

6HUM1060 Thinking with History

Workshop two: historians' skills

John Tosh, *Why History Matters* – speaks of 'applied history'

= p.60 – '**Historical analogy** is the most common kind of applied history'.

- **commend** a particular course of action
- **cautionary** moral against a course of action

Words with historical references and associations used in contemporary politics:

(Macmillan, pp.158-9; Tosh, pp.64-66)

- 'appeasement'
- 'terror'
- 'world war...'
- 'war on...'

Can you suggest other words used in this way?

Problems with analogy and comparison =

some politicians or policy makers may use analogy to discount the processes of change and development = deliberate presumption that the past is the same as the present in order to ignore change or difference.

Tosh – argues historians should be more careful – use analogy to point out change and difference over time as well as similarity.

Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time* –

Their central method is **drawing analogies** =

- **Inspecting the issue** – causes of an incident or an event, and more importantly, its consequences for the future.
- **Probing presumptions** – what were the attitudes of the historical actors at the time? Those recording the evidence? Later commentators and historians? Why did they take the decisions they did?
 - - e.g. Bay of Pigs incident and US-Cuban-Russian relations
- Placing people - biographies
- **Placing organisations** – organisational history

e.g. Martin Luther King or Malcolm X – what elements of their upbringing shape his ideas and actions? What did the situation in which they lived, and wider social frameworks and histories, contribute to their actions and their legacy for modern race relations? Can we use their histories to understand current troubles (e.g. Ferguson?)

 - **Noticing patterns**
 - **Judging change**

e.g. economic growth and financial crises – long term structural change? Can we learn from the 1929 Wall Street Crash? The 1720 South Sea Bubble?

Neustadt and May's framework for drawing up useful analogies:

Compare Likenesses and Differences:

- *Known*
- *Unclear*
- *Presumed*

In the workshop draw up a framework, elaborating on Neustadt and May and also Tosh and MacMillan:

Put together something that works for you. The document can be in whatever format you would find most useful - a flow chart, a series of questions, a table - but filling it in should allow you to analyse critically any case of using history as a guide.

It doesn't need to be perfect - you can refine it as you go along. It's there to help you go that extra step from noting the use of history to being critical of it, so you can develop your own line of argument. You'll be able to use it when we come to the case studies - it's basically a tool to ensure you work systematically.