**Social Studies Home Learning Activities**

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| **Focus Standard Benchmark**  **Civics 3a**  **Other Standard Supported**  **Civics 1a** | Students will understand that civil rights secure political freedom while property rights secure economic freedom and that both are essential protections for United States citizens.  Students will Understand why governments have the authority to make, enforce, and interpret laws and regulations, such as levying taxes, conducting foreign policy, and providing for national defense. |
| **Grade Band** | 6-8 |
| **Vocabulary/Key Concepts** | Civil rights |
| **Note to Teachers**  **Collaborative Group Option** | This activity could be a group project for students allowing them to interact via Zoom meetings to hash out solutions as part of a collaborative “National Task Force on COVID-19 Civil Rights Issues.” Students could be sent into breakout rooms to discuss solutions for different civil right problems then jigsaw solutions into a single task force report. |

***Addressing Civil Rights Issues during National Emergencies***

**Focus Questions:**

1. How might the powers of governments in the United States be used to overcome civil rights issues brought on by any emergency, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How do national emergencies highlight how civil rights are essential protections for American citizens?

**Introduction**

Civil rights are a special category of rights that protect individuals and groups from unfair treatment (discrimination). Those most in need of civil rights protections tend to be minorities and people living in poverty – often due to discrimination or inabilities (e.g. the elderly, handicapped etc.). Since the 1960s in particular, the American people have paid more attention to civil rights issues than in any other time in our nation’s history.

National emergencies often have two important effects associated with civil rights matters. First, national emergencies can inflict far greater or disproportionate harm on those for whom civil rights protections are most needed i.e. minorities and the poor. Secondly, national emergencies draw increased attention to challenges and inequalities that minorities and those living in poverty face. The Hurricane Katrina national emergency that took place in New Orleans back in 2005 is a good example. We are now experiencing a new national emergency in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The civics standards for grades 6-8 raise several questions that can be connected effectively for those living through a national emergency. They include…

1. Why do governments have certain powers?
2. How might they be used well to address the emergency?
3. Why are civil rights essential protections for United States citizens?

Brought together, the activity offered here asks how the powers of governments in the United States might be used to overcome civil rights issues brought on by any emergency, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

**Activity and Scenario:** You have been assigned to serve on the *National Task Force on the COVID-19 Pandemic and Civil Rights*. You are asked to use some powers granted to governments in the United States (national, state, local) as tools to be used in the formulation of recommend solutions to the heightened challenges faced by minorities and people in poverty. Know, however, that the powers of government always expand in times of emergencies. The key to expanding those powers during thi emergency is not to get too far ahead of what the public believes is acceptable.

**Powers at Our Governments’ Disposal:**

* make and enforce laws
* make and enforce regulations
* levy taxes
* conduct foreign policy
* create and use an army
* provide for the national defense

**Document 1: Civil Rights Issues Involved with the COVID-19 Pandemic**

**The Poor:** poor Americans cannot go out and stock up on food and supplies like wealthier Americans can. Even if they could, some do not have adequate places to store food (e.g. big refrigerators, freezers). The poor often live paycheck to paycheck and have to wait for checks to come in. They have to make choices between buying things like food or cleaning products that kill germs in their homes – if they can get them after wealthier people buy them all up. Many of the poor have to go out and eat in fast food places where the food is less expensive but far less healthy, and they face increased risks of coming in contact with people who have the virus. Then, they are criticized for being outside frequently while others do not know the reasons why. Worse of all, hospitals turn them away when they get sick because they do not have medical insurance.

The number of people in poverty is growing because of government decisions to close businesses. More Americans have now lost their jobs. The results – they will struggle to pay their rent or mortgage and face the possibility of being kicked out of their homes. Some will not be able to pay water and utility bills (e.g. electricity), and the utility companies turn off access to the electricity and water.

**Elderly (Grandparents):** Many grandparents serve as full-time caretakers for children in the United States. Others are being asked to provide part-time childcare for their own children who are working adults. As a result of schools and daycare centers closing the parents have to work and turn to grandparents to help. The problem is that the elderly are at increased risk of catching the coronavirus from their children and grandchildren, then suffering more severe effects because their immune systems are less powerful.

**Black Americans:** current data shows that anywhere from 58-81% of those dying in some counties are black Americans despite the fact that they only make-up 23-26% of the people living there. Some are poor or have modest incomes and cannot practice social distancing or follow stay at home orders because they need the go to work to earn money. Others work in jobs considered “essential” e.g., nurses, first responders, bus drivers, supermarket employees and are required to go to work. Additionally, some of them rely on public transportation (e.g. busses) to get to work because of the cost of owning cars, which includes paying for insurance, gas, and parking.

**Rural Americans:** people living in many rural areas face significant medical challenges. The nearest hospitals for people living there can be 2-3 hours away. Additionally, rural areas find it hard to attract and keep doctors and nurses. They are extremely demanding jobs because the doctors and nurses in these areas are always “on call” because there are so few of them. The pay is often not as good, nor is the medical facilities or equipment. Moreover, there are fewer exciting things to do in a person’s free time for those who might consider living in rural areas.

**Students:** many students attending schools rely on the meals provided at those schools during the day to avoid hunger. When schools close, these students risk going unfed. Their parents or guardians sometimes have to give up their food for their children. Some students are facing disadvantages because they do not have computers or internet service so they are falling behind in their education, which is important for advancing in life – getting good jobs, getting into college.

**Frontline workers:** Frontline workers are those whose jobs place them directly and frequently in contact with infected or potentially infected individuals. They include nurses, doctors, TSA agents, service workers, home care providers, fast food workers, bus drivers, and people working in supermarkets. Many of them have not been given masks or other Persona Protective Equipment (PPE), and are told that they will be fired if they do not show up for work.

**Asian Americans:** There are reports of increased discrimination and hate crimes against Asian Americans due to repeated public statements pointing out that the Pandemic began in China and the effects of some calling this the “China virus” and “Wuhan virus.”

**Prisoners:** prisoners in American jails are closely quartered in not-so-clean jail cells where germs spread rapidly, unable to practice or benefit effectively from social distancing. Those guarding them as well as those providing for their care are equally at risk. More than 1,300 inmates in three Ohio prisons have tested positive for coronavirus. As of April 19, 18 correctional officers and 20 inmates have tested positive for the coronavirus in Delaware.

**The Accused:** some persons accused of crimes, but who are presumed innocent under our justice system, are lingering in jails because court cases are postponed indefinitely until courthouses are reopened. The have either been denied bail or cannot afford it.

**Voters:** when elections are held, those who want to vote have to stand in lines with other people, sign forms on clipboards using pens touched by other people, then enter voting booths where many have touched voting machines. Many people, and particularly the most vulnerable such as the poor and elderly, may fear going out to vote this year.

These are a sample of the most vulnerable who have to rely on civil rights and governments to protect them. As a member of the “National Task Force on COVID-19 Civil Rights Issues”, how will you recommend the powers of government be used to protect the vulnerable populations who are often ignored even in normal times?

**Source:** Coronavirus Equity Considerations. NAACP (updated April 3, 2020) accessed at <https://naacp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Coronavirus-Equity-Considerations.pdf> on April 19, 2020

**Document 2: Task Force Recommendations**

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| **Group Affected** | **Power(s) to be Used and How** |
| The Poor | Sample Response  **Make a law** that provides people living below the poverty line with $250 per week. Raise the money by putting a **tax** on people earning more than $1 million per year. |
| The Elderly |  |
| Black Americans |  |
| Rural Americans |  |
| Students |  |
| Frontline Workers |  |
| Asian Americans |  |
| Prisoners |  |
| People Accused of Crimes |  |
| Voters |  |

**Conclude:** Explain why civil rights protections are essential for American citizens..