

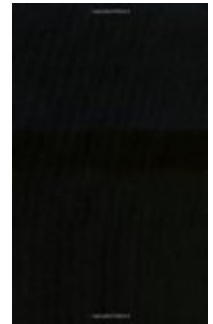
H-Net Reviews

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Patrick Manning. *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. 384 S. \$33.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4039-6119-8; \$100.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4039-6117-4.

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Everything You Wanted To Know about World History, and a Bit More ...

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Put this book alongside Ross Dunn's *New World History*, and you will have a comprehensive guide to the rapidly evolving field of world history.[1] Dunn's book lets you sample recent scholarship in world history; Manning's book takes you on a faster but more extensive tour of the field's rapidly moving frontier lands. It is the most thorough account we have of the state of the discipline. Manning, like Dunn, is a world history veteran. He knows the other veterans, he was present at some of the epic battles for world history, and one suspects he knows where the bodies are. He also knows the excitement of living on a scholarly frontier. As he writes in the acknowledgments, "The past dozen years of work on world history at the graduate level have provided me with all the academic excitement I could hope for" (p. viii). But his book is more than a handbook—it is also a work of advocacy, despite its sober style. Manning argues that world history, understood as the study of interconnections between human societies, is of vital importance today. Yet without some careful and systematic institution-building, it will not fulfill its potential. "For all its achievements and advances, world history remains an arena of amateur activity. Only if it can attract the backing necessary to create substantial centers of research and graduate training will it become a field of professional study" (p. xii). *Navigating World History* is both a sign of the field's rapid maturation and a pointer to future directions.

Manning's initial training, and the continuing focus of his research, has been in African history. In 1969, he completed a Ph.D. dissertation on the economic history of southern Dahomey at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, with Philip Curtin as his dissertation director. At Wisconsin he was part of a large cohort of Africanists and world historians that was to play a vital role in the revival of world history in the United States. (Manning describes the pioneering Wisconsin program in world history on pp. 327-328.) He published his dissertation in 1982, and other books followed, including a book on Francophone sub-saharan Africa (1985, revised and expanded in 1999), edited volumes on slavery and African life (1990), and on "History from South Africa" (1991), and a global history of the slave trades (1996).[2] Manning's commitment to African history is apparent throughout this book, as he raids the field for examples, illustrations, and models of good world history scholarship. Indeed, he argues that African history, by highlighting relationships of connection rather than domination, may also provide an appropriate thematic model for world history. In addition to his books, Manning has also published many articles and book chapters, and a CD on migration in world history, as well as numerous reviews. In 1994 he founded the World History Center at Northeastern University. He was effectively the founder of Northeastern's Ph.D. program in world history, which began in 1994 and is still one of the very few doctoral programs specializing in world history. In the last ten years he has directed the research of a new cohort of world historians who will be unique in coming to the field with

specialist training.

Navigating World History owes much to Manning's experiences as director of Northeastern's graduate program in world history, and it covers much of the historiographical and methodological territory necessary in a good doctoral program.[3] He writes, "This volume presents an overview and critique of world history as a field of scholarship and teaching" (p. ix). The book is divided into five parts. Part 1 defines the field and surveys its evolution; part 2 describes recent changes within history and neighboring disciplines that have contributed to the emergence of modern forms of world history; part 3 summarizes recent debates in the field; while part 4 discusses issues of methodology, and part 5 discusses the institutional structures within which world history scholarship and teaching take place. One of the most valuable parts of the book will be its extensive bibliography of over 1,000 items, many of which are discussed in the text. Appropriately, given the book's title, it is easy to navigate, with a clearly defined structure and a comprehensive index.

World history, for Manning, is not the attempt to sum up all of history. It is, rather, the story of connections within the global human community. "I can state the basic nature of the world historical beast with some confidence: it is the story of past connections in the human community. World history presumes the existence of a human community—one riven sometimes by divisions and hatreds but unified nonetheless by the nature of our species and our common experience" (p. 15). The work of world historians, therefore, is "to portray the crossing of boundaries and the linking of systems in the human past" (p. 3). In his extensive survey of the prehistory of world history, he shows that the project itself is very ancient, even if many historians still regard world history as a novelty. Modern world history has roots, therefore, not just within the discipline of history, but also in neighboring fields from geography to biology. Indeed, Manning maintains this slightly artificial distinction between the "historian's path" and the "scientific-cultural path" to world history throughout the book.

Most of part 1 surveys the evolution of world history. Manning's survey begins in the European renaissance, though there is a strong case to be made for going back much further in time, to ancient philosophy (whether Mediterranean, Chinese, or Mayan) and to the creation stories of oral traditions. Manning argues that, though early writings on world history were long on philosophy and short on data, there is remarkable continuity in the

questions they posed, so they still have much to teach us. In the nineteenth century, professional historians became increasingly suspicious of the wide-angle lens of world history. Nevertheless, interesting world history continued to be written in much of the twentieth century. But the impact on professional historians of works by Wells, Spengler, Toynbee, and others was limited. In North America, the field began to achieve wider acceptance amongst professional historians after the publication of William McNeill's classic, *The Rise of the West*, in 1963.[4] This demonstrated that, despite its scale, good world history could meet the highest standards of rigor, precision, and cohesion. Two further chapters in this part of the book describe the growth of North American scholarship in world history after 1965 and the accelerating growth and rapid institutionalization of the field in the 1990s.[5] Manning's survey shows a field with ancient roots, and much recent success, driven, in part, by global changes such as the world wars, or the recent pulse of globalization, that have exposed the limitations of nationalist approaches to the past. Yet he argues that the growth of world history will remain insecure as long as the field lacks formal programs of graduate study that can give the field a clear definition within modern historical scholarship.

In part 2, Manning surveys recent developments in history and neighboring disciplines, which have forced historians to explore new themes, questions, and methodologies. He traces the rapid emergence of new sub-disciplines within history, such as the history of gender, which have undermined the pre-war consensus that politics and nations were the core themes of good historical research. He also traces the emergence of area studies, which, though they sometimes created new forms of insularity, widened the geographical, and sometimes the temporal, perspectives of American scholars in many fields, including history. Finally, he discusses the tentative emergence of global studies, attempts to grasp processes at global scales, both within and outside of the history discipline.

Part 3 offers a broad-ranging survey of recent writing in world history, classifying scholarship according to the historical sub-disciplines with which it is most closely aligned. This is in some ways an odd classification, but it makes the important point that most world historians still enter the field from some other specialization, carrying with them the questions, the methods, and the conceptual baggage of their earlier specializations, whether in political and economic history, cultural history, social history, or the history of technology or the environment.

This approach raises important and interesting questions: why, for example, have social history and cultural history had so little impact on the thinking of world historians? Is it because the data or the concepts they use are too firmly rooted in the nationalist paradigm? This part ends with a discussion of recent debates in world history, such as the remarkable discussions about the relative importance of European and Asian economies in the creation of a modern world.

Taken together, the first three parts of the book provide an extremely detailed tour of world history and its antecedents. The long lists of different themes, questions, and approaches will be invaluable to those trying to find their bearings in the field. On the other hand, the very thoroughness of the tour means that the book can occasionally read like a catalogue. Is this itself a comment on a field that is developing on so many fronts that it lacks cohesion?

In parts 4 and 5, Manning takes up some of the methodological and institutional issues that he sees as keys to the successful development of world history. These are perhaps the most original sections of the book. They argue forcefully against ad hocery in world history. Manning insists that the field needs to become more self-conscious about its methods, its logic, its research techniques, and the ways in which it becomes institutionalized. World history needs to clarify what distinguishes it from other fields, thematically, conceptually, and methodologically. "There does exist a characteristic method for analyzing world history. As widely as studies in world history may vary in the topics and disciplines of their research, they retain a certain commonality in their underlying approach, which distinguishes them in method and not only in scope from studies at localized and specialized levels" (p. 313). In part 4, Manning focuses on method, on the "logic of analysis" in world history. He begins with the issues of scale, the need to address world historical issues at multiple scales. This is a problem that can be taken for granted in other fields of historical scholarship, but not in world history. In this and other sections, Manning argues that world historians need to aim at peculiarly high standards of clarity and rigor as they choose their research agendas, as they formulate their hypotheses, and as they verify their conclusions. Not all world historians will accept the steps he proposes to maintain such rigor, but they count as a valuable first attempt to formalize the distinctive methods of thinking and scholarly approaches necessary to write good world history.

In part 5 of his book, Manning takes up the subject of institutionalizing world history scholarship through the construction of special programs of training in world history. This, he believes, is the key to the field's future success: "The single most important unmet need, in the establishment of a strong field of world history, is programs of graduate training" (p. 377). All world historians aware of this challenge will find much of interest and benefit in these sections, based on Manning's extensive experience in creating such a program. How should a graduate program in world history be structured? Should it grow out of area studies scholarship? Or should it emphasize global scholarship from the start? What distinctive research techniques should it emphasize? What research resources are available? Manning has as much experience with these problems as anyone in the field, and he has some strong opinions on the subject, so this discussion provides a wonderful introduction to some of the critical institutional and pedagogical challenges facing world historians today.

Navigating World History is such a complete survey of the field that it raises sharply the question, where is world history going? Manning is both exhilarated by the field's successes, and uncertain that they will be sustained. As he puts it, the growth of the field has been "spontaneous and somewhat disorderly." Now, he argues, the need is for more systematic development, through "a purposeful campaign of developing world-historical insights" (p. 371). The systematic and well-funded programs of graduate study that he calls for will certainly be a part of this process; but the conceptual incoherence of the field is also clear from Manning's book. He is aware of this, and attempts a fair bit of terminological tidying up; but he also knows that the problems go deeper than that. Graduate programs alone cannot solve these problems, for the danger is that they will merely reproduce the incoherent assortment of concepts and thought-habits from other disciplines that Manning describes so well. In addition to new programs of graduate study, world history needs to find the underlying questions and concepts that can give it more intellectual coherence. By providing such a fine survey of progress so far, *Navigating World History* should help clarify the institutional and conceptual challenges that face the field today.

Notes

[1]. Ross Dunn, *The New World History: A Teacher's Companion* (Boston and New York: Bedford, 2000).

[2]. Patrick Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640-1960* (Cambridge: Cam-

bridge University Press, 1982); *Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa, 1880-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); *History from South Africa: Alternative Visions and Practices* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); *Slave Trades, 1500-1800: Globalization of Forced Labor* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996).

[3]. Manning offers a brief summary of his own book in Patrick Manning "Navigating World History: A Synopsis." *World History Connected* 1, No. 1. Available at <http://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiuc.edu/1.1/manning.html>.

[4]. William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963; reprinted 1991, with a retrospective essay, "The Rise of the West after Twenty-five Years").

[5]. More than half of the items included in Manning's bibliography were published after 1990. How rapidly the field is growing in the United States is apparent from Ane Lintvedt, "The Demography of World History in the United States," *World History Connected* 1, no. 1 (Nov. 2003). Available at <http://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiuc.edu/1.1/lintvedt.html>.

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