



LESSON PLAN

GRADES: 9 -12

The Neutral Ground Lesson Plan: Confederate Monuments: Their Not Neutral



OVERVIEW

“Since they don’t want to move fast enough, we need to bring attention to all symbols to white supremacy. You need to know that it is representative of the same kind of state sanctioned violence that allows for all of these brothers and sisters who have been gunned down with no consequence from police because the reality is when we talk about symbols they are representative of oppressive systems.”

Angela Kinlaw
Take ‘Em Down Nola

The *Neutral Ground* documents New Orleans' fight over monuments and America's troubled romance with the Lost Cause. In 2015, director CJ Hunt was filming the New Orleans City Council's vote to remove four confederate monuments. But when that removal is halted by death threats, CJ sets out to understand why a losing army from 1865 still holds so much power in America.

This lesson plan is designed to help students gain a more critical understanding of the controversies surrounding contemporary movements to remove confederate monuments. The goal is to foster healthy conversations and cultivate a deeper understanding of the subject matter while also promoting compassion and advocacy.

In this lesson, students will be presented with a choice board by which they may find the truth within the different narratives referenced in the film.

A Note from Curriculum Creators, Ahmariah Jackson & Cora Davis

Education is my revolution. The revolution does not have a uniform and its roles are fluid. I respect those that march and stir up good trouble; however, my approach is a little different. As much as I love literature and figurative language, I educate to bring forth what already exists within my students. I'd envision myself as a freshly cleaned mirror, allowing students to see a divine reflection of themselves in my eyes. Hopefully, they will internalize that reflection and live within their individual power.

The Neutral Ground calls upon the most beautiful trouble, speaking life to history and taking control of its current narrative. The issue is divisive: but what worthy cause isn't? I am compelled by the idea of giving students agency and structured steps to develop and raise their own voices. These antiquated celebrations of fragility will more than likely be dismantled by those not already bound to the status quo. Much like the Civil Rights Movement, the youth will lead us.

- Mr. Ahmariah Jackson

Education has been my medicine. I grew up being one of the very few black students in the classroom. High school was my first interaction with racism. I was called the "n-word" for

the first time my senior year amongst several other racial slurs and jokes. I didn't understand why I felt hurt, other than knowing that being called a "gorilla that should get back on the boat" was mean and a little strange. In college, I was taught the history that didn't make it into the whitewashed Texan history books and I felt like I could see for the first time.

As C.J takes us on his journey to self-discovery in the film, he is speaking for me too. He shines a light on the ways that even the darkest parts of history can bring healing. Learning the truth about the "n-word" and the history behind it's sting empowered me to see the system at play that wanted me to be ashamed of who I was. The truth and honesty within this film can work like salve to other's wounds like it did for my own. I want to empower and equip teachers to teach this with authenticity and humility to allow the students to make their own discoveries. This lesson could be the key to a student getting to know themselves in a greater way. That is powerful.

- Ms. Cora Davis

A Note to Teachers from POV Education

There is nothing neutral about white supremacy and no common ground when it comes to racism. Education is a crucial intervention to make whiteness's perceived neutrality visible and to begin deconstructing the harm institutionalized racism, prejudice, and bigotry perpetuate in the lives of everyone - especially people of color. Through this film and lesson plan there will be learning and unlearning for both you and your learners. Remember to model what not knowing looks like, embrace vulnerability, and have tough conversations that begin from the clear starting point that hate speech and violence will not be tolerated. Growing consciousness and language around the very real violence and threat that white supremacy continues to pose can be a catalyst for change. The discomfort will be a hurdle, but not unbearable. It is your responsibility to do the work of, practice, model, and embody anti-racism - this lesson plan invites you to put these necessary interventions into practice and to do so while attending to the differentiated experiences of safety that the learners in your care may feel.

Subject Areas

List 5-8 relevant subjects areas in which this lesson can be used

- Social Studies
- English Language Arts and Literacy
- Civics and Government
- Geography
- American Laws and Rights
- US History
- Social Emotional Learning

Grade Levels: 9-12

Objectives:

NOTE TO TEACHERS: This lesson seeks to find creative ways to engage with critical and potentially triggering subject matter. You should prepare in advance and have community guidelines for your classroom to ensure harm-reductive approaches to engaging in dialogue around histories of white supremacist violence and Black resistance in the US.

In this lesson, students will be asked to choose to:

- Use personification to give voice to the statues by exploring a central aspect of the debate.
- Create an artistic example of a monument that celebrates America through a counter-narrative approach that centers Black America.
- Remix (rewrite or compose) alternate or more truthful versions of songs associated with the Antebellum period.
- Envision an alternative to the Lost Cause ideology following The Civil War.
- Chart the creation of monuments to important historical events that happened near that time.
- Use the SPLC's map of confederate monuments and research five-ten of the men that were commemorated.

- Consider a video journal where you pose questions related to the film's content to members of your family and community.

Materials

- [Critical Concepts List](#)
- [Critical Race Theory Overview Handout](#)
- Film clips and equipment to project/screen the film clips
- Notebook
- Writing utensil
- Headphones
- Anticipation Guide
- [Finding Neutral Ground-Choice Board](#)
 - *The Choice Board will serve as the centerpoint of classroom activities and provide options for your students to engage with this lesson in creative and critical ways.*
- Various supplementary links and resources
- Art supplies (poster board, markers, paint, etc.)
- [Matching Game Materials](#)
 - Print enough slides for students to participate in the game individually or in small groups.

Time Needed

This lesson can be completed over the course of one week. The first two days of the week can be used to show and discuss film clips as well as provide instructions for each activity on the choice board. The film clips will serve as a part of laying the foundation for the students before they begin to explore the topics of the film in the main assignment. The next two days can be used for independent or group work time on the choice board activity of the students' choice. The last day of the week can be used for an extra work day or presentations.

PREPARATION:

Ahead of teaching, we encourage you to become familiar with the [Critical Race Theory in Education Handout](#) and orientation towards teaching included in this lesson.

Additionally, ahead of teaching you should assess your students' knowledge of the long history of settler colonialism, American Slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and White Supremacy in America and modify the lesson as needed to meet your students' where they are.

Critical Race Theory & Counter-Storytelling

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a framework for teaching that challenges existing relationships between race, racism, and power. Useful to this lesson, we encourage you to grow familiar with “counter-storytelling” which is a major tenant of CRT in Educational approaches to challenging dominant perspectives, structures, and systems of power. Counterstorying, or counter narratives, is a method of telling stories from the perspective of people whose stories and experiences have historically and systemically been excluded due to structures of power. Examples of dominant narratives can be found throughout “official knowledge” in curricula.

By centering the stories, experiences, wisdom, and knowledge of historically-marginalized people and *decentering* dominant (white, masculine, hetero/straight people) narratives that have been historically centered in curricula and positioned as ‘truth,’ counter-storytelling and CRT makes interrogations, interruptions, and refusals of oppressive narratives possible.

FILM CLIPS: Prepare for Classroom Activities

Use these clips to screen with students and engage in time for reflection and discussion guided by the essential questions ahead of classroom activities.

Clip 1: United Daughters of the Confederacy: Grief as a Guiding Force

42:58 - 44:48

The clip begins at 42:58 with a shot of an address by Mildred Lewis Rutherford and ends at 44:48 with confirmation this ideology was taught in schools until the 1970's.

The United Daughters of the Confederacy waged a campaign to engrain the Lost Cause into public schools which lasted until the 1970's. Rutherford's "Measuring Rod to Test Text Books and Reference Books" was used to control how curriculum framed slavery. Additionally, the Daughters often dressed young school girls to represent a living Confederate flag at the unveiling of monuments. Their propaganda campaign rejected textbooks that acknowledged slavery as the cause of the Civil War, and solidified false histories of racial violence into curricula.

Discussion Questions: Clip 1

- Does this clip give you a different perspective on why Confederate monuments were built initially?
- Was the reasoning behind the UDC's efforts to make sure that Confederate soldiers were honored justified by their grief?

Clip 2: The Civil War Reenactment: Campfire Talk [

34:01 - 36:23

The clip begins at 34:01 with a shot of a truck with Confederate license plates and ends at 36:23 with Butterbean denying slavery as the cause for secession.

During a Civil War reenactment at Camp Moore, CJ immerses himself in role play as a Confederate soldier, or “bad guy”, alongside Thomas Taylor and other attendees. While CJ, a former theatre kid and costume lover, describes the reenactment as “unexpectedly fun until, of course, you start talking about anything besides the costumes”. During a discussion about the Civil War and its history and cause from the Confederate perspective, CJ is challenged for stating the truth and is accused of believing everything that he hears. CJ counters by referencing the wording of the Declaration of Causes.

Discussion Questions: Clip 2

- Do you think that Butterbean would benefit from visiting the Whitney plantation to learn more about slavery? What are your thoughts on CJ's suggestion to Butterbean about taking time to learn more about one another's history?
- In some ways, this clip is a snapshot of conversations that can happen often. What are ways that people can have conversations about race that lead to unity and understanding?

Clip 3: The Lost Cause: Fiction as Historical Memory

21:00 - 24:31

The clip begins at 21:00 with a shot of Confederate tombstones and ends at 24:31 with Christy Coleman discussing the lie of the Lost Cause.

While Thomas Taylor and CJ wrap up a conversation, we are shown historic imagery that depicts the loss of Confederate soldiers, the idea of the grief of the Confederacy, and the trauma that was imposed upon both the North and South. Here, we are introduced to a discussion featuring Christy Coleman and Karen Cox where the origins and fallacies of the Lost Cause are explored, and how the women of the White South's need was to make their loss mean something. CJ narrates: "To find a meaning in a losing army that went all in on slavery... You'd have to write, like, a whole new story. And, that is exactly what White Southerners did. The story they invented after the War is called The Lost Cause". The narrative is offset by juxtaposing movie clips celebrating the gallant south with stark images of brutalized enslaved men.

Discussion Questions: Clip 3

- What is the impact that the Lost Cause had on people understanding the depths of slavery?
- Why was the Lost Cause so believable for some people?
- What are some ways you see the effects of the Lost Cause narrative in current day society?

Clip 4: Charlottesville: Waving Hate

1:03:52 - 1:08:12

The clip begins at 1:03:52 with CJ and photographer friend Abdul Aziz traveling to Charlottesville, VA and ends at 1:08:12 with CJ uttering “they killed someone today.”

CJ travels with his photographer friend Abdul Aziz to document the infamous protests surrounding the removal of a Confederate Monument in Charlottesville, Virginia. Upon arrival, CJ and Aziz, while recording and documenting photos, find themselves amidst a gang of White men shouting “You will not replace us... Blood and sword!” and marching with tiki-torches. Though CJ describes the event to be “terrifying”, he and Aziz plan to continue to document these mobs. The next day, CJ and Aziz document opposition to the White Nationalist rally. As they leave Charlottesville, a distraught CJ reflects on the tragedy of the day, noting that a person was killed during the riot.

Discussion Questions: Clip 4

- Do you have a different perspective of the Confederate Flag after viewing this clip? Does the flag change meanings in different settings (front yard vs. a white supremacy rally)?
- What does the Confederate flag represent to you? What could it represent to others?

Clip 5: Slave Rebellion Reenactment: Redemption & Self Discovery

01:12:53 - 01:16:04

This clip begins at 01:12:53 when CJ is sitting on bench, right before he starts talking, and ends with close ups of people at the slavery rebellion reenactment after CJ says "...outside of that Chase"

CJ reflects on ways that history can sometimes leave out the parts of the slave narrative that are empowering, and how that piece is missing from himself. He joins a slavery rebellion reenactment where an uprising of black men and women fought for their freedom in what is now known as St. John the Baptist, Louisiana. At this reenactment, Dread Scott, the organizer, explains that this event is a difficult performance that is deeply engaged with the ideas of Revolt of 1811 and radical freedom. Throughout the clip, this sentiment is shown through clips of the reenactment. CJ later explores the impact that participating in the reenactment has had on his journey to self-discovery.

Discussion Questions: Clip 5

- What does CJ discover about himself in this clip from the film? Point to specific moments that led you to make this inference.
- In what ways can history lead to self-discovery? Have you made any self-discoveries, like CJ, throughout your life?
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- What does this clip teach you about the dangers of false histories being taught in school? How might a false history that is taught in school impact your ability to understand yourself and your position in the world?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

GROUNDING KNOWLEDGE

NOTE TO TEACHERS: *You should prepare ahead of these activities by engaging students in dialogue using film clips, reviewing and discussing vocabulary, and agreeing upon community guidelines for how to collectively maintain a respectful classroom community so the learners in your care are not causing harm to one another.*

Step One: Level Setting and Shared Space

- (1.) Ask students what they know and have been taught about the Civil War.
- (2.) Record what they've been taught on the board as they share.
- (3.) Depending on your student's prior knowledge of the Civil War, your class can explore the following resources go develop a better understanding:

[Civil War and Its Aftermath | Uncovering America](#) from PBS LearningMedia
[A War to Free the Slaves?](#) From Zinn Education Project

- (4.) Prepare for lesson and establish guidelines:

Ask students how it feels that they have been taught misrepresentations of history and been told that it is true? Allow students to share their feelings around this and then explain to them that for the next few days you will be exploring the real history of the Civil War and the role of white supremacy in American history. Give students time to share their feelings about being invited to do this as a learning community and reaffirm community and classroom guidelines. Sometimes it is helpful to remind students that they will be clumsy because they haven't been taught language to discuss race and racism in school but to take great care with one another and themselves.

5. Introduce The Neutral Ground and CJ's exploration of history, race and education. You can play the [trailer](#) to spark curiosity and discussion around the topics ahead. Ask students to take a few quiet moments to write how they are feeling about being asked to discuss race and racism over the next couple of days. Ask them to set a personal goal for how they want to show up in the community space, for one another, and with care and curiosity.

Have them complete this sentence and then go around and give every student an opportunity to share out loud:

I want to treat my classmates with care and respect because _____.

Step Two: Show Film Clips and Classroom Discussions

Play each of the film clips and give students note cards or sticky notes to jot down questions, observations, or reflections that they would like to discuss after the film clip is over. The clips will serve as a way to provide context to students before they begin working on the main activity within this lesson. Each film clip has guiding questions to help frame your classroom discussions.

You can play the clip and then give students time to reflect on their own, then ask the guiding questions as a way to start conversation. You can also give students the option of writing their responses down on paper if they do not feel comfortable sharing in the group.

The Critical Concepts (see Critical Concepts List above) can be printed out or written on the notecards for students to review. Students could choose two and then write down a response to this question: How do you see these concepts and ideas showing up in the film clips?

ACTIVITY: Matching Game & [Choice Board](#)

Step 1: Matching Game

Students will work in groups of three to four to match the picture of each monument to the quote that correlates with the picture. Give students five to ten minutes to complete this quick warm up. Once students have decided on their answers, present the correct answers. Then ask the students to list 2-3 reasons why this person does not deserve a monument and/or how this monument causes harm. Have students share with the whole group. There is an additional extension activity on the [matching game slides](#).

Step 2: Choice Board

Explain the instructions for each option listed below for the [Choice Board](#). Provide a copy of the Choice Board to students and/or post the Choice Board on your Learning Management

System. Students can choose one of the options to complete during the week of your lesson. Allow students two-three days to work on their assignments.

Choice Board Options

Option 1: If Monuments Could Talk

Use personification to give voice to the statues by exploring a central aspect of the debate. Envision the monument as a living, breathing entity. Would they be happy to be the face to commemorate the ideas and times with which it is associated? Why or why not?

Do monuments that are perceived to celebrate institutionalized racism erode/demolish/diminish the ideals of American Democracy?

Is there a difference in removing Confederate monuments and the toppling of statues of Saddam Hussein in Iraq? Why or why not?

Option 2: Museum for Monuments Art Exhibit

Create a Museum for Monuments art exhibit.

Can you create an artistic example of a monument that celebrates America that centers Black America?

Create a Lost and Found virtual archive of descendents of individuals who were enslaved like a lost and found box of history.

Are there notable figures who you think should be celebrated?

Cultural Currency as an example <https://www.joestu.net/joes-art>

Option 3: Remix Project: Song Cry

Remix (rewrite or compose) alternate or more truthful versions of songs associated with the Antebellum period. Examples might include:

Confederate Song (I Wish I was in Dixie)

The National Anthem

Compilation of Civil War Songs: <https://civilwarfolkmusic.com/songs-by-year/>

Option 4: Timeline

Chart the creation of monuments to important historical events that happened near that time using a digital resource (Canva or Google Slides) or create the timeline on paper.

Events might include:

Racial Violence

Political Upheaval

Achievements of people who are oppressed

You might even consider monuments that were erected to celebrate people who are oppressed or new ideas on race and identity in America. (or worldwide)

Option 5: Letters to Lovers of the Lost Cause

Consider an alternate to the Lost Cause ideology following The Civil War. Is there another way by which Southern heritage could have been celebrated without overt racist overtones?

The film suggests that many mothers and wives were left to mourn the life of their beloved Confederate soldiers after the war ended. Can you envision a way by which they could have celebrated the men they loved without speaking ill of the newly liberated/formerly enslaved individuals?

Write a letter to Edward Pollard, the creator of the Lost Cause, OR to one of the United Daughters of the Confederacy to express your ideas.

Option 6: Map the Monuments

Use the [SPLC's map of confederate monuments](#) and select one state to focus on. Explore the monuments in that state and select five to ten of the monuments to further research. Create a chart that provides information about each person who was commemorated with

a monument.

Step 3: Presentations (Optional)

Give students the opportunity to present their final products with the class on the last day of the lesson.

Culminating Activity

Closing Questions: Students will choose one to two questions to respond to in their journals. Students can take some time to discuss their response in small groups. Stop by each group to listen to conversations and provide answers to questions that may come up as they are sharing.

Questions:

Do numbers matter? If the majority does not agree, does that invalidate the minority? (In reference to Confederate monuments, but also plays into Constitutional Theory)

If the Confederacy founders explicitly expressed that its formation was based on race, how do so many ignore that fact?

Can we explore Confederate history without promoting hate? Is it best to call it something else?

What is Southern in a nation founded by the direct descendents of Europeans? Under that same guise, what is American?

How do we (the citizens of The United States of America) find and maintain "Liberty and Justice for All?"

EXTENSIONS

What are your family's memories/thoughts/feelings about monuments in your local area?

What are some challenges with the intersection of Race and Religion as shown in the film?

When is an insurrection (riot) revolution?

When is an insurrection (riot) terrorism?

Consider a video journal where you pose one of these questions to members of your family and community.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about *The Neutral Ground* by visiting the film's [website](#).

Articles That Connect to Locations and Struggles Featured in the Film:

- [My Complicated, Exhausting Relationship with my City, Stone Mountain](#)
- [Confederate Flag History Through Art](#)
- [Violence at Rally in Virginia Prompts Cities to Remove Confederate Statues](#)
- [Mississippi Furls Its State Flag with Confederate Symbol On It](#)
- [Mississippi Approves Flag with Magnolia to Replace Old Confederate Themed One](#)
- [Cities Add Signs to Confederate Statues to Tell the Full Truth About Them](#)
- [Virginia Student Suspended for Wearing Confederate Flag on Clothes](#)
- [Confederate Flag Display in One State Raises National Political Debate](#)
- [Cities Move to Change Schools Named After Confederate Generals](#)
- [Charlottesville Teen Goes From Targeting a Statue to Taking on the System](#)
- [Dueling Messages: Propaganda in the Civil War](#)

Resources for additional lesson plans and curriculum development:

[Learning for Justice](#), Southern Poverty Law Center

[Zinn Education Project](#)

[1619 Project](#), New York Times Magazine

[Tools for Anti-Racist Teaching Webinars](#), PBS LearningMedia

[POV's Delve Deeper Reading List](#) can be a tremendous support to you as you seek out companion texts for addressing histories of white supremacy and racism in America's history

[PBS Presents: POV Watch Club](#)

PBS has partnered with POV to support educators' deeper engagement with critical media literacy and anti-racist teaching practices. Through this ongoing virtual professional development series, PBS/POV offers access to a free documentary each month; a platform to engage with educators across the country to discuss ideas, questions, and share resources; an "After Show" featuring experts, activists, educators, and filmmakers who engage in honest and critical conversations that connect the documentaries directly to education systems and structures (and the past to the present); *and* practical tools for bringing these documentaries and inspiring critical pedagogy in your classroom. Register to become a member of the club.

POV: Media Literacy Questions for Analyzing POV Films

[This](#) list of questions provides a useful starting point for leading rich discussions that challenge students to think critically about documentaries.

Podcasts

[Sounds Like Hate](#), Southern Poverty Law Center

Sounds Like Hate is an audio documentary series about the dangers and peril of everyday people who engage in extremism, and ways to disengage them from a life of hatred.

[Blindspot: Tulsa Burning, NPR](#)

On May 31, 1921, Tulsa's Greenwood District was thriving — a Black city within a city. By June 1, it was in ashes, leveled by a white supremacist mob. The Tulsa Race Massacre remains one of the worst incidents of racial terror in U.S. history. In six episodes, *Blindspot: Tulsa Burning* tells the story of a thriving neighborhood that attackers set on fire, and the scars that remain 100 years later. We consider the life of this remarkable 35 blocks of Tulsa through the stories of the survivors, descendants and inheritors of that legacy.

Film Resources

[PBS Series: Eyes on the Prize](#) (1987 - 1990)

Eyes on the Prize tells the definitive story of the civil rights era from the point of view of the ordinary men and women whose extraordinary actions launched a movement that changed the fabric of American life, and embodied a struggle whose reverberations continue to be felt today.

[Ethnic Notions](#), Marlon Riggs (1987)

Ethnic Notions is Marlon Riggs' Emmy-winning documentary that takes viewers on a disturbing voyage through American history, tracing for the first time the deep-rooted stereotypes which have fueled anti-black prejudice. Through these images we can begin to understand the evolution of racial consciousness in America.

[POV Community Network](#)

POV's free digital lending library allows you to check out POV films for screenings and access our additional resources, including our [Delve Deeper Reading List](#) and Discussion Guide.

Standards

English Language Arts Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.8

Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.9

Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (e.g., Washington's Farewell Address, the Gettysburg Address, Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech, King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail"), including how they address related themes and concepts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.8CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.2

Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.3

Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, & Technical Subjects

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3

Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Ahmariah Jackson is the Griot, nestled somewhere between the raucous ideology of Gil Scott Heron and the subtle subversion of James Baldwin. Words are his sword and shield. He views education as a noble revolution and values the holistic growth of students over any standardized assessment. He re-invented the poetry club and dubbed it “The Griot Circle” where he fosters empowerment through expression. He is an emcee and a devotee of Hip Hop as culture, movement and music and folds all his passions into his classroom.



Cora Davis is a former militant, angry protester turned reconciler. Her life has been transformed by the principles of nonviolence that are the foundation of how she lives and interacts with others. She teaches middle school students that their voices matter by fighting for her own and she has created an effective after school (and weekend and lunch hour and anytime) club for the “at risk” students otherwise falling through the cracks of the system. She believes a willingness to look at ourselves first is the key to bringing unity to the hurting world around her and is now convinced we cannot fight hate if it is in us, no matter how justified it is.