

Denmark and Sweden, or the United States and Canada — and unionization declines significantly in one of the countries but not in the other. The subsequent wage patterns in the two countries should give us helpful information about the existence and magnitude of the hypothesized effect.

A second is to make greater use of a difference-in-differences approach to large-N quantitative macro analysis. We now have relatively lengthy time series for many policies, institutions, and outcomes, which enables us, in some instances, to examine the degree to which cross-country differences in change over time in a policy or institution are correlated with cross-country

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differences in change in an outcome. This gets us closer to an experimental design, reducing the likelihood of mistaken inferences.

I also think policy-oriented research would benefit from more frequent use of multiple sources of evidence. Seldom do we have the evidence we'd ideally want — the "smoking gun" that gives us a clear and true signal about policy effects. So we should examine various types of data. For each, we should ask: "What would we expect to observe if a particular hypothesis were true? Is that what we in fact observe? If so (or if not), what does that tell us about the answer to our research question?" Then we piece together a conclusion from our multiple imperfect and incomplete bits of

evidence. The social scientist, in this account, is more like Sherlock Holmes than like a chemist in a lab.

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Comparative historical sociology and liberating social changes in the last two centuries

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I suspect I'm not the only one in this symposium who brings up Marx's famous saying that "philosophers only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is, to change it." To be sure, what he means by philosophy is more about sociology, a discipline he helped found inadvertently. Marx analyzed the historical development of capitalism and class struggles, and he illustrated how comparative-historical knowledge can aid the analysis of the interplay of class forces in his numerous commentaries on current events around the world, with the *Eighteenth Brumaire* and *Civil War in France* as the most well-known ones. These analyses did not necessarily directly lead to actions all the time, but were important stepping stones toward dispositions taken by the international working class movement that he and Engels led at the time.

Guiding Strategies and Policies

Marx's linking of historical sociological knowledge to political practice was not restricted to proletariat revolutionary actions

but extended to more moderate causes. As historian Robin Blackburn (2011) pointed out, Marx diagnosed that in the historical development of the wage labor system, extra-economic exploitation outside the system like slavery was instrumental to strengthening capitalists' hands in their containments of free workers' struggles. He concluded in many of his newspaper writings that the international working class movement had to throw their support behind the US abolitionist movement to maximize the freedom of Europe's free workers to struggle, even though the abolitionist movement was led by the American bourgeoisie. Marx even sent a letter to Lincoln on behalf of the International Workingmen's Association to express their support of the North. The US ambassador in London returned to Marx, confirming the President had read Marx's letter and was thankful. Marx's position on the American Civil War, as derived from his analysis of the historical development of wage labor, was no small thing. In the early stage of the American Civil War, many liberals and leftists sympathized with the Confederacy. To them, supporting the South seemed to be a more natural position from either a free trade or self-determination standpoint. Marx's and the International Workingmen's Association's support of the North contributed to shifting Europe's public opinion to become more favorable to the Union. The hesitation of Europe in general and UK in particular in aiding the Confederacy, which expected that such support could lend them victory over the North, contributed a great deal to the eventual triumph of the Union and the final dissolution of slavery in America.

After Marx, generations of intellectuals followed his spirit to count on historical-comparative analysis to guide their advocacy and practice for liberating social changes, even though they are not necessarily the revolutionary type like Marx. For example, Charles Tilly (1978), through his classic works

on nineteenth-century rebellions and social movements in Europe, theorized that organizational resources and political opportunities brought by cleavages within the ruling elite circle were critical for the rise of contentious politics. These insights inspired many analysts and practitioners of social movements to see the importance of organization building and seeking alliance with elite sympathizers. In contrast, Frances Piven and Richard Cloward (1978), based on their investigations in the history of popular movements in twentieth-century America, concluded that movements that were not connected to the power elite and not constrained by formal organizations were usually more effective in bringing progressive changes, as they dared to be more disruptive and hence more powerful in intimidating the ruling elite to yield. These opposite views on social movements are both historically grounded. Only more historical sociology, not less, can resolve their differences.

Historical-comparative analysis is essential to the discovery of general conditions or universal dynamics underlying social movements and revolutions, as their emergence and success usually did not transpire in numbers large enough for effective quantitative analysis at any given time. Instead, social movements and revolutions usually occurred in waves and were distributed unevenly across time. To look for cases for comparison and generalization, one has to choose historical instances at different times and places. Movements and revolutions, to be sure, are just two examples of this type of social phenomenon. Another object of study for which comparative historical analysis is particularly pertinent is the process of development, industrialization, or industrial upgrading. Like social movements and revolutions, successful take-off of developing economies does not happen all the time in great numbers, and analysts need to look at historical cases in different parts of the world to compare

and to unearth the conditions conducive to successful development.

For example, Andre Gunder Frank (1966) compared economic growth in different periods of Latin America and found that most Latin American countries grew rapidly when their economic linkages to the metropolises in North America and Europe were severed by wars or depression, while their growth slowed down when their linkages with the metropolises revived. He therefore formulated the famous “development of underdevelopment” thesis, arguing that trade and investment links with rich countries were detrimental to development in poor countries. Policy makers and politicians influenced by this school of thought experimented with different regimes that restricted trade with and investment from rich countries as development policies. For another example, scholars who compared the postwar development of East Asia and Latin America reached a different conclusion, contending that what determined successful or unsuccessful development was not linkages to wealthy countries, but the autonomy and capacity of the state (e.g. Evans 1995). As such, the most effective policy to promote development is not to sever ties with rich countries, but to strive to build a capable, resourceful and development-promoting bureaucracy. Again, these two contrasting views and the corresponding policy prescriptions are both grounded on comparative-historical analysis, and their resolution will require more, not less, historical sociology.

Recovering Repressed Agencies and Processes

Comparative historical sociology also contributes to progressive social change by helping recover historical processes and agencies that were crucial in the causal chains of historical development, but were repressed in contemporary historiography for political or other reasons. One good example is the work

that reconstructs the contribution of slave rebellion in the Caribbean to the end of slavery in the world capitalist system. In the hegemonic historiography, the abolition of the slave trade and the rise of the abolitionist movement that led up to the American Civil War were mostly enacted by white Christians who detested slavery as an immoral system and fought for its end. In popular culture, we saw a lot of glorifying narratives about William Wilberforce and Abraham Lincoln. In these narratives, slaves of African descent were little more than passive victims waiting to be emancipated by conscientious white men, and the agency of the black resistance rarely entered the picture until Martin Luther King.

There has been a spate of sociological works showing that what set the abolitionist movement in motion or created the condition for its success in Europe and the United States was the wave of slave revolts at the turn of the nineteenth century - those in the Caribbean in particular (Patterson 1970; West and Martin 2009; Silver and Slater 1999). These revolts culminated in the slave revolution in French Saint-Domingue in 1791-1804. The Black Jacobins who led the rebellion there were inspired by the French Revolution. They overthrew the slavery system on the island and founded the Haitian Republic. The army of former slaves not only defeated Napoleon's army which tried to reinstall French rule and slavery, but also expelled the British navy which tried to conquer Haiti for fear that the Haitian Revolution would spread to British Jamaica. The triumph of the Black Jacobins sparked a wave of slave revolts in the American South, forced France to leave North America, and made the Louisiana Purchase possible. It created great anxiety among slave owners that slaves imported from Africa could no longer be assumed to be docile. This wave of slave revolts set the stage for the victory of the British abolitionists in banning the slave trade in 1807, and contributed to the rise of the

US abolitionist movement that moved the North to a staunchly anti-slavery position. These revolts also fostered transnational networks of solidarity and exchanges among the African diaspora across the Atlantic Ocean that persisted through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and helped connect African anti-colonial struggles and the many currents of the civil rights movement in postwar America (see West et al eds. 2009).

While historians might unearth some forgotten events repressed in hegemonic collective memory, it is often historical sociologists who rediscover the systemic significance of these events, the agencies embodied therein, and the inter-connectedness among these agencies and processes. The recovery of these silenced voices can shed new light on our interpretation and understanding of contemporary movements like Black Lives Matter and contribute to our formulation of effective strategies in those movements.

Another example illustrating how comparative historical sociology rediscovers repressed historical processes is the new sociology of neoliberalism. Dominant interpretation of the rise of neoliberalism according to the monetarist orthodoxy asserted that neoliberal reforms in the US and UK in the 1980s were necessary, technical, and successful responses to the stagflation crisis caused by the failure of Keynesianism in the 1970s. This interpretation of history has spread fear of inflation in most advanced capitalist countries and strengthened the call for austerity even at times of economic crisis, making many believe that major increases in government spending and money supply would bring the stagflationary 1970s back. Niall Ferguson has been predicting that fiscal and monetary stimuli under Obama's White House and Bernanke's Federal Reserve would foster the nightmare of double-digit inflation. Though this prophecy has never been fulfilled, it lent support to the Tea Party agenda

of defunding the state. It also fuelled the rise of austerity politics in Europe.

Thanks to the new sociology of neoliberalism (e.g. Prasad 2006; Martin 2008; Krippner 2011), we now know that this orthodox interpretation of the rise of neoliberal reform is a myth. Instead of a technical and impartial remedy to economic failure, the liberalizing reforms in the US and UK in the 1980s stemmed from capitalist and middle class mobilization aimed at taming the power of organized labor and rolling back progressive

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taxation. More, inflation in the 1970s was driven by powerful organized labor, wage growth, and high employment. Inflation at that time devalued debt and lowered inequality, and it was bad to owners of capital but not necessarily bad for debtors and workers. The stagflation crisis was therefore more a crisis of capital than a crisis of labor (Hung and Thompson forthcoming). The subsequent three decades of neoliberalism has shifted the

balance of power between capital and labor heavily to the former's favor. Its consequence is a runaway financial bubble, escalating inequality and underemployment, and more recently, deflationary pressure. It follows that the prevalent worry about inflation among economists and policy makers today is excessive, and deflation is in fact a bigger risk. What we need now are bold public policies that re-empower the working class, revive the social state, and reverse the rise of inequality.

History is too important to be left to historians. Comparative-historical sociologists are bestowed with the obligations to generalize and theorize from important historical processes across different parts of the world, as well as to uncover historical processes and agencies that have been repressed by ideologies. These are not only important for our better understanding of the world, but are also important intellectual building blocks for viable social movements and public policies that could bring us a better world.

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What do you think?

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If you are interested in having your thoughts on this debate appear in the next issue of *Trajectories*, please email Matt Baltz (mjbaltz@ucla.edu). If you would like to be involved in the "Can CHS Save the World" effort, email Monica Prasad (m-prasad@northwestern.edu).