

“WHAT AND WHY IS WORLD HISTORY?”

Peter Stearns, *World History: The Basics*. London: Routledge, 2011. Print

Peter Stearns is a professor at George Mason University, where he was the provost, from January 1, 2000 to July 2014. Stearns was the Chair of the Department of History at Carnegie Mellon University. In addition, he founded and edited the *Journal of Social History*. While at Carnegie Mellon he developed a pioneering approach to teaching World History. The excerpt below is taken from the first chapter of *World History: The Basics*.

Directions: Highlight and annotate the following article. Attempt to identify the author's primary argument and any supporting claims, note supporting evidence and analysis, and connect the context and your own understanding to explain the significance of what you are reading.

The most important point to know about any subject, when beginning to engage with it, is: what's the purpose; why bother?

The basic reason to study world history involves access to the historical context for the globalized society we live in today (whether one likes a globalized society or not). Correspondingly, the reasons world history courses and programs have soared over the past quarter-century in the United States but also a number of others places, are that more and more educators, and students, have realized how complex and interconnected the world they live in has become, and have identified the resulting needs for a new kind of historical scope. Purely national or regional histories no longer do the trick, though they may be exceptionally useful alongside a world history approach. We need a history that shows how world relationships have emerged and how different cultural and political traditions have formed and interacted. That's what the world is about now, and that's what world history can help explain.

This said, there are some supporting rationales, through they are much less important than the primary claim. A decisive factor in creating American interest in world history, from both high schools and colleges-universities, was the growing diversity of the student body. With more students arriving from backgrounds in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and often also with greater interest in their heritage, the need to offer a history that went beyond purely American or West European

content became compelling. This was one reason world history initially spread more rapidly, as a teaching subject, at state colleges than at the elite private institution whose enrollments were less mixed. But there were outright student protests at places like Stanford, pressing for more innovation in the history curriculum instead of a purely Western diet, and these currents unquestionably opened new doors for the world approach.

World history offers genuine new discoveries, a third reason to move it forward as a subject area. We will see that additions are particularly telling for the periods 600 – 1450 and 1450 – 1750, where escaping a narrow Western framework is particularly refreshing (even, it can be argued, for a proper understanding of the West itself). But world history adds new data and new points of view to virtually every period, even the great age of Western imperialism in the nineteenth century. New stories are available, new reasons to become intrigued with the past. Above all, new vantage points emerge that clarify what the past was all about and how it relates to the present. Most world historians would argue that in the process a more accurate view of the past emerges, and accuracy is not to be scorned.

This returns us to the main points: world history fosters methods of analysis that prepare people at all levels to deal with the issues that contemporary global society poses, and will pose in the future.

All this assumes that world history can deliver on its promises. The goal of providing the mixture of facts, skills and analyses that meet the demanding criterion of using the past to explain the global present is undeniably challenging. Students in world history courses should be able to say, at the end of their labors, that they've at least made serious advances in that direction.

Short Answer Questions: Stearns ~ What and Why is World History

1. Identify the main argument the author is making in the passage.

2. Explain one of the “supporting rationales” presented by the author.

Short Answer Rubric

All short answer questions will require you to use historical thinking skills to respond to either a primary source, historian’s argument, non-text based sources such as data or maps, or general propositions about history. Each question will ask you to identify and analyze examples of historical evidence relevant to the source or question. It is required that responses are written in complete sentences.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS	
<p>[HA] Historical Accuracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Demonstrates an understanding of the events, people, and context</i> 	<p>[A] Analytical Explanation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Makes a strong and clearly defensible historical argument</i>
<p>[P] Response to Prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Directly answers all parts of the question</i> 	<p>[O] Organization and Synthesis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Constructs a well-written, cohesive answer</i>

SCORING					
5 points [+] [PLUS]	4.5 points [/+] [CHECK PLUS]	4 points [/] [CHECK]	3.5 points [/-] [CHECK MINUS]	3 points [-] [MINUS]	2.5 points [0] [ZERO]
<i>All four critical elements</i>	<i>One critical element missing</i>	<i>2 critical elements missing</i>	<i>3 critical elements missing</i>	<i>Missing critical elements, but demonstrates some knowledge</i>	<i>No response or lack of knowledge shown</i>

