


Reading Guide for The 1857 Project Essays

“Press flubs first draft of history of race” by William H. Freivogel, pgs 22-25

[Graphic organizer for this essay](#)

<p>Excerpt</p>	<p>“The press’ rough draft of the history of race in St. Louis, Missouri and Illinois got most things wrong. In the early 1950s, a group of young civil rights activists—Irv and Maggie Dagen, Charles and Marion Oldham and Norman Seay—led a CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) sponsored sit-in of lunch counters in segregated downtown St. Louis. Richard Dudman, a young reporter for the <i>Post-Dispatch</i>, ran across the protest and hurried back to the office with the big story. The editors told the future Washington Bureau chief to forget it. They knew about the protests but weren’t writing about them because it might trigger violence. Avoiding a riot was a preoccupation at the paper where big glass windows near the presses were bricked over just in case. There never was a riot, a fact often cited as a reason St. Louis never seriously grappled with race before Ferguson.”</p>
<p>Key Names, Dates, and Terms</p>	<p>Joseph Pulitzer II, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), COINTELPRO — CounterIntelligence Program, Fascist, Freedom of Information Act</p>
<p>Supplemental Texts</p>	<p>Primary Sources: Universal Declaration of Human Rights “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Civil Rights Act of 1963 House Assassinations Committee Findings of 1980 Memphis Sanitation Strike</p>  <p>https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/revisiting-sanitation-workers-strike-180967512/</p> <p>Secondary Sources: 1963 Jefferson Bank Protest</p> <p>Opinion Article: The Wrongness of the Right Side of History by Darran Anderson, <i>Prospect</i></p>

	<p><i>Magazine</i></p> <p>Essay: “Looking Back: Legacy of Slavery Limited Opportunities at <i>Post-Dispatch</i> and Beyond” by Linda Lockhart, <i>Gateway Journalism Review</i></p>
<p>Guiding Questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do civil rights differ from human rights? • When is the “right time” to protest? • How does the right of assembly both reinforce and challenge American values? In what ways does the definition of a protest ensure it will be ill-timed and unwelcomed? • What aspects of communism could have been attractive to Black Americans? • Post-slavery, why was the idea of giving Black Americans civil and human rights threatening? • Who determines what is “newsworthy”? How do these determinations work to shape and create history? How has technology changed this? • Why does the reliability and credibility of a news source matter? How do consumers of media evaluate the reliability and credibility of news sources?
<p>Extension: Writing Prompt</p>	<p>After reading the essay, “Press Flubs First Draft of History of Race,” and the following excerpt from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. 's “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” develop a cohesive essay to respond to the following prompt:</p> <p>Consider the actions of well-intentioned individuals who believe that all people should have equal human rights, but don’t want to “go too far” or do “too much” to fight for such rights to be secured. The essay “Press Flubs First Draft of History of Race” discusses Joseph Pulitzer’s hesitance to publish a Black man’s plea for human rights in the 1950s out of fear that it would “do the Negro cause more harm than good” and those reluctant to hire Black people. In Dr. King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” he addressed the sentiments of those in the 1960s who felt that Black people should “wait” to fight for civil rights, thinking that it wasn’t the right time for action; in 2016, Colin Kaepernick was demonized for how he protested police brutality as human rights violations, with many saying that he wasn’t protesting the “right way”; 2020 protests of police killings of unarmed Black people have been contentious because they are seen as “violent,” “destructive,” and “inconvenient.”</p> <p>Based on your knowledge and understanding of the fight for civil and human rights within America, evaluate the manner in which abolitionists and activists have fought to secure equal rights. In what ways have they been successful? In what ways have they erred? Do you believe that all Americans have equal rights? If so, explain your reasoning and provide evidence to support your assertions. If not, explain what actions should be</p>

taken for all citizens of our country to have equal rights. When is the right time for these actions? Who should begin the action?

Excerpt from “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

“We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly I have never yet engaged in a direct action movement that was “well timed,” according to the timetable of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word “Wait!” It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity. This “wait” has almost always meant “never.” It has been a tranquilizing Thalidomide, relieving the emotional stress for a moment, only to give birth to an illformed infant of frustration. We must come to see with the distinguished jurist of yesterday that “justice too long delayed is justice denied.” We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward the goal of political independence, and we still creep at horse and buggy pace toward the gaining of a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say wait. But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, brutalize, and even kill your black brothers and sisters with impunity; when you see the vast majority of your 20 million 3 Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can’t go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see the tears welling up in her little eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see the depressing clouds of inferiority begin to form in her little mental sky, and see her begin to distort her little personality by unconsciously developing a bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking in agonizing pathos: “Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?” when you take a cross country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading “white” men and “colored” when your first name becomes “nigger” and your middle name becomes “boy” (however old you are) and your last name becomes “John,” and when your wife and mother are never given the respected title of “Mrs.” when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tip-toe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of “nobodiness”—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice where

	<p>they experience the bleakness of corroding despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.”</p>
<p>Discussion Questions</p>	<p>Consider the title of this essay, “Press Flubs First Draft of History of Race,” and discuss how today’s local press is chronicling race issues. Is it objective? Accurate? Fair? Is the media coverage hurting or helping the cause? Explain and support each response with relevant and specific evidence.</p> <p>Modern history records Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as the leader of the Civil Rights Movement, a pioneer and freedom fighter for civil rights. Many esteem him and feel that he left a lasting legacy for all humans to follow, not just Black Americans. However, during the Civil Rights Movement he was deemed “the most dangerous Negro of the future in this nation from the standpoint of communism, the Negro, and national security.” If Dr. King’s actions were considered illegal in the 1960s, yet admirable today, how do we know if our present actions and decisions will be on the “right side” of history? How do you think future generations will judge current laws and practices related to racial equity and human rights?</p> <p>How is social media working to change our understanding of newsworthiness, and history?</p>