

Course: 20th Century American History: Civil Rights Seminar

Grade Levels: 10th-12th honors level students

Prior Knowledge: Students will already be familiar with the ideas of Booker T. Washington and WEB Dubois, the practice of lynching, media stereotypes of African-Americans in the early 20th century, sharecropping, the Tuskegee syphilis study, and the Great Migration;

Pre-Reading: on geography of the Mississippi Delta from *Rising Tide* by John Barry

Objectives: Students will be able to identify basic geographical features of the Mississippi Delta and how this impacted life in the region; Students will be able to analyze and discuss the causes, responses to, and effect of the Great Flood of 1927 on the Mississippi Delta region with a particular emphasis on African-Americans.

Key Terms/Figures: alluvial soil, levees, levees only system, crevasse, Flood of 1927, William Percy, Hurricane Katrina.

Materials Needed: LCD, Overhead Projector, maps of Mississippi Delta, internet access, newspaper cartoons.

Assessments: Journal Entries

Total Time Expected: 1 1/2 to 2 hour block of class

Part I: A series of questions will be written on the board for students at the beginning of class. Students will be given ten minutes at the beginning of the class to reflect on these questions in their journal. The questions are as follows:

What things in your life would you like to change?

Is there anything that is preventing you from making this change? If so, is it an external factor or an internal factor that is preventing you from making this change?

Part II: Students will listen to a recording of the blues song "When the Levee Breaks" by Memphis Minnie. Copies of the lyrics will be provided to the student. The song will be used to facilitate a discussion on the prereading from Rising Tide by John Barry. The following questions will be posed to the students:

What area comprises the Mississippi Delta?

What does the song reveal about life in the Mississippi Delta?

What types of people would have settled in the Mississippi Delta?

Why would people settle in a region that provided so many dangers?

The discussion will be accompanied with powerpoint images of the Mississippi Delta.

Part III: Students will be provided with a copy of a cartoon from the Chicago Defender April 30th, 1927 titled: "No Color Line Here". Students will be asked to analyze the cartoon (The cartoon conveys the idea of cooperation between the races to deal with the flood);

Part IV: Students will watch the documentary from the Weather Channel;

site:<http://www.weather.com/multimedia/videoplayer.html?collection=257>

Film clip is 43 Minutes long. Students will be given the following guided questions to consider while watching the film:

What attempts were made to control the Mississippi River up through 1927?

Why do these attempts to control the Mississippi River fail in 1927?

How are refugees from the flood treated? What factors influence how authorities treat these refugees?

In what ways, both short and long term, does the Flood of 1927 affect the Mississippi Delta?

Part V (Closing Discussion question): What comparisons can you make between the Flood of 1927 and Hurricane

Katrina (causes, government response, political ramifications, race relations).

Part VI (Closing assignment): Students will be given an additional brief reading selection from *Rising Tide* by John Barry. The selection will focus on William Percy and his response as head of the relief effort in his region of the Delta. This reading should serve to extend their knowledge of Percy from the film and follow up class discussion. After reading the selection, students will be asked to do the following:

"In your initial journal entry, in our class discussions, and in your assigned readings, nature has been a recurring theme. In using the term nature, I am referring to both human nature and the physical environment. You have seen the response of individuals and communities to the flood relief efforts in 1927, you have seen and read about Will Percy's struggle with both internal and external crises, and you have learned about various attempts to control the Mississippi

River. Providing examples from these events and referring back to your earlier journal entry, I would like you to write a 400-500 word journal entry based on the following: Which do you think is more easily changed and controlled-human nature or the physical environment?

optional supplemental resources:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/flood/> (for contemporary newspaper articles on the flood of 1927)

http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2001/05/0501_river4.html (article by Stephen Ambrose titled "Man Vs. Nature: The Great Flood of 1927")

Richard Wrights Flood Stories and the Great Mississippi River Flood of 1927: Social and Historical Backgrounds by William Howard in The Southern Literary Journal, Spring 1984 Vol. 16.