

Prizes

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Prizes are rewards for victory or superiority, as in a contest or competition. For centuries, territory was the supreme prize for winning wars. In 1763, for example, Prussia gained Silesia in the Seven Years' War against Austria. Japan gained the Liaodong Peninsula, Taiwan, and the Pescadores Islands after the first Sino-Japanese War, 1894-95. Other prizes for victory in war ("war booty") consisted of militarily useful property (food, weapons and fuel). Since the Enlightenment (1650-1800), with its emphasis on reason and the perfectibility of humankind, the number and types of prizes issued in all countries have proliferated. Monarchies and governments realized that various prizes (medals, honors, awards, scholarships, fellowships, and state decorations) could be used not only to recognize achievements, but also to stimulate innovation and progress. With the growth of industrial firms and monopolies, for example in the United States after the Civil War (Standard Oil, 1870; U.S. Steel, 1901; Ford Motor Company, 1903), private corporations and individual philanthropists, not just governments, could also issue prizes and for different reasons (e.g. to provide opportunities for underprivileged minority groups). In 1884 John D. Rockefeller, Sr. (founder of Standard Oil) funded a college in Atlanta for black women (Spelman College). Andrew Carnegie (initiator of U.S.

Steel) pioneered the notion of philanthropy in an 1889 essay ("The Gospel of Wealth"), opining that the rich should, instead of "leaving their wealth to their families, administer it as a public trust during life." Philosophers (e.g. Nietzsche, Rand) have denounced such philanthropism as coddling the weak. The issuing of merit-based prizes, however, averts such criticism. Thousands of prizes are offered annually across the professions. Prizes for advancements in science and technology include the Nobel Prize, Balzan Prize, Ho-Am Prize (Korea), and Lomonosov Gold Medal (Russia). For medical sciences, foundations offer prizes such as the Wolf Prize in Medicine, the Louis-Jeantet Prize for Medicine, and Albert Lasker Award for Clinical Medical Research. Prizes for excellence in the arts include the Carnegie Prize, Prix de Rome, and the Onassis Award for Culture. For poetry and literature, prizes exist such as the Griffin Poetry Prize, Nobel Prize in Literature, Nosside International Poetry Prize, Man Booker Prize, and King Faisal Foundation Prize for Arabic Literature (Saudi Arabia). Exclusively for U.S. citizens, the Pulitzer Prize, initiated in 1917, rewards excellence in print journalism, literary achievements, and musical composition. Since 1925, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation has awarded fellowships annually to citizens of North and South America to recognize advanced professionals such as published authors for their productive scholarship or creative ability in the arts. The Academy Awards ("the Oscars"), established in 1929, are perhaps the oldest prizes for motion picture making (acting, directing and screenwriting), and are granted annually in Los Angeles. With the growth in public relations and technology in the twentieth century (videos, internet, cable and satellite TV, CDs, DVDs), film festivals offering

prizes have proliferated in nearly every country, but the oldest international film festivals include those in Venice (1932), Moscow (1935), Cannes (1939), Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic (1946), Edinburgh, Scotland (1947), Berlin (1951), Toronto (1976), and Utah (Sundance Film Festival, 1978). Olympic medals (gold, silver, bronze) are the most coveted prizes for athletes worldwide. While religion inspired the first ancient Olympic Games, the modern Olympic Games were partly sparked by a desire for military prowess. Originally dedicated to the Olympic gods, the Olympic Games originated in 776 BCE and were played every four years for nearly 1200 years until 393 CE, when the Christian Byzantine Emperor Theodosius I abolished them for their “pagan influences.” One and a half millennia later, during the era of imperialism, European powers conquered Africa, justifying such aggression with the ideology of “the white man’s burden” (Great Britain) or of a “civilizing mission” (France). French pedagogue Pierre Frédy, Baron de Coubertin (1863-1937), theorized that the French army lost the battle with the Prussians in 1870 because they were physically unfit. After the baron’s extensive lobbying, the modern Olympic Games opened in Athens in 1896. Athletes from developing countries were grossly underrepresented, since the Games were not well publicized internationally. Contestants were not nationally chosen, but instead came individually, at their own expense. Since 1896, participation in the Olympic Games has increased to include athletes from nearly all nations worldwide. With the improvement of satellite communications and global telecasts of the events, the Olympics are consistently gaining contestants and financial supporters. Prizes in international competitions have served both to unite and divide the world

community. Scientists may be encouraged to pool their efforts to find a cure for cancer, but worthy contestants not chosen typically resent the winners and suspect racial, gender, or age discrimination. Controversy also often arises over voting methods and eligibility. Since official prizes usually involve monetary rewards, the most advanced industrialized countries can offer more prizes to stimulate excellence than can smaller developing countries. Across cultures and countries, women and other minorities have traditionally competed for, and received, fewer prizes.

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