

# Historical Investigation of the Poor People's Campaign

**Museum Connection:** Family and Community

**Purpose:** In this lesson students will examine primary and secondary sources to analyze the events and effects of the Poor People's Campaign of 1968.

**Course:** United States History, African American History

**Time Frame:** 1-2 Class Periods

**Correlation to State Standards:**

**United States History State Curriculum:**

**5.0 CONTENT STANDARD: HISTORY-** Students will examine significant ideas, beliefs and themes; organize patterns and events; analyze how individuals and societies have changed over time in Maryland and the United States.

**Expectation: 5.4:** Students will demonstrate understanding of the cultural, economic, political, social and technological developments from 1946-1968.

2. Analyze the economic, political, social and technological developments from 1946-1968 (5.4.2).

**Objectives:**

e. Analyze the growing impact of television and other mass media on politics and political attitudes, such as the Kennedy-Nixon debate, the Vietnam conflict, and the Civil Rights movement (PS, PNW)

f. Describe the overall goals of the Great Society and its programs, such as the War on Poverty and Medicare/Medicaid (PS, PNW, G, E)

**Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards**

**Framework Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies**

**CCR Anchor Standard #1** Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

**RH.11-12.1** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

**RH.11-12.2** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details.

**RH.11-12.3** Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

**Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards  
Framework Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies**

CCR Anchor Standard #1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

**WHST.11-12.1** Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.

**1a** Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counter claims, reasons, and evidence.

**1b** Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.

**1e** Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

**Objective(s):**

Students will individually and collaboratively analyze primary sources in order to create a historical thesis that explains the reasons behind the failure of the Poor People’s Campaign

**Vocabulary and Concepts:**

Poverty	the deprivation of those things that determine “quality of life” such as nutritious food, adequate clothing, decent shelter, and safe drinking water.
Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)	An organization created by Martin Luther King, Jr. and his followers in 1957 to coordinate and assist local organizations, churches, and civil rights groups that work for the full equality of African Americans in all aspects of life.

Black Power	slogan or call among African Americans that emphasized racial pride, economic and political power, and recognition of black cultural institutions and values.
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**Materials:**

***For the Students:***

- Student Resource Sheet 1: Dr. King’s Nobel Acceptance Speech
- Student Resource Sheet 2: Background Information on the PPC (narrative and organizer)
- Student Resource Sheet 3: Individual Analysis of Documents
- Student Resource Sheet 4: Group Analysis of Documents
- Student Resource Sheet 5: Political Cartoon in *The Chicago Defender*
- Student Resource Sheet 6: Photographs of the Poor People’s Campaign
- Student Resource Sheet 7: Quotations about the Poor People’s Campaign in Newspapers
- Student Resource Sheet 8: Statements of Demands for Rights of the Poor
- Student Resource Sheet 9: Ralph Abernathy’s Quote about the Poor
- Student Resource Sheet 10: Ralph Abernathy: Out of the Shadow

**Resources:**

***Publications:***

- Burns, Stewart. *To The Mountaintop*. New York: HarperCollins, 2004.
- Bishop, Jim. *The Days of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Putnam, 1971.
- McKnight, Gerald. *The Last Crusade: Martin Luther King, Jr., the FBI, and the Poor People’s Campaign*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998.
- Jackson, Thomas. *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King and the Struggle for Economic Justice*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007.

***Web Sites:***

- PBS Eyes on the Prize Materials on the Poor People’s Campaign:  
[http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/story/15\\_poor.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/story/15_poor.html)
- NPR Segment on the Poor People’s March:  
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=91626373>

Poor People’s Campaign Continues Today:

*Maryland State Department of Education and Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture*

<http://www.poorpeoplescampaignppc.org/>

King Online Encyclopedia:

[http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia\\_contents](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia_contents)

### **Historical Background:**

It is commonly held that Martin Luther King, Jr. was a driving force behind the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, and that his passion and charisma were in part responsible for the movement's successes. Although many know of his racial equality work with groups such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, his work in the later part of his life is generally less well known. In the last years of his life Dr. King worked with fellow leaders Ralph Abernathy, Jesse Jackson, and countless others to demand economic opportunity for all Americans regardless of race. The reason for a transition from a social movement based on civil rights and on race to one focused on economic equality was twofold. First, in the wake of the 1964 and 1968 Civil Rights Acts, African Americans had gained some of the political and civil rights they initially sought. King and other leaders turned their attention to the poverty that many African Americans faced as the second obstacle to true racial equality. Secondly, the leaders of the civil rights movement subscribed to a variety of philosophies that treated social equality as holistic. King and many of his colleagues felt that in order to create a society based on justice and peace, oppression in all of its forms must be eliminated.

In the winter of 1967 Marion Wright, the director of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund suggested a Poor People's Campaign as the next step in achieving racial equality. The Poor People's Campaign (PPC) sought to improve the living conditions and economic security of Americans in poverty who then numbered 25 million. The PPC united the leadership of Hispanic American, American Indian, Asian American and poor White activists with the SCLC and the NAACP. The campaign sought to bring attention to impoverished Americans, and sought a legislative solution to the problem. Specifically, the Campaign's leaders issued an Economic Bill of Rights that included a \$30 Billion anti-poverty package and a commitment to full employment and an increase in low income housing.

Through early 1968 King travelled across the country working on the Poor People's Campaign and several other projects including the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike. On April 4<sup>th</sup> King was fatally shot while standing on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in downtown Memphis. In order to honor King, the leaders of the Poor People's Campaign made the decision to go forward with the march and demonstration. Just over a month later the demonstration began in Washington DC.

The demonstrations began on Mother's Day, May 12<sup>th</sup>, with Coretta Scott King leading a march of women to the base of the Lincoln Memorial. The following day, the camp, called Resurrection City, was officially established and thousands began to arrive. Initially, the camps were well organized and a sense of hope pervaded. Participants recall there being social services for the campers, including sanitation and schools, and

*Maryland State Department of Education and Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture*

even a mayor. (Accounts differ as to whether Rev. Jackson or Rev. Abernathy was actually proclaimed Mayor of Resurrection City.) Daily, the demonstrators would protest and lobby the federal agencies according to their interests and needs – the Department of Agriculture was visited daily by large groups, while many American Indians in attendance also made trips to the Department of the Interior.

Resurrection City's early promise gave way to despair because of multiple factors. One such factor was the weather. It rained ceaselessly for almost the entire six weeks Resurrection City demonstrators occupied the Mall. The inclement weather shortened tempers, made logistics more difficult, and amplified the lack of basic resources protesters confronted. Another factor was the sense of hopelessness that gripped the nation as not just Martin Luther King Jr., but Robert Kennedy was assassinated that spring. The loss of these two figures was especially difficult for the PPC, which suffered from a leadership vacuum in the absence of two of its greatest organizers. Also contributing to the poor morale was the lack of initial success that many protestors sought. The demonstrators were largely unable to influence the looming federal bureaucracy. Finally, social problems overwhelmed the camp. Stoney Cooks, one of the event's organizers, summarized the discord by saying, "It was 4,000 to 5,000 [poor] people, and all of their problems." Reports of crime and vandalism in the camp began to surface in the later weeks of the demonstration. Resurrection City was shut down six weeks after it was established, due to the expiration of its permit. Although the PPC can claim some small concessions from the federal government, its goals remained largely unmet. In this lesson, students will analyze primary sources to determine the causes for the failure of the Poor People's Campaign.

### **Lesson Development:**

#### ***Motivation:***

Play the following excerpt of the speech delivered by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. upon receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. If necessary, distribute the text to students so that they may read along. An audio recording of the speech can be found here:

#### Audio

<http://www.nobelprize.org/mediaplayer/index.php?id=1579>

#### Text

[http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-acceptance.html?print=1](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-acceptance.html?print=1)

Use the discussion questions below the text to help students process and analyze King's remarks.

1. What does King believe the world should focus on now?

2. Why do you think King chose to discuss this topic when he received the Nobel Peace Prize?

**Activities:**

1. Distribute and/or read the narrative (Student Resource Sheet 2) to the class and have students complete the accompanying organizer. Then raise the focus question at the end.

**Focus Question: Why did the Poor People’s Campaign fail?**

In order to answer the questions, the students will examine several documents.

2. **Guided Activity/Guided Practice:** As a class, analyze the first document (**Document 1- a cartoon from the *Chicago Defender***). Make sure that you prompt students with questions that help them remember how to analyze primary source documents. An example of such a prompt would be: “If you’re not sure what the word means in this context, where should you look?” or “How can we tell how this person truly feels? Why do you think someone with that point of view would feel that way?” After the group has analyzed a document as a group, students will work individually to complete the rest of the chart. Students will analyze each document and answer the following questions on the graphic organizer (**Student Resource Sheet 3**):

When was this document written? Who wrote it? What was its purpose?  
Explain the author’s point of view.

How does this document help you answer the focus question? If it doesn’t directly help you answer the focus question, what other information does this source give you about the Poor People’s Campaign?

3. Now that the documents have been analyzed, students will have the opportunity to discuss the documents and the focus question with the students in their groups. As they discuss interpretations of the documents, they will need to cite evidence to support their opinions. Multiple interpretations can emerge and may or may not be accepted by all. After discussing, students will create group responses in the appropriate section of the graphic organizer (**Student Resource Sheet 4**).

**Note:** As an alternative to having students complete two organizers for each source (one for individual analysis and one for group analysis), teachers may wish to have the students conduct their initial analysis of the sources in small group discussions, perhaps in stations, making sure that students understand that they are likely to develop a different perspective on each source than their peers. If this method is followed, provide each *group* of no more than 2-3 students with a single copy of the primary sources and each *student* with his/her own source analysis organizer.

**Assessment:**

Once historians complete their research, they formulate a thesis that answers the focus question. Students will do the same. Summaries should answer the focus question below and be supported with details from the documents.

**Focus Question: Why did the Poor People's Campaign fail?****Closure:**

Ask students to reflect on how the US would be different had the Poor People's Campaign succeeded. Also ask students to think about why some people and interest groups would have opposed the Poor People's Campaign. Finally, ask students to articulate the challenges a Poor People's Campaign would face if it were active today.

**Thoughtful Application:**

Ask students to research the term "grassroots movement." What is a grassroots movement? What examples of grassroots movements from American history have been successful? Does the PPC qualify as a grassroots movement? How does the PPC compare to other recent large social movements/public demonstrations, such as the Million Man March and recent Tea Party demonstrations?

**Lesson Extensions:**

1. Visit the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture. Examine exhibits on the civil rights movement in Maryland and on social activist Bea Gaddy.
2. View the film *Citizen King*. [www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/mlk/filmmore/index.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/mlk/filmmore/index.html)

# **Student Resource Sheet 1**

## **Dr. King's Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech**

For Resources, go to the link below

[http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-lecture.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-lecture.html)

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MLA style: "Martin Luther King – Nobel Lecture." Nobelprize.org 11 Jun 2012

Scroll down to paragraphs 22, 23 & 26

### **Have students to answer the questions below**

1. What does King believe the world should focus on now?
2. Why do you think King chose to discuss this topic when he received the Nobel Peace Prize?



## **Student Resource Sheet 2**

### **Background Information on the Poor People's Campaign**

For Resources, go to the link below

<http://tiny.cc/2u3qfw>

## Student Resource Sheet 2 (continued)

### Background Information on the Poor People's Campaign

**Directions:** As you read the Background Information on the Poor People's Campaign, complete the organizer below.

#### The Poor People's Campaign

<b>WHO</b> organized it (both individuals and organization)? <b>WHEN</b> did it happen?
<b>WHERE</b> did it fit in to the larger Civil Rights Movement?
<b>WHAT</b> were its goals?
<b>DESCRIBE</b> what it entailed.
In the space below, record other details about the PPC you think are important

Now, consider this focus question: **WHY DID THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN FAIL?**

## Student Resource Sheet 3

### Primary Source Individual Analysis Form

**Focus Question: WHY DID THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN FAIL?**

	<b>When was this document written? Who wrote it? What is its purpose?</b>	<b>Explain the author's point of view</b>	<b>How does this document help you answer the focus question? If it doesn't directly help you answer the focus question, what other information does this source give you about the Poor People's Campaign?</b>
<b>Document 1</b>			
<b>Document 2</b>			

**Focus Question: WHY DID THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN FAIL?**

	<b>When was this document written? Who wrote it? What is its purpose?</b>	<b>Explain the author's point of view</b>	<b>How does this document help you answer the focus question? If it doesn't directly help you answer the focus question, what other information does this source give you about the Poor People's Campaign?</b>
<b>Document 3</b>			
<b>Document 4</b>			

**Focus Question: WHY DID THE POOR PEOPLE’S CAMPAIGN FAIL?**

	<b>When was this document written? Who wrote it? What is its purpose?</b>	<b>Explain the author’s point of view</b>	<b>How does this document help you answer the focus question? If it doesn’t directly help you answer the focus question, what other information does this source give you about the Poor People’s Campaign?</b>
<b>Document 5</b>			
<b>Document 6</b>			

## Student Resource Sheet 4

### Primary Source Group Analysis Form

**Focus Question: WHY DID THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN FAIL?**

	<b>When was this document written? Who wrote it? What is its purpose?</b>	<b>Explain the author's point of view</b>	<b>How does this document help you answer the focus question? If it doesn't directly help you answer the focus question, what other information does this source give you about the Poor People's Campaign?</b>
<b>Document 1</b>			
<b>Document 2</b>			
<b>Document 3</b>			

**Focus Question: WHY DID THE POOR PEOPLE’S CAMPAIGN FAIL?**

	<b>When was this document written? Who wrote it? What is its purpose?</b>	<b>Explain the author’s point of view</b>	<b>How does this document help you answer the focus question? If it doesn’t directly help you answer the focus question, what other information does this source give you about the Poor People’s Campaign?</b>
<b>Document 4</b>			
<b>Document 5</b>			
<b>Document 6</b>			

## Student Resource Sheet 5

### Document 1

Chicago Defender  
June, 1968

Ralph  
Abernathy



<http://etext.virginia.edu/journals/EH/EH40/chase40.html>

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## **Student Resource Sheet 6**

### **Document 2**

### **Photographs of the Poor People's Campaign**

For photographs, go to the link below

[http://johnphillipsphotography.com/Poor\\_People\\_Gallery/index.html](http://johnphillipsphotography.com/Poor_People_Gallery/index.html)

## **Student Resource Sheet 7**

### **Document 3**

#### **Quotations about the Poor People's Campaign in Newspapers**

For Resources, go to the link below

[http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/story/15\\_poor.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/story/15_poor.html)

Scroll down to middle of page and click on 3<sup>rd</sup> tab which is PRESS

## **Student Resource Sheet 8**

### **Document 4**

#### **Statements of Demands for Rights of the Poor SCLC April 29-30, May 1, 1968**

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, architects of the Poor People's Campaign, has outlined 5 requirements of the bill of economic and social rights that will set poverty on the road to extinction:

1. A meaningful job at a living wage for every employable citizen.
2. A secure and adequate income for all who cannot find jobs or for whom employment is inappropriate.
3. Access to land as a means to income and livelihood.
4. Access to capital as a means of full participation in the economic life of America.
5. Recognition by law of the right of people affected by government programs to play a truly significant role in determining how they are designed and carried out.

Specific Legislative Goals of the Campaign:

1. Recommit the Federal Government to the Full Employment Act of 1946 and legislate the immediate creation of at least one million socially useful career jobs in public service.
2. Adopt the pending housing and urban development act of 1968.
3. Repeal the 90<sup>th</sup> Congress' punitive welfare restrictions in the 1967 Social Security Act.
4. Extend to all farm workers the right--guaranteed under the National Labor Relations Act--to organize agricultural labor unions.
5. Restore budget cuts for bilingual education, Head Start, summer jobs, Economic Opportunity Act, Elementary and Secondary Education Acts.

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Class Resurrection: The Poor People's Campaign of 1968 and Resurrection City

Robert T. Chase

George Mason University

<http://www.brynmawr.edu/socialwork/GSSW/schram/chasearticle.htm>

## Student Resource Sheet 9

### Document 5

#### Ralph Abernathy's Quote about Poor Power



Ralph David Abernathy. Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain)

"..the poor are no longer divided. We are not going to let the white man put us down anymore. It's not white power, and I'll give you some news, it's not black power, either. It's poor power and we're going to use it."

Ralph Abernathy, 1968

[http://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=131403983588292&story\\_fbid=340116106050411](http://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=131403983588292&story_fbid=340116106050411)

## **Student Resource Sheet 10**

### **Document 6**

#### **RALPH ABERNATHY: OUT OF THE SHADOW**

For Resource, go to the link below

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,844503,00.html>