



2023 Racial Justice Essay Contest Equal Justice Initiative

The Equal Justice Initiative in partnership with the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project is pleased to announce an upcoming scholarship contest open to 9th – 12th grade students attending public high school in Alexandria, VA where prizes totaling at least \$5,000 will be awarded to winning participants. This scholarship contest is part of the community remembrance work of the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project. Each year the coalition recognizes and honors Joseph McCoy, who was lynched on April 23, 1897 and Benjamin Thomas, who was lynched on August 8, 1899. EJI has documented at least 84 racial terror lynchings of African Americans in the State of Virginia between 1877 and 1950.

Details about student awards will be shared to all participating students after the close of the contest.

Eligibility

The 2023 Racial Justice Essay Contest is open to all students grades 9-12.

Deadline for submission:

March 17, 2023, 11:59 PM ET

Guidelines to students

How to Prepare a Complete Submission for the Contest

Students are asked to write an essay using all of the "**Essay Preparation Instructions**" below. Essays must include all of the required information based on the instructions to be considered complete. Students must also submit their **completed entry form** to have a complete submission. Submissions that do not follow these steps will be considered incomplete.

Essay Preparation Instructions

STEP 1: Carefully review the information on the "**Choosing an Essay Topic**" page on identifying an essay topic. After choosing a topic, select a historical event using **EJI's History of Racial Injustice Calendar and Timeline**, local history of your community, or another source to discuss in your essay.

STEP 2: Use the **theme and topic** definition and source recommendation information as a research starting point (see the "**Choosing an Essay Topic**" page). **Do additional research** to learn more about the **theme and topic** and **historical event** you have selected to write about in your essay.

STEP 3: Once you have done your research, write an essay **between 800 and 1000 words** that responds to the following prompt:

A myth of Black inferiority and white supremacy was developed to justify slavery in the United States. Even though we ended chattel slavery, we did not end the myth of racial difference. EJI believes we need a new era of truth and justice that starts with confronting our history of racial injustice. Based on the **theme and topic** and **historical event** you selected, how does the history of racial justice help to explain **present-day injustice** in our society? How can this history be overcome in order to address the challenges our nation is facing today?

STEP 4: When writing your essay and responding to the prompt, be sure to:

- **Use a specific historical event** (see **STEP 1**) to make connections between the past and present. Discuss how the history of racial and economic injustice and/or narratives of racial difference continue to impact our society today. How do they play out in your life? What are those impacts? What myths do you see shaping the way people are treated?
- **Offer your insight into how this history can be overcome in order to change current realities.** There are many possible approaches, including but not limited to: institutional, educational, interpersonal, changes in power dynamics. We invite you to consider as many approaches as you would like.
 - For this part of your essay, it can be helpful to **imagine the world as you believe it should be** and then work backwards to decide what changes are required to bring that world into existence.

OPTIONAL: Your essay can include personal reflections and stories in addition to your historical research to support your overall conclusions. While you are not required to, you are free to include reflections about artistic expressions (a song, poem, physical art, etc.) to explain or emphasize an idea or concept that is related to your topic and/or your

analysis. You can also include analysis of the influence of media (newspapers, speeches, modern news sources, etc.) and its role in promoting racial injustice or advancing positive change related to racial justice.

STEP 5: Include a list of all sources used. If including a website source, **include the name of the online article or website** and the **complete link** (e.g. include "<https://eji.org/reports/lynching-in-america/>", not only "<https://eji.org/>") to the website. No specific format beyond including complete links is required.

Essay Submission Instructions

1. **Complete the online essay contest entry form.** You will receive a **confirmation email with a copy of your entry form** attached.
2. **To submit your essay,** simply **reply to the confirmation email with your essay attached.** Essays can be submitted as a **PDF or Word Document.**
3. If you have difficulty completing the online entry form or submitting your essay by email, please email Sumita Rajpurohit (srajpurohit@eji.org) or Jennifer Harris (jharris@eji.org) or reach out by phone at 334-269-1803.

PLEASE NOTE: Entries that are not the original work of the student will be rendered ineligible. You will be asked in your entry form whether you adhered to the "Essay Preparation Instructions," including the word requirements (**800-1000 words**) and source information. Essays received that do not meet these requirements will be considered incomplete submissions.

Qualities of a Winning Essay

Winning essays usually have the following features:

- **A compelling, creative introduction**
- **Supportive paragraphs that answer the prompt, using clear examples and various sources**
- **Personal reflections that relate to the topics being described, or additional reflection material,** such as reflections on artistic expressions, such as songs, poetry, or movies that connect to the topics being explored. Strong essays have been able to explain what the additional reflection material reveals about our past and our current-day issues related to racial injustice in America.
- **A strong conclusion that ties together the main ideas of the essay and introduces a meaningful idea or call to action**

- **Properly gives credit to source materials** to avoid plagiarism.
- Has been **carefully edited for spelling and grammar edits** multiple times.
Reading your essay out loud can be helpful for this.