



**ASSOCIATION FOR
THE STUDY OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN
LIFE AND HISTORY**

SOCIAL JUSTICE 101: UNDERSTANDING THE LANGUAGE OF RACIAL OPPRESSION

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CURRICULUM SUMMARY

Too often language laden with history is either misunderstood or used problematically. Based on the presentations curated during Social Justice Workshop Wednesdays, the aim of this curriculum is to give participants a general understanding of basic concepts, terminology and narratives of racial oppression. The goal is to tether language and theory to the many ways in which racial oppression occurs in everyday life in the United States. This objective will be achieved through the activities of reading, discussion, reflection and debate as well as written responses to prompts.

Dr. Lisa Brock

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INVENTORY OVERVIEW

Documentaries, News Stories and Primary Documents

1. Andrew Jackson, Andrew Jackson's Speech to Congress on Indian Removal, December 6, 1830.
2. Confessions of the Murders of Emmett Till The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi By William Bradford Huie, Look Magazine, January, 1956.
3. First Laws in US establishing white supremacy.
4. View and Discuss: A (Black) Girl Like Me, directed by Kiri Davis, 2007.
5. Amandla Steinberg, Don't Cash Crop My Corn Rows.
6. Kony 2012, directed by Jason Russell, 2012.

Texts

1. Read and Discussion https://psychology.umbc.edu/files/2016/10/White-Privilege_McIntosh-1989.pdf.
2. Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye, 1970.
3. Jean Paul Satre, "Preface," in Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 1961.
4. David Knight, What is Colorism?.
5. Iris Young, Five Faces of Oppression.
6. Andrea Smith, Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy, 2016
7. Teju Cole, The White Savior Industrial Complex. (March, 2012)

Videos

1. View and Discuss the Video: When Beyonce was white?

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Race:

a specious, historically constructed, sociological classification entrenched by Western Europeans during the time of their world-wide expansion of colonialism, capitalism and slavery (1300-1888) to assign human worth and social status, using themselves as the model of humanity. Emerging first to differentiate the oppressed in Europe such in the British use of it to define the Irish, during their early conquest of Northern Ireland, it became more commonly used for the purpose of legitimizing white power, white privilege, exploitation and oppression over conquered people of the global south. There were other stark strata/caste/religious divisions before this but rarely based on skin color. Race increased as a weapon of power used by emerging nations, economies and empires of the global north in order to gain access to peoples and resources of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities and nations throughout the world. Race has become a legitimizing lever?

Racism:

Race prejudice + misuse of power by systems, institutions and people to uphold it.

White Supremacy:

based on the ideological belief that European and white intellectual, political and historic contributions to global humanity are superior to those of People of Color. So much so, that they have become universal. It is so "normalized" that in the words of Michel Foucault its "power is everywhere, diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and regimes of truth."

Whiteness:

the normalization of a white racial identity throughout the America's that created a culture where nonwhite persons are seen as inferior or abnormal. This white-dominant culture also operates as a social mechanism that grants privileges to white people, since they can navigate society both by feeling "normal" and being viewed and treated as "normal". They also have the privilege of not "seeing race" should they choose not to, while BIPOCs (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) do not have that choice.

Internalized Racial Superiority:

A complex multigenerational socialization process that teaches White people to believe, accept and live out superior societal definitions of self and to fit into and live out superior societal roles in relationship to people of color. These behaviors define and normalize the race construct and its outcome –white supremacy. Frantz Fanon and Andrea Smith have called it the syndrome of the Settler in a colonial context.

Internalized Racist Inferiority:

A complex multi-generation socialization process that teaches People of Color to believe, accept societal definitions of people of color and to assimilate comfortably into white supremacist frameworks. Frantz Fanon called it a syndrome of the "Native or comprador" in the colonial context.

Anti-blackness:

Based on a belief of a dehumanization of Black people, which systemically shows up as white supremacy, internalized racial superiority and racism. However, it also shows up among people of color because of Internalized racism and white proximity or adjacency.

Colorism:

or the lighter/whiter the better is the way anti-blackness shows up, everywhere, but has a particular meaning in countries that did not apply the one-drop rule to the racial construct and/or had a more porous system of racial categorization. (Mention Cuba, the DR mentioned above). But also in mannerisms, values, attitudes and the politics of representation. HBCUs; Black Classism, Paper Bag test, Michael K. Williams, recently passed actor, who was dark skinned, said his blackness, caused him grief growing up even in the Black community of Brooklyn.

Cultural Appropriation:

involves members of a dominant group exploiting the culture of less privileged groups, with little understanding or acknowledgement of the latter's history, experience and tradition. Because of white privilege, commercial cultural appropriators profit from the cultural property of others, often without just compensation being given to those to whom it belongs. If the commodification of Black bodies was justified through enslavement, of course Black culture could and would be by extension as well.

Oppression:

In its traditional usage, oppression means the exercise of tyranny by a ruling people are not always oppressed by cruel tyrants. In many cases, historic and systemic laws, policies, and practices can embed unquestioned harmful norms, habits, and symbols. This could mean treating certain groups of people in dehumanizing and violent ways for which there is societal justification and acquiescence (genocide/slavery). But it could also mean denying people language, education, and other opportunities which would make them full partners in society. (The demeaning of Black English; Indian Boarding Schools) Iris Young (1990) says there are five faces of oppression:

exploitation (economic), violence (state/extra-state), powerlessness (political/economic), marginalization (segregation/poverty), and cultural imperialism (theft and appropriation).

The White Savior Industrial Complex

is a concept first coined by writer Teju Cole in 2012. In a series of tweets, which were later published in the Atlantic, he critiqued filmmaker Jason Russell for the release of his film Kony 2012. In the film, white Americans are encouraged to start a campaign and/or go to Uganda to capture the notorious General Joseph Kony, known for leading vicious military campaigns in Central Africa. As soon as it was released, the entire premise was rejected by Uganda journalists and activists who argued that they did not need or want the world's "help" with Kony. Cole cited a long history of white western meddling in Africa under the guise of helping, even when it is not asked for or wanted. This is different than solidarity which works in concert with people's struggles and under their leadership. The WSIC, instead, maintains the power relationship between the West under the guise of helping the less fortunate. This was especially evident in this case as Russell was known in Uganda as a meddler and he had been told that his efforts were not wanted.

ACTIVITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

1. After explaining Race and Racism from the Glossary pose this prompt for discussion:

a. Given that the term race is used to define people by their color today, its origins are quite complicated, emerging slowly over time. Can Black People today be Racist against White people?

2. After explaining White supremacy from the Glossary:

a. Participants should read for discussion

- First Laws in US establishing white supremacy. (Virginia)
- Andrew Jackson, Andrew Jackson's Speech to Congress on Indian Removal, December 6, 1830.
- Andrea Smith, Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy, 2016

3. After explaining Whiteness from the Glossary:

a. Participants should read: Peggy McIntosh, White Privilege, 1989.

b. Participants should write a one paragraph response to this prompt:

- If you are white, do you feel you are privileged? Why or why not? If you are a person of color, have you experiences bias based on white supremacy and/or white privilege? If so, share an experience?

c. The normalization of whiteness and white supremacy is so twisted that for some to perceive a Black person as "normal" or "equal" they must codify them as white. Participants should View and Discuss the Video: When Beyonce was white?

4. After explaining Internalized Racial Superiority from Glossary:

a. Participants should read and Discuss: Jean Paul Satre, "Preface," in Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 1961.

b. Participants should read and Discuss: Confessions of the Murders of Emmett Till The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi By William Bradford Huie, Look Magazine, January, 1956.

c. Discussion Question: What cases today are similar to the Emmett till case?

5. After explaining Internalized Racial inferiority from the Glossary:

a. Participants should View: A (Black) Girl Like Me, directed by Kiri Davis, 2007 and write a one paragraph response to this prompt:

- Do you know anyone who has struggled with their skin color, hair, etc. that might have exhibited this issue?

b. Read: Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye, 1970 and response

6. After explaining Anti-blackness and Colorism from the Glossary:

a. Read and Discuss: David Knight, What is Colorism?.

b. Write a paragraph response to this prompt:

- If you are of color, how has anti-blackness and colorism, shown up in your family, your community? If you are white, have you noticed family or community responding differently to People of Color, depending how dark their skin may be, or if their cultural framework is deemed as "Black."

7. After explaining Cultural Appropriation from the Glossary

- a. View and Discuss: [Don't Cash Crop My Corn Rows.](#)
- b. View and Discuss: [Black American Steals African Art: Yes or No?.](#)
- c. Participants should respond to this prompt:
 - If Black people can dance ballet and sing opera, why can't non-black people engage Hip Hop? Discuss and debate the challenges, complexities and necessity of claiming Cultural Appropriation. What does power, permission, honor, paying the producer, class, racism, colonialism, have to do with it?

8. After explaining Oppression from the Glossary:

- a. Read and Discuss: [Iris Young, Five Faces of Oppression.](#)
- b. Participants should identify how the Five Faces have shown up in our society in a three-page paper.

Culmination Activity

- a. Final Writing. Choose one:
 - Use a personal experience as a foundation in which talk about at least one term, doing more historical research on that term, illustrating how the past links to racial oppression today in the US or the Americas, or Europe.
 - Take two terms, and do historical research on them, illustrating how the past links to racial oppression today in the US, or the Americas, or Europe.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[ASALH x Howard University's Social Justice Workshop Wednesdays Series](#)
(ASALH TV via YouTube)

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DR. LISA BROCK

CURATOR



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