

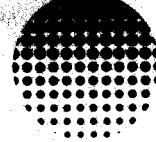
# One World

## World History in the College Curriculum

By Joan Francis

“The Pope Visits Brazil”; “Japanese Trade Mission in U.S.”; “David Duke Makes Headlines in Louisiana and London”; “More Clothes Arrive From Korea”; “Japanese Toyotas Made in U.S.”; “Two Hundred World Leaders Meet for Earth Summit in Rio.” Headlines like these show that modern travel and trade have transformed diverse cultures into one world. To be equipped for the next century, today’s college student must gain in-depth knowledge of the various nations that comprise our world.

Whether to teach world history is now a source of lively debate. One would think that with headlines like those above, this controversy would be resolved. But as colleges seek to improve and diversify their curricula to prepare students for the 21st century, the question is still hotly discussed. Fueling the debate is turf protectionism, the quest for multiculturalism, and calls for gender sensitivity and inclusiveness. In addition, a new factor, Afrocentrism, has challenged the relevance of teaching global history in the same old way.



However, as various countries of the world embrace democratic ideas, and others seek alternative approaches to life, the teaching of world history becomes more of a mandate than an option. In the United States, a country with a long history of accepting immigrants from other nations, the argument has smoldered for a long time. It burst onto center stage as the world, in the quincennial years of Columbus' voyages, reconsiders the implications of his actions. Did he cause two worlds to collide? Or did he set up an exchange? A knowledge of world history should help to clarify some of these issues.

The idea that everyone ought to be knowledgeable about world history rather than only Western civilization has been discussed for over a decade. Unfortunately, for too long Western Civilization courses have been the only history courses required by most colleges in the U.S. and other countries. Nations influenced by Eurocentric traditions have upheld the notion that the West was best and would always be best, and have traditionally adopted an approach

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### *Why every student should study world history in college.*

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to history that was very Western or Western-oriented.

But with new realities come a new way of teaching history. Education today should address that new reality through changes in college curricula. This change must begin at the institutions where future leaders and teachers are trained. The shift must begin at the college level.

#### **Why Study World History?**

Why study world history in college? For the same reasons students should study history in general. David Sweet expressed this well when he stated:

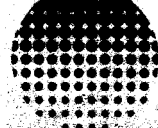
*Perhaps the best argument for a program in World History is that in the end history is all one piece—that it is the whole story of humanity, seen in the context of humanity's changing relation-*

*ship to nature. This includes an acknowledgement that all parts of that story are of importance to the whole, and that they have full meaning only when seen somehow in relation to the whole.<sup>1</sup>*

World history enables people to see themselves not as isolated and apart from the human race, but a part of it, involved in the issues that confront all humanity. The way society reacts to new ideas, the influence of one's environment on that reaction, and the interplay of old and new ideas are important issues for every civilization. The narrow views of earlier civilizations resulted from infrequent contact with their neighbors. Today provincialism is neither excusable nor tolerable. The ignorance of others that breeds distrust, contempt, and arrogance must not be perpetuated in today's shrinking world. But before young citizens can learn respect for others, they must learn about the views, successes, failures, and inventiveness of people in other nations and eras.

World history can provide the remedy for intolerance and dogmatism. As students learn about the wisdom of other peoples and philosophies, they will recognize that throughout history humanity has sought answers to similar questions and has had to cope with similar struggles. This understanding will help them to be more tolerant and eliminate much of the suspicion with which people view others who are dissimilar from themselves.

The need to understand the history and customs of other parts of the world is more critical at a time when the news circulates so quickly. Bombings in Sarajevo are instantly broadcast on our radios; the impact of a holiday in Tokyo is felt on Wall Street; and the Gulf War was quickly projected on TV screens around the world. Millions watched satellite broadcasts of the Israeli and Palestinian peace talks. But these events make sense only when seen in context. Judged against traditional Western standards, the Arab-Israeli meetings seemed to be endless rounds of futile meetings. But to other eyes, these meetings, with their posturing and positioning to save face, were brilliant



moves.

Niara Sudarkasa points out one result of failing to teach world history:

*One of the reasons why our students have little respect for non-Western countries, particularly the most underdeveloped ones, is that they study these areas only as impoverished nations with a history rooted in conquest and colonialism and a future made bleak by the prospect of continued underdevelopment and dependency. A very different view of these nations emerges if students are encouraged to appreciate their contributions to world history.<sup>2</sup>*

When American students learn about individual freedoms and the Bill of Rights, they should also be aware that the Japanese and Chinese emphasis of putting the group rather than the individual first has served about a fourth of humanity well for more than a thousand years. As students prepare to participate in the events of the next century, they must understand the history and current events of the countries that encircle our globe.

### **Promoting Tolerance**

World history helps to promote tolerance of the various people of the world. Not only has technology brought us closer, but it has also changed the demographics of the world through extensive travel. Scarcely any part of the world is homogenous. Through travel and immigration one meets different cultures and languages everywhere. For people to get along together, they need to learn about other cultures, values, and practices.

World history classes help students appreciate the different ways of accomplishing similar tasks, i.e. government, economics, and food preparation. Through exposure students learn to appreciate and understand diversity. As Mark Welter states, "World history innately avoids the traditional, unilinear view of the world community. . . . The path that one nation or culture takes in confronting a universal—a social, political, economic, religious, or aesthetic need is exposed as *one* workable solution not *the* answer."<sup>3</sup>

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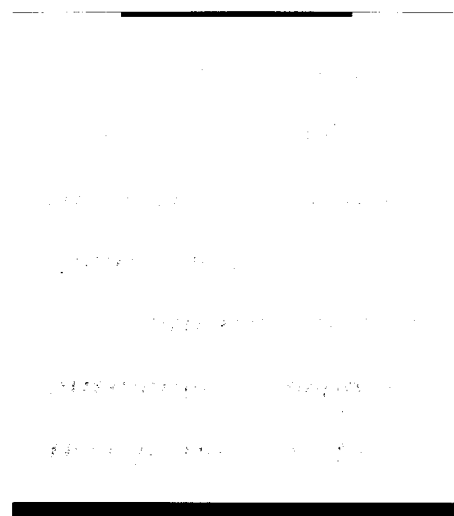
Another rationale for teaching world history is to sharpen awareness of the world's interdependence. Although the news media highlights contemporary global connections, the educational system sometimes lags behind.

*Math and science seldom recognize debts to other times and cultures. Most students are not conscious of the fact that their education is overwhelmingly about their own group. This builds identity*

*among themselves but excludes other members of the human family. . . . To deal with global reality, students need a broader curriculum with appropriate goals. . . . Students need to be introduced to humanity's collective memory, world history.<sup>4</sup>*

On another level, in the structuring of courses, one geographical area can no longer be presented as automatically superior. Contributions from many parts of the world will have to be included. For example, Africa's contribution to the Mediterranean lands will be highlighted, as well as the nature and importance of Islam on Africa and other parts of the world. Knowledge of how Chinese innovations were spread to the Americas and other colonial empires would encourage respect for other cultures. Students cannot truly comprehend either Western or non-Western history unless they have a global overview that encompasses both.

Above all, both genders of humanity need to be underscored in the teaching of history. Women must be given a central place in the story of humanity.

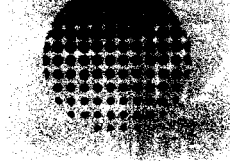


central place in the story of humanity. Their contributions must be recognized in order for the world to utilize all its potential in the next century.

World history courses must not be taught as simply a collection of facts about the various regions of the world. Rather, they must emphasize the world events that have shaped the various areas. As Stavrianos has pointed out, world history should analyze the essential characteristics and experiences of the major world regions and consider those forces or movements that have had a worldwide impact.<sup>5</sup> For example, the introduction of writing, the expansion of the East, the impact of diseases, the roots of European expansion, and the development of the global economy all force researchers to ask different questions. Searching for answers to these questions will enable the student to benefit fully from the rich heritage of humanity.

In the teaching of world history, as in all history classes, teachers need to guide students to think critically, evaluate evidence carefully, and to be aware of authors' frames of reference as they handle information from any source. For, as John Hope Franklin states, "The writing of history reflects the interests, predilection and even prejudices of a given generation."<sup>6</sup>

Adventist colleges can bring the unique perspective of the church's global commission to the teaching of world history. This is illustrated by Atlantic Union College's mission statement,



which gives as one of its objectives for students: “to understand their own culture and other cultures, past and present, and their patterns of thought, linguistic structures and aesthetic principles.”<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, this mission has often been packaged in the culture of the messenger. Many well-meaning missionaries have ignored the local customs and culture. In other areas our work has been hindered by the ignorance of misled zealots. Some of these problems could have been eliminated if such persons had understood the value of other cultures.

Properly taught, world history helps to inspire appreciation for the humanity of all human beings. It inculcates a spirit of tolerance and respect for unity and diversity, as well as a recognition that change and continuity are a vital part of the human condition.

In the context of Adventist Global Mission, there is no time for mistakes. If

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the church is to take this mission to the entire world, messengers from many nations will be sharing their faith. Consequently, the aims for teaching world history—tolerance for others; acceptance of diversity; the recognition that there are many ways “to cook rice”; and the knowledge that change and continuity are integral to the human

condition—will match the aims of Global Mission.

To serve the world is to first understand the people of the world. One excellent way of preparing for this is through the study of world history. Students in our schools must learn that “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). <sup>8</sup>

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