

How the Humanities and Social Sciences Address Today's Political Divide

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Abstract

While most twelfth-grade students at Bodine High School realize the responsibility of citizenship and registering to vote, many are still reluctant to say that history, geography, philosophy, and other academic disciplines in the humanities and social sciences intrigue them or are valuable to them. Despite attending a high school that has a humanities-based identity, these fields of study are still largely underappreciated by students. Perhaps this is because they do not see the utility or practicality the humanities offer them. This gap in appreciation may be understandable considering if students compare the utility of humanities-based courses to their STEM-based counterparts. For this reason, this curriculum unit provides a final, culminating unit plan for high school seniors to reflect on the previous mentioned topics covered in IB History and Social Science to better understand the country's political and social landscape. Additionally, this unit plan hopes to show students the value of the humanities and the social sciences, both from the perspective of applying the lessons learned in the humanities and the social sciences to our world today as well as understanding the human condition.

Keywords

Social studies, humanities, social sciences, history, political divide, identity politics

Introduction

“The people made their recollections fit in with their sufferings.” – Thucydides in *History of the Peloponnesian War*

Much of the content in both my history and civics courses teaches students how government works in real-time while also providing an atypically taught perspective of American history, government, and politics. Many of these units run counter to and challenge the American ideals of egalitarianism, equal justice, and opportunity. These topics discuss historical inequity, uneven economic distribution, and suppression and exclusion. The clash of the celebration and criticism of American Exceptionalism playing out as identity politics dominates the political landscape today. While some progressives argue for affirmative action and even reparations, conservatives talk about how the country moves too quickly or away from American ideals. When civic dialogue and political unity are so meaningful, many continue to compare political polarization

today to that of the US Civil War. Throughout this unit plan, I analyze how we can approach the political divide by examining how we value the humanities and social sciences.

When writing about the Peloponnesian War, the Greek historian Thucydides stated, “The people made their recollections fit in with their sufferings.” He predicted that people would continue to remember the past in a way that memorializes and justifies their feelings of suffering. Thus, history as a humanistic discipline serves a vital role in democratic societies today, as it allows us to understand our past and inform us of our beliefs today.

I hope that this unit exposes students to real-world problems, fosters civic participation, and encourages students to create solutions to the issues that affect their communities today. However, perhaps most of all, I hope that this unit teaches students to appreciate the value of the humanities and social sciences to build empathy and spark political dialogue.

Rationale

Bodine is a magnet high school in the School District of Philadelphia (SDP). Bodine is located in Philadelphia’s Northern Liberties neighborhood and serves roughly 600 students. Middle school grades, attendance, disciplinary records, state test scores, and other criteria determine student admission. The SDP operates as a Title I school district; under this policy, all students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Over ninety-five percent of students at Bodine live below the poverty line. Students attend daily class periods of fifty-three minutes each. Bodine offers Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses to its upperclassmen. This unit can be used in AP and IB courses and for ninth, tenth, and eleventh-grade students. This two-week unit plan is designed for high school twelfth-grade social studies classes at William W. Bodine High School for International Affairs, whether students enroll in IB 20th Century World History or Social Science.

IB History

At Bodine High School, I teach IB History, a two-year course offering that allows students to take the three-part IB History exam at the end of the program. The IB Diploma Program offers teachers flexibility in how they teach the course and which topics they choose to teach (see Figure 1). In their junior year, students must enroll in a course titled IB History of the Americas. As seniors, students can elect to matriculate into the second year of IB History by taking the IB 20th Century World History course. Below, I explain how Bodine High School elects to teach the IB History material.

IB History at Bodine High School	
Paper One Prescribed Subject: Rights and Protest (IB 20th Century World History)	
Case Study 1: Civil Rights Movement in the United States (1965-1965)	Case Study 2: Apartheid South Africa (1948-1964)
Paper Two World History Topics (IB 20th Century World History)	
Authoritarian States (20 th Century)	The Cold War: Superpower Tensions and Rivalries (20 th Century)
Paper Three Depth Studies: History of the Americas (IB History of the Americas)	
Colonial Government in the New World (1500-1800)	Independence Movements (1763-1830)
Nation-Building and Challenges (c. 1780-c.1870)	US Civil War: Causes and Effects (1840-1877)
Emergence of the Americas in Global Affairs (1880-1929)	

Figure 1: The above chart lists the topics that the IB History program at Bodine High School teaches its students. This structure, organized by each of the three essays on the IB History exam, is covered in more detail in the following subsections.

Paper One

In both years of IB History, students learn how to evaluate primary and secondary sources by examining the values and limitations of a document's origin, purpose, and content. The IB History Paper One section of the exam tests these historiographical skills by presenting students with documents from one of the listed prescribed subjects. At Bodine, the Social Studies Department teaches the IB History Rights and Protest Prescribed Subject, presenting students with documents from the US Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa. Although the content of the prescribed subjects is not discussed until students enroll in the twelfth-grade IB 20th Century World History course at Bodine, these historiographical skills are taught in both the junior and senior years of IB History. Learning these historiographical skills and the Rights and Protest Prescribed Subject content prepares students for the first essay on the IB History exam.

Paper Two

If twelfth-grade students choose to enroll in the second year of IB History, they cover the IB History Paper Two topics through a world history lens. At Bodine, this course is titled IB 20th Century World History, and it includes topics such as the Spanish Civil War, World War One, World War Two, and the Cold War. Teaching this historical content allows students to succeed on the second essay on the IB History exam. This course

replaces the civics requirement at Bodine and is a continuation of IB History of the Americas.

Paper Three

Students cover multiple IB History Paper Three topics in their junior year by focusing on a designated continental region. At Bodine, all students must enroll in IB History of the Americas. This course replaces the US History course that is taught at most other high schools in the SDP. In IB History of the Americas, students learn about topics including European imperialism in the Americas, the American Revolutionary War, the Haitian Revolution, Latin American independence movements, the US Civil War, the Industrial Revolution, and the outbreak of World War One. While it is a regional approach to history that centers on the Americas, it is centered mainly on United States history.

As students enroll in their twelfth-grade year, they have the option of enrolling in the IB 20th Century World History or Social Science course.

Social Science

At Bodine High School, twelfth-grade students enroll in Social Science, a civics course that focuses on government, politics, and economics. Keeping the classroom's curriculum as relevant as possible is of the utmost importance. The course's curriculum is modified to teach topics such as lead and health, the presidential campaigning process, gerrymandering, school funding, redlining, mass incarceration, affirmative action, globalization, and the Financial Crisis of 2008 in the order listed (see Figure 2). Respectively, these topics relate to the role of the media, political parties, legislative representation, how budgets become law, the federal bureaucracy, trial courts, appellate courts, economic systems and trade, and banking and government regulation. Students are genuinely interested in these topics; therefore, the relevance of these lessons better equips them to understand how the three branches and levels of government work in action. Students are quick to register to vote and become civically engaged, which is one of the goals of this course and unit plan.

Social Science at Bodine High School	
Government	
The Role of the Media (Lead and Health)	Foundations of American Government (The US Constitution)
Elections and Voting and Political Parties and Presidential Campaigning (The 2020 General Election)	The Legislative Branch (Gerrymandering and School Funding)

The Executive Branch (Executive Orders and Housing)	The Judicial Branch (Trial Courts and Mass Incarceration; Appellate Courts and Affirmative Action)
Economics	
Economic Systems and Trade (Globalization and Outsourcing/Automation)	Banking, Government Regulation, and Personal Finance (The Financial Crisis of 2008)

Figure 2: The above chart lists the topics taught in Social Science at Bodine High School.

Whether students enroll in IB 20th Century World History or Social Science, students will spend time reflecting on the last two years of social studies at Bodine High School. After learning about various historical, governmental, political, and economic topics, this curriculum unit will push students to consider how these issues contribute to the United States' political division today. This way, students can explore the multiple perspectives that make up the identity politics of the nation. Students will learn to remain vigilant as citizens and as residents. This will lead to students holding government officials accountable and creating a better understanding of how government and politics work in practice in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and the United States more broadly. Most importantly, this approach to teaching history and civics will ideally show students the value of the humanities and social sciences.

Content Objectives

While most twelfth-grade students at Bodine High School realize the responsibility of citizenship and registering to vote, many are still reluctant to say that history, geography, philosophy, and other academic disciplines in the humanities and social sciences intrigue them or are valuable to them. Despite attending a high school with a humanities-based identity, students underappreciate these academic disciplines. Perhaps this is because they do not see the utility or practicality the humanities offer them. This gap in appreciation may be understandable considering if students compare the utility of humanities-based courses to their STEM-based counterparts. For this reason, this curriculum unit provides a final, culminating unit plan for high school seniors to reflect on the previously mentioned topics covered in IB History and Social Science to better understand the country's political and social landscape. Additionally, this unit plan hopes to show students the value of the humanities and the social sciences, both from the perspective of applying the lessons learned in the humanities and the social sciences to our world today and understanding the human condition.

Throughout this curriculum unit, students will learn about how philosophical thought is the foundation of how individuals study the human condition and understand our social and political environment today. This unit plan contains five sections:

First, students will examine the philosophical foundations of history and historiography. By analyzing how we study and document the past, students will understand the complexities of historical memory and how we use the past to inform our decisions today.

Second, students will apply their understanding of how historians interpret and document the past to gather information regarding current events. Students will explore topics concerning which news networks and sources people gravitate towards depending on their own identities.

Third, students will explore how history and news consumption affect the country's political landscape. Students will study political socialization and analyze how their background contributes to their political ideology regarding social issues.

Fourth, students will shift from examining how social issues contribute to their ideology to how fiscal issues affect their view of the world.

Lastly, students will reflect on the previously listed steps to learn how the humanities and social sciences help explain today's world.

Content Background

On January 6, 2021, members of the US Congress met on Capitol Hill to officially certify the results of the 2020 General Election. Just two weeks later—Inauguration Day—Joseph R. Biden would become the 46th President of the United States. The morning Congress began to formalize the election results, Trump held a rally on the lawn between the White House and the Washington Monument. Hours later, Trump's most fervent supporters packed the steps of the US Capitol Building chanting "Stop the count!" Those participating in the attempted coup d'état armed themselves with military-grade equipment and weapons. The rioters used canisters of pepper spray, riot shields, and any other piece of equipment they could repurpose as weapons. Flags celebrating Trump became ubiquitous, as did the Confederate Flag. Congress members and Vice President Michael R. Pence retreated from the Capitol Building floor to find protection in a secure location. Insurrectionists entered the chamber just minutes later, defaming the offices and offices of the building that represents American democracy. Hours passed until local and federal police forces were able to secure the Capitol Building. Ultimately, five individuals died, including one Capitol Police officer. The last time rioters ransacked the Capitol Building was during the War of 1812, just decades after the United States had declared its independence from Great Britain and defeated its monarchical power during the American Revolutionary War.

The United States prides itself as a beacon for the rest of the world. The celebration of American exceptionalism—the notion that the United States’ rapid growth is uniquely American—constantly references the underdog story of a small collection of colonies united against their tyrannical overlord. The United States became the birthplace of modern democracy when the Declaration of Independence was first signed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on July 4, 1776, making Philadelphia the only American city to achieve the UNESCO World Heritage honor. In the years following the United States’ successful revolt against Great Britain, nations referenced the ideals that the American colonists drew from during the Age of Enlightenment. The principles that Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams referenced in the Declaration of Independence became a template for those across the Atlantic Ocean and throughout the Western Hemisphere. Peasants and the working-class overthrew the French monarchy. The world’s first successful slave revolt occurred in Haiti, and dozens of creole revolutionary leaders achieved independence throughout Latin America. The spirit of liberalism encouraged politicians to expand democratic principles and provide power to the masses. So how did the first democratic state of the modern era become victim to a coup d’état by its own citizens?

The Study of the Past

The subject of history is often met with students rolling their eyes and resting their heads on their desks. Much of the monotony students associate with history may result from the way history is presented through the conventional use of textbooks. Students often must memorize key figures and dates on multiple-choice-based exams. This presentation of history presents the subject as a binary study. Things are or they are not. Something happened or it did not. Someone is lying or they are telling the truth. This approach towards understanding the past overlooks the inherent complexities of how humans behave and interact with each other and the ever-present interpretation of past events. By focusing on the nuance history and historiography teach us, we can then closely examine *what* happened in the past and *how* we write about the past.

Understanding the Past

There is perhaps no period of American history that is as popular as the Civil War is to study. In fact, since the Battle of Appomattox, over 65,000 books have been published about the topic—an equivalent of over one per day.¹ However, the enormous amount of research focused on the Civil War does not clarify how society views this historical event. Instead, debates continue over the causes of southern secession and the ensuing war.

Many identify slavery as the primary motivation for South Carolina and other southern states to leave the Union. After all, the Missouri Compromise of 1820, the Compromise of 1850, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 all dealt with slavery directly to maintain

a balance of free and slave states in Congress. Despite this, others point to issues such as states' rights or sectionalism as the reason for southern secession and the creation of the Confederacy. The roots of Abraham Lincoln's Republican Party in the North indeed trace back to the federalist sentiment which favored a strong, federal government. On the other hand, Andrew Jackson's Democratic Party drew roots in anti-federalist sentiment from Thomas Jefferson's Democratic-Republican Party, which saw the importance of strong state governments to avoid a tyrannical federal government like that of King George II's British Empire.

When analyzing the causes of the Civil War, it is crucial to consider each of these arguments to some extent. Neither argument should be entirely dismissed. It is precisely the attempt to give weight to these arguments that are the basis of historical thinking. Presenting the causes of the Civil War as a binary choice avoids the necessary nuance that historical thinking provides. Instead, when studying history, the embedded nuances must be embraced rather than dismissed for purposes of personal or political convenience.

Presenting oversimplified interpretations of the past is ultimately harmful to democratic dialogue. For example, some paint the US Civil War as the "War of Northern Aggression." Presenting this interpretation oversimplifies and distorts the events that occurred. This version of history depicts the North as the aggressor, and the South, therefore, as the victim. In reality, southern slaveholders stood to lose out on their most valuable asset, aside from the land that they owned.² To southern slaveholders, the threat of emancipation would lead to the concentration of economic and political power in the North as the Industrial Revolution gained traction. This worry among slaveholders motivated southern states to secede from the Union to ensure their economic security, ultimately leading to the outbreak of war at Fort Sumter. Nonetheless, presenting the US Civil War as the "War of Northern Aggression" virtually ignores these details and gives way for a false interpretation of the events.

Not only does this method of thinking lead to an incorrect interpretation of history, but it also leaves room for the justification of the brutalization and enslavement African American slaves faced from southern slaveholders. For example, American textbooks have described slaves as immigrant workers.³ States' rights and sectionalism certainly played a role in the outbreak of war; nonetheless, to dismiss slavery as the primary motivation or as a cause altogether for the outbreak of war shows the challenge society faces when using historical thinking.

Describing the US Civil War as the "War of Northern Aggression" affects historical memory and democratic dialogue today in the tension surrounding the construction and placement of Confederate statues. Construction of Confederate monuments reached its peak during the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017. Following the Charleston Church Shooting in which Dylan Roof shot and killed nine

African Americans in a church, a group of white supremacists paraded throughout Charleston with the Confederate Flag and Germany's Nazi Party flag. Counter-protestors supporting the Black Lives Matter Movement clashed with the white supremacists. During the counter-protests, James Alex Fields Jr. drove his car into the crowd killing Heather Heyer and injuring nine others.

The rise in white supremacist terrorism relates to the interpretation of the US Civil War directly. The celebration of the Confederate Flag in Charlottesville, Virginia and around the country does not relate to the anti-federalist values of Thomas Jefferson's Democratic-Republican Party. Instead, the Confederate Flag symbolizes sympathy for the South during the Civil War and support for populism—a concept that traces back to the Jacksonian Democrats.



Figure 3: The above image shows the Confederate monument of Robert E. Lee, the General of the Confederate Army that ultimately surrendered at the Battle of Appomattox.⁴

The construction of Confederate statues was often a reaction to periods associated with civil rights for African Americans. Spikes in the construction of Confederate monuments such as the statue of General Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville, North Carolina occurred during Reconstruction when the Ku Klux Klan terrorized African Americans, especially in the Deep South. Construction of Confederate monuments also spiked during the Great Depression, World War Two, and the Civil Rights Movement. Most notably, though, the

construction of Confederate statues soared when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People formed in 1909. The distortion of society's historical memory has only exacerbated political tensions. Simplifying history to a binary choice ultimately does the same in how parties engage in dialogue today. Just like the study of history requires nuance to achieve a democratic dialogue, the inclusion and corroboration of historical documentation also enhance historiographical analysis.

Documenting the Past

The documentation of historical events is what shapes our historical memory in the first place. Teaching students the necessary critical thinking skills to examine how authors witness and present information helps students embrace history's nuances while also building methods of understanding when engaging in dialogue.

Examine the case of Paul Revere—a member of the radical Sons of Liberty in Boston, Massachusetts during Colonial America. Many students may associate Revere with his recollection of the events of March 5, 1770 with the famous engraving that almost all history curriculums include (see Figure 4). Paul Revere titled his illustration the “Boston Massacre”—a title textbooks still regularly use to refer to the events of March 5, 1770. Revere's account of the events is often accepted as fact. However, his documentation of the events is problematic when corroborated with other sources.



Figure 4: The above-listed image shows Paul Revere’s account of the events that unfolded on March 5, 1770. Paul Revere titled his illustration the “Boston Massacre.”⁵

Revere published the engraving three full weeks after the event. His illustration depicts the British soldiers as organized and directed to fire upon an innocent crowd of colonists.

As shown above, Revere was sure to include bloodshed, a dog, and distraught expressions among helpless colonists.

If this was the only document students encountered of the events that occurred on March 5, 1770, it would be easy for them to understand the tyrannical behavior of the British Empire, making it easier to embrace the message put forth by Revere and other revolutionaries. However, if students are presented with multiple accounts of what happened on this day by examining testimony from the trial of the British soldiers. In fact, John Adams, a co-author of the Declaration of Independence and became the second President of the United States, chose to represent the British military officers in court. The trial required the deposition and testimony of witnesses, many of whom recounted the throwing of snowballs at British soldiers. Given this information, Paul Revere's narrative becomes much more complicated, and his illustration as a primary source is perhaps discredited altogether.

The omission or suppression of outside voices may change Paul Revere's message, but including voices other than Revere's provides a more holistic version of the events that Revere describes as the "Boston Massacre". Before accepting Revere's documentation of March 5, 1770 as fact, one must examine Revere's position in society to assess why he may have made such claims.

Paul Revere was a member of the Sons of Liberty and a Boston resident, where revolutionist sentiment and British military occupation were most present. Including this information when examining the validity of Revere's account teaches students the importance of document analysis. Additionally, the lessons that historiography provides allow students to embrace the principles of standpoint epistemology or that their social position influences their perspective or knowledge. As Heidi Grasswick, a philosopher at Middlebury College, puts it:

If social location shapes one's perspective on the world (through differential experiences) and we can only interact with the world and know it through that perspective, then the areas of knowledge for which one's social location is relevant may be very broad indeed, and may include areas of knowledge not obviously connected to the experiences of a particular social location.⁶

In other words, in the context of history, it is crucial to examine an author's position in society to understand their message. Not only does the inability to properly examine historical documentation quickly lead to the oversimplification of historical events, but understanding Revere's motives—intentional or not—positions students to more acutely arrive at an accurate version of what transpired on March 5, 1770. The same is true for how we remember the past and how we inform ourselves today.

Informing Ourselves Today

Today's messaging has not become clearer than the messaging we receive in history textbooks or primary source documents. The wave of social media applications has created multiple platforms for readers to seek out news stories. One can argue that the amount of news outlets and sources provides a more democratic approach to gathering information; however, challenges that threaten the ability to engage in a democratic dialogue also arise when tech companies become involved in distributing information. Simply put, the content that users search for on the web is tracked by tech companies. That information is compiled and sold to businesses. Both tech companies and businesses use this data to manipulate search results and the advertisements users see from their searches. This way, users become more engaged in their searches, as the search results are tailored to their search history.⁷ These forces quickly generate filter bubbles, which only show news sources that the user is likely to agree with.

As users gravitate to sourcing their information from online web pages, the decline of the local newspaper industry has been exacerbated. Local newspapers provide more objectively based news, help curb political corruption, and even save taxpayers money.⁸ Moreover, they are the sources national news institutions reference. As users rely more heavily on social media applications to generate their news, their beliefs are only reaffirmed. When readers have less access to sources they are not inclined to agree with, they begin to find it harder to see any validity in an opinion different from their own. Under the worst circumstances, the creation of filter bubbles challenges objectivity or evidence-based claims altogether.

The dependence on social media platforms for news has even brought into question what is true and what is not. Some go as far as to argue that we live in a "post-truth" society, where the lines between fact, opinion, or outright lie have been blurred so much that there is no stark division among them. The erosion of the local newspaper industry and the creation of filter bubbles have led to "fake news" and conspiracy theories entering mainstream politics. As C.G. Prado wrote:

What is frightening about rhetorical exuberance and the acceptance of it is that these are defining characteristics of relations between dictators and their benighted supporters. The originator of the term, "post-truth", one Steve Tesich, first used the term in an article titled "A Government List", published in *The Nation* in 1992. Tesich criticized the Nixon and Reagan administrations for deceptiveness by omission and outright falsehoods, but much of the thrust of his article was that Americans preferred hearing pleasing fabrications from their elected officials than harsh realities. More recently, Lawrence Martin maintained, in a June 2017, issue of *The Globe and Mail* that "In America, the less you know, the cooler you are", pointing out that when The New York Times catalogued a dozen lies Trump told his Iowa rally in June, 2017, "Nobody cared".⁹

Perhaps “nobody cared” because the narrative fits into what they want to believe or what is part of their agenda. Nonetheless, the malicious practice that runs counter to the values history gives us of omitting truth and suppressing factual evidence disrupts the nature of democracy, thus harming the essence of forums of debate. It leads to the development of pockets within societies that are no longer willing to engage with one another.

While companies can generate more profit from creating filter bubbles, users who get their news from online sources grow increasingly exposed to echo chambers. Without being exposed to opinions and perspectives unlike their own, achieving a democratic dialogue and engaging in political moderation becomes more challenging. Ultimately, the way we consume news today and how we understand the past heavily weighs on our ability to engage politically. Much like the raising of Confederate statues or Paul Revere’s engraving, the inability or unwillingness to corroborate a news story ignores the nuance that the study of history teaches us, thus harming the political

The Political Impact

Waves of populism that embrace racism, xenophobia, and conspiracy theories have seen once nonexistent or fringe political parties gain votes: Vox in Spain, Alternative für Deutschland in Germany, National Front in France, England’s Brexit movement, and the Tea Party Movement in the United States. These waves of populism are not just targeting countries referred to as “developing economies”; rather, they are happening to some of the most powerful economic forces in the world—countries that have been considered a reference of stable democratic states. Historically, the forces that drive populism have always been present, but they become strongest when political division is highest.

Social Issues and Politics

Take, for example, the politics of the 1960s. As African Americans returned from World War Two, activists fought for civil rights ranging from desegregation efforts to solidifying enfranchisement. The Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision had declared in 1954 that *Plessy v. Ferguson*’s “separate but equal” ruling was unconstitutional. This liberal era of politics saw the election of John F. Kennedy, the country’s first Catholic and youngest President. Kennedy ran on a platform to expand civil rights, which Lyndon B. Johnson continued after Kennedy’s assassination. Johnson’s Great Society created the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which banned redlining practices. President Johnson had his policies upheld by the Warren Court, even considered today to be the most liberal Supreme Court in American history. Other social movements, including activists fighting for feminist principles and the Gay Liberation Movement, gained popularity and support in mainstream politics.

Of course, while celebrated in American textbooks for its egalitarian principles, this wave of politics was met with fierce resistance among the nation’s conservatives. As southern

Democrats, known as Dixiecrats, once required the Roosevelt Administration to bar African Americans from being eligible for the New Deal programs, Nixon ran on a “Law and Order” campaign that saw these Dixiecrats helping Nixon get to the White House due to his Southern Strategy. Nixon spewed racist rhetoric that connected the nation’s rising crime rates to the affirmative action measures the country began to take. The result was a wave of mass incarceration that targeted the nation’s Black population.

Once again, the choices were presented on the ballot in the United States as a binary one. Nixon’s campaign implied that voters that did not vote for Nixon were against a society based on law and order. In reality, the true nature of these decisions was much more nuanced. Nixon’s “Law & Order” campaign ignored issues of urbanization, a massive population increase from the Baby Boomer generation, and new ways of tracking crime as reasons for the nation’s rise in crime rates.¹⁰ While Johnson’s response was to expand social welfare programs, Republicans focused on the role of the individual. The lack of nuance in the country’s political arena extends beyond social issues.

Fiscal Issues and Politics

The same issues have taken shape today for economic issues. Voters have gravitated towards supporting protectionist policies in recent years. Many wondered why swing-state voters supported protectionist economic policies that Trump campaigned on in 2016. Thus, many pundits focused on Biden’s ability to peel off voters from Trump to build the “Blue Wall”—Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania—in the 2020 General Election. Without understanding the impact of the Industrial Revolution and the Labor Movement, it can be challenging to grasp contemporary political issues such as the Tea Party Movement, the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the hostile 2020 General Election.

It is important to examine the economic policies that took shape in the United States throughout the twentieth century to examine the political divide the country faces today. For example, as the Labor Movement challenged the policies of the Industrial Revolution and Gilded Age, more workers entered into labor unions. Labor unions, in part, contributed to lower levels of wealth inequality throughout the Interwar Period; however, during the 1970s and 1980s, when neoliberalism ideology grew popular and many jobs were outsourced and automated, the membership and power of labor unions declined nationwide (see Figure 5).

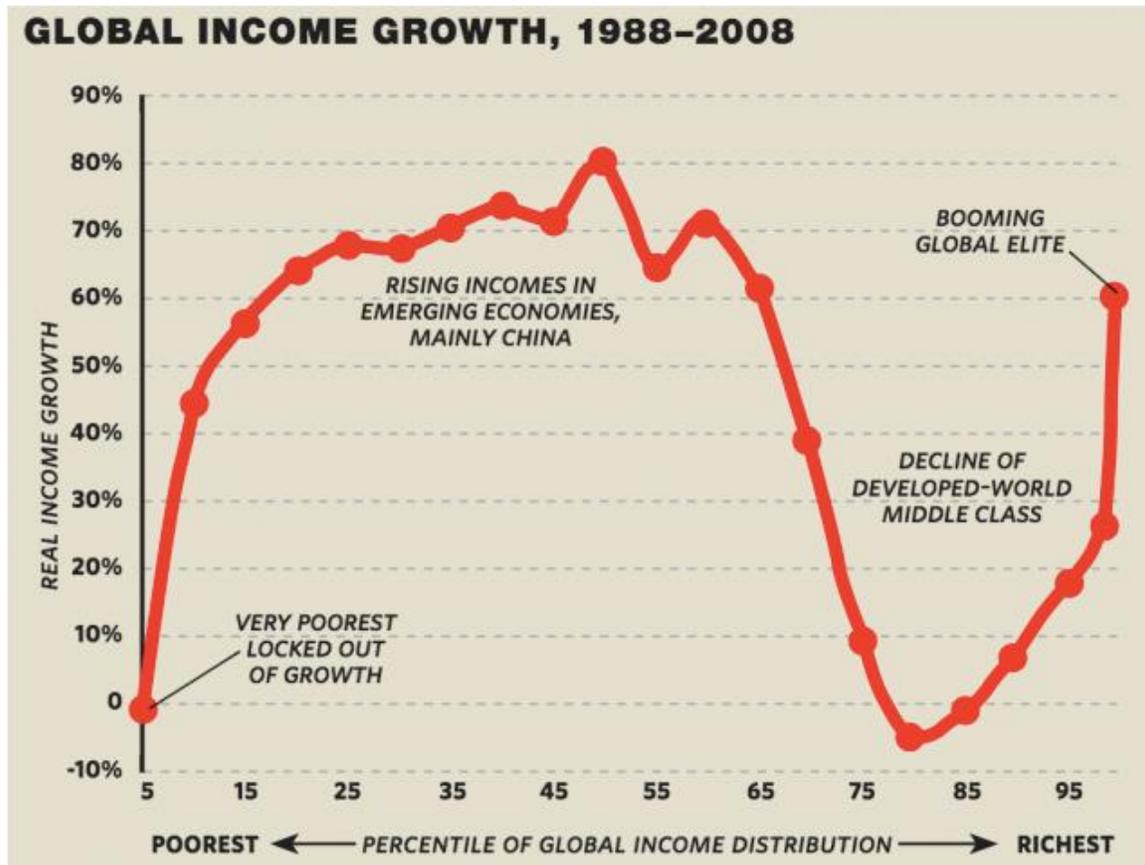


Figure 5: The above-listed image shows the rise of outsourcing and automation practices, which has led to a decline in manufacturing jobs in developed economies and a rise in these job sectors in developing economies.¹¹

The dissatisfaction and many voters have felt as they face economic insecurity has only grown since then. Wealth inequality levels are higher today than they were during the Gilded Age. This, coupled with the affirmative action policies seen in recent years, has led to anger and resentment by many white working-class voters. This voting bloc received much of the attention during the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections.

The politics of the Civil Rights Movement and the 2016 and 2020 presidential races is perhaps best explained through epistemic injustice, or the idea that people's knowledge or perspective is altogether dismissed because of features that deal with their identity.¹² In many ways, the political tensions that exist today are little different from the 1960s. People's experiences and political opinions are altogether dismissed because of their identity. White working-class voters whose jobs have been outsourced or automated in the last several decades are cast aside as angry and resentful. African Americans are depicted as lawless and anti-law enforcement. The reality is much more complicated.

The erosion of the humanities and the study of history have contributed to today's political divide. Rather than addressing the issues at hand, people are altogether dismissed before a debate can commence. Now, more than ever, students must learn the valuable lessons and skills history and the social sciences provide. The critical thinking skills students learn in history allow them to decipher bias, build empathy, and contribute to democratic dialogue.

Teaching Strategies

Analyzing Film and Texts

Students will read poems and newspaper articles. These readings will offer information on the importance of the humanities and history of Bodine High School's founding. By examining these texts, students will embrace the values history and the social studies teaches them.

Verbal and Written Debate

Much of the information will be given to the students through journals, magazines, government documents, and newspaper articles. Students will be reading and watching videos throughout the unit, as this is how many people receive their news today. Students will be exposed to various texts, films, podcasts, and many other forms of media. As students read and enhance their literacy skills, students will then complete writing assignments that they will use to debate each other and present each other with. This assignment allows for students to learn how to articulate their opinion in written and in verbal format.

By studying philosophy, politics, geography, and history, students will develop critical thinking skills and construct a verbal and written argument using textual evidence. These skills allow students to improve their reading and writing skills while also developing their ability to think logically and form a persuasive and evidence-based argument. By learning these skills, students will apply these concepts throughout periods of time to understand the past better and better understand our political and social climates today.

Reflection

Since this unit plan is taught at the end of their senior year, students will be required to reflect on the content and skills they learned in social studies over the previous two years. Students will be asked to reflect on the importance of being an informed, active citizen while also analyzing the utility and value of the humanities and social sciences in today's world. Ultimately, students will be required to think about how the topics they learned in IB History and Social Science apply to today's political landscape.

Voter Registration

To prepare students to become engaged in their local, regional, and global communities, they must be aware of the history of their community and nation. These topics can be used within the classroom to promote active, civic participation to encourage students to study the past to understand the present. This practice will result in students' ability to apply concepts and practices throughout history to understand the origin and workings of modern-day societies, cultures, and institutions. Understanding the past is crucial when understanding how the history of philosophy, geography, and culture impacts how our government and politics work in today's economic world, both nationally and globally.

Classroom Activities

The following lesson plans are listed and described below to ensure that students properly understand the unit's concepts. This list of activities is not an exhaustive list for this curriculum unit. (Note: SWBAT = Students will be able to; IOT= in order to).

Billy Collins Poem

Objective

SWBAT analyze Billy Collins' "The History Teacher" poem IOT evaluate the importance of the humanities and inf

Materials

- "The History Teacher" by Billy Collins

Procedure

Students will first read "The History Teacher" individually. Then, as a class, students will review each stanza of the poem. Lastly, students will describe the lessons they took away from a particular unit plan from IB History of the Americas or Social Science. Students will be asked to both explain the information from that unit plan and describe how it relates to a passage from the poem and the world today.

"A Graduating Class of Worldly Pioneers"

Objective

SWBAT analyze “A Graduating Class of Worldly Pioneers” IOT reflect on their time as a student at William W. Bodine High School for International Affairs.

Materials

- “A Graduating Class of Worldly Pioneers” article

Procedure

Students will read the article from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. The article discusses why Bodine High School was founded and its mission statement regarding a humanities- and civics-based education. Upon reading the article, students will be required to write a journal entry. In their writing response, students will be asked to reflect on their experience at Bodine High School by discussing the importance schools play in creating an informed citizenry.

Voter Registration

Objective

SWBAT register to vote IOT participate in local, state, and federal elections.

Materials

- PA voter registration application

Procedure

Throughout the year, eligible students will register to vote. Students will be required to complete research projects before each local, state, and federal election to ensure that they make an informed decision when going to the polls. Students will also encourage their peers to register to vote.

Resources

The resources that this curriculum unit used during the research process of this unit plan are listed below. The first three sections contain references that will benefit teachers across the United States. The last section contains materials that are specific to Pennsylvania and Philadelphia. Teachers should feel encouraged to research how redlining policies affected their state and city.

Annotated Bibliography for Teachers

Blight, David. "Lecture 1 – Introductions: Why Does the Civil War Era Have a Hold on American Historical Imagination?" New Haven: Yale University. Mp3.
<https://oyc.yale.edu/history/hist-119/lecture-1>. The American historian reviews the history of the US Civil War in this recorded lecture series.

Corak, Miles. "The Winners and Losers of Globalization, Branko Milanovic's New Book on Inequality Answers Two Important Questions." *Economics for Public Policy*. May 18, 2016. <https://mileskorak.com/2016/05/18/the-winners-and-losers-of-globalization-branko-milanovics-new-book-on-inequality-answers-two-important-questions/>. This article reviews how wealth inequality has surpassed levels dating to the Gilded Age.

Fricker, Miranda. "Miranda Fricker on Epistemic Injustice." Podcast by *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. This podcast discusses epistemic injustice and gives practical examples of how the theory can be understood.

Gao, Pengjie; Lee, Chang; and Murphy, Dermot. "Financing Dies in Darkness? The Impact of Newspaper Closures on Public Finance." *Journal of Financial Economics*. 2020. Volume 135, Number 2.
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3175555. This study shows the economic impact local newspapers have on their communities.

Grasswick, Heidi. "Feminist Social Epistemology." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2018. In her journal article, Grasswick discusses how epistemology relates to feminism.

Greenlee, Cynthia. "How History Textbooks Reflect America's Refusal to Reckon with Slavery." *Vox*. August 26, 2019.
<https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/8/26/20829771/slavery-textbooks-history>. This article talks about the descriptions of slavery in various American textbooks.

Jones, Sabrina and Mauer, Marc. *Race to Incarcerate: A Graphic Retelling*. New York: The New Press, 2013. Jones and Mauer analyze the history of mass incarceration.

Revere, Paul. *The Bloody Massacre Perpetrated in King Street Boston on March 5, 1770 by a Party of the 29th Regiment, 1770*. Print engraving with watercolor on laid paper, 25.8 x 33.4 centimeters. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/ppmsca.01657/>. Revere illustrates his account of the events of March 5, 1770.

Statues and Sculpture. Robert E. Lee Statue. 1920. Charlottesville, Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2019681371/>. Like this one of Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville, members of the confederacy were memorialized when statues were erected of them.

Prado, C. G. "Post-Truth." 19. Prado discusses the role truth and factual evidence play in today's democracy.

Student Reading List

Pariser, Eli. "Beware Online "Filter Bubbles." *TED*.
https://www.ted.com/talks/eli_pariser_beware_online_filter_bubbles/transcript?language=en. Pariser presents how today's search engines are harmful to democracy.

Collins, Billy. "The History Teacher." *Questions about Angels*. University of Pittsburgh Press.
<https://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/index.php%3Fdate=2002%252F03%252F12.html>. This poem shows the importance of the study of history.

Resources Specific to Philadelphia

"A Graduating Class of Worldly Pioneers." *Philadelphia Inquirer*. June 17, 1985. This article talks about the founding of Bodine High School and its mission.

Appendix

Below is a list of standards from the history and social studies section of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Education. These standards will be used as a guideline to allow students to think critically about the issue of mass incarceration.

Civics and Government

Standard - 5.2.12.C: Evaluate political leadership and public service in a republican form of government.

Standard - 5.3.12.J: Evaluate critical issues in various contemporary governments.

Economics

Standard - 6.1.12.B: Evaluate the economic reasoning behind a choice.

Standard - 6.3.12.A: Evaluate the costs and benefits of government decisions to provide public goods and services.

History

Standard - 8.1.12.C: Analyze, synthesize, and integrate historical data, creating a product that supports and appropriately illustrates inferences and conclusions drawn from research. (Reference RWSL Standard 1.8.11 Research)

Standard - 8.2.12.A: Evaluate the role groups and individuals from Pennsylvania played in the social, political, cultural, and economic development of the US and the world.

Reading Informational Text

Standard - CC.8.5.11-12.A: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

Standard - CC.8.5.11-12.C: Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Notes

¹ David Blight, "Lecture 1 – Introductions: Why Does the Civil War Era Have a Hold on American Historical Imagination?" Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, mp3, 43:06, <https://oyc.yale.edu/history/hist-119/lecture-1>.

² David Blight, "Lecture 1 – Introductions: Why Does the Civil War Era Have a Hold on American Historical Imagination?" Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, mp3, 43:06, <https://oyc.yale.edu/history/hist-119/lecture-1>.

³ Cynthia Greenlee, "How History Textbooks Reflect America's Refusal to Reckon with Slavery," *Vox*, August 26, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/8/26/20829771/slavery-textbooks-history>.

⁴ *Statues and Sculpture. Robert E. Lee Statue*, 1920, photo, 5 x 7 inches, Charlottesville, Virginia, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2019681371/>.

⁵ Paul Revere, *The Bloody Massacre Perpetrated in King Street Boston on March 5th 1770 by a Party of the 29th Regiment*, 1770, print engraving with watercolor on laid paper, 25.8 x 33.4 centimeters, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/ppmsca.01657/>.

⁶ Heidi Grasswick, "Feminist Social Epistemology," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (2018): 14.

⁷ Eli Pariser, "Beware Online 'Filter Bubbles,'" *TED*, https://www.ted.com/talks/eli_pariser_beware_online_filter_bubbles/transcript?language=en.

⁸ Gao, Pengjie; Lee, Chang; and Murphy, Dermot, "Financing Dies in Darkness? The Impact of Newspaper Closures on Public Finance," *Journal of Financial Economics*, 2020. Volume 135, Number 2, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3175555

⁹ C. G. Prado, "Post-Truth," 19.

¹⁰ Sabrina Jones and Marc Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate: A Graphic Retelling* (New York: The New Press, 2013), 7.

¹¹ Miles Corak, "The Winners and Losers of Globalization, Branko Milanovic's New Book on Inequality Answers Two Important Questions," *Economics for Public Policy*, May 18, 2016, <https://milesorak.com/2016/05/18/the-winners-and-losers-of-globalization-branko-milanovics-new-book-on-inequality-answers-two-important-questions/>.

¹² Miranda Fricker, “Miranda Fricker on Epistemic Injustice,” podcast by *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*.