

National History Day

1997 Supplement:

Triumph & Tragedy in History

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Information about the 1997 National History Day competition may be obtained from National History Day, 0119 Cecil Hall, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland 20742. Telephone: (301) 314-9739. fax: (301) 314-9767. E-mail: hstryday@aol.com. Visit them on the World Wide Web at <http://www.inform.umd.edu:8080/CampusInfo/Services/guest/nhd>

National History Day, which occurs annually in June, is the culmination of a series of contests at successively higher levels. Throughout the school year, students engage in extensive research of primary sources to prepare papers, projects, performances, and media presentations based on a historical theme. Themes are broad enough in scope to encourage investigation of topics ranging from local to world history. During the 1996-97 school year, National History Day invites students to research topics related to the theme "Triumph & Tragedy in History."

To understand the historical 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 did events happen, but why did they happen. What factors contributed to their development? What was the impact or lasting influence in history? How did this topic change the course of events? What effect did it have on a community, society, nation, or the world?

For National History Day 1997, students are encouraged to select an individual, idea, or event and demonstrate how and why their topic was a triumph and/or a

tragedy in history. A student may choose to focus on the discovery of penicillin as a historic and medical triumph. Or students may decide to study the tragic impact of the Great Russian Famine of the 1890s. In these cases, the subject could be presented as either triumph or tragedy.

Students should keep in mind, however, that often the same topic can be viewed as both triumph and tragedy depending on the experience of the participants, the perspective of historians, and the passage of time. One person's triumph was often another person's tragedy. For example, the American Civil War was a great triumph of the North over the South, of unionism over sectionalism, of freedom over slavery. But the war also took a terrible toll in human lives, caused widespread destruction, and left a legacy of bitterness. In all wars and military encounters there are social disruptions and material costs—winners triumph and losers experience tragedy.

Securing the peace can be as difficult as winning the war. The year 1997 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Marshall Plan which resulted in the United States sending billions of dollars in food and equipment to Western Europe as its na-

tions struggled to overcome the economic devastation and tragedy of World War II. Was the Marshall Plan a triumph for the western European nations that participated? Was the Marshall Plan an economic triumph for the United States? Was it a political triumph? Why or why not? How did the Marshall Plan differ from the reconstruction plans of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe?

While military topics may seem to be obvious choices because of the generally clear line between winners and losers, triumph and tragedy may be explored in a wide variety of historical contexts. Students who are interested in ancient history might create a project that examines the architectural triumph in the building of the Parthenon in Athens and the tragedy of its use as a military arsenal and fortress in the centuries that followed. A performance might be developed that examines the life of Julius Caesar and his triumphant rise to power as well as his role in undermining the Roman Republic. Was his assassination considered a triumph or a tragedy by his contemporaries? By historians? Or students might produce a media presentation which interprets the destruction of Pompeii when Mt. Vesuvius erupted as a

tragedy for the people caught unaware, but a triumph for archaeologists almost two thousand years later who excavated the civilization preserved in lava.

Students interested in historic places might want to explore places in their own communities that possess tragic and triumphant associations. Whitman Mission National Historic Site, for example, tells the story of Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, their Methodist mission in southwestern Washington, and their massacre in 1847 by Cayuse Indians. Whether tragedy or triumph depends on one's perspective. Other National Park Service sites that reflect these opposing themes are Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site in Atlanta, which chronicles Dr. King's triumphant rise to national prominence and his tragic death in Memphis; Little Big Horn National Monument in Montana where Sioux and Northern Cheyenne led by Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse defeated George A. Custer in 1876; and Booker T. Washington National Monument in southern Virginia which illustrates Washington's rise from slavery to become founder of the Tuskegee Institute and one of the foremost black educators at the turn of the twentieth century.

An individual can affect a historic development that is both a triumph and a tragedy. Gandhi led India to independence with his strategy of passive resistance triumphing over violent protest. But the victory of anti-colonialism was accompanied by the tragedy of Moslem-Hindu conflict. An individual can also experience public triumph and personal tragedy. Frederick Douglass, a slave, experienced the triumph of escape and freedom, becoming a distinguished lecturer on abolition and equal rights for blacks. But in his daily life Douglass continued to suffer from the tragic legacy of racism.

The world of politics and foreign policy is filled with examples of triumphs and tragedies. A paper might be written which examines the effect of Japanese colonization of Korea between 1910 and 1945 and the subsequent acrimony between the two nations. A media presentation might be produced that explains the appeasement

policy of the British and French toward Adolf Hitler in Germany during the late 1930s and the tragic consequences that followed. Or a project might be created which analyzes Benjamin Franklin's success in gaining French recognition for American independence in 1778 and the consequences of French military assistance during the Revolutionary War.

In migration and immigration there were those who triumphed over the odds and others who met tragic fates. In the settlement of the American West, for example, pioneers struggled against elements, the land, and sometimes each other to carve new homes and communities out of the wilderness. Conversely, Native Americans fought the pioneers' encroachment onto the land and the changes in their livelihoods and culture brought by the advance of white settlement.

Students who are interested in sports might develop a performance which dramatizes Wilma Rudolph's struggle to overcome personal tragedy and historical circumstances to triumph as an Olympic athlete. Or a student who is interested in civil rights issues might write a paper that analyzes the efforts of the Freedom Riders to register African-American voters in the early 1960s and the eventual passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The history of technology includes scores of topics related to triumph and tragedy. A comparison might be made between the San Francisco earthquakes of 1906 and 1989. How did the tragic consequences of the 1906 quake contribute to new knowledge in engineering and design that helped to lessen damage in the 1989 disaster? Another topic for study might be the efforts of the Wright brothers in their attempt to create the "flying machine," or Chuck Yeager's role in breaking the sound barrier. Students who are interested in inventions might consider investigating the development and impact of the telephone by Alexander Graham Bell or the light bulb by Thomas Edison. What makes one inventor triumph while another fails?

The theme is a broad one, so topics should be carefully selected and developed in ways that best use students' talents

and abilities. Whether a topic is a well-known event of world history or focuses on a little-known individual from a small community, students should be careful to place their topics into historical perspective, examine the significance of their topics in history, and show development over time. Studies should include an investigation into available primary and secondary research, an analysis of the materials, and a clear explanation of the relationship of the topic to the theme, "Triumph & Tragedy in History." Students should pay special attention to the possibilities of triumph and tragedy within the same subject. Then, students may develop papers, performances, media presentations, and projects for entry into National History Day competitions.

Topics Related to:

Triumph & Tragedy in History

The following is a list of possible topics for investigation in preparation for National History Day 1997. The list is not inclusive; rather, it provides a starting point for teachers and students to begin brainstorming ideas for National History Day entries. Some of the most exciting and interesting topics are local in nature. Students should be encouraged to look for topics in their own communities. Whether students choose to create papers, projects, performances, or media presentations, they must be sure to place their topics into historical perspective and context and analyze the significance and impact of their topics in history.

Exploration/Expansion/Conquest

- The Triumphant and Tragic First Voyage of Christopher Columbus
- The Trail of Tears
- Native Americans and the Tragedy of European Diseases
- Families in Struggle and Triumph on the Oregon Trail
- The Triumph and Tragedy of the Roanoke Settlement
- Manifest Destiny and the Native American Tragedy

- Triumph and Tragedy at the Ancient City of Pompeii
- The “Discovery of America”: Triumph for Columbus, Tragedy for Native Americans
- The Louisiana Purchase
- The California Gold Rush

War and Peace

- A Tragic End for the Triumphant Black Soldiers at Fort Wagner
- New Technology in World War I Produces Tragic Results
- William Penn: Planting the Seeds of American Pluralism
- The Treaty of Versailles: the Bitter Fruit of Peace
- From Pearl Harbor to Midway: Turning the Tide of War
- The Battle of the Crater: a Triumph of Engineering and a Tragedy of Leadership
- The Return to the Philippines: General Douglas MacArthur
- The Surrender at Appomattox: One Man’s Triumph is Another’s Tragedy
- Lake Erie: Decisive Battle of the War of 1812
- The Easter Rising of 1916 in Ireland
- SALT: a Triumph for Peace
- The Generation of ‘98: Spain’s Melancholy After the Spanish-American War
- The Fire Bombing of Dresden: Triumph for the Allies, Tragedy for German Citizens
- Pancho Villa and his Triumphant Fight for Mexican Independence

Politics and Foreign Relations

- Bosnia: A Balkan Tragedy
- The 38th Parallel: a Line Between Triumph and Tragedy
- Richard M. Nixon: a Triumphant and Tragic Presidency
- Fidel Castro: Social Triumphs and Tragedies in Cuba
- Nelson Mandela’s Triumphant Return to Power in South Africa

- A Dream Deferred: Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations
- The Cuban Missile Crisis: a Near Tragedy Becomes a Triumph
- The Marshall Plan and Western European Reconstruction
- Joseph Stalin and the Purge of Russia
- Surprising Triumph: Truman Defeats Dewey

Social/Cultural

- Wilma Rudolph: Overcoming the Odds
- Jewish Immigration and the Creation of Israel: Triumph for Israelis, Tragedy for Palestinians
- The Freedom Rides and the Campaign for Voting Rights
- Chinese Immigrants and the Building of the Transcontinental Railroad
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Triumphant Highs and Tragic Lows
- Jonestown: the Tragedy of Religious Fanaticism
- Billie Jean King: a Role Model for a Movement
- Frederick Douglass: a Triumphant Life Born of Tragedy
- Amelia Earhart: a Triumphant Life Ends in Tragedy
- The Mormon Migration
- Daisy Bates and her Triumphant Effort to Integrate Little Rock High School
- The Chicago Black Sox: Baseball’s Tragedy
- Dorothea Dix and Mental Health Reform
- The Triumph of Women’s Relief Agencies During the Civil War
- Biddy Mason Triumphs Over Slavery and Racism
- Vincent van Gogh: Portrait of a Tragic Man
- Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad

The Environment

- Triumph in the Face of Tragedy:

- Relief Efforts After the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake
- The Hoover Dam: Triumph or Tragedy for the Environment?
- Chico Mendes and the Rubber Tappers: Triumph and Tragedy in the Brazilian Rainforest
- Rachel Carson and her Triumph Over Pesticides
- Metropolis in the Desert: the Engineering Triumph of Bringing Water to Los Angeles
- The Johnstown Flood: Small Triumphs After a Large Tragedy
- Ocean Fishing and Over-Fishing: Economic Necessity or Environmental Tragedy?
- Reconstruction After the Great Chicago Fire
- Power to the People: the Tennessee Valley Authority

Economic/Labor

- The Homestead Strike
- Conquering Fear: America Fights the Depression
- The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire and Labor Legislation: Triumph From Tragedy
- The Pullman Strike
- The Progressives Fight Against Child Labor
- The Triumph of the “Brazilian Miracle” Leads to the Tragic Debt Crisis

Science and Technology

- The U.S. Space Program: Triumphs and Tragedies
- Polio: Tragic Disease, Triumphant Vaccine
- The Invention of the Cotton Gin: Economic Success With Tragic Consequences
- The Construction of the Panama Canal: Engineering and Political Triumph
- The Development of Nuclear Power and the Consequences of Nuclear Accidents

- Sputnik: Soviet Triumph Motivates American Space Program
- Three Mile Island: the Pursuit of Power in a Fragile Environment
- Egyptian Pyramids: Architectural Triumph Built on the Tragedy of Slave Labor
- Henry Ford and the Assembly Line
- Triumph Over Darkness: Thomas Edison and the Electric Lightbulb
- John P. Holland and the Submarine: a Technical Triumph

Bibliography

The following bibliography prepared by National History Day is not all inclusive. It is meant to serve as a place for students to begin their research. Students will need to conduct extensive research and investigate primary as well as secondary sources. They should be encouraged to consult not only their own school library, but also their public libraries, archives, and museums. Students who choose local history topics should investigate community sources and conduct oral interviews when possible. Students should be made aware that resources for investigating historical topics include songs, fiction and poetry, and works of art and architecture in addition to books, documents, and manuscripts.

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