


Global Practice in World History

Advances Worldwide

Edited by Patrick Manning

 Markus Wiener Publishers
Princeton

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CHAPTER 12

The World History Network— Facilitating Global Historical Research

Patrick Manning

The World History Network, established in its present form in 2004, has as its objective the facilitation of historical research at a global level. While many other institutions contribute to world-historical research, the Network is focused primarily on this task. The activities of the Network have been situated primarily in North America, its home base, but a substantial beginning has been made toward facilitating and publicizing world historical research in many areas of the world.

Current Network Activities

Entering the fourth year of its existence, the Network draws on modest amounts of funding from a variety of sources.¹ It sustains four major types of activity: a website, the convening of specialized conferences, print publications, and research projects. The website, first, is a comprehensive guide to online resources for research and teaching in world history. A database of over two hundred teaching and research resources, each categorized and introduced with a brief critical commentary, is shared by the teaching and research sides of the site. In addition the site provides access to major programs of graduate study, major journals in world history with tables of content, and announcements of conferences, prize competitions, and a selection of recent publications.

Secondly, the Network sponsors specialized research conferences, supplementing the conferences of major historical organizations. The 2006

Research Agenda Symposium focused on identifying research priorities in world history; a second conference on research agenda is planned for the 2008-2009 academic year. A third conference, providing a critical celebration of the life and work of Andre Gunder Frank, has been announced for April 2008. Each of these meetings, while held in the U.S., draws participants from all over the world.

Thirdly, the Network supports print publication. This volume is the second volume published through the efforts of the network; it was preceded by a volume highlighting the research of scholars trained in formal programs of world-historical study.² Future conferences are expected to result in publications of conference proceedings. Fourthly, the Network has begun to organize support for world historical research projects, as described later in this chapter.

In its governance, the Network is incorporated as a nonprofit corporation headed by a five-person Board of Directors, one of whom serves as president. An Advisory Board provides periodic commentary on the affairs of the Network, making recommendations especially on funding.³ In 2006 the Network became an affiliate of the World History Association, and in the same year the members of its Board of Directors were appointed as members of the WHA Research Committee.⁴ Thus the Network carries out its own activities, but reports on a number of its activities to the WHA.

A few other organizations parallel the World History Network, in that they support world-historical research in various ways. The Network seeks to maintain regular contact with them: they include the World History Association, the European Network in Universal and Global History (ENIUGH), the Research Institute of World History, World History For Us All, and the Golden Web project.⁵

Evolution of the World History Network

The Network emerged out a previous decade of building graduate study in world history. Only gradually did the need appear, out of that experience, for an independent institution, world-wide in its scope, and focused primarily on facilitating research in world history. The experiences that led to formation of the World History Network were those of the doctoral program in world history at Northeastern University (beginning in 1994),

the World History Center at Northeastern University (1994–2004), and the project for creation of the World History Network website (2001–2004).

The doctoral program at Northeastern University, focusing almost entirely on world history, admitted an average of three students per year from 1994 to 2000, and declined somewhat thereafter. University approval of the program in 1993 included the stipulation that future hires would expand the faculty in world history, but in practice no more than two specialists in world history were ever employed in the department. With so many competing demands in the university and in the History Department, few resources in faculty appointments or staff support were allocated to world history. Further, external fellowship support for students was scarce, as world-history proposals tended to lose out in competition with area-studies dissertation work. Nevertheless, a curriculum for research specialization in world history was developed and successfully implemented for a time. By 2004, ten world history PhDs had been awarded, and in virtually every case the degree recipients had found employment as professors of world history.⁶

The World History Center at Northeastern, created along with the history PhD program, was to be a research center somewhat parallel to area-studies centers. It facilitated research of doctoral students at Northeastern and nearby institutions, for instance through conduct of a World History Seminar, in which local and visiting scholars gave nearly a hundred presentations over the course of a decade.⁷ As with the doctoral program, the university hoped that external funding would provide support for the center. External support came in the form of project grants, but the center never had support for dedicated staff. It obtained some small research grants, but most of its \$2 million in external funding came from projects to support teaching: multimedia instruction materials, supplementary materials for textbooks, and professional development workshops for teachers. This work on teaching did provide support and experience for the doctoral students who carried out much of the work. From 1998 to 2002 the World History Resource Center—a teacher resource library and center for teacher workshops—developed a separate identity from the World History Center, and conducted numerous regional and national teacher workshops.

Nevertheless, the shortage of resources in the university, and the reluctance of funding agencies to support research in world history, led to

the conclusion that the Center was unsustainable in its current form. As founder and director of the center, I decided in 2002 that the center would close, and that decision was implemented in the spring of 2004. A wrap-up conference was held in March of 2004, and the center closed in June.⁸

Yet the center completed one last major project before closing. When the National Endowment for the Humanities opened a competition in 2000 for a comprehensive world history website, emphasizing both teaching and research, the World History Center applied and won the award. From 2001 to 2004 construction of the website took place, with an emphasis on creating a critical guide to resources, rather than a definitive summary of world history. The website was organized with overlapping teaching and research sections: it centered on a database that could link to thousands of sites, each of them described in systematic terms. Co-director Heidi Roupp, having just completed a term as WHA president, led in building the teaching side of the website. Under her leadership, a preliminary WHN website provided current teaching materials for users from 2002 to 2004. Additional aspects of the website included descriptions of major programs of graduate study, lists of world-historical journals and their tables of contents, and space for discussion of current research. The website was released to the public in July 2004, and remains active. For its initial two years, the website had to be maintained primarily through volunteer labor, but thereafter it began to gain a systematic staff. It took major funding, such as that from NEH, to create this website; it was to require additional major support to sustain it.

In sum, the experience of ten years' work at Northeastern showed that, while an energetic local group could prepare PhD graduates with strong research skills in world history, virtually all of whom would gain employment within their field in higher education, the resources of a single university could not sustain the program. Collaboration among the small existing groups seemed the only possible way to enable a conception of world history specialization to grow. An independent organization, not tied to a single university, presented the most logical option for facilitating ties among researchers. For the organization to base its activities on a website would help with communication among the far-flung participants. Thus it was decided to form the World History Network, Inc., which would become proprietor of the World History Network website. The new organization maintained the archives of the World History Center, but otherwise ended

the Center's affiliation with Northeastern University.⁹ With these steps, the World History Network launched itself as an independent, nonprofit corporation, and began to elaborate a more wide-ranging focus on research in world history.

Research in World History

Research in world history takes place in a variety of institutional and organizational frameworks, and is conducted by scholars with varying backgrounds and varying academic identities. Such research is usually conducted by individuals, though occasionally it is collaborative or even supported by major research grants. To categorize the background of researchers, one may distinguish individual research by self-trained scholars (mostly at senior levels), research by scholars who have had some training in world history (for instance, as a minor field in doctoral studies), and research by scholars who have completed comprehensive and specialized programs in world history. World historians are subdivided in their identities in other ways as well. Various labels have developed to differentiate various communities of "worldish" historians with specializations in big history, global history, transnational history, international history, not to mention such nearby communities as those of Atlantic history, area-studies history, and imperial history.¹⁰

For all the richness of these varying approaches to history on a large scale, the field remains limited seriously by its reliance on self-trained scholars. The shortage of formal, graduate-level training in world-historical analysis is arguably the greatest limitation on the expanded strength and scope of research. Graduate programs do exist at a few universities in North America, Europe, Australia, and East Asia, but progress in the expansion of these programs and their production of PhDs is very slow. The World History Network is not well placed to contribute much to establishing new programs of graduate study in world history.

But the Network can contribute to the productivity of existing programs by facilitating contacts among them, ensuring exchange of information and curricular ideas, research materials, and even actual faculty members and students. Simply listing and describing the programs on the Network website is a start; encouraging contacts at international conferences is another useful tactic.

In addition the Network can pursue a campaign, first proposed some years ago, to create post-doctoral appointments as an effective way to expand the number of specialized world historians. That is, if funds were available to support a postdoctoral fellowship, based in an existing graduate program in world history, awards could be made to recent PhD-holders who have some background in world history, but who could substantially strengthen their expertise in a year or two of teaching and research in collaboration with leading scholars in the field. This idea first developed at a World History Association meeting in 2003, but funds have yet to be located to implement it. In a second dimension of building skills of researchers, the Network can hope to facilitate location of support for researchers to work in archives well supplied with world historical data, such as the national archives in Lisbon, Amsterdam, London, Beijing, and Washington, and the archives of international organizations in Geneva and New York.

The Network has already achieved advances in another area: debating the research agenda of world history. In late 2005 the Network decided to sponsor an international conference to debate the research priorities of world history; in early 2006 the World History Association became a co-sponsor. The conference itself was held in Boston in November of 2006: its results comprise the opening chapter of this volume.

Further, the Network can participate in the creation of world-historical databases. The combination of national governments, international organizations, and university research groups have developed fairly comprehensive, global databases addressing the last half of the twentieth century. For earlier times, however, the data remain scattered and disaggregated, except for data on such extraordinary nations as Sweden. One response to the need for data has been the development of historical databases on various specific topics, especially within economic history. Yet another dimension is the attempt to develop systematic, worldwide data for periods before the mid-twentieth century. The World History Network is now associated with two small projects to begin the work of designing comprehensive historical databases and assembling empirical databases to make them comprehensive.¹¹

Global Studies Approaches

World history, though a cosmopolitan field of study, can only go so far within its disciplinary boundaries. The projects and activities described above, while promising substantial advances through linking up otherwise isolated historians, do not do much to link historians to the advances in neighboring disciplines. One may ask, then, whether there is something to be gained by connecting world historians to the developing programs of "global studies." Global studies centers and programs have proliferated in major universities, especially in the United States but in virtually every region of the world as well. These programs, however, have focused rather specifically on contemporary politics, economics, and occasionally environmental concerns, rather than on the full range of global problems deserving of analysis.¹² The enterprise of global studies, as practiced so far, has included very little in the way of history, and little in the humanities.

Another approach to global studies would be to create centers for global studies more fully parallel to those of area studies. Area Studies scholarship, developed from the mid-twentieth century, has been multidisciplinary, with regional interplay of social sciences and humanities. Area studies scholarship has relied heavily on history, which has been important in anchoring the identity of each regional program of study—no less for Africa and Latin America than for East Asia, South Asia, and Russian and East European Studies.

A still more comprehensive approach to global studies might prove to be productive for the development of world history, and more productive in general as a field of knowledge. It could include history and the humanities, it could address long time frames as well as the immediate present and future, it could encompass varying spatial frameworks from the local to the global, and it could become a realm of encounter of various theoretical approaches.

The World History Network is beginning experiments with the latter two approaches to global studies. These experiments have begun locally at the University of Pittsburgh, but it is anticipated that they will expand to collaboration with other global studies centers and programs. Possible benefits of this comprehensive approach to global studies could emerge in at least four general areas. First, this approach would put the field of world history into institutional contact with other fields in social sciences, in humanities, and in natural sciences. Second, it would enable world history to work systematically with area-studies scholars (who tend to

work at regional, continental, or civilizational levels), and would facilitate geographic analysis at varying spatial scope. Third, a broad approach to global studies should bring additional breadth to the temporal framework. The field of history has mostly focused on modern and early modern periods—for instance, emphasizing the histories of nations, which have existed for roughly two centuries. Empires, however, have existed for five millennia, and environmental processes evolve over both short-term and very long-term paces. All of these factors are worthy of world-historical analysis. Finally, the broad approach to global studies should result in the linkage of theories that have been developed in specific arenas. Historians may have a special role to play in nurturing the links among various theories, notably in the interplay of political, social, and demographic factors. At present, the various fields of environmental studies have shown leadership in transdisciplinary work. While it is unlikely that an advanced form of global studies would bring simultaneous advance in all of these areas, the point of listing these suggestions is that a more comprehensive approach may facilitate connections in research revealing new patterns in historical change at the global level.

Toward a Global Discourse on the Global Past

The field of history, more than most arenas of scholarship, centers its study at the national level. Its institutions of study, its academic journals, are organized primarily at the national level, or in aggregations of closely related nations. Not only are the historical interpretations focused primarily at the national level, but the authors of historical works work limit most of their intellectual exchange to discussions with others of the same national unit. In a world that we widely and readily label as globalizing, it is time to give adequate emphasis to the global side of history. This ought to be done along at least two axes: the development of interpretations of global patterns in the past, and the creation of a global historical discourse. The earlier parts of this chapter have focused primarily on the conduct of research yielding large-scale interpretations of the past. These final paragraphs give more attention to creating a global discourse.

Of the various past efforts to create global discourse on history, the one that stands out most was led by UNESCO in its early days, in the 1940s and 1950s: UNESCO took under its wing the Comité International des Sciences

Historiques (CISH), and supported creation of a new historical journal and a general history of the world.¹³ In fact that effort was focused more on creating a world-wide discourse than on developing global interpretations. The effort created a number of volumes, but did not succeed in creating an ongoing, transnational community of historical scholars. Indeed, UNESCO in its early days also launched a world-wide investigation of the history of science, and an initial volume of the *History of Mankind: Scientific and Cultural Development* appeared in 1963. This divergence in the efforts of historians and historians of science began to be reconsidered only later, after both initial UNESCO projects had been abandoned.¹⁴

We now are in the midst of another effort to create a global discourse on history, as world-historical research and analysis is developing in numerous regions and numerous disciplines. Given today's interplay of world-historical research with studies in social sciences, natural sciences, and humanities, it is difficult to believe that the divergence of the early UNESCO projects will be repeated. There is every reason for world historians to be connected organizationally and intellectually to each other, to scholars in other fields of history, and to colleagues in other disciplines worldwide. Nevertheless, the development of such connections is proceeding at a slow pace, and world historians' practice of working as self-supporting individual scholars is not well designed to speed up these connections. The grass-roots strength of world historians, developing new and global insights from many vantage points, needs to be complemented by a stronger network of historians and more formalized links to other groups of scholars. It will require a proactive approach for world historians to gain the organizational breadth and strength necessary to establish good communication with the sociologists, art historians, and environmental scientists who are also working to assemble large-scale interpretations of the past.

One such step is in process: the creation of an International Network of World History Organizations (INWHO), which can become an affiliate of CISH and put world historians formally on the program at the quinquennial CISH conferences. Thanks in particular to the energies of Matthias Middell (Leipzig University) and David Christian (San Diego State University), the World History Association and the European Network in Universal and Global History are cooperating to form the new network and to request affiliation with CISH. This structure will have the advantage of maintaining

and strengthening existing organizations, but also providing a space for development of participating groups of world historians based in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It can strengthen the worldwide dialogue among world historians. Most importantly, it may be a step at the global level toward the formal recognition of world history, in all its forms, as an established arena of scientific study, worthy of support for its research and valuable as a field of study with which scholars in other fields should conduct exchanges.

Notes

1. These have included royalties from sales of *Migration in Modern World History, 1500–2000* (Wadsworth Publishing, 2000), produced by the World History Center; conference support from the School of Arts & Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh; and conference support from publishers.
2. Patrick Manning, ed., *World History: Global and Local Interactions* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publications, 2005).
3. Officers are Patrick Manning, President; H. Parker James, Treasurer; and other board members are Deborah Smith Johnston, David Kalivas, and Stephen H. Rapp. Advisory Board members are Stanley Katz (Princeton University), Janice Reiff (UCLA), Heidi Roupp (Aspen, CO), James Stellar (Northeastern University), and Heather Streets (Washington State University). The Network is incorporated in the state of Massachusetts. For further details see www.worldhistorynetwork.org/dev, "About Us."
4. The Research Committee of the World History Association included as its members in 2006 and 2007 Patrick Manning, chair, Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, H. Parker James, Deborah Smith Johnston, David Kalivas, Adam McKeown, and Stephen H. Rapp.
5. World History Association (www.thewha.org), the European Network in Universal and Global History—ENIUGH (www.uni-leipzig.de/~eniugh/index.php), the Research Institute for World History (www.history.l.chiba-u.jp/~riwh/index.html), World History For Us All (worldhistoryforall.sdsu.edu/), and The Golden Web Foundation (www.goldenweb.org/).
6. For the eight PhD dissertations completed by the end of 2003, see www.worldhistorycenter.org, "Graduate Study." The same page describes the dissertation of eight further students in this group who completed their degrees in 2004 (5), 2006 (1), and 2007 (2).
7. www.worldhistorycenter.org, "Seminar."
8. For the conference website, see 134.241.47.94/NextTenYears/index.html; proceedings of the conference were published as Manning, ed., *World History*.
9. In its first three years the Network retained its base in Boston, though some activities moved to Pittsburgh as the president took up employment at the University of Pittsburgh.
10. For a recent discussion of the various labels adopted by historians working at scales beyond the national, see "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History," *American Historical Review* 111 (2006): 1441–1464.
11. The projects are "World-Historical Database Design Group" and "Global Studies over Time: An Online Database Collection," each supported by funding from the University of Pittsburgh.
12. In secondary schools in the U.S., in contrast, "global studies" generally refers to curricula centered on geography and comparative cultures.
13. CISH was founded in Geneva in 1926; the postwar journal was *Cahiers d'Histoire Mondiale* or *Journal of World History*. CISH is usually known by its French-language acronym rather than, in English, the International Committee of Historical Sciences. On the project of a general history, see Gilbert Allardyce, "Toward World History: American Historians and the Coming of the World History Course," *Journal of World History* 1 (1990): 23–76.
14. Libby Robin and Will Steffen, "World History without Historians? Science in Search of Sustainability" (unpublished paper). I am grateful to the authors for permission to cite this study. The organizations for history and history of science were affiliated with quite different sections of UNESCO: CISH (history) affiliated with the International Council of Philosophy and Human Sciences, while the International Union for the History of Science affiliated with the International Council of Scientific Unions.