

# World History in a Nation-State: The Transnational Disposition in Historical Writing in the United States

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The internationalization of historical writing is here to stay. The high mobility of students and professional historians, the transnational cooperation in research projects and in journals, and above all the growing interest in research designs that do not ignore the borders of nation-states but cross them with vigor—all have become routine. While twenty years ago Karl Dietrich Erdmann could suspect that the “ecumenism of historians” was limited to international conferences, that is no longer so. To be sure, many of the transnationalizing trends have been encouraged and financed by national-level governments, and the national context of universities, archives, and professional historical organizations has not been threatened by these developments, nor has the historian’s orientation toward a national public and its interest in historical information.<sup>1</sup>

Noticeable tendencies toward internationalization of the historical profession as a dimension of the oft-proclaimed process of globalization, therefore, do not level all national distinctions; instead they create areas of conflict with national scholarly cultures and with the fluid traditions of “national styles” within the profession. Admittedly, it makes a difference whether national historiographies merely react to the trends of transnationalization in modern history that disconnect historians from the nation-state as a preferred research subject or themselves generate such transnational perspectives. To explain such differences (a task for the comparative history of historiographies), one may define a national style as a set of dispositions that may emphasize certain research opportunities and play down others. Any debate on transnationalization and on an emerging international historiography benefits from historicizing historiographies. In Dominic Sachsenmaier’s words, we ought to contextualize our own historical activities

by asking the same sets of questions that we as historians would apply to academic networks of the past. It would greatly enrich the debates on global history if we

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Dietrich Erdmann, *Die Ökumene der Historiker: Geschichte der Internationalen Historikerkongresse und des Comité International des Sciences Historiques* (The ecumenism of historians: A history of the International Congresses of Historical Sciences and of the International Committee of Historical Sciences) (Göttingen, 1987); Lutz Raphael, *Geschichtswissenschaft im Zeitalter der Extreme: Theorien, Methoden, Tendenzen von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart* (Historical writing in the age of extremes: Theories, methods, trends since 1900) (Munich, 2003), 268–71.

would include our own professional worlds into the picture. These worlds include the sociologies of knowledge, and the multifarious social, political and cultural contexts that frame our academic endeavors.<sup>2</sup>

In this essay, I will (in part I) sketch the widespread interest of American historians in world (or global) history, particularly with respect to a transformation and preservation of American history in a transnational context. I will then (in II) inquire about the present or recent motives for such interests and (in III) test whether a transnational orientation has been a lasting attribute engrained in American historical writing from its inception—a structural disposition that endured the field's transformation without perhaps ever being dominant. American historical writing has not assumed a completely transnational perspective, and it will probably never do so. That is why, in conclusion (in IV), I will mention contradictory tendencies whereby historians commit themselves to working exclusively on topics relevant within the borders of their own nation-state.<sup>3</sup>

## I

Historical writing in the United States has never lost its interest in world or universal history (that is, an old type of such history completed by an author in a single volume). By contrast, historical writing in Germany, since Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1918–1922), either treated world history as an effort in speculative historical philosophy and an expression of cultural pessimism, or it relegated such history, additive histories of empires and nations, to amateur historians. In the United States, however, numerous publications by the University of Chicago scholar William H. McNeill, particularly his *World History*, which first came out in 1967, not only found a large audience but also helped the author establish excellent academic credentials for himself and his subject. Despite his lasting reputation, McNeill nevertheless typifies, not the advanced position of American world historians, but rather an older type of historical writing that cannot resist the search for a normative matrix connecting the world in its totality and that preserves a conception of history built on the idea of gradual progress. It is not surprising that McNeill published a biography of Arnold Toynbee. McNeill followed the tradition of “grand meta-narratives of Western world history, grounded in an Enlightenment vision of universal humanity and a nineteenth-century practice of comparative civilizations,” which, as Michael Geyer and Charles Bright have observed, “ceased to produce

<sup>2</sup> On national styles, see Christoph Conrad and Sebastian Conrad, “Wie vergleicht man Historiographien?” (How to compare historiographies?), in *Die Nation schreiben: Geschichtswissenschaft im internationalen Vergleich* (Writing the nation: History writing in international comparison), ed. Christoph Conrad and Sebastian Conrad (Göttingen, 2002), 22. On transnationalization in European historical writing, compare Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung: Der Ansatz der Histoire croisée und die Herausforderung des Transnationalen” (Comparison, transfer, interdependence: The idea of histoire croisée and the challenge of transnationalism), *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* (Göttingen), 28 (no. 4, 2002), 607–36; and Kiran Klaus Patel, “Überlegungen zu einer transnationalen Geschichte” (Considerations on transnational history), *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* (Berlin), 52 (no. 7, 2004), 626–45. Historical writing in some places has rejected transnationalism and reveals—“refined” and pluralized—the “return to national narratives,” according to Stefan Berger, “A Return to the National Paradigm? National History Writing in Germany, Italy, France, and Britain from 1945 to the Present,” *Journal of Modern History*, 77 (Sept. 2005), 675. Dominic Sachsenmaier, “Global History, Globally,” introductory remarks at the “Global History, Globally” conference, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Feb. 2008 (in Marcus Gräser's possession), 4.

<sup>3</sup> This essay defines “American historical writing” as a practice of historians at universities, colleges, and external research institutions in the United States of America irrespective of their ancestry or nationality. “American history” means the history of the United States of America.

explanation at precisely the moment that a global history became possible and [when] a history of our own age and of the condition of globality is necessary.<sup>4</sup>

That moment was perhaps epitomized in 1990, when the *Journal of World History*, the organ of a new generation of world historians, was first published. The end of the Cold War and a sudden realization that a new era of globalization was underway provided historians of that generation a sense that similar developments were increasingly likely to occur simultaneously around the globe. The new world history/global history (most scholars use the concepts interchangeably, but “world history” is the common term in the United States) was conceived as an apt interpretation of the globalized world “of our own age” and of past centuries.<sup>5</sup> It broke with old-school world history and its idea of being able to explain the totality of history comprehensively. The reconstruction of “worldwide interconnectivity” replaced such efforts by way of programmatic declarations as well as through practical efforts to create a new world history.<sup>6</sup> World history is “shared history.” Rather than being concerned with the entire world, it considers the world as it is present in and constituted by the elements of “interconnectivity, large or small.” The Harvard University historian Sven Beckert’s most recent works inform us how such a history can be conceived and what potential it has. He is writing a global history of cotton and is investigating its relationship to the transnational character of capitalism, and he tries to “focus on [neither] the nation-state, [nor] a primary problem of the nation-state nor the specific role of the nation-state, but [to] define the changing forms of the transnational [concept] as a problem.” Beckert’s approach makes it possible to answer questions of national significance that are impossible to conceive of or discuss from a national perspective, such as “Why did the USA instead of another country become the world’s largest supplier of cotton?”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (The decline of the West: Perspectives of world history) (2 vols., Vienna, 1918–1922); Hans Freyer, *Weltgeschichte Europas* (A world history of Europe) (Stuttgart, 1954); Otto Zierer, *Neue Weltgeschichte* (A new world history) (3 vols., Stuttgart, 1966); William H. McNeill, *A World History* (New York, 1967); William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (Chicago, 1963); William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City, 1976); William H. McNeill and J. R. McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird’s-Eye View of World History* (New York, 2003). See also William H. McNeill, “The Changing Shape of World History,” *History and Theory*, 34 (May 1995), 8–26. William H. McNeill, *Arnold J. Toynbee: A Life* (New York, 1989); Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, “World History in a Global Age,” *American Historical Review*, 100 (Oct. 1995), 1034–60, esp. 1041.

<sup>5</sup> On globalization from the perspective of historical writing, see Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, *Globalization: A Short History* (Princeton, 2005). Benedict Stuchtey and Eckhardt Fuchs, “Problems of Writing World History: Western and Non-Western Experiences, 1800–2000,” in *Writing World History, 1800–2000*, ed. Benedict Stuchtey and Eckhardt Fuchs (Oxford, 2002), 32–34.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Bright and Michael Geyer, “Where in the World Is America? The History of the United States in the Global Age,” in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley, 2002), 67. On American debates over world history, see Sven Beckert, “Das Reich der Baumwolle: Eine globale Geschichte” (The empire of cotton: A global history), in *Das Kaiserreich transnational: Deutschland in der Welt 1871–1914* (The transnational empire: Germany in the world, 1871–1914), ed. Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel (Göttingen, 2004), 287–90; and Marcus Gräser, “Globalizing America’ und ‘Provincializing Europe.’ World History als Feld der amerikanischen Geschichtswissenschaft” (“Globalizing America” and “provincializing Europe”: World history as a field of American history writing), in *Globalgeschichte* (Global history), ed. Margarete Grandner, Dietmar Rothermund, and Wolfgang Schwentker (Vienna, 2005), 183–96.

<sup>7</sup> Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria, “Geteilte Geschichten—Europa in einer postkolonialen Welt” (Shared histories—Europe in a postcolonial world), in *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus: Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften* (Beyond Eurocentrism: Postcolonial perspectives in history writing and cultural studies), ed. Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria (Frankfurt am Main, 2002), 9–49; Beckert, “Reich der Baumwolle,” esp. 301, 298. See also Sven Beckert, “Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War,” *American Historical Review*, 109 (Dec. 2004), 1405–38; and Sven Beckert, “From Tuskegee to Togo: The Problem of Freedom in the Empire of Cotton,” *Journal of American History*, 92 (Sept. 2005), 398–426.

In historical writing in the United States, the subdiscipline of world history has made significant progress in recent years. According to the annual report of universities' history departments, published by the American Historical Association in 2001/2002, world history had caught up with, if it did not surpass, the traditional "Western Civilization" course in the number of students enrolled and the number of courses offered. The extensive book review section of the *American Historical Review* already has a subdivision for "comparative/world." Such progress is testament to the hard-fought recognition of a research field as well as an expression of the creation of a canon for it. Yet there is danger of world history/transnational history being used as a "buzzword among historians, more a label than a practice, more expansive in its meaning than precise in its application," or as a trite alternative term for the Western Civilization course—no longer politically correct—that has served as a conventional instrument of college education.<sup>8</sup>

For historical research in the United States, the reception of globalization after 1990 (that is, of new dimensions of that ongoing process), which ultimately led to the questioning of American history as nation-state history, was momentous. In 1996, under the leadership of Thomas Bender and with the participation of American and non-American historians, the Organization of American Historians and New York University established the Project on Internationalizing the Study of American History. Four years later the project culminated in the *La Pietra Report*, named after a conference villa in Florence. What made this initiative remarkable was the collective attempt to design a position and a statement for future research and teaching in the profession. In the notoriously fragmented discipline of American history, such endeavors are rare. Considering the proposal to reform teaching as well as the interpretation of American history in the context of research "in a global age," the historicization of the nation and the following forceful demand are significant: "Historical inquiry must be more sensitive to the relevance of historical processes larger than the nation." In the field of American history, the primacy of "transnationalism," which was connected to the introduction of transnational space as an area for research, was not tied to a negation of the nation-state as a subject of study but to its transformation and preservation; that is, there was a dialectical entanglement of national and transnational history. The report carefully states that the transnationalization of American history "does not propose to subsume United States history under the umbrella of world or global history. We would not have United States history thus erased; rather the aim is to deepen its contextualization and to extend the transnational relations of American history."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the transnational view of American history is not merely

<sup>8</sup> Robert B. Townsend, "Survey Shows Sizeable Increases in History Majors and Bachelor's Degrees: Latest Data Points to Wide Differences in Undergraduate Class Sizes and Course Offerings," *Perspectives*, 42 (April 2004), 17–23. On precise uses of the term "world history," see C. A. Bayly et al., "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History," *American Historical Review*, 111 (Dec. 2006), 1441. For the transition from "Western Civilization" to "world history," see Peter N. Stearns, *Western Civilization in World History* (New York, 2003). On political correctness, see Peter N. Stearns and Noralee Frankel, eds., *Globalizing American History: The AHA Guide to Re-imagining the U.S. Survey Course* (Washington, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> The Organization of American Historians/New York University Project on Internationalizing the Study of American History, Thomas Bender, director, *La Pietra Report: A Report to the Profession* (New York, 2000), esp. 5, 6. Participants in the La Pietra discussions are now among the first to try to make good on the promise of "rethinking American history in a global age." See Thomas Bender, *A Nation among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York, 2006); and Ian Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective since 1789* (New York, 2007). As early as 1984 American and European historians met to discuss the view of American history from abroad. See the special issue "The View from Abroad: The Bellagio Conference on American History," *Reviews in American History*, 14 (Dec. 1986), vii–ix, 487–686. Thomas Bender, "Introduction: Historians, the Nation, and the Plenitude of Narratives," in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, ed. Bender, 1–21. On the consequences

a consequence of the new interest in world history; the two trends are as distinct as they are related. They are an expression of one and the same unease with national restrictions in the historical profession.<sup>10</sup>

The indexes of the leading journals, the *American Historical Review* and the *Journal of American History*, indicate the popularity of such transnational approaches to American history (as well as the transnational disguise of the proven, older instrument of comparative history of nation-states). A few monographs, some of which have already attained reference status, also reveal the pathbreaking nature of such a removal of borders. Axel R. Schäfer's *American Progressives and German Social Reform, 1875–1920* (2000) and Daniel T. Rodgers's *Atlantic Crossings* (1998) explain the slow implementation of American welfare politics since 1900 not solely in light of internal American constraints and the perception of domestic social problems but also as an inseparable part of a transnational learning process in what Rodgers called an "age of social politics." However, in addressing the question of what, how, and when something is learned, the analysis returns to the nation-state.<sup>11</sup>

In *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change* (2001), Adam McKeown takes this process one step further. The book's analytical focus, unlike that of more conventional research on immigration, is not on the adaptation of distinct immigrant groups to certain locations and the contribution of immigrants to the transformation of American politics. Instead, scholars such as McKeown now focus on the development of networks, transnational institutions, and families that aided the migration process, conceiving of the development of those links as an economic strategy and a means for the circulation of products, persons, information, and profit. In this process, the economic opportunities of cities (as a preferred destination of migrants) and the cultural influence of regional diasporas together played a more significant role than individual nation-states and their regulation of immigration. Those examples as well as Beckert's cotton history identify the three objects of investigation that clearly exhibit a tendency toward transnationality: products, ideas, and families. Those three objects are examples of "historical processes [that] are made in different places but . . . are constructed in the movement between places, sites, and regions."<sup>12</sup>

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of transnationalization in the field of American studies, see Nicole Waller, "Refigurations of American Studies: On Transnationalizing the United States," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* (Heidelberg), 50 (no. 1/2, 2005), 231–47. For the proposition "that the goal of transcending national history compels us paradoxically to revitalize it," see John Higham, *Hanging Together: Unity and Diversity in American Culture* (New Haven, 2001), 242.

<sup>10</sup> On the distinction between transnational, international, and world history, see Kiran Klaus Patel, "Jenseits der Nation: Amerikanische Geschichte in der Erweiterung" (Beyond the nation: The enlargement of American history), in *Deutschland und die USA in der internationalen Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts: Festschrift für Detlef Junker* (Germany and the USA in international history in the twentieth century: A festschrift for Detlef Junker), ed. Manfred Berg and Philipp Gassert (Stuttgart, 2004), 44–45. On the ways that transnational history and world history may overlap in practice, see Arif Dirlik, "Performing the World: Reality and Representation in the Making of World Histor(ies)," *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, 37 (Fall 2005), 21. On "transnational" as a term for history that "is not necessarily global in scope, examining instead particular regions . . . connected by particular networks," see Sven Beckert, "AHR Conversation," 1446.

<sup>11</sup> For the argument that the transnationalization of American history does not represent a method but a research perspective and that most often its method is comparison or analysis of transfers or a combination of both, see Patel, "Überlegungen zu einer transnationalen Geschichte," 628. See also Beckert, "AHR Conversation," 1454. Axel R. Schäfer, *American Progressives and German Social Reform, 1875–1920: Social Ethics, Moral Control, and the Regulatory State in a Transatlantic Context* (Stuttgart, 2000). See also Axel R. Schäfer, "W. E. B. Du Bois, German Social Thought, and the Racial Divide in American Progressivism, 1892–1909," *Journal of American History*, 88 (Dec. 2001), 925–49. Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998); Daniel T. Rodgers, "An Age of Social Politics," in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, ed. Bender, 250–73.

<sup>12</sup> Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900–1936* (Chi-

## II

The trend toward a transnationalization of American history and the accompanying interpretation of the United States as a “global nation” reveals only one dimension of the American historical profession’s pluralism. Several considerations demonstrate that this is a stable trend bound to become stronger. An important basis in American historical writing for the transformation of (rather than a mere postulation of having transformed) the concept of the nation-state to acknowledge a dialectical entanglement of national and transnational is that no other national community of historians is so inherently international.<sup>13</sup> This characterization also pertains to the student body, and the internationalism is not solely a matter of ancestry or nationality. Large American research universities and their history departments are international by any standard. Roughly one-third of historians of both sexes in such institutions work on the history of the United States, a similar (and shrinking) third work on European history, and a similar (but growing) third are devoted to the—large—“rest” of the world. The tradition of area studies has eased cooperation by historians with scholars in other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. But the obvious interest in non-American history at American universities does not necessarily prompt historians of American history to assume a transnational perspective. The more or less strict departmentalization within the history faculties may bring about the exact opposite: narrow specialization and hierarchy (with traditional American—or European—history on top). However, faculties diversified in both ethnic and national origin provide opportunities for collaborative efforts. Even more relevant for educating future generations, they facilitate among historians a natural familiarity with the history of other nations, regions, and continents. Such worldliness and cosmopolitan awareness promote the exploration of transnational history.<sup>14</sup>

Even though the American historical profession may appear to be bursting with good health at the country’s major universities, it is not without self-doubt. The transnationalization of U.S. national history and the support of world history apparently serve as an escape route in response to two nagging uncertainties: Poststructuralism and postcolonial studies have not only challenged traditional methods of writing history but have also used criticism of an infamous “Eurocentrism” and of an overestimation of the “West” to attack and successfully diminish the former standing of European history as a field. Dipesh Chakrabarty, who teaches Southeast Asian history at the University of Chicago, has called for a “provincialization” of Europe as a prerequisite to global history and transnational

cago, 2001), esp. 25. For more examples of transnational history, see Kiran Klaus Patel, “Transatlantische Perspektiven transnationaler Geschichte” (Transatlantic perspectives of transnational history) *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* (Göttingen), 29 (no. 4, 2003), 635–38. Isabel Hofmeyr, “AHR Conversation,” 1444.

<sup>13</sup> Bright and Geyer, “Where in the World Is America?,” 66. For an early interpretation of the United States as a “federation of cultures,” see Randolph S. Bourne, “Trans-National America,” in *War and the Intellectuals: Collected Essays, 1915–1919*, by Randolph S. Bourne (Indianapolis, 1999), 115, 117, 121. See also David Thelen, “The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History,” *Journal of American History*, 86 (Dec. 1999), 967. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, Eng., 1988), 470. On the importance of German-speaking emigrants for American historical writing, see Hartmut Lehmann and James J. Sheehan, eds., *An Interrupted Past: German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933* (Washington, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> Consider the sections used for book reviews in the *American Historical Review*. Since 1961–1962 there have been sections devoted to historical literature on the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Robert B. Townsend, “What’s in a Label? Changing Patterns of Faculty Specialization since 1975,” *Perspectives*, 45 (Jan. 2007), 7–10; Barbara Weinstein, “How Much Have We Decentered the Historical Profession?,” *ibid.* (March 2007), 3–6; Thomas Bender, Philip M. Katz, and Colin Palmer, *The Education of Historians for the Twenty-first Century* (Urbana, 2004), 11.

American history. According to Chakrabarty, the use of the transnational paradigm in American history not only responds to postcolonial criticism but also offers an opportunity to create “an alliance between the leading metropolitan histories and the subaltern pasts of the periphery.” He is well aware of the irony that the provincialization of Europe (as a condition for the valorization of non-European history) can be achieved only by using intellectual tools provided by the European tradition (in the case of Chakrabarty, the German tradition of Karl Marx and Martin Heidegger).<sup>15</sup> However, the postnational reading of American history can also be interpreted as a reaction to the ongoing and bitterly debated inability to achieve synthesis in historical writing in the United States. Beyond the numerous textbooks there is no history of the United States of America that can compete in scope and quality with Hans-Ulrich Wehler’s work on Germany or with Fernand Braudel’s late attempt to write a history of the French nation.<sup>16</sup> The reasons for the absence of an American equivalent are linked to the fragmentation of the American nation and the multitude of particular histories within an immigration society—a society whose national history would need to integrate a history of Native Americans as well as the history of those who were forced to “immigrate.” Considering such issues, the historicization of the national history as transnational history may appear as a solution. Indeed, Thomas Bender, who teaches at New York University, is a key figure both in the debate over the need for a synthesis and in the transnationalization of American history. Similarly, one might speculate whether attempts to merge American history into world history are intended to provide a new type of synthesis for a nation that considers itself a global nation—a position that could conceive of a demand for internationalization of American history as tautological.<sup>17</sup>

The reality of American world politics (and of an American quasi empire) gives future relevance to a transnational view of American history. The proponents of American history in a global age raised the question: “Where in the world is America?” It was met with an answer that ridiculed the paradox of a global nation: “The United States is one with the world because it is the world.”<sup>18</sup> Bender is correct to warn that “the United States *in* global history might all too easily morph into U.S. history *as* global history” and into “an apologia for empire.” But his positioning of the United States “as one of the many provinces that collectively constitute humanity” evades the place of the United States in the

<sup>15</sup> Lynn Hunt, “Is European History Passé?,” *Perspectives*, 40 (Nov. 2002), 5–7; Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 465; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, 2000); Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Europa provinzialisieren: Postkolonialität und die Kritik der Geschichte” (Provincializing Europe: Postcoloniality and the critique of history), in *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus*, ed. Conrad and Randeria, 304. On the “conversation” between Karl Marx and Martin Heidegger as related to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s argument, see Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Bender, “Wholes and Parts: The Need for Synthesis in American History,” *Journal of American History*, 73 (June 1986), 120–36; Thomas Bender, “Venturesome and Cautious: American History in the 1990s,” *ibid.*, 81 (Dec. 1994), 992–1003. See also Thomas Bender, “Wholes and Parts: Continuing the Conversation,” *ibid.*, 74 (June 1987), 123–30. An important critique of Thomas Bender’s call for synthesis is Eric H. Monkkenen, “The Dangers of Synthesis,” *American Historical Review*, 91 (Dec. 1986), 1146–57. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (History of German society) (5 vols., Munich, 1987–2008); Fernand Braudel, *Frankreich* (France) (3 vols., Stuttgart, 1989–1990). Fernand Braudel’s uncompleted work tries to illuminate the nation from a transnational perspective inasmuch as “the borders of history of international relations” should be crossed. *Ibid.*, I, 23.

<sup>17</sup> On the fragmentation of American historical writing and its crisis since circa 1980, see Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 521, 578–84. Robert Gregg, “Making the World Safe for American History,” in *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation*, ed. Antoinette Burton (Durham, 2003), 182.

<sup>18</sup> On the debate about the existence and nature of an American “empire,” see Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006). Bright and Geyer, “Where in the World Is America?,” 63; Louis A. Pérez Jr., “We Are the World: Internationalizing the National, Nationalizing the International,” *Journal of American History*, 89 (Sept. 2002), 564.

world: Should not every attempt to put the United States in a global perspective explain the extraordinary position of the United States among “the many provinces” and reflect on the consequences that position may have for the “collectively constituted humanity”?<sup>19</sup> But the American historical profession, in an advanced state of transnationalization, does not provide a mirror image of, or an ideological refuge for, aggressive foreign policy.<sup>20</sup> American historians have been very much at odds with history policies pursued by former president George W. Bush and a majority in Congress. Personnel decisions by the administration with respect to the National Archives as well as legislative initiatives and congressional support programs suggest that Bush and the Republican party (but also parts of the Democratic party) do *not* favor a global-historical, transnational interpretation of American history. Instead, they share a longing for a more traditional and uplifting political history that contains a grand narrative supported by well-known documents, events, and historical personae. But the American public continues to be made aware of global history or the transnational reach of historical writing. In her introduction to an edition of the *Journal of American History* entitled “History and September 11,” Joanne Meyerowitz suggested that

if we learned anything from the events of September 11, we should have learned . . . that we cannot understand American history by dwelling solely on the United States. The attacks of September 11 force us to turn outward and to see the United States not in isolation, but in and of the world, where other peoples have sometimes embraced, sometimes reframed, and sometimes repudiated the mythic promise of America.<sup>21</sup>

### III

Irrespective of its intended meaning, the old-fashioned phrase “mythic promise of America” may lead us to conclude that the transnational disposition of American historical writing may have grown out of an American ideological and interpretative focus commonly referred to as “exceptionalism.” The origins of that interpretation derive from a Puritan emphasis in the seventeenth century. In 1630, at the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the Puritan leader John Winthrop insisted that New England Puritans live up to the challenge of being “a city upon a hill.” A later tendency to view America in light of universal principles promoting democracy (secular trend) entails a transnational disposition inasmuch as (a) exceptionalism, to sustain its singularity, requires making covert or open comparisons with “others” (a task sometimes assumed by scholars); and (b) the recognition of universal principles inevitably seems to imply the responsibility to assume a global mission.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See Bender, *Nation among Nations*, esp. 298, 7.

<sup>20</sup> For a different assessment of Western historical writing and the global influence of capitalism, see Hayden White, “Die Verwestlichung der Weltgeschichte” (The westernization of world history), in *Westliches Geschichtsdnken: Eine interkulturelle Debatte* (Historical thought in the West: An intercultural debate), ed. Jörn Rüsen (Göttingen, 1999), 185.

<sup>21</sup> Gräser, “‘Globalizing America’ and ‘Provincializing Europe.’” On recent historical-political decisions of Congress, see Bruce Craig, “Capitol Commentary,” *Organization of American Historians: Newsletter*, 33 (April 2005), 7, 14; and Bruce Craig, “Some Parting Thoughts on Capitol Hill,” *Perspectives*, 45 (Jan. 2007), 26–27. Joanne Meyerowitz, “History and September 11: An Introduction,” *Journal of American History*, 89 (Sept. 2002), 414.

<sup>22</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York, 1996); Martin E. Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America* (New York, 1985), 63. The method of comparison has been prominent in recent American historical writing. See C. Vann Woodward, ed., *The Comparative Approach*

To interpret such circumstances as the origins or wellsprings of transnational historical writing in the United States implies that American historians merely reproduce aspects of an American ideology and that they thereby overlook the genuine substance of American historiography—the problem of explaining how the United States evolved as a nation-state. Certainly, a number of pre-professional historians, above all George Bancroft, were unable to view the history of the American nation as anything but “the story of the achievement of America’s divinely ordained identity.”<sup>23</sup> The origins of an early transnational disposition of professionalized American historical writing, however, may only partially be confounded with a commitment to the interpretative mode of exceptionalism.<sup>24</sup> More important are circumstances that, instead of fostering arrogance and the desire to valorize the American nation, were shaped by doubts about, and criticism of, this polity and the challenges and insecurities attached to the responsibilities of the field of history within it.

Most noteworthy were the circumstances in which Western Civilization was first taught at Columbia University in 1919 and in which that course became the foundation for the general education in history at almost all American colleges. Admittedly, the Western Civilization course influenced teaching more than research. However, the canonization of the course at colleges forced history departments to employ professors who could teach American history, traditional ancient history, and European history (interpreted mostly as a set of national histories) and its influence on transatlantic expansion. Such changes to the instruction in national history surely had an effect on research universities because of their dedication to a nexus between research and teaching. Such canonization was accompanied by the differentiation of area studies that paralleled and was supported by America’s post–World War II role of global supervision. The perspective promoted by area studies slowly granted an increasingly relevant role to those cultures that in the initial phase of Western Civilization had been viewed “from the deck of a gunboat.” The slow replacement of Western Civilization by world history came as a necessary, timely, and consistent change.<sup>25</sup>

Academic support for American participation in World War I was significant for the canonical development of Western Civilization courses, which developed from programs used by the Students’ Army Training Corps to give soldiers an intellectual preparation for deployment in the European war zone. This curriculum was designed to explain the Eu-

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*to American History* (New York, 1968); and the second edition: C. Vann Woodward, ed., *The Comparative Approach to American History* (New York, 1997), esp. xi–xiii. On the significance of comparative views in the debates on transnational perspectives in American historical writing, see Michael Kammen, *In the Past Lane: Historical Perspectives on American Culture* (New York, 1997), 169–98; and Ian Tyrrell, “Beyond the View from Euro-America: Environment, Settler Societies, and the Internationalization of American History,” in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, ed. Bender, 168–91.

<sup>23</sup> Dorothy Ross, “Grand Narrative in American Historical Writing: From Romance to Uncertainty,” *American Historical Review*, 100 (June 1995), 653. See also Dorothy Ross, “Historical Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century America,” *ibid.*, 89 (Oct. 1984), 915. “Nineteenth century American historiography was characterized by such devoutness in broad swaths, which was completely unknown to an enlightened historical writing in Europe,” according to Gabriele Lingelbach, *Klio macht Karriere: Die Institutionalisierung der Geschichtswissenschaft in Frankreich und den USA in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Clio’s career: The institutionalization of historical writing in France and in the USA in the late nineteenth century) (Göttingen, 2003), 87.

<sup>24</sup> For an interpretation of American historical writing that discusses “transnational moments and possibilities” but does not view them as forming a disposition, see Ian Tyrrell, “Making Nations/Making States: American Historians in the Context of Empire,” *Journal of American History*, 83 (Dec. 1999), 1015–44, esp. 1015–18.

<sup>25</sup> Gilbert Allardyce, “The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course,” *American Historical Review*, 87 (June 1982), 695–725; Mark M. Krug, “The Teaching of Universal History,” in *New Perspectives in World History*, ed. Shirley H. Engle (Washington, 1964), esp. 547.

European conflict and the relationship between the United States, Great Britain, and France. In the aftermath of the war, the term “civilization” quickly lost its association with the front lines of World War I and was generally used to explain the “West.” James Harvey Robinson, the canon’s main supporter at Columbia University (if not its main proponent in general), wrote in 1926 that “during the past two or three centuries the knowledge and devices of Western Europe have disseminated themselves over the whole globe, as no other civilization in the history of mankind has done.” During the European crisis of the interwar years, World War II, and the Cold War, Western Civilization courses explained (and were not entirely wrong in arguing) that the United States was the heir and safekeeper of that “civilization.” According to a more critical assessment made after World War II, “the western civilization course was, in effect, a world history course with the United States as the most recent bright light in the story of free society and the individual.” Western Civilization was lampooned for depicting a historical trajectory that extended “From Plato to NATO.”<sup>26</sup>

This canon of a Western civilization teleologically culminating in the emergence of the United States as a world power (a conception whose roots reach back beyond the Students’ Army Training Corps) should not conceal the fact that American preponderance was not as apparent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the construct may suggest. The inclusion of American history in the broader context of Western civilization betrayed an insecurity relevant well into the twentieth century—doubts about the independence and significance of American history as a history of an independent nation-state. The escape into a canon of “civilization” compensated for such an inferiority complex. Historians and their audience so naturally conceived of the American nation as a component of the European cultural space that it seemed doubtful that the United States could establish an autochthonous national culture. It may be too radical to conclude, as the German historian Axel Jansen has recently done, that the universalistic orientation of early twentieth-century educated Americans suggests “that the American nation-state had not yet emerged as a self-sufficient political community.”<sup>27</sup> But it is certain that the definition of “civilization” that long reverberated through American historical writing precluded a consideration of the nation outside the construct of “American civilization.” In his 1929 presidential address to the American Historical Association, Robinson posited the primacy of a general history:

National history seems to us more provincial than formerly it did. We now know so much more of the origin and dissemination of civilization. . . . Each people at every stage of its civilization owes most of its knowledge, skill, art and *mores* to other peoples including those of a very remote past. So national history merges into general history. And without some vivid conception of the whole sweep of civilization national history is likely to be very badly interpreted.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Allardyce, “Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course,” 706; James Harvey Robinson, *The Ordeal of Civilization: A Sketch of the Development and World-Wide Diffusion of Our Present-Day Institutions and Ideas* (New York, 1926), 4–5. On the conception of Western civilization, see Roxann Prazniak, “Is World History Possible? An Inquiry,” in *History after the Three Worlds: Post-Eurocentric Historiographies*, ed. Arif Dirlik, Vinay Bahl, and Peter Gran (Lanham, 2000), 224. Raphael, *Geschichtswissenschaft im Zeitalter der Extreme*, 211.

<sup>27</sup> On the debate about “civilization” in Herbert Baxter Adams’s seminar at the John Hopkins University in Baltimore in 1889, see Higham, *Hanging Together*, 243. In 1881 the trustees of Cornell University questioned “whether it would be reasonable to establish an endowed chair exclusively for American history”—although they did so. See Lingelbach, *Klio macht Karriere*, 241. Axel Jansen, *Individuelle Bewährung im Krieg: Amerikaner in Europa 1914–1917* (Individual volunteers in the war: Americans in Europe, 1914–1917) (Frankfurt am Main, 2003), 233.

<sup>28</sup> Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (4 vols., New York, 1927–1942). The

Robinson's valuation of the term "civilization" at the expense of an exclusively national perspective points to another development promoting the transnational tendency of American historical writing. In the years prior to World War I, a new generation of progressive historians who claimed to write a "new history" succeeded in modernizing historical writing in America. The thinking of Frederick Jackson Turner, Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, John Franklin Jameson, and Robinson approximated that of Henri Berr and Karl Lamprecht, key advocates of a modernization then underway in European historical writing. The Americans, however, were far more successful than most of the European counterparts with whom they discussed such issues. All three components of the new history—the alliance with the social sciences, the expansion of topics and objects of investigation beyond classic political history, and the orientation toward the present and its questions and needs for explanation—pointed to areas that could no longer be explained by reference to the nation-state alone. The significance of the nation-state seemed to vanish, and the issue of national cohesion lost its former significance. In 1912 Jameson noted that the "nation is ceasing to be the leading form of the world's structure; organizations transcending national boundaries are becoming more and more numerous and effective. . . . We are advancing into a new world which will be marked by cosmopolitan thought and sentiment."<sup>29</sup> This statement could not have articulated more clearly the contrast between modern American historical writing, on the one hand, and a movement among German historians dedicated to Leopold von Ranke and what they took to be his commitment to the nation-state, on the other. Jameson's anticipation of an emergent "cosmopolitan thought" was unfathomably optimistic.<sup>30</sup>

Beards' construction of an "American civilization" did not involve an imperial "mission" for the American nation. At times they used "civilization" ironically, referring to it as a "cabbalistic symbol" and "household word." *Ibid.*, IV, v, 10–12. On the significance of the history of civilization for American historical writing, see Friedrich Jaeger, *Amerikanischer Liberalismus und zivile Gesellschaft: Perspektiven sozialer Reform zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* (American liberalism and civil society: Perspectives on social reform in the early twentieth century) (Göttingen, 2001), 81–107. James Harvey Robinson, "The Newer Ways of Historians," *American Historical Review*, 35 (Jan. 1930), 247.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York, 1968); James Harvey Robinson, *The New History: Essays Illustrating the Modern Historical Outlook* (New York, 1912), 1–25. On the international discussion, see Luise Schorn-Schütte, "Karl Lamprecht und die internationale Geschichtswissenschaft an der Jahrhundertwende" (Karl Lamprecht and international historical writing at the turn of the century), *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* (Cologne), 67 (no. 2, 1985), 417–64. John Higham, *History: Professional Scholarship in America* (Baltimore, 1990), 111–13; John Franklin Jameson, "The Future Uses of History," in *John Franklin Jameson and the Development of Humanistic Scholarship in America*, vol. I: *Selected Essays*, ed. Morey D. Rothberg and Jacqueline Goggin (Athens, Ga., 1993), 309, 312. For "cosmopolitan" tendencies in academia before World War I, see Erdmann, *Ökumene der Historiker*, 13–17. See also Adelheid von Saldern, "'North Atlantic Civilization': Konzeptioneller Aufbruch zu einem neuen Verhältnis zwischen den USA und Europa in den 1920er Jahren" ("North Atlantic Civilization": Conceptualizing a new relationship between the USA and Europe in the 1920s), in *Unterwegs in Europa: Beiträge zu einer vergleichenden Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte* (On the way in Europe: Essays in comparative social and cultural history), ed. Christina Benninghaus, et al. (Frankfurt am Main, 2008), 271–99.

<sup>30</sup> Friedrich Jaeger and Jörn Rüsen, *Geschichte des Historismus: Eine Einführung* (History of historicism: An introduction) (Munich, 1992), 92–95. On the (limited) influence of German historians on American historical writing, see Matthias Waechter, "Die 'Progressive Historians' und die Modernisierung der amerikanischen Geschichtswissenschaft" (Progressive historians and the modernization of American historical writing), in *Geschichtsdiskurs* (Discourses of history), vol. IV: *Krisenbewusstsein, Katastrophenerfahrungen, und Innovationen, 1880–1945* (Consciousness of crisis, sense of catastrophe, and innovations, 1880–1945), ed. Wolfgang Küttler, Jörn Rüsen, and Ernst Schulin (Frankfurt am Main, 1997), 126; and Lingelbach, *Klio macht Karriere*, 9–10, 505–8, 673–74. On misconceptions of the American reception of the work of Leopold von Ranke, see Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 28ff.; and Friedrich Jaeger, "New History: Historismuskritik und Sozialgeschichte in den USA zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts" (New history: Criticism of historicism and American social history in the early twentieth century), in *Historismus in den Kulturwissenschaften: Geschichtskonzepte, historische Einschätzungen, Grundlagenprobleme* (Historicism in the cultural sciences: Concepts of history, historical assessments, basic issues), ed. Otto Gerhard Oexle and Jörn Rüsen (Cologne, 1996), 347. To explain the sudden victory of the new history, Friedrich Jaeger correctly pointed to the "lack of an institutionalized and theoretical-methodological historicism" in the United States. (Historicism is

His statement merely marks the conclusion to an intellectual movement that Turner had addressed in his 1891 essay on “The Significance of History,” in which he declared that history restricted to just one territory was inadequate:

In history there are only artificial divisions . . . not only is it true that no country can be understood without taking account of all the past; it is also true that we cannot select a stretch of land and say we will limit our study to this land; for local history can only be understood in the light of the history of the world. . . . Each [nation] acts on each. Ideas, commodities even, refuse the bounds of a nation. All are inextricably connected, so that each is needed to explain the others. This is true especially of our modern world with its complex commerce and means of intellectual connection.

Two years later, Turner contributed to historical writing his well-known essay on the significance of the “frontier”—a space where American democracy was supposedly generated—in which he confidently dismissed the dominant interpretation of the “Germanic origins of Anglo-American democracy” promulgated by Herbert Baxter Adams and thus initiated the emancipation of American historical writing from its European models. By emphasizing the frontier, Turner had implicitly, but not consciously, paid tribute to the inevitability of transnationalization. Turner described the settlement and occupation of the North American continent as a structural pattern. In light of the colonizers’ internationality and of the continual arrival of new immigrants, this pattern of settlement and land claims on the North American continent could not be immediately integrated into a national model and had to function as a universal sign of an evolution. Turner approvingly cited the views of American history of the Italian social scientist Achille Loria: “the land which has no history reveals luminously the course of universal history.” Americans’ adoption of the European perspective for their own history is ambivalent, since the unique significance of the country could be arrived at only by designating its history as universal, and that approach intensified doubts about the value of their own history.<sup>31</sup>

Outside America’s leading universities, however, a much more comprehensive historical culture was evolving that also made use of—and reinforced—the transnational perspective. Turner declared: “Local history can only be understood in the light of the history of the world,” and that insight was particularly pertinent to those ethnic groups whose history could not be written without taking into view other world regions. As W. E. B. Du Bois wrote in 1906, black history in the United States had been separated from the

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an epoch in German historiography and, more generally, a mode of historical thought with roots in the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, in romantic ideas of “individuality” and “tradition,” and in Johann Gottfried von Herder’s conception of development [*Entwicklung*].) The weakness of historicism in American historical writing permitted a universal definition of culture only. *Ibid.* American historians criticized the counterposing of (German) culture and (Western) civilization popular among German historians at this time. See the discussion of Oswald Spengler, Ernst Robert Curtius, and the early Thomas Mann in Beard and Beard, *Rise of American Civilization*, IV, 53–60. The relinquishment of such a stark distinction in American historical writing facilitated the transnational tendency in historical writing whereas the fixation on one exclusive term for culture (versus civilization) in the German case impeded that tendency.

<sup>31</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of History,” in *History, Frontier, and Section: Three Essays*, by Frederick Jackson Turner (Albuquerque, 1993), 50. On the “Teutonic-germ theory of the origins of democracy,” see Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 87–88. By dismissing Herbert Baxter Adams’s interpretation of the Germanic-Anglo-Saxon origins of American democracy and instead emphasizing its genuine American “place,” Frederick Jackson Turner nationalized American historical writing and brought U.S. national history to a path resembling that of European historical writing. Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” in *History, Frontier, and Section*, by Turner, 66. On Turner’s view on the transnational disposition, see Tyrrell, “Making Nations/Making States,” 1032. Turner, “Significance of History,” 50.

mainstream of American historical writing and thus must be seen as a “local phase of a world problem.” The history of immigrants who had arrived voluntarily (and of subsequent generations descended from them) could easily be integrated into a transnational narrative, as their experience was inherently transnational. Their origin, justification, and success could not be explained without reference to the situation in the countries they had left, and their history found an audience not only in the United States but in their former countries as well. Their particular history was explosive when the immigrants’ homeland was not a nation-state. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, any Irish and Polish attempt at establishing a historical self-consciousness was necessarily tied to a transnational fight for an independent national state. This contest occasionally led to tensions with immigrants (such as the Germans) whose country was considered to be a repressive neighbor or (in the case of the Irish) to a hostile distance from particular types of Anglo-Saxon, British domination in the United States. Such reactions often resulted in conflicts over the adequate representation of the various ethnicities’ histories in school textbooks. In all these cases—that of African Americans as well as of European immigrants—the particular histories containing the stories of overlapping diasporas not only satisfied particular audiences but also added to the fragmentation of a national American historical culture.<sup>32</sup>

These three transformations—the development of a model of civilization that transcends the borders of one’s nation-state, the modernization of historical writing in light of the present in a way that was simultaneously concerned with questions of both world history and the nation-state, and the development of a particularist, ethnically pluralist historical culture that explores world history within the nation-state—all took place between 1890 and 1920. During this period conditions in the United States approached those in Europe: what Turner called the “closing of the frontier,” gradual industrialization and urbanization accompanied by violent labor conflicts, and involvement in World War I. That is why professional historical writing in the mode of exceptionalism seemed less suitable than adopting the idea of transnationalism. Colonial history further reminded historians that major decisions affecting American history had been made outside American borders. Those who have to rely on foreign archives to explore their own history hardly lose sight of the impact of transnational influences.

Another circumstance remains crucial to creating the context of transnational dispositions in American historical writing. During the nineteenth century European historical writing emerged in close proximity to, and in accord with, the nation, the state, and academia. Although American historical writing also demonstrates a close nexus between academia and the ideal of a nation, it remains detached from the institutions of the federal state. Up until the New Deal era, the government of the United States was notoriously shy of bureaucracy, without significant domestic capacity, and uninterested in academia and research. When compared to European countries, for example, the United

<sup>32</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Color Line Belts the World,” in *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader*, ed. David Levering Lewis (New York, 1995), 42; Jonathan Zimmerman, “‘Each ‘Race’ Could Have Its Heroes Sung’: Ethnicity and the History Wars in the 1920s,” *Journal of American History*, 87 (June 2000), 92–111; Robin D. G. Kelley, “How the West Was One: The African Diaspora and the Re-Mapping of U.S. History,” in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, ed. Bender, 123–47; Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 469–521; John Higham, “Multiculturalism and Universalism: A History and Critique,” *American Quarterly*, 45 (June 1993), 195–219. The fragmentation and the willingness to recognize American developments as “local phases of world problems” have also sensitized American historians to the transnational moments of sociopolitical movements such as the women’s and labor movements. See Mary Beard, *Woman as Force in History: A Study in Tradition and Realities* (New York, 1946), 100–105.

States established national archives rather late. Any attempt to establish a research institution unconnected to the university system depended on private donations.<sup>33</sup> Apart from a few state universities (such as the University of Wisconsin, Madison), it was private universities that first gained a reputation in history (Johns Hopkins University, as well as Harvard University, Columbia University, and the University of Chicago). American historians established their reputations in the market rather than responding to the state's demand for education and research. Market conditions required adjustment to an audience that expected historians to uphold democratic ideals, and this is one of the reasons why American historical writing has been wedded to that ethos. Unsurprisingly, William M. Sloane entitled his introductory essay to the first edition of the *American Historical Review* "History and Democracy." He explained: "Believing that our democracy with its growing numbers, wealth, and influence will nevertheless remain historically minded and therefore afford proportionate support to the best historical work, we trust that all the elements it embraces may find representation and encouragement in these pages." Sloane's notion of democracy was by no means radical, indeed, rather conservative. And yet he argued that a historical profession committed to democracy should not be restricted in its choice of topics and questions. "We have found," he wrote, "the movement of the race more majestic than that of nations or individuals, the interest in man more intense than that in men or persons, and the development of civilization more instructive than the achievements of heroes." According to Sloane, even the fixation on race is rooted in pluralism and the consideration of American circumstances. "Mixed races and mixed civilizations have been the most persistent in the history of man." It was through this opening up of history beyond the framework of the nation-state that the historical profession (and an equivalent historical culture) responded to the demand Robinson distilled into the epigram: "History for the common man."<sup>34</sup>

#### IV

Even if all of these conditions provided American historical writing with a disposition to transnationalization that withstood changing discourses on modernization, generational and paradigmatic changes, and political caesuras, there have certainly also been moments when that tendency has been weakened. Despite their commitment to civilization, progressive historians, in their empirical works, have focused on social conflict within

<sup>33</sup> Ernst Schulin, "German and American Historiography in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century," in *Interrupted Past*, ed. Lehmann and Sheehan, 8; Conrad and Conrad, "Wie vergleicht man Historiographien," 20. See also Raphael, *Geschichtswissenschaft im Zeitalter der Extreme*, 49. For a different conclusion on the federal state and historical study, see Tyrrell, "Making Nations/Making States," 1023. Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877–1920* (Cambridge, Eng., 1982); Alan Dawley, *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991); Morton Keller, *Regulating a New Society: Public Policy and Social Change in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994). See the example of the privately supported Department of Historical Research of the Carnegie Institution in Higham, *History*, 22–25.

<sup>34</sup> William M. Sloane, "History and Democracy," *American Historical Review*, 1 (Oct. 1895), 1–23, esp. 22, 4, 14. William M. Sloane's own analysis of the transnational in American history resembled conventional political and diplomatic history. See William M. Sloane, "The World Aspects of the Louisiana Purchase," *ibid.*, 9 (April 1904), 507–21. For more on Sloane, see Ross, "Grand Narrative in American Historical Writing," 654–55. Another reason for the orientation to the demands of market and audience may be that the American Historical Association never abandoned a relationship with nonprofessional historians and devoted attention to public history—historians' work at museums and memorials. On the influence of "private patrons" on historians' attitudes, salaries, and lesson plans as exemplified at the University of Michigan and the University of Chicago, see Novick, *That Noble Dream*, esp. 53, 198, 197. Robinson, *New History*, 132–53.

the colonies and the United States. In the post–World War II years, the development of American studies with its inwardness was quite clearly devoted to the rebuilding of a national consensus, an effort that was more concerned with a stable identity than with the nation’s integration into a transnational context. The rise of social history in the years after 1960 produced studies that deemphasized the role of nation-states and instead focused on local cases.<sup>35</sup>

For those reasons interest in shared history and a transnational perspective on the history of the United States may certainly seem new. Yet the certainty with which U.S. historians can practice world history today and the transnationalization of their own national history is to be understood in light of a long inscribing of the transnational perspective into historical thinking and into the practice of historical writing. This disposition has gained in strength, and its influence on international historiography is patent—even though, in its genesis between 1890 and 1920, it was considered a sign of weakness for both the nation and for academia; even if it betrayed a sense of the inferiority of a young national history; even though it may have resulted from the rapid fragmentation of historical culture within ethnically diverse American society; and, finally, even though it has received only marginal support from national institutions.<sup>36</sup> This strength corresponds to American political power today but does not depend on it. Its claim to historicize American scholars’ own national history by revealing its transnational relations thus fulfills the task of historical writing: to enlighten us historically.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Higham, *History*, 232. Many dissertations written in the years before World War I prioritize local and regional historical topics and do not display “a historical emphasis on the nation” according to Lingelbach, *Klio macht Karriere*, 477. The interest in local case studies continues—although “compromises” with a transnational perspective are possible. See the advocacy of the formula “Read Globally, Write Locally” in Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, “Eurocentrism and Its Discontents,” *Perspectives*, 39 (Jan. 2001), 26.

<sup>36</sup> It has been argued that the influence of U.S.-based historians on international historiography fosters hierarchy and produces inequalities of knowledge, as scholars may ignore works not written in English, whereas scholars outside the English-speaking world must read English-language works. See Sachsenmaier, “Global History, Globally,” 5.

<sup>37</sup> How much strength is jeopardized by state intrusion into academic affairs “in the age of homeland security” remains open. The delay or denial of visas to non-U.S. citizens invited or hired by American universities may make “one-time ‘transnational scholars’ now feel like foreigners or aliens who have no rights, even to an explanation for why they have been or are being excluded.” See Barbara Weinstein, “The AHA and Academic Freedom in the Age of Homeland Security, Revisited,” *Perspectives*, 45 (Dec. 2007), 4. Jürgen Kocka, *Geschichte und Aufklärung: Aufsätze* (History and enlightenment: Essays) (Göttingen, 1989), 140–59, 193–97.