



maryland
historical society

Historical Investigation:

Protests Against Segregation in Baltimore's Theatres

Grades: 9-12, U.S. History

Time: 45 to 60 minutes

Materials:

1. Graphic Organizer
2. Primary Source Handouts

Common Core Standards for Literacy:

- a. RH.6-8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- b. RH.6-8.2 Determine the central or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- c. RH.6-8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- d. RH.6-8.6 Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose.
- e. RH.6-8.8 Distinguish among fact, opinion and reasoned judgment in a text.
- f. WHST.6-8.1 Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.
- g. WHST.6-8.1a Introduce claims, acknowledge and distinguish claims from alternate of opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.
- h. WHST.6-8.1b Support claims with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.
- i. WHST.6-8.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

College, Career, and Civic Life: C3 Framework for the Social Studies:

Dimension 1: Asking Compelling Questions and Constructing Inquiries

- D1.2.6-8 Explain points of agreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a compelling question.
- D1.5.6-8 Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration multiple points of views represented in the sources.

Dimension 2: Apply Disciplinary Concepts & Tools – History

- D2His.3.6-8 Use questions generated about individuals and groups to analyze why they, and the developments they shaped, are seen as historically significant.

- D2His.4.6-8 Analyze multiple factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.
- D2His.6.6-8 Analyze how people’s perspectives influenced what information is available in the historical sources they created.
- D2His.10.6-8 Detect possible limitations in the historical record based on evidence collected from different kinds of historical sources.
- D2His.13.6-8 Evaluate the relevancy and utility of a historical source based on information such as maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose.
- D2His.16.6-8 Organize applicable evidence into a coherent argument about the past.

Dimension 3 Evaluating Sources & Using Evidence

- D3.1.6-8 Gather relevant information from multiple sources while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.
- D3.2.6-8 Evaluate the credibility of a source by determining its relevance and intended use.
- D3.3.6-8 Identify evidence that draws information from multiple sources to support claims, noting evidentiary limitations.

Dimension 4: Communicating Conclusions & Taking Informed Action

- D4.1.6-8 Construct arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging the strengths and limitations of the arguments.

Primary Sources (*Events not covered in the *Baltimore Sun*):

1. “Protesting Jim Crow admissions policy at Ford's Theatre,” 1948. Paul Henderson Photograph Collection. Maryland Historical Society, Special Collections.
2. Parren Mitchell, Oral History. 1976. OH 8170, Governor Theodore McKeldin-Dr. Lillie May Jackson Project. Maryland Historical Society.
3. “After 6 Year Picket Line: Md.’s Ford Theatre Ends Separate Seating Policy.” *The Baltimore Afro-American*. 9 February, 1952.
4. “McKeldin Takes Initiative: Gov. Calls For Probe Of Ford’s Theatre Bias,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*. 12 January, 1952.
5. Brown, Milton P. Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Hollander. Sidney Hollander Papers, MS 2044, March 4, 1949, MdHS.

I. Engage the Students

- Show students the photograph, *Protesting Jim Crow admissions policy at Ford's Theatre*, taken by Paul Henderson in 1948.
- Ask: What do you think is going on in this print?
- Ask: What strategies are being used by the participants?
- Provide students with background on the issue of segregation in Baltimore's theatres and other private businesses.

Despite being considered one of the most ideologically progressive cities in the American south, Baltimore was largely segregated well into the 1940's and 50's. Even as formerly all white housing, employment, and higher education were being opened up to blacks, major recreational and entertainment opportunities were still rigidly divided. Performance theatres presented a difficult situation for their owners, across the north and the south. There was no uniform strategy for regulating the inevitable interactions that would arise in a multiracial industry that catered to both blacks and whites.

Ford's Theatre, located on Fayette Street in Downtown Baltimore, had practiced varying degrees of segregation since its opening in 1871. Its policy during the latter period was to restrict African American patrons to the upper balcony. The Baltimore branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was one of the country's strongest since the 1930's. Though most often associated with legal challenges to discrimination, the organization employed different tactics when they began to lead protest efforts against Ford's in February of 1947. The city was also home to the *Afro-American* newspaper, which aggressively covered and supported the efforts of civil rights activists.

II. Conduct the Investigation

- ❑ Present students with graphic organizer, which asks them to record:
 1. Title, date, and creator of the source.
 2. What strategies were used to protest? By whom?
 3. How does the source describe the problem?
 4. Is there evidence of the impact of these actions (on the theatre or on the public)?
 5. What evidence of the impact is provided in the source?

Guided Practice

- ❑ Model the analysis of one source (*Protest Demonstration*) for the class:
 1. Have students read and note visual clues aloud.
 2. Read aloud again in chunks, asking students to give the explicit meaning.
 3. As a class, fill in the graphic organizer.

Independent Practice

- Have students work in pairs or groups to read remaining sources and fill in the graphic organizer.

III. Discussions

1. Share findings as a whole class. Use portions of Guided Practice: Historical Thinking Skills to direct discussion.

2. Conduct a class discussion, in order to support student thinking about the focus question:

How were Civil Rights activists able to influence the discriminatory policies used by Baltimore's theatres?

Prompt using the following questions:

- What strategies were used by individuals and organizations to protest the policy at Ford's Theatre? Who participated?
- What words or phrases did these critics use describe the discriminatory policy?
- Were the efforts successful? How/Why were they effective?

IV. Assessment

- Ask students to assume the identity of an African American theatre patron, a white theatre patron, a white theatre owner, or a performer of either race. Direct them to write a letter to the editor of a newspaper, or a private letter to a friend, supporting or disagreeing with the activists picketing Ford's Theatre in Baltimore.

- Tell students to provide specific evidence from the primary sources to support their view.
- Remind them to consider the opposing arguments that might be presented.

“Protesting Jim Crow admissions policy at Ford's Theatre” 1948. Paul Henderson Photograph Collection. Maryland Historical Society.



Educational materials developed by the Maryland Historical Society, 2014.

“Protesting Jim Crow admissions policy at Ford's Theatre” 1948. Paul Henderson Photograph Collection. Maryland Historical Society.



PROTEST AT FORD'S THEATRE, PAUL HENDERSON COLLECTION, MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY. PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS DOCUMENT IS GRANTED FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY.

How were Civil Rights activists able to influence the discriminatory policies used by Baltimore's theatres?

Source Title/Date/Creator	What strategies were used to protest? By Whom?	How do these sources describe the problem?	Is there evidence of the impact of these actions (on the theatre or the public)?	What evidence of the impact is provided in the source? Provide specific quotes or visual details.
<i>Protest Demonstration</i> (two photos), 1948.				
Parren Mitchell, Oral History, 1976				
“After 6 Year Picket Line,” <i>Afro-American</i> . February 1952.				
Milton Brown Letter to Sidney Hollander, 1949				
“McKeldin Takes Initiative,” <i>Afro-American</i> . January 1952.				

Source Title/Date/Creator	What strategies were used to protest? By Whom?	How do these sources describe the problem?	Is there evidence of the impact of these actions (on the theatre or the public)?	What evidence of the impact is provided in the source? Provide specific quotes or visual details.

result of that City Wide Young Peoples Forum. Although I was very young at that time I was old enough to understand exactly what was being said in terms of the discrimination, the racism.

As a result of that, I remember one of my first picketing ventures was at Ford's Theater when at that time black people could only sit in their third balcony, and I remember night after night being there on that picket line, and the actual ugliness, the hostility on the part of some of the whites that crossed the picket line; oh, who were just annoyed because we were there, and then the encouragement that came from some of the others. From that point on it was just one thing after another. Once you got into it, events were breaking fast, and that's the way it happened.

I: Wasn't Dr. Jackson fairly active in supporting and encouraging the City Wide Young Peoples Forum at the time?

A: Oh, yes. She was the prime mover behind almost every forward looking thing in civil rights at that time. Again, I can recall when I was very young going to the NAACP rallies, and they were always dramatic and exciting and she generally spoke toward the end of them, and she always just turned the crowd on. The people gave up their money willingly, because of two things: Because she was a dynamic personality and, secondly, they could see the result of the NAACP effort. They could see either the fight on or some things being changed. So, once you get in it you lose a kind of time perspective. I can't remember what I did next, what rally was next, what picket line was next, but I know that from that point on I was knee deep in it.

Governor McKeldin has asked his Commission on Interracial Problems and Relations to investigate the jim crow policy of Ford's Theatre.

This marks the first time that a State official has taken a stand in the fight to lower the color bar at the Fayette St. Theatre. The NAACP has been picketing the theatre for six years.

Governor Blasts Discrimination

In a letter to William C. Rogers, chairman of the commission, Governor McKeldin called discrimination in theatres and other cultural institutions "both offensive and illogical."

He added that the "absurdity" of the practice is illustrated by the grossly inconsistent and arbitrary manner of its application both in this State and elsewhere."

Washington Cited

Here the Governor pointed out that in Constitution Hall in Washington, colored performers are not permitted on the stage, but the audience is seated without restriction.

He said further that also in Washington is another theatre which has no objection to colored performers, but objects to colored spectators, and still others that have no restrictions whatsoever.

Said the Governor, "A similar capriciousness is exhibited in Baltimore. Colored artists are banished from the stage at the Lyric, but members of their race may and do sit through performances without challenge or complaint from white patrons.

"Ford's Theatre, on the other hand, follows the converse rule. It accepts colored actors, but restricts colored theatre-goers (to the second balcony)."

"McKeldin Takes Initiative: Gov. Calls For Probe Of Ford's Theatre Bias," *The Baltimore Afro-American*. 12 January, 1952.

BALTIMORE

Segregation will be practiced no longer at Ford's Theatre.

This change in policy is in accord with a resolution prepared by the Governor's Commission on Interracial Relations following its recent meeting with Ford Theatre officials.

Accepting the commission's recommendation, the theatre manager, John Little, said Thursday that the new policy takes effect on Feb. 14 when the theatre reopens with "The Merry Widow."

For approximately six years, the NAACP, the Committee For Non-Segregation in Baltimore Theatres and associated groups had waged war against the theatre's policy of restricting colored patrons to balcony seats.

Patronage Dropped Off

Their constant picket lines and influential appeals to actors, playwrights, and producers had caused a marked drop in the theatre patronage as many top-flight Broadway plays by-passed Baltimore.

"After 6 Year Picket Line: Md.'s Ford Theatre Ends Separate Seating Policy." *The Baltimore Afro-American*. 9 February, 1952.

TELEPHONE LAFAYETTE 8504

BALTIMORE BRANCH

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

402 DOLPHIN STREET
BALTIMORE 17, MARYLAND

MILTON P. BROWN, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

ATTY. W. A. C. HUGHES, JR.
LEGAL ADVISOR

ATTY. CHARLES H. HOUSTON
CONSULTANT

MRS. LILLIE M. JACKSON
PRESIDENT

VICE-PRESIDENTS

MRS. AUGUSTA T. CHISSELL
MRS. SARAH F. DIGGS
MRS. MAYME F. GRIFFIN
REV. J. R. BUTLER
REV. FRANK J. FRYE
REV. H. O. GRAHAM
REV. E. W. WHITE
REV. WILLARD CLAYTON

MRS. ELAINE C. FIELDS
SECRETARY

WILBUR O. STEWART
TREASURER

DR. W. O. BRYSON, JR.
AUDITOR

JOSHUA E. MAXWELL
AUDITOR EMERITUS

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

HENRY U. AYERS
KENNETH BASS
REV. J. J. BARNES
MAHALIA BLAIR
MRS. LAURA BOULDIN
MRS. LILLIE BROOKS
MRS. REBECCA BROWN
GUS E. BROWN
REV. HELEN BROWN
DR. J. E. T. CAMPER
JOHN COBB
RICHARD COLE
DR. BERNARD CHRISTMAS
REV. JOHN T. COLBERT
ATTY. CALVIN A. DOUGLASS
GEORGE DOUGLASS
MRS. EMMA J. EPPS
MRS. AMANDA FINCH
HERBERT GARDNER
REV. G. J. GARNETT
CLIFTON GATEWOOD
MRS. DOROTHY C. GIBSON
MRS. FANNIE GLASCOE
MISS BERTHA GREENE
REV. EUGENE T. GROVE
MRS. ANNIE HARCUM
MRS. SEDONIA HARRISDAY
MRS. ZENOBIA HOLLIS
MISS P. ESTELLA HOLLOWAY
MRS. MART E. HAWKINS
WILLIE E. HUBBARD
MACEO HOWARD
REV. KELLY L. JACKSON
MRS. KATIE JOHNSON
MRS. MAMIE SNOWLAND
ELI JONES
CHARLES KEY
JOHN KOSER
MRS. EMMA KEY
DR. ALBERT L. LAFOREST
REV. E. L. LOFTON
DR. GEORGE McDONALD
MRS. ENOLIA P. McMILLAN
MRS. FRANCES B. MACDODEN
MRS. BEATRICE MARTIN
MRS. MARIE MASON
MRS. REBECCA MERCER
CLARENCE M. MITCHELL, JR.
DR. GEORGE B. MURPHY
MRS. DELLA MYERS
MRS. IDA NORRIS
REV. D. R. PAGE
REV. A. J. PAYNE
MRS. MAMIE PATTERSON
ATTY. ERNEST L. PERKINS
MRS. VIOLA PICHON
MARION S. POLLETT
MRS. VICTORIA RIDGELY
MRS. BERTAL ROSS
PAUL SCOTT
BISHOP A. P. SHAW
ELDER WINFIELD SNOWDEN
MRS. FLORENCE SNOWDEN
MISS SALLIE STEWART
REV. LILLIAN THOMPSON
MRS. EVA TAYLOR
REV. WILBUR WATERS
DR. CHARLES WATTS
DR. WILLIAM WATTS
REV. J. O. WILLIAMS
REV. V. T. WILLIAMS
MRS. MAUD WILLIAMS
REV. D. A. WILSON
RAYMOND A. C. YOUNG

March 4, 1949

Mr. & Mrs. Sidney Hollander, Sr.
2513 Talbot Road
City-16

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Hollander:

For the third successive season, the Baltimore Branch of the NAACP has maintained a picket line at Ford's Theater, protesting the racially discriminatory policy of the management in restricting colored patrons to a few seats in the top balcony. This picket line was put into effect as a last resort after years of conferences, meetings, and correspondence proved of no avail.

This is part of a national effort being made by our organization in Kansas City, St. Louis, and Washington, D. C., to eliminate racial segregation in the legitimate theater. Certainly, the field of the arts should know no color line.

Here in Baltimore, the response of Theatre Guild subscribers, other patrons, actors, and the general public, has been most encouraging. Attendance at Ford's Theater has definitely decreased. There are weeks in which no show is scheduled at the Theater. Fewer plays are appearing here than at any season before. Some of the best plays on the road today are refusing to come to Ford's because of its segregation policy, as will be noted in the enclosed brochure. Two weeks ago, Mrs. Lillian Hellman, who wrote "The Little Foxes" and "Another Part of the Forest", called this office to inquire concerning our picket line. She stated that in view of the fact that we are continuing our picket line, she would not open her new play here in Baltimore as she had originally planned.

This means that our community is becoming increasingly aware of its responsibility in a constitutional democracy to abolish superficial barriers against groups of its citizens

CHAIRMEN OF COMMITTEES

CARL J. MURPHY
ADMINISTRATIVE AND
LEGAL RECORDS
MRS. BETTY M. PHILLIPS
PUBLICITY
MRS. MAYME F. GRIFFIN
CHURCH
MRS. JUANITA J. MITCHELL
LABOR
MRS. AUGUSTA T. CHISSELL
INTER-RACIAL
WILBUR O. STEWART
FINANCE
JENTRY McDONALD
MEMBERSHIP
REV. J. R. BUTLER
STEERING
MRS. BEATRICE MARTIN
HOUSING
ATTY. ERNEST PERKINS
LEGISLATIVE
ATTY. DONALD G. MURRAY
VETERANS
MRS. FLORENCE SNOWDEN
FRATERNAL

Brown, Milton P. Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Hollander. Sidney Hollander Papers, MS 2044, March 4, 1949, MdHS.