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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2019 Volume III: American Democracy and the Promise of Justice

Chasing the Dream: The Civil Rights Movement and Desire for American Equality

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by Matthew Menschner

This unit is designed to review the history of the American civil rights movement. Specifically, the actions, rhetoric and ideologies of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Many students understand that both men played prominent roles in the movement, but they do not understand to what extent their political philosophies influenced their actions. Furthermore, both men were products of their environments, with Martin symbolizing the Southern black middle class, and Malcolm the Northern urban poor and destitute. Beginning with an overview the black integrationist and black nationalist philosophies, the unit will examine critical periods in the civil rights movement, weaving the actions and words of Martin & Malcolm in throughout. The unit encompasses landmark moments of the civil rights movement such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Montgomery bus boycott, the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, and the assassinations of Martin King and Malcolm X. Rhetorical analyses will provide students with opportunities to reflect on how language and action were directly related during the civil rights movement. The culminating activity for the unit tasks students with leading a class-wide debate on the topic of the American dream as it related to African Americans during this period. Students will incorporate a variety of primary sources and unit materials as evidence to support their arguments in the debate.

(Developed for Social Science, grade 11; recommended for U. S. History, AP U. S. History, Civics, and Government, grades 9-12)

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