



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1998 Volume I: The Use and Abuse of History in Film and Video

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## **Let Justice Roll Down: The Civil Rights Movement Through Film (1954-1965)**

Curriculum Unit 98.01.06  
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The curriculum unit I have chosen will be incorporated into the United States History II course that is required of all eleventh graders in the city of New Haven. The unit will focus on the Civil Rights Movement during the years 1954-1965. In my past years of teaching American History, one of my goals was to make history come alive and be exciting for my students. I used a variety of techniques in the classroom recognizing the fact that students learn in a multitude of ways. One method I have found to be extremely successful is the use of visual materials. Films can bring a lesson to life. They can play a vital role in stirring up social issues of the past. Hollywood, as well as independent film companies have created many films that address the issues of the civil rights movement. In viewing a film students can acquire an incredible amount of comprehensive knowledge on a topic. Film visually recreates the time period for students. They are able to see physical gestures, cadences of speech, style of dress, style of architecture, as well as experience the environment. After viewing and discussing the film, students are usually amazed at the amount of factual knowledge they acquired while they were being entertained. I have found it to be an unusual instance when a classroom lecture can have the same impact as a powerful film. Six films will be presented in this unit as part of the study on the time span I have chosen. They include the following; *Separate But Equal*, *The Long Walk Home*, *The Ernest Green Story*, *Ghosts of Mississippi*, *Mississippi Burning*, and *Malcolm X*.

### **Objectives and Strategies**

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Students will examine how the NAACP used the courts to end legal segregation in the schools, as well as reflect on the meaning of individual sacrifice. Imagine being unable to attend the school of your choice or being forced by law to attend a school with inferior facilities. These were the facts of everyday life for many African-American students in the southern part of the United States. Two films will be studied at this time. The first, *Separate But Equal*, provides an in depth look at the fight for racial equality in the public schools. In one of his finest performances Sydney Poitier plays the role of Thurgood Marshall, the NAACP lawyer who took the fight for racial equality to the United States Supreme Court via the *Brown v. the Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas* in 1954. Richard Kiley plays the role of Chief Justice Earl Warren, and Burt Lancaster is believable as the opposing counsel.

Before viewing the film *Separate But Equal* teachers will need to explain the origin of the phrase “separate but

equal” to the class. Students will need to research the *Plessy v. Ferguson case (1896)* . Encourage interested students to study the arguments and decisions in this case. Final reports may consist of written briefs or dramatizations in which small groups of students present each side to their classmates. Explain to students that this case arose as part of a careful strategy to test the legality of the Louisiana law. This law gave constitutional sanction to virtually all forms of segregation in the United States until after World War II.

In September, 1891, elite “persons of color” in New Orleans formed the “Citizens Committee to Test the Constitutionality of the Separate Car Law.” They raised three thousand dollars for the cost of a test case. Albion Tourgee, the nation’s leading white advocate of black rights, agreed to take this case for no fee. Students might be interested in researching civil rights cases today where attorneys have worked for free.

In June 1892, Homer Plessy purchased a first-class ticket on the East Louisiana Railroad, sat in the “white” car and was promptly arrested and arraigned before Judge John Ferguson. Plessy then sued to prevent Ferguson from conducting any further proceedings against him. Eventually his challenge reached the United States Supreme Court.

Before the Court, Tourgee argued that segregation violated the Thirteenth Amendment’s prohibition of involuntary servitude and denied blacks equal protection of the laws, which was guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. These amendments along with the Declaration of Independence, gave Americans affirmative rights against discrimination. The lawyers for the Louisiana railroad argued that the separate facilities for black passengers were just as good as the white facilities.

The Supreme Court sided with the railroad and ruled that separation of the races in public accommodations was legal and did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment. The decision established the doctrine of “separate but equal” which allowed states to maintain segregated facilities for blacks and whites so long as they provided equal service. The vote in this case was 7 to 1 with Justice Henry Brown writing the majority decision and Justice John Marshall Harlan writing the dissenting opinion. Justice Brown wrote “... if one race be inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them on the same plane.” Ask students to interpret what Justice Brown meant. Remind students that in practice the separation was enforced, but the equality was not. Justice Marshall Harlan dissented when he stated “The thin disguise of equal accommodations for passengers in railroad coaches will not mislead anyone or atone for the wrong this day done.” Harlan’s voice was that of a prophet ignored by his own age. More than five decades would pass before the Supreme Court recognized the fundamental truth of his dissent. Meanwhile, the South built a legal system rooted in social segregation.

The film *Separate But Equal* shows how the NAACP had been trying to end segregation since 1909. One influential figure portrayed was Charles Hamilton Houston, a brilliant Harvard University Law Professor who trained African American law students and who also served as chief legal counsel for the NAACP from 1934-1938. For help, Houston recruited some of his most able law students. In 1938 he placed the team under the direction of Thurgood Marshall, played by Sydney Poitier. Over the next 23 years, Marshall and his team of NAACP lawyers would win 29 out of 32 cases argued before the Supreme Court. The film is a factual account of Thurgood Marshall’s campaign against segregated schools in the south. It shows how he had to convince the NAACP lawyers to back parents suing to integrate school systems in four states ( Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, Delaware) and the District of Columbia. The Court lumped the cases together in a single ruling named for the case concerning nine year old Linda Brown. Her father, Oliver Brown, had charged the Board of Education, Topeka Kansas with violating Linda’s rights by denying her admission to an all white elementary school four blocks from her house. The state had directed Linda to cross a railroad yard and then take a bus to

an all black elementary school 21 blocks away. Parents in the other three states were faced with similar situations. Harry Brig of Clarendon, South Carolina was outraged that his five children had to attend schools which operated on one-fourth the amount of money given to white schools. Ethel Belton took her complaints to the Delaware Board of Education when her children were forced to ride a bus for nearly two hours each day instead of walking to their neighborhood high school . In Farmville, Virginia, 16 year old Barbara Johns led her fellow students on a strike for a better school. All over the country, black students and parents were angered over the conditions of their schools. NAACP lawyers studied their grievances and decided it was not enough to keep fighting for equal facilities, but rather, wanted all schools integrated.

Marshall's arguments rested on the psychological effects of segregation. He produced expert testimony demonstrating that segregation lowered the esteem of African American children, thus, segregation violated the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment. In a unanimous 9-0 decision the Supreme Court ruled that the states of the nation do not have the right to separate black and white children in different public schools. Segregation of the races was held to be in violation of the Constitution. Chief Justice Earl Warren read the majority decision which said in part, "to separate those children 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 unlikely ever to be undone... Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal...Any language in *Plessy v. Ferguson* contrary to these findings is rejected." Students might further investigate the issue of school integration by researching the earlier cases argued by Thurgood Marshall concerning integration of graduate schools. Possible cases are *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents* , 1950 and *Sweatt v. Painter* , 1950. Students should be divided into two groups. They should learn the facts of the cases (date, plaintiffs, defendants and legal issues) and the Supreme Court decisions (vote, majority opinion, and dissenting opinion) They should be prepared to present their case to the entire class.

Sydney Poitier presents a powerful performance as Thurgood Marshall. He demonstrates how Marshall dedicated himself to fighting the indignities of a racist system he knew all too well. Students will be asked to research the life of Marshall. Suggest that they use the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* to find obituaries published in national news magazine such as *Time* , *Newsweek* . or *U.S. News and World Report* .

The second example of a film that examines desegregation in the public schools is *The Ernest Green Story* . This production shows racism at its ugliest and determination at its most magnificent. This Disney presentation is the true story of nine black students who were selected to be the first to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. The nine students were Jean Brown Trickey, Carlotta Walls LaNier, Melba Patillo Beals, Terrence Roberts, Gloria Ray Karlmark, Thelma Mothershed Wair, Elizabeth Eckford , Jefferson Thomas and Ernest Green. Ernest was the only senior in the group.

In the summer of 1957, the city of Little Rock made plans to desegregate its public schools. Within a week of the 1954 Brown Supreme Court decision, Arkansas was one of two southern states to announce it would begin immediately to take steps to comply with the new law of the land. The law school in Arkansas had already been integrated since 1949. By 1957, seven of its eight state universities had desegregated. Little Rock felt it could break down the barriers of segregation in its schools with a carefully developed program. It had already desegregated its public buses, as well as its zoo, library, and park systems. Its school board had voted unanimously for a plan starting the desegregation of the high school in 1957 followed by junior high schools and elementary schools the next year.

But the smooth transition to the school's system integration was not to be. On September 2, 1957 Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus called out the state's National Guard to surround Little Rock Central High School and

prevent any black students from entering . He stated that it was his duty to protect citizens and property from possible violence by protesters that were supposedly coming to Little Rock.

The film presents the nine teenagers preparing for opening day by meeting with members of the NAACP. They were doing a series of role playing where they were subject to taunts. They were taught not to react in an angry way , but to “turn the other cheek.” They were taught to follow the example of Martin Luther King and believe in the concept of non-violence. Students should try and put themselves in the place of these nine teenagers as they marched up the steps of Little Rock Central High School amid a crowd of angry white people who despised them for presuming to attend a public school in their own town. They marched up those steps with a cool courage that inspired awe. No matter how many times you look at the original newsreels it is amazing how the courage and dignity of these students comes through. Ask students how they would have responded in such a situation? The National Guardsmen, carrying billy clubs with carbines over their shoulders formed a cordon around the school. They halted traffic on side streets along the high school and directed it along the main thoroughfare in front of the building. The students were turned back on that first day and they did not return until President Eisenhower ordered in units of an airborne division to escort them to class and enforce the order of the Supreme Court.

The film shows the teenagers getting advice from various people within the black community. A strong influence on these young people was a woman by the name of Daisy Lee Gatson Bates. Ms. Bates was president of the Arkansas state conference of the NAACP. She led the black community’s campaign on integration of the public schools Little Rock. All activities of the nine teenagers were planned and coordinated by Daisy who stood with the children during the ordeal. Students should be asked to analyze whether the role of Daisy Bates in the film was an adequate one for the amount of work that she did for the cause.

Ossie Davis portrays the grandfather of Ernest Green. He is depicted as a very wise and strong role model for young Ernest. The mother of Ernest is portrayed as a spiritual and proper woman who quietly gives her son strength and support. The younger brother of Ernest seems to be torn over whether his brother is doing the right thing. Even the best friend of Ernest asks him why he is leaving his black high school where he was a “big man” on campus. Students should be required to research the life of Ernest Green in order to determine if these people are accurately depicted in the film. Disney even includes an elderly black woman neighbor who is extremely upset over the fact that Ernest is “rocking the boat with this integration thing.”

Students usually react very strongly to the scene in the movie showing Elizabeth Eckford being taunted and jeered by white mobs as she tried to enter the school on the morning of September 22, 1957. She had mistakenly gone to school alone on that morning for there was some sort of miscommunication. Her grace under pressure while she was jeered and taunted by white mobs is accurately portrayed in the film. Her strength and dignity came to symbolize the determination of an entire generation of African American students. Students might have difficulty researching information about Elizabeth after 1958. She dropped from public view and did not reappear in the news until 1996 when Heather Jurgensen, a student at a rural Kansas high school, convinced Ms. Eckford to be the subject of a video for the National History Day Competition. After turning down media interviews for decades, Eckford decided to help Jurgensen. Jurgensen became a national finalist in the competition. Students should be assigned to read Eckford’s account of her first appearance at Central High School. It is described and recorded in a book by William Loren Katz titled *Eyewitness: The Negro in American History*. Ask students why they think Elizabeth Eckford encountered such a hostile reaction when she arrived at the school..

The film summarizes the entire school year for the black teenagers at Central High School. The students finally

entered the school on September 23. About 1,000 people gathered in front of the school. The police escorted the nine black teenagers to a side door where they quietly entered the building as classes were beginning. When the mob learned the students were inside, they began to challenge the police and surged toward the school with shouts and threats. Fearful the police would be unable to control the crowd the black students were sent home early through a side door. In December, 1957 taunted by white male students, Minnijean Brown dumps a bowl of chili on them in the cafeteria. She is suspended for six days. In February, 1958 following additional altercations with white students, Minnijean is suspended by the Board of Education for the remainder of the school year. She transferred to New Lincoln High School in New York City. The events that surround Minnijean usually contribute to a very lively discussion in the classroom. Students usually react to the severity of the suspension compared to the punishments of today. Students should be encouraged to find further information about the daily events of these young people as recorded in *The Tiger* , the student newspaper and the two newspapers of Little Rock; the *Arkansas Gazette* and the *Arkansas Democrat* .

On May 27, 1958 Ernest Green became the first black student to graduate from Central High. He was one of 600 seniors to receive his diploma at commencement exercises at Quigley Stadium. Federal troops and city police were at hand at the event, but everything went smoothly. The film shows the high school principal trying to convince Ernest not to walk in the ceremony in order to avoid any possible disruption. Whether this conversation actually occurred seems unclear? The fact is that Ernest participated fully in the graduation program. Teachers might want to lead a discussion on the importance of being publicly recognized for an achievement. Would students be just as excited to receive their high school diploma in the mail?

Students might enjoy reading the account of Melba Beals' year at Central High School. Her book is titled *Warriors Don't Cry* . Although she has a small role in the movie she became an outspoken activist in the Civil Rights Movement. Also, students can create a time line documenting the progress of integration from September, 1957 through September, 1972 when all public schools in Little Rock were finally integrated. It was really a long struggle and is worth having the students investigate. Finally, interested students should be encouraged to research the life of the nine students before and after the crisis in Little Rock.

**Students will be able to trace the development of the Montgomery bus boycott and understand how the struggle for equality became a mass movement based on direct action** . The film *The Long Walk Home* deals with the issue of segregation of the city buses in Montgomery, Alabama. Before viewing the film teachers will need to present students with a factual background of the situation. On December 1, 1955 a small neatly dressed black woman left work at quitting time, stopped at a pharmacy to do some shopping and then boarded a Montgomery city bus for the ride home. She took a seat toward the rear in the row just behind the section marked "White's Only." Holding her packages she was glad to sit down. After a long day her feet hurt. As the bus wound its way through town it steadily filled with passengers and soon every seat was taken. When two white men boarded the bus and paid their fares, the bus driver called over his shoulder for the first row of blacks to move back. After some delay three blacks rose and stood in the aisle, but Rosa Parks, her feet aching, her lap covered with packages, did not budge. The driver shouted to her to get up. Rosa Parks refused and for that she was arrested and put into jail. She had defied the law that not only established separate seating for blacks and whites, but required blacks to surrender their places if buses were filled.

Rosa Parks has been called the "mother of the civil rights revolution." Ask students how Ms. Parks might have acquired this name? Rosa was described as having high moral values as well as a strong character. Why do you think that would make her a good symbol to promote the bus boycott? Have students explain in their own words what her actions meant to American history.



The film highlights this absorbing drama as experienced by a black maid played superbly by Whoopi Goldberg and her white employer played by Sissy Spacek. The movie focuses on the different experiences of both women as the boycott continued on for 381 days. For the black maid the issue is clear. She will honor the boycott and not ride the city bus to work. For the husband and brother-in-law of Sissy Spacek the issue is also clear. They do not support the boycott and do not want the system of segregation to end. They wish to maintain the status quo. As a matter of fact, they belong to the White's Citizens Council which was formed in various areas around the south to preserve all white schools and to prevent court decisions in favor of integration from being enacted. For Sissy Spacek the issue is not as clear and herein lies the conflict. The story is told through the eyes of her young daughter. At first her mother drives her maid to work because she needs the help running her household. However, as time goes on she becomes personally involved in the boycott until she finds herself voluntarily participating in the carpooling of black workers. A bond is formed between the black maid and her white employer. The climax at the end of the movie shows Spacek joining forces with her maid, other black workers and her young daughter against her brother-in law and her husband. The film also shows conflict in the maid's family when her children ride the bus against her wishes. While this movie portrays relationships, students must be reminded that the event is based on fact, but the relationships in the film are fictitious. Students may assume there might have been such relationships. Teachers should help them to focus on the main issue .

Rosa Parks was fined \$14 in police court for disregarding a driver's order to move to the rear of the bus. She appealed her fine and was released under a \$100 bond signed by Attorney Fred Gray and NAACP state president E.D. Nixon. It was the black women of Montgomery who acted first. The day after the arrest the Woman's Political Council, an organization of black activists, started handing out leaflets calling for blacks to stay off the municipal buses. This event is depicted accurately in the film. At first the maid doesn't know what to make of the boycott, but after attending a meeting at the local church she supported the boycott. That meeting was conducted by the Reverend Martin Luther King, the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Pastor Church. The Montgomery Improvement Association ,a group established by the city's black leadership, organized alternative transportation. The buses stayed empty as carpools shuttled blacks from their neighborhoods to their places of work.

Martin Luther King was only 26 years old when he was asked to lead the Montgomery bus boycott. His voice is easily recognized as the one giving inspirational speeches in the film about the importance of keeping the boycott alive. With passion and eloquence he preached the cause of nonviolent protest and asked his followers to love their enemies. Students might research where King drew his ideas from the teachings of Thoreau, Gandhi, Jesus and A. Philip Randolph. King proved to be an extraordinary leader. Had he not led the boycott, many people would have gone back to riding the buses. Students should be able to identify the goals of the boycotters, their needs, emotions and prior experiences. Students should definitely understand that a boycott is a direct action and may be a form of civil disobedience. Discussion in the classroom might focus on the following questions: What motivates a person to defy authority and risk jail? Why would a whole community organize a boycott? What can happen when enough people defy authority? Students should keep these questions in mind when they study the Montgomery Bus boycott and other protests. Martin Luther King said that the uprising is "more than a boycott." Instead he said it can be more adequately described as a mass protest by a people who are "tired of conditions they experienced for so many years. It is not a conflict between the white race and the Negro race, it is a conflict between justice and injustice" Ask students to interpret these words of Martin Luther King.

Ask students to write a review of the film. Have them summarize the story, describe the segments or images that interested them most and analyze why those segments were effective. Rate the film on a scale of one to

five stars and give reasons for your rating.

**Students will become aware that there was immense danger and little glory attached to Civil Rights work in Mississippi (1963-1964).** Two films will be viewed under this objective. *Ghosts of Mississippi* and *Mississippi Burning*.

*Ghosts of Mississippi* is a rehash of the 1963 slaying of civil rights activist Medgar Evers and the trial thirty years later that put accused killer Byron De La Beckwith behind bars. The film begins with a backflash of the assassination. Before viewing this movie students should be provided with a background of Evers. This can be done by the teacher or students may be assigned to research the life of Evers and report back to the class.

By the time Medgar Evers was 28, he had lost a family friend to a lynch mob. He had been turned away from a voting place by a gang of armed white men. He had been denied admission to the University of Mississippi Law School because he was black. Nevertheless, Medgar Evers loved Mississippi. He fought in World War II and was determined to return to Mississippi to fight for equality for his race. Evers became the first NAACP Field Secretary for Mississippi and he spent much of 1955 investigating racial killings. Evers' research on the murders of George Lee, Lamar Smith, Emmett Till and others was compiled in a nationally distributed pamphlet called *M is for Mississippi and for Murder*.

There was great danger and little glory attached to civil rights work in Mississippi. Medgar Evers was the one who counseled James Meredith when Meredith became the first black person to enroll at the University of Mississippi. He also arranged for the safe escape of Moses Wright after the elderly black man testified against the white killers of Emmett Till.

In the spring of 1963 Edgars was living in Jackson, leading a drive for fair employment and integration against a stubborn city government. As the momentum of the movement increased so did the threat of violence. A molotov cocktail was thrown at the home of Evers. Student demonstrators were beaten by police. So many protesters were arrested that the state fairground had to be turned into a detention camp. Evers spent day and night in negotiations and strategy sessions, seeking desperately to avoid violence. On the night of June 12, 1963, President John Kennedy delivered a very strong message on civil rights stating "a great change is at hand. and our... obligation is to make that revolution, that change, peaceful and constructive for all." Evers watched this speech with other NAACP officials and arrived home after midnight. He pulled up into his driveway, gathered up a pile of NAACP T-shirts reading "Jim Crow Must Go," and got out of his car.

Myrlie Evers had let her children wait up for their father that night. They heard his car door slam. "And in that same instant, we heard loud gunfire," Mrs.Evers recalled. "The children fell to the floor, as he had taught them to do, and I made a run for the front door, turned on the light and there he was. The bullet had pushed him forward, as I understand, and the strong man that he was, he had his keys in his hand and had pulled his body around the rest of the way to the door. There he lay." The film seems to recreate this scene perfectly as the voice of Whoopi Goldberg remembers that evening in narrative.

Neighbors carried Evers on a mattress and drove him to the hospital, but he was dead within an hour after the shot. The next morning police discovered a small clearing patch of honeysuckle near the house. On the ground nearby lay a high-powered rifle with a telescopic sight. An FBI investigation later showed the fingerprints on the rifle belonged to Byron De La Beckwith, a charter member of the White Citizens Council. Two trials were held for Beckwith and yet, both ended in a hung jury.

This film is not so much about the life of Medgar Evers, but rather the white district attorney who reopened

the case in 1994 and finally obtained justice. After her husband's assassination, Myrlie Evers stayed active in the civil rights movement. She worked in her home state of Mississippi and lectured widely. In 1995 she became chairperson of the NAACP Board of Directors.

The third trial for Byron De La Beckwith was held in 1994 in Mississippi. He was finally found guilty. Students should research the trial itself and compare it to the previous ones. Why was this district attorney able to get a guilty verdict when the other two trials ended in a hung jury? Students need to consider the attitudes of the times, the make-up of all three juries and the abilities of the district attorneys themselves. Was any new evidence uncovered that would account for the final guilty verdict? Teachers might divide the class into three different groups and have the students in each group report on the findings of their trial.

*Mississippi Burning* is a hair-raising account of what might have happened in 1964 when three civil right activists turned up missing in Mississippi. The movie is set during Freedom Summer which was organized by the Council of Federated Organization Voter Registration. During this summer one thousand college students were brought to Mississippi to register voters and teach in Freedom Schools. No one anticipated the magnitude of violence that would follow. Three workers, Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney were kidnapped and killed. Their bodies were buried in an earthen dam. By the end of the summer, 31 black churches had been burned, 30 homes bombed, 80 civil rights workers beaten and more than 1000 arrested. The brutal response to Freedom Summer brought national attention to racism in Mississippi. Federal agents were sent to Mississippi to investigate the missing young men. In the film two of the agents are played by Gene Hackman and Willem Defoe.

The film contains strong language and violence; however, violence framed the context of all COFO activities. Teachers might want to have their students view only parts of this film. The film, however, does a good job of creating the climate of tension and fear within the organization, as well as the racism that existed in Mississippi.

Teachers should make evident what really happened to Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner. All three young men were driving toward Philadelphia, Mississippi when they were stopped at the town limits by the Neshoba County Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price. Price arrested Chaney for speeding and Goodman and Schwerner for the arson of Mount Zion Church. This black church had been burned to the ground on that day. It was to have been the sight for the first Freedom School. To charge these young men with arson was ludicrous, but it was a familiar ploy of whites who claimed civil rights workers staged their own violence to create sympathy for their cause. The arrest of these three men set a long awaited plan into action. (None of this is evident in the film) Klansmen immediately began gathering at the home of a member and job assignments were handed out, directions given, meeting times coordinated. Three Klansmen were sent out to buy rubber gloves. Another was sent to contact a local bulldozer operator. Deputy Price jailed the civil rights workers without letting them use the telephone. Then about 10 o'clock that night he suddenly released them and ordered them to return to Meridian. The young men got in their car. They did not go far before they were pulled over again by Price. This time he was accompanied by two carloads of Klansmen. One by one the three men were taken out of the car and shot at point blank range. Their bodies were deposited at a nearby farm where an earthen dam was under construction. The bulldozer operator who had been hired by the Klan scooped out holes for the bodies and built the dam above them.

The disappearance of the three civil rights workers sent shock waves throughout the United States. Within hours after their disappearance top officials at the justice department were notified. Within days President Johnson met with the parents of Goodman and Schwerner. By the end of the week, 100 FBI agents were



assigned to search for the missing men. The search for the three civil rights workers quickly became the biggest federal investigation ever conducted in Mississippi. The FBI dragged 50 miles of the Pearl River and marched in columns through the swamps looking for the bodies. The film does a good job of recreating the search and impresses upon the audience the magnitude of resources the federal government was using.

Finally, an anonymous informer revealed the location of the bodies in exchange for \$30,000 in federal reward money. In the months that followed several Klansmen gave information to the FBI, but no charges were brought until civil rights activists sued for the legal right to prosecute the suspects. Finally, the U.S. Justice Department called a Federal grand jury and won indictments against 19 men including police officials and Klansmen for the murders.

On October 20, 1967, seven Klansmen, including Samuel Bowers and Deputy Price were found guilty of federal civil rights violations in the deaths of the three men. They were sentenced to prison terms ranging from three to ten years. Three other defendants were freed by a hung jury and three were acquitted. It was the first time a jury in Mississippi had ever convicted Klansmen in connection with the death of a black person or a civil rights worker.

Students are usually confused over the difference between a federal trial and a state trial. This is a good opportunity for teachers to explain how our judicial system works. Students also question what they believe to be an “easy” sentence. They must remember that these men were put on trial for civil rights violations and not for murder. Teachers should point out to students that no state murder trial was ever held. This usually provides for stimulating discussion. Why weren’t these men ever held accountable for murder? The film also makes this clear. At this point I have often compared the case of these three young men with that of the Rodney King case. Teachers might want to assign students to research the federal civil rights trial in the Rodney King case. Discussion also might take place over the charge that President Johnson would not have reacted as quickly if the civil rights workers had all been black.

While this film is not an accurate account of the murder of these three men, it never makes that claim. I find the film extremely useful in recreating the atmosphere of the time in Mississippi and can provide a springboard for some very stimulating discussions. Students usually like to know that the names of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner are inscribed on the Civil Rights Memorial in front of the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Alabama. The memorial celebrates 40 ordinary citizens who sacrificed their lives for freedom. It also commemorates 53 landmarks in the Civil Rights Movement. Interested students might want to research more about this memorial.

### **. Students will become aware of a new voice of discontent in the Civil Rights Movement known as Malcolm X.**

In chronicling the life of this black activist, Spike Lee followed him from his gangster years in Harlem to his 1965 assassination at the age of 39 by followers of Elijah Muhammed. Mr. Lee remains faithful to the autobiography. He emphasized the early radicalism of Malcolm X, as well as his later more humanistic outlook.

Malcolm X first came to public notice as a spokesman for the Black Muslim religious sect in the 1950’s and 1960’s. Founded in 1930, the Black Muslim’s rejected the white man’s Christian world and urged racial separation. Malcolm X, born Malcolm Little went to jail at age 20 for burglary. While in prison, he studied the teachings of Elijah Muhammed, the head of the Nation of Islam, or the Black Muslims. Malcolm changed his name to Malcolm X (dropping what he called his slave name) and after his release from prison in 1952, became a minister of the Muslim faith. Soon he was one of Elijah Muhammed’s most famous disciples. He

preached the views of Elijah Muhammed stating that whites were the cause of the condition in which blacks found themselves and that blacks should separate from white society. His message appealed to many African Americans and their growing pride in their identity. He also advocated armed self-defense.

The press gave a great deal of publicity to Malcolm X because his controversial statements made dramatic news stories. This publicity had two effects which are adequately recreated in the film. First, his call for armed self-defense frightened whites and moderate African Americans. Second, reports of the attention Malcolm received awakened resentment in some other members of the nation of Islam.

In March 1964, Malcolm broke with Elijah Muhammed over differences in strategy and doctrine and formed another Muslim organization. One month later Malcolm went on a pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. In Mecca, he learned that orthodox Islam preached the equality of all races and he worshipped alongside people from many countries. He prayed alongside fellow Muslims whose eyes were the "...bluest of blue, whose hair was the blondest of blond and whose skin was the whitest of white..." This experience radically changed the thinking of Malcolm. When he returned to the United States, he still burned with a hatred of racism and injustice, but his attitude toward whites had changed. Now instead of preaching separatism, he began to urge African-Americans to identify with Africa and to work with world organizations and even progressive whites to attain equality.

Malcolm believed his life might be in danger because of his split with the Black Muslims. On February 21, 1965 Malcolm X walked into Harlem's Audubon Ballroom to address a crowd of about 400 followers. No sooner had he begun speaking, than three men rushed forward and shot him down.

Spike Lee does an extremely accurate and unbiased account of Malcolm X. Denzel Washington gives a superb performance in the title role. Students can watch the entire movie or sections of it on certain periods of his life. It may be presented as a lesson in history. Teachers might assign teams of students to create a dialogue in which Malcolm X and Martin Luther King discuss and debate their two philosophies for change. Have students reenact their dialogues either in a live skit or in the form of a videotape. Students might be split into groups; one group should represent Martin Luther King, a second group should represent Malcolm X and a third group should represent Elijah Muhammed. Have students think about the goals and objectives of each leader; the reaction of the public to each leader's method and the short and long term effects of each leader's efforts. Students might also enjoy speculating on how the civil rights movement might have been different if these men had not been assassinated.

## **Lesson Plan One "Crisis in Little Rock"**

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### **Objective:**

Students will examine and understand the significance of the key events in the history of Little Rock Public School desegregation.

### **Procedure:**

In this activity students will review the series of key events before, during, and after the integration process of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas by creating a human time line. Before class begins write each of the events listed below on a separate large index card. The events are listed in chronological order. Begin the

activity by explaining to students that they are about to create a human time line of the significant events in Little Rock, Arkansas. Randomly distribute the event cards. Direct students to reread the information on their card in the text, **The Americans** , Chapter 28, and to write a paragraph explaining the event under the heading of the card. The event should include a date or approximate date. Designate starting and ending points for the human time line and have the pairs whose events begin and end the chronology stand in their positions. Direct the rest of the class to decide among themselves where along the time line they should stand to create an accurate chronology. Check the accuracy of their time line with the chronological listing of the events provided below. Students are then to explain their event to the class as it occurs chronologically.

### **Material Used:**

5x7 index cards, textbook **The Americans**

The following timeline presents a brief glimpse into the key events of the crisis in Little Rock:

Spring, 1957 There were 517 students who lived in the Central High School district and were eligible to attend Central in the fall. Eighty expressed an interest in doing so. Following the interviews with the Superintendent and the staff, 17 are selected for the first year of integration. Eight of those decide to remain at the all black Horace Mann High School.

Summer, 1957 The Capital Citizen's Council and the Mother's League of Central High are organized to oppose integration.

September 2, 1957 Governor Orval Faubus calls out the Arkansas National Guard to surround Little Rock Central High in order to **preserve the peace and avert the violence that might be caused by extremists who came to Little Rock in caravans.**

September 4, 1957 The nine black students attempt to enter Central High School and are turned away by the National Guard.

September 20, 1957 Federal District Judge Davies rules that Faubus had used the troops to prevent integration and not keep the order as stated. The Governor is ordered to remove the Guardsman and the local police are put in charge.

September 23, 1957 Nine black students enter the high school through a side door crowd of 1000 people milled around the outside door opposing integration. When the mob learned the students were inside they become unruly. The black students were sent home for fear of a riot.

September 24, 1957 The mayor of Little Rock sends President Eisenhower a telegram asking for federal troops to assist in the integration. The President announces he is sending 1000 members of the 101st Airborne Division to Little Rock. He also federalizes the National Guard.

September 25, 1957 Under escort by the Army troops the nine black students are escorted back to Central High.

December, 1957 Taunted by white male students, Minnijean Brown, one of the black students, dumps a bowl of chili on her antagonists in the cafeteria. She is suspended for six days.

February 6, 1958 Minnijean Brown is suspended for the remainder of the school year following additional

altercations with white students. She transferred to New Lincoln High School in New York City.

February 20,1958 The Little Rock School Board filed a request for permission to delay integration until the concept of “all deliberate speed” is defined and until effective legal means exists for integrating the schools without impairing the quality of the educational programs.

May 27,1958 Ernest Green becomes the first black student to graduate from Central High School. Federal troops and city police are at hand, but the event goes perfectly.

June 21,1958 Federal District Judge Harry Lemley grants the delay of integration until January 1961, stating that while black students have a constitutional right to attend white schools the “time has not come for them to enjoy that right.” The NAACP appeals.

August 18,1958 The Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals reverses the Lemley order.

August 21,1958 The School Board requests the Appeals Court to stay the order overturning Judge Lemley’s decision for 30 days to allow the board time to appeal to the United States Supreme Court.

August 25,1958 The U.S. Supreme Court announces a special session to discuss the Little Rock desegregation issue.

August,1958 Governor Orval Faubus calls a special session of the state legislature allowing him to close public schools to avoid integration and lease the schools to private school corporations.

September,1958 The U.S. Supreme Court rules that Little Rock must continue with its integration plan. The School Board announces the opening of the city’s high schools on September 15.Governor Faubus orders Little Rock’s three high schools closed.

September 16,1958 The Women’s Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools is formed and asks for a special election as a way to keep the schools open.

September 27,1958 Public high schools in Little Rock close for the year, sending the city’s 3,698 high school students to seek alternatives. More than 750 whites enroll in newly established private T.J. Raney High School. Others leave town or the state to live with relatives or friends to continue their education.

November 12, 1958 Five of the six school board members resign in frustration, having been ordered by the federal appeals court to proceed with integration of the high schools, even though it had no high schools to integrate.

December 6,1958 A new school board is elected with its members divided on the issue of integration.

March,1959 Little Rock Chamber of Commerce votes in favor of integrating the school on a controlled minimum plan.

June 18,1959 Federal Court declares the state’s school closing law unconstitutional. The new school board announced it would reopen the high school in the fall.

August 12,1959 School board opens public high schools a month early. Three black girls quietly attend the new Hall High School.

Fall, 1972 All grades in Little Rock public schools are finally integrated.

## Lesson Plan Two “Separate But Equal”

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### Objective:

Students will examine Supreme Court cases in order to understand the concept separate but equal..

### Procedure:

Divide the class into two groups. One group will be assigned the case Plessy v. Ferguson and the other Brown v. the Board of Education. It will be necessary to provide library time for the students so they may research the facts of the cases( dates, plaintiffs, defendants and legal issues) and the Supreme Court decisions(vote, majority opinion and dissenting opinion. Students within each group should then be assigned the roles of the key players. They will present their findings back to the class by taking on the personality of the key players. It might be useful to have one person in each group act as a narrator and present the background of each case. The key players for Plessy v. Ferguson are Homer Plessy, Judge John Ferguson, Attorney Albion Tourgee, Justice Henry Brown and Justice John Marshall Harlan. The key players for Brown v. the Board of Education are Oliver Brown, Linda Brown, Attorney Charles Hamilton Houston. Attorney Thurgood Marshall, and Chief Justice Earl Warren.

### Questions to Consider

1. Explain the phrase “separate but equal” as first used in the Plessy case.
2. What do you think Justice Brown meant when he said the Constitution would not “put people on the same plane?”
3. How did Justice Harlan oppose Brown’s opinion?
4. “Separate but equal” became the law of the land in 1896. In practice the separation was enforced, but the equality was not. Comment
5. How did Plessy v. Ferguson affect the civil rights of African Americans?
6. What was the central issue raised in Brown v. Board of Education?
7. Explain the reasoning behind the Brown decision.



## Lesson Plan Three “Justice in Montgomery”

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### **Objective:**

Students will be able to analyze the motives behind the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Introduction: Sometimes history has hinged on the action of one person or group. To better understand historical actions, historians analyze the motives or the reasons behind them. Most motives can be broken into several parts; the goals of the group taking the action and the people’s needs, emotions and prior experiences.

### **Procedure:**

Divide students into groups of four. Have them brainstorm answers to the following questions in order to analyze the motives behind the bus boycott in Montgomery and the arrest of Rosa Parks. One student should be designated as the recorder and a second student should be prepared to report their answers back to the class.

### **Key Questions**

1. What were the goals of the boycotters?
2. What were the needs of the boycotters?
3. Describe the emotions of the boycotters.
4. What were the prior experiences of the boycotters?
5. What do you think motivates a person to defy authority?
6. What can happen when enough people defy authority?
7. Was the goal of Rosa Parks in refusing to give up her seat the same as King’s goal in leading the boycott?
8. What was King’s philosophy of protest and social change?
9. How do you think King would have defined the word courage?

## Lesson Plan Four “Voices of Discontent”

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### **Objective:**

Students will become aware of how the struggle for equality changed in the mid 1960's.

### **Introduction:**

Students should understand that the riots and issues of economic injustice and segregation that sparked them posed a challenge for Americans in the civil rights movement. For many the dream of achieving integration through peaceful means had been shattered. By 1965, the leading civil rights groups, while still sharing the goals of racial equality and greater opportunity, began to drift apart. New leaders emerged as the civil rights movement turned its attention to the North where African Americans faced not legal racism, but deeply entrenched and oppressive racial prejudice.

### **Procedure:**

Students should be divided into six groups. Each group should select a name from those listed below. Research will be done as a group in the library. They should research the life of their person. They will need to make an outline of the important activities and events of that person's life. They will need to write the biography. Once this is done they will present their information back to the entire class. Students should consider the following key questions as they are writing their report: What event or situation caused the leader to become involved in the civil rights movement? What were the leader's major contributions to the movement? What were the effects of those contributions and how did the American people react to the leader's efforts?

### **Key People:**

1. Malcolm Little
2. Stokely Carmichael
3. Huey Newton, Bobby Seale
4. Floyd McKissick
5. James Meredith
6. Medgar Evers

## Teacher Bibliography

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Anthony, Earl. *Spitting in the Wind*. Malibu California: Roundtable Publishing Co., 1990.

This book discusses civil rights cases.

Archer, Jules. *You Can't Do That To Me*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990.

This book provides detailed information on famous civil rights cases.

Banks, James A. and Cherry A. *March Toward Freedom: A History of Black Americans*. Carthage, Illinois, Fear Teacher Aids, 1978.

This book is an excellent account of the black experience in the civil rights movement.

Congressional Record, 84th Congress, 2nd Session, pp. 4515-4516, 1956.

This excerpt records the opposition of 100 southern congressmen to integration.

Davies, Mark. *Malcolm X*. New Jersey: Silver Burdett Press Inc., 1990.

This book highlights the life, struggle, and death of Malcolm X.

Haley, Alex ed. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1966.

Malcolm X worked on this book with the author. It reveals his character, abilities, personality, and changing views towards the end of his life.

Kluger, Richard. *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. the Board of Education*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976.

The background and consequences of the 1954 Supreme Court decision are ably presented here.

Sitkoff, Harvard. *The Struggle For Black Equality, 1954-1980*. New York: Mcmillan Publishing, 1981.

This book discusses the racial upheavals of that time period.

Warren, Earl. Decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* , 347 U.S. 492-494 (1954) Williams, Juan. *Eyes on the Prize*. New York: Blackside Inc., 1970.

This book recaptures the dramatic events in the civil rights movement from 1954-1965.

Wolters, Raymond. *The Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of School Desegregation*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984.

This book is an overview of school desegregation; its problems and its successes.

## Student Bibliography

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Bates, Daisy. *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*. David McKay Company, 1962.

This book recounts the struggle of the pioneers in desegregation in Little Rock Arkansas in 1957.

Beals, Melba. *Warriors Don't Cry*. New York: Pocket Books, 1964.

This is a soul searching memoir by one of the Little Rock Nine.

Coles, Robert. *Children of Crisis: A Study of Courage and Fear*. Boston: Little Brown and Company. 1965.

This book gives details from a long term study of how children handled the onset of desegregation of schools.

Friese, Kai. *Rosa Parks and The Movement Organize*. New Jersey: Simon and Schuster, 1990.

This book is a biographical sketch of Ms. Parks. It focuses on that fateful day in Montgomery when she refused to give up her seat on the bus.

Hampton, Henry and Steve Fayer. *Voices of Freedom*. New York: Bantam Books, 1991.

This book highlights personal accounts of the civil rights movement.

## Films and Videos

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America's Civil Rights Movement, this film introduces the civil rights movement through people who risked their lives during the movement. The video challenges students to understand the fundamental democratic principles behind the movement and identifies sacrifices. *The Civil Rights Movement: Witness to History*, this film describes the civil rights movement from 1955-1965. *The Ernest Green Story*, this film recreates the integration of Central High School in 1957 as told through the eyes of Ernest Green, one of the Little Rock Nine. *Eyes on the Prize*, is a six part series of historical film and interviews on African-American life. *Ghosts of Mississippi* recreates the assassination of Medgar Evers and the subsequent trials of Byron de la Beckwith. *The Long Walk Home* is a delightful film about the significance of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. *Malcolm X*, Spike Lee's presentation of Malcolm X begins with his gangster period in Harlem and ends with his assassination at the age of 39. *Mississippi Burning* is a fictional account of what might have happened during Freedom Summer when three young civil rights workers were murdered by the KKK. *Separate But Equal* is a detailed account of how the Brown v. the Board of Education case came to be a reality and the significance of the case.

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