**Abstract of Jerry Bentley’s paper entitled “Cross-Cultural Interaction and Periodization in World History” by Karen Plumb**

Jerry Bentley’s paper, “Cross-Cultural Interaction and Periodization in World History,” proposes a “cross-cultural periodization scheme that can establish a ‘world history’ periodization method that avoids privileging a particular culture/society/geographic region/religion/civilization/ etc.” Bentley does this by discussing global history in terms of six eras related to mass migrations, campaigns of imperial expansion and long distance trade.[[1]](#endnote-1) Although time is continuous Bentley sometimes uses his distinct periods to substantiate certain cultural or political or economical distinction which is what commonly happens when one mentally “sculpts” a topic into time frames and as a result he socially constructs historical discontinuity at times.[[2]](#endnote-2) The time periods are Bentley’s way of describing how the periodization method is developed by way of cross cultural interactions across boundary lines of societies and cultural regions to structure the world’s past to include all of the world’s peoples.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Bentley describes the first period of global history, 3500 B.C. to 2000 B.C. to be based on cross cultural interactions such as migration and trade from areas such as China to Egypt.[[4]](#endnote-4) Also, there were cross cultural interactions beyond civilizations such as the expansion of agriculture from Persia and China to sub Saharan Africa.[[5]](#endnote-5) Bentley “lumps” the first two historical time periods together to describe the development of agriculture’s dramatic effect on demographics as the world population grew from 14 million people in 3000 B.C. to approximately 100 million people by 500 B.C.[[6]](#endnote-6) [[7]](#endnote-7) Bentley mentions the third period of global history, from 500 B.C. to 500 C.E. to be historically known as the time of cultural and religious developments.[[8]](#endnote-8) However, in support of Bentley’s argument during this time period kingdoms and dynasties took on more territory and further advancements in technologies of transportation added to the cross cultural interactions that helped define this period.[[9]](#endnote-9) Bentley refers to the fourth time period, 500 C.E. to 1000 C.E. as being labelled the “dark age” but despite the “historical marginalization” that the label implies he says there were religious and cultural exchanges that moved it forward in history.[[10]](#endnote-10) [[11]](#endnote-11) Furthermore, Bentley says cross cultural interactions became more frequent, regular, and intense as there were more people travelling the silk roads and trade routes during the fifth period of global history (1000 C.E. – 1500 C.E.).[[12]](#endnote-12)Subsequently, the demographic decline in population leads to the end of the era hence a historical discontinuity exists based on cross cultural interactions that had a negative effect, namely the bubonic plague.[[13]](#endnote-13)

Bentley is clearly using particular states/cultural/political distinctions that encompass geographic regions to define history in periods with cross cultural interactions as the basis. Temporal language such as the names of each of the time periods (early complex societies, age of ancient civilizations, classical civilizations, post classical age, nomadic empires, and modern age) help to categorize the time period based on particular societies but Bentley successfully discusses them within the framework of cross cultural interactions.[[14]](#endnote-14) The last period, the modern age is one that lends itself to many sub-categories defining its periods with the influence of language using names such as early modern, industrial, new imperial, contemporary, and postmodern.[[15]](#endnote-15) Bentley asserts that these terms are attributed to by the nature of cross-cultural interactions and therefore he succeeds in developing a periodization method by way of cross cultural interactions across boundary lines of societies and cultural regions.[[16]](#endnote-16)

Notes

1. Jerry H. Bentley, *Cross-Cultural interaction and Periodization in World History,* American Historical Review 101(3), June 1996: 749-770. <http://www.learner.org/channel/courses/worldhistory/support/whatis_reading_2.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Eviatar Zerubavel. *Language and memory: “Pre-Columbian” America and the social logic of periodiztion*. Social Research 65 (2), 1998: 315 – 330. <http://proquest.umi.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/pqdlink?Ver=1&Exp=02-24-2015&FMT=78DID=32030255&RQT=309> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Jerry H. Bentley, *Cross-Cultural interaction and Periodization in World History,* AmericanHistorical Review 101(3), June 1996: 749-770. <http://www.learner.org/channel/courses/worldhistory/support/whatis_reading_2.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Eviatar Zerubavel. *Language and memory: “Pre-Columbian” America and the social logic of periodiztion*. Social Research 65 (2), 1998: 315 – 330. <http://proquest.umi.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/pqdlink?Ver=1&Exp=02-24-2015&FMT=78DID=32030255&RQT=309> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Jerry H. Bentley, *Cross-Cultural interaction and Periodization in World History,* American HistoricalReview 101(3), June 1996: 749-770. <http://www.learner.org/channel/courses/worldhistory/support/whatis_reading_2.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Eviatar Zerubavel. *Language and memory: “Pre-Columbian” America and the social logic of periodiztion*. Social Research 65 (2), 1998: 315 – 330. <http://proquest.umi.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/pqdlink?Ver=1&Exp=02-24-2015&FMT=78DID=32030255&RQT=309> [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Jerry H. Bentley, *Cross-Cultural interaction and Periodization in World History,* American HistoricalReview 101(3), June 1996: 749-770. <http://www.learner.org/channel/courses/worldhistory/support/whatis_reading_2.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Eviatar Zerubavel. *Language and memory: “Pre-Columbian” America and the social logic of periodiztion*. Social Research 65 (2), 1998: 315 – 330. <http://proquest.umi.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/pqdlink?Ver=1&Exp=02-24-2015&FMT=78DID=32030255&RQT=309> [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Jerry H. Bentley, *Cross-Cultural interaction and Periodization in World History,* American HistoricalReview 101(3), June 1996: 749-770. <http://www.learner.org/channel/courses/worldhistory/support/whatis_reading_2.pdf>

    [↑](#endnote-ref-16)