

GEORG IGGERS, 1926-2017

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Georg Gerson Iggers, a world-renowned historian, well-known for his expertise in historiography, and co-founder of the International Commission for the History and Theory of Historiography, passed away in Buffalo, New York, on November 26, 2017. He was ninety years old.

Born into a Jewish family on December 7, 1926 in Hamburg, Germany, Iggers received his early education there until twelve. He recalled that he had had a relatively happy childhood in the city, in spite of several episodes of anti-Semitism. Yet as the Nazi government intensified its persecution of the Jews, the Iggers family decided to leave the country for the United States. They arrived in New York in October 1938, narrowly escaped the infamous Kristallnacht. A couple of months later, the family was relocated in Richmond, Virginia where Iggers continued his education. He attended University of Richmond, majoring in French and Spanish literatures. Having suffered racial discrimination as a child in Germany, Iggers was appalled by the racial segregation in American South and sympathetic for the African-American experience.

After graduating from University of Richmond in 1944 at age seventeen, Iggers went to study at the University of Chicago. He received his M.A. at the German Department a year later and then spent a year at the New School for Social Research in New York; the period was considered by him “the most valuable of my career as a student.” Returning to Chicago, Iggers made his decision to focus on modern European intellectual history. It was also during that time he fell in love with Wilma Abeles, a fellow graduate student at the University who, like him, was also Jewish and had left Europe and settled in Canada. The two married in 1948 and lived together for nearly seventy years.

Having taught at University of Akron for two years, the Iggers moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, and taught at Philander Smith College, a college founded in 1877 for African-American students. They quickly involved themselves in the Civil Rights Movement, taking several actions to demand equal treatment for black students at both secondary and college levels. As members of NAACP, they played leadership roles in the struggles for ending segregation in Little Rock Central High School and unequal employment in the city’s school districts. Then Iggers taught at Dillard University, another historically black institution in New Orleans, where he continued his fight against racial segregation. On one occasion, when he and his children were riding a city bus in New Orleans, Iggers refused to sit in the front rows of the bus with other white passengers to protest unequal treatment of the blacks.

In the midst of his civil rights activities, Iggers conducted fruitful research on European intellectual history and historiography. His first book, entitled *The Cult of Authority; the Political Philosophy of the Saint-Simonians* (1958), was based on his doctoral dissertation which he completed for the Committee for the History of Culture, an interdisciplinary program, at University of Chicago back in 1951. From the early 1960s, he published several important articles in such leading journals as the *American Historical Review*, *History and Theory* and *Journal of Modern History*. His "The Image of Ranke in American and German Historical Thought," which appeared in *History and Theory* in 1962 and was immediately translated into several foreign languages, remains today a seminal reading for anyone interested in Rankean School, and modern historiography in general. Supported by the American Philosophical Society and the Guggenheim Foundation, Iggers and his family, in the early 1960s, returned to Europe for researching and writing his *German Conception of History*, where he met several key intellectual figures of the time, such as Fernand Braudel, Herbert Butterfield, Karl Popper, Isaiah Berlin, Geoffrey Barraclough and Gerhard Ritter. He also went to Hamburg, his birthplace, and saw his grade schoolteacher. From then on, Iggers frequently visited and sojourned in Europe, especially in Germany, where he did his research and writing, developed life-long friendships with many scholars, promoted academic exchanges and, more importantly, helped improve cultural and scholarly relationships between historians in West and East Germany before the country's unification in 1990.

After the Civil Rights Movement achieved a marked progress in the mid-1960s, the Iggers family left the South. After two years of teaching at Roosevelt University in Chicago, Iggers moved, in 1965, to teach as Professor of History (later Distinguished Professor of History) at the University at Buffalo (then State University of New York at Buffalo) till his retirement in 1997. He published two significant books on German and European historiography: *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (1968; 1983) and *New Directions in European Historiography* (1975; 1984). Appearing in several languages after their publications, both were received exceedingly well in historical communities around the world. As an internationally recognized authority on the study of historiography and historical theory, he co-founded, with Charles-Olivier Carbonell (France), Lucian Boia (Romania) the International Commission for the History and Theory of Historiography (ICHTH) in 1980. In 1982 by working with other distinguished scholars, Iggers cofounded the journal *Storia della Storiografia*. While based in Italy, the journal publishes articles on the history and theory of historiography also in English, French and German. Through ICHTH, *Storia della Storiografia* and other venues, Iggers reached out to scholars not only in East and West Germany but also Eastern Europe and Asia, including Bianca Valota Cavallotti (Italy), Andrzej Grabski (Poland), Hans Schleier (GDR), Karl-Georg Faber (FRG), Wolfgang Mommsen (FRG), Jürgen Kocka (FRG), Jörn Rüsen (FRG), Jerzy Topolski (Poland), Zhang Zhilian (China), Masayuki Sato (Japan), Antonis Liakos (Greece) and many others. During 1995 and 2000, Iggers served as ICHTH president.

Indeed, from the 1980s, Iggers expanded his research and lecture trips from Euro-America to many other parts of the world. His first visit to China, for example, took place in 1984, hosted by Qi Shirong at Capital Normal University (then Beijing Teachers College), where he gave a series of lectures on several campuses throughout the country. Around the same

period onward, Iggers also visited Japan and Korea. Having authored the internationally acclaimed *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (1997), which he first wrote in German, Iggers later coauthored, with Q. Edward Wang and Supriya Mukherjee, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (2008; 2017), which represented his genuine interest and earnest intention to transcend Eurocentrism in historiographical study. The book has now appeared in Chinese, Japanese, German, Greek and Russian. To the same goal, Iggers and Wang also coedited *Turning Points in Historiography: A Cross Cultural Perspective* (2002) and *Marxist Historiographies: A Global Perspective* (2016). Iggers thus was instrumental in transcending Eurocentrism by globalizing the field of historiography.

For his academic achievement and remarkable role in bridging over the then divided Germany, Iggers was awarded First Class Cross of the [Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany](#) in 2007. Toward the last few years of his life, Iggers visited Cuba twice, in hopes of integrating Cuban historians with the historical communities at large. Iggers is remembered not only as an outstanding scholar, but also a caring, warm and remarkable teacher and mentor to his students and friends. He was also a good husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather, loved by everyone in his family. He is survived by his wife Wilma, his sons Jeremy, Daniel, Jonathan and their families.