

MODULE E: AFRICAN AMERICANS TAKING A STAND IN LOUISIANA

Overview

Voting rights and civil rights have often gone hand-in-hand throughout US history. This is true of the voting rights campaign of 1964 in Louisiana. The Louisiana campaign is merely one in a series of campaigns across the country to secure voting rights for African Americans. In partnership with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and local groups and individuals in Louisiana organized to register African Americans to vote.

In this lesson, students will examine the actions of African Americans in Louisiana in partnership with the NAACP and CORE in taking a stand for voting rights in Louisiana. The students will analyze reports, press releases, and other materials to address the following questions:

- What actions were taken by these groups and individuals to secure the right to vote in Louisiana?
- How could these actions in Louisiana impact voting rights across the United States?

Materials

- Department of Justice Report on Civil Rights in 1962: Robert F. Kennedy to John F. Kennedy, January 24, 1963, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC05630.
- West Feliciana Report: Excerpt from James Farmer, *Louisiana Story 1963* (New York: CORE, November 1963), p. 3, from Lynd, Staughton. Lynd--Printed Material, February 1963-October 1965 & Undated (Staughton and Alice Lynd Papers 1938-2008, Archives Main Stacks, Mss 395, Box 5, Folder 1), Wisconsin Historical Society, FSStaughtonB5F1006; 1963, content. wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/4501/rec/1.
- Press Release, May 27, 1964: Congress of Racial Equality, Southern Regional Office, CORE Southern Regional Office--Press Releases, Periodicals, and Clippings, July 1961-October 1965 (Congress of Racial Equality. Southern Regional Office Records, 1954-1966; Archives Main Stacks, Mss 85, Box 1, Folder 6), Wisconsin Historical Society, May 27, 1964, content. wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/56158/rec/1.
- Training Sessions for Freedom Summer, June 18, 1964: Congress of Racial Equality. Southern Regional Office. CORE Southern Regional Office--Press Releases, Periodicals, and Clippings, July 1961-October 1965 (Congress of Racial Equality. Southern Regional Office Records, 1954-1966; Archives Main Stacks, Mss 85, Box 1, Folder 6), Wisconsin Historical Society, FSCOREsroBox1186; June 18, 1964, content. wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/56163/rec/1.
- Press Release, July 1, 1964: Congress of Racial Equality. Southern Regional Office, CORE Southern Regional Office--Press Releases, Periodicals, and Clippings, July 1961-October 1965 (Congress of Racial Equality. Southern Regional Office Records, 1954-1966; Archives Main Stacks, Mss 85, Box 1, Folder 6), Wisconsin Historical Society, WIHVC239T-A; SCOREsroBox1193; July 1, 1964, content. wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/56170/rec/1.
- Record Month in Louisiana Voter Campaign, October 8, 1964: Congress of Racial Equality, Southern Regional Office, CORE Southern Regional Office--Press Releases, Periodicals, and Clippings, July 1961-October 1965 (Congress of Racial Equality, Southern Regional Office Records, 1954-1966; Archives Main Stacks, Mss 85, Box 1, Folder 6), Wisconsin Historical Society, WIHVC239T-A; FSCOREsroB1f6000; October 8, 1964, content. wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/56183.
- New Registered Voters in 1963: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *In Freedom's Vanguard, Report for 1963*, July 1964, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC09640.157.02.

Procedure

1. **Lesson Preparation (5 minutes):** Remind students of the essential questions.
2. **1964 Louisiana Voter Campaign Activity (30–35 minutes)**
 - a. Distribute the “1964 Louisiana Voter Campaign Documents activity sheet with excerpts from seven reports, press releases, and other materials.
 - b. Students will carefully read the texts and complete the “Critical Analysis” activity sheet. Questions require students to cite textual evidence from each document.
 - c. The “Final Task” on the activity sheet requires students to write a paragraph, citing evidence from the documents, to summarize how these groups sought to secure the right to vote.
3. **Lesson Activity Debrief (10 minutes):**
 - a. Place the students in working groups of two or three to discuss their answers.
 - b. Were there discrepancies among group members’ interpretations of the documents? If so, revisit the documents for clarification.
4. **Discussion (5–10 minutes)**
 - a. Engage the class in a brief discussion of the actions taken by African Americans to secure the right to vote in Louisiana. Be sure to emphasize and identify the stand they took and the challenges they faced in their efforts to secure the right to vote.
 - b. As a culminating topic for discussion, have students revisit the essential questions and hypothesize about how the actions taken by African Americans in Louisiana could have impacted voting rights across the United States, citing key evidence from the documents to support their claims.

1964 Louisiana Voter Campaign Documents

DIRECTIONS

Read each of the documents carefully and answer the questions that follow. You must cite evidence from the text to support your response.

Department of Justice Report on Civil Rights in 1962

Dear Mr. President:

. . . The most significant civil rights problem is voting. Each citizen's right to vote is fundamental to all the other rights of citizenship and the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960 make it the responsibility of the Department of Justice to protect that right. . . .

In East Carroll Parish, Louisiana, the voting referee provisions of the 1960 Act were used for the first time in 1962, with the federal judge himself hearing registration applications. Although he approved the application of 26 Negroes, the State of Louisiana attempted to block their registration through a state court injunction. We acted to set aside the state injunction and obtained an order forbidding further interference. On July 23, five days later, Negroes voted in East Carroll Parish for the first time since Reconstruction. . . .

Source: Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy to President John F. Kennedy, January 24, 1963. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC05630)

West Feliciana Report (1963)

West Feliciana is one of eight southeastern parishes in Louisiana's 6th Congressional district where CORE, since the fall of 1962, has been conducting a voter registration campaign. Leading the campaign is CORE Field Secretary Ronnie Moore, who in 1961 was expelled from Southern University and jailed on a "criminal anarchy" charge as a consequence of his leadership in mass demonstrations to desegregate lunch counters in Baton Rouge (A campaign which ended successfully on August 6, 1963). Over the summer his staff was augmented by a group of 50 CORE Task Force workers from all over the country as well as Rudy Lombard and Gordon Carey from national CORE. Over 450 Negroes were registered during the drive. In the same period over 200 discrimination complaints were filed with the Department of Justice.



Above: CORE task force worker Daniel Mitchell interviews a prospective registrant. Below: CORE Vice-chairman Rudy Lombard (at left) speaks to another potential voter.

Excerpt from James Farmer, *Louisiana Story 1963* (New York: CORE, November 1963), p. 3 (Wisconsin Historical Society)

Press Release, May 27, 1964

New Orleans, La., May 27, 1964: In Louisiana as in other southern states, Negroes have been denied the right to vote on the basis of race. Out of a voting potential of little over 500,000, we have less than 170,000 Negroes registered. . . . At present, neither Negroes nor whites are allowed to register in West and East Feliciana Parishes because registrars . . . have vowed to halt registration indefinitely rather than obey Federal court orders. . . . The Justice Department has filed numerous suits to end the Louisiana legal and political conspiracy to restrict Negro suffrage. . . .

Since these problems on voting exist in Louisiana and other southern states, CORE plans to initiate in early June a massive non-violent campaign aimed at focusing national attention on the denial of the right to vote to Negroes in Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, northern Florida, and other southern states.

We plan to start the campaign in Louisiana on June 11, 1964 by training a staff of 60 workers in Iberville Parish at Plaquemine, which remains the headquarters for CORE's voter education program in Louisiana. . . .

The objective of the summer project will be to awake the nation to the fact that Negroes want to vote. . . .

The highlights of the Louisiana Summer Freedom Campaign will be as follows . . .

- (1) Negroes will make strong bids for public office. . . .
- (2) Negroes will protest disfranchisement through mock registration. . . .
- (3) Freedom Days – On certain days . . . we plan to hold non-violent direct action protests at the registrars' offices.
- (4) Actual Registration – On as many days as possible . . . we plan to flood the registrar's offices with applicants.
- (5) A challenge of the Louisiana delegation . . . to the National Democratic convention will be staged by a Freedom Delegation. . . .

Source: Congress of Racial Equality, Southern Regional Office, CORE Southern Regional Office--Press Releases, Periodicals, and Clippings, July 1961–October 1965. (Wisconsin Historical Society)

Training Sessions for Freedom Summer, June 18, 1964

Oxford, Ohio, June 18—Plaquemine, Louisiana and Quincy, Florida training sessions are underway in Oxford, Ohio for the CORE Freedom Summer program, a massive voter registration drive in the deep south. . . . In Plaquemine, Louisiana, CORE Organization Director, James McCain and CORE Field Secretary, Ronnie Moore, are instructing some 50 students who will concentrate on 19 parishes in the fifth and sixth congressional districts. "These parishes were chosen because of their Negro voting potential and because of strong established community backing for our organization," explained Moore. . . .

Source: Congress of Racial Equality. Southern Regional Office, CORE Southern Regional Office--Press Releases, Periodicals, and Clippings, July 1961–October 1965 (Wisconsin Historical Society)

Press Release, July 1, 1964

Due to the fact that over 400,000 Negroes have been disfranchised in Louisiana by the discriminatory application of rigid and unconstitutional voter registration laws, Negro leaders in several La. parishes have found it essential to demand equal representation through mock registration. . . . As a part of freedom registration, a petition in the form of a registered letter has been sent to Gov. John McKeithen.

Freedom registration consists of getting every unregistered Negro voter to fill out a simplified version of the state application form in the presence of a freedom registrar. . . .

Source: Congress of Racial Equality. Southern Regional Office. CORE Southern Regional Office--Press Releases, Periodicals, and Clippings, July 1961-October 1965 (Wisconsin Historical Society)

Record Month in Louisiana Voter Campaign, October 8, 1964

Baton Rouge, La., Oct. 8 [1964]— We registered a total of 1,032 persons in September—the highest number for any single month since CORE started its Louisiana voter registration campaign two years ago, report[ed] CORE Field Secretary Ronnie Moore, who has led the drive over the two-year period. . . .

Asserting that discrimination is just one of the problems, he states: “Negro voter applicants and civil rights workers constantly are harassed, arrested, prosecuted and subjected to economic, political and physical reprisals by private citizens, public officials and sometimes businesses.”

Source: CORE Southern Regional Office--Press releases, periodicals, and clippings, July 1961-October 1965 (Wisconsin Historical Society)

New Registered Voters in 1963

Following is a compilation by states of known new registrations:

STATE	NEW REGISTERED VOTERS - 1963	
Virginia	7,814	108,313 (poll tax payers)
North Carolina	17,531	
Louisiana	610	
Florida	13,382	
Georgia	6,403	
Mississippi	1,251	
South Carolina	5,714	
Tennessee	16,243	
Texas	13,785	(poll tax figures not available)
Total	82,733	

NAACP, *In Freedom's Vanguard, Report for 1963*, July 1964 (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC09640.157.02)

Louisiana Voter Campaign

CRITICAL THINKING

Use evidence from all seven documents to respond to the following:

List key challenges faced by African Americans in Louisiana seeking the right to vote.

Using the evidence from the text, what did these challenges have in common?

List three key actions taken by African Americans in Louisiana to secure the right to vote.

Using the evidence from the text, what do these actions have in common?

How could the Louisiana “Summer Project” have impacted voting rights nationally?

Cite textual evidence to support your answer.