

**National Endowment for the Humanities Landmark Seminar:
The Most Southern Place on Earth- July 2010**

Title

By Jayne Fought-Schlemmer

Objective: Increased civic engagement. Students will practice identifying problems within a Mississippi Delta family and community and ways to address those problems. They will then take this process and apply it to their own community in order to increase their civic awareness and become more engaged in improving their own communities.

Audience: Designed for 8th Grade United States History

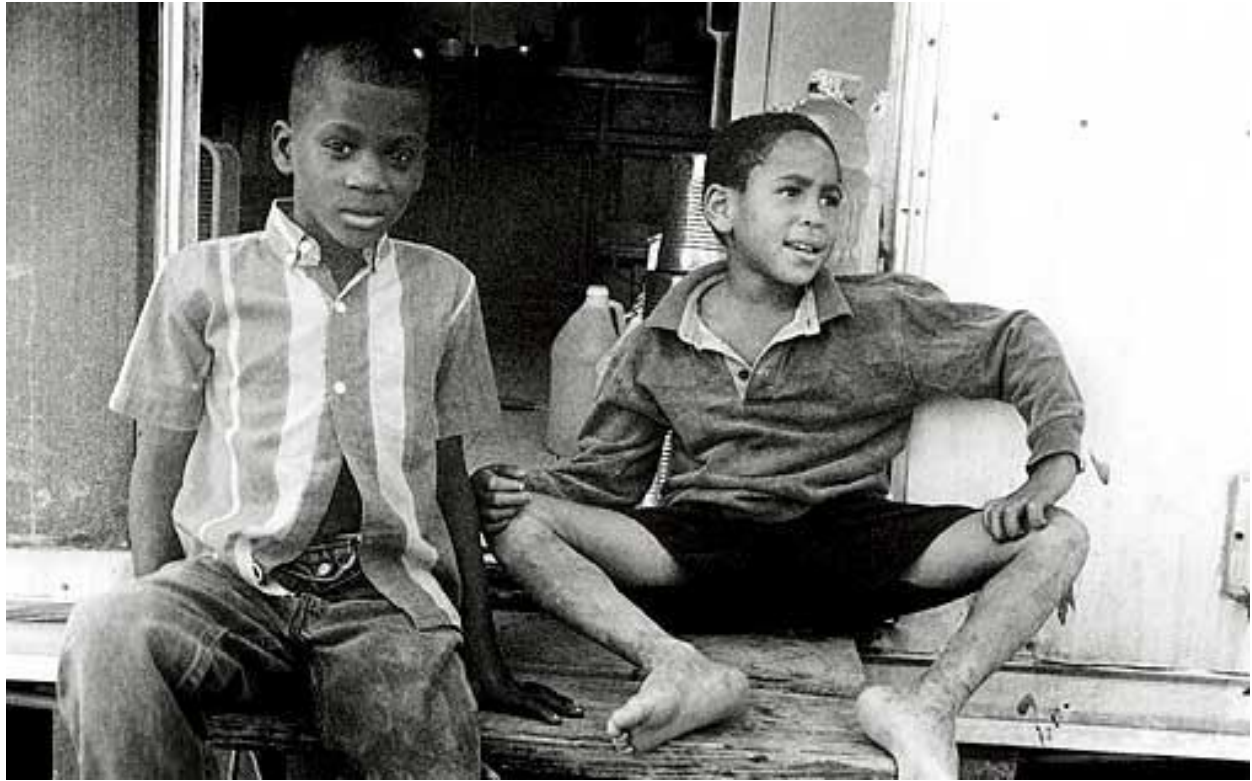
Time: Three 60 Minute Class Periods

Rational: The term “civic engagement” refers to, “Individual and collective actions designed to address issues of public concern.” The goal of civic education is informed, responsible participation in public life by competent citizens committed to the values and principles of American democracy. To be an effective citizen, a student must learn more than just facts about history and government. A student must also learn civic virtue. These are traits of character such as: integrity, empathy, industry, respect & responsibility.

This lesson is designed to help students bridge the gap between desire to help their community, and the ability to identify the needs within the community. Only then will students be prepared to actively contribute to the improvement of society.

Indiana State Standard: 8:2:7 Roles of Citizens: Explain the importance in a democratic republic of responsible participation by citizens in voluntary civil associations/non-governmental organizations that compromise civil society.

Background: *LaLee's Kin: The Legacy of Cotton* is a 2001 (88 min) [American documentary film](#) directed by [Deborah Dickson](#), [Susan Frömke](#) and [Albert Maysles](#). It was nominated for Best Documentary Feature at the [74th Academy Awards](#). ^[1]



LaLee's Kin: The Legacy of Cotton has two [storylines](#), both of which show the impoverished life of residents in the American South. The documentary draws the connection — a vicious cycle — between poverty and the lack of education opportunity for black people living in the [Mississippi Delta](#), over 150 years after the abolition of slavery.

Laura Lee (LaLee) Wallace, a great-granddaughter of a slave, is an illiterate 62-year-old woman who has been living all her life in [Tallahatchie County](#), one of the poorest in the [United States](#). She has one surviving son, nine daughters, 38 grandchildren, and 15 great-grandchildren. Her daily living consists of many difficulties: LaLee has to raise many of her grandchildren, her son is continually put in prison, and most of her daughters have to leave Tallahatchie County searching for work. LaLee's life is heavily dependent on the cotton industry; she struggles to earn a living by cooking lunches for people working in local cotton factories.

Reggie Barnes is the superintendent of the [West Tallahatchie school system](#), which is put on probation by the state due to poor standardized test results. The school has the hardship of trying to educate the children of illiterate parents. If it fails to raise the annual standardized test scores, the school will be taken over by the state.

Materials Needed: Video: *LaLee's Kin*; *The Legacy of Cotton*, T-chart video worksheet, easel pad, markers, civic engagement brochure, personal commitment form

Procedure:

Day 1:

Pick a character from the documentary to focus on: LaLee Wallace, Granny, Redman & Main, Dr. Reggie Barnes

Watch the documentary taking notes on the t-chart identifying problems faced by your character (this will probably need to be completed at the beginning of day 2.

Day 2:

Finish the video

Get in a group with other students who focused on the same character

Compare and add to the problems faced by your character—listing them on the left side of a t-chart.

Work with your group to develop solutions or ways to address the problems your character faced.

List the possible solutions on the right side of the t-chart

Groups present their information to the class

Day 3:

Introduce Civic Engagement requirement using the brochure

Divide in new groups and have students brainstorm problems in their own community.

Recording these on an easel pad using the same t-chart form

Next, students follow the same process as with the film and identify possible solutions or ways to address the problems in their community, adding these to the easel pad t-chart.

Finally, each student will fill out a commitment form stating three ideas for completing their own individual Civic Engagement requirement. Students will turn this in so that you can make a copy for your records and return the original to the student.

Assessment: will be based on the t-chart worksheet, easel pad t-chart, commitment form and finally the completion of their Civic Engagement.

Lalee's Kin; The Legacy of Cotton

Choose one of the main characters to focus on while you view the documentary and then circle your choice:

LaLee

Granny

Redman & Main

Dr. Barnes

**Problems faced by your
character
(make a list)**

**Possible Solutions or ways to
address each problem**

Name _____ P _____

Please list three problems in your community and ideas for completing your Civic Engagement requirement in order to address those problems.

1.

Problem:

Civic Engagement Idea:

2.

Problem:

Civic Engagement Idea:

3.

Problem:

Civic Engagement Idea: