

Sovereignty Commission Mississippi Studies Lesson Plan

Students will

- Learn the significance of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission
- Explore how state government sought to oppress civil rights activity
- Take an in-depth look at a document from the Sovereignty Commission
- Create a historical marker

Materials

- Computer/tablet with internet access
- Paper and writing utensil (physical option)
- Colored pencils (physical option)

Preparation

- National Archives Written Document Analysis Sheet, one copy per student
- Rubric, one copy per student

Required Links

- [Memo from Zack J. Van Landingham to the Director MSSC; October 9, 1958](#) (3 pages)
 - Memo from Zack J. Van Landingham to the MSSC Director regarding the background of Dr. Ernest Borinski, a Professor of Sociology at Tougaloo College suspected of civil rights activism.
- [Investigation Report from Zack J. VanLandingham to Governor J. P. Coleman, Attorney General Joe T. Patterson, and the MSSC; December 17, 1958](#) (37 pages)
 - Detailed report on Clyde Kennard's background, activities, and his attempt to desegregate the University of Southern Mississippi.
- [Memorandum from Zack J. Van Landingham to MSSC; December 30, 1958](#) (6 pages)
 - Record relating information on the background, associations, and activities of the Mississippi Field Secretary of the NAACP, Medgar Evers.
- [Handwritten Note to MSSC; April 23, 1961](#) (3 pages)
 - Handwritten note listing the names, addresses, car license plate information, and car make/models of vehicles parked outside of a suspected Civil Rights meeting.
- [Investigation Report from Virgil Downing to the MSSC; November 22, 1961](#) (4 pages)
 - Report on activities by the NAACP and other Civil Rights organizations in Hattiesburg and Forrest County, and the integration of bus terminals in compliance with the I.C.C.'s (Interstate Commerce Commission) November 1, 1961 ruling.
- [Investigation Report from A. L. Hopkins to the MSSC; March 23, 1964](#) (2 pages)
 - Report on the background and activities of white CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) worker, Michael Schwerner and his wife, Rita, in Meridian, Mississippi.

- [Investigation Report from Tom Scarbrough to the MSSC; April 30, 1964 \(3 pages\)](#)
 - Report regarding concerns related to an event in Panola County featuring Fannie Lou Hamer and Victoria Jackson Gray.
- [Student Application from Jo Ann Ooiman to the Mississippi Summer Project; ca. 1964 \(6 pages\)](#)
 - Student application from Jo Ann Ooiman for the Mississippi Summer Project, listing her background and qualifications for a position with the project.
- [Report from Erle Johnston, Jr. to Bryant George; February 28, 1966 \(29 pages\)](#)
 - Report on the investigation of the creation and activities of the Mississippi Delta Ministry, a civil rights project and division of the National Council of Churches.
- [Letter Intercepted by the MSSC, from the Committee of Concerned Citizens in Jackson, Mississippi to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; March 31, 1968 \(5 pages\)](#)
 - Letter intercepted by the MSSC sent from the Committee of Concerned Citizens in Jackson, Mississippi to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., listing their complaints over a lack of support and equal representation by the city government.

Curricular Connections

Mississippi College- and Career-Readiness Standards for the Social Studies

Mississippi Studies

- MS.8 Evaluate the role of Mississippi in the Civil Rights Movement.
 - MS.8.1 - Analyze the significant figures, groups, and events of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi (e.g., Emmett Till, Medgar Evers, James Meredith, Fannie Lou Hamer, etc.).
 - MS.8.4 - Evaluate the lasting impact of the Civil Rights movement on Mississippi.

Introduction

To understand the past and see its impact on the present, students should engage with primary sources from past events. For students to truly understand the documents and have the correct context, teachers must first lay the groundwork for this connection. The teacher should begin this lesson with a brief introduction to the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission (MSSC) and the Civil Rights Movement. A short introduction to the MSSC and a list of additional resources is [available here](#).

From significant events and high profile figures to local people, these documents reveal how far the MSSC went in order to undermine and suppress the fight for civil rights in the state. This activity highlights seven people targeted by the commission, including Medgar Evers, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Martin Luther King Jr. Teachers can also use other documents suggested by scholars on this website.

Using an analysis sheet, students will analyze one of the ten above documents from the MSSC. Using the same document, students will also develop a historical marker that commemorates the event or person, including a 200 word summary to adorn the marker. Student work can be displayed online or in the school.

Educators and students can also use other documents suggested by scholars on this website or search the full [MSSC digital collection](#) online. Tips for searching the commission files are [here](#).

Procedures

1. Introduce the lesson to students by explaining the role of the Sovereignty Commission.
2. Expand upon the Sovereignty Commission primary documents from the archives.
3. Introduce the National Archives document analysis tool to the students.
4. Assign each student one of the provided ten civil rights documents.
 - Some are longer passages and will better serve stronger readers. Some will require students to do more internet research.
5. Have students analyze their document using the National Archives tool.
6. Instruct students to (digitally or physically) write a 200 word description of their given document. This should include a summary of the document and its historical importance. They can also discuss the importance of the main person or organization in the document.
7. In pairs, students should review each other's documents and provide feedback.
8. Have students implement changes from the peer review.

9. Instruct students to design an image or PowerPoint slide to insert their text on. This can also be done on paper. The image should be similarly shaped to the [Civil Rights Trail Historical Marker](#). Examples of trail markers can be found [here](#).
10. Students should find images to accompany the text on their marker.
11. Students should present their projects to the class.
12. Historical markers should be displayed online or in the school. Markers could be displayed on a map of Mississippi, corresponding to where they took place.

Rubric

Category	4-Advanced	3-Proficient	2-Adequate	1-Basic
Construction and Design	The organization and design of the marker follows a logical, orderly progression that enhances the readers' experience.	The organization and design follow a mostly logical progression that has order and compliments the information provided.	The marker is organized and has a design, but neither adds to the reader's overall experience.	There is little to no organization and the design is distracting, if existent.
Grammar	Minimal (2 or less) errors in spelling, punctuation, or grammar.	Some (3-5) errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar.	Several (10-6) errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar.	Many (over 10) errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar.
Connection to Topic	Demonstrates an understanding of the significance of this topic in history.	Showed a degree of understanding of the importance of the topic in history.	Kept to the topic, but did not show a connection to the significance of the topic in history.	Inaccurate and did not connect the topic to its significance in history.
Document Analysis	Exhibits a strong understanding of the key elements in the document.	Exhibits good understanding of the key elements in the document.	Exhibits some understanding of the key elements in the document.	Exhibits no understanding of the key elements in the document.