



critical media project

Playlist: Black Protest & Social Movements

overview

The following playlist uses media as a lens to explore the history, underlying causes, politics, and representation of Black protest and social movements in U.S. history. The playlist prompts us to consider Black protest in the context of a 400 year history, dating back to the arrival of the first enslaved Africans to the US colonies in 1619 and continuing through today.

The examples explore how various forms of media have portrayed and contextualized these movements and the struggles and violence that precipitated them, as well as how activists and creators use media to advance their message and cause.

This playlist is not intended to provide a comprehensive accounting of Black protest and struggle; rather, the examples have been selected to encourage critical discussion around various dimensions, tensions, and opportunities in media representations of social unrest and racial justice. The media is organized by genre in order to explore the ways different types of media have represented and framed protest and violence against Black communities. Some of the examples underscore divisions and silos among groups, while others focus on inclusion and unity. Examples also highlight different historical moments to show cycles, patterns, and departures in media representations—how we see the same power structures and systems reinforced or challenged over time. These varied portrayals in fiction and nonfiction media ask us to think about the roots of protest—the factors that instigate it—as well as how protest is castigated and valued in the context of social, political, and cultural change.

Note: Given the subject matter, you may want to warn students that many of these media examples contain or reference violence and other possibly triggering content.

Before showing the media, ask students to **define and distinguish between the terms “protest,” “riot,” and “social movement.”** Have them consider which of these terms applies to various media examples below. Feel free to then use the below definitions provided by *Sharp’s Dictionary of Power and Struggle* to further your discussion:

- **Protest:** an “expression of objection and disapproval by words or action.”
- **Riot:** “a disorderly action by a crowd of people expressing their feelings or opinions in various boisterous or destructive ways.”
- **Social Movement:** “A grouping of a significant number of people who by belief and actions seek change in the conditions under which they live.”

Then have students discuss the **role of media in representing social issues and movements.** Why and how is media an important and valuable lens for understanding social movements and protest for racial justice? As a group, collectively brainstorm a set of broad questions that are useful in this kind of critical analysis of media. These will provide an underlying framework to help guide analysis through discussion of the specific media examples on the playlist.

Examples:

- How are individuals and groups represented?
- Whose perspectives are emphasized or downplayed? What is the effect?
- Who is the primary audience for a given type of media?
- What is the effect of the media on the audience? How does media produce a specific effect through images, sounds, and other creative choices?
- How is the media constructed in terms of narrative structure and style? What is the effect of the creative choices made by media producers?

After examining and analyzing the media on the playlist, create your own piece of media that:

- Defines, redefines or provides nuance in thinking about the terms protest/riot/social movement
- Offers a personal experience or a family member's experience with a protest or a social movement
- Answers the question "what role does history (or media representation) play in our present moment?"

Stuck? Take a look at our [DIY](#) section for ideas!

resources

If you want to learn more about African American history and the ongoing fight for equality and human rights by African Americans and other marginalized groups, visit the following sites:

[1619 Podcast](#)

[Array Now](#)

[Black Futures Lab](#)

[Black Lives Matter](#)

[California African American Museum](#)

[Children's Defense Fund](#)

[Code Switch podcast \(NPR\)](#)

[Color of Change](#)

[Facing History and Ourselves–Athletes and Activism](#)

[National Association for the Advancement of Colored People \(NAACP\)](#)

[NAACP Legal Defense Fund](#)

[National Center for Civil and Human Rights](#)

[National Museum of African American History & Culture](#)

[National Museum of African American History and Culture/Talking About Race](#)

[Southern Poverty Law Center](#)

[Teaching Tolerance](#)

[Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture — Black Liberation Reading List](#)

[Teaching for Change](#)

[Zinn Education Project](#)