

Title—A Companion to World History
Author—Douglas Northrup
Year—2012

Categories: World History, Methodologies
Place: The World
Time: 1500-Present

Argument Synopsis:

Northrup's *A Companion to World History* is an essay collection focused on world history as a field and methodology. World history is a relatively young field, especially when compared with other fields of history, and attempts to ask historical questions in new ways. Northrup seeks to provide readers with many variations of a perceptive observer, a proper spot from which to look, and a concept through which to 'see' and understand what was happening. In other words, he aims to orient readers to world history by showing the globe from as many point-of-views as possible. The collection contains over thirty essays, they do not represent descriptions of canonical topics, but rather provide starting points for further exploration. World history attempts to consider the way history would look if it was not so dominated by modern Western scholars and their concerns.

In terms of organization, the collection is broadly organized into two large sections. The first section discusses the making of world history as a field and of world historians to populate it. It also reveals the techniques and methods historians are currently trained to think around the world. The second section details the chief concepts, categories, and approaches that are employed today by world and global historians. This section emphasizes that world history does not only mean looking at the whole world, and it can be a set of methods utilized in on a smaller scale. Northrup notes that just as world history does not purport to discuss everything that has ever happened, the essay collection does not attempt to survey the field exhaustively.

A part of Northrup's effort to synthesize the field of world history includes overviewing the existing works that have attempted the same. He finds that most of these works include at least two key ideas. He identifies these as the importance of **scope and mobility**. World history is intimately concerned with the importance of scale, especially the interconnecting of different scales. For Northrup, mobility references that the past is fundamentally shaped and concerned with the movements, relationships, and connections of people. He argues that world history brings multiple stories together by comparing or connecting individuals and communities separated in space or time. He warns against focusing only on the simple expansion of scale, noting that cross-regional, cross-temporal, and global points of view are essential and often overlooked perspectives. In his discussion of the different methods utilized in world history, he acknowledges the dominance of state-produced sources in the archives. However, he points to the tools of subaltern studies, which have proven the ability to read these sources 'against the grain.' He concludes by noting that the field of world history is still in formation, and the goal of the field is to illuminate humanity's history.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- The past is fundamentally shaped and concerned with movements, relationships, and connections of people
- World history at its heart denies the presumably foundational character of the nation-state
- World history seeks to show the world's past if it were written by all its people