

Lesson P

Protesting the Vietnam War

Delaware Social Studies Benchmarks

History Two 9-12b: Students will examine and analyze primary and secondary sources in order to differentiate between historical facts and historical interpretations. **Essential for Grade 11**

Lesson Essential Question

- Why is it important to distinguish between fact and interpretation?

Documents

1) *Lesson P, Delaware Public Archives, James E. Crow Letter, RG 1302.7*

[back to back with]

Lesson P, Delaware Public Archives, Student Telegram, RG 1302.7

2) *Lesson P, Delaware Public Archives, Student Letter, RG 1302.7*

[back to back with]

Lesson P, Delaware Public Archives, VFW Letter, RG 1302.7

Instructional Strategies

Strategy One: Gathering Information

Graphic Organizer

Have students work in groups of 2-3 to recall examples of public protest in American history. Students might list such protests as the Boston Tea Party, the abolitionist movement, the women’s suffrage movement, etc.

Have students construct a graphic organizer like the one below to record the protests.

Example of Public Protest	Motivation for the Protest	Successful?

Ask students to think about what motivated these protest movements and to what extent they were successful in achieving their goals. Add this information to the graphic organizer.

Strategy Two: Gathering Information

Direct Teaching

Provide students with historical background on the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War and protest movements of the Vietnam Era. A good resource for this era is the Gilder-Lehrman Institute of American History: The Tumultuous 1960s:

http://www.gilderlehrman.org/teachers/module.php?module_id=564

Strategy Three: Extending and Refining

Think-Pair-Share

Distribute the *James E. Crow Letter/Student Telegram* documents to half the class and the *Student Letter/VFW Letter* to the other half. Instruct students to analyze the documents using the Primary Document Analysis Worksheets (below). Have student share their answers.

Conduct a Think-Pair-Share in which students consider why the documents have different views on the same issue.

Emphasize the background of the authors.

What can students infer from American society at this time from these documents?

Strategy Four: Application

Ask students to complete independently the Primary Document Analysis worksheet for one of the documents included under “Learning Tools: Issues” at The Tumultuous 1960s site: Civil Rights, the New Left, or Women’s Liberation.

http://www.gilderlehrman.org/teachers/module.php?module_id=568

Ask students to investigate the actions of the group. Were they successful in achieving their goals? Why or why not? Why might some groups in the United States oppose these goals?

Check for Understanding

- How does this poster demonstrate an *interpretation* of the Vietnam War? Why is it important to distinguish between fact and interpretation?



http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Exhibits/Track16.html#Poster

Rubric

- 2 – This response gives a valid demonstration and a valid explanation.
- 1 – This response gives a valid demonstration or a valid explanation.

Primary Document Analysis Chart

Title and Author:	Date:
Intended Audience:	Purpose:
Facts included in document:	Interpretations in document:
Summary of Document:	An Important Quote from the Document:

Document Background

The telegram and all the letters used in this lesson are part of the Governor's Papers Collection, Record Group 1302.7. The telegram and the Student letter are located in Box 291899, folder 22-2 University of Delaware (folder 2 of 5). The box includes correspondence to and from Governor Peterson in the year 1970. The VFW letter is located in Box 132953, folder 23-1, Veterans and Servicemen. This box includes correspondence to and from Governor Terry. The Crow letter is located in Box 132952, folder C.3 (Misc.). The box also includes correspondence to and from Governor Terry. The Governor's Papers Collection includes general administrative files created by the Office of the Governor reflecting the operations of that office. This collection dates from 1874 to 2001.

Charles L. Terry, Jr. served as Governor of Delaware from 1965 to 1969. Russell W. Peterson served as Governor of Delaware from 1969 to 1973.

Transcriptions

Student Letter

Newark, Del

May 12, 1970

Dear Governor Peterson:

I like to think that you are receptive to the ideas and feelings of the so-called younger generation, in particular, the students at the University of Delaware. I hope that I am right. I hope that you can find time to come to our campus so that we can talk with you, not just listen to you.

I believe the students at the university, and at most universities, are sincerely concerned and acting with best interests in mind. I personally do not feel that striking is right for me, but I am spending as much time as I can afford outside the classroom working for peace. I hope you are properly informed about campus activities and that you will do your best to inform others. I fear the majority of people have misconceived ideas.

I seriously doubt that any violent protests will take place on this campus, but if the National Guard is called in, I hope you will see that their weapons are not loaded. Any means except killing should be used to break up an angry crowd. Perhaps the National Guard should be given more training in riot control. We must avoid tragedies like those at Kent State at all costs. It is obvious that killings will not prevent future protest, but possibly added precautions will prevent future deaths.

Sincerely,

Crow Letter

May 11, 1968

Honorable Charles L. Terry, Jr.
Governor, State of Delaware
Executive Department
Dover, Delaware

Dear Governor Terry:

I just returned home from taking my daughter to the University of Delaware where she is taking her last entrance exams prior to entering the University of Delaware.

She, like most 17 year old girls is not as mature as I would wish. We have tried to rear her in a Christian home, teach her proper manners, provide her with the necessities of life and encourage her to go to college.

But, what do the next years have to offer her? Will it be a constant barrage of sit ins, obscene language, protest marches, a decaying moral situation, possible communist influence, a loss of respect for law and order and other sick acts perpetrated by a misguided infinitesimal minority. Even though we live less than two miles from the campus we think it proper that she live in a dormitory. In this environment she will not have access to the daily counsel at her mother and me.

My wife and I are deeply concerned over the present state at our two Delaware Universities. We look to you for corrective measures, now.

I would urge you to do the following:

1. Announce in straightforward, plain language that campus lawbreakers will be arrested and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.
2. Point out the legal and political methods for gaining change to existing situations (and changes are in order in some instances).
3. Call for an impartial investigation of both universities, to be made promptly. Act promptly on the report of the investigating committee.

As a resident of the state of Delaware I am sick and tired of hearing unrealistic "Demands" being made, the reference

Background Information

[University students] hated the hypocrisy of adult society, the rigidity of its political institutions, the impersonality of its bureaucracies. They sought to create a society that places human values before materialistic ones, that has a little less head and a little more heart,

that is dominated by self-interest and loves its neighbor more. And they were persuaded that group protest of a militant nature would advance those goals.ⁱ

Student unrest in the 1960s and 1970s followed an American tradition, dating back to colonial times, of voicing, either vocally or by actions, frustration with government policies that created unjust situations within society. If the war years and the apparent euphoria following had been characterized by a sense of unity and camaraderie within the country, the sixties and seventies were marked by discord and societal fracturing into bitter animosity between generations. While commonly referred to as “the sixties,” the period, a war on the status quo, actually covered the years from 1955, when Rosa Parks, remaining in the front of the bus, doing what she chose to do, and not what she was “supposed” to do, through its gradual ebbing after January 1973 and President Nixon’s proclamation ending America’s involvement in Vietnam.

Participants in college protest movements during that time tended to be young people, more often men rather than women, from affluent, well educated parents who had attained high grades in high school and were attending college. Other similarities identified by researchers include politically involved parents, adolescent trust in the political system, and membership in non-fundamentalist or non-conservative Protestant denominations. The young people involved had witnessed, through their parents’ participation, that activism within the system could effect changes. They accepted the notion that political action, “not simply obedient patriotism,” made an impact. Additionally, living on college campuses with its ready exposure to new ideas and people enhanced the opportunity for involvement in protest activities.ⁱⁱ Population on college campuses had swelled to all time highs as the first of the children of returning World War II veterans, known as the Baby Boomers, entered higher education for the first time.

This period of intense political protest was the era when frustrations with numerous social issues coalesced into an alliance of multiple factions. Agitating for civil rights, for women’s liberation, for environmental issues, for better treatment for Native Americans, for sexual freedom and acceptance, involved students merged with anti war activists into one huge, seemingly amorphous mass of young people, identifiable by hair styles, manner of dress, language, drug use, sexual freedom, and anti-establishment music. This “younger generation” was counter culture, rebelling against traditional checks and balances of parental, societal, and religious controls. Freedom from expectations combined with youthful optimism brought about belief that change advocated from the outside would bring about change within the system. Commitment to change during this period brought affluent activists into close contact with urban and rural poor who were also working to improve the conditions for minorities and those living below the poverty line.

Through the “wonders of television,” students of early ‘60’s witnessed the impact of the McCarthy hearings on American society. At the University of Michigan, Al Haber led the Student League for Industrial Democracy, the collegiate arm of the socialist League for Industrial Democracy. He was frustrated with the narrow focus of the group:

educating students about the values of socialism. Haber sought to inject activism into the group but met with opposition from LID. Envisioning a nationwide network of students working to improve social conditions, he formed the Students for a Democratic Society. While still officially a chapter of LID until 1965, for all intents and purposes, SDS's aims and activities separated it from the beginning. One of Haber's associates, Tom Hayden, President of SDS in 1962, had become disenchanted with the governing institutions in America, deciding that both liberals and conservatives decided agendas based on personal interests and political power. Platitudes and laws were not, as Hayden saw it, addressing the poverty in the country nor the mistreatment and isolation of blacks in the South. He believed that rules and regulations were being made to keep order not really to improve conditions and those rules and regulations reduced involvement in communities. Hayden believed that change would come only from a "participatory democracy...should build community, enrich people's everyday lives, and develop realistic, workable solutions to social and economic problems as efficiently and judiciously as possible."ⁱⁱⁱ

Hayden and colleagues from around the Midwest and on the East Coast met in 1962 to codify their beliefs of radical change to the country and how college students, acting together in one movement, could effect needed change. This codification is known as the Port Huron Statement. Initially the group concentrated on developing its philosophical stands on society, building a strong publication program of pieces written by its members, and focusing on three major areas: radical community organizing, peace issues, and university reform.^{iv}

Significant events in civil rights were occurring throughout the country, bringing about an intersection of more affluent students with poor and minority populations of the Deep South and in Appalachia. African American college students in the South worked to overturn segregation and repression. In 1961 Haber and Hayden went south to work with the Student Non Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), participating in freedom rides and sit-ins. Together white and black college students worked to extend civil rights to all citizens. SDS saw the effect of peaceful activism and incorporated methodologies learned from SNCC and Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference as they expanded from publicizing their ideas to true "participatory democracy." SDS, with a grant from the United Auto Workers, remained active in promoting social change and formed Economic and Research Action Project (ERAP). This arm worked in low-income areas to educate residents on the potential of change and how to achieve that change. The focus of this successful activity was Newark, New Jersey.

Transformations similar to the ones achieved in Newark required working for change from within. Many SDS members began to believe that this style of change was not only too slow and ineffective for long-term societal change but also against their principles. The Presidential decision to send more troops into Vietnam in 1965 marked a dramatic shift in SDS activity, eventually leading to a philosophical dispute that splintered the group and propelled it into violent radicalism. The March on Washington, April 1965, was a significant "happening" during this time period. Over 20,000 people participated from all over the country; students from Mississippi and SNCC arrived by the busloads. Similar events occurred in Los Angeles, Portland, San Francisco, and at the LBJ ranch in

Texas. In Washington, the event was peppered with speakers from the House and Senate voicing their disapproval of the involvement in and bombing of Vietnam. Singers such as Joan Baez, Carole King, Phil Ochs and Pete Seeger stirred the emotions of the crowd and got them actively singing during the march to the Capitol.

Archibald MacLeish in a New York Times editorial entitled "In Praise of Dissent" captured the essence of the times and for college students: "the dissenter is every human being at those moments of his life when he resigns momentarily from the herd and thinks for himself"^v Student protests spread across the country. Focus moved from working on issues for the greater good of society to issues that directly impacted their lives: the draft and the Vietnam War. The rallies involved Americans of all ages but were primarily composed of young college students. The country split along generational lines. Youth tossed tradition and support of country in the faces of parents. Appearing ungrateful for the sacrifices of their fathers, they confronted governmental policies demanding their involvement in a military action not directly jeopardizing America liberty. Blind obedience vanished. SDS proclaimed that war was most injurious to the poor because they were the first to go. College students gained yearly deferments from service. The poor not attending colleges and marginalized in society were drafted and sent to the front lines. And so the dissent grew, in size, in volume, and in violence.

The University of Delaware, with its own SDS chapter, agitated for change. At many colleges, particularly at those private institutions called the Ivy League and at major midwestern schools like Wisconsin, sloppy and unusual dress had become an accepted part of the campus scene even by 1960. But not at Delaware, where a vigilantly paternalistic administration enforced a strict dress code as well as an auto ban until 1967; no women, for instance, could enter the library in pants except in examination periods.^{vi}

In his annual report to the Board for 1965-66, University President Perkins noted, "'More of our students are conforming to non-conformity. There has been a noticeable increase in the number of students unkempt or bizarre in dress."^{vii} Student involvement in committed dissent fractured the University community and often placed parents in direct opposition to administrative actions to control and safeguard students.

At UD, students at Delaware actively protested military involvement in Vietnam. Military training was a compulsory part of education at the University of Delaware in the 1960s. In 1967, encouraged by campus SDS members, student demonstrations had interrupted formations and marching at the ROTC building. In a wave of related activism, students were suspended, homes of the Acting President and Vice President of the University were picketed, and the head of the Student Government Association, Ramon Ceci, a member of SDS, resigned. The faculty responded to student demands to end obligatory ROTC by ending the requirement in January 1968. Student protests continued throughout the period with monthly moratoria and candlelight vigils. A bomb was planted in the uniform storage area of the ROTC building, causing damage and more frustration and fear on the campus. Protest was no longer just the domain of students as three faculty members were involved in the bombing incident.^{viii}

At Delaware much of the student restlessness focused on civil rights, women's movement, and changes in university policies. Students approached the Administration requesting changes to overly restrictive policies. They asked for (1) elimination of all dormitory regulations that restricted women more than men; (2) permission to entertain visitors of either sex in their rooms at all hours; and (3) liberalization of all regulations pertaining to extracurricular affairs, including the invitation of speakers to the campus. Additionally, since the requests had not been implemented before Trabant became President of the University, the students added "freedom from restrictions on the use and possession of alcohol by those over twenty-one; ... right to establish rules for their own government in living units on campus and the power to allocate the use of money collected by the university as an activities fee. They also wanted a voice in the making of university policies, by representation on trustee committees and by participation in departmental decisions."^x

1968 was a traumatic year for America. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy had been assassinated. Riot police had brutally ended demonstrations at the Democratic convention. President Johnson had informed the country that he would not seek reelection. Civil rights activism had erupted into violent confrontations in Detroit, Watts, and in Wilmington, DE. Governor Terry had closed down Delaware State College in response to the rioting. Student unrest was splintered into groups advocating the violent overthrow of the system. SDS and SNCC had been taken over by more militant leaders and had lost the initial optimism of peaceful change. Many young men were fleeing to Canada in an effort to avoid the draft. With the election of President Nixon and his promise to bring the war in Vietnam to a rapid close, people hoped for progress and a return to "normalcy" for the country.

On a national scale tension erupted like a firebomb in 1970. President Nixon had initiated "Operation Menu," the secret bombing of Cambodia, which continued for fourteen months, dropping 383,851 tons of explosives from 16,527 sorties. Military personnel in Vietnam rose to 541,000.^x "As a result of the expanded and intensified bombing campaigns, it has been officially estimated that as many as 350,000 civilians in Laos and 600,000 in Cambodia lost their lives. (These are not the highest estimates.) Figures for refugees are several multiples of that. In addition, the widespread use of toxic chemical defoliants created a massive health crisis that naturally fell most heavily on children, nursing mothers, the aged, and the already infirm. That crisis persists to this day."^{xi} A reporter for the NY Times revealed the bombing operation in Cambodia. After tragedies at the 1968 Democratic Convention, anti war activists had become unnaturally quiet, as if waiting for a salvo to be fired by the new Nixon Administration. Hopes were high when Nixon announced troop withdrawals and his Vietnamization policy. However, after a NY Times reporter broke the story of attacks in/on Cambodia, student leaders called for a nationwide walkout of classes to protest "President Nixon's unwarranted and illegitimate decision to send American combat troops into Cambodia and to resume bombing of North Vietnam."^{xii}

On November 15, 1969, 250,000 protesters of all ages and from many different groups gathered in Washington D.C. to voice their concern about the course of the war and the

unrest in the country. The days' events concluded three days of peaceful protesting and included addresses by political and religious leaders as well as a folk concert; by 8:00 PM the official activities ended. The scene turned violent, however, when over 500 demonstrators began looting and rioting, breaking windows and hurling rocks at government windows and police. Over 100 people were arrested and another 100 wounded and hospitalized. The event was significant for many reasons. Not only was it the largest demonstration in US history until that time, but also it, according to many historians, marked a turning point in the progress of the war. Many believed it "finally made evident that American public opposition to the War was extensive and was a force which needed to be seriously considered by those in the Government."^{xiii}

In response to the secret bombing of Cambodia, violent rioting occurred across the nation. Perhaps the most tragic, and therefore, the most memorable is the Kent State disaster. National Guard troops had been called in to quell ongoing protesting at the campus. Students had burned the ROTC building, thousands attempted to march on the home of the college President, and, on May 4, 1970, four were killed by the National Guard.^{xiv} Rioting intensified throughout the country. Ronald Reagan, then Governor of California, closed all 92 public colleges and universities and requested that private institutions follow suit.^{xv} In Jackson, Mississippi, on May 13-14, rioting got out of control and two students lost their lives and at least twelve others, wounded.^{xvi} At the University of Delaware students joined in the strike and President Trabant sent a message to President Nixon urging a speedy conclusion to the Vietnam War. Students joined in the nationwide strike that had closed many schools and cancelled classes at other universities. Students marked the class moratorium with marches, with vigils, with placards. Trabant refused to be provoked into any irrational response by these events, and "hen students held a candlelight procession on Sunday night, May 10, in honor of the slain Kent State students, the president and Mrs. Trabant, along with Stuart Sharkey, then director of residence, joined the procession, which moved from the Student Center to Old College and then, after three minutes of silent reflection, to Memorial Hall."^{xvii}

The decade, which really lasted over 15 years, left scars and changed the country forever. The country even now suffers the effects of governmental distrust, of a civil rights movement that has never been completed, and a continuing generation gap characterized by counterculture traits. Students still protest, but not as much nor as violently, and people still fight to hold the government accountable, but with little more success than in the sixties.

The sixties, were, to use the apt subtitle of Todd Gitlin's valuable book, "years of hope, days of rage." The words remind us that we should avoid judging the sixties by how they ended instead of how they began. Vivid in our image are the riots, the Weathermen, the Panthers; lost to memory are the courageous acts of civil disobedience, the sight of blacks and whites marching together. It was, for all its foibles, fury and desperate fantasies, an era of good faith.^{xviii}

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Zakrewski, Dana. Students for a Democratic Society. [Online: <http://barksdale.uta.edu/undergrad2a.htm>] May 30, 2003.
- ^{iv} "Programs" in Students for a Democratic Society. *Democracy, Vol. 1*. 1965. Online Archive of California. [Online: <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/kt6g5004vt>] May 30, 2003.
- ^v MacLeisch, Archibald. "In Praise of Dissent," *New York Times*. New York Times (1857-Current file), New York, N.Y.; Dec 16, 1956; pg. BR3. New York Times Historical Backfile, King County Library System. [Online: <http://hn.umi.com/pqdweb?Did=000000084940956&Fmt=10&Deli=1&Mtd=1&Idx=6&Sid=1&RQT=309>] May 30, 2003.
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- ^{vii} Ibid.
- ^{viii} Munroe, John. "Chapter 12: Further Growth and a New Stability," *A History of the University of Delaware*. [Online: <http://www.udel.edu/PR/munroe/chapter12.html>] May 30, 2003.
- ^{ix} Ibid.
- ^x Nixon and Vietnam. [Online: <http://history.acusd.edu/gen/20th/nixon-vietnam.html>] May 30, 2003. The American Experience: Vietnam Timeline. [Online: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/time/tl4-noframes.html>] May 30, 2003.
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