Black Power: A Historical Definition

Focus/Summary

Black Power has, from its inception, been widely demonized as an extreme nationalistic violent break from the more seemingly acceptable non-violent movement of the SCLC and others. Although this movement represented the systemic racism experienced by African Americans/Blacks in the ghettos of the North it receives little depth in most textbooks and survey courses. The purpose of this lesson is to allow students the opportunity to explore the origins of the term Black Power and how the nascent movement was characterized by the white popular media, mainstream Civil Rights leaders, and the Black Power movement itself.

Vital Theme and Narrative
Value, beliefs, political ideas, and institutions
Conflict and cooperation
Patterns of social and political interaction

History Habits of the Mind
Acquire at one and the same time a comprehension of diverse cultures and of shared humanity.
Recognize the importance of individuals who have made a difference in history, and the significance of personal character for both good and ill.

Necessary Skills and Background knowledge
- Primary source/Narrative analysis
- Contentious history of race and the government action/reaction during the past
- Structure of disassembly/meatpacking plants and the requisite skills and labor
- Current political debate as to the status, protection, prosecution of undocumented workers in the United States on the local, state, and National Level
- Forces that cause people to immigrate and migrate.
- Economic forces that create a need for migrant workers

Objectives:
SWBAT
- Assess the goals of the Black Power movement as outlined by Stockley Carmichael.
- Determine if the popular historical understanding of the Black Power movement is accurate in comparison to its stated goals
- Analyze the reaction to Stokley Carmichael’s speech by the popular white media and mainstream Civil Rights leaders.
- Determined how this idea was accepted in the African American/Black community as evidenced in popular culture (fashion and music).

Procedures
**Opening the Lesson**—Bell Ringer: What is the definition of “Black Power?” Whole class discussion that should include follow-up questions to help students flesh out both the term’s meaning and impact as well as its historical legacy (e.g. Why did they choose this term? What is the impact of using this term for African Americans/Blacks? Whites?, What has been its historical legacy -what do you know about it? How is it understood?, What are its successes? Failures?)

**Developing the Lesson**— Students will read and analyze the following pieces:

- Stokely Carmichael’s Black Power speech delivered at the University of California Berkeley on October 1966 ([http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/stokelycarmichaelblackpower.html](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/stokelycarmichaelblackpower.html)) -This site provides both the audio and a transcript. Students could view the text being projected while listening or have a printed version if the technology is not available.
- CPS “Black Power, White Backlash” a video aired on September 27, 1966. ([http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=2906180n](http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=2906180n)) Students should focus their note taking on the reasoning behind Black Power, the white backlash in the video, and how Mike Wallace/CBS covers the material.
- Students should then use a primary source analysis sheet to gain an overall understanding of each one of the sources.
- Students should then work in small groups to share the information that they have analyzed and try to come to an agreement of what each source said. They should also work to understand the larger question of what Black Power means and whether it was skewed to present a negative viewpoint.

**Concluding the Lesson**— Whole class debrief where students answer the larger questions presented. Students should then write an essay on what Black Power means and why did it garner such a strong reaction? Students should also address what the historical legacy of Black Power is? How does it compare to the legacy of the more mainstream movement led by the SCLC and others.
Assessing Student Learning- Rubric to assess writing. Teachers have flexibility to construct rubric to meet student needs and teacher focus.

**PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS SHEET**

Whenever you are faced with a primary source it is important that you take the time to really understand all the ideas (obvious and hidden) that are held within
the piece. You cannot really “get” what it means until you have taken the time to analyze the source—this sheet will help you do that. This can be used to analyze both textual (mainly words) and visual (mainly pictures) sources.

**WHO**: Who wrote, spoke, photographed, or created this piece? What do you know about who they were, what they believed in, where they came from, what organization or movement they belonged to that might help you to figure out their perspective and bias? Remember the adage: “Consider the source” when determining what the piece is telling you.

**WHEN & WHERE**: When was it written, spoken, photographed or created. The piece may not tell you so you might need to use context clues to figure it out (Did they mention an event that just took place? A person who was involved? What kind of clothes are they wearing? What kind of technology do you see?) Remember that you’re the historian detective and you have to use all your resources to figure it out. Once you have figured out the date then you should construct an understanding of the time period (context). Try to really remember (or look up) what was going on during the time period. This will really help you to understand the piece MUCH better. Finally, where was the piece written and where did it appear or where did people come in contact with it (the TV, radio, a newspaper, firsthand, etc.)

**WHAT**: Quite simply what is the topic of the piece and what does the piece say? You should summarize the overall message as well as the creator’s main points.

**WHY**: Why did the author create the piece? Who was their intended audience? Who were they trying to influence or speak to?

**HOW**: What imagery and wording (language) did the creator use to communicate specific ideas or to influence their audience. Remember to be deep! Look beyond the obvious and really try to figure out what the author is saying at every level.

**SO WHAT?**: Here is the biggest most important question of all. Why is this source important? What did it impact? Why was it significant? How might things be different if it did not exist? How does it shape how we understand the topic or time period? Of special importance: How can we use it to construct/support a thesis?