

Lesson Plan 2

"The New Deal is *Not* Christ's Deal": Coughlin's Turn Against FDR and the Formation of the National Union for Social Justice

I. Lesson Description

Coughlin during the 1932 campaign had actively worked towards the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt as president going so far as to proclaim, "the New Deal is Christ's Deal." Beyond that level of hyperbole, Coughlin had anticipated a major role in policy formation within the new Democratic administration. Unwilling to alienate the priest and his audience, Roosevelt remained non-committal along with his staff to the flood of proposals and unannounced visits from Coughlin.

By 1934, evidence that his views had not found a receptive audience within the administration soured Coughlin's opinion of FDR. At the same time, he also did not wish to openly break with Roosevelt and lose whatever influence he might have had with elected officials. The November 11, 1934 signaled a new direction for the radio ministry as Coughlin spoke of a new organization dedicated to "social justice" and provided his most sharply worded criticisms.

This lesson will help students examine the thinking behind both the New Deal of President Franklin Roosevelt and the new opposition as represented by the National Union for Social Justice. Understanding the public presentation of policy positions is a critical part of civic culture, and by finding ways to interpret and debate these differing stances helps us to better understand the Great Depression.

The Assignment

Students will work either individually or in groups to examine the provided primary sources and to formulate a position on both the New Deal and Coughlin's NUSJ. They will then participate in an inner circle/outer circle debate that has then examine both sides of the issue and to offer a post-debate reflective essay or discussion. Key questions for this assignment include, how does Coughlin explain his turn against Roosevelt, what does Coughlin mean by his vision of "social justice," and how did Franklin Roosevelt explain the purpose of the New Deal?

II. Lesson / Learning Objectives and Benchmarks

Benchmarks

U.S. History Framework (2006)

Period 7: Modern America and the World Wars (1914-1945)

Theme 1: How did the Depression affect American politics? How did the Depression change assumptions about the nature of federalism and the role of government?

Michigan Curricular Framework

Strand III - Civic Perspective: Students will use knowledge of American government and politics to make informed decisions about governing their communities.

- *Standard III.3 - Democracy in Action:* All students will describe the political legal processes created to make decisions, seek consensus, and resolve conflict in a free society.

Students will:

- Listen to the views of other and respond to them.
- Contemplate multiple views on a controversial issue.
- Develop oral speaking skills and impromptu responses in a group discussion.
- Develop skills in supporting one's opinion with facts and examples based in primary sources.
- Write a position essay or reflective piece about the debate.

III. Lesson Outcomes and Requirements

Skills Attained:

- Use primary and secondary sources to inform a position and to conduct research.
- Present a position/argument based on evidence.
- Have the ability to conduct an argument rationally and analyze the arguments of others.
- Work collaboratively in a group.

Method / Materials:

- Internet access to use the *Social Justice* Collections.
- Readings for the class - to contextualize the information (see Bibliography).
- Rubrics from the teacher to evaluate the debate and position pieces.

IV. Lesson Activities

Prior to this debate, teachers should have dealt with the causation and impact of the Great Depression.

Have the students read the primary sources listed in the bibliography, and have them formulate an informal position paper or points that deal with the following questions:

- How did Roosevelt define the focus of his administration and the New Deal?
- How did Coughlin define social justice?
- How are these points similar or different?
- What points could you use to argue for both sides?

Make sure to tell the students that they will need to argue for both sides, this helps to avoid having them "buy-in" to the idea that either Coughlin or Roosevelt are "correct" and to view the issues from multiple perspectives.

Cluster the students into four groups of equal size. Arrange students in Group 1 into a circle of chairs facing out. Then have students from Group 2 sit in a circle around and facing in to Group 1. Then have Groups 3 and 4 gather around the perimeter of the circle facing in at Groups 1 and 2.

Now, provide the students in the inner circle 10-15 minutes to discuss the first three questions listed above. During that time, the rest of the students should focus their attention on the students in the inner circle. The outer circle is not allowed to speak as the inner students conduct their debate but should take notes for comparison to their points. Next, have the inner and outer circle switch positions giving the new inner circle groups a few minutes to discuss what points they will use that are different than the first inner circle. Then resume the debate for an additional 10-15 minutes though often this debate goes faster due to the number of points dealt with in the initial group. The second inner circle can disagree with the initial groups' views.

The new outer circle students should take notes on the points these students bring up.

After the debate, the class should have a class discussion or a position essay to help refine the key points raised. How do we understand the public statements of elected officials and opposition figures? What does it mean to dissent, and how precise can these positions be articulated?

VII. Bibliography / List of Resources

These are the required documents for reading to learn how Coughlin and Roosevelt's administration viewed what they intended to do and why. These should be read in conjunction with the classroom textbook.

Coughlin

The National Union for Social Justice broadcast, Sunday, November 11, 1934 at <http://www.ssa.gov/history/fcspeech.html>

Social Justice

"National Union for Social Justice By-Laws," Vol.1, No.1, pg.7, March 14, 1936.

Cartoon, "We Won't Pull Our Punches," Vol.1, No.2, pg.8, March 20, 1936.

"A Message to the National Union," Vol.1, No.6, pg. 8-10, April 17, 1936.

Franklin Roosevelt and Others

These two documents come from the inexpensive publication:

The Era of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1933-1945: A Brief History with Documents. Richard Polenberg, ed. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000. ISBN: 0-312-13310-3.

"First Inaugural Address," March 4, 1933.

"Annual Message to the Congress," January 4, 1935.

Additionally

Adolf A. Berle, Jr., "The Social Economics of the New Deal," *New York Times Magazine*, October 29, 1933, 4-9, 19.