

# Unit 1

## Maps, Time, and World History

### Section 1

#### Unit Materials

Questions To Consider

Question 1.

What kinds of geographical and chronological frameworks do world historians use?

Question 2.

What are the units of analysis used by world historians, and how do these differ from those used in other fields of history?

Question 3.

Why are so many historians interested in studying world history at this particular moment in our own history?

Question 4.

What is the purpose of studying world history?

### The Big Picture

#### How is this topic related to Increasing Integration?

World historians try to integrate the human past into a comprehensive big picture that emphasizes the shared experiences of all humans.

#### How is this topic related to Proliferating Difference?

World historians also understand that the human past is marked by important differences between peoples across space and time, and try to place that difference in a common historical context.

### Unit Purpose

- World history is a way of seeing the world and understanding history through multiple perspectives and narratives. It is not about assembling the histories of all places and times into one grand narrative.
- World historians, like all historians, organize the past using both chronological and spatial structures in order to make history meaningful and comprehensible.

- World historians also pay close attention to the ways that the chronological and spatial structures they use shape both the questions they ask about the past and the way the past is understood.

## Unit Content Overview

World history is a way of seeing the world—a worldview. It asks us to look for global patterns as we consider what has drawn humanity together. It also asks us to ponder what accounts for human difference through time. World history offers a way of grasping the Big Picture—seeing the history of the world not as separate elements but as an integrated whole. In order to capture both the diversity and similarities of human experience, world history draws on case studies. These studies illustrate how people have faced global challenges in interacting with each other and the environment. Because of the breadth of world history, decisions must be made about organization and selection. By taking a thematic approach, by paying attention to space, scale, and time, and by using appropriate units of analysis, world history can be made meaningful in many ways to many people.

World historians recognize that there are multiple narratives and multiple perspectives through which to understand world history. The themes for this course involve the fundamental questions of how people and societies through time have experienced both “accelerating integration” as well as “proliferating differences.” This unit specifically focuses on the spatial and temporal frameworks world historians use to organize their discipline. Through an exploration of historical map projections, it illustrates how spatial constructs influence the ways we understand, interpret, and portray the past. In addition, it demonstrates how the units of analysis historians choose to investigate the past—whether civilizations, area studies, cities, water regions, or nation states—influence the stories told about history as well as the questions that are asked. Finally, this unit discusses how world historians organize their studies through temporal frameworks like periodization, chronology, and sequencing. This temporal dimension allows historians to interpret how things change over time. It also illustrates how a society’s worldview might be affected by linear or cyclical understandings of time.

## Unit References

Deborah Smith Johnston, *Rethinking World History: Conceptual Frameworks for the World History Survey*, (2003), available through UMI, Microfilm dissertation network.

Jerry Bentley, “Sea and Ocean Basins as Frameworks of Historical Analysis,” *Geographical Review* 89, no.2 (April 1999): 215-25.

Arif Dirlik, “The Asia-Pacific Idea: Reality and Representation in the Invention of a Regional Structure,” *Journal of World History* 3, no.1 (1992): 55-79.

David Christian, “The Case for ‘Big History,’” *Journal of World History* (Fall 1991): 223-38.

Peter Nabokov, *A Forest of Time: American Indian Ways of History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Nancy Farriss, “Remembering the Future, Anticipating the Past: History, Time, and Cosmology among the Maya of Yucatan,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29 (1987): 566-93.

Karen Wigen and Martin Lewis, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

## Global Historical Context

- Time Period: All-inclusive
- This is a unit designed to provide an overall framework for the study of world history, so its chronological scope is all-inclusive. However, it is important to note that just as European national histories in the nineteenth century were the product of the rise of the nation-state, world history is a product of the forces and processes of globalization in the twentieth century.

### AP Themes

- Explores change and continuity by demonstrating the ways that perceptions of time and space have changed over time and vary by culture.
- Examines technology and environment by looking at map-making tools and techniques, and the ways these affect human perceptions of the world.
- Discusses cultural and intellectual developments by comparing the different ways societies have approached the concept of time and periodization.

## Related Units

- Unit 2. History and Memory: How are history and memory different? Topics in this unit range from the celebration of Columbus Day to the demolition of a Korean museum to the historical re-interpretation of Mayan civilization. This unit explores the ways historians, nations, families, and individuals capture, exploit, and know the past, demonstrating the dynamic nature of historical practice and knowledge. It is related to Unit 1 because world historians also have multiple ways of understanding the past, each of which determines how the past will be told and remembered.
- Unit 18. Rethinking the Rise of the West: How does historical scholarship change over time, and why do the perspectives of historians shift? This unit recaps the economic and political events that led to the rise of the West, but examines and re-examines those events through differing opinions of its causes, reflecting changes in historical interpretation. It is related to Unit 1 because it demonstrates some of the ways historians have attempted to come up with comprehensive frameworks through which to understand the human story.
- Unit 26. World History and Identity: How have global forces redefined both individual and group identities in the modern world? This unit examines the transnational identity that emerged from the Chinese diaspora and compares it to a newly re-defined national Chechen identity forged through war with Russia. It is related to Unit 1 because it locates the study and practice of world history within a specific historical context of accelerating global interaction.

## **Section 2**

### **Video-Related Materials**

#### **Video Segment 1: Cartographical Constructs**

This segment uses historical maps to demonstrate that maps can be tools for understanding the worldviews of the people and societies that make them. The Mercator projection is a good example of this phenomenon. In 1569, Gerardus Mercator published his famous world map, which allowed mariners to plot distances more accurately. The Mercator is a “conformal” map projection, which means that it represents shapes much the way they appear on the globe, but it distorts relative size. One result of the Mercator projection was that its distorted portrayal of the northern hemisphere as much larger than it really is played into European notions about their importance in the world and in world history. In 1974, a cartographer named Arno Peters unveiled a projection meant to redress the Eurocentrism of the Mercator projection. This projection accurately represented the size of the world’s landmasses, but it distorted their correct shapes. Given the difficulties inherent in using a flat map to represent a sphere, neither the Mercator nor the Peters projection accurately portrays the world. They do, however, communicate distinct worldviews that influence our understanding of the world — and therefore shape our understanding of world history. For world historians, maps are both useful tools and historical artifacts that reveal how different cultures have understood the world.

#### **Video Segment 2: Units of Analysis**

The units of analysis historians use to organize their studies help to dictate the questions asked and the stories told about history. This segment explores some of these units of analysis and the implications they have for world history. It begins with the nation-state, because this unit of analysis has dominated the historical profession since the emergence of history as a professional discipline in the nineteenth century. World historians, however, have advocated the use of alternative units of analysis in attempts to move beyond a nation-state framework. These alternatives include civilizations, the environment, systems, and area studies, as well as sea and ocean basins. By considering, for example, the Mediterranean region as a whole instead of the independent countries that comprise it, historians can focus on commonalities and connections across conventional political borders. By focusing on such regions, historians can pay attention to local and regional experiences as well as larger global processes such as trade, disease, and migration.

#### **Video Segment 3: Chronological Constructs**

Periodization can be defined as the way historians organize time. This segment looks at this concept and demonstrates that the ways we organize time influence the ways we think about the past. For example, when historians organize the period 1492-1800 into a framework known as the “Age of Exploration,” European events and patterns become the focus. In other words, such a framework means that both earlier and later explorations—including the early Pacific voyages of the Polynesians, the movement of Malay sailors around the Indian Ocean, the tribute trips of Zheng He, and recent space exploration—are ignored. For historians to ask global questions that step out of traditional boxes, they need to vary the units of time they study just as they vary the spatial units they analyze. It is also clear that time is not perceived the same way across time or in all cultures. Societies are as diverse in their interpretation of the nature of time as they are in their belief systems and histories. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, there is an emphasis on linear, progressive time that will result in the coming of the Messiah. Other cultures view time cyclically. It is important for world historians to be conscious about the ways they use time. It is also

important for world historians to understand the ways cultures have understood time in both the past and present.

### **Perspectives on the Past: Big History**

What are the limits of world history? Should world history only be the story of humanity, or should historians be concerned with the longer history of the Earth, the solar system, and even the universe? One trend within world history is to write “big history” that looks beyond human history to incorporate much larger time spans, species, and processes.

### **Video Details**

#### **Who Is Interviewed**

- Deborah Smith Johnston
- Jerry H. Bentley
- Ross Dunn

#### **Primary Source Materials Featured in the Video**

- Arno Peters, twentieth-century cartographer
- Fernand Braudel, twentieth-century historian
- Lakota elder

#### **Program Contents**

<b>Begins</b>	<b>Ends</b>	<b>Contents</b>
00:00	01:36	Show tease, show opening credits
01:37	05:09	Program overview/introduction
05:10	11:54	Video Segment 1: <i>Cartographical Constructs</i>
11:55	16:48	Video Segment 2: <i>Units of Analysis</i>
16:49	23:51	Video Segment 3: <i>Chronological Constructs</i>
23:52	26:10	Perspectives on the Past: <i>Big History</i>
26:11	28:25	Show close and program credits