

## ALBA Lesson Plan Template – Social Studies

**Title:** Lincoln Brigade Veterans Battle Political Discrimination During World War II – An Analysis of Personal Letters

**Subject:** U.S. History

**Grade(s):** 9-10 (based on Common Core standards applied to this lesson)

**Standards:** [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4](#), [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6](#), [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.8](#)

**Key words/phrases:** Discrimination, fascism, communism, Comintern, republic, Red Scare, subversive activity, internment camps

**Essential Questions:** Under what circumstances will the U.S. government question the loyalty of Americans and prevent them from fighting for their country?

**Synopsis:** Japanese-Americans were the most prominent group targeted for discrimination during World War II, but they were not the only ones. Veterans of the Lincoln Brigade were also targeted. Through analysis of two primary documents, students will compare the experiences of two U.S. soldiers and their reactions to government discrimination.

**Standard Alignment(s) Used:** English Language Arts Common Core (reading historical sources)

**Recommended Teacher Background:** Teachers should watch the 10- or 40-minute introduction to the Spanish Civil War among the [ALBA teacher resources](#).

**Connections to other disciplines:** English Language Arts, U.S. Government or Civics, Civil Rights History)

**Number of Class Periods:** 1-2 class periods.

### Standards:

<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4</a>	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6</a>	Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.8</a>	Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.

### Primary Sources:

- Letter from Lincoln Brigade veteran Alvin Warren (see Appendix 1)

- Letter from Lincoln Brigade veteran Sam Nahman (see Appendix 2)

## Procedures

1. Lead-In/Hook: Describe to students (or have them describe) any recent controversy surrounding surveillance of U.S. citizens, such as the controversy over activities of the National Security Agency, or questions raised by the Patriot Act, and ask the following questions:
  - Why does a government choose to spy on its own people?
  - Who often gets targeted for government surveillance and violation of civil rights?
  - Is this fair? What does it mean when government officials or critics of the government talk about balancing freedom with security?
  - What are some other examples of the U.S. government spying on U.S. citizens and/or taking action against “subversive activity”?
  - Is this the same as discrimination? Why or why not?
2. Pre-assessment and activation of prior knowledge: Review with students one or more examples from past lessons that dealt with either spying on citizens or government action against activities it deemed subversive, such as The Red Scare and the Palmer Raids, the Sedition Act of 1918, or the Sacco and Vanzetti trial. Vocabulary might include such terms as “surveillance,” “subversive,” “anarchist,” “republic,” “fascism,” “communism,” “communist sympathizer,” “sedition,” and “internment.”
3. Step by Step:
  - a. After pre-assessment or activation of prior knowledge, inform students that during World War II, our government became suspicious of U.S. citizens who it thought might undermine the war effort. The biggest target became Japanese Americans, but others were targeted as well.
  - b. Briefly introduce or review the activities of Americans who fought in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade during the Spanish Civil War. Inform or remind students that some Americans defied U.S. neutrality laws and fought on the side of the Republic against the rebellion led by Francisco Franco and his fascist supporters, Hitler and Mussolini. Americans who had supported the Republic either as soldiers in Spain or supporters at home were targeted by the government as “subversives,” partly because the Republic was supported by the Soviet Union, and because many supporters of the Republic, both home and abroad, were actually communists or communist sympathizers, or anarchists.
  - c. If Internet access is available, have students read “[World War II Letters From the Lincoln Brigade](#),” especially “Preface” and “Before Pearl Harbor.” Then pass out copies of the letter by Alvin Warren (Appendix 1). Vocabulary to master before reading may include: Furlough, malingerer, AWOL, progressive, chaplain. Allow students quiet reading time.
  - d. Pass out copies of the letter by Sam Nahman. Inform students that Nahman’s spelling and punctuation have not been corrected. Vocabulary to master before reading may include: Anti-Defamation League.

*BEFORE READING: Inform students that one of the elements of primary documents to be considered by historians is the “tone” of the writing. This refers to the author’s feelings about the subject being considered and how the author communicates those feelings. For example, is the author angry?*

*Does he or she communicate anger with open hostility or with sarcasm? Is the author appreciative? Does he or she communicate appreciation with formal or relaxed/conversational language?*

e. For students to consider after the first reading:

- What was Alvin Warren’s purpose in writing this letter? How do you know?
- Why do you think Warren was prevented from visiting “any coastal areas”?
- What was Warren’s purpose in discussing his recommendations from his superior officers?
- In his interview with his battalion commander, why was Warren asked about his attitude toward labor unions?
- Provide three examples of statements from the letter that can be taken as fact.
- Give three examples of statements that should be taken as opinion.

f. Questions to consider after the second reading:

- To whom was Nahman writing? How does this affect the tone of the letter? How is the tone of this letter different to the Warren letter? Why?
- What was Nahman’s purpose in writing (compared to Warren’s)?
- Is there any evidence (from both letters) to suggest that Nahman was much more belligerent toward the Army than Warren?
- What evidence exists from the letters that preventing the soldiers from combat positions came from the highest levels of the U.S. government? (Write down key phrases or sentences from each letter.)

4. Closure: Discuss with students how a historian might use these letters? Are they good sources? For what purpose? What problems would be raised by a historian attempting to use these sources to tell a story? Was the government justified at targeting these soldiers for “limited duty” or “confinement”? Do you think they were communists? Does it matter? Would this impact their service if they were in combat positions?

#### **Differentiation:**

- **Advanced:** Students can research letters from Japanese-Americans who were put in internment camps and provide a comparison-contrast with Lincoln Brigade veterans, both on their experiences and the tone of their letters.
- **Struggling:** Bullet-pointed questions could be discussed in small groups before individual written responses are made. Students could also be put in heterogeneous groups with the letters read out loud before the questions are considered individually.

#### **Assessment:**

As part of an assessment on all or part of a World War II unit:

- Ask students to define important vocabulary from the lesson background or the soldiers’ letters (standard [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4](#))
- Ask students to write a compare/contrast essay of the two letters, noting the authors’ purposes, how their tone is affected by their intended audience, and on what part of their narratives they choose to focus, and why? (standard [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6](#))

- Ask students to discuss how the letters fit into the grand narrative of World War II. Did the authors communicate a story worth telling? What is that story? Do their claims of injustice hold up to historical scrutiny? What might be useful in confirming the claims made by the authors? (standard [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.8](#))

## Appendix 1:

From Alvin Warren

Jan 14, 1943

[Fort Benjamin Harrison

Indiana]

Jack Bjose

Executive Secretary

Veterans of Abraham Lincoln Brigade

100 Fifth Ave

New York N.Y.

Dear Jack:

I am very sorry that I have not gotten the details of my situation to you earlier than this. I have been waiting to find out definitely as to the disposal of my request for a furlough to New York. It has been definitely refused, with the statement that I would not be permitted to enter any coastal areas. However, they are permitting me to travel to Chicago. So I guess you will have to answer all questions and act as my representative in N.Y. Below is a statement of the facts starting from the date of induction.

I was inducted into the Army June 8, 1942. I was held at Camp Upton, N.Y. for one month before being sent to a Replacement Training Camp. I arrived at Fort Knox Ky July 7 1942. Here I received my three months basic training attached to a gunnery platoon. During my training period, I was interviewed by my superior officers and recommended for Officer Training School. At that time I was the only drafted man out of my entire company to be so recommended. Later on I also received the highest recommendations for officers not specifically attached to my organization. (During that period I was promoted to Squad leader.) The company commander asked if I would [like] to stay on as a cadre (training personnel) after the training period was completed. I told him that I would rather not as I preferred to join an active division or enter one of the tank technical schools.

Near the end of the training period I was called in by the Battalion commander for an interview before going before the Officer Candidate School board. This interview lasted well over an hour, when the usual interview of this type lasted only about ten minutes. During the discussion many questions were asked about my attitudes toward labor unions, Harry Bridges<sup>i</sup>, my political affiliations etc. Several days later I was ordered to appear before the Medical Board for a physical examination for officers school. This in itself was unusual as it was customary to go before the Officers School Board (and if accepted, then go a physical examination.) The examining officer turned me down because of certain alleged defects. I was told at that time, that the findings of the medical officer would not affect my status as an enlisted man and that I would be sent out to active service. From then on, until I was transferred, I functioned as acting cadre on the company training staff. The Commanding Officer told me at that time that I would soon go to a division or to one of the technical schools.

On October 27, 1942, I received a War Department order to entrain for Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana. Here, I entered the H.Q. and H.Q. Post Company, 1530<sup>th</sup> Service Unit. Let me tell you something of the character of this company. It is composed of I-B or limited service men, many of whom, in my opinion, are malingerers. Further, there are Japanese, Germans, and Italians in this company who are not allowed to go to combat outfits. Some are suspected of Fascist-Nazi leanings. In addition there are deserters, A.W.O.L.s, drunkards, and general troublemakers. It was until recently, staffed by non-coms who have been rejected by regular outfits and many of whom have been in the guardhouse at one or another. The main function of the company is that of a work outfit. There is no military training carried on at all. It supplies K.P.s, sentries, prison guards, work details and a host of other non-descript details. It has all the characteristics of a dumping place for undesirables and problems. You can well imagine the state of morale in such an outfit. Then there is this further fact. My mail is censored along with that of the foreign born and the suspects.

Upon my arrival at Fort Benjamin Harrison, I immediately asked my first sergeant if he knew why I had been sent there and what steps could be taken to secure a transfer into a combat outfit. He told me that he didn't know the reason that I had been sent in, but that more than likely it would fall into one of the three categories.

1. Physically unfit or limited services.
2. Being of foreign origin, with relatives in the land of my nativity
3. Having participated in labor or progressive activities, such as my background as a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade during the Spanish War 1936-1938

I asked if he would attempt to find out from the Personnel Division, Post Headquarters what was the reason and what I had to do to effect a transfer. He said he would. The result was, as he stated, that H.Q. did not know the reason why, that I had

merely been transferred in on a War Department order. He further suggested seeing the Post Chaplain to see what he could do about the situation. This I proceeded to do. The Chaplain told me, as a result of his inquiries, that I was there because of physical condition. He suggested as the next step, that I apply for a physical examination to find out the exact nature of the alleged deficiencies and take the necessary steps to correct them. I did this. The medical findings were that I was perfectly fit for full and active duty. With this information I went to the head of the Personal Division, Lt. Thomas, to find out what my exact status was and how I could be transferred out to combat duty. He told me that he did not know nor could he find out what the exact reasons for my being sent to this post were. This was in contradiction to the findings of Chaplain. He stated further, that there was no way I could be transferred to other services. The only developments since then is that the Military Intelligence has been visiting many of my former friends and employers, soliciting information of a political nature, about me.

In closing I want to remind you of certain facts which I think are important. You know that the Army is desperately in need of technical men. I have five years experience with Diesel engines. To make that experience more valuable to the Army, the year previous to my induction, I attended a Diesel Engineering School so that I could qualify as an expert in my field. This knowledge is needed by the Army now. Further, my two years experience in Spain has provided [me] with knowledge that can be very useful in the combat services of our Army. I feel that I can help achieve successes with a minimum of cost in life in blood. All I want out of the Army is the chance to serve like any ordinary American soldier to be able to go overseas to participate in the battles which will bring the downfall of countries enemies. Any source of action which you may decide upon has my full agreement. You may use my name and the facts in the case in any way you see fit.

Fraternally Yours

Pvt. Alvin Warren

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<sup>i</sup> Bridges, allegedly a Communist, was head of the San Francisco waterfront workers' union.

## **Appendix 2:**

From Sam Nahman

**Error! Main Document Only.**S/Sgt Sam Nahman

Tampa, Fla.

MacDill Field

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June 7, 1943

Hello Boys,

Well the axe has descended, chalk up another hit for the defeatists. Following are some of the sordid details. I don't know why but some how I felt I was going to get thru. What an optimist!! Here goes.

On June 3 I was to get transferred to another field for further training and inside of a month or so I was to be overseas. That morning orders came out promoting me from a sergeant to a staff sergeant. All packed up and ready to go I went to receive orders at combat crew headquarters. There I heard that a rumor had cropped up that I was not going. I went to the officer in charge and asked if he had heard the rumor, he said no but would check up on it. He then called his superior officer on the phone and asked about me. The officer (a major) said yes I was to be knocked off the combat crew. I asked why I was knocked off, my pilot was very satisfied with me, I was rated one of the best engineers in by the sqdn. I passed my combat physical and I had the necessary technical schooling. I told him I would like his permission to see the major. He then said it would do me no good to see him as it was done by "intelligence" and was out of the major's hands. I then told him why I thought I was knocked off by intelligence and he was surprised. When he heard intelligence cut me off he had thought the worse. All he could do tho was express regrets. I told my pilot and crew and they were mad as heck. My pilot went in to talk to the officer but of course of no avail. I then went back to my old sqd'n. I told my engineering sergeant about it and he said he had heard about it and he heard I was a communist. When I asked him who told him that he said they (with no further explanation) had come around saying that. Boy by that time I was hopping mad. I went to see my first sergeant and asked permission to see the C.O. and explained the situation to him. Altho he has the authority to grant permission he said I would have to see the personnel officer. I went to him, explained what had happened asked to see the C.O. in order to find out officially why I was taken off the combat crew and also where I now stood. He seemed to know all about the case. I told him I felt I was being discriminated against because I fought in Spain, that I felt I was qualified to be on the combat crew and only that morning I was promoted from sergeant to staff. I told him that I had been engineer-gunner for five months here and 3 months in B-25, the oldest engineer here. I also told him I volunteered to be an engineer gunner and volunteered also for the combat crew. He got very mad and indignant and said he would not give me permission to see the C.O. and anyway he continued, "the captain couldn't do anything for you (meaning that the matter was not a local one). I told him I'd like to see some one in base headquarters. He kinda exploded then and said, "I order you not to go over my head and see anyone in base." I then asked if I was to continue working as an engineer in the

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sqd'n. He answered I would and added "for the time being until we receive further orders and at that time we will inform you."

Well I wasn't going to stop then. The following afternoon I went to see the Jewish chaplain as he is the one person (and very influential) I can see with out getting permission. I told him my case and he was astounded at the raw deal I was handed. He told me he had read about what had happened to other vets in Drew Pearson's column and various magazines and papers. He told me quite frankly he would help me if he could. Speaking plainly he said this is a hot issue and most effective way to help me was to do it in connection with a national organization. He told me he was going to new york during the week and that he would take it up with the anti Defamation league of the Bnai-Brith (I think that's the way you spell it). Rather than first taking it up with the base which he said would liable to make me get transferred to Shenango, Penn. (Is that the place where most of the vets were sent to) he could do more by raising it that way and any way since the policy seems to be a national one it would get better results. I will drop in to see him from time to time and will keep you informed as to results.

Well that's the whole case as to all that happened and all I did. Write and let me know if you have any suggestions as to what I should do or what some of the other fellows have done. I will keep in touch with you. Write to me at Sylvia Nahman 2906 - 13<sup>th</sup> St. Tampa, Florida it is easier getting mail there.

Salud and Victoria

Sam Nahman