

Paths Through Conflict

Examine how communities responded to racial, ethnic, and religious conflict.

8.23.C “identify ways conflicts between people from various racial, ethnic, and religious groups were addressed;”

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Mark each action people or institutions took in response to a conflict: underline constructive actions meant to solve or reduce the conflict, and circle coercive actions that used force or punishment. Then number three constructive approaches that could help create a lasting solution.

Responding to Group Conflict

- ① In Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963, African American residents challenged laws and practices that separated people by race. Local activists, including students, used marches, sit-ins, and a boycott to demand equal treatment. City officials tried to control the protests by making arrests and using police dogs and fire hoses. Television and newspaper coverage of that police response brought national attention to the conflict. Federal leaders then pressed for a civil rights law, and Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned segregation in many public places.
- ② Years earlier, Mexican American families in Orange County, California, confronted school districts that placed their children in separate schools. In 1945, Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez joined other parents in a federal lawsuit. They used testimony and legal arguments to show the harm caused by separation. In 1947, a federal appeals court upheld a ruling against the districts. California soon changed its school segregation law, and the districts integrated their schools. This court-based response gave families a way to challenge unequal treatment without violence.
- ③ Religious conflicts can also be addressed through cooperation and public protection. After the September 11, 2001, attacks, some Muslim Americans faced harassment and false blame. In response, interfaith groups brought Muslims, Christians, Jews, and others together for conversations, public statements, and shared events. These efforts challenged stereotypes by letting neighbors hear one another directly. Laws against hate crimes and discrimination also offered protection when bias led to threats or violence. Dialogue cannot erase every disagreement, but it can reduce fear while laws provide a way to hold people accountable.

HISTORICAL CASE: PENNSYLVANIA HALL, PHILADELPHIA, 1838

Event	Response and outcome
Black and white abolitionists met together at Pennsylvania Hall to oppose slavery. A white anti-abolition mob attacked and burned the hall on May 17, 1838.	Abolitionists used interracial meetings and public discussion against slavery; the mob used violence to silence them.
After the destruction, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court held the county responsible for damages.	The hall association received compensation, but no one was convicted for the attack. Legal redress did not mean racial hostility had ended.

1 WORKS CITED

Use with the passage

Historical case adapted from National Park Service, "Destruction by Fire of Pennsylvania Hall - May 17, 1838," Independence National Historical Park. <https://home.nps.gov/articles/000/inde-pennsylvania-hall-fire-1838.htm> (accessed October 9, 2026).

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE Use the passage

1 What constructive methods did Birmingham activists use to challenge racial segregation?

2 What coercive methods did Birmingham city officials use in response to the protests?

3 How did the Mendez families use the court system to address unequal treatment in schools?

4 Why could interfaith dialogue and laws against hate crimes work together to address religious conflict?

5 In the 1838 Pennsylvania Hall case, identify a constructive response to racial conflict and one limit of the legal outcome.

Imagine that students at a community event are being excluded because of race, ethnicity, or religion. Write 4 to 5 sentences that propose a response using at least three methods or ideas from the passage. Explain how each method could help address the conflict.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Mark each action people or institutions took in response to a conflict: underline constructive actions meant to solve or reduce the conflict, and circle coercive actions that used force or punishment. Then number three constructive approaches that could help create a lasting solution. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What constructive methods did Birmingham activists use to challenge racial segregation?	They used marches, sit-ins, and a boycott to demand equal treatment.
2	What coercive methods did Birmingham city officials use in response to the protests?	They made arrests and used police dogs and fire hoses.
3	How did the Mendez families use the court system to address unequal treatment in schools?	They joined a federal lawsuit, used testimony and legal arguments, and won a ruling against the school districts. The districts then integrated their schools.
4	Why could interfaith dialogue and laws against hate crimes work together to address religious conflict?	Dialogue can reduce fear and challenge stereotypes, while laws can protect people and hold those who threaten or harm others accountable.
5	In the 1838 Pennsylvania Hall case, identify a constructive response to racial conflict and one limit of the legal outcome.	Black and white abolitionists met and discussed opposition to slavery together; the court also provided legal redress through compensation. No one was convicted, and compensation did not end racial hostility.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Students could hold a guided conversation where families hear one another directly. They could organize a peaceful public event that rejects stereotypes and includes all groups. If someone makes threats or excludes others unfairly, adults should document it and use school discrimination rules to protect students. These steps combine dialogue, public action, and accountability to reduce fear and address harmful behavior.

Accept responses that accurately identify constructive and coercive responses from the passage. For the open response, look for at least three passage-based methods or ideas, such as dialogue, public statements or events, peaceful protest, legal action, anti-discrimination rules, or accountability for threats. The added 1838 case supplies the inherited nineteenth-century context. Accept interracial organizing or court-ordered compensation as constructive responses, and lack of convictions as a limit. Modern cases remain comparisons; legal compensation is not evidence that the underlying racial conflict was solved.