

Lesson Seven

Decade Seven: 1960 - 1970

The Poor People's Campaign

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Summary of Topic

The Poor People's Campaign (PPC), conceived by Dr. Martin Luther King, was intended to bring people together from all parts of the United States. This convergence of racial and economic concerns brought, black, Hispanic, American Indian, and white people together to make government officials more aware of those living in poverty in the United States (Chase, 1998).

Nationally, the Civil Rights movement was perceived as an African-American versus Caucasian American issue. However, the Poor People's campaign was intended to encompass all citizens living in poverty no matter what ethnicity. It was also intended to develop an awareness of the class system in America. Driven by King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), this campaign was focused on the socioeconomic inequalities in the United States. Unfortunately, before the Poor People's Campaign came to fruition, on April 4, 1968, fate, by the name of Jack Ruby, interfered with those plans when he assassinated Dr. King. "Martin Luther King Jr. was defending the rights of striking sanitation workers in Memphis and planning a 'Poor Peoples' Campaign march to Washington to promote the linkage between civil rights and economic opportunity at the time of his assassination in 1968. Dr. King and others...knew there was a close connection between those denied civil rights and those mired in what seemed to be intractable poverty" (civilrights.org, 2005).

The original design of the Poor People's Campaign was to be the most intensive "widespread campaign of civil disobedience yet undertaken by any movement. They aimed to bring fifteen hundred protesters to Washington, D.C. to lobby Congress and other governmental agencies for an "economic bill of rights" (Martin Luther King Papers Project, 2002). Participants came from all parts of the United States in caravans to non-violently protest in Washington D.C. From May 14 to June 24, over 2,600 people built makeshift shelters on Washington D.C.'s famous Mall. This makeshift slum, named "Resurrection City" included a city hall, a dispensary, a dining tent, a "poor peoples' university, a cultural tent called the "Soul Center," a psychiatrist, and even its own zip code. Resurrection city also provided musical entertainment, cultural exchange programs and multi-racial education courses, all of which were focused on racial tensions. Participants lived in these dismal circumstances until politicians focused legislation on helping those living in poverty.

The PPC culminated on June 19, 1968, with "Solidarity Day." On this day 50,000 people marched to the Lincoln Memorial to peacefully discuss issues relating to the goals of the campaign. These efforts ended on June 24, 1968, with the closing of Resurrection City after numerous riots began. The campaign's goals for the poor were never achieved and the PPC was quickly dubbed a dismal failure, what Bill Rutherford, executive director off the SCLC called the "Little Big Horn of the Civil Rights movement" (Chase, 1998, p. 28).

It was thought by the organizers and participants of the campaign that money spent in Vietnam would be better spent at home fight issues of poverty and welfare. Although each of the ethnic groups had its specific needs, they were able to come together for one greater purpose: fighting poverty.

While many considered the PPC a failure for reform, it did open the eyes of white middle-class liberals to the issue of a class system in the United States. As a result of this campaign, President Lyndon Johnson declared the "War on Poverty." Some viewed Johnson's effort as little more than a conglomeration of poorly designed programs (Peterson). However, it did serve as a vehicle for the establishment of valuable programs such as Medicaid, Job Corps, Head Start, Chapter 1 reading programs in schools, school lunch programs, and Guaranteed student loan programs. (civilrights.org, 2005).

Dr. Martin Luther King's legacy of fighting poverty continues into the 21st century. Even now this nation continues to deal with issues of poverty. "Since the 1960s, policymakers and scholars have recognized that discrimination and poverty are major obstacles to opportunities in America...Civil rights advocates and others

have argued that developing opportunity through adequate funding of education, job training, and other programs is key—along with continued systematic attacks on discriminatory barriers that continue to block opportunity in employment, housing, education and elsewhere." (Civil Right 101.htm. 2005 p. 5). It benefited many politicians to deem this awareness about the effects of poverty as a failure, but with awareness comes change.

Acknowledgements:

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References:

Chase, R. T. (1998). Class resurrection: The Poor people's campaign of 1968 and resurrection city. *Essays in History*, University of Virginia, Corcoran Department of History.

Electronic reference Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project (2002). Stanford University Available from www.stanford.edu/group/King/about_king/encyclopedia/poorpeoples.html.

The Civil Rights Coalition (2002). Civil Rights 101. Available from civilrights.org. Retrieved 7/14/2005 from civilrights_org-Civil Rights 101.htm.

Grade Level: Middle/High School

Subject: Social Studies

Topic: Decade Seven 1960-1970

The Poor People's Campaign and poverty

Standards:

USA-Nat. Council for Social Studies: Nat. Standards for Social Studies Teachers

A1: Thematic Standard: Culture and Cultural Diversity Social Studies teachers should possess the knowledge, capabilities, and dispositions to organize and provide instruction at the appropriate school level for the study of Culture and Cultural Diversity.

Teacher Expectations Teachers of social studies at all school levels should provide developmentally appropriate experiences as they guide learners in the study of culture and cultural diversity. They should enable learners to analyze and explain the ways groups, societies, and cultures address human needs and concerns;

Expectations: guide learners as they predict how data and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference;

Expectations: encourage learners to compare and analyze societal patterns for preserving and transmitting culture while adapting to environmental or social change;

Expectations: have learners interpret patterns of behavior reflecting values and attitudes that contribute or pose obstacles to cross-cultural understanding

Expectations: guide learners as they construct reasoned judgments about specific cultural responses to persistent human issues;

A5: Thematic Standard: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Social studies teachers should possess the knowledge, capabilities, and dispositions to organize and provide instruction at the appropriate school level for the study of interactions among Individuals, Groups, and Institutions.

Expectations: help learners understand the concepts of role, status, and social class and use them in describing the connections and interactions of individuals, groups, and institutions in society;

Expectations: help learners analyze group and institutional influences on people, events, and elements of culture in both historical and contemporary settings

Expectations: challenge learners to evaluate the role of institutions in furthering both continuity and change

Expectations: guide learner analysis of the extent to which groups and institutions meet individual needs and promote the common good in contemporary and historical settings

Expectations: assist learners as they explain and apply ideas and modes of inquiry drawn from behavioral science and social theory in the examination of persistent social issues and problems.

A10: Thematic Standard: Civic Ideals and Practices Social studies teachers should possess the knowledge, capabilities, and dispositions to organize and provide instruction at the appropriate school level for the study of Civic Ideals and Practices.

Expectations: assist learners to understand the origins and interpret the continuing influence of key ideals of the democratic republican form of government, such as individual human dignity, liberty, justice, equality, and the rule of law

Expectations: facilitate learner efforts to locate, access, analyze, organize, synthesize, evaluate, and apply information about selected public issues--identifying, describing, and evaluating multiple points of view

Expectations: provide opportunities for learners to practice forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic

Expectations: help learners to analyze and evaluate the influence of various forms of citizen action on public policy

Expectations: prepare learners to analyze a variety of public policies and issues from the perspective of formal and informal political actors

Expectations: support learner efforts to construct policy statements and action plans to achieve goals related to issues of public concern

Expectations: create opportunities for learner participation in activities to strengthen the "common good," based upon careful evaluation of possible options for citizen action.

USA-Nat. Council for Social Studies: Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies.

Culture: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

Individuals, Groups, & Institutions: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions

Civic Ideals and Practices: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.

Objectives:

- To investigate the original intentions of the Poor People's Campaign
- To consider the political ramifications of planning and facilitating this event.
- To develop sensitivity to the social and cultural conditions that maintain poverty
- To identify a variety of governmental strategies in place to assist those who live in poverty
- To develop a sense of how poverty continues to impact this country

Essential Questions

- Based on the influences of the last decade what do you predicate might happen in this decade?
- What constitutes poverty?
- What types of support are necessary for people to overcome poverty?
- What types of people can live in poverty?
- Does race have an influence on poverty? Why is this the case or not?

Culturally Responsive Resources

Payne, R. (2001). Framework of poverty. Highlands, TX: Aha Publishing.
http://www.njstatelib.org/NJ_Information/Digital_Collections/AAHCG/unit14.htm

Lesson Plans Activity #1

a. Summary of Activity

The Shelter

This activity will allow students to develop team cooperation, problem solving and communication skills while building a paper shelter in which they will simulate a person living in poverty. This activity simulates the concepts of poverty much the way Poor People's campaign had hoped to accomplish them.

b. Procedure

Materials Needed: 5" of stacked used newspaper per team, one roll of masking tape per team.

Time Needed: 45 minutes- 1 hour

1. Teams of 5-7 students must build a free-standing shelter with only the tape and newspaper supplied to them. All teams will have 30 minutes in which to build this structure.
2. The team can plan as long as they want, however, during the planning time the participants cannot touch the resources.
3. When the team begins to build the structure any talking must stop for the duration of the building.
4. When the facilitator calls time all students must be able to get under the structure without holding up any parts.

Processing this activity will be the most important part. Helping students make the link between the experience and what they have learned about themselves, their team and the intent of the activity will be vital to the learning process.

Debriefing for the teams: (can be done verbally or written):

- How did the team work together when everyone could talk?
- Were everyone's ideas heard?
- How did you decide on the plan?
- What were some of the barriers to effective communication and planning?
- When the building began, how did the group react to the "No talking" rule?
- How did the group communicate? Effectively or ineffectively?
- Were changes to the original plan necessary? How were the changes decided upon and then communicated?
- What might it be like to live in this type of structure? or in a refrigerator box or other places homeless people live?
- What resources would you learn to look for? What would you need to survive this way?
- Would you need others to survive?

Lesson Plan Activity #2:

This topic dovetails with the Shelter activity in helping students process what living in poverty might be like. This activity helps students consider what resources and support might be necessary to survive in a world of poverty.

Students are randomly selected to live within the confines of the shelter they have just built. Each of the students is given a certain amount of play money. This money will be all they get to survive until the end of a month period of time. The group will decide how they will utilize each person's money for the month. What are the necessary items to survive? Where might one go to get food, housing, clothing, medical needs.

Objectives of Activity #2:

- To identify necessities to survive in poverty
- To help students develop sensitivity to the needs of others
- To break the derogatory stereotypes of poor people
- To research the needs and skills of people in a different socio-economic status
- To develop an awareness of resources available and not available to the poor

Materials Needed: Play money; List of resources available to impoverished people, Scenario Cards

Time Needed: Students are randomly selected to live within the confines of the shelter they have just built. Each of the students is given a certain amount of play money. Example \$100/person in the shelter. This money will be all they get to survive until the end of a month period of time. The group will decide how they will utilize each person's money for the month. What are the necessary items to survive? Where might one go to get food, housing, clothing, medical needs.

Students will be allowed to pull a card from a resource pile. Each group must then act on what the card states

Scenario Cards

One member must be taken to the hospital as a result of an accident. How will this situation be resolved?

You have had a day labor job for a week when the boss has informed you that they won't need you any more. Where will you go to seek employment?

You have an opportunity to get employment, but do not have any clothing to wear to the job. How will you get clothing for your new job?

60-70% of the homeless have a mental disorder and need medication to maintain reality. How do those in need of medication get this support?

It is the end of the month and there is no money left. You have nothing to eat. Where will your group go to get food and water?

You would like to have a job but you cannot read or write very well. How do you go about filling out a job application and interview for a job?

You have two children with you and no housing, no money, no food how do you get your children an education, food and clothing?

You are completely out of money. How might you make some extra money to be able to live for the remainder of the month?

Questions for the team to consider:

- Will the group each use their own money or will the group collaborate on using the money?
- How will the use of the money be decided?
- What are the priorities needed to live for the month?

Differentiated Instruction Ideas (engaging students with disabilities):

- Every group could bring one pre-made item that would be beneficial for students with significant disabilities.
- Ask the group to design the model so that it is accessible for individuals with disabilities.
- Students with significant disabilities can "teach" their group an alternative communication system (this could be an activity implemented prior to the lesson).
- Students could be the banker and be responsible for distributing the money.

Debriefing:

What are some of the things your group had to live without as money began to run out?

Describe the feelings of the team effort it took to buy necessities to live through the month.

How did you help in getting the needs met of everyone on the team?

Assessment:

Students will be able to identify 3 resources available to individuals living in poverty.

Students will be able to discuss the differences between middle class assumptions and those living in poverty.

Essential Questions:

- What did you learn about living in poverty?
- Were your predictions of this decade on target?
- What were some of the unexpected events that changed how this decade turned out?
- Based on this decade what do you predict for the next decade?