



LITERACY
NETWORK



Youth Activism

Objective:

Students will be able to identify and analyze how activists in the past fought to bring about change.

Activism

is action to make a change, or stop a change, in society.

Activist

An activist is someone who is not willing to let a situation go unnoticed. It is an individual who feels so passionately about a topic.



Youth Activists in Civil Rights Movement

While some young people came into the movement by way of their parents' activism and their explicit encouragement, others had to make an abrupt and hard break in order to do so, with some even severing familial ties. Joan Trimpauer Mulholland was a young white girl from Arlington, Virginia, when she came to realize the hypocrisy of her segregated church in which she learned songs such as "Jesus loves the little children, red and yellow, black and white." When she left Duke University to join the movement, her mother, who had been raised in Georgia, "thought I had been sort of sucked up into a cult... it went against everything she had grown up and believed in. I can say that a little more generously now than I could have then." Phil Hutchings' father was a lifetime member of the NAACP, but couldn't support his son when he moved toward radicalism and Black Power in the late 1960s. Hutchings reflects on the way their different approaches to the struggle divided the two men, a common generational divide for many families who lived through those times: "He just couldn't go beyond a certain point. And we had gone beyond that... and the fact that his son was doing it... the first person in the family who had a chance to complete a college education. I dropped out of school for eleven years... He thought I was wasting my life. He said, 'Are you ... happy working for Mr. Castro?'" Many college student activists sacrificed or postponed their formal education, but they were also picking up practical skills that would shape their later careers. Michael Thelwell remembers his time as a student activist with the Nonviolent Action Group, an organization never officially recognized by Howard University and a precursor to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC): "I don't think any of us got to Howard with any extensive training in radical political activism. By that I mean, how do you write a press conference [release]? How you get the attention of the press? How do you conduct a nonviolent protest? How do you deal with the police? How do you negotiate or maneuver around the administration?"



Mary Eliza Church Terrell

Mary pursued activist work; she was one of the founders and the first president of the National Association of Colored Women. She gave speeches on the Chautauqua circuit and was known as “the female Booker T. Washington,” making money to increase the family income (Quigley, 43). Terrell had long aspired to a career and had given up an offer of a job at Oberlin to marry Robert. They had one child, Phyllis, in 1898, and Mary Terrell continued to lecture while her mother cared for Phyllis. In 1906, the Brownsville Affair took place; the race riot in Texas was the start of Terrell’s path as a civil rights activist. Mary lobbied William Howard Taft, then War Department Secretary, to have the soldiers’ discharges stalled so an investigation could start. Terrell’s bid for justice was unsuccessful, but after that incident, she continued to pursue equality for African Americans. She wrote at that time that she had lived in D.C. for fifteen years and the city “made conditions ‘intolerable’ for blacks” (Quigley, 58).

She was indefatigable in her turns on the lecture circuit and in her article writing. She spoke on lynching, government relations to race, the convict lease system, women’s suffrage, education for African Americans and women, and what she and her contemporaries referred to as “the race problem.” She spoke at the International Congress of Women in Berlin in 1904 (the only American to give her address in German). She joined the NAACP shortly at its founding; participated in the Amenia Conference; and worked for the U.S. government in the War Camp Community Service. She and her husband grew more active after WWI, when it became clear that African American soldiers who fought for their country would not be allowed equality postwar. After Robert died of a stroke in 1925, she busied herself writing her memoir.

ROSA PARKS
HOW ONE PERSON CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

A Montgomery, Alabama seamstress, Rosa Parks, decided on December 1, 1955 that because she was tired, she would not give up her seat on the bus to a white man as the law required. Mrs. Parks went to jail and became the catalyst for the successful Montgomery bus boycott led by a new community activist, 26 year-old Baptist minister, Martin Luther King Jr.

The success of the bus boycott encouraged a wave of massive demonstrations that swept across the South like a floodtide.

Mrs. Parks paid dearly for her courage. Her husband, a barber, became ill from pressure caused by bigotry. The family ultimately moved to Detroit, where Mr. Parks resumed his profession. Mrs. Parks, a seamstress did alterations for customers in her home until she found a job as a dressmaker.

In Detroit, she became a community activist and worked with youth in the areas of cultural exposure and recreation. Dr. King, once called her "the great fuse that led to the modern stride while sitting still."

Mrs. Parks is presently a receptionist secretary to U.S. Representative John Conyers. A religious person, she serves as deaconess of St. Matthews A.M.E. Church in Detroit. She accepts many speaking engagements because she wants to help "young people grow, develop, and reach their potential."

- If you were an activist during these times what would you do to address these problems.

Rosa Parks & Youth Activists

Group Assignment:

- Each group will have an activist or article.
- Write down information learned about activist.
- Students will present with group educating their class about the activist they have been assigned.

Individual Assignment:

- If you were an activist during these times what would you do to address these problems.

Homework:

- What are some issues going on in your community, city, or town that you want to address? How will you become involved and provide a solution?