



Corrupt: 1920-1940 Lesson Plan for Teachers

BEFORE

(Preparing for and showing the episode should take approximately one 50-minute class period.)

To get students thinking about Prohibition, ask them to list the negative aspects of smoking cigarettes (e-cigarettes included). They are likely to point out numerous deleterious health effects, expense, fire risk, addiction, second-hand smoke risks etc. Then, ask what would happen if the federal government decided to make all cigarettes illegal. After a short discussion, indicate that in 1920 the United States Constitution was amended to ban alcoholic beverages. They should watch *Corrupt: 1920-1940* looking for any parallels between what happened following the prohibition of liquor and their predictions about a federal ban on cigarettes.

Words before watching:

These are terms that are used in the episode and/or on the note sheet. It will be helpful to review any unfamiliar terms with students.

Prohibition – the period from 1920-1933 when making or selling alcohol was illegal in the US

Magistrate – a civil officer who enforces the law, especially for minor offenses

Ward – an administrative division of a city

Vaudeville – a type of variety show that was popular in the early 1900s

Decrepit – decaying and worn

Deed restrictions – a legal agreement about who may purchase a house, usually used to discriminate against potential black home buyers

Redlining – the policy of denying loans to areas of a city deemed undesirable; it has been done most markedly in black neighborhoods leading to blight and housing segregation.

Circumvent – avoid

Bootlegging – making something illegally, especially alcohol

Speakeasies – during Prohibition, a place that illegally sold alcohol

Kickbacks – an illegal payment, a bribe

Sesquicentennial – the 150th anniversary of a place or institution

Fiscal – financial

Committeeperson – a low level elected official, beneath the level of a ward leader

Insurgency – revolt or uprising

Wondering before watching

These are the essential questions that permeate the episode. You may choose to present them before and/or after watching.

- How did corruption take hold in Philadelphia during the 1920s?
- What were the impacts of the Great Depression and New Deal on Philadelphia?
- What were the challenges and success of African Americans in Philadelphia during the period covered in the film?

DURING**Work while watching:**

Students will fill out a **Note-Taking Sheet** (available in Student Materials; Answer Key is Appendix A) that, once filled out, will provide an outline of the episode.

Pause while watching:

Pause at 8:49

This would be a good time to do the Sadie Tanner Mossell primary source activity. It will give students a better understanding of how the Great Migration effected Philadelphia's African American community prior to the 1920s.

AFTER**Discussion after watching**

These questions can be used for a class discussion or as a homework assignment and can be answered before or after going over the note-taking sheet.

- What were the positive and negative impacts of the Organization's hold on political power?
- What factors led to the rise and fall of the Vare-led Organization?
- Why did Prohibition fail to prevent the sale and consumption of liquor in Philadelphia?
- How did the New Deal impact Philadelphia?
- Refer to **essential questions**

Activity after watching: Based on Note-Taking Sheets

1920-1940 was a relatively dark time in Philadelphia history. Using their note-taking sheets and information they recall from the film, have students work in small groups to pinpoint the lowest point of the period. You may want to leave the question open-ended for students or assign a particular event to each group (e.g. Butler's departure from Philadelphia, the failure of the Sesquicentennial, bank failures/factory closures after the stock market crash of 1929, the collapse of Lucy Spease's home etc.).

Activities after watching: Primary Sources**Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out (Appendix B)**

Blues singer Bessie Smith lived in Philadelphia during the time period covered in *Corrupt*. Distribute lyrics and, if possible, play a recording of this song. Ask students to describe the tone and mood of the song. Then discuss how the content of the film relates to Smith's lyrics.

Sadie Tanner Mossell's Thesis (Available in Student Materials; Answer Key is Appendix C)

See reading and worksheet based on the work done by prominent Philadelphia attorney and activist, Sandy Tanner Mossell Alexander. Her survey of housing conditions of Southern migrants to Philadelphia sets the stage for the struggles faced by African Americans who arrived in Philadelphia during the 1920s.



Activities after watching: Quiz Questions

1. Each of the following is true of Prohibition in Philadelphia EXCEPT:

- A. Brigadier General Butler succeeded in ridding the city of liquor.
- B. Bootlegging and speakeasies were widespread.
- C. Mayor Kendrick fired Brigadier General Butler under pressure from the Vare Machine.
- D. Political corruption increased.

2. The 1876 World's Fair (Sesquicentennial celebration) was

- A. Also a celebration of the completion of the Parkway.
- B. Considered a huge success.
- C. Easily accessible by subway from other parts of the city.
- D. Held in a swampy area of South Philadelphia.

3. African Americans migrating to Philadelphia in the 1920s

- A. Brought musical styles such as blues, jazz, and ragtime with them.
- B. Struggled to find safe and affordable housing.
- C. Created a thriving community around South Street.
- D. All of the above.

4. Each of the following is true of the Vare Machine EXCEPT:

- A. It gained loyalty by helping people with such things as paying bills and getting jobs.
- B. Its popularity increased following the collapse of the home of Lucy Spease.
- C. It was credited with choosing Freeland Kendrick as mayor.
- D. Part of its power came from paying off elected officials.

5. Which project was completed as part of the New Deal in Philadelphia

- A. A new airport was constructed.
- B. Fairmount Park was remade.
- C. A subway across the Benjamin Franklin Bridge was installed.
- D. All of the above.

Relevant Pennsylvania Common Core Standards

Key Ideas and Details

Grade 6-8

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions

Grade 9-10

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text

Grade 11-12

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationship among the key details and ideas



Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Grade 6-8

Integrate visual information (e.g. in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts)

Grade 11-12

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

Appendix A: Notetaking Sheet Answer Key

I. A city of contrasts

1. **Stephen Nepa:** Liquor was everywhere during Prohibition in Philadelphia; Philadelphians loved to get around this **law** any way they could.

2. *Afraid of their city veering out of control, outraged citizens appeal to the **federal** government for help.*

3. **Kate Oxx:** All of the people who studied the Parkway as the site for The World's Fair agreed with Wanamaker that this was the **best site**, that's where it should happen.

4. **James Tayoun:** The Vare brothers made money. They spread some of that money out and got what what they wanted. Their **power** came from giving **jobs** to people and giving **money** to elected officials and feeding the populace.

5. *The Vare brothers use their power to take over the Republican Party **machine**, the Organization, once dominated by **elites**.*

6. What did the Organization provide to people? **Coal, payment of bills, scholarship money, relief from laws, jobs, Christmas gifts and candy**

7. This system allows the Vares to run anyone they want for **mayor** and they choose an old friend, Freeland Kendrick, who **wins** easily.

II. The Great Migration

1. **J McCarthy:** You have tens of thousands of **rural** black immigrants coming and settling in the city and they're bringing cultured, cultivated African American **music** and sort of lowdown gutbucket **blues**, and early forms of **jazz** and ragtime.

2. *Newly arrived in the big city, Lucy Spease seeks employment in the homes of white families, but she and her children must make their **home** in a decrepit boarding **house** .*

3. **T. Gill:** What African Americans in Philadelphia did was take the disadvantages of their lack of access to other **parts** of the city and instead create a **thriving** community in and around South Street.

III. The Vare Machine

1. **C. Hardy:** You have gambling and prostitution and bootlegging and speakeasies that are running wide **open**, which kicks back to the magistrate, which kicks back to the **city** committee.
2. **Stephen Nepa:** (Police Commander) Butler initiated something called the “**pounce** policy” where he would send out teams to start **raiding** several of the speakeasies and distilleries at once.
3. **T. Keels:** (Mayor) Kendrick feels he has no choice but to **fire** Butler.
4. T Keels: Kendrick moves the World’s Fair from the Parkway down to this mass of **swamps** and ash heaps in **South** Philadelphia.
5. The Sesquicentennial is a failure because: **buildings not ready, no subway to get to distant location**

IV. The Great Depression & New Deal in Philadelphia

1. *The 1929 stock market crash causes already weakened Philadelphia **banks** to fail, and bank failures lead to the **swift** closing of factories.*
2. The collapse (of Lucy Spease’s home) transfixes the city.....Immediately, it becomes a **symbol** of the incompetence of the Organization. Philadelphia’s working people start to band together along **ethnic** lines.
3. List accomplishments of New Deal programs in Philadelphia:
 - **Formation of Philadelphia Housing Authority**
 - **Jobs for people**
 - **Airport**
 - **Remake of Fairmount Park**
 - **City History Museum**
 - **Bridge Line subway across Ben Franklin Bridge**
 - **New main post office**
 - **New federal building**
 - **New Central High School**
 - **Parkway improvements**

Appendix B:**Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out**

Once I lived the life of a millionaire
Spent all my money, didn't have any care
Took all my friends out for a mighty good time
Bought bootleg whisky, champagne and wine

Then I began to fall so low
Lost all my good friends, I did not have nowhere to go
I get my hands on a dollar again
I'm gonna hang on to it till that eagle grins

Cause no, no, nobody knows you
When you're down and out
In your pocket, not one penny
And as for friends, you don't have any

When you finally get back up on your feet again
Everybody wants to be your old long-lost friend
Said it's mighty strange, without a doubt
Nobody knows you when you're down and out

When you finally get back upon your feet again
Everybody wants to be your good old long-lost friend
Said it's mighty strange
Nobody knows you
Nobody knows you
Nobody knows you when you're down and out

How do the lyrics of this Bessie Smith song reflect the content of *Corrupt: 1920-1940*?



Appendix C:
Answer Key

The Standard of Living Among One Hundred Negro Migrant Families
in Philadelphia by Sadie Tanner Mossell, PhD

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Negro Migration of 1916, 1917, 1918.
A Detailed Statement of the Migration to Philadelphia During This
Period

Getting the Facts

1. How did World War I (the Great War) change the labor market in the North?
European immigrants stopped coming to the US leading industries to turn to Southern blacks
2. What generalizations can be made about the type of work done by the migrants?
Many worked on the railroads or heavy industry; some women worked in textile mills; low-skilled labor
3. How did Philadelphia's existing black community help the migrants?
 - Black churches helped other agencies seeking to provide better housing
 - Black doctors, dentists, and pharmacists helped with housing, medical needs, and education
 - Churches offered lectures on how to care for themselves
 - Cavalry Church (Broad & Bainbridge) put kids in Sunday School, gave out soup and coal
 - Other churches helped by giving advice such as to take advantage of educational opportunities and to be good workers
4. How did white Philadelphians react to the influx of black Southern migrants?

-Blacks were restricted to certain parts of the city for housing, contributing the severe housing problems

-Schools were segregated

-Churches, restaurants, and theaters that had previously welcomed blacks barred their presence

5. How did the influx of the migrants impact the lives of “old Philadelphians,” members of Philadelphia’s long-standing black community?

-Social and educational facilities that had previously been open to them no longer were

-Some churches split up because old Philadelphians didn’t want migrants to join their congregations.

6. According to Alexander, why were the migrants in part to blame for the negative views that whites and “old Philadelphians” had of them?

-Some “lounged on corners” or went to “dens of vice and saloons”

-Some were armed and became involved in crime

Analysis:

1. What is the significance of the race riot that occurred when a “colored probation officer...a woman of refinement and training and a citizen of old Philadelphia” purchased a house on previously all-white block?

Answers will vary

2. Sadie Tanner Mossell was a member of the elite and well-established “old Philadelphia” black community, yet she chose to write her dissertation about the lives of the migrants. Based on what you’ve read in the Introduction, how do you think she feels about the steep increase in Philadelphia’s black population?

Answers will vary