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Introduction

One More New Birth of Freedom

Lincoln hoped that the fires of the Civil War would burn away the sin of slavery and give the United States a “new birth of freedom.” In a sense, it did that. Slavery was abolished. And for a time, the nation’s leaders seemed determined to set a new course to bring African Americans into full citizenship.

But that did not happen. Instead, in the decades after Reconstruction, a new and oppressive system of legalized racial segregation was imposed on African Americans — especially in the South. Elsewhere, indifference and racial prejudice made the entire nation complicit.

It would take nearly a century for blacks and whites to forge a movement to bring down “Jim Crow.” That movement flowered in the wake of a world war against a hideously racist regime, perhaps shaming Americans enough to open their hearts and minds to cries for change. At that point, exactly the right leader appeared, one able to mobilize fully the religious, spiritual and political resources of his people. In Martin Luther King, Jr., all of America discovered its best voice. And in the early 1960s, a united assault finally put an end to all forms of *de jure* segregation. Moreover, it confronted Americans as never before with the need to eliminate the evil of racism in all its forms. That struggle continues, of course, but the turning point came in the years of the civil rights movement of the ‘50s and ‘60s.

The 12 visual displays we have chosen here focus on many of the key aspects of that movement’s history. The visuals are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three displays to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

The “Jim Crow” South

The illustrations here focus on the poverty of blacks in the South and on the ugly realities of “Jim Crow” segregation in all its forms.

A New Day Dawning

The emphasis here is on the early success of two key strategies — a legal attack in the courts on the concept of “separate but equal” and a popular protest movement that arose in the wake of the Montgomery bus boycott.

“We Shall Overcome”

The full force of the movement made itself known through the sit-ins, Freedom Riders and other activists who went South in ever increasing numbers in the early 1960s. The 1963 March on Washington marked a turning point after which Congress could no longer avoid the challenge.

Race: New Opportunities, New Challenges

The civil rights acts of 1964, 1965 and 1968 ended all the forms of legal segregation that had united the civil rights movement. But the urban riots of the mid-1960s made it immediately clear that racial divides still existed and that struggles against them would not be easy in the years ahead.

Using Photos, Cartoons and Other Visuals to Teach History

Most textbooks today are full of colorful visuals. But all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. But only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general and their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

The principles that guided us in developing the lessons in this booklet are spelled out more explicitly in the MindSparks visual literacy materials, especially *The Visual Image in the Classroom: A Visual Literacy Resource Booklet* and *The Way Editorial Cartoons Work*. You may want to consider using these resources along with your other MindSparks materials.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON MINDSPARKS, CALL:
1-800-558-2110**

How to Use this Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AT THE START OF EACH LESSON

An introductory page for each lesson provides brief explanations of the three illustrations for the lesson and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

TRANSPARENCIES FOR EACH ILLUSTRATION

These crisp, high-quality overhead transparencies help you use each illustration as the focal point for an all-class discussion.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS FOR EACH ILLUSTRATION

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the overhead of the illustration. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. In addition to these discussion questions, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. The instructions for these activities are directed to the student. Some are individual assignments. Others work best as small group or all-class activities. You may reproduce any of these pages for classroom use.

The Civil Rights Revolution

**OBJECTIVES
FOR THIS LESSON:**

1. Students will better understand the conditions in the U.S. South that gave rise to the civil rights movement in the 1950s.
 2. Students will better appreciate the challenges blacks faced in living with “Jim Crow.”
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The “Jim Crow” South

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS:

Illustration 1

The Civil War ended slavery in 1865. But nearly one hundred years later, roadblocks still limited the lives of African Americans in many ways. This was especially true in the South. Blacks were often forced to live in the poorest, most run-down sections of its cities and towns. While some of them bettered their lives in the decades following the Civil War, many still struggled to survive as sharecroppers, tenant farmers or migrant farm workers. These illustrations from the late 1930s suggest the hard life all too many African Americans had to accept.

Illustration 2

The term “Jim Crow” is from a character in a song sung in minstrel shows in the 1800s. But over time, Jim Crow came to stand for all the laws and practices that kept the races separate in many states in the decades after the Civil War. Hundreds of photos could convey the degrading nature of Jim Crow segregation. These two show how it split Southern communities in two. In the better-off parts of town, African Americans had to use separate facilities of all kinds — schools, rest rooms, restaurant seats, hotels, theaters and drinking fountains. Most of the facilities for blacks were inferior to those used by whites. Jim Crow also denied blacks the right to vote, in spite of the 15th Amendment’s protection of that right. And without the vote, blacks were nearly powerless to prevent whites from maintaining this “separate-and-unequal” system forever.

Illustration 3

African Americans suffered under Jim Crow. However, they did not submit to it. Instead, they managed to create a strong and proud community life of their own. That life was based on two institutions above all others — the family and the church. The families in the church pews here, for example, may have been poor, but they obviously gave hope and strength to one another in this setting. And black churches, in addition to offering spiritual guidance, often helped found businesses and self-help organizations that gave African Americans a chance to develop leadership skills and a basis for community independence. When the civil rights movement began in earnest in the South in the 1950s, it was the black ministers and their churches that would take the lead.

Lesson 1 — The “Jim Crow” South

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. These photos are of African Americans in the U.S. South in the 1930s and 1940s. What do you know of life in the South in those years? In your opinion, do these photos seem typical of what life was like for most African Americans there? Why or why not?
2. After the Civil War, African-American slaves were free. When did the Civil War end? Many left the South after the Civil War, but most stayed. Why do you think that was so?
3. Most blacks in the South in the first half of the 1900s lived hard lives as sharecroppers, tenant farmers or migrant farm workers. What do you know about the kinds of problems such groups would have faced in their everyday lives?
4. These two scenes show a rural small town and some out-of-work blacks on a city street in the late 1930s. Of these two settings, which do you think would have been the harder one in which to grow up as an African American in the South in those years? Why?

Follow-up Activities

1. Small Group Activity: The photo on the left shows a small, run-down black community in Tennessee in 1940. Pretend that the man in this photo has just received a letter from his cousin in Harlem urging him to come north. What might the man in the photo say in reply? Divide your group in half. One half should write the letter from the cousin. The other half should assume the role of the man in the photo and write a reply. Try to make these letters as believable as you can given what you know about American in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Display the two groups of letters on a bulletin board.
2. Both of these photos were taken before World War II. What effect might the war have had on blacks in the South in late 1940s and 1950s? Find out what your history textbook says about this. Seek out other sources as well. Once you have done some research, write a brief report answering the following question: How did World War II influence the civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s?