HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS
(1964–1995)
FEATURED IN

Teaching U.S. History Thematically
Document-Based Lessons for the Secondary Classroom

Rosalie Metro
**Event:** Organization of Afro-American Unity founded, 1964

**Document:** By Any Means Necessary, Malcolm X, 1964

Due to a permissions issue, the document cannot be presented here, but can be viewed at blackpast.org/1964-malcolm-x-s-speech-founding-rally-organization-afro-american-unity.

Include the opening paragraph and excerpt from “So we have formed an organization known as the Organization of Afro American Unity” to “we will continue to be a defenseless people at the mercy of a ruthless and violent racist mob.”


**SHORTENED Document (See Chapter 7):** By Any Means Necessary, Malcolm X, 1964

Excerpt from “So we have formed an organization known as the Organization of Afro American Unity” to “That’s our motto.”
**Event:** War on Poverty begins, 1964

**Document:** State of the Union address, Lyndon B. Johnson, 1964

Unfortunately, many Americans live on the outskirts of hope—some because of their poverty, and some because of their color, and all too many because of both. Our task is to help replace their despair with opportunity.

This administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America. I urge this Congress and all Americans to join with me in that effort.

It will not be a short or easy struggle, no single weapon or strategy will suffice, but we shall not rest until that war is won. The richest Nation on earth can afford to win it. We cannot afford to lose it. One thousand dollars invested in salvaging an unemployable youth today can return $40,000 or more in his lifetime.

. . . The war against poverty will not be won here in Washington. It must be won in the field, in every private home, in every public office, from the courthouse to the White House.

The program I shall propose will emphasize this cooperative approach to help that one-fifth of all American families with incomes too small to even meet their basic needs.

Our chief weapons in a more pinpointed attack will be better schools, and better health, and better homes, and better training, and better job opportunities to help more Americans, especially young Americans, escape from squalor and misery and unemployment rolls where other citizens help to carry them.

Very often a lack of jobs and money is not the cause of poverty, but the symptom. The cause may lie deeper—in our failure to give our fellow citizens a fair chance to develop their own capacities, in a lack of education and training, in a lack of medical care and housing, in a lack of decent communities in which to live and bring up their children.

But whatever the cause, our joint Federal-local effort must pursue poverty, pursue it wherever it exists—in city slums and small towns, in sharecropper shacks or in migrant worker camps, on Indian Reservations, among whites as well as Negroes, among the young as well as the aged, in the boom towns and in the depressed areas.

Our aim is not only to relieve the symptom of poverty, but to cure it and, above all, to prevent it.

**Event:** Delano grape strike, 1965–1970

**Document:** Address to the Commonwealth Club of California, Cesar Chavez, 1984

Due to a permissions issue, the document cannot be presented here, but can be viewed at chavezfoundation.org/_cms.php?mode=view&b_code=001008000000000&b_no=16&page=1&field=&key=&n=7.

Excerpt from “Today, thousands of farmworkers live under savage conditions” to “dangerous pesticides which poison our people and poison the food we eat.”

**Event:** Black Panther Party founded, 1966

**Document:** The Ten-Point Program, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, 1966

1. **We Want Freedom. We Want Power To Determine The Destiny Of Our Black Community.** We believe that Black people will not be free until we are able to determine our destiny.

2. **We Want Full Employment For Our People.** We believe that the federal government is responsible and obligated to give every man employment or a guaranteed income. We believe that if the White American businessmen will not give full employment, then the means of production should be taken from the businessmen and placed in the community so that the people of the community can organize and employ all of its people and give a high standard of living.

3. **We Want An End To The Robbery By The Capitalists Of Our Black Community.** We believe that this racist government has robbed us, and now we are demanding the overdue debt of forty acres and two mules. Forty acres and two mules were promised 100 years ago as restitution for slave labor and mass murder of Black people. We will accept the payment in currency which will be distributed to our many communities. The Germans are now aiding the Jews in Israel for the genocide of the Jewish people. The Germans murdered six million Jews. The American racist has taken part in the slaughter of over fifty million Black people; therefore, we feel that this is a modest demand that we make.

4. **We Want Decent Housing Fit For The Shelter Of Human Beings.** We believe that if the White Landlords will not give decent housing to our Black community, then the housing and the land should be made into cooperatives so that our community, with government aid, can build and make decent housing for its people.

5. **We Want Education For Our People That Exposes The True Nature Of This Decadent American Society.** We Want Education That Teaches Us Our True History And Our Role In The Present-Day Society. We believe in an educational system that will give to our people a knowledge of self. If a man does not have knowledge of himself and his position in society and the world, then he has little chance to relate to anything else.

6. **We Want All Black Men To Be Exempt From Military Service.** We believe that Black people should not be forced to fight in the military service to defend a racist government that does not protect us. We will not fight and kill other people of color in the world who, like Black people, are being victimized by the White racist government of America. We will protect ourselves from the force and violence of the racist police and the racist military, by whatever means necessary.

*(document continued on next page)*
Document: The Ten-Point Program, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, 1966 (continued)

7. **We Want An Immediate End To Police Brutality And Murder Of Black People.** We believe we can end police brutality in our Black community by organizing Black self-defense groups that are dedicated to defending our Black community from racist police oppression and brutality. The Second Amendment to the Constitution of the United States gives a right to bear arms. We therefore believe that all Black people should arm themselves for self-defense.

8. **We Want Freedom For All Black Men Held In Federal, State, County And City Prisons And Jails.** We believe that all Black people should be released from the many jails and prisons because they have not received a fair and impartial trial.

9. **We Want All Black People When Brought To Trial To Be Tried In Court By A Jury Of Their Peer Group Or People From Their Black Communities, As Defined By The Constitution Of The United States.** We believe that the courts should follow the United States Constitution so that Black people will receive fair trials. The Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution gives a man a right to be tried by his peer group. A peer is a person from a similar economic, social, religious, geographical, environmental, historical and racial background. To do this the court will be forced to select a jury from the Black community from which the Black defendant came. We have been, and are being, tried by all-White juries that have no understanding of the “average reasoning man” of the Black community.

10. **We Want Land, Bread, Housing, Education, Clothing, Justice And Peace.**

Event: Military coup in Chile, 1973

Document: Memorandum for the President, National Security Council meeting, November 6, Chile; Henry Kissinger, 1970

A. DIMENSIONS OF THE PROBLEM
The election of Allende as President of Chile poses for us one of the most serious challenges ever faced in this hemisphere. . . .

Allende is a tough, dedicated Marxist. He comes to power with a profound anti-US bias. . . .

The consolidation of Allende in power in Chile, therefore, would pose some very serious threats to our interests and position in the hemisphere, and would affect developments in our relations to them elsewhere in the world: . . .

While events in Chile post these potentially very adverse consequences for us, they are taking a form which makes them extremely difficult for us to deal with or offset, and which in fact poses some very painful dilemmas for us:

a. Allende was elected legally, the first Marxist government ever to come to power by free elections. . . .

b. We are strongly on record in support of self-determination and respect for free election; you are firmly on record for non-intervention in the internal affairs of this hemisphere and of accepting nations “as they are.” . . .

C. OUR CHOICES . . .
1. The Modus Vivendi Strategy:
This school of thought . . . argues that . . . the best thing we can do in these circumstances is maintain our relationship and our presence in Chile so that over the long haul we may be able to foster and influence domestic trends favorable to our interests. . . .

2. The Hostile Approach:
DOD [Department of Defense], CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], and some State [Department] people, on the other hand, argue that it is patent that Allende is our enemy, that he will move to counter us just as soon and as strongly as he feels he can; . . . we should try to prevent him from consolidating [power] now when he is at his weakest. . . .

Within this approach there are in turn two schools of thought:

a. Overt Hostility.

This view argues that we should not delay in putting pressure on Allende and therefore should not wait to react to his moves with counter-punches. . . . This approach therefore would call for (1) initiating punitive measures, such as terminating aid or economic embargo; (2) making every effort to rally international support of this position; and (3) declaring and publicizing our concern and hostility.

(document continued on next page)
Document: Memorandum for the President, National Security Council meeting, November 6, Chile; Henry Kissinger, 1970 (continued)

b. Non-overt Pressure, Cold, Correct Approach.

This approach concurs in the view that pressure should be placed on Allende now and that we should oppose him. . . . It argues that an image of the US initiating punitive measures will permit Allende to marshal domestic support and international sympathy on the one hand, and make it difficult for us to obtain international cooperation on the other. . . . This approach therefore calls for essentially the same range of pressures as the previous one, but would use them quietly and covertly; on the surface our posture would be correct, but cold.

D. ASSESSMENTS

[ . . . ] I recommend, therefore that you make a decision that we will oppose Allende as strongly as we can and do all that we can to keep him from consolidating power, taking care to package those efforts in a style that gives us the appearance of reacting to his moves.

Event: Ronald Reagan elected, 1980

Document: A City on a Hill, Ronald Reagan, 1974

I have always believed that there was some divine plan that placed this great continent between two oceans to be sought out by those who were possessed of an abiding love of freedom and a special kind of courage. This was true of those who pioneered the great wilderness in the beginning of this country, as it is also true of those later immigrants who were willing to leave the land of their birth and come to a land where even the language was unknown to them.

. . . One-half of all the economic activity in the entire history of man has taken place in this republic. We have distributed our wealth more widely among our people than any society known to man. Americans work less hours for a higher standard of living than any other people. Ninety-five percent of all our families have an adequate daily intake of nutrients—and a part of the five percent that don’t are trying to lose weight! Ninety-nine percent have gas or electric refrigeration, 92 percent have televisions, and an equal number have telephones. There are 120 million cars on our streets and highways—and all of them are on the street at once when you are trying to get home at night.

But isn’t this just proof of our materialism—the very thing that we are charged with? Well, we also have more churches, more libraries, we support voluntarily more symphony orchestras, and opera companies, non-profit theaters, and publish more books than all the other nations of the world put together.

. . . We cannot escape our destiny, nor should we try to do so. The leadership of the free world was thrust upon us two centuries ago in that little hall of Philadelphia. . . . We are indeed, and we are today, the last best hope of man on earth.


Courtesy Ronald Reagan Library.
Event: Ronald Reagan elected, 1980

SHORTENED Document (See Chapter 7): A City on a Hill, Ronald Reagan, 1974

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Courtesy Ronald Reagan Library.
Event: Reaganomics launched, 1981


I’m speaking to you tonight to give you a report on the state of our Nation’s economy. I regret to say that we’re in the worst economic mess since the Great Depression. . . .

The Federal budget is out of control, and we face runaway deficits of almost $80 billion for this budget year that ends September 30th. That deficit is larger than the entire Federal budget in 1957, and so is the almost $80 billion we will pay in interest this year on the national debt.

Twenty years ago, in 1960, our Federal Government payroll was less than $13 billion. Today it is $75 billion. During these 20 years our population has only increased by 23.3 percent. The Federal budget has gone up 528 percent. . . .

Regulations adopted by government with the best of intentions have added $666 to the cost of an automobile. It is estimated that altogether regulations of every kind, on shopkeepers, farmers, and major industries, add $100 billion or more to the cost of the goods and services we buy. And then another $20 billion is spent by government handling the paperwork created by those regulations. . . .

Now, we all had a hand in looking to government for benefits as if government had some source of revenue other than our earnings. Many if not most of the things we thought of or that government offered to us seemed attractive.

In the years following the Second World War it was easy, for a while at least, to overlook the price tag. . . . Some government programs seemed so worthwhile that borrowing to fund them didn’t bother us. . . .

Some say shift the tax burden to business and industry, but business doesn’t pay taxes. Oh, don’t get the wrong idea. Business is being taxed, so much so that we’re being priced out of the world market. But business must pass its costs of operations—and that includes taxes—on to the customer in the price of the product. Only people pay taxes, all the taxes. Government just uses business in a kind of sneaky way to help collect the taxes. They’re hidden in the price; we aren’t aware of how much tax we actually pay. . . .

All of you who are working know that even with cost-of-living pay raises, you can’t keep up with inflation. In our progressive tax system, as you increase the number of dollars you earn, you find yourself moved up into higher tax brackets, paying a higher tax rate just for trying to hold your own. The result? Your standard of living is going down. . . .

Now, at the same time we’re doing this, we must go forward with a tax relief package. I shall ask for a 10-percent reduction across the board in personal income tax rates for each of the next 3 years.


How can a federal statute be found an unconstitutional infringement of state sovereignty when state officials consented to the statute’s enactment? The answer follows from an understanding of the fundamental purpose served by our Government’s federal structure. The Constitution does not protect the sovereignty of States for the benefit of the States or state governments as abstract political entities, or even for the benefit of the public officials governing the States. To the contrary, the Constitution divides authority between federal and state governments for the protection of individuals. . . .

State officials thus cannot consent to the enlargement of the powers of Congress beyond those enumerated in the Constitution. Indeed, the facts of these cases raise the possibility that powerful incentives might lead both federal and state officials to view departures from the federal structure to be in their personal interests. Most citizens recognize the need for radioactive waste disposal sites, but few want sites near their homes. As a result, while it would be well within the authority of either federal or state officials to choose where the disposal sites will be, it is likely to be in the political interest of each individual official to avoid being held accountable to the voters for the choice of location. If a federal official is faced with the alternatives of choosing a location or directing the States to do it, the official may well prefer the latter, as a means of shifting responsibility for the eventual decision. If a state official is faced with the same set of alternatives—choosing a location or having Congress direct the choice of a location—the state official may also prefer the latter, as it may permit the avoidance of personal responsibility. . . .

. . . The Constitution protects us from our own best intentions: It divides power among sovereigns and among branches of government precisely so that we may resist the temptation to concentrate power in one location as an expedient solution to the crisis of the day. The shortage of disposal sites for radioactive waste is a pressing national problem, but a judiciary that licensed extraconstitutional government with each issue of comparable gravity would, in the long run, be far worse.

Event: Dayton Peace Accords, 1995

Document: On Bosnia, Bill Clinton, 1995

Last week, the warring factions in Bosnia reached a peace agreement as a result of our efforts in Dayton, Ohio, and the support of our European and Russian partners. Tonight I want to speak with you about implementing the Bosnian peace agreement and why our values and interests as Americans require that we participate.

Let me say at the outset America’s role will not be about fighting a war. It will be about helping the people of Bosnia to secure their own peace agreement. Our mission will be limited, focused, and under the command of an American general.

In fulfilling this mission, we will have the chance to help stop the killing of innocent civilians, especially children, and at the same time, to bring stability to central Europe, a region of the world that is vital to our national interests. It is the right thing to do.

From our birth, America has always been more than just a place. America has embodied an idea that has become the ideal for billions of people throughout the world. Our founders said it best: America is about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

In this century especially, America has done more than simply stand for these ideals. We have acted on them and sacrificed for them. Our people fought two world wars so that freedom could triumph over tyranny. After World War I, we pulled back from the world, leaving a vacuum that was filled by the forces of hatred. After World War II, we continued to lead the world. We made the commitments that kept the peace, that helped to spread democracy, that created unparalleled prosperity and that brought victory in the Cold War. . . .

Now that doesn’t mean that we can solve every problem. My duty as president is to match the demands for American leadership to our strategic interests and to our ability to make a difference. America cannot and must not be the world’s policeman. We cannot stop all war for all time but we can stop some wars. We cannot save all women and all children but we can save many of them. We can’t do everything but we must do what we can. There are times and places where our leadership can mean the difference between peace and war and where we can defend our fundamental values as a people and serve our most basic strategic interests.