



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2019 Volume II: Teaching about Race and Racism Across the Disciplines

Introduction

In the late 1920s, an organization called the American Eugenics Society, led by a prominent set of Yale faculty and administrators, regularly gathered at its headquarters at the corner of Church and Elm Street overlooking the New Haven Green. There, leading scholars from across the country would turn to the most advanced research findings in medicine, psychology, economics, sociology, and other disciplines to support their contention that involuntary sterilizations of the “unfit,” together with race-based immigration exclusions, were vitally necessary to safeguard the well-being of the nation and its white Anglo-Protestant heritage. Their research and findings were eagerly consumed and championed by colleagues in Nazi Germany, as well as the many dozens of hospitals, prisons and other state institutions where tens of thousands of Americans were involuntarily sterilized in the early 20th century.

The building housing the AES has long been demolished; their research and findings widely discredited. But the influence and legacy of their work in the academic disciplines has not. The influence and assumptions of intellectual white supremacy, with its focus on hierarchy, ordering, and the exaltation of some people above others, continues to shape the academic disciplines today, and thus much of what is taught and learned in the K-12 classroom. Celebrations of “racial colorblindness,” race neutrality, and even diversity have not displaced these inheritances.

Participants in the “Teaching about Race and Racism Across the Disciplines” seminar considered these legacies across a wide range of fields, including psychology, music studies, art, literature, sociology, educational studies, history, geography, and teacher education.

Perhaps more importantly, the seminar explored a set of pedagogical and conceptual tools and resources for Fellows to expand their capacity to teach about race and racism within their disciplines and objects of study. Moving beyond the more limited paradigms of racial colorblindness and diversity, the seminar introduced curricular strategies for centering examinations of race and racism in ways that are accessible to students from a broad range of backgrounds, and that work to advance the overall goals of the curriculum.

The fruits of hundreds of hours of collective labor by three middle and seven high school teachers resulted in the curriculum units that follow.

The first three curriculum units were produced by social science teachers based at a diverse magnet high school that already boasts an innovative and vibrant social justice curriculum.

Julia Miller’s unit, “Race and the Law: The Story of Housing and School Segregation in the United States,” designed for a Constitutional Law elective, uses a series of housing and school segregation cases to explore

the ways that racial power, domination, and resistance operate through the law. The unit draws on a wonderful array of carefully cultivated primary sources and cases rooted in innovative pedagogical approaches.

Nataliya Braginsky's "Latinx History" unit, developed to respond to a new statewide legislative mandate intended to expand high school offerings in Latinx and African American Studies, surveys a wide-range of Latinx history rooted within but extending beyond the boundaries of the United States. The unit pays particular attention to the themes of gender, culture, and imperialism, asking students to imagine new futures of intellectual and creative self-determination.

Leslie Blatteau's "Talking Back to Empire: Investigating International Issues and Human Rights with New Lenses," examines the history and impact on U. S. imperialism, centered on voices of resistance and transformation. Developed for a 12th grade International Issues seminar, it engages students in a provocative critique of the possibilities and limitations of liberal human rights discourses, while exploring other collective visions for interdependence and peace.

Next, John Laub's "Incorporating Native American History and Settler Colonialism in the AP United States History Course" is based on his many years of teaching Advanced Placement U. S. History, and his frustration with that curriculum's limited focus on indigenous history and settler colonialism. Laub augments this standard curriculum by turning to an inventive array of primary and secondary materials, drawing variously from sports, film, poetry, and traditional historical texts.

Daisha Brabham's unit "On Teaching Race in the Classroom: A Foundational Thematic Approach to Race & Law in the U. S. History Curriculum" similarly invites a reconceptualization of the dominant approaches to teaching U. S. History in high school, focusing on the particular interaction between race and the law. Taking up the specific cases of anti-miscegenation laws, Eugenics, and race-based immigration restrictions, it invites students to consider the ways that earlier historic regimes and formations determine contemporary politics and conditions.

Marco Cenabre's curriculum unit, "Identity, Hip Hop and Social Justice," puts rap music at the center of a sweeping exploration of social inequality, racial discrimination, and cultural imaginations of emancipation. Cenabre demonstrates that when we conceive of source materials and sites of intellectual formations broadly, new forms of knowledge creation become possible.

Robert Schwartz's "Decolonizing the Imagination: Teaching about Race Using Afrofuturism and Critical Race Theory" rethinks the terms on which "multicultural" literature is taught by centering Black speculative fiction and creative practice. Schwartz's unit turns to figures like novelist Octavia Butler, musician Sun Ra, and visual artist Jean Michel Basquiat to center the critical study of race within literary studies.

The final three units were produced by middle school language arts teachers.

Cheryl A. Canino begins her unit, "Using Afrofuturism to Re-Vision My Place in the World" with a poignant letter written directly to her students that describes her hopes for engaging their widest intellectual curiosities and dreams. Canino draws on a far-reaching set of primary texts and secondary sources to place imagination, justice, and anti-racism at the center of the middle school language arts curriculum.

Carolyn L. Streets's "An Approach to Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry" uses the widely taught 1976 novel by Mildred Taylor to introduce a creative set of teaching strategies, activities and content objectives that seek to

deepen students understanding of the historical, political and cultural context in which the narrative is set. Streets invites students to attend to issues of plot and character development through music and other forms of cultural production.

Finally, Sean Griffin's unit, "Teaching The Outsiders from a Critical Race Perspective" demonstrates that teachers can also turn to well-established texts to introduce students to the critical study of race. Griffin's unit asks students to consider S.E. Hinton's novel in light of histories of Eugenics, immigration restrictions, and social divisions and boundaries within the social category of whiteness.

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