



## The Chicago Campaign

### Learning Targets/Objectives:

- Discuss the purpose of the Chicago Freedom Movement.
- Understand the role of the Chicago Freedom Movement during the Civil Rights Movement.

### Success Criteria:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of the Chicago Freedom Movement by creating a Chicago Campaign Sign.
- Write a letter to Mayor Richard J. Daley asking for fair housing in Chicago.

### Lesson Content Overview:

As pervasive as segregation was in the South, the subtle and hidden racism of the North was just as horrendous, if not worse, on Black Americans' emotional, psychological, and physical well-being. In an effort to attack the covert racism of the North, King and the SCLC developed the Chicago Campaign to address educational, housing, and economic inequalities.

In January 1966, King moved his family into a Chicago slum to begin a protest for better housing and economic conditions. King selected an apartment resembling a “typical West Side ghetto apartment.” One SCLC division, Operation Breadbasket, had been negotiating with employers in Chicago for more and better jobs for Black workers. King’s other plans for the city included rehabilitating rundown apartment buildings in the Chicago Dwellings Association, job training by the Cook County Welfare Department, and teaching preschool children in the Head Start project of the Office of Economic Opportunity.<sup>1</sup>

On July 10, 1966, Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed a crowd of more than 50,000 at Chicago’s Soldier Field during the effort to end slums in Chicago. King was joined by CORE leader, Floyd McKissick and James Meredith on the list of speakers. Just a month earlier, Meredith had been shot while attempting to march from Memphis, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi (Meredith had dubbed that march the “March Against Fear”). At the end of his freedom rally, which exceeded 100-degree temperatures, King led 38,000 of his followers on a two-mile march from Soldier Field to City Hall, where he posted demands of the Nonviolent Freedom Fighters on Mayor Richard J. Daley’s door. This echoed the actions of his namesake, Martin Luther, the German theologian, who nailed his ninety-five theses (statements for debate) on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517.

As mentioned, the Chicago Campaign included Operation Breadbasket, a program to pressure local businesses to hire African American workers from the community. It began in 1962 in Atlanta, Georgia, under the directorship of Rev. Fred Bennett, Jr.; however, the tactic was used throughout the urban South—particularly when challenging unjust practices of department stores and other downtown retailers. A group of African American ministers, under SCLC, typically visited local businesses to negotiate hiring African American workers, especially in job categories from which African Americans had been traditionally excluded. When negotiations failed, the ministers encouraged their congregations to boycott the firms until owners and the SCLC reached an agreement over fair hiring.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Anniston Star*. “King Set to View Backing.” July 10, 1966. 5D.



While in Chicago, King encountered the unrest, impatience, and frustration of Black youth – some of whom booed him during a weekly Chicago Campaign meeting. Although initially hurt and disappointed by their reaction, King understood their frustration. Later some of the youth joined the campaign.

Also in July 1966, riots started in Chicago’s “West Side” (Ogden to Pulaski to Lake to Cermak) when police forcibly shut off a fire hydrant that area residents were using to beat the heat. Commenting on the Chicago riot or “social eruption,” King concluded:

*Riots grow out of intolerable conditions. Violent revolts are generated by revolting conditions and there is nothing more dangerous than to build a society with a large segment of people who feel they have no stake in it, who feel they have nothing to lose. To the young victims of the slums, this society has so limited the alternatives of his life that expression of his manhood is reduced to the ability to defend himself physically. No wonder it appears logical to him to strike out, resorting to violence against oppression. That is the only way he thinks he gets recognition.<sup>2</sup>*

King’s keen understanding of man-made instruments of oppression, coupled with his faith in nonviolence and reconciliation as a proven method of conflict resolution, helped keep him focused as the media, white liberals, and racist whites tried to blame his organization for the hatred and anger of some Northern whites.

The final wave of the “Chicago Campaign” was Operation Breadbasket. Operation Breadbasket was a radical economic philosophy that demanded white retailers and merchants respect black purchasing power. The philosophy was simple, “If you respect my dollar, you must respect my person.” This meant that white retailers would not be allowed to profit from sales to the Black community and not invest in the community (by providing jobs through fair hiring programs).

The results of Operation Breadbasket were awesome, and it was one of the SCLC’s most successful programs. “The net results added up to approximately eight hundred new and upgraded jobs for Negro employees, worth a little over \$7 million in new annual income for Negro families.”<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the summer of 1966, King led other marches into white neighborhoods demanding that housing be opened to Blacks. The governor gave the national guard a “shoot to kill” order to put down violent demonstrations. To defuse tension in the city when King planned to march into Cicero, Mayor Richard Daley called a “summit meeting” with King and 70 civic leaders on Friday, August 26, 1966 at the Palmer House in Chicago. An accord was met, which announced an open housing agreement allowing Blacks to move into all-white areas as long as King postponed his march on Cicero. “The total eradication of housing discrimination has been made possible,” King said. Mayor Daley agreed: “We will go ahead to eliminate slums, provide better schools, and more jobs in our city.”<sup>4</sup>

The SCLC poverty and unemployment program called Operation Breadbasket was later put under the leadership of Jesse Jackson. Overall, the Chicago Campaign helped lay the foundation for The Fair Housing Act. The Fair Housing Act, 42 U.S.C. 3601 et seq., prohibits discrimination by direct providers of housing, such as landlords and real estate companies as well as other entities, such as municipalities, banks or other lending institutions and homeowners’ insurance companies whose discriminatory practices make housing unavailable to persons because of 1) race or color 2) religion 3) sex 4) national origin 5) familial status and 6) disability.

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<sup>2</sup> Editor: Clayborne Carson. *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* 2001. Chapter 28: Chicago Campaign.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* 1967.

<sup>4</sup> *Chicago Tribune*. “Pact Provides Equal Access to Housing Loans.” August 27, 1966. 1; *Birmingham Post-Herald*. “King March on Cicero Called Off.” August 27, 1966. 1.



### SEL Opener:

- Show a map of Chicago, Illinois. Have the students describe its location in comparison to Birmingham, Alabama and Atlanta, Georgia.
- **Discussion:** Ask the students if they think segregation in the North was the same as what was happening in the South.

### Instructional Activities:

- Activity 1: Complete the [MLK Chicago Attack - Picture Prompt](#).
  - Have the students look at the picture: their faces, their positions, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
  - **Prompt:** Have the students pretend they witnessed the attack and have them write about their experience: *What do you see? What do you hear? How do you feel seeing Dr. King injured?*
- Activity 2: Watch the [Dr. King's Chicago Crusade Video](#)
  - **Small Group/Individual Work:** Complete the [Video Reaction Worksheet](#)
- Activity 3: Complete the [Freedom Sunday Picture Prompt](#).
  - Have the students look at the picture: the faces of those in the crowd, of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and of those riding with him.
  - **Prompt:** Have the students pretend they are one of the people in the crowd and have them write about their experience: *What do you see? What do you hear? How do you feel seeing Dr. King in the North?*
- Activity 4: Read the [Martin Luther King Jr. in Chicago](#) article.
  - **Small Group/Individual Work:** Complete the [Guided Notes](#) / [Answer Key](#)
  - **Large Group Discussion:**
    - Review the guided notes.
    - Discussion Questions: *Why was Dr. King in Chicago? How did it relate and impact the Civil Rights Movement?*
    - Acknowledge the themes among students' answers.
- Activity 5: Complete the [MLK Chicago Housing Reflection Worksheet](#).
  - **Discuss the Reflection Questions:**
    - 1) How would you feel if your family was not allowed to move to certain neighborhoods?
    - 2) Why do you think Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. cared about the issues in the North?
    - 3) Why do you think Dr. King was willing to move from the South to the North?



### Assessments:

- **OPTION 1:** Create a Chicago Marching Sign → [Chicago Campaign Sign Worksheet/Template](#)
- **OPTION 2:** Pretend you were a child in 1966. Write a letter to Mayor Richard J. Daley asking for fair housing in Chicago → [Letter Template](#)

### Adaptations for Student Needs

#### IEP/504:

- Sizes of student groups range
- Students team up with a peer partner, while others would prefer to work individually.
- There is a variety of small-group work
- Chunking information
- Visual cues and wait time
- Visual supports (maps, images, PowerPoint slides, handouts)
- Assessments will be modified, and students given extra time

#### ELD/ELL/ESL:

- Modified/simplified reading material
- Content-related lists/handouts of key terms
- Text is supported by visuals and connected to real-life experiences