



NATIONAL HISTORY DAY 2021

# Communication in History:

THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING



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*NEW!*

## NHD Contest Rule Book

NHD's new contest rules for 2021 launch  
Monday, June 22, 2020.  
Visit [nhd.org/rulebook](https://nhd.org/rulebook)  
to review the new rules.

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## NHD Contest Evaluation Forms

NHD's new evaluation forms for 2021 launch  
Monday, June 22, 2020.  
Visit [nhd.org/evaluation-forms](https://nhd.org/evaluation-forms)  
to review the new evaluation forms.



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# What is National History Day<sup>®</sup>?



National History Day (NHD) is a nonprofit organization that creates opportunities for teachers and students to engage in historical research. NHD is not a predetermined, by-the-book program but rather an innovative curriculum framework in which students learn history by selecting topics of interest and launching into year-long research projects. The mission of NHD is to improve the teaching and learning of history in middle and high school. The most visible vehicle is the NHD Contest.

When studying history through historical research, students and teachers practice critical inquiry, asking questions of significance, time, and place. History students become immersed in a detective story. Beginning in the fall, students choose a topic related to the annual theme and conduct extensive primary and secondary research. After analyzing and interpreting their sources and drawing conclusions about their topics' significance in history, students present their work in original papers, exhibits, performances, websites, or documentaries. These projects are entered into competitions in the spring at local, affiliate, and national levels, where they are evaluated by professional historians and educators. The program culminates at the national competition held each June at the University of Maryland at College Park.

Each year National History Day uses a theme to provide a lens through which students can examine history. The annual theme frames the research for both students and teachers. It is intentionally broad enough that students can select topics from any place (local, national, or world) and any time period in history. Once students choose their topics, they investigate historical context, historical significance, and the topic's relationship to the theme by conducting research in libraries, archives, and museums; through oral history interviews; and by visiting historic sites.

NHD benefits both teachers and students. For the student, NHD allows control of his or her own learning. Students select topics that match their interests. Program expectations and guidelines are explicitly provided for students, but the research journey is driven by the process and is unique to the topic being researched. Throughout the year, students develop essential life skills by fostering intellectual curiosity. In addition, students develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills that will help them manage and use information now and in the future.

The classroom teacher is a student's greatest ally in the research process. NHD supports teachers by providing instructional materials and hosting workshops at local, affiliate, and national levels. Many teachers find that incorporating the NHD model into their classroom curriculum encourages students to watch for examples of the theme and to identify connections in their study of history across time.

NHD's work with teachers and students extends beyond the contest and includes institutes and training programs, which provide teachers with opportunities to study history and develop lessons and materials they can share with their students. In addition, NHD offers continuing education courses for teachers (for graduate credit or professional development hours) to improve classroom practice ([nhd.org/onlineeducation](http://nhd.org/onlineeducation)). NHD also offers teaching resources to help teachers integrate primary sources and critical thinking into the classroom. These resources are free and accessible to all teachers. Visit [nhd.org](http://nhd.org) to learn more.

# 2021 Theme Narrative: *Communication in History: The Key to Understanding*

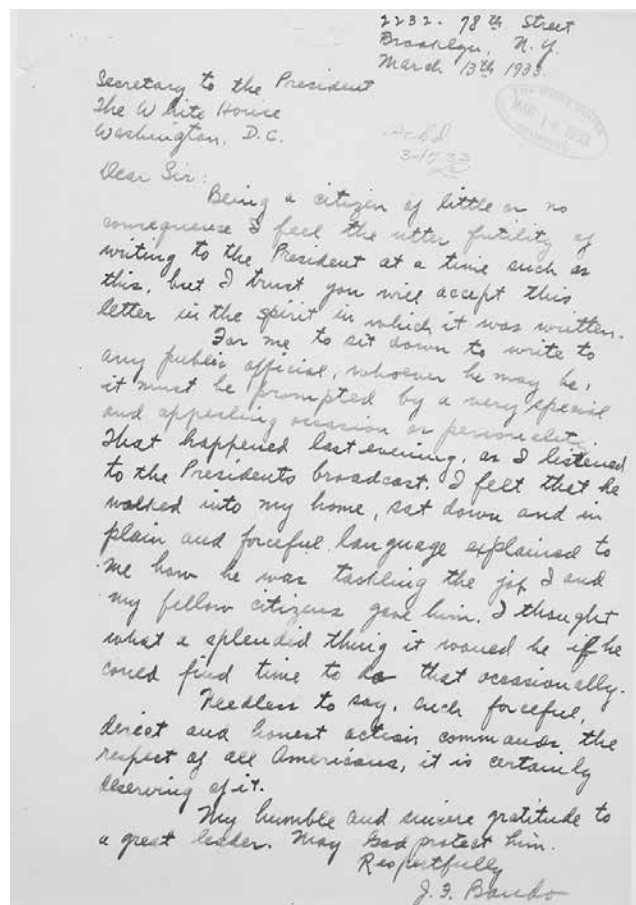
ASHLEY FOLEY DABBRACCIO, Program Assistant, National History Day®

During the 2020-2021 academic year, National History Day (NHD) students will explore topics relating to the theme *Communication in History: The Key to Understanding*. This theme asks students to consider how people exchange information and interact with each other. Students have the chance to explore how the methods and modes of communication have changed over time, and how they have shaped the present. Major inventions like the telephone, the telegraph, and the television stand out in our minds as obvious examples of how communication has changed over time. Yet, communication is more than just these inventions. It is about how words, thoughts, or ideas are exchanged throughout history.

## THE ACT OF COMMUNICATION

Merriam-Webster defines communication as “a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior.” History is filled with stories about people, groups, or nations either communicating or failing to communicate with each other. Before we can understand these stories, we must go beyond common definitions of communication and recognize the many ways people communicate. Only then can we begin to investigate the impact communication has had on social and political changes throughout history.

Let us look at written communication. Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press in the 1400s, making it easier to mass-produce the written word. Before that, manuscripts had been written by hand and were only available to the elite. How did the mass production of books and other printed materials help to shape society? Or, consider telecommunication. Students interested in global history might look to the spread of telecommunication lines across the globe. For instance, the development of Australia’s first international telecommunication system linked them to Asia in 1872. How did this development shape international diplomacy?



J. F. Bando's November 13, 1933, letter to the Secretary of the President revealed that President Franklin D. Roosevelt's fireside chats connected him to the American people on a very personal level. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration (198124).

Students can also research the importance of the radio in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s. The radio provided a more accessible and less expensive way to get updates on popular culture, weather, and daily news. Some students might examine the radio's role in promoting jazz in



the 1920s. Others might explore President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's fireside chats. How did President Roosevelt use the radio to communicate with the American people? Why was it important that he did so?

Conventions, exhibitions, movements, and other public gatherings help people communicate ideas and opinions with each other. For instance, World's Fairs (also known as World Expositions), in which nations showed off their most recent advancements, exploded in the 1800s. Visitors came from all over the world. Why might countries want to communicate their achievements? What specific ideas and information did the nations show the world, and why might that be important?



The 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, Missouri, featured a Palace of Electricity meant to showcase the United States' achievements in commercializing electricity. Courtesy of the Hornbake Library, University of Maryland.

Another example is the use of conventions by social activists to speak out on topics like abolition, woman suffrage, temperance, and other social reforms. The Declaration of Sentiments address given at the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention revealed that suffragists wanted equality and voting rights. How did the suffragists shape their arguments? Was the message they conveyed well-received, or did it lead to a broader discussion? Other students might look to Steve Biko's speeches and his time with South Africa's Black Consciousness Movement in the 1970s. How did he communicate his demand for an end to apartheid and social unrest in South Africa?

Language is a key way we communicate with each other. Immigrants to the United States often lived and worked in communities alongside others who spoke their native language. Why might they have chosen to do so? Did their language barrier make it harder for immigrants to communicate effectively and adjust to life in the United States?

What restrictions have been placed on language in the past? Students might explore the ban on the native Hawaiian language following the overthrow of Queen

Lili'uokalani in 1893. Why was the Hawaiian language banned? Did that action change the way native Hawaiians communicated with each other?



The December 1893 cover of *Judge* magazine featured a caricature of Queen Lili'uokalani being dethroned by armed American soldiers. The artist's aggressive imagery and the phrase "We draw the line at this" presented the event as a hostile takeover by the U.S. government. Courtesy of HathiTrust & Digital Library (18811939).

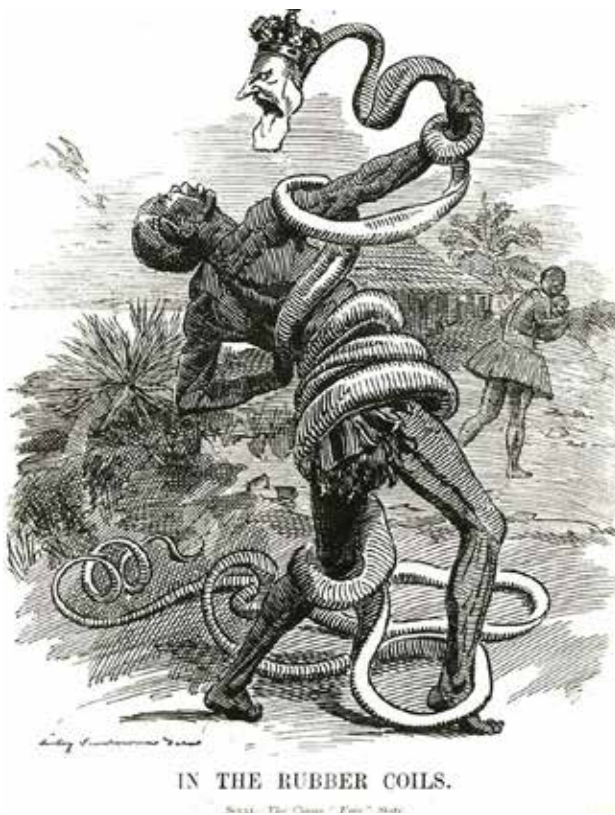
Language does not always involve the physical act of speaking. Developed in the early nineteenth century, American Sign Language (ASL) helped deaf individuals communicate. What barriers did hearing-impaired individuals experience before the use of ASL? Similarly, the written language of Braille has helped the blind community communicate. Who invented it, and why? Did it break barriers or create more challenges?

On a more personal level, students might explore letter writing. How were letters used as a means of communication? What did people write about in letters? Did they write to the government, family, or friends? How does the tone change based on the recipient or the topic? Students might explore letters written by women during the American Civil War and investigate what they wrote about. What was the purpose of the letters? To whom did they send these letters? Why did they feel the need to voice their thoughts during the American Civil War? Others might



explore open letters like the one written by Émile Zola to protest the Dreyfus Affair in France (1894-1906). What consequences did Zola face? How did the event affect the country of France?

Images and imagery, too, can communicate thoughts, opinions, or ideas. Portraits, photographs, and art convey meaning. Students might look to the cave paintings of earlier societies or the hieroglyphs and drawings created by Ancient Egyptians. What do those images convey about their society? Do they communicate what was deemed to be important whether it be about family, war, or society in general? Other examples might include satirical materials from England's *Punch* weekly magazine. In 1906, *Punch* ran "In the Rubber Coils," a political cartoon that depicted Belgium's King Leopold II as a rubber vine coiled around a Congolese man. What is the image trying to convey to the reader about the relationship between Europe and Africa? How do images communicate people's opinions on important political and social topics? How did political cartoons sway public opinion about support for anti-imperialism measures?



The 1906 political cartoon from *Punch* magazine highlighted social unrest around European imperialization of Africa. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Students might also look at other key ways imagery has communicated opinions or feelings. The invention of the television changed how we communicate and learn about different events. The Vietnam War (1955-1975) divided American public opinion for over 20 years. How was press coverage of the Vietnam War different from that of previous wars? What images of the war did Americans see daily on their television screens? How did photographs and film footage inspire anti-war protests in the United States and abroad? Other students might compare and contrast the footage of the 1968 Democratic and Republican Conventions. How did those broadcasts influence the vote? What was the overall impact on Republican Richard Nixon's victory over Democratic Vice President Hubert Humphrey?

## THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING

Communication, in and of itself, is defined by the exchange of ideas, news, or information. Yet, there is another side to communication. Do we *understand* what is told to us? American journalist Sydney J. Harris wrote, "The two words 'information' and 'communication' are often used interchangeably, but they signify quite different things. Information is giving out; communication is getting through."<sup>1</sup> Information is extremely important, but if we fail to get our point across or miscommunicate the information, it often leads to unintended results.

What happens when we do not understand the intended message? How has miscommunication or failure to communicate shaped history? History is riddled with examples of miscommunication that resulted in unwanted consequences. The events at Wounded Knee (1890) between Native Americans engaging in their ancestral ghost dance and U.S. soldiers led to a violent encounter between the two groups. Why? Did both sides understand what the other was doing, or did a lack of understanding lead to violence and chaos?

What happens when miscommunication occurs during war? Students might explore the events of the now-infamous Charge of the Light Brigade during the Crimean War (1853-1856). How did miscommunication affect the battle? What were the consequences of such miscommunication?

Another example of misinformation is the 1898 Spanish-American War. Misinformation and miscommunication led many Americans to blame Spain for the explosion onboard the USS *Maine* in Havana Harbor. Newspapers ran wild stories about the event. Why did they choose to blame Spain? Why publish such a sensational story? What effect did this story have?

Miscommunication and misinformation can turn countries against each other or turn friends into enemies. Take, for instance, the Bosnian War (1992-1995), which turned

<sup>1</sup> Sydney J. Harris was an American journalist for the *The Chicago Daily News* and *The Chicago Sun-Times* until his death in 1986. His column, "Strictly Personal," was syndicated in over 200 newspapers throughout the United States.

Serbians against their Bosnian and Croatian neighbors. What was communicated? Why? What consequences arose as a result? How did Slobodan Milošević's fiery rhetoric cause such miscommunication between the nations? How did it affect friends, family, and neighbors who found themselves on opposite sides of the conflict?

## CONCLUSION

The act of communicating with other people, communities, or nations is often taken for granted. Yet, communication and our ability to understand what is being conveyed is a much more complicated story. In order to understand the role communication plays in history, students will have to understand the historical context of what is being talked about during the period. All communication happens as part of a larger story. In order to understand, we need to know what is motivating people to talk, write, and communicate with each other in the first place.

While this narrative provides examples to help students think about different topics, many more can be found in museums, archives, and related organizations that support NHD student research. Learn more about these NHD partner resources at [nhd.org/partner-resources](https://nhd.org/partner-resources).

To access more theme resources, go to [nhd.org/themebok](https://nhd.org/themebok).

# Know The Rules!



## Same Contest, New Rules

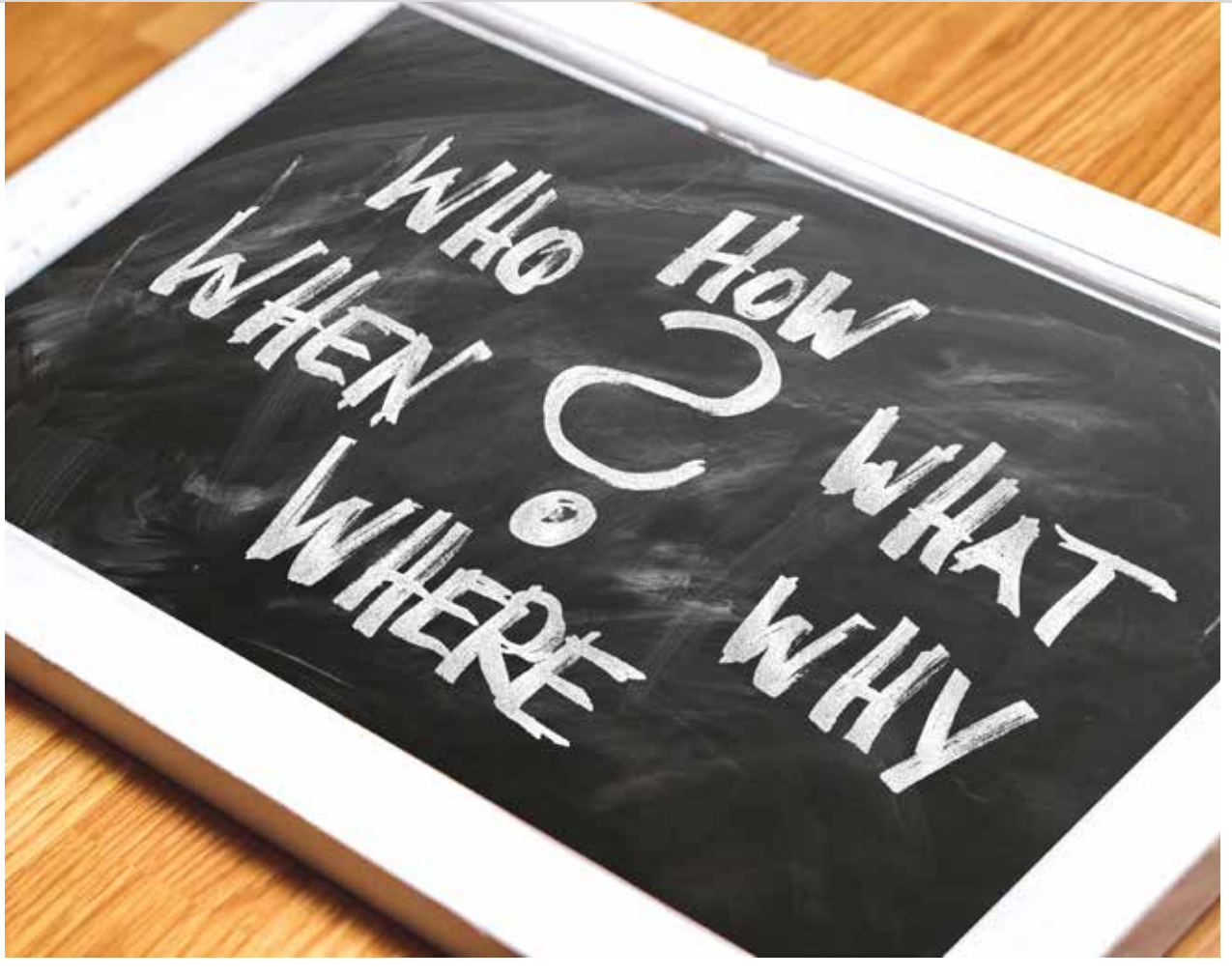
NHD's new contest rules for 2021 launch

Monday, June 22, 2020.

Visit

<https://www.nhd.org/rulebook>

to review the new rules.



JOIN US IN THE

# NHD Classroom

Join National History Day in the summer and fall of 2020 for online education courses. Teachers 4-12 are eligible to join. Learn pedagogical strategies for developing project-based learning in the classroom!

Visit [nhd.org/onlineeducation](https://nhd.org/onlineeducation) to register for NHD's 2020 online courses

## **NHD 101: INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT BASED LEARNING THROUGH THE NHD CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK**

Summer Course | June 26, 2020 to August 24, 2020  
Fall Course | September 14, 2020 to December 14, 2020

## **RESEARCH METHODS: CONDUCTING HISTORICAL RESEARCH THROUGH THE NATIONAL HISTORY DAY MODEL**

Fall Course | September 14, 2020 to December 14, 2020



# Getting Started with National History Day<sup>®</sup>: The Basics

JESS BURKE, Co-Coordinator, NHD Georgia, Georgia Humanities

Welcome to National History Day (NHD)! We are so excited you are interested in the program and look forward to seeing the amazing research projects your students develop. You will notice along the way that your students will do more than just produce scholarly, well-rounded work. Students will grow throughout the NHD process by improving their research skills, gaining confidence, and becoming capable, forward-thinking students equipped with skills that will help them throughout college, career, and life as a whole. Prepare to be inspired by your students and what they are able to achieve.

We thought it would be beneficial to introduce you to some NHD basics to guide you as you begin this new journey. In this article, you will find everything from how to contact your affiliate coordinator for guidance, to what goes into a topic and project, how to connect with the annual theme, and what the contest process looks like—everything you will need to succeed at NHD.

Best wishes and happy researching!

## GETTING STARTED

### CONTACT YOUR AFFILIATE COORDINATOR

Your first step is to contact your affiliate coordinator. NHD takes place in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. territories, and multiple countries. We call these individual programs affiliates. Each affiliate has its own contest dates and resources available to serve local students and teachers. To find your affiliate, go to [nhd.org/affiliate](https://nhd.org/affiliate) and select your state, territory, or country from the dropdown. An affiliate profile will open. In it you will find links to your affiliate coordinator and website, the affiliate contest date, and a directory of affiliate-specific resources such as regional online databases, historic societies and museums, and additional organizations that will help you begin your NHD adventure.

Reach out to your coordinator as soon as possible and stay in touch throughout the year so you can keep up to date on your affiliate's contest deadlines and information.



National History Day has 58 affiliates in the United States and abroad. Students from all over the world unite at the NHD National Contest each year to present their research projects to public audiences. Courtesy of National History Day.

### EXPLORE THE CONTEST RULE BOOK

The next thing you need to do early in the process is read the NHD *Contest Rule Book* with your students. This will be their project guide and will describe exactly what is required in an NHD project. It is recommended that you, your students, and their parents familiarize themselves with the rule book, which is available for free digital download on the NHD website at [nhd.org/contest](https://nhd.org/contest).

Before beginning an NHD project, read the *Contest Rule Book* (revised for the 2021 NHD contest year). The *Contest Rule Book* is available at [nhd.org/rulebook](https://nhd.org/rulebook).



This photograph highlights a student exhibit, NHD's most popular category. Students are interviewed about their research at all NHD contests. Courtesy of National History Day.

## FIRST STEPS WITH STUDENTS

### CONNECT WITH THE ANNUAL THEME

Every year, NHD selects a theme around which students base their research. Each theme is purposely chosen to be broad, allowing students to think creatively and critically about world, national, state, or local history. Utilize the annual theme as a tool to help students develop thoughtful and focused research questions, which will result in quality historical arguments.

NHD provides a series of theme resources to aid students and educators. Visit NHD's website at [nhd.org](http://nhd.org) and click on the link to the annual theme that can be found at the bottom of the home page or at [nhd.org/themebook](http://nhd.org/themebook).

- › **Theme Book:** You are reading the theme book right now. It is loaded with potential ideas and activities to use with your students. Add this book to your classroom library, digitally or physically, to support students in their quest to understand the theme and how it connects to potential topics. A downloadable PDF version can be found on the annual theme page at [nhd.org/themebook](http://nhd.org/themebook).
- › **Theme Narrative:** This document, included in this theme book, briefly introduces students to the current contest theme, asking them to think about the

different ways the theme could be interpreted and providing example topics that connect to the theme. A downloadable PDF version can be found on the annual theme page at [nhd.org/themebook](http://nhd.org/themebook).

- › **Theme Graphic Organizer:** With every new theme, NHD designs and distributes a graphic organizer to help students examine historical context within the theme. A downloadable PDF version can be found on the annual theme page at [nhd.org/themebook](http://nhd.org/themebook).
- › **NHD Partner Resources:** NHD provides a list of partner resources that connect to the annual theme. These resources can include topic lists, theme-related lesson plans and classroom activities, theme-related webinars and publications, and more, all produced by NHD partners who aim to better support you and your students. They can be accessed at [nhd.org/partner-resources](http://nhd.org/partner-resources).
- › **Affiliate Partner Resources:** Many affiliate coordinators provide affiliate-specific resources to help students connect with the theme on a local level. These resources often meet local educational requirements, making them easy to incorporate into your classroom. They can range from coordinator-created resources to those created by partners located at museums, archives, libraries, and universities. Check with your affiliate coordinator to see what resources they have available for your classroom.



This photograph captures a student performance at the NHD National Contest. In this category, students have ten minutes to present their argument to a panel of judges. Courtesy of National History Day.

## HELP STUDENTS FIND A TOPIC THAT INSPIRES THEM

When picking topics, students must make certain they fit the annual theme. It is also incredibly important that students are interested in what they are researching. Choosing something they are excited to explore and learn more about will motivate students, allowing them to take ownership over something they care about and want to share with an audience.

Topics should not be too broad and instead should have a narrow focus that allows students to do in-depth research. For example, if your student is interested in aviation, he or she could narrow down the topic to a specific event such as the first flight of the Wright Brothers (1903) or Amelia Earhart's solo trans-Atlantic flight (1937). Once your students have selected their topics, they will need to develop guiding questions to get their research process started.

Each student must then develop an argument based on the topic and provide a clear thesis statement that captures his or her position on the topic and is supported by wide research. If students are stuck selecting a topic, direct them to the partner resource page ([nhd.org/partner-resources](http://nhd.org/partner-resources)) as a place to start their search for a topic.

## PICK A PROJECT CATEGORY

Students can create an NHD project in one of five categories: paper, exhibit, documentary, website, or performance. It is important for students to pick a project medium that fits their personality and interests. For example, is the student a budding filmmaker? If so, the documentary category might be a perfect fit. Students who love plays and creating their own characters and scripts may really enjoy the performance category. However, students must be aware that not all topics fit well in all categories. For example, a topic with only a few visual resources would not make a good documentary, where a wide variety of images is critical.

Students can create projects individually or in groups of two to five, with the exception of the paper category, which is an individual entry only.

You can visit the project categories webpage ([nhd.org/categories](http://nhd.org/categories)) to learn about NHD project categories, including step-by-step guidelines for creating each type of project and sample entries from previous years.

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## REQUIRED PROJECT DOCUMENTS

### ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

All NHD projects must include an annotated bibliography, a document that allows students to cite their sources and provide brief annotations showing how their sources influenced their project. The annotated bibliography provides a way for judges to better understand the research students conducted, allowing them to determine whether the student conducted wide research, examined both primary and secondary sources, and considered multiple perspectives.

Information about creating annotated bibliographies can be found at [nhd.org/annotated-bibliography](https://nhd.org/annotated-bibliography).

### PROCESS PAPER

A process paper is required in all entry categories. It allows students to explain their research process, choices, topic development, and the creation of their entry. It serves as a valuable tool for judges, providing them with insight into topic selection and relationship to the annual theme, the research process, project creation, historical argument, and the significance of the topic in history. More information can be found in the *Contest Rule Book* available at [nhd.org/rulebook](https://nhd.org/rulebook).

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## RESOURCES

A wealth of helpful resources can be found on the NHD website. Teachers and students should become familiar with all the website has to offer.

### STUDENT RESOURCES

The “For Students” section of the NHD website provides numerous resources to support students throughout the project process. These resources include contest advice, guidelines for creating annotated bibliographies, tips for conducting appropriate interviews, and reliable research links. In addition, NHD provides historical partner resources for topics such as Women in American History and World War I. Be sure to also check out the annual Ask an NEH Expert web series ([nhd.org/nehexperts](https://nhd.org/nehexperts)), a collaboration between NHD and the National Endowment for the Humanities that introduces students to the unique attributes of each NHD project category and offers tips on how to research, construct, and revise NHD projects. Explore NHD Student Resources at [nhd.org/student-resources](https://nhd.org/student-resources).

### TEACHER RESOURCES

At National History Day we believe that we cannot support our students without supporting their teachers. To assist in your classroom, the Teacher Resources page ([nhd.org/teacher-resources](https://nhd.org/teacher-resources)) provides numerous resources including sample rubrics, grade level-specific guides, lesson plans, and free partner resources. NHD also has numerous webinars and videos to help teachers get started, as well as NHD publications that you can add to your classroom library, such as the *Making History Series*, which provides step-by-step instructions for creating projects in each of the five contest categories.

You can also follow NHD on multiple social media platforms to stay current on new resources and announcements.

- › [facebook.com/NationalHistoryDay](https://facebook.com/NationalHistoryDay)
- › [instagram.com/nhdcontest](https://instagram.com/nhdcontest)
- › [twitter.com/NationalHistory](https://twitter.com/NationalHistory)
- › [youtube.com/nationalhistoryday](https://youtube.com/nationalhistoryday)

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In addition to teacher resources, NHD provides various professional development opportunities for teachers, adding new opportunities every year.

- › [Online webinars and workshops](#)
- › [Summer institutes](#)
- › [Live teacher workshops](#)
- › [Online classroom resources](#)

You can learn more about NHD Professional Development at [nhd.org/professional-development](https://nhd.org/professional-development).

### NATIONAL HISTORY DAY NEWSLETTER

To ensure you never miss an exciting NHD announcement, National History Day provides a free monthly newsletter that focuses on NHD-related opportunities for both teachers and students. Newsletters include regular updates on the program and news about national education trends as they relate to history education and the NHD program.

You can register for the NHD Newsletter at [nhd.org/newsletter](https://nhd.org/newsletter), where you can also access archived newsletters.



## THE CONTEST

### BASIC CONTEST INFORMATION

The contest side of NHD can vary by affiliate, since not all contest levels happen in all affiliates. Generally, the progression looks something like this:

**District or School → Region → Affiliate → National**

Students receive feedback from judges at each contest level. One of the unique aspects of the NHD contest progression is that students who are advancing to the next level are encouraged to apply feedback and make edits to improve their projects. Some affiliates may even offer workshops between contest levels to aid students and teachers. By the time students reach the affiliate and national levels, they often have well-rounded and scholarly research projects ready to share.

For information on registering for the district, region, and affiliate levels of the contest, contact your affiliate coordinator.

### THE NATIONAL CONTEST

Students who place first or second at their affiliate contests are eligible to attend the annual NHD National Contest in June at the University of Maryland at College Park. At this stage in the contest, students become members of their affiliate's National Contest delegation, representing their affiliate on the national stage.

In addition to the competition, students who qualify have the opportunity to participate in various activities, including the NHD Welcome Ceremony; NHD-Explore (NHDx), which allows students to explore the Washington, D.C.-area museums and institutions; and the popular NHD Parade of Affiliates in which students showcase their affiliate pride to kick off the National Contest Award Ceremony.



Students from Massachusetts and Maryland show their state pride at the Parade of Affiliates. Courtesy of National History Day.

### SPECIAL PRIZES

Special prizes are a way to recognize students' outstanding work in a specific area of history. In addition to place awards, a variety of special prizes are presented at the National Contest as well as at many affiliate and regional contests. You can visit [nhd.org/special-prizes](https://nhd.org/special-prizes) to see the list of current national contest special prizes and learn about their sponsors. Contact your affiliate coordinator for information about special prizes at the affiliate or regional levels.

#### Additional Questions

Now that you have the National History Day basics down, you are ready to get started. If you have additional questions, reach out to your affiliate coordinator or email your questions to NHD at [info@nhd.org](mailto:info@nhd.org).

Happy researching!

To access more theme resources, go to [nhd.org/themebook](https://nhd.org/themebook).

NEW!

# MAKING — HISTORY — SERIES

PURCHASE YOUR SERIES TODAY AT  
[NHD.ORG/SHOP](https://www.nhd.org/shop)

## A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE NATIONAL HISTORY DAY PROGRAM

The Making History series is a comprehensive set of workbooks that provides teachers step-by-step guidance on how to conduct historical research and gives students direction on how to create NHD projects. Pre-order to receive an updated copy of *A Teacher's Guide to the National History Day Program* as well as the latest revised editions of *How to Create a Historical Performance*, *How to Write a Historical Paper*, *How to Develop a Historical Website*, *How to Create a Historical Exhibit*, and *How to Create a Historical Documentary*. These newly updated category-specific books include the most recent advice for crafting the best possible project.

# Unexpected Communications: Understanding History Through Primary Sources

MICHAEL APFELDORF, Educational Resources Specialist, Library of Congress

CHERYL LEDERLE, Educational Resources Specialist, Library of Congress

LEE ANN POTTER, Director of Learning and Innovation, Library of Congress

STEPHEN WESSON, Educational Resources Specialist, Library of Congress

Communication can take many forms, and some of the most surprising discoveries and interesting ways of understanding history can come from exploring unexpected sources. Some forms of communication, such as diaries, private letters, or coded messages, were intended for a very small, very specific audience—sometimes only for one person to read, and sometimes only for the author. Others, such as pseudonymous or anonymous writings, were intended to reach their audience without providing them with any information about the author. Many forms of communication, such as published works or public spectacles, were intended to communicate to a specific public audience, but have survived through the centuries to reach a different audience, whose assumptions and responses might be very different from the ones their creators expected.

By analyzing these unexpected communications, students can not only unearth new information about past events and historical figures, but also apply their critical-thinking skills to discover new ways of understanding them.

## PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS FROM A PIONEERING COMMUNICATOR: ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL

Your students probably know that the telephone expanded and simplified communication. It made instantaneous verbal exchanges possible over distances and led to the development of other valuable communication tools — the internet, cell phones, and more.

However, they may not be aware that the individual credited with inventing and patenting the first practical

telephone in 1876, Alexander Graham Bell, was a prolific writer. His papers at the Library of Congress contain his journals, diaries, scientific notebooks, sketches, speeches, articles, books, telegrams, letters, and more. The materials both reveal his interests in a wide range of scientific and technological fields and provide insight into his personality and his relationships.

Among his correspondence files are thousands of letters that he exchanged with hundreds of individuals, including other scientists and inventors of his day such as electrical engineer Elisha Gray; astronomer and aviator Samuel P. Langley; John Wesley Powell, who led the first expedition to map the Grand Canyon; the Wright Brothers, who are largely credited with making the world's first successful airplane; and Guglielmo Marconi, a pioneer in radio and wireless telegraphy.

But the person with whom he communicated in writing the most was his wife, Mabel Gardiner Hubbard Bell. When she was five years old, she contracted scarlet fever, and the disease left her completely and permanently deaf. Although Mabel was a skilled speaker and lipreader, the written exchanges between the two were vital to their relationship. Their exchanges communicated ideas, opinions, concerns, emotions, and attitudes, as well as simple elements of everyday life.

One letter in particular actually communicated Alexander's temporary need for no communication. On January 2, 1888, while at the Braddock House, a hotel in Alexandria, Virginia, He wrote a letter to his wife who was at home, approximately eight miles away. "Alec" told his "darling Mabel" that he had "struck upon a great idea" related to attractive force and the conservation of energy. As a result, he wrote her, "Leave me alone — there's a darling — for a little while. Don't even telegraph me unless necessary. I will come back soon."





Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to his wife, Mabel Gardiner Hubbard Bell, on January 2, 1888, asking her to, “leave me alone—there’s a darling—for a little while. Don’t even telegraph me unless necessary. I will come back soon.” Courtesy of the Library of Congress (magbell.03700501).

Sharing this letter with students ([loc.gov/item/magbell.03700501](https://loc.gov/item/magbell.03700501)) could pique their interest in the Bells’ relationship. It might make them consider the value of communication, or the value of time alone with one’s thoughts. Or, perhaps it might generate student interest in various forms of communication available at different moments in history.

If the letter leads to curiosity about Bell, invite students to explore the Alexander Graham Bell Papers at the Library of Congress. This collection contains more than 145,000 items and is available online at ([loc.gov/collections/alexander-graham-bell-papers/about-this-collection/](https://loc.gov/collections/alexander-graham-bell-papers/about-this-collection/)). 4,695 of those items (about 51,500 images) are correspondence, scientific notebooks, journals, blueprints, articles, and photographs documenting Bell’s invention of the telephone and involvement in the first telephone company, his family life, his interest in the education of the deaf, and his aeronautical and other scientific research. The collection spans from 1862 to 1939, with the bulk of the materials dating from 1865 to 1920. Included among Bell’s papers are pages from his experimental notebook from March 10,

1876, describing the first successful experiment with the telephone, during which he spoke through the instrument to his assistant the famous words, “Mr. Watson—Come here—I want to see you.” Bell’s various roles in life as teacher, inventor, celebrity, and family man are covered extensively in his papers. Complementing the Bell Papers are digital images of photographs from the Gilbert H. Grosvenor Collection in the Library’s Prints and Photographs Division ([loc.gov/rr/print/res/142\\_bell.html](https://loc.gov/rr/print/res/142_bell.html)).

## COMMUNICATING ACROSS TWO CONTINENTS AND THREE CENTURIES: OMAR IBN SAID

In order to construct a meaningful understanding of a moment of communication from the past, it is not enough to analyze what was said. It is equally important to analyze the source of the communication, its context, and its audience.

Born in West Africa near present-day Senegal, Omar ibn Said (also referred to as Omar ben Saeed) was captured, enslaved, and brought to the United States in 1807 at the age of 37. In 1831, he was asked to write the story of his life, which he did in his native Arabic language. His book, *The Life of Omar ben Saeed, called Morro, a Fallah Slave in Fayetteville, N.C.* Owned by Governor Owens ([loc.gov/item/2018371864/](https://loc.gov/item/2018371864/)), is the only surviving narrative written in Arabic by an enslaved person in the United States. For students, the mere existence of this document has the potential to communicate something entirely new about the history of American slavery and those individuals who were enslaved.



A page from the book *The Life of Omar ben Saeed, called Morro, a Fallah Slave in Fayetteville, N.C.* Owned by Governor Owen. Courtesy of the Library of Congress (2018371864).

You can illustrate this point by showing students an Arabic-language page from Said's *Life* ([loc.gov/resource/amedsaid1831.dw042/?sp=16](https://www.loc.gov/resource/amedsaid1831.dw042/?sp=16)) and asking them who they think might have written it and why. After recording their answers, show students the English-language cover page ([loc.gov/resource/amedsaid1831.dw042/?sp=1](https://www.loc.gov/resource/amedsaid1831.dw042/?sp=1)) produced in 1848 after the narrative was translated into English. What new or unexpected information does this cover page offer? Some students may be surprised to learn that the Arabic document examined earlier was in fact written in the United States, and that its author lived in slavery in North Carolina. For twenty-first century audiences, Said's autobiography can communicate not only his life story, but the fact that enslaved people in the nineteenth century included practicing Muslims from West Africa who had learned to read and write Arabic before being transported to the United States.

Among some audiences in the nineteenth century, however, Said's literary work may have also been used for other purposes. On the cover page of the 1848 manuscript, students will find references to several men involved in the acquisition, translation, and dissemination of Said's manuscript. Foremost among these was Theodore Dwight, who first acquired the document in 1836. Dwight, a founding member of the American Ethnological Society, was keenly interested in West African culture and in slavery. He was also a member of the New York Colonization Society, which supported the migration of free African Americans to the west coast of Africa as an alternative to emancipation in the United States.

In an 1863 letter addressed to the Secretaries of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions ([loc.gov/item/2018662624/](https://www.loc.gov/item/2018662624/)), Dwight explained how Said's manuscript has "excited attention in Europe"—presumably by showing that some West Africans were literate—then added:

I have long felt confident, that much good might be done, by sending small publications into Africa, in the Arabic Language, carrying information concerning other parts of the world, accompanied with Christian instruction; and I have made efforts to enlist good men in the enterprise, but even the best and wisest could not believe that Negroes, in their native land, had intelligence enough to be reached...

Invite students to examine Dwight's letter for insights into his communication goals, encouraging them to research the organizations of which Dwight was a member as well as the political context of the United States in 1863.

Finally, invite students to reflect on the extent to which examining *The Life of Omar ben Saeed* can help them understand United States history in new ways, even before they have read the narrative itself. How has their analysis of source, context, and audience assisted them in discovering all that this remarkable document has to communicate to today's readers?

## CARTOGRAPHIC COMMUNICATION: MAPS

Maps might seem like fairly straightforward communication tools: they are intended to provide information about a place and may offer navigation tips. However, maps can also communicate a great deal about the circumstances in which they were created. Reading maps as historical objects and applying historical thinking strategies can help students discover what these sometimes-overlooked objects can communicate to us.



The map *The battle fronts of Europe* superimposes the European World War I battlefields over North America. Courtesy of the Library of Congress (2016432164).

For example, students might look at the map *The battle fronts of Europe* ([loc.gov/item/2016432164/](https://www.loc.gov/item/2016432164/)) created in 1917 or 1918. To help them focus on the map itself, first present it with the title and right sidebar text folded under and allow time for them to examine it. Ask them: *What do they notice first? Why do they think this map was created? What do they think it communicates? What questions do they have about the map?* Students might notice that in addition to superimposing a map of Europe over a map of the United States, the item also names a number of distances on both continents. Allow time for them to speculate why the mapmaker named those distances and why. Then, reveal the text and allow time for students to read the title and sidebar. Ask them to reflect on how this additional information shapes their understanding of the message intended to be conveyed by the map. What questions does the information spark? Finally, students should read the item record. They might notice when the item was created and where (London). Allow time for them to discuss the possible significance of that time and place.

Encourage students to put the map into historical context by identifying or researching what was happening in the country—and the world—at the time of its creation. Consulting a secondary source such as this timeline ([loc.gov/exhibitions/world-war-i-american-experiences/timeline/](https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/world-war-i-american-experiences/timeline/)) that accompanies the Library's exhibition *Echoes*

of the Great War: American Experiences of World War I, students might notice that the U.S. declared war in October 1917, but Great Britain committed much earlier, in 1914. What new insights do students gain about the map from this additional information? What new questions do they have about the item and what it was intended to communicate?

To gain additional perspective, students might examine additional items created by the printer. A search of [loc.gov](https://www.loc.gov) for “Roberts & Leete” will yield more than two dozen additional items, including both images and text. Assign or allow students to select one or more additional sources to study and analyze, and then share their thinking with the class. Ask them to consider how studying these items by the same printer adds to their understanding of what the *Battlefronts...* map communicates. Ask them to contemplate how the information might have had a different effect if it had been presented in a different form. For example, what if the distances had been listed in a table rather than a map?

Finally, students might reflect on what they can learn about the past by examining, analyzing, and critically comparing even such ordinary historical objects as maps. What other maps can they find that communicate information and understandings beyond the expected geography?

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## COMMUNICATING ABOUT AN ATTEMPT TO COMMUNICATE: THE PROGRAM FOR A SUFFRAGE PARADE

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the leaders of the battle to secure voting rights for women embraced bold new methods of communication. Since the founding of the woman suffrage movement in the nineteenth century, its leaders had used the tools available at the time, and the new century provided new opportunities to reach a broad and diverse nation. As the population of U.S. cities continued to swell, suffrage leaders designed and staged public spectacles intended to attract the attention of crowds of people. Twentieth-century suffragists organized public demonstrations, lit bonfires, set up pickets outside the White House, wrote and sang suffrage songs, parked a suffrage streetcar in New York’s Union Square, drove cross-country in a yellow convertible, and staged countless marches, rallies, hikes, and motorcades, all intended to spread the word about women’s right to vote.

Although these events were themselves short-lived, the documents that the events left behind offer rich opportunities to investigate both the messages that suffrage leaders sought to communicate and the methods they chose to do so. They can also communicate to readers today, perhaps unintentionally, the assumptions and prejudices that shaped those messages.

The suffrage events of the early twentieth century generated an impressive paper trail. Untold thousands of fliers were printed and handed out at demonstrations and pickets. Marches were documented with cardboard stereographs ([loc.gov/item/96519665](https://www.loc.gov/item/96519665)) and books of suffrage songs were distributed at meetings. Perhaps most importantly, the more spectacular suffrage events were given extensive coverage in daily newspapers, which at the time were wildly popular, very affordable, and hungry for attention-getting events to put on their front pages.



The official program of the March 3, 1913, suffrage parade in Washington, D.C. Courtesy of the Library of Congress ([rbpe20801600](https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe20801600/)).

One document that provides ample opportunity for student exploration is the official program of perhaps the most elaborate spectacle ever staged by the suffrage movement: the Woman Suffrage Procession in Washington, D.C., on March 3, 1913 ([loc.gov/item/rbpe.20801600/](https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.20801600/)). This procession, which took place on the eve of the inauguration of President Woodrow Wilson, was staggering in its scale, as it included thousands of marchers making their way up Pennsylvania Avenue in color-coordinated outfits, ten bands, dozens of floats, heralds on horseback, and charioteers, culminating in a costumed allegorical tableau on the steps of the U.S. Treasury building. The printed program for the procession is suitably ambitious, including not only a careful listing of the parade’s many sections (“1. Countries Where Women Have Full Suffrage.”), but also a statement of purpose (“WHY WOMEN WANT TO VOTE”), biographical profiles of the procession’s many organizers, and pages of advertisements.

These features allow students today to identify the arguments suffrage leaders used to persuade the program’s readers, to speculate as to why they chose those arguments, and to consider which arguments would be successful today. The arguments in the statement of purpose range widely and include both “because it is right and fair that those who must obey the laws should have a



voice in making them” and “because it would increase the proportion of native-born voters.” They also allow readers to make inferences about the assumed audience for the program. Students might review the organizers’ profiles to see who was included and who was excluded from this group, and to speculate about the reasons for those inclusions and exclusions. A close examination of which businesses and organizations were selected to advertise in the program—a list that includes law schools, interior decorators, costume makers, and financial institutions—could also spark inferences about assumed audience.

The documentary record of the woman suffrage movement and its ephemeral events is available to students in many forms, notably in the online collections of the Library of Congress related to woman suffrage ([guides.loc.gov/19th-amendment/digital-collections](https://guides.loc.gov/19th-amendment/digital-collections)). These records are waiting to be explored, and to communicate with readers more than a century after their creation.

## CONCLUSION

Working with historical primary sources provides many opportunities for unexpected communication, as documents and other artifacts allow today’s students to eavesdrop on long-ago conversations and to view events and individuals from the past in a new light. The examples in this article represent only a few of the possibilities that students might consider in their own research, and hopefully provide a taste of the types of new discoveries they can make as they explore the unexpected.

To access more theme resources, go to [nhd.org/themebok](https://nhd.org/themebok).

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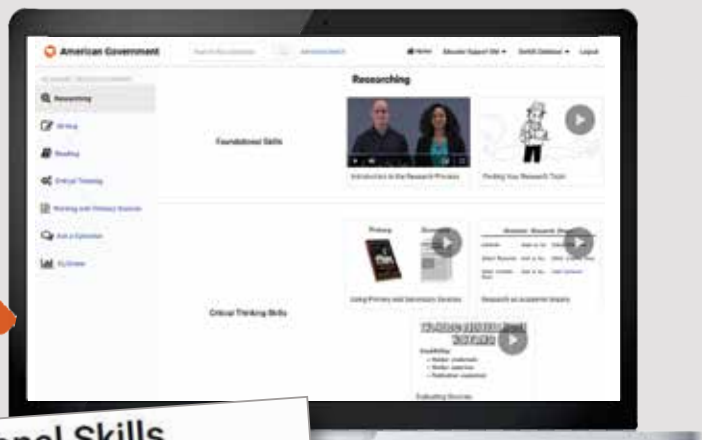
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# Media and Communication Technology in the Making of America

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The National History Day® (NHD) 2021 theme, *Communication in History: The Key to Understanding*, asks students to think about how people have communicated with each other over time, and the effect of communication and communication technology on how they consume and critically evaluate information. Newspapers have long offered the “first draft of history” as they were the most common medium for communicating information to a mass audience, even before the start of the republic. As a result, newspapers remain important artifacts to consider when researching historical events and can offer insights into contemporary issues regarding media and the press. Newspapers need to be analyzed just like any other source for use in an NHD project.

When using historic newspapers, it is important to consider in whose interest a report or story is published. Ask yourself: *Whose point of view is missing from the account of what happened? By whom or for what purpose is a publication produced? What makes a source trustworthy?* Each of these questions, and many more, can be examined by studying innovations in and events related to communication and how we work toward understanding diverse and divergent perspectives across U.S. history.

This article is framed by the compelling question, “How have changes in media and technology influenced communication and civic engagement in U.S. history?” In it, educators will find resources and lessons on media and communication technology throughout U.S. history that align with strategies for inquiry and project-based learning. The materials and learning activities included make it possible for students to:

- Examine the role of communication in the political, social, and cultural life of people in the United States.
- Analyze the relationship between media, technology, and communication in U.S. history.
- Evaluate how news and public information—in all its forms—connect to civic engagement.
- Evaluate how media influences the public and private lives of the American people then and now.
- Create original interpretations of historical and contemporary communication and media technology phenomena.

## PRINT MEDIA AND COLONIAL AMERICA

In Colonial America, news was often transmitted orally in sermons from pulpits and in handwritten letters circulated among the elite leaders within a community. The first successful newspaper in America, *The Boston News-Letter*, appeared in 1704 and was the only newspaper in the colonies for 15 years. In 1719, both *The Boston Gazette*, a local competitor in Boston, and *The American Weekly Mercury*, the first newspaper in Philadelphia, emerged. The first newspaper in Virginia, *The Virginia Gazette*, was founded in 1736. In total, by 1740 there were 16 newspapers in the British colonies—all weeklies—and by the time of the American Revolution in 1775, 37 newspapers were in print.



*The Boston News-Letter*, dated April 17 to April 24, 1704. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

Each American newspaper in the colonial period had its own personality. Some were news-focused, some more literary, but nearly all followed a standard format: the style

of the London papers. Early American newspapers were generally one page, comprising one small sheet printed front and back; later papers were four pages, one larger sheet printed front and back and folded once over.

Typically, the first section contained foreign news, cribbed from the London or European papers. Next came news from other American colonies, followed by a bit of local news, then advertisements. All the items, including the ads, were usually very brief, limited to one paragraph or one sentence. Illustrations, while rare, often came in the form of crude woodcuts. These woodcuts used iconography to direct readers toward different areas of news. For instance, a ship represented shipping news, a house marked land transactions, and a horse indicated livestock sales and auctions.

Consider the following questions when analyzing the structure of these early newspapers:

- What effect might brevity have on public understanding of an issue or event?
- Why were symbols used?
- How has technology changed the form and content of newspapers?

## PRINT MEDIA AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Dating from the sixteenth century, printed announcements often took the form of broadsides, or large, single-sided sheets of paper that served as advertisements and commentary for large audiences. Not unlike present-day community bulletin boards, broadsides prior to and during the American Revolution were typically posted in public squares to be read and debated. The EDSITEment lesson “Colonial Broadsides and the American Revolution” ([edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/colonial-broadsides-and-american-revolution](https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/colonial-broadsides-and-american-revolution)) asks students to consider the role of print communication by analyzing broadsides used to inform the public of actions taken by elected officials and to organize resistance against the Stamp Act in 1765, the Boston Tea Party in 1773, and the formation of the First Continental Congress in 1774. Working with these primary sources, students both analyze the timeline of significant events during this era and gain insight into how the arguments for and against revolution were organized and presented to the public. Consideration of perspective, audience, tone, and the use of evidence to support an argument are just some of the topics students can evaluate and discuss while working with these broadsides.



A U.S. postal stamp showing a broadside nailed to a building in the colonial era. The stamp was issued in 1973 to commemorate the bicentennial of the United States (1776-1976). Courtesy of the National Postal Museum.

In 1770, Isaiah Thomas and Zechariah Fowle established the most popular newspaper of the time, the *Massachusetts Spy*, which boasted 3,500 subscribers throughout the 13 colonies. While Thomas, a Bostonian, initially tried to make the *Spy* politically impartial, he soon found it impossible to do so in the epicenter of the growing imperial crisis. Thomas's strident Whig position was evident in his writing and in the text above the masthead: “Americans!---Liberty or Death!---Join or Die!”

Thomas's views frequently got him in trouble with the royal authorities, as evidenced by the history behind the May 3, 1775, issue of the *Massachusetts Spy*. Following the clash of arms at Lexington and Concord, printers sympathetic to the call for revolution rushed to publish firsthand accounts of the battles that blamed the British forces for the violence. Under the advisement of John Hancock, Thomas smuggled his press out of Boston during the night of April 16, 1775, moving it inland to the nearby Whig stronghold of Worcester, where he set it up in Timothy Bigelow's basement. When a supply of paper finally arrived in early May, he published his May third issue of the *Spy*, the first periodical ever printed in Worcester.



The *Massachusetts Spy*, a popular revolutionary newspaper. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

Readers will find Thomas's summary far from being an objective account of the Battles of Lexington and Concord. Thomas ends the introductory paragraph by claiming that the British troops had

...wantonly, and in a most inhuman manner fired upon and killed a number of our countrymen, then robbed them of their provisions, ransacked, plundered and burnt their houses! nor could the tears of defenseless women, some of whom were in the pains of childbirth, the cries of helpless babes, nor the prayers of old age, confined to beds of sickness, appease their thirst for blood!—or divert them from their DESIGN of MURDER and ROBBERY!

Using this primary text in class, students may ask, as a publisher would, whether Thomas had the right to include his own ideological leanings within the publication. Comparing this and other publications of the time raises questions about bias, freedom of speech and press, and the responsibility of the press to provide factual and impartial information. By analyzing point of view and the manner in which writers and publishers organize arguments, students engage in critical reading that aligns with change-over-time analysis and helps them recognize that arguments regarding bias and truth have a long history in media communication.

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## NEWSPAPERS AND THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

Newspapers flourished dramatically in early nineteenth-century America. By the 1830s, the United States had some 900 newspapers. The 1840 U.S. census counted 1,631 newspapers and by 1850 the number was 2,526, with a total annual circulation of half a billion copies for a population of a little under 23.2 million people. The growth in daily newspapers was even more striking. From just 24 in 1820, the number of daily newspapers grew to 138 by 1840 and to 254 by 1850. By mid-century, the American newspaper industry was amazingly diverse in size and scope. Big city dailies had become major manufacturing enterprises, with highly capitalized printing plants, scores of employees, and circulation in the tens of thousands. Meanwhile, small town weeklies, with hand-operated presses, two or three employees, and circulations in the hundreds were thriving as well.<sup>1</sup>

An important and very popular daily newspaper in New York, *The Sun* (established in 1833), was the first so-called “penny press” paper in America, targeting the middle and lower classes. The editorial style of these papers also tended to be sensational, often featuring stories of crimes and other socially aberrant behaviors that would attract attention and sell papers. Students can examine

some of the attention-grabbing rhetorical tactics used by these presses and compare them to headlines and advertisements they might see on the internet today. Aside from using newspaper sources to help students evaluate the role of media in U.S. politics and the economy, they can also provide important firsthand accounts of historic events. In the EDSITEment Lesson “Evaluating Eyewitness Reports” ([edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/evaluating-eyewitness-reports](https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/evaluating-eyewitness-reports)), students can investigate primary sources from the American Civil War and 1871 Chicago Fire.



The January 8, 1847 edition of *The Sun*. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

Newspapers solidified communities of Americans that were not represented in positions of power in the first half of the nineteenth century. For example, newspapers owned and operated by African Americans proliferated with the rise of the abolition movement. Frederick Douglass, a notable abolitionist who broadcast his ideas via published speeches and newspaper contributions, founded *The North Star* anti-slavery newspaper (1847), which is featured in the EDSITEment Lesson “A Debate Against Slavery” ([edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/lesson-3-debate-against-slavery](https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/lesson-3-debate-against-slavery)). In this lesson, students use evidence to argue why an African American print newspaper had more of an impact on the abolitionist movement than speeches given to various audiences around the country. In addition, Charleston's *South Carolina Leader* ([chroniclingamerica.org](http://chroniclingamerica.org)).

<sup>1</sup> Students can explore examples of these newspapers on the American Antiquarian Society's website at <http://americanantiquarian.org/earlyamericannewsmedia/exhibits/show/news-in-antebellum-america/the-newspaper-boom>.



[loc.gov/lccn/sn83025783/](http://loc.gov/lccn/sn83025783/)), an African American newspaper, began publication in 1865.

Women not only contributed to the labor of the nineteenth-century American press, but they also used print culture to advocate for their rights and comprised the primary consumer market for domestic magazines and trade catalogues. In the EDSITEment Closer Reading “Women’s History through Chronicling America” ([edsitement.neh.gov/closer-readings/womens-history-through-chronicling-america](http://edsitement.neh.gov/closer-readings/womens-history-through-chronicling-america)), students can reconstruct the response to nineteenth-century woman suffrage campaigns through newspaper write-ups.

EDSITEment’s “Chronicling America: History’s First Draft” ([edsitement.neh.gov/teachers-guides/chronicling-and-picturing-america](http://edsitement.neh.gov/teachers-guides/chronicling-and-picturing-america)) brings together resources and lessons that incorporate the use of historical newspapers, including access to newspapers specific to multiple ethnic and racial groups. As the nineteenth century saw the arrival of immigrants from Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, newspapers in languages other than English became available. Some of the most popular languages were German, Polish, and Yiddish.<sup>2</sup> However, the Arabic news-printing industry began in 1883 with the publication of *Kawkab Amirka* (Star of America) ([loc.gov/rr/amed/guide/nes-america.html](http://loc.gov/rr/amed/guide/nes-america.html)). The Chinese publication *The Oriental*; or, *Tung-Ngai San-Luk* ([americanantiquarian.org/earlyamericannewsmedia/items/show/74](http://americanantiquarian.org/earlyamericannewsmedia/items/show/74)), released its inaugural issue in 1855.



The Chinese publication *The Oriental*; or, *Tung-Ngai San-Luk*, April 28, 1855. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

Of course, there were other non-English-speaking groups living in the United States and its territories. The Spanish-language newspaper *El Misisipi* was born in 1808 in New

Orleans ([chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83026406/](http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83026406/)) and in 1855, *El Clamor Publico* ([chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn93052786/](http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn93052786/)) was available in Los Angeles.

With each of these newspapers, students can engage in a comparative analysis that considers audience, perspective, and how these smaller newspapers compare to national newspapers in terms of the public policy issues that are covered and arguments that are forwarded in their editorial sections.

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## TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS OF THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

After the American Civil War, rapid advancement and proliferation of communication and media technology in the United States changed the appearance and delivery of messages for a variety of purposes, from commercial to political to social. Chromolithography allowed for a quick transfer of full-color images using a grease and water technique on large stones.<sup>3</sup> Not only did this type of printing kick-start a new era of mass advertising, but it also proved immensely popular with social correspondence, as seen in the rise of the postcard industry supported by a growing U.S. Postal Service.

The Second Industrial Revolution (1870-1914) brought forth advancements in technology that included electricity and telecommunication, such as the expansion of telegraph lines, the telephone, and radio communication. The EDSITEment Learning Lab collection “Breaking Barriers: Innovation and Industry” ([learninglab.si.edu/collections/breaking-barriers-innovation-and-industry/YzLXyMsCLuE5Ec44#r](http://learninglab.si.edu/collections/breaking-barriers-innovation-and-industry/YzLXyMsCLuE5Ec44#r)) includes resources for learning more about Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, and the tools that made communicating across the country and oceans possible, forever changing both national and international relations. These technological developments also set the stage for the explosion of sound recording and radio transmission at the beginning of the twentieth century.

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## MEDIA AND THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Competition between publishers and the growing influence of the press on public opinion resulted in yellow journalism—the practice of seeking out sensational rather than factual news—at the end of the nineteenth century. Perhaps the original form of “click bait” in media and journalism, the sensationalizing of events in Cuba by two New York newspaper publishers is credited with

2 Leah Weinryb Grohsgal, “Chronicling America’s Historic German Newspapers and the Growth of the American Ethnic Press,” updated July 2, 2014, accessed January 3, 2020, [neh.gov/divisions/preservation/featured-project/chronicling-americas-historic-german-newspapers-and-the-grow](http://neh.gov/divisions/preservation/featured-project/chronicling-americas-historic-german-newspapers-and-the-grow).

3 “Chromolithography,” The American Antiquarian Society, accessed January 3, 2020, [americanantiquarian.org/prang/whatisachromo](http://americanantiquarian.org/prang/whatisachromo).

the U.S. entry into the Spanish-American War in 1898. The EDSITEment lesson “The Spanish-American War” ([edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/lesson-2-spanish-american-war](https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/lesson-2-spanish-american-war)) includes an interactive component that asks students to examine competing perspectives about the war and the role played by journalists and media at the time.

On the eve of the twentieth century, the first transatlantic radio message was transmitted, ushering in a century filled with leaps in communication technology, much of which originated with developments in military technology: radio, television, film, computers, cellular communication, and the internet.

A few forms of telecommunication technology used during times of war and to communicate with foreign governments include reporting from the frontlines on the radio, filming scenes of combat, marshalling Navajo code talkers during World War II, and dialing a red phone in the White House to speak with Moscow during the Cold War. The EDSITEment lesson “On the Home Front” ([edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/home-front](https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/home-front)) looks at the importance of the radio during World War II, and “The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962” ([edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/cuban-missile-crisis-1962-missiles-october](https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/cuban-missile-crisis-1962-missiles-october)) engages students with questions about the importance of television broadcasts and communication between U.S. President John F. Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev.

As mass media became an integral component of American culture, new jobs and forms of communication were developed. EDSITEment’s “Chronicling America: History’s First Draft” ([edsitement.neh.gov/teachers-guides/chronicling-and-picturing-america](https://edsitement.neh.gov/teachers-guides/chronicling-and-picturing-america)) brings together resources and lessons on these various topics. For instance, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, newspaper publishers relied on newspaper boys (“newsies”) to distribute their newspapers on city streets. Because newsboys purchased their papers up front, they usually had to sell all of them to make a decent profit ([loc.gov/rr/news/topics/newsboys.html](https://loc.gov/rr/news/topics/newsboys.html)). On the other end of the press spectrum, Joseph Pulitzer single-handedly transformed the newspaper industry and became one of the wealthiest men in America. But controversy and conflict followed him to his deathbed—including press wars and accusations of libel from President Theodore Roosevelt ([loc.gov/rr/news/topics/pulitzer.html](https://loc.gov/rr/news/topics/pulitzer.html)). Although cartoonist W.E. Hill has now been largely forgotten, he was hailed as an artistic genius who dealt in “making the world safe from hypocrisy.” Every Sunday for years, Americans eagerly awaited “Among Us Mortals,” a full page of satirical illustrations devoted to the everyday citizen ([loc.gov/rr/news/topics/mortals.html](https://loc.gov/rr/news/topics/mortals.html)).

Growth in the number of people using the telephone brought about the Hello Girls, female switchboard operators who proved to be an integral part in telecommunications at home, as well as for military operations during World War I ([loc.gov/rr/news/topics/hello.html](https://loc.gov/rr/news/topics/hello.html)). And of course, the invention of moving pictures made it possible to share information and communicate

in creative ways. In addition to a brief timeline of developments related to the creation of film and early film houses, these newspaper articles report on George Eastman’s first camera, the first time a moving picture was projected in France, and the opening of the first nickelodeon in the U.S. in 1905 ([loc.gov/rr/news/topics/cinema.html](https://loc.gov/rr/news/topics/cinema.html)).

To engage in an evaluation of how photographs represent events and influence public opinion, students can examine the photographs James Karales took at a 1965 civil rights march with the EDSITEment lesson “Picturing Freedom: Selma to Montgomery in March, 1965” ([edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/picturing-freedom-selma-montgomery-march-1965](https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/picturing-freedom-selma-montgomery-march-1965)).

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## CONCLUSION


Questions of bias, intent, and audience are critical when discussing the press and communication since the early days of the American republic. Further, the role of technology, the means by which history is recorded and how information is disseminated was then, as it is now, a changing and integral part of politics, economics, and culture in the United States.

As the number of news and information producers and outlets have multiplied, the need for critical reading, viewing, and listening skills as part of civic literacy has grown. As such, the investigation of news and news publishers, as well as how information is communicated to the public, can fuel inquiry and project-based learning. The theme of *Communication in History: The Key to Understanding* challenges students to think about how different information is conveyed to the public. It lets them consider different ways the news is presented to audiences today and how information affects the lives of everyday citizens. Students might think critically about:

- How is news gathered, distributed, shared, and consumed?
- What impact do changes in media technology have on content?
- How do historians weigh technological change against other social and economic forces?
- What impact did law and government policy have on the press and communication?
- How have changes to media and communication technology affected freedom of the press and freedom of speech under the First Amendment?
- What roles did news and public information play in the lives of ordinary Americans?
- How might the experience of history shed light on our experience with media today?
- How might our experience with media today shed light on our understanding of history?

Though digital and social media encompass the popular means of communication used across the world today, the issues that continue to challenge governments, citizens, and the news media—bias, truthfulness, rights, and access, to name a few—have been present throughout U.S. history. How technology influences what is communicated, by whom, and for what purpose has been woven within communication from the time of early newspapers to radios to televisions to the hand-held mobile devices of this century. As such, our study of issues and concerns regarding communication in history informs how we consume and produce information today and, hopefully, enables us to engage with others in the interest of listening and communicating to understand.

To access more theme resources, go to [nhd.org/themebook](http://nhd.org/themebook).



The Chronicling America landing page ([chroniclingamerica.loc.gov](http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov)) is a great resource for searching historic American newspapers for use in classrooms or NHD projects.



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# Finding Communication in History Through the National Park Service's Educator's Portal

LINDA ROSENBLUM, Education Program Manager, Office of Interpretation, Education and Volunteers, National Park Service

On January 10, 1917, a dozen determined women left the National Woman's Party (NWP) headquarters and marched across Lafayette Park to the White House. They carried purple, white, and gold flags and banners. The banners read, "Mr. President, What Will You Do for Woman Suffrage?" and "How Long Must Women Wait for Liberty?" During the next few cold and wintry months, women took up their stations in front of the White House as "silent sentinels." These women became the first group to politically picket at the White House.

At first, the women were viewed as a curiosity, but the entrance of the United States into the Great War in April of that year caused a change in public sentiment toward anyone who criticized the government. Although many other groups seeking woman suffrage suspended their work for voting rights in favor of supporting the war effort, the NWP continued its protests of the government and of President Woodrow Wilson in particular. The press and the public increasingly found the NWP's behavior unpatriotic and in some cases subversive. The picketers were attacked by violent mobs, sometimes led by soldiers and sailors who supported U.S. involvement in the Great War. Finally, on June 22, 1917, the police arrested these female protesters on the technical charge of "obstructing traffic." The arrests and prison sentences continued and increased, culminating in a "Night of Terror" at the Occoquan Workhouse in Lorton, Virginia. While at the workhouse, 33 women protesters suffered physical beatings when they demanded that the prison superintendent treat them as political prisoners. Other women were forcibly fed when they went on hunger strikes while imprisoned.

The brutal treatment of the protesters eventually won the public's sympathies. Many of the activists were also leaders in supporting the war effort. The press increasingly presented their plight in a more sympathetic light. On September 20, 1918, President Wilson argued for support of woman suffrage in Congress. The House of Representatives passed the Nineteenth Amendment twice, once in 1918 and again in 1919. The amendment finally passed the Senate in June 1919. Ratification of the amendment by three-quarters of the states dragged out

over the next 14 months, with Tennessee becoming the thirty-sixth state to ratify the amendment in August 1920.

The National Woman's Party exercised their First Amendment rights to speech and assembly in their effort to pass the Nineteenth Amendment. They endured public contempt, mob violence, and even imprisonment to communicate their message for women's right to vote. Many later groups and individuals followed the NWP's example to picket at the White House for and against many causes or issues.

The National Park Service (NPS) preserves and protects the places and resources that tell America's stories. There are over 400 units of the National Park Service and nearly two-thirds of these units preserve and interpret historical or cultural resources and stories. The story of the NWP's protests at Lafayette Park, across the street from the White House, is retold in a series of lesson plans created by NPS staff that are available online for educators to access through the NPS Educators' Portal ([nps.gov/teachers/index.htm](https://nps.gov/teachers/index.htm)).

These lesson plans are selected to reflect a variety of stories that can connect to the National History Day® theme of *Communication in History: The Key to Understanding*. They are arranged in groups with similar themes.

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## SPEAKING OUT FOR WOMAN SUFFRAGE AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

### PRESIDENT'S PARK (WHITE HOUSE) (WASHINGTON, D.C.)

[nps.gov/whho/index.htm](https://nps.gov/whho/index.htm)

The President of the United States lives in a National Park. Every president, except George Washington, has called the White House and its surrounding grounds his place of work, rest, and solitude. Recognizable around the world,

the White House stands as a symbol of democracy. The White House and its park grounds serve not only as the seat of the executive branch of government of the United States of America, but also as an iconic place for civil discourse.

› **Lafayette Park: First Amendment Rights on the President’s Doorstep**

[nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/139LafayettePark/139Lafayette\\_Park.htm](https://nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/139LafayettePark/139Lafayette_Park.htm)

The story of the National Woman’s Party (NWP), which originated the practice of political protest at the White House gates, was presented in the introduction to this article. This lesson plan is part of the Teaching with Historic Places collection of over 160 lessons developed for educators. Students will analyze maps, readings, and photographs to consider how women exercised their First Amendment rights of speech and assembly to protest for woman suffrage at the president’s front door. They will investigate how these protests led to violence, arrest, imprisonment, and eventually to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. Students will have the opportunity to engage in activities comparing woman suffrage movements in the United States with those in the United Kingdom, researching subsequent movements that protested at the White House, and examining First Amendment rights exercised in local issues.



National Woman’s Party protest outside the White House. Photograph by Harris & Ewing, January 1919. Courtesy of the Library of Congress (mnwp.276030).

**BELMONT-PAUL WOMEN’S EQUALITY NATIONAL MONUMENT, NATIONAL MALL AND MEMORIAL PARKS, PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, WOMEN’S RIGHTS NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK (WASHINGTON, D.C., AND SENECA FALLS, NEW YORK)**

[nps.gov/bepa/index.htm](https://nps.gov/bepa/index.htm)  
[nps.gov/nama/index.htm](https://nps.gov/nama/index.htm)  
[nps.gov/paav/index.htm](https://nps.gov/paav/index.htm)  
[nps.gov/wori/index.htm](https://nps.gov/wori/index.htm)

Leading the march for women’s equality, the following National Park Service sites preserve and interpret stories of women and men who worked toward woman suffrage and equal rights. Women’s Rights National Historical Park tells the story of the first Women’s Rights Convention held in Seneca Falls, New York, July 19-20, 1848. It is a story of struggles for civil rights, human rights, and equality—global struggles that continue today. The efforts of women’s rights leaders, abolitionists, and other nineteenth-century reformers remind us that all people must be accepted as equals. Home to the National Woman’s Party for nearly 90 years, the Ava Belmont house was the epicenter of the struggle for women’s rights. From this house in the shadow of the U.S. Capitol and Supreme Court, Alice Paul, a leader of the woman suffrage movement, and the NWP developed innovative strategies and tactics to advocate for the Equal Rights Amendment and equality for women. President Barack Obama designated the national monument on April 12, 2016. The following lesson plans look at how the National Woman’s Party and its leaders communicated through protests, picketing, lobbying, and political speeches to work toward woman suffrage and equal rights.

› **A Woman’s Place is in the Sewall-Belmont House: Alice Paul and the Work for Women’s Equality**

[nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/alicepaul-womans-place-in-this-house.htm](https://nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/alicepaul-womans-place-in-this-house.htm)

This lesson, also from the Teaching with Historic Places collection, studies the continued work of the National Woman’s Party (NWP) following the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, which provided women the right to vote.

In 1929, the restless leaders of the NWP bought a house on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., and designated it their new headquarters. Over a decade had passed since its members picketed the White House and went to prison for their political activism, and nearly a decade since they persuaded Americans to care about woman



suffrage. While many of the suffrage veterans thought the war was won, its founder, Alice Paul, did not rest. For her, the fight for the Nineteenth Amendment was just the first battle in a longer struggle.

Dedicated to erasing discriminatory laws that she believed kept women from being free and equal citizens, Paul lived at the strategic headquarters of the organization she started. Paul and the NWP lobbied Congress to support federal legislation like the first proposed Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which Paul drafted in 1921. She never saw the ERA realized, as it was never ratified by the necessary number of states.<sup>1</sup> However, the legacy of her fierce determination can be found in the Nineteenth Amendment, the United Nations Charter, and the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Tucked among federal office buildings, the U.S. Supreme Court, and the U.S. Capitol, the Sewall-Belmont House & Museum, home of the National Woman's Party, stands today in the center of American government as a women's history museum, archive, and monument.



Sewall-Belmont House of Belmont-Paul Historic Site. Courtesy of the National Park Service.

### › A New Home on Capitol Hill: Fighting for the Equal Rights Amendment

[nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/alicepaul-capitol-hill-era.htm](https://nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/alicepaul-capitol-hill-era.htm)

The National Woman's Party (NWP) continued to work for women's equality after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. In 1921, the party leaders and members debated the organization's future. Some of the members believed that with women's enfranchisement achieved, the time for activism had ended. Alice Paul and Alva Belmont wanted the NWP to stay in Washington, D.C., and use the new political power they had as voters to lobby for laws that addressed women's political, economic, and social

inequality. In addition, they wanted to return to the strategy of amending the U.S. Constitution, this time to achieve complete legal equality for women in the United States.

Students will read a text about the history of the Equal Rights Amendment and early objections to the possible effects of the ERA, particularly for working women. They will analyze a political cartoon using what they learned from the reading. Students will then develop a response to the concerns about the ERA addressed in the cartoon.

### › Lobbying for Equality: Examining the “Deadly Political Index” of the National Woman's Party

[nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/lobbying-for-era-lessonplan.htm](https://nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/lobbying-for-era-lessonplan.htm)

“Neither members of Congress who have swung from the anti-suffrage to the pro-suffrage column nor those who remain in the list of the antis are aware that at the headquarters of the National Woman's Party...is a card index system so extensive in detail, political and personal, that twenty-two different cards are required for each Senator and Representative,” *The New York Times* reported in March 1919. San Francisco native Maud Younger oversaw this detailed record-keeping system, which became known as the “Deadly Political Index.”

Younger grew up in a wealthy household but spent most of her life as an activist for working-class women. She joined the suffrage movement in California and then moved to Washington, D.C., at the request of Alice Paul. Younger was a powerful speaker who participated in many Congressional Union and National Woman's Party public events. In 1917, as the NWP launched its picketing campaign, Younger became the chair of the NWP's lobbying committee. She set to work putting pressure on members of Congress to support the Nineteenth Amendment (also known as the Susan B. Anthony Amendment) while the more-visible picketers focused their efforts on winning President Wilson's endorsement.

Using this lesson, students will examine a primary source document from the National Woman's Party lobbying records and identify differing perspectives on the Equal Rights Amendment. They will plan their own lobbying approach based on what they have learned. Students then identify an issue and design their own campaign for change.

<sup>1</sup> As of January 2020, Virginia became the critical thirty-eighth state to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. The ratification came almost 50 years after its second proposal in 1972 and just shy of 100 years after the original proposal by Alice Paul in 1923.

## COMMUNICATION DURING CONFLICT

### PATERSON GREAT FALLS NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK (NEW JERSEY)

[nps.gov/pagr/index.htm](https://nps.gov/pagr/index.htm)

Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park is a new unit of the National Park Service that is open to visitors for self-guided outdoor activities and tours. Here visitors will explore a National Natural Landmark, the Great Falls of the Passaic River. The falls are the centerpiece of the park; their beauty and power are central to Paterson's story. Whether viewing them at a distance from Overlook Park, or feeling their spray in Mary Ellen Kramer Park, the Falls are a "must-see" for anyone visiting the area. Paterson also boasts a National Engineering Landmark. The raceways that were built in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to take advantage of the nearby waterpower were engineering marvels. A walk through Upper Raceway Park takes visitors along the beginning of the raceway system and past just a few of the many mills that benefited from it.



Photograph, titled *Great Falls of the Passaic River*, by Martha Cooper with collaboration by Thomas D. Carroll, August 15, 1994. Courtesy of the Library of Congress (AFC 1995/028: WIP-MC-C030-09).

#### › Paterson, New Jersey: America's Silk City

[nps.gov/articles/paterson-new-jersey-america-s-silk-city-teaching-with-historic-places.htm](https://nps.gov/articles/paterson-new-jersey-america-s-silk-city-teaching-with-historic-places.htm)

The water cascades over rugged cliffs, drops 77 feet, and rushes through the Passaic River Gorge. Paterson, New Jersey, was established in the 1790s to utilize the power of these falls. Massive brick mill buildings lined the canals that transformed the power of the falls into energy to drive machines. These mills manufactured many things during the long history of this industrial city including cotton textiles, steam locomotives, Colt revolvers, and aircraft engines. In the late nineteenth

and early twentieth centuries, they produced silk fabrics in such quantities that Paterson was known as "Silk City." In 1913, however, the mills stood silent for five months as workers joined in a bitter strike that brought the city national attention.

This lesson plan studies how early twentieth-century labor organizers in the silk industry merged skilled and unskilled workers together to protest new technologies that required fewer workers to tend the looms, and also called for increased wages and an eight-hour workday. Students will review maps and readings and will analyze historical photos to understand how the International Workers of the World (IWW or "Wobblies") used their communication skills to lead over 20,000 silk workers to strike against the owners of the mills. Students will develop arguments about the positions held by the unions, strikers, and the mill owners and support their arguments with evidence from the lesson resources.

### TUMACÁCORI NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK (ARIZONA)

[nps.gov/tuma/index.htm](https://nps.gov/tuma/index.htm)

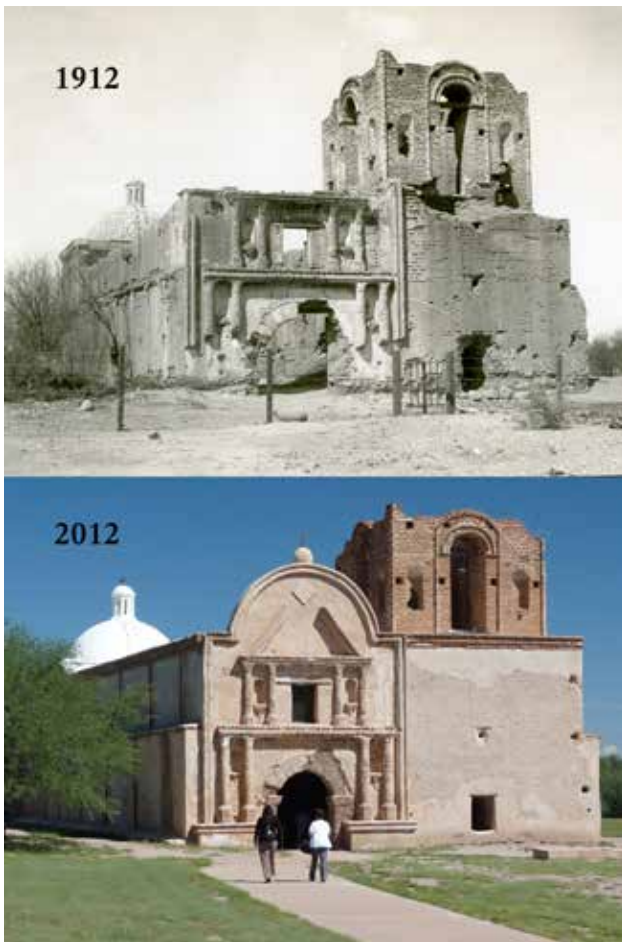
Tumacácori sits at a cultural crossroads in the Santa Cruz River Valley. Here O'odham (or Pima), Yaqui, and Apache people met and mingled with European Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries, settlers, and soldiers, sometimes in conflict and sometimes in cooperation.

#### › Riot, Rebellion, or Revolt?

[nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/riot-rebellion-revolution.htm](https://nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/riot-rebellion-revolution.htm)

In the region of what is now southern Arizona and northern Sonora México, Padre Eusebio Francisco Kino<sup>2</sup>, a Jesuit missionary from the Holy Roman Empire (now Italy), set up a system of missions and smaller communities. In these communities, he encouraged Native Americans to accept a Spanish way of life. This meant learning a trade, being baptized, worshipping in the Catholic Church, learning Spanish, and giving up native tradition. The relationship between the Native Americans of the Pimería Alta, the Spanish, Christianized natives, and mestizos (people born of both Spanish and indigenous descent) was a relatively peaceful one. However, discontent among some of the native people led to a well-organized revolt in 1751. The revolt resulted in the deaths of two priests and more than 100 others who were perceived as Spanish sympathizers. There are many accounts of this incident as revealed through letters. Some writings label the O'odham rebels as *hechiceros* (witch doctors), "wicked children," and "malcontents." Other writings sympathize with the way the native people were treated and abused.

2 In Italy, Kino is referred to as Eusebio Francisco Chini. Kino is the Spanish version of his name.



Photographs of the mission church at Tumacácori National Park. Courtesy of the National Park Service.

This lesson examines how word choice influences us, our perspectives, and the way we attempt to communicate with others, as well as how the reports and letters of the Upper Pima (O’odham) Rebellion of 1751 used connotative and denotative meanings to portray the events.

## COMMUNICATING THROUGH DIPLOMACY

### EISENHOWER NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE (PENNSYLVANIA)

[nps.gov/eise/index.htm](https://nps.gov/eise/index.htm)

Eisenhower National Historic Site is the home and farm of General and President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Located adjacent to the Gettysburg Battlefield, the farm served the president as a weekend retreat and a meeting place for

world leaders. With its peaceful setting and view of South Mountain, it was a much-needed respite from Washington, D.C., and a backdrop for efforts to reduce Cold War tensions.

#### > Thaw in the Cold War: Eisenhower and Khrushchev at Gettysburg

[nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/29ike/29ike.htm](https://nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/29ike/29ike.htm)

Perhaps a change of scene would make a difference. Dwight D. Eisenhower and Nikita Khrushchev, opposing leaders of the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics at the height of the Cold War in 1959, had reached an impasse. Even in the informal setting of Camp David, with occasional escapes from the intrusive protocol and ever-present advisers, the leaders were making little progress in their effort to lessen the tensions. As he and Khrushchev boarded the helicopter for the short flight from Camp David to the president’s farm in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, Eisenhower hoped that the quiet, rural atmosphere would have the intended effect on Khrushchev.

While Khrushchev’s trip to the United States did not end the Cold War, it was successful in temporarily lessening tensions between the two nations. Eisenhower and Khrushchev both got the minimum concessions each wanted from the other. In addition, Eisenhower gained a better understanding of Khrushchev’s complex personality, information that would prove valuable as the Cold War continued.



Eisenhower’s farm house in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Courtesy of the National Park Service.

This lesson plan will introduce students to Eisenhower’s Cold War diplomacy through maps, historical photographs, transcripts of the president’s news conferences leading up to the Khrushchev visit, and an interview with John S. D. Eisenhower, the president’s son, regarding his experience at the Gettysburg farm during the Khrushchev visit.

## JIMMY CARTER NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE (GEORGIA)

[nps.gov/jica/index.htm](https://nps.gov/jica/index.htm)

Whether they are Carter enthusiasts, researchers, or just curious how a small town influenced a young boy who would become the president of the most powerful nation in the world, odds are visitors will find a stop at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site interesting. The history and culture of this rural community can provide a look into why the Carters' ties to Plains, Georgia, endured the stresses of public life and remained as strong as they were decades earlier. A visit to the site provides an opportunity to explore the historic resources and rural southern culture that had an influence in molding the character and political policies of Jimmy Carter.

### › A Pathway to Peace—Jimmy Carter and the Camp David Accords

[nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/a-pathway-to-peace-jimmy-carter-and-the-camp-david-accords.htm](https://nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/a-pathway-to-peace-jimmy-carter-and-the-camp-david-accords.htm)

The new nation of Israel was created in 1948 following World War II as a homeland for displaced Jewish people from around the world. Land was taken from the Palestinian people to create the new Israeli nation. Land disputes over the boundaries of Israel continued from 1949 through the 1970s. Israel fought wars against Egypt and Syria in 1967 and 1973 over boundaries and Israel's attempts to settle new territories in the West Bank and the Sinai Peninsula. United States support of Israel led to an oil embargo by the Arab nations in 1973, causing gas shortages and increased petroleum prices.

Beginning in 1977, President Carter sought to devise a comprehensive peace plan for the Middle East focusing on three main concerns: Israeli security, land ownership, and Palestinian rights. Carter arranged for a summit between Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli President Menachem Begin to be held at Camp David in September 1978. After 13 days of negotiations between representatives of both countries' governments, an agreement was reached to create a "framework for peace" between Egypt and Israel. The actual treaty was not signed for another six months. President Carter hosted Sadat and Begin at a signing ceremony at the White House in March 1979.



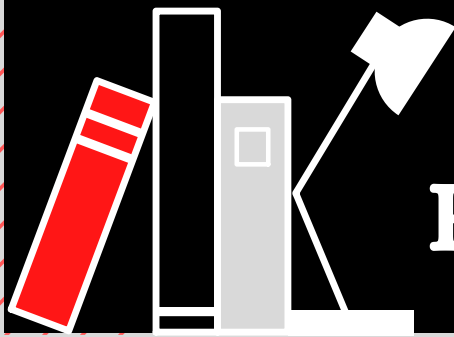
Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, U.S. President Jimmy Carter, and Israeli President Menachem Begin shake hands following the Camp David Peace Plan, March 26, 1979. Courtesy of the Library of Congress (2003673991).

These lessons utilize primary sources and background information to help students understand the complex process of resolving conflict. Students will analyze documents, photographs, and political cartoons related to the Camp David Accords. They will learn how and why the United States, Israel, and Egypt negotiated this historic peace agreement. They will also analyze the resulting agreement, understanding that every party does not get everything they want in a compromise.

Lesson plans and other educational resources produced by the National Park Service and some of its partners are available to educators through the NPS Educator's Portal at [nps.gov/teachers/index.htm](https://nps.gov/teachers/index.htm). A simple keyword or subject search can lead to examples of lesson plans and activities and provide a starting place for finding great stories on which to base a National History Day project.

To access more theme resources, go to [nhd.org/themebook](https://nhd.org/themebook).





# NHD RESOURCES

## NHD CONTEST RESOURCES

### WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CONTEST?

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# Cultural Communication: Japan and the United States Establish Diplomatic Relations

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IMAGE RESEARCH BY ELIZABETH GEARHART, Program Assistant, National Museum of American Diplomacy

A Google Images search of the term Manifest Destiny reveals maps of the continental United States or artistic works such as John Gast's 1872 painting, *American Progress*. While these images are not nonfactual representations of the philosophical idea of American expansionism in the mid-nineteenth century, or of how Americans put it into practice in war and foreign policy, they nonetheless enforce the misconception that Manifest Destiny exclusively meant land acquisitions within the continental United States. In the classroom, the Manifest Destiny theme provides a useful framework for students to understand why the United States government and white settlers aggressively pushed west, spurring violent conflict with both their neighbors to the south and Native American nations living in the west.



John Gast's painting, *American Progress* (1872), communicates a popular image of Manifest Destiny from the American point of view. Courtesy of the Library of Congress (ppmsca.09855).

John O'Sullivan introduced the term Manifest Destiny in his 1839 article, "The Great Nation of Futurity," published in *The United States Democratic Review*. As a classroom primary source, excerpts from the text serve to help students make the connection between ideas, motivation, and action when studying American expansionism in the mid-nineteenth century. As O'Sullivan wrote,

The expansive future is our arena, and for our history. We are entering on its untrodden space, with the truths of God in our minds, beneficent objects in our hearts, and with a clear conscience unsullied by the past. We are the nation of human progress, and who will, what can, set limits to our onward march?<sup>1</sup>

That 1840s and 1850s "march" did not end at California's shores. Educators can incorporate stories and primary documents demonstrating America's Pacific trade ambitions, such as the first engagement with Japan, into lessons to provide a broader understanding of this era of expansionism and imperialism. Including personal narratives of diplomats in the classroom shows how they worked for their respective nations to achieve domestic and foreign policy goals during these negotiations. This article will demonstrate how American diplomats and officials—who sought to distinguish themselves from the monarchical governments of Europe—advanced national expansion goals when they engaged in diplomacy with Japan, a country that had been largely isolated from the western world and whose language and culture were utterly foreign to Americans.

## COMMUNICATION AND DIPLOMACY

Communication is one of the primary tools of diplomacy. In the mid-nineteenth century, the majority of American

<sup>1</sup> "The Great Nation of Futurity," *The United States Democratic Review*, Volume 6, Issue 23, (1839): 426-430. [http://collections.library.cornell.edu/moa\\_new/browse.html?notisid=AGD1642-0006-46](http://collections.library.cornell.edu/moa_new/browse.html?notisid=AGD1642-0006-46).



diplomats had engaged with western nations. Foreign language skills and an understanding of cultural norms and customs had not been barriers to diplomatic relations. First, as British colonies, and later following independence in 1776, the United States became accustomed to negotiating commercial alliances with European empires and trading in exports and imports around the world. As carriers of trade goods, American merchants and mariners often spoke multiple languages and had extensive knowledge of the customs and manners of many countries. As a result, they often served as the first consuls to foreign nations and important communication conduits to the Department of State in Washington, D.C.<sup>2</sup>

In 1852, U.S. President Millard Fillmore appointed Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry to head a naval expedition to Japan, which at the time was living under the rules of the 1636 Act of Seclusion. Imposed by the Tokugawa shogunate, the military government that ruled Japan from 1600 until 1868, the act limited diplomatic and trade access to only China, Korea, and a Dutch East India outpost on a small island in Nagasaki Harbor.<sup>3</sup> From America's perspective, breaking Japan out of its more than 200 years of self-imposed exile would give the United States an opportunity to counter the Europeans' commercial influence in Asian and Pacific countries. They understood that Japan would be wary of westerners' motives, having seen China's sovereignty erode after decades of aggression and outright war to force the Chinese into commercial treaties favorable to European nations.

## GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY COMMUNICATION

As an experienced naval officer, Commodore Perry took care to study diplomatic successes and failures in East Asia before embarking. As uninvited visitors who did not speak the language, other avenues of communicating intent would be key to the mission's success. Perry knew the Japanese would not distinguish Americans from Europeans and also surmised the Tokugawa government would not take them seriously if they did not enter Edo (now Tokyo) Bay demonstrating military strength. At the same time, he understood that while the United States had to indicate it would use force if deemed necessary, it also had to respect and adhere to Japanese ceremonial traditions.

Perry arrived unannounced and uninvited to Edo Bay in 1853 with a squadron of gunboats, which the Japanese called "kurofune," or "black ships of evil means," because

of the black smoke produced by their coal-fired engines. Known as gunboat diplomacy, Perry's arrival effectively communicated the threat of force to achieve foreign policy objectives.



An 1854 Japanese print depicting Commodore Perry's visit to Japan. The print describes Perry's "Black Ships." Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

The Japanese were alarmed, but unsurprised. The Dutch had warned the Tokugawa government of the Americans' impending arrival. Following days of internal deliberation, Perry was granted permission to deliver a letter of introduction from President Fillmore to Japanese officials, who would then take it to the emperor. After an elaborate landing ceremony, Perry presented Fillmore's letter in a blue velvet box adorned with gold tassels and informed the officials he would be back within a year for their response.

Perry returned in the spring of 1854 with even more gunboats, this time bringing gifts. In the interim, the Tokugawa shogunate had determined it was in its best interest to negotiate a treaty with the Americans. As a result, they entered into formal discussions through a Dutch interpreter. In 1854, Perry and Japanese officials signed the Kanagawa Treaty, ending the Act of Seclusion and opening two ports to the Americans while ensuring the safety of American sailors.<sup>4</sup>

## COMMUNICATING WITH GIFTS

Traditional scholarship credits gunboat diplomacy for Perry's success, but it is only part of the story. While the Japanese did recognize that their military prowess could

2 A "consul" is synonymous with diplomat, or an official appointed by the government who resides in a foreign country, protecting its citizens and promoting its interests. For those interested in learning more about the history of American diplomacy, check out Major Samuel Shaw, a Revolutionary War veteran and sailor aboard the first commercial vessel to China in 1784. Shaw served as the first American consul to Canton (now Guangzhou) from 1786 to 1789. Major Samuel Shaw's journal of his experience in Canton can be found at [www.questia.com/library/1314579/the-journals-of-major-samuel-shaw-the-first-american](http://www.questia.com/library/1314579/the-journals-of-major-samuel-shaw-the-first-american).

3 Suzuki Yasuko, *Japan-Netherlands Trade 1600-1800: The Dutch East India Company and Beyond* (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2012).

4 David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Involvement: American Economic Expansion Across the Pacific, 1784-1900* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 155-156.



not match that of the Americans, the Fillmore letter and the types of gifts they received communicated to them that a treaty with the United States would greatly benefit their nation's own prosperity. Fillmore's letter, authored by Secretary of State Edward Everett, made the Americans' intentions clear, with language constructed to convey respect and goodwill.

"GREAT and Good Friend," the letter began, "...I entertain the kindest feelings towards your majesty's person and government, and that I have no other object in sending [Perry] to Japan but to propose to your imperial majesty that the United States and Japan should live in friendship and have commercial intercourse with each other."

Everett was careful to indicate that the United States government specifically prohibited "all interference with the religious or political concerns of other nations," to allay any concerns that the Americans sought to depose the emperor or diminish Japan's sovereignty, as the European nations had done with China. The letter also asked that the Japanese take care of and return shipwrecked American whaling sailors, agreeing to do the same for their countrymen.<sup>5</sup>

The gifts the Americans selected to present to the emperor were carefully considered and designed to communicate to the Japanese that a commercial treaty would be mutually beneficial. Traditional decorative gifts were avoided in favor of those showing American-made products and communication technology that the Japanese could adopt or trade in return for raw materials, such as coal. Today, we would recognize this as a clever marketing strategy designed to entice a customer. This tactic stood in stark contrast to European diplomatic gift-giving strategies, which usually consisted of giving watches, clocks, or works of art. The Americans presented guns, agricultural tools, reports of standards of weights and measures, numerous books explaining how the U.S. government functioned, and examples of native flora and fauna. The gifts that made the most impact however, and may have been the tipping point, were a scaled-down, fully-operational steam-powered locomotive, complete with track and car, and two battery-operated telegraph sets wired for a three-mile span. The Japanese reciprocated, offering fine foods to the Americans as a gesture of respect and hospitality, communicating their receptiveness to establishing formal relations.<sup>6</sup>



An 1856 lithograph illustrating the gifts brought by Commodore Perry to the Japanese. Note the locomotive. Courtesy of the Library of Congress (2003689056).

## DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AS A FORM OF COMMUNICATION

In 1858, U.S. envoy to Japan, Townsend Harris, negotiated a general commercial treaty that superseded the 1854 treaty, opening up several Japanese ports to American trade and establishing formal diplomatic relations between the two countries.<sup>7</sup> The Americans proposed taking a delegation of Japanese diplomats with them on their return trip to the United States to allow them to personally deliver the signed treaty to Washington and present their credentials. Three months later, on May 14, 1860, the first Japanese "Embassy" of 77, headed by Tokugawa shogunate Ambassador Shimmi Masaoki and Vice-Ambassador Muragaki Norimasa, arrived in Washington, D.C., where they were greeted by 5,000 cheering spectators. Their mission was to present the treaty to Secretary of State Lewis Cass for official ratification and meet with President James Buchanan.<sup>8</sup> Unknown to the Americans, the Japanese government had also instructed them to observe economic conditions, return with detailed reports of manufacturing and technology, and estimate the strength and size of the U.S. Navy.<sup>9</sup>

5 The full transcript of the Fillmore letter can be found at Asia for Educators, Columbia University, <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu>.

6 Courtney Fullilove, "Gift and Gunboat: Meanings of Exchange in the Perry Expedition," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 42, no. 1 (January 2018): 96-97.

7 An envoy is a government official sent to a foreign nation on a specific diplomatic mission.

8 Norimasa Muragaki, *The First Japanese Embassy to the United States of America, sent to Washington in 1860 as the first of the series of embassies specially sent abroad by the Tokugawa Shogunate*. (Tokyo: The America-Japan Society, 1928), 35.

9 Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Involvement*, 160.



The Japanese mission to the United States, photographed by Mathew Brady, 1860. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gilman Collection, Purchase, The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation Gift, through Joyce and Robert Menschel, 2005 (2005.100.1115).

Verbal communication, mutual respect, and understanding of cultural norms are essential to successful diplomatic relations. However, this first venture between the United States and Japan is an example of miscommunication caused by a lack of understanding.

The diplomats stayed at the Willard Hotel and became the toast of the city. They visited the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Patent Office, the Smithsonian Institution, the U.S. Naval Shipyard, hospitals, churches, and the printing office. They also attended a session of Congress where the debates on the floor reminded them, as one wrote, of a “fishmarket.”<sup>10</sup>

In his detailed travel diary, Vice-Ambassador Muragaki recounted that while the diplomats were treated with great respect, they marveled over the lack of formality in speech and dress at official government meetings.<sup>11</sup> When they asked Secretary Cass, through a Dutch interpreter, about proper protocol and etiquette for meeting with President Buchanan, they were astonished to hear that “no such thing existed at the President’s court, and that we might do as we pleased.”<sup>12</sup> They were also appalled that American women joined the men at official functions, asking what the Japanese considered to be intrusive and impertinent questions. At one State dinner, President Buchanan’s niece sat next to an embarrassed Muragaki asking him how “Japanese ladies dress[ed] their hair,” and how did the diplomats “like American women compared with the Japanese?” Entertained lavishly each evening, the Japanese delegates often reluctantly ate dishes

heavy in meat and dairy, and rice cooked in butter and sugar, all served with unfamiliar cutlery. “Our stomachs refuse to accept it,” Muragaki wrote, and several of the diplomats fell ill.<sup>13</sup>

The Japanese delegation was particularly impressed with American machinery and manufacturing, taking detailed notes and drawing sketches. They were confident that the technology could be adopted in their home country, and it was. In 1868, the Japanese built eight steam-powered warships, and it opened its first passenger rail service from Shimbashi to Yokohama (a distance of 20 miles) three years later.

Before leaving Washington, D.C., on June 5, the diplomats paid a final call to Buchanan at the Executive Mansion and presented silk screens, swords, and porcelains to the president, who explained that these gifts were not made to him alone, but to the American people. In return, Secretary Cass handed the diplomats gold, silver, and copper medals struck with a likeness of Buchanan on one side, the other side reading, “In Commemoration of the First Embassy from Japan to the United States 1860.” After visiting Philadelphia and New York, the diplomats returned to Japan. The commerce treaty and newly established diplomatic relationship flourished for nearly 80 years, until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.



Print of artists and photographers taking pictures of the gifts presented by the Japanese delegation, 1860. Courtesy of the Library of Congress (2006677547).

<sup>10</sup> Muragaki, *The First Japanese Embassy*, 47.

<sup>11</sup> Muragaki, *The First Japanese Embassy*, 40-41.

<sup>12</sup> Muragaki, *The First Japanese Embassy*, 37-38.

<sup>13</sup> Muragaki, *The First Japanese Embassy*, 50, 62.

## CONCLUSION

The establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and the United States in the 1850s and 1860s demonstrates a myriad of communication methods used by diplomats in the mid-nineteenth century to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome despite a language barrier. The story is currently featured in the National Museum of American Diplomacy's exhibit, *Diplomacy is Our Mission*, at the U.S. Department of State. Educators may schedule student group visits by emailing [nmad@state.gov](mailto:nmad@state.gov). An online version of the exhibit is available, along with several other historic and contemporary stories of diplomacy, on the museum's website, [diplomacy.state.gov](http://diplomacy.state.gov).

The website offers an education page that provides several resources for educators about the practice of diplomacy, the roles of the Secretary of State and the U.S. Department of State, geographic locations and functions of U.S. embassies and consulates, and examples of how diplomats use communication skills to advance the interests of the United States. The education page also offers downloadable materials for educators to use when facilitating an in-class diplomacy simulation in which students role-play diplomats working to solve a global crisis based on real-life challenges diplomats currently face, such as refugees, wildlife trafficking, and combating infectious diseases. In addition, the site provides an instructional video for facilitators, as well as explanations by diplomats of their work with their overseas counterparts on these global issues. Invite your students to practice their twenty-first century communication skills, and perhaps some will be inspired to pursue a career in diplomacy.

To access more theme resources, go to [nhd.org/themebook](http://nhd.org/themebook).



At the end of their visit, members of the Japanese delegation received commemorative gold pieces emblazoned with an image of President James Buchanan on one side. Courtesy of the National Museum of American Diplomacy.

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# Bearing Witness: Testimony as an Act of Courage

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tes-ti-fy: (verb)

1) to bear witness to or to serve as evidence of

2) to declare under oath before an officially constituted public body<sup>1</sup>

When individuals communicate their stories, or *testify*, to the things that they have seen or experienced, they become pro-active agents in history, impacting their own moment in history and leaving an imprint to be discovered by future generations. This article looks at testimony as a form of communication that informs a deeper understanding of the historical narrative.

In the aftermath of the American Civil War (1861-1865), more than four million African Americans experienced legal freedom for the first time and were able to turn their attention to re-establishing families broken apart by slavery, creating community networks previously denied, acquiring land to gain economic freedom, and becoming part of the American body politic.<sup>2</sup> During this era, commonly known as Reconstruction (1865-1877), African Americans also experienced struggles, turmoil, and outright violence as they sought to claim an equal space in society.

Recent scholarship has highlighted the previously-muted voices of the newly freed African Americans, resulting in them taking their rightful places as active players in the larger narrative of United States history. Scholars have begun to mine historical records from agencies such as the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (commonly known as the Freedmen's Bureau); the files of the Southern Claims Commission; and the *Testimony Taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into Condition of Affairs of the Late Insurrectionary States*; all of which



A lithograph, created by Thomas Kelly, depicting a parade celebrating the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment held in Baltimore, Maryland. Courtesy of the Collection of the National Museum of African American History & Culture (2010.45.11).

provide documentation of the African American experience after slavery was no longer the law of the land. These records captured African American voices as they claimed their space in the United States through land and property claims, negotiated labor contracts, and communicated and documented personal stories about the realities of life in the post-emancipation world.

The testifying captured in these records demonstrates one way that African Americans communicated their understanding of the world and their place in it during the late nineteenth century, outlining their needs, challenges, and triumphs. According to historian Kidada E. Williams, "Testifying was the primary way that many black victims and witnesses resisted violence and thereby communicated who they thought they were in relation to the traumatic injuries they suffered."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. "testify (vb.)," accessed January 8, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/testify>.

<sup>2</sup> To learn more about how black families searched for loved ones following the American Civil War by communicating with each other through personal newspaper advertisements across the American South. For more information, see: Heather Williams, *Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Kidada E. Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 8.

African Americans testified about their post-emancipation experience in informal, private ways within the black community and in formal, public ways through interaction with the federal government. In telling their stories and staking their claims directly to federal officials, African Americans insisted that the government recognize and respond to them as citizens. Simultaneously, the federal government found reason to investigate these realities for black men and women living in the American South. The hopeful promise of Reconstruction was short-lived as former Confederates and other conservative white people quickly sought to re-establish their social, legal, and political dominance. Through oppression and violence, they ushered in a period known as Jim Crow, where *de facto* segregation became the law.

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## SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER: GIVING EVIDENCE AT THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU

### BUREAU OF REFUGEES, FREEDMEN, AND ABANDONED LANDS

As the end of the Civil War approached, the federal government was faced with the challenge of how to integrate millions of formerly enslaved men, women, and children into society. One strategy was the creation of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau). Established as part of the War Department by the U.S. Congress in March 1865, the role of this federal government agency was to supervise and manage all matters relating to refugees, freedmen, and Confederate lands abandoned or seized during the war.<sup>4</sup> These Bureau activities provided a wide and unprecedented range of services to assist freedpeople in their transition from slavery to freedom. It established schools and hospitals, leased and sold land, officiated at marriages, negotiated labor contracts, provided legal representation, investigated racial conflicts, and assisted soldiers in securing pensions and other benefits.<sup>5</sup>

The Freedmen's Bureau was in existence only until 1872. Its records are vital to understanding more about the African American experience in the post-emancipation world. They document a moment in history when many African Americans, especially the newly freed, interacted with the federal government for the first time. These sources—letters, affidavits, school records, and more—provide evidence of African American struggles to rebuild family and community as well as establish economic independence and wealth.



A newspaper illustration showing an image of the Third District of the Freedmen's Bureau, 1867. Courtesy of the Library of Congress (99613977).

The Freedmen's Bureau records can provide much-needed insight to students studying the effects of the Civil War by investigating the challenges and triumphs of formerly enslaved people, considering the ways that African Americans interpreted their citizenship, or examining other similar concepts. This body of records can be searched by state, which will support students exploring some of these themes through a local lens.

One of the primary services of the Freedmen's Bureau was to assist freedmen by judging the legal claims made by these new citizens. The following statement from Green Jones of Bienville, Louisiana, is one example of testimony given to the Freedmen's Bureau. Jones, an African American man who lived on the plantation of John Reagans, communicated the violence committed by men unknown to him in August 1866. Testimony like his helped build a body of evidence that cast light on the injustices being perpetrated in the American South against the newly freed as well as those who traveled south to assist in the transition from slavery to freedom.<sup>6</sup>

On Monday night I was waked up by some men shooting into my house. I jumped up and tried to get away but they caught me and threatened to blow my brains out if I moved an inch. They took John Gordon and Henry Clay with me. Felix Dixon got under the floor and made his escape. they took us about twenty yards from my house and whipped Gordon first then they pulled my shirt over my head and made me lay down on the ground. two of them stood on my head and arms and they whipped me with a leather strap fastened to a stick. they must have given me about 300 lashes. the cut me up badly and kicked me in the

4 Recent scholarship has also revealed that freedwomen's use of the Freedmen's Bureau broke barriers when they took it upon themselves to interact with the federal government. For more information, see: Mary Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau: Race, Gender, and Public Policy in the Age of Emancipation*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

5 Along with the Freedmen's Bureau, Congress also created the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company (also known as the Freedman's Bank) to provide financial services for African American soldiers and civilians.

6 The text of the excerpt retains its original grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

face (bruises and wounds exhibited) When they were through they asked me if I could be obedient to every little white child and could call every white man and woman Master and Mistress and raise my hat to every white man I met and never to leave home without a

pass. They then told me I had to sell my horses, that they would not allow negroes to have horses. that must get into some white man's yard for protection. That they would not allow negroes to live off to themselves. They said they would be round once a week.<sup>7</sup>



Students participating in an event at Howard University on Douglass Day in February 2018. Courtesy of Leah L. Jones, National Museum of African American History and Culture.

### Freedmen's Bureau Project

The Freedmen's Bureau was the primary federal agency during Reconstruction and created millions of records that contain the names and information of hundreds of thousands of formerly-enslaved individuals and southern white refugees. For many years, people interested in researching the Bureau had to view the records at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) reading room. In 2015, the Bureau records became available online for the first time as a result of collaboration between the National Museum of African American History & Culture and FamilySearch International. The museum is partnering with the Smithsonian Transcription Center to transcribe more than 1.5 million image files from the Freedmen's Bureau records. As records are transcribed, family historians, genealogists, students, and scholars around the world can search the records and view results that feature both an image and transcription of the original record. Transcribing the Freedmen's Bureau records gives unprecedented access to this invaluable repository of historical data.

Want to join this historic effort? Visit <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/initiatives/freedmens-bureau-records> to learn more.

<sup>7</sup> Statement of Green Jones, August 18, 1866, National Archives and Records Administration (RG 393, Pt 1). For more information, search the Freedmen & Southern Society Project at the University of Maryland (<http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/>) or Rene Hayden, et al, Eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).



## “I SOLEMNLY SWEAR”: TESTIFYING FOR PROPERTY RIGHTS

### SOUTHERN CLAIMS COMMISSION

On March 3, 1871, the U.S. Congress formed the Southern Claims Commission (SCC), providing a way for those citizens who remained loyal to the Union, but lived within the Confederacy during the Civil War, to apply for reimbursement for property confiscated by the Union Army during that time. Before the American Civil War, free and enslaved African Americans were largely barred from giving testimony for or against white persons throughout the United States. The creation of the SCC represented one of the first times free and previously enslaved African Americans living in the postwar American South interacted with the federal government on a more equal basis as new legal citizens. African Americans communicated their access to a more equal citizenship by submitting claims to the government alongside white Southerners. Furthermore, many African Americans acted as witnesses for these claims, testifying for or against white Americans for the first time.

When filing a claim with the SCC, claimants were wholly responsible for proving their loyalty and ownership of seized property. The SCC originally consisted of only three commissioners who were responsible “to satisfy themselves of the loyalty of each claim; certify the amount, nature, and value of property taken or furnished; report their judgments on each claim in writing to the House of Representatives; . . . hold their sessions in Washington; keep a journal of their proceedings and a register of all claims brought before them.”<sup>8</sup> The claims could be allowed, disallowed, or barred (for not submitting evidence). However, how did the commissioners establish who was loyal and who was not?

Many southern people, whether Unionist or Confederate, had their property seized by the Union Army, especially as the war continued through the later years and moved farther south. The commissioners composed a list of over 60 questions that were modified in 1872 and then again in 1874 with the addition of questions created specifically to evaluate the loyalty of claimants of color and women. Documentation of property through traditional means or some form of a receipt from the Union Army helped with



This image shows the house and property of James Robinson, an African American man who owned 170 acres in Virginia during the Civil War. After the war, Robinson filed a claim with the Southern Claims Commission for his property taken by the Union Army. His claim was approved as he was able to prove ownership and loyalty to the Union. Courtesy of the Library of Congress (2018671067).

proving claims. Yet, one of the most valuable forms of testimony was that of witnesses. A witness could testify to the character and actions of a claimant during the war.

Witnesses were subject to intense questioning by the commissioners. Because the war was being fought over slavery, certain witnesses, such as previously enslaved and free African Americans, were considered more likely to be credible than others. Although African Americans could have their *absolute* loyalty to the Union questioned (actions such as selling produce to Confederate soldiers were considered acts of disloyalty because they provided aid to the enemy), the commissioners assumed that most African American allegiances lay with the Union, as “we do not understand that the legal implication of loyalty applies to color or complexion, but to the status and condition of slavery.”<sup>9</sup> It was often the case that free and previously enslaved African Americans sought to align with the Union since their fates were tied to the continuation or destruction of slavery.

It took until 1880 for the SCC commissioners to process the 22,298 claims submitted from 12 states from 1871 to 1873.<sup>10</sup> Of those, 7,092 were approved while 15,206 were disallowed or barred, due to the inability to prove property ownership. This was largely due to the fact that enslaved people—who were considered property themselves—could not own property.

8 Later, special agents and commissioners were appointed to help handle the workload. To learn more, see “File Microcopies of Records in the National Archives: No. 87, Roll 1. Records of the Commissioners of Claims (Southern Claims Commission) 1871 – 1880; Journal of the Commissions, March 16, 1871 – March 9, 1880. Washington, D.C.: The National Archives, 1945. <https://www.slcl.org/sites/default/files/scc%20dp%20m87.pdf>.

9 Summary report, Alexander Anderson Disallowed Claim, Amelia County, Virginia. Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, Southern Claims Commission, National Archives and Records Administration (Record Group 233).

10 The twelve states allowed to submit claims included Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.



The records of the Southern Claims Commission are an excellent primary source collection and project topic for students looking to investigate how enslaved and free African Americans communicated their understanding of loyalty during the American Civil War and the impact this had on the notion of citizenship after the war. To begin the process, students can use the *U.S. Southern Claims Commission Master Index, 1871-1880*, and the 1860 and 1870 federal censuses to identify African American claimants.<sup>11</sup> They can then compare how different groups of African American claimants—those living in different counties or states, enslaved or free, male or female, young or old, etc.—communicated their notions of loyalty during the Civil War, and the impact that had on the decisions of the commissioners. Were some groups of African American claimants approved, disallowed, or barred more or less often than others? Why? What characteristics of loyalty did these groups display that the commissioners found to be acceptable or unacceptable? Students can then question how these professed demonstrations of loyalty impacted the overall discussion and understanding of the notion of citizenship for African Americans that began during the Reconstruction era and continues to present day.

## “THEY WOULD KU-KLUX ME”: TESTIFYING AGAINST INJUSTICE AND VIOLENCE

### TESTIMONY TAKEN BY THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE TO INQUIRE INTO THE CONDITION OF AFFAIRS OF THE LATE INSURRECTIONARY STATES

After emancipation, Congress passed the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, which formally outlawed slavery, conferred birthright citizenship, and extended voting rights to African American men. Known as the Reconstruction Amendments, these new laws opened up new possibilities for free and formerly enslaved African Americans. But as African Americans, individually and collectively, worked to build their families, communities, and wealth as well as to exercise their political rights, some white citizens, primarily in the southern states, sought to reinstate a version of the old social order.



Political cartoon by Frank Bellew entitled “Visit of the Ku-Klux.” The cartoon was published in *Harper’s Weekly* on February 24, 1872. Courtesy of the Library of Congress (2001695506).

Widespread campaigns of oppressive and at times violent activities targeting the political and economic activities of African Americans were reported to the Freedmen’s Bureau and in black newspapers by both victims and witnesses. Public outcry in response to these attacks, particularly those carried out by white terrorist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), led to the passage of the Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871. The acts, which were designed to protect the life, property, and political rights of African Americans, even when threatened by state or local governments or other citizens, authorized the federal government to intervene when necessary. The last of the three Enforcement Acts, known as the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871, rendered the activities of the Ku Klux Klan illegal under federal law and enabled the federal government to prosecute outrages by individuals against African Americans with or without state compliance.

*Testimony Taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs of the Late Insurrectionary States* ([onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/metabook?id=insurrection1872](https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/metabook?id=insurrection1872)) is a collection of interviews given to a Congressional committee that communicated the indignities and atrocities that African Americans experienced. Testimony was taken in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida.

In the testimony they gave, African American men and women indicated their awareness of the desire of some white people to protect their own social, economic, and political dominance. African Americans gave evidence that was “a deeply personal and political act” as they shared with representatives of the committee the stories

<sup>11</sup> The *U.S. Southern Claims Commission Master Index, 1871-1880* can be searched using Ancestry.com. To learn more, see Gary B. Mills, *Southern Loyalists in the Civil War: The Southern Claims Commission* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2004).

of their struggles.<sup>12</sup> These testimonies reinforced the need for federal intervention and protection in the former Confederate states. By criminalizing the intimidation and violence of terrorist groups, the Enforcement Acts were a tool in the fight against the many injurious and inhumane acts endured by the newly freed. African Americans who testified about the violent conditions in the South exhibited a particular form of courage, as they could often be targeted for speaking out against the injustices. Their testimony also demonstrated the ways in which African Americans worked to protect themselves, their families, and their property.

Students who study post-Civil War America and citizenship rights, voter intimidation, African American civil rights in the post-emancipation era, the rise of U.S.-based terrorism, or other similar topics will find a wealth of material in the *Testimony to the Joint Committee* that provides first-person accounts of the 1870s. As an example, the following excerpts from the testimony of Harrison Flannigan, a 25-year-old African American man from Jackson County, Georgia, demonstrate how fragile life could be for African Americans in the South during Reconstruction. During Flannigan's testimony in October 1871, he was asked about his family, how long he worked in the county, who he worked for, whether he knew about the Klan, and incidents that happened to him.<sup>13</sup>

*Question.* Do you know anything about any people in that county they call Ku-Klux?

*Answer.* Yes, sir; I know two or three of them.

*Question.* How many of them did you ever see?

*Answer.* About eighteen came to my house one night.

*Question.* When was that?

*Answer.* It was the next month after Christmas; about the last of the month after Christmas.

*Question.* What did they do?

*Answer.* They came there and carried me out; but I got loose from them. They carried me off from the house I reckon about one hundred and fifty yards. I got loose from them, and they shot at me eight or ten times...They left word that I had to go away from there. I moved off to Athens and staid [sic] a while, and then came back again.

*Question.* How did they get hold of you; where were you?

*Answer.* I was in the house; they just knocked the door down and came in.

#### TESTIMONY CONTINUES

*Question.* Was anything done with these men for disturbing you?

*Answer.* No, sir.

*Question.* Why did you not go before the court about it?

*Answer.* I just thought it would make the thing worse if I staid [sic] in the settlement, and I wanted to stay there and make a crop. I thought if they did not bother me again I would not bother them.

*Question.* Do you know what they had against you that they were disturbing you for?

*Answer.* There was a little fuss took place on the road last August was a year ago. They rather knocked some black fellows about, and some of us took it up and told them they should not do that. From that they said they allowed to whip us all for it. One of them and I had a few words on the road like this evening, and next evening he walked up to me—that is, Jack Haney—and asked if I was the same man I was yesterday evening. I said, “Yes, of course.” -He struck at me with his hoe, and as I caught it a man by the name of Jim Collins knocked me down. I questioned some people around there as to what they thought best, and they said “Put it in law.” I went to Jefferson, and they said they would Ku-Klux me; that I should not go into court. The trial was to come off in February. I came on to court, and they never bothered me. When I got to court they came to me and wanted to make it up, and said that each man would just pay his costs and just drop it. But they worked it around some way or other and swindled me, so that I had all the costs to pay. I understood afterward that they stated that it did them as much good to have me pay all the costs as if they had whipped me.

*Question.* Were those men who came to your house disguised?

*Answer.* Yes, sir.

*Question.* How were they disguised?

*Answer.* Some of them had dough-faces on their faces, and white sheets on; and some had blankets around them; and some had paper faces on their faces.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me*, 49.

<sup>13</sup> The text of the excerpt retains its original spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

<sup>14</sup> Harrison Flannigan, a 25-year-old African American from Jackson County, Georgia, is one individual who provided testimony to the Joint Select Committee. Excerpts from his testimony are presented here. The full testimony can be accessed by going to <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moa/>, entering “Harrison Flannigan” in the search box, and selecting page 480. *Report of the Joint select committee appointed to inquire into the condition of affairs in the late insurrectionary states, so far as regards the execution of laws, and the safety of the lives and property of the citizens of the United States and Testimony taken*, Atlanta, Georgia, October 23, 1871.

## CONCLUSION

The new social order established during Reconstruction brought great triumph and large gains for previously free and newly freed African Americans. This time period was also one of constant violence, oppression, and intimidation as many white people resisted the new social changes. Victims and “witnesses’ subsequent refusal to endure violence silently constitutes an underappreciated form of resistance to white supremacy.”<sup>15</sup>

The value and power of communication as a tool is evidenced by African Americans who sought to communicate their own experiences through informal and formal testimony in the post-emancipation world. Their personal, verbal testimony continued a deep oral-based tradition that dates back to their African roots. This was the time when communication between African Americans and the federal government became possible in a manner previously untapped. African Americans exercised their agency and spoke up to gain citizenship rights, enjoy human comforts, and protest inhumane treatment. The federal government and liberal-minded white citizens worked alongside African American activists and citizens in the early period of Reconstruction to protect the “life,

liberty and the pursuit of happiness” of the newly freed. However, within a decade, the long shadow of oppression and violence in the form of legalized segregation once again became the norm in much of the United States, effectively setting back the post-emancipation gains.

Communication is a tool that helps humans share their stories to mark people’s lives and experiences across time. The recent historical exploration of the bodies of documents that preserve the communication of African Americans during Reconstruction has opened paths to new understanding of how African Americans saw themselves. It draws attention to their actions to build new positions in freedom, and to the courage with which they faced federal officials to tell about the atrocities heaped upon them as southern white society tried to create an atmosphere of oppression to resist black excellence.

To access more theme resources, go to [nhd.org/themebook](http://nhd.org/themebook).

<sup>15</sup> Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me*, 3.

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TOP LEFT TO RIGHT:  
Victor (left) and John Almonzo, 1943. The Almonzo brothers' graves are one of 30 sets of brothers who rest side by side at Loraine American Cemetery.  
Almonzo Family Collection  
Applying Sand to a Headstone, 2015  
Teacher Brian Weaver applies sand from the beaches of Normandy to the grave of Charles Crossley at Ardennes American Cemetery.  
Chris Peppas  
Cemetery at Temporary Cemetery in Normandy, 1947  
Members of the military participate in a ceremony at a temporary American military cemetery in Normandy.  
U.S. Army Signal Corps

Photographing a Battle Map, 2015  
Teacher Donald Davis photographs a battle map mosaic at Loraine American Cemetery.  
Chris Peppas  
BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT:  
Overview of Cambridge American Cemetery, 1960s/70s  
Cambridge American Cemetery honors more than 8,000 Americans that gave their lives during World War II.  
American Battle Monuments Commission  
Dutch Girl Lays Flowers at Temporary Cemetery in Netherlands, 1940s/1950s  
A Dutch girl lays flowers at a temporary American military cemetery in the Netherlands as a symbol of thanks.  
American Battle Monuments Commission

Airman Sculpture at Cambridge American Cemetery, 2015  
Teacher Karimah Williams pauses during her eulogy for Richard Townsend at Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery.  
Joe Boyle  
Offering a Eulogy in Belgium, 2015  
Teacher Karimah Williams pauses during her eulogy for Richard Townsend at Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery.  
Joe Boyle  
Military Men Salute at Temporary Cemetery in Netherlands, 1940s  
Members of the military salute during the Memorial Day Ceremony at a temporary American military cemetery in the Netherlands.  
American Battle Monuments Commission

BACKGROUND IMAGES, TOP TO BOTTOM:  
Map Schematic of Cambridge American Cemetery, 1950  
A map schematic of Cambridge American Cemetery from 1950 details the plot plans for the completed cemetery.  
American Battle Monuments Commission  
Overview of Loraine American Cemetery, 2014  
Loraine American Cemetery honors more than 10,000 Americans who gave their lives during World War II.  
American Battle Monuments Commission/Warrick Page

# History Is in the Mail: Using the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum Collections to Explore Communication in History

JESSIE AUCOIN, School Programs Manager, National Postal Museum

Messenger of sympathy and love  
Servant of parted friends  
Consoler of the lonely  
Bond of the scattered family  
Enlarger of the common life  
Carrier of news and knowledge  
Instrument of trade and industry  
Promoter of mutual acquaintance  
Of peace and of goodwill among men and nation

"The Letter" by Dr. Charles W. Eliot

Chiseled into the façade of the Old City Post Office in Washington, D.C.,—now home to the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum—this verse by Dr. Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard University from 1869 until 1909, eloquently outlines the profound role mail has played in shaping the American experience. As compared to other forms of communication we use in our contemporary lives, only mail physically travels great distances to bring people closer together. Through researching the creativity and hard work of the postal service to process and deliver our material messages in a timely fashion, one can examine how a national communication system has impacted our shared history.

Many take for granted the methods by which mail moves from one place to another. Out of our collective trust in the postal system, we rarely take a moment to consider what happens to our letters once they are stamped and dropped into the mailbox. However, without knowledge and understanding of the people, decisions, and actions taken to ensure our mail arrives safely, and without reflection on the sweeping social and cultural changes, groundbreaking innovations, and technological advancements made in its name, we risk losing sight of the value we place on this mode of communication.

Throughout this article, we will explore some moments of pioneering change and innovations related to mail processing and delivery. Students are encouraged to reflect on how incremental adjustments, such as the introduction of a "bit of paper," can revolutionize the very structure of communication and the means by which information is transmitted.

## CONGRESSIONAL FRANKING

While working to establish a new nation, the First Continental Congress (1774) diligently examined British systems and policies to identify those they wished to incorporate into their new government. One such carryover was the concept of franking, or sending mail without requiring payment. Franking began in England in 1652 and allowed all public packets as well as letters of parliamentarians and officers in public service to be carried free of charge as long as they contained the sender's signature. The government designed franking in the hope of ensuring an open exchange of information between public servants and the British people.

Modified for the new democratic principles in America, franking soon allowed letters to be carried to and from congressional members while they actively attended Congress. In the absence of a Washington press corps, franking was altered yet again in the early nineteenth century to ensure local newspapers were sent copies of acts, bills, and speeches for print. Today, the franking privilege applies only to non-partisan mail sent by members and members-elect of Congress, the vice president (who is president of the Senate), and select congressional officers.

Though the sender does not bear the cost personally, there is an expense associated with delivering franked mail. In fact, each year Congress reimburses the United States Postal Service for the costs incurred; in 2014, Congress spent \$16.9 million in official mail services.<sup>1</sup> Knowing this, it becomes clear that the use of franking in America clearly demonstrates the value placed on public officials being able to converse easily with their constituents. Franking creates a mode of communication that embodies the very essence of the American democratic system—one that provides for all people to fully participate in the legislative process.



Daniel Webster, U.S. Senator for Massachusetts (1827-1841, 1845-1850), used his congressional free franking privilege to mail this envelope on September 8 (year unknown) to Caleb Cushing, U.S. diplomat and politician from Massachusetts. Courtesy of the Collection of the National Postal Museum, Smithsonian Institution (2009.2016.289).

A small selection from the museum’s collection of envelopes with free franks is available for researchers to examine in greater detail on the “Free Franked and Official Covers” page of the National Postal Museum website ([postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm\\_2009.2016.289](http://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm_2009.2016.289)). The objects were sent by a variety of public officials, including members of Congress as well as foreign dignitaries and ambassadors assigned overseas. In addition to the markings that denote free franking, these envelopes provide additional evidence of the journey each letter made as seen in the cancellation and postmark stamps that identify dates, towns, and even modes of transportation. When researching their topics, students should consider investigating the original envelopes associated with important pieces of mail. *What additional stories does this primary source tell?*

## WHAT’S IN A STAMP?

May 1, 1840, stands as a watershed day in postal history, a moment that clearly segments time into “before” and “after” eras. It is on this date the British government issued their very first postage stamp, designed to standardize costs and simplify the mailing process. Prior to the introduction of the postage stamp, the cost of mailing letters and packages was typically paid by the recipient. The complex pricing structure, which varied according to distance, weight, and the number of pages, sometimes resulted in an unexpected high payment owed at the time of receipt. Complicating matters further, some mail went unclaimed or the recipient outright refused to pay for the delivery, resulting in a loss of profit for the postal service.

In 1837, a former British school teacher, Rowland Hill, published a pamphlet entitled *Post Office Reform: Its Importance and Practicability*.<sup>2</sup> In it, he outlined the idea for the very first postage stamp—a “bit of paper...covered at the back with a glutinous wash.” This “bit of paper” provided proper proof of payment when affixed to the outside of an envelope. Three years later, in 1840, Great Britain issued the world’s first stamp. Commonly called the Penny Black, it depicts the silhouette of Queen Victoria in front of a black background and denotes a value of one penny. With the release of the Penny Black came a significant increase in the public’s use of postal services. In response, the United States issued its first two stamps on July 1, 1847. The five-cent stamp featured a portrait of Benjamin Franklin, America’s first Postmaster General, and the ten-cent stamp honored George Washington, the nation’s first president. Since then, the United States has issued approximately 5,300 postage stamps depicting national heroes, historic events, pop culture icons, national landmarks, and other illustrations of our shared values and ideals.



In 1847, the United States issued its first two postage stamps. The ten-cent Washington portrays the nation’s first president. Mailing a letter in 2020 costs 55 cents for the first ounce. Courtesy of the National Postal Museum, Smithsonian Institution (2008.2006.17).

1 Matthew E. Glassman, “Congressional Franking Privilege: Background and Recent Legislation,” Congressional Research Service, (2015). <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RS22771.pdf>.  
 2 For more information on Rowland Hill’s suggested reforms, visit [archive.org/details/cihm\\_21617/page/n5](http://archive.org/details/cihm_21617/page/n5) to read a copy of *Post Office Reforms: Its Importance and Practicability*.



The importance of this change—the introduction of a “bit of paper”—cannot be understated. There was great benefit in having a standardized and convenient system for mailing letters. However, people were being asked to pay for a service before it had been rendered. In so doing, the public needed to inherently trust that their mail would be delivered safely and quickly to the intended recipient and that their money had not been spent in vain. To this day, this payment model is still used around the world, with the United States Postal Service printing 16.5 billion stamps in 2018 alone.<sup>3</sup>

With approximately 5.4 million objects, the Smithsonian’s National Postal Museum has the most comprehensive stamp collection in the world. Before being issued, every stamp must undergo a thorough research and design process to ensure it meets requirements put forth by the Citizens’ Stamp Advisory Committee. As they travel the world affixed to envelopes, stamps are a visual medium that depicts American values and ideals, sharing them with every person who looks at the image. The National Postal Museum’s blog ([postalmuseum.si.edu/blog](https://postalmuseum.si.edu/blog)) has numerous posts that detail the history portrayed on U.S. postage stamps. Each issue provides researchers an opportunity to ask a series of questions: *Whose story is being told? Does the image portray the complete story? If not, who or what is absent from this depiction? What does the image convey about American cultural, social, and/or political movements of the era?*

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## SPEEDING MAIL ON THE RAILS

The U.S. Postal Service has always been interested in incorporating the latest technologies to help improve the network. Though the Railway Mail Service was officially launched in 1832, it was not until 30 years later that it revolutionized mail processing with highly trained staff and the use of specially outfitted train cars known as Railway Post Offices (RPOs). After the Civil War (1861-1865), the nation underwent rapid expansion of the railway systems. Postal officials simultaneously sought faster and more efficient ways to process an ever-increasing volume of mail. They developed methods for working the mail while the train was in motion to make the most of available time—truly a manifestation of the value the postal service and its customers place on swiftly-moving communications.

Railway Mail Service routes were determined and limited by existing railroad tracks. Each postal clerk was assigned a route that intersected dozens of towns and cities. As the train clattered along, clerks sorted the mail collected as they traveled, ideally completing the process before they approached the next town and ensuring people received their mail as expeditiously as possible. These unique cars

contained pigeonhole letter cases and mail bag racks to hold sorted letters or parcels. They were also designed with an open door, allowing clerks to easily throw sacks of mail out of the moving RPO at predetermined stops or to grab sacks of outgoing mail suspended from hooks placed along the tracks using a catching arm. To watch a short video showing an RPO clerk transferring the mail, visit [postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibition/mail-by-rail/mail-on-the-fly](https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibition/mail-by-rail/mail-on-the-fly).<sup>4</sup>



This photograph shows Railway Post Office clerks sorting mail inside a Railway Mail Service train car circa 1920. Courtesy of the Curatorial Photographic Collection of the National Postal Museum, Smithsonian Institution (A.2006-48).

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The work of RPO clerks was mentally and physically rigorous. To help ensure rapid sorting and processing of mail, clerks memorized all the villages, towns, and cities within the distribution area their route served. As one former clerk stated, “I heard it said that any RPO clerk that was worth his salt was good for 10,000 post offices in his distribution area.”<sup>5</sup>

Although postal employees have been required to pass the civil service exam since 1883, rail clerks also had to pass an additional written test and were administered sorting and skills assessments periodically throughout their careers. The extensive knowledge needed to perform their duties required constant studying and practice. As a result, the postal service paid RPO clerks an hour’s pay for every 45 minutes they worked. Being an RPO clerk was considered prestigious within the postal community, but with the glory came risk. Train wrecks were an all-too-common occurrence, with over 6,000 crashes involving Railway Mail Service cars between 1890 and 1900.<sup>6</sup>

3 U.S. Postal Service, “Postal Facts,” last modified 2019, accessed January 2, 2020, <http://facts.usps.com/stamps/>.

4 “Train taking up mail bag, U.S.P.O.,” Niver (Kemp) Collection, Library of Congress, 1903, accessed January 3, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/item/00564551/>.

5 “Mail by Rail,” National Postal Museum, updated July 30, 1993, accessed January 3, 2020, <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibits/current/moving-the-mail/mail-by-rail/index.html>.

6 “Train Wrecks,” National Postal Museum, accessed January 3, 2020, <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibition/mail-by-rail/train-wrecks>.



A reliable and efficient way to transport material goods, the postal service has often processed parcels that contained items of exceptional financial value. The result was “a sudden and unusual increase in crimes committed in the ‘hold-up’ of railway mail trains, mail messengers, etc.” and was one factor behind the findings that Postmaster General Albert S. Burleson reported to Congress in 1921.<sup>7</sup> In fact, items valuing over \$6.3 million were stolen in 1920 alone. As Burleson went on to say in his report to Congress, “The mails are inviolate and there is no limit to which the postal service must go to keep them so.”<sup>8</sup> In direct response to the dangerous working conditions they faced, as well as the monetary and sentimental value of the cargo they transported, RPO clerks were issued .38 caliber pistols to be carried while on the train cars.



The U.S. Postal Inspection Service released this wanted poster in 1923 seeking information on the whereabouts of the three De Autremont brothers, who had robbed a mail train, killing four people in the process. Courtesy of the National Postal Museum, Smithsonian Institution (1990.0563.3).

Although the Railway Mail Service is no longer active, its history provides readers a significant opportunity to reflect on the great lengths taken by postal officials and RPO clerks to provide reliable and fast mail distribution. The public’s ability to efficiently communicate with one another required RPO clerks to spend countless hours studying to master their distribution areas and also to endure dangerous working conditions that put their very lives at risk.

In the summer of 2007, the National Postal Museum began an oral history project to document the experiences of RPO clerks. Clips from nearly 100 interviews can be found online ([postalmuseum.si.edu/research-articles/the-railway-mail-service/oral-histories](https://postalmuseum.si.edu/research-articles/the-railway-mail-service/oral-histories)) for researchers seeking to learn more about life on the tracks. While listening to the descriptions about the work of the Railway Mail Service, students will gain insight into the dangers of the job and the sacrifices made to ensure the swift transport and delivery of the mail. *What do the risks of the job convey about the importance of mail communication in American history? Did the American public know about the dangers RPO clerks faced on their behalf? If so, did they appreciate the lengths taken for them to receive their mail?*

*What, if any, comparable sacrifices are made in the name of communication today?*

## MASTERING THE ZIP CODE WITH MR. ZIP

In the 20 years following World War II, the postal service struggled to handle a massive influx in mail, with twice as many pieces being processed as previously. To help, the Post Office Department launched the Zone Improvement Plan in 1963. Better known as ZIP codes, the Zone Improvement Plan implemented five-digit codes to standardize addresses and segment the nation into ten geographic regions. Each of the ten regions is identified by the first digit in the ZIP code, with numbers increasing from zero to nine as the regions move from northeast to west. The second and third numbers identify a central post office facility in the region, while the fourth and fifth represent the post office that will complete the final processing and sorting. The incorporation of the ZIP code into addresses systemized information and enabled more machine processing of the growing quantity of mail.

Postal officials acknowledged that such a significant change in addresses was likely to cause confusion and resistance with the American public. In fact, they learned this lesson after witnessing the negative public reaction to the reformatting of phone numbers to include three-digit area codes. As a result, the postal service launched a national public awareness campaign using posters, radio and television announcements, and pop songs to spread the word about the ZIP code, focusing on the positive outcomes of speeding mail with this new change. A friendly-looking cartoon character named Mr. ZIP, who embodied swiftness by appearing to be in a constant state of rapid forward movement, soon became the official spokesperson of the new plan.



Published in August 1966, this poster was part of a national campaign to promote the new postal ZIP code system. Mr. ZIP was depicted hurriedly traveling forward wearing an iconic letter carrier uniform and satchel. Courtesy of the Collection of the National Postal Museum, Smithsonian Institution (2002.2001.1).

<sup>7</sup> To read about specific train robberies committed against the Railway Mail Service, visit <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibitions/mail-by-rail/robberies>.

<sup>8</sup> *Annual Report of the Postmaster General for the Fiscal Year ended June 30 1921* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), 122-123, <https://books.google.com/>.

Ever present throughout the campaign, his likeness was easily found on stamps, signs, letter carriers' satchels, and the sides of mail delivery vehicles, as well as memorabilia and children's toys.<sup>9</sup> Such a dramatic change required ample time and detailed coordination—an indication of just how vital the Postal Service viewed this shift. Examining primary sources from the era, ranging from advertisements promoting the new ZIP code to newspaper columns implying that ZIP codes were un-American, offers some insight into the social and political challenges of the time.<sup>10</sup>

The incorporation of ZIP codes significantly expedited mail by enabling automated processing. Using the precise locations denoted in a ZIP code, the postal service has developed an infrastructure to receive, process, and deliver mail in as little as one day. This is a monumental

task, particularly in view of the fact that there were nearly 42,000 ZIP codes in use around the country in 1918.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the use of ZIP codes has gone far beyond the postal service and now includes realtors, marketers, and social scientists who use them to systemize geographical and population studies.<sup>12</sup>

As part of the extensive advertising and public awareness campaign launched to promote the new ZIP code system, the postal service published a four-page comic book in 1968 ([postalmuseum.si.edu/collections/object-spotlight/promotional-zip-code-comic-book](https://postalmuseum.si.edu/collections/object-spotlight/promotional-zip-code-comic-book)). Describing how the incorporation of a ZIP code in an address expedites the mail process, this pop culture object exemplifies how elaborate and thorough the public awareness campaign needed to be. By reading this publication, researchers

### The Smithsonian's National Postal Museum provides classroom resources and digital collections online:

- Curriculum packets and lesson plans on a wide variety of topics, including wartime letters and stamp stories, can be found at [postalmuseum.si.edu/curriculum-guides](https://postalmuseum.si.edu/curriculum-guides).
- The museum's collection has nearly six million objects focusing on both postal history and philately (stamp history). In conjunction with our past and present gallery exhibitions, the museum posts online content at [postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibitions](https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibitions).

### The Smithsonian Institution provides multiple online research sites and resources:

- The Learning Lab ([learninglab.si.edu/](https://learninglab.si.edu/)) offers access to digital resources from across the Smithsonian's 19 museums, nine major research centers, the National Zoo, and more. In addition to the over 20,000 digitized objects from the National Postal Museum, the Learning Lab is also home to online collections created by the museum's curatorial staff:
  - » "The Post Office Takes Full Control of Airmail – August 1918" details the transition from a mail transportation service controlled by the U.S. Army to one managed by the postal service. [learninglab.si.edu/collections/the-post-office-takes-full-control-of-airmail-august-1918/w096anWuRiUpv45W#r](https://learninglab.si.edu/collections/the-post-office-takes-full-control-of-airmail-august-1918/w096anWuRiUpv45W#r).
  - » "A Difficult December" highlights the creation of a regular airmail route between New York, New York, and Chicago, Illinois, in December 1918. [learninglab.si.edu/collections/a-difficult-december/FEwM78NqpneCPKwa#r](https://learninglab.si.edu/collections/a-difficult-december/FEwM78NqpneCPKwa#r).
- The Smithsonian's Collection Search Center ([collections.si.edu/search/](https://collections.si.edu/search/)) includes over 14.9 million records of museum objects, archives, and library materials. The National Postal Museum's collection can be found at [collections.si.edu/search/gallery.htm?og=national-postal-museum](https://collections.si.edu/search/gallery.htm?og=national-postal-museum). Additional objects and artifacts can be located on the Smithsonian Open Access site at [si.edu/openaccess](https://si.edu/openaccess).

9 For more information on the creation and use of Mr. ZIP as well as other public service campaigns affiliated with the launch of ZIP codes, visit <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/collections/object-spotlight/mr-zip>.

10 "The ZIP Code Promotional Campaign," National Postal Museum, accessed January 3, 2020, <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibitions/flashing-across-the-country/the-zip-code-promotional-campaign>.

11 Postal Facts, "Size and Scope," <http://facts.usps.com/size-and-scope/>.

12 For more information on unexpected ways the ZIP code is used today, read "The Untold Story of the ZIP Code" at [https://www.usps.gov/sites/default/files/document-library-files/2015/rarc-wp-13-006\\_0.pdf](https://www.usps.gov/sites/default/files/document-library-files/2015/rarc-wp-13-006_0.pdf).

can learn more about why the postal service found the new system to be so important. *As portrayed in the comic book, what role does the mail play in American life? How is the postal service portraying itself and its value in American life?*

## CONCLUSION

Take a moment and reflect on how long it once took for information to be communicated great distances. 38 days passed between the signing of the Declaration of Independence and its publication in the *London Gazette*, sharing the news of American independence with the British public. It took 170 days for news that President Abraham Lincoln had issued an executive order known as the Emancipation Proclamation to travel from Washington, D.C., to Texas. Yet, in 2020, one ounce of First Class mail costs only \$0.55 in postage and within a day or two we can communicate in a physical format with people on the other side of the country.

Today we expect a rapid and reliable exchange of information that eliminates the distance between sender and receiver. Exploring just a few examples of the

technologies and innovations used by the postal service in the pursuit of efficient and cost-effective communication will hopefully shed some light on the enormous task the organization faces daily. Some would marvel that nearly 150 billion pieces of mail—letters, postcards, periodicals, and packages—are processed and delivered each year by the United States Postal Service.<sup>13</sup>

As Dr. Charles W. Eliot expressed in the opening poem, the mail acts as the “Enlarger of the common life” and the “Carrier of news and knowledge.” Whether it is used to share joy, heartache, or simple facts, the mail is integral to our shared experience and is a key ingredient in connecting humans to one another through communication. Although technology will undoubtedly continue to improve our ability to converse and interact, it is vital that we all remember the people and innovations that got us where we are today.

To access more theme resources, go to [nhd.org/themebook](http://nhd.org/themebook).

13 Postal Facts, “Size and Scope,” <http://facts.usps.com/size-and-scope/>.



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# A Century Later: Using National History Day<sup>®</sup> Resources to Understand the People and Impact of World War I

LYNNE M. O'HARA, Director of Programs, National History Day

In many ways, World War I and its legacies defined the twentieth century. This war cast a long shadow with political, military, social, technological, economic, intellectual, and artistic implications that lasted far beyond the four years of direct conflict.

Beginning in 2018, National History Day (NHD) has been fortunate to partner with several organizations including the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission, and the Pritzker Military Foundation. NHD has developed programming that allows teachers and their students to engage in the study of World War I and its legacies in new ways.

## REFOCUSING THE APPROACH TO TEACHING WORLD WAR I

The mission of NHD is to improve the teaching and learning of history. National History Day's World War I outreach efforts have been designed around several goals. First, we invited teachers to examine the unique components of World War I as well as the legacies that shaped twentieth-century world history.

We then exposed teachers to the latest scholarship by World War I experts and engaged teachers and their students in honoring both Silent Heroes<sup>®</sup> and veterans of World War I by researching their histories. We encouraged students to examine the World War I experience in their home communities. We built and published lessons that focus on various aspects of the war and its aftermath that deserve attention in American classrooms.

Now that the work is complete, teachers and their students can access the videos, lessons, and profiles. NHD built a landing page to organize our World War I materials. You can find them at [nhd.org/world-war-i](https://nhd.org/world-war-i). The landing page contains links to four resources.



Hawai'i teacher Pualeilani Fernandez places a lei on the grave of U.S. Army Captain Philip Overton Mills at Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in France. You can learn more about Captain Mills at [nhd.silentheroes.org/philip-overton-mills](https://nhd.silentheroes.org/philip-overton-mills). Courtesy of National History Day.



NHD teachers visiting Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in France in 2018. Courtesy of National History Day.

### WORLD WAR I WEBINAR SERIES

In fall 2018 and 2019, 114 teachers (two from each NHD affiliate) were offered scholarships to participate in the World War I webinar series. Each month, teachers learned from a World War I historian and were presented with ways to integrate a pedagogical strategy into the classroom. All eight webinar videos are available for teachers to watch.

### WORLD WAR I SILENT HEROES AND VETERAN PROFILES

History becomes relevant when teachers remind students that wars are fought by ordinary men and women who lived in extraordinary times. NHD teachers helped to research and honor 36 Silent Heroes who gave their lives during the war and 20 World War I veterans buried in national cemeteries.

### WHO THEY WERE WORLD WAR I TOOLKIT

We cannot fully teach the story of war without teaching the stories of the home front. This toolkit, designed for younger learners, helps students ground the experience by looking at their hometowns a century ago and honoring those who never came home.

### WORLD WAR I LESSON PLANS

This is an extraordinary collection of lesson plans that examines the war and its aftermath. The resource book, *Great War, Flawed Peace, and the Lasting Legacy of World War I*, contains 27 lessons that allow teachers to access unique primary sources and engage students across academic disciplines. In addition, *Memorializing the Fallen* is a collection of nine lesson plans that connect students to different national cemeteries. All are designed to work for groups who can visit the cemetery (or virtually for those who cannot).

**Can you tell us about the power of visiting the places that you saw when we travelled?**

“The power of place was critical in deepening not only my understanding of the war, but also my understanding of and connection to my fallen hero, Frank Dann, as I literally walked in his footsteps one hundred years later.”

SUZAN TURNER, IOWA

## HOW CAN THESE MATERIALS INSPIRE NHD RESEARCH?

Regardless of the annual theme, there are great ways to use these resources to inspire student research interests. Here are four examples of potential topics, including links to the World War I collection; many more can be found by visiting the website ([nhd.org/world-war-i](http://nhd.org/world-war-i)).

HELLO GIRLS		
<p>During World War I, a group of educated women, fluent in French and trained as skilled telephone operators, traveled to France to run the telephone networks that maintained communication for Allied forces during the war and diplomatic negotiations after the war.</p>		
<a href="#">Webinar Series Video</a>	“Women in World War I” with Dr. Elizabeth Cobbs	<a href="https://youtube.com/watch?v=OKKuNoCUIL4">youtube.com/watch?v=OKKuNoCUIL4</a>
<a href="#">Veteran Profile</a>	Private Melina Olive Shaw	<a href="http://nhd.org/sites/default/files/MelinaOliveShaw.pdf">nhd.org/sites/default/files/MelinaOliveShaw.pdf</a>
<a href="#">Lesson Plan</a>	“What is a Veteran?”	<a href="http://nhd.org/sites/default/files/WhatisaVeteran.pdf">nhd.org/sites/default/files/WhatisaVeteran.pdf</a>
<a href="#">Lesson Plan</a>	“Suffragists Unite!”	<a href="http://nhd.org/sites/default/files/SuffragistsUnite.pdf">nhd.org/sites/default/files/SuffragistsUnite.pdf</a>

IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE		
<p>During World War I, approximately 20% of the American military was filled by men who were immigrants. Many more combatants were second- and third-generation Americans. Many immigrants of German descent struggled as their new country went to war with their old one.</p>		
<a href="#">Webinar Series Video</a>	“Immigration Following the Great War” with Dr. Katherine Benton-Cohen	<a href="https://youtube.com/watch?v=ZY9ZopXhmJA">youtube.com/watch?v=ZY9ZopXhmJA</a>
<a href="#">Silent Hero Profile</a>	Private Gustav Arvid Fredrik Ekstrom	<a href="http://nhsilentheroes.org/gustaf-arvid-fredrik-ekstrom">nhsilentheroes.org/gustaf-arvid-fredrik-ekstrom</a>
<a href="#">Silent Hero Profile</a>	Corporal Ferdinand Egon Deeringhoff, Jr.	<a href="http://nhsilentheroes.org/ferdinand-egon-deeringhoff">nhsilentheroes.org/ferdinand-egon-deeringhoff</a>
<a href="#">Lesson Plan</a>	“Alien Enemies Detained: German Americans in World War I”	<a href="http://nhd.org/sites/default/files/AlienEnemiesDetained.pdf">nhd.org/sites/default/files/AlienEnemiesDetained.pdf</a>
<a href="#">Lesson Plan</a>	“English Only: A Wartime Necessity or an Act of Intolerance?”	<a href="http://nhd.org/sites/default/files/EnglishOnly.pdf">nhd.org/sites/default/files/EnglishOnly.pdf</a>





Kansas teacher Kyle Johnson placing sand in the grave marker of U.S. Army Corporal Albert Hohberg at Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in France in 2018. You can learn more about Corporal Hohberg at [nhsilentheroes.org/albert-hohberg](http://nhsilentheroes.org/albert-hohberg). Courtesy of National History Day.

## VETERAN EXPERIENCE

Many World War I veterans returned to a world unfamiliar to them. They struggled to communicate their needs to a world that could not understand their experiences in Europe.

<b>Webinar Series Video</b>	“The World War I Veteran Experience” with Dr. Jennifer Keene	<a href="https://youtube.com/watch?v=T8RVm7Q6-6w">youtube.com/watch?v=T8RVm7Q6-6w</a>
<b>Veteran Profile</b>	Colonel Marcus Aurelius Smith Ming	<a href="http://nhd.org/sites/default/files/MarcusAureliusSmith-Ming.pdf#overlay-context=markus-smith-ming">nhd.org/sites/default/files/MarcusAureliusSmith-Ming.pdf#overlay-context=markus-smith-ming</a>
<b>Veteran Profile</b>	Yeoman First Class Helen M. Whittaker	<a href="http://nhd.org/sites/default/files/HelenMWhittaker.pdf">nhd.org/sites/default/files/HelenMWhittaker.pdf</a>
<b>Lesson Plan</b>	“Coming Home: The Doughboys Return to Civilian Life”	<a href="http://nhd.org/sites/default/files/ComingHome.pdf#overlay-context=coming-home">nhd.org/sites/default/files/ComingHome.pdf#overlay-context=coming-home</a>
<b>Lesson Plan</b>	“The Bonus Army and the Election of 1932”	<a href="http://nhd.org/sites/default/files/TheBonusArmyandthe-Electionof1932.pdf">nhd.org/sites/default/files/TheBonusArmyandthe-Electionof1932.pdf</a>



## AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Many African Americans served honorably in a segregated military that denied them opportunities. Some units, like the famous 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, served with distinction under French command and helped to popularize American jazz. However, upon returning home, African Americans continued to face discrimination and violence.

<b>Webinar Series Video</b>	“African Americans in World War I” with Dr. Adriane Lentz-Smith	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NuTFSuAg2dQ">youtube.com/watch?v=NuTFSuAg2dQ</a>
<b>Silent Hero Profile</b>	Private First Class John Billhimer	<a href="https://nhsilenthheroes.org/john-billhimer">nhsilenthheroes.org/john-billhimer</a>
<b>Silent Hero Profile</b>	Private Harry W. Hatcher	<a href="https://nhsilenthheroes.org/harry-w-hatcher">nhsilenthheroes.org/harry-w-hatcher</a>
<b>Lesson Plan</b>	“Jazz: The Harlem Hellfighters’ Gift to the World”	<a href="https://nhd.org/sites/default/files/JazzHarlemHellfighters-2019.pdf">nhd.org/sites/default/files/JazzHarlemHellfighters-2019.pdf</a>
<b>Lesson Plan</b>	“We Return Fighting: Mapping the Experiences of African American Soldiers After World War I”	<a href="https://nhd.org/sites/default/files/WeReturnFighting.pdf">nhd.org/sites/default/files/WeReturnFighting.pdf</a>

## USE OF THE RESOURCES

NHD encourages teachers to check out the myriad of resources posted at [nhd.org/world-war-i](https://nhd.org/world-war-i). We hope these will inspire students to engage in NHD research and encourage teachers to share these unique primary sources and active learning strategies with their students.

To access more theme resources, go to [nhd.org/themebook](https://nhd.org/themebook).



Megan Kopp, an NHD teacher from Pennsylvania, reads a eulogy for U.S. Army Private Freeman Wilbur Bower. He is memorialized at Somme American Cemetery in France. You can learn more about Private Bower at [nhsilenthheroes.org/freeman-wilbur-bower](https://nhsilenthheroes.org/freeman-wilbur-bower). Courtesy of National History Day.



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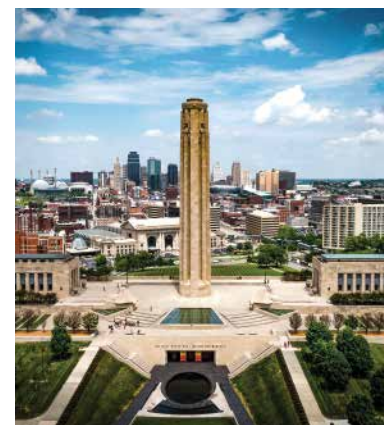
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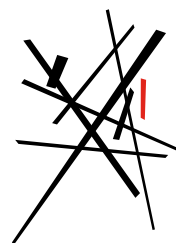
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