

Professional Development Grant Final Report

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Restatement of Professional Enhancement Opportunity

I have been a member of the World History Association (WHA) for over ten years and have gone to most of their annual meetings. People on the board know me, and I have extensive contacts in the organization. This has led to publishing opportunities and conference lecture opportunities and maintaining these connections and making new ones is a central part of attending these conferences. On this occasion I delivered a paper called "The Anthropocene as Cultural Metaphor in Scientific History."

Brief Review

Although the concept of the "Anthropocene" did not appear in any of the foundational big history texts (Spier, 1996; Christian, 2004; Brown, 2007; Spier, 2010), as soon as it made its way into mainstream academic discourse, the idea was quickly incorporated into the official big history narrative. First it was inserted into the free online course funded by Bill Gates, the Big History Project (2011); then there was an article on big history and the Anthropocene in *History Today* (2013); then an episode called "The Anthropocene and the Near Future" in John Green's *Crash Course Big History* (2014); an entire chapter devoted to the subject in the most widely used big history textbook (David Christian, Cynthia Stokes Brown, Craig Benjamin, *Big History: Between Nothing and Everything* (McGraw Hill Education, 2014); and an Anthropocene conference at the Big History Institute (Macquarie University, 2015).

None of this has anything to do with science, or the validity of the Anthropocene as an epoch: it has to do with the ways in which the ostensibly scientifically-grounded and objective nature of the concept reinforces the image big history wants to maintain of itself as empirical and data-driven, while at the same time advancing its often unacknowledged ideology of environmental advocacy. Whatever its scientific merits, the Anthropocene as cultural metaphor plays directly into the role of big history as evolutionary epic.

Summary of Findings, Outcomes, Experiences

I had the opportunity to talk with John McNeil at length at this meeting. John is the incoming American Historical Association President and someone I've known via the WHA for years. David Christian couldn't make it because of health reasons, but I did meet up with Craig Benjamin as well, former WHA President and editor of a book being published by Routledge to which I've just contributed a chapter. The

audience for my talk was okay, and there was some discussion of my paper, but the real benefit of going to these meetings is maintaining my professional scholarly connections.

Conclusions and Recommendations

I am very appreciative of the opportunity that ATU's Professional Development Grant gave me to participate in this conference. It is a professional enhancement opportunity of inestimable value, which not only presented me individually with a positive scholarly experience but at the same time gave me the chance to enhance the reputation of Arkansas Tech University as an institution that is committed to serious scholarly research.