

RESOURCE LIBRARY
ACTIVITY : 1 HR

The Impact of the JFK Assassination on American Politics

Students analyze the impact of John F. Kennedy's death on the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act. Students analyze election data to evaluate the impact of these landmark pieces of legislation on politics in the United States.

GRADES

9 - 12+

SUBJECTS

Social Studies, U.S. History

CONTENTS

1 Audio, 2 PDFs, 1 Resource, 4 Links

OVERVIEW

Students analyze the impact of John F. Kennedy's death on the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act. Students analyze election data to evaluate the impact of these landmark pieces of legislation on politics in the United States.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/impact-jfk-assassination-american-politics/>

Program

KILLING
KENNEDY

DIRECTIONS

1. Elicit prior student knowledge about the civil rights movement.

Ask students to share what they know about the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Encourage students to draw upon their knowledge of the movement's leaders, goals, and political successes.

Explain to students that they are going to analyze one of the catalysts for the political successes of the civil rights movement—the assassination of President John F. Kennedy—and how those same political successes affected American politics in the 1960s. At the end of the activity, they will be expected to summarize their findings in an essay answering the question: To what extent was President Lyndon Johnson correct when he reportedly said, "*We have lost the South for a generation*"?

2. Listen to JFK's 1963 speech on civil rights legislation.

Play the provided audio of JFK's 1963 speech on civil rights. Ask students to identify Kennedy's reasons for pushing for civil rights legislation and to write those reasons in their notebooks as they listen.

Have students share what they learned after listening to the speech, and list their responses on a whiteboard or poster paper. Correct any misconceptions or errors in student responses.

3. Analyze LBJ's reaction to Kennedy's assassination.

Explain that despite Kennedy's push for civil rights legislation, he was assassinated before Congress was able to pass a bill. But after Kennedy's death, the new president, Lyndon Johnson, thought it was possible to get a civil rights bill through Congress.

Distribute the LBJ and Civil Rights Movement worksheet. As they read the speech on the worksheet, students should respond to the questions.

After working independently, allow students to compare responses with a partner or small group. Then, bring the class back together to discuss LBJ's speech. Ensure that all student responses can be supported with evidence from the text.

4. Assess LBJ's alleged quotation: "We have lost the South for a generation."

Share the following information about the Civil Rights Act of 1964: *In 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act and one year later passed the Voting Rights Act. These two laws made segregation and voting discrimination in the United States illegal. While these two laws had major impacts—specifically making discrimination illegal and putting a legal end to years of inequality—these laws also had major impacts on the American political system.*

Project the HR. 7152. PASSAGE. website depicting the voting results of the Senate on the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act. Ask students:

- *What do you notice about the geographic breakdown of votes?*
- *Does this surprise you? Why or why not?*

Next, project the electoral map from John F. Kennedy's 1960 election. Ask:

- *How does this compare to the previous map? What's different?*

Tell students they will now use election data to analyze the extent to which LBJ was correct when he reportedly claimed the Democratic Party lost the South for a generation. Distribute the T-chart handout to students and direct them to use the two following headings: 1) Supports LBJ's claim, and 2) Refutes LBJ's claim. Inform students that as they examine their data, they need to add their findings to this T-chart. Model how to do this with students, using examples from the Senate on the Civil Rights Act of 1964 map and electoral map from John F. Kennedy's 1960 election. Ask: *How would you categorize the two maps we examined earlier on this T-chart?* In addition to summarized information, add specific data examples from each map to the two columns.

Divide the class into small groups, and provide each group with a computer. Direct students to the websites listed below and instruct them to look at multiple election years. Remind students that they need to decide if each election supports or refutes LBJ's supposed claim and that they should add this information to their T-charts.

- National Archives Presidential Election Data
- Southern Gubernatorial Elections

5. Students write an essay supporting their claims by summarizing their findings.

After students have completed their T-charts, ask them to respond to the following essay question: To what extent was President Lyndon Johnson correct when he reportedly claimed, “*We have lost the South for a generation*”? Inform students that their essay must include:

- An evaluative thesis that fully answers the question
- Evidence supporting their thesis
- Explanation of evidence

Collect student responses.

Modification

If students are already familiar with the history of the civil rights movement in the early twentieth century, do not have them read the pre-lesson handout on civil rights.

Tip

If students are having a hard time visualizing the geographic distribution of the 1964 Senate vote in step 4, show this map from [1964 Senate Vote for Civil Rights Act H.R. 7152](#).

Tip

If students struggle to examine the election maps, project maps and discuss with all students.

Modification

If you do not have access to student computers, print out or project relevant data to allow students to complete the activity.

Tip

If you have access to a document camera, use it to help students set up their T-chart and model effective note taking.

Informal Assessment

Allow students to finish the essay for homework. Collect the essay and assess using the provided grading rubric.

Extending the Learning

Have students conduct research to evaluate the effectiveness of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act on ending discrimination in the United States.

OBJECTIVES

Subjects & Disciplines

Social Studies

- U.S. History

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- explain the impact of President Kennedy's assassination on the passage of civil rights and voting rights legislation by analyzing rhetoric in Lyndon Johnson's message to Congress
- assess impact of Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act on American politics by analyzing data from presidential and gubernatorial elections and public opinion polls
- analyze maps and apply their analysis to support an argument

Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

Teaching Methods

- Discovery learning
- Discussions
- Inquiry
- Multimedia instruction
- Research

Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
 - Information, Media, and Technology Skills
 - Information Literacy
 - Information, Communications, and Technology Literacy
 - Media Literacy
 - Learning and Innovation Skills
 - Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Critical Thinking Skills
 - Analyzing
 - Evaluating
 - Understanding

National Standards, Principles, and Practices

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM STANDARDS

- Theme 3:

People, Places, and Environments

- Theme 4:

Individual Development and Identity

- Theme 5:

Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

ISTE STANDARDS FOR STUDENTS (ISTE STANDARDS*S)

- Standard 4:

Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

Preparation

What You'll Need

MATERIALS YOU PROVIDE

- Paper
- Pencils
- Pens

REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY

- Internet Access: Required
- Tech Setup: 1 computer per learner, Projector, Speakers
- Plug-Ins: Flash

PHYSICAL SPACE

- Classroom
- Computer lab

GROUPING

- Large-group instruction

OTHER NOTES

Important to Note: It would be wrong for students to argue that John Kennedy's death led to the reshaping of the Democratic Party. Although it occurred after his death, those demographic changes were well underway as the Democratic Party became increasingly progressive, marginalizing southern voters who did not embody the new Democratic platform. Yet this seems to be the obvious response.

BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

Background Information

During the first half of the twentieth century, African-Americans were systematically denied civil rights guaranteed in the Constitution. Barred from voting and forced to endure a demeaning existence in a segregated society, the civil rights movement sought to redress these inequalities. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy actively voiced his support for comprehensive civil rights legislation, yet before he was able to push such a bill through

Congress, he was assassinated. Taking up Kennedy's mantle, President Lyndon Johnson helped secure passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act, partially as a tribute to Kennedy.

These two laws had dramatic impacts on American politics. Although the South had voted for the Democratic Party since the Civil War, the party's support for civil rights legislation pushed many southerners to realign with the Republican Party in national elections. At a state level, Republicans came to dominate southern politics, but the transition happened more slowly.

Prior Knowledge

["General understanding of the politics of the Jim Crow South", "Working knowledge of discrimination and tactics used in southern states to suppress African-American voting", "Understanding of and experience analyzing maps and public opinion data to make inferences and draw conclusions"]

Recommended Prior Activities

- None

Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
discrimination	<i>noun</i>	treatment based on a group to which a person belongs, not the person himself.
integration	<i>noun</i>	process of mixing different substances or groups.
Jim Crow	<i>adjective</i>	(1874-1965) set of laws, rules, and behaviors that enforced segregation between African Americans and whites in the American South.
racism	<i>noun</i>	governmental or social systems based on the belief that one race or ethnic group is superior to others.
segregation	<i>noun</i>	the systemic separation of people based on race, religion, or caste.

For Further Exploration

Websites

- [Civil Rights Museum](#)
- [PBS: Eyes on the Prize](#)
- [Library of Congress: Civil Rights Act](#)
- [Digital Library of Georgia: Civil Rights Digital Library](#)
- [U.S. Senate: Landmark Legislation: The Civil Rights Act of 1964](#)

PARTNER



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