The recent growth in secondary- and university-level world history education reflects that of the field as a whole. Secondary schools in the United States are now mandating the study of world history, and elsewhere in the world, historians and teachers are beginning to question curricula that celebrate the nation state. Lest there be any doubt, these are not revamped Western civilization or British imperial history courses: this is a new world history, truly global in its orientation. As one teacher puts it, ‘Rather than studying region by region, or Europe and the others, world history provides an opportunity to move the lens back away and show how people interact with each other.’¹ The appeal of world history is not hard to see. None of us live in truly isolated places, and current events – global terrorism, bank failures in Argentina, environmental degradation in the Aral Sea, MTV in Paris or Delhi, or the women’s movement in China, for instance – drive home the connections between peoples in often distant parts of the world.² World history has the potential to be the most exciting course in the curriculum. Students become excited when they recognize that world history involves a great number of diverse peoples, that it does not have to focus on memorization of names and dates, and that it connects to the world they live in today. Others legitimate world history based on its ability to help students develop a worldview. As Ron Edgerton has argued, world history ‘gives students a sense of their humanity and how they have been influenced by activists across time and place, thereby creating a broader sense of common identity among all of us’.³

emergence

World history instruction first began in the United States in 1821 at the English Classical High School in Boston, and by World War I a number
of schools offered a one-year ‘general history’ course which was nested in with other social science options. ‘General History’ was designed to better meet the diverse needs of an expanding student population. Aims, however, often fell short of reality. Historians were not satisfied with the content and rigour of the course, teachers were not happy with the pedagogy and students questioned its relevance. As Gambrill noted in a 1927 report, for example:

> These courses are increasing in number and textbooks are multiplying impressively... Yet it cannot be said that the high schools have really caught the idea of the new world history. Both the courses and the textbooks remain in nearly all cases overwhelmingly European in content and point of view, while the reasons for introducing them are in many cases utterly reactionary... the new course is introduced simply to cover as much ground as possible in the one year of history other than American which is offered, and the exigencies of a commercial or technical curriculum or the conflicting demands of other social studies are the real explanation, rather than any recognition of a World Community or of the need for a new world history.4

Despite critiques like this, however, enrolments rose across the country, and until the 1960s, ‘Western Civilization’ courses reigned supreme. Generally, ‘Western Civ’ courses delivered an account of European-led progress and the rise of the US as an international political and economic force. It provided postwar (World Wars I and II) North America with a sense of national unity and global positioning. Much of the rationale for teaching Western Civ courses changed, however, with international political events in the 1950s and 1960s. As Bullard commented:

> The Soviet launching of Sputnik had set the USA on her ear... When most of us try to recall what we were taught about human cultures from kindergarten through Grade 12, we remember only United States history, the history of our own home state, and what was lumped in a bag known as ‘world’ history, namely European, emphatically Western culture, commencing in Mesopotamia and the Nile Valley. Suddenly out of the 1960s, sprang Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Canada.5

With the 1958 National Defense Education Act, the United States Congress officially recognized the need to understand the world beyond its traditional periphery. Area-studies research and language support expanded, drawing graduate students to places all over the