



A painting of a scene from the Taiping Rebellion by artist Wu Youru, 1886. Wikimedia Commons.

However, choosing a particular war as a topic would not be wise for an NHD student, as it would be impossible to explain the significance of such a massive event within the limited confines of an NHD entry. Remember, NHD projects are limited in size and, therefore, must be limited in scope. For example, an NHD documentary is limited to ten minutes, and a paper is limited to 2,500 words. To research, collect evidence, and present an entire war's significance in history would take years and hundreds of pages. So, NHD students must choose a topic narrow enough to be presented within NHD project limits.

Still interested in war? A certain battle would be an obvious choice, but how about considering investigating the impact of World War II on a small village in Eastern Europe? What effects did it have on the people living there? What were the immediate and long-term consequences for that village or for a particular individual? Or, how did a political decision serve as a catalyst for war? How did the Bosnian people's decision to declare independence from Yugoslavia in 1992 lead to war? What were the consequences of the voters' decision? In what way can a vote on a single issue serve as a turning point and lead to immediate and long-term change?

Enough about war. Politics, laws, and court cases have served as turning points in history. How did the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia (1917) or the Chinese Communist Revolution (1949) lead to some of the most convulsive changes the world has ever seen? How did laws like the Selective Service Act (1917), the Trade Expansion Act (1962), or the Voting Rights Act (1965) create turning points? In what ways did the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *McCullough v. Maryland* (1819) change the relationship between the U.S. federal government and the state governments?

Human inventiveness has changed business and human life in ways great and small. How were innovations such as the plow, reaper, or fertilizer turning points in farming?

Interested in social media?

STOP right there! That is a little too recent for an NHD study. What about earlier forms of communication, such as the development of cuneiform writing in ancient Sumer, the printing press in fifteenth-century Europe, or the invention of radio or television in the twentieth century? What were the consequences of such turning points?

The COVID-19 Pandemic is another event that has certainly had a great impact on human society. But, again, as with social media, it is too recent for students of NHD to focus on this year. Why not choose a fast-spreading disease of the more distant past, such as the Influenza Pandemic of 1918? Or, students might research the consequences of losing half of Europe's population to the Black Death between 1347 and 1352.



An emergency outdoor hospital in Brookline, Massachusetts, set up to care for influenza patients, October 1918. National Archives and Records Administration (NAID 45499327).

For all their successes, humans cannot overcome nature. Weather and natural events have been significant factors in history and are often the catalysts for major turning points. The eruption of Mount Vesuvius destroyed Pompeii in 79. A typhoon in 1281 destroyed a Mongol fleet as it prepared to invade Japan. Winds blew the Spanish Armada off course in 1588. In 1692, an earthquake caused the Jamaican city of Port Royal to slide into the sea. How were these turning points?

Sometimes turning points have symbolic as well as tangible impacts. In 1961, a wall was built in Berlin separating East and West Germany and remained in place until 1989. Why was it built and by whom? How was its construction a turning point in history, politically and socially? How was it a symbolic turning point for those outside of Germany? Why did it fall? What were the immediate and tangible consequences? What were the symbolic and long-term consequences?