

Civil Rights: For or Against?

Goals

Students learn how to identify the main point in an informational text, assess the evidence and reasoning behind it, and decide whether to accept or reject it by analyzing a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) pamphlet and a Citizen's Council advertisement.

Central Questions

When someone claims something is true, how do you decide whether he or she is right? When you see something in a historical document, on the web, or on television, how do you decide whether or not you should believe it?

Background Information

Today the question of whether or not to support the Civil Rights Movement seems odd, but at that time the issue was not at all clear to millions of Americans. Many white people thought the movement was unnecessary or dangerous. Many African Americans were justifiably afraid that if they joined the movement, they would be punished by authorities or even killed by racist terror groups like the Ku Klux Klan.

The first document in this lesson plan was published by the Citizens' Council in Selma, Alabama. The councils were a sort of white-supremacist Chamber of Commerce; some historians have called them, "the Klan in suits and ties." Business leaders across the South formed the councils in the late 1950s to oppose integration through marketing campaigns and direct action. Members worked together to shape public opinion and to punish Black residents who supported civil rights by firing them from jobs, foreclosing on their mortgages, and more. The full-page newspaper advertisement from 1963 encourages white readers to join the local Citizens' Council and help stop the Civil Rights Movement.

The second document is from a 1964 brochure urging Black Mississippians to support the Freedom Summer volunteers who were planning to enter their communities. It was prepared by the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), a coalition of major civil rights organizations in Mississippi and the sponsor of Freedom Summer. These two pages are from a six-page mimeographed brochure asking local Black residents to support civil rights workers rather than stand on the sidelines.

Documents Used in This Lesson:

1. "Ask Yourself This Important Question: What Have I Personally Done to Maintain Segregation?"
<http://wihist.org/1vFbVmr>
2. Mississippi Freedom Summer brochure (excerpts).
<http://wihist.org/1zlygGi>

You may want to copy the two documents back-to-back and the two-page worksheet the same way. Students can then work in pairs or small groups to analyze the documents. Each group of students would need a pair of worksheets (one to analyze each document).

Document 1: Ask Yourself This Important Question: What Have I Personally Done to Maintain Segregation.”

<http://wihist.org/1vFbVmr>

SUNDAY, JUNE 9, 1963 THE SELMA TIMES-JOURNAL THREE

ASK YOURSELF THIS IMPORTANT QUESTION: What have I personally done to Maintain Segregation?

If the answer disturbs you, probe deeper and decide what you are willing to do to preserve racial harmony in Selma and Dallas County.

Is it worth four dollars to prevent a "Birmingham" here? That's what it costs to be a member of your Citizens Council, whose efforts are not thwarted by courts which give sit-in demonstrators legal immunity, prevent school boards from expelling students who participate in mob activities and would place federal referees at the board of voter registrars.

Law enforcement can be called only after these things occur, but your Citizens Council prevents them from happening.

Why else did only 350 Negroes attend a so-called mass voter registration meeting that outside agitators worked 60 days to organize in Selma?

Gov. Wallace told a state meeting of the council three weeks ago: "You are doing a wonderful job, but you should speak with the united voice of 100,000 persons. Go back home and get more members."

Gov. Wallace stands in the University doorway next Tuesday facing possible ten years imprisonment for violating a federal injunction.

Is it worth four dollars to you to prevent sit-ins, mob marches and wholesale Negro voter registration efforts in Selma?

If so, prove your dedication by joining and supporting the work of the Dallas County Citizens Council today. Six dollars will make both you and your wife members of an organization which has already given Selma nine years of Racial Harmony since "Black Monday."

Send Your Check To THE DALLAS COUNTY Citizens Council

SELMA, ALABAMA
YOUR MEMBERSHIP IS GOOD FOR 12 MONTHS

Document 2: Mississippi Freedom Summer brochure (excerpts).

Two panels from a folding brochure addressed to local Black residents of Mississippi by COFO.

The whole brochure is online at <http://wihist.org/1zlygGi>

What is COFO?
Voter Registration


ARE YOU A REGISTERED VOTER?

If we were all voting then things would be better in Mississippi.

We would have:

- enough food
- more jobs
- better schools
- better houses
- paved sidewalks

People coming here this summer can work with you on VOTER REGISTRATION. They can knock on doors, teach the registration forms and drive people to the courthouse. They can help in any way you want them to.



MISSISSIPPI STATE COURTHOUSE
1505 1/2 5th Street
phone - 488-0286

What You Can Do:

This is your FREEDOM SUMMER. It will not work without your help.

COFO is asking you to:

- provide housing for the people who are coming to work here.
- look for buildings which can be used for Freedom Schools and Community Centers.
- get names of students who want to go to Freedom Schools.
- let us know when you have meetings or arrange meetings so we can come answer questions about the FREEDOM SUMMER.

Many people are coming here to work during our FREEDOM SUMMER. They want to learn about Mississippi. They feel that the problems here are the problems of people all over the country. Most of them will be college students, both Negro and white.

COFO is your organization. The things it is trying to do should be done by the state. The people who have been elected to run the state say that they do not have to do things for Negroes.

IT IS THE FAULT OF THE STATE that you cannot:

- find work
- read and write
- send your children to better schools.

If you work with COFO you will be working to get yourself the better conditions you deserve.

Questions

Document analysis: “Ask Yourself This Important Question” and Mississippi Freedom Summer brochure.

With a partner, read the document and try to discover answers to the following questions. You may not be able to find answers to them all.

1. Write the document’s title, or make one up that describes it.
2. What kind of document is it (book, letter, advertisement, article, flier, pamphlet, etc.)?
3. When and where was it made?
4. Who created it? Who did they make it for?
5. What is the main point? What is it trying to say? Restate it in your own words.

6. What did the creator assume about the audience?
 - a. *Values*: What does the author think is good and bad? What do you think one of the author's unspoken values was?

 - b. *Standards*: What did the author think was ideal or best for society? What did he or she think is the opposite of that?

 - c. *Biases and prejudices*: Some values and standards are so deeply rooted and basic that authors don't even explain them. Strong statements that aren't backed by evidence often reflect biases. Name one of the author's biases.

7. What evidence does the author give to support his or her main point or assumptions?

Evidence is facts offered to support the main point. It usually includes a description of the author's personal experience or quotations from authorities with more knowledge or experience. Write down the evidence the author provides to prove the main point. Does the evidence look relevant to the main point? Trustworthy? Complete?

8. Outline the main point, assumptions, and evidence you found in the document this way: assumptions + evidence, therefore main point.

9. Does the argument in the document make sense to you? Do you agree or disagree with the argument? Would you be likely to take the action it recommends? Why?