

Segregation in the Wilson Administration: Should the President be Held Accountable?

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Abstract

In this lesson, students will examine the idea of segregation and the precedent of “separate but equal” as established by Plessy v. Ferguson. They will then go on to examine if segregation was truly “separate but equal” as it relates to the 14th Amendment. Specifically, students will look at how segregation impacted African-Americans who were employed by the United States Postal Service and the United States Treasury. After examining various primary and secondary sources, students will then address the question on whether or not President Woodrow Wilson should be held accountable for violating the Constitutional rights of African-Americans.

Essential Questions

- What is a Constitutional Right?
- What is Segregation?
- Was the United States truly “separate but equal”?
- Should a president be held accountable for violating the rights of the citizens?

Assessment

After having examined various primary and secondary sources concerning the segregation of African-Americans employed by the United States Postal Service and the United States Treasury, students will explain why or why not President Woodrow Wilson should be held accountable for the violation of African-Americans’ Constitutional rights.

Activities

- 1.) Setting the Purpose: The teacher will ask the basic question, “What are Constitutional Rights”? During this time, small groups will work together to brainstorm an answer to this question, and provide at least two specific examples.
- 2.) The teacher will then pass out Handout #1 (14th Amendment) and Handout #2 (Document Analysis Worksheet), and lead a whole class review of the 14th Amendment, and the significance to the Constitutional Rights it guaranteed.
- 3.) In small groups, the teacher will then provide copies of Handout #3 (Plessy v. Ferguson) and Handout #4 (Document Analysis Worksheet) and have group examine the significance of this court case.
- 4.) The class will reassemble and share out their findings from Plessy v. Ferguson, and the teacher will discuss the overall significance of the court case.

- 5.) The teacher will then pose the question, “Was the United States truly ‘separate but equal’”? Groups will then discuss the question and then share their findings with the entire class.
- 6.) The teacher will then provide groups with Handouts #5 (Another Open Letter to Woodrow Wilson), Handout #6 (The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow: Segregation in the U.S. Government), Handout #7 (The History and Experience of African Americans in America’s Postal Service), Handout #8 (Documents Analysis Worksheet), and Handout #9 (Was America Truly “Separate But Equal?”), and have groups determine if America was truly “separate but equal”.
- 7.) Groups will share out their findings with the entire class.
- 8.) The teacher will then ask, “Should a president be held accountable if his/her administration violates the rights of the people”? Groups will discuss this question, and then share their findings with the entire class.
- 9.) Finally, the teacher will pass out Handout #10 (Should Wilson Be Held Accountable?), and explain that student will imagine that they are a citizen living during the Wilson Administration, and they are writing a letter to their U.S. Senator. In this letter, they will explain why or why not they believe the Wilson Administration had violated the rights of African-Americans working for the government.

Analysis of Local Primary Sources

In this lesson, student will be analyzing national primary sources only, but these sources will help lead to later lessons that will examine local primary sources that examine how segregation impacted their local community.

Ties to National Primary Sources

In this lesson, students will examine how the ruling of Plessy v. Ferguson and the idea of “separate but equal” lead to the policy of segregation in the United States. Further, students will examine how this policy impact the Constitutional rights of African-Americans employed by the United States Government, and whether the President should be accountable for the violation of these rights.

List of Sources