

[Free pdf] Rational Action: The Sciences of Policy in Britain and America, 1940-1960 (Transformations: Studies in the History of Science and Technology)

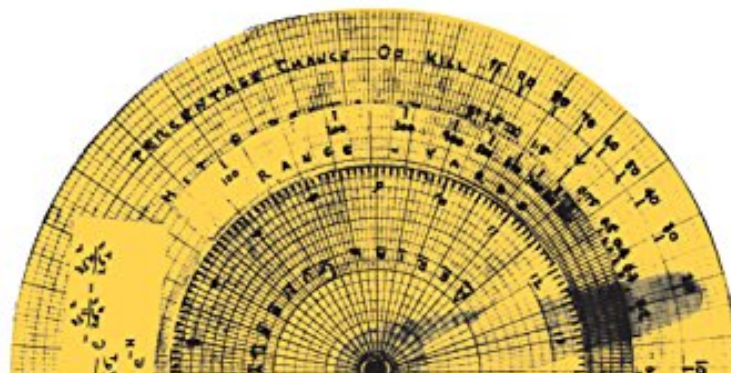
Rational Action: The Sciences of Policy in Britain and America, 1940-1960 (Transformations: Studies in the History of Science and Technology)

William Thomas

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WILLIAM THOMAS



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William Thomas : Rational Action: The Sciences of Policy in Britain and America, 1940-1960 (Transformations: Studies in the History of Science and Technology) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Rational Action: The Sciences of Policy in Britain and America, 1940-1960 (Transformations: Studies in the History of Science and Technology):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. useful and usable contexts for thinking about how 'data' lead ...By Michael D. Schrage in an era when the 'hype cycle' consistently puts 'big data' and 'predictive analytics' on the front pages of the *WSJ* and the covers of 'serious' business publications worldwide, Thomas' history provides thorough, useful and usable contexts for thinking about how 'data' lead to 'rational action' in government and industry alike.... the book is well-written, immaculately researched and does a fantastic job of delineating between the individual and institutional influences that turned WW2 'operational research' in the UK into post-War 'systems analysis' in RAND.....this is a remarkable profile of exceptionally creative political/mathematical minds and an equally compelling description of how organizations adopted and adapted the algorithmic/analytic insights and innovations that emerged.....there is not a 'born digital' start-up or fortune 1000 enterprise that would not find vital components of their 'data driven' future foreshadowed in this thoughtful review of the 'policy science' past.... the 'obvious' criticism is that this is, indeed, an 'academic' book and thus focuses on subtleties, nuances and interpretations of greater interest to scholars than practitioners....that said - and I say this as someone who's keynoted @ informs conferences - 'rational action' is precisely the sort of history that 'serious' practitioners should read because - sorry! - the past really is prologue when it comes to rigorous thinking around rigorous analysis.....anyone and everyone interested in the big data/algorithmic future will find real value in 'rational action'....data scientists who wish to learn from failures past to boost their odds for future success will read the book twice....

During World War II, the Allied military forces faced severe problems integrating equipment, tactics, and logistics into successful combat operations. To help confront these problems, scientists and engineers developed new means of studying which equipment designs would best meet the military's requirements and how the military could best use the equipment it had on hand. By 1941 they had also begun to gather and analyze data from combat operations to improve military leaders' ordinary planning activities. In *Rational Action*, William Thomas details these developments, and how they gave rise during the 1950s to a constellation of influential new fields -- which he terms the "sciences of policy" -- that included operations research, management science, systems analysis, and decision theory. Proponents of these new sciences embraced a variety of agendas. Some aimed to improve policymaking directly, while others theorized about how one decision could be considered more rational than another. Their work spanned systems engineering, applied mathematics, nuclear strategy, and the philosophy of science, and it found new niches in universities, in businesses, and at think tanks such as the RAND Corporation. The sciences of policy also took a prominent place in epic narratives told about the relationships among science, state, and society in an intellectual culture preoccupied with how technology and reason would shape the future. Thomas follows all these threads to illuminate and make new sense of the intricate relationships among scientific analysis, policymaking procedure, and institutional legitimacy at a crucial moment in British and American history.

Thomas takes us behind the scenes, to the experts' offices and field laboratories, where new sciences of decision making were developed. He excels in revealing the diversity of such sciences, and adds welcome and convincing detail to the story of the warfare state. (Jon Agar, Professor of Science and Technology Studies, University College London; author of *Science in the Twentieth Century and Beyond*) A fascinating account that challenges some widely held views about the sciences of policy in the mid-twentieth century. Cross-disciplinary in its scope, this book covers material that is important for historians of economics and other social sciences as well as for historians of science and technology (Roger E. Backhouse, Professor of the History and Philosophy of Economics, University of Birmingham) *Rational Action* explores the history of one of the most significant political and scientific developments of the past century. Overall, a fascinating account of the intersection of history, politics, science, and mathematics. (Paul E. Ceruzzi, Chairman, Division of Space History, National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution) This scholarly yet captivating volume is most welcome. (Science and Public Policy) *Rational Action* will be of interest to historians of postwar science, economics, and business, and a welcomed challenge for science studies scholars. (Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences) As befits the author's impressive educational and professional background, *Rational Action* is scholarly, elegantly written, and well organized. (Interfaces) About the Author William Thomas is a Senior Historian at History Associates, Inc., in Rockville, Maryland.