TEACHING THE WORLD: GLOBALIZATION, GEOPOLITICS, AND HISTORY EDUCATION AT U.S. UNIVERSITIES

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On November 23, 1962, Alan Simpson, Dean of the College of the University of Chicago, wrote to John W. Gardner, the president of the Carnegie Corporation, requesting support for the development of a new history course for his college, a course covering the history of the world in its entirety. He justified this initiative with reference to the longstanding tradition of curricular innovation at his institution, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, but he also highlighted a series of continuous educational experiments in which the new course in world history appeared to be the logical and self-evident next step:

The efforts of our own College in the past decade to enlarge the undergraduates’ exposure to world history have probably been as ambitious as those of any in the country. Our required course in the history of Western Civilization was organized in its present form in 1948. In 1956 the Carnegie Corporation helped us to institute year-long elective courses in the civilizations of India, China, and Islam.... In 1959, we added to our curriculum a year-long course in Russian Civilization and another in Japanese Civilization. In 1962, Milton Singer has organized ... an Honors Seminar on “The Comparison of Civilizations.” But we have not so far felt ready to develop an integrated course on World History. [...] The opportunity which the College is now determined to seize is the completion of a scholarly contribution to the solution of this basic problem, by a member of our faculty....

This faculty member was William H. McNeill, whose famous book, The Rise of the West, was about to be published. Most likely following McNeill’s lead, the dean believed that this book would provide an interpretative framework for a new course that fit in well with already established courses in history. Simpson’s plea was successful: the course was implemented, becoming one of the early college courses in the U.S. with a global perspective on historical developments aside from nineteenth-century courses in universal history.

There is something striking about Simpson’s remarks: On the one hand, his descriptions of course innovations at the University of Chicago
are entirely consistent with common descriptions of the emergence of world history as an academic field in the U.S. After all, the usual disciplinary history attributes the field’s intellectual beginnings to William H. McNeill, and also to Leften S. Stavrianos, whose pioneering works inspired the comparative and area studies of Philip D. Curtin and a group of younger scholars in the 1970s and 1980s. This group challenged the field’s focus on European and Western history with its Eurocentric master narrative “from Plato to Nato.”5 On the other hand, Simpson’s statement asserts continuity between the teaching of “world history” and the older, more established course in “Western Civilization.”

Yet these two approaches to the past are viewed as worlds apart—they are, in fact, presented as opposites. Moreover, their difference and dichotomy triggered intense controversy, for example, in the public debates of the 1990s about the contents of the National School Standards for the teaching of history in secondary schools. Furthermore, the divergent educational implications of both courses contributed to the contemporary “cultural wars,” which revolved around pivotal issues of cultural identity, historical consciousness, and national belonging.6 Simpson’s statement, however, suggests that world history derives not only from regional and area studies, and from extra-European history, but has its roots in European history courses as well. How can Simpson’s assertion that world history in the U.S. successively and gradually developed from European and extra-European history be aligned with the common belief that it developed in sharp contrast to the traditional European history and as a criticism of that teaching practice, and that it represents more than just accumulated stories about world regions other than one’s own culture or civilization?7

I found it tempting to seek an explanation for these contradictory notions by looking for lesser known origins of world history. And indeed, I gradually uncovered a historical transformation in the teaching of history from the 1910s to the early 1960s that can be described as a gradual spatial expansion and globalization in course designs. Changes in institutional structures, as well as course offerings, seminar topics, degree requirements and examination fields, attest to this remarkable spatial broadening. Not only did parts of the world receive attention that had previously been ignored,8 but entities other than the nation-state increasingly came to be used as a framework for course design and as categories of historical interpretation. Two important global developments drove this expansion: first, the world was becoming increasingly interconnected, and people perceived it as such; and second, the United States itself was turning into a geopolitical superpower with zones of influence and activity across the world.

Interestingly, this spatial expansion is particularly obvious in “general history,” a field mostly taught as “general education” courses at the
college level. Although often overlooked by professional historians, these history survey courses grew considerably more influential for formulating and maintaining collective perceptions of the past. Because these courses were required and reached the majority of students, they became crucial conveyors of both historical-political knowledge and worldviews, attracting immense interest among educators, scholars, and societal mediators alike. They introduced large-scale historical developments and transmitted master narratives in condensed form in year-long courses. They also referred continuously to the present—after all, they had to be relevant to a diverse body of students with various expectations and career and life aspirations. These history courses very quickly took up and historicized new social, political, economic, and cultural developments. The attention the American Historical Association gave to discussing the shape of these introductory courses underscores their importance to the teaching and practice of academic history.

To be sure, the spatial broadening of general history courses was by no means a linear development, much less a teleological one, and at no time was the traditional paradigm of national history entirely replaced. This was true for both U.S. history and the reconstruction of European or non-European history. Yet, it went on continuously (parallel to the teaching of U.S. history) and largely along the lines Simpson had stated: after “Western Civilization” courses were introduced, “Non-Western Civilization” courses supplemented them, which, in turn, eventually stimulated courses in world or global history.

The spatial broadening of the content of history courses in the U.S. constitutes a transnational development on at least four levels. First, the increase in transnational linkages in the U.S. initially spurred this broadening. Historical narratives are closely tied to contemporary needs and challenges; they transfer present-day concerns onto the past so that the past can provide orientation and guidance. Thus, the emergence of history courses that included the past of other cultures can be understood as a reflection of the transnational entanglements and global integration of the United States in the last century. Ongoing contacts and connections with other cultures inspired people’s interest in their histories and also established a need to know more about them. Second, teaching historical traditions other than those of the United States fostered understanding for cultural differences and both facilitated and stimulated transnational encounters. Third, these courses also resulted from the multicultural composition of U.S. society. By responding to the needs of immigrants and ethnic minorities, they helped “manage” processes of transnationalization. Finally, the history courses I deal with here have become transnational phenomena themselves since they have been used as models for history education in other parts of the world.
In the following, I will reconstruct the transformation of general history courses at the liberal arts colleges of the University of Chicago, Harvard University, and Columbia University as examples of this spatial expansion of the subject matter. I will restrict myself to the educational aims of these courses and the set of conditions that facilitated their emergence without presenting course contents in detail. This focus will demonstrate that the gradual globalization of these courses developed in response to large-scale historical processes, above all those of global integration and the rise of the United States as a geopolitical power.

My sample, like any, is not unproblematic. Some might argue that the findings, based on three elite universities, could not be representative. I am aware of this problem, but I maintain that the developments at these institutions resulted less from specific and internal conditions (as influential as they were) but from external factors, among others, the topical foci of funding programs of private foundations (like the Ford Foundation), or programmatic decisions within the professional institutions (like the American Council of Education). These institutions aimed to address issues of national concern, saw themselves as national players, and sought to influence private and public education alike, often with the same policy instruments. That the curricular changes at a few universities resulted in large part from the policy-making efforts of these organizations, as well as from structural changes within the historical discipline, reduces the exceptionality of these cases.

“General History” and the Introduction of Courses on the “History of Contemporary Civilization”

“General history” courses already comprised part of study programs at U.S. colleges in the nineteenth century since a broad education in history was regarded as important. However, the content of these courses changed considerably in the 1910s and 1920s as a result of several institutional, social, and demographic changes.

Around 1900, professionalization of the disciplines began to transform academic structures such as research and teaching subjects and departmental organization. Two shifts were particularly important: First, research overtook teaching in priority, and, concomitantly, graduate education took precedence over undergraduate education. Secondly, as disciplines became more differentiated, research topics and course offerings became similarly specialized. In the 1880s, modern research universities had already emerged next to the traditional liberal arts colleges. This development challenged colleges that awarded bachelor’s degrees and, thus, administered exams for admission to graduate studies to find a balance between two different, if not opposed, educational purposes: on the
one hand, they still had to guarantee their mission of providing a general education, but, on the other hand, they also had to convey specific and expert knowledge so that students would qualify for graduate studies.

Another major change to the B.A. degree around this same time consisted in efforts to combine specialized preparation for academic studies with vocational training. The classic curriculum of the nineteenth century had aimed to instill mental discipline and moral character and mediate knowledge by means of a set of prescribed courses covering the major fields of learning—classical languages and literatures such as Greek and Latin, mathematics, logic and rhetoric, as well as divinity and metaphysics. But these goals were no longer regarded as sufficient. One reason for this was the democratization of undergraduate education. Between 1890 and 1925, enrollment in institutions of higher education grew 4.7 times as fast as the population. With these larger numbers, students with very diverse social backgrounds entered colleges—all the more so as the B.A. degree became a sign of social advancement and a precondition for a successful professional career. Therefore, student expectations diverged—seeking more than merely a general education, some students wanted their studies to give them the requisite knowledge for advanced academic work while others sought vocational qualifications.

Additionally, an influx of immigrants at the turn of the century brought diverse experiences and cultural backgrounds into classrooms. This created a demand for their social integration, which, it was hoped, colleges could achieve by educating immigrants in the traditions, values, and institutions of American society. Thus, college administrators had to find or create a space within the undergraduate curriculum, now so filled with vocational and specialized academic training, that would provide knowledge designed to integrate students socially and culturally in the spirit of the old liberal arts colleges. Hence, in this same period, the idea of “general education” emerged, which was understood as “those phases of non-specialized and nonvocational learning which should be the common experience of all educated men.” Even now, general education continues to be understood in similar terms. Michael Geyer, for example, in 1993, described it as “the ‘symbolic territory’ on which knowledge about the common good and a sense of body politics are molded … It is knowledge that moves inward toward a consideration of the subject(s) of citizenship and outward to a critical reflection of what constitutes peoples and relations.”

General education courses quickly became a distinct part of many undergraduate curricula, replacing or supplementing the introductory courses offered during the first two years of study in particular disciplines. Institutions organized these in different ways: some colleges revised the existing introductory courses, while others developed “gen ed” courses...
from scratch. However, two aspects of this process were crucial to the later spatial expansion of the subject matter: First, history as a subject was assigned a prominent position. In spite of the professionalization and, thus, increasing specialization of history as a discipline, the idea and the institutionalized field of general history remained strong. In the 1890s, academic history teaching had taken shape, bringing about two required courses: one in the history of the United States and another in “general history.” Equally important for the central position of history as part of general education were changes in the humanities on the whole. Expanding beyond their nineteenth-century concentration on the study of Greek, Latin, and religion, the humanities broadened to include subjects that had previously received little attention, such as literature, philosophy, and history. In this way, they were able to compete with the emerging social sciences as a means to serve society’s developing need for cultural orientation.

Secondly, the prominence and wider purpose of general history in general education led colleges to reconsider such courses’ content and thoroughly revise them.22 They asked themselves which parts of the past should be taught and with which interpretations. The premises of “New History” had begun to spread in the 1910s, significantly shaping reflections on these questions. This epistemological renewal of history as a discipline aimed, among other things, to substantiate history’s decisive role in society at large and in everyday life on the basis of its political-pedagogical value. In line with the progressive movement, historians like James Harvey Robinson and Charles Austin Beard conceived of history as an analysis of transformations of all aspects of society. Consequently, the past, historicized as a process of perpetual change, became significant for the present as it was thought to prompt, enable, and guide political and social action.23

What historians and educators, therefore, tried to develop was a corpus of knowledge that corresponded to these ideas and fulfilled the new social and political purposes of an educational system in transformation. However, although they discussed possible revisions to the old introductory or survey courses in general history before 1915, they failed to reach a satisfying solution. But educational needs that arose in World War I brought new answers leading to curricular innovations.

**World War I and the “War Issues Course”**

On April 6, 1917, the U.S. declared war on Germany. In the early summer of 1918, the Committee on Education and Special Training (CEST) of the War Department called for educational institutions to contribute to the mobilization for war and make their knowledge and resources available for the national defense. In concrete terms, colleges and universities were
to set up Special Army Training Camps (SATC) that would prepare recruits for their deployment to Europe. Technological and military subjects comprised the bulk of this training, but in July 1918, the CEST decided to introduce an obligatory course on “Issues of the War” designed to familiarize the students with the causes and goals of the conflict. Frank Aydelotte, director of the “War Issues Course” at the CEST, helped to develop a general syllabus for this course, as well as the accompanying material, though the preparation of the seminars and lectures was left to the participating institutions. The guidelines suggested that the first section of the year-long course present the historical and economic reasons for the war with a major focus on Europe’s relationship to other parts of the world—for example, in trade or colonial expansion. A second section was to concern itself with the forms of government of the countries participating in the war, and a third part was to treat the national characteristics of these countries. Beyond these guidelines, two points were made explicit: the course was to be designed from historical, philosophical, economic, and sociological perspectives with the participation of instructors from the respective disciplines; and secondly, the course was to take over the functions of a humanistic education within the training program.

Although 540 institutions had implemented the course with a total of 125,000 SATC recruits as of October 1919, it only lasted for a few weeks—on 18 November, the armistice was signed, bringing the war to an end. Still, the course paved the way to the future. Half of the institutions decided to complete the currently running course and integrate it the following year into the regular curriculum, either as a part or replacement of the older general history courses. Of course, its content changed slightly, usually to include the Paris Peace Conference and the postwar order. Nevertheless, by and large, the course seemed compatible with the regular curricula. This can be best illustrated by the curricular revision at Columbia College: a general shift in attitude was taking place that Frederick J. E. Woodbridge, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Columbia University, remarked upon in November 1918:

Those, who have had to do with the course, are beginning to ask themselves if it does not constitute the elements of a liberal education for the youth of today. [...] It has awakened a consciousness of what we, as people, need to know if our part in the world of today is to be intelligent, sympathetic and liberal.

Two months later, following this lead, the faculty of Columbia College decided to convert the “war issues” course into a “peace issues” course. Further, in the fall of 1919, the obligatory introductory course in history and philosophy was replaced by the latter. Although the new course
took more than seven months to plan and eventually appeared under a new title, “Introduction to Contemporary Civilization,” it bore a striking resemblance, in the course announcements, to both the war and peace issues course that had preceded it. It carried forth the historical perspective of the war and its causes. Two of the three course sections presented history up to the seventeenth century, but the then-current international relationships and the new role of the United States in the changing international landscape formed pivotal points: they were not only treated in the last section but shaped the presentation of the earlier history, too.29

Despite its heavy reliance on its predecessors, the course was pioneering in its conceptual framework: it aimed to analyze American and European civilization. This new orientation appeared after the war in Europe had undermined the general belief in the values and institutions of the “progressive” world, fostering a need for them to be validated and refined. The U.S. came to understand itself as the moral defender of Western Civilization, and educational institutions wanted to participate in this.30 Thus, Columbia University created a general education course that dealt with contemporary international developments from a distinctly historical perspective on the basis of the earlier “War Aims” course. It conceived of the Atlantic-European space as coterminous with civilization and made it the core of any general education. This framework captured the “commonality between Americans and Europeans inspired by the First World War … the commonality between Poles and Irish, between English and Italians, among all of the European immigrant groups pouring into America” and “portrayed European civilization as a unit transcending ethnic borders” that fosters a common identity beyond national differences.31

It was not long before this course was implemented nationwide. As early as 1926, thirty-four colleges and universities had adopted Columbia’s course,32 and in the mid-1920s, a slew of textbook publishing for such courses began.

A year-long “history of contemporary civilization” course addressed the social and educational needs that had been established before the war. For one thing, its historical perspective helped integrate immigrants and develop homogeneity of values among the students. Its ideal was, as Carolyn Lougee has pointed out, “homogenizing and normative: it socialized the young from whatever particularist background traditions to a uniform standard of thinking and behaving that ought to characterize America’s expanding educated class.”33

For another, it conveyed the knowledge that older courses in civic education and general history had covered, offering a solid historical-political education, but now in a framework that advanced contemporary U.S. foreign policy interests. In addition, it took up the theoretical and methodological innovations formulated by “New History” and progressive
historians like James Harvey Robinson and Charles A. Beard. Furthermore, Columbia’s course on the history of contemporary civilization (and similar courses) incorporated world regions that had previously been neglected: extending its spatial scope far beyond Europe and the United States, it presented histories of the Middle and Far East, as well as Africa and Latin America.34

In sum, a new kind of general history emerged in the 1920s that found its place in interdisciplinary, introductory college courses on “civilization.” It resulted from a unique configuration of social, political, and institutional factors: from the teaching of military training programs at the colleges during the First World War, from shifting power relations in the postwar world order, as well as from the requirement for a general reform of college education (largely caused by the influx of immigrant students) and innovative approaches in academic historiography. The presentation of civilizational history within this climate supported a reaffirmation of cultural traditions. At the same time, it constituted a historical academic unit that reached spatially from the U.S. to the Russian frontiers. In this sense, it marked the beginning of the spatial expansion of history teaching.

Divergent Developments of General History Courses in the 1940s and 1950s: “Western” and “Non-Western Civilization” Courses

In the following three decades, the teaching of general history at colleges all over the U.S. firmly established such history of civilization courses. Interestingly, however, a transformation of the geographical span and thus also of the interpretation of that civilization set in. The initial courses on the “history of civilization” or “contemporary civilization” gradually metamorphosed into two almost opposite formats: In some cases, they narrowed to focus on the history of “Western Civilization,” specifically on historical developments in Europe. At the same time, such courses took up a transatlantic perspective (of the U.S. and Western Europe) within the framework of “educating for democracy” based on the narrative of the rise of the West. In other cases, though, as area studies became popular and began to be institutionalized in the 1940s and 1950s, the history of civilization courses evolved to focus on non-Western civilizations from these new regional perspectives. These courses presented extra-European history to supplement the goal of democratic education with “education for international understanding.”35

Taken individually, these courses did become more focused on specific geographical areas, but taken all together, they presented a greatly expanded and globalized picture of world history.

In the former case, the transformation of the history of civilization(s) course into “Western Civilization” cannot be attributed to a particular
time or even be linked to a certain event or location. Rather, the term itself, “Western Civilization,” prevailed in the 1930s within historical-academic discourse as a designation for historical narratives of Europe—including its western borders. Then, in the 1940s, it also came to be associated with an introductory course of the same name in general history. The reasons this introductory course emerged are clear. First, the need to integrate new immigrants into American society remained, and the historical-political general education colleges provided continued to serve as an appropriate historical-political instrument: “Western civ promised to be a unifying and assimilative force which taught the several groups that they had a common and deeply rooted heritage that bound them together.”36

Second, America’s attitudes in international relations had changed. Nationalism and its correlate, isolationism, had again come to dominate in the 1930s; the international involvement of the early 1920s had resulted in some disappointments, and the worldwide economic crisis had necessitated some domestic political stabilization. This circumstance opened up space for emphasizing the nation both in the elaboration of U.S. history courses and in the increasingly Western focus of general history teaching.

In 1945–46, Harvard University programmatically developed an introductory history course along these lines, which would later serve as a model throughout the country. For several years, administrators and faculty at Harvard had been discussing curricular reform for Harvard College. In the process, they evaluated and redesigned the standard “History I” course, which had been a staple of the curriculum since the nineteenth century.37

The committee in charge had recommended implementing a less specific course that would nonetheless properly suit general education requirements. That is, it had to fulfill the task of obligatory gen ed courses, aiming to create culturally integrated, socially committed, and politically loyal citizens or provide the knowledge necessary for the development of such citizens. The faculty adhered to this recommendation, designing a course called “Western Thought and Institutions,” whose objective was to describe the past in a way that would develop a “comparatively coherent and unified background for an understanding of some of the principal elements in the heritage of Western civilization.”38 What this meant at Harvard College was similar to what it meant at most liberal arts colleges. Huberman and Schubert have summarized what such introductory history courses have emphasized:

… the importance of Renaissance Italy and the histories of Britain and France; when they look at other powers, it is to contrast the development of democracy in Britain and France with the authoritarian structures of Tsarist Russia, Bismarckian and Nazi Germany, and Fascist Italy, among others; the importance and values of the
Reformation and Protestantism; the significance of the European imperial conquests on the rest of the world and on Europe; the significance of Lockean and Rousseauian ideas in the development of concepts of rights and sovereignty of the people; the importance of parliamentary history in Britain and elsewhere; a heavy emphasis on the French Revolution and other revolutions leading to popular sovereignty; the significance of big powers and their histories rather than developments in smaller countries; the role of labor movements and quests for voting rights among the middle and lower classes and women; the mercantile and industrial revolutions and the importance of a capitalist economy. 39

Thus, such introductory courses presented the political concepts of freedom, self-determination, and civil rights, as well as the sociological components of cultural heritage, the religious substructure, and the historical development of the current social and economic world. Catchwords used to describe such courses reinforced the understanding of their general aims: “civic education,” “moral instruction,” “Western democracy,” and, to a lesser extent, “civilization.”

This thematic focus, wherein the United States was perceived as upholding the core values of Western civilization while Europe went astray, was connected with a reinterpretation of the relationship between the U.S. and Western Europe. By the 1930s and 1940s, Americans took special pride in their nation’s enduring commitment to Western civilization. Although the history of Western civ was still a story of progress, Europe of the twentieth century was a mess. It was the United States that avoided fascism, that maintained capitalist values, that really embodied the best of the Western spirit. One way to handle the messier parts of the twentieth century was to wonder where the rest of the West went wrong while the United States continued to show the true Western way.40 Thus, these courses no longer portrayed the U.S. as defending and preserving universal civic values that had been sparked and flourished in Europe but had been extinguished by the First World War. Rather, the United States came to represent the Western values that Europe had apparently turned away from—such as democracy and freedom linked with a capitalistic social order. This transformation reflects America’s increasing historical self-confidence in relation to Europe.

During the early 1940s, the experiences of the Second World War propelled the parallel development of history of civilization courses into extra-Western history courses. The President’s Commission on Higher Education explained this new need for “education for international understanding” as a direct consequence of the war and its impact on American foreign policy:
With World War II and its conclusion has come a fundamental shift in the orientation of American foreign policy. Owing to the inescapable pressure of events, the Nation’s traditional isolationism has been displaced by a new sense of responsibility in world affairs. The need for maintaining our democracy at peace with the rest of the world has compelled our initiative in the formation of the United Nations, and America’s role in this and other agencies of international cooperation requires of our citizens a knowledge of other peoples ... such as has not hitherto been so urgent.41

In other words, the U.S. wished to play a new role on the world stage after the war that required a change in knowledge structures and expanded spatial horizons. In practice, this spatial expansion occurred in two linked steps. First, regional courses—those on non-European history—were introduced into the curriculum. After some time, these courses led to the development of a more synthetic understanding of “world history,” both in terms of new course designs and institutional structures. In the late 1940s, “area studies” quickly became institutionalized in the U.S. academic system on a large scale, financially supported by private funds and state aid alike.

However, in the early 1940s at the latest, colleges and universities were already beginning to turn toward non-European regional studies both in research and education.42 When Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941, another reform of the higher education system was initiated that involved nationwide planning, conceptualization, and implementation. In December, the president of the American Council on Education (ACE), one of the larger interest groups for educational policies, commissioned a small, informal group within the council to compose a memorandum on teaching Asia at American high schools and colleges.

Basically, the work of this commission demonstrates how important developing the curriculum in this sector was.43 After additional meetings, two conferences, and councils at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, as well as the National Council of Social Studies, the commission applied in February 1943 for funding from the Rockefeller Foundation. It was successful, gaining financial support for activities that integrated Asia into curricula and research programs of educational institutions according to the following line of thought: “The program of Asiatic studies in American education needs to be related to the programs of education about Latin America, about geopolitics, about world reconstruction, in order that full strength and support may be assured for far-sighted development in this country of total civic education for participation in world affairs. Asiatic studies are to be conceived not as goals of a pressure group, but as one aspect of the reconstruction of civic education in the light of world events and trends.”44 Furthermore, the commission argued
that an educated citizen desiring to act effectively and responsibly in society needs to know about worldwide developments and their implications for the role the U.S. plays in the world. At the same time, because this role is constitutive, the U.S. needs to produce experts on specific languages and cultures who enable it to act with commitment and effectiveness within the new international conditions. Therefore, study of Asia was not to be treated as merely a regional supplement to existing curricula, but it was to take a key position in historical-political education.

University education could address both of these needs by educating students to be future players on the international stage who could constructively promote U.S. interests with their knowledge of other countries and cultures. To be sure, the ACE and Rockefeller Foundation were not the only organizations with this agenda. In 1944, seven area committees—including Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America—were founded by the “American Council of Learned Societies.”

Two other initiatives were relevant to the implementation of regional or “areas studies” courses. One was a report by the “Committee on World Regions” of the Social Science Research Council published shortly after the council was incorporated in 1943 on the future growth of regional studies in the social sciences. Inspired by the war, which “had focused attention as never before upon the entire world,” the committee noted that, for the U.S. to do justice to its role as a member of the UN after the war, Americans had to learn to respect and form an understanding of other nations and their peoples, cultures, and institutions. Therefore, it considered reform in undergraduate and graduate education, as well as research, necessary.

Then, a year later on March 15–16, 1944, social scientists, politicians engaged in educational policy, and representatives of the major philanthropic foundations gathered at a “Conference on Area and Language Programs in American Universities” to discuss the future of area studies in academic teaching and research. In a concluding report, “The Future of Area Studies in American Universities and Colleges,” they formulated concrete suggestions and procedures for anchoring regional studies in the curriculum.

Their understanding of the educational functions such studies were supposed to fulfill motivated this initiative, and it was almost identical to that of the ACE’s commissions. That is, the more global role of the U.S. now required educated citizens who understood worldwide developments and experts in more languages and the cultures of the world for U.S. engagement in new areas. As to whether the political requirement was directly declared or was articulated in the sense of an “education for peace” is less important than the fact that, in the beginning of the 1940s within the educational elite, a consciousness concerning the relevance of the “rest of the world” for U.S. society and politics emerged. Although this
political need was not always directly stated (often it was subsumed under a concern for an “education for peace”\textsuperscript{51}), this conference as well as the other stated initiatives show clearly that an awareness of the relevance of the “rest of the world” for U.S. society and politics was growing within the educational elite from the early 1940s.

Despite this growing awareness, universities needed another impulse to prepare and actually implement new teaching models that considered other areas of the world in addition to the U.S. and Europe. This came in the 1950s in the form of grants from philanthropic foundations such as the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, and the Rockefeller Foundation. An excellent illustration of the effect these grants had on educational design is Robert Redfield’s and Milton B. Singer’s project on India. From 1951 on, the Ford Foundation sponsored these University of Chicago scholars’ research. The results were integrated a few years later into a “gen ed” course on “Indian Civilization” at their home institution.\textsuperscript{52}

Gustav E. von Grunebaum’s research application to the Rockefeller Foundation for Marshall G. S. Hodgson (University of Chicago) in 1956 also demonstrates the impact of these foundations on teaching. Originally, Hodgson had proposed to write a monograph on Islamic civilization, but the foundation rejected the proposal on the grounds that it was far more important to develop teaching materials about this region.\textsuperscript{53} Although Hodgson received a travel scholarship enabling him to study in several Islamic countries for six months, he could not convince the foundation shortly after his return to fund him to write up all the material he collected.\textsuperscript{54} In the end, the foundation instead supported a conference at the University of Chicago that aimed to prepare college teaching materials on this topic.\textsuperscript{55} Hodgson then planned an “Islamic Civilization” course based on insights from this conference. In structure, it was similar to the “Chinese Civilization” course (designed by Herrlee G. Creel) and the above-mentioned “Indian Civilization” course. All three of these non-Western civilization courses later received financial support from the Carnegie Foundation and were so successful at the College of the University of Chicago that, in 1959, they became requirements in general history, which permanently anchored them in the curriculum.\textsuperscript{56}

Yet another factor contributed to the introduction of these non-Western civilization courses. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the academic discipline of history, which had only emerged between 1860 and 1890, faced a loss of status. At that time, academia was undergoing a process of differentiation that produced new disciplines such as sociology and economics. These disciplines claimed to address current social and political problems, forcing historians to defend the value of historical knowledge and research. From the 1920s to roughly the 1960s, discussions within the AHA aptly display just how hard history was struggling to
position itself within the new academic environment. Allying itself more with the social sciences, which would entail, among other things, concentrating primarily on modern or even contemporary history, promised the historical discipline more academic prestige, more private funding, and, therefore, more opportunities for research and larger numbers of students. Allying itself with the humanities, in contrast, would allow it to adhere to the long-standing breadth of the field and its intellectual traditions but would result in less support and importance. The conflict of disciplinary identity became even more explosive in light of historical dimensions of area studies. When other departments outside history addressed these topics with social science approaches, discussion about the relevance of history as a discipline intensified, and the distribution of materials and financial resources turned into touchy issues. These discussions influenced the spatial expansion of history as a discipline as it converged with and oriented itself toward the regional foci of these area studies. Moreover, this expansion offered possibilities for mediation in history’s identity crisis, as well as for prestige and greater funding.

From “Non-Western Civilization” to “World History” Courses

As we have seen, area studies and history began to stimulate one another, and regional studies and historical approaches began to work in concert, essentially moving toward “world history.” After World War II, the educated elite played a significant role in this as they became aware of the strong influence global connections had begun to exert on society. As the President’s Commission on Higher Education, composed of academics, educational administrators and political leaders, put it:

In speed of transportation and communication and in economic interdependence the nations of the globe already are one world; the task is to secure recognition and acceptance of this oneness in the thinking of the people, so that the concept of one world may be realized psychologically, socially, and in good time politically.

Although this idea had been articulated earlier, it was in the 1950s when it gained widespread acceptance.

Historians like William H. McNeill, whom we saw at the beginning of this paper, and Leften S. Stavrianos were then able to develop world history courses—and get funding for them—to integrate into college curricula, arguing that they gave students insight into the global nature of their time as well as an awareness of just how deeply the U.S. was involved with other countries. McNeill’s dean at the College of the University
of Chicago, Alan Simpson, used similar arguments when he advocated McNeill’s course in world history in his funding proposal to the Carnegie Corporation: “The present condition of the world has made some understanding of the whole history of the human family one of the imperatives of a liberal education.” Stavrianos—who worked at Northwestern University and also in Chicago—also made these claims in his proposal to the Carnegie Corporation, using a quotation by George L. Mosse from 1949: “Surely a student, in order to make intelligent political choices in our society, must know more about Russia and about the Far East than such a Western Civilization course can give him.”

Both initiatives were successful and received grants. By the academic year 1960/1961, Stavrianos was able to teach a course entitled “World History in Modern Times” that soon became a permanent course (though under the slightly different title “World Civilizations”) in the history offerings. Some miles to the south, at the University of Chicago, McNeill was able to introduce his “World History Course” in 1964. Colleges had discovered the whole world, albeit in segments, as subject matter for “general history” as people grew ever more aware of globalization. At the same time, they began to address connections between separately taught areas.

In the following decades, these two different types of general education courses (non-Western civ and world history) were taught side by side—and Western civ continued to be taught as well. Two factors help explain why they so successfully and enduringly became fixtures in American education: First, both types of courses not only spatially expanded the historical perspective, responding to America’s needs as a world power and the increasing globalization of society. In fact, they also conveyed new historical master narratives, that is, all-encompassing interpretations of the past. These historical meta-narratives present models of societal development and make assumptions about cultural characteristics that create communities of belonging. Whereas Western civilization presented the narrative of the “rise of the West,” basically treating the “the rest of the world” as a counter-example to the Western story of success, world history conveyed the idea of cultural pluralism.

These master narratives were one reason a broad swath of educators and shapers of educational policy (like the Department of War in World War I, the American Council on Education, or philanthropic foundations such as the Rockefeller Foundation) paid so much attention to these introductory courses in general history.

A second but related factor in the successful institutionalization of the new courses was the development of “progressive history” within the historical discipline between the 1910s and 1950s. This new trend promoted history teaching on the undergraduate level that went beyond mere intellectual-academic knowledge transfer to achieve “outreach and public relevance.” “Progressive historians” were at the forefront of both historical
research and teaching, combining scholarship with “wider involvement in reformist groups and institutions.” They saw themselves “not as elitist public intellectuals … but rather as scholars reflecting and shaping historical consciousness in university and public service.” For them, reconstructing and interpreting the past could help the nation address contemporary societal challenges. Thus, they developed and constantly revised survey courses in Western civilization, non-Western civilization, and also world history that linked the present to historical master narratives by interpreting it through the lens of history.

All in all, colleges in the U.S., with their general historical/political education, always were, and still are, central places for the transmission of perceptions of the past and thus for the forming of cultural self-images including their integration in ideas of world orders. Whoever sought to play a part in the forming of collective views of history, in the struggle for interpretive dominance of enforcement of historical narratives—hence, in the politics of history—strove to affect the negotiation of the shape, and content, of “general history” as taught at the college.

* * *

Since the 1910s, in response to the general needs of reform in American undergraduate education, colleges thoroughly revised the general history courses in accordance with history’s strengthened position within general humanistic education. With curricular innovations during World War I, these courses became the institutional anchor for history teaching as part of general education programs. From then on, this history teaching underwent a winding but nevertheless steady process of spatial expansion until world history courses were developed and implemented, particularly after the spread of non-Western civilization courses during the late 1940s and 1950s. Taken together, the very different forms general history courses took, including those on Western civilization, mirrored not only transformations in American society, international politics, and the educational needs of a global power but also people’s ever growing awareness of the transnationalization and globalization of their world—a world characterized by cross-cultural interactions, dependencies, and hierarchies of power and influence. General history courses offered a venue for trying out and establishing transnational and global historical perspectives in reaction to the concrete experience of living in a world deeply linked across cultural and political borders. Added to that, the reconstruction of parts of this development undertaken here highlights three often ignored dimensions of the history of transnational and world history courses: First, Western civilization and world history courses are much more intertwined than is often acknowledged, being, in fact, part of a more general transformation of history teaching at colleges. Second, although this process of curricular
change leading to the emergence of world history courses accelerated after the end of World War II, its origins lie in developments that extend back to the first two decades of the twentieth century. And third, this process was stimulated by social and political factors, that is, by national needs and global developments that characterize the twentieth century: increasing cross-cultural interconnectedness and the U.S. hegemony in geopolitics. Since the teaching and writing of history mirror the social, cultural, political, and economic conditions within which they occur, transnational and world historical perspectives reflect and are part of wider processes of transnational entanglements and global integration.

Notes


4 To be sure, funding applications are ambiguous historical sources, which have to be interpreted at least as critically as any other remnant of the past. They may require even more caution since their function and specific language do not seem to represent factual developments or actual motivations particularly well, be they intellectual, social, or political. However, this difficulty does not seem to apply to the striking aspects of Simpson’s remarks I have in mind.


8 A quantitative analysis of history course offerings at 24 land-grant universities supports this claim: “The most prominent change between 1910 and 1990 was the huge decrease in the percentage of the average curricular time devoted to the history of Western Europe and England – from 61.1% to 33.6%.” John David Frank, Evan Schofer, and John Charles Torres, “Rethinking History: Change in the University Curriculum, 1910–1990,” *Sociology of Education* 67, no. 4 (1994): 231–42, 236.

9 This characteristic is connected with the “presentism” of “New History.” For “New History,” among others, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, 1988), 98–100.
The American Historical Association repeatedly formed committees to discuss history education until the late 1940s, including the Committee of Ten (1893), Committee of Seven (1889), Committee of Five (1907–1911), Committee of the Social Studies (1916), Commission on History and other Social Studies in the Schools (1929–34), and the Committee for Teaching of American History in Schools and Colleges (1942–1944). On the connection of undergraduate education to graduate teaching and academic research, see Katja Naumann, “Weltgeschichte in der universitären Lehre – institutionelle Räume, intellektuelle Partner und gesellschaftspolitische Anbindungen,” in H-Soz-u-Kult, July 14, 2007. http://geschichte-transnational.clio-online.net/forum/id=896&etype=diskussionen.


Rudolf, The American College, 442n11; see also Lingelbach, Klio macht Karriere, 134–37n3; for the restrictions on this trend toward more students and greater social inclusiveness, see Jerome Karabel, The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton (Boston, 2005).


On the liberal arts college and liberal education in general, see W. B. Carnochan, The Battleground of the Curriculum: Liberal Education and American Experience (Stanford, 1993); Charles Wegener, Liberal Education and the Modern University (Chicago, 1978).

Such was the understanding of a group of educational and civic leaders called together by President Truman, as phrased in their report, Higher Education for American Democracy, published in 1947. See also Gail Kennedy, ed., Education for Democracy: The Debate over the Report of the President’s Commission on Higher Education (Boston, 1952).


These reconsiderations lay at the root of the general education movement that emerged in the 1920s. See Champion Ward, ed., The Idea and Practice of General Education: An Account of the College of the University of Chicago (Chicago, 1950); Russell Thomas, The Search for a Common Learning: General Education, 1800–1960 (New York, 1962); Daniel Bell, The Reforming of


25 Ibid., 15.

26 Ibid., 18–20. Different arguments concerning the connection of these two course offerings (the “War Aims” Course and the “Introduction to Contemporary Civilization” course) are expressed in the secondary literature: While Gilbert Allardyce emphasizes continuity between them, Segal tries to prove that, in fact, both course offerings were independently developed: Gilbert Allardyce, “The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course,” American History Review 87, no. 3 (1982): 695–725, 706; Daniel A. Segal, “‘Western Civ’ and the Staging of History in American Higher Education,” American Historical Review 105, no. 3 (2000): 770–805, 781. The final reports on the “War Issues” course that were sent to the War Department, as well as descriptions of course offerings and curricula from the 1920s, prove, however, that the “War Aims” course was used as template for the “Introduction to Contemporary Civilization” course. See the documentary material in Aydelotte, endnote 19; and Columbia College, ed., A History of Columbia College on Morningside (New York, 1954).


30 Peter N. Stearns, Western Civilization in World History (New York, 2003), 15–16.


32 This number is taken from Frederick Rudolph, Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study since 1636 (San Francisco, 1977), 238; see also Segal, endnote xxi, 781–84.

33 Lougee, “[The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course]: Comments,” 727.


35 For the influence of the educational aim to foster international understanding and peace and on the early writing of world history and its emphasis on extra-European history, see Gilbert Allardyce, “Toward World History: American Historians and the Coming of the World History Course,” Journal of World History 1, no. 1 (1990): 23–76, 26–36.

36 Lawrence W. Levine, The Opening of the American Mind: Canon, Culture and History (Boston, 1996), 58.

37 Phyllis Keller, Getting at the Core: Curricular Reform at Harvard (Cambridge, MA, 1982).


42 In the late nineteenth century, the federal government had been reluctant to regulate higher education, and there was a consequent lack of national discourse on educational policy. But this changed when associations articulating and expressing interests of particular professional groups began to form and, in the 1910s and 1920s, private foundations were established. In the 1920s, large institutions began providing financial support and advice on the organization of teaching and research to colleges and universities. As a result, in a few decades, a sphere of public discourse on social and political demands developed that addressed educational institutions across the country and decisively shaped curricula and research agendas. See the special issue on “Philanthropy, Patronage, Politics,” *Daedalus* 116, no. 1 (1987); Roger L. Geiger, “American Foundations and Academic Social Science, 1945–1960,” *Minerova* 26, no. 3 (1988): 315–41; Hughes Hawkins, *Banding Together: The Rise of National Associations in American Higher Education, 1887–1950* (Baltimore, 1992).

43 George F. Zook to the members of the council, February 9, 1942, in Fd. 2264, Box 189, Series 200R, Record Group 1.1., Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York (in the following RAC); “Proposal for Exploration of the Needs and Methods of Study of Eastern Asia in the Schools and Colleges of the United States,” American Council on Education, February 1942, ibid.

44 Proposal for Continued Development of Asiatic Studies in American Education, submitted by the Committee on Asiatic Studies in American Education of the CE, Tentative Draft, November 1, 1942, 6, in Folder 2265, Box 189, Series 200R, Record Group 1.1., Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.


48 Ibid., 2.

49 For the conference program, a list of participants, and a transcript of the discussions, see the papers in Folder 2508, “Area Studies and Language Conference, Reprints 1944,” Box 210, Record Group 1.1, Series 200, R, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.


51 Allardycse, “The Rise and Fall,” n35.


53 Inter-Office-Correspondence, JM (John Marshall), February 2, 1956, in Folder 3783, Box 442, Series 200R, Record Group 1.2., Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC; and Excerpts of the Minutes, Board of Trustees, March 15, 1956, ibid.


55 Correspondence between Hodgson and Marshall, September 25, October 2, and December 12, 1956, ibid.; and Excerpt from the Minutes, Board of Trustees, January 15, 1957, ibid.


57 David Hollinger, *The Humanities and the Dynamics of Inclusion since World War II* (Baltimore, 2006).

58 *Higher Education for American Democracy*, 16n32.
Proposal for an Experimental College Course in World History, in2.


Northwestern College Announcements 1959/60, 73 and 1962/63, 77; College Announcements of the University of Chicago 1964/65, 134.

