

Young Scholars in Writing &
The Center for Democratic Deliberation

Rhetorical Analysis Contest

\$1,000 First Prize

Dr. Jack Selzer invites undergraduates to submit rhetorical analysis essays that build our knowledge of the rhetoric of the African American Freedom Struggle, particularly the events identified on two websites sponsored by Penn State's Center for Democratic Deliberation:

1. Voices of Democracy
2. Rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement

This contest is open to all undergraduate students. A revised version of the winning essay will also be published in Young Scholars in Writing.

What We're Looking For

Write a scholarly, informed, and informative analysis of a piece (or pieces) of civil rights rhetoric that interests you—something that has not received enough attention or that you think has been misunderstood. Essays should be 3,000-6,000 words and prepared according to the current MLA style.

Information for Faculty

The purpose of this contest is to encourage rhetorical analysis as an important research method for undergraduate students and to encourage greater familiarity with discursive events in the United States that have congregated around the African American Freedom Struggle. We encourage you to consider using this essay contest in your teaching. If the winning essay emerges from an undergraduate course assignment, the faculty member will be awarded \$250.

Timeline

- April 15, 2022: Submissions due to civilrightsrhetoriccontest@gmail.com
- May 15, 2022: A winner will be announced
- Summer 2022: The winning author will work with a *Young Scholars in Writing* editor to revise their essay for publication
- Winter 2022-2032: The revised essay will be published in volume 20 of *Young Scholars in Writing*.

Note: Only the winning contest essay is considered a submission to *YSW*. Essays not selected as the contest winner are eligible for submission to *Young Scholars in Writing* through the journal's regular submission process.

Please direct questions to Dr. Jack Selzer, Penn State Professor Emeritus, at jls25@psu.edu.

Advice for Writers from Dr. Jack Selzer

As you consider which object(s) of analysis to pick, think about your interests, explore the [Voices of Democracy](#) and [Rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement](#) websites, and talk with your faculty mentors. (Note: Entrants are not required to consult either of the websites, but judges are likely to favor those who do.)

You can submit a revised version of an essay that you worked on for a class assignment, or you can start from scratch on a topic that is new to you.

Usually, the best papers come from your engagement with a speech (or speeches) or document(s) or song(s) or photo(s) or film(s) or another artifact that you are especially curious about (or even confused by). If you have always wondered about a specific civil rights personage—historical or contemporary—pick something produced by that person. Or choose a civil rights artifact that has intrigued you or something you have a personal connection to—something you have encountered in a course, on a family trip, or in your home community. Then become an expert on your topic by studying it thoroughly: use primary and secondary sources that are available on each website. Aim to explain the rhetorical event(s) so well, thoroughly, and authoritatively that your essay will stand as the one that others depend on.

Example essays that may guide your analysis are included under “Resources for Research” on the [Rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement](#) website and the [Voices of Democracy](#) website.

As you craft your essay, keep in mind these suggestions as well:

- Be strategic in deciding which features of your topic you want to emphasize and which ones you should deemphasize; focus on the most interesting or problematical features while also being attentive to the whole.
- Be sure that your essay develops a clear thesis, defends it with a carefully organized and evidence-saturated argument, and is expressed clearly and effectively. In short, be a professional in terms of presentation. A common format is to offer an introduction describing the rhetorical challenge faced by the person whose artifact(s) you have chosen, and then to fill the body of your essay with accounts of the strategies and tactics used by the author to meet that challenge. Look at some of the papers on the website for guidance!
- Follow MLA guidelines (i.e., double space with one-inch margins; and follow MLA advice about type size and style as well as documentation and the correct way to insert photos and quotations).