

Jaina Dotson: Communication in History: Posters  
and Protest Signs in the Black Freedom Struggle

Senior Division  
Individual Documentary  
Process Paper: 489

## Process Paper

When choosing a topic for this year's National History Day I knew that I wanted to focus on an artistic part of history. I narrowed my options down to music, dance, and art, and finally concluded with protest posters in history. After tinkering with my thesis statement for a while I eventually decided to discuss the importance of protest posters in the Black Freedom Struggle. This ties into the overall theme of Communication in History because the messages that were conveyed through the numerous posters displayed in the Black Freedom Struggle helped communicate the problems in society to the rest of the world. These messages ultimately helped shape society to the place it is today and continue to do so as new protests continue to be fought.

As I searched for the right sources for my project I discovered a few articles that covered the importance of posters in history and proved my thesis correct. The articles that I found discussed exactly what I needed and the authors of most of the articles that I incorporated in my project were very credible which made it easier for me to rely on the information that was provided.

As far as the way in which I wanted to deliver my project I knew right away that I wanted to present my information in the form of a documentary. For the past two years of doing NHD I have presented my projects through documentaries and this year I wanted to do the same since it was so enjoyable to do before. Not only that, but I wanted to see my progress in documentary making from 7th to 9th grade. My script wasn't very hard to do thanks to my helpful sources, years of essay writing and debate cases that I have to pull together each month. When it comes to the documentary itself I used iMovie as it is the most familiar editing tool to me.

For the historical aspect of my project I decided to cover the significance of advocating for the rights of African-Americans during a time where they were severely

oppressed through imagery and a visual representation of their demands. “Activists throughout the black freedom struggle used protest signs and posters to convey powerful messages, to advocate for the creation of important new laws, to repeal damaging laws and to spread awareness of crucial issues due to the atrocities that they faced. Policy change and a shift in Black representation in leadership were the chief goals of the freedom movement.”

Finally, it was important that I clearly conveyed the significance of protest posters in history. Protest posters in the Black freedom struggle helped change many things such as the I Am A man poster which helped raise awareness for the creation of new laws that would protect sanitation workers from the possible dangers of their work. This goal was eventually achieved after OSHA passed laws that reflected this need.

# Annotated Bibliography

## Primary Sources:

### Videos:

*"APARTHEID CRISIS IN SOUTH AFRICA 1960"* Posted by Buyout Footage Historic Film Archive, Jul 18, 2012. <https://youtu.be/I-18LA8PwTY>

This informational video discusses the crisis of Apartheid in South Africa and displays some of the large gatherings of South Africans protesting against the unfairness of apartheid.

*"The March (1963, restored)"* Posted by US National Archives Sep 6, 2013. <https://youtu.be/DQYzHIIQ1O4>

This video helped me display how protesters utilized their protest signs through various protests in the Civil rights movement.

*"I Am A Man: Dr. King & the Memphis Sanitation Strike"* Posted by atulocal689, April 4, 2008. <https://youtu.be/HBDgH435oaU>

This video helped me show how the sanitation workers were treated when they went on strike and how they used their identical signs in the protest. It also provided me with the actual footage of Martin Luther King, Jr's last speech.

*"Memphis sanitation workers remember the 1968 strike, 40 years later"* Posted by The Commercial Appeal, February 17, 2008. <https://youtu.be/zN3ko9kjuxc>

This video also provided me with footage from the Memphis sanitation strike as well as some of the perspectives from the actual sanitation workers who went on strike.

*"South Africa Apartheid Protest 1960"* Posted by historycomestolife, January 19, 2014. <https://youtu.be/NSt5mpfXCkA>

I used this video to capture the protests of the South Africans who suffered from the oppression of Apartheid. I could see how even in another continent just the use of one or two signs could deliver the sentiment of an entire population.

*"The Signs Protesters Carry"* Posted by Rolling Stone, June 11, 2020. <https://youtu.be/WSotLZJxLSY>

By incorporating clips from this video into my documentary I was able to display the more current protests where people still gather to protest against the same things that were protested against several years ago.

*“Violent racism during peaceful protests in the Civil Rights Movement”* Posted by Omar García Pérez, December 9, 2014. <https://youtu.be/32HIQa0ZHBE>

I used this video to show the brutal racism that occurred during peaceful protests.

#### **Pictures:**

*Mass Incarceration, Then and Now.* The New Yorker, <https://media.newyorker.com/photos/5e21ed7979cb9c0008ad5a66/master/pass/RadioHour-Mass-Incarceration.jpg>

This image creatively displays how many African Americans are impacted by the systemic racism in the U.S., specifically when it comes to mass incarceration.

Winter, Damon. *Donald Trump, Andre Jackson and American Populism.* The New York Times/Redux; Edward Anthony/Universal History Archive/ UIG/Getty Images <https://api.time.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/diptych-meachum-jackson-trump.jpg?w=633&quality=85>

This combination photo shows President-elect Donald Trump and former U.S. President Andrew Jackson. I used this photo to show how former racist policies and ideas are still present today and carried through by racists who are given a substantial amount of power.

*Redlining robs Black families of generational wealth.* The Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/resizer/9ancJcesFI-fbQ2Ez62agy83a6A=/1484x0/arc-anglerfish-washpost-prod-washpost.s3.amazonaws.com/public/FSDDP7PPIZDSZLUYXRSVVKAKYA.jpg>

This image shows what redlining can look like in a simple manner.

Fairey, Shepard. *Barack Obama "Hope" poster.* Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Barack\\_Obama\\_Hope\\_poster.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Barack_Obama_Hope_poster.jpg)

I incorporated this historical poster in my documentary to show some of the timeline of black historical figures.

*Black Americans in Congress.* History, Art & Archives, United States House of

Representatives,

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fhistory.house.gov%2Fbaic%2F&psig=AOvVaw2MHB2A4wCKOBxFecN3I-x8&ust=1612992703096000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAIQjRxqFwoTCKC73pzg3e4CFQAAAAAdAAAAABAD>

I implemented this image in my documentary to show some of the timeline of black historical figures as well.

Obilor, Demetria. *John Lewis*. Twitter.

<https://pbs.twimg.com/media/EdLnSYwUEAMfBtb.jpg>

I also used this image to show some of the timeline of black historical figures.

*Creation and Evolution of the Congressional Black Caucus*. National Archives and Records Administration, <https://historycms2.house.gov/assets/35021.jpeg>

I used this picture to show some of the timeline of black historical figures. “Fifteen members of the Congressional Black Caucus pose on the steps of the U.S. Capitol in 1977, from left to right: (front row) Barbara Jordan of Texas, Robert Nix, Sr., of Pennsylvania, Ralph Metcalfe of Illinois, Cardiss Collins of Illinois, Parren Mitchell of Maryland, Gus Hawkins of California, Shirley Chisholm of New York; (middle row) John Conyers, Jr., of Michigan, Charles Rangel of New York, Harold Ford, Sr., of Tennessee, Yvonne Brathwaite Burke of California, Walter Fauntroy of the District of Columbia; (back row) Ronald Dellums of California, Louis Stokes of Ohio, and Charles C. Diggs, Jr., of Michigan.”

*UDF Unites, Apartheid Divides*. Courtesy of South Africa History Archive, <https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/UDF%20Unites%20-%20Apartheid%20Divides.jpg>

This is the poster for the United Democratic Front that was displayed during apartheid and used to help represent those affected by apartheid.

*Support the Consumer Boycott*.

[https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/Support the Consumer Boycott\\_0.jpg](https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/Support%20the%20Consumer%20Boycott_0.jpg)

I used this poster to show one of the 6 protest signs that were used during the Apartheid Era. “Designed in 1985, this UDF poster, is the first from a set of five that were produced to highlight the demands of a consumer boycott in the Western Cape.”

Rothenburg, Stephen and Smithers, Morris. *South African Scooter Drivers Union*.  
Courtesy of South Africa History Archive,  
[https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/South\\_African\\_Scooter\\_Drivers\\_Union.jpg](https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/South_African_Scooter_Drivers_Union.jpg)

I also used this image to show one of the signs that were used during Apartheid. “Spurred by the strikes in Durban in 1973, the formation of trade unions, like the South African Scooter Drivers Union in Johannesburg (1984), provided labor protection to black South Africans.”

*International Youth Year: Rally*. International Youth Year (IYY) Committee /  
Courtesy of South Africa History Archive.  
[https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/International\\_Youth\\_Year\\_Rally.jpg](https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/International_Youth_Year_Rally.jpg)

I incorporated this poster to show another sign used during Apartheid. “The International Youth Year Rally (1985) was organized by the United Nations with the goal of raising awareness on issues concerning the abuse and mistreatment of youth worldwide.”

*Workers Unite*. [https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/Workers\\_Unite.jpg](https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/Workers_Unite.jpg)

I used this Apartheid resistance poster to help support my thesis. “Founded in 1985, the Congress of South Africa Trade Unions (COSATU) calls for “One country, one federation” with the goal of uniting the South African people.”

*UDF Public Meeting*. Johannesburg Democratic Action Committee (JODAC), creator /  
Courtesy of South Africa History Archive,  
[https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/Call\\_to\\_Whites.jpg](https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/Call_to_Whites.jpg)

This is another apartheid resistance poster that I incorporated in my documentary to help support my thesis. “The Johannesburg Democratic Action Committee (JODAC) was formed as an affiliate of the UDF in 1983, and provided an opportunity for whites to join the struggle against apartheid.”

*Civil Rights Posters*. Courtesy of Marsh, Cynthia.  
<https://i.pinimg.com/564x/df/bd/46/dfbd4623048fcc3c34b8acc2a474ae52.jpg>

I used this image to show one of the many posters used to represent the Civil Rights movement.

Walker, Hank. Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images  
[https://www.neh.gov/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/2018-07/2013\\_09-10](https://www.neh.gov/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/2018-07/2013_09-10)

[Massive Resistance 04.jpg?itok=jnkbu6qT](#)

This picture displays a group of protesters who are protesting for the integration of schools.

*Demonstrators, a young boy among them, picket in front of a school board office in protest of segregation, St Louis, Missouri, in the early 1960s.* PhotoQuest/Getty Images. <https://www.the74million.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Children-adult-s-signs.jpg>

This image was implemented in my documentary to show one of the several protests in the Civil Rights Movement.

*Maurice Berger at the opening of Revolution of the Eye: Modern Art and the Birth of American Television at the Jewish Museum, 2015.* Photo: Will Ragazzin, [https://miro.medium.com/max/931/1\\*PwfHNweqFNZVwOvD7Pclfw.jpeg](https://miro.medium.com/max/931/1*PwfHNweqFNZVwOvD7Pclfw.jpeg)

I used this portrait to show one of the authors of a source that I used. Maurice Berger was an important writer, curator, and historian who unfortunately passed just last year.

## Secondary Sources:

### Websites:

*“Protest Signs: Barometers of Social Change.”* Protest Signs: Barometers of Social Change | The New Antiquarian | The Blog of The Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America, [www.abaa.org/blog/post/protest-signs-barometers-of-social-change](http://www.abaa.org/blog/post/protest-signs-barometers-of-social-change).

This blog discusses important protest posters in history such as those used in the women’s suffrage movement and the “I AM A MAN” posters used by striking Memphis sanitation workers in 1968 during the Civil Rights Movement and the Labor Movement.

hilds, Arcynta Ali. *“The Power of Imagery in Advancing Civil Rights.”* Smithsonian.com, Smithsonian Institution, 1 Oct. 2011, [www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/the-power-of-imagery-in-advancing-civil-rights-72983041/](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/the-power-of-imagery-in-advancing-civil-rights-72983041/).

This article discusses the importance of imagery in movements

*“Posters from the Freedom Struggle in the 1980s.”* Facing History and Ourselves, [www.facinghistory.org/confronting-apartheid/chapter-3/posters-freedom-struggle](http://www.facinghistory.org/confronting-apartheid/chapter-3/posters-freedom-struggle)



[-1980s.](#)

This article explains the importance of posters during apartheid. It lays out several posters in the movement to end apartheid.

Staff. *“Anniversary of Dr. King's Death and Tracing the Roots of the ‘I Am a Man’ Poster.”* History Detectives, 6 Apr. 2018,  
<https://historydetectives.nyhistory.org/2018/04/sanitation-workers-the-declaration-of-independence-and-an-18th-century-english-potter-tracing-the-roots-of-the-i-am-a-man-poster/>

This article talks about how imagery plays an important role in conveying messages and how that makes posters in protests vital to spreading awareness to issues.

*5 Protest Signs That Changed History* - WooContent Copywriting Services.”  
<https://woocontent.com/5-protest-signs-that-changed-history/>

This article outlines 5 historically significant posters and allows the audience to understand how posters play an important role in history. It also includes the “I Am A man” poster and explains how much the original posters are worth today.