

Milwaukee School Boycott, May 18, 1964

Goals

Students analyze a political flier and a video clip, discover their main messages, and try to imagine what they would do in similar circumstances today.

Central Questions

Why did Milwaukee civil rights leaders call for a school boycott? What sacrifices are involved in direct actions like school boycotts?

Background Information

Despite the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision declaring racial segregation illegal, a 1960 survey of Milwaukee schools found that schools in the central city were 90 percent Black. In March 1964, community activists, including attorney Lloyd Barbee, Milwaukee Common Council member Vel Phillips, and Father James Groppi organized the Milwaukee United School Integration Committee (MUSIC).

Parents were distressed by the vast differences in quality between majority Black and majority white schools. Another point of contention was “intact busing,” or transporting African American students to all-white schools but keeping them in segregated classrooms, cafeterias, and activities. Many Black children were also tracked into vocational classes instead of business or college prep classes.

In 1964, MUSIC organized a one-day boycott of predominantly Black schools for May 18, the tenth anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board* decision. Instead of going to school, students attended Freedom Schools, where they learned about segregation, racism, and discrimination. The majority of Milwaukee’s Black, inner-city school population (11,000 or roughly 60 percent) stayed out of school, and about 8,500 attended the Freedom Schools.

In October 1965, after seeing few significant changes, MUSIC organized a three-day boycott. By then, Barbee had filed a lawsuit charging the Milwaukee School Board with practicing discrimination, and the issue was tied up in the courts. Milwaukee’s civil rights leaders shifted focus to fair housing and other equal opportunity issues.

Documents Used in This Lesson:

1. May 18, 1964 “Keep Your Children Out of School” flier.
<http://wihist.org/12iziaC>
2. Five-minute news film clip on school boycotts and segregation, May 18, 1964. The first 1:50 seconds have no sound. At 1:50, Lloyd Barbee is interviewed for two minutes about the success of the boycott. The remaining two minutes of the video can be skipped.
<http://wihist.org/1yrlmXx>

This lesson could be used in conjunction with Lesson 2, School Segregation in Milwaukee in the 1960s (p. 13), or Lesson 9, School Segregation in Mississippi (p. 50).

KEEP YOUR CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL

Because

- ▶ Milwaukee schools are in fact segregated
- ▶ Negro children are receiving inferior education
- ▶ Almost one year of NAACP, CORE, and NNNPC efforts have met with continuous refusal to even recognize segregation in Milwaukee schools. The School Board in its current work sessions, has not yet begun to deal with the problem.
- ▶ The School Board continues to segregate 37 classes of Negro children who are bussed to 'white schools.'

A one day mass student withdrawal has been called by the Milwaukee United School Integration Committee (MUSIC) which includes all the civil rights groups and many church and fraternal groups. The withdrawal will protest and dramatize the evils of our segregated schools and the inferior education offered to our children.

Join thousands of Milwaukee parents who feel morally obligated to withdraw their children from school on Monday, May 18, 1964, in support of

FREEDOM DAY MAY 18th

to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the U. S. Supreme Court's school desegregation decision.

Send your children to FREEDOM SCHOOLS which will be staffed by qualified persons who will offer them a full and enriching experience in the areas of freedom, democracy, and the achievements of Negroes in American civic, scientific, military, legal, educational, and cultural life.

A Freedom Day Hootenanny will also be held for the benefit of your children who attend the Freedom schools.

Stand with Milwaukee's civil rights' demand for integration of our schools and true equality of educational opportunities in the inner core.

Don't be intimidated! For further information call 374-6720. You will be assisted in every way. What will you do to HELP?

MILWAUKEE UNITED SCHOOL INTEGRATION COMMITTEE (MUSIC)

2944 North 9th Street

Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53206

Telephone 374-6720

Questions

Document 1: May 18, 1964 “Keep Your Children Out of School” flier.

Working in a small group, investigate the flier and answer the questions together. Reach agreement on a single answer to each question.

1. Who created the flier and who was its target audience? What evidence do you see on the flier to support your answers?

Creator:

Audience:

2. List in your own words the problems that organizers point out on the flier. Choose two problems you think are the most serious.
3. Think of two or three issues that people are protesting today. Choose one. If you were asked to boycott school in order to protest it, would you do it? Why or why not?
4. Can you imagine an issue that everybody in your group would skip school to protest? Describe it, and explain why it's more important than suffering the consequences of skipping school.

Document 2. News film clip on school boycotts and segregation, May 18, 1964.
<http://wihist.org/1yrlmXx>



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Questions

Document 2: News film clip on school boycotts and segregation, May 18, 1964.

Working with a partner, make notes on the following questions. Be prepared to share them with the class.

1. What's happening during the first two minutes when there's no sound? Make a list of the types of places shown and the activities you see happening there.
2. If the video had been used on the TV news, an announcer would have been talking over the first two minutes. What do you think would have been the announcer's main points? Consult your list from question 1.
3. Watch the brief interview with Lloyd Barbee. Why does he say the boycott is needed? Does he think it is succeeding? Do you think the man asking the questions supports the boycott, opposes it, or doesn't take sides? Why do you think that?
4. On another sheet, create your own script to go with the silent portion of the video. While the teacher shows the video read it aloud as if you were the newscaster.