

- (c) a combination of covering-law and propensity explanations, with the covering laws concerning uniformities in human propensities to choose
- (d) cognitive mechanisms as the central, or perhaps exclusive, sites of causation

The historical sociologists whose work Kiser and Hechter criticized, including me, generally differed from them in at least one of these regards. Even Jack Goldstone and Raymond Boudon, the two critics who have most frequently adopted choice-theoretical models in their own work, challenge Kiser-Hechter versions of explanations and cognitive mechanisms. The disagreements of Quadagno, Knapp, Somers, and Calhoun (not to mention major critics not represented in this collection, such as Andrew Abbott and Theda Skocpol) extend to genre and ontology as well. Considered as a whole, these disagreements overflow the specialized field of historical sociology. They represent fundamental choices for social science and history as a whole.

5. Practical Procedures.

Much of my daily work involves helping young people learn practical procedures of historical analysis. I have no intention here of cataloging all the tools, techniques, and *tours de main* we use at one time or another. I remember vividly how historical sociologist George Homans used to bellow “People do social science in the *damnedest* ways!” (George enjoyed bellowing because it jarred people into arguing with him, a sport in which he delighted and excelled. In this case, however, his exhortation, guidance, and practice coincided.) So long as it expands our range of viable explanations at reasonable cost, I will endorse any morally defensible sociological method. Nor do I plan here to make the case for a particular combination of genre, ontology, explanatory logic, and mechanisms. Astute readers have no doubt already scented my personal preference for process analysis, relational realism, mechanism-based explanations, and relational mechanisms, but I hope that colleagues will continue to do their best with competing programs. That will allow the next generation of historical sociologists to compare the results of contrasting intellectual strategies.

Instead of attempting to fine-tune other people’s historical investigations, let me offer some general tips on undertaking historical analysis from a social scientific perspective.

- Take care to define the phenomenon you want to describe and explain, considering to what extent your definition itself implies historical limits. How will you recognize an instance when you see one?
- If possible, examine at least three instances of that phenomenon – the minimum set for making some sort of comparison, then seeing whether conclusions from that comparison hold up for a new instance.
- Think through in what times and places the phenomenon has actually occurred, then what sorts of times and places those are. That will start the process of identifying other times and places where the phenomenon occurred differently, with varying intensities, or not at all.

- Learn what descriptions and explanations relevant historians of those times and places offer for the phenomenon – especially where they disagree with each other or with previous authorities. Look closely at the kinds of evidence they use, how they use the evidence, and how they construct their accounts.
- Work out your own theories – preferably testable theories – concerning how the sources of evidence came into being, how the historians identified, selected, and presented those sources, and how the historians arrived at their claims. Questions about genre, ontology, explanatory strategies, and mechanisms that help clarify choices in historical sociology will also help specify how historians do their work.
- State explicitly how your own analysis of the phenomenon under study will build upon, improve upon, or differ from the best historical work you have found on the subject. Once again questions about genre, ontology, explanatory strategies, and mechanisms should help.
- In particular, decide whether your work qualifies as historical social criticism, pattern identification, scope extension, process analysis, or some well defined combination of these genres.
- When you have that decision clearly in mind, review a few first-class works in your chosen genre, asking pointedly about ontology, explanatory strategies, mechanisms, sources, methods, measurement, units of observation, and construction of arguments. State clearly in what regards your own inquiry resembles or differs from those first-class works.
- In a sentence or two, state the main argument you want to make about the phenomenon. Then state where you got the argument, and why it matters.
- In another sentence or two, summarize how you will determine whether that argument is correct.
- Choose your own version of twelve-tone composition – a set of consistent, effective rules for collecting and analyzing the evidence – and stick with it.
- Gather a small sample of the relevant historical material, try out a miniature version of your analysis, write it up, criticize it at least as severely as you have criticized other people's previous work, then revise your plans accordingly. Reiterate until the next iteration produces no significant change of plan.
- Carry out your investigation and write up the results.
- Recognize that you will eventually face four kinds of criticism: a) from historians who claim to know the times, places, sources, and/or phenomena better than you; b) from advocates of arguments you have implicitly or explicitly rejected; c) from analysts who prefer other genres, ontologies, explanatory strategies, mechanisms, sources, and methods than you have chosen; d) from your own recognition of gaps, inconsistencies, uncertainties, and exaggerations in the analysis.

- As much as possible, write so clearly that these four brands of criticism will actually bear on what you meant to say, rather than what someone – including yourself! -- mistakenly thought you meant to say.
- If you are trying to influence how other people carry out their own research and writing in historical sociology, waste little time on debate and exhortation.
- Instead, devise, execute, and report studies that a) clearly bear on already pressing questions in social science and history, b) embody replicable and extensible procedures, c) analyze a kind of evidence that is available for multiple times and places, d) require a year or two of full-time effort from a reasonably trained researcher, and are therefore suitable for articles, master's theses, and doctoral dissertations, e) immediately demand substantiation, elaboration, refutation, or extension.

As I turn my hortatory crank, I begin to hear hurdy-gurdy tunes instead of lullabies and chorales. Let me therefore close the music with a quick finale: Historical sociology runs little risk of becoming atheoretical and particularistic. It runs thick with theory, not only concerning the phenomena it investigates, but also concerning both historical processes as such and the generation of historical knowledge. It works better when its practitioners know what genres, ontologies, explanatory logics, mechanisms, sources, methods, and arguments they have chosen, why they have adopted them, and what rules those choices entail. Of course it doesn't hurt to have the wit, finesse, and expertise of an Alban Berg or a Béla Bartók. But even we lesser talents can turn out lullabies and chorales from time to time.