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Examining Competing Definitions of Patriotism during World War I

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Abstract

High school students need learning opportunities to explore public issues that they will grapple with as future democratic citizens. One public issue that high school students need to examine is the role of protests in U.S. democracy. In this article, I provide a series of activities for the high school U.S. history classroom to examine the role of protests on the U.S. home front during World War I. The series of activities allows students to examine competing definitions of patriotism. Students analyze Herbert Hoover's Food in War Speech and a series of paintings commissioned by the U.S. Food Administration that advocated for civilians on the U.S. home front to be patriotic by donating for the food conservation effort. They also read excerpts from *Roses and Radicals* (Zimet, 2018) that chronicles suffragists' protests for the right to vote during World War I. The steps and resources needed to implement the series of activities are provided. The series of activities is driven by the inquiry-based teaching practices advocated for in the C3 Framework by the National Council for the Social Studies.

Keywords: U.S. patriotism; U.S. women's suffrage movement; World War I; civic education; C3 Framework

Americans define patriotism differently. This is because people have different values, biases, and beliefs based upon economic, geographic, cultural, social, political, and regional factors (Westheimer, 2008). A recent example of this can be seen with the Colin Kaepernick controversy. Kaepernick refused to stand for the national anthem at NFL games and knelt due to social injustices and racism still present in American society. Donald Trump viewed Kaepernick's actions as unpatriotic. Trump's responses to Kaepernick's actions show that the divergences in ways that people define patriotism are ever present (Serwer, 2017). High school students need meaningful learning opportunities to explore how and why people define patriotism differently. One ideal example for this is examining civilians' actions on the U.S. home front during World War I.

In this article, I focus on different versions of patriotism espoused on the U.S. home front during World War I. First, I discuss the role that high schools play in preparing future democratic citizens. Then, the focus of the article shifts to briefly examine the importance of teaching public policies such as divergent views on patriotism. Finally, a series of activities is given that looks at competing beliefs about

patriotism on the U.S. home front during World War I. The steps and resources needed to implement this series of activities are provided.

The Role of High Schools Preparing Future Democratic Citizens

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) defines social studies as the integration of the different social science disciplines in schools to develop K-12 students' civic competencies (NCSS, 2010). After all, the purpose of high schools is to prepare future democratic citizens (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977). Being a democratic citizen is not a passive process. Democratic citizens play an active role in backing potential elected officials, analyzing and supporting public policies, and engaging in service-learning projects for their local communities (Oliver & Shaver, 1966). These examples capture some of the many responsibilities and skills needed for being a democratic citizen. NCSS does a great job articulating many of the needed skills of future democratic citizens for the 21st century in its C3Framework.

The C3 Framework provides a vision for a student-centered classroom where students research issues through compelling questions in the four core social studies disciplines: history, economics, geography, and civics (NCSS, 2013a). Through the four dimensions of the Inquiry Arc in the C3 Framework, students analyze primary and secondary sources to answer a compelling question and then take civic action to help address an issue. Grant, Swan, and Lee (2017) provide the IDM Blueprint to help social studies teachers structure and organize their inquiry-based lesson plans. The implementation of this type of teaching advocating for inquiry-based practices builds students' disciplinary thinking, literacy, and argumentation skills (Lee & Swan, 2013). However, it is important to note that historical thinking is different from civic thinking because historians ask different questions than political scientists to examine issues and events. Civic thinking skills are focused on enabling our students to apply political scientists' analysis skills to examine issues and events (Clabough, 2018). One important component of civic thinking skills is equipping our high school students with the ability to analyze public policies.

An integral component of any social studies curriculum is equipping high school students to analyze public policies. Public policies are enduring issues that are not bound to one era and create conflicting perspectives from citizens (Oliver & Shaver, 1966). These conflicting perspectives are due to the fact that people's solutions are based on their values, biases, and beliefs (Hunt & Metcalf, 1955; Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Some examples include the role of the federal government in people's lives and income inequality. It is important for high school students to grapple with public issues because this prepares them to do so as future democratic citizens. Our high school social studies classrooms should be "laboratories for democracy" where students can examine competing solutions to public issues (Clabough & Wooten, 2016). After all,

our social studies classrooms are some of the few spaces where students can engage in meaningful discussions about public issues (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Junco, 2018).

One public policy that was a major controversy throughout the 20th century is the role of the U.S. home front in times of war. The issue of divergent perspectives of patriotism during times of war was really an issue during World War I. War on an industrial scale created the need for the home front to contribute more in supplying goods for the war effort. This can be seen with the U.S. government trying to direct the actions of civilians to donate food for World War I

(Miller, 2018; Mullendore, 1941; Jeansonne, 2016). However, many women saw hypocrisy in the U.S. government claiming to fight for freedom abroad while denying them the right to vote at home. This caused many women to protest for the right to vote during World War I (Sneider, 2008; Zeiger, 2000).

Protests during times of war became a common feature in the U.S. during the 20th century: 50 African American sailors were tried for mutiny during World War II for refusing to go back to segregated and unsafe working conditions after the explosion at Port Chicago and the more well-known protests throughout the Vietnam War.

Protests and divisions on concepts of patriotism have extended into the 21st century with the War in Afghanistan, the Second War in Iraq, and most recently with the Colin Kaepernick controversy. Westheimer (2008) argues that there are different versions of patriotism based on people's beliefs. Therefore, it is important for the high school social studies teacher to design classroom activities to allow students to explore the different ways that citizens define patriotism (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003). In the next sections, I provide a series of activities to examine competing definitions of patriotism on the U.S. home front during World War I.

Examining Divergent Definitions of Patriotism in World War I

The teacher starts by reviewing the ways that technological advancements changed warfare in World War I. Students answer the following two questions.

1. How did technological developments change warfare during World War I?
2. How could technological developments change the roles of civilians on the U.S. home front during World War I?

After students answer these questions, there is a class discussion. Students discuss how industrialization altered modern warfare. They also speculate about how industrialization changed citizens on the U.S. home front from having a passive to active role by manufacturing goods needed for the war effort.

After this discussion, the teacher transitions to how the U.S. government

envisioned the role of U.S. citizens on the home front. This role may be best captured by Herbert Hoover's Food in War Speech about the need for food conservation. During World War I, Hoover was the head of the U.S. Food Administration (Mullendore, 1941; Nash, 1996). The teacher may have students in pairs read an abbreviated version of Hoover's Food in War Speech (see Appendix) and answer a couple of analysis prompts. These analysis prompts are provided in the following section.

1. According to Hoover's speech, what was the purpose of the U.S. Food Administration? Use evidence to support your arguments.

2. According to Hoover's speech, why did U.S. citizens need to take part in food conservation during World War I? Use evidence to support your arguments.

The teacher floats around the room to answer questions. These two analysis prompts enable students to examine Hoover's perspective about the role of citizens on the U.S. homefront.

After students answer these analysis prompts, there is another class discussion. Groups share their responses. The teacher asks an extension question to get students to explore Hoover's speech in more depth. Why do you think Hoover gave this speech? This question helps students examine Hoover's goals with this speech. These analysis prompts build students' ability to formulate arguments by utilizing evidence to support their claims (Wineburg, Martin, & Monte-Sano, 2013).

The U.S. Food Administration commissioned a series of 12 paintings based on Hoover's Food in War Speech. Sets of these paintings toured the country to garner support for the war effort by food donations. The teacher starts by introducing students to one of these paintings, *The Body May Die but the Soul Is Unconquerable* (Johnes, 1918) (Figure 1), and models how to analyze the symbolic imagery (The paintings in the following sections and the abbreviated version of Hoover's Food in War Speech are provided with the permission from the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library-Museum). Three analysis questions to help students decode the layers of meaning in this painting are provided on the following page.

1. What stands out to you from this painting? Use evidence from the painting to support your arguments.

2. Why do you think the artist depicted the buildings and street in this manner? Explain your reasoning.

3. What is the message that the artist is trying to convey in this painting? How does the message of this painting connect to Hoover's Food in War Speech?

Use evidence from the painting and Hoover's speech to support your arguments.

Figure 1

"The Body May Die but the Soul Is Unconquerable"



Note. Copyright 1918 by the U.S. Food Administration.

This scaffolding by the teacher equips students with the skills to analyze symbolic imagery found within *The Body May Die but the Soul Is Unconquerable* (Johnes, 1918). Students will need practice to engage in the abstract thinking required to analyze the symbolic imagery within these paintings. These questions help students consider and discuss how images within this painting may be utilized by the artist to convey ideas and arguments.

After modeling for students how to analyze the symbolic imagery in one of the Hoover paintings, students in pairs analyze another painting, *We Need Men and Supplies, as well as Plans* (Streets, 1918) (Figure 2), and answer the following questions.

1. What stands out to you from this painting? Use evidence from the painting to support your arguments.
2. Why do you think the artist utilized soldiers in this painting to evoke certain feelings and emotions? Explain your reasoning.

3. What is the message that the artist is trying to convey in this painting? How does the message of this painting connect to Hoover's Food in War Speech? Use evidence from the painting and Hoover's speech to support your arguments.

Figure 2

"We Need Men and Supplies, as well as Plans"



Note. Copyright 1918 by the U.S. Food Administration.

These questions help students see how the U.S. government has consistently connected civilians' actions during times of war to the support of soldiers on the front lines. Students gain experience from this activity of articulating how people use imagery to convey arguments (Sperry & Baker, 2016).

After pairs analyze this painting, there is another class discussion. Students share their responses to these questions and support their arguments with details from the painting. This activity gives students experience deconstructing the messages within this painting and helps them grasp how visual primary sources convey arguments through images (Journell, 2009). The analysis of these two paintings based on Hoover's Food in War Speech helps students articulate one vision for the role of the U.S. home front during World War I and gives them experience deconstructing subtle political messages contained in visual primary sources. However, this was not the only viewpoint about the role of U.S. citizens on the home front.

Throughout American history, the United States has been a democracy in theory as opposed to in reality. Most white women did not gain the right to vote until 1920; most African American men and women did not gain the right to vote until 1965. Students can explore this contradiction in the American character by examining the photograph at the following link, <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/kaiser-wilson-suffragette>. This photograph depicts a woman with a banner protesting women’s inability to vote during World War I. The teacher asks the following question. How does this photograph contradict the U.S. message abroad while being involved in World War I? The class discusses this question, and the teacher helps students to see how many questioned how the U.S. could advocate for democracy abroad while denying women the right to vote at home. The teacher may also discuss how citizens use protests to argue their positions when their elected representatives ignore their pleas (Nokes, 2019; Percy, 2019).

The discussion of this photograph prepares students to explore the protest for women’s suffrage during World War I. *Roses and Radicals: The Epic Story of how American Women Won the Right to Vote* (Zimet, 2018) is a great trade book for examining the ways that suffragists protested for the right to vote during World War I. The teacher assigns students in groups of three to read pages 121-124 from this trade book. As students read these pages, they complete the following graphic organizer (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Tradebook Graphic Organizer

Why did Alice Paul and her followers refuse to end their protests during World War I? Use evidence from the text to support your arguments.	What tactics did suffragists use to protest World War I, and how were they treated by fellow citizens and government officials? Use evidence from the text to support your arguments.

These questions help students grasp why suffragists protested during World War I. Students can see why these supporters of the women suffragist movement saw hypocrisy in the U.S. claiming to fight for democracy abroad while denying women the right to vote at home (Percy, 2019).

After groups read these pages and complete the graphic organizer, there is another class discussion. Students share their responses and add onto their graphic organizer based on peers’ comments. The teacher asks the following question. How does the suffragists’ arguments about women not being able to vote create a

contradiction in the ways that the United States tries to present itself in the world? This question helps students explore a contradiction throughout U.S. history that a country espousing democratic beliefs should not deny her citizens basic democratic rights (Wineburg, 2018).

The examination of Hoover's Food in War Speech and the ways in which suffragists protested for the right to vote shows students different visions for how citizens on the U.S. home front defined patriotism during World War I. The steps in the activity described above position students to complete one of the following two prompts.

1. Assume the role of a person that has just heard Hoover's Food in War Speech and write a letter to a local newspaper explaining why his message for food relief should or should not be supported in your local community. Your letter should draw on Hoover's statements to support your claims. The length of your letter should be a half page in length.
2. Assume the role of a person that has just seen the photograph of women protesting for the right to vote in front of the White House. Write a speech to be delivered at a local townhall on why women's protests should or should not be supported. Your speech should draw on Zimet's trade book to support your arguments. The length of your letter should be a half page in length.

Through completing one of these writing prompts, students practice taking the role of a democratic citizen. They make persuasive arguments about a form of patriotism. Perspective-writing activities like these strengthen students' higher order thinking skills by utilizing evidence to articulate a person's point of view (Lo, 2018). The steps of this activity position students to

see divergent viewpoints about patriotism on the U.S. homefront during World War I. The examination of issues connected to patriotism can be explored in other wars and also sets students up to individually articulate their own definition of patriotism. In this way, the teacher helps students develop their own civic identity (NCSS, 2013b).

Afterthoughts

In this article, I explored competing ways that Americans define patriotism during times of war. An activity is provided that examines why divergent definitions of patriotism connected to issues and events during World War I. Herbert Hoover's Food in War Speech about the need for food conservation reflects a reoccurring argument made by U.S. government officials that the civilian population should forsake all issues and focus solely on winning a war. However, Zimet's trade book does a great job capturing a dissenting voice during World War I with how suffragists argued that the

U.S. could not disseminate an argument for democracy abroad while denying a portion of her citizens the right to vote at home. The series of activities in this article gives students the opportunity to grasp how and why people define U.S. patriotism differently.

During the Vietnam War, Richard Nixon weaponized protestors as instruments to energize his supporters and maintain his political power. Protestors were seen by many as unpatriotic and not American when in fact they were trying to make government officials come to terms with the contradictions of the Vietnam War (Farrell, 2017; Perlstein, 2008). Since the Vietnam War, protests have been tools employed by politicians for their political gain by dividing the electorate. One way to deescalate the current hyperpartisanship in this country is by setting up opportunities for high school students to examine why people have divergent beliefs about public issues such as defining patriotism in different ways. This critical examination of issues equips students with the knowledge to dissect competing arguments about an issue and apply evidence to take civic action (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Journell, 2016).

Our high school social studies classrooms are some of the few spaces that students have to discuss dissenting perspectives about public issues (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Junco, 2018).

Therefore, the social studies teacher must design meaningful class activities that allow his or her students to examine different perspectives on public issues. These public issues help students see how solutions were reached to issues in the past and how some topics have endured as new issues in contemporary U.S. society. This way students are equipped with the knowledge to put some issues to rest as future democratic citizens. However, for this to occur, the high school social studies teacher must make a commitment through his or her class activities to preparing the next generation of citizens to fulfill the many responsibilities of democratic citizenship.

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Appendix

Herbert Hoover *Food in War* Speech

The Food Administration in the United States is an instrument of our war effort. Its primary concern is feeding our own people and those of the Allies. This guarantees the strength of all men, women, and children on the homefront and abroad.

The question of meeting the food needs for the war is mainly about determining the amount of food we need at home so extra food can be shipped to our soldiers and allies. The United States is the most important part of meeting the food needs not only of our soldiers but the soldiers and citizens of Allied countries. This is because we can ship our extra food to the war effort, plant more food at home, and reduce our waste of food.

The reduction of food use in the United States is important for the war effort to be successful. We have to reduce the food eaten in the United States a little bit to help the soldiers and citizens of our allies. This means that we are going to have to increase the exports that we send to the Allies with food such as wheat and eat a little less of such food items as wheat.

The success of the war effort is dependent on the sacrifices of U.S. citizens on the homefront. This happens through the everyday actions of U.S. citizens and working with local community groups to meet the needs of the war effort. The food producers in the United States have also worked hard to meet the food needs of our soldiers and the soldiers and citizens of the Allies.

One group that we have had to feed is the needy displaced women and children in Belgium impacted by the destruction caused by the German army. We have had this duty for the last three years. Additionally, the food lines for the poor in England, France, and Italy have been worse this past winter. This has really put a strain on the governments of our European allies. This should pull on our heart strings. These food shortages pose a threat to our success in war. U.S. citizens need to volunteer to help with the war effort by eating only what is needed and through saving extra food for the war effort.

I do not believe that anyone has the right to profit from the war through high increases in prices of foods or supplies. Price gouging reflects poorly on the American character and values. If our citizens engaged in price gouging, the United States would be no better than our German enemies. People price gouging hurt our soldiers involved in the war.

The success of the Food Administration is largely because of volunteer cooperation of U.S. citizens on the homefront. With our current war, it will be successful based on the actions of men, women, and children in the United States.