

# **Race and Ethnic Studies: Power and Perspective**

## **Coursebook**



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## Lesson

# 1

# What Is Ethnic Studies?

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## Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Reflect on the meaning and impact of race and ethnicity.
- Describe the history of ethnic studies.
- Examine how and why people are motivated to take action.
- Analyze the portrayal of race and ethnicity in media.

## Lesson Introduction

Critical race and ethnic studies (CRES) explores the social, political, economic, and historical formation of different racial and ethnic groups, and examines how different groups have been marginalized. The term *marginalized* in this context refers to people or groups who, because of different histories (such as slavery), have been systematically blocked from access to goods, resources, or opportunities.

Critical race and ethnic studies emphasizes how colonialism and racism impact our world. While traditional ethnic studies may be more focused on history and culture, this course explores the connections between race, class, sexuality, gender, ability, and more. It also looks at how groups confront and challenge marginalization via cultural production (such as art and music), social movements and community organizing (such as civil rights movements or Black Lives Matter), and civic engagement (such as voting or educational forums).

Critical race and ethnic studies emerged in the 1960s as a result of student movements and the civil rights movement. These movements brought awareness to the fact that the histories of Black, Indigenous, Latino/a/x, Asian American, and other racialized groups were excluded from mainstream educational curricula.

As a starting point, you will learn about the history of critical race and ethnic studies in the United States and its roots in youth activism and community organizing. After learning about the history and

## ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Read the lesson introduction and key terms.
- ☐ Read chapter 1 in *A Different Mirror*.
- ☐ Watch the documentary *On Strike: Ethnic Studies 1969–1999*.
- ☐ Complete journal entry #1.
- ☐ Write a one-page reflection on the documentary.
- ☐ Activity A: Race Discussions
- ☐ Activity B: People Emojis

foundational concepts, the course will consider different social processes and dynamics that are central to CRES. This includes settler colonialism, slavery, capitalism, migration, and immigration. In later lessons, the course will look closely at how groups contest, disrupt, and challenge domination and injustice. While CRES often explores global or transnational dynamics (connections across borders), this course will focus primarily on the United States.

Rather than focusing on specific identities or groups, you will learn about the histories that produced different racial and ethnic groups as inferior or superior as well as specific histories and legacies of colonialism and racism. So, for example, while the history of racism against Asian Americans deserves specific examination, how is this history connected to broader anti-immigrant sentiments? A CRES lens promotes an interrelational approach to understand the distinctions between each group's history while also understanding the connections between them and the histories of settler colonialism and slavery.

As you will learn, settler colonialism is an ongoing process (not simply something that happened in the past) where a group of people settle on—and steal—Indigenous peoples' land and exterminate or attempt to eradicate Indigenous populations over time. So, for example, when the British, Spanish, and French settled the Americas, they took land that belonged to Indigenous peoples. This course will explore settler colonialism as a process that is ongoing and continues to have an impact on our society as a whole, with particularly devastating effects for Indigenous populations.

As you move through the course, remember that learning about race and ethnicity can be difficult because many things we learn impact how we think about ourselves and those around us. While race is a *social construct* (something we will explore in lesson 3), it has a very real impact on everyday life. Some of what you will learn might make you uncomfortable, or it might be empowering. Or both. That's okay. Part of learning about how race and ethnicity impact society is unlearning dominant histories that erase or downplay painful pasts or exclude different racial or ethnic groups.

Although learning about painful pasts can be challenging, it is important to remember that ethnic studies help us to understand how power operates in society and impacts groups in different ways; this includes questioning things we might have previously learned and/

### Key Terms

The terms listed in this section represent important concepts and information. You will want to be able to define, understand, and use them in the context of your assignments.

**Ethnicity:** the categorization of a group of people around a language, region, history, culture, and family (“kinship”).

**Critical race and ethnic studies (CRES):** the study of the connections among forms of social differentiations (such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality) and how these forms of differentiation provide advantages for some groups and disadvantages for others. Broadly, critical race and ethnic studies moves beyond the study of individual identity to consider inequality, power, and social change.

or take for granted as true. As your studies unfold, you are encouraged to embrace empathy. *Empathy* is relating to another's feelings or experiences or an ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes. Empathy takes practice! Throughout the course, imagine or try to understand different perspectives and experiences.

## Reading and Viewing

In this section, you will often find questions or reflection prompts accompanying the reading and viewing assignments. These are meant to guide your study. You do not have to write anything down to submit to your teacher, but you are encouraged to take notes to support your learning.

1. In *A Different Mirror*, read chapter 1, "A Different Mirror: The Making of Multicultural America" (pages 3–20), or read chapter 1, "Why a Different Mirror?" in *A Different Mirror for Young People* (pages 5–23). You may want to read the first few pages from each version to see which one will work best for you. Another reading strategy is to begin with the original book, and then switch to the young people's version if the reading becomes too challenging.

Throughout the course, you will be given reading assignments from each book, and you can choose which will work best for you. The readings will cover the same basic content. You can expect the original book to be written at an adult reading level and be more complex; the young people's version uses simpler language and is aimed at students rather than adults. You might find it useful to read the young people's version first to get a clear sense of the topic and then switch to the original version to gain more insight and knowledge about certain topics. You are free to approach these readings in whatever way works best for you.

Because the original version is a complex text, usually only selected sections of the chapters are required. In the young people's version, the full chapters are assigned. Although the assignments for each book differ, the reading time is approximately the same.

Reading tip: As you read, please focus on what Takaki means by "The Master Narrative of American History."

2. Watch the following documentary about how college students fought for ethnic studies. (Video length: 34:35)

*On Strike! Ethnic Studies 1969–1999*

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=0xovOLk9qE8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0xovOLk9qE8)

Consider why the students felt so passionate about fighting for ethnic studies. Why was this important to them?



### Think About It

Whose history counts?

Have you learned about the history of slavery, colonialism, and Indigenous peoples in the United States in school? Have you read novels by nonwhite authors in your English courses? Why are some histories taught in school and other histories excluded?

Ask a few of your peers or older friends and family members about their educational experiences and what they think about how—and whose—history is taught in schools.

## Assignments

1. For your first journal entry, write about yourself. How do you feel about taking this course on ethnic studies? Are there things you are excited about learning? Do you have any concerns or things you are unsure about regarding race and ethnic studies? What have you learned in the past about ethnic studies? What do race and ethnicity mean to you? How do race and ethnicity impact your life?

You will complete a journal entry in each lesson. The goal of these assignments is to think critically about the lesson topics and their impact on you personally. You aren't expected to have all the answers. In fact, you might find yourself asking more questions. Honest self-expression matters more than writing style or technique. However, in order to express yourself clearly and powerfully, you'll want to use your command of the English language to its fullest.

You might find that writing by hand in a blank journal helps your ideas flow. Some of your journal assignments will be fairly informal, and others will be more involved. For the more complex assignments, you may want to use your handwritten journal to organize your initial thoughts, and then type your response as you revise and shape it into its final form.

2. After watching the documentary *On Strike! Ethnic Studies 1969–1999*, write a one-page reflection about the student movement. Why were ethnic studies controversial? Why did students want ethnic studies included in the curriculum? How do you think these students handled the issue—was it effective? Would you have done anything different? If you were there at the time, would you have participated? Why or why not?

## Activities

Complete both of the following activities. Write a few sentences about each.

### Activity A: Race Discussions

Over the course of two days this week, keep track of how many times topics of race or ethnicity appear in media or in conversations you have. Pay attention to everything you normally view or listen to: radio, music, television, YouTube, Instagram and other social media, news outlets, etc. Keep a tally of any mention of race or ethnicity. On the third day, reflect on what you observed about when these topics appeared and why. Do you notice any patterns or trends?

### Activity B: People Emojis

Use your smartphone or computer to explore different emojis that represent people. Is there an emoji that looks like you? Do the emojis capture differences in gender or race? How?



(Image credit: Prawny)

## Further Study

If you are interested in additional reading about race and ethnic studies, the following texts are recommended. (All of these readings are optional.)

*When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* by Ira Katznelson (W.W. Norton and Company, 2006)

*The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* by George Lipsitz (Temple University Press, 2018)

*Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* by James W. Loewen  
(The New Press, 2018)

*A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn (Harper Collins, 2003)

### **SHARE YOUR WORK**

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher. Make sure each assignment is clearly labeled. Please proofread your work and make any corrections before notifying your teacher that it is ready to review.

If you have any questions about the lesson assignments or how to share your work, contact your teacher. If you would like to modify any of the assignments or activities (now or in future lessons), please consult with your teacher first.

## Lesson

# 2

# Identity: Who Are You?

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## Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Identify different aspects that can make up a person's identity.
- Examine the process of identity formation in individuals and society.
- Examine how a sense of identity can change over time.

## Lesson Introduction

Who are you? What aspects of your identity are important to you and why?

Our identities are shaped by a variety of factors and impact how we move through the world. In this lesson, you will learn about identity and identity formation. To some extent, our identities are formed by the values of our parents and the culture in which we live. The values we absorb affect how we see ourselves. When these values and how we see ourselves are in alignment, we generally feel good about ourselves. When these values and how we see ourselves are at odds, this can create conflict in ourselves and in our lives.

Most people have several identity markers: sister, teacher, athlete, writer, Muslim, dancer, introvert, friend, etc. Many, but not all, people identify with a particular ethnicity as well, and this often becomes a dominant identity and force in their lives. As you consider the different ways you see yourself, think about how each identity influences your behavior and thoughts. What does it mean to you to be an artist or Mexican or an extrovert? How does each label or identity express itself in your life?

As you learn about identity, consider how you might describe your own identity and how others might describe you and your identity. Do these characterizations differ? This question is a starting point to consider how identity is shaped by internal and external factors.

## ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Read the lesson introduction and key terms.
- ☐ Read *The House on Mango Street*.
- ☐ Watch the video "The Bear That Wasn't."
- ☐ Complete journal entry #2.
- ☐ Create an identity map, diagram, or other type of graphic.
- ☐ Activity A: Family History Interview
- ☐ Activity B: Me, My Race, and I

### Key Terms

**Identity:** who you are and what characteristics or traits define you. Identity can describe both how you define yourself and how other people might describe you.

## Reading and Viewing

1. Read the novel *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (110 pages). *The House on Mango Street* is a coming-of-age story about a young girl, Esperanza, and her relationship to place, family, culture, and more.

Reading tip: What aspects of identity are important to Esperanza? How do other people try to characterize her identity? How does where she lives impact her identity? As you read, notice how her identity and concept of self change over time.

2. Watch the following video. (Video length: 5:04)

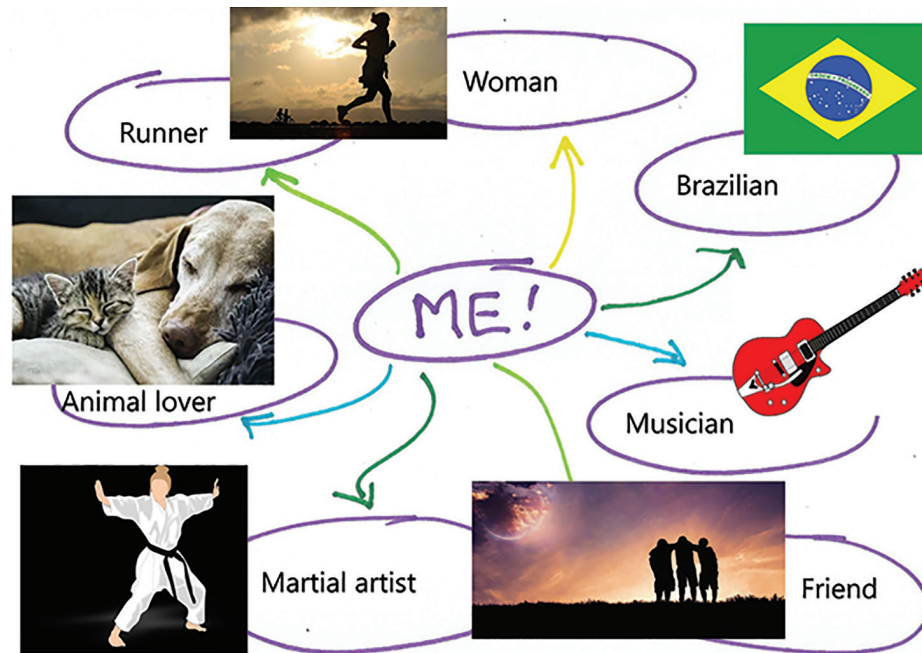
“The Bear That Wasn’t”

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=mt106ojXPYE&ab\\_channel=FacingHistoryandOurselves](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mt106ojXPYE&ab_channel=FacingHistoryandOurselves)

Consider the different aspects of the bear’s identity. How did other people characterize the bear’s identity? How did their perspective impact the bear?

## Assignments

1. Complete journal entry #2 by writing an identity autobiography using the following prompts:
  - What parts of your identity are important to you?
  - Why are they important?
  - What is your race and ethnicity?
  - Do you remember the first time you learned about your race and ethnicity?
  - Has your sense of self been influenced by the way others see you? If so, how?
2. Based on your journal entry, draw an identity map, diagram, or other graphic using these categories as a starting point: race, gender, sexuality, nationality, religion, birth order, country of residence, or country of birth. You may also highlight other parts of your identity that are important to you.



## Activities

Complete the following activities.

### Activity A: Family History Interview

Interview an older member of your household about their identity and memories related to their family history. Start with the following questions:

- Where and when were you born?
- Where are your ancestors from?
- How did your family end up living in your current region?
- Are you named after anyone in your family?
- What did/do your parents do for a living?
- What is your earliest memory of your family?
- Where did you sleep in your house?
- What was your favorite food to eat as a child? Why?
- What holidays did your family celebrate?

Include any other questions you want to add. Invite your interviewee to share anything else they'd like to include about their family history.

Write a reflection on your interview. Did anything surprise you? Did the interview help you better understand your own personal history and identity?

### **Activity B: Me, My Race, and I**

Explore the following slideshow:

“Me, My Race, and I: What’s Race Got to Do with It?”

[www.pbs.org/race/005\\_MeMyRaceAndI/005\\_00-home.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/005_MeMyRaceAndI/005_00-home.htm)

Consider the role race has played in your life. After viewing the slideshow, is there an experience that you look back on with a different perspective or understanding? Describe this in writing or in another format (artistic, creative, photographic, etc.).



(Image credit: PickPik)

## **Further Study**

To explore what it means to have a cultural identity, read the following article. (All Further Study activities are optional.)

“What Is Your Heritage? Discover Your Cultural Identity”

[www.familysearch.org/blog/en/what-is-heritage](http://www.familysearch.org/blog/en/what-is-heritage)

### **SHARE YOUR WORK**

When you have completed this lesson, proofread your work carefully. Are you showing what you’ve been learning and thinking about? You can always add more than is asked for in the assignment.

When you are ready, share your work with your teacher, and include any questions you might have. Notify your teacher when your work is ready to be reviewed, and then continue to the next lesson.

## Lesson

# 3

# Race and Ethnicity

## Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Explain race as a social construct.
- Differentiate between different types of racism.
- Examine the historical origins of racism.

## Lesson Introduction

Race is a defining feature of our social world. It often shapes how we interpret the world around us. However, race is a social construct. *Social* refers to groups of people and interactions, and *construct* refers to building or creating something. So, a social construct is something built or constructed by people and society; it refers to assigning meaning to something that becomes accepted as a norm in society.

Let's look at an example of a social construct. Why do we stop driving when we see a red light, slow down when we see a yellow light, and go when we see a green light? Did you know that meaning was assigned to these different colors for trains as they traveled on railways? While red has long been a color associated with caution, danger, fear, and blood, and thus used to signal the need to stop, the colors for caution and go have changed over time. In fact, white lights were once used to signal go. But in 1914, the red lens on a stoplight fell off, leaving the white light behind the lens; since a white light was the signal for go, this caused two trains to crash. Later, the colors on traffic lights were assigned meaning. There is no scientific reason that these colors are used on a traffic light. The colors could be purple, blue, and black. But meaning has been assigned to red, yellow, and green to help keep people safe.

Although meaning is socially constructed and assigned to these colors, the shared understanding of the meaning of the colors has very real effects in our everyday life. In fact, our shared understanding

## ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Read the lesson introduction and key terms.
- ☐ Read the following articles:
  - “Ten Things Everyone Should Know About Race”
  - “The Historical Origins and Development of Racism”
- ☐ Watch the video “Unequal Opportunity Race.”
- ☐ Watch the three-part series *Race: The Power of an Illusion*.
- ☐ Complete journal entry #3.
- ☐ Explore the website *Race: The Power of an Illusion*.
- ☐ Activity: Alien Invasion

of the colors of red, yellow, and green on a traffic light is a matter of life or death, and it impacts our actions and behaviors in a powerful way. Likewise, other social constructs have an important impact on how we move through the world.

As a social construct, there is no biological essence to race or racial groups. That means that there is nothing biological that separates different races of people—there is nothing in DNA or blood or in one's body that makes one race different from another. In fact, as you will learn from the videos you watch this week, there is more variation in the biology within a singular racial group (Black, white, Asian, etc.) than between groups.

Race as a social construct with no biological basis may be a new, and possibly challenging, concept for you. It may take time for the ramifications of this information to fully sink in. Don't worry! Many concepts in this course take time to grasp because they are taken for granted in society and require critical thinking to deconstruct. When we deconstruct a concept, we break it down into its component parts so we can really stop and think about their meaning and how the concept came to be.

Over time, racial categories have developed as a way to categorize different groups of people. These categorizations designated certain groups as superior or inferior based on socially constructed racial traits or characteristics. Racism is stigmatizing groups as inferior based on their presumed racial categorization. This week you will learn about the history of race and racism from scientists, historians, and other researchers who challenge some of the long-held assumptions about race in society.

### Key Terms

**Race:** the meaning and difference assigned to a group of people based on assumed biological distinctions related to skin color and physical features (known as phenotype), ancestry, and culture. Because of the importance placed on race in society, many assume that race is “natural” or biological. However, race is a social construct and is created by society.

Other definitions of *race*:

- “A social construction to describe a group of people who share physical and cultural traits as well as common ancestry” (Golash-Boza 6)
- “Constructed categories of people based on a hierarchical worldview that associates ancestry, descent and phenotype with cultural and moral attributes” (Golash-Boza 211)

**Racialization:** the process by which a person is racialized or identified by others based on their presumed race. For example, one might be racialized by their accent, how they dress, or their physical features.

**Racism:** the assigned inferiority to a group based on assumed racial difference, which is used to justify unequal and discriminatory treatment.

There are different types of racism. Often, when we think of racism, we understand it as individual discrimination from one person to another. However, racism operates at different levels.

**Interpersonal racism:** racism between individuals. This might include overt discrimination, prejudice, or microaggressions targeted at an individual.

**Institutional racism:** racism that is built into an institutional structure. Institutions include schools (education), hospitals (health care), the labor market (employment), etc. An example of institutional racism would be when a qualified person applies for a job but does not get hired because of a discriminatory hiring practice or policy based on race. This term was first used by Ture and Hamilton (1967) to describe racist policies and practices in institutions and organizations. They wrote, “When a black family moves into a home in a white neighborhood and is stoned, burned or routed out, they are victims of an overt act of individual racism which most people will condemn. But it is institutional racism that keeps black people locked in dilapidated slum tenements, subject to the daily prey of exploitative slumlords, merchants, loan sharks and discriminatory real estate agents.”

**Structural racism:** the connections and interactions among different institutions in the production and maintenance of racism (also known as interinstitutional racism). The school-to-prison pipeline is an example of structural racism: Black and nonwhite students are often disciplined in school in ways that push them into the criminal justice system. This interinstitutional connection shows how the educational system and the criminal justice system work together to discriminate against people based on race. (You will learn more about the school-to-prison pipeline in lesson 12.)

**Systemic racism:** racism entrenched in all aspects of society. The study of systemic racism emphasizes an analysis of white supremacy (the belief that white people are superior to nonwhite people, which informs policies and practices to uphold this belief), history (for example, the history of slavery and its legacy), and anti-Black ideologies (normalized ideas that stigmatize and discriminate against Black people) to understand how racism influences all segments of society (see Feagin 2000). The school-to-prison pipeline is also an example of systemic racism (in addition to being an example of structural racism). The school-to-prison pipeline is built on a false belief that nonwhite people need to be disciplined and punished because of criminal tendencies. This belief is rooted in long-standing violence and systemic discrimination against nonwhite people.

**Microaggression:** an everyday, often subtle comment, interaction, or behavior that is rooted in bias. The term refers to a little thing (*micro*) that feels like a personal attack (*aggression*). An example would be complimenting someone on their command of the English language based on their physical attributes. This is a microaggression because of the assumption that someone who looks a certain way would not know how to speak English or speak it well. Often, the person who commits a microaggression does not realize that their behavior is discriminatory, rooted in bias, and hurtful.

## Reading and Viewing

1. Read the following articles:

“Ten Things Everyone Should Know About Race”

[newsreel.org/guides/race/10things.htm](http://newsreel.org/guides/race/10things.htm)

“The Historical Origins and Development of Racism”

[www.pbs.org/race/000\\_About/002\\_04-background-02-01.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-background-02-01.htm)

2. Watch the following video by the African American Policy Forum. (Video length: 4:08)

“Unequal Opportunity Race”

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBb5TgOXgNY&ab\\_channel=aapfvideo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBb5TgOXgNY&ab_channel=aapfvideo)

What are different examples of institutional and structural racism in the short video? How did you feel while watching this video?

3. Watch *Race: The Power of an Illusion* (California Newsreel 2003), a three-part series on the history of race and its contemporary implications. Each film is approximately one hour long.

“Part I Race: The Difference Between Us”

“Part II Race: The Story We Tell”

“Part III Race: The House We Live In”

This series is available at [vimeo.com/ondemand/race](http://vimeo.com/ondemand/race). A one-week rental costs \$4.99. (If you are unable to access it, contact your teacher for alternate suggestions.)



### Think About It

“There is no such thing as race. Racism is a construct; a social construct. And it has benefits. Money can be made off of it. People who don’t like themselves can feel better because of it. It can describe certain kinds of behavior that are wrong or misleading. So [racism] has a social function. But race can only be defined as a human being.” —Toni Morrison

Think about the function of race as a social construct. Whom does it benefit? Whom does it harm?

## Assignments

1. Complete journal entry #3 by responding to the following prompt: Race is a social construct. There is no biological essence. Race is not natural or neutral.

Discuss this idea in your own words. Use the terminology and concepts you have learned. Explain the reasoning behind your ideas and provide supporting details.

2. Explore the following interactive website:

Race: The Power of an Illusion

[www.pbs.org/race/001\\_WhatIsRace/001\\_00-home.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/001_WhatIsRace/001_00-home.htm)

Start by reading the section “What Is Race?” on the home page. Read through facts 1–10 by clicking on the circles at the bottom of the box titled “Is Race for Real?” List at least three facts that you found particularly meaningful or surprising. Explain your choices. How does each fact fit with or relate to what you already know or contradict something you thought was true?



### **Around the World: Global Perspectives**

Despite race having no biological basis, racial discrimination is a persistent global issue. For instance, many ethnic minorities in the Middle East region have experienced discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, and religion. Sometimes racial discrimination occurs when people have been displaced or find themselves stateless after political and military actions rearrange borders or force relocation.

The Kurds are one of the indigenous groups in the Middle East. The BBC article “Who Are the Kurds?” says the following:

“Between 25 and 35 million Kurds inhabit a mountainous region straddling the borders of Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran and Armenia. They make up the fourth-largest ethnic group in the Middle East, but they have never obtained a permanent nation state. . . . Today, they form a distinctive community, united through race, culture and language, even though they have no standard dialect. They also adhere to a number of different religions and creeds, although the majority are Sunni Muslims. . . .

“There is deep-seated hostility between the Turkish state and the country’s Kurds, who constitute 15% to 20% of the population. Kurds received harsh treatment at the hands of the Turkish authorities for generations. In response to uprisings in the 1920s and 1930s, many Kurds were resettled, Kurdish names and costumes were banned, the use of the Kurdish language was restricted, and even the existence of a Kurdish ethnic identity was denied, with people designated ‘Mountain Turks’.”

To learn more, read the full article below.

“Who Are the Kurds?”

[www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29702440#:~:text=Between%2025%20and%2035%20million,obtained%20a%20permanent%20nation%20state](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29702440#:~:text=Between%2025%20and%2035%20million,obtained%20a%20permanent%20nation%20state)

## Activities

Complete the following activity.

### Activity: Alien Invasion

Imagine an alien arrived on Earth and was trying to understand race and gender. How would you explain it? Write a dialogue between you and the alien about race and gender in the United States. (Assume the alien can understand your language and communicate.) Another option is to use a drawing, comic-style panel, play, music, or other creative art form to convey the concepts of race and gender to your alien friend.

Let the alien ask tough questions that you have to answer, rather than just having them listen and agree with everything you say.

### SHARE YOUR WORK

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher, and include any questions you might have. Notify your teacher when your work is ready to be reviewed.



(Image credit: Pixabay)

## Lesson

# 4

# Power and Privilege

## Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Examine the four different types of power.
- Analyze the relationship between power and privilege.
- Explain how power and privilege impact your life based on your identity and experiences.
- Define intersectionality.

## Lesson Introduction

In the first three lessons, you explored the meaning of race, racism, and identity, along with aspects of the histories of different racial and ethnic groups. This week will focus on a framework for understanding how power works and the benefits, or privileges, that dominant groups experience as a result of their social position.

Intersectionality is a theory developed by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw that examines intersecting systems of power and oppression. Intersectionality is a framework that helps us understand how racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, classism, and other forms of oppression interact or intersect. Please note, intersectionality is not a framework of “additive oppression” where, for example, a queer Latina experiences “triple oppression” because of her position as LGBTQ, female, and Latina (thus, triple oppressed). Instead, intersectionality provides a framework for understanding the relationship between racism, sexism, homophobia, and many other forms of oppression. Understanding the complexity of intersectionality is essential to addressing the problems of power, privilege, and oppression.

## ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Read the lesson introduction and key terms.
- ☐ Read the following articles:
  - “What Is Intersectionality? Let These Scholars Explain the Theory and Its History”
  - “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”
- ☐ Watch the film *A Class Divided*.
- ☐ Complete journal entry #4.
- ☐ Write about the experiment described in *A Class Divided*.
- ☐ Activity: Intersectionality

Often, when we think about power, it is framed as power over someone or something. Power can be experienced as domination, such as when you are in charge of a younger sibling and you get to control what they can and can't do. Power also can be experienced as subordination, such as when a parent or boss controls what you can and can't do.

However, there are many different types of power. By exploring how power manifests in different ways, you can begin to consider how groups can use this knowledge to fight for social change and bring about transformation. (We'll look more closely at social movements and social change in a later lesson.)

### Key Terms

**Privilege:** advantages that one benefits from because of their social status.

**Intersectionality:** a framework used to understand how racism and other forms of oppression interact or intersect.

## Reading and Viewing

1. To learn more about intersectionality, read a short history of the concept in the following article:

"What Is Intersectionality? Let These Scholars Explain the Theory and Its History"

[time.com/5560575/intersectionality-theory](https://time.com/5560575/intersectionality-theory)

2. Read the following article by Peggy McIntosh to learn more about privilege and power:

"White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"

[www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf](http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf)

Reading tip: This article emphasizes individual privileges. However, while privilege can be experienced on an individual level, it is also part of a broader system that creates benefits and disadvantages for different groups based on a socially constructed hierarchy. The short video "Unequal Opportunity Race," which you watched in the last lesson, will help you understand the difference between individual and structural benefits and disadvantages.

3. Watch the following film. (Film length: 53:05)

*A Class Divided*

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/class-divided](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/class-divided)

**Language content warning:** In the documentary, one of the students uses the "N" word, a racial slur. Please note that this language is rooted in a deep history of racism and anti-Blackness and was/is used as a tool to subordinate Black people.

When watching *A Class Divided*, think about what you've learned about race as a social construct and how meaning is assigned to different groups. In this experiment, how is eye color used to assign meaning to different groups? What does this teach children about difference and power? Remember, it is not simply that these groups are socially constructed as “different”—it is about the power assigned to different groups and how some groups are positioned as superior and inferior to one another.



### Think About It

When we think about power, it is usually understood as someone having power over someone else. But what about other kinds of power?

Power can describe domination, resistance, collaboration, and/or transformation. The different types of power are:

**Power over (coercion, violence, abuse, force, oppression)**

- Example: A bully at school who creates an unsafe, unhealthy atmosphere that makes learning difficult or unsustainable.

**Power with (collective)**

- Example: Your power to work together with your friends to demand that every person deserves a good education.

**Power to (personal agency)**

- Example: Your power to speak up for yourself or make your own choices.

**Power within (personal sense of self-worth and self-knowledge)**

- Example: Your power to know that you deserve a good education.

## Assignments

1. For journal entry #4, make a list of different advantages (privileges) you benefit from based on different aspects of your identity. This could be age, ability, gender, race, sexuality, religion, etc. You can use the list in “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” to help you generate your list. Does anything about your list surprise you?
2. After you watch the documentary *A Class Divided*, write a one-page essay using the following prompt: Is Jane Elliot’s blue eyes/brown eyes experiment relevant to today’s society?

After you’ve written a rough draft, take the time to revise your essay to make it more expressive and effective. Think about your word choice and phrasing. Are you expressing your ideas clearly?

Are you using reasoning and relevant details to develop your stance? After your revisions are complete, proofread it to make sure you are delivering your best work.

## Activities

Complete the following activity.

### Activity: Intersectionality

To further understand intersectionality, watch the following keynote speech by Mia Mingus, which was presented at the 2018 Disability Intersectionality Summit in Cambridge, Massachusetts:

“DIS2018: Mia Mingus, opening keynote presenter”

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Im21KpsNk1s&ab\\_channel=DisabilityIntersectionalitySummit](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Im21KpsNk1s&ab_channel=DisabilityIntersectionalitySummit)

If you prefer to read the transcript, it can be found here:

“‘Disability Justice’ Is Simply Another Term for Love”

[leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2018/11/03/disability-justice-is-simply-another-term-for-love](http://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2018/11/03/disability-justice-is-simply-another-term-for-love)

Afterward, create a graphic or drawing that expresses your understanding of the concept of intersectionality.

## Further Study

Watch Kimberlé Crenshaw’s 2016 TED Talk about intersectionality. (Video length: 18:41)

“The Urgency of Intersectionality”

[www.ted.com/talks/kimberle\\_crenshaw\\_the\\_urgency\\_of\\_intersectionality?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality?language=en)

**Content warning:** the video contains images and descriptions of violence.



(Image credit: Ted Eytan)

### SHARE YOUR WORK

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher, and include any questions you might have. Notify your teacher when your work is ready to be reviewed.

## Lesson

# 5

# Whiteness

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## Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Understand whiteness and white supremacy as historical constructions.
- Analyze the connection between privilege and oppression.
- Explain what it means to make whiteness visible.

## Lesson Introduction

Is *white* a racial identity? Whiteness studies examine the systems and structures that create racism and white supremacy. It is not the study of an individual identity—it doesn't look at an individual white person as being racist, for example. Instead, whiteness studies seek to make the racial category of white visible, explore the history of white supremacy, and investigate and question how whiteness is socially constructed as a superior racial classification that benefits white people at the expense of other groups.

An example of making whiteness visible is in *A Class Divided*, the film you watched for lesson 4. In the film, students learned about racism and their white privilege. They learned that racism is something that is taught and learned, and that, as white children, they benefit from racism. The film makes whiteness visible as a default racial identity, where white students generally do not have to learn about race or their racial identity because it is taken for granted and because of the privileges associated with being white. Whiteness studies also shed light on issues of “white guilt” and “white fragility”—when learning about racism, white individuals often respond with a sentiment of guilt or fragility that impedes anti-racist efforts.

## ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Read the lesson introduction and key terms.
- ☐ Read chapter 6 in *A Different Mirror*.
- ☐ Read “How Italians Became ‘White.’”
- ☐ Watch the film *White Like Me: Race, Racism and White Privilege in America*.
- ☐ Complete journal entry #5.
- ☐ Write a reflection about white privilege.
- ☐ Activity: Talking About Whiteness

### Key Terms

**White privilege:** inherent system-wide preferential treatment based on skin color; this unearned privilege extends into all areas of society, including social, economic, educational, political, and professional sectors.

## Reading and Viewing

1. Choose one of the reading assignments below.

In *A Different Mirror*, read the following sections from chapter 6, “Fleeing the ‘Tyrants Heel’: ‘Exiles’ from Ireland”:

- Chapter beginning (131)
- “Behind the Emigration: ‘John Bull Must Have the Beef’” (132–137)
- “‘Green Power’: The Irish ‘Ethnic’ Strategy” (151–154)

In *A Different Mirror for Young People*, read chapter 6, “The Flight from Ireland” (105–124).

Reading tip: Consider how the category of “white” changed over time. What contributed to the Irish transitioning from being considered white ethnics or nonwhite to white?

2. Read the following article:

“How Italians Became ‘White’”

[www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/10/12/opinion/columbus-day-italian-american-racism.html](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/10/12/opinion/columbus-day-italian-american-racism.html)

3. On the Kanopy website, watch the following video. (Video length: 57 minutes)

*White Like Me: Race, Racism and White Privilege in America* (Media Education Foundation, 2007)

All Kanopy/Media Education Foundation films are accessed using the private access link provided to you. (See the Course Materials section of the introduction for more details.)



### Think About It

Does studying or learning about whiteness put too much focus on white people as opposed to dismantling or challenging whiteness? Or is it important to talk about whiteness to make it visible and denormalize it as a racial category?

If possible, discuss these questions with both white people and those who identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color).

## Assignments

1. Complete journal entry #5. Building on last week's journal entry about privilege and power, dive deeper into your experiences with advantage and disadvantage.

Remember that power and privilege is not only about individual experiences but also about connections to broader systems of power and oppression. That is, one might be affected on an individual level (for instance, through microaggressions, such as when a person assumes someone doesn't speak English or was not born in the United States because of the color of their skin, how they dress, or their accent) or on an institutional level (such as when a student is not admitted into a college or university because of the high school they attended).

Can you identify a specific experience where you benefitted from your social position or were hindered by it? How does reflecting on this experience make you feel?

2. Central to Tim Wise's argument in *White Like Me: Race, Racism and White Privilege in America* is the impact of whiteness on white people as well as its cost. Write a one-page reflection on why Wise thinks it is important for white people to address racism and white privilege. How does making whiteness visible attempt to address racial inequality and racism?



## Activities

Complete the following activity.

### Activity: Talking About Whiteness

Explore the following resource from the National Museum of African American History:

“Talking About Race: Whiteness”

[nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/whiteness](https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/whiteness)

Create an image or word collage about what you learned, what you were surprised by, or your experiences and emotions around this topic.

## Further Study

Tim Wise’s lecture *White Like Me: Race, Racism and White Privilege in America* was filmed in 2007. Do you think things have changed? Why or why not? Make a bulleted list in your journal of what has or has not changed.

### SHARE YOUR WORK

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher, and include any questions you might have. Notify your teacher when your work is ready to be reviewed.