

Chapter 1:

A Holistic World History: An Introduction

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*"We cannot solve a problem by using the same level of thinking we used to create them."
Albert Einstein*

Section 1: An Introduction

Tsunami-wave shifts are occurring in our world today. We live in an increasingly interdependent world, and we are grappling with rapid changes that are dramatically affecting our lives. We are attempting to sort out what kind of path we will follow today and into the future, while also trying to make sense of the momentous changes affecting our fragile planet. Global problems of monumental proportion are battering us at such alarming frequency that we are often paralyzed into fear and inaction. These global problems require a collective effort to solve, something that we have never had to undertake in the past and for which there is no template. The question is where to begin? Perhaps one way to better understand the enormity of the issues and consequences of our actions that our collective species faces is to draw upon the lessons from the past. This holistic world history offers us valuable insights that we can learn from the past. Therefore, this history is a contribution to helping sort-out and put into perspective where we have come from and where we are heading as a human species.

World History. The very concept seems overwhelming. There is no way we can know everything about the past. Many of us are intimidated by the vastness of the subject and never have been able to fully grasp the extent of its scope. It is an immense subject. But instead of casting the whole subject aside I would like to share with you a different way of learning about world history. After all, our more interdependent and complex world necessitates that we have an understanding of the world around us. I call my approach a holistic world history. This approach simplifies world history into an understandable framework that can help you better comprehend what is happening in the world today and in the past. I have devoted many years to the development and teaching of this holistic approach and now have pulled all the research and experimenting together into this book.

Holistic is used to describe this approach to world history. The term holistic emphasizes the full range of relations among parts of a system and the ways the operation of those parts helps to perpetuate the whole system. My *holistic*

world history model studies the world's past by viewing it as a system of interactions instead of as separate, unrelated parts. In this model we study the whole system to see how the individual parts, events, and people of history relate to the whole. In this *holistic perspective* history is viewed in the broadest possible context in order to understand interconnections and interdependence. My approach offers a "big picture" vision of the past drawn from various disciplines—history, sociology, anthropology, political science, geography, economics, psychology, and the sciences. With this holistic model we gain a deeper appreciation of the world we live in today, how this present time is connected to our shared human past, and how we might help create a life-enhancing future. And the model helps to connect seemingly disparate strands of the past and present into a holistic process that provides a workable, intelligible framework for understanding our shared history.

This holistic world history offers an alternative to the familiar chronological and linear historical approach that I call traditional history. Most history analyzes parts of history. For example, a traditional study of the French Revolution analyzes the separate events but usually fails to connect that turmoil with the broader context that gives rise to political revolutions in the Western hemisphere and England. Since the connections and patterns in history are ignored, valuable opportunities to learn lessons are denied. In the case of the French Revolution, one lesson to be learned is why the landed ruling elite and church in France, and in other countries as well, were facing violent opposition from divergent groups. If we pay attention, our history can teach us valuable lessons from the past that can be applied to our life today. History needs to be more than a dry collection of interesting but unconnected facts about the past; instead it can be a rich gift from generations long ago to the present generation. Our study of history can provide a worthy experience relevant to our lives today from which wisdom and guidance can be gleaned, not only for making informed decisions about the present but also to gain valuable knowledge for fashioning a viable, healthy, stable and sustainable future.

The increasing complexity and interdependence of the world we live in today calls for a new perspective. A long list of problems—global warming, resource depletion, poverty, wars, and inequality—faces our global community. Although the list hasn't changed much over the past few decades, the problems have significantly accelerated and intensified and, obviously, have not been solved. The current mode of thinking, which looks at only parts of issues and problems in isolation, will not move us forward to create a more livable, stable, and hopeful future. Instead of looking at each isolated part of world history, we need to understand the whole world as a system. (Although there are subtle differences

between the terms holistic and systems thinking, for the purposes of this book I will be using the terms interchangeably.) Individual elements of world history are part of a puzzle that, when pieced together, can give greater meaning to the whole panoramic picture of our world. By examining the past more holistically, we can gather wisdom that will be useful in addressing and solving some of the critical global issues that are begging for immediate attention. It is with this purpose that I propose this holistic world history for your consideration.

Section 2: Systems Thinking: A Different Approach to History

Systems thinking informs this world history. But first, what is a system? A *system* is defined as something that maintains its existence and functions as a whole through the interaction of its parts. To put it another way, a system is a collection of parts that interact with each other to function as a whole and continually affect each other over time. Systems are not only interconnected, they are logically organized around a shared purpose. For example, the human body is a system; each part of the body affects another. A school is a system as well. It is the relationships, and the mutual influence of the parts, that is important, rather than the number or size of the parts. These relationships and systems can be simple or complex.¹

In a system...

- Parts are interconnected and function as a whole
- A complex web of relationships unifies the parts
- The system is changed by addition or subtraction of parts
- Arrangement of the pieces is crucial
- Behavior depends on total structure: change the structure and the behavior changes

This holistic model of world history draws upon the field of systems thinking that is currently being applied to business, the sciences, health, medicine, and other fields. *Systems thinking* looks beyond what appear to be isolated and independent events to identify deeper structures within the system. The whole system and the interrelationship of the parts to the whole are the focus, not just the isolated basic building blocks. Seeing the connections between events is a basic principle of systems thinking, where connections and the larger, global context inform the subject. In other words as the saying goes: “see the forest, not just the trees.”

Systems thinking views issues and problems in the context of the larger whole; it is complementary to analytical thinking. *Analysis* means taking something apart in order to understand it and to see how the pieces work individually. But a system—such as world history—cannot be understood by analysis alone. The complement of analysis is *synthesis*, which means relating the parts to the harmonious whole. Deeper understanding is gained through synthesis.²

Conventional Thinking

If systems thinking is so wonderful, why haven't we been using this type of thinking all along? Good question. Changing the way we see the world or our worldview does not happen easily or quickly; conventional ways of thinking have deeply entrenched roots that resist change. When using *conventional thinking*, sometimes called traditional, linear or mechanistic thinking, people tend to see simple sequences of cause and effect that are limited in time and space, which assumes that cause and effect occur within a close time frame. But the causes and effects may be far apart in time and space. For example, industrial pollutants have accumulated over a 200 year time period since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution around 1800, but the effects are only beginning to be felt today in the phenomenon known as global warming.

Conventional thinking segments issues, events, and even world history into small divisible parts for careful analysis and scrutiny. The world is seen as a collection of separate objects while the relationships are secondary. In a systems view, networks of relationships are embedded in larger networks. Relationships are primary while the objects are secondary.³ An example of conventional thinking is when school officials administer standardized tests to students, who earn a score that ranks them with other students. This isolated score does not take into consideration the whole student: his/her relationship to other students, teachers, or parents, his/her contribution to the community, or even the student's ability to think about the subject beyond the questions in the test. The test score only represents one aspect of the student's ability, yet is given undue significance in classifying a student's abilities.

Conventional thinking continues to shape Western society in many ways. One example is the way that schoolroom desks are arranged in linear straight rows; this arrangement reflects linear or hierarchical thinking in which the teacher is given a position of authority. Individual housing patterns in suburbs that are separated into "little boxes" and unconnected to each other through community space signifies compartmentalized thinking. Medical treatment of a patient's isolated symptoms with medications or surgery without recognizing the impact on the entire body is an example

of conventional analytical thinking. The way the international political structure is organized into separate, autonomous nations exemplifies conventional ways of organizing the world. And even in world history, individual regions or nations and events are usually separately studied. All these examples represent how conventional thinking is expressed in our daily lives. This way of thinking is habitual, familiar deeply embedded, and hard to change.

Conventional Thinking...

- Separates and divides people, nations, events, cultures and actions
- Sees simple sequences of cause and effect that are limited in time and space
- Uses only causes and effects to explain historical events.
- Zeroes in to fault and blame an individual or group
- Applies analysis not synthesis

Reasons to Use Systems Thinking in World History

Our daily lives are changing dramatically, even though we might not want to acknowledge it, while our future looks uncertain, insecure and unpredictable. Although many of us wish to hide our heads in the sand and pay no attention to our critical situation, the reality is that we urgently need to address crucial global issues which are adversely impacting all our lives and threatening our future well-being. But the complexity of the situation demands that a different way of learning, thinking, teaching, and communicating be used to even address, let alone solve, these urgent issues such as global warming and resource depletion. Although it can be argued that conventional thinking served us fairly well for centuries (if you overlook wars, genocide, species eradication, and environmental devastation) this type of thinking cannot cope with the monumental problem-solving challenges that face us in an interconnected world. Therefore it behooves us to be aware of a systems thinking approach and consider it as a viable alternative method that may be successful applied in many different areas, including world history.

Secondly, a detailed analysis of any specific problem or issue in isolation limits understanding of its complexity and ramifications. We must look beyond individual issues towards a broader perspective, where an individual issue is seen as part of a coherent whole. Studying something in isolation, separate from the context in which it exists, restricts understanding because it does not include the effect one part has on another, or on the whole. But when systems thinking is used, the relationships among problems are primary and any proposed adjustment or correction to the system takes

into consideration how all aspects affect the whole situation. For example, when planning for development and growth in cities and suburbs, consideration of the availability of fresh water should be given high priority.

Third, we can't solve any of the problems on our own because only one perspective is not enough to wholly understand a problem; we need to be aware of as many different perspectives as possible. Therefore, it is useful to have people from diverse ethnic, racial, class, and gender perspectives working together on an issue, as well as people of different personality types and worldviews. Those holding different perspectives provide unique angles for looking at problems and are instrumental in contributing to more effective solutions to problems.

Fourth, a systems thinking perspective enables us to understand why simply fault-finding is such a futile activity. Singling out the decisions or actions of participants to establish culpability for the cause of a problem is often limiting; most blame is misdirected. A problem is usually not one person's fault, for most people are usually doing the best they can within the system they are working. The structure of the system, not the effort of the people, has created most of the problems and determines the outcome. Just listen to a television or radio newscast and recount how many times the interviewer asks someone, "And who is to blame for this or that failure?" Systems thinkers progress beyond simply seeing the events and mishaps in isolation to seeing patterns of interaction and the underlying structures or worldviews that are accountable for the problems. Systems thinking is always process thinking; it explains things in terms of their context or situation.

World history is a system. And I will be looking at world history as a system in this book. It might not be easy to think of it as a system, it might seem strange or unfamiliar at first, but as we practice this type of thinking and apply it we will hopefully begin to see its benefits. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain from looking at world history from this different perspective.

Benefits of Systems Thinking⁴...

- Recognizes episodes or patterns that underlie events.
- Sees underlying structures that are responsible for the episodes or patterns.
- Learns from history by discerning patterns so that we are not doomed to repeat the same problem.
- Predicts events and prepares for them by using systems thinking, rather than being helpless in their wake.
- Appreciates how our thinking is inseparable from the problems we encounter.

- Understands obvious explanations and majority views are not always right.
- Goes beyond blaming others or self.
- Challenges, probes, and clarifies our own habitual ways of thinking.
- Encourages long term thinking.
- Predicts unintended consequences.

The Interacting Parts of a System

Systems are quite complex and contain many different interacting components. I think it will be beneficial to examine the interdependent parts of a system to understand more clearly how the system works and how the components interact. The *stability* of a system—whether it changes or remains steady—depends on many factors, including the size, number and variety of the subsystems within it and the type and degree of connectivity between them. A large complex system is not necessarily an unstable one. Many complex systems are remarkably stable and resist change. A few examples of stable systems are the Supreme Court, the celebration of Christmas, Judaism, a lifelong marriage, and the underlying patterns in this holistic world history. Overall, stability is a positive aspect, but it comes with a price: resistance to change. When a stable system does change, it can change rapidly and quite drastically. There is a threshold beyond which a system will suddenly change or break down. If it is under a lot of pressure a small trigger can cause collapse—the proverbial “straw that breaks the camel’s back.” Or, systems can change instead of collapsing. For example, with just the right combination of steps, smart leaders can sometimes initiate change with surprising ease. This is the principle of *leverage*. Leverage doesn’t mean piling on the pressure, but knowing where to intervene so that a small effort can get a huge result. How do you apply leverage? First ask what stops the change, and then look at the connections that are holding in place the part you want to change. Cut or weaken these connections and the change may be easy. Applying strategic leverage to initiate change is a key principle of systems thinking.⁵

Feedback loops are integral components of a system. The parts in a feedback system are all interconnected directly or indirectly, and when change occurs in one part it ripples out to affect all the other parts. The new parts change and the effect of this change ripples back to affect the original part. The original part then responds to the new influences and the influences then come back or *feedbacks* to the original part in a modified way, making a loop, not a straight line.

Reinforcing feedback is when changes in the whole system feedback to amplify the original change. Change goes through the system, producing more change in the same direction as the initial change. Reinforcing feedback drives a system in the way it is going. Reinforcing feedback is more commonly referred to as positive feedback but this can be confusing since not all feedback is always positive or beneficial. Reinforcing feedback may lead to growth or decline, depending on the starting conditions. We use several reinforcing feedback metaphors in everyday conversation to help describe this process: we're on a roll, jump on the bandwagon, it's downhill all the way, spiraling into oblivion, the sky's the limit, a ticket to heaven, can do no wrong, on the way up, on the slippery slope, snowballing out of control, and nothing lasts forever.⁶

The second type of feedback, *balancing feedback*, limits, restricts, and impedes change and keeps the system stable. Although more commonly called negative feedback, it is neither good nor bad but merely means the system resists change. All systems have balancing feedback loops to stay stable because all systems have a goal, even if it is to remain as they are. Balancing feedback loops keep our environment steady, such as in a rainforest, prairie, coral reef, desert, or marsh. However, today global warming is disrupting the balancing feedback loops and creating change in the atmosphere. Other examples of balancing feedback are bodily healing, body temperature, air conditioning, a car's cruise control, predator and prey relationships, food and population balance, market's supply and demand, and election cycles. The more dynamically complex the system, the longer the feedback takes to travel around the network connection. When there is a time delay between cause and effect we often assume there is no effect at all. This delay may fool us into adjusting too late or too much. Many scientists believe this is the case with global warming: what we are doing to correct global warming is too little too late. The feedback delays in signaling global warming have been too far apart in time for us to recognize the cause as industrial pollutants and the burning of fossil fuels. I am optimistic that these scientists are incorrect in their assessment and that we will be able to make the needed adjustments.

Ways to Use System Thinking:

- Look at the whole system, not just its parts.
- Appreciate how our thinking is inseparable from the problems we encounter.
- Transform the thinking that led to the problem in the first place.
- Scan the big picture context.

- Challenge the idea that you can judge a person's behavior/actions independent of the system he is in.
- Use circular or cyclical and deep thinking, more than just linear, vertical, or horizontal thinking.
- Apply maps, models, and visual images that make it easier to see connections, relationships, and patterns.
- Draw on diverse perspective when viewing chaotic events.
- Apply systems thinking to your own way of thinking because our beliefs are themselves a system.

Section 3: Worldviews: The Way We Look at the World

Systems thinking is a viable method for solving the myriad of problems that we face and an interesting way of looking at world history. But the question remains, if we all know what the problems are and we have known for decades, why haven't we been able to solve the problems, in fact, why have they gotten worse? Why isn't systems thinking within our radar screen as a problem solving approach? Quite simply, I would argue, because these global problems are caused in large part by the ways we think, communicate, learn, and understand! Our way of thinking or worldview heavily determines the kind of political, economic and social patterns or structures that we create, and those, in turn, create the episodes and events occurring in the world. You might respond and say that if we had a better president or more responsible corporations then the problems could be solved; or you might blame governmental and economic roadblocks for the impasse—after all, Congress moves at a snail's pace. However, the real roadblocks are not material but mental. Remember our systems thinking principles that placing blame does not solve the problem; it is the underlying structures or what I call patterns that create the problems in the first place.

If the ways of thinking that got us to this point are inadequate for coping with the future, we need to purposely learn to think in new ways. Let us first try to understand the nature of the problem. Systems thinkers often use an iceberg as an analogy for looking at a problem. At the tip of the iceberg, the 10-20 percent seen above the surface represents events. These events are reported on the television news, headlined in the newspaper, or featured on the Internet. But looking beneath the surface level of the iceberg's events are the episodes. For example, we see the event of Hurricane Katrina on the news, but the hurricane is not an isolated event; it is part of larger episodes of hurricanes that are wreaking havoc along coastlines. And if we look further below the surface of the iceberg's episodes, we see that patterns—political, economic, technological, social, environmental, and cultural—create these episodes. Many scientists attribute such

violent and extreme weather conditions as Hurricane Katrina to global warming, which is caused by our burning of fossil fuels. Our economic system, the pattern or underlying structure, is based on the burning of fossil fuels for our energy consumption to drive our modern way of life, while the environmental impact of burning fossil fuels is an unfortunate but necessary byproduct.

Farther down towards the base of the iceberg, lies the underlying structure or what I call the worldview. This worldview, in turn, influences the patterns, episodes, and events.⁷ Our worldview is fashioned around the idea that unlimited economic growth is the unquestioned path to prosperity and well-being. However, the environmental repercussions of this worldview are finally revealing the unintended consequences of this unquestioned belief in unlimited growth. Finally, at the very base of the iceberg we see the great mass of ice supporting the whole iceberg; these are our human behaviors, the universal human commonalities that shape who we are as a species (more on human commonalities in chapter 3). Therefore, if we want to change the events and episodes we must change the patterns that create them; this means we need to modify the way we think, learn and communicate. In other words we must transform our behaviors or worldview.

A Worldview

What is a worldview? A *worldview* is an overall perspective from which one sees and interprets the world; a set of simplifying suppositions about how the world works and what is seen and not seen. It is an internal collection of assumptions, held by an individual or a group that are firmly believed to be self-evident truths. These assumptions shape an individual's beliefs, ideas, attitudes, and values, which, in turn, affect behaviors and actions. A worldview is a paradigm, a fundamental way of looking at reality which functions as a filter. It admits information that is consistent with our deeply held expectations about the world while guiding us to disregard information that challenges or disproves these expectations. When we look through a filter we usually see through it, rather than seeing it—so it is with worldviews. A worldview acts as a built-in “operating system,” even though most people are unaware that their perceptions are filtered through it. Worldviews are rarely brought out into the light of day, so people are not usually aware of them. They are hidden deep in our human consciousness, all the while quietly shaping our reactions to new ideas and information, guiding our decisions, and ordering expectations for the future. Every book read, policy statement enacted, vote cast, the way children are raised, the way solutions are made, the particular method of teaching, opinions

about globalization, a religious sermon, and even the approach used to write about world history is shaped as much, if not more, by our worldview as by any objective data or analysis.⁸ But if worldviews are so important in influencing what we do, what are the prevailing worldviews that we all hold so dearly?

Contemporary Worldviews

At this time, a unique period of human history is occurring, a fifth turning—what I have called the Global Wave—that is transforming our human story as this new millennium dawns. Within the Global Wave there is not one all-pervasive, homogenous way of thinking and perceiving reality. Instead I have identified four often contentious and conflicting worldviews, with contradictory ways of knowing and understanding the world, promoting dissimilar visions for the present and future. In the United States and throughout the world, most people identify with one or another of these worldviews. The following is a brief summary of the four major worldviews: traditional, modern, globalized, and transformative. (Chapter 8: also addresses the four worldviews.)

Traditional Worldview

A *traditional worldview* can be traced to the formation of values, attitudes, and beliefs held by people through multiple generations. Although diversity abounds among people holding a traditional worldview, for a clearer understanding this group is divided into two segments: 1) traditional, indigenous people living in small farming villages or nomadic bands and 2) traditional people living in modern settings who follow orthodox or fundamentalist religious traditions. Both these groups behave in similar ways: they hold to the ideas, beliefs, customs, traditions, and religions of a traditional worldview and see the past as unchanged and wish to preserve their presumed direct bond with it. Some traditionalists hold firmly to what are often labeled traditional “family values.”

Some traditional people may wish to live their lives quietly and without interference from the outside world, while upholding their ancient traditions as much as possible. They may disagree with modern and global influences and separate themselves from the modern world in a peaceful manner. Others may violently resist modern and global pressures and voice their dissent through inflammatory fundamentalist rhetoric, violent acts, or armed resistance. Either way, this is their response to the disrupting influences of economic globalization and modernization. Although traditional worldviews may be very diverse in their detail, the essence of these beliefs is adherence to a structure with a long history and resistance to the tide of modernization.

Modern Worldview

The *modern worldview* traces its historical origins back more than 500 years to the expansion of Western European power and its influence and/or ultimate dominance around the world. The modern worldview has been especially powerful over the last two centuries and has today expanded to the farthest reaches of the world. It extols scientific reasoning, exalts individualism, treats nature as a commodity, promotes liberal political traditions, separates church and state, and places faith in technological solutions. A Newtonian mechanistic view of the Universe—the world operating as a giant machine—prevails in the modern worldview. The modern worldview has ushered in a host of astonishing achievements such as the equality of women, medical breakthroughs, educational progress, and advancement of human rights, as well as appalling failures such as values of rampant consumerism, cut-throat competition, unlimited economic growth, the use of punishment as a way to correct behaviors, and military force to resolve conflict. One of the challenges of the 21st century is how to draw on the achievements produced from a modern worldview, and rethink or discard the darker elements.

3. The Globalized Worldview

A third worldview, the *globalized worldview*, is sweeping the world today. *Globalization* is a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon that interconnects worldwide economic, political, cultural, social, environmental, and technological forces that transcend the limits of national boundaries. Greatly intensifying since the 1980s, it reflects the many ways in which people on an increasingly populated planet have been drawn together not only by their own movements but also through the flow of goods, services, capital, labor, technology, ideas, and information. Through globalization the world becomes a single place that serves as a frame of reference, which influences the way billions of people around the world conduct their everyday lives.

One of the most important dimensions of globalization is economic globalization. *Economic globalization* is the increasing integration and expansion of the capitalist economy around the world, particularly through trade, financial flows, business, and the movement of labor, technology, and information across national borders. This expansion has reduced the significance of local and national economies and has folded the globe into one integrated economic system governed by capitalist principles. The globalization process and, in particular, economic globalization, has both negative and beneficial aspects.

Although globalization has “opened up” the world in many positive ways—communication networks, especially the Internet, transportation linkages and travel opportunities, sophisticated technology, medical breakthroughs, and comfortable living standards for some—critics challenge its corporate dominance, unbridled consumerism, expedient business climate, ravaged environment, and uncertain future.

4. Transformative Worldview

The negative aspects of the traditional, modern, and globalized worldviews have spurred many people to piece together a different worldview. None of the above worldviews seems sufficient to meet the complex, interrelated challenges of the 21st century and each has glaring detriments with the potential to harm our planet and undermine our future life. For example, the rigid dogma and intolerance of fundamentalism will not generate a more inclusive and culturally tolerant worldview in an increasingly interracial environment, yet many want to preserve the sense of shared meaning and universal values such as compassion and love that universal religions offer. We need to integrate the sense of local place and the importance of the environment that many traditional people have connected with for millennia without losing our shared consciousness as global citizens. We need to move beyond the mechanistic, segmented order of the modern worldview without sacrificing the value of scientific inquiry, secularism and rational, logical thought. We need to assimilate the advances in technology, transportation and communication, while rejecting the despoiling of our planet through environmental exploitation. We need to draw upon the idea that we are all global citizens, heralded in the globalized worldview, and take steps to limit the dominance of the world’s economy by giant, multinational and self-serving corporations.

At this point in time, diverse people are actively challenging the negative parameters of the three worldviews. A different worldview, some say a different story, is urgently needed in order to assure the continuation of our human species and life as we know it on Earth. Leaders from diverse fields—religious leaders, business entrepreneurs, international political leaders, indigenous farmers, political activists, environmentalists, entertainers, scientists, working people, artists, writers, academics, educators, economists, concerned citizens, and others—are contributing to the creation of what I call a *transformative worldview*. Those who adhere at least in part to this worldview assert that diverse paths are possible and attainable, and that the globalized worldview is not an inevitable or desirable scenario of how the future will or should be played out. Millions of people around the world are promoting alternative ideas and diverse options for a

different worldview and voicing their convictions in a forceful, yet peaceful fashion.

Elements in the formation of a transformative worldview come from diverse sources; some are positive aspects of the three other worldviews. For example, highly regarded from the traditional worldview is the wisdom of indigenous people who call upon the wise council of their elders, respect and connect with nature, and value the strong relationship with territorial place. From the modern worldview we can glean the ideal of liberal democracy, the advancement of scientific inquiry, medical improvements, beneficial technological innovations, public-supported, mass education, and the expansion of human rights to include women and people of color; all are noteworthy accomplishments that need to be sustained. The globalized worldview's stunning technological developments, especially high-speed, integrated computer networks and reasonably-priced, global transportation, have provided instantaneous communication linking diverse people around the globe. Even some indigenous people in remote villages are linked to the Internet and use appropriate scientific knowledge for enhancing their goal of achieving their self-sufficiency goal in food production. And some would say that the globalized worldview's vision of "opening up" the world to unfettered trade has benefited many people with a more materially comfortable standard of living than ever experienced before.

Yet the transformative worldview is a process in evolution. Its many proponents offer alternatives to prevailing notions of cultural uniformity, corporate dominance, consumer-driven values, unchecked individualism, oligarchic concentration of wealth and power, and environmental destruction. Although this diverse array of thoughts, beliefs, ideas, theories, lifestyles, choices, and actions defies rigid categorization, these visionary conceptions share common characteristics that define the transformative worldview.

We need to be selective and mindful in fitting values of the three worldviews into a new framework. Even though the traditional, modern, and globalized worldviews are currently the dominant paradigms at this point in time, the transformative worldview is challenging their authority and offering viable options for a sustainable, more equitable future. Which worldview or combination of worldviews will we as global citizens choose for our future? We all have a voice and a critical stake in the future outcome.

Now that we are aware of systems thinking and the four worldviews that are currently informing our Global Wave, it is time to turn to a description of my holistic world history model.

Section 4: Waves of Global Change: A Holistic World History

World History from a Transformative Worldview

Each generation narrates its version of history through its particular lens or worldview, which filters how its members see the past; in other words, the present influences how the past is constructed. Through our worldview lens, the past is interpreted, the present is acted out, and the future is determined. Today different interpretations recount an incomprehensibly complex and diverse past, each vying with one another for authenticity and authority. Each world history author may interpret the past quite differently.

When using the phrase “traditional” approach to history, I am referring to interpretations of the past that are largely filtered through the prevailing, mainstream or conventional worldview. My holistic approach to world history is seen through a particular lens as well. My version of world history challenges the prevailing worldviews and instead offers a different lens from which to view the past, act upon the present, and visualize the future. I am using the term holistic in this world history to reflect the growing alternative perspective that sees the past, present, and future as a synergistic, interdependent process, not as a separate collection of unconnected events and actions. Through this holistic lens a different world history is told.

Many ideas, beliefs, ways of thinking, and values from the transformative worldview have inspired and informed my writing and teaching of a holistic world history. Although today we celebrate our political freedoms and enjoy our material abundance, we are also witness to the insensitive abuse of nature, the perilous promotion of consumerism, threats to participatory democracy, and a push to homogenize and commodify world culture. These trends, among others, need to be seen in the larger context of our long and varied human history. If we can look at the “big picture” of our past, we can more deeply understand the enormity of our present-day actions and recognize what I consider to be the destructive and unsustainable path that our society is currently following and promoting around the world. The purpose of this book and this holistic model of world history is to shed light, through a holistic lens, on the history of our human species, and see how and why we have arrived at the point we have reached today. With this holistic perspective of our history we are able to acquire a deeper, richer, and clearer understanding of our shared human past that, in turn, helps us connect that past to our present life, enabling us to make more informed decisions about the crucial choices that we need

to make not only today but in the future as well.

This holistic approach to world history is an attempt to write and convey a different history from the traditional history that is customarily written and taught. Our human story is not a static subject rigidly fixed in a set canon; rather it is a dynamic, flexible, and unfolding process. This holistic approach explores our story from a systems perspective in which interconnections and interactions among humans across the globe are communicated.

Organization of a Holistic World History

When writing about and teaching world history, the first logical question to ask is where does our story begin? A few historians argue that a true “big picture” history commences with the story of the “big bang” and the creation of our Universe, the Milky Way Galaxy, our solar system, the formation of life on Earth, and the evolution of our human species. I agree with this approach and have included a brief survey of these topics in the second chapter. I believe that this inclusion places humans within a larger historical and universal context. The threads (to be discussed below) that intertwine with our human history also exist and weave together the story of our Universe, Earth, and human evolution.

I suggest starting a narration of our human story around 40,000 BP (before the present) or 40,000 years ago when our rich tapestry of cultures began to emerge and humans differentiated themselves as modern. Although some point out that our modern human species--*homo sapiens sapiens*—evolved earlier, around 100,000 BP, the 40,000 BP mark is a compelling time in which human artistic and technological expressions became more innovative and sophisticated denoting a clear break from earlier developments.

When describing this “big picture” of our 40,000 year story simplicity is of utmost importance. A chronological, historical narrative is typically the master organizer of most traditional history. However, in this holistic world history I have selected a different approach. The development of humans through history shapes my fairly simple periodization plan. *Human development*, in this holistic context, means the common ways in which humans fashion their ways of living, interact with the environment, cultivate political, economic, and social systems, and create cultural and religious expressions. Thus, the development of people, rather than a chronological narrative is the master organizer in this world history.

With human development as the master organizer, we can steer away from the typical assumption that people have marched in triumphal steps towards “progress” by means of increasingly complex technology, culminating in our

superior modern society. Using human development as the master organizing principle also frees us from thinking in strictly chronological terms, which might impede our ability to view simultaneous but often contradictory occurrences around the world. However, I will use chronology within the development framework, since development implies movement through time. This organizational framework encourages us to think more creatively and to examine more fully and without cultural judgment the world's peoples at various points of their development, seeing both the amazing accomplishments and the appalling shortcomings of our species.

Waves of Global Change

As we consider our 40,000 year span of history, we can readily see that our species has fashioned very diverse ways of living. To clearly identify some of the distinct patterns of our development, I have arranged human development into five major human transformations called *waves*, which are critical turning points or watersheds that represent deep structural change in the historical process. These developmental waves are organic metaphors and do not follow strict chronological dates but have approximate beginning dates and no ending dates. The beginning date of each wave indicates where the earliest known expression of that wave gets underway in a specific area of the world, but the ending dates are left open because all five waves continue, albeit in altered form, even today.

Waves are an easy image to envision, especially for visual learners, who can readily identify the ebb and flow of the waves and the fluidity with which waves change and adapt to their surroundings. Waves are both a description of what happened and a historical methodology for understanding our past. Although these waves denote change, it is important to remember that at a foundational level, universal human behaviors or commonalities lie below the surface and signify unifying continuity. Yet despite our unchanging human essence, change does occur. When change occurs within a wave, due to a combination of complex and interacting factors, ripples of change radiate and overlap to act upon all parts or patterns of human society. Deeply embedded within each wave is a paradigm or over-arching worldview that shapes the political, social, economic, technological, intellectual, ecological, and cultural patterns of society. Waves can accommodate significant shifts in their patterns without changing their essential worldview. But if change alters all patterns within a wave, it will cause a crucial shift in the fundamental paradigm or worldview inherent in the wave; thus a new wave is created or return to a different wave takes place. Since paradigm-altering change is rare, only five waves of

change are proposed in this world history. The five paradigmatic waves of change are the Communal, Agriculture, Urban, Modern, and Global. Following is a brief description of each wave.

1. Communal Wave In this wave people gather/hunt or forage for food and live together in small communal, nomadic bands bound together through strong kinship ties. This wave encompasses the emergence of modern humans around 40,000 years ago and continues today with very small numbers still practicing, although in an altered form, a foraging way of life.
2. Agriculture Wave With this wave people change from foraging for food to agricultural food production and a sedentary, village way of life. People begin to make this change in some, but not all, areas of the world beginning approximately 10,000 BCE.⁹ This transition also occurs at later time periods whenever a group begins to adopt an agricultural way of life. Some people today continue to live in small villages and retain some Agricultural Wave characteristics similar to earlier people.
3. Urban Wave During this wave, beginning in Mesopotamia around 3500 BCE, groups of people evolve out of sedentary agricultural villages to develop more populous and complex urban societies. This wave marks a transition to what we call civilization and all its accompanying characteristics. Some people in the world today continue to practice conventions that are characteristic of the Urban Wave, especially its religious traditions.
4. Modern Wave This wave emerges around 1500 CE when some Western European countries rise to prominence, beginning with the conquest of the Western hemisphere and followed by interaction with and subjugation of societies throughout the world. Modern characteristics, shaped largely by Western Europeans, diffuse around the world after 1500.
5. Global Wave This wave is presently developing across the world. Humans in this wave create globally interconnected communication, transportation, financial, commercial, and trade networks, and they use sophisticated technological innovations.

Each wave represents a momentous transformation in all facets of human development—political, economic, social, technological, cultural, spiritual, ecological, and worldview. Hence, each wave is holistic. When some people begin to move into a different wave, this does not mean that all people throughout the world change simultaneously. Therefore, within a specific time in history, people throughout the world are at different developmental junctures. In other words,

the occurrence of a new wave denotes that people in a core area or areas are making a transformation to a different way of life, a new wave, but not all the people throughout the world make the transition at the same time, while others may never change significantly at all. Hence, we find throughout the world diverse ways of living occurring simultaneously by societies in different waves of social development.

The core area or areas that make such a shift may only comprise a minority of the world's people at any given time, but these areas represent momentous change, despite their relatively small early numbers. For example, as the Modern Wave begins around 1500, the vast majority of the world continues to live within the Communal, Agriculture, or Urban Waves. The changes labeled modern are only beginning to take root in specific parts of Western Europe, and only among a small number of people. But enough variables are interacting at this time to stimulate change among other people, and this change compounds and spreads to other areas of Europe and beyond. As these dominant changes radiate outward from the core area in the Modern Wave, more areas are enveloped into the Modern Wave system and assimilate its characteristics either voluntarily or through force and conquest. Usually those in the new wave have more sophisticated military technology than the other waves, which facilitate their subjugation of weaker groups. For example, some people in the Urban and Modern Waves use their complex warfare apparatus to overtake those in the less complex Communal and Agriculture Waves with relative ease.

On the other hand, some societies or regions do not necessarily move in lock-step fashion from the Communal, to the Agriculture, and onward to the Urban, Modern, and Global Waves. They may move from one wave to a different wave because of interacting variables. For example, after the "fall" of the Roman Empire in the Urban Wave, many people fled the city and picked up a way of life characteristic of the Agriculture Wave, a less complex way of life more in keeping with their situation. The same occurrence happened with the collapse of the Mayan civilization in the Western hemisphere. Evidence suggests that most people were propelled into the Agriculture Wave from the Urban Wave for reasons beyond their control.

A cautionary reminder is needed here. This world history model is only the map, not the actual territory. A full account of the vast diversity of our human history through such a vast span of time and space can never be made; only a partial understanding, an approximation, can be achieved. World history, by its very nature, makes generalizations about people that do not always apply to every specific society or culture. With these generalizations comes the caveat that

diversity is more prevalent than generalizations indicate and the use of generalizations is merely a convenient tool to explain the collective experience.

Patterns

This study of world history emphasizes differences but a story of our human species cannot dwell exclusively on differences without becoming overwhelmed by detail. In this holistic approach human similarities or commonalities are recognized as well as differences, for one does not exist independently of the other. Therefore, I have organized these human commonalities into five patterns that are repeated in each of the five waves. Human commonalities, which are what link us together as a species, provide the foundation for this approach.

These five patterns are the background on which cultural diversity is imprinted. Each is further differentiated into five sub-patterns for a total of 25 sub-patterns. The five patterns and 25 sub-patterns are:

1. Relationship with Nature: Eco-system Patterns. Includes five sub-patterns: geography, environment, human populations, natural populations, and human/nature interaction.
2. Ways of Living: Techno-economic Patterns. Includes five sub-patterns: daily life, economic systems, technology, exchange and trade, and patterns of labor.
3. Human Networks: Social Patterns. Includes five sub-patterns: human groups and institutions, the family, gender, social status, and socialization/education.
4. Establishing Order: Political Patterns. Includes five sub-patterns: political systems, forms of leadership, rules/laws and punishment, migration/interaction, and conflict/cooperation and warfare.
5. Human Expressions: Cultural Patterns. Includes five sub-patterns: worldview/ideology, spirituality/religion, communication, identity/belonging, and aesthetic expression.

In each of the waves some of the sub-patterns may be emphasized more than others, some may be ignored, or others added depending upon the circumstances. Yet this cluster of patterns and sub-patterns is intended to provide a sense of continuity and order that help us to remember significant information, concepts, and the flow of history. The patterns are a mental organizer for us to help contextualize world history or, in other words, something for us to “hang our hat on.”

World History Threads

Along with the five waves, five patterns, and 25 sub-patterns, this holistic world history has interwoven five key threads throughout the narrative. In the study of the formation of the Universe and Earth, the evolution of life on Earth, the emergence of humans, and our ensuing history, certain threads emerge as significant and recurring motifs. In this holistic history these motifs are woven into five dynamic and interconnected threads: interdependence, creative and destructive energies, paradox, commonality and diversity, and change and continuity. These intangible yet ever-present threads are manifested throughout history and from them are woven the events and processes, the behavior of humans and our fellow species, the global environment, and space and time itself, into an interdependent web.

These five threads are abstract and not always readily apparent but they are embedded within the deep processes of the Universe, the superficial and exterior occurrences of ordinary history, and in everyday human life. When they are repeatedly identified throughout history we can begin to grasp their significance, recurrence, and connection to our own lives. We are constantly reminded that we can learn from history; after all, that is why we study it. By identifying and connecting the five threads to real life situations and historical events, we can see their repeating motifs. We can learn from the past by circumspectly and judiciously applying what we have learned from these threads to our present situations. The following is a brief explanation of the five key, reoccurring threads woven through this holistic world history:

1. Interdependence

For the past five centuries the Western worldview has regarded humans as separate, isolated superior entities set apart and above other forms of life. This segmented, Newtonian, differentiated, modern worldview is currently being challenged by proponents of holistic thinking, who see our human species as intricately connected to all other forms of life, each a part of an interdependent web of life on Earth. Humans are also inextricably connected to each other in a dynamic interplay of interactive relationships and exchange.

2. Creative and Destructive Energies

Both creative (constructive) and destructive energies are simultaneously at play within the Universe, in life on Earth, and in the human experience. Among some of the destructive energies described in this world history are entropy, contraction, extinction of life forms, collapse and decline of civilizations, disorder, war, disease and conquest. Among

some of the creative energies at play are expansion of the Universe, creation of life on Earth, evolution of our human species, spiritual connections, kinship bonds, human relationships, peace movements and artistic expressions.

Both destructive and creative human behaviors also play out in history. Human destructive behaviors such as anger, apathy, avarice, boredom, conceit, despair, egotism, envy, fear, gluttony, greed, hate, indifference, jealousy, lust, narcissism, self-indulgence, self-pity, and vanity contribute to the destruction of the human spirit. On the other hand, creative behaviors such as acceptance, altruism, appreciation, charity, compassion, empathy, forbearance, forgiveness, hope, gratitude, love, mercy, patience, self-control, selflessness, tolerance, and understanding contribute to uplifting the human spirit.

Tension between creative and destructive energies is what creates change throughout the Universe and in our own history as well. In this holistic study, creative and destructive energies do not have normative values attached to them, but are seen as vital interacting processes.

3. Paradox

Paradox lies at the heart of the Universe, the natural world, and within human events and actions. A double edge sword, paradox cuts both ways. Paradox is expressed as an apparently true statement that appears to lead to a contradiction or to circumstances that defy common sense or intuition. The human story is a tale of contradictions and tensions that do not necessarily have a solution. Holding the tension of paradox and controversy without feeling the need to resolve it is part of systems thinking. For every solution to a problem there are repercussions. No clear right and wrong appears to exist in history, as paradoxical as that may seem, but humans link normative values to paradoxical forces. Uncovering paradoxes and contradictions that continuously flow through our history and our everyday life is part of the mystery we observe and attempt to record here.

4. Commonalities and Diversity

Humans throughout the world share many similar characteristics, behaviors, and physical and genetic make-up. An exploration of human commonalities connects humans to a world community where we all share a common history. At the same time, humans are diverse. As unique individuals and groups, we celebrate the differences that give each of us a sense of identity and expression. In this history, diverse ways of living are represented in each of the five waves while commonalities are expressed through the five patterns.

5. Change and Continuity

Change and continuity are vital processes in history as in our daily lives. Change involves increasing or decreasing complexity, but it does not necessarily mean progress. Parallels between biological change and continuity on the one hand, and cultural change and continuity on the other, are evident in our human history and link us to our fellow species in the natural world.

It is difficult to understand and explain why some people change from one wave to another, and why continuity or slower change characterizes other human situations. A traditional world history approach usually explains change as cause and effect. For example, as it is usually explained, the construction of complex irrigation networks in China causes its civilization to develop. As historian Ross Dunn explains, most world history is a “serial study of several civilizations, stressing chronological strings of causation within each, with one cause creating the effect.”¹⁰

When using a systems thinking approach, change is viewed as an interacting feedback system in which numerous variables combine to create change. When change takes place, one variable or several variables are stimulated by various factors that disrupt continuity and accelerate change. Once disruption of previously stable variables takes place, the feedback loop system is set in motion, with one variable affecting another, which in turn stimulates change in others. For example, when one pattern within a wave—the economy, technology, society, politics, religion, or cultural expressions—is stimulated to change, if the change is intense enough it can stimulate other elements to change as well. When change is forceful, the repercussions are exacerbated and the whole system changes. The process of change can actually appear to be quite random, since all the variables involved may not be obvious.

A wave in this holistic world history is a fluid metaphor that signifies major human transformations. Major change in history is compared to waves in an ocean. Under the right conditions a tiny ripple in the ocean grows into a swell that becomes a wave, and helps to create even larger waves, until the whole process can either dissipate or grow to such proportions that it creates havoc and destruction in its wake. The creation of a new wave implies the destruction of one wave and a change in the way of life for the people living through the transformation. Although this is not an exhaustive list, several variables help stimulate change: environmental factors such as soil depletion and water exhaustion; climate change; interaction among strangers; military overreach; invasions both military and biological; chance happenings; individual choice; creative individuals; forceful leaders; technological innovation; and physical adaptations. These

variables most likely differ from place to place, with some having greater influence in certain areas than in others. In order to explain change more fully I have identified six basic types:

1. The first type of change is random change or chance. Chance is analogous to biological mutation. In this type of change, apparently random historical circumstances or abrupt climatic events influence change.
2. A second type of change occurs through regional differentiation. When species are isolated they change and develop their own adaptations in concert with their local environmental setting. Human societies that develop in diverse isolated or partially isolated settings adapt unique cultural customs and traditions that fit their particular circumstances. For example, on the island of New Guinea, an area in which humans were isolated until recently, linguists have identified over 1,000 spoken languages today out of a total of 5,000 recognized languages throughout the world.¹¹
3. A third type of change is cultural change; its principles are also applicable to biological change. Cultures, like organisms, are typically not totally isolated, and they interact, in varying degrees, with others. When interaction occurs, diffusion takes place between interacting cultures; hence, cultural diffusion or cultural interaction occurs, with each culture involved in the interaction. Cultural interaction abounds in world history with the interaction between nomadic and urban societies just one of many recurring examples.
4. A fourth type of change is innovative or material change that usually occurs rather abruptly, especially when compared to longer periods of relative continuity. A few examples of material change include the development of new subsistence strategies, a technological innovation, or population increases.
5. Material change may be cumulative, which leads to a fifth type of change: cumulative change. An example of cumulative change is readily visible today; astounding technological advancements developed over decades have resulted in a comfortable material standard of living that many people in the West are accustomed to today. But cumulative change is not necessarily continuously progressive in an unbroken chain of upward advancement; cumulative advancement ends at some point. When cumulative change turns towards decline in cultural evolution, a civilization collapses or weakens. Similarly, at some cumulative change may finally lead to biological involution and extinction occurs.
6. A sixth type of change involves human choice. Innovative cultural change is stimulated by human agency or choice, which, it can be argued, plays a role in biological change as well. Creative individuals, usually about 10 percent of the

total population, or charismatic leaders, may be agents of either positive or negative historical change. Adolph Hitler, leader of Germany during World War II, has been called the most evil leader of the 20th century, while Mahatma Gandhi, the national and civil rights leader from India, epitomizes the compassionate leader. Paradoxically, both were instrumental in effecting change, but one produced destructive change while the other promoted constructive change.

In this world history change is understood not as mono-causal and autonomous, but is composed of dynamic components influencing each other, which is best described with an inter-looping feedback system. When change occurs, through the various causalities explained above, one variable or several variables are stimulated by assorted factors that disrupt continuity and accelerate change. Once disruption of previous variables takes place, a feedback loop system is activated with variables affecting each other. When one element or pattern within a wave is stimulated to change, the other patterns—relationship to environment, economy, technology, social order, political organization, and cultural expressions—change to some degree as well. When change is dynamic enough, the repercussions are exaggerated and the whole system changes,¹² and from that, a new wave develops or a transition to another wave occurs. For example, technological and economic changes (the techno-economic pattern) have accelerated dramatically around the world in the last few decades. Innovative technologies such as the Internet and high speed computers are just two breakthrough variables that have stimulated other variables to change as well. By using this interacting feedback system to explain change, our history is seen as an interdependent, layered process rather than a surface-level chain of cause/effect events.

When cultural change occurs in human societies, its members respond in a number of ways. One response is to assimilate or accept the new social and cultural elements that are introduced into a society. Assimilation can be accomplished when the recipients of change voluntarily absorb and accept new cultural elements, or when change is forced upon recipients by coercion, or by some combination of forces along an assimilation continuum. When assimilation occurs, most of the societal elements are replaced by new elements and older elements become secondary. An example of assimilation is the experience of immigrants in the “melting pot” of the United States during the 20th century. Many second generation immigrants no longer speak the family’s language, and cultural traditions from the “old country” have given way to Americanized traditions.

A second response to change is when certain elements are preserved and sustained by combining old and new elements,¹³ often called synthesis. In some cases, even if change is abrupt, the replaced culture’s symbols, values, and

beliefs may continue to exist in differing degrees and forms. This is the case with many Native Americans who accepted the Catholic religion imposed by the Spanish conquerors around 1500, but synthesized many of the Catholic saints and religious symbols into their native religious beliefs.

A third response is when too much change occurs too rapidly; the system breaks down and panic and disorder prevail. An example of this third response is the 1979 Islamic Revolution in the nation of Iran. During this time deep changes in the form of a theocratic Islamic state were ushered in with Islam as the official religion and where strict adherence to cultural traditions of the past was legally enforced. Today in Iran, many of the nation's young people under 30—who make up more than 70 percent of the population—are resisting imposition of this theocratic order in overt and subtle ways. Their elders may also wish to change the theocratic order of the last 30 years but remember the disruption and chaos of earlier changes and would rather not endure the hardships once again; thus, they resist or do not embrace change. When devastating social disruption occurs, a country's social values, traditions, and customs break down with alienation, despair, and violent behaviors expressed. Usually periods of rapid change are followed by periods of disorder, and then followed by long periods of continuity.

Continuity is coupled with change in this holistic world history. *Continuity* is the persistence of cultural elements in a society. If change is placed on a continuum, periods of relative stability or continuity also appear; this does not mean that no change occurs, but rather that change is superficial, not deeply structural. Continuity means the variables are balanced; secondary or non-structural changes can be accommodated by minor adjustments in the patterns. Long-term stability or continuity does not imply backwardness or stagnation; rather, it indicates a certain type of success. A society must effectively satisfy its members' physical and psychological needs if it is to endure, and in order to satisfy these needs a certain degree of stability and continuity is required. Cultural continuity persists not because certain cultural elements of a society are superior or more efficient than former elements, but because they provide uniformity and familiarity. Rapid change disrupts a society's uniform and familiar way of life, which exacts a financial and psychological toll on its members. Change in one area of society likely means change in other areas as well. New information and accompanying changes in daily routine are threatening to many people, who may be anxious or uncomfortable with its consequences. Not surprisingly, the elderly, who tend to be more conservative and less eager for change, strive to maintain stability, as do farmers, land-owners, ruling elites, and religious leaders. Informal and formal processes of socialization, such as

education, also help maintain continuity in the midst of change. Socialization instills the society's cultural values and provides a rationale for members to believe their culture is worth preserving and continuing. We can think of United States history classes as an example of this process, or any history course that extols a particular nation. Socialization is very effective; cultural elements become embedded in our minds and hearts that we therefore automatically assume them to be true.

Section 5: Features of a Holistic World History

The following ten points (not necessarily in the order of importance) will further explain the advantages of this holistic model.

1. A "Big Picture" Periodization Plan

This holistic world history has a well defined and well developed periodization plan. As described above, the plan uses waves as a metaphor for human development and change. I organize this wave model of world history to begin with the "Big Bang," while human history begins approximately 40,000 years ago with the Communal Wave. While the categories of the five patterns and sub-patterns remain the same in each of the five waves, the content of the patterns in each of the five waves changes.

2. Five Universal Threads

Our human story is often portrayed as separate and unconnected to the universal threads found within the resplendency of the Universe, the formation of our Milky Way galaxy, the solar system, and planet Earth, the unfolding of life on Earth, and the evolution of our human species. Yet, these five intricately woven threads knit us together into this awe-inspiring process. Uncovering these threads that connect humans interdependently with the world tells us about ourselves and helps explain our often puzzling actions, behaviors, events, and ideas that all blend together into our paradoxical human story.

3. Recognition of Human Commonalities

Our species exhibits common characteristics that differentiate us from other species. These solidly rooted, underlying psychological and biological human commonalities provide a foundation that unites our diverse families, groups, clans, tribes, and nations across time and place. To discover our commonality, we set our story within a larger framework that

stretches over a long 2.5 million years. During this long period of time, we developed deeply rooted instincts, behaviors, and habits that have served us well for our survival and proliferation. Among these hard-wired instincts are a shortsighted outlook of the future, concern for the welfare of the proximate group, and responsibility for the local environs.

As we coexist today with billions of fellow humans on a finite planet, these narrowly focused behaviors that helped our ancestors endure over the millennia are paradoxically creating havoc for our species today. But along with our survival-based, shortsighted instincts, we also possess self awareness: the faculties of reason, reflection, the capacity to learn and understand, and a sense of our own personal and collective identity—in other words, consciousness. Along with all of these traits, we, as a species, have the remarkable ability to transform—that is, to change our own detrimental, deep-seated behaviors to life-sustaining behaviors and actions that will enhance the continuation of our species and countless other fellow life forms within our larger, complex ecosystem.

4. Five Patterns

The commonalities described above are differentiated into patterns—ecosystem, techno-economic, social, political, and cultural—and then into sub-patterns as a way of sorting and organizing the material. Instead of organizing history by particular cultures or societies or using a chronological approach, observing patterns provides a way to make a large amount of information intelligible.¹⁴ In a chronological approach, names, dates, events, and other factual detail lead the organization, which is summed up in the humorous expression, “history is just one damn thing after another.” This approach includes factual information but boils down a great deal of that information to a manageable level.

Each of the patterns roughly carries equal weight in each of the waves. Political history, which emphasizes military campaigns, leaders, laws, elites, and dates, is usually over-emphasized in world history and leads to information overload. When we focus exclusively on political history, the depth and complexity of history is overlooked. Political history usually excludes or de-emphasizes women and non-elites, while men and elites are highlighted. Military history is largely reduced, as well, since wars and military heroes are often overly romanticized in world history and the realistic portrayal of horrific suffering and violence of warfare is disregarded. Alternative forms of conflict resolution are encouraged; therefore, a constant reference to wars reinforces the notion that only through military force can disputes be

resolved. My holistic model includes political history but reduces the emphasis on political actors, events, and wars and gives equal balance to social, cultural, environmental and economic factors.

5. A Holistic/Systems Thinking Approach

One of the hallmarks of this model is that it uses systems thinking as a foundation for understanding history. With systems thinking the whole system is studied—all the parts and the connections between the parts—in order to more fully understand the parts in relationship to the whole system of world history.

6. Interdisciplinary Perspective

In keeping with a holistic approach, this world history uses a trans-disciplinary perspective in which diverse subjects—history, anthropology, psychology, geography, economics, sociology, humanities, political science, and the sciences—are woven into the historical framework. By scanning across the disciplines we can see emerging conditions, paradigm shifts, and change, while the artificial boundaries separating academic disciplines fall away.

7. A Global Format

This history follows a global format in which an attempt is made to give equal credence to diverse areas of the world, instead of following the familiar “Western civilization approach,” more commonly found in traditional world history. In the West, Western civilization is the foundation of most of our values, institutions, beliefs, and worldview. From this Eurocentric vantage point, the West emerges as the influential agent with non-Western societies merely responding passively to its influence. The assumption is that Western values, goals, and worldview are an appropriate yardstick for comparing and judging the entire world. In that kind of curricular orientation, history is organized according to an ancient, medieval, modern timeline that fits the West. This holistic approach does not exclude or overly glorify Western civilization but balances it and integrates it into a larger framework.

Another approach often used in world history is based on a national history format. From this vantage point, world history is narrated as the sum of the parts of a nation’s history, which are merely compiled together on the assumption that a global picture will magically emerge. This format is reflective of modern worldview thinking in which separate, unrelated national parts are each autonomous and unrelated. But in reality, human history is not the sum of disparate national history parts but an integrated process.

World history told from a regional plan jumps from region to region across the world, yet fails to find underlying commonalities connecting these regions together as an interdependent system. In a regional approach, each region signifies separate cultures or demarcated civilizations that have unique characteristics, cultural attributes, and histories. Interaction of regions is largely minimized, except when wars force regions into contact. Although the regional approach has some beneficial attributes—indeed regions often have distinctive characteristics—a regional approach alone does not provide a satisfactory holistic approach.

This holistic world history chooses a format that embraces global interaction, human commonalities, and regional commonalities and diversity rather than one based solely on Western civilization, or national or regional exclusivity.

8. A Female Voice

World history books are typically authored by male professional historians. Although I am certainly not discounting their rigorous, scholarly work, I believe a balancing female voice in world history is instrumental to a more holistic understanding. I have emphasized the role of females, family, and children in all five of the waves. I maintain that the female viewpoint is more supportive of a holistic and thematic approach where patterns are the unifying factor. Less emphasis is placed on wars, political elites, and military history than in most world histories authored by men.

Educator Johnny Johnson, a Navajo man from Arizona,¹⁵ recently commented at a conference that he feels that the male part of being human has come to dominate our educational system with its rigid hierarchies and emphasis on acquiring information. In order to save the planet he says we need a balancing female voice in our educational system as well as in our everyday lives. The male influence in education enforces hierarchy, which he sees as “deadly” specialization, and exploitation; “like we are a job shell.” The female influence, on the other hand, encourages gathering in a circle to foster the cooperative spirit, egalitarian relationships, and being more human. Western culture is male, but the Earth is female. He, along with countless other women, eloquently argue that we need to write and tell new stories that emphasize the female to balance our lives. I agree.

9. Non-State Peoples

History is traditionally about people who live in urban civilizations, empires, states, or nations with an inordinate emphasis on their “achievements.” I have included in this holistic world history what are often called “non-state” peoples. Often derisively labeled “backward” or “primitive,” these are people who have lived on the margins of

civilizations, states, or nations, and have traditionally been excluded from the spotlight of history. The nomadic people of Asia, for example, are usually portrayed in history as the “barbarians” who attack and threaten to destroy civilization. Yet their nomadic culture and society is rich, diverse, and interesting. They and other marginalized groups have a right to be represented and, where possible, their stories have been woven into this holistic world history.

10. Insights: Learning from the Past

History can be an excellent way to learn valuable lessons from the past that in turn can be applied to our everyday lives. History must be more than a dry collection of interesting but colorless information about the far-removed past. We can incorporate history into our life experiences, making the study more personally relevant and valuable. Therefore, I have included what I call insights throughout the book that highlight valuable lessons that we can learn from and apply to our own experience.

Concluding Insights

This holistic model offers an alternative approach for understanding and learning about world history. It provides a realistic portrayal of world history; for example, we are made aware of the creation of new societies and the collapse and decline of them as well. This model encourages systems thinking and critical and creative thinking that I believe are valuable perspectives for well-informed and engaged global citizens to explore. This integrative approach offers a foundation for understanding other subjects, helping to put contemporary issues into context while connecting seemingly disparate strands of the past and present into a holistic process. It provides a workable, intelligible model that synthesizes an appreciation of our species in which we can gain a deeper admiration of the world in which we live today. This approach does not purport to address all the issues and details about our human history but it does attempt to provide a “big picture,” global perspective for greater understanding. Thankfully, human history has many perspectives and interpretations, each contributing to a fuller understanding of a complex, interdependent global system. Varied perspectives can be a part of a puzzle that when pieced together will give greater meaning to the whole picture of our world. It is my intention that this holistic approach to world history will contribute to the development of new ways of thinking about how to interpret our shared past, our present human experiences, and the importance that our future decisions will have on us, our fellow species, and the Earth as a whole.

Before jumping into a discussion of the five waves in this holistic world history we next turn to a brief survey of the Universe and human emergence. This chapter offers a big picture in which to contextualize a history of our human species and shows how the five threads are intertwined within events in the Universe, on Earth, and our species.

Endnotes: Chapter 1: Introduction to a Holistic World History

¹ O’Conner, Joseph and McDermott, Ian. The Art of Systems Thinking: Essential Skills for Creativity and Problem Solving. London: Thorsons, 1997, p. 3-13 and John Goekler, “Teaching for the Future: Systems Thinking and Sustainability.” Green Teacher 70, Spring 2003, p. 8-14.

² Capra, Fritjof. The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems. New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1996, p. 30.

³ Please see the modern worldview in this book to understand how mechanistic ways of thinking emerged.

⁴ O’Conner, Systems Thinking, p. xv-xvi

⁵ O’Conner, Systems Thinking, p. 19-21.

⁶ O’Conner, Systems Thinking, p. 32, 37

⁷ John Goekler, “Teaching for the Future: Systems Thinking and Sustainability.” Green Teacher 70, Spring 2003, 8-14.

⁸ Meadows, Donella & Dennis, Randers, Jorgen. Limits to Growth: The Thirty Year Update (White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2004), p. 4.

⁹ I will use the time designation BCE, before the Common Era, and CE Common Era for time, instead of BC and AD which stem from a Eurocentric approach to world history. I will dispense with the customary periods after the designations.

¹⁰ Ross Dunn, “Central Threads for World History,” Historical Literacy, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), p. 227.

¹¹ Jared Diamond, The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992), p. 6.

¹² Ruth Whitehouse and John Wilkins, The Making of Civilization, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), p. 51.

¹³ Gerhard and Jean Lenski, Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), p. 69.

¹⁴ Ross Dunn, “Central Threads World History,” Historical Literacy, p. 219 and Jean Elliott Johnson, “Patterns and Comparison,” The History Teacher, Vol. 20, No. 4 (1987), p. 436.

¹⁵ Comments made by Johnny P. Johnson, Fort Defiance, Arizona, at the New Mexico Conference on Aging, Albuquerque, New Mexico August, 29, 2007.