

Title—Re-thinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam and World History
Author—Marshall Hodgson
Year—1993

Categories: World History, Empire, Islam

Place: The World

Time: 1700-1950

Argument Synopsis:

Marshall Hodgson's *Re-thinking World History* is a collection of essays focusing on world history methodology, as well as the role of Islam in a global context. He provides recommendations to break down ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism: avoid talking about the East and the West as a binary, avoid describing Europe as in the center stage of world history, and to switch to a map projection that does not directly favor the West like the Mercator projection does. In particular, he calls for a move beyond talking about the 'incomprehensibility of the East' and to use the 'incomprehensibility of cultures other than one's one' if necessary. Hodgson argues that the Western image of the world is the most perpetually reinforced. One difficulty illuminated by Hodgson regarding world history is that large-scale history questions are unavoidably impersonal.

The collection is divided into two parts. The first part is a collection of Hodgson's articles summarizing his views on the value of interregional history, the civilization as a conceptual formulation, and the weaknesses of the Eurocentric model as an approach to the global past. This section includes a critique of McNeil's *The Rise of the West*. The second part is a set of four articles on Islam and world history. This section includes what would have been the last three chapters of Hodgson's unfinished book "The Unity of World History," where he argues that world historians need to recognize the explanatory power of genuine interregional history, as opposed to historical generalizing that always stops at the frontiers of nations of culture areas.

By placing Muslim civilization in a world context, as opposed to strictly Middle Eastern, Hodgson argues both that Western scholars must transcend their narrowly regionalist perspective and that they should recognize the whole of Eurasia and Africa together. He highlights the importance of a focus on the 'cited zone' extending from Mediterranean basin to China as the only social space within which world historical processes involving Islam and Muslims can be properly understood.

Hodgson died in the late 1960s, thus this book was organized and published posthumously in 1993. Due to this, some of the writing is a bit clunky, as some chapters had not been fully edited before his death. His comprehensive study, "The Unity of World History," was never published.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Mature world history requires much more than studies of how civilizations and cultures have interacted with each other over time
- A development in one locality may have affects all across the world, producing a historical restructuring of the whole
- Critique of the belief that civilizations can be in possession of 'seminal traits' imprinted on cultural genes and passed along from one era to another