

## **The Power of Youth: Movements Past & Present**

### **Overview**

Young people often feel disengaged from the political process and powerless to bring about change. However, history shows us that successful movements have often had youth at the forefront, leading the charge for social justice. In this lesson, students will examine historical and current examples of various movements and protests driven by youth, in the hope that young people will begin to develop political identities themselves. As noted by Jean Anyon (2005), “Middle and high school teachers, in particular, can make a powerful contribution to movement-building by engaging students in civic activism. Both the civil rights movement and successful youth efforts to reduce the voting age from 21 to 18 (legalized in 1971) demonstrate that activism by young people can make a huge impact on American society” (p. 188).

### **Grades**

8-12

### **Essential Questions**

- In what ways have youth been instrumental in social movements throughout history?
- Why do young people often underestimate their power?
- Why is it important for youth to be aware of what is happening in the world and to make it known when they disagree with something, or feel their rights are being violated?

### **Materials**

- One sign reading “AGREE” and one sign reading “DISAGREE”
- Images: “Young Boy Protesting Segregation” and “Children’s Crusade,” attached
- “Students Walk Out in 2nd Day Of Immigration Rights Protest,” article attached
- “Iran: YOUTH-led Protests Attaining Critical Mass,” article attached
- “Student Activism Results in Twenty-sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution,” article attached
- Lyrics to Sam Cooke’s, “A Change is Gonna Come,” attached

### **Duration**

45-60 minutes

### **Instructions**

#### **The Power of Youth**

1. As a warm-up, tell students that you are going to ask them to physically represent their opinions regarding a few statements. Explain that you are going to project (via Power Point or overhead transparencies) and/or read some statements (listed below) and you would like them to respond to the statements by walking to the side of the room labeled with the word that best represents their opinion. (Teachers should post large signs reading “agree” and “disagree” on either side of the room prior to class). Tell students to move to either side of the room silently and carefully as

you project each statement for their response. Encourage students to follow their own opinions rather than choosing sides based on where their friends move. Sample statements to project include:

- Adults, such as parents and teachers, often don't listen to teenagers.
- Young people have the power to change their communities for the better.
- Most teenagers don't care about political and social issues.
- There are many ways I can participate in democracy and the political process, even though I'm not old enough to vote.
- School officials should consult students on the decisions they make.
- Federal, state, and local government officials should consult people our age on the decisions they make.
- The voting age should be raised – most eighteen year olds don't know enough to be able to vote.
- There are issues in my school or community that I think need improved.

As students move about the room, teachers should make notes regarding what the majority opinion seems to be for each statement, when the group is evenly split, etc., so that this can be discussed further.

2. After going through the statements thank students for their participation and instruct them to return to their seats. Further discuss their responses and opinions; for example:
  - Almost all of you felt that adults don't listen to young people. Why do you feel this way? What evidence can you note to back this up? Why *should* adults listen to young people?
  - For those of you who felt that teenagers actually do care about political and social issues, what makes you think this? What evidence can you note?
  - A vast majority of you agreed that school officials should consult people your age on the decisions being made. Why should they?
  - For those of you who said there are improvements you'd like to see in your school or community, what are some of those improvements you feel are needed? Have you ever officially shared your opinion with decision makers and/or tried to get these changes implemented? Why or why not?
3. To culminate this line of thinking, ask students if they can think of any specific examples throughout history when young people have made a difference or affected change.

### **The Children's Crusade**

4. Project the attached image of a young boy protesting segregation, and ask students to comment on what they see. Prompt them to consider when they believe the photo was taken, where it took place, and what was happening before, during, and after the pictured moment. Ask students to share what they already know regarding segregation.
5. Project the attached image of the "Children's Crusade," again encouraging students to share their observations. If needed, specifically prompt students to comment on the age of those pictured. Again, facilitate student inferences regarding when and where the photo was taken, as well as ideas of what was happening before, during, and after this photo was taken. After discussing, explain that this photo is of some of the 900+ students who were held by the police in

Birmingham, Alabama in 1963. The students were arrested for protesting segregation! Give students some background information on what became referred to as the “Children’s Crusade”:

- During segregation, adult protesters faced life altering consequences, such as losing their jobs, for participating. With the civil rights movement in Birmingham running out of adults who could take this risk in 1963, organizers noted that children had less to lose. Thus, on May 2, 1963, hundreds of students, some as young as 6-years-old, skipped school to carry signs and sing freedom songs protesting segregation. By the end of the day, over 900 youth had been sent to Birmingham jails due to their peaceful protesting, and the jails overflowed, unable to hold such numbers. With threats of suspension and expulsion from their principals, and the knowledge they would be thrown back into jail, the children still returned to the protest lines the very next day. Police tried to dissuade the young protestors by spraying them with fire hoses and releasing attack dogs. When pictures of these young protestors being attacked made front pages across the nation, society could no longer ignore what was taking place in Birmingham. Due largely to youth participation, on May 10, 1963 the desegregation of many of Birmingham’s public facilities began. (The Children’s March, 2005)
- “Bob Moses argued: ‘We can’t count on adults. Very few who “have the time” and are economically independent of the white man are willing to join the struggle, and are not afraid of the tremendous pressure they will face. This leaves the young people to be the organizers, the agents of social and political change...[I]t is a sign of hope that we have been able to find young people to shoulder the responsibility for carrying out the voting drive. They are the seeds of change’” (Anyon, 2005, p. 139).

6. Project the two attached quotes, one made by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to the parents of the young, jailed protestors; the other made by Malcolm X in response to the jailing of the children in Birmingham:

- “Don’t worry about your children; they are going to be alright. Don’t hold them back if they want to go to jail, for they are not only doing a job for themselves, but for all of America and for all of mankind.” ~Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- “Real men don’t put their children on the firing line.” ~Malcolm X

7. Discuss the quotes as a class:

- How do MLK and Malcolm X’s views differ regarding youth involvement in the civil rights movement?
- What does MLK mean when he says that the children were doing a job for themselves and “all of mankind?” Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
- What point is Malcolm X trying to make? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- Do you think you would have joined the “children’s crusade” were you living in Birmingham in 1963? Why or why not?
- What impact did these youth have on Jim Crow laws and segregation? (Are our schools legally separated today? Do Jim Crow laws still exist on the law books of states? Discuss with students how while we still have work to do in terms of race relations, the victories of the civil rights movement for huge.)

8. Ask students to imagine what it would be like today had it not been for the civil rights movement. Focus students on understanding that: “A crucial process in the development of the civil rights movement was the active participation of youth...throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sit-ins, boycotts,

and ‘freedom rides’ were planned and carried out primarily by students and other youth. High school girls and boys often took part – and sometimes played leadership roles in – civil rights activity in Southern cities and farmlands” (Anyon, 2005, p. 139).

9. Teachers who have time and would like to further explore the civil rights movement as a youth led movement can use the following:
- **Optional Activity 1:** Show the movie “The Children’s March” (or excerpts), produced by Teaching Tolerance and available free to teachers at [http://www.tolerance.org/teach/resources/childrens\\_march.jsp](http://www.tolerance.org/teach/resources/childrens_march.jsp) . The teacher’s edition is 40 minutes long and “tells the story of how the young people of Birmingham, Ala., braved fire hoses and police dogs in 1963 and brought segregation to its knees. Their heroism complements discussions about the ability of today’s young people to be catalysts for positive social change.” Teachers with time may also want to consider using some of the activities in the accompanying curriculum guide.
  - **Optional Activity 2:** Watch “Eyes on the Prize: No Easy Walk” on Birmingham and the Children’s Crusade. Have students address the following questions in small groups or as a class:
    - Why was the decision to use youth in the campaign? What is your opinion of this decision?
    - Why were parents discouraged from posting bail for their children?
    - What do you think King meant when he stated that the demonstrations allowed children to develop “a sense of their own stake in freedom and justice”?
    - What do you imagine you would have done were you living during this time? What were young people risking by participating in the demonstrations? Do you think you still would have participated?
    - What sacrifices would you be willing to make today for a cause you care about?

### **The Seeds of Change**

10. Remind students of the opinions they expressed in Step 1 regarding the statement that youth have the power to change their communities. Explain that the civil rights movement is just one of the many examples where young people their age have made a huge difference in the world. “Student movements in the U.S., France, Italy, Mexico, and Spain in the 1960s, and in Tiananmen Square in 1989 China attest to the importance of youth leadership in the struggle for social justice. Indeed, it is doubtful that social movements would develop at all without central participation of the young” (Anyon, 2005, p. 140). The fact is, youth can, have, and often do make a substantial difference when they commit themselves to a cause.
11. To explore this concept further, break students up into groups of three and provide each group with one of the three attached articles, each of which details when a group of youth have advocated for change. (Teachers should attempt to have an equal number of groups read each of the three articles. If possible, teachers should print each article on a different color of paper – this will make the transition to the second group easier. Teachers should also feel free to use alternative articles as they see fit.) Tell students that they should read the article then together discuss:

- What issue or conflict is described that youth tackled? What outcomes were the young people involved hoping for?
- Why do you think young people were activated to address this issue?
- What strategies did the youth described use to advocate for change?
- Were they (or do you think they will be) successful? Why?
- Imagine that this issue was being protested today. What advice would you give the young people involved to help them be successful?

Let students know that in the second part of this activity, they will be sharing a summary of the article they read as well as their group’s conversation with a new group. It is thus important that each group member contribute and take notes on the questions.

12. Once all groups have completed their reading and discussion, ask the students to “jigsaw” into new groups of three. Each new group should contain one person representing each article. (If the three articles were copied on different colors of paper, each new group will have at least one person with each color of paper.) Once students are settled in their new groups, have each member take 3-4 minutes to summarize their article and their groups answers to the discussion questions.
13. After each student in the new groupings has discussed their article with their new group members, further discuss:
  - Why are youth so important to social movements and bringing about change in various communities?
  - Why do you think people your age often underestimate your power?
  - Why is it important for each of you to be aware of what is happening in our community and throughout the world, and to make it known when you disagree with something or feel your rights, or someone else’s rights, are being violated?
  - What are the various ways that you can make your voice be heard and advocate for change? Consider all of the ways we have discussed in class, that you have read about, that you have witnessed, etc. (As students note these, write them on chart paper.)
14. Once students have exhausted all their thoughts on ways to advocate for change, tell them you want to focus on one particular type of activism, which is music. While students may have more readily offered examples such as protests, petitions, boycotts, etc., music and art can also be effective ways to convey a message of dissent. To explore this concept, project the lyrics for Sam Cooke’s “A Change is Gonna Come” while playing the song. Afterwards, discuss:
  - What do you think this song is about? Provide one example from the lyrics that supports your answer.
  - When do you think this song was written? What evidence do you have that supports your answer?
  - What was Sam Cooke protesting? (i.e., treatment of African Americans in the United States before and during the Civil Rights movement.)
  - Can you think of other song examples when something is being protested? Explain.
  - What impact can a song have on change?
15. Additional information to share with students regarding the song:

Greatly moved by the emotion in Bob Dylan's 1963 protest song "Blowin' in the Wind" and its message of change, Cooke sat down to write the tune after speaking to some sit-in demonstrators in Durham, North Carolina, following one of his concerts.

It was a departure from the more mainstream ballads and dance tunes Cooke had built his reputation on, such as "Twistin' the Night Away" and "You Send Me". The song was inspired by the accidental drowning of Cooke's 18-month-old son in June 1963 and the disturbing-the-peace arrest of the singer and his band in October of 1963 for trying to check into a "whites only" motel in Shreveport, Louisiana, with the latter forming the basis for the song's moving third verse. (Vena, 2009)

16. As a culminating activity, tell students that they are going to compose a song that addresses an aspect of society that they would like to offer commentary on or see changed. Either individually or in partners, students should work together to create a song with at least 16 original lines that will convey their opinion or evoke emotion regarding a topic they care about. Lyrics may be based upon general themes (i.e. social justice, war, violence, etc.) or be specific (i.e. gang violence, access to higher education, etc.) Encourage students to be creative in their lyrics and melody. Teachers should determine what types of song composition are allowed (i.e. whether students should work in a particular rhythm scheme or try and rhyme their lyrics; whether students can use the tune of an existing song to put their original lyrics to; will students be responsible for performing their songs; etc.)

### **Resources**

Anyon, Jean. (2005). *Radical possibilities: Public policy, urban education, and a new social movement*. New York, NY: Routledge.

## Young Boy Protesting Segregation



Source: <http://sphtc.org/timeline/1960-4.jpg>

## The Children's Crusade



Source: [http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/liberation\\_curriculum/childrenscrusade/lesson2.htm](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/liberation_curriculum/childrenscrusade/lesson2.htm)

## Northern Virginia Schools Students Walk Out in 2nd Day Of Immigration Rights Protest

Seven Area High Schools Affected

By Tara Bahrapour and Maria Glod

Washington Post Staff Writers

Wednesday, March 29, 2006



Chanting, " *Sí, se puede* ," ("Yes, we can") and carrying "Latino Power" signs, hundreds of Northern Virginia high school students demonstrated for a second day yesterday against legislation that would crack down on illegal immigrants.

In Prince William County, about 350 students protested outside Freedom High School in Woodbridge. In Fairfax County, dozens of students marched out of J.E.B. Stuart High School and into Arlington County, where they stopped at two more high schools, adding students at each stop.

Opponents of the legislation have demonstrated across the country, including 500,000 people in Los Angeles on Saturday. The legislation, passed by the House of Representatives, would make it a felony to be in the United States illegally and make it a crime to help illegal immigrants.

The Fairfax march started at Stuart High in the Falls Church area about 9 a.m. "We started getting bigger, so we left the school," said Louie Martinez, 16, a sophomore at Stuart, whose student body is 40 percent Latino. "We were like, 'We'll just keep walking.' We're showing the government we're big."

The group marched to Wakefield High School and then, followed by police cars that blocked traffic, marched several miles up George Mason Drive to Washington-Lee High School.

After police told them they would be arrested if they strayed onto the Washington-Lee campus, the protesters demonstrated at a park across the street.

The school's doors were locked to prevent outsiders from entering, and at noon Principal Gregg Robertson announced that students who left would have unexcused absences. Still, about 40 students left to join the protest, which swelled to around 200 people.

School officials did not try to stop them. "Part of the Washington-Lee mission is to encourage students to take an active role in their community," Robertson said. As with earlier demonstrations, word of the protests was spread by cellphone and the Web site MySpace.com. Some students said they learned about the immigration debate from newspapers or in class. Others said friends convinced them that many of the proposals were unfair.

Raeshwan Greene, 17, a senior at Wakefield, which is 43.7 percent Latino, said: "Half of my friends came here a few years ago. . . . People have forgotten the meaning of America."

Caitlin Thomson, 17, a junior at Wakefield, said: "These people have worked really hard to get here. There might be economic problems or a dictatorship. People want to be free and have a new life. That's what we learn in history class."

Some had more personal connections to the issue. Ephram Lopez, 16, a sophomore at Stuart, is U.S.-born, but he worries that his mother, a baker, could be sent back to her native Guatemala.

"They are trying to deport her," Lopez said. "It's going to take her away from me and my two little brothers."

Lopez said everyone's quality of life in the Washington area is improved by immigrants. "We work at fast food restaurants. We paint houses. We mow lawns. Most people work without papers."

In Prince William, in addition to students from Freedom High School, many young people waving Mexican and El Salvadoran flags said they were from C.D. Hylton, Gar-Field and Woodbridge high schools, all in the eastern section of the county, where many Latinos live.

The students marched down Route 1 to Todos Supermarket, operated by Carlos Castro, a Salvadoran immigrant.

Arlington County Board member Walter Tejada (D), who joined the demonstration at Washington-Lee, said the students had been "itching to have their voices heard."

"They know that this bill unfairly cuts the legs of the working immigrant community," he said.

Christian Dorn, 16, a Salvadoran and a junior at Potomac High School in Dumfries, said the demonstrations had proved something.

"It got the word out that we're not going to be quiet," she said. "It's similar to what the African Americans did in the 1960s. . . . We shouldn't be treated like criminals."

*Staff writers Ian Shapira and Jamie Stockwell contributed to this report.*

Source: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/28/AR2006032800982.html>

## Iran: YOUTH-led Protests Attaining Critical Mass

Eurasianet Staff Writers

June 18, 2009

A chain reaction of hope in Iran is fueling youth-led street protests that seem poised to beat back Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's power grab. Over 1 million demonstrators gathered for a Tehran rally on June 18, by far the largest anti-government crowd to assemble since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.



When the protests began in the aftermath of the fraudulent June 12 presidential vote, many young people had a limited demand: count all the votes. But now, with the protest movement gaining momentum, and young people discovering that technology can set them free, many Iranians are starting to think big, envisioning a life and political system without religious control over society and authoritarian instruments of coercion. For now, the crowds on the street support the aggrieved presidential candidate Mir Hussein Mousavi. But that does not necessarily mean that Iran's young people follow Mousavi, or any other individual who wishes to preserve the Islamic Republic. Mousavi, for young people, may merely be a means toward a greater end.

The sixth day of massive street protests on June 18 kept the pressure up on Ahmadinejad and his chief backer, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The hardline forces that they command have tried every trick in their bag to bully Iranians into submission, striving to stifle the means of communication and making mass arrests. But all the old instruments of intimidation are failing them in the Twitter age. The only option left open to them would appear to be massive force, but it seems they are having trouble finding Revolutionary Guard units to carry out an order to shoot.

A route for compromise seems to be closed off for Ayatollah Khamenei, as during televised comments on June 17, he maintained his staunch support for Ahmadinejad, referring to him as the "elected" president.

A big reason that many units of the security forces are seemingly sitting on the sidelines is that Iran's clerical establishment is lining up against Ahmadinejad. For example, on June 18, an influential institution, the Association of Combatant Clergy, which has already issued a statement calling for the election results to be annulled and another vote held, announced that it would sponsor a pro-Mousavi rally on June 20.

An estimated two-thirds of Iran's population is under 30, and thus has no memory of the passion and the pain that gave birth to the Islamic Republic. All the post-revolutionary generation knows is the frustration of not being able to realize one's aspirations. This frustration -- combined with the fear that Ahmadinejad, if he succeeds, will squelch expectations for decades to come, and thus render millions of lives meaningless -- is what is driving hundreds of thousands of young people into the streets. A growing determination is taking hold among the young to topple Ahmadinejad.

But they may not stop there. Unverifiable evidence, i.e. statements relayed via Twitter, indicate that some protesters wish to do away with the Islamic Republic. The longer this political crisis goes on, it seems reasonable to expect that such sentiment will expand.

"I want more than just a new president, I want an end to this brutal regime," said one tweet purportedly sent by one Tehran protester.

Another tweet said the following: "Remember that Mousavi/[unsuccessful presidential candidate Mehdi] Karoubi is not our ideals. We just voted for change."

In many respects, the youth of Iran have been forced to live double lives, and they are tired of it.

Prior to the election, EurasiaNet visited the Islamic Republic for several weeks, getting an opportunity to observe first-hand the daily travails of young people. The existing system forces many of them to break the law in order to feel normal.

Where holding hands in public is punishable, the sight of a woman smoking is cause for arrest, and where being different -- whether it is sexual preference, religion, musical taste or style of dress -- is prosecuted, many young people are forced to live repressed existences. Behind closed doors, in private, young people's relief from controlling social pressures is palpable, but never complete.

Even in private, one can only half relax. Young people are constantly fearful of running into the morality police, whose agents roam the streets seeking real or perceived deviants. These enforcers of orthodoxy wait outside shopping malls, art galleries, parks, fast-food restaurants and cafes, stadiums, and even the book show on National Book Day. With their archaic modes of punishment, such as flogging, for showing affection in public, enjoying strange art or playing rock music, the morality police are much-feared zealots.

Despite high literacy rates -- about 80 percent -- and enrollment in secondary school in the 70 percent range, youth unemployment keeps growing. In recent years, over 1 million graduates have been entering the ranks of the unemployed annually. These young people want a future, and with each passing day it becomes increasingly apparent that if the existing government does not respond to their needs, they will try to take matters into their own hands and create one that does.

Source: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav061809.shtml>

**“Old enough to fight, old enough to vote!”  
Student Activism Results in Twenty-sixth Amendment  
to the United States Constitution**

*From Wikipedia*



The Twenty-sixth Amendment (Amendment XXVI) to the United States Constitution standardized the voting age to age 18. It was adopted in response to student activism against the Vietnam War and to partially overrule the Supreme Court's decision in *Oregon v. Mitchell*. It was adopted on July 1, 1971.

In 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment indicated that only individuals over the age of twenty-one were able to vote. While males aged eighteen and older were called upon or encouraged to fight in the Civil War, WWI, WWII, Korea, and Vietnam, they were unable to vote in national, state, or local elections.

As young protestors abounded amidst the Vietnam conflict, Congress and the state legislatures felt increasing pressure to pass the Constitutional amendment. The young men fighting and risking their lives in the Vietnam War, many of whom were being drafted against their will, weren't able to cast a vote. Thus, "Old enough to fight, old enough to vote," was a common slogan used by proponents of lowering the voting age.

On March 10, 1971, the Senate voted 94-0 in favor of proposing a Constitutional amendment to guarantee that the voting age could not be higher than 18. On March 23, 1971, the House of Representatives voted 401-19 in favor of the proposed amendment. Within seven months after the Congress submitted it to the states, the amendment was ratified by three-fourths of the state legislatures, the shortest time in which any proposed amendment has received the number of ratifications needed for adoption.

On June 22, 1970, President Richard Nixon signed a law (not a constitutional amendment) which required the voting age to be 18 in all federal, state and local elections. In his statement on signing the extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Nixon stated:

“Despite my misgivings about the constitutionality of this one provision, I have signed the bill. I have directed the Attorney General to cooperate fully in expediting a swift court test of the constitutionality of the 18-year-old provision.”

Subsequently Oregon and Texas challenged the law in court. In *Oregon v. Mitchell*, 400 U.S. 112 (1970), the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional the parts of the law which required states to register 18-year-olds for state and local elections. However, by this time, four states had a minimum voting age below 21.

On July 5, 1971, during the amendment's signing ceremony in the East Room, President Richard Nixon talked about his confidence in the youth of America:

“As I meet with this group today, I sense that we can have confidence that America's new voters, America's young generation, will provide what America needs as we approach our 200th birthday,

not just strength and not just wealth but the “Spirit of ‘76’ a spirit of moral courage, a spirit of high idealism in which we believe in the American dream, but in which we realize that the American dream can never be fulfilled until every American has an equal chance to fulfill it in his own life.”

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twenty-sixth\\_Amendment\\_to\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_Constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twenty-sixth_Amendment_to_the_United_States_Constitution)

**STUDENT HANDOUT:**

## Sam Cooke's "A Change is Gonna Come"

I was born by the river  
In a little tent  
And just like the river  
I've been running ever since

It's been a long, long time coming  
But I know a change gonna come  
Oh, yes it is

It's been too hard living  
But I'm afraid to die  
I don't know what's up there beyond the sky

It's been a long, long time coming  
But I know a change gonna come  
Oh yes it will

Then I go to my brother  
I say brother help me please  
But he winds up knocking me  
Back down on my knees

There's been times that I thought  
I wouldn't last for long  
But now I think I'm able to carry on  
It's been a long, long time coming  
But I know a change is gonna come  
Oh, yes it will