Teaching about matters of ethnicity, race, and culture in the social studies is controversial in nature, but necessary to ensuring students are leaving the classroom with some multicultural competence. In social studies, discussion of race and racism is typically confined to the master narrative, which is limited to content pertaining to slavery, the Civil War, and the Civil Rights Movement. What is missed in the discussion about racism in the social studies is the conversation about intraracial racism or discrimination, which may not be a mainstream topic, but a persistent and ever-present issue within Black communities. The purpose of this article is to provide teachers with activities that can elicit discussion about Black intraracial discrimination, a harmful legacy of slavery and colonization. By using various pedagogical tools for discussion of intraracial discrimination, teachers will be incorporating a controversial, but culturally relevant, topic into the curriculum as well as ensuring that students become aware of matters of culture and race that exist beyond the textbook.

**Keywords:** race, racism, discrimination, intraracial, social studies, history

**Introduction**

To understand this, you have to go back to what [the] young brother here referred to as the house Negro and the field Negro — back during slavery. There was two kinds of slaves. There was the house Negro and the field Negro.” - Malcolm X, 1963, Message to the Grassroots

In his speech at the 2004 National Democratic Convention, former senator and current president, Mr. Barack Obama, spoke about the ridicule Black students receive from their peers for educational attainment (Morin, 2005). First Lady Michelle Obama also addressed the derogatory nature of relating Black academic achievement to acting White in her 2013 commencement address at Boise State University, referring to the act as slander (Haven, 2013).

Noted author and scholar Michael Eric Dyson is a popular figure notorious for his negative referral to levels of Blackness, albeit in an academic manner, in his public feuds with Bill Cosby (Dyson, 2005), and Cornel West. In 2011, comedian Steve Harvey agreeing with Dyson, referred to Cornel West and television anchor Tavis Smiley as Uncle Toms for their criticism of President Obama (Vassar, 2011). Championship boxer Bernard Hopkins famously referred to Black National Football League (NFL) quarterback Donovan McNabb as a “guy in the house, while others are in the field” because McNabb comes from a two-parent home and has never been arrested (ESPN, 2011, para. 2).

There have been many other public occurrences in which derogatory racial terms and phrases such as House Negro, Uncle Tom, and acting White have been used by African Americans, in reference to others within the subgroup, to questioning levels of “Blackness”. The interrogation of one’s Blackness, alluded to in contemporary mainstream politics, sports, and entertainment, is a form of intraracial discrimination, or discrimination occurring within a particular race. Intraracial discrimination is one of many ugly legacies of slavery and plantation politics in which intentional intraracial division was established on plantations by slave owners in the form of color codes (Fredrickson, 2008). These color codes then served as the basis for a hierarchy within the Black race in which mulattos and lighter-skinned Blacks found themselves...
in more “favorable” and privileged positions on plantations. Unfortunately, the effects of plantation politics with regards to intraracial division persist today. Intraracial discrimination among Blacks exists in two forms: colorism and borderism (Jenkins, 2006; Smith & Jones, 2011; Turner, 2013). Colorism or skin color prejudice is a prominent form of intraracial discrimination among Blacks that largely influences Black identity (Turner, 2013). Colorism is associated with notions of skin tone. The concept of borderism is associated with those who “cross the color line” by choosing not to align themselves with perceived Black behaviors or racial identity (Smith & Jones, 2011, p. 1568). Borderism is closely connected with the idea of the Uncle Tom, the sellout, or acting White.

Borderism and colorism are not mutually exclusive, but together form the basis for matters of intraracial class discrimination (Gullickson, 2005; Hochschild & Weaver, 2007). A study by Derek Hyra (2006) noted the impact of intraracial discrimination on matters of class, as middle-class Black families have moved into historically lower socioeconomic status Black communities such as Harlem (New York) and Bronzeville (Chicago) with the intentions of community improvement. This community uplift was met by opposition from lower-income Black residents causing intraracial and class conflict. Various other studies (Goldsmith, Hamilton & Darity Jr., 2007; Gullickson, 2005; LaFree & Drass, 1996; Mason, 2010) attribute notions of colorism and borderism such as skin tone stratification and educational attainment to income disparity, thus making the issue of intraracial racism complex and multifaceted.

### Intraracial Discrimination in Social Studies

As intraracial racism and discrimination is an issue within the community, it cannot be ignored in the classroom. Black students hold less favorable opinions towards their Black peers and adults who speak using Standard English as opposed to Black English (Gross & Kroch, 1997) which can pose a problem in school settings. Intraracial bullying among school-aged and adolescent children is a common problem (Merrell-James, 2006) caused by issues of colorism and borderism such as skin tone, hair type, physical features, economic background, and school achievement. In addition, forms of intraracial bullying and peer pressure affect identity and relationship development for Black students (Yip, Sellers & Seaton, 2010).

Black students are negotiating meaning and assigning “personal significance to a particular racial group” (Tatum, 2003, p. 16) as a part of their racial identity development. As a result, consideration of race and racism deserves a place in school curriculum. The purpose here is to provide social studies educators with ways to incorporate the controversial topic of Black-on-Black discrimination. Due to the socio-cultural nature of this topic, the social studies classroom provides a platform for discussion of intraracial discrimination among Blacks. Although students generally dislike the social studies, they enjoy the topics that can be explored within the curriculum (Thornton, 2005). Students may perceive intraracial discrimination as an interesting and salient issue to explore as it is a common yet unexplored construct of race evident through scholarly literature as well as public occurrences. Blacks, as well as other students of color, express more disinterest and dislike for the social studies because of its irrelevance to their lives (Gay, 2005), therefore, discussion about intraracial discrimination may help to engage a group of students who are otherwise discontent with the curriculum.

Social studies teachers have long been hesitant to explore matters of race, and whenever they do, it is typically confined to the discussions set forth by the textbook regarding either slavery or the Civil Rights Movement (Bolgatz, 2005). Very rarely are students provided the opportunity in social studies to explore various constructs of race. Intraracial discrimination provides students with the opportunity to explore constructs of race beyond the Black-White
binary, as well as engage in discussion about one of the many harmful legacies of slavery and colonization. In addressing the direction that social studies educators should take regarding race, Tyrone Howard (2004) posited the importance of incorporating the legacy of race and racism:

“It is essential for students to develop an awareness of how racism has shaped the landscape of U.S. society, and how its ramifications are still felt today. A refusal to acknowledge the legacy of racism gives students an incomplete account of the country’s history, and also invalidates the painful experiences of millions of U.S. citizens who have endured—and continue to endure—the harsh effects of racism” (p. 94).

The topic of intraracial discrimination amongst Blacks can be intimidating or outright controversial, but discussions about controversial issues are important in fostering democratic classrooms (Hess, 2009). To treat intraracial racism and other matters of race as if they do not exist is a socially unjust practice as race makes up an integral part of society and, consequently, of school culture (Ladson-Billings, 1998). More race-centered dialogue is needed in the social studies (Howard, 2003). The social studies curriculum is naturally positioned to address issues of race and diversity (Sanchez, 1997). While intraracial racism is not included within mainstream social studies curriculum, it is part of the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum includes issues that do not necessarily appear in social studies textbooks or curriculum, yet emerge in the classroom through the students’ lived experiences (Massialas, 1992). Teachers can either perpetuate racial tensions (in this case intraracial) or help students to deconstruct these tensions and reconstruct more positive intraracial relations (Price, Hyle & Jordan, 2009).

The concept of race is complex and multi-faceted. Most people are under the presumption that race is biological, but it is a socially constructed idea invented and constantly molded by human beings (Chandler, 2010). Many, however, view race as a natural division, leading to the view of race as meaningful and real (Khanna & Harris, 2009; Winant, 1994). Teaching about matters of race and racism requires an understanding from teachers and students that the concept of race is a social construction (Khanna & Harris, 2009).

**Teaching Activities**

The activities described below can be fully incorporated into an existing curriculum to teach intraracial discrimination among Blacks as well as other ethnic groups. These activities may also be used as icebreakers to initiate dialogue on the topic without going into much detail. I previously used these activities to introduce a short unit on intraracial racism to 11th grade history classes in an urban, low-income school.

During the school year in which I implemented the following activities, I taught both advanced and general education students. My classes primarily consisted of Black students from various ethnic backgrounds: African-American, Jamaican, Haitian, Dominican, and Puerto Rican. The student body also consisted of students who were either Caucasian or Euro-Latinos (mainly Cuban). No matter their ethnic background, students found the unit interesting, engaging, and relevant. More importantly, students began to demonstrate some change in their attitudes towards their peers as they had become more aware of the harmful effects of intraracial discrimination. The negative commentary frequently heard among Black students concerning one another influenced my curricular decision to include a small unit on intraracial discrimination. The advanced Black students in the school consistently degraded other Black students who did not achieve academically, and those students who did not achieve academically referred to Blacks who performed well in school as acting White.

There were numerous instances in which colorism became a topic of concern, manifesting itself in my classroom when having a Socratic philosophical chairs discussion on
interracial marriage and the historic Loving v. Virginia, (1967) Supreme Court case. Before viewing documents, students were given the opportunity to confirm their beliefs. This discussion strategy can be used to solicit students’ ideas, beliefs, and prior knowledge about a particular topic or issue (Kegan, 1982). During the discussion, numerous darker toned females accused their Black male peers of having a preference towards lighter toned Black women, mixed race women, Latinas, or even White women, thus causing darker hued Black women to feel inferior due to their skin complexion.

Beyond classroom-based discussions, intraracial discrimination was inherent within the school setting. There were instances in which Latinos would separate themselves based on origin and skin color, with Afro-Latinos, mainly Dominicans, isolating themselves from their Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Haitian peers. The color divisions permeated throughout the school hallways so, it was necessary that the intraracial discrimination taking place be addressed in an academic manner in the classroom, thus intellectualizing the conversation on race.

**Surveys**

To introduce the topic of intraracial discrimination, the Intra-racial Discrimination survey could be given to the students (see Figure 1). Opening with the survey is beneficial in that it gives students the opportunity to reflect on the topic, and to question their experiences, which helps to create relevance and meaning for them. Asking students for their input involves them in discussion on the topic early in the classroom implementation of the unit. Another benefit of the survey is its ease of completion. The instrument allows the teacher to collect preliminary data to ascertain student beliefs and to prepare relevant materials to engage students in inquiry based on the data. After completing the survey, students can either discuss the questions in pairs, in small groups, or in a whole-class discussion. Not all students are enthusiastic about discussion despite how interesting or salient the topic may be (Wilen, 2004). As an option, the teacher can collect the surveys, calculate the data, and report back to the students with the statistics in order to foster a more anonymous discussion where students are not required to initially express their respective viewpoints, but can simply respond to the data.

**Intraracial Discrimination Survey**

Directions: Read the list of statements. For each statement, circle either “yes” or “no” indicating whether or not you have experienced what was stated. In the space below each statement, briefly explain your response to each statement.

1. Yes or No: I have discriminated against or made fun of someone of my race because of his or her academic achievement.

   Explanation:

2. Yes or No: Another person of my race has discriminated against or made fun of me because of my academic achievement.

   Explanation:
3. Yes or No: I have discriminated against or made fun of someone of my race because of his or her skin tone/complexion.
   Explanation:

4. Yes or No: Another person of my race has discriminated against or made fun of me because of my skin tone/complexion.
   Explanation:

5. Yes or No: I have discriminated against or made fun of someone of my race because of his or her hair type.
   Explanation:

6. Yes or No: Another person of my race has discriminated against or made fun of me because of my hair type.
   Explanation:

7. Yes or No: I have discriminated against or made fun of someone of my race because of their physical features (nose, lips, eyes, etc.).
   Explanation:

8. Yes or No: Another person of my race has discriminated against or made fun of me because of my physical features (nose, lips, eyes, etc.).
   Explanation:
9. Yes or No: I have discriminated against or made fun of someone of my race because of his or her social class background.

Explanation:

10. Yes or No: Another person of my race has discriminated against or made fun of me because of my social class background.

Explanation:

*Figure 1*: Intraracial discrimination survey

**Attractiveness/Intelligence Survey**

Directions: You will see 10 pictures. For each picture, first tell me what you see (briefly describe the person). Then on a scale of 1-5, tell me how attractive you think the person is, and how intelligent you think the person is. 5 is the highest level of attractiveness/intelligence a person can have and 1 is the lowest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Picture No.</th>
<th>What do you see? (skin tone, physical features, hairstyle, hair type, etc.)</th>
<th>Attractiveness Rating (1-5)</th>
<th>Intelligence Rating (1-5)</th>
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Another form of surveying that can be used to foster discussion related to colorism is the use of attractiveness and intelligence surveys. Show students about ten pictures, five female and five male, of Blacks with various skin tones. Using the Attractiveness and Intelligence survey (Figure 2), students will rate each photo using a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the most attractive or intelligent and 1 being least attractive or intelligent. As with the intraracial discrimination survey, students can share their responses immediately or the data can be anonymously calculated and reported back to students by the teacher.

**Film and Syndicated Programming**

One of the most effective ways to teach about ethnicity, race, and race relations in the social studies is to use film (Loewen, 1991). Using film also is helpful with subject matter that can be too emotionally complex for a teacher to introduce, thus helping to reduce the role of the teacher and letting the film introduce the topic. *School Daze*, *Jumping the Broom*, and *Crash* are particularly suitable movies for introducing the topic of intraracial racism amongst Blacks as they are based on notions of colorism and borderism. Although the *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* is not a movie, this television series provides numerous examples of intraracial discrimination. The immensely popular syndicated television series is riddled with hints of intraracial racism based on skin tone, social class, physical features, and use of vernacular. Carlton’s character in the television program, for example, provides students with an example of borderism as he uses Standard English, is academically inclined, and often is considered to be acting White by Will. More specifically, one could show the episode where intraracial discrimination by Will against Carlton briefly forced Carlton to adapt perceived notions of Blackness in which he used Black English Vernacular, wore baggy clothes, and exhibited overly aggressive behaviors.

Choose one, or a few of the movies to show to students, but be sure to follow the school-wide or district procedures for incorporating Hollywood films in your curriculum as most of the movies pertaining to racial issues are rated R. Show students an episode or clips of the *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* and have them note instances where they perceive intraracial discrimination taking place. After watching the films and the television shows, have students share notes from the film or television show for discussion. To ensure that conflicting opinions are shared respectfully, ensure there are procedures in place for discussion. Race can be controversial as students may have negative dispositions about matters of race. It is important that teachers build community as a preventative measure before engaging students in controversial discussion.
In addition to introducing fact-based questions to guide discussions (Yeager Washington & Humphries, 2011), teachers should stress that the goal is to engage in dialogue as opposed to debate.

**Media Analysis**

One activity students may enjoy is a media analysis. After watching a film or television show, ask students to go home and watch television (be mindful of your students’ access to television before implementing this assignment). Students will note five portrayals of Blacks or other people of color in the media by analyzing commercials, music videos, reality shows, news outlets, or other television varieties. Have students fill in the media analysis chart (Figure 3) and bring their responses back to class. After analyzing and discussing their chart with a peer, ask students to write a reflection paper about how Blacks may be portrayed as well as interact with one another based on skin complexion, social class, academic achievement, or physical features. In the media analysis reflection, have students include information about a peer’s analysis, comparing and contrasting it with their own.

**Media Analysis**

Directions: While watching television, conduct a media analysis to look for ways in which intra-racial discrimination takes place within the media. For example, we are light-skinned Blacks more prevalent that dark skinned Blacks on a specific channel or within commercials for a particular brand? This media analysis will help you answer these types of questions. Indicate the channel you are watching (ESPN, MTV, BET, A&E, History Channel, Food Network, HGTV, etc.), the category of television (reality show, sitcom, sports, news, music videos, entertainment, history, crime, or even commercials), the title of the show (brand if it’s a commercial), characteristics of the Blacks portrayed (educational attainment, hair type, skin complexion, physical features, social class, etc.), and how the Blacks interacted with other Blacks on the show if they did at all.

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<th>Channel</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Title/Brand</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Interactions (if applicable)</th>
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Assessment

There are various ways through which you can assess students’ learning about intraracial discrimination. Due to the nature of this topic, authentic assessments such as projects and open-ended essay questions are most suitable (Ochoa-Becker, 2007). Students can write personal reflection papers in which they reflect on what they have learned both academically and personally regarding the topic. Students can complete research papers or discuss current events in which they reflect on a particular instance in which intraracial discrimination took place, its effects, and what could be done to prevent this action from happening in the future. Creating advertising campaigns and billboards are also effective ways to authentically assess students’ learning as well as incorporate their creative abilities into the lesson.

Conclusion

Conversations regarding racism in the social studies primarily exist within a Black-White dichotomy, however, it is important to acknowledge racism as not just one group enacting prejudice or using pejoratives upon another, but it occurs within intragroup contexts as well. Critical race theory posits race is central to the everyday experience of Blacks and people of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998), and I argue that intraracial discrimination can be an aspect of racial experiences. Although it is not a typical topic found within social studies curriculum and texts, Black intraracial discrimination is part of the hidden curriculum I chose to incorporate the topic into my 11th grade American History curriculum because I heard the spiteful things students said about one another within the school and classroom context in which I taught. As an African-American male who has also experienced intraracial discrimination due to my skin tone and educational attainment, I recognize the validity of my experiences and how they are not unique, but rather a fabric interwoven within the Black society as a result of slavery.

This discussion about intraracial discrimination is not one to be limited just to urban schools or to primarily Black student populations as all students need to learn about the harmful legacies of slavery (Howard, 2004). Although intraracial discrimination among Blacks maybe more pronounced (Jenkins, 2006), it is not a phenomenon limited to the Black race as various other racial and ethnic groups grapple with this notion (Ford, 2012; Mendez, Bauman & Guillory, 2012)

It is important for teachers to intellectualize the conversation on racial issues, beginning with the meaning of race and how it is presented in various constructs. Race should be presented in an educational manner encouraging students to think, reflect, and engage in dialogue with one another concerning the matter. Intraracial discrimination deserves a place in within the curriculum as students are grappling with aspects of race, racism, and racial identity (Tatum, 2003). It is also important that common and harmful narratives are not perpetuated, but students are provided with the opportunity to challenge stereotypes, oppressive behaviors, biases,
and historical misinformation (Bigelow, 2007). The aforementioned teaching activities encourage deep reflection and dialogue about a serious topic in an engaging way. By incorporating intraracial discrimination into your classroom, hopefully, change will be enacted and students will become more knowledgeable about the various ways in which racism still permeates U.S. society today.

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Web-Based References


Author’s Bio

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