

Decolonizing US History

Syllabus for Undergraduate Students

The best format for these lessons is to have students sign up in pairs to present each week. The students are responsible for coming up with additional discussion questions and providing two primary sources for fellow students to analyze. This syllabus is a guide and can be changed as needed to fit the needs of your students.

Lesson 1: Settler Colonialism

Lesson 1 (no presentation)

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

If you have access to *An Indigenous People's History of the United States* by Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, I suggest you assign either one of the first two chapters instead of "Columbus, the Indians, and Human Progress" by Howard Zinn. I would also suggest "The Great Law of Peace" from 1491 by Charles C. Mann.

Have students download the Native Land app. They should look up the tribe that is from the land the college is on. They should also look up whose territory they are from (for US students). Did they know the information before? Was it something they had learned about previously in school?

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: Decolonization and Racial Capitalism

Lesson 1 (presentation)

Educators should review the slideshow. Encourage student presenters to go over the Atwater speech with fellow students. 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. How is mass incarceration connected to slavery and how are both of these institutions tools of racial capitalism?

Lesson 3: White Supremacy and Privilege

(presentation)

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.

There is a lot of material for this lesson, so it would be beneficial to leave the White Privilege knapsack for in-class as one of the primary sources that students present on.

Lesson 4: Anti-Blackness

Lesson 1 (presentation)

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 5: Black Resistance and Solidarity **(presentation)**

I would suggest splitting this lesson up into two parts, the first part to discuss the Civil Rights movement, and the second part to discuss anti-racism.

Lesson 6: White Feminism and Intersectionality **(presentation)**

There are a lot of sources for students to go through, I would have student presenters focus on the Declaration of Sentiments or the Combahee River Collective statement. Depending on how you want to focus the lesson it might be beneficial to include chapters 6,7, and 9 from *Women Race & Class* by Angela Davis.

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 7: MeToo and Violence Against Women

(presentation)

The second video in this lesson has a trigger warning for rape and sexual assault, please remind students to be careful if those are triggers for them.

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.

For this lesson make sure that you have a way to connect students with resources your school has for victims of sexual assault.

Lesson 8: Heteronormativity as a colonial construct

(presentation)

Ask students to explore: how did these heteronormative ideas about gender become so widespread? Look at the role of religion and colonization.

Lesson 9: No One is Illegal on Stolen Land

(presentation)

This is an opportunity to discuss positive stereotypes and how they are racist. Educators should discuss how “yellow peril” and “model minority” are used to classify “good Asians” and “bad Asians.”

Lesson 10: No One is Illegal on Stolen Land

(presentation)

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 11: Abolishing ICE

(presentation)

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?

Lesson 12: War on Terror

(Presentation)

The video about Guantanamo Bay does discuss torture. I have put a trigger warning, but you should remind students.

If you have access to *An Indigenous People’s History of the of United States* by Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, I suggest you use Chapter four “Bloody Footprints” which makes a strong connection between settler colonialism and US imperialism.

Lesson 13: Disability Justice and COVID-19

(presentation)

Educators should be familiar with the accommodations that the university makes for students with disabilities. This includes cognitive, physical, and non-visible disabilities. Students and educators should consider, are these measure enough? Do they, at the very least, follow the American with Disabilities Act?

Assignments: Students will pick a theme on the first day of class, and in groups of two create a lesson that will be posted on the website.

Lesson 5: Students need to have compiled an annotated bibliography with 5 theoretical texts related to the theme they want to create a lesson for.

Lesson 9: Students need to have a list of complete list of digital sources for their lesson.

Final: Lessons due and posted on site