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**3rd Annual Electronic Conference on
 Religions in World History: Interactions and
 Connections**

Description

This conference will examine the flow of religious ideas over various routes from ancient to modern times. The emphasis will be on Buddhism, Christianity and Islam and their respective expansion into the Afro-Eurasian worlds, specifically how the religious ideas found their ways to the various places.

Format

There will be three initial statements of from 1000-1500 words, which will be posted to the discussion list on Wednesday, March 28.

Presenters

Buddhism: Xinru Liu, Beijing Academy of Arts and Sciences
 Christianity: Al Andrea, University of Vermont
 Islam: Michael Weber, Salem State College

This will be followed by two commentaries on the initial statements of around 500 words each, which will be posted on Thursday, March 29.

Commentators

Sharon Cohen, Walter Johnson High School, Maryland
 TBA

The discussion will open to all members of the discussion list on Friday, March 30th including authors of the papers and commentaries. The discussion will close on Tuesday, April 3.

How to Subscribe

To subscribe to the NERWHA discussion list, send this email message to Maisner@casdn.neu.edu:

Sub NER-WHA

**WORLD HISTORY COLLABORATIVE
 SYMPOSIA**

**James Diskant, Ph.D.,
 Program Associate**

The second annual world history symposium, "Ethics and Justice: Understanding the Human Condition," held at Northeastern University's Curry Student Center in May of 2000, was a huge success as illustrated by the following representative participant comments "Each session provided excellent insights, information, and understanding, as well as suggestion for material." The Symposium was "a smorgasbord of sessions that make for a difficult choices at times."

Co-sponsored by 24 organizations, this two day event provided 140 teacher participants content ideas, teaching strategies, and teaching resources in 30 workshop sessions, two keynote addresses, and informational tables. On Friday, May 5th participants divided into five groups: teachers of grades 4 & 5, of grades 6-8, grade 9, grade 10, and middle and secondary teachers with pedagogical interests for three sessions of content and subjects of interest to them. Tailoring of sessions to grade level meant that teachers were able to come away with teaching strategies, and content that teachers could use in their classes. Such an approach was welcomed by most participants one of whom commented they gained "specific activities, new information and new ideas." For example, most teachers of 9th graders followed a specific course of three workshops, as they participated in workshops about religious and ethical beliefs in Asia, trade in Asia, and the Mongol Empire. Their colleagues teaching in 0th grade went to sessions on Oslo, the Century of the Globe, and Weimar.

At lunch participating co-sponsoring groups provided a wealth of information on their organizations, including purchasable materials, Institute flyers, and other materials. At the end of the day more than 120 teachers stayed to hear Paul Michael Hill, an Irish human rights activist, speak about his experiences when he was falsely arrested and how eventually -- after 20 years, was freed. He went on to discuss the importance of different kinds of resistance in the name of justice for a community and to make parallels between the Irish conflict and other 20th century conflicts. An "inspirational" speaker wrote one participant. (Collaborative Symposia, continued)

Most of these 140 teachers returned on Saturday and were joined by a few more so that 100 people started the day with Saturday's keynote speakers, Martha Minow and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela. They spoke on aspects of rebuilding societies after mass violence. Minow, a professor of law, spoke about different societies, as to how they dealt with these issues in Gobodo-Madikizela, a psychologist and a member of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, discussed her experiences in South Africa.

As on Friday, teacher participants had five choices for each of their breakout sessions: focus on Grade 4-8, Grade 9, Grade 10, Grades 9 & 10, and pedagogical issues for grade 8-10. For example, teachers of grade 9 & 10: comparison on Germany and South Africa, Asian values, and Chinese women.

The third world history symposium is entitled: "Personal Identities and Public Communities in World History." It is scheduled for Friday, May 11 and Saturday, May 12, 2001, and will also be held in Northeastern University's Curry Student Center. The Symposium will focus on the connections between individuals' personal lives and public space. This social history focus builds upon the work of scholars of the past thirty years to place social history at the center of historical study. It connects to peoples' values and beliefs, as well as to the governments and other institutions that people develop in different places and times so that students learn that they and their families are a part of history. It attempts to illustrate that such issues may appear to be modern ones, but that they have a long historical tradition.

Central questions that will be investigated in this collaborative event include 1.) how different groups of people create their own communities in different places and in different ways, 2.) the dynamic connection between governments and peoples' definitions and needs, and 3.) the similarities and differences across age, class or estate, gender, location, race, religious belief, and time. Such comparative work allows us to place these complex issues in a historical and global context, and to pose questions of values, social organization, and politics and laws, as well as of conformity and diversity.

Like the past symposia, it will include two keynote addresses, choices of breakout sessions by grade level and approach, and informational tables from participating organizations. All of the breakout sessions will be comparative, as well as a combination of scholarly and hands-on presentations.

TEACHING RESOURCES: A COLUMN FOR HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

By David Burzillo

Jean Johnson has taught at both the high school and college level. She is currently associated with the Asia society. Volume one of *The Human Drama*, which she co-authored with her husband Don, was just published by Markus Weiner. She is currently working on volume two.

1. What, in your opinion, are the biggest pitfalls in teaching high school students about Asia?

Perhaps the biggest difficulty is that not many of us have ever had any training in Asian studies yet we have to teach it. That's really difficult. Many times we do not show how the various societies in Asia change gradually over time. Given the constraints of our teaching schedules as well as our own knowledge, we may teach about the Indus valley civilization and to a lesser extent developments in the Yellow River valley. We do Confucius and Laozi and the Buddha, caste, and Hinduism. Next thing, we are in the age of exploration and colonialism. We don't show how India and China have developed and changed over the millennia, nor examine the options people in the past had or why they made the choices they did. Southeast Asia is hardly even mentioned. We are tempted to focus on exotic aspects of Asia such as arranged marriage, bound feet, and bride burning. We hardly ever consider the challenges for a society that caste tries to solve. We are tempted to treat people in these countries as "other," even when first and second generation Asian American students are in our classes. We have to tread a thin line between "othering" and dismissing all differences, saying "We are all "human."" The later option usually translates "Everyone should act like I do." Without a world history focus, when we call countries in Asia "third-world" or "under-developed," our students assume they have always been so, never realizing that, for example, China by the 11th century was producing more iron and steel than England did until 1750. How many of our students think about the fact that Indian built the Taj Mahal and Pilgrims landed at Plymouth at about the same time? Maybe the underlying problem is that we try to teach "about Asia" as if it were an single entity. The Chinese and Indian worldviews are very different, and so are their histories.

2. What strategies did you find most helpful for avoiding them?

A world history approach avoids many of pitfalls. Properly taught, it allows for the development of change over time. If we introduce certain themes such as empire-building, nomadic-settled interaction, cross-cultural exchanges, and the spread of ideas, we can return to these themes in different periods, reinforcing what students have already learned and providing opportunities for contrast and comparison. Studying options in the past and the choices people made can empower our students and help them realize that their decisions count. And world history makes it impossible to assume that countries in Asia have always been trying to "catch up with the West." Using primary documents, literature and art in an attempt to let the cultures speak for themselves. Examining issues such as

(Teaching Resources, continued)

family values, the tension between the individual and the group, choice and assigned role, and dealing with a pluralistic society, which many of our students face today, and seeing how various Asian cultures have dealt with these same issues over the years. Celebrating cross-cultural exchanges and how people in the past have borrowed and adapted from a wide variety of cultures. (The recent series on Jazz was a good example of that process in our society.) Address adequate

teacher preparation. This is a challenge for the whole teaching profession, not an individual teacher's problem. The profession should press for pre-service training not only in Asian content but in other content areas as well. Good in-service workshops and summer institutes help, but pre-service is critical. In addition, teachers should be told in the spring what courses they will be expected to teach the following year. That's a reform we should all get behind!

3. What was the most important understanding about Asia you wanted students to leave your class with?

The differences between our dualistic approach to reality and a more holistic approach in South Asia and a harmony of opposites in East Asia. We tend to assume that something is either this or that and cannot be both. Either/or is the basis for our legal system and our faith in justice, our approach to morality, even our multiple choice tests. (Three answers are wrong and only one is right.) Hinduism teaches about the oneness of all experience and the less-than-ultimate-differences among the choices we make. (Some Hindus, citing Mahavira who told about the blind men and the elephant, might suggest that all the answers are right and all of them are wrong. When John Foster Dulles asked Prime Minister Nehru, "Are you with us or against us?" Nehru replied, "Yes.") Confucius stressed harmony in human relations rather than justice, and the Daoists teach that both yin and yang are important and reciprocal rather than competing with each other.

4. What books would you recommend to high school teachers about Asia?

Get schools to subscribe to *Education about Asia*, a magazine published by the Association for Asian Studies that offers great materials for Kindergarten through undergraduate teachers. Stanley Wolpert's *History of India* is a basic survey and a useful reference. Barbara Stoler Miller's translation of the Bhagavad Gita has an intriguing essay about why Thoreau took the Gita to Walden Pond. I still turn to Reischauer, Fairbank, and Craig, *East Asia The Great Tradition* as an invaluable general source. Jonathan Spence is a great resource for China; his *The Death of Widow Wang* brings Ming China to life. The deceptively simple novel *Waiting* by Ha Jin gives insights into contemporary China. Jerry Bentley's *Old World Traditions Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times* and Philip Curtin's *Cross-cultural Trade in World History* are extremely helpful for placing civilizations in Asia in a world context.

PERSONAL IDENTITIES AND PUBLIC COMMUNITIES IN WORLD HISTORY

THE THIRD ANNUAL WORLD HISTORY SYMPOSIUM

Friday, May 11th and Saturday, May 12th, 2001

Curry Student Center
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts

A two-day symposium for social studies teachers of grades 4 -10 will provide:

- new ideas about the teaching of social historical topics,
- lesson plans, and
- primary sources appropriate for upper elementary, middle, or secondary students.

Conference Highlights:

- Two Keynote Addresses:

William Fash, "Piecing Together Ancient Maya History: Lessons from the Past for Building a Better Future".

Diana Wylie, "Starving on a Full Stomach? The History of Food in Southern Africa and Beyond"

Northeastern University
Comment:

- 20 breakout Sessions -- each an hour and half in length -- on aspects of comparative social history for Grades 4 - 10 social studies educators: teachers, administrators, and curriculum developers

Registration

- By Monday, April 23: \$55 for one day, \$70 for both days
- On-site registration: \$60 for one day, \$75 for both days.

For more information: download the complete brochure, including registration materials, from the web: www.whc.neu.edu or call 617-373-4855

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Note to Members

If you know of anyone who would be interested in joining NERWHA (membership is free), please let us know and we can send them a newsletter. Also, if you have any questions, comments, or ideas for future articles for the newsletter, please feel free to get in touch. You can reach us at (617)-373-4060.

New England Regional World History Association
 C/O Department of History
 249 Meserve Hall
 Northeastern University
 360 Huntington Avenue
 Boston, Massachusetts 02115