WORLD STUDIES AT QUEENS COLLEGE

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At Queens College, faculty from across the disciplines recently completed the design and implementation of a world studies program. Interest in this program began a number of years back with an ad hoc faculty committee, chaired by Roger Sanjek (Anthropology). Thanks to the support of Queens' president, Shirley Strum Kenny, the Mellon Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities provided funding for three years of planning committees and summer institutes. In 1988 planning committees were established under the leadership of Paulette Pierce (Sociology), David Kleinbard (English), Edith Wyshogrod (Philosophy), Ronald Waterbury (Anthropology), and Frederick Buell (English). After considerable research and debate regarding the nature and validity of World Studies as an academic field, the committees formulated a statement of philosophy—a definition of the field—and devised a process whereby different disciplines could be integrated into the program. The committees then developed a four-course sequence that embodied their philosophy and disciplinary aims. The training of additional faculty for the program, which was perceived to be a major component of the enterprise, was carried out in two full-scale NEH summer institutes, led by Matthew Edel (Urban Studies), Edith Wyshogrod (Philosophy), Morris Rossabi (History), and Frederick Buell (English). A shorter NEH conference, on pedagogy, was led by Ronald Waterbury (Anthropology). In total, approximately 75 faculty members participated in the planning committees or the summer seminars or both.

The project was particularly appropriate for the Queens campus, as Queens has a very diversified student body. Over forty nationalities are represented on campus, and the borough of Queens is now the East's largest port of immigration. Well over a third of the student body is either foreign born or born to recently-immigrated parents. But still more important to the construction of the program were factors that affect all American colleges and universities. From the beginning, program construc-
tion came in response to the perception, both in popular media and specialized scholarship, that the contemporary world has become more globally interconnected and interactive than ever before and the growing opinion in academic circles that students need more than a common core of knowledge about their nation, or the Western tradition. They need a global frame of reference. To list but a few of the factors that support the need for a new, world perspective: a global marketplace has been formed, with the rise of multinational corporations and banks and the internationalization of production, consumption, and capital investment; electronic media, enhanced communication, and rapid mobility have tied places in the world more closely together, so that what were formerly thought to be local cultures and traditions have been deterritorialized or made more heterogenous; geopolitical barriers have fallen, worldwide labor migrations have been dramatically renewed, and local social forms are more and more clearly created and reproduced in connection with, or even as a result of, global factors. The world is, in short, being refigured as a single socio-cultural system.

As a result of these varied and profound changes, individual disciplines are examining and revising many of their basic assumptions; more than a little of the current theoretical debate across disciplinary lines comes, directly or indirectly, from the perception of a radically altered world order. This awareness of change has not only altered ideas about the present; it has provoked a drastic reinterpretation of the past as well. The World Studies program at Queens was designed to investigate this newly-perceived interconnectedness, past and present; its challenge was to explore ways the world’s social, cultural, and economic forms could be understood anew by adopting a global frame of reference—by seeing what happened when one, to use Roland Robertson’s phrase, took concern with the world as a central hermeneutic.

The second-year planning committee produced a general program description which argues that the application of a global frame of reference to particular sites in the world’s past and present involves two sorts of activities, activities which are both complements and opposites to each other. First, it involves investigating the nature of the world-system that many maintain emerged in modern times, and the problems and possibilities
involved in constructing master narratives of the world's development from ancient times to the present version of that system. Second, it involves understanding the challenges of encountering a culture or society—ancient or modern—that is different in its history, traditions, and social forms from one's own, and making these cultures comprehensible to today's students. Together, these two activities represent an attempt to appreciate patterns of interconnectedness in world history, without dissolving the particularity or homogenizing the diversity of specific cultures and sites in the world. These two activities correspond to the chief needs of our students. The first area responds to their need for an overall perspective, in both temporal and spatial terms, on the world as a unit. The second responds to their need to overcome ethnocentrism and learn how to negotiate different local encounters within their increasingly interrelated world.

Along with this general definition of field, the program rationale made three additional commitments. First, it committed the program to exploring the entire range of the world's traditions and cultures—Asian, African, Middle Eastern, Latin American, European, North American—despite the overweening ambition and enormous wealth of material involved in such a project. Second, the rationale committed the program to teaching not to positions in fields, but to controversies; for example, global histories, not global history, would be taught, so that students would, along with absorbing information, become engaged in the exciting, vexing, and perpetually unresolved effort to construct a narrative for the world and become aware, in the process, of the kinds of controversies that now mark that effort. The rationale thus applied Gerald Graff's valuable suggestions (in Professing Literature [1987]) about how literary studies might be restructured in an era of theoretical controversy to the interdisciplinary format of global studies. Third, the rationale committed teachers, pedagogically, to helping students become aware of how their historical and cultural positions are simultaneously connected to and different from those studied throughout world history.

Crucial to the first of these questions was a survey of recent scholarship in world history and recent debate about worldwide interrelationships in that history. Attempts to construct master narratives for the world have usually meant narratives of the genesis of world history out of a world in which there are a number
of separate histories: in the history of the world, there was a point when world history commenced. Different narratives of this event privilege different fields and construct very different plots. To privilege a field is to make a decision about what the essential world-creating forces are in history: for example, William McNeill’s delightful little book, *The Human Condition* (1979), privileges ecology (processes of micro and macroparatism); Daniel Boorstin’s *The Discoverers* (1983) seems often to be a version of culturism; and Immanuel Wallerstein’s *The Rise of the Modern World System* sees political economy as key to world development. Often related to, but ultimately distinct from the question of what field is privileged is how a plot for world history is constructed; the most widespread debate today seems to be between eurocentric and anti-eurocentric approaches. Thus, the primacy given to the West in hegemonic views of the rise of capitalism—as well as that given the West as a necessary step in world-historical development by many Marxian counter-hegemonic views—are countered by an attempt to privilege other regions and cultures. Examples would be Janet Abu-Lughod’s *Before European Hegemony* (1989) and Samir Amin’s *Eurocentrism* (1989), both of which style the West as initially a cultural and political backwater, a peripheral area in world history, and do so as part of a project of empowering third world sites today. Similarly, they, and more strikingly, Martin Bernal, in *Black Athena* (1987), disrupt the eurocentric narrative by arguing that Europe is not Europe, but a multicultural creation; modern Europe, like ancient Greece, formed itself out of materials from many other cultures—Islamic, Semitic, African, Eastern—and then suppressed its indebtedness as it constructed a racialist ideology to justify its worldwide domination.

Feminism and anti-racism challenge typical Eurocentric master narratives differently (here I am using material formulated by Anthony O’Brien [English]). Feminist narratives of the origins and differential development of sex-gender systems intervene in existing master narratives in such a way as to destabilize them. Feminism argues that the gendered subject, and, in particular, the female subject, be foregrounded and not marginalized. Such different feminist works as that of Gayle Rubin and Michelle Barrett in social science, Lourdes Beneria in economics, Sandra Harding in science, Martha Nussbaum and Nancy Fraser in phi-

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losophy, Bell Hooks and Teresa de Lauretis in cultural study, Luce Irigaray and Nancy Chodorow in psychoanalysis conveys a logic of the gendered subject and sex-gender system as now necessary in any construction of the object of knowledge of any discipline. Similarly, anti-racism also forms a basis for interventionist master narratives. It intervenes in existing narratives by emphasizing the ethnically/racially specific subject and the pattern of dominance and distinction based on race and ethnicity in the construction of objects of knowledge. Relevant to these ends would be work by George M. Frederickson, Cornel West, Samir Amin, and Hazel Carby.

The plot of world history can be written very differently, but different plots tend toward a similar conclusion: world history gives birth to an interconnected world. Crucial to this notion is the idea that at some point in time what we could call a world system was born. A world order in which, synchronically as well as diachronically, the world, and all sites within it, reveal themselves to be composite, interactive, mutually created entities. The cornerstone for much of this speculation is Wallerstein’s world systems theory, embodied in his two volume magnum opus, The Rise of the Modern World System (1974). According to Wallerstein’s theories, a world system shows its presence by non-local constitutive forces: a world system is not just the result of the interaction of previously constituted parts, it is a system that non-locally creates its own parts. Thus modern nations, for Wallerstein, are not consolidations of primordial units, but creations of a modern capitalist world system (emergent since the sixteenth century); this system, unlike an empire, is vested in no single center of power, but requires the creation of a competitive plurality of power sources (which Wallerstein differentiates into core, semiperiphery and periphery) in order to operate.

An enormous amount of revisionary scholarship in a wide variety of disciplines today grapples with this or similar notions of worldwide nonlocal creation. Some of the scholarship occurs within the boundaries of Wallerstein’s world systems theory, some in opposition to it, and some outside of it. On the boundary between history and anthropology, Eric Wolf, in Europe and the People Without History (1982), has written a somewhat different version of the rise of the modern world system. In sociology, Roland Robertson and a number of others are spearheading an
alliance of cross-disciplinary studies in the area he calls globalization theory; Robertson has described his enterprise as the attempt to stand world systems theory on its head by emphasizing social structure and culture over economy in studying the formation of what he calls "the world-as-a-whole."

A related, but different, movement in sociology is the study of nationalism; Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) has been the most influential single book in the field, arguing that nationalism is, in a more complex way than previous scholars had recognized, a globally disseminated fiction, a "cultural artifact" that has spread throughout and reshaped the world in the course of the last three centuries. Anderson's analysis of nationalism has, in turn, been important to recent literary history, such as *Nation and Narration* (1990), edited by Homi Bhabha. In this collection of essays, the notion of locally produced national literary traditions is deconstructed, revealing local traditions as in fact heterogenous within and dependent on international structures without.

Closely allied to this deconstruction of national literary traditions are a number of other developments in literary history, sociology, and historiography. In ethnic studies, works such as Henry Lewis Gates' *The Signifying Monkey* (1988), William Boelhower's *Through a Glass Darkly* (1987), and Stanley Tambiah's "Ethnic Conflict in the World Today" (1989) seek to relocate ethnic traditions in international contexts, either as diasporic formations (Gates), the legacy of colonial domination (Boelhower), or an integral part of the current world system (Tambiah). In post-colonial literary studies, national literary traditions have been reinterpreted as creations of the world system. *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (1990), containing essays by Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson, and Edward Said is a good recent example, while the decolonisation theories of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (*Decolonising the Mind* [1981]) and Ashis Nandy (*The Intimate Enemy* [1983]), reflect similar theses, although with a greater third-world emphasis. (Both Ngugi and Nandy are revisions of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* [1963]). Said's name suggests another distinct field of study, imperial discourse theory, the field *Orientalism* (1978) occupies. According to this approach, the way the first world has represented the third in knowledge and art is neither objective nor harmless, but an inte-
gral part of the process of domination; regional identity is thus revealed as a construction of global power relations. Said's approach has been applied in many fields, from ethnography (Writing Culture [1986], ed. James Clifford) to art (Sally Price, Primitive Art in Civilized Places [1989]). Moreover, recent work in philosophy and cultural studies, like V. Y. Mudimbe's The Invention of Africa (1988) and Christopher Miller's studies of francophone black African literature, reveal how these discourses, that originate in the first world, not only represent first-world attitudes, but also tend to resurface in anti-colonial movements in altered form. What is perhaps even more startling is that the notion of revising knowledge by placing knowledge-construction in a post-colonial context has spread even to the hard sciences. This is explicit in Ashis Nandy's Science, Hegemony, and Violence. In a more conventional manner, changes in science are yoked to changes in notions of global order, when Janet Abu-Lughod and Arjun Appadurai support their models of decentered world systems by drawing on the arcana of quantum, chaos, and catastrophe theories. Last, one could collect some of the work mentioned above under the rubric of what is being done in much broader, interdisciplinary fields: feminism and race studies are fields which coordinate reinterpretations of knowledge-construction in a wide variety of disciplines as parts of worldwide discursive formations of gender and race.

Clearly one could easily supplement these reconsiderations of the past with examples of recent developments: globalization present is as rich an area for study as globalization past. From postmodernism in media and many art forms, to the new polycultural international modernism in fiction dominated by third-world authors like Salman Rushdie, and from the creation of a global media network to the development of transnational capitalism, the world map has dramatically changed, becoming more obviously plural, non-local, interactive, and even inter-constitutive. Indeed, as Frederic Jameson's work on postmodernism and Scott Lash and John Urry's The End of Organized Capitalism (1987) indicate, contemporary developments in cultural studies and contemporary developments in economics are more than complementary; they are interconnected, prompting analyses of interconnections that are much richer than traditional Marxian thought allows.
Seen in this way, world systems theory and a host of explicitly related and apparently independent intellectual developments in and outside of poststructuralism add up to a diffuse, but overlapping reinterpretation of culture and society worldwide as being the products of an interconnected world. The variety of types of interconnection suggested above are thus part of the focus of the global area of investigation of Queens' program. Along with these discoveries, however, has come a different kind of debate about the world system concept: the assertion that global history contains a succession of different types of world systems. In contrast to Wallerstein, for whom the "modern world system" is the only one to have emerged in world history yet, scholars like Janet Abu-Lughod (and more informally William McNeill) have pushed the horizon for the development of the world as a single system back in time, arguing for the existence of a pre-modern world system, based on trading networks joining Europe and the East. On the other end, the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has argued, in his remarkable "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" (*Public Culture* 2 [2], 1-24) for the existence of a postmodern world system for an era of disorganized capitalism and contemporary media.

This pluralization of world systems begs the question as to what preceded them. Stated another way, should the paradigm of non-local, interactive creation be confined to late-premodern or modern times? An answer to this must take two forms. On the one hand, Wallerstein argues that a true world system requires 90-day communication between distant parts of the ecumene for an interconstitutive system to emerge. As one inspired by chaos theory might counter, this limitation indicates that world systems theory is not wholly objective, but, rather, perspectively constructed. A long-term analysis of human development, such as given by the brief overview of large-scale population movements in Kingley Davis' article, "The Migrations of Human Populations" (*Scientific American*, Sept. 1974), would also depict a non-locally created world history. On the other hand, the notions crucial to world systems theory must also be applied to the investigation of more localized formations, from civilizations to tribal groups. Thus, Bernal, in *Black Athena* (1987), reconsiders ancient Greece as a composite creation from regional cultural interactions, and many anthropologists today criticize the notion of bounded, sepa-
rate, consensual, tacit cultures, arguing for the reverse of all of these terms. To think in the former ways would be the utilization of an orientalist paradigm to the neglect of what Arjun Appadurai has called the epistemological fadeout that occurs as one investigates past (and also pre-literate) societies.

The above review of scholarship doubtless emphasizes my particular interests as humanist; others would cite still further viewpoints and texts. All would, however, affirm that the study of world interconnectedness represents the guiding principle of the Queens program. Conceptually, theories of global history and global interconnections comprise the first of the two emphases of Queens' World Studies program, and, practically, they offer the occasion for requiring students to absorb a great deal of information about world history and development. The second component of the program also implements the notion of worldwide interactiveness on a different plane. Trying to overcome ethnocentrism and exploring the challenges involved in negotiating presents and pasts different from one's own means not simply differentiation, but differentiation as a part of the perception of relationship. As suggested above, the relationships students may discover are both diachronic (the present has multiple pasts, as when Bernal and Amin assert that the "Western" is also the "Eastern" and the "African") and synchronic (the contemporary world system is fundamentally multicultural, as its subjects construct themselves both through present interactions with each other and out of the circulation of information and imagery about each other's pasts). To involve students in the discovery of difference that also means relationship, specific studies of different sites are emphasized equally with attempts to construct a vision of the whole. Typically, the program selects sites that emphasize heterogeneity, the intersection of several different cultures or other formations within world history. For example, different sites may be compared/contrasted with each other; an encounter between two sites may be dramatized and analyzed, so that it reveals much about each and the mechanism of their relationship; or one site may reveal itself as constructed out of material from a number of others. These changing emphases represent—but only very roughly—changing mechanisms for world interactions privileged at different moments in history. These are the development of relatively independent regional centers linked by migration,
trade, and the diffusion of cultural products; colonial conquest; and global interactivity in a contemporary world in which, as James Clifford notes in *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), “difference is encountered in the adjoining neighborhood, the familiar turns up at the ends of the earth (14).” Typical examples of the above exercises would be comparing epic poems in Greece, India, and Africa along with material about the societies that produced them and studying the observations of world travelers like Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta; contrasting the vision of the “native” with that of the colonizing Europeans; or analyzing the complex polycultural indebtedness of the protagonists in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (1975) or Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1982).

In carrying out these local studies, attention is paid throughout to the range of terms used to ground the differences and relationships thereby discovered: terms like “culture,” “civilization,” “religion,” “region,” “ethnicity,” “nationality,” “class,” “gender,” and “race.” Noting this additional order of multiplicity makes one conscious of the embedded assumptions in, and the intellectual and social history behind, the terminology available for analysis. It also multiplies the variety of local “worlds” to be portrayed, by incorporating into the program an abundance of recent scholarship carried out under a variety of rubrics, such as canon reform, gender studies, and subaltern studies. This approach explores how different traditionally suppressed historical subjects—such as women or racially-defined “others”—represent themselves, their histories, and their world. Given this multiplicity, local studies not only present students with the sensation of negotiating a complex world of differences and relationships, but also show them how hard it may be to construct a coherent narrative of world development. Indeed, localized studies may prompt some students to question the possibility or even validity of constructing global views—or, as Jean-Francois Lyotard put it in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report of Knowledge* (1979) of totalizing knowledge about the world in a master narrative. (Lyotard argues that, in the contemporary world, we no longer can totalize knowledge about the world, but are engaged in a series of dispersed, localized projects that attempt not just to extend knowledge within existing paradigms, but to alter the paradigms themselves).

Surprisingly, then, emphasizing interrelatedness in a world
seen as a complex single system may prompt some either to construct or perpetually to deconstruct particular visions of that whole: the term "world studies" can be both singular and plural. It can mean one world (or world system) through many studies, or it can also mean one world splintered into many studies. In the latter form, it may lead one to argue that the original assumption was wrong, and many studies mean many worlds, many competing, conflicting visions of the same interconnected whole. In a program that tries to teach controversies not truths, this is one of the most fundamental, generative contradictions. It does not represent the shallow cultural relativism (the permissive coexistence of supposedly separate ways of seeing the world) that critics of multiculturalism deride. It represents a crucial contest over representation in and for a shared, interconnected world.

With the Queens program placing emphasis on an interconnected world, four courses have been developed, ones which can be taken as a sequence or separately. The first course focuses on the central concepts and problems of global studies, as discussed above; it then tests these concepts in a series of local investigations. The latter three are divided up into periods chosen to reflect the sequence of world systems discussed above and to provide insight into the comparative development of social structures. Strict chronological sequence was rejected, as the same date can mean something very different in different parts of the world. In each of these courses, material is drawn from a number of cultures and societies, the intent being to provide global coverage and reflect interconnectedness.

Committee-authored course descriptions present the four courses as follows: World Studies 101 ("Interpreting the World") is a study of diverse cultural traditions, political and economic structures, and their interactions. It is designed specifically to expose students to three dimensions of the world system: 1) the global, 2) the local, and 3) the connections between them. First, the course explores how world history evolves over time and how, at different periods, significant interactions between different parts of the world have been constructed. (This area of investigation therefore includes material ranging from studies of early migration, to the formation of highly integrated regional centers, to the global interactions of pre-modern, modern, and post-modern world systems). Second, the course provides students with the
opportunity to appreciate the diversity and richness of local societies as represented in different disciplines. Third, it examines how and to what degree local historical, economic, and cultural developments are shaped by their temporal and spatial position in a wider system of global interactions. To facilitate these understandings, students are expected to assimilate a substantial amount of basic information: historical, economic, geographic, cultural, demographic, etc.

World Studies 102 ("Ancient Worlds"), examines the emergence, globally, of social and cultural forms, from prestate societies to the rise of empires and the development of an early world system. The course utilizes both a local and global approach. On the one hand, it requires a comparative study of various cultures and societies worldwide, based on the use of humanities' and social sciences' texts. On the other, it requires discussion of evolutionary schema for the development of human society and culture from prestate societies to empires and an early world system. (Such schema would include a variety of social science theories, such as ecological evolutionism, mode of production analysis, cyclical development of societies, challenge and response theories, etc., as well as a variety of theories about the development of cultural forms). Throughout these analyses on the local and global levels, attention is given to a scholarship that contests the ways in which traditions have been "invented" or retrospectively constructed during the last several centuries and to the multiplicity of cultural and other viewpoints exposed as this retrospective construction is dismantled.

World Studies 201. ("Encounters Between Civilizations, 1500-1900") begins with the European voyages of exploration and ends in the twentieth century with the rise of anti-colonialism and nationalism in the Third World. This period is associated with the rise and expansion of the "modern world system," a system that differs from the previous period of regional and inter-regional systems by a qualitative increase in the frequency, scale, and magnitude of economic, political, and cultural interrelationships between regions and peoples. Accordingly, the global focus of the course deals with different versions of this narrative and different analyses of the world system that has come into being. Juxtaposed to each other are Eurocentric and non-Eurocentric, gendered and gender-blind positions on the "Age of Discovery," the con-
quest, the rise of capitalism, colonialism, nationalism, imperialism, and anti-colonial resistance. On the local level, this period brings about a dramatic increase in the frequency, depth, and intensity of cross-cultural encounters, and these form the basis for a variety of specific studies of intercultural contacts, as Europeans interact with different peoples around the globe. Each such contact is to be studied with attention to actions of both sides, their perceptions of each other, and the effects of the encounter on both, with care being taken throughout to show that both colonized and colonizing societies are not monolithic, but possess multiple, conflicting viewpoints.

Finally, World Studies 202 ("Contemporary Worlds"), treats the emergence of new forms of global culture. It is an interdisciplinary study of societies, economies, cultures and ideologies in the twentieth century, with focus on the evolution of an increasingly interactive world order, as seen from different historical, ideological and cultural positions within it, and different disciplinary perspectives. Among the issues included are: the evolution of the three-world theory in its economic, ideological, and cultural versions; neocolonialism and decolonization; ethnic and diasporic formations; persistence of "indigenous" cultures; religious movements; nationalism; varieties of resistance; the rise of multinational organizations and movements; international flows of capital and labor, both male and female; redefinitions of cultural identity and difference in an increasingly globalized world; the study of gender and its global/local political, social and cultural implications; the changing awareness of relationships between culture and power; the rise of global media, global commercial culture, and global literary and artistic forms; contemporary science, technology, and their relationships to society and the environment; and the question of the existence and identity of a "post-modern world system" different from the "modern" one. Given the extensive interrelationships in this period between the construction of local sites and the operation of world-wide forces, global and local perspectives are harder to separate and could be taught simultaneously. Thus, instructors are given the option of picking two or three particular "hot spots" or localized topics in the world news, ones that involve the interactions of different cultures and societies and ultimately reveal the operation of the global system on cultural, social, and economic levels.
Queens' program is now well along in the task of developing extensive bibliographies and collections of course materials for the four courses. These have been collected over the three years of planning and are further augmented as instructors use new materials and strategies from semester to semester. (Instructors teaching each section are encouraged to develop new material, within the constraints of the course guidelines; at the end of each semester, they are asked to write up an explanation of their syllabus and an evaluation of its success, and file this and their course materials with the program head).

The curriculum outlined above is not written in stone. As self-criticism yields insights and as new scholarship dictates, the program will change. The experience at Queens has shown that, in constructing such a program out of diverse disciplinary interests and commitments, an "imagined community" of participants emerged, and this community, along with the program, can remain viable only so long as the same sort of exploration that produced it continues. To accomplish this end, Queens is planning an ongoing program of faculty and student seminars and symposia. Making World Studies a center for innovative intellectual activity for both students and faculty hopefully will ensure its health and long life.

The above comments are intended to describe the common core of the World Studies Program at Queens College. But just as the program has been designed to embody questions and controversies, not positions and answers, no single account of it can stand for the participation or express the viewpoints of all involved. If there is anything that we have learned at Queens, it is that this project is a focus for many of the strongly-felt disagreements of our day—disagreements that range from what we should teach to how we should teach it. The intent of the World Studies Program at Queens is not to suppress or even resolve these disagreements, but to use them in the development of a new and challenging pedagogical experience for faculty and students alike.

The current program director and contact person for those wishing further information is Professor Ron Waterbury, Director of World Studies, Kissena Hall, Queens College, Flushing, NY 11367.