



Teaching LGBTQ History

a project of Our Family Coalition

Resurgence of the KKK

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Subject: History

Topic: Integrated, the Klu Klux Klan

Grade Level: High School: 11th Grade

Overview

This lesson seeks to teach students about the history of the Ku Klux Klan and their prominence during the 1920s-1930s. Students will read different articles that explore the KKK and think broadly about the ways in which the KKK's violent rhetoric and actions towards BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) currently shape America's political and social climate.

Time: 60 minutes

Lesson Objectives:

Students will learn:

- The history of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s-1930s

Students will think about:

- How the Ku Klux Klan and their ideology has endured in modern society
- The balance between spreading awareness and normalizing extremist groups

Essential Questions:

- Have historical forms of violent ideologies informed or shaped the political climate today?
- Is there a way to balance freedom of speech and denouncing hateful rhetoric?
- Should the government have a role in regulating hate groups like the KKK?
- Does the rhetoric of extremist groups make it easier for people to perpetuate harm?
- How has American society allowed for/normalized extremist groups that advocate and promote violence and harm towards their opposition to meet their ends to exist, even today?
- How do we learn/talk about racist extremist groups without normalizing them?

Standards:

HSS 11.5: Students analyze the major political, social, economic, technological, and cultural developments of the 1920s.

CCSS SL 11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS RH 11-12.7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

HISTORY FRAMEWORK: CH 16 P 395: In addition to American political leaders’ reluctance to embrace change, many Americans did not embrace the social and cultural openness of the decade. These people found a voice in many organizations that formed to prevent such shifts. The Ku Klux Klan launched anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic, and moralizing campaigns of violence and intimidation; vice squads targeted speakeasies, communities of color, and LGBT venues.

Vocabulary:

Ku Klux Klan (KKK): A white supremacist hate group that enacts violence on racially and ethnically marginalized communities including but not limited to: the Black community, the Jewish community, the Latinx community, the Asian community, and non-white immigrants. This group originated in Polaski, Tennessee but has since spread throughout the United States.

White supremacy: A form of racism that argues white people are better than and superior to all other races. White supremacy has been used to achieve social and political dominance for white people.

White/White People: In this case, white or white people do not simply equate to an ethnicity and rather an aggregation of power based on skin color. Members of the KKK weaponize this power to physically harm and further oppress other races.

Hate speech: A form of expression (i.e. speech, gestures, conduct, writing, etc.) through which the perpetrator intends to vilify, humiliate, or incite hatred and/or violence against a marginalized community.

Normalization: In this lesson, normalization is the process by which white people create standards for culture, customs, and beliefs to which other groups are compared or expected to adhere. Generally, normalization dictates whether or not a person, custom, or belief is normal and it does not have to be solely on the basis of race.

Extremist Groups: A group of ideologically motivated individuals that use violence, fear mongering, and normalization to achieve their ideal society. In this lesson, extremist groups use violent tactics to enact their perceived racial superiority over racially marginalized groups.

Teacher Background:

Teachers should understand the three waves of the Ku Klux Klan and be comfortable speaking about the second resurgence and the harm associated. Teachers are encouraged to provide a space for students after class to debrief the subject material.

Materials:

- Handout of The Atlantic essay titled: "[Make America White Again?](#)" and the History.com article titled: "[Tulsa Race Massacre](#)"
- Paper and writing equipment for notes

Instruction:

- **Content warning (2 minutes)**
 - Provide a disclaimer at the beginning of class that today's class will explore a more violent subject matter and if students need to step out for a breather at any point they are supported in that decision. Acknowledge that some students will be more impacted by this lesson than others.
- **Lesson (30 minutes)**
 - Originally formed in 1866, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) comprised of former Confederate soldiers and white Southerners who opposed Reconstruction post-Civil War
 - However, the nationalist and supremacist group soon disbanded as Reconstruction receded in the late 1870s.
 - After viewing *Birth of a Nation*, a film that depicted KKK members as unsung heroes, William Joseph Simmons revived the KKK (known as the second KKK) and set a cross on fire to "mark the rebirth" of the group in 1915
 - The group took form as an exclusive and underground fraternal organization (complete with coded names and official Klan garb) and posed itself as a patriotic community to the public
 - Simmons hired two local publicists, Edward Young Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler to recruit new members at a price point of \$10 per membership
 - The membership of the group surged, and by 1925, it was reported that around 2 to 5 million people across the United States either were members of the KKK or were supporters
 - This time period coincides with the Great Migration, an increase in immigration from Eastern Europe, and the peak of the Harlem Renaissance and Jazz Age which saw a small yet growing acceptance of marginalized communities such as Black and LGBTQ individuals
 - In 1922, Simmons was overthrown by Hiram Wesley Evans (a dentist) with an aim to "reduce" the violent acts and create a women's auxiliary. **NOTE: these efforts still contributed to the organization's overall supremacist motive and the harm they perpetuated; the reduction in outward physical violence does not excuse any violence or harm perpetrated**
 - After 1920 when white women obtained voting rights, many joined the KKK's women's auxiliary, in hopes of being active citizens in purifying the country

- Women in the KKK described their actions with this group as being the duty of the “American Mother” to showcase their patriotism and uphold white supremacy
 - The sentiments used to recruit these women denounced racial integration, religious plurality, and immorality on the basis of how these things impacted their gender and the family unit
 - Klanswomen organized to achieve systemic forms of oppression such as political and social power through propaganda recreational events, rallies, parades, and lecture series.
- What was the KKK message?
 - Much of the early KKK ideals were inspired by Reconstruction-era thinking in the South but not confined to this region
 - Although the South was historically a hotbed for racist ideology, that did not prevent it from operating in other parts of the country
 - Only thinking about the KKK in relation to the South paints other regions, especially the West Coast, as being a progressive haven beyond the reach of such violent hate groups
 - The KKK ideology adopted xenophobia, religious prejudice, and white supremacy and this message was touted as “moralism”, a return to “clean living”, and “true Americanism”
 - Platforms included being anti-Black, anti-Catholic, anti-Jewish, anti-Mexican, anti-Asian, anti-non-white immigrants, anti-Communism, anti-evolution, and anti-birth control
 - Promised that white nationalism would curb modern cultural practices
 - Believed that immigrants brought increased levels of crime and that immigrants “stole” jobs from Americans
 - Attempted to fight certain vices such as bootlegging (illegal sale of alcohol), prostitution, gambling, and the dealing of drugs, often leading Klansmen to target speakeasies which were often venues for Black and LGBTQ individuals
- KKK ideology bred violence
 - Throughout the 1920s, the KKK went on violent missions and perpetrated other forms of oppression including:
 - “flogged Mexicans, tarred and feathered doctors who performed abortions, ... strong-armed politicians ... lynched Black people, showed up on night rides to terrify prostitutes, bullied Jews, and lashed young women found riding in cars with men” (Rothman, 2016)
 - During the growing movement for more women’s rights and independence, the Klansmen increasingly pushed back in rhetoric and harmful action, claiming to stand for “pure womanhood.” The

sentiments used to recruit these women denounced racial integration, religious plurality, and immorality on the basis of how these things impacted their gender and the family unit

- Gentrification was another structural mechanism used to terrorize Black people at this time. For example, city leadership in Charlottesville, VA participated in efforts to drive Black people out of predominantly Black neighborhoods
- In California, the presence and membership of the Klan grew immensely during the '20s. Recreational and celebratory Klan gatherings became a regular part of the normal culture in Central California
 - Many members did not condone this violence and joined the Klan because of its moral conservatism, white supremacist ideals, and support for civic engagement opportunities (many Klasmembers were elected congresspeople, mayors, and other government positions etc.)
 - In the 1920s, the KKK helped to elect governors in 12 states by swaying and/or influencing officials at higher levels of government (in both parties)
 - In 1925, 40,000 members of the KKK marched to the Washington Monument
 - However, the increased membership of the Klan ultimately served to give the group and its violence legitimacy
- The disintegration of the organization came from inner-group power dynamics as well as the fact that white Protestants still held most of the power in the United States
 - There was no need for a formalized organization to be racist, xenophobic, etc. because many already participated in or supported acts and policies that disenfranchised marginalized communities
- **Activity (20 minutes)**
 - Briefly explain that the KKK is an organization that still operates today and there are similar hate groups ('Skinheads', 'Neo-Nazis', etc.)
 - Break students up in 2 small groups where they will discuss separate articles
 - Group #1: [Tulsa Race Riot](#)
 - Students should discuss how the resurgence of the KKK may have influenced other acts of crime against marginalized people, considering the Tulsa Race Riots in the 1920s but thinking more broadly as well
 - Could this ideology affected the treatment marginalized groups of modern society? Has it already?
 - Group #2: [Make America White Again?](#)
 - Ask students to consider the historical ramifications of the KKK on modern day life in addition to the current activities and ideologies of the KKK.

- Students should discuss how historical acts and groups of violence can have an effect on current political climate and mainstream America thinking
- **Debrief (5 minutes)**
 - The teacher should re-acknowledge the intense subject matter and offer themselves as support for students. If comfortable, engage students in a breathing exercise to stabilize any negative emotions and to relieve tension and spend some time in the classroom afterwards to provide any support.
 - [Breathing exercise](#)
 - From a standing position, bend forward from the waist with your knees slightly bent, letting your arms dangle close to the floor.
 - As you inhale slowly and deeply, return to a standing position by rolling up slowly, lifting your head last.
 - Hold your breath for just a few seconds in this standing position.
 - Exhale slowly as you return to the original position, bending forward from the waist.

Assessment Ideas:

- Look at [TIME Magazine's 1924 cover of KKK leader Hiram Evans](#) and read modern articles that have been controversial such as the [New York Time's A Voice of Hate in America's Heartland](#)
 - Writing as a journalist, investigate the role of the media in reporting hate groups in a news article format. Consider the following questions:
 - Where should we draw the line in spreading awareness of hate groups and normalization? Who should draw that line?
 - Does excessive reporting on extremist groups give a platform to their ideologies?
 - How should reporters highlight the voices of marginalized communities harmed by extremist groups?
 - Students should cite specific lines in the article provided to justify their main argument.

Relevant Resources:

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