

Unit 13

Prejudice or Negative Points of View

GRADES 6-12

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Points of view reflect attitudes held by citizens and by combatants from the American Revolution through the present war in Iraq. Points of view reflect prejudices against other people as well as attitudes regarding engagement in a war. During World War II, for example, inappropriate terms were often used to portray the Germans, Japanese, and Italians in a negative, impersonal manner. If the enemy could be portrayed through negative propaganda as evil and inhuman, then killing them could be easier.

Prejudiced behaviour was directed not only against the enemy, though. It was also found closer to home where it was vilified members of our own military forces – in particular African Americans, the Irish, Mexicans, and Jews. During World War I, for example, Caucasian and African American troops were strictly segregated from one another. African Americans typically held service-oriented jobs, such as cooks and servants, or provided physical labor, such as loading supplies or building roads. In the movie, *The Lost Brigade*, a World War I unit from Brooklyn, New York, represented the melting pot of society. Many of the enlisted men and draftees expressed their distaste of having to serve beside a ‘Dago’ or ‘Polak’. The story of this unit shows how their prejudices proved to be false.

During the Korean War, President Truman signed into law Order 8099 which led finally to the integration of military troops. Since that time, all American forces have been reflected the diversity of the American communities, although in an all-volunteer army the less affluent and less educated bear a higher burden of responsibility.

Points of view also affect how citizens perceive the reason for fighting or not fighting a war. During the mid-1960s through the end of the war in Vietnam in 1973, citizens and in particular student activists found opportunities to express their anti-war feelings.

PROCESS

Read and discuss the following stories in the context of their times. *Do these prejudices still resonate today? Why? Why not?*

OUTCOMES

Students will at various grade levels gain a better understanding of the negative effects of prejudice and/or blind following of a particular philosophy at the cost of alienation.

A. World War II

PFC Carver McGriff served in an infantry regiment following D-Day. During his time in the service he came into contact with soldiers from many different ethnic backgrounds. America was and still is the melting pot of many cultures. Unfortunately, American citizens then and now hold prejudices against the newer immigrants, or those who stand out more obviously from their own culture.

Language Arts & Social Studies

- Read a second account “Captured by the Germans.” *Discuss how McGriff learned a valuable lesson* (page 183 to mid-184, II). *What lesson can be gained from this story today?*

B. Vietnam

William Catching grew up in Chicago. He decided to enlist instead of waiting for the draft. All too quickly he was thrown into the maelstrom of a jungle war, which was growing increasingly unpopular back home.

First read Catching’s account of his experiences in Vietnam (pages ----, II). Then, visit the following websites for additional background information:

<http://www.mmtcnet.com/bmiller/vietnam/differ.htm> and <http://www.vhfcn.org/stat.html>

Social Studies

- Questions to discuss: *How was the Vietnam War different from other wars? How were the American soldiers different? Was North Vietnam a threat to the United States? Was there support in the U.S. for the war? Where did it come from? What segment of the population of the U.S. supported the war? Who did not support the war? Why?* (See *Teaching American History with the Internet*, page106.)
- View the following website: How the Vietnam War Differed From Other Wars. <http://www.mmtcnet.com/bmiller/vietnam/differ.htm> For statistics about the war, see <http://www.vhfcn.org/stat.html>
- Video segments: View film clips from a movie or news footage of the war. [Such as *Good Morning, Vietnam*, *The Thin Red Line*, or *Apocalypse Now*]
- Divide the class into groups to read different segments of Catching’s letters. Look for the answer to the questions: *How was the fighting different from earlier wars? Did this war cause unusual trauma for returning soldiers? What did you see on the video or read from Catching that might indicate the returning soldiers would have problems?*
- Assignment 1: Create news broadcast that includes information from the front on the progress the war in Vietnam. Also include in the broadcast information about protests going on in the United States over involvement in the war. *What happened at the University of Wisconsin, at University of California at Berkley, or Kent State?*
- Assignment 2: Write a letter to William Catching from a friend at home. Support your friend, but include information to him about the contrast of feelings that Americans had over participation in the war.

Selected Bibliography:

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Buckley, Gail. *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*. (Random House, 2001).

Lakoff, Robin Tolmach. See her article about the use of words to make the enemy seem more contemptible. *The New York Times*, "From Ancient Greece to Iraq, the Power of Words in Wartime," May 18, 2004 or at this web site: <http://www.globalcommunity.org/timeline/76/index.shtml#7>

Leepson, Marc and Helen Hannaford, ed. *Webster's New World: Dictionary of the Vietnam War*. (Simon & Schuster, 1999).

Maraniss, David. *They Marched into Sunlight: War and Peace Vietnam and America October 1967*. (Simon and Schuster, 2004).

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