

Process Paper

When I started to look for a History Day topic, I wanted to learn about a leader whose actions shaped the history of a region. I also had an interest in 20th century European history. I decided Josip Broz Tito would be an interesting topic through which I could learn more about Yugoslavia. I liked the topic because it spans a large time range and Tito's legacy is filled with controversy.

I started my research with biographies of Tito, in both print and online form, to obtain a basic outline his time in power. Next, I researched the breakup of Yugoslavia and how Tito's policies contributed to it. I obtained primary sources in the form of historical newspaper articles. I also conducted a personal interview with my Spanish teacher, Martina Talić, who grew up in Yugoslavia. She provided important information about Communist repression of religion and the situation in the Balkans today.

In order to present Tito's leadership, I researched a large time range of Yugoslavian history. I learned about Tito's rise to power, his 35-year rule, and the breakup of Yugoslavia after his death. One important decision I made was to examine the Yugoslav Wars as part of Tito's legacy. While some sources presented Tito as the great unifier of Yugoslavia, I was intrigued when I came across the idea that he held the country together through force and propaganda rather than working towards lasting unity. After comparing these two points of view, I decided to present how Tito's leadership contributed to the wars a decade after his death.

After regional History Day, I visited a college library and checked out a number of books that examined Tito and Yugoslavia's history in greater depth. I became far more well-versed in the specifics of Tito's leadership, and made major changes to my website based on what I learned. I conducted a phone interview with Mike Jaros, who grew up in Yugoslavia. I also conducted an email interview with Geoffrey Swain, an expert on Yugoslavia who wrote one of the books I was using. He gave me answers to some specific questions I came up with as I consolidated my research.

Tito was a charismatic, ambitious leader who turned a kingdom comprised of competing ethnic groups into a unified Communist state. Tito instituted Communist policies and controlled the country with his secret police and army. He led the country through its dangerous conflict with the Soviet Union, and emerged as the leader of the only independent Communist state in Eastern Europe. For 35 years, Tito dominated Yugoslav society, keeping the country stable, unified, and relatively prosperous. However, he repressed nationalism and religion, and allowed the republics to become divided. This allowed for the emergence of nationalism after his death and contributed to the violent disintegration of the society he created. Tito's Yugoslavia did not last. The economic struggles, political problems, and ethnic divisions of the seven countries of former Yugoslavia are his legacy today.