
The Worlds of American Intellectual History

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New Directions, Then and Now*Angus Burgin*

IN DECEMBER 1977, John Higham and Paul Conkin convened a gathering to discuss the state of American intellectual history at Wingspread, a Frank Lloyd Wright house near the shores of Lake Michigan.¹ As Daniel Wickberg recently observed, the conference was held in the midst of a “wave of self-reflection” that “swept the discipline” in the late 1970s and early 1980s.² Many of the participants shared a sense that the field was in crisis, and the tenor of their conversations was fraught. For decades, the resulting volume, *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, received less attention than might have been expected based on its distinguished roster of contributors, but in recent years its name has resurfaced with increasing frequency.³ The reason for this renewed interest is clear: as intellectual historians enter into a new generational wave of self-reflection, *New Directions* offers a unique point of comparison for assessments of methodological continuity and change. To what extent do the “worlds” of intellectual historians today resemble those encountered by our predecessors nearly four decades ago?

The contributors to *The Worlds of American Intellectual History* have self-consciously eschewed this line of questioning, avoiding invocations of the Wingspread conference as either a model or a source of critical inquiry. With few exceptions, the editors have steered these essays toward the exemplary rather than the theoretical, and the programmatic rather than the retrospective. There is much to commend in such an approach: it appeals to the practice-oriented sensibility shared by most historians, and caters to a widespread desire to move beyond the disciplinary quarrels of prior generations. Cumulatively, these essays imply that the future of the field will

emerge through a set of shared questions and problems, rather than through a critical dialogue with its pasts.

This sensibility, however, is made possible by our own distinctive moment in the history of the profession. Those who return to *New Directions* will discover a very different set of assumptions about the role that a collection of essays on the state of the field should play. That conference, Higham and Conkin wrote in their initial grant application, was intended for scholars who felt “beleaguered and defensive about their specialty.”⁴ As one reviewer observed, many at the time shared an impression that American intellectual history had become “unbuttoned” and methodologically thin; in Thomas Bender’s more dire recollection, scholars were forced either to find alternatives to scholarship on such reductive topics as the “American mind” or “prepare the field for death.”⁵ In such a moment, the contributors felt the need to dwell more extensively on the approaches they would avoid than on the problems and practices they would adopt. They shared a belief that their visions for the future of the field could only emerge through a reckoning with the practices of prior generations. The vivid contrast between those assumptions and our own is indicative of a transformed social and institutional context, which has shaped intellectual historians’ perceptions of their current practices and projected futures. Understanding the trajectory of the field since *Wingspread* requires, however uneasily, historicizing ourselves.

At the time of the *Wingspread* conference, the field’s practitioners were besieged and questioned on all sides, and therefore eager to identify a positive research program that would absolve them of the practices for which their predecessors had been roundly criticized. Their posture was chastened, and their views were presented in deliberate contradistinction to those of their mentors and more senior colleagues. But such a defensive standpoint was unlikely to survive in a field that no longer found its legitimacy under constant assault. In more recent years, as American intellectual historians have grown both in numbers and influence, they have begun again to embrace the ambitions of their midcentury predecessors. The methodological parameters articulated by the participants in the *Wingspread* conference have long since begun to erode. Many of the field’s leading practitioners today are again eschewing the archive, tracing concept blocs across vast expanses of time and space, seeking to articulate the spirit of an “age,” engaging topics of contemporary political significance, and embracing the many challenges of grand synthesis. Intellectual history, for better and for worse, is once again a hubristic discipline, and its practitioners’ enthusiasm at the field’s brightening future should be tempered by caution at the prospect of re-enacting the methodological excesses of its past.

NEW DIRECTIONS IN CONTEXT

Shortly after American intellectual history came of age in the postwar era, John Higham emerged as its most attentive internal chronicler. He published the first of

many assessments of the state of the field, “The Rise of American Intellectual History,” in the *American Historical Review* only two years after completing his dissertation at the University of Wisconsin. At the time a synthetic evaluation was badly needed. Its practitioners were still viewed as innovative and perhaps even slightly subversive; as Henry May recalls, his decision to teach a course on the topic as a new professor at Berkeley felt “satisfyingly radical.”⁶ Due in part to the excitement generated by its novelty, the number of courses offered in the field was rapidly expanding.⁷ And despite the warnings of senior professors that its methods were “impossibly vague and subjective,” its leading figures were among the most admired historians of their generation.⁸ *The Growth of American Thought*, which was published in the midst of World War II by Higham’s mentor at Wisconsin, Merle Curti, was named in a poll of American historians in the early 1950s at their “most preferred” recent book. Another work of intellectual history, V. L. Parrington’s *Main Currents in American Thought*, was at the top of the list for an earlier period, and books by Joseph Dorfman, Perry Miller, and Henry Steele Commager received high rankings as well.⁹ Intellectual history had reached its apex: still perceived by many as pioneering even as its methods were increasingly adopted as the norm.

Higham’s initial treatment of the “rise” of intellectual history reflected this ambiguity in its status, intermittently representing it as exploratory and triumphant. The field was “still seeking coherence, still eluding confinement,” he wrote, even as it received accolades as the profession’s “outstanding achievement” of the preceding decade, accumulated a “very extensive” monographic literature, and generated mature syntheses on a grand scale. Higham’s agenda for its future research—a need to “explore more thoroughly the incidence and intensity of widespread, popular attitudes, each followed in its extensive ramifications through a span of time long enough to show significant transitions,” including “democracy, nationalism, individualism, class consciousness, race prejudice, anti-intellectualism, and fundamental beliefs about God and nature”—established an ambitious program for which his own forthcoming book, *Strangers in the Land*, could serve as an exemplar. Future work on these problems, Higham concluded, would help scholars along the journey toward understanding that elusive subject, the “American mind.”¹⁰ Emerging from graduate school in the midst of a field that was still defining itself, Higham’s essay glimmered with optimism at the grand themes its methods might address.

His subsequent writings provide a sensitive barometer of the evolving status of the field. In a 1954 essay in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, “Intellectual History and Its Neighbors,” he continued to juxtapose the field’s sense of excitement with its lingering methodological uncertainties, depicting its practitioners as caught between “the blessings of effervescence and the curse of confusion.” His assessment remained confident in tone and ambitious in scope: intellectual history was well positioned to serve as an “interdisciplinary enterprise” and “integrative tool,” producing works that drew on materials “from the comics as well as from the philosophers” to arrive at conclusions that were relevant to scholars in a host of contiguous disciplines.¹¹

By 1960, he observed that the field's ascendance was complete, while acknowledging that it was no longer at the vanguard of the profession.¹² Only a decade later, Higham began worrying that intellectual historians seemed to have become superannuated themselves. In *Writing American History* he announced that their work may "have passed the zenith of its influence."¹³ The eager tone of his earlier essays, in retrospect, had come to seem "embarrassing."¹⁴ The maturation of his own career now appeared, somewhat disconcertingly, to have tracked the fall of the methodology in which he was trained.

At the outset of the 1970s Higham was far from alone in his sense that the field had entered into a state of decline. Early in the decade he attended sessions at the American Historical Association and Organization of American Historians that expressed concern about its diminishing influence, and even younger scholars, such as David Hall, were beginning to speak of the need for a gathering to retrench and reassess.¹⁵ Sensitive to his own drift in other directions, Higham began to wonder if the responsibility to lead such an effort would nevertheless fall on him. "The sad fact is that the senior scholars in the field have either left it . . . or lapsed into silence," he wrote in private correspondence. "The young men and women are aching for leadership and feeling a bit lonesome. If something dramatic and heartening is not done for the intellectual historians we will all be guilty of complicity in that old and pathetic tendency of Americans to rush from one fashion to another, leaving serious enterprises in which great investments have been made to fall into neglect."¹⁶ Scholarly conventions had shifted, and to a certain extent his own interests had as well, but he continued to feel a sense of personal responsibility for his onetime field. He shared his feelings with Paul Conkin, who replied that he too worried about the "self-conscious, "lonely," and "defensive" condition of intellectual historians in recent years.¹⁷

Higham elaborated on the nature of his concerns that year in a letter to Ray Allen Billington. "During the last ten years the once fashionable assumption that ideas are the master key to understanding American history has gone out of vogue, and intellectual history no longer draws great numbers of students," he wrote. The time had arrived to evaluate the field's "assets and liabilities" and to cultivate "a closer fraternity" among its practitioners.¹⁸ In Higham's view, the experience of marginalization was leading intellectual historians to adopt new practices. They could no longer disparage social historians, as Perry Miller once did, for writing "monographs on stoves or bathtubs" instead of "fundamental themes."¹⁹ Methodological limitations that had been disregarded by an earlier generation now needed to be considered with great care, and there was little leeway for the internecine quarrels that had riven the field in the eras of Lovejoy and Miller and Curti. Higham and Conkin argued in a grant application that their goal, in contrast, was to strike a "positive note" that would provide "a demonstration of continuing vitality under adverse conditions."²⁰

In order to achieve such "vitality," some suggested that current intellectual historians would need to establish a clearer boundary between their own work and that of

preceding generations. Reviewers of the conference proposal, for instance, worried that Higham's plan to combine the event with a celebration of Merle Curti's eightieth birthday would imply that the group was "committed to certain basic propositions that need to be questioned." As one grant administrator wrote, the proposal was unlikely to receive funding unless it more clearly demonstrated that the future of the field would be severed from its past.²¹ Higham responded by acknowledging that his onetime mentor was now "a historical figure rather than an active force" and that extensive attention to his work "would be out of touch with present realities."²² The implication was clear: any recognition accorded to Curti should not signify respect for the current value of his ideas. The Wingspread conference would help intellectual historians construct a path leading away from the figure it ostensibly honored.

Higham saw the the future of the field as emerging less from internal debates among intellectual historians than from external imperatives that had become difficult to ignore. Some of those imperatives were institutional, such as the collapse of a longstanding alliance with American studies, which had resulted in a diminished audience for intellectual historians' work. Others were related to theoretical trends within the broader discipline. Foremost in the minds of many of the attendees at Wingspread was the rise of social history, which in sweeping through the profession had raised a host of new concerns about the legitimacy of prior methodologies. As Gene Wise observed, intellectual historians found themselves confronted by a long list of sins: they had maintained a facile concept of "consensus," ignored "economic exploitation, political repression, social injustice," restricted their analyses to those with a "privileged location in the social order," overlooked "intermediary social environments," and disregarded the "irrational and emotional" dimensions of human cognition.²³ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, leading figures in the field were engaged in intensive debates about how best to respond to this challenge. Some, including Dominick LaCapra, argued that the moment called for intellectual historians to become more assertive about the distinctive aspects of their work, in order to prevent "the reduction of intellectual history to a function of social history."²⁴ Others, such as Robert Darnton, urged colleagues to draw on insights from social history in reevaluating and reformulating their methods. For too long, Darnton observed, intellectual historians had assumed that they could access a "national character" by analyzing sources drawn exclusively from the "culture of middle-class whites."²⁵ Still others wrestled with these competing sensibilities, adopting a defensive posture while acknowledging that some of the subfield's conventions were now untenable. Alan Lawson's comments about the proposed conference to Paul Conkin—"I expect that many in our group will focus on ways of drawing upon, or competing with, the methods and findings of social history"—reflected this ambivalence.²⁶ Those who attended would need to determine what they should appropriate from social historians even as they reaffirmed the boundaries that held them apart.

A year after their initial funding application was declined, Higham and Conkin received the grants they needed to hold the conference. They hoped that the participants

would respond to the challenges of the moment by identifying a shared program, and their introductory and concluding essays for the resulting volume suggest that in this regard they saw the gathering as a success. Gone were the days when scholars would make easy references to an “‘American mind,’ a national ‘myth,’ a ‘climate of opinion,’ or a ‘liberal tradition,’” Higham observed.²⁷ As intellectual historians became increasingly sensitive to the source materials that their research elided, they had learned to avoid presumptions of geographic, temporal, or ideological uniformity and to reconcile themselves to the bounded nature of their analyses. They were also increasingly sensitive to the complex relationship between theory and praxis, and more inclined to explore the ways in which ideas could serve as “constraints” as well as “motives.”²⁸ In his afterword, Paul Conkin observed that the volume’s participants had absolved themselves altogether of engaging with “the role of something called ideas.”²⁹ They no longer sought to present their subjects as synecdoches for a broader culture or to grant them primacy in narratives of political change.

Laurence Veysey’s contribution to the conference, “Intellectual History and the New Social History,” summarized the situation that had emerged in the wake of these new disciplinary imperatives. “Generalizations,” he asserted, “. . . to be credible, must be extremely hard earned.”³⁰ This insight manifested itself in dueling imperatives:

- (1) a historian should not claim to be writing about a social aggregate broader than the one reflected in the evidence collected;
- (2) by some means, whether quantitative or intuitive, a historian should do everything possible to maximize the representativeness of the evidence used to describe either the behavior or the mental states of any given social aggregate.³¹

The urge to generalize should be deliberately curtailed, resulting in more circumscribed claims. But even as intellectual historians scaled back their narrative reach, they would need to expand the horizons of their research, seeking new resources that would strengthen their claims to “representativeness” within the limited communities they discussed. Murray Murphey shared Veysey’s suspicion of “grand synthesis,” arguing in his conference essay that such narratives became impossible when confronted by “so complex an entity as modern society.” If intellectual historians still wanted to connect their discrete inquiries into a unified whole, they would need to become much more attentive to institutional contexts, and more willing to incorporate “action, experience, psychological need, and social structure” into their analysis.³² Those who followed this mandate would rely on a broader range of evidence to describe a more closely bounded subject of inquiry.

Of course, any effort to broaden the evidentiary base required a capacity to engage with unfamiliar texts and archives, and historians had widely divergent understandings of what such adaptations might entail. William Bouwsma’s 1982 essay on the “History of Meaning” suggested one possibility, in which a longtime emphasis on logical treatises

would give way to an “expanded concern” with those “meanings expressed by every kind of human activity in the past.”³³ The methods of intellectual history could be applied to texts and individuals who had long fallen outside its purview. David Hall took a different approach in his *Wingspread* essay, emphasizing the new possibilities afforded by recent scholarship on the history of the book. A turn toward the material history of ideas, he suggested, would help intellectual historians consider not only elite producers of texts but also those who disseminated and read them. The “boundaries and rhythms” of such an approach were more “fluid,” he suggested, and its mode of “understanding” was “broader.” And it also carried some strategic benefits: in the combative arenas of historiographic debate, it turned one of the field’s longtime vulnerabilities into a source of strength. The idea of “collective mentality,” which had long been wielded as a “weapon” against intellectual historians, would now serve as one of their tools.³⁴

A number of the younger attendees were eager to assimilate recent developments in the discipline, but less persuaded of the need for Veysey’s conciliatory tone or Hall’s methodological departures. While sympathetic to calls for “expansive” methodologies and “bounded” claims, they suggested that such practices were largely consonant with what scholars in the subfield had long sought to achieve. By appropriating recent theoretical frameworks to validate longstanding practices, their essays suggested that methodological novelty was not the only way to respond to recent challenges. Thomas Haskell’s extensive remarks on Thomas Kuhn in “Deterministic Implications of Intellectual History” reflected this sensibility. While acknowledging the broad influence of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in the sixteen years since its publication, Haskell argued that Kuhn’s depiction of the resilience of paradigms was, outside the specific context of his analysis, hardly new: “Intellectual history has repeatedly taught that the deepest layers of assumption in human belief systems are so tenacious that they shape experience far more often than they are shaped by it.”³⁵ To Haskell, recent trends within the discipline were not wholly hostile to intellectual history; rather than trying to reinvent the subfield, he urged his colleagues to rediscover the analytical force of methods they had long used.

David Hollinger, too, was skeptical of many of the criticisms of intellectual history that had inspired Higham to convene the *Wingspread* conference. As he observed in the final footnote to his contribution, his objections to recent work were “not at all the ones that have been the most loudly proclaimed (for example, the field is elitist, excessively fascinated by ambiguity and complexity, idealist, oblivious to the social origins of ideas, and too literary).” Instead, he was eager to see work that was more rigorous, less parochial, more attuned to the sciences, and less ambiguous about its analytical focus on “the discourse of intellectuals.” The latter phrase, Hollinger thought, might help to clarify the task that intellectual historians generally undertook. In his view, a “tenacious loyalty to the particularity and density of experience” had led many works in the field to conform to a recognizable pattern. Covering a period of “two or three generations,” historians would chart “a discourse carried on predominantly in verbal form

among disputants who were essentially peers, who were cognizant of each other's views, and who shared both a language and what we could loosely call . . . a national culture." Although Hollinger was quick to acknowledge the contributions of other modes of intellectual history, he structured his essay around a defense of this specific approach.³⁶ He marshaled a rich array of recent theoretical literatures in its support: such works manifested a loyalty to Geertzian "thickness," helped intellectual history avoid "the deleterious effects of the idea-event dichotomy"; and enabled historians to adopt "Foucault's rasping, audacious, almost exasperated testimony to the substantiality of the particulars of discourse" without sharing his conviction "that these particulars are controlled by discoverable rules immune to human agency." Intellectual historians did not need to reconsider their fundamental commitments—the task was merely to articulate them more clearly, and to that end the intensity of contemporary interest in "anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, and sociology" was better seen as a benefit than a threat.³⁷

One of the ironies of *Wingspread* is that the attendees who were most sensitive to recent theoretical developments were also most protective of longstanding practices. Despite Hollinger's tonal and bibliographic differences from more alarmist colleagues like Higham and Veysey, his representation of its future did not look altogether different. The work on "the discourse of intellectuals" that he celebrated was also "bounded," adopting significant temporal, geographical, and interpersonal constraints in order to provide a thick representation of a discrete community of inquiry. Hollinger, Higham, and Veysey agreed that attempts to yield integrative themes were most prudently pursued through the careful tracking of networks of communication and affiliation, a mode of analysis that was both more exacting and less sweeping than the synthetic works that had accompanied (and aided) the field's rise to prominence. The substantial overlap between their discrete visions for the future of the field was evident in those contributions, like Thomas Bender's "The Cultures of Intellectual Life," that were less invested in the problem of demarcating the old from the new. Like Hollinger, Bender was self-reflective about his interest in "communities of discourse"; like Veysey, he was eager to find points where "intellectual history and social history touch," through both the history of the professions and the history of local communities.³⁸ Bender's work suggested that intellectual historians could learn from the insights of their contemporary critics without abandoning the methods of their predecessors altogether.

Even as many of the participants at *Wingspread* coalesced around such an approach, some vocal dissenters emerged. In his contribution to the *Wingspread* volume, Gordon Wood vigorously defended a history of ideas that engaged with social aggregates, arguing that "a kind of zoom lens" was required to capture the dynamic interplay between individuals and a broader culture. In abandoning the wider angles, his colleagues had lost much of their capacity to interpret the significance of their research material.³⁹ Rush Welter also expressed concerns that a narrowed focus on specialized disciplines and communities of discourse would lead intellectual history to "lose much of its significance."

Worried that his colleagues were throwing the baby out with the bathwater, he urged them not to abandon “broad-gauged analyses of American thought,” and to continue inquiry into the much-maligned category of the “American ‘mind.’”⁴⁰

At the time Welter had recently completed precisely such a task, and his contribution to the Wingspread conference struck its conveners as the lament of a scholar who relied on conventions that they had long since disavowed.⁴¹ In an acknowledgment of his outlier status, Welter rewrote his conference essay to take the explicit form of a dissent. Wood’s essay, too, struck the editors as a departure from the tenor of the volume: as Paul Conkin observed, he was the only participant who emphasized the importance of work on the historical “role of ideas.”⁴² Even unsympathetic reviewers of the conference volume perceived that the field was drifting away from the positions advocated by Welter and Wood. In the *William and Mary Quarterly*, Robert Skotheim observed that the essays demonstrated its “increasing professionalization and specialization,” and worried about the loss of “synthesizing and generalizing possibilities” this “narrowing” entailed.⁴³ The new era of analytical restraint was already generating nostalgia for a time when intellectual historians confidently took their place at the center of debates within the broader discipline.

Although Higham and Conkin had convened the Wingspread conference in the belief that their younger colleagues felt lonely and besieged, they emerged with a new sense of solidarity and an increasing confidence in the participants’ capacity to answer the questions that shadowed the field. Their retrospective assessment made this sense of satisfaction clear.⁴⁴ The challenge, of course, was to find some way to sustain the momentum that the participants seemed to have generated. Even before the conference began, Higham had expressed concerns that any progress it generated would dissipate over the following years. This anxiety was exacerbated by the absence of institutions capable of preserving lines of communication. He found it “shocking,” he wrote in the early stages of planning, “that intellectual historians are virtually the only group in the profession without their own network of communication.” A successful conference would need to generate not only a “closer fraternity,” but also something more tangible, such as a “journal or newsletter.”⁴⁵

Many of the attendees at Wingspread shared Higham’s sense of the urgency of this need. A subgroup of them assembled a steering committee under the leadership of Thomas Bender, and within a year they had compiled the first edition of the *Intellectual History Newsletter*. The conference participants agreed to consign their royalties to the enterprise in full, which sustained it at no cost to subscribers for the first five years of its existence.⁴⁶ Higham was delighted to see a venue emerge that was capable of building upon the conference discussions, and congratulated Bender on a “crisp” production that had “launched us beautifully.”⁴⁷ Over the quarter-century that followed, the *Newsletter* came to provide a communal gathering place for the assessment of new trends in the discipline. In the process, it also served as a venue that helped to situate the views of many of the Wingspread participants as the received wisdom in the field.

The initial volume of the *Newsletter*, which included a series of essays on the problem of specialization, established many of its major themes. William Taylor criticized an earlier generation's approach to intellectual history for being "too often vague and, in its generalizations, over-arching in its ascription of historical consequences."⁴⁸ Bruce Kuklick, who had participated in the Wingspread conference without publishing in the final volume, added that the aspiring generalist no longer could "proceed in his normal fashion": it was only possible to write about broad topics if one obtained "mastery of recondite areas of knowledge."⁴⁹ Thomas Haskell agreed, arguing that intellectual historians needed "to acknowledge and actively follow the torturous paths of specialization along which the modern intellect has in fact moved."⁵⁰ The inaugurators of this new publication were coalescing around a view that many of them had previously expressed: practitioners should begin with specialized lines of inquiry before cautiously drawing connections to broader themes.

This was by no means a uniform view within the broader field. A volume edited by Dominick LaCapra and Steven Kaplan, *Modern European Intellectual History*, was released five years after the Wingspread volume, and drew attention to the different methodological concerns of historians who focused on continental Europe. While some of the essays in that volume echoed the enthusiasm at Wingspread for social context and the history of the book, others expressed reluctance to import methods from social history and suggested the field would benefit from closer attention to insights from Critical Theory and post-structuralism.⁵¹ American studies departments continued to train some students, including Jackson Lears, who produced expansive arguments about American culture.⁵² Christopher Lasch remained the best-known intellectual historian in the American public sphere (and helped to advise an influential cohort of graduate students at the University of Rochester), even as his own writings drifted away from historical analysis and toward social and cultural criticism.⁵³ And John Patrick Diggins explicitly argued that intellectual historians should be "reluctant to abandon the 'old fashioned approach to the history of ideas' that was practiced by 'the pioneers,'" and demonstrated the continuing vitality of those methods in a series of high-profile articles and books.⁵⁴

In the pages of the *Newsletter*, however, these contrary inclinations remained distinctly marginalized. Its editorial board was overwhelmingly dominated by Americanists, many of whom had participated in the conference at Wingspread, and the contributors' comments on the volume edited by LaCapra and Kaplan were much more attentive to methodological divisions than continuities.⁵⁵ (Bruce Kuklick concluded in a caustic review that "from the perspective of American history, the importation of continental theorizing has not produced any substantive advances"; LaCapra replied with a letter referring to Kuklick's review as "little more than McCarthyite.")⁵⁶ Jackson Lears's sole appearance in its pages was a brief response to a forum in 1996.⁵⁷ The only article from Christopher Lasch was published after his death.⁵⁸ And John Diggins used his contribution to the *Newsletter* to criticize what he saw as the methodological tendencies

of its leading figures. Aiming his arrows squarely at the “‘new directions’ exponents,” he argued that a focus on Haskell’s “networks of intellectual discourse” resulted in a domestic “parochialism” and a myopic fixation on the “sociological . . . or institutional system that purports to relate intellectuals to one another.” In his view, a central task for intellectual historians involved juxtaposing major thinkers across time and space in order to find continuities and points of differentiation between them.⁵⁹ If the broader field of intellectual history in this period was marked by a persistent heterogeneity—as some colleagues preserved continuities with earlier exemplars, and others embraced novel theoretical languages—the contributors to the *Intellectual History Newsletter* remained largely committed to the goals that had been articulated by the participants at Wingspread.

Over time, however, this loose consensus began to show signs of eroding. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, several major books endeavored to preserve an emphasis on specific discursive contexts while addressing increasingly expansive themes. James Kloppenberg’s *Uncertain Victory* and Dorothy Ross’s *The Origins of American Social Science*, for example, gestured respectfully toward the lessons of Wingspread while engaging extraordinarily wide-ranging source bases that traversed across temporal, spatial, and disciplinary divides. A “focus on discourse,” Ross wrote, led her to situate her subjects’ “language in the economic, political, and social institutions that formed their historical world.”⁶⁰ Kloppenberg urged that his interest in “the larger contours of politics and ideas” did not require him to engage in the flattening that had characterized some prior inquiries into such broad themes. “I am not trying to erect such overarching analytical constructs as the ‘Social Democratic Mind,’ the ‘Progressive Temper,’ or anything of the sort,” he argued, adding that his subjects were “too multifaceted and dynamic to be contained neatly within generalizations drawn from twenty or even several hundred individuals.”⁶¹ The significance of these works emerged, in part, out of their attempts to transcend the division between a methodological emphasis on communicative networks and the thematic ambition that had animated earlier work on the history of ideas.⁶² They suggested that new work from intellectual historians would be heavily informed but not overdetermined by the network of assumptions that had emerged in the wake of the conversations at Wingspread.

In the late 1990s, some historians also began to suggest that perceptions of intellectual history within the broader discipline were changing. Whether this was attributable to shifts in its methodological orientation or merely symptomatic of a widespread decline of theoretical disputation, hints of a triumphal tone began to appear. “The field experienced an extraordinary renaissance, beginning in the late 1970s,” Casey Blake observed in his introduction to a forum on intellectual history and cultural studies in the *Intellectual History Newsletter* in 1996, and this had “resulted in the emergence of a generation of younger historians and an impressive body of scholarship that drew on new currents.”⁶³ Several forum contributors suggested that this resurgence was closely related to its appropriation of insights from other fields, as practitioners became more sensitive

to social and cultural contexts and less inclined to make grand proclamations based on limited evidence. “Almost every important work in American intellectual history after 1980,” James Livingston wrote, “. . . commutes in similar fashion between discrete texts (or authors) and cultural contexts.”⁶⁴ Although always contested and imperfectly applied, the research program associated with Wingspread had yielded some remarkable successes. The field was now able to shed the conference’s institutional legacy, as the *Newsletter* gave way to an academic journal that sought to give “synergy, focus, and profile” to the “rich diversity” of scholarship that had since emerged.⁶⁵

In recent years, some have even expressed concern that the field’s institutional successes have resulted in a condition of stasis. “There are no ‘new directions’ in this vision of intellectual history, only the same direction we have been on for thirty years or more,” Daniel Wickberg wrote in response to a recent forum in *Modern Intellectual History*. The field had become marked by “complacency,” and so convinced of the virtues of “fine-grained attention to local and institutional practices” that all broad categories were dismissed out of hand.⁶⁶ In his view, leading intellectual historians arrived at a loose consensus in the Wingspread era that has gone largely unchallenged ever since. But attention to the tenor and content of the conversations at that conference suggest that such parallels should not be so easily drawn. Historians are notoriously reluctant to draw attention to our own social and institutional contexts, but we cannot assess recent trends in the field without acknowledging just how substantially its situation has changed.

NEW DIRECTIONS TODAY

The contributions to *New Directions in American Intellectual History* did not in themselves transform the shape of the field. The trends the volume identified were already well underway by the time it was published, and later essays and books discussed future possibilities with comparable insight. One can easily envision an alternative path in which the Wingspread gathering never occurred and very little changed as a result. Nevertheless, a close re-examination of the conference helps to uncover the distinctive set of problems and possibilities that confronted intellectual historians at the moment when it was held. The participants had developed their research programs in direct response to the challenges posed by social and cultural historians, and their credibility emerged in large part from their willingness to repudiate the scope and ambition that had defined the field in its “heroic age.” The resulting focus on communities of discourse had become normative by the late 1980s, and remains broadly influential today.

Comparing Wingspread with more recent debates over American intellectual history, however, suggests that the character of that influence has evolved. The pressures faced by scholars in the field today are very different from those confronted by their generational forbears. Declension narratives have given way to intimations of a “renaissance,” and references to “malaise” have been replaced by discussions of the substantial “influence”

that scholars in the field now enjoy.⁶⁷ Earlier concerns about the “imperialistic” designs of social history have receded, as intellectual historians again follow Higham’s early injunction to explore their own field’s potential as an “integrative tool.”⁶⁸ The absence of institutional connections and venues for publication has given way to a relative proliferation.⁶⁹ And where intellectual history once seemed to some on the verge of extinction, it now seems to be “everywhere”: diffused, by virtue of its broad applicability, into historical scholarship by those who have never seen it as a methodological home.⁷⁰ Above all, intellectual historians today feel that they can pursue their interests without being disparaged by most of their colleagues in the discipline. As David Hall observed in the recent *Modern Intellectual History* forum, his peers were now “released from the sensation of being under siege from those who question the importance of ideas and especially the ideas voiced by so-called ‘elites.’”⁷¹ This narrative of a “decline, fall, and phoenix-like rebirth” is now so familiar, Leslie Butler noted in a companion essay, that it has become “trite with the retelling.”⁷²

This transformed context suggests that claims of methodological continuity should be approached with skepticism. Historians, like members of most disciplines, pursue their projects with a vivid sense of the points where their methods are likely to offend disciplinary norms.⁷³ They are trained to approach their work in a manner that addresses the questions contemporary readers are most likely to ask. The hallmarks of the Wingspread conference—an emphasis on communities of discourse, a close attention to social and cultural contexts, an inclusive approach to texts and subjects, and a suspicion of grand narratives—emerged through its participants’ dialogues with the principal interlocutors of the time. In recent years, the softening of colleagues’ critiques has led intellectual historians to devote less attention to the matters that occupied their predecessors. At the same time, three decades of narrative restraint have left a number of major topics without any current and coherent synthetic account. The pressures and possibilities facing scholars in the field have changed.

Over the past decade, the new books produced by intellectual historians have gradually but unmistakably become more ambitious in scale. Younger scholars were long counseled to work outward from disciplinary histories with caution and restraint; now, their books address ever more expansive themes. Answering Jo Guldi’s and David Armitage’s call in *The History Manifesto* for work of ambitious scale, intellectual historians are once again writing concept histories that range widely across time and space.⁷⁴ In contrast to the customary denunciations of Arthur Lovejoy, some historians have even begun returning to *The Great Chain of Being* as a model for the nuanced treatment of ideas over the *longue duree*.⁷⁵ Daniel Wickberg is among the most prominent of these exponents, arguing in a recent essay that treatments of Lovejoy as an “intellectual atomist” have missed his emphasis on the “plurality of meaning” and the “surprising diversity of ideas.”⁷⁶ Others, including Sophia Rosenfeld in this volume, have advocated for a methodological program that resembles Lovejoy’s without explicitly invoking his name. Rosenfeld’s defense of “philosophical history” suggests that historians have the

capacity to traverse broad expanses of time and space while remaining sensitive to “ambiguity, complexity, multiplicity, and patterns of difference and similitude.”⁷⁷ Her book *Common Sense* exemplifies such an approach, providing an expansive *Begriffsgeschichte* that is closely attentive to the “social history of ideas.”⁷⁸ Where Rosenfeld argues that intellectual historians could expand their temporal and geographical horizons while retaining some of the qualities conventionally associated with narrative constraint, Wickberg finds such practices embedded in the very literature that the contributors to *New Directions* renounced.

Wickberg and Rosenfeld are far from alone in their desire to reengage with the challenge of connecting ideas across broad expanses of time, space, and sensibility. Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen’s treatment of *Wisdom* in this volume suggests that historians should approach “philosophical engagement as a broader cultural practice,” by connecting the writings of “first-order thinkers” to articles published in glossy magazines.⁷⁹ She pursues a related methodological program in *American Nietzsche*, using the problematics posed by Nietzsche’s image to address questions about “the *grounds*, or foundations for American thought and culture” raised by readers from starkly different backgrounds and perspectives.⁸⁰ Transatlantic appropriations of a single theorist thereby provide an anchor for a multivalent engagement with some of the problems that animated the syntheses of an earlier era. Jonathan Levy’s *Freaks of Fortune* is still broader in its analytical scope: rather than fixing on interpretations of one individual, it develops a century-long “biography” of the concept of “risk.” As Levy observes, “risk was in fact everywhere,” and a consideration of its varied forms reflects outward on “the spread of commerce; the rise and fall of American slavery; the Industrial Revolution; the economic development of the West; the ascendance of the corporation.”⁸¹ The sweep of this analysis is breathtaking, and—emerging from a dissertation, and receiving three prizes at a recent meeting of the OAH—it provides an unambiguous signal that the era of narrative restraint has passed.

Other recent works of intellectual history have hewed more closely to a narrative emphasis on communities of discourse, while tracing these connections in a manner that deliberately transcends disciplinary boundaries. Joel Isaac’s analysis of the “Harvard complex” in *Working Knowledge*, for example, focuses on the development of an “interstitial academy” that enabled scholars to work in enclaves that were insulated from “disciplinary fragmentation and professional specialization.” Isaac’s close attention to interdisciplinary meeting grounds reveals that many of the major developments in the midcentury human sciences emerged only through “a middle ground of conflict, adjustment, and conceptual change.”⁸² Similarly, Jonathan Holloway’s *Confronting the Veil* explores disciplinary intersections in a shared institutional context, as public-minded economists, sociologists, and political scientists at Howard University encountered a common set of problems in an academic world that remained sharply divided along racial lines.⁸³ In conjunction with other recent work, these books suggest that even the highly specialized intellectual life of the American research university can only be comprehended by historians who are willing to traverse disciplines.⁸⁴

While Isaac and Holloway range across multiple disciplines from within the bounded setting of an individual university, Daniel Rodgers's *Age of Fracture* draws connections across a much more expansive national context. To some extent *Age of Fracture* embraces a methodological emphasis on fragmentation and multiplicity, by depicting the late twentieth-century intellectual world as marked by the weakening of the ties that once held individuals and institutions together. The homogenizing tendencies of midcentury intellectual history would be ill-suited to such a resolutely heterogeneous landscape. But despite all the centrifugal forces of the contemporary academy, *Age of Fracture* suggests that a discerning historian can find surprising points of commonality that gesture toward a shared tenor of an "age." In Rodgers's analysis a frank acknowledgment of "hyperspecialization" is juxtaposed with the observation that disciplinary boundaries are "always porous and open to raiding," and the abstract theories of individual disciplines are subsumed into a "contagion of metaphors" that take on strange new manifestations in "widely flung fronts of thought."⁸⁵ In this representation, capturing the intellectual life of an era requires engagement with the mutability of its theoretical language: as he suggests in his contribution to this volume, ideas are at their most interesting and illuminating when in motion, and intellectual histories that hew to discrete communities capture only glimpses of complex processes that their methods cannot comprehend.⁸⁶

Age of Fracture also suggests that intellectual historians have become less hesitant to establish connections between theoretical developments and processes of political change. Its analytical scope implies that ideas are everywhere, and impossible to disaggregate from the social and political movements that invoke them; to restrict oneself to the back-and-forth of academic disputation would be to ignore many of their most interesting and important incarnations. "People kept big books splayed open on their reading tables," Rodgers observes on the opening page, and those engaged in politics spoke of "intellectual shock troops" and an ongoing "war of ideas." The boundaries between theory and practice, too, are porous, as social constructs like "the economy" are themselves formed out of "practices, norms, and conventions" every bit as much as they are out of "structures of exchange."⁸⁷ These "dense feedback loops" also form a central theme of Sarah Igo's call in this volume for "an intellectual history that respects the changeable, capacious nature of its subject." In a "mass-mediated world," the boundaries between popular and intellectual thought become blurred, and histories that attempt to distinguish between them are deceptive.⁸⁸ The history of ideas is also a history of events, and any attempt to segment one from the other relies upon limits imposed by the historian rather than the research material itself.

In recent years many historians have joined Rodgers in making more expansive claims for the political influence of ideas. A broad array of recent works on the history of conservatism seek to answer questions about America's rightward turn in large part through origin stories rooted in the history of ideas.⁸⁹ The gradual re-emergence of intellectual biography, once viewed as a casualty of the social-historical assault on facile

presumptions of “agency” or “influence,” suggests a renewed appreciation for both the importance of ideas in the lives of individuals, and for individuals in the precipitation of social change.⁹⁰ James Kloppenberg’s *Reading Obama* further extends this trend by rehabilitating the genre of the intellectual biography of a politician, arguing that Barack Obama’s sensibility was “shaped” both by “his own intellectual formation” and “the longer history that stretches from the Puritans to the present.” “Ideas matter to him,” and therefore, presumably, those who are interested in the policies he has sought to enact.⁹¹ Other historians have looked beyond the president to the interstitial figure of the “policy intellectual,” thereby finding tangible points of connection between academic ideas and governmental practices of obvious public significance.⁹²

Intellectual historians today are far more comfortable traversing across disciplinary lines and making broad claims for the influence of ideas than they were in the years following the gathering at Wingspread. Their attachment to archival sources has diminished as their synthetic ambitions have grown.⁹³ The field is no longer defensive, and its practitioners have largely ceased defining their projects in terms borrowed from social history or emphasizing their departures from the excesses of the “heroic age.” The participants in this volume are engaged in the historicization of such expansive ideas as “democracy,” “privacy,” “wisdom,” “secularization,” and “choice,” in reframing the disciplinary history of philosophy and political science, and in constructing new syntheses of American thought. When these “new directions” are contrasted with those advocated at Wingspread, intellectual historians can rest assured that their current path is not marked by complacency. Rather, the essays in this volume are navigating an uneasy terrain between renewed narrative ambition and a lingering recognition of the virtues of constraint. After sixty years, the field is now characterized by the “blessings of effervescence” and the “curse of confusion” once again.

HISTORICIZING OURSELVES

Ever since Higham’s earliest assessments of the state of the field, intellectual historians have engaged in frequent evaluations of their status within the discipline. While such instances of self-reflexivity occasionally veer into solipsism, they can provide a sensitive indicator of the ebbs and flows of historical fashion, and have at times exerted a powerful influence on later work in the field. In recent years, the increasing confidence of these appraisals has fostered a research program that grows ever more ambitious in scope. Although perhaps not attributable to specific methodological innovations, this transition should not in itself be a cause for celebration or regret. Historians continually navigate between synthesis and particularism, abstraction and tangibility, agency and context, cohesion and comprehensiveness, and ambition and constraint; each of these paths enables certain virtues while foreclosing others. If scholars preserve some dialectical wisdom from the rise and fall of prior methodologies, they can limit the likelihood that reactions against the excesses of one generation will lead them to mimic the flaws of another.

But while intellectual historians have always been quick to criticize other disciplines for effacing the past, our own work has at times demonstrated a similar myopia. Even volumes dedicated to the state of the field engage only sporadically with the writings of prior generations. The Wingspread conferees' deep anxieties about finding representative sources, situating ideas in a thick social context, and tempering causal claims may have been heightened by the preoccupations of the historical profession in the late 1970s, but a change in disciplinary norms does not alone entitle us to abandon their circumspection. Likewise, the partial rehabilitation of the methods of intellectual historians from the field's "heroic age" should be accompanied by thorough reappraisals of their work. Even as some have begun that task in earnest for Arthur Lovejoy, other major figures, including Merle Curti himself, remain largely ignored.⁹⁴ Historians should be well aware of the hazards involved in such acts of forgetting. In exploring the "worlds" of American intellectual history, a sensitivity to context and contingency is essential to understanding not only our subjects, but also ourselves.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Thomas Bender, David Hollinger, Bruce Kuklick, Dorothy Ross, Daniel Wickberg, the participants in the conference "The Futures of Atlantic Intellectual History," and the editors of this volume for their comments and responses to previous drafts of this chapter, and to Paige Glotzer for her work as a research assistant.

2. Daniel Wickberg, "Is Intellectual History a Neglected Field of Study?," *Historically Speaking* 10 (September 2009): 14.

3. For example, see the recent forum "The Present and Future of American Intellectual History," *Modern Intellectual History* 9 (April 2012): 149–248.

4. John Higham and Paul Conkin, NEH Grant Application, box 6, folder "Wingspread Conference: Participants," John Higham Papers, Special Collections, Johns Hopkins University (hereinafter cited as "JH/JHU").

5. Stow Persons, "The Wingspread Papers," *Reviews in American History* 7 (December 1979): 450; Thomas Bender, "Forum: The Present and Future of American Intellectual History: Introduction," *Modern Intellectual History* 9 (April 2012): 150.

6. Henry F. May, *Coming to Terms: A Study of Memory and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 307.

7. H. L. Swint, "Trends in the Teaching of Social and Intellectual History," *Social Studies* 46 (November 1955): 244.

8. May, *Coming to Terms*, 307.

9. John Walton Caughey, "Historian's Choice: Results of a Poll on Recently Published American History and Biography," *Mississippi Historical Review* 39 (September 1952): 299–300.

10. John Higham, "The Rise of American Intellectual History," *American Historical Review* 56 (April 1951): 453–71.

11. John Higham, "Intellectual History and Its Neighbors," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 15 (June 1954): 339, 341, 347.

12. John Higham, "American Intellectual History: A Critical Appraisal," *American Quarterly* 13 (Summer 1961): 230.
13. John Higham, *Writing American History: Essays on Modern Scholarship* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 169.
14. John Higham, preface to *Writing American History*, ix.
15. Higham and Conkin, NEH Grant Application, JH/JHU; Robert Darnton, "Intellectual and Cultural History," *The Past before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, ed. Michael Kammen (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 328; Laurence Veysey to John Higham, October 10, 1975, JH/JHU.
16. John Higham to Linn Marshall, June 1, 1976, JH/JHU.
17. Paul Conkin to John Higham, October 15, 1975, JH/JHU.
18. John Higham to Ray Billington, July 30, 1975, JH/JHU.
19. Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956), vii–viii.
20. Higham and Conkin, n. 4.
21. *Ibid.*; Philip Marcus to John Higham, July 14, 1976, JH/JHU.
22. Higham and Conkin, NEH Grant Application, JH/JHU.
23. Gene Wise, "The Contemporary Crisis in Intellectual History Studies," *Clio* 5, no. 1 (1975): 60–62.
24. Dominick LaCapra, "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts," in *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives*, ed. Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 48.
25. Darnton, "Intellectual and Cultural History," 328, 332, 340.
26. Alan Lawson to Paul Conkin, July 7, 1977, JH/JHU.
27. John Higham, introduction to *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, ed. John Higham, and Paul Conkin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), xii.
28. *Ibid.*, xvii.
29. Paul Conkin, afterword in Higham and Conkin, *New Directions*, 229.
30. Laurence Veysey, "Intellectual History and the New Social History," in Higham and Conkin, *New Directions*, 23.
31. *Ibid.*, 20.
32. Murray G. Murphey, "The Place of Beliefs in Modern Culture," in Higham and Conkin, *New Directions*, 164.
33. William J. Bouwsma, "From History of Ideas to History of Meaning," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 12 (Autumn 1981): 288. John E. Toews used Bouwsma's essay as a launching point for a major reassessment of the state of the field in "Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience," *American Historical Review* 92 (October 1987): 879–907.
34. David Hall, "The World of Print and Collective Mentality in Seventeenth-century New England," in Higham and Conkin, *New Directions*, 167, 177.
35. Thomas L. Haskell, "Deterministic Implications of Intellectual History," in Higham and Conkin, *New Directions*, 138–40.
36. Hollinger reiterated his belief in the merits of a heterogeneity of methods in a later essay, "American Intellectual History: Some Issues for the 1980s," in *In the American Province: Studies in the History and Historiography of Ideas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 176–88.

37. David Hollinger, "Historians and the Discourse of Intellectuals," in Higham and Conkin, *New Directions*, 48, 58–59.
38. Thomas Bender, "The Cultures of Intellectual Life: The City and the Professions," in Higham and Conkin, *New Directions*, 181, 183.
39. Gordon S. Wood, "Intellectual History and the Social Sciences," in Higham and Conkin, *New Directions*, 37.
40. Rush Welter, "On Studying the National Mind," in Higham and Conkin, *New Directions*, 64.
41. Welter had recently published *The Mind of America, 1820–1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975).
42. Conkin, afterword to *New Directions*, 229.
43. Robert Allen Skotheim, "Review: Higham and Conkin, *New Directions in American Intellectual History* and Kammen, "A Season of Youth," *William and Mary Quarterly* 37 (April 1980): 315–16.
44. Paul K. Conkin and John Higham, "Narrative Report of Accomplishments" for NEH grant, JH/JHU.
45. John Higham to Ray Billington, July 30, 1975, JH/JHU.
46. Thomas Bender, "Future Issues," *Intellectual History Group Newsletter* 6 (Spring 1984): 1.
47. John Higham to Thomas Bender, October 17, 1978, JH/JHU.
48. William Taylor, "Toward a History of Perception," *Intellectual History Newsletter* 1 (Spring 1979): 17.
49. Bruce Kuklick, "Generalists and Specialists," *Intellectual History Newsletter* 1 (Spring 1979): 5.
50. Thomas Haskell, "Intellectual History and Intellectual Specialization," *Intellectual History Newsletter* 1 (Spring 1979): 3.
51. LaCapra and Kaplan, *Modern European Intellectual History*.
52. See T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
53. On Lasch as a graduate adviser, see Eric Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time: A Life of Christopher Lasch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 164. Hollinger discusses Lasch's *The New Radicalism in America* as a "counterpoint" to a traditional emphasis on communities of discourse in "Historians and the Discourse of Intellectuals," 54.
54. John Patrick Diggins, "The Oyster and the Pearl: The Problem of Contextualism in Intellectual History," *History and Theory* 23 (May 1984): 153.
55. James Kloppenberg noted the "implicit and explicit disagreements" between these two volumes in "Deconstructive and Hermeneutic Strategies for Intellectual History: The Recent Work of Dominick LaCapra and David Hollinger," *Intellectual History Newsletter* 9 (April 1987): 3.
56. Bruce Kuklick, "New Directions in European Intellectual History," *Intellectual History Newsletter* 6 (Spring 1984): 26; Dominick LaCapra, letter to the editor, *Intellectual History Newsletter* 7 (April 1985): 25.
57. Jackson Lears, "Against Anti-Intellectualism," *Intellectual History Newsletter* 18 (1996): 20–21.
58. Christopher Lasch, "Guilt," *Intellectual History Newsletter* 16 (1994), 15–17. This essay was originally submitted by Lasch to the (then forthcoming) volume *A Companion to American Thought*, and was accompanied by an interview by Richard Wightman Fox.

59. John Patrick Diggins, "The Problem of Contextualism in Intellectual History," *Intellectual History Newsletter* 3 (Spring 1981): 15–16.
60. Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), xix.
61. James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Social Thought, 1870–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 10.
62. In various later essays Kloppenberg explained the theoretical basis for this position, arguing that historians should turn to "the terrain of pragmatic truth, which provides us with hypotheses, provisional syntheses, imaginative but warranted interpretations, which then provide the basis for continuing inquiry and experimentation." See James T. Kloppenberg, "Objectivity and Historicism: A Century of American Historical Writing," *American Historical Review* 94 (October 1989): 1030; James T. Kloppenberg, "Pragmatism: An Old Name for Some New Ways of Thinking?," *Journal of American History* 83 (June 1996): 100–138.
63. Casey Blake, symposium introduction, *Intellectual History Newsletter* 18 (1996): 3.
64. James Livingston, "Why, of Course," *Intellectual History Newsletter* 18 (1996): 34.
65. Charles Capper and Anthony La Vopa, Editors' Note, *Intellectual History Newsletter* 24 (2002): 3.
66. Daniel Wickberg, "The Present and Future of American Intellectual History," April 3, 2012, <http://s-usih.org/2012/04/present-and-future-of-american.html>.
67. Sarah E. Igo, "Reply to Daniel Wickberg," *Historically Speaking* 10 (September 2009): 19. As one tangible sign of a rebirth, David Hollinger observes that the *American Intellectual Tradition* sourcebook is "selling better" in its fifth edition than any time since the publication of the first edition in 1989. See David Hollinger, "Thinking Is as American as Apple Pie," *Historically Speaking* 10 (September 2009): 17–18.
68. For references to the "imperialistic" designs of social historians, see John Higham and Paul Conkin, "Narrative Report of Accomplishments," for NEH grant, JH/JHU.
69. This includes the founding of *Modern Intellectual History*, the transformed *Journal of the History of Ideas*, and the emergence of the *U.S. Intellectual History blog* and annual conference of the Society for U.S. Intellectual History (S-USIH). One might also mention a number of increasingly hospitable journals covering discrete fields, such as the *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* or *History of Political Economy*, and subsidiary communities, such as the Intellectual History Colloquium at Harvard.
70. Daniel Wickberg, "Is Intellectual History a Neglected Field?," 15. See also Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn, "Introduction: Interim Intellectual History," in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, ed. Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.
71. David D. Hall, "Backwards to the Future: The Cultural Turn and the Wisdom of Intellectual History," *Modern Intellectual History* 9 (April 2012): 171.
72. Leslie Butler, "From the History of Ideas to Ideas in History," *Modern Intellectual History* 9 (April 2012): 157.
73. Thomas Haskell has written insightfully about this problem in "History, Explanatory Schemes, and Other Wonders of Common Sense," *Objectivity Is Not Neutrality: Explanatory Schemes in History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 1–24.

74. Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014). For a skeptical response, see Deborah Cohen and Peter Mandler, “*The History Manifesto: A Critique*,” *American Historical Review* 120, no. 2 (April 2015): 530–42.

75. On the incipient revival of Lovejoy’s “history of ideas,” see Darrin M. McMahon, “The Return of the History of Ideas?” in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, 13–31.

76. Daniel Wickberg, “In the Environment of Ideas: Arthur Lovejoy and the History of Ideas as a Form of Cultural History,” *Modern Intellectual History* 11, no. 2 (August 2014), 447. Wickberg also cited Lovejoy as a primary influence on his first book, *The Senses of Humor: Self and Laughter in Modern America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 4.

77. Sophia Rosenfeld, “On Lying: Writing Philosophical History after the Enlightenment and after Arendt,” in this volume.

78. Sophia Rosenfeld, *Common Sense: A Political History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 8.

79. Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, “The Longing for Wisdom in Twentieth-Century US Thought,” in this volume.

80. Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 23–24 (emphasis is Ratner-Rosenhagen’s).

81. Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 2, 5.

82. Joel Isaac, *Working Knowledge: Making the Human Sciences from Parsons to Kuhn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 32, 237

83. Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919–1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 19, 32–33.

84. Recent works that resist conventional disciplinary boundaries include Sarah E. Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007) and Andrew Jewett, *Science, Democracy, and the American University: From the Civil War to the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

85. Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 10–11.

86. Daniel T. Rodgers, “Paths in the Social History of Ideas,” in this volume.

87. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, 1, 9.

88. Sarah E. Igo, “Toward a Free-Range Intellectual History,” in this volume.

89. For recent intellectual histories of the conservative turn, see Patrick Allitt, *The Conservatives: Ideas and Personalities throughout American History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); S. M. Amadae, *Rationalizing Capitalist Democracy: The Cold War Origins of Rational Choice Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Angus Burgin, *The Great Persuasion: Reinventing Free Markets since the Depression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Michael Kimmage, *The Conservative Turn: Lionel Trilling, Whittaker Chambers, and the Lessons of Anti-Communism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Daniel Stedman-Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

90. In his introduction to the Wingspread volume, Higham cited a decline of the “partnership” between intellectual history and biography, due to an emphasis on “communities and anthropological points of view” that supplanted the prior supposition of “subjectivity and freedom in human affairs.” Higham, introduction to *New Directions*, xvii. For prominent examples of the resurgence of biography among American intellectual historians since the mid-1980s, see Howard Brick, *Daniel Bell and the Decline of Intellectual Radicalism: Social Theory and Political Reconciliation in the 1940s* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); Charles Capper, *The Private Years* (1992), vol. 1, and *The Public Years* (2007), vol. 2, of *Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Daniel Geary, *Radical Ambition: C. Wright Mills, the Left, and American Social Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

91. James T. Kloppenberg, *Reading Obama: Dreams, Hope, and the American Political Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), ix, xviii.

92. See, for example, Nils Gilman’s attempts to chart the course of transition from “abstract theory” to “policy-oriented questions” to “actual policy recommendations,” in Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 11. For other recent works that explore the intersection between intellectual history and policy history, see David Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) and *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America’s Soviet Experts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Bruce Kuklick, *Blind Oracles: Intellectuals and War from Kennan to Kissinger* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Alice O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-century U.S. History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

93. Many of the most prominent recent works in the field rely on an expansive array of textual references and limited archival content: see, for example, Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*; Howard Brick, *Transcending Capitalism: Visions of a New Society in Modern American Thought* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

94. On Curti see David Brown, *Beyond the Frontier: The Midwestern Voice in American Historical Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), and John Pettegrew, “A Tribute: Merle Curti, Pragmatist Historian,” *Intellectual History Newsletter* (1996): 70–75, and “The Present-Minded Professor: Merle Curti’s Work as an Intellectual Historian,” *History Teacher* 32 (November 1998): 67–76. Paul Conkin observed that Curti’s marginalization belied the continuing relevance of his methods in the afterword to *New Directions*, 227.