

Internet Research Projects

Chapter 1: Diversity in the United States: Questions and Concepts

Race

In Chapter 1, we discussed race – one of the most consequential concepts in the history of this nation (and the globe). To extend the discussion, we can utilize some readily-available resources on the Internet. One very useful website was created to accompany a 2003 PBS-sponsored documentary on race entitled “The Power of an Illusion.” The series is well worth viewing on its own and the web site includes a vast array of richly-detailed insights on the phenomenon of race. The website is located at http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm

The single major point of the web site (as in this text) is that race is a social construction, a cultural and political perception invented during particular historical eras, largely to justify and rationalize the differential treatment of others. Once established and passed from generation to generation, race becomes hugely consequential in the lives of all U.S. citizens – it becomes its own reality, shaping and controlling people’s lives

The website has 6 subsections and you are encouraged to explore them all. As you do, look for answers to each of the questions below and use this information, along with other insights you develop, to analyze the concept of race.

1. In what ways should race be considered a modern idea?
2. In what ways is race NOT a biological concept?
3. How have ideas about race evolved and changed since ancient times?
4. What are some U.S. examples of how public policy has treated people differently based on race? What are some of the consequences of these policies?
5. How have definitions of black and white changed over the years? How has Census Bureau definitions of race changed? Why?
6. Try the “Sorting People” exercise and record your number of “correct” classifications here _____. How does this exercise make you think about the concept of race? Can you accurately tell someone’s race by looking at them? If not, what does this say about the concept?
7. Take the quiz under the “Human Diversity” tab and record the number of correct answers here _____. Was your information accurate? Where did you get your information?
8. Click on the “Explore Diversity” button under Human Diversity and explore the activities. Does this information support the idea that “race isn’t biological?” How?

Optional Group Discussion: Select three of the questions above to discuss with classmates. (Your instructor may have more specific or different instructions.) Add your own topic if you

wish. Bring your information and reactions from the website and the text to class and be prepared to discuss the issues. To aid the discussion, develop a concise statement or summary of what you learned and what you think was most important about the experience of visiting this website.