

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

Lesson Title - Civil Rights: John Lewis's Speech(es) of August 1963, the March on Washington from Betsy Kowal

Grade - 9 Modern United States History

Length of class period – 1 to 2 class periods

Inquiry – (What essential question are students answering, what problem are they solving, or what decision are they making?)

Why was it necessary for John Lewis to revise the speech he prepared for the March on Washington in August 1963?

How would the reception of Lewis's original speech likely have differed from the revised version?

Was Lewis's message to America still heard?

Objectives (What content and skills do you expect students to learn from this lesson?)

Students will compare and contrast the speech prepared by John Lewis and the speech he actually delivered at the March on Washington, August 1963.

Students will debate the need for the speech revision.

Students will be able to evaluate the power of John Lewis's message.

Materials (What primary sources or local resources are the basis for this lesson?) – (please attach)

The March on Washington
Actual SNCC Chairman John Lewis' Speech to the March
<http://www.crmvet.org/info/mowjl2.htm>

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<http://www.crmvet.org/info/mowjl2.htm>

SOAPSTONE Text Analysis <http://www.apstudynotes.org/english/bonus/soapstone-text-analysis/>

Activities (What will you and your students do during the lesson to promote learning?)

This lesson is part of a larger unit on the Civil Rights Movement in America. In previous lessons, students have been introduced to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the leaders of each group and the specific mission of the groups.

1. Either through a homework assignment or lecture, explain the purpose of the March on Washington, who the organizers and leaders of the March were. I then review who John Lewis was and what his role was in the Movement.
2. Divide students into partners of two. Give each pair a copy of both speeches to analyze utilizing the SOAPSTONE Text Analysis Worksheet. Ask students to define terms they are unfamiliar with as they work.
3. Discuss the original draft of the speech first. Refer to the SOAPSTONE format to extract salient points from students.
4. Discuss the edited speech using the SOAPSTONE.
5. Question students: How are the speeches different? Why would the leaders of the March want Lewis to change the speech? How would President Kennedy have reacted to the original speech? How would Congress react? In what ways was Lewis's attitude different from Martin Luther King Jr.'s?
6. Do students believe Lewis made the right choice in revising the speech? Why or why not?

How will you assess what student learned during this lesson?

After class discussion, instruct students to write for five minutes (an exit slip), summarizing the message John Lewis wanted to give to America in the original speech. Students should indicate if this message was evident in the speech he actually delivered.

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards -

- Predict how alternative actions by individuals or groups might have changed a historical outcome
- Cite evidence from a source to determine an author's purpose and intended audience.

The March on Washington Original Draft of SNCC Chairman John Lewis' Speech to the March

[Note – Below is the text of the speech that John Lewis and SNCC activists originally wrote (taken from [Walking With the Wind](#)).]

We march today for jobs and freedom, but we have nothing to be proud of, for hundreds and thousands of our brothers are not here. They have no money for their transportation, for they are receiving starvation wages, or no wages at all.

In good conscience, we cannot support wholeheartedly the administration's civil rights bill, for it is too little and too late. There's not one thing in the bill that will protect our people from police brutality.

This bill will not protect young children and old women from police dogs and fire hoses, for engaging in peaceful demonstrations: This bill will not protect the citizens in Danville, Virginia, who must live in constant fear in a police state. This bill will not protect the hundreds of people who have been arrested on trumped up charges. What about the three young men in Americus, Georgia, who face the death penalty for engaging in peaceful protest?

The voting section of this bill will not help thousands of black citizens who want to vote. It will not help the citizens of Mississippi, of Alabama and Georgia, who are qualified to vote but lack a sixth-grade education. "ONE MAN, ONE VOTE" is the African cry. It is ours, too. It must be ours.

People have been forced to leave their homes because they dared to exercise their right to register to vote. What is there in this bill to ensure the equality of a maid who earns \$5 a week in the home of a family whose income is \$100,000 a year?

For the first time in one hundred years this nation is being awakened to the fact that segregation is evil and that it must be destroyed in all forms. Your presence today proves that you have been aroused to the point of action.

We are now involved in a serious revolution. This nation is still a place of cheap political leaders who build their careers on immoral compromises and ally themselves with open forms of political, economic and social exploitation. What political leader here can stand up and say, "My party is the party of principles?" The party of Kennedy is also the party of Eastland. The party of Javits is also the party of Goldwater. Where is *our* party?

In some parts of the South we work in the fields from sunup to sundown for \$12 a week. In Albany, Georgia, nine of our leaders have been indicted not by Dixiecrats but by the federal government for peaceful protest. But what did the federal government do when Albany's deputy sheriff beat attorney C. B. King and left him half dead? What did the federal government do

when local police officials kicked and assaulted the pregnant wife of Slater King, and she lost her baby?

It seems to me that the Albany indictment is part of a conspiracy on the part of the federal government and local politicians in the interest of expediency.

I want to know, which side is the federal government on?

The revolution is at hand, and we must free ourselves of the chains of political and economic slavery. The nonviolent revolution is saying, "We will not wait for the courts to act, for we have been waiting for hundreds of years. We will not wait for the President, the Justice Department, nor Congress, but we will take matters into our own hands and create a source of power, outside of any national structure, that could and would assure us a victory."

To those who have said, "Be patient and wait," we must say that "patience" is a dirty and nasty word. We cannot be patient, we do not want to be free gradually. We want our freedom, and we want it *now*. We cannot depend on any political party, for both the Democrats and the Republicans have betrayed the basic principles of the Declaration of Independence.

We all recognize the fact that if any radical social, political and economic changes are to take place in our society, the people, the masses, must bring them about. In the struggle, we must seek more than civil rights; we must work for the community of love, peace and true brotherhood. Our minds, souls and hearts cannot rest until freedom and justice exist for *all people*.

The revolution is a serious one. Mr. Kennedy is trying to take the revolution out of the streets and put it into the courts. Listen, Mr. Kennedy. Listen, Mr. Congressman. Listen, fellow citizens. The black masses are on the march for jobs and freedom, and we must say to the politicians that there won't be a "cooling-off" period.

All of us must get in the revolution. Get in and stay in the streets of every city, every village and every hamlet of this nation until true freedom comes, until the revolution is complete. In the Delta of Mississippi, in southwest Georgia, in Alabama, Harlem, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia and all over this nation, the black masses are on the march!

We won't stop now. All of the forces of Eastland, Bamett, Wallace and Thurmond won't stop this revolution. The time will come when we will not confine our marching to Washington. We will march through the South, through the heart of Dixie, the way Sherman did. We shall pursue our own scorched earth" policy and burn Jim Crow to the ground — nonviolently. We shall fragment the South into a thousand pieces and put them back together in the image of democracy. We will make the action of the past few months look petty. And I say to you, WAKE UP AMERICA!

REVISED SPEECH

The March on Washington Actual SNCC Chairman John Lewis' Speech to the March

[Note – Below is a transcript of the speech that John Lewis actually gave at the March after editing it to meet objections from others.]

We march today for jobs and freedom, but we have nothing to be proud of, for hundreds and thousands of our brothers are not here, for they are receiving starvation wages or no wages at all. While we stand here, there are sharecroppers in the Delta of Mississippi who are out in the fields working for less than three dollars per day, 12 hours a day. While we stand here, there are students in jail on trumped-up charges. Our brother James Farmer, along with many others, is also in jail.

We come here today with a great sense of misgiving. It is true that we support the administration's Civil Rights Bill. We support it with great reservation, however. Unless title three is put in this bill, there's nothing to protect the young children and old women who must face police dogs and fire hoses in the South while they engage in peaceful demonstration.

In its present form this bill will not protect the citizens of Danville, Virginia, who must live in constant fear of a police state. It will not protect the hundreds and thousands of people that have been arrested on trumped charges. What about the three young men, SNCC's field secretary in Americus, Georgia, who face the death penalty for engaging in peaceful protest?

As it stands now, the voting section of this bill will not help the thousands of people who want to vote. It will not help the citizens of Mississippi, of Alabama and Georgia who are unqualified to vote for lack of sixth grade education. One man, one vote is the African cry. It is ours too. It must be ours.

We must have legislation that will protect the Mississippi sharecroppers, who have been forced to leave their homes because they dared to exercise their right to register to vote. We need a bill that will provide for the homeless and starving people of this nation. We need a bill that will ensure the equality of a maid who earns five dollars a week in the home of a family whose total income is 100,000 dollars a year. We must have a good FEPC bill.

My friends let us not forget that we are involved in a serious social revolution. By and large, politicians who build their career on immoral compromise and allow themselves an open forum of political, economic and social exploitation dominate American politics.

There are exceptions, of course. We salute those. But what political leader can stand up and say, "My party is a party of principles"? For the party of Kennedy is also the party of Eastland. The party of Javits is also the party of Goldwater. Where is our party? Where is the political party

that will make it unnecessary to march on Washington? Where is the political party that will make it unnecessary to march in the streets of Birmingham? Where is the political party that will protect the citizens of Albany, Georgia?

Do you know that in Albany, Georgia nine of our leaders have been indicted, not by the Dixiecrats but by the federal government for peaceful protest? But what did the federal government do when Albany deputy sheriff beat Attorney C.B. King and left him half-dead? What did the federal government do when local police officials kicked and assaulted the pregnant wife of Slater King and she lost her baby?

To those who have said, "Be patient and wait," we must say that we cannot be patient. We do not want our freedom gradually but we want to be free now.

We are tired. We are tired of being beat by policemen. We are tired of seeing our people locked up in jail over and over again, and then you holler "Be patient." How long can we be patient? We want our freedom and we want it now.

We do not want to go to jail, but we will go to jail if this is the price we must pay for love, brotherhood and true peace. I appeal to all of you to get into this great revolution that is sweeping this nation. Get in and stay in the streets of every city, every village and hamlet of this nation until true freedom comes, until a revolution is complete. We must get in this revolution and complete the revolution. In the Delta of Mississippi, in Southwest Georgia, in the Black Belt of Alabama, in Harlem, in Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia and all over this nation the black masses are on a march for jobs and freedom.

They're talking about slow down and stop. We will not stop. All of the forces of Eastland, Barnett, Wallace, and Thurmond will not stop this revolution. If we do not get meaningful legislation out of this Congress, the time will come when we will not confine our march into Washington. We will march through the South, through the streets of Jackson, through the streets of Danville, through the streets of Cambridge, through the streets of Birmingham. But we will march with the spirit of love and with the spirit of dignity that we have shown here today.

By the forces of our demands, our determination and our numbers, we shall send a desegregated South into a thousand pieces, put them together in the image of God and Democracy. We must say wake up America, wake up! For we cannot stop, and we will not and cannot be patient.

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SOAPSTONE Text Analysis

Who is the Speaker?

- The voice that is speaking. Identification of the historical person (or group of people) who created the primary source.
- What do we know about this historic or contemporary person?
- What role does he play in an historic event?

What is the Occasion?

- What is the time and place? The context in which the primary source was created?
- What is the Geographic and Historic intersection at which this source was produced?

Who is the Audience?

- The readers to whom this document is directed.
- The audience may be one person, a small group, or a large group; it may be a certain person or a certain people.

What is the Purpose?

- What is the reason behind the text
- Why was it written?
- What goal did the author have in mind?

What is the Subject?

- What is the general topic, content, or idea contained in the text?
- Summarize in a few words or phrase.

What is the Tone?

- What is the attitude expressed by the speaker?
- Examine the choice of words, emotions expressed, imagery used to determine the speaker's attitude.

