



NEW ENGLAND REGIONAL WORLD HISTORY ASSOCIATION

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World History Symposium Announcement

NEW ENGLAND REGIONAL WORLD HISTORY ASSOCIATION

September 20, 1997, Keene State College, Parker Hall

PROGRAM

SESSION I: **The West and the World in Global History**

"A Medievalist Reconsiders the East and the World since 1400," Alfred J. Andrea, University of Vermont

"A Modernist Reconsiders the East and the World Since 1400," A. Gunder Frank, University of Toronto

SESSION II: **The Problem of World Systems**

"World Systems: A Source of Disunity and Wars," Theodore Von Laue, Emeritus, Clark University

LUNCH: Keynote Speech, "Western Civilization, Multiculturalism and the New World History," Ross Dunn, San Diego State University

SESSION III: **Pedagogy in World History:**

"The Contemporaralities Method of Teaching World History," Wilfred Bisson, Keene State College

SESSION IV: **"Teaching with Technology",**

demonstration of CD ROM on Migration

Registration for the Conference (lunch included): \$15.00 (late fee after 9/13/97: \$18.00)

The Symposium offers eight Professional Development Points or equivalent for middle and high school teachers

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A Review of Implementing the World History Curriculum in Public Senior High Schools

A Study of the National Center for
History in the Schools

by David Burzilo, The Rivers School

In a recent issue of the World History Bulletin, John Lanetti asked the question, "Has the World History Course Arrived?" He analyzed the growing acceptance of the idea that there is such a thing as world history, as well as the growing recognition that such a course has a legitimate place in the college curriculum, concluding that, while it has "not yet" arrived, it appeared to be "well on its way."¹ In that same spirit, it is appropriate for educators to pose this question with regard to the status of world history in America's secondary schools. Anyone interested in this question would do well to consult this study, and the two accompanying studies on American history in

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World History on the Internet

NER-WHA web page:

<http://library.ccsu.ctstateu.edu/~history/ner-wha/index.html>

World History Association web page:

<http://library.ccsu.ctstateu.edu/~history/WHAA/index.html>

World History Center web page:

<http://www.whc.neu.edu>

See also:

<http://www.whc.neu.edu/ner-wha>

public senior and junior high schools. The study was released in the spring of 1994, about five months before the release of the National History Standards. As a result of the contentious debate that followed the release of the standards and its dominance of subsequent discussions about history education, these studies have received scant attention. Given the quality of the information they contain and the value of that information for people interested in improving history education in the United States, this is quite unfortunate.

The study of world history in public senior high schools undertaken by the Center was begun in the 1989-1990 school year but had been proposed earlier and was clearly a response to the debate about history education--and education in general--at the time. The public mood in the 1980's was one of great frustration with American public education. In *A Nation At Risk* it was reported that "the average graduate of our schools and colleges today is not as well-educated as the average graduate of 25 or 35 years ago, when a much smaller proportion of our population completed high school and college." There was concern that the American educational system was producing students who could not compete with their peers from around the globe.

Although concern was expressed about every area of American public education, the state of history education was the subject of a number of thoughtful writers. Many felt that American students had a very poor grasp of history, both their own and that of the world. The results of a national assessment of student achievement provided confirmation for many of the public's fears. In *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?* Diane Ravitch and Chester Finn characterized the performance of students on the history section of the National Educational Assessment as "extremely weak."

A general frustration expressed by those concerned with improving history education in the United States was the lack of concrete data about the actual state of history education, which was seen as an obstacle to the formation of sound judgments and recommendations. In *Historical Literacy*, Kenneth and Barbara Jackson of the Bradley Commission reported: "The first objective of the Bradley Commission was to evaluate the present state of the history curriculum in the United States. Remarkably, neither the federal government nor any other national body could provide such information." In an effort to make their discussions more concrete by basing them in the reality of the situation, the Bradley Commission sent out surveys to a random sample of teachers at all grade levels across the nation. The responses from the 800 surveys returned were used to help frame commission discussions and often served to focus the commissioners on areas in need of specific recommendations.

As wide ranging as the survey of the Bradley Commissioners was, it was neither scientific in nature nor were its results disseminated. The survey was designed to guide the work of the commissioners, not address the lack of nationwide information on the state of history education in America. In contrast, the surveys of the National Center for History in the

Schools on American history, world history, and Western Civilization in American public schools were specifically designed to address that need.

These studies provide the most comprehensive and reliable picture of the history curriculum in America's high schools now available. Despite the fact that the data were gathered six years ago, and only questionnaires were used to collect the data, this is a report full of important information for those interested in the teaching of high school world history.

The sample for the world history survey, as well as for the American history surveys, was generated by using education directories from all fifty states and the District of Columbia, and compiling a comprehensive list of all the high school and junior high schools. From the list of high schools, every fifteenth school was chosen; for junior high schools, every seventeenth was chosen. The principals from every second school on this list then received a questionnaire. If the principal agreed to allow teachers at his/her school to participate, he/she was asked to list the names of all teachers of the subjects under study. Of the 517 principals who received questionnaires, 390 (75.4% of 517) returned them and of that number 274 (70.2% of 390) responded that they had at least one teacher of a general enrollment course in world history. Principals at the individual schools were asked to identify all teachers of the world history survey course and make the following distinctions: teachers of AP/Honors sections; general enrollment sections; non-college bound/non-remedial sections; low achieving/remedial sections; esl/ep/nep sections; and "other" category sections. Surveys were then mailed to one teacher of each class type at each school. Questionnaires were ultimately completed by teachers at 190 schools (65.6% of 274).

"Has the World History Course Arrived?" Yes. Survey responses indicate that a substantial number of the nation's high schools offer world history. Of the 390 principals who responded to the Center's initial questionnaire, 274 or 70.2% identified at least one teacher who was teaching a general enrollment world history course. Despite the lack of earlier studies with which to compare this figure, world history advocates should be pleased that over 2/3's of the schools in this sample reported offering a world history course.

Given the level of response to the survey and the data collected, the appropriate question should not be has the world history course "arrived" in American public high schools, but what is the course that has arrived. "What is being taught in the world history course in public high schools?" Given the responses to the survey on this issue, conclusions are much more problematic.

For the purpose of investigating what is being taught in world history classes, teachers were asked to indicate the number of class sessions allocated to a par-

licular topic in a given year. The world history survey contained a list of fifty-six topics. This list was generated by David O'Shea, the directors of the NCHE, and a committee of ten Center scholars.

In the final report, the list of topics was presented as well as the percentages of teachers who taught a topic for a particular length of time. A look at the topics and the responses in rank order reveals that "those receiving most class time in general enrollment world history courses are related to Greek and Roman civilizations and to developments in Europe since that period. Receiving least time, in terms of class sessions allocated, are topics dealing with Asian and African civilizations." The number one topic in terms of the number of class sessions in the typical world history course was Ancient Rome. Of the first 28 topics receiving the most class time, only four do not relate to Greece, Rome, or European history. The first topic that is focused solely on a non-Western topic was the "Indus River Civilization," the thirty-second item on the list. Other types of analysis done on the responses, such as factor analysis, showed that the topics tended to cluster in six factor groups; the factor groups "Europe," "Greece/Rome," and the "Modern World" had higher numbers of class sessions allocated to them than the other factor groups.

As a result of each type of analysis of the topics found in high school world history courses, O'Shea concluded: "Data on curriculum content reveal a contradiction in that the course

labeled world history actually emphasizes topics dealing in European civilizations. From this one can deduce that commonly the course is presented with a view to helping students understand contemporary American society by analyzing its historical origins. While this is a desirable objective, its adoption results in a world history course that is unlikely to meet the expectations of those who believe that such courses should present students with a balanced overview of the historical background of each of the major civilizations that have shaped the modern world."

The remaining sections of the study move away from issues of course content and focus more on pedagogical issues.

Most important perhaps are the findings about who is teaching world history and the educational preparation of those teachers. Based on the responses to survey questions about academic background, O'Shea found that a large proportion of the people teaching general enrollment courses in world history (40.4%) lacked "a substantial academic background in history." These figures were almost identical to those reported in the study on American history.

When it comes to materials and methods, respondents indicated using a variety of textbooks in their world history courses, but close to ninety percent of all teachers used one of eight texts, with *World History: Patterns of Civilization*, *History and Life*, and *People and Nations* being the clear favorites.

Respondents also indicated that there was little variety in how world history is being taught. The surveys indicate the preference for lecture and discussion as the most popular teaching methods. Eighty percent or more of the respondents reported using lecture and discussion once a week or more. Close to seventy percent reported that feedback most commonly came from written answers to questions. The use of simulations and games, cooperative learning, debates, creating models, and dramatization was limited, with over sixty percent of the respondents indicating they "never or seldom" used these instructional activities. In this regard, the findings in the world history study were similar to those of the American history study.

The final topic considered in the study was teachers' views on what needed to change to improve the quality of instruction. Survey respondents overwhelmingly identified "home support" and "student effort" as the two conditions most in need of change. Once again, these findings were similar to those of the American history study.

Due to limitations of space the extensive footnotes which accompanied this article have been omitted. Copies of the article with footnotes are available from NERWHA or by contacting the author.

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WORLD HISTORY CENTER World History Seminar 1997-1998 Schedule

The World History Seminar, an open forum on research and curriculum development in world history, meets biweekly during the academic year at Northeastern University in Boston on Friday afternoons, 2-3:30pm, 420 Classroom building

Speakers for 1997-1998 include:

September 26, 1997

Andre Gunder Frank, University of Toronto

October 10, 1997

Robert Hall, Northeastern University

November 7, 1997

Peter Gran, Temple University

December 5, 1997

Noam Chomsky, MIT

January 23, 1998

Sergei Khrushchev

April 10, 1998

Heidi Roupp, President, World History Association



Note to Members:

If you know of anyone who would be interested in joining NEH-WHA (membership remains free), please let us know and we can send them a newsletter.

Also, if you have any questions, comments, or ideas for future articles for the newsletter, please feel free to get in touch.

You can reach us at (617) 373-4060.

With the development of NEH-WHA, we have decided to build a list of e-mail addresses of our members so that we can communicate with each other more efficiently. It will also allow us to hold on-line conferences of NEH-WHA (see page 2).

If you have an e-mail address already, please send it to Beimei Long at: belong@lynx.neu.edu.



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