Pressure and Power

Tracing activism's influence on federal civil rights measures

SS24.US2.10b "Analyze the extent to which the actions and campaigns of civil rights activists and organizations from 1954 to 1965 prompted federal measures to advance civil and human rights."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one activist action in each paragraph, circle a related federal measure, and give each action-measure pair a matching number to show the connection.

When Campaigns Reached Washington

(1) In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in Brown v. Board of Education that segregated public schools were unconstitutional. The NAACP had pursued years of lawsuits, using individual families' cases to challenge the legal basis of segregation. Yet a court ruling did not integrate schools overnight. In 1957, nine Black students attempting to attend Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, faced hostile crowds and resistance from the state's governor. President Eisenhower sent federal troops to protect them and enforce a court order. Activists' legal campaign secured a federal ruling, while local defiance made further federal enforcement necessary.

(2) In Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963, civil rights organizers led boycotts, sit-ins, and marches against segregation. Police used dogs and fire hoses against protesters, including children, and the images reached audiences nationwide. President Kennedy proposed a broad civil rights bill that June, arguing that unequal treatment demanded federal action. Later that summer, the March on Washington added public pressure for the bill. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964, after Kennedy's assassination and months of debate under President Johnson. The act outlawed segregation in public accommodations and discrimination in employment. Activism helped build urgency, but presidents and Congress made the measure law.

(3) In March 1965, voting-rights activists organized voter-registration drives and marched from Selma, Alabama, toward Montgomery to challenge barriers that kept many Black citizens from voting. State troopers attacked marchers at the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7, an event shown on television. Days later, President Johnson urged Congress to protect voting rights; in August he signed the Voting Rights Act. The law barred literacy tests in places with histories of discrimination and authorized federal oversight of voter registration. Selma increased pressure for swift action, but the law also depended on federal lawmakers and a president willing to act. Activists drove change without controlling every outcome.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the NAACP's legal campaign produce a federal measure, and why was another federal action needed in Little Rock?

2. What evidence suggests that the Birmingham campaign increased pressure for Kennedy's proposed bill?

3. How did the Selma campaign help prompt a federal measure that addressed the problem activists challenged?

4. Which detail in the passage most clearly shows a limit on activists' control over federal measures? Explain your choice.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write one paragraph of 80 to 110 words challenging this claim: "Once the Supreme Court ruled in 1954, later federal civil rights measures were inevitable." Use one legal campaign and one public protest from the passage, explain how each affected federal action, and acknowledge one limit on activists' influence.

Pressure and Power

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one activist action in each paragraph, circle a related federal measure, and give each action-measure pair a matching number to show the connection. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the NAACP's legal campaign produce a federal measure, and why was another federal action needed in Little Rock?	**NAACP lawsuits helped secure the Supreme Court's 1954 ruling against school segregation. Resistance in Little Rock led Eisenhower to send troops to protect students and enforce a court order.**
2	What evidence suggests that the Birmingham campaign increased pressure for Kennedy's proposed bill?	**Organizers led protests, and images of police using dogs and fire hoses reached audiences nationwide before Kennedy proposed the bill that June.**
3	How did the Selma campaign help prompt a federal measure that addressed the problem activists challenged?	**The march and televised attack increased pressure to protect voting rights. Johnson urged Congress to act, and the Voting Rights Act addressed discriminatory literacy tests and voter-registration practices.**
4	Which detail in the passage most clearly shows a limit on activists' control over federal measures? Explain your choice.	**Accept a supported example, such as the months of congressional debate before the Civil Rights Act passed. Activists increased pressure, but Congress and the president decided whether and how to enact the law.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The claim ignores what happened after Brown. NAACP lawsuits helped win the 1954 ruling, but Little Rock students still faced a governor's resistance, and Eisenhower had to send troops to enforce a court order. A legal victory did not guarantee compliance. A decade later, Selma activists exposed violent barriers to voting, increasing pressure before Johnson urged Congress to act and signed the Voting Rights Act. These campaigns made federal action more likely and more urgent, though presidents and lawmakers still had to choose how to respond. Change was neither automatic nor the work of activists alone.

Accept different supported causal links and limits, including Little Rock's resistance or the roles of presidents and Congress. Responses should distinguish activist pressure from the federal decisions that produced rulings, enforcement, or legislation.