Chapter One

World History
Departures and Variations

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"World history" exists today as both an established undergraduate-level teaching field in US higher education and a recognizable – though arguably still fledgling – research field that operates transnationally. In both manifestations, world history has gained a significant foothold only since the early 1980s. That earlier efforts failed to establish world history as either a teaching or research field, and that world history faces continued skepticism from many academic historians, indicates significant tensions between history as an institutionalized discipline and the project of world history. The ongoing work of producing both world history courses and scholarship has thus required that historians depart from some of the received practices of their discipline, even while building on others.

The need for two such departures has been particularly visible to the pioneers of world history. The first and most obvious of these involves acquiring knowledge about areas of the world and their inhabitants that had previously been little studied by historians. The second involves studying phenomena on a scale larger than the national and state units that have been the usual units of historical inquiry and legitimate expertise. During the early emergence of world history this shift upward in geographic scale most often took the form of treating supranational "civilizations" as distinct wholes, in close parallel with the established treatment of nations and states; increasingly, however, the shift upward in scale has involved recognizing and thinking in terms of connections and the ways connections shape the places they connect.

In addition, as historians have pursued comprehensive world history projects – world history survey courses, for example – they have also pursued a third departure, involving working on much larger time-scales than is common for historians. Put simply, just as the inclusive ideal of world history has motivated a concern with neglected spatial regions, it has also motivated increased attention to the large segment of early human time that had previously been left to archaeology and paleoanthropology.

Without question, these departures – particularly the first two – have produced important new knowledge. They have, for instance, led to a much fuller recognition of

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the extra-European dimensions of historical phenomena that had been understood – prior to recent world history scholarship – as purely European stories. Yet these achievements have not resolved the considerable challenges of extending the spatial and temporal coverage of history to be inclusive of all of humanity.

From Disciplinary Exclusion to Limited Acceptance, circa Late 1800s to 1990

As history was institutionalized as an academic discipline in Europe and the United States in the 1800s, its leading figures produced historical scholarship that served nationalist movements and/or states to which they had allegiance, whether by fostering collective memory and patriotic pride, offering lessons from "past politics" for statesmen, or both.[1] Yet, the mutual recognition of these works as "history" – while other scholarship also on the human past, specifically social evolutionary studies of non-European peoples, was not so recognized – meant that "history" as a discipline was identified with the aggregate of the states and nations these "historians" wrote about. This aggregate was, in turn, a distinct subset of the globe and humanity: it is what we have come to know as "the West." Thus, even though most works of "history" were written about a single state or nation, and even though these texts were written in a voice that identified with their respective national or state subject, the discipline as a whole interpolated an overarching civilizational identity. At its onset, then, disciplinary history at once conjoined, and was shaped by, two projects: the making of nation-states and the making of the Western Self.

Moreover, this double identification of the discipline – with individual states and nations on the one hand and the West on the other – was further supported by the denigration of works of "general history" (as works with some attempt at global coverage were called) as amateurish and popular. The effect, not surprisingly, was that in the wake of the discipline's institutionalization, works of this genre came to be produced only by persons outside of or at the margins of the profession.[2]

Within the discipline, the earliest significant production of supranational and suprastate history appeared in the context of US undergraduate teaching following World War I, when the Western Civ survey course was introduced. This shift upward in geographic scale to the discipline's civilizational Self reflected concerns about the discontents of nationalism, as evidenced by the war and the upsurge of both nativism and isolationism in the United States after the war. Though the Western Civ course is now rightly remembered as "Eurocentric," this label – if no more is said – risks obscuring important aspects of the course's relationship to world history. First, along with its supranational and suprastate geographic scope, the Western Civ survey recognized and narrativized the full span of human time, starting with the emergence of hominids. Indeed, in the years surrounding the Scopes Trial, Western Civ was a significant vector in the United States of the secular chronology of human existence. Second, in a nontrivial sense, Western Civ provided a story about humanity *in toto*. It did this by inscribing a "first-the-West-then-the-rest" grand narrative. Within this schema, the West's trajectory foretold the shared – or if not the shared, then the defining – experiences of all humanity; the West's history was thus humanity's history (Segal 2000).

With the continued success of the Western Civ survey and emergence of area studies programs after World War II, survey courses about other "world areas" entered the

undergraduate curriculum in US higher education. These courses were typically organized chronologically, even when they were housed in area studies programs. (See Kramer, this volume.) The most common of these new surveys were devoted to East Asia or East-plus-Southeast Asia.[3] That it was East Asia or a larger Asian area that was the primary addition is a pattern we will see repeated many times in tracing efforts to redress history's institutionalized tie to "the West" – with this being an indication that non-Western areas other than Asia, particularly sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania, were seen as even further behind in (or even more thoroughly lacking) history. Yet even though the broadening of the curriculum was circumscribed by this gradient sense of the historicalness of different peoples and places, by representing the histories of other areas as complex and distinctive, the new area survey courses troubled the social evolutionary notion that the Rest merely followed the West. These courses thus disturbed the conflation of the West's history with human history and thereby suggested that the task of representing human history required a significant broadening of the discipline's geographic scope.

This disturbance was, however, far from sufficient to support the emergence of world history in the 1950s. True, some "world history" surveys did appear, but these were located primarily at institutions of lower prestige (state colleges with teacher training programs, for instance), and the textbooks that served these courses were minimally adapted Western Civ texts, with Asia – and usually East Asia – getting the bulk of the additional coverage. At Northwestern University, Leften Stavrianos made a rare attempt to establish a more robust world history survey at this time – and at an institution of some prestige, no less. Yet, Stavrianos was firmly rebuffed by his own department.[4]

In the postwar period, many journals, conferences, and American Historical Association (AHA) book prizes also came to be organized on areal rather than national or state lines. Here, again, the region that was most prominent was East Asia. Furthermore, most research in this and other new areal fields was conducted on national or state units within the delimited area, and what research there was that focused on a larger region almost always deployed notions of a distinct areal essence or character. Connections were not what this work foregrounded.

A small number of important books of the middle decades of the century escaped or at least pushed at these constraints. Braudel's *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century* had significant global coverage and gave considerable attention to connections.[5] The same author's *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* – though narrower in geographic scope – was also an important forerunner of world history, particularly because it demonstrated that, despite what area studies boundaries suggested, North Africa and Southern Europe belonged together as a historical unit of analysis.[6] Indeed, one of Braudel's most profound legacies for world history is the injunction in this text to "imagine a hundred frontiers, not one, some political, some economic, and some cultural": historians should, in short, resist treating any unit of analysis as a discrete, functional whole (1972: 170).

William McNeill's *Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (1963) and *Plagues and Peoples* (1976) also operated on a global scale and were nonetheless widely respected by professional historians. But while Braudel's and McNeill's books were admired in the profession, their works were seen neither as models for younger historians to imitate nor as harbingers of an emerging field of world history. Indeed, McNeill tried and failed to persuade his own department (at the University of Chicago) to create a world history program at the graduate level.

Only from the end of the 1970s did world history begin to attract more attention in many departments – in the first instance, as an undergraduate survey course. Departments that had added colleagues who worked on areas outside of the West often sought ways to integrate those colleagues into lower-division teaching. One attempted solution was to have those colleagues participate in Western Civ surveys, on the grounds that this was material every historian had to know. This was never very satisfactory, in no small part because it limited how much the non-Western specialists could teach in their own areas of expertise. A second response was the introduction of various lower-division surveys on other geographic areas: Africa, Latin America, South Asia, and so on. This second response was supported by critiques of Eurocentrism in both the curriculum and scholarship, which had also played a part in creating faculty lines in these areas.[7] So too, this second response was supported by both a decline in the number of schools that required students to take Western Civ and new competition for enrollments from other programs that aimed to bring “diversity” into the curriculum, notably women’s studies and ethnic studies. Yet there were important institutional – and intellectual – limits to this second response. Multiplying survey courses had diminishing returns in enrollments, since most students only took one of them, and yet these courses had to be offered regularly in order for students to be able to use them to meet requirements. Consequently, additional survey courses consumed a big chunk of the total courses that could be offered in the new areal fields, which often had just one or two faculty members. This outcome was good neither for these colleagues nor for a department that wanted varied upper-division tracks for its majors and grad students. Offering a world history survey, by contrast, addressed these several problems at once.

Changes in secondary education in the 1980s provided a further incentive for departments to offer a world history survey. A number of US states, also in response to critiques of the curriculum, were shifting from the teaching of the history of Europe or the West to the teaching of world history. (See Bain, this volume.) For many public universities and less elite private ones, aspiring high school teachers comprised a significant fraction of history majors; it thus made sense for those departments to offer students undergraduate training more closely aligned with the curriculum they would be expected to teach.

As world history as a teaching field grew in this context, an important moment of its institutionalization occurred in 1982, when the American Historical Association co-sponsored a conference with an academic institution that many historians, in the post-Vietnam era, would otherwise have avoided: the US Air Force Academy. Yet the Academy was one of the few institutions of higher education with an established world history survey course. This was so, we suspect, because the Academy’s mission – like the US military’s mission more generally – was inescapably global, while the number of technical and military courses required of students meant that there was no opportunity for them to take a sequence of area surveys. And whether coincidentally or not, the AHA’s president-elect in 1982 was Philip Curtin, an early advocate of world history. Whatever the exact reasons for this unusual collaborative venture, the conference drew more people than expected and was judged a major success by its organizers and many participants. Following a post-conference planning meeting, the World History Association (WHA) was founded in 1983, as an affiliated society of the AHA.

Yet while world history surveys were introduced on more and more US campuses in the 1980s, the most prestigious universities and elite colleges remained resistant. Prestigious research departments could afford to have many colleagues who never taught

lower-division courses, and historians in these departments, as well as those at elite liberal arts colleges, had the least to gain and the most to lose by championing a new field that was easily dismissed as too broad to meet the discipline's standards of meticulous archival and contextual work.

All of this was reflected at the Air Force Academy conference in 1982. Though some well-known historians (most notably, William McNeill) attended, the prevailing view at the conference was that the focus of world history would be on teaching, not research (Lockard n.d.). So too, most of the members of the first steering committee were from less prestigious institutions, with the best-known of these schools being the Academy, the University of Houston, and Tufts; and finally, throughout the 1980s, about 50 percent of WHA members were high school teachers.[8]

In this context, world history graduate tracks appealed primarily to departments that placed many of their PhD students at the kinds of schools that, by the mid to late 1990s, expected faculty to teach world history to undergraduates. (See Streets-Salter, this volume.) Minnesota, Rutgers, University of California at Irvine, at Santa Cruz, and at Riverside, and the University of Hawai'i were among the pioneers in establishing these graduate programs. Moreover, after some two decades of weak academic job markets, many departments outside the top reputational cluster had faculty who, as individuals, could compete for excellent graduate students, but who were hobbled by having relatively few colleagues in their own geographic area. Because world history allowed these colleagues to collaborate across area fields, this situation also made world history a compelling venture. The 1999 grant application that launched the University of California's Multi-Campus Research Unit in World History, for instance, emphasized that graduate-level world history represented an opportunity for the university's system because (1) many top-ranked departments were ignoring it, and (2) it made use of collaboration among talented faculty whose separate fields and departments lacked critical mass. Tellingly, while the Irvine, Riverside, Santa Cruz, and Davis faculty have been the mainstays of this multi-campus project, UC Berkeley faculty have barely participated.[9]

Influences, Resources, and Canon Formation, circa Late 1980s to 2011

An important step in world history becoming recognized as a research field was the founding in 1990 of the *Journal of World History*, which was sponsored by the WHA and edited by Jerry Bentley at the University of Hawai'i. (Winning a prize as the year's best new scholarly journal made this founding still more emblematic of the field's arrival.) Yet in the decade or so before this moment of institutionalization of world history as a research field, we find a rich panoply of scholarship that did not call itself "world history," but which in retrospect can be seen as pointing to and providing a rich base of knowledge and innovation for world history. Many of these works represented efforts to make older subfields more attentive to non-Europeans, often drawing on other disciplines to do so. (See chapters by Weinstein and by Northrop, this volume.)

An important example is Christopher Bayly's *Imperial Meridian*, which Bayly framed as an effort to revive "imperial history" by both "broadening" its concerns to include "the history of the colonised" and contesting its pro-empire bias (1989: xiv). As this suggests, Bayly was strongly influenced by the many scholars, including subaltern studies

scholars, who had produced histories of the colonized. The subalternists had, in turn, extended into new geographic areas the efforts of European and American social historians to study the everyday lives of ordinary – often nonliterate – people, and, like the social historians before them, had often drawn on works from other disciplines, particularly anthropology.

Interestingly, within a strictly South Asian studies context, Bayly's work has often been seen as central to a "Cambridge School" that represents a polar opposite to subalternist approaches: he pays more attention to collaborating indigenous elites than to insurgent impoverished masses, and he is more inclined than the subalternists to see at least some positive legacies of British imperialism. But through a retrospective lens informed by the emergence of world history, areas of commonality between Bayly and the subaltern school seem striking. There is, for instance, Bayly's insistence that the agency of both colonized and colonizers be taken seriously and, along with this, his recognition that colonizing shaped the colonizers – and not just vice versa. (See Sinha, this volume.)

Perhaps even more important for world history, and building on this last point, Bayly demonstrated that one can fruitfully frame the most canonical of "European" events – the French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars and early nationalism, and the reshuffling of class and ethnic alignments leading to both British electoral reform and the "rise of the middle class" – within a world historical context. It was this last element that John Wills highlighted in a review essay in the *American Historical Review* as likely to create "a profoundly de-centering experience for many historians" (1993: 89) and which has led to an ongoing discussion about the pros and cons of reframing the Atlantic "Age of Revolutions" as part of a larger "Global Crisis" (see Armitage and Subrahmanyam 2010).

Meanwhile environmental history – which became prominent through works by William Cronon (1983), Richard White (1991), and others – made a number of important contributions that world history later drew upon. First, environmental history made a compelling case for doing historical work that was not tied to national or state units, since environmental phenomena were so obviously not contained within such units. In addition, through its analyses of ecological webs, food chains, and nutrient cycles (analyses that were taken from the natural sciences), environmental history demonstrated the possibility and payoffs of focusing on connections and flows. Finally, environmental history powerfully challenged the identification of historical scholarship with the study of "documents." (See Simmons, this volume.)

Also crucial for the subsequent emergence of world history was the accelerated growth of historical literatures on geographic areas other than Europe and the United States. The roster of important works in African history produced from the mid-1970s through the early 1990s is particularly impressive, including as it does Alpers (1975), Miller (1976), Cooper (1980), Ehret and Posnansky (1982), Harms (1981), Hiskett (1984), Nurse and Spear (1985), Hall (1987), Pouwels (1987), Feierman (1990), Vansina (1990), and Vaughan (1991). In the aggregate, these and other works established that one could in fact write professionally irreproachable history of times and places that had previously been dismissed as, at once, outside of history and refractory to historical investigation.

The dearth of an earlier historical literature on Africa, and of research methods suited to studying the past of places without institutionalized archives, meant that to establish the field of African history as an ongoing project, its pioneering practitioners found it

useful to draw heavily on other disciplines – notably archaeology and social and cultural anthropology, as well as historical linguistics. Importantly, in doing this, Africanists made a wider range of research methods available to other historians.

Some of the Africanist works of these decades took a step towards "world history" by placing parts of Africa within frameworks that transgressed received area studies boundaries. Alpers's placement of East Africa within an Indian Ocean context is particularly notable in this regard. Yet even without this, by contesting the received division of humanity into peoples with and without history, this literature made a profound contribution to "working through" the discipline's institutionalized barriers to world history.

It is only in the last 15 or so years, however, that we find a number of books that presented themselves as world history and which have been taken, as a cluster, as making the case that it is possible for there to be a field of world history – and not just one-off works of singular, if high-status, outliers. R. Bin Wong's *China Transformed* (1997), John McNeill's *Something New under the Sun* (2000), and Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence* (2000) all announced themselves as world history and all quickly gained prominence and stature. Not coincidentally, these authors occupied a similar structural position in the profession. All three had published first books that established significant reputations for their authors in their regional fields, and all three worked at solidly reputable but not top-tier universities. Pomeranz's book won the AHA's prize for East Asian history, a strong indication that doing "world history" need not be inconsistent with contributing to an areal field. Moreover, much as Bayly had argued for treating the canonically Western "age of democratic revolutions" as part of a world history produced by forces with many geographic origins, so too Wong, Pomeranz, and others have shifted the debate about the (equally canonically Western) "Industrial Revolution."[10] Within a few years of their publication, these three and other world history books began to appear on graduate (and undergraduate) "theory" reading lists and were recognized as important contributions to the wider discipline by prominent historians who were not identified with the world history movement (Eley 2005: 197; Hobsbawm 2010: 149–150).

A bit later, we began to see junior scholars in well-regarded and even major departments author *first* books that were framed and presented as works of world history: examples include Lauren Benton at New York University (NYU), Jeremy Prestholdt at University of California at San Diego, and Kerry Ward at Rice (Benton 2002; Prestholdt 2008; Ward 2009). Books by senior scholars also signaled and furthered the increased legitimacy of world history in the discipline. This included works by historians who had been early adopters of the world history label (e.g. Richards 2003) and works by others who had not (e.g. Burbank and Cooper 2010). Moreover, several leading departments that had not previously had world history graduate fields created them, in one form or other.[11] That there was now both a significant pool of well-received texts, as well as canonical debates for which one could hold students accountable, made this both easier and more legitimate than it had previously been.

Significant developments also emerged from US history – the largest and often most insular subfield in most departments in the United States. While "internationalizing US history" may seem an obvious move in retrospect – given both the role of empire in shaping the US and the role of the US in shaping globalization – it is only in recent years that this reframing of US history has itself been well established. Tyrrell's *Woman's World/Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Movement in International*

Perspective (1991) was an important early landmark, and among the many works that have followed, Rodgers's *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (1998) and Manela's *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (2007) are particularly noteworthy. Both come from scholars housed in departments of the highest prestige (Princeton and Harvard, respectively); both have won considerable professional acclaim; and both took stories that had previously been told in largely national terms and demonstrated that actors in multiple and dispersed sites mattered. Similarly salient for world history is work that contests the separation of settler and Native American histories, *contra* the entrenched practices of the US subfield (e.g., White 1991; Rath 2005; Hämäläinen 2011).

Nonetheless, world history's acceptance in the profession remains provisional and incomplete. Many leading departments do not teach it, even at the undergraduate level. At Berkeley, for instance, world history is in International Studies and largely taught by nonladder faculty; at Michigan, just how fully it will be embraced and institutionalized remains an open question. Graduate-level programs remain the exception rather than the rule; the recent National Research Council rankings of history departments did not list world history as a possible subfield. The pressures on graduate students to finish their programs rapidly have increased, which makes dissertations requiring multiple languages and visits to archives in multiple countries particularly difficult. And, of course, the intellectual tensions we have discussed above remain unresolved and deeply important. Even more than with new fields like environmental history and women's history, it seems likely that world history can only win full acceptance in the discipline if the discipline itself changes in significant ways.

Variations Now

What is striking about world history today – looking at both teaching and research – is the great variety of frameworks that are in use, and the continued difficulties of dealing with issues of geographic and temporal coverage, particularly in comprehensive projects.

The most inclusive approach of all – or so it may seem – is "big history," pioneered especially by David Christian. Christian seeks what he calls a "grand unified story" (a phrase modeled on the physicists' "grand unified theory") that places human history within the context of the development of the entire universe from the big bang forward (2011). Only this context, Christian argues, can enable us to break away from studying world history as an enlarged version, or syntheses, of national and/or civilizational histories, and thus allow us to frame questions appropriate to the history of the species – by asking, for instance, what actually distinguishes human history from the ways our "closest relatives," the chimpanzees, live in time (2004: 142). Christian argues that the answer to this question is "collective learning" which, over the long haul, results in human history moving in a clear direction: toward the building of ever more complex structures that depend on ever larger amounts of energy (2003). (See Spier, this volume.)

These are bold formulations, and "big history" courses have gained many adherents, shaking up assumptions of students and teachers alike.[12] Yet too much can be lost in Christian's single "big picture." First, while it is true that everything that is distinctly cultural, and thus distinctly human, about humans involves "collective learning," culture is also more than this. The languages we speak, for instance, are obtained by learning

from others, but it misrepresents languages to think of them as "collective learning": languages are not nomenclatures. The more historical version or dimension of this same point is that while some of the movement of humans through time is defined by "collective learning," it is hard to see how this characterization applies to changes in, say, religious beliefs or artistic traditions. Moreover, it seems similarly reductive to think that humans ineluctably create increases in "complexity" that, even more specifically, ineluctably require ever larger amounts of energy. Here Christian seems to be both generalizing about the course of human existence primarily on the basis of the last two centuries, and using entropy, as defined in physics, too literally in thinking about cultural dynamics. Moreover, these mis-steps lead Christian to a profoundly circumscribed view of the contemporary moment and near future: on his view, either humanity will find a way to harness even more energy than it does now, on some sustainable basis, or the "complexity" that defines human history will collapse. That humans might instead, through collective action, respond to the dangers of climate change and exposure to radioactive materials by placing limits on further increases in energy consumption is an alternative future – a *complexity*, we would say – that Christian's theoretical apparatus rules out.

It is also unclear how useful this totalizing approach is for generating a range of distinctive and fruitful research agendas for historians. Charting flows of knowledge and trends in energy use fit within big history, but these would also fit within other versions of world, and even national, histories. Conversely, even though some very traditional topics might be placed in a "big history" frame – the trial of Galileo, for instance, can be seen as a case study of restraints on knowledge diffusion – it is not clear how the "big history" frame would change what one would say about this event. Thus, while provocative, "big history" does not have a strong purchase on research practices in the discipline.

By contrast, what is sometimes called "global history" in the United States has a much narrower temporal and topical agenda.[13] It traces the ongoing intensification of long-distance contacts, focusing particularly on the development of specifically modern institutions: multinational corporations, nongovernmental organizations concerned with specifically global issues (the environment, *human* rights as defined by supranational communities, and so on), and the United Nations. While acknowledging that long-distance contacts are not new, it emphasizes the purportedly unique and self-reinforcing character of these contacts in an era with technologies that allow for transcontinental interaction in something like real time (Mazlish n.d.). (See Bright and Geyer, this volume.) Whatever the merits of such a chronologically foreshortened and unabashedly teleological approach might be, it has relatively little to say to the large majority of historians who study people, places, and periods marked by very different conditions. And such an approach also offers little to those who pursue world history because they want to bring into historical study social orders and persons on the margins, or even outside, of states, markets, and so on.

Some similar issues arise with the attempt to frame world history along the lines suggested by world-systems theory. (See Chase-Dunn and Hall, this volume.) Scholars within this tradition differ over how far back in time they think one can detect a unified "world-system," with some going back far beyond the roughly 500-year timeline offered by Wallerstein (1974; Frank and Gills 1993; Chase-Dunn 1989; Chase-Dunn and Anderson 2005). Some, such as Arrighi, have also moved away from Wallerstein's view that, in modern times, a capitalist world-system centered in Europe became the sole

motor of history; Arrighi (2007) has substituted a story built around the interaction of Atlantic and East Asian systems with distinct dynamics, thereby eliminating some of the Eurocentrism and determinism of Wallerstein's framework. Yet even in this more nuanced form, a world history that makes capital accumulation its master process has not proved congenial to large numbers of cultural, political, gender, and other sorts of historians – or to historians of times and places marginal to the rise of global capitalism. Moreover, even many historians who share the focus on economic history have been skeptical of world-systems models, particularly because of the small role accorded in them to technology. That said, many projects influenced by the world-systems tradition have made important contributions to world history. These include prominent works on "commodity chains" – which follow sugar, silk, coffee, cocaine, and other global goods across time and space (Mintz 1985; Gootenberg 1999). (See Levi, this volume.) However, research and teaching that embraces world-systems as an overall or master framework are probably much more common today in sociology than history departments.

A more widely embraced approach (and the subject of several chapters in this volume) has been to define world history around an emphasis on "connections" of diverse kinds – migration, trade, religious evangelism, warfare, crop diffusion, epidemics, technology transfers, and so on – without insisting on the primacy of any one kind of connection. (See Fernández-Armesto and following chapters, this volume.) In *Navigating World History*, for instance, Patrick Manning tells his readers: "I can state the basic nature of the world historical beast with some confidence: it is the story of past connections in the human community" (2003: 15). Jerry Bentley, lead author of the biggest-selling world history textbook, *Traditions and Encounters*, also gives connections priority in defining the field – a view he makes explicit in an essay (2003: 60). And John and William McNeill's very successful "bird's-eye view of human history," *The Human Web* (2003), makes the growth of long-distance connections its major theme. Our sense is that some version of a connection-centered view enjoys broad assent among scholars who say they do "world history": the contents of the *Journal of World History* and *Journal of Global History* certainly suggest as much.

This approach has had several advantages for gaining acceptance as a research field. It gives world history a specialized domain as one field of history among others: making it seem both more feasible and more respectful of the turf of other specialties than if it claimed to be comprehensive. Moreover, the turf it claims as its own is of growing contemporary interest, both for students and for the general public. Likewise, prioritizing connections over comparisons, without theorizing what constitutes a significant connection, privileges relations between geographically separated areas that seem to be objectively "there" rather than created by the scholar. This accommodates the discipline's attachment to empiricism, while avoiding head-on conflict with postmodern critiques of comparison, grand narratives, and generalized social theory. Overall, this focus on connections has generated much important work and, concomitantly, contributed to world history's legitimacy within the discipline. Yet, emphasizing "connections" as the sole distinction of world history risks limiting the project, and thus the benefits, of expanding the discipline's coverage to include the social orders that have most stubbornly been treated as being behind in, or outside of history.

Put simply, the problem with the focus on connections is that it treats the least connected social orders and persons as marginal to world history. The most obviously excluded are those in many small-scale communities, especially on islands or in difficult

terrain. But even many people embedded in larger social orders have little personal experience of long-distance connections: many peasants in great agrarian empires, for instance. One important way of redressing this exclusion is to recognize that working with longer time-spans than is typical in historical research allows us to see and study flows that, particularly in earlier eras, proceeded at much slower rates. (See chapters by Yoffee and by Liu, this volume.) Yet even this usefully heightened knowledge of connections misses the intellectual importance of casting as wide a net as possible in order to avoid generalizations and explanations based on a restricted, and thus skewed, set of human histories.

It seems necessary, then, that world history recommit to broad comparison as well as a focus on connections. Granted, nobody would want to return to the mode of comparison in which essentialized "nations" or "civilizations" are treated as cleanly separated monads that could be compared without considering their interconnections or the fuzziness of their boundaries. Contemporary comparative strategies – whether the "encompassing comparisons" of Charles Tilly (1984), the "connected histories" of Sanjay Subramanyam (1997), or the "histoire croisée" of Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann (2006)[14] – all take into account that interconnections, and the effects of participation in some larger system, are part of what comparisons investigate. (See Adas, this volume.)

Insisting on the pursuit of both comparisons and connections makes it harder to define world history neatly; and it makes it harder to frame world history as a field that a graduate student could master and then, in producing a dissertation, work within and contribute to. In addition, insisting on more and broader comparisons will mean that world history will need to continue to draw on disciplines that have produced knowledge about the places and peoples that history has least attended to. In all of these ways, insisting on both comparison and connections is likely to sustain, rather than resolve, the sense that world history is in some tension with its disciplinary home. But this seems necessary if "world history" is to remain connected to the everyday meaning of *world* and, concomitantly, to the project of teaching at multiple levels of mass schooling; and too, if it is to be maximally effective at "doubting the absoluteness" of the familiar and of the sufficiency of any story in which modernity emerges from a single region of the globe (Boon 1982: 6).

Concluding Reflections

If the difficulties of defining world history have sometimes been an impediment to institutionalization, they also position the field to benefit from a wide range of scholarship and initiatives. It is important here to note that a commitment to inclusiveness does not mean that individual works must take the whole world as a unit of analysis to be world history; if it did, the field would remain very small. And insofar as the field hopes to demonstrate the insufficiency of national and civilizational stories, it makes sense that world history would embrace the growing numbers of studies that constitute regions for study not by claiming that the region shares a social or cultural essence, but by mapping multiple and shifting spaces in which diverse societies interact (Gilroy 1993; Thornton 1998; Chaudhuri 1985; Barendse 2002; Hamashita 2008). At least some studies of diasporic groups, professional and intellectual networks, and so on have also made important contributions to world history (for instance, Ho 2006; Aslanian 2011; Grove 1995; Liebersohn 2001). (See Ward, this volume.)

There are also important efforts to write global histories of processes abstracted from particular societies and, at least potentially, aggregated at the global level. One big project centered at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam aims to map the spread of wage labor (and changes in the amounts of other kinds of labor) around the world; a second project looks at migration rates; a third, based at the University of California at Davis, assembles wage and price data from around the globe (van der Linden 2008; Lucassen and Lucassen 2009; Global Price and Income History Group n.d.). Others, mostly focused on very recent times, count other important social phenomena such as institutionalized schooling, access to telecommunications, and so on.[15]

At this stage, such projects are largely concerned with definition, description, and quantification, but their participants hope that explanation will follow. Other projects, often based outside history, have attempted global histories of land use and deforestation, population and energy use, the state of the oceans and atmosphere, and other topics important to historians (Williams 2003; Richards 2003; Ellis 2003).

At the same time, such projects pose difficult questions. Their procedures – often involving large collaborative projects, and/or reliance on nontextual data – are alien to many historians. Even more importantly, deciding to assign some specific historical case to a general category such as "wage labor" often requires giving priority to the investigator's classificatory scheme over that of people within a particular society; thus historians of that society will often see it as distorting that group's lived experiences, as Feierman (1993) has argued in the case of certain African practices which he says have been placed too facilely in the familiar category, "slavery." At the very least, this insight shows the importance of taking such incommensurability into account when pursuing these macrohistorical studies.[16] (See Part III, this volume.)

One particularly important development for world history that began outside of the field is new work that looks at the history of science in a broader, and even global, context. Some of this has been comparative in a relatively conventional way, dealing with scientific traditions that had little or no interaction (or minimizing such interactions) (Huff 2003; Lloyd and Sivin 2002); some has dealt with the impact of Euro-American science and/or technology on other places (Elman 2005; Morris-Suzuki 1994; Curtin 1989; Chakrabarty 2000; and many others). However, there have also been increasing numbers of studies that emphasize the importance of extra-European locales for the growth of "modern science": as sources of stimulating ideas, puzzling and/or decisive data, as places where colonists could try experiments that European property-holders would not have tolerated, and so on. Richard Grove's pioneering work (1995) argues that colonial settings were crucial in all these ways for the origins of European and North American environmental sciences. But a global perspective can be highly illuminating even without all of the elements in Grove's analysis. Simon Schaffer (2009), for instance, has painstakingly traced the origins of all the empirical data in Newton's *Principia Mathematica* and found that a remarkable amount of it came from extra-European locales that had only recently become part of English trade routes. In particular, crucial data for Newton's explanation of tides – a mathematical breakthrough and a major factor in subsequent improvements in the accuracy of astronomical observations generally – came from the Gulf of Tonkin, the coast of Taiwan, and Cape Horn, and was provided by pilots employed by the East India Company, a venture in which Newton had made large investments.

This does not, of course, mean that either European scientific traditions or Newton himself had no independent significance. Yet – in concert with other work we have

discussed, in which applying a world history frame unsettled received ideas about the French/democratic Revolution and the Industrial Revolution – it argues strongly that world history can reshape understandings of how the basic lineaments of the modern world came to be. Such ambitions suggest continued tension between world history and various other subfields, but also the possibility that those tensions could improve the questions behind histories pitched at myriad different spatial and temporal scales.

To end with this observation is to signal our judgment that we are observing world history at a moment when it remains emerging and in flux – that is, at a moment when it has not settled into what Thomas Kuhn would have called a normal science (1962). Not being "normal science," its acceptance remains incomplete, and its boundaries vague (which is one reason why we have not attempted a comprehensive survey of the field). But for the same reason, it still has great potential for surprising and unsettling the larger discipline.

Notes

1 Important examples include Jules Michelet, T.B. Macaulay, Heinrich von Treitschke, and F.J. Turner. "Past politics" is taken from the motto Herbert Baxter Adams chose in 1882 for the history seminar room at The Johns Hopkins University: "History is past Politics and Politics present History."
2 Prominent examples include H.G. Wells, Oswald Spengler, and Arnold Toynbee.
3 Courses at Harvard and Columbia were particularly influential models.
4 See Stavrianos (1959) and, in the Northwestern University archives, the L.S. Stavrianos Biographical File and the College of Arts and Sciences Records of Dean Simeon E. Leland, Series 11/1/2, Box 4, Folder 12 and Box 8, Folder 1.
5 Braudel (1981–1984) was published in French from 1967 to 1973 and then available in English in 1973, in an abridged edition. This work did, however, rely on essentialist notions of the "peoples" of different continents, as Feierman has persuasively argued (1993: 174–177).
6 Braudel (1972), published in French in 1949.
7 Said (1978) quickly became, and has remained, iconic of these critiques.
8 Sept. 19, 2010 email from Jerry Bentley, cited with permission.
9 Almost too neatly (given the location of the UC Los Angeles department in the discipline's prestige hierarchy), the participation of UCLA historians falls in between these two poles. The overall pattern is a rich, if painful, illustration of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977).
10 See also Frank 1998; Goldstone 2002; 2009. For a response that straddles this global approach and an older, British-centered approach, see Allen (2009).
11 Columbia, Penn, Brown, Duke, NYU, and Rice; others allow students to construct what is effectively a world history field. (See Streets-Salter, this volume.)
12 As of 2011, the movement of "big history" into secondary education has the benefit of funding from the Gates Foundation; Big History Project, at www.bighistoryproject.com (accessed May 8, 2011).
13 "Global history" has a different meaning outside the United States, as indicated by the contents of the British-based *Journal of Global History*.
14 There is a useful list of other formulations in Gould (2007: 766, nn 9 and 10).
15 See, for instance, Mapping Globalization, at www.princeton.edu/~mapglobe (accessed May 1, 2011).
16 A significant approach to world history that robustly registers such incommensurability, but that has had little uptake by historians to date, can be found in the work of Marshall Sahlins and other cultural anthropologists. Sahlins studies history as the interplay between culture

(understood as contingent categories and values) and experience (Sahlins 1991 is a key statement of his position). This suggests that different human communities will produce trajectories through time that exhibit distinctive forms (as Ortner 1989 emphasizes), with the variety of these forms being much richer than the binary of stasis or progress; it also suggests that colonial encounters involved complex interactions of distinctive cultural orders and meanings (as Robbins 2004 emphasizes).

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