

No Turning Back Part 3 & Epilogue

Guiding Question: How did ordinary Americans, including many teenagers, play a role in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s?

Document-based Writing Activity

Students Activists & Non-violence

Document Analysis

Why did the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) practice non-violent protest?

To answer this question, read the excerpt from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) handout below, and then answer the Analysis Questions that follow it.

Writing

Once you have completed the document analysis questions use your answers to write *three short paragraphs*:

- **Paragraph 1:** What is non-violent protest? What are its goals?
- **Paragraph 2:** What are some specific ways that one practices non-violence?
- **Paragraph 3:** What do you think might make non-violent protest difficult to practice?

Be sure to cite details from the documents to support your statements.

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Source: “Nonviolence”

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced “snick”) was founded by North Carolina college students in 1960, and it quickly became the central organization of student activism efforts during the civil rights movement. Hundreds of SNCC field secretaries, such as Sam Block whom you meet in the game, organized civil rights activism in communities across the South. The organization adopted the philosophy of nonviolence, which required their activists to be prepared to endure violence from others—being shoved, hit, kicked, etc.—without retaliating. The document below is from a handout SNCC gave to its volunteers in 1964.¹

NONVIOLENCE

Non-violence is a deliberate way of securing social change and of reaching others...

Practicing non-violence requires discipline in order to keep control in the face of provocation. If we retaliate with violence, we convert our struggle into a test of physical strength. But our whole purpose is to make society behave in a more responsible – which means a more moral – way. Thus we exert moral force in order to bring about a moral response in others, and thus a more moral society. If we act irresponsibly, we confirm the prejudices of those who want to deny our rights because they claim we are incapable of exercising them morally and responsibly. If we act responsibly, we do more than to repudiate that argument, and to persuade others that we do have the capacity to act justly and correctly. We also strengthen ourselves – we confirm by our actions, our belief in ourselves and our values, and our readiness to put our legitimate rights and privileges to proper use.

Non-violence is a way of speaking to others and to ourselves. We must continue to speak while we act, and never close the door to a dialogue with the rest of the community. Non-violence testifies to our readiness always to speak in a spirit of constructive conciliation and cooperation. There are six maxims of non-violent behavior.

1. Our attitude toward officials and others who may oppose us will be one of sympathetic understanding of the burdens and responsibilities they carry.
2. No matter what the circumstances or provocation, we will not respond with physical violence to acts directed against us.
3. We will not call names or make hostile remarks.
4. We will adhere as closely as we are able to the letter and spirit of truth in our spoken and written statements.
5. We will always try to speak to the best in all men, rather than seeking to exploit their weaknesses to what we may believe is our advantage.
6. We will always attempt to interpret as clearly as possible to anyone with whom we are in contact – and especially to those who may oppose us – the purpose and meaning of our actions.

¹ Document’s author is identified as SNCC in the Wisconsin Historical Society’s [Freedom Summer Digital Collection](#). It’s distribution to volunteers in 1964 is noted on the page [“Nonviolent Resistance as Practiced in the Civil Rights Movement”](#) on the website of the Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement.

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Language adapted for student readability.

word bank

provocation (n.) – an action or statement that someone makes on purpose in order to harm or harass another person

moral (adj.) – just, ethical, and principles

repudiate (v.) – reject

capacity (n.) – ability

testifies to (v.) – demonstrates

constructive (adj.) – helpful or useful

conciliation (n.) – the settling of a conflict

maxims (n.) – rules

adhere (v.) – follow

interpret (v.) – explain

Analysis Questions

1. What is the philosophy of non-violence? According to the document, what are some specific ways that one can practice non-violence?
2. What impact did SNCC hope to have by using non-violent protest methods?
3. What do you think the authors mean when they say that by practicing non-violence they “exert moral force in order to bring about a moral response in others”?
4. What do you think makes non-violent protest difficult to enact and keep up?