Rights Under Pressure

How opponents tried to limit civil rights victories

SS24.US2.10d "Summarize the political, economic, and physical means by which opponents of the Civil Rights Movement sought to limit its achievements."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each tactic opponents used, circle the right or opportunity it threatened, and write P, E, or F beside the tactic to mark it as political, economic, or physical.

When a Right Met Resistance

1 In 1964, a Black voter in Mississippi could face more than a long line at the courthouse. County registrars sometimes used literacy tests and uneven rules to reject applicants. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 suspended literacy tests in covered jurisdictions and authorized federal examiners to register voters. Yet winning access to the ballot did not always mean winning influence. Some local governments used at-large elections, in which the whole community voted for every seat, instead of district elections. In communities with a white majority, this could make it harder for Black neighborhoods to elect a representative of their choice.

2 Opponents also struck at people's incomes. In parts of the South, white employers fired Black workers who tried to register or joined protests. Landowners could evict sharecroppers, and banks could deny loans to activists. A family facing lost wages or housing might have to choose between immediate survival and public action. White Citizens' Councils, groups that defended segregation while presenting themselves as respectable, helped organize such pressure. Economic retaliation did not erase a new legal right. Instead, it raised the cost of using that right and made it harder for neighbors to sustain a long campaign together.

3 Violence made the threat even sharper. During the 1964 Freedom Summer registration campaign in Mississippi, members of the Ku Klux Klan murdered civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. In March 1965, Alabama state troopers attacked voting rights marchers at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. Such attacks aimed to frighten people away from organizing, voting, or marching, even when their demands had legal support. Public outrage over violence in Selma helped build support for the Voting Rights Act. The same attacks that tried to stop change also exposed the danger faced by people who sought it.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Summarize two political tactics in the passage and explain how each could limit Black voters' power.

2. How could economic retaliation limit the use of a voting right without changing the law?

3. What did the attacks in Mississippi and Selma seek to stop, and what unintended result followed the violence in Selma?

4. How could a political barrier and an economic threat reinforce each other after people gained the right to vote?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a town where Black residents can now register to vote, but local officials and employers oppose change. Write an 80 to 100 word museum label explaining how a political tactic and an economic tactic could work together, how the threat of violence could affect residents, and one response residents might organize.

ANSWER KEY

Rights Under Pressure

GRADE 11 · SS24.US2.10d

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each tactic opponents used, circle the right or opportunity it threatened, and write P, E, or F beside the tactic to mark it as political, economic, or physical. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Summarize two political tactics in the passage and explain how each could limit Black voters' power.	**Registrars used literacy tests and uneven rules to block registration. At-large elections could make it harder for Black neighborhoods to elect a representative even after residents gained access to the ballot.**
2	How could economic retaliation limit the use of a voting right without changing the law?	**Threats of lost jobs, housing, or loans could make people afraid to register, protest, or continue organizing.**
3	What did the attacks in Mississippi and Selma seek to stop, and what unintended result followed the violence in Selma?	**The attacks sought to frighten people away from civil rights organizing and voting rights action. Outrage over the Selma attack helped build support for the Voting Rights Act.**
4	How could a political barrier and an economic threat reinforce each other after people gained the right to vote?	**An at-large election could limit Black voters' influence, while threats to jobs or housing could discourage them from organizing to change that election system.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A new voting law opened the registration office, but the town still held at-large elections. Because the white majority chose every council member, Black voters might struggle to elect a representative from their neighborhood. Employers could then threaten to fire workers who joined a campaign for district elections. Violence against marchers might frighten families who depended on those wages. Residents could organize a shared emergency fund and ask federal officials to investigate intimidation. The right to vote remained on paper, but these linked pressures could keep that right from producing equal local influence.

Accept other passage-supported tactics if students explain how they limited the use or impact of civil rights gains. For the museum label, accept a plausible organized response that is not explicitly named in the passage.