

Father Theodore Hesburgh:
Bridging a Communication Barrier for Civil Rights

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Communication in history is not a difficult topic, but proving that the communication made a significant difference in history can be more challenging. We chose our topic because of our strong Catholic faith and the fact that we are both fans of Notre Dame. Over the summer, Isaac participated in an online course on Civil Rights and the Right to Vote and stumbled upon the topic of Notre Dame's Father Hesburgh. Father Hesburgh's life and legacy relates to the theme of Communication because his work with the Civil Rights Commission was vital to the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. His ability to communicate the needs for civil rights to the Commission was vital.

Once we had an idea about a topic, we dove into learning more about Father Hesburgh and his role in the Civil Rights Commission. We conducted our research through reading books, such as God, Country, Notre Dame, which is Father Ted's autobiography. We also studied the work, life, and controversy of Father Hesburgh by looking at websites that contained primary sources, such as the University of Notre Dame's website. We knew a decent amount about some of the events leading up the 60s, but we kept wondering why the Commission was even created. Through digging into events in the 50s, we built our context for our topic by studying all aspects of the Civil Rights Movement.

We created our project by first conducting thorough research then building our website. We wanted to make sure to include not just Father Hesburgh's life and legacy, but also plenty of information on the Civil Rights Movement. The information on the Civil Rights Movement was important to set the scene for the importance of our project.

Our historical argument is that the communication of Father Theodore Hesburgh was vital to the creation of the Civil Rights Acts of 1960 and 1964. Without Father Ted, this act that has been vital to our nation, would not have been possible because the members of the Civil Rights Commission would not have been able to come to an agreement. His ability to find common ground between the diverse opinions led to a step forward in rights for African Americans in our country.

This topic is significant to history because we are still fighting the same battles that Father Hesburgh was fighting for with the Civil Rights Commission and the creation of the Civil Rights Act. In fact, Father Hesburgh won the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his work on the Commission. His work and the work of the others on the Commission have shaped the nation that we live in today. Hesburgh continues to impact history through the Klau Center, an educational division at Notre Dame that trains students to fight against Civil Rights Violations.