



Student Name:
Class Period:
Date:

Meet the Originals

Texas Originals is a radio series about people who made an impact on Texas. You can hear it online and on radio stations around the state. Read or listen to the episode on John Howard Griffin. Then, answer questions about it.

John Howard Griffin 1920–1980

In 1961, author John Howard Griffin published an account of a six-week journey through the American South. He called the book an “obscure work,” likely to interest only sociologists. But the book—*Black Like Me*—became a modern classic.

Born in 1920, Griffin grew up in Fort Worth. At fifteen, he moved to France, where he attended school and studied music and photography. He served in the French Resistance before returning home in 1941 and enlisting in the Army Air Corps.

In the fifties, Griffin became increasingly troubled by racial discrimination and sought to better understand the plight of Black people in America. He later wrote, “The only way I could see to bridge the gap between us was to become a Negro.”

Griffin consulted with a dermatologist to darken his skin and soon began traveling southern states passing as Black. In *Black Like Me*, he chronicles the indignities he suffered, offering readers a troubling view of racial dynamics in the Jim Crow South. The *New York Times* hailed the book as “an essential document of contemporary American life.” But it also triggered immense hostility. At one point Griffin and his family moved to Mexico, fearing for their safety.

Griffin devoted the rest of his life to promoting social justice—teaching, delivering lectures, and working with civil rights leaders. He died in 1980.

Check for Understanding: Answer the questions below based on evidence from the episode on John Howard Griffin. Refer to the text included above if needed.

1. What book did John Howard Griffin write, and what was it about?
2. What did Griffin do to continue to promote social justice after publishing his book?

Going Further: Write or discuss your answer to the question below, supporting your answer with evidence from the episode or additional information you have learned in class.

3. **Taking a Position.** Griffin's book received both positive and negative responses. Why do you think the response was so mixed?