

**College of Liberal Arts
Diversity and Inclusion Resource Module**

**TOPIC: Race and Racism
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I. Overview

The concept of race has informed almost every institution and social structure in US society since the early days of nation formation. Today, despite widespread claims that the United States has become post-racial, race still retains a unique power to influence most, if not all, contemporary institutions. Although race is a socially constructed concept, it nevertheless produces significant and long-lasting material effects in many institutional contexts. These effects can manifest in the form of racism, the systemic and institutional practices that put specific racial groups at a disadvantage (in the United States, these racial groups are defined as “not White”). For example, race plays a role in determining one’s residential neighborhood and housing conditions, level of access to quality health care and education, income level, job opportunities, treatment in the political and legal systems, and freedom to move in certain spaces without being subjected to surveillance or policing. Race also structures many institutions of higher education in the United States, like Cal Poly, which tend to teach curriculum centered on White perspectives and cultures, employ predominantly White faculty and staff, and enroll and graduate a majority of White students.

This resource module will introduce Cal Poly faculty and students to the interconnected concepts of race and racism and help them see that race plays an influential role in all institutions in US society, including academia and the university setting. This module is divided into two sections. The first section addresses the concept of race and covers the following topics:

- The development of race as a concept in US society.
- How and why race is a biological fiction.
- How and why race is a social construct.
- How race is distinct from ethnicity, nationality, and culture.
- Examples of how race produces material consequences in the lived experiences of individuals.

The second section addresses the concept of racism and covers the following topics:

- The definition of racism.
- How racism is distinct from stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination.
- How reverse racism has been defined and why it is a problematic concept.
- Examples of how racism manifests in different sectors of society.

Ultimately, this resource module is designed to empower faculty members from all academic disciplines to feel comfortable talking about race and racism with their students. The goal is to provide faculty members with the skills to facilitate informed and candid conversations about race and racism, so that our campus community can grow more culturally inclusive. This objective is rooted in the belief that members of the Cal Poly community will be better positioned to work actively to challenge racism if they are equipped to recognize it.

II. Outline

Race

1. What is race?
 - a. Definition of race
 - i. The definition of race has been contested throughout US history based on changing social and political contexts.
 - ii. Today, race is generally understood to refer to a group of people who share certain inherited physical characteristics (such as skin color or stature) that have been assigned social meaning. Since these physical characteristics are deemed socially significant, society often treats people differently on the basis of such characteristics.
 - b. Origins of the concept of race
 - i. The concept of race first emerged in North America when European explorers “discovered” people who looked different from them and began questioning the very definition of humanity. These settlers engaged in religious debates about whether God had created one singular species of humanity and whether the natives of the New World could be considered human (and thus considered redeemable souls). These debates resulted in the ultimate conclusion that humanity is reserved for Europeans only, and the concept of race was constructed in order to legitimate this conclusion. The notion of race helped to distinguish Europeans (the racial “norm,” children of God, civilized, humans, etc.) from non-Europeans (racial “others,” heathens, barbarians, non- or sub-humans, etc.). This distinction helped justify horrific abuses committed against non-European people, such as African slavery and native land dispossession and extermination.¹
 - c. Race as a biological fiction
 - i. Scientists of European descent supported the European settlers’ definition of humanity by arguing throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that race is a biological concept, with racial differences traceable to essential, fixed aspects of biology.² Today, the notion that race is biological is widely discredited in the scientific community. While there may be apparent physical differences between different geographic populations, there are very few genetic differences between these same populations. In a famous genetic study published in an article titled “The Apportionment of Human Variation” (1972), Richard Lewontin demonstrated that there is greater genetic variation (80-85%) within the same purported racial group (e.g. Europeans) than there is

¹ See Episode 2, “The Story We Tell,” from the PBS documentary *Race: The Power of an Illusion* for more explanation about the origins and evolution of the concept of race.

² See Stephen Jay Gould’s *The Mismeasure of Man* (1981) for a comprehensive overview of how science has been used to justify racist ideology.

genetic variation (1-15%) between different purported racial groups (e.g. Europeans and Africans), refuting the notion that there are different biological races.³

- d. Race as a social construction
 - i. Today, scholarly consensus maintains that race is socially constructed. This is because racial categories and definitions have changed over time depending on variations in social relations, historical period, and political context. For example, in the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the definition of Blackness varied from state to state. Some states said Blackness was defined by appearance (“if you look Black, you’re Black”). Other states defined Blackness according to blood quatum to varying degrees (one-quarter, one-sixteenth, and one drop of Black blood). Many other examples of the social construction of race can be found in the history of Whiteness in the United States. In the mid-1800s to early 1900s, Irish and Jewish immigrants were excluded from the White racial category. However, by the 1950s, Irish and Jewish people had become fully accepted into the White category. These variations in the definition of racial categories (e.g. Black and White) demonstrate that race is socially constructed and changes across different times and places.
2. How is race distinct from ethnicity, nationality, and culture?
 - a. Definition of ethnicity
 - i. Ethnicity refers to one’s ancestral heritage and is connected to specific geographies. Ethnicity is ascribed at birth and not necessarily connected to personal or direct experiences. However, often people of the same ethnicity share a common culture, religion, and language.
 - ii. Race is distinct from ethnicity because race is a social construction based on criteria that may be far removed from ancestral heritage. For example, people of Vietnamese, Chinese, Hawaiian, and Korean ethnicity are often categorized in the same racial category of Asian, which ignores key differences in ethnicity.
 - b. Definition of nationality
 - i. Nationality refers to one’s civic belonging to a particular nation. Often nationality is synonymous with citizenship.
 - ii. Race is distinct from nationality because people who are racialized as “non-White” in the United States are often considered foreign or “other” regardless of their US citizenship. This occurs when Asian or Latinx people are asked the question, “Where are you *really* from?”, which suggests that they are perpetual foreigners and that their US citizenship (and attendant US nationality) is not legitimate.
 - c. Definition of culture

³ See Episode 1, “The Difference Between Us,” from the PBS documentary *Race: The Power of an Illusion* for more explanation as to why humans cannot and should not be subdivided into races based on biology.

- i. Culture refers to the beliefs, social norms, and material practices of a social group. Culture is made up of language, food, norms, values, hierarchies, gender expectations, family structures, religious practices, communication patterns, etc. These influence how people act, think, talk, and engage with other people.
 - ii. Race is distinct from culture because it is defined by social structures and systems, rather than social networks.
3. How does race produce material consequences in the lived experiences of individuals?
 - a. Although race is a biological fiction and social construction, it nevertheless creates significant material consequences. Some examples:
 - i. Income level: In 2016, the median income of non-Hispanic White households was \$65,041, as opposed to \$39,490 for Black households, \$47,675 for Hispanic-origin households, and \$81,431 for Asian households.⁴
 - ii. Access to higher education: Between 2012 and 2016, 11,242 non-Hispanic White students attended college, as opposed to 2,752 Black students, 1,545 Asian students, and 3,287 Hispanic students. At the graduate and professional degree level, there were 2,261 non-Hispanic White students enrolled between 2012 and 2015, as opposed to 499 Black students, 486 Asian students, and 372 Hispanic students.⁵
 - iii. Incarceration rates: In 2016, the rate of imprisonment for White adults in state and federal prisons was 274 per 100,000, as opposed to 1,609 per 100,000 for Black adults and 857 per 100,000 for Hispanic adults.⁶ As of July 1, 2017, White people of non-Hispanic origin constitute 60.7% of the US population, whereas Black people constitute 13.4% and Hispanic people constitute 18.1%.⁷

Racism

1. What is racism?
 - a. Popular discourse in contemporary US society defines racism as individual and hateful prejudice directed toward members of a racial group. According to this definition, racism manifests in individual people who are labeled “racist” (and are therefore “bad”) and are contrasted with people who are “not racist” (and are therefore “good”). However, this definition is incomplete because it assumes that racism is a rare occurrence and, when it does occur, is always intentionally and consciously hateful. As such, this definition fails to recognize institutional or

⁴ Jessica L. Semega, Kayla R. Fontenot, and Melissa A. Kollar, United States Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2016* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2017) 7.

⁵ Erik P. Schmidt, United States Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, *Postsecondary Enrollment Before, During, and Since the Great Recession* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2018) 5.

⁶ E. Ann Carson, United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Prisoners in 2016* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2018) 10.

⁷ United States Census Bureau, “Quick Facts” 1 Jul. 2017
<<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045217>>.

everyday racism, which is often not blatant, not conscious, and not visible to the White majority.

- b. Emerging out of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, today's leading scholars of critical race studies define racism as the structural and institutional practices that work on a structural level to put specific racial groups at a disadvantage.
 - c. Because racism is systemic and structural, it pervades all sectors and institutions of contemporary US society and is not just limited to individual acts.
2. How is racism distinct from stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination?
- a. From a young age, we receive information about racial others from a variety of different sources, including family, media, cultural images, etc. Although these messages are often distorted and rooted in misinformation, they form the basis of our understanding of racial others. These messages help create stereotypes, which fuel prejudices, which can lead to discriminatory action. Racism builds upon all of these phenomena, but manifests in systemic and institutional practices.
 - b. Definition of a racial stereotype
 - i. A racial stereotype is a general, wide-sweeping belief about a particular racial group. Stereotypes are often damaging, even when they appear to be flattering (e.g. "Asians are good at math").
 - c. Definition of racial prejudice
 - i. Racial prejudice refers to the feelings that are attached to stereotypes (e.g. "I'm resentful of my Asian American classmate because he has an unfair advantage in our math class").
 - d. Definition of racial discrimination
 - i. Discrimination occurs when a person acts on prejudicial feelings to unfairly treat another person from a particular racial group (e.g. "I won't invite my Asian American classmate to join our math study group because I resent his unfair advantage").
 - e. Racism occurs when systemic and institutional practices and policies combine to place a racial group at a disadvantage. For example, throughout US history, Asian Americans have been systemically disadvantaged due to prejudicial attitudes about their perceived foreignness. Fueled by the belief that people of Asian descent are perpetual foreigners and potential threats to US hegemony (a racist myth known as "yellow peril"), US legislators have established many exclusionary laws and policies that oppress and police Asian American communities. These policies include anti-Asian labor laws that targeted Chinese immigrant workers in the late nineteenth century and Filipinx immigrant workers in the early twentieth century, anti-miscegenation laws that criminalized marriage between Asian men and White women, laws that policed Asian men's bodies (such as the Pigtail Ordinance of 1873, which forced Chinese men to cut off their waist-long queues), the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, which banned all immigration to the United States for citizens of Asian countries, Executive Order 9066, which authorized the internment of 122,000 people of Japanese ancestry during World War II, and Executive Order 13769 (colloquially known as the "Muslim Ban"),

which banned immigration from several West Asian countries in 2017. In the context of this long history of discriminatory practices against Asians, the example of discrimination provided in point (d) above (excluding an Asian American classmate from a math study group) can be understood as racist because it perpetuates the systemic and structural practices that disadvantage people of Asian descent on the basis of their perceived racial difference (which in this hypothetical scenario manifests as being “too good” at math and thus threatening to White American students).

3. “Reverse Racism”
 - a. What is “reverse racism”?
 - i. In recent years, the term “reverse racism” has emerged to refer to perceived anti-White racism. White people who claim to experience “reverse racism” argue that they are unfairly targeted by people of color simply for being White.
 - b. Why is “reverse racism” a problematic concept?
 - i. The concept of “reverse racism” is fundamentally flawed because US society is built on a racial hierarchy that places White people at the top; thus, White people enjoy systematic, institutionalized advantages due to their racial status. This hierarchy is reinforced through economic, legal, political, and social institutions that work collectively to maintain White people’s power.⁸ White people can experience prejudice and discrimination at the hands of people of color, but as long as such prejudice and discrimination is not reinforced by US economic, legal, political, and social institutions (as prejudice and discrimination against people of color is), these experiences cannot be defined as manifestations of anti-White racism.
4. How does racism manifest in different sectors of US society?
 - a. Housing and land ownership:
 - i. Throughout the 1800s and 1900s, various states implemented Alien land laws prohibiting “non-desirable” immigrants, particularly those from China and Japan, from becoming landowners. These laws were designed to discourage Asian immigrants from settling permanently in the United States. Since property ownership is connected to wealth accumulation, these Asian immigrants were systematically disadvantaged by these policies.
 - ii. In the 1940s and 1950s, banks refused to invest in neighborhoods of color by engaging in redlining practices that denied loans to Black people. This practice has led to the residential segregation of White and Black

⁸ For more information about how legal and political structures entrench the racial hierarchy, I recommend delving into the scholarship emerging from Whiteness studies and critical race theory/studies. Suggested readings include Derrick Bell’s *And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice* (1987), Kimberlé Crenshaw’s *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (1996), Ian Haney López’s *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (1997), George Lipsitz’s *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (1998), and Richard Delgado’s *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (2012).

people and lowered the property values of many residential neighborhoods that are inhabited primarily by people of color.⁹

- b. Legislation and executive orders:
 - i. Indian Removal Act – Signed by President Andrew Jackson on May 28, 1830, this law authorized the US government to forcibly remove southern Native American tribes to federal territory west of the Mississippi River. Thousands of Native Americans died from cold, hunger, and disease due to this forced migration.
 - ii. Chinese Exclusion Act – Signed by President Chester A. Arthur on May 6, 1882, this federal law prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers into the United States and remained in effect until 1943. A legislative response to severe anti-Chinese racism, this law made it virtually impossible for Chinese men in the United States to reunite with their wives or start new families (due to strict anti-miscegenation laws that criminalized their union with White American women).
 - iii. Jim Crow laws – These laws enforced the racial segregation of Black and White people in the Southern United States from the end of Reconstruction in 1877 to the mid-1960s, which saw the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965. These laws maintained the racial caste system that had existed during slavery times.
 - iv. *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) – In this landmark decision, the Supreme Court upheld Jim Crow segregation laws according to the legal principle of “separate but equal.”
 - v. Executive Order 9066 – Signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 19, 1942, this order authorized the incarceration of people of Japanese descent (two-thirds of whom were US citizens) in military zones that the government called “internment camps.”
 - vi. Executive Order 13769 – Colloquially known as the Muslim Ban, this order was signed by President Donald J. Trump on January 27, 2017 and suspended the entry of refugees and immigrants from seven Muslim-majority countries, including Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. Since Muslim identity has been heavily racialized throughout US history, particularly in the post-9/11 era, this Executive Order is widely considered racist, as it structurally disadvantages a group of people based on their perceived racial identity.
- c. Criminal justice and incarceration:
 - i. As indicated by the racial demographics of incarceration (mentioned earlier), people of color are disproportionately targeted and imprisoned in the criminal justice system. Popular discourse explains this overrepresentation of people of color in US jails and prisons by

⁹ For more information about the history of residential segregation in the United States, see Richard Rothstein’s *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (2017) and Episode 3, “The House We Live In,” from the PBS documentary *Race: The Power of an Illusion*.

criminalizing them (“they did a crime, so they deserve to be imprisoned”). However, many key scholars have challenged this belief, such as Michele Alexander, who argues that the mass criminalization and incarceration of people of color is a modern-day extension of slavery and Jim Crow segregation, and Angela Davis, who argues that racism and capitalism intersect in the punishment industry in the form of a prison industrial complex.¹⁰

¹⁰ See Michele Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010) and Angela Davis’ *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003).

III. Annotated Bibliography for Instructors

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

Bonilla-Silva argues that in the post-civil rights era, White people have developed a new ideology that justifies contemporary racial inequality called “color-blind racism.” This color-blind racism attributes racial inequality to nonracial dynamics, such as market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and presumed cultural deficiencies. This new form of racism manifests in four central frames: abstract liberalism (the belief in meritocracy and individualism), naturalization (the belief that racial inequality is “just the way it is”), the biologization of culture (the idea that presumed cultural practices within communities of color are inherent and fixed and have led to their subordinated positions), and the minimization of racism (the belief that discrimination is no longer a salient issue in the United States). All of these frameworks provide a safe, color-blind way to express racist ideology without appearing to be overtly racist. This book is a helpful resource for educators who want to understand how racism has taken on new forms and expressions in the aftermath of the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

***Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real About Race in School*. Ed. Mica Pollock. New P, 2008.**

This book features more than 60 essays written by leading educators that discuss strategies for teaching about race and racism in school. The book is divided into six sections. The first section encourages educators to address their own biases and prepares them to talk about race with their students. The second section provides information about racial inequality in the school system. The third section provides strategies and tips for designing a culturally inclusive curriculum that raises important questions about race. The fourth section offers guidance for educators who want to provoke critical inquiry and thinking in their students around the topic of race. The fifth section examines how educators can connect their teaching to students’ communities outside of the classroom. The final section points to the future direction of inclusive teaching about race.

Fluehr-Lobban, Carolyn. *Race and Racism: An Introduction*. AltaMira P, 2006.

This book offers a clear overview of race and racism from an anthropological perspective. Fluehr-Lobban reviews the contemporary scientific knowledge about human evolution, DNA mapping, and mental intelligence in relation to race. She also outlines the history of scientific racism (the use of science to justify racial inequality). This is an important book for those who want to learn more about why race is a biological fiction. As an introductory primer, the book also offers concise and accessible information about the history of racism and antiracism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the construction of Whiteness and White privilege in the United States, and race relations in a moral global, comparative context.

Lipsitz, George. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*. Temple UP, 1998.

Lipsitz argues that racial inequality in the United States is produced and reinforced by a “possessive investment in whiteness,” which encourages White (and White-identified)

Americans to invest both economically and figuratively in Whiteness, a racial status that provides them with economic resources and social power. This book is an essential resource for educators who want to understand why White people are so invested in maintaining the racial hierarchy, which has been constructed in the United States to grant White people greater access to wealth, resources, and power.

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States*. Routledge, 1986.

In this foundational text in the field of critical race studies, Omi and Winant argue that race is a sociohistorical concept, given that racial categories and their meanings are defined by specific social dynamics and historical contexts and vary across time and space. They refer to this process as “racial formation,” in which various social, economic, and political forces shape racial categories and grant them meaning. This book provides a useful overview of racial formation and racial politics in the United States since World War II.

***Race: The Power of an Illusion*. Directed by Christine Herbes-Sommers, Tracy Heather Strain, Llewellyn Smith, Produced by Larry Adelman. California Newsreel, 2003.**

This three-part documentary film series presents a wealth of information about the concept of race in an easily accessible format. The first episode, “The Difference Between Us,” provides an overview of scientific research proving that race is not biological and cannot be defined by genetic traits. The second episode, “The Story We Tell,” provides a historical overview of the origins of the concept of race, which began with the European conquest of the New World and the implementation of the US slave system. The third episode, “The House We Live In,” demonstrates how social, legal, economic, and political institutions and policies in the United States advantage some racial groups at the expense of others. All three episodes are an hour long and available through Cal Poly’s Kanopy service. (Watch [Race: The Power of an Illusion on Kanopy](https://calpoly.kanopy.com/video/race-power-illusion-0).¹¹)

Trepagnier, Barbara. *Silent Racism: How Well-Meaning White People Perpetuate the Racial Divide*. Paradigm, 2010.

This book argues that well-meaning White people perpetuate institutional racism through “silent racism,” passive and often unacknowledged expressions of racism that reinforce racial inequality. Trepagnier presents qualitative data from her study of small focus groups consisting of White women who self-identify as “not racist.” The women in this study demonstrated silent racism by expressing beliefs about Black people that were rooted in stereotypical images and paternalistic assumptions, despite their self-perception that they were not racist. Her study reveals that despite White people’s belief in the oppositional categories of “racist” and “not racist,” racism is built into the very fabric of society and should be reconceptualized on a continuum that varies in degree from more racist to moderately racist to less racist.

¹¹ Link to watch *Race: The Power of an Illusion*: <https://calpoly.kanopy.com/video/race-power-illusion-0>.

IV. Annotated Bibliography for Students

McIntosh, Peggy. "[White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](https://nationalseedproject.org/white-privilege-unpacking-the-invisible-knapsack)."¹² *Peace and Freedom Magazine*, Jul./Aug. 1989, pp. 10-12.

In this short article, McIntosh describes her efforts to define how white privilege operates in her everyday life. She provides a groundbreaking list of the effects of white privilege that she experiences on a daily basis. This list provides a framework for understanding white privilege, which she describes as "an invisible package of unearned assets" that leads to "conferred dominance." This is a relatively short and easy read for students that can spark critical conversation in the classroom about how racism operates on a systemic level to grant White people advantages and people of color disadvantages.

Tatum, Beverly Daniel. "Defining Racism: 'Can We Talk?'" *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race*. Basic Books, 1997, pp. 3-17.

Written by a clinical psychologist who researches the development of racial identity, this book provides important insights into the development of racial identity in Black, White, and multiracial children. In the opening chapter, Tatum provides a clear breakdown of key concepts. She defines racism as a system of advantage based on race that is fueled by cultural messages, institutional policies, and the beliefs and actions of individuals. She differentiates between active racism (blatant and intentional acts of racial discrimination) and passive racism (more subtle acts of racial prejudice), noting that not all White people are actively racist, most are passively racist, and few are actively antiracist. This short chapter provides a concise overview of race and racism that students should find clear and accessible.

Race, Class, and Gender in the United States. Ed. Paula S. Rothenberg and Kelly S. Mayhew. Worth, 2004.

This anthology provides a wealth of short articles and essays that discuss the social construction of difference based on race, class, gender, and sexuality in the United States. Many of these essays are written by key scholars in the field of critical race studies, including Michael Omi and Howard Winant, Beverly Daniel Tatum, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Peggy McIntosh, Mae Ngai, Evelyn Asultany, Cornel West, Frank Wu, Angela Davis, and Audre Lorde. Split into nine sections that feature several short essays on related topics (e.g. "Understanding Racism, Sexism, Heterosexism, and Class Privilege," "Discrimination in Everyday Life," "The Economics of Race, Class, and Gender," "How it Happened: Race and Gender Issues in U.S. Law"), this book offers students a broad array of resources to understand the intersecting structures of oppression in the United States. I especially recommend the following essays from this book:

- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. "Color-Blind Racism," pp. 133-140.
- Davis, Angela. "Masked Racism: Reflections on the Prison Industrial Complex," pp. 641-645.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. "Racial Formations," pp. 13-22.

¹² Link to download "White Privilege" article: <https://nationalseedproject.org/white-privilege-unpacking-the-invisible-knapsack>.

V. Sample Classroom Activities

Cultural Assumptions Activity

This activity should take place at the beginning of the term, when students are still getting to know each other and the instructor is setting the stage for students to feel comfortable discussing race and racism. The goal of this activity is to help students see that they all are aware of stereotypical beliefs and assumptions about other cultures and that they bring these beliefs and assumptions into the classroom.

Begin by passing out a handout (see Appendix A for a sample) that lists several social identities in different boxes. Make sure that these social identities are as diverse as possible. Ask students to fill out this handout on their own by writing down all of the stereotypes and assumptions they have about these social identities. Then ask students to share their answers in small groups (3-5 students). Finish with a large-group discussion in which you invite students to reflect about what they discussed in their small groups. Questions to consider during the large-group discussion include:

- How did you feel about writing down your assumptions and sharing them with your classmates? Why did you feel this way?
 - Note: I ask these questions because many students will feel uncomfortable expressing their stereotypical beliefs for fear that they will be labeled “racist.” I find that it is helpful to address this concern early on so that the class can have open and honest discussions about race without being paralyzed by fear.
- Where do you think your assumptions came from? Where did you learn these stereotypes?
 - Note: This question prompts students to think about the sources of their information, such as family, books, television, news, etc., and to question the legitimacy of such information.
- What did you discover when you shared your assumptions with your classmates and heard your classmates’ assumptions?
 - Note: Students will usually find that there is a common pattern to the stereotypes they have identified for each social group. As a large group, the class can discuss why these common patterns exist.
- What have you learned from this activity?
 - Note: I end with this general question to spark open reflections about the exercise. You can also ask the students to answer this question in a timed free-write.

By the end of this activity, students should feel that they are all starting on a level playing field in that they all bring cultural assumptions to the classroom and feel more comfortable discussing race and racism with the classroom community.

Racial Microaggression Activity

This activity is designed to spark critical reflection about how racism might manifest in subtle, everyday interactions. First, introduce students to the concept of a racial microaggression, which is a commonplace expression (either verbal or non-verbal) that insults a racial group. Microaggressions can be intentional or unintentional. Split students into small groups of 3-5 people and assign each of them to discuss one microaggression from a list that you have compiled ahead of time. The following are some sample microaggressions you might use for this activity:

- Non-verbal microaggressions:
 - A student touches his Black classmate's hair without asking permission.
 - A pedestrian crosses to the other side of the street when she sees a large Latino man walking toward her.
 - During PE class, the students who are assigned to pick teams for a basketball game select their Black classmates first and their Asian classmates last.
- Verbal microaggressions:
 - "You are a credit to your race."
 - "How did you learn to speak English so well?"
 - "You don't act/sound Black [or other racial group]."
 - "Where are you really from?"
 - "Your name is just so hard to pronounce – I'll never get it right. Is it okay if I call you ____ instead?"
 - "I wouldn't survive in jail. I'm not like you!"

In groups, students should discuss why their assigned remark or action is a racial microaggression. Possible questions for discussion include:

- Have you ever heard this remark/action? What was the context? Who was it directed at? How did that person respond? How did it make you feel (whether you were the recipient, the person making the remark, or a bystander to the exchange)?
- What assumptions and stereotypes form the basis of this racial microaggression?
- How might this remark/action make the recipient feel excluded or insulted?
- How should someone respond to this remark/action? What burdens might come with this response?

End the activity by asking a representative from each group to share what they discussed with the rest of the classroom and leading a final conversation with the whole class in which the students reflect on what they have learned. This final conversation could also take the form of a short free-writing exercise in which the students process what they learned on their own.

Antiracism Brainstorming Activity

The goal of this activity is to ask students to think critically about how racism manifests in their daily lives and to brainstorm how they can work actively to challenge such racism. Begin by facilitating a large-group brainstorming session in which you ask students to identify some racist structures, policies, or practices in their everyday experience. To help the students warm up to this brainstorming session, you might ask them to come up with some ideas on their own during a timed free-write. Encourage students to think about how they see racism occurring in their own experiences, such as their work spaces, their residential area, their university, their families, their extracurricular activities, their religious organizations, etc. If you are teaching a major class, you might ask students to think about how the academic discipline that you are all a part of is informed by racism.

After coming up with a large list of examples of how racism manifests in students' everyday lives, select a few of these for further study and assign one each to a small group of 3-5 students. Ask students to brainstorm in their small groups about how they might work actively to challenge such racism. Encourage each group to come up with at least one concrete action item that they can take to combat their assigned issue. If you are working in a high-tech environment, you can post a link to an editable Google document on your course website and ask one representative from each group to write down their action plan in the document, so that students will have a shared resource that they can return to in the future.

Finally, end the activity with group presentations, in which students share their action plans with the rest of the class. By the end of this activity, students should feel empowered to take action against racism in their daily lives.

VI. Media Resources

Documentaries

13th. Directed by Ava DuVernay, Produced by Howard Barish, Ava DuVernay, and Spencer Averick. Kandoo Films, 2016.

Explores how slavery has been maintained in postbellum practices like anti-Black lynchings, Jim Crow segregation, the criminalization and policing of Black people, and the mass incarceration of people of color. (Available on Netflix; Watch the trailer for [13th on YouTube](#).¹³)

***The Chinese Exclusion Act*. Directed by Ric Burns and Li-Shin Yu. PBS, 2017.**

Examines the history and impact of the 1882 law that made it illegal for Chinese people to immigrate to the United States and for Chinese nationals currently living in the country to become citizens. (Watch [The Chinese Exclusion Act on the PBS website](#).¹⁴)

***A Class Divided*. Directed and produced by William Peters. Frontline, season 3, episode 9, PBS, 26 Mar. 1985.**

Revisits Jane Elliott's landmark class experiment in which she treated children with blue eyes as superior to children with brown eyes. (Watch [A Class Divided on the PBS website](#).¹⁵)

***A Girl Like Me*. Directed by Kiri Davis. Reel Works Teen Filmmaking, 2005.**

A short seven-minute documentary that examines the impact of European beauty standards on Black women and reprises the famous doll experiment conducted by Kenneth and Mamie Clark in the 1940s. (Watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17fEy0q6yqc>.¹⁶)

***Charlottesville: Race and Terror*. VICE News, HBO, 14 Aug. 2017.**

A short 22-minute documentary that recounts the events of the "Unite the Right" rally that took place on August 11-12, 2017 and exposes the violence of the neo-Nazi White supremacists. (Watch ["Charlottesville" on YouTube](#).¹⁷)

***I Am Not Your Negro*. Written by James Baldwin, Directed by Raoul Peck. Velvet Film, 2017.**

Based on James Baldwin's unfinished manuscript, *Remember This House*, which was written in the mid-1970s and recounts the lives of three key civil rights leaders, Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr. (Watch [I Am Not Your Negro on Kanopy](#).¹⁸)

***Race: The Power of an Illusion*. Directed by Christine Herbes-Sommers, Tracy Heather Strain, Llewellyn Smith, Produced by Larry Adelman. California Newsreel, 2003.**

¹³ Link to watch *13th*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V66F3WU2CKk>.

¹⁴ Link to watch *The Chinese Exclusion Act*: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/chinese-exclusion-act/>.

¹⁵ Link to watch *A Class Divided*: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/class-divided/>.

¹⁶ Link to watch *A Girl Like Me*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17fEy0q6yqc>.

¹⁷ Link to watch *Charlottesville*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RlrcB1sAN8I>.

¹⁸ Link to watch *I Am Not Your Negro*: <https://calpoly.kanopy.com/video/i-am-not-your-negro>.

Three one-hour episodes that explore the social and historical construction of race in the United States. (Watch [Race: The Power of an Illusion on Kanopy](#).¹⁹)

***White Like Me: Race, Racism, and White Privilege in America.* Directed by Scott Morris, produced by Jeremy Earp, Sut Jhally, Scott Morris. Media Education Foundation, 2013.** Based on Tim Wise’s autobiographical book *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*, which examines race and racism through the lens of White privilege. (Watch [White Like Me on Kanopy](#).²⁰)

Television

“Asian American Doll.” Saturday Night Live, season 40, episode 10, NBC, 20 Dec. 2014. Short clip that satirizes colorblind discourse and can serve as a conversation starter for students who may feel hesitant to talk about race. (Watch [“Asian American Doll” on NBC](#).²¹)

***Black-ish.* Created by Kenya Barris. ABC, 2014-.** Sitcom about a Black American family living in a White, upper-middle-class neighborhood. Offers insightful commentary about contemporary US race relations. (Watch [Black-ish on ABC](#).²²)

***Dear White People.* Created by Justin Simien. Netflix, 2017-.** Netflix television series based on the 2014 film of the same name that explores racial politics at an Ivy League university. (Available for viewing on Netflix; watch the trailer for [Dear White People on YouTube](#).²³)

***Fresh Off the Boat.* Created by Nahnatchka Khan. ABC, 2015-.** Based on Eddie Huang’s 2013 memoir of the same title and notable for being the first television sitcom starring an Asian American family to air on US network primetime since 1994. Portrays the daily experiences of a Chinese American family living in Orlando, Florida in the 1990s. (Watch [Fresh Off the Boat on ABC](#).²⁴)

***Kim’s Convenience.* Created by Ins Choi and Kevin White. CBC, 2016-.** Sitcom based on a 2011 play of the same title by Ins Choi that narrates the daily experiences of a Korean Canadian family living in Toronto. (Available for viewing on Netflix; watch the trailer for [Kim’s Convenience on YouTube](#).²⁵)

¹⁹ Link to watch *Race: The Power of an Illusion*: <https://calpoly.kanopy.com/video/race-power-illusion-0>.

²⁰ Link to watch *White Like Me*: <https://calpoly.kanopy.com/video/white-me-0>.

²¹ Link to watch “Asian American Doll”: <https://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/asian-american-doll/2836284>.

²² Link to watch *Black-ish*: <https://abc.go.com/shows/blackish>.

²³ Link to watch *Dear White People* trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYKgHvPVACE>.

²⁴ Link to watch *Fresh Off the Boat*: <https://abc.go.com/shows/fresh-off-the-boat>.

²⁵ Link to watch *Kim’s Convenience* trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_BT3jdkUPg.

***Little Mosque on the Prairie.* Created by Zarqa Nawaz. CBC, 2007-2012.**

Groundbreaking television series that explores the lives of Muslims living in a small prairie town of Mercy, Saskatchewan, Canada. Notable for using humor to break down stereotypes about Muslims living in North America in the Islamophobic post-9/11 era. (Available for viewing on Hulu; watch the trailer for [Little Mosque on the Prairie on YouTube](#).²⁶)

***Master of None.* Created by Aziz Ansari and Alan Yang. Netflix, 2015-2017.**

Critically acclaimed television series that follows the personal and professional experiences of a 30-year-old Indian American actor named Dev Shah. Offers insightful commentary on contemporary racial issues, such as interracial dating, the representation of Indian Americans in the media, and intergenerational interactions between immigrant parents and their US-born children. (Available for viewing on Netflix; watch the trailer for [Master of None on YouTube](#).²⁷)

***The Secret Life of Muslims.* Created by Joshua Seftel and Brittany Huckabee. Vox, 2016-.**

A series of short videos featuring first-person commentary by a wide range of Muslim Americans about their personal experiences. Offers an illuminating portrait of the complexity and diversity of the United States' 3.3 million Muslims. (Watch [The Secret Life of Muslims on YouTube](#).²⁸)

Film

***The Color of Fear.* Directed by Lee Mun Wah. Diversity Training Films, 1994.**

Captures the insightful (and often heated) conversation among eight American men of Asian, European, Latino, and African descent as they discuss the state of race relations in the United States. (Purchase [The Color of Fear on the Diversity Training Films website](#).²⁹)

***Moos-Lum.* Written and directed by Qasim Basir. Peace Film, 2010.**

Tells the story of a Black American Muslim family's experiences both before and after the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001. (Watch [Moos-Lum on Kanopy](#).³⁰)

***Smoke Signals.* Written by Sherman Alexie, directed by Chris Eyre. Miramax, 1998.**

Tells the story of two young Coeur d'Alene men who journey off the reservation. Features an all-Native American production, including producers, director, screenwriter, actors, and technicians. (Watch the trailer for [Smoke Signals on YouTube](#).³¹)

²⁶ Link to watch *Little Mosque on the Prairie* trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ed01j-Z3DyY>.

²⁷ Link to watch *Master of None* trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bFvb3WKISk>.

²⁸ Link to watch *The Secret Life of Muslims*:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLJ8cMiYb3G5dIu76T0o8smkqjHOz1-kUo>.

²⁹ Link to purchase *The Color of Fear*: <http://www.diversitytrainingfilms.com/films-2/films/>.

³⁰ Link to watch *Moos-Lum*: <https://calpoly.kanopy.com/video/moos-lum>.

³¹ Link to watch *Smoke Signals*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYiPQsJGVk>.

***Twilight: Los Angeles.* Written by Anna Deavere Smith, Directed by Marc Levin. PBS, 2000.**

Theatrical single-actor performance that recounts the five-day Los Angeles rebellion after the 1992 Rodney King verdict from the perspective of various impacted parties. (Watch the trailer for [Twilight on the PBS website](#).³²)

***Walkout.* Directed by Edward James Olmos, produced by Moctezuma Esparza. HBO, 2006.**

Based on the true story of the 1968 East L.A. high school walkouts during the Chicano Civil Rights Movement. (Purchase [Walkout on YouTube](#).³³)

³² Link to watch *Twilight* trailer: <https://www.pbs.org/video/great-performances-twilight-los-angeles/>.

³³ Link to purchase *Walkout*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apvolbUM-RI>.

VII. Tips and Pitfalls

Pitfall #1: Colorblind Students

Many Cal Poly students grew up in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, when colorblind ideology has dominated national conversations about race. Colorblind ideology discourages the discussion or acknowledgement of racial difference, refuses to consider race in public policy decisions, and attributes racial inequality to nonracial dynamics. As a result, many Cal Poly students have been taught that the best way to manage racial strife is to ignore racial difference.

Due to their colorblind training, many of your students may feel uncomfortable talking about race and racism. In order to address this problem, invite your students to analyze why they feel uncomfortable with these topics. Facilitating a discussion about their feelings can help dispel the tensions attached to these topics. You might consider sharing your own anxieties and concerns about this topic. You could also assure your students that acknowledging race and racial difference is not in and of itself a racist act; in fact, acknowledging the existence of race as a socially constructed but materially powerful force in US society is critical for antiracist work.

Pitfall #2: The Myth of American Meritocracy

When you teach students that racism is a system of advantage based on race, you may have some students who resist this definition because it challenges their deeply ingrained belief in an American meritocracy. Some White students who have internalized the myth of American meritocracy may feel threatened by this definition of racism because it suggests that their ancestors' ability to succeed in the United States was made possible not by their independent effort and merit, but rather by their Whiteness, which granted them unearned privileges that allowed them to access key resources and accumulate wealth. For these students, recognizing that they live in a racialized world may feel like an existential crisis.

One strategy for dealing with such emotions in the classroom is to provide a factual, historical account of the social construction of Whiteness in the United States. This will help students feel that you are removing emotion and bias from the conversation and just providing them with historical facts and statistics. Another strategy is more pre-emptive. Postpone teaching about racism until after you have first taught your students about classism, ageism, or sexism, with are other oppressive systems that students may be more receptive to learning about. If students can see that classism, ageism, and sexism exist, then they will be more likely to see that racism exists.

Pitfall #3: Racist Remarks in the Classroom

Whenever the topic of race comes up in the classroom, there is a risk that students may make offensive, culturally insensitive, or racist remarks during discussion. This is to be expected, considering that many students have been trained not to talk about race (see Item #1 in this

section) and thus do not always have the vocabulary or skills to speak in a sensitive manner about this topic. Here are some strategies for dealing with this situation:

- Begin any discussion of race and/or racism with a reminder to students that the classroom is a learning environment designed to help them gain new skills, tackle challenging (and sometimes uncomfortable) tasks, and learn from their mistakes. This will help provide a framework for responding to offensive remarks, whether intentional or inadvertent, as the discussion proceeds.
- Ask the student who made the offensive remark if they can reflect on where they learned that information. For example, you might say, “I’ve heard this remark a lot, so a lot of people must believe this. Where do you think people are getting this information? Why do you think people think this? Why might this thinking be problematic?” These questions can be directed to the entire class for a larger discussion that invites everyone to reflect.
- Take a five-minute timed-writing break. If you feel discussion is getting too heated and students are beginning to voice unsafe or hurtful remarks, remind students that the classroom needs to remain a safe space for learning and put a pause on the conversation. During this time, ask students to do a five-minute free-write in which they write down their thoughts and feelings about the conversation or most recent remarks. This forced break will allow students to process their emotions independently and hopefully cool down so that they can return to the discussion with more critical awareness.

Pitfall #4: “But I’m Not a Race Expert!”

You may be concerned that you are not equipped to teach about race and racism to your students because you are not a “race expert” or academically trained in critical race studies. This is a very normal feeling to have, and it is perfectly understandable to feel this way. However, keep in mind that you are an experienced educator and are skilled at distilling complex information into accessible formats for students. You also do have experience teaching challenging topics and facilitating discussions in the classroom.

To help dispel this anxiety, you could let your students know that you are not a race scholar, but that you are committed to learning about race and racism and that you invite them to learn about these topics with you. Showing your students that you have an interest in these topics and are committed to bringing them into the classroom will go a long way toward highlighting the importance of being a racially informed member of US society. Don’t be afraid to tell your students that you don’t know an answer to a question. It is far better to admit your lack of knowledge than attempt an answer that you do not feel certain about. Far from losing confidence in your authority, your students will respect your honesty. You can promise to look up the answer after class and get back to them or invite them to work together with you in the moment to do research and find the answer as a collective. This could be a great opportunity to teach students about how to find answers on their own and to build a sense of community in the classroom as you all work together to complete a task.

General Tips

Talking about race and racism can be emotionally and psychologically draining, since these topics often provoke strong reactions. Here are some tips to help you manage your own mental health and emotional well-being when teaching about this topic.

- Be kind to yourself. You may make some mistakes. You may worry that you could have handled a heated discussion more smoothly. This does not mean you are a bad person or a bad teacher. It simply means that you are human.
- After every class session in which you discuss race and racism, spend a few minutes writing down your thoughts about the experience. What went well? What did you think could have gone better? What would you like to do differently next time? This strategy will not only help you improve your teaching in the future, but also help you reflect on your experience in a constructive manner.
- Seek out a community of other educators who are committed to bringing discussions about race and racism into their classrooms. Share your experiences with them and listen to their experiences; seek out their advice and offer your own when they encounter challenges. This community will provide a critical support network as you continue to do the important work of teaching about race and racism to your students.

Appendix A: Cultural Assumptions Activity

What cultural assumptions are you carrying?

Directions: Write in each box the stereotypes, assumptions, and/or impressions you have heard about the following groups of people.

Black Men	Black Women	Asian Men	Asian Women
Latinxs	White Men	White Women	Muslims
Christians	Jews	Southerners	Native Americans
Gays/Lesbians	Transgender People	People with Disabilities	British people