



A PBS feature broadcast of Black History Month



# DISCUSSION GUIDE

# JOHN LEWIS GET IN THE WAY

**"He is the moving, roaring protector of the rights afforded every person in this nation. *Get in the Way* arrives at the perfect moment!"** ALFRE WOODARD, ACTOR, ACTIVIST

**"Trump, as you may recall, tweeted that Lewis was 'all talk, talk, talk — no action or results.' The documentary will show just how wrong he was. Lewis is all action, action, action."** BOSTON GLOBE

**"The values he embodies are more important than ever. Recent events signal a new urgency to see this inspiring film portrait."** ASSOCIATED PRESS

EARLY LIGHT PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS *John Lewis: Get in the Way* A Film by Kathleen Dowdey  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER Charles Floyd Johnson CONSULTING PRODUCER Donna Brown Guillaume EDITOR Lillian E. Benson DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY Charles Schner  
MUSIC Camara Kambon STORY CONSULTANT Jed Dannenbaum CO-PRODUCERS Jim Carr, Karen Elizabeth Price PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY Kathleen Dowdey

[getinthewaymovie.com](http://getinthewaymovie.com) [info@earlylightproductions.com](mailto:info@earlylightproductions.com)

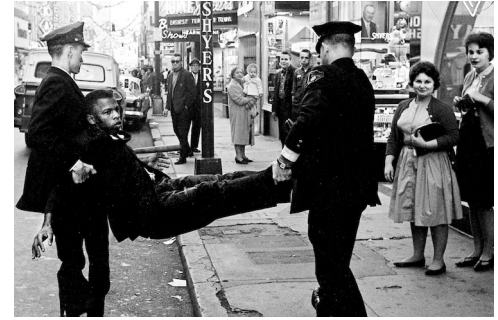
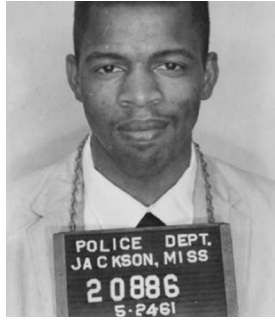
Major funding provided by: Alabama Humanities Foundation, The Coca-Cola Company, Kendeda Fund, Natalie & Matthew Bernstein, Kraft Foods, Sapelo Foundation, PBS

© 2017 Early Light Productions

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Filmmaker Statement .....	3
II. About the Film .....	4
III. The U.S. Civil Rights Movement in Historical Context (Valerie Hunt, Ph. D.) .....	5
IV. The U.S. Civil Rights Movement in Global Context (Roni Amit, J.D., Ph.D.).....	9
V. The Civil Rights Movement Continues Today (Syreeta McFadden) .....	12
VI. Questions for Discussion.....	18
VII. Activities .....	19
VIII. Resources.....	21

# I. FILMMAKER STATEMENT



When I was growing up, the elders of my Irish Catholic family used to talk about an earlier time when they were marginalized, excluded, rebuffed and ridiculed. I believe it was because of these memories that they were fierce when defending the rights of those who were treated unfairly. None of them ever said it was my duty to take a stand. It was simply an ethos the family embraced and prided itself in upholding.

My father, a trial lawyer in Washington D.C., was known at the courthouse as an ardent liberal Irishman. He used the law to challenge social and economic inequality in cases involving school segregation and unfair housing practices. His clients were often so-called troublemakers like SNCC organizer Marion Barry and the D.C. Black Panthers. Years later, I learned the source of my father's commitment to justice when I made my first films in Ireland. Subjugated by colonial rule for centuries, the Irish persisted in their fight for independence by employing every tactic imaginable, usually against overwhelming odds.

While producing a documentary film about a progressive southern newspaper editor in Atlanta, I met and interviewed John Lewis for the first time. As he told his story of growing up in Pike County, Alabama, he explained how he hated the laws and customs of racial segregation, but he had to accept them. I was struck by how vividly he portrayed this conflict: his youthful, frustrated spirit clashing with his elders who warned him to stay alert, be careful and behave. Though he disliked conforming, he also understood his family's caution. Like them, he had seen what happened to those who violated the laws and unspoken codes of segregation. It took Dr. King's message of nonviolence and the Montgomery Bus

Boycott to awaken young Lewis' to activism. His decision to stand up changed the course of his life. His story moved me to make this film.

Producing *Get in the Way* took over 20 years for me to complete. There were long gaps between shooting and several halting points of despair, but my persuasive, justice-seeking family kept reminding me of my legacy. Throughout those many years, I kept coming back to these same questions: What is the source of this man's strength? How could he stand up to such hate and violence? How did he hold on to his beliefs through the beatings and jail, the setbacks, humiliations and loss? As a documentarian, I sought nuanced answers to these questions and when I began following Lewis, I found them. My crew and I went everywhere with him, filming his routines, his workplace, his travel, his exchanges with family, staff, colleagues and strangers; his moments of pure energy and enthusiasm, his weariness and frustrations, his melancholy pauses and unexpected humor. From this footage, we offer a window into a man whose life is, in the end, beyond explanation.

Today our nation faces growing threats to the social, institutional and legal progress that marked so many of the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement. For social justice advocates of the 21st century, John Lewis' story has become invaluable. My team and I are honored to have made *Get in the Way* and we invite you to use this guide as a discovery companion. Explore Lewis' path and tactics. Analyze his actions. Trace the turns of his life. Reach out and exchange your ideas with others. Envision how you might move into the future and find your way to get in the way.

## II. ABOUT THE FILM



A film by Kathleen Dowdey, *John Lewis: Get in the Way* is the first biographical documentary about John Lewis. It is an inspiring portrait of one man cast into extraordinary times and his unhesitating dedication to seek justice for the marginalized and ignored. The film spans more than half a century, tracing Lewis' journey of courage, confrontations, and hard-won triumphs.

The son of sharecroppers, Lewis grew up in rural isolation, seemingly destined to a bleak, segregation-imposed future. But his fate took a different turn, and Lewis rose from Alabama's Black Belt to the corridors of power on Capitol Hill, his humble origins forever linking him to those whose voices customarily go unheard. A man of the people and a congressional elder statesman, Lewis is as exceptional as he is ordinary.

He was the youngest speaker at the historic 1963 March on Washington, where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his legendary "I Have a Dream" speech. And in March 1965, Lewis led the Bloody Sunday march in Selma, where

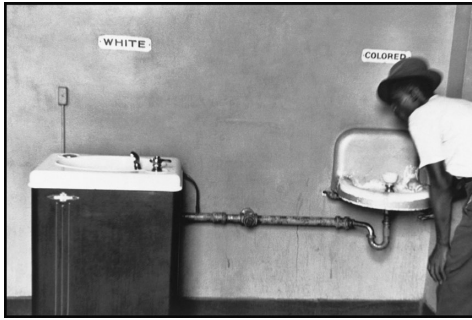
Alabama State Troopers attacked peaceful protesters with billy clubs, bullwhips, and tear gas. Their horrific actions were broadcast on nightly news reports into living rooms across America; eight months later, the Voting Rights Act was signed into law.

Through never-before-seen interviews shot over 20 years, Lewis tells the gripping tale of his role in these history-making events. Other key interviews include Civil Rights Activists Andrew Young, C.T. Vivian, Juanita Abernathy, and Bernard Lafayette, plus Lewis' congressional colleagues Eleanor Holmes Norton, Nancy Pelosi, Harry Reid, Emanuel Cleaver, and Amory Houghton.

Once an activist pushing from the outside, Lewis, now 77 years old, has become a determined legislator making noise on the inside. Considered by many to be the conscience of Congress, with equal measures of modesty and forcefulness, Lewis strives to persuade D.C. power brokers to hear the voices of the unheard.

# III. THE U.S. CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

BY V.F. HUNT, PH.D. (SEATTLE CENTRAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE)



## Jim Crow and Its Origins

The four-hundred-year institutionalized practice of enslavement of people of African descent in the U.S. ended at the conclusion of the Civil War (1861-1865).

Following this, the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877) involved the difficult task of enforcing the new Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that legally abolished slavery, along with the Fourteenth Amendment, which mandated equal protection under the law in all states.

In response, the defeated southern states individually chose a different legal tactic in perpetuating the dehumanizing treatment of former slaves and their descendants. Eventually referred to as “Jim Crow” laws (based on a demeaning blackface dance routine by a White actor), this ongoing series of legislation by various states solemnly vowed to accord “separate but equal” treatment to the newly emancipated Black population, while simultaneously eliminating any race-mixing in public, economic, political, and social spheres. And though the results yielded the intended goal of almost complete separation between Blacks and Whites, the practical effects were anything but equal.

With the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v.*

*Ferguson* (1896), the doctrine of “separate but equal” had become the law of the land, allowing states the essentially unfettered freedom to create two sets of public facilities, one for Whites and the other—almost always vastly inferior—for Blacks. From stultifying, shoebox-sized waiting rooms to filthy, substandard restrooms to tiny, often-broken drinking fountains (and so much more), the level of inequality was impossible to miss. And the message was clear: these states did not want to recognize Black Americans as full citizens, and this preference was mandated with the full force of law.

As the Jim Crow practices spread, the canard of “separate but equal” extended to the use of hospitals, trains, buses, business ownership, and schools. Perhaps most damaging, Black citizens were systemically denied the right to vote, making it all but impossible to address their grievances with public policy at the ballot box.



### III. THE U.S. CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT (continued)

#### QUESTIONS FOR DEEPER THINKING:

01. What do you know about the Jim Crow Era in American history—in relationship to the workforce, voting and civic rights, transportation, public life, and community?
02. Can you name at least three things that were illegal for African Americans to do under Jim Crow?

#### Laws varied state by state, but here are some possible answers:

In many workspaces, employees could not work in the same room, enter through the same door, or gaze out of the same window.

Marrying outside of race was illegal, and in Virginia, so was living on a street where most of the residents were not people you could marry. Six entire towns in Texas banned Black Americans from living in them. A Jim Crow curfew in Mobile, Alabama banned Black Americans from leaving their homes after 10 pm.



“Whites Only” or “Colored” signs segregated ticket windows and drinking fountains. Georgia segregated public parks, and Oklahoma, phone booths. Schools and colleges were segregated, and in North Carolina, even textbooks. Fraternities in Virginia could not use the term “brother” as an address between Black and White members. Prisons, hospitals, and orphanages were segregated. In Atlanta, courts kept two Bibles: one for Black witnesses and one for Whites.

03. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 overruled the final remaining Jim Crow laws. However, it has taken years of community and legal actions—still ongoing today—to unravel the effects of institutionalized racism. Why do you think it took so long for American society to confront Jim Crow? How and where do we see echoes of Jim Crow today?



#### World War II and the Post-War Era

The German-Nazi party launched World War II in a quest for territorial expansion, while brutally and systematically killing European-Jewish people (as well as other minority groups including the Roma, LGBT people, and people with physical and mental disabilities) in the Holocaust. Black Americans demonstrated their patriotism in significant ways during that bloody conflict, including through the service of over two million enlisted men in various branches of the armed forces that fought in all theatres. Segregation was employed in

### III. THE U.S. CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT (continued)

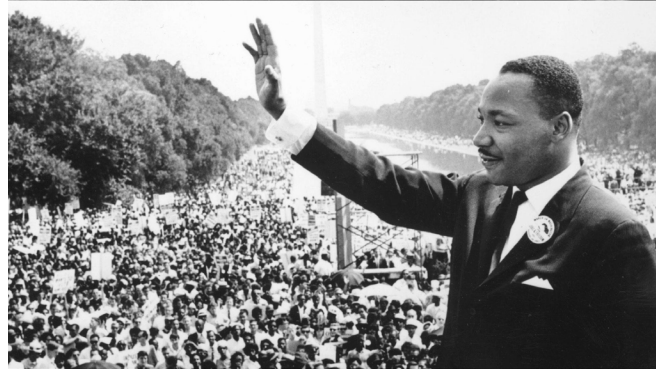
most units of the U.S. military, especially in the Navy, which was accused of practicing Jim Crow. Soon after the end of World War II, the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. began taking shape. Black-American soldiers returned home to the systematic denial of the very rights they had risked their lives for overseas.

While the U.S. invested heavily in the reintegration of returning White soldiers after the war, Black-American veterans were shut out of the economic boom that characterized the post-World War II era. For example, the G.I. Bill paved the way for most White-American male veterans to receive a college education and buy homes. But while these benefits were in theory also available to Black veterans, few colleges would admit them and even fewer banks would extend them housing loans.

While there existed no single event that triggered the transition from random acts of resistance to the emergence of what became known as the Civil Rights Movement, there were instead a confluence of groundbreaking occurrences that permanently set the wheels of moral justice in motion.

First came the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), which struck down the fallacious "separate but equal" doctrine established in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, in the process dismantling the entire Jim Crow system. Soon thereafter came the highly successful 1955-1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott; the integration of Little Rock High School in 1957; the high-profile 1960 Greensboro, North Carolina lunch counter sit-ins; the courageous Freedom Riders in 1961; the 1962 matriculation of James Meredith, who became the first Black American to attend the University of Mississippi; and the 1964 Freedom Summer voter registration project.

But arguably no event better crystallized the mission of the Civil Rights Movement in the minds of the public than the Reverend Dr. King's massively attended and widely publicized "I Have a Dream" address, given during the March on Washington in the late summer of 1963—which also included the important participation and leadership of a young Lewis from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Based in part on the nonviolent, love-thy-



neighbor teachings of both Jesus Christ and Indian activist Mohandas Gandhi, Dr. King's powerful message of hope also made it abundantly clear that enough was enough; Blacks in America would no longer accept anything less than full equality on every level.

Following the speech, and with the passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the direction was set; there would be no going back. The issue of civil rights could no longer be dismissed by White America as simply the "negro problem." It was now an American problem.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DEEPER THINKING:

01. Consider the unique role of Black Americans fighting in a war launched by the Nazis—whose ideology was founded on the notion of White supremacy. Given the status of Black Americans at home, what message did this send worldwide about America's own human rights violations?
02. In what ways did World War II contribute to the emerging consciousness of Black Americans and their rights as citizens?
03. Dr. Hunt writes about the reframing of civil rights in the American psyche, "The issue of civil rights could no longer be dismissed by White America as simply the 'negro problem.' It was now an American problem." What does she mean by this?

### III. THE U.S. CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT (continued)

#### Nonviolent Direct Action as a Primary Strategy in the Civil Rights Movement

Since the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877), Black-American citizens have been the victims of civic and governmental violence, including the 1916 East St. Louis Massacre, the Rosewood Massacre of 1923, and the 1919 mass lynching of 237 Black Americans in Arkansas. The decision of Black leaders to respond to violence with means other than violence was a painful and dangerous choice. It was understood that rank and file participants, leaders, women, men, and young people were putting their lives and the lives of their families, loved ones, and communities in jeopardy.

However, the political and economic success, as well as the high moral ground of nonviolent direct action (*satyagraha*) as practiced by Gandhi, appealed to community leaders—

particularly those leaders who rose from the Black-Christian community. Organizations including the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC), SNCC, and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) adopted nonviolent direct actions into their overall strategies, such as the lunch counter sit-ins, the Freedom Rides, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Actions like these were key successes in the Civil Rights Movement and also paved the way for the culminating legal successes of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Key leaders in the Civil Rights Movement went on to continue public and civic service: Lewis, Andrew Young, Jesse Jackson, and Ella Baker. Many of today's new civil rights leaders carry on the tradition of insisting on the truth in nonviolent ways: Kimberlee' Crenshaw, Bryan Stevenson, Opal Tometi, Ta-Nehesi Coates, Elija Cummings, Maxine Waters, and Cynthia McKinney.

---

#### Resources:

**"African Americans in WWII."** National Museum of the Pacific War. 2017.  
<http://www.pacificwarmuseum.org/your-visit/african-americans-in-wwii/>

**"Jim Crow Laws."** National Park Service. 2015.  
[https://www.nps.gov/malu/learn/education/jim\\_crow\\_laws.htm](https://www.nps.gov/malu/learn/education/jim_crow_laws.htm)

**"Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand (1869-1948)."** Martin Luther King Jr. and the Global Freedom Struggle, Stanford. [http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc\\_gandhi\\_mohandas\\_karamchand\\_1869\\_1948/](http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_gandhi_mohandas_karamchand_1869_1948/)

**"At Home."** The War, PBS. 2007.  
[http://www.pbs.org/thewar/at\\_home\\_civil\\_rights\\_minorities.htm](http://www.pbs.org/thewar/at_home_civil_rights_minorities.htm)

**"Civil Rights: Timeline of Events."** FindLaw. 2017.  
<http://civilrights.findlaw.com/civil-rights-overview/civil-rights-timeline-of-events.html>

**"Jacob Lawrence 1917-2000."** Whitney Museum of American Art. 2017.  
<http://collection.whitney.org/artist/759/JacobLawrence>

**"Race: Are We So Different?"** American Anthropological Association. 2016.  
<http://www.understandingrace.org/home.html>

**"King Philosophy."** King Center. 2014.  
<http://www.thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy>



# IV. THE U.S. CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN GLOBAL CONTEXT

BY RONI AMIT, J.D., PH.D. (HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY)



## The Global Civil Rights Movement: South Africa's Anti-Apartheid Struggle

Most Americans are familiar with the U.S. Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 60s, led by key figures such as Dr. King and Lewis. What they may not realize is that this struggle was part of a larger global movement. In South Africa, the fight for equality, freedom, and human rights was taking shape at this time through the Anti-Apartheid Movement. Dr. King himself gained inspiration after reading about the nonviolent resistance that Gandhi first practiced in a segregated South Africa and later carried to his native India.

Just as the era of Jim Crow laws was part of the legacy of slavery in the U.S., Apartheid South Africa grew out of the legacy of the colonization, which involved subjugating the native population. The racist practices were institutionalized when the Nationalist Party took power in 1948 and formally established the Apartheid government: a system of White supremacy in which non-Whites (including other racial minorities) were denied fundamental rights. Blacks and other minorities were forced to live separately from Whites, were

not allowed to vote or participate in government, could not mix with or marry Whites, and could only travel to White-controlled areas with permission and for specific purposes such as providing labor to the white population.

In the 1950s, the African National Congress (ANC)—a resistance organization that went on to become the dominant political party in post-Apartheid South Africa—led a defiance campaign targeting the country's unjust laws. This mass movement of resistance was made up of labor unions, student organizations, churches, women's groups, and civic associations. These groups also joined together in the 1955 Freedom Charter, giving voice to the people's demands for equality and justice.

Acts of resistance included boycotts, nonviolent demonstrations, and protest marches—tactics also employed in the U.S. Black-South Africans held mock elections to protest their exclusion from the political system, as did activists in the U.S. In both countries, Black and White activists protested segregation by defying restrictions on integrated spaces and by deliberately going to areas designated for the other race.

Albie Sachs, a White liberation activist, who subsequently became a constitutional court judge in post-Apartheid South Africa, was arrested for sitting in a “non-Whites only” designated seat in the 1950s. The authorities responded to the nonviolent resistance with violent crackdowns, including beatings, arrests, and killings. In 1963, Nelson Mandela, a prominent leader of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, was sentenced to life in prison for his role in the ANC. He would go on to become the first president of a democratic, post-Apartheid South Africa.

## IV. THE U.S. CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN GLOBAL CONTEXT (continued)

***“The Americans we trusted most were those who understood that their Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement, for example, were part of the same battle we waged in Africa. We were all working to free ourselves from the bondage of race-based oppression, whether in the form of Apartheid in South Africa or the legacy of slavery and racism in the United States. We were part of a worldwide movement that continues today to redress the economic and social injustices that kill body, mind, and spirit. Just as we watched and learned from the continuing struggle within the United States, so too did activists there gain strength from our struggles.”***

- Nelson Mandela, Foreword, *No Easy Victories*, 2007.

### The Global Context

The Civil Rights Movement took place during the Cold War, in which Western governments saw communism as a grave threat. While civil rights activists explicitly saw themselves as part of a global struggle for liberation in Africa and other parts of the world, governments viewed both the Civil Rights and Anti-Apartheid Movements, as well as other liberation movements, through a Cold War lens that rendered them internal threats. North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms, a vehement opponent of civil rights movements in general, characterized both Dr. King and Mandela as communists, who threatened the Western way of life.

The international community turned its attention to Apartheid following the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, in which the South African government fired on peaceful demonstrators who had gathered outside a police station, killing 69 Black protesters. The United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution condemning Apartheid and calling on member states to cut off economic and military relations with South Africa. The U.S. abstained from the vote, while continuing its own segregationist policies.

### The Shared Struggle

Activists in the U.S. and South Africa were engaged in a shared struggle and explicitly linked their movements. Although both movements included elements that advocated greater militancy, the struggles shared a similar message of nonviolence, love, and forgiveness. They sought to build a society at peace with itself. Mandela was both inspired by and served as a source of inspiration for the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, stating that the movements “learned a great deal from each other.”

In 1962, Dr. King and an ANC leader issued a joint appeal for action against Apartheid. In 1964, entertainer and activist Harry Belafonte led a group of activists from SNCC to meet African independence leaders. After his visit, Lewis affirmed his belief that “the social, economic, and political destiny of the Black people in America is inseparable from that of our brothers in Africa.”

## IV. THE U.S. CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN GLOBAL CONTEXT (continued)

***“We can understand South Africa because we have seen the inside of the jails of Mississippi and Alabama and have been herded behind barbed wire enclosures, attacked by police dogs, and set upon with electric prods—the American equivalent of the sjambok. There is no difference between the sting of being called a ‘kaffir’ in South Africa and a ‘nigger’ in the U.S.A. The cells of Robin Island and Birmingham jail look the same on the inside. As the vanguard of the struggle against racism in America, SNCC is not unfamiliar with the problems of southern Africa”***

- SNCC position paper submitted to the UN, 1967.

### QUESTIONS FOR DEEPER THINKING:

01. How did the Anti-Apartheid Movement of South Africa and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement emerge from a shared history? What were the root causes of discrimination against Africans and African Americans?
02. In the quote above, Mandela states that the Civil Rights Movement, the Anti-Vietnam War Movement, and the struggle in South Africa were all part of the same movement. What does he mean?
03. In what ways were the movements in South Africa and the U.S. similar? How were they different?
04. What were the goals that each movement was seeking? How do these goals link to our understandings of human rights in relationship to other oppressed identities?

# V. THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT CONTINUES TODAY

BY SYREETA MCFADDEN



Some 15 months after the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision that reversed laws permitting the legal separation between races in public schools, a 14-year-old Chicago boy was murdered by two White men in Money, Mississippi. During an extended visit with family, Emmett Till was kidnapped, brutally beaten, and shot in the head for whistling at a White woman outside the town's grocery store. Till's body was recovered from the Tallahatchie River on August 31, 1955. Local authorities pressured Till's relatives to bury the body quickly. However, when relatives contacted the boy's mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, in Chicago, she demanded that they return her child's body home. Till's body was returned in a sealed wooden box, which the funeral home director initially refused to open for Till-Mobley until he yielded to her protests. When she finally saw her child's body, she made the crucial and heartbreaking decision to have an open-casket funeral. "Let the people see what I've seen," Till-Mobley told *Jet Magazine*, one of the leading national Black publications in the country, which published graphic photographs of Till's face and body. In an instant, Till-Mobley's private horror turned public mourning, fueled moral outrage.

The photographs of Till's disfigured and mutilated body horrified the nation, but for African Americans, it was a more

pronounced and personal horror. Till could be, at any moment, one of them. Till's funeral drew thousands of mourners; some 50,000 people lined up to view the brutalized body of the 14-year-old boy over the four day period.

Murder by lynching of Black men and women had long been shrouded in secrecy and fear. Black families of lynching victims feared retaliation by White neighbors, citizen councils, klan members, and local communities should they seek justice and punishment for the perpetrators. White dominated law enforcement were taciturn and recalcitrant in enforcing criminal charges against their own. Till-Mobley was born in the South and had migrated north to Chicago—like hundreds of thousands of African Americans in the first half of the 20th century, who had come north for better economic opportunity and to flee the racial violence and discrimination that they had endured in the South. She thought she had escaped the crippling grip of racial violence and caste in the U.S.. Her son's brutal murder brought the plight of Black Americans in sharp relief.

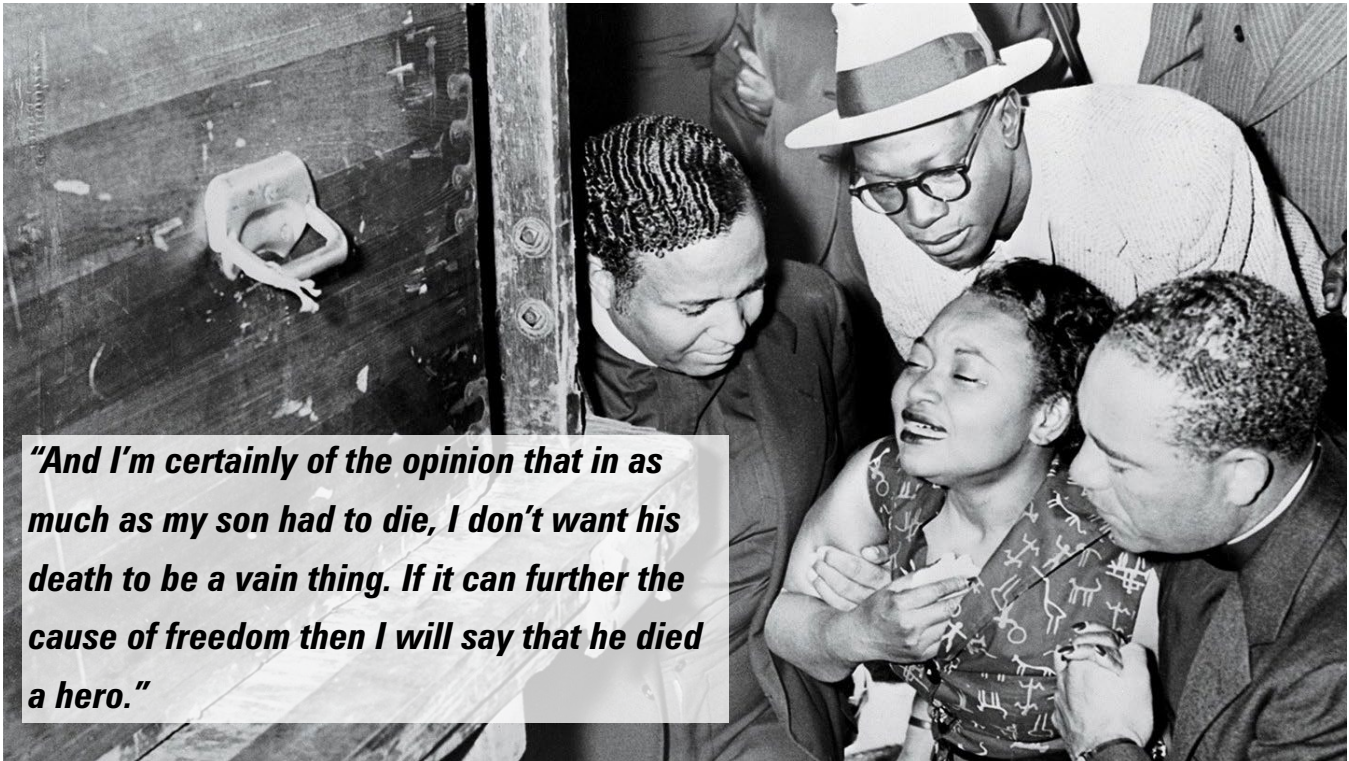
---

***"Before Emmett Till's murder, I had known the fear of hunger, hell, and the Devil. But now there was a new fear known to me—the fear of being killed just because I was Black. This was the worst of my fears. I knew once I got food, the fear of starving to death would leave. I also was told that if I were a good girl, I wouldn't have to fear the Devil or hell. But I didn't know what one had to do or not do as a Negro not to be killed. Probably just being a Negro period was enough, I thought."***

- Anne Moody in *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, 1968.

---

## V. THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT CONTINUES TODAY (continued)



- Mamie Till-Mobley in a 1955 TV interview.

On September 23, 1955, Till's murderers (Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam, who later confessed to the killing in a paid interview for *Look Magazine* in January 1956) were acquitted by an all-White jury. The verdict drew national and international outrage and protests. Weeks later, a grand jury would deliver a no true bill for kidnapping charges despite eyewitness testimony. Thousands rallied and protested; in Harlem, 10,000 protested the verdict. Till-Mobley would not be silent about her pain. She spoke openly and publicly, "Two months ago, I had a nice apartment in Chicago. I had a good job. I had a son. When something happened to the Negroes in the South, I said, 'That's their business, not mine,'" Till-Mobley said. "Now I know how wrong I was. The murder of my son has shown me that what happens to any of us, anywhere in the world, had better be the business of us all."

It was the Till case that forced Americans to confront the ugliness of racial segregation and discrimination endured by African Americans in the South, and further, reckon with the fact that the laws did not equally protect Black victims of cold-blooded murder. Haunted by these images and the injustice, a nascent generation of young activists had been

shook to their core and energized into action. Till-Mobley's determination to speak and advocate for justice on behalf of her only son, and, by extension, for all mothers of African-American children, women, and men, became the clarion call to action for young people growing up throughout the South—spurring on the SCLC-organized bus boycotts and shortly after, SNCC student organizing. Till's murder has long been credited as the catalyst to the Civil Rights Movement, which asserted the dignity and humanity of Black people and that Black people are citizens deserving of equal protection of the law and full and equal rights. The declaration of these values was an assertion of Black life mattering.

### **A Fear Known: Parallels between the Civil Rights Movement and Black Lives Matter**

Till's murder and its aftermath serve as analog and prologue for the modern moment in the continuing struggle for civil rights and equal protection of African Americans in the U.S..

On February 27, 2012, 57 years after Till's murder, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was murdered on his way home in Sanford, Florida by George Zimmerman. Zimmerman, a self-

## V. THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT CONTINUES TODAY (continued)

appointed neighborhood watchman followed and pursued Martin. Martin, who was walking home was racially profiled by Zimmerman, who presumed that Martin's hoodie was a marker of Black guilt and criminality. Zimmerman was not arrested for weeks. In his defense, he invoked a fraught state law known as Stand Your Ground. In April 2012, high school students from Miami-Dade County staged walkouts in protest to the inaction of Sanford officials. Later, former and current college students organized a 40-mile march from Daytona to Sanford as symbol to the 40 days Zimmerman remained free. The march ended in a five-hour blockade of Sanford Police Department doors, where they successfully demanded the firing of the police chief and Zimmerman's arrest. This group later became known as the Dream Defenders.

In July 2013, Zimmerman was acquitted of Martin's murder. For observers of the trial, the defense's case was all too familiar in strategy, laying blame for the victim's death squarely on the victim. The parallels were clear: a Black child in the American South should know his or her place; the conduct of Black bodies in public spaces are presumed criminal until proven innocent; and the law had failed again to protect Black citizens.

Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi created the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter in 2013 in response to the shooting death of Martin, believing Martin "was posthumously placed on trial for his own murder and the killer, George Zimmerman, was not held accountable for the crime he committed." Their vision shares its DNA with Civil Rights Activist Ella Baker, who facilitated the organization of SNCC in 1960. It was Baker who instructed students to build a grassroots "group leadership" organization to work in concert with movement leaders. Black Lives Matter is parallel in philosophy, and has spurred locally based chapters nationwide—just as SNCC had done during the Civil Rights Movement.

Since 2013, this "leader-full movement" has organized thousands to engage in direct action and nonviolent civil disobedience to agitate for equal protection and to hold police and municipalities accountable for victims of police abuse and violence. Groups like Florida's Dream Defenders,

which, in the immediate aftermath of Zimmerman's acquittal, staged a sit-in at Florida Governor Rick Scott's office to demand a legislative session to review Stand Your Ground laws, Chicago's Black Youth Project, and New York's Justice League are powered by the commitment and activism of young people.

Under the hashtag and as a collective movement, Black Lives Matter has become a crucial tool in connecting people from casual observers to die-hard activists in tracking state violence against Black people, as well as aggregating real-time responses by the public to deaths of African-American citizens at the hands of police officers. It is more than a mere rallying cry; it has engendered national and international awareness to these events, driven a conversation around state violence against Black bodies and communities, and has served as a vehicle for protests and actions. By August 2014, with the killing of 18-year-old Michael Brown by former police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri, the moral cause of Black Lives Matter had exploded, revealing a nationwide crisis in the relationship between African-American communities, law enforcement, and the justice system.



***"If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon."***

- President Barack Obama, March 2012

## V. THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT CONTINUES TODAY (continued)



***“I have to do my part, I have to do something to remember my son. I have to do something to try to make a difference in this world and try to do something to bring awareness to racial profiling, gun violence, and just the evilness that’s going on right now.”***

- Sybrina Fulton, mother of Trayvon Martin, in *The Cut*, 2015.

### **Photography and Social Media [The Same Death Over and Over]**

In the 21st century, with the proliferation of mobile photography, video, real-time streaming tools, such as Facebook Live or Twitter’s Periscope, public awareness of unchecked abuse of state power is as well documented as it is ubiquitous. Acts of injustice have an immediate platform to counter dominant narratives propagated by law officials that center on the presumed guilt of their victims, and not of police.

It was principally through Twitter that activists brought global attention to the death of Brown in Ferguson. Within minutes of his death, images were posted of Brown lying dead in the middle of the street. Brown’s body laid in the street for four hours before authorities removed it. Within hours, a photo of Louis Head, Brown’s stepfather, holding a sign that read “Ferguson Police executed my unarmed son” was shared virally across the Internet. Brown’s death and the Ferguson Uprising arrived in a year where repeated instances of unarmed Black boys and men were killed by law enforcement nationally. The images, and the circumstances for their deaths, were reminiscent of lynchings.

As with Till-Mobley in 1955, who used the potency of photography to document injustice, Diamond Reynolds in 2016 filmed in real time the death of her partner Philando Castile, who was shot during a routine traffic stop in Minneapolis. With immediacy, Reynolds presented to the world the pain of denied justice.

Photography was crucial to advancing the work of the Civil Rights Movement. It served as witness for a public wearily following the conflict between unrelenting forces of segregationists and peaceful protesters, illustrating as Dr. King wrote in 1963 “the immorality of Jim Crow laws enforced on African Americans.” In the era of Black Lives Matter, photography has enabled activists and engaged citizens access to a moderate public struggling to make sense of the issues.

Photography had to prove the humanity, dignity, and citizenship of African Americans to White masses and show that the demand by activists and the response to that demand by the state were unequal and savage. Photography in the 21st century now works to document and illustrate that these indignities still persist and are still wreaked upon American citizens of color—and that the response to those demands remains unequal and savage.

## V. THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT CONTINUES TODAY (continued)

***“When we say Black Lives Matter, we are broadening the conversation around state violence to include all of the ways in which Black people are intentionally left powerless at the hands of the state. We are talking about the ways in which Black lives are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity. How Black poverty and genocide is state violence. How 2.8 million Black people are locked in cages in this country is state violence. How Black women bearing the burden of a relentless assault on our children and our families is state violence. How Black queer and trans folks bear a unique burden from a hetero-patriarchal society that disposes of us like garbage and simultaneously fetishizes us and profits off of us, and that is state violence. How 500,000 Black people in the U.S. are undocumented immigrants and relegated to the shadows. How Black girls are used as negotiating chips during times of conflict and war. How Black folks living with disabilities and different abilities bear the burden of state-sponsored Darwinian experiments that attempt to squeeze us into boxes of normality defined by White supremacy, and that is state violence.”***

- Black Lives Matter website

### QUESTIONS FOR DEEPER THINKING:

01. What did the Civil Rights Movement accomplish that continues to uphold dignity and rights for Black Americans today? What issues are still occurring, even many years later?
02. SNCC and Black Lives Matter, both movements ignited by younger people, fought for the humanity of Black lives. What are the two movements' similarities? What are their differences?
03. When Till-Mobley decided to have her son's brutalized body on display to the world, as McFadden writes, her private horror became a public mourning. What power does the act of witnessing hold? What are the limitations?
04. How has modern technology furthered the act of witnessing? What purposes can viral photographs and videos of tragedy and injustice serve? To what does social media allow us access? What would the Civil Rights Movement have been like if the Internet had been invented then?



## V. THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT CONTINUES TODAY (continued)



### Selected Readings

**"Letter From Birmingham Jail"** by Martin Luther King, Jr.

***The Fire This Time, an anthology edited*** by Jesmyn Ward

***They Can't Kill Us All*** by Wesley Lowery

***From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*** by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

***We Gon Be Alright: Notes on the Resegregation of America*** by Jeff Chang

***A Colony Within A Nation*** by Chris Hayes

***The Condemnation of Blackness*** by Khalil Gibran Muhammad

***Between the World and Me*** by Ta-Nehisi Coates

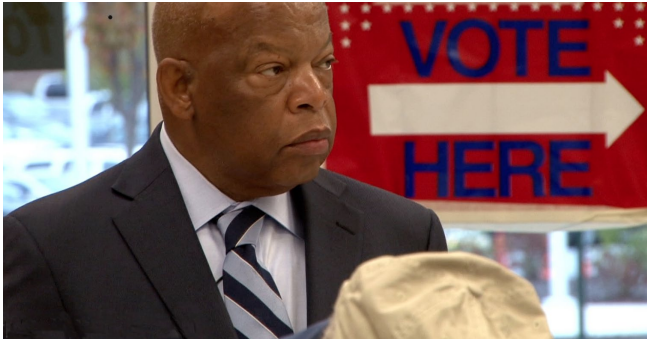
***Citizen*** by Claudia Rankine

***Don't Call Us Dead*** by Danez Smith

***The New Jim Crow*** by Michelle Alexander

***North of Dixie*** by Mark Speltz

# VI. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION



- Did you notice that Lewis has a good sense of humor? How did he use his sense of humor to bring people together and to deliver his message?
- What do you think Lewis meant when he said “You must be a headlight and not a taillight?” In what ways can each of us as individuals and as groups be a headlight?

See further questions for discussion in the Quote Exchange activity in the following section of this guide.

- Is there anyone here with us today that lived through, and is willing to share personal stories about the Civil Rights Movement? Were you familiar with Lewis then?
- The documentary illustrates how elders and young people—even when in conflict—ultimately learned from each other about how to make the world a better place. Can you think of times in your own community where young people and elders learned from each other to bring about positive change?
- When Lewis and SNCC did the sit-ins, they were “finding a way to get in the way.” What were some other actions that they did to get in the way? Think of some groups and people you know? What are they doing to get in the way?



# VII. ACTIVITIES

## 01. CIVIL RIGHTS WORDMAP

A wordmap is a visual aid, sourced from the knowledge of a group, that helps to organize information, make critical connections and expand conversation around a word or topic. This activity is most supportive as a dialogue opener—warming participants up before diving deeper into reading and discussion. On a blackboard, or a piece of large paper, write the words civil rights in the center. From here, there are a few approaches to creating a wordmap that might be useful:

- **OPTION ONE:** Assign one group member as recorder, and invite the collective to share words and concepts, processing suggestions aloud as they are shared and illustrated on the map.
- **OPTION TWO:** If the surface is large enough, invite all participants to approach the board/paper with markers. Silently, each adds and contributes to the wordmap, drawing lines between words that connect, branching off from various concepts. At the end of a set time period, five to ten minutes, step back and discuss the group product and process.
- **OPTION THREE:** An art-based adaptation might incorporate illustration, drawings, or collaged elements to create the wordmap. This will add on significant time to the process, but would work well as an expanded project for an art-oriented group.
- **OPTION FOUR:** Create categories that serve as organizers in each corner of the paper. You might choose what is in this guide, for example: civil rights in historical context, global context, and today. Silently, participants write their word associations on Post-it notes and then stick them under the category most aligned. This also allows for the group to move the Post-its, able to easily rearrange the living document as needed while discussing.

## 02. THE ROOT CAUSES TREE

The root causes tree can be used to map and visualize the roots (causes) and branches/leaves (outcomes/surface issues/symptoms) of social issues. This exercise can be particularly supportive in connecting current social issues to the history of the Civil Rights Movement.

Begin with a particular issue, such as police brutality. Draw a large tree on chart paper and write the overarching issue on the trunk. Begin by naming the outcomes, surface issues and symptoms (death, innocent people killed or harmed, police are out of control, no justice, tension between communities, people live in fear, protests, or riots), adding leaves to the tree with each offering. You might also modify this for participants to write words and phrases on paper cut in the shape of leaves and then tape them onto the branches.

When complete, move to the roots. What are the fundamental causes of police brutality? Here answers might include, for example, poverty, media portrayal of Black men, institutional racism, a history of slavery, the aftermath of Jim Crow, etc. Debrief with a discussion about the relationship of surface issues to root causes. What does our society tend to focus on? Why are root causes so much more difficult to address than surface issues? Where does true, lasting change come from?

Extend and modify this exercise by inviting small groups to create their own root causes trees around a series of issues. After viewing and debriefing as a group, notice the connections between root causes, noting how a handful of causes can spur a whole forest of issues.

## 03. QUOTE EXCHANGE

A series of quotes from Lewis invite participants to deepen dialogue around his philosophies, life, and work. Break into small groups or pairs. Hand one person in each group one of the five quotes and discussion prompts. Offer the group five minutes to discuss the quote. When the time is up, the quote is handed to the next group for discussion. Repeat until all quotes have been engaged, then regroup to have a larger debrief on what arrived in small group conversations that was surprising, moving, interesting, or confusing.

## QUOTE EXCHANGE ACTIVITY

**QUOTE ONE:** *"I met Rosa Parks when I was 17. I met Dr. [Martin Luther] King when I was 18. These two individuals inspired me to find a way to get in the way, to get in trouble. So I got in good trouble, necessary trouble."* - John Lewis

**DISCUSS:** Sometimes it is hard to know what's good trouble. How can we know what trouble is good trouble? What did Lewis consider to be good trouble? Who inspires you to make change or get into good trouble?

---

**QUOTE TWO:** *"I thought I was going to die a few times. On the Freedom Ride in the year 1961, when I was beaten at the Greyhound bus station in Montgomery, I thought I was going to die. On March 7th, 1965, when I was hit in the head with a nightstick by a state trooper at the foot of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, I thought I was going to die. I thought I saw death, but nothing can make me question the philosophy of nonviolence."* - John Lewis

**DISCUSS:** We see from Lewis' journey, and from that of his SNCC colleagues, that doing the right thing can put you in harm's way. Is there a time when you did something you believed was the right thing to do but was unpopular or even dangerous? What would you do if someone you loved wanted to support a greater cause by putting their body in harm's way? What advice would you give them? What would you do to support them?

---

**QUOTE THREE:** *"I say from time to time that the vote is precious. It's almost sacred. It is the most powerful nonviolent tool or instrument that we have in a democratic society. And we must use it."* - John Lewis

**DISCUSS:** What does Lewis mean by precious and sacred? In the face of voter suppression and tampering, what are the challenges to America's voting process today? Do you agree with Lewis' statement? Why or why not?

---

**QUOTE FOUR:** *"We never gave up. We didn't get lost in a sea of despair. We kept the faith. We kept pushing and pulling. We kept marching. And we made some progress."* - John Lewis

**DISCUSS:** As we see in the film, Lewis' large family and Christian faith helped him endure humiliating Jim Crow laws and a sharecropper's childhood. However, if you asked Lewis, he'd frame his faith as "something in the universe" that has guided him to keep his "eyes on the prize." Where do you imagine other civil rights activists drew their strength from? Where does your own strength and resiliency come from?

---

**QUOTE FIVE:** *"I have fought too hard and for too long against discrimination based on race and color not to stand up against discrimination based on sexual orientation. I've heard the reasons for opposing civil marriage for same-sex couples. Cut through the distractions, and they stink of the same fear, hatred, and intolerance I have known in racism and in bigotry."* - John Lewis

**DISCUSS:** Lewis has great love and compassion for people. Can you recall scenes from the documentary where we see Lewis' support of people with both shared and differing identities? What does he do to advocate for different causes? What causes do you care about? What inspires you to support the rights of people that do not share your own identity?

# VIII. RESOURCES

## PBS PROGRAM WEBSITE

[HTTP://WWW.PBS.ORG/PROGRAM/JOHN-LEWIS-GET-IN-THE-WAY/](http://www.pbs.org/program/john-lewis-get-in-the-way/)

## BOOKS

Alexander, Michelle. ***The New Jim Crow Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness***. New York: New Press, 2012.

Baldwin, James, et al. ***The Fire Next Time***. Köln, Germany: Taschen, 2017.

Carson, Clayborne, ***In Struggle, SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s***, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981.

Kurlansky, Mark. ***Nonviolence: the History of a Dangerous Idea***. New York: Modern Library, 2008.

Lewis, John, et al. ***March***. Marietta, GA: Top Shelf Productions, 2013.

Lewis, John and Michael D'Orso. ***Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement***. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998.

Levinson, Cynthia. ***The Youngest Marcher: The Story of Audrey Faye Hendricks, a Young Civil Rights Activist***. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2017.

## VIDEO/DOCUMENTARIES

***Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years 1954–1965***. PBS, 1987.

***Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads 1965–1985***. PBS, 1990.

***Freedom Riders***. Dir. Stanley Nelson. PBS American Experience, 2010.

***13TH***. Dir. Ava DuVernay. Netflix, 2016.

***The Color of Fear***. Dir. Lee Mun Wah, 1994.

***The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975***. Dir. Göran Olsson. 2011.

## ONLINE ARTICLES

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. ***"The Case for Reparations."*** *The Atlantic*. August 17, 2017. [www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/)

Tometi, Opal and Gerald Lenoir. ***"Black Lives Matter is Not a Civil Rights Movement."*** *Time Magazine*. December 10, 2015. <http://time.com/4144655/international-human-rights-day-black-lives-matter/>

## VIII. RESOURCES (continued)

### WEBSITES

**K-TOWN'92** is an interactive documentary website that explores the 1992 Los Angeles Riots through the lens of the greater Koreatown community. <http://ktown92.com/>

**FIT THE DESCRIPTION** is a video series that delves into the perspectives of Black male officers and civilians sharing personal stories around their experiences with law enforcement. <http://www.fitthedescription.com/>

**ONE PERSON, ONE VOTE** is a collaboration of the SNCC Legacy Project and Duke University to chronicle the historic struggles for voting rights and to develop ongoing programs that contribute to a more civil and inclusive democracy in the 21st century. <http://onevotesncc.org>

**QUESTION BRIDGE** facilitates a dialogue between a critical mass of Black men from diverse and contending backgrounds and creates a platform for them to represent and redefine Black male identity in America. <http://www.questionbridge.com>

**THE CIVIL CONVERSATIONS PROJECT** from On Being with Krista Tippett is a public forum providing ideas and tools for healing our fractured civic spaces. <http://www.civilconversationsproject.org>

**SNCC LEGACY PROJECT** works to preserve and extend SNCC's legacy through a variety of initiatives including archival efforts, literature, and media development—amplifying the voices and stories of veteran SNCC members and pursuing one of the still great unfulfilled needs of the Freedom Movement: quality public education as a constitutional right. <http://www.sncclegacyproject.org/>

**SNCC HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY: MAPPING AMERICAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS THROUGH THE 21ST CENTURY** explores the history and geography of this seminal organization with (1) interactive maps, charts, and lists that show more than 500 SNCC sit-ins, boycotts, and other actions from 1960 to 1970; (2) a yearbook/ database of SNCC actions; (3) a brief year-by-year history. [http://depts.washington.edu/moves/SNCC\\_intro.shtml](http://depts.washington.edu/moves/SNCC_intro.shtml)

**SNCC 1960-1966: SIX YEARS OF THE STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE** covers the SNCC from its birth in 1960 to 1966, when John Lewis was replaced by Stokely Carmichael as chairman. <https://www.ibiblio.org/sncc/index.html>

### EXHIBIT SPACES

**Center for Civil and Human Rights**  
<https://www.civilandhumanrights.org/>

**The National Museum of African American History and Culture** <http://www.nmaahc.si.edu>

# CREDITS

**Written by:**

Valerie Hunt, Ph.D.  
Roni Amit, JD, Ph.D  
Syreeta McFadden  
Caits Meissner

**Edited by:**

Caits Meissner  
Dennis Palmieri

**Layout by:**

Zinna Riley

**Special Thanks to:**

Kathleen Dowdey, Renee Gasch, Desiree Gutierrez

This guide was made possible by a grant from Black Public Media, with support from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

All contents are (c) 2017 Early Light LLC

**EARLY LIGHT PRODUCTIONS**



impact  media  
P A R T N E R S