

Title—Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past
Author—Patrick Manning
Year—2003

Categories: World History, Pedagogy, Theory

Place: The World

Time: 2003

Argument Synopsis:

Manning attempts to present an overview and critique of world history as a field of scholarship and teaching. To do so, he reviews the narratives and analyses of historians who focus on large processes and connections in the past. Importantly, he is not proposing to have created an authorized version of all of world history. His book is organized around five principle objectives. Manning highlights how he organized the book in a way to make it useful as a reference book, with clearly defined chapters. First, he seeks to **define world history** in terms of the patterns of its current rapid development and its firm base in earlier writing, essentially focused on illustrating the long-term continuities in the conceptualization and study of world history. This first section looks at the period from the Renaissance to 1900, focusing on European writers that Manning identifies as having done early world history. He then turns to discuss the early twentieth century and identifies three landmark books from the period, written by William McNeill, Arnold Toynbee, and Oswald Spengler.

His second aim is to demonstrate how the current expansion of world history is part of a wider revolution in historical studies, pointing to the growth in area studies as an example. He identifies conceptual histories, such as economic or cultural history, as being part of this wider trend of growth in the historical field. Manning's third aim is to summarize recent advances in each of the several sub-fields of world history and examine the current main debates among world historians. In particular, he contrasts the advances in global, political, and economic history with recent developments in social history. His fourth goal is to enunciate the guiding rules for conducting a logistical analysis in world history. In other words, summarizing the historian's choices in selecting geographical scale, time period, and topical focus. Manning's fifth aim with his book is to offer a set of program and curriculum recommendations designed specifically for promoting successful and research in world history. To do so, he reviews the development of graduate programs in world history and illuminates resources for world historical study. Manning argues that world historians are not yet able to debate effectively with national historians due to a lack of an organized body of research. He proposes suggestions in his book that could help concretize the field, and thus allow it to more effectively counter the thrust of national history dominant in the academy. Manning aims to separate world history from the term connection, positing that the term only works when it operates alongside the terms: selection, comparison, modeling, and shifting perspectives.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Calls for the establishment of comprehensive institutions for research, study and teaching in world history to facilitate accelerated learning
- Specificity of the world history movement in the United States stems from its place as the global hegemon
- Five areas of practice in world history: past accomplishments, developing disciplines, old & new debates, global logic, and comprehensive study habits