

The “Nadir of Black History”

JUST MERCY



JOURNEYS IN FILM™
educating for global understanding

Table of Contents

Click the heading to be taken to that page

About <i>Journeys in Film</i>	3
Introducing <i>Just Mercy</i>	5
Lesson: The “Nadir of Black History” (U.S. History)	6
Handout 1: Political Cartoon #1: “Is This a Republican Form of Government?”	12
Handout 2: Political Cartoon Analysis	13
Handout 3: Political Cartoon #2: “And Not This Man?”	14
Handout 4: Political Cartoon #3: “And Not This Man?”	15
Handout 5: NPR Podcast: The Long Hot Summer	16
Teacher Resource 1: Cartoon #1 Analysis (Answer Sheet)	17
Teacher Resource 2: Cartoon #2 Analysis (Answer Sheet)	18
Teacher Resource 3: Cartoon #3 Analysis (Answer Sheet)	19

About Journeys in Film

Journeys in Film is a 501c(3) nonprofit organization that amplifies the storytelling power of film to educate the most visually literate generation in history. We believe that teaching with film has the power to help educate our next generation with a richer understanding of the diverse and complex world in which we live.

We transform entertainment media into educational media by designing and publishing cost-free, educational resources for teachers to accompany carefully chosen feature films and documentaries while meeting mandated standards in all core subjects. Selected films are used as springboards for lesson plans in subjects like math, science, language arts, social studies and more. Our resources support various learning styles, promote literacy, transport students around the globe, and foster learning that meets core academic objectives.

In addition to general subject areas, Journeys in Film's programs engage students in meaningful examinations of human rights, poverty and hunger, stereotyping and racism, environmental issues, global health, immigration, and gender roles. Our teaching methods are successful in broadening perspectives, teaching for global competency, encouraging empathy, and building new paradigms for best practices in education. We seek to inspire educators, school administrators, community members and home-schooling parents to use our innovative curriculum to capture the imagination and curiosity of their students.

We also develop discussion guides for films that don't necessarily lend themselves to academic standards but cover topics and themes that are valuable for classroom discussions and in other settings, such as after school clubs, community screenings, and college classes.

Why use this program?

In an age when literacy means familiarity with images as much as text and a screen has become a new kind of page, 21st-century students are more connected to media than any previous generation. This offers educators unprecedented opportunities to engage students in learning about a variety of subjects and issues of global significance. Films, television, documentaries, and other media platforms can provide an immediate, immersive window to a better understanding of the world and matters affecting all of us.

We teach our students literature that originated from all around the world, but we tend to forget that what often spurs the imagination is both visual and auditory. Films evoke emotion and can liven up the classroom, bringing energy to a course. We believe in the power of films to open our minds, inspire us to learn more, provide a bridge to better understanding the major issues of 21st century concern, and compel us to make a difference.

When properly used, films can be a powerful educational tool in developing critical thinking skills and exposure to different perspectives. Students travel through these characters and their stories: They drink tea with an Iranian family in *Children of Heaven*, play soccer in a Tibetan monastery in *The Cup*, find themselves in the conflict between urban grandson and rural grandmother in South Korea in *The Way Home*, and watch the ways modernity challenges Maori traditions in New Zealand in *Whale Rider*. Journeys in Film brings outstanding and socially relevant documentaries to the classroom that teach about a broad range of social issues in real-life settings such as famine-stricken and war-torn Somalia, a maximum-security prison in Alabama, a World War II concentration camp near Prague; they explore complex and important topics like race and gender. Students tour an African school with a Nobel Prize-winning teenager in *He Named Me Malala* and experience the transformative power of music in *The Music of Strangers: Yo-Yo Ma & the Silk Road Ensemble* and *Landfill Harmonic*.

Our hope is that this generation of youth will contribute to the betterment of humankind through kindness and understanding, together with scientific knowledge to help solve some of the world's most pressing issues.

Our goal is to create relevant and engaging curricula and programming around media that encourage cross-cultural understanding, empathy, and knowledge of the people and environments around the world. We aim to prepare today's youth to live and work as globally informed, media-literate, and competent citizens.



Introducing *Just Mercy*

After watching *Just Mercy*, viewers may feel as if this story depicts an unfortunate moment long ago. It can be hard to believe that Bryan Stevenson's battle, against an Alabama justice system haunted by the legacies of slavery and Jim Crow laws, took place as recently as the late 1980s, given its powerful themes of oppression, discrimination, and dehumanization. But we now know that these racist ideologies still plague our present-day society.

Just Mercy is not only a film centered around themes of empathy, equity, hope, and resilience. It is a story that uplifts marginalized voices who are typically unheard, unacknowledged, or deemed undeserving of mercy in the criminal justice system. The story follows Harvard Law School graduate Bryan Stevenson's move to Alabama where he recognizes an urgent need to provide free legal assistance to minorities who have been unfairly sentenced. Central to the film is the formation of the strong connective relationships between Stevenson and the condemned men he is helping. He builds a particularly powerful relationship with Walter McMillian, a Black man wrongfully sentenced to death, who helps him navigate the challenges of confronting such a strong structure of power and intimidation. Through these relationships, viewers gain insight into the humanity of the incarcerated individuals and the motivating factors for Bryan's resilience in the face of devastating barriers.

The movie's initial scenes demonstrate the transition for Walter McMillian from living in freedom to becoming a forgotten unit within an oppressive justice system. While he is first shown as an independent business owner who takes in a moment of fresh air working outdoors as a logger, the film quickly shifts to a brutal encounter with the police that results in his swift incarceration for murder. Walter has lived through many years of racialized trauma in that area and has begun to accept the prevalence of overt racist acts as a normalcy. As a result, he initially rides the fine line of being

a source of hope for his friends on death row while holding a slightly pessimistic attitude toward the possibility of obtaining justice for himself.

As the film progresses, viewers increasingly see the characters as real three-dimensional human beings to whom they can relate. The incarcerated men become living people with histories and aspirations; Walter's family vividly show their hopes, fears, and frustrations; the Equal Justice Initiative staff members cope with racism, bureaucracy, and vested political interests. At a time when the police, the judicial system, and the prison business are under close scrutiny, this film tells the story from the perspective of one innocent man, a man who stands for many others, and the young attorney and staff who successfully challenge the system.

DIRECTOR: Destin Daniel Crettin

WRITERS: Destin Daniel Crettin and Andrew Lanham

PRODUCERS: Gil Netter, Asher Goldstein, Michael B. Jordan

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: Bryan Stevenson, Mike Drake, Nijja Kuykendall, Gabriel Hammond, Daniel Hammond, Scott Budnick, Jeff Skoll, Charles D. King

CAST: Michael B. Jordan, Jamie Foxx, Brie Larson

Based on the book *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* by Bryan Stevenson



The “Nadir of Black History”

Enduring Understandings

- Over the course of American history, white supremacy has stood as a barrier to social and political equality for African Americans.
- State-sanctioned intimidation and violence have been used to subject African Americans to second class citizenship.
- Legislative solutions have historically proven ineffective in dealing with political and social inequalities because of persistent white supremacy.

Essential Questions

- What hardships did African Americans still face despite two periods of progressive legislation?
- How did violence permeate both the period following Reconstruction and the end of the Civil Rights Movement?
- How does American history provide the foundation for the events in the film *Just Mercy*?

Notes to the Teacher

Reconstruction and Post-Reconstruction

After the Civil War, the period known as Reconstruction gave hope to freedmen that they would gain the civil rights that free men enjoyed. White Republican members of Congress like Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner passed the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution to eliminate slavery, provide civil rights protections for freedmen, and give them the right to vote.

However, inequality and racism did not end with the passage of this legislation. White mobs attacked Black men who were trying to exercise their new rights, especially the right to vote; hundreds of legally enfranchised Black men were lynched. Several Black legislators were kidnapped and brutally beaten. The efforts by Black people and the political advancements they were able to make during that era led to white Southerners' desire to end Reconstruction and to the formation of armed terrorist groups like the Ku Klux Klan and the Knights of the White Camellia. For more information about this period, see the Equal Justice Initiative's webpage at <https://eji.org/report/reconstruction-in-america/>.

The violence was not limited to KKK members. Thousands of white citizens participated in and celebrated these lynchings and white newspapers advertised and justified the violence. You may wish to give students access to sections of EJI's *Lynching in America* report at <https://eji.org/reports/lynching-in-america/> or use EJI's animated *Lynching in America* video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aS61QFzk2tI&feature=emb_title during the lesson to illustrate how white people used intimidation, fear, and violence to maintain the racial hierarchy behind Mr. McMillian's experience in *Just Mercy*.



How had this come about, just decades after the Civil War and Reconstruction? In the election of 1876, no presidential candidate received the required majority of electoral votes. As a result, Republicans worked out a deal to give Rutherford B. Hayes the presidency over the Democrat candidate, Samuel J. Tilden. The deal, known as the Compromise of 1877, included these provisions:

- a. The removal of all remaining U.S. military forces from the former Confederate states. This would impact African Americans because the U.S. military protected African American institutions and property from violence during Reconstruction.
- b. The appointment of one Southern Democrat to the President's cabinet.
- c. The right to deal with African Americans without Northern interference. This provision would perpetuate state-sanctioned discrimination and violence against African Americans.

The harshness of life in Walter McMillian's Alabama is the result of well over a century of tactics used by Southern whites to solidify power over Black residents after Reconstruction ended in 1877. With the installation of "Redeemer" segregationist state governments throughout the former Confederacy, Black people lost the right to vote that had been guaranteed by the 15th Amendment. Oppressive poll taxes (mitigated for whites by the "grandfather clause" that gave suffrage to anyone whose ancestors had voted), unfair and unequal literacy tests, and white supremacist judges, county clerks, and other officials—all combined to make voting almost impossible for Black citizens. Economic inequality was enforced with the sharecropping system and unequal and segregated public education. Segregation was even supported by the Supreme Court through the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which declared that "separate but equal" accommodations such as railroad cars were constitutional. The KKK and similar groups declined in membership because actions by government made them less necessary. However, violence, including lynchings and cross-burnings,

was used to intimidate anyone who dared challenge the rules of segregation. African American historian Rayford Logan coined the phrase "the nadir of black history" to describe this period, a phrase that has been echoed by many historians.

It is important for students to understand that racism was not limited to the South. As Black people migrated to other parts of the country in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly during the Great Migration of more than 6 million African Americans in the years after 1916, racism and racial hierarchy remained a central feature in their daily lives. Black people fled domestic terrorism in the South only to find their lives circumscribed by racial inequality in the North, Midwest, and West. As governments in the South passed laws to curtail the exercise of Black civil and voting rights (*de jure* segregation), racism was codified in the North, Midwest, and West through residential segregation, school segregation, and the criminal justice system (*de facto* segregation).

By the 1920s, white antipathy toward Black people led to a revival of the Ku Klux Klan, first in Indiana and then throughout the South. Before the decade was over, historians estimate that between three and eight million people were members of the Klan. Klan sympathizers were elected to public office and punished violations of "Jim Crow" laws (laws that codified segregation) with both legal and extra-legal violence. Lynchings were endemic in the South during the 1920s.

Reconstruction failed to bring about the legal equality of the races that had been called for by the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. Almost a century later, during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Black leaders like Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and John Lewis began to make "good trouble," to use Lewis's phrase, through marches and demonstrations. Black students staged sit-ins at segregated restaurants and other venues. Black "Freedom Riders,"

sometimes joined by white peers, rode segregated buses throughout the South. The resulting Civil Rights Act of 1964, enacted by Congress under the leadership of President Lyndon Johnson after years of marches and sit-ins, prohibited discrimination in public places, provided for the integration of schools and other public facilities, and made employment discrimination illegal. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 banned the use of literacy tests and provided for federal oversight of voter registration in areas where less than 50 percent of the non-white population had registered to vote. It also authorized the U.S. attorney general to investigate the use of poll taxes in state and local elections. In 1964, the 24th Amendment made poll taxes illegal in federal elections; the U.S. Supreme Court banned poll taxes in state elections in 1966.

In July of 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson established the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, which became known as the Kerner Commission. President Johnson hoped to uncover the roots of continuing unrest plaguing many American cities. The Commission found that white supremacy was the cause of the unrest within the country. Just as a recommitment to white supremacy after the Civil War enabled violence against Black people, opposition to the civil rights movement also encouraged similar violence. As had happened during Reconstruction, the passage of laws did not immediately result in changes in racial attitudes of white supremacy, and this was particularly apparent in the criminal justice system. However, the Johnson administration sidelined the report because it was perceived to undercut the president's Great Society platform.

Thomas Nast

Discrimination faced by Black Southerners became the subject matter of a number of political cartoons drawn by Thomas Nast, one of the most influential cartoonists in American history; he is often called the “Father of the American Cartoon.” Born in Germany, he immigrated to the United States at the age of 6; by age 15, he had begun drawing for *Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. Today, Nast is best remembered for creating the modern image of Santa Claus and the Republican elephant and popularizing the Democratic donkey through his iconic illustrations. He was an admirer of Lincoln and many of his earlier cartoons championed Black suffrage and castigated white supremacists. Much of this lesson deals with his early cartoons. [Note: Some of his later cartoons criticized Black politicians in unflattering caricatures. You are advised not use to them in class.]

In this pre-viewing lesson, students first learn about the lives of Black Americans following both Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement. Students will be asked to analyze several of Thomas Nast's political cartoons from the Reconstruction period. In preparation for Part 2, they will listen to an NPR podcast reviewing the impact of the Kerner Commission and/or read the transcript; you may wish to give students a choice between the two formats or encourage them to read the transcript on their devices as they listen. This preparation will give them context for understanding the treatment of Walter McMillian by the police, the prosecutor, and the judicial system as a whole.



Common Core Standards addressed by this lesson

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8

Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

Duration of Lesson

The main activities in this lesson can be completed in two class periods; the extension activities can take up to three additional class periods.

Assessments

Primary source document analysis handout
Analysis presentations
Group discussion
Summative essay (optional)

Materials

Samples of modern political cartoons from a local newspaper or from a source like <https://www.theweek.com/cartoons>.

Access to library or computers to locate items on the Internet

Copies of the following:

Handout 1: Political Cartoon #1: Is This a Republican Form of Government?

Handout 2: Political Cartoon Analysis (two copies per student)

Handout 3: Political Cartoon #2: "And Not This Man?"

Handout 4: Political Cartoon #3: "Of Course He Wants to Vote the Democratic Ticket"

Handout 5: The Long Hot Summer

Teacher Resource Sheets 1, 2, and 3: Answer sheets for Political Cartoons

Podcast: NPR *Throughline*: "The Long Hot Summer" at <https://www.npr.org/2020/07/07/888184490/the-long-hot-summer> OR the transcript of the program at <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/888184490>. If you wish to make copies for your students, the first 25 pages will be sufficient.



Procedure

Part 1: Reconstruction to Early 20th Century

1. Using the information provided in Notes to the Teacher and any textbook your students have been using, review the historical trends in Black history from Reconstruction to the revival of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. You may wish to use some of the Equal Justice Initiative resources mentioned in the Notes to the Teacher section to further student understanding of this history and how it set the stage for Walter McMillian's arrest, trial, and conviction.
2. Ask students to explain what a political cartoon is. Show several examples from your local newspaper or an online source, preferably on topics of interest to your students.
3. Introduce the students to Thomas Nast using the information in Notes to the Teacher.
4. Distribute **Handout 1: Is This a Republican Form of Government?** and **Handout 2: Political Cartoon Analysis**. Project the cartoon on a screen as well so that students can read the words at the bottom of the cartoon; it can be found at <https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3c16355/>.
5. Work through the analysis together to model for students what you expect them to do. Answers are on **Teacher Resource 1**. When they see the sign about the White Liners, ask them to spend a few minutes on the Internet to find out the meaning of the term.
6. Divide the class into pairs or groups of three to complete the analysis of the remaining two cartoons. Give each group either **Handout 3** or **Handout 4** and an additional copy of **Handout 2**. Allow time for each group to analyze the cartoon. Then have students review their analyses with the class as a whole.

7. Introduce the term “the nadir of Black history” and explain that the Black historian Rayford Logan coined the term as a way of describing the period from the end of Reconstruction to the early 20th century. Define “nadir” as the lowest point. Ask students if they think this description is accurate, if this period really was worse than slavery. Why do they think Logan described it this way? (Answers will vary.) Point out that the Ku Klux Klan, which had died out at the end of Reconstruction, was reborn in the early 20th century as well.

Part 2: The Civil Rights Movement in the 20th Century

1. Ask students to imagine a time jump into the future: fast forwarding nearly a century from Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Movement. Using information from Notes to the Teacher and your students' textbook, lead a discussion of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the urban unrest that led to the establishment of the Kerner Commission.
2. Distribute **Handout 5: The Long Hot Summer** and review it with students. Have students listen to the start of the 43-minute podcast for the remainder of the class period. It details the history and response to the Kerner Commission. If you have printed copies of the transcript or if students have access to computers, they can read the transcript as they listen.
3. For homework, have them finish listening to the podcast and/or reading the transcript. Remind them to take notes on **Handout 5** to prepare for the next day's discussion.
4. Once students have completed the podcast, begin a class discussion on the questions from **Handout 5**. Answers will vary.



5. Tell students that they are going to watch a film called *Just Mercy*, about a Black man imprisoned on death row and the lawyer who works to free him. The film is set in the 1980s in Alabama. Explain that this is based on a true story. Then show the film. [Note: Lesson 2 of this guide is a film-viewing lesson that you may want to use in conjunction with the film.]

6. After the film, you may wish to assign students a summative essay based on this prompt: How does American history provide the foundation for the events of *Just Mercy*?

Extension Activities

If you wish to have your students continue to research about this period, here are some possible extension activities for them.

Political and social equality post Reconstruction

Booker T. Washington and the Atlanta Exposition Speech

Washington was a leading Black figure in America during the period following Reconstruction. He gave a famous speech in which he outlined a strategy of how he believed Black Americans should achieve political and social equality. Have students read a brief biography and his speech and complete a critical analysis of the text.

Biography: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3882b.ct009032/>
Speech: <https://iowaculture.gov/history/education/educator-resources/primary-source-sets/reconstruction-and-its-impact/booker-t>

Voting in Southern States

Have students read a pamphlet developed to advise African American men on how to vote in southern states in 1900 and do a document analysis on the varying voting conditions across states.

Pamphlet: <https://www.loc.gov/item/92838850/>

Lynching

Ida B. Wells “Southern Horrors”

Wells emerged as the leading figure calling attention to the lynchings of Black Americans. In this extension activity, have students read a short biography about Wells and her text “Southern Horrors,” and then complete a critical analysis of the text.

Biography: <https://www.biography.com/activist/ida-b-wells>
“Southern Horrors”: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14975/14975-h/14975-h.htm>

Equal Justice initiative report *Lynching in America* at <https://eji.org/reports/lynching-in-america/>

EJI’s animated *Lynching in America* video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aS61QFzk2tI&feature=emb_title

Poverty

The War on Poverty 50 years Later

Under President Barack Obama, The Council of Economic Advisers conducted a study on poverty fifty years after the Johnson administration declared a war on poverty. Have students review the study and complete a critical analysis of the text.

Pamphlet: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2014/01/08/war-poverty-50-years-later>

Additional resources

A. Print materials (books, magazine articles, etc.)

Graphic novel: *March* by John Lewis

Book: *The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. DuBois

Book: *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin

B. Internet resources

Lynching in America

<https://eji.org/reports/lynching-in-america/>

C. Media (film, television, etc.)

Music: “Strange Fruit” by Billie Holiday

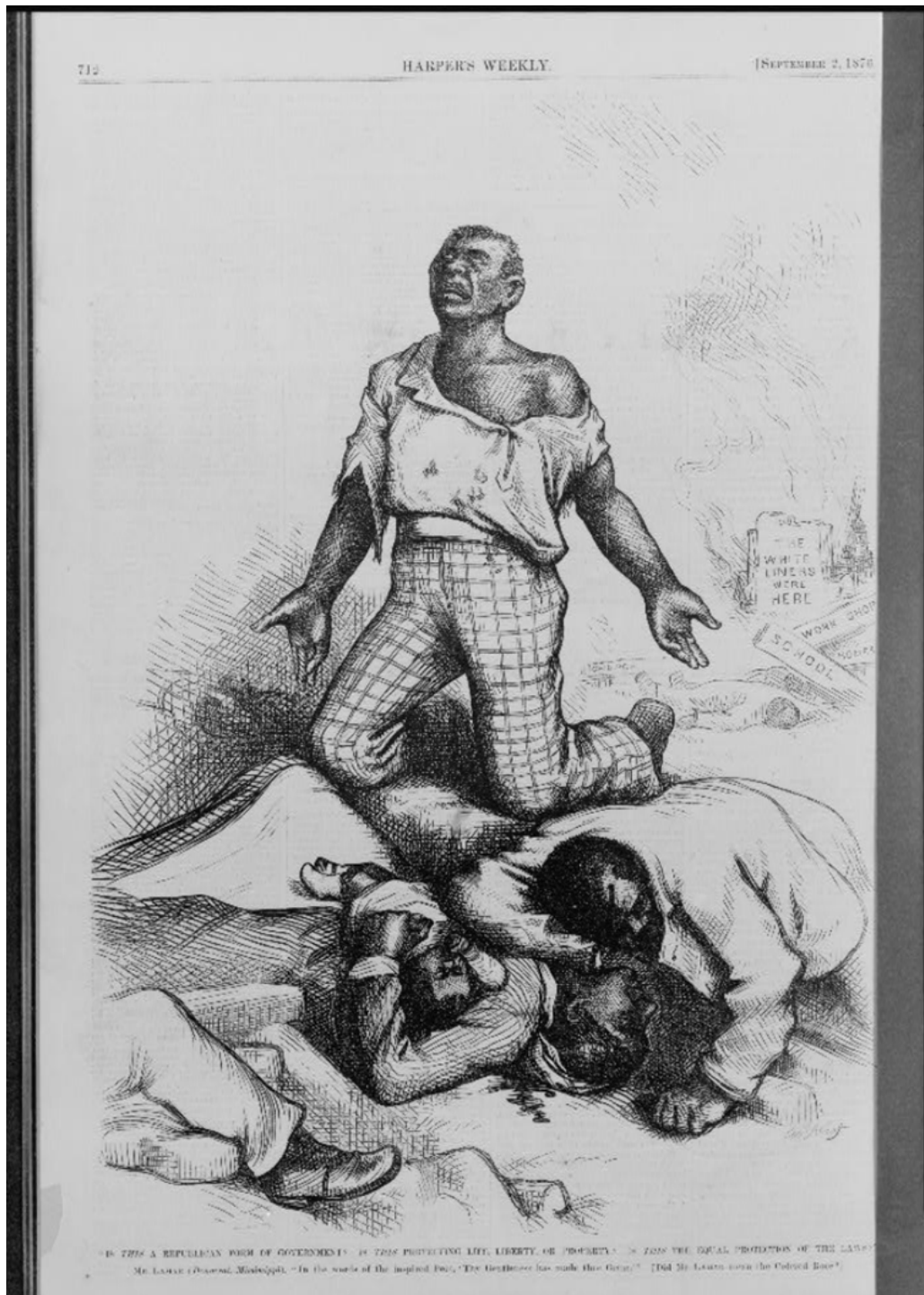
Miniseries: *Roots: The Next Generation*

Miniseries: *Watchmen* (opening sequence of episode 1) on HBO



Handout 1

Political Cartoon #1: “Is This a Republican Form of Government?”



Source: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3c16355/>



Handout 2

Political Cartoon Analysis

Title of the cartoon _____

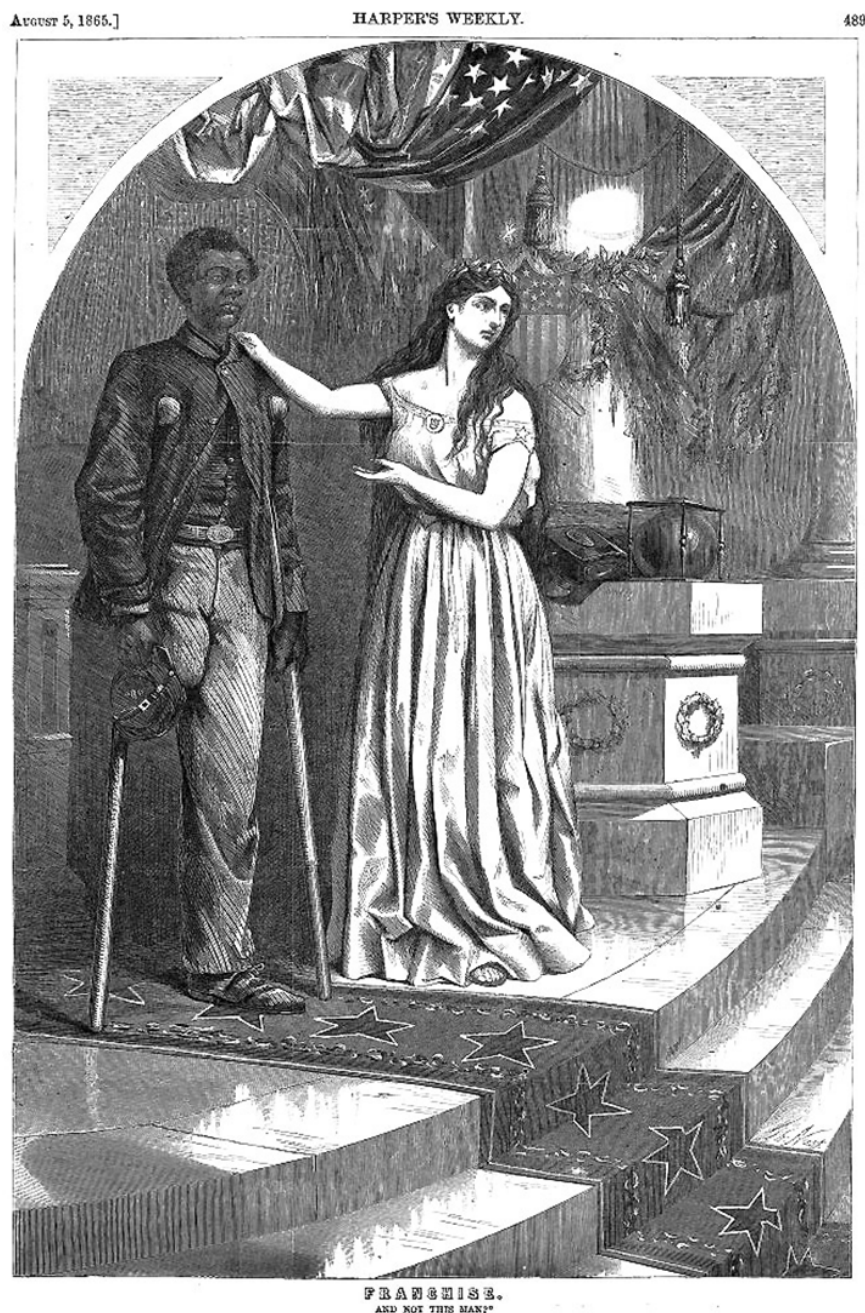
Name of cartoonist _____ Date of cartoon: _____

1. Who are the people that appear in the cartoon?
2. Whom do these people represent?
3. What significant objects do you see in the cartoon? What do they symbolize?
4. What is happening in the cartoon?
5. What significant words do you see in the cartoon?
6. What is the message of the cartoon?
7. Who would be likely to agree with this message? Who would probably disagree?



Handout 3

Political Cartoon #2: “And Not This Man?”





Political Cartoon #3: “And Not This Man?”



Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Of Course He Wants To Vote The Democratic Ticket' \(October 1876\), Harper's Weekly.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Of_Course_He_Wants_To_Vote_The_Democratic_Ticket_(October_1876),_Harper's_Weekly.jpg)

Handout 5

NPR Podcast: The Long Hot Summer

On July 9, 2020, National Public Radio's *Throughline* produced this 43-minute podcast about the urban unrest in the cities during the 1960s, the response of police and the federal government, and the results of an investigation by the Kerner Commission, a group appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson. As you listen to the podcast or read the transcript (or do both simultaneously if you prefer), think about the following questions. Take notes that will help you to formulate your answers.

- a. What were the hardships African Americans faced following the Civil Rights Movement? How were the hardships similar to those following Reconstruction?
- b. How did violence permeate both the period following Reconstruction and the end of the Civil Rights Movement?
- c. What connections can we make between the period following Reconstruction, the end of the Civil Rights Movement, and the modern emergence of Black Lives Matter?

Cartoon #1 Analysis (Answer Sheet)

Title of the cartoon: “Is this a republican form of government? Is this protecting life, liberty, or property? Is this the equal protection of the laws?”

Name of cartoonist: Thomas Nast

Date: 1876

1. Who are the people that appear in the cartoon?

Black man kneeling with outstretched arms

Black family lying dead on the ground

2. Whom do these people represent?

Black people in the South who are victims of violence

3. What significant objects do you see in the cartoon? What do they symbolize?

Sign “The White Liners were here”

Rubble from school, workshop, and homes and burning fires symbolize the violence and destruction that have occurred.

4. What is happening in the cartoon?

The kneeling man is next to the victims and seems to be asking a question about why this has happened.

5. What significant words do you see in the cartoon?

The words on the sign, “White Liners were here.”

The words under the cartoon: “Is this a republican form of government? Is this protecting life, liberty, or property? Is this the equal protection of the laws?”

6. What is the message of the cartoon?

White Liners (made up of Confederate veterans) launched campaigns of violence against Black Southerners and destroyed institutions set up to advance their equality and prosperity. This implies that the promises of liberty and protection for the people formerly enslaved are hollow.

7. Who would be likely to agree with this message? Who would probably disagree?

Black people would agree with the cartoon because it highlights the danger of being Black in the South.

Southern whites would probably see the White Liners as maintaining law and order in the South.



Teacher Resource 2

Cartoon #2 Analysis (Answer Sheet)

Title of the cartoon: “And Not This Man?”

Name of cartoonist: Thomas Nast

Date: 1865

1. Who are the people that appear in the cartoon?

A Black soldier wearing a Union uniform

A woman who is gesturing at the soldier and asking a question.

2. Whom do these people represent?

The soldier represents Black men from both North and South who joined the Union Army.

The woman is Columbia, representing the United States. (Students may have difficulty identifying her unless they recall the image from movies made by Columbia Studios.)

3. What significant objects do you see in the cartoon? What do they symbolize?

The flag hanging behind them symbolizes the United States. There is a pedestal with a wreath which may symbolize victory; there seems to be a cannon ball from the war on top of it.

4. What is happening in the cartoon?

The woman is pointing to the man who has lost his leg fighting in the war. She places her hand on his shoulder in a gesture of solidarity.

5. What significant words do you see in the cartoon?

At the bottom of the image: “Franchise” and “And not this man?” Students should define franchise as the right to vote.

6. What is the message of the cartoon?

Black soldiers who fought and sacrificed for the North during the Civil War should have the right to vote.

7. Who would be likely to agree with this message? Who would probably disagree?

Black veterans and other Black people would be likely to agree, as would abolitionists. Members of the Republican Party in general would agree since Black voters would be likely to vote for the party of Abraham Lincoln. Democrats of the time, particularly Southern Democrats, would disagree for racist and political reasons.

Teacher Resource 3

Cartoon #3 Analysis (Answer Sheet)

Title of the cartoon: “Of course he wants to vote the Democratic ticket.”

Name of cartoonist: Thomas Nast

Date: 1876

1. Who are the people that appear in the cartoon?

A Black man in the center
Two white men holding guns
Room full of white men

2. Whom do these people represent?

Black man in the center represents Black men in the South trying to vote.
White men holding guns represent white intimidation of Black voters.

3. What significant objects do you see in the cartoon? What do they symbolize?

Ballot boxes on the table represent voting. The small ticket in the Black man’s hand represents a vote for the Democratic Party. (Ballots were not secret back then.)

4. What is happening in the cartoon?

The Black man, who is likely to want to vote for Republicans, the party of abolition and the Civil War Amendments, is being forced at gunpoint to vote the Democratic ticket.

5. What significant words do you see in the cartoon?

“Of course he wants to vote the Democratic ticket.”

“Democratic Reformer: ‘You’re as free as air, ain’t you? Say you are, or I’ll blow yer black head off.’”

From the note on the bottom left: “[The] farmers have agreed to spot every leading Radical negro [sic] in the county, and treat him as an enemy for all time to come. The rotten ring must and shall be broken at any and all costs. The Democrats have determined to withdraw all employment from their enemies. Let this fact be known.”

6. What is the message of the cartoon?

Southern white Democrats used intimidation and force (as others watched) to maintain power in the South as Black voters tried to assert their Constitutional rights. A Black voter faced violence, unemployment, and even death if he tried to vote for Republicans. [You should make clear that today’s Democratic Party does not try to suppress Black votes now. According to Pew Research, 91% of Black voters voted Democratic in 2016.¹]

7. Who would be likely to agree with this message? Who would probably disagree?

Black voters would likely agree. Southern whites would find this characterization offensive.

¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2018/08/09/an-examination-of-the-2016-electorate-based-on-validated-voters/>



JOURNEYS IN FILM
educating for global understanding

PO Box 65357
Albuquerque, NM 87193