Chapter Activities

# Chapter 8: Race and Ethnic Group Stratification: Beyond “Us” and “Them”

## Music as Social Activism

**Objective:** Students should recognize the power of music to impact social movements and heighten social awareness.

**Directions:** Instructors should make a music compilation to play in class of songs that address issues of social injustice. Instructors should also make overheads or handouts with the song lyrics they intend to play. In class, instructors will play a selection of songs and then ask students to discuss the role of music in social activism. Depending on song selection, discussion can be focused around many different topics. For instance, the following playlist can be used to discuss the role of music in unifying individuals on social issues and constructing specific instances as social problems. However, playlists can also be created to discuss why tone and message make some songs more able than others to unify people on social issues. Instructors can also select songs to discuss whether music is more effective as social activism when it targets minority or dominant groups. To find additional songs that could be used in class, please see <http://rateyourmusic.com/list/SadEyedLady/top_30_protest_songs/>.

**Recommended Songs**

1. “Strange Fruit” by Billie Holliday (There is a PBS documentary by the same name that could be used in conjunction with this activity.)
2. “Don’t Call Me Nigger, Whitey” by Sly and the Family Stone
3. “Fight the Power” by Public Enemy
4. “Maria” by Rage Against the Machine
5. “Your Racist Friend” by They Might be Giants
6. “Hurricane” by Bob Dylan
7. “Southern Man” by Neil Young
8. “Get Up, Stand Up” by Bob Marley
9. “Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee” by Buffy Saint Marie
10. “Ridin’” by Chamillionare
11. “What’s Going On” by Marvin Gaye
12. “We Shall Overcome” traditional hymn

## Our Perception of Race

**Objective:** After completing this activity, students should understand that it is difficult to determine an individual’s racial identity by physical characteristics only.

**Directions:** Have the class complete the activity “Sorting People” found here: <http://www.pbs.org/race/002_SortingPeople/002_00-home.htm>. Ask the students why they categorized people into certain racial categories. Discuss the results with the students.

## Race Relations

**Objective:** This activity allows students to understand the current state of race relations in the United States today.

**Directions:** Have students review the State of Race Relations report by the Pew Research Center. <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/interactives/state-of-race-in-america/>

Ask students to break up into groups and discuss the findings. Questions to consider:

1. What are some of the major differences in the perception of race relations between blacks and whites?
2. What are some of the major differences in the perception of race relations among other population groups (age groups and political party affiliations)?
3. What are some of the most surprising findings to your group?

## Racism and Discrimination Today

**Objective:** Some people believe that racism no longer exists in the United States. This activity will illustrate that this is unfortunately not the case.

**Directions:** Have students do a search for recent media stories that illustrate racism in the United States. This can be done during class if students have computers in the classroom or before class and students will bring in their news stories. Discuss the examples as a class. What type of racism does the news story illustrate? Is discrimination involved? Prejudicial attitudes?

## What Is Racism?

**Objective:** In this activity, students should learn to distinguish between ideological, symbolic, and institutional racism. They should also explore why our society is more prone to identifying ideological racism as a social problem.

**Directions:** In groups or as a class, students should be given 5–20 minutes to think of instances or scenarios they would define as racist. (If the instructor is worried about scenarios students might create, they could also create a list of 10–15 scenarios, but this activity works best if students create the list). The instructor should go around the room and have students list their instances and scenarios. As the students create the list, the instructor should write the scenarios on the board or the overhead, dividing the scenarios into examples of ideological, symbolic, and institutional racism (but without labeling the three types). After the list is compiled, the instructor should then label the categories as ideological, symbolic, and institutional racism. The class will likely highlight more examples of ideological racism. The instructor should use the activity to discuss how our society defines racism. Discussion should also include the social problems created by ignoring or underemphasizing certain types of racism.

## Connecting Prejudicial Attitudes to Racism

**Objective:** Have the students understand how prejudicial attitudes can lead to racism.

**Directions:** Show the students the documentary “A Class Divided.” Elliott divided her class by eye color—those with blue eyes and those with brown. On the first day, the blue-eyed children were told they were smarter, nicer, neater, and better than those with brown eyes. Throughout the day, Elliott praised them and allowed them privileges such as taking a longer recess and being first in the lunch line. In contrast, the brown-eyed children had to wear collars around their necks, and their behavior and performance were criticized and ridiculed by Elliott. On the second day, the roles were reversed, and the blue-eyed children were made to feel inferior while the brown eyes were designated the dominant group. What happened over the course of the unique two-day exercise astonished both students and teacher. On both days, children who were designated as inferior took on the look and behavior of genuinely inferior students, performing poorly on tests and other work. Then divide the students into small groups and have them answer the following questions:

1. What did you learn?
2. What features did Elliot ascribe to the superior and inferior groups and how did those characteristics reflect stereotypes about blacks and whites?
3. How is the blue eyes/brown eyes exercise related to the Sioux prayer, “Help me not judge a person until I have walked in his shoes”?

## Is Discrimination?

**Objective:** In this activity, students should learn to distinguish between individual and institutional discrimination. They should also explore why our society is more prone to identifying individual acts of discrimination as the predominant form of discrimination.

**Directions:** In groups or as a class, students should be given 5–20 minutes to think of instances or scenarios they would define as discrimination. (If the instructor is worried about scenarios students might create, they could also create a list of 10–15 scenarios, but this activity works best if students create the list). The instructor should go around the room and have students list their instances and scenarios. As the students create the list, the instructor should write the scenarios on the board or the overhead, dividing the scenarios into examples of individual or institutional discrimination (but without labeling the two types). After the list is compiled, the instructor should then label the categories as individual or institutional discrimination. The instructor can also have students classify examples of institutional discrimination as purposeful or unintentional discrimination. They should also be asked to classify the unintentional discrimination as side-effect or past-in-present discrimination. The instructor should use the activity to discuss how our society defines discrimination. Discussion should also include the social problems created by ignoring or underemphasizing certain types of discrimination. Discussion should also include various ways the examples of discrimination have been or could be addressed by organizations or policies. If this activity is done in conjunction with the “What is Racism?” activity, the instructor should also describe how the lists are similar or different. Another point of discussion should be whether how our society defines racism also defines what we view as discrimination.

## What Has My College or University Done?

**Objective:** This activity will highlight efforts taken by your college or university to promote ethnic and racial equality. It will also facilitate a discussion about colleges and universities as organizations that promote social change.

**Directions:** Either as a class or in small groups, have students list all the various campus organizations or initiatives created to address racial/ethnic equity or to promote diversity. Have students discuss how effectively the college or university has addressed racial/ethnic stratification. Also, have the students discuss what else the college or university could do to better promote diversity. (Most colleges and universities have statements on diversity. If possible, instructors should make copies of the college or university’s statement on diversity and encourage discussion about how effective students think the administration has been in addressing these goals.) Instructors should also discuss the role of colleges and universities in addressing racial and ethnic stratification.

## Race in the Media

**Objective:** This activity requires students to think about media portrayal of racial and ethnic groups in American popular culture. It should help them understand race relations; racial and ethnic stereotypes; and ethnic boundaries.

**Directions:** Either bring in copies of magazines or assign your students to bring in magazines targeted to a particular racial or ethnic group as well as some mainstream publications such as *Newsweek*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Details*,or *National Geographic.* In groups, have your students browse the various magazines. Have them note how the content varies. Also, have them note how the advertisement varies. Lead a discussion in the various portrayals they saw. Also, have them discuss the role that stereotypes played in these differences.

Some potential magazines include *Jet*, *Vibe*, *Ebony*, *Black Enterprise*, *American Jewish Spirit*, *Audrey*, *KoreAm Journal*, *Latina*, *Vanidades*, and *The Crisis*.

## What Is Race?

**Objective:** This activity will ask students to examine what race is and how it is socially constructed and leads to racism.

**Directions:** Have students bring in a list of various definitions of race and racism compiled from dictionaries and social science textbooks and the Internet. Part of the assignment should be for them to try to identify how many races there are. Break students into small groups to compile each of their lists into what they think is the best definition of each concept. Have them include a discussion of the differences among all their definitions and why they settled on the one they are presenting. Ask each group to identify how many races there are and how they came to that number. Ask them if it would be possible for them to label their group one particular race. After they have discussed the concepts, have each group present their definitions of race and racism and how many races they think there are. Then hold a class discussion on the following issues: How do the definitions of race contribute to racism? Can members of racial minority groups also be racist themselves? If so, do these ideas tend to perpetuate a racial divide in America? How? Finally, what role does politics play in defining what constitutes racism and/or determining its consequences?