

College Guild

PO Box 696, Brunswick, Maine 04011

Challenges to Justice and Freedom

Unit 3 of 5

Government, Aggression, and Poverty

This unit examines the role of government and the challenges that can occur in political and cultural values and practices.

Glossary of Terms:

1. **Captive**-a person who has been taken prisoner or an animal that has been confined
2. **Democratic Republic** - The United States government is a complex entity known as a **democratic republic**. This means that the government operates on the principles of both a republic and a democracy. The American Heritage Dictionary defines a **republic** as “a political order in which the supreme power lies in a body of citizens who are entitled to vote for officers and representatives responsible to them.” The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines **democracy** as “a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections.” In other words, in a republic there are a group of citizens elected or appointed to represent the people, but with a democracy the power is theoretically in the hands of usually all voting citizens. A democratic republic is a mixture of the two.
3. **Federated Union of States** - A political entity characterized by a union of partially self-governing states, or other regions under a federal government (federalism). In a federation, the self-governing status of the component states, as well as the division of power between them and the central government, is constitutionally entrenched and may not be altered by a unilateral decision by the component states nor the federal political body.
4. **Israel**-a Middle Eastern country on the Mediterranean Sea, is regarded by Jews, Christians and Muslims as the biblical Holy Land. Israel is the only Jewish country, and the spiritual home for Jews all over the world.
5. **Palestine** – Palestine, officially known as the State of Palestine, is a country in the Levant region of West Asia. It is officially recognized as a state by the United Nations and numerous countries. Palestine shares borders with Israel to the west and north, Jordan to the east, and Egypt to the southwest. The state comprises the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip.
6. **Vengeance** - punishment inflicted or retribution exacted for an injury or wrong,
7. **Trapped** - caught in a trap, unable to move or escape as a result of obstructions, unable to escape, as from a situation, unable to be moved as a result of obstruction, jammed; entangled or caught, prevented from escaping
8. **Survivor** - one who lives through affliction, one who outlives another

PART 1: GOVERNMENTS



You could say we are **captives** of the electoral process, but it is also the basis of a free society. Each state has a certain number of electoral votes which go to the Presidential candidate with the most votes in that state. The next President is the one who gets the most electoral votes, (not necessarily the one who gets the most popular votes overall.)

The federal government, seated in Washington, D.C., represents a **democratic republic**, which governs a **federated union of states**, each of which in turn has its own democratic-republican government for its jurisdiction.

1. What are the best and the worst things about a system that votes to choose its President?
2. What is another form of government? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the way that the government selects its leaders?

One approach governments may use to "solve" national or international problems is **vengeance** or **aggression**, that is, punishing the culprit with an action similar to the crime they committed; an example is using capital punishment to prevent murder. Revenge does not have a positive "blindness imagery" like the one for Lady Justice. Instead, the message is:

An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind.



3. How might this apply to Israel and Palestine?
 4. Do you think the current level of violence in the Middle East will ever change?
 5. When (if ever) should a country base its foreign policy on vengeance?
 6. What happens when a country bases its criminal justice system on vengeance?
- Vengeance can be both the cause and result of terrorism.
7. Describe the similarities and differences of revenge and terrorism.



On September 11, 2001, terrorism hit the United States at a level and in a way never before imagined.

8. Is there a difference between a terrorist and a criminal? Explain.

9. List three possible steps individuals, the US President, and/or the international community can take to reduce terrorism.

PART 2 - WAR



During World War II, the city of London, England was bombed regularly by the Germans. That threat was always present as individuals went about their daily lives. In Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Iran and Israel (and other countries) bombs have fallen and are still falling on civilians. People have been killed by soldiers on both sides of the conflict. People often think of the “invading” country as offering a chance for freedom while others see them as foreign invaders.

10. Are the people in the countries being bombed prisoners? Explain your answer.

11. What do you think is going to happen in Israel, Iraq, Ukraine and/or the US in the next 5 years as a result of these incursions?

War has devastated the world from the time historical records were kept. It has not just been about battling countries, but tribe against tribe, religion against religion, culture against culture, and race against race.

This was sung by American slaves, but they were singing of another time from long before, in ancient Egypt:

*Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egypt land,
Tell old Pharaoh,
Let my people go.*

War holds all involved captive -- POWs, draftees, civilians, families of soldiers, and tax-payers to name just a few.

Pilot Ted Withington was one soldier whose plane was shot down during World War II; he was able to bring it down just outside enemy territory. The following is an entry from his journal:

December 3, 1944

We were taken to another military post and questioned for an hour by unfriendly intelligence officers. They even accused us of being spies and threatened to keep us as prisoners unless we told them all we knew. We tried to explain how we got there, but no one of them spoke English and the one crew member we had who spoke a little Polish decided to keep quiet.

12. Write an entry from the journal of a soldier (US or another country) serving in war.

13. Describe a day in the life of a child in a land that has current fighting or war.

A comparison of war and criminal justice is found in the case of Alabama death row inmate Brian Baldwin. Brian was executed in Alabama's electric chair in 1999. He wrote the following essay comparing his own experiences to those of Ted Withington.

The similarities between Ted's story and my prison life is survival at all costs. Witnessing best friends dying. Being right in the middle of battle wondering if this will be your last run, but feeling invincible, losing what all other humans still have, fear.

Fear is not there anymore, only survival and knowing if you do come out alive, you will never let anything in life get the best of you. I can only compare the casualties of World War II to executing prisoners today because of the survivors. The survivors are the ones that carry the memories of friends killed. They're the ones that are left wondering was one death worth it, and is the world really a better place now that their friends are dead.

14. Write a letter to a supporter of capital punishment.

Here is a poem by John Yarbrough – it could apply to either war or capital punishment:

*Survivor
Let there be one of us
left when the carnage ends.
A mind filled
with things spilled*

from our hearts.
 Let there be a survivor
 to ring the bell
 to tell
 the world.

15. If you were that survivor, what would you tell the world? (Answer in a song, poem, diary entry, speech or letter.)

PART 3: POVERTY

Author Henrik Ibsen (1828 - 1906) wrote:

"There can be no freedom or beauty about a home life that depends on borrowing and debt."

Money or the lack of it can be a prison -- too many in this world are trapped in poverty.



16. How is a free person or incarcerated individual without enough money affected?

17. What should the state and federal governments be doing to decrease poverty?

It's ironic, but people can also be trapped by wealth. This quote written more than 2,000 years ago captures this issue:

"Thus in the highest position there is the least freedom of action." (Sallust)

18. What did Sallust mean? Give an example of how having too much money can make a person's life miserable or even lead to death. (You can use fiction, non-fiction or poetry.)

The lyrics to an old song claim:

*There's nothing surer,
 The rich get richer and the poor get poorer
 In the meantime, in between time
 Ain't we got fun.*

19. Is it true that the rich get richer while the poor get poorer? Explain.



Self-Reflection Exercise

- 1) What was the most interesting thing you learned about Government, Aggression and Poverty?
- 2) How do the lessons of Government, Aggression and Poverty apply to your own life?

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes