

# OHIO HISTORY DAY

## Theme Narrative

### Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History

This year's National History Day theme allows you to look at topics from all over the world and in many areas of study. As you dive deeper into your research, you'll find that this is a complex and thought-provoking theme. We've broken down this year's theme to help you choose a topic and begin your research.

Don't forget to check out the [Local History Topic List](#) for more help on how to explore this year's theme of [Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History](#). We're so excited to see what topics you select and the projects you create this year!

#### What is a revolution?

We can think of a revolution as **the forcible overthrow of a government or social order, in favor of a new system, or a dramatic and wide-reaching change in the way something works, is organized, or in people's ideas about it.**

Sometimes, revolutions involve a change in government, like the American Revolution. Other revolutions are about changing the way society views certain people, practices or social norms. And some revolutions are about changing the way society, or a specific group of people, do something, like the mechanization of production during the Industrial Revolution or the Scientific Revolution that led to new knowledge about our natural world.

#### What is a reform?

**The effort to change to a better state or form; to improve by alteration, substitution, or abolition (removal).** Reform is all about changing the way something works.

Reform can include change to the way we do things, like the invention of the oral Polio vaccine. It can also be about substituting or swapping something out, like when the Founding Fathers wrote the U.S. Constitution to replace the Articles of Confederation. Reform can also be about the outright removal or end of something, like the abolition of slavery.

#### What is a reaction?

**An action performed or a feeling experienced in response to a situation or event; or the resistance or opposition to a force or movement.** Reaction is all about how people respond to something that happens.

Reaction can take many forms. Sometimes reactions are limited to verbal or written responses, like a newspaper opinion piece against something. Other times, reactions take on a more active or organized role, like staging a protest or organizing a letter writing campaign.

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There is always a reaction to a revolution or reform. People will always have a response to change. Reaction can also lead to revolution and reform.

### What is the difference between revolution, reaction, and reform?

This year's NHD theme does not require you to use all three of the theme words "revolution, reaction, reform" in your project, but you should include them if your topic deals with them. For example, if your topic deals with both revolution and reaction, you should address both in your project. If your project deals with revolution, reaction, and reform, then it should address all three theme words.

The lines between revolution, reaction and reform are blurred, and a topic dealing with one will often touch on another. Sometimes a topic can be considered a revolution, reform, and reaction all in one. All three theme words are centered on change. Reforming the way something works can often also revolutionize that same thing. Similarly, a revolution will often lead to reform in the way something works.

Keep in mind that reaction is always a part of revolution and reform, because there will always be a reaction to a revolution or reform taking place. Reaction can often also lead to revolution or reform. Reaction is important in understanding the changes that take place through revolution and reform.

Let's see how revolution, reaction and reform can interact with each other, using the Underground Railroad as an example.

#### Revolution

- It was extremely dangerous for freedom seekers to escape and for those conductors on the Underground Railroad who helped them along their journey. This did not stop many people from fighting for their freedom. This revolutionary network of brave people had ideas about the changes and reforms needed for equality.

#### Reform

- The right to equality, where all people should be treated equally under the law, inspired many to challenge the institution of slavery and call for reform. This belief in the right to equality led individuals to act by providing safe houses, resources, and guidance to freedom seekers, despite the personal risks involved. Abolitionists' call for reform and the banning of slavery led to reactions both positive and negative.

#### Reaction

- Slavery had been a part of America for hundreds of years. Generations of enslaved people were seen as essential to the economy of the country. The idea of abolition caused tensions between those who saw slavery as

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unconstitutional and those who saw it as a necessity. The Underground Railroad was a reaction to this inequality and was kept so secret for fear of consequences.

### Multiple Perspectives

When thinking about revolution, reaction and reform, it's important to consider different perspectives. There are often many opinions on revolutions, reforms and reactions taking place. Some people will think reform or revolution are needed, but others will not. Similarly, not everyone will agree with the changes that take place during a revolution or reform. People react differently to historical events.

Let's consider the right to vote. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the women's suffrage movement fought to earn women the right to vote. Suffragists wanted to revolutionize and reform the voting system in the United States. However, not everyone thought reforming the voting system was a good idea. There were many different reactions to the women's suffrage movement. Some believed that only certain groups deserved the right to vote, while others advocated for equal voting rights for all citizens. Recognizing these differing perspectives helps us understand the complexities of achieving the right to vote.

When thinking about different perspectives, consider these questions:

- Does everyone react the same way to a revolution or reform?
- Why might people react with resistance to a revolution or reform?
- Does the revolution or reform bring positive change to everyone? Are some groups left out of the revolution/reform?
- How might different perspectives help us to better understand this topic?

### Thinking About Short and Long-Term Impacts

It's important to think about how revolution, reaction, and reform can have both short-term and long-term impacts. For example, revolution might lead to immediate changes, but it can also inspire future generations and lead to long-lasting societal changes. Similarly, reform may take decades of work to overcome reactions of resistance and create long-term change.

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### Local History Topics: Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History

History happens every day and in your own backyard! In fact, Ohio has played an essential role in both U.S. and world history. We've put together a list of Ohio topics for the 2026 NHD theme of Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History. Be sure to check out some example topics, marked with asterisk (\*), after the local history list!

#### African American History

- Brigadier General Charles Young – First African American man to achieve the rank of colonel in the U.S. Army
- Carl B. Stokes – First African American mayor of a major US city (Cleveland, 1967), later a judge and ambassador \*
- Charlene Mitchell – Civil rights activist and socialist. She was the first African American woman candidate to run for President of the United States
- Ohio in the Underground Railroad
- Levi Coffin
- John P. Parker
- John Rankin
- Henry Boyd
- AME Church (see Dr. Cheryl LaRoche)
- Lady Fanm Goumen
- W.C.A. No. 2—First African American branch of the YWCA in the nation
- Wilberforce University—First Black owned and operated private HBCU

#### American Indian History

- Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks \*
- Wilberforce University—First Black owned and operated private HBCU
- American Indian Movement, 1960s/70s
- American Indian Religious Freedom Act, 1978
- American Indian Wars, 1789-1795
- French Indian Wars, 1754-1763
- Haudenosaunee Confederation
- Indian Removal Act, 1830
- Lord Dunmore's War (1774)
- Michikinikwa, or Little Turtle, leader of the Myaamia

- Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, 1990
- Proclamation of 1763
- Tecumseh- leader of the Shawnee
- Western Confederacy

#### Diplomatic History

- Bouquet's Expedition
- Constitutional Conventions, 1851, 1870, 1912
- King Philip's War, 1675-1678
- The Dayton Accord
- Toledo War & the Frostbitten Convention, 1835-1836
- Treaty of Greenville, 1795
- War of 1812

#### Economic History

- Baldemar Velasquez – American labor union activist and co-founder of Farm Labor Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO.
- Building of the Miami and Erie Canal
- Cincinnati meatpacking "Porkopolis," 1840-1875
- Cleveland Strike at General Motors –
- Construction of the National Road in Ohio, 1825-1838
- Formation of the United Auto Workers
- Panic of 1907 & the founding of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland
- United Mine Workers coal strike of 1919 in Ohio
- Youngstown "Little Steel" Strike – Led to the formation of the United Steels Workers Union \*

#### Environmental History

- Cuyahoga River Fires
- National Environment Policy Act, 1970

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### Local History Topics: Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History

- The Great Flood of 1913 & the Ohio Conservancy Law \*
- Scioto River pollution
- The Wilderness Act of 1964

#### Political History

- Associate Justice Harold Burton, 1 of 9 Supreme Court Justices to rule on Brown v. the Board of Education, 1954
- Benjamin Lundy – Abolitionist, publisher of antislavery newspapers
- Brandenburg v. Ohio, 1969
- Clement Vallandigham – Leader of the Ohio Democratic Party and opponent of the American Civil War
- Columbus Board of Education v. Penick, 1979
- Equality Foundation of Cincinnati vs. City of Cincinnati, 1997 \*
- Florence Ellinwood Allen – First woman elected to the Ohio Supreme Court and first to serve on the Supreme Court of any state
- Joshua R. Giddings – Abolitionist, one of the founders and member of the Republican Party
- Kent State University shootings, 1970
- Mapp v. Ohio, 1961
- Maxwell's Code, 1795
- Ohio Black Codes & Ohio Black Laws, 1804 & 1807 respectively
- Ohio Civil Rights Act of 1959
- Ohio Public Accommodations Law of 1884
- Ohio Statehood, 1803
- Stonewall Union (now known as Stonewall Columbus)
- The Bing Act, 1921
- The Northwest Ordinance, 1787

#### Science & Medicine History

- 1918 Flu Epidemic at Camp Sherman in Chillicothe, Ohio
- AIDS Task Force of Greater Cleveland
- Albert Sabin & the invention of the oral polio vaccine \*

- Ella P. Stewart – First African American female pharmacist in the U.S.
- Neil Armstrong & Apollo 11 mission
- Thomas Alva Edison – Menlo Park laboratory & his inventions
- Willem Kolff – Cleveland Clinic doctor who invented kidney dialysis

#### Social & Cultural History

- Bouquet's Expedition
- Red Power' – Pan Indian Identity, 1960s
- Cleveland Black Gay Pride Weekends
- Harry C. Smith – Journalist & Legislator who championed Civil Rights in Ohio
- Jean O'Leary – one of the founders of National Coming Out Day
- Jerry Siegel & Joe Shuster- creators of the "first superhero," Superman
- Jesse Owens & 1936 Berlin Olympics
- Lane Seminary Debates
- Lockbourne Army Air Force Base (Columbus) – Tuskegee Airmen
- McGuffey Readers – standardized textbook for students around the country in 18<sup>th</sup> century
- Natalie Clifford Barney – American playwright, poet and novelist
- Paul Laurence Dunbar – African American Poet and activist
- Protest & labor songs of Appalachian coal miners
- Toni Morrison, author & first African American woman to win the Nobel prize in literature \*
- United Freedom Movement

#### Women's History

- 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment
- Betsy Mix Cowles – Prominent educator, activist & suffragist
- Gloria Steinem – Famed women's rights advocate
- Lucy Stone – Abolitionist & Suffragist
- Oberlin College – First college to admit women and one of the first to admit African Americans
- Ohio Women's Convention at Salem
- Victoria Woodhull – First woman to be nominated for president in 1872 and member of the suffrage movement



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### Local History Topics: Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History

Dig deeper into some Ohio topics! Take a look through the background on each topic and think through the research questions. What other research questions could help you think about these topics and how they relate to revolution, reaction and reform?

#### Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks

##### *Background:*

Over 2,000 years ago, Indigenous communities built eight monumental earthworks across Ohio. Known today as the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks, these structures were designed with incredible precision to align with the movements of the sun and moon and served as ceremonial centers that united communities from across eastern North America. Early archaeological studies of the sites began in the 1700s, but they often damaged the sites and overlooked Native voices. Sacred objects and human remains were removed and kept in museums, despite Indigenous protest.



Photograph. Columbus: Ohio History Connection, 1992. Ohio History Connection, Archaeology Blog. <https://www.ohiohistory.org/a-view-within-the-circle-part-ii-inside-looking-out/> (Oct. 25, 2024).

This changed with large-scale calls for reform of archaeological practices in the 1980s, as well as the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990, which gave Tribes the right to reclaim remains and associated objects tied to their people. At the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks, partnerships, educational initiatives, and consultation programs led to significant change, including using innovative and less invasive technologies in archaeological exploration, and elevating American Indian voices at the sites.

##### *Questions to Consider:*

Widespread change in the treatment of American Indian sites and artifacts did not come until the late 1980s to 1990s with the introduction of NAGPRA; why might it have taken a large-scale reaction to bring about change in the treatment of American Indians' graves and associated artifacts? Not all American Indians share the same feelings about the excavation and management of the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks. How might the differing reactions to this issue have impacted the reforms made to the management and interpretation of the sites? How does the history of the Hopewell

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Ceremonial Earthworks reflect broader societal reform in the appropriate treatment of American Indian graves and associated artifacts?

#### Youngstown "Little Steel" Strike

##### *Background:*

In 1937, the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) executed a strike targeting small steel mills for the recognition of workers' unions. Previously, steel laborers working in mills belonging to large corporations had bargained successfully. SWOC's goal was to have the unions of steel laborers recognized by smaller companies too, such as Republic Steel, Bethlehem Steel, Inland Steel, and Youngstown Sheet and Tube in Ohio, and enable the workers to collectively bargain with their employer. When the "Little Steel" workers sought the same recognition of their unions, however, they were met with strong opposition and bad faith bargaining from management. The tensions between "Little Steel" companies and their workers rose as executives refused to sign a deal with the workers.



International News Photos. *Steel strikers outside Cleveland City Hall. 1937.* SC 1252, Strikes and Lockouts Collection.  
<https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll32/id/8731/rec/29>  
(accessed July 30, 2025).

The negotiations escalated to violence between striking laborers and police in Chicago, swaying public opinion in favor of the companies. The event allowed "Little Steel" companies in Ohio to paint the companies' anti-union sentiment as an effort to preserve law and order. While 20,000 workers were striking at various Youngstown plants, mills supplied guns, tear gas, and ammunition to law enforcement to use against the strikers. On June 20, 1937, two picketers were killed and 14 injured by law enforcement. The violence resulted in Ohio's governor calling upon the National Guard to bring order to Youngstown. Despite their effort, "Little Steel" workers did not gain union recognition and bargaining rights until 1941.

##### *Questions to Consider:*

Other than union recognition, what were the specific reforms that "Little Steel" strikers in Youngstown desired? What were the reactions of the companies to their demands? Was the governor's reaction to the event of sending the National Guard to Youngstown acceptable? What revolutionary changes, if any, came about after the June strike? Were there national reactions and reforms due to the strike?

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#### Toni Morrison

##### *Background:*

Toni Morrison is one of the most decorated American authors. She has won a Pulitzer Prize, the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Barack Obama, and the Nobel Prize in Literature. Morrison was born in Lorain, Ohio, in 1931. Racial segregation was a reality in America at that time, which affected her experiences. She attended Howard University, a historically Black institution. Ultimately, she earned a Master of Arts degree in English from Cornell University. Despite her accomplishments as an author, she didn't publish her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, until she was 39. Morrison's novels tell stories of life as a female in America who is also Black.



Wikimedia/Enoch Pratt Library, CC.2.0  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Toni\\_Morrison.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Toni_Morrison.jpg).

After Morrison's third book, *Song of Solomon*, was successful, she decided to become a full-time writer. The novel *Beloved* was released in 1987 and is one of her most successful books. It was a bestseller for 25 weeks and won numerous awards, including the Pulitzer Prize. Morrison used a true story as the basis for *Beloved*. A Black woman, Margaret Garner, who escaped from slavery in Kentucky. Her husband and children also escaped with her to Ohio. Their slaveholder found them, however, and Margaret went to extreme lengths to save her daughter from returning to slavery. In the novel, names have been changed. Readers get an in-depth look at the life of numerous characters in the Reconstruction South, after the Civil War. It is a powerful ghost story that has haunted readers since its release.

##### *Questions to Consider:*

Morrison was born during the era of segregation. How did she use writing to react to her experiences as a Black woman in America? In what ways did Morrison's work as an editor help revolutionize Black voices? Looking at the broad themes in Morrison's novels, how does her work contribute to social reforms? How is Morrison an example of an author and political activist?



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#### Dr. Sabin & the Oral Polio Vaccine

##### *Background:*

Albert Sabin created the oral polio vaccine in the early 1960s. This vaccine transformed not just medicine but American life itself. Polio terrorized communities for decades in the early 1900s. During summer outbreaks, towns would close public pools, movie theaters, and schools. Jonas Salk had already made an injectable vaccine that worked well. But Sabin's oral vaccine was very different. It used a live, weakened virus that could be given on a sugar cube instead of through a shot.

The vaccine's adoption sparked intense debate among scientists. Some supported Salk's killed-virus method. Others backed Sabin's live-virus approach. Unlike many researchers who wanted to make money from their work, Sabin insisted his vaccine should be free for everyone. This choice, along with the vaccine's easy use, made huge global vaccination campaigns possible. The vaccine was developed during the Cold War. Despite tensions between countries, Sabin worked with Soviet scientists. They tested his vaccine on millions of Soviet children, showing how scientific progress could cross political boundaries.



Dr. Sabin administers his oral vaccine to two Cincinnati children. Henry R. Winkler Center for the History of the Health Professions, University of Cincinnati, 1960. Photograph. <https://www.neh.gov/explore/albert-b-sabin-archives> (accessed July 10, 2025).

##### *Questions to Consider:*

How did Sabin's oral vaccine revolutionize the fight against polio compared to earlier approaches? How was Sabin's refusal to patent his vaccine revolutionary for pharmaceutical companies, investors, and other researchers? What reactions emerged from different groups—parents, medical professionals, religious communities, and government officials—to mass vaccination campaigns? What reactions did the medical community have to using a live virus vaccine, and how did safety concerns shape public discourse? How did the success of polio vaccination campaigns lead to

reforms in how governments approach disease prevention and mandatory vaccination policies? How did the experience of polio and its prevention reform disability rights movements and public accessibility? What lasting reforms in global health cooperation emerged from the international effort to distribute Sabin's vaccine, particularly in developing nations? What ongoing debates about vaccine accessibility, pricing, and distribution can trace their roots to the precedents set by Sabin's vaccine?

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#### Carl B. Stokes

##### *Background:*

On Sunday, June 22, 1969, the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, Ohio caught fire and burned for less than 30 minutes—so quickly in fact that the newspapers were not able to get a photograph of it. While this was not the first time that the river caught fire, it was the first time that the burning river was viewed as an environmental crisis and not just an economic cost. Two factors contributed to this river fire being a catalyst for a national conversation about our environment: a *Time* magazine article published on August 1, 1969, that featured the burning river and Cleveland Mayor Carl B. Stokes.

Cleveland Mayor Carl B. Stokes was a national figure as the first African American man elected mayor of a major U.S. city. Stokes viewed the Cuyahoga River cleanup not simply as environmentalism but as something that could have meaningful and enduring impact in what



he called the “urban environment.” During his campaign and mayorship, he worked to remedy the air and water pollution that disproportionately impacted low-income neighborhoods. Today, we might call this type of work environmental justice.

Less than 24 hours after the June 1969 fire burned on the Cuyahoga, Stokes organized and led a press tour along the riverbank, featuring stops at the fire location, an industrial site, and sewers. Stokes drew attention to the pollution issues that were not only unique to Cleveland, but to the country.

Cleveland honors trailblazing mayor by declaring June 30 ‘Carl B. Stokes Day.’  
Cleveland.com, July 1, 2025.  
<https://www.cleveland.com/news/2025/07/cleveland-honors-trailblazing-mayor-by-declaring-june-30-carl-b-stokes-day.html> (accessed July 1, 2025).

##### *Questions to Consider:*

How did Stokes' reaction to the river fire lead to environmental reform on the state and national levels? How did other stakeholders like residents of Cleveland, business and industry owners along the Cuyahoga River, and politicians react to Stokes' call to action? How was Stokes' press tour and opinion of the river fire as an environmental issue revolutionary?

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#### The Great Flood of 1913 & the Conservancy Act

##### *Background:*

On Sunday, March 23rd, 1913, a massive rainstorm hit the Ohio Valley, bringing 9-11 inches of rain and the worst natural disaster the state had seen. The already-saturated ground, overflowing rivers, and broken levies brought massive flooding to the cities along the Great Miami River. The unparalleled flood led to fires across the city, \$3.25 billion in property damage, the loss of countless homes and businesses, and the death of over 360 people.

As Ohioans reeled from their loss, the Dayton, Ohio community came together to raise funds for flood prevention. They quickly came to the realization that any lasting change to prevent future floods would require the kind of cooperation and planning across city and county boundaries that simply didn't exist in Ohio law. As a result, Dayton resident and former Congressman John McMahon drafted the Conservancy Act of Ohio, which was passed into

law shortly after. The Act allowed the formation of Conservancy Districts: political subdivisions that solve water management issues, like flooding, as well as conserving and developing water supplies, and treating wastewater. Despite legal challenges to the Act, residents of the Ohio Valley quickly organized into a Conservancy District and hired an engineering firm to design a solution to their flooding problems. Since the passage and implementation of the Conservancy Act, Daytonians have yet to see another flooding natural disaster like that of 1913.



Photograph. Columbus: Ohio History Connection, 1992. Ohio History Connection, Archaeology Blog. <https://www.ohiohistory.org/a-view-within-the-circle-part-ii-inside-looking-out/> (Oct. 25, 2024).

##### *Questions to Consider:*

How did Ohioans react to the Great Flood of 1913? How did Ohioans' reactions to the flood lead to reform? Did people have different opinions about the best way to reform water management in the state? Why might some people or cities have challenged the Conservancy Act? In what ways might the Conservancy Act be considered revolutionary?