**Do you have questions about the 2014 National History Day theme? We are here to answer them!**

<http://www.nhd.org/2011websitediscussion.htm>

**Our suggestions to you….Pick a specific event in history, how has that changed or developed into a group or individuals right, what are the responsibilities that come along with the right. Example: Right to assemble. Use the March on Washington as your main event and break that down how the right was violated or demonstrated and the effects of it (responsibilities). So in other words your focus of your project is going to be on the March on Washington and how that demonstrated rights/responsibilities. What did the march accomplish, limit, etc.?**

**Do projects need to address BOTH rights and responsibilities within a single topic?  Based on the sample topics list for this year, it looks to me like some topics just address rights OR responsibilities, not both.**  
There is no single interpretation of any of the NHD themes – the goal is to create a lens through which students can analyze their topics.  Realistically, many topics will touch on both rights and responsibilities, but that is NOT a requirement. A student might choose to study the case of Curt Flood, the baseball player who sued for the right to become a free agent, and argue how the right of free agency became a key right for professional athletes.  Another student might focus on the Pure Food and Drug Act, and how it created a government that became responsible for food safety.   
Most students will find that while their topic may have a primary focus, the other half of the theme begins to creep in as they further their research.  For example, a student studying Alice Paul and the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment might find sources arguing as to whether the government has a legal responsibility to accord certain considerations to women under the law.  
  
When considering a topic, here are some questions to consider:  
-What is the struggle between those who have power and those who don’t?  
-What are we required to give to the community?  What are we entitled to be given?  
-How do we balance the rights of the individual with the rights of the group?    
-What responsibilities do we have to protect those who cannot protect themselves?  
-What are the limits to rights?  Where should the lines be drawn?  
  
  
**Can the topic for a project be a recent one (previously students were encouraged to focus on events that happened over 10-25 years ago)?**  
The topic of your National History Day project should be historical, not a current event. (Don’t forget the “in History” part of the theme!) There is no official rule on exactly “how old” your topic must be, but enough time must have passed to allow historians to evaluate the impact and historical significance, and create secondary sources. Current events are still unfolding, and therefore you cannot yet see all causes and effects and what the long term outcome is.  These are all very important aspects to look at when conducting your research.  Remember – for a great NHD project you need to be able to analyze your sources and draw conclusions about your topic, not just report what happened.   If you are interested in a current event (like the conflict in Syria) look at other examples where a group of people tried to revolt against their government (in the Congo, in Yugoslavia, in the American Civil War) and tie the interest back that way.  
  
**When defining responsibility as part of this year’s theme, can the concept of responsibility be that an event forces the government to recognize it has certain responsibilities such as to the prisoners of war in the Civil War who needed certain basic requirements, or responsibility to provide basic safety for children?  Can it be a more ‘implied’ than written responsibility?**  
Yes.  Not all responsibilities are written explicitly.    
  
**This year’s theme is a very hard one to get behind.  I am having trouble with kids coming up with what to do.  It really needs to be thought about.  Most of the participants that I have are 7th and 8th graders and it is very hard for them to think outside the box. Any suggestions?**  
I would start with a student’s interests and then link it to the theme.  For example, a student with an interest in military history might be interested in World War II.  As a teacher, I might encourage him/her to consider segregation in the military, the rights of POWs (on all sides of the conflict), the rights of female soldiers and sailors, the way that young men in Japanese internment camps were drafted into military service, the way that the government took responsibility for the veterans with the GI Bill...there are so many options.  I always suggest to start with an area of interest and work from there.

**In the past, we helped students organized projects by: Background, Analysis (change), Importance. This year, what would you recommend?  We were thinking:  Background, Analysis (rights violated), Importance (changes which resulted-taking responsibility).**   
I think you have a good strategy over time. While there is no magic formula, every good NHD project should ask the question “so what?” and strive to show WHY this topic (person, event, etc.) matters in history.

**What are some questions we should ask ourselves while researching to help our research be more effective for this year's theme?**  
-What is the struggle between those who have power and those who don’t?  
-What are we required to give to the community?  What are we entitled to be given?  
-How do we balance the rights of the individual with the rights of the group?    
-What responsibilities do we have to protect those who cannot protect themselves?  
-What are the limits to rights?  Where should the lines be drawn?  
  
**How would a student write a thesis with the theme "Rights and Responsibilities in History"?**  
The answer to this question depends entirely on your topic and your analysis of your sources. The thesis statement should be your conclusion about your research. What are you trying to say/prove about your topic and its significance in history? What is it that you want viewers to understand about your topic?  Have a look at the “Conducting Research” page on our website for more tips on your thesis, [here](http://www.nhd.org/ConductingResearch.htm" \t "_blank).

**Should there be a balance between rights and responsibilities or could we focus on one or the other?**  
Realistically, many topics will touch on both rights and responsibilities, but that is not a requirement.  Most students will find that while their topic may have a primary focus, the other half of the theme begins to creep in as they further their research.  For example, a student studying Alice Paul and the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment might find sources arguing as to whether the government has a legal responsibility to accord certain considerations to women under the law.  
  
**Is it best to put more emphasis on a right, or visa versa, or to show an even view?**  
You want to be careful that your project does not become a political statement.  You want to look at an issue in historical perspective.  An intelligent historian will show and acknowledge an opposite perspective of an argument, even while arguing an alternate interpretation.  What’s important is that your project have a point of view – that’s what separates a historical argument from a factual report.