



National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity Education Foundation

Cracking the Codes: The System of Racial Inequity. Dir. Dr. Shakti Butler. World Trust, 2013. Film.

History

The narrator of the film speaks about learning what constitutes a continent and his questioning his teacher as to why Europe is considered a continent when it does not meet the geographical requirements for being considered such. He alluded that his challenging the lesson frustrated his teacher, for which he was subsequently sent to the principal's office.

Can you recall learning something when you were young that you've since found to be untrue? Did that realization prompt you to examine other lessons learned where the validity of the "fact" was questionable to you? What consequences did you face because you were questioning what was always perceived as "fact"?

If you are an educator, are there instances where students challenge what you are teaching? If so, how do you handle those situations?

Identity & Culture

Peggy McIntosh explains that her family used the word "good" to teach her the values of the White middle class family, and that "good" demarcated what was acceptable in terms of life activities and culture. The association of "good" was synonymous with only one particular culture, which meant that anything different, therefore, was "bad."

Is there an activity, mindset, or interest you have now that would have been considered "bad" at one point in your life? What process did you embark on to perceive positively what was once considered "bad"? Did others reject your new interest or brush it aside?

Ise Lyfe, an educator featured in the film, recounts that when he was young, he did not fully realize that he was Black. Being very light-skinned as a child raised by a mixed-race mother who was also very fair, Ise had to learn how to function in two cultures. Having to learn to function in two different cultures, cultures differentiated by skin color, is a reoccurring trope in American history called "the tragic mulatto." The term "tragic mulatto" speaks to the difficulty one encounters when attempting to navigate two cultures that the individual participates in and, in some instances, it prompts the individuals to reject one culture over the other.

If you are of mixed race or have students in your classroom that are of mixed race, what are some of the strategies you use to manage the cultural binary? What are some of the ways in which you can eradicate the trope of the tragic mulatto from your students' (or even your own) mindset?



Bias

Tim Wise speaks to unconscious bias, otherwise referred to as “implicit association.” We all have unconscious bias rooted in one of the many “isms” found in American culture. If you are unsure of what your unconscious biases are, Harvard University’s Implicit Association Test or “IAT” is a great tool to help you discover what deeply ingrained biases you might have (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>).

Can you readily identify a bias you might have? Can you bring your unconscious bias to the fore, so that you can begin correcting your subconscious thinking? What actions or steps might you take to begin correcting implicit, negative biases against others?

Privilege

Tilman Smith coins the phrase “internalized white superiority.” What does that phrase mean to you? How does this phrase coincide with Peggy McIntosh’s explanation of the “American myth of meritocracy”?

Internalized Racism

Joy Angela DeGuy illustrates what she calls “post-traumatic slave syndrome” (PTSS) through a story about two mothers, one White, one Black, each whom have a son who does well in school and extracurricular activities. The boys are friends. Upon compliment, the White mother proceeds to exhibit the pride she has in her son and lists the other accomplishments he has made. She pauses and realizes that the Black mother’s son actually supersedes her White son, and begins to return the compliment only to have the Black mother downplay what her own son has done. The white mother perceives the Black mother (and African Americans in general) to be negative.

How has “post-traumatic slave syndrome” affected the Black mother? How do the constraints of chattel slavery continue to influence life for Americans? If you are a person of color, can you think of any other instances where PTSS occurs and link it back to its root cause? (Think about chattel slavery as interchangeable with mental bondage.)

Interpersonal

Tim Wise explains how the media influences our perceptions of people we do not typically interact with in our daily lives and how this influence might cause us to discredit another individual who does not fit the cultural mold the media projects. Media images, he explains, might also prompt a person to make broad, negative categorizations of others, too.



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Can you think of any instances where media has supported racial stereotypes that have influenced your thinking or seeped into your unconscious bias to form implicit associations? How many persons of color can you count as acquaintances? How about as friends? What barriers do you encounter that make it difficult for you to interact and positively communicate with people racially/ethnically/culturally different from you?

Institutional

Racism is not just a thing that happens on a personal level; it is also deeply ingrained in the various institutions that frame American culture. Where in the education system do you see evidence of institutional racism? What can you do to eradicate institutional racism from your classroom?

Structural

Racequitytools.org describes structural racism as “aspects of our history and culture that have allowed the privilege associated with 'whiteness' and the disadvantage of 'color' to endure and adapt over time.” If you are White, how has this system benefitted you? If you are a person of color, how has this system harmed you or prohibited you for making progress in your own life?

To order a copy of *Cracking the Codes: The System of Racial Inequity*, visit crackingthecodes.org for complete details.