

## National History Day 2014 Theme

# RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN HISTORY

This year's theme, Rights and Responsibilities in History, is broad. This means you can choose a topic that allows you to explore your own interests, whether it's science, politics, the arts, education—you name it. Inspiration can come from most any place: local history, your textbooks, or perhaps recent headlines, TV shows or even the latest Twitter feed. As a student, it's your right to find a topic that you want to find out more about, but you also have responsibilities: to choose carefully and develop your NHD project in ways that best use your talents and abilities. Listed below are some examples of different kinds of projects that address this year's theme.

Let's think about this year's theme. What are rights? Are responsibilities always attached to rights? Are there times when rights protect some while disenfranchising others—and is that fair? Do we have economic rights? Are civil rights upheld at the same level for everyone in the United States? What are our rights as global citizens? And what about animal rights—do humans bear responsibility for non-humans? These are just a few questions you might ask as you begin your research.

Rights have taken many different forms.

America's founders believed that individuals had certain fundamental rights, simply by virtue of being human, but slaves did not share those "unalienable" rights. In other societies, rights depended on being a member of a group or class. The castes of Brahmin India and the aristocracy in England are examples of societies where birthright predetermined an individual's role. Human institutions—governments, churches, corporations and other entities—have also enjoyed rights, sometimes bestowed on them by their constituents, and sometimes self-bestowed.

With rights come responsibilities, whether they involve exercising rights within specified limits or ensuring the rights of others. You might find it tempting to focus mostly on rights in your project, but remember that this year's theme also encompasses responsibilities. Learning about and explaining the correlation between rights and responsibilities might

in fact help you become a better researcher and writer, in addition to deepening your understanding of your topic.

To explore a topic's historical importance, you have to answer the question, "So what?" You must address questions about time and place, cause and effect, change over time, and impact and significance. Always try to do more than just describe what happened. Draw conclusions about how the topic affected individuals, communities, other nations and the world as a whole. This helps give your research historical context.

Science and technology provide abundant topics. The conflict between the rights and responsibilities of scientists could be illustrated by a performance of Galileo's experience with the Roman Inquisition in 1633 or a documentary about J. Robert Oppenheimer and other Manhattan

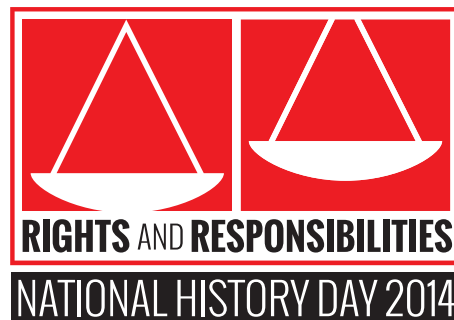
Project scientists who worried about the future of atomic and nuclear weapons. How has technology such as the printing press and television changed our views on our rights and responsibilities?

If you find politics intriguing, you might choose to explore the origins and impact of key documents related to rights. You

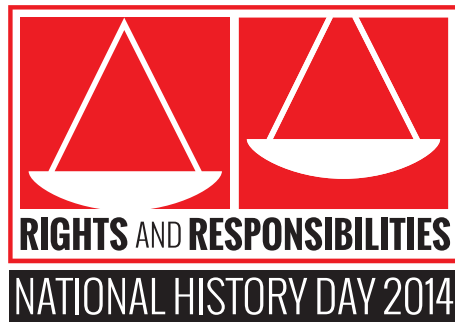
could write a paper investigating England's Bill of Rights in 1689—or the American version, written a century later. Students interested in local history might create an exhibit examining the development of their state constitutions or town charters, to discover the rights and responsibilities of people and governments and how they have changed over time.

Great thinkers have often deliberated the rights and responsibilities of individuals and society. A performance might analyze the origins and impact of Mary Wollstonecraft's feminism, while a documentary could explore the relationship between the Industrial Revolution and Karl Marx's views of the rights and responsibilities of workers and owners. What other thinkers or philosophers have influenced rights in history?

Specific rights can make excellent topics. A performance might probe the evolution of freedom of the press in America and the ethical obligations



required of journalists. A documentary could analyze the origins of the right to receive a free elementary education, found in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which implies a governmental responsibility to provide free education. How did the legal right of slaves to buy their freedom affect Latin American societies?



You might choose to research the rights and responsibilities conferred by citizenship. A website could compare the meaning of citizenship in the ancient Greek City states of Athens and Sparta. The evolution of income tax in America would make an excellent exhibit, while a documentary could explore the duty of military service in a society such as Meiji Japan (1868-1912) or 20th-century Israel.

Perhaps you're interested in the rights and responsibilities of family members. A paper could analyze the practice of suttee, a custom formerly practiced in India in which widows were burned along with their husband's bodies, while an exhibit might discuss the development of married women's property rights in 19th-century America. How have the rights and obligations of parents and children changed over time in America and China?

Students can also examine the experience of different groups. A performance might analyze how economic and political changes affected the obligations and rights of lords and vassals in medieval Europe, while a documentary might explore the development of affirmative action in the United States. An exhibit could evaluate the consequences for Sri Lanka of the different rights of the Sinhalese and Tamil people while it was a British colony.

Many powerful projects could come from studying the denial of rights and the struggle to gain rights. An exhibit might analyze the role of different women's organizations such as the National Woman's Party in winning female suffrage, while a documentary could explore the impact of a key individual such as Mohandas Gandhi in earning India's political freedom. What events in the American Civil Rights Movement could be dramatized in performances?

Nations and governments also have rights and responsibilities. How did the extraterritoriality rights of Europeans affect 19th-century China? A paper might examine how the idea of the "White Man's Burden" affected American foreign policy early in the 19th century. The changing views of the American government's responsibilities for the poor

in the 20th century might make a good website.

You might choose to research topics related to religion. An exhibit could investigate the relationship between the Mexican Revolution and the privileges the Catholic Church enjoyed in Mexico. What impact did the notions of religious duty have on the Crusades? A dramatic performance could recount the conflict between Ann Hutchinson's idea of religious freedom and governmental responsibility to enforce orthodoxy in 17th-century Massachusetts.

The economy provides excellent topics. Compelling documentaries or performances could focus on events such as the Homestead or the Pullman Strikes of the 1890s, in which workers and owners struggled over rights. A paper could look at the development of corporate rights in America, perhaps focusing on court cases such as the Charles River Bridge case of 1837 or the conflict between corporate rights and government responsibility in the antimonopoly struggles of the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. A website might analyze the battle for land reform in a Latin American country such as Nicaragua, which pitted the rights of peasants against the rights of wealthy landowners.

Whether you're focusing on a well-known event in world history or a little-known individual from a small community, you should place your project into historical perspective, examine its significance in history, and show development over time. All studies should include an investigation into available primary and secondary sources, analysis of the evidence, and a clear explanation of the relationship of the topic to the theme.



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Refer to web site for local contest dates and information. National Contest: June 15-19, 2014