

Title: What Would You Do? Desegregating the Military Lesson Plan

Author: Erin Welch

Course: American Government, American History

Time Frame: Two 45-55 minute class period(s) (depending on student familiarity analyzing primary sources)

Subjects:

Civil Rights, Civil Rights, African-American History

Grade Levels:

9, 10, 11, 12

Classroom/Homework Activity to be performed:

Students will analyze primary documents, make decisions in the role of Harry S. Truman, and participate in group discussion and debate to understand the complex decision making that went into Truman's decision to desegregate the U.S. military in 1948.

Rationale:

Often, the desegregation of the U.S. military in 1948 is presented only as part of "early" civil rights successes prior to the late 1950s and early 1960s. I believe that students should have a deeper understanding of the factors that impacted Harry Truman and led to his decision to desegregate the military. This lesson may be used in a unit on civil rights, on Truman, or on presidential decision-making.

Lesson objectives - the student will:

- Analyze and evaluate primary documents relating to American race relations after World War II and to the desegregation of the U.S. military
- Take the role of President Harry S. Truman to determine what decision they would have made on desegregating the military
- Participate in small-group and class-wide discussion and debate about the decisions reached

District, state, or national performance and knowledge standards/goals/skills met:

- Culture: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.
- Time, Continuity, and Change: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.
- People, Places, and Environments: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.
- Power, Governance, and Authority: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance.
- Civic Ideals and Practices: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.

Missouri Standards

2. Continuity and change in the history of Missouri, the United States and the world
6. Relationships of the individual and groups to institutions and cultural traditions
7. The use of tools of social science inquiry (such as surveys, statistics, maps, documents)

Kansas Standards

Benchmark 3: The student uses a working knowledge and understanding of individuals, groups, ideas, developments, and turning points in the era of the Cold War (1945-1990).

7.(K) examines the struggle for racial and gender equality and for the extension of civil rights (e.g., Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Little Rock Nine, Martin Luther King, Jr., Montgomery Bus Boycott, Voting Rights Act of 1965, Betty Friedan, NOW, ERA, Title IX).

Benchmark 5: The student engages in historical thinking skills.

1. (A) analyzes a theme in United States history to explain patterns of continuity and change over time.
2. (A) develops historical questions on a specific topic in United States history and analyzes the evidence in primary source documents to speculate on the answers.
3. (A) uses primary and secondary sources about an event in U.S. history to develop a credible interpretation of the event, evaluating on its meaning (e.g., uses provided primary and secondary sources to interpret a historical-based conclusion).

Secondary materials (book, article, video documentary, etc.) needed:

- Harold Jackson, "Truman a civil rights hero," in the Philadelphia Inquirer, February 21, 2008

Primary materials (book, article, video documentary, etc.) needed:

Â All documents available at Truman Presidential Library and Museum; most in conference packet on Desegregation and Civil Rights; others available in Truman Library's online document collection. Use all or choose some of these documents for your classroom.)

- Press Conference statement of Truman K. Gibson, Jr., Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, April 9, 1945
- Letter to Harry S. Truman from R.R. Wright, Sr., regarding Isaac Woodard, July 18, 1946 (optional)
- Memorandum from the President to Administrative Assistant David K. Niles, with attachment to Attorney General Tom C. Clark, regarding Isaac Woodard, September 20, 1946
- "Jury Finds Five Men Not Guilty," in the Kansas City Call, March 7, 1947 (optional)
- Harry S. Truman's speech to the NAACP, June 29, 1947
- The Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, 1947 (Assignment from the President [p. VII] and A Program of Action: The Committee's Recommendations [pp. 156-163, especially point 9 of Section III]) <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/civilrights/srights1.htm>
-

http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/1948campaign/large/docs/documents/pdfs/1-1.pdf#zoom=100

-

Political cartoon, C.K. Berryman, "I Stand Pat!," The Washington Star, March 14, 1948

- Letter to Harry S. Truman from Robert Winston, 1948
- Letter to Harry S. Truman from Mr. and Mrs. Irvin Dagen, regarding "Jim Crow military forces," June 15, 1948
- Letter to Harry S. Truman from Americans for Democratic Action, July 22, 1948
- Harry S. Truman's reply to Ernie Roberts regarding civil rights, August 18, 1948
- Executive Order 9981, July 26, 1948

Technology required: None

Full description of activity or assignment:

1. Prior to this activity, students should understand the basic history of racial segregation in the U.S., including discrimination and violence against African Americans in the 1930s and 1940s
2. In 1948, President Harry S. Truman faced many huge decisions, one of which involved segregation; specifically, the segregation of the U.S. armed forces. Explain that students will place themselves in Truman's shoes and individually examine a packet of primary documents addressing race relations in the U.S. in the late 1940s. Documents range from Truman's personal thoughts, to letters he received from citizens, to official documents dealing with race and politics. I recommend providing students with a highlighter to mark major passages (if not reusing document packets), and requiring them to take notes on the major points of each document. (If students need assistance analyzing primary sources, have them use the Truman Library and Museum's Document Analysis worksheet on the major sources.) It may also be a good idea to set a certain amount of time for students to look through the documents; they will be pressed for time, but presidents do not always have the luxury of unlimited time and must often make decisions under the gun. Student document analysis will likely take most or all of one class period, but should be limited to only one class period.
3. After students analyze the documents, each should write a brief (2-3 paragraph) "press release" to the American public explaining the decision he/she, President Truman, has reached on desegregating the military: did the student choose to desegregate the military? If so, why? If not, why not? Students should reference at least five specific documents that influenced their decision. The press release should be written formally, as if it really will be released to the public and published across the nation. This press release is the formal assessment for this activity.
4. After students write explanations, place students in groups of 4-5 to discuss the decision each reached. Students should explain to the group their decision, rationale for the decision, and the documents that most influenced them. Each group should then reach a group decision on what should be done about military segregation.
5. Lead a whole-class discussion on the issue, polling each group (and student, if there was much dissension in a group) for its decision and rationale. Allow some informal debate between students and groups if it occurs. During the discussion, ask which specific documents impacted students' decisions most. Did these documents appeal to their conscience? to political considerations? If it does not come up, point out Clark Clifford's 1947 memo to Truman emphasizing the importance of civil rights and the Black vote in winning the 1948 election. Did students pick up on this? Was this an important consideration for them? Do they think it was for Truman? This should spark some great discussion about the many factors impacting a president's decisions: while Truman may have felt personally that the time for desegregation was right, the move was also motivated at least partly by political considerations. How do students feel about this? Is it possible to know which factor—personal beliefs or political considerations—motivated Truman more? Does it matter, as long as something was done? What about more recent presidents and their decisions? What factors could have influenced them?
6. To conclude, hand out a copy of Executive Order 9981 (or project it on an overhead) and have students read Truman's actual decision (this should be fairly obvious to them by this point). Next, have students read Harold Jackson's article in the Philadelphia Inquirer, "Truman a civil rights hero" (February 21, 2008) and discuss their opinions of the article. Do they agree with Jackson's premise that Truman should be regarded as a civil rights champion? Why or why not? Discuss the effects of Truman's decision to desegregate the military, immediately and today. Be sure to reiterate the difficulty of Truman's decision, the many factors that

influenced him, and the challenge of presidential decision-making in general.

Full explanation of the assessment method and/or scoring guide:

Participation points may be given for participating in the small-group and whole-class discussion (my students can currently earn up to ten participation points per class period). The more formal assessment will consist of the “press release” explained above. After students analyze the documents, each should write a brief (2-3 paragraph) “press release” explaining to the American public the decision he/she, Harry Truman, has reached on desegregating the military: did the student choose to desegregate the military? If so, why? If not, why not? Students should reference at least five specific documents that influenced their decision. The press release should be written formally, as if it really will be released to the public and published across the nation.

What Would You Do? Desegregating the Military Assessment Scoring Guide

10 = excellent; 8 = good; 6 = satisfactory; 4 = needs work; 2 = marginal/ineffective; 0 = guidelines not met

1. Press release clearly explains student’s decision and rationale 0 on desegregating the military	10	8	6	4	2	
2. Press release thoroughly references at least five documents 0	10	8	6	4	2	
3. Press release is convincing to public and effective at portraying 0 “president’s” decision on the subject.	10	8	6	4	2	
4. Press release meets basic writing guidelines (length, etc.)	10	8	6	4	2	0
5. Press release is well-written, legible & free of major grammatical 0 errors	10	8	6	4	2	

6. Teacher comments

7. TOTAL POINTS EARNED: /50 Percent & Letter Grade: