

World History Education around the World

Ross Edmunds Dunn
San Diego State University

WORLD HISTORY EDUCATION as a type of cultural production has expanded globally in the past thirty years. This article surveys world history as a component of curricula in universities, colleges, and precollegiate schools in several parts of the world. I argue that teachers and scholars in the United States pioneered this field and that American models of how to teach the subject eventually contributed to roused interest in many other countries. Since the late 1980s, institutions, centers, and programs dedicated to the advancement of world history as both an intellectual and pedagogical endeavor have proliferated, especially in Europe and East Asia. Advances in other parts of Asia or in Africa have been less evident to date.¹

World history as a distinctive subject of investigation and mode of discourse has evolved along two intertwined paths. One path is world history as a field of research and writing. Most practitioners of the historical discipline as it emerged in the mid-nineteenth century believed that their task was to describe and interpret the histories of nation-states and national communities. This doctrine guided university departments and graduate training programs just about everywhere in the world for more than a century. Only in the 1970s did world history, as distinct from a much older tradition of “universal

history” as expounded by Voltaire, Marx, or Toynbee, begin to enjoy professional respect. We know this happened—it probably had to happen—because of the great transformations humankind was confronting in nearly every sphere of life in the twentieth century. Factors that urged broader spatial and temporal conceptions of the past, what Andre Gunder Frank called “humanocentric history,” included the global Cold War, the formation of dozens of post-colonial states, the continuous expansion and restructuring of the world economy, the venture into space, and the accelerating flow of people, goods, ideas, and information.² The world history research field has grown remarkably in the past half century. Even so, as a professional discipline, its career is young.

World history’s second path, as a subject of teaching and learning in both K-12 and collegiate institutions, has a significantly earlier starting point, emerging in the United States about 150 years ago. I explore here how that happened, and in what circumstances significant numbers of educators eventually rallied enthusiasm for world history, even though they also repeatedly redefined and restructured the field as an intellectual and pedagogical project. As Americans debated the field’s objectives and merits, professionals in other regions of the world gradually joined in. I contend that, at present, world history education in fact appears to be advancing more energetically in Europe and East Asia than in the United States.

The American Origins of World History Education

The history of world history education in the United States is an impressive success story. In the past fifty years or so, educators and public officials have committed more intellectual, administrative, and fiscal resources than in any other country to the development of scholastic world history. This commitment has encompassed institutions from middle schools to doctorate-granting universities. Of the more than 27 million students that were projected to be enrolled in grades six through twelve in American public schools in 2020,³ a substantial majority were expected to take mandatory courses of one or more academic years titled “world history,” “global history,” “world civilizations,” or some other variant of the subject. In 2018-2019 in California alone, most of the more than 950,000 children in grades six and seven took world history.⁴ In 2019, more

than 313,000 secondary students registered for the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) World History examination.⁵

In the higher education sector in the past few years, I estimate that some tens of thousands of first- and second-year students enrolled in at least a one-term introductory world history course.⁶ Today, collegiate institutions offer not only introductory surveys of the human past, but also advanced undergraduate and graduate courses in a wide range of specialized historical subjects having global, interregional, or comparative scope.

The beginnings of academic world history in the United States lie in the later nineteenth century, when new high schools and academies were proliferating across the country. In debates over core curricula for these schools, both professional historians and K-12 teachers agreed that boys and girls must learn their own nation's past, as children did in Europe. But many also argued that young people needed some type of "general history"—that is, study that linked the admittedly brief story of America to the broader, deeper traditions upon which American political and cultural values mainly rested. That meant study of Europe and the classical civilizations—the subjects assumed to be the world history that Americans needed to know or that could be known. In his *Outlines of the World's History*, a high school textbook published in 1874, William Swinton contended that general history "is of especial moment in our own country, as a preparation for citizenship in a free, self-governing nation: for how can we appreciate what we enjoy, unless we know how it *came to be*?"⁷

This was an admirable rationale for writing world history schoolbooks. In those days, however, the definition of the subject also conformed to publicly accepted doctrines of pseudoscientific racism. Swinton, for example, informed readers that the "Caucasian race" was "the only truly *historical* race,"⁸ owing fundamentally to its biological superiority to all other races. The people who contrived nineteenth-century racial theory deployed all sorts of specialized vocabulary, scientific apparatus, and laboratory experimentation to validate their theories. The popularity of these claims also coincided neatly with the high period of European and American imperial expansion in Africa and Asia, an aggression that seemed to authenticate the special organic fitness of the Aryan "branch" of colonizers. Indeed, racism dressed up as science was commonly

taught to children in classrooms and Sunday schools in Europe, the United States, and everywhere else where the descendants of Europeans lived.⁹ True to his times, Swinton declared that among the Caucasian race, the Aryans “are peculiarly the race of *progress*; and a very large part of the history of the world must be taken up with an account of the contributions which the Aryan nations have made to the common stock of civilization.”¹⁰ Africans, Asians, and American Indians, he declared, had always been to one degree or another intellectually and culturally incapacitated. Their societies either existed permanently in a prehistoric state, or they constructed ancient civilizations that eventually reached cultural and intellectual stasis and finally vanished. Swinton’s book included an initial section on “The Ancient Oriental Monarchies,” but it then shifted quickly westward to the story of Europe from ancient Greece and Rome to the 1870s.¹¹

The popularity of general history waned at the end of the century, owing largely to an influential report of the American Historical Association (AHA). In 1899, the AHA named a committee of seven men, most of them distinguished professors, to develop a national “new history” curriculum for high schools. It was to be founded on progressive principles, which meant replacing memorization and recitation with critical inquiry, lively discussion, and analysis of primary source documents. This Committee of Seven also recommended that general history, which they faulted for skimming across the surface of the past, give way to a four-year sequence of courses: ancient history, medieval and modern European history, English history, and United States history. The committee endorsed a brief review of Oriental civilizations, but then more substantive study of Greece, Rome, and medieval Europe, implying that these were the sole places whose histories registered change of significance to American citizens. Overt pseudoscientific racism was not evident in the committee’s recommendations, but the curriculum remained as Eurocentric as general history had been.¹²

World History, the Social Studies, and Western Civilization

The four-year history sequence prevailed in many schools for about two decades. But by 1920, professional opinion was shifting once again. Postwar educationists, especially school administrators

and public officials, formulated arguments for what became known as “social studies,” a multidisciplinary curriculum to be taught in every grade. These reformers contended that, despite its pedagogically progressive creed, the four-year program took up way too much school time. American participation in the Great War and the subsequent revival of mass foreign immigration made clear that schools must be well-managed, efficient institutions organized to produce well-informed, civic-minded men and women. This was also the period when academic scholars were organizing social scientific inquiry into professional disciplines. They raised their voices in support of the educators demanding time in the school day for civics, geography, economics, current events, and other subjects intended to prepare the coming generation for productive careers.

No one argued against the teaching of the American past, and many educators thought non-American history also had merit, as long as it could be neatly wrapped into a one-year high school survey. Furthermore, most social studies experts thought this course, now to be called “world history” and designated in most schools for grade ten, should emphasize the modern and contemporary. If teachers wanted to expose their pupils to ancient Egypt, Charlemagne, and the Hundred Years War, they should find a way to squeeze those topics into the academic year without slighting coverage of the more recent past. Erudite champions of the four-year history block scorned these novel developments, complaining that the new course looked suspiciously like the superficial general history of the previous century. The university historians, however, proved no match for the new social studies managers. Gradually losing interest in the struggle, most academics turned away altogether from the concerns of K-12 education.¹³

The scholars, however, had new ideas of their own. During World War I, professors at Columbia College in New York City introduced a first-year undergraduate course titled “Contemporary Civilization.” This initiative became an early model for the history of Western civilization course, or “Western Civ.” The Columbia teachers had a mix of motives for requiring the course of their undergraduates. First, postwar foreign policy leaders felt impelled to firm up U.S. membership in the club of liberal democratic nations, thus identifying America’s relatively young institutions with Europe’s older republican and constitutional traditions. Second,

the course would address the problem of adapting immigrants of all origins to America's Europe-derived civic and cultural mores. Third, the authors of early Western Civ textbooks, according to historian Daniel Segal, aimed to help restore the "rational inquiry" that had undergirded democratic states before World War I and to gird thinking citizens for defense against the sort of authoritarian and irrational behavior that had produced that horrendous conflict.¹⁴

The Western Civ course spread widely in American colleges and universities. It aimed to trace the past from its beginnings to the near present. By the 1920s, many teachers and textbook writers were ready to shed some of the ludicrous precepts of race theory. Nevertheless, a wide strand of cultural and social arrogance continued to run through both K-12 and collegiate curriculum. Western Civ aimed to recount the progressive advance of humankind from "stone age" times to ancient Southwest Asia and Egypt, then through Greece and Rome to medieval and modern Europe, with some attention to the United States and to European imperial conquerors and settlers in other parts of the world. Sometimes, the course also included the first two or three centuries of Arab Islamic history, owing to academic opinion of early Islam as a sort of storeroom of classical knowledge destined for reinvigoration in Europe. Generally, though, Western Civ presumed the histories of human groups other than Europeans to have ceased moving in any progressive direction well before the modern era began. Segal called the course a social evolutionary construction. "Cultures," he wrote, "do not cross, they fall in line..."¹⁵ The world historian William McNeill observed that, under the influence of nineteenth-century British thinkers, the founders of Western Civ regarded "all history as moving towards the realization of human freedom."¹⁶ Thus, most teachers and textbook authors taught both high school world history and college Western Civ without telling their students that the narrative they were describing was not world history at all.

One reason for the success of the course was general education (GE), an innovation that required first- and second-year university students to take a basic list of courses—mostly in the humanities, arts, social sciences, and natural sciences—to equip them with critical skills and wide-ranging knowledge. As one Columbia professor observed, GE was to be "a common core of learning for the common man."¹⁷ Partly out of worry that high schools were

failing to prepare students to pursue bachelors' and graduate degrees, most colleges and universities bought readily into GE. Furthermore, states and localities began in the 1930s to support community colleges—that is, two-year institutions that offered associate degrees or certificates in a range of academic and vocational subjects. These colleges also taught the GE courses, including Western Civ, required of students who transferred to four-year schools.¹⁸

American instructors and their students may have found Western Civ a reasonably enlightening experience, at least at first. As time moved on, however, the history profession exploded with new research, topics, problems, and methods—a supermarket of knowledge to be crammed into one academic year. Not only did students grumble about mountains of testable detail, but senior lecturers occupied with their research often foisted the course on junior colleagues or graduate students. This had the effect of obliterating the original “march of freedom” organizing principle. Similarly, at the high school level, world history students faced diminishing narrative coherence. Nevertheless, these courses remained the preeminent vehicles for non-American history in the United States, Western Civ until the 1980s and the secondary course even now.¹⁹

There is irony, however, in the way teachers conceptualized Western Civ. Despite its unforgiving Eurocentrism, it helped pave the way to more inclusive, globe-encircling history. By presenting Europe as a single historical scene—rather than as a collection of bounded political entities, each with a self-contained past—it disrupted the nineteenth-century presumption that history was the study of nation-states. It invited students to explore developments of importance on fairly large scales of time and space—the Roman empire, the Christian Church, the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution, the world wars. Western Civ was border-crossing history—indeed, an early expression of what is currently called “transnational history.” Western Civ became such a valued asset in American higher education that during my early travels in Europe, I was startled to learn that a course of such broad regional dimensions was barely known anywhere there. In England, for example, history education was mostly detailed, overlapping stories about Britain. Even the Irish and the French, never mind the Nigerians, received little classroom attention.

Redefining World History Education after World War II

In the United States, the very success of Western Civ eventually inspired some historians to ask why—if larger-scale, multinational history was such a good idea—it should be limited almost exclusively to Europe. For a growing number of American educators, European history was no longer sufficient for postwar citizenship. The narrow nationalism to which so many people reverted after World I did not reassert itself after the second conflict. Rather, new international commitments impelled educators to demand more capacious history education. The planet seemed to be simultaneously shrinking as an interacting social sphere and expanding in the American collective consciousness. Indeed, postwar internationalism helped advance my own education. In 1958, the U.S. Congress passed the National Defense Education Act, a program designed to better equip the country for global leadership. This legislation funded regiments of graduate students to take up “areas studies”—that is, to learn the language, history, culture, and economy of African, Asian, Latin American, or Soviet bloc regions and to write dissertations that would serve the national interest. As a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin in the 1960s, I received a National Defense Foreign Language Fellowship to study Arabic, as well as Muslim history and culture in Africa and the Middle East.

Starting in the 1970s, some area studies Ph.D.s like myself who secured university jobs proposed to teach introductory world history of global scope to parallel or replace Western Civ. One factor that spurred these initiatives was the great expansion of knowledge about every world region, knowledge that shattered tired myths about inert civilizations and “traditional societies.” Another was the social and ethnoracial broadening of faculties to include young women and men who came to prefer world history to Europe-centered curriculum that stood in for world history.

Nevertheless, the pursuit of new programs and textbooks proved challenging. Few teachers had great confidence in their ability to design courses that would span the globe, yet not end up even more fact-stuffed and unwieldy than Western Civ had become. One problem was that model courses and scholarly studies to provide guidance were scarce. Fortunately, however, the works of several pioneering world historians offered blueprints for conceptualizing accounts of the human past.

Among them, William H. McNeill should be invoked first. He constructed his monumental 1963 work, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community*, around the development of major civilizations.²⁰ He explored in detail the processes and consequences of interactions among those societies. He drew on cultural diffusion theory to argue that encounters of one society “with bearers of another culture or civilization is sure to change local ways of life. This was and remains, in my opinion, the main drive wheel of historical change.”²¹ McNeill produced many books of world historical significance, and throughout his long career, he energetically campaigned for stronger world history education.²² Writing in *The History Teacher* in 1977, he declared that even though the Western Civ course had lost a clear rationale or organizing principle, a basic course for all students was imperative: “I must confess that it seems to me self-evident...that the only frame suitable for introducing students to the world in which they live is world history.”²³

Leften Stavrianos, a second key innovator, became concerned in the 1950s that many Americans did not appear to understand the global crises of the time, impelling him to speak up for a renewed partnership between academic specialists and high school teachers. He was a historian at Northwestern University when in 1962 he published a high school world history textbook, one of the first that challenged the Eurocentric narrative. His book took a civilizationist yet worldwide approach, and he paid some attention to interregional connections.²⁴ He produced multiple editions of the book and attracted growing audiences. He also published a college world history that offered a world-scale conceptual guide for new instructors.²⁵

In 1959, Philip Curtin, a third pioneer of importance, founded the Comparative Tropical History (later Comparative World History) graduate program at the University of Wisconsin. This was the first curriculum of its kind. In contrast to McNeill and Stavrianos, Curtin questioned the value of sweeping world history surveys. Rather, he urged a global frame for investigating the history of trade, migration, slavery, disease, and numerous other potential topics by applying a methodology of inductive comparison of individual cases. Curtin had great success training graduate students to teach, write, and lay institutional foundations for world history education. Many

of his students, including myself, initiated first-year surveys in our universities. But we learned from Curtin to think about teaching not in terms of “covering” regions and civilizations, but as an endeavor to address specific historical problems in world-historical contexts.²⁶

Finally, Marshall G. S. Hodgson had a much shorter career as a world history theorist. A colleague of McNeill’s at The University of Chicago, he died in 1968 at the age of 46. His masterwork, *The Venture of Islam*, appeared in three volumes six years after his death, but he wrote his seminal articles on world history in the 1950s.²⁷ These essays are close to clairvoyant in their anticipation of the world-historical reconceptualization still in progress today. Like McNeill, Hodgson accepted the reality of civilizations as cultural aggregates, but ultimately had less interest in them as distinct cultural totalities than he had in the whole of Afroeurasia as an enormous zone of complex and ever-changing interactions among human groups. In *The Venture of Islam*, he viewed Afroeurasia (or Afro-Eurasia, as he spelled it) as the proper spatial context for comprehending the elaboration of Muslim societies, as well as other large-scale developments having sufficient significance to alter human relations across the entire transhemispheric region. For Hodgson, conceiving of Afroeurasia as a kind of supercontinent could free historians to explore developments without letting constructed geographical or civilizational boundaries get in their way.²⁸ The achievements of McNeill, Stavrianos, Curtin, and Hodgson continue today to inspire world history as a field of learning. Other thinkers who started making scholarly contributions to the discipline during its early years of development (before about 1985) include Michael Adas, Fernand Braudel, K. N. Chaudhuri, Alfred Crosby, Daniel Headrick, Kevin Reilly, Lynda Shaffer, Peter Stearns, and Immanuel Wallerstein.

In the 1980s, several college publishers, awakening to the market potential for alternatives to Western Civ, began to advertise world history textbooks that boasted global coverage. All of the authors of those early books, at least as far as I know, adopted the McNeill or Stavrianos civilizational models, though usually including some discussion of societal interactions. Why, however, did college instructors largely replace Eurocentrism with Europe plus a number of other civilizations or regions, each having its own internal chronology? Why did they not develop more humanocentric

narratives? One reason was the lingering professional principle that discrete “cultures,” whether nation-states, civilizations, or geographic regions (Africa, Latin America) were the natural, obvious containers for investigating the human past. Another and commonly heard rationale was that students should focus first on long-term continuities within particular spatial units to know their internal histories and distinct cultural forms. Only then would they be prepared to inquire into connections between them. This reasoning, however, assumed that these units developed as they did largely irrespective of events in other places—an assertion that world historical research could no longer sustain.

A third factor that helped privilege civilizationist world history was the American multiculturalist movement that arose in the 1960s. Multiculturalism, defined basically as the validation and appreciation of American social and cultural diversity, emerged as a fairly benign educational idea. By the 1980s, however, it became an ideological weapon in the passionate culture wars that have continued to smolder ever since. The political left wanted both K-12 schools and universities to pay much more attention to the culture and history of women and minority ethnoracial groups. As an appeal for global inclusivity, multiculturalism served world history education well. Even so, advocates tended to emphasize the “multi” in multicultural, conceiving of world history as mainly the serial study of different civilizations and peoples. Politically conservative observers disputed multiculturalist curriculum, arguing that too much of it would marginalize study of the Western traditions on which America was founded and ultimately divide the country into mutually uncomprehending ethnoracial factions.²⁹ These public quarrels tended to reify named aggregates of people, as if every ethnoracial group in the United States and every civilization elsewhere represented a distinct homogenous category. For the most part, world history curricula and textbooks accepted these presuppositions rather than challenging them as historicized constructions.

Civilizationism vs. Humanocentric History

The world was changing too fast, however, for conceptions of world history—or any other educational field—to remain static. Michael Geyer and Charles Bright described what they call our

“condition of globality”—the idea that, in the past few decades, the planet has not only become a single arena of intense, dynamic interaction among humans in nearly all spheres of life, but also that most people have become in some measure conscious of this state of affairs and its implications.³⁰ Educators have been acutely aware of the acceleration of change, and some of them have felt impelled to reflect on the global past in more holistic and spatially flexible terms. Back in the mid-1980s, the anthropologist Eric Wolf asked:

If there are connections everywhere, why do we persist in turning dynamic, interconnected phenomena into static, disconnected things?...By endowing nations, societies, or cultures with the qualities of internally homogeneous and externally distinctive and bounded objects, we create a model of the world as a global pool hall in which the entities spin off each other like so many hard and round billiard balls.³¹

Some world history practitioners, persuaded by the billiard ball critique that Wolf, Hodgson, and a few other scholars offered, concluded that the definition of their field as the study of different cultures might have outlived its usefulness. Nevertheless, this rethinking process moved slowly, partly because a broad world historical research base began to grow only in the 1980s. World historians have often observed that the field’s teaching project nourished research more richly than the other way round. Indeed, the pressure on curriculum writers and textbook publishers to distinguish world history from the Western meganarrative exceeded scholarly energy devoted to new studies in interregional, comparative, and global subjects. Some of the best scholarship in world history has come from academics who taught the subject before they wrote about it. Philip Curtin, for example, started the world-scale comparative history program at the University of Wisconsin before publishing books that contributed to the field. “I have already raided my lectures for [The World and the West] course to publish two books,” Curtin wrote in 1991, “one on cross-cultural trade and one on plantations.”³²

Whether teaching or research came first, the library of books and articles on world historical topics grew at a quickening pace. Notwithstanding continuing quests to make intelligible the entire human venture, world history practitioners understood that writing or teaching the subject was not to be limited to production of histories of the world. The challenge, rather, was to formulate

useful historical questions without allowing conventional spatial contexts—nation-states, civilizations, continents—to predetermine the scope of the investigation. By the 1990s, more historians who taught introductory courses were ready to ask questions that invited—indeed, required—interregional or global frames of analysis. They argued that the planet should be understood as the *primary* domain of investigation, but not the only one. Attention to global contexts should not marginalize the local, the biographical, the specific case, or, indeed, the civilization-centered perspective, as long as the potential relevance of the global or interregional setting is kept in mind.³³ Participants in an international world history conference held in Boston in 2006 offered a broad definition of the field as it was developing:

The phrase “world history” expresses a willingness to move beyond existing national, regional, and chronological frameworks, to experiment with a variety of different conceptual, spatial, and temporal scales that raise new types of questions and encourage new forms of comparative and interactive study.³⁴

In my view, this definition encompasses all of the several names we have given the field, or particular approaches within it—world history, global history, comparative history, transnational history, connected histories, *histoires croisées*, world system history, big history, and deep history.

In colleges and universities, the growing library of world history scholarship led to the broadening not only of introductory courses, but of more advanced undergraduate and graduate options, including interregional and transnational studies, seminars on the historiography of world history as an academic discipline, and comparative investigations of revolutions, commercial systems, religions, disease pandemics, and numerous other subjects.

In K-12 education, the tenth-grade world history course has proved an immovable object in many states since the 1920s. In few places have state or local content standards and the textbooks broken out of the multicultural, one-civilization-at-a-time mold, as well as the presumption that students’ understanding of the modern centuries requires preponderant study of Europe. There have, however, been some bright spots. In the United States, K-12 world history education enjoyed a burst of public attention in 1994, when the National Center

for History in the Schools (NCHS) at UCLA published federally funded national subject matter and critical skill standards for both U.S. and world history. The project involved dozens of teachers and professional or civic associations. The designers of the world history guidelines chose a conceptual architecture based on investigation of successive global eras, rather than on civilizational studies in sequence. The new standards faced an assault from figures in the political right partly for devaluing positive appreciation of the Western heritage in favor of multiculturalism, critical historical inquiry, and “politically correct” attention to obscure parts of the world. The controversy, however, boosted public interest in both U.S. and world history education and encouraged thousands of teachers to apply the standards in their classrooms.³⁵ In 2001, the San Diego State University history department, motivated by the national standards’ humanocentric conceptual approach, collaborated with the NCHS to launch World History for Us All, an online model curriculum for world history in middle and high schools. Thousands of teachers use this extensive resource, which continues under development today.³⁶ The 2017 version of the *California History-Social Science Framework*, which recommends three years of world history in grades six, seven, and ten, gives significantly greater attention to interregional and global developments than earlier versions did.³⁷ The educators who created the immensely successful Advanced Placement world history course that the College Board introduced in 2002 insisted on a fundamentally unilinear chronological structure by eras of the global past rather than by a sequence of civilizational and regional studies.³⁸ In 2020, Gates Ventures, the company founded by Bill Gates that developed the online open education resource course on Big History, launched the World History Project, a companion program that emphasizes study of the human past on large scales.³⁹

One prominent example of supplier conceptions of world historical study, taught mostly in collegiate institutions, is what some historians have labeled “basin history.” Fernand Braudel provided an early, seminal model for this approach with his integrative study of the sixteenth-century Mediterranean region.⁴⁰ Many others have subsequently addressed that region as a distinct zone of historical development.⁴¹ Philip Curtin and Alfred Crosby pioneered the idea that the lands facing the Atlantic Ocean constituted what Curtin called “a relevant aggregate” of data and human

interrelationships.⁴² Subsequently, Atlantic basin history grew into a prolific subdiscipline. Soon enough, historians began to teach and write about other interregional basins—notably, the Indian Ocean, the Pacific, the Sahara Desert, and the Eurasian steppes, all places where the histories of people, products, and ideas became profoundly entangled.⁴³ Basin history, however, is just one of the ways to think creatively about units of space or time that serve the investigation of historical problems. The late Adam McKeown wrote that making sense of the global past requires spatial malleability:

[I]t is hard to imagine a genuinely global explanatory narrative emerging while our knowledge remains divided into familiar geographic units. The units that make up those narratives may instead have to be chronological, event-centered, network-centered, or rooted in geographical spaces other than those framed by area studies.⁴⁴

Identifying significant historical problems in fresh ways has also brought more attention to the range and variability of the scales in both space and time at which the past may be investigated. Critics of world history education used to protest (and may still do) that history at the global or even interregional scale is too nebulous to be usefully explored. The profession has been learning, however, that moving from small to large spatial or temporal scales does not mean that perceived patterns of change are sparser and hazier, but that they are simply different. In his seminal article on big history published in 1991, David Christian argued that “What is central at one scale may be detail at another and may vanish entirely at the very largest scales. Some questions require the telephoto lens; others require the wide-angle lens.”⁴⁵ Indeed, Christian pushed the logic of this observation to its final limit, we might say, arguing that the ultimate context for human history is not Earth, but the cosmos.⁴⁶ He introduced a course titled “Big History” at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, and he also taught it for several years at San Diego State University. The course required students to comprehend change on multiple scales, including very large ones (starting with the Big Bang), and to tackle questions formulated by researchers in the historical sciences, including cosmology, geology, and evolutionary biology, as well as in the humanities and social sciences. The aims of big history require that students keep an eye trained on panoramic pictures of the past, such as the evolution of our species, global environmental change, and long-term interregional migrations. Big history allows deep dives

into civilizations and nation-states, though mainly to help illustrate or provide evidence for larger-scale historical claims.⁴⁷

Over the past few decades, research on the cognitive processes that learners deploy in making sense of the human past has shown that the ability to connect specific events and details to larger-scale, structural patterns of meaning is an analytical proficiency. But it is one that has to be acquired. Among several of the thinking skills that should be part of world history education, the ability to contextualize specific knowledge in order to more thoroughly understand its significance is essential.⁴⁸

The movement for what some have called the “new world history” has given educators leave to break out of the compartmentalized conventions of nation-state and culture-bound history. As they have done this, they and their students have discovered myriad new and engaging historical problems that earlier generations never addressed or even perceived. Referring to the twentieth century, Patrick Manning noted, “the problem is not with studies of nations but that the national framework constrained...historians to limit their research and writing.”⁴⁹ And, I would add, their teaching.

World history education has advanced so remarkably in the United States, especially since 1980, not only because men and women taught the subject, but also because they founded institutions for professional development and support. Universities that train future world history teachers and scholars have multiplied since the University of Wisconsin, as mentioned earlier, founded the first program in 1959. Twenty-six years later, Jerry Bentley and colleagues at the University of Hawaii introduced a secondary Ph.D. field in world history. From then on, the number of advanced programs accelerated. Many of them have combined in one way or another research scholarship, the preparation of both K-12 and college teachers, and the integration of historical methods with those of other disciplines, including archaeology, linguistics, genetics, and climatology. In a 2012 article, Heather Streets-Salter identified fifty-three institutions in the United States and Canada having master’s or Ph.D. programs in world history.⁵⁰ That number has no doubt risen somewhat since then. The National Endowment for the Humanities and several private foundations have supported world history graduate programs, as well as institutes and workshops for both K-12 and college instructors.

In 1982, a small band of educators launched the World History Association (WHA). From the start, the membership worked to expand the field by sponsoring annual meetings, symposia, workshops, a newsletter, and, in 1990, the *Journal of World History* (JWH). In contrast to most academic associations until quite recently, the WHA made bridge-building between K-12 and collegiate educators a key part of its mission. Beginning in 1984, teachers crossed those sector boundaries to found several regional affiliates of the WHA that organize their own activities.

Several other institutional developments have helped advance the teaching field. In 1994, H-World, a free electronic list for discussing world history scholarship and education, was founded. That same year, George Mason University founded the Center for History and New Media (now the Roy Rosenzweig Center) to both “preserve and present history online,” including document resources and up-to-date world history news.⁵¹ In 2003, the electronic journal *World History Connected* came online to support teaching and research in the field and “to bridge the long-standing divide between teachers in secondary and post-secondary education.”⁵² Finally, world history teachers and scholars gathered at UCLA in 2012 to create the Alliance for Learning in World History, an association now based at the University of Pittsburgh dedicated to improving world history education in middle and high schools.⁵³

World History Education in Europe

In terms of the sheer numbers of students relative to total population engaged in world history education at all levels of study, the United States has no close competitors to date. Nevertheless, this state of affairs is changing fast. My sampling of institutions in other parts of the world suggests that in the past three decades, scholars and teachers have created a remarkable number of new programs and institutes. In Europe, world history as an academic subject barely existed anywhere at any educational level as recently as 1990. Since then, however, university professionals have founded a remarkable number of entities in single universities or as multi-university collaborations, as well as professional organizations and online networks. These endeavors have variously identified their mission as world, global, transnational, or universal history.

The German historian Katja Naumann linked this surge of academic innovation to a sharpened sensitivity to world-scale change following the unanticipated collapse of the post-World War II political order after 1989. More European scholars and educators have paid attention to the accelerating complexity of global interconnections, the widening of Europe's political integration (until recently), and the European Union's (EU) aspiration to shape a new regional identity, partly by encouraging both European and global studies as a counterweight to parochial nationalisms. In surveying the state of world history education as of 2012, Naumann identified "countless programs of academic study, research centers, networks, and forums on world-historical problems and issues."⁵⁴ These activities have only multiplied since then.

In striving to establish these institutions, historians have encountered resistance, especially from members of the academy wedded to the nation-state as the prime foci of research and teaching. But similarly to many American professionals, Europeans who just a few years ago might have regarded introductory world history for undergraduates or secondary school students as an outlandish idea have in some measure changed their views. The growing number of young scholars with research expertise on non-Europe regions, the EU integrationist ideology, and the rise of financial support from the EU and other funding bodies have encouraged projects to institutionalize world history education, as their American counterparts started to do a decade or so earlier. The surge of world historical literature coming from the United States has also significantly influenced European research. Writing in 2011, Dominic Sachsenmaier noted that "A recently published important German essay collection in the field of global and transnational history consists almost exclusively of articles previously published in the United States. This shows that research trends on the other side of the Atlantic are an important benchmark for many global historians in Germany."⁵⁵

Institution formation in Europe has opened opportunities for fresh cadres of world history researchers and graduate students, people who display considerable national, linguistic, and gender diversity. Today, centers for advanced research in world history by one name or another exist in Austria, Belgium, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Russia, Spain, the Netherlands, and perhaps

other states. European entities that sponsor both world-historical research and graduate training may now exceed the number of similar institutions in the United States.

A few examples illustrate the proliferation of centers and programs. In Germany alone, there were by 2012 at least seven universities offering graduate degrees in global or transnational history and related disciplines.⁵⁶ The University of Leipzig's Global and European Studies Institute (GESI), founded in 2008, coordinates a consortium of universities that offers a two-year master's degree program titled Global Studies—A European Perspective. The curriculum includes significant attention to world-scale history.⁵⁷ In addition to Leipzig, the founding institutions of the GESI were the University of Vienna, the University of Wrocław in Poland, and the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Today, the consortium embraces twelve universities, six of them in European states and one each in Australia, Canada, China, India, South Africa, and the United States. Leipzig also directs an interdisciplinary and international Ph.D. program emphasizing innovative approaches to the spatial dimensions of change on regional, transnational, and global scales.⁵⁸

In England, the LSE has published the *Journal of Global History* (*JGH*) since 2006. In their mission statement, the founding editors announced that the journal's attention to "processes of globalization" signified "a subtle difference between the closely related endeavors of global and world history."⁵⁹ Perhaps so, though a comparison of the first eight volumes of the *JGH* with eight chronologically corresponding volumes of the *JWH* indicates few conspicuous differences in content except for the *JGH*'s greater number of articles on post-1900 topics.⁶⁰ At the University of Warwick, the Global History and Culture Centre, created in 2007 as a research and teaching institute, offers a Master's in Global and Comparative History and encourages Ph.D. research in the field.⁶¹ At the University of Oxford, students may earn an M.A. in Global and Imperial History through the Centre for Global History, established in 2011.⁶² In the Netherlands, Leiden University's history department awards a Master of Arts degree in Colonial and Global History.⁶³ Open Programmes at the University of Amsterdam offers two courses in Big History.⁶⁴

European scholars have also initiated multinational organizations to advance knowledge and professional exchange. The Global Economic History Network (GEHN) was created in 2003 as a partnership of

LSE, Leiden University, Osaka University, and the University of California (Irvine and Los Angeles) to promote communication and collaboration among individual scholars. The grant supporting GEHN's research, meetings, and visiting fellowships ended in 2006, but the network membership, which reached nearly fifty individuals in eleven countries, continues informal exchanges.⁶⁵ In 2002, the European Network in Universal and Global History (ENIUGH) was established as an international association to promote research, teaching, and professional discussion.⁶⁶ The network has sponsored six academic congresses since 2005, most recently in 2020 in Turku, Finland. It also publishes two journals, *Comparativ: A Journal for Global History* and *Comparative Studies* (and its electronic companion *Connections: A Journal for Historians and Area Specialists*). In 2008, the foundational meeting of the Network of Global and World History Organizations (NOGWHISTO) took place in Dresden. This consortium aims to facilitate discussion and cooperation among world regional associations. Although its activities and institutional development have been limited to date, five world history organizations are NOGWHISTO members: ENIUGH, the WHA, the Asian Association of World Historians (AAWH), the African Network in Global History (ANGH), and the International Big History Association, which held its inaugural conference in Italy in 2010.⁶⁷

Regarding precollegiate education, national and European history continues to loom over state curricular mandates, in contrast to the near universality of world history requirements in American K-12 schools. Some European academics and secondary teachers, however, have begun to take an interest in high school world history. The mission statement of ENIUGH recognizes "education in schools" as one of its important activities.⁶⁸ Sachsenmaier has observed that in recent years, "there have been rather lively debates on how to introduce global or world historical perspectives into German university education. There are similar projects targeting high school history education, from which non-Western or world history traditionally has been virtually absent."⁶⁹

There are, however, myriad differences in middle and high school curricula from one European state to another, as one would expect. France and England illustrate this variety. In France, the national curriculum is largely Eurocentric, but some moderate room is made for transregional and Asian history. Revisions recently undertaken

in the national system require students at the *collège* level (ages thirteen to fifteen) to address a period encompassing human origins through the formation of early urban societies. Youths who go on to *lycées* (ages fifteen to eighteen) are introduced in their first year to cross-cultural and integrative approaches when they study the Mediterranean and its rim lands from the ancient era through the sixteenth century. In year two, they study international relations according to a thematic plan that gives some attention to Asian countries and the United States. Attention to African or Latin American history is nearly absent. And there is no broad world history survey approaching the American model.⁷⁰

In England, the ministry of education has in recent years devalued history in general compared to its place in the original national curriculum of 1991. Today, students in state schools study *no* history at all after age fourteen, unless they choose British and European history as an A-level subject to qualify for university admission. In the curriculum that includes students from ages seven to eleven (Key Stage 2), world history is awarded three classroom topics: 1) ancient history that prescribes “depth study” of just one society chosen among Sumer, the Indus Valley, Egypt, and the Shang Dynasty; 2) ancient Greece; and 3) one non-European society selected from early Islamic civilization, Mayan civilization, or Benin in West Africa. For students between twelve and fourteen years (Key Stage 3), the compulsory syllabus is almost entirely British and European history, except for the vague directive to engage in “at least one study of a significant society or issue in world history and its interconnections with other world developments.” For this unit, four “world history” topics are suggested as possible options: Mughal India, China’s Qing Dynasty, the Russian empire after 1800, or the United States in the twentieth century. This requirement appears to be the only one anywhere in the national curriculum where world historical “interconnections” are mentioned. In the final two years (Key Stage 4) before students take the exam for the General Certificate of Secondary Education, the history discipline is absent entirely. In addition to the dearth of world history in the national curriculum, teachers may apparently present the few non-European topics that are required without regard for larger-scale contexts. Thus, Shang China, Mayan society, and Benin drift freely in global space in the enduring tradition of world history as siloed “cultures.”⁷¹

World History Education in East Asia

The scholarly works and textbooks on world history produced in China, Japan, and Korea before the 1980s either surveyed “foreign” societies or described Europe’s rise to global power. Writers drawn to the “rise of the West” problem—a group that included Marxist intellectuals—juxtaposed Europe against their own country. In general, those books contended that the nation should be modernizing, but was impeded by a combination of internal disadvantages and Western imperial pressures. Writers of early Western Civ and high school world history textbooks in the United States assumed that the unassailable achievements of Western civilization qualified it as the only sensible way of representing the history of humankind. By contrast, classroom texts in the East Asian states grappled with the rise of the West as a phenomenon deserving of appreciation. For them, however, the West was clearly not the world, so its ascendancy represented not an undisputed truth, but a complicated problem to be untangled within a context that included East Asia at the very least. Sachsenmaier has shown that in China even in the Republican period (1912-1949), “forms of global consciousness” influenced the historical profession. “Whereas for the intellectual and political mainstreams of Western societies,” he wrote, “visions for the future were usually not tied to programs of learning from other cultures, the opposite was the case in many other parts of the world, including China.”⁷²

In China after 1949 and the founding of the Peoples Republic, history scholars and educators continued to situate national history in world-scale frames, though adhering closely to the Soviet Union’s Marxist-Leninist blueprint regarding the stages of world history and contrasting China’s revolutionary path with the West’s bourgeois ideology and imperial exploitation. This world history remained largely absorbed in the story of Europe’s capitalist development and China’s need for modernization within communist theoretical guidelines. But after 1976 and the Communist Party’s proclamation of its “opening up policy,” scholars gradually gained freer rein to draw on foreign historical literature to discuss China’s past and future and its political role among the world’s major powers. Owing to the country’s growing international influence, the rapid expansion of universities, and the widening opportunities for international

travel and exchange, more educators ventured to question long-enduring preoccupations with Western modernizing success and with the “what went wrong” analysis of change in China. Ironically, new foreign contacts exposed scholars to the corpus of mostly anglophone literature that, despite its provenance in North America and Europe, challenged Eurocentric world history by positing new configurations of historical time and space, designing sophisticated comparative analyses, and proposing new explanations of Western power in world-scale and comparative contexts.

Academic interest in what Chinese educators have often labeled “global history” (or its Chinese-language equivalent) rather than “world history” mushroomed in the 1990s. According to Yunshen Gu at Shanghai’s Fudan University, this trend originated in 1988 with the publication of a Chinese edition of Stavrianos’ *A Global History*, which was then a popular textbook for American students. Following the Congress of Historical Sciences meetings in 1995 and 2000, where global history figured as an important topic, Chinese academics took a new interest, “inviting scholars from abroad, founding new institutions, hosting forums, and translating works of global history.”⁷³ Indeed, Fudan University’s history department has developed rich global history programs for both undergraduates and graduates, and its faculty includes several outstanding world historians.

Nankai University is the site of another established world history program that according to Zhang Weiwei endeavors to privilege a holistic approach, taking “the globe as the single unit of analysis in global history. Global history is all within one eggshell.”⁷⁴ Nankai offers both undergraduate and M.A. students major programs in world history. The AAWH was founded there in 2008. Probably the most prominent institute in China is the Global History Center at Capital Normal University in Beijing. Founded in 2004, the center accommodates nearly a dozen research scholars and teachers who staff both M.A. and Ph.D. programs.⁷⁵ The center also publishes the Chinese-language *Global History Review* and in 2011 hosted the annual conference of the WHA. A notable feature of these developments in China is that, on the whole, the global history movement’s leaders shifted from an ambivalent acceptance of a Eurocentric conceptual structure, especially for the modern centuries, to an even greater enthusiasm for humankind as the primary arena of investigation than has so far taken place in the United States. And

notwithstanding some attention to regional units, they accomplished this without passing through the years of multiculturalist-inspired civilizationism that characterized American world history education.

Japan and Korea both have traditions of writing and translating world histories going back to the nineteenth century. The ideological disposition of these early writings, especially textbooks, changed over the decades, depending on the prevailing political regime. In the years following Japan's Meiji Restoration (1868), both Japanese and Korean intellectuals struggled with problems of modernizing their state while preserving freedom from European intrusion. In the process, world history became a useful concept. The subject was understood, however, to refer mainly to East Asia and Europe. World history textbooks, introduced to Japan from the United States or Britain before the end of the century and then translated into Japanese, had a large influence on intellectuals and educators, though knowledge of these books was limited mostly to literate elite families. Swinton's *Outlines of the World's History*, discussed earlier as a textbook that commended pseudoscientific racist ideology, defined civilization as synonymous with European ideas of nation, liberty, democracy, and race. Japanese scholars began to publish world histories that largely acknowledged this narrative as a model for their country's political and economic advancement. In the late Meiji period, however, and especially after Japan's victory in the war with China (1894-1895), some writers pushed back against Eurocentric assumptions, demanding world histories that made more room for Japan, and Asia generally.

After the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) and the colonization of Korea (1910), Japan emerged as an imperial power, and public discussion of school world history nearly vanished. As the historian Jie-Hyun Lim observed, "World history was thus diagnosed with infection by the Western disease. Japanese intellectuals...lamented the distortion of the Japanese spirit by Western modernity and sought opportunities to remedy the perceived ills of Westernization."⁷⁶ Asian history thus came to the fore, though a version that privileged Japan as the key to modernization for all Asian peoples. The country's political turn to rightist authoritarianism in the interwar period meant that by the late 1930s, school children's study of history amounted mostly to ultranationalist indoctrination. Since Korea was Japan's colonial possession, its schools had to follow along.

When World War II ended, the American occupiers of both Japan and South Korea quickly dismantled the authoritarian education systems in both countries, introducing in their place ideologies and structures directly imported from the United States. The progressive principle that education should be egalitarian, functional, inquiry-based, and dedicated to the formation of a publicly informed citizenry was one educational influence. Policy experts contributed the idea that responsible participation in civic life required young people to engage with an eclectic curriculum of social studies, including world history weighted toward the modern and contemporary. In this way, so the American military authorities declared, both Japan and South Korea would put down roots of constitutional democracy.⁷⁷

Postwar schools in both Korea and Japan mirrored the common American practice of requiring world history at the secondary level, though it privileged the European past, as American schools did for another three decades. New universities that the United States helped build in both countries introduced the American model of general education, which exposed many college students—in contrast to most European youth—to Western Civ and, eventually, to world history. The American authorities intended this curriculum to help eradicate the stains of Japanese authoritarianism and Korean colonial subjugation by teaching Western civic values. Furthermore, liberal democracy offered a countervailing ideology to communist doctrine in postwar North Korea and, after 1949, Maoism in China.

By the late 1980s, however, some educators in Korea and Japan became convinced of the need to climb off the intellectual pendulum that had been swinging between Western and Asian centrisms since the late nineteenth century. As in China and in Europe a bit earlier, the end of Cold War polarity, rapidly globalizing economies, and immediate electronic access to knowledge worldwide suggested a world history that spotlighted neither Europe nor Asia, but that explored the humanocentric model that some American world historians had already begun to articulate. The thickening webs of international exchange among professionals, in person or via the Internet, meant that more of the mainly anglophone world historical literature found its way, translated or not, into Japanese, Korean, and Chinese universities—and eventually to precollegiate teachers. Many East Asian historians may have known the work of William McNeill for some time, but after 1990, the writings of Marshall

Hodgson, Alfred Crosby, Andre Gunder Frank, Jerry Bentley, Patrick Manning, Kenneth Pomeranz, and other world historians became subjects of discussion in conference halls and seminar rooms.

In the new century, the institutionalizing of world history studies got seriously underway. In 2004, Jie-Hyun Lim founded the Research Institute of Comparative History and Culture at Hanyang University in Seoul. In 2010, the institute organized the first Flying University of Transnational Humanities, a one-week international summer program for graduate students and young scholars interested in transnational history and contemporary issues. In 2015, Lim initiated the Critical Global Studies Institute at Sogang University. The credo of the institute's graduate program stresses interactional phenomena:

[I]n order to respond actively and creatively to the challenges and tasks of the global era, such as the capital and technology that cross national borders, migration and migrant workers, international territorial disputes and genocide, the environment, and the rights of social minorities, it is necessary to have critical knowledge and practice across and beyond the preexisting boundaries.⁷⁸

Owing to modified adoption of the American social studies curriculum model, many high schools introduced world history. Since then, the ministry of education has required this course off and on; currently, it is taught as an elective. Nevertheless, Korean historians have been producing new textbooks that give significant attention to the interrelations of peoples and societies across time.⁷⁹

Japan has paralleled Korea in the growth of institutions dedicated to innovative world-scale research and teaching. The Research Institute of World History, founded in Tokyo in 2004, is an independent center dedicated to advancing the field at all instructional levels. This center disseminates information of value to researchers and educators, publishes books and book reviews, evaluates textbooks, promotes academic exchanges, and introduces world history as an important intellectual discipline to the Japanese public.⁸⁰

At Osaka University, the Global History Division of the Institute for Open and Transdisciplinary Research Initiative dates to 2003, when Shigeru Akita and colleagues introduced a series of seminars on global history. The Global History Division sponsors a variety of programs similar to those of the Tokyo institute, including a summer school program for secondary teachers. World history is

a compulsory subject in Japan's state high schools, and students may elect to take three years of the subject. In 2022, the ministry of education intends to introduce a mandatory course that integrates world and Japanese history.⁸¹ This plan has no parallel that I know of in American public schools—although the AHA has been encouraging projects to blend more world history into U.S. courses, and vice versa.⁸²

World History Education in Some Other Countries

In other regions of the Eastern Hemisphere, investment in world history research or education has grown more slowly, despite the enthusiasm of world-minded scholars and teachers here and there. One interesting program is the Bachelor of Human Sciences in History and Civilization at the International Islamic University Malaysia.⁸³ The curriculum is dedicated to Islamic perspectives, but takes an integrated approach to the human past, endorsing “a creative synthesis of the Islamic legacy and Western knowledge.”⁸⁴

In the Arabian Gulf region's many universities, curricular programs include numerous courses on the histories of world areas, especially of predominantly Muslim states and regions. But to date, only three institutions—the American University of Sharjah, Qatar University, and the United Arab Emirates University—offer broad world history courses. Professor Ahmed Abushouk, who developed the course at Qatar University titled “World History since 1300,” attributes the slow development of world history studies in the Gulf region to several factors. One is that instructors lack training and experience in the field and, like some educators in Western countries, tend to perceive world history as ill-defined, excessively general, and inevitably Eurocentric. A second factor is that, in contrast to the situation in K-12 schools in the United States, few students graduate from the region's secondary programs having more than limited exposure to any historical subject, let alone world history. A third problem is the dearth of world history textbooks in Arabic. To strengthen the teaching field in Gulf universities, Abushouk recommends that “world history associations and centers in the West and the East should support potential candidates to attend training courses on world history and international conferences that deal with global historical themes and trans-regional issues.”⁸⁵

In Morocco, world history is neither a required nor elective course at any level of public education. Knowledge of the field in universities is limited, though a number of university professionals have shown interest.⁸⁶ Al Akhawayn University, an English-language institution, is committed to “the American liberal arts model.” A course in modern world history is an option in the GE curriculum and mandatory for certain majors.⁸⁷

In sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa’s Stellenbosch University offers a master’s degree in global studies as part of the multinational consortium of universities administered from Leipzig University, as discussed earlier. The African Network in Global History has undertaken few projects since its founding in 2009. Plans are afoot, however, for an international meeting of the association in Dakar in the next few years.⁸⁸

World history courses in precollegiate schools in Africa and Asia vary hugely from one country, province, or local school authority to another, and I have gathered only a sampling of data on precollegiate curriculum. One country that stands out is India. In contrast to the three East Asian states I have discussed, India has only one research institute with world historical interests, at least that I have identified. This is the Ibn Batuta International Center for Inter-Cultural and Civilizational Studies, a division of the Islamic Ma’din Academy located in Calicut (Kozhikode), Kerala.⁸⁹ In addition, the University of Hyderabad and Ashoka University have both initiated single world history courses.⁹⁰ By contrast, world history education in precollegiate state schools is, at least on paper, impressively strong. The country’s enormous public education system struggles with scarce funding, high dropout rates, teacher shortages, neglect in rural areas, Hindu nationalist bias in curriculum and textbooks, and other challenging problems. Nevertheless, India’s Central Board of Secondary Education stipulates substantial student exposure to world history. In grade eleven, for example, the syllabus is a chronologically organized investigation of the human past from the Paleolithic Era to modern times, a course close to the typical American high school requirement, though topics of study are more selective.

Comparing world history education in Egypt, India, and Britain between 1950 and 1970, Susan Douglass argues that in both India and Egypt, textbooks and official protocols welcomed students to survey a wider view of the world and its past than did Britain, where

racialized and culturally arrogant characterizations of other societies, especially populations in the rapidly disappearing colonial empire, endured for a quarter century after World War II.⁹¹ Since 1991, when the British government announced the new national curriculum, topics in non-British history have moved in and out with periodic revisions. Today, however, students in Indian state schools ideally study far more world history than they do in the United Kingdom.

Conclusion

World history education in institutions of learning originated in the distinctive social, cultural, and political climate of the United States in the later nineteenth century. From then to the present, the definition and central objectives of world history study have significantly changed several times. Most recently, beginning in the 1990s, the reality of a fluid, ever-mutating, network-driven world urged not only a more dynamic conceptualization of the modern centuries, but also abandonment of the whole notion that civilizations and other boxed “cultures” had ever existed as standing entities. More educators became sensitive to the idea of the civilization—also called “complex society”—as a malleable, unstable, socially constructed concept.⁹² Historians took on more research projects that were less dependent on orthodox configurations of space and time. They also aimed to situate their subject in global or interregional contexts wherever relevant. These practices required fresh thought about geographical units and divisions, shifting scales, periodization, turning points, the development and meaning of networks, and many topics that no one had previously pursued.

The world history movements that gathered steam in Europe and Asia in the late twentieth century challenged in some measure both older Eurocentric views of the usable past and the bipolar perspective that entitled Europe and East Asia only. These movements, however, largely escaped the multiculturalist tribulations that rocked American education off and on for four decades and that contributed to the idea of world history as study of a series of fenced-in cultural units. Professionals in China, Korea, and Japan who learned about American efforts to more systematically globalize the past, or who discovered this endeavor for themselves, proceeded to innovate along these new lines without passing through a multiculturalist phase.

In both East Asia and Europe, the earthshaking political events of the 1980s and 1990s helped activate interest in global history. And this appears to have happened without obdurate resistance from either national history experts or nationalist ideologues. Until then, European universities typically organized Europe's past into the traditional tripartite scheme of ancient, medieval, or modern. But even if teachers gave scant attention to other parts of the world, they did not typically claim that European history reasonably represented the whole human venture.

By contrast, America's Western Civ tradition rested on the ideological premise, whether explicitly stated or not, that world history required just part of global space, not all of it. How else to explain why courses and textbooks began (and still begin) with the story of the human species in the context of paleolithic Africa, but then progressively shrank the narrative until only Europe and Europeans were left? Nevertheless, if Western Civ's conception of world history was cramped, new world history educators built on that tradition, consciously or not. This is because Western Civ was a decidedly border-crossing course. It embodied a transnational commitment that transcended nation-centered history and that ultimately prefigured genuine world-scale studies.

Unfortunately for the progress of world history education, however, nationalist or civilizationist ideology remains tenacious in the great majority of schools and universities. The humanocentric "new world history" that excites a growing body of professionals in many countries appears to remain sadly unfamiliar to most educational decision makers, including policy-setting legislatures, public school agencies, textbook companies, and funding bodies"—as well as to American social studies practitioners who believe that schools teach too much history and not nearly enough civics and current events. Persistent misunderstanding or ignorance has produced aggravating signs. In American universities, dedication to the humanities has been declining for several years. Meanwhile, politicians and educational managers constantly urge the young to choose STEM careers (science, technology, engineering, and math) over less marketable vocations. Presumably, universities will thus produce enthusiastic and talented, though not particularly literate, corporate employees who command salaries far surpassing those of history teachers.

The right-wing nationalist upswing in a disturbingly large number of countries represents another serious threat to global education. Ultranationalist regimes may or have already begun to reconstruct educational programs to mirror culturally exclusivist ideology, as is currently happening in India, or to restrict knowledge of the external world mainly to government officials, diplomats, and corporate planners.⁹³ In many countries, in fact, even university history faculties commit relatively few resources to research or teaching on foreign areas, never mind world history. For example, as of 2013, U.S. academics specializing in East Asia accounted for less than nine percent of a surveyed total; in the United Kingdom, it was less than two percent. A bit over four percent of U.S. historians specialized in African history; in the U.K., less than three percent did. As the historians who produced these figures have written: “in the United Kingdom, 84 percent of all historians work on the UK, Europe, or North America. Coincidentally, that’s also the percentage of the world’s population that lives outside those regions: 16 percent of UK historians are left to work on 84 percent of the planet’s collective heritage.”⁹⁴

This comparative review of the development of world history education makes clear that a fuller understanding of its worldwide growth and direction will require much more research and support. Numerous essential questions remain to be addressed. I have identified a variety of institutions and programs in a selection of countries, but, with the partial exception of the United States, I have not examined precisely what sort of world-scale history educators in these places teach, how they teach it, and, no doubt most important, what students learn. Several other questions must be asked: Is there a general consensus among educators and students as to the definition of world history as a subject of learning? In what social, economic, and cultural circumstances do young people study a subject like world history? What sort of training for world history instruction do schoolteachers and academic lecturers have or need? In what ways do governments and public agencies encourage or inhibit world history education? Are there distinct conceptual differences between world, global, transnational, world system, and universal history as fields of study?

With whatever success we reveal the current state of world history education in numerous if not all national states, the approaching environmental crisis requires that teachers and students devote

much more attention to the past, present, and future of our species, and relatively less to the separate internal stories of nations and civilizations. The East Asian educators I have read or talked to in recent years seem especially eager to build the new world history into all levels of learning. Writing from Fudan University in Shanghai in 2017, Yunshen Gu affirmed:

I believe that by continuing to promote global history in China, we will encourage more young scholars to devote themselves to the study of history, train them to be open-minded, and help them appreciate the pluralistic nature of the world. As the concept of global history evolves, it will also serve as a source of inspiration for historians in China and around the world.⁹⁵

Notes

1. The scope of research for this article omits discussion of world history research and education in Latin American countries. Engagement between Latin American educators and world historians elsewhere has been limited. The reasons for this are explored in Matthew Brown, "The Global History of Latin America," *Journal of Global History* 10, no. 3 (November 2015): 365-386. See also Lauren Benton, "No Longer Odd Region Out: Repositioning Latin America in World History," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 84, no. 3 (August 2004): 423-430.
2. Andre Gunder Frank, "A Plea for World System History," *Journal of World History* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 3.
3. National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, "Table 203.10. Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Level and Grade: Selected Years, Fall 1980 through Fall 2028," <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_203.10.asp>.
4. California Department of Education, Data Quest, "2018-19 Enrollment by Grade," <<https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/EnrGrdLevels.aspx?cds=00&agglevel=state&year=2018-19>>.
5. College Board, AP Program Participation and Performance Data 2019, "Program Summary Report," <<https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/research/2019/Program-Summary-Report-2019.pdf>>.
6. Julia Brookins, "Survey Finds Fewer College Students Enrolling in College History Courses," *Perspectives on History* 54, no. 6 (September 2016): 10-11.
7. William O. Swinton, *Outlines of the World's History* (New York: Ivison, Blakeman, Taylor, 1874), v.
8. Swinton, *Outlines of the World's History*, 2. Swinton further asserted that "Modern scholars divide this historical stock—the Caucasian race—into three main branches: I. The A'ryan, or Indo-European branch; II. The Semit'ic branch; III. The Hamit'ic branch" (p. 2).
9. See, for example, Robert Wald Sussman, *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).
10. Swinton, *Outlines of the World's History*, 4.
11. Some general history textbooks included passing references to Asia and Africa in addition to the most ancient urban societies. For example, Philip V. N. Myers published a successful volume in 1889 that gave five pages each to India and China and ten to the early growth of Islam, but 701 pages to ancient civilizations and Europe. Gilbert Allardyce, "Toward World History: American Historians and the Coming of the World History Course," *Journal of World History* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 46.
12. Committee of Seven, *The Study of History in Schools: Report to the American Historical Association* (New York: Macmillan, 1899).
13. For accounts of the first few decades of K-12 history education in the U.S., see Hazel W. Hertzberg, "History and Progressivism: A Century of Reform Proposals," in *Historical Literacy: The Case for History in American Education*, ed. Paul Gagnon (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 70-95; Gary B. Nash,

Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 32-36; and Allardyce, "Toward World History," 48-55.

14. Daniel A. Segal, "'Western Civ' and the Staging of History in American Higher Education," *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (June 2000): 785-788.

15. Segal, "Western Civ," 792.

16. William H. McNeill, "Beyond Western Civilization: Rebuilding the Survey," *The History Teacher* 10, no. 4 (August 1977): 511.

17. Terry O'Banion, "A Brief History of General Education," *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 40, no. 4 (2016): 327-334.

18. O'Banion, "A Brief History of General Education."

19. Enrollments in the high school course grew from about 12% of all students in grades nine through twelve in 1934 to more than 69% by 1961—that is, about 1.5 million mostly tenth-graders. Allardyce, "Toward World History," 53-54.

20. William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1963).

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