

## Neutrality or Engagement?

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### Goals

Students analyze a political cartoon and a diary entry that highlight the risks taken by civil rights workers in the 1960s. They imagine themselves in similar situations and consider conflicting motivations and responsibilities. Then they evaluate how much they would sacrifice for an ideal.

### Central Questions

Many Black Mississippians—including Black ministers, teachers, and business owners—chose not to get involved in the Civil Rights Movement because of the dangers connected with participating. What do you think you would have done when Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) or Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) came to your town? Was joining the movement worth the risk?

### Background Information

Many people willingly put their lives and safety on the line to fight for civil rights. But other people chose not to get involved from fear of being punished by the police, employers, or terrorist groups. The dangers were very real: during the 1964 Freedom Summer, there were at least six murders, 29 shootings, 50 fire-bombings, more than 60 beatings, and over 400 arrests in Mississippi.

Despite their fears, 80,000 residents, mostly African Americans, risked harassment and intimidation to cast ballots in the Freedom Vote of November 1963. But the next year, during 1964's Freedom Summer, only 16,000 black Mississippians tried to register to vote in the official election that fall.

“The people are scared,” James Forman of SNCC told a reporter. “They tell us, ‘All right. I’ll go down to register [to vote], but what you going to do for me when I lose my job and they beat my head?’”

We hear many stories about courage and heroism, but not many about people who didn't dare to get involved. We like to imagine that we would have been one of the heroes. But would we? What does it take to risk everything for an ideal?

### Documents Used in This Lesson:

1. Political cartoon, “Caught him trespassin’ on private property!” This cartoon by Frank Miller appeared in the *Des Moines Register* on July 10, 1964.  
<http://wihist.org/1FOlvWy>
2. Walter Kaufmann’s diary entry for Aug. 15-16, 1964 (excerpt). Kaufmann describes violent incidents he witnessed during his first two days in Mississippi.  
<http://wihist.org/11WzwEJ>

Document 1: Political cartoon, "Caught him trespassin' on private property!" This cartoon by Frank Miller appeared in the *Des Moines Register* on July 10, 1964.  
<http://wihist.org/1FOlvWy>



## Questions

Cartoon Analysis: “Caught him trespassin’ on private property!”

Work with a partner or small group to answer these questions.

1. Identify the cartoon’s caption or title.
2. Record any important dates or numbers that appear in the cartoon.
3. Locate three words or phrases that identify objects or people. Which appear to be the most significant? Why do you think so?
4. List the objects or people you see in the cartoon. Which ones are symbols for an idea?
5. Explain how the words in the cartoon clarify the symbols.
8. List adjectives that describe the emotions portrayed in the cartoon.
9. Explain the main message of the cartoon in your own words.
10. What groups would agree or disagree with the cartoon’s message?

Date: Sat Aug 15th

ARRIVED JACFSON MISS COFO OFFICE APPROX. 10:30 PM SAT.,  
5 MIN. LATER A VOLUNTEER WORKER WEAS ASSAULTED WITH A BASEBALL  
BAT DIRECTLY ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE COFO OFFICE. TWELVE  
STITCHES WERE TAKEN IN HIS HEAD. THE OFFICE IS IN THE HEART  
OF THE NEGRO GHETTO --THE ASSAILANTS WERE WHITE.

TEN MINUTES LATER, SILAS MAGEE, FIELD SECRETARY FOR SNCC,  
WAS SHOT IN THE HEAD IN GREENWOOD, MISS., FIVE MIN. LATER, A  
NEGRO WAS SHOT IN THE LEG ON LYNCH STREET, ONLY ONE BLOCK FROM  
THE OFFICE. SIMULTANEOUSLY A CROSS WAS BURNED AT TERRY AND  
LYNCH STREET, S ONLY FOUR BLOCKS FROM THE COFO OFFICE.

Sun. Aug 16th

LEPT COFO OFFICE LOAM FOR MILESTON, MISS. TO INTERVIEW  
HARDIMAN TURNBOLT AN ELECTED DELEGATE TO THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC  
CONVENTION FOR THE FREEDOM DEMOCRAT PARTY. HE IS A LIFETIME  
RESIDENT OF MISS., SEMI-ILLETERATE BUT A NATURAL LEADER AND A  
DYNAMIC PERSONALITY. HE SAYS THAT HE IS FED UP WITH THE TREATMENT  
OF THE NEGROES AND JUST CANT TAKE ANY MORE. EARLIER THIS YEAR,  
HE LED A GROUP OF 14 NEGROES YO THE COURTHOUSE IN HOLMES COUNTY  
TO REGISTER. THE SHERIFF LINED THEM UP, PULLED HIS GUN, AND  
ASKED, "WHO WANTS TO BE FIRST?". HARDIMAN TURNBOLT IMMEDIATELY  
STBPPED FORWARD AND SAID "ME". THE SHERIFF WAS SO SURPRISED  
THAT HE DID NOT SHOOT BUT HOLSTERED HIS PISTOL AND TOLD THEM  
ALL TO GO HOME.

2 WEEKS LATER, HIS HOME WAS FIRE-BOMBED, AND AS HE , HIS  
WIFE AND TWELVE YEAR OLD DAUGHTER WERE FLEEING THE BURNING BLDG.,  
HE WAS FIRED UPON BY WHITES, HE REPELLED THEM BY FIRING BACK,  
WHICH HE HAS DONE ON TWO OCCASIONS SINCE THEN.

COFO: Council of Federated Organizations, the coalition that ran Freedom Summer.

SNCC: Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the most active group during Freedom Summer.

"Hardiman Turnbolt" was actually Hartman Turnbow.

## Questions

Document 2: Walter Kaufmann's diary entry for Aug. 15-16, 1964 (excerpt).

1. Make the diary your own. Choose one of the two activities below.

Write a story: Retell what happened to Mr. Turnbow as if it happened to you. Imagine you or your family are in that situation and tell the story through your own eyes. Make up any details or ending you want.

or

Make a sketch: Draw something to represent one of the incidents Walter Kaufmann described. What did you find the most interesting, moving, offensive, or powerful? Use your art to represent what happened—and how you felt about it.

2. Values clarification exercise

Take five index cards. Write on each card something that you value a lot: a possession, your job, a person you love, your reputation, your home, your health, a cherished pet, your church, making art or music, a sport that you do, feeling safe in your neighborhood—anything that you value deeply. Write a different thing on each card. Put the five cards aside.

Now write on a piece of paper an issue or a cause that you care about: animal rights, police brutality, the right to vote, women's equality, gay marriage, climate change, homelessness, reproductive rights, or any other issue that you feel strongly about.

Pick up your index cards again. Which valuable thing would you give up to help that cause? Crumble up that index card and throw it in the wastebasket. Which valuable thing would you sacrifice next? Continue until you have only one card left. Would you give that up, too?

List three things people in your grandparents' generation risked or sacrificed in order to secure the right to vote and end racial discrimination. That's why you have all the opportunities that you do today.