

Newsletter

(Affiliated with the Wisconsin Historical Society)

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FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE:

- **EIGHT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WIN '08-'09 ESSAY AWARDS. READ WINNING ESSAYS BEGINNING ON PAGE 3.**
- **THANKS TO DONORS FOR 'LABOR IN SCHOOLS' PROJECT. PAGE 2.**

Quotable:

"There is no doubt that workers of our past generations have spilled blood, sweat and tears to create the working conditions we have today. The least we can do to honor that sacrifice is to teach our students the importance of the labor movement and the collective bargaining process."

— **Rep. Andy Jorgensen at the Assembly Labor Committee hearing on April 8.**

SUPPORT SHOWN FOR TEACHING LABOR HISTORY IN SCHOOLS

A stream of testimony supported a bill to require the teaching of labor history in Wisconsin schools at a public hearing April 8 before the State Assembly Labor Committee.

Rep. Andy Jorgensen (D-Fort Atkinson), one of the authors of the bill, introduced the bill noting that "to understand where we are today with modern labor standards and working conditions, children must first understand from where we come. The 40-hour work week, the weekend, the better working conditions without physical harm or reprisal were not always a reality in Wisconsin. Events such as the Bay View Massacre in Milwaukee proves that workers have fought and died for the types of benefits we enjoy today."

Jorgensen reminded the committee that Wisconsin was at the forefront of many pivotal moments in worker history, such as pioneering the development of workers' compensation and unemployment compensation. He said the contributions of labor must not be left out of history.

He denied the opposition view that the bill would be an "unfunded mandate," noting that the Fiscal Bureau's impact statement showed only a minimal impact to school districts and none to the state. The bill permits districts to develop the teaching on its own, he said. His comments continued:

"By teaching our children the history of labor in America we are preserving our rich



Rep. Andy Jorgensen:
"...children must know from where we come."

labor heritage and insuring that future generations will understand why we have the eight-hour workday and why we are able to enjoy the weekends with our family and friends."

He also noted that the bill will provide comfort to those teachers and districts who would discuss labor history in the classroom, but feel it might not be popular. This bill says they can do it, he said.

Senator Dave Hansen (D-Green Bay), another author of the bill, recalled that the bill has been "around for quite a while" but failed to pass the full Legislature. He said that the requirement is straight forward and is

part of the "citizenship goals" of the current statute (Sec. 118). "We have to remember how we got here," he said. "The eight-hour day, the 40-hour workweek are things we take for granted, and they did not just come without the sacrifices of working men and women."

He noted that "union and non-union employees benefited from what went on in this state" in improving working conditions."

Hansen said that new workers entering the workforce today will face new challenges, such as globalization and down-sizing, and the knowledge of history will assist workers in responding to these new issues.

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EIGHT STUDENTS WIN LABOR HISTORY ESSAY HONORS

Eight Wisconsin high school students were named cash prize winners in the Wisconsin Labor History Society's annual Essay Contest for 2008-2009.

The winners are to be honored and announced at the Society's annual conference May 9, 2009 at the Neenah-Menasha Labor Temple, Neenah. They will receive awards ranging from \$100 to \$500. Students competed with a 750 word essay on "Unions Are Important to my Family and Community . . ."

Benjamin T. Plass, of Combined Locks, a senior at Kimberly High School, won the first prize award of \$500 for his essay on how important his father's union membership in Steelworkers Local 16 was to his life and the community. His father works at Neenah Paper's Appleton Mill. The union has been working to overcome the effects of the closing of nearby Kimberly Paper Mills, he wrote. Benjamin turned 18 on November 2, and states his pride in being able to vote for President two days later. He played four years on the Kimberly Papermakers High School football team, mainly as an offensive lineman. The team won two state titles in Division 2. In addition, he's a member of the school's trapshooting and bowling teams. He also helped to form the school car club. He works as a salesman for a nutrition store, and plans to enter Concordia College, Mequon, to study pharmacy.

Rebecca Schleicher, of Oostburg, a senior at Oostburg High School, won a second prize award of \$300 for her essay that compared the difference between working for union and nonunion employers, as well as the community services work performed by union members. Rebecca participates in the shotput in track and field at her school and is active in the 4-H Club and Future Farmers of America. She also performs much community service and works part-time for a sporting goods company. She plans on attending the University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh to study business administration.

Ariel Johnson, of Solon Springs, a sophomore at Solon Springs High School, won a third place award of \$200 for her essay about how her father's membership in the Plumbers Union has benefited her family. The essay also tells of the contributions of that union to the community. Ariel is a member of the cross country team and plays clarinet in the school band. She likes fishing, including ice fishing, and is planning on attending college.

Five students were awarded \$100 each for Honorable Mention awards in the contest. They were:

Melissa Ertl, a 10th grader at Park Falls High School;

Joshua Sigmond Elder, a 12th grader at La Crosse Logan

THANKS TO THESE SUPPORTERS WHO MADE CONTRIBUTIONS TO WLHS LABOR HISTORY IN SCHOOLS

Int'l Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 494	Milwaukee
Painters & Allied Trades District Cncl 7	New Berlin
Sheet Metal Workers Local 18	Milwaukee
AFSCME Council 24	Madison
AFSCME Local 171	Madison
Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers Loc. 6	Merrill
Communication Workers Local 4603	Milwaukee
Racine County AFL-CIO CLC	Racine
Spring City Machinists Lodge Loc. 1377	Waukesha
Stevens Point & Portage County CLC	Stevens Pt.
United Steelworkers Local 2-213	Green Bay
United Steelworkers District 2	Menasha
United Steelworkers Local 2138	Eau Claire
Wisconsin Laborers' District Council	DeForest
Bayfield County Employees	Washburn
Machinists Local Lodge 2073	Seymore
Int'l Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 14	Fall Creek
Lettercarriers (NALC) Branch 2	Milwaukee
Plumbers & Steamfitters UA Local 434	Mosinee
United Auto Workers Local 469	Oak Creek
United Steelworkers Local 904L	Sun Prairie
WI Federation of Nurses & Health Prof.	West Allis
AFSCME Local 1800	Green Bay
Sheboygan County Labor Council	Sheboygan
United Steelworkers Local 3245	Orfordville

Contributions from these groups totaled \$2,475, providing funds for the WLHS high school essay contest and National History Day awards.

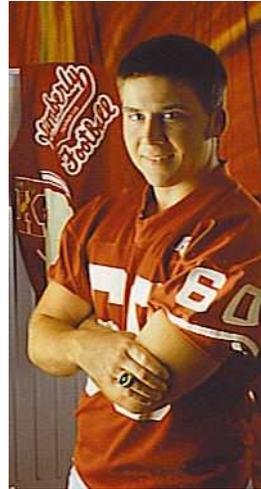
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**2008-2009 LABOR HISTORY ESSAY CONTEST
WINNERS**

Benjamin T. Plass

**Combined Locks
12th Grade
Kimberly High School**

**1st
PLACE**



When approached by my father to apply for this scholarship opportunity, I was compelled to think about all the important things that labor unions have done in the past.

This is a vast subject to think about, let alone to write about. So I decided to focus on how unions have affected my family, my community and, finally, my country.

My father has worked in a paper mill for a major part of his life. He has been a hard worker, first as a machine operator and, more recently as a journeyman millwright and pipefitter. For as long as I can remember, even far back into my childhood, I can remember seeing my father come home from work at "the Plant," as he called it, tired but happy. Happy for the fact that he had a job by which he could earn a living wage to support his wife and two growing boys.

If it weren't for unions fighting to protect the rights of simple working men like my father, it is certain that the middle-class working family would be extinct. This American staple would be replaced by the richer rich and the poorer poor, with a majority of the latter being unable to support their families with a single income.

My brother, a 20-year-old engineering student at UW-Fox Valley, earns enough money through the student summer-help program at a paper mill (the same one that my father works for) to pay for his tuition, and related college expenses. This enables my brother not to have to work during the school year so that he can focus on his studies, and spending time with his family. Programs like the summer-help program would be unheard of if it weren't for labor unions fighting for these supplemental-worker programs.

It is easy to see the importance of labor unions on my life, and my family's life, but what about my community? The Kimberly Paper Mill has been the glue that has held my community together since the town was established. Even the mascot of Kimberly High School is a Paper Wasp, called a Papermaker.

In recent history, the Papermakers of Kimberly High School have done very well, winning two state titles in football, back to back (of which I was on both teams), along with several other amazing accomplishments. These successes by one kind of Papermaker have been overshadowed, however, by the closing of the Kim-

berly Paper Mill. Over 600 jobs were lost, and families were uprooted.

I had the opportunity to attend a rally located in a park across the street from the mill. This rally was put on by the United Steelworkers, a union that my father, brother, uncle, and grandfather all belong(ed) to. Since the announcement of the closing of the Kimberly Mill, the United Steel-

workers have been fighting for a fair solution to this problem.

Along with Congressman Dr. Steve Kagen, and both Senators Herb Kohl and Russ Feingold, the union is giving the families of the 600 jobs lost a fighting chance of return to normal lives.

It just so happens that as I write some of this essay, Barack Obama is about to become the 44th President of our great United States. Coincidentally, my father is being inaugurated as the Vice President of United Steelworkers Union Local 16. Along with the help of his colleagues, my father will attempt to improve the quality of life for middle class working families in the Fox Valley.

Along with the help of his advisors, Barack Obama will be working to do the same for all working class citizens in the United States, working with unions and management to create jobs and increase wages to allow working families to survive and thrive once again.

I am aware that this essay is supposed to be about Labor History, but I believe that in this very day and age, we are making history. President Obama will prove to be the most historic president to date, and I am extremely happy to be involved in such a historic era, and so proud to be able to say that the first president that I voted for, two days after my birthday, was the 44th, and greatest president to date, Barack H. Obama.

Right now, thousands of men and women like my father are working collectively to improve the quality of life for the common man. These working people are not looking for a hand-out, just a hand up. These working people do not wish to be treated with favoritism, just to be treated fairly, and given enough opportunity for prosperity and the pursuit of happiness promised to them by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence. Because of this collaboration, my country, my community, and my family will all benefit. This is the importance of unions to me.

2008-2009
LABOR
HISTORY
ESSAY
CONTEST
WINNERS

Rebecca Schleicher

Sheboygan Falls
12th Grade
Oostburg High School

2nd
PLACE



What is a union? According to Wikipedia - a union is an organization of workers who have banded together to achieve common goals, mostly for wages, hours and working conditions.

In talking to people from both a union environment and non-union environment, I have found that they each have different views and perspectives of how unions affect their lives. The non-union employees feel that they do not need a union because their employer treats them well and gives them good wages and benefits. The union employees feel that if they had not bargained for a contract, which guarantees wages and benefits they would not be so well off. In our community, we have a mixture of companies some that are union plants, some non-union, and the union plants set the standards for other companies to follow. Non-union plants in order to compete for the workforce have to pay comparable wages not only to keep the workers they have but also to entice people to work for them. The influence that unions have regarding this is that more people are able to find jobs that pay them a living wage. They are more inclined to spend their dollars in the community for food and entertainment ensuring that other people have work also. Good paying union jobs allow people in my community to purchase homes and automobiles.

My grandfather worked in a union shop and also served on the Executive Board for many years, my mother worked in a union shop for 30 years, 16 of those years she was the recording secretary for her local. She was and still is the Chairperson of their Community Services Committee. My father was also involved in his union before his plant closed down. To my family the union has been a huge part of our lives, we know that to work in a union shop there are rules that have to be followed. There is some type of job security, that seniority is very important. The union ensures that they cannot be fired or let go without just cause. Procedures are set in place to protect their working environment. Union's strive for better working conditions, reasonable hours to that help all people in our community. When I read more into the working

conditions in the early part of the century you can see how important unions were at that time and how many hurdles had to be jumped to get to the environment that we now have. The struggles that our ancestors went through to make better working conditions were many. Unfortunately, not too many people hear these stories, unless they are doing research for a report, or they have great storytellers in their family, they only see what is happening now. They do not care about the past. Many take the union and their officials for granted.

Many unions have members who are very active in the community volunteering for various organizations, such as Salvation Army, United Way, food pantries, domestic abuse shelters, paramedics and so on. The impact of unions with these organizations are huge and very often overlooked and under recognized. As union members are bonded together they organize many fundraisers to help the less fortunate, they have a good network system that gets communication out without costly advertising. Example: a band raiser was held years ago for a former union member and family friend who had cancer. My mom went to her union meetings and explained what was going on. The word got out about this fund raiser and people started volunteering to help, collect door prizes, sell tickets etc. An escape artist offered to entertain along with a band at no charge, the local canning company donated corn on the cob for roasting. Over \$11,000.00 was collected in one day. A community came together to help a fellow member. UAW locals throughout our state have joined together to reach out to people across the state they acquired volunteers to help with special Olympics, they recruit workers to ring the bell for Salvation Army, organized a campaign to raise awareness of the importance of signing organ donor cards over 50,000 donor cards were signed in one year. Prove of the matter is if a union is involved in a project it usually is quite successful mostly because of the type of bond these workers have with their co-workers and other union members within the community. The union is important to my family for getting them a living wage and supporting our community.

Ariel Johnson

Solon Springs
10th Grade
Solon Springs HS

3rd
PLACE



2008-2009
LABOR
HISTORY
ESSAY
CONTEST
WINNERS

Unions are important to my family and community for many reasons. Many of my family members are in the Union. My dad is a Union Plumber, my grandpa is a retired Union Electrician, and my brother is an apprentice for Union Plumbing. The Union provides many people with good paying jobs that include benefits. These benefits are health insurance, a job as an apprentice while going to school, and many other benefits. It would be very hard for the U.S. to function without a Union. Unions keep the entire economy going, even during tough times like we are experiencing today.

The Union has helped my family in many ways. I am allergic to bee stings and have been getting shots to weaken the reactions. Every week I have to go to the doctor and receive shots. But because my dad works for the Union, he has good health insurance and we are able to afford shots that could save my life. I am also on thyroid medications. Normally, these cost about \$ 100, but because of the good health insurance my dad has through the Union, we only have to pay about \$10 for them. My brother and I are able to go to doctor appointments, seek medical help when needed, and maintain a healthy life. This is because the Union gives my dad health insurance. We can afford these things that others who aren't in the Union may not have. Health benefits are just one of the many benefits of being in the Union and having a Union.

Unions also give its workers good dental insurance. This is a good thing and has helped my family in a couple ways. I had braces when I was younger and my younger brother is going to get braces. We also see the dentist a couple times a year. This is a good thing because it keeps our teeth healthy so we don't have to live in pain because of toothaches. Luckily, we can afford to get dental care because my dad has a union job. Unions help my family in many ways.

Unions offer paid vacations and holidays off. This is important to many people, especially parents, who want to spend time with family during the holidays. My dad spends every holiday with us because he works for the Union. Union workers can take a vacation every now and then, and don't have to worry about not having a good paycheck. The Union is very

different from other jobs because of the paid vacation and holidays off, but this is a good thing because then families can spend time with each other during the holidays.

The Union has helped my community and surrounding communities in many ways. Union workers build new buildings for the community, run businesses, and give many people good paying jobs. Good paying jobs allow the country and communities to continue running. Without money, stores would rapidly close and the economy would crash. Unions also have more secure jobs than other jobs. For example, the U.S. will always need teachers, plumbers, electricians, welders, and other Union jobs. Jobs that aren't part of a Union, such as family owned businesses, might not always have work. This will put people out of business and those people won't have money to spend. If this happened a lot, the economy would crash. Unions keep the economy running because they give people jobs.

Unions give people good retirements. Without this, people might have to work until they died. My grandpa was able to retire from being a Union Electrician and is able to live happily with his retirement. He was able to receive this retirement only because he was a union worker for many years. My dad is planning on retiring in the near future and won't have to really worry about how to survive because he has a retirement plan. Unfortunately, because of the stock markets and the way the economy is going, he may have to work longer than he expected. But thankfully, because he is a union worker, he will be able to retire.

There are endless reasons why Unions are important to my community, my family, and to the economy. Mainly, they keep workers and their families healthy and they keep communities and the economy working. Unions give its workers benefits, paid vacations and holidays off. Without Unions, the United States would not be as organized and functional as it is. Union workers are also better trained than other workers. The Union trains its workers to be efficient and hard working so the jobs are functional. Unions are a very crucial to the U.S. and play an important role in many peoples' lives.

LESSONS FROM LABOR HISTORY NEEDED FOR TODAY'S WORKERS

(Continued from page 1)

He referred to the commentary of Prof. James Green of the University of Massachusetts who said that teaching of labor history is important because it "teaches the history of ordinary citizens achieving extraordinary things and it's the inspiration we must pass on to our young people."

While there was no testimony opposing the bill, three Republican members raised concerns about AB172.

Rep. Stephen Nass (R-Whitewater) said he was

**AB 172 OK'D FOR HOUSE
VOTE; THEN SENATE TO ACT**

The Assembly Labor Committee passed AB 172, the bill requiring the teaching of labor history and collective bargaining in the schools on April 16, sending it to the full assembly for approval.

The bill also is expected to be considered by the State Senate; it's companion bill number is SB 135.

There are Democratic majorities in both houses of the Assembly, making it more likely the bill will pass, Ken Germanson, WLHS president, said, but he warned that it is important that interested persons contact their own State Legislators to assure its passage.

Sponsors of the bill include Senators Dave Hansen of Green Bay, Robert Wirch of Pleasant Prairie, Jon Lehman of Racine, Russ Decker of Schofield, Lena Taylor of Milwaukee, Jon Erpenbach of Waunakee, Pat Kreitlow of Chippewa Falls and Jeff Plale of South Milwaukee; and Representatives Andy Jorgensen of Ft. Atkinson; Josh Zepnick of Milwaukee, Christine Sinicki of Milwaukee, Chris Danou of Trempealeau, Barbara Toles of Milwaukee, Terese Berceau of Madison, Tamara Grigsby of Milwaukee, Jeff Smith of Eau Claire, Steve Hilgenberg of Dodgeville, Richard Spanbauer of Oshkosh, Spencer Black of Madison, Peter Barca of Kenosha, Donna Seidel of Wausau, Gary Sherman of Port Wing, Mark Pocan of Madison, Tom Nelson of Kaukauna, Mike Sheridan of Janesville and Joe Parisi of Madison.

concerned that the passage of the bill would "open the door" to other groups seeking special mention in the standards, such as demands to teach the history of the military, agriculture or police and firefighter protection. Nass also said that the subjects for teaching should be up to the individual districts, while not burdening the districts with other requirements.

Jorgensen responded that as a former teacher he said such issues as military history and agriculture is already being taught.

Rep. Mark Honadel (R-South Milwaukee) also questioned the merit of the bill, indicating labor history is already being taught and urging the teaching of "capitalism" in the schools.

Rep. Don Knodl (R-Germantown) questioned the wisdom of passing the bill, indicating that students are not getting enough math and science and that "to mandate another issue that will take time away from those issues."

Rep. Christine Sinicki (D-Milwaukee), chairperson of the committee, clarified the bill, noting that it would not involve teaching a whole semester on labor history, and that the teaching of labor history would be included within the regular curriculum of the schools. Jorgensen agreed noting that "nothing else should be pushed off the table and it should be a part of something that is already happening."

Ken Germanson, president of the Wisconsin Labor History Society, testified on behalf of the Society and the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO.

Displayed along with his testimony was a large photograph of the Bay View Rolling Mills, the site of the May 5, 1886 Bay View Tragedy when seven persons were killed by state militia guns during a march on behalf of the eight-hour day. The framed picture was held by a staff person from the office of Rep. Sinicki, in whose office it is hung.

He said the teaching of labor history is more important than ever because of the current economic crisis, noting that that passage of the

(Continued on page 7)



Sen. Dave Hansen (D-Green Bay) said labor history shows ordinary people can do extraordinary things



Rep. Christine Sinicki, chairperson of Assembly Labor Committee, seeks action on passing bill

IT WAS NEVER TAUGHT, IS TESTIMONY

(Continued from page 6)

Wagner Act (also known as the National Labor Relations Act) in 1935 may have been the most critical piece of action in restoring the economy during the Great Depression. He said the bill gave workers the right to collectively bargain for the first time, spurring the growth of unions and helping to add more purchasing power to the pockets of working people.

Germanson noted that Section 118 currently mandates teaching of cooperatives and focusing on Hispanics and American Indians. He said that there are 375,000 workers in Wisconsin currently in unions, constituting a large number of persons.

Labor history shows that "ordinary folks can get together to change things," he said.

Other presenters included::

Tim Dineen, Evansville, state director of the United Transportation Union, said that it's important to open the minds of students through discussions and debate. He noted the need for unions to protect the railroad workers, who still do not have an eight-hour day.

Thomas Bennett, Milwaukee, president of Teamsters Local 200, said teenagers may know all about Chris Brown, but know Cesar Chavez only as a street in Milwaukee. He said young people do not know about his Farmworkers Union which is important because migrant workers still work in Wisconsin. Teaching labor history in the schools will help to overcome the negative thinking about labor. He noted the passage of the Davis-Bacon Act has been important for keeping wages fair for construction workers.

(Continued from page 2)

HIGH SCHOOL ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS NAMED

High School:

Erin Scharenbroch, a 12th grader at Portage High School;

Adam Cooper, a 12th grader at Portage High School; and

Aliyya Terry, a 12th grader at Rufus King High School, Milwaukee.

Entries are accepted from high school students throughout the state, and judging is done by a committee of Wisconsin Labor History Society members. Harvey J. Kaye and Andrew Kersten, both professors of history and social change at University of Wisconsin - Green Bay,, judged the essays.

Donations were received from many local unions and labor councils to fund the costs of running the contest and the awards. The WLHS has been running the contest for 28 years. In addition, the funds are used to sponsor awards for the National History Day statewide program for those entries featuring labor.

Peni Keeling, vice president of UAW 72 in Kenosha, noted she is a fourth generation autoworker. She said unions serve as "a legitimate voice" for working people, since no other institution enters into the workplace where people spend more than half of their waking hours. "No other institution could express the concerns of working class Americans," she said. She said unions assisted in making workers a greater part of their community in many way; she cited support of the civil rights movement provided by workers and their unions.

"We are a great part of American history and of Wisconsin history and it should be taught in the schools," she said.

Thomas Strickland, of Teamsters Local 662, Green Bay, said that his own children rarely get information in schools about unions. The children think that the benefits have "always been there."

Brian Kennedy, Milwaukee, president of the American Federation of Teachers, recalled his own background, noting that his immigrant grandfather had been involved in mineworker unions in Pennsylvania and the autoworkers in Ohio. He said students rarely get a full understanding of how the economic system works if they do not know about unions and the collective bargaining process.

Mike Williquette, of Teamsters Public Sector unions, said youngsters don't know about Teamsters, AFSCME or WEAC, and they should know about unions. He said it was "shameful for anyone to vote against this bill."

Judy Burnick, former business manager of Local 35 OPEIU, noted she grew up in a labor family and joined her father on picketlines of Steelworkers. She recalled helping to organize Blue Cross-Blue Shield office workers and recalled working with many young people, fresh out of school, who had no understanding of the unions. She recalled they claimed they "could do it on their own." They felt they didn't need unions until they got into trouble and then they would begin to realize. "They really need to be exposed to both sides, so that they can make a choice once they get into the workplace," Burnick said.

Her daughter, **Rose**, of Richfield, a 2006 graduate of Hartford Union High School, said that during her schooling she was taught in many areas and provided all sorts of information. "However, Hartford never brought up the history of labor and labor history or mention of unions. I was brought up with my mom and that was how I learned about labor."

She also noted that young people fail to understand their rights in the workplace, and teaching of labor history and collective bargaining would change that. "We really don't know what to do" as young workers, she said.

To view this testimony in a video or sound format go to: http://wiseeye.org/wisEye_programming/ARCHIVES-asm_committee09.html#1983.

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**Dedicated to preserving the
history of Wisconsin workers
and their unions**

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NEWSLETTER
For Members
And Friends

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In This Issue:

**Read the essays
of the winners of
the WLHS annual
High School labor
history essay
contest.**