



Yale-New Haven  
Teachers Institute®

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

---

## The Civil Rights Movement Through Film

Guide for Curriculum Unit 98.01.06  
by Joan Rapczynski

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. One method I have found to be extremely effective 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 producers have created many films that address 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 a student. 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 period I have selected. They include the following: *Separate but Equal*, *The Long Walk Home*, *The Ernest Green Story*, *Ghosts of Mississippi*, *Mississippi Burning*, and *Malcolm X*.

---

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University  
For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>