

# African Americans: Pursuit of Equality

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Teachers hold the potential to present history in a nuanced and multifaceted manner and motivate students to learn fascinating perspectives on United States history. One way to accomplish this feat is to present African American history within its proper context to the formation of the United States. For students to understand history, they need a starting reference to help them grasp the goals of any given societal group that lacks power and representation.

The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution serve as the perfect starting points to frame how African Americans were active players in ensuring that they had access to the rights and liberties that form the backbone of the United States democracy. Starting with these documents can also highlight how individuals and groups sought to restrict African American access to these rights and liberties. The founding documents detailed what rights and freedoms were due to the inhabitants of the United States. From the colonial era to the beginning of the twentieth century, African Americans sought to hold the United States government accountable to these documents. Rather than make arguments based on racial lines, African Americans rooted their fight for representation and participation in their humanity as lawful citizens of the country they called home.

Educators should possess the ground-level knowledge that centers African American agency within the United States historical narrative. Scholars of Black Studies and History have written great works that provide a holistic view into the long fight for freedom, equality, and inclusion. This article explores African American agency from the colonial period to the twentieth century and references important scholarship and resources that can aid teachers in their classroom instruction.

## **CLAIMING HUMANITY IN SLAVERY**

Since the colony of Virginia established the first laws creating race-based slavery in 1641, enslaved Africans developed a strategy to humanize their chattel status. They sought to seize as much control of the institution of slavery as possible to create an existence where enslaved people could assert themselves as free-thinking people entitled to reap the benefits of personhood. Slavery was a condition placed upon enslaved Africans and their descendants; slavery was not their identity. It is important to stress this concept so that this group is not presented solely through the lens of the people who enslaved them. Works such as *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, and *American Negro Slave Revolts: Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, Gabriel, and Others* explain that enslaved people developed an identity similar to the slaveholding class and similarly constructed their lives.

The slaveholding class possessed the greatest access to freedoms and rights. By knowing how the system of slavery operated, enslaved people learned how to negotiate with slave owners to better their living conditions. Enslaved people understood their personhood and used labor negotiation to access improved treatment and rights within the slave system. Tactics such as slowing down work, refusing to work, destroying property, or rendering oneself incapable of work were acts of resistance that caused work stoppages and impacted slavery's profitability.<sup>1</sup> When the Founding Fathers wrote in the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal, the words did not escape enslaved people. They had long developed a mindset that positioned them no less than any other person.

## DEMANDING RIGHTS AND EQUALITY

The ratification of the U.S. Constitution in 1787, in conjunction with the Declaration of Independence, laid the foundation for which African Americans held the United States government accountable for ensuring rights to all people. The Constitution makes no reference to slave or slavery; however, the Three-Fifths Compromise allowed Southern states to count their slaves as 3/5 of a person.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the abolition of slavery in northern states, free Black people in the North faced limited freedoms. They advocated for the abolition of many forms of inequality, which included rejecting colonization and voter disenfranchisement. The scholarship of Benjamin Quarles and James and Lois Horton underscores the importance of Black intellectual agency in the early nineteenth century. Free Black people banded together to tackle issues that members of their communities faced. They took control of their causes because they did not trust that others would do it for them. The evolution of the Black press provided an invaluable platform and voice. *The Colored American*, *The Mirror of Liberty*, and *The North Star* captured the spirit and politics of the time and serve as valuable primary resources today.<sup>3</sup>

Analyzing state constitutions and court rulings provides a first-hand account of how and why Black people used the law to fight injustices—but also how the law was used to prolong injustices. Obtaining access to uninhibited suffrage was the first step toward a society where equality was not just a notion but a fact. Abolition became more than abolishing slavery but abolishing inequality.<sup>4</sup> Abolitionists' greatest threat was not public opinion but the courts. The courts played a critical role in hindering the full enjoyment of rights and liberties. Northern state legislatures either limited or fully eliminated Black men from the ballot box. In the 1837 *Hobbs v. Fogg* case, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled “that a free negro or mulatto is not a citizen within the meaning of the constitution and laws of the United States, and of the state of Pennsylvania, and, therefore, is not entitled to the right of suffrage” after William Fogg, a Black man, sued based on his right to vote being violated.<sup>5</sup>

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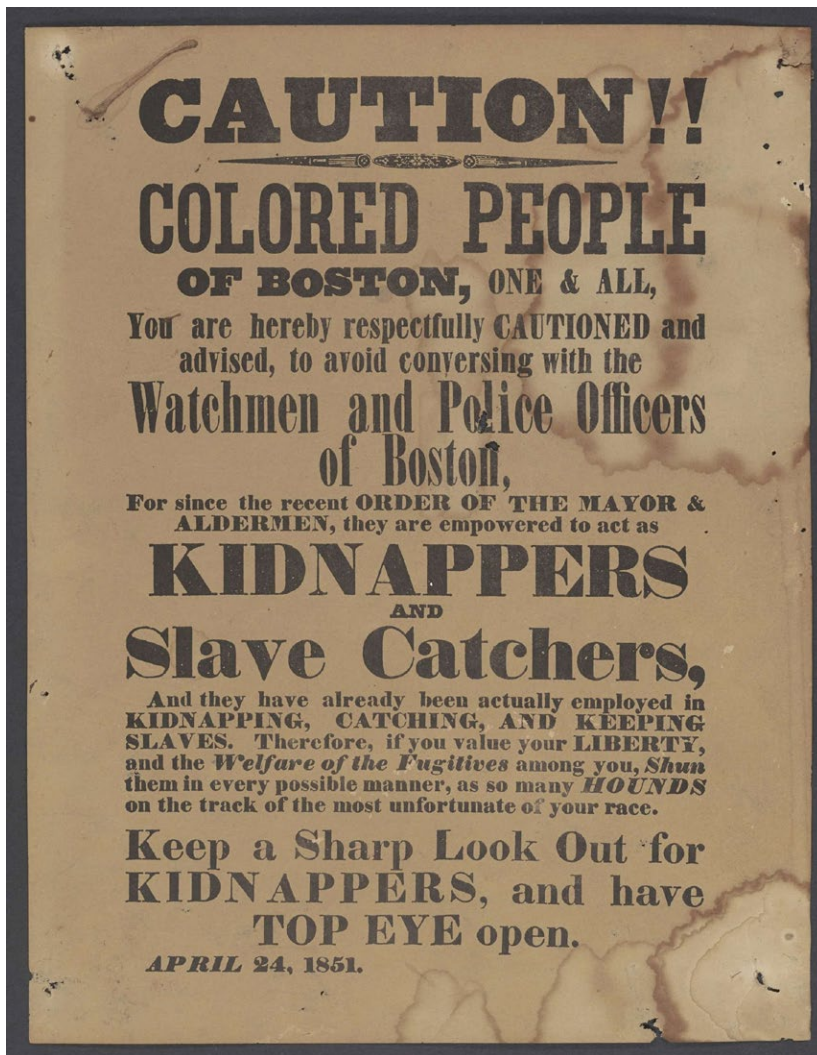
<sup>1</sup> Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, Press, 1998), 34–38. Berlin also discusses the slaveholding class stripping away rights from enslaved peoples. This point is important because Herbert Aptheker wrote that slaves believed that liberty belonged to all people, not just White people. Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 3, 5–6, 217–218, 317; Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts: Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, Gabriel, and Others* (New York: International Publishing Co., 1983), 18–19, 83–84, 141–142.

<sup>2</sup> John Hope Franklin and Evelyn Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 100–101.

<sup>3</sup> James O. Horton and Lois Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 125, 129, 139; Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 87. David Walker's, *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* ([docsouth.unc.edu/nc/walker/walker.html](https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/walker/walker.html)) and Robert Young's *Ethiopian Manifesto: The Black Abolitionist Papers Vol. I: The British Isles, 1830–1865* provide primary accounts of the politics of slavery during the antebellum era.

<sup>4</sup> Quarles, *Black Abolitionist*, 168–169. Also see Martha Jones, *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007) for an intersectional analysis of how Black women sought to include women's issues within the larger debate for race equality.

<sup>5</sup> Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 162–163.



**An April 24, 1851 poster warning the “colored people of Boston” about policemen acting as slave catchers. Papers of Anne Spencer and the Spencer Family, University of Virginia Special Collections (14204).**

The Hobbs case exemplified the call-and-response struggle for civil rights. Black people’s calls for freedom often led to a response that limited freedoms. The Underground Railroad, a complex system that aided escaping slaves to freedom, disrupted the slave institution and played a key role in a Fugitive Slave Act being passed. The 1850 Fugitive Slave Act required all individuals to participate in the return of escaped slaves, even in free territory.<sup>6</sup>

When Dred and Harriet Scott sued for their freedom after living in a free state, the Supreme Court ruled in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) that no Black person, free or enslaved, was a citizen and had no rights or access to democratic processes.<sup>7</sup> These legislative and judicial milestones resulted from Black people’s demands to change the status quo.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “The Fugitive Slave Act (1850),” National Constitution Center, accessed March 10, 2023, <https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/historic-document-library/detail/the-fugitive-slave-act-1850>.

<sup>7</sup> “*Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857),” National Archives and Records Administration, accessed March 10, 2023, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/dred-scott-v-sandford>.

<sup>8</sup> See Hanes Walton Jr.’s *Black Republicans: The Politics of the Black and Tans* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1975) for a discussion of how before being firmly affiliated with the Republican Party, African Americans understood their alliance to any party was their opportunity to create a platform that would benefit the race. The Republican Party was eager to have African Americans to build their numbers but had little interest in tackling the issue of slavery or the Fugitive Slave Act. Another valuable resource is the 1989 film, *Glory*, which chronicles the debate of the Union using Black soldiers in Civil War combat. The film showcases the desire for Black peoples to assist in their freedom struggle.





**Engraving of a photograph of Dred and Harriet Scott, c. 1857, published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, June 27, 1857. Library of Congress (2002707034).**

## **LIBERATION IN THE AGE OF EMANCIPATION**

Teaching the difference between emancipation and liberation is crucial for teachers to explain the continued Black freedom struggle after the Civil War. Emancipation and liberation are not interchangeable. The post–Civil War era was a struggle for liberation. The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery (except as a criminal punishment). The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments gave citizenship and ballot protections. As the Constitution expanded, so did Black people’s expectations that their rights and liberties be respected and protected. Legislation did not equate to compliance. While legally free, the United States struggled to create a society rooted in equality because many White people would not accept being equal to Black people.

The racialization of U.S. society cemented the concept of racial superiority in the American psyche. Black Codes subjected African Americans to a near replicate of the slave institution. African Americans constructed their lives along the lines of their constitutional protections. They purchased land, built schools, created community organizations, formed positive interracial partnerships, and participated in politics to cement their presence at the local, state, and federal levels.<sup>9</sup> As African Americans continued to etch their pathways in U.S. society, anti-Black forces created mechanisms to curtail their forward advancement.

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<sup>9</sup> See W.E.B. Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880*; Leon Litwack’s *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*; and Evan Howard Ashford’s *Mississippi Zion: The Struggle for Liberation in Attala County, 1865–1915* for a nuanced examination of the active role African Americans took to establish the foundations of liberation.

The evolution of Jim Crow society grew from the successes that African Americans achieved in liberating themselves in slavery's aftermath. Jim Crow sought to firmly establish racial hierarchy. After the Supreme Court overturned the 1875 Civil Rights Act, states passed laws establishing color lines in public spaces such as streetcars, parks, and theaters. States stripped funds from African American schools to increase the quality of White education. During the 1890s and continuing into the twentieth century, Southern states passed new state constitutions that targeted voting. Literacy tests, comprehension tests, residency requirements, and poll taxes headlined the new requirements aimed to eliminate the influence of African American voters. These tactics alone could not eliminate educated and economically stable African Americans. The disenfranchisement of Black people's influence in elections occurred with the primary system.<sup>10</sup> Jim Crow halted the United States' responsibility to uphold its framework of liberty and justice for all.

Understanding the twentieth-century freedom struggle to defeat Jim Crow requires a familiarity with late-nineteenth century Black politics. The last decade of the nineteenth century centered on the accommodation versus agitation "debate." *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) made "separate but equal" the law of the land.<sup>11</sup> *Williams v. Mississippi* (1898) declared that Mississippi's voting regulations were constitutional.<sup>12</sup> These rulings eroded rights granted to African Americans in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. The attack on Black freedoms left African Americans in a vulnerable position by making it difficult for the collective race to create thriving political, social, and economic identities and institutions because, at every turn, they were faced with some form of suppression.

Booker T. Washington, with whom accommodation is famously associated, assessed the southern African American situation and understood that Black Americans had to find a way to deal with White resistance until they were in a better position to take back control of their situation. By "accommodating," African Americans would provide additional time and opportunities to secure their rights by using the laws intended to oppress them, turning these laws against their oppressors. Agitation served as a competing strategy to accommodation. African Americans, such as Ida B. Wells, W. E. B. Du Bois, William Monroe Trotter, and Timothy Thomas Fortune, believed that taking a slower pace, advocated by Washington, only emboldened those seeking to oppress the Black race.



**Photograph of Booker T. Washington c. 1905.  
Library of Congress (2016857180).**

<sup>10</sup> See Charles W. Chesnutt, "The Disenfranchisement of the Negro," *The Negro Problem: Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Others* (Milwaukee: Centennial Press, 2003), 24–26.

<sup>11</sup> "Plessy v. Ferguson," HISTORY®, updated January 11, 2023, accessed March 10, 2023. <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/plessy-v-ferguson>.

<sup>12</sup> Amanda Brown, "Williams v. Mississippi," Mississippi Encyclopedia, accessed March 10, 2023. <https://mississippiencyclopedia.org/entries/williams-v-mississippi/>.

Journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett exposed the reality of lynching and made it an international issue. African Americans understood that an organization would give them a voice to regain the rights taken from them. National organizations arose to respond to the loss of voting rights and the increased violence toward African Americans. The Afro-American League and National Afro-American Council were early attempts at national organizing.<sup>13</sup>

## CONCLUSION

History is not one note, and teachers are positioned to add nuance to United States history by explaining how African Americans held the country accountable to protect all its citizens. While it is easy to frame their mission as a struggle, struggle is not always negative. Struggle indicates that a group is logically and intellectually making progress toward their goals, evidenced by the response from the dominant group seeking to maintain the status quo. African Americans of the nineteenth century framed the twentieth-century freedom struggle by making the civil rights question a referendum on how the United States presented itself to the world versus its domestic practices. The African American presence guaranteed they would always be active players in shaping U.S. democracy to live up to its true definitions of liberty and justice for all.



**Photograph of Ida B. Wells-Barnett taken by Sallie E. Garrity, c. 1893. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution (NPG.2009.36).**

## RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE

- ▶ Shawn Leigh Alexander, *An Army of Lions: The Civil Rights Struggle Before the NAACP*
- ▶ Evan Howard Ashford, *Mississippi Zion: The Struggle for Liberation in Attala County, 1865–1915*
- ▶ Christopher James Bonner, *Remaking the Republic: Black Politics and the Creation of American Citizenship*
- ▶ Thulani Davis, *The Emancipation Circuit: Black Activism Forging a Culture of Freedom*
- ▶ P. Gabrielle Foreman, Jim Casey, and Sarah Lynn Patterson, Editors, *The Colored Conventions Movement: Black Organizing in the Nineteenth Century*
- ▶ Alton Hornsby, Jr., *Black Power in Dixie: A Political History of African Americans in Atlanta*
- ▶ Dylan C. Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South*

To learn more about National History Day's Inclusive History Initiative, go to [nhd.org/inclusivehistory](https://nhd.org/inclusivehistory).

<sup>13</sup> Shawn Leigh Alexander. *An Army of Lions: The Civil Rights Struggle Before the NAACP*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 4–7, 26–27, 47, 69, 72. Other key readings on Black politics include *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography, Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion*, and *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*. The National Association of Colored Women (NACW), founded by Mary Church Terrell, grew from the organizational success women enjoyed through the church. African American women found success by uniting women from all classes and showed that they would be instrumental in securing civil rights along race, class, and gender lines.



# Expanding Inclusivity Through Constitutional Change

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The impetus to create a more inclusive society by making changes to the Constitution has always come from the citizens of the United States, not from the legislature, the judiciary, or the executive branches of the government. Since the turn of the twentieth century, changes to the Constitution and the laws abolishing discriminatory practices have happened slowly, sometimes taking decades. The impulse and energy for those changes have come from African American people and their allies, as they continue to hold the government and the courts accountable to the citizens. The people who agitate for change have often risked a great deal; some even risk their safety or that of their families to change customs or the law. Even when the Constitution or laws are changed, it sometimes takes generations for the dominant society to accept the right of all people to full democratic participation.

The twentieth century opened many controversies related to the expansion of African American rights and responsibilities. The often violently enforced “system of racial segregation and African American disfranchisement” known as Jim Crow sought to support White supremacy and limit Black agency everywhere.<sup>1</sup> Although Jim Crow targeted Black citizens from the end of the Reconstruction Era, this system of institutional discrimination continued to dominate the first 60 years of the twentieth century. Virtually every social institution in the United States supported segregation, implying that people of color were somehow inferior to White people. This discrimination affected access to education, medical care, travel, housing, restaurants and hotels, and public restrooms throughout the United States. However, African Americans challenged White supremacy through the courts, on the streets, in stores, and in other public spaces.<sup>2</sup>

## **EXPANDING POLITICAL RIGHTS**

Political rights expanded when women won the legal right to vote in 1920 after 70 years of campaigning. The Nineteenth Amendment states that the right to vote cannot be abridged because of sex. In practice, however, many women of color struggled to access this basic political right because individual states determine the specific details of voter eligibility. Native American women and men, barred from United States citizenship until 1924, continued to be denied access to the polls until the 1960s. African American women, particularly in southern states, suffered the same state-level discriminatory practices that African American men had suffered for decades. In addition, people of color who attempted to vote often faced hostility or violence from racist individuals at polling places. However, the challenges of accessing voting rights did not stop people of color from voting.

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<sup>1</sup> *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from the Civil War to Civil Rights*, eds., Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>2</sup> For more on Black resistance to Jim Crow, see Dailey, Gilmore, and Simon, eds., *Jumpin' Jim Crow*; St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); and Gretchen Sorin, *Driving While Black: African American Travel and the Road to Civil Rights* (New York: Liveright Publishing Company, 2020).

From the 1910s until the 1970s, as many as six million African American people moved from the oppression of the South into the northern, midwestern, and western United States. This Great Migration afforded African Americans more economic opportunities, relief from laws “that would regulate every aspect of black people’s lives,” and freedom from the terrorism of a revitalized Ku Klux Klan that targeted African Americans.<sup>3</sup> After settling in the North, African Americans pushed for fair housing, access to better education, integrated public transportation, and other rights available to U.S. citizens.<sup>4</sup> Some African Americans embraced Black nationalism and racial separation. Marcus Garvey (1887–1940) emerged as one of this movement’s leaders and founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) to support a “back to Africa” movement. Many Black people found his views too controversial, but his ideology influenced the Black Power Movement.<sup>5</sup>



Episodes of lynching, a terrifying form of mob violence, increased following the end of Reconstruction and continued into the twentieth century. African American academics, such as Monroe Work (1866–1945), and journalists, including Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862–1931), collected data and wrote articles about lynching.

**James Van Der Zee documented African American life during the Harlem Renaissance. This photograph shows a middle-class family in Harlem. The man was a member of Marcus Garvey’s African Legion in 1924. Museum of Modern Art (SC2008.1.101). This image is used with permission. James Van Der Zee Archive, The Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Richard Benson.**

<sup>3</sup> Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010), 40.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to Wilkerson’s *The Warmth of Other Suns*, see Eric Arnesen, *Black Protest and the Great Migration: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 2002); Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011); Marcia Chatelain, *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2015); and Herb Boyd, *Black Detroit: A People’s History of Self-Determination* (New York: Amistad, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> For more about Marcus Garvey, see Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) and “Marcus Garvey,” National Archives and Records Administration, accessed February 17, 2023, <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/individuals/marcus-garvey>. See also Marcus Garvey, *The Tragedy of White Injustice* (Eastford: Martino Fine Books, [1935] 2017).



Campaigns against lynching invoked the law as well as the Constitution. North Carolina Representative George Henry White (1852–1918), at the time the only African American in Congress, introduced an anti-lynching bill in the House of Representatives in 1900. Various legislatures introduced about 240 anti-lynching bills before the Emmett Till Antilynching Act, named after a 14-year-old African American boy who was lynched in Mississippi in 1955, finally passed in March 2022.<sup>6</sup>

The founding of the interracial National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909 offered another approach to resisting lynching and other forms of violence against African American people. Founded by W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mary White Ovington (1865–1951), and others, the NAACP focused on court cases related to discrimination in employment, government, and education. The establishment of African American organizations, such as the Afro-American League, the Afro-American Council, the National Association of Colored Women, the Niagara Movement, and conferences for the Study of the Negro Problems predated the NAACP's founding, and the organization continues to hold the government and the court system accountable for equality for all U.S. citizens.

## **WORLD WARS AND THE GREAT MIGRATION**

Two world wars took place in the first half of the twentieth century, and many African American women and men believed it was their responsibility to serve their country. About 200,000 African American men joined the U.S. Army during the First World War. However, despite their military training, many were forced to do heavy labor on the docks and railway lines in France rather than fight the German Army. The 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment fought with French troops rather than with the American division. The regiment proved itself in combat and received the *Croix de Guerre*, the highest military honor France could bestow, and 171 decorations for individual heroism. Lieutenant James Reese Europe (1881–1919), who led the 369<sup>th</sup> Harlem Hell Fighters Regiment band, became famous for introducing jazz to Europe.

Black women sought assignments as nurses, likely caring for fellow African American service members, and some of those who could “pass” as White served in hospitals and medical tents. Still, racist policies limiting medical assignments for most African American women made it difficult for them to provide medical care to Black soldiers. Addie Waites Hunton (1875–1943) and Kathryn Magnolia Johnson (1878–1954) succeeded in getting to France through their positions with the YMCA, and African American pianist and composer Helen Eugenia Hagan (1891–1964) entertained soldiers overseas.<sup>7</sup> The record of African American contributions was remarkable, despite discriminatory policies and behavior from the U.S. military and White soldiers.<sup>8</sup>

During World War II (1941–1945), more than a million African American women and men served in every branch of the Armed Forces. They conspicuously fought with distinction in every arena of war. Yet, as veterans, they continued to face civil rights issues at home.

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<sup>6</sup> Devery S. Anderson, *Emmett Till: The Murder That Shocked the World and Propelled the Civil Rights Movement* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017); Public Law No: 117-107 (Emmett Till Antilynching Act), Congress.gov, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/55/text>.

<sup>7</sup> Addie W. Hunton and Kathryn M. Johnson, *Two Colored Women With the American Expeditionary Forces* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Eagle Press, c.1920, <https://archive.org/details/twocoloredwomenw00hunting/page/n7/mode/2up>).

<sup>8</sup> Kimberly Jensen, *Mobilizing Minerva: American Women in the First World War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 118–20; J. Patrick Lewis, *Harlem Hellfighters* (Mankato: Creative Editions, 2014); Peter Nelson, *A More Unbending Battle: The Harlem Hellfighters' Struggle for Freedom in WWI and Equality at Home* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2009); Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider, *Into the Breach: American Women Overseas in World War I* (New York: Viking, 1991), especially, chapter 6, “The Black Record,” 168–176.

Between the wars, African Americans engaged in the “New Negro Movement,” an intellectual and artistic revolution known today as the Harlem Renaissance. Connected to the resurgence of civil rights activism, African American literature, poetry, dance, and music both reflected and sparked a renewed interest in African American culture. Cities such as New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, Washington, D.C., and others in the West experienced the same thrilling cultural awakening.<sup>9</sup> Anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960), novelist James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938), poet Langston Hughes (1901–1967), artist Aaron Douglas (1899–1979), band leaders Louis Armstrong (1901–1971) and Duke Ellington (1899–1974), and numerous others helped many African Americans find opportunities in business and other professions. Art and racial pride helped Black people prove they had humanity and the right to equality, laying a foundation for increased civil rights activism.

## POST-WORLD WAR II

African Americans challenged segregation in transportation, housing, and education. They also boycotted businesses that refused to cater to African American customers. By 1954, with the combined support of the NAACP and the American Civil Liberties Union, the Supreme Court finally ended the era of “separate but equal” in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).<sup>10</sup> African Americans defied segregation on buses when individuals, such as teenager Claudette Colvin (1939–), sat in “Whites only” sections. This strategy accelerated when Rosa Parks (1913–2005) was arrested after she refused to give up her seat to a White passenger in Montgomery, Alabama. She and other African American leaders organized a boycott of the buses in the city. In conjunction with the boycott, local activists challenged the legality of government-mandated segregation on buses in *Browder v. Gayle* (1956). Eventually, the case reached the Supreme Court, which declared such laws unconstitutional because they violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>11</sup>

The bus boycott’s effectiveness prompted a new phase of the Civil Rights Movement, and the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968) emerged as a leading figure. Influenced by the methods of nonviolent civil disobedience practiced by anti-colonial activist Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) in India, King encouraged these strategies even when he was abused, arrested, and his house was bombed. The charismatic King traveled millions of miles, gave hundreds of speeches, and wrote numerous articles and books. He was also arrested 20 times. Other leaders, such as Fannie Lou Hamer (1917–1977), suffered similarly. Hamer joined the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to help protect African American people’s right to vote. Arrested and beaten while in jail, she suffered from her injuries for the rest of her life. Nevertheless, Hamer continued to agitate for voting rights, participation in political delegations, and, later, economic rights.<sup>12</sup> Many people, including young students, demonstrated for civil rights.

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<sup>9</sup> For more on the national experience of the Harlem Renaissance, see Cary D. Wintz, “The Harlem Renaissance in the American West,” *Black Past*, accessed February 15, 2023, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/harlem-renaissance-american-west/>. There are many books on the Harlem Renaissance, including Alain Locke, *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (Mansfield Centre: Martino Fine Books [1925], 2015); *Black Women of the Harlem Renaissance Era*, eds., Lean’tin L. Bracks and Jessie Carney Smith (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017); Flannery Burke, *From Greenwich Village to Taos: Primitivism and Place at Mabel Dodge Luhan’s* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2016); Cary D. Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1992); *The Harlem Renaissance in the American West: The New Negro’s Western Experience*, eds. Cary D. Wintz and Bruce A. Glasrud, (New York: Routledge Press, 2011); and Wil Haygood, *I Too Sing America: The Harlem Renaissance at 100* (New York: Rizzoli Electa, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> “History: *Brown v. Board of Education* Re-enactment,” United States Courts, accessed February 15, 2023, <https://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/history-brown-v-board-education-re-enactment>.

<sup>11</sup> Donnie Williams and Wayne Greenhaw, *The Thunder of Angels: The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the People Who Broke the Back of Jim Crow* (Brooklyn: Lawrence Hill Books, 2007); “The Montgomery Bus Boycott,” National Park Service, updated September 21, 2022, accessed February 15, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/montgomery-bus-boycott.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> Keisha N. Blain, *Until I am Free: Fannie Lou Hamer’s Enduring Message to America* (New York: Beacon Press, 2021); Debra Michals, “Fannie Lou Hamer (1917–1977),” National Women’s History Museum, updated 2017, accessed February 15, 2023, <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/fannie-lou-hamer>.



**Lincoln Memorial Youth March for Integrated Schools, October 25, 1958. National Archives and Records Administration (NAID: 175539930).**

The Civil Rights Movement drew attention from around the world. King won the Nobel Peace Prize for his leadership and strategies in 1964. He donated his prize money to the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>13</sup> That same year, Congress enacted the Civil Rights Act, which prohibited discrimination in public places, required integration in schools and other public institutions, and made discrimination in employment illegal.<sup>14</sup> The next year, Congress enacted the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which made it illegal to prevent African Americans from exercising their constitutional right to vote under the Fifteenth Amendment.<sup>15</sup> Tragically, in 1968, while preparing to lead another protest march, King was assassinated. Despite their grief at the loss of an important leader, African American people continued to agitate for equal rights.

The end of the 1960s finally saw the end of “legal” Jim Crow, and everywhere people took down signs designating separate facilities for African Americans. But that did not guarantee equality. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, founded in 1966, was a militant Black power organization. In addition to providing services, including transportation, food, and clothing, to the Black community, Panthers challenged the police, protected African Americans from violence, and confronted politicians.<sup>16</sup> By the 1970s, the Black Power Movement, a precursor to the present-day Black Lives Matter movement, emphasized racial pride, access to economic power, cultural and political institutions to celebrate African American achievements, and demands for colleges to offer Black

<sup>13</sup> “Martin Luther King Jr. Biographical,” The Nobel Prize, accessed February 15, 2023, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1964/king/biographical/>.

<sup>14</sup> “Milestone Documents: Civil Rights Act (1964),” National Archives and Records Administration, updated February 8, 2022, accessed February 15, 2023, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/civil-rights-act>

<sup>15</sup> “Milestone Documents: Voting Rights Act (1965),” National Archives and Records Administration, updated February 8, 2022, accessed February 15, 2023, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/voting-rights-act>.

<sup>16</sup> “The Black Panther Party: Challenging Police and Promoting Social Change,” National Museum of African American History and Culture, accessed February 15, 2023, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/black-panther-party-challenging-police-and-promoting-social-change>.

history and studies courses and hire more professors of color. Since 2013, the Black Lives Matter movement, now global in scope, has continued this work, focusing on eradicating White supremacy and violence against African American people today.<sup>17</sup>

African American people broke many racial barriers in the 1980s. Michael Jackson's (1958–2009) album *Thriller*, released in 1982, is the highest-selling album of all time, and he continued to produce popular music, win awards, and engage in philanthropy through the 2000s. Alice Walker (1944–) won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction with *The Color Purple* (1983), and Vanessa Williams (1963–) was the first Black woman to be crowned Miss America. African Americans became astronauts, newscasters, talk show hosts, neurosurgeons, anthropologists, and football coaches. Many Black people also won elections and served in Congress, as mayors of major cities, and in various other political offices. Their advocacy for civil rights, as well as broader acceptance of African American people as professionals, continued into the following decade.

Even greater achievements mark the 2000s. The world celebrated the 2008 election of Barack Obama (1961–) to the Presidency. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009 for his “extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples.”<sup>18</sup>



**Barack Obama, elected in 2008, served two terms as the first Black President of the United States. During his second term, he gave a speech at the fiftieth anniversary of the Civil Rights March from Selma to Montgomery and another at the dedication of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. This photo is from his remarks at the foot of the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7, 2015. Official White House Photo by Pete Souza.**

<sup>17</sup> “Black Lives Matter,” accessed February 10, 2023, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/>.

<sup>18</sup> “Barack H. Obama: Facts.” The Nobel Prize, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2009/obama/facts/>.



Increasingly, women of color are entering politics, helping to ensure equal rights for all citizens. Attorney Stacy Abrams (1973–) ran for governor of Georgia in 2018. Although she lost that race, she has become nationally recognized for fighting voter suppression, winning several awards.<sup>19</sup> In 2020, the people of the United States elected Joe Biden as president, who had selected Kamala Harris (1964–), the first woman and first woman of color, as his vice president.

## CONCLUSION

Discrimination and violence against African American people continues. As of this writing, the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2021 has passed the House of Representatives and is in the Senate for consideration. Most people in the United States, Black and White, are angry that police violence continues.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, most African Americans take their responsibility as citizens very seriously and continue to contribute to their communities and the larger society through education, voting, volunteering, donating to help those in need, and patronizing Black-owned businesses.

## RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE

- ▶ Carol Anderson, *One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression Is Destroying Our Democracy*
- ▶ Lerone Bennett, Jr., *The Shaping of Black America: The Struggles and Triumphs of African-Americans, 1619–1990s*
- ▶ Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross, *A Black Women’s History of the United States*
- ▶ Joy DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*
- ▶ Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon, eds. *Jumpin’ Jim Crow: Southern Politics from the Civil War to Civil Rights*
- ▶ St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*
- ▶ Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*
- ▶ Clint Smith, *How the Word Is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America*
- ▶ Gretchen Sorin, *Driving While Black: African American Travel and the Road to Civil Rights*
- ▶ Marjorie J. Spruill, *Divided We Stand: The Battle Over Women’s Rights and Family Values That Polarized American Politics*
- ▶ Christopher Waldrep, *African Americans Confront Lynching: Strategies of Resistance from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Era*

To learn more about National History Day’s Inclusive History Initiative, go to [nhd.org/inclusivehistory](https://nhd.org/inclusivehistory).

<sup>19</sup> Emma Rothberg, “Stacey Abrams (December 9, 1973–)”, National Women’s History Museum, accessed February 15, 2023, <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/stacey-abrams>.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew Horace and Ron Harris, *The Black and the Blue: A Cop Reveals the Crimes, Racism, and Injustice in America’s Law Enforcement* (New York: Legacy Lit, 2019); Andrea J. Ritchie, *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color* (New York: Beacon Press, 2017); and “Mapping Police Violence,” Mapping Police Violence, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/>.

# Reframing the "Master Narrative": A Simulation of The 1946-1947 President's Committee on Civil Rights

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**GUIDING QUESTION:** During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1930s and 1940s, which rights did African Americans seek to gain, and how did they compel the United States government to secure these rights?

## > OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will integrate perspectives from various components of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1930s and 1940s and "testify" before President Harry S. Truman's 1946 President's Committee on Civil Rights.

## > OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to

- > Identify the long Civil Rights Movement as a continuum of Black protest, with a focus on the 1930s and 1940s;
- > Research and represent individuals and organizations involved in civil rights activities during the 1930s and 1940s; and
- > Evaluate how the United States government could have more effectively taken responsibility for protecting the civil rights of African Americans in the 1930s and 1940s.

## > STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

### CONNECTIONS TO COMMON CORE

- > CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- > CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WH.11-12.1 Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.
- > CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

## CONNECTIONS TO C3 FRAMEWORK

- › D2.His.4.9-12. Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.
- › D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

## › DOCUMENTS USED

### PRIMARY SOURCES

Brochure, *Committee for Equal Justice for Mrs. Recy Taylor, A Story of Unequal Justice: The Woman Next Door . . .*, c. 1945

Library of Congress (018.00.01)

<https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/rosa-parks-in-her-own-words/about-this-exhibition/early-life-and-activism/committee-for-equal-justice-for-mrs-recy-taylor>

Harry S. Truman, Executive Order 9808, December 5, 1946

Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum

<https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/executive-orders/9808/executive-order-9808>

National Urban League, “Civil Liberties Implications of the Employment, Housing, and Social Adjustment Problems of Minorities,” April 1, 1947 (excerpt)

National Archives and Records Administration (NAID 239790436)

<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/239790436>

Newspaper article<sup>1</sup>, “Segregated Regional College Doomed by McCready Decision”

*Miami Times* [Miami, Florida], April 29, 1950

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83004231/1950-04-29/ed-1/seq-15/>

Oral history interview, Frances Mary Albrier, “We Decided to Picket” [2:41]

The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture

<https://youtu.be/kJ9vTwM2A3I>

Supreme Court decision, *Pearson v. Murray*, 1936 (excerpt)

BlackPast

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/raymond-pearson-v-donald-g-murray-1936/>

### SECONDARY SOURCES

Article, “Harry S Truman and Civil Rights”

National Park Service

<https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/harry-s-truman-and-civil-rights.htm>

Audio story, Michel Martin, “Hidden Pattern of Rape Helped Stir Civil Rights Movement,” February 28, 2011

National Public Radio

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=134131369>

Mary-Elizabeth B. Murphy, “African Americans in the Great Depression and New Deal,” 2020

*Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.632>

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<sup>1</sup> The article immediately next to this article in the newspaper contains a graphic story of a police brutality against three African American men. Please preview before deciding to share the link with students. The student handout does not contain the web address.

Theme Study, *Civil Rights in America: Racial Discrimination in Housing*, March 2021 (excerpt)  
National Park Service

[https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/upload/Civil\\_Rights\\_Housing\\_NHL\\_Theme\\_Study\\_revisedfinal.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/upload/Civil_Rights_Housing_NHL_Theme_Study_revisedfinal.pdf)

Video, “Historical Context: The Long Road to Civil Rights,” 2024 [9:15]

National History Day

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-auo4bah\\_A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-auo4bah_A)

## ➤ TEACHER-CREATED MATERIALS

- Group Simulation Instructions
  - » Members of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights
  - » The “Don’t Buy” Movement
  - » Fair Housing
  - » Sexual Violence
  - » Desegregation of Higher Education before *Brown v. Board of Education*
- Simulation Notes
- Formal Written Statement Assessment

## ➤ ACTIVITY PREPARATION

- Arrange the classroom for group work.
- Organize students into five groups.
- Make one copy of the Group Simulation Instructions for each student group member. Students receive only the materials for their assigned group.
- Preview all materials for appropriateness for your students.

## ➤ PROCEDURE

### ACTIVITY ONE: INTRODUCTION (15 MINUTES)

- Introduce the focus question to students: *During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1930s and 1940s, which rights did African Americans seek to gain, and how did they compel the United States government to secure these rights?* Remind students that the fight for civil rights stretched back to the colonial era and a more accurate account of the Civil Rights Movement needs to include the important stories of students, preachers, working people, activists, and intellectuals who challenged Jim Crow segregation in the American South in the 1930s and 1940s.

### Teacher Notes:

- ▶ Read the articles “African Americans: Pursuit of Equality” and “Expanding Inclusivity Through Constitutional Change” in this resource to help set the lesson in the context of modern scholarship.
- ▶ Remind students that historical simulations help us understand ideas and perspectives from the past more deeply. During the simulation, students should avoid any participation that is disrespectful and may detract from that goal.
- ▶ When conducting this lesson, take time to teach your students how to use proper terminology (Black migrants, African American laborers) and not to use collective terms (like “Blacks”) to describe a group of people based solely on their race. Read the article “What’s in a Word? Being Thoughtful about Terminology in Historical Writing” in this resource for additional support.



- › Show the video, “Historical Context: The Long Road to Civil Rights” [9:15]. Lead a class discussion:
  - › *What is the long Civil Rights Movement?*
  - › *What rights did African Americans seek to gain?*
  - › *What strategies and tactics did activists deploy?*
  - › *What is the master narrative of the Civil Rights Movement? In what ways does this resource challenge that narrative?*
- › Record student responses for the follow-up discussion.

### **ACTIVITY TWO: SIMULATION PREPARATION (30 MINUTES)**

- › Explain that students will re-create the Truman administration’s 1946–1947 President’s Committee on Civil Rights. They will represent groups of civil rights activists from the 1930s and 1940s and members of the committee itself.
  - › **Teacher Tip:** Remind students that when simulating people from the past, they should be respectful of those people, sharing their ideas and perspectives but avoiding the tendency to imitate or otherwise act disrespectfully.
- › Assign each student group a simulation role and distribute the appropriate Group Simulation Instructions:
  - › Members of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights
  - › The “Don’t Buy” Movement
  - › Fair Housing
  - › Sexual Violence
  - › Desegregation of Higher Education before *Brown v. Board of Education*
- › Ask students to prepare for their role in the simulation by reading their assigned sources and preparing oral testimony that answers the focus question for their group. Members of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights should prepare an opening statement summarizing the purpose of the Committee.

### **ACTIVITY THREE: SIMULATION (45 MINUTES)**

- › Arrange the room in a panel setting so that each group faces the members of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights.
- › Distribute the Simulation Notes handout to all students.
- › Recreate the 1946–1947 President’s Committee on Civil Rights.
  - › Allow members of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights to deliver their opening statement. Next, they should ask each group to present their testimony.
  - › Following each group’s testimony, members of the President’s Committee will follow up with two or three clarifying and probing questions. For example, Committee members may ask each group how the different branches of the federal government can best use their respective powers to protect all Americans’ civil rights. Each group should receive five or six minutes to present testimony and answer questions.
- › Encourage students to use the Simulation Notes handout and record the main points raised by each group.

- › Ask the members of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights to prepare and deliver a closing statement. The closing statement should summarize the Committee’s initial findings and next steps on the focus question: *How should the United States government more effectively take responsibility for protecting the civil rights of African Americans?*

### **ASSESSMENT OPTIONS**

- › Assign the Formal Written Statement Assessment.
- › Assign students to research connections between the Civil Rights Movement of the 1930s and 1940s and the later phase of the movement.



**Students interested in this topic might be interested in researching the following for an NHD project:**

- ▶ **Housewives League of Detroit (1930s)**
- ▶ **Recy Taylor (1919–2017) and Betty Jean Owens (1940–)**
- ▶ **Executive Order 9981 (1948)**
- ▶ **Shelley v. Kraemer (1948)**
- ▶ **Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County (1954)**

To access a PDF containing all of the sources and materials to complete this lesson plan, go to [nhd.org/inclusivehistory](https://nhd.org/inclusivehistory).

# MEMBERS OF THE PRESIDENT’S COMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS

## GROUP SIMULATION INSTRUCTIONS

**Focus Question:** How should the United States government more effectively take responsibility for protecting the civil rights of African Americans?

In 1946, President Harry S. Truman created the President’s Committee on Civil Rights. His instructions to the committee stated, “I want our Bill of Rights implemented in fact as well as on paper . . . there are certain rights under the Constitution of the United States which I think the Federal Government has a right to protect, and I want to find out just how far we can go.” He charged the committee to “make recommendations with respect to the adoption or establishment, by legislation or otherwise, of more adequate and effective means and procedures for the protection of the civil rights of the people of the United States.”<sup>1</sup>

Today, you will lead a simulation of the 1946–1947 President’s Committee on Civil Rights and gain a better understanding of Black activism during the long Civil Rights Movement of the 1930s and 1940s.

### Directions:

- ▶ Read the secondary and primary sources attached below.
- ▶ Prepare and deliver an opening statement summarizing the purpose of the Committee. Remember that President Truman has tasked you with collecting evidence and making recommendations to protect all Americans’ civil rights. Your opening statement should be a minimum of eight sentences long.
- ▶ Prepare clarifying questions for the following groups who will testify before the Committee. You should prepare three or four questions for each group, and your questions may be general or specific to a group.
  - ▶ “Don’t Buy” Movement
  - ▶ Fair Housing
  - ▶ Sexual Violence
  - ▶ School Desegregation before *Brown v. Board of Education*
- ▶ Following all groups’ testimony, prepare and deliver a closing statement. The closing statement should summarize the Committee’s initial findings and next steps in response to the focus question.
- ▶ All group members must participate in the oral delivery of the opening statement, the delivery of the closing statement, and/or by asking questions.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in William E. Luechtenburg, *The White House Looks South: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005), 166.

## MEMBERS OF THE PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS (CONT.)

### Secondary Source:

Article, "Harry S. Truman and Civil Rights"

National Park Service

<https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/harry-s-truman-and-civil-rights.htm>

### Primary Source:

Harry S. Truman, Executive Order 9808, December 5, 1946

Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum

<https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/executive-orders/9808/executive-order-9808>

EXECUTIVE ORDER 9808

ESTABLISHING THE PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS

WHEREAS the preservation of civil rights guaranteed by the Constitution is essential to domestic tranquility, national security, the general welfare, and the continued existence of our free institutions; and

WHEREAS the action of individuals who take the law into their own hands and inflict summary punishment and wreak personal vengeance is subversive of our democratic system of law enforcement and public criminal justice, and gravely threatens our form of government; and

WHEREAS it is essential that all possible steps be taken to safeguard our civil rights;

NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States by the Constitution and the statutes of the United States, it is hereby ordered as follows:

1. There is hereby created a committee to be known as the President's Committee on Civil Rights, which shall be composed of the following-named members, who shall serve without compensation:

Mr. Charles E. Wilson, Chairman; Mrs. Sadie T. Alexander; Mr. James B. Carey; Mr. John S. Dickey; Mr. Morris L. Ernst; Rabbi Roland G. Gittelsohn; Dr. Frank P. Graham; the Most Reverend Francis J. Haas; Mr. Charles Luckman; Mr. Francis P. Matthews; Mr. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.; The Right Reverend Henry Knox Sherrill; Mr. Boris Shishkin; Mrs. M. E. Tilley; Mr. Channing H. Tobias.

2. The Committee is authorized on behalf of the President to inquire into and to determine whether and in what respect current law-enforcement measures and the authority and means possessed by Federal, State, and local governments may be strengthened and improved to safeguard the civil rights of the people.

3. All executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government are authorized and directed to cooperate with the Committee in its work, and to furnish the Committee such information or services of such persons as the Committee may require in the performance of its duties.

4. When requested by the Committee to do so, persons employed in any of the executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government shall testify before the Committee and shall make available for the use of the Committee such documents and other information as the Committee may require.

5. The Committee shall make a report of its studies to the President in writing, and shall in particular make recommendations with respect to the adoption or establishment, by legislation or otherwise, of more adequate and effective means and procedures for the protection of the civil rights of the people of the United States.

6. Upon rendition of its report to the President, the Committee shall cease to exist, unless otherwise determined by further Executive order.

HARRY S. TRUMAN.

THE WHITE HOUSE,



# “DON’T BUY” MOVEMENT

## GROUP SIMULATION INSTRUCTIONS

**Focus Question:** How should the United States government more effectively take responsibility for protecting the civil rights of African Americans?

In 1946, President Harry S. Truman created the President’s Committee on Civil Rights. His instructions to the committee stated, “I want our Bill of Rights implemented in fact as well as on paper . . . there are certain rights under the Constitution of the United States which I think the Federal Government has a right to protect, and I want to find out just how far we can go.” He charged the committee to “make recommendations with respect to the adoption or establishment, by legislation or otherwise, of more adequate and effective means and procedures for the protection of the civil rights of the people of the United States.”<sup>1</sup>

Today, you will participate in a simulation of the 1946–1947 President’s Committee on Civil Rights and gain a better understanding of Black activism during the long Civil Rights Movement of the 1930s and 1940s.

### Directions:

- ▶ Read and watch the secondary and primary sources linked below.
- ▶ Prepare and deliver testimony presenting your group’s perspective and answer to the focus question. Remember that you are attempting to convince the Truman administration to use the power of the federal government and take action. Your testimony should be a minimum of ten sentences long.
- ▶ Brainstorm potential questions that the Committee members may ask your group. Brainstorm how you will respond to these questions.
- ▶ All group members must participate in the oral delivery of the opening statement, the delivery of the closing statement, and/or by asking questions.

### Secondary Source:

Mary-Elizabeth B. Murphy, “African Americans in the Great Depression and New Deal,” 2020 *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.632>

**Note:** Focus on the section titled “Militant Black Protest Politics in the 1930s.”

### Primary Source:

Oral history interview, Frances Mary Albrier, “We Decided to Picket” [2:41]

National Museum of African American History and Culture

<https://youtu.be/kJ9vTwM2A3I>

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in William E. Luechtenburg, *The White House Looks South: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005), 166.

# FAIR HOUSING

## GROUP SIMULATION INSTRUCTIONS

**Focus Question:** How should the United States government more effectively take responsibility for protecting the civil rights of African Americans?

In 1946, President Harry S. Truman created the President’s Committee on Civil Rights. His instructions to the committee stated, “I want our Bill of Rights implemented in fact as well as on paper . . . there are certain rights under the Constitution of the United States which I think the Federal Government has a right to protect, and I want to find out just how far we can go.” He charged the committee to “make recommendations with respect to the adoption or establishment, by legislation or otherwise, of more adequate and effective means and procedures for the protection of the civil rights of the people of the United States.”<sup>1</sup>

Today, you will lead a simulation of the 1946–1947 President’s Committee on Civil Rights and gain a better understanding of Black activism during the long Civil Rights Movement of the 1930s and 1940s.

### Directions:

- ▶ Read the secondary and primary sources linked below.
- ▶ Prepare and deliver testimony presenting your group’s perspective and answer to the focus question. Remember that you are attempting to convince the Truman administration to use the power of the federal government and take action. Your testimony should be a minimum of ten sentences long.
- ▶ Brainstorm potential questions that the Committee members may ask your group. Brainstorm how you will respond to these questions.
- ▶ All group members must participate in the oral delivery of the opening statement, the delivery of the closing statement, and/or by asking questions.

### Secondary Source:

Theme Study, *Civil Rights in America: Racial Discrimination in Housing*, March 2021 (excerpt)  
National Park Service

[https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/upload/Civil\\_Rights\\_Housing\\_NHL\\_Theme\\_Study\\_revisedfinal.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/upload/Civil_Rights_Housing_NHL_Theme_Study_revisedfinal.pdf)

### Primary Source:

National Urban League, “Civil Liberties Implications of the Employment, Housing, and Social Adjustment Problems of Minorities,” April 1, 1947

National Archives and Records Administration (NAID: 239790436)

<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/239790436>

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in William E. Luechtenburg, *The White House Looks South: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005), 166.

## FAIR HOUSING (CONT.)

Theme Study, *Civil Rights in America: Racial Discrimination in Housing*, March 2021 (excerpt)  
National Park Service

[https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/upload/Civil\\_Rights\\_Housing\\_NHL\\_Theme\\_Study\\_revisedfinal.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/upload/Civil_Rights_Housing_NHL_Theme_Study_revisedfinal.pdf)

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### THE FAIR-HOUSING MOVEMENT AND WHITE BACKLASH DURING THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

#### The NAACP Campaign against Restrictive Racial Covenants

In 1937, Carl Hansberry purchased an apartment building in an all-white Chicago neighborhood in violation of a restrictive racial covenant drawn up by members of the Woodlawn Property Owners Association. Neighbors threw rocks through his window, directed his family to leave, and then filed a lawsuit to enforce the covenant banning property “sold, leased to or permitted to be occupied by any person of the colored race.” In 1939, the Supreme Court of Illinois affirmed a circuit court judgment “declaring the conveyance to Hansberry and wife void and ordering them to remove from the premises, and holding the restrictive agreement valid and in full force and effect.” The NAACP appealed to the US Supreme Court, part of a renewed effort to challenge the constitutionality of racial covenants previously upheld in *Corrigan v. Buckley* (1926). The Supreme Court ruled in Hansberry’s favor but left the *Corrigan* precedent intact by deciding the case on the technicality that barely half of the stipulated 95 percent of homeowners in the Woodlawn neighborhood had signed the agreement.<sup>150</sup> The Chicago episode later inspired Lorraine Hansberry, who was eight years old at the time of her family’s odyssey, to write the 1959 Broadway play *A Raisin in the Sun*, also released in a 1962 film version starring Sidney Poitier. Hansberry’s powerful indictment of White northern racism and her sensitive portrayal of Black family life captured the integrationist spirit of the early civil rights era with the message that African Americans also believed in the American Dream of a detached home in a single-family neighborhood.<sup>151</sup>

The civil rights challenge to restrictive racial covenants moved to the center of the fair-housing movement that gathered steam during the 1940s. Encouraged by powerful institutions such as the Federal Housing Administration and the NAREB, restrictive covenants governed an estimated three-fourths or more of postwar White-occupied housing in cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and Detroit.<sup>152</sup> As in the 1920s, the NAACP led the legal battle to overturn racial covenants as a violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In Los Angeles, the controversy played out in the 1946 “Sugar Hill case,” after prominent Black business leaders and famous actresses such as Hattie McDaniel and Louise Beavers purchased homes in the restricted West Adams neighborhood. White homeowners in the West Adams Heights Improvement Association filed a lawsuit to void the sales, but NAACP attorney Loren Miller convinced the California state courts to invalidate the restrictive covenant on technical grounds. The NAACP then sent Miller to Detroit, where he teamed up with Thurgood Marshall to work on the case of *McGhee v. Sipes*.<sup>153</sup> Orsel and Minnie McGhee, a middle-class Black couple, were already living in a White neighborhood in Northwest Detroit when the civic

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<sup>150</sup> *Lee v. Hansberry*, 372 Ill. 369 (1939); *Hansberry v. Lee*, 311 U.S. 32 (1940); Meyer, *As Long as They Don’t Move Next Door*, 56–57.

<sup>151</sup> Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun: A Drama in Three Acts* (New York: S. French, 1959); *A Raisin in the Sun* (Columbia Pictures, 1961).

<sup>152</sup> Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights*, 261–64.

<sup>153</sup> Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 98–101. Also see Gibbons, *City of Segregation*, 41–72. In Michigan, the case started as *Sipes v. McGhee*, 316 Mich. 614 (1947).



## FAIR HOUSING (CONT.)

Theme Study, *Civil Rights in America: Racial Discrimination in Housing*, March 2021 (excerpt)  
National Park Service

[https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/upload/Civil\\_Rights\\_Housing\\_NHL\\_Theme\\_Study\\_revisedfinal.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/upload/Civil_Rights_Housing_NHL_Theme_Study_revisedfinal.pdf)

association sued them in 1945 to enforce a covenant restricting occupancy to “the Caucasian race.” Under the authority of *Corrigan v. Buckley*, the Michigan state courts ordered the expulsion of the McGhees from their home. The NAACP appealed the verdict to the US Supreme Court as part of a flood of litigation designed to prove that judicial enforcement of restrictive covenants represented a public, not merely a private, form of racial discrimination.<sup>154</sup>

The civil rights climate in national politics seemed advantageous in 1947, when the Supreme Court agreed to hear the consolidated appeals of four cases challenging the constitutionality of racial covenants. That year, the President’s Commission on Civil Rights called for the “elimination of segregation, based on race, color, creed, or national origin, from American life.” The commission appointed by Harry Truman condemned racial prejudice in the housing market and proclaimed that “equality of opportunity to rent or buy a home should exist for every American.” Its report, *To Secure These Rights*, labeled restrictive covenants the “chief weapon in the effort to keep Negroes from moving out of overcrowded quarters into white neighborhoods.” Because “the power of the state is thus utilized to bolster discriminatory practices,” the civil rights commission recommended legislative action and judicial intervention to ban racial covenants.<sup>155</sup> In anticipation of the report’s release, Truman delivered the first presidential address to an NAACP audience, assembled in front of the Lincoln Memorial. “There is no justifiable reason for discrimination because of ancestry, or religion, or race, or color,” Truman declared. “Every man should have the right to a decent home, the right to an education, the right to adequate medical care, the right to a worthwhile job.”<sup>156</sup> After lobbying by civil rights organizations, the Truman administration also filed an *amicus* brief urging the Supreme Court to outlaw racial covenants. The Department of Justice emphasized the negative Cold War repercussions of this blatant form of racial discrimination and acknowledged that restrictive covenants in federally funded developments placed “the stamp of government approval upon separate residential patterns.”<sup>157</sup>

The US Supreme Court barred the judicial enforcement of restrictive racial covenants in the 1948 ruling of *Shelley v. Kraemer*. The lead case originated in St. Louis, after J. D. and Ethel Lee Shelley purchased a home covered by a neighborhood covenant prohibiting occupancy by “people of the Negro or Mongolian race,” and the White neighborhood association sued to evict them. The companion cases included the Detroit litigation in *McGhee v. Sipes* and two appeals from Washington, DC, involving Black families who also enlisted the NAACP to fight eviction litigation initiated by White homeowners. The *Shelley* opinion by Chief Justice Fred Vinson reaffirmed the constitutional distinction between public and private discrimination but expanded the scope of the state action doctrine to encompass “active intervention” by local and state courts

<sup>154</sup> Jeffrey Gonda, *Unjust Deeds: The Restrictive Covenant Cases and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 37–45; Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 125–58.

<sup>155</sup> *To Secure these Rights: The Report of the President’s Commission on Civil Rights* (Washington: GPO, 1947), available at Harry S Truman Presidential Library & Museum, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov>.

<sup>156</sup> “President Truman’s Address before the NAACP,” Truman Library Institute, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library>.

<sup>157</sup> Gonda, *Unjust Deeds*, 157–173; Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 168–74, 191–93. On the civil rights impact of Cold War geopolitics, see Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).



## FAIR HOUSING (CONT.)

Theme Study, *Civil Rights in America: Racial Discrimination in Housing*, March 2021 (excerpt)  
National Park Service

[https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/upload/Civil\\_Rights\\_Housing\\_NHL\\_Theme\\_Study\\_revisedfinal.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/upload/Civil_Rights_Housing_NHL_Theme_Study_revisedfinal.pdf)

to deprive the property rights of Black renters and homeowners on the basis of race. *Shelley* specified that the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment applied to “only such action as may fairly be said to be that of the States. That Amendment erects no shield against merely private conduct, however discriminatory or wrongful.” The Supreme Court concluded that the architects of the Fourteenth Amendment intended to guarantee “equality in the enjoyment of property rights . . . as an essential pre-condition to the realization of other basic civil rights and liberties.” The two companion cases from Washington, D.C., consolidated in *Hurd v. Hodge* (1948), extended the ban to the separate constitutional issue of enforcement of restrictive covenants by the federal courts. A subsequent 1953 decision, *Barrows v. Jackson*, held that White property owners could not sue for damages based on the violation of racial deed restrictions, closing a loophole left open by the *Shelley* reasoning.<sup>158</sup>

Civil rights organizations and fair-housing activists initially celebrated the victory in *Shelley v. Kraemer* as a new dawn for racial equality and housing integration in the United States. In Los Angeles, a Black newspaper headlined its report: “California Negroes Can Now Live Anywhere!” In similar fashion, the African American press in Detroit proclaimed: “We Can Live Anywhere! This far-reaching decision means that a mortal blow has been struck at racial restrictions in homes, artificially created ghettos, . . . and countless other jim-crow manifestations made possible because of heretofore enforced segregation in home ownership.” The *Chicago Defender* praised the Supreme Court for ending “one of the ugliest developments in American history. . . . These covenants have been responsible for more human misery, more crime, more disease and violence than any other factor in our society. They have been used to build the biggest ghettos in history.” Walter White of the NAACP called the ruling an expansion of democracy but warned that the real estate industry and White homeowners associations would “attempt to find some other means of maintaining residential segregation.”<sup>159</sup> Indeed, numerous real estate groups responded by reiterating the NAREB mantra that the maintenance of property values required racial homogeneity in neighborhoods. For two years after *Shelley*, the Federal Housing Administration resisted pressure to discontinue mortgage loans to properties with racial covenants, until President Truman ordered a policy change that the agency then applied only to new deed restrictions. The FHA also rejected the NAACP’s request to “exclude all considerations predicated upon racial, religious, or national distinctions for the purpose of making commitments for insurance.” For two more decades, the federal government declined to require racial nondiscrimination as a condition of loans and mortgages and therefore continued to subsidize segregated housing developments, primarily in the booming suburbs.<sup>160</sup>

<sup>158</sup> *Shelley v. Kraemer*, 334 U.S. 1 (1948); *Hurd v. Hodge*, 334 U.S. 24 (1948); *Barrows v. Jackson*, 346 U.S. 249 (1953); Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 100–21, 177–210, 230–46; Gonda, *Unjust Deeds*. On the St. Louis case, also see Gordon, *Mapping Decline*, 71–86. On patterns of housing segregation in Washington, D.C., also see Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation’s Capital* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

<sup>159</sup> Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 100; Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 181–82; Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 211–18.

<sup>160</sup> Abrams, *Forbidden Neighbors*, 222–24; Hirsch, “Choosing Segregation,” 212; Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 218–30. In 1949, Thurgood Marshall charged that “FHA is more interested in pointing out to prejudiced real estate interests ways and means of evading the clear intent of the Supreme Court decision . . . than in implementing an effective anti-discrimination policy.” In Hirsch, “‘Containment’ on the Home Front,” 165. Also see Gonda, *Unjust Deeds*, 194–218.

## FAIR HOUSING (CONT.)

National Urban League, "Civil Liberties Implications of the Employment, Housing, and Social Adjustment Problems of Minorities," April 1, 1947

National Archives and Records Administration (NAID: 239790436)

<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/239790436>

-8-

### The Right to a Home

The present national preoccupation with the problem of housing has highlighted the housing problems and needs of thousands of Negro families. It must be stated here that this problem is not new to most Negro families because the majority of them have long known the depressing and debasing effects of substandard housing.

The seriousness of the housing problem for Negroes and certain other minorities is graphically pointed out in the 1940 Census and other related data on this subject. These reports revealed that of the dwellings occupied by Negroes, 83 percent were in need of major repairs or had plumbing deficiencies, while 45 percent of those occupied by non-whites were substandard. Twenty-five percent of the urban housing Negroes occupy is overcrowded compared with 8.5 percent of that of whites. Owner-occupied dwellings were almost twice as numerous among whites as among Negroes, the percentage being 43 for whites and 24 for Negroes. The average value for homes owned by Negroes was reported to be \$1,108, while for whites it was \$3,181. In rental housing, 71 percent of Negro renters paid monthly rentals below \$20. The corresponding figure among white tenants was \$32. This, briefly, presents an over-all picture of the disparities in the housing conditions among a large proportion of the Negro population.

During the six-year period since the 1940 Census, several factors have further aggravated a situation that was already deplorable. Almost a million Negroes have migrated from rural and semi-rural areas to urban communities. The overcrowded racial "ghettos" of the pre-war years have expanded very little to accommodate the steady stream of newcomers. The end result is that practically every important American city is now bulging with ill-housed Negro families whose condition is even more desperate than that of similarly-placed whites.

Beyond this meager statement of the facts regarding the housing problem of Negroes, it is important to examine the factors that are contributing to the perpetuation of undesirable patterns in housing. There is an unmistakable correlation between the low earning power of Negro families and their inability to acquire suitable housing. Further, the housing problems of low-income Negro families and other low-income families are essentially the same and are part of the total problem of providing adequate housing for the people of America. But, in addition to these understandable factors, the housing problem for Negroes is complicated and intensified by the application of restrictive policies and practices adopted by real estate interests and property owners in nearly every section of the nation. In a great measure, these policies and practices are sanctioned and supported by agencies of government, both at local and national levels.



## FAIR HOUSING (CONT.)

National Urban League, "Civil Liberties Implications of the Employment, Housing, and Social Adjustment Problems of Minorities," April 1, 1947

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-9-

The crux of the problem is the widely used practice of residential segregation based exclusively on race or nationality. Because of this practice, Negro home-seekers are denied equal access to decent housing regardless of their ability to pay for such housing. The ultimate result is reflected in the concentration of Negro families in congested and frequently neglected slum and blighted areas characteristic of many communities.

The methods employed in achieving this end vary from city to city. In some communities the establishment of racial colonies has become so widely accepted that the practice now has the status of unwritten law. In others, Negroes are prohibited from occupying properties located in so-called white neighborhoods by intimidation and threats of violence. But by far the most prevalent method currently used to prevent Negro occupancy is the restrictive covenant and neighborhood agreement. Through these devices, property owners agree not to sell or rent properties to Negro or other racial minorities for a definite period. Restrictive covenants, while clearly contrary to our democratic concepts, enjoy legal sanction, chiefly because they involve private property rights of the signers. Consequently, court opinions on the legality of such agreements have not provided a clear-cut legal basis for determining their constitutionality.

To further strengthen residential segregation through use of restrictive covenants, the Federal Housing Administration has adopted the policy of private property owners and private real estate financing institutions by advocating such covenants. Although the Federal Housing Administration has approved restrictive covenants under the pretense of protecting the value of mortgages insured by the agency, it is apparent that this policy has served not only to perpetuate existing racial "ghettos", but to create new ones. How the Federal Housing Administration has dealt with the subject is shown in the following excerpt from its Underwriters Manual (1938):

"Special Considerations in Rating Undeveloped Subdivisions and Other Sparsely Built Areas:

980 (1). Protection from Adverse Influences.

The Valuator should realize that the need for protection from adverse influences is greater in an undeveloped or partially developed area than in any other type of neighborhood. Generally a high rating should be given only where adequate and properly enforced zoning regulations exist or where effective restrictive covenants are recorded against the entire tract, since these provide the surest protection against undesirable encroachment and inharmonious use. To be most effective, deed restrictions should be imposed upon all land in the immediate environment of the subject location.

# SEXUAL VIOLENCE

## GROUP SIMULATION INSTRUCTIONS

**Focus Question:** How should the United States government more effectively take responsibility for protecting the civil rights of African Americans?

In 1946, President Harry S. Truman created the President’s Committee on Civil Rights. His instructions to the committee stated, “I want our Bill of Rights implemented in fact as well as on paper . . . there are certain rights under the Constitution of the United States which I think the Federal Government has a right to protect, and I want to find out just how far we can go.” He charged the committee to “make recommendations with respect to the adoption or establishment, by legislation or otherwise, of more adequate and effective means and procedures for the protection of the civil rights of the people of the United States.”<sup>1</sup>

Today, you will participate in a simulation of the 1946–1947 President’s Committee on Civil Rights and gain a better understanding of Black activism during the long Civil Rights Movement of the 1930s and 1940s.

### Directions:

- ▶ Read and listen to the secondary and primary sources linked below.
- ▶ Prepare and deliver testimony presenting your group’s perspective and answer to the focus question. Remember that you are attempting to convince the Truman administration to use the power of the federal government and take action. Your testimony should be a minimum of ten sentences long.
- ▶ Brainstorm potential questions that the Committee members may ask your group. Brainstorm how you will respond to these questions.
- ▶ All group members must participate in the oral delivery of the opening statement, the delivery of the closing statement, and/or by asking questions.

### Secondary Source:

Audio story, Michel Martin, “Hidden Pattern of Rape Helped Stir Civil Rights Movement,” February 28, 2011 [14:00]

National Public Radio

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=134131369>

Transcript available at: <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/134131369>

### Primary Source:

Brochure, *Committee for Equal Justice for Mrs. Recy Taylor, A Story of Unequal Justice: The Woman Next Door*. . . , 1945

Library of Congress

<https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/rosa-parks-in-her-own-words/about-this-exhibition/early-life-and-activism/committee-for-equal-justice-for-mrs-recy-taylor>

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in William E. Luechtenburg, *The White House Looks South: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005), 166.

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE (CONT.)

Brochure, *Committee for Equal Justice for Mrs. Recy Taylor, A Story of Unequal Justice: The Woman Next Door. . .*, 1945

Library of Congress

<https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/rosa-parks-in-her-own-words/about-this-exhibition/early-life-and-activism/committee-for-equal-justice-for-mrs-recy-taylor>





## SEXUAL VIOLENCE (CONT.)

Brochure, *Committee for Equal Justice for Mrs. Recy Taylor, A Story of Unequal Justice: The Woman Next Door...*, 1945

Library of Congress

<https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/rosa-parks-in-her-own-words/about-this-exhibition/early-life-and-activism/committee-for-equal-justice-for-mrs-recy-taylor>

### **A Woman You Don't Know...**

Mrs. Recy Taylor doesn't actually live next door to you. She might have. She is like your neighbor and hundreds of other Americans. Twenty-four now, she grew up in the country, and then moved to town (not a big town, Abbeville is about 2,000). After a while she got married and had a baby. When little Joyce was old enough to be left with friends Mrs. Taylor worked in the daytime (for things must be better for the baby).

Nights she'd sew, perhaps, or sit on the porch talking with Will, her husband.

Her life was like that—until something happened.

Last September 3rd, Mrs. Taylor left her child with Will, and went to church with Mrs. Daniels, a friend, and Mrs. Daniels' son. After the services they started walking home through the moonlit night.

### **The Car Passed...**

The walkers didn't pay much attention until it passed again, then they noticed the seven young men inside. When the car stopped beside them they drew together.

Mrs. Taylor was forced into the car at the point of a gun.

The Daniels, unable to find the Sheriff, found the Deputy, who started the hunt for the kidnapers. While he was at the home of Mrs. Taylor's father, Mrs. Taylor staggered in. She had been taken out into the country and criminally assaulted by six of the hoodlums. She gave the Deputy a description of the rapists and the car.

### **Confession**

The car—and its driver—was found. The young man confessed, and is reported to have named the others.

Yet none of the rapists were detained in jail.

### **Mrs. Recy Taylor is a Negro**

When Henry County's Grand Jury met on October 9th they refused to indict the rapists, in spite of the confession and the testimony of the Daniels and Mrs. Taylor.

But a new South has come into being. Forward-looking Southerners are fighting to wipe out the blot of unequal citizenship. It used to be said that in the South "A Negro has no rights a white man is bound to respect." There are sections where this is still true, such as the section of Alabama where Abbeville lies. Alabamans are refusing to allow this situation to continue. They asked for help in focusing national attention on the case. A Committee was formed, to make the facts and issues known. Alabama's governor was informed of the case. He assigned investigators to collect evidence. Again the confession.

### **Pressure's Result: A Special Grand Jury Meeting**

The Governor asked the Grand Jury to meet again. Once more feudal attitudes prevailed. The twelve to six vote necessary for indictment was not obtained. But Alabamans are demanding justice. *The Birmingham News*, foremost Alabama daily, insists that Henry County bring the rapists to trial.

### **Equal Justice Can Be Won**

1. Send letters, telegrams, resolutions to Gov. Chauncey M. Sparks, State Capitol, Montgomery, Alabama, commending his forthright stand. Urge him to use his powers as Chief Executive of the state to see that justice is done.

2. Send financial contributions to the Committee for Equal Justice for Mrs. Recy Taylor, Room 204, 112 East 19th St., New York 3, N. Y.

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE (CONT.)

Brochure, *Committee for Equal Justice for Mrs. Recy Taylor, A Story of Unequal Justice: The Woman Next Door. . .*, 1945

Library of Congress

<https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/rosa-parks-in-her-own-words/about-this-exhibition/early-life-and-activism/committee-for-equal-justice-for-mrs-recy-taylor>

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# SCHOOL DESEGREGATION BEFORE *BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION*

## GROUP SIMULATION INSTRUCTIONS

**Focus Question:** How should the United States government more effectively take responsibility for protecting the civil rights of African Americans?

In 1946, President Harry S. Truman created the President’s Committee on Civil Rights. His instructions to the committee stated, “I want our Bill of Rights implemented in fact as well as on paper . . . there are certain rights under the Constitution of the United States which I think the Federal Government has a right to protect, and I want to find out just how far we can go.” He charged the committee to “make recommendations with respect to the adoption or establishment, by legislation or otherwise, of more adequate and effective means and procedures for the protection of the civil rights of the people of the United States.”<sup>1</sup>

Today, you will participate in a simulation of the 1946–1947 President’s Committee on Civil Rights and gain a better understanding of Black activism during the long Civil Rights Movement of the 1930s and 1940s.

### Directions:

- ▶ Read the secondary and primary sources attached below.
- ▶ Prepare and deliver testimony presenting your group’s perspective and answer to the focus question. Remember that you are attempting to convince the Truman administration to use the power of the federal government and take action. Your testimony should be a minimum of ten sentences long.
- ▶ Brainstorm potential questions that the Committee members may ask your group. Brainstorm how you will respond to these questions.
- ▶ All group members must participate in the oral delivery of the opening statement, the delivery of the closing statement, and/or by asking questions.

### Secondary Source: Historical Context

In the 1930s, the NAACP began its campaign to end school segregation. While the 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision is the most well-known case, it was built on two decades of lawsuits and a carefully developed strategy that focused first on graduate and professional institutions. These schools were much more geographically spread out, making racial segregation a greater barrier to attendance. The first such case was *Pearson v. Murray* (1936). In 1934, Donald Murray, a Maryland resident, and recent Amherst College graduate, applied to the University of Maryland Law School and was rejected solely on the basis of his race.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in William E. Luechtenburg, *The White House Looks South: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005), 166.



## SCHOOL DESEGREGATION BEFORE *BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION* (CONT.)

To circumvent laws mandating equal access, several states had provisions where Black students could receive scholarships equal to the extra tuition they would otherwise be charged at out-of-state schools. However, moving out of state remained a significant burden on many students. The NAACP argued that such scholarships did not make up for the costs of moving great distances, and therefore, rejection on the basis of race essentially made acquiring graduate degrees disproportionately more expensive. In the case of *Murray*, this strategy proved successful. The Supreme Court ruled unanimously that Murray could not be denied admission on racial grounds as an “equal” opportunity was not available to him elsewhere. The University of Maryland Law School became the first integrated law school in the United States, and these tactics were used repeatedly at higher education institutions, including the University of Missouri and the University of Oklahoma. They laid the groundwork necessary for *Brown v. Board’s* success.

### Primary Source:

Supreme Court decision, *Pearson v. Murray*, 1936 (excerpt)

Black Past

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/raymond-pearson-v-donald-g-murray-1936/>

“ . . . The method of furnishing the equal facilities required is at the choice of the state, now or at any future time. At present it is maintaining only the one law school, and in the legislative provisions for the scholarships that one school has in effect been declared appropriated to the whites exclusively. . . . No separate school for colored students has been decided upon and only an inadequate substitute has been provided. Compliance with the Constitution cannot be deferred at the will of the state. Whatever system it adopts for legal education now must furnish equality of treatment now. . . . [T]he equal treatment can be furnished only in the one existing law school, the petitioner, in our opinion, must be admitted there.

“The court is clear that this rather slender chance for any one applicant at an opportunity to attend an outside law school, at increased expense, falls short of providing for students of the colored race facilities substantially equal to those furnished to the whites in the law school maintained in Baltimore. . . . in Maryland no officers or body of officers are authorized to establish a separate law school, there is no legislative declaration of a purpose to establish one, and the courts could not make the decision for the state and order its officers to establish one. Therefore the erection of a separate school is not here an available alternative remedy. . . .

The case, as we find it, then, is that the state has undertaken the function of education in the law, but has omitted students of one race from the only adequate provision made for it, and omitted them solely because of their color. If those students are to be offered equal treatment in the performance of the function, they must, at present, be admitted to the one school provided.”

# SCHOOL DESEGREGATION BEFORE BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION (CONT.)

## Primary Source:

Newspaper article, "Segregated Regional College Doomed by McCready Decision"  
*Miami Times* [Miami, Florida], April 29, 1950

**Segregated Regional College Doomed By McCready Decision**

New York — The decision of the Court of Appeals of Maryland upholding the right of Miss Esther McCready to admission to the University of Maryland School of Nursing clearly demonstrates that "the regional education compact cannot be used as an excuse for excluding qualified Negro students from existing educational facilities within a state," Thurgood Marshall, NAACP special counsel, said today in commenting on the court's unanimous decision.

The opinion handed down by the Court of Appeals on April 14 at Annapolis, reversed a decision of Chief Judge W. Conwell Smith of the Baltimore City Court. Judge Smith had held that the university could legally exclude Miss McCready through arranging for her training at the nursing school of Meharry Medical College in Nashville.

Judge Smith's decision, Mr. Marshall said, "inferentially upheld the regional compact as an instrument for exclusion of Negroes from state universities."

The Court of Appeals cited its decision of 1938, ordering the admission of Donald Murray to the University of Maryland Law School, and stated that the law "permits no distinction between the study of law and the study of nursing." It referred also to two other NAACP cases, the Gaines and Sipuel cases, in which the United States Supreme Court established the responsibility of a state to provide educational facilities for Negroes within its borders equal to and at the same time as facilities provided for White students.

Miss McCready applied for admission to the university on February 1, 1949. In August of that year the university, refusing to enroll her, offered to arrange for her matriculation at Meharry. She rejected this offer and took her case to the NAACP. Charles H. Houston of Washington, chairman of the Association's national legal committee assisted by Mr. Marshall and Donald Murray of Baltimore, plaintiff in the aforementioned case of 1938, represented her.

In the trial before Judge Smith, John E. Ivey, Jr., director of the Regional Council for Education, filed a brief pointing out that the regional compact was not intended to be used for the purpose of excluding Negroes from the only state facility offering the desired courses.

**MIAMI TIMES, MIAMI, FLORIDA**  
**SATURDAY, APRIL 29, 1950**      **PAGE FIFTEEN**

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# SIMULATION NOTES

GROUP	SIMULATION NOTES
President's Committee members	
"Don't Buy" Movement	
Fair Housing	

## SIMULATION NOTES (CONT.)

GROUP	SIMULATION NOTES
Sexual Violence	
Desegregation of Higher Education	

## FORMAL WRITTEN STATEMENT ASSESSMENT

**Focus Question:** How should the United States government more effectively take responsibility for protecting the civil rights of African Americans?

Choose one of the following formal written statement options:

- ▶ Formal Written Testimony
- ▶ Formal Written Closing Statement

### Formal Written Testimony

Based on one group's testimony during the simulation, write a formal written statement responding to the focus question. Your written statement may be written in the first or third person and should:

- ▶ Be approximately 500 words long;
- ▶ Be addressed to the President's Committee on Civil Rights;
- ▶ Incorporate specific evidence from the assigned secondary and primary sources; and
- ▶ Include a properly formatted bibliography.

### Formal Written Closing Statement

Based on all groups' testimony during the simulation, write a formal written closing statement responding to the focus question. Your written statement may be written in the first or third person and should:

- ▶ Be approximately 500 words long;
- ▶ Be addressed to President Harry S. Truman;
- ▶ Incorporate specific evidence from the assigned secondary and primary sources;
- ▶ Include specific references to all groups who presented testimony during the simulation; and
- ▶ Include a properly formatted bibliography.

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