

**Investigating Race and Religion in U.S. History:
A Short Course or Unit for the Secondary School Classroom**

NEH Summer Institute “The Many and the One: Religion, Pluralism, and American History”
IUPUI Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture
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Institutional Context:

Epiphany School is a tuition-free independent school in the Dorchester section of Boston, Massachusetts. Founded in 1997, Epiphany is a middle school serving approximately eighty-five students in fifth through eighth grade. The school is designed to target students from economically disadvantaged families in Boston’s neighborhoods. Thus, any student can apply to Epiphany as long as their family qualifies for free or reduced price lunch in Boston Public Schools and has residency in the city of Boston. There are no tests or interviews to be accepted. Admission is by lottery of those who apply, with 20% of each year’s entrants reserved for students referred from the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families. This provides the school with a student body comprised of diverse cognitive profiles, family backgrounds, and previous educational experiences.

Epiphany considers itself a “full-service” school. This means that the school attempts to provide holistic support to children and families, recognizing that a student’s educational progress is impacted by a number of factors outside the classroom. The Epiphany outreach team works to schedule eye, ear, and dental screenings for students, to assist families who need housing or healthcare help, and to advocate for students and families in whatever ways are necessary. This framework of support also extends throughout the school day and year. Epiphany School functions on a 7:50 a.m. to 7:15 p.m. school day schedule Monday through Thursday, with 3:15 dismissal on Fridays. This extended school day seeks to provide additional support to families and students who use the time for team sports and guided homework completion. Students also attend summer programs, including a residential month-long camp for 7th and 8th graders and a farm trip and boat trip for students in other grades. These commitments tie into Epiphany’s core mission, to “never give up on a child.” While the full mission statement elaborates and contextualizes this motto, Epiphany attempts to be a school that supports students fully no matter what level of educational or social success or failure they attain. Even if a student or family decides to find an alternative placement, Epiphany offers itself as a support network in that student’s new venture.

Epiphany School’s teaching structure assigns a certified, experienced “lead teacher” in each classroom along with a teaching intern. The teaching internship program recruits recent college graduates to give two years of service to the school with a modest stipend. Teaching interns act as aides and student teachers who are mentored in the profession and may have the opportunity to pursue graduate coursework in education while interning. Institutionally, Epiphany was founded in the Episcopal tradition, and holds a Eucharist service each week with the Episcopal liturgy and readings from a diverse set of major world religions. While all students may not be of common religious traditions, all are encouraged to observe this community time. If families object to their student’s inclusion in this service, the student will be excused. This religious identity also factors heavily into the school’s mission to “never give up on a child,” and can be seen through the school’s religion curriculum, which instructs 6th graders in the life of Jesus and violence prevention, 7th graders in world religions, and 8th graders in community service and social justice.

Pedagogical Context:

The following outline and materials are designed for a month-long summer course or a unit within an existing year-long course. Realistically, however, materials could be pulled from here to support and extend existing coursework in U.S. history for our 8th grade. Epiphany School's History and Social Studies curriculum focuses on building reading, writing, and thinking skills while utilizing the tools and methods of the historian. Fifth grade focuses on basic geographical skills, maps, and terms; sixth grade studies ancient civilizations; seventh grade studies parts of world history focusing on Africa, Europe, and the Americas; and eighth grade studies themes and problems in U.S. history. The department operates off of specific target skills and content-related benchmarks for each grade, in dialogue with the Massachusetts state curriculum frameworks and Epiphany's institutional goals and priorities. Teachers in the department work to make their courses student-centered, providing rich opportunities for engagement with primary sources, critical analysis and evaluation, interaction and discussion, and multiple modes of expression and assessment. The following short course is designed to fit within this departmental mission of pushing students to critically think about the world, in this case by engaging them in the study of race and religion in historical perspective in the United States.

Background Sources:

A diverse set of scholarly resources are available on this topic. While anthropological, sociological, and other social scientific methods could be used fruitfully to investigate these themes, this course draws primarily from historical methods and historical scholarship. Also, there is a need to keep the themes and scope of the course manageable while still retaining the subject's inherent complexity and ambiguity. Following are major, overarching sources used to sketch the course outline.

Race: The Power of An Illusion. PBS series, produced by California Newsreel.

Race: Are We So Different? A Project of the American Anthropological Association.

Johnson, Sylvester. Lecture to the National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute, Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis, 20 July 2010.

Kidd, Colin. *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600 – 2000*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Painter, Nell Irvin. *The History of White People*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010.

**Proposed Outline for Short Course or Unit:
Investigating Race and Religion in U.S. History**

What follows is an overview – a rough sketch or outline – of a possible short course on race and religion in U.S. historical perspective. There are few, if any parts of this outline that are ready for classroom use. Rather, this would form the backbone from which classroom and student-accessible materials would be formed. Each session includes a guiding question or theme that would structure the inquiry. When applicable, goals, guiding questions, and sources are provided to give an idea of the trajectory of the inquiry session. The sources listed are not seen as particularly appropriate for secondary classrooms. Rather, these sources form the intellectual framework that would be the starting point for creating accessible and research-based classroom materials. The early sessions attempt to establish concepts of race in historical perspective, then moving on to apply those concepts and ideas to particular moments or personalities in U.S. history. Undoubtedly imperfect and incomplete, this rough sketch should serve as a first draft of the kind of inquiries that our students should be doing if they are to provide educated voices to complex and emotionally-charged public discussions of race and religion in U.S. society.

Session One and Two

What is race?

- These sessions push students to begin interrogating their ideas of what “race” really is – whether it is in the body, in heredity, in society, in history. Activities will allow students to discover their own conceptions of the idea of race and to question prevailing assumptions. This will serve also as an introduction to the ways that today’s scholars think about race, and how it will be approached in this class as a social and historical construct with no biological basis. Show *Race: The Power of An Illusion*, Episode 1 as a part of this investigative question.

Session Three and Four

What are the ideas of “whiteness,” “blackness,” and non-white “others”?

- These sessions will begin the study of race in U.S. society by introducing the concept of “whiteness” as a set of social privileges. Students will be engaged with primary and secondary historical sources that will allow them to trace important developments in the history of whiteness and the enlargement of whiteness as a privileged group throughout U.S. history. Non-white “others” will also be explored in relation to the establishment of whiteness.

Session Five

What were religious explanations for racial division?

- This session will explore the Noah legend and Myth of Ham which provided religious explanation for racial difference, as well as other approaches that religious authorities took in explaining race.

Session Six

What were scientific explanations for racial division?

- This session will explore the development of race science in the 18th, 19th, and 20th century Europe and United States. Students will explore specific people who advanced scientific theories of race and the kinds of data that were gathered and truths that were extrapolated from those data about race.

Session Seven and Eight

How do we know when to trust religious or scientific authorities?

- This session will be a Socratic Seminar centered on the sources and inquiries of the previous two sessions. Students will consider this main question about the trustworthiness of religious and scientific authorities. Students must discuss how religious and scientific authorities functioned in the history of race in Europe and the U.S., and if that history is in any way instructive for our interaction with religious and scientific authorities today. Show *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, Episode 2 as part of this investigation and discussion.

Session Nine

Case Study: *Race, religion, and freedom - The case of colonial Virginia*

Goal: Analyze how notions of freedom developed alongside slavery, and how race and religion were intentional and significant tools in the development of “freedom” in late 17th century Virginia

Guiding Questions:

1. How did Virginia transition from a labor force of English servants to African and Indian slaves in the late 17th century?
2. How did Virginia’s legislature intentionally create a superior position for poor Whites and an inferior position for Black and Indian slaves?
3. How did the meaning of “freedom” and indicators of being “free” change throughout mid-to-late 17th century Virginia?
4. Was it the system of slavery that caused Americans to build such a strong ideal of freedom? Did the commitment to freedom develop out of the reality of slavery?

Sources:

Morgan, Edmund S. *American Slavery American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975.

Patterson, Orlando. *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*. New York: Basic Books, 1991.

Session Ten

Case Study: *Race, religion, and freedom - The case of Thomas Jefferson*

Goal: Analyze Thomas Jefferson’s words and actions on the issues of slavery, freedom, and racial difference.

Guiding Questions:

1. What were Jefferson’s views on Anglo-Saxon history and culture?
2. What were Jefferson’s stated beliefs about the existence of the slave system? How did Jefferson think the slave system would influence parents, children, and the morals of future generations?
3. What did Jefferson believe were the differences between Black and White people? Why did Jefferson see enslaved Blacks as inferior to Whites?
4. Does Jefferson explain racial difference using religious, scientific, or other means?
5. How does sex and sexuality factor into Jefferson’s view of Blacks, and how does Sally Hemings modify our understanding of him on this issue?

6. How did American Indians fit into Jefferson's racial understanding?
7. How do you make sense of this dilemma: Jefferson, one of the U.S.'s great philosophers of freedom and liberty, owned hundreds of enslaved people?

Sources:

Jefferson, Thomas. *Declaration of Independence and Notes on the State of Virginia*.

Jordan, Winthrop D. *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968.

Morgan, Edmund S. *American Slavery American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975.

Painter, Nell Irvin. *The History of White People*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010.

Session Eleven

Case Study: *Race, religion, and becoming "American"*

Goal: Analyze the influence of religion and race in determining who was considered American during 19th century U.S. territorial expansion.

Guiding Questions:

1. How did ideas of "Anglo-Saxon" and "White" influence 19th century U.S. expansion?
2. What religious stories and metaphors were used to motivate and make sense of U.S. expansion in the 19th century?
3. How did religious stories and ideas work together with racial science and racial attitudes to fuel U.S. expansion?
4. How did Christianity relate to the idea of whiteness? How did Native Americans and Mexicans fit into the racial categories of the 19th century U.S.?
5. How were racial and religious views embedded in the art and sculpture of manifest destiny and territorial expansion?

Sources:

Baigell, Matthew, "Territory, Race, Religion: Images of Manifest Destiny," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, vol. 4 no. 3/4 (Summer-Autumn 1990), 2-21.

Goldschmidt, Henry, and Elizabeth McAlister, Eds. *Race, Nation, and Religion in the Americas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Horsman, Reginald. *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981.

Session Twelve

Case Study: *Race, religion, antislavery, and antistructure*

Goal: Analyze how free Blacks and evangelical religion challenged existing structures of slavery and the slave trade in North America and Africa.

Guiding Questions:

1. In what ways were free Black Americans and Africans who had escaped capture uniquely qualified to challenge the slave trade?
2. What were Walker, Allen, and Pennington's approaches to refuting the slave system?
3. How was the newer form of evangelical Christianity more effective in Africa against the slave trade than medieval Christianity?

4. How did Black evangelical Christians make the case against slavery? How were they “antistructure?”

Sources:

- Allen, Richard. “An Address To Those Who Keep Slaves and Approve the Practice.”
 Noll, Mark A. *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
 Pennington, James W.C. *The Fugitive Blacksmith*.
 Sanneh, Lamin. *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.
 Stout, Harry S. *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War*. New York: Viking, 2006.
 Walker, David. *David Walker's Appeal, In Four Articles: Together With A Preamble To The Coloured Citizens Of The World, But In Particular, And Very Expressly, To Those Of The United States Of America*.

Session Thirteen

Case Study: *Race, religion, proslavery, and social order*

Goal: Analyze how religious institutions supported and reinforced racial division and the slave system in North America.

Guiding Questions:

1. How was the legend of Noah and his sons used to explain ideas about race?
2. How did Americans use the Noah legend to explain Black slavery?
3. More generally, how was the Bible used to support slavery?
4. How could the same religion be on both sides of the slavery debate in the antebellum United States?

Sources:

- Goldenberg, David M. *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003.
 Johnson, Sylvester A. *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity: Race, Heathens, and the People of God*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
 Noll, Mark A. *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006
 Schaff, Philip. “Slavery and the Bible”
 Stout, Harry S. *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War*. New York: Viking, 2006.

Session Fourteen

Case Study: *Race in the U.S. Census*

Goal: Analyze how the U.S. government has created and adjusted racial categories and counting methods in ways that shaped and were shaped by societal developments.

Guiding Questions:

1. How did race categories in the U.S. census change in these periods: 1790 – 1840; 1850 – 1880; 1890 – 1920; 1930 – 2000?

2. Has the census served only to count society's racial categories, or does the census play a role in creating new categories or labels?
3. How was a person's race assessed in the census, and how did those methods change?
4. Is the government a neutral participant in understandings of race in the U.S.?

Sources:

Nobles, Melissa. *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000.

Perlmann, Joel, and Mary C. Waters. *The New Race Question: How the Census Counts Multiracial Individuals*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002.

U.S. Census Bureau www.census.gov Race Main "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For The United States, Regions, Divisions, and States"

Session Fifteen and Sixteen

Culminating Presentation or Project

- Students will present on a question or theme of interest that involves historical research, interpretation, and evaluation, then presenting that research to the class with connections to the present day. Students may provide an essay or speech to culminate their research, or present a digital history project, piece of art, or other mode of expression approved by the instructor. Show *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, Episode 3 as part of this final wrap-up and discussion.