

Year 3:

Unit 3

"We Shall Overcome" - The Modern Civil Rights Movement (1945 - 1970): Introduction

Unit Purpose: Why This Unit?

Although the study of the era following World War II can easily be dominated by a preoccupation with the Cold War, our understanding of present-day American society would be deficient without understanding the struggle for civil rights that transformed American life during the 1950s and 1960s. African Americans migrated to the North, where they had the right to vote and could live a life free from the oppressive Jim Crow laws that governed the South. However, African Americans were not fully aware of a different type of segregation that existed in the North. Unlike the segregation by law (de jure) that reigned supreme in the South, de facto segregation was the unspoken way of life in the North. Segregation might not have been lawful, but it existed just the same. New government policies, like the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, attempted to challenge this way of life and laid the groundwork for the end of racial segregation.

Civil rights became a national issue for the first time since Reconstruction, and conflict emerged between supporters and opponents of desegregation. In the black community, two leaders had competing philosophies on how to combat racism and injustice. Martin Luther King Jr. preached nonviolence and led peaceful resistance movements, such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Selma to Montgomery March. Martin Luther King Jr. believed in working with the white community to achieve rights for black Americans. Malcolm X, on the other hand, called for unity among black Americans to develop their own communities separate from the white community "by any means necessary." Malcolm X spoke critically of any black leader who advocated for inclusion because he believed that as long as black Americans tried to "fit in" with white society, white Americans would always have power over them.

The Civil Rights Movement ultimately developed around Martin Luther King Jr.'s philosophy of nonviolence, culminating in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The philosophical debate endures, however, as the legacy of these two men continues to shape how leaders respond to civil rights issues in the black community today.

Unit 3 is a Project-Based Learning unit, emphasizing interdisciplinary perspectives through projects and simulations. Scholars will use these creative endeavors to engage with complex and challenging historical themes. This unit demands reading critically, drawing upon evidence to create convincing projects, and expressing arguments creatively both in projects and in writing. Because this is a Project-Based Learning unit, there are 90 minutes dedicated to each lesson, rather than the usual 50 minutes.

To best invest your scholars in this unit, organize a showcase or presentation of scholars' work at the end of the unit!

Note: We recommend teaching this unit concurrently with *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in your ELA classes.

Unit 3 Learning Goals

Essential Question

If you are successful in this unit, your scholars will be able to answer the Unit 3 Essential Question: *To what extent was nonviolence effective in achieving rights for black Americans?*

Big Ideas

The Big Ideas, outlined below, help answer the Unit 3 Essential Question and reflect the key ideas that scholars must master by the end of this unit. As you teach Unit 3, connect every lesson back to the Big Idea(s) that the lesson helps illustrate. The Unit 3 Big Ideas were adapted from the UCLA National History Standards United States History Era 9.

- **Big Idea 1: The Modern Civil Rights Movement emerged in the era following World War II, as black Americans fought for equality in response to segregation in both the North and South.**
 - Although the armed forces were desegregated in 1948 and many black Americans fought valiantly for the United States during World War II, these black soldiers returned home to a country that still practiced segregation, preventing them from benefiting from the prosperity of the era.
 - Jim Crow laws in the Southern states solidified white supremacy and prompted many black Americans to move to the northern United States in search of more opportunities and to get away from the oppressive, often violent, de jure segregation they faced. However, de facto segregation in the North continued to limit the opportunities of black Americans even though discrimination based on race was not officially legal.
 - The landmark Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education in 1954 overturned the long-standing rule of "separate but equal" established in the Supreme Court case Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896. The Brown ruling opened the door for black Americans to fight segregation in all areas of life, beyond school buildings.

- **Big Idea 2: Competing philosophies on how to advance equality in the black community emerged in response to Southern resistance to desegregation during the 1950s and 1960s.**
 - Although segregation in schools was ruled illegal in the Brown v. Board of Education case in 1954, the reality remained that many states, especially in the South, did not comply and refused to integrate their schools, which sparked protests in the black community.
 - Amidst the rising protests, two competing philosophies emerged on how to achieve rights for black Americans, championed by Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. While Martin Luther King Jr. preached nonviolence through protest movements such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the March on Washington, Malcolm X advocated for a separation of the black community from the white community, to advance black power “by any means necessary.”
 - Ultimately, the Civil Rights Movement emerged on the basis of King’s nonviolent philosophy, sparking nonviolent protests and boycotts throughout the United States. These protests forced the government to act and desegregate schools, and ultimately resulted in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

- **Big Idea 3: The efforts of individuals, groups, and institutions during the Civil Rights Movement helped redefine civil rights for black Americans and have continued to shape American society and protest. Their legacies are still felt in the current movements for black equality.**
 - Although leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks are publicly remembered many years after the Civil Rights Movement, the movement could not have been successful without the hard work and dedication of many individuals who sacrificed their time, livelihoods, and relationships, and sometimes their lives, for the cause of black equality.
 - Black activists were not only essential during the Civil Rights Movement but they also inspired further activism in the years following the movement, including movements like Black Lives Matter today.

Key Terms

The following people, places, and events are foundational to understanding the Big Ideas of this unit. As these words are introduced in each lesson, add them to your word wall and hold scholars accountable for using them in discussion and writing throughout the unit.

- Plessy v. Ferguson
- Jim Crow
- NAACP
- Brown v. Board of Education
- White supremacy
- Emmett Till
- De jure segregation
- De facto segregation
- Philosophy of nonviolence
- Martin Luther King Jr.

- Malcolm X
- Freedom Riders
- Children’s March
- March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom
- Sit-ins
- Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
- Black nationalism
- Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Selma to Montgomery March
- Voting Rights Act of 1965

Intellectual Preparation

Class Materials Once you have internalized the Big Ideas of the unit, to be successful you must study all scholar documents and materials before you teach the first lesson:

- All documents in the [Unit 3 Sourcebook](#)
- All scholar and teacher materials in the [Unit 3 Workbook](#)

Additional Resources The resources below provide additional historical background for the content covered in Unit 3:

- Review the civil rights timeline on the Civil Rights Digital Library website.
- Read the essays “The Civil Rights Movement,” “African American Religious Leadership and the Civil Rights Movement,” and “Different Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement” on the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History* website.
- Watch the videos “The Civil Rights Movement” and “Jim Crow Wisdom: Memory and Identity in Black America Since 1940” on the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History* website.

*To access these readings and more free American History content and resources, create an account on the Gilder Lehrman Institute website.

Unit 3 Lesson Sequence

Essential Question: To what extent was nonviolence effective in achieving rights for black Americans?

The first three lessons introduce scholars to the realities of segregation in the United States after World War II. Lesson 1 introduces scholars to the very beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement, as black Americans faced segregation within the country after World War II, even though the armed forces were desegregated in 1948 and many black Americans fought valiantly in the war. In Lessons 2 and 3, scholars will write a speech evaluating the different types of segregation that black Americans faced in the United States after World War II. By the end of these lessons, scholars will understand the origins of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and will be prepared to examine how and why segregation, in both its forms, sparked the movement.

Lesson 1: The Birth of a Movement (Gallery Walk)

- **Central Question:** To what extent did black Americans gain civil rights after World War II?

Lessons 2–3: The Impact of Segregation (Writing Seminar)

- **Central Question:** Against which form of segregation, de jure or de facto, should civil rights activists focus their efforts?

The following six lessons develop scholars' understanding of the competing philosophies about how to address racial injustice during the 1950s and 1960s. In Lesson 4, scholars will examine how Malcolm X's philosophy differed from Martin Luther King Jr.'s; as Malcolm X advocated for separation from the white community to gain black power "by any means necessary," while Martin Luther King Jr. preached nonviolence as a means to have the white community recognize black Americans' humanity and treat them as equals. In Lessons 5 and 6, scholars will conduct research on the varying types of nonviolent protest that occurred during the Civil Rights Movement and will create a presentation in which they evaluate how their topic embodies the nonviolent philosophy. In Lessons 7 through 9, scholars will evaluate both Martin Luther King Jr.'s and Malcolm X's philosophies and write a speech defending which philosophy was more effective at addressing racial injustice. Scholars will then prepare their speeches and have a class debate defending their choice. By the end of Lesson 9, scholars will be able to articulate how nonviolence was used in the Civil Rights Movement to achieve legislative victories like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Additionally, scholars will understand that although Malcolm X's philosophy was viewed as radical and violent at the time, it is a philosophy that still reverberates in contemporary society and has had a lasting impact, as continuing black rights movements have come to embody his more radical ideas.

Lesson 4: "By Any Means Necessary"? (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** How did Malcolm X's philosophy on achieving rights for black Americans differ from Martin Luther King Jr.'s?

Lessons 5–6: Nonviolent Protest (PBL)

- **Central Question:** How was nonviolence used in the Civil Rights Movement?

Lessons 7–9: Competing Philosophies (Writing Seminar, Presentation of Speeches/Debate)

- **Central Question:** Which philosophy, Martin Luther King Jr.'s or Malcolm X's, was more effective at addressing racial injustice?

The final three lessons prepare scholars to research, plan, and present about the lasting impact of the Civil Rights Movement in their trifold projects for the Winter Academics Showcase. In Lesson 10, scholars will explore the various individuals who contributed to the Civil Rights Movement and choose one individual to deeply research for their presentations. In Lesson 11, scholars will

organize their research from the previous lesson and plan trifolds that convey an argument about their chosen individual's impact on the Civil Rights Movement. In Lesson 12, scholars will create their final trifolds based on these plans and practice their oral presentations about their chosen topics. By the end of Lesson 12, scholars must be prepared to present their trifold presentations orally and to explain how the individual they chose had an impact on the Civil Rights Movement as well as has a lasting legacy today.

Lessons 10–12: The Impact of the Civil Rights Movement (Independent Research)

- **Central Question:** What is the lasting impact of the Civil Rights Movement?

Pre-Mortems and Solutions

Facilitating meaningful Project-Based Learning (PBL) is challenging because there are materials to manage and the work is open-ended. But this is the very reason why it is important and engaging for our scholars. These lessons in this unit are 90 minutes to ensure that you have enough time to fully engage in each project.

Your level of preparation and your clarity of purpose make all the difference. The purpose of every project should be clear in every lesson, and you must ensure that you connect these projects to the purpose of the lesson and the Essential Question.

Guard against exploration without rigor! Whether in the classroom studying a text or crafting a project, scholars should have experiences that spark questions and further investigation about the topic. Do not be fooled by beautiful projects that have little or no historical relevance. Just like with writing, PBL demands that scholars have an idea. Guard against project work that expresses details without an idea by constantly asking scholars what idea their project work is trying to prove and having sky-high expectations for the quality of ideas in the projects. Similarly, all captions should first and foremost express the idea conveyed in the image rather than highlighting the details of the image. The point of these PBLs is to use creative means to convince the viewer of an idea. Therefore, scholars' project work must always be grounded in accurate and compelling historical evidence to prove their ideas. Projects with strong historical arguments should be commended, regardless of artistic talent.

Make sure that the goals of history class are not lost in the midst of project work. Continue to emphasize the Habits of Great Readers, Writers, and Historians in every class.

Scholars will work with a variety of materials as they create their projects. Develop a plan to manage the materials, but keep the focus on the content!