

We Are Not Alone: Cold War (Black) Radical Unionism, Internationalism and the World After George Floyd

Abstract: This unit is created to help students connect the present with the past. Many of our students have been victims of state repression during the George Floyd protests, either as protesters or as organizers. Many of the methods of domestic state repression were shaped and created through the Cold War, namely through the McCarthy era. By examining the history of the various unions and organizations that existed during both phases of the Civil Rights Movement and how internationalism (being an ideological benchmark of the USSR) shifted the focus of the Civil Rights Movement. Students will benefit from this unit by gaining an appreciation of the power of international solidarity as evidenced by the George Floyd protests in 2020.

Keywords: USSR, solidarity, social movements, socialism, McCarthyism, unions

School Background:

Overbrook High School is a public four-year high school in West Philadelphia. Based on the 2022-2023 Student Enrollment and Demographics, there are 394 students that attend Overbrook High with 76% of students residing within the catchment area. 23% of students have an IEP, and 3% of students are English language learners. The ELA data for Keystone standardized testing reflects that 15% of students scored proficient. As per the most recent school survey, 100% of the students are categorized as economically disadvantaged. The attendance rate for students who have attended 95% or more enrolled days is 6% (based on 2020-21 data). The school schedule operates on a rotating block schedule for the first period, and then subsequent 54 minute period classes afterward. Overbrook High offers Honors classes to all of the students and has many athletic opportunities for students.

Introduction

The sun did what the sun does. The sun and I did not see eye to eye that day. The summer was on high broil, and I remember the fated impasse. I sat on my bike italicized, leaning. I looked at my Signal chat and I knew that I had the responsibility to warn. The police looked like ants at my distance, but my experienced eyes told me what was about to happen. I carted down the street and warned all passersby— *They are about to kettle! They are kettling us!* By the time I was under the overpass, a loud boom shook the ribcage of the structure. Another young man, no more than two years older than me, did not flinch when he got pierced by a rubber buckshot. ‘Nah, it's okay bro. I’ve seen worse’, he went on to say as he and his friend started to follow the receding waters

of the crowd around him. The spoke of my bike scratched my ankle as I struggled to get footing, and then the air got heavy.

That is when the drama began. We forgot about the ants marching around us. Pepper spray ribboned the air, masses of people wept in choir, we ran for the walls as the ants swept through the lanes. *I'd be damned if I get arrested if I got work tomorrow.* I left my bike behind, littered my poisoned cloth mask and began to climb. I couldn't tell you what carried me over the wall beyond the kindness of strangers that day.

The event of I-676 made citywide news. The protesters who surrendered were sprayed without mercy. My bike was taken to a bike shop in West Philadelphia. I took a shower, tucked in my feelings, and helped prepare my eighth graders' virtual graduation. The kindness of strangers.

We are approaching four years since the George Floyd Uprising. It is hard to look away from the fact that many of our students have participated in these protests, and many of our students faced arrest, flirted with illegalist tactics, and/or faced protest-related injuries due to state retaliation. Outside of physical protest, the Uprisings seemed to legitimize the so-called democratic "marketplace of ideas" digitally. Conversations about anti-blackness, transphobia, and police accountability that were considered "fringe" started to eclipse the 'Overton window' of political discourse and while still contentious, are treated more as social facts than rhetoric.

There's a new election cycle coming. During the 2016 Trump-Clinton election, many firebrand articles regarding socialism proliferated. With the rise of Justice Democrats and their democratic socialist figurehead, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, socialism was not propelled as a specter, but as a social marker of the good-willed-yet-naive Millennial middle class generation. With these social identifiers, it is easy to view socialism as largely a "white middle class" ambition if one is not connected to history.

Where is socialism now in public discourse? Not much to be found. Many socialist and left-leaning organizations have been under heavy intelligence scrutiny after the George Floyd protests. The Pew Research Center shows that positive views for socialism and capitalism have had modest declines post-George Floyd¹. This political ambivalence is telling and dangerous, and it can be difficult to track the direction of the future of the nation. The same digital "marketplace of ideas" that allowed for anti-racist discourse during the Floyd uprisings also permits misogynist, racist, and increasingly xenophobic content as well. In the midst of the

¹ "Modest Declines in Positive Views of 'Socialism' and 'Capitalism' in U.S." 2022. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/09/19/modest-declines-in-positive-views-of-socialism-and-capitalism-in-u-s/>.

power struggle of ideas, it is important that Black students understand that history is the arbiter of truth. The fight for social justice will not end with the Floyd Uprising, and it did not start with the Civil Rights movement. It is also important that many Black activists, organizers, and educators were deeply tied to socialist ideals— despite the channels of racism and anti-communism flowing strongly against them. After surviving getting tear-gassed and kettled by the police, I felt alone and I'm certain that many school-aged youth who were trapped on I-676 felt the same way, and the bitter truth of the situation is that no amount of financial restitution will compensate for the political and social loneliness that we felt at that exact moment.

It is most important to let our students know the history of repression is the other side of collective social victories. Russia is a dirty word in “post”-Cold War America, and with the current war against Ukraine, it can be hard for educators to teach beyond the current “baggage” that the country has. However, Russia proved to be inspirational to many Black visionaries and Cold War anti-communism changed the direction of the Civil Rights movement. This unit will aim to highlight how the Civil Rights movement started with internationalist roots and then capitulated to domestic demands during the Cold War Era. Furthermore, this perspective will be juxtaposed with how the George Floyd Uprisings started as a domestic incident that had taken on international appeals for justice. In order to support these goals, students' reflection of their involvement in the protests and their perspectives of the outcome will help dimensionalize the impact of the historical event.

The Internationalist Roots of the Civil Rights Movement (1000 words)

The political disposition of Black Americans changed after World War II, due to the failed expectations of social equality following their participation in World War I. Many Black soldiers were disillusioned that white American officers would perpetuate racist stereotypes to comrade British officers during the War that “all Negroes have tails, they are savage, diseased, illiterate, and they will rape their women”². Fighting for democracy internationally while being a victim to a Jim Crow army became a contradiction too much for Black American soldiers to stomach and as a result became more voracious for social and economic parity domestically. Scholar James Gilbert Cassedy in his article, “African Americans and the American Labor movement”, details the development of Black American growth by noting:

The advance of African Americans in American industry during World War II was the result of the nation's wartime emergency need for workers and soldiers. In 1943 the

² Anderson, Carol. *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* Cambridge University Press, 2003, <https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/eyes-off-prize-united-nations-african-american/docview/37788823/se-2> (accessed May 5, 2024).

National War Labor Board issued an order abolishing pay differentials based on race, pointing out, "America needs the Negro . . . the Negro is necessary for winning the war."³ This social discontent inspired political will among the Black working class that helped birth the rise of Civil Rights Unionism, a coalition of Black-led unions in the United States that fought against Jim Crow laws and discrimination domestically and internationally, with left-led, often Communist Party affiliated cadres taking the lead. Many Black workers had an inclusive vision for justice that was shaped by the multi-racial (yet often white-led), multi-ethnic Communist Party and internationalism has a deep tradition within the socialist tradition as a response to capitalist hegemony. In the Constitution of the First International, Marx contended "That the emancipation of labour is neither a local nor a national, but a social problem, embracing all countries in which modern society exists, and depending for its solution on the concurrence, practical and theoretical, of the most advanced countries"⁴. Living by the internationalist principle, for instance, in the first decade of the 20th century, the white-led Los Angeles Socialist Party built relationships with their Partido Liberal Mexican comrades and led a strike in Cananea in order to protest the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz⁵. Internally, the Communist Party's internationalism was at times at odds with other Left organizations as it was lock-step responsive to the needs of the Soviets and shaped its internal party policy based on geopolitical developments to encroaching imperialist nations. This became especially true with the National Negro Congress which provided a much needed counterbalance to the "at home" NAACP.

The National Negro Congress (NNC), which was founded in 1937, was important for dimensionalizing the early Civil Rights Movement and expanding the political perspective of the more "liberal" NAACP, despite suspicions by the latter organization that the Congress would be "sold down the river by Reds" as it was affiliated with the Communist Party⁶. The relationship between the Communist Party and the NAACP was tense throughout the 1930's, despite many Black workers having a strong relationship with the Party. The National Negro Congress was led by famous Socialist revolutionary leader A. Philip Randolph and it challenged the NAACP's myopic legalist strategy in that it recognized the relationship between (African) enslavement, American Jim Crowism, and the capitalist order and envisioned a political strategy that was not dependent on the transmuting whims of the Democratic and Republican party⁷. Author Carol Anderson in her book *Eyes Off the Prize*, elaborates on the political vision of the Congress by noting:

³Gilbert, James. 2022. "African Americans and the American Labor Movement." National Archives. <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1997/summer/american-labor-movement.html>.

⁴"THE CONSTITUTION OF THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL." 1973. In Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: An Introduction to Their Lives and Work, translated by Joshua Kunitz. N.p.: Monthly Review Press.

⁵Gershon, Livia. 2022. "Internationalism and Racism in the Labor Movement," JStor Daily. <https://daily.jstor.org/internationalism-and-racism-in-the-labor-movement/>.

⁶Anderson, page 20

⁷Anderson, page 21

Rather than depending solely on the New Deal, the courts, or the electoral process, the solution to black equality lay in a strategy that would “place human rights above property rights.” The NNC, therefore, urged a “united front” of labor, civil rights, and other progressive forces to confront the racial, political, and economic disarray in Depression-era America⁸.

Due to the Nazi-Soviet Aggression Pact, many Black Reds were at a political standstill due to the Communist Party’s internal policy, which left many like A. Philip Randolph, a persona-non-grata in the NNC. Specifically, due to the fact that he was suspicious about many Cadres’ idealism about the USSR and the country’s relationship with selling oil to Fascist Italy (which was used to invade Ethiopia), therefore highlighting how the Party was not deeply invested in Black welfare⁹. Although A. Phillip Randolph left the NNC, he was instrumental in creating a watershed moment for Black Civil rights through the creation of the March on Washington Committee that forced the hand of then-President Franklin Roosevelt’s issuing of executive order 8802 and creating a Fair Employment Practices Committee, which banned discrimination in the defense industry and helped narrow the black and white wage gap¹⁰.

Many Black-led, left-leaning organizers understood that the relationship between internationalism and the sprawling and extractive capitalist political economy threatened the liberation of Black people everywhere, and had an inclusive vision of freedom that included people of the African diaspora. Many Black workers flocked to the racially inclusive and progressive Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) instead of the racist, conservative American Federation of Labor¹¹. While the divided nature of the American North and South did create barriers for these workers to navigate, it did not inhibit the visionary processes of these organizations. For example, the United Public Workers of America (UPWA) is a sterling example of this wide-eyed vision of political thoroughness, as Black organizers who were often affiliated with the Communist Party or other left-leaning organizations, fought to not only democratize public sector and governmental institutions as a means to protect Black social mobility but also organized workers on the Panama Canal to resist the exploitative American

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Bunch, Ralph J. “Notes on the Third National Negro Congress,” April 28, 1940, Box 166, File “Carnegie-Myrdal Study Negroes in America, March 22-June 30, 1940,” Papers of the NAACP; Ralph Bunche, “Critique of the National Negro Congress,” 1940, Reel i, Bunche; A. Philip Randolph, “Why I Would Not Stand for Reelection for President of the National Negro Congress,” press release, May 4, 1940, Box 444, File “National Negro Congress: 1940-44,” Papers of the NAACP.

¹⁰ Heideman, Paul. 2020. “How McCarthyism and the Red Scare Hurt the Black Freedom Struggle.” Jacobin. <https://jacobin.com/2020/05/mccarthyism-red-scare-civil-rights-movement>.

¹¹ Bruno, David Patrick. 2023. The end of solidarity: America’s postwar turn right and the decline of the CIO and new deal liberalism. Ph.D. diss., St. John's University (New York), <https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/end-solidarity-america-s-postwar-turn-right/docview/2833534074/se-2> (accessed May 5, 2024).

wage system.¹² Intellectuals and workers also came together to create the Council of African Affairs, famously led by icons such as Paul Robeson and WEB DuBois¹³.

Anti-Communism and the Domestic Shift of the Civil Rights Movement (1000 words)

While there was the first wave of the Red Scare from 1917-1920, the Truman administration dramatically changed the course of the Civil Rights Movement as we know it today. The end of the Second World War not only changed the ambitions of Black Americans, it also created a global contest of power between the USSR and the United States with the start of the Cold War in 1945. While there were deep ideological differences between the contesting superpowers, it was convergent cultural rules, not only divergent political economies, that set the stage for the political drama. Scholar John David Skrentny elaborates on this political fact when he writes:

What is important is that both the American and Soviet political leaders perceived a *shared* cultural rule let loose in the world: humans of all races were of equal worth and equal dignity. They saw this rule being stringently applied to any country claiming a leadership role— regardless of that country’s ideology.¹⁴

Skrentny delves deeper into this political reality in that the *entire* United States was not invested in the world’s perception, especially the American South, even though American racism and discrimination were constantly employed by the USSR as propaganda to delegitimize the authority of the United States. Scholar Doug McAdam elaborates that “American racism suddenly took on international significance as an effective weapon of the Communists”¹⁵. It is documented by the State Department that in the early 1950’s, about half of the Soviet propaganda was centered around the “race issue”¹⁶. The divide between the Federal government and the South harkens back to ghosts of the Civil War, and in regards to how they handled social repression against Black Uprising, the Federal government was averse to using troops while the South was much less averse to repression, likely still stuck in the early American isolationism that defined foreign policy before World War II¹⁷. Furthermore, for politicians like Alabama sheriff Bull Connor, the complete ignorance of world opinion and complete investment of their white Southern audience may have encouraged violent acts of repression on Black rebellion as it did not threaten their political legitimacy. In reality, it may have enhanced it¹⁸.

¹² Heideman, Paul. 2020. “How McCarthyism and the Red Scare Hurt the Black Freedom Struggle.” Jacobin. <https://jacobin.com/2020/05/mccarthyism-red-scare-civil-rights-movement>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Skrentny, John David. “The Effect of the Cold War on African-American Civil Rights: America and the World Audience, 1945-1968.” *Theory and Society* 27, no. 2 (1998): 242. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/657868>.

¹⁵ McAdam, Doug. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930- 1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

¹⁶ Nichols, Lee. *Breakthrough on the Color Front* (New York: Random House, 1954), 9

¹⁷ Skrentny, page 243.

¹⁸ Skrentny, page 262

However, President Roosevelt set the terms of engagement for a moral democracy by supporting the Declaration by the United Nations of 1942, and then again in 1945 when delegates around the world created the Charter of the United Nations which specifically included human rights and racial equality as moral hallmarks of the organization¹⁹. Acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson to the Fair Employment Practices Commission elaborated on the pressure to uphold these ideals in the presence of the expectations of a newfound world audience:

We are reminded over and over by some foreign newspapers and spokesmen, that our treatment of various minorities leaves much to be desired. While sometimes these pronouncements are exaggerated and unjustified, they all too frequently point with accuracy to some form of discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin. Frequently we find it next to impossible to formulate a satisfactory answer to our critics in other countries; the gap between the things we stand for in principle and the facts of a particular situation may be too wide to bridge²⁰.

The year 1947 proved to be an important year for the shift of trajectory for the Civil Rights movement as we know it. On January 6, 1947, Truman created the President's Committee of Civil Rights and by June in the same year, Truman addressed the NAACP at the Lincoln Memorial on Civil Rights issues. Prima facie, this seems like progressive development, however in March of that same year, Truman signed Executive Order 9835, a loyalty oath for federal employees endangering many left-led Unions who did the grassroots organizing for Civil Rights²¹. Along with two million employees who were implicated by the order to be evaluated by the House Un-American Activities Committee, many organizations like the National Negro Congress, the Council of African Affairs, as well as the Communist Party were negatively impacted by the Executive Order. The Taft-Hartley Act gutted many left-led unions and many liberal unions like the CIO which had held many far-left organizers at arms length further distanced themselves after the Act. The government was not solely responsible for dismantling grassroots organizations; many organizations such as the NAACP "cleaned shop" and purged suspected Communists even to the point where then-Vice President, Judge Jane Bolin, resigned because the priority of anti-Communist flushing overcame the fight for civil rights (in her opinion)²².

In order to protect against state-repression, many Black grassroots organizations appealed to patriotism and became explicitly "anti-Kremlin" and kowtowed to state respectability during the McCarthy era. However, many "Old Left" organizers who were affiliated with the Communist

¹⁹ Green, James F. *The United Nations and Human Rights* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1959), 17.

²⁰ *President's Committee on Civil Rights, To Secure These Rights* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office 1947), 146

²¹ Heideman, Paul. 2020. "How McCarthyism and the Red Scare Hurt the Black Freedom Struggle." *Jacobin*. <https://jacobin.com/2020/05/mccarthyism-red-scare-civil-rights-movement>.

²² Greenberg, Cheryl. 1988. "The Black/Jewish Dilemma in the Early Cold War," conference paper, American Historical Association—Pacific Coast Branch.

Party played a crucial role in the development of the movement as we know it today, even those the political scope of their affiliated organizations had narrower, yet important, ambitions. The Johnson, Kennedy, and Eisenhower administrations worked very hard to control the public perception of American racism for the sake of its international reputation; however, with the assassination of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, and the Vietnam War, U.S. reputation was seriously injured. The independence movements of African nations in the 1960's also changed the character of the world forum and provided the opportunity for left-led Black grassroots organizations to expand their focus and to develop, such as the famous Black Panther Party. As France, Britain, Belgium and other colonial powers "relinquished" their former colonies in name (albeit neocolonialism through burgeoning financial international apparati did maintain serious political leverage for these "former" colonial powers), the fact that the United States did not severely criticize their colonial allies was enough for the USSR to indict their adversary's commitment to the cultural rules of social justice to the world audience. The United States refused to severely criticize their allies for fear that acknowledging their expanding participation in Empire might create an opportunity for Soviet influence worldwide and decided to propagate their advancements in domestic civil rights (as well as to criticize the USSR's draconian suppression of the Hungarian Revolution)²³. Historian Paul Lauren summarizes a serious contradiction of political realities by saying, "...[T]he same Cold War that actually assisted the movement for racial equality in the United States thus helped retard decolonization in the world at large"²⁴. While initially this seems convincing, I'd argue that the Cold War complicated and even inhibited the Civil Rights Movement in the long term. The anti-communist animus of the McCarthy era inspired state repression like none other, empowering figures like J. Edgar Hoover to covertly and systematically dismantle Black and Left grassroots organizations throughout the United States and beyond. During the Black Lives Matter Era of Black uprising, real and imagined state surveillance unnerved many grassroots organizations and many organizers' lives were deeply affected by state repression.

George Floyd: From Domestic Tragedy to International Solidarity (1000 words)

It has been four years since the murder of George Floyd by police officers in Minneapolis became the spark-plug for social uprising throughout the nation. The death of George Floyd was an emotional trigger for many Black Americans because of the enduring history of state-sanctioned murder of Black people by police officers and other state functionaries. American police have a terrible international reputation as well, killing "more people in the first 24 days of 2015 than British and Welsh police have killed in the last 24 years"²⁵. Concomitant with the high rate of American police violence relative to the world, American police also had a terrible track-record for police accountability. In Minneapolis, the proverbial "Ground Zero" of the

²³ Eisenhower, Dwight. 1965. *Waging Peace*, 112.

²⁴ Lauren, Paul. 1998. *Power and Prejudice*, 2

²⁵ Hirschfield, P.J. (2015), *Lethal Policing: Making Sense of American Exceptionalism*. *Sociological Forum*, 30: 1109-1117. <https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12200>

incident, protests escalated from peaceful demonstrations to violent outrage as the police made two controversial decisions that changed the impact of the protests forever: they decided to use excessive force through tear gas and rubber bullets on peaceful protesters and they decided to protect the 3rd Precinct building that left local businesses and buildings vulnerable to looters and arsonists, eventually costing the city of Minneapolis millions of dollars²⁶. It's important to note that protesters still accosted the building regardless.

The domestic protests that happened throughout the United States after the death of George Floyd *resonated* with other social movements and actions worldwide. Resonance, in this instance, is used in a theoretical context employed by Hartmut Rosa that argues that resonance is “an experiential mode of relating to the world that is opposed to alienation, can help us heal the relationship to the world around us, a broken relationship based on sharpening social divisions and systemic inequalities”²⁷. In resisting social alienation and political anomie, many activists directly engaged with history through the destruction of statues and public art that had direct ties to the legacy of white supremacy. On June 7th, 2020, during the whirlwind of the Floyd protests in America, organizers in the United Kingdom took history into their own hands by toppling and dragging the statue of Edward Colston, an infamous slave trader, into the Bristol Harbor²⁸. This came after years of petitioning, protesting, and consciousness-raising about the history of Colton with no avail, and the Floyd protests gave the moment for people to rise to the occasion to engage with collective memory and history on their own terms. While many disgruntled members of the Conservative Party claimed that this act was a moment of “erasure”, historian David Olusoga set the record straight when he commented:

The historical symmetry of this moment is poetic. A bronze effigy of an infamous and prolific slave trader dragged through the streets of a city built on the wealth of that trade, and then dumped, like the victims of the Middle Passage, into the water. Colston lies at the bottom of a harbour in which the ships of the triangular slave trade once moored, by the dockside on to which their cargoes were unloaded²⁹

The Colston statue proved to be a violation of public space, just as the Robert Milligan statue became a violation of public space, as both statues invoked both the history and presence of colonialism in British society. It is said by famous philosopher Robert Musil that “there is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument” and yet that does not detract from its potential violence that it invokes upon other people, and when people destroy public works it is, as what scholar Ana Christina Mendez elaborates, “making it newly visible for what is and was, or may

²⁶ Caputo, Angela, Will Craft, and Curtis Gilbert. 2020. “What happened at Minneapolis' 3rd Precinct — and what it means.” APM Reports. <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2020/06/30/the-precinct-is-on-fire-what-happened-at-minneapolis-3rd-precinct-and-what-it-means>.

²⁷ Rosa, H. (2019). *Resonance: A sociology of our relationship to the world*. Polity.

²⁸ Mendes, A. C. (2021). From “Crisis” to Imagination: Putting White Heroes Under Erasure Post-George Floyd. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 21(5), 394–400. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15327086211028677>

²⁹ Olusoga, David. 2020. “The toppling of Edward Colston's statue is not an attack on history. It is history | David Olusoga.” *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/08/edward-colston-statue-history-slave-trader-bristol-protest>.

newly be understood to be, as a reminder of acts of violence that may be understood to be in many ways ongoing”³⁰.

Other than statue defacement, international protests after the murder of George Floyd played a huge role in the movement for police accountability. While demonstrators in countries like Italy, Denmark, Germany and Poland all used U.S. based slogans such as “Black Lives Matter” and “I Can’t Breathe”, they also used the George Floyd protests to highlight the particular political inequities present in their respective countries. In Italy and Denmark, there were connections of refugees and migrants to the George Floyd protests, while Germany connected structural racism to its colonial past³¹. German activists when trying to dispel the myth of a (not) racist Germany, post-1945, had to navigate a rhetorical double-edged sword by using George Floyd messaging as a discursive vehicle as it “it opened a window of opportunity for advancing the anti-racist struggle, yet it also risked perpetuating a widespread narrative that racism and police violence were issues of importance predominantly outside of Germany”³². Poland proved to be an interesting case, due to the fact that it does not have a historical complicity in colonialism nor does it have a large Black population. It is worth noting that all 17 of Poland’s BLM protests happened within a span of two weeks with largely white leadership who had not been formally attached to a Black Lives Matter organization proper; however, most U.S. slogans and chants were recited in English, not Polish and there was an opportunity for the public to revisit its own racist history through the “Stop Calling Me Murzyn” campaign (a traditional term for Black people in Poland)³³. Either through public defacement of public art, protest, or the creation of murals from Kenya to Palestine, many organizers, activists, and artists took the opportunity to latch on to the essential idea that our struggles are interconnected and we cannot measurably have a democratic society unless we fight for it³⁴.

Unit Content and Teaching Strategies

While the Floyd Uprising is still recent enough to evoke students’ memory, alternatively, the Cold War is a daunting subject even for history scholars and the topic of unionism may seem abstract for high school students to understand. This unit’s content is very dense, and teaching strategies are going to be critical for the transfer of knowledge and hopefully, for students to take

³⁰ Mendes, A. C. (2021). From “Crisis” to Imagination: Putting White Heroes Under Erasure Post-George Floyd. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 21(5), 397-8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15327086211028677>

³¹ Milman, Noa, Folashade Ajayi, Donatella d. Porta, Nicole Doerr, Piotr Kocyba, Anna Lavizzari, Herbert Reiter, et al. 2021. *Black Lives Matter in Europe: Transnational Diffusion, Local Translation and Resonance of Anti-racist Protest in Germany, Italy, Denmark and Poland*.4.: Deutsches Zentrum für Integrations- und Migrationsforschung DeZIM e.V. https://www.rassismusmonitor.de/fileadmin/user_upload/NaDiRa/Pdfs/DeZIM_Research_Notes__06_-_Black_Lives_Matter_in_Europe.pdf.

³² Ibid, page 9.

³³ Ibid, page27.

³⁴ Lang, Cady. 2022. “What the Artists Behind George Floyd Murals Around the World Want Us to Remember.” *Time*. <https://time.com/6180773/george-floyd-murals/>.

ownership of their learning. The reason why this unit was created was to help provide a through line from the recent past to the very distant past and to show how fractures and divisions between movements are not a recent development or a “new thing” that happened out of thin air. Group antagonisms are natural in social movements, and some may even argue that they are necessary for these movements to develop. It is important for students to understand the social conditions that gave rise to these groups, track the development of these groups, and analyze the relationships that exist between these organizations that had similar “big picture” visions of justice but contrasting strategies. These pursuits will be supported by the following teaching strategies:

1. Journaling
2. Timeline
3. Text Rendering
4. Pedagogical Similes
5. Three by 3's
6. KWL Chart

Classroom Activities

This unit is created to support six 84 minute classes over the course of six weeks in A/B block scheduling. Due to the flipped classroom structure, it is expected that students will work on this unit inside and outside of the classroom.

Lesson 1: George Floyd Past and Present

CCCS (Common Core Curriculum Standard): CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10

Objective(s): SWBAT to reflect upon their past experience with George Floyd protests in order to examine past and current American social values and contrasting experiences with their classmates

Materials:

- Powerpoint Presentation
- Notebooks for Journaling

Time: 54 minutes

Classroom Set-Up: Students could work in rows, however, in my personal classroom set-up, students are in groups of six. Students may modify seating to work with pairs as they see necessary.

Lesson Structure:

Do Now (15 minutes):

- Students will write about the following prompt(s):
 - Reflect on the murder of George Floyd, how has your reaction to his death changed as a child to a young adult?

- Were you or someone you know involved in the George Floyd protests? Write about your experience as a short story.
- Students will have the opportunity to answer one or both of the following questions for the duration of the 15 minute period. Due to the culture of one's learning environment, students may write for the allotted time or given the directions to write ten to fifteen sentences.

Group Discussion (25 minutes):

- Pair and Share: After the journaling, students will have the opportunity to talk with each other and to read their journal entries to each other. The listening student will write down three adjectives that describe the tone of the journal article while the student reads.
 - If the student does not want to read with another student, the author of the journal article will come up with three adjectives to describe the mood of the article
- The class will compile their chosen adjectives and by process of elimination and voting, choose their top three. Students will share their experiences with the George Floyd protests based on their relationship with the adjectives presented.
- **Exit Ticket (14 minutes):** What did you learn about your classmates? How did the lesson influence your perspective on the George Floyd Protests?

Lesson 2: Understanding the Cold War

CCCS (Common Core Curriculum Standard): CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10

Objective(s): **SWBAT** analyze and track the development of the Cold War IOT make new connections to how it has changed modern protest culture

Materials:

- Powerpoint Presentation
- Note Making/Note Taking Form
- YouTube Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6THwqI5c6w>

Time: 54 minutes

Classroom Set-Up: Students could work in rows, however, in my personal classroom set-up, students are in groups of six. Students may modify seating to work in pairs as they see necessary.

Lesson Structure:

- **Do Now (15 minutes):** Students will complete a KWL Chart on the Cold War. The teacher may create the option for students to complete the “K” (or “Know”) and “W” (“What I Want to Know”) section for students to do independently, or may assign students the option to complete the “K” section independently with the “W” section in pairs with a fellow student.

- **Guided Practice (20 minutes):** Students will watch a YouTube video on the development of the Cold War. Students will be expected to fill out a “Note Taking/Note Making” Guided Notes.
 - **Teacher’s Note:** Allow for extra time for students to make their final notes after the video.
- **Group Discussion (10 minutes):** Students will discuss their “Note Taking/Note Making” Chart with their classmates and discuss important facts and questions that stood out. They will complete the “L” section of their chart (What I Learned) during the classroom discussion.
- **Exit Ticket (5 minutes):** Students will complete one of the following similes:
 - If Russia is like a prowling lion, America is like _____.
 - If the United Nations is a wrestling ring, the USSR is like _____ and America is like _____.
 - The USSR wouldn’t forgive America and Britain for trying to destroy the Russian Revolution, America wouldn’t forgive the USSR for the Nazi-Soviet Pact. They are like _____.

Lesson 3: Timeline Assignment

CCCS (Common Core Curriculum Standard): CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1

Objective(s): SWBAT examine the events, happenings, and media between the 1930’s to the 1950s in order to accurately contextualize World War II, the Cold War and the Civil Rights movement

Materials:

- Construction Paper
- Markers, Pens, Construction Paper
- Chromebook
- Grass by Carl Sandburg

Time: 54 minutes

Classroom Set-Up: Groups of six are necessary for this assignment

Lesson Structure:

- **Do Now (15 minutes):** Students will do a text rendering of the poem “Grass” by Carl Sandburg. Students will be instructed to highlight literary devices in order to determine the theme present in the poem.

- Students will be instructed to answer the following prompt: Do humans make time or does time make humans? How does the presence of grass challenge our concepts of history?
- **Direct Instruction (10 minutes):** The instructor will give an overview of the timeline that this unit will cover (1930's-1955). Students will be tasked to name:
 - Six major political events (three from the USSR and three from the USA)
 - Three major literary works
 - Three media related works (music, movies, etc)
 - Three major "icons" (Very Important Person) during the time period
- **Independent Practice:** Students will be tasked to put these items on their Construction Paper and they will present to the class. Due to the intensity of the project, this project may take two days. Students will present their project to the class.
- **Exit Ticket (10 minutes suggested):** Students will choose one historical event, one media related work, and one "icon" that they did not have on their project that they learned from another group.

Lesson 4: African American Soldiers during WWII (Day 1)

CCCS (Common Core Curriculum Standard): CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1

Objective(s): SWBAT examine the historical importance of African American soldiers during WWII IOT to frame how they shaped the attitudes of the Civil Rights Movement

Materials:

- Students will read "Song of Spain" by Langston Hughes
- Langston Hughes' wartime reporting on African American soldiers during the Spanish Civil War

Time: 54 minutes

Classroom Set-Up: Students could work in rows, however, in my personal classroom set-up, students are in groups of six. Students may modify seating to work in pairs as they see necessary.

Lesson Structure:

- **Do Now (25 minutes):** The instructor will give a brief overview about the Spanish Civil War. Students will read and text render the "Song of Spain" by Langston Hughes. Students have the option to:
 - Write a poem that responds to the speaker of the poem.
 - Respond to the following prompt: What is the role of the worker in this poem? Why is it important that the poem is focused on the "worker" knowing the context of the Spanish Civil War?"
 - Students may opt to do this as a Pair and Share activity.

- **Independent Practice (25 minutes):** Students will read the LiteraryHub article “When Langston Hughes Went to Report to the Civil War”. and answer reading questions related to the reading.
- **Exit Ticket (4 minutes):** If you were to use one word to describe Langston Hughes’ attitude about his reporting, what would it be?

Lesson 5: African American Soldiers during World War II (Day 2)

CCCS (Common Core Curriculum Standard): CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1

Objective(s): SWBAT examine the historical importance of African American soldiers during WWII IOT to frame how they shaped the attitudes of the Civil Rights Movement

Materials:

- James Thompson's Letter to the Pittsburgh Courier
- Powerpoint Presentation
- Excerpt from "Eyes Off the Prize" by Carol Anderson

Time: 54 minutes

Classroom Set-Up: Students could work in rows, however, in my personal classroom set-up, students are in groups of six. Students may modify seating to work in pairs as they see necessary.

Lesson Structure:

- **Do Now (10 minutes):** Students will read James Thompson's Letter to the Pittsburgh Courier. At the door, students will pick up a number from 1-9. Students will read Thompson's Letter to the Pittsburgh Courier. As the letter is "chunked" into nine sections, students will draw a picture capturing the main essence of the number that they took at the door.
- **Guided Practice (20 minutes):** Afterwards, students will vote for the best drawing in each number. After each drawing is chosen, the instructor will line the photos in order of the reading and then read the letter in sequence. Students will then write a short reflection (5-7 sentences) about what they learned about the political aims of African American soldiers.
- **Independent Practice (20 minutes):** Students will read an excerpt of "Eyes Off the Prize" that details African American WWII soldiers' wartime experiences. Students will then compare and contrast the excerpt with James Thompson's letter.
- **Exit Ticket (4 minutes):** Students will respond to the following prompt in two to three sentences: If you were an African American soldier fighting in World War II, how would you define Double Victory? Answer the question in three to five sentences.

Lesson 6: The Communist Party, Unionism, and the Civil Rights Movement WebQuest

CCCS (Common Core Curriculum Standard): CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8

Objective(s): SWBAT understand the relationship between the Communist Party and emerging Unions during the 1930s and 1940's IOT analyze the development of the Civil Rights Movement

Materials:

- Powerpoint Presentation

Time: 54 minutes

Classroom Set-Up: Students could work in rows, however, in my personal classroom set-up, students are in groups of six. Students may modify seating to work in pairs as they see necessary.

Lesson Structure:

- **Direct Instruction (10 minutes):** The instructor will introduce historical terms such as The Truman Doctrine, McCarthyism, and the major organizations (CIO, Negro National Congress, NAACP, CPUSA, Council of African Affairs, and UPWA) that played a role during the 1930's and 1940s.
- **Independent Practice:** Students will do their webquest for the rest of the period. Students will then have to write a research paper focusing on the relationship of two of the aforementioned organizations and their development in the Civil Rights Movement.
- ****Teacher Note**:** Due to the highly independent nature of this assignment, it will be suggested that students have two days to complete their webquest, and three days to write their research paper. However, the timeline and page amount is at the personal discretion of the instructor and the needs of their school.

Lesson 7: George Floyd and International Support (Day 1)

CCCS (Common Core Curriculum Standard): CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1

Objective(s): SWBAT evaluate the history of the George Floyd Protests and examine how activists in other countries showed support against police brutality.

Materials:

- Powerpoint Presentation
- "How George Floyd Died and What Happened Next", video by *The New York Times*

-
Time: 54 minutes

Classroom Set-Up:

Lesson Structure:

- **Do Now (10 minutes):** Students will watch the video “How George Floyd Died and What Happened Next”. Afterwards, students will respond to the following prompt: After watching the video, what are some events that you learned about the murder of George Floyd that you did not know from before?
- **Guided Instruction (35 minutes):** Students are going to do an Iceberg project that examines the underlying causes of the George Floyd protest. Students will do independent research and then present their findings to the class.

Lesson 8: George Floyd and International Support (Day 2)

CCCS (Common Core Curriculum Standard): CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2

Objective(s): SWBAT evaluate the history of the George Floyd Protests and examine how activists in other countries showed support against police brutality

Materials:

- Powerpoint Presentation

Time: 54 minutes

Classroom Set-Up: Students could work in rows, however, in my personal classroom set-up, students are in groups of six. Students may modify seating to work in pairs as they see necessary.

Lesson Structure:

- **Direct Instruction (10 minutes):** Instructor will present how different nations (Germany, Poland, and Italy) supported the George Floyd protests in relation to their own social issues.
- **Guided Instruction (44 minutes):** Students will research a country of their choosing and how they responded to the George Floyd protests of 2020. They will create a poster detailing their nation’s key protest organizations that took leadership during the George Floyd protests, how they used the George Floyd protests to elevate their social issue, and the challenges that they had while protesting.

Appendix

Common Core Reading Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1- Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2- Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7- Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8- Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10- Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1-Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

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