Red Summer: Lesson Plan

Topic
The Red Summer lasted from April 1919 to November 1919 and was marked by a series of riots that broke out as a result of postwar racial tension. Riots occurred in Chicago, Washington D.C., St. Louis, and many other cities across the United States. As a result of the Red Summer, hundreds of people were killed, hundreds more injured, and at least one thousand Black families were left homeless.

Possible subjects/classes	Time needed
History, Government, Civics, Ethics, English	30-45 minutes

Video link:
https://academy4sc.org/topic/the-red-summer-summer-of-racial-discontent/

Objective: *What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?*
Students will be able to…   - Identify key factors of tension between white and Black Americans prior to the Red Summer of 1919.   - Explain the purpose of Black veterans arming themselves against white rioters and police.

Key Concepts & Vocabulary
The Great Migration, Strikebreakers

Materials Needed
Worksheet, Student Internet Access

Before you watch
Quick write: Have students write on the question below for two to five minutes, and then compare their responses in small groups. What is the purpose of the police and government? What would you do if they stopped doing their jobs?

While you watch

1. List three key events that led to white outrage against Black Americans.
2. How do the police and other government organizations react to these outbreaks of violence?
3. Why did Black Americans feel the need to arm themselves during the Red Summer?

After you watch/discussion questions

1. What is the connection between the popularity of *The Birth of a Nation* and the false narratives spread about Black men?
2. What parallels can you observe between the reactions of the government to the Red Summer, Civil Rights Movement, and Black Lives Matter?
3. Why did the United States government feel the need to closely watch Black newspapers?

Activity Ideas

- Research into three to five riots or other significant events during or leading up to the Red Summer of 1919 and create a timeline showcasing this information. Within the timeline, students will give a brief description of each event along with any images or symbols they believe contribute to the summary.
  - [Here](#) students can find an overview of multiple riots. Once they have an overview, they can do more research on events that stand out to them.
- Analyze political cartoons that were created prior to or throughout the Red Summer. Consider what narrative each cartoon presents and how they would influence white readers.
  - Political cartoons show ["mammy dixie"](#), [mob law](#), [growing tensions](#), ["the new negro"](#), and [U.S. reactions to rioters](#). Discuss as a class the different perspectives of rioters presented and the reactions of Black Americans.
- Independently read and annotate poetry written in response to the Red Summer, such as [Claude McKay's "If We must Die"](#). Look closely at the phrasing and imagery McKay uses to convey the purpose and feeling behind the Black American's actions throughout the Red Summer.

Sources/places to learn more

1. J. Edgar Hoover and the "Red Summer" of 1919 Author(s): Mark Ellis Source: Journal of American Studies, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Apr., 1994), pp. 39-59 Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of the British Association for American Studies Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/27555783
2. Karen Sieber (2015). Visualizing the Red Summer. http://visualizingtheredsummer.com/?page_id=6
3. Mellis, D. (2007). "Literally Devoured": Washington, D.C., 1919. *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, *40*(2), 1+. Retrieved from https://link-gale-com.libproxy.chapman.edu/apps/doc/A183991925/LitRC?u=chap_main&sid=LitRC&xid=378ffe53
4. *Red Summer*. The National WWI Museum and Memorial. https://www.theworldwar.org/learn/red-summer
5. Williams, C. L. (2007). Vanguards of the New Negro: African American veterans and post-World War I racial militancy. *The Journal of African American History*, *92*(3), 347+. Retrieved from https://link-gale-com.libproxy.chapman.edu/apps/doc/A169311965/LitRC?u=chap_main&sid=LitRC&xid=93f47fc3