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Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi
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Some of the faces pictured here are very famous. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (top left) and Rosa Parks (top right) are remembered as national civil rights heroes. But many other leaders, like Fannie Lou Hamer (bottom left) and Medgar Evers (bottom right), are less well known despite the crucial roles they played in the civil rights movement. This curriculum will focus on the important roles played by local leaders and activists in Mississippi, whose work was essential to the civil rights movement in that state and throughout the United States.
Introduction: The Struggle for Freedom

On August 28, 1963, before a crowd of over 200,000 people in Washington D.C., Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered the most famous speech of the U.S. civil rights movement. “I have a dream,” he declared, “that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.”

The March on Washington has become one of the most celebrated moments of the civil rights movement, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is the movement’s most famous leader. But the story of the fight for civil rights has more to it than large marches and speeches on national television.

Often out of sight of the national media, most civil rights activity occurred in local communities, in states like Mississippi, where thousands of everyday people organized themselves to fight against racial injustice. Instead of one national civil rights movement led by a few, we can think of the struggle of the 1950s and 1960s as a series of local movements for racial justice with many participants and leaders. Taken together, these local movements made up what is called the mass civil rights movement.

As Dr. King noted in his speech, Mississippi had a reputation as the most violent and oppressive racist state in the United States. Mississippi symbolized both the vicious, systemic racism that existed throughout the South, and the powerful black movement that developed in response. The civil rights movement that emerged in small towns throughout Mississippi rarely made national headlines, but thousands of black Mississippians put their lives on the line everyday in pursuit of a better life. They had numerous goals, including desegregation, economic justice, and an end to the racial violence and intimidation that cast a shadow over their daily lives. By trying to register to vote, helping civil rights workers, or pursuing an education, local people in Mississippi worked to change their communities with small, often dangerous steps towards freedom.

The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s was just one chapter in the black freedom struggle. As many historians have noted, African Americans have been fighting for their freedom since the first slave ships arrived in the Americas. The Civil War ended slavery in the United States, but emancipation did not bring equal rights or economic opportunities to black people. While the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s spurred the federal government into action and won many legal rights for African Americans, challenges remain today. The black freedom struggle continues.

In the following pages you will explore the civil rights movement and focus on events in Mississippi. Part I examines emancipation, the rise and fall of Reconstruction, and the Jim Crow era in Mississippi—a period of racial violence and intimidation as well as inequality. Part II addresses the development of the mass civil rights movement, and explores how the movement played out in Mississippi. It culminates in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party’s attempt to be seated at the 1964 Democratic National Convention. An epilogue examines the outcome of the convention and the course of the civil rights movement in the years that followed. It also looks at the movement’s accomplishments and challenges that continue to this day.
The story of the black freedom struggle begins with slavery. The North American colonial economy depended on the forced labor of enslaved Africans and African Americans. Their descendants remained enslaved well into the nineteenth century.

In this section you will read about the legacies of slavery that limited freedom for African Americans after emancipation. You will see how state and local governments and white citizens in the South worked to ensure that blacks remained at the bottom of Southern society, and examine how African Americans responded to this oppression.

The Civil War and Reconstruction

In 1861, the year the Civil War began, most enslaved black people in the South labored on plantations (large, white-owned farms). Many picked cotton in grueling conditions for white planters to sell in the international cotton market. Although slavery in the North had ended much earlier, the Northern economy was closely tied to the plantations of the South. In addition, African Americans in the North continued to face racism and discrimination.

The Union victory in the Civil War brought freedom to more than four million African Americans in the South. But the future of black people in the United States remained unclear. The passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865—officially banning slavery throughout the country—sparked questions about the meaning of emancipation. What would freedom look like? What opportunities, resources, and rights was the government responsible for providing? How could African Americans be made equal citizens of a country that had been built on their enslavement?

What was freedom like for African Americans in the South?

For African Americans in the South, freedom meant little without the resources and protection needed to achieve economic independence and develop prosperous communities. Since it had been illegal in most states for an enslaved person to learn how to read and write, the vast majority of freed slaves were illiterate. Most had little more than the clothes on their backs. Black freedmen and freedwomen pressed the federal government to provide them with equal rights
and land on which to start their new lives. At the end of the Civil War, Union General William Sherman set aside land on the South Carolina and Georgia coast for black families to settle on forty-acre plots. This inspired hope in many freed people that they would receive land in the years to come. But the federal government returned the property to its former white owners, and was unwilling to distribute land to African Americans.

Without property or money to start their own farms, most blacks in the South became sharecroppers. Sharecroppers worked plots of land on white plantations in exchange for a share (usually one-half) when the cotton they grew on that land was sold. Most sharecroppers remained stuck in economic dependency and poverty.

White Southerners rejected the idea that freedom meant equal rights, land, and economic opportunity for black people. They did everything in their power to ensure that blacks remained second-class citizens. Following the war, white mobs attacked African Americans, beating and killing black professionals and soldiers who had fought for the Union army. Despite these hardships, newly freed men and women worked to rebuild families that had been torn apart by slavery and to develop vibrant black communities.

What was Reconstruction?

In April 1865, just three days after the end of the Civil War, John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Abraham Lincoln. The job of unifying and rebuilding the country fell in the hands of Lincoln’s vice president, Andrew Johnson.

Johnson wanted to return the country to normal quickly. He allowed Southern states to elect all-white governments and many Confederate leaders returned to power. These governments immediately passed laws called the “Black Codes” to control the newly freed black population. By criminalizing unemployment and putting limitations on black freedom, these laws kept African Americans poor and dependent on whites for employment.

A group of Northern politicians known as the Radical Republicans had a different vision than President Johnson. They believed that in order for African Americans in the South to be truly free, the federal government needed to protect them from racist policies and violence, and ensure their right to vote. The Radical Republicans pushed the federal government to “reconstruct” the South before admitting former Confederate states back into the Union.

The Reconstruction Act of 1867 allowed the federal government to govern the South until Southern governments did more to protect the rights of African Americans. The federal government deployed troops and appointed military leaders to oversee the region. During the Reconstruction period, Congress

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<th>Reconstruction Amendments of the U.S. Constitution</th>
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<tr>
<td>Thirteenth Amendment (1865)—officially outlaws slavery throughout the country.</td>
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<td>Fourteenth Amendment (1868)—establishes that all persons born in the United States are citizens, grants all citizens equal protection under the law and the right to due process, regardless of race, color, or prior condition of servitude.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fifteenth Amendment (1870)—grants all male citizens the right to vote, regardless of race, color, or prior condition of servitude.</td>
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passed the Fourteenth Amendment, granting equal protection under the law to all citizens regardless of race, and the Fifteenth Amendment, giving black men the right to vote. These Reconstruction amendments empowered the federal government to demand that states respect the rights and freedoms of African American citizens. Southern states would be readmitted to the Union only after they had ratified the Fourteenth Amendment.

Reconstruction opened up many political and economic opportunities for African Americans. Black voters went to the polls in large numbers and elected black officials to government posts. In some places, 90 percent of registered black voters cast their ballots. During the Reconstruction period, over fifteen hundred African Americans held political office, and sixteen African Americans were elected to the U.S. Congress.

Black politicians, working with a small number of white Republican allies, enacted legislation that helped African Americans throughout the South. Biracial state governments created public school systems that served both black and white students. The “Black Codes” were abolished. Hundreds of black men served on Southern juries, bringing a degree of fairness to the court system. Reconstruction gave African Americans hope that freedom and opportunity were possible.

How did white Southerners react to Reconstruction?

Most white Southerners resisted Reconstruction and opposed the new amendments to the Constitution. They sought to restore the white supremacy that existed during slavery. (The total control of Southern society by whites was often referred to as “white supremacy.”) Although white Southerners varied in their attitudes toward blacks, most resented the rising status of African Americans and the federal government’s attempts to interfere with Southern politics and society.

During slavery, white slaveholders had thought of African Americans as property, not full human beings. When slavery ended they were unwilling to consider freed blacks their equals. White landowners depended on cheap black labor for their economic success. They wanted African Americans to remain poor, working on plantations as sharecroppers. Many poor whites, who had always had a higher status than African Americans under slavery, did not want black people to rise above them on the social ladder.

To restore white supremacy, white Southerners used violence to drive blacks from politics and take control of all political and economic power in the South. Several white terrorist organizations developed in the period, the most famous of which was the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The KKK and other groups used violence and fear to force black elected officials and voters out of politics entirely. While not all white Southerners engaged in or approved of violence against black people, most believed that white supremacy was the “natural order” of life in the South. The few whites in the South who supported the Re-
The Republican Party’s Reconstruction policies were ridiculed or worse.

At various times during Reconstruction, the federal government took action to suppress white violence and protect the rights of African Americans. The federal government’s interest in intervening on behalf of African Americans began to dwindle in the 1870s.

**How did Reconstruction come to an end?**

As the 1870s wore on, federal Reconstruction began to lose steam. An economic crisis struck the country, and the Republican Party grew more concerned with the state of the economy, and less interested in the plight of former slaves. Northern politicians began to sympathize with white Southerners who blamed economic problems and political corruption in the South on the new black leadership.

> *“It is the dregs of the population [dressed] in the robes of their intelligent predecessors, asserting over them the rule of ignorance and corruption…. [I]t is barbarism overwhelming civilization by physical force.”*

Democrats regained control of several southern state governments, due to the fraud, violence, and intimidation used by whites against black voters. These white groups called themselves “Redeemers” because they believed they were “redeeming” their state governments from control by black Republicans.

The controversial presidential election of 1876 marked the retreat of the federal government from the South. In an informal deal—known as the Compromise of 1877—southern Democrats agreed not to dispute Republican Rutherford B. Hayes’ election if he promised to stop federal interference in Southern affairs and end Reconstruction. Shortly after coming to power, Hayes removed federal officials from the South. With those officials gone, many of the policies that had helped African Americans during Reconstruction were rolled back. Many African Americans felt betrayed by the Republican Party.

> *“The whole South…had got into the hands of the very men who made us slaves.”*
> —A free African American, 1876

**How did the Mississippi Constitution of 1890 disenfranchise African Americans?**

Violence against black voters was particularly fierce in Mississippi, where black voter participation dropped off more steeply than in any other state in the South.

> *“[I]t is no secret that there has not been a full vote and a fair count in...”*

Jim Crow was a famous character in white minstrel shows. These shows used racist humor to caricature black people in the South. The name Jim Crow was later used to describe the laws that legalized racial segregation following the end of Reconstruction.
“Scientific Racism”

Although there are no significant biological differences between people of different races, in modern times people have used biology to justify the oppression of certain racial groups. This is sometimes called “scientific racism.” Slave owners in the United States claimed that white people were biologically superior to black people in order to justify the enslavement of African Americans. In the 1890s, intellectuals in the North began to argue that African Americans were poor because they were biologically inferior to white people. In reality, black poverty was caused by a lack of land and money, discriminatory laws, racial violence, and other legacies of slavery. The rise of scientific racism contributed to the perception among many white Americans that segregation and white supremacy were the “natural order” of society.

Mississippi since 1875…. In plain words, we have been stuffing ballot boxes, committing perjury and... carrying the elections by fraud and violence until the whole machinery for elections was about to rot down.”
—J.B. Chrisman, white judge from Mississippi, 1890

Jim Crow Mississippi

The Fifteenth Amendment prohibited the denial of voting rights based on race. But in 1890, Mississippi adopted a new constitution designed to prevent African Americans from voting. The state introduced literacy tests that most black people could not pass and poll taxes that most black people could not afford. These requirements for voter registration were usually only imposed on African Americans. By 1892, black Mississippians had been all but eliminated from politics. When the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Mississippi constitution in Williams v. Mississippi (1898), other states were free to pursue policies that disenfranchised blacks.

What were the Jim Crow laws?

In Mississippi and across the South, local governments passed laws segregating nearly every aspect of public life, including rest

Convict Leasing

Following Reconstruction, white Southern governments enacted vagrancy laws making it illegal for adults to be unemployed. These laws technically applied to all races, but in practice local police only arrested African Americans for vagrancy. During the Jim Crow period, local jails began to fill up as Southern governments arrested black men at high rates. Looking to make a profit, white businessmen and plantation owners asked the government to allow them to use prisoners as workers on plantations and railroads, and in mines and lumber camps. The government agreed and a new system of convict-leasing was born, giving many white business owners a steady supply of unpaid workers. The working conditions for prisoners were horrendous. As many as one in ten convicts working on plantations and in labor camps died each year. Although some prisoners were white, the vast majority of leased convicts were African Americans. When the convict leasing system came to an end in the late nineteenth century, Mississippi found a new way to profit from prison labor. The state created a large prison called Parchman Farm, where inmates performed manual labor for the state under brutal conditions. Mississippi argued that black inmates needed to learn to become disciplined workers.
Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi

Mississippi had a strictly followed tradition of racial inequality and oppression. African Americans and whites typically lived in separate neighborhoods. Local customs ensured that interactions between the two typically reinforced African American’s inferior social status. For example, whites used demeaning names like “boy” or “auntie” to refer to black adults, and African Americans had to look down or get off the sidewalk when they passed white people on the street. This code of racial “etiquette” was a constant part of life in Mississippi, and when African Americans failed to heed it, they put their lives at risk.

How was violence used to reinforce white supremacy?

Whites in Mississippi maintained white supremacy by attacking individuals who failed to submit to whites. African Americans were beaten or killed simply for standing up for themselves. Violent white groups also attacked people who symbolized black achievement and political activism. Black landowners, doctors, political leaders, and voters were particularly vulnerable. Following World War I, white groups attacked black veterans returning to Mississippi.

“If it is necessary every Negro in the state will be lynched; it will be done to maintain white supremacy.”

—Mississippi Governor James K. Vardaman, 1907

rooms, public school classrooms, and street-cars. Black and white prisoners could not share jail cells. Hospital patients of different races were kept apart, and nurses were forbidden from treating people of other races. In the 1896 Supreme Court case Plessy v. Ferguson, the federal government ruled that segregation did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment’s requirement of equal protection under the law. Black and white people could be legally separated as long as they were provided with equal services and opportunities. This policy became known as “separate but equal.” But equality was never the reality in Mississippi, or anywhere in the United States. African Americans consistently received vastly inferior services.
The official legal system never gave black Mississippians a fair trial, and white mobs often took justice into their own hands. When black Mississippians violated the racial hierarchy of Jim Crow society, white supremacists responded with violence, including public lynchings (executions). White people from all classes gathered to watch mobs torture and hang black people. Often whites justified lynchings by claiming that the victim had raped a white woman, but these accusations were almost always false. Although some white leaders spoke out against violence, the majority of white society felt that lynchings were necessary to maintain the social order and control African Americans. When critics in the North complained about lynching, Mississippi officials responded by blaming black people for not understanding their place in Southern society.

"This is strictly a white man’s country…. If the northern negro-lover wants to stop negro lynching in the South, he must first get the right conception of the proper relation that must necessarily exist between the races and teach and train the negro race along these lines and in this way remove the cause of lynching.”

—Mississippi Governor Theodore Bilbo, July 1, 1919

Violence and fear were a part of everyday life for African Americans living in Mississippi during the Jim Crow era. Between 1889 and 1945 at least 476 people were lynched in Mississippi, more than any other state in the country. Of those, 439 were black men. Lynching made black political activism extremely dangerous.

**How did African Americans make a living during Jim Crow?**

While a small number of African Americans owned farms in the Jim Crow era, 85 percent of African Americans worked on land owned by white planters—most as sharecroppers.

The sharecropping life was very difficult. Though some landowners treated tenants fairly, many exploited them, using fraud, racist laws, and threats of violence to maintain control over their plantations. Men, women, and children all had to work long hours during peak seasons. Women often worked doubly hard, tending to the fields and the household at the same time.
Sharecropping families often spent most of their earnings paying down debts they had accumulated during the year. Merchants imposed high interest rates on sharecroppers, who had to buy most of their products on credit until the harvest payout. Some landlords deliberately cheated sharecroppers when calculating their earnings. In the end, very few black sharecroppers earned enough money to buy their own land. Most remained stuck in a state of economic dependency not unlike slavery.

“Just work all the year long and at the end of the year, what they say—‘You done fine Jim or John, you come out just even.... Maybe you do better next year.’”

—Mississippi sharecropper, 1935

**What was life like for African Americans living in cities?**

The majority of black Mississipians lived in the countryside. But the black population in cities and towns increased five-fold between 1890 and 1940, as African Americans began looking for work in growing southern cities. While they were often better off than sharecroppers, African Americans living in urban areas were usually only able to get jobs that whites considered the least desirable. They worked as servants, gardeners, cooks, janitors, porters, and bellhops. Black men did some of the most difficult and dangerous work in cities including factory work, construction, and maintenance. Black women were domestic workers in the homes of wealthy and middle-class whites. When whites and blacks did perform the same jobs, for example as teachers, whites received far better pay.

“All the good jobs are for white folks... and the hard ones are for black folks.”

—Jim Evers, father of civil rights leaders Medgar and Charles Evers

Skilled jobs were limited for African Americans in Mississippi during the early twentieth century. Many whites refused to hire black carpenters and builders. Black professionals were also rare, and they usually worked exclusively within the black community. For example, black doctors could only count on black patients for their business. Black lawyers had been relatively commonplace during Reconstruction, but by 1900 there were few still practicing. Judges often excluded black attorneys from courtrooms, and the state’s white bar association frequently tried to revoke black lawyers’ licenses.

**What educational opportunities did African Americans receive under Jim Crow?**

Without representation in state government, black Mississipians received very few public services. Black students were taught in separate, inferior schools—often in log cabins, churches, or stores because the school buildings were so run down. No state spent as little on the education of black children as Mississippi. By 1930, the Mississippi government was spending an average of $31.33 per year on each white student, but only $5.94 on each black student.

Despite the lack of state support, black Mississipians believed that education was key to improving their situation. They often raised funds among themselves and collected donations from northern philanthropists to raise money for schoolhouses and supplies. Black teachers developed innovative ways of teaching with few resources and were often highly respected members of the black community.

“All the black folks understood that their passport to a better community was a good education.... It was a general position of my parents and other parents of that generation, that if we got an education, we would be free.”

—James Miller, black Mississippian, 1994
Black schools rarely went beyond the eighth grade. In 1916, there were no four-year black public high schools in all of Mississippi, and only a few black universities. Many white leaders feared that if black children received a good education they would be able to pass the voter registration tests and challenge the strict racial hierarchy of southern society. They argued that black students did not need to be educated in math, literature, or the sciences. If they promoted black education at all, white southerners advocated for agricultural and industrial education that would train black youth to be “efficient,” “disciplined” workers with good manners and hygiene.

“People talk about elevating the race by education...it comes pretty nearly to being criminal folly. The negro isn’t permitted to advance, and their education only spoils a good field hand.”
—James K. Vardaman, future governor of Mississippi, 1889

Living with Jim Crow

Black Mississippians responded to the hostile realities of Jim Crow in a variety of ways. Sometimes they fled to states they thought would offer a better life. They also developed strategies for surviving within an oppressive society and fighting back against inequality and injustice. The next section is divided into three parts that describe African Americans’ different responses to the harsh realities of Jim Crow—survival, flight, and resistance. Sometimes these strategies overlapped. In a society that prevented black people from living healthy, prosperous lives, surviving could be an act of resistance, and flight could be a matter of survival.

Survival

African Americans developed a variety of ways to cope with the oppressive nature of Mississippi society. Black children learned at a young age how to avoid provoking whites—to stare at the ground when speaking to white people, to refer to all whites with titles of respect, and to hold back when a white person insulted them. Only in the safety of all-black spaces could African Americans freely speak their minds and act as they pleased.

“When you are in front of white people, think before you act, think before you speak. Your way of doing things is all right among our people, but not for white people. They won’t stand it.”
—Richard Wright, renowned African American novelist, recalling the advice his school principal gave to him when he was a child

Booker T. Washington

Booker T. Washington was one of the most famous black leaders during the Jim Crow era. Born a slave, he worked his way through college and eventually established the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama—an industrial school that taught young black men to be well-mannered, hard-working laborers. Washington wanted to train black people for the difficult manual labor jobs that were available to them at the time. He believed that black people needed to prove that they were responsible and diligent workers before they could demand political rights. Prominent white businessmen funded Washington’s educational programs. But many black leaders criticized his reluctance to challenge white supremacy.

After the release of Washington’s autobiography, Up From Slavery, President Theodore Roosevelt invited him to visit the White House. Some Southern whites were unwilling to see any African American, no matter how moderate, getting national attention. Extreme racist leaders in the South criticized Roosevelt for showing such respect to a black man.
Although most African Americans resented the injustice of Jim Crow laws, few black Mississippians wanted complete integration. Racial separation gave them the opportunity to live apart from hostile whites.

Black Mississippians developed churches, schools, and social clubs that served only black people. These institutions were important spaces for socializing away from whites. The church provided a place for political and social gatherings, and brought people together to talk about their daily struggles. Women played an important role in many of these institutions, passing on local knowledge and history that helped to unify the black community and encourage racial pride.

Seeking to free themselves from dependence on white people, black Mississippians also started their own insurance companies, banks, and a variety of small businesses that exclusively served the black population. Despite these efforts, the majority of African Americans remained impoverished during the period. Black companies often lacked start-up funds, and struggled to keep their prices low enough to compete with white businesses. In 1929, despite making up over half of Mississippi’s population, African Americans owned just 12 percent of the businesses and accounted for less than 1 percent of the state’s total sales.

Why did some black leaders try to work with moderate whites?

Booker T. Washington was part of a group of black leaders who believed that African Americans needed to take responsibility for working themselves out of poverty. These leaders thought that aggressively confronting the injustices of Jim Crow society would be dangerous and ineffective. They felt that progress towards racial equality could only happen slowly, and that the best way for African Americans to improve their lives was through hard work and self-discipline.

These leaders placed their hopes for African Americans in moderate white politicians. They thought that racism was primarily a problem with poorer, less educated whites. If they could show that African Americans were intelligent and hardworking, they felt they would win the respect of the educated white population and eventually win black political rights. But throughout the Jim Crow period, whites from all classes worked to keep black Mississippians at the very bottom of society.

Moderate white leaders praised figures like Booker T. Washington for their nonconfrontational stance on racial issues. But some black leaders considered them “accommodationists” or “gradualists” for being content to wait for change and unwilling to challenge white supremacy.
Flight

Many African Americans opted to escape the hardship of Jim Crow life through migration. Since the early Jim Crow period a steady stream of black people had migrated out of Mississippi. In 1915, this stream grew into a flood. Between 1915 and 1920, 500,000 African Americans left the South—100,000 of them from Mississippi. In total, from 1910 to 1960, nearly one million black people left Mississippi seeking a better life—more than the state’s entire black population in 1900. This pattern of black movement from the South to the North was called the Great Migration.

What factors contributed to black migration northward?

Although racial violence and injustice played a role, the causes of black migration were largely economic. During World War I, northern manufacturers needed more workers to provide supplies to the military. They also hoped to use the influx of black workers to force wages down. As a result, many black migrants faced hostility from northern white workers.

Companies sent advertisements to the South to try to convince black workers to make the trip north. Sharecroppers stuck in endless debt, manual laborers working long hours, and domestic workers paid as little as two dollars a week all responded to the call of steady jobs, higher pay, and better conditions in the North.

“I’ve been working here for a dollar and four bits a day that’s good wages for a [black person] in Jackson. Flour is costing me nearly two dollars a sack, meat is so high I can’t eat it. I am leaving because I can’t buy food...on what I make. If you white folks want [black people] to stay in the South you will have to...pay us more money.”

—A black Mississippian, July 22, 1917

How did the Great Migration affect Mississippi?

The steady stream of African Americans to Northern cities hurt black communities in the South. Most of the migrants were between the ages of twenty-five and forty-four and many had received a basic education. A high number of women left to seek domestic employment in northern homes. The migrants left behind a disproportionate number of children, elderly, and poorly educated people.

Some white Mississippians initially expressed happiness to see black people leaving the region. But businessmen and plantation owners soon realized that they were losing an essential labor force. They tried to prevent African Americans from leaving the state by banning Northern employers from advertising. They spread propaganda that described the poor conditions of life in the North, and sometimes forcefully prevented black people from getting on trains. Their efforts were largely
ineffective. The flow of black people to the North continued throughout the early twentieth century.

What was life like for black migrants in the North?

Escaping to northern cities like Chicago and New York brought an end to much of the daily violence and humiliation that black people faced in Mississippi. Black migrants wrote letters to their families back home, describing the freedom and dignity of their new lives.

“I should have been here twenty years ago. I just begin to feel like a man. It’s a great deal of pleasure in knowing that you have got some privilege. My children are going to

the same school with the whites and I don’t have to [h]umble to no one. I have registered—will vote the next election and there isn’t any ‘yes sir’ and ‘no sir’—it’s all yes and no and Sam and Bill.”

—A black migrant in Chicago, writing to family in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, 1917

But the North was no “promised land.” Racism and discrimination existed in the North as well. Black people often remained impoverished, usually confined to low-paying factory work and manual labor. Many urban whites resented the arrival of black workers. Race riots broke out in some northern cities, including Chicago and St. Louis. Whites attacked and killed black residents and set fire to homes and businesses.

Resistance

Many white Mississippians believed that African Americans were content under Jim Crow. In reality the majority of black Mississippians longed to fight back against a system that kept black people poor, uneducated, landless, and without representation in government. Although it was often extremely dangerous, many black people found ways to resist the injustices that marked their daily lives.

How did black people fight for their voting rights?

Throughout the Jim Crow era, black Mississippians asserted their desire for political representation.

“We want only one thing, primarily... that is the ballot. Ballot everywhere. My people cannot vote down here.... We want the damnable curse of disenfranchisement in primary elections removed in every form of state government.”

—C.E. Johnson, a black Mississippian, 1920
Despite the risk of violence, African American citizens continued to go to the polls and demand the ballot. After the U.S. government granted women the right to vote in 1920, black women began trying to vote. Some communities organized night schools in an attempt to help blacks pass the literacy tests that barred them from registering. Others went to court to challenge the laws that restricted their ability to vote. Black political leaders across the country called on the federal government to enforce the Fifteenth Amendment.

Attempts to resist the system that disenfranchised thousands of black voters had little effect. From 1890 to World War II, only a small fraction of the black population was able to overcome the difficult barriers to voting. Black people remained unrepresented by the all-white Mississippi government.

**How did black farm workers resist the sharecropping system?**

Despite extreme danger, some black sharecroppers and farmers organized unions and cooperatives to fight for their rights as workers. In the 1930s, hundreds of Mississippi farmers joined the Southern Tenant Farmers Union to fight against the dependency and poverty of the sharecropping system.

White resistance to black sharecroppers’ unions was particularly intense in Mississippi. White landlords had the local police arrest union members or force them out of the state. By the 1940s, they had effectively crushed the union movement in Mississippi.

Black workers also used other, less dangerous methods to fight back against injustice. Just as their ancestors had under slavery, black field workers found ways to frustrate white employers. For example, they would deliberately work slowly, sabotage equipment, and pretend to be sick. In these ways, field workers were able to limit white planters’ ability to control their lives.

In addition, the vast majority of black Mississippians kept guns in their homes. Although armed resistance could be extremely dangerous, the fact that black families were armed deterred some racist violence.

**How did black Mississippians resist the segregation of public spaces?**

Black Mississippian usually protested the lack of racial equality rather than segregation itself. They understood that white leaders would be more likely to support equitable services than the end of racial segregation. But some black Mississippian came to believe that equality could not be achieved if black and white people were constantly separated, and they fought to end the segregation of public spaces.

“No grander lie was ever enacted into law than that that declares for ‘separate but equal accommodations’…. Separation presupposes and invites inequalities.”

—A black Mississippian, 1917

In January 1904, under pressure from white voters, the Mississippi legislature declared that street trolleys needed to provide separate cars or compartments for black passengers. This new “Jim Crow car” was often crowded and left uncleaned. Blacks in five of the seven Mississippi cities with streetcars organized a boycott, refusing to ride the trolleys. Although the boycott did not succeed in integrating the trolleys, it represented strong, organized resistance to segregation. Over time, more African Americans in Mississippi and around the country came to see segregation as a moral injustice.

**What was the NAACP?**

Nationally, a growing population of black leaders began to advocate for direct challenges to the Jim Crow system. One of these leaders was W.E.B. Du Bois, an intellectual who graduated from Harvard University. In 1903, he published the book *The Souls of Black Folk*. The book criticized Booker T. Washington’s philosophy of self-help and accommodation,
and advocated for the black right to vote and an end to racial discrimination.

In 1909, W.E.B. Du Bois and a coalition of civil rights supporters founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)—one of the primary organizations advocating for black rights throughout the twentieth century and into the present day. The NAACP became the channel for resisting Jim Crow in the court of law. NAACP legal teams provided representation for black criminal defendants, protected black civil liberties, challenged the exclusion of blacks from juries, and fought for equal salaries for black public school teachers.

The NAACP also launched a campaign to end lynching in the South. The organization’s newspaper, *The Crisis*, published accounts of lynching, exposing the horrors of Jim Crow for the world to see. The NAACP pushed the federal government to pass anti-lynching legislation, but southern senators defeated the bill by arguing that a federal anti-lynching law would violate the rights of individual states to make their own laws.

**Why was resistance to Jim Crow more difficult in Mississippi than in other states?**

The NAACP established branches in major cities throughout the South. But until World War II it was never able to sustain more than five offices in Mississippi—less than any state in the South. In Georgia, Alabama, and Arkansas, the NAACP organized voter registration drives, “don’t buy where you can’t work” campaigns, and protests against police brutality and racial inequality. None of this was possible in Mississippi. White opposition to black political groups was so intense, and the possibility of violent backlash so great, that NAACP branches in Mississippi needed to operate almost entirely in secret. In Mississippi, a meaningful challenge to white supremacy was not yet possible.

In Part I, you have read about the end of slavery and the Civil War. You considered the progress made by African Americans during the Reconstruction era, and saw the ways in which many of those gains were lost through the Jim Crow system that developed in the South. You examined what life was like for African Americans living in Jim Crow Mississippi. In Part II, you will read about the rise of a mass movement for civil rights in the United States, with a focus on the local movement in Mississippi. As you read, remember to reflect back on Part I, and the nature of the Jim Crow society that African Americans were fighting to change.
Part II: The Freedom Movement

For decades African Americans had resisted the system of white supremacy created after Reconstruction. They had carved out spaces of dignity and self-assertion, but white supremacy remained overwhelmingly strong. In the 1940s, developments in the United States created new opportunities to challenge Jim Crow.

In Part II, you will read about the rise of the mass civil rights movement in the United States. The reading will focus on the strong local movements that developed in Mississippi, the most racially oppressive state in the South. You will explore the strategies that activists used in their fight for racial justice, and the efforts of local whites to maintain white supremacy. You will also consider the responses of local, state, and federal governments to these issues.

The Beginning of Change

World War II marked the beginning of the mass civil rights movement in the United States. Tens of thousands of African Americans fought in the war. Although they faced discrimination in the military, these black soldiers experienced life without Jim Crow in Europe. Black veterans returned home to a country still deeply divided by race, but many had gained skills, status, and confidence that would help them fight for racial justice.

“We got a chance to travel, go different places, meet a lot of different people from different backgrounds…. You saw in different countries how people...were living together, black and white.... It gave you something to look forward for. To hope for.”
—Ezekiel Rankin, World War II veteran from Mississippi

Throughout the country, black veterans began to speak out against racism in the United States and join organizations dedicated to fighting against Jim Crow. NAACP membership in the South rose significantly—from 18,000 in the 1930s to 156,000 by the end of the war. Many of these new NAACP members were World War II veterans. Although NAACP membership was more concentrated in the less violent and oppressive states, NAACP branches across Mississippi began to set goals for statewide activism.

What was the NAACP’s strategy for defeating Jim Crow and inequality?

The courts were the battleground where the NAACP chose to fight Jim Crow. The Fourteenth Amendment (1868) of the Constitution had given all
citizens equal protection under the law and the right to due process, regardless of race. The Fifteenth Amendment (1870) had given all men, regardless of race, the right to vote. In the years after their ratification, the states, courts, federal government, and citizens disputed how these amendments would be interpreted. For example, the Supreme Court’s interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) made racial segregation legal throughout the country.

The legal disputes over the principles of these Amendments continued well into the twentieth century. In the 1944 Supreme Court case Smith v. Allwright, brought by the NAACP, the court ruled that preventing blacks from voting in state Democratic primary elections was illegal. Inspired by the Supreme Court case, black veterans attempted to vote in large numbers and helped organize voter registration campaigns throughout the South. As a result, more black southerners went to the polls in 1946 than at any point since Reconstruction.

What was the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court case?

In the early 1950s, the NAACP won a series of Supreme Court cases demanding that state governments provide equal educational opportunities regardless of race. Following these victories, the NAACP decided to challenge the legality of racial segregation itself. The Supreme Court agreed to revisit the issue. On May 17, 1954, the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision overturned Plessy v. Ferguson, making state-sponsored segregation illegal throughout the country. The case focused on public schools, and the court ruled that: “separate education facilities are inherently unequal…. Segregation is a denial of equal protection of the laws.”

Although it did not end Jim Crow, the Brown decision inspired black activists. African Americans began to actively protest segregation throughout the South. For example, in 1955, black activists including Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and members of the Women’s Political Council launched a citywide bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama to protest racial segregation in public transportation. Blacks refused to ride buses for months, putting economic pressure on the city. In 1956, in one of the first great victories of the movement, the Supreme Court ruled (Browder v. Gayle) that segregation on buses was unconstitutional.

To test out the Brown decision, the NAACP attempted to register black students in white southern schools. In 1957, nine black students were chosen to enroll in an all-white high school in Little Rock, Arkansas. The Arkansas governor tried to use the state’s national guard to prevent the integration of the school, but President Dwight D. Eisenhower sent in the U.S. Army to escort the students inside. The military remained in Arkansas throughout the school year. The governor responded by closing all the public schools in Little Rock the following year to prevent integration. The event focused national media attention on the question of school integration.

How did white southerners react to the Brown decision?

Many southern whites opposed the Brown decision as an attack on the southern traditions of segregation and white supremacy. They believed that black and white populations should be kept separate, and that states had the right to make their own laws regard-
ing race relations. Although some whites did not believe in segregation, it was difficult for them to speak up in a culture rooted in white supremacy.

Alarmed at the increase in black activism, prominent whites in Mississippi organized white Citizens’ Councils to resist integration and black advancement. The Citizens’ Councils, which sprang up across the South, primarily used economic punishments rather than outright violence to intimidate black activists. When African Americans or white moderates supported civil rights activity, the white businessmen and government leaders in their communities would take away jobs, deny loans, revoke insurance, or boycott black businesses. For example, when black parents in Yazoo City, Mississippi signed a desegregation petition organized by the local NAACP, the local Citizens’ Council published their names in the local newspaper. The petition signers who worked for white employers quickly lost their jobs.

Southern state governments also took measures to keep segregation intact. They made voter registration requirements stricter, and threatened to shut down public schools rather than desegregate them.

"The South will not abide by nor obey this legislative decision of a political court. Any attempt to integrate our schools would cause great strife and turmoil."
—Mississippi Senator James Eastland, 1954

Major newspapers only published stories sympathetic to white supremacy. Local television stations pulled the plug on national coverage of NAACP activity and other black activism. In 1956, the state of Mississippi created the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission—a secretive government branch devoted to preventing the enforcement of federal civil rights laws like the Brown decision. Throughout the mass civil rights movement, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission (and government branches like it in other states) spied on civil rights activists and worked with the Citizens’ Councils to prevent civil rights activity. In addition, local whites continued to use violence to suppress black resistance to white supremacy.

**How did the response to the Brown decision affect black activism?**

This fierce white backlash hurt black activism in the South. The national NAACP
decided to drop its desegregation campaign in Mississippi, where white resistance to the movement was particularly intense. The federal government was unwilling to intervene to enforce the *Brown* decision in the environments most hostile to integration. Federal officials did not want conflict with southern politicians who would stop at nothing to prevent integration.

But despite the intensity of white repression, black activists worked to improve the lives of African Americans and fight for change within their communities. In Mississippi, local NAACP chapters organized voter registration classes, petitioned local schools to desegregate, and boycotted white businesses that were hostile to African Americans. The NAACP also developed youth councils in towns like Jackson and Clarksdale, Mississippi to organize young people and prepare them to become political leaders. In December 1954, the NAACP hired Medgar Evers as its Mississippi field director. A World War II veteran, who had been denied admission to the University of Mississippi School of Law earlier that year, Evers worked to expose the injustices carried out by the police and the courts.

Although they did not succeed in dismantling Jim Crow, local activists in the 1950s—most of whom were affiliated with the NAACP—laid a foundation for the movement that would develop in Mississippi in the early 1960s.

### A New Kind of Movement

The 1960s marked a new chapter in the freedom struggle. The Murder of Emmett Till

On August 28, 1955, two white men in Mississippi murdered a fourteen-year-old black boy named Emmett Till for allegedly flirting with a white cashier. Pictures of Emmett Till’s mutilated body were published around the country, and the trial became an international media event. Despite overwhelming evidence of their guilt, the two men were acquitted of all charges. Although most white Mississippians supported the verdict, thousands of people around the world protested the fourteen-year-old’s death and the unjust acquittal. One year later, the two men publicly admitted their guilt when they sold their story to a national magazine. Because they had already been tried and acquitted, they could no longer be convicted of the murder.

African Americans throughout the United States witnessed the injustice of the highly publicized Emmett Till trial. The trial became a defining moment for a new generation of activists. Many historians see it as an important turning point in the black freedom struggle, uniting African Americans around the country in their desire for change.
black freedom struggle. While World War II veterans had led much of the activism of the 1950s, in the early 1960s, black high school and college students came to the forefront of the movement. This younger generation of civil rights activists aggressively confronted Jim Crow and forced the movement onto the front pages of newspapers across the country.

What was the sit-in movement?

On February 1, 1960, four black college students sat down at a “whites only” lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. By refusing to move, the students directly challenged racial segregation. Within weeks the “sit-in” tactic had spread to more than two hundred cities throughout the South. For example, in Nashville, black (and some white) students sat down at lunch counters throughout the city over the course of several months. The Nashville campaign resulted in more than 150 arrests and national media attention. In some cities, students were attacked by white mobs.

The sit-in protests often forced stores to desegregate or close down. The city of Nashville began to desegregate all public facilities in 1960 in response to the student protests. The sit-ins inspired black and white students around the country to participate in the civil rights movement. It also helped to establish nonviolent direct action as a useful tactic for challenging white supremacy (see box).

What important ideas did Ella Baker bring to the civil rights movement?

In the spring of 1960, an activist named Ella Baker organized a conference for the sit-in activists at Shaw University in North Carolina. Two hundred students attended and heard speeches from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other black leaders. Ella Baker urged the students to channel the energy from the sit-ins into the larger fight against racism and segregation in all aspects of society.

What is Nonviolent Direct Action?

Nonviolent direct action is a strategy for creating social change. A group of people creates a demonstration or disturbance that draws attention to a particular injustice, and forces people in power to respond. Protests, strikes, and sit-ins are all examples of nonviolent direct action. In 1930, as part of the Indian independence movement, Mohandas Gandhi and his followers defied the British government by marching in protest of a colonial tax on salt. Despite being beaten and arrested by government troops, the marchers remained nonviolent, earning them the support and sympathy of observers around the world. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, U.S. civil rights activists confronted segregation by intentionally violating regulations that excluded black people from public spaces, and demanding that the federal government enforce laws that protected civil rights. Some of the most famous nonviolent direct action protests were the “sit-ins” at segregated restaurants and lunch counters.

“Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks to so dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.”

—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” 1963
From 1940 to 1953, Ella Baker had worked for the national NAACP. During that time she had grown frustrated with the organization. Baker felt that the NAACP’s focus on national legal reform left the majority of NAACP members—poor blacks—with little role to play in its work. In 1957, she joined the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) as its executive director. Baker tried to get the SCLC to devote more of its attention to women and students, but most SCLC ministers resisted her ideas. Baker felt that the organization was limited by its dependence on its central leader, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

“I have always felt it was a handicap for oppressed people to depend so largely on a leader, because unfortunately in our culture, the charismatic leader usually becomes a leader because he has found a spot in the public limelight…such a person gets to the point of believing that he is the movement.”

—Ella Baker, from “Developing Community Leadership,” 1970

The NAACP and other black organizations had long depended on a few individuals (usually educated, middle-class men) for political leadership. Ella Baker and other activists affiliated with the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee believed that the movement needed to organize poor black communities in the South to fight for change. They argued that the most oppressed people should play a more important role in the movement for racial justice.

At Ella Baker’s urging, the sit-in students at the Shaw University conference created their own organization, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced “Snick”). SNCC set out to attack white supremacy in the South through nonviolent direct action. The student activists also wanted to develop political leaders among the poor, black southerners at the bottom of Jim Crow society. Unlike the NAACP, the organization was made up primarily of young people, many of them women. SNCC worked to empower individuals, and all members had a voice in organizational decisions.

The Student Movement Comes to Mississippi

During the Jim Crow era, Mississippi earned a reputation as the most dangerous state in the South for black activism. Although national NAACP leaders warned that direct action protests would be too dangerous in Mississippi, the new youth-led movement came to the state anyway. Young activists from organizations like SNCC and CORE (the Congress on Racial Equality) entered Missis-
Mississippi’s small communities and worked with local people to fight for change. Despite fierce opposition from white supremacist groups and the state government, Mississippi developed one of the strongest and most united movements in the country.

**How did the Freedom Riders bring nonviolent direct action to Mississippi?**

On May 4, 1961, thirteen activists brought together by CORE boarded two buses in Washington D.C. headed for the South. The “Freedom Riders” wanted to draw attention to racism in the South. They also wanted to challenge the federal government to enforce its own laws on racial integration. An earlier Supreme Court ruling had outlawed segregation in interstate bus terminals, but in practice transportation in the South remained segregated. In Alabama, white mobs attacked the activists, setting one of their buses on fire and savagely beating several people. Coverage of the event sparked international outrage at local police, who allowed the violence to occur. Energized by the events and ready to take action, black and white students from a variety of cities began riding buses into Mississippi.

**How did the federal government respond to the Freedom Rides?**

President John F. Kennedy tried to convince the Freedom Riders to abandon their efforts. Kennedy worried that the protests would lead to violence. He was also concerned that the Freedom Rides would tarnish the United States’ international image. At the time, the United States and the Soviet Union were locked in a decades-long struggle for global power known as the Cold War. The Soviet Union used the poor treatment of African Americans to criticize the United States.

Kennedy agreed to allow Mississippi police to arrest the Freedom Riders if the state promised to protect them from mob violence. The activists chose to go to jail rather than pay their bail. The Freedom Rides into Mississippi continued, and by the end of the summer 328 activists had been arrested. Most of them were sent to Parchman prison, where they were beaten and abused by white guards. In prison the activists developed important relationships that would help the movement in the future. In September 1961, under pressure from civil rights activists and U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy, the Interstate Commerce Commission issued orders to desegregate all interstate bus facilities.
How were SNCC activists divided about voter registration in Mississippi?

In the summer of 1960, SNCC Field Secretary Robert (Bob) Moses, a former graduate student from New York, made a trip into Mississippi with a list of names given to him by Ella Baker. There he contacted a number of older NAACP activists who convinced him of the need for a voter registration campaign in their state (see box). Amzie Moore, a World War II veteran, told Moses that because blacks were the majority in many Mississippi communities, he believed they could win meaningful political power if they were able to vote. Moses invited Amzie Moore to speak at a SNCC conference, and the Mississippi leader made a pitch for a voter registration campaign in his state.

In the summer of 1961, as SNCC began operations in Mississippi, the young activists debated whether direct action or voter registration should be their primary tactic for confronting white supremacy. The Kennedy administration tried to encourage SNCC activists focus on voter registration. President Kennedy felt that voter registration would be less confrontational and lead to less violence than direct action protests.

Many of the students were concerned that the federal government was trying to undermine the movement. Reflecting on the success of the sit-ins and the Freedom Rides, they argued that direct action was more effective and empowering than voter registration. In the end, Ella Baker helped the students reach a compromise. SNCC developed two wings—one focused on voter registration and the other on direct action.

SNCC started its voter registration work in McComb, Mississippi. C.C. Bryant (the head of the local NAACP) and other local leaders helped SNCC workers run a voter registration drive. It soon became clear to the SNCC activists that, in Mississippi, registering voters could be just as confrontational and dangerous as direct action.

In McComb, for example, a local black leader named Herbert Lee, who was involved in the voter registration drive, was shot and killed by a white Mississippi legislator in broad daylight. A black man named Louis Allen witnessed the murder. When SNCC Field Secretary Bob Moses called the U.S. Justice Department and asked for protection for Allen, the Justice Department said it couldn’t provide protection. Later Allen was also gunned down. No one was ever charged with these crimes.

SNCC volunteers realized whites could use violence against and even kill civil rights activists without fear of legal consequences. They also saw that even though the federal government was aware of the threat of violence in Mississippi, it did not provide the protection that activists believed was needed.

How did COFO unite different civil rights organizations is Mississippi?

In early 1962, representatives from three of the major civil rights organizations working in the South (SNCC, CORE, and the NAACP) met to plan a statewide voter registration campaign in Mississippi. They wanted to connect their efforts in the state and avoid competition between civil rights groups. The three groups united under an umbrella organization

The Role of Older Activists

Students were at the forefront of the movement in the early 1960s. But older activists, including World War II veterans and members of the NAACP, continued the work they had been doing for years. Many young Mississippi activists came from families with long histories of Jim Crow resistance, and were inspired by their older family members. Older civil rights leaders served as mentors to younger student activists, and helped build trust between the young SNCC workers and local people who were skeptical about the movement. In addition, earlier NAACP work had laid a foundation of political connections that the student organizers in SNCC could use in their attempts to register voters and organize direct actions.
called the Congress of Federated Organizations (COFO). COFO agreed to send civil rights workers into communities with large black populations to encourage black voting and develop local leadership. Aaron Henry, the head of the Mississippi NAACP, was named president of COFO. SNCC provided the majority of the workers and direction for the campaign.

How did COFO workers organize local communities?

COFO workers received training in community organizing techniques at the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee in the summer of 1962. The activists then prepared to enter black communities throughout the state, including the Mississippi Delta (see map)—a region marked by black poverty and violent white racism. They would learn many valuable lessons from the local people they met in these small Mississippi communities.

“[SNCC] got [to the Delta] and we discovered...an extremely resourceful and courageous and heroic people, who had been resisting all along—contrary to the myth.... These were ordinary people without a great deal of formal education, but with resources of wisdom, resources of courage, of decency and nobility who educated and instructed us.”

—Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, SNCC activist, recollecting in 2012

At first, most people in these small Mississippi communities were wary of the young organizers. COFO workers were seen as outsiders. Remembering the Freedom Rides, many black Mississippians were afraid that the arrival of COFO workers in their towns would provoke a violent white backlash.

“People would just get afraid of me.... They said, he’s a Freedom Rider.... I was just there to stir up trouble.”

—Samuel Block, SNCC organizer in Greenwood

COFO organizers understood that if they were going to be successful, they needed to earn the respect and trust of the community. Organizers lived in the homes of local people and participated in the day-to-day life of the community. Canvassers, often the youngest activists, went door-to-door getting to know every resident on the block and talking to them about voting rights. They revisited homes repeatedly in order to build strong relationships with people before encouraging them to register.

“Go to their homes, eat with them, talk the language that they talk, associate with them on a personal level. Then go into your talk about the vote.”

—Instructions to SNCC organizers at a training at the Highlander Folk School, June 1962

Self-Defense

SNCC and other civil rights organizations used nonviolent direct action as a political tactic, but that did not mean that local people in Mississippi were committed to a philosophy of nonviolence in their daily lives. Black Mississippians, who had been living under the threat of violence for years, did not hesitate to use weapons to defend themselves from white attacks. Most black families in Mississippi owned guns.

“I wasn’t being ‘non’ nonviolent. I was just protecting my family.”

—Hartman Turnbow, describing why he shot at night riders who had tried to burn down his house in the spring of 1963
Through these relationships with local people, COFO organizers gained essential knowledge about local life, town power structures, and the nature of white supremacy in Mississippi.

Organizers would hold mass meetings to give an emotional boost to the slow canvassing work. Drawing on the black religious traditions of Mississippi, the meetings featured fiery speeches, bible readings, and personal stories about racism. Organizers explained voting rights and helped local people understand the voter registration forms. Leaders brought news of the struggle from around the country to connect their local efforts with the national movement.

In mass meetings, often held in churches, people came together to sing freedom songs—songs about the civil rights movement that were influenced by old religious spirituals. These songs helped unite the community and inspired local people to overcome their fears about participating in the movement.

“The most essential movement business was nurturing the people who had come.... Singing was the ‘bed’ and the ‘air’ of everything, and I had never before heard or felt singing do that on that level of power. In mass meetings I was alive and I knew what I was supposed to be doing and where I was supposed to be.”

—Bernice Johnson Reagon, SNCC worker and freedom singer, recollecting in 2010

COFO organizers also established Citizenship Schools in towns throughout Mississippi. The schools empowered many local people who had very little formal education. Organizers taught local blacks how to pass voter registration tests, and helped black Mississippians analyze the history of white supremacy.

Local teenager Doug Smith (left) and SNCC Field Secretary Sandy Leigh (right) urge Hattiesburg resident Felix Smith to register to vote. Summer 1964.
How did COFO activists develop local leadership?

In all their work, the young COFO organizers sought to develop local leaders and foster leadership skills among the people they worked with, regardless of social status or income. COFO activists in Mississippi made sure that everyone had a role to play in the movement.

“What we were trying to do was, starting with already existing leadership...cultivate additional local leadership, and cultivate community organization. Our argument was people have a right to have at least some say-so in the decision making that affects their lives. They have to take control over their lives. And that is something that we can’t do for you...you have to take control of your life and make it better.... If you want to do that, we’ll help you as best we can.”

—Charles (Charlie) Cobb, SNCC field secretary, recollecting in 2012

Many local people became community organizers through their participation in voter registration campaigns and other movement activities. The movement in Mississippi depended on these local organizers. For example, Fannie Lou Hamer became one of the most influential leaders of the Mississippi movement. She was the youngest of twenty-one siblings in a family of sharecroppers from Sunflower County, and had very little formal education. Inspired by speeches she heard at her first mass meeting, Hamer attempted to register to vote in August of 1962. The white plantation owner she worked for responded by firing her and kicking her out of her home. A few days later, a group of whites fired shots into the house where she was staying. Undeterred, Fannie Lou Hamer got more involved with the movement. She took the registration test again, began to teach at Citizenship Schools, and eventually became a field secretary for SNCC.

How did local whites react to the movement in Mississippi?

Local activism challenged the common white assumption that African Americans were content with their place in society. Whites routinely blamed black activism on “outside agitators” and “communists” who came to stir up trouble. They refused to believe that the movement was an expression of discontent throughout the black community.

Black Mississippian who participated in the movement put their lives in constant jeopardy. Racist groups and individuals beat black organizers, intimidated local people, and burned down meeting houses in an attempt to stop the momentum of the movement and maintain white supremacy. White supremacists attacked and beat hundreds of civil rights workers in Mississippi; some activists lost their lives because of their work. While threats of violence deterred some people from joining the movement, it made others more determined to fight for their rights.

The vast majority of white Mississippian did not participate in violence against civil rights workers. But white Mississippian were under enormous pressure to uphold white supremacy. For example, a white family in McComb named Heffner was forced to leave town after they invited white civil rights workers to dinner.

Mississippi Heats Up

In the early 1960s, the U.S. government was more concerned with the Cold War than with black activists in Mississippi. Tension with the Soviet Union reached a boiling point in October 1962, when the Cuban Missile Crisis brought the two world powers to the brink of nuclear war. But events in Mississippi drew national attention and forced the federal government to confront the situation in the South. Below are three key events that occurred in Mississippi in this period.

Integrating the University of Mississippi: In 1961, a black Mississippi veteran named James Meredith decided to apply to the University of Mississippi to see if the school
The Federal Government in Mississippi

One of COFO’s goals was to throw a national spotlight on the racial terror in Mississippi and compel the federal government to act. COFO leaders sought national attention to the systemic racism of Mississippi and federal protection from violence against activists. Because white supremacists could often act without fear of legal consequences in Mississippi, civil rights leaders wanted the federal government to deal with state and local institutions that denied African Americans justice and their rights. They believed that the federal government needed to enforce its laws and uphold the Constitution’s Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.

Although President John F. Kennedy consistently spoke in favor of civil rights, again and again he refused to order federal intervention when white mobs or local police threatened people in Mississippi. Kennedy wanted to protect the United States’ international image as the leader of the free world and opponent of Soviet communism. He did not want to send federal troops into the South again (he had sent twenty-three thousand during the integration of the University of Mississippi), because it would call international attention to the racial faultlines and inequalities in the United States. Additionally, Mississippi Senators James Eastland and John Stennis, both strict segregationists, were powerful Democratic legislators. President Kennedy felt he needed their support to pass legislation and wanted to avoid angering them.

President Kennedy directed his administration to support the civil rights movement through voter registration, which he believed would be less likely to lead to violence and confrontation than direct action protests. In 1962, the federal government began supporting the Voter Education Project (VEP), which funded civil rights efforts to increase black voter registration. Through the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, the Kennedy administration also sent lawyers to counties across Mississippi to investigate and file lawsuits in cases of voter discrimination. These D.C. lawyers often faced county officials who refused to hand over records or judges who avoided speedy trials. Despite their willingness to fight in the courtrooms for fair voter registration, federal officials remained reluctant to offer African Americans protection from day-to-day violence.

would abide by the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. When the university rejected his application, the NAACP, under the direction of Medgar Evers, filed a lawsuit against the university for racial discrimination. The U.S. Fifth Circuit Court ruled that Meredith should be admitted to the school. Many white Mississippians were enraged by the decision, and Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett promised to defy the ruling. Attorney General Robert Kennedy had to send five hundred U.S. marshals to Oxford, Mississippi to protect Meredith and allow him to enroll. A riot broke out on the campus when a white mob attacked the federal marshals. Two people were killed in the violence, and hundreds were injured. The Kennedy administration sent twenty-three thousand U.S. troops to Mississippi to stop the riot. The integration of the University of Mississippi made international news.

**Leflore County:** In 1962, in response to SNCC organizing, the Leflore County government decided to end a program that had provided food to poor families during the winter. SNCC asked for donations, and soon civil rights supporters in northern cities were shipping tons of food to Mississippi for SNCC to distribute. The movement had already begun to make inroads in Leflore, but the urgency of the food drive gave the movement a much-needed lift. The donations connected many new black Mississippians to SNCC, and the local government’s decision to cut the food program highlighted the importance of black being able to vote. Organizers asked people to fill out voter registration forms before they received food. High numbers of new recruits began taking the voter registration test.

White supremacists responded by burn-
ing down black businesses and shooting at SNCC cars and offices. As tensions in Leflore County heated up in the spring of 1963, SNCC transferred most of its Mississippi staff to Greenwood, the county capital. When 150 black Mississippians marched through Greenwood, local police released dogs and arrested many of the activists.

The Kennedy administration filed a lawsuit against the city of Greenwood, demanding the release of all activists and an end to white interference with voter registration. But the U.S. Justice Department dropped the case after the federal government reached an agreement with the city to release eight SNCC activists. Although the federal government had helped get activists out of jail, many in the movement were angry that it did not stand up for voting rights. They felt the government had abandoned their cause. Even without federal assistance, the voter registration drive continued on through the spring, with twelve to twenty-four people attempting to register every day in Greenwood. Most attempts failed because officials denied or rejected the applications.

The Jackson Movement: In December 1962, the Jackson NAACP announced a boycott of Jackson businesses that refused to hire black employees. The group demanded desegregation of all facilities and fair employment practices. The mayor of Jackson refused to meet any demands and the boycott carried on into the spring of 1963. In May of that year, students and faculty from Tougaloo College, a black college in Jackson, held a sit-in at a segregated lunch counter downtown. They were attacked and beaten by a white mob as the local police and FBI agents stood by.

The event sparked marches, pickets, and other demonstrations across the city. Then on June 12, 1963, a member of the Citizens’ Council shot and killed NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers at his home.

National NAACP leaders worried that the direct action protests in Jackson were too aggressive and costly. National NAACP Executive Director Roy Wilkins came to Mississippi to scale back the campaign. With support from the Kennedy administration, the national NAACP cut a deal with the mayor of Jackson—the city would hire six black police officers if the movement stopped all major marches. To the frustration of local activists, the original demands for desegregation and the end to racist hiring practices were not met.

What was the Freedom Vote?
By the summer of 1963, thousands of black Mississippians had attempted to register to vote with little success. Violent resistance to black activism was on the rise as the KKK reopened chapters throughout the state. COFO activists decided to try a new tactic in Jackson and Greenwood in order to generate national publicity and force the federal government to protect black Mississippians.

COFO used a little-known state law that said that those who had been denied the right to vote could cast a provisional ballot with a statement of the voter’s qualifications. The qualifications would be considered later.
COFO did not expect the votes would ever be fairly considered. The votes were cast as a protest. It was also a way to show the rest of the country that, contrary to white Mississipians’ claims, black people were anxious to vote.

On the day of the Democratic primary, thousands of black Mississipians went to the polls. In some towns, crowds of whites blocked their way, threatening black voters while police arrested activists. But in Greenwood, between five hundred and seven hundred black voters cast ballots.

“Difficult to capture is the mood of the day—the air of jubilation at going to vote, and the infusion of spirit in the Greenwood staff.”

—Mike Miller, SNCC organizer, 1963

COFO considered repeating the protest during the general election in the fall, but decided that it would be too dangerous. Instead, COFO organized its own statewide mock election called the “Freedom Vote.” Like the Democratic primary protest, the Freedom Vote would show that the Mississippi elections did not represent the thousands of black voters who were unable to register due to intimidation, fraud, and registration tests. COFO organizers and local Mississipians ran a campaign supporting Aaron Henry (the head of the Mississippi NAACP) for governor, and Rev. Edwin (Ed) King (a white minister involved in the movement) for lieutenant governor. In total, around eighty thousand black Mississipians cast ballots in the Freedom Vote.

**Why did Mississippi activists debate whether to allow white students in the movement?**

During the Freedom Vote campaign, a group of college students (most of them white) came to Mississippi to volunteer on the campaign. The national media only began covering the Freedom Vote after these college students got involved. Some COFO organizers felt that they should bring even more students to Mississippi the following summer.

“Bring the nation’s children, and the parents will have to focus on Mississippi, our thinking ran. And if the parents raised their voices, the political establishment would be forced to listen.”

—Bob Moses, recounting Freedom Summer, 2001

The proposal for a Freedom Summer project involving northern college students sparked a tense debate. Many COFO workers opposed involving so many of these students, most of whom were white and had little experience in the South. They worried that it would take the focus away from local people and the goal of building local leadership. But most local people involved...
in the movement felt that the students could bring much needed publicity and protection to the voter registration work in Mississippi. As white violence increased in early 1964, COFO’s leaders moved forward with the Freedom Summer project.

What happened to the Freedom Summer volunteers when they got to Mississippi?

The main goal of Freedom Summer was to register black Mississippians to vote. The project also focused on black education. In all, over eight hundred northern students participated. Although most of them were white, about 10 percent of the volunteers were black northerners. After training in Oxford, Ohio in voter registration tactics, nonviolence, and the history of Mississippi, the volunteers began the journey south on June 20, 1964.

A day later, tragedy struck. A sheriff in Neshoba County, Mississippi pulled over a car carrying two white activists, Michael “Mickey” Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, and black CORE activist James Chaney. Later that night police turned the three men over to a mob of Klansmen, who executed the activists and buried their bodies in an earthen dam.

At least a dozen black Mississippians had been murdered in recent years, including Medgar Evers, Henry Lee, and Aaron Lewis, but only with the arrival of white student activists from the North did the country begin paying attention to violence against civil rights activists in Mississippi. The FBI dispatched
1964 Civil Rights Act

On June 11, 1963, President John F. Kennedy called for federal legislation that would desegregate all public spaces. While most movement participants supported the idea of a Civil Rights Act, many worried that the bill did not offer protection from police brutality or protection for black activists. At the August 1963 March on Washington, SNCC’s John Lewis demanded a bill that would also protect black activists and provide relief for the poor people of the South.

“We must have legislation that will protect Mississippi sharecroppers, who have been forced to leave their homes because they dared to exercise their right to vote. We need a bill that will provide for the poor and starving people of this nation.”

—SNCC Chairman John Lewis, 1963

President Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963. The new president, Lyndon Johnson, was determined to pass the civil rights bill. In the face of fervent opposition from white southern senators, President Johnson resisted compromises that would water down the bill and drew on his own experience in Congress to get the bill passed by both houses. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law in July 1964. The bill prohibited segregation of public accommodations and employment discrimination. In the short term, the bill had little effect on Mississippi, which remained a highly segregated state for years to come. But the 1964 Civil Rights Act would prove to be an important piece of civil rights legislation that is still used in legal cases to this day.

“We most certainly do not and will not give protection to civil rights workers. In the first place, the FBI is not a police organization. It’s purely an investigative organization, and the protection of individual citizens, either natives of this state or coming into the state, is a matter for the local authorities. The FBI will not participate in any such protection.”

—J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI, July 10, 1964

During Freedom Summer, there were at least three additional murders, thirty-five shootings, and sixty-five bombings or burnings of black homes and churches. White business owners fired employees that participated in the project, and local police arrested over one thousand movement activists. Countless others were beaten.

Despite the threat of violence, Freedom Summer carried on, and COFO used the additional volunteers to expand its work into many communities previously unexposed to the movement.
Although black Mississippians had many reasons to distrust white people, most welcomed the northern volunteers with warmth and hospitality. The white students usually treated the local Mississippians with respect, and had a desire to learn from more experienced organizers. Although the presence of white students was a source of tension, by and large black Mississippians and northern volunteers worked well together with mutual admiration during the Freedom Summer project.

What were the Freedom Schools?

After witnessing the inequality of the Mississippi education system, SNCC Field Secretary Charlie Cobb suggested using the summer project volunteers to improve black education in Mississippi. Throughout the summer, COFO staff and volunteers developed schools across the state to serve black students of all ages. One goal of the Freedom Schools was to develop young leaders for the civil rights struggle. The Freedom Schools were designed to empower black youth to be critical thinkers and politically active citizens.

“The goal is to fill an intellectual and creative vacuum in the lives of young Negro Mississippian, and to get them to articulate their own desires, demands, and questions... to stand up in classrooms around the state and ask their teachers a real question... This will make it possible for them to challenge the myths of our society, to perceive more clearly its realities and to find alternatives and ultimately, new directions for action.”

—Charlie Cobb, 1963

By summer’s end, about 2,500 students were enrolled in almost fifty schools across Mississippi. The Freedom Schools opened young Mississippians’ eyes to new possibilities, and raised their expectations for a better future. The schools also showed that the movement could create its own institutions to support the black community in Mississippi.

What was the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party?

As part of Freedom Summer, COFO established its own multiracial party—the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP or sometimes FDP). The goal of the MFDP was to represent the black citizens that were excluded from the all-white Democratic Party. It also hoped to represent poor whites, whose views were also not represented by that party.

Following the success of the Freedom Vote in 1963, COFO decided to challenge the all-white Mississippi Democratic Party at the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. They wanted to send the MFDP delegation to win political recognition for black Mississippians, and force the
national Democratic Party to acknowledge that the all-white Democratic Party in Mississippi did not, and therefore should not, represent Mississippi.

"[W]e can’t get past these people at the state level because they lock us out. But we just know that once we get to the national level, with all the proof that we’ve had the courage to go ahead and create our own party, then we feel like we are going to get that representation that we’ve been denied for so long."

—Victoria Gray Adams, SNCC activist

**What was the political atmosphere in the United States during the summer of 1964?**

It was nearly certain the Democratic Party would nominate President Lyndon Johnson to run for president at the Atlantic City convention in August 1964. Johnson, who had assumed the presidency after Kennedy’s assassination, wanted the convention to be a show of unity and support for his candidacy.

The country had rallied together following the assassination of President Kennedy. Nevertheless, as 1964 progressed, the racial divisions in the country were gaining more attention. Freedom Summer had focused the country’s attention on the civil rights movement in Mississippi, but racial strife wasn’t limited to Mississippi or the South. After a white police officer shot and killed a young black man in Harlem, New York, violent protests erupted in July. Demonstrations and violence also spread to other northern cities as African Americans protested their treatment at the hands of whites as well as unequal economic and social conditions. And although 60 percent of U.S. citizens supported civil rights legislation according to polls, nearly the same percentage thought that the pace of racial integration was moving too quickly.

It was in this heated atmosphere that the Democratic National Convention began. Many sensed that a moment of change was looming and that the country was on the verge of a new era. Some hoped to provoke change, others wanted to prevent it. The MFDP had come to Atlantic City seeking justice and to bring attention to its cause. National civil right leaders believed that another term in the White House for Lyndon Johnson would bring progress for African Americans. The all-white Mississippi delegation felt betrayed by the Democratic Party they had supported for nearly one hundred years. And President Lyndon Johnson was within reach of a dream: his nomination by his party for the presidency of the United States.

These competing forces would collide over four days at a political convention filled with drama and unexpected turns. The result would change the course of U.S. politics and history.

Alabama Governor George Wallace at the Democratic National Convention. Wallace was a strong opponent of civil rights.
The MFDP’s trip to Atlantic City in August 1964 brought the local struggle for civil rights in Mississippi onto the national political stage. The events of Freedom Summer had already captured the attention of the country. Earlier in the month, the bodies of murdered civil rights workers Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney had been discovered, six weeks after they had disappeared.

President Johnson’s signature in July on the 1964 Civil Rights Act had shown that the movement could create lasting legal changes. But federal laws meant very little in states like Mississippi where local officials refused to enforce them. African Americans continued to face violence and discrimination.

What was the strategy behind the formation of the MFDP?

COFO wanted to force the national Democratic Party to recognize the MFDP as the only legal party from Mississippi. They had collected evidence that the all-white Mississippi Democratic party violated the national party’s rules against discrimination and, therefore, should not represent Mississippi at the convention.

To make their case, COFO organizers sent activists to the Mississippi Democratic Party’s meetings where delegates to the Atlantic City convention would be chosen. They found that many of the meetings were held in secret. If the meetings were public, men with guns barred blacks from entering. All of these actions violated the national party’s rules of open meetings.

Over the course of the summer, COFO workers and northern volunteers registered around eighty thousand black Mississippians for the MFDP. MFDP meetings were open and public. The organizers made sure to follow the national Democratic Party’s rules carefully so that they could show that they were the only legal party from Mississippi at the national convention. The MFDP organized a state convention on August 6 in Jackson to elect representatives for its delegation to Atlantic City. Ella Baker gave the keynote speech.

“Until the killing of black mothers’ sons is as important as the killing of white mothers’ sons we must keep on.”

—Ella Baker, August 6, 1964

The MFDP elected Lawrence Guyot as chair of the party, Aaron Henry as chair of the delegation, and Fannie Lou Hamer as vice-chair. The total delegation consisted of sixty-eight representatives—sixty-four black delegates and four white. Many of the delegates were poor Mississippians with very little formal education who had become leaders through their participation in the movement.

What happened to the MFDP in Atlantic City?

The MFDP delegates arrived in Atlantic City on August 21. They immediately set to work trying to convince the politicians at the convention that they were the legal delegation from Mississippi. Few people expected the MFDP to succeed. Lyndon Johnson and other Democratic Party leaders had made it clear that they wanted to avoid any controversy at the convention. But the MFDP delegates had reason to hope, as several prominent political groups endorsed their party.

“Initially I thought we would go down in defeat, but then based on the response that had come from other parts of the country and those in Congress, I felt we would be victorious.”

—Hollis Watkins, SNCC activist and high school student from McComb, Mississippi
On August 22, the MFDP and the all-white Mississippi Democratic Party each went before the convention’s credentials committee to argue why their delegates should be seated as the legitimate Mississippi delegation. Fannie Lou Hamer told the riveting story of her own attempt to register to vote in Mississippi. She described her treatment in a local jail when white prison guards forced black prisoners to beat her. As millions watched her speech on television, President Johnson called a press conference to cut off her television coverage. But stations replayed her speech later that night, and her words captured the attention of people around the country.

“...And if the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America. Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, where we have to sleep with our telephones off the hooks because our lives be threatened daily, because we want to live as decent human beings, in America?”

—Fannie Lou Hamer, August 22, 1964

National civil rights leaders came to Atlantic City to support the MFDP. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke out in favor of the MFDP delegation. But while the national NAACP and national civil rights leaders were supportive of the MFDP, they were also far more cautious than SNCC and the MFDP. They worried that the MFDP’s challenge might alienate Lyndon Johnson, whom they saw as an important ally. The national NAACP also did not think that poor, under-educated Mississippians like Fannie Lou Hamer were qualified to be leaders in the Democratic Party.

What was President Johnson’s reaction to the MFDP challenge?

Winning the election was President Lyndon Johnson’s top concern going into the Atlantic City convention. He was projected
to win, but he worried that if he supported the MFDP, white Southern Democrats would abandon the party, giving his Republican rival Barry Goldwater a chance. In fact, many of the white Mississippi Democrats were already planning on supporting Goldwater.

President Johnson did all he could to prevent the MFDP delegates from being seated. He instructed FBI agents to pose as journalists and spy on MFDP meetings in order to provide him with information about the party’s strategy. His administration pressured members of the convention’s credentials committee not to seat the MFDP. Some members of the credentials committee received threats that they would lose their jobs if they voted in favor of the MFDP.

**What compromise did the Democratic Party offer the MFDP?**

The national Democratic Party offered the MFDP a compromise. Two MFDP representatives, Aaron Henry and Rev. Ed King, would be given non-voting seats at the convention. The remaining MFDP delegates would be “welcomed as honored guests of the convention.” Members of the all-white Mississippi Democratic Party would be seated as the official state delegation, but they would also be required to pledge their support of the party and President Johnson in the general election in November. As part of the compromise, the Democratic Party promised to eliminate racial discrimination in all state delegations by 1968.

Before the MFDP and others had heard the details of the compromise, the Democratic Party announced that a deal had been reached. Hubert Humphrey, a Minnesota senator hoping to become Johnson’s vice president, asked MFDP leaders Ed King, Bob Moses, and Aaron Henry to agree to the compromise. They refused and insisted on bringing the question before the entire MFDP delegation for a vote. But the credentials committee voted in favor of the deal before the MFDP had a chance to discuss the proposal.

Nevertheless, the MFDP and other civil rights leaders organized a meeting to discuss whether to accept the compromise. In the days that followed, different groups at the convention reacted to the compromise and the treatment of the MFDP in Atlantic City. In the upcoming activity, you will have a chance to examine these different perspectives more closely.

The Atlantic City Democratic National Convention brought the various groups involved in the civil rights movement together under one roof. As the convention unfolded, the tensions between these groups and their different perspectives on the movement rose to the surface. Movement activists and the Johnson administration disputed what change
should look like and how fast it should come. The national Democratic Party worried about its relationship with white Democrats from the South, many of whom were ready to abandon the party because of its support for civil rights. The convention also made divisions within the movement clearer, as different civil rights groups argued about the goals of the movement and the best strategies for achieving them.

As you examine the different perspectives, consider what was at stake for each of the groups. What did each group want for the future of the civil rights movement? What did each want for the future of the country? Which groups held the most power? How could different groups use their power?

Rev. Ed King (left) and Aaron Henry (right) were leaders in the MFDP who negotiated with Senator Hubert Humphrey about Johnson’s proposed compromise. The photo shows King’s scarred face—a near-fatal injury he suffered in Jackson, Mississippi on June 18, 1963. King had been riding in a car with another activist, John Salter, when the son of a prominent segregationist deliberately caused another car to hit them. Salter was severely injured, and King was left unconscious with his face lodged in the windshield. According to police reports, the white driver’s car had faulty brakes and so the driver was not held accountable.
Perspectives in Brief

Perspective 1: Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party

The majority of MFDP delegates wanted to reject the proposed compromise. They believed that they had “right” on their side and felt that they had not traveled all the way to Atlantic City for the token recognition of two seats. Although rejecting the compromise could alienate some powerful allies in the Democratic Party, the Mississippi Freedom Democrats were thinking first about justice and correcting a wrong. The MFDP delegates wanted political power in order to transform society and end discrimination. The MFDP delegates felt betrayed by politicians who wanted them to compromise while their friends and family members back in Mississippi continued to live as second-class citizens and in fear for their lives.

Perspective 2: National NAACP and Civil Rights Leaders

Although the leaders of the NAACP and other national civil rights organizations supported the MFDP challenge, they wanted the MFDP to accept the compromise. They believed that change that would help all African Americans required protecting political alliances with President Johnson. The Civil Rights Act, which President Johnson had signed in July, was an important legal milestone and victory. These leaders wanted Johnson and other federal politicians to pass more civil rights legislation, including laws that would guarantee African Americans’ right to vote. While these leaders sympathized with the young SNCC activists, they also saw them as politically inexperienced and inflexible. Anything that damaged the NAACP’s relationship with Johnson or hurt his chances for election was to be avoided.

Perspective 3: President Lyndon Johnson and the National Democratic Party

President Lyndon Johnson’s top priority was to be elected president. Johnson had taken strong stands for school integration and civil rights legislation, but he worried that allowing the MFDP to represent Mississippi could hurt his chances for winning the presidency. Johnson engineered the compromise in an attempt to appease both sides of the Democratic constituency—liberal supporters of civil rights and the white supremacists from the South who had been solidly Democratic since Reconstruction had been imposed by the Republicans in 1867. Lyndon Johnson had spoken out in favor of integration, voting rights, and the end of white supremacy. But Johnson also knew that many white Americans thought integration was moving too fast, and he feared a wider public backlash against the Democratic Party for its support of civil rights.

Perspective 4: White Mississippi Democrats

The white Mississippi Democrats were furious about the MFDP’s presence at the Democratic National Convention. Throughout the week, they warned Democratic leadership that they would walk out of the convention if the MFDP were seated. Since the Civil War, the vast majority of white southerners had been loyal members of the Democratic Party. But the national Democratic Party’s sympathy for the civil rights movement changed these loyalties. By 1964, many white southerners were ready to end nearly a century of support for the Democratic Party and vote for the Republican candidate, Barry Goldwater, because they felt he would be less likely to use federal power to attack white supremacy.
Perspective 1: Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party

The majority of MFDP delegates wanted to reject the proposed compromise. They believed that they had “right” on their side and felt that they had not traveled all the way to Atlantic City for the token recognition of two seats. The Mississippi activists had been fighting for the right to participate in the political system for years. They did not want to accept an offer that did not give MFDP delegates real voting power.

The MFDP had launched its Atlantic City challenge in order to show a national audience that voting practices in the South were discriminatory and unconstitutional. The all-white Mississippi Democrats had systematically excluded African Americans from selecting delegates to the Democratic Convention, which broke the national Democratic Party’s rules. In contrast, the MFDP had followed the party’s rules when choosing its delegates. They claimed that this made them the only legal delegation from Mississippi at the convention. They wanted Lyndon Johnson and Democratic Party leaders to judge their challenge based on the rules.

Although rejecting the compromise could alienate some powerful allies in the Democratic Party, the Mississippi Freedom Democrats were thinking first about justice and correcting a wrong. The MFDP delegates wanted political power in order to transform society and end discrimination. Activists in Mississippi continued to face the constant threat of violence. Despite COFO’s efforts, very few local blacks had successfully registered to vote. The MFDP came to Atlantic City to see real progress. They would not accept anything less.

For years, activists from SNCC and other organizations had assumed that when they brought the country’s attention to the injustices of white supremacy in the South, powerful officials would be pressured to do the right thing and that justice would prevail. The Democratic Party’s unwillingness to seat their whole delegation forced them to question this assumption. The MFDP delegates felt betrayed by politicians who wanted them to compromise while their friends and family members back in Mississippi continued to live as second-class citizens and in fear for their lives.

Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Perspective 1

1. The MFDP challenge is about justice and what is right. This is a moral and Constitutional issue that must come before any backroom political deal. People are dying in Mississippi. Their demands are urgent.

2. The compromise offered by the Democratic Party leadership is not acceptable. The MFDP came to represent black Mississippians at the convention and demonstrate the illegitimacy of the all-white party. This deal would accomplish neither of these goals.

3. Black Mississippians from all walks of life and with all levels of education have the right to represent themselves politically.

Next Steps for Perspective 1

1. Reject the compromise.

2. Develop new strategies for the movement that do not depend on the Democratic Party for support.

3. Continue to seek national political recognition, but also develop separate institutions for black Mississippians, like the Freedom Schools.
From the Historical Record

Bob Moses, August 1964
“What is the compromise? We are here for the people and the people want to represent themselves. They don’t want symbolic token votes. They want to vote themselves.”

Bob Moses, August 26, 1964
“We’re not here to bring politics to our morality, but to bring morality to our politics.”

Fannie Lou Hamer, August 26, 1964
“We didn’t come all the way for no two seats when all of us is tired!”

Victoria Gray, member of MFDP, recalling her words on August 26, 1964
“I took the floor and I simply said to people in no uncertain terms why we were there, and reminded them of what the people back in Mississippi were expecting from us, and that I for one was not going back to Mississippi and tell those people a lie.”

Bob Moses, November 24, 1964
“You say we’re not legal because we don’t abide by Mississippi’s laws, but the laws of Mississippi are illegal.... So what kind of question are you really raising for us when you say that we’re not legal? What you’re saying is that [whites] have power. Or that you don’t want us to have it.”

Charles Sherrod, August 1964
“We want much more than ‘token’ positions or even representation. We want power for our people. We want it out of the country’s respect for the ideals of America and love for its own people.... We could have accepted the compromise, called it a victory and went back to Mississippi country as their champions. But we love the ideals of our country; they mean more than a ‘moment’ of victory. We are what we are—hungry, beaten, unvictorious, jobless, homeless, but thankful to have the strength to fight.”

Unknown MFDP member, reporting on the Democratic National Convention
“The FDP delegation did not come to Atlantic City begging for crumbs. They came demanding full rights, for themselves and for one million other human beings. They would have accepted any honorable compromise between reasonable men. The test was not whether the FDP could accept ‘political realism’, but rather whether the Convention and the national Democratic Party could accept the challenge presented by the FDP. The Convention and the national Democratic Party failed that test.”

Fannie Lou Hamer, August 22, 1964
“[I]f the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America. Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, where we have to sleep with our telephones off of the hooks because our lives be threatened daily, because we want to live as decent human beings, in America?”

James Forman, executive secretary of SNCC, recalling words to the delegates
“What effect will a decision to accept the honored guest status and the two seats-at-large, with the delegates named for you—what effect will this have upon your friends and your relatives and your fellow workers in the state of Mississippi? It seems you have no other choice but to reject support for this resolution.”

John Lewis, SNCC organizer, recalling the MFDP’s challenge
“Personally, I felt proud. If there’s one thing I’ve believed in my entire life, it’s taking a stand when it’s time to take a stand. This was definitely one of those times.”
Although the leaders of the NAACP and other national civil rights organizations supported the MFDP challenge, they also wanted the MFDP delegates to accept the compromise. They urged the MFDP to accept the two seats. Although these leaders sympathized with the MFDP’s demands for justice, they believed that the best way to advance the cause of civil rights was to agree to the compromise that President Johnson wanted and help get him elected. Johnson’s Republican opponent, Senator Barry Goldwater, had voted against the Civil Rights Act.

Many of them saw the future of the national movement as more important than the fate of the small MFDP contingent from Mississippi. They believed that change that would help all African Americans required protecting political alliances with President Johnson. The Civil Rights Act, which President Johnson had signed in July, was an important legal milestone and victory. These leaders wanted Johnson and other federal politicians to pass more civil rights legislation, including laws that would guarantee African Americans’ right to vote. Although many would have preferred that the MFDP be seated instead of the all-white Mississippi delegation, the national leadership felt that accepting the compromise in Atlantic City would preserve party unity, and set the stage for larger, more politically significant gains in the future.

For more than fifty years, the national NAACP had advocated for legal reforms to help African Americans. Its leaders had experience building relationships with powerful people and working in coalitions. These leaders knew the value of compromise. While they sympathized with the young SNCC activists, they also saw them as politically inexperienced and inflexible. Anything that damaged the NAACP’s relationship with Johnson or hurt his chances for election was to be avoided. The national NAACP petitioned the MFDP to accept the deal and continue to work with the national Democratic Party.

**Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Perspective 2**

1. President Lyndon Johnson is a powerful ally in the fight for civil rights. Civil rights activists need alliances with the president and others in the federal government to achieve their goals.

2. Compromise is a political necessity. This compromise may be disagreeable to some in the short term but it will lead to long-term gain.

3. Educated black leaders, like those in the NAACP, are best qualified to lead the civil rights movement.

**Next Steps for Perspective 2**

1. Accept the compromise and celebrate it as a victory for the movement.

2. Work to reelect President Johnson and collaborate with him and Congress on more national civil rights legislation, including a law to protect voting rights.

3. Focus on getting qualified, educated African Americans into positions of leadership in established political institutions.
From the Historical Record

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., speaking to the MFDP on August 26, 1964 (quote approximated by James Forman in his book The Making of Black Revolutionaries)

“Indeed we have a long road to travel. Indeed we cannot travel it alone. Indeed there is only one party that has helped the Negro in this country. Indeed there are segregationists in this party, but indeed the Democratic Party is the best we have and we must work to make it better…. I’m not going to counsel you to accept or reject (the compromise). But I want you to know that I have talked to Hubert Humphrey [prospective vice presidential candidate]. He promised me there will be a new day in Mississippi if you accept this proposal....”


“The liberal concern is that a failure of the civil rights movement to accept the ambiguities and frustrations of politics could have dangerous consequences.”

Bayard Rustin to the MFDP, August 26, 1964

“There is a difference between protest and politics. The former is based on morality and the latter is based on reality and compromise. If you are going to engage in politics you must give up protest.... Those of you, my friends, who are here from Mississippi and who have made such a valiant struggle, you are now engaged in politics. You must accept the compromise. If you don’t, you’re still protesting....”

Bayard Rustin, “From Protest to Politics,” 1965

“Neither that movement nor the country’s twenty million black people can win political power alone. We need allies. The future of the Negro struggle depends on whether the contradictions of this society can be resolved by a coalition of progressive forces which becomes the effective political majority in the United States. I speak of the coalition which staged the March on Washington, passed the Civil Rights Act, and laid the basis for the Johnson landslide—Negroes, trade unionists, liberals, and religious groups....

“Necessarily there will be compromise. But the difference between expediency and morality in politics is the difference between selling out a principle and making smaller concessions to win larger ones. The leader who shrinks from this task reveals not his purity but his lack of political sense.”
Perspective 3: President Lyndon Johnson and the National Democratic Party

President Lyndon Johnson’s top priority was to be elected president. Johnson wanted the convention to highlight his political leadership and Democratic unity without distractions or protests. Johnson had taken strong stands for school integration and civil rights legislation, but he worried that allowing the MFDP to represent Mississippi could hurt his chances for winning the presidency. Johnson engineered the compromise in an attempt to appease both sides of the Democratic constituency—liberal supporters of civil rights and the white supremacists from the South who had been solidly Democratic since Reconstruction had been imposed by the Republicans in 1867.

President Johnson felt that African Americans would vote for him regardless of his position on the MFDP. The Republican candidate for president, Senator Barry Goldwater, was openly hostile towards the civil rights movement and had voted against the Civil Rights Act. Johnson’s larger worry was that southern white Democrats—including the delegations from Mississippi and from other southern states—would walk out of the convention and leave the Democratic Party if the MFDP were seated. These southern Democrats would turn to the Republican Party, giving Goldwater and other Republicans a chance in the upcoming elections. In the longer term, Johnson worried that the South, solidly Democratic for nearly a hundred years, would become solidly Republican. This would hurt the Democrats and also the civil rights movement, which Johnson supported.

Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson had both spoken out in favor of integration, voting rights, and the end of white supremacy. But Johnson also knew that many white Americans thought integration was moving too fast, and he feared a wider public backlash against the Democratic Party for its support of civil rights. National leaders of the Democratic Party agreed about the need for equal rights and an end to segregation, but they wanted change to come on their own terms and timetable—not the MFDP’s.

Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Perspective 3

1. The most important issue for the good of the country is the election of Lyndon Johnson. The MFDP’s demands must not get in the way of this goal.

2. The Democratic Party risks losing the solid support of the South to the Republican Party if it does not proceed carefully with the MFDP’s challenge and management of the whole civil rights movement.

3. The denial of civil rights to African Americans is wrong and must change. Slowly, through political reform and federal legislation, activists and politicians can break down barriers to black opportunity together.

Next Steps for Perspective 3

1. Encourage the MFDP delegation to accept the compromise.

2. Convince the all-white southern Democratic delegations not to walk out on the convention, and to sign the loyalty oath to support the Democratic Party in the election.

3. Ensure that the Johnson administration wins the election, then push for more civil rights legislation and fair representation at party conventions in the years to come.
From the Historical Record

President Lyndon Johnson, State of the Union, January 8, 1964

“Let me make one principle of this administration abundantly clear. All of these increased opportunities—in employment, in education, in housing, and in every field—must be open to Americans of every color. As far as the writ of all federal law will run, we must not abolish some, but all racial discrimination. For this is not merely an economic issue, a social, political, or international issue. It is a moral issue.... Today, Americans of all races stand side by side in Berlin and in Vietnam. They died side by side in Korea. Surely they can work and eat and travel side by side in their own country.”

President Lyndon Johnson, May 30, 1963

“The Negro says, ‘Now.’ Others say, ‘Never.’ The voice of responsible Americans...their voices say, ‘Together.’ There is no other way.”

President Lyndon Johnson talking to labor union leader Walter Reuther about the need for politician Hubert Humphrey to deal with the MFDP if Humphrey wanted to be vice president, August 1964

“You better talk to Hubert Humphrey, because I’m telling you that [Humphrey]’s got no future in this party at all if this big war comes off here, and the South walks out, and we all get in a hell of a mess.”

President Lyndon Johnson, speaking to his wife, August 1964

“I am not going to bend to emotionalism. I don’t want this convention to either. The election is not worth that.”

Jack Valenti, advisor to President Johnson, August 1964

“It isn’t a matter of what our emotions want, it is a matter of what the law demands.”

Union leader Walter Reuther, speaking to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. about accepting the compromise, August 1964

“Your funding is on the line.... The kind of money you got from us in Birmingham is there again for Mississippi, but you’ve got to help us and we’ve got to help Johnson.”

Lyndon Johnson to Georgia Governor Carl Sanders, August 1964

“What’s happening is we’re doing four or five things. Number one: we’re coming in there and seating the [white Mississippi Democrats]. Every damn one of them. Now, they oughtn’t to be, Carl. They oughtn’t to...

“You and I just can’t survive our political modern life with these goddamned fellows [white Mississippi leaders] down there that are eating them [African Americans] for breakfast every morning. They’ve got to quit that. And they’ve got to let them vote. And they’ve got to let them shave. And they’ve got to let them eat, and things like that. And they don’t do it.

“However much we love [Democratic Senators] Jim Eastland and John Stennis, they get a governor like Ross Barnett, and he’s messing around there with [George] Wallace, and they won’t let one [black] man go in a precinct convention. We’ve got to put a stop to that, because that’s just like the old days, by God, when they wouldn’t let them go in and cast a vote of any kind.”

President Johnson, August 1964

“I think [the MFDP delegates] are bigger than the president this morning, and I think it’s just water on Goldwater’s paddle.”
Perspective 4: White Mississippi Democrats

The white Mississippi Democrats were furious about the MFDP’s presence at the Democratic National Convention. Throughout the week, they warned Democratic leadership that they would walk out of the convention if the MFDP were seated. Since the Civil War, the vast majority of white southerners had been loyal members of the Democratic Party. But the national Democratic Party’s sympathy for the civil rights movement changed these loyalties. By 1964, many white southerners were ready to end nearly a century of support for the Democratic Party and vote for the Republican candidate, Barry Goldwater, because they felt he would be less likely to use federal power to attack white supremacy.

White Mississippian politicians would do whatever it took to prevent integration and preserve white supremacy. Most white Mississippian felt that segregation was the “natural order” of the South. They believed that the separation of racial groups was necessary to maintain a peaceful, harmonious society. They were unwilling to share spaces with African Americans as equals, or grant black people positions of power or the right to vote. White politicians from Mississippi claimed that black Mississipians were content with their position in society. They argued that activism in Mississippi was initiated by outside agitators and communists, and did not represent the desires of Mississippi’s African Americans.

Since the days of Reconstruction, white leaders in the South resisted the federal government’s attempts to regulate southern racial policies. For white Mississippi leaders, the decision to offer the MFDP token representation at the convention signaled the federal government’s increasing commitment to the civil rights movement. The Johnson administration had recently signed the Civil Rights Act. White Mississippian believed that Johnson had turned his back on white southerners. It was clear that the Democratic Party would no longer allow white people in the South to uphold white supremacy in their communities. For many this was the last straw—it was time to break with the Democrats for good.

Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Perspective 4

1. Segregation and white supremacy are the “natural order” of the South. Southerners will not change their traditions or give in to pressure from the civil rights movement or the federal government.

2. The civil rights movement in Mississippi is just a small group of outside agitators and communists attempting to incite racial conflict and violence. The majority of Mississippian are content with segregation.

3. The compromise represents the abandonment of the white South by the Democratic Party.

Next Steps for Perspective 4

1. Reject the compromise and walk out of the convention to protest the federal government’s support for integration.

2. Abandon the Democratic Party. Vote for Barry Goldwater and the Republicans in the upcoming election to send a message that the South will not tolerate the federal government’s support for civil rights.

3. Continue to work to prevent future attempts to force integration, voting rights, and racial equality upon Mississippi.
From the Historical Record

**Mississippi Democratic Party, August 1964**

“The Mississippi Democratic delegation did not leave the national Democratic Party; it left us.”

**Mississippi Senator James Eastland on the phone with President Johnson, June 23, 1964**

“This Negro woman [Fannie Lou Hamer] in Ruleville that’s been to Washington and testified that she was shot at 19 times is lying. Of course with anybody that gets shot at 19 times is going to get hit, and she hasn’t been shot at a time, and nobody’s tried to bother her. They let her sit in the Democratic county convention this morning.”

**Texas Governor John Connally, August 1964**

“If you seat those black buggers, the whole South will walk out.”

**Georgia Governor Carl Sanders, August 1964**

“It looks like we’re turning the Democratic Party over to the negroes.”

**Senator James Eastland, May 27, 1954**

“The southern institution of racial segregation or racial separation was the correct, self-evident truth which arose from the chaos and confusion of the Reconstruction period. Separation promotes racial harmony. It permits each race to follow its own pursuits, and its own civilization. Segregation is not discrimination. Segregation is not a badge of racial inferiority, and that it is not is recognized by both races in the southern states. In fact, segregation is desired and supported by the vast majority of the members of both races in the South, who dwell side by side under harmonious conditions.

“The negro has made a great contribution to the South. We take pride in the constant advance he has made. It is where social questions are involved that southern people draw the line. It is these social institutions with which southern people, in my judgment, will not permit the Supreme Court to tamper.... Let me make this clear, Mr. President: There is no racial hatred in the South. The Negro race is not an oppressed race.”

**Governor Ross Barnett speaking about the Civil Rights Act (which was not passed until 1964), July 12, 1963**

“The passage of this legislation will mean the complete end of constitutional government in this country and result in racial violence of unimaginable scope.”
Epilogue: The Struggle Continues

The Johnson administration’s compromise failed to satisfy either of the delegations from Mississippi. Most of the white Mississippians refused to pledge their loyalty to the Democratic Party and Lyndon Johnson. All but three walked out immediately, and many left Atlantic City in protest. In the years after the convention, many southern white Democrats would leave the party to join the Republicans, the political party they had opposed since Reconstruction. In the presidential election that year, Barry Goldwater received less than 40 percent of the vote nationally, but in Mississippi he won 87 percent of votes cast.

Against the advice of many national civil rights leaders, the MFDP also rejected the compromise.

“The whole issue around the compromise for us, and for me, was that it was some kind of political ploy that they understood, but for us, for Mississippi, it was what was right and what was wrong. It was we who had been done wrong. Our rights had been taken away, and you just couldn’t issue some two seats at large to correct that. And it was a moral situation that had to be righted.”

—Unita Blackwell, SNCC activist

The 1964 Democratic National Convention was a turning point for the movement in Mississippi. For years, black Mississippians had been asking the federal government to use its power to enforce voting rights, protect civil rights workers, and end racial violence. For some activists, the Democratic Party’s unwillingness to seat their delegation shattered their hopes that politicians in Washington could be counted on to support the push for justice and equality.

“Never again were we lulled into believing that our task was exposing injustices so that the ‘good’ people of America could eliminate them. We left Atlantic City with the knowledge that the movement had turned into something else. After Atlantic City, our struggle was not for civil rights, but for liberation.”

—Cleveland Sellers, SNCC activist

The disagreement over whether to accept the compromise reflected larger disagreements about the goals and tactics of the civil rights movement. These disagreements would divide the movement in Mississippi and around the country in the years to come.

What happened in Mississippi after the convention?

Following the 1964 convention, many key community organizers in the Mississippi movement began to step back from their work. People like Bob Moses, who had given years of their lives to the movement, took less active roles or left Mississippi altogether. This drained the movement of valuable experience and energy.

The political differences that had emerged at the convention further divided COFO’s different member organizations. These factors led to the collapse of COFO in 1965.

Nevertheless, the struggle for racial justice in Mississippi continued. Civil rights groups organized voter registration drives, boycotts, and marches in communities throughout the state. The Mississippi movement became one of the strongest and most comprehensive of any state in the South. By the end of the decade its accomplishments were clear to see. African Americans won the right to participate in electoral politics, and in 1968, more than 250,000 black Mississippians registered to vote.

When an all-white Mississippi delegation asked to represent Mississippi at the 1968 Democratic Convention, the Democratic Party refused this time. Instead they seated an alternate and integrated delegation that included...
The War on Poverty

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson began an effort to alleviate poverty in the United States. As part of the “War on Poverty,” Johnson started many government programs that provided employment and economic assistance to poor people. Many of the War on Poverty programs had a positive impact on poor black communities throughout the country. Some of them—including Head Start, VISTA, and the food stamp program—are still in operation today. Funding for Johnson’s poverty programs began to decline as the U.S. government increased its military spending during the Vietnam War.

Fannie Lou Hamer, Aaron Henry, and others who had their hopes dashed in 1964.

The movement did away with legal segregation—the defining feature of the Jim Crow era. In 1969, after a Supreme Court order, Mississippi’s schools finally integrated. The Mississippi civil rights struggle also brought an end to most of the violence and terror that pervaded everyday life for African Americans under Jim Crow, though civil rights activists continued to face white hostility when they pushed for change.

The Voting Rights Act

Much of the black activism of the 1950s and early 1960s focused on integration and voting rights. After the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which integrated public spaces, activists and sympathetic politicians turned their attention to legislation that would ensure African Americans’ right to vote. These efforts came to a peak in 1965 following the Selma to Montgomery civil rights marches in Alabama.

In 1963, local African Americans and SNCC activists had begun working on voter registration in Selma, Alabama. In 1965, a protestor was shot by a white policeman and movement leaders called for a march to the state capital of Montgomery to demand justice. On their first attempt, the marchers were attacked by local police, forcing them to turn back. The violence drew more people to the cause and two weeks later eight thousand marchers set out for Montgomery. They marched for four days, finally reaching the capital building where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered a speech.

The Selma to Montgomery marches had a strong impact on public opinion. People around the country, including President Johnson, were moved by the images of police violence. President Johnson presented the first version of the Voting Rights Act to Congress two nights after the first march attempt. The Voting Rights Act was signed into law on August 6, 1965. It outlawed the discriminatory voting practices that had been practiced in the South since Reconstruction. The Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act were two
key pieces of federal law to emerge from the civil rights movement. They were an assertion of the federal government’s supremacy over state and local law in protecting the rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.

**How did the civil rights movement change in the late 1960s?**

By the end of the 1960s, activists across the country understood that voting rights and integration were not enough to achieve justice and equality. The movement began to focus more on economic justice. National civil rights leaders, like Bayard Rustin, began to argue that integration did not matter if African Americans remained poor and unemployed.

“What is the point in earning access to public accommodations for those who lack the money to use them… I fail to see how the movement can be victorious in the absence of radical programs for full employment, abolition of slums, the reconstitution of our educational system.”

—Bayard Rustin, 1965

Before his assassination in 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. began the “Poor People’s Campaign” to end poverty and homelessness. He called for an economic bill of rights that would address the lack of affordable housing and income inequality issues.

“There are forty million poor people here, and one day we must ask the question, ‘Why are there forty million poor people in America?’ And when you begin to ask that question, you are raising a question about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth…. We are called upon to help the discouraged
beggar in life’s marketplace. But one day we must come to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.”  
—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., August 1967

What was the black power movement?

Some activists began to question whether integration should even be a goal of the movement. They supported black self-determination and separation from white society. No longer willing to rely on authorities for political support or protection, they argued that African Americans should develop their own political institutions.

In 1966, James Meredith (the man who had integrated the University of Mississippi in 1961) began a solo march from Memphis, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi to protest racism. He was shot and injured by a white gunman. Civil rights leaders from around the country came to Mississippi to continue the march. In a speech to these leaders in Greenwood, Mississippi, SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael declared that African Americans needed “black power.”

“We have to organize ourselves to speak from a position of strength and stop begging people to look kindly upon us. We are going to build a movement in this country based on the color of our skins that is going to free us from our oppressors and we have to do that ourselves.... We have to organize ourselves to speak for each other. That’s ‘black power.’ We have to move to control the economics and politics of our community...”
—Stokely Carmichael, July 28, 1966

The slogan “black power” became a rallying call in the late 1960s, and inspired new organizations like the Black Panther Party. Black power activists felt that if African Americans wanted to achieve freedom and racial equality, they needed to stop depending on the established political system, which was controlled largely by whites. Many African Americans felt that the phrase “black power” symbolized the strength and solidarity of the civil rights movement that had been building for generations. In practice, some organizations took black power to mean a shift in their leadership and activism to African American members only.

For others, like the Black Panthers, black power involved moving away from nonviolent direct action. Black Panther activists argued that violence was necessary in certain situations when fighting against white supremacy and defending their communities. In particular, the Black Panthers took issue with police brutality in black communities. The Black Panthers also started programs that provided services, like free breakfast and medical care, to poor people in the inner cities.

The concept of black power divided the civil rights movement. Some civil rights leaders criticized black power activists for being too confrontational. White liberal groups stopped funding organizations like SNCC that embraced black power.

Why were some of the gains of the movement rolled back in the decades that followed?

The goals of the civil rights movement had always been broad. Civil rights activists in SNCC and other organizations were not just fighting for legal rights, but political power, social equality, and economic opportunity. After the 1960s, some politicians began to argue that the movement had been nothing more than a legal fight to create a color-blind society. They argued that the movement had succeeded in passing laws for equality, and that civil rights issues were no longer relevant.

From the 1970s onwards, many of the programs developed during the 1960s to address problems of economic injustice—including expanded social services and programs to counter racism and discrimination in education and hiring practices—were diminished.
Civil Rights Today

The mass civil rights movement challenged the racism that prevented African Americans from gaining access to politics, education, and good jobs throughout the United States. It made it possible for more black people to join the middle class. African Americans began attending college and finding employment in the public and the private sectors at much higher rates. Today, African Americans occupy positions of power throughout society—from corporate boardrooms, to prestigious universities, to the oval office. In 2009, Barack Obama became the first black president of the United States.

The movement also inspired legislation that helps prevent civil rights abuses to this day. Although many activists thought them insufficient at the time, the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act created federal legal standards that protect the Constitutional rights of all citizens.

What civil rights challenges remain?

Despite many meaningful victories, the mass civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s did not end racism or racial inequality in the United States. Many of the injustices and inequalities that African Americans fought to overcome during the early 1960s remain today. Although new opportunities exist for African Americans, 27 percent of black people in the United States live in poverty. In Mississippi, 45 percent of black families continue to live under the poverty line as of 2010.

The legacies of Jim Crow and other forms of historical discrimination remain. For example, although the movement eliminated legal segregation throughout the country, neighborhoods and schools remain largely segregated. School systems with majority black populations are often underfunded.

African Americans are also disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system. One in three black males in the United States will go to prison in their lifetimes, compared to just one in every seventeen white males. In
Mississippi, 75 percent of state prisoners are black. These disparities are caused by a variety of factors including high rates of crime in poor communities and racial discrimination in the criminal justice system. Studies have shown that people of color are far more likely to be stopped by the police than whites.

While the 1965 Voting Rights Act officially banned voter discrimination, many African Americans continue to have difficulty exercising their right to vote. For example, new voter identification laws passed in 2011 in a number of states make it impossible for people without a photo ID to vote. African Americans are more than twice as likely as whites to lack photo ID. While defenders of these laws portray them as a way to protect the integrity of the electoral process, critics see them as similar to the various methods used during the Jim Crow era to reduce the political power of African Americans and other minorities.

The regular lynchings of the Jim Crow period have long since ended, but racism and racial violence have not. People of color in the United States continue to face discrimination and sometimes violence because of their race.

**Conclusion**

The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s transformed the United States, wrenching it away from the Jim Crow era and challenging the systemic racism that denied African Americans their Constitutional rights. And while national figures like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks are celebrated for their important roles, the foundation of the civil rights movement was the local activism and organizing that took place in communities throughout the country.

In the South, particularly in Mississippi, local civil rights activism often meant working every day for years in a dangerous campaign to register voters. It meant walking door to door and convincing people that if they were willing to take a stand then justice was possible. It meant participating in direct action protests against racial hatred, oppression, and inequality.

Thousands of individuals—sharecroppers, laborers, domestic workers—risked their safety, jobs, and lives to participate in the civil rights movement. Young people led canvassing drives and joined older activists at demonstrations, and boycotts to end racial injustices.

In these pages you have read about some of the people who rose to the challenge of organizing their communities in Mississippi in this struggle. All of these stories (and there are many others) remind us that the civil rights movement was not simply a national movement led by a few, it was a series of local movements for racial justice with many participants and leaders. These stories remind us of the collective power of individuals to change society and affect the course of history.

"The strength of the civil rights movement was in the fact that there were so many local people involved. We had marvelous high-profile national spokespersons, but the day-to-day work, the hanging in there was done by the local people.... Local people made the difference."

—Victoria Gray Adams, SNCC activist
Supplementary Resources

Books


Web


The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute: Student Resources/Study Guides <http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/resources/categories/C91/> Provides an encyclopedia of key figures and terms from the civil rights movement. Also provides letters, sermons, and speeches written by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum: Integrating Ole Miss <http://microsites.jfklibrary.org/olemiss/home/> Provides information and primary source documents related to the admission of James Meredith to the University of Mississippi in 1962.

The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries: Civil Rights in Mississippi Digital Archive <http://digilib.usm.edu/crmda.php> Provides access to historical manuscripts, photographs, and oral histories from the civil rights movement in Mississippi.

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Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi

*Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi* traces the history of the black freedom struggle from Reconstruction through the 1960s. Readings and activities focus on the grass-roots movement to achieve civil rights for African Americans.

*Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi* is part of a continuing series on current and historical international issues published by the Choices Education Program at Brown University. Choices materials place special emphasis on the importance of educating students in their participatory role as citizens.

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TEACHER RESOURCE BOOK
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Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi is part of a continuing series on international public policy issues. New units are published each academic year and all units are updated regularly.

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The Choices Approach to Historical Turning Points

Choices curricula are designed to make complex international issues understandable and meaningful for students. Using a student-centered approach, Choices units develop critical thinking and an understanding of the significance of history in our lives today—essential ingredients of responsible citizenship.

Teachers say the collaboration and interaction in Choices units are highly motivating for students. Studies consistently demonstrate that students of all abilities learn best when they are actively engaged with the material. Cooperative learning invites students to take pride in their own contributions and in the group product, enhancing students’ confidence as learners. Research demonstrates that students using the Choices approach learn the factual information presented as well as or better than those using a lecture-discussion format. Choices units offer students with diverse abilities and learning styles the opportunity to contribute, collaborate, and achieve.

Choices units on historical turning points include student readings, primary sources, suggested lesson plans, resources for structuring cooperative learning, role plays, and simulations. Students are challenged to:

- understand historical context
- analyze and evaluate multiple perspectives at a turning point in history
- analyze primary sources that provide a grounded understanding of the moment
- understand the internal logic of a viewpoint
- identify the conflicting values represented by different points of view
- develop and articulate original viewpoints
- recognize relationships between history and current issues
- communicate in written and oral presentations
- collaborate with peers

Choices curricula offer teachers a flexible resource for covering course material while actively engaging students and developing skills in critical thinking, persuasive writing, and informed citizenship. The instructional activities that are central to Choices units can be valuable components in any teacher’s repertoire of effective teaching strategies.

Historical Understanding

Each Choices curriculum resource provides students with extensive information about an historical issue. Choices units help students to understand that historical events often involved competing and highly contested views. The Choices approach emphasizes that historical outcomes were hardly inevitable. This approach helps students to develop a more sophisticated understanding of history.

Each Choices unit presents the range of views that were considered at a turning point in history. Students understand and analyze these views through a role-play activity. The activity demands analysis and evaluation of the conflicting values, interests, and priorities.

The final reading in a Choices historical unit presents the outcome of the turning point and reviews subsequent events. The final lesson encourages students to make connections between past and present.
Note to Teachers

The civil rights movement was one of the most pivotal events in U.S. history. Today we think of the key leaders, mass demonstrations, and watershed legislation that have become synonymous with this movement. Often forgotten are the everyday people who were on the frontlines of the fight for justice and equality, working for change in their home communities. Many historians believe that we should think of the civil rights movement not as one national movement, but as a collection of local movements that worked for racial justice in towns and cities across the country.

*Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi* explores the history of the civil rights movement at a local level. Mississippi was one of the most racially divided states in the South. It symbolized the oppression and violence of white supremacy, and the strong black movement that rose up in response.

Students consider the historical roots of racial inequality and discrimination by exploring the end of slavery, Reconstruction, and the rise of Jim Crow. They then examine the movement that developed in Mississippi, and the ways in which national and local forces interacted at the grass-roots level. A central activity helps students recreate the 1964 Democratic National Convention, at which African American delegates from the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party challenged the legitimacy of the all-white Mississippi Democratic Party. The reading concludes with an examination of the legacies of the civil rights movement and the challenges to equality that exist today.

**Suggested Five-Day Lesson Plan:** The Teacher Resource Book accompanying *Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi* contains a day-by-day lesson plan and student activities that use primary source documents and help build critical-thinking skills.

**Note:** This period in U.S. history was marked by oppression and violence and has had lasting repercussions for many groups. It is important to be sensitive to the students in your class and the ways in which this history might be a difficult topic. Being prepared to deal with this complex and fraught topic can help ensure that discussion and activities are enriching and rewarding. See “Teaching about Racial Issues” on page TRB-2 for more suggestions.

- **Alternative Study Guides:** Each section of reading is accompanied by two study guides. The standard study guide helps students gather the information in the readings in preparation for analysis and synthesis in class. It also lists key terms that students will encounter in the reading. The advanced study guide requires that students analyze and synthesize material prior to class activities.

- **Vocabulary and Concepts:** The reading addresses subjects that are complex. To help your students get the most out of the text, you may want to review with them “Key Terms” on page TRB-65 before they begin. An “Issues Toolbox” on TRB-66 provides additional information on the social and political context of the civil rights movement.

- **Assessment:** A documents-based exercise (TRB 60-64) is provided to help teachers assess students’ comprehension, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of relevant sources. The assessment is modeled closely on one used by the International Baccalaureate Program. The assessment could also be used as a lesson.

- **Additional Resources:** More resources, including powerpoint maps, original documents, additional lessons, and videos are available for download at <www.choices.edu/civilrightsmaterials>.

The lesson plans offered here are provided as a guide. Many teachers choose to devote additional time to certain activities. We hope that these suggestions help you tailor the unit to fit the needs of your classroom.
Teaching about Racial Issues

*Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi* recounts some of the most disturbing elements of U.S. history. Although much of what is described in these pages happened fifty years ago, race and the history of relations between white and black people in the United States remains a charged and challenging topic. Tackling this challenge can bring the reward of new understanding of the past as well the present for students. But there is also the risk of inciting denial, anger, distress, grief, and blame. The process of exploring the unequal power dynamics of racism can lead students to lash out in anger or to suffer in silence.

We encourage teachers to consider carefully the dynamics of their classrooms as they prepare to teach these materials. For example, students of different races may experience the text differently. Discussions can take unexpected turns. Students may unwittingly offend each other. Teachers need to be aware of these possibilities and act to make their classrooms a safe place for all students.

There are many excellent resources available online or from colleagues to help guide teaching about these topics. While we cannot offer a formula for dealing with all situations, being prepared will go a long way to helping students discover this rich and important history.

Because of these concerns, we chose to do two things when writing these materials:

1) We constructed the role-play activity so that students do not advocate for any position. The positions of participants at the Democratic National Convention of 1964 include the racist views of white Mississippi Democrats. Instead of asking student to step into the shoes of convention participants and recreate these views, the activity asks them to take on the role of historians analyzing documents and to describe the different perspectives.

2) After careful consideration, we chose not to use primary sources that include the word “nigger.” We believe that historical accuracy is important and do not want to diminish the cruelty that characterized this era of U.S. history. But we also recognize that this word continues to have power today, and can be hurtful no matter what the context. We have considered many arguments around this issue, including that its omission sanitizes the history and that historical inquiry provides an opportunity to explain the context of the word and all of its power. Those arguments are compelling, but unanswerable questions remain about how the word is wielded, by whom, and, most importantly, how it is heard.

You may wish to preview websites or other resources on the civil rights movement that we have recommended before sharing with your students, as the word is used in several of them.

For teachers who want to discuss this word’s usage with their students, there are many good suggestions online for how to teach about this topic, including <http://www.tolerance.org/n-word-straight-talk>.
Integrating this Unit into Your Curriculum

Materials produced by the Choices Education Program are designed to be integrated into a variety of social studies courses. Below are a few ideas about where *Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi* might fit into your curriculum.

**U.S. History:** The civil rights movement was a pivotal moment for the United States. Despite the Declaration of Independence’s claim that “all men are created equal,” for more than a century and a half the United States did not uphold the values it was founded upon. Even after the end of slavery in 1865, systematic discrimination and violence kept African Americans from participating as full citizens in U.S. society. The mass movement for civil rights mobilized people across the nation to hold the government to task for its unkept promises. The curriculum tells this story as a social history, reflecting a new historiography that explores the ways in which ordinary people led the fight for equal rights and justice.

*Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi* also highlights the contested nature of this movement in ways that have real consequences for how we understand the United States today. To some, the civil rights movement was a struggle for equality under the law and, as such, has achieved its aims. To many others, it was one chapter in a much longer story of black oppression and the fight for freedom in the Americas—a struggle that continues to this day.

**Government/Political Science:** The civil rights movement forced the United States to recognize that it was not a true democracy. It was a period in which the rights of citizenship were extended to a large portion of the population that had long been excluded. Disagreements over the role of government riddled the civil rights era, raising important questions about the ability of the law to end oppression and discrimination. Many of the questions raised by the civil rights movement are still relevant today: What rights are people due in a democracy? What is the government responsible for providing? What are the roles of the local, state, and federal governments? Is equality under the law all that should be guaranteed to U.S. citizens? What about questions of economic equality and justice?

**Sociology:** The civil rights movement was not simply a movement of key leaders and national marches. Much of the work of this movement was done at the local level, as everyday people sought to improve conditions in their home communities. This curriculum helps students explore the ways in which social movements germinate and develop on a local scale.

*Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi* can also be used as a springboard for explorations of current race relations in the United States. It gives students a good understanding of the historical underpinnings of racial inequality, drawing clear connections between inequalities of the past and inequalities that exist today.
This unit covers a range of issues over a long period of time. Your students may find the readings complex. It might also be difficult for them to synthesize such a large amount of information. The following are suggestions to help your students better understand the readings.

**Pre-reading strategies:** Help students to prepare for the reading.

1. Be sure that students understand the purpose for their reading the text. Will you have a debate later and they need to know the information to formulate arguments? Will students communicate with students in other classrooms? Will they create a class podcast or video?

2. Use the questions in the text to introduce students to the topic. Ask them to scan the reading for major headings, images, and questions so they can gain familiarity with the structure and organization of the text.

3. Preview the vocabulary and key concepts listed on each study guide and in the back of the TRB with students. The study guide asks students to identify key terms from the reading. Establish a system to help students find definitions for these key terms and others that they do not know.

4. Since studies show that most students are visual learners, use a visual introduction, such as photographs or a short film clip to orient your students.

5. You might create a Know/Want to Know/Learned (K-W-L) worksheet for students to record what they already know about the civil rights movement and what they want to know. As they read they can fill out the “learned” section of the worksheet. Alternatively, brainstorm their current knowledge and then create visual maps in which students link the concepts and ideas they have about the topic.

**Split up readings into smaller chunks:** Assign students readings over a longer period of time or divide readings among groups of students.

**Graphic organizers:** You may also wish to use graphic organizers to help your students better understand the information that they read. These organizers are located on TRB-9 and TRB-23. A graphic organizer for the perspectives is provided on TRB-41. Students can complete them in class in groups or as part of their homework, or you can use them as reading checks or quizzes.
Data Analysis: Separate, but Equal?
Measuring Plessy v. Ferguson in Mississippi

Objectives:
Students will: Analyze, calculate, and interpret data.
Consider the implications and outcome of the Supreme Court’s decision in Plessy v. Ferguson in Mississippi.
Work collaboratively with classmates.

Required Reading:
Before beginning the lesson, students should have read the Introduction and Part I of the student text and completed “Study Guide—Introduction and Part I” (TRB 6-7) or “Advanced Study Guide—Introduction and Part I” (TRB-8).

Scholars Online:
Short, free videos that you may find useful in this lesson are available at <http://www.choices.edu/resources/scholars_cr_lesson.php>.

Handouts:
“Analyzing Data: Comparing Education Resources for Blacks and Whites in Mississippi” (TRB 10-11) for each group

Note:
Students may find a calculator, colored pencils for graphing, and copies of the previous night’s reading helpful.

In the Classroom:
1. Focus Question—Put the following question on the board: “What is equality?” Have the class brainstorm; record their ideas. Ask the class to recall the Supreme Court’s decision in Plessy v. Ferguson. What was its central premise?
2. Working in Groups—Divide the class into groups of 3-4 students and distribute the handout to each group. Groups should work through and discuss the questions pertaining to each set of data. Have one member of each group record their group’s responses on the worksheet.

For each chart, students are asked to perform a simple calculation and then interpret the result. The calculations are basic, but some students might need coaching. Emphasize to students that the graph they are making need not be overly precise. Rather it should roughly indicate trends. Emphasize the importance of labeling the graph clearly.

3. Sharing Conclusions and Discussion—Ask groups to share their findings and compare answers with the other groups. Were educational opportunities in Mississippi equal for black and white students? Was Mississippi meeting the standard of Plessy v. Ferguson—“separate, but equal”? Do students feel like they have enough data and information to answer the questions?

Why would Mississippi spend less on education for blacks than whites? Ask students to consider where they might get data and information to answer this question.

What are the short and long-term impacts of underfunding education? Ask students to list any possible effects that come to mind. In addition to funding, are there other factors that students think influenced African Americans’ access to quality education? For example, if a child of sharecroppers had to help his or her parents in the fields, how would this influence his or her ability to attend school?

Homework:
Students should read Part II of the student text and complete “Study Guide—Part II” (TRB 20-21) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part II” (TRB-22).
Study Guide—Introduction and Part I

Vocabulary: Be sure that you understand these key terms from the Introduction and Part I of your reading. Circle ones that you do not know.

- racism
- colonial economy
- emancipation
- hierarchy
- social status
- disenfranchisement
- white supremacy
- literacy
- segregation
- racial inequality
- vagrancy
- racial etiquette
- urban
- skilled jobs
- integration
- accommodationists
- gradualists
- migrants
- solidarity
- equitable

Questions:

1. List three aims of the civil rights movement in Mississippi.
   a.
   b.
   c.

2. What did the Radical Republicans believe about African Americans in the South?

3. a. What was the purpose of the Fourteenth Amendment?
   b. What was the purpose of the Fifteenth Amendment?

4. What was Reconstruction?

5. List two reasons why white southerners supported white supremacy.
   a.
   b.
6. What was the purpose of Jim Crow laws?

7. What was the principle idea of the Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson*?

8. Use the chart below to list the three ways that black Mississippians responded to the realities of Jim Crow and give examples of each strategy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. What was a major accomplishment of W.E.B. Du Bois?

10. Why was it particularly difficult for black Mississippians to resist Jim Crow?
Advanced Study Guide—Introduction and Part I

1. What is meant by the phrase “black freedom struggle”?

2. How did the status of African Americans in the South change during and after Reconstruction?

3. What tactics did white southerners use to reestablish white supremacy in the South after Reconstruction?

4. What were the causes and consequences of the Great Migration?

5. What were the philosophical differences between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois?
Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi

Graphic Organizer

Post-Civil War South

Jim Crow Mississippi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What did Jim Crow laws do?</th>
<th>How were Jim Crow laws enforced?</th>
<th>How was life for African Americans in rural areas?</th>
<th>How was life for African Americans in cities?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Gains for African Americans

Things that remained the same

White response

African American Hopes

White landowners:

Poor whites:

Instructions: Use the information in Part I of your reading to fill in the boxes.

Reconstruction

Living With Jim Crow

Strategy

Survival

Flight

Resistance

What did this entail?

Give an example

Name: ____________________________________________
Analyzing Data: Comparing Education Resources for Blacks and Whites in Mississippi

*Instructions:* With your group, review each chart and answer the questions that follow. Be prepared to share your findings with the rest of the class.

**Chart 1**

Chart 1 shows the investment in school property per pupil in Mississippi.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1913-1914</td>
<td>$8.00</td>
<td>$1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-1922</td>
<td>$18.00</td>
<td>$4.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-1936</td>
<td>$147.00</td>
<td>$11.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949-1950</td>
<td>$175.00</td>
<td>$11.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. a. Calculate the difference between investment in school property per black pupil and per white pupil for each school year. (Hint: subtract black pupil amount from white pupil amount.) Write your answers in the chart above.

b. Which school year had the greatest difference in funding for school property? What is the difference?

**Chart 2**

Chart 2 shows Mississippi school expenditures for each pupil by race.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Black Funding as a Percentage of White Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1913-1914</td>
<td>$8.20</td>
<td>$1.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929-1930</td>
<td>$31.33</td>
<td>$5.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-1941</td>
<td>$38.96</td>
<td>$4.97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949-1950</td>
<td>$122.93</td>
<td>$32.55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. a. Calculate the percentage of expenditures a black pupil received compared to a white pupil for each school year. (Hint: divide black per pupil expenditure by white per pupil expenditure and multiply by 100.) Write your answers in the chart above.

b. In which years did the percentage of funding for black pupils come the closest to funding for white pupils?
Chart 3

Chart 3 shows Mississippi school teacher salaries by race. Salaries earned by black teachers were often less than they could earn as cooks or handymen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1885-1886</td>
<td>$125</td>
<td>$110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890-1891</td>
<td>$130</td>
<td>$90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912-1913</td>
<td>$323</td>
<td>$173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939-1940</td>
<td>$750</td>
<td>$237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945-1946</td>
<td>$1,211</td>
<td>$426</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. a. Create line graphs of the salaries for white teachers and for black teachers. Focus on general trends, not precisely graphing the numbers. Be sure to label your graph.
   b. What does the changing distance between the two lines show?

Chart 4

Chart 4 shows black and white illiteracy rates in Mississippi. Illiteracy means unable to read or write.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White Fraction</th>
<th>Black Fraction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Sometimes it is helpful to express statistics in different ways. For example, in 1900, 49.1% of blacks in Mississippi were illiterate. Another powerful way to express this statistic is to say that in 1900, nearly one out of two blacks in Mississippi were illiterate. You can arrive at this calculation by making the percentage into a fraction (see example) and then reducing as much as possible. Sometimes you might need to round off the percentage into a number easily divisible into 100. For example, for the black illiteracy rate in 1900, you can round off 49.1 to 50.

   a. Write the fractions for each year in the space provided.
   b. Express the statistic for white illiteracy in 1910 in a different way. In 1910, about one in________ whites in Mississippi were illiterate.
   c. Express the statistic for black illiteracy in 1930 in a different way. In 1930, about one in_______ blacks in Mississippi were illiterate.

The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells

Objectives:

Students will: Explore the work of an early civil rights activist.

Understand the role of violent white supremacy in the history of the United States.

Required Reading:

Students should have read Part I of the student text and completed “Study Guide—Introduction and Part I” (TRB 6-7) or the “Advanced Study Guide—Introduction and Part I” (TRB-8).

Handouts:

“Biography of Ida B. Wells” (TRB-13)

“The Writings of Ida B. Wells” (TRB 14-17)

In the Classroom:

1. Introduction—Ask students to recall the previous night’s reading. What was white supremacy? How did some whites use violence to control Southern society? Distribute “Biography of Ida B. Wells” and ask students to read it individually, or read it aloud together as a class. Discuss the biography if necessary.

2. Working in Groups—Divide the class into groups of three to four students. Give each student a copy of “The Writings of Ida B. Wells.” Instruct students to read the excerpts and discuss the questions together. Each student should record responses to the questions.

Note: Some of the language in the excerpts is challenging. Students may find it useful to underline sections or phrases that they do not understand, and then address these as a class.

3. Class Discussion—Review the excerpts and ask students to share their responses to the questions. What were the dominant white views about lynching at the time? What were Wells’s messages to her readers? What strategies did she use to convince readers of the injustice of lynching and the need for action?

Who do students think Wells was hoping to reach with her writing? Why might Wells have chosen to address an audience beyond the regions where lynching occurred? How would increasing global awareness about lynching influence the U.S. reputation in the world (for example, as a leader in democracy)?

Although it may be difficult or upsetting for students to consider lynching as an aspect of U.S. history, ask students to contemplate what it would have been like to live as an African American with the threat of violence or lynching. How might this have affected people’s daily lives? What challenges did African Americans face in trying to resist this system?

Read the following statement to the class:

“The men and women in the South who disapprove of lynching and remain silent on the perpetration of such outrages, are...accomplices, accessories before and after the fact, equally guilty with the actual law-breakers...”

—Ida B. Wells, Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in all its Phases, 1892

What does this statement mean? Do students agree with this statement? Why or why not? Why do students think that members of society tolerated lynching? What difficulties would a white person wishing to challenge white supremacy face?

Ida B. Wells believed that documenting lynching and disseminating accurate information was a necessary step in creating change. Although she and other anti-lynching activists increased awareness about lynching, the practice continued for decades. Do students believe that journalism is an effective means of activism? Can students think of any current examples of writing or journalism that has raised awareness about injustice?

Homework:

Students should read Part II in the student text and complete “Study Guide—Part II” (TRB 20-21) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part II” (TRB-22).
Biography of Ida B. Wells

Ida B. Wells was an African American journalist and activist. She worked to promote equal rights and justice for African Americans and women, and was an early leader in the campaign against lynching in the United States.

Wells was born in 1862 in Holly Springs, Mississippi to enslaved parents during the early years of the Civil War. As a young teacher in Tennessee, Wells refused to budge when a train conductor ordered her to move from the first-class seat she had purchased to a crowded train car designated for African Americans. After being removed from the train, she took legal action against the railroad company.

Wells frequently wrote about racial injustice, and became a co-owner, editor, and reporter for a newspaper in Memphis, Tennessee. In 1892, after several of her friends were lynched, she focused her writing on the topic. Lynching is the mob killing of someone for an alleged offense, without authorization by the law. Mobs killed victims by hanging, shooting, burning, or other means. Lynching was a problem that worsened throughout Wells’s lifetime—it increased in the wake of the Civil War and intensified after Reconstruction. In 1892, several men in Tennessee threatened to torture and kill her because of her work. She left the South, and continued writing and speaking internationally on the topic of lynching. Wells also contributed to the founding of the National Association for Colored Women (NACW) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Wells’s campaign challenged popular misperceptions about lynching, and advocated for equal treatment and protection for African Americans under the rule of law. By providing information about specific cases, Wells portrayed lynching as a brutal and oppressive tool that whites used to maintain power and authority.

In the preface to one of her pamphlets on lynching, Wells writes,

“This statement…is a contribution to truth, an array of facts, the perusal of which it is hoped will stimulate this great American Republic to demand that justice be done…. It is with no pleasure I have dipped my hands in the corruption here exposed. Somebody must show that the Afro-American race is more sinned against than sinning, and it seems to have fallen upon me to do so.”

—Ida B. Wells, Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in all its Phases, 1892
The Writings of Ida B. Wells

Instructions: Below are excerpts from Ida B. Wells’s work. Read the quotes carefully and complete the questions that follow. Be prepared to report back to the class. Note that section A is made up of quotations from white newspapers that Wells included in her publication. Sections B, C, and D are Wells’s original writing.

A. Southern White Newspapers

Wells’s work challenged popular beliefs about the causes and justifications for lynching. Below, she quotes two Southern newspaper articles that express widely held views about the need for lynching at that time. The “crimes” that lynching victims were accused of were often not things that we would consider crimes today. The accusations of more serious offenses, such as rape or murder, were often false.

From Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in all its Phases 1892

[The Memphis Daily Commercial, May 17] “Nothing but the most prompt, speedy and extreme punishment can hold in check the horrible and bestial propensities of the Negro race.... The generation of Negroes which have grown up since the war have lost in large measure the traditional and wholesome awe of the white race which kept the Negroes in subjection.... There is no longer a restraint upon the brute passion of the Negro. What is to be done? The crime of rape is always horrible, but [for] the Southern man there is nothing which so fills the soul with horror, loathing and fury as the outraged of a white woman by a Negro....”

[The Memphis Evening Scimitar, June 4] “Aside from the violation of white women by Negroes... the chief cause of trouble between the races in the South is the Negro’s lack of manners. In the state of slavery he learned politeness from association with white people, who took pains to teach him.”

Questions:

1. The second paragraph describes how whites “took pains to teach” enslaved people “manners” and “politeness.” How does this racist perspective differ from what you know about race relations and the effects of slavery?

2. According to the newspapers that Wells cites, what are two justifications for the lynching of African Americans?
B. Lynching Cases

Wells wrote detailed accounts of lynching that occurred throughout the country and challenged the widespread belief that lynching victims were men who had committed violent crimes. She documented many attacks targeting successful African Americans or those who attempted to participate politically in their communities. Wells also described cases of women and children being lynched.

Case 1
From Mob Rule in New Orleans 1900

“Feb. 22d, 1898, at Lake City, S.C., Postmaster Baker and his infant child were burned to death by a mob that had set fire to his house. Mr. Baker’s crime was that he had refused to give up the post office, to which he had been appointed by the National Government. The mob had tried to drive him away by persecution and intimidation. Finding that all else had failed, they went to his home in the dead of night and set fire to his house, and as the family rushed forth they were greeted by a volley of bullets. The father and baby were shot through the open door and...were burned to death. The remainder of the family, consisting of the wife and five children, escaped with their lives from the burning house, but all of them were shot, one of the number made a cripple for life.”

Case 2
From A Red Record 1895

“At Moberly, Mo., February 18th and at Fort Madison, S.C., June 2d, both in 1892, a record was made in the line of lynching which should certainly appeal to every humanitarian who has any regard for the sacredness of human life. John Hughes, of Moberly, and Isaac Lincoln, of Fort Madison, and Will Lewis in Tullahoma, Tenn., suffered death for no more serious charge than that they ‘were saucy to white people.’ In the days of slavery it was held to be a very serious matter for a colored person to fail to yield the sidewalk at the demand of a white person, and it will not be surprising to find some evidence of this intolerance existing in the days of freedom. But the most that could be expected as a penalty for acting or speaking saucily to a white person would be a slight physical chastisement to make the Negro ‘know his place’ or an arrest and fine.... After being charged with their offense and apprehended, [the men] were taken by a mob and lynched. The civil authorities...did not feel it their duty to make any investigation after the Negroes were killed.”

Questions:
1. According to Wells, why were the individuals in Cases 1 and 2 lynched?
   Case 1:

   Case 2:

2. How do these cases provide a different perspective on lynching than the newspaper excerpts that Wells cites in Part A?
C. Message to African Americans

Although any challenge to white violence was incredibly dangerous, Wells called upon African Americans to use a variety of methods to stop lynching.

From Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in all its Phases 1892

“To Northern capital and Afro-American labor the South owes its rehabilitation. If labor is withdrawn capital will not remain. The Afro-American is thus the backbone of the South.... The Afro Americans of Memphis denounced the lynching of three of their best citizens, and urged and waited for the authorities to act in the matter and bring the lynchers to justice. No attempt was made to do so, and the black men left the city by thousands, bringing about great stagnation in every branch of business. Those who remained so injured business of the street car company by staying off the cars.”

From Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in all its Phases 1892

“Of the many inhuman outrages of this present year, the only case where the proposed lynching did not occur, was where the men armed themselves in Jacksonville, Fla., and Paducah, Ky., and prevented it. The only times an Afro-American who was assaulted got away has been when he had a gun and used it in self-defense. The lesson this teaches and which every Afro American should ponder well, is that a Winchester rifle should have a place of honor in every black home, and it should be used for the protection which the law refuses to give.... The more the Afro-American yields and cringes and begs...the more he is insulted, outraged, and lynched.”

Questions:

1. Based on the excerpt and Part I of the reading, why did Wells describe African Americans as “the backbone of the South”?

2. According to Wells, how can African Americans use their economic power to put an end to lynching?

3. Why does Wells argue that African Americans should defend themselves with force?
D. Appeal to a Broader Audience

Wells hoped to reach readers throughout the United States and around the world with her writing. She believed that a U.S. failure to resolve the issue of lynching would be a failure of the nation.

*From A Red Record 1895*

“The Negro does not claim that all of the one thousand black men, women and children who have been hanged, shot and burned alive during the past ten years, were innocent of the charges made against them.... But we do insist that the punishment is not the same for both classes of criminals. In lynching, opportunity is not given to the Negro to defend himself against the unsupported accusations of white men and women. The word of the accuser is held to be true and the excited bloodthirsty mob demands that the rule of law be reversed and instead of proving the accused to be guilty, the victim of their hate and revenge must prove himself innocent. No evidence he can offer will satisfy the mob.”

*From A Red Record 1895*

“‘Equality before the law,’ must become a fact as well as a theory before America is truly the ‘land of the free and home of the brave.’... It is the white man’s civilization and the white man’s government which are on trial. This crusade will determine whether that civilization can maintain itself by itself, or whether anarchy shall prevail; whether this Nation shall write itself down a success at self government, or in deepest humiliation admit its failure complete.”

*From A Red Record 1895*

“[W]e demand a fair trial by law for those accused of crime, and punishment by law after honest conviction.... Surely the humanitarian spirit of this country which reaches out to denounce the treatment of the Russian Jews, the Armenian Christians, the laboring poor of Europe...will no longer refuse to lift its voice on this subject.... Can you remain silent and inactive when such things are being done in our own community and country? Is your duty to humanity in the United States less binding?”

Questions:

1. Wells writes, “‘Equality before the law,’ must become a fact as well as a theory before America is truly the ‘land of the free and home of the brave.’” According to her writing and last night’s reading, in what ways were African Americans *unequal* before the law during this time period?

2. What does Wells believe African Americans are entitled to? (See the third excerpt.)

3. According to Wells, why should readers care about the issue of lynching? (Each excerpt provides a different reason.)
Women's Experiences in SNCC

Objectives:
Students will: Use primary sources to understand the experiences of SNCC organizers in Mississippi.
Assess the point of view of sources and the value of personal stories for understanding history.

Required Reading:
Students should have read Part II of the reading and completed “Study Guide—Part II” (TRB 20-21) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part II” (TRB-22).

Scholars Online:
Short, free videos that you may find useful in this lesson are available at <http://www.choices.edu/resources/scholars_cr_lesson.php>.

Handouts:
“Voices from SNCC Worksheet” (TRB-24)
“SNCC in Mississippi” (TRB 25-31)

Note:
Students may find different colored pencils helpful for marking the documents in this activity.

In the Classroom:
1. Focus Question—Write the question on the board: “Why do people decide that they are willing to die for a cause?” Have students brainstorm and record their answers on the board.

2. Group Work—Divide students into small groups and distribute the handouts. Tell students that “SNCC in Mississippi” contains excerpts from Hands on the Freedom Plow, Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC. The book, published in 2010, contains stories from fifty-two women about their experiences in SNCC. Women made up the majority of SNCC members.

The “Voices from SNCC Worksheet” provides space for students to analyze two sources. You may choose to have students read and consider more (or fewer) sources.

Tell students to read carefully the directions on the worksheet. The instructions ask students to mark difficult words or phrases, sentences that refer to events described in their reading, and 3-5 of the most important sentences in each document.

3. Analyzing Stories—Ask each group to consider the sources they read. What was the tone of each story? Was it angry? Proud? Fearful? What sort of information did the stories contain? Were there any themes that came up in more than one story?

Did students learn anything new about the civil rights movement in Mississippi? Does hearing from people who experienced these events change their perspectives on the civil rights movement in Mississippi? How? Did hearing female perspectives on civil rights activism have any impact on students? Why or why not?

For an additional perspective on the role of women in SNCC, you may wish to show students the following Scholars Online video: “What role did women play in SNCC?” by Judy Richardson, SNCC activist.

4. Understanding Point of View—Ask students to assess the point of view of the sources. Discuss how students might recognize the point of view of the writer—through language or selective use of facts, for instance. Can students identify particular points of view or opinions in the stories they read? What were they? How were the writers’ opinions shaped by the personal experiences they described? How can readers know if these personal stories present accurate information?

5. Debriefing—Revisit the question “Why do people decide that they are willing to die for a cause?” What fears were expressed in these stories? Why do students believe that these individuals chose to risk their lives?
Ask students to comment on the value of personal stories for historians. How would using these types of sources change the kind of history one might write about the civil rights movement? What are the benefits and drawbacks of using sources like these?

**Homework:**

Students should read “1964: The Atlantic City Democratic National Convention” and “Perspectives in Brief” in the student text.
Study Guide—Part II

Vocabulary: Be sure that you understand these key terms from Part II of your reading. Circle ones that you do not know.

activists
discrimination
social movement
community organizing
social status
boycott
integration

sit-in
tactic
direct action
Cold War
nonviolence
self-defense
convention

Questions:
1. How did World War II create new opportunities for African American activism?

2. a. Which national civil rights organization organized the legal work that led to Brown v. Board of Education?

   b. What court case did Brown v. Board of Education overturn?

3. Who was Emmett Till and why was he important?

4. List three ways that state governments in the South resisted integration.
   a.
   b.
   c.
5. What was Ella Baker’s philosophy about local leadership?

6. COFO, the Congress of Federated Organizations, united which three civil rights groups in Mississippi?

7. Who was the first black student admitted to the University of Mississippi?

8. Why did COFO debate whether to bring white students to Mississippi for the Freedom Summer project?

9. List three things that northern volunteers did in Mississippi during Freedom Summer.
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 

10. What was the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party?
Advanced Study Guide—Part II

1. Why did black resistance to Jim Crow become more successful after World War II?

2. Explain the philosophy of community organizing embraced by Ella Baker and SNCC.

3. Describe the relationship between the federal government and civil rights organizations in Mississippi.

4. Why did COFO decide to create the MFDP and challenge the 1964 Atlantic City Democratic National Convention? What did they hope to accomplish?
**The Movement in Mississippi**

*Instructions:* Use your reading to fill in the chart below. In the first column, explain in one sentence what this event was. Then describe the roles played by different actors. Do not fill in the shaded boxes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>What was this?</th>
<th>Role of non-Mississippi activists</th>
<th>Role of Mississippi activists</th>
<th>Response of white Mississippians</th>
<th>Response of the federal government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freedom Rides</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Meredith and the University of Mississippi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Leflore County Voter Registration</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Jackson Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freedom Vote</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Freedom Summer</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Name:** ____________________________________________
Voices from SNCC Worksheet

*Instructions:* These stories are excerpts from *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC*. Read the excerpts your teacher has assigned you and then complete the worksheet. As you read, use different colors to mark 1) words or phrases that you don’t understand; 2) 3-5 sentences that you think are most important in each; and 3) any sentence that refers to events described in your reading. Answer the questions below with your group. Be prepared to share your answers with your classmates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source A</th>
<th>Source B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who is the author of this story?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What experiences in the civil rights movement does the author describe?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the most interesting or powerful aspect of the story for you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From what point of view is the author speaking? What strong opinions does the author express?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do these stories tell you about the experience of living and working in Mississippi as a woman at this time?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Document 1: “Waiting, Watching, and Resisting,” by Hellen O'Neal McCray

“Growing up in the Delta, time seemed endless, nothing moved. For black folks Mississippi was sitting-on-the-porch summertime days—a chair rocked, a fan waved, a soft voice hummed, a chinaberry dropped, the sharp crack of a fly swatter broke the stillness. We were always sitting, waiting for something to happen. Clarksdale, Mississippi, the soul of the Delta, is my home....

“[T]here was active resistance in my hometown of Clarksdale. When fourteen-year-old Emmett Till was lynched in Money, Mississippi, we looked at his mutilated body in JET magazine with horror. We knew awful things happened in Mississippi. Our parents reminded us often enough. Till’s case was also discussed in churches, pool halls, beauty shops, anyplace where more than one black person gathered. We shared tears of bitter disappointment with Emmett Till’s mother as Roy Bryant, one of the two men who later admitted to killing Till, and his wife celebrated his acquittal with a long, slow kiss on the courthouse steps. Sadness swept over our community like a shroud. Bryant and his family finally moved on.

“The people in my family were small landowners, farmers, tradesmen, and skilled craftsmen, who did their best to avoid segregation. As a child I had no contact with white people, and family members discouraged me from going anywhere with ‘white’ and ‘colored’ doors. My stepfather taught my sister Inez and me to patronize black businesses and not spend our money anywhere we were not respected. As a result, I shopped only at those stores where I was treated well. We used white services only when no comparable black services existed. When my stepfather took my sister to a white doctor and a white woman was called in before them, he took Inez home without seeing the doctor. ‘Better body sick than head sick,’ he explained. Usually we went to Mound Bayou, Mississippi, an all black town, if our local black doctor, Dr. McCaskill, was not in the office.

“On our porches, we read the Chicago Defender, the only news that people in Clarksdale could read and believe. Our local newspaper, the Clarksdale Press Register, dripped race hatred and contempt; black men and women were criminals or didn’t exist within its pages. My stepfather always read them both. Most of the people in Clarksdale were connected to Chicago by blood ties. The Chicago Defender allowed us to read about successful black people and their lives. When the news was about a civil rights victory there, my neighbor Miss Gert, usually a quiet and thoughtful woman, would get excited and exclaim, ‘Them colored folks in Chicago are somethin’. They don’t take no white folks’ mess.’

“We also followed the growing national civil rights movement in the Defender’s pages and on our little television set. We knew that something was going to happen somewhere soon. We tried to figure out if the 1954 Supreme Court decision meant we would be going to Clarksdale’s white schools. The Register’s editorials said, ‘Our colored people are happy; they don’t want to go to our schools.’ We watched from our porches as the scramble took place to build new schools for African Americans. It was a puzzle to us. We watched our television with our neighbors when the Little Rock Nine started to school. We couldn’t get enough of it. We cheered when President Eisenhower nationalized the National Guard for the Little Rock Nine. Arkansas was just across the river; certainly we would be next...."
Document 2: “They Didn’t Know the Power of Women,” by Victoria Gray Adams

“I’ve always been in the Movement. I’ve always had my own movement, from the time that I was conscious of the situation, both racially and economically speaking. For example, I was very unhappy with the kinds of employment that were available for black women in Mississippi, so I decided to start my own business. When the movement that you know about came to town, I was a businesswoman selling cosmetics and household miscellany. My mission, as I understood it, was to help people have a better life by providing employment for black people in general, but women in particular.

“When SNCC workers…were walking the dusty roads, encouraging people to register, people in the black community were afraid of them. Their fear was based on articles in the white papers circulated in the city, the Hattiesburg American and the Jackson Clarion Ledger. These papers said the SNCC kids were dangerous, talking about Communism, and that their actions would jeopardize the entire black community. Black people were afraid, among other things, of losing their jobs as well as the few hard-won rights we did have….

“As I went from place to place for my business, I talked about those young people and why it was important for us to support them. Sometimes the kids had pretty lean days out there…. The local white people spread propaganda that the kids had plenty of money. I told the people I came in contact with, ‘Oftentimes when these youngsters out here knock on your door, they’re hungry….’

“When I was moving around the country speaking on behalf of our challenge to the Democratic Party and other civil rights matters, the issue of women’s leadership came up frequently. Many leaders of the MFDP were women. People wanted to know: Why is it that women are out front in the MFDP? Women were out front as a survival tactic. Men could not function in high-visibility, high-profile roles where we come from, because they would be plucked off…. Think about the black men of the early days of the movement. Think about how many of them were killed simply because they went down and tried to register to vote or simply because they provided shelter to somebody. The women had to do it.

“Dying isn’t so bad, but dying and nothing is ever going to be done about it, that’s foolish. That’s very foolish. You don’t sacrifice your life just for the heck of courageousness when you know nothing is going to come of it. Nobody’s going to pay the price of having taken your life. Nothing is going to happen to discourage it from happening again and again. So that’s what it was all about. That’s why the women were out front. The white folks didn’t see the women as that much of a threat. White thinking has always been, if you controlled the men, you got the rest of them covered. They didn’t know the power of women, especially black women.

“The strength of the civil rights movement was in the fact that there were so many local people involved. We had marvelous high-profile national spokespersons, but the day-to-day work, the hanging in there was done by the local people. Once they were able to rise above their fear, they had the courage to stand up for what was rightfully theirs as citizens of this country. Local people made the difference.

“To young people today, I would say, get to know everyday people. Make sure you acquire, to the degree possible, the wisdom and knowledge of these people. Everybody has something to say and something to offer. There should be an opportunity for that to happen. Make the information available and all of the sources accessible. Then hear what the people have to say. If you do, you will find, to borrow a phrase from Miss Ella Baker, ‘Strong people don’t need strong leaders.’”
Document 3: “Standing Up for Our Beliefs,” by Joyce Ladner

My Community: Palmers Crossing, Mississippi

“Race was always the central most important thing in the lives of my older sister, Dorie, and myself. We’ve always carried both the burden and the blessing of this strong racial consciousness. Perhaps it came from our mother, who taught us that you look white people dead in the eye and don’t blink. All the white salesmen, like the insurance collector who came around our house, deferred to her. She always told us that there was a certain way you carry yourself in order to keep your dignity so that white people don’t walk all over you.

“One day Dorie and I were at the grocery store, a block from our house. Dorie had just bought some doughnuts, and we were looking through the magazine rack. We were just entering puberty, and she had just gotten her first bra. The white cashier at the store walked up behind her and tried to touch her breasts. She turned around, took the bag of doughnuts, and began to beat him over the head. Then we ran all the way home, frightened and worried about what our mother would do, because assaulting a white person was strictly forbidden by the unwritten laws of segregation. My sister’s act of defiance might have put us and our family in immediate danger from night riders or the Klan. When we told her what had happened, our mother insisted that we should never tolerate any form of sexual abuse and replied in all seriousness, ‘You should have killed him. Don’t ever let any white man touch you wrong....’

“Even though we live in a very closed society, it was possible to get certain information. I read the newspaper from the time I was very little spending a dime a day to buy the paper. I remember the Brown decision very clear and how the local newspaper covered it. After that decision there was no attempt at all to desegregate the Hattiesburg schools, or schools anywhere in Mississippi. What the black community got were new public schools in some places, which was the white Mississippi’s way of staving off any attempt to say that we had unequal facilities. WDAM, the major television station in Hattiesburg, was very, very racist in the late fifties, but as an NBC affiliate they would break for Chet Huntley and David Brinkley. This was the one window of national news that we saw.

“More importantly, a family friend, an older man by the name of McLeod, came to our house all the time when I was about twelve or thirteen years old.... Every week he brought us the Chicago Defender and the Pittsburgh Courier and every month Ebony and the JET.... He also brought books, introduced us to literature on black people, and told us ‘You girls are going to have to change things. It’ll be your generation that’s going to change things when you get older.’

“Black war veterans also criticized race relations in the United States. I remember when I was a little girl that my uncle Archie, a World War I vet, would sit on the back porch and tell us that going to France had given him a different perspective and that it was disappointing to come back home and see how terrible conditions were. The veterans of World War II, especially, were very important to the civil rights movement in Mississippi. Many of them were founders of the then-underground statewide NAACP. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the role these men played. They were the ones who always felt that ours was the generation that would make things different. For them the environment was pregnant with possibilities of all kinds of change.

“Ours was the Emmett Till generation. No other single incident had more profound impact on so many who came into SNCC..... I felt that if they had killed a fourteen-year-old, they could also kill me or my brothers. We knew that men were lynched, but we’d never known of a child being lynched before. On a profound, personal level, this reality had a strong galvanizing effect on all of us. The image is with me still. It became etched in my generation’s consciousness.”
Document 4: “If We Must Die,” by Janet Jemmott Moses

“I decided at twenty-two that I would risk my life to stay alive, to walk in the sun without shame or guilt for not doing what in my heart I knew I should do. A chain of events had brought me to this crossroads in my decision tree. Two years of picketing of Woolworth’s stores in support of the campaign against segregated lunch counters didn’t seem to be enough when others were putting their lives on the line. So I finished out the school year—I was teaching social studies at Wadleigh Junior High School in Harlem—and made arrangements to go to Mississippi in the summer of 1964....

“I spent a lot of time working with young people who were becoming increasingly conscious of their right to a place in the sun. We would go to pool halls, juke joints—wherever the folk were. The community bailed us out when we got arrested with leaflets and for demonstrating in front of the local segregated movie theater....

“One day I met Mr. Brown and his wife. He listened unemotionally as I told him who I was and why I was there. I knew this was not the first news he had had about voting. I invited myself back—another day, another week—to chat some more. He didn’t tell me not to return, so I would go and talk to so-and-so. After several months they all agreed, singly, that registering to vote was a good idea and that they would support a voter registration day in Fayette. We set the date.

“I don’t remember how the FBI got involved; a rumor had been launched that there would be trouble, that a group of Klansmen was planning to stop the demonstration. On the morning of the demonstration, local people began to gather around the courthouse in clusters. Some stood across the street, and others sat at the side of the courthouse lawn. I moved from group to group, greeting onlookers who had indicated that they might try to register. We escorted those ready to take the long walk up the courthouse steps into the registrar’s office.

“I recall that at some point several white men in a pickup truck drove up in front of the courthouse. I watched them from the courthouse steps as they got out of the truck. Trouble was materializing in front of our eyes. There was no place to go, or to run. (Mother had always instilled in my brother and me that we could only be chased if we ran.) The bottom line at that moment was that I not show fear. As they approached the stairs, several other white men—FBI—intercepted their approach and escorted them to their truck.

“Mr. Brown indicated that he wanted to see me. He sat on the stone embankment that bordered the side of the courthouse, one among several men with whom we had worked rather closely over the past few months. He wore baggy denim overalls and held a crumpled brown paper bag in his lap. There may have been another crumpled bag next to him—I’m not sure. Mr. Brown beckoned. I sat down as instructed and gently asked if he was ready to ascend the courthouse steps. He answered by opening the paper bag in his lap. In it lay a large pistol—I surmised a .38 or .45. ’Now, Mizjaunette, don’t you worry ‘bout a thing. You just keep working,’ he said. I humbly thanked him and managed to escort a few others up the courthouse stairs....

“In Mississippi, we lived by the grace of God and the love and the vigilance of farmers and day workers who took care of us children, who had no better sense than to believe that we could take white power to the mat.”
Document 5: “Do Whatever You Are Big Enough to Do,” by Jean Smith Young

“In the spring of 1964, I went to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, as part of a SNCC effort to organize a statewide Freedom Vote, one of the building blocks to the MFDP’s August challenge of the regular Mississippi Democratic Party. The Hattiesburg Freedom Vote was held on the same day as the regular precinct elections. This very hot day started under the watchful eye of Miss Woods, a black lady somewhere between forty-five and seventy-five years old, who allowed us to use her rooming house on Mobile Street—the colored business street of Hattiesburg—as a meeting place....

Lately, when I had caught her unaware, I’d notice that she was looking at me with a special concern. I think she felt sorry for me because I was going with a man from the Movement who, as far as she was concerned, didn’t mean me a bit of good. And I didn’t have the sense to figure this out. I’ll call him Paul.

“That morning Miss Woods looked at me with sadness as I explained that I was waiting for Paul, who was one of the early and legendary Mississippi field organizers and whose reputation stood ten feet tall. The two of us were supposed to lead the precinct meeting. I’d gotten it into my head that I could not start the precinct meeting without Paul.

“But I didn’t know where he was.... Eight o’clock and he still wasn’t here; where could he be? Finally, at nine o’clock, Miss Woods got disgusted and said, “It’s time for you to go, Jean. You got work to do. Don’t wait on no man.”

“At 9:30 A.M. I walked up the stairs to the Masonic Hall.... Our meeting was scheduled for 10:00 A.M. It was modeled on the white Democratic precinct meetings being held that month, which excluded black people. This was a historic moment and I was very excited. By this time I was a pretty good organizer, but I had never led a mass meeting.... This was important and I didn’t want to be the one to botch it. Worried, I looked around the hall for Paul. Where is Paul? I wondered....

“I knew that Paul talked in such an intense, powerful way he could move people by brute force. I felt that my orating skills were nothing in comparison to his. My intellectual self sneered at this indecision: ‘What are you standing around for, girl. It doesn’t matter how good he is. He can’t get votes if he’s not here. You are going to have to do this yourself.’ But my heart stood staring at the door waiting.

“After a while the farmers and city people started passing their fans down the aisle. It didn’t look like any meeting was going to happen that day, I could feel the disappointment in the air, and I felt ashamed.

“Then I felt the presence of Miss Woods in the room. I can’t remember whether Miss Woods actually followed me from her boarding house and down the street to the Masonic Hall, or whether her spirit, her persona, went with me. The thought of Miss Woods.... summoned up memories of all the strong women who had helped me get to this point in life.

“I remembered my quiet, thin anatomy teacher at Cass Technical High School, a science and arts school in Detroit....

“Right along side my teacher came an image of Patricia Roberts Harris, the dean of women when I attended Howard University.... In 1963 Dean Harris gave me a gold chain for my Phi Beta Kappa key from Howard University and told me that she expected I would do great things ‘for the race.’

“Finally, standing there in the Masonic Hall, was my mother, who had found herself a widow at the age of twenty-one, with two children under the age of two. My father, one of the Tuskegee Airmen, was killed while strafing a train in Germany, just a few months before the end of World War II. My mother had taken care of us and went on to become a nurse and then a teacher of the deaf. I do not remember one word of complaint from her about the difficulties in our life. She just did whatever she had to do....

“In the presence of all of these women who loved me and expected me to do well, my job became quite easy. I walked toward the
front with the FreedomDemocratic Party ballots. I took a deep breath and started talking. I forgot about my limited skills in comparison to Paul’s magnificent oratory, and my words took wings....

“I was so excited...that I had to stop and make sure people were listening. Not only were they listening, but the were also rocking and nodding their heads and shouting, ‘Amen, sister,’ the sweetest sound I’d ever heard—Amen! to me, with me! I felt wonderful. Thirty minutes before, I had been tongue-tied and helpless. Now here I was connected to all these people; I was them and they were me. We were sharing a great vision.”
**Document 6: “Depending on Ourselves,” by Muriel Tillinghast**

“Three days after I graduated from Howard University in June 1964, I decided I was going to Mississippi. I didn’t know what was going to happen after that, but I was definitely going to ‘the Sip....’

“We spent a week at the orientation center in Oxford, Ohio, getting ready for something no one could really prepare for. We were taught to take Mississippi seriously, to respect our hosts and our contacts, to understand the risks they were taking and that they might be the ones to save our lives. Then we headed south in Greyhound buses. People sang and spoke quietly among themselves. Everyone was pensive. These would be the last relaxed thoughts and movements we would have for weeks to come. Once we crossed the Mississippi state line there was silence. It was past midnight and we had not been told exactly where we would be assigned. Most of us were dropped off in small groups. The local people whose silhouetted forms met the summer volunteers hurriedly escorted their charges from the pickup point, disappearing silently in the starlit Mississippi night. I was dropped off in Greenville, not Greenwood—both are in the Mississippi Delta, but Greenwood was known for its hard-edged racism and active Klan activities. Greenville was a river town that enjoyed local distinction as being ‘liberal’—that is, liberal for Mississippi. In Greenville I still had hope.

“I spent my first two weeks in the upstairs office of the Greenville Project. I was petrified. How was I going to survive Mississippi? It dawned on me that I would never get anybody to register to vote staying in the office, so s-l-o-w-l-y I started coming downstairs and cautiously going out into the town. I walked like a shadow on the wall, edgy, just getting used to walking in the streets....

“We had to be careful about talking to people and about what we discussed when we canvassed, because everything and almost everyone could be traced. Wherever we were staying, those people were just as vulnerable day and night to raids and attacks on the streets as we were. When they allowed us to sleep on their floors or in their beds, whatever the accommodations were, black Mississippians were risking economic reprisals, the loss of their jobs, or worse. We stayed with people who were just barely getting by themselves, yet they were willing to risk all to allow us to bring the message of their rights and the Movement to them.

“One family of cotton pickers that I stayed with in Hollandale—two adults and five children—worked by permission on some-one else’s land. They worked from sunup to sundown with no breaks. It was as close to slavery as I hope I ever see in my life. I usually ate elsewhere or not at all, but one night they said, ‘No, you eat with us.’ I’ll never forget that dinner. It was cornbread and a huge pot of water into which they cut three or four frankfurters. For them that was a special dinner; on other days their meals were even more meager. Rarely have I ever been the beneficiary of such generosity and kindness.”
Singing for Freedom

Objectives:
Students will: Examine primary sources.
Work within groups to analyze the emotions expressed in songs sung by Freedom Riders in 1961.
Consider the importance of freedom songs to civil rights activists.

Required Reading:
Students should have read Part II of the reading and completed “Study Guide—Part II” (TRB 20-21) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part II” (TRB-22).

Scholars Online:
Short, free videos that you may find useful in this lesson are available at <http://www.choices.edu/resources/scholars_cr_lesson.php>.

Handouts:
“Freedom Songs Worksheet” (TRB-34)
“Songs of the Freedom Riders” (TRB 35-37)
“Reflections of Movement Participants” (TRB-38)

Note:
Students will have a much richer experience if they are able to listen to the songs.
Online versions are available at the following sites:
Hallelujah I’m A-Travelling: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kf0iefSgYg>
Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ’Round: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5Z1trynEHs>
Buses Are A-Comin’: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRPRprE1p1Y>
Calypso Freedom (Audio for the song is available in the player on the left. The song begins at 1:09): <http://www.sweethoney.com/audio.php>

In the Classroom:
1. Historical Context—Ask students to recall last night’s reading. Who participated in the movement in Mississippi? What were their aims? What challenges did they face? How real was the threat of violence for civil rights activists?

Ask students to consider the Freedom Rides that took place in the summer of 1961. Who participated in these bus rides? What were their aims? What challenges did they face in the South? What do students think it would have been like to be a Freedom Rider?

For additional context you might want to show students the following Scholars Online video: “Were you ever afraid for your safety?” by Judy Richardson, SNCC activist. After watching, ask students to describe the effect that Annie Pearl’s whistling had on Ms. Richardson when she was in jail in Atlanta. How did she feel before she heard the whistling? How did she feel afterwards? Why do you think the sound of the whistling had such a profound effect on her?

You might also wish to show your students a short excerpt from the PBS American Experience documentary “Freedom Riders,” available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuZQkl0Jho>. It provides background on the importance of song to the Freedom Riders and is a good introduction to this activity.

2. Source Analysis—Divide the class into small groups. Give each group a copy of the handouts. Tell students to carefully read the directions before they begin. Each group should read the sources and answer the questions.

3. Considering the Role of Songs in the Movement—When students have finished answering the questions, reconvene the class. What emotions are expressed in these songs? How can students tell? When do students think that the Freedom Riders might have sung these songs? Why?
What are the historical roots of freedom songs? Why might this be important? Why would it be helpful for activists to choose songs that most people already knew?

Do students think that freedom songs were important to the civil rights movement? Why or why not? Ask students to consider the effects of singing on the movement. What role did these songs play for activists? How do students think the songs may have affected others, for example law enforcement officials or observers?

**Homework:**

Students should read “1964: The Atlantic City Democratic National Convention” and “Perspectives in Brief” in the student text.
Freedom Songs Worksheet

Instructions: In this activity, you will consider the role of freedom songs in the civil rights movement. You will examine songs sung during the 1961 Freedom Rides, as well as the reflections of two movement participants on the importance of song. Read the sources with your group members and answer the questions below.

Part I: Song Analysis
Fill in the chart below after you read each song. In the second column, list the emotions expressed by the song. For example, does it express hope, fear, sadness, gratitude, happiness, determination, etc.? In the third column, explain what the song is about. In the last column, write down a time you think the Freedom Riders might have sung this song. For example, would they have sung it riding on the bus? During confrontations with the police? When they were in jail?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song title</th>
<th>Emotions expressed</th>
<th>What is this song about?</th>
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Part II: Considering the Role of Songs in the Movement
1. According to Dr. King and Prathia Hall, what are the historical roots of these songs?

2. Why do you think people in the movement used spirituals as the basis for freedom songs?

3. Why do you think movement participants often changed the words of the songs they sang?

4. Why did movement participants sing?
**Songs of the Freedom Riders**

**Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ‘Round**
Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me ‘round,
Turn me ‘round, turn me ‘round.
Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me ‘round.
I’m gonna keep on a-walkin’, keep on a-talkin’,
Marchin’ on to freedom land

Ain’t gonna let no jailhouse turn me ‘round,
Turn me ‘round, turn me ‘round.
Ain’t gonna let no jailhouse turn me ‘round.
I’m gonna keep on a-walkin’, keep on a-talkin’,
Marchin’ on to freedom land

Ain’t gonna let segregation turn me ‘round,
Turn me ‘round, turn me ‘round.
Ain’t gonna let segregation turn me ‘round.
I’m gonna keep on a-walkin’, keep on a-talkin’,
Marchin’ on to freedom land

Keep on a-walkin’, keep on a-talkin’,
Marchin’ on to freedom land

**Hallelujah, I’m A-Traveling**
In nineteen fifty-four,
The Supreme Court has said,
Listen here, Mr. Jim Crow
It’s time you were dead.

Chorus:
Hallelujah, I’m a-traveling
Hallelujah, ain’t it fine;
Hallelujah, I’m a-traveling
Down freedom’s main line.

At Howard Johnson’s one day,
We will all buy a Coke
And the waitress will serve us
And know it’s no joke.

I’m taking a trip
On the Greyhound Bus Line
I’m riding the front seat
To Jackson this time.

In Fayette County,
Set off and remote,
The polls are not open
For Negroes to vote.

Three hundred Freedom Riders
When offered a choice
Six months, three hundred dollars,
Respond in one voice.

Chorus:
Hallelujah, I’m a jailbird
And I ain’t paying no fine.
Hallelujah, I’m a-traveling
Down freedom’s main line.
Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi

Optional Lesson

Buses Are A-Comin'

Buses are a-comin'
Oh Yes!
Buses are a-comin'
Oh Yes!
Buses are a-comin'
Buses are a-comin'
Buses are a-comin'
Oh Yes!

Better get you ready
Oh Yes!
Better get you ready
Oh Yes!
Better get you ready
Better get you ready
Better get you ready
Oh Yes!

They’re coming through Alabama
Oh Yes!
Coming through Alabama
Oh Yes!
Coming through Alabama
Coming through Alabama
Buses are a-comin'
Oh Yes!

They’re rolling into Jackson
Oh Yes!
Rolling into Jackson
Oh Yes!
Rolling into Jackson
Rolling into Jackson
Buses are a-comin'
Oh Yes!

Note:
Activists often adapted the songs they sang to suit their purposes, for example, by substituting in the names of local politicians or towns in which they worked. For the Freedom Riders, songs also became important when they were in jail. In a well-known episode in Parchman Prison in Mississippi, prison guards threatened to take away the activists’ mattresses if they didn’t stop singing. The Freedom Riders responded by singing this song, but with new lyrics: “You can take my mattress, oh yes! I’ll keep my freedom, oh yes!”
**Calypso Freedom**
Well, I took a trip on a greyhound bus,
Freedom's coming and it won't be long.
To fight segregation, and this we must,
Freedom's coming and it won't be long.

Chorus:
We want Freedom,
Freedom, Freedom, Huh!
Freedom's coming and it won't be long.
Freedom
Freedom, Freedom, Huh!
Freedom's coming and it won't be long.

Well, I rode on a bus down Alabama way,
Freedom's coming and it won't be long.
We met with much violence on Mother's Day,
Freedom's coming and it won't be long.

Chorus:
What do we want?
Freedom, Freedom, Huh!
Freedom's coming and it won't be long.
Freedom, Freedom
Freedom, Freedom, Huh!
Freedom's coming and it won't be long.

Well, over the Mississippi with speed we go,
Freedom's coming and it won't be long.
De blue shirt policeman meet me at the door,
Freedom's coming and it won't be long.

Chorus:
Give us Freedom!
Freedom, Freedom, Huh!
Freedom's coming and it won't be long.
Freedom,
Freedom, Freedom, Huh!
Freedom's coming and it won't be long.
Reflections of Movement Participants

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. 1963  

“In a sense the freedom songs are the soul of the movement. They are more than just incantations of clever phrases designed to invigorate a campaign; they are as old as the history of the Negro in America. They are adaptations of the songs the slaves sang—the sorrow songs, the shouts for joy, the battle hymns and the anthems of our movement. I have heard people talk of their beat and rhythm, but we in the movement are as inspired by their words. ‘Woke Up This Morning with My Mind Stayed on Freedom’ is a sentence that needs no music to make its point. We sing the freedom songs today for the same reason the slaves sang them, because we too are in bondage and the songs add hope to our determination that ‘We shall overcome, Black and white together, We shall overcome someday.’

“I have stood in a meeting with hundreds of youngsters and joined in while they sang ‘Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ’Round.’ It is not just a song; it is a resolve. A few minutes later, I have seen those same youngsters refuse to turn around from the onrush of a police dog, refuse to turn around before...men armed with power hoses. These songs bind us together, give us courage....”

Prathia Hall, SNCC activist  

“I’d heard those songs before. I’d heard them in the piney woods setting of the churches of my mother’s heritage in Nelson County, Virginia.... Yet, in this place, Southwest Georgia, with hostile police ringing the exterior of the church, they were neither repetitious nor familiar; they were worship that contained within the reality of its expression a power affirming life and defying death. That power...fashioned fear into faith, cringing into courage, suffering into survival, despair into defiance, and pain into protest.... It would be insanely dishonest to claim that we were unafraid. Fear was an intelligent response. Fear was a part of the survival kit. The challenge was to use fear as a signal to exercise caution while refusing to allow fear to paralyze you. One night when a gang of local ‘lawmen’ entered the mass meeting and stood behind us with their hands on their guns, we sang our freedom songs with defiant and prayerful fervor.... All of us joined that prayer and we sang:

Ain’t gonna let no sheriff  
Turn me ’round,  
Turn me ’round,  
Turn me ’round,  
I’m gonna keep on a-walking,  
Keep on a-talking,  
Marching up to Freedom Land.”
Considering the Perspectives: Organization and Preparation

Objectives:
Students will: Analyze the issues that framed the 1964 debate over the MFDP’s role at the Democratic Convention.
Identify the core assumptions underlying the perspectives.
Create political cartoons to express their assigned perspectives.
Work cooperatively within groups to organize effective presentations.

Required Reading:
Students should have read “1964: The Atlantic City Democratic National Convention” and “Perspectives in Brief” in the student text.

Handouts:
“Presenting Your Perspective” (TRB-40) for each perspective group
Perspectives from the student text, one perspective for each group
“Perspectives: Graphic Organizer” (TRB-41)

In the Classroom:
1. Planning for Group Work—In order to save time in the classroom, form student groups before beginning Day Three. During the class period, students will be preparing their presentations.
2. Perspective Groups—Form four groups of at least four students each and assign a perspective to each group. Inform students that each group is responsible for creating a political cartoon that represents the views of their perspective. Each group will also present a summary of their assigned perspective to the class. Explain that the groups should follow the instructions in “Presenting Your Perspective.” Groups should begin by assigning each member a role (students may double up). Remind students to use information from the reading to support their presentations.

3. Evaluating the Perspectives—Give each student a copy of “Perspectives: Graphic Organizer.” Students should fill in the row that corresponds to their assigned perspective while they are preparing their presentations. (Note that students will have to shade the box in the fourth column because they will not be able to answer that question.) During the class presentations, they should fill in the remainder of the chart.

Note:
The positions of participants at the convention include the racist views of white Mississippi Democrats. Students from all four perspective groups should be sure not to advocate their assigned perspectives in their presentations. Instead, students should consider themselves historians researching and reporting on the views of a particular group from this historical event. They should take care not to judge their assigned perspective group. Instead, they should seek to understand what their group thought, and the reasons why they held those views. This type of analysis will help students better understand the reasons why some people considered violent white supremacy and segregation to be viable options at the time of the convention.

Homework:
Students should complete preparations for their presentations.
Presenting Your Perspective

Your Assignment: Your group has been assigned a perspective of a group at the Democratic National Convention in 1964. Your assignment is to explain this perspective to your classmates, both in a presentation and in a political cartoon. Your job is not to pass judgment on your assigned group. Rather, you should seek to understand WHAT they think and WHY they have those views, and consider the implications this has for the Democratic convention and the civil rights movement.

Political Cartoon: With your group members, draw a political cartoon that expresses how your assigned perspective views the situation at the convention. You will present this cartoon to the class during your presentation.

Presentation: Your group will be called upon to present a three-to-five minute summary of your perspective to the class. You will be judged on how well you present your perspective. This worksheet will help you prepare.

Organizing Your Group: Each member of your group will take a specific role. Below is a brief explanation of the responsibility of each role. Before preparing your sections of the presentation, work together to address the questions below. The group director is responsible for organizing your presentation. The historian is responsible for explaining how history has affected your group’s perspective. The political expert is responsible for explaining how your group’s position relates to the upcoming presidential election. The cartoonist is responsible for presenting your perspective’s political cartoon.

In your presentation, be sure to use quotes and evidence from your reading to help explain the views of your group.

Questions to Consider
1. What does your group hope to achieve at the Democratic Convention?

2. How does your group hope to achieve this?

3. What are your group’s goals beyond the convention?

4. What is the timetable for achieving these goals?

5. What is your group’s perspective on the civil rights movement?
### Perspectives: Graphic Organizer

**Instructions:**
As you prepare your presentation, fill in the row that corresponds to your assigned perspective group. (Since you can’t answer the question in the last column for your assigned perspective, color in that box with a pen or pencil.) During the presentations of other perspective groups, fill in the remainder of the chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>What is the long-term goal of this group?</th>
<th>How does this group hope to achieve its goal?</th>
<th>What does this group think of your group’s assigned perspective?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party</td>
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<td>National NAACP and Civil Rights Leaders</td>
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<td>President Johnson and the National Democratic Party</td>
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<td>White Mississippi Democrats</td>
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Considering the Perspectives: Presentation and Discussion

Objectives:
Students will: Articulate the perspectives of their assigned group.

- Analyze primary sources and synthesize information.
- Cooperate with classmates in staging a presentation.

In the Classroom:
1. Setting the Stage—Tell students that today they will be historians presenting the perspectives of groups at a particular moment in history. Remind students about what is going on at the Democratic National Convention in 1964. What is the purpose of the convention? Why is the MFDP there?

2. Managing the Presentations—Be sure that each student has their copy of “Perspectives: Graphic Organizer.” Explain that each group will give a three-to-five minute presentation to the class explaining the perspective that they have been assigned. As groups present, the rest of the class should fill in their charts. When each group finishes its presentation, allow students to ask any questions they may have.

3. Guiding Discussion—When the presentations are finished, ask students what was at stake for each perspective group. Which groups had the most to gain? Which group(s) had the most to lose? Which groups do they think were the most influential or powerful?

4. Gaining More Perspective—Tell students they are going to consider the idea of compromise. What is the purpose of compromise?

Why did the Johnson Administration and Democratic party leaders offer a compromise? What were the motivations of the groups that wanted to accept it? What were the motivations of the groups who wanted to reject it?

What were the goals of the different groups beyond the convention? How did the different groups hope to achieve their goals? By working within the political system? By working to change communities? In other ways?

Is compromise always a good thing? Ask students to think of other examples from history or their own lives where compromises were accepted or rejected. Are there issues that students feel should not be compromised on? Why?

Homework:
Students should read the Epilogue in the student text and complete the “Study Guide—Epilogue” (TRB 44-45) or the “Advanced Study Guide—Epilogue” (TRB-46).
A Nonviolent Movement?

Objectives:

Students will: Assess popular perceptions of the civil rights movement.

Examine different perspectives on the use of violence in the struggle for human rights.

Required Reading:

Students should have read the Epilogue in the student text and completed the “Study Guide—Epilogue” (TRB 44-45) or the “Advanced Study Guide—Epilogue” (TRB-46).

Scholars Online:

Short, free videos that you may find useful in this lesson are available at <http://www.choices.edu/resources/scholars_cr_lesson.php>.

Handouts:

“Source Worksheet” (TRB-47)

“Sources on Violence and Nonviolence” (TRB 48-50)

In the Classroom:

1. Reviewing the Movement—Ask students to think about perceptions of the civil rights movement today. Do most people associate the civil rights movement with nonviolence or violence? Why?

Have students recall from their reading the role that nonviolence played in the movement. What was nonviolent direct action? Were all civil rights activists committed to nonviolence?

You may wish to show students the following Scholars Online video: “What role did nonviolence play in the movement?” by Charles E. Cobb Jr., SNCC activist. Ask students to describe Professor Cobb’s experiences working in Mississippi. What is his perspective on nonviolence in the movement?

2. Group Work—Divide students into small groups and distribute the handouts. Ask each group to read the sources and complete the worksheet.

3. Making Connections—Call students back together. Ask them to consider the sources they read. How would students define nonviolence? Is self-defense different? How? In his second quote, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. contrasts self-defense with violence that is initiated. What do students think it means to initiate violence? What types of violence (or nonviolence) do students think the individuals in these sources were advocating? Do students think the Mississippi activists saw self-defense and violence as the same thing? Why or why not? What did Dr. King mean by “pure nonviolence”? Do students think there can be multiple forms of nonviolence?

Were any of the arguments particularly compelling to students? Which ones? What experiences do students think motivated these individuals to have these particular views?

What similarities exist between King’s vision of nonviolence, the tradition of self-defense in places like Mississippi, and the way that these black power activists viewed the use of violence? In what ways are these positions different? Do students think there was a strong difference of opinion among these individuals? Why or why not? Encourage students to use excerpts from the sources to back up their claims.

Was Dr. King opposed to all types of violence? Is that surprising to students? Why or why not? How does reading these different perspectives on the use of violence affect students’ perceptions of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.? Black power activists? Can students draw any conclusions about the use of violence in the civil rights movement?

Homework:

Ask students to write an editorial answering the question “was the civil rights movement nonviolent?” Encourage them to use information from their readings and the sources from this lesson.
Study Guide—Epilogue

Vocabulary: Be sure that you understand these key terms from the Epilogue of your reading. Circle ones that you do not know.

self-determination
political system
social services

Questions:
1. How did Southern white Democrats respond to the compromise at the 1964 convention?

2. a. How did the MFDP respond to the compromise?

   b. How did the convention influence the movement in Mississippi?

3. List three achievements of the civil rights movement in Mississippi by the end of the 1960s.
   a. 

   b. 

   c. 
4.  a. What was the purpose of the Voting Rights Act?

   b. When was it signed?

5. What issue did the civil rights movement focus on in the late 1960s?

6.  a. What was “black power”?

   b. How did it divide the civil rights movement?

7. What do you think is the greatest civil rights challenge that exists today? Why?
Advanced Study Guide—Epilogue

1. How did the movement change after the 1964 convention?

2. Why did leaders like Bayard Rustin and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. believe that the civil rights movement needed to focus on economic justice?

3. What idea did Stokely Carmichael propose in a speech in Greenwood, Mississippi?

4. What is the status of civil rights in the United States today?
**Source Worksheet**

*Introduction:* Read the three sets of sources on violence and nonviolence, and answer the questions below.

1. Who are the authors of the sources in this section?
2. When and where do these sources come from?
3. According to these sources, what role should violence have in the civil rights movement?
4. What is the most interesting or powerful aspect of this set of sources for you?
5. What do the three sets of sources tell you about the use of violence in the civil rights movement?

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Sources on Violence and Nonviolence

Introduction: The civil rights movement is widely known for its embrace of nonviolence. But individuals in the movement held a wide variety of views on the role of violence in the struggle. The sources below represent the perspectives of some movement participants. While Martin Luther King Jr. was a leading proponent of nonviolence, activists in Mississippi (as in most areas of the South) came from a long tradition of armed self-defense in the face of racist violence. Black Power activists, who rose to prominence in the late 1960s and 1970s, also held diverse opinions about the role of violence in the movement. As you read, consider the ways in which these views differ and the ways in which they overlap.

A. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Many civil rights organizations of the 1950s and 60s committed themselves to the tactic of nonviolent direct action. For Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and others, nonviolence became a spiritual philosophy for how to live one’s life.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., from “Nonviolence and Racial Justice” in The Christian Century, February 6, 1957

“The alternative to violence is nonviolent resistance. This method was made famous in our generation by Mohandas K. Gandhi, who used it to free India from the domination of the British Empire. Five points can be made concerning nonviolence as a method in bringing about better racial conditions.

“First, this is not a method for cowards; it does resist. The nonviolent resister is just as strongly opposed to the evil against which he protests as is the person who uses violence. His method is passive or nonaggressive in the sense that he is not physically aggressive toward his opponent. But his mind and emotions are always active, constantly seeking to persuade the opponent that he is mistaken. This method is passive physically but strongly active spiritually....

“A second point is that nonviolent resistance does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent, but to win his friendship and understanding. The nonviolent resister must often express his protest through noncooperation or boycotts, but he realizes that noncooperation and boycotts are not ends themselves; they are merely means to awaken a sense of moral shame in the opponent. The end is redemption and reconciliation. The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, while the aftermath of violence is tragic bitterness.

“A third characteristic of this method is that the attack is directed against forces of evil rather than against persons who are caught in those forces. It is evil we are seeking to defeat, not the persons victimized by evil. Those of us who struggle against racial injustice must come to see that the basic tension is not between races....

“A fourth point that must be brought out concerning nonviolent resistance is that it avoids not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. At the center of nonviolence stands the principle of love. In struggling for human dignity the oppressed people of the world must not allow themselves to become bitter or indulge in hate campaigns. To retaliate with hate and bitterness would do nothing but intensify the hate in the world. Along the way of life, someone must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate. This can be done only by projecting the ethics of love to the center of our lives....

“Finally, the method of nonviolence is based on the conviction that the universe is on the side of justice. It is this deep faith in the future that causes the nonviolent resister to accept suffering without retaliation. He knows that in his struggle for justice he has cosmic companionship. This belief that God is on the side of truth and justice comes down to us from the long tradition of our Christian faith.
There is something at the very center of our faith which reminds us that Good Friday may reign for a day, but ultimately it must give way to the triumphant beat of the Easter drums.”

*Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., from “The Social Organization of Nonviolence,” October 1959*

“The principle of self-defense, even involving weapons and bloodshed, has never been condemned, even by Gandhi, who sanctioned it for those unable to master pure nonviolence…. When the Negro uses force in self-defense he does not forfeit support—he may even win it, by the courage and self-respect it reflects. When he seeks to initiate violence he provokes questions about the necessity for it, and inevitably is blamed for the consequences.”

**B. Activists in Mississippi**

Although many civil rights activists believed in Dr. King’s vision of nonviolent resistance, local people throughout the South had been practicing armed self-defense for years. During the Jim Crow period, African Americans in the South used weapons to protect themselves from racist attacks. The practice of self-defense continued throughout the South during the civil rights movement.

*Bob Moses, SNCC organizer in Mississippi*

“I don’t know if anyone in Mississippi preached to local Negroes that they shouldn’t defend themselves…. Probably the closest is when I asked Mr. E.W. Steptoe not to carry guns when we go together at night. So instead, he just hides his gun and then I find out later…. Self-defense is so deeply ingrained in rural southern America that we as a small group can’t affect it. It’s not contradictory for a farmer to say he’s nonviolent and also to pledge to shoot a marauder’s head off. The difference is that we on staff have committed ourselves to not carry guns.”

*Charles Evers, NAACP leader in Claiborne County, Mississippi*

“I don’t know what the Lord told Martin Luther King, but the Lord’s never once told me to turn the other cheek…. I don’t consider when you defend yourself, violent. You got a right to defend yourself.”

*Robert F. Williams, Mississippi activist who organized armed self-defense groups against KKK attacks in 1957*

“A man cannot have human dignity if he allows himself to be abused; to be kicked and beaten to the ground, to allow his wife and children to be attacked, refusing to defend them on the basis that he’s so pious, so self-righteous, that it would demean his personality if he fought back.”

*Robert F. Williams*

“The Afro-American militant is a ‘militant’ because he defends himself, his family, his home and his dignity. He does not introduce violence into a racist social system—the violence is already there, and has always been there. It is precisely this unchallenged violence that allows a racist social system to perpetuate itself. When people say that they are opposed to Negroes ‘resorting to violence’ what they really mean is that they are opposed to Negroes defending themselves and challenging the exclusive monopoly of violence practiced by white racists.”
C. Black Power Activists

In the late 1960s, “black power” emerged as a guiding force of African American activism. Black power activists were dissatisfied with the pace of progress and the focus of the movement. While black power has often been associated with violence, the black power movement was in fact broad and diverse in its views and strategies. Some black power activists, including members of the Black Panther Party, believed armed resistance was necessary to defend against police violence and white supremacist groups.

Stokely Carmichael, SNCC activist and black power leader, Stockholm, Sweden, 1967

“Dr. King’s policy was that nonviolence would achieve the gains for black people in the United States. His major assumption was that if you are nonviolent, if you suffer, your opponent will see your suffering and will be moved to change his heart. That’s very good. He only made one fallacious assumption: in order for nonviolence to work, your opponent must have a conscience. The United States has none.”

Angela Davis, speaking to a journalist from San Rafael County Prison, 1972

“You ask me, you know, whether I approve of violence—I mean, that just doesn’t make any sense at all... I grew up in Birmingham, Alabama. Some very, very good friends of mine were killed by bombs, bombs that were planted by racists.... [F]rom the time I was very small, I remember the sounds of bombs exploding across the street, our house shaking. I remember my father having to have guns at his disposal at all times because of the fact that, at any moment...we might expect to be attacked....

[In 1963, white terrorists bombed a church in Birmingham, killing four young girls.] “[O]ne of them lived next door to me. I was very good friends with the sister of another one. My sister was very good friends with all three of them. My mother taught one of them in her class.... [I]n fact, when the bombing occurred, one of the mothers of one of the young girls called my mother and said, ‘Can you take me down to the church to pick up Carole? You know, we heard about the bombing, and I don’t have my car.’ And they went down, and what did they find? They found limbs and heads strewn all over the place. And then, after that, in my neighborhood, all the men organized themselves into an armed patrol. They had to take their guns and patrol our community every night, because they did not want that to happen again. I mean, that’s why when someone asks me about violence, I just—I just find it incredible, because what it means is that the person who’s asking that question has absolutely no idea what black people have gone through, what black people have experienced in this country, since the time the first black person was kidnapped from the shores of Africa.”


“When a mechanic wants to fix a broken-down car engine, he must have the necessary tools to do the job. When the people move for liberation they must have the basic tool of liberation: the gun. Only with the power of the gun can the Black masses halt the terror and brutality directed against them by the armed racist power structure; and in one sense only by the power of the gun can the whole world be transformed into the earthly paradise dreamed of by the people from time immemorial. One successful practitioner of the art and science of national liberation and self-defense, Brother Mao Tse-tung, put it this way: ‘We are advocates of the abolition of war, we do not want war; but war can only be abolished through war, and in order to get rid of the gun it is necessary to take up the gun.’”

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Civil Rights and U.S. Public Schools Today

Objectives:

Students will: Consider the role of two Supreme Court decisions: *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Consider historical arguments around the issue of school segregation.

Work with groups to analyze primary sources and statistics.

Assess the importance of school integration in the United States today.

Required Reading:

Students should have read the Epilogue in the student text and completed the “Study Guide—Epilogue” (TRB 44-45) or the “Advanced Study Guide—Epilogue” (TRB-46).

Scholars Online:

Short, free videos that you may find useful in this lesson are available at <http://www.choices.edu/resources/scholars_cr_lesson.php>.

Handouts:

“School Integration: Documents” (TRB 53-56), one document for each group

“School Integration: Statistics” (TRB 57-59)

Note:

This lesson would work well over two class periods. Alternatively, you may want to assign students to analyze the documents for homework before completing the rest of the activity in class.

In the second part of the lesson, students are asked to make some basic calculations using data. Students may find it helpful to have calculators.

In the Classroom:

1. Considering Civil Rights Today—Ask students to consider the state of civil rights today. Do students think the civil rights movement was successful? Why or why not? Have any of the goals set forth by the movement been achieved? If so, which ones? What goals have not been realized? What challenges to equality still exist? Do students think that the work of the civil rights movement should continue? Why or why not?

   You may wish to show students the following Scholars Online videos:

   “How successful was the civil rights movement?” answered by Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, SNCC activist, and “What were the major accomplishments of the civil rights movement and what challenges remain?” answered by Professor Françoise Hamlin, Brown University.

   Ask students to consider school integration in particular. Was this a success? Are U.S. schools integrated today? How can students tell? Do students think that school integration was an important outcome of the movement? Why or why not?

   To review *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board of Education*, you may wish to show students the following Scholars Online video:

   “What were the Brown v. Board of Education cases?” answered by Professor Françoise Hamlin, Brown University.

2. Document Analysis—Divide the class into four groups. Give each group copies of one of the documents in “School Integration: Documents.” Each student should have their own copy. Ask students to read their assigned excerpts and answer the questions that follow with their group. Each student should be sure to write down their group’s answers on their own copy of the handout.

3. Small Group Discussion—After groups have completed the questions, break the class into new groups that have a representative of each document group. Give students about ten minutes to share their findings within the new groups. Prompt small group discussion with the following questions: Is separate unequal?
Why or why not? Was separate unequal at the time of *Plessy v. Ferguson*? What about at the time of *Brown v. Board of Education*? How are the ideas from these court cases reflected in the quotes by Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.? Why did Malcolm X draw a distinction between “separation” and “segregation”? According to Dr. King, why is integration so important? What arguments are presented for and against segregation in these documents? Do students agree with any of these arguments? Tell students that many of these same arguments are made when people consider this issue today.

4. Data Analysis—Give students a copy of “School Integration: Statistics Today.” Tell students to work with their group members to interpret the data and answer the questions that follow. If students have trouble, you may want to analyze the data first as a class.

5. Making Connections—When students have finished answering the questions, reconvene the class.

Is segregation still a problem in U.S. public schools today? Why or why not? Is segregation increasing? Ask students to back up their answers with data. What are some possible causes of increased segregation? What are some possible consequences of increased segregation?

Do students think inequality is a problem in U.S. public schools today? What other data or information would students want to have in order to more fully answer this question?

Remind students of the discussion they had at the start of class. Have any students changed their minds about the success or failure of integration since *Brown v. Board of Education*? Why or why not?

Is this something people in the United States should be concerned about today? How important are values like diversity, inclusion, and equality to the U.S. national identity? Should full integration be a goal of U.S. society? Why or why not?

Suggestions:

If you have extra time and students have access to computers, you may want to have them do some research about factors causing increased segregation among and within U.S. schools today. Here are some websites students might find useful:

<http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity>

<http://www.pbs.org/beyondbrown/legacy/index.html>
School Integration: Documents

Document 1: *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896

“[W]e think the enforced separation of the races, as applied to the internal commerce of the State, neither abridges the privileges or immunities of the colored man, deprives him of his property without due process of law, nor denies him the equal protection of the laws within the meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment...

We consider the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff’s argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it.... The argument also assumes that social prejudices may be overcome by legislation, and that equal rights cannot be secured to the negro except by an enforced commingling of the two races. We cannot accept this proposition. If the two races are to meet upon terms of social equality, it must be the result of natural affinities, a mutual appreciation of each other’s merits, and a voluntary consent of individuals....

Legislation is powerless to eradicate racial instincts or to abolish distinctions based upon physical differences, and the attempt to do so can only result in accentuating the difficulties of the present situation. If the civil and political rights of both races be equal, one cannot be inferior to the other civilly or politically. If one race be inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane.”

Questions
1. According to the court’s ruling, what was the fallacy (error) of Plessy’s argument?

2. According to the court, does enforced separation create inequality? Why or why not?

3. a. What did the court mean by the following statement: “Legislation is powerless to eradicate racial instincts or to abolish distinctions based upon physical differences”?

   b. According to the court, what are the limitations of creating equality between black and white people by law?

“We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other ‘tangible’ factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does.…

“Such considerations apply with added force to children in grade and high schools. To separate them from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlike-ly ever to be undone…. Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law, for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn. Segregation with the sanction of law, therefore, has a tendency to [retard] the educational and mental development of negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racial[ly] integrated school system.…”

Questions
1. Reread the first paragraph. What was the court’s ruling in this case?

2. According to the court ruling, how is school segregation harmful?

3. What does the following statement mean: “The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law, for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the negro group.”?
Document 3: Malcolm X, 1964

“A school system in an all-white neighborhood is not a segregated school system. The only time it’s segregated is when it is in a community other than white, but at the same time is controlled by the whites. So my understanding of a segregated school system, or a segregated community, or a segregated school, is a school that’s controlled by people other than those who go there....

“[T]he schools in Harlem are not controlled by the people in Harlem, they’re controlled by the man downtown. And the man downtown takes all of the tax dollars and spends them elsewhere, but he keeps the schools, the school facilities, the schoolteachers, and the schoolbooks, material, in Harlem at the very lowest level. So this produces a segregated education, which doesn’t do our people any good.

“On the other hand, if we can get an all-black school, that we can control, staff it ourselves with the type of teachers that have our good at heart, with the type of books that have in them many of the missing ingredients that have produced this inferiority complex in our people, then we don’t feel that an all-black school is necessarily a segregated school. It’s only segregated when it’s controlled by someone from outside. I hope I’m making my point. I just can’t see where if white people can go to a white classroom and there are no Negroes present and it doesn’t affect the academic diet they’re receiving, then I don’t see where an all-black classroom can be affected by the absence of white children. If the absence of black children doesn’t affect white students, I don’t see how the absence of whites is going to affect the blacks.

“So, what the integrationists, in my opinion, are saying, when they say that whites and blacks must go to school together, is that the whites are so much superior that just their presence in a black classroom balances it out. I can’t go along with that.”

Questions
1. What did Malcolm X believe was the root of the problem with schools in Harlem?

2. In other speeches and interviews, Malcolm X argued that there was a difference between “segregation” and “separation.” Reread the third paragraph of this selection. What do you think he saw as the difference between a school that was segregated and a school that was separated?

3. Did Malcolm X believe separate schools were always unequal? Why or why not?
Document 4: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

unknown date: “It should be declared firmly and forthrightly that the integration of schools is right and just and that our nation cannot have peace, freedom from tension, nor democratize its institutions until this unfinished task of democracy is achieved.”

1962: “Segregation is but a new form of slavery—an enslavement of the human spirit and dignity rather than of the body…. Separate, segregated facilities cannot, by their very nature, be equal….

“Sixty-six years was a painfully long time for the parents and children of Negro Americans to be declared constitutionally entitled to the full fruits of public education that had heretofore been limited and restricted under the Plessy v. Ferguson doctrine of separate-but-equal. One hundred years after the abolition of chattel slavery is indeed an even longer time....”

1965: “My reaction to the progress in school desegregation is a mixture of optimism and realism. On the optimistic side, I am encouraged by the fact that school desegregation took place in many hard core areas of the South this year with hardly a modicum of resistance....

“On the realistic side, honesty impels one to admit that progress in school desegregation is presently only a step in a thousand mile journey. We are still receiving an overdose of tokenism. Every year we procrastinate or allow others to do so. We send hundreds of thousands of Negro youth back into segregated classrooms to be further crippled emotionally and educationally in their most formative years.

“If we are to expect young Negroes to assume adequately the full responsibilities of citizens in our democracy, then, the very least our nation could do is provide them with the benefits of integrated quality education in our public school systems.”

Questions
1. In the first quote, what does Dr. King say will not be possible until integration of schools is achieved?

2. According to the second quote, can separate ever be equal? Why or why not? (Hint: carefully re-read the first paragraph of that quote.)

3. In the third quote, who does Dr. King say is harmed by segregation? How are they harmed?

4. In the last paragraph of the third quote, why does Dr. King say integration is important?
School Integration: Statistics

Table 1: Change in Black Segregation in the South, 1954-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage of Black Students in Majority White Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>.001 (one in 100,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>.1 (one in 1,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>33.1 (331 in 1,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>43.5 (435 in 1,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>27.0 (270 in 1,000)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Questions

1. What does this table show?

2. a. In what year was there the least integration? What percentage of black students were in majority white schools?

   b. In what year was there the greatest integration? What percentage of black students were in majority white schools?

3. What percentage of black students were in majority white schools in the South in 2005?

4. Is segregation in the South increasing or decreasing?
Table 2: Racial Composition of Schools Attended by the Average Student of Each Race, 1990-1 and 2005-6

Racial Composition of School Attended by the Average:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White Student</th>
<th>Black Student</th>
<th>Latino Student</th>
<th>Asian Student</th>
<th>American Indian Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>83 77</td>
<td>35 30</td>
<td>32 27</td>
<td>48 44</td>
<td>52 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>8 9</td>
<td>54 52</td>
<td>11 12</td>
<td>11 12</td>
<td>6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Latino</td>
<td>6 9</td>
<td>9 14</td>
<td>52 55</td>
<td>16 21</td>
<td>8 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Asian</td>
<td>3 4</td>
<td>2 3</td>
<td>5 5</td>
<td>24 23</td>
<td>2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% American Indian</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td>0 1</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td>32 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100 100</td>
<td>100 100</td>
<td>100 100</td>
<td>100 100</td>
<td>100 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Questions

1. What does this table show?

2. a. In 1990-1, most white students went to school with ________________ students.
   
   b. In 1990-1, most black students went to school with ________________ students.
   
   c. Did the answers to these questions change in 2005-6?

3. a. Calculation: In 2005-6, if a white student attended a school with 600 students, how many of them would be...
   
   white?  
   black?

   b. Calculation: In 2005-6, if a black student attended a school with 600 students, how many of them would be...
   
   black?  
   white?

4. Can we draw any conclusions from this data? For example, who do students tend to go to school with? Are certain students more likely to attend integrated schools than others?
Table 3: Black Students’ Access to Top Schools

This bar graph shows the percentage of black students in schools ranked in the top 20 percent and bottom 20 percent of the schools in each city. School rankings are based on standardized test scores for the year 2010-2011.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Schools in the Top 20%</th>
<th>Schools in the Bottom 20%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta, GA</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Des Moines, IA</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrisburg, PA</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson, MS</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee, WI</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syracuse, NY</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions

1. What does this graph show?

2. Calculation: In which city is the difference between the percent of black students attending top schools and bottom schools…
   a. the greatest? What is the difference?
   b. the smallest? What is the difference?

3. Are there limitations to what you can learn from this graph? What other information would you want to have?

4. What does this graph tell you about equality in educational opportunity?
Assessment Using Documents

*Instructions*: These questions relate to the role of the federal government in the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

1. a. What does Document 1 imply about the federal government’s role in the civil rights movement?

   b. How does Document 6 challenge the impression given by Document 5?

2. How does Document 9 support the conclusions made in Document 2?

3. Assess the value and limitations of Document 4, Document 5, and Document 7 for historians studying the federal government’s role in the civil rights movement. Be sure to refer to the origin and purpose of each document.

4. Using these sources and your knowledge, explain the federal government’s impact on the civil rights movement in the United States.
Documents


“Powerful presidents, congressional lawmakers, and members of the Supreme Court provided the legal instruments to challenge racial segregation and disenfranchisement. Without their crucial support, the struggle against white supremacy in the South still would have taken place but would have lacked the power and authority to defeat state governments intent on keeping Blacks in subservient positions.... It does not belittle African-Americans’ creativity and determination to conclude that given existing power relationships heavily favoring whites, southern Blacks could not possibly eliminate racial inequality without outside federal assistance. Furthermore, Washington officials had to protect African Americans from intimidation and violence to allow them to carry out their challenges to discrimination. Without this room for maneuvering, civil rights advocates would encounter insurmountable hurdles in confronting white power.”


“The local movement was necessary because new national laws and legal precedents were inadequate by themselves in changing racial power relations. This is evident in Claiborne County whites’ persistence and effectiveness in evading court decisions and legislative changes like the Brown decision, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and prohibitions against jury discrimination. Determined black assertiveness and insistence were the keys to forcing southern whites’ slow, reluctant acquiescence to the nation’s laws and to triggering what was, at its best, intermittent federal enforcement of those laws. It is especially critical to understand the role of the federal government with some accuracy because many people unquestioningly accept...that an activist federal government was in the forefront of generating change. In fact, the opposite is closer to the truth.”

“It took a grassroots insurgency in the South to persuade a reluctant federal government to act. Neither Dwight Eisenhower nor John F. Kennedy regarded righting racial wrongs as their priority.... Strong federal commitment to racial equality began with Kennedy’s ‘Birmingham’ speech and ended with Johnson’s inspiring address at Howard [about his ‘war on poverty’]. During this brief three-year space the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts passed Congress, and the Office of Economic Opportunity attempted to come to grips with the problems of poverty. This period of promise ended abruptly in the summer of 1966. Black Power and Vietnam were of course in part responsible. But by then Martin Luther King and other established leaders were becoming convinced that equality of opportunity did not lead to equality of condition on a playing field that was not level, and when they began to demand that white people make sacrifices to achieve the greater good they lost the support of the White House and Congress.”

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**Document 4:** From a letter written by Evelyn Grimes Allen, a parent in Lubbock, Texas to President Dwight Eisenhower on September 25, 1957. On September 24, President Eisenhower had sent the army to Arkansas to protect the nine black students who were trying to attend Little Rock High School.

“Dear President,

Our love and greatest admiration for your courageous step, yesterday, in combating the vicious HATE cancer that has taken over the Southland!

After almost one hundred years, they feign for ‘added time to integrate.’ They flaunt the Confederate flags at every football game and parade. They have no intention of integrating the schools.

All Federal Aid for school construction should be withheld until doors are opened wide to all races and creeds. Locally, ‘integration’ consists of two or three Negroes at each of two white schools. My daughter was persecuted, two years ago, when she had a Negro child in her 4th grade room at Thompson School here. The other 34 mothers maligned, ridiculed, and insulted her because she refused to isolate the child....

They accept the Negro as servants to handle and prepare their food, yet, they become panicky at the thought that they might use the same chalk and erasers, or that the child’s coat might contaminate the lockers. This thing has snowballed into a ghastly thing down here....

Cordially Yours,

Evelyn Grimes Allen”


“SNCC had gone into voter registration work in some of the most dangerous Deep South counties convinced they were in partnership with Washington, that the Justice Department was going to do something to neutralize racial violence. In fact, in the face of violence against civil rights workers and local people, they learned that the government continued to make timid and minimalist responses. In some cases including [the murder of Herbert Lee], they had reason to believe that some members of the Justice Department were even in collusion with local racists. The Justice Department could not be counted on…”
**Document 7:** From President John F. Kennedy’s address on the proposal for a Civil Rights Bill, June 11, 1963.

“Next week I shall ask the Congress of the United States to act, to make a commitment it has not fully made in this century to the proposition that race has no place in American life or law…. The old code of equity law under which we live commands for every wrong a remedy, but in too many communities, in too many parts of the country, wrongs are inflicted on Negro citizens and there are no remedies at law. Unless the Congress acts, their only remedy is the street.”

**Document 8:** Introduction to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, approved on July 2, 1964 during the presidency of Lyndon Johnson.

“An Act: to enforce the constitutional right to vote, to confer jurisdiction upon the district courts of the United States to provide injunctive relief against discrimination in public accommodations, to authorize the Attorney General to institute suits to protect constitutional rights in public facilities and public education, to extend the Commission on Civil Rights, to prevent discrimination in federally assisted programs, to establish a Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity, and for other purposes. Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That this Act may be cited as the ‘Civil Rights Act of 1964’.”

**Document 9:** From SNCC activist John Lewis’s speech at the March on Washington, August 28, 1963.

“We must have legislation that will protect the Mississippi sharecroppers, who have been forced to leave their homes because they dared to exercise their right to register to vote. We need a bill that will provide for the homeless and starving people of this nation. We need a bill that will ensure the equality of a maid who earns five dollars a week in the home of a family whose total income is 100,000 dollars a year…. My friends let us not forget that we are involved in a serious social revolution. By and large, politicians who build their careers on immoral compromise and allow themselves an open forum of political, economic and social exploitation dominate American politics. There are exceptions, of course. We salute those. But what political leader can stand up and say, ‘My party is a party of principles’? For the party of Kennedy is also the party of Eastland. The party of Javits is also the party of Goldwater. Where is our party? Where is the political party that will make it unnecessary to march on Washington?”
# Key Terms

## Introduction and Part I:
- racism
- colonial economy
- emancipation
- hierarchy
- social status
- disenfranchisement
- white supremacy
- literacy
- segregation
- racial inequality
- vagrancy
- racial etiquette
- urban
- skilled jobs
- integration
- accommodationists
- gradualists
- migrants
- solidarity
- equitable

## Part II:
- activists
- discrimination
- social movement
- community organizing
- social status
- boycott
- integration
- sit-in
- tactic
- direct action
- Cold War
- nonviolence
- self-defense
- convention

## Epilogue:
- self-determination
- political system
- social services
Cold War

The Cold War was the dominant foreign policy problem for the United States and the Soviet Union between the late 1940s and the late 1980s. The two countries were locked in an economic, political, and ideological competition for power and influence around the world. Nearly every foreign policy decision was intricately examined for its potential impact on U.S.-Soviet relations. Domestic policy was equally important. The U.S. government believed it was vital to portray a positive image of the United States to the world community in order to win this ideological battle. The treatment of African Americans in the United States became a growing embarrassment for the country as the century progressed. Many countries criticized the U.S. government for espousing values such as equality and freedom while simultaneously allowing large portions of its population to be oppressed based on skin color. Eventually this international pressure helped convince U.S. leaders to take a more active role in the civil rights struggles spreading throughout the South.

Institutionalized Racism

Institutionalized racism is discrimination against people of a certain race through biased laws or practices. This type of racism can affect everything from employment to housing to educational expectations to the rates at which individuals are arrested and incarcerated. Black power activist Stokely Carmichael made a distinction between what he called “individual racism” and “institutional racism.” Individual racism, he argued, consists of acts by individuals, and is often violent and overt. Institutional racism is more subversive and thus harder to see. It is not possible to pin this racism on any one individual or group. Instead, it is racism that is ingrained within U.S. society, for example in racial profiling by the police, voter laws that disenfranchise a disproportionate number of African Americans, and negative stereotypes that affect how people in the United States interact. This racism contributes to the racial inequality that continues to plague U.S. society.

Social Movement

A social movement is a large group of people working together for social change. Social movements are focused around specific social or political issues, such as environmental concerns, workers’ rights, or the actions of a government or corporation. Generally they involve a collection of organizations and individuals. These movements exist on the left and right of the political spectrum, and may use a variety of methods to achieve their aims including everything from protest to political lobbying to sabotage and violence. The U.S. civil rights movement in the twentieth century is an example of a widespread social movement that mobilized a significant portion of the U.S. population in pursuit of its goals. It united a variety of diverse organizations and individuals all working towards the same goal: equality and justice for African Americans in U.S. society.
Making Choices Work in Your Classroom

This section of the Teacher Resource Book offers suggestions for teachers as they adapt Choices curricula on historical turning points to their classrooms. They are drawn from the experiences of teachers who have used Choices curricula successfully in their classrooms and from educational research on student-centered instruction.

Managing the Choices Simulation

A central activity of every Choices unit is the role-play simulation. Just as thoughtful preparation is necessary to set the stage for cooperative group learning, careful planning for the presentations can increase the effectiveness of the simulation. Time is the essential ingredient to keep in mind. A minimum of forty-five to fifty minutes is necessary for the presentations. Teachers who have been able to schedule a double period or extend the length of class to one hour report that the extra time is beneficial. When necessary, the role-play simulation can be run over two days, but this disrupts momentum. The best strategy for managing the role play is to establish and enforce strict time limits, such as five minutes for each presentation, ten minutes for questions and challenges, and the final five minutes of class for wrapping up. It is crucial to make students aware of strict time limits as they prepare their presentations. Our short video for teachers “Tips for a Successful Role Play” <www.choices.edu/pd/roleplay.php> also offers many helpful suggestions.

Adjusting for Students of Differing Abilities

Teachers of students at all levels—from middle school to AP—have used Choices materials successfully. Many teachers make adjustments to the materials for their students. Here are some suggestions:

- Go over vocabulary and concepts with visual tools such as concept maps and word pictures.
- Require students to answer guiding questions in the text as checks for understanding.
- Shorten reading assignments; cut and paste sections.
- Combine reading with political cartoon analysis, map analysis, or movie-watching.
- Read some sections of the readings out loud.
- Ask students to create graphic organizers for sections of the reading, or fill in ones you have partially completed.
- Supplement with different types of readings, such as from literature or text books.
- Ask student groups to create a bumper sticker, PowerPoint presentation, or collage representing their perspective.
- Do only some activities and readings from the unit rather than all of them.

Adjusting for Large and Small Classes

Choices units are designed for an average class of twenty-five students. In larger classes, additional roles, such as those of newspaper reporter or member of a special interest group, can be assigned to increase student participation in the simulation. With larger perspective groups, additional tasks might be to create a poster, political cartoon, or public service announcement that represents the viewpoint of a perspective. In smaller classes, the teacher can serve as the moderator, and administrators, parents, or faculty can be invited to play other roles. Another option is to combine two small classes.

Assessing Student Achievement

Grading Group Assignments: Students and teachers both know that group grades can be motivating for students, while at the same time they can create controversy. Telling students in advance that the group will receive one grade often motivates group members to hold each other accountable. This can foster group cohesion and lead to better group
results. It is also important to give individual grades for group work assignments in order to recognize an individual’s contribution to the group. The “Assessment Guide for Oral Presentations” on the following page is designed to help teachers evaluate group presentations.

Requiring Self-Evaluation: Having students complete self-evaluations is an effective way to encourage them to think about their own learning. Self-evaluations can take many forms and are useful in a variety of circumstances. They are particularly helpful in getting students to think constructively about group collaboration. In developing a self-evaluation tool for students, teachers need to pose clear and direct questions to students. Two key benefits of student self-evaluation are that it involves students in the assessment process, and that it provides teachers with valuable insights into the contributions of individual students and the dynamics of different groups. These insights can help teachers to organize groups for future cooperative assignments.

Testing: Research demonstrates that students using the Choices approach learn the factual information presented as well as or better than from lecture-discussion format. Students using Choices curricula demonstrate a greater ability to think critically, analyze multiple perspectives, and articulate original viewpoints. Teachers should hold students accountable for learning historical information and concepts presented in Choices units. A variety of types of testing questions and assessment devices can require students to demonstrate critical thinking and historical understanding.

For Further Reading


## Assessment Guide for Oral Presentations

**Group assignment:**

**Group members:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Assessment</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The group made good use of its preparation time</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The presentation reflected analysis of the issues under consideration</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The presentation was coherent and persuasive</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The group incorporated relevant sections of the reading into its presentation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The group’s presenters spoke clearly, maintained eye contact, and made an effort to hold the attention of their audience</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The presentation incorporated contributions from all the members of the group</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Assessment</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The student cooperated with other group members</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The student was well-prepared to meet his or her responsibilities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The student made a significant contribution to the group’s presentation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Day 1
See Day Two of the Suggested Five-Day Lesson Plan. (Students should have read Part II of the reading and completed “Study Guide—Part II” before beginning the unit. To gain an introduction to the topic, students should also read the Introduction.)

Day 2
Assign each student one of the four perspectives, and allow a few minutes for students to familiarize themselves with the mindsets of the perspectives. How do the perspectives differ? What are their goals?

Homework: Students should read the Epilogue.

Day 3
See Day Five of the Suggested Five-Day Lesson Plan.
Choices Curricula
Promote 21st Century Skills

Students are best able to understand and analyze complex content if they are actively engaged with the material. The Choices Program uses a problem-based approach to make complex international issues accessible and meaningful for students of diverse abilities and learning styles. All of our units address these 21st century skills:

Critical Thinking
Students examine contrasting policy options and explore the underlying values and interests that drive different perspectives.

Media and Technology Literacy
Students critique editorials, audio and video sources, maps and other visuals for perspective and bias. They watch video clips to gather and assess information from leading scholars.

Global Awareness
Readings and primary source documents immerse students in multiple perspectives on complex international issues.

Collaboration
Students work in groups to make oral presentations, analyze case studies, and develop persuasive arguments.

Creativity and Innovation
Creating political cartoons, memorializing historical events artistically, or developing original policy options are some of the innovative ways that students express themselves.

Civic Literacy
Choices materials empower students with the skills and habits to actively engage with their communities and the world.

www.choices.edu
Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi

_Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi_ traces the history of the black freedom struggle from Reconstruction through the 1960s. Readings and activities focus on the grass-roots movement to achieve civil rights for African Americans.

_Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi_ is part of a continuing series on current and historical international issues published by the Choices Education Program at Brown University. Choices materials place special emphasis on the importance of educating students in their participatory role as citizens.

THE CHOICES PROGRAM

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