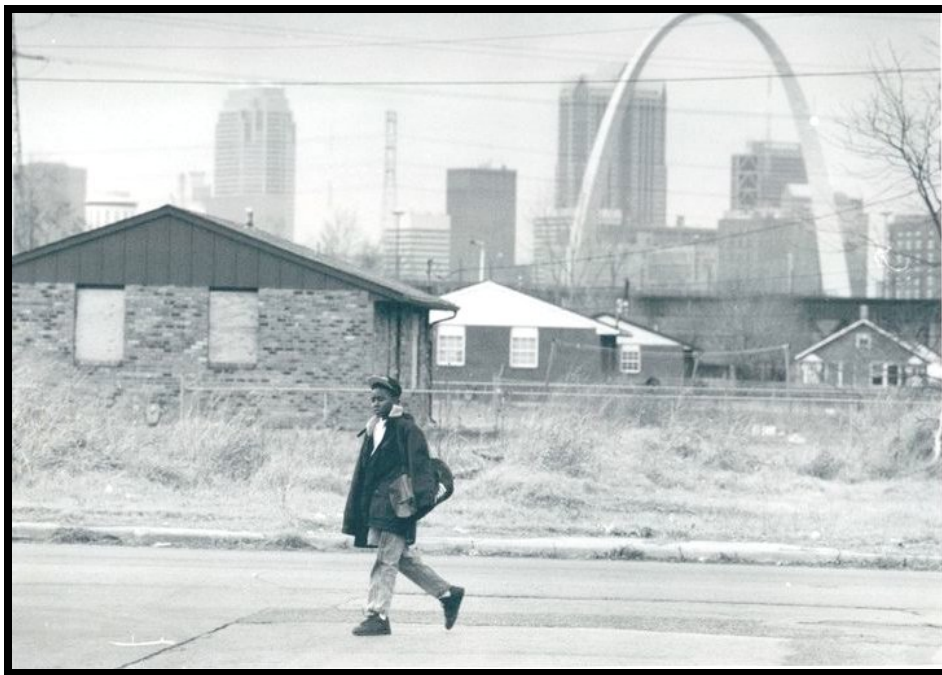


# TRUTH AND JUSTICE IN AMERICA

*A Mini Curriculum Unit on Race and Diversity  
Using Social Issue Documentary*

*Developed for High School  
History, Social Science or Humanities classes*



**Young man walking to school in East St Louis, Illinois**

*Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern  
the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts  
from the fiction.*

□ Martin Luther King Jr

# Truth and Justice in America

## Curriculum Overview

**OVERVIEW:** Truth and Justice in America – is an interactive, multimedia, classroom unit that can be considered an important building block in the teaching of African-American, American, and Illinois history with an emphasis on an understanding of how cultural attitudes can shape our society.

This curriculum is taught in conjunction with the social issue documentary film *Against All The Odds* and all lessons are based on the viewing and critical examination of this 82 minute award winning documentary. *Against All The Odds* has been screened at educational and theatrical venues throughout the country.

Lesson plans include engaging hands on activities, in class discussions, group sessions, and authentic and relevant participatory experiences that promote a more complete understanding of our history and cooperation among cultures.

Students will gain an understanding of why events in East St Louis are representative of some of the most important social, cultural and economic issues that have impacted American life. This unit will also assist instructors in the exploration of society's current attitudes toward race and diversity.

Truth and Justice in America can be taught in history, social studies, and humanities classes and supports several national and state learning standards. Length of complete curriculum: 5 -10 hours. Length of individual units 1-3 hours each

---

**FILM DESCRIPTION:** *Against All The Odds* is a story of courage, community, and spirit in the iconic city of East St Louis, Illinois, where the American Dream took a wrong turn, leaving an entire city without resources for thirty years. The film recounts the city's past and present, tracing its history from its beginnings as a service center to the gateway city of St Louis, Missouri, before the turn of the 20th century, to its present day status as a socially and economically ailing urban center. East St Louis evolved from a city with a majority white working class population into the only all African-American city in America. Once one of the nation's key industrial centers, East St Louis' decline is significant, affecting the entire population. The film explores the questions, who helped, who didn't, and why we should care.

After World War II, many of the Midwest's 'rust belt' cities had to adjust to major economic changes that produced significant population shifts, but in the case of East St Louis, the massive white flight was so extreme that eventually the city was left with a virtually all Black population and almost no usable infrastructure. Because Black Americans were shunned in entrepreneurial efforts, capital to rebuild with was nearly impossible to get, and the Black citizens of East St Louis, Illinois began to experience the painful decline of their city.

While East St Louis has been at the crossroads of some of America's greatest accomplishments it has also been party to some of her gravest errors; its story is a microcosm of American history. At one time, East St Louis boasted the second largest rail yard in the country and only Chicago had a larger stockyard, but the city also endured the most brutal race riot in American history in 1917, and civil rights was hard fought in this defacto segregated city.

**With this film and the accompanying educational curriculum, we now have an opportunity to bring to light some of the accomplishments, true history, and intrinsic value of a culture whose American experience has been vastly misunderstood and overlooked.**

## **Objectives**

- Define and understand ‘social issue’ documentary.
- Understand the geographic importance of East St Louis, Illinois i.e. the river location.
- Understand how a city can create an identity by its social, economic and political actions internally and regionally.
- Analyze and identify key historical and ethical elements that shaped East St Louis, i.e. industrialization, unionization, The Great Migration, 1917 Race Riot, defacto segregation, the civil rights movement, race relations, white flight, urban decline.
- Understand the cause and effect relationship of these historical and ethical elements.
- Analyze themes, which inform an understanding of race relations in America.
- Incorporate a holistic view of the relevant historical and social issues.
- Describe, develop and report on ideas for community actions, which could result in positive changes for race relations.
- The opportunity to talk frankly and openly (with teacher guidance) about racism.

Viewing of the 82-minute documentary film, *Against All The Odds* will be in two parts, and comprise the first two units lessons. Each viewing session will begin with an overview. In the first session the teacher will briefly define ‘social issue documentary’ and give a short synopsis of the film. In the second session the teacher will recap part one of the documentary before viewing part two.

The following 8 lessons will study all the objectives by means of hands on activities, multimedia clips, written texts, class discussions, small group discussions, and evaluations.

## **Key Takeaways:**

- An awareness of African-American culture, arts and history.
- A different perspective on American history
- A more profound understanding of how Whites and Blacks interact and why racism is a dangerous thing.
- An understanding of how and why social issue documentaries are important because they are able to broaden perspectives, solve problems and bring closure.
- Why role-playing, (or putting oneself in someone else’s place) is so important to an ethical and productive society.
- Accepting that truths about our past can be painful. ...but important to know so we don’t make the same mistakes in the future
- Understanding that the attitudes and actions the students bring with them into their adult lives will shape the future of our society.

The real success of this curriculum won’t be evidenced by tests, evaluations or reports, but in the long run, by how much these students are able to assimilate the lessons learned in this material and become better and more informed citizens, even inspiring real change within their respective communities.

**Materials:**

**Audio-Visual:**

- ✚ DVD – AGAINST ALL THE ODDS – 82 minutes
- ✚ DVD – The Making of Against All The Odds – 6 min
- ✚ CD/MP4 – with selected interviews, music and clips from the film to use as topic headings for reports and group discussions

**Printables:**

- ✚ Historical Timeline
- ✚ East St Louis fact sheet
- ✚ Maps
- ✚ Class activity work sheets
- ✚ Still photos from film for role play activity

**For more information, contact: Sandra Pfeifer/ Feed Room Films/ 166 Bull Pen Rd/  
Simpson, IL/62985 618.695.3644 [aato.film@gmail.com](mailto:aato.film@gmail.com)/ [www.againstalltheodds.com](http://www.againstalltheodds.com)**