

# The Struggle for Justice

Compiled by the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

**Target Grade Level:** 7–12 in United States history classes

## Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be better able to:

- Identify and analyze key components of a portrait and relate visual elements to relevant historical context and significance.
- Understand the roles played by key individuals in various civil rights movement of the mid- to late twentieth century, and analyze their impact on the movements.

## Portraits

Utilize the portraits found in “The Struggle for Justice” online exhibition, found at <http://npg.si.edu/exhibit/struggle/index.html>.

## Materials

**\*The teacher should supply students with paper and art materials when necessary.**

- *Reading Portraiture Guide for Educators*, found at <http://www.npg.si.edu/docs/reading.pdf>
- The Struggle for Justice Worksheet

## Background Information for Teachers

The history of American democracy has been one of increasing participation and inclusiveness. America transformed itself from thirteen states along the narrow line of the eastern seaboard, governed by elites, to a vast country governed by a large and heterogeneous population. One of the great achievements of this past century was a series of successful campaigns to strike down long-standing segregationist practices and discrimination in American society. While these changes ultimately became enacted in the nation’s courts and legislatures, the struggle to secure them was principally fought where intolerance reigned. As such, the nation’s polls, buses, schools, and countless other places became battlegrounds in the crusade for equal rights. The figures represented in this exhibition were important catalysts during a period that witnessed historic changes concerning the status of women, Native Americans and other ethnic groups, gays and lesbians, and the disabled.

Most striking perhaps was the progress achieved by African Americans. Although born in an earlier century, the civil rights struggle reached a crescendo in the 1950s and 1960s. Its triumphs recast the contours of American society and contributed to ongoing campaigns being waged to bring equal opportunity to all Americans. Although not without setbacks, this expanding inclusiveness continues to be the defining characteristic of American democracy.

## ***Lesson Procedures***

### **Portrait Activity**

- Brainstorm with students what an exhibition called “The Struggle for Justice” might be about at the National Portrait Gallery.
- Discuss the various types of injustice that individuals have fought against and rights they have fought for during the mid- to late twentieth century. Consider the following groups:
  - African Americans
  - Latino Americans
  - Native Americans
  - Gays and lesbians
  - People with disabilities
  - Women
- Divide students into small groups. Give each group a copy of the Struggle for Justice Worksheet.
- Using the online exhibition—or visit “The Struggle for Justice” exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery—ask students to complete the worksheet in one of two ways.
  - Have students find at least one individual’s portrait that represents each movement discussed above.
  - Have students focus on a particular movement and look for all portraits related to the movement.
- Discuss findings as a class. Questions to consider:
  - What kinds of symbols were represented in the portraits that helped you understand the sitter’s contribution?
  - What similarities did you find among the portraits as you completed the worksheet?
  - What story does each portrait tell?
  - Who is missing from the exhibition? If you could add individuals, who would they be and why?

### **Extension Activity I: Protesting Injustice**

“The Struggle for Justice” exhibition portrays a wide variety of injustices that were protested in the twentieth century by numerous individuals and movements. One of the ways in which people have historically resisted injustice is by using protest songs to dramatize their cause and rally support for their movement. Sometimes the songs have been written specifically for the occasion, but more often they have been created by fitting new lyrics to familiar music. This activity will give students the opportunity to add their voice to this long tradition of protest music.

1. Divide students into small groups and have them choose an example of injustice that they feel is worth protesting. The example can be contemporary or historical.
2. Students should write a protest song in response to the example of injustice, using the following guidelines:
  - Pick a simple tune (one that the students already know) and write new lyrics to it.
  - The lyrics should identify and protest the issue that the group has selected. Ideally, they should also propose a solution to the problem.
  - The song should have at least two verses and a chorus.
  - The song does not have to rhyme.
3. Once each group has come up with the lyrics for their song, have the groups present their songs to their classmates.

### **Extension Activity II: Creating a Timeline**

The civil rights movement of the mid- to late twentieth century was the extension of a struggle for equality that began much earlier in American history and that has continued to the present day.

- Divide students into groups. Assign each group a movement.
- Have students research the history of their movement in the United States, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century.
- Use their research to choose ten individuals who have played key roles in the fight for rights, past and present.
- Then have students place the individuals they have chosen into a timeline (mid-nineteenth century to the present) and include a portrait, a symbol, and/or a quote for each entry. Students should be prepared to explain and defend why they chose to include each individual in their timeline.
- Next, layer the timelines to determine and discuss relationships occurring during particular periods in history.

## **Web Resources**

Voices of Civil Rights

<http://www.voicesofcivilrights.org/>

“The African American Odyssey: A Quest for Full Citizenship” from the collection of the Library of Congress

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aahtml/exhibit/aointro.html>

Eyes on the Prize: American Civil Rights Movement 1954–1985

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/>

Women’s Rights Issue Covers from the *Time* Collection

[http://www.time.com/time/archive/collections/0,21428,c\\_women,00.shtml](http://www.time.com/time/archive/collections/0,21428,c_women,00.shtml)

Timeline of Key Events in the American Women’s Rights Movement, 1921–1979

<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/womenstimeline2.html>

The American Gay Rights Movement: A Timeline

<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0761909.html>

Milestones in the Gay Rights Movement

<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0194028.html>

Harry and the Mattachine Society

<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/womenstimeline2.html>

Special Olympics

<http://www.specialolympics.org/>

Americans with Disabilities Act, U.S. Department of Justice

<http://www.ada.gov/>

American Indian Movement

<http://www.aimovement.org/>

United Farms Workers of America

<http://www.ufw.org/>

## **National Standards of Learning**

Standards in History for Grades 5–12

Era 9: Postwar United States (1945 to early 1970s)

### **STANDARD 4: The struggle for racial and gender equality and for the extension of civil liberties.**

**Standard 4A:** The student understands the “Second Reconstruction” and its advancement of civil rights.

Grade Level 5–12: Explain the resistance to civil rights in the South between 1954 and 1965. [Identify issues and problems in the past]

Grade Level 7–12: Analyze the leadership and ideology of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X in the civil rights movement, and evaluate their legacies. [Assess the importance of the individual in history]

Grade Level 5–12: Evaluate the agendas, strategies, and effectiveness of various African Americans, Asian Americans, Latino Americans, and Native Americans, as well as the disabled, in the quest for civil rights and equal opportunities. [Explain historical continuity and change]

**Standard 4B:** The student understands the women’s movement for civil rights and equal opportunities.

Grade Level 7–12: Analyze the factors contributing to modern feminism and compare the ideas, agendas, and strategies of feminist and counter-feminist organizations. [Marshal evidence of antecedent circumstances]

Grade Level 5–12: Identify the major social, economic, and political issues affecting women and explain the conflicts these issues engendered. [Formulate a position or course of action on an issue]