

Debate & Diplomacy in Vermont History: Successes, Failures, Consequences

This year's theme has a lot of parts. Let's start by breaking down the words:

Debate – an argument or a dispute, often between opposing sides

Diplomacy – negotiations between nations or groups, sometimes as a way to solve problems without fighting

In History – something that happened far enough in the past so that the successes, failures, and consequences are clear

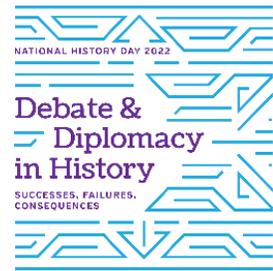
Successes* – what worked well; who won the debate or the diplomatic negotiation?

Failures* – what didn't work; who lost the debate or the diplomatic negotiation?

Consequences** – what happened afterwards, good or bad, in the short-term and long-term

*remember that successes for one side might be considered a failure for another

**and remember that there are often many consequences for one event

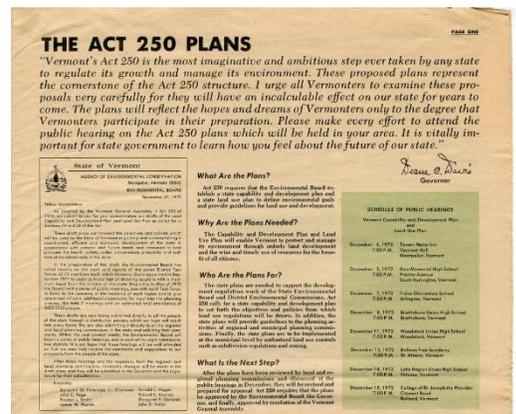


According to the NHD Theme Book, you need to focus on a topic in either *Debate* OR *Diplomacy* and also discuss the *Successes* AND *Failures* AND *Consequences* of your topic.

For Vermont History Day, you can select a topic in US history, world history, or local history. For example, Act 250 could be a topic in Vermont history related to the theme. This law, enacted in 1970, created a permitting process for certain types of land development. Uncontrolled development in ski towns and other areas concerned some Vermonters in the 1960s. Governor Deane Davis established the Gibb Commission to recommend ways to control development and plan for the future.

What debates and diplomacy took place before the controversial law was passed? What debates happened after the law was passed? Some people might argue that the law was successful in controlling development. Others might argue that the law failed because it limited development too much – or not enough. In the short term, the law established regional environmental commissions to review projects. It also called for statewide land use planning, a provision that was removed in 1984 after many debates. After 50 years, why has Governor Phil Scott proposed changes to the law? Were there other successes, failures and consequences?

To conduct your research, you can start with secondary sources, like an [article](#) on the Vermont State Natural Resources Board website. An [overview](#) on the Vermont Historical Society website also includes links to primary source oral history interviews. A newsletter [article](#) from the Vermont State Archives suggests avenues for research. For other primary sources, the text of the 1970 [law](#) (and later amendments) is available on the Vermont Legislature website. The State Archives website has Governor Scott's 2020 [veto](#) of an Act 250 reform bill. You could visit the Vermont Historical Society research library to read [The Act 250 Plans](#) from 1972. Vermont PBS archives has a [video](#) from 1971 called *Choosing Our Tomorrows*. The Vermont Natural Resources Council [website](#) has links to articles on Act 250 (some primary and some secondary). What sources could you find to investigate what Vermont was like before and after Act 250? It's up to you to figure out the historical context (what was happening at the time) and the historical significance of the topic.



Here are some other Vermont history topics that might fit the theme of Debate & Diplomacy in History: Successes, Failures, Consequences:

- Vermont debates at town meeting – what issues were debated in your town?
- Civil Unions and Marriage Equality, 1990s-2010s
- Abenaki Recognition (state and federal), 1970s-today
- Clarina Howard Nichols' fight for women's rights, 1850s
- Green Mountain Parkway debate, 1930s
- School Consolidation, 1900s-today
- UVM Kake Walk, 1890s-1970s
- Vermont Yankee, 1970s-2010s
- Haldimand Negotiations, 1780s (should Vermont be part of Canada?)
- Representatives Matthew Lyon and Roger Griswold fight in Congress, 1790s
- Reapportionment of the Vermont legislature, 1960s
- Eugenics Survey, 1920s-1930s and lasting harm through today
- Radical Abolition, 1830s-1860s
- Wabanaki Confederacy and the Great Council Fire Alliance, 1500s-1800s
- Billboard Ban, 1930s-1960s
- Bread & Puppet, 1960s-today
- Vermont Equal Suffrage Association, 1880s-1920s
- Vermont Circumferential Highway Location, 1960s-2000s
- Fred Tuttle vs. Jack McMullen, 1998
- Vermont/Canada Border Location and Fort "Blunder," 1810s
- Poor Farms, 1800s-1960s
- Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 (signed by Calvin Coolidge), 1700s-1924
- Mandatory Recycling Laws, 1990s-2010s
- Vermont Railroad Route Locations, 1840s-1860s
- Yorkers vs. New Hampshire Grants, 1770s
- Vermont/New Hampshire Border Location, 1760s-1930s
- Vermont as an independent republic, 1770s-80s
- Vermont's admission to the United State as the 14th state, 1780s-90s
- Vermonter Warren Austin, 1st US ambassador to the United Nations, 1940s
- Vermont Senator Ralph Flanders and censure of Senator Joseph McCarthy, 1950s

You can also take a national or international issue and look for local connections.

See also: [Vermont Black History Database](#) and [Vermont Women's History Database](#) or <https://vermonthistory.org/catalog>

This Place in History: <https://vermonthistory.org/this-place-in-history>