http://worldhistoryconnected.press.illinois.edu/1.1/manning.html
From *World History Connected* Vol. 1, Issue 1.
Viewed May 10, 2014 15:53 EDT

Navigating World History: A Synopsis

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The field of world history is growing in so many directions that it is time for a guidebook. Such a guide and critique can provide an overview for those entering the field and can sharpen the debates for those who will make key decisions on the direction of world history as an arena of teaching, research, and institution-building. For instance, will world history be a distinctive field of study for teachers, students, and specialized researchers? Or will it be linked closely with other social sciences and humanities in an interdisciplinary analysis of the global past and present? My recent book, *Navigating World History*, is an overview of world history that explores this type of question: I offer the present synopsis to enable readers of this journal to anticipate the topics and viewpoints that are addressed in more detail within it. 1

The audience for the book includes researchers, teachers, and general readers. The researchers perusing this book may include professional historians writing monographs, graduate students getting ready for general exams, and advanced undergraduate students seeking to add to their knowledge and experience. The teachers among these groups may be preparing classes for high school or middle school classes, or for graduate or undergraduate students. One of their primary concerns is how to convey the lessons of world history in their classrooms. General readers seeking an introduction to world history may be students of national history exploring wider connections or scholars in fields such as economics or biology who seek to set their work in the context of change over time. 2

The general purpose of the volume is to present an overview and critique of world history as a field of scholarship and teaching. I have organized this book around five principal objectives, devoting a section to each. My first goal involves defining world history in terms of the patterns of its current rapid development and its firm base in earlier writings. This discussion focuses on illustrating the long-term continuities in the conceptualization and study of world history and on demonstrating how the ideas of world historians and their institutions have influenced the current expansion of teaching and research in world history. 3

My second objective centers on showing how the current expansion of world history is part of a wider revolution in historical studies. The development of new theories and new data in the disciplines of social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences has pushed back the boundaries of historical studies in general and created an exciting set of "world-centric" insights. In turn, the development of area studies and the rise of several sorts of global studies have greatly expanded the world history field. 4

Third, I summarize recent advances in each of several sub-fields of world history and examine the current main debates among world historians. In the course of this review, I contrast the advances in global political and economic history (historically the strongest sub-fields) with recent developments in social history; with the interplay of technological, ecological, and health history; and with the many and 5

varied aspects of cultural history.

My fourth objective is to enunciate guiding rules for conducting a logical analysis in world history. 6
This task involves summarizing the historian's choices in selecting a geographic scale, a time period, and a topical focus; outlining strategies for researching and interpreting the global past; and delineating techniques for verifying interpretations. Overall, these guidelines restate in a world-historical context the discipline of history as the art, craft, and science of collecting evidence and then using these data to characterize and interpret the past.

In the fifth and concluding section, I offer a set of program and curriculum recommendations 7
designed specifically for promoting successful study and research in world history. These guidelines address in particular the needs of those participating in organized world history programs such as graduate or undergraduate schools or professional development workshops for teachers. They should also prove useful; however, to readers engaged in individual studies of world history.

While I labored with care on the pages of my text, perhaps the most outstanding part of the book is 8
the work of other historians: the bibliography at the end of the book. This listing includes over a thousand citations of studies in world history and works relevant to world history, from earliest writings to the present. They are organized by author within the four periods of historical writing that I identified: the writings of historical philosophers from ancient times to the end of the nineteenth century, the works of global synthesis from 1900 to 1964, the thematic analyses of world history from 1965 to 1989, and the analyses accompanying the organizing of professional study in world history from 1990. The dramatic expansion in world-historical analysis emerged clearly: over half of the citations are for works published since 1989.

In the remainder of this synopsis, I describe the contents of each section in terms of the five principal 9
tasks that I propose as the basis of solid accomplishments for world history researchers and teachers.

Historiography

The first task is to keep track of lessons already learned. World history is a new field, but it is also an 10
old field. Recognizing the historical depth of the interpretive debates we carry out is as important as the emphasis on the latest techniques of analysis and the newest data. In a six-chapter section on historiography, I discuss the development of world-historical ideas from various perspectives. While I emphasize consistently the dual traditions of historians--rethinking old knowledge and developing new knowledge about society--I argue that this pattern took a different shape beginning in the nineteenth century. Since that time we have had two distinct paths toward the development of world history: what I have called "the historians' path" and the "scientific-cultural path." The world-historical debates over politics, the social order, and the economy developed along the historians' path; the new discoveries in biology, geology, linguistics, archaeology, and anthropology led to the expansion of work along the scientific-cultural path. The historical analyses of global issues continued for a century along both of these paths at the fringes of the academy. Meanwhile in the late nineteenth century, the field of history as a whole was captured by a vision of professionalism that centered narrowly on the celebration of national histories and excluded world history as speculative and irrelevant.

William H. McNeill's *Rise of the West*, appearing in 1963, arguably opened the professional study of 11
world history with a broad interpretation of politics and civilization. At the same time, one can now identify the many other writers who earlier in the twentieth century conducted historical and sociological studies that laid down much of the groundwork for the emerging field of world history. For the period 1965-1989, I have focused especially on Philip Curtin's development of monographs in world history and

on Immanuel Wallerstein's development of global analysis for the early modern period. Both of these scholars worked along the historians' path to world history as they enunciated new interpretations of old issues in economic and social history. In the same period, Alfred Crosby did much to open the scientific-cultural path to world history through his use of biological and other scientific information to provide interpretations of environmental history. Andre Gunder Frank, another major scholar with a long career, articulated a series of connections, cycles, and broad patterns in world history. The field of world history has its giants, but it also has many other scholars who have contributed to the development of a remarkably rich literature.

For the period from 1990 forward, world history has moved beyond individual accomplishments to 12
the creation of institutions for professional study. It has seen an extraordinary expansion in the teaching of world history at secondary and college levels in the U.S. (and, if to a lesser degree, in a number of other countries, large and small, for which global connections are recognized as important). The character of world historical analysis has changed, meanwhile, turning toward more interdisciplinary and interactive studies.

My preference in historiography is to reaffirm the importance of both sides of the balance: historians 13
should continue to reread and rethink the earlier studies of global issues, and they should keep up with the newest developments. In the last of my six historiographic chapters, I propose a narrative of the unfolding interpretation of world history. In it I suggest that the types of historical problems and the types of interpretive solutions have changed with time, as the character of society has changed, and as our knowledge about the physical world, the organization of society, and the patterns of culture has expanded periodically. Despite this succession of changes, it remains remarkable to see how well such early writers as Herodotus and Sima Qian can speak to people of today.

Revolution in Historical Studies

A second task of world historians is to be alert to changes in the numerous disciplines that are 14
relevant to the study of the past. This section of the book focuses on three great axes of scholarly change -- new and transformed disciplines, the rise of area studies, and the rise of global studies. In each of three chapters I trace the panoply of new information, techniques, perspectives, and theories that developed and entered the purview of historical studies in the late twentieth century. The results are expanding the frontiers of historical study, strengthening the tool kit, and broadening collaborative responsibilities of historians. Yet in every case, the changing disciplines present historians with new dilemmas along with advances in method.

The disciplines range from social sciences to humanities, arts, and natural sciences. The chapter 15
reviewing disciplinary changes notes, for instance, the application to historical topics of theories in economics, sociology, politics, and demography in the social sciences; and the rise of literary theory and gender studies in the humanities. In cultural studies, new methods in historical linguistics, art history, and music history brought changes along with cultural anthropology. In the natural sciences; geology, genetics, and medicine are just a few of the disciplines that have had impact on history. In addition, improvements in computer technology have transformed data storage and retrieval as well as communication for historians.

Of the new developments in the disciplines, it has been easiest for historians to utilize or appropriate 16
the results of the new data and new techniques, especially through a growing reliance on computers. New perspectives have brought benefits at a somewhat slower pace. For historians of the scientific-cultural path, shifting perspectives has meant especially shifting among the standpoints of various disciplines:

from cell biology to zoology to cultural anthropology to ethnomusicology. For those working along the historians' path, the shifts in perspective have been principally from one social standpoint to another: history as seen from the standpoint of gender categories, of regional or of class perspectives. National perspectives and national histories remain significant, even among world historians, but it has now become almost automatic for world historians to view "the nation" as only one of numerous social perspectives and, in viewing the nation, to consider it from any of several disciplinary perspectives.

17 For all the benefits to historians of the new data, new techniques, and new perspectives for study of the past, it is in the realm of theory that historians still tend to drag their feet in appropriating the benefits of the revolution in method. Historians, being what they are, will always subordinate theory to empirical data. But the prominence of many sorts of theoretical formulations in the rapidly transforming disciplines leaves historians with the clear need to learn and implement a selection of the available theories as part of their historical work. At best, historians can be critics and creators of theory as well as an audience for the interpretations of other scholars.

18 The rise of area-studies analysis made it possible for world history to become something more than a celebration of the experience of empires based in Europe and the Mediterranean. From the 1950s in the U.S. and elsewhere, programs of study expanded many fields of knowledge about Africa, various regions of Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. Historians participated equally and worked closely with other social scientists in developing regional knowledge. While studies of Europe and North America maintained the most resources and the most prestige, a move toward scholarly equalization gradually advanced. As scholars working on South Asia and Southeast Asia gained in confidence, they began comparing and connecting regional experiences. Out of these comparisons emerged a growing interest in world history.

19 The resulting dilemma, however, was that the approach to world history that came out of area studies treated world history as Third World history (leaving aside large areas of the world) and treated world history as the comparison of continental regions (stopping short of exploring global patterns or even continental interactions).

20 The third element in this revolution in historical studies was the emergence of global studies and the conceptualization of the earth as a unit of social and economic analysis. This global vision, based especially on the recent experience of economic globalization, made it easier to conceive of the earth as a historical unit as well.

21 Yet the development of global studies has left world historians relatively isolated. Global-studies analyses tend to focus on economic, environmental, and international relations issues for today and tomorrow and focus little on history. And world historians, who have little contact with other social scientists, have not had much more contact with national or area-studies historians. World history, while thriving in its own terms, stands relatively alone as a field, lacking close ties either to other groups of historians or to the social scientists who lead in global studies.

22 World history, newly enabled by the expanded methods, differs from previous historical studies in addressing a wider range of topics, specifying previously neglected connections among arenas of human experience, tracing broad patterns in the past, and clarifying relationships among different scales of the world's events and processes. For all its difficulties, it is one of the most exciting areas in scholarship and teaching today.

Research Agenda and Debate

23 A third task of world historians is to locate key debates and to update a research agenda identifying

the topics and approaches of highest priority in new research. In the chapters of Part III, I present seven sub-fields in four chapters, followed by a review of major debates in the field. I give considerable emphasis in each chapter to the *research agenda*, the historical questions under study for each sub-field. I trace the origins of the research agenda, in turn, both to scholarly questions emerging from previous research and to current issues of public interest.

For political and economic history, I focus on problems of governance and on the production, consumption, and exchange of goods and services. For social history, I review research on the many dimensions of family and community. In a combined chapter, I discuss technological history, centering on human devices for control of nature; ecological history, addressing at once the influence of nature on human society and the impact of humanity on the environment; and the history of health, focusing on problems of illness and healing. For cultural history, I review studies seeking to address the full range of humans' representations of their experience and understandings. This chapter includes a review of the recent innovations in analytical approach to culture which I interpret in terms of "macrocultural" and "microcultural" studies. 24

One great current debate focuses on the world economy from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Phrased in terms of dominance, the question is whether East Asia or Western Europe led the world in output, productivity, and profit. The same question, phrased in terms of connection, is what global trade in silver reveals about the mutual dependence of East Asia, Western Europe, and other regions in a global system of production. The debate is not only about the answers but about which question is most useful for developing an interpretation. 25

Another great debate centers on nationalism and nationhood. In terms of dominance, the question is whether nationhood was a system of politics developed in the North Atlantic that was later exported to the rest of the world. In terms of connection, the question is how nationhood became the political organization of everyone. 26

The debates on earlier times are more likely to be interdisciplinary than these economic and political debates on recent times. Scholars in linguistics, archaeology, and other fields have been tracing the early movements of Indo-European speakers across the Eurasian heartland up to ten thousand years ago, debating their points of origin, their concentrations of population, and their cultural exchanges with each other and with other groups. Similarly, scholars have focused on the interplay among religious traditions in this same Eurasian space. While connections among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are well known, recent work examines commercial, cultural, and philosophical links among Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrian religion, and other traditions. 27

Other debates have yet to develop in detail, but we can be certain that they will emerge once new evidence is located. What is the place of gender in world history? What have been the global patterns in the structure and behavior of the family? The list of topics ripe for debate is a long one. The philosophical and analytical range of approaches to the global past is equally long: historians must distinguish repeatedly between continuity and change, deterministic and conjunctural patterns, and between uniqueness and interconnection. 28

Method in World History

A fourth task of world historians is to explore world history logically. The four chapters in this section center on *research design*, distinguishing among the various elements of framework and strategy in analyzing history. Overall, the chapters of this section emphasize the design, execution, validation, and presentation of world-historical research with attention to assuring that studies in world history account 29

for a range of both analytical and social perspectives.

The first of these chapters addresses the issue of scale in world history: the limits in space, time, and topical coverage. World history necessarily involves analysis at several levels, and the exterior scale of the historian's framework needs to be linked to the interior scale and dynamics of space, time, and topic. A second chapter proposes the appropriate logic of analysis at each scale: I have broken down research design into frameworks for analysis, strategies of analysis, and modeling the dynamics of historical change. Then I turn to the important matters of verifying the validity of interpretations in world history and presenting the analysis effectively to the readers. 30

There can be no single method for a field of study as broad and varied as world history. Yet I have concluded that there does exist an appropriate framework for the conduct of world historical analysis. Rather than serving as a precise recipe for creating a preordained product, the analytical rules of world history provide a set of methodological and philosophical priorities. I quote a summary statement of these rules from the book's concluding chapter: 31

> Here is my statement of the general steps for creating or evaluating an interpretation of issues in world history. At each stage, these interpretive steps focus on logical consistency, empirical documentation, and the identification of global dynamics. The steps alternate in widening and narrowing the analysis, in order to ensure that the result is at once broadly connected and grounded in specifics. 32
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> *Select a topic and purpose for study.* World history faces one with too much to cover, so one must develop a readiness to select specific topics for study. Happily, many--perhaps most -- topics in history are susceptible to global analysis. Each historian may take responsibility for selecting what part of the past to analyze rather than accept someone else's definition of the problem, debate, or dilemma. He or she should be able to defend the logic of that choice and should accept the interpretive consequences of the selection.
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> *Exploratory comparison.* Having selected a topic, one should explore comparisons with a wide range of related or parallel topics considering any possible connections, similarities, and contrasts among topics. This sort of brainstorming is essential to guaranteeing breadth and comprehensiveness in world historical analysis, and it may reveal unsuspected dimensions of the topic or suggest patterns and interactions to be documented.
>
> *Modeling the dynamics*. World historians, in seeking to link disparate bodies of information into coherent stories, must formalize their logic rather than wait for the facts to speak for themselves. The models of historians may range from explicitly detailed and deductive theories to attractive but imprecise metaphors. In any case, the model needs to be explored to its limit in search of ideas to be tested, and it must highlight the dynamics of global change. Modeling world history requires that analysts consider cases, networks, systems, and debates and develop the art of conducting several of these activities at once.
>
> *Identify connections.* World historians seek out connections among events and processes in the past and also among the models and disciplines with which we explore the past. In particular since the models may refer to one or several areas under study, it is important to seek out linkages among the subsystems within the topic under study. World history links both the accidental and the systemic connections in the places, times, and themes of the past to help explain the broader patterns.

Verify the conclusions. Having developed an argument about the past, the world historian must next seek to verify it. In general, this means analyzing historical data to measure one model against another for sections of the analysis and for the study overall. This task, even when only partially completed, addresses the questions "How do you know?" and "Compared to what?" It thereby takes the analysis from insight to confirmation.

Shift perspective. A world historian, having completed the steps above and developed a perspective on the past, will find that there is always another relevant way to look at the issue. The next step, then, is rethinking the analysis from inside and outside and reiterating the steps above from a new perspective. One should evaluate the interpretation from the standpoint of one and then another person from past time, explore the interpretation through the optic of one and then another analytical discipline, and reconsider it in short-term and in long-term perspective.

Overall interpretation. Having carried out all the steps above at least twice, one may offer an overall interpretation that is not necessarily a synthesis of all available information and probably not a definitive conclusion but more likely a provisional summary. Such a summary presented forcefully can prove insightful and can stimulate further discussion and research.

Within each of the seven steps above there is a great range of details and possible sub-categories. This summary of the logic of world history provides a framework for analysis of the past that gives systematic emphasis at once to broad patterns and to specific links in historical experience.[1]

Graduate study

A fifth task of world historians is to follow a rigorous program of study. The five chapters of the 33
concluding section present guidelines for such study, arguing that a program of formal study presents substantial advantages over informal, self-directed study. The section opens with a chapter reviewing the development of programs of graduate study and the continuing debates over priorities within graduate study, especially the choice between area-studies and global approaches to training in world history. The next chapter proposes programs of study at three levels of intensity: a one-year program of introduction to the field; a two-year program for a specialization in teaching; and a full doctoral program for research. This chapter gives details on proposed courses and on requirements for language study, research, and curriculum development. A chapter on resources points out ways of gaining access to the many world-historical materials in print, in archives, and in electronic form: it highlights the Library of Congress as the single greatest resource in world history. A chapter on research techniques describes research seminars in world history and gives pointers on conducting micro-research projects, small projects, and large, book-length projects.

These chapters draw on the experiences of many, but address especially the work of the program of 34
graduate study at Northeastern University and the World History Center. In the ten years of its activity, the combination of the center and the graduate program developed a doctoral specialization in world history, prepared entering teachers of world history, conducted major research and curriculum development, founded a world history resource center, and conducted numerous professional

development workshops for teachers. Other institutions and programs are carrying on similar work.

35 Still, the problem of resources presents a crucial difficulty for world history. In many ways world history can be said to have proven itself in the classroom and in the outpouring of new research and debate. Yet in other ways the field has yet to establish its full credentials as an area of scholarship: both collegiate and secondary institutions continue to demand the results of world historical analysis without investing in the programs of research and teacher preparation that are necessary to expand those results. I hope that *Navigating World History* will contribute to strengthening the case for a deeper investment in research and teaching about the global past.

36 The single most important unmet need in the establishment of a strong field of world history is programs of graduate training. Both teachers and researchers will benefit immensely from programs of formal study in world history. The relative absence of graduate programs, with their intensive and specialized study, means that world history has yet to benefit from the fresh thinking that can emerge from concentrated and detailed study. To put it in more positive terms, the establishment of full-scale programs of graduate study in world history will enliven the discipline of world history and enable world historians to face the challenge of an immense and complex field of study.

Biographical Note: Pat Manning is the Director of the World History Center and Professor of History and African-American Studies at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts.

Notes

[1] Manning, *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 375-377.

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http://worldhistoryconnected.press.illinois.edu/8.1/forum_manning.html
From *World History Connected* Vol. 8, Issue 1.
Viewed May 10, 2014 15:50 EDT

FORUM

Expanding Academic and Popular Debate in World History

Patrick Manning

History, as much as any endeavor in knowledge, necessarily encounters the conflicts in society. The unevenness and conflict accompanying the expansion of African History and then the rethinking of South African history are good examples of the process.

A new or expanding field of study is inescapably aimed at creating a different view of the past, and therefore rattles some existing cages, but is not necessarily "radical" or "leftist." I am happy to accept the labels of "radical" and "leftist" for my own ideas if not actions. But if those terms can in some sense be applied to the earlier expansions of African History and South African History, I don't apply them to World History as it is practiced in the U.S. In my opinion, World History in the U.S. is neither the creation of the Power Elite nor a project governed by a radical, counter-hegemonic outlook. On balance, I find the prevailing outlooks among World Historians to have been moderate and perhaps even centrist, except for the insistence of these historians on exploring the past in steadily broader frames.

On the other hand, I don't want to argue that World History in the U.S. is innocent of a political slant or that it fails to provide service to notions of American global hegemony. One can't help but notice that World History has grown especially in the U.S. in the era of its expanding and increasingly problematic global hegemony. But this is no simple matter of history as ideology. World History is also an advance in historical science, and its more comprehensive perspective is conceivably of use to many political perspectives.

I am cautious, therefore, about the notion that World History will create good global citizens and bring about dependable world peace. Rather, I tend to believe that as World History becomes better understood, all of the old political and philosophical debates will be elevated and carried out on this new and more sophisticated terrain. Small as the gain will be, I still think it's worth it.

The current activity that, in my opinion, can bring the biggest advance in world historical studies, is the creation and functioning of the Network of Global and World History Organizations (NOGWHISTO), bringing World Historians of every continent together on a basis of equality to share and debate their concerns about World History. This is not the place to describe NOGWHISTO and its activities in detail, but I urge world historians of every stripe to learn about this new organization and consider the impact it might have. As Trevor has emphasized, these will all be academicians, and hearing the voices of the common people or of elite global skeptics remain as steps and perhaps conflicts for the future. But I still think that globalizing professional World History will be a momentous step. That's my

main point.

As a second point, I am now learning to say that I am a fan of "World History from Below." In completing my history of the African Diaspora, I realized that all the general histories of the modern world, no matter how skillful, consign black people to a few racially specific footnotes on slavery, emancipation, and civil rights. Yet black people, of African ancestry, are roughly one sixth of humanity and, in an age where we proclaim the equality of all humanity, it is simply illogical that they should be absent from the leading trends in history. The error, I think, lies in an approach to history that gives too much attention to elite initiatives and not enough to the social innovations of those outside the elite. For the African Diaspora, I traced in some detail the ways that black commoners substantially reworked popular culture in the 20th century. I think that parallel approaches can reveal central contributions of ordinary people in politics, technology, and economy.

These points aside, I do agree with Trevor that World History, if it succeeds in expanding, will encounter new voices and social forces that will forcefully challenge existing interpretations. These interesting times will be unpleasant as often as they are exhilarating, as we debate whether we really seek "World History For Us All."

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