

Document A: JFK's Acceptance Speech

This is an excerpt from Senator Kennedy's Democratic Nomination acceptance speech, delivered on July 15, 1960, at the Democratic National Convention.

The "Rights of Man"—the civil and economic rights essential to the human dignity of all men—are indeed our goal and our first principles. This is a platform on which I can run with enthusiasm and conviction.

Today our concern must be with that future. For the world is changing. The old era is ending. The old ways will not do.

Here at home, the changing face of the future is equally revolutionary.

A peaceful revolution for human rights—demanding an end to racial discrimination in all parts of our community life—has strained at the leashes imposed by timid executive leadership.

But I tell you, the New Frontier is here, whether we seek it or not. Beyond that frontier are the uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of peace and war, unconquered pockets of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions of poverty and surplus. It would be easier to shrink back from that frontier, to look at the safe mediocrity of the past, to be lulled by good intentions and high rhetoric—and those who prefer that course should not cast their votes for me, regardless of party.

Source: John F. Kennedy's acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, July 15, 1960.

Document B: Kennedy's Televised Address (Modified)

This is an excerpt of President Kennedy's televised speech on June 11, 1963. The purpose of the speech was to explain and promote a civil rights bill that would outlaw racial discrimination in all public facilities and services, protect African American voting rights, and give the federal government greater power to enforce school desegregation and to punish employers for racial discrimination.

We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities, whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated. If an American, because his skin is dark, cannot eat lunch in a restaurant open to the public, if he cannot send his children to the best public school available, if he cannot vote for the public officials who will represent him, if, in short, he cannot enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place?

One hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs, their grandsons, are not fully free. They are not yet freed from the bonds of injustice. They are not yet freed from social and economic oppression. And this Nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts, will not be fully free until all its citizens are free.

I am, therefore, asking the Congress to enact legislation giving all Americans the right to be served in facilities which are open to the public—hotels, restaurants, theaters, retail stores, and similar establishments.

Source: President Kennedy's national address on civil rights legislation, televised on June 11, 1963.

Document C: *Detroit Tribune*, 1962

This article appeared in the Detroit Tribune on March 6, 1962. Civil rights leaders had called for the Kennedy Administration to prohibit discrimination in public housing, but President Kennedy was slow to act. President Kennedy signed an executive order banning discrimination in federally funded housing seven months later.

King Criticizes Kennedy

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. expresses strong disappointment with the first year of the Kennedy administration and its record in civil rights. The integration leader declares . . . “in backing away from the **Executive Order** to end discrimination in housing, the President did more to undermine confidence in his intentions than could be offset by a series of smaller accomplishments during the year.”

“Cautious approach of the Administration caused a possible spectacular victory to end in tragic defeat.” Dr. King reminds the readers that JFK had made a campaign pledge to fight for this change.

“It is a **melancholy** fact that the Administration is aggressively driving only toward the limited goal of **token integration**.”

In decrying the President’s abandonment of the civil rights legislation in favor of his trade program, Dr. King reflects, “There is something deeply immoral in delaying human rights for a century in the pursuit of more prosperity and economic **ascendancy**.”

Source: *Detroit Tribune*, March 6, 1962.

Vocabulary

executive order: a rule issued by the president that is like a law

melancholy: sad, upsetting

token integration: making a minimal or symbolic effort at integration to give the appearance of racial equality, without making significant changes

ascendancy: dominance

Document D: John Lewis's Speech (Modified)

This is an excerpt of a speech that the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee (SNCC) Chairman John Lewis planned to deliver at the March on Washington in August 1963. Leaders of the march, including Dr. Martin Luther King, were concerned that parts of Lewis's speech were too forceful, and they convinced Lewis to remove some passages before he delivered it, including his criticism of the Kennedy Administration's civil rights bill and his suggestion that civil rights advocates would march through the South like General Sherman (who destroyed Southern cities and plantations during the Civil War).

We march for jobs and freedom, but we have nothing to be proud of, for hundreds and thousands of our brothers are not here. They have no money for their transportation, for they are receiving starvation wages, or no wages at all.

In good conscience, we cannot support wholeheartedly the administration's civil rights bill, for it is too little and too late. There's not one thing in the bill that will protect our people from police brutality.

I want to know, which side is the federal government on?

To those who have said, "Be patient and wait," we must say that "patience" is a dirty and nasty word. We cannot be patient. We do not want to be free gradually. We want our freedom, and we want it *now*. We cannot depend on any political party, for both the Democrats and the Republicans have betrayed the basic principles of the Declaration of Independence.

Mr. Kennedy is trying to take the revolution out of the streets and put it into the courts. Listen, Mr. Kennedy. Listen, Mr. Congressman. Listen, fellow citizens. The black masses are on the march for jobs and freedom, and we must say to the politicians that there won't be a "cooling-off" period.

We won't stop now. The time will come when we will not confine our marching to Washington. We will march through the South, through the heart of Dixie, the way Sherman did. We shall pursue our own "scorched earth" policy and burn Jim Crow to the ground—nonviolently. We shall fragment the South into a thousand pieces and put them back together in the image of democracy. We will make the action of the past few months look petty. And I say to you, WAKE UP AMERICA!

Source: Speech written by John L. Lewis in preparation for the March on Washington in August 1963.

Document F: *Detroit Tribune*, 1961 (Modified)

This article appeared in the Detroit Tribune on December 30, 1961. This article, like Document C, is discussing the delay of a bill to prohibit discrimination in federally funded housing.

Postpone Bias Housing Order in Bid for Southern Democrat's Votes Say JFK May Not Issue Order Until Nov. '62

WASHINGTON—An executive order banning racial and religious discrimination in federally assisted housing has been delayed to avoid irritating the Southern Democrats.

President Kennedy needs the Southern Democrats' votes in the coming session. Any antagonizing of Dixie Democrats might result in losing the present slim prospects for tax revision, medical care and tariff cutting bills.

During his 1960 Presidential campaign, Mr. Kennedy promised to issue an order prohibiting discrimination in [government home loans and government building projects.]

Mr. Kennedy has been criticized by civil rights groups for not having issued the order already.

Source: *Detroit Tribune*, December 30, 1961.

Guiding Questions

Document A: JFK's Acceptance Speech

1. (Sourcing) At what event was Kennedy speaking? Why was this important?
2. (Contextualization) What was happening in the in the Civil Rights Movement at the time?
3. (Close reading) What did JFK say about civil rights?
4. (Close reading) He blamed the slow progress in civil rights on "timid executive leadership." What do you think he meant by this? What might this suggest about his approach to civil rights?

Document B: President Kennedy's 1963 Televised Address

1. (Sourcing) How much time had passed between this speech and the speech in Document A?
2. (Close reading) What did JFK say about civil rights?
3. (Close Reading) What did he want Congress to do?
4. What does this speech suggest about Kennedy's commitment to civil rights?

Based on Documents A and B, was JFK a strong supporter of civil rights for African Americans? Why or why not?

Document C: *Detroit Tribune*, 1962

1. (Close Reading) What did King accuse Kennedy and his administration of?
2. (Close Reading) According to King, why did Kennedy “abandon” the civil rights legislation?
3. (Corroboration) According to King’s comments in this document, was JFK a strong supporter of civil rights?

Document D: Lewis’s March on Washington Speech

1. (Sourcing) Who delivered this speech? Where? Who was the audience?
2. (Close Reading) According to Lewis, what was the problem with the civil rights bill proposed by JFK’s administration?
3. (Close Reading) Did Lewis think JFK had been a strong supporter of the Civil Rights Movement? Provide a quote to support your answer.

4. (Close Reading) At the end of the document, what did Lewis say civil rights activists and demonstrators would do?

5. (Corroboration) How does this document support or refute the conclusions you drew from Documents A and B?

Based on Documents C and D, was JFK a strong supporter of civil rights for African Americans? Why or why not?

Document E: Video

1. (Sourcing, Contextualization) When was this meeting? What was it in preparation for?
2. (Contextualization, Close Watching) Why was Kennedy giving this speech? And what were the goals of the address?
3. (Close Watching) What were Kennedy and his advisors concerned about? What could this cost the President?
4. (Close Watching, Contextualization) One advisor argued the address should be made at a later date. What was the argument for delivering it immediately?

5. Based on this documentary, what factors influenced Kennedy's actions on introducing civil rights legislation?

Document F: *Detroit Tribune*, 1961

1. (Close Reading) According to the article, why had the bill been delayed?
2. (Close Reading) What was JFK's administration trying to avoid? For what purpose?
3. (Close Reading) Why did Kennedy want the support of Southern Democrats?

Based on Documents E-F, was JFK a supporter of civil rights for African Americans?