



Ethnic Studies Lesson 1F: Introduction—White Supremacy, Part 1

TOPIC:
INTRODUCTION

GRADE LEVELS:
11-12

TIME:
1½ HOURS

California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Themes, Values, and Principles Alignment

Theme:

3. Systems of Power

Values and Principles:

4. Critique empire building in history and its relationship to white supremacy, racism, and other forms of power and oppression.
5. Challenge racist, bigoted, discriminatory, and imperialist/colonial beliefs and practices on multiple levels.

California English and Social Science Standards Alignment

English Language Arts Standards (11th and 12th Grade):

Reading—Informational Text (RI.11-12)

Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging. (RI.11-12.5)

Writing—(W.11-12)

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. (W.11-12.1)

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (W.11-12.5)

Social Sciences Standards (11th and 12th Grade):

History-Social Science Content Standards—(Grades 9-12)

Analyze the roots of white supremacist thought, including its historical development and ideological underpinnings. (History-Social Science Content Standard 11.5)

Lesson Purpose

Students will research the roots and legacy of white supremacist thought in the US.

Essential Questions

What are the roots of white supremacist thought, and what continues to be its legacy?

Why is studying American history through ethnicity important?

Materials

[Council on Foreign Relations: What Is Colonialism and How Did It Arise?](#)

[TED-Ed: The Atlantic slave trade: What too few textbooks told you](#)

[History: Social Darwinism](#)

[CNN: The KKK: Its history and lasting legacy](#)

[KWL Chart](#)

Vocabulary

colonialism

Atlantic slave trade

social Darwinism

white supremacy

Lesson Steps

Step 1:

- As a class, ask students what they know about the terms *colonialism*, *imperialism*, and *white supremacy*. Make sure students understand that racism and white supremacy are not just American issues. Almost all countries of European origin participated in the 16th-to-19th-century colonialism across the world. As a class, use a group reading strategy such as round robin or popcorn to read [Council on Foreign Relations: What Is Colonialism and How Did It Arise?](#) through the first map. As students listen, have them take notes on the definition of *colonialism* and what it might look like for the people who live there.
- As a class, when students have completed notes, have them share with the class and develop a class definition of *colonialism*.

Step 2:

- As a class, ask students how colonialism could have led to racism. Have students watch [TED-Ed: The Atlantic slave trade: What too few textbooks told you](#) (video 5 minutes, 38 seconds). As students watch, have them take notes on who the colonizers were, what population was dehumanized, and what strategies were used to justify slavery.
- When students have finished watching, have them share their notes with a partner. As a class, have students share. Make sure students understand that many of the topics the class has discussed so far, such as scientific racism, phrenology, eugenics, etc.—as well as white supremacy—have their roots in a justification for inequality during the period of European colonization. (It may be helpful to post the following quote on the board.)

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“It is impossible for us to suppose these creatures to be men, because, allowing them to be men, a suspicion would follow that we ourselves are not Christians.”—Enlightenment philosopher Baron de Montesquieu ([from Hope College, How European Colonialism Led to the Invention of Race—and Why That Still Matters](#))

Step 3:

- Ask students what they already know about the term *social Darwinism*. As a class, use a group reading strategy such as round robin or popcorn to read [History: Social Darwinism](#). As students read, they should take notes on how some theories of social Darwinism align with other forms of scientific racism and how those can be used to justify limiting the civil rights of certain groups. Students should speculate on other reasons that groups might not thrive—other than being the fittest. Students should also know that there were several forms of social Darwinism—collectivist, individualists, anti-imperialists, etc.
- As a class, when students have completed their notes, have them share with the class. How are some of the theories of social Darwinism the same as or different from other forms of pseudoscience that were used to promote the ideas of racial difference?

Step 4:

- As a class, ask students this lesson’s questions, “What are the roots of white supremacist thought and what continues to be its legacy?” and this unit’s question, “Why is studying American history through ethnicity important?” Make note of what was learned on this unit’s KWL chart—along with additional questions.

Essential Question Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection

As time permits and for homework, have students watch [The New York Times, A conversation with White People on Race](#) (video 5 minutes, 35 seconds). As students watch, have them take notes on which person speaking invokes a reaction in them. The reaction could be one of understanding, disbelief, relating to, or identifying some of the racially based ideas the class has discussed so far. Students should write up their reaction in a short paragraph.

Additional Readings and Resources

Anderson, William L., and David Kiriazis. “Rents and Race: Legacies of Progressive Politics.” *The Independent Review* 18, no. 1 (2013): 115-133.

Bernstein, David E., and Ilya Somin. “Judicial Power & Civil Rights Reconsidered,” George Mason University School of Law Working Paper Series, Paper 9, 2004. <https://law.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1008&context=gmulwps>

Fredrickson, George M. *Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*. Harper, 1971.

Fredrickson, George M. *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study of American and South African History*. Oxford University Press, 1982.

Marshall, Jonathan. “William Graham Sumner: Critic of Progressive Liberalism.” *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 3, no. 3 (1979): 261-277. https://cdn.mises.org/3_3_2_0.pdf

Moreno, Paul D. *Black Americans and Organized Labor: A New History*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005.

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[*The New York Times*. A conversation with White People on Race.](#)

Reilly, Wilfred, *Lies My Liberal Teacher Told Me: Debunking the False Narratives Defining America's School Curricula*. Broadside Books, 2024, 184-201.

Reilly, Wilfred. *Taboo: Ten Facts You Can't Talk About*. Regnery, 2020, chap. 7.

Roback, Jennifer. "Racism as Rent-Seeking." *Economic Inquiry* 27 (October 1989): 661-681.

Saunders, Daniel G. "The Nazis Weren't 'White Supremacists' and Why It Matters," *The Times of Israel*, June 3, 2024. <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-nazis-werent-white-supremacists-and-why-it-matters/>

Zwolinski, Matt. "Social Darwinism and Social Justice: Herbert Spencer on Our Duties to the Poor." *Institute on Law and Philosophy* (2015): 188. https://digital.sandiego.edu/law_philosophy_scholarship/188/

NOTE TO EDUCATORS REGARDING ADDITIONAL READINGS AND RESOURCES: America is a pluralistic country, ethnically. It is also a pluralistic country politically—left, right, and center. Ethnic studies educators have ready access to resources from the left-of-center in the [2021 California Model Curriculum](#) and in the [Liberated Model Curriculum](#). This Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum favors teachers exposing students to views from across the political spectrum. Educators often lack guidance to materials from outside the left-of-center. Therefore, in the sections on Additional Readings and Resources, the Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum alerts educators to credible resources that provide an alternative to the other Model Curricula. In doing so, this curriculum encourages educators to acquaint students with evidence-based views from left, right, and center.

Ethnic Studies 1B: KWL Chart

KNOW**WONDER****LEARNED**

What do we think we already know about this topic?

What do we wonder about this topic? Write your questions below.

After the research is completed, what did we learn? Make sure to cite your source.

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