The President Takes a Stand: Kennedy’s Report to the American People on Civil Rights

Topic: President Kennedy’s June 11, 1963 Report to the American People on Civil Rights; Analyzing a Persuasive Speech

Grade Level: 5 - 8

Subject Area: Social Studies, English Language Arts

Time Required: 3 class periods with additional time for writing and editing

Goals/Rationale
When President Kennedy delivered his June 11, 1963 Report to the American People on Civil Rights, he addressed a divided country. Many Americans still supported segregation and were reluctant to acknowledge racial injustice. However, months of escalating conflict that included massive demonstrations, police repression, and even deaths of activists and other citizens, compelled Kennedy to take a clear stand on the issue. In this landmark speech on civil rights, Kennedy presented the case for why racial discrimination had no place in American law. He also announced his plans to introduce an omnibus civil rights bill to Congress.

The speech is historically significant for several reasons. It was Kennedy’s strongest public statement to the country (and the rest of the world) on civil rights. Also, historians consider it a ground-breaking speech because Kennedy framed racial injustice as a moral or ethical issue. He challenged Americans to ask themselves, how do we want to be treated? What is the right way to behave towards others in a country founded on equality? Finally, the speech was a call to action; Kennedy challenged individuals to act, to treat each other with respect in their daily lives.

By studying this historic non-fiction text, students learn how a president demonstrates leadership through ideas, words, and deeds. Students can analyze the text as a persuasive speech and identify the arguments Kennedy used to try to convince the nation that all Americans deserve equal treatment regardless of race.

Essential Question: How does a president show leadership through ideas, words, and deeds? What tools does a president use to try to persuade the public on a controversial issue?

Overview
In this lesson, students analyze President Kennedy’s June 11, 1963 Report to the American People on Civil Rights as a persuasive speech. They identify the main idea of the speech, summarize sections of the text, and describe the arguments President Kennedy used to communicate his message. They also reflect on how he demonstrated leadership through his ideas, words, and deeds. As assessment, they write an essay.
describing the main idea of the speech and the arguments Kennedy used to try to persuade the country to pass civil rights legislation.

While the address has challenging vocabulary for elementary and some middle school students, it is an historically significant non-fiction text with rich possibilities for developing language arts skills.

**Connections to Curricula (Standards)**

*National History Standards*
Standard 1: Historical Comprehension
Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation
US History Era 9
Standard 4: The struggle for racial and gender equality and for the extension of civil liberties.

*Massachusetts History and Social Studies Curriculum Frameworks*
*Grade 3: Civics and Government*
Give examples of the different ways people in a community can influence their local government.
*Grade 5:* Observe and identify details in cartoons, photographs, charts, and graphs relating to an historical narrative.

*Common Core State Standards: Anchor Standards for Grades K-12*

*English Language Arts, Reading Standard 1:* Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

*English Language Arts, Reading Standard 2:* Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

*English Language Arts, Reading Standard 10:* Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

*English Language Arts, Writing Standard 2:* Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization and analysis of content.

*English Language Arts, Writing Standard 4:* Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

*English Language Arts, Writing Standard 9:* Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis reflection, and research.
English Language Arts Standards, History/Social Studies, Grades 6 – 8, Standard 1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

English Language Arts Standards, History/Social Studies, Grades 6 – 8, Standard 6: Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose.

Objectives
Students will:
- Learn that on June 11, 1963, President Kennedy’s gave an historic speech on civil rights.
- Summarize a section of the speech.
- Determine the main idea of the speech and describe the arguments President Kennedy used to communicate his message.
- Identify supporting reasons and evidence for Kennedy’s arguments.
- Reflect on how Kennedy demonstrated leadership through ideas, words, and deeds.

Materials
- Universal International News on the events of June 11, 1963: News reel about the integration of the University of Alabama and Kennedy’s speech on civil rights. (Time: 1:45)
- June 11, 1963 Report to the American People on Civil Rights: Video and transcript of President Kennedy’s speech. (Time: 13:41)
- Report to the American People on Civil Rights: Transcript of speech for students.
- Report to the American People on Civil Rights by section: Transcript of speech, separated into sections for small group work.
- Section Summary and Arguments (Handout for students)
- Template for Illustration and Quote (Handout for students)
- Glossary for students .(Handout)
- Suggested Responses to Graphic Organizer (For teacher use)
- Suggested Arguments with Reasons and Evidence (For teacher use)
- Time Life Production television spots on civil rights, October 10, 1963: Video of Lena Horne, Jackie Robinson and civic leaders promoting support of civil rights for all. (Time: 4:34)
- Responses to the President’s speech and actions in Alabama: A memo to Assistant Press Secretary Andrew Hatcher with a pro/con count of letters and telegrams sent to the White House from June 11 to June 14.
- Chart paper or White Board/Bulletin Board.
**Historical Background and Context**

After narrowly defeating Richard M. Nixon in the 1960 election, John F. Kennedy was cautious in his approach to civil rights. He was reluctant to lose southern support for legislation on many fronts by pushing too hard on civil rights legislation. By the spring of 1963, Kennedy's attention became increasingly focused on civil rights. The 1963 Birmingham Campaign in Alabama made national news with images of children attacked by dogs and blasted with high pressure fire hoses. The growing number and size of civil rights demonstrations, and the violent backlash from segregationists compelled the president to take direct action and speed up introduction of civil rights legislation.

On June 11, 1963, Kennedy took a bold stand. Earlier that day, Alabama Governor George Wallace had attempted to block two African-American students from entering the University of Alabama. The president federalized the Alabama National Guard and the governor finally stepped aside, allowing the students to enter the University. That evening, the president delivered an historic message: segregation and other forms of racial injustice must end and he would introduce legislation to work toward that goal.

The decision to make a speech that evening was a sudden one. Although civil rights legislation had been in the works for several weeks, it was still in process. Theodore “Ted” Sorensen, President Kennedy's special counsel and primary speechwriter, did not start a first draft of the speech until that afternoon. An hour before the speech, President Kennedy, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, Assistant Attorney General Burke Marshall and Sorensen were assembling and rewriting parts of the speech, and the president did not have a completed version when he sat down in front of the television camera at 8:00 p.m. He extemporized the concluding paragraphs of the speech.

In his speech, the president responded to the threats of violence and obstruction of justice on the University of Alabama campus following desegregation attempts, explaining that the United States was founded on the principle that all men are created equal and thus, all American students are entitled to attend public educational institutions, regardless of race. He addressed discrimination in education, public accommodations, and voting rights. The president declared that “it ought to be possible, in short, for every American to enjoy the privileges of being American without regard to his race or his color.” The president made it clear that the issue of civil rights affected the country as a whole; it was not limited to one city or one region.

The president asked Congress to enact legislation protecting all Americans’ voting rights, legal standing, educational opportunities, and access to public facilities, but recognized that legislation alone could not solve the country's problems concerning race relations. He stated that “it is time to act in the Congress, in your State and local legislative body and, above all, in all of our daily lives.”

**Procedure**

**Part 1: Setting the Context**
Note: This lesson works well as part of a unit on the civil rights movement so that students have been introduced to the historical context of that time.

Optional introduction for younger students: If you are introducing elementary students to the topic for the first time, read aloud Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down by Andrea Pinkney to help introduce the historical context of the civil rights movement. After discussing the book, focus students’ attention on the page with the text, “When President John F. Kennedy got a taste of SNCC’s integration, he didn’t sit in; he stepped in! On June 11, 1963, the president went on TV. He urged Americans to treat each other fairly. He then told Congress to take action against segregation. This became the Civil Rights Act of 1964.”

Suggested questions for discussion:
- Why do you think President Kennedy chose to make a speech at this moment in time?
- Why was it important for President Kennedy to take a stand?
- How could he, as president, make a difference at that time? What impact might his speech have?
- What arguments might he have used to convince the country that everyone should be treated equally under the law? Write student ideas about the last question on chart paper.

For older and younger students:

Share key points from the Historical Background provided in this lesson plan:

- Kennedy had been cautious about civil rights because it had been a very close election and he wanted to keep the support of as many people and legislators as possible.
- Conflict over integration and civil rights had been escalating through the spring of 1963. In May in Birmingham, Alabama, thousands of protestors marched for equal rights and faced a fierce police response. Young people were arrested and jailed, police dogs frightened and harmed demonstrators, and many protesters were injured. (For a visual image of the police response, see photographs from newspapers in The Confrontation section of Project C.)
- On June 11, George Wallace, the Governor of Alabama tried to block two African American students from entering the University of Alabama. The president called in the National Guard and the governor stepped aside. The president informed the country of the event in a speech on radio and television during which he explained why it was so important for all Americans to be treated fairly and have equal rights and privileges. He announced that he would be introducing a law that would end segregation in public places, require schools to become desegregated, and protect people’s right to vote. (View a news reel on the events of June 11, 1963 in The Showdown section of The Integration of the University of Alabama.)

Part II: Summarizing the Speech and Identifying the Arguments
1. **Provide a copy of the entire Report to the American People on Civil Rights to each student.** Explain that students will have the opportunity to examine this historic speech, Kennedy’s strongest statement to the American people on civil rights. At the time, the American people did not all agree about segregation and other issues related to race. Many Americans wanted to keep racial segregation, and others thought President Kennedy had not taken enough action to address racial injustice. Students will work together to become familiar with the speech. At the end of the process, they will be able to describe arguments that President Kennedy used to convince the American people that racial discrimination was wrong and that the country needed to pass a law to make sure people of all races had equal rights.

2. **Explain that you have divided the speech into sections and that they will work in groups to become experts on one of the sections.** Divide students into nine groups, each group will analyze one section of the speech. Distribute the graphic organizer. First, their group will work together to make sure they understand the vocabulary in their section. They will then write a summary and identify the main arguments in their text.

3. **Use the first section of the speech to demonstrate how to complete the graphic organizer.** See *Suggested Responses for Graphic Organizer* for sample summaries and examples of main arguments. These are only suggestions. There are many possible ways to summarize each section and several different ways to describe the main arguments.

4. **Have students work together to complete the graphic organizer.** Distribute one section of the speech to each group, providing copies of the section to each person in the group. Have students locate their section in the larger speech. Guide them to consult the Glossary handout and dictionaries to make sure they understand the vocabulary in their section. In addition to summarizing the text, each group should identify one or two arguments that Kennedy used in the text. Check each group’s work before convening the whole group to share their findings.

5. **In chronological order by section, have a reporter from each group share the summary and main arguments of each section.** By hearing a summary of each section, students will get a preview of the speech. Record the arguments on chart paper or white board.

6. **Review the list of arguments generated by the small groups.** As a class, have students edit the list, combining arguments that are similar and making sure the language is clear. Once you have decided on a final list, number each argument and post it on a wall in the classroom.

Possible arguments might include:
Everyone should be able to go to public places like movie theaters and restaurants regardless of skin color.

| Everyone should be able to go to public places like movie theaters and restaurants regardless of skin color. | Education is not equal for everyone. Every student has the right to a good education. | America stands for freedom and equality. | We need new laws to make sure people are treated fairly. | People need to take action in their daily lives to end discrimination. |

Explain that students will be listening to the entire speech to see how Kennedy used reasons and evidence to support each of his arguments.

**Part IV: Persuading the public**

1. **Based on information from these class sessions, ask students to describe Kennedy’s audience.** To whom was he speaking? How would the speech be received? How did Americans feel about segregation and civil rights? (Many Americans did not agree with Kennedy. They supported segregation and were afraid of change.) To make his speech effective, Kennedy (and his speechwriters) had to use convincing arguments. He also had to make sure he had reasons and evidence to support his arguments.

2. **Have students follow their transcript of the speech as they listen to President Kennedy’s speech located in The Address section of the 1963: The Struggle for Civil Rights website.** Have them highlight quotes they think are particularly convincing.

3. **Ask students to share sentences or excerpts that they think are particularly convincing or important.** Have each student select an excerpt of the speech and illustrate it. They should include the quote below the illustration.

4. **Have students place their illustrations and quotes under the argument they think it best supports.** As a class, make sure the quotes are supporting the designated argument (many quotes can support more than one argument.) If there are arguments that remain “unsupported,” challenge students to find quotes they can add so that every argument has a convincing reason or piece of evidence to support it. (To view examples of quotes to support each argument, see Examples of Supporting Evidence.)

**Part V: Jackie Robinson Speaks Out**

1. **Introduce the document, “Jackie Robinson Says He Would Cast His Ballot for Kennedy” which describes the impact of the June 11th speech on Robinson.** The document is one of several responses to Kennedy’s speech.
that can be found under Public Opinion in The Address section of the 1963: The Struggle for Civil Rights website.

2. **About Jackie Robinson:** Many students may be familiar with Jackie Robinson as the first African-American baseball player to play in the major leagues. In addition to breaking the color barrier in baseball and achieving success in that sport, Robinson became a successful businessman and a civil rights advocate, serving on the board of directors of the NAACP. Although he had campaigned for Nixon in 1960 and had been critical of President Kennedy, he stated, “The Presidential statement on the color question is one of the finest declarations ever issued in the cause of human rights.”

**Suggested questions for discussion:**
- What do you know about Jackie Robinson? (Provide information as need from above.)
- What is the date of the document? When was it published? (It is dated June 13, 1963, two days after Kennedy delivered the speech.)
- How did the president’s speech affect Robinson? (He admired Kennedy for his leadership and his stand on the issue. It convinced him to support Kennedy.)
- What might he have done differently in the past? (He did not support Kennedy in 1960; he campaigned for Nixon.)
- How does Robinson describe the president’s speech? (“The Presidential statement on the color question is one of the finest declarations ever issued in the cause of human rights.”)

3. **Have students identify words and phrases from the press release that describe the president’s speech** (i.e. “inspired leadership,” “finest declarations ever issued in the cause of human rights,” “sincerity”). Ask students if they agree with Robinson and discuss what they liked about the speech. Draw on the following questions for further discussion or have students write their response as an assessment: What made it an effective speech? Are there elements of the speech that are not effective? Would the speech convince a variety of listeners? How did Kennedy demonstrate leadership through his ideas, words, and deeds?

4. **Students can view film footage of Jackie Robinson speaking out for civil rights in The Bill section of 1963: The Struggle for Civil Rights.** (It is entitled Civil Rights and You in the Public Opinion section.) The footage is one of several television and radio spots by Time Life Productions to promote support for civil rights legislation.

**Assessment**
Have students write an essay on the Report to the American People on Civil Rights as a persuasive speech. The essay should include an introductory paragraph describing the main idea of the speech. It should also include three arguments and quotes to show how
Kennedy used reasons and evidence to support his ideas. In the conclusion, students should reflect on how Kennedy demonstrated leadership through his words and ideas.

**Lesson Extensions**

**Sharing the story (Recommended for younger students.)**

Compile students’ illustrations and quotes into a picture book. Have them write an introduction and conclusion, providing historical information on the speech. Have them present information on the speech and perform a reading of the quotes to another class or at a gathering for parents.

**How did people respond?**

Have students examine an historical document to learn about responses sent to the White House after the speech. Project the document, *Response to the Speech*, from the 1963: *The Struggle for Civil Rights* website, or distribute copies. (It is under *Public Opinion* in the *The Address* section.) Possible questions for discussion:

- What is a telegram?
- What does the letterhead tell you?
- What is the date of the document?
- What is the purpose of the document?
- What do you think PRO and CON mean?
- What is being counted?
- What information does the document give about responses to the speech?
- Does anything surprise you about the document?
- What else would you want to know about the document?
- How might you find the answers to your questions?

According to the document, the White House received about four times as many positive responses to the speech as negative. We cannot assume this reflects the response of the entire country, but the opinions of people who felt strongly enough to contact the White House. Explore the letters and telegrams in the *Public Opinion* section reflecting individual responses.

**Bringing it into today (Recommended for older students.)**

Have students analyze President Obama’s speech on immigration reform, delivered on June 11, 2013, fifty years after Kennedy’s historic speech on civil rights. What is the main idea of the speech? What arguments does Obama use to support the main idea? Compare and contrast the speech to the *Report to the American People on Civil Rights*. (Challenge students to find similar language in the two speeches. For example, Obama states, “We owe it to America to do better. We owe it to the DREAMers to do better. We owe it to the young people like Tolu and Diego Sanchez, who’s with us here today.” Kennedy states, “I think we owe them and ourselves a better country.”)

**What happened next? (Recommended for older students.)**

Have students explore *The Bill* section of *1963: The Struggle for Civil Rights* to find out more about the legislation Kennedy proposed. The introductory essay tells the story the Civil Rights Act: how it was introduced, the strategies used to gain support, and how it
was signed into law. In *The Challenge* section of *The Bill*, students can view a photograph of President Johnson signing the Civil Rights Act on July 2, 1964. They can see the bill by clicking on The Civil Rights Act of 1964.

**Bibliography for Students**


See the *Teachers* section of the website for a complete bibliography for young readers.
Report to the American People on Civil Rights
June 11, 1963

President Kennedy: Good evening, my fellow citizens:

This afternoon, following a series of threats and defiant statements, the presence of Alabama National Guardsmen was required on the University of Alabama to carry out the final and unequivocal order of the United States District Court of the Northern District of Alabama. That order called for the admission of two clearly qualified young Alabama residents who happened to have been born Negro.

That they were admitted peacefully on the campus is due in good measure to the conduct of the students of the University of Alabama, who met their responsibilities in a constructive way.

I hope that every American, regardless of where he lives, will stop and examine his conscience about this and other related incidents. This Nation was founded by men of many nations and backgrounds. It was founded on the principle that all men are created equal, and that the rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened.

Today we are committed to a worldwide struggle to promote and protect the rights of all who wish to be free. And when Americans are sent to Viet-Nam or West Berlin, we do not ask for whites only. It ought to be possible, therefore, for American students of any color to attend any public institution they select without having to be backed up by troops.

It ought to be possible for American consumers of any color to receive equal service in places of public accommodation, such as hotels and restaurants and theaters and retail stores, without being forced to resort to demonstrations in the street, and it ought to be possible for American citizens of any color to register and to vote in a free election without interference or fear of reprisal.

It ought to be possible, in short, for every American to enjoy the privileges of being American without regard to his race or his color. In short, every American ought to have the right to be treated as he would wish to be treated, as one would wish his children to be treated. But this is not the case.
The Negro baby born in America today, regardless of the section of the Nation in which he is born, has about one-half as much chance of completing a high school as a white baby born in the same place on the same day, one-third as much chance of completing college, one-third as much chance of becoming a professional man, twice as much chance of becoming unemployed, about one-seventh as much chance of earning $10,000 a year, a life expectancy which is 7 years shorter, and the prospects of earning only half as much.

This is not a sectional issue. Difficulties over segregation and discrimination exist in every city, in every State of the Union, producing in many cities a rising tide of discontent that threatens the public safety. Nor is this a partisan issue. In a time of domestic crisis men of good will and generosity should be able to unite regardless of party or politics. This is not even a legal or legislative issue alone. It is better to settle these matters in the courts than on the streets, and new laws are needed at every level, but law alone cannot make men see right.

We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the scriptures and is as dear as the American Constitution.

The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities, whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated. If an American, because his skin is dark, cannot eat lunch in a restaurant open to the public, if he cannot send his children to the best public school available, if he cannot vote for the public officials who represent him, if, in short, he cannot enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place? Who among us would then be content with the counsels of patience and delay?

One hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs, their grandsons, are not fully free. They are not yet freed from the bonds of injustice. They are not yet freed from social and economic oppression. And this Nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts, will not be fully free until all its citizens are free.

We preach freedom around the world, and we mean it, and we cherish our freedom here at home, but are we to say to the world, and much more importantly, to each other that this is a land of the free except for the Negroes;
that we have no second-class citizens except Negroes; that we have no class or cast system, no ghettos, no master race except with respect to Negroes?

Now the time has come for this Nation to fulfill its promise. The events in Birmingham and elsewhere have so increased the cries for equality that no city or State or legislative body can prudently choose to ignore them.

The fires of frustration and discord are burning in every city, North and South, where legal remedies are not at hand. Re-dress is sought in the streets, in demonstrations, parades, and protests which create tensions and threaten violence and threaten lives.

We face, therefore, a moral crisis as a country and as a people. It cannot be met by repressive police action. It cannot be left to increased demonstrations in the streets. It cannot be quieted by token moves or talk. It is a time to act in the Congress, in your State and local legislative body and, above all, in all of our daily lives.

It is not enough to pin the blame on others, to say this is a problem of one section of the country or another, or deplore the fact that we face. A great change is at hand, and our task, our obligation, is to make that revolution, that change, peaceful and constructive for all.

Those who do nothing are inviting shame as well as violence. Those who act boldly are recognizing right as well as reality.

Next week I shall ask the Congress of the United States to act, to make a commitment it has not fully made in this century to the proposition that race has no place in American life or law. The Federal judiciary has upheld that proposition in a series of forthright cases. The executive branch has adopted that proposition in the conduct of its affairs, including the employment of Federal personnel, the use of Federal facilities, and the sale of federally financed housing.

But there are other necessary measures which only the Congress can provide, and they must be provided at this session. The old code of equity law under which we live commands for every wrong a remedy, but in too many communities, in too many parts of the country, wrongs are inflicted on Negro
citizens and there are no remedies at law. Unless the Congress acts, their only remedy is in the street.

I am, therefore, asking the Congress to enact legislation giving all Americans the right to be served in facilities which are open to the public-hotels, restaurants, theaters, retail stores, and similar establishments.

This seems to me to be an elementary right. Its denial is an arbitrary indignity that no American in 1963 should have to endure, but many do.

I have recently met with scores of business leaders urging them to take voluntary action to end this discrimination and I have been encouraged by their response, and in the last 2 weeks over 75 cities have seen progress made in desegregating these kinds of facilities. But many are unwilling to act alone, and for this reason, nationwide legislation is needed if we are to move this problem from the streets to the courts.

I am also asking Congress to authorize the Federal Government to participate more fully in lawsuits designed to end segregation in public education. We have succeeded in persuading many districts to desegregate voluntarily. Dozens have admitted Negroes without violence. Today a Negro is attending a State-supported institution in every one of our 50 States, but the pace is very slow.

Too many Negro children entering segregated grade schools at the time of the Supreme Court's decision 9 years ago will enter segregated high schools this fall, having suffered a loss which can never be restored. The lack of an adequate education denies the Negro a chance to get a decent job.

The orderly implementation of the Supreme Court decision, therefore, cannot be left solely to those who may not have the economic resources to carry the legal action or who may be subject to harassment.

Other features will be also requested, including greater protection for the right to vote. But legislation, I repeat, cannot solve this problem alone. It must be solved in the homes of every American in every community across our country.
In this respect, I want to pay tribute to those citizens North and South who have been working in their communities to make life better for all. They are acting not out of a sense of legal duty but out of a sense of human decency.

Like our soldiers and sailors in all parts of the world they are meeting freedom's challenge on the firing line, and I salute them for their honor and their courage.

My fellow Americans, this is a problem which faces us all - in every city of the North as well as the South. Today there are Negroes unemployed, two or three times as many compared to whites, inadequate in education, moving into the large cities, unable to find work, young people particularly out of work without hope, denied equal rights, denied the opportunity to eat at a restaurant or lunch counter or go to a movie theater, denied the right to a decent education, denied almost today the right to attend a State university even though qualified. It seems to me that these are matters which concern us all, not merely Presidents or Congressmen or Governors, but every citizen of the United States.

This is one country. It has become one country because all of us and all the people who came here had an equal chance to develop their talents.

We cannot say to 10 percent of the population that you can't have that right; that your children can't have the chance to develop whatever talents they have; that the only way that they are going to get their rights is to go into the streets and demonstrate. I think we owe them and we owe ourselves a better country than that.

Therefore, I am asking for your help in making it easier for us to move ahead and to provide the kind of equality of treatment which we would want ourselves; to give a chance for every child to be educated to the limit of his talents.

As I have said before, not every child has an equal talent or an equal ability or an equal motivation, but they should have the equal right to develop their talent and their ability and their motivation, to make something of themselves.
We have a right to expect that the Negro community will be responsible, will uphold the law, but they have a right to expect that the law will be fair, that the Constitution will be color blind, as Justice Harlan said at the turn of the century.

This is what we are talking about and this is a matter which concerns this country and what it stands for, and in meeting it I ask the support of all our citizens.

Thank you very much.
Report to the American People on Civil Rights
(Divided into sections)
June 11, 1963

Section 1

President Kennedy: Good evening, my fellow citizens:

This afternoon, following a series of threats and defiant statements, the presence of Alabama National Guardsmen was required on the University of Alabama to carry out the final and unequivocal order of the United States District Court of the Northern District of Alabama. That order called for the admission of two clearly qualified young Alabama residents who happened to have been born Negro.

That they were admitted peacefully on the campus is due in good measure to the conduct of the students of the University of Alabama, who met their responsibilities in a constructive way.

I hope that every American, regardless of where he lives, will stop and examine his conscience about this and other related incidents. This Nation was founded by men of many nations and backgrounds. It was founded on the principle that all men are created equal, and that the rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened.

Today we are committed to a worldwide struggle to promote and protect the rights of all who wish to be free. And when Americans are sent to Viet-Nam or West Berlin, we do not ask for whites only. It ought to be possible, therefore, for American students of any color to attend any public institution they select without having to be backed up by troops.

It ought to be possible for American consumers of any color to receive equal service in places of public accommodation, such as hotels and restaurants and theaters and retail stores, without being forced to resort to demonstrations in the street, and it ought to be possible for American citizens of any color to register and to vote in a free election without interference or fear of reprisal.

It ought to be possible, in short, for every American to enjoy the privileges of being American without regard to his race or his color. In short,
every American ought to have the right to be treated as he would wish to be treated, as one would wish his children to be treated. But this is not the case.

Section 2

The Negro baby born in America today, regardless of the section of the Nation in which he is born, has about one-half as much chance of completing a high school as a white baby born in the same place on the same day, one-third as much chance of completing college, one-third as much chance of becoming a professional man, twice as much chance of becoming unemployed, about one-seventh as much chance of earning $10,000 a year, a life expectancy which is 7 years shorter, and the prospects of earning only half as much.

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We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the scriptures and is as dear as the American Constitution.

Section 3

The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities, whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated. If an American, because his skin is dark, cannot eat lunch in a restaurant open to the public, if he cannot send his children to the best public school available, if he cannot vote for the public officials who represent him, if, in short, he cannot enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place? Who among us would then be content with the counsels of patience and delay?

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from the bonds of injustice. They are not yet freed from social and economic oppression. And this Nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts, will not be fully free until all its citizens are free.

Section 4

We preach freedom around the world, and we mean it, and we cherish our freedom here at home, but are we to say to the world, and much more importantly, to each other that this is a land of the free except for the Negroes; that we have no second-class citizens except Negroes; that we have no class or cast system, no ghettos, no master race except with respect to Negroes?

Now the time has come for this Nation to fulfill its promise. The events in Birmingham and elsewhere have so increased the cries for equality that no city or State or legislative body can prudently choose to ignore them.

The fires of frustration and discord are burning in every city, North and South, where legal remedies are not at hand. Re-dress is sought in the streets, in demonstrations, parades, and protests which create tensions and threaten violence and threaten lives.

Section 5

We face, therefore, a moral crisis as a country and as a people. It cannot be met by repressive police action. It cannot be left to increased demonstrations in the streets. It cannot be quieted by token moves or talk. It is a time to act in the Congress, in your State and local legislative body and, above all, in all of our daily lives.

It is not enough to pin the blame on others, to say this is a problem of one section of the country or another, or deplore the fact that we face. A great change is at hand, and our task, our obligation, is to make that revolution, that change, peaceful and constructive for all.

Those who do nothing are inviting shame as well as violence. Those who act boldly are recognizing right as well as reality.
Section 6

Next week I shall ask the Congress of the United States to act, to make a commitment it has not fully made in this century to the proposition that race has no place in American life or law. The Federal judiciary has upheld that proposition in a series of forthright cases. The executive branch has adopted that proposition in the conduct of its affairs, including the employment of Federal personnel, the use of Federal facilities, and the sale of federally financed housing.

But there are other necessary measures which only the Congress can provide, and they must be provided at this session. The old code of equity law under which we live commands for every wrong a remedy, but in too many communities, in too many parts of the country, wrongs are inflicted on Negro citizens and there are no remedies at law. Unless the Congress acts, their only remedy is in the street.

I am, therefore, asking the Congress to enact legislation giving all Americans the right to be served in facilities which are open to the public-hotels, restaurants, theaters, retail stores, and similar establishments.

This seems to me to be an elementary right. Its denial is an arbitrary indignity that no American in 1963 should have to endure, but many do.

I have recently met with scores of business leaders urging them to take voluntary action to end this discrimination and I have been encouraged by their response, and in the last 2 weeks over 75 cities have seen progress made in desegregating these kinds of facilities. But many are unwilling to act alone, and for this reason, nationwide legislation is needed if we are to move this problem from the streets to the courts.

Section 7

I am also asking Congress to authorize the Federal Government to participate more fully in lawsuits designed to end segregation in public education. We have succeeded in persuading many districts to desegregate voluntarily. Dozens have admitted Negroes without violence. Today a Negro is attending a State-supported institution in every one of our 50 States, but the pace is very slow.
Too many Negro children entering segregated grade schools at the time of the Supreme Court's decision 9 years ago will enter segregated high schools this fall, having suffered a loss which can never be restored. The lack of an adequate education denies the Negro a chance to get a decent job.

The orderly implementation of the Supreme Court decision, therefore, cannot be left solely to those who may not have the economic resources to carry the legal action or who may be subject to harassment.

Other features will be also requested, including greater protection for the right to vote. But legislation, I repeat, cannot solve this problem alone. It must be solved in the homes of every American in every community across our country.

In this respect, I want to pay tribute to those citizens North and South who have been working in their communities to make life better for all. They are acting not out of a sense of legal duty but out of a sense of human decency.

Like our soldiers and sailors in all parts of the world they are meeting freedom's challenge on the firing line, and I salute them for their honor and their courage.

Section 8

My fellow Americans, this is a problem which faces us all - in every city of the North as well as the South. Today there are Negroes unemployed, two or three times as many compared to whites, inadequate in education, moving into the large cities, unable to find work, young people particularly out of work without hope, denied equal rights, denied the opportunity to eat at a restaurant or lunch counter or go to a movie theater, denied the right to a decent education, denied almost today the right to attend a State university even though qualified. It seems to me that these are matters which concern us all, not merely Presidents or Congressmen or Governors, but every citizen of the United States.

This is one country. It has become one country because all of us and all the people who came here had an equal chance to develop their talents.
We cannot say to 10 percent of the population that you can't have that right; that your children can't have the chance to develop whatever talents they have; that the only way that they are going to get their rights is to go into the streets and demonstrate. I think we owe them and we owe ourselves a better country than that.

Section 9

Therefore, I am asking for your help in making it easier for us to move ahead and to provide the kind of equality of treatment which we would want ourselves; to give a chance for every child to be educated to the limit of his talents.

As I have said before, not every child has an equal talent or an equal ability or an equal motivation, but they should have the equal right to develop their talent and their ability and their motivation, to make something of themselves.

We have a right to expect that the Negro community will be responsible, will uphold the law, but they have a right to expect that the law will be fair, that the Constitution will be color blind, as Justice Harlan said at the turn of the century.

This is what we are talking about and this is a matter which concerns this country and what it stands for, and in meeting it I ask the support of all our citizens.

Thank you very much.
Glossary

civil rights – A right is something you are allowed to do by law. In the United States, all citizens 18 years or older have the right to vote. When we talk about civil rights we mean the things we think everyone should be able to do as a citizen: you have the right to go to school, purchase items in stores, find housing, play in parks, go to the movies. It includes voting and being treated fairly. Many different groups have struggled for civil rights throughout history: women, native people, people with disabilities, and elderly people, to name a few. When we talk about the civil rights movement that took place during the 1960s, it often means the ongoing struggle for equal rights for African-American people in the United States.

desegregation – Desegregation is another word for integration; it means putting people of different races together. In the 1954 lawsuit Brown v. Board of Education, the Supreme Court ruled that “separate but equal” would not be allowed in this country. According to this court ruling, all public schools had to desegregate. The Supreme Court decided that it was unfair to have separate schools for black children and white children. It took many years for schools to make this change and open their doors to African-American students.

demonstration – To demonstrate (or protest) means to express your opinion as a group in a public place. When you organize a demonstration, you gather a group of people to take action to try to change something you don’t like or you think isn’t fair. In the civil rights movement, leaders organized demonstrations so that people could march together to try to make things more fair. Demonstrators held signs with messages about changes they wanted to make happen. Demonstrations were organized to try to end segregation and racial discrimination.

federal – There are different levels of government in the United States. There is local government for towns and cities, a state government for each of the fifty states, and a federal government for the whole country. Federal describes the rules, offices, and services that apply to all fifty states. Federal judiciary means the court system for the whole country. Federal personnel are the people who work for the national government.

integration – Integration means mixing together. During the civil rights movement, people worked towards integration so that black people would have the right to go to the same places as white people. Integrating public facilities meant that black people could go to the same restaurants, movie theaters, parks, and schools as white people.

legislation – A law. Civil rights legislation is a law that says all people have equal rights. Legislative means something having to do with the law. For
example, the job of the legislative branch of the government is to make and approve laws.

**Negro** – Until about 1967, Negro was one of the acceptable words used by Americans of all races to identify black or African-American people. When John F. Kennedy delivered his Report to the American People on Civil Rights on June 11, 1963, the word “Negro” was not thought of as a negative word by most people. However, around 1967, some black leaders and thinkers criticized the word and believed it was important for Americans of African descent to choose their own way to describe themselves. They preferred to the words “black” and then “Afro-American.” Now we use “black,” “African-American,” or “a person of color” to describe Americans of African descent.

**public accommodation** – An accommodation is an organization, business, or other place that serves people in some way. Restaurants, stores, movie theaters, parks, and swimming pools are all considered public accommodations because anyone might decide to enter them or use them. Many towns and cities in the South had segregated accommodations; African-American people were not welcomed or served in restaurants, hotels, stores, and theaters.

**racial discrimination** – To discriminate is to make a choice based on differences. Racial discrimination happens when someone is treated unfairly based on his or her skin color. In the segregated South, there was racial discrimination when black people were not allowed to go to schools, restaurants, theaters and other places that were reserved for white people only.

**segregation** - Segregation means separation. When President Kennedy was in office, there were some states that had laws to keep black people and white people separate. African-Americans could not use the same public water fountains and bathrooms as white Americans. Many movie theaters, restaurants, and parks were only open to white people or had separate sections for black people. The facilities for white people were usually of better quality than those set aside for African-Americans.
Report to the American People on Civil Rights, June 11, 1963

Section # _____________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of section</th>
<th>Main Argument(s)</th>
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1. 

2. 

3.
Suggested Responses for Section Summaries and Main Arguments
(For teacher use)

Section 1:

Sample summary: Alabama National Guardsmen were needed at the University of Alabama. They carried out the court order that allowed two black students to attend the college. The students were respectful and that helped make it a peaceful entrance. America was created with the idea that all people are equal. We ask people of all races to defend our country. Americans of any race should be able to go to restaurants, hotels, theaters and stories. No one should have to organize a protest just to be able to use public places. All citizens should have the right to vote. We should treat others the way we want to be treated.

Main argument(s):
- American stands for freedom and equality.
- Everyone should have equal rights.
- Everyone should be able to go to public places.
- We should treat others the way we want to be treated.

Section 2:

Sample summary: At this time, an African-American person has much less opportunity to receive a good education or well-paying job as a white person. People are being treated unfairly based on race in all parts of America, not just in one city or one part of the country. We need to come together to solve the problem. It is better to use the laws to make things more fair, than have demonstrations, and we need new laws. But we need more than laws. This is about right and wrong. Treating people fairly has been a problem for a long time (as old as the Bible). We can look to the American Constitution to keep things fair.

Main argument(s):
- African-Americans do not have equal rights at this time.
- This is about fairness.

Section 3:

Sample summary: Think about what it would be like to be told you could not eat at a restaurant or send your children to a good school or vote. Would you want to be treated that way? Would you want someone to tell you just wait for awhile longer and things will get better? It’s already been one hundred years since slavery ended but African Americans do not yet have equal rights. We do not truly have a fully free country until we all have equal rights.

Main argument(s)
• Treat others as you want to be treated.
• Freedom is part of our country’s history but we do not have a fully free America at this time.

Section 4:

Sample summary: This country stands for freedom. How can we say we stand for freedom if there is a group of people who are not treated equally? There is too much conflict about equality to ignore the issue. If we don’t have laws to make things more fair, people hold protests and demonstrations which make the conflict worse and can lead to violence.

Main argument(s)
• America stands for freedom.
• People should not have to demonstrate to get equal rights.

Section 5:

Sample summary: We have to act now and make a decision between right and wrong. We can’t just let the police arrest people, or have more and more demonstrations. We need to take a big step which includes passing laws and thinking about how to treat others fairly. We need to make big changes and make sure they are peaceful and for the good of all.

Main argument(s)
• We need to act now.
• People should not have to demonstrate to get equal rights.
• We want fairness, not violence.

Section 6:

Sample summary: I am going to ask lawmakers in this country (Congress) to pass a law that will make sure people of all races have equal rights. Since there are many places in the country where laws do not protect African Americans, the only way they can achieve equal treatment is by demonstrating. I am going to ask Congress to pass a law so that Americans of all races can be served in hotels, restaurants, theaters, and stores. Some businesses are welcoming people of all races but not all businesses are doing this. We need a law to make sure this happens so that people don’t have to demonstrate, they can take someone to court who treats them unfairly based on the color of their skin.

Main arguments(s)
• We need a law to make sure people are treated fairly.
• People should not have to demonstrate to get equal rights.
Section 7:

Sample summary: We should include desegregation of schools in a new civil rights law. It is taking a long time for schools to integrate and African Americans need to be able to have a good education to get good jobs. All citizens should also have the right to vote. It will take more than a new law to make things fairer. It is up to each person in the country to treat people of all races fairly and with respect. People who have been treating all people with respect deserve to be recognized.

Main arguments(s):

- We need a law to make sure people get a good education.
- People need to treat people fairly in their daily lives.

Section 8:

Sample summary: African Americans are not being treated fairly. They have higher unemployment, less opportunity for a good education, and are not allowed to go into all public places. America stands for equality. We cannot tell one group the only way you are going to have equal rights is to hold demonstrations.

Main arguments(s):

- African Americans do not have equal rights.
- America stands for equality.

Section 9:

Sample summary: Everyone should help in making sure that we treat others the way we want to be treated. Every child should have the chance to develop his or her talents. We have to expect that African Americans will respect the law but we have to have laws that make sure people have equal rights.

Main argument:

- Everyone should have equal rights regardless of skin color.
Suggested Arguments with Reasons and Evidence  
(For teacher use)

1. Everyone should be able to go to public places like movie theaters and restaurants regardless of skin color.
   - I am, therefore, asking the Congress to enact legislation giving all Americans the right to be served in facilities which are open to the public—hotels, restaurants, theaters, retail stores, and similar establishments.

   This seems to me to be an elementary right. Its denial is an arbitrary indignity that no American in 1963 should have to endure, but many do.

   - We preach freedom around the world, and we mean it, and we cherish our freedom here at home, but are we to say to the world, and much more importantly, to each other that this is a land of the free except for the Negroes; that we have no second-class citizens except Negroes; that we have no class or cast system, no ghettos, no master race except with respect to Negroes?

   - It ought to be possible for American consumers of any color to receive equal service in places of public accommodation, such as hotels and restaurants and theaters and retail stores, without being forced to resort to demonstrations in the street, and it ought to be possible for American citizens of any color to register and to vote in a free election without interference or fear of reprisal.

2. Education is not equal for everyone. Every student has the right to a good education.
   - The Negro baby born in America today, regardless of the section of the Nation in which he is born, has about one-half as much chance of completing a high school as a white baby born in the same place on the same day, one-third as much chance of completing college, one-third as much chance of becoming a professional man, twice as much chance of becoming unemployed, about one seventh as much chance of earning $10,000 a year, a life expectancy which is 7 years shorter, and the prospects of earning only half as much.

   - As I have said before, not every child has an equal talent or an equal ability or an equal motivation, but they should have the equal right to develop their talent and their ability and their motivation, to make something of themselves.
• Therefore, I am asking for your help in making it easier for us to move ahead and to provide the kind of equality of treatment which we would want ourselves; to give a chance for every child to be educated to the limit of his talents.

• Today we are committed to a worldwide struggle to promote and protect the rights of all who wish to be free. And when Americans are sent to Viet-Nam or West Berlin, we do not ask for whites only. It ought to be possible, therefore, for American students of any color to attend any public institution they select without having to be backed up by troops.

• Too many Negro children entering segregated grade schools at the time of the Supreme Court's decision 9 years ago will enter segregated high schools this fall, having suffered a loss which can never be restored. The lack of an adequate education denies the Negro a chance to get a decent job.

3. America stands for freedom and equality.

• I hope that every American, regardless of where he lives, will stop and examine his conscience about this and other related incidents. This Nation was founded by men of many nations and backgrounds. It was founded on the principle that all men are created equal, and that the rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened.

• One hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs, their grandsons, are not fully free. They are not yet freed from the bonds of injustice. They are not yet freed from social and economic oppression. And this Nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts, will not be fully free until all its citizens are free.

• We have a right to expect that the Negro community will be responsible, will uphold the law, but they have a right to expect that the law will be fair, that the Constitution will be color blind, as Justice Harlan said at the turn of the century.

• This is one country. It has become one country because all of us and all the people who came here had an equal chance to develop their talents.

4. We need new laws to make sure people are treated fairly.

• I have recently met with scores of business leaders urging them to take voluntary action to end this discrimination and I have been encouraged by their response, and in the last 2 weeks over 75 cities have seen progress made in desegregating these kinds of facilities. But many are unwilling to
act alone, and for this reason, nationwide legislation is needed if we are to move this problem from the streets to the courts.

- But there are other necessary measures which only the Congress can provide, and they must be provided at this session. The old code of equity law under which we live commands for every wrong a remedy, but in too many communities, in too many parts of the country, wrongs are inflicted on Negro citizens and there are no remedies at law. Unless the Congress acts, their only remedy is in the street.

5. People need to take action in their daily lives to end discrimination.

- It is not enough to pin the blame on others, to say this is a problem of one section of the country or another, or deplore the fact that we face. A great change is at hand, and our task, our obligation, is to make that revolution, that change, peaceful and constructive for all.

Those who do nothing are inviting shame as well as violence. Those who act boldly are recognizing right as well as reality.

- Other features will be also requested, including greater protection for the right to vote. But legislation, I repeat, cannot solve this problem alone. It must be solved in the homes of every American in every community across our country.

In this respect, I want to pay tribute to those citizens North and South who have been working in their communities to make life better for all. They are acting not out of a sense of legal duty but out of a sense of human decency.

Like our soldiers and sailors in all parts of the world they are meeting freedom’s challenge on the firing line, and I salute them for their honor and their courage.

- We face, therefore, a moral crisis as a country and as a people. It cannot be met by repressive police action. It cannot be left to increased demonstrations in the streets. It cannot be quieted by token moves or talk. It is a time to act in the Congress, in your State and local legislative body and, above all, in all of our daily lives.

6. We should treat people the way we want to be treated.

- It ought to be possible, in short, for every American to enjoy the privileges of being American without regard to his race or his color. In short, every
American ought to have the right to be treated as he would wish to be treated, as one would wish his children to be treated. But this is not the case.

- The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities, whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated. If an American, because his skin is dark, cannot eat lunch in a restaurant open to the public, if he cannot send his children to the best public school available, if he cannot vote for the public officials who represent him, if, in short, he cannot enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place? Who among us would then be content with the counsels of patience and delay?

- Therefore, I am asking for your help in making it easier for us to move ahead and to provide the kind of equality of treatment which we would want ourselves; to give a chance for every child to be educated to the limit of his talents.