

Issue Number 8

Subject: "The West...in World History" - Electronic Conference

The New England Regional World History Association (NER-WHA) invites you to participate in an electronic conference on the topic of "The West and Western Civilization in World History -- definition and interpretation." The conference begins on March 31, 1997, and ends on April 6, 1997. It takes place on this discussion list, the major presenters, and describes the conference format.

TOPIC: "The West and Western Civilization in World History: definition and interpretation."

What is "the West"? What are its geographical, cultural and social boundaries? What is "Western Civilization"? Are the two synonymous? How have the meanings and applications of these terms changed over time? How should they be used in the future?

What has been the role of "the West" in world history? How has that role changed with time? For instance, has the West been the driving force in world history, or does it provide but one story among several regional stories, or does it reflect a dimension of a larger, global process?

March 1997

PRESENTERS.

Jacquelyn Kent, H-Net (Latin American and world history)

Tara Sethia, Cal Poly - Pomona (South Asian and world history)

Peter Stearns, Carnegie-Mellon University (European and world

history)

COMMENTATORS

David Burzillo, The Rivers School, Weston, MA

Steven Seto, Snowden International High School, Boston, MA

FORMAT. On March 31 the initial three statements (of 1000-1500 words each) will be distributed to the list. On April 1, the two commentaries on the opening statements, of about 500 words each, will be posted to the list. Then open discussion among all participants, including the authors, will take place from April 2 until the end of the conference on April 6.

The opening statements and commentaries will also be available on the NER-WHA web page

(<http://library.ccsu.ctstateu.edu/~history/nerwha/index.html>)

and at the Northeastern University World History Center web page

and at the Northeastern University World History Center web page

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

Music is an essential element in Africans' life. Although African music differs from region to region in way of performance, gender role, instruments, etc., one common characteristic is that music as cultural expression, both for religious and secular needs, runs through Africans' view of the universe, their life philosophy and their sense of community.

Since the Atlantic slave trade, Africans took their culture and tradition with them to the New World and were able to retain them, among which is the musical tradition of Central and West Africa. As a result, jazz, blues, rock and other forms of popular music originated from African tradition have spread all over the world, including to places such as South Africa. In

spiritual life, the power of Gospel music has been appealing to people of all cultural groups.

Traditional African music is an ever-present part of daily activities arising spontaneously whenever the need is felt. It is a dynamic manifestation of abstract ideas. Dance, drum and song are performed in Africans' life cycle events, in every wedding, birth, and in every funeral ceremony. As an integral part of village life, music accompanies the rhythm of work in the fields by day and accompanies community dances in the village square at night. Through music, Africans can keep seeking material well-being, like healing, as well as spiritual well-being, like forgiveness of sin, within the religious context. In many African communities, ancestors are considered still part of the living world. For this reason, the funeral is the most elaborately celebrated occasion in communal life. The vigorous music and dance are integral to the funeral process. Song and drum intend to link the visible with the invisible world, allusion to the gods or spirits.

African American music has its own unique identity. However, Africa has been clearly established as the source of most Afro-American music. In fact, a major mode of modern Western music grew out of the funeral tradition, as we all know that jazz was born in the funeral parades of New Orleans, patronized by Black and Creole societies at the turn of the century.

Music is part of the performance in African religion, varying from region to region. On religious occasions, Africans hear drums instead of an organ. In the religious sense, the tom-tom beat of the drums is calling Africans to make religion authentic, to take the African context as divine revelation.

Rhythm to the Africans is what harmony is to the Europeans. The characteristics of African music lie in the complexity of rhythm and tonal texture achieved by labor, practice and refinements through the efforts of generations. To appreciate African music requires an active engagement, because Africans have acquired a rather exact sense of time as they learn to relate to the rhythmic potential of what goes on around them. "When Europeans imagine we are beating strict time, the African will merely smile at the 'roughness' of our beating." (A.M.Jones)

Chant is considered the ultimate connecting link between African tradition and African American harmony singing. Praying had

been part of the Africans' religious behavior in the homeland, and call-and-response was part of the African narrative and musical expressive technique, which, not surprisingly, has been the standard format in Afro-American music. The preaching, praying, and singing of spirituals have been and will be the practice in the music for African Americans.

By singing and dancing with the drum, with the rhythms of their heart and soul, African people keep the charitable human sensitivity that can be easily lost in the modern world.

Media Column

Films on Africa in the World

1. *Clash of Cultures , The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (Ali Mazrui series, documentary, 60 min. 1986).

2. "Tryin' to Get Home": *A History of African American Song* (well-known Afro-American songs of all genres of 20th century, documentary, 55 min. 1993).

3. *Cry Freedom*, (feature film, based on true story. A romantic look at the short life of South African activist Steven Biko, and his friendship with white news editor, Donald Woods. 157 min. 1987).

4. *Roots* , (feature film, an African's life story in Africa in his childhood and youth and in the United States later in his life in 17th century, 90 min. 1977. 6 video tapes on TV saga, 570 min). Alex Haley's novel, portrayed in this path-breaking TV mini series, brought African-American ancestry into America's limelight.

Teaching Resources:

A Column for High School Teachers

by David Burzillo

Sarah Pomeroy is the Distinguished Professor of Classics at Hunter College and the Graduate School, City University of New York, where she has taught since 1964. Her work *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, originally published in 1975, was reissued with a new preface in 1995. Her *Women in Hellenistic Egypt from Alexander to Cleopatra* was published in 1984. Mary Lefkowitz is Andrew W. Mellon Professor of the Humanities at Wellesley

College, where she has taught since 1960. Her works include *Heroines and Hysterics* (1981) and *Women in Greek Myth* (1986). She collaborated with Maureen Fant on *Women's Life in Greece and Rome* (2nd ed. 1992).

Professor Pomeroy, In the preface to the 1995 edition of *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, you talked about the reevaluation of older evidence having led to the reinterpretation of some issues in the field of women in antiquity. You specifically talked about the reevaluation of the issues of matriarchy in Greek society, women in archaic Athens, and infanticide; would you add other issues to the list since you wrote this new preface?

Yes. One area in particular is “women in the visual arts, especially the work done by Shapiro and Kampen.”

Professor Lefkowitz, In your writings you have used Greek mythology to investigate the position of women in Ancient Greece. If high school teachers want to investigate the position of women with their students in this way, what are the pitfalls?

Teachers need to be careful about “reading modern values onto the past. The study of ancient women should be grounded in ancient history.”

In your opinion, what are the most interesting developments or trends in the study of women in classical antiquity in recent years?

SP: To me the most interesting work is being done on “Hellenistic women and on domestic space.”

ML: Recently “information from papyri and inscriptions and the study of ancient gynecology” have added greatly to our understanding of women in antiquity.

What are the most important things high school world history teachers can teach their students about women in antiquity?

SP: Teachers need to “pay attention to variation (geographical, chronological, status) in women's lives, and they must be careful not to generalize about ‘women.’”

ML: In teaching about women in the antiquity, teachers need to teach students “about their lives and the limitations of those lives.”

What are some of the books about women in antiquity that would be beneficial for high school world history teachers to read?

Both recommended Fantham, Foley, Kampen, Pomeroy, and Shapiro's *Women in the Classical World* (Oxford, 1994). In addition Mary Lefkowitz recommended Pomeroy's *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* (Schocken, 1995) and the sourcebook she edited with Maureen Fant titled *Women's Life in Greece and Rome* (Johns Hopkins, 2nd ed. 1992).

Bibliography

In each issue, we will have a bibliography list both focusing on world history in general and by region. In this newsletter, we emphasize African spiritual life in World History.

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Note to Members:

If you know of anyone who would be interested in joining NER-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 NER-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 NER-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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Patrick Manning
William H. Miller
Lynda Shaffer
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