

## NHD® Annual Theme: Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History

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Each year, National History Day® (NHD) picks a special theme to help students like you explore history. The theme for the 2025–2026 school year is “**Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History.**”

To begin your NHD project, the first step is to select a topic that fits this theme. It is important to show how your topic connects to the theme throughout your project, so choose one with a strong connection. This guide is here to help you find one that fits—and one that you find interesting! Remember, everything has a history, so pick something that grabs your attention and makes you curious to learn more.

Your topic can come from any time period or place in the world. Just make sure to check with your teacher first in case they have any rules or suggestions about what you can choose.

### Understanding the Theme

Sometimes, the differences between **revolutions**, **reactions**, and **reforms** can be tricky to understand because they are all connected, like a chain reaction. Imagine a line of dominoes—when you push one, it knocks down the next, and then the next, and so on.

Revolutions and reforms usually happen in reaction to some idea, action, or event. And guess what? They often cause more reactions! It's like a never-ending domino effect.

This may make you wonder, "Do I need to focus on all three words—revolution, reaction, and reform for my project?" The answer is: not always. It depends on what you're studying. If your topic includes all three, then yes, you should talk about all of them in your project. But if it doesn't, just focus on the ones that are most important for your topic.

To understand each part of the theme better, let's take a closer look at what each one means:

- **Revolution** is when big changes happen quickly and often in a powerful way. It can be when people overthrow a government or system and replace it with something new. It can also be a major shift in how things work or how people think about something.
- **Reaction** is how someone acts or feels when something happens. This can mean pushing back or standing against a new idea, change, or movement.
- **Reform** means working to make something better. It could involve changing, replacing, or getting rid of parts of a system or idea to improve it.

## Getting Started with Finding a Topic

When you're doing a history project—especially for something like History Day—it can be tough to take on a large topic like a full revolution or reform movement. Instead of trying to cover everything, it's better to focus on a smaller part that you can dive into. Let's look at some examples of revolutions, reactions, and reforms from North Carolina history to help you get started.

### REVOLUTION

#### The American Revolution

When you hear this year's theme, the American Revolution might be the first thing that pops into your head—especially since 2026 marks 250 years since the Declaration of Independence! But remember, the Revolutionary War lasted eight years, and that does not even include all the events that led up to it. That's a lot to fit into a History Day project like a 500-word exhibit or a 10-minute documentary.

So how can you make the American Revolution a more manageable topic? Try focusing on one smaller part of it—like a protest, battle, or a person or group who played a key role. Here are some ideas to help you narrow it down:

- **How did North Carolina colonists react to the Stamp Act of 1765?** Did it push them closer to revolution?
- **What were the tea parties all about?** For example, the Edenton Tea Party in 1774. What was so revolutionary about the participants' actions? How did the British react?
- **How was the signing of the Halifax Resolves a revolutionary act?** What was the reaction of North Carolina colonists?

You can also look at specific battles. The **Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge** might seem small compared to other battles, but it was a big turning point. What did both sides think about the outcome? What about the **Battle of Guilford Courthouse**?

There are also powerful stories from people whose voices aren't always heard. In Harlowe, North Carolina, a group of free Black colonists chose to fight for independence. Today, they're known as the **Harlowe Patriots**. Why did they choose that side, while some other Black colonists supported the British? What changes were they hoping to see?

You can also explore the experiences of Indigenous communities during this time. How did the **Cherokee** react to the War? Did this lead them to take a particular side? In the piedmont the **Catawba** faced their own decision on what to do. Did the outcome of the French and Indian War years earlier influence their actions?

## Other Revolutions

The American Revolution is an important topic, but there are many other revolutions you can research for your project. Some revolutions, like the **French** or **Russian Revolutions**, involved fighting. Other revolutions were peaceful and focused on making big changes in society, politics, culture, or science.

No matter which revolution you choose, the same advice applies - keep your topic focused and manageable.

For example, the **Industrial Revolution** was an important time of change, but it's too big to cover in one project. Instead, you could look at how it affected a specific industry, place, or group of people. In North Carolina, that might mean exploring how the **textile, tobacco, or furniture industries** impacted a certain group or region of our state.

Another example is the **American jazz revolution**. It involved many musicians and cities, but you could narrow it down by focusing on one artist—like **Thelonious Monk**—and how he helped shape the **bebop movement** in jazz.

## REFORM

When you think about **reform**, it often relates to important movements like **Civil Rights, Women's Suffrage, Prohibition**, and **Labor Unions**. Here are some examples of how you can focus on one of these big movements for a History Day project:

- How did **Ella Baker** and the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)** at Shaw University work to make changes during the **Civil Rights Movement**?
- How did **Gertrude Weil** try to help women in North Carolina gain the right to vote?
- What role did North Carolina play in changing alcohol laws during **Prohibition**?
- How did **Ella Mae Wiggins** use music to organize mill workers in Gaston County to fight for better pay and working conditions?

## **REACTION**

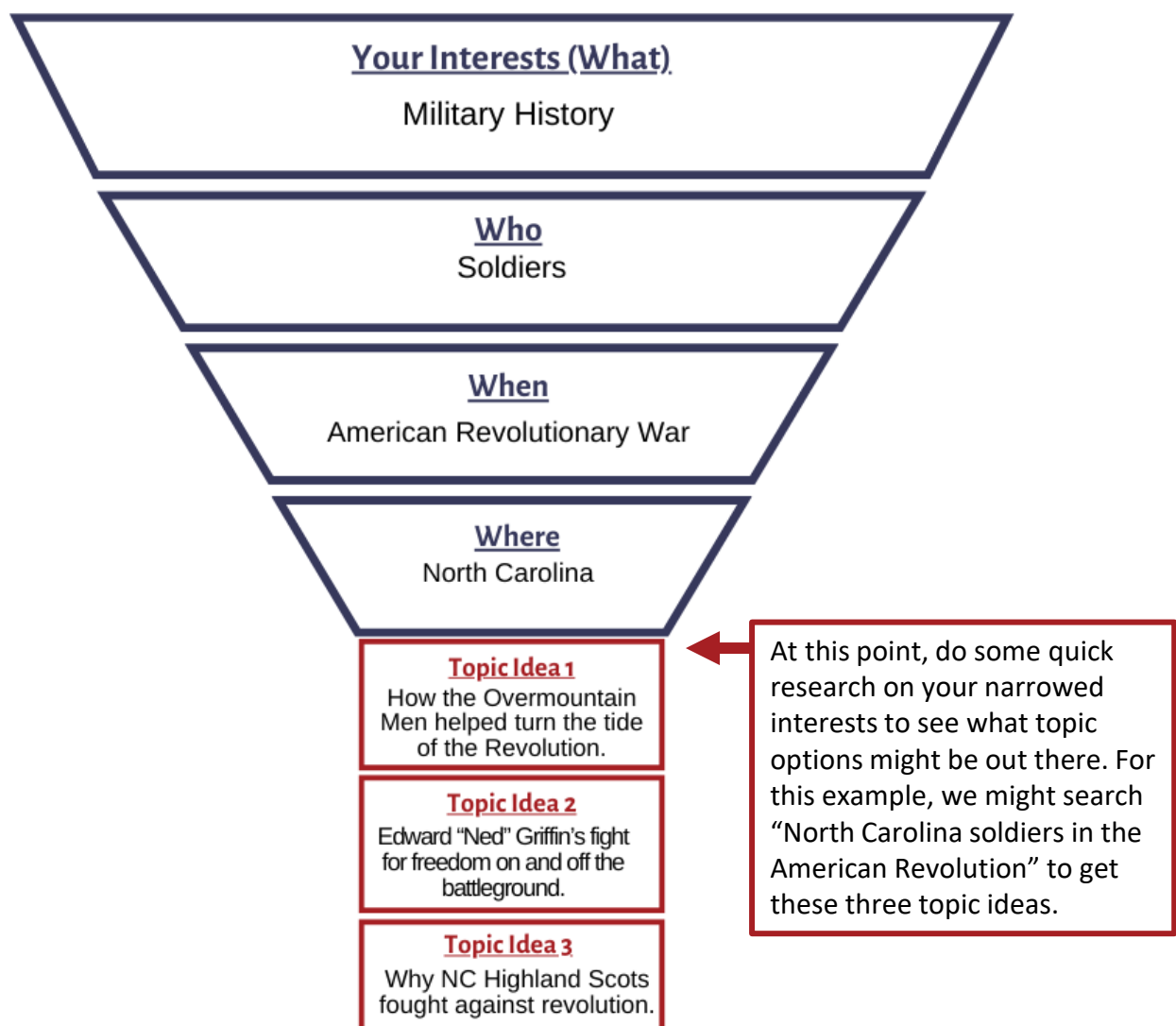
**Reactions** are an important part of understanding history topics, whether they are about a **revolution**, a **reform**, or both.

When there is a revolution, people react. When there is reform, people also react. Sometimes, these reactions can even lead to more reforms or new revolutions.

Going back to the main question at the start of this guide: your topic might be about a revolution, a reform, or a mix of both. No matter what, **understanding reactions is the key to figuring out how and why changes happen.**

## **NHD Topic Brainstorming Funnel**

The chart below shows how you can use **Who**, **What**, **When**, and **Where** questions to help focus your broad ideas into the right-sized topic for History Day. There is a blank topic funnel at the end of this guide that you can use for your brainstorming!



# Topic Ideas for Revolution, Reaction, Reform in NC History

The topic ideas listed on the following pages explore possible connections to this year's theme within North Carolina history. Although sorted by type of history, many topic ideas overlap multiple sections, so examine the list carefully. [NCpedia.org](https://www.ncpedia.org) is a great resource for learning more about these topics.

## Agriculture

Agricultural Revolution in North Carolina  
John Blue – Farming Inventions  
NC State University  
Pasteurization Initiative in Tarboro, 1918  
Priestley Mangum and His Innovative Terrace  
Silas McDowell and the Thermal Zone

## Arts & Entertainment

André Leon Talley (Fashion Journalist and Stylist)  
Ava Gardner (Actress)  
Black Mountain College (Art School)  
Carolina Shag (Dance Style)  
Cecil B. DeMille (Filmmaker)  
Chang and Eng Bunker (Conjoined Twins, Performers)  
Charles Kuralt (Television Journalist)  
Charlie Poole (Banjo Musician)  
Chitlin' Circuit (Performance Venues during Segregation)  
Dell Glover (Music Industry)  
Doc Watson (Guitarist, Singer, & Songwriter)  
Ernie Barnes (Artist/Painter)  
Harry Golden (Newspaper Journalist)  
Levonina Frazier (Model)  
Mel A. Tomlinson (Dancer and Choreographer)  
Millie-Christine McKoy (Conjoined Twins, Singers)  
Molly McCoy Hancock (Fashion Designer)  
Nina Simone (Singer, Pianist, & Songwriter)  
NC Art Museum (1st state-funded art museum in US)  
NC Symphony (1st Continuous State-funded Orchestra)  
Thelonious Monk (American Jazz Pianist and Composer)  
Thomas Wolfe (Author)  
*Unto These Hills* (Play)  
William Sydney Porter/O. Henry (Author)  
Willie Otey Kay (Fashion Designer)

## Education

1971 Durham Schools Charette  
Anna Julia Cooper  
Charlotte Hawkins Brown and the Palmer Institute  
Formation of El Centro Hispano  
Ella Baker and the SNCC

NC History Day

## Education (cont.)

Malcolm X Liberation University  
Pearsall Plan  
Rosenwald Schools in NC  
Sequoyah's Syllabary  
Speaker Ban Laws  
Shaw University  
UNC Chapel Hill  
UNC Pembroke

## Environment

1997 Clean Water Responsibility Act  
Brown Creek Soil Conservation District  
Building of Fontana Dam  
Carl Schenck and the Cradle of Forestry  
Eno River Association  
Fight Against the Transmountain Road  
Fight to Save Jockey's Ridge  
Creation of Mount Mitchell State Park  
Creation of the North Carolina Zoological Park  
Establishment of Cape Hatteras National Seashore  
Granville County Toxic Waste Incinerator Protests  
Hurricane Floyd  
Movement to Save the Red Wolves  
NC Pesticide Disposal Assistance Program  
NC Pesticide Law of 1971  
Warren County's 1982 PCB Landfill Protests

## Legal

*Bayard v. Singleton*  
*Burroughs Wellcome Co. v. Barr Laboratories, Inc.*  
David Walker and His Appeal  
*Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*  
*Leandro v. State of North Carolina*  
Lumbee Organize Against the Ku Klux Klan (1958)  
Pauli Murray  
Greensboro Massacre  
*R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. v. Liggett & Myers*  
*Sarah Keys v. Carolina Coach Company*  
*Simkins v. Cone*  
*State v. Mann*  
*Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*

## Government

1763 Proclamation Line through Western NC  
1835 Constitutional Convention  
1865 Freedmen's Convention in NC  
1898 Wilmington Coup d'état  
Ellan Winston and Social Work Reform  
Greensboro Sit-in



# Topic Ideas for Revolution, Reaction, Reform in NC History

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## Government (cont.)

Gertrude Weil  
Golden Frinks  
Great Fire of New Bern  
Impeachment of Andrew Johnson  
Indian Removal Act of 1830  
James Eubert Holshouser Jr.  
Kirk-Holden War  
Lillian Exum Clement  
Lost State of Franklin  
Lowry War in Robeson County  
NC Constitution of 1835  
Prohibition in North Carolina  
Royal Ice Cream Sit-in  
Salisbury Bread Riot  
Sarah E. Small  
Stanly-Spaight Duel  
Tsali's Resistance  
Tuscarora's 1710 Petition against Carolina Settlers

## Industry & Labor

1906 Formation of the NC Child Labor Committee  
1995 Strike at Morganton's Case Farms  
Burlington Dynamite Plot  
Creation of Student Action with Farmworkers  
Crystal Lee and the J.P. Stevens Plant  
Ella Mae Wiggins and the Lora Mill Strikes  
Harriet-Henderson Cotton Mills Strike  
Hamlet Chicken Processing Plant Fire  
North Carolina Gold Rush  
Textile Strike of 1934 in NC  
United Tobacco Workers Local 22 Union

## Maritime & Naval

Battle of Hatteras Inlet Batteries  
Battle of Ocracoke Inlet (War of 1812)  
Blackbeard  
Cape Lookout Lighthouse  
Civil War Blockades and Blockade Runners  
German U-Boat Attacks in World War II  
Joseph Hewes and the Founding of the U.S. Navy  
Maritime Industry and Shipbuilding  
North Carolina State Navy (1776 – 1779)  
NC and the Maritime Underground Railroad  
Otway Burns  
Pea Island Life-Saving Station  
Sinking of the *Metropolis*  
Sinking of the *USS Huron*

## Medical

1918 Flu Pandemic in North Carolina  
Carrie Early Broadfoot, RN  
Elizabeth Blackwell  
Karl von Ruck  
L. B. McBrayer  
Lewyn McCauley  
Leonard Medical School  
NC Eugenics Board  
"Miracle of Hickory"  
Mental Health Reform and Dorothea Dix Hospital  
NC Artificial Limbs Program after Civil War  
NC Medical Society (Founded 1849)  
Zelda Fitzgerald and Mental Health Treatment

## Military

35th Regiment of the United States Colored Troop  
1863 Salisbury "Bread Riot"  
Abraham Galloway  
Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge  
Battle of Guilford Courthouse  
Battle of Charlotte  
Cherokee War of 1776  
Conscription Act of 1862 in NC  
Creation of Montford Point  
Culpeper's Rebellion  
Dragging Canoe  
Edward "Ned" Griffin  
Harlowe Patriots  
Overmountain Men  
Regulator Movement  
Shelton Laurel Massacre  
Skirmish at the House in the Horseshoe

## Religion

Billy Graham  
Camp Meetings and the Second Great Awakening in NC  
George Whitefield  
Jacob Henry  
Melville B. Cox  
NC Quakers and Religious Pacifism  
Poole Bills (Teaching Evolution in Schools)  
Shubal Stearns and the Baptist Church

## Road to Revolution

Edenton Tea Party  
Governor Tryon's "Palace"  
Halifax Resolves  
NC Committees of Safety  
Mecklenburg Resolves  
New Bern Resolves  
Stamp Act in North Carolina

# Topic Ideas for Revolution, Reaction, Reform in NC History

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## Science & Innovation

Buckminster Fuller and the Geodesic Dome  
Christine Darden and the Space Race  
Creation of Research Triangle Park  
Invention of the Gatling Gun  
Mary Maria Petty's Chemistry Lab for Women  
Project Diana and Radar Astronomy at Camp Davis  
Pepsi-Cola  
Rural Electrification Administration in NC  
Wilmington Fire Department  
Wright Brothers' Flight

## Sports

1944 Basketball Game: NCCU vs. Duke Medical School  
Althea Gibson  
Charlie Scott  
Dean Smith  
Edwin Okoroma  
Integration of Pinehurst  
Irwin Holmes  
Michael Jordan  
Lawrence "Bubba" Wallace Jr.  
NC High School Athletic Association and Football Safety  
NC State's 1974 Women's Basketball Team  
Ned Jarrett  
Richard Petty

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### Looking for US History or World History Topic Ideas?

Watch the [2026 NHD Theme Video](#) or try searching "Revolution, Reaction, Reform in \_\_\_\_\_ History" with a specific geographical location or topic area in the blank to help get ideas flowing!

## **Worksheet: Topic Brainstorming and Focus Ideas**

Using **Who**, **What**, **When**, and **Where** questions can help you narrow down your broad history interests into focused topic ideas. Use this funnel template on this worksheet to brainstorm and narrow your ideas. See the example in this handout if you need help.

**WHAT are your interests?**

**Who?**

**When?**

**Where?**

**Topic Idea 1**

**Topic Idea 2**

**Topic Idea 3**



## Checklist for a Selecting a Strong Topic

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Before you decide on your final topic, use this checklist to make sure you pick a good one that will help you do well!

- ☐ **Does this topic fit the annual theme?** A strong topic should clearly connect to this year's theme. Can you explain how it shows a revolution, reaction, or reform? If it's hard to explain or you're unsure, think about choosing a different topic. If you can see a clear connection, then move on to the next question.
- ☐ **Does this topic fit your teacher's guidelines?** If you are doing History Day as a class project, your teacher may have given specific rules, like picking a topic from a certain place or time period. Make sure your topic matches those rules before you continue.
- ☐ **Are you interested in this topic?** Choose a topic that you find exciting! You will be studying it for several weeks, so it should be something you enjoy learning about.
- ☐ **Can you find sources on your topic?** Some topics might sound fun but can be hard to research if there aren't enough sources. Do a quick search to see if you can find **both** primary (original documents) and secondary sources (books or articles about the topic). If it's hard to find information, consider picking a different topic.
- ☐ **Does your topic have historical significance?** A strong History Day project explains why your topic matters. What changed because of it? Look for short-term effects (what happened soon after) and long-term effects (how it affected the future). If you can find both types of effects, you're on the right track!
- ☐ **Is your topic historic?** If your topic is too recent, it might be more of a current event instead of a history topic. New topics can also be harder to research, making it tough to show their long-term impact. Though not a rule, we recommend choosing a topic that is at least 25 years old to ensure it fits well with History Day.