**CHAPTER 1**

**Diversity in the United States: Questions and Concepts**

**Classroom Activities and Suggestions for Discussion**

1. Have students write anonymously about their own prejudices. How did they acquire these prejudices? Who were the agents of socialization who taught them these ideas? Did they hear conflicting messages from different agents of socialization? What impact do students think these beliefs have had on their interactions with others? Do they have evidence to support their ideas? If students don’t have good evidence to support the particular ideas they hold, why do they continue to hold them? How do they feel about holding these prejudices? Are there particular costs (to themselves and others) involved? What stereotypes might others have about them, based on their group membership?
2. Have students write about their own prejudices and any acts of discrimination. Discuss the differences between prejudice and discrimination. Ask students to reflect on the prejudices they hold and whether they have acted based upon them in a discriminatory manner. Have students actively tried to re-socialize themselves to think differently about different types of people? Have they experienced a time when their beliefs changedd? What are the common themes that emerge from their experiences? Discuss them. [NOTE: You may want to collect student papers so at the end of the semester you can pass them back and students can reflect on how their ideas concerning race, ethnicity, class, and gender have changed.]
3. Ask students to write down all the ways that they believe people are separated by race, e.g. hair color and texture, skin tone, body types, language use, athletic ability. (NOTE: Many of these categories will be baseless and controversial, but the point of the assignment is to tease this thinking out of the students so that it can be confronted.) Ask them to make a chart of all these traits for each racial category. Encourage the students to speak honestly about their thoughts and to be specific and thorough with their charts. Once they have assembled their charts, ask them to use these charts on campus to categorize all the people they know and meet. When they return to class, ask them the following questions: did all the people in any given racial category share all the traits listed? Were there people who shared no traits of a given category, but whom they placed in that category anyway? Why? Were there some people whom they could not place in a category? Why? Ask them to reflect on the racial categories, given their experiment, and consider why race is a social construction. How can those categories be human inventions? (Try to get the students to see that the categories are both overly and under-deterministic of any group, and that they are arbitrary and ahistorical.) Ask the students to question how and why racial categories came to be in the first place. What might Weber, Marx, Lenski, and Collins say?
4. Have students write about their experiences with race. Ask students what race means. What does it mean to say race is a social construction? How do they make sense of the existence of race, if it is not biological? You might ask how they first became aware of the concept of race. Have they lived and worked in a diverse community? School? Workplace? How has their “race” affected your life or the life of their family members? Have them describe their most positive and negative experiences related to race.
5. Invite guest speakers to come speak to your class about issues of prejudice and discrimination. For example, you might ask members of the NAACP to join your class, or perhaps there’s a local coalition fighting for the rights of gays, American Indians, or other minorities. Many groups exist to assist immigrants with their transition into U.S. life. Invite them to speak to your class.
6. Ask the students first to write down the key theorists presented in this chapter and their essential ideas. Then ask them, as a group, to discuss the differences between any two theorists. Then ask them to role-play one theorist and analyze the conditions of inequality in the U.S. For example, what would Marx, Weber, Patricia Hill Collins, and Gerhard Lenski say to one another about inequality in the U.S. if they got together for coffee?
7. Have students reflect on a situation in which they were a minority member. Did they attempt to “assimilate”? If so, how? If not, why not? Have them reflect on their feelings about the experience. Did they feel comfortable? If so, why? If not, why? How did others respond to them, positively or negatively? Did they see themselves as “other”? How does this relate to issues of race and ethnicity? Discuss.
8. Ask students to observe a public space for about 30 minutes, taking careful notes and paying particular attention to the matrix of domination. Can race be genderless? Classless? How is gender enacted differently by race, class, etc.? How is race enacted differently by gender, class, etc.?
9. Ask the students to discuss what Patricia Hill Collins means by intersectionality. How do gender, race, and class form a “matrix of domination”? Does this mean that racism, sexism, and classism are linked? If so, how? What does this mean about the status of privilege in our society? What does this mean about addressing inequality in our society? How does this make us focus on context when we talk about privilege and discrimination?
10. Discuss the realities of pervasive inequality, differential opportunity, injustice, and other kinds of unfairness, particularly as race, ethnicity, gender, and class inform these social problems. Ask students what they believe is the “real” America—a nation where tolerance and altruism dominate or a nation that is narrow minded and complacent about such problems? This is an opportunity to allow students to think critically and discuss the wide range of attitudes present in the United States.
11. One particularly salient issue is the controversy that surrounds self-naming or other-naming of minority groups. Ask students to develop a rubric of names for minority groups, making sure to include the highly positive as well as the highly disparaging ends of the spectrum. What do these names indicate about the “group feelings” (dominant/subordinate) toward a minority out-group? Are in-group names necessarily more positive? How have racial and ethnic slurs been reclaimed by minority groups in the climate of political correctness that dominated the end of the 20th century? Is this process of reclaiming always empowering and positive?
12. Ask students to identify or estimate what class segment they belong to and then to check their self-identification against Figure1.4 on page 12. Were their estimates correct? Higher? Lower? Discuss the fact that most Americans, regardless of actual class status, will self-identify as middle class. Why might this be the case?
13. Ask students about race as a biological concept. While mainstream television and particularly crime programming presents the idea that it is easy to “see” race in genetics, discuss the evolutionary reality that humans are one species with much genetic diversity, and the fact that race is predominantly socially defined. Why is there such a fascination about the forensic links between race and crime? What purpose does it serve to keep race in the forefront of the popular discussions and depictions of crime in the U.S.?
14. Ask students what the key differences are between prejudice and discrimination. Can a person hold prejudicial attitudes and not discriminate? Can a person discriminate without holding prejudicial attitudes? Discuss Robert Merton’s Typology of Prejudice and Discrimination.