



YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

to strengthen teaching in public schools®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2021 Volume II: Race, Class, and Gender in Today's America

Introduction

by Frances McCall Rosenbluth, Damon Wells Professor of Political Science

This year the Yale National Initiative brought together a talented and committed group of teachers, despite our inability because of Covid to work in New Haven together. Nine teacher Fellows worked together, albeit from a distance, to build their projects. Based on a set of related themes, the teachers built an extraordinarily powerful set of course units under the theme of **Race, Class, and Gender in Today's America**. Some of this group were highly skilled and knowledgeable teachers while others were developing new approaches for the first time, but the projects are all impressive. This is an impressive group of teachers whose curriculum ranges from very young to senior scholars, from diverse ethnic, racial, and class backgrounds. The group members not only understood the challenges of their own students, but were also empathetic about different kinds of students than their own.

A number of the teachers established powerful intellectual projects on American history. **Matthew Menschner** built a unit around colonization and early American history, African slavery in North America, the Civil War, segregation and racial discrimination in the military, the women's suffrage movement, and the civil rights movement. **Catherine Cunha** focused on the 13th and 14th amendments, Plessy v. Ferguson, Jim Crow laws and Black Codes, and Brown v. Board of Education. Introducing her students to "Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry," helps explain the potency of racism. **Tara McCrone** adds a unit focused on an important but discouraging period: racism and class from the 19th century seen through the lens of conflicts over immigration. She uses *Esperanza Rising* as well as books about Irish and Chinese immigration, Ellis Island, and Angel Island entry points and the enforcement of Japanese internment camps.

Kaitlin Waldron, also focusing on American history, tackles five texts: *Esperanza Rising*, *House on Mango Street*, *We Are Not Free*, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, and *Ghost Boys*. By studying these texts, students will gain potent and powerful content knowledge. **Christine Shaub** shifts the attention to African American male figures, and asks why African American males are so often killed by white police officers. Do the ideologies of the white slave masters still have credence in the mindset of white law enforcement officers today? **Krista Waldron** focuses on whether potent racism continues, focusing on the Tuskegee Syphilis study, the story of Henrietta Lacks and her HeLa cells, and current inequalities in our Covid 19 present. These questions lead her to ask some key questions including about the roles race and/or gender play in healthcare access and whether and how government institutions and the medical establishment affect these inequities?

Sharon Ponder-Ballard begins by helping her students understand the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota and the subsequent murder of Adam Toledo in Chicago, Illinois. She engages her students with hip hop lyrics and its intersection to various social justice movements in America. **Sophia Alvarez** asks her students to understand ethnography of a gang in Chicago and the surrounding

neighborhood, by anthropologist Laurence Ralph, as an entry point to issues of belonging and exclusion. Alvarez helps students investigate the ethics and nuances of ethnography, build empathy and self-awareness, and gain the academic language to discuss social issues today.

Shaasia Jackson also aims to teach her students about resilience and empathy. They are given the opportunity to read *Class Act* by Jerry Craft. Her aim is to get them to understand how resilience is multiplied exponentially when supplemented by empathy.

This year's teachers illustrate a wide range of classroom plan and teaching style. They are an impressive group with extraordinary teaching talent.

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