

U.S. Entry into WWII and Changes in Dissention Attitude

The Basics

Time Required

2-3 class periods

Subject Areas

11th Grade History (A.P.)

The Great Depression and World War II, 1929-1945

Common Core Standards Addressed:

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12

Author

Martha Graham (2004)

The Lesson

Introduction

The songs “Ballad of October 16” and “What Are We Waitin’ On?” both sung by the folk group Almanac Singers, express opposite sentiments regarding war. “Ballad of October 16” was written in 1940 to protest FDR’s movement toward war. The passage of a conscription law in September 1940 was evidence to Communist Party members, which included many members of the Almanac Singers, that FDR was lying when he had vowed to stay out of the European war. As a result of this scathing criticism, FBI files were opened on Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie and they were followed for decades. “What Are We Waitin’ On?” written in 1942, demonstrates an abrupt about-face that can be explained only in the context of the German invasion of the Soviet Union and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Guiding Questions

Why did the United States enter World War II?

How would this decision affect the lives of American citizens?

Learning Objectives

1. Students will describe the causes for dissention prior to US involvement in WWII.
2. Students will explain the causes for US entry into the war.
3. Students will synthesize the change in the attitudes in some dissenters during the war.

Preparation Instructions

Songs used in this lesson:

“What Are We Waitin’ On?”

“Ballad of October 16”

“Citizen CIO”

Songs used in lesson:

- “Ballad of October 16” (1940) performed by Almanac Singers on *That’s Why We’re Marching: World War II and the American Folk Song Movement*, Smithsonian Folkways, 1996.
- “What Are We Waitin’ On?” (1942) performed by Woody Guthrie on *That’s Why We’re Marching: World War II and the American Folk Song Movement*, Smithsonian Folkways, 1996.
- “Citizen CIO” (1944) performed by Josh White, Tom Glazer, and Bess Lomax Hawes on *That’s Why We’re Marching: World War II and the American Folk Song Movement*, Smithsonian Folkways, 1996.
- “I’m Gonna Put My Name Down” (1944) performed by Tom Glazer on *That’s Why We’re Marching: World War II and the American Folk Song Movement*, Smithsonian Folkways, 1996.

Lesson Activities

Prior to lesson, give students the following list to place in chronological order and indicate dates and results of action:

- German U-boat attacks Kearny
- Germany invades USSR
- Battle of Britain
- Non-Aggression Pact
- Neutrality Act 1939 repealed
- Nye Report
- Germany sinks Robin Moor
- Germany invades Poland
- Destroyer for Bases Deal
- Neutrality Acts
- Phony War
- Neutrality Acts
- Germany invades France
- Japan attacks Pearl Harbor
- Munich Conference
- Lend Lease Act
- German U-boat sinks Reuben James
- 1st Peacetime Draft in US

Introductory learning activities:

- What is dissention? *Opposition to the policies of those in power*
- Is dissention desirable in a democracy? Explain your answer.
- How can people express opposition? *Protests, editorials, strikes, music*

- Give examples of what has happened to dissenters in times of crisis? *Arrested for violating Alien & Sedition Acts, suspension of habeas corpus during Civil War, strikes broken by state & federal troops in 1890s*

Song discussion questions and activities:

1. Play “Ballad of October 16”

- What is the message of this song?
- Why did the author oppose the draft?

2. Explain the background of the Almanac Singers and the Communist Party: The American Folk Song Movement was instrumental in the growth of the unions during the 1930s, and foremost among these musicians was a group called the Almanacs, which included such artists as Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Tom Glazer, and Josh White; they were closely affiliated with Communist Party, which took direction from Moscow.

- Based on the communist view of war, what will their position be? *Opposed because war benefits capitalists*
- Who else opposed war? *Quakers, Amish, conscientious objectors*
- Do you think most people considered this song unpatriotic in 1940?

3. Show Gallup poll – isolationism still strong

<http://teaching.arts.usyd.edu.au/history/hsty3080/3rdYr3080/Callous%20Bystanders/isolationism.html>

4. Check homework: time line/graphic organizer

1934	Nye Report	Blamed American capitalism for involvement in WWI
1935-37	Neutrality Acts	Restricted U.S. trade with belligerence
Sept. 1938	Munich Conference	Allies give Hitler Sudetenland
Aug. 1939	Non-Aggression Pact	USSR & Germany; ACP conflicted
Sept. 1939	Germany invades Poland	Great Britain & France declare war
	Neutrality Act	European democracies may buy armament, cash only
Oct '39- April '40	Phony War	No significant military action
June 1940	Germany invades France	France surrenders; Dunkirk evacuation
Aug. 1940	Battle of Britain	German air attacks on Britain
Sept.	Destroyer for Bases	U.S. aids Great Britain

1940	Deal	
	1st Peacetime draft in U.S.	Within 1 month 16 million men registered [Ballad]
March 1941	Lend Lease Act	US aids Great Britain; German: US not neutral
May 1941	Germany seeks Robin Moor	unarmed American merchantman
June 1941	Germany invades USSR	[ACP change attitude toward war]
Oct. 1941	German U-boat attacks Kearny	11 died
Oct. 1941	German U-boat sinks Reuben James near Iceland	100 died
Nov. 1941	Neutrality Act of 1939 repealed	Armed merchant Ships; War with Germany expected
Dec. 1941	Pearl Harbor	U.S. declares War

5. Put song on time line

6. Play “What are We Waitin’ On?” by Woody Guthrie

- How does the sentiment expressed in this song differ from the first song?
- Looking at the timeline, what might have convinced labor and the Communist Party to support war? *Jobs, the Fascist attitude towards unions and communism, German invasion of USSR (most important for American Communist Party), German U-boat attacks on US ships, Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor*

7. Use the NARA lesson at

http://www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/lessons/day_of_infamy/day_of_infamy.html

- Read FDR’s Infamy Speech, complete NARA worksheet, discuss responses
- Listen to recording of speech, complete NARA worksheet, discuss techniques employed to gain public support for war

8. Desire to defeat fascism led Communist Party to urge labor unions to make no strike pledges for the duration of the war.

- Play short segments of “Citizen CIO” and/or “I’m gonna put my name down” to illustrate their continuing commitment to labor
- Despite this apparent unity, dissention still existed in 1943. Labor strikes increased between 1942 and 1944 (Faragher, 780)

- Were these strikes unpatriotic at this time?
- How might a striker justify his/her action?
- Was it wrong to ask for higher wages from employers?

9. Strikes did not necessarily reflect real opposition to the war; such opposition did, however, exist.

- What groups remained pacifist throughout times of war? *Religious groups, CO*
- Is it fair that a person can declare himself a conscientious objector and exempted from service?
- For homework, prepare a statement for assigned character on his/her position on the war:
 - 50-year-old labor union member
 - American Communist Party officer
 - 22-year-old male
 - 46-year-old mother of 3 grown children
 - Conscientious objector, such as Quaker or Amish

Assessment

Position paper and debate can be assigned as an assessment of the lesson.

Extending the Lesson

Debate: It is January 1, 1942 -- Should the U.S. be involved in the war?

Everyone assigned to the same character shall meet in a group to compare position papers and prepare strategy for debating the above question. Choose one person to speak, though others should assist speaker during debate.

After debate:

- Compare to the present war in Iraq.
- What are the differences?

Resources

Lyrics

“What Are We Waitin’ On?” available at

http://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/What_Are_We_Waiting_On.htm

“Ballad of October 16th” available at

<http://www.folkarchive.de/oct16.html>

”Citizen CIO” available at

<http://www.folkarchive.de/citizen.html>

“I’m Gonna Put My Name Down” available at

http://media.smithsonianfolkways.org/liner_notes/folkways/FW02513.pdf

Other resources:

Recordings:

That’s Why We’re Marching: World War II and the American Folk Song Movement, Smithsonian Folkways, 1996.

Books:

Dunaway, David King. *How Can I Keep From Singing?: Pete Seeger*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1981.

Faragher, John M., et al. *Out of Many: A History of the American People*. Upper Saddle, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005.

Seeger, Pete. *Where Have all the Flowers Gone? A Singer’s Stories, Songs, Seeds, Robberies*. Bethlehem, PA: Sing Out Corporation, 1993.

Web Sites:

“Woody Guthrie Foundation and Archives” <http://www.woodyguthrie.org/>

“Teaching With Documents Lesson Plan: ‘A Date Which Will Live in Infamy’ – The First Typed Draft of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s War Address,” NARA

http://www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/lessons/day_of_infamy/day_of_infamy.html

“Public Opinion and Isolationism,” Faculty of the Arts, Sydney, Australia, taken from Michael Leigh, *Mobilizing Consent: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy*, Greenwood Press, Westport, 1976, 32 – 33.

<http://teaching.arts.usyd.edu.au/history/hsty3080/3rdYr3080/Callous%20Bystanders/isolationism.html>