

INTERIM PERFORMANCE REPORT
“World History Matters” [Grant ED-50050-03]

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During the first six months of this grant, we have made considerable progress. The website for *Women in World History* has been built and the basic infrastructure completed. As a curriculum and resource center for high school and college world history teachers, this website is designed for maximum accessibility and clear presentation and can now be viewed at: <http://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh>. In consultation with project partners and several teachers, we renamed the features of *Women in World History* make the nature of the content as clear as possible. Thus, “Finding Women in World History” has become “Website Reviews,” “Reading Women/Unpacking Evidence” has become “Understanding Evidence,” “Curriculum Modules” has become “Lessons,” and “Analyzing Documents” has become “Analyzing Sources” (see below for detailed descriptions).

In October 2003, Heran Sereke-Brhan was hired as Post-doctoral Fellow/Project Historian for *Women in World History*. A recent graduate of Michigan State University, Sereke-Brhan studied African history and her research interests include Ethiopian, African Diaspora, and women’s history, as well as African material and expressive culture. She joined George Mason University from the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian. We have communicated with advisory board members and senior advisors, introducing Sereke-Brhan and updating them on the status of the project. They have been helpful in recommending potential contributors for various aspects of *Women in World History*, which has aided us in recruiting a number of new, highly qualified scholars to participate. Several scholars who were unable to participate in the project have thus been successfully replaced.

“Website Reviews” is a guide to 30 of the best online primary source archives for studying women in world history. Our two editors, Kirsten McKenzie and Nora Jaffray, will write 15 reviews each, evaluating the teaching potential of the sites, and assessing the merits and limitations of their content and presentation. Kirsten McKenzie teaches history at the University of Sydney and includes comparative colonial identity, South Africa, and Australia among her research interests. She replaces Nancy Wingfield, who will be writing the “Understanding Evidence” guide. Kirsten and Nora have received and begun working on a preliminary list of these websites that have been matched to their areas of expertise and selected by diversity of region, subject matter, and chronology. There are particular challenges to finding quality websites that include primary sources on women as available selections are limited in topical diversity, geographical area, and temporal depth. With this feature of *Women in World History*, we hope to minimize these challenges and provide high school and college world history teachers with a guide for multiple teaching purposes, including locating sources, directing students to useful websites, and discerning quality.

“Understanding Evidence” teaches students how to analyze evidence specifically related to women and world history, with special emphasis on cultural contact and globalization.

Nancy Wingfield will write the guide to this section, discussing general approaches to studying women and providing an overview of various source materials, such as personal accounts or travel narratives. She will develop questions that would help students make sense of primary sources for studying women in world history and will suggest critical reading strategies that can be used to place such sources in broader disciplinary contexts.

Women in World History will feature 20 “Lessons” of focused case studies on a variety of topics, themes, geographic areas and time periods. Each Lesson will contain an introduction, a brief narrative that provides the historical setting, reading strategies, and discussion questions and answers, as well as suggestions for further exercises. Most importantly, each Lesson will have 6-8 primary sources with contextualizing notes. Primary sources, ranging from literary pieces, material culture (objects and images), sacred texts, or personal accounts (diaries, memoirs, travel narratives) will be presented on a selected topic. The goal of each lesson is to allow students to gain some knowledge in a particular topic and then apply specific strategies to analyze and interpret primary sources.

The first of these, a lesson on “Women Writers of Heian Japan (11th century)” is in its final stages of formulation. We have designed the prototype for this feature and anticipate the completion of the first Lesson by mid-February 2004. The next five Lessons will be on select topics on “Women in Islam,” “Women in Russian History,” “Women in China,” “Women in India” and “Women in Israel.” Each will be in line with the most recent scholarship on women in the world and emphasize comparative analysis in its conception. We anticipate completing a total of seven to nine lesson plans by the end of the first year of the grant.

“Lessons” has been designed with optimal accessibility in mind for teaching purposes. To this end, our consultant Kimberly Bahumian, a high school world history teacher, has provided helpful input from the perspective of a teacher with hands-on classroom experience about ease of use for teachers and student interest. We will continue exchanging ideas with her on the structure and content of lesson plans as they develop.

“Analyzing Sources” offers eight multimedia models of scholars discussing strategies for interpreting primary sources, with the aim of making more apparent the work of experienced historians or “expert learners.” Five local scholars, and a sixth visiting Washington, D.C., during the American Historical Association meeting, were interviewed. The aim of this section is to ask “expert learners” to share their thinking and analytical process when using primary source material to write or teach history. The primary sources discussed by participants ranged from literary sources, official documents, and religious texts, to photographs, paintings and prints. In regional focus, the scholars drew sources from Europe, East Asia, South America, Africa, and the Middle East and the temporal span stretched from the sixth to the twentieth century (details below).

In November 2003, Maureen Miller (Assistant Professor, European History, GMU), discussed literary sources known as *lais*, a collection of court stories on romance from the

European Middle Ages. She highlighted one particular story believed to have been written by Marie, a French court woman during the 11th and 12th centuries. Miller described the cultural milieu within which the *lais* were created and shared differing scholarly views on their significance and interpretation.

Three scholars were interviewed in December 2003. Brian Platt (Assistant Professor, Japan and East Asia, GMU), analyzed Japanese prints from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These popular woodblock prints, known as *ukiyo-e*, represent images of women as seen through the eyes of artists. The creators and consumers of this genre of art were Japanese urban commoners who, through production of this shared visual imagery, contributed towards framing notions of national identity.

Joan Bristol (Assistant Professor, Latin America, Social and Cultural History, GMU) spoke about a seventeenth-century Inquisition document from Mexico. These trial records illuminate prevalent social values, political concerns, and economic relationships of colonial Latin America. Bristol suggested ways in which these sources could also be used to chart the history of resistance and discussed issues of production, audience, and timing for using these sources to reconstruct the past.

Sumaiya Hamdani (Assistant Professor, Islamic history, Middle East, Women's Studies and Global History, GMU), discussed sources of Islamic religious texts known as *Hadiths*. These were accounts with reports on the social and political context of Prophet Mohammed's life and the impact of his teachings. *Hadiths* were written during the Prophet's life in the sixth and seventh centuries by women who were close to Mohammed, and represent an example of acceptable, authorial role for women in Islam.

In January 2004, we interviewed Ellen Fleischmann (Assistant Professor, Middle East and Western Civilization, University of Dayton) and Yvette Richards (Associate Professor, African American Studies, Women's Studies, GMU). Fleischmann's topic was the life history of a twentieth-century Palestinian woman through which she explored general and particular points on gendered concepts of history, issues of political organization and activity, and the importance of education. She reflected on the challenges and rewards of gathering and using personal accounts as a source for writing historical narrative.

Based on two photographs taken during a political rally in 1957, Yvette Richards traced the contribution of Muslim women in Tanganyika's (later Tanzania's) struggle for independence. Richards drew on the lives of Maida Springer, a black woman labor activist originally from Panama, and Bibi Titi Mohammed, a prominent Tanganyikan Muslim woman leader, both of whom attended this historic event, to illustrate the creative reconstruction of women's stories in political and social movements in East Africa and the African Diaspora.

With two interviews left to complete "Analyzing Sources," work on transcribing and editing has begun. We will continue production work and conduct the final interviews by

June 2004. We anticipate having three multi-media modules on the *Women in World History* website by summer 2004 and the rest by fall 2004.

In sum, we believe we have made good progress in this first six-month period of the grant. We have created the infrastructure and design for the website and refined the features. We have finished prototypes for some features and are moving forward on developing content. In addition, we have raised the matching funds of \$35,000 from private donors.

We would be delighted to provide more detailed information on our progress. We would particularly welcome a visit from NEH staff to the project at George Mason University at any convenient time.

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