

HANDOUT ONE:

Lesson Five Transcript

CASE STUDY TITLE: Civil Rights

STILL: Black family uses "Colored Only" fountain

LOWER THIRD: JOHN LEWIS / Congressman and Civil Rights Activist

JOHN LEWIS:
During the '60s we felt the stain of segregation and racial discrimination.

STILL: Young black girls look through wire fence at a playground in distance

JOHN LEWIS:
And when you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, you have to do something.

B-ROLL (archival): Birmingham streets filled with black demonstrators walking holding signs

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. (at press conf.):
We cannot continue to accept these conditions of oppression for this is not a struggle for ourselves alone, it is a struggle to save the soul of America.

B-ROLL (archival): Birmingham streets filled with black demonstrators walking holding signs; demonstrators gathered with signs; 18th Street Baptist Church sign; church members holding hands, clapping and singing together

LOWER THIRD: JANICE WESLEY KELSEY / Civil Rights Activist

JANICE KELSEY:
When I participated in the movement, I was fifteen. It would not have been successful, had it not been for ordinary little nobodies doing their part to make it happen.

B-ROLL (archival): Birmingham streets filled with black demonstrators walking holding signs; MLK being arrested

JON MEACHAM: By 1963 the full panoply of segregation was under attack. It begins to culminate on the streets of Alabama.

B-ROLL (archival): Black student protesters behind bars

REPORTER (archival):
The campaign was directed against racial discrimination in Birmingham, the most totally segregated big city in the South.

JANICE KELSEY:
I had a made-up mind that I could handle whatever was coming, and be non-violent.

B-ROLL (archival): Demonstrators fill the streets of Birmingham; police on motorcycles; firefighters unscrew fire hydrant and hose children; police dogs go after children

JON MEACHAM:
In May, thousands of children march against segregation in Birmingham.

MAN (archival):
The city is determined to maintain order.

JON MEACHAM:
They're attacked by fire hoses, by police dogs...

JANICE KELSEY:
To see children treated like this, the whole nation rose up in arms.

STILLS: Young demonstrators in Birmingham being attacked by police dogs; newspaper photo of man demonstrating against use of police dogs against children; HEADLINE: 950 Arrests in Two Days in Birmingham

REPORTER (archival):
The events in Birmingham have sent a chill through most Americans.

JON MEACHAM: What the movement did was dramatize the stakes between good and evil.

GEORGE WALLACE (archival): I will be present to bar the entrance of any Negro who attempts to enroll at the University of Alabama.

HEADLINE: "Gov. Wallace Retreats From
University Door"

B-ROLL (archival): aerial of March on
Washington; crowds waiting to hear MLK speak;
King at the podium

JON MEACHAM:

All of these incidents have a slow cascading
effect on the opinion of the country.

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR:

I have a dream today! (applause)

B-ROLL (archival): Ext. White House

JON MEACHAM:

And honestly the opinion of President Kennedy.

B-ROLL (archival): JFK walks towards Oval
Office desk to make announcement; press cameras
ready

JOHN LEWIS:

I remember President Kennedy saying to us on
one occasion, "We now understand."

JOHN F. KENNEDY (archival):

This nation was founded on the principle that
all men are created equal, and that the rights
of every man are diminished, when the rights
of one man are threatened. Now the time has
come for this nation to fulfill its promise.

B-ROLL (archival): Sign: "Two Great Democrats"
with images of JFK and LBJ; Presidential
Motorcade in Dallas

JON MEACHAM:

Kennedy and Johnson propose a far-
reaching civil rights act. It was not going
particularly well.

B-ROLL (archival): Motorcade rushes by

REPORTER 1 (archival): It appears as though
something has happened in the motorcade group.

B-ROLL (archival): hospital ext.; roses in
backseat where JFK was shot

JON MEACHAM: Kennedy is shot to death in
Dealey Plaza.

REPORTER 2 (archival):

It's official now, the president is dead.

B-ROLL (archival): woman crying; JFK's casket
being loaded onto plane

STILL: LBJ being sworn in on Air Force One

LYNDON B. JOHNSON (on AF-1):

I solemnly swear...

JON MEACHAM:

Johnson takes the oath of office on Air Force
One, becomes President.

B-ROLL (archival): JFK's casket being moved
from airplane to hearse, crowds observe

LYNDON B. JOHNSON (archival):

We have suffered a loss that cannot be weighed.
I ask for your help, and God's.

B-ROLL (archival): White House ext. at night

STILL: Cut out of LBJ's face deep in thought

JON MEACHAM:

That night Johnson's lying in bed and he's
listing all the things he wants to do—foreign
leaders that need to be called, funeral
arrangements. But in the midst of this, he
says he wants to pass the administration's
civil rights bill without changing a comma.
And it was kind of a remarkable moment because
Johnson had a presidential race coming up.

B-ROLL (archival): LBJ on ranch, with cows;
Lyndon Johnson for Senator banner; Johnson
as Senator on podium; black woman in crowd
listening to Johnson; Senator LBJ disembarks
plane

STILLS: LBJ eye-to-eye with Lincoln statue;
LBJ in discussions with MLK

JON MEACHAM: No more political man ever drew
breath than Lyndon Baines Johnson. Johnson
had been a senator from Texas, a segregated
state. A lot of debate about to what extent he
watered down civil rights legislation in the
'50s, but he did. He was in no way a leading
progressive. And so you wouldn't've bet that
Lyndon Johnson was going to finish the work of
Lincoln. Everything about that moment would
have led him politically to have made all
kinds of promises, all kinds of rhetorical
nods to the civil rights legislation but not
to pursue it. There was something in Johnson's

soul that led him to believe that this was the moment to strike.

STILLS: LBJ on phone; MLK on phone

LYNDON B. JOHNSON (phone call audio): We've got a civil rights bill that hasn't even passed the house and it's November and Hubert Humphrey told me yesterday everybody wanted to go home. I'm going to ask the Congress Wednesday to just stay there until they pass them all. They won't do it but we'll just keep them there next year until they do. And we just won't give up an inch.

MARTIN LUTHER KING (phone call audio): It's so imperative. I think one of the great tributes that we can pay in memory of President Kennedy is to try to enact some of the great, progressive policies that he sought to initiate.

STILLS: LBJ on phone

LYNDON B. JOHNSON (phone call audio): Well, I'm going to support them all, and you can count on that. And I'm going to do my best to get other men to do likewise. And I'll have to have y'all's help. I never needed it more than I do now.

STILL: LBJ in discussions with civil rights leaders, John Lewis; James Farmer.

JOHN LEWIS:

Lyndon Johnson was a strong, strong leader. He made a commitment to those of us in the civil rights movement that he would pick up where President Kennedy left off. And he did.

STILL: LBJ in meeting with MLK and other civil rights leaders.

JON MEACHAM: Lyndon Johnson risked just about everything for civil rights. As he later put it, "What the hell is the presidency for if not to do the big things that other men might not?"

LYNDON B. JOHNSON (archival): Ladies and gentlemen, we are going to pass the civil rights bill because it's morally right.

B-ROLL (archival): White House ext.

STILLS: Johnson talking one-on-one with various congressmen and senators

JON MEACHAM: What Johnson then did from '63 to '64 is he created a remarkable coalition of Republicans and Democrats to pass a law that would finally undo what had been the racist reaction to the verdict of the Civil War.

LYNDON B. JOHNSON (archival): I promise you here and now that we are going to pass a civil rights bill.

JON MEACHAM: Lyndon Johnson was one of the great persuaders of American politics, the "Johnson treatment" it was called.

B-ROLL (archival): view of Washington Monument and reflecting pool; Lincoln memorial; D.C. street with Capitol in background; Capitol building; White House ext.

LYNDON B. JOHNSON (archival): We will pass the strongest civil rights bill in American history.

JON MEACHAM: The trade-offs, the deals cut to get to a legislative solution is the work of politics.

B-ROLL (archival): LBJ signing Civil Rights Bill

NARRATOR (archival): July 2nd, 1964. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the civil rights bill into law.

LYNDON B. JOHNSON (archival): I urge every American to join in this effort to bring justice and hope to all our people and to bring peace to our land (applause).

B-ROLL (archival): LBJ signing Civil Rights Bill, handing out pens

STILLS: A man blocks a police car during student protests in Birmingham; a policeman pushes back a black protester

JON MEACHAM: The Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act taken together in '64 and '65 to represent what concentrated acts of citizenship can do when they intersect with the attention and skill of those in power.