NATIONAL HISTORY DAY 2015 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 2014-2015 contest focused on the theme: "Leadership and Legacy in History."

During the 2015-2016 school year, National History Day invites students to research topics related to the theme, "Exploration, Encounter, and Exchange in History." The theme is broad enough in scope to encourage investigation of topics ranging from local to world history.

To understand the historical importance of their topics, students must ask questions of time and place, cause and effect, 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 carefully about what the terms "exploration," "encounter," and "exchange" mean. This will help students to begin the process of brainstorming about possible research topics with a clear framework. Once students have created a list of possible topics, they should think carefully about the second part of the prompt which calls for an analysis of the consequences (including the successes and failures) of their historical event. The NHD notes that this is such an exciting theme because there are so many topics available for study. Moreover, 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 2014-2015 National History Day competition. We congratulate Caroline E. Katzive, winner of the Junior Division Individual Paper competition and Anna J. Stoneman, 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.