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Building Citizens or Building Nations? Alternative Visions for Learning History in Germany and the United States: The Geschichtswettbewerb Des Bundespraesidenten and National History Day, 1974-1984

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

BUILDING CITIZENS OR BUILDING NATIONS?
ALTERNATIVE VISIONS FOR LEARNING HISTORY
IN GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES:
THE *GESCHICHTSWETTBEWERB DES BUNDESPRÄSIDENTEN*
AND NATIONAL HISTORY DAY, 1974-1984

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN
CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	vii
ABSTRACT.....	viii
Introduction	1
Why Study National History Day and the <i>Geschichtswettbewerb</i> ?	5
Revitalizing History Education: The Birth of National History Day	11
University Roots	14
A Civic Experiment	23
Educating for Democracy.....	34
The <i>Geschichtswettbewerb des Bundespräsidenten</i>	42
Two Unlikely Co-Founders	43
Blazing Trails in History and History Learning	50
Building a Public Culture of Historical Consciousness.....	60
Conclusion	68
APPENDIX A	73
BIBLIOGRAPHY	75
VITA	78

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AASLH	American Association of State and Local History
AHA	American Historical Association
CMHF	Chicago Metro History Fair
CWRU	Case Western Reserve University Archives, Cleveland
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany)
GDR	German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
KAK	Kurt A. Körber Foundation Archives, Hamburg
NCSS	National Council for the Social Studies
NEH	National Endowment for the Humanities
NHD	National History Day
OAH	Organization of American Historians

ABSTRACT

The German philanthropist Kurt Körber and the American historian David Van Tassel envisioned a future where students engaged in discovering the sources and interpreting the past for themselves rather than reciting facts filtered by a textbook or teacher. Their ideas developed into two strikingly similar programs: the Geschichtswettbewerb des Bundespräsidenten and National History Day. These endeavors became models for similar efforts in many other countries. This comparative history argues that such programs offer provocative insights into the civic nature and purpose of history education. Inquiry learning and enhanced access to sources gave students opportunities to ask their own questions of the past. Social history made it possible to investigate local history, tell the stories of marginalized groups, and use new sources. In classrooms guided by these philosophies, inquiry is the centerpiece of history instruction. These programs illuminate the connections between student-centered inquiry-based history education and national memory, democratization, and citizenship.

Introduction

The West German businessman and philanthropist Kurt Körber and the university professor David Van Tassel shared a similar vision for the historical education of young people. Both men imagined a future where students engaged in discovering the past for themselves rather than reciting back names, dates, and facts deemed important by a textbook or a teacher. This future held the promise of making history come alive by creating a forum through which teens could ask their own questions of the past and find their own answers through significant historical research. By learning how to investigate the past for themselves and come up with their own conclusions, students would be more knowledgeable about the world around them and better prepared for the demands of citizenship—equipped to help shape the future.

These two visions took shape in the mid-1970s. Körber poured profits from his successful Hauni Maschinenbau cigarette and tobacco filtering machine business, as well as his other entrepreneurial pursuits, into the Körber Foundation. Upon the request of Federal President Gustav Heinemann, the Körber Foundation offered to sponsor what would become known as the *Geschichtswettbewerb des Bundespräsidenten* (The Federal President's History Competition). Among the foundation's earliest and most important educational initiatives, this civic education program has enjoyed the active support of successive German presidents for over

thirty years and served as a model for more than a dozen similar programs which have since emerged across Europe.¹ In an entirely independent effort, Case Western Reserve University history professor David Van Tassel led efforts to establish National History Day starting at the same time. Case Western historians conceived this local history education program, which would later extend nationwide, in an effort to help middle and high school students discover history for themselves and build bridges between academic, public, and school history. Both programs asked students to investigate historical questions of their choosing, find answers through significant historical research, and create projects that demonstrated their findings. These programs would gradually become established, respected players in the larger history education community, influencing efforts to make history education more inquiry-based, source-driven, and student-centered.

Perhaps because these two programs, as independent nonprofit organizations, operate primarily from formal education's margins rather than as programs sponsored by state or federal educational agencies with mandate powers, or because they have often been misperceived as "just a competition," the *Geschichtswettbewerb* and National History Day are usually neglected in the professional literature on history education. However, such programs offer

¹ The Körber Foundation renamed the German history competition several times. The first contest requested submissions under the title "Gustav-Heinemann-Preis für die Schuljugend zum Verständnis deutscher Freiheitsbewegungen" (Gustav Heinemann Prize for School Youth toward the Understanding of the German Freedom Movements), reflecting the patronage of the President who provided the impetus for the program. This paper will use the abbreviated term *Geschichtswettbewerb* (history competition). At times, the paper will refer to "West Germany" in order to accurately represent the historical context of the time period being discussed, events which happened prior to reunification in 1990. When discussing developments which apply to the *Geschichtswettbewerb* both before and after reunification (or Germany's longer history), the more general term "Germany" shall be used.

provocative insights into the civic nature and purpose of history education and debates about best practices in history education, especially in democratic countries. The interpretation offered here presupposes that educational nonprofits and foundations, like international education organizations,² are historical agents in their own right which contribute to students' and teachers' larger academic experiences and the wider educational culture. Examining education without these voices leaves out a significant perspective that helps to understand the educational landscape. This essay attempts to explain the fundamental underpinnings of the *Geschichtswettbewerb* and National History Day by exploring the roots of these programs and the factors influencing their early development. It examines the place of these organizations in the recent educational histories of West Germany and the United States at a macro level in order to identify common traits and meaningful distinctions and explores how the background of these programs in American universities and West German philanthropic interests may have influenced the shape and development of the programs.

This paper attempts to explain a simple, yet important, question: Why did the *Geschichtswettbewerb* and National History Day take root rather than fade away? Though these two programs emerged at the same time and share remarkable similarities in goals and structures, there is no evidence suggesting leaders of the two programs had any contact in the programs' early years. Why, then, would both programs adopt an inquiry-based competition framework? They were formed in

² J. Resnick, "International Organizations, the 'Education-Economic Growth' Black Box, and the Development of World Education Culture," *Comparative Education Review* (May 2006): 173-195.

response to related but different historical, educational, and political contexts that deserve examination and further explanation. Moreover, the programs have withstood numerous waves of educational reform and publicly controversial debates about the nature and purpose of learning history. How can we explain the programs' similarities? How do we interpret the programs' longevity? This essay hopes to shed light on the origins and formative years of these programs by exploring the following interrelated questions: Why did these two programs emerge? What factors in the wider academic, political, and social context may have influenced their formation and the shape they would eventually take? What motivated early leaders? What key insights can we take from the programs' early years?

A comparative analysis of the *Geschichtswettbewerb* and National History Day creates an opening to suggest larger implications than would be possible by investigating a single program alone, especially related to the role that history education plays in national identity and civic development. In particular, I believe that these programs convey insights about the civic nature and purpose of history education in democratic countries. Interestingly, both programs benefitted in the early years from national conversations (and controversies) about history and public support—in the United States, through connections with the Bicentennial celebrations and early funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities; in West Germany, through the contest's early and ongoing connection to the Federal President and emerging national conversations about the country's Nazi past. In addition, the two programs' emphasis on learning history "from the sources" implies

wider relevance in understanding changes within the discipline of history and history education.

By examining the structure, goals, and context shaping the development of National History Day and the *Geschichtswettbewerb*, this paper intends to promote a practical, useful cross-cultural exchange between practitioners in these types of history education programs and those who study developments in history education. It does not attempt to prove the programs' impact on student participants or teachers, nor does it discuss recent developments in these organizations, such as the expansion of the *Geschichtswettbewerb* to include East Germans after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Rather, the paper concentrates on describing the context which influenced these organizations during their formative decade (1974-1984), the leaders' intentions and actions, and what we might be able to learn about wider themes in history education by looking into these programs.

Why Study National History Day and the Geschichtswettbewerb?

Examining the *Geschichtswettbewerb* and National History Day from a comparative perspective has become increasingly relevant over the past ten years. Not only are the U.S. and German programs the oldest and most fully-developed, an increasing number of history educators have looked to the German and U.S. models for ideas on developing history competitions fulfilling similar purposes in their own countries. The German program inspired a full network of European history competitions called EUSTORY, mostly notably in formerly Communist Eastern

European countries.³ EUSTORY is also a sponsored program of the Körber Foundation, the parent of the *Geschichtswettbewerb*. Australian, South Korean, Mongolian, and Croatian history educators have visited the U.S. program, with the Australia National History Challenge emerging as a result of this dialogue. By looking at the roots of National History Day and the *Geschichtswettbewerb*, I hope to encourage future conversations about the role that such programs play in civic education. As someone who has made a profession of working with National History Day, my own interest in these programs is quite personal.⁴ However, the interest demonstrated by other countries in establishing programs with similar aims and structures suggests educational issues of cross-national relevance, particularly related to democratization, and calls for further investigation.

The longevity of these two programs may be best explained by their reputation for being both “history innovators,” or at least vocal advocates for inquiry-based, source-driven, student-centered approaches to learning history, and “civic incubators” in their roles of fostering the skills of citizenship by encouraging students to investigate sources for themselves and draw their own conclusions. It is important to understand this close relationship between inquiry and civic skill-building, especially in circumstances where it is or may become threatened. Joel Westheimer describes a fine line between *authoritarian patriotism*, which demands

³ Gabriele Woidelko, “EUSTORY – the History Network for Young Europeans” (2010), KAK.

⁴ In the interest of full disclosure, I should note that I was introduced to the National History Day program as a student participant and have spent many years involved in the program professionally as a student teacher and coordinator. I came to know the *Geschichtswettbewerb* while on an Alexander von Humboldt German Chancellor Fellowship in 2002 and have worked with its parent organization, the Körber Foundation, to coordinate student and teacher programs.

unquestioning loyalty to a centralized leader, leading group, or national narrative, and *democratic patriotism*, which asks its citizens instead to commit to the values and principles that underlie democracy—such as political participation, free speech, civil liberties, and social equality. Schools that foster democratic patriotism support independent thinking about historical issues and encourage their students to develop the skills of citizenship by learning to consume information critically and form their own opinions. However, Westheimer cautions how easily such efforts can be undermined by political actions that disparage any deviation from the progressive national narrative as “unpatriotic” and discourage critical analysis of historic events, independent inquiry, and interpretation. Even in a country with a long-established democratic tradition like the United States, several recent state laws, political speeches, and high states testing under the guise of “accountability” may diminish students’ exposure to a variety of historical information and their ability to practice and develop skills in evaluating competing claims.⁵

Both National History Day and the *Geschichtswettbewerb* significantly influence certain aspects of history education in their respective countries. The shape of each is rooted in the historical context which influenced the programs originally and an interest in historical inquiry and project learning methods as an instrument of democratization. In the United States, the emphasis is felt in the program’s continued commitment to “reform the teaching and learning of history” in the classroom that inspired National History Day’s original founders. In Germany, the

⁵ Joel Westheimer, “Thinking about Patriotism,” *Educational Leadership*, February 2008, 48-54.

emphasis on researching the everyday life of the ordinary person and the in-depth investigation of previously untold histories in the local community continues to shape the program's direction.

Inquiry and project-based learning are central to the approaches of both National History Day and the *Geschichtswettbewerb*. In the 1960s and early 1970s, critiques mounted that history was taught simply as a “long march” of facts and dates requiring little more than skill in memorization. Inquiry, in contrast, was tied closely to giving students the raw material of history – primary sources – and asking them to form their own interpretations. In the U.S., Glenn Linden, Margaret Woodhouse, and Dan Fleming⁶ link this new interest in inquiry to educational experimentation that was encouraged in a Cold War context which provided federal funding through the National Defense Education Act of 1958. University historians and professional historians used these newly-available federal funds to develop methods and materials to transform public school history education and train teachers. The hope was that:

...when presented with historical materials [through the inquiry process], the student will not find the unanimity of the text, but will discover the historical process, the nature of historical evidence, a knowledge of different viewpoints, a pattern of thought to justify his own position, and a knowledge of the subject far broader than he would have from merely reading the text.⁷

⁶ Glenn Linden, “The Historical Profession in Transition: Its Response to the Challenges of the 1960s and 1970s,” *The History Teacher* 23 (May 1990): 294-296; Margaret Woodhouse and Dan B. Fleming, “Moral Education and the Teaching of History,” *The History Teacher* 9 (February 1976): 203.

⁷ Donald C. Lord, “Teacher Training and the Inquiry Method: The Program at Texas Women’s University.” *The History Teacher* 2 (January 1969): 26.

In the 1970s, projects such as Richard Brown's Amherst Project and the curricular materials produced by Edwin Fenton's Carnegie Education Center⁸ would promote inquiry and provide source materials to teachers who wished to use inquiry techniques in their history instruction.

Inquiry had been popular in certain educational circles at least since John Dewey in the early twentieth century, but it experienced a resurgence of interest among history educators in the 1960s and early 1970s due in part to changes in the social, educational, and political climate. This renewed interest in inquiry and the Cold War context help to explain why the two history competitions took shape in the 1970s, with both choosing an inquiry framework. It is no accident that programs like the *Geschichtswettbewerb* and National History Day would emerge so soon after the student protests of the late 1960s. To juxtapose, history and civics instruction in Communist countries during the same period was driven by a single, approved national narrative. As Karl Schmitt describes history instruction in Communist East Germany, "Education theorists of the GDR hold the opinion that a logically strict analysis of the material allows only *one* interpretation and forcibly leads to only *one* evaluation."⁹ While history and civic education in the GDR was not always as uniform as the educational theorists hoped and planned, conformity was demanded through mandatory curricula and close supervision.¹⁰ The organizers of National History Day

⁸ Richard Brown, "Learning How to Learn: The Amherst Project and History Education in the Schools," *Social Studies* 87 (Nov/Dec 96): 267-274.

⁹ Karl Schmitt, "Education and Politics in the German Democratic Republic," *Comparative Education Review* 19 (February 1975): 44.

and the *Geschichtswettbewerb*, in contrast, advocated for a more democratic experience with history.

Many discussions of national narrative and what people want students to know about history center on the textbook,¹¹ but this paper contends that the textbook-centered focus, while important, excludes a significant piece of the story. The rise of inquiry learning and the publication of document collections and new media have made access to sources easier since the 1970s and have given teachers tools to enable students to ask their own questions of the past. Social history made it possible to investigate local history, tell the stories of previously marginalized groups, and use different kinds of sources to understand what happened in the past. In classrooms guided by these new philosophies and resources, the textbook becomes an important reference tool framing points of inquiry (if it provides any background at all), but is not the centerpiece of history learning. These shifts away from a central authority dictating what is valuable enough to be learned indicate the importance that some history educators place on students learning the critical thinking skills required for engaged, informed, active democratic participation. The *Geschichtswettbewerb* and National History Day provide an opportunity to include another important perspective on larger debates in history education, a perspective informed by these wider educational developments in inquiry and social history.

¹⁰ John Rodden, *Textbook Reds: Schoolbooks, Ideology, and Eastern German Identity* (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

¹¹ For example, see Hanna Schissler and Yasemin Nohuglu Soysal, *The Nation, Europe, and the World: Textbooks and Curricula in Transition*, eds. Hanna Schissler and Yasemine Nuhoglu Soysal (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005); Mary Beth Norton, "Rethinking American History Textbooks," in *Learning History in America: Schools, Cultures, and Politics*, ed. Lloyd Kramer, Donald Reid, and William L. Barney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

Revitalizing History Education: The Birth of National History Day

Two primary factors converged in the mid-1970s to prompt David Van Tassel and his colleagues at Case Western Reserve University to begin National History Day. First, many historians held grave concerns about the status of history in America's schools. Low enrollments, student apathy, and a sense that history was being engulfed in the "New Social Studies"¹² alarmed the historical community. But these concerns may not have led to the establishment of a student history competition were it not for a historic opportunity, the Bicentennial celebration of the American Revolution. The observance not only brought attention and public interest to history, it also provided the possibility of start-up funding that may not have been readily available otherwise. Results from these initial local and state pilots would later generate interest in other states and help gain support for national expansion from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

Case Western Reserve University historians organized the first History Day event on May 11, 1974. Co-sponsored by Case Western, the Western Reserve Historical Society, and the Greater Cleveland Council for the Social Studies, the first History Day event asked local junior high and high school students to create papers,

¹² The literature on inquiry and the New (and New, New) Social Studies that emerged during this time period is too voluminous and complicated to adequately summarize here, but interested readers may wish to consult Christopher Spivey, "History and Social Studies Projects in America," *The History Teacher* 4 (May 1971): 19-24; Linda W. Rosenzweig and Thomas P. Weinland, "New Directions for the History Curriculum: A Challenge for the 1980s," *The History Teacher* 19 (February 1986): 263-277; Donald C. Lord, "Teacher Training and the Inquiry Method: The Program at Texas Women's University," *The History Teacher* 2 (January 1969): 24-32; Margaret Woodhouse and Dan B. Fleming, "Moral Education and the Teaching of History," *The History Teacher* 9 (February 1976): 202-209.

displays, and projects illustrating the theme of "Ohio and the Promise of the American Revolution." Heidelberg College in Tiffin began a similar program in 1975, and the History Day program went statewide in 1976. Funding by the National Endowment for the Humanities would permit History Day leaders to expand the program nationally over the course of the next five years with an aim to "revivify interest in history in the schools by encouraging new teaching methods, giving outside reinforcement to teachers as to the value of their subject, and by allowing students to go out of the classroom to 'do something' with history."¹³

Modeled consciously on the International Science Fair,¹⁴ History Day students researched topics of their choice related to an annual theme and created original projects that illustrated their findings. While the first History Day events reflected a wide range of project types, the program would gradually refine its categories to become more explicitly analytical and interpretive in nature (rather than simply demonstrative).¹⁵ Echoing the ways that historians present their conclusions, exhibit displays, research papers, dramatic performances, and media presentations gave student historians myriad ways to show what they had learned outside a traditional exam or written work. Students with artistic talents might convey their

¹³ "History Day '76" [final report], p. 3, 1ZH1 Box 1, Folder 3, Case Western Reserve University Archive (hereafter CWRU).

¹⁴ "History Day" [Clipping from NEH *Humanities*], 1ZH2 Box 3, Folder 6; [Untitled notes about the International Science Fair], CWRU 1ZH2, Box 3, Folder 1, CWRU.

¹⁵ The first History Day events featured a wide variety of student work. Displays included dioramas, models, and collections of photographs as well as museum-style exhibits. Performances included readings from primary sources, demonstrations, music, as well as interpretive scripts. Following the first few initial contests, program organizers would refine the program guidelines to encourage students to develop more analytical and interpretive presentations. "Regional History Day 1979," [NEH grant proposal], p. 26, 1ZH3 Box 1, Folder 4, CWRU.

interpretations through visual sources in exhibits or media presentations. Outgoing students might write and perform a script based on historical events. The interdisciplinary nature of the program also provided an opportunity to bring students together onto college campuses in a festival-like environment to share their work with their peers and the public and recognize academic achievement in the field of history. These culminating public events led to a misleading name for a school year-long educational program, "History Day."

Project guidelines, judging criteria, and the judging process would be refined many times over the first decade of the program, but historical quality would remain at the heart of what the project hoped students would achieve by participating. National History Day emphasized the research and discovery process, especially the use of primary sources and advanced secondary sources. Criteria asked judges to evaluate student work on the basis of such factors as historical accuracy and authenticity, types of sources used, historical perspective and content, creativity and originality, as well as how well the project utilized the annual theme. After much discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of competition,¹⁶ early History Day leaders determined that competition would motivate students to excel academically and provide an opportunity for more interaction between professional historians, teachers, and students. With academic and public historians as program coordinators and a primary pool for judges, the competitions themselves proved to be an important venue for achieving the goal of enhanced communication and

¹⁶ "Planning Grant for Regional History Day 1978," [NEH grant proposal], p. 15, 1ZH3 Box 1, Folder 1, CWRU.

cooperation between historians, history teachers, and history students at all levels. By tapping into students' interdisciplinary interests and giving students the opportunity to examine a subject of personal interest and choose a way of presenting their findings which complemented their learning style, History Day's structure provided a great deal of flexibility to help the program attract teachers and weather changing educational tides.

University Roots

The mid-1970s became a time of professional introspection for many historians. Low enrollments in secondary and college level history courses, fewer jobs for trained historians, the apparent decline of history courses within a wider social studies curriculum, and seeming apathy toward the study of the past led historians to believe that their discipline was in a state of crisis. Students, administrators, and politicians questioned the relevance of studying history. Some history professionals felt that greater communication and cooperation between historians, history teachers, and others in the profession might help to secure history's preeminent spot in social studies and rejuvenate a profession in distress. History Day was consciously organized to become a bridge between historians at different levels and to stimulate student and community interest in studying the past by employing new methods and approaches. In this way, the program became one novel and proactive attempt to enhance the status and quality of historical study in American schools.

Richard Kirkendall, Executive Secretary of the Organization of American Historians (OAH) and board member of National History Day, captured many of these concerns about the state of the profession in his reports to the OAH membership. In his inaugural report as Executive Secretary, Kirkendall called the status of history in schools and colleges "one of the largest challenges facing us" and noted strong concerns about the job crisis in the historical profession. Kirkendall's September 1975 report "The Status of History in the Schools" further documented these fears.¹⁷

While the status of history and history teaching varied greatly from state to state, Kirkendall expressed strong concerns about requirements for teachers of history in secondary schools and the lack of non-teaching job opportunities for trained historians. The reduction in many states' teaching certification requirements in history produced serious complications for the profession. First, it weakened enrollment in university history courses which had been "fattened" by state mandates for university training in history. Pressures to increase economics, anthropology, sociology, and geography at the expense of requirements in history threatened to result in job losses for the profession. Secondly, it produced teachers who were less well-trained in the discipline and, in turn, students who did not understand nor appreciate the impact of history in their lives.

Excerpts from committee members who reported on the status of history in their states confirm widespread concern on the part of historians about the potential consequences of changes in the social studies. A Maryland representative reported,

¹⁷ Richard S. Kirkendall, "Report of the Executive Secretary for the Year 1973-1974," *Journal of American History* 61 (September 1974): 576-580; Richard S. Kirkendall, "The Status of History in the Schools," *Journal of American History* 62 (September 1975): 557-570.

"History has been clearly deemphasized and is now generally incorporated into social studies units...the general trend is toward the multidisciplinary approach." In Iowa, "major changes in both content and method are under way, and ...the thrust of these changes has been toward teaching less history of the traditional sort, eroding any sense of a differentiated past and unique time perspectives, and turning students away from historical study or an appreciation of its importance."¹⁸

Reports from several states reflected a sense that the role and traditional understanding of history and history teaching were changing in important ways, even if history was not fading altogether. New techniques integrated history and other social studies subjects and encouraged inquiry methods. In New Mexico, "In place of traditional history courses, many New Mexico high schools are offering ethnocultural courses of which history as a subject is only one aspect of the class." For Hawaii, history as a subject has "moved from a position of dominance to that of being a partner with other social sciences in what curriculum designers call the Inquiry-Conceptual Program. This new program, which hopes to integrate all the social sciences, focuses upon understanding problems and making decisions and taking action on social and civic problems."¹⁹

Some committee members seemed cautiously optimistic that these changes would generate more student interest in history; others seemed concerned that these new approaches might devalue history's traditional emphasis on chronological

¹⁸ Kirkendall, "The Status of History in the Schools," 563.

¹⁹ Ibid.

awareness of historical events. Responding to concerns that history was not a "practical subject," the Nebraska report commented that the "adoption of an approach toward history that emphasizes 'concepts' rather than 'facts' is based upon the assumption that the new approach will 'better prepare the student to understand and cope with the world.'" Wyoming reported that history was "on the upswing, largely as a result of changes in techniques of teaching. The chronological approach has been replaced by the 'inquiry method.'"²⁰

Historians at Case Western Reserve University were strongly influenced by this wider educational and social climate. In Ohio, history course enrollments dropped significantly after 1970-71, more than 30 percent in some institutions. History department chairmen believed that the decline in enrollment was caused in large part by a student tendency to see history as irrelevant and a desire for more courses teaching practical, and employable, skills.²¹ Funding proposals for History Day and internal communications among History Day leaders echo these same concerns. Declining enrollments were attributed to a generation that was "ahistorical." Students demanded "relevance" in their coursework, making courses in contemporary issues popular such as "Crisis in the Cities 101." J.H. Plumb's *Death of the Past* predicted the worst for the discipline. Political turmoil in the 1960s (especially youth protests against the Vietnam War and the cultural conservatism of their parents' and grandparents' generations) and the rise of vocationalism in the

²⁰ Ibid., 563-564.

²¹ Ibid., 566-567.

1970s contributed to curriculum changes challenging traditional methods of teaching history.²² The "Status of History in Schools" report itself was often used to help justify the need for a program like History Day:

Signs of improvement are scarce; history is still in crisis. Confidence and interest in history are not nearly as widespread and strong among students, educational administrators, and politicians as they were only a few years ago. Doubts about its usefulness for the individual and for society now exert a large influence on attitudes and decisions. These are facts that must be recognized and faced by members of the profession, and solutions must be developed by individual historians working in their classrooms, libraries, and studies, and by history departments, historical agencies, and historical organizations examining their programs...[Historians] can work more effectively to demonstrate the importance for present problems of the understanding that history supplies. The situation calls for imagination and innovation by historians and a willingness and ability to tap other disciplines. It also calls for respect for the traditions and the unique features of history itself.²³

In this distressing professional climate, History Day promised to build bridges between historians at all levels, generate stronger interest in studying the past and more capable students, and provide a flexible educational model helping to integrate other disciplines while simultaneously reinforcing the fundamentals of historical study. In short, History Day aimed to not only break down barriers *between* the disciplines, but also to break down barriers *within* the field of history itself. Again and again, History Day funding proposals and internal communications expressed concern for greater cooperation between university historians, secondary level teachers, and others in the profession. Program leaders hoped History Day would be

²² "'History Day' Contest Puts Premium on Relevant Facts," *Sun Press*, 17 February 1977, clipping in 1ZH2, Box 1, Folder 4 CWRU; "National History Day Contest Guide," p. 1, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 5, CWRU; "History Day '76" [report], p. 3, 1ZH1 Box 1 Folder 3, CWRU.

²³ Kirkendall, "The Status of History in the Schools," 569-570.

a “profession-wide project.”²⁴ The NEH proposal for a Regional History Day pilot program summarized this potential to build better relationships through History Day:

History Day promotes better communication between history teachers in junior and senior high schools, college professors, and those from allied fields. This cooperation has been sadly lacking in the historical profession, and many felt this should be a primary goal of History Day. The important consideration here is that History Day is a cooperative project among history professionals at different levels. Everyone is equal, and everyone stands to both contribute to History Day and to learn from the experience. Everyone involved in History Day – the student, the junior high and senior high school teacher, the college professor, the historical society official, the newspaper columnist – learns at History Day.²⁵

For historians like Clair Keller of Iowa State University, History Day presented an opportunity for professionals in secondary schools and higher education to overcome past tensions and cooperate more closely. His concern about the need to overcome the “lack of communication...distrust...and lack of mutual respect” between history teachers at high school and college levels may have influenced his decision to spearhead the Iowa program during History Day’s pilot national expansion.²⁶ Nancy Forderhase, a district coordinator in Kentucky, echoed similar thoughts: “I think historians need to get off the campuses and talk to teachers and educators. I am committed to working with and supporting my former students who are teaching in the schools in Kentucky. I share a real concern...about the future of history as a discipline.”²⁷ Professor Carl Klopfenstein expressed similar thoughts,

²⁴ “Regional History Day 1979,” [NEH grant proposal], p. 9, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 4, CWRU.

²⁵ “Regional History Day Pilot”, [NEH grant proposal], p. 14, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 2, CWRU.

²⁶ Planning a History Day Contest, p. 2, 1ZH2, Box 3, Folder 1, CWRU.

History Day "initiates a rapport between college history departments and history teachers and students at the secondary education level in a conscious effort to build a bridge of communication which previously has not existed."²⁸ Thousands of university professors, history majors, and public historians would invest in History Day over the course of the coming decades by volunteering their time as coordinators for state and local programs, judges, advisers to student participants, planning committee members, evaluators, and resource visitors in area junior high and high school classrooms. In this way, the organizational structure chosen for History Day succeeded in its goal of fostering better communication and cooperation between different levels of history professionals.

History Day's roots at Case Western Reserve University quickly spread to other universities across the country after 1976. When the program expanded regionally and then nationally, university historians first stepped up to become state and district History Day coordinators. Gradually more historical societies, state archives, educational agencies, and university education departments would serve in coordinating or co-coordinating capacities, but lists of state and district coordinators confirm the predominant influence of university history departments in National History Day's early national expansion.²⁹ In addition to hosting the local History Day

²⁷ Report – History Day '78, Nancy Forderhase, Coordinator, Fifth Congressional District, p. 5. 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 4, CWRU.

²⁸ Meeting of the Regional History Day Planning Committee, Feb. 18-19, 1977, Heidelberg College, Draft Minutes, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 3, CWRU.

²⁹ Several lists of state and district coordinators confirm the strong presence of university faculty in History Day coordination: List of state and district coordinators (1978?), 1ZH3 Box 1, Folder 5; National History Day State Coordinators 1980-81, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 8; National History Day State

competitions, coordinators conducted workshops, wrote teaching materials and bibliographies to assist teachers, and visited local classrooms. They also recruited their colleagues to serve on planning committees and as judges.

Historians' willingness to build bridges with history teachers at the secondary level through History Day made a strong impression on some teachers. Loris Points, a history teacher from Lafayette High School in Lexington, Kentucky, visited Ohio History Day events at Heidelberg College and Case Western Reserve University when Kentucky was considering piloting the program. In her observations about the events, she reflected,

I was impressed with the willingness of professional historians to admit that there is a variety of means and methods available for teaching history. At one time in the not far past it seemed to me that historians resisted varieties in methodology in public school teaching of history. This is a refreshing and worthwhile experience to have. I hope that this mutuality of interest will lead to greater willingness from public school teachers to realize that professional historians have a good deal to offer them.³⁰

Professional networks proved essential in History Day's early efforts to gain visibility, credibility, and funding. The Organization of American Historians (OAH), the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH), the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), and the American Historical Association (AHA) helped to raise History Day's professional profile by publicizing the program to their memberships through

Coordinators (1979?), 1ZH2, Box 3, Folder 3; History Day 77 State Committee and Regional Contest Coordinators, 1ZH2, Box 1, Folder 3; CWRU.

³⁰ Loris Points, letter to David Van Tassel, May 17, 1977, 1ZH2, Box 1, Folder 4, CWRU.

newsletters and conferences.³¹ The OAH and AASLH also used their communication networks to distribute handbooks and urged their members to work with local schools through teaching workshops and classroom visitations by both history professors and their students.³²

The support of the OAH, AASLH, NCSS, and AHA was particularly vital in History Day's early development. Representatives from these organizations helped evaluate the program during its pilot years. Their enthusiastic support for the ideas and objectives of History Day, along with their participation in the official History Day planning committees,³³ would be instrumental in securing the support of the NEH in taking the program nationwide. Reviewers from the AHA and the OAH commented on the uniqueness of National History Day, noting the range and quality of the projects, the participation of parents and community leaders, its capacity to enhance student interest in history, and the program's ability to build bridges between the university and secondary level history classroom.³⁴ In addition, representatives from these organizations provided professional guidance, contacts, and credibility to History Day by serving on the Board of Directors for National History Day.³⁵

³¹ Regional History Day 1979, [NEH grant proposal], p. 5-23, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 4, CWRU.

³² "Minutes of the Business Meeting of the OAH, April 9, 1976," *Journal of American History* 63 (September 1976): 516; Richard S. Kirkendall, "Report of the Executive Secretary for the Year 1976-1977," *Journal of American History* 64 (September 1977): 537-38; Richard S. Kirkendall, "Report of the Executive Secretary for the Year 1977-1978," *Journal of American History*, 65 (September 1978): 565.

³³ Regional History Day 1979, [NEH grant proposal], p. 23, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 4, CWRU.

³⁴ Regional History Day 1978, [NEH grant proposal], Appendix 2: Evaluating letters from Regional History Day Planning Committee Members, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 2, CWRU.

A Civic Experiment

National History Day's civic mission is reflected in both its educational method and the organization's structure. The educational method selected for the program—students conducting independent research and developing their own conclusions based on the sources—modeled the real world skills needed to engage as citizens in a democracy. Annual themes selected by the program gave students wide latitude to discover their local community's history as well as investigate the achievements and shortcomings of their nation's history. Indeed, the “National” in “National History Day” never implied that students would focus on certain key milestones in the nation’s history, but rather suggests the importance of the national network of volunteers and institutions working together at the local and state level to bring the ideals of inquiry-based history education to schools across the country. The federal structure adopted for History Day gave supporters opportunities to help shape the program through volunteerism, participation, in-kind support, and funding. Numerous historical organizations, universities, libraries, archives, and professional organizations collaborated with National History Day to achieve the mutually-held goals of raising student interest in history and historical thinking skills. In some cases, this partnership structure also led to conflicting aims and competition for resources. These accounts of cooperation and conflict embody the civic enterprise at

³⁵ National History Day Committee Meeting Minutes, January 16, 1979, p. 4, 1ZH3 Box 1, Folder 7, CWRU.

the heart of History Day's early development and help to explain why the program spread throughout the country.

The Bicentennial anniversary of the American Revolution presented the opportunity Case Western Reserve University historians needed to address their growing concerns about students' disinterest in history. The first History Day event was a local affair inviting students in the area around Cleveland to come together on the campus of Case Western Reserve University and the Western Reserve Historical Society to share their work on "Ohio and the Promise of the American Revolution."³⁶ While the Bicentennial brought its share of uncritical patriotic observances, History Day organizers were reluctant to make the event a mere celebration, party, or trivia quiz. Karen Grochav of the Western Reserve Historical Society said, "It's more of an inquiry into the past, an examination and evaluation...We're not trying to make the event a rah-rah party of patriotism." Professor Daniel Weinberg continued, "The emphasis will be on getting the students out of the classroom, and into the neighborhoods and libraries."³⁷

While one might expect that this theme would strongly reflect traditional history topics like battles or political figures, the suggested topics list indicates the influence of the then-recent rise in social history. Students were urged to consider topics such as the McGuffey Reader, the apprentice system, sports in the schools, and the utopian and religious communities of Ohio, in addition to more traditional

³⁶ History Day Proposal, 1ZH1, Box 1, Folder 1, CWRU.

³⁷ "History Seems Alive and Well," *Circle Standard*, Nov. 18, 1974, p. 4, clippings in 1ZH1, Box 1, Folder 1, CWRU.

subjects.³⁸ History Day leaders conceived the program as a three-year project leading up to the Bicentennial year of 1976. Subsequent themes in 1975 and 1976 ("The Spirit of the American Revolution" and "Images of America: A Bicentennial Mirror of People, Places, Ideas or Events") expanded beyond local history to include other aspects of American history.

Perhaps because the Bicentennial generated widespread interest from community organizations, the Case Western Reserve University history department was able to secure support and involvement from a number of co-sponsors and funders. The history department worked in close cooperation with the Western Reserve Historical Society (which would later take over responsibility for the statewide History Day program), the Greater Cleveland Council for Social Studies, the Diocesan Social Studies Teachers Association, the Greater Cleveland Bicentennial Commission, the Cleveland Press, and the Cleveland Area Arts Council.³⁹ These partners would become long-time partners of the History Day program as participants in planning committees and as vocal advocates of the program with their networks of supporters. Inspired by the first History Day experiments at Case Western and a similar program at Heidelberg College in 1975, the Ohio American Revolution Bicentennial Advisory Commission would sponsor the program statewide in 1976 with funding by several local foundations including significant grants by the Martha Holden Jennings and George Gund Foundations.⁴⁰

³⁸ History Day Newsletter, January 1974. 1ZH1, Box 1, Folder 1, CWRU.

³⁹ Program [from 1974 History Day], 1ZH1, Box 1, Folder 1, CWRU.

This professional and community support would help History Day expand rapidly in the program's first three years and attract interest from history professionals in other states as well. By 1976, the program had grown across Ohio to include 11 districts. By the end of the three initial Bicentennial-related History Day events, there was no doubt that program supporters would continue the program in Ohio, although funding after the Bicentennial became more difficult to find until the NEH grants began.⁴¹ Interest from history professionals in other states sparked interest in expanding the program nationwide. With the aptly-titled annual theme "Turning Points in History," History Day leaders in Ohio began the laborious task of creating a civic network of district and state programs in 1977.

Funding to support this national expansion effort in its early phases was essential. Program leaders sought and won first a planning grant, then seed money, from the NEH to fund History Day's expansion to a nationwide program. NEH support for National History Day fell under the Youth Projects division, a program of the NEH which would end abruptly in the early Reagan administration along with federal funding for National History Day.⁴² From 1977 until 1981, however, NEH funding allowed the program to expand from one to 29 states and the District of Columbia,⁴³

⁴⁰ David Van Tassel?, letter to Joseph Brady, VP for University Development, August 27, 1975; "History Day '76" Report, 1ZH1, Box 1, Folder 3, CWRU.

⁴¹ David Van Tassel, Memo to History Day Coordinating Committee for the State of Ohio, October 4, 1976, 1ZH2, Box 1, Folder 3, CWRU.

⁴² Lois Scharf, executive director of National History Day, letter to state coordinators, December 5, 1980, 1ZH2, Box 3, Folder 6; Scharf, letter to state coordinators, March 17, 1981; 1ZH2, Box 3, Folder 6; Scharf, letter to state coordinators, May 5, 1981, 1ZH2, Box 3, Folder 7, CWRU.

⁴³ National History Day Minutes from the Board of Trustees Meeting, January 12, 1982, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 9, CWRU.

fulfilling the promise of the name *National* History Day. These years of start-up funding were critical to convince universities and historical societies across the nation to take on the challenge of beginning state and district National History Day programs. When a new state joined National History Day, state programs received \$10,000 and district programs \$1,000 in their first year; in their second year of participation, half that figure.⁴⁴ These funds supported costs associated with publicizing the program, coordinating History Day events, and recognizing student achievement. A matching grant provision helped to encourage local giving in an effort to build a base of financial support that would sustain the program after federal funding expired. The implicit goal of NEH funding for National History Day was to build a self-sustaining national network of student history education programs and competitions by creating a foundation of institutional partnerships, volunteerism, and local funding for state and district programs.

NEH staff and reviewers viewed History Day favorably because of its ability to engage students and its cost efficiency. In a letter to program director David Van Tassel from NEH, the program officer noted reviewers' enthusiasm for National History Day's "real potential to interest a large number of junior high and high school age young people and complement the existing history curriculum." Marion Blakey continued, "I, too, am enthusiastic about the project, for I feel it is an experiment which has the potential to provide large numbers of young people with a substantive

⁴⁴ Minutes, History Day Meeting, May 19, 1979, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 7, CWRU.

experience in the humanities at a low cost-per-capita."⁴⁵ The pledge that National History Day would become self-sustaining after initial funding by the NEH was a primary concern throughout the life of the grant. NEH directors regularly asked for progress reports on efforts to build local funding.⁴⁶

The NEH grant aimed to replicate the successes of the Ohio History Day program in states around the country, creating a framework of community support in each state and its affiliated districts. The grant funded expansion efforts, first in a three-state regional pilot and then gradually phasing in new states. If funding proposals, comments from NEH program officers, and meeting minutes are any indication, enhancing the quality of student academic work was not the primary goal at this stage of the program's development, though it would later become so.⁴⁷ Instead, History Day leaders and Endowment representatives focused on generating teacher and student interest, securing necessary partnerships and endorsements to permit the program to grow locally, involving the media, establishing consistent rules and judging guidelines, and most especially, building a base of funding that would outlast federal funding. The hope in these early years was to build an infrastructure that would support the program for the long term.

The organizational structure developed for the Ohio History Day program would become a loose model for other History Day programs across the country, but

⁴⁵ Marion Blakey, Program Chief, NEH Youth Programs, letter to David Van Tassel, December 3, 1976, 1ZH2, Box 1, Folder 4, CWRU.

⁴⁶ National History Day Planning Committee Meeting Minutes, October 9, 1978, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 5; Scharf, letter to state coordinators, February 10, 1981, 1ZH2, Box 3, Folder 6, CWRU.

⁴⁷ Regional History Day 1979, [NEH grant proposal], 1ZH2, Box 4, Folder 2, CWRU.

local and state experimentation were also encouraged.⁴⁸ By adopting a federal structure rather than a centralized one early in the program's expansion, History Day evolved to fit a variety of different civic and professional circumstances.⁴⁹ University history departments very often spearheaded the program, usually on an all-volunteer basis, and worked in close cooperation with local organizations, especially local and state historical societies. Planning and coordinating committees composed of representatives from social studies councils, professional organizations, libraries and archives, historical groups, educational leaders, and the media helped to promote the program and make decisions about local and state implementation.⁵⁰ Libraries, archives, historical societies, museums, and other community institutions began to invite students to use their resources. Volunteers and in-kind services provided a cornerstone of support at each level of the program.⁵¹ The program became a civic investment by individuals, groups, and institutions in hundreds of local districts and numerous states.

Junior Historians programs and state social studies fairs proved to be welcome partners for National History Day.⁵² Usually coordinated by state historical societies, Junior Historians programs provided a ready-made audience, coordinating

⁴⁸ Regional History Day 1979, [NEH grant proposal], 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 7, CWRU.

⁴⁹ David Twining, "Final Report on History Day '76," July 27, 1976, p. 3, 1ZH2, Box 1, Folder 2, CWRU.

⁵⁰ Regional History Day 1979, [NEH grant proposal], p. 6-30, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 4; Meeting of the Regional History Day Planning Committee [minutes], April 29, 1987, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 3, CWRU.

⁵¹ Final Report on History Day '76, p. 14, 1ZH2, Box 1, Folder 2, CWRU.

⁵² Regional History Day 1979, [NEH grant proposal], Section VII.A., 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 7, CWRU.

staff, a communication and organizational network, and history of some success in reaching out to schools to encourage interest in history. With some discussion, most state Junior Historian coordinators were able to find ways to incorporate National History Day participation into their existing programs. One of the most common methods of cooperation was to encourage Junior Historians to enter their research projects into both Junior Historian and National History Day events.⁵³

Representatives at National History Day regional planning committee meetings expressed concern that the cooperation be set up in such a way that the programs did not compete with one another for interest or resources. A sensitive area for this state-national collaboration was the fact that most Junior Historian programs and state social studies fairs focused on state history, while National History Day posed an annual theme broad enough to include American and world history topics as well.⁵⁴ National History Day resolved this problem by proposing broad themes that supported local and state history topics and reaching out to state historical societies at meetings of Junior Historian representatives and historical society education directors. In most regions of the country, the tension between the national theme and local history proved relatively easy to overcome. Indeed, local history topics became very popular for student projects as indicated in lists of student project titles submitted to competitions. State historical societies and other local affiliates with state and local history missions produced topics guides and other educational

⁵³ Meeting of the Regional History Day Planning Committee [minutes], April 29, 1977, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 3, CWRU.

⁵⁴ National History Day Planning Committee Meeting Minutes, October 9, 1978, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 5, CWRU.

resources that publicized possible avenues to connect community history to the national theme. Later, local archives and other historical institutions would begin to publicize primary source collections with special relevance to the national theme.

One of the weaknesses of the federal structure, however, was the ongoing battle to raise sufficient visibility and funds to support basic program needs at each level – school, district, state, and national. Though the program enjoyed positive ongoing relationships with numerous supporters, fundraising remained a key challenge for History Day programs and their time-strapped mostly-volunteer coordinators. Because of foundations' concerns that National History Day become self-sustaining, program leaders were obligated to make regular pledges that they would be able to continue without further foundation support after only one more year of funding.⁵⁵ This promise, and similar assurances to NEH, proved difficult to fulfill. The NEH stipulation of a gifts and matching provision in the budget increased pressure on district and state coordinators to raise funds to support the organization locally, but most coordinators had their hands full running the program amongst their other duties. A stipulation that NEH funds not be used for cash prizes or meals and a difficult system to take advantage of the NEH-funded regrant system meant that some coordinators opted to use locally-raised funds for other purposes which could not be matched. Raising additional funds toward the NEH match was beyond the means of some coordinators.⁵⁶ Entry fees for students and in-kind support from institutional sponsors could only carry the program so far. It proved difficult to find a

⁵⁵ David Twining, letter to James Lipscomb, November 5, 1976, 1ZH2, Box 1, Folder 4, CWRU.

⁵⁶ Regional History Day 1979, [NEH grant request], p. 13, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 4, CWRU.

corporate or foundation sponsor willing to serve as the primary funder for the program on an ongoing basis, and some coordinators were restricted from raising funds for their programs because they worked within a larger nonprofit or governmental institution with different fundraising priorities.⁵⁷ In a 1979 letter to district and state coordinators, David Van Tassel requested that registrants be asked to donate \$1 each to be used toward the match, "We must have a certain cash flow in order to make the program work, and to demonstrate to NEH and other foundations and corporations that there is real grass-roots support for the program."⁵⁸

In light of a Presidential transition recommendation for the abolition of the Youth Projects program, humanities funding was vulnerable. NEH staff found it difficult to advocate for continued funding for National History Day due to limited media exposure for History Day and its NEH funding.⁵⁹ Raising funds to support National History Day and public visibility would continue to be a battle, especially difficult for a program built largely through the efforts of volunteers.

The federal structure also encouraged competition for limited financial resources and some duplication of time and resources, especially when National History Day tried to incorporate partners that already had successful history

⁵⁷ National History Day Committee Meeting Minutes, January 16, 1979, p. 2, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 7, CWRU.

⁵⁸ David Van Tassel, memo to district and state coordinators, History Day 1980, 1ZH2, Box 3, Folder 3, CWRU.

⁵⁹ Scharf, memo to state coordinators, February 10, 1981, 1ZH2, Box 3, Folder 6, CWRU.

education outreach efforts at the state or local level.⁶⁰ The most problematic episode occurred when leaders of the Chicago Metro History Fair applied to the NEH for grants to expand their History Fair model to other urban areas in 1980.⁶¹ The Chicago Metro History Fair (CMHF) served as coordinating partner for History Day in the Chicago metro area and had a representative on the National History Day Board of Trustees, but minor differences in philosophy and approach threatened to overcome far-greater similarities in program objectives. Though CMHF was already partnered with National History Day in the first phases of the NEH-funded History Day expansion project, the organization applied independently to the NEH for funds to support expansion of their successful urban fair model in other cities without communicating those intentions to their partners. Lack of coordination with their National History Day counterparts on this grant put the partnership (and potential funding for both programs) in jeopardy. After learning about the application, David Van Tassel summarized these concerns in a letter to CMHF staff stating, "I'm afraid that there may be a good deal of duplication of effort, competition, and certainly confusion." Because National History Day was already in the process of setting up district and state committees throughout the country, many of these in urban areas, History Day leaders feared confusion for participants. Van Tassel also feared that the two "parallel undertakings" might cause competition for limited resources that might endanger the success of either or both programs.⁶²

⁶⁰ "History News," March 1980, p. 8, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 7, CWRU.

⁶¹ Scharf, memo to state coordinators, October 16, 1980, 1ZH2, Box 3, Folder 6, CWRU.

Ultimately, efforts to secure continued federal funding in the new political climate of the 1980s proved unsuccessful and program coordinators were forced to rely on the shaky, but developing, funding support base build in the years of NEH grant.⁶³ In a letter to state coordinators, the National History Day executive director stated,

It was always clear that an independently-financed program was the ultimate goal—even necessity. We had hoped that this would have eventuated after complete national coverage had been attained with large-scale NEH funding. Such is not to be the case, and we shall test the efficacy of such time-honored concepts as volunteerism, private support, work ethic, professional commitment, etc.⁶⁴

Educating for Democracy

Historians designed National History Day to promote the historical awareness and critical thinking skills students needed to make informed decisions as citizens and to participate effectively in a democracy. The open-ended inquiry approach promoted by the program gave students a chance to test the national narrative they learned in school by asking their own questions of the past, examining the moments where Americans failed to live up to their country's ideals as well as their achievements. Organizers attempted to create an open program structure providing an umbrella under which supporters and participants of widely varied political and social beliefs could fit comfortably. The program's design exhibited flexibility that would allow National History Day to respond to a variety of political, fiscal, and

⁶² The conflict between National History Day and the Chicago Metro History Fair is covered extensively in 1ZH3, Box 1, Folders 6 and 7, CWRU.

⁶³ Series of letters in 1ZH2, Box 3, Folder 6, CWRU.

⁶⁴ Scharf, letter to state coordinators, May 5, 1981, 1ZH2, Box 3, Folder 7, CWRU.

educational circumstances. This flexibility helped the program attract new participants with diverse perspectives on history, weather financial challenges by appealing to a variety of supporters, and become a tool for learning history in a more dynamic and discovery-oriented method.

In an article printed in the NEH newsletter, a judge tried to pinpoint why a program like History Day was needed: "The Science Fair was a response to Sputnik, to a crisis. But History Day is a response to something else—perhaps to the need for a national heritage."⁶⁵ By "national heritage," this judge was not referring to a need for students to master a set of facts about the founding fathers, military triumphs, or famous individuals. Memorizing the details of the national narrative was not the intention of History Day. If it had been, a trivia contest would have proven to be a more suitable design. While some of the students' projects focused on important people or events, almost as many projects tried to document the lives of hometown heroes, according to the judge. It was this personal connection to history that History Day leaders hoped to inspire in student participants. In reflecting on his own experiences with history and History Day, David Van Tassel explained,

I suddenly felt a part of a history that hitherto I had known as abstract and distant. I experienced a sense of the living past that I had never felt before, and I was determined as a teacher somehow to share this with others. History Day became the vehicle, for I discovered after twenty years of teaching that this experience could only be passed on to students by allowing them to make discoveries for themselves...⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Clipping from *NEH Humanities*, attached to letter from Lois Scharf to state coordinators, October 16, 1980, 1ZH2, Box 3, Folder 6, CWRU.

⁶⁶ National History Day pamphlet, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 9, CWRU.

The inquiry or "discovery" process gave students opportunities to learn how to find information for themselves and develop their own ideas about the meaning of historical events, a process which developed the critical thinking skills "to create a better-informed citizenry."⁶⁷ Publicity materials portray a program intending to create well-rounded citizens who "will be able to vote intelligently" and who will carry away from the program "an appreciation for their way of life."⁶⁸ Independent evaluator Sally Wertheim concurred with the organizers' belief that National History Day fostered more effective citizenship, stating that National History Day helped students "enhance their knowledge of and commitment to the study of history, which is necessary for the perpetuation of a democratic society." Though these civic goals may sound rather conservative in nature, the program design carried within it a liberalizing possibility—to foster a new generation of young people trained in evaluating information and developing their own conclusions about its meaning. Renowned historian John Hope Franklin hoped that through National History Day "we may become sufficiently conscious of our past that we will be truly willing to learn something from it."⁶⁹

The program was not easily pigeon-holed into a narrow political or historical perspective, which proved to be an asset in attracting participants in diverse regions of the country and giving the program flexibility to include new strains of history. This suppleness also allowed the program to seek the support of people usually divided

⁶⁷ National History Day brochure, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 5, CWRU.

⁶⁸ National History Day brochure, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 7, CWRU.

⁶⁹ Trustees Meeting, April 9, 1980, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 8, CWRU.

along party or class lines. Union leaders joined in supporting the program because it attracted students to tell the stories of labor history,⁷⁰ yet businesses and corporate foundations could also support the program because it presented opportunities for students to learn about and gain an appreciation for America's free enterprise traditions.⁷¹ While at first these claims may appear to be contradictory, History Day student work reflected the same diversity found within the community, presenting attractive examples to supporters from many backgrounds.

One of the ways that National History Day tried to be inclusive was by selecting a broad and general annual theme and asking students to make a case, or a historical interpretation, for their conclusions. Though the first three themes focused on the legacies of the Bicentennial, they gradually expanded from local history to world history. The 1977 theme, "Turning Points in History," was broad enough to include almost any aspect of history and program organizers stepped up calls for historical analysis and interpretation in students' projects.⁷² Themes needed to be wide enough to encompass local history topics, especially because National History Day partnered with local historical institutions with missions promoting local history. However, program organizers did not want to limit projects exclusively to local history for three reasons. Limiting student choice to Ohio history in the first year of the program was not as successful as organizers had hoped. Secondly, organizers

⁷⁰ Walter Davis, director of the department of education for the AFL-CIO, letter to John Driscoll, president of the Connecticut State Council of AFL-CIO, February 6, 1980, 1ZH2, Box 3, Folder 3, CWRU.

⁷¹ David Van Tassel, letter to David Twining, March 19, 1982, 1ZH2, Box 4, Folder 1, CWRU.

⁷² Planning Grant for Regional History Day 1978, [NEH proposal], p. 9, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 1, CWRU.

wanted the program to appeal to students with diverse interests. Finally, teachers of world history wanted to participate and organizers wished to counteract "the trend in education to downplay world history."⁷³

One attempt to use a narrow theme inspired by current issues failed. Fuel shortages, the longest national coal strike in the nation's history, and a severe winter which closed many schools for a month made the 1978 theme "Energy: Its Impact on History" very timely and relevant.⁷⁴ Afterward, however, program organizers felt that the narrow theme "discouraged as much participation as it encouraged"⁷⁵ and that many projects would have been more appropriately entered into the science fair.⁷⁶ At least one teacher passed information about the contest to the school's science teachers instead, feeling that the theme was not social studies,⁷⁷ and some project titles seemed to indicate that students thought at least as much about present and future energy concerns as evaluating the historical implications of energy. In reflecting on the success of the Energy theme, organizers agreed that future themes "should be sufficiently broad and historically oriented as to encourage more historical interpretation and research than science and technology oriented projects."⁷⁸

⁷³ Meeting of the Regional History Day Planning Committee, February 18-19, 1977, draft minutes, p. 3, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 3, CWRU.

⁷⁴ Final Report, History Day '77, Region 3 Heidelberg College, 1ZH2, Box 1, Folder 5, CWRU.

⁷⁵ Memorandum to the History Day '78 Review Committee, from the Indiana History Day State Office, May 12, 1978, p. 1, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 3, CWRU.

⁷⁶ Regional History Day 1979, NEH grant proposal, p. 24, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 4, CWRU.

⁷⁷ Western Reserve Historical Society, untitled document, p. 2, 1ZH2, Box 2, Folder 1, CWRU.

⁷⁸ Regional History Day 1979, NEH grant proposal, p. 24, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 4, CWRU.

At times, however, the need to appeal to the interest of funders may have influenced the choice of themes, in some cases encouraging organizers to choose more restrictive, but fundable, themes. Comments about the Energy theme being "good for outside support" or the Trade and Industry theme being "good for fund raising"⁷⁹ indicate that fundability was on the minds of program organizers, at least as a tangential benefit even if it was not the primary impetus for selecting a theme. With NEH funding virtually dried up in the early 1980s, the Trade and Industry theme made corporate partnerships all the more essential. Funding requests for the 1982 theme "Trade and Industry in History" demonstrate how program organizers attempted to use the theme to highlight principles which they felt would be attractive to business-oriented sponsors. One funding request made a direct appeal to business interests, "The program shows students, through the excitement of personal investigation and research, how the industrial revolution, hard work and unregulated business opportunities produced our free political and economic system."⁸⁰

Broad themes attracted teachers like Shelley Sucher of Harding Middle School who wished to integrate National History Day into her normal curriculum.⁸¹ Interestingly, National History Day appealed to students for a different reason. Feedback sessions with participants indicated that students wanted to use the National History Day experience to investigate history that they did not normally have

⁷⁹ Regional History Day 1979, NEH grant proposal, p. 24, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 4, CWRU; Scharf, letter to state coordinators, February 10, 1981, 1ZH2, Box 3, Folder 6, CWRU.

⁸⁰ Ralph Besse, trustee, letter to A.N. Olsen, Johns-Manville Sales Corporation, March 24, 1982, 1ZH2, Box 4, Folder 1, CWRU.

⁸¹ History Day '76 Report, p. 32, 1ZH1, Box 1, Folder 3, CWRU.

a chance to explore. "[S]tudents didn't care what the theme was, so long as it was not something that they were dealing with in a routine fashion in the classroom. It was quite the opposite reaction to that of the teachers."⁸² Entry and winners lists reflect a wide range of student interests. Project titles and program materials reflect the influence of developing trends and techniques in the discipline of history, especially social history, local history, and oral history. The voices of the unknown figures in history proved highly interesting to student participants.⁸³

The History Day format was consciously designed to appeal to students and teachers with diverse interests and strengths, especially those who may not necessarily view history favorably. In particular, National History Day leaders sought to build a program that would be interdisciplinary. As Van Tassel noted, "History Day, with its emphasis on projects and dramatic presentations as well as more standard written reports 'gives the students some feeling that there is something more to the study of history than just taking exams.'"⁸⁴ A 1978 slide-tape show to be shown in classrooms started off with appeals to students' interest in art, music, science, and other areas of interest⁸⁵ before history was even mentioned. Organizers also

⁸² David Van Tassel, letter to David Twining, May 15, 1978, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 3, CWRU.

⁸³ "National History Day 1980—Winners," CWRU 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 7; "Student Guide for History Day '79," 1ZH3 Box 1, Folder 5, 13, CWRU.

⁸⁴ NEH Humanities, p. 13, 1ZH2, Box 3, Folder 6, CWRU.

⁸⁵ Script of History Day 1978 Slide-Tape Show, 1ZH2, Box 1, Folder 4, CWRU.

expressed great interest in involving teachers in related subject areas, such as English, and librarians.⁸⁶

From the beginning, History Day organizers determined that success was almost totally dependent on their ability to reach classroom teachers. Promotion and events may attract public attention, organizers agreed, but support of teachers was essential to get students involved and help them succeed.⁸⁷ While the first years of the contest devoted a great deal of attention to procedural issues such as rules, judging consistency, funding, and expansion, teacher workshops and other forms of support for teachers who wished to "innovate and experiment" became commonplace after 1980. A key element of these professional development opportunities was the aim for "teachers and professors of history and social science education to discuss new ways of making history more meaningful to students. History Day will liberalize the older academic approach to history without sacrificing academic standards."⁸⁸

Did National History Day in fact revitalize history education? Program organizers understood that it was beyond the capacity of any one program to "revitalize" a field as diverse and multi-faceted as history education. While this paper cannot fully address this question, it can offer some conclusions that offer insight into program accomplishments and struggles in its formative years. First, National History Day succeeded in building a network which gave university history professors

⁸⁶ David Twining, "History Day '76," *Focus*, p. 16, 1ZH2, Box 1, Folder 2, CWRU.

⁸⁷ State Coordinators Meeting, [History Day 1980?], 1ZH2, Box 3, Folder 5, CWRU.

⁸⁸ Regional History Day 1979, [NEH grant proposal], p. 9, 1ZH3, Box 1, Folder 4, CWRU.

opportunities to engage with secondary level teachers and their students. By creating a program structure that primarily centered History Day programs in universities, coordinating professors and their colleagues had many opportunities to conduct outreach with teachers and students. This greater communication between levels helped university historians gain a better sense of what was happening in secondary level history education and promoted greater cooperation within the discipline, even if the formal structures of academic history never changed to reward professors who worked in this sort of public service. Secondly, the key success of the program's first decade was the creation of a civic network of volunteers, institutional supporters, and sponsors that would help to sustain the program even when conditions were not favorable. While National History Day would struggle to maintain a strong and stable funding base throughout the next decades, the civic network originally supported by NEH proved strong enough to continue to grow and deepen its educational impact. Finally, the inquiry and project-based approaches advocated by National History Day would contribute to a growing trend toward democratization of history education.

The Geschichtswettbewerb des Bundespräsidenten:

Building Historical Consciousness and Promoting Innovative History

While American historians considered how they could use the occasion of the Bicentennial to make history education more relevant, two prominent West Germans engaged in uncannily similar conversations. The Federal President of Germany and a leading Hamburg businessman devised together a program with striking similarities

to National History Day. Originally named the "Gustav-Heinemann-Preis für die Schuljugend zum Verständnis deutscher Freiheitsbewegungen" (Gustav Heinemann Prize for School Youth toward the Understanding of the German Freedom Movements), the German history competition originated from conversations between Federal President Gustav Heinemann and Kurt A. Körber, founder and owner of the Hauni-Werke Körber & Co. KG in Hamburg-Bergedorf. After Körber's purchase of a set of valuable documents from the 1848 revolutions, he and Heinemann discovered mutual interest in promoting the historical consciousness of young people. These conversations would lead to the establishment of the German national history competition organized by the Körber Foundation with the support of the Federal President's office. Like National History Day, the foundation would also hold its first contest in 1974. This competition served to promote two primary goals: first, to encourage innovative methods in historical study and draw attention to important new themes and issues in German history; and second, to develop historical consciousness and prepare young people for the responsibilities of democratic citizenship.

Two Unlikely Co-Founders

While American professors' concern about establishing greater relevance for the study of history moved them to create a national history competition, Germany's competition would come from a rather unlikely set of partners. At a time when history was not considered highly by many West Germans, the Federal President decided to take up the challenge of promoting historical consciousness by becoming

a public representative of history. In particular, Heinemann wanted to increase awareness of Germany's democratic traditions. Lacking the governing authority to influence school textbooks or create legislation regarding history education, Heinemann could use the power of his position to publicize awareness of Germany's democratic traditions, but needed private sector support to accomplish his goals. Heinemann's friendship with Hamburg industrialist and philanthropist Kurt A. Körber presented an opening. For his part, Körber hoped his young foundation might gain status and visibility by collaborating with the president's office. Moreover, Körber saw an opportunity to support innovative, investigative learning and foster a young generation committed to active, critically-minded involvement in political and social issues. Winners from the first competition would be recognized in the waning days of Heinemann's term, but the first steps taken by his office would continue through six successive German presidents until today.

The meeting of Körber and Heinemann occurred amid a climate of political, social, and educational change and tensions with East Germany over its claims about German history. The 1969 West German federal elections marked a political turning point with the formation of the social liberal coalition under Willy Brandt and Walter Scheel and the election of Heinemann as the first social democratic president. The students' movement in 1968 and generational strife between those who had lived through the Holocaust and their children contributed to the negative associations and distrust that many West German young people felt toward their country's recent past, older generations, and how history had been taught. At the same time, school history was being engulfed in larger "social studies," while most academic historians

remained resistant to social history, preferring instead to continue to adhere to conventional state history.⁸⁹

At the same time, philosophical differences between East and West Germany led to competing interpretations of the countries' shared past. Heinemann was profoundly concerned by the historical claims of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the lack of response from West Germans. Numerous newspaper articles in the early 1970s trumpeted quotes from Heinemann's public statements about history. With headlines like "German history is not divisible," "Heinemann wants historical consciousness," "Heinemann: History of freedom and revolution shouldn't be turned over to the GDR", and "We should not turn over our traditions to the GDR," newspapers across Germany conveyed Heinemann's conviction that West Germans risked a GDR monopoly on the two Germanys' shared past.⁹⁰ Newspaper reports from Heinemann's public appearances intimate the tension with the East German neighbors, "We are in competition with the other German state over the better order of public things, freedom, and justice." He also questioned who has more right to claim the heritage of the freedom movements in German history and who better fulfilled the goals. "If we can't live in one German state," Heinemann remarked, "then we must at least keep a collective history (with the GDR)."⁹¹

⁸⁹ Bodo von Borries, *German History: A Pupils' Competition for the Federal President's Prize*, trans. Brangwyn Jones (Bonn: Inter Nationes, 1989), 35.

⁹⁰ Numerous newspaper articles carry similar titles and themes in the binders of press clippings at the Kurt A. Körber Foundation archives in Hamburg (hereafter, KAK). See Gustav-Heinemann-Preis Pressberichte, Pressereaktionen: Wettbewerb 1973 and Wettbewerb 1974.

Heinemann did not merely lend his name and visibility as a statesman to efforts to raise historical consciousness, he actively campaigned for public awareness and participation in history, especially history of the German freedom movements. Taking advantage of the 125th anniversary of the 1848 revolutions, Heinemann's office created a public exhibition at Schloss Rastatt featuring the rare papers Kurt Körber had recently acquired. Conversations between the president and Körber about those papers in the spring of 1973 provided the spark for the competition itself. In his recollections about the "birth hour" of the competition, Körber remarked,

With the purchase of a library of valuable texts on the Revolution of 1848, I came into conversation with then-president Gustav Heinemann on questions of historical consciousness. Heinemann's request, to strengthen the freedom traditions in the German historical picture, made an impression on me and I suggested that students in the framework of a competition should research such traditions in their own surroundings.⁹²

Heinemann and his presidential office would participate actively in the creation of this history competition, hosting and participating in meetings of the *Kuratorium* board, hosting student winners at the presidential palace, writing letters to be included in the materials advertising the competition, and providing other forms of visible association with the presidential office. This cooperation between the office of the federal president and the staff at the Körber Foundation would continue under

⁹¹ "Heinemann: Erinnerungsstätte soll nicht ein 'Walhalla deutscher Freiheit' werden," *Heilbronner Stimme*, 27 June 1974, clippings in Wettbewerb 1974, KAK; Hans Joerg Sottorf, "Heinemann scheidet nicht sorgenfrei aus dem Amt," clippings in Gustav-Heinemann-Preis Pressberichte, Pressereaktionen: Wettbewerb 1974, KAK.

⁹² 10 Jahre Schülerwettbewerb Deutsche Geschichte um den Preis des Bundespräsidenten: Entwicklungen, Erfahrungen, Bibliographie, p. 5, KAK Item 438.

other presidents, with the current undersecretary of the president's office always serving as board chair.⁹³

Heinemann's primary interest was to promote youth awareness of the history of the German freedom movements and strengthen the historical consciousness of West German students.⁹⁴ Though he claimed "The Bundespräsident is not the history teacher of the nation,"⁹⁵ Heinemann frequently criticized textbooks for having too little information about the freedom movements, calling it an "incredible sadness" that school history books spend so little attention on these themes.⁹⁶ While it might seem as if the president was trying to polish an image of German history tarnished by recent wars and improve Germans' perception of their past, this is only partly true. Heinemann did hope to create a stronger relationship with history, but not a mere celebratory relationship. Germans, even more so than other people, "cannot escape their history," Heinemann remarked.⁹⁷ His hope was not to idealize the German freedom movements, but to give his country's citizens the opportunity to examine them. In the Rastatt exhibit as well as the history competition, Heinemann did not

⁹³ von Borries, *German History: A Pupils' Competition for the Federal President's Prize*, p. 72.

⁹⁴ "Zum Verständnis deutscher Freiheitsbewegungen," *GEU Niedersachsen*, 15 January 1974, S. 4, Nr. 2-74, Gustav-Heinemann-Preis Pressberichte, Pressereaktionen: Wettbewerb 1973, KAK; "Heinemann wendet sich an die Jugend," *Saar-Zeitung*, Saarlouis, 5 December 1973, Wettbewerb 1973, KAK.

⁹⁵ Hans Joerg Sottorf, "Heinemann scheidet nicht sorgenfrei aus dem Amt," clippings in Gustav-Heinemann-Preis Pressberichte, Pressereaktionen: Wettbewerb 1974, KAK.

⁹⁶ "Arbeiten zum Verständnis deutscher Freiheitsbewegung," *Weser-Kurier* (Bremen), 5 December 1973, clipping in Gustav-Heinemann-Preis Pressberichte, Pressereaktionen: Wettbewerb 1973, KAK; "Revolution 1848/49 als Wettbewerb," *Reutlinger Generalanzeiger*, 5 December 1973, clippings in Gustav-Heinemann-Preis Pressberichte, Pressereaktionen: Wettbewerb 1973, KAK.

⁹⁷ "Nicht aus der Geschichte entfliehen," *NWZ Geislinger Fünftaelerbote*, 27 June 1974, clippings in Gustav-Heinemann-Preis Pressberichte, Pressereaktionen: Wettbewerb 1973, KAK.

want a place to quietly admire the "greats" of history; rather, he hoped that people would come to understand the achievements of those who fought to create a democratic tradition in Germany, as well as the setbacks, failures, and lost opportunities along the way. More importantly, Heinemann, who was deeply troubled by growing radicalism, wanted to foster democratic participation and conserve and vitalize the Constitution⁹⁸ by encouraging citizens' critical analysis of their country and free discussion of social issues.

The prestige and bully pulpit of the federal president undoubtedly helped the German history competition gain traction in its early years, however the competition would not have been possible without significant financial underwriting and leadership provided by Kurt Körber. Körber's profits from Hauni-Werke, an industrial outfitter for tobacco machinery, and his other business pursuits were invested in the Körber Foundation. While the foundation heavily supported projects in engineering education in its early years, the socially-minded benefactor quickly branched out to projects that would address social-political concerns. For Körber, economic and business investments alone were not enough. "My decision to put great sums at disposal year after year so that historical lay people can devote attention to their history is based on the insight that economic success alone cannot be a sufficient basis to deal with the diverse challenges of the present and future," Körber asserted.

⁹⁸ Franklin Kopitzsch, *Aufklärung, Widerspruch und Anstoss: Gustav W. Heinemann und die Geschichte der deutschen Freiheitsbewegungen*, p. 794, KAK Item 434.

“Only profit-oriented businesses can increase our affluence. But capitalism without the reins of an ethical consciousness gallops in the abyss.”⁹⁹

The history competition would quickly become the foundation's largest single budget item, committing 500,000 DM annually in prizes and general operating funds to the project in its early years, and later 1 million DM.¹⁰⁰ Foundation staff members operated the competition from its central office in Hamburg, with Körber himself integrally involved in program decision making and public affairs related to the competition. Heinemann's successor Karl Carstens would call Körber the "intellectual father" of the competition. Körber shared Heinemann's concern about fostering thoughtful engagement with democratic tradition and participation. “In the pupils' competition...democratic tradition and political participation are not only formal objectives: they are also practical methods...action-oriented, political education and effective familiarization with the tools of democracy.”¹⁰¹

But if Heinemann was primarily motivated by a desire to foster historical consciousness and awareness of the German freedom movements, Körber was equally inspired to support learning by discovering the history of one's own surroundings, researching in one's *Heimat*. Results from those first competitions reinforced Körber's conviction that researching in one's own locale would strengthen students' understanding of history and give them opportunities to contribute to

⁹⁹ Kurt A. Körber, “Schüler auf den Spuren von Stasi und Stalinismus,” *Geschichte Magazin* Nr. 96, September/October 1990, p. 35; KAK Item 436.

¹⁰⁰ 1980 Budget, Ordner HHKRST03-000013, Kurt A. Körber Stiftung 1964, 1976-1981; von Borries, *German History*, p. 72.

¹⁰¹ von Borries, p. 16.

historical knowledge by bringing to light new sources or by exploring new themes. The new social history methods promoted in the *Geschichtswettbewerb* produced a "treasure trove"¹⁰² of new history sources discovered by students and plenty of new insights into local memory and identity. Körber's strong financial support and powerful ties would make it possible for the competition to promote innovative approaches to history and encourage the exploration of unexplored or unfamiliar areas of history by seeking traces in the local community. In the end, Körber hoped that students would gain a better and more critical understanding of today's problems by researching their historical roots and contribute to a public dialogue about those issues.¹⁰³

Blazing Trails in History and History Learning

With a stable and considerable source of funding at their disposal, Körber Foundation staff and advisors were in a position to tackle difficult or controversial areas of history, to be innovators rather than reactors to changes in the historical and history teaching landscape. At a time when teacher-centered history instruction was the norm, the *Geschichtswettbewerb* promoted the student-centered model of inquiry-based learning. By advocating the methods of *Forschenden Lernen* (learning by searching) or *Entdecken Lernen* (discovery learning), as well as group work, the *Geschichtswettbewerb* hoped to encourage changes in learning history in and

¹⁰² "'Fundgrube neuer Geschichtsquellen,'" *Nordbayerischer Kurier Bayreuth*, 24 June 1974, clipping in Gustav-Heinemann-Preis Pressberichte, Pressereaktionen: Wettbewerb 1973, KAK.

¹⁰³ 10 Jahre Schülerwettbewerb Deutsche Geschichte um den Preis des Bundespräsidenten : Entwicklungen, Erfahrungen, Bibliographie, p. 5, KAK Item 438.

outside the schools.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, the competition popularized new methods in the discipline of history—oral history, *Alltagsgeschichte* (the history of everyday life), and local history. With academic history and school history in a period of "pronounced crisis" in Germany,¹⁰⁵ the *Geschichtswettbewerb* offered something new and different to teachers, students, and the public.

"History from below" and subsequent discussions about the role of history in nation-building on both sides of the Atlantic offer relevant context to understand the *Geschichtswettbewerb* and National History Day. Whereas professional historians led the way in developing social history in the United States, lay historians were integrally involved in popularizing history from below in Germany through *Geschichtswerkstätten* (history workshops) and *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life). Many of these individuals had some training and a strong interest in history, but a constricting economic situation left them with no hope of pursuing academic jobs in history. This "academic proletariat"¹⁰⁶ included tens of thousands of younger schoolteachers, former junior professors, and others interested in history. Though some academic historians also became involved, an important element of these movements reflected their intention to promote *public* dialogue of

¹⁰⁴ Sven Tetzlaff, "Der Geschichtswettbewerb des Bundespräsidenten : Ein Projekt im Spannungsfeld von Politik, Öffentlichkeit und Schule" in *History Sells! Angewandte Geschichte als Wissenschaft und Markt*, ed. Wolfgang Hardtwig and Alexander Schug (Stuttgart 2009), 269.

¹⁰⁵ Alfons Kenkmann, "Ein Phänomen in der bundesdeutschen Geschichtslandschaft: Der Schülerwettbewerb Deutsche Geschichte um den Preis des Bundespräsidenten," in *Jugendliche erforschen die Vergangenheit: annotierte Bibliographie zum Schülerwettbewerb Deutsche Geschichte um den Preis des Bundespräsidenten*, (ders.: Hamburg 1997), 15.

¹⁰⁶ Roger Fletcher, "History from Below Comes to Germany: The New History Movement in the Federal Republic of Germany," *The Journal of Modern History* 60 (1988): 557-568.

contemporary history issues and the role of ordinary people in shaping their community. The movement advanced research and public discussion of working class history, National Socialism, the family, strikes and protest, and women's history. Thousands of German young people would join this movement of "barefoot historians" through the *Geschichtswettbewerb* by looking into the history of their own local communities. For many *Geschichtswettbewerb* students, the secondary source literature to help analyze and make sense of their topics simply did not yet exist, particularly as the competition took up the history of current issues in the mid-1980s. Looking into their own local communities, investigating in archives, and interviewing *Zeitzeugen* (witnesses) made them integral participants in the *Alltagsgeschichte* movement in Germany.

Like National History Day, *Geschichtswettbewerb* organizers were not interested in promoting rote memorization of key events in the national historical narrative. Rather, they hoped that students would develop their own questions and problems, search for clues to those questions in their local area, and form their own opinions. By requiring *Forschenden Lernen* and group work in the early days of the contest, the *Geschichtswettbewerb* contrasted itself with the dominant instructional methods of the time. Competition participant Dirk Rumberg of Dachau describes the experience as,

[a]...pleasant alternative to school lessons where everything is served up bite-sized and one is supposed to swallow it without giving it much thought (this applies to all subjects, not just history). Here on the other hand, I am obliged to procure all information myself and forced to classify it myself."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Bodo von Borries, *German History: A Pupils' Competition for the Federal President's Prize* (Bonn: Inter Nationes, 1989), 97.

In contrast to the "acquisition" method of learning, *Forschenden* or "discovery" learning provided a direct access to historical events and the opportunity for students to shape their own opinions about events in the past.¹⁰⁸ Competition organizers intended that in independently seeking and collecting historical sources and making their own judgments, that students would deepen their understanding of the tasks of the present and their insights into the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democratic state.¹⁰⁹ "The youth opened through the competition a new access to history and brought something to it that school lessons and academic history had not."¹¹⁰ History education scholar Bodo von Borries described the limitations and intent of the *Geschichtswettbewerb* and *Forschenden Lernen*:

With its approach of 'explorative learning' the pupils' competition cannot revolutionize historical consciousness, turn history teaching upside down, or rewrite school textbooks. It is more a laboratory belonging to history didactics and an experimental, social dialogue on history. Having to memorize prefabricated textbook formulations is replaced by learning situations with a serious character and history one can grasp. As a consequence, within a multi-voice discourse, it represents an important and independent contribution to reformed school textbooks, project-oriented teaching and reflected historical consciousness.¹¹¹

The pedagogical shift advanced by *Forschenden Lernen* was centrally important to the history competition's objectives, but the *Geschichtswettbewerb*

¹⁰⁸ This focus is described throughout the materials on the *Geschichtswettbewerb*, but for a short early public account, see "Gustav-Heinemann-Wettbewerb diesmal mit Demokratie-Thema," *Neue Cuxhavener Zeitung*, 13 December 1975, clipping in Gustav-Heinemann-Preis Pressberichte, Pressereaktionen: Wettbewerb 1974, KAK.

¹⁰⁹ Wettbewerb 1976 für die Schuljugend "Gustav-Heinemann-Preis" brochure, p. 1, *Kuratorium Sitzung: 7th Kuratorium*, KAK.

¹¹⁰ Reinhard Rürup, "Der Geschichtswettbewerb um den Preis des Bundespräsidenten : 'Forschendes Lernen,' Geschichte 'von unten' und demokratische Gesellschaft," 9 June 2009, KAK.

¹¹¹ von Borries, p. 98.

aimed in equal measure to accomplish changes in the methods of the discipline of history itself, at least where young people were concerned. By promoting the new practices of oral history, local history, and *Alltagsgeschichte*, the *Geschichtswettbewerb* took a stand toward a more democratic and participatory history. In contrast to some Western countries, West German academic historians were slow to embrace social history methods and topics. The methods of oral history and the orientation toward everyday life were new concepts in German academic history in the 1970s. The *Geschichtswettbewerb* offered a platform to test new methods and gain public recognition for methods and research perspectives that had yet to gain widespread acceptance in academic history. Lutz Niethammer, one of the historians who supported such change in the discipline of history, called the *Geschichtswettbewerb* the "strongest support for the potential of history 'von unten' (from below)."¹¹²

As early as the 1975 competition, organizers propagated oral history and the method of *Augenzeugetgespräche* (conversations with eyewitnesses).¹¹³ The second series of themes from 1977-1979, concentrating on the social history of everyday life, furthered these efforts by giving students opportunities to talk with elders about such topics as working conditions, patterns of living, and leisure time. Because *Geschichtswettbewerb* students researched the recent history of their hometowns and local areas, oral history interviews provided an important perspective

¹¹² Lutz Niethammer, *Ego-Histoire? Und andere Erinnerungsversuche* (Wien: Boehlau, 2002), 136.

¹¹³ Tetzlaff, p. 266.

on how events in the past shaped the local community, a source generally overlooked by traditional histories. Part of the motivation to promote oral history was the desire to bring young people into conversation with their grandparents' generation about history. For the interviewees, such conversations were almost always the first time that someone had shown interest in their stories of the past.¹¹⁴ Supporting intergenerational dialogue was an important element in the *Geschichtswettbewerb's* aim to raise public consciousness of history. Oral history became a cornerstone of the *Geschichtswettbewerb* that persists until today.

The *Geschichtswettbewerb* also served as a testing ground for two other lay history movements which would gain a stronger foothold in West German historical consciousness in the 1980s—local history and *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life). The *Alltagsgeschichte* movement was intimately tied to researching the history of one's own local surroundings, or *Heimat*. *Alltagsgeschichte* practitioners asked questions about what life was like in the community in earlier times, seeking to understand how and why their community came to be the way that it is today. Alon Confino calls this a "local turn"¹¹⁵ in historical examinations of nationhood and nation-building. Whereas traditional interpretations of nationhood subordinated the local to the national, Confino believes that local memory shapes nationalism and national identity and that nationalism relies on localness to foster collective identity. He asserts that the nation can best be understood through examination of the

¹¹⁴ Körber, "Schüler auf den Spuren von Stasi und Stalinismus," p. 35.

¹¹⁵ Alon Confino, *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 23.

people's collective memory, particularly the ways they negotiate multiple memories – local, national, and group. The *Geschichtswettbewerb* encouraged researching in local communities from its founding days.

In many cases, the *Geschichtswettbewerb* organizers were steps ahead of later developments in the alternative history movements. Already in the first series of competitions on the German freedom movements (1974-1976), contest organizers focused students' inquiry on their local history. The model for *Alltagsgeschichte*, the Swedish "dig where you stand" movement, would first appear in 1978, five years after the founding of the *Geschichtswettbewerb*. The second series of contests on the social history of everyday life (1977-1979)¹¹⁶ brought students' attention to questions of what life was like for ordinary people in the past. Long before the lay history movement would take root across West Germany, *Geschichtswettbewerb* participants practiced *Alltagsgeschichte*. The everyday life and local history orientation of the contest was then and is today the decisive programmatic feature of the history competition.¹¹⁷

Asking students to look at their local communities from the beginning of the competition produced several positive results. For many students, looking into their own surroundings proved to be motivating; it provided a better access point to historical events than impersonal history books.¹¹⁸ Moreover, tying the competition to the students' local communities allowed the competition to become an innovative

¹¹⁶ See Appendix A.

¹¹⁷ Kenkmann, p. 17.

¹¹⁸ "10 Jahre Schülerwettbewerb Deutsche Geschichte um den Preis des Bundespräsidenten: Entwicklungen, Erfahrungen, Bibliographie," p. 8, KAK Item 438.

force within the field of history. Students were able to uncover untold stories of the "little people," collect their papers, photographs, or oral histories, and share that information with the public. Not infrequently, the information the students gathered preserved a historical perspective that might otherwise have been lost. Certainly, it contributed to knowledge about the local communities that was unknown before the students started rummaging through archives and attics. Such student searching also encouraged familial dialogue about historical experiences, a critically important contribution given the silences that had occurred between the students of the 1960s and their parents' generation because of painful Holocaust history. Submissions for the competition, along with the oral history transcripts, photographs, and other documents collected during the students' research, were archived at the Körber Foundation in Hamburg so that these stories would be accessible to others.

In spite of the founding President's personal interest in the German freedom movements, this focal area would prove to be too limiting for the competition for the long term. Because the competition theme had to be broad enough to allow students in all regions of Germany the same chances of researching successfully into the history of their local area, only certain moments in Germany's struggles for democracy had wide enough geographic reach to be appropriate as a competition theme. Körber himself pondered whether his 500,000 DM in prizes had produced enough of the desired impact on historical consciousness of German youth in the first three competitions on the German freedom movements.¹¹⁹ Instead, he

¹¹⁹ Niederschrift über die 7. Kuratoriumssitzung am 12 Mai 1976, Kuratorium Sitzung: 7th Kuratorium, KAK.

encouraged the *Kuratorium* to consider a wider framework for future competition themes. Heinemann's death in 1976, combined with the Social Democratic Party's decision to designate another prize with a similar name (not affiliated with history education), prompted the organizers of the student history competition to rethink the form and goals of continued competitions.

A conference of historians and teachers in February 1976 urged competition decision-makers to use the foundation established in the first competitions to head in new directions. Most importantly, the central objectives of strengthening the development of democratic historical consciousness in school youth and deepening youth understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens in a free democratic state should be retained, as well as the practical focus on *Forschenden Lernen* in local history.¹²⁰ However, they also argued that the next series of themes should give students the opportunity to contribute to the historical dialogue by focusing on the social history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*). In an essay urging the *Kuratorium* to consider a series of *Alltagsgeschichte* themes, Professor Dr. Reinhard Rürup argued that such a social history "from below," that takes up the experiences of individual people, would support young citizens' understanding of their own role contributing to life in a democracy.¹²¹ By no longer fixating on big moments in political history, but on the conditions and relationships of everyday life, young people would take up the direct experiences of people in their local areas and

¹²⁰ [Überlegungen zu einem Rahmenthema künftiger Wettbewerbe], Kuratorium Sitzung: 7th Kuratorium, KAK.

¹²¹ Reinhard Rürup, "Gustav-Heinemann-Preis fuer die Schuljugend Vorschlaege fuer eine neue Themenreihe," p. 2, Kuratorium Sitzung: 7th Kuratorium, KAK.

contribute historical knowledge in an area that had not been of much interest to historians.¹²² For the next phase of the program, competition organizers would put forward issues of work, leisure, and living conditions under the series "Social History of Everyday Life" and also rename the competition, "*Schülerwettbewerb-Deutsche Geschichte um den Preis des Bundespräsidenten* (Pupils' Competition on German History for the Prize of the Federal President)."¹²³

By organizing the late 1970s competitions under a framework of *Alltagsgeschichte*, the Körber Foundation helped to initiate a new historical arena and new methods of historical investigation. The time of the greatest debates on the history of everyday life and history "from below" would not occur until the next decade. The public "history workshops" which took off in the mid-1980s profited from the experiences of the history competition; without the early efforts of competition participants, mistrust of historical laymen and their inquiries might have been much greater.¹²⁴ Like the inquiry movement in American history education, advocates of *Alltagsgeschichte* faced criticism by those who felt that it might tend to reproduce clichés, mislead students who identify with rather than criticize their local history sources, and limit understanding of the connections to wider regional, national, and international trends.¹²⁵ Yet, the competition retained its focus on

¹²² Ibid., p. 5.

¹²³ Niederschrift über die 8. Kuratoriumssitzung am 22 Oktober 1976, Kuratorium Sitzung: 8th Kuratorium, KAK.

¹²⁴ Kenkmann, p. 9; Reinhard Rürup, "Der Geschichtswettbewerb um den Preis des Bundespräsidenten: 'Forschendes Lernen,' Geschichte 'von unten' und demokratische Gesellschaft," p. 4-5, 9 June 2009, KAK.

Alltagsgeschichte and local history and continued to tackle controversial new approaches to history in future series.

Building a Public Culture of Historical Consciousness

Since the beginning, the *Geschichtswettbewerb's* mission centered on strengthening historical consciousness and nurturing informed, engaged young people who actively contributed to civic life. Certainly, the competition focused primarily on the students and teachers who participated, but its reach would stretch beyond the participants to include the communities where students researched and shared their work. Archives opened to lay historians. Public exhibits displayed students' work. The sources students collected for their projects were made available to other researchers. Students' research would lead to small civic action projects resulting in renamed streets, memorials, and restoration of long-forgotten historic sites. The public resonance of the competition would sometimes bring protest, sometimes acclaim, and especially dialogue with the local community. In other words, it would foster a sense of public historical consciousness, as Heinemann had intended.

Germany in the 1970s needed nurturing of its still-new democracy and opportunities for civic dialogue and political participation. Whereas other Western countries had comparatively deep democratic roots, terms like “belated nation” and

¹²⁵ “Der Alltagsansatz auf dem Prüfstand: Eine Umfrage bei Wissenschaftlern und Lehrern zu ihren Erfahrungen im Schülerwettbewerb,” in *Die Kriegsjahre in Deutschland: 1939 bis 1945* (Hamburg: Verlag Erziehung und Wissenschaft, 1985), 62.

“inadequate civic sense” persistently plagued Germany’s political reputation.¹²⁶ Opportunities for students to learn history through the active, “emancipatory” methods of inquiry held deep resonance in such an environment. Historian Reinhard Rürup contended that the *Geschichtswettbewerb* served as a valuable tool to acquaint students with methods of productive democratic engagement and civic dialogue. Rürup argued, the “*Geschichtswettbewerb* is an essential component of the history culture in the Federal Republic of Germany...[I]t is an important element of democratic education because it offers young people the chance to research independently and form their own opinions, promotes their understanding of the other...and to strengthen their recognition and positive valuing of the diversity and contradictions of society in the past and in the present.”

Efforts to use the competition itself and students’ work to prompt a larger civic dialogue began early in the history of the *Geschichtswettbewerb*. From the time of the first competition, television networks publicized the contest by running films related to the contest theme, sometimes provoking critical commentary themselves.¹²⁷ The competition’s well-networked board included not only the Federal President and his undersecretary, but also representatives from the television station WDR, the director of a federal center for political education, the

¹²⁶ von Borries, p. 11-12.

¹²⁶ Reinhard Rürup, “Der Geschichtswettbewerb um den Preis des Bundespräsidenten : ‘Forschendes Lernen,’ Geschichte ‘von unten’ und demokratische Gesellschaft,” 9 June 2009, p. 7, KAK.

¹²⁷ Tetzlaff, p. 265; Niederschrift über die gemeinsame Sitzung von Stifter und Stiftungsvorstand am 15.5.74, V Sitzung, Kurt A. Körber-Stiftung, LFK, G. Heinemann-Preis, 1973-1975, KAK.

former mayor of Hamburg, a state secretary on the ministry for instruction and culture, and other important political and educational figures.¹²⁸ The *Geschichtswettbewerb* used these well-placed contacts, as well as their academic advisory body of teachers and historians, to spread the word.

From the time of the first competition, organizers devoted special attention to ensuring that students' work would be shared with the community and with other researchers. Because of the local history focus, *Geschichtswettbewerb* students very often contributed to the historical record and public dialogue about history by uncovering stories in their family members' and neighbors' pasts that otherwise were undocumented by traditional history.¹²⁹ Students' written projects included photocopies of letters, photographs, and other sources telling these stories from the lives of ordinary people. The Körber Foundation made this work accessible to others in three ways in the program's first years. Following the first competition, the Schloss Rastatt memorial displayed prizewinning student work in conjunction with its exhibit on the German freedom movements. Secondly, competition organizers committed to archiving student projects and making them accessible to researchers with a finding aid in 1974, a practice which continues. Finally, the foundation regularly published prize winning entries in books for teachers or the general public.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ "Auf den Spuren der Revolution von 1848/49," *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 5 December 1973, clipping in Gustav-Heinemann-Preis Pressberichte, Pressereaktionen: Wettbewerb 1973, KAK.

¹²⁹ Körber, p. 36.

¹³⁰ Bericht: 4. Kuratoriumssitzung am 8.10.74 in Bonn, Kuratorium Sitzung: 4th Kuratorium, KAK.

The *Geschichtswettbewerb* also reinforced a change in the archival community which had begun in the 1960s. By visiting the archives, student historians helped encourage historical repositories to become more welcoming to amateur historians and young people. Early *Geschichtswettbewerb* participants did not always find the archives to be an encouraging place; participant Dirk Rumberg was among those who faced suspicion at the archival doors, “There are archivists who obviously regard the documents they have in safekeeping as their private property...”¹³¹ Having long perceived their roles as “document protectors,”¹³² a growing number of archivists began to loosen restrictions regarding public access to their holdings. The history competition encouraged thousands of young people to visit the archives for the first time. Young users required a different sort of assistance than the academics of the past, encouraging many archives to adopt a more open and “communicative” stance toward the public. The archives’ experience with *Geschichtswettbewerb* participants would pave the way for *Heimat* and family researchers when the lay historian movement took off in the 1980s.¹³³

Archives’ experiences with young people were not always positive encounters, however, especially when student researchers asked uncomfortable questions about their community’s past and the roles of ordinary people in painful historical episodes. The competition series “Unfinished Contemporary History” (1980-1985) about life during the time of National Socialism brought difficult and sometimes hostile

¹³¹ von Borries, p. 97.

¹³² Kenkmann, p. 18.

¹³³ Kenkmann, p. 10, 18; 10 Jahre Schülerwettbewerb Deutsche Geschichte um den Preis des Bundespräsidenten : Entwicklungen, Erfahrungen, Bibliographie, p. 35, KAK Item 438.

episodes when the public was forced to confront a past that many preferred to leave buried. Student historians occasionally provoked ugly public encounters when they uncovered embarrassing or incriminating stories about prominent or respected community members who turned a blind eye or actively contributed to Nazi atrocities. Survivors and their descendants felt attacked. Communities worried that their reputation had been damaged or their tourist trade might be threatened. Businesses challenged accusations about their actions during the Holocaust.¹³⁴

Even if community elders did not always appreciate students' investigations, young people were eager to learn about this long-silenced piece of Germany's history. Student interest in examining National Socialism through the *Geschichtswettbewerb* was quite high as early as 1975. A student survey of that year's participants showed that a majority of students preferred the theme "Resistance in the Third Reich" for the next theme. Despite the high interest, contest organizers declined to offer the theme at that time due to concerns about difficulties students might have in researching the subject. By 1979, however, it became evident that contest organizers needed to take up the Nazi era directly. A key turning point came with the West German television broadcast of the American film "Holocaust" to millions of viewers in 1979 and a brewing public conversation on the history of the Nazi era. The film, along with concern about Neo-Nazi activities and a generational shift, broke old taboos and promoted public discussion of the Holocaust.¹³⁵ Competition

¹³⁴ von Borries, p. 93.

¹³⁵ Dieter Galinski and Ulla Lachauer, *Jahrbuch zum Schülerwettbewerb Deutsche Geschichte um den Preis des Bundespräsidenten 1980/81* (Hamburg?: Agentur Pedersen 1982), 14-15.

organizers selected a series of themes dealing with National Socialist Germany under the umbrella of “Unfinished Contemporary History” starting in 1980. The first of these themes, “Everyday Life under National Socialism,” prompted a record number of competition entries—nearly 13,000 students submitted over 2,000 projects in 1981.

Even with the high student interest in the Nazi era, deciding on a National Socialism theme proved to be contentious—not because competition organizers wished to cover over this piece of history, but for the opposite reason. *Kuratorium* meeting minutes and reports from the academic advisory body exhibit leaders’ apprehension that the competition theme and preparatory materials avoid simplistic or dismissive representations of Nazi crimes. Competition advisors expressed concerns that the competition not become just a package of “two trendy things” (National Socialism and *Alltag*)¹³⁶ together, but that it accomplish a more critical purpose: to serve as a venue for thoughtful examination of the actions of ordinary individuals during the Holocaust. In investigating the past, competition organizers hoped that students would achieve for their *Heimat* a deeper, more reflective picture of how everyday actions in local communities contributed to the larger story of the Holocaust. Concerned that students might be seduced by oral history interviews or other sources that attempted to whitewash local contributions to Nazi crimes or that some students might use the venue of the competition to deny the Holocaust (a crime in Germany), the academic advisory body and staff devoted considerable

¹³⁶ Ibid., 16-17.

attention to the language for the competition. Among the safeguards was a decision that work which supported or held harmless the criminals of the NS time would not receive prizes even if the entries were otherwise well-researched and plausible.¹³⁷

The theme received an unusual amount of public attention. Newspapers throughout Germany reported on the competition and, in some cases, helped draw attention to research possibilities in the area. However, the theme also provoked resistance because it asked students to look beyond leaders like Hitler to history “from below.” Körber Foundation staff regularly received inquiries from students looking for guidance when authorities attempted to prevent their research, witnesses and participants in historic events were unwilling to be interviewed, or archives¹³⁸ tried to prevent access to sources. These problems seemed particularly acute in rural areas and small towns where everyone knew each other, limiting participation from smaller towns in comparison to larger cities.

Often, students’ sensitive research projects sparked negative reactions by community members. The most famous of these cases occurred in the village of Passau when *Geschichtswettbewerb* participant Anna Rosmus stirred up a few too many memories while examining “My Hometown during the Third Reich.” Rosmus thought that she would find stories of resistance and persecution in her small Catholic town, but instead, archival doors slammed shut when she started asking questions. Rosmus sued in court and won access to city files, but continued to face public resistance to her work. She persevered, submitting a prize-winning project for

¹³⁷ Ibid., 20-21.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 40-41.

the *Geschichtswettbewerb* that she would eventually turn into a book, in spite of challenges like fire-bombings of her home and being dismissed from the university without adequate justification. Her real-life experiences of public ridicule, personal threats, and barriers to research are told in the 1991 fictionalized film called *Das Schreckliche Mädchen* (The Nasty Girl).¹³⁹ However, she was not alone in her struggles. In other cases, infuriated community members wrote directly to the federal president, to the press, or to the competitors themselves to express their anger that “immature young persons” had taken it upon themselves to pass judgment on actions in the past.

These examples of public controversy, however, reinforce why it is important to include examples like the *Geschichtswettbewerb* in discussions about the history of history education. Critics of the students’ work would have preferred that the stories the participants uncovered in their research remain untold, absent from the anonymous national narrative. “They cannot reconcile themselves with the fact that historical consciousness ought not be arbitrarily decreed by the authorities or nationalistically instrumentalized, but that it should be elaborated independently with a critical approach to sources. They reject the enlightening, fundamentally democratic, basic position itself.”¹⁴⁰ However, in a pluralistic democracy, the students’ work contributed (however painfully) to public consciousness of historical events and dialogue about its impact on the present.

¹³⁹ von Borries, p. 88-98; covered extensively in Schülerwettbewerb Deutsche Geschichte XI: Ausland, USA, Anna Rosmus, KAK.

¹⁴⁰ von Borries, 94-96.

Conclusion

Mary Beth Norton has argued that debates about how we learn history and what we learn about the past were hardly conceived of only a few short decades ago.¹⁴¹ As schooling for the general public developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, states around the world used history curricula and textbooks to forge collective meaning and establish common values for their people – in other words, using the history curriculum to foster nation building. Academic historians were called upon to create a collective narrative that legitimized the nation and fostered social cohesion. As Schissler and Soysal describe, subjects could be made into citizens through the study of a collective history.¹⁴² While disagreements over interpretations or methods might have been common, there was more general consensus on what history was and what its purpose should be, at least until the middle of the twentieth century. History was public – politics, economics, diplomacy, war, and great (white male) leaders.

But by writing “history from below” and including the experiences of previously neglected groups including minorities, women, and the working class, historians brought new voices into the profession in the 1960s and 1970s, changing the ways that history was conceived. History was no longer the exclusive domain of politics and the stories of the “great men” of the past. At the same time that historiography was shifting, worldwide historical developments challenged conventional wisdom

¹⁴¹ Mary Beth Norton, “Rethinking American History Textbooks,” in *Learning History in America: Schools, Cultures, and Politics*, ed. Lloyd Kramer, Donald Reid, and William L. Barney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 25.

¹⁴² Hanna Schissler and Yasemine Nuhoglu Soysal, eds. *The Nation, Europe, and the World: Textbooks and Curricula in Transition* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 1.

about the role of teaching history. Globalization, along with destructive wars of nationalism during the 20th century, caused many to wonder if the traditional purposes of history mattered in a rapidly-changing world. Schissler and Soysal conclude, “National history has lost in importance practically everywhere”¹⁴³ as local and global forces become more important. The writing of the histories of previously-neglected groups below the national level, as well as supranational entities, are gradually becoming more central factors in how individuals understand their past. Has the national narrative function of history outlived its usefulness, especially in light of changes in the discipline initiated with the rise of “history from below” and inquiry? Is school history supposed to inculcate patriotism that unifies the nation through one central story? Or should history rather teach students the critical thinking skills and knowledge to make informed decisions as citizens?

National History Day and the *Geschichtswettbewerb* offer a unique perspective on these complex questions. The programs emerged as one response to larger developments in history and history education and changes in the wider political and social landscape. Concerned about disaffected youth, program leaders sought a solution that might encourage young people to reengage with their country’s history. In both West Germany and the United States, leaders opted for an inquiry-based competition framework that would encourage young people to ask their own questions of the past and search for answers in the sources. Inquiry had its share of critics from all sides, as it had since John Dewey and the Progressives.¹⁴⁴ Inquiry and

¹⁴³ Ibid., 3.

project-based learning of the type advocated by programs like National History Day or the *Geschichtswettbewerb* held depth, not breadth. However, inquiry presented an opportunity to foster civic participation and practice the skills of citizenship. Core elements of inquiry took root in the history curriculum, especially the emphasis on primary sources (which were more widely available thanks to numerous inquiry projects in the 1970s that produced educational materials for teachers). Even the textbook industry quickly started to pick up the interest in primary sources by producing a variety of document kits and changing the way that textbooks were structured to offer more original material. The competitions also presented a forum through which students could investigate what Bodnar has described as “vernacular history,” the inconsistencies that children perceive between the “official” history taught in schools and the realities they witness in their communities.¹⁴⁵ Presented with opportunities to assess the sources for themselves and ask questions about the factors that shaped their world, competition participants might contribute to critical dialogue about important civic issues.

The programs faced some common pedagogical and social challenges. The balancing act between “covering the content” and historical inquiry left teachers little

¹⁴⁴ Critiques of the inquiry method are as numerous as its advocates. Three articles used here summarize some of the core debates: James Fitzgerald, “History in the Curriculum: Debate on Aims and Values,” *History and Theory* 22 (December 1983): 81-100; Linda W. Rosenzweig and Thomas P. Weinland, “New Directions for the History Curriculum: A Challenge for the 1980s,” *The History Teacher* 19 (February 1986): 263-277; Harry N. Scheiber, “Recapturing a Usable Past: Knowledge and Skills in the High School American History Curriculum,” *The History Teacher* 12 (August 1979): 481-492.

¹⁴⁵ Barton, Keith, and Linda Levstik. “‘It Wasn’t a Good Part of History’: National Identity and Students’ Explanations of Historical Significance.” *Teachers College Record* 99 (Spring 1998): 478-513; Bodnar, John. *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.

time to do both well. Furthermore, ensuring educational equity proved to be a challenge for both programs, with academic elite students typically faring better in the competition than their less privileged peers.¹⁴⁶ Both programs asked students to commit significant, sustained energy to the historical inquiry process, to spend time in historical institutions that are foreign to them, and grapple with historical issues at higher levels of critical thinking and analysis. These are often new skills even for more academically privileged students, but they are particularly challenging for students who do not come to the programs with the academic foundation to be successful. Cultural, language, geographical, financial, and safety barriers also contribute to the challenges disadvantaged students face in successfully navigating the historical inquiry experience. However, the programs contained a liberalizing potential for all students – that in practicing the skills of historical inquiry and drawing their own conclusions from the sources they might be better prepared to contribute their own voices in the civic arena.

Why did the *Geschichtswettbewerb* and National History Day take root rather than fade away? This paper contends that the answer is two-fold. Both programs pushed the discipline of history and the profession of history teaching in new directions—serving as “historical innovators.” In the U.S., National History Day built bridges between university and secondary level history, promoted fundamentals of the discipline of history at a time when many perceived its future to be threatened by

¹⁴⁶ The minutes of early *Geschichtswettbewerb Kuratorium* sessions show great concern that academic elite students (those who attended gymnasium) fared better in the competition than students in less-demanding academic programs. Judging criteria now take into consideration the students’ school background in prize considerations so that academic achievements may be recognized more evenly across the different types of schools.

the social studies, and used innovative pedagogical practices (categories responsive to multiple intelligences, group work, and inquiry- and project-based learning) to strengthen the study of history in American schools. In West Germany, the *Geschichtswettbewerb* advocated new approaches like oral history and *Alltagsgeschichte* and the examination of previously understudied themes in local history. Perhaps even more importantly, however, both programs served as “civic incubators.” The programs supported civic development in method by requiring students to ask questions, search for multiple perspectives and sources on those questions, and form their own ideas—in essence, testing the official national narrative against the sources of their own inquiry. By entering the product of their work into civic dialogue, young people furthered community engagement in important civic, political, and social issues and fostered public historical consciousness.

APPENDIX A:
COMPETITION SERIES AND THEMES FOR THE
GESCHICHTSWETTBEWERB DES BUNDESPRÄSIDENTEN,
1974-1995

THE STUDENTS' COMPETITION ON GERMAN HISTORY FOR THE PRESIDENT'S AWARD			
Year	Topic	Partici- pants	Research Papers
<i>Understanding German Liberation Movements</i>			
1974	The 1848/49 German Revolution	4525	760
1975	From Empire to Republic 1918/19	2721	464
1976	Democratic New Beginning 1945/46	3226	505
<i>Social History of Everyday Life</i>			
1977	The Working World and Technology in the Process of Change	5023	1271
1978	Living Accomodation in the Process of Change	4112	991
1979	After-work Hours and Leisure Time in the Process of Change	3995	756
<i>Unfinished Contemporary History</i>			
1980/81	Everyday Life under National Socialism. From the End of the Weimar Republic to the Second World War	12843	2172
1982/83	Everyday Life under National Socialism. The War Years in Germany	5894	1168
1984/85	From the Collapse to Reconstruction. Everyday Life in Postwar Germany	3994	708
<i>Current Problems in the Light of Historical Experience</i>			
1986/87	Environment is History	5004	1016
1988/89	Our Town – A Home for Foreigners?	5646	1005
1990/91	Fascination Speed: Travel Through History	6311	1226
1992/93	Monument: Provocation - Remembrance - Reminder	11559	2319
1994/95	East-West Stories		

History is not for professors only: The Students' Competition on German history for the President's Award.

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VITA

Crystal Johnson is the Director of Education at the Chicago Metro History Education Center. Before attending Loyola University Chicago, she graduated summa cum laude from Kansas State University with a Bachelor of Arts in History and a Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education. She also earned graduate credit in the Departments of History and Education at the University of Iowa. She has been certified to teach secondary level history in Kansas and Illinois.

Johnson acted as the Education Outreach Coordinator and National History Day State Coordinator for the State Historical Society of Iowa from 1997 until 2004, and served on the Executive Committee of State Coordinators for National History Day from 1999-2004. From 2002 to 2003, Johnson worked at the *Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* in Bonn as an Alexander von Humboldt German Chancellor Fellow researching museum education and history education in Germany. Johnson joined the Chicago Metro History Education Center in 2004 as its executive director, a role she filled until 2009 when she adopted the position of Director of Education. In her present institution, Johnson has performed a number of educational and administrative responsibilities including planning and writing grants for educational programs, conducting educational workshops and seminars, creating educational resources, and coordinating evaluations of educational programs.

