



Handout 1 - The Civil Rights Movement as Turning Point: A Document-Based Question

Suggested reading period: 15 minutes

Suggested writing time: 45 minutes

Directions: *The following question requires you to construct a coherent essay that integrates your interpretation of the documents and your knowledge of the time period addressed in the question. High scores will be earned only by essays that both cite key pieces of evidence from the documents and draw on outside knowledge of the period.*

Question: Evaluate the extent to which the Civil Rights Movement marked a turning point in United States history. In your response, consider the impact of the movement politically, culturally and socially.

Document A: *Excerpt from "A Negro Nation within a Nation," (1935) by W.E.B. Du Bois*

In this broader and more intelligent democracy we can hope for progressive softening of the asperities and anomalies of race prejudice, but we cannot hope for its early and complete disappearance. Above all, the doubt, deep-planted in the American mind, as to the Negro's ability and efficiency as worker, artisan and administrator will fade but slowly. Thus, with increased democratic control of industry and capital, the place of the Negro will be increasingly a matter of human choice, of willingness to recognize ability across the barriers of race, of putting fit Negroes in places of power and authority by public opinion. At present, on the railroads, in manufacturing, in the telephone, telegraph and radio business, and in the larger divisions of trade, it is only under exceptional circumstances that any Negro no matter what his ability, gets an opportunity for position and power. Only in those lines where individual enterprise still counts, as in some of the professions, in a few of the trades, in a few branches of retail business in artistic careers, can the Negro expect a narrow opening.

Document B: *Excerpt from "The Negro Has Always Wanted the Four Freedoms," (1944) by Charles Wesley, from What the Negro Wants, edited by Rayford W. Logan.*

The Negro wants ultimately the abolition of segregation in education and the equalization of educational opportunity as an immediate step. The segregated Negro school is usually an inferior school and a disparity in the bi-racial system continues to develop . . . This inequality is represented by inequalities in school terms, salaries, training of teachers, buildings and equipment. The inequalities extend from the elementary schools through the graduate school.



Document C: *Lyrics of "A Change is Gonna Come," (1964) by Sam Cooke*

I was born by the river in a little tent
Oh and just like the river I've been running ev'r since
It's been a long time, a long time coming
But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will

It's been too hard living, but I'm afraid to die
'Cause I don't know what's up there, beyond the sky
It's been a long, a long time coming
But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will

I go to the movie and I go downtown
Somebody keep tellin' me don't hang around
It's been a long, a long time coming
But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will

Then I go to my brother
And I say brother help me please
But he winds up knockin' me
Back down on my knees, oh
There have been times that I thought I couldn't last for long
But now I think I'm able to carry on
It's been a long, a long time coming
But I know a change is gonna come, oh yes it will

Document D: *Excerpt from the March on Washington Address by Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963)*

In a sense we have come to our nation's Capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of our Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check; a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation.



Document E: *Excerpt from the lyrics of “Say It Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud” (1968) by James Brown*

Say it loud: I’m black and I’m proud!
Say it loud: I’m black and I’m proud!
Some people say we’ve got a lot of malice
Some say it’s a lot of nerve
But I say we won’t quit moving until we get what we deserve
We have been bucked and we have been scorned
We have been treated bad, talked about as just bones
But just as it takes two eyes to make a pair, ha
Brother we can’t quit until we get our share

Document F: *Excerpt from “From Protest to Politics,” by Bayard Rustin (1965)*

It would be hard to quarrel with the assertion that the elaborate legal structure of segregation and discrimination . . . has virtually collapsed. On the other hand . . . we must recognize that in desegregating public accommodations, we affected institutions which are relatively peripheral both to the American socio-economic order and to the fundamental conditions of life of the Negro people. In a highly-industrialized, 20th-century civilization, we hit Jim Crow precisely where it was most anachronistic, dispensable, and vulnerable—in hotels, lunch counters, terminals, libraries, swimming pools, and the like . . . At issue, after all, is not civil rights, strictly speaking, but social and economic conditions.

Document G: *Introduction to the Kerner Commission Report (1968)*

This is our basic conclusion: Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.

Reaction to last summer’s disorders has quickened the movement and deepened the division. Discrimination and segregation have long permeated much of American life; they now threaten the future of every American.

This deepening racial division is not inevitable. The movement apart can be reversed. Choice is still possible. Our principal task is to define that choice and to press for a national resolution.

To pursue our present course will involve the continuing polarization of the American community and, ultimately, the destruction of basic democratic values.

The alternative is not blind repression or capitulation to lawlessness. It is the realization of common opportunities for all within a single society.



Document H: *Excerpt of the lyrics of “What’s Going On?” (1971) by Marvin Gaye*

Mother, mother
There’s too many of you crying
Brother, brother, brother
There’s far too many of you dying
You know we’ve got to find a way
To bring some lovin’ here today
Father, father
We don’t need to escalate
War is not the answer
For only love can conquer hate
You know we’ve got to find a way
To bring some lovin’ here today
Picket lines and picket signs
Don’t punish me with brutality
Talk to me
So you can see
What’s going on

Document I: *Excerpt from The Beatles’ contract to perform at the Cow Palace, San Francisco, CA, 1965*

“Artists will not be required to perform before a segregated audience.”



Document J: Political Cartoon from the Commercial Appeal "Halt, Memphis!" (1923)

