

The Black Panther Party Example Lesson

Classroom Context: This lesson was originally taught to an Ethnic Studies class made up of 18, 9th-12th grade students. The majority of these students identified as Mexican and several as Filipinx. All came from working or middle class backgrounds. A handful of these students identified as LGBT+. About 75% were young women. Before this lesson, our class watched and dissected a two hour lecture on the history of institutionalized racism in the United States. Students went into this lesson with basic understandings of political and economic systems of capitalism, communism, and socialism.

Essential Questions:

- Why isn't the Black Panther Party seen as a prominent force of the civil rights movement?
- What were different ideologies and tactics used during the civil rights movement?
- Why are some ideologies of this era seen as acceptable today while others are not?

Learning Goals:

1. Students will understand the history and ideology of the Black Panther Party including: the political philosophy behind the 10 point program, their major community programs, and the FBI involvement in the downfall of the party.
2. Students will understand the differing perspectives on the Black Panther Party held by both the black community and the US Government.
3. Students will evaluate the concept of a "master narrative".
4. Students will identify and critically examine the master narrative surrounding the civil rights movement.
5. Students will understand the contributions the Black Panther Party made in combating institutional racism despite not fitting into the master narrative.
6. Students will examine the way their knowledge and education of the civil rights movement has been influenced by the master narrative.

Lesson Summary:

Throughout this lesson, students receive a majority of the information through lecture but their learning is also heavily reliant on discussion between students. Students consistently engage in critical thinking about the history of institutional racism in the US and the political era of the late 1960s and 1970s. The teacher guides students in evaluating their knowledge and education of the civil rights movement to identify the master narrative. Their little knowledge of activists who used tactics other than non-violent protest is a starting point for students to trace back the history of the Black Panther Party and the reasons they do not fit into the master narrative. Students study the political ideology of the party, their community programs, and the FBI's involvement

in the end of the party. This lesson exposes students to activists who stood for the liberation of their community in a way that is not widely celebrated today. Students will recognize how and why a master narrative has omitted an important movement from their education.

Classroom Set-up: Students sit “family style” around one large table. Everyone can see each other around the table and the teacher sits with the students so to engage in round-table discussions at the same level as students.

Speaker Notes: Approx. 2 hrs total

Begin by having the class stand to recite In Lak’ech

Introduction:

Ask students to engage in casual discussion and “shout out” answers to the following:

Slide 2:

1. What have you learned about the civil rights movement in school?
2. Who were the prominent figures?
3. What were the main tactics used in the movement?
 - a. Many students will share similar experiences of learning about MLK, nonviolent resistance, and of being taught about racism as a past event, not existent today.

Slide 3 & 4:

1. Ask students to identify pictures of MLK and Rosa Parks - “Who is this?”
 - a. This should be very easy for them as they are widely celebrated figures.

Slide 5 & 6:

2. Ask students to identify pictures of Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale - “Who is this?”
 - a. Most students will not be able to identify them by name.
 - b. Reveal to the students that the images are of the founders of the Black Panther Party
3. Share the first Essential Question as a motivator for today’s lesson: Why isn’t the Black Panther Party seen as a prominent force of the civil rights movement?

Slide 7:

1. Reiterate that the average public has only ever been exposed to images of the civil rights movement like in the picture: Martin Luther King peacefully protesting with the conclusion that the end of segregation meant the end of racial inequality.

Slide 8:

1. Ask students to raise their hand if they had ever heard of Malcolm X
 - a. If students have, ask them to share their overall understanding of who he was and the sentiment held about him
 - b. Share that Martin Luther King Jr. wasn't the only civil rights leader, Malcolm X was a very well known leader as well
2. Describe Malcolm's political ideologies of Black Separatism

Slide 9:

1. Show the video of Malcolm's speech

Slide 10: Discussion (10 min)

3. Ask students to think/pair/share to compare the differences in ideology of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.
 - a. Why might he be considered "the opposite of MLK" ?
4. What does he mean in fighting for liberation "By any means necessary" ?
 - a. Again, how is this different from MLK?
5. Why isn't he often taught as part of the civil rights movement?
 - a. How did white Americans & the government feel about MLK vs. Malcolm X?
 - b. Why might it be uncomfortable for Americans to recognize Malcolm's tactics & ideology?
 - i. Malcolm X promoted the idea of returning the violence they faced from the government, not forgiveness.
 - ii. He wasn't forgiving to oppressors

Slide 11:

1. Describe the origins of the Black Panther Party
 - a. This movement was inspired after the assassination of Malcolm X.
 - b. Founded in 1966 in Oakland
 - c. Huey P. Newton & Bobby Seale
 - d. Started as the BPP for Self Defense - protecting the black community from police brutality
 - e. Small community organization

Slide 12: The Ten-Point Program

1. Print the points on a sheet a paper and cut it so that each small slip of paper has one point from the program.
2. Assign each point to a pair of students.
3. Ask them to identify what their point is demanding.
4. Ask them to examine what was going on in the community that caused the BPP to demand that point. Why were they demanding it?

5. Have each pair share out.
6. Ask students to connect the points to other political philosophies they have heard of.
 - a. Explain the BPP Marxist beliefs

Slide 13:

1. Play the footage of the Black Panthers marching on to the Senate floor while teacher describes the event.
2. Describe that the BPP were at the CA state capitol to protest a bill that would threaten their right to openly carry weapons
 - a. They mistakenly marched onto the Senate floor while look for the observation deck
 - b. As their weapons were confiscated by the capitol security Bobby Seale read his right to bear arms directly from the constitution.
 - c. This caused a media frenzy and was the first event that brought national attention to the BPP.

Slide 14:

1. Explain to students how following the media frenzy at the State Capitol, the Black Panther Party grew tremendously.
 - a. The party grew to have chapters in 48 states.
 - b. The party had support groups in Japan, China, France, England, Germany, Sweden, Mozambique, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uruguay, and elsewhere.
 - c. 60% of members were female
 - d. As the party grew in membership, so did its programs and goals

Slide 15:

1. Describe the different programs the Black Panther Party sponsored and ran
 - a. Police Brutality Defense, The Black Panther Newspaper (national), The Breakfast Program, People's Free Medical Centers, The Intercommunal Youth Institute, Seniors Against a Fearful Environment, People's Free Ambulance Service, Free Food Program
2. Ask students to identify where these lack of services for Black people stem from
 - a. What kinds of oppression were they facing and addressing
 - b. How are they connected
3. Explain that the programs were meant to highlight inadequate social services from the government and to fulfill the needs of the Black community

Slide 16:

1. Describe the use of Panther Paper in uniting and informing the Black Community
 - a. Used to expose cases of wrongful murder and police brutality

Slide 17 & 18:

1. Read J. Edgar Hoover's quote (Director of the FBI)
2. Ask students to critically examine why the US is so fearful of the BPP.
 - a. The party was involved in criminal activity, including the assault of police officers
 - b. Marxist Ideology → Why is this threatening to the US?
 - i. The US was actively fighting against communism around the world
 - ii. Who benefited from the current economic structure of America?
 - c. The Party was accused of plotting to overthrow the US Government
 - i. Why is the end of racism and capitalism a severe threat to the US Government?
3. Ask: What impact do you think J. Edgar Hoover's statement had on the country?

Slide 19:

1. Explain to students that COINTELPRO was the Counterintelligence Program conducted by the FBI to disrupt domestic political organizations.
2. Explain the main tactics the FBI used to disrupt the BPP

Slide 20: Fred Hampton

1. Fred was a main target of COINTELPRO because of his ability to unite the working class
2. He created The Non-Aggression Pact which organized all the gangs in Chicago to stop the violence and rivalry between gangs and unite into the Black Panther Party
3. He created The Rainbow Coalition which united Black, Brown, and White people of the working class
4. He was a very respected leader for his ability to educate, empower, and unite the public

Slide 21: Video

1. Play video
2. Offer a moment for students to debrief with the people around them

Slide 22:

1. Describe the differences the BPP leadership had in the downfall of the party
2. Bobby Seale wanted to integrate the party into the government by running for mayor of Oakland
 - a. He did not win but his campaign got large population of Black citizens to get civically involved
3. Eldridge Cleaver wanted the party to take a more offensive approach in inciting violence against police officers

4. These differences along with the very public assassinations, framing, and negative press caused a lot of fear and caused the membership to decline

Slide 23 & 24: Discussion

1. Ask students: Why do you think COINTELPRO was considered “The FBI’s war on Black America” by some?

Slide 25 & 26:

1. Read the current description of the Black Panther Party from the FBI Website
2. Discuss:
 - a. Why do you believe this is still the sentiment of the BPP today?
 - b. Why don’t we learn about BPP as part of the civil rights movement?
 - c. Why is it important that we learn about their history?
 - d. Are the issues the BPP advocated against still relevant today?
 - i. Connect back to the master narrative
 - ii. Connect back to institutional racism
 - iii. Connect to Black Lives Matter