

Review by James Tracy

### General comments

Having never taught at the secondary level, I have at best a second-hand acquaintance with the theory behind the Social Studies reform of a few decades back. But my experience as one who has taught History at the U of M for over 35 years, including a first-year survey course on the average every other year, I am convinced that this grand experiment ought to be pronounced a failure. The aim, as I understand it, was to have students learn to understand things relationally, in connection with one another, so they would not have to be bombarded with disconnected factoids, like when did Napoleon die, or when was George Washington elected president. The problem is that time-sequence and spatial reference are the most important contexts for all human learning about the past, including the kind that students must needs go through. To give a few examples I have run into: if one learns that the Yamomami are an example of a hunter-gatherer people, but hasn't a clue whether they or alive in today's world, or if so where, what has one really learned? If one learns to work outward from one's own immediate neighborhood, but cannot tell whether a country being pointed to on a map is 'France' or 'China,' what has one learned about the world? If one learns in school that democracy is wonderful, but isn't quite sure what the word 'monarchy' means, how much has one learned about political institutions? Every time I teach a survey course, I find that concept students seemed to grasp the last time now need to be explained a bit more.

Hence I welcome standards that aim at giving students the framework they need to understand the world of the past from which our own world has come. One could argue that defining standards in this way leaves no scope for critical thinking, for showing students that the facts we often take for granted are not so factual after all. This was the view of some of my History Department colleagues, in a discussion some of us had last week with Dana Carmichael-Tanaka of the Minneapolis Public Schools. My sense is that we have gone too far in this direction already, so that we get incoming students who are quite ready to question whatever they are told, which is fine as far as it goes, except that they themselves sometimes seem to know almost nothing that is worthy of being questioned. Thus instead of showing high school graduates that things are not as simple as they may think – the college teacher's role – we have to spend time showing them what they should have learned at a lower level, so as to put question marks around it. In sum, it's past time for a strong push in terms of standards that have recognizeably to do with History and Geography, time and space.

My general critique – relating to a point made by Ms. Carmichael-Tanaka – is that the standards as written are a bit more prescriptive than they need to be. Instead of embedding specific examples in the 'Benchmarks,' it would be preferable to have separate columns for "Benchmarks" and "Examples". I would be delighted to have students who had at some point run across the concept of absolute monarchy, and had heard of either Louis XIV or Frederick the Great – both would not be necessary. Also, I think a structural change of this kind would allow greater scope for the professional discretion of our teachers: in a given year, or for a given student group, Louis might make more sense than Frederick, or vice versa.

As one whose first-year survey teaching in the past decade has been World History, I

have also a number of specific suggestions for the standards for Grades 9 – 12 (I do not venture to offer any comments for standards for the primary grades).

### Suggestions re World History curriculum, grades 9 - 12

#### A. Era 1, Early Civilizations

Highlighting the importance of agriculture makes sense, perhaps the more so in a state like ours. I hope that A present-day knowledge of early peoples@ will include the A Out of Africa@ hypothesis, which seems to command growing acceptance (i.e. that our species began in Africa ca. 150,000 years ago, and that people began out-migrating to other parts of the world ca. 80,000 - 60,000 years ago).

#### B. Era 2, Classical Civilizations, to 1000 BC

Might be better to go only to (e.g.) 1500 BC, because this section would have more coherence if limited to the four pioneer civilizations having the greatest antiquity, i.e. Sumer and Akkad, Egypt, Indus valley, China

#### B. Era 2, Classical Civilizations, 1000 BC - 500 AD (I would suggest, from 1500 BC)

Focus here might be continuity of civilization in Mesopotamia (including the Hebrews) and in China, and in India the rebuilding of empire (after a hiatus) under the Mauryas and Guptas. On particular points, the whole notion of Aryan migrations has become problematic (and if one were to speak of Aryan migration into India, 1000 BC would be several centuries too late), and the origins of the caste system are also a lot less clear than used to be thought. Requires consultation with specialists (which I am not), but it strikes me the India benchmark might better be something like, A with emphasis on the formation of empires, the growth of Buddhism, giving way to the growth of Hinduism.@

#### B. Era 2, Classical Civilizations - Greek world

Not just A development of democracy@ but A aristocracy [or oligarchy] and democracy,@ otherwise the important comparison of Athens and Sparta makes no sense. In line with my comment above, re the specificity of benchmarks, might be better to have the benchmark say that students should have some familiarity with the achievements of Greek culture, listing various possibilities under a separate >examples= column, e.g. Aeschylus (drama), Homer (poetry), Herodotus (history), the Parthenon (architecture), Euclid (science and math), Plato (philosophy).

#### B. Era 2, Classical Civilizations - Roman world

Again, not just >democratic features,= but >aristocratic [the Senate] and democratic features.= On the other hand, >Benchmarks= list seems too long. For example, bullets four and five might be compressed into one (the spread of Rome=s military domination, and its domestic consequences for state and society); the same goes for bullets six and seven, which could be something like, the transition from the Republic to the Principate, and abuses of power by the early emperors. Re Christianity, might usefully be something re Jewish roots, especially if students are later to compare the various religious traditions.

#### C. Era 3, Postclassical civilizations, 500 - 1000AD

Russia does not belong in this section - save for section D. Bullets four and five should

trade places, because of chronology (schism does not occur til 1054). Also, present bullet four should be something like, creation of a Byzantine sphere of influence in the Slavic world

#### C. Era 3, Postclassical Civilizations, Islamic world

Empire of Axum goes here, not under section D. Tours / Poitiers was a turning point for Latin Christendom (thus belongs with European history), but a minor skirmish for Muslim armies; better to highlight a signal early Islamic victory, like the conquest of Sassanid Persia, or Byzantine Egypt. I don't think Spain ought to be stressed to the exclusion of Syria under the Umayyad caliphs, or Baghdad under the Abassids, where the works of greek philosophy and science were translated into Arabaic. Here again, a distinction between general benchmarks (achievement of Islamic civilization) and a separate column for examples to choose among would be helpful.

#### C. Era 3, Western Middle Ages

Bullets need to be reordered, for chronological coherence: spread and influence of Christianity and the Catholic Church; barbarian migrations, and formation of new kingdoms within the former Roman Empire of the West, notably that of the Franks, Charlemagne=s attempt to revive the empire; new wave of invasions (e.g. Angles and Saxons, Vikings, Magyars); feudal society.

#### D. Era 4, 1000 - 1450, Empires of Eastern hemisphere (?)

Label is confusing, given what follows. This period is too late for Axum, which ceases to be a great kingdom after Islamic invasions (see above). What does go in this time period is Russia, Kievan state, Mongol conquest, rise of Muscovy. Really should be something on Sung China, given its achievements in many different spheres (e.g. printing, paper currency). I would also put the Mongol empire here, not below, with western European states.

#### D. Era 4, Western Hemisphere

I suggest taking African empires (Mali especially, Songhay is of a later period) out of previous section, re-naming this section something like AEmpires beyond Eurasia@, to Include Africa as well as the Americas. In the Americas, would argue that both the Aztec and Inca empires are very important for students to know about (note, however, that Inca state has barely begin by 1450), Mayas less so.

#### D. Era 4, nation states

First, it is really too early to speak of nation-states in western Europe of this period - national monarchies would work. Second, as noted above, Russia and Mongol Empire belong more properly a couple of sections above this. Thirdly the whole phenomenon of the growth of semi-autonomous cities in Europe, notably in Italy, is a lot more important than the Hanseatic League. Lastly, European philosophy of this era should be characterized as scholastic (for contrast with humanist movement of Renaissance, below), and the transfer of Greek thought via Arabic translations is indeed important, but will make more sense to students if the >example= for Islamic civilization is Baghdad (see above), not Spain.

#### E. Era 5, Global Age 1450-1650

'Economic Foundations of the Renaissance' a very weak idea, because cultural

developments associated with the term Renaissance come during a period of economic downturn, from around 1300, recovery begins slowly ca 1450. Rise of Italian city states belongs in previous section. Creativity of this period in philosophical terms (strictly speaking) is very minor. I suggest a new set of bullets:

- =Invention of printing, its impact on European life and culture
- =Renaissance movement in arts and letters (in examples column: Petrarch, Michaelangelo)
- =theories of government, monarchical and republican (in examples column: Machiavelli, More's Utopia)
- =growth of vernacular literatures (in examples column, Dante, Shakespeare)

#### E. Era 5, Reformations [sic]

Here again, strikes me that the bullets are rather confused, would propose new ones as follows:

- =doctrines of the Protestant Reformers, reasons for their appeal (in examples column, Luther, Calvin)
- =Catholic Reformation, and attempts to repress dissent (in examples column: Ignatius Loyola, Inquisition)
- =overlap between religious conflicts and rival state interests (examples: Henry VIII, Wars of Religion in France)

#### E. Era 5, Age of Discovery

Triangular trade not that important in the larger Atlantic scheme of things, certainly not by 1650, hence last two bullets should be merged, something like: Columbian exchanges: commodities and disease pools (examples: impact of gold in Europe, smallpox in the Americas)

#### E. Era 5, Age of Discovery, global trade and regional civilizations

A better and more coherent label might be, Global Centers of Power and Europe's trading nations

- =The Islamic world (examples: Ottoman empire, Mughal empire)
- =East Asia (examples: Ming China, Japanese shogunate)
- =Africa (examples: Songhay, Kongo)
- =Europe's trading nations, around the globe (examples: Portuguese, Dutch, English)

#### F. Era 6. Era of Revolutions 1650-1914

Since this section is pretty crowded, it might make sense to postpone the Scientific Revolution until two sections below, where it could become the lead-in for treatment of technological changes culminating in the Industrial Revolution. For the French Revolution, the examples column should give some indication of the breadth of opinion among those who supported overthrow of the monarchy – not fair to have Robespierre in effect standing for the whole French Revolution.

#### F. Era 6, Age of Revolutions, Napoleon to Bismarck

There was not (as second bullet seems to say) a necessary connection between revolutions and the expansion of political rights, rather, the two themes should be split, and I'm not sure students need to know about both key examples of national unification. Thus:

- =Napoleon's reign in France (consolidates Revolution), and the Napoleonic wars

- =Europe's 19<sup>th</sup> Century revolutions (examples: 1830, 1848, 1870)
- =the movement for the expansion of political rights
- =the process of national unification (examples: Italy, Germany)

I stop at this point, since I have rarely had occasion to teach Twentieth Century history.