PS1 for 1/7/88#ATTACKS ON THE BICENTENNIAL COMMISSION

The (BF)New York Times(end BF) has made available many of its column inches to several academic historians who attacked the Commission on the Bicentennial of the Constitution because it allegedly failed to produce ""serious scholarship on works of lasting value'' and instead focused on ""public relations extravaganzas.'' These complaints are really just sour grapes from Ph.D.-types who are upset that they haven't been able to get government grants to write treatises and hold scholarly gab sessions which the private sector (and even universities) won't finance because the prospective audience would be so limited.

These complaints from academicians also include petty sniping at the chairman of the U.S. Bicentennial Commission, former Chief Justice Warren E. Burger, whom they accuse of convening ""secret meetings appropriate to the Central Intelligence Agency.'' That is really rather silly because every action and document of the Bicentennial Commission is readily available to anyone under the Freedom of Information Act.

Chairman Burger properly took the position that the celebration of the Bicentennial should NOT be the exclusive property of Ph.D.s, professors and lawyers, but should be primarily a celebration shared by all Americans. People who have no interest in reading what academicians and scholars write have just as much stake in the Constitution as those who do.

Because the Commission has focused on public consciousness-raising about the greatness of the U.S. Constitution and why it has lasted for 200 years, the Bicentennial observances have been shared by millions of Americans. This public awareness campaign has been extended by 50 state commissions, 1,400 local commissions, and 100 federal agencies, plus the impressive privately-financed activities of 2,000

organizations, schools and colleges.

Most of the Bicentennial participation has a learning component as well as public awareness-raising. It is teaching people to read, study and appreciate the Constitution and its enduring greatness.

More than ten million copies of a pocket Constitution have been distributed. Chairman Burger hopes that all Americans will have their own copy of the Constitution, be familiar with its provisions, and be able to cite and discuss it easily.

The Commission's principal educational project is the National Bicentennial Competition, a six-week course for grades 10-12 designed to make the study of the Constitution a more important part of the high school curriculum. Millions of high school students are currently involved in this program all over the country.

The educational grants given out by the Bicentennial have gone exclusively to develop curricula on the Constitution for elementary and secondary schools. It is clear from numerous school surveys and public opinion polls that our number-one task is to remedy widespread ignorance of the American people about what is in the Constitution.

The privately-financed educational projects include the high school essay contest sponsored by (BF)U.S.A. Today(end BF) which drew 13,000 entries. The American Legion ran an oratorical contest on the Constitution, and West Publishing Company conducted an essay contest for law students.

Vignettes about the Constitution were printed on 100 million cereal boxes and on 59 million milk cartons. McDonald's printed 16 million tray liners that carried educational quizzes.

The goal set by Chief Warren Burger for the work of the Bicentennial Commission was to have ""a history and civics lesson for all of us.'' In that, the Commission has been outstandingly successful, despite sniping from those who would rather criticize than

cooperate.

The Advertising Council developed a first-rate ad campaign for television, radio and newspapers spotlighting many of the constitutional liberties unique to America. The tag line was ""The Constitution -- the words we live by.'' Some $25 million in advertising space was donated to carry these public service ads.

In its peak months of the summer and fall of 1987, the Bicentennial was generating newspaper pieces at the rate of more than 30,000 per month. There are, of course, hundreds of interesting constitutional controversies that people can discuss and debate. In this land of free speech, they have every right to argue about constitutional cases and issues, and to finance and publish those discussions. It is not the mission of the Bicentennial Commission, however, to get involved in current controversies.

The Constitution Bicentennial celebrations have really only just begun; they will extend through the Bicentennial of the ratification by Virginia of the first Ten Amendments on December 15, 1991, the final step in making the Bill of Rights part of the U.S. Constitution. The Bill of Rights Bicentennial may receive even more public attention, as public interest builds through the Bicentennial years.