

Save Our History®

# Voices™

of Civil Rights

Study Guide



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In the summer of 2004, journalists, photographers, and videographers toured the country for 70 days collecting thousands of stories from individuals who lived during the civil rights era of the 1940s-'60s. The project, *Voices of Civil Rights*, was a collaborative effort by the AARP, the Leadership Council on Civil Rights (LCCR), and the Library of Congress. It promises to be the world's largest archive of civil rights oral history. This *Save Our History*® documentary presents a sample of these stories and weaves them together into a poignant portrait of life in the United States during a tumultuous period of American history. Blacks and whites, children and parents, Freedom Riders and segregationists all speak from their own experiences to tell a more personal side of the civil rights movement. They are the historians and the primary sources in this program as they narrate a portion of American history through their recollections of growing up under segregation, joining the KKK, and taking to the streets in protest. In doing so, they demonstrate that those who battled for and against equality are still alive today in all of our communities, as are their memories of this dramatic era. Students are invited to learn about this history directly from those who experienced it firsthand, from those who the program calls the "Voices of Civil Rights."



## Objectives

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Through viewing this program, students will broaden their knowledge of American life during the civil rights era. They will build their understanding of the important events which comprised this area, and will gain particular insights into the personal experiences of those who lived through this period. Students will also think critically about the purpose of oral history and how to analyze it for historical information.

## Curriculum Links

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*Voices of Civil Rights* is appropriate for classes focusing on 20th-century American history, American culture, civics, and oral history. This program is appropriate for 6th grade and above. Due to some strong language and images, we recommend that teachers view the program before showing it to students. It fulfills the following standards as outlined by the National Council for History Education:

- (1) Values, Beliefs, Political Ideas, and Institutions
- (2) Patterns of Social and Political Interaction.

## Vocabulary and Key Words

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Using a dictionary ([www.merriamwebster.com](http://www.merriamwebster.com)) and an encyclopedia, students should define or explain the significance of the following terms:

bigotry	ideology
Children's Crusade of 1963	infallible
complicit	injunction
exonerate	Jim Crow
Freedom Rides	

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## Pre-Viewing Activity

On a large posterboard, have students brainstorm and write down their responses to the following question:  
What are the first images, themes, or people that come to mind when you think of “civil rights”?

## Viewing Discussion Questions

For the following discussion questions, encourage the students to support their answers with specific examples.

1. Refer back to the pre-viewing activity. How has this documentary made you think differently about the civil rights era? In what ways does this program affect your views of history and the manner in which it should be told?
2. How do you define civil rights? In light of your answer, what would you say are the beginning and ending dates of the “civil rights era”? Who would you expect to be the “voices of civil rights”?
3. Who are the voices of civil rights in this program? (Think about age, location, ethnicity, vocation, etc.) Are there missing voices? If so, who are they and what questions would you ask them?
4. What were some similar themes throughout these stories? What were some differences?
5. Some of the interviewees described that during the civil rights era “there were two Americas.” Discuss to what extent this is an accurate depiction of America at this time. How do other ethnic groups fit into this separated America during the civil rights era? How many Americas are there today?
6. How did the interviewees describe their experiences as students during integration? How does the social climate of your school compare/contrast to that of public schools during integration?
7. Is majority opinion infallible? (See your vocabulary list.) How does Billy Roy Pitts’ story of belonging to the Ku Klux Klan help to answer a question like this?
8. How does the theme of forgiveness appear in the stories?
9. In what tangible ways can you see the impact of the civil rights era in your community?
10. Historians often labor at historical accuracy via fact-checking. How do you ensure these stories are “accurate”? How is fact-checking for oral history similar to the process for printed documents? How does it differ?
11. Why are some “voices” readily heard in the historical record while others are not? In what ways can historians seek out unheard voices?
12. The stories in this program and the others that have been collected as part of the larger project will be archived at the Library of Congress. What are some steps and technologies we can use to preserve these stories for future generations?



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## Extended Activities

**Save Our History®** – Students can also be a part of the effort to collect and archive the personal stories of people who lived during the civil rights era. For instructions on conducting and transcribing an interview, consult **The History Channel®** Classroom's Oral History Guidelines online at: [www.historychannel.com/classroom/oralhistguidelines.pdf](http://www.historychannel.com/classroom/oralhistguidelines.pdf).

Some questions to answer as a class or group before conducting your interview include:

- Are there key questions everyone should ask his/her interviewee?
- How will you record the interview? (audiotape, videotape, both, etc.)
- How will you preserve these stories for future generations?

After you have completed your transcription, take 2-3 minutes from the interview that resonated with you and read it aloud to your classmates. The Oral History study guide also has other ideas for what students can do to share their interviews with each other.

**What is Your Story?** – Students can also become a part of the historical record by interviewing each other on the young person's perspective of civil rights in America today. Break up into pairs and follow the same instructions as in the activity above. After you hear each story, answer such questions as:



- What was the process of interviewing and being interviewed like?
- How does the experience provide insight into the process for the producers and interviewees of this program?
- According to your stories, what does civil rights in America look like today?

**The Singing Voice of Civil Rights** – Another voice of civil rights is the musical voice heard in marches, churches, and sit-ins. Break up into groups. Each group should find and research one protest song from the civil rights movement. See the **Resources** section of this study guide for sample audio CD compilations.

Answer such questions as:

- What are the origins of this song?
- Can you pinpoint when it was first sung as part of the struggle for civil rights?
- What specific parts of the song make it a protest/civil rights song?
- According to your previous answer, are there any modern-day civil rights songs?

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Present your research findings to the class in a PowerPoint presentation. If you are musically inclined, write your own civil rights song and teach it to your classmates.

**More Voices of Civil Rights** – From the suffragettes to the American Indian Movement to the Gray Panthers, there are many other groups of people who have fought for civil rights in America. Choose any cause or issue that is important to you and research the activities of groups that have fought both for and against it. Use the library and as many primary sources as possible in your research. Present your research to your class in a PowerPoint presentation.

## Primary Sources

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Following are two forms of primary sources from the civil rights era. The first is a protest song called “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize” sung in many marches and churches throughout the south. The second is a photograph of a segregated drinking fountain in the south. Answer the questions that follow each source.

### ***KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE***

Paul and Silas, bound in jail,  
Had no money for to go their bail.

***Chorus:***

Keep your eyes on the prize,  
Hold on, hold on,  
Hold on, hold on –  
Keep your eyes on the prize,  
Hold on, hold on

Paul and Silas begin to shout,  
The jail door opened and they walked out.

Freedom’s name is might sweet –  
Soon one of these days we’re going to meet

The only thing that we did wrong –  
Stayed in the wilderness too long.

But the one thing we did right  
Was the day we started to fight.

We’re gonna board that big Greyhound,  
Carryin’ love from town to town.

We’ve met jail and violence too,  
But God’s love has seen us through.

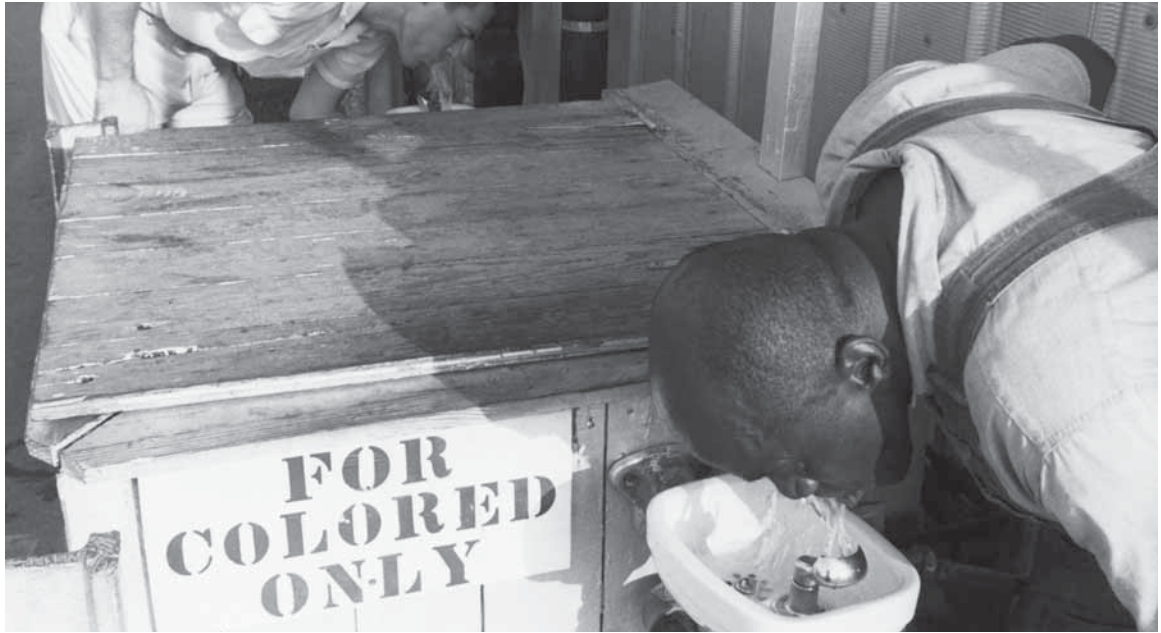
We’re gonna ride for civil rights,  
We’re gonna ride, both black and white.

1. What are the overall themes of this song?
2. What do you think the prize is?
3. What are some of the experiences described in this song?
4. How do faith and belief appear in this song? Why do you think religion played a role in the civil rights movement?
5. What do you think the following lyrics mean in the context of the struggle for civil rights: “The only thing that we did wrong – Stayed in the wilderness too long”?
6. How would you go about finding out more about the meaning of this song?

*\*See the Resources section at the end of this study guide for audio CDs you can obtain to hear an original recording of this song.*

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*Segregated drinking fountain in use in the American South. Undated photograph.*

Begin your examination of the above photograph using a Photograph Analysis Worksheet designed and developed by the education staff at the National Archives and Records Administration: [http://www.archives.gov/digital\\_classroom/lessons/analysis\\_worksheets/photo.html](http://www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/lessons/analysis_worksheets/photo.html).

- Is there anything unusual or unexpected about this photograph?
- What specifically is segregated and what is shared at this public drinking fountain?
- How does the idea of “separate but equal” apply to the situation in the image?
- What role does the sign play literally and symbolically to users of the fountain?



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## Resources

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### PART I: CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Visit the official website of the *Voices of Civil Rights* project for more information about the bus tour and archive of civil rights oral history: [www.voicesofcivilrights.org](http://www.voicesofcivilrights.org).

Also, read the book inspired by the project, Juan Williams' *My Soul Looks Back in Wonder: Voices of the Civil Rights Experience* (Sterling, 2004).

#### Books:

Eskew, Glenn T. *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle*. University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Koestler-Grack. *Going to School During the Civil Rights Movement*. Blue Earth Books, 2002.

Levine, Ellen. *Freedom's Children*. William Morrow & Company, 1993.

Lewis, John with Michael D'Orso. *Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*. Simon & Schuster, 1998.

#### Sound Recordings – Audio CD

*Sing for Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement through Its Songs*. Smithsonian Folkways, 1992.

*Voices of the Civil Rights Movement: Black American Freedom Songs, 1960-66*. Smithsonian Folkways, 1997.

#### Websites

“Research Center.” [Civilrights.org](http://www.civilrights.org)  
[http://www.civilrights.org/research\\_center/index.html](http://www.civilrights.org/research_center/index.html)  
A comprehensive research site on civil rights in the United States.

“Civil Rights Law and History – For Kids.”  
U.S. Department of Justice.  
<http://www.usdoj.gov/kidspage/crt/crtmenu.htm>  
A student-friendly website by the federal government about civil rights history in the United States.

“Civil Rights Documentation Project.” University of Southern Mississippi.

<http://www.usm.edu/crdp/index.html>

An oral history project documenting civil rights in Mississippi with audio clips online.

“The Civil Rights Era.” Library of Congress – American Memory Project.

<http://www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/aahhtml/exhibit/aopart9.html>

An overview of the civil rights era with documents from the Library of Congress.

“We Shall Overcome - Historic Places of the Civil Rights Movement National Register.”

National Park Service.

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/>

### PART II: ORAL HISTORY

#### Websites:

“Oral History Guidelines – Study Guide.”

The History Channel Classroom.

[www.historychannel.com/classroom/oralhistguidelines.pdf](http://www.historychannel.com/classroom/oralhistguidelines.pdf)

A student guide for conducting and transcribing oral history interviews.

Shopes, Linda. “Making Sense of Oral History.”  
History Matters.

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/>

An excellent website that provides tools for analyzing oral history.

“Southern Oral History Program (SOHP).” University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Southern Historical Collection.

<http://www.sohp.org/howto/index.html>

A comprehensive guide for conducting oral history interviews.



THE HISTORY CHANNEL.  
History.com

