Editors' Introduction

World history seems such a forbidding proposition. How do we delimit the potentially vast temporal and spatial scope of this history? When does it begin? How far does it extend? Can we even define a notion of the world adequate to the multiplicity of interactions and interconnections shaping it? Indeed, the discrepant meanings attached by historical actors to these relationships remind us that we are dealing not so much with the patterned regularities of one unified material world as with the contingent globality of many overlapping imagined and contested worlds. While we may be accustomed to the deceptively familiar contours of discrete nations, areas, societies, and cultures, historians cannot so easily take the measure of and distance ourselves from an object such as "the world," whose shadows and echoes can often surprise us into a self-reflexive recognition of our own presence in and engagement with it.

Without diminishing the achievement of Fernand Braudel and William H. McNeill, for example, or of Janet Abu-Lughod, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Eric Wolf, world history is no longer the province of a few expert practitioners of large-scale and long-term history. The World History Association—which enjoys over one thousand members, sponsors the *Journal of World History* and the *World History Bulletin,* and holds its annual meetings in countries like South Korea and Morocco, as well as the United States—has made an enormous contribution to the development of world history as a teaching and research field.[1] As a result, world history has now been opened to many approaches and perspectives. This pluralization is due in part to the everyday creative practice of many secondary school and college teachers of world history, reflected in increasingly sophisticated textbooks.[2] It is also due to a growing number of scholars researching and writing world history, often as a consequence of understanding that their projects have significant global and local dimensions. It is this border crossing between world history and a whole range of

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supposedly separate histories—from gender and labor to diplomacy and religion—that can prevent the field from becoming another rigidly demarcated academic specialization. Here we suspect we disagree with Patrick Manning, a distinguished world historian who has played a leading part in developing the field and who has recently expressed concern about the capacity of programs to train a new generation of specially skilled and qualified world historians.[3]

To be sure, the expansion of world history in, say, the United States coincided with the launch of the so-called age of globalization in the 1980s and 1990s. This has been a period characterized by strategic realignments among the triad powers of East Asia, North America, and the European Union, intensified financial exploitation of emerging markets in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and capitalist and professional-managerial class formation on a global scale. It is no accident that world history is supplementing and even replacing Western civilization courses in certain prep schools, universities, and military academies. Certainly, world history, like area studies before it, can be put into the service of discourses of "Westernization" and the "clash of civilizations." But it would be one-sided to treat world history simply as providing an alibi for neoliberalism or neocolonialism.[4] We can argue just as strongly and persuasively that world history offers a potentially radical expression of the notion of "two, three, many worlds," that it can become the commonsense of decolonization and what Walden Bello and Focus on the Global South are calling deglobalization.[5]

Where do radical historians enter the complex terrain of this field? If we mean by radical history a broad project of politically committed, theoretically informed, and methodologically innovative history—concerned with teaching as well as research, activism as well as scholarship, the public as well as the academic—there are many ways for radical historians to contribute to world history. Dissenting anti/postcolonial, diasporic, feminist, indigenous, queer, socialist, and subaltern perspectives can make a significant difference in maintaining the openness and vibrancy of the field. Although those of us in the United States, for example, come from a variety of traditions, we share longstanding antiracist and anti-imperialist legacies. Our historical self-understanding recognizes how profoundly we have been and continue to be shaped by the global processes of capitalism, colonialism, slavery, migration, and diaspora. We identify with and take part in oppositional movements that are increasingly transnational, pluricultural, and polycultural in nature and scope.[6] The fact that some aspects and versions of world history concerned with trade, war, or global order leave little space for the agency of ordinary people, the historical resistance of antisystemic social and national movements, and the persistence of alternative political and cultural imaginaries really provides an opportunity for us to offer something different. Indeed, radical historians have more than a few insights to share about "globalization from below," the articulation of the local and the global, the raced and gendered nature of world-historical processes, and, of the many exchanges that make and unmake worlds, the often hidden and overlooked exchange between the past and the present carried on in the memories and hopes of people in struggle.

Something quite practical that radical historians can contribute to the field of world history comes from our tradition and culture of collective work. Patrick Manning has urged fellow world historians to explore the possibilities of collaborative scholarship.[7] We strongly agree, and in fact many of our contributors are actively engaged in collaborative research, teaching, and activist projects, both local and transnational in scope.

We are pleased to publish in this issue feature articles by John Chalcraft, Matthew Guterl and Christine Skwiot, and Micol Seigel. All three articles argue for the need to think of historical processes as interactive and to imagine historical interactions as multilateral and multidirectional. Chalcraft's critique of classical Marxist interpretations of capital targets the notion that the history of capital begins in the West and spreads to the non-West. In such a model, historical interaction between West and non-West exists, but only in one direction. Here the history of the world is made by the expansion of economic patterns originating in the West. Thus the rest of the world's history must either mimic that of Europe or, when empirical evidence suggests the contrary, must be understood as a failed history—the world-historical failure of the non-West to enter capitalist modernity. Imitation or failure—these constitute the options, as Chalcraft sees them, in traditional Marxist analysis. Instead, he demands that we think of histories of capitalisms as pluralized and heterogeneous in order to grasp the many directions that economic, political, and cultural change has taken place globally. Thus to achieve a world-historical approach to power and oppression, historians must rethink some of the fundamental categories of Marxist analysis—capital, labor, class—in order to comprehend local practices of domination and resistance that may not conform to the traditional stages of development suggested by the dialectic of historical materialism. Rather than a singular, universal history that ought to apply to all parts of the world, we must offer multisited and multidirectional narratives of historical change.

Guterl and Skwiot rethink the category of labor precisely in a multisited and multidirectional narrative that situates local debates about so-called coolie labor in a broader, interactive discussion among managerial and bureaucratic agents of Anglo-American empire. They demonstrate that despite contradictions in this discourse, which either praised Chinese workers for their machinelike efficiency or condemned them for their supposed moral and racial defects, the exchange of knowledge contributed to the global construction of an imperial white supremacy based on notions of racial hierarchy and paternalism. Labor and class in this account cannot be adequately addressed within a purely economistic analytical framework. Rather, a racial analysis is needed to answer the questions of what coolie labor meant, what essentially white colonial and ex-colonial governments—especially the United States, South Africa, and Australia—were thinking when they encouraged or discouraged Asian immigration, and how an international division of labor was reconstructed during the global age of emancipation. The interactive and multidirectional dialogue of world-traveling managers and officials was, however, not merely a discourse disembodied from material and social conditions. The exchange of ideas tracked by Guterl and Skwiot has important implications for the history of race and labor throughout the modern world. One specific consequence of their methodological approach is to situate the United States within global networks of interaction, thus disrupting the American exceptionalism that has characterized so much scholarship in the field of U.S. history.

Seigel likewise seeks to situate the United States, along with Brazil, in a wider web of transnational historical connections. Like Guterl and Skwiot, she also focuses on the construction of "race" through the interactive dialogue of Anglo-American and Brazilian intellectuals. Again like Guterl and Skwiot, the broader methodological implications for historians prove significant. Practitioners of transnational history cannot simply be comparative in scope. Comparison is itself theoretically and politically problematic according to Seigel, for every comparison creates a "self" and an "other," thus participating in the production rather than the critique of difference and its manifold consequences. As Seigel argues, "comparisons obscure the workings of power." In the specific context of U.S. and Brazilian intellectuals comparing the systems of race between their own nations, these comparisons never were ideologically neutral, but served to construct and perpetuate racialized national identities. Seigel thus concludes that the very act of comparison, whether between one individual and another, or socially constituted national, racial, or gendered subjects and an other, should become the object of study rather than the method employed to conduct our studies. By examining how comparative method has been used to define race across borders, Seigel transforms our understanding of the interdependent, transnational relationships that underpin the complex of identities—always fluid and unstable—so central to the ordering of modern politics and society.

Apart from these extremely thought-provoking articles, we have also organized our sections to address issues relevant to the radical study of world history. "Interventions" marks the twentieth anniversary of the Bhopal disaster by highlighting the local gas-affected people's movement for justice and its international campaign against corporate impunity and government complicity. "Reflections" gathers essays by scholars from around the world commenting on the practice and meaning of world history from their own international and diasporic locations and points of view. "Teaching Radical History" includes three thoughtful essays to promote exchange between world historians and women's and gender historians. "(Re)Views" features a dialogue on two extraordinary films about popular struggles around the world. Finally, "The Abusable Past" helps us laugh as well as cry.

Altogether, the pieces appearing in this issue have a great deal to offer those of us trying to write and teach world history not so much within a single, totalizing global framework as within overlapping, interactive contexts that reveal the embedded and intertwined nature of historical events and processes. Like all issues, this one is the product of a collective effort. In addition to thanking our coworkers in the *Radical History Review* editorial collective, we are grateful for the help of Gregory Blue, Edmund Burke III, Michael Gomez, Peter Limb, Victoria Martinez, Peter Perdue, Fernando Rosa-Ribeiro, and Joanna Waley-Cohen, as well as for the intellectual community provided by Georgia State University's Program in World History and Cultures.

—Duane J. Corpis and Ian Christopher Fletcher

Notes

1. The World History Association also has a strong presence online, with H-World (www.h-net.msu.edu/~world/) and now with the launch of *World History Connected: The EJournal of Learning and Teaching* (worldhistoryconnected.press.uiuc.edu/).
2. For example, see Robert Tignor et al., *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart: A History of the Modern World from the Mongol Empire to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), which blurs the conventional 1500 divide between premodern and modern history, takes a global rather than a continental approach by discussing most if not all regions in each of its chronological, thematically driven chapters, and questions the narrative of global integration by attending to "worlds apart" as well as to "worlds together."
3. Patrick Manning, "Concepts and Institutions for World History: The Next Ten Years" (plenary address at the "World History: The Next Ten Years" conference, Northeastern University, Boston, March 13, 2004). This informative and thoughtful document, which deserves wide dissemination and discussion, is available at www.whc.neu.edu/NextTenYears. Thanks to our colleague Steven Rapp for providing us with a copy. For a conference report, see Patrick Manning and H. Parker James, "Conference Celebrates Center's Closure," *World History Bulletin* 20 (2004): 51–52.
4. Indeed, it should be noted that neither U.S.-led corporate globalization nor enormous U.S. military power is necessarily synonymous with continued American ascendancy in the world system. See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Decline of American Power* (New York: New Press, 2003).
5. See Walden Bello, *Deglobalization: Ideas for a New World Economy,* 2nd ed. (London: Zed, 2004); Bello, "The Global South," in *A Movement of Movements,* ed. Tom Mertes (London: Verso, 2004), 49–69, esp. 60–62; and various papers on the Focus on the Global South Web site, especially Walden Bello and Nicola Bullard, "The Global Conjuncture: Characteristics and Challenges," at www.focusweb.org.
6. For exciting discussions of pluricultural and polycultural movements and politics, see June C. Nash, *Mayan Dreams: The Quest for Autonomy in an Age of Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2001), and Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon, 2002).
7. Manning, "Concepts and Institutions for World History."