

## Entering a New Era in World History Education

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*The Alliance for Learning in World History*

DESPITE MORE THAN TWO DECADES of emphasis on and promotion of the shared histories and cultural commonalities of world citizens, history teachers now find themselves at a crossroads. Somehow, despite our collective and longitudinal efforts to heighten our students' sense of global identity, countries around the world appear to be entering a period of re-nationalization reminiscent of the Cold War Era. As hyper-nationalists assume power across Europe, the Americas, and Asia, they bring with them self-serving approaches to identity—often promoting patriotism, national pride, and even xenophobia.<sup>1</sup> History teachers are left asking several poignant questions. Among them: Are we failing in our efforts to educate students about the virtues of global community, common background, and shared histories? What responsibilities do we as history teachers bear in combatting this emerging global identity crisis?

Perhaps ironically, recent studies have revealed that world history is the fastest growing school subject in U.S. middle and high schools.<sup>2</sup> Such findings, while seemingly advantageous to and supportive of our work as teachers, reveal even more potential for concern because we know that the scope of these courses and the best practices for teaching them remain unclear. Notably, however, in recent years, scholars affiliated with the Alliance for Learning in World History (ALWH), founded in 2012, have helped launch dynamic programs of

educational research on world history that facilitate and promote the development of curricula, materials, and techniques that emphasize global patterns in the evolution of the human community rather than the traditional sequential narratives of separated civilizations, empires, or regions. This movement is grounded in an understanding that expanded global interaction has brought growing attention to the subject of world history and its instruction in many parts of the world. Today, ALWH scholars and educators are working together to integrate lessons learned within their specific contexts to develop more standards and resources for supporting more inclusive, more accurate, and more meaningful world history education for all students (ALWH is online at <http://www.alliance.pitt.edu>).

This movement is also grounded in historiographical knowledge of our collective efforts to teach world history to middle and high school students. We know that the United States, for instance, has the largest concentration of world history education, and a vast range of textbooks, curricula, and approaches to teaching the subject. In Japan, world history has been a standard topic of instruction since the 1940s. In Egypt and India, world history textbooks were implemented beginning in the 1950s. And recent research in England has also resulted in significant advances in the understanding of how students learn history.

### **Our “Researching World History in the Schools” Conference**

In May 2015, with help and support from faculty members and staff of the World History Center, the School of Education, and the Global Studies Center at the University of Pittsburgh, the ALWH hosted a “Researching World History in the Schools: Nationwide and Worldwide” conference at the Pitt campus. This two-day meeting was funded by the Global Academic Partnership of the Global Studies Center at the University of Pittsburgh (<http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/~global>), the Japan Iron and Steel Federation, and the Pitt World History Center (<http://www.worldhistory.pitt.edu>). It brought together world history experts from several countries and teachers from local schools to promote a multi-faceted mission to share relevant research, to facilitate discussions on emerging curricula, and to explore new theories to develop a degree of synergy to the scholarship in this growing field.

The conference also allowed us to merge two threads of research on the teaching and learning of world history: its global conceptualization, and its implementation in specific social settings. In terms of conceptualization, we looked at historical thinking skills and explored new findings about how students learn history. We also examined what is being done in terms of curricular advancement and assessment of historical knowledge and skills. In terms of implementation, presenters highlighted new avenues in critical race theory and learning in world history, and applied comparative lenses to the history of the world as it is taught in schools in various countries. We also explored emergent world history-related professional development in content and instructional methods.

Today, the ALWH continues to blaze new trails in history education partnerships; collaborative efforts that are now driven by our vested interests in investigating how to best integrate and infuse teaching practices with cutting-edge world history scholarship. In short, we seek to inform and enrich what is being taught in middle and high school social studies courses with our findings and university practices, and to work with teachers in district, school, and one-on-one settings to promote evidentiary historical inquiry and problem-solving in truly comparative contexts. We believe this work will result in strong curriculum building partnerships between universities, history and pedagogical experts, and classroom teachers, and will lead to better social studies education at all levels.

With this goal in mind, we have been quite pleased to see that the “Researching World History in the Schools” conference not only highlighted ongoing scholarship, but continues to forge new and thriving collaborative efforts. This special world history issue of *The History Teacher* celebrates this emergent body of scholarship and developing partnerships by sharing five select papers; three of which were presented at the conference, and two representing subsequent projects.

*The Mt. Lebanon Project: Partnering to Re-Envision the Teaching of World History*

Our opening paper, authored by Michael Lovorn and Veronica Dristas, describes the partnership and products of a collaborative

curriculum redevelopment enterprise in the Mt. Lebanon School District (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) that brought local history teachers together with representatives of the Social Studies Education Program, the Global Studies Center, and the World History Center at the University of Pittsburgh. The project was founded on a fairer and more balanced vision for a comparative world history curriculum. Building on existing cornerstone approaches and databases of the Alliance for Learning in World History (<http://www.alliance.pitt.edu>), World History for Us All (<http://worldhistoryforall.sdsu.edu>), and The Big History Project (<https://www.bighistoryproject.com/home>), project partners set out to help world history curriculum reach its full potential by designing an implementable framework for teaching a truly global comparative world history.

This paper orients the reader to the origins of the partnership; summarizes the theoretical frameworks that informed curriculum development activities; elaborates on the scope and sequence of the curriculum that was developed; addresses challenges encountered by the curriculum development team throughout the partnership; describes implementation of the curriculum and shares data related to impacts on students and teachers; and makes suggestions for next steps in the process.

*Helping Students Use World Historical Knowledge to Take a Stand on a Contemporary Issue: The Case of Genocide*

Our second paper, authored by Tamara Shreiner, argues that the study of world history should arm students with the historical knowledge and competencies needed to reason about global issues they will face as citizens. The regular study of world history, Shreiner continues, should also facilitate students' deeper understandings of relationships that have shaped global problems, as well as consistently present the multifaceted consequences that political, environmental, commercial, and socioeconomic decisions in one part of the world often have in another.

Shreiner reports further that students do not always come into classrooms equipped with tools needed to effectively use historical information to reason about political issues. As a result, this paper engages the reader in a discussion on the types of scaffolds teachers

may use to address this deficiency and equip students to use world historical knowledge for global citizenship purposes. This approach is framed in a study of instruction on genocide. The unit under study was aimed at helping students use historical knowledge of genocide to take a stand on U.S. policy toward genocide today. It was implemented in two world history classrooms over two years. Shreiner's study highlights changes observed across student work after implementing specific strategies for making comparisons between historic cases and present-day cases.

*Six Degrees of the Mongol Empire: Using Thought Experiments to Prepare World History Teachers*

Our third paper, authored by Lauren McArthur Harris, asks: what if teachers and students could make connections between world historical events with as much ease as some of us play the popular parlor game *Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon*? Her work then details three world history-related "thought experiment" activities that may be used to engage teacher candidates in making connections for themselves, and thus encourage them to implement these activities with their future students. She focuses particularly on world history thought experiments as an effort to address teacher candidates' fears related to content knowledge and the vast amounts of space and time that are encompassed in this subject.

This paper reminds us all that history education is centered on connections, and that teacher candidates must be trained in processes and skills development to make those connections for themselves, navigate history curriculum, and then help their students make similar connections. Harris describes innovative card-sorting tasks, thought experiments, and related discussions she uses in her methods courses as an approach to engaging teacher candidates in more of the nature of the field of world history.

We are quite proud that this special issue also includes two subsequent papers; each of which developed from the aforementioned partnerships. The first promotes the development of world historical knowledge and skills necessary to formulate an informed opinion on a contemporary issue, and the second advances critical perspectives on world history.

*Teaching World History in Arabian Gulf Universities: Challenges and Prospects*

Our fourth paper, authored by Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk, focuses on contemporary implications of the field of global or “transnational” history that developed during the 1980s, and how those elements inform contemporary approaches to the subject. Abushouk provides a history of various Gulf universities and highlights common patterns that emerged across all cultures to integrate the people of the world. He investigates differences that reveal the diversity of human experiences, and then provides a detailed account of the evolution of this academic move toward comparative world histories, and how related historical perspectives and philosophies differ in various parts of the world. He then argues that if we are sincere in our collective commitment to establish a genuine global approach that would provide new understandings of the world history, we must incorporate perspectives formulated in non-Western cultures.

Abushouk exemplifies this approach by describing features of history courses offered by history departments in Gulf universities—from economic aspects of globalization, to intellectual and cultural adjustments, to modernity—and discusses the challenges that encounter the introduction of world history courses. He then proposes a means by which history scholars and teachers may facilitate the gradual introduction of world history courses and, in doing so, streamline and sequence history education at the university level.

*Teaching Alternative and Indigenous Gender Systems in World History: A Queer Approach*

Our final paper, authored by Tadashi Dozono, introduces a view of world history from the perspective of alternative gender individuals. Highlighted by the media particularly in recent days, public conversations continue to emerge about how gender is defined (and redefined). Teachers and students can and should help each other understand gender variance in a more broad and respectful way. Regardless of what voices reach the media, learning about different constructs of gender, different forms of identity, different systems in general—especially from the indigenous record—demonstrates advanced historical thinking.

The paper is based on Dozono's own incorporation of the *muxe* in Oaxaca, Mexico when teaching about the consequences of colonization in Latin America, and includes other non-binary gender systems, including *hijras* in India, and two-spirit people in various Native American communities. The *muxe* in Oaxaca provide evidence of how pre-Colombian ways of imagining the world continue today.

Considering the possibilities for and cautions of incorporating alternative gender systems into the world history curriculum, Dozono's paper focuses on three aspects of the issue: 1) acknowledgment of gender diversity allows students to imagine the world differently, opening up future possibilities in contexts of history; 2) a teacher's efforts to address indigenous gender systems intensifies the point that most current world history curricula privileges European ways of knowing and thinking about the world; and 3) the study of indigenous gender systems, if done well, reinforces the skill of contextualization in the work of the historian. Dozono's paper encourages teachers to engage indigenous gender systems in order to challenge the status quo narratives of world history, while cautioning against using alternatively gendered individuals as exotic objects of inquiry.

### **Other Conference Presentations**

The "Researching World History in the Schools" conference also boasted groundbreaking work by world-renowned history education scholars that have not been included in this issue. Among the papers presented, many published in other outlets, were the following titles:

"Nested Frameworks: An Approach to Learning World History"

*Bob Bain, University of Michigan*

"A Study on the Teaching and Learning of the Concept of Change and Continuity Over Time in an AP World History Classroom"

*Linda Black, Stephen F. Austin State University*

"What is the Potential of the English Curricular Tradition of 'Interpretations of History' for the Teaching of World History?"

*Christine Counsell, Cambridge University*

"Teaching World History in Japan"

*Andrea Radzimirski, History Student, University of Pittsburgh*

"National and State Social Studies Mandates for World History, 1995-2015: How Far Have We Come?"

*Susan Douglass, George Mason University*

- “Shanghai: A Great Place to Do World History, But is it Being Done?”  
*Deborah Smith Johnston, Concordia International School, Shanghai*
- “World History in China’s Schools”  
*Yang Biao, East China Normal University*
- “In Search of Integrated Education of World and Japanese Histories  
in Japanese High Schools and Universities”  
*Shiro Momoki, Osaka University*
- “Aligning the Historical Thinking Movement to the Global History  
Movement”  
*Tim Keirn, California State University, Long Beach*
- “World History for Us All: Past and Future of an Online Model  
Curriculum”  
*Ross Dunn, University of California, Los Angeles*
- “Critical Race Considerations for the Future of World History  
Education”  
*Ashley Woodson, University of Pittsburgh; LaGarrett King,  
University of Missouri*
- “More than Just Food: Learning from How Children Understand  
Race in World and Global History”  
*Tony Castro and Andrea Hawkman, University of Missouri*

### **A Framework for Setting and Achieving High Standards in World History Education**

In framing our pursuit of high standards, we understand that while change often comes slowly to public education, we do not underestimate the power of partnership. To this end, we reiterate our four-fold framework for progress. First, we restate the proposition of the conference, which was that good world history teaching requires contributions and collaboration by educational researchers as well as classroom teachers. We assert that research into the historical past, into student comprehension of the world and of history, and into pedagogy and professional development of teachers, is needed to provide essential frames and lenses through which we will all perceive and promote the virtues of global community.

Second, we believe that even (perhaps especially) in the current hyper-nationalistic and supremely narcissistic political environment of the present moment, history scholars and educators should strive



to create and maintain a global and international perspective on teaching rather than succumbing to such myopia. We feel this progressive persistence was a great strength of the conference and, naturally, it is represented in the balance among the five articles we share with you now.

Third, we hope our efforts here can be used to inspire students and teachers of world history courses in middle schools, high schools, and college classrooms to imagine students elsewhere in the world who are also studying world history—and, in doing so, be exposed to and consider the variant ways in which similar content is being presented to them. This practice would undoubtedly help them all observe and articulate the multiple perspectives that we know are out there.

Finally, we hope to publicize and celebrate existing efforts and emerging enterprises to present high-standards world history to middle and high school students. One example is that of the African Diaspora Consortium (<http://www.adcexchange.org>), headed by Dr. Kassie Freeman, which has prepared a syllabus for an AP Capstone Seminar course on the African Diaspora. Patrick Manning, ALWH co-founder, led the syllabus design team, and the College Board has recently approved it for implementation. And with this, it is our hope that readers will be both engaged and inspired by our compilation of diverse and exemplary papers. We also hope to provide you with a nice theoretical and practice foundation for reconceptualizing world history education, and we invite you to join us in this noble work.

## Notes

1. Michael Lovorn and Tatyana Tsyrlina-Spady, “Nationalism and Ideology in Teaching Russian History: A New Federal Concept and a Survey of Teachers,” *World Studies in Education* 16, no. 1 (2015): 31-52.

2. Robert B. Bain, “Challenges of Teaching and Learning World History,” in *A Companion to World History*, ed. Douglas Northrop (Oxford, United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing, 2012): 111-127; Robert B. Bain, “Considering the ‘Hidden’ Challenges of Teaching and Learning World History,” *Historically Speaking* 12, no. 3 (June 2011): 20-22; Sean Cavanagh, “World History and Geography Gain Traction in Class,” *Education Week*, 21 March 2007, 10.

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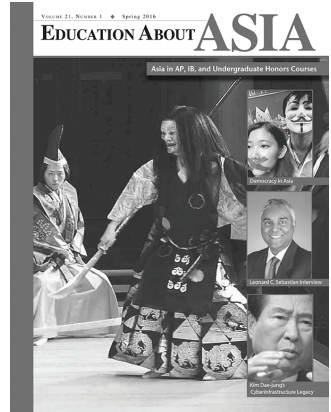


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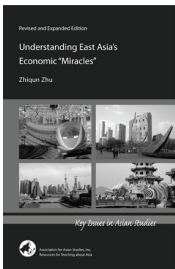
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