

Document Based Lesson Plan

How do the Social Issues of the 1920's Compare to Current Issues Today?"

High School Level

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Summary:

In this document based question, students get to look at the social issues of the 1920's. They are then asked to write an essay that asks to what extent did the issues of the 1920's compare to what contemporary America is dealing with today.

Time Allotted:

One to Two 60 minute class periods.

Materials Needed:

Set of Documents, paper, writing utensils.

Directions:

Each student is to get a set of documents. To conserve paper, another way of distributing the document is to have them posted around the room in 'stations'. Number the students off into equal groups of students per documents (i.e....six document stations, six groups of students.) Give ample time to read and take notes (15-20 minutes) on the documents and then rotate clockwise until all documents have been viewed by all the groups. Allow for a class discussion to debrief the students' findings on the documents. The students are to write an essay, incorporating the documents to support their answer on the following:

How do the social issues of the 1920's compare to current issues today?

Document A: Speech by Hiram W. Evans, Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan.

Background information: Texas dentist, Hiram Evans assumed leadership of the organization in 1926. In this speech, he reveals that the Klan was fundamentally a protest against all ills associated with modern culture.

". . . The Klan, therefore, has now come to speak for the great mass of Americans of the old pioneer stock. We believe that it does fairly and faithfully represent them, and our proof lies in their support. To understand the Klan, then, it is necessary to understand the character and present mind of the mass of old-stock Americans. The mass, it must be remembered, as distinguished from the intellectually

mongrelized "Liberals.... Presently we began to find that we were dealing with strange ideas; policies that always sounded well but somehow always made us still more uncomfortable.

Finally came the moral breakdown that has been going on for two decades. One by one all our traditional moral standards went by the boards or were so disregarded that they ceased to be binding. The sacredness of our Sabbath, of our homes, of chastity, and finally even of our right to teach our own children in our own schools fundamental facts and truths were torn away from us. Those who maintained the old standards did so only in the face of constant ridicule. . . . The old-stock Americans are learning, however. They have begun to arm themselves for this new type of warfare. Most important, they have broken away from the fetters of the false ideals and philanthropy which put aliens ahead of their own children and their own race. . . . The Ku Klux Klan, in short, is an organization which gives expression, direction and purpose to the most vital instincts, hopes, and resentments of the old-stock Americans, provides them with leadership, and is enlisting and preparing them for militant, constructive action toward fulfilling their racial and national destiny. . . . The Klan literally is once more the embattled American farmer and artisan, coordinated into a disciplined and growing army, and launched upon a definite crusade for Americanism! . . .

Thus the Klan goes back to the American racial instincts, and to the common sense which is their first product, as the basis of its beliefs and methods. . . . There are three of these great racial instincts, vital elements in both the historic and the present attempts to build an America which shall fulfill the aspirations and justify the heroism of the men who made the nation. These are the instincts of loyalty to the white race, to the traditions of America, and to the spirit of Protestantism, which has been an essential part of Americanism ever since the days of Roanoke and Plymouth Rock. They are condensed into the Klan slogan: "Native, white, Protestant supremacy."

Questions:

1. What does Evans mean by "old-stock Americans"?
2. What is the slogan of the KKK?
3. What type of warfare have these Americans begun to arm themselves for?

Document B: "The Case for Birth Control" by Margaret Sanger, 1924

"It is generally conceded by sociologists and scientists that a nation cannot go on indefinitely multiplying without eventually reaching the point when population presses upon means of subsistence. While in this country there is perhaps no need for immediate alarm on this account, there are many other reasons for demanding birth control. At present, for the poor mother, there is only one alternative to the necessity of bearing children year after year, regardless of her health, of the welfare of the children she already has, and of the income of the family. This alternative is abortion, which is so common as to be almost universal, especially where there are rigid laws against imparting information for the prevention of conception. It has been estimated that there are about one million abortions

in the United States each year. To force poor mothers to resort to this dangerous and health destroying method of curtailing their families is cruel, wicked, and heartless, and it is often the mothers who care most about the welfare of their children who are willing to undergo any pain or risk to prevent the coming of infants for whom they cannot properly care.

There are definite reasons when and why parents should not have children, which will be conceded by most thoughtful people...."

Questions:

4. Summarize what Sanger is saying in this article.
5. What type of mother has only the alternative suggested here, according to Sanger?
6. Why would mothers turn to this type of birth control, according to Sanger?

Document C: Untying the Knot by Roderick Phillips

"...as usual the United States presented a rather more complicated picture of state divorce legislation, but a continuing trend of liberalization is evident. The reasons were mixed, however. In the late 1920's a veritable divorce trade war broke out among states such as Nevada, Idaho, and Arkansas, each vying to attract out-of-state petitioners. In 1927 Nevada reduced its residency requirement from six to three months, and in 1931, when the other two states seemed about to match it, the requirement was lowered again, to six weeks. The aim was not to gain the distinction of having America's most lax divorce policies, but to attract the millions of dollars that were spent by divorce migrants on legal fees, court costs, travel, accommodation, and subsistence. The effects of changing the residency requirements were palpable: There were 1,021 divorces in Nevada in 1926, but in 1927 (after the requirement was reduced) they almost doubled to 1,953 and in 1928 rose again to 2,595. Between 1930 and 1931, when the six week residency rule was introduced, the number of divorces again doubled, rising from 2,609 to 5,260. By 1940...Nevada accounted49 divorces per thousand resident population."

Questions:

7. Why were states like Nevada making it easier to get divorced?
8. How many divorces were there in Nevada in 1926? In 1928? 1931?

Document D: Historical trivia of the 1920's on drugs and alcohol

1921 Thomas S. Blair, MD, chief of the Bureau of Drug Control of the Pennsylvania Dept. of Health, publishes a paper in the Journal of the American Medical Association in which he characterizes the Indian peyote religion a "habit indulgence in certain cactaceous plants," calls the belief simply a "superstition" and those who sell peyote "dope vendors," and urges the passage of a bill in Congress that would prohibit the use of peyote among the Indian tribes of the Southwest. He concludes with this revealing plea for abolition: "The great difficulty in suppressing this habit among the Indians arises from the fact that the commercial interests involved in the peyote traffic are strongly entrenched, and they exploit the Indian. . . . Added to this is the superstition of the Indian who believes in the Peyote Church. As soon as an effort is made to suppress peyote, the cry is raised that it is unconstitutional to do so and is an invasion of religious liberty. Suppose the Negroes of the South had a Cocaine Church!"

1921 Cigarettes are illegal in 14 States, and 92 anticigarette bills are pending in 28 States. Young women are expelled from college for smoking cigarettes.

1921 The Council of the American Medical Association refuses to confirm the association's 1917 resolution on alcohol. In the 1st 6 months after the enactment of the Volstead Act, more than 15,000 physicians and 57,000 druggists and drug manufactures apply for licenses to prescribe and sell liquor.

1921 Alfred C. Prentice, MD, a member of the Committee on Narcotic Drugs of the American Medical Association, declares: "Public opinion regarding the vice of drug addiction has been deliberately and consistently corrupted through propaganda in both the medical and lay press. . . . The shallow pretense that drug addiction is a 'disease' . . . has been asserted and urged in volumes of 'literature' by self-styled 'specialists.'"

1924 The manufacture of heroin is prohibited in the U.S.

1925 Robert A. Schless: "I believe that most drug addiction today is due directly to the Harrison Anti-Narcotic Act, which forbids the sale of narcotics without a physician's prescription. . . . Addicts who are broke act as agents provocateurs for the peddlers, being rewarded by gifts of heroin or credit for supplies. The Harrison Act made the drug peddler, and the drug peddler makes drug addicts."

Questions:

9. Summarize Dr. Blair's quote regarding Indians and peyote.

10. What does Mr. Schless believe the Harrison Anti-Narcotic Act did?

Document E: Editorial from the *New York Medical Journal* May 15, 1915. (six weeks after the effective date of the Harrison Anti-Narcotic Act)

"...As was expected ... the immediate effects of the Harrison antinarcotic law were seen in the flocking of drug habitues to hospitals and sanatoriums. Sporadic crimes of violence were reported too, due usually to desperate efforts by addicts to obtain drugs, but occasionally to a delirious state induced by sudden withdrawal....

The really serious results of this legislation, however, will only appear gradually and will not always be recognized as such. These will be the failures of promising careers, the disrupting of happy families, the commission of crimes which will never be traced to their real cause, and the influx into hospitals to the mentally disordered of many who would otherwise live socially competent lives. "

Questions:

11. What have those who took drugs begun to do since the law took effect?
12. What are the long last effects of this legislation, according to the *New York Medical Journal*?

After all questions have been answered, and also using your own knowledge on the subject, write an essay that answers the question:

How do the social issues of the 1920's compare to current issues today?

Works cited: Document D historical trivia: <http://www.trivia-library.com/a/history-of-legal-and-illegal-drugs-from-1920-to-1925-ad.htm>

