

2021 MIPS Black History Month Essay & Trivia Contest

Official Contest Rules

ELIGIBILITY:

This contest is open to all New Jersey high school students (grades 9 - 12). There is no entry fee for this contest. All entries must be written in English and submitted online as a PDF file or Microsoft Word document. (See [Essay Format](#))

HOW TO ENTER:

Step 1: Read the [2021 Essay Topic](#)

Step 2: Write a 1500-word essay answering these questions:

- A. Why was Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996 originally passed into law?
- B. What has been its impact?
- C. Should it be changed? Why or why not and if so, how?

Step 3: Students must register and submit your essay online at njsba.com as a PDF or Word document (See [Essay Format](#)). Only one submission is allowed per student.

ESSAY SUBMISSION DEADLINE AND DETAILS:

All essays must be received by midnight **January 20**.

- All submissions become the property of the New Jersey State Bar Association.
- The student must complete the official online entry form, which includes a stipulation that the essay is the student's original work and has not been published elsewhere.
- Entries must be submitted by the student through the official Essay Contest Submission website. (Use this link.)
- Duplicate entries are not allowed.
- Each submission will be confirmed by e-mail using the address supplied.

IMPORTANT DATES AND DEADLINES:

January 20 Essay submission deadline

February 12 Essay finalists and runners-up will be notified

February 19 Selected students must confirm attendance for Award Reception and Trivia Contest

2021 MIPS Black History Month Celebration

Thurs., February 25 on Zoom

6 - 8:30 p.m.

*This virtual event will be presented by the NJSBA Minorities in the Profession Section on Zoom. Featuring winners of our annual essay competition facing off in a trivia contest for cash prizes. Additional program features include music by the Trenton High School Orchestra, a keynote speaker and a virtual art show. **Click here** for more information or to register for this event.*

ESSAY FORMAT

All Essays will be judged without knowledge of the identity of the author.

- The essay must be written in English.
- The title of the essay should appear at the top of page one; further pages should be numbered on the top right; the **student's name must not appear on the essay.**
- The essay must be in MLA format (double-spaced and in 12-point type throughout, with one-inch margins on all sides of each page).
- The essay must be no more than 3 pages in length (or 1500 words), not including the Works Cited page.
- Essay must be saved as a Word Document or PDF file.
- Google Docs will not be accepted.*

*Google Docs should be saved as a Word or PDF document prior to submission. By selecting File/Download and selecting PDF Document or Microsoft Word.

JUDGING CRITERIA:

Essays will be reviewed anonymously by a select panel of judges for the NJSBA Minority in the Profession Section, based on the following criteria:

- Point of view (clearly stated and well-supported)
- Quality of writing (spelling, grammar, punctuation)
- Creativity and meaningful response (use of critical and creative thinking)
- Adherence to specific limitations (3 pages or 1500 words or less)

QUALIFYING ESSAY / WINNER NOTIFICATIONS:

Five essay finalists and three runners-up will be notified by email and/or phone on **February 12.**

TRIVIA CONTEST

Essay finalists are invited to compete in a Trivia Contest via Zoom on February 25 for a chance to win up a \$500. Finalists who cannot participate in the Trivia Contest will be replaced by a runner-up and awarded a \$100 prize for honorable mention.

First, second and third runners-up are invited to attend the Trivia Contest and may be eligible to compete in the Trivia Contest if any essay finalist is unable to compete. The first runner-up will have priority, followed by the second-runner up and the third-runner-up. If a runner-up is asked to compete in the Trivia Contest in place of a finalist, that runner-up will be eligible to win up to \$500. (See [Prizes](#))

STUDENT CONFIRMATION DEADLINE FOR TRIVIA CONTEST

All essay finalists and runners-up must confirm their attendance and availability to compete in the Trivia Contest by **February 19** or within 7 days of notification.

AWARD RECEPTION

All essay finalists and runners-up are invited to attend the 2021 MIPS Black History Month Award Reception via Zoom on **February 25** at 6 p.m. A Zoom invitation will be sent to the email address provided with the student's essay submission.

PRIZES:

A total of \$1500 in cash prizes will be awarded to eight students as follows:

Trivia Contest Awards

1st Place \$500

2nd Place \$300

3rd Place \$200

Honorable Mentions (Unranked Essay Winners/Runners-up)

Unranked trivia contestants and qualifying essay winners/runners-up will be awarded \$100 as honorable mentions. These include essay finalists and runners-up who could not compete or win a top prize in the Trivia Contest.

2021 Essay Topic

In 1996 Senator Ron Wyden, a Democrat from Oregon and Congressman Chris Cox, a Republican from California crafted Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (CDA). CDA 230 says an "interactive computer service" can't be treated as the publisher or speaker of third-party content. In other words, it protects Internet-based companies like gaming platforms, Twitter, Facebook and others from lawsuits if a user posts something illegal. Many people believe that it is the most important law protecting Internet speech.

In 2016, the American people elected Donald J. Trump as the 45th president of the United States. In its aftermath, many people blamed social media companies like Twitter and Facebook for spreading false information about the candidates and the election.

In the four years since that election, the debate over the role social media platforms play in the spreading of "fake news" or "political censorship" has only intensified. Many have vilified CDA 230 as the culprit.

Democrats and Republicans want to change the law. This includes President Trump, former President Barack Obama, and even president-elect, Joe Biden.

While the political parties want change, they don't agree on the reasons for that change. Democrats want change in order to limit the spread of alleged hate speech and misinformation while Republicans seek to curb purported discrimination of conservative viewpoints.

In recent testimony, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey warned lawmakers that stripping back CDA 230 could "collapse how we communicate on the Internet" and Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said that "without Section 230, platforms could potentially be held liable for everything people say" and could "face liability for doing even basic moderation, such as removing hate speech and harassment that impacts the safety and security of their communities."

2021 Essay Questions

- A. Why was Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996 originally passed into law?
- B. What has been its impact?
- C. Should it be changed? Why or why not and if so, how?