

The Aftermath of the Battle: Fascism (Un)Defeated?

Enquiry Question: *Did the Battle of Cable Street defeat fascism in Britain?*

Guidance Notes and Lesson Plan

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Understand the immediate consequences of Cable Street.
- Investigate the continuing presence of antisemitism in Britain.
- Examine competing interpretations of Cable Street's significance.
- Reach evidence-based conclusions using historical sources.

Key Information

This lesson is designed for students aged 13 and above. It is devised for History classes.

The timings suggested are based on a one-hour lesson and may need adapting based on circumstances. Some adaptations have been suggested where appropriate.

Prior knowledge is not needed. However, the notion that students may arrive with knowledge, ideas and preconceptions is embraced and should be utilised to explore and resolve misconceptions. As far as possible, students should remain in the same small group throughout this course of lessons.

Resources:

- Lesson plan
- Lesson PowerPoint containing:
 - a short video (Slide 5)
 - a short film clip (Slide 6)
- Student worksheet (A4; one per student)
- Sources sheet (A4 double-sided; one per pair)
- *Blackshirt* front page (A4; one per pair)
- Interpretation Information Sheet (A4; one per student)

Introduction

Teacher Guidance Notes: The Meaning and Aftermath of Cable Street

By this stage of the unit, many students will see Cable Street as a decisive victory that defeated fascism in Britain. This lesson challenges that assumption by exploring what happened afterwards and examining whether the outcomes matched the hopes of those who participated. Students investigate the immediate consequences of the Battle, the continuing presence of the BUF, ongoing antisemitism in Britain, the introduction of the Public Order Act, Britain's response to Jewish refugees, and competing interpretations of Cable Street's significance.

Throughout the lesson, students return to five key questions: **Did Cable Street achieve what participants hoped? What happened immediately afterwards? Did fascism become stronger or weaker? Did antisemitism disappear? How significant was Cable Street in the long term?** These questions encourage students to move beyond a simple narrative of victory and consider the complexity of historical change.

A central aim of the lesson is to develop students' understanding that **historical consequences are often unexpected and contested**. While Cable Street became a powerful symbol of resistance to fascism and antisemitism, neither fascism nor antisemitism disappeared in 1936. Students should be encouraged to compare expectations with reality, and recognise that historians continue to debate Cable Street's long-term importance. By the end of the lesson, they should understand that an event can be both a significant achievement and a reminder that social and political problems are rarely solved by a single moment in history.

Lesson Plan

Starter (3-5 minutes)

Bring students back into thinking about Cable Street by asking a few information retrieval questions (**Slide 1**):

What can you remember?

What Happened at Cable Street?

1. When was the Battle of Cable Street?
2. Who planned the march?

3. Why was the East End chosen?
4. Who did the protestors consist of?
5. What role did the police play?
6. Why was the march abandoned?

Then ask the question on **Slide 2**: If you stop a march, have you defeated an ideology? This can be done as a quick whole class discussion by taking a few responses, or as a brief 'Think-Pair-Share' activity. Once responses or feedback has been received, show **Slide 4** and reveal the BUF march of July 4th, 1937. Ask the question again and take feedback. Has anyone altered their view on the question? (**Slide 3** can be shown and students asked to vote on the options at the teacher's discretion.)

Alternatively, teachers can ask students to predict what they think happened next, as far as fascism in Britain was concerned. Ask students to vote on the options (**Slide 3**) and keep a record of the votes on the board.

NB: If this approach is used, the teacher should hide **Slide 2** and move on to **Slide 4** for the question.

Video: (5 minutes)

Play the embedded video from the PowerPoint (**Slide 5**). There is no requirement for discussion or follow-up to the video, unless something flows naturally from it or a relevant question is raised, however it may help students to focus by encouraging note taking – for example identifying three key facts or points of interest. The content of the video is designed to raise questions about what happened after Cable Street, and whether it was what might have been expected. (The script of the video is in Appendix A at the end of the Guidance Notes and Lesson Plan.)

Activity: The BUF after Cable Street – Source Investigation (20 minutes)

This activity is potentially challenging as it puts across the BUF response and that response was anti-democratic and antisemitic in nature. Nevertheless, students must have access to it in order to be able to make informed historical judgements.

Begin by showing segments of the BUF march of October 3rd, 1937 (**Source A; Slide 6**). Whilst watching the film students should add notes to **Task 1** on their worksheet.

The film (which is silent) is almost 10 minutes long and there is no need to show all of it. It is recommend that students are shown the first two minutes or so and then if desired the teacher can simply pick other segments at random or using the list of key moments given below. The point of the film is simply to show the scale of the march and begin the process of interrogating the idea Cable Street defeating fascism.

NB: these are rushes – unedited film, likely to have been shot professionally by a newsreel company (not Norman’s Film Service as shown on the title screen, that was a film footage library that acquired discarded film from various sources).

Some key moments which the teacher may want to show include:

- a close-up of Oswald Mosley (1.07-1.13)
- drums and bagpipes (1.57-2.04)
- a range of ages, including children and a war veteran (2.44-2.59 and 3.19-3.28)
- women marching (4.40-4.57 and 8.12-8.39)
- the scale of the crowd can be seen at 6.10-6.44

After showing the extract(s) check understanding with some or all of the following questions:

- What types of people were on the march? (*Men, women, children of all ages. Some may point out that everyone is white.*)
- How would you describe the march? (*Answers may include organised, disciplined, gender division, peaceful, big, happy (trying to get on camera), the presence of children may be mentioned again.*)
- Did you notice any protests? (*Apart from a couple of people who may be protestors (7.58-8.10) no anti-fascist protestors are shown.*)
- Any other comments or points of interest? (*Answers may include the presence of children suggesting a peaceful march, the large numbers of police including mounted*

police, the number of people giving fascist salutes (which may be referred to as “Hitler salutes”), that the march was divided into men and women, there were no Blackshirts or other uniforms, the seeming lack of anti-fascist protestors)

- A lot of people were giving fascist salutes, recognisable from Nazi Germany. What does that suggest about attitudes in Britain towards Nazi Germany just two years before war broke out? *(Possible answers should include that it was a complex and/or nuanced relationship, many people were sympathetic to the Nazis for the same reasons that they were sympathetic to the BUF, the BUF march to Trafalgar Square on July 4th, 1937 (shown on slide 2) may be referred to.)*
- Why were there no Blackshirt uniforms? *(The Public Order Act banned them.)*

After the feedback discussion, show **Slide 7** (or handout the provided copy of it to pairs of students) and ask them to complete **Task 2** on their worksheet. Ensure that students are aware that the paper is describing a march that took place ten days after Cable Street on October 14th.

After a suitable period of time, take feedback on the questions.

1. Does this sound like a defeated movement?
2. Why might the BUF present events this way? *(Undefeated, well-supported etc.)*
3. What audience is being targeted? *(Workers, non-Jewish, non-Communist residents of the East End)*

Ensure that students pay close attention to the sub-headings and the words at the top of the front page, not simply the headline.

Activity: Antisemitism after Cable Street (10 minutes)

Remind students that in the earlier video, the presenter told them that not only did antisemitism continue after Cable Street, but it was arguably worse than before.

In pairs, students should complete **Task 3** on their worksheet, using **Sources C-F**. After a suitable period of time, take feedback using the worksheet questions and discussion question on **Slide 8**.

Pause – Recap – Question (3 minutes)

Talk through **Slide 9**, checking that students know the meaning of appeasement and that they are aware of the Kindertransport. Essentially, this slide is summing up what we have looked at regarding antisemitism in Britain, whilst the discussion question looks forward to the next lesson.

Having encapsulated these nuances for students and already looked at the BUF and anti-fascist interpretations of Cable Street, we now turn to historians' interpretations (**Slide 10**). As we have already seen, many people remember Cable Street as the moment fascism was defeated. However, we have also seen that the picture is more complicated. Cable Street did not immediately destroy the BUF and support remained significant in some areas afterwards. It seems sensible to conclude that there are two possible interpretations (**Slide 10**).

Activity: Historical Interpretations (15 minutes)

Divide the class into two (hopefully equal) groups – Group A and Group B. Students in Group A will individually investigate Interpretation A, whilst students in Group B investigate Interpretation B, using their previous worksheets, the knowledge and understanding they have gained over the unit, and the relevant source sheet for their Interpretation.

Allow 5-6 minutes for pairs to provide evidence for each of the claims that relate to their Interpretation. The evidence should be recorded in the table in **Task 4** in their worksheet. It is most likely that students in Group A will provide evidence for the first and last claims, whilst students in Group B will do so for the second and third claims, but it is not vital that this split happens.

After 5-6 minutes, student pair up with a student from the other Group and share their findings. Allow 3-4 minutes for students to share and record the new information. They should then discuss their conclusion about each claim. They should write their conclusions into their table, including why they reached those conclusions. They do not need to agree.

The teacher should spend the time of this activity circulating amongst the pairs, checking understanding, evidence and the conclusions.

Alternative: If time is short and this activity cannot be completed effectively, teachers can use the following alternative.

Slides 9 and 10 must be shown and talked through, followed by a discussion question which allows students to express (and support with evidence) their opinions on the historical interpretations. Such a question could be as simple as “How important was the Battle of Cable Street really?” Students will have access to the claims in the table (**Slide 11**) on their worksheet and these can be used to facilitate the discussion. A vote on the different interpretations could be taken, with students asked to explain why they voted the way they did.

Plenary (2-3 minutes)

Show **Slide 12** and ask for a show of hands for each of the factors in preventing the success of British fascism. Students can (and should!) vote for more than one factor. If there is time, students can be asked why they voted for a particular factor, but it is likely that there will only be time to record the votes for each of them.

The point being made here returns us to both our Enquiry Question, “Did the Battle of Cable Street defeat fascism in Britain?” and to the concluding statement made at the end of the video: historical events rarely have simple consequences.

APPENDIX A

Video: What happened next? (5 minutes)

Video Script: What Happened After Cable Street? Did the Battle Defeat Fascism?

[Presenter on location in Cable Street or beside the Cable Street mural]

On October 4th, 1936, tens of thousands of people gathered in London's East End to stop Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, known as the BUF, from marching through local neighbourhoods. The protesters succeeded, Mosley's planned march was abandoned and the Battle of Cable Street quickly became one of the most famous moments of anti-fascist resistance in British history.

But what happened next? Did Cable Street defeat fascism? Did it end antisemitism?

Today we're exploring what happened after the Battle and why historians argue that the consequences were much more complicated than many people expect.

The Immediate Reaction

For many of those involved, Cable Street felt like a victory. The Communist newspaper *Daily Worker* celebrated with the famous headline:

"Mosley Did Not Pass."

Many local residents believed they had defended their community and sent a powerful message against fascism. But historical events rarely have simple consequences.

The BUF was embarrassed by what had happened, but it did not disappear. Mosley remained politically active, BUF meetings continued, and membership actually increased in some East London districts in the months after Cable Street. The BUF's own newspaper, *Blackshirt*, claimed that the movement had been unfairly prevented from exercising its democratic rights and insisted that support for Mosley remained strong.

The same event was being interpreted in completely different ways.

The Public Order Act

[Images of Parliament, police and Blackshirt marches]

One important consequence of Cable Street was the introduction of the Public Order Act, 1936.

In the years before Cable Street, political violence had become increasingly common. Fascist groups, communist organisations and anti-fascist campaigners frequently clashed in public meetings and demonstrations. The government was concerned that political tensions were getting out of control and the events surrounding Cable Street strengthened those concerns. In light of this, in December of that year Parliament passed the Public Order Act, the first of its kind.

The law did two important things:

- It banned the wearing of political uniforms in public, directly targeting organisations such as Mosley's Blackshirts.
- It also gave the police greater powers to place restrictions on marches and public demonstrations when there was a risk of serious disorder.

For many anti-fascists, this was evidence that Cable Street had achieved something important.

Yet historians still debate its significance. Was it Cable Street itself that weakened British fascism? Or was it the new law, combined with growing concern about Hitler and Nazi Germany, that really limited the BUF's future?

Mile End: The Violence Continues

[Presenter on location in Mile End]

I'm standing here in Mile End, just a short distance from Cable Street. Many people assume that the Battle ended antisemitism in East London. But events here remind us that the story was far from over. Just one week after Cable Street, violent anti-Jewish attacks broke out in parts of East London. Jewish homes and businesses were targeted; windows were smashed and tensions escalated across the area. These attacks were among the most serious outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence in Britain during the interwar period.

This challenges a common misunderstanding. Yes, Cable Street was an important victory against fascism., but it did not remove antisemitism from British society. Prejudice that had developed over many years could not be ended by a single protest, however dramatic that protest had been.

Looking Beyond Cable Street

[Images of refugees, 1930s Europe, and Britain before the Second World War]

The years after Cable Street raise even bigger questions. Throughout the late 1930s, antisemitism continued to exist in parts of British society. At the same time, Jewish refugees were trying to escape persecution in Nazi-controlled Europe. Britain accepted some refugees and later welcomed around 10,000 children through the Kindertransport programme, yet adult refugees faced severe restrictions, and many people believe that Britain could have done more.

Looking at these wider events helps us understand that opposing fascism in East London did not automatically end prejudice elsewhere.

Conclusion

[Modern footage of the mural, commemorations and East End streets]

So, did Cable Street defeat fascism? Not immediately.

Did it end antisemitism? No.

But that does not make it unimportant. Cable Street helped inspire new laws, demonstrated the power of collective action, and became a lasting symbol of resistance to hatred.

Perhaps the most important lesson is this: **Historical events rarely have simple consequences.** Cable Street was both a victory and the beginning of new challenges. Understanding that complexity helps us understand why it still matters today.

APPENDIX B

Student Worksheet

The Aftermath of the Battle: Fascism (Un)Defeated?

As instructed by your teacher, work through this worksheet in pairs, each person completing their own worksheet. Discuss each question before writing your answers.

Task 1

You are going to watch sections of an unedited film of a BUF march (Source A) taken by an (unknown) professional cameraperson, probably for a newsreel company. Whilst you are watching make notes under the questions below.

1. What types of people were on the march?
2. How would you describe the march?
3. Did you notice any protests?
4. Make a note of anything else interesting or unusual.
5. Can you learn anything about British attitudes towards Nazi Germany before the war?

Task 2

Look carefully at Source B, which describes a BUF march in East London on Wednesday October 14th, 1936. Use the source to answer the questions below. Remember to explain your answers.

1. Does this sound like a defeated movement?
2. Why might the BUF present events this way?
3. What audience is being targeted?

Task 3: The Pogrom of Mile End

One week after Cable Street, violent anti-Jewish attacks occurred in parts of East London. Jewish businesses and homes were targeted. Study Sources C – F and answer the questions.

1. What sorts of things happened?
2. Who was affected? How?
3. What does this suggest about the consequences of Cable Street?

Task 4: Historical Interpretations

By now, you will have realised that there are two possible interpretations of Cable Street; you are going to investigate these. You have been placed in either Group A or Group B. Group A will investigate Interpretation A, whilst students in Group B will investigate Interpretation B. Use your previous worksheets, the knowledge and understanding you have gained so far, and the Interpretation Information Sheet to complete the parts of the table below that seem most relevant to the Interpretation you are researching.

Interpretation A. Cable Street was a great anti-fascist victory. Evidence: the BUF march was prevented; there was a huge mobilisation of anti-fascists; it has become a symbol of solidarity.

Interpretation B. Cable Street has been exaggerated. Evidence: BUF activity continued; Antisemitism remained; Other factors, such as the Second World War, weakened fascism later.

Claim	Evidence	Your Conclusion
Cable Street stopped Mosley		
Fascism survived		
Antisemitism continued		
Cable Street is an important symbol		