

Unit: Making a Change

In this unit, students deepen their understanding of the civil rights movement as they explore how the news media influenced public perception of the events, shaping its goals and outcomes. It includes pre- and post-visit activities designed to bracket the Making a Change NewseumED class, plus a class-specific Newseum gallery guide. Through these experiences, students will use primary sources to experience what it was like to live through the height of the civil rights movement, draw connections between the five freedoms of the First Amendment and the tactics used by civil rights protesters, and explore the movement's ongoing legacy.

Note: You can find additional activities, worksheets and handouts related to Making a Change by searching EDTools on NewseumED.

OBJECTIVE: Students will understand the role of the First Amendment, and especially freedom of the press, in shaping the tactics, objectives and perception of the civil rights movement.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Middle and high school

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How did the civil rights movement use the First Amendment to effect change?
- How does the press shape our perception of current events?
- How does the press shape history?
- What is the ongoing legacy of the civil rights movement?

KEY TOPICS AND SKILLS

- The civil rights movement
- The role of the free press in advocating for social change
- Social movements and protest
- Primary source analysis

UNIT CONTENTS

1. Before Your Visit
 - **Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail":** Students analyze Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter From Birmingham Jail" to understand his vision for the civil rights movement.
2. During Your Visit
 - **NewseumED Class – Making a Change:** Students learn how the First Amendment was used as a vehicle for social change and analyze a documentary about the role of the press in the civil rights movement.
 - **Making a Change Gallery Guide:** This guide takes students through three galleries to see how others have used the five freedoms to foster social change.
3. After Your Visit

- **Covering the Freedom Rides:** Students read four newspaper articles about the events of May 1961 in Alabama and complete a worksheet to understand the causes and events of the Freedom Rides.
- **Coverage Now of Coverage Then:** See how two Southern newspapers have publicly re-examined their coverage of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s.

Before Your Visit: Martin Luther King's 'Letter From Birmingham Jail'

Students analyze Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter From Birmingham Jail" to understand his vision for the civil rights movement.

GRADE LEVEL: Middle and high school

TIME: 30-60 minutes (can be completed in class or for homework)

MATERIALS: "Letter From Birmingham Jail" and "A Call for Unity" handouts (download)

PREPARE

Print copies of the "Letter From Birmingham Jail" and "A Call for Unity", one per student.

DO

1. Ask students what they know about when and why Martin Luther King Jr. wrote "Letter From Birmingham Jail." Key points include:
 - King was arrested on April 12, 1963, in Birmingham, Ala., by Bull Connor, the public safety commissioner, for parading without a permit and for defying a state order banning demonstrations.
 - The same day that King was arrested, a letter, signed by eight white ministers from Birmingham and titled "A Call for Unity," was printed in *The Birmingham News*.
 - The letter called for an end to protests and demonstrations for civil rights in Birmingham.
 - King spent eight days in jail in Birmingham. On April 16, 1963, King responded to "A Call for Unity" with his own call which has come to be known as his "Letter from Birmingham Jail."
 - This letter was thought to be originally published in *The Christian Century* and was reprinted soon after in *Atlantic Monthly* magazine under the title "The Negro is Your Brother."
2. Distribute copies of the letters to each student.
3. Give students time to read the letters.

DISCUSS

These prompts can be used for discussion or for short essay questions for homework.

- Why were these writings — "A Call for Unity" in *The Birmingham (Ala.) News* and King's response in *The Christian Century* and then reprinted in *Atlantic Monthly* — called "letters"?
- Who was the audience for the ideas expressed in each?
- King's response was written in the margins of old newspapers that had to be smuggled out of his jail cell in segments by his lawyers. Why didn't King simply write his letter and send it to *The Birmingham News*? Do you think it would have been published there?
- In King's response he writes, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." What are the implications of this statement for all people in relation to social injustices? Do you believe he is right? Why or why not?
- What are the four basic steps King outlines for a nonviolent campaign? Would you add any

additional steps? What are some examples of people using these approaches today?

- How does King define “just” laws and “unjust” laws? Why do you agree or disagree with his reasoning? Are there laws today that you think are unjust? If so, why are they unjust and why do people continue to obey them?
- King writes, “Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute understanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.” What does he mean by this? Do you agree with this statement? Explain.
- What definition of “extremist” does King use when he gladly accepts the label?
- If you were one of the clergymen who wrote “A Call to Unity,” how do you think you would view King’s letter? Why?

During Your Visit: Gallery Guide

This guide takes students through the News Corporation News History Gallery (Level 5) and the First Amendment (Level 4) and Make Some Noise (Level 4) galleries to see how others have used the five freedoms to foster social change.

GRADE LEVEL: Middle and high school

TIME: 30-60 minutes

MATERIALS: Make a Change Gallery Guide ([download](#))

After Your Visit: Covering the Freedom Rides

Students read four newspaper articles about the events of May 1961 in Alabama and complete a worksheet to understand the causes and events of the Freedom Rides.

GRADE LEVEL: Middle and high school

TIME: 30-60 minutes (can be completed in class or for homework)

MATERIALS: Stories from *Daily Defender*, *The Anniston Star* and *The New York Times* (one handout, download), Freedom Rides worksheet (download), Civil Rights Research Guide handout (download, optional)

PREPARE

Print copies of the news articles and worksheet, one per student or small group.

DO

1. Ask students what they know about when and why the civil rights Freedom Rides occurred.
2. Tell students that geography, culture and political affiliations of the editors and writers can affect how a newspaper covers breaking news. Today they will read four accounts of the same event to research a historic event in the United States, and see how the information varied by newspaper.
3. Distribute copies of the articles and worksheet; give students time to read them and answer the questions.

DISCUSS

Remind students that these articles are primary sources. Primary sources are documents, articles, recordings and other items that usually offer a firsthand account from an authoritative or reputable source about an event. Compare and contrast the sources. Possible prompts:

- Who was the targeted audience for each article — who was going to read each article?
- Did the article or editorial provide factual information?
- Was there any information you found in one article that was not provided in another? If so, what information? Why do you think this information was omitted? Was it that the author didn't have the information or that the author didn't want to report the information?
- Why do you think the article or editorial was written? Was the author trying to advocate for an opinion? Or a course of action? Is this information important for people to know? If it is, why is it important to know?

OPTIONAL EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

In class or for homework, you might have your students:

- Research another important moment or figure in the civil rights movement using the Civil Rights Research Guide (download).
- Create a map tracing the routes of Freedom Rides in the summer of 1961.
- Create a summary of the Supreme Court case *Boynton v. Virginia*.
- Create a profile of one or several Freedom Riders.
- Create a timeline of events related to the Freedom Rides.

- Research other examples of movements that have used or use tactics like the Freedom Rides to bring attention to their cause.

After Your Visit: Coverage Now of Coverage Then

See how two Southern newspapers have publicly re-examined their coverage of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s.

GRADE LEVEL: Middle and high school

TIME: 30-60 minutes (reading and worksheet could be assignment as pre-class homework)

MATERIALS: Articles about the *Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader* and *The Jackson (Tenn.) Sun* (download), Coverage Now of Coverage Then worksheet (download)

PREPARE

Print copies of the news articles and worksheet, one per student.

DO

1. Tell students that in 2004, the *Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader* issued an apology for its failure to adequately cover the civil rights movement. In 2000, *The Jackson (Tenn.) Sun* published a series of articles on the civil rights movement in Jackson. It also has created an online resource that chronicles the events in Jackson in the 1950s and 1960s.
 - Note: You may wish to have your students conduct additional research on the civil rights movement using the *Sun's* resource: <http://orig.jacksonsun.com/civilrights>.
2. Distribute copies of the articles and worksheet. Give students time to read them and complete the worksheet.

DISCUSS

Review their answers. Ask students: What role do editors today have for others' errors or bad judgment? Possible prompts:

- What are some of the reasons that these two newspapers failed to cover newsworthy events involving civil rights issues in the 1950s and 1960s?
- *The Jackson Sun* chose to run a series of articles about the civil rights movement and create an online resource. The *Lexington Herald-Leader* chose to issue an apology for "neglecting to cover the civil rights" movement and analyzed the newspaper's lack of coverage. Which do you think was a better approach?
- If you were the editor of a paper that had "neglected to cover the civil rights movement," would you issue an apology? Create an online resource? Or do something altogether different? If so, what and why?
- How do you think the lack of coverage by these two papers may have affected events in these two cities? What is the effect of newsworthy events not being covered by the local newspaper?