

Civil Rights Era

Before Reading

Two short readings follow with questions related to the Civil Rights Era. The readings address different aspects of a movement: politics, individual response, and social norms.

Brainstorm the rights that are promised to you as an American citizen or resident. As you read, look back at your list. Circle the ones that have been available to you. Check the ones that have *not* been available to you.

Look over the list when you are finished. What explanation can you find for the rights that have been promised but not available in reality? Are the reasons related to race or ethnicity, social class or something else?

Reading: Rosa Parks and Civil Rights

Three months after her arrest, Mrs. Rosa Parks, a forty-three-year-old seamstress, explained why she refused to obey the Montgomery law providing for segregation on city buses, why she decided to sit down in the “white” section of the bus:

“Well, in the first place, I had been working all day on the job. I was quite tired after spending a full day working. I handle and work on clothing that white people wear. That didn’t come in my mind but this is what I wanted to know: when and how would we ever determine our rights as human beings? . . . It just happened that the driver made a demand and I just didn’t feel like obeying his demand. He called a policeman and I was arrested and placed in jail. . .”

from Howard Zinn, A People’s History of the United States, New York: Harper, 1980.

After Reading

1. How do you think Americans (white and black) responded when they heard about Rosa Parks’ action?
2. Do you think you would have done the same thing in her position?
3. Rosa Parks said, “It just happened . . .”. In fact, she and others had been preparing to resist this kind of discrimination for a time. Rosa Parks went to a center in Tennessee where they trained people for this kind of leadership and resistance. Why do you think she says in this interview that “it just happened?” What were the risks in telling the whole story?
4. Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King are two very famous names that came out of the Civil Rights Movement, but many people contributed to the movement. Why do you think our society looks to make one or two people the outstanding leaders? Make a collage to show your idea of leadership.

Before Reading

This is a dense reading. The first two paragraphs set the stage. If you have read about the Civil Rights Movement, you can skim and begin at the third paragraph.

Reading: "African American Dress in the 60's"

In the mid-sixties, a feeling of racial pride and ethnic consciousness took root among African Americans incited by the Civil Rights Movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King. Prior to 1965, African Americans had been unable to take full advantage of their rights and privileges as American citizens because of the political and social restraints enforced by the dominant white society . . .

African Americans were no longer willing to accept the discrimination directed towards them because of the color of their skin, without regard to their character. Although the Civil Rights Movement was socially and politically motivated its effects could be seen in the physical appearance and social behavior of African Americans during the latter part of the decade.

The demonstrations by African Americans were aggressive expressions of discontent with societal practices of discrimination. More subtle expressions were taking place simultaneously as African American females began to reject the traditional image of beauty—long hair, thin lips, white skin and pointed noses. For many years African American females tried to conform to images of feminine beauty established by white society.

A movement in fashion occurred when African Americans expressed pride in their physical characteristics by flaunting rather than altering or concealing their features.

Short of complete physical reconstruction, Blacks could not completely conform to white standards. This realization led to the expression “Black is beautiful” and was exemplified by African American women who let the natural texture of their hair show and had it cut and shaped in African styles. The Afro, also referred to as “the natural,” became a symbol of Black identity and pride. . .

from “African American Dress in the 60’s” by Valerie L. Giddings, in African American Dress and Adornment: A Cultural Perspective, eds. Starke, Holloman, and Nordquist, Kendall/Hunt Publishing.

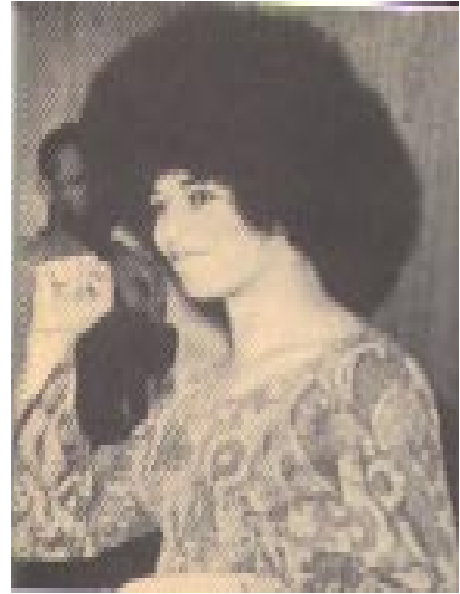


Photo of Angela Davis from Associated Press files.

After Reading

1. What does the Afro hairstyle have to do with the Civil Rights Movement?
2. A shift in thinking occurred in the 1960’s. To show the changes, start with two sheets of paper. Draw a line dividing each one in half lengthwise. On the first sheet, write *Before the Civil Rights Movement*. On the second sheet, write *After the Civil Rights Movement*. Label the left columns, “Accepted.” Under this heading, write what people accepted. Label the right columns, “Rejected.” Under this heading, write what people rejected.
3. Some people call this kind of radical change in thinking a paradigm shift. Have you ever had a complete shift in the way you thought about something. What were the categories and how did they change?

The Fitness Craze



The ideal shape for women changed radically between the 1950's and the 1970's. Young people made statements about what the U.S. stood for as never before. They didn't accept the lifestyle their parents had in the 1950's. They didn't accept their idea of beauty either. The culture of the 1960's rejected the hour-glass woman's shape and girdles

and other garments that contained one's body. The ideal shape for the 1960's and 1970's was a young, slender body. How does a person maintain a slender shape? If you answer dieting, exercise, and spandex, then you already know a lot about the 1970's.

For a person today who wants to get more exercise, what are some options. Without trying very hard, you can probably think of 10 ways.

- Sign up for an aerobics class
- Buy a Nordic Track
- Join a club and lift weights



Thirty years ago, these were not such common options. Beginning in the 1970's, Americans began to run. Manufacturers, corporations, and advertising were right there (and they still are) to sell us the exact kind of sneakers we need for every activity. And they cost money.

1. Do an interview or a class survey to find out more about the patterns in how people buy sneakers. Brainstorm some questions like, what brand do you buy? Are your sneakers good for running, walking, basketball, or another sport? About how much do you spend on sneakers? How often do you buy new sneakers?

Before Reading

You are about to read a short biography on Rachel McLish. How does her story connect to the information you just read?

Reading: Rachel McLish (1958-)

Bodybuilder, actress

Rachel Livia Elizondo McLish, the woman credited with bringing glamour to women's bodybuilding, first gained fame when she won first place in the 1980 U.S. Women's Bodybuilding Championships. Other titles include Ms. Olympia in 1980 and 1982 and the World Championship in 1982. McLish left bodybuilding competition when the use of steroids became a factor, prompting her to crusade against steroid use and drug abuse in general. Although she has since turned her attention to acting, writing, and the fashion world, McLish remains dedicated to promoting physical fitness, especially among women.

Born in Harlingen, Texas, to Rafael and Rachel Elizondo, McLish's interest in fitness was first sparked simultaneously by the study of ballet and her father's weight-lifting hobby. Even as a child, she was fascinated with the strength and the grace of the human form. These two diverse activities set the foundation that would later enable her to encourage women to appreciate feminine muscularity as a new physical ideal. During her high-school years, she won a spot on the cheerleading team and found herself forced to choose between cheering and ballet. She opted for cheerleading. The immediate gratification of popularity and a full social schedule overshadowed her childhood dream of becoming a professional dancer. By the time she enrolled at Pan American University in Texas, she regretted giving up dance and feared that, at age seventeen, she was too old to pursue it again. McLish missed the physically active lifestyle she had known all her life and decided to pursue her other love—working with weights. At the time, weight-training wasn't very popular with the general public and exercise clubs were scarce. McLish eventually found a spa called the "Shape Center" and fell in love with the atmosphere. Unfortunately, as an impoverished college student putting herself through school, she couldn't afford the membership dues. Instead, McLish applied for and

was offered a job at the spa. She started by teaching exercise classes and eventually became a manager.

Becomes First Female Body Building Champion

In 1978, McLish earned a degree in health and physical education and formed a partnership to build the "Sport Palace," the first and largest health club facility in south Texas. The club was so successful, it eventually expanded to Corpus Christi and Brownsville, Texas. In 1980 McLish read about the first U.S. Women's Body Building Championship being held in Atlantic City. She was interested for two reasons: to promote her fitness centers but, more important, if she could win the first title she could serve as a positive "feminine" example of a body-builder. She entered and walked away with the title.

As the first female bodybuilding champion, Rachel McLish was hailed as a new female role model. She appeared on magazine covers and television programs worldwide. She became a sought-after personality and traveled extensively to lecture on physiology, diet and beauty under the title of the World's First Female Body Building Champion. Her dedication and effort paid off. She won the Ms. Olympia title in 1980 and 1982 and the 1982 World Championship. When the emphasis in body-building shifted in the mid-1980s from muscle tone to massive muscular development, however, McLish decided to stop competing. While she wasn't winning bodybuilding titles, McLish wasn't idle, either. She accepted a part in the documentary *Pumping Iron II: The Women*. McLish also starred in the CBS prime-time television special *Women of the 21st Century*, a documentary exploring a woman's commitment to a physical lifestyle. She made her feature film debut in 1992 in *Aces: Iron Eagle III* opposite Academy Award-winner Louis Gossett, Jr. McLish continues to pursue a career in films, but is very selective about the roles she chooses, refusing any that she feels are demeaning to women.

Enters Fashion World

In 1985 McLish became spokesperson for the Health and Tennis Corporation of America. Her continuing dedication to fitness and nutrition

also prompted her to write two books, *Flex Appeal* and *Perfect Parts*. *Flex Appeal* addresses all aspects of health and fitness, including psychological conditioning, dietary responsibility, nutrition and sports medicine. *Perfect Parts* is a fitness guide on spot reducing. In 1990, McLish and K-Mart department stores joined forces to create a line of bodywear that would offer comfort, fit and fashion for active women. The collection, "Rachel McLish for The Body Company," made its debut in K-Mart's 2,200 stores on January 1, 1990. As with every other aspect of her professional life, McLish took a hands-on approach and was actively involved with the project from its conception. In a 1992 interview with Elena Kellner, McLish commented: "It's not like I'm just a spokesperson. And I feel really lucky that my mother was a seamstress and she taught me how to sew at a very early age. So when I had my first meeting in New York with the manufacturers, the pattern-makers, the fit models and all the people involved in making a line of clothing, they were pleasantly shocked in that I knew exactly how to construct a garment." She proudly added that in 1991 her line of bodywear accounted for 28% of the total sales of sportswear in the United States.

McLish was briefly married in the early 1989 to John McLish, her sweetheart at Pan Am University in Texas. They had no children. In 1990 she wed Ron Samuels, a successful Los Angeles artists' manager and film producer who, in an interview with the Dallas Morning News, described his wife as a settling force: "She has an inner strength and spirituality that is very uplifting and strengthens me. She has tremendous self-esteem without any sense of arrogance."

Through her campaign against steroid abuse and unique image as a "feminine bodybuilder," Rachel McLish has become a role model for many women and has helped make weight-training and body shaping one of the fastest growing women's exercise activities. In an interview in the Los Angeles Times, McLish expressed her thoughts: "The point of physical fitness is not narcissism or egotism. It's well-being. Most people have no idea what it's like to feel good all over. All the time. People unfortunately take drugs to do it part of the time. But the ultimate rush is the feeling you can get from intelligent exercise. It's addictive. In the best way.

by Elena Kellner in Notable Hispanic American Women. Edited by Diane Telgen and Jim Kamp. Copyright 1993 Gale Research. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.

Sources:

Periodicals:

Dallas Morning News, October 1, 1989; *Hispanic*, September, 1992, pp. 50-54; *Hispanic Business*, July 1992, p. 24; *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 1987.

Other:

McLish, Rachel, interview with Elena Kellner, April 1992

After Reading

1. Do a timeline to show the important events in Rachel McLish's life. Which decisions and actions had important consequences for her future?
2. Make a list of the beliefs, values or principles that led Rachel to make her decisions. For example, she believes that women can be strong. What influences shaped Rachel's beliefs?
3. Make a timeline of important events in your own life. Then list your beliefs, values, or principles which led you to certain decisions. Where did those beliefs come from? Are they from your family, religion, friends, or are they part of American culture?

Something to Say–Part 1

The way we use words tells a lot about what the issues and feelings are in culture. Here are some expressions from the 1970's. Notice which phrases are still with us and which we don't hear often anymore.

Designer jeans With brands like Calvin Klein and Gloria Vanderbilt, you can spend a lot of money on jeans

go with the flow

have a nice day

Heimlich maneuver—a procedure named after the U.S. surgeon who invented it to keep someone from choking to death

launder—can mean to run money through different accounts to hide where it came from

leisure suit—“How many polyesters did you kill to make that suit?” – Actor and comedian, Steve Martin.

meltdown—The melting of a nuclear reactor core and release of dangerous levels of radiation into the surrounding communities

pull the plug—Let the patient die. Karen Ann Quinlin was in the news because her family wanted to give her the right to die

punk—music and style of dying hair rainbow colors and piercing one's body

red dye #2—The number of people with cancer seemed to skyrocket in the 1970's. Scientists searched for cancer-causing substances in animals. This artificial color was banned by the federal government as a possible cause of cancer in 1976.

theme parks—Amusement parks based on a theme like Mickey Mouse opened up around the country.

Something to Say–Part 2

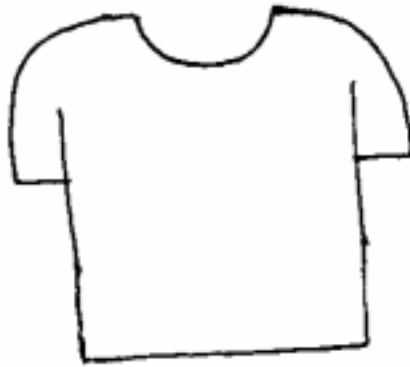
Aside from words appearing on clothing as with designer labels, words appeared on T-shirts, telling everyone what the wearer likes or believes in. Of 300 million t-shirts produced annually, one out of four had something to say on them. This is yet another way that people in America have gotten used to “sound bytes,” or getting to the point in a snappy, quick way.

Some t-shirts had messages that had a message that was political or environmental or social or advertised a product. From the list below, match what category you think the slogan belongs in.

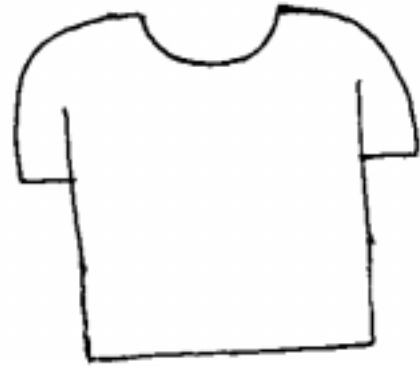
Hang ten
Jaws
I love New York
Free Lee Marvin
Chorus Line
Ban Hand Guns
Anita Bryant’s Husband is a HOMO SAPIEN!
Stop Diablo Canyon before it stops us
Grateful Dead
Equal Rights
Nuke the Whales
I Survived 3 Mile Island
Womans Place is in the House and in the Senate
Peace
My Parents Went to the Caribbean and All I Got was this Crummy T-Shirt
Solar Energy
Your Pace or Mine?

On the next page, you will see four drawings of t-shirts. Write a message for each category that would be good for this year. Of course, you can draw your own in a larger or smaller size, if you choose.

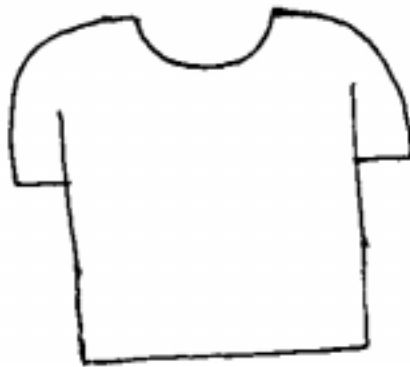
Environmental



Social



Political



Advertise a product

