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**Clearing Up Counterfactuals: The Decades-Long Historiographical
Debate**

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Clearing Up Counterfactuals: The Decades-Long Historiographical Debate

The year is 1783. You are a resident of the New York colony and have survived eight long years of war. This morning, you woke up to the news of peace. Soldiers march through the streets in double file, their muskets resting on the shoulders of their bright red coats. After years of fighting, the British army finally put down the rebellion that had crept its way into the thirteen British colonies. Now that the resistance fighters have been defeated, things will slowly return to the state of normalcy that existed before the symbiotic relationship between the colonies and Britain had been disrupted. There will be some difficult times ahead. Most port cities will likely fall under martial law to ensure that the last rebels do not try to restart the war. While this is an inconvenience, you far prefer it to the neverending sounds of cannons and gunfire. You may have once thought a world without British control would be interesting, but ever since the rebels lost the Battle of Saratoga and the hope of French support fell through, you have been praying for the end of the war, regardless of the winner.

Hopefully, it is obvious that this is not our history. We know that Britain was driven out of the colonies with help from the French and that the United States earned its independence. The narrative above is an alternate history. Some historians would wince at the sight of it, while others would see it as an interesting thought experiment. This concept of counterfactual history, the telling and exploring of alternate histories, has been a topic of debate for some time amongst academics working in the field.

Why is it that some professional historians approach historical counterfactuals with such caution when others are willing to wield them with confidence? Historians often feel as though there is no responsible basis for the use of counterfactual history and that it can be chalked up to

a mere “parlor game.”¹ Unlike physicists and mathematicians, historians use counterfactuals as a method for uncovering causal connections rather than determining the result of hypothetical scenarios.² “Analyzing a counterfactual question is not the same as constructing a ‘what if’ narrative [...] such tales are exercises not in history but in historical fiction.”³ When drawing conclusions and assumptions about the past, it is easy to slip into a presentist mindset and stray away from the thoughts and experiences of the past. When this happens, counterfactuals stop being history and start being fiction. The line between historical fiction and counterfactual history is one that many researchers steer clear of. If research based on “what ifs” and historical fiction is often lumped together, why do some historians not fear this outcome when employing counterfactuals?

While historians are often viewed as stuffy academics, they can be some of the most imaginative people out there. Everyday exercises in counterfactual history can, and often do, turn into a discussion of wildly irrelevant hypotheticals. I am sure that several people reading this have either asked or heard someone ask a history teacher a question along the lines of “What if Lincoln hadn’t been shot?” or “What if Germany won World War II?” To the historians who appreciate the value of counterfactuals, these two questions mean drastically different things.

The former proposes a single, plausible change to history that can be extrapolated using information of the time. The latter, on the other hand, takes a nose dive into historical fiction. The difference lies in how historians obtain a firm grasp of why things happened the way they did. Counterfactual exercises are meant to pinpoint a single event in history and see how it affected the greater historical period by altering what transpired. Suggesting a counterfactual

¹ Edward Hallett Carr, *What Is History?* The George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures (New York: Vintage, 1961), 44.

² Richard Ned Lebow, “Counterfactual Thought Experiments: A Necessary Teaching Tool,” *The History Teacher* 40, no. 2 (2007): 162.

³ Erik Schatzberg, “Counterfactual History and the History of Technology,” *Technology’s Stories* (August 1 2014). <https://doi.org/10.15763/JOU.TS.2014.8.1.03>.

exercise built around the Nazis winning World War II is frowned upon because there are far too many things that led to the results of World War II to simply ask what would happen if the outcome were different. Historians who have included counterfactuals in their research know the difference between studying specific contingent scenarios and spinning tales of parallel universes. This is the line that other historians are afraid to even approach.

So, who is correct in this debate? Do some historians truly know what is best when staying away from counterfactuals, or are other historians right in using them with confidence? I will be uncovering the origin of this disagreement, exploring both sides of the debate, and explaining historians' approaches and attitudes toward counterfactuals in order to reveal the pitfalls and potentials of the technique. To do this, I will begin by analyzing E. H. Carr's critique of the practice using his background and the responses of the historical community, which was his main audience.

Where Did the Debate Begin?

When delving into a topic that is so frequently debated, it is important to understand where the disagreement came about to better frame the stances of both sides. In the case of counterfactual history, one must look back to the writings of Edward Hallett Carr. E. H. Carr was a British historian, diplomat, journalist, and international relations theorist. He started his historiographical career in the mid-1900s, publishing two books with Cambridge University Press. Carr's second book, *What is History?* originated in a series of lectures given by Carr in 1961. The lectures were intended as a broad introduction to the subject of the theory of history. *What is History?* would go on to become one of the key texts in the field of historiographical thought.

Carr's opinions on the study of history were extremely controversial at the time. One of his most controversial claims was that contingency, "the might-have-beens of history," had no place in historical thought or research.⁴ This claim refuted the years-long practice of examining the possibilities of what could have happened throughout history if things had gone differently. Carr believed that "the study of history is the study of causes" and that alternate history implies that the causes of an event have changed.⁵ Carr's book sparked the debate over whether or not contingency had any place in historiography. The next decade after the book's publication was filled with reviews and responses to Carr.

Sir Geoffrey Elton criticized Carr in his book *The Practice of History*. Elton thought that Carr made a "whimsical" distinction between the "historical facts" and the "facts of the past."⁶ Carr claimed that "the facts speak only when the historian calls on them."⁷ He explained the difference between "historical facts" and "facts of the past" is that the former is a truth about history while the latter is a historian's interpretation of a historical fact that they have manipulated how they see fit. Elton said that this idea of historians being able to bend facts to their will reflected "an extraordinarily arrogant attitude both to the past and to the place of the historian studying it."⁸ In Elton's view, Carr was placing the historian above the history they were studying by not acknowledging the free will of past peoples, claiming that past events were inevitable.

Elton's review highlighted Carr's deterministic ideologies, which were unpopular at the time. Determinism is the philosophical view that events are determined by previously established outside factors. This ideology implies that individuals have no free will and cannot be held

⁴ Carr, *What Is History*, 97.

⁵ Carr, *What Is History*, 81.

⁶ Carr, *What Is History*, 7.

⁷ Carr, *What Is History*, 9.

⁸ Geoffrey Rudolph Elton, *The Practice of History* (New York: Crowell, 1968), 56-57.

<http://archive.org/details/practiceofhistor00elto>.

morally responsible for their actions. The historical community often rejects this ideology since it is the actions of past people that form the history that is studied.

British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper also responded to Carr's book, claiming that not only was looking at the alternate possibilities of history useful, but it was a historian's responsibility. Trevor-Roper said historians could only properly understand a period of time by looking at all possible outcomes. Along this thread, he thought that historians who adopted Carr's determinist perspective of only seeking to understand the winners of history and treating the outcome of a particular set of events as the only possible outcomes were "bad historians."⁹

However, not all reviews of Carr's book were negative; in a review in 1963 in *Historische Zeitschrift*, Andreas Hillgruber wrote favorably of Carr's writing and his critiques of historians.¹⁰ British philosopher W. H. Walsh said in a 1963 review that he agreed with Carr's claims about "historical facts" and "facts of the past." This break in the historical community over Carr's assertions began a disagreement over counterfactual history that has lasted sixty years.

What Motivated Carr?

A break from years-long practice such as E. H. Carr's is not typically published on a whim. Instead, it is best to look at the historiographical landscape of the time when *What is History?* was written to better understand why Carr was compelled to go against the grain of most historians. One of the biggest influences on Carr and on all of Britain at the time was the emergence of the field of social history. Social history turned away from studying the "great figures" of history and focused on the story of everyday people. In the 1960s, social history

⁹ H. R. Trevor-Roper, "Review of *E. H. Carr's Success Story*," in *Encounter* (May 1962), 76.

¹⁰ Anders Stephanson, "The Lessons of What is History?" in *E. H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Michael Cox (Palgrave: London, 2000), 300.

quickly became one of the dominant modes of historical writing in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada.

Social history's explosion onto the scene in Europe can be traced to the Annales school. The Annales was a group of historians associated with a French mode of historical writing designed to stress social history. The Annales was founded by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre in 1929 while they were teaching at the University of Strasbourg and later in Paris.¹¹ The Annales school sought to create an impact on other countries with widely varying degrees of success.¹² In Britain, apart from a few Marxists, historians were generally hostile towards the ideas of the Annales school at first.

However, the Annales school approach did eventually hook some historians, such as Hugh Trevor-Roper, on the idea of social history. Social history rose after the end of World War II because of a movement toward scientific practices in the historical community. Some historians of the 1960s wanted their discipline to be seen as more of a science that relied on facts and figures. Social history lent itself well to this type of research because it was the study of groups of people. Historians were able to move away from the classic story-telling methods of studying history and more towards collecting population data and quantifiable statistics.

Carr was also hooked by this idea and quickly wrote about how history should be a study of hard facts. Many of these themes can be seen in *What is History?* as Carr joined the Annales school in the push towards social history.

Do Historians Really Not Like Counterfactuals?

¹¹ Penelope J. Corfield, "Annales School," Making History, Accessed April 12, 2023. https://archives.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/themes/annales_school.html

¹² Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution : The Annales School, 1929-89*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990), ch 5.

While most historians disagreed with Carr on the issue of counterfactuals, the presumption that historians do not value contingency in historiography has persisted to today. Reviews and rebuttals to Carr's ideas against counterfactuals are still published on a regular basis, begging the question, do historians actually oppose the use of counterfactuals in historical thought, or have Carr's claims been superimposed onto all historians?

Most academics who presume historians oppose counterfactuals have a stereotypical view of historians. They claim historians are "rather prone to deterministic explanations," which limit them from seeing anything more than what textbooks and records tell them.¹³ This is not often the case, however. Contemporary historians actually view contingency as "an engagement with the search of plausible possibilities of the past."¹⁴ These alternate histories afford a better understanding not only of time periods but also of specific events. Being able to determine how things could have happened allows researchers to see why things actually happened the way that they did.

The last twenty years have been filled with research affirming the value of contingency in historiographical thought. Hirofumi Oguri, social studies professor at Okayama University, claimed "that asking 'what-ifs' can help us identify the causal relationships between events and historical pasts."¹⁵ Oguri went on to elaborate "that the greater the time that separates a cause from a consequence, the less relevant we presume that cause to be," meaning "that the role of the counterfactual lies in establishing causation and" is "the historical equivalent of laboratory

¹³ Peter Franklin, "The Greatest Stories Never Told," UnHerd, September 8, 2020, <https://unherd.com/2020/09/the-greatest-stories-never-told/>.

¹⁴ Hirofumi Oguri, "Are What-Ifs a Virtual Experiment or a Parlour Game?: Some Thoughts on Methodology Bridging International Law and History," *Völkerrechtsblog*, (June 16, 2021), 1. <https://doi.org/10.17176/20210616-192927-0>.

¹⁵ Oguri, "Are What-Ifs a Virtual Experiment," 2.

experimentation in the physical sciences.”¹⁶ Counterfactuals anchor events to their immediate causes in historical context. According to Oguri, their value cannot be over-exaggerated.

Some historians go so far as to challenge traditional historiographic methodology in their defense of counterfactuals. Rutgers University philosophy professor Martin Bunzl went so far as to claim that “the rhetoric of historical methodology makes evidence central in a foundational concept of the discipline, and direct evidence is just what you can’t have for claims that are by definition contrary to fact.”¹⁷ While initially, it may seem that he agreed with Carr, he took contingency's importance one step further. While most defenders of counterfactuals do so by appealing to the role of imagination in historical research, Bunzl took a different approach. He defended “counterfactual reasoning based on indirect evidence” so that it can be used for historical purposes.¹⁸ Bunzl argued that since counterfactual reasoning can be used in conjunction with evidence, there should be no higher scrutiny of its use than that of causation. This pushed back against the historical communities tendency to rely on tangible evidence by adding counterfactual scenarios into the process.

While Bunzl’s defense of counterfactual history was logical and well argued, he ran into the same issue as other historians that tried to defend counterfactuals. It seems that everyone who tried to reintroduce contingency and counterfactuals back into historiographical research seemed to be arguing against a fictitious majority of historians who will not stand for the use of counterfactuals. The only name that many of these academics attach to this anti-contingency argument is E. H. Carr.

If it is true that Carr is still the only major opponent, more than sixty years after the

¹⁶ Oguri, “Are What-Ifs a Virtual Experiment,” 2.

¹⁷ Martin Bunzl, “Counterfactual History: A User’s Guide,” *The American Historical Review* 109, no. 3 (2004): 845. <https://doi.org/10.1086/530560>.

¹⁸ Bunzl, “Counterfactual History,” 845.

release of his book, then why is the idea that historians dislike counterfactuals so widespread? One reason for this may be the way that Carr changed historical thinking. British historian Richard J. Evans said, “E. H. Carr's *What is History?* played a central role in the historiographical revolution in Britain in the 1960s.”¹⁹ While many of Carr’s claims about history were controversial to the historians of the 60s, students of history during the book's release and for the next few decades were hugely influenced by Carr’s approach to the entire discipline. Carr “rudely knocked the sacred texts of the historical profession [...] off their pedestals, to the general applause of all [...] who were forced to” read and analyze them.²⁰

W. H. Walsh thought Carr was correct that historians did not stand above history and were instead products of their own places and times.²¹ This appealed to a new generation of historians who were growing up studying the World Wars instead of living through them. The thought that the historical works that students of the 60s had to read were swayed by the events occurring in the authors’ lives heavily impacted future historians.

Due to this, presentism became something to avoid when studying the past. Presentism is the tendency to interpret past events in terms of modern values and concepts. History students are now taught to try to avoid inspecting and analyzing the actions of people in the past with a presentist lens. The danger that many have run into when trying to conduct counterfactual exercises is that they are prone to presentist pitfalls. Without direct evidence of an event, it is second nature to rely on past experiences. With counterfactual exercises, it is very seldom that direct evidence exists of what would have happened in an alternate history. Therefore, historians must use their background knowledge to deduce what would have happened. This can become

¹⁹ Richard J. Evans, “The Two Faces of E. H. Carr,” *History In Focus*, Accessed March 7, 2023. <https://archives.history.ac.uk/history-in-focus/Whatishistory/evans10.html>.

²⁰ Evans, “The Two Faces.”

²¹ W. H. Walsh, “Short Notices,” *The English Historical Review* LXXVIII, no. CCCVIII (July 1, 1963): 587. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/LXXVIII.CCCVIII.587>.

muddled when the historian cannot completely separate their historical background knowledge from their life experience. It is easy to fall into a presentist lens when there is very little tangible evidence on which to rely. This is another reason why historians like Carr spoke out against the use of counterfactuals and contingency in historical thought.

Australian historian Keith Windschuttle claimed *What is History?* was one of the most influential books written about historiography and that very few historians since the 1960s had not read it.²² Since this piece of Carr's book became so widely accepted in the historical community, it may have seemed to the outside world that more of Carr's ideas were accepted. With reviews from the likes of Hillgruber and Walsh to back up the idea that Carr's book was well-received combined with the spreading influence of the Annales school, it would not have been a far jump to apply all of Carr's ideologies to all historians.

Why Are We Still Talking About Counterfactuals?

With the majority of the debate over counterfactuals taking place in the 1960s, it may seem out of place that the defense of contingency is still written about today. However, a deeper look at the chronicles of history writing since the 1960s and the ways in which modern-day media has utilized history reveal why it is still so frequently discussed.

As the emergence of social history continued through the second half of the 1900s, people's views shifted on how historiographical thought should be conducted. In the 1980s, French philosophers, including Michel Foucault and Jean-Francois Lyotard, criticized the entire discipline of history. Their thoughts on postmodernism and their "incredulity towards

²² Keith Windshuttle, "The Real Stuff of History," Sydney Line, December 11, 2008, <https://web.archive.org/web/20081211162744/http://www.sydneyline.com/Real%20Stuff%20of%20History.htm>.

metanarratives” were pinned on scientific progress.²³ Lyotard related history to the “metanarratives or grand recits — the grand overarching stories that a culture tells itself [to] several contradictions and inconsistencies inherent in the social order.”²⁴ By challenging the tangibility of history and questioning how history differed from mere storytelling, these philosophers sent the historical community scrambling. Historians of the time felt that their discipline was under attack, so in order to ensure its safety, historiographical practice shifted even further toward hard facts and scientific principles.

Treating history like a science instead of part of the humanities disproved these philosophers. Unfortunately for historians who were conducting hypothetical thought experiments, like counterfactuals, this shift meant that these methods of study were even less accepted than they had been. This set the stage for “the discipline of historiography [to be] regarded by many as a social science” and for less evidence-based research to be pushed outside of the discipline.²⁵

Modern-day media has elevated the idea of alternate histories with the production of novels, movies, and television series. Unfortunately for historians in support of counterfactuals, these often work against their position. People “asking ‘what if’ questions is commonplace in everyday situations” due to their portrayal in the media, for example “Philip K. Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), which depicted a parallel world in which the Axis powers of Nazi Germany and the Japanese Empire ruled the world after their victory in WWII.”²⁶ Since then, there has been a television remake that has added to a long list of alternate histories, including

²³ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (U of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

²⁴ Nasrullah Mambrol, “The Postmodern as ‘the Incredulity towards Metanarratives,’” *Literary Theory and Criticism*, April 3, 2016. <https://literariness.org/2016/04/03/the-postmodern-as-the-incredulity-towards-metanarratives/>.

²⁵ Liah Greenfeld, and Robert A. Nisbet. "social science," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 17, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-science>.

²⁶ Oguri, “Are What-Ifs a Virtual Experiment,” 1.

the likes of Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* and series like *For All Mankind*. The popularization of alternate histories as a form of fiction diluted the academic legitimacy of counterfactual history in the eyes of the public.

Members of the historical community who oppose the usage of counterfactuals often cite these depictions of historical fiction in their critiques. Alternate history and counterfactual history are often seen as one and the same by non-historians. Every time a piece of historically fictitious media or entertainment comes out, those in favor of counterfactuals find themselves having to defend their methods. While historical fiction does not follow the flow of history as tightly as alternate histories do, they both influence the way people understand history through works of fiction.

Another way in which counterfactuals have remained relevant is through historical education. An interesting phenomenon that has transpired throughout the history of counterfactuals is that educators have never had an issue with using the technique and often find it useful. Secondary educators use counterfactuals in high frequencies when teaching high school-level students. Why is it that this group is not plagued by the claims of E. H. Carr and his rejection of contingency? Most high school history teachers can provide a simple answer: some high schoolers think history is boring. Counterfactual exercises are used as a tool to engage students and make history fun.

One thing that history has over subjects like math and science is its narrative structure. History is the greatest story ever told; the greatest because it's true. The difficulty is getting students to understand how and why the story unfolds. High school-aged students "grow in the way they think. They move from concrete thinking to formal logical operations."²⁷ These

²⁷ "Stanford Medicine Children's Health," Accessed March 7, 2023.
<https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=cognitive-development-90-P01594>.

students are primed to learn in sequential order, relating causes to consequences. By introducing counterfactual histories into the secondary classroom, teachers can bring this cause-and-effect learning style to history in a way students are not used to.

Another great thing about secondary education students is that they have very active imaginations. Unlike Bunzl, high school teachers want to base counterfactuals on students' imaginations in order to get them more engaged in the content. Even a student who hates the idea of participating in history class can get into a discussion about what would have happened if President Lincoln had not been assassinated. It is conversations and scenarios that delve into counterfactuals that have allowed classrooms to keep the usage of the technique alive and well even when the historical community could not come to a consensus about it.

Tracking the Debate

In order to track a debate of this size, which has evolved and expanded over the last sixty years, I will analyze how the historiographical discourse has changed by investigating notable works of counterfactual history and their reception by the historical community. By examining widely reviewed counterfactual works written since Carr's book, I will uncover the thoughts of the historical community. This way, the reactions to counterfactuals will show how the practice's acceptance has changed since the 1960s. In order to attempt to cover the past six decades of this discussion, I have spaced out the reviewed counterfactual exercises in order to capture different reactions from different decades.

After analyzing the initial reactions to Carr's *What Is History?* from the 1960s, the next point of focus will be in the mid to late 1970s. After the initial controversy surrounding counterfactuals, historians were unsure and undisciplined when trying to attempt counterfactual

experiments. This led to a wide variation in the quality of counterfactuals published during the 1970s, which may have played into the historical community's continued rejection of them. This time of uncertainty led into the 1980s when Foucault and Lyotard turned the historical community on its head and pushed historians toward the statistics and quantitative figures of social history. This left questions of contingency and “what ifs” to the writers of fiction, both in novels and in Hollywood.

It was not until the 1990s that the tide of counterfactual history would rise again. This time, it was on the backs of a handful of historians looking to revive and rebrand the practice of counterfactual history as a device to be used against historical determinism. This was done by urging readers and historians to acknowledge that people “constantly ask such ‘counterfactual’ questions in [their] daily lives.”²⁸ Therefore, historians confirmed not only that counterfactuals are a natural aspect of life, they are necessary to understand the lives and actions of people who lived before us.

This resurgence of counterfactual history gained momentum throughout the 2000s, which can be seen by the unprompted defenses of counterfactuals in the last twenty years. However, there is still a rift in the historical community over the issue that was exemplified by a critique written in the early 2010s that rang true to Carr’s initial claims. The responses to this work revealed how the historical community’s thoughts on counterfactuals have nearly come full circle.

From the preliminary research that I conducted while writing about the origins of this debate, I formed a hypothesis that historians have not actually been as negative about counterfactuals over the years as many believe. In fact, I hypothesized that this acceptance of counterfactuals may be accurate not only from the past twenty years but throughout the past six

²⁸ Niall Ferguson, *Virtual History : Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 2.

decades. While the rise of social history and the spread of the Annales school's influence did guide history toward a more fact and evidence-based discipline, historians never abandoned the idea of contingency, which had been in use for centuries prior. I will be using these intermittent works to track this debate to see if it is actually as influential to the practice's acceptance as some historians would make it out to be. Through the reviews of counterfactual works, I will reveal the extent to which the historical community rejects the usage of counterfactual history and how the practice was influenced by the debate surrounding it.

The Aftermath of Carr

It was J. C. Squire's *If It Happened Otherwise*, published in 1933, that E. H. Carr had in mind when he wrote *What Is History?* in 1961 and introduced the idea of rejecting contingency to the historical community. Once Carr published his work, the historical community was forced to reevaluate its practices and determine whether or not to accept Carr's criticisms as valid or to reject his historiographical opinions. For Carr, who had been a journalist and diplomat for many years before his career as a historian, to reject the ideas of contingency was natural. His work and life had revolved around concrete facts for so long that utilizing counterfactuals, which are ipso facto untrue, was incompatible with his standards for a publication. However, in a community as traditional and critical as the historical one, Carr was not able to publish a total rejection of a counterfactual practice without rocking the boat.

After Carr's publication in 1961, historians quickly emerged with their critiques. Historians like Trevor-Roper and Elton found flaws with Carr's claims and took it upon themselves to publish their rebuttals. In the case of Trevor-Roper, he was quick to respond to Carr with an article appearing in the literary magazine *Encounter* in May of 1962. Trevor-Roper

dissected Carr's work with precision, pulling on the loose threads of his argument and unraveling them in just a handful of short pages. He mainly focused on how Carr's claim "that documents are useless till they have been 'processed' by the historian" lead to him saying "history [is] dependent on the historian."²⁹ Trevor-Roper was able to use Carr's own argument and his own personal definition of "objectivity" to arrive at the conclusion that Carr was a determinist. He pointed out Carr's reduction of historical practice as:

by and large, a record of what people did, not of what they failed to do: to this extent it is inevitably a success-story. Professor Tawney remarks that historians give "an appearance of inevitableness" to an existing order "by dragging into prominence the forces which have triumphed and thrusting into the background those which they have swallowed up." But is not this, in a sense, the historian's job?³⁰

Trevor-Roper was saying that Carr was proving himself a determinist by claiming only "the right facts" should be used by historians and that exploring contingency was useless. He was also critical of Carr's argument that historians "are not outside of history," and the suggestion that, "the historian, too, [is] a mere social product, his work a 'document' to be 'processed' like any other."³¹ Trevor-Roper ended his critique of Carr by claiming that "no historian since the crudest ages of clerical bigotry has treated evidence with such dogmatic ruthlessness as this" and "no historian, even in those ages, has exalted such dogmatism into an historiographical theory."³² In writing about determinism, Carr came off as condescending as he tried to convince the historical community that his way of conducting historiography was the only way it should be done. Trevor-Roper was able to pull Carr out from behind his writing, just as Carr believed should be done with all historians, and broke down his argument by exposing Carr's view of the historical "process," historiographical theory, and the historical community as a whole.

²⁹ Trevor-Roper, "E. H. Carr's Success Story," 70.

³⁰ Carr, *What is History?*, 77.

³¹ Trevor-Roper, "E. H. Carr's Success Story," 70.

³² Trevor-Roper, "E. H. Carr's Success Story," 76.

Elton's rebuttal would not be published until 1968 as part of his book, *The Practice of History*, in which he wrote about the different practices of several different historians of the time. As stated earlier, Elton agreed with Trevor-Roper's claim that Carr put the historian above the history, even though Carr's own claim was that historical "documents" cannot be separated from the society they were written in. Elton initially praised Carr for rejecting the role of "accidents" in history, but changed his tune upon realizing that this rejection came from Carr's deterministic ideology. Elton felt that Carr's philosophy of history was an attempt to provide a secular version of the medieval view of history as the working of God's master plan with "Progress" playing the part of God.³³ Elton's own writings rejected Carr's deterministic views, saying that the historical community is limited in what it can know and that "for the greater part of history we shall always know very little or nothing concerning such things."³⁴

The foil to Trevor-Roper and Elton's critiques were the reviews that came out in support of Carr's ideas, like that of Walsh published shortly after Trevor-Roper's in 1963. Walsh also focused his writing on Carr's claims that historians cannot be separate from their place in time and society. However, instead of pointing out the contradictions in Carr's argument, Walsh found significance in it. He claimed that in using Carr's writing one can see that "all history is contemporary history" and that historians are "products of a particular age and society, and their interests and preferences are shown both in the problems they select for investigation and in the way they go about their solution."³⁵ While it may seem that Walsh was throwing his support behind Carr, he was still hesitant to fully embrace the radical writings of the time. Walsh did not fully delve into Carr's idea of objectivity; he mostly expanded on his writing while trying to

³³ Elton, *The Practice of History*, 40.

³⁴ Elton, *The Practice of History*, 31.

³⁵ Walsh, "Short Notices," 587.

avoid exposing how Carr's definition of objectivity contradicted his arguments about historians and their practices.

With Carr's groundbreaking work dividing historians in such a definitive fashion, the stage was set for the debate over contingency to be played out in history journals for the coming decades. Even though there were large numbers of historians at the time who were rejecting Carr's ideas and the growing influence of the Annales school, enough of the historical community embraced the new wave of historiographical practice to make historians shy away from using counterfactual experiments in their work coming out of the 1960s.

Uncertain Practice and "Sloppy Scholarship"

Coming into the 1970s, social history was on the rise, with historians turning away from studying the great men and the wars of the past and moving toward studying the experiences of ordinary people in the past. Since social history relies on documenting large structural changes and reconstructing the experiences of people in the course of those changes, contingency was not widely utilized. This lack of interest in contingency and the uncertainty of its acceptance coming out of the 1960s left no agreed upon, acceptable practice for conducting a counterfactual experiment.

Due to the lack of usage and the absence of guidance in how to conduct a historical thought experiment dealing with contingency, historians were left to their own devices. Without many readily available examples, those looking to conduct counterfactual experiments had to piece them together without the contemporary criteria of what makes a counterfactual effective. These guidelines for an effective counterfactual would not arise until the late 1990s, leaving historians of the 1970s to fend for themselves. One of the first to attempt to tackle the idea of

counterfactuals in this decade was Robert Sobel. Sobel was the Lawrence Stessin Distinguished Professor of Business History at Hofstra University. In 1973 Sobel published his book *For Want of a Nail : If Burgoyne Had Won at Saratoga*, which took on the same counterfactual exercise that opened this thesis: what if the colonists had lost the battle of Saratoga?

Sobel's novel depicted an alternate world where history diverged in 1777 when the British won the Battle of Saratoga, leading to the failure of the American Revolution. The beginning of the work was a dream come true to fans of counterfactual experiments. Despite the preface, a reader would not know that they were reading a counterfactual experiment. The book began with the first chapter telling how the British transgressions against the Thirteen Colonies after the Seven Years' War led to the Revolutionary War. The second chapter took the reader through the early years of the war and ended with the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

It was not until chapter three that Sobel deviated from an actual account to an alternate one. The key difference that Sobel made was a plausible one. He posited that when General "Burgoyne sent a delegation to ask [General] Gates his terms for a truce," the outcome of the battle would have changed depending on Gates' response.³⁶ Sobel wrote that Gates overplayed his hand, and when Burgoyne countered with a honorable ending to the battle for both sides, Gates hesitated. This was in place of British General John Burgoyne and colonial General Horatio Gates signing a capitulation. Gates' hesitation allowed for British reinforcements to arrive and for the eventual surrender of Gates rather than Burgoyne.

At that point in Sobel's book, contemporary advocates for counterfactual history and contingency should have been overjoyed. Not only did Sobel pinpoint a plausible moment in history that could have gone differently with the terms of surrender at Saratoga, he also

³⁶ Robert Sobel, *For Want of a Nail : If Burgoyne Had Won at Saratoga* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 31.

immediately delivered the payoff with the battle shifting the other way and the British winning. He had done an extremely effective job at establishing that the outcome of the Battle of Saratoga was contingent upon the decisions that Gates made while negotiating Burgoyne's surrender. However, readers may be concerned with the fact that the payoff for Sobel's initial counterfactual experiment came on page thirty-one of his book that is over 400 pages long.

Similar to the counterfactual posed at the beginning of this work, France pulled their support for the colonies after their loss at Saratoga, and Spain followed suit. After the military losses, the people had lost faith in the radical signers of the Declaration of Independence and opted to be led by more moderate leaders. These leaders in turn decided to surrender to the English, effectively ending the American Revolution. If this seems like fast moving consequences of a single battle, it is because they are. At this point Sobel had extended his counterfactual too far for it to be deemed legitimate, making his work seem more foolish than academic.

Unfortunately, the preposterous nature of Sobel's book did not stop there with the American Revolution ending at the conclusion of the third chapter. Sobel continued on for 365 more pages about the "thousand former rebels [that] departed from New England and the Middle colonies for central Louisiana" where they would eventually establish the United States of Mexico.³⁷ The book brought the reader all the way to 1971 where the British-founded Confederation of North America "is the most powerful conventional nation in the world" and the United States of Mexico "is considered the world's trouble spot [... with] statesmen and political analysts [unable to] decide whether the world would be safer or more endangered should Mexico develop a [nuclear] bomb."³⁸

³⁷ Sobel, *For Want of a Nail*, 46.

³⁸ Sobel, *For Want of a Nail*, 400.

The true tragedy of Sobel's work was that it was so close to being a perfect counterfactual experiment. Looking at the book from an academic perspective, it felt like an example of a counterfactual that had been extrapolated out and expanded into a full-length book instead of a journal article. Claiming that this book overextended the initial counterfactual is an understatement. If this book had come out as either a journal article or a book that properly followed through on analyzing Sobel's initial counterfactual, it may have changed how people thought about the use of contingency in the 1970s. Instead, Sobel decided to create a fictional parallel world that provided an alternate history to the one we live in today.

Due to the book's fictional nature, it was not widely reviewed academically. Most historians wrote it off as another misguided attempt at establishing contingency through counterfactual history. The most popular review of the book was actually included as the work's last chapter as a foil to acknowledge some of the biases Sobel may have had as an Australian writing about American history. It was a critique written by Frank Dana, professor of history at the University of Mexico. In the critique, he mainly pointed out "the historian must strive for objectivity, knowing he can never succeed."³⁹ In actuality, this "critique" was a fabricated product of Sobel's alternate history, with the author, Professor Dana, not actually existing in real life.

Sobel's inclusion of a self-critique was interesting, as it explained some of his possible motivations for writing such a fiction and why he formatted it as a rigid history rather than a narrative story. Under the guise of "a healthy dialogue fostered between historians of two nations," Sobel wrote four pages on the ways in which he was biased while writing his historical fiction.⁴⁰ Although the critique was dated in 1972 (a year before the actual book was published),

³⁹ Sobel, *For Want of a Nail*, 406.

⁴⁰ Sobel, *For Want of a Nail*, 402.

one can assume that it actually outlined the purposeful usage of bias and the statement Sobel was trying to make throughout writing rather than nitpicking them after the fact. The proper historiographical practice throughout the book, the beautifully crafted counterfactual experiment that started it, the instances of obvious fictional bias, and the “minor errors and questionable conclusions” pointed to the argument that Sobel was attempting to make about historians.⁴¹ Sobel was arguing that historians of the time were being foolish for not including contingency and counterfactuals into their historiographical practices, since their practices could effectively be used on an entire fabrication of history. His claim was that since the historian cannot ever achieve complete objectivity, they might as well take into account the things that may have happened and risk the presence of presentism for the sake of contingency.

Robert M. Calhoun, professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and founding editor of the on-line *Journal of Backcountry Studies*, drew attention to the book's true intentions in his review of Sobel's work. Calhoun started by pushing past the work's “elaborate bibliography of non-existent books, and its breezy, gossipy” to acknowledge the actual historiographical practice that Sobel used.⁴² Calhoun praised Sobel's overextended counterfactual for highlighting that “the division of the North American continent into Revolutionary and colonial nations would have brought out the worst in both British imperialism and American expansionism.”⁴³ In the end, Calhoun concluded that the book was good for those looking for “amorphous reconstructions of campaigns, interest groups, and personalities” carried to the extreme as Sobel tried to tell the reader “that historians take themselves and their work too seriously.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ Sobel, *For Want of a Nail*, 403.

⁴² Robert M. Calhoun, “Review of For Want of a Nail... If Burgoyne Had Won at Saratoga, by Robert Sobel,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (1974): 442.

⁴³ Calhoun, “Review of For Want of a Nail,” 442.

⁴⁴ Calhoun, “Review of For Want of a Nail,” 442.

Calhoon did a good job of citing the pieces of Sobel's work that were done well while ultimately acknowledging what the book actually was: "part spoof, part critique of historical writing, and part exercise in counterfactual analysis."⁴⁵ By acknowledging that Sobel's book began with an actual counterfactual exercise, Calhoon was not only giving merit to the practice, he was also showcasing the missed opportunity that this book could have capitalized on. Sobel wrote his book in order to critique the heavily footnote-laden and factually dense writing that was becoming popular in the historical community following the rise of social history and more scientific historiographical practices spurred on by Carr and other like minded historians.

Sobel was one of the first to strike out against this trend in the 1970s, but unfortunately for historians who utilized contingency, he chose to bury the purpose of his book under his fiction. While Sobel certainly wasn't hiding his claim by writing each chapter in the style of a different academic historian, and the final critique based on the savage reviews commonplace in historical journals, he did not clearly state it. The unclear nature of his message combined with the overextension of a superb counterfactual exercise made Sobel's book a huge missed opportunity. If Sobel had chosen to write an actual counterfactual experiment around the premise of his book instead of creating a fictional critique of the historical community, he may have not only been more effective in his goal, but he also could have saved the practice of contingency going forward. To ponder what would have happened if Sobel had used his efforts to put out an effective counterfactual in a time when contingency was on its way out of historiographical practice requires a counterfactual exercise of its own. However, the effort may have been enough to keep the usage of contingency relevant in the tide of changing historiographical practices.

While speculating about the impact that Sobel could have had on the historical community is both topical and interesting, he was not the only one striking out against historians'

⁴⁵ Calhoon, "Review of For Want of a Nail," 441.

resistance to contingency. John M. Murrin was a professor of history at Princeton University and a scholar of American colonial, revolutionary, and early republic history who often utilized counterfactual experiments in his work. Murrin was a doctoral student when Carr published *What is History?* He began teaching at Washington University two years later. Since he was nearly a full-fledged historian by 1961, he was able to strike out against Carr's ideas with the publishing of "The French and Indian War, the American Revolution, and the Counterfactual Hypothesis: Reflections on Lawrence Henry Gipson and John Shy" in 1973. Murrin took the road that Sobel did not, claiming in his first line that "history is not fiction [and] historians reject the liberty essential to historical novelist."⁴⁶ In the introduction to his article, Murrin defended the usage of counterfactual experiments and actively refuted historians speaking out against them. Murrin claimed that:

most [historians] attempt in practice what [they] reject in theory. To make sense out of the past, historians do fantasize about their subject. Every time a historian evaluates a particular decision or policy option in terms of contemporary alternatives, he is thinking counterfactually because he has to, unless one is prepared to assert that real choices did not exist in the past or that, if they did, historians should ignore them.⁴⁷

Murrin's ability and willingness to directly speak out against the opposition to counterfactuals separated him from Sobel. While Sobel was trying to prove a point to his peers by applying historiographical practices to fiction, Murrin was trying to change historiographical practices by refuting his predecessors' arguments and writing counterfactuals of his own. Murrin acknowledged that the "sheer lack of rules" that counterfactuals had at the time led to it being employed "haphazardly rather than systematically."⁴⁸ The absence of counterfactual guidelines

⁴⁶ John M. Murrin, "The French and Indian War, the American Revolution, and the Counterfactual Hypothesis: Reflections on Lawrence Henry Gipson and John Shy," *Reviews in American History* 1, no. 3 (1973): 307. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2701135>.

⁴⁷ Murrin, "The French and Indian War," 307.

⁴⁸ Murrin, "The French and Indian War," 308.

was one of the biggest things that turned historians away from the practice during this period of uncertainty.

In an effort to put contingency and counterfactuals back to their rightful, unquestioned places in historiographical practice, Murrin attempted to establish some guidelines when using counterfactuals. Murrin suggested that counterfactual hypotheses could “be formulated and assessed only in terms of the data from which they arise.”⁴⁹ He provided an example of a poor counterfactual by posing that if George III had invented the airplane then Britain may have won the Revolutionary War. He went on to elaborate that “this particular counterfactual argument is absurd [...] because it violates what we already know about the science of the period, [but] other might-have-beens are more plausible and merit serious attention.”⁵⁰ Murrin was the first to try to not only refute the ideologies of Carr but also to pose a solution to the problems that historians have identified when using counterfactuals.

Unfortunately, Murrin’s attempt to push back against the momentum of the historical community in the 1970s became lost in a sea of naysayers and fiction writers. Murrin used his article to highlight the arguments made by historians who had used counterfactuals previously instead of producing one of his own. The lack of new counterfactual material combined with Sobel and Murrin both publishing their works in the same year led to counterfactuals gaining little to no headway with historians. The popularity of social history continued to spread throughout the 1970s as did the unpopularity of historians using contingency in their research. Writers like Sobel, who completed his work and was happy with his effort, went on to write other things, while writers like Murrin refused to back down and stuck with the cause, waiting for their work to be rightfully appreciated.

⁴⁹ Murrin, “The French and Indian War,” 308.

⁵⁰ Murrin, “The French and Indian War,” 308.

As the 1970s came to a close, there was one more resurfacing of contingency in *If I Had Been ... : Ten Historical Fantasies*. The 1979 book, edited by British writer, historian, and lecturer at the University of Sussex, Daniel Snowman, was a nontraditional take on using contingency historiographically. Snowman's collection of chapters from various contributors all focus on the premise of "if I had been my chosen figure."⁵¹ The contributors attempted to write hypotheticals about how they would have acted during certain historical events. In these chapters the authors altered the overall actions of a single pivotal figure rather than a specific action or moment in time. This significant twist to counterfactual experiments toed the line of the guidelines that Murrin proposed and skewed far over the line of what is now understood to be an effective counterfactual. However, Snowman's collection is worth studying due to his defense of contingency in his introduction and his contributors' attempts to use contingency historiographically.

Snowman's claim that "the game of 'If I Had Been ...' is one that [everyone plays] from time to time" and is proof of contingency in people's daily lives.⁵² This mirrored the arguments of Sobel and Murrin, who both claimed that historians also practice contingency regularly and are being unreasonable when leaving it out of historiographical practices. However, Snowman's approach to historiographical contingency opened multiple cans of worms that traditional counterfactuals do not. Snowman had to address the issue of presentism in his contributors' work by asking "in what sense, [anyone] can pretend to be someone else."⁵³ He also had to grapple with the debate "between the advocates of determinism and free will" on a much deeper level than the other historians using contingency at this time.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Daniel Snowman, *If I Had Been ... : Ten Historical Fantasies*, (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), 2.

⁵² Snowman, *If I Had Been ...*, 2.

⁵³ Snowman, *If I Had Been ...*, 3.

⁵⁴ Snowman, *If I Had Been ...*, 6.

The contributors to Snowman's book took the actions of a "great man" at a pivotal moment in history and changed them with a presentist approach. Snowman addressed the attempt was not to change the entire scenario but to merely change a set of choices made possible through free will. The issue with this approach is that "not everything in the past is susceptible to hypothetical alteration," which significantly limits the applications of counterfactual experiments.⁵⁵ While contemporary historians know the limited range of effective counterfactuals and when they are applicable, Snowman was not working with an established set of guidelines. The contributors attempted to "improve" the events of the past which showcases how poorly constructed counterfactuals can fall into situations of "if only" instead of "what if."⁵⁶ Therefore, the contingency based chapters that he collected fell way out of the lines of effective historiography and more toward presentist based historical fiction.

W. Benjamin Kennedy, a professor of history at West Georgia College, reviewed Snowman's book a year after its publication in 1980. Kennedy gave credit to Snowman for the "interesting points of historiography and philosophy of history" that the "new approach" raised.⁵⁷ However, Kennedy did recognize that "sometimes [...] the hypotheses are extended too far."⁵⁸ Kennedy concluded that Snowman's work could be helpful in the classroom to show historians in training different types of historiographical thought, but would not necessarily be useful for established historians.

Kennedy's mild reaction to the over-extended use of contingency by Snowman represented the attitude that the historical community felt toward contingency by the end of the 1970s. While there was a surge in social history, military history and political history remained

⁵⁵ Snowman, *If I Had Been ...*, 5.

⁵⁶ "Short Notices." *Teaching History*, no. 26 (1980): 47.

⁵⁷ W. Benjamin Kennedy, "Review of If I Had Been... Ten Historical Fantasies, by Daniel Snowman," *The History Teacher* 13, no. 3 (1980): 440. <https://doi.org/10.2307/491692>.

⁵⁸ Kennedy, "Review of If I Had Been...", 440.

major fields of study. Military history is the study of armed conflict in the history of humanity and its impact on societies, cultures, and economies; political history is the study of political events, ideas, movements, government, voters, parties and leaders. The arguments of Sobel, Murrin, and Snowman all rang true in the sense that when conducting historiographical research in the field of military or political history it is human nature to think of the “what ifs.”

Nearly twenty years removed from Carr’s groundbreaking claims about contingency’s place in historiography, the historical community was mostly indifferent on the topic. Young historians like Murrin were attempting to establish new guidelines for how to use counterfactuals. However, with historians like Snowman attempting to push the boundaries of historiography and writers like Sobel burying their claims about contingency and historiography under hundreds of pages of fiction, historians looking to utilize contingency were met with examples of uncertain practice and “sloppy scholarship.”⁵⁹

The Social History Wave Crests as Contingency Crashes

As discussed earlier, the emergence of social history after World War II marked a turning point for the historical community and historiographical practices. With more and more historians in Europe falling under the influence of the Annales school and the phenomena of social history spreading across the globe, historians’ concerns about counterfactuals were becoming more widespread. While this did not stop the work of historians who were determined to include contingency in their work, it did put up several roadblocks for them.

For example, Murrin did not allow the historical communities’ unaccepting nature toward counterfactuals to stop him from marching ahead. Ten years after his first article, in 1983, he published “No Awakening, No Revolution? More Counterfactual Speculations” in which he

⁵⁹ Murrin, “The French and Indian War,” 308.

reflected on his previous work and continued utilizing counterfactual experiments. Murrin acknowledged “counterfactual arguments have their terrors for historians, especially [because] they lack a rigorous statistical base.”⁶⁰ The reference to historians’ comfort in statistics was a result of the growing social history movement and the emergence of economic history happening simultaneously.

New economic history, often called cliometrics, originated in 1958 in the United States with the systematic application of economic theory and other mathematical methods to the study of history. Cliometrics and social history both emerged and grew in popularity in step with one another. Even though the two ideologies were conceived on different sides of the globe, their practices were extremely compatible. Just as contingency had been a crucial part of studying military and political history before Carr, cliometrics was becoming an integral part of practicing social history.

In the early 1980s, cliometrics was gaining popularity but was not yet accepted in full by the historical community. However, with articles like Murrin’s continuing to toe the line between using counterfactual experiments and referencing old ones, the fight against social history and cliometrics was scarce. The ten years since Murrin’s last attempt only improved his historiographical practice, allowing him to pose some of his own “counterfactual musings [to] provide” causality between the Awakening and the American Revolution.⁶¹ Unfortunately, Murrin still relied heavily on the writings of past historians that used counterfactuals rather than primary documents to back up his work. As a result, Murrin’s attempt ended the same as his last, with the historical community passing it over in their movement toward social history.

⁶⁰ John M. Murrin, “No Awakening, No Revolution? More Counterfactual Speculations,” *Reviews in American History* 11, no. 2 (1983): 162.

⁶¹ Murrin, “No Awakening, No Revolution?,” 163.

The following year, in 1984, Lyotard published *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* in which he completely turned the historical community on its head. He claimed that history was nothing more than stories that groups of people told themselves about the past to rationalize what came before their existence. Lyotard critiqued the historical community by arguing that “consensus [had] become an outmoded and suspect [way to determine something’s] value.”⁶² Historians had been conducting historical research and interpreting the past for centuries based on the debates and consensus of the historical community. Instead of pushing back against Lyotard and defending their discipline, the historical community sought a way to remedy the issue that he had pointed out.

The solution that the historical community came up with in this time of uncertainty was to establish their discipline as a science. To accomplish this, the historical community fully embraced the practice of social history and the usage of cliometrics. In 1993, Robert William Fogel, often described as the father of modern econometric history, was honored “for having renewed research in economic history.”⁶³ This recognition signaled the biggest surge in cliometrics since its emergence in the 1960s. With social history and cliometrics working hand in hand, the historical community was moving toward cliodynamics. Cliodynamics is an area of research that combines cultural evolution, cliometrics, macrosociology, the mathematical modeling of historical processes, and the construction and analysis of historical databases.⁶⁴ Although the term was not officially coined until 2003 by the complexity scientist Peter Turchin, the historical community began seriously treating history like a science and practicing cliodynamics after Lyotard’s critiques in the mid-1980s.

⁶² Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 66.

⁶³ NobelPrize.org, “Press Release,” October 12, 1993.
<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/economic-sciences/1993/press-release/>.

⁶⁴ Peter Turchin, “Arise ‘Cliodynamics.’” *Nature* 454, no. 7200 (July 2008): 34–35.
<https://doi.org/10.1038/454034a>.

This shift was almost a fatal blow to contingency's presence in historiography. While some historians continued to publish counterfactual experiments and reflections in scarce articles, the majority of historians were following the wave of social history that was sweeping over academia. With cliodynamics on the rise, the usage and acceptance of counterfactuals plummeted. This opened the possibility for speculation as to why historians disliked counterfactuals, resulting in the modern stigma. It was the historical community's reaction to the critiques of the 1980s that pushed counterfactuals out of historiography and gave the opportunity for assumptions to be made about practices of historians.

The Resurgence of Counterfactuals

With contingency on the outs and cliometrics established as a new norm in the historical community, the future of counterfactuals seemed bleak. However, the imagination and creativity in the minds of many historians had not simply vanished, rather, it had been suppressed and was looking for an outlet. It was not until the publication of Geoffrey Hawthorn's *Plausible Worlds: Possibility and Understanding in History and the Social Sciences* in 1991 that these historians felt they were able to scratch their contingency driven itches. Hawthorn was a professor of international politics and social and political theory at the University of Cambridge. In his book, Hawthorn attempted to reconcile the usage of contingency with the study of history as a social science. Hawthorn claimed that:

Explanations ... are not fixed. There is nothing in the world itself to tell us what they are. And there is no good argument from elsewhere always to rule in some kinds of account, those in terms of theories, for example, or of laws, or of causes, or in History and the social sciences, of reasons, as explanatory, and always to rule out others. We simply set out to explain the facts and we adduce information to do so. What that information is, and

how it is cast, depends on what is being asked. Explanations, we can say, are dependent, as explanations upon context.⁶⁵

Hawthorn's book was a declaration of philosophical ideology, which he then attempted to apply to historical understanding and practice. He argued that the only objectivity that came from the study of history were conclusions that were agreed on by "contingent convergence."⁶⁶ This undercut the practice of history as a science by claiming that only through consensus in the historical community could something be deemed somewhat objective. This pushed directly against Lyotard's claims and the altered practices of the historical community, which had been in use for nearly a decade by the time of Hawthorn's publication.

As a result, Hawthorn's book was largely shrugged off by the historical community as a philosophical work attempting to throw a wrench into the discipline of history. Haskell Fain, professor of philosophy at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, wrote in his review that Hawthorn's writing was "learned yet bewildering."⁶⁷ The overall rejection of Hawthorn's ideas by Fain was evident in his opinion that the philosophical argument "is terse, at times to the point of unintelligibility."⁶⁸ Even historians who were more open minded to the ideas of contingency, such as Roy Porter, were not entirely convinced by Hawthorn's attempt. Roy Porter, who specializes in medical history rather than historical ideology, questioned "whether [Hawthorn's argument] warrants a book."⁶⁹ Porter appreciated the work that Hawthorn put into his writing, but like many in the historical community at the time, he did not see the need for contingency or a break away from more scientific practices. In the words of the former California State

⁶⁵ Geoffrey Hawthorn, *Plausible Worlds: Possibility and Understanding in History and the Social Sciences* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1991), 26.

⁶⁶ Hawthorn, *Plausible Worlds*, 178.

⁶⁷ Haskell Fain, "Review of *Plausible Worlds; Possibility and Understanding in History and the Social Sciences*," by Geoffrey Hawthorn, *History and Theory* 32, no. 1 (1993): 83. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2505331>.

⁶⁸ Fain, "Review of *Plausible Worlds*," 84.

⁶⁹ Roy Porter, "Review of *Plausible Worlds: Possibility and Understanding in History and the Social Sciences*," by Geoffrey Hawthorn, *Sociology* 27, no. 4 (1993): 728.

University professor Ronald J. Vander Molen, “Hawthorn's learning [was] impressive and his objectives [were] worthy; but he never [pulled] off the argument.”⁷⁰

While Hawthorn’s work was not accepted with open arms by the historical community, it did open the door for other historians looking to reestablish contingency in historiography. In 1996 another attempt was made to defend counterfactuals in *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics: Logical, Methodological, and Psychological Perspectives*. This book was a collection of essays brought together by political science professors Philip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin. Tetlock and Belkin addressed “the ferocity of the skeptics” by acknowledging that “there is nothing new about counterfactual inference.”⁷¹ In their book, Tetlock and Belkin agreed that critics:

are right that counterfactual inference is dauntingly difficult. But they are wrong that we can avoid counterfactual reasoning at acceptable cost. And they are wrong that all counterfactuals are equally ‘absurd’ because they are equally hypothetical. We can avoid counterfactuals only if we eschew all causal inference and limit ourselves to strictly noncausal narratives of what actually happened (no smuggling in causal claims under the guise of verbs such as “influenced,” “responded,” “triggered,” “precipitated,” and the like).⁷²

Their argument that counterfactuals come naturally to historians and are somewhat present in all historiographical research rings true to what users of counterfactuals had been saying since Carr. There is a clear throughline from the 1960s: historians have been arguing that contingency is part of historical thinking and that taking it out is not only counterproductive but nearly impossible.

⁷⁰ Ronald J. VanderMolen, “Review of Plausible Worlds: Possibility and Understanding in History and the Social Sciences,” by Geoffrey Hawthorn, *The Historian* 55, no. 1 (1992): 126.

⁷¹ Philip E. Tetlock, and Aaron Belkin, *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics: Logical, Methodological, and Psychological Perspectives* (Princeton University Press, 1996), 3. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv10vm1bn>.

⁷² Tetlock and Belkin, *Counterfactual Thought Experiments*, 3.

Tetlock and Belkin's book fell in line with the advocacy for contingency but it was quickly overshadowed by Niall Ferguson's *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals*. Inspired by Hawthorn's work, Ferguson, former professor at Harvard University, the London School of Economics, New York University, and the New College of the Humanities, published his collection of counterfactual essays in 1997. Ferguson's book is comprised of nine different counterfactual experiments conducted by different historians and an introduction and conclusion written by Ferguson himself. His manifesto-like introduction is a ninety-one page defense of counterfactual history in which Ferguson directly addressed and refuted arguments of determinists and Marxists from the previous four decades.

Ferguson began his introduction with the same argument that his predecessors had made, that counterfactual thoughts and questions are a natural part of life and certainly come naturally to historians. He quickly shifted from this point to acknowledge "the attitude of generations of historians" that came before him and agreed with Carr.⁷³ Ferguson claimed that the generations before him felt that asking the "what if" question was not worth the trouble. Ferguson related the "hostility to counterfactual arguments [that had] been and [remained] surprisingly widespread among professional historians" to the ideas of determinists like Carr or E. P. Thompson.⁷⁴ Thompson's determinist dismissal of "counterfactual fictions" as "*Geschichtswissenschaft*, [or] unhistorical shit" showed how much determinist ideology conflicts with the existence of counterfactual history.⁷⁵

However, Ferguson moved on from the determinism and free will debate to acknowledge other critiques of counterfactuals from historians who did not have the same outlook as Carr and

⁷³ Ferguson, *Virtual History*, 4.

⁷⁴ Ferguson, *Virtual History*, 5.

⁷⁵ E. P. Thompson, "The Poverty of Theory," in *idem*, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London, 1978), 300.

Thompson. The critiques, from the likes of idealist philosophers Benedetto Croce and Michael Oakeshott, mostly focused on how wearisome it is to conduct counterfactuals and how they are not based on hard evidence and therefore have no place in historiography. These arguments fall in line with Tetlock and Belkin's claim that some historians find counterfactuals too inaccessible and difficult to conduct in a scientific way.

The next piece of Ferguson's lengthy introduction dealt with the "serious historians who have ventured to address [...] counterfactual questions" and how their counterfactuals were received by the historical community.⁷⁶ He started his analysis of past counterfactuals in the beginning of the twentieth century and worked his way up through the rise of social history. Ferguson identified one of the issues with Snowman's work and other collections of contingency based essays as how "in a number of the chapters a single, often trivial, change has momentous consequences."⁷⁷ This implied that a trivial detail caused the actual event, which Ferguson deemed problematic due to the lack of causality that was provided in the monocausal explanations. George Herbert's historic poem, which was also the basis for Sobel's book, was another point of interest for Ferguson. He highlighted how the trivial detail of wanting a horseshoe nail led to the downfall of Richard III and how counterfactuals like this are detrimental to the usage of contingency as a whole. It was "the defects of all these attempts at explicit counterfactual analysis" that Ferguson used to partially "explain the failure of counterfactualism to catch on."⁷⁸

Ferguson then refuted the claims that historians who use counterfactuals are revisionists, or that counterfactualism is used by revisionists to provide legitimacy to their claims. In response to these accusations, Ferguson offered up a number of sound counterfactuals that ended in things

⁷⁶ Ferguson, *Virtual History*, 8.

⁷⁷ Ferguson, *Virtual History*, 12.

⁷⁸ Ferguson, *Virtual History*, 19.

going far worse than actual events played out. Ferguson ended the first section of his introduction by concluding that it was “more than the defects of past attempts at counterfactual history [that] has deterred” historians from accepting its use.⁷⁹

Ferguson used the majority of the rest of his introduction to address the different philosophies of history that caused suspicion of counterfactuals. He tackled the ideologies of divine intervention and predestination, scientific determinism, materialism and idealism, scientific history, narrative determinism, and chaostory. For each of the different historical philosophies, Ferguson explained either how counterfactual history is compatible or he refuted the philosophy, claiming that it should be critiqued, not counterfactuals. Ferguson concluded his introduction by reflecting on the paradigm shifts of the historical community. In comparison to scientific disciplines that undergo “scientific revolutions,” the paradigms of history “change in a more haphazard way. In place of modern periodic ‘shifts’ forward, the modern historical profession has [had] a sluggish ‘revisionism.’”⁸⁰ According to Ferguson, “history appears to have [a] kind of cyclical quality” but in reality nothing is determined and the only way things come about is through the autonomous actions and decisions of the past.⁸¹

The remainder of Ferguson’s book included nine counterfactual essays taking place between 1646 and 1996, each written by a different historian who wanted to help Ferguson bring counterfactuals back into the limelight. The book concluded with an afterword by Ferguson in which he told a historical narrative as if the nine counterfactuals all took place in a single timeline. This was a questionable decision for Ferguson, as his defense of proper counterfactuals was so summative in his introduction, yet he broke several of his own rules for what made a good counterfactual in his afterword.

⁷⁹ Ferguson, *Virtual History*, 20.

⁸⁰ Ferguson, *Virtual History*, 90.

⁸¹ Ferguson, *Virtual History*, 90.

Although Ferguson's book was not the first counterfactual defense to be published in the 1990s, it is considered to be one of the most pivotal works in the counterfactual history debate. This historical community of the time was at a crossroads as they approached the turn of the century, resulting in a mixed reaction to Ferguson's groundbreaking work. Susan L. Carruthers, professor of US and international history at the University of Warwick, gave credit to Ferguson for outing the "various breeds of determinists who [thought counterfactually] while simultaneously trumpeting their aversion to such hypothetical lines of enquiry."⁸² Although Carruthers acknowledged the impressive nature of Ferguson's introduction, she was critical of the rest of the work. She claimed that "the results are perhaps rather less spectacular" in that the counterfactuals included in the book were not as creative as Ferguson's writing would have readers expect.⁸³ Many of the essays fell into the same malpractice "which Ferguson's introduction criticizes."⁸⁴

These critiques were not unique to Carruthers's review. Arthur Marwick, professor of history at the Open University, shared many of the same opinions in his review of Ferguson. Ferguson commended the opening defense of counterfactuals, saying:

not clear whether the book is a final, frenzied dismemberment of the (I would have thought) already comatose body of historical determinism, or a rite of purification opening the way to a professional world in which no work will be acceptable unless all counterfactual alternatives have been thoroughly considered. Ferguson sets down the rules for counterfactual history: alternative outcomes may be explored only if there is evidence in the primary sources that contemporaries actually expected these alternative outcomes.⁸⁵

⁸² Susan L. Carruthers, "Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals," *International Affairs* 73, no. 4 (October 1997): 803. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2624505>.

⁸³ Carruthers, "Virtual History," 803.

⁸⁴ Carruthers, "Virtual History," 803.

⁸⁵ Arthur Marwick, "Review of Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals," by Niall Ferguson, *History* 83, no. 269 (1998): 87.

Unfortunately, Ferguson's "contributors generally don't follow the rules" that he established.⁸⁶ Marwick claimed that this was because it was difficult to conduct an effective counterfactual when there was no evidentiary basis and the historian had to rely on secondary sources. He compared the essays that followed Ferguson's introduction to bad television. Relying on the interpretations of other historians rather than the information and primary documents of the time made for a weak counterfactual. While Marwick criticized Ferguson for ignoring those who had "made the case that historians should look towards the sciences rather than literature," he did think that Ferguson's defense of counterfactuals should "be studied by everyone interested in history."⁸⁷

Eyal Segal, independent scholar and former professor at Tel Aviv University, also praised Ferguson's introduction and bashed the following chapters. He claimed that the introduction was "one of many methodological aids to a better understanding of the factual."⁸⁸ Segal's review focused on how Ferguson's work was interesting to both historians and literary theorists who study the line between fact and fiction. However, Segal argued that "considering the expectations that arise from the book's introduction and the titles of its essays, the counterfactual pieces themselves may appear somewhat disappointing."⁸⁹ He claimed that this was mainly because most of the chapters were spent analyzing the events that actually occurred instead of establishing the counterfactuals posed in their titles.

American historian of modern Germany and the former president of the American Historical Association, James J. Sheehan, agreed with the proponents of counterfactuals that "it might be possible to believe in historical determinism as a theory, it is practically impossible to

⁸⁶ Marwick, "Review of Virtual History," 87.

⁸⁷ Marwick, "Review of Virtual History," 88.

⁸⁸ Eyal Segal, "Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals (Review)," *Poetics Today* 22, no. 4 (2001): 864.

⁸⁹ Segal, "Virtual History," 864.

write about the past without imagining that things might have turned out differently.”⁹⁰ In his review, Sheehan used the guidelines that Ferguson himself established for an effective counterfactual to evaluate the following chapters. Using the ideals of literary merit and plausibility, Sheehan concluded that the essays provided an “unsatisfactory structure.”⁹¹ He claimed that these issues were most prominent in Ferguson’s afterward “which strings together all of the counterfactual alternatives proposed” leading to an alternate history that “badly fails the plausibility test.”⁹²

While many historians critiqued the essays that Ferguson had collected for not upholding the values of his introduction, the entire historical community did not feel this way. Darrin M. McMahon, historian, author, public speaker, and professor of history at Dartmouth College, made the claim that “the books’ nine essays, by a range of distinguished historians, help to bear” outed Ferguson’s claims about counterfactuals.⁹³ McMahon did acknowledge that “fuel for controversy” amongst the essays but overall did not discredit them against Ferguson’s introduction.⁹⁴ He also praised Ferguson’s introduction for its “compelling case that such resistance [toward counterfactuals] is misplaced.”⁹⁵

However, not all historians thought that Ferguson’s defense of counterfactuals was as groundbreaking as some reviews made it out to be. Jeremy Black, historian, writer, and former professor of history at the University of Exeter, was disappointed by Ferguson’s attempt. He claimed that “Ferguson, a very capable historian, [was] surprisingly weak on the theory of his

⁹⁰ James J. Sheehan, “Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals,” (1999): 990. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086%2F318551>.

⁹¹ Sheehan, “Virtual History,” 991.

⁹² Sheehan, “Virtual History,” 991.

⁹³ Darrin M. McMahon, “Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals (Review),” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 31, no. 3 (2001): 428.

⁹⁴ McMahon, “Virtual History,” 429.

⁹⁵ McMahon, “Virtual History,” 428.

subject.”⁹⁶ Instead, he recommended that readers would be better off reading the work of Tetlock and Belkin that had come out the year before Ferguson’s. Black argues that Ferguson did not do a good enough job explaining the historiography of the practice to the reader and that those who read Tetlock and Belkin “would then be able to discuss how” counterfactuals actually work.⁹⁷ Black did conclude that Ferguson’s work was “stimulating and important” but was sure to acknowledge that “it is a less-than-complete survey of the subject.”⁹⁸ Former professor of history at Colorado College and president of the American Society for Military History, Dennis Showalter, built on this idea in his review, acknowledging that Ferguson’s work was still “developing its methodology.”⁹⁹ With counterfactual history being viewed as a minefield for decades before Ferguson’s book, the “current standards” of practice had to be reestablished.¹⁰⁰

P. J. Waller, historian and emeritus fellow at the University of Oxford, framed his review of Ferguson’s book as a movie review, with the book as a “high-speed chase through the historiography of hypothetical history.”¹⁰¹ While his verbiage gave a very casual tone to the review, Waller provided a very comprehensive recap of the historical communities reactions to Ferguson’s work. He first identified the authors of the chapters as the “usual suspects” who “will not disappoint their fans before they are led away to their cells” for advocating for counterfactuals.¹⁰² Waller enjoyed the counterfactual arguments represented in the book although he acknowledged that his taste was less refined compared to the rest of the historical community. He also made sure to mention that:

⁹⁶ Jeremy Black, “Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals,” *History: Reviews of New Books* 28, no. 2 (Winter 2000): 51.

⁹⁷ Black, “Virtual History,” 51.

⁹⁸ Black, “Virtual History,” 52.

⁹⁹ Dennis Showalter, “Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals,” *The Journal of Military History* 64, no. 3 (July 2000): 919.

¹⁰⁰ Showalter, “Virtual History,” 919.

¹⁰¹ P. J. Waller, “Virtual History. Alternatives and Counterfactuals,” *The English Historical Review* CXIII, no. 452 (June 1, 1998): 815.

¹⁰² Waller, “Virtual History,” 815.

historians of a sensitive disposition, who prefer a simple romance to a thriller, will be upset and even offended. They may need reassurance that the blood is ketchup, as they flip up their seats and storm out. But, the connoisseurs will want to know, when they recall those favourites of yesteryear, from the now almost fading talkies about Cleo's Nose to the more recent computerized classics which have brought us Cliometrics and Chaos Theory, does this version contain any original twists?¹⁰³

Unfortunately, Waller appreciated the ideals put forward by Ferguson but concluded that it was “a pity, then, that not every member of the seasoned cast seems to understand the direction” Ferguson was headed in.¹⁰⁴ Waller’s tone falls in line with something that McMahon touched upon in his review. At the end of his review, McMahon posed his own counterfactual of “what if published history could be serious, engaging, and fun?”¹⁰⁵ Both McMahon and Waller tapped into this idea of history being entertaining and fun that had not been a large factor in the historical community since the shift toward cliodynamics. While Ferguson did not succeed in winning over the entire historical community with his collection of essays, he did manage to inspire a new wave of counterfactual works aiming to make the practice of history exciting again.

Two years after Ferguson published his book, another collection of essays was collected by American military historian Robert Cowley. *What If? : The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been*, published in 1999, focused on the use of counterfactuals in military history. Cowley described “what if?” or the counterfactual as “the historian’s favorite secret question.”¹⁰⁶ This related back to the arguments of the proponents of counterfactual history over the prior three decades. A review of both Ferguson and Cowley’s work suggested “that reviewing these collections of ‘what if’ historical scenarios would be easy

¹⁰³ Waller, “Virtual History,” 816.

¹⁰⁴ Waller, “Virtual History,” 816.

¹⁰⁵ McMahon, “Virtual History,” 429.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Cowley, *What If? : The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been* (New York: Putnam, 1999), xi. <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy1209/99032215-b.html>.

and fun.”¹⁰⁷ Just two years after the release of Ferguson’s counterfactual defense, the historical community’s attitude toward counterfactual history was beginning to change.

With this changing attitude came the opportunity for historians to publish counterfactual experiments under the newly acceptable guidelines. Gary J. Kornblith, professor of history at Oberlin College and former student of John M. Murrin, published “Rethinking the Coming of the Civil War: A Counterfactual Exercise” in *The Journal of American History*, the leading journal for US history scholarship, in 2003. Inspired by his former teacher and mentor, Kornblith took the new structure that had been given to counterfactual history and applied it to “the causation of the Civil War.”¹⁰⁸ Kornblith’s counterfactual experiment was one of the first to not begin with a justification for counterfactual history since the 1960s. While he did cite Murrin’s techniques from the 1970s, he did so to provide historical context rather than historiographical. However, by acknowledging Murrin’s practices in the 1970s, Kornblith was drawing readers’ attention to the fact that Murrin had been using effective counterfactuals long before the historians of the 1990s. Kornblith’s execution of the counterfactual experiment caused historians like Robert Shaffer to think about how “historians in the not-too-distant future may conduct similar exercises about the relationship between the disputed election of 2000.”¹⁰⁹ A large portion of the historical community was beginning to think about the future of counterfactuals rather than trying to leave them in the past.

The historians of the 1990s opened the door to allow counterfactual history, and with it contingency, back into historiographical practice. The works of Hawthorn, Tetlock, and Belkin

¹⁰⁷ McDougall, Walter A. McDougall, “Review of Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals; What If? The World’s Foremost Historians Imagine What Might Have Been,” by Niall Ferguson and Robert Cowley, *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 5 (2000): 1692. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2652041>.

¹⁰⁸ Gary J. Kornblith, “Rethinking the Coming of the Civil War: A Counterfactual Exercise,” *Journal of American History* 90, no. 1 (June 1, 2003): 76–105. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3659792>.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Shaffer, “Letters to the Editor,” *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 3 (2003): 1154. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3661071>.

prepared the historical community to be ready to accept a set of guidelines for counterfactual experiments. When Ferguson offered these guidelines in 1997, there were those who did not want to accept the resurgence of counterfactuals, but overall the historical community somewhat begrudgingly accepted the practice. In the years following, historians like Cowley and Kornblith took inspiration from the counterfactuals of the past to bring the excitement of contingency back to the discipline of history.

Determinists Attempt to Strike Back

As the twentieth century ended, a new page turned in historiographical practice with a wave of historians embracing the resurgence of counterfactual history. The new rush of support was ushered in by historians writing defenses of counterfactual history. Many of these defenses, like the one's written by Oguri and Bunzl, were targeted toward Carr's claims from the 1960's. Although the rise of social history and the acceptance of cliometrics was the biggest factor in counterfactual's limited use, Carr became the face of the determinist ideology for proponents of contingency.

Additionally, members of the contemporary historical community began looking back to past counterfactual works. Nicholas Whyte, author and international psephologist, wrote a review of Snowman's work in 2009 from a contemporary lens. Whyte generally criticized the essays collected by Snowman and could only muster calling the book "an interesting read" for praise.¹¹⁰ However, Whyte did not bat an eye about Snowman's defense or usage of contingency, rather he critiqued the contingent practice used in the chapters. This review showed the progression of contingency's acceptance in the historical community.

¹¹⁰ Nicholas Whyte, "Nicholas Whyte's Review of If I Had Been... Ten Historical Fantasies," (Goodreads, 2009). <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/51936529>.

Unfortunately for the proponents of counterfactual history, not all historians were sold on the practice's reemergence. Richard J. Evans, Regius professor of history at the University of Cambridge, President of Cambridge's Wolfson College, and Provost of Gresham College, published a book opposing counterfactual history and upholding the ideals of Carr in 2013. *Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History* took a deep dive into the practice of counterfactual history in order to critique its use and lend an explanation as to why it had stepped out from the shadows. Evans, while not a direct student of Carr, was a student of his work and had even written the new introduction to the latest republishing of *What is History?*¹¹¹

Similar to Ferguson, Evans began his book by going over past counterfactual experiments and their flaws. However, unlike Ferguson, with each failed counterfactual work Evans built toward his argument against counterfactual history. Evans directly cited the limitations that Carr placed on counterfactuals and how Snowman attempted “to get beyond this limitation.”¹¹² Evans even used Ferguson’s critiques of Snowman’s work to help further his anti-counterfactual argument. Evans used his first chapter to make the claim that counterfactual experiments are prone to falling “into the trap of wishful thinking” by nature.¹¹³ In doing so he attempted to paint counterfactuals as historians expressing regret or relief rather than conducting actual historiographical research.

Evans’s second chapter directly addressed Ferguson’s *Virtual History* and the resurgence of counterfactual works that followed it. He acknowledged the impact that Ferguson’s book had on the practice, claiming that “counterfactual histories have now become so frequent that they need investigating as a genre themselves.”¹¹⁴ Evans went on to argue that the tight knit group of

¹¹¹ Evans, “The Two Faces.”

¹¹² Richard J. Evans, and Hedva Ben-Israel, *Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press/Historical Society of Israel, 2013), 17.
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/assumption-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1524274>.

¹¹³ Evans, *Altered Pasts*, 19.

¹¹⁴ Evans, *Altered Pasts*, 31.

historians publishing counterfactuals since Ferguson's work were mostly "politically and methodologically conservative."¹¹⁵ His claim was that since the events of history had skewed toward the Left, very few Leftist historians felt the need to write counterfactuals. One of the few exceptions he acknowledged was Carr himself, who pondered what it would have been like if Lenin had not died. Evans politicized the issue, claiming that "counterfactuals have been more or less a monopoly of the Right" and that the reason for their resurgence in the mid-1990s was "because a long period of Conservative Party dominance" was coming to an end.¹¹⁶ These claims led to Evans's larger argument, that counterfactuals had been used as a political tool in the historical community against historians like Carr and Thompson, who were labeled Marxists. While Evans was sure to clarify that Carr was neither a Marxist or social historian, he did claim that the usage of counterfactuals "reduced historical investigation to the status of an adjunct to present-day politics."¹¹⁷ He finished his second chapter by lumping Snowman and Ferguson together, arguing that both their works were "the product of purposeful political motivation" and that they were attempting to tell the "people in the past what they should have done" rather than practicing contingency.¹¹⁸

The next chapter of Evans's work delved into the relationship between counterfactual history, alternative history, and historical fiction. He discussed how authors had been writing fiction based around historical periods and events long before the practice of counterfactual history was established. Evans connected "the real and the fictional" in his explanation of alternative history.¹¹⁹ He differentiated alternative history from counterfactual history by highlighting that "counterfactual history foregrounds the effects of a single change in an existing

¹¹⁵ Evans, *Altered Pasts*, 32.

¹¹⁶ Evans, *Altered Pasts*, 34.

¹¹⁷ Evans, *Altered Pasts*, 35.

¹¹⁸ Evans, *Altered Pasts*, 63.

¹¹⁹ Evans, *Altered Pasts*, 89.

causal change,” while “alternate history simply poses a world parallel to our own.”¹²⁰ Although he acknowledged the differences between the two, Evans claimed that “counterfactual history essentially belongs in the same world as these other, obviously more fictional works of the imagination.”¹²¹ Evans was skeptical of counterfactual history’s connection to what is real and felt that in order to uncover if there was a connection fiction must be ignored.

Evans attempted to accomplish this goal of finding the connection between counterfactual history and reality in his last chapter. Throughout this chapter he continued to argue that the differences between counterfactuals and fictions are minimal and that the two belong in the same category. His biggest evidence to support this was the “radical divergences of opinion between the counterfactualists on the same topic.”¹²² Evans used this fact to argue that the political motivations of each individual historian influenced the outcome of their counterfactual experiments rather than the historical context of the time. This combined with his claim that “counterfactual speculations frequently, perhaps even generally, tread on thin evidential ice” led to his opposition to counterfactuals. Evans concluded his work by stating that “counterfactual speculations are unconvincing and unnecessary for the historians because they elide too many links in the proposed causative chain after the initial alerted event.”¹²³ Although he acknowledged the effective and controlled guidelines set by Ferguson, he argued that almost every counterfactualist, broke those rules and ended up revealing more about the present with their writing than the past.

The historical community’s reaction to Evans’s work showed the extent to which the resurgence of counterfactual history changed the attitudes of contemporary historians. While

¹²⁰ Evans, *Altered Pasts*, 91.

¹²¹ Evans, *Altered Pasts*, 91.

¹²² Evans, *Altered Pasts*, 120.

¹²³ Evans, *Altered Pasts*, 120.

there were those who agreed with Evans's attempt to criticize historians trying to, as *New Statesman* put it, express "their creativity untrammelled by inconvenient facts," others saw flaws in the critique and even went so far as to defend counterfactuals.¹²⁴

John R. Reese, professor at the Joint Warfare Studies Department of Air Command and Staff College, approached Evans's work with an open mind. Reese commended Evans for continuing "the fight for real history [by] taking aim at counterfactual or 'what if' history and its practitioners."¹²⁵ While Reese's approach to his review was written objectively it did seem that he agreed with Evans more than he disagreed with him. He argued that "the argument is complex, forceful, and mostly persuasive" to convince readers to turn against counterfactual history.¹²⁶ Reese did not explicitly say that he accepted Evans's argument that "counterfactuals have no utility for understanding the past and should be given a wide berth by serious students" but by expressing and entertaining its validity he was advertising the work's message.¹²⁷

Professor of history at the University of Navarra, Francisco Javier Caspistegui, also agreed with much of Evans's argument, but for different reasons. Caspistegui's review offered a unique point of view on both Evans's book and counterfactuals as whole, coming from outside the American and European countries that utilized counterfactual history the most. He highlighted and agreed with Evans's argument that counterfactuals were useful only by studying its practice, but not in the practice itself. Caspistegui explained that "even though [counterfactuals] do not serve to explain what happened, [...] we are aware that there could have been other alternatives to what occurred."¹²⁸ While mostly agreeing with Evans he did

¹²⁴ Anonymous, "Ns Recommends," *New Statesman*, London (United Kingdom: New Statesman Ltd., March 7, 2014).

¹²⁵ John R. Reese, "Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History," *Fides et Historia* 48, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2016): 159.

¹²⁶ Reese, "Altered Pasts," 160

¹²⁷ Reese, "Altered Pasts," 160

¹²⁸ Francisco Javier Caspistegui, "Contrafactuales. ¿Y si todo hubiera sido diferente?" *Memoria y Civilización* 22 (2019): 820–21. This review is translated from Spanish.

acknowledge the existence of counterfactuals and that they had some use, even if they were not nearly as significant as counterfactualists believe they were.

However, not every member of the historical community was willing to fall back into Carr's doctrine without poking some holes in Evans's work. Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, President of the Center for Jewish History and professor of history at Fairfield University, wavered between agreeing with Evans and critiquing him for leaving out the merits of counterfactuals. Rosenfeld gave Evans credit for his "useful introduction to an understudied topic" but also acknowledged Evans's "view is a partial one that neglects countervailing evidence and never penetrates to the heart of why the field has left the margins for the mainstream."¹²⁹ After highlighting Evans's arguments about plausibility, politicization, and popularity, he eventually concluded that it was not Evans's place to judge counterfactuals as a historiographical practice. Rosenfeld argued that counterfactuals "can often be implausible, the very process of testing them in the free marketplace of ideas will ultimately determine whether they stand or fall."¹³⁰

Daniel Woolf, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University in Kingston and historian, had a similar take to Rosenfeld's. Woolf portrays "both considerable agreement with the thrust of *Altered Pasts* but also some other ways of viewing both the problem of counterfactuals and the relation of modern efforts."¹³¹ He argued that the basis for counterfactual thought developed centuries ago and although it may not be necessary in historiographical practice it is natural to think about. Woolf claimed that counterfactuals are rooted in:

- a) the capacity to think of possible alternative pasts that could actually have occurred in a real, historical world outside the writer's imagination; b) an evidence-based approach to scholarship and narrative that both opened historians' eyes to contingency and provided

¹²⁹ Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, "Whither 'What If' History?" *History and Theory* 53, no. 3 (2014): 451. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.10724>.

¹³⁰ Rosenfeld, "Whither 'What If' History?" 467.

¹³¹ Daniel Woolf, "Concerning Altered Pasts: Reflections of an Early Modern Historian," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 10 (November 17, 2016): 432. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18722636-12341344>.

the means of testing, heuristically, the relative impact of events on consequent events; and c) the parallel development of history and prose fiction along lines that – unlike real parallels – did eventually cross and re-cross, producing historical novels, counterfactual histories, and – though governed by different rules – their offspring, the counterfactual novel and film.¹³²

While Woolf tied his argument in with Evans's by relating counterfactual history with fiction, he did so in a way that validated the usage of counterfactuals. These historians willing to poke holes in both Evans and Carr's arguments showed how the resurgence of counterfactuals shifted the views of the historical community.

Some historians took the resurgence of counterfactuals a step further by defending them in the face of Evans's critiques. Daniel Nolan, author and lecturer in philosophy at the University of St Andrews, analyzed and countered Evans's work with his own claims. Nolan argued that "different kinds of alternatives have different kinds of uses [and] some of those uses are vital for investigation."¹³³ He agreed with past claims that "many historians have been thinking about alternative historical possibilities all along" although he was not willing to be a full on proponent of the practice.¹³⁴ He concluded that:

Hiding all the 'judgements of possibility' in a work of history will at best lead to an esoteric history where the real work is hidden under the surface of what is published, and at worst would lead to historical works stripped of many of the causal and explanatory claims history requires, as well as of many of the historical analogies that may be useful to decision makers in the present and future. This sort of historical actualism would be too arid, if we were to engage in it.¹³⁵

Another defense against Evans's work came in the form of a vicious critique from Michael Bentley. The historian of British politics and Emeritus Professor of modern history at the University of St Andrews was brutal in his examination of Evans's work. Bentley claimed

¹³² Woolf, "Concerning Altered Pasts," 432.

¹³³ Daniel Nolan, "The Possibilities of History," *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, Accessed November 7, 2023, 13. <https://philarchive.org/archive/NOLTPO-3>.

¹³⁴ Nolan, "The Possibilities of History," 14.

¹³⁵ Nolan, "The Possibilities of History," 14.

that “the place of Richard Evans in modern historiography –a distinguished place –is assured through his work on German politics and culture. Yet expository prowess does not guarantee theoretical depth.”¹³⁶ He extended this critique by bashing Evans for only spending two paragraphs on the true origins or counterfactual history in 1955, choosing instead to focus on the more recent collections of long-run counterfactuals. Bentley was left unsatisfied by the lack of “philosophical issues intrinsic to an engagement with counterfactualism” and the destruction “of easy targets” by “an arsenal manufactured in the 1960s.”¹³⁷

The shift in the attitude toward counterfactuals in the historical community was evident in Bentley’s willingness to not only defend counterfactuals but to directly cut down the historic works of Carr. While Nolan used his own argument to counter Evans’s and Bentley directly attacked his argument, the two coworkers effectively critiqued and countered Evans’s defiance to counterfactuals. The acceptance of counterfactuals as historiographical practices was even more evident in these defenses because the reviewers were not inherently proponents of the practice, but noticed the flaws in Evans’s claims and were able to poke holes in his work.

In 2016, Evans responded to the reviews of his book published in the *Journal of the Philosophy of History*. Evans directly responded to three of the critiques of his book, including the reviews of Woolf and Nolan. In his response, Evans doubled down on his takes and attempted to discredit the reviews against this work, although he said that he hoped he didn’t “sound too austere.”¹³⁸ He claimed that “historical research and writing are fun, and historians ought to convey some of that fun in the way they write” but did not relinquish his stance on the “restricted utility of counterfactuals for present-day historical practice.”¹³⁹ While he did not

¹³⁶ Michael Bentley, “Alternatively,” *TLS. Times Literary Supplement*, no. 5797 (May 9, 2014): 30.

¹³⁷ Bentley, “Alternatively,” 30.

¹³⁸ Richard J. Evans, “Response,” *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 10, no. 3 (November 17, 2016): 467. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18722636-12341347>.

¹³⁹ Evans, “Response,” 467.

budge on his anti-counterfactual stance, Evans's response did show that the historical community was no longer unwilling to have a dialogue about the usage of counterfactual history, even if the result was a change in no one's opinion.

More evidence for the historical community's evolving attitudes toward counterfactuals included the reviews to Murrin's *Rethinking America : From Empire to Republic*. Published in 2018, this book brought together Murrin's seminal essays on the American Revolution, the United States Constitution, and the early American Republic which included his previously published counterfactual articles. The reprinting of these counterfactual exercises not only allowed the contemporary historical community to react to them but also gave Murrin the credit he deserved for being a proponent of effective counterfactual practice when the historical community had turned its back on it.

Phill Greenwalt, author and co-founder of the Emerging Revolutionary War blog, compared the study of history to a one track train, stopping historians from reliving the past. However, Greenwalt claimed that Murrin was able to alter "the prism in which we view yesteryear" with his essays.¹⁴⁰ He also commended "Murrin's dissection of other historian's views" on counterfactuals and his ability to do so "while still maintaining the objectivity needed for a thoughtful discourse."¹⁴¹ Similarly, Shira Lurie, assistant professor of U.S. History at Saint Mary's University, also praised Murrin's counterfactuals. While Lurie critiqued Murrin's "disproportionate reliance on white male scholars," she did highlight "Murrin's talents for playing with counterfactuals."¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Phill Greenwalt, "Review: Rethinking America From Empire to Republic by John M. Murrin," *Emerging Revolutionary War Era* (blog), July 24, 2018. <https://emergingrevolutionarywar.org/2018/07/24/review-rethinking-america-from-empire-to-republic-by-john-m-murrin/>.

¹⁴¹ Greenwalt, "Review: Rethinking America."

¹⁴² Shira Lurie, "Rethinking America: From Empire to Republic by John M. Murrin (Review)," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 144, no. 2 (2020): 237.

While the praise of Murrin’s collection showed an appreciation for both counterfactual history and his contributions to its practice, possibly a more evident sign of counterfactuals’ acceptance was when it was treated as normal historiography. Ben Gates, lecturer in history at Indiana University and professor at Purdue University Fort Wayne, critiqued the book because the different articles were intended for different audiences which made the book feel disjointed. However, Gates’s only opinion on Murrin’s counterfactual exercises was that they are “some of the more entertaining essays in this volume.”¹⁴³ Matthew Kruer, assistant professor of history at the University of Chicago, followed this trend. He identified Murrin’s work as “not only historiographically important, but also beautiful examples of the craft of essay writing,” but did not delve into Murrin’s counterfactuals.¹⁴⁴ The most that Kruer put toward the counterfactuals in Murrin’s book was acknowledge Murrin’s “mastery of that notoriously tricky genre.”¹⁴⁵ The most that John J. Gurner, curator with the U.S. Army Center of Military History, put toward Murrin’s counterfactuals was to highlight that “*Rethinking America* is an exploration of issues of historiography that all U.S. historians should revisit.”¹⁴⁶ A leader in Early American History at King's College, Max M. Edling, did not even mention Murrin’s usage of counterfactuals in his review.

Kevin R. C. Gutzman, American constitutional scholar and professor of history at Western Connecticut State University, provided the most unique insight into Murrin’s counterfactuals by providing an anecdote from one of his graduate students. In reaction to Murrin’s counterfactuals, one of Gutzman’s graduate students argued that “‘real’ historians [...]

¹⁴³ Dr. Ben Gates, “Review of *Rethinking America: From Empire to Republic*,” by John M. Murrin. *Indiana Magazine of History* 114, no. 4 (2018): 315. <https://doi.org/10.2979/indimagahist.114.4.06>.

¹⁴⁴ Matthew Kruer, “*Rethinking America: From Empire to Republic*,” *History: Reviews of New Books* 47, no. 2 (March 2019): 28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03612759.2019.1565011>.

¹⁴⁵ Kruer, “*Rethinking America*,” 27.

¹⁴⁶ John J Gurner, “Review of *RETHINKING AMERICA: FROM EMPIRE TO REPUBLIC*,” by John M. Murrin. *Army History*, no. 119 (2021): 42.

do not write about hypothetical questions.”¹⁴⁷ Gutzman’s response was that “for Murrin, this will not do” and that Murrin’s book was worth reading for his counterfactual “speculation and much more.”¹⁴⁸ The outlook of this graduate student fell in line with Evans’s argument which made sense since his book would have been published just before or during this student's undergraduate studies.

The lack of critiques of Murrin’s usage of counterfactuals was representative of the historical community opening itself up to counterfactual histories after decades of skepticism and rejection. The ability for a studied, long time historian like Murrin to publish a book and not have his historiographical practices raked over the coals showed the growth of counterfactual history since Ferguson’s work in the late 1990s. This was especially representative of the growth of counterfactuals since, at the time Murrin was writing the counterfactuals he included in this book, he was either disregarded or discouraged for using the practice. The historical communities willingness to refute the claims of Carr’s that Evans represented and support the historiographical practices of Murrin’s counterfactual experiments was evidence for the successful resurgence of counterfactual history into historiography.

What Was the Debate?

Before I began collecting the counterfactual works, defenses, and oppositions, I hypothesized that historians had not actually been as negative about counterfactuals over the years as many believed and that counterfactuals may have been accepted not only for the past twenty years but throughout the past six decades. After reviewing the published works and the reviews from across the past six decades, it has become clear that I was wrong, although not

¹⁴⁷ Kevin R. C. Gutzman, “John M. Murrin. Rethinking America: From Empire to Republic,” *The American Historical Review* 124, no. 5 (December 1, 2019): 1874. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhz625>.

¹⁴⁸ Gutzman, “John M. Murrin,” 1874.

entirely incorrect.

As many of the publications since the 1960s have demonstrated, the usage of contingency has been present in historiographical study and everyday thought long before Carr had an issue with it. While Carr was purposefully trying to change the practice of the historical community with his book, he was not the first to speak out against a historiographical practice. He was, however, the first to publish a book speaking out against contingency as social history was emerging within the historical community.

After Carr's publication it became clear that the two sides of pro and anti contingency had emerged. Once the debate entered the 1970s, counterfactuals came into the conversation with the most vocal participants being against their use. However, it is unclear whether it was Carr's meddling in historiographical thought or the Annales school's influence that made historians uneasy about using contingency and counterfactuals in the 1970s. It is possible that it was a combination of the two that shocked the community enough to defend the historiographical practice but not use it themselves.

The brave souls like Murrin and Snowman who did decide to strike out against Carr and the new rising wave of social history were mostly met with dry critiques and little attention. In the 1980s these counterfactual works got even less attention with cliometrics becoming popular and critics of the discipline of history pushing historians toward cliodynamics. With this unpopularity came the lack of a debate. For the most part those who cared about counterfactual history in the 1980s were attempting to write it, and everyone else was attempting to shift history from a humanity to a social science.

The resurgence of counterfactuals in the 1990s also has multiple possible causes. Evans argued that it was a political move and that Right-wing historians were looking to use the

practice after the end of a long Conservative Party run. However, by this point the shock of Lyotard's claims were dying down and academics were looking for history "to focus on the particular" while others, who were working toward cliodynamics, "[developed] unifying theories and [tested] them with data generated by history, archaeology and specialized disciplines."¹⁴⁹ It may have even been that enough time had passed since Carr that historians were somewhat comfortable writing counterfactuals again.

Ferguson's defense of the practice changed the landscape of the debate. Many historians who were either unaware of the tension over contingency in the 1960s and 70s or who had not thought about counterfactuals since the 1980s, were reminded of the practice and spoke in favor of it. While Ferguson himself was directly criticized over his defense, it inspired a wave of articles in support of counterfactuals for the next two decades. These were the articles that I found in my preliminary research that led me to my hypothesis.

Evan's book attempted to restate Carr's initial critiques of counterfactuals using the prior decades of undisciplined contingency based work. Unfortunately for him, Evans ended up providing a counterclaim to the nearly finished debate and allowed the proponents of counterfactuals to defend their practice once again, this time as a critique of a book instead of the other way around. Murrin's collection of works published just before the end of his life was the final push counterfactuals needed to bring them to contemporary historiography.

Through my research I have uncovered two parallel paths of the counterfactual debate that has taken place since the mid-1900s. The first is a battle of titans, with figures like Carr and Thompson declaring war against contingency in the 1960s and historians like Evans continuing their fight in the twenty-first century. They were squaring off against the likes of Murrin, whose steadfast hand carried his sound practices through the entirety of the debate, and Ferguson,

¹⁴⁹ Turchin, "Arise 'Cliodynamics,'" 34.

whose ability to refute the past critiques of others and defend counterfactuals opened the door for counterfactual history to reenter historiography. This version of the debate put the control in the hands of individual historians. It may seem like too big a piece of historical practice and study to put on just a few historians, but over the six decades of the debate, these same names continue to show back up as the driving forces.

The second version of the debate deals much more with the historical community and the history of historiography as a whole. It started with Robert William Fogel, the father of cliometrics, publishing an article in the *Journal of Political Economy* in 1955. In this article Fogel applied quantitative methods to imagine the U.S. economy of 1890 had there been no railroads. The same man who would win the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for furthering cliometrics in 1993 also conducted the first serious counterfactual experiment in 1955. Fogel's work, like Carr's, emerged as the Annales school was pushing the usage of social history throughout Europe. Both new economic history and counterfactuals were picked up by different historians and grew their own practice after Fogel's publication. Unfortunately for proponents of counterfactuals, cliometrics fit better with the rising practices of social history and helped the discipline grow while counterfactual history shrank. Even as social history took over the historical community, counterfactual histories continued to be published and one eventually made enough ripples to rekindle the historical community's interest. In this way the process was cyclical, with social history, an important piece of historiography, developing before counterfactuals were able to reemerge and co-exist with other incompatible practices.

While the reality is that some combination of these two versions of the debate contributed to the rollercoaster of counterfactual history, in my research I have seen more evidence that the latter is the more accurate interpretation. The discipline of history is ever changing as new

interpretations are formed by new historians and new techniques are discovered with the development of technology and practice. The path that counterfactual history took to get where it is today does not set it apart from the rest of historiography. It has always been used by historians to uncover causation between events but was overshadowed by an emerging piece of the historical discipline. It went through a patch when the expectations for its acceptance were unclear, and today some historians still do not accept its validity. The debate that unfolded around the development of counterfactual history was an interesting and heated one but overall had little impact on the practice's development. It was the proponents of the practice that developed counterfactual history in spite of the critics who opposed change. Likeminded historians continued to workshop counterfactual history until it was ready to be reaccepted by the larger historical community. Perhaps if social history had risen at a different time or if Fogel had focused more on counterfactuals than cliometrics, things would have been different. Or maybe E. H. Carr still would have published his book and shaken the confidence of historians using contingency. It will be left up to future counterfactualists to determine “what if?”

Annotated Bibliography

Anonymous. "Ns Recommends." *New Statesman*, London, United Kingdom: New Statesman Ltd., March 7, 2014.

This review of Evans's book makes the claim that historians like Niall Ferguson, Andrew Roberts, and Robert Harris like counterfactuals because they are outlets for "creativity untrammelled by inconvenient facts." The reviewer is not only reductive of counterfactual practice, but it also puts Evans on a pedestal, highlighting the quote: "What if I took counterfactual history seriously?" The *New Statesman* is a British political and cultural news magazine published in London. Founded as a weekly review of politics and literature.

Black, Jeremy. "Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals." *History: Reviews of New Books* 28, no. 2 (Winter 2000): 51–52.

This review acknowledges the merits of Ferguson's work while also pointing out the flaws, both topical and historiographical. Black claims Ferguson is weak on the "theory of his subject," wanting more of an explanation of the historiographical practice. He also critiques the book as being too Eurocentric. Jeremy Black is a British historian, writer, and former professor of history at the University of Exeter, as well as a senior fellow at the Center for the Study of America and the West at the Foreign Policy Research Institute.

Bentley, Michael. "Alternatively." *TLS. Times Literary Supplement*, no. 5797 (May 9, 2014): 30–31.

This review critically rips Evans' book and argument apart, commenting not only on the outdated nature of his view on counterfactuals but on how his expository prowess does not guarantee theoretical depth. Bentley points to the ideas that Evans presents that were "bequeathed to him by his mentor, E. H. Carr," which Evans utilizes to throttle Holocaust deniers as well as other historians looking to use counterfactual history academically. Michael Bentley is an English historian of British politics and Emeritus Professor of Modern History at the University of St Andrews.

Bunzl, Martin. "Counterfactual History: A User's Guide." *The American Historical Review* 109, no. 3 (2004): 845–58. <https://doi.org/10.1086/530560>.

This article, published in the *American Historical Review*, explores the reasons why

historians widely shy away from the usage of counterfactual history in their research. The author also offers his own thoughts on how the study of historical casualties and counterfactuals are inherently linked. Due to this belief, he argues that counterfactuals hold an important place in historical research if used correctly. The author is a professor of philosophy at Rutgers University. This article provides a straightforward explanation of why historians often frown upon the usage of counterfactual history. He also provides several examples of counterfactual histories, such as Hitler's victory in WWII, the survival of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and the alternate unfolding of the Civil War, amongst others.

Burke, Peter. *The French Historical Revolution : The Annales School, 1929-89*. Key Contemporary Thinkers. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990. <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/cam027/90070699.html>.

This book provides background information on the Annales School and how it revolutionized the historiographical landscape by spreading the usage of social history. This book will be used to lay the groundwork for the spread of social history and the shift toward more scientific practices and away from creative ones by historians. Peter Burke is a British historian and professor.

Calhoon, Robert M. "Review of For Want of a Nail... If Burgoyne Had Won at Saratoga, by Robert Sobel." *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (1974): 441-42.

This review acknowledges Sobel's "ponderous whimsicality" that he utilizes in his arguments while also realizing that the book is a serious attempt to effectively utilize counterfactuals. However, Calhoon claims that this book is also Sobel's attempt to remind readers that historians take themselves too seriously by providing a fresh, absurd extreme. Robert M Calhoon is a professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and the founding editor of the online Journal of Backcountry Studies.

Carr, Edward Hallett. *What Is History?* The George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures. New York: Vintage, 1961.

This book challenged the ways in which historians conducted historiography in the early 1960s by criticizing the use of contingency in historical research. By critiquing the historical practices of the time, this book sent shock waves throughout the historical community, with some hailing it as a much-needed breath of fresh air and others tearing

it to pieces with reviews and rebuttals. Coming in the midst of the rise of social history, this book gained traction and became one of the most popular books about historiography to come out of the time period, so much so that some of the ideas from the book developed into stereotypes for contemporary historians. E. H. Carr was a British historian, diplomat, journalist, and international relations theorist.

Carruthers, Susan L. "Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals." *International Affairs* 73, no. 4 (October 1997): 803. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2624505>.

This review highlights the ideas that Ferguson puts forward in his introduction and outlines how he dismantles his predecessors' arguments against counterfactuals. However, Carruthers also does not think that the articles following Ferguson's argument are able to live up to Ferguson's or the publisher's hype. Susan L Carruthers is a Professor of US and International History at the University of Warwick as well as many other esteemed positions.

Caspistegui, Francisco Javier. "Contrafactuales. ¿Y si todo hubiera sido diferente?" *Memoria y Civilización* 22 (2019): 817–21.

This review offers a unique point of view on both the book and counterfactuals, coming from outside the American and European world that utilizes counterfactual history the most. Caspistegui provides a brief outline of historical fictions and counterfactual histories up until 2019 and points to Evans' argument that the most useful aspect of counterfactuals is the phenomenon itself, worthy of study per se but of little practical utility in the sound study of the past. Caspistegui agrees with Nietzsche's point of view, where counterfactual hypotheses are ironic because they shed more light on the present than on the past. Francisco Javier Caspistegui is a professor of history at the University of Navarra and formerly worked at the Complutense University of Madrid.

Corfield, Penelope J. "Annales School." *Making History*. Accessed April 12, 2023. https://archives.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/themes/annales_school.html.

His summary provides a simple and broad overview of the origins of the Annales school. This article will provide background knowledge to establish how the Annales school influenced the rise of social history in Europe. Penelope J. Corfield is a historian, lecturer, and education consultant and currently serves as the President of the International Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies.

Cowley, Robert. *What If? : The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been*. New York: Putnam, 1999.

<http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy1209/99032215-b.html>.

This book was one of the collections of counterfactual essays to come out after Ferguson's. It focuses mostly on counterfactual usage in military history and argues that "what ifs" are a natural part of thinking about history. Robert Cowley is an American military historian, who writes on topics in American and European military history ranging from the Civil War through World War II.

Edling, Max M. "Rethinking America: From Empire to Republic (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018, £25.49). Pp. 407. Isbn 978 0 1950 3871 2 ." *Journal of American Studies* 54, no. 3 (July 2020): 627–28.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875820000420>.

This review of Murrin does not at all mention his counterfactual works. This will be used to show the normalcy that counterfactuals have reached in the modern day. Max M. Edling is a Reader in Early American History at the King's College, London.

Elton, Geoffrey Rudolph. *The Practice of History*. New York, Crowell, 1968.

<http://archive.org/details/practiceofhistor00elto>.

This book was partially a rebuttal to E. H. Carr's *What Is History?* where it criticized Carr's "whimsical" distinction between the "historical facts" and the "facts of the past." This book will be used as an example of historians from the 1960s who spoke out against Carr's new and radical historiographical ideas. Sir Geoffrey Rudolph Elton was a British political and constitutional historian, specializing in the Tudor period.

Evans, Richard J. "Response." *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 10, no. 3 (November 17, 2016): 457–67. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18722636-12341347>.

This is a response to three reviews of his book published in the *Journal of the Philosophy of History*. In this review, Evans defends his stance and refuses to budge against the three critiques.

Evans, Richard J. "The Two Faces of E. H. Carr." *History In Focus*. Accessed March 7, 2023. <https://archives.history.ac.uk/history-in-focus/Whatishistory/evans10.html>.

This article breaks down the way in which E. H. Carr wrote his research and why some of his readings seem to be written by two different people. He delves into how there

was Carr, the journalist, who could write with wit and humor, and there was Carr, the bureaucrat, who had spent years as a civil servant in the British Foreign Office. The author is a British historian of 19th- and 20th-century Europe focusing on Germany. He is the author of eighteen books and was Regius Professor of History at the University of Cambridge. He provides insight into Carr's writing style and how it affected how historians received it in the 1960s.

Evans, Richard J., and Ben-Israel, Hedva. *Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History*.

Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press/Historical Society of Israel, 2013.

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/assumption-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1524274>.

This book takes a deep dive into the practice of counterfactual history in order to critique its use and lend an explanation as to why it has stepped out from the shadows of being mere “parlor games.” Published in the early to mid-2010s, this book provides an oppositional approach to the re-embraced historiographical practice in order to curb the intellectual fallout from historical counterfactuals. Richard J Evans offers an engaging and insightful introduction to the genre while providing arguments about the reasons for its revival in popularity, the role of historical determinism, and his suspicions of the hidden agendas of the counterfactual historian. This book comes from the Brandeis University Press and the Historical Society of Israel, written by Richard J Evans, Regius Professor of History at the University of Cambridge, President of Cambridge's Wolfson College, and Provost of Gresham College, and Hedva Ben-Israel, professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and one of the foremost scholars of modern nationalism. Due to the oppositional nature of the book's argument and the rising popularity of counterfactual history in the past ten years, the book lends itself to being widely reviewed by both those looking to put the practice back in its place or those looking to defend it.

Fain, Haskell. “Review of Plausible Worlds; Possibility and Understanding in History and the Social Sciences,” by Geoffrey Hawthorn. *History and Theory* 32, no. 1 (1993):

83–90. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2505331>.

This review of Hawthorn's work largely rejects Hawthorn's ideas. Fain feels that Hawthorn's philosophy is far too complex to describe in the simple way that it is, and due to the simple language, it is unintelligible at times. Haskell Fain is a professor of philosophy at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Ferguson, Niall. *Virtual History : Alternatives and Counterfactuals*. New York: Basic Books, 1999. <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/fy0714/00267405.html>.

This book is a collection of historical articles that utilize counterfactuals with a large introduction by the editor, Niall Ferguson, who defends and explains the usage of counterfactuals as a valid and useful historiographical practice. Published at the end of the 1990s, this book provides a look at how counterfactuals were being utilized in the historical community after years of criticism had pushed historians toward more scientific historiographical practices. While this book does not come from a collegiate press, it is written by several qualified historians led by Niall Ferguson, the Milbank Family Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, and a senior faculty fellow of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard, where he served for twelve years as the Laurence A. Tisch Professor of History. Due to the controversy surrounding counterfactuals after the shift toward social history, this book is widely reviewed, making it a good work to track the status of the debate in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Franklin, Peter. "The Greatest Stories Never Told." UnHerd, September 8, 2020.

<https://unherd.com/2020/09/the-greatest-stories-never-told/>.

This article, published by UnHerd, lays out a general definition of alternate or "alt" history and briefly explains how alternate histories and counterfactual exercises are used. The author also discusses historians' hesitance toward using alternate histories in their research. The author is an Associate Editor of UnHerd. He was previously a policy advisor and speechwriter on environmental and social issues. He provides insight into some of the reasoning as to why historians supposedly dislike counterfactuals. One shortcoming of the article is that it uses historians disliking counterfactuals as facts and not as a general assumption about all historians.

Gates, Dr. Ben. "Review of Rethinking America: From Empire to Republic," by John M. Murrin. *Indiana Magazine of History* 114, no. 4 (2018): 314–16.

<https://doi.org/10.2979/indimagahist.114.4.06>.

This review critiques the cobbling together of this work with Murrin's different articles being intended for different audiences, making the book feel disjointed. However, Gates does bring a contemporary view to Murrin's counterfactuals, writing about them as if they are typical historiographical essays. Dr. Ben Gates is a Lecturer in History at Indiana University and a professor at Purdue University Fort Wayne.

Greenfeld, Liah, and Robert A. Nisbet. "Social Science | History, Disciplines, Future Development, & Facts | Britannica," March 17, 2023.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-science>.

This web page, written for the Britannica website, provides a broad overview of social sciences and the history of social science. The breakdown of the different eras of social history allows readers to pinpoint how social science has changed over time. The authors are both professors of sociology, political science, and anthropology, as well as humanities, respectively. This web page provides a good basis for contextualizing history's place amongst other social histories.

Greenwalt, Phill. "Review: Rethinking America From Empire to Republic by John M. Murrin." *Emerging Revolutionary War Era* (blog), July 24, 2018.

<https://emergingrevolutionarywar.org/2018/07/24/review-rethinking-america-from-empire-to-republic-by-john-m-murrin/>.

This review utilized the metaphor of history being a single-track train that cannot go backward to show how Murrin was able to reach back in time to see how things could have unfolded if history had taken a different track. Greenwalt writes highly of Murrin's work, providing more of an overview than any actual critiques. Phill Greenwalt is an author and co-founder of the Emerging Revolutionary War blog and is also a full-time contributor to the Emerging Civil War blog.

Gurner, John J. "Review of RETHINKING AMERICA: FROM EMPIRE TO REPUBLIC," by John M. Murrin. *Army History*, no. 119 (2021): 42–43.

This review of Murrin treats his counterfactual exercises as normal historiographical practice. Gurner even recommends that the book be revisited as an exemplary exploration of historiography. John J. Gurner is a curator with the U.S. Army Center of Military History.

Gutzman, Kevin R. C. "John M. Murrin. Rethinking America: From Empire to Republic." *The American Historical Review* 124, no. 5 (December 1, 2019): 1873–74.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhz625>.

This review provides an overview of Murrin's work as well as gives interpretations of the historiographical practices that were utilized. Gutzman mentions the unconventional use of counterfactuals and how his graduate students claimed that "Real" historians do

not write about hypothetical questions. Kevin R C Gutzman is an American constitutional scholar and a Professor of History at Western Connecticut State University.

Hawthorn, Geoffrey. *Plausible Worlds : Possibility and Understanding in History and the Social Sciences*. Cambridge ; Cambridge University Press, 1991.

This book was the first defense of counterfactual history after the historical communities shifted toward more scientific practices in the 1980s. Hawthorn's book was a declaration of philosophical ideology, which he then attempted to apply to historical understanding and practice. The book is mostly philosophical, partially to combat the philosophical arguments against history argued by Lyotard in the 1980s. Geoffrey Hawthorn was a professor of international politics and social and political theory at the University of Cambridge.

Kennedy, W. Benjamin. "Review of If I Had Been... Ten Historical Fantasies, by Daniel Snowman." *The History Teacher* 13, no. 3 (1980): 440–41.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/491692>.

This review treats Snowman's historiographical practice fairly, despite "its new approach," by pointing out how the essays make the reader think about whether the actions of one man actually change history. Kennedy does criticize Snowman for over-extending his essays on a few occasions, but overall, he commends him on utilizing a unique historical methodology effectively. W Benjamin Kennedy was a professor of history at West Georgia College.

Kirkpatrick, David. "For Want of a Nail--If Burgoyne Had Won at Saratoga." *RUSI Journal: Royal United Services Institute for Defense Studies* 142, no. 5 (October 1997): 88–89.

This review adopts the emerging ideology of 1997 of the positives of counterfactual history that was shown in Ferguson's book. Kirkpatrick looks past the historiographical faux pas in Sobel's work and instead praises it as a visionary saga of imaginative extrapolation. David Kirkpatrick is a Senior Associate Fellow at RUSI and an aeronautical engineer and economist.

Kornblith, Gary J. "Rethinking the Coming of the Civil War: A Counterfactual Exercise." *Journal of American History* 90, no. 1 (June 1, 2003): 76–105.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/3659792>.

This essay, published in the *Journal of American History*, is one of the first serious counterfactuals published after the resurgence of counterfactual history in the late 1990s. Kornblith was a former student of Murrin and gives him credit for conducting effective counterfactuals long before their resurgence. Gary J. Kornblith is a professor of history at Oberlin College.

Kruer, Matthew. "Rethinking America: From Empire to Republic." *History: Reviews of New Books* 47, no. 2 (March 2019): 27–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03612759.2019.1565011>.

This review of Murrin treats his counterfactual exercises as normal historiographical practice. Kruer does claim that the work is historiographically important but does not delve into the counterfactual exercises. Matthew Kruer is an assistant professor of history at the University of Chicago.

Lebow, Richard Ned. "Counterfactual Thought Experiments: A Necessary Teaching Tool." *The History Teacher* 40, no. 2 (2007): 153–76.

This article explores the argument between counterfactual and "factual" thought amongst members of the history community. The author also explores the drive behind the dismissive attitude that many historians hold for counterfactual history. The author is an American political scientist best known for his work in international relations, political psychology, classics, and philosophy of science. He is also a professor of International Political Theory in the Department of War Studies at King's College London, an Honorary Fellow of Pembroke College, University of Cambridge, and James O. Freedman Presidential Professor Emeritus at Dartmouth College. This article provides specific reasoning behind the resistance to the usage of counterfactuals by historians as well as gives positive attributes of alternate history.

Lurie, Shira. "Rethinking America: From Empire to Republic by John M. Murrin (Review)." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 144, no. 2 (2020): 236–37.

This review praises Murrin's arguments that create a constant throughline over the course of his entire body of work. While Lurie does single out "Murrin's talents for playing with counterfactuals," she also criticizes him for not touching on the ideas of race and gender and leaning too heavily on white male scholars. Shira Lurie is an Assistant Professor of U.S. History at Saint Mary's University and was a University College Fellow in Early American History at the University of Toronto.

Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

This book is a philosophical work published by Lyotard. In it, he critiques the discipline of history and the historians who practice it. By challenging the tangibility of history and questioning how history differs from mere storytelling, this book sent historians scrambling toward turning history into a science rather than a humanity. Jean-François Lyotard was a French philosopher, sociologist, and literary theorist.

Mambrol, Nasrullah. “The Postmodern as ‘the Incredulity towards Metanarratives.’”

Literary Theory and Criticism, April 3, 2016.

<https://literariness.org/2016/04/03/the-postmodern-as-the-incredulity-towards-metanarratives/>.

This article analyzes and breaks down Lyotard’s writing in relation to metanarratives. This article will be used to both gain a better grasp of Lyotard’s argument and to relay how his work interacted with the idea of metanarratives in more common English. Nasrullah Mambrol is a researcher and the founder of the website Literary Theory and Criticism.

Marwick, Arthur. “Review of Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals,” by Niall Ferguson. *History* 83, no. 269 (1998): 87–88.

This review absolutely slams the articles that the contributors wrote for the book, comparing them to bad television and claiming that they directly go against the rules of counterfactuals that Ferguson outlines in his introduction. He does, however, give some merit to Ferguson for his introduction and his possibly unnecessary argument against historical determinists, although he makes sure to also rag on Ferguson’s conclusion. Arthur Marwick was a British social historian who served for many years as a Professor of History at the Open University.

McDougall, Walter A. “Review of Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals; What If? The World’s Foremost Historians Imagine What Might Have Been,” by Niall Ferguson and Robert Cowley. *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 5 (2000): 1692–93. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2652041>.

This review of both Ferguson and Cowley’s work highlights the imaginative nature of these counterfactual collections and how long-run counterfactual essays can be accessible to common readers. Walter A McDougall is an American historian, currently

a professor of history and the Alloy-Ansin Professor of International Relations at the University of Pennsylvania.

McMahon, Darrin M. "Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals (Review)." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 31, no. 3 (2001): 428–29.

This review praises Ferguson's visions of a historical climate where determinism is a relic and counterfactuals are widely accepted and claims that the articles that follow help back up his argument to varying degrees. This review ends by posing "a counterfactual of its own: What if published history could be serious, engaging, and fun?" Darrin M McMahon is a historian, author, public speaker, and currently a professor of history at Dartmouth College, where he is Mary Brinsmead Wheelock Professor of History.

Munslow, Alun. "Book Review: E. H. Carr, a Critical Appraisal," October 2001.

<https://archives.history.ac.uk/history-in-focus/Whatishistory/munslow4.html>.

This review is of Michael Cox's *E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal*, which is a review of E. H. Carr's works. The review provides a good summarization of Cox's broad view of Carr's writings and views. The author was a Professor Emeritus of history and historical theory at Staffordshire University. One of the major drawbacks of this source could be that this is a review not once but twice removed from the primary source being talked about.

Munslow, Alun. "Book Review (Reappraisal): What Is History?," November 1997.

<https://archives.history.ac.uk/history-in-focus/Whatishistory/carr1.html>.

This review of Carr's *What is History?* provides a 1990s point of view of the radical work. It will be used to compare how the views on Carr's claims evolved from the 1960s to the 1990s. The author was a Professor Emeritus of history and historical theory at Staffordshire University.

Murrin, John M. "No Awakening, No Revolution? More Counterfactual Speculations."

Reviews in American History 11, no. 2 (1983): 161–71.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/2702135>.

This article is one of the essays found in Murrin and Shankman's book and one of his first counterfactuals published in 1983.

Murrin, John M. “The French and Indian War, the American Revolution, and the Counterfactual Hypothesis: Reflections on Lawrence Henry Gipson and John Shy.” *Reviews in American History* 1, no. 3 (1973): 307–18. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2701135>. This article is one of the essays found in Murrin and Shankman’s book and one of his first counterfactuals published in 1973.

Murrin, John M., and Shankman, Andrew. *Rethinking America : From Empire to Republic*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018.

This book brings together Murrin's seminal essays on the American Revolution, the United States Constitution, and the early American Republic. These essays contain previously published counterfactual articles. John M Murrin was a professor of history, emeritus, a scholar of American colonial and revolutionary history and the early republic who often utilized counterfactual experiments in his work. Andrew Shankman is an Associate Professor of History at Rutgers University, Camden, and a Senior Research Associate at the McNeil Center for Early American Studies.

NobelPrize.org. “Press Release,” October 12, 1993.

<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/economic-sciences/1993/press-release/>.

This press release is from the 1993 Nobel Prize announcement when Fogel won for his work in furthering new economic history.

Nolan, Daniel. “The Possibilities of History.” *Journal of the Philosophy of History*.

Accessed November 7, 2023. <https://philarchive.org/archive/NOLTPO-3>.

This review of Evans refutes his critiques of counterfactual history. Nolan gives credit to counterfactual history for being useful in historiographical investigations and claims that without it, history writing would be very dry. Daniel Nolan is an author and lecturer in philosophy at the University of St Andrews

Oguri, Hirofumi. “Are What-Ifs a Virtual Experiment or a Parlour Game?: Some Thoughts on Methodology Bridging International Law and History.” *Völkerrechtsblog*, June 16, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.17176/20210616-192927-0>.

This article reevaluates E. H. Carr’s stance on counterfactuals through a modern-day lens. The author argues against Carr’s claims that there is no room for counterfactuals in historical research. By drawing from recent forms of historical fiction, the article attempts to show how the historical landscape has changed since the 1960s. The author

is an Associate Professor of the humanities and social sciences at Okayama University. This article provides an extremely useful analysis of Carr's ideas in a modern-day context. It also gives an example of a contemporary historian who is in favor of the usage of counterfactuals.

Porter, Roy. "Review of Plausible Worlds: Possibility and Understanding in History and the Social Sciences," by Geoffrey Hawthorn. *Sociology* 27, no. 4 (1993): 727–28.

This review of Hawthorn appreciated the work that he put into his writing, but like many in the historical community at the time, Porter did not see the need for contingency or a break away from more scientific practices. Roy Porter was a British historian known for his work on the history of medicine.

Reese, John R. "Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History." *Fides et Historia* 48, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2016): 159–60.

This review takes a very open-minded approach to Evans' argument against counterfactual history and highlights his claim that counterfactual history "is bad history in service of reactionary politics." Reese chalks Evans' argument up as a caution against extreme historiographical practice rather than bashing him for writing against a practice that is implicit in mainstream political and military history. John R Reese is a professor at the Joint Warfare Studies Department of Air Command and Staff College.

Rosenfeld, Gavriel D. "Whither 'What If' History?" *History and Theory* 53, no. 3 (2014): 451–67. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.10724>.

This review toes the line of agreeing that Evans brings up some undeniably true arguments about counterfactuals not being necessary for historiography and acknowledges that Evans forgets some merits of counterfactuals in enhancing our interest in real history. Rosenfeld determines that it is not Evans' place to judge counterfactuals as a historiographical practice but rather that their use in historiography will show "whether they stand or fall." Gavriel D Rosenfeld is President of the Center for Jewish History in New York City and Professor of History at Fairfield University.

Schatzberg, Erik. "Counterfactual History and the History of Technology." *Technology's Stories*, August 1, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.15763/JOU.TS.2014.8.1.03>.

The article questions the existence of counterfactual history as a separate area of study in the historical field. The author also dives into and endorses counterfactual reasoning,

specifically in the area of the history of technology. The author is a professor of history and sociology at Georgia Tech who specializes in the history of technology. This article provides some useful base-level definitions as well as explores the idea of counterfactual reasoning over counterfactual history. One drawback of this article is its focus on the history of technology. This is a very niche area that will not be explored in this research.

Segal, Eyal. "Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals (Review)." *Poetics Today* 22, no. 4 (2001): 863–64.

This review leans heavily on the comparison between counterfactual works and historical fiction, as well as Ferguson's defense of counterfactuals from being lumped together with fiction. Like other reviews, Segal agrees that the essays do not live up to the hype of Ferguson's opening. However, the review does say that the book could be used as a "methodological aid to a better understanding of the factual." Eyal Segal is an independent scholar and formerly worked at Tel Aviv University.

Shaffer, Robert. "Letters to the Editor." *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 3 (2003): 1154–55. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3661071>.

This review of Kornblith's counterfactual relates his work to the American conflict in the Middle East during the early 2000s. Shaffer uses this relation to speculate how future historians would write counterfactuals about his time period. Robert Shaffer is Professor of History at Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania

Sheehan, James J. "Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals," 1999. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086%2F318551>.

This review proposes literary merit, plausibility, and whether it helps the reader understand factual history as the three criteria for an effective counterfactual work using Ferguson's introduction as a guideline. Sheehan does not think that all of the essays in the book qualify under these criteria, and certainly not Ferguson's epilogue. James J Sheehan is an American historian of modern Germany and the former president of the American Historical Association.

"Short Notices." *Teaching History*, no. 26 (1980): 45–47.

This brief highlight of Snowman's book utilizes the language that Evans criticized counterfactual works for in the phrase "if only?" instead of "what if?"

Showalter, Dennis. "Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals." *The Journal of Military History* 64, no. 3 (July 2000): 918–19.

This review proposes reasonability and thinkability, as well as the plausibility of previous events reasserting themselves as the two criteria for effective counterfactuals. Showalter spends most of his review recapping and expanding upon the "developing methodology" of Ferguson's book. Dennis Showalter was a professor emeritus of history at Colorado College and president of the American Society for Military History.

Snowman, Daniel. *If I Had Been ... : Ten Historical Fantasies*. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979.

This book is a collection of essays that focus on how the actions of a "great man" could change the outcome of several different events throughout the course of history. Each of these "fantasies" begins with a factual lead-up to the event and is followed by an assessment of the possibility of one man's actions changing the historical outcome. This historiographical practice was an out-of-pocket idea by Snowman and is a play on counterfactual history. The book provides good examples of historians incorporating their imaginations into historiographical practice while simultaneously keeping the counterfactual exercise plausible. Daniel Snowman is a British writer, historian, lecturer at the University of Sussex, and broadcaster on social and cultural history. This book is a good precursor to Ferguson's work since it mirrors his book's setup but has not yet advanced in historiographical practice.

Sobel, Robert. *For Want of a Nail : If Burgoyne Had Won at Saratoga*. New York: Macmillan, 1973.

This book is an alternate history novel published in 1973. The novel depicts an alternate world where history diverts in 1777 when the British win the Battle of Saratoga, leading to the failure of the American Revolution. This provides an early example of a counterfactual experiment, coming over a little more than a decade after Carr's critique of the practice. Sobel's novel provides an example of a counterfactual extrapolated out and expanded into a full-length book instead of a journal article. Robert Sobel was a Lawrence Stessin Distinguished Professor of Business History at Hofstra University. This is an early attempt to utilize counterfactual practice effectively without much precedent so the book comes off as very informal and almost seems to be making a joke of the whole exercise.

Stephanson, Anders. "The Lessons of What Is History?" In *E. H. Carr : A Critical Appraisal*, 283–303. London : Palgrave Macmillan UK : Palgrave Macmillan, 2000. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-08823-9_14.

This chapter of *E. H. Carr : A Critical Appraisal* explores the works that Carr is best known for and how they open up some basic questions about the discipline of counterfactual history. This chapter will be used to provide examples of historians who publicly agreed with Carr's work in the 1960s. Anders Stephanson is a professor of history at Columbia University.

Tetlock, Philip E., and Aaron Belkin. *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics: Logical, Methodological, and Psychological Perspectives*. Princeton University Press, 1996. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv10vm1bn>.

This book was published in 1996, just before Ferguson's, and tries to accomplish a very similar goal. Tetlock and Belkin argue that counterfactuals come naturally to historians and are somewhat present in all historiographical research. Their work, like Hawthorn's, was not accepted by the historical community and was quickly overshadowed by Ferguson. Philip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin are political science professors at the University of Pennsylvania and San Francisco State University, respectively.

Thompson, E. P. "The Poverty of Theory." in *idem, The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, London, 1978.

This chapter in Thompson's book discusses the nature of counterfactual history from a determinist point of view. Thompson creates a new term, "Geschichtswissenschloppf" or "unhistorical shit," to represent what he thinks about counterfactual questioning. E P Thompson was an English historian, writer, socialist, and peace campaigner.

Trevor-Roper, H. R. Review of *E. H. Carr's Success Story*. *Encounter*, May 1962.

This article, published in *Encounter*, is an initial review of E. H. Carr's *What is History?* Written by a predominant historian of Carr's time. The review presents several valuable critiques of Carr's work while also pointing out the strong points of his claims. The author was a prominent British historian and Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Oxford. This article is extremely valuable because it comes directly from an opponent of Carr's and disputes some of his claims during the 1960s. Also,

having been written by a historian who would transition to social history like Carr, it provides an example of how the historical community saw Carr's work before the emergence of social history took over in Britain.

Turchin, Peter. "Arise 'Cliodynamics.'" *Nature* 454, no. 7200 (July 2008): 34–35.

<https://doi.org/10.1038/454034a>.

This article discusses the rise of cliodynamics, an area of research that combines cultural evolution, cliometrics, macrosociology, the mathematical modeling of historical processes, and the construction and analysis of historical databases. It is an inherent part of how modern historians think of history as a science. Peter Turchin is a Russian-American complexity scientist, specializing in an area of study he and his colleagues developed cliodynamics.

VanderMolen, Ronald J. "Review of Plausible Worlds: Possibility and Understanding in History and the Social Sciences," by Geoffrey Hawthorn. *The Historian* 55, no. 1 (1992): 125–26.

This review of Hawthorn gives his work credit for delving into the philosophical issues surrounding counterfactuals but does not think that he is able to pull off his overall argument. Ronald J. Vander Molen is a former California State University professor.

Waller, P. J. "Virtual History. Alternatives and Counterfactuals." *The English Historical Review* CXIII, no. 452 (June 1, 1998): 815–16.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/CXIII.452.815>.

This review leans heavily into the fun and excitement that counterfactuals bring to the historical community by comparing Ferguson's work to an action-packed thriller that may insult some historians' delicate sensibilities. While this makes for a smooth read, the creative wordplay that Waller uses implies that he does not take Ferguson's work very seriously. P.J. Waller is an English historian and emeritus fellow of Merton College, University of Oxford.

Walsh, W. H. "Short Notices." *The English Historical Review* LXXVIII, no. CCCVIII (July 1, 1963): 587–88. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/LXXVIII.CCCVIII.587>.

This article, published in the *English Historical Review*, provides an example of a historian of the mid-1900s who agreed with Carr's claims and would go on to perpetuate the ideas of social history. The author pinpoints younger historians or

students studying history who were captivated by Carr's idea that historians have been slanted by the events of the 1900s. This would go on to further spread Carr's ideas as these younger people entered the historical field. The author was a British philosopher and classicist in the mid-1900s.

Whyte, Nicholas. "Nicholas Whyte's Review of If I Had Been... Ten Historical Fantasies." 2009. <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/51936529>.

This review offers a more contemporary view of Snowman's unique take on counterfactual history with much uncertainty. Whyte acknowledges some of the counterfactual arguments that Snowman is able to effectively use in his book. However, he also critiques them due to their contradiction of Snowman's factual essays, and he is unsure about the rest of the book's ability to create alternate histories. Nicholas Whyte is an author who is currently working for an international organization in Bosnia Herzegovina.

Windschuttle, Kieth. "The Real Stuff of History." The Sydney Line, December 11, 2008.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20081211162744/http://www.sydneylines.com/Real%20Stuff%20of%20History.htm>.

This article goes through the ways in which the historical community and historiography have changed over the past six decades. This article will be used to show how influential Carr's writing was on the historians in the 1960s and those who came after. Keith Windschuttle is an Australian historian.

Woolf, Daniel. "Concerning Altered Pasts: Reflections of an Early Modern Historian."

Journal of the Philosophy of History 10 (November 17, 2016): 413–32.

<https://doi.org/10.1163/18722636-12341344>.

This review of Evans concedes that the work has some good points about the nature of past counterfactual works. However, Woolf gives significance to the usage of counterfactuals far beyond what Evans does. Daniel Woolf is a British-Canadian historian and former Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University in Kingston.

"Cognitive Development in the Teen Years." Accessed March 7, 2023.

<https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=cognitive-development-90-P01594>.

This is a web page put out by Stanford Medicine designed to provide information about children's health. The page specifically focuses on the brain's cognitive development in the teenage years. This page provides information that can be utilized to make claims on the value of certain teaching techniques for high school students.