

## ALBA Lesson Plan – Social Studies

**Title:** African Americans in the Lincoln Brigade

**Subject:** U.S. History

**Grade(s):** 9-12

**Standards:** [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4](#), [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6](#), [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.9](#), [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.10](#), [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7](#), [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9](#)

**Key words/phrases:** Racism, prejudice, lynching, civil rights, fascism, Nazism, Communism, civil war, isolationism, invasion of Ethiopia.

**Essential Questions:** What were the racial policies in the U.S. after World War I? How were African Americans who were fighting for civil rights in the 1920s and '30s affected by world events, particularly in Russia, Ethiopia, and Spain? What was the foreign policy of the U.S. after World War I?

**Synopsis:** Students will explore the lives of African Americans after World War I. By examining primary and secondary documents (on the Internet) and creating journals and a project, students will be able to identify the major factors that motivated African Americans to fight illegally in the International Brigades. Several additional/alternative activities are also presented.

**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. This lesson also utilizes ALBA's website module [African Americans in the Spanish Civil War](#).

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

**Number of Class Periods:** 2-5 days (50-minute blocks)

**Standards:**

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| <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><br><a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.9</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.9-10.10</a>   | By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend  |

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|  | history/social studies texts in the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.   |
| <a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7</a> | Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem. |
| <a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9</a> | Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.   |

### Primary Sources:

- Letter by Canute Frankson
- Excerpts of congressional testimony of Crawford Morgan

### Procedures

Lead-In/Hook: Journal-writing assignment and discussion – *Why Fight: Would you ever join a fight that you did not start? Why? Under what circumstances do you voluntarily join in? What are the consequences of participating?*

- Have students share their answers in groups of two to four. Bring them back to a large group discussion and have students share two or three of their responses.
- Tell students that they will explore the response of the United State to similar questions as we begin our study of WWII. Review US foreign policy of isolationism and the rise of nationalism in Europe.

Pre-assessment and activation of prior knowledge: Review key words and phrases as needed.

### Step by Step:

(Day One, continued) Have students visit [www.alba-valb.org](http://www.alba-valb.org) to read [Introduction to Spanish Civil War](#) – Students can pair up to answer the following questions.

- What led to the Civil War in Spain?
- What countries supported the Spanish Republic?
- What countries supported Franco and his rebellion troops?
- What foreign policy stance did President Roosevelt and the United States take? Describe the purpose of Roosevelt’s [1937 Quarantine speech](#).
- What were the International Brigades? ([Formation of the Lincoln Brigades](#))
- What is the [Neutrality Act](#) of August 31, 1935?
- “The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War intensified conflicts between Nazi and Fascist expansion in Europe and the efforts to preserve democratic governments” Do you believe this statement is true? Explain.

(Day Two) What was life like for African Americans in the 1930s? Have students prepare for this lesson by visiting [www.alba-valb.org](http://www.alba-valb.org) to read [African Americans and the Spanish Civil War](#). Students can also read an overview of [Race Relations in the 1930's and 40's](#) at the Library of Congress' American Memory site.

In class, have students develop *talking heads* or *sensory figures* to help brain storm experiences of African Americans during this time.

- **Sensory figures** - stick figure with lines coming from mouth, eyes, head, ears, fingers and heart. From each of these lines the students write descriptive terms of what the individual feels, touches, sees, says, hears etc. at work, at home and on the streets.
- **Talking head** – drawing the profile of an individual, the student fills the head with thoughts the individual would have during this time period and speech bubbles indicating what the individual would say.

After completing this task have students meet in groups of four to share work. Bring back to the large group. Based on students' responses, draw a web on the board listing the realities of life for African Americans during 1930s. Have students copy into notes. Tell students that of the 35,000 men and women who joined the International Brigades, around 90 were African Americans. (Students can also search the ALBA Volunteers Database for [African Americans](#), noting demographic information such as where they lived, their marital status, and what jobs they had at home and as brigade volunteers.)

### **Journal Writing: Why do you think African Americans joined the fight in Spain?**

Have students share with groups and then with the whole class.

Explain: Today we will try to explore what motivated these brave young men and women to volunteer to fight a war thousands of miles from home.

With students in groups of two, distribute a letter by Canute Oliver Frankson (Appendix 1) and the congressional testimony of Crawford Morgan (Appendix 2). Both letters are preceded by biographical sketches of Frankson and Morgan that may also provide important insight. Ask student pairs to read the letters and list the reasons why these men chose to volunteer. Share findings with larger groups.

1. Closure: Students will learn about the 1950s and '60s civil rights movement, including Supreme Court decisions and legislation that was created as a result of intense protest to foster public awareness of our country's gross inequality. But much of the groundwork for 20<sup>th</sup> century civil rights was laid earlier by black soldiers who fought bravely in World War I, the Spanish Civil War and World War II.

**Differentiation/Enrichment:** Students can complete the following activities or an adaptation of them.

**Newspaper Assignment:** Introduce newspaper assignment on *African Americans and the Spanish Civil War*, using ALBA **Student Handout** - [African Americans and the Spanish Civil War](#).

In groups of four, students will create a newspaper from the time period leading up to (and including) the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. Each group will be responsible for a total of **eight entries** into their newspaper. Each person in the group will be responsible for two entries into the newspaper.

Each entry should cover one of the following issues (underlined terms should be researched and explained – a list of potential sources is in Appendix 3):

- **What effect did the horrors of WWI have on the American public?**  
Desire for foreign policy of isolationism and a return to normalcy.  
**What were the racial policies of the South?**  
Jim Crow, lynching, great migration, Ku Klux Klan.
- **What was life like for African Americans in northern cities?**  
Great migration, segregation, race riots, economic inequality, Ossian Sweet trial
- **How did the US economy impact the African American struggle in 1930s?**  
Growing African American middle class, Harlem Renaissance, interest in the Communist party, FDR's Black Cabinet, participation in political process, support for labor movement, NAACP.
- **How did the Russian Revolution affect African Americans?**  
US Communist Party, Scottsboro Case
- **How did the fascist invasion of Ethiopia impact African Americans?**  
Seen as fight against 'global Jim Crow'
- **What was the United State's foreign policy position in regards to Ethiopia and then Spain?**  
FDR's Quarantine speech, Neutrality Act of 1937
- **Why did African Americans choose to fight in the International brigades?**  
Letter from Canute Oliver Frankson and testimony of Crawford Morgan.

Each person must choose **two** of the following types of submissions for their entries. Each group's newspaper must have at least four articles. Note: handout examples of each of these formats from local paper.

- Editorial comic or political cartoons
- Letter to Editor
- Editorial commentary
- News article

Explain the importance of becoming an expert in order to write these articles. Distribute above questions on a separate sheet and make links available to students. Students will break into groups and decide on what articles they will write. The remainder of the time should be focused on writing the articles and completing layout on poster board or through newsletter software available as a Microsoft Template.

#### **Assessment:**

Authentic assessment might include the presentation of findings from the primary and secondary documents/sources with a rubric created from one or more of the Common Core standards listed above. For example, students could be assessed on how well they integrated primary and secondary sources for the purpose of understanding the concept of motivation ([CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9](#) )

#### **Appendix 1: Short Biography and Letter from Canute Frankson**

**Frankson, Kanute.** (Oliver), b. June 13 (April 13), 1890, Parish of St. Catherine, Jamaica, to the US April 30, 1917; African American, Possibly attended college, Separated (Divorced), Mechanic, CP December 1934 section organizer; Sailed April 21, 1937 aboard the *Queen Mary*, Arrived in Spain on May 10, 1937, Served with the International Auto Park, Albacete, Chief Mechanic, Returned to the US on September 24, 1938, aboard the *President Harding*, d. 1940s in an auto accident.

From Canute Frankson

Albacete, Spain  
July 6, 1937

My Dear Friend:

I'm sure that by this time you are still waiting for a detailed explanation of what has this international struggle to do with my being here. Since this is a war between whites who for centuries have held us in slavery, and have heaped every kind of insult and abuse upon us, segregated and jim-crowed us; why I, a Negro, who have fought through these years for the rights of my people am here in Spain today.

Because we are no longer an isolated minority group fighting hopelessly against an immense giant, because, my dear, we have joined with, and become an active part of, a great progressive force, on whose shoulders rests the responsibility of saving human civilization from the planned destruction of a small group of degenerates gone mad in their lust for power. Because if we crush Fascism here, we'll save our people in America, and in other parts of the world, from the vicious prosecution, wholesale imprisonment, and slaughter which the Jewish people suffered and are suffering under Hitler's Fascist heels.

All we have to do is to think of the lynching of our people. We can but look back at the pages of American history stained with the blood of Negroes, stink with the burning bodies of our people hanging from trees; bitter with the groans of our tortured loved ones from whose living bodies, ears, fingers, toes, have been cut for souvenirs — living bodies into which red-hot pokers have been thrust. All because of a hate created in the minds of men and women by their masters who keep us all under their heels while they suck our blood, while they live in their bed of ease by exploiting us.

But these people who howl like hungry wolves for our blood, must we hate them? Must we keep the flame which these mastered kindled constantly fed? Are these men and women responsible for the programs of their masters, and the conditions which force them to such degraded depths? I think not. They are tools in the hands of unscrupulous masters. These same people are as hungry as we are. They live in dives and wear rags the same as we do. They too are robbed by the masters, and their faces kept down in the filth of a decayed system. They are our fellowmen. Soon and very soon they and we will understand. Soon many Angelo Herndons<sup>1</sup> will rise from among them, and from among us, and will lead us both against those who live by the stench of our bunt flesh. We will crush them. We will build us a new society—a society of peace and plenty. There will be no color line, no jim-crow trains, no lynching. That is why, my dear, I'm here in Spain.

On the battlefields of Spain we fight for the preservation of democracy. Here, we're laying the foundation for world peace, and for the liberation of my people, and of the human race. Here, where we're engaged in one of the most bitter struggles of human history, there is no color line, no discrimination, no race hatred. There's only one hate, and that is the hate for fascism. We know who are enemies are. The Spanish people are very sympathetic towards us. They are lovely people. I'll tell you about them later.

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<sup>1</sup> Angelo Herndon was an African American communist convicted for violating Georgia's criminal insurrection law after he helped organize an interracial hunger march in Atlanta in 1932. In 1937 the United States Supreme Court found Georgia's insurrection law to be unconstitutional.

I promised not to preach, but by all indications this seems more like a sermon than a letter to an old friend. But how can I help it, being face to face with such trying circumstances? I'm quite conscious of the clumsiness of my effort to write you an intimate letter, but your knowledge of my earnestness and sincerity, with your intelligence and patience will enable you to understand and be tolerant. Later, after I've overcome this strain, I'm sure I'll be able to write more intimately. The consciousness of my responsibility for my actions has kept me under terrific strain. Because I think it has caused you a lot of unpleasantness.

Don't think for one moment that the strain of this terrible war or the many miles between us has changed my feelings towards you. Our friendship has meant a great deal to me, and still means much to me. I appreciate it because it has always been a friendship of devoted mutual interest. And I'll do whatever is within my power to maintain it.

No one knows the time he'll die, even under the most favorable conditions. So I, a soldier in active service, must know far less about how far or how close is death. But as long as I hold out I'll keep you in touch with events. Sometimes when I go to the front the shells drop pretty close. Then I think it is only a matter of minutes. After I return here to the base I seem to see life from a new angle. Somehow it seems to be more beautiful. I'd think of you, home and all my friends, then get to working more feverishly than ever. Each of us must give all we have if this Fascist beast is to be destroyed.

After this is over I hope to share my happiness with you. It will be a happiness which could not have been achieved in any other way than having served in a cause so worthy. I hope that the apparent wrong which I committed may be compensated for by the service I'm giving here for the cause of democracy. I hope that you're well, and that you will, or have, forgiven me. My sincere desire is that you are happy, and when this is over that we meet again. But if a Fascist bullet stops me don't worry about it. If I am conscious before I die I don't think I'll be afraid. Of one thing I'm certain: I'll be satisfied that I've done my part.

So long. Until some future date. One never knows when there'll be time to write. There's so much to do, and so little time in which to do it. Love.

Salude.

Canute

## **Appendix 2: Short Biography of Crawford Morgan, and excerpts of his congressional testimony**

**Morgan, Crawford.** b. Nov. 4, 1910, Rockingham, North Carolina. While still a child, he moved with his family to Norfolk, Virginia where he attended high school. After graduation, Morgan studied to become a printer. In 1932, he joined the Young Communist League. During the Depression he became involved in organizations of the unemployed in New York and was on one occasion arrested in a demonstration at the Home Relief Bureau. On March 10, 1937 Morgan boarded the Washington bound for France. In Spain he was assigned to the infantry attached to the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion and later transferred to the Lincoln-Washington Battalion. His battalion went into action at the end of August 1937 on the Aragon front and Morgan received a leg wound storming the town of Quinto. After recovery, Morgan rejoined the Lincoln-Washington Battalion's Third Company. This was shortly after the action at Fuentes de Ebro in October 1937. Complications from his leg wound resulted in his transfer to the XVth Brigade's Transport Unit where Morgan remained for the remainder of the war. Morgan returned from Spain, on the SS Paris, on December 15, 1938. In August 1942 Morgan enlisted in the U.S. Army and served in an all-black unit, until May 1946. After leaving the army Morgan resided in Norfolk, Virginia and worked as a truck driver until 1949. He later returned to New York and became an offset printer. He died August 27, 1976.

### ***Excerpts of Congressional Testimony of Crawford Morgan***

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:

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.

**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 3: Online Sources for Newspaper Article Research**

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/> (Information on "return to normalcy," FDR's Quarantine Speech, Neutrality Act of 1937)

<http://withoutsanctuary.org/> (Information on lynching)

<http://www.inmotionaame.org/migrations/topic.cfm?migration=8&topic=1> (Information on the Great Migration and FDR's "black cabinet")

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/harlem/harlem.html> (Information on the Harlem Renaissance)

<http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1997/summer/american-labor-movement.html>

(Information on African Americans in the American labor movement)

<http://www.naacphistory.org/Default.aspx?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1#/home> (Interactive timeline of the NAACP)

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/scottsboro/timeline/index.html> (Timeline of the Scottsboro cases)

<http://www.alba-valb.org/volunteers/browse> (Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive volunteer database)