

FINAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web
(<http://historymatters.gmu.edu>)

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Report covering to July 1, 2000 to December 31, 2002

We have not only reached but exceeded many of our goals during the two years of this grant. *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web* (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu>) has continued to grow, expanding existing features and developing new ones as we work with teachers across the country and respond to their comments and needs. We completed a successful transition to a Linux server and to an open source database, ensuring greater security and longevity for the *History Matters* website. In addition to adding new annotated websites, primary documents, and scholarly website reviews, we have continued to develop the site overall to provide teachers and students with critical online resources.

Through active publicity, we have markedly increased our audience of high school and university teachers around the world. This has included postings to listservs and websites; email announcements; conference presentations; postcard mailings; inclusion in professional development seminars in New York City and nationwide; and word-of-mouth. Outreach efforts have included conference presentations and workshops on *History Matters* to the following organizations:

- South African National Cultural Heritage Training and Technology Program (August 2000);
- American Association of Colleges and Universities (January 2001);
- Wisconsin Conference on the Teaching of History (April 2001);
- National Council for Social Studies (October 2001);
- American Historical Association (January 2002);
- Organization of American Historians (April 2002);
- National University Telecommunications Network conference (June 2002);
- Japanese Association for American Studies (June 2002);
- North American Labor History Conference (October 2002);
- Fairfax County Public Schools In-service (September 2002, January 2003);
- Virginia Council of Social Studies Educators (November 2002);

- American Historical Association (January 2003);
- New York State Council on Social Studies (March 2003)

Outreach efforts have also included publication of three articles on *History Matters* (see Appendix A):

- “*History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*,” in *Social Education* (April 2001), the publication of the National Council for Social Studies;
- “Making History on the Web Matter in Your Classroom,” in *The History Teacher* (May 2001); and
- “Navigating the Past Online: New Media and History in the Classroom,” in *AHA Perspectives* (forthcoming, May 2003).

In addition, the *Social Education* article was republished in the California Association for the Gifted Journal, *Gifted Education Communicator* (Fall 2001). We have been invited to submit articles to several journals, including the Organization of American Historians *Magazine of History*, *The Public Historian* and the *Journal of the Association for History and Computing*, based on conference presentations, and will work on these in the coming months.

History Matters is also featured in the American Social History Project’s (ASHP) extensive professional development programs in New York City and across the country, providing information about the site and hands-on instruction to hundreds of teachers in over thirty New York City high schools. Hundreds of faculty members who participate in the New Media Classroom program in ten regional centers (ranging from Dillard University in New Orleans, LA, to Washington State University in Pullman, WA) are introduced to the site and encouraged to participate in forums and submit syllabi, lessons, and student work. This intensive work with teachers and the feedback they provide has helped shape many of the features on the site and guided development of new resources.

Publicity for *Talking History* online discussion forums consistently and effectively informed historians, teachers, students, and interested users of current *History Matters* activities as well as reminding them of the rich resources available on the website. To publicize the discussion forums, for example, we posted announcements each month on all relevant H-Net lists as well as the general announcement through H-Net. *History Matters* maintains a guestbook with more than 1,500 registered users. We emailed fall and spring forum announcements to all of these users, many of whom signed up to participate, as well as to the over one thousand college and high school faculty affiliated with ASHP’s professional development programs. The Center for History and New Media (CHNM) maintains email lists of interested teachers, historians, and the general public who also receive forum announcements. We sent email announcements to an additional 300 interested middle school and high school teachers, many of whom teach in Fairfax County Public Schools.

We worked extensively this fall to expand the *Talking History* audience among K-12 teachers, building on strong ties with school divisions through presentations and workshops. We also contacted social studies and curriculum coordinators in each school division in Virginia and sent postcards for distribution to all U.S. History teachers in the state.

The scholarly web reviews have become a regular, much anticipated, feature of *History Matters*. In collaboration with the *Journal of American History* (JAH) we continue to review approximately 25 websites per year. The reviews are co-published by the JAH and *History Matters* and appear in both venues. The latest batch of reviews appeared in the March 2003 JAH and are available online on *History Matters* (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/us/browse/wwwhistory/>), bringing the total to 46 archived reviews. Future reviews are in progress.

As an extension of these longer scholarly reviews, we were invited to produce audio web reviews for "Talking History," a thirty-minute weekly radio program that offers interviews with historians and writers. The show, co-sponsored by the Organization of American Historians, is broadcast on more than 400 stations nationwide. These web reviews, produced by the Center for History and New Media, air monthly and will further promote *History Matters* and the use of online history resources. "Talking History" began airing the web reviews in February 2003 and we plan to continue this feature. We are currently producing thirteen new reviews for 2003 and will revise the format as needed based on feedback from the initial airings.

During the past two years, we have made considerable progress on *WWW.History*, the annotated guide to the most useful websites for U.S. history and social studies teachers, exceeding our initial expectations in the grant proposal. Since the beginning of the grant, we have added hundreds of annotations, bringing the total number of websites annotated and publicly available to 700. In this process, we have reviewed more than 5,200 websites and selected only the highest quality resources for inclusion in *History Matters*. We continue to select and annotate new websites regularly and have an additional 75 websites approved for annotation. As noted in previous reports, in light of the rapidly changing nature of online resources, we shifted some of our efforts to reviewing and updating annotations that were more than one year old. We completed this process at the end of the summer 2001 and since that time have resumed writing new annotations. To help users evaluate the information we also added a field letting viewers know when the website was last visited and the annotation last updated. For example, an annotation might note that a site is under construction or that new documents on a certain topic will be added by a certain date. Knowing when this was written helps users evaluate the usefulness of the site for their particular needs.

Many Pasts has also grown rapidly, expanding from 150 documents to 1,000 and exceeding what was promised in the original proposal. Under the guidance of guest editor, David Jaffee, Professor of History at City College of the City University of New York, we added more than 150 new documents from the period before 1876. These primary documents range from an account of the 1530 Spanish exploration of Florida to letters from Kansas homesteaders dating from the 1870s. We have also added more than 175 new documents from the post-World War II era, including more than 50 oral history accounts. The oral histories range from Bayard Rustin's account of his 1947 civil rights campaign to the personal experiences of workers in the September 11, 2001, World Trade Center attacks. As requested by many teachers, *Many Pasts* now also includes images, such as cartoons, lithographs, posters, and photographs. In addition, the new *Making Sense of Evidence* section (see below) enhances this feature by providing teachers and students with the tools to read and analyze these primary documents.

Making Sense of Evidence (MSE), primarily funded through our alliance with the *Visible Knowledge Project* at Georgetown University, is a much-anticipated new feature of *History Matters*. The first five of the eight *Making Sense of Documents* guides on how to work with different kinds of historical evidence—oral history, maps, letters and diaries, numbers, and early films—are now available online (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/browse/makesense/>). The additional three guides—documentary

photographs, popular songs, and advertisements—are in final production and will be public by summer 2003. We have completed webographies for all eight guides.

The other central component of *MSE, Scholars in Action*, presents audio clips of “expert learners” analyzing different historical documents—cartoons, photographs, newspapers, letters, speeches, songs, house inventories, and short stories. Scholars illustrate the strategies they use, the questions they ask, and the additional sources they consult when trying to make sense of evidence. We have finished production for all eight guides:

- *Analyzing Political Cartoons* with History Professor Michael O’Malley (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/sia/cartoon.htm>);
- *Analyzing Blues Songs* with History Professor Lawrence Levine (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/sia/blues.htm>);
- *Analyzing Photographs* with Smithsonian Curator Frank Goodyear (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/sia/photo.htm>);
- *Analyzing Letters* with American Studies Professor Teresa Murphy (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/sia/letters.htm>);
- *Analyzing an 1804 Inventory* with Smithsonian Curator Barbara Clark Smith (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/sia/inventory.htm>);
- *Analyzing Abolitionist Speeches* with English Professor Carla Peterson (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/sia/speeches.htm>);
- *Analyzing a Melville Short Story* with English Professor Hans Bergmann (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/sia/melvillestory.htm>); and
- *Analyzing A Colonial Newspaper* with Smithsonian Curator Barbara Clark Smith (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/sia/newspaper.htm>).

Past Meets Present contains articles and resources that link the past with current issues and events. We have surpassed our initial goal of six essays and now offer eight. Our most recent essay explores the ways in which the film *We Were Soldiers Once* presents the past and how it fits into a Hollywood tradition of war films. Past topics include gun control, capital punishment, federal funding for “faith-based” social service programs, and the film *Thirteen Days* about the Cuban missile crisis.

The *Digital Blackboard* feature provides successful web-based, teacher-tested assignments from individual teachers, the *Journal of American History*’s new “Teaching the JAH” resource, the Library of Congress, and the National Archives and Records Administration. Project staff have developed, tested, and contributed lessons ranging from the use of visual evidence to statistical analysis of the slave trade. We have added many lesson plans in the past two years, bringing the total to 72, exceeding the initial goal of 70.

Syllabus Central provides annotated syllabi for the survey course that offer creative approaches to teaching with particular emphasis on using technology. We currently have 13 syllabi, meeting proposal goals, including one from the University of New South Wales that contributes to our efforts

to place the study of U.S. history within global contexts. We have expanded beyond the traditional U.S. survey course to include syllabi on the history of American women, America and the world, and immigration and ethnicity in U.S. history. We continue to solicit syllabi from teachers at the community college and college levels.

Students as Historians presents examples of the kinds of projects history students, from high school to graduate school, have accomplished on the Internet. We currently have 30 outstanding examples of student work and creativity, more than the goal of 25, including several oral history projects and local archiving projects conducted by high school students from across the country.

We have also worked to develop the *Secrets of Great History Teachers* and have reached our proposal goal of 13. We have worked over the past two years to interview a broad range of teachers and now offer interviews with great teachers at the high school, community college, college, and university levels. In addition to being posted on *History Matters* (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/browse/secrets/>), many of these have been published in *The History Teacher*. This process proved to be more difficult than originally anticipated, however, in part because the interviews we have completed exceeded expectations in terms of depth and breadth. Locating excellent teachers who have the time to participate in this lengthy interview process has been a challenge; several teachers agreed to be interviewed but were then overloaded with other commitments. We therefore adjusted the format slightly during the second year of the grant, conducting shorter interviews in order to accommodate these needs and reach more teachers. Our goal throughout the process was to select a diverse group of teachers who represent various grade levels, teaching situations, and experiences.

The *Talking History* forums remain a huge success with a steady increase in subscribers. We received funding from the *Virginia Foundation for the Humanities* to continue the forums for the 2002-2003 academic year. During the fall 2002 semester, we hosted forums on the History of Feminist Movements in the U.S. moderated by Estelle Freedman (September 2002); Using Material Culture to Teach U.S. History moderated by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich (October 2002); and the History of Early Settlement in the U.S. moderated by Alan Taylor (November 2002). During the spring semester, we hosted two additional forums on Teaching with Oral History moderated by Linda Shopes (February 2003) and Teaching the Civil War moderated by David Blight (March 2003). In September 2003, we will host a forum on Teaching the Civil Rights Era with Charles Payne as moderator. During the 2001-2002 academic year, we hosted Eric Foner on Reconstruction (October), Tom Bender on Internationalizing U.S. History (November), Christine Heyrman on Religion (December), and Linda Gordon on Families in U.S. History (March). The 2000-2001 topics included David Montgomery on Labor History, Alan Brinkley on the Great Depression and the New Deal, Fred Hoxie on American Indian history, Emily Rosenberg on U.S. imperialism, and James Horton on African-American history. These fifteen new forums, from 2000-2003, surpass the initial goal of nine.

The *Reference Desk* continues to serve as a gateway to quality websites for information on using new media in the classroom. Pre-screened, annotated links lead to valuable guides on citing digital resources, understanding copyright and fair use laws and how they apply to classroom practices, evaluating digital materials, and addressing national and state history standards. These resources help teachers sharpen their own skills and provide guidelines for student researchers. We plan to update this feature periodically.

Our historical puzzles, *Puzzled by the Past*, continue to draw a steady supply of responses and engaged participants. Over the past two years, we posted new puzzles regularly, including our current puzzle, "Testing History?" which asks visitors to assess standardized tests for history and social studies on how well they test student knowledge and understanding of the past. We currently have an archive of 19 puzzles (with answers) available for classroom use.

The number of visitors to the *History Matters* site has increased significantly since work on the NEH grant began in the summer of 2000. In fall of 2001, the average number of visitors (not hits) was more than 50,000 per month, almost double the number for the previous fall (27,000). In fall of 2002, the average number of visitors was more than 70,000 per month, an increase of 40%, and the average number of hits was 1,500,000. Among the reasons for the increase were: 1) the expansion of the site (including new features and more documents and annotations); 2) increased publicity efforts (such as announcements sent to all H-NET lists, journal articles designed for teachers, and conference presentations); and 3) increased traffic on CHNM and ASHP websites based on national publicity and high visibility of the *September 11 Digital Archive* (<http://911digitalarchive.org/>). While most visitors come from the U.S., the logs record visits from at least fifty different nations.

In fall 2002, the Center for History and New Media, whose servers maintain the *History Matters* database, embarked on a major system upgrade. Although this work was not funded by NEH, it allowed us to better serve teachers and students by providing a more robust, stable *History Matters*. We successfully transitioned from a Macintosh Web server running WebStar and a separate database server (using Filemaker Pro for the database and Tango to serve the data to the Web) into open source software on a Linux server. We created a MySQL database served by PHP on a Linux server and successfully imported all the data. This was a major and costly effort, but will insure long-term stability. The transition was successfully completed in January 2002 and the resulting year has seen almost no disruption of service. The Center for History and New Media will continue to host *History Matters*, providing stability and ensuring continued access for the teachers and students who have come to depend on the.

In sum, we believe that the project was a success. We made enormous progress during this grant: developing new material for the *History Matters* website, creating new features, expanding our base of regular visitors and reaching out to new audiences, and putting in place the mechanisms to continue improving the site after the grant period ends.

We would, of course, be delighted to provide more detailed information on our progress and would be happy to meet with NEH staff to present our work at any convenient time.