LESSON OBJECTIVES

Develop an understanding of how the civil rights movement and contemporary musicians of the past and present create change in our society.

Learn about civil rights efforts to address injustice in our society and identify aspects of the civil rights movement that were influenced in the City of New Orleans and nationwide by artist like New Orleans native, Mahalia Jackson.

Consider how students can affect change in their community while strengthening analytical, critical thinking, and literacy skills.

FREEDOM SONGS AND MAHALIA JACKSON

“The freedom songs are playing a strong and vital role in our struggle,” said Martin Luther King, Jr., during the Albany Movement. “They give the people new courage and a sense of unity. I think they keep alive a faith, a radiant hope, in the future, particularly in our most trying hours”

Janis Kearney did extensive research on Mahalia Jackson before writing her book, "Only on Sundays: Mahalia Jackson's Long Journey". Kearney's research helped her understand what it was like for Mahalia Jackson, growing up in New Orleans in the early 1900's and why Mahalia Jackson left the South in the Great Migration. Her research also revealed how Gospel music shaped Mahalia Jackson's life and how it was instrumental in Ms. Jackson's influence on great men like Dr. King.

Students can better understand the role of a writer using The National Civil Rights Museum's online learning activity that allows students to view the Montgomery Bus Boycott from 1955-57 from the perspective of a newspaper investigative reporter.

Students are guided through a series of bus stops where they are given scenarios of the unfair treatment and conditions African Americans endured during a bus ride in Montgomery, Alabama. Once they complete the activity, have them write a one-page journal entry describing their experience and how it made them feel.

E-Learning Activity
Standing Up by Sitting Down
https://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/students
"Everybody else wanna tell your story BLK
Wanna sing your song
and not call it Karaoke BLK
Mimic your cool and disregard
all the scorching, red summers, that made you
this BLK."

Excerpt from 1N-----|
Poem by Sha’Condria "Icon" Sibley

Classroom Discussion and Writing Prompts

Both poetry and songwriting can be used to express an idea or tell a story. The excerpt from Icon's poem, 1N-----|
, expresses how it feels to have others imitate Black culture while disregarding Black people. Mahalia Jackson's rendition of the powerful song, "We Shall Overcome" gave hope to millions fighting for civil Rights in the 1960s.

Have student search Sam Cooke's 1964 song, "A change is Gonna Come". Discuss how Cooke's song reflects the tone and mission of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's dream in his 1963 "I have a Dream Speech"?
MAHALIA JACKSON:
VOICE OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Classroom Discussion and Writing Prompts

“Gospel songs are the songs of hope. When you sing gospel you have the feeling there is a cure for what’s wrong, but when you are through with the blues, you’ve got nothing to rest on.”
— Mahalia Jackson

“I’ll come to any benefit if I see SCLC get all the money.”
— Mahalia Jackson

“The prison officials wanted us to stop singing, because they were afraid our spirit would become contagious and the other prisoners would become Freedom Riders as a result of our singing”.
— James Farmer, Freedom Rider

• How important do you think the role of the Black church was during the Civil Rights Movement? Would the Civil Rights Movement have been successful without the Black Church?

• Mahalia Jackson’s songs were considered the “soundtrack to the Civil Rights Movement.” Why do you think gospel music was essential to the movement? How was it used as a tool to motivate and rally the people?

• Have students identify and define and understand the goals of the civil rights movement and the concept of “social justice and equal rights”. Using these concepts, have students analyze the lyrics of the following freedom songs and the messages that apply to the civil rights movement:
  o I’ve been Buked and I’ve Been Scorned
  o Keep Your Eyes on The Prize
  o I wish I knew How It Would Feel To Be Free
Classroom Discussion and Writing Prompts (CONTINUED)

Celebrate! Using Mahalia Jackson’s music commemorate social justice today.

Our program featured several selections from Mahalia Jackson’s catalog. As the sound of the civil rights movement, Jackson’s music mobilized and invigorated the public to protest. Ask students to select songs from contemporary artists that would serve as the soundtrack for today’s social movements. Encourage students to share playlists with class. The teacher should create a master playlist that is shareable with the entire student body.

The Best of Mahalia Jackson Sings
Vol 1, 1961
DVD
Call number: 782.254 J13
New Orleans Public Library
Remember! Celebrate! Act!

BESSIE SMITH
BLACK CHURCH
BLACK PEARL
CHICAGO

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT
DISCRIMINATION
ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES
EQUAL ACCESS

FREEDOM
GOSPEL MUSIC
GREAT MIGRATION
HILLARY STREET

MAHALIA JACKSON
MARCH ON WASHINGTON
MEMPHIS
MOVED

NEW ORLEANS RACIAL SEGREGATION
ORETHA CASTLE HALEY
PITT STREET
PROTESTS

THE MOUNTAINTOP
REPRESSION
REVIVALS
SOCIAL MOVEMENT

UPERTOWN TRIANGLE
BOOKS and CDS AVAILABLE AT THE NEW ORLEANS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference
by David J. Garrow
CD
Call number: CD 323.409 GARROW
Book
Call number: 323.4 K53.B

The Best of Mahalia Jackson Sings: Vol 1
DVD
Call number: 782.254 J13

Birmingham Foot Soldiers: Voices from the Civil Rights Movement
by Nick Patterson
eBook through Hoopla

Mahalia Jackson: Freedom's Voice
by Denis Lewis-Patrick
Book (Juvenile)
Call number: 323.1196 R479c

Civil Rights Sit-Ins
by Duchess Harris
Book (Juvenile)- Aligned to Common Core Standards
Call number: 323.1196 H313c

Mahalia Jackson: The Voice of Gospel and Civil Rights
by Barbara Kramer
Book
Call number: 782.25 J13.K

Dreams and Nightmares: Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcom X and the Struggle of Black Equality in America by Britta Waldschmidt-Nelson
Book
Call number: 323.0922 W168d

Got to Tell it: Mahalia Jackson, Queen of Gospel
by Jules Victor Schwerin
Book
Call number: 782.25 J13.s

Jazz Scrapbook: Bill Russell and Some Highly Musical Friends
by Historic New Orleans Collection
Book
Call Number: AARC 781.650922 H67j
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you for participating in the African American Resource Collection’s 2022 Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration. This supplement is created to encourage participants to reflect on the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahalia Jackson, and New Orleanian activists during the civil rights era. We encourage the use of primary source materials such as speeches, interviews, and newspaper articles to gain a deeper understanding of the civil rights movement and its connection to social justice today.

We would like to thank the Friends of New Orleans Public Library and Capital One Bank for Sponsoring this program. We would also like to thank the New Orleans Public Library staff for helping make this program a success!