

Singing for Change: The Power of Music in the Civil Rights Movement

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Documentary
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Process Paper

Topic Chosen

Our project began in our history class. We formed our NHD group last year and began discussing potential topics. We decided to study the role of communication through music in the Civil Rights Movement.

Research Conducted

Our research began by watching documentaries, listening to music and collections of oral histories, and reading books, including primary and secondary sources. Our most impactful sources include:

- “Soundtrack for a Revolution”
- “The History of We Shall Overcome”
- “History Makers”
- *Sing for Freedom*

We continued researching by giving each member of the group a specific time period related to the Civil Rights Movement. For example, one of our members researched the Underground Railroad and music that impacted enslaved people seeking freedom. Another member researched how the Freedom Singers communicated hope and faith during the 1960s. The final two group members researched how music is used as a modern tool to inspire social change.

Our thesis stemmed from our research. **Music fuels social change within cultural and social movements by uniting people through its message of hope and perseverance.** This thesis poses the argument that music was used to communicate and inspire change, and that *without music*, the Civil Rights Movement and other movements for social change would not have been successful.

Category Chosen

We chose the category of documentary because we believe it best expresses the message we want to convey. We believe viewers of our project should be able to see, hear and feel the power of music. Last year we spent time learning from a professional documentarian, so we became passionate about this medium.

Project Development

After researching how music was a powerful communication tool, we developed our thesis. We created a storyboard for planning. We gathered photographs, videos, and planned the filming process. We met twice weekly to research, write our script, film, and edit. We selected production roles:

- Production manager
- Camera operator
- Sound technician

Finally, we worked together to edit. We shared our documentary with members of our community. Through their feedback, we learned about the correct terminology for the word “slave.” We learned the importance of using the word “enslavement,” rather than

slave, because enslavement describes the condition of a person instead of defining a person. We adjusted our script accordingly.

Project Theme

This topic relates to the theme because music was *the* key communicator influencing the success of the Civil Rights Movement, inspiring unity, hope, and communicating the emotions of people in the movement. Civil rights activists John Lewis and Berenice Johnson Reagon both believe the Civil Rights Movement could not have happened without the music.

Our topic is significant to history because musicians and activists stood up for what they thought was right using the power of music. Music is a way of sharing a message and protesting in a nonviolent way. The music of the Civil Rights Movement provided spiritual, physical, and emotional support for people committed to changing America.

Primary Sources

“AMERICAN EXPERIENCE: Freedom Riders.” KPBS Public Media, KPBS, 5 Nov. 2020, www.kpbs.org/news/2011/may/13/american-experience-freedom-riders/.

People used signs to tell people to communicate their need to protest. Signs were used during protests, and on buses to spread the message to end injustices. .

“AMERICAN EXPERIENCE: Freedom Riders: The Strategy.” YouTube, 1 Mar. 2011, youtu.be/KREQGwC_cFY.

During the Civil Rights Movement, people would teach students how to react to people abusing them or yelling racial slurs.

Ardeljan-Braden, Alexa. “The Incredible Story Of Harriet Tubman, An American Paragon For Social Justice.” Culture Trip, The Culture Trip, 7 Dec. 2016, theculturetrip.com/.

We used this photograph to show Harriet Tubman with her family. Tubman helped free many of her family members.

“Bernice Johnson Reagon.” Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, folklife.si.edu/legacy-honorees/bernice-johnson-reagon/smithsonian.

This is a picture of Bernice Johnson Reagon singing. We used this picture to show how singing impacted people during mass meetings to come together and stand up against injustices.

Bettis, Chap, et al. “Parents, Follow This North Star.” The Gospel Coalition, 22 Sept. 2016, www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/parents-follow-this-north-star/.

We used the North Star photographs on this website in our documentary. Underground Railroad travelers followed the North Star to freedom. The North Star was also used in songs to communicate direction to travelers.

Callison, Jeffery. “Civil Rights: The Music and the Movement.” University of California Television

, 23 Apr. 2009.

Mavis Staple discusses her experience in the Civil Rights Movement. She explained her young life in the South as well. Her story was very interesting and she played a large part in the movement. Furthermore, she talked about her experiences touring the country and how she had to stay in special homes just for black Americans. Staple encouraged everyone to sing.

Carawan, Guy, et al. *Sing for Freedom: the Story of the Civil Rights Movement through Its Songs*. NewSouth Books, 2007.

The Carawans were activists during the Civil Rights Movement and used their music to influence social change. We used the lyrics shared in this book to influence our documentary. We also used the first hand accounts of participants in the Civil Rights Movement to inform our documentary.

“Charles Sherrod.” SNCC Digital Gateway, 17 May 2018,
snccdigital.org/people/charles-sherrod/.

We used this picture of Charles Sherrod in our documentary. We learned how Sherrod worked with SNCC and participated in the Sit-Ins.

Dorsey, Danielle. “It’s Time to Stop Romanticizing the Civil Rights Movement and Get Real.”
Atlanta Black Star, 15 Feb. 2017,
atlantablackstar.com/2017/02/15/time-stop-romanticizing-civil-rights-movement-get-real/.

We used this photograph in our documentary to show protesters during the Civil Rights Movement. The signs communicated messages of freedom from oppression.

Edited by SNCC Legacy Project & Duke University, SNCC Digital Gateway, SNCC Legacy Project & Duke University, snccdigital.org/.

This website collection of materials provides in-depth primary and secondary information about the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). We learned about the

Freedom Singers, including individual song leaders such as Berenice Johnson and Charles Sherrod and their vision to stand-up against injustices..

“The Freedom Singers - Alchetron, The Free Social Encyclopedia.” Alchetron.com, 1 Feb. 2018, alchetron.com/The-Freedom-Singers.

We used this photograph in the Civil Rights section of our documentary to show the impact of the Freedom Singers on the Civil Rights Movement. Their songs brought hope and communicated a nonviolent method to fight against oppression.

“Fugitive Slave Act, 1850 by Granger.” Pixels, pixels.com/featured/fugitive-slave-act-1850-granger.html.

This photograph was used in our documentary to portray the tragedy of slavery and the impact it had on families.

Greenspan, Jesse. “6 Strategies Harriet Tubman and Others Used to Escape Along the Underground Railroad.” History.com, A&E Television Networks, 29 June 2020, www.history.com/.

We used this picture to show how Underground Railroad travelers were treated by their slave owners.

Huffman, Amanda. “The First Woman to Lead a Military Operation Was Harriet Tubman.” We Are The Mighty, We Are The Mighty, 30 Oct. 2020, www.wearethemighty.com/mighty-history/harriet-tubman-military-leader/.

We used this photograph of Harriet Tubman in our documentary. We learned how Tubman worked to free slaves and used music as a communication tool.

“I Will Meet You in the Morning // Advent Harmony Choir.” YouTube, 26 July 2015, youtu.be/EW3jJpac1Sk.

This song was a signal to slaves to meet Harriet Tubman in the early morning to escape from their owners.

Kadoguy2006. “Marvin Hayes Sings ‘Follow the Drinking Gourd.’” YouTube, YouTube, 16 Dec.

2017, m.youtube.com/watch?v=VNyhfQ7argU.

We used this song in our documentary to show how this song communicated directions to Underground Railroad travelers. Follow the Drinking Gourd was a phrase for the big dipper. The Big Dipper contained the North Star. Traveling North would lead to freedom.

Koch, Felix. "Home of Quaker Abolitionist Levi Coffin." Cincinnati, Ohio, 1905.

We used this picture for the Harriet Tubman section of our documentary to show a house that was part of the movement.

Lindsley, Harvey B. "Harriet Tubman, Full Length Portrait." Cph 3a10453

[//hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/Cph.3a10453_0AD](https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/Cph.3a10453_0AD).

This is a picture of Harriet Tubman for our Underground Railroad section for our documentary

Malveaux, Suzanne, et al. "Civil Rights Legend Rep. John Lewis Dead at 80." CNN, Cable News Network, 18 July 2020.

We used this photograph of John Lewis to highlight the courage he had while standing up for equality.

"Martin Luther King Jr." GreenLight Rights, 5 Sept. 2018,

greenlightrights.com/icon/martin-luther-king-jr/.

We used this picture of Martin Luther King Jr. in our documentary to show the powerful communication manners he used to raise awareness of injustices.

Martina, Post. "Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Bus Boycott for Leaving Cert

History #625Lab." Leaving Cert Notes and Sample Answers, 2 Feb. 2019,

www.625points.com/2018/12/martin-luther-king-montgomery-bus-boycott-leaving-cert-history.html.

This is a picture of Martin Luther King Jr. and other activists boycotting the Montgomery buses. This was used in the Civil Rights section of our documentary.

Meredith, Susan. "Buckstown Village Store, 1975." 16 Feb. 2007.

We used this photograph in our documentary to show the home of Harriet Tubman. The home still stands today.

"Music in Civil Rights Movement (Excerpt from PBS 'Let Freedom Sing', 2009)." YouTube, 8 Sept. 2020, youtu.be/DwmOADOVLGA.

We used this video in our documentary to show advocates for equality singing with Pete Seager.

"No Mask? Behavioral Scientists on How We Make Pandemic Decisions." Marketplace, 29 July 2020,

www.marketplace.org/2020/07/28/behavioral-scientists-pandemic-decisions-why-we-make-them/.

This photograph was placed in the Modern Day section of our documentary to show adversity and the responses of citizens.

"Now Let Me Fly." YouTube, YouTube, 8 Nov. 2014, m.youtube.com/watch?v=pAxQ888EvU4.

We used this song in our documentary because it offered hope of better days to Underground Railroad.

"The Official Licensing Website of Jackie Robinson." Jackie Robinson,

www.jackierobinson.com/.

This photograph was used at the end of our documentary to pay tribute to people who have inspired us. Robinson endured the tragedy of racism and fought back using a nonviolent approach.

"Oh Freedom! ." Performance by Golden Gospel Singers, 12 Dec. 2013,

www.youtube.com/watch?v=veiJLhXdwn8.

This source helped us understand how slaves used music to express their feelings and communicate the immorality of slavery.

"Perfect Way To Die." Performance by Alicia Keys, 19 Jan. 2019,

www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOzJpgVWwrs.

This source helped us understand how music is used to spread a message in present day times. Music is often used at protests to communicate themes and calls for action.

Press, The Associated. "Pete Seeger, Iconic Troubadour and Activist, Dies at 94 in New York."

The Current,

www.thecurrent.org/feature/2014/01/28/pete-seeger-iconic-troubadour-and-activist-dies-at-94-in-new-york.

We used this picture of Pete Seeger to show how passionate he was for change during the Civil Right Movement.

"Protesters Singing 'We Shall Overcome' in Minneapolis." YouTube, 30 May 2020,

youtu.be/-QolkXz94-Q.

The citizens in this video are singing in Minneapolis. This song was highlighted throughout our documentary and sang by many people to stand for social injustice and change.

"Rare Video Footage of Historic Alabama 1965 Civil Rights Marches, MLK's Famous Montgomery Speech." YouTube, 25 Feb. 2013, youtu.be/CBm48Scju9E.

This video explains the significance of the marches throughout Alabama and includes one of Martin Luther King Jr's famous speeches. We used this footage in our documentary to provide historical context to the Civil Right Movement.

"Real MOORS Talk about: Jim Crow Laws Part 2." BlogTalkRadio, NXphase Records, 20 Feb. 2019,

www.blogtalkradio.com/queend7/2019/02/20/real-moors-talk-about-jim-crow-laws-part-2.

This website provided photographs and clips of injustices during the Civil Rights Movement. We used this media in our documentary to capture the unjust laws of the Civil Rights Movement.

"Rosa Parks." Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 4 Feb. 2021,

www.britannica.com/biography/Rosa-Parks.

We used this photograph at the end of our documentary to highlight leaders that inspired us. Parks took a stand when refusing to give up her seat on a public bus.

Russell, Kimberly. "Follow the Drinking Gourd."

This picture was used in our documentary to show Underground Railroad travelers following the drinking gourd, which was the Big Dipper constellation.

"Ruth Bader Ginsburg." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 8 Mar. 2021, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruth_Bader_Ginsburg.

We used this photograph at the end of our documentary to highlight leaders that inspire us. Ginsburg fought against injustices throughout her life and served on the Supreme Court.

Son, J.W. Pepper and. "Now Let Me Fly (SATB) Arr. Julie Gardner Br: J.W. Pepper Sheet Music." Now Let Me Fly (SATB) Arr. Julie Gardner Br | J.W. Pepper Sheet Music, www.jwpepper.com/Now-Let-Me-Fly/3025806.item#/.

This website provided the sheet music for "Now Let Me Fly." We used the music and photograph of the sheet music in our documentary to demonstrate how music communicated hope and freedom.

Staff, NPR. "Freedom Singer: 'Without Music, There Would Be No Movement'." NPR, NPR, 28 Aug. 2013, www.npr.org/2013/08/28/216422973/freedom-singer-without-music-there-would-be-no-movement.

In this recording, Rutha Mae Harris talks about the movement and how it would be not as impactful without music. She then talks about how their music during the Civil Rights Movement was important.

Staple, Mavis, and Jeffery Callison. "Civil Rights: The Music and the Movement." University of California Television, Los Angeles, California, 23 Apr. 2009.

Singer Mavis Staple discussed her experience in the Civil Rights Movement. She explained earlier life growing up in the South. Her story was interesting as she played a large part in the movement and stood for freedom and courage. about her experiences She toured the country and stayed in homes just for black Americans involved in the movement. Lastly, she said that everyone could sing and be part of the movement (not just professional singers).

“The Historic March to Montgomery’ (Selma, AL, 3/20-21/1965).” YouTube, 6 May 2013, youtu.be/XArs06XavIE.

This video shows the bloody march to Selma. We used this footage in our documentary to show the brutally used by the police towards marchers. Participants demonstrated courage as they marched for equality.

“THE STORY OF BLOODY SUNDAY, MARCH 7, 1965.” YouTube, 21 Nov. 2016, youtu.be/TYtO7zj2zz8.

This video showed the tragic march to Selma. People were beaten and choked by police officers.

Taylor, Diane C. *Singing for Equality: Musicians of the Civil Rights Era*. Nomad Press, 2020.

Taylor expresses the vital role music played in the Civil Right Movement. Taylor shares the stories of Bob Dylan, Mavis Staples, Nina Simone, Sam Cooke, and James Brown. Each of these artists described used their music to call people to action.

Thousands and Thousands of People in the Manifestation. London, England, 4 June 2020.

This photograph was used in our documentary to show the impact of modern day protests.

“Voices of Struggle The Civil Rights Movement, 1945 to 1965.” Edited by Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, [Folkways.si.edu](https://folkways.si.edu), Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 3 Feb. 2021, folkways.si.edu/.

This recording provided the history and struggles of people in the Civil Rights Movement. We used this source to help us understand the adversity and inequalities that were prevalent during the movement.

“Was the Albany Movement a Successful Civil Rights Demonstration?” YouTube, 14 Nov. 2017, youtu.be/OPVQEFP2SY4.

This video discusses the Albany Movement and shows the demonstrations that took place in Albany to stop segregation. This video was used in our documentary to show footage of the time period.

“We Shall Overcome.” Performance by Pete Seeger, Martin Bertelsen, 24 Jan. 2008, www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhnPVP23rzo.

This song addresses inequality and how people shall overcome their differences. We used this song in our documentary to highlight how music communicates a message during the past and present.

“Women in the Civil Rights Movement.” Click - Women in Civil Rights - Women in the Civil Rights Movement, Ella Baker, Black Women and Civil Rights, Women and Civil Rights Act, www.cliohistory.org/click/politics-social/civil-rights.

We used the photograph on this website to show the struggles of women during the Civil Rights Movement.

Secondary Sources

“African American Song.” The Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200197451.

This secondary online article discussed the origins of African American music in America, such as gospel, jazz and the blues. In addition, this source explains some of the different types of religious gatherings African slaves had, and it included a description of gospel and spiritual songs. It also reviews music used in the Civil Rights Movement, which we used in our documentary.

Beck-Cross, Cathy. “The Importance of Singing Among Slaves.” Exploring African American History, 22 May 2020, gvhist298.wordpress.com/2020/05/21/https-historyengine-richmond-edu-episodes-view-4844/.

Beck-Cross described how the slaves embedded codes within songs to communicate and offer hope of freedom. “Wade in the water” and “Follow the Drinking Gourd” were two songs mentioned in the article. We featured these songs in the Underground Railroad portion of our documentary.

Berry, Kenyatta. Singing in Slavery: Songs of Survival, Songs of Freedom, 25 Jan. 2017, www.pbs.org/mercy-street/blogs/mercy-street-revealed/songs-of-survival-and-songs-of-freedom-during-slavery/?scrlbrkr=206aa897.

This article explained how slaves communicated by using songs to express their feelings regarding the tragedies of slavery and the need for survival. It helped us understand the trauma slaves went through, which created the need for song to express their feelings. We gave examples of this in our documentary.

“Category: Underground Railroad.” Harriet Tubman, www.harriet-tubman.org/category/underground-railroad/.

This website helped us understand the history of the Underground Railroad. We also used several of the photographs in our documentary to provide context and show the

Underground Railroad travelers' emotions by showing us the lyrics of songs in the Underground Railroad. We used the context from this article to build historical accuracy to our documentary.

Edited by SNCC Legacy Project & Duke University, SNCC Digital Gateway, SNCC Legacy Project & Duke University, snccdigital.org/.

This website collection of materials provides in-depth primary and secondary information about the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). We learned about The Freedom Singers, including individual song leaders such as Berenice Johnson and Charles Sherrod. Learning about their experiences with music in The Civil Rights Movement built our understanding of the powerful influence of song, which we demonstrated in our documentary.

Graham, Casey. "SNCC Freedom Singers (1962-1966)." Welcome to Blackpast •, 6 Feb. 2020, www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/sncc-freedom-singers-1962-1966/.

Graham explained the impact of The Freedom Singers to the Civil Rights Movement by sharing their experiences from 1962 through 1966. Graham also elaborated on the events in the colleges and high schools around the U.S. He demonstrated that music has the power to impact a movement in more ways than only motivation. We used this to provide more description of The Freedom Singers in our documentary.

Gyrus. "Follow the Drinking Gourd." Dreamflesh, Oct. 2014, dreamflesh.com/essay/follow-drinking-gourd/.

Slaves used this song to follow the Big Dipper constellation. By following the North Star, the Underground Railroad travelers could find the promised land and freedom. We highlighted this song in our documentary.

"How Women Shaped the Civil Rights Movement through Music." Futurity, 8 Aug. 2019, www.futurity.org/civil-rights-movement-women-music-2128232/.

This article talked about the impact women made during the Civil Rights Movement. Women were discouraged during the movement, but they never gave up for what they stood for and believed in. Women used the power of song to lead and to express themselves. We learned women and others who felt powerless to lead, could lead if they used music. We sought to demonstrate this phenomenon of music as a leadership tool in our documentary.

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, iep.utm.edu/music-sj/.

This website helped us understand how music is used to promote social justice and human rights, which supports the theme of our documentary as we discussed the importance of inclusiveness and the value of every human-being.

Meacham, Jon, and Tim McGraw. *Songs of America: Patriotism, Protest, and the Music That Made a Nation*. Random House, an Imprint and Division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2019.

Meacham and McGraw review the cultural and political power that music has on movements and historical events. We used the chapters regarding the Civil Rights Movement to inform how music served as a powerful communication tool to offer direction and hope.

Miller, Robert B. "Underground Railroad: Information and Articles about the Underground Railroad, One of the Causes of the Civil War." HistoryNet, Historynet.com, www.historynet.com/.

This website elaborated on the details of the Underground Railroad. It provided us with historical context about the Underground Railroad and the time period that we could use in our documentary.

Mingo, AnneMarie. "Transgressive Leadership and Theo-Ethical Texts of Black Protest Music." *Black Theology*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2019, pp. 91–113., doi:10.1080/14769948.2019.1613324.

Mingo explained the ethics of music throughout the Civil Rights Movement. Mingo shared her opinion about the reasons songs were shared and how anyone could sing the songs and become a leader. This journal article made us think about the power behind music and how we can embrace music for social change. This article provided further evidence that music is a leadership tool that can be used by anyone, regardless of whether they were previously viewed as a leader.

movieclips. "Harriet (2019) - Crossing the River Scene (3/10) | Movieclips." YouTube, YouTube, 13 Feb. 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=MuoKbVOU3gU.

This video clip shows Harriet Tubman getting into the water to hide from the bounty hunters. This is where the song "Wade in the Water" comes from. We used it in our documentary to narrate the journey the slaves had to make to freedom.

"Music From the Civil War to the 1950s." Edited by Timetoast.com, Timetoast.com, www.timetoast.com/.

This website contained a timeline about music from the Civil War to the 1960s, including links to listen to the songs. This was helpful in developing an understanding for styles of music used during our time periods of study.

"Music in the Civil Rights Movement: Articles and Essays: Civil Rights History Project: Digital Collections: Library of Congress." The Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/collections/civil-rights-history-project/articles-and-essays/music-in-the-civil-rights-movement/?scrllybrkr=900e9f89.

This article explained how important songs were in the Civil Rights Movement. Pete Seeger and songwriters Guy and Candie Carwin had a big role in the movements and described how songs were used to bring healing during the movement. We used the song "We Shall Overcome" in our documentary to show how hope for the future was communicated.

“Songs and the Civil Rights Movement.” The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute, 4 May 2018, kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/songs-and-civil-Rights-movement.

This article explains the effect that music has on the moral attitude of the movement. It also discusses some of the more important songs in the movement. One of the examples would be "We Shall Overcome," which is the unofficial anthem of the movement. Singing was also used by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in meetings and had the power to unite differences. It also has many good quotes from MLK and other movement members. This helped us develop further historical context for our documentary. We also used photographs from this article

“Songs and the Civil Rights Movement.” The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute, 4 May 2018, kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/songs-and-civil-Rights-movement.

This website provided information regarding important songs like, “We Shall Overcome” and, “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” The website also provided photographs used in the Civil Rights section of our documentary.

“Songs of the Underground Railroad.” Harriet Tubman,

www.harriet-tubman.org/songs-of-the-underground-railroad/.

This website shared the lyrics of songs used in the Underground Railroad. It also discussed the reasons the songs were created and the directions or codes that the slaves used. Also, the article talked about the origins of the slave song in America. They were brought over from Africa to help with monotonous work. Music helped slaves to find hope.

“The Times They Are A 'Changing: The Impact of Protest Songs.” Kore Studios, 18 Feb. 2020,

www.kore-studios.com/the-times-they-are-achanging-the-impact-of-protest-songs.

This website explained how music can be used as a protest tool. The songs on this

website have themes of overcoming injustice and oppression. This website informed our documentary and helped us understand how music is a powerful communication tool throughout different eras of history.

“The Underground Railroad and Historic Inns with Underground Railroad Ties.” Destinations, www.noirguides.com/undergroundrailroadinns.html.

We used this picture because it depicts how Underground Railroad travelers got away from their owners.

www.facebook.com/BLACKENTERPRISE/. “15 Top Civil Rights Songs That Promote Freedom and Justice for Black History Month.” Black Enterprise, Black Enterprise, 31 Jan. 2020, www.blackenterprise.com/15-awesome-empowering-motivational-songs-playlist-civil-rights/.

This secondary source helped us find the top songs impacting the Civil Rights Movement by sending a message through music. The music inspired citizens to make a difference by standing up to injustices.