

HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

Lesson Title: American Presidents and Race Relations

Author(s) Kaycee Taylor Bainbridge Island High School

Grade level 11, 12

Duration of lesson: three to four 50 minute classes or one to two 100 minute blocked classes

Background/Overview of the lesson: Race relations continue to be an important aspect of American Culture and history. From the beginning of the nation's history this issue has been at the heart of numerous conflicts, triumphs and tragedies. While the policies of various Presidents by no means serve as an exhaustive list of examples of how the nation has struggled with this issue, they do provide a way to better understand how historical eras shape and reflect the values of the people. To better understand the changing nature of this issue and the influences of different historical periods, students will engage in an interdisciplinary lesson (social studies and language arts). This may serve as a stand alone lesson or as part of a larger unit on topics such as: Race, Presidential Policy, Civil Rights, and Public Policy Decision making.

NCSS Standards:

- 2. Time Continuity and Change
- 4. Individual Development and Identity
- 5. Individuals, Groups and Institutions
- 6. Power, Authority and Governance
- 10. Civic Ideals and Practices

National Standards for English Language Teachers:

- 3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
- 7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
- 8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

- 4. Advancing Disciplinary Knowledge and Understanding
- 5. Promoting Social Understanding
- 6. Developing Civic Competence

Social Studies Skills:

Standard 2: Historical Comprehension

- B. Reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical passage.
- F. Appreciate historical perspectives.

Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation

- A. Compare and contrast differing sets of ideas.
- B. Consider multiple perspectives.
- C. Analyze cause-and-effect relationships and multiple causation, including the importance of the individual, the influence of ideas.
- D. Draw comparisons across eras and regions in order to define enduring issues.
- E. Distinguish between unsupported expressions of opinion and informed hypotheses grounded in historical evidence.

Standard 4: Historical Research Capabilities

- A. Formulate historical questions.
- B. Obtain historical data from a variety of sources.
- C. Interrogate historical data.
- D. Identify the gaps in the available records, marshal contextual knowledge and perspectives of the time and place
- E. Employ quantitative analysis.
- F. Support interpretations with historical evidence.

Standard 5: Historical Issues- Analysis and Decision Making

- E. Formulate a position or course of action on an issue.
- F. Evaluate the implementation of a decision.

Guided Question:

To what extent have Presidents Lincoln, L.B. Johnson, Regan, Nixon, and Clinton influenced race relations during their administration (and today)?

Objectives:

- Explain the policies of race relations of five presidents
- Analyze primary documents to understand the various views and actions of five Presidents in regards to race relations
- Evaluate the influence of presidential policy on race relations today

Vocabulary:

- **race:** People who are believed to belong to the same genetic stock.
- **race relations:** Cultural contacts between people of different races.
- **policy:** A plan of action adopted by an individual or social group.
- **affirmative action:** A policy designed to redress past discrimination against women and minority groups through measures to improve their economic and educational opportunities.
- **civil rights:** Civil rights are those legal protections granted to citizens under the jurisdiction of the civil law of a state. They are distinguished from human rights in that they may be violated or removed, and they may or may not apply to all individuals living within the borders of that state.

- **Civil Rights Act of 1964:** The Civil Rights Act of 1964 (CRA'64) in the United States was landmark legislation. The original purpose of the Bill was to protect black men from job discrimination, but at the last minute in an attempt to kill the bill, it was expanded to include protection for women. As a result it formed the political impetus for feminism. CRA'64 transformed American society. It prohibited discrimination in public and governmental facilities.
- **Voting Rights Act:** The United States Voting Rights Act of 1965 outlawed literacy tests and provided for federal registration of African-American voters in areas that had less than 50% of eligible voters registered. It was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson on August 6, 1965.
- **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP):** The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is an American civil rights organization. The NAACP was founded as the American Negro Committee on February 12, 1909 by a group of thirteen activists, where W. E. B. DuBois was the only African-American while the others were Jewish Americans. The organization was one of the leading organizations involved in the civil rights struggle of the 1960s and 70s.

Evaluations/Assessment (based on student and teacher needs)

- 1) Students will create a position paper which analyzes the impact of presidential policy on race relations today.
- 2) Students will take on the persona of a selected president (Lincoln, LBJ, Regan or Nixon) to defend his position on race relations.
- 3) Students will create a digital photo essay of the historical era and the relevant policies of the president

RESEARCH RESOURCES

Teaching American History

This site contains historical documents sorted by commonly used era references such as Colonial Era, Founding Era, etc.

<http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org/>

EBSCOHost Student Research site

This site must be accessed through a school online library available in most states. Using the “advance search” options, students use key words in selected fields to find primary source documents. For student research, this is the most effective and efficient site.

The National Archives

This site holds primary documents considered historically significant to the United States.

<http://www.archives.gov/>

William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum

This site contains personal records of Bill Clinton and other historical documents significant to his presidential tenure.

<http://www.clintonlibrary.gov/>

Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library and Museum

This site contains personal records of Richard Nixon and other historical documents significant to his presidential tenure.

<http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/>

Ronald W. Reagan Presidential Library and Museum

This site contains personal records of Ronald Reagan and other historical documents significant to his presidential tenure.

<http://www.reaganlibrary.gov/>

Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum

This site contains personal records of Lyndon B. Johnson and other historical documents significant to his presidential tenure.

<http://www.johnsonlibrary.gov/>

The White House Historical Association

This site displays various presidential documents.

<http://www.whitehousehistory.org/>

Materials:

- Computer and Internet access for each student or group
- Primary sources from Internet
- Graphic organizer
- Warm-up activity handout

Procedures:

- Warm-up – Students will complete a “pre-test”, matching quotes on race relations with the American Presidents who said them. Answer the questions and decide whether or not the quotes reflect the actions of the presidents using only students’ current knowledge.
- Guided practice – Explain to students that they will research an assigned president to determine his actions toward race relations in the United States.
- Independent Practice – Each student (or group) will research the assigned president using primary sources and some secondary sources. Since this is a cross curricular activity that includes research skills, students will also find reliable sites on their own, with some guidance.
- Wrap-up – After students have completed their research and assessment, class discussion on each presidents’ actions during their tenure.

Extended Application:

- Students will determine the effect of those policies today.
- During a presidential campaign, students may determine the policies to which the candidates align themselves.
- Site visits to the following historical locations:
 - Lincoln Memorial, Washington DC
 - U.S. Capital building, Washington DC
 - Virtual tours of presidential libraries

Warm-up activity

Teacher provides a number of quotes from the 5 selected presidents without revealing the names associated with the quotes. Students will be asked to pair the quote with the author and provide a short explanation (1-3 sentences) of why they made the match.

1) A major hurricane hits New Orleans. Within hours the President of the United States is on Air Force One headed for the stricken city. Upon landing in the no-electricity darkness, with a flashlight held to his face, he announces "This is the President of the United States and I am here to help"

Johnson

2) A conversation with a prominent Christian Preacher (CP) and the President (P) in regards to Jewish people and the media:

"This stranglehold has got to be broken or the country's going down the drain" (CP)

You believe that?" (P).

"Yes, sir," (CP)

"Oh, boy," replies (P). "So do I. I can't ever say that but I believe it."

"No, but if you get elected a second time, then we might be able to do something," replies (CP)

Nixon

3) In regards to people collecting welfare, this president referred to a "Chicago welfare queen" who had 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cards, and collected benefits for "four nonexisting (sic) deceased husbands," bilking the government out of "over \$150,000."

Reagan

4) During a weekly Oval Office radio address, this President told his audience that "I have vivid and painful memories of black churches being burned in my own state when I was a child." A reputable newspaper reported the following day that there was no evidence available of a black church ever being burned down in his home state.

Clinton

5) "When southern people tell us they are no more responsible for the origin of slavery, than we; I acknowledge the fact. When it is said that the institution exists; and that it [was] very difficult to get rid of it, in any satisfactory way, I can understand and appreciate the saying"

Lincoln

6) "Until justice is blind to color, until education is unaware of race, until opportunity is unconcerned with the color of men's skins, emancipation will be a proclamation but not a fact."

Johnson

7) "A man without a vote is man without protection."

Johnson

8) "I favor the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and it must be enforced at gunpoint if necessary."

Reagan

9) "Let us all take more responsibility, not only for ourselves and our families but for our communities and our country."

Clinton

10) "Protecting the rights of even the least individual among us is basically the only excuse the government has for even existing."

Reagan

Sources for Presidential Quotes:

<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2003/0309.mendacity-index#clinton>

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/>

<http://www.recordonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060828/NEWS/608280323/-1/NEWS0204>

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/>