

Sophie Hardt (15)

10th Grade

Homeschool

(916) 802-5336

sophiebean06@gmail.com

Local History: Handing Students the Key to Their Future

History is the story of how a place came to be; its origin, its hardships, its triumphs, all circumstances and decisions leading to the present moment. History is commonly viewed as the events that took place decades ago, but the truth is that history is happening *now*. There is no better example of this than the year 2020. Economies, communities, and lifestyles around the world were completely reshaped just in the last two years by the coronavirus pandemic. Across America, our nation is experiencing “the great migration” as people flee oppressive states with restrictive laws, high taxes, and high costs of living. Many see Texas as the modern day manifest destiny because its ideals and history align with the constitutional premise of the right to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”. As opportunities decrease in other states due to the laws they’ve set in place to address the pandemic, Texas’ rich history should be well understood and respected by all who settle here if our community is to have a promising future. Learning and honoring the local history of the great state of Texas will keep the communities of Collin County flourishing.

In 2020, businesses all over the country were completely shut down in an effort to prevent the spread of coronavirus and COVID-19. Business owners struggled to support themselves and their families. Job opportunities decreased significantly and many were permanently lost. The shut-down lasted longer in some states than others. On March 2, 2021, Governor Abbott issued the reopening of the state of Texas (DSHS). With the dissolution of mask mandates, Texas allowed its citizens to choose the best preventative practices for themselves rather than dictate the precautions they should be taking as individuals. Restaurants were reopened at lower capacities as early as May 2020 and all businesses could operate at full capacity by March 2021, should they choose to do so. California, by comparison, allowed partial reopening of restaurants in places July 1, 2020. However, in places like Los Angeles County,

those restaurants were permitted a reopening period of a mere 90 minutes, before they were shuttered again for a second shutdown lasting well into 2021 in many places (Valles, Eater). In other California counties, reopenings lasted just a few months; better than 90 minutes, but not nearly enough time to give local businesses a chance at revival. The freedom to operate and patronize businesses caught the attention of many living in states with significant restriction, thus painting the Texas government as more supportive of their personal rights.

The importance of religion cannot be overlooked at any point in history, and certainly not in the recent past that is 2020. “Research shows that the Bible was the primary source of ideas for early Americans. It was their instruction manual for building a civil society.”(Kamrath). America’s currency, landmarks, and ethics are all deeply rooted in Christianity. Texas is a part of the bible belt and home to many communities that put their trust in God. Collin County is no exception. Proof of this lies in the establishment of the First Christian Church in McKinney. In April of 1848, two years after Collin County’s founding, the First Christian Church was established. The group that began the church originally practiced their prayers in their own homes. In hopes of starting a real church for the town, they trekked to the county seat of McKinney, “[...] desiring that the first institution in the town be a religious body,” (First Christian Church). The First Christian Church still exists today, spreading their message just as faithfully as they did in 1848. The pandemic has increased religious faith in Americans and many churches in Texas, much like the First Christian Church in McKinney, have seen an increase in attendance (Pew Research Center). The same cannot be said for California, whose state government seriously restricted the ways they were allowed to worship. Singing – a part of worship that remains favored by many – was strictly prohibited. For a country whose founding ideals include freedom of religion, this filled people with fierce indignation (Duerr). In Texas,

Governor Abbott claimed religious services were essential and left the manner of worship to the discretion of the congregations (Davila). Here in Collin County, one will discover a large community that places their trust in God, just as our predecessors and founders trusted Him to assist in the development of our country.

At the start of the pandemic, schools across the country closed for in-person instruction. Children were sent home with laptops and the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year saw classrooms moved online. The lack of in-person instruction and regular socialization between friends and peers resulted in major setbacks, both academically and emotionally. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) estimated that the learning loss for the 2019-2020 school year was roughly 5.7 months (Cross). The social lives of teenagers were completely decimated. Lack of contact with peers led to serious mental health issues in adolescents all over the country (Sparks). From April to October of 2020, the number of adolescents ages 12 to 17 who visited a medical center for mental health assistance rose by 31 percent (Sparks). Despite all information pointing to students' learning loss and decline in mental health, a number of states across the U.S. ordered school campuses to remain closed. States like Texas made the choice to reinstate in-person instruction. Children in Texas now have the freedom to study and interact alongside their peers, resulting in great improvements to academic learning and overall mental health.

History is happening now. It is important to learn what has happened — what *is* happening — in places around the world, but the events taking place in other countries don't necessarily impact our daily lives. National history is important to study because the principles upon which our country is founded influence our belief systems and guide many of our goals. Yet it is local history that shapes our lives daily, determines where it is most beneficial to work and attend school, and as last year has shown, determines if we can even worship freely. In the

last 18 months, local elected officials of many states and communities have made decisions that steer population growth towards certain places and away from others. The laws made by our local governments have played a massive role in the population growth of Collin County and Texas as a whole. The success of the communities established here relies on students' understanding of who leads their local governments and what beliefs they hold. Students should be able to recognize and support elected officials whose beliefs align with their own. Additionally, they should be able to recognize when communities are flourishing or floundering and the reasoning behind its success or failure. All of these skills are best taught through the study of one's local history. The history we teach today will provide guidance to future leaders and give voters the information needed to elect strong leaders. Most importantly, it will give students the tools they need to shape the future of their own communities.

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