



*When Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, an ardent Cold War warrior, asked Prime Minister Nehru, "Are you with us or against us?" Nehru is reported to have answered, "Yes." In the same vein, if asked, "Do you support **National Standards for World History** or do you think it is too encyclopedic?" we might reply, "Of course." Let's steer questions about Standards away from simplistic judgments and consider how this document removes Asia from the invidious category Eric Wolf calls "peoples without history" while at the same time offering a more accurate history of the West. In addition, let's examine how the document's "Standards in Historical Thinking" can help teachers conceptualize and organize an integrated world history course.*

## BEYOND US AND THE OTHER *Standards for Mainstreaming Asia*

BY JEAN JOHNSON

**N***ational Standards for World History: Exploring Paths to the Present* grew out of the governors' call in 1989 for National Education Goals. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act that President Clinton signed into law in March 1994, identified history as one of the five school subject areas for which students should be able to demonstrate "competency over challenging subject matter." Utilizing funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the U.S. Department of Education, the UCLA Center for History in the Schools "sought to develop broad national consensus for what constitutes excellence in the teaching and learning of history in the nation's schools."<sup>1</sup> Two years of extensive work by hundreds of educators including gifted classroom history teachers, supervisors, state social studies

specialists and academic historians, and a broad array of professional and scholarly organizations, resulted in *National Standards for World History*, a unified chronological history of the world.

The first section offers five "Standards in Historical Thinking": Chronological Thinking, Historical Comprehension, Historical Analysis and Interpretation, Historical Research Capabilities, and Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-Making. These include skills such as establishing historical succession and cause and effect, analyzing historical perspectives and competing narratives, differentiating between historical facts and historical interpretation, gathering and interrogating historical data, and holding interpretations of history as tentative. The skills could be applied to any period of history and dictate active learning on the student's part.

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The academicians and teachers who created *Standards* debated whether the content, called "Historical Understanding," should be organized by discrete civilizations or as a unified whole. Since no civilization has developed in isolation, separating Europe from its larger context, and reifying the West as a distinct entity, distorts history, as would considering China or India in isolation or reifying those civilizations. *Standards* presents one unified chronological narrative, abandoning the "ancient-medieval-modern" paradigm in favor of eight inclusive, though very general, eras. Most eras are organized around a large-scale pattern such as "Classical Traditions, Major Religions and Giant Empires 1000 B.C.E.-300 C.E." (Era 3), "Intensified Hemispheric Interactions 1000-1500 C.E." (Era 5), or "The Age of Revolutions 1750-1914" (Era 7), and all of them include information that cuts across geographic boundaries and encourages cross-cultural comparisons and interactions. Each era is divided into content standards and these, in turn, have numerous "examples of student achievement" that suggest specific teaching materials and strategies that could be used to demonstrate understanding of that content. Throughout the document, Historical Thinking and Historical Understanding are interwoven in what, ideally, should be a three-year sequence, but certainly requires two years to accomplish.

While the creation of *Standards* revealed that historians in general advocate teaching genuine world history in the schools, scholars of Asian studies particularly should welcome this approach. The two courses in the present social studies or history curriculum where high school students usually study Asia are Western Civilization and Area Studies, often called Global or "Non-Western" Studies. Even a brief review of school curricula suggests that neither of these courses presents the major civilizations of Asia on a par with European civilization.

The Western Civilization course, developed after WW I in an effort to socialize citizenship values among the increasingly diverse high school and college populations, focuses largely on a linear development of the European democratic tradition. That tradition begins in the ancient "Middle East" and, reaching its full glory in 20th century American civilization, will usher in the "end of history" in a global society that emulates the "modern West." So-called "non-Western" areas are usually introduced when European powers establish trade and later political control over those "traditional" societies.

#### **INTEGRATED WORLD HISTORY INSTEAD OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION OR ASIA STUDIES**

By the 1960s some leading historians began to criticize the concept of Western Civilization, and textbook authors, adding a few chapters about "traditional" India and China, usually just before sections on "The Glory that was Greece and the Grandeur that was Rome," renamed their Western Civilization texts *World History*. Some also inserted a chapter on Africa and the Americas before the section on European exploration. Many teachers who now claim to be teaching world history are actually using this organization. Concurrently, beginning in the 1960s, along with Western Civilization, schools began offering a course called Area Studies that includes the study of two, three, or even more non-Western societies, usually treated as static cultures. In the 1980s some schools, and even the New York State Education Department, designated Europe as one of the world "cultural areas" to be studied along with other areas of the world, but unfortunately this attempt at reform did not eliminate the disparaging double standard between Western Civilization and other societies.

For example, most New York high school students study the history of the

West in detail and spend about six weeks each on various non-Western cultures where time constraints permit only a cursory look at geography and traditional ways of life before the class examines the impact of Europe. Ironically, this approach reinforces the importance of the West, because students study European imperialism again and again, each time Westerners conquer yet another non-Western culture. Students are often asked to consider issues dualistically and make judgments without any real historical context for analysis, deciding, for example, whether "caste is good or bad for India" or whether Mao's revolution helped or hurt China. With no examination of such things as the development of underdevelopment, students are encouraged to conclude that "Hinduism is holding back progress," but that India could enter the 20th century by westernizing. In addition, hoping to make Area Studies interesting and relevant, and because they often have no background in the various non-Western societies, teachers emphasize cultural traits and have students dress in saris, perform tea ceremonies or make flower arrangements.

When we consider *National Standards for World History* against these classroom realities, we realize an integrated world history approach is a major improvement over both Western Civilization and Area Studies courses. Studying how people around the world have communicated, traded and learned from one another enables students to realize that cultural traits, including civilization, are learned and are not the genetic monopoly of any one people. William McNeill, whose *Rise of the West* urged an earlier generation of teachers to abandon Western essentialism, reminds us that all civilizations have enjoyed periods of greatness and eras of decline, and all peoples have done things of which they are both proud and ashamed.

How can *Standards* help teachers present the past as a unified story? Although scholars of world history and ex-

perienced teachers presently offering genuine world history may wish the document provided more teachable thematic unity for the rich array of content, and perhaps more interaction among the major civilizations within a global system, they will find the document is a reservoir of both information and innovative teaching suggestions. Teachers who have had no training or experience in conceptualizing world history may, at first, fear they might drown in all its information. Faced with the responsibility of creating a world history course, often by gradually merging Western Civilization and Area/Global Studies into a two-year sequence, they look for familiar content in *Standards*.

Western Civilization teachers will recognize Athens and the Aegean, Alexander and the Hellenistic world, Rome, Western Christendom, the rise of centralized monarchies, the Renaissance, Reformation, the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment. For Indian scholars there are topics like the Indus Valley, Ashoka and the Mauryans, the development and spread of Hinduism and Buddhism, the Guptas, Islam and the Mughals. China specialists will find familiar components devoted to the Shang, Qin, Han, major development in the era of the Tang, Mongol rule, and Chinese regional power under the Ming.

Teachers, wary about moving into unfamiliar territory, may begin by making only a few small changes such as adopting *Standards'* more inclusive B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era) instead of B.C. and A.D. for marking time, or using less Eurocentric terminology such as Southwest Asia in place of the Middle East. 479 B.C. and 479 B.C.E. both date the end of the Persian War, so changing that terminology is relatively easy, and students enjoy realizing that when the Middle Kingdom is in the middle of a world map, New York City becomes the "Far East." Teachers notice *Standards* offers clues about unfamiliar information such as an exemplar on Angkor Wat that

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notes it was "built in Cambodia beginning in the 12th century" and asks students how it combines Indian and Southeast Asian influences and why it has been called the most impressive structure ever built (p 135). Teachers begin to understand how using an integrated world history approach would eliminate problems like whether to put the Nile Civilization with Africa or the Middle East or how to teach the Crusades or Mughal India without first having taught about Islam.

#### **MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES AND CROSS-CULTURAL CONTACTS**

Using 479 B.C.E. rather than B.C. helps students realize that Jesus is not "the Christ" for everyone. While this is a statement of fact and not a value judgment, students begin to consider how terminology influences perceptions and judgments. They can consider values implicit in the designation West (us) and non-West (the other) or conveyed by automatically calling Alexander and not Ashoka "the Great." As the philosopher Thomas Szasz has so wryly observed, "In the animal kingdom, the rule is, eat or be eaten; in the human kingdom, define or be defined."<sup>2</sup> It doesn't take long for teachers to discern that *Standards* is challenging their view of the past. European exploration looks different from the Benin court or the decks of the Ming fleet, but so does most familiar material when it is embedded in larger contexts and viewed from various perspectives. With this insight, teachers may be ready to frame not a politically correct world history course but a historically accurate one.

*Standards* offers comparisons of historical experiences across boundary lines of civilizational and cultural regions, includes much cross-cultural interaction, and utilizes large-scale patterns that help organize and account for global historical experience, the very aspects that Professor Jerry Bentley, a prominent world historian, suggests separate world history from other

historical configurations.<sup>3</sup> Even inexperienced world history teachers can try linking material they already teach with one or more of the cross-cultural comparisons *Standards* suggests. For example, Standard 3 in Era 3, devoted to the rise of large-scale empires 500 B.C.E. to 300 C.E., offers not only the rise of the Roman Empire but the Qin and Han in China and the Mauryan in India. Exemplars suggest comparing Alexander of Macedonia to Ashoka or how "Confucius, Aristotle and Jesus sought to promote harmony in society (p 90)." Standard 1 in Era 4 devoted to "Imperial crises and their aftermath, 300-700 C.E." compares the decline of the Roman and Han empires (p. 100-1) and the spread of Christianity and Buddhism (p. 102-3). Exemplars in Era 5, 1000 to 1500, link Marco Polo's familiar travels with those of Ibn Battuta (p. 147) and Ibn Battuta's account of the effects of the Black Death with Boccaccio's (p. 155). In Era 6, 1450 to 1770, students may compare Elizabeth I of England and the Mughal ruler Akbar (p. 187), or James I of England, Louis XVI of France and Peter I of Russia, and all three with Chinese and Ottoman rulers (p. 179). An exemplar in Era 7, 1750-1914, suggests comparing the Janissary Corps with Japanese samurai, Mongol soldiers, European knights and modern infantry (p. 216).

Teachers see how to introduce cross-cultural contact and influences from many areas. *Standards* sets familiar topics about Hellenism in the context of "how interrelations developed among peoples of the eastern Mediterranean and Southwest Asia (p. 78)." An exemplar in Era 5, 1000 to 1500, asks about the possible influence Kautilya or Han Fei might have had on Machiavelli (p. 177). Exchanges take place not only among peoples but among flora, fauna and germs as the Black Death or the Columbian encounter illustrate so well. Standard 3 in Era 7 on the transformation of Eurasian societies "in an era of global trade and rising European power" includes

the Ottoman empire, Russian imperial expansion, encounters among Europeans and peoples of South and Southeast Asia, China's economic and political crises and Japan's transformation. *Standards* includes not only how Christianity grew from Greek and Jewish roots but how Islam reflected these influences, how China adopted Buddhism, why Southeast Asians built Hindu and Buddhist sacred centers and later adopted Islam. Students consider how India taught the Arabs zero and how Muslims took that concept, along with Chinese inventions such as paper, gunpowder and the magnetic compass, to help transform the West.

### COMBATting THE MYTH OF ASIA AS A COLLECTION OF TIMELESS CULTURES

*Standards* also presents larger patterns, perhaps the most difficult aspect of world history for inexperienced teachers to handle but the most critical in creating genuine world history. Assessing the existence and importance of trans-cultural trade appears continually from Era 2 on, along trans-Eurasian "silk roads," maritime routes, camel caravans across the Sahara Desert and Central Asia. Interaction between pastoral peoples and settled societies first appears with nomads from the Eurasian steppes in the second millennium B.C.E. and continues to the Mongol invasions in the 13th century C.E. Era 6, which includes the Renaissance, Reformation, Scientific Revolution, and Enlightenment, starts with "transoceanic interlinking of all major regions of the world" (p. 168). "Major Global Trends," discussed at the end of Eras 6 and 7, offers major trends such as demographic changes, boundary shifts, cultural continuity and the transfer of technology.

As teachers frame their own world history course, "Standards in Historical Thinking" (pp. 17-34) can inform their content selections and discourage them

from asking students to memorize vast quantities of information. Change over time is the basis of "Chronological Thinking" (pp. 20-22), and *Standards* shows how change has occurred for millennia, not just in the West or in Europe, but throughout the world. Perhaps the biggest injustice schools have done to the peoples of Asia is treating Asia as a collection of timeless cultures, and *Standards* makes that approach impossible. For example, in Era 1, peoples of East and Southeast Asia are among those establishing agricultural communities. In Era 2, the Indus and Shang are among the urban centers that develop out of these agricultural communities, and students consider how both interact with nomadic invaders. Era 3 examines major developments in the Mauryan and Han empires, and students are to trace how Brahmanism (Era 2) developed into Hinduism (Era 3 & 4), and to examine the origin (Era 3), transformation and spread of Buddhism (Era 4). By Era 5, students are ready to consider "the maturing of an interregional system of communication, trade, and cultural exchange in an era of Chinese economic power and Islamic expansion (p. 132)," as well as the rise of Mongol hegemony.

Part of "Historical Analysis and Interpretation" (pp. 26-28) involves restoring to the past the options it once had. Instead of encouraging teachers to select material that suggests history follows a pre-determined evolutionary path toward the final triumph of the Western ideal, *Standards* asks students to consider the unpredictable nature of human achievement, wherever it takes place and the many roads to the future that were available. People in China had a real choice among Confucian, Taoist (Daoist) and Legalist philosophies. They could have sent Zheng He (Cheng Ho) on an eighth voyage instead of scrapping their fleet. Emperor Constantine was not programmed to accept Christianity. It wasn't inevitable that the West would come to

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dominate much of the globe by the end of the 19th century, or that Stalin would control the Soviet experiment.

### SCHOOLS, UNIVERSITIES AND WORLD HISTORY

Understanding cause and effect is another aspect of historical analysis, and *Standards* offers a wide range of possible causes for events in the past. Ross Dunn, the major editor of *Standards*, suggested that for the Ottoman, Mughal, Safavid and Ming, "Nothing fails like success," while for Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries, "Nothing succeeds like failure."<sup>4</sup> Although it does not employ these provocative terms, *Standards* constantly expects students to assess the causes of events. For example, in Era 6, students examine those Islamic empires and then consider historic reasons for the rise of the West and the transformations that resulted from "expanding European commercial power."

"Issue-Analysis and Decision-Making," the last part of Historical Thinking, involves formulating a position or course of action and evaluating its implementation. If world history offers the best paradigm for both a more accurate understanding of our common past and for including the great civilizations of Asia in that narrative, what are the strategies for getting it into America's schools? *Standards* is not a course outline but a conceptual framework and an innovative resource. Teachers endeavoring to organize a world history course must accept the responsibility to go beyond *Standards* and seek systematic academic training in world history. College professors must stop resisting teaching world history or just offering after-school in-service sessions or summer institutes, and ensure that all history majors are exposed to world history. Area Studies specialists must be willing to place their expertise in a wider context.

Colleges and universities must offer undergraduate majors and advanced degrees in world history. In the short run, school administrators must allow released time for teachers of Western Civilization and Asia Studies to consider creating world history courses, and provide support for the course and for innovative teaching ideas such as team-teaching that would allow teachers to take advantage of their own expertise while they retrain.

Moreover, teachers and administrators must cooperate to build support for world history. Americans have long believed that school history plays an important role in creating responsible and loyal citizens. We must also realize that studying world history offers not only a more accurate understanding of our common human experience but produces informed citizens who, thinking historically instead of regurgitating facts, know how to examine why perceptions and peoples differ, what peoples have learned from one another, and what the past teaches us all. Understanding and appreciating our global interrelationships is essential if American young people are to participate responsibly in the modern interdependent world. ■

### NOTES

1. Preface to *National Center for History in the Schools. Exploring Paths to the Present National Standards for World History* (Los Angeles, 1994), iii.
2. Brian K. Smith, *The Ancient Indian Varna System and the Origins of Caste* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 2.
3. Jerry Bentley, "The Quest for World-Class Standards in World History," *The History Teacher* 28: 3 (May 1995), 449-456.
4. Lecture delivered at the World History Institute sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation (July 1991).

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