Curriculum Unit Introduction

Title of Unit: Civil Rights Movement

Vital Theme of the Unit: A survey of different aspects of the Civil Rights Movement and the effects that they had on society at that time including the leaders, the music, and the media.

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Grade level: Eleventh Grade Advanced Placement U.S. History Students

Number of lessons in unit: 5 **Time needed to complete unit:** 1 week

Curriculum standards addressed: Advanced Placement U.S. History Course Description Outline

Unit introduction and overview of instructional plan: This unit contains five lessons using differentiated methods of instruction for relating the various aspects of the Civil Rights Movement. Included in the unit are several primary source documents for the students to interpret, including ten historical photographs, Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech and President Lyndon Baines Johnson's "We Shall Overcome" speech. Also included is a lesson on the various leaders of the Civil Rights Movement where the students will research their individual contributions and then create a timeline depicting when and in what order those people took part in the Movement. A study of the music of the Movement is another part of this unit. The students will transcribe the lyrics to three different "freedom songs" and discuss the message and emotions expressed in each song. All of these activities will provide the students with the opportunity to connect historical facts with actual documents. They will also get the opportunity to exercise their language art skills as they write essays to express their understanding of the content. This unit will take approximately one week.

The Music of the Civil Rights Movement

Submitted by Teri Blair
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It is nearly impossible to study the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s without addressing the importance of the music of that period. Music was an integral part of the movement as it tended to inspire the people involved emotionally and spiritually. In fact, most of the anthems associated with the marches and demonstrations were actually new versions of some old spirituals that were commonly sung by former slaves during their struggle for freedom. Originally, the rhythms and lyrics of these songs helped the slaves to express their Christian beliefs and faith that "Just as the Lord fought for Moses and the Israelites, just as He toppled Goliath before David, just as He appeared to Jacob on the ladder, so would He work in their lives".[1] During the movement, some minor adaptations were made to these same spirituals so that the lyrics and rhythms could express the new message that was the quest of African Americans to acquire their long deserved civil rights. Most of the singing was done in congregations or small groups and was spontaneous and unrehearsed. Many of the songs used by the protesters had evolved over the years, and the words were changed to reflect the goals of one particular demonstration or protest.

December 1955 is when most historians believe the modern civil rights movement began when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a city bus thereby starting the Montgomery Bus Boycott. During the mass meetings of activists and participants that took place in churches, singing was one of the methods for uniting the people and relaying the message. The songs most commonly associated with the activities in

[1] Curtis, Ken, "*Slave Songs Transcend Sorrow,"* Glimpses Bulletin, no. 89.

Montgomery are "*We Are Soldiers in the Army," "Keep Your Hands on the Plow," and "This Little Light."*

As the movement progressed into the 1960s, the techniques and the music began to change somewhat. Student demonstrations against the segregation of public facilities took the form of sit-ins at downtown lunch counters, and some early attempts at conducting Freedom Rides were attempted. As a result, there were countless arrests and demonstrations, and once again mass meetings were the driving force of the movement. Out of necessity, in addition to the spirituals, some new songs were added to the meetings that were more satirical and light-hearted in an effort to ease some of the tensions among the participants. Two songs that are associated with this time period are *"You Better Leave Segregation Alone,"* and *"Your Dog Loves My Dog."*

By the mid 1960s in Georgia, the music of the movement seemed to take on a life of its own. The numbers and ages of the participants grew and changed, and the songs that were heard during the mass meetings started to reflect these changes, too.
A combination of traditional spirituals and newly adapted freedom songs were performed not only at the gatherings by activists, but also by organized groups of singers, called the SNCC Freedom Singers, who would go on national fundraising tours. Among the most popular songs during this time were *"Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around," "I Woke Up This Morning With My Mind on Freedom,"* and *"Keep Your Eyes on the Prize,"* which was an adaptation of the spiritual *"Keep Your Hands On the Plow*." By now, the importance of the music to the momentum of the movement had become so obvious to those involved that a series of workshops were organized by Guy Carawan, a teacher in East Tennessee at the Highlander Folk School, to teach the current songs to

movement participants in various locations across the South and also to create new verses and new songs to add to the collection.

Mississippi and Alabama were the locations of some of the most difficult protests of the Civil Rights Movement. In Mississippi, the system of segregation was entrenched so deeply that some of the worst violence resulted from the demonstrations. "*Which Side Are You On?"* and *"I'm Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table"* were two songs that were actually borrowed from the struggles of the coal-miners and used to articulate the situation of the civil rights protesters. In the rural areas of Mississippi, there was a major push to register black voters. In most cases, the responses to this by unrelenting whites were economic sanctions, beatings, and even killings. One inspirational song that was used to keep the civil rights workers on task and encourage the bravery of the registries was *"Get On Board."* In Alabama, the violence against the protesters reached its peak with national news coverage of the local police using angry, vicious guard dogs along with water-spewing fire hoses against the men, women, and children participating in civil rights demonstrations. After this, the churches in Birmingham came alive with nightly meetings and singings with songs such as *"I'm On My Way,"* and *"Yes, We Want Our Freedom."* Fortunately, the passion and persistence of the protesters paid off in this case because Congress responded to this situation with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

In addition to some particular demonstrations and protests becoming associated with certain songs, some of the actual leaders of the Movement had their favorite songs, and they chose to use them on several occasions at various different locations. According to Carren Moham, assistant professor of voice at Illinois Wesleyan University, Dr. Martin

Luther King, Jr. chose songs that would "stir passion, but always in a positive way."[2] Among his picks were *"We Shall Overcome," "I'll Be Alright,"* and "*Steal Away To Jesus*." Then there are others who became known as leaders of the movement simply for their contribution in terms of music. The performances of "*Oh, Freedom,"* by Joan Baez, "*Only A Pawn In Their Game*," by Bob Dylan, and *"Blowin' In The Wind,"* by the American folk group Peter Paul and Mary are just a few examples of how some musicians were willing to lend their talent and support to the cause of civil rights.

Perhaps the most famous song of the Civil Rights Movement was "*We Shall Overcome*" which suggested the belief that African Americans would someday overcome the obstacles to freedom.[3] Guy Carawan learned this song, originally titled "I'll Overcome Someday," at the Highlander Folk School and then taught it, among other freedom songs, to civil rights activists throughout the South in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The message of the movement was articulated in several of the verses and then over and over in the chorus:

We shall overcome
We shall overcome
We shall over come some day
Chorus

Chorus: Oh, deep in my heart I do believe
We shall overcome some day

We'll walk hand in hand
We'll walk hand in hand
We'll walk hand in hand some day
Chorus

[2] Moham, Carren, "*Music's Role Integral to Civil Rights Movement*"
[3] Carrawan, Guy, "Sing For Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement Through its Songs," Bethlehem, PA: Sing Out Corp, 1990

We are not afraid
We are not afraid
We are not afraid some day
Chorus[4]

In fact, President Lyndon B. Johnson must have appreciated this song and the message of the lyrics because he used it as the title of his speech before a Joint Session of Congress on Voting Legislation on March 15, 1965. He even quoted the refrain "we shall overcome" in the text of his speech when he spoke of the need to offer the same economic and educational opportunities to all people during his mission to get Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act.[5]

The role that music played in the Civil Rights Movement simply cannot be understated. The rhythms of the melodies and the lyrics of the songs that provided the backdrop for the marches and demonstrations as well as the inspiration for the participants forty years ago have also left us with a means for better understanding this very important part of our nation's history and the struggle for the attainment of civil rights for African Americans.

[4] "*We Shall Overcome*," Ludlow Music, BMI.
[5] Text=Public Domain

Evaluation of Civil Rights Movement Photographs

Submitted by Teri Blair
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Unit: Civil Rights Movement

Lesson Title: Evaluating Photographs for Historical Evidence

Grade Level: Eleventh Grade Advanced Placement U.S. History students

Essential Question related to Vital Theme: How can looking at photographs of events and participants in Civil Rights protests and demonstrations in Tennessee expand and reinforce information presented in textbooks and lectures?

Lesson time: one fifty-five minute class period

Curriculum standards: Advanced Placement U.S. History Course Description Outline

Materials: Copies of 10 photographs from Movement activities in Tennessee
Copy of questions used to evaluate the photographs

Activity description: Students will assemble into groups of four and receive copies of ten photographs to view and discuss. The teacher will ask the students to try determine as a class the following things about the pictures:

1. Was the photograph posed or candid?
2. What was the photographer's purpose in taking the photograph?

Then, each group of students will receive a copy of questions to answer while evaluating the photographs based on their previously acquired knowledge about other more notorious demonstrations and protests in other states during the Civil Rights Movement. After a considerable amount of time for group discussions, the teacher will lead a classroom discussion to allow the groups to share their views and opinions of the photographs.

Assessment: The teacher will assess based on student participation and discussion.

Evaluating Photographs for Historical Evidence

1. Who might have taken the photograph? Can you determine the photographer's point of view from the photograph?

2. What was the message of the photograph? Were the people in the photograph willing or reluctant to be photographed?

3. Was this photograph printed for an individual's collection or was it used in a public exhibition, or printed in a newspaper or book?

4. What questions does this photograph raise? What would you like to know more about after looking at this photograph? Where could you find the answers to these questions?

5. What other activities during the Civil Rights Movement are you reminded of when you look at these pictures, and where did they take place?

6. How is looking at a photograph different from other sources of historical evidence?

Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement

Submitted by Teri Blair
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Unit: Civil Rights Movement

Lesson Title: Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement

Grade Level: Eleventh Grade Advanced Placement students

Essential Question related to the Vital Theme: What were the goals and strategies of different leaders and participants and their organizations during the Civil Rights Movement? How can their participation be placed on a timeline?

Lesson Time: Two fifty-five minute class periods

Curriculum Standards: Advanced Placement U.S. History Course Description Outline

Materials: List of the following leaders and participants of the Civil Rights Movement:

Thurgood Marshall
Four Little Angels
Rosa Parks
Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.
James Meredith
Huey Newton and Bobby Seale
President Lyndon B. Johnson
The Little Rock Nine
Malcolm X
Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth
Medgar Evers

Technology used and how: The students can use the internet to research information about the different leaders and participants and their organizations.
Some suggested sites are: http://www.infoplease.com and http://en.wkikpedia.org

Activity: After receiving an overview of the Civil Rights Movement through teacher lecture, the students will be given a list of different leaders and participants and be assigned the task of researching the goals and strategies used by each person or group of people and their respective organizations. Then students must create a simple timeline of the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968, and place each one in the appropriate time according to their participation. This assignment will be turned in during class on the following day for assessment.

Assessment: A rubric will be used to assess the student's research and timeline

Civil Rights Leaders and Timeline Rubric

1954:	Thurgood Marshall successfully challenged racial segregation in public education, which led to the Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka and ended the doctrine of "separate but equal."
1955:	Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white man in Montgomery, Alabama, leading to the Montgomery Bus Boycott.
	Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., president of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA,) led the Montgomery Bus Boycott.
1957:	Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth established the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC.)
	The "Little Rock Nine," nine black students, were denied entrance into Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, by the governor until President Eisenhower sent in federal troops and the National Guard to Intervene on their behalf.
1961:	James Meredith was the first black student to enroll at the University of Mississippi despite violent resistance.
1963:	Medgar Evers, secretary of the Mississippi NAACP is murdered outside his home.
	Denise McNair, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Addie Mae Collins, later coined the "Four Little Angels," were killed when a bomb exploded at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.
1964:	President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964
1965:	Malcolm X, founder of the Organization of Afro-American Unity is shot to death.
1966:	Huey Newton and Bobby Seale organize the Black Panthers.
1968:	President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1968.

"I Have A Dream"

Submitted by Teri Blair
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Unit: Civil Rights Movement

Lesson Title: "I Have A Dream"

Grade Level: Eleventh Grade Advanced Placement Students

Essential Question related to Vital Theme: Can students use this primary source document to understand the tone of the message and the mood of the audience to which it was delivered during the March on Washington in 1963?

Lesson Time: One fifty-five minute class period, plus additional time at home

Curriculum Standards: Advanced Placement U.S. History Course Description Outline

Materials: Copy of the "I Have A Dream" speech
Copy of questions used to interpret primary source documents

Activity Description: The students will each be given a transcribed copy of the "I Have A Dream" speech delivered by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. on August 28, 1963. They will also receive a set of questions used to interpret primary source documents. After reviewing the document and answering the questions on the handout, the students will write a 250-word essay describing how they believe the audience received this speech on that day. They will use their previously acquired knowledge about the Civil Rights Movement to support their essay. This assignment will be turned in at the beginning of the next class period.

Assessment: Students will be assigned a grade based on the completion of their questions and the essay.

The I Have a Dream Speech

In 1950's America, the equality of man envisioned by the Declaration of Independence was far from a reality. People of color, blacks, Hispanics, Orientals, were discriminated against in many ways, both overt and covert. The 1950's were a turbulent time in America, when racial barriers began to come down due to Supreme Court decisions, like Brown v. Board of Education; and due to an increase in the activism of blacks, fighting for equal rights.

Martin Luther King, Jr., a Baptist minister, was a driving force in the push for racial equality in the 1950's and the 1960's. In 1963, King and his staff focused on Birmingham, Alabama. They marched and protested non-violently, raising the ire of local officials who sicced water cannon and police dogs on the marchers, whose ranks included teenagers and children. The bad publicity and break-down of business forced the white leaders of Birmingham to concede to some anti-segregation demands.

Thrust into the national spotlight in Birmingham, where he was arrested and jailed, King organized a massive march on Washington, DC, on August 28, 1963. On the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, he evoked the name of Lincoln in his "I Have a Dream" speech, which is credited with mobilizing supporters of desegregation and prompted the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The next year, King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The following is the exact text of the spoken speech, transcribed from recordings.

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, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the 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 languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. So we have come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense we have 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, 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." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check -- a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quick sands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.

We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny and their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone.

As we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied, as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue

of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We can never be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

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. Some of you have come from areas where your 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, 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.

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification; one day right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with a new meaning, "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring."

And if America is to be a great nation this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!

Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado!

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California!

But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!

Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!

Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, When we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! free at last! thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

"I Have A Dream"

After reading the transcribed copy of the "I Have A Dream" speech, answer the following questions. After you have finished the interpretation process, write a 250-word essay describing how you think this speech was received by the audience that day. What was the mood of the atmosphere, the tone of the speaker, and the response by the crowd? Use the facts and information you have acquired in class about the status of the Civil Rights Movement at that particular time to support your essay. This assignment is due at the beginning of class tomorrow.

1. What type of document is this source, and what instances of historical evidence does it provide?

2. How great is the distance between the author of the source and the event he is describing? Is this source a firsthand account, written by a witness or participant? Was it written before, during, or after the event?

3. What are the possible biases of the source? (Every document is biased, whether deliberately or unconsciously, by the point of view of the person.)

4. For whom was this document created? Was the author writing it for a specific audience? Did the author have an outcome he wanted these words to bring about?

Music of the Civil Rights Movement

Submitted by Teri Blair
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Unit: Civil Rights Movement

Lesson Title: Introduction to Music of the Civil Rights Movement

Grade Level: Eleventh Grade Advanced Placement Students

Essential Question Related to Vital Theme: Can the students gain an understanding of why "freedom Songs" became such a motivating force during the Civil Rights Movement by surveying the lyrics of the songs?

Lesson Time: one fifty-five minute class period

Curriculum Standards: Advanced Placement U.S. History Course Description Outline

Technology Used and How: CD Player and "*Sing For Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement through its Songs"*

Materials: Copy of questions to answer regarding the lyrics of freedom songs

Activity Description: Divide class into small groups of 3 to 5 students. Assign each group one of the following freedom songs to listen to and discuss:

1. We Are Soldiers In The Army
2. Aint Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around
3. We Shall Overcome

Tell the students to carefully transcribe the lyrics as they listen.
Give each small group a copy of questions to answer regarding the lyrics of the song they listened to. Tell them to try and relate the lyrics to the information they already know about the Civil Rights Movement as they formulate their answers to the questions. After each group is finished, have the groups report to the class their answers to the questions. Have the class compare and contrast the multiple points of view found in each song.

Assessment: The teacher will assess based on student participation and discussion

"Freedom Song" Lyrics

Listen to your assigned "freedom song" and carefully transcribe the lyrics. As a group, discuss and answer the following questions about the lyrics while relating them to the information you already know about The Civil Rights Movement. Be prepared to discuss your answers and compare and contrast the multiple points of view found in other songs with the rest of the class.

1. What emotions are expressed in the song through the lyrics and music?

2. To whom is this song addressed?

3. What issues, problems, or events are presented in the song? Does the song seem to be written in response to a specific event?

4. What points of view or attitudes are revealed in this song?

5. What were the circumstances at the time this song was released?

6. Does this song suggest any solutions to the issues or problems it addresses?

7. How effective is this song as a social protest?

8. What, if any, relevance does this song have to American society today?

We Shall Overcome

Submitted by Teri Blair
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Unit: Civil Rights Movement

Lesson Title: Lyndon Baines Johnson: We Shall Overcome

Grade Level: Eleventh Grade Advanced Placement U.S. History Students

Essential Question related to Vital Theme: Can students read a transcript of President Johnson's "We Shall Overcome" speech before Congress on March, 1965, and interpret the purpose and goals of this speech?

Lesson Time: one fifty-five minute class period

Curriculum Standards: Advanced Placement U.S. History Course Description Outline

Materials: Copy of President Johnson's "We Shall Overcome" speech

Activity description: Students will each be given a copy of the "We Shall Overcome" speech which he delivered before a joint session of Congress in March of 1965. Tell them to reflect on what they already know about the Civil Rights Movement, the various goals, the demonstrations and protests, and the violence, etc. After allowing the students time to read the speech, instruct them to write a 300-word essay summarizing the most immediate reasons for this speech at this particular time, describing the goals that President Johnson set for Congress in this speech, and recounting his justifications for accomplishing these goals. Then tell the students to briefly compare Johnson's "We Shall Overcome" speech with Rev. Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech in terms of their persuasive tone and spirit. This assignment is due at the end of class.

Assessment: Students will be assigned a grade based on the quality of information presented in their essays.

Lyndon Baines Johnson: "We Shall Overcome"

Joint Session of Congress Address on Voting Legislation

delivered 15 March 1965, Washington, D.C.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, Members of the Congress:

I speak tonight for the dignity of man and the destiny of democracy. I urge every member of both parties, Americans of all religions and of all colors, from every section of this country, to join me in that cause.

At times history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man's unending search for freedom. So it was at Lexington and Concord. So it was a century ago at Appomattox. So it was last week in Selma, Alabama. There, long-suffering men and women peacefully protested the denial of their rights as Americans. Many were brutally assaulted. One good man, a man of God, was killed.

There is no cause for pride in what has happened in Selma. There is no cause for self-satisfaction in the long denial of equal rights of millions of Americans. But there is cause for hope and for faith in our democracy in what is happening here tonight. For the cries of pain and the hymns and protests of oppressed people have summoned into convocation all the majesty of this great government -- the government of the greatest nation on earth. Our mission is at once the oldest and the most basic of this country: to right wrong, to do justice, to serve man.

In our time we have come to live with the moments of great crisis. Our lives have been marked with debate about great issues -- issues of war and peace, issues of prosperity and depression. But rarely in any time does an issue lay bare the secret heart of America itself. Rarely are we met with a challenge, not to our growth or abundance, or our welfare or our security, but rather to the values, and the purposes, and the meaning of our beloved nation.

The issue of equal rights for American Negroes is such an issue.

And should we defeat every enemy, and should we double our wealth and conquer the stars, and still be unequal to this issue, then we will have failed as a people and as a nation. For with a country as with a person, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

There is no Negro problem. There is no Southern problem. There is no Northern problem. There is only an American problem. And we are met here tonight as Americans -- not as Democrats or Republicans. We are met here as Americans to solve that problem.

This was the first nation in the history of the world to be founded with a purpose. The great phrases of that purpose still sound in every American heart, North and South: "All men are created equal," "government by consent of the governed," "give me liberty or give me death." Well, those are not just clever words, or those are not just empty theories. In their name Americans have fought and died for two centuries, and tonight around the world they stand there as guardians of our liberty, risking their lives.

Those words are a promise to every citizen that he shall share in the dignity of man. This dignity cannot be found in a man's possessions; it cannot be found in his power, or in his position. It really rests on his right to be treated as a man equal in opportunity to all others. It says that he shall share in freedom, he shall choose his leaders, educate his children, provide for his family according to his ability and his merits as a human being. To apply any other test -- to deny a man his hopes because of his color, or race, or his religion, or the place of his birth is not only to do injustice, it is to deny America and to dishonor the dead who gave their lives for American freedom.

Our fathers believed that if this noble view of the rights of man was to flourish, it must be rooted in democracy. The most basic right of all was the right to choose your own leaders. The history of this country, in large measure, is the history of the expansion of that right to all of our people. Many of the issues of civil rights are very complex and most difficult. But about this there can and should be no argument.

Every American citizen must have an equal right to vote.

There is no reason which can excuse the denial of that right. There is no duty which weighs more heavily on us than the duty we have to ensure that right.

Yet the harsh fact is that in many places in this country men and women are kept from voting simply because they are Negroes. Every device of which human ingenuity is capable has been used to deny this right. The Negro citizen may go to register only to be told that the day is wrong, or the hour is late, or the official in charge is absent. And if he persists, and if he manages to present himself to the registrar, he may be disqualified because he did not spell out his middle name or because he abbreviated a word on the application. And if he manages to fill out an application, he is given a test. The registrar is the sole judge of whether he passes this test. He may be asked to recite the entire

Constitution, or explain the most complex provisions of State law. And even a college degree cannot be used to prove that he can read and write.

For the fact is that the only way to pass these barriers is to show a white skin. Experience has clearly shown that the existing process of law cannot overcome systematic and ingenious discrimination. No law that we now have on the books -- and I have helped to put three of them there -- can ensure the right to vote when local officials are determined to deny it. In such a case our duty must be clear to all of us. The Constitution says that no person shall be kept from voting because of his race or his color. We have all sworn an oath before God to support and to defend that Constitution. We must now act in obedience to that oath.

Wednesday, I will send to Congress a law designed to eliminate illegal barriers to the right to vote.

The broad principles of that bill will be in the hands of the Democratic and Republican leaders tomorrow. After they have reviewed it, it will come here formally as a bill. I am grateful for this opportunity to come here tonight at the invitation of the leadership to reason with my friends, to give them my views, and to visit with my former colleagues. I've had prepared a more comprehensive analysis of the legislation which I had intended to transmit to the clerk tomorrow, but which I will submit to the clerks tonight. But I want to really discuss with you now, briefly, the main proposals of this legislation.

This bill will strike down restrictions to voting in all elections -- Federal, State, and local -- which have been used to deny Negroes the right to vote. This bill will establish a simple, uniform standard which cannot be used, however ingenious the effort, to flout our Constitution. It will provide for citizens to be registered by officials of the United States Government, if the State officials refuse to register them. It will eliminate tedious, unnecessary lawsuits which delay the right to vote. Finally, this legislation will ensure that properly registered individuals are not prohibited from voting.

I will welcome the suggestions from all of the Members of Congress -- I have no doubt that I will get some -- on ways and means to strengthen this law and to make it effective. But experience has plainly shown that this is the only path to carry out the command of the Constitution.

To those who seek to avoid action by their National Government in their own communities, who want to and who seek to maintain purely local control over elections, the answer is simple: open your polling places to all your people.

Allow men and women to register and vote whatever the color of their skin.

Extend the rights of citizenship to every citizen of this land.

There is no constitutional issue here. The command of the Constitution is plain. There is no moral issue. It is wrong -- deadly wrong -- to deny any of your fellow Americans the

right to vote in this country. There is no issue of States' rights or national rights. There is only the struggle for human rights. I have not the slightest doubt what will be your answer.

But the last time a President sent a civil rights bill to the Congress, it contained a provision to protect voting rights in Federal elections. That civil rights bill was passed after eight *long* months of debate. And when that bill came to my desk from the Congress for my signature, the heart of the voting provision had been eliminated. This time, on this issue, there must be no delay, or no hesitation, or no compromise with our purpose.

We cannot, we must not, refuse to protect the right of every American to vote in every election that he may desire to participate in. And we ought not, and we cannot, and we must not wait another eight months before we get a bill. We have already waited a hundred years and more, and the time for waiting is gone.

So I ask you to join me in working long hours -- nights and weekends, if necessary -- to pass this bill. And I don't make that request lightly. For from the window where I sit with the problems of our country, I recognize that from outside this chamber is the outraged conscience of a nation, the grave concern of many nations, and the harsh judgment of history on our acts.

But even if we pass this bill, the battle will not be over. What happened in Selma is part of a far larger movement which reaches into every section and State of America. It is the effort of American Negroes to secure for themselves the full blessings of American life. Their cause must be our cause too. Because it's not just Negroes, but really it's all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice.

And we shall overcome.

As a man whose roots go deeply into Southern soil, I know how agonizing racial feelings are. I know how difficult it is to reshape the attitudes and the structure of our society. But a century has passed, more than a hundred years since the Negro was freed. And he is not fully free tonight.

It was more than a hundred years ago that Abraham Lincoln, a great President of another party, signed the Emancipation Proclamation; but emancipation is a proclamation, and not a fact. A century has passed, more than a hundred years, since equality was promised. And yet the Negro is not equal. A century has passed since the day of promise. And the promise is un-kept.

The time of justice has now come. I tell you that I believe sincerely that no force can hold it back. It is right in the eyes of man and God that it should come. And when it does, I think that day will brighten the lives of every American. For Negroes are not the only victims. How many white children have gone uneducated? How many white families have lived in stark poverty? How many white lives have been scarred by fear, because we've wasted our energy and our substance to maintain the barriers of hatred and terror?

And so I say to all of you here, and to all in the nation tonight, that those who appeal to you to hold on to the past do so at the cost of denying you your future.

This great, rich, restless country can offer opportunity and education and hope to all, all black and white, all North and South, sharecropper and city dweller. These are the enemies: poverty, ignorance, disease. They're our enemies, not our fellow man, not our neighbor. And these enemies too -- poverty, disease, and ignorance: we shall overcome.

Now let none of us in any section look with prideful righteousness on the troubles in another section, or the problems of our neighbors. There's really no part of America where the promise of equality has been fully kept. In Buffalo as well as in Birmingham, in Philadelphia as well as Selma, Americans are struggling for the fruits of freedom. This is one nation. What happens in Selma or in Cincinnati is a matter of legitimate concern to every American. But let each of us look within our own hearts and our own communities, and let each of us put our shoulder to the wheel to root out injustice wherever it exists.

As we meet here in this peaceful, historic chamber tonight, men from the South, some of whom were at Iwo Jima, men from the North who have carried Old Glory to far corners of the world and brought it back without a stain on it, men from the East and from the West, are all fighting together without regard to religion, or color, or region, in Vietnam. Men from every region fought for us across the world twenty years ago.

And now in these common dangers and these common sacrifices, the South made its contribution of honor and gallantry no less than any other region in the Great Republic -- and in some instances, a great many of them, more.

And I have not the slightest doubt that good men from everywhere in this country, from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, from the Golden Gate to the harbors along the Atlantic, will rally now together in this cause to vindicate the freedom of all Americans.

For all of us owe this duty; and I believe that all of us will respond to it. Your President makes that request of every American.

The real hero of this struggle is the American Negro. His actions and protests, his courage to risk safety and even to risk his life, have awakened the conscience of this nation. His demonstrations have been designed to call attention to injustice, designed to provoke change, designed to stir reform. He has called upon us to make good the promise of America. And who among us can say that we would have made the same progress were it not for his persistent bravery, and *his* faith in American democracy.

For at the real heart of battle for equality is a deep seated belief in the democratic process. Equality depends not on the force of arms or tear gas but depends upon the force of moral right; not on recourse to violence but on respect for law and order.

And there have been many pressures upon your President and there will be others as the days come and go. But I pledge you tonight that we intend to fight this battle where it should be fought -- in the courts, and in the Congress, and in the hearts of men.

We must preserve the right of free speech and the right of free assembly. But the right of free speech does not carry with it, as has been said, the right to holler fire in a crowded theater. We must preserve the right to free assembly. But free assembly does not carry with it the right to block public thoroughfares to traffic.

We do have a right to protest, and a right to march under conditions that do not infringe the constitutional rights of our neighbors. And I intend to protect all those rights as long as I am permitted to serve in this office.

We will guard against violence, knowing it strikes from our hands the very weapons which we seek: progress, obedience to law, and belief in American values.

In Selma, as elsewhere, we seek and pray for peace. We seek order. We seek unity. But we will not accept the peace of stifled rights, or the order imposed by fear, or the unity that stifles protest. For peace cannot be purchased at the cost of liberty.

In Selma tonight -- and we had a good day there -- as in every city, we are working for a just and peaceful settlement And we must all remember that after this speech I am making tonight, after the police and the FBI and the Marshals have all gone, and after you have promptly passed this bill, the people of Selma and the other cities of the Nation must still live and work together. And when the attention of the nation has gone elsewhere, they must try to heal the wounds and to build a new community.

This cannot be easily done on a battleground of violence, as the history of the South itself shows. It is in recognition of this that men of both races have shown such an outstandingly impressive responsibility in recent days -- last Tuesday, again today.

The bill that I am presenting to you will be known as a civil rights bill. But, in a larger sense, most of the program I am recommending is a civil rights program. Its object is to open the city of hope to all people of all races.

Because all Americans just must have the right to vote. And we are going to give them that right. All Americans must have the privileges of citizenship -- regardless of race. And they are going to have those privileges of citizenship -- regardless of race.

But I would like to caution you and remind you that to exercise these privileges takes much more than just legal right. It requires a trained mind and a healthy body. It requires a decent home, and the chance to find a job, and the opportunity to escape from the clutches of poverty.

Of course, people cannot contribute to the nation if they are never taught to read or write, if their bodies are stunted from hunger, if their sickness goes untended, if their life is

spent in hopeless poverty just drawing a welfare check. So we want to open the gates to opportunity. But we're also going to give all our people, black and white, the help that they need to walk through those gates.

My first job after college was as a teacher in Cotulla, Texas, in a small Mexican-American school. Few of them could speak English, and I couldn't speak much Spanish. My students were poor and they often came to class without breakfast, hungry. And they knew, even in their youth, the pain of prejudice. They never seemed to know why people disliked them. But they knew it was so, because I saw it in their eyes. I often walked home late in the afternoon, after the classes were finished, wishing there was more that I could do. But all I knew was to teach them the little that I knew, hoping that it might help them against the hardships that lay ahead.

And somehow you never forget what poverty and hatred can do when you see its scars on the hopeful face of a young child. I never thought then, in 1928, that I would be standing here in 1965. It never even occurred to me in my fondest dreams that I might have the chance to help the sons and daughters of those students and to help people like them all over this country.

But now I do have that chance -- and I'll let you in on a secret -- I mean to use it.

And I hope that you will use it with me.

This is the richest and the most powerful country which ever occupied this globe. The might of past empires is little compared to ours. But I do not want to be the President who built empires, or sought grandeur, or extended dominion.

I want to be the President who educated young children to the wonders of their world.

I want to be the President who helped to feed the hungry and to prepare them to be tax-payers instead of tax-eaters.

I want to be the President who helped the poor to find their own way and who protected the right of every citizen to vote in every election.

I want to be the President who helped to end hatred among his fellow men, and who promoted love among the people of all races and all regions and all parties.

I want to be the President who helped to end war among the brothers of this earth.

And so, at the request of your beloved Speaker, and the Senator from Montana, the majority leader, the Senator from Illinois, the minority leader, Mr. McCulloch, and other Members of both parties, I came here tonight -- not as President Roosevelt came down one time, in person, to veto a bonus bill, not as President Truman came down one time to urge the passage of a railroad bill -- but I came down here to ask you to share this task with me, and to share it with the people that we both work for. I want this to be the

Congress, Republicans and Democrats alike, which did all these things for all these people.

Beyond this great chamber, out yonder in fifty States, are the people that we serve. Who can tell what deep and unspoken hopes are in their hearts tonight as they sit there and listen. We all can guess, from our own lives, how difficult they often find their own pursuit of happiness, how many problems each little family has. They look most of all to themselves for their futures. But I think that they also look to each of us.

Above the pyramid on the great seal of the United States it says in Latin: "God has favored our undertaking." God will not favor everything that we do. It is rather our duty to divine His will.

But I cannot help believing that He truly understands and that He really favors the undertaking that we begin here tonight.

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