

Michael Scott's **Global Connections**



“The emergence of the nation state left little room for a global perspective that prioritised connections between nations”

It can easily feel as if the globalisation that has defined the 20th and now 21st centuries is irreversible.

And with it has come a thirst for a more global view of history – providing, of course, the impetus to create this new magazine. But at times like these it's worth remembering that we have been here before – and that back then our hunger for the global dried up, thanks to changing world perceptions and events.

The 15th and particularly 16th centuries was an age of great exploration and discovery. And for a new and much bigger world, a new and much bigger approach to history was required. Sir Walter Raleigh – one of those exploring new parts of the planet, when not defending England from the Spanish Armada – spent the years between 1603 and 1616 imprisoned in the Tower of London. During this time, his interest turned to writing history – to be specific, the first volume of his *History of the World*.

Raleigh's historical approach linked independent but near-simultaneous events from different geographical areas to help weave together his narrative: for instance, he observed that Prometheus lived in the same age as Moses. This was a universal project that sought to highlight connections between different strands of history, in order to prepare future leaders for an age in which the boundaries of the world would be – as they were being at the time – rapidly expanded: global history for global times.

The remaining four volumes of Raleigh's history were never completed, but the published volume was extremely popular: 10 editions were printed between 1614 and 1687, and even Oliver



Cromwell recommended it to his son – precisely because of its global outlook.

Crucially, however, almost as quickly as Raleigh's universal history project had gained popularity, it once again lost it. Tastes in history changed, largely because of the industrial revolution and the emergence of the modern nation state. Such a new entity as the modern nation required a historical focus bounded by that state's nascent borders to help construct a sense of national identity. In turn, the nation state became the dominant lens for all (but particularly western) historical writing, and the main frame for knowledge acquisition. There was now little room for a global perspective that prioritised the connections between nations and the similarities that bonded together humanity.

It was not long, of course, before the imperial ventures of the 19th century provided a new impetus for global learning. And soon after that, the catastrophic world wars of the 20th century prompted many to look for ways to remind people just how much humanity had always owed to peaceful interaction with one

another, rather than conflict – efforts that also underpin our current interest in global history.

But stories such as that of Raleigh's *History of the World* do beg the question: if we lost our interest in the global before, could we do so again – and what kind of politics and sense of self could provoke it? *The Guardian* newspaper called the UK Brexit vote “a rejection of globalisation”, and many European politicians worry for the future of the EU project following Britain's exit. The US 2016 presidential election was, in many ways, about very different visions for America's future role in the world – one much more isolationist, another more connected. And the 2015–16 migration movement into Europe – the biggest since the Second World War – has prompted calls in numerous countries for stricter border control and more isolationist politics. Could these be early symptoms of another decline in the human desire for a global outlook?

Sir Walter Raleigh wrote that the purpose of his *History of the World* was “to teach by example of times past such wisdom as may guide our desires and actions”. In essence, his message was: forewarned is forearmed. And the lesson of the oscillating popularity of his own work of history is simple: if we want to keep our global perspective, we are going to have to fight for it. 🌐

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