The Civil Rights Movement (1950s and 1960s)



Instructions:  You will watch the video(s) and read the text(s), then discuss and answer the questions as a group.  You will find the video and text on this website.  Write down your responses on your question sheet and keep in your notebook.  Be prepared to share your answers and ideas.

Introductory Reading: ‘Civil Rights Movement’ from history.com

“Nearly 100 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, African Americans in Southern states still inhabited a starkly unequal world of disenfranchisement, segregation and various forms of oppression, including race-inspired violence. “Jim Crow” laws at the local and state levels barred them from classrooms and bathrooms, from theaters and train cars, from juries and legislatures. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the “separate but equal” doctrine that formed the basis for state-sanctioned discrimination, drawing national and international attention to African Americans’ plight. In the turbulent decade and a half that followed, civil rights activists used nonviolent protest and civil disobedience to bring about change, and the federal government made legislative headway with initiatives such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Many leaders from within the African American community and beyond rose to prominence during the Civil Rights era, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, Andrew Goodman and others. They risked—and sometimes lost—their lives in the name of freedom and equality.”

**Source # 1 (Online Video) History of the Civil Rights Movement**:  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URxwe6LPvkM>

1.       “Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable.”  Why do you think the video begins with this quote?

2.       Can you list 2 Key Concepts (Events, People, Legislative Acts, etc.) discussed in the short video and why they are important to the history of the civil rights movement?

3.       Based on your viewing of the video, how could you finish this sentence?

The Civil Rights movement was…

**Source # 2 Excerpts from Martin Luther King Jr’s ‘I Have a Dream Speech’ Presented in 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C.  (americanrhetoric.com)**

“I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, [a great American](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Lincoln), in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the [Emancipation Proclamation](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/emancipation_proclamation/). This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. And so we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the [Declaration of Independence](http://americanrhetoric.com/speeches/declarationofindependence.htm), they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the "unalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." “

1.       Why do you think MLK refers to the Emancipation Proclamation, the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence near the beginning of his speech?

2.       What is MLK really trying to say when he says “we’ve come to our nation’s capital to cash a check… (but) America has given the Negro people a bad check”?

“I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. And some of you have come from areas where your quest -- quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive. Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed.

Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a *dream* today!”

3.       What message did MLK have for those in his audience who were facing hardships and persecution?

4.       Why do you think MLK’s famous words, “I have a dream”, have had such a widespread and lasting impact on American society and culture?

5.       What are your thoughts / opinions about MLK’s words in these brief excerpts?

**Source # 3 Excerpts from a Malcolm X Speech Given in 1964 and titled ‘Advice to the Youth of Mississippi’  (britannica.com)**

“I myself would go for nonviolence if it was consistent, if everybody was going to be nonviolent all the time. I"d say, okay, let"s get with it, we"ll all be nonviolent. But I don"t go along with any kind of nonviolence unless everybody"s going to be nonviolent. If they make the [Ku Klux Klan](https://www.britannica.com/blackhistory/article?tocId=9046315) nonviolent, I"ll be nonviolent. If they make the White Citizens Council nonviolent, I"ll be nonviolent. But as long as you"ve got somebody else not being nonviolent, I don"t want anybody coming to me talking any nonviolent talk. I don"t think it is fair to tell our people to be nonviolent unless someone is out there making the Klan and the Citizens Council and these other groups also be nonviolent. . . .

I think in 1965, whether you like it, or I like it, or they like it, or not, you will see that there is a generation of black people becoming mature to the point where they feel that they have no more business being asked to take a peaceful approach than anybody else takes, unless everybody"s going to take a peaceful approach.”

1. How does Malcolm X argue against nonviolent protest by African-Americans?

“Excuse me for raising my voice, but this thing, you know, gets me upset. Imagine that--a country that"s supposed to be a democracy, supposed to be for freedom and all of that kind of stuff when they want to draft you and put you in the army and send you to Saigon to fight for them--and then you"ve got to turn around and all night long discuss how you"re going to just get a right to register and vote without being murdered. Why, that"s the most hypocritical government since the world began! . . .

I hope you don"t think I"m trying to incite you. Just look here: Look at yourselves. Some of you are teen-agers, students. How do you think I feel--and I belong to a generation ahead of you--how do you think I feel to have to tell you, “We, my generation, sat around like a knot on a wall while the whole world was fighting for its human rights--and you"ve got to be born into a society where you still have the same fight.” What did we do, who preceded you? I"ll tell you what we did: Nothing. And don"t you make the same mistake we made. . . .

You get freedom by letting your enemy know that you"ll do anything to get your freedom; then you"ll get it. It"s the only way you"ll get it. When you get that kind of attitude, they"ll label you as a “crazy Negro,” or they"ll call you a “crazy nigger”--they don"t say Negro. Or they"ll call you an extremist or a subversive, or seditious, or a red, or a radical. But when you stay radical long enough, and get enough people to be like you, you"ll get your freedom. . . .

So don"t you run around here trying to make friends with somebody who"s depriving you of your rights. They"re not your friends, no, they"re your enemies. Treat them like that and fight them, and you"ll get your freedom; and after you get your freedom, your enemy will respect you. And we"ll respect you. And I say that with no hate. I don"t have hate in me. I have no hate at all. I don"t have any hate. I"ve got some sense.”

2.    Why does Malcolm X refer to the U.S. government as “the most hypocritical government since the world began”?

3.    What advice does Malcolm X give his audience of teenagers on how to gain their freedom?

4.    What are your thoughts / opinions on Malcolm X’s words in these brief excerpts?

\*Group Discussion Questions:  Discuss as a group and then record your thoughts.

1.  Compare and contrast Martin Luther King Jr.’s views on gaining civil rights with Malcom X’s views?  Who would you have supported if you had lived during the Civil Rights Movement?  Why?

2.  How are the effects of the Civil Rights Movement still felt today?  Examples?

3.  In what ways are there still race-related challenges in the United States?  How can Americans work to improve race-relations?