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NEWS RELEASE

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Oregon Students Win First Prize at National History Day® Contest for Second Consecutive Year

Portland, OR – June 24, 2020 – For the second year running, Portland sophomores [Kyler Wang and Alan Zhou](#) won gold at the annual National History Day® contest in the Senior Group Documentary category for their film, [Breaking the Curfew: The Story of Minoru Yasui](#). Wang and Zhou won first place in the same category in the 2019 contest for their documentary, [Echo of Falling Water: The Inundation of Celilo Falls](#) — the first time in several years that Oregon students have medaled at the national contest, which this year drew over 3,000 students from across the country.

Even amidst a pandemic, 141 students from across the state came together virtually to participate in [Oregon History Day](#), the statewide qualifying competition for the annual National History Day® contest. Working from home, middle and high school students developed their research projects, in the forms of papers, documentaries, websites, performances, and exhibits, persevering through hurdles that the new virtual format presented. Fifty volunteer judges evaluated over 70 projects online, and 56 students advanced to the National History Day® contest, which took place online from June 14–20.

As veteran Oregon and National History Day® participants, the switch to a virtual format provided new hurdles for the documentarians, according to Zhou:

Competing virtually was definitely a change for us, as we had gotten used to flying to Maryland for the national competition the past two years. Fortunately, we were able to complete most of our research and personal interviews before the COVID-19 quarantine began. We did conduct a few interviews over the internet. Although this affected the visual quality, we still learned a lot from them. Our work process was also altered —we were unable to meet in-person to write our script and revise the project. Despite these challenges, the overall experience of participating in NHD and conducting historical research remained fulfilling. We are extremely grateful that Oregon History Day continued, as we would not have the chance to tell our story and view projects created by other students.

While the students clearly persevered, Wang noted that he, “definitely missed some of the yearly traditions at Nationals, like exchanging state-themed buttons and the parade before the award ceremony.”

Breaking the Curfew profiles Hood River, Oregon, born [Minoru Yasui](#), who intentionally violated the military curfew imposed on Japanese Americans during World War II. In 2015, President Barack Obama awarded a posthumous Presidential Medal of Freedom, America’s highest civilian honor, to Yasui for challenging the incarceration of Japanese Americans in concentration camps during World War II and for his leadership in civil and human rights. He is the first Oregonian to receive that Medal.

“Through our documentaries, we’ve always tried to give a voice to powerful stories that have been mostly untold or forgotten,” remarked Wang. “Even as Oregonians, Alan and I had never heard of Minoru Yasui, nor Celilo Falls.”

Zhou further shared:

We first came across Minoru Yasui during our visit to the Oregon Historical Society museum's [Experience Oregon](#) exhibition in September 2019. We were instantly captivated and inspired by his powerful story. Here was an Oregonian, born and raised just 60 miles east of our high schools, who dared to stand up against the full force of the United States government in his fight against the discriminatory military orders imposed on his community during World War II. After doing some more research, we knew that Minoru Yasui fit the theme of this year's National History Day competition (*Breaking Barriers in History*) perfectly. Mr. Yasui not only broke barriers by intentionally violating the curfew during WWII, but by serving as a champion of justice throughout his lifetime. He stands as an example of what it means to be an Oregonian —and an American.

Other Oregon students recognized at National History Day® include Anja Jolin, now a student at St. Mary’s Academy in Portland, Oregon. Jolin first participated in the Oregon History Day program three years ago when she was a student at Laurelhurst K–8. Still mentored by her middle school teacher, Lindsay Gebbie, Jolin has won the Outstanding Oregon Entry for her projects three years running, this year recognized in the senior category for her paper, [Chipping Away at the Bulletproof Glass Ceiling: Portland Women Breaking Barriers in Policing](#). When asked why she continues to participate in the program, Jolin says:

Oregon History Day has given me the chance to delve into topics that interest me and explore the intricate details and mysteries of historical events. I enjoy connecting local history to broader issues with national significance, such as

immigration and systemic gender barriers. Oregon History Day has given me a chance to take my learning outside the classroom and learn about events and people in history and the impact that they have made to society as a whole.

Evelyn Chen, Flora Huan, and Rachel Wang from Beaverton, Oregon's, Stoller Middle School won the Outstanding Oregon Junior Entry award for their Junior Group Documentary, [*Fighting for Change: The Integration of Women in the Armed Forces*](#).

Other notable projects that represented Oregon at the National History Day® contest included:

- [*Breaking the Child Labor Barrier: Looking through Lewis Hine's Lens at Lost Childhood*](#), a senior paper by Alexa Rose from Echo School
- [*Women Entering a Male Dominated Field*](#), a senior exhibit by Kaylan Ma from South Salem High School
- [*Soaring Above Segregation: The Story of Bessie Coleman*](#), a junior website by Jaiden Smith from Seven Peaks School in Bend

For the first time, students can already begin working on their 2021 National History Day® projects, following the new annual theme, [*Communication in History: The Key to Understanding*](#). National History Day® provides an excellent project-based learning opportunity for all middle and high school students; educators interested in bringing this program to the classroom should contact Oregon History Day Coordinator Kristen Pilgrim at kristen.pilgrim@ohs.org.

About Oregon History Day:

Oregon History Day, part of National History Day®, is a renowned, evidence-based middle and high school program where students across the state develop historical research projects based on an annual theme. Facilitated by the Oregon Historical Society, Oregon History Day encourages students to nurture their curiosities by researching topics from any time period or place, and by analyzing a historical event that connects to the annual theme. Students present their work in one of five categories — paper, website, exhibit, documentary, or performance — that can be developed independently or in groups of up to five students for each category (except paper).

Open-ended topic selections and student-directed inquiries give participants ownership over their projects and give educators the flexibility to adapt the program to fit their curriculum. Educators can narrow the scope of topic selections to align with themes they

are covering in the classroom, such as focusing on the diversity of the many people who have shaped Oregon's history. As students move through the process, they learn to collect, organize, and analyze information through a historical lens by evaluating primary and secondary sources.

Over half a million students across the nation participate, and for the first time ever, the National History Day® office is allowing students to begin work on their 2021 projects now! The 2021 theme is [Communication in History: The Key to Understanding](#). For more information on National History Day®, visit www.nhd.org.

About the Oregon Historical Society

For more than a century, the Oregon Historical Society has served as the state's collective memory, preserving a vast collection of artifacts, photographs, maps, manuscript materials, books, films, and oral histories. Our research library, museum, digital platforms & website (www.ohs.org), educational programming, and historical journal make Oregon's history open and accessible to all. We exist because history is powerful, and because a history as deep and rich as Oregon's cannot be contained within a single story or point of view.