



## Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation (Chicago Studies in Practices of Meaning)

By William H. Sewell Jr.

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While social scientists and historians have been exchanging ideas for a long time, they have never developed a proper dialogue about social theory. William H. Sewell Jr. observes that on questions of theory the communication has been mostly one way: from social science to history. *Logics of History* argues that both history and the social sciences have something crucial to offer each other. While historians do not think of themselves as theorists, they know something social scientists do not: how to think about the temporalities of social life. On the other hand, while social scientists' treatments of temporality are usually clumsy, their theoretical sophistication and penchant for structural accounts of social life could offer much to historians.

Renowned for his work at the crossroads of history, sociology, political science, and anthropology, Sewell argues that only by combining a more sophisticated understanding of historical time with a concern for larger theoretical questions can a satisfying social theory emerge. In *Logics of History*, he reveals the shape such an engagement could take, some of the topics it could illuminate, and how it might affect both sides of the disciplinary divide.

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## **Editorial Review**

### Review

"*Logics of History* initiates dialogue between historians and social scientists about social theory and shows historians that they have important contributions to make to current theoretical discussions. Written by one of the most influential and widely respected historians today, it is a book that will make the intellectual history of our times."

(Michèle Lamont *Michèle Lamont* 2004-09-21)

"This is a truly significant work. *Logics of History* will set the agenda for theoretical discussion about the nature of social transformations and the relation between history and the social sciences for years to come."

(Keth Baker *Keith Baker* 2005-03-30)

"If 'events' are, according to William H. Sewell Jr., 'that relatively rare subclass of happenings that significantly transforms structures,' then *Logics of History* is surely an event. His extraordinary range of intellectual and cultural knowledge across multiple social science disciplines puts him in a position to make novel and brilliant connections. The relationship between history and social theory will never be the same."

(Sherry B. Ortner *Sherry B. Ortner* 2005-03-30)

"This is a thorough and engaging analysis of how utilizing a historical ontology can mitigate inherent problems in sociological methodology and anthropological theory. . . . This work is a brilliant expose of the ontologies and methodologies of the various social sciences and is certainly applicable for use across the social science disciplines. . . . I would not doubt that this work finds its place in history as a landmark exposition."

(J. David Granger *Canadian Journal of Sociology*)

"Over the past thirty-five years William H. Sewell has established himself as one of the leading social historians of his generation. One thing that makes him, as he notes, still fairly unusual is his willingness to reflect on the methods and assumptions of the forms of enquiry in which he engages. . . . This collection is . . . evidence of the fertility of the project."

(Alex Callinicos *International Review of Social History*)

"A pathbreaking book: intelligent, probing, and as good at raising new questions as it is at addressing old ones. It makes a highly original contribution to discussions of the relationships between the social sciences and history that will be of interest to specialists on all sides."

(Daniel Little *Journal of Social History*)

"This rigorously argued treatise on the social theoretical implications of the contingent, sequential, and fateful character of human action may prove to be the most important theoretically engaged book written by a professional historian in the past generation. . . . An ideal text for any graduate course in 'theory and history' and for any campus's cross-disciplinary faculty seminar."

(David A. Hollinger *Journal of Modern History*)

From the Inside Flap

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#### About the Author

**William H. Sewell Jr.** is the Frank P. Hixon Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science and History at the University of Chicago. He is the author of three previous books, including *Work and Revolution in France* and *A Rhetoric of Bourgeois Revolution*.

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