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1994 Volume IV: Racism and Nativism in American Political Culture

In Search of Rights

Curriculum Unit 94.04.07
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INTRODUCTION

The over-all thrust of this unit is to link America's multi-ethnic past to its present social relations among ethnic groups, with the intent of directing the course of our inheritance in its future. It is intended as a brief examination of the Constitution—the spirit and the letter of its laws, as it relates to equal rights for all American citizens. Through this unit students are encouraged to make critical evaluations of their own sense of justice and fairness, as it relates to the rights of others.

While America boasts equality for all, the dominant group practices an overt racism which continually grants preferred status to a favored few of its citizenry. However, we have only to look back through the history of racial protests and civil unrest, religious struggles, and women suffrage to remind ourselves that the term "We the people" as stated in our constitution is reserved for those favored few who are "truly" American.

In an attempt to explore both the theoretical and practical sides of the expression "We the People" a cursory investigation into human rights for all of America's citizens will be unavoidable. As a part of this exploration, I raise the question- What does it profit America to violate the rights of so many of its citizens in order to grant preferred status to a favored few ?

Today, in multi-ethnic America, as it has been since its founding, favored few has meant European whites. Still today, in multi-ethnic America, even after staging numerous legal battles, waging a bloody civil war, and amending the constitution, we are forced to continue a search for human and equal rights for all Americans.

OBJECTIVES

It is this idea of equal rights for all around which I will build an 18 week study unit, in Future Studies, for use with seventh grade students in the Resource Room Program for Gifted. The study initiates yet another call to action for change in the direction of social growth in this country while providing a safe forum for open and honest dialogue among the differing cultural groups who make up this class.

This study will afford students opportunities to research Supreme Court cases, formally debate court rulings,

write a scenario portraying a possible futuristic America and participate in a field practicum for media production, while evaluating various social, economic and racial conflicts that exist among America's ethnic groups.

It employs as its core lesson a simulation "Equality," which is intended to be used in conjunction with factual information about this society. It examines the discrepancies that exist among rich and poor and among the various ethnic groups who call America home and it invites students to take a new and unbiased approach to viewing that which keeps us separated as a people.

PURPOSE

Many of the students for whom the unit is written, will enter the course as fourth year veterans of the TAG (Talented and Gifted) Resource Room Program. They come together, as a group, one day per week and from three area middle schools, bringing not only different ethnic backgrounds, but educational, social, economic and religious differences, as well.

The teacher who chooses to implement this unit, naturally has freedom to augment the lesson ideas in a way such that it is conducive to teacher planning time and to the learning styles of the students. Keep in mind that the study is student oriented with the teacher serving as facilitator. It is designed with the idea that there are two teachers involved in the implementation and that students are comfortably familiar with independent learning strategies. While the unit is intended for students who are being serviced through Gifted programming, it is easily adapted to any grade level and to numerous academic disciplines in the regular education programs.

STRATEGIES

Lessons are outlined in three, six week blocks. The introductory lesson activities for each block are given, as I would approach them. Information needed for each segment is included as background readings at the end of each lesson block. Additional materials appear in the section labeled "Activities" at the end of the third block.

Lesson Block #1: Introduction to the Study

Objective: Students will identify and discuss ideas and issues which typify their cultures.

Activity A:

Read and discuss the "Introduction" to this unit. Allow student concerns to direct the discussion. Survey the students' interests in the unit as you outline its objectives and activities.

Activity B:

A good starting point for learning about similarities and differences among cultures is to orally identify some of the typical customs, ideas, behaviors, traditions and values of one's own culture. Typical should be interpreted as that which is practiced most frequently in one's culture. The activity is enhanced if students are

talking freely about their own cultural experiences.

Activity C:

For further discussion, raise the questions which precede the resource information. Use the information which follows and the ideas that grow out of students' shared experiences as a basis for discussing the questions.

Background Readings:

Who are Americans ?

Max Lerner writes in *America As A Civilization*, "America's jungle is its ethnic environment of a myriad of peoples. Is any one ethnic stock (race) more American than the others ? To say of someone that he is of American stock has come to mean that he is white, probably Protestant and of Anglo-saxon descent, and that his forebears emigrated to America some generations back."

Since its beginning, America's West Europeans have set themselves apart from other ethnic groups. The thought has been one that suggests Europeans are rightly entitled to absolute power, to reign over others, to receive the best of what the country offers in economics, education, employment and property, with themselves as conqueror, the native Indian as conquered and newcomers as foreigners wanting to get in on the power and glory.

America, in its conception intended to break the ties with the old world by creating a society which was free of the burdens of the feudal system. This new society was supposed to be free of the restrictions of social classes. Within this new society, "No man was to get a better or worse start than another, each was to have the same chance to begin and end as a man; none was to bare his head or bend his knee to another by reason of birth, rank or vested power; each was to be judged by what he was and could do." (Lerner,1987).

In the new society, the American elite was to be recognized by his ability and achievement, not by blood, race or position, as it were in European society. That was the intent or the spirit. The reality is the elite of America is recognized by the color of his skin and by his wealth. The reality is a separate and unequal nation of ethnic peoples. The reality is a system of institutionalized racism, against those who are not of West European ancestry.

In this "classless" society, there remains a hierarchy of prestige depending partly on stock black, brown, yellow and red at the bottom, white protestant, West European at the top. Lerner makes reference to a "Prestige chart of the ethnic hierarchy." The big divergences are that the Indians, who came first, are not at the top but toward the bottom of the pyramid; and the negroes who were brought over early, are not near the top but at the very bottom.

On this chart, one can superimpose a residence map showing which stock or ethnic groups are distributed in slum areas, middle-class districts or in the upper class residences. Over that an occupational chart can be drawn to show the kinds of employment to which each ethnic group is linked or particularly suited.

America can never truly hope to compete as a world power if the country continues to underutilize so much of its human resource. What people of color have in common, whether Hispanic, African, Jews, Arabs, Asian or other, is their sense of an overall America, its constitution and its laws. These groups also have in common, a hunger for access, knowledge, skills, high living standards and a sense of belonging. All of these ethnic-Americans help carry the harsh burdens of this society. Why is each group not recognized for such?

Abraham Lincoln asserted that “Slavery deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world; enables the enemies of free institutions with plausibility to taunt us as hypocrites; causes the real friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity; and forces so many good men among us into an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil liberty.” (Commager 1987)

While the country has officially abolished slavery as an institution, the practices of discrimination against ethnic groups continue to burden the society and forces many to accept second class citizenship, in a country that bills itself as a land of hope and opportunity.

* When you read the preamble to the Constitution, what is your understanding of the term ‘We the people’? In your opinion, does the expression include all American citizens?

Looking back, to the framing of the Constitution (1781), much of America, at the time and by sheer numbers only was European in its ancestry. Therefore it comes as no surprise to many, that the document, which Americans tend to think of as our “Rugged Constitution” was designed to protect its framers propertied men of European ancestry. At the time, there was no recognition of non-propertied whitesmen or women or of non-European cultures, as equals. Since that time, however, America has undergone dramatic social, political and economic changes, thereby requiring some change in thought.

History shows us that some change in thought has forcibly occurred among some who once held on to the notion of superior dominance; to the idea of inferior race(s) and to the practice of racism. That change of thought is reflected in the spirit of the so called Civil War Amendments 13, 14, & 15 to the Constitution. These amendments were designed to guarantee not only freedom, but also civil rights to the African-American. Amendment 13 (adopted 1865) outlines instructions prohibiting slavery. Amendment 14 (adopted 1868) defines U.S. and state citizenship and assures protection of certain fundamental rights. Amendment 15 (adopted 1870) grants all citizens the right to vote.

Although the Amendments provided for congressional enforcement, the congress failed to implement these provisions by appropriate legislation until the 1950’s. While these changes were intended in spirit to amend the original document, today’s multi-ethnic America still finds that the attitudes and practices of the dominant group have not adequately changed to effectively eliminate the need for continual formal protests from those who have been denied certain rights guaranteed through this constitutional document.

The mindset with which the Constitution was drafted and the racial conflicts with which we are confronted today negates the facts that Native American Indians had already settled and formed a workable society for themselves, prior to the 1607 landing of the Pilgrims. That alone should have entitled them to U.S. citizenship.

Although Native American Indians wanted to be recognized as independent nations, certainly we cannot accept Indian reservations, established and governed by white rule, as a realistic attempt by the government at granting such status, or as an idea of independence. Neither can we accept the position taken by the government to officially recognize only a selected few of the existing Indian tribes.

We cannot accept the burning of Indian villages or the systematic destruction of the buffalo, a major source of Indian survival, as a legitimate effort to co-exist with the Indians. Certainly none of this could be misconstrued as honest efforts to recognize Native Americans as anything—independent Nation, U.S. citizen or fellow man with rights and privileges that are entitled any human.

The original draft also ignored, as citizens, the first Africans who were brought here as early as 1606, not as

slaves but as indentured servants, as were poorer whites. Not only did the framers not consider the protection of these men of African descent; those who followed received even less consideration under the laws of the country.

It appears that the framers also ignored the fact that America is a nation of immigrants, with two exceptions. The Native American Indian reportedly, came to the Western Hemisphere by walking across a land bridge believed to have been in existence some 20,000 years ago. The African, whose immigration was involuntary, was brought to America in chains as slaves. The death and disease of these men, women and children far exceeded the horror of any other group who came to America's shores. But that hardly compares to the horrors with which Africans met under the dehumanizing system of slavery in this country.

As of 1883, even though the African no longer was subject to being bought and sold, he was surrounded by adverse sentiment and watched in his every movement. Once free, African-Americans remained at the bottom of the social order, burdened with increasingly oppressive racial prescriptions. Still today, many white Americans have great difficulty in accepting the African as their equal, as a person who could become a part of American life.

Frederick Douglass offered this observation in his speech at the Louisville Negro convention, " If the negro comes in ignorance, rags and wretchedness, he conforms to the popular belief of his character, and in that character he is welcome. But if he shall come as a gentleman, a scholar and a statesman, he is hailed as a contradiction to his race, and his coming is resented as impudence." (Carson, et al., 1991).

Not much has changed since Frederick Douglass' speech to the Convention in 1883. Except to say that in 1994, the word "negro" is easily interchangeable with the name of any of America's ethnic groups. Douglass goes on to say "It is our lot to live among a people whose laws, traditions and prejudices have been against us for centuries, and from these they are not yet free. To assume that they are free from these evils simply because they have changed their laws is to assume what is utterly unreasonable and contrary to facts." (Carson, et al. 1991).

Lesson Block #2 The Simulation EQUALITY

Objective: Students will read and discuss the issues surrounding the theme idea of the loss of freedom due to man's dominance over man as they participate in the simulation "Equality."

NOTE: The complete simulation can be purchased from Interact Publishers. I have tried to include a basic outline for its implementation and sample ideas of the study materials (see "ACTIVITIES" section).

Activity A:

- After you've read the introduction to the simulation, Equality, and have clearly outlined students' responsibilities, students are given a futuristic scenario, "Fantasia" (reproduced here) in which they are the enslaved group, known as the uglies. After analyzing the scenario, allow time for students to discuss their reactions to the situation and write about those feelings in their journals.
- Read and discuss the segment on slavery. For the most part, students are likely familiar with the extremely cruel treatment of slaves here in America. You may want to brief students on ideas such as: slavery as a business, plantation life in the South vs. Northern slavery and the psychological effects of the practice upon the enslaved. The focus of the reading, however, is the attitudes and actions of the slave holder and the government to dominate a race of people.

- This activity can be continued through an oral or written comparison of the scenario “Fantasia and American slavery.”

Activity B

- Spend some time studying the map of the imaginary city of Independence. Students are “born” as citizens in Independence, a mythical American city. The students are then asked to draw ID tags to determine their roles. After moving into their own neighborhoods, each group simulates an environment which represents their stations in life (encourage creativity at this point).

- Ask the students to begin conducting a library and computer search of Supreme Court cases which relate to human or civil rights violations, in addition to those given in the background readings. Theoretical concerns and ideas which center around racial, economic and religious discrimination and the practice of separate but equal education are discussed within the scenario and the background readings and should be further explored through research and discussion of additional Supreme Court cases, which relate to the same.

Activity C:

- This is a good time to role play some of the conflicts that have arisen among ethnic groups in the simulation and in students’ “real world” communities. Role playing situations are designed to help students understand ethnic relationships and the pressures which occur within an urban setting. As you evaluate the consequences of these situations, continue to discuss man’s dominance over man. It is most important that the situations are evaluated by the teacher and students and are recorded in student journals.

Activity D:

- Conduct a town meeting based on the synopsis of an article which appeared in the town’s only newspaper, The Daily Chronicle. Direct students to review the data outlined in the Student Guide and the map of Independence (reproduced here in Activity section). Next have students outline their positions, as speakers for or against the school board, based on the roles of the characters assumed earlier in the simulation.

- At some point, students should be given the opportunity to state their true positions on the subject in a formal debate. The resolution could be decided upon by the class and should represent a real world issue about education in this country.

Additionally, this block includes essay writing, discussions and related group’ activities (per selected theme idea) which center around specific rights in conflict, as suggested in the simulation and as reported in various current media and in poetry.

Background Readings

1) INTRODUCTION:

“Equality” is designed to explore the struggle for racial equality in a typical American city. The events could easily be set in any urban center, anywhere in America. For familiarity, we’ll use the city of New Haven as a basis for comparison.

The simulation focuses on finding ways to help people of differing ethnic backgrounds to learn to live together. It opens with a brief study of a mythical society and its slavery. As students write about their lives as slaves, they begin to understand what happens to a free man’s personality when someone “owns” his body.

The simulation requires students to read and discuss the information found in the background readings, write personal essays, keep a journal of actions and reactions throughout the lesson (this record can be written as a personal diary), participate in a town meeting to discuss a potential community crisis centered around the integration of schools in the town of Independence, and role play situations centered around urban problems.

As students study, their self-images increase in proportion to the Image Points (IMPS) they earn. But they can also lose IMPS whenever pressure cards are handed out. These cards which represent chance striking their lives, can add or take away from their total image points. The cards also serve as mini-lectures which subtly cover a number of urban problems i.e. crime, education, social relations, housing, jobs and civil rights (see IMPS Cards.)

2) SLAVERY:

Slavery has been a part of history since its beginning. Strong men have always conquered weaker men and made them slaves. Slaves built the giant pyramids of Egypt. Slaves built many of the buildings of ancient Greece and Rome. Christian slaves were forced to fight wild animals in the arena for the pleasure of Roman Emperors and mobs. Indians enslaved other Indians. Black Africans enslaved other Black Africans. And for centuries Christians believed in keeping heathens as slaves.

For me there is never any justification to the whole notion of slavery, let alone its practice. What is it that makes men so cruel that they want to buy, sell and use fellow humans as objects? For American slave holders and traders, slavery was a big business. The more slaves that the traders could bring to the new world, the more money everyone could make.

In American slavery, about which we have been repeatedly told, the dehumanizing treatment of slaves was motivated by additional concerns. One overriding concern was that of control. Slavery presented an opportunity to promote the idea of superiority over a people, deemed by Europeans as an inferior race. According to proponents of slavery, they were helping to “civilize” the African. Surely they knew that this idea had no basis in truth, but the practice continued.

The implicit protection of slavery embodied in the Declaration of Independence was made explicit in the Constitution, which treated a slave as being equivalent to three-fifths of a person for purposes of appointing representative; and taxes among the states. The Constitution also contained a clause ensuring that the “migration or importation” of slaves into existing States would be legal until at least 1808, and a fugitive slave clause requiring that when a slave escaped to another State, he must be returned on the claim of the master.

“In their declaration of the principles that were to provide the cornerstone of the new nation, the Framers made it plain that “we the people” for whose protection the constitution was designed did not include those whose skins were the wrong color.” (Carson, et al 1991)

Individual states likewise established the machinery to protect the system of slavery. This protection, sanctioned by the government, maintained through a series of laws known as “Slave Codes” was designed to defend the property interests of the owner in his slave. In an effort to dominate all people of African descent, and legally maintain slavery, these codes were also imposed upon the free African, as well. These same mechanisms of control, also government sanctioned, later became known as Jim Crow laws of legal segregation, along with a host of other racist devices.

The local courts, yet another tool of government confirmed this way of thinking as evidenced in numerous case rulings involving civil rights. The combined efforts of State and Federal government effectively

maintained Negroes in a position of legal inferiority for another century after the drafting of the Civil War Amendments.

3) CASE REFERENCES:

(Note: The following are summarily taken from U.S. Constitution Supreme Court Cases).

Dred Scott v. Sanford (1857) Dred Scott sued Sanford, a N.Y. resident arguing that he was a free citizen his former master, Dr. Emerson, a U.S. army surgeon took him to Illinois and into the Louisiana Territory (Minnesota). Illinois prohibited slavery in its Constitution and the 1820 Missouri Compromise prohibited it in the northern portion of the Louisiana territory. Scott sought to assert his freedom and that of his family.

The question to be decided by the court of nine was "Can a negro slave become a citizen and sue in the courts of the United States? The decision (7-2) was No. Taney speaking for the court explains that Negroes are subordinate and inferior class of beings. Neither the class of person who had been imported as slaves, nor their descendants, whether they become free or not, were included in the words of the constitution. Dred Scott is not a citizen of Missouri, but merely a slave or chattel (personal property) and therefore not entitled to sue in the courts. McLean and Curtis offered the dissent: Congress, not the Court, has the discretion to govern territories; the act is valid and Scott is a citizen.

Plessey v. Ferguson (1896) involved the constitutionality of a Louisiana law that required separate accommodations for white and colored passengers on railroads in that state. Homer Plessey, a citizen of Louisiana had been arrested for refusing to obey the order of the conductor to sit in the car designated for blacks. After his conviction in the state courts, Plessey appealed to the Supreme Court claiming that the statute was contrary to the 13th and 14th amendments.

Justice Henry Brown delivered the opinion for the court of eight (7-1), upholding the Louisiana law. Brown's interpretation of the 14th Amendment declared: The object of the Amendment was undoubtedly to enforce the absolute equality of the two races before the law, but in the nature of things it could not have been intended to abolish distinctions based upon color, or to enforce social, as distinguished from political, equality, or commingling of the two races upon terms unsatisfactory to either.

Justice Harlan offered the dissent: In respect of civil rights, common to all citizens, the Constitution does not permit any public authority to know the race of those entitled to be protected in the enjoyment of such rights.

The court denied that the law stamped the negro race with a badge of inferiority, suggesting that such would be the case, only if the negro chose to see it as such. This ruling depicted the very way in which the dominant group approaches the idea of equality. While the ruling spoke to the spirit of the constitutional Amendment, the results were in accordance with the existing racist practices of the society.

Brown v. Board of Education (1954) representing a consolidation of cases across the U.S., reversed the sixty year old decision of the Court in Plessey v. Ferguson. The question put before the Court asked "Does segregation in public schools violate the equal protection provision of the 14th Amendment ?"

Chief Justice Warren for the unanimous Court answered "Yes". The intent of the framers of the Constitution cannot be distinguished. At that time there were so few schools in the nation and it is not clear what, if any, effect was intended toward them. Segregated schools place a badge of inferiority on negro children which becomes a life-long stigma. "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

4) SYNOPSIS:

The city school board meeting was interrupted by a protest group calling itself citizens for Saving Our Schools (S.O.S.). The group led by a minister from Center City, accused the school board of running a segregated school system where minority students are not allowed to mix with students of white suburbia. S.O.S. demanded that segregation be stopped immediately, or it would shut down all of the city's schools.

Lesson Block #3 Unit Summary

Activity

Students are now asked to read, discuss and write about the patterns of discrimination against ethnic-Americans. Be sure to focus on comparing and contrasting ideas.

Background Readings

1) Patterns of Discrimination:

With the Constitution at its back, European whites continue to preside over a dual societal system: one whose legal code reflects that he is part of a people and another whose legal practices reflects that he is ruler of racially "inferior" subjects.

According to Ringer and Lawless, in the book, Race, Ethnicity, and Society this duality, like a web, spun around a new category of nonwhites -the immigrant from China and later from Japan. In search of gold, California saw the flow of foreign migrants and white Americans just as it became a state in the union in 1850. "The structure of discrimination and exclusion that eventually engulfed the immigrants from Asia was built upon the very foundations of a plural arrangement and racial creed that was articulated against the Negro and the Indian at the Constitutional Convention of 1849."

Still today, as it has been since its founding, ethnic groups are included in the production of this country's wealth but, systematically excluded from sharing equally in the distribution of that wealth and its opportunities.

While we are given to understand that power is a corrupting force and that the best way to hold on to power is to concentrate it among a small few, we are not accepting of the fact that the power enjoyed by the dominant group in America is achieved on the backs of the very people who are condemned as social outcasts in this society.

While we are given to understand that human nature dictates self preservation, an important question prevails. Can America preserve itself, by destroying parts of itself? The practice of violating the rights of the "many" in order to grant preferred status to a favored "few" renders an entire nation of people "unfree"!

2) Timeline of Events:

NATIVE AMERICANS (source:Takaki,1993)

1803

President Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson convince southern Indians to sell their "useless" forests and become farmers.

1814

Jackson negotiates Chickasaw treaty and opens land to white settlement.

1828

Newly elected President Andrew Jackson conspires with state authorities to abolish Indian tribal units and extend state authority over Indians. White settlers occupy cultivated Indian tracts.

1830-1853

With the coming of the railroad, laws providing for Indian removal from their lands were enacted. Removal was carried out through land allotments and broken treaties. By 1839 many of the tribes had been dispossessed of any property holdings, imprisoned, killed or rounded up for internment. The railroad was completed and the Indian territory was suddenly recompositioned in terms of race.

1871

Indian Appropriation Act declared, “hereafter, no Indian nation or tribe within the territory of the United States shall be acknowledged or recognized as an independent nation, tribe or power, with whom the United States may contract by treaty.

by 1889

White population had exploded in Indian territory and the prairie had been transformed into buffalo killing fields.

AFRICAN AMERICANS (source: Berlin)

1775

Royal governor of Virginia declares martial law and frees all slaves willing and able to bear arms in His Majesty’s service. (all negroes were not slaves)

1790-1810

Free negroes living in the United States totals 186,446.

1813

Talbot County, Maryland represents the trend for property holding middle class negroes.

1822

Free negroes challenge white racial ideals. When Virginia legislators find state penitentiaries too crowded and the treasury low, negro felons are ordered to be whipped and sold into slavery.

1831

Following Nat Turner rebellion, white mobs roam countrysides attacking free negroes. Fearing the spread of rebellion, North Carolina confines every free negro to jails. Virginia and Maryland call for the physical removal of all free negroes. They agree not to employ them or rent them land or houses, but pay the State Colonization Society to transport negroes back to Africa.

1834 & 1835

Tennessee and North Carolina’s constitutional conventions disfranchise the property holding negrotaking away his right to vote.

by 1842

The removal laws of 1831 is a dead letter in the lower South. Maryland and Delaware tighten their black codes and demands for free negro removal spread to the upper South.

1865

With the passage of the 13th Amendment slavery is no longer legal in America.

1870

We witness lynchings, ritual burnings, the rise of the KKK, economic intimidation in the form of sharecropping, Jim Crow laws and white mobs

CHINESE AMERICANS (source: Steidl,1991)

1848

Economic depression in China and the discovery of the gold in California bring the first significant wave of Chinese to America. Thousands are drawn to Hawaii by the promise of work in the sugarcane fields.

1869

Railroad workers find jobs in the West and other parts of the United States. Anti-Chinese violence and sentiments intensify.

1882

The Chinese Exclusion Act halts Chinese immigration to the United States and prevent those Chinese who are already here from becoming naturalized citizens. This law would be repealed in 1943.

1948

Outbreak of Chinese Civil War brings second wave of immigration to United States.

1952

The McCarran-Walter Act allows immigrants from Asian and Pacific Islands to become U.S. citizens.

1990

U.S. census finds 805,000 people of Chinese ancestry, 701,000 of Japanese Ancestry living in the United States.

JAPANESE AMERICANS (source:Steidl,1991)

1885

Japanese emigration begins to Hawaii and the U.S. mainland.

1919

Issei (first generation) farmers own over 450,000 acres of land in California. Alien Land Law of 1930 will try to prevent Asians from becoming landowners and from competing with non-Asian farmers.

1942

In the midst of World War II, Executive Order 9066 mandates that all persons of Japanese ancestry are placed in internment camps.

Activities

(figure available in print form)

Student Guide

(figure available in print form)

FANTASIA

(figure available in print form)

INDEPENDENCE

(figure available in print form)

De-BRIEFING EVALUATION

(figure available in print form)

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