

Activity 11: Continuity: Progress and Decline

Consider the continuity of the Civil Rights Movement



Photographer unknown (1865) 107th US Coloured Infantry at Fort Corcoran in Virginia, November 1865. Available at: https://www.flickr.com/photos/washington_area_spark/23880476106/ (Accessed: 4 April 2023). Licensed under: Creative Commons — Attribution-NonCommercial 2.0 Generic — CC BY-NC 2.0

This activity works well with the “Moments of Change” activity, as the students can use the same timeline they have already made. If you have not already done this, start this task by asking the class to split into small groups of 3-4. For this activity, provide the students with the whole image pack. The students should then organise the images into a chronological timeline. Provide them with A3 paper and pens to make notes if they need to.

Each group should then consider whether significant periods of continuity can be seen on the timeline, and which could be considered periods of either “progress” or “decline” – were things getting continuously worse, or better?

A good example for this is the image of the all Black regiment in the Civil War and the all Black regiment in WW2. These images are almost 80 years apart, but show distinct continuity – on the face of things, little has changed. Yet the students know that the soldiers in the Civil War were likely to be made up of formerly or still enslaved people, fighting for their own freedom. By 1944, Black people were free from slavery and therefore fighting for other reasons. This can encourage a good discussion about whether the continuity in these images represents any “progress” or “decline.”

They can make a note of which images fit into which category. Questions they can reflect on while they do this:

- Can they categorise and name these periods of continuity?
- Did they notice commonalities across the events marked “progress” and the ones marked “decline”?
- Are there any events represented by these images which could be considered as representing both “progress” and “decline”? Images of segregation may be useful here, to prompt discussion on opinions about “separate but equal policies” – touted by some as progress towards “equality” as enshrined in the Constitution, but in reality, further empowerment of Jim Crow.