

Controversial Issue Lesson Plan Template

Lesson Title: Is America Still Racist?

Author Name: Jeff Bellows

Contact Information: North Valleys High School; 971-6473; jbellows@washoeschools.net

Appropriate for Grade Level(s): 11

US History Standard(s): Social Studies Skills-Civic Participation-1) Discuss issues and events that have an impact on people at local, state, national, and global levels. 2) Seek information from varied sources and perspectives to develop informed opinions and creative solutions.

Controversial Issue: Now that Barack Obama has been elected as President of the United States, it is safe to say that this country has truly overcome its racist past. Agree or disagree and why?

Objective(s): At the end of this lesson, students will be able to...

1) Formulate an opinion based on new evidence presented. 2) Think critically about the role racism plays in the United States. 3) Create a working definition of "racism". 4) Examine the difference between individual and institutional racism.

Rationale: Why Teach This Issue? (50-100 words) By looking at how institutional racism still creates obstacle for blacks to achieve in this country, students may question their own beliefs about the role racism plays. Most people understand the idea or have anecdotal examples of racist individuals, but many do not truly understand the destructive nature of a country that is left with the remnants of slavery. This lesson will allow students the opportunity to examine the problems that still plague African Americans in the 21st Century. The ultimate goal of this lesson is to allow students to build critical thinking skills that will help them throughout their lives weigh and evaluate information from multiple perspectives.

Student Readings (list): Teacher will provide information based on excerpts from *Invisible Enemy* by Greta de Jong.

Total Time Needed: Approx. 1-2 hours based on student interest/discussion time needed

Historical Background & Context (+/- 250 words): The struggle for Civil Rights for African Americans in this country is well documented. Everyone has heard of Martin Luther King and his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. Most people have heard of the struggles faced by Rosa Parks which led to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Most people also know that in 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed important black Civil Rights legislation into law. However, for most people this is where the story ends. But for those dealing with the aftermath of slavery and the highly oppressive Jim Crow laws that promoted the inferiority of one race and/or the superiority of another, the story was far from over. Civil Rights leader Julian Bond provided the following scenario to describe the situation that African Americans face in trying to overcome this depressing past. "It is the fourth quarter of a football game between the white team and the black team. The white team is ahead 145 to 3. The white team owns the ball, the field, the goalposts, the uniforms and the referees. They have been cheating since the game began...Suddenly the white quarterback, who feels badly about things that happened before he entered the game says, 'Can't we just play fair?'"¹ While it is probably safe to say that most Americans are not racist towards blacks, at least in relation to previous generations, most also fail to realize the tremendous obstacles that still need to be overcome in order to achieve true equality. This lesson will allow teachers and students the opportunity to see how institutional racism still dramatically affects the lives of blacks in their struggle to achieve the American Dream.

¹ Greta de Jong, *Invisible Enemy: The African American Freedom Struggle after 1965*: (United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 2.

Detailed Steps of Lesson (including teaching methods/strategies that engage student participation):

Time Frame (e.g. 15 minutes)	What is the teacher doing?	What are students doing?
5-10 min	Pair up the students and ask them to create a definition of the "American Dream" together.	With a partner, students come up with a definition of the "American Dream".
5-10 min	Lead class discussion on definition. (List on the board)	Share the definition they came up with.
5-10 min	Tell students to individually come up with an Acrostic Poem for the word "Racism" (Define by using a word that begins with each letter in racism) Discuss	Create poem/Discuss
10 min	Ask students to answer Obama/Racism statement (Controversial Issue above) Discuss	Writing short essay describing their agreement or disagreement with the statement./Discuss
15 min	Introduce list of facts about black Americans	Listen to or read list of facts
5-10 min	Discuss the idea of individual vs. institutional racism and the role it plays in the United States.	Class Discussion
5-10 min	Ask students to go back to their poems and recreate based on new ideas.	Recreate the acrostic poem
10 min	Ask students to readdress the controversial issue statement based on new ideas presented to them.	Re-write short essay to address the controversial issue.
5-10	Lead a short discussion to enable students to share any remaining ideas/thoughts	Share new ideas/thoughts
10 min	Put students in their original pairs and ask them to come up with creative solutions to overcome institutional racism	Discuss and create solutions with a partner.
		(Add more rows, if necessary.)

How will students reflect on their learning & understanding? Class discussion; Pre- and Post- writing activity; Think about and possibly create solutions to problems caused by institutional racism

Description of Lesson Assessment Tied to Objective/Standards: This lesson provides many opportunities for class and/or peer discussion of the material. Students will also create a pre- and post- acrostic poem on the word "racism". Finally, they will write a short essay both before and after the information in the lesson is presented. If time allows, students will also try to come up with solutions to the various problems faced by blacks in the United States, either alone, in pairs, or small groups.

Attached to the following pages are all readings, primary sources, guided questions, worksheets, assignment guidelines, rubrics, etc.

Acrostic Poem example:

Reality

Advantages

Constructed

Ignorance

Systematic

Malevolent

Institutional Racism Facts List

Source: 2010 United States Census

- *Total U.S. Population = 308,745,538
- *Total U.S. Black Population = 38,901,937 or 12.6% of total pop.
- *Black owned firms in the U.S. = 7.1%

Source: Wikipedia/Answers.com/Ask.com

- *Black Senators = 6 all time; 2011 = 1 out of 100 or 1%
- *Blacks in the House of Representatives = 123 all time; 2011 = 41 out of 435 or 10%
- *Black Governors = 4 all time; 2011 = 2 out of 50 (David Patterson of NY; Deval Patrick of Mass.) or 4%
- *Black mayors = of the roughly 20,000 cities/towns/municipalities, there are between 500-650 black mayors or 3.25%
- *Black Baseball Managers ("America's Pastime") = 2 out of 30 (Dusty Baker, Ron Washington) or 6.67%

Source: Forbes.com

- *Forbes list of the 400 American billionaires lists only one African American, Oprah Winfrey. 1 of 400 or .0025%
- **In fact, eleven of the fifteen wealthiest blacks in America are in some form of entertainment. (Tiger Woods (Golf), Kobe Bryant (Basketball), Oprah Winfrey (Television and Film), Bill Cosby (Television and Film ; Jay Z (Recording Artist), Don King (Boxing Promoter), Barry Gordy (Motown), Richard and Shelia Johnson (BET or Black Entertainment Television)

The following information comes from the book, *Invisible Enemy: The African American Freedom Struggle after 1965*, by Greta de Jong. (Page number given)

**The following list taken from page 54 gives statistics based on 1960 data compared with 2006 data for blacks in the United States.

- 1) High School Graduation Rate: 1960 = 20%; 2006 = 81% of black population
- 2) College Degrees: 1960 = 3%; 2006 = 19% of black population
- 3) Annual Income Greater than \$75,000: 1960 = 3%; 2006 = 17% of black population
- 4) Poverty Rate: 1960 = 51%; 2006 = 25% of black population (1 in 4)
- 5) Infant Mortality Rate for Blacks: 1960 = 40/1000 infants died; 2006 = 14/1000 infants died (still 2x the rate for white infants)

6) Life Expectancy: 1960 = 64 years; 2006 = 73 years

7) 25% of black people are poor compared to 11% of whites.

8) Median income of white families was \$24,000 more than black families.

9) 1/3 of white families had incomes over \$75,000/yr vs. 1/5 of black families.

10) The median net worth of white families was \$140,700 vs. \$24,500 for blacks

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11) As late as 1990, 1/4 of the nation's petrochemicals were produced along an 85 mile corridor between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. This "Cancer Alley" as it is nicknamed, is mostly made up of poor black people.

11a) The people, mostly black, that live in Louisiana's St. James Parish are exposed to 4500 pounds of toxic released by nearly industrial plants each year vs. the national average of about 10 pounds/yr.

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12) By 2008 the United States led the world in citizens incarcerated in correctional facilities. (38 new prisons built in the 1980's and 90's in New York alone!)

12a) 326,000 in 1972 vs. 2.1 million in 2003 an increase of 552% during that time period whereas the U.S. population only increased by 37% in that span.

12b) For American adult blacks, there was a 99% increase in the 1990's alone.

12c) Now 1 in 100 adult American blacks are in the prison system; 1 in 20 black men. However, if you are a black man aged 20-34 you have a 1 in 9 chance.

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13) Drug arrests tripled between 1980-2000 from 581,000 to 1,579,566.

13a) By 2004, drug offenders made up 55% of prison population.

13b) For many, mandatory minimum sentencing provides no "gray area".

14) In New York City in 1998/99, blacks made up 25% of the population, but 50% of all police stops were of black people.

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15) In 2000, there were over 900,000 blacks imprisoned in America (1/2 the total jail population).

16) In 2000, 1 in 3 black men aged 20-29 were on probation, in prison, or on parole.

17) There was an increase of 267x the amount of black women in prison between the years 1985-2000.

18) Many problems faced by blacks who spend time in the prison system are compounded because upon release, most find it very difficult to find employment, they are no longer eligible for welfare, public housing, or student loan programs. Perhaps worst of all in a democracy, many are unable to vote after being incarcerated.

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19) On August 29, 2005 Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast and approximately 1400 people died mostly black and poor. (New Orleans alone is almost 70% black.)

19a) "Political leaders had known for years that levees were deteriorating, but neglected to allocate funds for repairing them."

19b) "Disaster preparedness plans included no provisions for evacuating the 40,000 residents of New Orleans that did not own cars."

19c) Relief agencies took days to provide food, water, and medical care. Some people were stranded on rooftops for days.

19d) "Law enforcement officers and National Guard units were directed to patrol white neighborhoods with orders to 'shoot to kill' looters instead of helping people in the flooded areas."

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20) In some areas, poor blacks do not own cars to get them to polling stations to vote, do not own phones to receive information about voting, and have do not have the training necessary to successfully cast their votes.

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21) In a 2002 welfare report from the state of Georgia, a county which was 98% white spent approximately \$2090 per person vs. a neighboring county, which was 96% black spent \$694 per person.

Controversial Issue Lesson Rubric

Name _____

Class Discussion Participation _____/_____pts

American Dream Definition _____/_____pts

Acrostic Poem (Pre-) _____/_____pts

Short Essay (Pre-) _____/_____pts

Acrostic Poem (Post-) _____/_____pts

Short Essay (Post-) _____/_____pts

Ideas/Solutions (Optional) _____/_____pts

Total _____/_____pts