

ACTIVITY : GRIEVANCE JOURNAL

INSTRUCTIONS

The document below discusses how some city services could not be used by certain people because of Jim Crow laws. This meant that these people,

- Couldn't find a job
- Couldn't find a house
- Couldn't use the bus
- Couldn't attend certain schools
- Couldn't ask the police for help
- Couldn't play in city parks
- Couldn't eat in restaurants

African American community leaders presented a list of grievances - a statement or complaint about something believed to be wrong or unfair - to a group of white citizens in Rome in the early 1960s. After reading the document, pick one of these services and write a journal entry about how you would feel if this service was denied you and your family. Write the entry from your point of view, not the view of an African American in the 1960s.

From Jule Levin's Oral History, ca 1960-1962

We had a black and white grievance meeting. I was one of five people appointed to represent the white community, and five black people came. One was a barber, one a minister, and one a painter. I'll never forget what he said. One of them said that he wants to live to see the time when "whites only" signs are removed. This is the list of grievances they brought.

"We, the Negro citizens of Rome and Floyd County, want to see the following changes.

Jobs. Qualified Negro boys and girls, men and women, are not given good jobs in department stores, grocery stores, or government offices. Giving out jobs should be based on ability, not on race. Because of this, every year a large number of young people graduate from high school, and not one good job has ever been given to them. Black doctors don't want to come into the community to give much-needed care.

Housing. The city does not have an area where Negroes can buy good homes for a fair price. Black neighborhoods don't have street lights. When Negroes try to buy a home, the seller raises the price. Despite high taxes, the streets are not in good condition.

Public facilities. The "blacks only" signs are offensive. They're over entrances, drinking fountains, and tables at the courthouse. Schools should be open to any student, no matter their skin. Negroes should know about the trade school and community colleges in the county. And all the buses should be desegregated.

Government services and police. There should be no separate sheet for recording Negroes' taxes. In black school zones and black neighborhoods, there are no signs warning drivers to go slow. There are no police to enforce these rules either. When whites commit crimes against Negroes, the police don't care. All law enforcement officers should treat black and white people the same. Black police officers should be able to arrest white citizens.

Recreation. Not enough parks are open to Negroes. Those that are open to Negroes don't have much playground equipment. All theaters should be open to Negroes so they can enjoy culture too. And finally, all lunch counters and restaurants should be open to serve everyone.

Black people are human beings. Their basic needs are the same as the white man's."

ANSWER KEY

Activity : African American Grievances

The responses for this activity will vary depending on the students personal views and perspectives. Make sure that students do not simulate what it would be like as an African American in the 1960s, but rather how they would feel today to not have the ability to use one of these services. Thoughtful responses will likely include references to unfairness, distress, and feelings of anger, betrayal, and sadness.

Further Information on the Civil Rights Movement in Rome, Georgia is available at:
<https://sites.berry.edu/civilrights/>

