MOVIE – "PIONEERS IN THE STRUGGLE"

I. Themes

The history of the United States, like that of other countries, is a history of the struggle for civil rights and full democracy. The struggle of the American colonists against England for self-determination was a civil rights struggle. The framers of the U.S. Constitution made sure to guarantee civil rights to certain Americans, but denied them to women, African Americans, Native Americans and others, who almost immediately began to mobilize to win equality for themselves. This movie is about the struggle for civil rights in Illinois with particular emphasis on the role of African American legislators. Using a chronological structure, it focuses on three main themes:

1. The struggle for civil rights and against discrimination both *de jure* and *de facto*. The movie opens with the early struggles for basic citizenship, moves to early representation, then to the struggles for equality in public accommodations and employment.

2. The role of the legislative branch in both winning and enforcing civil rights. In addition to exploring how minorities can use the legislative process to create societal change, the movie also focuses on the dynamic between elected representatives and the political participation of individuals, communities, and grassroots groups.

3. The historical stages involved in the African American community's struggle to gain sufficient political power to successfully struggle for its own interests. The curriculum traces the development from early leaders, to patron-client relationships, to the professionalization of elected leaders (though still tied to party policy), to independent political action as manifested in the Independent Black Legislative Caucus.

II. Objectives:

1. Describe the status of African Americans in Illinois from statehood to Reconstruction and account for the changes.

2. Analyze how the election of the first African American legislator defined issues of representation and initiated the role of black legislators in the civil rights struggle.

3. Explain how cumulative voting and redistricting can affect minority representation.

4. Define the historical stages in the development of African American political power.

5. Understand how and why civil rights legislation is strengthened through both extension and enforcement.

6. Understand the difference between *de jure* and *de facto* discrimination.

7. Identify both *de jure* and *de facto* discrimination in public accommodations and employment.

8. Understand the role of grassroots groups and elected officials in creating social change.

9. Understand how national, state, and local political histories are linked.

10. Understand the used of executive order and acts of legislation.

11. Understand the particular way that demands for equal rights may challenge both the status quo and those who defend it.

12. Describe the formation of a political caucus and alliances within the State legislature.

13. Analyze the affect of nationwide political struggles on local struggles (and vice versa).

14. Identify historical issues and relate them to their current manifestations.

III. Identification of processes.

This movie tells the story of the African American struggle in Illinois for civil rights, equality, and political power within the context of the state legislature. Within that overall narrative are several subordinate story lines that describe specific historical processes. We see three distinct processes:

Process One

a. The struggle to be recognized as citizens with equal protection under the Constitution develops into –

b. The struggle to gain a political voice, the right to elect political representatives and to run for office) to advance the interests of the community develops into –

c. The struggle to apply the principles of equality to gain equal opportunity in public accommodations, employment, and other areas of everyday life.

Process Two

a. The struggle often begins with broad legal statements of political rights as the Emancipation Proclamation, and the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the Constitution.

b. This may begin to limit *de jure* discrimination. However, without enforcement of laws, discrimination may continue. This is called *de facto* discrimination. *De facto* discrimination is enabled by a system of ideas, beliefs, and prejudices which are part of the culture, perpetuated by both individuals and institutions.

c. Weak civil rights laws are often strengthened over time by expanding their scope and mechanisms of enforcement.

d. One of these mechanisms is that of a "commission" to which complaints may be brought, investigated, and monitored.

Process Three

a. The process of moving from a silenced and marginalized position to one in which people gain their political voice is the process of political empowerment.

b. The process of political empowerment is a combination of grassroots activity and legislative action.

c. Struggling minority communities may go through a stage in which they need the sponsorship of the dominant community to participate in the political process.

d. The client-patron relationship will give way to greater independence as the community grows, but still one in which minority leadership may be tied to and supported by the party organization.

e. Over time, and with parallel action of mass movement or grassroots organizations, the elected leadership may become independent of the mainstream political parties, begin to take action, make decisions and form alliances. This may become a strong challenge to the status quo.