**CHAPTER 6**

**African Americans**

**Classroom Activities and Suggestions for Discussion**

1. One of my students’ favorite activities is to analyze music. For this activity, go to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and pull up songs that might get students to reflect on themes of this chapter. Possible songs to analyze[[1]](#footnote-1) include:

* Public Enemy’s “Burn Hollywood Burn”
* The Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy—“Socio-genetic Experiment” and “Famous And Dandy (Like Amos ’n’ Andy)”
* The Negro Problem—“Doubting Uncle Tom,” “Ghetto Godot,” and “Buzzing”
* Stevie Wonder and Paul McCartney’s “Ebony & Ivory”
* James Brown—“I’m Black and I’m Proud”
* Sly and Family Stone—“Everyday People”
* Tracy Chapman—“Across the Lines”
* Rage Against the Machine—“Sleep Now in the Fire” and “Take the Power Back” [NOTE: You might also have your students analyze the CD cover of The battle of Los Angeles. It is a powerful image about violence, the ghetto, defiance of “the system,” black-white relations.]
* Coolio—“Gangsta’s Paradise”
* US3—“Just Another Brother”
* Bob Dylan—“The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carrol” and “Hurricane”
* Stevie Wonder—“Pastime Paradise”
* Bob Marley—“War”

Ask your students to suggest other songs for exploration.

1. Watch films such as *Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle* (California Newsreel) about the sleeping car porters or *A. Philip Randolph: For Jobs and Freedom* (PBS. VHS available from California Newsreel). How do the films expand on what students learned in the text?
2. Watch the popular film W*hite Man’s Burden* (Savoy Pictures), starring Danny Glover and John Travolta. In the film we see an alternate or reversed social reality where blacks are the “haves” and whites are the “have-nots.” How does the film portray life in the inner city, violence, stereotypes, structural barriers, discrimination, racism, prejudice, and so on? Why doesn’t Belafonte’s character think he is racist? Is he? What theories in the book would help us explain his position? If you are short on time, you may choose to watch only the first few minutes of the film. What do students think their lives would be like if their “roles” were reversed? Give students a few minutes to write down their ideas. Then, discuss them as a class.
3. Watch the first chapter of *Eyes on the Prize* covering the Montgomery bus boycotts. Why were these boycotts significant? What rules of engagement did the movement adhere to regarding civil disobedience?
4. Watch and discuss The Road to Brown—The Man Who Killed Jim Crow —(California Newsreel). How was the “separate but equal” educational mandate developed? What problems was it intended, on the surface, to address? What did it mean for African Americans and other minorities? What motivated the plaintiffs in the legal cases that led to Brown v. Board of Education? Why do you think the NAACP combined many legal cases into one case, rather than trying them on a case by case basis?
5. Watch Ethnic Notions, a film that explores racist images such as the coon, pickaninny, the mammy, the tom, the sambo, the brute, and the golliwog. How are the images constructed to produce a political outcome? How and why have they changed as society has changed? How did particular images legitimate social inequality? For example, how did the images of the Sambo and Mammy legitimate slavery? How did the images of the brute attempt to legitimate violence toward blacks? How did the image of the Mammy mock black women for breaking gender norms of U.S. society? How did the image of the coon mock the idea of “racial equality”? How do these images relate to contemporary stereotypes of blacks? For a more recent look at stereotypical images in modern mass media, you may wish to watch Color Adjustment (California Newsreel). You might also watch “Birth of a Nation” and discuss the ways it shaped the consciousness of many whites who watched it.
6. Have students explore a variety of racist images by visiting the cyber museum at Ferris State University. See <http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/news/jimcrow/menu.htm>. You may also wish to use a good internet search engine like Google to locate other racist images. What do students think about people who collect racist memorabilia such as mammy dolls and pickaninny salt and pepper shakers? Why would African Americans want to collect such items? Does the collector’s race matter? Why or why not?
7. Compare and contrast the lyrics of “Strange Fruit” (lyrics by Lewis Allan, originally sung by Billie Holiday) with the contemporary and revised version of “Strange Fruit” by Danja Mowf (from the album “Word Of Mowf”). How do both songs illustrate violence against African Americans? How has the “nature” of that violence changed according to both artists? What do the songs suggest about justice and the criminal justice system?
8. Watch Two Nations of Black America, a PBS feature narrated by Henry Louis “Skip” Gates Jr. with Cornel West, Bill Wilson, and Orlando Paterson among others. How does this program illustrate diversity of opinion within the black community? How does it illustrate issues of social class? How does it expand on and differ from ideas in the text?
9. Ask students if segregation along racial lines still occurs in the United States. Have them then check their perceptions with the actual data on segregation in America. Some good sources for this data, as well as discussion about segregation, include [www.NAACP.org](http://www.NAACP.org), [www.BlackPast.org](http://www.BlackPast.org), and <http://americanhistory.si.edu/brown/history/1-segregated/segregated-america.html>.
10. Ask students what they know about the 2 strongest African American social movements of the 20th century, the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement. Which do they know more about? Why would one movement receive more historical focus than the other? What are the fundamental differences between these two movements?
11. Have students select a famous “name” from the Civil Rights Movement and research the contributions of that person. Good online sources include:

* <http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/par0int-1> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movements_for_civil_rights>
* <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement>
* <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/civilrightstimeline1.html>
* <http://americanhistory.about.com/od/civilrights/>
* <http://www.usatoday.com/topic/6bdfc1f8-cf8e-4589-baab-5c1b7c974f58/civil-rights-in-america/>
* <http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/Civil-Rights-Movement.aspx>
* <http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/Civil-Rights-Movement.aspx>
* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_civil_rights_leaders>
* <http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2014/02/civil_rights_leaders_you_should_know.html>

Have students then do in-class presentations or research papers on the leaders they have researched.

1. Have students select a famous “name” from or event in which the Black Power movement was involved. Who were the major players? What contributions did they make? What was the movement focused on doing? How was the movement treated in the media? What got into the news and what didn’t in terms of what Black Power activists were up to? Good online sources include:

* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Power>
* <http://hoover.archives.gov/exhibits/africanamerican/blackpower/>
* <http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Black+Power+Movement>
* <http://www.ushistory.org/us/54i.asp>
* <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-black-power.html>
* <http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/timeline/p_4.html>
* <http://library.uncg.edu/dp/crg/topicalessays/blackpowermovement.aspx>
* <http://socialistworker.org/2011/10/25/black-power-era>
* <http://www.biography.com/people/stokely-carmichael-9238629>
* <http://www.malcolmx.com/about/bio.html>
* <http://www.biography.com/people/huey-p-newton-37369>
* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H._Rap_Brown>
* <http://www.biography.com/people/bobby-seale-9477529>
* <http://www.biography.com/people/miriam-makeba-9395996>

1. Ask students to assess the situation of African Americans by decade from 1940 to 2010 (this decade) using the concepts of assimilation and pluralism to illustrate progress or setbacks. What significant changes have occurred in social, legal, and economic conditions?
2. In light of the shooting deaths of Trayvon Martin in Florida and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, what is the contemporary relationship between the criminal justice system and young African American males? What can be done to reduce the antagonism between the stakeholders? Why do young African American males continue to be the focus of law enforcement and the courts? Is there an economic foundation to the hyper-focus on this group as more criminal than any other?
3. Have students discuss the Culture of Poverty thesis. Is it relevant? Is it racist? Is it classist? Should it be used or abandoned in sociological investigations? Why or why not?

1. Note that some of these songs use profanity. You'll want to listen to them beforehand. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)