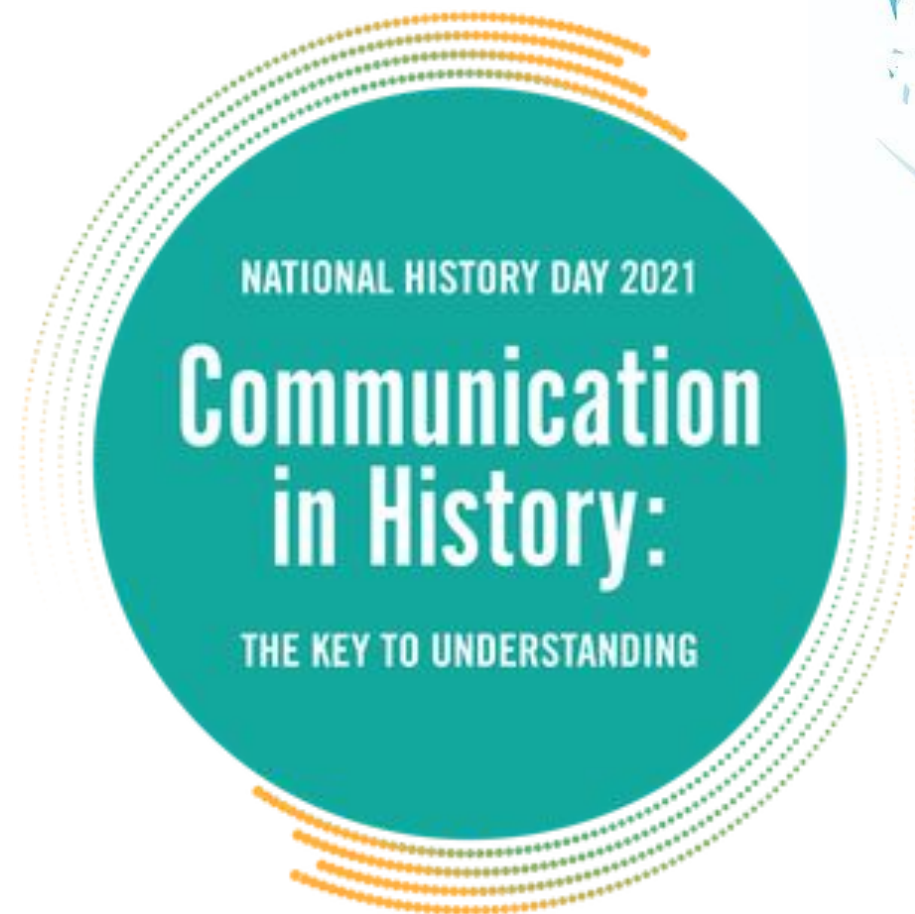
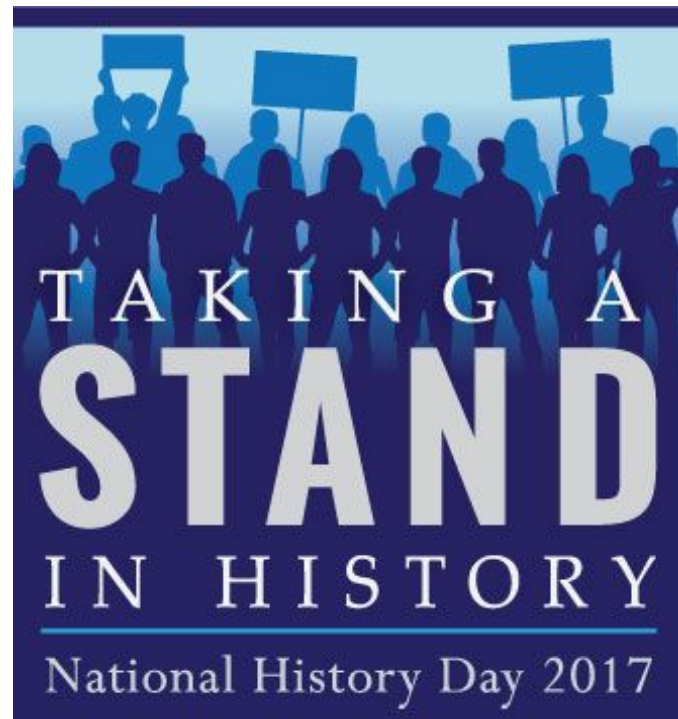


Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History

National History Day 2026

national
history
day **MN**



There is a different National History Day theme every year.

- Same theme for all students
- Big idea that you have to connect to your topic
- The themes are very broad - many topics will connect





**The theme is a lens
through which you
view your topic.**

Example: Montgomery Bus Boycott

- How was the Montgomery Bus Boycott a **reaction** to racial segregation?
- What **reforms** were a result of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the successful Supreme Court case?
- How did the strategies used in the Montgomery Bus Boycott **revolutionize** the way people fought for rights during the civil rights movement?

What's the difference between revolution and reform?

🔍 What is reform?

“The effort to change to a better state or form; to improve by alteration, substitution, abolition.”

🔍 What is revolution?

“The forcible overthrow of a government or social order, in favor of a new system; a dramatic and wide-reaching change in the way something works or is organized or in people's ideas about it.”

What's the difference between revolution and **reform**?

🔍 What is reform?

“The effort to change to a better state or form; to improve by alteration, substitution, abolition.”

- Reform happens when people work to change something for the better without completely getting rid of it.
- **Synonyms:**
 - **Noun:** Improvement, correction, change, adaptation, amendment
 - **Verb:** Improve, correct, alter, adjust, adapt
- *Reform is like fixing your car. You keep the same car, but you make it better by getting new tires.*

Reform

“The effort to change to a better state or form; to improve by alteration, substitution, abolition.”

Example: 1970 Minneapolis Teachers' Strike

In 1970, teachers in Minneapolis went on strike. They wanted better pay, smaller class sizes, and better working conditions. Even though public employees were not allowed to strike, 2,200 teachers protested.

After a compromise was reached, teachers went back to the classroom. In addition to the changes in the classroom, the strike also led to the passage of the Minnesota Public Employee Labor Relations Act (PELRA). Labor laws were changed, and public employees could legally strike.

Revolution or Reform? It may be stronger to argue that the 1970 strike was a **reform**. Teachers worked within an existing system for change. You could connect to revolution by connecting to the larger labor movement PERLA as a dramatic and wide-reaching change.



Minneapolis Teachers Strike, 1970. Minnesota Historical Society.

What's the difference between **revolution** and reform?

- Revolution is when people want major change. They want to do things in an entirely new way, or completely change the way people think about something.
- **Synonyms:**
 - **Noun:** Rebellion, revolt, transformation, disruption, innovation
- *Revolution is like buying a new car instead of fixing the old one, or inventing a whole new kind of transportation.*

 What is revolution?

“The forcible overthrow of a government or social order, in favor of a new system; a dramatic and wide-reaching change in the way something works or is organized or in people’s ideas about it.”

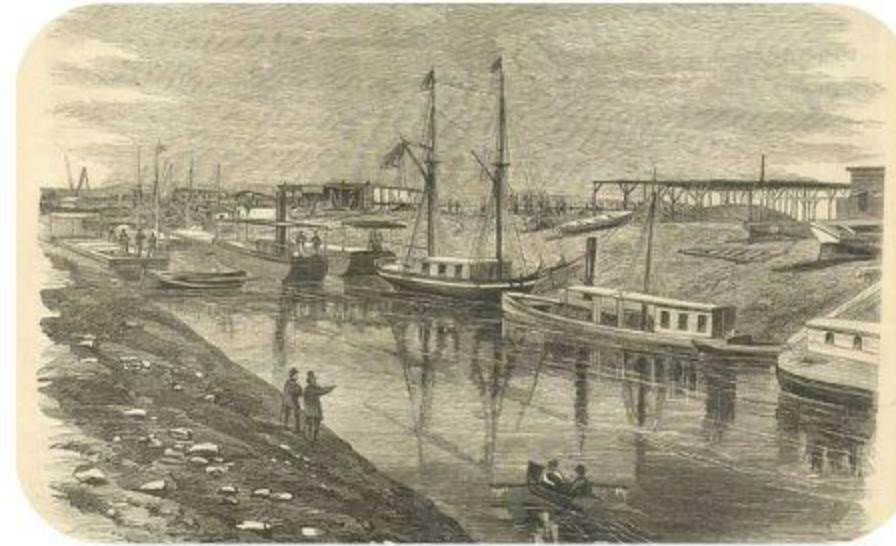
Revolution: Dramatic and wide-reaching change in...



John Trumbull, The Declaration of Independence, 1818.

Politics

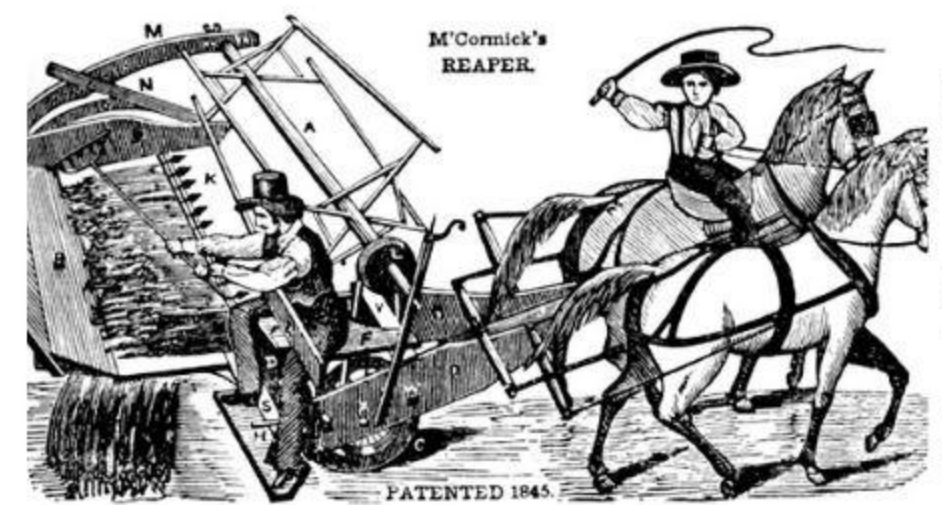
The **American Revolution** was an overthrow of the existing government.



First Vessels through Canal, 1869. Appleton's Journal of Popular Literature, Science, and Art.

Economics

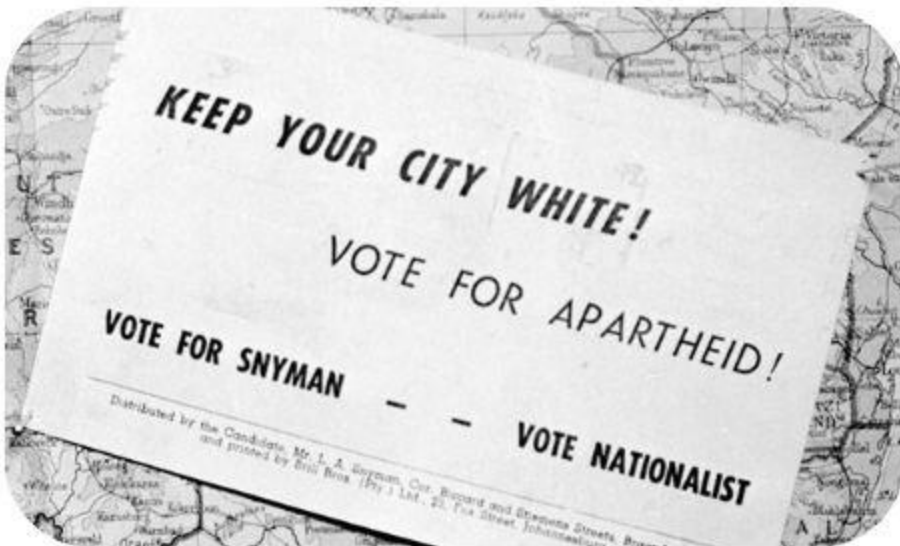
The **Suez Canal** changed global trade routes, cut transportation times, and changed global commerce.



McCormick Reaper, 1845. Chicagology.com.

Technology

The invention of the **mechanized reaper** allowed farmers to grow more food with less labor.



Election flyer, 1953. Jurgen Schadeberg Collection

Society

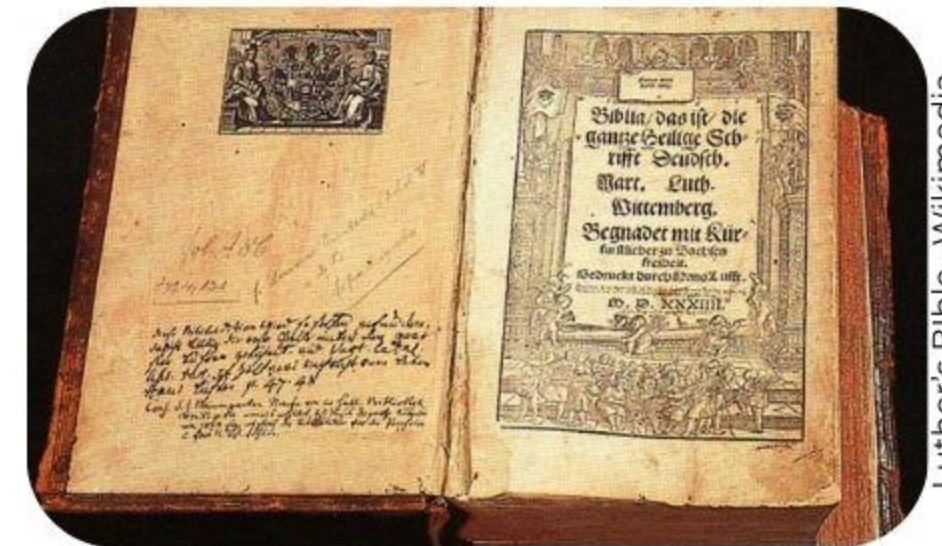
The **end of apartheid** in South Africa was a revolution in how society was organized and the rights of Black people.



Poster, 1968. Library of Congress.

Culture

The **Chinese Cultural Revolution** attempted to reshape the culture of the country by getting rid of old traditions, ideas, customs, and beliefs.



Luther's Bible, Wikimedia.

Religion

Martin Luther's 95 Theses launched a religious revolution as people broke with the Catholic Church.

Revolution

“The forcible overthrow of a government or social order, in favor of a new system; a dramatic and wide-reaching change in the way something works or is organized or in people’s ideas about it.”



Assembly Line Postcard, 1920s. Detroit Historical Society.

**‘GOLD RUSH’
IS STARTED
BY FORD’S
\$5 OFFER**

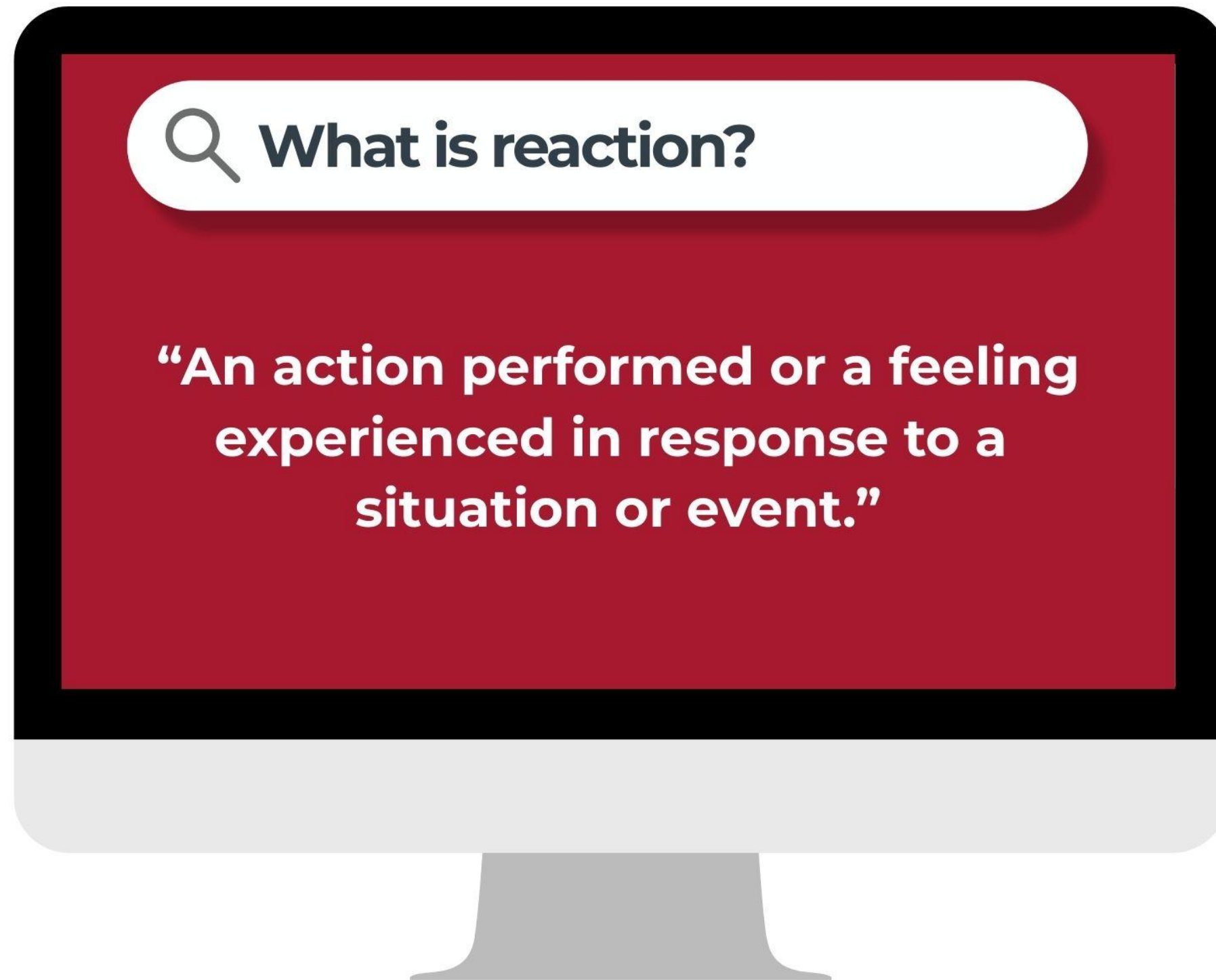
The Henry Ford

Example: Henry Ford and the Assembly Line

The moving assembly line was introduced by Henry Ford in 1913. This process increased production and allowed Ford to reduce costs, dropping the consumer price, and increasing sales. The process spread to other manufacturers and other industries.

Revolution or Reform? The assembly line, popularized by Ford, was **revolutionary**. It was a dramatic change in the United States. It created change not only in car assembly, but also spread to many other industries and reshaped manufacturing processes. Ford also implemented other reforms in his factories, like the Five-Dollar Day (doubling worker’s wages) as a way to improve worker satisfaction with a more tedious job.

What about reaction?



- Reaction is how someone or something responds to something else that happens.
- **All topics should connect to reaction.**
 - This could be the “spark” for your topic – people reacted by trying to change things.
 - Reaction could be the impact of your topic - how people responded to or changed things because of your topic.

Your theme connection is unique to your topic.

- You might find revolution, reaction, or reform in any “part” of your topic - before, during, or after the main event.
- There may be different connections within the same topic.

**Historical
Context**

**In
History**

Reform

**Multiple
Perspectives**

Significance

Revolution

Reaction

Making a Strong Theme Connection

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Aerial photograph of Medium Range Ballistic Missile (MRBM) Launch Site 1 near San Cristóbal, Cuba, taken on October 25, 1962. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.



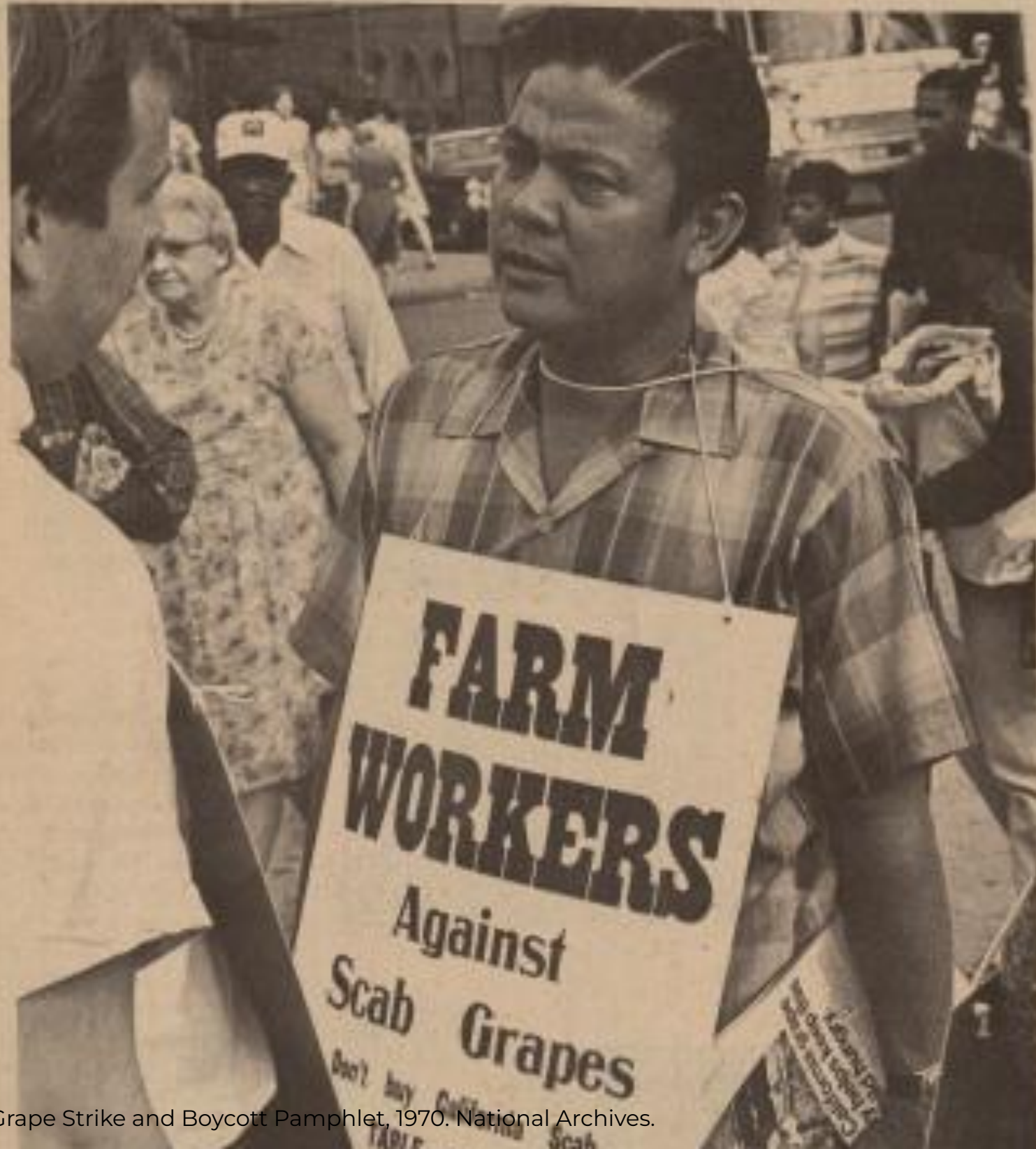


For Example: The Cuban Missile Crisis

- The Cuban Missile Crisis was the closest the world ever came to nuclear war. During the Cold War, between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Soviet Union placed missiles on the island of Cuba, which could have hit targets in the US. Through tense negotiations, the two countries made promises to avoid nuclear war.
- A project on this topic might focus on the **reactions** of both countries in the conflict and the diplomatic **reforms** that came out of it to prevent similar situations. This project might not focus on revolution.



The Delano Grape Strike and Boycott



You don't have to talk about revolution, reaction, and reform equally.

- One might have played a larger part in your topic. You might discuss one more in your project.
- **Example: Delano Grape Strike**
A project on this topic might focus more on the **reforms** that the strikers were demanding to improve working conditions and the **reactions** of the public to support their cause.



Historical context will help to show how your topic was a revolution or reform.

- How was it different from what came before?
- **For Example: Florence Nightingale**
Nightingale was a pioneer in nursing, The reforms she advocated for, like handwashing and ventilation, reduced mortality rates in hospitals. How as her approach different from what came before?

On December 16, 1773, colonists in Boston **reacted** against a British tax on tea by boarding trade ships and throwing tea into the harbor, calling for **reforms** to representation and tax levels. While the British **reacted** with increased restrictions in the colonies, the **revolutionary** Boston Tea Party encouraged other colonists to demand **reform** and helped lead to the American **Revolution**.

Focus on one major “connection” for each theme word.

- Your theme connection isn't necessarily stronger by using the theme words many times.
- Your judges may have a harder time identifying the theme connection.



Revolution may be the first word in the theme, but it may not be your “main event.”

- **For Example: Child Labor and the Industrial Revolution**

While child labor existed before the Industrial Revolution, the need for workers in factories increased it, often in dangerous conditions. In this case, the Industrial Revolution would be background for a project focusing on child labor reforms.

Use your thesis
to map it where
you will
connect to the
theme.

The year-long Montgomery Bus Boycott began in 1955 as a non-violent **reaction** to racial segregation when Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger. The bus boycott and following successful Supreme Court case sparked nationwide **reforms** and **revolutionized** how Black citizens organized to fight for civil rights.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott: The Fight for Civil Rights Reform

Background • Emancipation Proclamation • 13th – 15th Amendments are added to the Constitution • Jim Crow laws • <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i>	Heart of the Story • Montgomery Bus Boycott starts • City transit system suffers severe economic loss • Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders lend support through the Montgomery Improvement Association	Short-Term Impact • Boycott officially ended • Segregated buses to be unconstitutional • Major public victory and gain national attention
Build-Up • <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> • Montgomery WPC and NAACP organizing to challenge bus segregation • Rosa Parks attends Highlander School • Rosa Parks is arrested		Long-Term Impact • Movement gains momentum • Greensboro Sit-ins • Freedom Rides • Children's Crusade • March on Washington • Selma to Montgomery March

You might need to use synonyms or different forms of the word to make your writing flow.

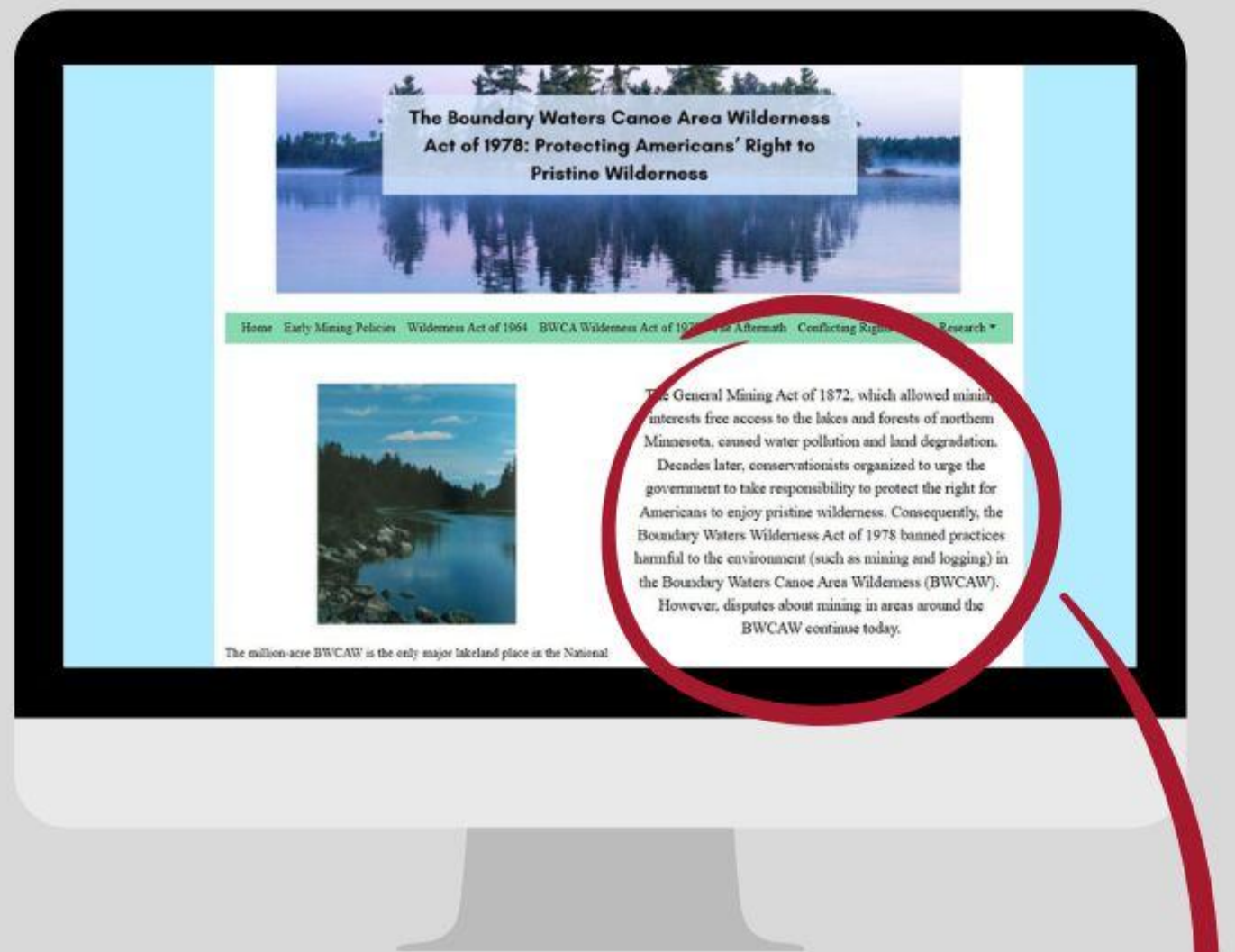
- **Revolution:** Revolutionized, revolutionary, transformed, upheaval
- **Reaction:** Reacted, response, backlash
- **Reform:** Changes, changed, improved, reshaped

THE MEIJI RESTORATION

A POLITICAL REVOLUTION

Your theme connection should be clear in the project itself.

- It shouldn't depend on you explaining it in-person.
- There's no formula for where it has to go.
- Can you include it into your thesis or title?



Be consistent!

- The theme connection (and thesis) that's in your project needs to match what's in your process paper.

**The Boundary Waters Canoe Area
Wilderness Act of 1978:
Protecting Americans' Right to Pristine
Wilderness**

Senior Division
Individual Website
Student-Composed Words: 1,200 words
Process Paper Words: 500 words
Media Length: 3:00

used the microfilm machines to find Duluth News Tribune articles about northern Minnesota residents' reactions to the BWCAW Act of 1978, and I looked through my old local newspaper clippings about mining rights near the BWCAW.

After conducting research, I wrote my thesis and sorted my information into five sections. I decided to present my project as a website because I've had experience creating a History Day website before and wanted to showcase audio clips in my project. I chose a blue-toned color scheme to represent the lakes and forests in the BWCAW.

My historical argument is that the General Mining Act of 1872, which allowed mining interests free access to the lakes and forests of northern Minnesota, caused water pollution and land degradation. Decades later, conservationists organized to urge the government to take responsibility to protect the right for Americans to enjoy pristine wilderness. Consequently, the Boundary Waters Wilderness Act of 1978 banned practices harmful to the environment (such as mining and logging) in the BWCAW. However, disputes about mining in areas around the BWCAW continue today.

The BWCAW act is significant in history because it protected the wilderness for the public to enjoy the wilderness, as once it's spoiled, there's no going back. Today, we can see how many people appreciate visiting this serene wilderness every year.

Reminders

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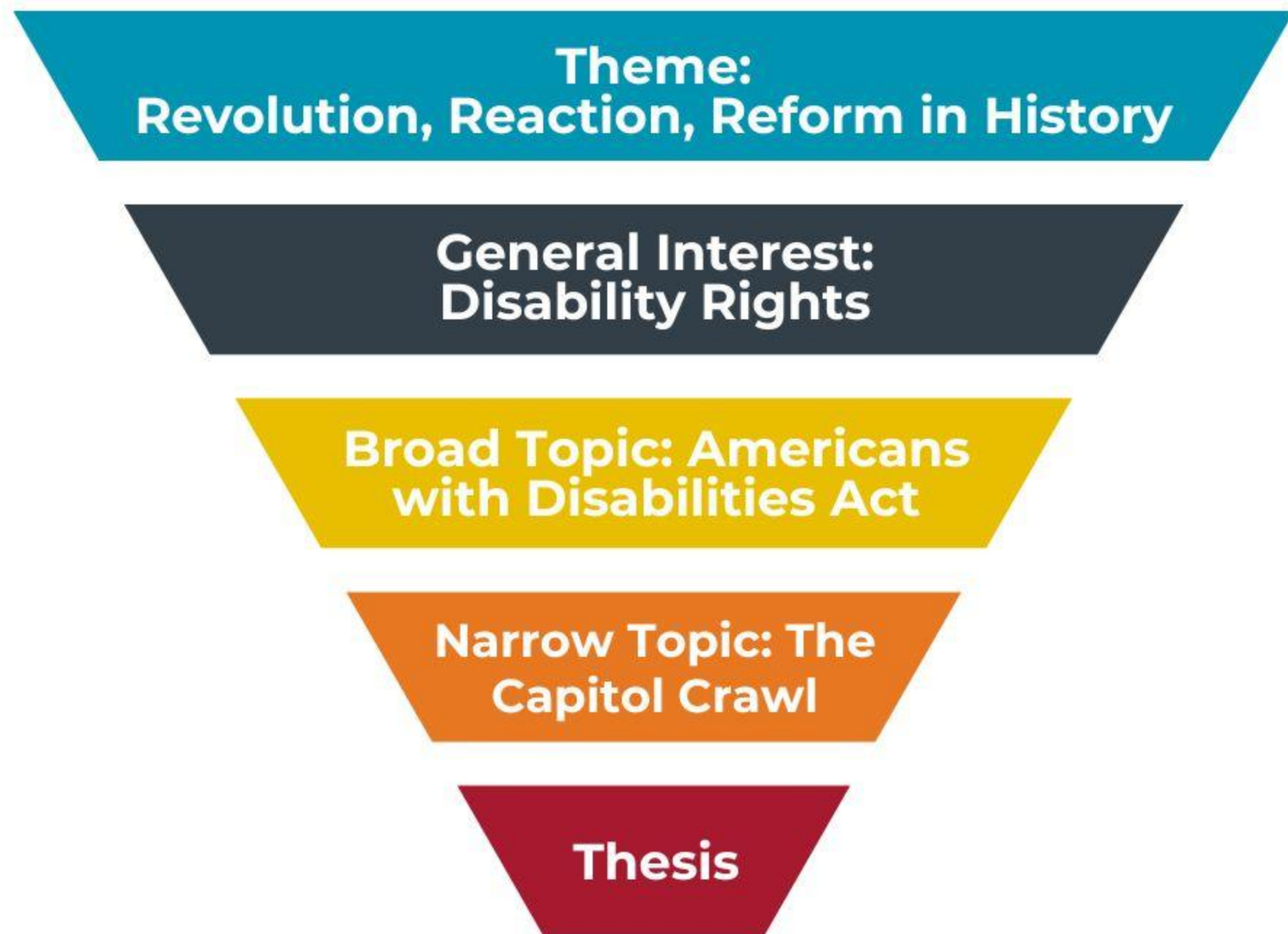


The impacts might be positive, negative, or a combination of both.

It's especially important to think about how your topic impacted different people or how those impacts changed over time.

- **Positive:** The O'Shaughnessy Dam was completed in 1923, flooding the valley under the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir. It provides both water and power to the San Francisco Bay area.
- **Negative:** Groups fought the dam as destructive to a unique landscape and biodiversity.





Think about how “big” your topic is.

- History Day projects aren't huge.
- Narrow topics are actually easier to research and present.
- Start with a general interest and get more focused.



Your topic could have been a success, failure, or a combination of both.

Example: Prohibition

- **Success:** The 18th Amendment was successfully passed to prohibit the manufacture, sale, and transportation of intoxicating liquor in the United States, beginning the Prohibition Era.
- **Failure:** While alcohol consumption decreased, Prohibition increased organized crime.



Focus on What Actually Happened

- Talking about what *might* have happened if historical actors had made different decisions is “what if” history.
- **Instead of:** If the US didn’t enter WWII, Germany would have won the war.
- **Try:** When the US entered WWII, they aided in the eventual defeat of Germany in 1945.



Minnesota Frost with Walter Cup, MPR News.



All-American Girls pRoessional Baseball League, 1948. Library of Congress.

Pick a topic “in history.”

- Look for topics where the main events took place at least 20 years in the past.
- Connections to current events should not be the main focus of your project.
- **For Example: Women’s Sports**
 - **Current Event:** The Minnesota Frost won the championship of the Professional Women’s Hockey League in 2025.
 - **Historic Event:** The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League ran from 1943 to 1964, and started as a way to keep stadiums full while many male players were serving in WWII.

Change may happen quickly or slowly.

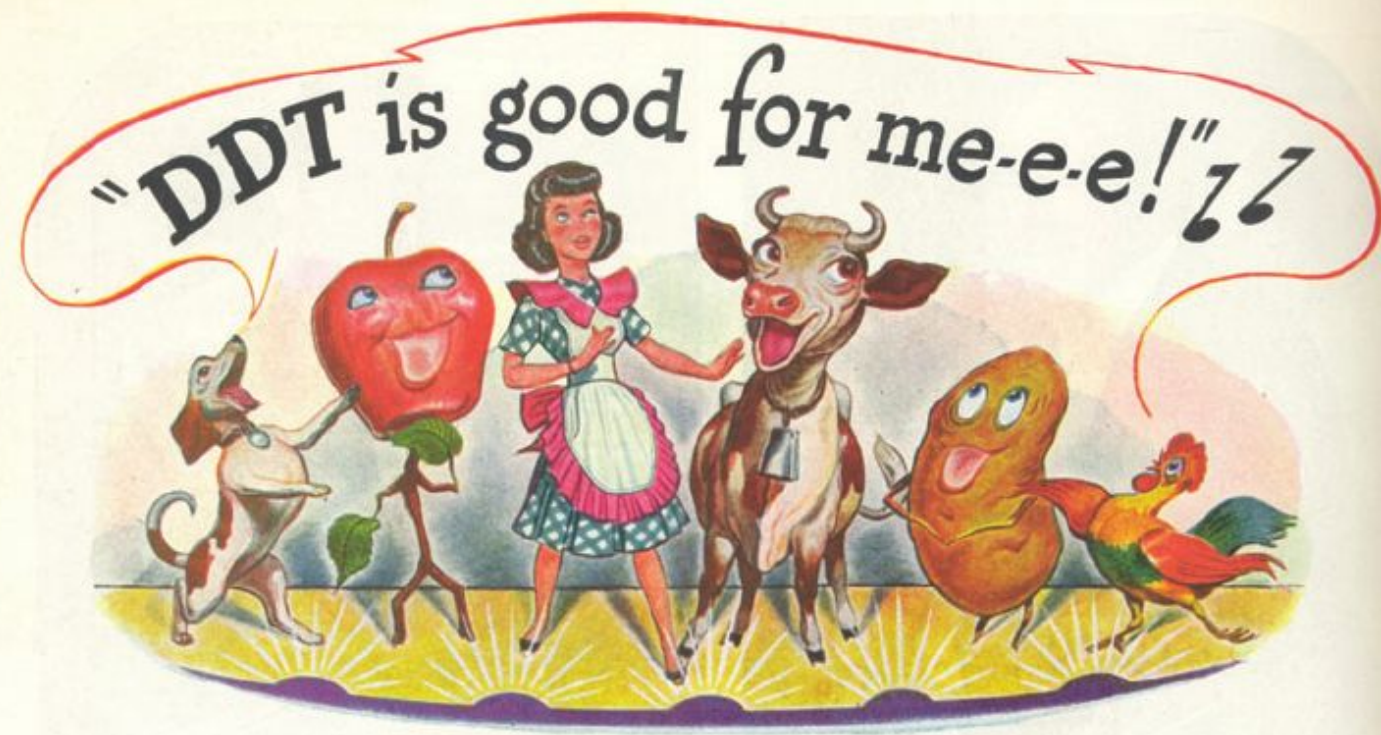
- **Quickly:** Things are different right away.
 - **For Example: The Atomic Bomb**
The 1945 dropping of atomic bombs by the US on Japan during WWII, and Japan surrendering less than a month later.
- **Slowly:** Things change over a long period of time.
 - **For Example: Women's Suffrage**
The first woman's rights convention was held in 1847, but the amendment giving women the right to vote didn't become law until 1920.

Cincinnati Enquirer, 1945.



Mary Winsor (Penn.) 1917, Library of Congress.





The great expectations held for DDT have been realized. During 1946, exhaustive scientific tests have shown that, when properly used, DDT kills a host of destructive insect pests, and is a benefactor of all humanity.

Pennsalt produces DDT and its products in all standard forms and is now

one of the country's largest producers of this amazing insecticide. Today, everyone can enjoy added comfort, health and safety through the insect-killing powers of Pennsalt DDT products . . . and DDT is only one of Pennsalt's many chemical products which benefit industry, farm and home.



GOOD FOR STEERS—Beef grows meatier nowadays . . . for it's a scientific fact that—compared to untreated cattle—beef-steers gain up to 50 pounds extra when protected from horn flies and many other pests with DDT insecticides.



Knox FOR THE HOME—helps to make healthier, more comfortable homes . . . protects your family from dangerous insect pests. Use Knox-Out DDT Powders and Sprays as directed . . . then watch the bugs "bite the dust"!



GOOD FOR FRUITS—Bigger apples, juicier fruits that are free from unsightly worms . . . all benefits resulting from DDT dusts and sprays.



Knox FOR DAIRIES—Up to 20% more milk . . . more butter . . . more cheese . . . tests prove greater milk production when dairy cows are protected from the annoyance of many insects with DDT insecticides like Knox-Out Stock and Barn Spray.



GOOD FOR ROW CROPS—25 more barrels of potatoes per acre . . . actual DDT tests have shown crop increases like this! DDT dusts and sprays help truck farmers pass these gains along to you.



Knox FOR INDUSTRY—Food processing plants, laundries, dry cleaning plants, hotels . . . dozens of industries gain effective bug control, more pleasant work conditions with Pennsalt DDT products.



CHEMICALS

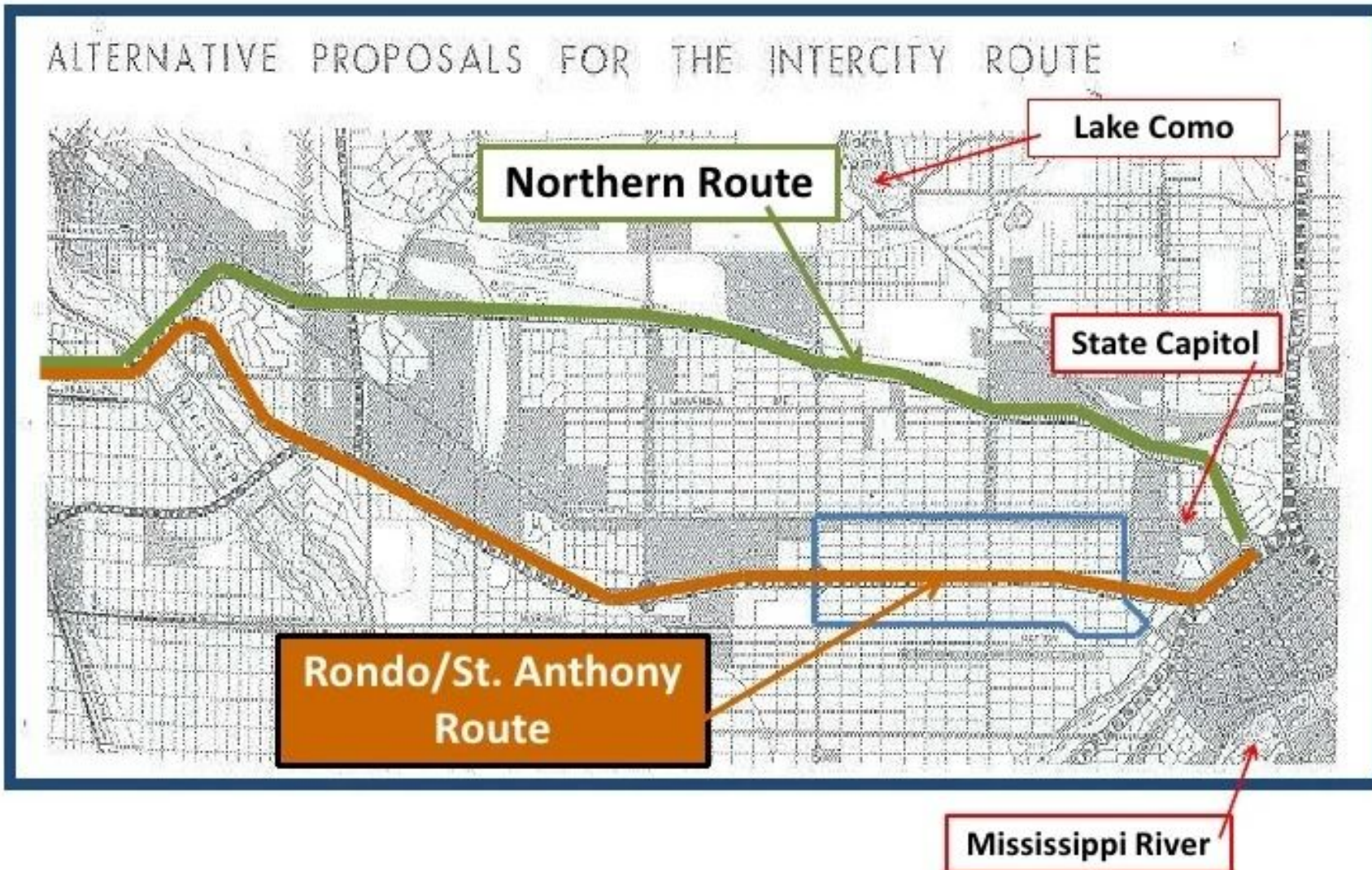
97 Years' Service to Industry • Farm • Home

PENNSYLVANIA SALT MANUFACTURING COMPANY

WIDENER BUILDING, PHILADELPHIA 7, PA.

The way people feel about the impacts might have changed over time.

- **Right Away:** DDT was one of the first synthetic insecticides. It was developed in the 1940s and was a turning point in fighting insect-borne diseases in humans and protecting crops and livestock.
- **Later On:** As it was used, scientists saw that DDT was not only becoming less effective but also had negative effects on wildlife and humans. It was banned in the United States in 1972.



The impacts might be global or local.

- Neither is “better” for your project.
- For local topics:
 - Explain how it changed things in that place or area.
 - Show how it was it connectioned to larger movements in history.

■ For Example: I-94 and Rondo

The construction of Interstate 94 through the predominantly Black neighborhood of Rondo in St. Paul in the 1960s was a major change for that community, but also something that happened to Black neighborhoods across the country.

Construction of I-94 at the former intersection of Rondo and Fairview Avenues, September 1, 1967. Minnesota Historical Society.



Think about multiple perspectives.

- People and groups were impacted differently by historical events.
- How can you find different points of view in your research? How were people impacted differently?
- **For Example: The Motion Picture Production Code**
Hollywood operated under a set of self-imposed guidelines from 1934-1968 that censored what they produced.
 - Who fought for and against this? Why?
 - How did different moviegoers feel about these restrictions?



Motion Picture Production Code Seal, 1934. Britannica.

Learn More!

**Find more History
Day resources from
the Minnesota
Historical Society:**

www.mnhs.org/historyday

