

Lesson Plan 3

The National Union for Social Justice as a Third-Party Movement

I. Lesson Description:

One of the major recurring questions for historians lies in the failure of new parties outside of the traditional system of Republicans and Democrats to challenge that order. Though often discussed, an effective third-party has yet come to pass with most only playing spoiler to one party or the other. Though often discussed and considered, an effective third-party has not yet come to power in the nation's political life. Those that have gained votes, particularly during the past few decades of the twentieth century, did so by drawing votes from one of the major parties and upsetting the election balance. This not a new phenomenon, however, these political upstarts have existed since the early nineteenth century with varying degrees of success.

Third parties have traditionally acted as pressure groups that draw attention to a particular position or as focal points for protest votes. These issues can, however, often be co-opted by the major political parties. They have struggled since the historical Second Party System (1837-1852) that helped to solidify the pluralist (or winner-take-all) system of representation rather than the proportional system. Smaller parties under the current system find themselves marginalized, thus helping to restrain challenges to the two-party system. In addition, ballot access laws, the use of primaries (especially after the disastrous 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago), and the Electoral College further erodes the influence of third-party candidates on the national stage.

The 1930s offered the most fertile ground in a generation since the hotly contested election of 1912 and the Populists of the 1890s. In Minnesota and North Dakota, the Farmer-Labor Party elected governor and held sway in local elections, the bitter 1934 campaign for the governorship of California featured socialist writer Upton Sinclair running a campaign called EPIC (End Poverty in California) and was defeated by a consortium of forces including movie studio moguls, Republicans, and even Democrats. Louisiana Governor Huey Long also offered a radical critique of the nation's economic and political life that drew upon a radio audience as Coughlin did. For the political life of the nation, these challenges when added to the economic strife meant that things were not business as usual.

Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice did not openly state that it would operate as a political party, but the close links to the Union Party have traditionally suggested otherwise. Even if it only served as a political pressure group, the desire to transform a potential audience of radio listeners to one of real voters makes the issue very relevant. This research project should be linked to the content of the Union Party from other lesson plans with questions about how separate the two entities really were during the campaign.

The Assignment

The assignment tasks students with examining the framework and operation of the United States' political system, particularly that of the 1930s. The final outcome should have students writing an essay ranging from 5 to 10 page research essay that has its base in primary sources. Students should examine how Coughlin and other third-party campaigns have defined and promoted their messages and platforms to the public. Topics for examination should include organizational structure, issues, time period (for context), advertising techniques, and technology. As is Lesson Plan 4, key questions involve the degree of separation between the Union Party and the National Union for Social Justice.

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?

Theme 3: how did the Depression and the New Deal influence economic theory and practice and the role of the government in the economy?

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.4 - American Government and Politics:* All students will explain how American governmental institutions at the local, state, and federal levels provide for the limitation and sharing of power and how the nation's political system provides for the exercise of power.

Students will

- Research the key issues of the 1936 U.S. presidential election campaign, the National Union for Social Justice's role, and that of *Social Justice*.
- Synthesize the information learned into the context of the election and the Great Depression.
- Evaluate the positions through the medium of a formal research project.

- Present the information and evaluation in both written and oral formats.

III. Lesson Outcomes and Requirements

Skills Attained:

- Use primary sources when conducting research.
- Present information and evaluation logically and clearly.
- Analyze political issues and positions within their historical context.

Method / Materials:

- Internet access to use *Social Justice* and other on-line sources.
- Library access for scholarly periodicals and books.
- Base readings for the class - to start the research and frame the basic project questions.
- Rubrics for evaluating the article and presentations.

IV. Lesson Activities

Required time

The time and length of this project is flexible, but if the material is being covered as part of a unit plan structure, 10 to 14 class days could be allotted for the overall project. Depending on the amount of class time set aside and then the time given over to tracking acceptable student progress, the project could be completed within a proposed time frame.

Essentially, that could involve one week for research, one week for writing, and then additional time for peer review and revisions of the final project.

Procedures

Day One: The students receive a handout explaining the project. The teachers should use Power Point or other technology to further enhance the explanation. Again, it is recommended that their project be integrated into a unit plan focused on the Great Depression so students can benefit from a fuller contextualization of historical events.

A method to avoid plagiarism comes from requiring student use of Social

Justice Collection primary sources, the listed bibliographic materials, and by dealing with the benefits and consequences of Wikipedia and other on-line materials. Further positive outcomes extend from requiring adherence to the formal paper questions that all students must deal with regardless of approach.

These questions offer a good starting point for research and a helpful framework for their projects as it would apply to the larger subject of third parties in U.S. political history.

- The National Union for Social Justice is often called a third-party, but what exactly does that mean and how has that definition changed over time?
- For both third parties and the NUSJ, what steps and policies would be needed to create an organized pressure group and/or political entity?
- What kind of leadership did third-party leaders and later Coughlin provide to their organizations?
- How did Coughlin define the purpose of the NUSJ?
- What kind of organizational and/or central leadership did Coughlin inspire?
- How well organized was the NUSJ to achieve its ends?

Day Two: Begin research using the library and Internet.

Day Three: Continue research - either in or outside of class.

Day Four: Continue work outside of class.

Day Five: Work on project - potentially putting together a proposed outline of their project and the resources they have encountered thus far.

Day Six: Discussion of how to organize their essay - see the sample below.

Days Seven to Nine: Students should be writing outside of class.

Day Ten: Students should submit as much of the written material as they have for review, comment, and preliminary grading to ensure progress.

Days Eleven to Fifteen: Peer review, revision and resubmission can be made a part of the project's component.

Paper Format

It is required that the students use proper mechanics and essay format to examine the key questions of the assignment.

Students intimidated by the task of writing a ten-page term paper may find it helpful to break the assignment and the paper into smaller units. Here is a model breakdown, showing the structure of a hypothetical 22-paragraph essay, which would normally work out to about 10-12 pages. Of course, this is an overly formulaic proposal. History will not fit into such neat boxes. Some sections will be longer than others. But this is a starting place for your wanderings.

The hard part about writing is that there is no set order in which the elements should be written. Among the first tasks are to break the story into sections, write a topic sentence for each planned paragraph, and come up with a working hypothesis. All will change in the course of actually writing. Your evidence will change your thesis. Your thesis will suggest ways in which to present your evidence. Keep rereading and rewriting your thesis and evidence and conclusion until all tell the same story.

Introduction (2 paragraphs)

The first paragraph poses the research question. Often, it tells a brief story, then explains why that story needs interpretation. E.G., "In August 1814, a British force invaded Washington and burned the White House. Why was the city so poorly defended?" Paragraph two explains how the paper will answer the question posed in the lead. The paragraph ends with the thesis statement: a one-sentence summary of the argument of the essay.

The Body (3x6 = 18 paragraphs)

It is often useful to break down the body of the essay into two, three, or four parts, each identified with a subhead. Three is an especially strong number. For example, Section I could state one side's position in a debate, Section II could state the opposing case, and Section III could explain how the conflict was resolved. Each body paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that supports both the main point of the section and the thesis of the paper. It may be helpful to write all eighteen topic sentences first, then flesh them out. (Of course, some may be dropped in the writing process, while others fragment into multiple paragraphs.)

The Conclusion (2 paragraphs)

Paragraph 1 of the conclusion reiterates your thesis, explaining why it is the best means of understanding the evidence you presented in the body. Paragraph 2 explains why this argument matters, and how the story and its interpretation help us understand Faulkner's universal truths-"Love and honor and pit and pride and compassion and sacrifice."

Third-parties, Coughlin, and *Social Justice* Essay Scoring Guide

Expectations	Excellent	Good	Needs Improvement	Points; additional teacher comments
Followed directions and met deadlines; typed, double-spaced, 1 inch margins, 12 font; 20 points	Met all requirements	Most requirements met	Ignored Directions	_____ Pts.
Essay well-written; followed proper paper format; proper mechanics; 70 points	Informative, creative, and interesting; flow and tone consistent.	Adequate approach to essay; did not fulfill all paragraph / mechanics requirements	Writing style confusing; did not attempt to fulfill paragraph / mechanics requirement.	_____ Pts.
Overall Analytical Sophistication, use of primary and secondary sources; 20 points	Thesis / argument cohesive and clearly stated; solid grasp of material, variety of sources.	Generally good thesis, limited sources; some analysis	Lack of clear argument; few sources;	_____ Pts.

V. Bibliography / List of Resources

***Social Justice* - recommended readings**

"National Union for Social Justice By-Laws," Vol.1, No.1, March 13, 1936, pg.7.

"An Answer and a Challenge!" Vol.1, No.1, March 13, 1936, pgs. 8-10.

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

"Father Coughlin's Weekly Letter 'To the District Officers,'" Vol.1, No.6, April 17, 1936, pg. 16.

"Father Coughlin's Weekly Letter 'To Local Unit Secretaries and Treasurers,'" Vol.1, No.7, April 24, 1936, pg.16.

"National Union News," Vol.1, No.8, May 1, 1936, pg. 7.

"Father Coughlin's Weekly Letter 'Solidarity and Social Justice,'" Vol.1, No.9, pg. 16.

Cartoon, "A New Liberty Bell," Vol.1, No.10, May 15, 1936, pg. 8.

"Father Coughlin's Weekly Letter 'Democracy Within the National Union,'" Vol.1, No.10, May 15, 1936, pg. 16.

"150,000 to Attend N.U.S.J. Convention," Vol.1, No.18, July 13, 1936, pg.9.

Secondary sources

Bennett, David H. *Demagogues in the Depression: American Radicals and the Union Party, 1932-1936*. Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1969.

Bennett, Robert W. *Taming the Electoral College*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

Brinkley, Alan. *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, & the Great Depression*. New York: Vintage Books, 1982.

Especially read Chapters 7, 8, and 10.

Carpenter, Ronald H. *Father Charles E. Coughlin: Surrogate Spokesman for the Disaffected*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998.

Evans, Sara M. and Harry C. Boyte. *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America*. New York: Harper & Row, 1986.

Goodwyn, Lawrence. *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

- Goodwyn, Lawrence. *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Judin, John B. *The Paradox of American Democracy: Elites, Special Interests, and the Betrayal of Public Trust*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2000.
- Kammen, Michael G. *A Machine That Would Go of Itself: The Constitution in American Culture*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transactions Publishers, 2006.
- Kazin, Michael. *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*. New York: Basic Books, 1995.
- Lepsit, Seymour M. and Jason M. Lakin, eds. *The Democratic Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004.
- Marcus, Sheldon. *Father Coughlin: The Tumultuous Life of the Priest of the Little Flower*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973.
- Stock, Catherine McNichol. *Rural Radicals: Righteous Rage in the American Grain*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.
- Tull, Charles J. *Father Coughlin and the New Deal*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1965.
- Warren, Donald. *Radio Priest: Charles Coughlin the Father of Hate Radio*. New York: The Free Press, 1996.
- Wilentz, Sean. *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*. New York: Norton, 2005.

Internet based resources

- "1896: The Presidential Campaign, Cartoons and Commentary," Vassar College:
<http://projects.vassar.edu/1896/1896home.html>
- "The Populists," Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund,
<http://www.celdf.org/ThePopulists/tabid/247/Default.aspx>