On October 17, 2012, the National Museum of American History (NMAH) partnered with the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), WETA television, and Smithsonian Affiliations to present the National Youth Summit on the Dust Bowl. The program, related to Ken Burns’s film The Dust Bowl, connected thousands of high school students and united them in a national dialogue regarding the Dust Bowl’s legacy on both the environment and the culture of the United States. Students discussed the importance of environmental awareness and the effects humans have on the natural world. In recognizing the Dust Bowl as an ecological disaster of primarily human origin, young people worked together to imagine ways a similar catastrophe could be avoided.

Together, students generated ideas about how each of us could be a responsible steward of the delicate environment in which we live. Students left the Summit with a better understanding of the Dust Bowl and the role of science and citizens in national policy.

Modeled on the successful Summit presented on the Freedom Rides in 2011, the National Youth Summit on the Dust Bowl included a live webcast from Washington allowing young people to engage with a distinguished panel of experts to discuss the history and legacy of the Dust Bowl. In addition to the students in the live audience in Washington, the program brought together students in Regional Town Halls at ten museums around the nation. Students who participated in the webcast then discussed local environmental issues with experts at each museum. PBS affiliate television stations around the nation filmed students at each of the Regional Town Halls, providing videotaped questions for the national panel and a short film documenting the program. Thousands more students watched.

26,795 students and teachers participated in the National Youth Summit live webcast as registered participants. Attendees joined in at 1165 separate locations representing 45 US states and 8 foreign nations including Canada, Thailand, Israel, United Kingdom, Haiti, Hungary, India and Italy.

2,100 students participated in the program at the National Museum of American History and at Regional Town Halls at ten museums around the country.
the Summit in their schools and homes and engaged electronically over the internet.

The “dust bowl,” words coined by an Associated Press reporter in 1935 to describe the southern plains that rain had forsaken, was one of the worst man-made ecological disasters in American history — in which the heedless actions of thousands of individual farmers, encouraged by their government and influenced by global markets, resulted in a collective tragedy that nearly swept away the breadbasket of the nation. It was a decade-long natural catastrophe of Biblical proportions, encompassing 100 million acres in Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico — when the skies withheld their rains, when plagues of grasshoppers descended on parched fields, when bewildered families huddled in dark rooms while angry winds shook their homes and pillars of dust choked out the mid-day sun.

It was an epic of human pain and suffering — young children struck down by “dust pneumonia,” self-reliant fathers suddenly unable to provide for their families and mothers unable to feed them, followed by the largest exodus in the nation’s history, as 2.5 million desperate Americans left their homes and faced an unknown and often cruel future.

And it is also the story of heroic perseverance; a study of the roles and limits of government; and a morality tale about our relationship to the land that sustains us — a lesson we ignore at our peril.

Students learned the history of this important episode in American history, but they also looked to the present as they discussed crucial issues that face the nation today. The Summit inspired students to explore the choices we have and the consequences that follow in production of food, fiber, fuel, housing and infrastructure.

Recorded LIVE:
National Youth Summit on the Dust Bowl
http://americanhistory.si.edu/nys/national-youth-summit-dust-bowl
The National Youth Summit on the Dust Bowl had a strong online presence, before, during, and after the webcast itself. The Summit was promoted through various social media sites and covered by numerous news outlets. Taking advantage of new media opportunities broadened access to the Summit and the story and lessons of the Dust Bowl.

**The Dust Bowl internet videos**

**Click on the image to view the video.**

- National Youth Summit Promotional Video
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--wc9zslvLY

- Biotechnology and Agriculture: Interview with Mallory Warner
  - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dE_UhaU8nRQ

- Mercury News video about Steinbeck Center program

- Technology of the Dust Bowl
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQsj5RJ0318
The best tweets and Facebook posts related to the summit can be found here http://storify.com/amhistorymuseum/dustbowl-edited

The Dust Bowl on Twitter

Two of the museum’s Dust Bowl tweets were among the most popular and most clicked of the museum’s tweets in October 2012. On the day of the Summit the #DustBowl hashtag on Twitter was mentioned 296 times.

People on Twitter were excited to see their questions answered:

Super pumped that one of my students’ questions was asked to the experts at the #DustBowl youth summit!

Oh my goodness - @KenBurns just answered my online question…feeling honored #DustBowl

There were thoughtful tweets about the environment:

@amhistorymuseum Trees are a valuable piece of the ecosystem. You cannot destroy them and think that the world will just go on. #DustBowl

The overall response on Twitter to the summit was very positive:

National Youth Summit was great and extremely informative. #DustBowl

@NEHgov @CaraSantaMaria @KenBurns @amhistorymuseum Thank you for workshop, we had HS students interested in history & conservation attend.

@amhistorymuseum yr tweets r coming to my phone here in Suffolk uk! I love US history
# Interactive and Print Articles

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Moderator – Cara Santa Maria is the science editor for the Huffington Post and has taught university and high school biology and psychology. Her research interests range from clinical psychological assessment to neuronal cell culture techniques and the mechanics of neurogenesis in the zebra finch. Her passion for science education has led to appearances on Larry King Live (CNN), Parker/Spitzer (CNN), Geraldo at Large (Fox News), I Kid (TLC), as well as a pilot for an HBO science program that she co-produced and hosted.

Ken Burns is a celebrated American documentarian who gradually amassed a considerable reputation and a devoted audience with a series of reassuringly traditional meditations on Americana. Burns’ works are treasure troves of archival materials; he skillfully utilizes period music and footage, photographs, periodicals and ordinary people’s correspondence, the latter often movingly read by seasoned professional actors in a deliberate attempt to get away from a “Great Man” approach to history. Like most non-fiction filmmakers, Burns wears many hats on his projects, often serving as writer, cinematographer, editor and music director in addition to producing and directing. He achieved his apotheosis with “The Civil War” (1990), a phenomenally popular 11-hour documentary that won two Emmys and broke all previous ratings records for public TV.

Cal Crabill, who survived the Dust Bowl growing up in Holly, Colorado, near the Kansas border, is featured in the Ken Burns film The Dust Bowl. A naval navigator in WWII, Crabill worked briefly for Walt Disney Studios and later attended UC Berkeley on the GI bill. He taught high school math for more than 30 years and co-authored three best-selling textbooks, one of which is still used today. After retiring, Crabill built homes — three for himself and dozens for Habitat for Humanity — and plays trumpet in a big band orchestra.

Roy Bardole is a 5th generation farmer from Rippey, Iowa. Along with his two grown sons (Peter and Tim) and his wife Phyllis, Roy farms about 1,400 acres of soybeans and corn. An innovative and progressive farmer Roy was an early adopter of precision and no-till practice. He is active in the promotion of American soybeans domestically and internationally serving as the Chairman of the United States Soybean Export Council and a Director of the United Soybean Board.

Deb Peters is a research ecologist for the Agricultural Research Service of the USDA in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Peters works to improve the science of predicting and preventing ecological disasters. Peters’ research area is the Southern Plains, where the Dust Bowl took place. Some of her research projects include: Management Technologies for Arid Rangelands and Rangeland Management and Technologies. She has written many articles on the topics of managing grassland ecosystems, wind erosion, and the effects of climate change and the possibilities of reversing desertification.

Glenn Roberts is the founder of Anson Mills in Columbia, South Carolina, which grows and mills one of the most diverse collections of heirloom grains in America. In 1998, Glenn followed a dream to resurrect the antebellum Southern cuisine that comprised the Carolina Rice Kitchen, by founding Anson Mills. He began by producing a 30 acre crop of the nearly extinct Carolina Gourdsseed White corn, a species that had dated back to the 17 century. After extensive research on growing and milling practices of the antebellum era, Roberts has managed to resuscitate over a dozen heirloom mill corn species, as well as Carolina Gold Rice and “Thirteen Colony” Red May wheat.
Sonoma County Museum
Santa Rosa, CA

Sixty students participated in the museum’s program, developed in collaboration with KRCB Television. After the national webcast, the museum organized a panel discussion with local experts.

VIDEO: Sonoma – Dust Bowl
National Youth Summit
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMZAaUL5ljw&feature=youtu.be

Heinz History Center
Pittsburgh, PA

The museum separated students into groups and had each group read a different article and draw conclusions for their calls to action. They then had a larger discussion with all the groups contributing different ideas to the conversation. The museum’s panel discussion explored wide-ranging environmental issues presented by experts on the Donora Smog and local “fracking,” and also the head of the Rachel Carson Institute at Chatham University.

“The speakers today have opened my eyes to a new view of how drilling and the use of pesticides affect the environment.”
**REGIONAL YOUTH SUMMITS**

**The Durham Museum**
**Omaha, NE**

A large group of 245 students from two Nebraska high schools attended the museum’s program, produced in collaboration with Nebraska Educational Television. An additional 350 students at one of the high schools who were not able to attend the museum program due to class conflicts watched the program from their auditorium. One week before the Summit, more than 550 students watched a preview of *The Dust Bowl* film and attended a presentation by Nebraska historian Barb Mohrman, who related her family story of living through the Dust Bowl in Nebraska.

**Student video question:**

*I'd like to know how surviving the Dust Bowl as a child affects the way you perceive the world today?*

**Museum of the South Dakota State Historical Society**
**Pierre, SD**

The museum, working with South Dakota Public Television, held a panel discussion at the South Dakota State Capitol building attended by 40 middle and high school students. An additional 40 students planned on attending but due to a strong windstorm they were unable to make it. The town hall included discussions about the recent drought and past flooding on the Missouri River. The panel included Presentation College historian Dr. Brad Tennant, South Dakota State Climatologist Dr. Dennis Todey, and Eric Stasch, Director of the Oahe Dam.

**VIDEO:** Nebraska - Dust Bowl National Youth Summit
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Li8SeADJkeQ&feature=youtu.be
History Colorado
Denver, CO

At History Colorado, which worked in collaboration with Rocky Mountain PBS, 134 students from five middle and high schools had the opportunity to engage with a distinguished panel including: Kristin Maharg, Program Manager for Colorado Foundation for Water Education; Einar Jensen, Life Safety Educator at South Metro Fire Rescue Authority; Adrianne Kroepsch, doctoral student in environmental studies; and Ryan Vachon, Director of Earth Initiatives affiliate with INSTAAR (Institute for Arctic and Alpine Research). Before the PechaKucha-style program, the students were asked to vote on what they considered to be the most critical environmental issue in Colorado: water, wildfire, climate change, or hydraulic fracturing. Students knew the least about hydraulic fracturing. After the presentations and the Q&A, students again were asked to vote. This time hydraulic fracturing was voted most crucial, demonstrating the effectiveness of the engagement activity in educating students on a new and important topic.

Rocky Mountain PBS — created a Facebook album for the Youth Summit that included photographs and video from the event.
http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10151251913747279.503094.8716402278&type=3

VIDEO: Denver – Dust Bowl National Youth Summit
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1oOmpzwElQg&feature=youtu.be

Student video question from History Colorado: How do you pick the stories and how do you get people to talk to you about their stories?

Fort Worth Museum of Science and History
Fort Worth, TX

The Museum of Science and History, working with Texas PBS, hosted a panel discussion featuring the museum’s curator of history, a specialist in the American West, and a specialist in Environmental Science. Fifty-six local high school students participated in the lively and engaging discussion.

Video question from Fort Worth student

Student video question: How preventable was the current drought?

VIDEO: Texas PBS – Dust Bowl National Youth Summit
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xj2TbG0jk4U&feature=youtu.be
**REGIONAL YOUTH SUMMITS**

**Miami Science Museum**
**Miami, FL**

The museum, in partnership with WPBT Television, hosted over 100 students from two middle schools. The town hall meeting focused on the Everglades, climate change, and effects on coastal environmental systems. Students explored these topics with an engaging panel including Dawn Shireffs, the Everglades Restoration Manager from the National Parks Conservation Association, meteorology professor Dr. Benjamin Kirtman, Dr. Jayantha Obeysekera, Chief Modeler from the South Florida Water Management District, and Maria Beotegui, a park ranger and education and outreach coordinator at Biscayne National Park. The session was moderated by meteorology PhD candidate Angela Colbert.

“It was a great experience!!!! The entire day was engaging to the pupils and very balanced – from interacting with the gallery exhibits, the local forum, and finally the Dust Bowl teleconference. The students did not want to leave. You provided the best type of learning experience – hands on, thought provoking, and relevant. Thank you for the invitation!” Silvia Balsinde, Centennial Middle School

**VIDEO:** Program at the Miami Science Museum
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilP_V2w_02fs&feature=youtu.be

**Oklahoma History Center**
**Oklahoma City, OK**

The museum hosted a local panel discussion attended by 45 students after the national Summit webcast. The panelists included Dr. Kenny Brown, professor and historian, Dr. Doug Hurt, professor and historical geographer, and Jason Harris, public historian and museum educator. The students and scholars explored the impact of agriculture on the local environment, factors causing migration out of Oklahoma during the Dust Bowl, changes in agriculture, current trends in farming, and the impact of the current drought on farming families. After the panel discussion students went on an exhibit tour of the collections related to the Dust Bowl era.

Oklahoma students watching the live national webcast
Students from Illinois and Iowa participated in a panel discussion with local experts before watching the national Summit webcast. They related their local watershed issues in the Mississippi River to the Dust Bowl. The local experts speaking with the students were Dr. Richard Shultz, a professor from Iowa State University who spoke about riparian ecosystem management, and Eric Schmechel, a watershed coordinator for the Catfish Creek watershed who spoke about local watershed practices that can be done by individuals.

Student Question:

Why is it important to study history, and what value do documentaries add to our understanding of historical events?