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Our Understanding of the Meaning of Race: A Sociological Critical Lens

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Introduction

"In the End, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." Martin Luther King

The fall of 1978 brought some real changes to my world. Growing up in the suburbs of Newark, Delaware, I lived with my mother, father, and younger sister in a three bedroom pink house with brown shutters and a carport. My father worked second shift at a local car factory so we rarely saw him. My mother had recently returned to work as a secretary. Instead of home-sewn clothes we finally were able to purchase shirts and jeans at the local JC Penney's. That was a big deal! I also had to take on more responsibility around the home – cleaning, cooking, and taking care of my sister. Everyone in our white, blue-collar neighborhood had the same type of life – swimming in the pool a few doors down during the summers, playing outside until dark, and keeping the doors unlocked. My sister, friends, and I would walk to school together where the middle and elementary schools were/are still connected. We would leisurely travel down West Stephens Drive passing the neighbors' houses, up the long and tall hill that we would sleigh down in the winters and then across the field where baseball teams would play during the spring. For eight years I had made that walk to schools I adored with teachers who instilled a love of learning that I still have today. As I entered my eighth grade year, unbeknownst to me, legal matters were being dealt with in our state capital courtroom regarding who attended what schools. That September, desegregation had finally come to our school more than twenty years after the initial Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

I look back on that time and think about how I have no memories of anyone in or outside of school talking about or preparing me for what would be a different type of school year – a year in which I would not attend school with my sister, a year that there would be African-Americans students bused to our school. My sister did not come to my middle school. As a sixth grader, her new feeder pattern included the same 40-minute bus ride as the Wilmington students, except in the opposite direction. Students living in Newark in grades four through six all had to do this while eighth through twelfth grade students living in Wilmington came out to Newark. This practice continues today for those who are not enrolled in one of the multiple private or the growing number of choice schools. Although I was immersed into this new situation, I did not really understand what was happening.

Reflecting on this moment in time, after having read various texts and documents regarding African-American

history as well as the concept of race, and sitting in seminar listening to in-depth conversations and content, I realize now that the silence of that experience was what made the difference – the difference in not understanding. Although years have gone by and today's students' perspectives may be a bit different, I believe that my unit can be a vehicle for providing a forum for conversations that will allow for the opportunity for understanding.

Rationale

Conrad Schools of Science (CSS) is a school completing its transition, changing into a science/biotechnology magnet school serving students in grades 6 – 12. This past year it housed all of these grades making the student population close to 1000. It is considered an urban school, situated on the outskirts of the most populated city in the state of Delaware. CSS students come from all over our state's largest county. The school's increasing popularity is obvious as many families complete the *Choice* application process seeking admission to our school. At the high school level, students can choose to focus on a variety of learning "strands" such as biotechnology, nursing, and veterinary science. Additionally, a variety of Advanced Placement (AP) courses are offered as well as three courses that are in conjunction with our local community college. I am the teacher of one of these courses, *Sociology*. Two years ago in the spring, when our principal mentioned that our school would offer its second community college course, *Sociology*, I was unable to contain my excitement, practically yelling out with joy. Although I already had a very diverse teaching schedule, I began to think about what I could do with this type of course. After all, sociology is my undergraduate degree. Wouldn't I be a perfect candidate? I taught our school's Psychology course...this fit perfectly – psychology/self and sociology/society. And so I began my journey to teach this course. A course that I had experience with – twenty years ago!

Twenty years is a long time! There was a lot to catch up on when it came to content area information – there still is – which is the primary reason why I am participating in this seminar and creating a unit specifically designed for my students. Working in conjunction with the local community college, I must follow their Collegewide Core Course (CCC) Performance Objectives. For this particular unit on race, the targeted objective is *toanalyze social stratification and the causes and consequences of classifying people by race, ethnicity, and gender.* The accompanying textbook sums up race and ethnicity in thirty-three pages. This year, when teaching this material, I felt at a loss. I wanted to be certain that I presented information in an appropriate manner – making sure that my students would not walk away thinking about race as just black and white – that, in reality, the topic was much, much deeper. I felt anxious. As a caretaker, a community builder in the classroom, it is important to me that students feel comfortable. I know this helps with the learning process – if students feel supported and safe they are more willing to take chances in their learning. This is essential to our distance learning class since we are in two different locations (our school and a sister school in our district) and trying to forge relationships and a sense of community via cameras across distances. I had spent the entire year trying to have students think from a sociologist's point of view and not a personal one. How could I convey the importance of this issue without it becoming a shouting match about their personal feelings and misconceptions?

I write "misconceptions" because I ascertained from the students' written and oral comments at the beginning of the unit that they were unaware of many things including: what is ethnicity versus race, the differences between prejudice and discrimination, and the meaning of affirmative action. When I teach this unit in the

future I want to do better; I want to be able to deliver information so that students can fully comprehend the term social stratification as it will also serve them to grasp class and gender issues as well. Additionally, my hope is that they will realize that race is not biologically based but socially constructed.

In this proposed unit, students will focus on the guiding questions: ***What is the meaning of race for ourselves, others, and our society? What are the causes and consequences of classifying people by race?*** This particular unit is designed for high school juniors and seniors who choose to take this social sciences course as an elective. Due to scheduling requirements, most of them tend to be seniors who have already met their graduation requirements. These students must complete and pass a basic literacy test given by the local community college to gain entrance. Additionally, their families must pay a tuition fee, albeit reduced. This ensures if they complete the work and pass with a predetermined grade average, they will receive community college credit. This past year there were a total of fourteen students who completed the course – nine at my school and five at the sister school site to which this course is broadcast. These students varied in all aspects – race, ethnicity, work ethic, and skills set. Although I have been a teacher for seventeen years, this was only the fourth year that I have worked with high school students and the first one teaching in a distance learning laboratory. My previous teaching experience was limited to middle school English Language Learners (ELLs) students. (I still work with these students. They constitute about one-third of my teaching load.) Working with the high school students challenges me to relate to students whose needs are different as young adults in the mainstream population and to create lessons that are more rigorous in content since this is also a community college course.

The textbook that we use is divided into modules with each topic highlighted by a world example. The section on *Race and Ethnicity* focuses on the United States. I was excited to learn that the Yale National Initiative (YNI) would offer a summer seminar entitled Narratives of Citizenship and Race since Emancipation led by Yale professor, Jonathan Holloway. During the YNI 2012 Virtual Open House, he stated that he would focus on "what has race meant to the development of America." This aligns perfectly with the textbook module**.** I believe that the use of the African American experience as a model will help students to investigate the definition/meaning of race. Through the reading of historical documents and fictional pieces as well as our textbook, students will see how "the story" helps to shape our country's make-up from a sociological viewpoint. Holloway posed a few questions that made me begin to think about the "story" of race. He stated, "How do people tell the stories of who they are? What are the narratives of history?" These questions will be added to the unit's guiding questions as part of the *personal* perspective that is essential to understanding race and ethnicity.

Additionally, I want students to participate in an authentic project to capture their attention, to engage them in the curriculum and to have them act as true sociologists. After investigating the definition/meaning of race in the sociological literature, my initial thought was that since this is a distance learning course and students are in two different schools, students would be able to create and administer a survey about students' attitudes toward ethnic and racial matters. In fact, in my readings thus far, I have discovered a *Social Distance Scale* that was created by Emory S. Bogardus. This scale represents how individuals view different types of social relationships. Since students most likely have had no experience with creating surveys nor is this an investigative course regarding quantitative or qualitative data, it makes more sense for them to use this scale in their investigative work. The important part is for them to focus on the evidence acquired about racial/ethnic matters not the creation of a survey. Additionally, they would be able to interview students at both sites. We would be able to compare and contrast the data acquired and present this information in a formal manner as they would be modeling the research of a sociologist.

Content

Sociological Perspectives

My students arrive to our class with little to no prior knowledge about most of the content that we will delve into throughout the year. I always find myself debating whether or not to go into some really juicy topic first to capture their attention – leaving them wanting more – with the standard introduction to the somewhat dry foundation of knowledge that they will need to know to make sense of future topics. Yes, of course – fortunately or unfortunately – the foundational knowledge wins out! However, I do appreciate how the textbook uses relevant, real-life examples to help students understand this better, making the content less dry and more meaningful at the same time. Information about the foundation is relevant to a student's understanding and will be applied to the concept of race.

There are three sociological perspectives that guide our studies throughout the year: Functionalist, Conflict, and the Symbolic Interactionist. These theories "offer a set of guiding questions and key concepts that address how societies operate and how people relate to one another." [1] These are viewed as a framework to be able to interpret a particular issue or event (in this case, race). Our year-long study of sociology begins with building a strong understanding of these perspectives so that students will be able to apply these theoretical perspectives to the many societal topics we cover such as gender, family, education, and politics. Race is one of our topics and I want my students to be able to describe this concept according to the sociological perspectives.

The functionalist theory highlights "how the 'parts' of society contribute in expected and unexpected ways to social order and stability and to social disorder and instability." [2] The central question regarding this theory is, "How do the parts of society contribute to social order/disorder and stability/instability?" [3] The idea here is that society is made up of many different parts that all contribute to its functioning – positively or negatively. Our textbook relates this theory to that of a human body – each body part has an individual function but they all are interrelated and interdependent. This is just like society. Each part, whether it is a law or a custom, helps society function. [4] Members of society try to reach "social consensus or cohesion" in which societal members work towards what is best for society. [5] This concept is demonstrated by Emile Durkheim who noted that there were two types of solidarity within a society – mechanical (seen in simple societies where people are bound together by the same values, beliefs, and common work) and organic (evident in more complex societies such as today's metropolitan cities like Los Angeles, Beijing, and Buenos Aires in which people are interdependent as their workload is different). The sociologist Robert Merton further detailed the **overall effect** of "the parts on society, not just its contribution to order and stability" [6] as the manifest functions (intended effects), latent functions (unintended effects), dysfunctions (disruptive consequence), and manifest dysfunctions (anticipated disruptions). Students must be aware that within this perspective there is a balance of the positive and negative effects and that it defends the existing social arrangements.

Viewing race from this perspective, we can see that it serves various functions. It maintains the subordinate group's status allowing for the dominant group to have more power. It also provides a "moral justification" for the dominant group's power and relieves it of the responsibility to address the problems/needs of the subordinate group. Additionally, it discourages the questioning of the system keeping the subordinate group in a lowly position and, in turn, supports "the existing order." This institution has helped to shape the nation's economic, political, social, and cultural structures the African American experience in addition to our country's

pathway.

According to Richard T. Schaefer the Conflict Perspective "focuses on conflict over scarce and valued resources and the strategies dominant groups use to create and protect social arrangements that give them an advantage over subordinate groups." [7] The principal question of this perspective is, "*Who benefits from a particular social pattern or arrangement, and at whose expense*?" [8] This perspective focuses on the inevitable conflicts of all types and was born form Karl Marx's work on class struggle. His economic focus spoke to society's two groups—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—and their connection to the means of production. The bourgeoisie consists of the group that is closest to the means of production, owning and being in charge of land, labor, machinery, etc. while the proletariat comprises the group that owns nothing except for the labor that it provides. The bourgeoisie exploit the proletariat giving them only a fraction of the profit that they make for their labor. Obviously, in societies there are those who have or who secure resources while others do not. The subsequent struggle over resources leads to the determination of who are members of the dominant and subordinate groups. Dominant group members maintain their interests through a variety of means. In the case of slavery, southern plantation owners could be considered the "bourgeoisie" as they owned the land, and the slaves (as the laborers) controlling all components of the "means of production." These owners "exploited" the slaves treating them as property not as human beings. They controlled them in many ways such as determining their work and living conditions, not enabling them to decide on their personal relationships, selling and punishing them at will.

From this perspective, the dominant and subordinate groups struggle due to the inequities in resources and power. The dominant group criticizes the subordinate group for "its low status - placing blame on the minority instead of holding society responsible." [9] Residential segregation is one example of the inequities of resources in that it reduces options for housing, schools, shopping, and medical care. Additionally, the subordinate group members will often need to travel farther to obtain certain services. This is more costly and time-consuming for the subordinate group members. [10] This echoes what Holloway stated in seminar, that it is more expensive to be impoverished.

The third perspective, Symbolic Interactionist, was introduced in the 1920s by sociologist George H. Mead. It centers on the question "*How do involved parties experience, interpret, influence, and respond to what they and others are doing while interacting*?" [11] To answer this question, sociologists focus on the interactions of people, paying attention to their use of their reflexive thinking. For example, when people are interacting with others sociologists would pay close attention to the symbols used to express themselves, interpreting these using their own prior knowledge about these symbols. [12] People make meaning of their personal interactions by using what they already know. From this perspective, we can see that our interpretation of "symbols" can be attributed to the labeling of people.

Race

In my elementary attempt to teach the concept of race, I first asked students to describe race in 200 words or less. I found their answers to be very intriguing. Comments such as, "*Race dictates how society views a person*"; "*Race is a barrier*"; "*It keeps some people from things that they want to accomplish*"; "*Most people are more than one race but consider themselves just one because that is what you see*" indicated that although my students' ideas already covered much of our textbook's content, they needed assistance with finding the sociological language associated with race. I had a hard time determining what to do with these comments due to my own fear. This was first time that I was teaching a racially heterogeneous group and was concerned that I would offend someone or that one of the students would say something to offend another in

our class. I remained silent much like the adults in my life did when desegregation came to my school. In my research and conversations with other Fellows, I came to think that I needed a simple organizational structure for covering this complicated topic, to help students make sense of the complicated information and make it easier for me to break the silence. So, after building the understanding of the sociological perspectives, I want to introduce race (via the perspectives) by organizing the subject into three categories: race classification, racial attitudes, and racial actions.

Elizabeth Higginbotham and Margaret L. Andersen state that, "Sociologists define a race as a group that is treated as distinct in society because of certain perceived characteristics that have been defined as signifying superiority or inferiority." [13] I want my students to look at this as an overarching view of the term race. Portions of it can be seen within the six definitions of race that emerged from the information that I researched: biological, ethnic groups, social class, racial formation, self-definition, and social construction. I include these because I believe students need to understand each one to comprehend the "big" picture of the meaning of race. One, race as a *biological category*, we have been conditioned to put people into racial categories by their physical characteristics such as skin color and hair texture, among others. [14] These do play a part in how people define race themselves. This is because the human variability between what are regarded in society as "'racial groups' occurs mostly within racial groups rather than between them." [15] I imagine that most students will likely associate with this definition as it is what they "see." However, I will challenge them on this idea in two preliminary activities in which they will need to "classify" people into races.

In some cases, *ethnic groups* have become racialized in that the members share a common culture. Jewish people are an example of a racialized ethnic group as they share a common religion. This second definition will help me to clarify the distinct differences between the term race and ethnicity.

S*ocial class or prestige rank* is also used as defining race. For example, in Brazil, which has a saying, "Money whitens," [16] people who are well-dressed, have a desirable occupation, or money, are considered to be more white.

The"*Racial formation*" of society's institutions like the educational, state and federal, legal, and criminal systems, all control how a race is defined/who is classified within a particular race. [17] We will be viewing a film, *Skin*, that demonstrates the classification of race. This film is based on a true story about two white Afrikaner shopkeepers living in a remote area of South Africa have a baby girl who appears black. They raise her white but the larger community does not accept her. Over time she is classified and re-classified as white, black, white and lastly, black which she chooses for herself. This is also seen in the United States' history in regard to the one-drop rule passed in the twentieth century that assigned someone to the group with lower status, of any African ancestry. This rule supports the institution of slavery and Jim Crow laws "Because blacks are defined according to the one-drop rule, they are a socially constructed category in which there is wide variation in racial traits and therefore not a race group in the scientific sense. However, because that category has a definite status position in the society it has become a self-conscious social group with an ethnic identity." [18]

Self-definition is another way in which one could be defined; a person determines what he or she calls him/herself. "The point is that there is more to race than one's personal definition even as applied to one's own self. It may sound odd to quarrel with a person about what they choose to call themselves racially. But such is the reality of race in the United States – and most other countries as well: It is not totally up to the person alone!" [19]

Lastly, the definition upon which I want my students to focus: *social construction* wherein race is defined through human interactions in which people learn "to attribute certain characteristics to people who are classified into a racial category." [20] Higginbotham and Andersen state, "The actual meaning of race lies not in people's physical characteristics, but in the historical treatment of different groups and the significance that society gives to what is believed to differentiate so-called racial groups. In other words, what is important about race is not biological difference, but the different ways groups of people have been treated in society." [21] Students will be introduced to this information in the first lesson. Social construction of race varies between societies and over time. It is difficult to categorize some people as they do not "fit" into the classification categories. We see this in our society when it comes to people who are multi-racial. Only recently the US Census has begun to include a multi-racial category. Through the documents they will read and the history they already know and that we will build on, students will begin to understand this important concept.

Minority Groups/Minority Group Status and Stratification (Subordinate Groups)

Students need a strong foundation in the understanding of what constitutes minority groups. In this unit, it will aid them in answering the guiding question: What are the causes and consequences of classifying people by race? A subordinate group or minority group means that the group members have "less control or power over their own lives than do the members of a dominant or majority group." [22] These groups are not based on size (number of people) but their inabilities to control resources. There are five characteristics that are common to minority groups including: "unequal treatment, distinguishing physical or cultural traits, involuntary membership, awareness of subordination, and in-group marriage." [23] Minority groups/group members are "systematically excluded (whether consciously or unconsciously) from full participation in society and denied equal access to positions of power, prestige, and wealth." [24] Minority group members are unable to move around freely within society.

Three processes are involved in minority group formation: migration, annexation, and colonialism. My students learn at an early age that migration is a form of movement – from one place to another to live. Words such as emigration (leaving one's country for another) and immigration (coming to a new country to live) may be necessary to review. The most important point to this process is that there are many reasons (push/pull factors) for the movement. Importantly, it is not always a voluntary process as is evident in the African American experience model we will focus on in our studies. We know that these peoples were captured, transported, and sold against their will to the Americas to be part of a labor force. This automatically put them into a subordinate role. Second, annexation is the process in which nations acquire new lands, usually through war, that lead those living there to become a minority even though their population numbers may be greater than those who have acquired the land. The dominant group works to "suppress the language and culture." [25] Lastly, colonialism is the major process in the creation of subordinate groups. In this process, a foreign power maintains dominance of all aspects, political, social, economic, and cultural over an area for an extended time period. [26] It is different from annexation as there is no type of assimilation; instead there is a separation of the peoples.

Outcomes of being a minority group include: extermination (elimination), expulsion (forced to leave), secession (forms a new nation or leaves to become part of another nation), segregation (physical separation), fusion (both groups combine to form a new group), and assimilation (subordinate group takes on the characteristics of the dominant group). [27] When looking at African American history, one can see that a few of these are relevant. W.E.B. Du Bois, a prominent sociologist and author, first supported assimilation, stating that if blacks wanted to claim this citizenship they would need to give up something. He later retracted this

when he found out that the black soldiers fighting under the French flag were first treated as citizens and then were not due to the United States government intervention. The US government informed the French that this type of behavior was not culturally appropriate. On the other hand, Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican politician, addressed secession by speaking to the idea for a separate society. He founded the Black Star Line hoping to aid in an African Disapora in which blacks would return to their African homelands. However, his vision was never realized.

Prejudice and Discrimination

From the onset I had the idea of how this unit could or would be structured via the sociological perspectives. Later, I thought to include my own personal experience regarding segregation and the silence that surrounded it. I messaged friends and had them write about their own perspectives as well. Their thoughts echoed mine. Then, I thought about the conversations that I have had with a school colleague and close friend. He had told me about a few experiences growing up as a young African American that stood out in his mind such as being confused when he was called a nigger in the new school he attended in the fourth grade or how his friend's brother mentioned that there would be a lot of chicken bones on the inner city field they were heading towards to play a football game. When he told me of these two stories, it was with matter-of-factness that I had a difficulty with. Again, this came up during our seminar when I told the Fellows about a recent communication with this same friend who wrote about two additional incidents in our own school in which others had made comments regarding his physical features and his "peoples'" adversity to water. Do I remain silent at this time? Reflecting on Martin Luther King's words at the beginning of this unit, I ask myself, as his friend, what will he remember about me? Maybe the point here is that when I teach about prejudice and discrimination it is not just the information but the idea of action as well.

When I first describe the terms "prejudice" and "discrimination" with my students, I am certain to speak to the main idea that prejudice is a thought while discrimination is an action. This is a simplified explanation but makes it easier for them to wrap their heads around these terms. Prejudice is the tendency to think negatively about a particular group of people – a type of pre-judgment. It is based on the emotions or feelings that are directed towards one group of people. It becomes emotional as it is generalized to the entire group without experience or knowledge of the group. Sociologists believe that there are two dimensions of pre-judgment: cognitive and affective. The cognitive dimension is comprised of stereotypes of the characteristics of a particular group. Exaggerative in nature, they are usually "overly simplistic, and resistant to disproof." [28] Many times, people who are extremely prejudiced will tend to focus on those exaggerated characteristics, looking only for information to confirm their beliefs. If people are faced with individuals who do not fit the stereotype they believe that person is an exception. Also, stereotypes are perpetuated when individuals attribute a particular characteristic as an "innate flaw" in the minority member while it would be considered a "shortcoming" in the dominant group member. [29]

The affective dimension relates to the emotional component of prejudice: scapegoat hypothesis, the theory of the authoritarian, and exploitation are included in this dimension. The scapegoat hypothesis emphasizes the frustration and anger (emotions) that one might feel and take out on a substitute target, not against the object or person that actually caused their frustration." [30] Minority groups are excellent targets as they have fewer resources and may be unable to protect themselves. "Hovland and Sears (1940) argued that the rate of lynching of African Americans in the South between 1882 and 1930 was correlated with fluctuations in cotton prices. Lynching generally increased during hard times when the price of cotton was low and (presumably) frustrations were more widespread." [31] The Authoritarian Personality theory is another way in which the development of prejudice may be explained. In this theory, prejudice stems from early childhood and may be

"produced by stern, highly punitive styles of parenting." [32] Children love their parents but feel hostility and anger towards them. So, instead of taking it out on their parents they "scapegoat" their fear and anger by expressing these emotions as prejudice against minority groups. Thus, prejudice provides people with authoritarian personalities a way of coping with their conflicted feelings for their parents." [33] A third theory, exploitation, connects to Karl Marx's idea of limited resources and the conflict that ensues between the dominant and subordinate groups for these resources. The dominant group will exploit the subordinate group to ensure its superior status. [34]

Above all, discrimination is an action – not a thought. It is "the denial of opportunities and equal rights to individual and group because of prejudice or for other arbitrary reasons." [35] In sociological terms, prejudice exists because someone (or group) gains from it. Groups are always struggling over controlling and/or having resources. The Marxist analysis of society explains that elites control the means of production and must develop "ideologies to justify or 'explain' the arrangement." [36] This type of "explanation" is seen in United States' history in regard to the institution of slavery. Slave owners perpetuated ideas of blacks as inferior, unable to care for themselves, helping them to justify the why of how they were being used as their labor force. Slave owners also used religion as source of control over slaves. Christianity promised rewards in heaven so that slaves did not focus on pain and suffering here and now but on the afterlife. [37]

Another theory, Split-Labor Market, attributes discrimination to the idea that the labor market is divided into three parts – the elite, higher-priced labor (dominant group members) and cheap labor. Throughout history, immigrants and minority group members have comprised the cheap labor source. These groups are obviously preferred by the elite, allowing for more profit. In reaction, the higher-priced labor sources make every effort to oust the cheap labor sources. The use of prejudicial actions help to reinforce the *threat* that these groups are perceived to bring, for example taking away all of the jobs. We can see an example of this phenomenon when unions, largely white ethnic enclaves in the early decades of the twentieth century, routinely barred blacks from membership. [38] Holloway lectures about this concept during his session on The New Deal Era stating that as a result of the economic crisis – stock market crash in October of 1929 and the increasing unemployment rates magnified the situation. A common rallying cry in picket lines and at labor rallies when a black person arrived was, "No jobs for niggers until every white man has a job." [39] Additionally, during the Civil Rights Movement southern whites (the dominant group) used prejudice as a weapon as they believed their privilege was being compromised. They used race-based privilege and stereotypes including "negative emotional rhetoric to motivate whites to attempt to defeat demands for racial equality and an end to segregation." [40]

Students seem to have an understanding that discrimination happens in a variety of situations. I want them to be able to speak to this in an educated manner. That is why I include this information about how discrimination occurs at two levels: individual and institutional. Carmichael and Hamilton define Institutional Discrimination as incidences in which "individuals in the subordinate group are denied opportunities and/or rights from a societal level (macro level) such as the criminal justice system, purchasing and renting homes, among others." [41] These are "the established, customary way of doing things in society – the unchallenged rules, policies, and day-to-day practices established by dominant groups that impede or limit minority members' achievement and keep them in subordinate and disadvantaged positions." [42] Affirmative action was introduced during John F. Kennedy's tenure in 1961 to help to reduce institutional discrimination. "Affirmative action is the positive effort to recruit subordinate group members, including women, for jobs, promotions, and educational opportunities." [43] It assists in the intention to reduce institutional discrimination.

Documents

The following documents will be used in the series of lessons that are categorized into three sections: Racial Classification, Racial Attitudes, and Racial Actions.

Racial Classification

How the Law Decided if You Were Black or White: The Early 1800s

This article about the three rules determining what side of the color line one was on – white or black – relied on traditional methods of "blood fraction, appearance, and invisible blackness." [44] A blood-fraction rule until the end of slavery was whether the mother was a slave or not. "Until the advent of the one-drop rule of invisible Blackness in the 1830s (discussed elsewhere), courts relied on a combination of three rules to determine whether someone was Black or White. The first was the rule of physical appearance. The second was the rule of blood fraction. The third was the rule of association." [45]

Skin

The article above will be paired with the film, "Skin." This film highlights the true story of a black South African girl born to her two Afrikaner rural shopkeepers parents. They raise her as a white girl. Troubles begin when she is sent to boarding school. Complaints arise and she is re-examined by state officials and re-classified as black. Her father begins a media battle to re-classify his *white* daughter. Over the following years, Sandra experiences the lack of acceptance from the white community and in the end asked for herself to be re-classified black since the children she has are considered black. This film will walk students through the idea of race classification as it changes over time and place to support societal wants at both the macro (society) and micro (Sandra and her family) levels.

Racial Attitudes

"*My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One-Hundredth Anniversary of Emancipation*"

This essay appeared as part of the book, *The Fire Next Time*. This poignant piece has James Baldwin writing to his young nephew about the harshness of the reality that faces him in United States society. The bleakness of the situation that determines how a black man is perceived draws the reader in to feel the author's anguish. This essay really resonated with me. When I spoke to one particular Fellow in my seminar, she stated that the tone was too angry for her to appreciate. I thought this interesting, as I truly believed it to be the most beautiful piece that we had read for seminar. In one of our sessions, Jonathan Holloway read from the essay:

> You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and for no other reason. The limits of your ambition were, thus, expected to be set forever. You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity. [46]

Holloway continued, stating that society has structured life's opportunities so that certain people lose out. In fact, a large group of people do. This resonated with me because it seemed to me it could have been written

just as easily about the English Language Learners (ELLs) whom I teach. The emotion I expressed in class represents the frustration of how I feel about society's view of my children; the low expectations that it has for them.

White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack

This essay is by sociologist Peggy McIntosh. McIntosh begins the piece reflecting on how she was taught about racism, "As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege which puts me at an advantage." [47] Her explanation of the lack of awareness surrounding the privileges that are afforded white people and men in our society help one to begin to think about the fact that one group continues to gain while another loses out. Having students read these two pieces and participating in a Socratic Seminar in which they can compare and contrast these texts while asking and answering questions of each other should prove interesting and insightful.

Racial Actions

"*What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?*" *Frederick Douglass, 1852*

This powerful speech speaks to the celebration of the birth of our nation – the fourth of July - and how what was stated in this country's most important documents does not allow for the freedoms and ideals listed for the slave nor the freed black man.

A More Perfect Union Speech, Senator Obama

In this speech Senator Barak Obama gave at the Constitutional Center in Philadelphia on March 18, 2008, he addressed the issue of race, opening up the opportunity for a conversation, much like the one that the students from Wilmington and I were denied. He spoke to slavery, the movement, and for the need – now – to come together to form the perfect union to move forward:

> Of course, the answer to the slavery question was already embedded within our Constitution – a Constitution that had at its very core the ideal of equal citizenship under the law; a Constitution that promised its people liberty and justice, and a union that could be and should be perfected over time. And yet words on a parchment would not be enough to deliver slaves from bondage, or provide men and women of every color and creed their full rights and obligations as citizens of the United States. What would be needed were Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part – through protests and struggle, on the streets and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience and always at great risk – to narrow that gap between the promise of our ideas and the reality of their time. This was one of the tasks we set forth at the beginning of this campaign - to continue the long march of those who came before us, a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America. I chose to run for the presidency at this moment in history because I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together - unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction - towards a better future for our children and our grandchildren. [48]

Students will compare and contrast these two pieces to determine the tone of the times (when each was

written) about race – what is the *narrative*?

Objectives

Our state's recommended curriculum units are created following the Understanding by Design model based on research and theory by Grant and Wiggins. [49] The overarching idea is to teach for understanding beginning from the end, focusing on what you want students to know. Enduring Understandings are the big ideas of the unit and are vital to students' comprehension of content and concepts. They have lasting value and help to make the content meaningful**.** The following Enduring Understandings are taken from the Core Concepts of our textbook's chapter on Race and Ethnicity. By the end of the unit, students will know that the concepts of race and ethnicity cannot be understood apart from systems of racial and ethnic classification and that governments and other powerful groups have created illogical racial and ethnic categories and have worked hard to present them as logical as one measure of their social importance. In addition, they will grasp that the racial and ethnic categories to which people belong are a product of three interrelated factors: chance, context, and choice. Students will additionally ascertain that the legal status of the foreign-born varies by country and is often connected to race and ethnicity. Also, students will see that minorities are populations that are systematically excluded (whether consciously or unconsciously) from full participation in society and denied equal access to positions of power, prestige, and wealth. Moreover, students will comprehend that social and cultural differences between racial and ethnic groups "disappear" when one group is absorbed into another group's culture and social networks or when two groups merge to form a new, blended culture. Lastly, students will recognize that racist ideologies claim that biological factors explain and even justify inequalities between racial and ethnic groups and that sociologists are interested in stigmas – attributes that are so deeply discrediting that they come to dominate interaction.

Essential Questions

1. What is the meaning of race for each of us, others, and our society?

2. How are racial and ethnic categories determined in the United States? What problems are associated with these categories?

3. How do the roles of chance, context, and choice affect racial and ethnic categories?

4. What are the causes and consequences of classifying people by race?

5. How does discrimination and prejudice affect individuals and society?

6. How does race and ethnicity play a role in a person's identity? How do people tell the stories of who they are? What are the narratives of history?

Strategies

Students come into our Distance Learning Laboratory with varying skills – technological, conversational, writing, and reading. All of these skills are essential to their academic success in our classroom and beyond. I need to employ teaching strategies that work towards strengthening these skills throughout the school year. One can talk with a number of my school colleagues or Yale Fellows to know that while my conversational, reading, and writing skills were strong I still needed to improve upon my technological skills! Immersing myself in this Distance Laboratory helped me to improve upon these skills. I searched out multiple opportunities to learn from my colleagues, call in district personnel, and spend numerous hours working with different types of practices such as Video Chat or Google Docs. My ultimate goal is to ready these students for the 21st century learning that will be expected of them when they leave high school to pursue higher education or enter the workforce.

Collaborative Learning/Groupwork

Students need to learn how to work together to accomplish goals – those set by the teacher and themselves. This is a basic requirement for many positions or jobs that they will hold in the future. Working together, relying on each other helps to build team-working skills. This strategy is somewhat challenging for us in that there are two groups of students at two different high schools. For the intense conversations that follow the readings of important concepts such as gender or race, a facilitator must be certain that there is a strong sense of camaraderie, trust, and willingness to work with and listen to others in the group. In collaborative learning, each group member is accountable to each other, dependent upon each other and contributes the established goals. Everyone has some strength to share. [50] Together, more is accomplished. Opportunities to learn about each other before and while working help to promote the camaraderie and cohesiveness necessary to work well together. Individual and group evaluations are necessary to monitor the group's work (product) and their progress in teamwork.

Google Docs

Technology is an essential part of classrooms today, especially at the university level. I see part of my role, obviously in this Distance Learning Laboratory with thousands of dollars of technological equipment, to use it with the students so that they become proficient in this new language of technology. Google Docs is one of the ways we have to provide students with a collaborative opportunity to participate in a joint writing process. Students will work with their peers to complete a piece of writing in response to a film, summarizing the key points to a lecture or reading, amongst others. I tell students that this skill they are perfecting in the classroom today will be beneficial to them at the university level in which they can work with their classmates across campus in completing group assignments without even meeting once! As an instructor, you can create and assign a Google Doc to monitor students' work on an assignment. With the use of the revision history the instructor can see students' progress and feedback can be easily given even while a student (or students) is working on an assignment. Additionally, it is easily monitored through the Revision History, so that an instructor can keep track of who has completed what. Furthermore, for my teaching situation it helps to build partnerships between the students in two different schools.

Blogs

Another technological feature used in this unit is the blog. A blog is an interactive site in which posts occur

each day. Using a question or statement, I can preview what will be discussed and/or looked at that day or review or clarify something from the previous day's lesson. For an instructor and the students, this is an invaluable tool. For the instructor, it enables you to see what students understand and may have misconceived in addition to what they think. I like to have them write about the why of what they think, helping me to better understand their viewpoints. This also enables them to think before they speak as we use their blog posts as a means of conversation as well. For students, they are able to see their written conversations and leave multiple comments as well as questions for each other. This is a great pre- and post-activity for the day's lesson in which the same question or statement is added to at the end of the day's lesson helping all parties to see individual and group progress in regard to comprehending a point or concept.

Socratic Seminar

I have noticed that my students tend to talk before thinking and are more interested in hearing themselves than their fellow classmates. Being able to think critically about a text before discussing it and then listening to others are important skills necessary for academic success and life-long ability to understand better another person's viewpoint. The weight of the conversation is left to the participants – in this case the students. They must critically look at and read the texts before coming to class and be prepared with questions and comments they would like to focus on. This is vital to the conversation's success. I want them to experience what it is to be in college in a small seminar-type atmosphere. Additionally, I believe if they are made responsible for this it will help them to better comprehend the content of the text which they are expected to master and be able to do well on the exams mandated by the local community college will lead to the grade that will determine if they receive college credit or not.

Classroom Activities

Lesson One – Racial Classification

How are racial and ethnic categories determined in the United States? What problems are associated with these categories? How do the roles of chance, context, and choice affect racial and ethnic categories?

This introductory lesson gives students an opportunity to learn about the classification of races.

Anticipatory Set: Have students brainstorm what the word race means/how would they define it. Students can do this in a Blog format in which they write their answers/thoughts on the Class Blog. Have them share these ideas with their classmates with a partner. Students will participate in the exercise, *What's My Race?* in which they will determine the race/ethnicity of fifteen people. They will categorize each of the people's photographs they see into one of the six racial/ethnic categories that are used in the US Census. Students will share their answers with a partner and afterwards, each pair will partner with another to compare and contrast their observations. Then, answers will be reviewed and discussed as a whole class.

Directed Instruction: Introduce information about the social construction of race through a PowerPoint presentation. Students should take notes for later use (study for exam).

Activity: Students will read the informational text, How the Law Decided if You were Black or White: The Early 1800s and view the film, Skin. They will use the information from these two texts to answer the guiding

questions.

Assessment: Students' *will respond to an essay in which they will incorporate all information acquired to answer the guiding questions.*

Lesson Two – Racial Attitudes

How does discrimination and prejudice affect individuals and society?

This lesson focuses on the ideas of discrimination and prejudice – how it can be defined and better understood.

Anticipatory Set: Have students define the terms: bias, discrimination, prejudice, and stereotype with a partner. Discuss their answers and clarify the meanings. Have students listen to the children's story, *Sneetches*, by Dr. Seuss. Afterwards, in small groups, students should list examples of the terms that were earlier defined.

Directed Instruction: Present PowerPoint regarding the terms from the sociological perspectives. Then, show film clips depicting real-life examples of these terms. Have students take notes on a graphic organizer. Review this information as a whole group, after students have had an opportunity to share with their tablemates.

Activity: Have students read *My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One-Hundredth Anniversary of Emancipation* by James Baldwin and *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack* by Peggy McIntosh. Afterwards, students will participate in a Socratic Seminar.

Assessment: Students' *Check for Understanding* consists of the Socratic Seminar rubric. Is there evidence to support their solid knowledge of the two pieces of text and are the students able to apply this information to answering the guiding questions.

Lesson Three – Racial Actions

What are the causes and consequences of classifying people by race?

This lesson focuses on a collaborative writing component in which students use Google Docs and partner with students from the opposite school site to read and analyze two pieces of text.

Anticipatory Set: Have students look back at their original definitions/meanings of race. Have them add or subtract to these and explain why.

Directed Instruction: Introduce historical information about both Frederick Douglass and Barak Obama and the time frames from which they come. Have students take notes on a graphic organizer. Review this information afterwards.

Activity: Pair up students from opposite school sites and have them "interactively read the two texts/speeches: "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" and "A More Perfect Union." Using a Google Doc, they will record relevant information from the speeches that will aid in their Socratic Seminar. In working with each other, they will interact more with the texts, constructing meaning of the information together.

Assessment: Students' *Check for Understanding* consists of the Socratic Seminar rubric. Is there evidence to

support their solid knowledge of the two pieces of text and are the students able to apply this information to answering the guiding questions.

Follow up lessons will consist of students conducting their own sociological research by using surveys and interviews to reflect on their school communities' racial attitudes. They will compare and contrast the data acquired from both schools. Additionally, they will present this information in a formal manner as they would be modeling the research of a sociologist.

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Appendices

As this is a course in which students will receive local community college credit if they successfully meet the requirements, we follow the performance objectives the local community college has established.

Collegewide Core Course (CCC) Performance Objectives

For this particular unit on race, the targeted objective is to *analyze social stratification and the causes and consequences of classifying people by race, ethnicity, and gender.*

Since our state is moving towards the use of the Common Core, I have included those in which these high school students will aim to meet in this unit:

English Language Arts/Reading: Informational Texts

RI.11-12.3. Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

Speaking & Listening/Comprehension and Collaboration

SL.11-12.1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.

Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

Endnotes

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