts of the same kind of property were equally divided on the matter of adoption or rejection—it would then become apparent that the Constitution had no ascertainable relation to economic groups or classes, but was the product of some abstract causes remote from the chief business of life—gaining a livelihood." But on the other hand, if you discovered "that substantially all of merchants, money lenders, security holders, manufacturers, shippers, capitalists, and financiers and their professional associates are to be found on one side in support of the Constitution and that substantially all or a major part of the opposition came from the non-slaveholding farmers and the debtors—would it not be pretty conclusively demonstrated that our fundamental law was not the product of an abstraction known as 'the whole people' but of a group of economic interests which must have expected beneficial results from its adoption?"

Brown's criticism of Beard is significant not only in its detail but also because of its implication of the dangers of shaping history by hypothesis: the tendency to claim too much and, in the excitement of developing a point, to lapse into grievous historiographic fault. Beard, alleged Brown, on occasion quoted out of context and excluded quotations that would not sustain his thesis, relied too much upon secondary works, substituted innuendo for fact, used evidence from one period of history to justify conclusions about another, and used emotion-laden words like "coup d'état" imprecisely. Brown's critique of Beard has amounted to the demolition of a historiographic style. And yet it was in the pattern of the declining popularity of the economic hypothesis since the early 1930's, another of the results of which was to reduce Vernon L. Parrington's economically determined *Main Currents in American Thought* to pretty much of a shambles.

The geographical, sectional, and regional hypotheses, like other hypotheses, were anticipated to some extent before their more definitive statement. As early as 1793 Jedidiah Morse, "father of American geography," indicated the geographic boundaries of the "Grand Divisions of the United States." In 1891 Nathaniel S. Shaler's *Nature and Man in America* stressed the role of geographic influences as determining factors in American history, a point of view which also found expression

in the work of Ellen C. Semple, disciple of the anthrogeographer, Ratzel. By 1900 the sectional and regional interpretations, which embraced a complex of factors generally within a geographic framework, was, according to Fulmer Mood, "well established at the University of Wisconsin."

Despite the impetus to sectional and regional studies through the publication of Turner's *The Significance of Sections in American History* and the usefulness of the regional and sectional concepts in history, the social sciences, and government, regionalism, as a hypothesis in historiography, suffers from the historian's inability to define the region and from the fact that there is no unanimity of lay or scholarly opinion on a single scheme of regional classification. Thus, one of the criticisms of Walter P. Webb's significant regional study, *The Great Plains,* was its alleged failure to delimit properly the Great Plains region. Like the frontier hypothesis, the sectional and regional concepts are considered too all-embracing, too inclusive of other factors, too vague in what they embrace, to enable the historian to use them as precise tools of historical interpretation.

The latest of the major historical hypotheses is A. M. Schlesinger's urban interpretation of American history, which was advanced in 1940 and urged "reconsideration of American history from the urban point of view." According to Schlesinger, Turner in his zeal to correct older notions like the Teutonic theory of American institutional origins "overlooked another order of society which, rivalling the frontier even in the earliest days, eventually became the major force. The city marched westward with the outposts of settlement, always injecting exacting elements into pioneer existence, while in the older sections it steadily extended its domain over politics, economics, and all the other interests of life. The time came when Turner himself confessed the need of 'an urban reinterpretation of our history.' A true understanding of America's past demands this balanced view—an appreciation of the significance of both frontier and city."

The urban interpretation of history is open to the same kind of challenge as the other hypotheses which we have considered, insofar as it offers a partial and incomplete picture of the American past. According to Schlesinger, "the city no less than the frontier has been a major factor in American civilization. Without an appreciation of the role of both the story is only half told." Contrary to the implications of this statement, however, there are other possibilities of interpretation besides

the frontier and urban hypotheses. And when Schlesinger writes that "the underlying strife between city and country led . . . to the formation of the first national parties under the constitution," we can see some justifiable basis for William Diamond's criticism of the urban interpretation on the ground that city and urban, like region and section, are too broad in their connotation to be useful as historical determinants.

Disenchantment alike with historical law and sweeping historical hypothesis has caused a few American historians to adopt an extreme antiscientist position and others to lean in that direction. This is reinforced by the current political climate, wherein historical determinism is looked upon almost suspiciously as a denial of free will and free choice in human affairs and, if not actually antidemocratic, as at least having the potential of being so.

There has been emphasis, almost prideful emphasis, upon the uniqueness of the subject matter of history and its emancipation from the positivistic philosophy that gave rise not only to historical law but to the social sciences as well. Distinctiveness, unrepeatability, and radical individuality are considered the very essence of historiographical data. Dr. Lloyd Sorenson, writing in the *American Quarterly,* has ventured to predict that the revolution in American historiography brought about by the late nineteenth-century impetus toward historical science will be repeated in the current era with the development of the antiscientific historiographical tradition of *Historismus* "and an unnamed development beyond *Historismus*" that is rooted in the work of Wilhelm Dilthey, Heinrich Rickert, Ernst Troeltsch, and Frederick Meinecke. *Historismus* is regarded by Sorenson as the antithesis of "the futile attempt of historical scientists since the enlightenment to force historical reality into the alien forms of natural reality. . . ."

In addition to individualizing tendencies that may be inherent in historicism, (I use the word *may* advisedly because I believe that Sorenson has underestimated the element of synthesis in Meinecke's statement of the theory of historicism)[1] antiscientism is strengthened by historical relativism, which, as we have seen, places the facts of history at the mercy of perception, with the result that all interpretations of history became equally valid or invalid.

Fortunately, neither extreme individualizing tendencies nor extreme relativism are much manifest in American historiography. Charles A.

1. Selection from Meinecke's *Values and Causalities in History* in Fritz Stern (ed.), *The Varieties of History from Voltaire to the Present* (New York, 1957), p. 272.

Beard made it plain that he was not the relativist he was accused of being as a result of publication of "That Noble Dream." Indeed, Beard attacked relativist extremism, including aspects of the New Deal philosophy. Although Beard once pushed anti-semitism to the point of rejecting the concept of cause in history, he never attempted to write history without introducing causal concepts. Beard never lost faith in scientific method insofar as it enabled the historian to seek out the facts of history. "The inquiring spirit of history," he wrote, "using the scientific method, is the chief safeguard against the tyranny of authority, bureaucracy, and brute power."

American historians are far from resolving the objectivist-relativist argument. They have evolved, however, an eminently practical compromise by learning, as Oscar Handlin said in 1953, to live with relativism. "Historians once disturbed by the discovery that history could not achieve scientific objectivity or finality have learned to work with materials which entail subjective involvement on the part of the historian and to accept the fact that completely objective truth is unobtainable." Regardless of the ultimate validity of such a reconciliation, it has apparently enabled the American historian to manage his materials so that relativism has not had anything like the disintegrating effect upon the American historical tradition that, according to Hannah Arendt,[2] it has had upon European historiography and the European historical tradition.

Although impressed by the uniqueness of historical phenomena and skeptical of historical law and hypothesis, the American historian has not surrendered his faith in generalization. Louis Gottschalk has said that "no honest scholar need feel ashamed because his generalizations are not golden or may not even glitter; even a common-sense truth or a 'law' so modified and conditioned as to be a truism is better than an untruth or an unexamined platitude." The historian's process of generalizing is aided by his borrowing from the social sciences. Applying social science methodology to history is as old, if not older, than the so-called "New History" of 1910. The subject has been treated most fully in 1954 in *The Social Sciences in Historical Study: A Report of the Committee on Historiography of the Social Science Research Council.* This is an effective summary of the treatment of social science concepts that the historian might draw upon. But as to how he might draw—that is, concerning the technique of integration—the report is vague. "There

2. "History and Immortality," *Partisan Review* (Winter, 1957), pp. 11–35.

are no neat, well-formulated social science methods that can be learned and applied [to history] without scrutiny and no social science concept either implies or involves any deviation from the strict rules of procedure that are the hallmark of sound historical research." This conclusion would seem to be in keeping with David Riesman's contention that, compared "to the new specialities that have emerged at the juncture of physics and chemistry or of physics and biology, the social sciences have been curiously static in the relations they engendered among each other." And, one might add, the relationship between history and the social sciences has been more static still.

The barriers to effective integration between history and the behavioral and social sciences are essentially these. The social science approach is essentially microcosmic and centers in the relationship frequently lending itself to quantitative expression, between a relatively few phenomena in a very limited and, for the most part, contemporary time sequence. The historian's approach, on the other hand, is macrocosmic, embracing a great number of variables distributed rather widely in space and time, whose interaction can rarely be precisely determined and, as a rule, cannot be measured quantitatively. In addition, certain of the methods of the social and behavioral sciences—such as interviewing, polling, and other aspects of sociological inquiry that require the presence of the subject—are useless to the historian, who, concerned with mankind's past, cannot ask questions of the dead. In addition, the historian has certain reservations about the methodology and technique of the social sciences. The historian tends to be more skeptical than the behavioral scientist of the values of psychological and psychoanalytical techniques in investigation, of the superiority of the quantitative measurements of the social scientist to his own informed guesses. The pollsters, Henry David asserts, rightly or wrongly, had they been around in 1800, could not have done a better job of estimating public opinion in the United States than did Henry Adams by using the historian's traditional sources.

On the other hand, insights contributed by the social sciences, not all of which were unanticipated by historians, have prompted increased awareness of hitherto neglected materials and new types of data, of new problems and new generalizations in historical investigation. "Prompted by the social sciences," writes Richard Hofstader, whose work is an outstanding example of the integration of historiography with behavioral and social science method, "the historian begins to

realize that matters of central concern to other disciplines force him to enlarge his conception of his own task—to place the results of social science research in much broader context."

To the extent that American history resists being categorized as a science, its public prestige has been diminished. The demand by a practical society that its experience be analyzed—so that essential tasks like predicting election returns, measuring opinion, and selling deodorants might be performed—has been met by others than the historians. Government and industry make use of sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, economists, and political scientists while, apart from a few areas of government service and an occasional business history, the historian can only teach and write books that, for the most part, do not sell at all well. The social scientists seem to have captured the public imagination. When Louis Gottschalk asserts that one of the historian's most important functions is to "check the looseness of others' generalizations about human experiences," he is describing a very necessary function. But it is not likely to impress even the informed public, which has been conditioned by a certain amount of vulgarization of the social sciences to think in terms of formula explanations of diverse social phenomena.

The historian, for the most part, does not appear to be too much concerned over what many fear is the declining status of the guild. The best of contemporary historiography is synthetic and macrocosmic, with more than a little attention paid to literary form. The historian will integrate social science research within the context of a sweeping historical narrative rather than advance such research by subjecting another small area to minute examination. The historian will shy away from group research and the problem-solving technique of the social sciences. At the same time, he upholds the non-utilitarian and individual character of historical inquiry as an "adornment of the free mind," an expression of the historian's inner creative urge rather than an attempt to fill consciously a specific social need.

In evaluating the idea of a science of American history, it should be remembered that the heritage of historiography is an ancient one with its own inner development. It would be ridiculous to deny the impact of scientific and social science development upon American historiography. There have been significant changes in American historiographic patterns from the prescientific era, but in other respects the changes have been surprisingly small.