

WORLD HISTORY ASSOCIATION



Call for Proposals **36th annual World History Association conference** **Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA** **June 27-29, 2027**

Conference theme: **"Living in Interesting Times: Inflection Points in World History"**

The World History Association's 2027 Annual Conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA will be organized around the theme of inflection points past and present.

Inflection points help us to conceptualize the movement from one historical state to another: the neolithic or agricultural revolution, the development of the bureaucratic state, the rise of industrialization. Every inflection point exists in reference to a defined scale and scope of historical analysis. Some signal epistemic shifts, such as the development of writing, the Chinese civil service exam, or the printing press. Others mark pivots in transregional power, such as the decline of classical empires or World War II. Still others emerge through interdisciplinary research and allow us to theorize significant climate-influenced developments, such as the depopulation of Classical Maya highland cities or the rise of the Dutch maritime empire. Those of most relevance to world history represent interrelated shifts that reverberate across and between societies.

Some posited inflection points may be mirages, or more limited than proposed, but often they do mark unfolding sequences of interconnected changes. Discussing and debating them can help us to understand the world in which we live.

Are we now living through an inflection point? We are currently experiencing a confluence of significant global developments: a shifting geo-political order, new military and surveillance technologies, a global energy transition, redistribution of wealth, reconfigured trade relationships, the emergence of generative AI, accelerated cross-cultural interactions and migration, and fundamental demographic changes. All of this is playing out in the context

of a rapidly changing climate that requires increased resilience from our physical, institutional, and social infrastructures. While these changes may look different from distinct global positions and perspectives, they seem to be broadly impactful and widely felt.

How are historical research, writing, and teaching useful to us as we try to make sense of the current moment?

We know that history is not a simple diagnostic tool and also that historians can't offer prognostications about the future based on past analogs. But history can help us contextualize the present and understand our position in it. We can use it to help us ask productive questions, think about events from different perspectives and at different scales, analyze changes and continuities, and formulate ethical responses to our current circumstances.

World history, in particular, is centrally relevant in this moment.

World history emerged as a field in the 1970s as historians and social scientists sought to analyze and explicate the historical processes that produced the highly interconnected post-World War II world and explain inequalities within it. The process was partly driven by demand beyond academia, from educators and others who wanted to make sense of a rapidly globalizing world. Early practitioners in the field grappled with how to synthesize existing research into methodologically sound transregional and comparative histories, how to work across disciplinary boundaries, and how to conduct original historical research through a world historical lens. By the mid-1990s, many in the field converged around a model of periodization, research, and teaching that centered "cross-cultural interactions and their results" (Bentley, 1996) to "portray the crossing of boundaries and the linking of systems in the human past" (Manning, 2003).

World history periodization was built specifically around inflection points in transregional political, economic, technological, cultural, environmental, and other regimes. Scholars in the field continue to research and analyze historical processes related to networks of interconnection and "zones of interaction" (WHA) at wide-ranging spatial and chronological scales.

Our Theme

This brings us back to the present. It is hard to imagine a better historical field than world history to help us meaningfully reflect on the magnitude, significance, and scale of the changes we perceive today. We will seize the opportunity of the 2027 annual conference to begin the collaborative task of understanding both the historical nature of inflection points and the historical roots of contemporary events, working together to inform the public and our fellow scholars of the global dimensions of these questions.

Call for Proposals

We invite submissions from scholars and educators interested in contributing to discussions about inflection points in world history. How does your work investigate or elucidate this theme? Does your work reveal the workings behind a historical transformation, connect change on a global level to local or regional events, or theorize how and why inflection points have sometimes been managed to the benefit of human societies? Does it explore how people in another time apprehended (or misapprehended) the historical significance of events in their world? Does it refine the scope of a widely accepted world historical inflection point, or propose a new one?

The World History Association offers multiple paths for participation in this conference program. You are welcome to submit more than one proposal.

We welcome proposals for full panels, round-tables, workshop sessions, individual papers, and co-authored works showcasing cooperation across historical areas of expertise or between disciplines.

To submit a proposal for a panel, roundtable, workshop, or individual paper, you will need to submit an abstract that describes your proposal and explains how it relates to the conference theme, and include details for each participant.

The 2027 conference will also host a Research and Writing Collaborative (RWC) for 12 - 16 people who would like the opportunity for deep engagement with fellow historians around the research and writing process. Group members will meet in 90-minute sessions during the conference to share their original written work (which will be read in advance of the conference by a number of other participants), and discuss problems of practice, and engage in deep dialogue about the discipline. These sessions will be open for all conference members to attend.

To apply to join the RWC, you will need to submit an abstract that describes your paper topic, explains how it meets the conference theme, and suggests problem(s) of practice you might like to discuss in the conference. If your proposal is accepted for the RWC, you will be required to submit your paper/chapter one month prior to the conference to give everyone ample time to thoughtfully review each others' work.

Please note: when you submit your proposal, you will be asked to select 1 category and up to 3 sub-themes that best fit your intended presentation:

Categories (select 1)

Teaching and Learning
Research
Public History
Digital Humanities

Sub-themes (select a maximum of 3)

- **Power, Law, and Institutions:** How power is created, exercised, contested, and legitimized through families, laws, governments, political movements, and other formal and informal institutions.
- **Technology, Information, and Human Possibilities:** How technologies and systems of knowledge have transformed human understanding, communication, creativity, labor, and relationships with the wider world.
- **Identities, Gender, Culture, and Faith:** How individuals and communities construct, express, negotiate, and contest identities through gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, religion, belief, art, and cultural practice.
- **Environment, Climate, and Health:** The historical relationships among human societies, environmental change, climate, disease, medicine, infrastructure, and individual and collective well-being.
- **Connecting the Global and the Local:** How migration, trade, economic exchange, transportation, networks, and the movement of people, goods, ideas, and resources connect local experiences to regional and global processes.
- **World Historians at Work:** The methods, sources, theories, technologies, teaching practices, and public-facing projects through which historians research, interpret, organize, and communicate the global past.

Deadline for Proposal Submissions: Monday, October 19, 2026

Please submit your proposals at: <https://pretalx.com/worldhistassn-pittsburgh-2027/>