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World History in the California History-Social Science Framework

California's State Board of Education makes available to K-12 educators several publications to guide curriculum development and classroom practice. The two most comprehensive documents are the History-Social Science Standards, which outline what students should know and be able to do, and the History-Social Science Framework, which guides teachers in designing and implementing courses of study. These two documents are intended to complement each other. The California framework represents a loftier commitment to world history education than do the standards and guidelines of many states. However, owing partly to the way both the framework and the standards evolved starting in the 1980s, the most recent framework revision, in 2017, to which I contributed,[1] did not go entirely as I had hoped. As a result, when the editors of *Social Studies Review* invited me to contribute an essay on the revised world history courses, I responded by writing an article published in 2018.[2]

Here, I revisit that article, noting the California Department of Education's decision to start a new review of the framework in 2023, a four-year process. I recount the tangled relationship between the framework and the standards over time and how it affected the revision process. I review the improvements 2017 edition made in its approach to world history, despite frustrating political restraints. And I offer some suggestions for rethinking that approach more radically when the new framework revision gets underway this year. This essay argues that K-12 world history education has come a long way in California and other states since the 1980s, but that if world history educators are not vigilant the teaching field can for a combination of intellectual, cultural, and political reasons easily lag well behind disciplinary advances.

From 1980 to 2017

Publication of guidelines for world history in the 2017 revision of the *California History-Social Science Framework*[3] represented an important stage in a process that, as mentioned above, goes back to the 1980s. In 1987, after two years of development, the

California State Board of Education (SBE) approved guidelines for curriculum and instruction in history and the social sciences. Bill Honig, the Superintendent of Public Instruction at the time, appointed Charlotte Crabtree of UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Diane Ravitch of Columbia University's Teachers College as the chief writers of the framework's inaugural edition in 1998. The document represented a remarkable endorsement of history education. It advised study of world history in grades six, seven, and ten, plus three years of United States history and one year of California history.[4]

The SBE's history turn doubtless reflected the moral panic that seized both educators and political leaders in the mid-1980s over the apparent historical cluelessness of American youth. Diane Ravitch and Chester Finn confirmed the public's worst fears in their 1987 book *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know*.[5] Distress over this national stigma produced two academic commissions, several university initiatives, and new efforts to bring K-12 and college historians together to address the problem. In Sacramento, the legislature approved the California History-Social Science Project (CHSSP) and other discipline-based programs to advance teachers' professional development. In 1988 the National Endowment for the Humanities under the chairmanship of Lynn Cheney funded creation of the National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA.

The History-Social Science Framework's call for three years of world history in middle and high school exceeded the requirements in any other state. Many internationally minded teachers supported this curriculum, convinced that the subject could no longer be taught as a slightly more multicultural version of Western civilization. Hadn't scholarly knowledge of all world regions grown immensely since World War II? Didn't America's international leadership demand curriculum that included global history and geography? Social activists also joined in, contending that the quest for inclusion and equality in the United States required that children explore the deep ancestries of all American ethno-racial groups, not just people of European origin.

Most advocates of world-girdling history education assumed however that curriculum reform would build out from, not dismantle, the conventional Western civ model. Educators generally accepted the idea that **"**Western civilization**,"** a term that came into wide use in the United States after World War I, was a historical entity that existed in time and space. American academics also awarded it status as a legitimate focus of teaching, complementing studies of the nation-state, which the nineteenth-century founders of the modern historical profession had regarded as an obvious and natural unit of investigation. After World War II, educators who began to press for more globally inclusive world history nonetheless continued to accept Western civilization, including its presumed Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Greco-Roman antecedents, as a bounded field of study**.** They insisted, however, on the inclusion of several other discrete

entities, mainly China, India, the Middle East, Pre-Contact America, and Africa south of the Sahara.

Owing partly to the influence of the social sciences and indeed to the way scholars had constructed the idea of Western civilization itself, history educators tended to think of these new units of study as "cultures." That is, they had in some measure the qualities of organisms, possessing fundamental, essential, and to some extent permanent characteristics. Teachers should therefore emphasize study of the ancient and medieval histories of these cultures, periods when they acquired their seminal traits. But ironically, many educators who denounced world history limited to Western civilization nevertheless accepted the notion that civilizations in other parts of the world had very little history between 1500 and 1950 that was worth studying. After 1500 the syllabus could justifiably turn back to Europe, where many great things were happening. In this light, teachers and their students had permission to enter what the historian James Blaut called "the European tunnel of time," a channel that sequenced study of European developments from the Renaissance to World War II.[6] Only in schoolwork for the post-war era, when many "new nations" emerged and the Cold War imposed itself on most of them, did most educators agree that Africa, Asia, and Latin America should be reintroduced in some detail.

It is no surprise therefore that the 1988 framework adhered closely to the model of world history education I have just described: steadfastly multiculturalist for eras up to 1500, including grade six and part of grade seven, and decidedly Eurocentric after that, including part of grade seven and most of grade ten. At first, teachers struggled to adapt to the new curricular regime. Help came from such institutions as the CHSSP and the California International Studies Project, which set up professional development centers around the state. In 1990, Houghton Mifflin published a K-8 history-social studies textbook series designed to support the new framework. On the national scale, California's history-centered curriculum earned much praise from professional historians, traditionalist educators, and patriotic Americans, thereby calming public anxiety over young people's failure to identify James Madison, Winston Churchill, or Mahatma Gandhi.

In the mid-1990s, following a right-wing media assault on the newly published National Standards for History, which deterred nervous education officials, including Bill Clinton's Secretary of Education, from accepting them, almost every state initiated its own program to write new history and social studies standards.[7] California quickly climbed onto this bandwagon. The SBE determined that clear guidance for curriculum development, assessments, and instructional materials required lists of rigorous content standards specifying what students needed to know and be able to do. The existing framework was to serve as a crucial complementary document, providing a blueprint for study of specific eras, peoples, and topics. Although the SBE, which approved new standards in late 1998, declared that the framework should be revised to align with

them, the legislature did not fund that project. The California Department of Education (CDE), however, used the framework as its primary model for creating the standards. That meant that the agency produced standards that in fact aligned well with the framework written more than a decade earlier. In 1997, 2001, and 2005, the CDE authorized some framework revisions, but course topics and descriptions, including those for the three world history years, remained mostly unchanged.

In 2009 the legislature finally approved an extensive framework review. Unfortunately, this revision took more than seven years to accomplish. It came to an abrupt halt within months of its launch owing to state budget shortages during the Great Recession, when Arnold Schwarzenegger was governor. Serious work resumed only in 2015, the drafting task falling to the CHSSP. Nancy McTygue, the Executive Director of that organization, reported to the History-Social Science Subject Matter Committee, a group managed under the Instructional Quality Commission. Following the approval of that body and the SBE, the new and much enlarged framework appeared online in late 2017. This is the document that teachers across the state currently use to guide their instructional programs.

Writing the 2017 guidelines, however, involved a serious constraint. The legislature had never funded a revision of the 1998 standards. But because the framework and the standards were supposed to complement each other to the benefit teachers, the framework revision could not start from scratch in designing conceptual structure, course sequence, and subject matter. It had to remain consistent with the existing standards. This was an ironic situation because the 1998 standards were based fundamentally on the original framework of 1988. Thus, the 2017 document has unavoidably retained much of the region-centered, multiculturalist, semi-Eurocentric structure of the original world history scheme. The new guidelines were anachronistically tied to a document produced three decades earlier, when serious rethinking of world history as both a school and university subject was just getting underway.

Since the 1980s, the world history discipline has opened many new frontiers, manifested in a stream of scholarly literature, many novel topics of study, new ways of configuring time and space, and numerous, ongoing conceptual and interpretive debates among professionals—all of this ferment reflecting the extraordinary transformations taking place in global economy, society, and environment. To some California teachers, therefore, the framework editions produced from 1988 to 2005 look old-fashioned indeed.

Revisions 2015-2017

Fortunately, however, the large group of educators that contributed to the framework rewrite in 2015-2017 included several people who not only taught world history but also

participated in the movement to rethink the discipline (full disclosure: I was one of them). The CHSSP officers indeed made sure that several of the recent advances in world history scholarship and teaching would significantly inform the 2017 guidelines. The tables below compare the course description titles of the 2005 edition, which included just a few changes from the 1988 one, with those in the new iteration.

World History Frameworks Old and New	
2005 Framework	**2017 Framework**
Grade 6	**Grade 6**
Introduction (untitled)	Introduction (untitled)
	Global Overview (untitled)
Early Humankind and the Development of Human Societies	Early Humankind and the Development of Human Societies
The Beginnings of Civilization in the Near East and Africa: Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Kush	The Early Civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Kush
The Foundations of Western Ideas: The Ancient Hebrews and Greeks	The Ancient Israelites (Hebrews)
	Ancient Greece
West Meets East: The Early Civilizations of India and China	The Early Civilizations of India
	The Early Civilizations of China
East Meets West: Rome	The Development of Rome

World History Frameworks Old and New	
2005 Framework	**2017 Framework**
Grade 7	**Grade 7**
Introduction (untitled)	Introduction (untitled)
Connecting with Past Learnings: Uncovering the Remote Past	The World in 300 CE
Connecting with Past Learnings: The Fall of Rome	Rome and Christendom, 300 to 1200
Growth of Islam	Southwestern Asia, 300 to 1200: Persia and the World of Islam
African States in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times	South Asia, 300 to 1200
Civilizations of the Americas	East Asia, 300 to 1300: China and Japan
China	The Americas, 300 to 1490
Japan	West Africa, 900 to 1600
Medieval Societies: Europe and Japan	Sites of Encounter in the Medieval World, 1200-1490
Europe during the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Scientific Revolution	Global Convergence, 1450-1750
Early Modern Europe: The Age of Exploration to the Enlightenment	Impact of Ideas, 1500-1750
Linking Past to Present	

World History Frameworks Old and New	
2005 Framework	**2017 Framework**
Grade 10	**Grade 10**
Introduction (untitled)	Introduction (untitled)
Unresolved Problems of the Modern World	The World in 1750
Connecting with Past Learnings: The Rise of Democratic Ideas	1750-1917: Revolutions Reshape the World: Democratic Revolutions
The Industrial Revolution	Industrial Revolution
The Rise of Imperialism and Colonialism: A Case Study of India	The Rise of Imperialism and Colonialism
World War I and Its Consequences	Causes and Consequences of World War I
	Effects of World War I
Totalitarianism in the Modern World: Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia	Rise of Totalitarian Governments after World War I
Nazi Germany	
Stalinist Russia	
World War II: Its Causes and Consequences	Causes and Consequences of World War II
	International Developments in the Post-World War II World
Nationalism in the Contemporary World • The Former Soviet Union and China • Middle East: Israel and Syria • Sub-Saharan Africa: Ghana and South Africa • Latin America: Mexico and Brazil	Nation-Building in the Contemporary World

	Economic Integration and Contemporary Revolutions in Information, Technology, and Communications • The New Geopolitics • The Impact of Globalization • Rights, Religion, and Identity • A New Role for the West

The grade six list of course units begins with a global overview of the eras the course embraces, a feature absent in the 2005 edition. This section aims to equip teachers with a description of large-scale patterns of change, providing a wide chronological and spatial context for studying particular societies. The seventh and tenth grade descriptions offer much shorter but nonetheless useful overview sections. These two courses also include, unlike the 2005 edition, synchronic descriptions of "the world in 300 CE" and "the world in 1750." These units highlight hemispheric or global developments in play at each course's historical starting point. They should help students situate study of particular places and events in larger frames of meaning, an approach well supported by cognitive research on how young people remember and understand history lessons.[8]

The units for all three world history grades are generally longer than they were in earlier framework editions. This expanded text represents greater attention both to topics addressed insufficiently or not at all in earlier versions and to developments that cut across conventional regional borders. The descriptions for grades six and seven, for example, endorse much weightier investigation of Persia in world history, a region that for centuries was the commercial and cultural pivot on which much of Afroeurasia turned. Owing in part to a surge of public comment on the framework as the revision proceeded, the middle school courses also improved the presentation of ancient and medieval Indian history, especially Hindu thought and practice. Grade seven includes an innovative feature that introduces students to "sites of encounter," that is, to a series of specified cities or regions—Sicily, Cairo, Calicut, Quanzhou, and several others—that in particular eras were not only centers of human achievement but also flourishing hubs of interregional commercial, social, and cultural exchange.

In the 2005 edition the Industrial Revolution description was one paragraph long, almost all of it focused on England. The new document offers a much-expanded text and acknowledges, at least implicitly, that industrialization was an event that happened "in the world" from the very start. The course description declares, for example, that industrialization "dramatically changed the way of life for millions of people who were not directly involved in factory work. Miners, independent farmers, and plantation workers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America were essential to the creation

of commodities produced in factories."[9] Moreover, as the table for grade ten shows, the descriptions bring students up to date with a final unit on the world of the past few decades, including detailed recommendations for teaching about globalization.

In sum, the world history courses in the framework present new knowledge, include recent scholarly interpretations, and suggest some ways of thinking about the human past on interregional or global scales. The world history research and teaching fields, however, continue to run well ahead of the framework's basic conceptual approach, a circumstance owing partly, as I have described, to the imperative of preserving consistency with the 1998 standards and by extension with the first framework of ten years earlier. In recent years world history educators have seriously questioned the merit of world history survey courses dedicated mainly to coverage of different civilizations and regions, none of them systematically linked together in time, space, or historical pattern. This traditional strategy usually ignores many large-scale but nonetheless important developments that cut through civilizational boxes and put the world into world history.

Some influential educators are persuaded that the discipline must continue to advance toward more integrative study, courses that endeavor to conceive of the human story from Paleolithic times to the present as a single, unilinear narrative. This story must of course have "chapters," that is, units requiring study of particular periods, places, and peoples—including civilizations, nation-states, and localities. Nevertheless, these units, presented perhaps in overlapping but nonetheless chronological sequence rather than region-by-region, would ideally center on one or more "big picture" developments, for example, the simultaneous spread of Buddhism and Christianity in different directions between 200-600 CE, the rise of a world economy after 1500, or the global consequences of the Little Ice Age. Teachers and students would also benefit from investigating these big pictures by deploying "central questions," leitmotifs to which classrooms return repeatedly, connecting world-scale developments (e.g., modern industrialization) to relatively smaller-scale ones (e.g., changing urban life in Britain). This fundamentally unitary approach to the human past liberates students from climbing up and down numerous chronological ladders, and it introduces them to particular peoples not simply because those societies have to be "covered" but because they sparked events, consciously or not, that have had indisputable significance for the human race in general. And because this approach organizes study at the broadest level by big questions rather than by regions, teachers and students will more effortlessly find their way to comparing developments in different societies and to investigation of trans-cultural interactions, important events in their largest contexts (e.g., the Black Death as an Afroeurasian catastrophe), and the movement of people, goods, and ideas across continents and oceans.

Viewing the past on this planetary scale also facilitates study of unconventional configurations of regions, for example the Indian Ocean or Atlantic basins, as "places"

where humans engaged in dense and voluminous interchange at particular periods of the past. The California framework refers on numerous pages to the Indian Ocean and its trade networks, but it does not direct students to investigate the whole sea basin as a dynamic region in itself. Similarly, grades seven and ten consider Atlantic slavery and the slave trade on many pages. But if teachers wish to introduce their classes in some detail to large processes involved in the making of the Atlantic world as a whole—a web of interrelations involving Africans, North and South Americans, Europeans, and Asians, they will have to seek other resources beyond those the framework provides.

With the next major curriculum revision in California scheduled to in 2023, its legislature should, in its wisdom, amply fund a world history project that simultaneously unshackles both the framework and the standards from outmoded conceptions prevalent in the 1980s and incorporates the most innovative and up-to-date ideas and interpretations of the field. And as educators know, many world historical concepts and pedagogical strategies on the cutting edge today will by that time have changed again.

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Notes

[1] I played a modest part in revising the world history courses that the framework specifies for grades six, seven, and ten.

[2] Ross E. Dunn, "The World History Courses in the New Framework," *Social Studies Review* 56 (2017-2018), 25-30.

[3] History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools (Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2017).

[4] History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools (Sacramento: California Department of Education, 1988).

[5] Diane Ravitch and Chester E. Finn, Jr., What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know: A Report on the First National Assessment of History and Literature (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

[6] J. M. Blaut, The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History (New York: Guilford Press. 1993), 3-6.

[7] Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

[8] Robert B. Bain, "Challenges of Teaching and Learning World History," in Douglas Northrop, ed., *A Companion to World History* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 111-127; Denis Shemilt, "Drinking an Ocean and Pissing a Cupful," in Linda Symcox and Arie Wilschut, eds., *National History Standards: The Problem of the Canon and the Future of Teaching History* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2009), 141-210.

[9] History-Social Science Framework, 2017.