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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1998 Volume I: The Use and Abuse of History in Film and Video

Teaching Ethnicity and Race through Films

Guide for Curriculum Unit 98.01.08
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Teaching Ethnicity and Race Through Films is designed to complement multicultural curricula on the high school level, although most of the films discussed in this unit could be shown to middle school students.

The author of this unit uses these films in a one semester course called ethnohistory. The films provide cultural and familial information which is missing from the course's main text - Thomas Sowell's controversial classic *Ethnic America* (1981). Dr. Sowell is an economist with strong scholarly interests in both history and sociology. Thus his text and the films fit together to provide a comprehensive view of ethnicity and race.

After discussing both the use of films in social studies classrooms and *Ethnic America*, this unit presents movie reviews and discussion questions for five films about ethnicity: "Far and Away" (Irish-Americans), "Avalon" (Jewish-Americans), "A Bronx Tale" (Italian-Americans), "The Long Walk Home" (African-Americans), and "Mi Familia" (Mexican-Americans). Short reviews of sixteen films about race and race relations follow. These films are listed in descending order of quality from the author's perspective. The unit concludes with a brief discussion of inaccuracies and misimpressions in Hollywood films.

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