

Title of Lesson: *The Wrong Side of History: How One Group Justified Its Opposition to the Freedom Riders and Civil Rights for African Americans*

(Suggested grade level: 11th Grade American History or Advanced Placement American History)

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Background Information:

This lesson explores opposition to the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama, particularly opposition to the Freedom Riders by the Citizens Council of Montgomery.

The following links provide background information on the Freedom Riders.

- PBS American Experience documentary called *Freedom Riders* premiered on May 16, 2011. A [companion web site](#) contains a wealth of resources related to the event.
- On May 19, 2011, Dr. Mills Thornton presented an ArchiTreats program at the Alabama Department of Archives and History on the Freedom Riders. This presentation is available for viewing at <http://www.archives.alabama.gov/video/>.
- A [Birmingham News](#) article, “Freedom rider remembers the struggle” (April 24, 2011) on Catherine Burks-Brooks, a resident of Birmingham and one of the original Freedom Riders
- A first-hand account by a nineteen-year-old Freedom Rider http://biology.clc.uc.edu/fankhauser/society/freedom_rides/freedom_ride_dbf.htm.
- A short summary of the Freedom Riders journey into the south http://www.realclearpolitics.com/news/ap/politics/2011/May/01/freedom_rides_of_1961_in_alabama.html.
- [Iconic photograph showing Freedom Riders with a burning bus in Anniston](#) (part of the Smithsonian “America on the Move” collection)
- [Anniston Star](#) article (Sept. 8, 2010) “Anniston to Commemorate the Freedom Riders”
- [Interview of Raymond Aresenault on "Fresh Air" on NPR May 4, 2007](#), a history professor and author of the book “The Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Civil Rights” on which the PBS documentary was based (33.07 minutes in length)
- [Encyclopedia of Alabama](#) article on the Freedom Riders
- [Birmingham Civil Rights Institute interactive timeline](#) on civil rights events (1954-68)
- Transcribed copy of [interview with Jim Zwerg](#), the young Freedom Rider who was savagely beaten when his bus arrived at the Montgomery bus station (part of PBS series “Peoples Century”)
- [Map showing route of Freedom Rides](#) (Library of Congress exhibit)
- [CORE \(Congress of Racial Equality\) website](#) on the Freedom Rides
- [Copy of letter from James Farmer](#), national director of CORE, sent to President Kennedy in April, 1961, explaining the purpose of the Freedom Rides
- [Life Magazine gallery of pictures](#) “MLK and the Freedom Rides”
- [EDSITEment \(National Endowment for the Humanities\) lesson plan](#): “The Freedom Riders and the Popular Music of the Civil Rights Movement”

- [“Democracy Now!” news program video on the Freedom Rides](#) (59 minutes). The first ten minutes consist of an interview with Stanley Nelson, director of documentary “Freedom Riders” in which he gives a clear overview of the major events, political dimensions, and significance of the Freedom Rides.

The following link provides more information of the Citizens Council, including copies of the *Citizens’ Council* newspaper:

- [Citizens’ Council Newspaper Historical Resource web site](#)

Overview of lesson:

This lesson is not designed to teach basic information about the Freedom Rides. Instead it is a supplemental lesson which seeks to uncover the thinking behind opposition to the Freedom Riders. Students will collaboratively examine a speech by the president of the Citizens Council of Montgomery, and write individual letters to the Council president refuting some of his arguments.

Content Standards

[Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies](#) (Bulletin 2004, No. 18)

Grade 11: Content Standard 12, p. 79

- Trace events of the modern Civil Rights Movement from post-World War II to 1970 that resulted in social and economic changes, including the Montgomery bus boycott, the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School, the march on Washington, and the Freedom Rides.

[National Standards for History, 1996](#)

Standards in Historical Thinking

Standard 2: The student comprehends a variety of historical sources. Therefore, the student is able to:

A. Identify the author or source of the historical document or narrative and assess its credibility.

Standard 3: The student engages in historical analysis and interpretation.

B. Consider multiple perspectives of various people in the past by demonstrating their differing motives, beliefs, interests, hopes, and fears.

Standards in History for Grades 5-12

Era 10, Standard 4A – Explain the resistance to civil rights in the South between 1954 and 1965.

[Curriculum Standards for Social Studies](#), (Bulletin 111, 2010)

Standard 5, High School – Individuals, Groups and Institutions, p. 139

Primary Learning Objective(s):

It is often difficult for students to understand how people in the past thought and felt, particularly when discussing ideas, such as slavery or child labor, that are no longer accepted by general society. One of the goals of a history class, however, is to strengthen a student’s ability to understand how and why people acted as they did in a given historical situation, even when the students find those actions unacceptable. This lesson will help students develop critical thinking skills and learn how to be constructive advocates for the causes they support.

At the end of the lesson students will be able to:

- Determine the primary goal of the Citizens Council of Montgomery and how that organization responded to the Freedom Rides.
- Analyze a speech given by the president of the Montgomery Citizens Council in terms of its factual claims, values statements, and points of argument.
- Deduce why some people were receptive to the ideas and values the Citizens Council.
- Write a response to the speech, logically refuting some of the author’s claims and arguments.

Time allotted: 70 minutes

Materials and Equipment:

- Transcribed copy of the speech given by the president of the Montgomery Citizens Council at a public meeting June 8, 1961(attached). For additional information click here for a [transcript of the entire meeting](#).
- Copy of guiding questions to go with the speech (attached)
- Directions for student letter refuting (countering) claims and arguments made in Mr. Lancaster’s speech (attached)
- Rubric for evaluating letters (attached)

Technological Resources:

- Computer with internet access

Background/Preparation:

Students should have an understanding of the Civil Rights Movement post-World War II including the following:

- Integration of the armed services
- Brown v Board of Education
- Montgomery Bus Boycott
- Integration of Little Rock Central High School
- Sit-ins
- Basic information about the Freedom Rides, including the attacks in Anniston, Birmingham, and Montgomery

Procedures/Activities:

Engagement/Motivation Activity: Write the words “Citizens Council” on the board.

Ask:

- What do you think a group with this name would be like?
- What sort of people might join?
- What overall goals might a group with this name have?
- What sort of activities would it engage in?

Step 1	Inform students that in the 1960s Montgomery had its own Citizens Council, as did many cities in the South. The main goal of these groups, however, was not to improve local civic life; it was to organize and coordinate opposition to integration. Ask : <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why would this group want to name themselves “Citizens Council?”• What advantages does that label offer them?
Step 2	Tell students, “Shortly after the three violent attacks on the Freedom Riders in Anniston, Birmingham, and Montgomery, the Montgomery Citizens Council held a public meeting on June 8, 1961. You will read and analyze a transcript of the speech that was given by Carl Lancaster, the president of the Council, at that

	meeting.” Note to teacher: There were two other speakers that night, the mayor of Montgomery and a white Baptist minister. A complete transcript of all three speeches can be found at the Alabama Department of Archives and History, and it would be worthwhile to display some of the other speakers’ remarks.
Step 3	Give every student a copy of Lancaster’s speech, along with the guiding questions. Allow time for them to read the speech and answer the questions individually.
Step 4	Put students in groups of three to four. Have some groups compare and compile answers to question # 1, others to question # 2, and others to question # 3.
Step 5	Conduct a whole-class discussion answering all three questions. Encourage students to expand their answers and to take notes on other students’ insights into the speech.
Step 6	Conclude the discussion by posing this question: “What have you learned from this speech about the mind-set of southerners who opposed integration and the Freedom Riders in particular, even though they did not take violent actions themselves?” Assist students in understanding that people in the present still struggle with issues such as this by asking them to compare this with a current issue, such as immigration concerns.
Step 7	Inform students that they will write an editorial response for a newspaper to Mr. Lancaster in which they refute the points he made in his speech. Distribute directions for this editorial, and answer any questions regarding the directions. Set the due date and point value.
Step 8	Collect, evaluate, and return the letters. Ask selected students to read their letters. Have students analyze what made those refutations especially effective.

Assessment Strategies

- Assess Guiding Questions for accuracy.
- Use attached rubric to evaluate the letters to Mr. Lancaster.

Extension:

- Display and read all or part of the remarks other people made at the Citizen’s Council meeting that night.
- Conduct additional research on the politics involved in President Kennedy’s initial reluctance to support civil rights for blacks living in the South.
- Students could research Alabama Governor John Patterson’s election in 1958 and the role he later played in the Freedom Rides.

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR SPEECH

1. Underline portions of the speech where the author is making an emotional appeal, either positive or negative. Write down a few emotionally loaded words/phrases that stand out for you.
2. Put parentheses around words/phrases/sentences where the speaker is making either implied or stated factual claims. List these claims underneath.
3. In your own words, summarize three points you think this author makes in support of segregation and in opposition to the Freedom Rides and Riders (three general reasons he offers in defense of his cause).

Mr. Carl Herbert Lancaster, President of the Montgomery Citizen's Council and a local architect, gave this speech at a public meeting the Citizen's Council held in the State Coliseum in Montgomery, Alabama, June 8, 1961.

"Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, exasperated Southerners, let me tell you what the Citizen's Council is. First, it is an organization of level headed conservative people who believe in solving their problems by lawful means.

Second, we were, and are organized to rally the people of the South. We are fighting defeatism.

Don't let anyone tell you that integration is inevitable. That is a lie. For three hundred years white people and negro people have been living in the South segregated. We intend to live that way for ten thousand years. Yes, we are entering into an offensive operation – not defensive.

Third, we are fighting federal encroachment of every kind, not just integration. We believe in self-rule. We believe in local police enforcement alone.

Fourth, the Citizen's Council has a positive program of offence [sic]. This program includes education of the public, both North and South, as to real reasons why certain political powers are pushing for integration. We know about it here – we know what it means. We are making plans. If the present trend of Federal intervention continues, there will no such thing as public recreation in Alabama.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are working on a plan for Montgomery, so look for an important development in the near future. If the present trend continues, there will be no such thing as public education. We are working on a plan in this area.

The Citizen's Council is not a political organization, except that we support any political party: Democratic, Republican, State Rights or otherwise which offers us a platform that we can support in good conscience.

.....

Now we are taking steps toward getting rid of that colossal misfit, United States Attorney Robert Kennedy.

His hand in the recent sorry spectacle in Alabama is clear. During the recent presidential campaign, he and Senator John Kennedy took time off during the heat of the campaign to telephone police authorities in Atlanta to get Martin Luther King off the hook for deliberately violating the law. (Voice from the audience: 'He's a traitor!') Yes, he is a traitor. The NAACP puppet mayor, Hartsfield, of Atlanta, credited this action of Kennedy's in putting Kennedy in office.

Robert Kennedy has worked behind the scenes with so-called Southern leaders in trying to get them to accept integration peacefully...or else.

According to testimony of so-called 'Freedom Riders,'" he, Robert Kennedy, even plotted their course through the South. These 'Freedom Riders' carefully planned their acts to cause violence by taking white women along with them, and reporters, and photographers of leading South-hating magazines. Yes, he knew these were the very things that would make the average Southerner 'see red.'"

When the bus driver refused to drive the buses, he tried to intimidate the bus station manager. He admitted that he had promised the so-called 'Freedom Riders' – which, incidentally, were an organized mob, protection to Montgomery.

He expected violence, and he had photographers placed on the Federal Building, ready to take pictures of it. He sent his special agent, a Mr. Siegenthaler, who was attacked by an angry by-stander; and a note fell out of his pocket, and on that note was [sic] the names of all the 'Freedom Riders.'"

He sent an honor of guard of Federal Marshalls to protect his pet, Martin Luther King, who flew into Montgomery during the height of the crises to hold an inflammatory meeting in the Negro Baptist Church. His chief henchman, Whizzer White, deliberately avoided working with the City Authorities. I think this surely indicates how deeply Robert Kennedy was involved in this monstrous scheme.

Mr. President, you said in your inaugural address to ask, not what your Country could do for you, but to ask what you could do for your Country. Now, Mr. President, the best thing you could do for the United States right now would be to remove your brother, Robert Kennedy, from the office of United States Attorney General.

Now, fellow Alabamians, I am going to read to you the creed of the Citizen's Council: 'Believing in racial segregation and States Rights, as established in the Bill of Rights; having undertaken to help defend by lawful and peaceful means, our people and our land, against integration, communism and all other forces which would destroy our God-fearing Nation, and pledging to uphold the Constitution of the United States and the State of Alabama.' That is the Citizens Council's Creed.

Now, fellow-Alabamians, if you can, and do believe in what I have read to you, I implore you to join the fight with us. If you are not a member of the Citizens Council, join it and JOIN NOW. Our ushers are going to pass among you , application blanks. If you are not a member of the Council, we want you to fill in those blanks. Don't put any money with it, just mail that in, or either drop it in one of the boxes, and we will bill you later.

DIRECTIONS FOR EDITORIAL RESPONSE TO MR. LANCASTER

What should you do when you believe someone else holds a mistaken position on a topic of great importance? Dismiss them and walk away? Yell at them about how stupid you think they are? If you want to be an effective advocate for the causes you believe in, you have to learn how to counter your opponents in a logical, persuasive, and respectful way. While you may not change his/her mind, exposing the holes in his/her arguments may go a long way toward convincing others of the rightness of your position. Learning how to refute someone's arguments is a valuable skill. As a practice exercise, you are going to write an editorial response to Mr. Lancaster in which you refute some portion of what he said.

Identify one or more of the points of support Mr. Lancaster made either FOR segregation or AGAINST the Freedom Riders in his speech. Locate the statements he made which correspond with that point(s). Your selection should consist of two or more sentences.

In this response (200-250 words) you will refute a part of what Mr. Lancaster said or implied. Start your editorial with the salutation "Dear Mr. Lancaster," and then include the following things in the order they are given:

1. Briefly summarize the argument(s) in Mr. Lancaster's speech that you are refuting.
2. State your position on that same point(s).
3. Acknowledge strengths or claims in Mr. Lancaster's speech that, divorced from the context of supporting segregation, might sound acceptable or even admirable.
4. Expose what you believe are the weaknesses of Mr. Lancaster's point(s) by considering the following questions in composing your letter. What made his statements and/or conclusions on this point(s) particularly weak and without merit? Were there fallacies in logic? Was his appeal based mostly on emotions rather than facts or logic? Did he oversimplify or misrepresent the situation? Did he attack someone's character without offering accurate factual support? Note: Quote phrases from the speech that illustrate the weaknesses you are targeting.
5. Offer reasons and support for your countering position. The more compelling your evidence and explanation, the stronger your case. You could use facts or quotes from a reliable source to bolster your own position but be certain to include an explanation of the significance of those facts or quotes.
6. Conclude with a brief statement about what you believe is the importance of integration and the Freedom Riders.

Remember you are not trying to refute Mr. Lancaster's entire speech, but only a portion of it. Aim for a solid, in-depth refutation of a limited but meaningful aspect of the original speech. Letter must be typed or neatly written in ink.

GRADING RUBRIC FOR ASSIGNMENT

An Editorial Response to Mr. Lancaster

Student Name _____

Final Score _____

Directions: You will write an editorial response to Mr. Lancaster in which you refute the points he made in his speech.

Letter was typed or neatly written in ink (5 pts).....

Salutation appeared at top of page (5 pts).....

Student clearly identified the point of support being contested and did so at the very beginning of the letter (5 pts.).....

Student stated his/her own opinion on that point (10 pts).....

Student identified and explained weaknesses of Mr. Lancaster's arguments in a clear and convincing way (25 pts.).....

Student offered sound and relevant reasons and/or support for his/her counter argument in a clear and convincing way (40 pts.).....

Student ended paper with an explanation of significance (10 pts.).....

Comments