In Class Reading: Excerpts from Civil Rights, Deprivation and Race Riots and the Kerner Commission Report plus Four Decades

Students will read and examine the causes of riots in the U.S. at the end of the Civil Rights Movement (Deprivation and Race Riots and the Kerner Commission Report plus Four Decades (Riots of 1967)) and compare them to the riots in and around Paris in 2005. Students will work in groups to identify 3 common causes attributed to the riots across the two countries. They will then compare the experience of both France and the United States with the experience of Tunisia and other countries during the ‘Arab Spring’.

Question Prompts: Students are divided into groups and the given one question or the other to discuss.

- Do the experiences of France and Tunisia give you an alternative perspective on the race riots of the 1960’s in the United States? Alternatively, how would you apply the lessons learned in the United States to France? How would you apply them in Tunisia?
- Is economic opportunity a civil right? Does the state have an interest in ensuring equality of economic opportunity?

Student Group Responses

Question 1:

“The experiences of France’s race riots have not changed our view of the USA 1960s riots.

For helping out France we suggest being less stubborn to the lesser peoples. The ones with no job, low income, no status, not a great balance of getting dreams accomplished. Basically get the government to pay some attention constantly and give needed help to them.”

The response to this question is weak. Aside from grammar and language, it appears, the students have interpreted the question to mean ‘how can France be more like America’. Furthermore, they have not made reference to the issues presented in terms of the commonalities between the examples. The question will require more revision in order to ensure that students fully understand the question and ensure that I have not biased their response.

Question 2:

“The state has an interest in assuring economic equality because a poor economy breeds poverty violence and other unrest in those areas which cost the state financially. Economic equality should indeed be a civil rights it’s the implementing of such a policy that would prove troublesome if not impossible.”
“As a group, we believe that economic opportunity is a civil rights. Everyone should be given equal opportunities to advance themselves as well as their family. The state should be interested in economic equality because it helps the state as a whole. It will decrease poverty and eliminate underground economics. It will also keep groups of people from starting riots and reveling in a violent fashion.”

Their replies to the second question are acceptable, neither exceptionally good nor bad. As part of class discussion, I was available to the students and discussed the subject matter with them upon request. Therefore, they did not derive this response completely on their own. Furthermore, the response did not refer to anything specific in any of the sources we observed in class that day. In future discussions, I will insist that they do so in their response.