



Mosaic America: Patterns of Racism

Curriculum Unit 94.04.03
by Ida Hickerson

A democratic society should recognize that every individual is unique, different from every other. Regardless of likenesses or differences, every man and woman is equal to every other in the rights to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” More than two centuries have passed since Thomas Jefferson wrote these words, but having them on paper does not mean that they are guaranteed. They have been contested and continue to challenge the courts and society to offer new interpretations that can expand or contract rights regardless of race, religion, or social background.

The curriculum will be used to motivate my seventh grade Urban-American students to gather, to organize and to analyze information about the principles of the American political system. In addition, it is my hope that the students will be able to recognize and positively affect racism. This will be accomplished by involving students in individual and group experiments set up to allow them to experience racism.

Students will be asked to develop a definition of racism, trace racism that is included in the Constitution and other state and/or local laws, and identify racism in various forms. Students will be encouraged to use research, critical thinking, organizational and vocabulary skills as they complete individual and cooperative group activities. At the completion of this unit, students will write an essay, compile a work portfolio, write and produce a skit. These activities will demonstrate what the students have learned and or experienced.

The students will be a heterogeneous group of seventh graders in four classes reading at or below grade level. The planned activities will allow all to invest their abilities as well as learn from peers.

Racism is the belief in the inherent superiority of a particular race. It denies the basic equality of humankind and correlates ability with physical composition. This often leads to the belief that some people (races) should be governed by others. Beliefs are learned from one’s cultural environment. Racism is an attitude that prompts hatred, prejudice, and discrimination.

The history of the United States is to a great extent a narrative of relations between people culturally and politically grouped into races. The experiences shared by Americans, whether natural born or naturalized, includes the major events of American history from exploration of the North American continent through the development of a plantation economy, its interference by growth of industrialization, and the massive dislocations of families and communities as the United States has changed from an agricultural society into an urbanized society. Thus, the United States enjoys the benefits of a diverse society, and the negative effects of not fulfilling the American creed of freedom and equality of opportunity. This was written as a part of the

Declaration of Independence.

Unfortunately, the land of opportunity, prosperity, and freedoms spelled out in the Constitution was not fully understood in colonial America or is it fully understood today. If every human being was born with fundamental rights that no government can legally alter or take away, then every human being is entitled by law to have his or her rights respected and protected. How is it that women were denied the privilege of voting? How is it that the courts and the government treated immigrants and other minority groups differently? Could it be that early Americans were blind to contradictions of that which many fought or died for during the American Revolution? Why did many Americans openly reject the principles of the United States government when non-whites were involved? The contradictions were left unsolved for decades and “liberty for all” was limited by skin color or race.

The Constitution, including the Bill of Rights, does not include the word race or woman. But it was well understood and practiced that there was a “race exception” to the Constitution, and it endured in more or less severe form for nearly two hundred years after the Constitution was ratified. There was little shelter for Indians, immigrants, slaves, and women offered in the framework of our country. Racism is an integral part of American culture.

Even so, not all Americans were tolerant of racism. During the American Revolution, some colonists spoke out against slavery. Up until 1860, many abolitionists, (Frederick Douglas, William Lloyd Garrison and John Brown) continued to ring the Bell for liberty for all.

Between 1831 and 1865, *The Liberator* , which was founded by William Lloyd Garrison, denounced slavery as a “compromise with tyranny”. Garrison was sued for libel, convicted, and fined, and imprisoned for his anti-slavery sentiments.

In 1857, the *Dred Scott Case* was decided by the United States Supreme Court. This ruling declared a federal law that prohibited slavery in American territories outside the South to be unconstitutional. This act of the government reaffirmed the “race exception” and explicitly added racism to our Constitution. If the Supreme Court was right, then the Constitution prohibited by Congress from abolishing slavery where it existed and where it did not exist. The opinion written by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney was racist. Taney wrote “Blacks are subordinate and inferior beings, who had been subjugated by the dominant race, and, whether emancipated or not, yet remained subject to their authority.” His opinion included not only slaves, but all Blacks throughout the United States. According to Taney, the Constitution permanently excluded Blacks from national citizenship and established them legally as less than fully human, as “subordinate and inferior beings”. According to chief Taney, “Blacks had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” If that is what the Constitution meant to the supreme court, then there is a form of “tyranny” against certain groups within American Society.

To counteract this decision of the *Dred Scott Case* , Frederick Douglas spoke of it as not true and not likely to last.

“The Supreme Court is not the only power in this world. We, the abolitionists and colored people, should meet this decision, unlooked for and monstrous as it appears, in a cheerful spirit. This very attempt to blot out forever the hopes of an enslaved people may be one necessary link in the chain of events preparatory to the complete overthrow of the whole slave system.

Frederick Douglas

In 1861, the Civil War began, therefore his belief was true.

Slavery was a defect of America that has never been completely corrected. Even with the additions of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, and the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, liberty and equality for many Blacks especially those from the Southern states (about 90% in those days), did not ring true. Almost immediately, white control was restored through law as designed to deny the fundamental rights to Black citizens. These laws were called “Black Codes”.

White supremacy again ruled. Blacks were not allowed to testify in court unless it was a case involving another Black. Certain jobs were not available to Blacks. In order to start a business, a special license was needed and was often denied to Blacks. This made it necessary for many Blacks to work in jobs with conditions similar to slavery. In some places, it was illegal to be unemployed. No work meant arrest and jail.

Some “Black Codes” denied Blacks the right to meet peacefully, live in certain areas, serve on juries, hold public office or vote. Harsh penalties for blacks were imposed, but whites were not likewise punished. (Death for raping a white woman, whipping and public pillory for violations of any of the codes).

Again, Congress stepped in to eliminate these injustices. In 1866, the first Civil Rights Act was passed that gave all Blacks citizenship; guaranteed equal legal rights to all citizens; made it illegal for states to pass laws treating people differently because of race or former slave status; and gave Federal officials the power to enforce the act. At first, the act was vetoed by President Andrew Johnson but Congress canceled his veto and it became law. In order to protect the Civil Rights Act of 1866, the Federal legislatures quickly added the Fourteenth Amendment. The Fifteenth Amendment added in 1870, reaffirmed the right to vote to all citizens regardless of race or former employment status.

Congress was active in passing other anti discrimination acts, setting up assistance for citizens (Freedmen’s Bureau), conducting a massive voter registration drive, and using the military to enforce these new laws. Congress was unable to rid the United States of institutionalized disadvantages or beliefs about people that are different in physical attributes (they are less than and deserve less than-racism).

In the mid 1870’s, violence against Blacks was widespread. Many were beaten at voting places, and elected officials were terrorized and or murdered. Those who were in Congress and favored equality for all citizens began to change their proactive attitude towards racial justice. Their control of Congress ended with the deal made by Republicans with the Democrats to remove all Federal troops from the South in exchange for the votes needed in the House of Representatives to elect Hays as President. Blacks were left to the mercy of Southern political powers to grant liberties of citizenship until 1957.

Not only did Congress turn its back on support of racial equality, so did the Supreme Court. In a 1876 ruling from an appeal case of three convicted murderers, the Supreme Court reversed its interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment. The states had authority to grant or deny the right to assemble. Thus the blacks that were killed did not suffer abridgment of their First Amendment right. In choosing to interpret the Fourteenth Amendment in that way, the court white-supremacists in denying blacks equal rights. This pushed blacks deeper into economic dependence which also made it difficult for them to defend their political and legal rights. Emancipation did not greatly alter the economic or political condition of the blacks.

Paired with the disfranchisement of the black voter was the institution of racial segregation. Not that this was new, for it existed in the ante-bellum North and to a lesser extent in southern cities before the Civil War. Even in Reconstruction, civil-rights legislation and laws providing for integrated education often went unenforced.

Legalization of segregation came in a series of state laws and judicial decision in the 1880's and 1890's that eroded the legal protection afforded Blacks by Reconstruction legislation. In 1896, the Supreme Court declared that railroad segregation did not violate the equal protection of the laws, so long as facilities for Blacks were "separate but equal." This was followed by many southern laws (Jim Crow laws) legalizing racial separation in all kinds of public and private institutions and facilities. Jim Crow, which had before been confined to southern cities, now became the norm of race relations throughout the South. Simultaneously, the United States was utilizing racist arguments to justify its conquest of the Philippines. Hence, it was very unlikely that northerners would object to the new laws. The period 1890-1910 witnessed not only segregation and discrimination, but the rise of lynching and failure of publicly-supported Black education in the South.

W. E .B. Du Bois said in 1897:

The history of the American Negro is the history of strife,—a longing to attain self-conscious manhood . . . (the American Negro), wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon . . .

For almost a century after slavery was abolished, America's black population subsisted under a system of controls. In the South, physical force was blatant and unabashed. The whim of a sheriff, an employer, even the driver of a bus, could hold black lives in thrall. In the North, intimidation and oppression were less explicit but nonetheless real. Between 1884 to 1914, there were at least 3,600 lynchings. Their right to vote was denied by state laws and unbridled violence. Their American Dream of equal opportunities was taken away.

No real change for Black Americans occurred until World War II. White Americans needed workers for the industries throughout the country and Black men were needed to serve in the armed forces. By 1950, racism had become less acceptable. The question of segregation of schools was brought before the Supreme Court in 1952 (*Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*). The case was not immediately decided. There were precedents upholding the legality of segregation and the illegality of unequal. On May 17, 1954, the Court decided that segregation was illegal.

Just as before, there was much resistance, some of it was violent, nearly all of it was planned and/or supported by elected officials. White-supremacist were enraged. But this time, blacks were hopeful and felt that if they asserted their rights, the Federal system (courts and laws) would respond.

College students in the South demanded through sit-ins to be treated equally, to be able to order a sandwich at a local lunch counter in North Carolina. This spurred other citizens to make demands of equal treatment.

Some of White America was not threatened by these activities. They felt safe with leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. preaching non-violence.

So until the mid 1960's, there was no obvious racial crisis. Violence erupted in Los Angeles, Detroit, and Newark. Black neighborhoods were bombarded with looting and burning. The nation observed while police and national guardsmen responding with gunfire indiscriminately. This changed the attitudes of many white America. They began to see blacks as not a group of Americans protesting for civil rights, but as a group wanting to impose themselves on society. Support for economic programs that could have genuinely change the material suffering of Blacks disappeared. As the 1970's rolled in, so did an increase in crime and an increase in worsening relations between the races.

From slavery to the present, the United States government and many white citizens have never completely

accepted Black Americans as citizens. The courts have contributed little, and often have taken away rights from Blacks with the exception of the 1954 decision and some of its progeny. Congress, too, has not given much assistance to insuring equality except for the Civil Rights act of the 1860's and the 1960's. If equality for all is to continue and be strengthened, than ideas and attitudes must be changed.

Lesson Plan One

Objective:

To make a work portfolio to keep unit activities and journal entries.

- I. Teacher defines collage. Using art textbook shows examples.
- II. Students are asked to cut out pictures of people that make up America from magazines. Using the pictures and a folder design outside of folder as a collage.
- III. Students are asked to write an essay describing their individual collage—entitled—Americans Are.

Lesson Plan Two

Objective:

To define racism, discrimination and prejudice.

- I. Teacher shows sketch of Dorie Miller. Reads poem—"Dorie Miller" by Gwendolyn Brooks.
- II. Teacher divides class into groups. Each group is given task of unscrambling words. Teacher helps one group to successfully complete task first. She then begins to praise them and gives them a special treat.
- III. Students are asked to break out of their groups and move back to their seats. Students will then be instructed to write their feelings about both activities in their individual portfolios.
- IV. Teacher will initiate a debriefing of Activity I and then Activity II.

NEGRO HERO

to suggest Dorie Miller

I had to kick their law into their teeth in order to save them.

However I have heard that sometimes you have to deal Devilishly with drowning men in order to swim them to shore.

Or they will haul themselves and you to the trash and the fish beneath.

(When I think of this, I do not worry about a few Chipped teeth).

It is good I gave glory, it is good I put gold on their name.

Or there would have been spikes in the afterward hands.

But let us speak only of my success and the pictures in the Caucasian dailies

As well as the Negro weeklies. For I am a gem.

(They are not concerned that it was hardly The Enemy my fight was against But them.)

It was a tall time. And of course my blood was Boiling about in my head and straining and howling and singing me on.

Of course I was rolled on wheels of my boy itch to get at the gun.

Of course all the delicate rehearsal shots of my childhood massed in mirage before me.

Of course I was child

And my first swallow of the liquor of battle bleeding black air dying and demon noise.

Made me wild.

It was kinder than that, though, and I showed like a banner my kindness.

I loved. And a man will guard when he loves.

Their white-gowned democracy was my fair lady. With her knife lying cold, straight, in the softness of her sweet-flowing sleeve.

But for the sake of the dear smiling mouth and the stuttered promise I toyed with my life.

I threw back!-I would not remember

Entirely the knife.

Still-am I good enough to die for them, is my blood bright enough to be spilled,

Was my constant back-question-are they clear

On this? Or do I intrude even now?

Am I clean enough to kill for them, do they wish me to kill

For them or is my place while death licks his lips and strides to them In the galley still?

(In a southern city a white man said

Indeed, I'd rather be dead;

Indeed I'd rather be shot in the head

Or ridden to waste on the back of a flood

Than saved by the drop of a black man's blood.)

Naturally, the important thing is, I helped to save them, them and a part of their democracy.

Even if I had to kick their law into their teeth in order to do that for them.

And I am feeling well and settled in myself because I believe it was a good job,

Despite this possible horror: That they might prefer the

Preservation of their law in all its sick dignity and their knives

To the continuation of their creed And their lives.

(From Selected Poems by Gwendolyn Brooks)

Lesson Plan Three

Objective:

To analyze landmark cases of the Supreme Court that effect the rights of minorities.

I. Teacher gives "mini" lecture on the three branches of the Federal government.

II. Teacher demonstrates using the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) and the Plessy v. Ferguson (1896). Supreme Court cases how to analyze the court cases.

Case Name (Date)

Background

Possible Decisions

Rights Effected

Decision of Court/Reason

Dissenting Opinion/Reason

III. Students are to do research in Media Center and locate four other landmark cases that directly effected the rights of minorities positively and negatively.

Lesson Plan Four

Objective:

To become familiar with the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

I. Show video - "Making of the Constitution".

II. Debrief the video.

III. Using diagramming, explain the parts of the constitution and their purposes.

IV. Give each student a copy of the Constitution and the Amendments. Divide class into groups. Assign group to choose three of the Amendments that they would not give up and prepare oral explanation. Using chalkboard record choices, and allow each group to present oral explanations. Following all explanations, tell class they must come to a "whole class" decision on the three most important amendments.

V. Individually, draw pictures to illustrate all twenty-six amendments. Display for class viewing.

VI. Teacher creates ten scenarios that either takes away a citizen's right or insures the citizen of his/her right. Student using copy of the Amendments identifies which amendment the right is included.

Video Listings

The Asianization of America . Films for the Humanities, Princeton, New Jersey, 1993. This twenty-six minutes of color video examines the role of Asian Americans since the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act. It identifies stereo types and feelings non Asian Americans exhibit to the nation's fastest growing racial group.

Black and White America . films for the humanities, Princeton, New Jersey, 1993. Color video that tells the stories of five students, two Black, two White, and one of a mixed-race marriage that show how they negotiate their lives based on what they feel about their own race and that of others. During the twenty-six minutes of the program, none of them escape racism.

Kids and Race: Working It Out . Films for the Humanities, Princeton, New Jersey, 1993.

This color program shows a promising approach to racism. In fifty-two minutes, a weekend encounter group of nine young people from varied backgrounds explore stereotypes and prejudice.

Pockets of Hate . Films for the Humanities. Princeton, New Jersey, 1993.

A color video program that examines racially motivated crimes and identifies where young people are picking up racist attitudes. Viewing times takes twenty-six minutes.

Poor Whites, Poor Blacks, and Integration . Films for the Humanities, Princeton, New Jersey, 1993.

Specially adapted Phil Donahue show used as a forum for a debate between the Ku Klux Klan and Black activists. The twenty-eight minutes of color video shows the ire of both groups on force integration.

Racism and Anti-Racism . Films for the Humanities, Princeton, New Jersey, 1993.

This program looks at issues that have stirred the education establishment . . . Should the curriculum have a multicultural base? What is the role and what are the rights of parents in the choice of what their children are taught in school? The color video is fifty-eight minutes in length.

Racism in America . Films for the Humanities, Princeton, New Jersey, 1993.

This color video looks at how a community successfully responded to its racial problems. In twenty-six minutes the program examines bigotry and racially motivated acts of violence and vandalism.

The Issue is Race . Time Magazine, New York, New York, 1993.

Two-hour color program combining a panel discussion and town hall format with documentary video segments promoting discussion of racial problems and policy choices that face the United States. The discussion focuses on whether race relations have improved or degenerated.

What Price Equality : Films for the Humanities, Princeton, New Jersey, 1993.

Color video program that focuses on Yonkers, New York where a federal court ruled that the city and school district violated the Constitution and denied equal protection under the law by intentionally discrimination against minorities in housing and schools. Viewing time takes fifty-six minutes.

Bibliography for Teachers

Altendory, Alan and Theresa. *Isms* . Mustang Publishing Company, Memphis, Tennessee, 1991.

A compendium of concepts, doctrines, traits, and beliefs from ableism to zygodactylism.

Bishop, Hillman and Hendel, Samuel. *Basic Issues of Democracy* . Meredith Publishing Company, New York, New York, 1965.

An overview of the problems facing democracy.

Calhoun, John Caldwell, *A Disquisition on Government* . Liberal Arts Press, Inc., New York, New York, 1953.

A detailed discussion of the functions of government on the United States inclusive of the poser of controlling the nation.

Edwards, Adrey and Polite, Craig K. *Children of the Dream: The Psychology of Black Success* . Doubleday Publishers, New York, New York, 1992.

The authors focus on professional Blacks to find out what particular strength and skills have enabled them to overcome the setbacks of racism.

Ford, Clyde W. *We Can All Get Along* . Dell Publishing Group. Inc., New York, New York, 1994.

An informative guide of how working individually or with others, one can truly help to end racism.

Fuch, Lawrence, *The American Kaleidoscope: Race, Ethnicity and the Civic Culture* . 1990

Discusses the constant changes of the cultures, racial and ethnic groups in the United States.

Grunsell, Angela. *Racism* . Gloucester Press, New York, New York, 1991.

An explanation of racism in the United States, where the responsibility for it lies and the problems that surround it.

Kozol, Jonathan. *Savage Inequalities* . Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, New York, 1991.

Documentation of the differences in urban schools and suburban schools in the United States.

Meltzer, Milton. *The Bill of Rights* . Thomas Crowell Junior Books, New York, 1990.

Discusses the first ten amendments, the concepts on which they were based, and the interpretations of them.

Rowan, Carl T. *Dream Makers, Dream Breakers: The World of Justice*. Thurgood Marshall. Little, Brown, and Company, Massachusetts, 1993.

A narrative that eloquently describes Thurgood Marshall as a civil rights advocate for all.

Scholastic Magazine. *What You Should Know About Democracy—and Why?* Four Winds Press, New York, New York, 1964.

Sgroi, Peter. *Living constitution: Landmark Supreme Court Decisions* . Simon and Schuster, Inc., New York, New York, 1987.

Discusses landmark Supreme Court cases, addressing such issues as desegregation of schools and the Miranda case.

Bibliography for Students

Aaron Henry. *I Had a Hammer* . Harper Collins, New York, New York, 1991.

An autobiography and also a sociopolitical commentary on racism in baseball and in the American Society. The book concentrates on his baseball career.

Bar-Lev, Geoffrey and Sakkal, Joyce. *Jewish Americans Struggle for Equality* . Rourke Corporation, Inc., Vero Beach Florida, 1992.

Discusses the struggle of Jews to secure equal rights in the United States.

Dear, Ray. *Young. Black Eagle Child* . Crown Publishers, 1990. Native American poet tells extraordinary, tragic, and comic story stories that show his development as an artist.

Garvey, J. "Alone With Our Rights." *Commonwealth* , October 25, 1991, Volume 118, Issue 18, p. 599.

Compares American and European culture by the way racism is handled.

Gonzalez, D. "Racism", *New York Times* , January 11, 1992, Volume 144, Issue 48845, p. 1.

Tells of a 12 year old Hispanic boy being attacked by three white teenagers on his way to school in the Bronx.

Herda, D.J. *Ethnic America* . The Millbrook Press, Brookfield, Connecticut, 1991.

Presents an overview of the history and contributions of major ethnic groups that shaped America yesterday and continue to change the American scene today. Discusses the social, economic, and political problems faced by immigrant groups as they settled in the United States.

Ingalls, Robert P. Hoods, *The Story of the Ku Klux Klan* . Longman Canada Limited, Toronto, Canada, 1979.

A history of the mysterious hooded organization from its beginnings during Reconstruction after the Civil War.

Jensen, Jeffrey. *Hispanic Americans Struggle for Equality* . Rourke Corporation, Inc., Vero Beach, Florida, 1992.

Identifies discrimination and discusses how Hispanic Americans have struggled for their civil rights.

Jones, Claire, *The Chinese in America* . Lerner Publications Company, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1972.

Discusses reasons for immigration of the Chinese to the United States, their problems here, and their contributions to American life.

Larsen, Ronald J., *The Puerto Ricans in America* . Lerner Publications Company, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1973.

A brief history of Puerto Rico, Puerto Rican Immigration to the mainland, and the individual contributions of Puerto Ricans to American life and culture.

Marshall, Paula. *Daughters* .

A powerful and evocative story of a young woman confronting the barriers to freedom that a Brooklyn born American with West Indian roots face in the United States.

Mizzell, Linda. *Think About Racism* .

Discusses racism in the United States and problems faced by minorities.

Monroe, S., and Gibbs, N. "Shades of Differences". *Time* , November 18, 1991, Volume 138, Issue 20, p. 66.

Summarized the impact ethnic diversity is having on California, where already there is no racial majority in either Los Angeles city or county.

Newman, M. "Victim of Bias Attack." *New York Times* , January 9, 1992, Volume 141. Issue 48840, p. 1.

Comments on the attack made on 14 year old Black youth and his sister by four young White men who sprayed them with white shoe polish and yelled racial epithets.

Parker, B., and Lida, D. "Pride From Prejudice." *Metropolitan Home* , February, 1992, volume 24, Issue 2, p. 38.

Studies the Black memorabilia collection of Lowery Sims, associate curator of 20th Century Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, why she collects the seemingly negative images of African-Americans.

Pinchot, Jane. *The Mexicans in America* . Lerner Publications Company, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1973.

A brief history of the Mexicans in the United States—their life in the American southwest before statehood, the United States acquisition of their land, and the individual contributions of Mexicans to American life.

Stark, E. "The Myth of Black Violence." *USA Today* . January, 1992, volume 120. Issue 2560, p. 32.

Investigates the media stereotypes of Blacks as violence prone; how the police and the court system perpetuate the false view; why the image of a violent Black underclass is based on flawed statistics; negative and tragic consequences for Blacks.

Wilson, Anna. *African Americans Struggle for Equality* . Rourke Corporation, Inc., Vero Beach, Florida, 1992.

Identifies discrimination and discusses the struggle of African Americans for equality in education, employment, and other areas of life.

Zuckerman, M.B. "Black and White in America". *US News & World Report* , October 28, 1991, Volume III, Issue 18, p. 92.

An editorial that contends how charges of racism have vastly diminished force in America; most Whites and a growing number of Blacks no longer maintain that racism is the main reason for the lack of Black progress; why a majority of the American public feel that high cost programs designed to benefit minorities have not worked; what is being blamed for the nations crime wave.

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