

Decolonizing US History

Syllabus for High School Students

To foster collaboration and open discussion, it is necessary for educators and students to create community guidelines that will set boundaries around sharing, discussion, and confidentiality. This syllabus is a guide and can be changed as needed to fit the needs of your students. I recommend that you encourage students to share multimedia sources and contribute to lessons by introducing topics and discussion questions.

Lesson 1: Settler Colonialism

Lesson 1

It is important for educators to start the lesson with a land acknowledgement.

For the second half of the lesson have students split up into small groups (3-4 students) to discuss how settler colonialism shows up in various forms. Some are listed on the website, but if you have a big class, you can research other forms of settler colonialism for students to learn about. Give students 5-10 minutes to go over sources and decide what they want to say. Have each group give a short presentation about the history of their issue and how it is an example of settler colonialism.

Lesson 2

Split students up into groups of 4-5 students. Each group will have to research a Native American resistance movement and give a 5–10-minute presentation. Each group should also prepare discussion questions. After the presentations, students should decide which questions they want to address first, and the teacher should moderate/guide the discussion.

Lesson 2: Decolonization and Racial Capitalism

Lesson 1

Educators should review the slideshow. You will want to go over the Atwater speech with students. They will not have the background information about Nixon and the Southern Strategy, so it is important that you provide it. Since the idea of racial capitalism is very abstract this may be a difficult concept for students to grasp. It is important that teachers are able to provide different examples of how racial capitalism works so that students can understand how it relates to power.

Lesson 3: The Invention of American Whiteness

Lesson 1

There is a lot of material for this lesson, so educators might want to split the workload among students.

Lesson 2

If you have White students in your class, you may want to ask them about how their families may have benefitted from assimilation or White privilege. If you are a White teacher, you may want to share how you have benefitted from assimilation or white privilege. It can be uncomfortable, but it helps students develop self-awareness.

Lesson 3

This lesson has two parts, the first part discusses how White supremacy is maintained through violence. The second part focuses on action students can take by being anti-racist.

Lesson 4: The Invention of Anti-Blackness

Week 1

Teachers should review the presentation. Take time to analyze the paintings of Santiago de Matamoros and Santiago de Mataindios with students. What does this painting say about how Spain saw itself? What are the racial implications of this figure? After King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella successfully defeated the Moors and started their consolidation of Spain, they made Santiago de Matamoros the official saint of the country. The fact that this Islamophobic (and racist) symbol is the patron saint of Spain demonstrates how Spanish national identity is built on the idea of a Christian (specifically Catholic, and White) nation. These religious and racial prejudices helped Spaniards to justify exploiting the labor of enslaved Africans and indigenous people.

For the second half of the lesson have students split up into small groups (3-4 students) to discuss how anti-Blackness shows up in various forms. There are some sources listed on the website, but if you have a big class, you can research other ways anti-Blackness shows up for students to learn about. Give students 5-10 minutes to go over sources and decide what they want to say. Have each group give a short presentation about the history of their issue and how it is an example of anti-Blackness.

Lesson 2

The Black Panther Party's 10 Point Platform is a great document to compare and contrast with the 20 Point proposal from the American Indian Movement. This is an opportunity for students to make the connections between these movements. Did they know the Black Panther Party document was written first? How do we see its influence in the 20-point proposal?

Lesson 5: Feminism and Intersectionality

Lesson 1

Students will need guidance in understanding how/why misogyny and patriarchy developed. The gender stratification video covers some of it, but educators might want to include extra sources. Help students break down the position of Native American and Black women in early America.

Lesson 2

Do a deep dive and have students lead a discussion that compares and contrasts the Combahee River Collective and Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments. How do stereotypes about Women of Color and Black women affect the way they are treated? Have students think critically about the stereotypes/ tropes they see in media about women.

This lesson could be a way to incorporate the Hayes addressing model. This exercise is a way for students to understand their own identity and privilege. Have the students do the activity, discuss in small groups and then share with the class if they would like.

Cultural Self-Assessment:

The ADDRESSING Framework

This exercise is to investigate your own cultural heritage and the influence that diverse culture had on you. The following is an example of a self-assessment done by a USC professor.

- Age and generational influences: 41 year old first generation Mexican-American; born of Mexican parents who have rather conservative and traditional values; family-centered; parents were firm about assimilation into the larger more dominant society.

- Developmental or acquired disabilities: no current disabilities. Struggling to lose some weight. Wears glasses after an unsuccessful laser eye surgery years ago.
- Religion and spiritual orientation: Grew up in a fairly religious Mexican Roman Catholic family. Entered the seminary to become a priest but later found this was not my calling. Strong sense of spirituality with an understanding of Jesus as Wisdom Teacher, Mystic, and Prophet. Attracted to Buddhist philosophy and earth-based spiritualities.
- Ethnicity: Mother and father both of Mexican-Indian heritage born in Mexico. My own identity was first identified as Chicano during my university years but now I identify as Mexican-American. I speak fluent Spanish but my primary language is English.
- Socioeconomic Status: Parents are urban, working, lower class members of an ethnic minority culture. My identity is university educated Mexican-American. I strongly identify with the lower and working class values, but my income is currently upper-middle class.
- Sexual Orientation: Straight. Heterosexual.
- Indigenous heritage: My maternal and paternal grandparents are very much village people who worked in the agricultural fields of rural Mexico.
- National Origin: Born in the USA. Spanish was my first language, but later fell in love with the English language. I consider the U.S. as my “father” and Mexico as my “mother.”
- Gender: Man. Married. Father of two children.

Now it is your turn. It is time to investigate your own cultural heritage. Be honest. There is no right or wrong answer.

- Age and generational influences:
- Developmental or acquired disabilities:
- Religion and spiritual orientation:
- Ethnicity:
- Socioeconomic status:
- Sexual orientation:
- Indigenous heritage:
- National origin:
- Gender:

Lesson 6: Heteronormativity as a colonial construct

Lesson 1

This lesson could also be an opportunity for students and educators to explore toxic masculinity. It is not a specific focus of this lesson, so educators would need to provide their own resources.

Lesson 2

Have students brainstorm how heteronormativity is normalized. Since they are young people, it is a chance to discuss how this coding shows up in children’s programming. There is a trigger warning for the video “Bury Your Gays,” please make sure to remind students of the warning.

Lesson 3

This lesson includes an analysis of the song “Montero” by Lil Nas X, this may or may not be appropriate for your students.

Lesson 7: No one is Illegal on Stolen Land

Lesson 1

You might want to include a political cartoon about Chinese exclusion or the hyper sexualization of Asian women.

Lesson 2

Keep in mind that the term “wetback” is a derogatory racial slur for Mexicans and should not be used inappropriately by students or teachers. I use this term in the lesson (but choose not to use the whole word) because it is the name of the Border Patrol maneuver to deport a large number of agricultural workers.

It is worth interrogating why that name was chosen for this operation when it was used as a racial slur at the time. It is a good opportunity to point out how their position as poor, immigrant, and non-English speaking made these workers especially vulnerable.

Lesson 3

For this lesson you should emphasize the ways that US foreign and domestic policies influence one another. You can have students think about media coverage—how have people forced to migrate been depicted? What about the detention camps along the border?

This lesson can be used to think about the role of ICE and detention centers at the border. For resources you can check out the lesson “Abolishing ICE” from the undergraduate curriculum.

Lesson 8: Iran-Contra Affair

Lesson 1

It is impossible to cover all of US imperialism in an high school class, but I choose to focus on Iran-Contra because of its connection to the War on Drugs. It is also a good way to introduce students to US interventions in the Middle East which are covered further in “War on Terror.”

Lesson 2

This lesson could be expanded by focusing on the US-Iran relationship. Educators can include sources that explore the impact of US sanctions

Lesson 9: Legalize It

Lesson 1

Focus on the connections between mass incarceration and the War on Drugs and the differences in criminalization. You may want to reference the video from “The Invention of Anti-Blackness” about police brutality.

Lesson 2

Connections between foreign policy and immigration policy. Have students think about the demand side of the drug war. Is that a better way to address addiction?

Lesson 10: War on Terror

Lesson 1

The last video in this lesson does discuss torture. I have put a trigger warning, but you should remind students.

Lesson 2

Students should choose one oral history to listen to from the Brooklyn Historical Society. Educators should guide students in discussion of racial profiling against Arab and South Asian communities.

Lesson 11: Fight for \$15

Lesson 1

If educators have time, this unit is a great opportunity to have students complete an activity where they try to live on minimum wage. This could be a group or individual activity.

Lesson 2

Have students think about the protections that unions could offer workers in the gig economy.

Lesson 12: Disability in the time of COVID

Week 1

If you want to take this lesson further, you can introduce disability justice to students.

Lesson 1: Environmental Justice and Land Back

Week 1

Focus on the intersectionality of environmental justice. How does this relate to housing, healthcare, etc...?

Week 2

Connecting the Land Back movement to the beginning of the curriculum. How does land back address climate change in a way that (White) environmental groups do not?

Assignments:

Lesson 3—Students should search in the library or on the internet for sources related to the topic. They should pick one source and write about why it is a credible source, the expertise of the author, and any critique they have of it.

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Lesson 7—For their midterm students should present a topic introduction that has a clear thesis statement along with an annotated bibliography of 10-15 sources. Three of these sources can come from class materials, but the rest must come from their own research.

Final: Choose an essay or creative project

1. Creative Project: If you could make something that highlighted one part of New York City, what would it be? Why? Solo or group project
 - a. What topic would you choose?
 - b. What format (app, video series (YT, TikTok), walking tour, podcast, TV show/movie, exhibit, play, poetry)? For the video series, students can make a YT video (5-10 mins) and an actual series of TikToks (5-10 videos). All of the other formats can be proposals for a project.
2. Essay Questions (choose one)
 - a. What does decolonization mean to you?
 - b. If you decolonize one part of your world, what would you choose? How would you change it? Focus on one aspect such as: heteronormativity, race, gender, housing, healthcare, US imperialism, the fashion industry, ableism, education,

