

THE HISTORY MANIFESTO

How should historians speak truth to power – and why does it matter? Why is five hundred years better than five months or five years as a planning horizon? And why is history – especially long-term history – so essential to understanding the multiple pasts which gave rise to our conflicted present? *The History Manifesto* is a call to arms to historians and everyone interested in the role of history in contemporary society. Leading historians Jo Guldi and David Armitage identify a recent shift back to longer-term narratives, following many decades of increasing specialisation, which they argue is vital for the future of historical scholarship and how it is communicated. This provocative and thoughtful book makes an important intervention in the debate about the role of history and the humanities in a digital age. It will provoke discussion among policy-makers, activists, and entrepreneurs as well as ordinary listeners, viewers, readers, students, and teachers.

JO GULDI is the Hans Rothfels Assistant Professor of History at Brown University. She is the author of *Roads to Power: Britain Invents the Infrastructure State* (2012).

DAVID ARMITAGE is the Lloyd C. Blankfein Professor of History at Harvard University. Among his publications are *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (2000), *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (2013), *Milton and Republicanism* (co-edited, 1995), *Bolingbroke: Political Writings* (edited, 1997), *British Political Thought in History, Literature and Theory, 1500-1800* (co-edited, 2006), and *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought* (co-edited, 2009), all from Cambridge University Press.

‘This is a very important and refreshing book. For too long, we have seen increasing specialisation within historical research and between the disciplines of social sciences. Armitage and Guldi rightly plead for a return of the *longue durée*. They call for more global, long-run and transdisciplinary approaches to big questions, including climate change, inequality and the future of capitalism. Their book will be an important milestone in this direction. A must read.’

Thomas Piketty,
Paris School of Economics

‘This well-written, smart, deeply and broadly learned book is a bracing challenge to contemporary historiography. Critical of the loss of a sense of *la longue durée* and series, replaced by histories of the “short term” and micro-scale since the 1970s, the authors argue that history has lost much of its public significance and usefulness. David Armitage and Jo Guldi have produced a rich history of the discipline as the foundation of a compelling plea for bringing forth more, bigger and better histories into our civic life.’

Thomas Bender,
New York University

‘Guldi and Armitage make a compelling argument for the relevance of history, and for its potential as an antidote to the twin afflictions of short-term thinking and future prognostication based on poor or partial evidence. In a concise and clear book, they make renewed claims for the capacity of the past and its data, properly studied, to inform public policy and democratic debate on a wide range of issues from economic malfunction to climate change. They also throw out a challenge to academic historians to pull on, and perhaps break, some disciplinary shackles that have mentally fettered the profession for the better part of a century.’

Daniel Woolf,
Queen’s University, Ontario

‘How can we think seriously about our grandchildren’s future if no one thinks on scales longer than a few years? Jo Guldi and David Armitage tell a rich and swashbuckling story of how historians are returning to big-picture thinking, armed now with the rich insights of microhistory and the vast archives of big data. In the Age of the Anthropocene, they argue, it is vital that we know the past, and that we know it at very large scales.’

David Christian,
Macquarie University

‘History will always remain a craft with many workshops perfecting different traditions, but here is a fast-paced manifesto which urges the profession to focus on long-term questions and embrace ethical obligations to provide urgently needed perspectives on key dilemmas of our times. Its view of

recent Anglo-American historiography as “short-termist” and passionate plea that history can map out alternative possibilities for better societies will invite controversy and instantly invigorate classroom debates with a double shot.’

Ulinka Rublack,
University of Cambridge, and editor of A Concise Companion to History

‘An important attempt to make history relevant to a broad public, away from the narrow specialisation that has dominated the historical profession to a long-range nexus of past, present and future which places the present global crises of ecology and inequality in their historical context and takes into account the impact of digitalisation on historical studies.’

Georg G. Iggers,
University at Buffalo, The State University of New York

‘An exhilarating anticipation of a digitised and globalised future, in which historians will assume the role of critical problem-solver. Guldi and Armitage argue that to do so, historians must recover their command of the *longue durée* and boldly apply their grasp of multi-causality to the dominant practical disciplines of the day.’

John Tosh,
University of Roehampton

‘In their timely and useful book, Armitage and Guldi have issued a call to arms. They urge historians to use their knowledge and skills to think big, to embrace long-term thinking and the possibilities of digital technology. Above all they hope that an increasingly fragmented discipline can embrace its public role and take on, in an ethical, utopian spirit, some of the biggest issues of our time, such as inequality and climate change. They make a heartfelt plea for those who specialise in the past to make a major contribution to thinking about the future. Their manifesto for history as a critical social science deserves careful consideration both by those already persuaded of its public purpose and by those yet to embrace this generous view of the field.’

Ludmilla Jordanova,
Durham University

‘Of all the many ways in which public policies and public debates today lack necessary perspective, perhaps the most important is their lack of historical perspective. In *The History Manifesto* David Armitage and Jo Guldi offer a ringing call not just for more knowledge of the past, but for the centrality of a broad and deep understanding of history to public knowledge itself.’

Craig Calhoun,
London School of Economics and Political Science

‘Big problems meet big data in this compelling case for long-term thinking in the public sphere. Guldi and Armitage don’t just chart a new course for the discipline of history, but for the *uses* of history across disciplines. I’m convinced: a return to the *longue durée* is theoretically sound, technologically feasible, politically imperative.’

Bethany Nowviskie,
University of Virginia

‘Ideas about big and deep histories have been recently flagged as ways historians could make their work speak to present concerns about human futures. This wide-ranging and spirited book not only provides the best discussion so far of these questions; by staking the very future of history on historians’ capacity to shape public debates, Guldi and Armitage issue to fellow historians nothing short of a stirring call to action. A welcome and timely intervention.’

Dipesh Chakrabarty,
University of Chicago

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and

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