

SPECIAL FEATURE

NATIONAL HISTORY DAY 2009 PRIZE ESSAYS
*Introduction**

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NATIONAL HISTORY DAY is an annual, yearlong program in which students learn historical research, analysis, and communication skills. Using both primary and secondary sources, students in grades six through twelve research topics related to an annual theme. Working individually or in groups of up to five students, they present their findings in creative museum-like exhibits, dramatic performances, or in multimedia documentaries. Entrants in the research paper category work individually, producing a scholarly paper accompanied by an annotated bibliography. Students compete in district or regional contests, with the top winners advancing to the state competitions. Each year, the competition culminates with the National History Day finals, held in June at the University of Maryland. At each level, groups of judges evaluate the entries and provide students with positive feedback. The judges are usually history professionals: educators, public historians, and archivists. The 2008-2009 contest focused on the theme: "The Individual in History: Actions and Legacies."

During the 2009-2010 school year, National History Day invites students to research topics related to the theme, "Innovation in History: Impact and Change." The theme is broad enough in scope to encourage investigation of topics ranging from local to world history. To understand the historical

* Editor's Note: *The History Teacher* publishes annually the Senior and Junior Division prize-winning essays from National History Day, exactly as chosen in the competition, with no editing according to *THT*'s usual format.

importance of their topics, students must ask questions of time and place, cause and effect, change over time, and impact and significance. They must ask not only when events happened, but also why they happened and what impact they had. What factors contributed to their development? Regardless of the topic selected, students must not only present a description of it, but also draw conclusions about how their topic affected individuals, communities, nations, or the world.

Students investigating this year's theme should think of it in broad terms. The theme of innovation in history is complex. Students must select their topics carefully because "innovation, by definition, involves some sort of change, but not all changes are innovations," note the NHD instructions. The NHD also advises students to examine the historical context of the innovation that they choose to study. In particular, "establishing historical context means showing what economic, political, social, technological, cultural, religious or other circumstances existed before, and perhaps contributed to, the innovation of interest." The theme is an important one, so topics should be carefully selected, and developed in ways that best use students' talents and abilities. Then students may create documentaries, exhibits, papers, and performances for entry into National History Day competitions.

History professionals around the country provide archival research ideas and assistance to teachers and students. Local and state historical societies, as well as state offices of the National History Day organization, are excellent starting places. Teachers and students should also consult the National History Day web site for further information about this year's theme as well as for potential topic ideas. The web site may be found at <http://www.nationalhistoryday.org>.

The History Teacher congratulates all participants in the National History Day contests. One again, this year we are pleased to publish the prize-winning essays of the Senior and Junior individual paper categories, chosen as finalists in the 2008-2009 National History Day competition. We congratulate Samvit Jain, winner of the Junior Division Individual Paper competition and Laura Ball, winner of the Senior Division Individual Paper competition. As before, these papers are published, unedited, in their prize-winning format, as submitted to the National History Day organization.