America Dilemmas

From Slavery to Freedom Guided reading pg.473-509

Standards Addressed

African American Studies

Intellectual Crosscurrents

Civil rights

- Assess the changing psychological interpretation of being American and Negro (Black) past and present.
- Analyze and interpret the evolution of Black Americans, including assimilation and cultural self-awareness. Interpreting, reflexing, analyze primary source documents. An American Dilemma, Ralph Ellison (The Negro Problem)
- Identify civil rights leaders and groups; Gunnar Myrdal, Ralph Bunche, Carter G Woodson, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, A Philp Randolph, NAACP, UAW, CIO.
- Interpret key themes; Civil rights and labor unions.
- Guided reading African American Labor rights.
- Determine the causes, consequences and possible resolutions related to civil rights movement. Students gather, evaluate, and use information locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize.
- Students understand Cause and Effects.

Activities: Learning Targets: Use the text book and ancillary information provided.

Complete work

- Apply historical and contemporary issues: The Invisible Man – Ralph Ellison
- Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man. As a Parable of Our Times. The New Yorker December 4 2016, Read the article and write one page reflection paper. Reflect on past and present.
  Read/listen Ralph Ellison no longer the invisible man 100 years after his birth. NPR code switchers. Read and or listen to article
- Analyze document An American Dilemma – Read article from Teaching American History-a review Ralph Ellisson 1944- Complete APPARTS
- Civil Rights identify key leaders and organizations; Gunnar Myrdal, Ralph Bunch, Carter G Woodson, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, A Philp Randolph, Thurgood Marshall, Brown v Board of Education NAACP, UAW, CIO.

Bloom’s Levels: create evaluate analyze understand remember

Title: The American Dilemmas and Civil Rights movement

Suggested Length of Time: April 27-May 15
In 2012, I was a high-school English teacher in Prince George's County, Maryland, when Trayvon Martin, a boy who looked like so many of my students, was killed in the suburbs of Florida. Before then, I had envisioned my classroom as a place for my students to escape the world's harsher realities, but Martin's death made the dream of such escapism seem impossible and irrelevant. Looking for guidance, I picked up Ralph Ellison’s 1952 novel, “Invisible Man,” which had been a fixture of the “next to read” pile on my bookshelf for years. “I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me,” Ellison writes in the prologue. The unnamed black protagonist of the novel, set between the South in the nineteen-twenties and Harlem in the
nineteen-thirties, wrestles with the cognitive dissonance of opportunity served up alongside indignity. He receives a scholarship to college from a group of white men in his town after engaging in a blindfolded boxing match with other black boys, to the delight of the white spectators. In New York, he is pulled out of poverty and given a prominent position in a communist-inspired “Brotherhood” only to realize that these brothers are using him as a political pawn. This complicated kind of progress seemed to me to accurately reflect how, for the marginalized in America, choices have never been clear or easy. I put the book on my syllabus.

The school was situated inside the beltway of Prince George’s County, and my classroom was filled with almost exclusively black and brown students, many of them undocumented immigrants. While Ellison wrote of invisibility as a black man caught in the discord of early-twentieth-century racism, this particular group of students read the idea of invisibility not as a metaphor but as a necessity, a way of insuring one’s protection. I was expecting that the class would relate the novel to the current climate of violence toward black bodies. But, as they often did, my students presented a compelling case that broadened the scope of the discussion.

Before my time in the classroom, immigration was rarely at the forefront of my consciousness. I did not come from a family of immigrants but from a group of people who had been brought to this country involuntarily, centuries ago. I cannot point to a map and say, “That is the country I came from”; our ancestry lies in the cotton fields of Mississippi and in the swamps of southern Florida. The repercussions of immigration did not feel as concrete to me as they did to the more than eleven million unauthorized immigrants across the country.

The day after Donald Trump was elected, one of my former students, from that same class, sent me a text message. We had not spoken in some time. She wrote, “I know I shouldn’t be, but I’m a little scared. Unsure of what’s going to happen.” She continued, “I know I wasn’t born here, but this has become my country. I’ve been here for so long, with a lot of shame, I don’t even know my own country’s history, but I know plenty of this one.” In his interview with “60 Minutes,” Trump reiterated that he would move immediately to deport or incarcerate two to three million undocumented immigrants. As for the rest, he said, “after everything gets normalized, we’re going to make a determination.” After I listened to the interview, I began looking over the essays from a writing assignment I had given a different group of students, years ago. The students were asked to write their own short memoirs, and many of them used the exercise as an opportunity to write about what it meant to be an undocumented person in the United States. Their stories narrated the weeks-long journeys they had taken as young children to escape violence and poverty in their home countries, crossing the border in the back of pickup trucks, walking across deserts, and wading through rivers in the middle of the night. Others discussed how they did not know that they were undocumented until they attempted to get a driver’s license or to apply to college, only to be told by their parents that they did not have Social Security numbers.

One student stood up in front of the class to read his memoir and said that, every day, coming home from school, he feared that he might find that his parents had disappeared. After that, many students revealed their status, and that of their families, to their classmates for the first time. The essays told of parents who would not drive for fear that being pulled over for a broken taillight would result in deportation; who had never been on an airplane; who were working jobs for below minimum wage in abhorrent conditions, unable to report their employers for fear of being arrested themselves. It was a remarkable scene, to witness young people collectively shatter one another’s sense of social isolation.

“Invisible Man” ends with the protagonist being chased by policemen during a riot in Harlem, and falling into a manhole in the middle of the street. The police put the cover of the manhole back in place, trapping the narrator underground. “I’m an invisible man and it placed me in a hole—or showed me the hole I was in, if you will—and I reluctantly accepted the fact,” he says.
I imagine that if I were to read this book with my students now, our conversation would be different. I wonder if any of my students would ever stand up in class to read their own stories, or if they would instead remain silent. I think of all the young people who, because of DACA, had emerged to be seen by their country as human, as deserving of grace, as deserving of a chance. I think of how they turned over their names, birth dates, addresses to the government in anticipation of a pathway out of the shadows. I revisi: the final pages of “Invisible Man” and think of how many things that once existed above ground in our country might now become trapped beneath the surface.

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More: Donald Trump  Immigration  Invisible Man  Race  Ralph Ellison
Ralph Ellison > An American Dilemma: A Review

GUNNAR MYRDAL’S An American Dilemma is not an easy book for an American Negro to review. Not because he might be overawed by its broad comprehensiveness; nor because of the sense of alienation and embarrassment that the book might arouse by reminding him that it is necessary in our democracy for a European scientist to affirm the American Negro’s humanity; not even because it is an implied criticism of his own Negro social scientists’ failure to define the problem as clearly. Instead, it is difficult because the book, as a study of a social ambiguity, is itself so nearly ambiguous that in order to appreciate it fully and yet protect his own humanity, the Negro must, while joining in the chorus of “Yeas” which the book has so deservedly evoked, utter a lusty and simultaneous “Nay.”

In our society it is not unusual for a Negro to experience a sensation that he does not exist in the real world at all. He seems, rather, to exist in the nightmarish fantasy of the white American mind as a phantom that the white mind seeks unceasingly, by means both crude and subtle, to lay to rest. Myrdal proves this no idle Negro fancy. He locates the Negro problem “in the heart of the [white] American ... the conflict between his moral valuations on various levels of consciousness and generality.” Indeed, the main virtue of An American Dilemma lies in its demonstration of how the mechanism of prejudice operates to disguise the moral conflict in the minds of whites produced by the clash on the social level between the American Creed and anti-Negro practices. There is, however, a danger in this very virtue.

For the solution of the problem of the American Negro and democracy lies only partially in the white man’s free will. Its full solution will lie in the creation of a democracy in which the Negro will be free to define himself for what he is and, within the large framework of that democracy, for what he desires to be. Let this not be misunderstood. For one is apt, in welcoming An American Dilemma’s democratic contribution, to forget that all great democratic documents—and there is a certain greatness here—contain a strong charge of anti-democratic elements. Perhaps the wisest attitude for democrats is not to deplore the ambiguous element of democratic writings, but to seek to understand them.
For it is by making use of the positive contributions of such documents and rejecting their negative elements that democracy can be kept dynamic.

Since its inception, American social science has been closely bound with American Negro destiny. Even before the Civil War the Southern ruling class had inspired a pseudoscientific literature attempting to prove the Negro inhuman and thus beyond any moral objections to human slavery. Sociology did not become closely concerned with the Negro, however, until after Emancipation gave the slaves the status-on paper at least-of nominal citizens. And if the end of the slave system created for this science the pragmatic problem of adjusting our society to include the new citizens, the compromise between the Northern and Southern ruling classes created the moral problem which Myrdal terms the American Dilemma.

This was a period, the 1870s, wherein scientific method, with its supposed objectivity and neutrality to values, was thought to be the answer to all problems. There is no better example of the confusion and opportunism springing from this false assumption than the relation of American social science to the Negro problem. And let us make no easy distinctions here between Northern and Southern social scientists; both groups used their graphs, charts and other paraphernalia to prove the Negro's biological, psychological, intellectual and moral inferiority, one group to justify the South's exploitation of Negroes, and the other to justify the North's refusal to do anything basic about it. Here was a science whose role, beneath its illusionary non-concern with values, was to reconcile the practical morality of American capitalism with the ideal morality of the American Creed.

Now, the task of reconciling moralities is usually the function of religion and philosophy, of art and psychoanalysis-all of which find myth-making indispensable. And in this, American sociological literature rivals all three, its myth-making consisting of its "scientific" justification of anti-democratic and unscientific racial attitudes and practices. If Myrdal has done nothing else, he has used his science to discredit all of the vicious non-scientific nonsense that has cluttered our sociological literature. He has, in short, shorn it of its mythology.

It is rewarding to trace the connection between social science and the Negro a bit further. Usually when the condition of Negroes is discussed we get a morality-play explanation in which the North is given the role of good and the South that of evil. This oversimplifies a complex matter. For at the end of the Civil War, the North lost interest in the Negro. The conditions for the growth of industrial capitalism had been won and, according to Myrdal; the Negro “stood in the way of a return to national solidarity and a
development of trade relations” between the North and the South. This problem was not easy to solve. Groups of Negroes had discovered the effectiveness of protest and what Myrdal shows to be the Negro’s strongest weapon in pressing his claims: his hold upon the moral consciousness of Northern whites.

In order to deal with this problem the North did four things: it promoted Negro education in the South; it controlled his economic and political destiny, or allowed the South to do so; it built Booker T. Washington into a national spokesman of Negroes with Tuskegee Institute as his seat of power; and it organized social science as an instrumentality to sanction its methods.

It might be said that this explanation sounds too cynical, that much of the North’s interest in Negro education grew out of a philanthropic impulse, and that it ignores the real contribution to the understanding of Negroes made by social science. But philanthropy on the psychological level is often guilt-motivated, even when most unconscious. And here, again, we have the moral conflict. When we look at the connection between Tuskegee and our most influential school of sociology, the University of Chicago, we are inclined to see more than an unconscious connection between economic interests and philanthropy, Negroes and social science.

But if on the black side of the color line Washington’s “Tuskegee Machine” served to deflect Negro energy away from direct political action, on the white side of the line the moral problem nevertheless remained. It does not, therefore, seem quite accidental that the man responsible for inflating Tuskegee into a national symbol, and who is sometimes spoken of as the “power behind Washington’s throne,” was none other than Dr. Robert E. Park, co-founder of the University of Chicago School of Sociology.

The positive contributions of Dr. Park and those men connected with him are well established. American Negroes have benefited greatly from their research, and some of the most brilliant of Negro scholars have been connected with them. Perhaps the most just charge to be made against them is that of timidity. They have been, in the negative sense, victims of the imposed limitations of bourgeois science. Because certainly their recent works have moved closer and closer toward the conclusions made by Myrdal. Indeed, without their active participation, An American Dilemma would have been far less effective. Nevertheless, it was Myrdal who made the most of their findings. Perhaps it took the rise of fascism to free American social science of its timidity. Certainly it was necessary to clear it of some of the anti-Negro assumptions with which it started.
Dr. Robert F. Park was both a greater scientist and, in his attitude toward Negroes, a greater democrat than William Graham Sumner. (It will perhaps pain many to see these names in juxtaposition.) In our world, however, extremes quickly meet. Sumner believed it “the greatest folly of which man can be capable to sit down with a slate and pencil and plan out a new social world,” a point of view containing little hope for the underdog. But for all his good works, some of Park’s assumptions were little better. The Negro, he felt, “has al-ways been interested rather in expression than in action; interested in life itself rather than in its reconstruction or reformation. The Negro is, by natural disposition, neither an intellectual nor an idealist, like the Jew; nor a brooding introspective, like the East Indian; nor a pioneer and frontiersman, like the Anglo-Saxon. He is primarily an artist, loving life for its own sake. His m’tier is expression rather than action. He is, so to speak, the lady among the races.”

Park’s descriptive metaphor is so pregnant with mixed motives as to birth a thousand compromises and indecisions. Imagine the effect such teachings have had upon Negro students alone! Thus what started as part of a democratic attitude, ends not only uncomfortably close to the preachings of Sumner, but to those of Dr. Goebbels as well.

One becomes impatient with those critics who accuse American capitalism of neglecting social planning. Actually its planning lay in having the loosest plan possible, and when it was economically expedient to change plans it has been able to do so. During the Abolitionist period the moral nature of the Negro problem was generally recognized, but with the passing of the Reconstruction the moral aspect was forced out of consciousness. Significantly, Booker T. Washington wrote a biography in which he deliberately gave the coup de grace to the memory of Frederick Douglass, the Negro leader who, in his aggressive career, united the moral and political factions for the anti-slavery struggle.

Following World War I, under the war-stimulated revival of democracy, there was a brief moment when the moral nature of the problem threatened to come alive in the minds of white Americans. This time it was rationalized by projecting into popular fiction the stereotype of the Negro as an exotic primitive, while social science, under the pressure of war production needs, was devoted to proving that Negroes were not so inferior as a few decades before. It was during this period that some of the most scientifically valid concepts for understanding the Negro were advanced. But social science did not have the courage of its own research. Following its vital Jamesian influence it began to discover the questionable values it supported and, until Myrdal arrived, timidly held its breath. Why, then, should Myrdal be brought into the country in 1937 by the Carnegie Foundation to prepare this study and not before? Why this sudden junking of ideological fixtures?
APPARTS Overview

APPARTS is a strategy students can use to help them understand primary source material. APPARTS encourages students to consider both the primary source’s message and context by examining a series of questions about a source.

A uthor: Who created the source? What do you know about the author? What is the author’s point of view?

P lace and Time: Where and when was the source produced? How might this affect the meaning of the source?

P rior Knowledge: Beyond information about the author and the context of its creation, what do you know that would help you further understand the primary source? For example, do you recognize any symbols and recall what they represent?

A udience: For whom was the source created and how might this affect the reliability of the source?

R eason: Why was the source produced at the time it was produced?

T he Main Idea: What point is the document trying to convey? How would you summarize it?

S ignificance: Why is this source important? What inferences can you draw from this document? Ask yourself, “So what?” in relation to the question asked.
APPARTS Worksheet

Document: 

Author: 

Place and Time: 

Prior Knowledge: 

Audience: 

Reason: 

The Main Idea: 

Significance: 
African-American's Rights

A House Divided: African American Workers Struggle Against Segregation

Throughout the 19th and early 20th century, the labor movement struggled to overcome racism in the midst of a society divided by race. In 1866, the National Labor Union declared it would admit members regardless of an individual's color or nationality believing unity was key to union strength. However, its affiliated unions continued to exclude or segregate workers by race, as white members tried to limit competition from African Americans for jobs. In response, Frederick Douglass and other progressive leaders supported the creation of new union organizations, such as the "Colored" National Labor Union, to organize against discrimination by employers and the labor movement.

In the 1880s, a new national labor organization arose, the Knights of Labor. The Knights vowed to admit workers of all races and nationalities, but this principle did not prevent the organization from tolerating segregated assemblies in the South. After the Knights were decimated by an employer backlash, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) revived the labor movement by organizing skilled workers. At its founding convention, the AFL required all affiliates to pledge that their members would never "discriminate against a fellow worker on account of color, creed or nationality." Unfortunately, by 1895, the AFL reversed this position and allowed new affiliates to prohibit African Americans from joining their ranks. In many unions that had no color barrier, African American members continued to be segregated into local unions which limited their membership rights and employment opportunities.

Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) was one of America's most important champions of equality and the right to organize a union. In 1872, Douglass was elected president of the "Colored" National Labor Union, and the publication he edited, The New National Era, became the union's official newspaper. Portrait, circa 1880s-1890s. AFL-CIO Still Images, Morris B. Schnapper Collection.
African Americans who maintained railroad locomotive engines had to sue the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen all the way to the Supreme Court to gain admission to the union in 1944. Members involved with the lawsuit pose with A. Philip Randolph (1889-1979), President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and prominent civil rights leader, circa 1940-1944. *AFL-CIO Still Images, Photographic Prints Collection.*

**From Segregation to Fair Employment: The Drive for Equality**

The rise of mass production, new limits on immigration, and World Wars I and II drove millions of African Americans north to find work in America's expanding industrial economy. By the 1930s, the growing importance of African Americans in industry began to tip the balance away from segregation and exclusion toward unity and inclusion. In 1935, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) was granted a charter by the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The BSCP was founded by African American workers and led by A. Philip Randolph, who went on to play a leading role in the movement for equality within the labor movement.
At its founding convention in 1936, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), in competition with the AFL, pledged to organize workers with no distinction to race or color and opposed all forms of segregation. In 1941, A. Phillip Randolph threatened a national march on Washington, D.C. if the federal government did not take action to end employment discrimination in the defense industry. Under pressure, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order that prohibited these discriminatory practices and established the Fair Employment Practice Committee. One year later, the CIO created the Committee to Abolish Racial Discrimination, which focused on combatting discrimination related to job assignments and promotions.

The Black Worker, newspaper of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, July 1937, front page reproduction. AFL-CIO Still Images, Photographic Prints Collection.

Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) poster used to promote organizing against discrimination, circa. 1940s-1955. AFL-CIO Posters, Broadsides, and Art Collection.

Discrimination case list. February 15, 1963. AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department Records, Director's Files.

After the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the establishment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, union members around the country filed charges with the federal government seeking to reverse employer and union discrimination.
Charge of Discrimination against the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union, Local 4-23, and Texaco Incorporated. Port Arthur, TX. May 16, 1967. AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department, Discrimination Case Files.

Call by AFL-CIO President George Meany for the full enforcement of voting rights and fair employment provisions of the 1964 Civil Rights Act by local and state labor, community and employer organizations on the occasion of the signing of the bill by President Lyndon Johnson. News from the AFL-CIO. July 2, 1964. AFL-CIO Information Department Records, Press Releases.
The Civil Rights Act of 1964...What is It...How to Use It. AFL-CIO. 1964. AFL-CIO Support Services Department Records, Publications.

From Fair Employment to Civil Rights: Sharing the Dream

The conservative politics of the Cold War put the labor and civil rights movements on the defensive. In 1946, the Fair Employment Practice Committee was abolished, limiting the ability of unions and civil rights organizations to fight discrimination on the job. Despite this political backlash, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) appointed a spokesman for civil rights for the first time. When the AFL and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) merged in 1955, a Civil Rights Department was created to build on the work of the Committee to Abolish Racial Discrimination. Organized labor also backed the civil rights movement’s campaigns against discrimination in public facilities, housing, education, and voting by providing financial resources, legal support, publicity, and lobbying efforts in Congress.

In 1963, the labor movement began to play a larger role in the civil rights movement by mobilizing 40,000 union members for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. The following year, the AFL-CIO provided critical lobbying support and testimony for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. These two laws led to the filing of thousands of successful cases against workplace discrimination and eliminated many of the racist voting restrictions in the South.

Today, the labor movement continues to support civil rights through organizations such as the AFL-CIO Race Commission and seeks to prevent the weakening of anti-discrimination laws and enforcement.
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. joins a picket line in support of a strike by the International Chemical Workers Union, Local 754, against discrimination at the Scripto Pen Company, Atlanta, 1964. *AFL-CIO Still Images, Photographic Prints Collection.*


"One War." National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax, which included the American Federation of Labor. circa 1940s. AFL-CIO Posters, Broadsides, and Art Collection.