

Mapping World History

Report on the World History Research Agenda Symposium
(Boston, November 10-12, 2006)

Released January 24, 2007

Drafted by

David Christian (San Diego State University) dgchrist@mail.sdsu.edu
Potukuchi Swarnalatha (Dhirubhai Ambani International School, Mumbai)
pslatha@rediffmail.com
Marilyn Lake (La Trobe University, Melbourne) M.Lake@latrobe.edu.au

Conference Director

Patrick Manning (University of Pittsburgh) pmanning@pitt.edu

INTRODUCTION: The Research Agenda Symposium

The “Research Agenda Symposium—Research in World History: Connections and Globalizations” was held in Boston at the John Hancock Conference Center, on November 10-12, 2006. It was organized by a committee chaired by Pat Manning of the University of Pittsburgh. Sponsors included the University of Pittsburgh, the World History Network and the World History Association. This summary of some of the issues raised and discussed during the conference is intended, first, as a record for participants of some of the research agendas and strategies debated during the conference. It is also intended to help other historians, as well as funding agencies, to get some sense of the range of research problems being tackled by world historians. [Manning, Transcript, 2:154. *References to the “Transcript,” are to the two text files of the transcribed record of the conference that have been made available to all participants.*]

Each of the 36 participants at the Symposium delivered a five-minute proposal on research agendas for world history; all proposals had been circulated in advance and posted on the conference website. Of the participants, 18 came from institutions in the United States and 18 from outside the U.S., making this one of the most internationally representative of recent conferences on world history held under the auspices of the World History Association. In addition to the formal participants, there were 10 observers and 6 members of the conference committee. The five-page conference program is included as an appendix to this document, and can also be found on the conference website: <http://www.worldhistorynetwork.org/dev/conference.htm>.

The initial call for papers invited research proposals on “the full range of world-historical issues,” including “any issues and approaches that may elucidate our understanding of world history.” In the introductory session, Adam McKeown asked if it was possible to

construct “a consensus statement on the research project of world history,” and to find “modes of cooperation” among between researchers in world history. [Transcript, 1:1-2] The call for papers included the following tentative list of possible areas of discussion:

- Topics that should be high priorities in world historical research
- Debates requiring further research
- Time frame
- Disciplines and disciplinary connections requiring particular attention
- Methods of world historical research requiring emphasis
- Resources—archives and other documentation—requiring attention
- Analytical emphasis—for instance, global patterns or global-local connections
- Individual or collaborative work
- Organization of national or transnational research groups
- Relative emphasis on graduate study, work by senior faculty, or combinations

What follows is an attempt to summarize and comment on the intense and diverse discussions that took place over the one and a half days of the conference. It is inevitably selective, and cannot do justice to the immense variety of ideas and perspectives that were presented, or to the intellectual synergy that the conference generated. Though we have attempted a coherent account of these debates, we have tried to avoid tidying up all the loose ends, as an excessively neat account could not possibly convey the diversity and richness of the discussions. As the reader will see, the conference raised as many questions as answers about world history and its future.

The summary is in three sections, followed by a conclusion:

- 1) A summary of the **main research areas and strategies** discussed in the formal presentations and discussions;
- 2) An attempt to summarize the diverse but overlapping **definitions of world history** proposed or implied in the course of these discussions;
- 3) Commentary and discussion of possible **priorities in world history research and future directions for the discipline.**

1. RESEARCH AREAS AND STRATEGIES

The proposals (available in the conference program) can be classified in several different ways. The classifications themselves provide some insight into how world historians currently organize their research. But the classificatory straitjacket adopted here cannot possibly capture the fluidity of discussions which ranged widely in space, time and theme.

Spatial Scales. Most world historians are keen to escape the national frames that have shaped so much historical scholarship. But what alternatives are available?

Several presentations defined their themes around broad geographical regions and the relationship of those regions to world history in recent centuries. Regions mentioned included China, the “Middle East,” the Indian sub-continent, and the Caribbean. In all cases, it was understood that world historians will naturally attempt to see these regions in larger spatial and temporal contexts, and to understand both the temporal coherence of each region, and the complex ways in which it is embedded within global networks and processes. The regional perspective is vital to world history because global issues are always seen from particular regional perspectives. [Teelucksingh, Zhang, Ma, Wills, Çaksu, Potukuchi, Adapa]

Chronological Scales. Many papers defined their themes chronologically or by particular eras. By doing so, they raised a large methodological question: how has the issue of chronological scale shaped world historical scholarship.

A striking feature of the conference was the overwhelming concentration of research in world history on recent centuries and the modern era. [Perry, Transcript, 1:250, only 4 of 40 presenters appear to work on eras before 1500] As Borin Stremelin put it: “the kind of world history that most people here subscribe to, the kind of world history that’s promoted by the World History Association is essentially the pre-history of globalization.” [Transcript, 1:24-5] Pat Manning commented: “Within the community of world historians, of course there is a great deal of concentration in modern times, but that merely mirrors the historical profession as a whole.” [Transcript, 2:56-7]

The minority of papers focusing on larger time scales discussed the need to study pre-modern definitions of and approaches to world history, to describe the human relationship with the biosphere on large scales, to explore particular themes (such as art or religion or the evolution of cosmologies) on large scales, and to explore the possibilities for a coherent world history of humanity as a whole. [Hughes-Warrington, Robin and Steffen, Kimball, Christian.] It was argued that the large scale view has acquired increased urgency in an era in which significant challenges (including the threats of nuclear war and global warming) can only be tackled by a unified global community. [Transcript, 1:11-15]

Several papers touched on the importance of exploring particular themes on larger chronological scales. The themes mentioned in this context included peace and violence, art, state formation, maritime history and religion. [Schmitt, Nolte, Richards, Heidbrink, Beck, Lindenfeld, Kimball] Discussions of distinct eras also raised issues of regional continuities and connections, which were related, in turn, to the larger issue of periodization. Can there be global periodizations? Or is periodization by its very nature local or regional?

Historiography, conceptual and methodological issues, the nature and role of world history. Several papers posed historiographical questions about the nature of world history, its evolution, its regional differences and its role in the modern world.

One group of papers touched on differing perspectives on world history in different parts of the world, and the need to broaden our sense of what world history is, has been, and can be. [Hughes-Warrington, Stremlin, Naumann and Middell, Witz, Potukuchi, Adapa, Pappé]. In a comment, Peter Gran asked whether world historians should aim at a unified vision of world history (in the spirit of some forms of Marxism), or a diverse vision (in a spirit of liberalism). He suggested that the very structure of this conference implied a broad commitment to a pluralist vision. [Transcript, 1:47-8]

Most papers in this group touched on the question of whether world history as practiced, particularly in North America, reflects a “Western” rather than a global perspective on the past. [Adapa, Transcript, 2:4-5, asks why world history studies of migration (and reverse migration) in Asia focus so little on intra-Asian migrations.] Does that perspective reflect the power of the West? If so, is there a danger that historians based in the “West” may (unwittingly?) impose a distinctly Western vision of world history? [Stremlin, Transcript, 1:25-7] If they are to be truly global in their approach it is vital for world historians to widen their view of what world history can be, by incorporating approaches from different regions and eras, and also from writers who are not professional historians.

A related group of papers touched on conceptual aspects of world history, in particular the notion of networks and nodes as an alternative (like the idea of “world systems”) to the dominant idea of the nation. [Hansen, Trimmer, Owens, and see Transcript, 2:52-3, 77-8, and 104-6, and also the caution in Transcript, 2:109, and Stremlin’s reminder that states, too, are networks: Transcript, 2:112].

Several papers suggested that world historians could engage more forthrightly in public debate on global issues, assuming a more active role as public intellectuals with a distinctive perspective on today’s world. [Gran, Transcript, 1:24] (One participant suggested that this might require special training in skills such as the writing of op ed pieces!) [Martin, Transcript, 2:144].

Several discussions touched on the methodological question of whether world historians should begin with the details or the overview. Do we need more information and more data bases? Or, instead, is the main need for clearer synoptic frameworks and a more carefully constructed conceptual tool kit? [Manning, Owens, Transcript, 1:59-63] This discussion touched on a larger issue that simmered below the surface for most of the conference: should world historians aim at a synoptic and global view of history, or should they avoid such grand narratives and focus, rather, on interconnections and comparisons, on the multiple strands from which world history is constructed.

A related issue concerns the nature of the audience for world history. What is the audience and what does it need or expect from world historians? [Spodek, Transcript, 1:65-6] Is there a global audience, or are there many distinctive regional and local audiences for world history, each with its own needs?

The issue of “interdisciplinarity” surfaced in many discussions. Is world history intrinsically interdisciplinary? If so, *how* interdisciplinary? Will world history necessarily encourage collaboration with scholars in the natural sciences as well as in other disciplines in the humanities or social sciences? Should it try to build on the models and paradigms available in other historically oriented disciplines, from sociology to cosmology? Should world historians engage in intellectual “outreach,” seeking new forms of collaboration within and beyond the history discipline? Should we accept that history as generally understood is now one of a range of historical disciplines that includes biology, geology and cosmology? (If so, should these disciplines be sharing conferences and constructing collaborative research teams?)

Themes. Many papers were organized around particular themes. Major themes included development, economic history and “defensive modernization” [Ma, Veese, Koponen]; religion [Beck, Lindenfeld; Transcript 2:182 announced an initiative to form a group of world historians studying religion in world history]; violence [Nolte]; peace [Schmitt]; maritime history [Heidbrink]; state formation [Richards]; art [Croizier, Kimball]; international exchanges of ideas [Chao]; disease [Dehner]; technology and communications [Wenzlhuemer]; cities [Perry, Spodek]; ecology [Robin and Steffen]. Some historical topics are clearly natural candidates for world historical scholarship, a case that Ingo Heidbrink made eloquently for the study of maritime history, Hans-Heinrich Nolte for the study of violence, and Roland Wenzlhuemer for the study of communications technologies. [Transcript, 1:79-82, 85, 90-1] So it is perhaps no surprise that the largest group of thematic papers focused on another intrinsically international theme, that of migration and regional connections. [Lake, Adapa, Gerritsen, Adebayo, Trimmer, Perry, Spodek, Sanders, Brizuela-Garcia]

Absences in world historical scholarship. Several commentators noted important missing themes or approaches, or themes and approaches that were touched on surprisingly lightly. Two such themes stood out: gender and environmental history. Has world history been a “masculinist,” as well as a “Western” project? [Hughes-Warrington, Transcript, 1:40] Is this partly why it has largely failed to incorporate the growing body of work on the history of gender and sexuality? [Streets, Transcript, 1:160-1, Lake, 1:166, Sanders, Transcript 2:82-3] Has it also been too human-centered, and insufficiently conscious of human relations with, and dependence on, the biosphere? [Transcript, 1:57, 64, 76-7, 99] Robins and Steffen, in their statement on the conference website, suggested we may be at the beginning of a new geological era, the “Anthropocene,” in which humans themselves have become major agents of biospheric change. [Transcript, 1: 4-5] Both the history of gender and the history of human relations with the environment are natural and important themes for world historians, though they were under-represented at this conference. What other important absences are there within world historical scholarship?

Collaboration and Funding: Several papers and comments discussed the potential importance of collaborative scholarship, and the need to consider creating international networks of linked researchers. [Trimmer, Owens, Sanders. Ma. Ma and Owens reported that they are already engaged in large collaborative projects collecting, respectively,

economic and geographical (GIS) data.] Many papers on particular themes also stressed the need for broad collaboration. Indeed, it was suggested that collaborative scholarship may be particularly strategic for world history because of the huge range and diversity of skills the field requires. [Hansen, Transcript, 2:76-79] So the idea of webs or networks turns out to be important for world history both as a concept (a description of what many world historians study) and as a research strategy. In many fields, including environmental history and the histories of gender and technology, collaboration will have to extend beyond the humanities disciplines to colleagues in the sciences.

A related issue concerns funding. Will networks of world historians, perhaps working with colleagues in other disciplines and countries, find it easier to generate research funding than those working solo?

What shapes the balance of themes and approaches? World historians are clearly distinctive in their willingness to explore an unusually wide range of spatial and temporal scales, and to do so, if necessary, by crossing discipline boundaries. Yet the themes and approaches apparent at this conference also suggest that the agendas of world history have been shaped to a considerable extent by the preoccupations of historians in general. For example, most of the papers presented were concerned with recent centuries, and most tackled themes that are central to modern historical scholarship. The “worldish” aspect of world history was apparent less in specific choices of themes and questions than in the approaches to those questions, so it seems that the thematic agendas of world history are largely being set by the history profession in general. Should this concern world historians? Or is it unrealistic to expect the field of world history to generate quite distinctive themes and research agendas? Is the concern with issues of scale perhaps a sufficient defining feature of world history?

Professional Training in World History. The fact that the themes and approaches of world historians are so powerfully shaped by the agendas of the history profession surely reflects the background and training of most world historians. It is a sign that the field is still dominated by historians who are historians first and world historians second. There are very few historians for whom the idea of world history was so central during their graduate training that they can define themselves first and foremost as world historians. (Though many of this cohort of “professional world historians” were present at this meeting; including Martin, Kalivas, Trimmer, Dehner, Johnson and James.) This is largely because there are so few programs that train world historians *as* world historians; nor is it yet entirely clear what might be expected of those appointed to jobs in world history. [Perry, Transcript, 2:20]

The issue of professional training in dedicated world history graduate programs is linked to that of funding for, without a clear sense of what it is that distinguishes a professional world historian from other types of historians, it is harder to get the attention of funding agencies (or even the attention of colleagues in the history profession).

It seems likely that increasing professionalization of the field might also shift the agendas of world history by giving the discipline a more distinctive identity, emphasizing in

particular issues of spatial and geographical scale. As this conference demonstrated, even world historians find it difficult to take seriously the “global” time frame of 200,000 years, or to incorporate serious discussion of the Paleolithic era into accounts of world history. How would a more serious consideration of very large scales affect discussions of continuities and discontinuities over the long span of human history? Such perspectives might also raise in more acute forms questions about the community whose history world historians are attempting to construct, and about new ways of balancing accounts of the intimate and private with accounts of large patterns. [As Kathleen Kimball pointed out, if we lack written records for the Paleolithic, we have lots of visual records, reaching back at least 50,000 years. Transcript, 1:140. However, using that evidence will require forms of training (in visual literacy for example) that few world historians possess at present.]

Teaching world history. Many discussions touched on the important relationship between teaching and scholarship in world history. To what extent have the agendas of world historical scholarship been driven by the agendas of syllabi in world history, and to what extent has the best scholarship in world history shaped teaching texts in the field? Such questions were not the central focus of this conference, which was concerned primarily with world historical scholarship and research, but there is clearly room for systematic exploration of the distinctive relationship between teaching and scholarship in world history.

2. DEFINITIONS: WHAT IS WORLD HISTORY?

At the risk of overlap with the previous section, this section attempts to summarize the views expressed at the conference about what world history is, how it works and what its function is. What are the spatial and chronological contours of world history? What is the relationship between world history and other social sciences? Or between world history and the natural sciences? Is world history the same as global history or transnational history or universal history? Can there be a unified paradigm for world history? What is the primary audience for world history? Here, too, it is apparent that the work of world historians is being steered by the agendas of the history profession in general. And it remains unclear to what extent world history has developed a distinctive research “personality” of its own.

a) Labels. The issue of terminology and labeling was raised several times. There are alternatives to the phrase, “world history,” including “global history,” “transnational history” and even “universal history.” What is the relationship between them? To what extent do they overlap?

b) Thematic and methodological diversity. As the previous section suggests, the themes, approaches and methods described in the papers and discussions were extremely diverse. Clearly, the label, “world history,” embraces great thematic and methodological diversity, different regional and national approaches, differences in scale, themes, approach, and questions. In fact, it reflects the diversity of historical research in general,

largely because most world historians were trained as historians rather than as *world* historians. Multiple definitions of the term, “world history” also reflect a variety of views held outside the academy. As Leslie Witz pointed out, the study of topics such as what counts as a world heritage site and why, provides a powerful way of teasing out assumptions about world history that are current outside the history discipline. [Transcript, 1:146]

World history means different things in different cultural contexts. One of the central challenges of world history will be to negotiate the profound differences in approach and themes that distinguish different national or regional traditions of world history scholarship. How should we deal with the paradoxical fact that regional traditions of world history scholarship may be shaped profoundly by regional or national historiographical traditions? Is there a Western or even US tradition of world history? What will it mean to produce a genuinely global tradition of world history scholarship? This question is closely linked to the question of audiences. Can there be a global audience for world history scholarship, or will the needs of different audiences (divided by class or cultural traditions or religious traditions) require different forms of world history? In other words, is world history bound to fragment into distinctive regional traditions?

c) The coherence of world history. Beneath the diversity of world history there is, nevertheless, a coherence that is most apparent in approach and perspective. During the discussions, the question was raised: What is the “value added” to the idea of history by the adjectival noun “world?” [Christian, Transcript, 2:69-70] At the most general level, the phrase “world history” expresses a willingness to move beyond existing thematic, regional and chronological frameworks, to experiment with a variety of different conceptual, spatial and temporal scales that raise new types of questions and encourage new forms of comparative study. [Christian, Transcript, 1:263-4] But it is clear, too, that world history must find ways of linking the different scales, which is why the theme of connections between the global and the local was so prominent. [For example, Gerritsen, Transcript, 2:13-16; Spodek, 2:27, on the city as a powerful way of linking the global and the local; but see also the caution from Leslie Witz, Transcript, 2:34, and following discussion, Transcript, 2:34-49]

How should world historians handle specific historical themes while retaining a sense of the coherence of their discipline? World historians seek out themes such as migration or disease or the history of violence, whose development is likely to take historical research beyond conventional national or regional frameworks. They explore issues such as state formation or the impact of religious thought and experience that reach across large periods of time. And some attempt to tease out larger patterns in human history as a whole. What distinguishes research and teaching in world history is the willingness to move beyond and to explore between the scales and themes of most other areas of historiography, and the new questions and insights that such research strategies can generate.

As yet, though, this exploration is still being approached with conceptual and even chronological tools familiar within most other areas of historical scholarship. For example, traditional strategies of periodization offer little to those world historians keen to approach world history as a global narrative.

d) A tension between diversity and coherence in world history? There is clearly a tension or dialectic within the field of world history between those keen to focus on the construction of larger, over-reaching narratives at multiple spatial and chronological scales (those who see world history as a sort of “connective tissue” [comment by Adebayo], or as a potential “pan human narrative” [comment by Kimball]); and those preferring to see world history as opening out new possibilities for a multiplicity of new comparative approaches to the past, without necessarily aiming at the construction of any kind of total narrative. The sense of this meeting was that this should be regarded as a creative tension, rather than a problem.

e) Importance and Contemporary Relevance. Why does world history matter? If it is true that world history, like all forms of history, studies the past in order to illuminate the present, what is the distinctive illumination that world history can provide?

One answer, occasionally expressed explicitly, but more often just beneath the surface of discussions and presentations, was that a global or trans-national perspective is particularly salient in a global and trans-national world. If a world of nation states demanded knowledge of the history of one’s own society, perhaps a more globalized world demands the historical perspectives of world history. Is the development of world history a reflection of the increasing number of problems (such as nuclear proliferation or global warming) that can no longer be tackled at national scales? Is the growth of world history perhaps driven by the increasingly global nature of modern societies, and is it possible that the discipline has important insights into such processes? If so, does this mean that world historians should attempt a larger vision of human history by borrowing concepts and paradigms from the natural sciences and attempting to construct a narrative of humanity as a whole? Is it possible that humanity as a whole should be thought of as an “imagined” community, analogous conceptually to the “imagined communities” Benedict Anderson has described within a more nation-based historiography. (As William Clarence-Smith pointed out, the idea of humanity as a historical community is at least as old as the oldest “universal” religions. [Christian, Clarence-Smith, Transcript, 2:110-11]) Questions about the audience for world history make it easier to pose such questions in practical, rather than purely theoretical terms. But it is also clear that over-emphasis on issues of relevance may encourage a certain present-centeredness in world history scholarship.

A second issue concerns the importance of world history within historical scholarship in general. How can world history, with its distinctive concern for questions and themes at larger scales help shape developments in other branches of historiography? One of the clearest answers, present just below the surface in many of the presentations and discussions, is that world history, like women’s history or economic history or art history, is well placed to encourage closer relations with neighboring disciplines. It can do so

with particular effectiveness because it is unified not so much around particular themes as around particular approaches and questions, those that emphasize changing scales and forms of interconnectivity.

A third problem concerns the relationship between scholarship and teaching in world history. As a teaching discipline, the importance of world history clearly lies in its transnational vision of the human past. But how should that vision be constructed? Should it be multiple, diverse, even national? Are distinctive regional traditions of world historical teaching inevitable in a world where many teachers of world history are paid by national governments? Or (to return to a question touched on before) should world historians construct teachable accounts of world history that try to transcend regional and cultural boundaries? It has already been suggested that there is a significant divide within world history scholarship between those who seek a unifying vision of the past, and those who seek a sharing of different visions of the past. The same divide appears also in discussions about world history as a teaching discipline.

3. PRIORITIZING RESEARCH AGENDAS IN WORLD HISTORY AND SELECTING FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Though the issue was largely avoided during the conference itself, those of us summarizing the discussions have been invited to comment on, as well as to summarize the discussions. The crucial issue is that of priority. Is there any way of ranking research agendas? Is there any way of teasing from these discussions a world history equivalent of the Hilbert program in mathematics?¹

In practice, participants shied away from any attempt to rank research proposals. This suggests that, even if the field is united by a determination to explore multiple scales and themes that cut across disciplines, there is, as yet, little clear sense of its central themes and research agendas. As has been said above, the themes and even the periodizations of most of the papers at this conference were reasonably typical of what one might have found at many general gatherings of historians. There does indeed exist within world history a “gravitational pull” towards themes and questions that are posed at larger-than-normal spatial or temporal scales or towards themes and questions that transcend national borders. And in recent years, many world historians have worked hard to move beyond traditional Eurocentric agendas, creating a flourishing scholarship as they do so. [That scholarship has been thoroughly reviewed in Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History*.] However, once beyond these unifying features and themes, there seems to be less unity among world historians about what they *ought* to be doing. As suggested above, this may reflect the fact that world historians remain, first and foremost,

¹ The German mathematician, David Hilbert (1862-1943), is widely regarded as one of the most influential mathematicians of the twentieth century. He was particularly concerned to think through the foundations of his discipline. In 1900, at the International Congress of Mathematicians held in Paris, he proposed a famous list of 23 (originally 24) fundamental problems facing the discipline. This list has shaped mathematical research ever since. One hundred years later 9 of Hilbert’s problems had been solved, another 8 had been partially solved, and some had been shown to be insoluble as originally formulated.

historians. To a considerable extent, world history remains history done with a “worldish” slant.

So can we begin to prioritize by picking out “certain issues or approaches for particular attention” [Manning] or those topics that “were well presented and show particular promise”? [also Manning’s phrase?] It may help to begin by trying to isolate those features of the papers that were “worldish” as opposed to those that might have been presented at any number of other historical conferences.

What follows is a tentative list in random order of broad research themes and approaches that emerged either directly or indirectly at the conference. While the first two paragraphs suggest strategic areas of future scholarship, the rest are more concerned with research strategies that may prove particularly salient for the future of world history as a research field.

1. **Historiography and world history.** Several papers touched on historiographical issues: on differences in regional approaches to the field, the difficulty of constructing an appropriate conceptual apparatus for world history, or a viable global periodization. Clearly, there is room for a major collaborative project that describes and takes stock of different approaches to world history. These approaches include large-scale interpretations written in recent and earlier times, and also assessments of the role of various regions in world history. [Hughes-Warrington; on the inclusion of Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, see the contributions of Adapa, Swarnalatha, Brizuela-Garcia, and Teelucksingh.] Such studies should survey not just scholarly research in world history, but also works produced outside the academy, textbooks for colleges and high schools (the way most people learn about world history), [Stremlin, Transcript, 1:248], as well as debates on world history in other fora, such as debates over world heritage sites. In the final session, Marnie Hughes-Warrington announced the intention of several participants to form an “International Historiography Research Cluster”. [Transcript, 2:161-2] Its aims would be: 1) to foster understanding of the institutions, forms and purposes of world histories and historiographies in various socioeconomic and historical contexts; 2) to better understand world history in relationship to history and other forms of historiography; 3) to elaborate the historiography of world history in order to reflect on the different scales and spatial frameworks of the field; 4) to identify opportunities to undertake collaborative research projects, disseminate results, and engage in the collaborative training of research students.
2. **Exploring multiple time frames.** Papers at this conference revealed clearly how centered current studies remain on recent times. If the discipline is to take more seriously the commitment to multiple scales which appears to be a defining feature of world history, its practitioners will find it fruitful to explore the many novel insights and comparative themes available for study at larger schemes. At the center of these explorations may be the inter-disciplinary challenge of incorporating a broad understanding of the Paleolithic world into discussions of

- themes including religion, peace and violence, power structures, gender relations, and migration.
3. **Data Bases and Resource collections.** The need for data bases that bring together data over large periods and large areas and are tailored to the distinctive needs of world historians. Such resources, where they can be assembled, will be a crucial part of the comparative mission of world historical research. Web-based resources including bibliographies and data bases may prove particularly important because they can be widely accessible and can be easily searched. Precise economic data can be assembled for recent centuries and, though with much less precision, for many millennia. There is also room to assemble data bases based on approximations and reasonable interpolations, over the whole span of human history. Such data bases might include estimates of population growth, both globally and in different regions, or discussions of the scale and reach of state power, or the nature of violence, or the scale and geography of global patterns of migration. In fact, research on most of the large themes discussed in this conference could be enhanced by the compilation of systematic data bases with a broad geographical and chronological reach. (A promising model is the China Historical GIS program at Harvard, under Peter Bol, which is collaborative, high-tech, and correlates many sorts of data to provide a really enhanced historical record over two millennia.) There is also a clear need for a bibliography of resources in world history and related fields that reflects the thematic, chronological and geographical breadth of the field. [Transcript, 2: 31, and 163-4]
 4. **Organizational Challenges.** Organizational challenges for world history include the construction of an international network of world history associations and support for regional or local networks of world history scholars and teachers, so as to increase the amount of global dialogue and collaboration on world history. Pat Manning reported that plans are underway for the construction of an “International Network of World History Organizations” that will apply for membership of the International Congress of Historical Sciences in time to take part in the 2010 conference of ICHS in Amsterdam. [Report, 2:151]
 5. **Graduate Programs and the issue of Professionalization.** A related issue is the importance of encouraging and supporting graduate programs in world history and expanding the number of upper-level courses that can help world history expand and develop its role as a research discipline. Many, particularly those actively engaged in graduate training in world history, feel that this is a vital step towards expanding the number of practicing world historians, and increasing the visibility of world history as a branch of historical scholarship. [Streets, Lindenfeld, Transcript, 2:158-9, 185-6] Increasing professionalization should also make it easier to generate research funding. But it is equally important in so far as a group of historians trained specifically in world history is more likely to develop a distinctive scholarly agenda, one driven more by the “worldish” nature of world history and less by the balance of themes and questions that happen to dominate the history profession as a whole. Some speakers noted the difficulties graduate students were bound to face in tackling the large themes common within world history [Transcript, 2: 176-7], and expressed some skepticism about doctoral programs in the field. However, it was pointed out that sharply focused themes

can often make for fine world history scholarship, and that there are already several functioning doctoral problems in world history.

6. **The public face of world history.** Should world historians make greater efforts to engage with a wider audience and play a more visible role as public intellectuals? World historians should be in a strong position to intervene in debates such as those over international migration or globalization or climate change that cannot be discussed seriously without a global perspective.
7. **Inter-disciplinary collaboration.** To the extent that world history is defined by its interest in adopting a wide-angle perspective, it should naturally encourage increasing cooperation between historians and scholars in neighboring disciplines. Cooperation with geographers using GIS technology was one area mentioned at the conference [Owens]. But there are many obvious areas where world historians are strategically placed to encourage greater interdisciplinary activity, even with scholars in the sciences. [Transcript, 1:5-6] Such activity should make it easier to develop a historiography that sees human societies as a part of an evolving biosphere rather than as an entirely self-contained domain of scholarship.

4. CONCLUSION

The Research Agenda Symposium on World History provided a rare opportunity for scholars in a rapidly developing field to take stock and share ideas about where the field is going. The discussions were wide-ranging and engaged and they displayed the intellectual enthusiasm that characterizes the field as a whole. World history has ancient roots. But as a field of *scientific* scholarship, it is new, which is why enthusiasm is balanced by considerable uncertainty and even anxiety about the field's current status and future directions. [Lake, Transcript, 2:204-5] In recent decades, world history has generated a rich body of scholarship. [Dehner, Transcript, 1:74-5] This conference showed that there is an astonishing diversity in the approaches, themes and methods of the field. By doing so, it raised deep questions about the coherence of world history scholarship, while also illustrating the field's vibrancy, openness and pluralism. What emerged from these discussions was less a coherent set of research proposals than the teasing out of important areas of debate within the field. Adam McKeown, one of the conference organizers, pointed out in a subsequent comment that the very nature of these debates may help define the field. They touched on: "The need for graduate training; the appropriateness of the global v. local dichotomy; the value of engaging with world historians from other times and places; the extent to which we need to engage in the metatheory of rethinking our spatial and temporal assumptions (or, more modestly, what can and can't we know at different spatial and temporal scales?); the extent to which world history should look for commonalities or differences." We suspect most participants left the conference with a similar sense of the powerful intellectual synergies such debates can generate within the field of world history, combined with a mild sense of uncertainty about the field's nature and future.

Since the conference concluded, the World History Network and the World History Association have decided to continue this debate by organizing a second conference on research agendas in world history in the 2008-2009 academic year.

APPENDIX: The Program and Participants.

Program: Research Agenda Symposium

Note: Participants are listed by affiliation and by country of residence.

Boston, John Hancock Conference Center

November 10-12, 2006

Friday, November 10

2:00PM – 7:00PM: Registration — John Hancock Conference Center

6:00PM – 7:00PM: Reception — John Hancock Conference Center

Saturday, November 11

8:00AM – 9:00AM: Breakfast

9:00AM – 10:30AM: Session 1 — Tasks for world historians.

Moderator: Adam McKeown, Columbia University

Marnie Hughes-Warrington, Macquarie University (Australia)

“World History Research: Priorities for an Expanded Vision of the Field.”

David Christian, San Diego State University (U.S.)

“Strange Parallels in World History.”

Libby Robin and Will Steffen, Australian National University (Australia)

“World history without historians?”

Silvia Pappel, Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana (Mexico)

“Point Zero – What happened to the so-called universal points of view?”

Peter Gran, Temple University (U.S.)

“Priorities for Research and Graduate Education: World Historians as Public Intellectuals.”

Boris Stremelin, Binghamton University (U.S.)

"The Production of World History Outside the West."

Katja Naumann and Matthias Middell, Leipzig University (Germany)
"Regimes of Territoriality and Historicization of World History Writing."

Debin Ma, London School of Economics (U.K.)
"Understanding Global Economics: Approaches and Agenda."

10:30AM – 11:00AM: Break

11:00AM – 12:30AM: Session 2 — Social science analysis.

Moderator: Zvi Ben-dor Benite, New York University (U.S.)

George Dehner, Wichita State University (U.S.)
"Research in World History: The Case for Diseases in History."

Ingo Heidbrink, Deutsches Schiffahrtsmuseum (Germany)
"Priorities in world-historical research – maritime history aspects."

Hans-Heinrich Nolte, University of Hannover (Germany)
"Violence: Comparisons and Interactions."

John Richards, Duke University (U.S.)
"State Formation in World History."

Cyrus Veese, Bentley College (U.S.)
"Defensive Modernization."

Roland Wenzlhuemer, Humboldt University (Germany)
"The De-Materialisation of Telecommunication as a Research Field for World Historians."

12:30AM – 2:00PM: Lunch

2:00PM - 3:30PM: Session 3 — Cultural and social analysis.

Moderator: H. Parker James, World History Network, Inc.

Ralph Croizier, University of British Columbia (Canada)
"Visuality in World History: Some Questions and Some Suggestions."

Kathleen Kimball, Water Dragon, Inc. (U.S.)
"World Art as a World History Research Priority."

Leslie Witz, University of the Western Cape (South Africa)
"World heritage and the challenges to world history."

Anne Chao, Rice University (U.S.)
"The Case for an Intellectual Study of World History."

Roger Beck, Eastern Illinois University (U.S.)
"Religions and Religious Missions in World History: Connectors, dividers, and Globalizers."

David Lindenfeld, Louisiana State University (U.S.)

"Beyond Conversion and Syncretism: Strategies and Processes in Local Encounters with World Religions."

3:30PM – 4:00PM: Break

4:00PM – 5:30PM: Session 4 — Region and place in world history.

Moderator: David Kalivas, Middlesex Community College

Jerome Teelucksingh, University of the West Indies (Trinidad and Tobago)

"Marginalized in the Global Village: The Contribution of the Caribbean to World Civilization, 1492-2006."

Zhang Weiwei, Nankai University (China)

"China's Function in Global History in Perspective."

Ali Çaksu, independent scholar (Turkey)

"Islamic history in world history: Waqf institutions."

Potukuchi Swarnalatha, Dhirubhai Ambani International School (India)

"Enveloping Eurasia into World History: A Framework for Research."

John Wills, University of Southern California (U.S.)

"Why Is China So Big? Comparative Political History and the Continued Relevance of Narrative."

Juhani Koponen, University of Helsinki (Finland)

"When Did Development Start? History of development and developmentalism."

6:30PM – 8:30PM: Reception and Dinner

Sunday, November 12

8:00AM – 8:30AM: Breakfast

8:30AM – 10:00AM: Session 5 — Human movement

Moderator: Deborah Smith Johnston, Lexington High School

Adapa Satyanarayana, Osmania University (India)

"Research Agenda for World History: Globalization and Migration Studies."

Marilyn Lake, LaTrobe University (Australia)

"Modern Mobilities and Transnational Solidarities."

Anne Gerritsen, Warwick University (U.K.)

"Local and Global in the Early Modern World: Local Responses to Global Connections, 1500-1800."

Peter Adebayo, University of Ilorin (Nigeria)

"Diaspora, Return Migration and Transnational Networking."

David Perry, University of Minnesota (U.S.)
"Trans-regional Exchange and the Transformation of Cities."

Howard Spodek, Temple University (U.S.)
"Urbanization: A Key Theme in World History."

10:00AM – 10:30AM: Break

10:30AM – 12:00AM: Session 6 — Networks and organization of research

Moderator: Stephen Rapp, Georgia State University

Annette Skovsted Hansen, Aarhus University (Denmark)
"Networks in Research Practice and Content."

Thomas Sanders, U.S. Naval Academy (U.S.)
"Encounter-ing World History: Thoughts on a World History Research Agenda from a Recent Collaborative Project."

Esperanza Brizuela-Garcia, Upper Montclair State University (U.S.) & **Martin Valadez**, Stanford University (U.S.)
"World History and Histories from the World."

Tiffany Trimmer, Bowling Green State University (U.S.)
"(Another) Call for World Historical Analysis of Networks and Networked Institutions."

J. B. "Jack" Owens, Idaho State University (U.S.)
"The Complex, Self-organizing Networks of the First Global Age (1400-1800): A high priority for world historical research."

Laurie Schmitt, Friends' Central School (U.S.)
"Perspectives on Peace."

12:00AM – 2:00PM: Session 7 — Lunch and Concluding Session

Moderator: Patrick Manning, University of Pittsburgh

This is the most important session of the Symposium because we will adopt our conclusions at this time. At this concluding session, over lunch, participants will seek to crystallize key insights, synthesize common views, and articulate major differences on priorities in world-historical research. Before dispersing, the group is asked to select three from its membership to lead in writing an article-length report on the Symposium. The article will be circulated to participants for comment before it is published.