

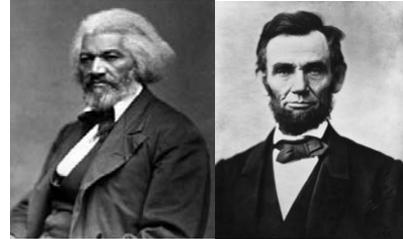
African American Voices Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan: Spinning Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln

Subject: United States History
American Government

Grade level: 11, 12

NGSSS-SS: **SS.912.A.1.2-** Utilize a variety of primary and secondary sources to identify author, historical significance, audience, and authenticity to understand a historical period.



**Description/
Abstract of Lesson:** After reviewing primary and secondary sources on the true relationship between Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln, the students will identify inconsistent political messages in both their speeches and writing about each other and will formulate opinions as to why such inconsistencies existed. The students will play the roles of public relations representatives (i.e. “spin doctors”) for Lincoln and Douglass and will reinterpret historic statements they made for the purpose of maintaining their good public image.

Objective(s): The students will

- Demonstrate appreciation for multicultural perspectives of history.
- Distinguish between primary and secondary sources.
- Develop awareness of political statements and controversies as they relate to different audiences.
- Develop awareness for the concept of “spin doctoring” in politics.

Materials:

- Internet Resources
- Attached Documents

Duration: 1-2 class periods

**Lesson Lead In/
Opening:**

1. Engage the students in a discussion about statements recently made by a public figure in local, state or national politics that the public generally regarded to be unfavorable. Read statements made by a public relations expert who reinterprets the statement and attempts to make the public figure look good.

Ask the students questions about what they thought about the reinterpretation: (examples)

- Do you believe this was a fair explanation of what the public figure meant to say?
- Why do you think this person is defending the public figure?
- How far is what this person saying from the truth?
- Does this person seem like a credible person? How so?

2. Explain to the students that public relations experts are hired by political figures to have them maintain a positive image to the general populace. Discuss further how in American politics public relations experts are cynically regarded as “spin doctors.” Explain how “spin doctoring” is initiated usually in the midst of political figures making controversial statements that may have angered or confused many people.

3. (Optional) Read the article “What is a Spin Doctor?” to the students to foster more comprehensive understanding:

<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-spin-doctor.htm>

Activity:

1. Have the students as a class read and discuss the introduction to a letter written by Frederick Douglass to Abraham Lincoln’s widow Mary after Lincoln’s passing posted on The Gilder Lehrman website. The piece itself discusses the complicated and at times conflictive relationship that Douglass has with Lincoln and his policies:

http://www.gilderlehrman.org/collection/docs_archive/docs_archive_douglass2.html

Read the letter as a class. Prompt discussion by asking the students higher order thinking questions: (examples)

- If Douglass found himself many at times at odds with the President’s policies on race, why do you think he stated in the letter that he considered the President to have had “humane interest in the welfare” of his race?
- Why do you believe Abraham Lincoln’s wife sent the cane to Douglass as a gift?
- Do you believe that Douglass was just as enthusiastic to work with the President as the President was enthusiastic to work with Douglass? What drives you to believe this?
- Do you believe it would have been appropriate if Douglass took the opportunity to express in the letter his conflicting views regarding the President’s public statements about race?

2. Have the students read and discuss other documents concerning Douglass’ public statements about President Lincoln and President Lincoln’s ever changing views on slavery and race relations:

- Attached Document - Oration In Memory Of Abraham Lincoln delivered by Frederick Douglass – Source:
<http://www.ashbrook.org/library/19/douglass/lincolnoration.html>
- Attached Document – Quotes by Abraham Lincoln on Slavery and Race Relations - Source:
<http://www.lewrockwell.com/orig/young8.html>
- Other Resources:
http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/exhibits/douglass_exhibit/index.html

3. Divide the students into four groups. Tell all of the groups that they are to make believe that they are competing public relations firms during the times of Lincoln and Douglass. Two of the firms are competing to get contracted by the Lincoln Administration. The other two firms are competing to get contracted by Frederic Douglass. The firms that are able to make their potential bosses look the best amidst controversy will be awarded the contracts. They are to use the documents provided in class to complete this assignment.

- Firms representing Lincoln should write brief statements for the media reinterpreting his controversial statements and policies regarding race relations. The statements are to portray Lincoln in a manner that he is concerned for the well being of all people regardless of race.
- Firms representing Douglass should write brief statements for the media reinterpreting Douglass' statements and actions against Lincoln. The statements are meant to assure the public that there is no animosity between Douglass and Lincoln and that they are getting along fine.

Limit the activity to four media statements.

4. The teacher is to engage in role play: Make believe that you are Lincoln and later Douglass (or vice versa) and have the firms present the media statements. You, as Douglass and Lincoln, will decide which firms will be awarded the contracts.

Extended Lesson: Have the students write a current event assignment involving political speeches and spin doctoring.

Assessment:

- Evaluate statements according to historical accuracy, grammar and neatness.
- Consider cooperative and creativity grades in group assignments.

**Suggested Books
In Lesson:**

Douglass, F. (1975) The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass,
International Publishers

Lincoln, A. (1989) Abraham Lincoln : Speeches and Writings 1832-1858,
Library of America

**Additional Web
Resources:**

Speeches by Frederick Douglass

<http://www.frederickdouglass.org/speeches/index.html>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2927.html>

<http://www.bickley.com/fm/recordings.html>

Speeches by Abraham Lincoln

<http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/speech.htm>

<http://www.vlib.us/amdocs/texts/kansas.html>

<http://www.historyplace.com/lincoln/haven.htm>

Quotes by Abraham Lincoln on Slavery and Race Relations

On Slavery:

"... when they [slaveowners] remind us of their constitutional rights, I acknowledge them, not grudgingly but fully and fairly; and I would give them any legislation for the claiming of their fugitives." ~ Lincoln, speaking in support of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

"...in nearly all the published speeches of him who now addresses you... I do but quote from one of those speeches when I declare that 'I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the states where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so.' "

"I have no objection to its being made express and irrevocable." ~ Lincoln, speaking in regards to slavery and in support of a proposed Thirteenth Amendment to explicitly guarantee slavery.

"Servile labor disappeared because it could not stand the competition of free labor; its profitability sealed [slavery's] doom in the market economy." ~ Ludwig von Mises, explaining why an institution that had been a universal feature of all societies throughout recorded history could finally be abolished by laissez-faire economic liberties, which unfortunately, could not prevent politicians from stealing the credit for it.

On Race Relations:

"The whole nation is interested that the best use shall be made of these territories. We want them for the homes of free white people." ~ Lincoln, on whether blacks – slave or free – should be allowed in the new territories in the West, October 16, 1854.

"I, as well as Judge Douglas, am in favor of the race to which I belong having the superior position. I have never said anything to the contrary." ~ Lincoln, Aug. 21, 1858, in remarks stating his belief that blacks were naturally inferior to whites, which was a nearly universal belief on the part of whites in both the North and South long before and long after the Civil War.

"Root, hog, or die" ~ Lincoln's suggestion to illiterate and propertyless ex-slaves unprepared for freedom, Feb. 3, 1865.

"They had better be set to digging their subsistence out of the ground." ~ Lincoln in a War Department memo, April 16, 1863

"Send them to Liberia, to their own native land." ~ Lincoln, speaking in favor of ethnic cleansing all blacks from the United States.

"I cannot make it better known than it already is, that I favor colonization." ~ Lincoln, in a message to Congress, December 1, 1862, supporting deportation of all blacks from America.

On the Emancipation Proclamation:

"What good would a proclamation of emancipation from me do, especially as we are now situated? I do not want to issue a document that the whole world will see must necessarily be inoperative, like the Pope's bull against the comet! Would my word free the slaves, when I cannot even enforce the Constitution in the rebel States?... Now, then, tell me, if you please, what possible result of good would follow the issuing of such a proclamation as you desire? Understand, I raise no objections against it on legal or constitutional grounds; for, as commander-in-chief of the army and navy, in time of war I suppose I have a right to take any measure which may best subdue the enemy; nor do I urge objections of a moral nature, in view of possible consequences of insurrection and massacre at the South. I view this matter as a practical war measure, to be decided on according to the advantages or disadvantages it may offer to the suppression of the rebellion.... I will also concede that emancipation would help us in Europe, and convince them that we are incited by something more than ambition.... Still, some additional strength would be added in that way to the war, and then, unquestionably, it would weaken the rebels by drawing off their laborers, which is of great importance; but I am not so sure we could do much with the blacks.... I think you should admit that we already have an important principle to rally and unite the people, in the fact that constitutional government is at stake. This is a fundamental idea." ~ Lincoln's reply to a Committee from Religious Denominations of Chicago asking for a Proclamation of Emancipation, on Sept. 13, 1862. Less than four months later he would decree what he would term a "war measure," the Emancipation Proclamation, on Jan 1, 1863.

"It had got to be midsummer, 1862. Things had gone on from bad to worse, until I felt that we had reached the end of our rope on the plan of operations we had been pursuing; that we had about played our last card, and must change our tactics, or lose the game. I now determined upon the adoption of the emancipation policy; and without consultation with, or the knowledge of, the Cabinet, I prepared the original draft of the proclamation, and, after much anxious thought, called a Cabinet meeting upon the subject. This was the last of July or the first part of the month of August, 1862. [The exact date was July 22,

1862.]" ~ Lincoln, to the artist F.B. Carpenter, Feb. 6, 1864. Almost two months before his meeting with the Chicago Committee. Ol' Honest Abe, indeed.

"The original proclamation has no... legal justification, except as a military measure." ~ Lincoln, in a letter to Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase.

Source: <http://www.lewrockwell.com/orig/young8.html>