

ALBA Lesson Plan – Social Studies

Title: Abraham Lincoln Brigade volunteers, anti-Communism and Civil Rights during the McCarthy era.

Subject: U.S. History, European and Global History, Law, Civics, Government

Grade(s): High School, 10-12

Standards: [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2](#) , [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.6](#) , [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.8](#)

Key words/phrases/Concepts: , McCarthy Era, The McCarran Act, Testimony, Subversive Activities Control Board (SACB), Testimony, Red Scare, First Amendment, anti-Communism, Civil Rights. , subversive, ideology (For an optional second unit, or additional lesson on *Brown v. Board of Ed* , use key terms: Supreme Court, Majority opinion, unanimous, First Amendment, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Precedent, Separate but Equal, Separation of Powers, *Brown v. Board of Education*.)

Essential Questions: How did the experience of African Americans, including those who had volunteered to fight in Spain, shed light on the anti-communist campaign of the 1950's? How did McCarthyism infringe on civil rights? Should actions taken for a moral conviction, but that are contrary to US policy be viewed as un-American or threatening? Can a nation support advancement on some civil rights while simultaneously infringing on others? (for Government classes, and/or as part of a *Brown* lesson)

Synopsis: By examining documents relating to SACB testimony, students will gain perspective on how anti-communism during the Red Scare impacted the civil rights of African Americans, including VALB. Using primary sources, such as transcripts from SACB, , students will gain perspective on civil rights issues facing volunteers (particularly African Americans) post WWII, as well as understanding their experiences as African Americans volunteers in Spain. Students will evaluate the challenge to the First Amendment during the McCarthy era .

Part II. (optional second component or additional lesson on *Brown*) By deconstructing excerpts of Supreme Court majority opinions, students will understand the complexities of civil rights issues facing the nation in 1950's , and be able to evaluate their significance. Students can gain perspective on both the goals and ideology of Abraham Lincoln Brigade volunteers and the impact their involvement had in Post WWII America. Students will also understand the role of the Supreme Court and address the paradox of how different branches of government dealt with Civil Rights.

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

Recommended Teacher Background Resources: Teachers should watch the 10- or 40-minute introduction to the Spanish Civil War among the ALBA teacher resources, and be familiar with ALBA resources about the goals and ideals of Abraham Lincoln Brigade volunteers. Teachers should also utilized ALBA resources and US

government records to find additional testimony of VALB before SACB. Teachers should also be comfortable with simple legal and legislative terminology of the McCarran Act.

Connections to other disciplines: English Language Arts, U.S. Government, Civics

Number of Class Periods: 2-4

Standards:

Objectives	Standards addressed (e.g. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1)
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2
Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.6
Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.8

Primary Sources:

Excerpts from Crawford Morgan’s testimony in front of SACB (see appendix A)
 Excerpts from The McCarran Act (see appendix B)

Secondary Sources:

Summary (See Appendix C)

(optional for second unit or additional lesson on Brown)

Excerpts from the Majority opinions of Plessy v. Ferguson and Brown v. Bd. of Education (see Appendix D)
 Secondary: video clip of PBS documentary/ *Supreme Court* (see Appendix E) on the significance of the Brown decision at URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTGHLdr-iaK>

Procedures

1. Lead-In/Hook /Motivational:

(Note: Students should already have learned about the Spanish Civil War in the context of Global History and have knowledge of or be informed about the Abraham Lincoln Brigades)

Ask students what they believe is the role or responsibilities of an American citizen? Ask students to what extent can an US citizen disagree with the government and how can they express it? What action should be considered “subversive” or “Un – American? Can beliefs or ideology be threatening? (try to get students to discuss the difference in disagreeing with government policy and taking action, and then discuss which actions are within 1st Amendment rights

Put on board (or distribute on paper in bold writing to each student) the full text of The First Amendment.

Ask students to write down what rights are given or restricted by this Amendment?

2. Pre-assessment and activation of prior knowledge: (Note: Students should already have learned about the Spanish Civil War in the context of Global History and have knowledge of or be informed about the Abraham Lincoln Brigades and in a US History class, the McCarthy era) Review the terms suggested in key words and phrases, and review the Spanish Civil War and ideologies.

3. Step by Step:

- A. After reviewing the above, have students to go back to their reflection of the 1st Amendment, ask students to share their answers to the following:
 - What rights does the amendment give citizens?
 - (discuss or emphasize words like protest, assemble, free to worship, express an opinion against government, established religion, emphasizing and deconstructing the language of the Amendment.)
 - Does the amendment provide citizens with *unrestricted* rights?
 - What rights may be limited?
 - Are citizens' or governments' rights given, limited? (elicit from students that part of the intent of this right was to prevent “congress/government” from infringing on citizen’s rights.)
- B. Use the above as a segue to McCarthyism and discuss the Red Scare, and investigation/subpoena of Americans suspected of subversive activities, including former volunteers in Spain.
- C. Distribute the McCarran Act excerpts and description (one side should have the language of the legislation, and the other side the summary of the Act) Before they read the summary/description, have student work in pairs and try to deconstruct the actual language of the act by listing 3 things the act required of citizens, and discuss what they feel was the purpose/goals of the legislation. After sharing some of the student responses, bring the class together and revisit their previous thoughts about The First Amendment. Ask Students if they feel this legislation challenges First Amendment rights?
- D. Distribute Crawford Morgan’s Congressional testimony to students. Students work in pairs and role play the transcription. After students read in pairs, bring the class together and distribute a worksheet with the following question: (students can do this in class as time permits or as a homework reinforcement:
 - According to his testimony, what were Mr. Morgan’s goals/motivations for volunteering in Spain?
 - In what ways did his experience in Spain differ from his experiences in the US as an African American?
 - Discuss with your partner: What reasons did the SACB have in bringing VALB members to testify and categorizing the Brigade as “Subversive”.
 - Do you feel the government had a right to do so? Did doing so violate any constitutional rights? If so, How?

4 Assessment: Bring students together and share answers. Ask Students to discuss If they feel volunteers of ALB acted within their first amendment rights by joining a volunteer force abroad? Have students discuss if the government (SACB) was acting within their rights in bringing VALB to testify? In what ways did requiring organizations to register with the SACB violate first amendment rights (elicit ...freedom of association) Students should reflect on this and write their responses for homework as a summation of this part of unit

Optional second component (or separate/additional lesson) of Civil Rights of the 1950's - connection to *Brown v. Bd of Ed*

1. Lead in/Hook/Motivational:

After reviewing the previous lesson, discuss with students that while Mr. Morgan's testimony in 1954 indicates a time during which the 1st Amendment was challenged by the government (congress), it was the same year in which other civil rights issues were evaluated, but in another branch of Government and concerning another civil right – the 14th Amendment. (have section 1 of the fourteenth Amendment on the board, and underline the *Equal Protection clause*)

Have students respond to the following:

What does Separate But Equal mean? Is such a thing possible?

1. Pre-assessment and activation of Prior Knowledge: review the terms and phrases as they relate to segregation, and the doctrine of Separate but Equal and assess if students are aware of the Plessy case. Assess students understanding of what a Landmark case is and how the Supreme Court's rulings become the "Law of the Land", and what that means. Briefly discuss Separation of Powers. Students should be familiar with *Brown v. Board of Education*, and/or the concept of overturning Precedent.
2. Step by Step:
 - A. Distribute excerpt of the Plessy v. Ferguson Majority opinion (see appendix)
Ask students if they feel this doctrine violated civil rights? How did the court justify its decision?
 - B. Distribute excerpt of Brown's holding opinion, (see appendix B), Students should circle words they do not understand.
 - C. Students watch video clip of the significance of the Brown decision.
After the video and in groups of 4, students should answer the following? (this can be in class as time permits, or as HW as the clip is available for students to review at home, and then share responses in working groups the next class)
 - What constitutional question is being heard in the Brown Case?
 - What arguments were made *in favor* of segregation?
 - How many justices ruled against Separate but Equal in the Brown case? What was the basis of their argument.
 - (discuss the significance of the Unanimous decision)
 - The Brown case is deemed to have been one of the most important cases in the 20th century? Why was it so significant? What changes were made possible because of it?
 - Comment on the role and the importance of The Supreme Court in America as a branch of government

- 3. Closure:
- Compare the way the Congressional branch of government used its power during the McCarthy era (elicit from students if they feel it violated First Amendment rights by accusing their actions of being Subversive) - to how the Supreme Court used their power with respect to civil rights.
- This summary discussion should challenge students to evaluate issues based on questions like the following?

Were Volunteers in ALB exercising their First Amendment rights by helping a cause they felt strongly about despite American policy at time?

1954 could be construed as a year of civil rights violations as well as landmark enhancement of civil rights? Explain the irony? (could discuss the complexity of a society that had been segregated, including it's military to which Crawford's testimony alludes, or how the separation of powers functions in the US,, or the irony of an African American Volunteer in ALB testifying in one branch of government about racism he experienced in the US (and not while in ALB) the same year another branch of government made a monumental decision addressing those very issues.

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Assessment: options:

- Students choose two components of this unit they found most compelling and interesting and write a response as to how it enhanced their knowledge of this period of time?
- students do further research on other VALB members who were called to testify for their involvement in the Spanish Civil War
- students craft a response to the following scenario: If you had been a VALB, and were called before congress or accused of being un-American, how would you have defended your involvement in the Spanish Civil War?

Appendix A

Excerpts of Congressional Testimony of Crawford Morgan (additional testimony from this hearing would be beneficial to the lesson, and could be found through ALBA resources).

Note: The following is taken from the book, *"This Ain't Ethiopia, But It'll Do: African-Americans in the Spanish Civil War,"* by Danny Duncan Collum, Editor, and Victor A. Berch, Chief Researcher.

In September 1954, the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (VALB) were brought before the Subversive Activities Control Board (SACB) in response to a petition by U.S. Attorney General Herbert Brownell to classify the VALB as a subversive organization.

On September 15 and 16, 1954, Crawford Morgan, an African-American member of VALB, testified before the SACB. The following are excerpts:

SACB: Did you have any understanding, Mr. Morgan, before you went to Spain, of what the issues were connected to that war?

Morgan: I felt that I had a pretty good idea of what fascism was and most of its ramifications. Being aware of what the Fascist Italian government did to the Ethiopians, and also the way that I and all the rest of the Negroes in this country have been treated ever since slavery, I figured I had a pretty good idea of what fascism was.

We have quite a few fascist tendencies in this country. Didn't come to the point of taking up arms and killing a lot of people, but for the longest time Negroes have been getting lynched in this country by mobs, and that was fascism on a small scale.

But over there [in Spain] it was one whole big group against the other. It was the Franco group that didn't like democracy. And they rebelled against the people after the 1936 elections and tried to stick their ideas down the throats of the freedom-loving people of Spain. So I, being a Negro, and all of the stuff that I have had to take in this country, I had a pretty good idea of what fascism

was and I didn't want no part of it. I got a chance to fight it there with bullets and I went there and fought it with bullets. If I get a chance to fight it with bullets again, I will fight it with bullets again.

SACB: **Mr. Morgan, were those thoughts in your mind before you went to Spain?**

Morgan: Ever since I have been big enough to understand things I have rebelled. As a small child of three or four years old I would rebel at human injustice in the way I understood it at that age. And as long as I have been able to remember, up until now, the government and a lot of people have treated me as a second-class citizen. I am 43 years old, and all my life I have been treated as a second-class citizen, and naturally if you always have been treated like one you start feeling it at a very tender age.

With Hitler on the march, and fascism starting the fight in Spain, I felt that it could serve two purposes: I felt that if we could lick the Fascists in Spain, I felt that in the trend of things it would offset a bloodbath later. I felt that if we didn't lick Franco and stop fascism there, it would spread over lots of the world. And it is bad enough for white people to live under fascism, those of the white people that like freedom and democracy. But Negroes couldn't live under it. They would be wiped out.

SACB: **Were you aware, at any time, that you were a member of the International Brigades, of receiving any different treatment because of your race?**

Morgan: No, from the time I arrived in Spain until after the time I left, for that period of my life, I felt like a human being, like a man. People didn't look at me with hatred in their eyes because I was black, and I wasn't refused this or refused that because I was black. I was treated like all the rest of the people were treated, and when you have been in the world for quite a long time and have been treated worse than people treat their dogs, it is quite a nice feeling to go someplace and feel like a human being.

APPENDIX B

EXCERPTS FROM THE MCCARRAN INTERNAL SECURITY ACT (1950)

AN ACT

To protect the [United States](#) against certain un-American and subversive activities by requiring registration of Communist organizations, and for other purposes.

SEC. 2. As a result of evidence adduced before various committees of the Senate and House of Representatives, the Congress hereby finds that-

(1) There exists a world Communist movement which, in its origins, its development, and its present practice, is a world-wide revolutionary movement whose purpose it is, by treachery, deceit, [infiltration](#) into other groups (governmental and otherwise), espionage, sabotage, terrorism, and any other means deemed necessary, to establish a Communist totalitarian dictatorship in the countries throughout the world through the medium of a world-wide Communist organization. . . .

(4) The [direction](#) and control of the world Communist movement is vested in and exercised by the Communist dictatorship of a [foreign country](#). . . .

(15) The Communist movement in the United States is an organization numbering thousands of adherents, rigidly and ruthlessly disciplined. Awaiting and seeking to advance a moment when the United States may be so far extended by foreign engagements, so far divided in [counsel](#), or so far in industrial or [financial](#) straits, that overthrow of the Government of the United States by force and violence may seem possible of achievement, it seeks converts far and wide by an extensive system of schooling and indoctrination. Such preparations by Communist organizations in other countries have aided in supplanting existing governments. The Communist organization in the United States, pursuing its stated objectives, the recent successes of Communist methods in other countries, and the nature and control of the world Communist movement itself, present a clear and [present danger](#) to the security of the United States and to the existence of [free American](#) institutions, and make it necessary that Congress, in order to provide for the common defense, to preserve the sovereignty of the United States as an independent nation, and to guarantee to each State a republican form of government, enact appropriate legislation recognizing the existence of such World-wide conspiracy and design to prevent it from accomplishing its purpose in the United States. . . .

SEC. 4. (a) It shall be unlawful for any person knowingly to combine, conspire, or agree with any other person to perform any act which would substantially contribute to the establishment within the United States of a totalitarian dictatorship, as defined in paragraph (15) of section 3 of this title, the direction and control of which is to be vested in, or exercised by or under the domination or control of, any foreign government, foreign organization, or foreign individual: Provided, however, That this subsection shall not apply to the proposal of a constitutional amendment. . . .

(f) Neither the holding of office nor membership in any Communist organization by any person shall constitute per se a violation of subsection (a) or subsection (c) of this section or of any other criminal statute. The fact of the registration of any person under section 7 or 8 of this title as an officer or member

of any Communist organization shall not be received in evidence against such person in any prosecution for any alleged violation of subsection (a) or subsection (c) of this section or for any alleged violation of any other criminal statute. . . .

SEC.7. (a) Each Communist-action organization (including any organization required, by a final order or the Board, to register as a Communist-action organization) shall, within the time specified in subsection (c) of this section, register with the Attorney General, on a form prescribed by him by regulations, as a Communist-action organization.

(b) Each Communist-front organization . . . shall . . . register with the Attorney General, on a form prescribed by him by regulations, as a Communist-front organization. . . .

(d) Upon the registration of each Communist organization under the provisions of this title, the Attorney General shall publish in the Federal Register the fact that such organization has registered as a Communist-action organization, or as a Communist-front organization, as the case may be, and the publication thereof shall constitute notice to all members of such organization that such organization has so registered. . . .

SEC. 12. (a) There is hereby established a board, to be known as the Subversive Activities Control Board, which shall be composed of five members, who shall be appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate. Not more than three member of the Board shall be members of the same political party. Two of the original members shall be appointed for a term of one year, two for a term of two years, and one for a term of three years, but their successors shall be appointed for terms of three years each, except that any individual chosen to fill a vacancy shall be appointed only for the unexpired term of the member whom he shall succeed. The President s hall designate one member to serve as Chairman of the Board. Any member of the Board may be removed by the President, upon notice and hearing, for neglect of duty or malfeasance in office, but for no other cause. . . .

APPENDIX C:

Description: The **Subversive Activities Control Board (SACB)** was a United States government committee to investigate Communist infiltration of American society during the 1950s Red Scare.^[1] It was the subject of a landmark United States Supreme Court decision of the Warren Court, Communist Party v. Subversive Activities Control Board, 351 U.S. 115 (1956), that would lead to later decisions that rendered the Board powerless.^[2]

It was organized on November 1, 1950, under authority provided in the McCarran Internal Security Act.^[3] The SACB was empowered to order the registration of organizations that it found to be "Communist fronts", "Communist action" groups or "Communist infiltrated" groups.^[6] In carrying out this mandate, the SACB was a leader in the U.S. government's response to the Red Scare. The SACB's proceedings were thorough and methodical. Hundreds of witnesses testified and were cross-examined by defense lawyers. The decisions and findings of the SACB were subject to judicial review.

In 1955, President Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed former Arkansas Governor Francis Cherry as SACB director. The appointment was continued by Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. The SACB was abolished in 1972^[7]

Appendix D: Excerpts of Plessy v. Ferguson and Brown V. Board of Education

[http://www.streetlaw.org/en/Page/519/Key Excerpts from the Majority Opinion Brown I 1954](http://www.streetlaw.org/en/Page/519/Key_Excerpts_from_the_Majority_Opinion_Brown_I_1954)

[http://www.streetlaw.org/en/Page/435/Key Excerpts from the Majority Opinion](http://www.streetlaw.org/en/Page/435/Key_Excerpts_from_the_Majority_Opinion)

Appendix E: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTGHLdr-iaK>