

## **Lesson Plan: Civil Rights or Human Rights?**



*The crowd listens intently at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, 28 August 1963*

Drawing by Evan Bissell based on a photo by Bob Fitch

### **Introduction**

Why have the international dimensions of the African American struggle for human rights been neglected in most high school history courses? Teachers tend to present the "Civil Rights Movement" as a distinctly American event, from "Montgomery to Memphis," with the Voting Rights Act of 1965 as its crowning moment. The term "civil rights" limits our understanding, since it refers specifically to rights guaranteed by the Constitution or protected through legislation. It fails to encompass the cultural, social, and economic goals of the struggle. Desegregation and voting rights were a means to achieve broader goals, such as overcoming social forces that limit freedom and opportunity.

Not only did the goals of the African American Freedom Struggle extend beyond civil rights, they were often inspired by the anticolonial struggles of the 20th century. To conceptualize the African American Freedom Struggle as part of a global movement for human rights invites a deeper understanding of the international events of the last century. But, what steps can we, as educators, take to reframe the traditional "civil rights" narrative?

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**Grades:** 6-8, 9-12

**Teaching Standard:** 10.4, 10.9, 11.1, 11.10, 11.11, 12.3, 12.9

## Essential Question

In what ways was the African American Freedom Struggle, better known as the Civil Rights Movement, part of a global movement for human rights in the 20th century?

## Sub Questions

- What are the major events and goals of the African American Freedom Struggle and how are they related to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?
- What were the international dimensions of the African American Freedom Struggle in relation to other movements against oppression?
- Why did Malcolm X ask African leaders in 1964 to investigate human rights violations in the United States?
- Is the traditional framing of the struggle as a "Civil Rights Movement" accurate?

## Lesson Activities

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[Culminating Project: Civil Rights or Human Rights?](#)

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## Part One: Timeline Activity: Freedom is on the Move



*The flyer, Appeal for Action Against Apartheid, was distributed by the American Committee on Africa as part of an international anti-apartheid movement*

Courtesy of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference Records, 1954-1970, Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Inc., Atlanta, Ga.

## Instructions

In this lesson students create an African American Freedom Struggle timeline and map on a classroom wall and apply the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to the timeline's events. The lesson's purpose is to transform the traditional understanding of the "Civil Rights Movement" as a domestic movement for political rights to an understanding of it as a struggle for human rights that is connected to struggles including political freedom, human dignity, and economic stability for marginalized and oppressed people around the world.

## Lesson Objectives:

- Students will create a timeline and map of the African American Freedom Struggle on a classroom wall
- Students will identify the major events in the African American Freedom Struggle and connect them with related articles from the UDHR
- Students will utilize the map and timeline to discuss the global dimensions of the African American Freedom Struggle
- Students will define the differences between civil, political, economic and cultural rights and will identify examples of these rights within the African American Freedom Struggle
- Students will critique the traditional framing of the "Civil Rights Movement"

## Classroom set-up:

- A large wall map of the world with string or tape for use along the bottom to serve as the timeline. On the timeline post the following years; 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970
- A class set of the [African American Freedom Struggle Timeline](#) and the [UDHR](#)

## Procedure:

1. As an opening activity, ask students what they know about the "Civil Rights Movement" and write their answers on the board. Who were the leaders? What were the major events? Where did they happen? What were the goals of the movement? Most students will identify [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#), [Rosa Parks](#), and [Malcolm X](#) as key figures and will include only events within the United States, such as the [March on Washington](#) and the [Voting Rights Act](#). Explain to student that the timeline and map activity will help them to see the movement as part of a larger global movement, not only for political and social rights, but also economic and cultural rights.
2. Give each student a copy of the timeline: [African American Freedom Struggle timeline](#). The timeline introduces students to thirty key events that illustrate the reciprocal relationship between the American civil rights movement and the international human rights movement, especially its campaigns against colonialism and in support of economic and social rights.

3. Split the class into two groups. Give each group a copy of the [African American Freedom Struggle Timeline](#) cut into squares. Group One will place each event on the corresponding location on the map. Group Two will place the corresponding event on the timeline. Encourage students to add creative design to accompany the events.
4. The timeline and map become a launching point for class discussion. Ask students to find Martin Luther King, Jr., on the map and the timeline. Where and when did he travel outside the United States? How do you think those experiences affected his leadership and philosophy? Before this activity, did you know about King's travels outside the United States? Why do you think this is left out of our general understanding of King? How does it affect our memory of him? Continue the discussion with the same questions regarding Malcolm X.
5. Share with students a brief background of the UDHR, if you have not already covered the document in your course. Give students a copy of the UDHR.
6. Facilitate a discussion defining the differences between civil, political, economic and cultural rights. Identify examples from the UDHR's articles.
7. Organize students into groups of three. Ask the groups to identify events on their timeline which reflect the human rights guaranteed in the UDHR. Ask students to share their conclusions with the class by citing specific examples from the timeline.
8. Ask students to think again about the goals of the African American Freedom Movement. How has their understanding of the people, the events and the goals changed? Does the term "Civil Rights Movement" correctly reflect the goals and events of the struggle? Using examples from the timeline, what strategies have people used to fight for their human rights?
9. Discussion Questions:
  - What were the goals of the African American Freedom Movement?
  - Does the term "Civil Rights Movement" correctly reflect the goals and events of the struggle?
  - What strategies have people used to fight for their human rights?

## Materials

- [African American Freedom Struggle Timeline](#)
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights: [UDHR/ UDHR PDF Booklet](#)

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## Part Two: United Nations' Commission on Human Rights

### Instructions

In July of 1964 Malcolm X attended the second meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). He presented a petition asking "In the interest of world peace, we beseech the heads of the independent African states to recommend an immediate investigation into our problem by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights." According to United Nations procedures, a nation can request a human rights investigation of another country on behalf of the people whose rights have been violated. The African heads of state discussed the proposition at the OAU summit but failed to bring the case before the United Nations based in part by pressure from the United States State Department.

Although the United Nations Commission of Human Rights never conducted the investigation, students will create a mock hearing and investigation. This simulation allows students to examine the human rights violations within the United States during the 1950's and 1960's, viewpoints of African American leaders of the time, and review the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This exercise also serves as a model for potential investigations of current violations. Students will run the hearing, present various viewpoints, and act as journalists reporting on the investigation.

### Lesson Objectives:

- Students will learn about various stakeholders during a role play including; United Nations Commission Human Rights panel member, UN delegate, African American leader, United States citizen or journalist.
- Students will research the backgrounds of various African American leaders and events of the African American Freedom Struggle.
- Students will identify the human rights violations perpetrated against African Americans during the 1950's and 1960's.
- Students will discuss the violations with their classmates during the role play.
- Students will communicate in a written assignment the correlation between events and conditions for African Americans in the United States during the 1950's and 1960's and the human rights treaties of the United Nations.

### Classroom set-up:

- Class set of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UDHR\)](#).
- [Human Rights Role Play Handouts](#).
- Access to online and print resources for students to conduct their research.

- For the simulated panel hearing, you will need 5 desks/chairs set up at the front for the members of the panel and 9 desks/chairs for the witnesses positioned in a semicircle facing the panel members. The rest of the class, including United Nations delegates and reporters will sit behind the witnesses, either in rows or a semicircle.
- Markers and paper for students to create name placards and posters.

**Procedure:**

1. Pass out role play handouts and read the introduction with the class.
2. Play the interview with Malcolm X in Cairo after the African Summit, which can be obtained from the [Malcolm X Project at Columbia University](#).
3. Review the [UDHR](#) and the events on the timeline from part one of the lesson.
4. Assign roles and allow time for research. The panel members will need a place to discuss the procedures for the hearing while the other students conduct research.
5. After students have had sufficient time to prepare, allow the panel to begin the hearing. The panel will conduct the hearing and the teacher will observe, providing guidance only when needed.
6. At the close of the hearing the reporters will circulate the room asking questions of the panel members, United Nations delegates, African American leaders and citizens.
7. While reporters are interviewing witnesses, citizens and delegates, the panel members reconvene to vote whether or not human rights violations have occurred and the recommended action, if any. The panel chairperson will make the announcement.
8. After the announcement, students will return to their regular seats to complete their writing assignment. Each writing assignment depends on the role. Writing assignments include an editorial, a letter, a speech and a newspaper article. You may wish to display the various writing assignments on a board at the end of the activity.
9. After the students complete their writing assignment, facilitate a class discussion. Consider the following questions:
  - Why did Malcolm X ask African nations to call for an investigation, why not European nations?
  - Did you agree with the conclusion of your classmates representing the panel?

- Which human rights violations were the most serious? Why?
- If the United Nations Commission on Human Rights had convened this hearing in 1964, what do you think the outcome would have been?
- Why do you think the US State Department attempted to keep this hearing from occurring in 1964?
- If a hearing like this took place in the United Nations about United States human rights violations today, which issues would be raised? Who would serve as witnesses and which human rights would they consider violated? What evidence would they provide?

## Materials

- [Universal Declaration of Human Rights/UDHR PDF Booklet](#)
- [Human Rights Role Play Handouts](#)
- [Malcolm X Project](#)

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## Part Three: Analyzing Documents

### Instructions

In this lesson students analyze three primary source documents from the African American Freedom Struggle of the 1950's and 1960's. The first document is from the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and encourages students to examine the goals of the march through a human rights framework. The second and third documents provide examples of the relationship between the human rights struggles in the United States and in South Africa.

### Lesson Objectives:

- Students will identify the author, subject, date and intended audience of each of the documents.
- Students will analyze the documents by discussing the purpose, point of view and historical context.
- Students will compare the content of the document to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in order to identify the common themes.

- Students will critique the mainstream understanding of the “Civil Rights Movement.”

**Procedure:**

1. If your students have not worked with primary sources before, spend a few minutes defining primary and secondary sources. Explain the importance of analyzing documents in order to construct historical understanding.
2. Place students in groups of three and give each group the [Document Analysis Worksheet](#), a copy of the [UDHR](#), and one of the documents (Document One: [Program for March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom](#), Document Two: [Appeal for Action Against Apartheid](#), Document Three: [Letter from the American Committee on Africa](#).)
3. Using a jig-saw method, have students form new groups so that each group has a "student expert" on one of the three documents. Each student will share the content and their analysis of their document.
4. In a whole class discussion, ask students to make connections between their documents and the UDHR. Which documents reflect the rights in the UDHR? Do the documents provide historical evidence to support a view of the “Civil Rights Movement” contrary to the mainstream perception?

**Materials**

**Documents:**

- Document One: [Program for March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom](#)
- Document Two: [Appeal for Action Against Apartheid](#)
- Document Three: [Letter from the American Committee on Africa](#)

**Resources:**

- [Document Analysis Worksheet](#)
- [Universal Declaration of Human Rights/ UDHR PDF Booklet](#)

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**Culminating Project: Civil Rights or Human Rights?**

“How is a black man going to get ‘civil rights’ before he first wins his *humanrights*? If the American black man will start thinking about

his *humanrights*, and then start thinking of himself as part of one of the world's greatest people, he will see he has a case for the United Nations.”

*Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Malcolm X, 1964

“**Something** is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; or Memphis, Tennessee, the cry is always the same: 'We want to be free.'”

*Martin Luther King, Jr., "I've Been to the Mountaintop," Address delivered at the Bishop Charles Mason Temple in Memphis, Tennessee, 3 April 1968*

“How could all of the blood, all of the courage, and all of the martyrs of the Civil Rights Movement still leave in its wake a nation where schools are more segregated than ever, where more than half of all black children live in poverty, and where the life expectancy of African Americans has actually *declined*? The answer lies, I believe, not so much in the well-documented struggle for civil rights, but in the little known, but infinitely more important, struggle for human rights.”

*Eyes Off the Prize*, Carol Anderson, 2003

As a culminating assignment students will examine common perceptions of the “Civil Rights Movement” and create an educational tool to inform others about the international dimensions of the African American Freedom Struggle and its central theme of human rights. Students will choose one of the above quotes to guide their project. For those who choose the quote from Malcolm X, they will focus on the definition of human rights and civil rights as it concerns the goals of the freedom struggle of the 1950's and 1960's. Students who choose the quote by Martin Luther King, Jr., will focus their project on the international dimensions of the freedom struggle of the 1950's and 1960's. Those who choose Carol Anderson's quote will explore connections between the past and present. Each project will be unique and students may use the suggestions below to stimulate ideas.

## **Lesson Objectives:**

- Students will create a unique project to be used as an educational tool to teach the African American Freedom Struggle.
- Students will communicate through their project the historical context of the African American Freedom Struggle and analyze the common misconceptions of the period.

- Students will present their project to their fellow students.
- Students will answer the following question in essay form; In what ways was the African American Freedom Struggle, better known as the Civil Rights Movement, part of a global movement for human rights in the 20th century?

**Procedure:**

1. Ask students to form groups of three or four and to choose one of the quotes as their guiding theme.
2. After students identify their theme, they will choose an educational tool. Possibilities include; a textbook chapter to replace their classroom text, a short documentary, an art installation, an article for a local publication, a website, a public service announcement, a comic book, a power point presentation for a community group, a lesson plan for a grade school class. Students should be encouraged to be creative in choosing their educational tool.
3. Students will write a one page proposal to you for feedback and guidance.
4. Depending on your class needs, you may want to create a rubric. The following criteria is suggested; accuracy of historical content, adherence to objective of assignment, creativity, organization, effectiveness as educational tool.
5. Students will present their project to the class and should be encouraged to bring their project to a larger audience.
6. After the presentations, ask students to reflect in essay form on the following question: In what ways was the African American Freedom Struggle, better known as the Civil Rights Movement, part of a global movement for human rights in the 20th century?