

Textbook Coverage of the Black Panthers: Is it an Accurate and Fair Characterization?

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ABSTRACT: In this lesson, students will analyze various primary and secondary sources related to a) accusations made against the Black Panthers in the 1960s, b) actual speeches and testimonies of Black Panther leaders, and c) later developments related to Black Panther criminal cases and investigations. Ultimately, students will synthesize the most important information and prepare a 1-3 paragraph summary of the Black Panther contribution to American history that attempts to surpass, in both completeness and accuracy, the entry in their own U.S. history textbook on the subject of the Black Panthers.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- What constitutes fair treatment of a subject in a history textbook?
- What questions should the reader of a history textbook ask herself in order to avoid putting unwarranted trust in the author's perspective and presentation of content?

ASSESSMENT: In this lesson, students will be assessed based upon several components completed throughout the activity. First, students will submit brief analyses of their source readings. Largely, this will require the students to determine what each source ultimately has to offer our understanding of the legacy of the Black Panthers, if anything. Second, students will synthesize their analyses in order to write a 1-3 page summary of the Black Panther contribution to American history, fit for use in a high school textbook. The goal will be to surpass, in both completeness and accuracy, the entry given to the Black Panthers in the students' own textbook. Third, students will complete a reflection activity which requires them to give thought to what they've learned and offer their insight into what should go into the fair treatment of a subject in their academic textbooks. In conjunction with this last exercise students will also offer advice to their classmates, and textbook readers in general, to allow for a more critical analysis of their readings.

SETTING THE PURPOSE: The teacher should begin this lesson by asking students what they know about the Black Panther organization of the 1960's. Following this, the teacher should ask the class to consider their responses and decide which deserve consideration for inclusion in an American history textbook.

Next, students should be presented with their textbook's entry for the Black Panthers. For example, the 12th Edition of *The American Pageant*, by Kennedy, Cohen and Bailey, includes the following text (*its only coverage of the Black Panthers*):

“With frightening frequency, violence or the threat of violence raised its head in the black community. The Black Panther party openly brandished weapons in the streets of Oakland, California.”

Students should be asked, based upon their background knowledge and their responses given to the first question asked above, how accurate, complete and fair this entry seems to be. It should be explained to students that the upcoming activity will allow them to improve upon their authors' entry, to more accurately, completely and fairly summarize the importance of the Black Panther's in American history.

ACTIVITIES:

Part One

1. Students will read several newspaper articles of the 1960's and early 1970's that convey the actual words of the Black Panthers themselves, including speeches and court transcripts.
2. Students will complete a brief document analysis form for each source.
3. Students will synthesize their analyses and prepare a one-paragraph summary of the Black Panthers that would be appropriate for a high school history textbook.

Part Two

1. Students will read several newspaper articles and government documents which appeared after the 1960's that report on the results of various Black Panther court cases and investigations.
2. Students will complete a brief document analysis form for each source.
3. Students will synthesize their analyses and prepare a 1-3 paragraph summary of the Black Panthers that would be appropriate for a high school history textbook. This should be cumulative with Parts One above, incorporating all analyses.

[NOTE: One purpose for breaking the aforementioned analyses into these two parts is to demonstrate to the students how the accuracy of historical interpretation is often dependent upon the availability of varied sources, including those that come to light much later than the original events themselves.]

Part Three

1. Students will complete a reflective exercise that requires them to consider what goes into a historian's fair treatment of a subject.
2. Students will also offer suggestions a hypothetical reader might ask herself as she goes about reading a history textbook, which would allow one to progress from being a passive and/or blindly trusting reader into one who critically assesses the text for indications of an accurate, complete and fair coverage of a subject.

ANALYSIS OF LOCAL PRIMARY SOURCES:

In this lesson, students will analyze primary sources related to court proceedings, police actions, and protests in Chicago. In addition, some coverage is given to related actions of the University of Illinois and related criminal acts in Champaign. An extra assignment offers students the opportunity to analyze an editorial that appeared in a Peoria newspaper in 1969.

TIES TO NATIONAL PRIMARY SOURCES:

In this lesson, students will analyze national news coverage of the Black Panthers with an emphasis on Chicago activities, as well as official Black Panther statements made outside of the local area.

LIST OF SOURCES: (NOTE: All pages for Google News links are those based on Google's pagination, not necessarily the page number of the newspaper itself.)

Part One:

http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos/Panther_platform.html

Black Panther Party 10-Point Program, (As drafted in 1966 by Newton and Seale)

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=feST4K8J0scC&dat=19680721>

(St. Petersburg Times, July 21, 1968, page 17, General coverage of main actors)

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=djft3U1LymYC&dat=19690601>

(The Pittsburg Press, June 1, 1969, page 16, Cynical view of Panther breakfast program)

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=uHQrz-U2knEC&dat=19690724>

(The Rock Hill Herald, July 24, 1969, page 8, *Hoover on Black Panthers*)

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=71XFh8zZwT8C&dat=19691031>

(The Miami News, October 31, 1969, page 40, Seale's treatment at conspiracy trial)

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=Oc-rVwKPngoC&dat=19691204>

(The Southeast Missourian, December 4, 1969, page 5, Initial coverage on murder of Clark and Hampton in Chicago)

<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/chicago7/seale.html>

(Excerpt of court transcript of Seale's conspiracy case in the Chicago 7 trial*)

(Note: Student's should be directed to read the transcript of the tape recording, about halfway down the webpage.) *excerpt does include an instance of profanity

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=jvrRlaHg2sAC&dat=19700113>

(The Milwaukee Journal, January 13, 1970, page 3, Police change story in Chicago's Black Panther killings)

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=A7-hzOul2KQC&dat=19700303>

(Sarasota Herald, March 3, 1970, page 11, *Senate investigation of Black Panthers*)

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=aFwNBOTKqaYC&dat=19700303>

(Sarasota Journal, March 3, 1970, page 3, *UIUC cancellation of Black Panther speaker*)

Part Two:

http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=dXBh7-90p_YC&dat=19700516

(Lodi News-Sentinel, May 16, 1970, page 2, Federal grand jury findings on Chicago's Black Panther killings)

http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=OWslULmVb_UC&dat=19700509

(Daytona Beach Morning Journal, May 9, 1970, page 2, Charges dropped against Black Panthers in Chicago shooting)

http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=mq6pegT_rIEC&dat=19701018

(The Palm Beach Post, October 18, 1970, page , *Chicago 8 conspiracy charges dropped against Seale*)

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=Fr8DH2VBP9sC&dat=19710526>

(The Montreal Gazette, May 26, 1971, page 4, *Murder charges dismissed against Seale*)

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=0klj8wIChNAC&dat=19721123>

(The Spokesman-Review, November 23, 1972, *Chicago Seven trial reversed*)

http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=3yMDF_cvnR8C&dat=19760105

(Bangor Daily News, January 5, 1976, page 3, *FBI's use of questionable tactics to disrupt the Black Panthers*)

<http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/cointelpro/churchfinalreportlllc.htm>

(Report from the 1975 U.S. *Senate investigation into Intelligence activities*)

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=Uo5fLKCIJkAC&dat=19800116>

(The Hour, January 16, 1980, page 6, *Hoover's personal interest in Seale*)

Useful Secondary Sources:

<http://www.thenation.com/article/was-fred-hampton-executed?page=full>

("Was Fred Hampton Executed?" *The Nation*, appearing on November 30, 2009)

http://www.maushard.com/LM_markclark.html

(Article on Mark Clark and his murder, by Peoria author Lawrence Maushard)

<http://www.ucimc.org/content/murdered-illinois-panther-leader-mark-clark-still-gets-no-respect-hometown-paper>

(Article on Mark Clark and the Peoria Journal Star's biased coverage of his death, appearing on *Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center's website*)

****For additional credit, locate the 1969 editorial itself (referred to in the article above) and complete a document analysis of this primary source.*