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NEWS RELEASE

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Oregon Students Reach Finals Round, Win Notable Awards at Virtual National History Day® Contest

Portland, OR — June 23, 2021 — Despite the historically challenging 2020–2021 school year, 50 middle and high school students across the state of Oregon participated in this year's National History Day® (NHD) contest, presenting individual or group projects in one of five categories: documentary, exhibit, paper, performance, or website. Four Oregon entries made it to the Finals Round and placed in the top 10 in the nation, with three entries earning special awards and nominations. These high-quality entries advanced to the national contest after placing first or second in the virtual Oregon History Day contest, competing against more than 2,700 students with over 1,500 unique entries from across the country.

Alan Zhou from Sunset High School won the highly competitive African American History Award sponsored by the National Parks Service for his Senior Individual Documentary, [The Birth of an Advocate: Beatrice Morrow Cannady](#). Zhou's film documents the campaign of [Beatrice Morrow Cannady](#), the editor of what was at that time Oregon's only Black newspaper, the *Advocate*, against the racist film, *The Birth of a Nation*. This documentary also placed eighth in the nation in its category. This is the rising senior's fourth year representing Oregon at the national contest. Zhou first participated in the program as part of a class project while attending Beaverton's Stoller Middle School. Read more about Zhou's [previous award-winning entries](#) on the Oregon Historical Society (OHS) blog, *Dear Oregon*.

Students often take inspiration from their own family history when developing their projects. This was the case for Eleanor Song, a first-time Oregon History Day student from Stoller Middle School (mentored by teacher David Gilde), whose Junior Individual Documentary shared the history behind China's First Lady Soong Mei-ling's speech to Congress in 1943. [Transcript of Applause: Soong Mei-ling's 1943 Speech to Congress](#) placed fifth in the nation and won the Junior Outstanding Oregon Entry Award. Song argues that Soong's speech helped to bring about the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, combating xenophobia against Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans in the

United States. “My topic impacted the daily lives of many Asian Americans and specifically Chinese Americans, which I am,” said Song. “My parents wouldn't have been able to immigrate to America without it, and that would have drastically changed my life as well.”

Students can conduct primary and secondary source research on topics of state, national, or international historical significance that relate to the annual theme. Anja Jolin, a student from St. Mary's Academy in Portland, was inspired to use the 2021 theme, “Communication in History: The Key to Understanding,” as a lens for providing historical context on local community issues. Her Senior Paper, “Bankrupting Hate: *Berhanu v. Metzger* and the Communications of the White Aryan Resistance,” was inspired by a recent article in the [Winter 2019 special issue of the Oregon Historical Quarterly](#) on White Supremacy & Resistance. Her paper placed eighth in the nation in its category. This is Jolin's fourth time representing Oregon, guided by her longtime mentor and former middle school teacher, Lindsay Gebbie.

“The increased attention to racial injustice prompted by the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 made me want to better understand the history of white nationalism in Oregon,” said Jolin. “During my initial exploration of potential History Day topics, I came across an issue of the *Oregon Historical Quarterly* focused on white supremacy in Oregon. It included an article about the murder of Mulugeta Seraw by agents of the White Aryan Resistance (WAR) and the ensuing civil trial, *Berhanu v. Metzger*.”

Under the guidance of their teacher, Tracy Villareal, Jesuit High School students Darsh Mander, Sophia Pi, Felix Petteni, Namrata Venkatesan, and Wenjun Hou placed eighth in the nation for their Senior Group Website, “[The 1898 Wilmington Massacre and Insurrection: Propaganda, Misinformation and Distorted Media Surrounding an Electoral Travesty](#).” Conducting a group project during a pandemic was no easy feat; each team member was responsible for researching a portion of the topic, including finding sources and content. They synthesized their findings, peer-reviewed each other's work, and collaborated on the website's final text.

Devin Von Arx and Lucia Zhang from Lake Oswego Senior High School took a different approach to this year's theme by focusing on how a *lack* of communication can have dangerous ramifications. Their Senior Group Website, “[Botched Battle Plans at Balaclava: Miscommunication during the Charge of the Light Brigade](#),” won the Senior Outstanding Oregon Entry Award.

The Oregon Historical Society is incredibly proud of this year's Oregon History Day students. It is an honor to witness their hard work, growth, and resilience this year, which would not have been possible without the support of their teachers and coaches who

supported, challenged, and encouraged their students through the process. The vital roles that teachers and coaches play look different for every student and at every stage of the program, but one thing that holds true across the board is their devotion to engaging their students in the highest level of critical thinking, arguing, researching, time management, and creative communication.

The Oregon Historical Society looks forward to seeing what topics students develop in 2022 on the new National History Day® theme, “Debate & Diplomacy in History: Successes, Failures, Consequences.”

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 in this powerful program. 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.