

Week 1

RACISM

This week's reading and video reading can be part of a foundation for understanding racism in the United States. Discussions of race typically focus on people of color: their plight, their actions, their culture. What too often goes unexamined is the simple question: What does it mean to be white?

Video/Reading

- *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, Parts 2 & 3
- "On Being White" (James Baldwin)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. After watching the documentary, do you understand race any differently? Were there any surprises or aspects of the film that troubled you?
2. For the US Government, what was the advantage of saying that Native Americans are close to white people and are capable of being "civilized"?
3. What is an ideology, and how does race act as an ideology? (Feel free to research.) How can/does the "ideology of race" influence people's thinking, both individually and collectively?
4. Why do you think white women in this film (and in general) are removed from history's conversation about white people's oppression of nonwhite people?
5. How do modern colorblind beliefs—"I don't see race," "Race doesn't matter anymore, so we shouldn't talk about it"—miss the target if race is an illusion with no biological reality?
6. Over thirty years ago, James Baldwin argued that there is no white community. What was his point? Do you think this is true today?
7. Baldwin mentions the "European vision of the world." What does this mean to you?
8. What was/is the "necessity of being white" in America?
9. Baldwin's article emphasizes the "Black condition," not the experience of people of color more generally. Why?

Week 2

CAPITALISM & INSTITUTIONALIZED RACISM

Slavery, capitalism, and racism were born together. To understand racism today and to combat it in its institutional forms, we have to understand its historical roots and its fundamental connection to capitalism and slavery.

Readings

- *Capitalism & Slavery*, Chapter 1 (Eric Williams)
- "From the Achievement Gap to the Educational Debt: Understanding Achievement in US Schools" (Gloria Ladson-Billings)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Williams say "racism was the consequence of slavery"?
2. What is the origin of slavery in the Americas?
3. In your opinion, what are the dominant values of a capitalist society? Make a list.
4. Slavery is over. What are some connections between racism and capitalism today?

5. Do you agree with Ladson-Billings concept of the "educational debt"? Which of the debts (historical, economic, sociopolitical, or moral) resonates the most for you?
6. How might ways to combat the achievement gap differ from ways to reduce the educational debt?
7. How is racism institutionalized in the US educational system?
8. In your opinion, what would/should racial justice look like today?

Week 3

INSTITUTIONALIZED RACISM

There are two million people entangled in the US penal system. Why are 90 percent of them black and brown? Michelle Alexander argues that the New Jim Crow—mass incarceration—is “the most damaging manifestation of the backlash against the Civil Rights Movement.” This may seem surprising, given the relative silence in US media and inaction among civil rights/social justice organizations. With more black adults under correctional control today—in prison or jail, or on probation or parole—than were enslaved in 1850, it seems clear that racism in the US can’t be dismantled without understanding the significance of this “racial caste system,” the New Jim Crow.

Reading

- *The New Jim Crow* (Michelle Alexander)
Introduction & Chapter 1 (Chapter 2 is optional)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was Jim Crow? What, ultimately, explains its downfall?
2. What is Alexander’s main argument in *The New Jim Crow*?
3. What does Alexander mean by “racial caste system”?
4. How does Alexander define “mass incarceration” or “the New Jim Crow”? What is the role of the criminal justice system in American society?
5. How was the Constitution designed to protect slavery?
6. What is the pattern to the births and deaths of racial caste systems in America?
7. What was the purpose of “law and order” and “tough on crime” rhetoric used following the Civil Rights Movement?
8. Why was the War on Drugs launched? How did the government (across political parties) and media build support for the “war”?
9. How does mass incarceration affect you, even if you (as a person of color) don't personally know someone who is/was incarcerated? Is mass incarceration a black issue or an American issue?
10. What does it mean to you to assert your full citizenship in America?
11. Would you welcome someone who was formerly incarcerated into your family or close circle of friends?

Week 4

SEXISM & FEMINISM

This week we will examine sexism (especially its impact on women of color) from historical and contemporary perspectives. In particular, we will view sexism through the lens of feminism. We will also explore gender as a social construct, as well as the role of masculinity in maintaining sexism. For a working definition of feminism, it might be helpful to begin this week's reading with the short piece by bell hooks.

Readings

- "Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression" (bell hooks)
- *Ain't I Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, Chapter 1 (bell hooks)
- "In Pursuit of Latina Liberation" (Elizabeth Martínez)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What forms does the "sexist oppression" of women take today?
2. Can you give examples of how sexism is institutionalized in this country?
3. What do you think Martínez means by "the institutionalized racism imposed by US colonization"?
4. Why have both black women and Latina feminists been accused of being "divisive"?
5. What are some common struggles faced by Latina and Black women and girls?
6. As a young person of color (whatever your gender identification), what do you see as the most pressing issues faced by contemporary women of color in the US (e.g., wage inequality, reproductive rights, educational opportunity, media representation, violence)? In other words, what do you consider to be some of the biggest problems women must face today?

Week 5

SEXISM & FEMINISM

The experiences (culturally, politically, economically) of black and brown women today are rooted in slavery and colonialism. This week we explore what a feminism shaped by the priorities of black and brown women could/should look like.

Readings

- "Why Immigration is a Feminist Issue" (Patricia Valoy)
- "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" (Angela Davis)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the concerns and struggles of black and brown women that might be different from white women?
2. Why is immigration a feminist issue?
3. Why is the notion of the "black matriarch" dangerous and damaging to women?
4. How and why was there equality amongst black men and women slaves (contrary to popular belief)?
5. Why should it be clear that black women, *en masse*, boldly and consistently resisted slavery? (Think about the use of rape as a widespread tool of repression by slaveowners.)
6. How have black women and Latinas resisted oppression—both racist and sexist?

Week 6

IMMIGRATION

There are many myths and assumptions about immigration policy in the United States. These myths persist and are largely fueled by xenophobia caused by regular economic decline and ever-widening income inequality among residents. Over time, US American policy on immigration and national citizenship have become some of the most restrictive in the world, and Chomsky's work will show how its dramatic evolution has been tailored to prohibit entry for the least powerful and most exploitable.

Reading

- *Undocumented*, Introduction (Aviva Chomsky)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do undocumented immigrants break the law? Why don't they come here legally? Why don't they just become US citizens?
2. Discuss the causes leading to deportation and the consequences of being deported.
3. What are the similarities between (a) mass incarceration and (b) immigration law as forms of racial control and the maintenance of the racial caste system in the US?
4. What is your reaction to the following phrases?
 - "They broke the law."
 - "This country belongs to Americans"
 - "This country was built by immigrants." / "America is a country of immigrants."
5. Discuss the role of globalization (particularly "free trade" legislation) in the existence of a class of undocumented peoples in the US.
6. How do your ideas of fairness (as related to citizenship and all its privileges) contradict or fall short of the principles and standards of human rights?

Week 7

COLONIALISM & GLOBALIZATION

Most of the poor, brown, "third world" peoples on this planet have had histories of colonization. As a rule, the most impoverished and "underdeveloped" nations have been the most exploited. This week we will explore the history of colonialism in Latin America and its continuing legacy today, with the specific example of Puerto Rico.

Readings

- Open Veins of Latin America, (Eduardo Galeano)
Introduction & Chapter 1 (pp. 11-15)
- "Colonialism bears bitter fruit in Puerto Rico" (W. T. Whitney, Jr.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did the term "colonialism" mean to you before finishing this week's readings?
2. Galeano says, "The strength of the imperialist system rests on the necessary inequality of its parts." What does he mean by this?
3. How was Hurricane Maria more than a "natural" disaster? Discuss the ways in which "natural" disasters can expose the crises of colonialism and capitalism (e.g., Puerto Rico, Haiti, Hurricane Katrina).
4. What is at stake for the US Government and US business interests, if the Puerto Rican people were to win their independence?

Week 8

GLOBALIZATION

This summer we've discussed racism, capitalism, sexism, colonialism, and their various manifestations—locally and internationally. How has your thinking changed or remained the same since the beginning of the summer? How do you see your role as a scientist of color? This week we will discuss globalization, with the example of Haiti. One of the most exploited and marginalized peoples, Haitians also have one of the most incredible histories of resistance.

Reading

- *Eyes of the Heart* (Jean-Bertrand Aristide)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did you think and feel reading *Eyes of the Heart*? Consider the topics we've discussed this summer. What connections does this book reveal?
2. What questions come to mind while reading?
3. Why is Haiti so impoverished?
4. Which of the stories told by Aristide was most striking? Why?
5. How might this book (and previous readings) inform your views of happiness and success? Is the American-led march to economic "globalization" an effective path to global prosperity (by any definition)?
6. What does Aristide mean by a "third way"? What is your "third way"? What social justice dream would you make into a reality?