



educating for cultural literacy  
and mutual respect

## Creating Inclusive and Equitable Communities – A Call to Action

*Understanding the origins and impact of bigotry in the  
U.S. today and what we can do about it*

### **Lesson 4: Connecting Racialization and Racism**

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## Introduction

This lesson builds upon Lesson 3, which introduced students to the social construction of race during the colonial era. Lesson 4 explains how powerful white American and European actors ascribed attributes to these newly created racial groups in order to justify racist actions and laws. While Lesson 3 focuses on the colonial origins of racialization, Lesson 4 invites students to explore the impact of racialization on racial and ethnic minorities through the 19th and 20th centuries.

In this lesson, students will learn that racialization laid the foundation for racism. In order to discriminate against people, groups in power had to first create ways to distinguish themselves from others. By inventing racial groups and then assigning negative attributes to groups that they considered non-white, white American and European actors were able to create a hierarchy that placed whites at the top and non-whites lower. This process of racialization cleared the way for white people in power to manipulate these racial categories for their own personal gain.

In this lesson, students will explore race as a social construct. Through a PowerPoint presentation and a PBS episode, students will grapple with the contemporary history of racialization and racism in the United States.

**Theme:** Identity; History and Movement

**Disciplinary Area:** General Ethnic Studies

**Ethnic Studies Values and Principles Alignment:** 1, 4, 5

### **Relevant Curriculum Standards**

California's [Literacy in History/Social Studies Standards](#):

- **Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies: RH.11.12.1; 11.12.2; 11.12.9**
  - Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
  - Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
  - Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.
- **Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: WHST.9.10.1; W.9.10.7**
  - Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.
  - Introduce a topic and organize ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
  - Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.
  - Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
  - Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources (primary and secondary), using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

## Background Information for Educators

Although race is often presented as a biological attribute, there are actually very few biological distinctions between racial groups.<sup>1</sup> Rather, researchers, including social scientists and medical experts, agree that race is a social construct.<sup>2</sup> This means that the concept of “race” was invented by people. Researchers have therefore refined the definition of race to mean “a system for classifying human beings that is grounded in the belief that they embody inherited and fixed biological characteristics that identify them as members of a racial group.”<sup>3</sup>

As was discussed in Lesson 3, the concept of race and racial categories as ways to distinguish between groups of people developed under the age of colonialism. In fact, the term “race” was not used in the English language to designate groups of people until the 16th century.<sup>4</sup> In the 18th centuries, European colonizers used the term “race” to distinguish between “superior” white colonizers and “inferior” people they colonized in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Once these racial groups were established, Europeans assigned certain attributes to these non-white populations which were then used to place groups on a continuum of hierarchy that privileged “whiteness” and devalued “blackness” and “brownness.”

The racial categories created under colonialism did not remain static, however. Rather, notions of “whiteness” and “non-whiteness” evolved over time. Consider the experience of Italian, Jewish, and Irish immigrants in the early 19th century. These groups, which are now widely seen as “white,” were considered “non-white” by Anglo-Saxon Americans.<sup>5</sup> Once Jews, Irishmen, and Italians were separated from the “purely white” Americans, they were portrayed as dangerous, ill, dirty, and uneducated. This racialization of new immigrant communities worked to justify policies that sought to curb immigration.<sup>6</sup> As new populations immigrated to the United States, groups that were previously seen as “non-white” gradually began to be seen as white as they assimilated into the communities they joined.

While Jews, Irishmen, and Italians “became” white, Arab Americans had the opposite experience. When the first groups of Arabs immigrated to the United States in the late 19th century, they were

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<sup>1</sup> Marvin Zuckerman, “Some Dubious Premises in Research and Theory on Racial Differences: Scientific, Social, and Ethical Issues,” *American Psychologist* 45, no. 12 (1990): 1297.

<sup>2</sup> Angela Onwuachi-Willig, “Race and Racial Identity Are Social Constructs,” *The New York Times*, September 6, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2015/06/16/how-fluid-is-racial-identity/race-and-racial-identity-are-social-constructs>.

<sup>3</sup> Ann Morning, *The Nature of Race: How Scientists Think and Teach about Human Difference* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Audrey Smedley, “The History of the Idea of Race,” in *Britannica*, December 17, 2004, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/race-human/The-history-of-the-idea-of-race>.

<sup>5</sup> Lillian Rubin, “Is This a White Country, or What?,” in *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study*, ed. P.S. Rothenberg, 4th ed. (New York: St. Martins, 1998), 92–99.

<sup>6</sup> Kamala Kelkar, “How a Shifting Definition of ‘White’ Helped Shape U.S. Immigration Policy,” PBS, September 16, 2017, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/white-u-s-immigration-policy>.

considered “marginally white.”<sup>7</sup> In the 1960s, however, perceptions of Arab Americans shifted as the United States became more involved in foreign affairs of the Middle East. Louise Cainkar argues this gradual racialization of Arab Americans was caused by a new perception of the “clash of civilizations” between the civilized white-Western world and the uncivilized non-white East.<sup>8</sup> By racializing Arabs, their new status as “non-white” became the basis for justifying American domination over the Middle East.

Overall, the process of racialization has been employed by white people in power to justify the domination of whites over non-whites since the 1600s. While specific racial categories and the dominant narratives about them have changed over time, the consequences of racialization have remained constant: prejudice and discrimination.

## Learning Objectives

**Identity:** *How will my instruction help students learn something about themselves and/or others?*

- Students will be able to analyze the consequences of racialization and racism on themselves and their peers.

**Skills:** *How will my instruction build students’ skills relating to the content?*

- Students will be able to summarize key arguments from multiple types of sources.
- Students will be able to compare and contrast how different groups were racialized.

**Intellect:** *How will my instruction build students’ knowledge and mental powers?*

- Students will be able to explain how the concept of race is a social construct.
- Students will be able to explain the origins of race in the United States.
- Students will be able to analyze the historical lineage of modern examples of racism.

**Criticality:** *How will my instruction inform students’ views of power and equity and the disruption of oppression?*

- Students will be able to analyze the role of power in creating racial groups for purposes of discrimination.
- Students will be able to explain the concept of hierarchy and how a racial hierarchy was created in the United States.

## Guiding Questions

1. What is race and what is racialization?
2. What is the connection between racialization and racism?
3. How did white Americans use racial categories to justify discrimination?

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<sup>7</sup> Louise Cainkar, “The Social Construction of Difference and the Arab American Experience,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 25, no. 2/3 (2006): 249.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 271.

## Key Concepts and Terminology

- **Discrimination** - treating people differently based primarily on membership in a group.
- **Hierarchy** - a system or organization in which people or groups are ranked one above the other according to status or authority.
- **Race** - a group of people who are perceived to share certain physical traits.
- **Racialization** - the classification of individuals into racial groups based on physical attributes.
- **Racism** - prejudice or discrimination against people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group.

## In-Class Activities

1. **The Hook** - Write the following quote on the board and ask students to write down what the quote means to them. Ask students to also write down one question about the quote that they would like to discuss during the class period. You will revisit students' answers to this quote at the end of the class period.

“Race as we know it has no deterministic, biological basis; all the same, race is so powerful that it can have life-or-death consequences” - Dalton Conley, sociologist and author of *You May Ask Yourself: An Introduction to Thinking like a Sociologist*
2. **Main Activity** - The main lesson consists of a short PowerPoint and a clip from the PBS film “Race: The Power of an Illusion.” First, present the ICSB slides 8 to 10, which introduce students to the concept of racialization. Students will use the PowerPoint Notetaking Worksheet (page 8) to take notes during the presentation. After the presentation, ask students to answer the following question with a partner: “How does racialization lay the foundation for racism?” Bring pairs back together to discuss their answers. Next, play the third episode, titled “The House We Live In,” of the PBS film “Race: The Power of an Illusion.” Play the first 11:22 minutes of the episode, which discuss the racism against non-white groups in the United States in the 20th century. Students should take notes on the Cornell Notetaking Sheet (page 9) while they watch.
3. **Class Discussion** - Lead a class discussion about what students learned from the PowerPoint and the PBS video. Use the Discussion Questions (page 6) to guide your class discussion. These discussion questions will also help students to answer the lesson’s Guiding Questions (page 4).
4. **Reflection** - Ask students to revisit the quote that they analyzed at the beginning of class. Has their understanding of the quote changed over the class period? How has their understanding of race changed? Revisit the questions they wrote down about the quote and discuss any lingering questions.

5. **Extension Activities** - Here are some ideas for further student exploration:
- Students watch the short Vox video [“The myth of race, debunked in 3 minutes,”](#) which introduces students to the idea that race is a social construct. The video also explains how racialization (or the process of assigning people to racial categories) has served various political, economic, and social purposes since the 18th century.
  - Students read the Atlantic article [“What We Mean When We Say Race is a Social Construct”](#) by Ta-Nehisi Coates and summarize the article in their own words.

## Discussion Questions

1. What makes race?
2. Even though race is an illusion, why does it play such a big role in social relations?
3. How were Italians, Slavs, and Jews perceived when they immigrated to the US in the late 19th to early 20th century? How did their roles change?
4. What role did pseudoscience play in racialization and racism?
5. Why were Italians, Slavs, and Jews considered to be able to “assimilate” but Blacks, Chinese, Puerto Ricans, etc., were not?
6. How did different places in the US define who was Black under the law? What does this prove about the concept of race?

## Homework

Students will conduct independent research on a historical issue that involves racialization and racism. Students may choose from the following list or may brainstorm their own example.

- Slavery
- Jim Crow Laws
- Chinese Exclusion Act
- Japanese Internment Camps
- Dispossession of Indigenous Land
- Segregation of Latinx into Urban Barrios
- Anti-Latinx Immigration Laws and Deportations

Students should prepare a multimedia presentation on their case study to share with the class during the next class session. Provide students with guiding questions to facilitate their research. Questions can include:

- What role did racialization play in this issue?
- What narratives were assigned to this racial group?
- How did oppressors use these narratives to justify racist policies and discrimination?
- How did people resist this instance of racism?
- If the issue is a historical event, are there lasting effects today? If so, what are they?

## Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection

- Refer to steps 3-4 of the In-Class Activities section

## Additional Resources

- Teaching Tolerance, “Jim Crow as a Form of Racialized Social Control” - <https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/jim-crow-as-a-form-of-racialized-social-control>
- The New York Times, “Teaching Japanese Internment Using Primary Resources” by Marjorie Backman and Michael Gonchar - <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/07/learning/lesson-plans/teaching-japanese-american-internment-using-primary-resources.html>
- The History Channel, “The Brutal History of Anti-Latino Discrimination in America” by Erin Blakemore - <https://www.history.com/news/the-brutal-history-of-anti-latino-discrimination-in-america>
- University of New Mexico, “Power and prejudice: Some definitions for discussion and analysis” by Jan Armstrong - <https://www.unm.edu/~jka/courses/archive/power.html>
- Oxford Academic, “The Racialization Process” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTcs-qOaAQ0>



## Student Worksheets

### PowerPoint Notetaking Sheet

1. Racialization is:
2. Describe how the following groups were racialized:

Africans	Indigenous Peoples	Hindus	Muslims

3. Why do you think these groups were racialized?
4. Jot down any questions you have.



## Cornell Notetaking Sheet

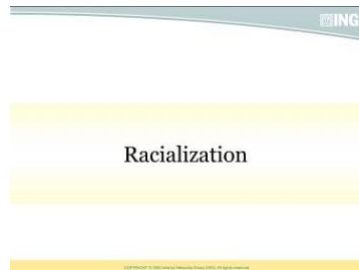
*Race: The Power of an Illusion. Episode 3: The House We Live In*

**Lesson:** Connecting Racialization and Racism

**Date:**

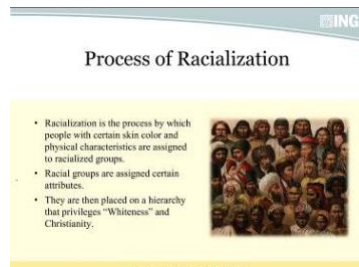
<p><b><u>Key Words</u></b></p> <p><b>Race</b> - a group of people who are <i>perceived</i> to share certain physical traits.</p> <p><b>Racialization</b> - the classification of individuals into racial groups based on physical attributes</p>	<p><b><u>Notes</u></b></p> <p>Race is an illusion but...</p> <p>What makes race?</p> <p>How did lawmakers react to immigration in the early 20th century?</p> <p>Scientific race theory...</p> <p>Virginia law defined a Black person as...</p> <p>Florida law defined a Black person as...</p>
<p><b><u>Questions</u></b></p>	<p><b><u>Key Takeaways</u></b></p>

## PowerPoint Presentation Slides



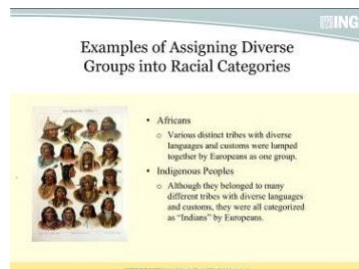
### Slide 16: Racialization

- We will now look at a second factor that has underpinned and helped justify colonialism - racialization.



### Slide 17: Process of Racialization

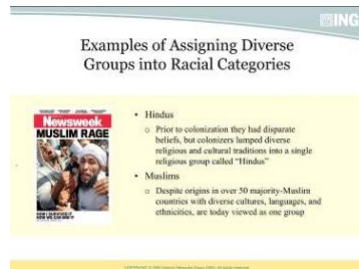
- Racialization refers to the process by which people with a certain skin color, physical or ancestral similarities are assigned to racialized groups.
- Certain attributes are then assigned to that racial group.
- Racialization is then used to create a hierarchy that privileges “whiteness” and Christianity and justifies the oppression of a subordinate group by representing it as less human.
- Racialization is used by those in power to reinforce existing racial hierarchies through policies.<sup>9</sup> Some groups are fluid within the hierarchy. For example, Irish Catholics were once disdained as “others” but are today viewed as white. Jews today are viewed as white, but still discriminated against for their non-Christian faith.



### Slides 18: Examples of Assigning Diverse Groups into Racial Categories

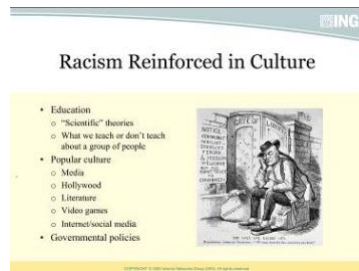
- Racialization assigns diverse groups of people into racial categories in which the groups didn't previously view or identify themselves.
- For example, various distinct African tribes with diverse languages and customs were lumped together by Europeans as part of the same group because they looked similar as “Blacks” or Africans.
- Indigenous Peoples, who are very diverse in cultures and languages and belonged to many different tribes, were all grouped together as one category - American “Indians.”

<sup>9</sup> Neil Gotanda, "The Racialization of Islam in American Law." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 637 (2011): pp. 184-95. Accessed July 25, 2018. <http://www.jstor.org.ez2.pausd.org/stable/41328573>.



## Slides 19: Examples of Assigning Diverse Groups into Racial Categories

- The British lumped together a rich diversity of religious and cultural traditions into a category called “Hinduism” and designated its followers as “Hindus.”
- Muslims today, despite their origins in over 50 majority-Muslim countries with diverse cultures, languages, ethnicities, and races, have recently come to be viewed as one monolithic group.
- This same process was applied to Europeans who as late as the two world wars were on opposing sides of conflicts but were united in the colonialism project. Today they are all classified as one group called Europeans or Westerners.
- However, the dominant group is generally afforded more nuance, and European history or civilization is given far more detail, than the history of non-Europeans.



## Slide 20: Racism Reinforced in Culture

- The result of racialization is racism; racism has been and continues to be upheld by various sectors of society. They include:
- Education
- Scientific theories in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, espoused by a number of leading scientists such as Charles Darwin, maintained that there were inherent differences, including differences in mental capacity, between people of different races; proponents of racist ideologies, including proponents of slavery in the United States and anti-Semites—and ultimately the Nazis—in Europe, cited these ideas in support of their policies.<sup>10</sup> These theories have been generally debunked in recent years.<sup>11</sup>
- When history is taught from the perspective of Europeans, it often diminishes the stories and contributions of non-Western peoples. This has led to the erasure of Indigenous or Black histories and the misrepresentations of their heroes, contributions, sufferings, and culture.
- It has also minimized the scientific and technological contributions of the Chinese and Indians, or the fact that Muslims contributed such everyday terms such as algebra, chemistry, and coffee.

<sup>10</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific\\_racism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_racism).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC420514/>.

- Popular culture continues to disseminate racism through various venues.
- The media generally portray Blacks, Latinx, Muslims, and others in a negative light, over-reporting bad news and underreporting positive stories about these groups.
- Hollywood often casts whites as the heroes and non-whites in stereotypical roles as servants or villains.
- Literature is commonly written from the standpoint of whites or with white protagonists.
- Video games often cast marginalized groups as the enemy or bad guys.
- The internet and social media are often used to promote racist stereotypes and ideas.
- Racism is used by those in power to reinforce existing racial hierarchies through government policies which target people of color, such as racial profiling, the War on Drugs that focuses enforcement on Blacks and Latinx, ICE raids that focus on Latinx, and the Travel Ban directed mainly against Muslim-majority countries.