

Introduction to the Academic Roundtable

For an intellectual project that aims to investigate the oldest records of existence, big history—the “integrated history of Cosmos, Earth, Life and Humanity” (<http://www.ibhanet.org>)—is very “right now.” In the past five years, the topic has become a contemporary buzzword fueled by digital media and mass audience platforms. Big historian David Christian launched the Big History Project (<http://www.bighistoryproject.com>) with a TED talk (http://www.ted.com/talks/david_christian_big_history) and big historians Kathy Schick and Nicholas Toth opened a long-term museum exhibit entitled “From the Big Bang to the World Wide Web” along with an accompanying website (www.bigbangtowww.org). In Fall 2013, the History Channel ran a 10-part series entitled *Big History*, narrated by Bryan Cranston (aka, Walter White of *Breaking Bad*). An International Big History Association (www.ibhnet.org) founded in 2010 regularly publishes an electronic newsletter of all things BH.

Individual natural scientists and people working in the humanities have been teaching versions of big history for decades, but within the past few years big historians have begun churning out primary, secondary, and post-secondary big history curricula. The above-mentioned Big History Project is aimed at developing big history programs for high school students. As Mojgan Behmand explains in her contribution to the Academic Roundtable, the First Year Experience program at Dominican University of California is organized around big history. And, in late 2013, McGraw-Hill put out a volume on big history aimed at university students. That textbook, *Big History: Between Everything and Nothing*, written by David Christian, Cynthia Stokes Brown, and Craig Benjamin, is the inspiration for the present Academic Roundtable.

The contributors to the Academic Roundtable reflect the genuinely multidisciplinary nature of the project: there is a political scientist (Lowell Gustafson), a historian (Bruce Mazlish), a literary scholar (Mojgan Behmand), a geologist (Walter Alvarez), and an astrophysicist (Eric Chaisson).