

Oakland TAHG Lesson Study 2008-2009

Possible 11thth Grade Topics

1. The Economic impact of World War II in the Bay Area

The military buildup for World War II brought fundamental changes to the region, the repercussions of which are still being felt today. The unprecedented level of military production was accompanied by an equally unheard of internal migration of people trying to escape the depression by following the trail of government spending. In a few short years, tens of millions of dollars poured into Alameda County specifically, making towns like Richmond important on a national and global scale.

The economic repercussions of the war changed the local and national economies, as well as the social conditions of the millions who came to the bay area. So much of our modern lives seem to have started here, from the influence of Kaiser in Oakland (and healthcare) to the demographic make-up of neighborhoods.

The topic has an abundance of questions students for students to investigate:

- What did total war look like in the U.S.? How were people mobilized and what benefits did they derive from it?
- Who immigrated to California and why? How did economics play a role in this?
- How did federal money influence college development and education?
- How did the war transform local economies?
- A focus on Kaiser and health care: why did corporate healthcare arise and what was the war's legacy in terms of employer/employee relations?

2. The Role of Government in the Economy: The New Deal and WWII Years

One could argue that with the advent of FDR's New Deal, the government *was* the economy. At the very least, it must be noted that the federal government took an unprecedented and unabashed role in shaping the American economic system under FDR's Presidency. The bank holiday, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the National Recovery Administration, the Social Security Act, and the Works Progress Administration are only a few of the large governmental programs created to address the financial crisis.

While far too massive for a single lesson or two, the topic of the government's role in the economy raises a number of questions that may interest students:

- How did governmental action affect different regions of the country (Bay Area, Tennessee Valley, other urban centers)?
- What segments of the population were best served by New Deal/Wartime economic policies? Who was left out?
- How did the nation's psychology impact the economic situation? Consider the charismatic

figure of FDR and the changing ideas about governmental obligation to citizens.

- What new labor issues arose from government involvement in the economy?

3. Sharecropping

With its roots in slavery, sharecropping contributed to the economic and social stagnation of the South. Predatory loans were enforced through bogus contracts and physical terror. Sharecropping provides an opportunity to explore the connection between economic conditions and social status. Black political rights were tied to the sharecropping system, and the fight to dismantle it changed the social structure of the South.

Students may want to explore sharecropping in a number of contexts:

- How does an economic system impact the development of racial and social castes?
- What conditions and government actions gave rise to sharecropping, and what conditions and government actions helped end it?
- How did population shifts and the economic forces behind urbanization effect sharecropping?

4. Dust Bowl

Perhaps no image is more emblematic of the Great Depression than the dust bowl. Beginning in the 1920s, a combination of natural, social, and economic forces worked to desertify an already-arid region of the country. Farming techniques, population shifts, and economic factors all contributed to this natural and economic disaster. The subsequent migration westward had deep economic roots and also served to alter the national economy in terms of job availability, and population centers. The Dust Bowl attacked one of the fundamental symbols of American culture: the small family farm.

Its multiple causes and national ramifications provide students with many lines of inquiry:

- How did economic policy impact the conditions that lead to the Dust Bowl?
- What were the consequences of the migration caused by the Dust Bowl?
- Did the Dust Bowl do irreparable damage to one on America's most cherished economic ideals: the family farm?

5. Government spending on dams and the west and the environment

The story of the American West is one defined by aridity and government influence. Much of the time, these two factors were linked. This can be seen in the massive water projects undertaken throughout the twentieth century. Whether it was local irrigation cases, the California Water Project, or the Hoover Dam, government spending caused economic, social, and political changes wherever it was used.

This topic will allow students to explore the impact of economic issues on the environment, while also considering the implications of policies that formed the environmental conditions that today we

take for granted:

- What economic forces led to large dam construction? Where did the money come from and who fought to get it?
- Evaluate the necessity of large-scale water projects: Were such projects warranted, and on what scale? Were there alternatives?
- What long term economic impacts did water laws and projects effect in the West? How did these conditions influence growth and population?

6. Labor and Unions

When considering economic history, it is easy to focus solely on capital and governmental aspects. However, it is very important to study the production side as well. The growth of unionized labor started in earnest at the end of the nineteenth century and increased drastically through the mid twentieth century. Studying the history of unionization allows for analysis of the successes and weaknesses of organized labor, those that benefitted from such a system, and those who were excluded.

Such a large topic can send students in a variety of directions:

- Compare the AFL and CIO. Who did they serve, with what success, and why did they merge?
- How did the rapid industrialization of the twentieth century affect the nature of work for most people?
- How were non-white workers helped or hurt by the Depression/WWII-era union movements?

7. Women in the economy in World War II

The image of Rosie the Riveter is ubiquitous in American history and pop culture as a representation of WWII women in the workforce. To be sure, this time period saw a huge influx of women in the wage economy, but the poster only tells part of the story.

This topic may be especially interesting for students as it is an analysis of an iconic image in American history:

- “Both Rosie the Riveter” and the “We Can Do it!” poster represent a specific racial view of WWII female labor. What were the experiences of non-white women in the workforce?
- What were the experiences of women in organized labor?
- How did wages-work affect traditional gender roles, and were these changes permanent?