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ABSTRACT

The paper describes ways in which the urban classroom teacher can celebrate the Bicentennial and investigate the historical role of the cities throughout American history, without sacrificing current and futuristic issues and topics. Primary and secondary sources are used and a community-based field program for students is developed. The following common municipal problems confronting both colonial and contemporary city residents could be the basis for a unit of instruction: fire, sanitation, traffic control, crime, welfare and the poor, public works, and defense. By developing a sense of historical perspective, the urban social studies student should be better prepared to examine the issues and municipal problems of today's cities. Community resources are abundant for the study of these and other local history issues and include community residents; guide books; Bicentennial television programs; novels; newspapers; municipal and county court records; diaries, letters, and autobiographies; maps; town, city, and county histories; travellers' accounts; and field trips. Also included is an extensive bibliography of early American history references and a sample competitive funding proposal for a community-oriented local Bicentennial project. (Author/DE)

"Bicentennial Social Studies for the Urban Classroom"

Paper Presented at the National Council
for the Social Studies Annual Convention

Atlanta, Georgia

November 27, 1975

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New York (1)

I put New York into a can
and sent it to New Amsterdam.
But as to salt I had forgotten,
When it arrived New York was rotten.

The Dutch they built a little town,
That's never to be forgotten.
But as this town began to grow
The place began to rotten.

Now we have to stop the spoils,
Do we use a cork?
It's up to you to think things out,
I'm sure you know New York.

Marian Edwards

On the eve of our nation's Bicentennial celebration, many urban social studies educators are preparing a reaffirmation of our Colonial spirit and heritage through various classroom and community enterprises. Numerous publication houses are now marketing social studies tests, filmstrips, games, kits, simulations and other paraphernelia designed for Bicentennial social studies curricula. But in many urban schools, social studies teachers are seriously questioning the time and expense involved in rehashing the story of our Founding Fathers at the expense of neglecting the ongoing relevant issues and concerns of city students. Adhering to the Bicentennial theme and a reexamination of our Colonial experience should be a curricular priority

for the suburban, rural and urban social studies teacher. The city and the city dweller hold a very special place in the archives of our history, for the city reflects a total embodiment of our political, industrial, educational, social and spiritual institutions.

By using primary and secondary sources, and developing a community-based field program for students, the urban classroom practitioner can honestly investigate the historical role of the cities throughout American history without sacrificing current and futuristic issues and topics. For illustration, the following municipal problems confronting Colonial city folks during the period 1750 to approximately 1784 could be the basis of a unit of instruction or a mini-course where city problems and solutions to these problems are examined through mock town meetings and other interesting student-oriented and community-focused activities:

> Fire - Narrow streets and closely built houses with chimneys constructed from wood and clay were a constant cause of fire. Housing and chimney codes were passed and fire companies organized to fight fires.
>
> Sanitation - Because of swine and dogs running in the open, and rubbish and trash often thrown into the streets, sanitation and consequently disease was a serious problem. Fines were imposed and trash collection efforts were initiated in order to curb the problem.
>
> Traffic Control - Because of the many narrow streets and numerous carriages, wagons, and horses as well as people in the streets, traffic problems arose. Fines for racing and speeding were imposed, and efforts were made to provide for wider streets in new construction projects.
>
> Crime - Drunkenness, prostitution, and gambling were among the more serious crimes. In addition to laws for punishment, taverns were required to be licensed and often travelers or strangers in town were required to sign in upon entering town for proper identification.

Welfare and the Poor - The elderly, poor, and sick presented a mounting problem in the colonial town. Following the guidelines of the English poor laws, the colonists provided for housing, food, and clothing and general care for the needy. Private citizens and church organizations also assumed major roles in caring for the unfortunate.

Public Works - With a growing port city, highways, bridges, wharves, street lighting, and tree planting for parks and green areas became a major financial problem. Although private initiative was encouraged, taxes were levied for the purpose of constructing and maintaining public works.

Defense - Although a declining problem, the fear of Indian attack or general protection of the citizenry after dark was a municipal problem. Sentry groups of private citizens or military watches were somewhat effective.

At the conclusion of this unit, the student, as just one possible culminating activity, might by role playing or a written report respond to the following question:

> Assuming that you are the mayor of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1750: first, identify and explain at least five municipal problems confronting your town, and secondly, explain what laws have been enacted or established to solve these problems. If no law or regulation exists to meet the specific problem cited, as the mayor you must submit a brief solution in writing designed to meet the need.

The opportunities for a Bicentennial urban-oriented social studies program are numerous. By developing a sense of historical perspective, the urban social studies student should be better prepared to examine the issues and municipal problems of our great metropolitan centers today. The 1975-76 and 1976-77 school year presents a tremendous challenge to all teachers, especially the urban educator. The time to begin preparation is now!

Teaching about the American Revolution (2) or the American past is a challenge for any social studies teacher. Understandably, most students are

more concerned with their immediate lives and future aspirations than what happened in their city or town years and years ago.

Seidl comments "Studying local communities focuses the attention of students on how social issues and historical change have shaped their own lives, and uses the knowledge they already have about contemporary family life, architecture, and street patterns, and community institutions. The smaller and more comprehensible scale of local studies invites students to move to conceptual understandings through the rich detail and human experience that characterize everyday life that is local and particular, put together with learning objectives, powerful questions and appropriate teaching strategies, can engage students in looking at important social issues." (3)

Community Resources

People - Within any neighborhood or community, students can begin a Bicentennial program of study by talking with "old timers" and other local persons about the way it was in the good old days. There are many knowledgeable and articulate people very able and willing to share their observations and experiences with students. Hence, an investigation of the Colonial period can start with an understanding of the immediate past. On the campus of Shippensburg State College in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, an old one room schoolhouse was recently rebuilt and refurbished. The last teacher to teach in this "Little Red Schoolhouse" continues to conduct tours and lectures for visitors even though he has been retired for fifteen years. He talks about life in rural America and his experiences in the big cities of Philadelphia and Washington. Since his mother attended this same one room schoolhouse, his tales and stories reflect her adventures as a young girl as told to her son many years ago. Speakers like this grand old gentleman are available in

most communities. There are many agencies and associations within communities that can provide the names of local resource persons. Local and state historical societies, college and university speakers' bureaus, newspaper resource files, and public information offices and the Chamber of Commerce can provide names of local authorities.

Guide Books - Do you recall the last time you explored an old book store, flea market or attended an antique show? Chances are that while you were scanning over some dusty old volumes in the old books section or table, you saw guide books possibly dating back to the early nineteenth century. These "how to do it" books were extremely popular reading among city folks. Books on cooking, marriage, raising children, and even home medical remedies were widely read throughout the Colonies. By using these old guide books in social studies classes students gain a better understanding of family life styles, values and everyday problems during the early days of our Nation.

Television - It may seem odd to mention television during a review of community resources for Bicentennial social studies, but with the increasing number of Bicentennial television specials being aired as the Bicentennial celebrations begin, the social studies educator can view with students initial broadcasts or videotape selected shows for later viewing. Copyright laws should be reviewed before any extensive taping.

Novels - Novels written during or about the Colonial period or any special period in American history should be integrated into class discussion or projects. In cooperation with English teachers within the school, special interdisciplinary programs or even modest team teaching efforts can provide great learning dividends. Poetry, plays and art forms from the Colonial period with emphasis on local artists or writers can be most useful. Even

a modern play like "1776" can be acted out while studying the period in question right in the social studies classroom.

Newspapers - Available in bound volumes or on microfilm, newspapers from the past provide running accounts of issues and problems faced by early settlers within the town or region.

Municipal and County Court Records - Deeds, wills and other special inventories are in most cases a matter of public record, and therefore, provide another useful primary source of information. Records of local births, deaths, marriages, tax records, warrants and even the minutes from town meetings are excellent for study and review. While many courthouses have been destroyed due to fire or urban renewal, what remains as far as records can provide a rich store of information.

Diaries, Letters and Autobiographies - Established memoirs, letters and personal diaries were very common during the Colonial period. Collections in local libraries, historical societies and museums are fascinating references. Publishing firms and private foundations publish these first hand accounts and other worthwhile reminiscences. The May Morris Collection of Dickinson College includes the letters of John Dickinson, Benjamin Rush and others, and represents a readily available source of information and just plain gossip for local educators. Collections like this one are common at most colleges.

Maps - In addition to the more obvious repositories, many municipal and county offices still maintain old settlement maps and survey reports. Often these records are found in the basement of old churches and even private buildings. The Bicentennial urban social studies teacher need not be a super-sleuth or a James Bond type character, but a great deal of curiosity does help.

Town, City and County Histories - With or without special funding, many communities and counties are publishing beautiful Bicentennial volumes about local history and events. Often including previously unavailable photos and other memorabilia from private collections.

Travelers' Accounts - Local and state libraries and museums maintain collections of gazettes which provide facts about local communities and travel accounts written or compiled by early travelers from America and abroad, while traveling from town to town.

Physical City - Goldfield best describes the importance of exploring the physical city in the following statement:

> "Buildings, open spaces, and streets comprise the major elements for studying the physical city. Instructors, however, need not be bound by this division. Physical artifacts of urban life include buses, cable cars, and subways, as well as bridges and canals. Much of the dynamism and growth of New York City is mirrored in the iron, stone, and concrete of that engineering marvel, the Brooklyn Bridge. The physical city is versatile enough to adapt itself to the special qualities of a community. The three elements presented here merely represent the most common, not the only, physical examples of living history in the city.
>
> The students' analysis of the physical city is beneficial from three standpoints. First, study of the physical city involves an experience in the methodology and use of primary source material. Second, after a little reading, some poking around in local records, an attempt at oral history, and much observation and picture-taking, students should know more about urban growth and its impact on the community's citizens. The examples of specific urban problems that the instructor presented visually in conjunction with lecture material will facilitate this discovery. Finally, the study and recording of the physical city will generate a consciousness and appreciation for the living legacy of buildings, open spaces, and streets. Just as urban reformer Jacob Riis wanted his photographs to reclaim his subjects from anonymity and neglect, so too the student can transform a building or a park from a collection of stones or weeds to an urban asset and document. Historic preservation has transcended antiquarian interest to become a nationwide concern. It is a concern that can conveniently be brought into the classroom as an accompaniment to the urban photographic essay." (4)

Urban Social Studies Grants and Awards

The National Endowment for the Arts, The National Endowment for the Humanities, and The National Bicentennial Commission with assistance and support from state affiliates provide funds to all sorts of community based organizations for the purpose of conducting a wide range of Bicentennial projects and programs. Local institutions and citizen groups are encouraged to submit proposals for Bicentennial projects. Many private foundations including local historical associations also provide funds for community oriented programs. Social studies teachers should consider preparing proposals for projects which will give students an active role in some meaningful Bicentennial project. It is not necessary to be a professional "grants-person" in order to secure funds for a community or school project. There are opportunities in both large and small towns. A typical format for such a proposal is included in the Appendix.

Conclusions

Not all students live in New York, Philadelphia, Boston or other large cities with a Colonial heritage. Not every community can trace its beginnings back to the days of Washington, Jefferson and Franklin. But all communities, towns and neighborhoods can explore their rich and honored past whenever it begins. Not all students can enjoy a trip and tour of historic Williamsburg or Old Sturbridge Village or the historic section of the nearest big city. But in some refreshing manner, all students, regardless of grade level, can rediscover the early roots of their community and its people. Turner's Frontier Thesis emphasizes the importance of the frontier in the development and expansion of the American West, but it is still the city where all the real action is and always will be.

My wife and I reside in a ninety-nine year old townhouse in the historic district of Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Just down the street is the Molly Pitcher cemetery. The tombstones in the graveyard bear the mark of weather and wind. But the old grave markers are symbols of the past and hold a special mystery unique to this old community. The community around us, big city or small town, represents a goldmine of resources for a creative and inquiring social studies teacher. This is probably the most exciting time in our history and in our teaching careers. The time to begin planning for the Bicentennial is now!

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APPENDIX

A Proposal

to

The Public Committee for the Humanities in Pennsylvania

"Institutional Understanding Through Community Involvement:
An Examination of Institutional Priorities and
Concerns in Carlisle and Cumberland County, Pennsylvania -
The Establishment of the
Carlisle Citizens' Town Meeting Forum"

Submitted by

Dickinson College
Carlisle, Pennsylvania
Dr. Sylvester Kohut, Jr.
Project Director

September 1, 1975

An Introduction

The objective of this proposal is the establishment of a Carlisle Citizens' Town Meeting Forum (CCTMF) sponsored by Dickinson College with the cooperation of a Community Advisory Group. The CCTMF would commence in November 1975. The major purpose of the CCTMF would be to provide a series of ten consecutive weekly open community discussion programs focusing on the important humanistic dimensions of everyday life within the community.

The Theme

The CCTMF will present discussions which relate to a central theme: "Institutional Understanding Through Community Involvement: An Examination of Institutional Priorities and Concerns in Carlisle and Cumberland County, Pennsylvania."

A Need

In our problematic and divided world where day-to-day problems and conflicts seem never ending, there is a definite need for a forum whereby all citizens can meet to discuss and share ideas concerning critical community-oriented issues.

Historically, in our democratic society, the town meeting or town forum has been an important vehicle for community involvement and citizen participation. Unfortunately, since the turn of the century, with the advent of mass communication and mass transportation, the town meeting has been relegated to a secondary community activity. Now that our society is witnessing a period of nostalgia maybe this is the proper time to revise the "old town meeting" and openly discuss with knowledgeable citizens the problems associated with human frailties and societal conflicts.

Carlisle is an ideal location within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to revise the town forum and to develop a model in its original style. The rich and lengthy history of Carlisle is both a point of civic pride, and an item of note to the scholars of colonial America.

Edgar White Burrill expresses the meaning and need for the understandint and acceptance of different viewpoints which is the cornerstone of the traditional town meeting in the following:

> "There is a story of two Greek sculptors who competed for the placing of a statue on a pillar in the public square. And one worked skillfully and well, until the features of his figure were smoothed and polished to look as if living. But the other left his block of marbel crude and jagged and uncouth, so that one could hardly tell if indeed it were a human being at all. And they put the statue of the first up on the pillar, where all might see; but high up on the pillar it was blurred by distance, and it could not be seen clearly from any angle. So they took it down, and put up the other's, and, behold, that which had not seemed true to life was not in its right perspective, and became life-like and beautiful, true to the imagination."

It has long been a contention that communication, the most difficult of the arts, is the key to the improvement of the human condition. At a time in our country when many of our honored and most fundamental institutions are being challenged, there is a critical need for the implementation of a model for facilitating communication among citizens at the community level. All viewpoints must be examined from all angles and the town meeting format is a viable alternative worthy of retrial and experimentation.

As our Nation's tenth oldest institution of higher learning with a long honored tradition for excellence in the arts and humanities, Dickinson College is prepared to support the CCTMF with the cooperation of community citizens. By uniting the humanist and the lay citizen, the CCTMF should create a theatre for ideas which will bridge the gap between theory and practice, and differentiate myth from reality in matters concerning public institutions.

The Specific Objectives

The primary thrust of the CCTMF would be to serve as an open forum for the citizenry of Carlisle and neighboring Cumberland County communities to meet with representatives and spokesmen from the humanities to discuss issues relevant to the community-at-large.

Besides the open public meeting aspect, the CCTMF would function to initiate or facilitate:

-- Community action programs.
-- Educational information dissemination.
-- Humanistic, civic, cultural, medical, and legal enterprises.
-- College and community cooperation.

The target audience will vary depending on the specific topic or question under investigation at any particular meeting, but eventually all segments of the community will be involved in this humanistic enterprise. The CCTMF is designed to improve dialogue between young and old, black and white, men and women, liberal and conservative, educated and uneducated.

Stages of Organization

Initial funding by the Public Committee for the Humanities in Pennsylvania for the proposed CCTMF would provide for ten consecutive Thursday evening town meetings beginning in November 1975. Depending on the discussion topic, meetings would be conducted in various locations including Dickinson College, Dickinson Law School, United States Army War College, Cumberland County Court House, Carlisle Public Library, Carlisle Memorial Hospital, Carlisle Intermediate School, a selected Carlisle nursing home, and the Carlisle town square.

A Community Advisory Group will determine the topics for inclusion in the CCTMF in accord with the project theme, and will participate in the selection process for identifying and recruiting qualified speakers for the CCTMF. The Community Advisory Group is composed of ten community leaders who represent a cross-section of the community population including clergy, educators, and workers in local business, industry and government.

Academic and non-academic humanists from Pennsylvania and the nation will participate as panel members and resource persons in the CCTMF series with a moderator responsible for introducing the topic and the panel members. After brief introductory remarks the forum will be open to the public for questions and discussion. All viewpoints regarding a particular issue will be expressed by the selected guest speakers.

Following adjournment of each CCTMF, panel members and attending citizens will be served refreshments and informal discussions will continue.

Videotaped recordings, films and cassette tapes of selected CCTMF programs will be made by Dickinson College and distributed to interested community clubs, schools and institutions. Newspaper, television and radio publicity will be provided by Dickinson College's Public Relations Office.

Possible topics for discussion include:

Early Childhood Education: Daycare! Who Cares?
Welfare Programs - Help of Handout
The Aware Generation - Myth or Fact
Consumer Protection and the Law
Is There a Doctor in the House? - Medical Concerns in the Community
The Golden Years - Problems of the Senior Citizen
Environmental Understanding and Community Action
Tune In or be Tuned Out - A Look at the Media
Sex Education - Yes or No
People and Prisons
The Citizen Soldier
The Greening of Walden Pond - The State of the Humanities
Death at Any Age - The Psychology of Death

Community Involvement

Community involvement will be treated in [redacted] (2) distinct phases. A group, the Community Advisory Group, will be constituted. This group will work with area humanists to develop ten (10) programs of interest to a wide audience. Specific programs will be geared to specific audiences, but each program will have sufficient general appeal. Among those persons who will be invited to serve on the Community Advisory Group will be:

Mrs. Loretta Adderson, home economist.
Mr. Richard F. Dennison, businessman.
Major Edwin Nobis, United States Army.
Dr. John Holbert, Superintendent of Schools.
Mrs. Mary Fitts, AAUW.
The Rev. Joseph F. Braubitz, pastor.
Mr. Ronald Johnson, attorney.
Mrs. Teresa Rasch, nurse.
Mr. Robert Schlager, prison warden.
Mr. James Lesh, union leader.

The Community Advisory Group will work with the project director to insure that notification for programs reaches every aspect of the community.

The second phase of community involvement will involve humanists from the College and general community. These persons will assist in the development of topics chosen by the Community Advisory Group and will recommend qualified spokesmen to serve as panelists.

From the College community the following persons will participate:

Dr. George Allan, Dean of the College and former Fellow of the National Endowment for the Humanities.
Dr. Richard H. Wanner, Professor of Psychology.
Dr. R. Leon Fitts, Assistant Professor of Classics.
Dr. Frederick Ferre, Professor of Philosophy and former Fellow of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Evaluation

All participating humanists will be encouraged to publish monographs, essays, reports, or articles concerning their involvement in appropriate journals or prepare papers for delivery before suitable forums.

Questionnaires will be administered to the audience, and citizens will be encouraged to write letters-to-the-editor of local newspapers.

Interested community clubs, schools, or other organizations who view videotaped recordings of selected meetings will complete evaluation forms after viewings.

The Project Director will submit periodic summary reports and a final evaluation report to the Committee.