

SAMPLE LESSON PLAN, ENG 221: AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Introduction [25 minutes]

In today's class, we discuss the works of Ibram X. Kendi and Coleman Hughes. I share the following videos with you to illustrate, first, that black people are divided on the topics of race and racism, and second, that black scholars are divided on these issues as well. Academia is often criticized for pushing a "woke" agenda, and while it's true that Ibram X. Kendi's "antiracism" exerts a kind of stronghold over universities nationwide, some of its biggest critics, such as Roland Fryer, Adolph Reed, John McWhorter, and Glenn Loury are revered within the academy. The point being: these are matters of *debate*, not wholesale acceptance.

▶ Ibram X Kendi: Stamped from the Beginning [Play 1:50-14:00]

▶ Ibram X. Kendi Turned Down My Offer

Short Lecture [15 minutes]

If one side of a debate labels itself as **antiracist**, it seems fair to assume, on this ground alone, that the other side must be either racist or—worse—**pro-racist**, as in: the debate over race and racism is between **anti-racists** on one side and **pro-racists** on the other.

But this is a vast misrepresentation. The foremost critics of **antiracism** are also fiercely opposed to **racism**, or the act of discriminating against individuals on the basis of their racial identity. What they oppose is not anti-racism per se, but rather, Ibram X. Kendi's re-definition of both **racism** and **anti-racism**, which he explains in the first chapter of *How to Be An Antiracist*:

"If racial discrimination is defined as treating, considering, or making a distinction in favor or against an individual based on that person's race, then racial discrimination is not inherently racist. The defining question is whether the discrimination is creating equity or inequity. If discrimination is creating **inequity**, then it is racist. Someone reproducing **inequity** through permanently assisting an overrepresented racial group into wealth and power is entirely different than someone challenging that **inequity** by temporarily assisting an underrepresented racial group into relative wealth and power until **equity** is reached. The only remedy to **racist discrimination** is **antiracist discrimination**."

Kendi will argue that statistical disparities between white and black people can only be explained by racist public policy (by which he means, **any policy that holds everyone to the same standard**). Thus, for Kendi, the word "racism" describes any idea, act, or policy that produces **unequal** results among racial groups, while "antiracism," by contrast, describes any idea, act, or policy that produces **equal** results among racial groups. Put simply:

- **Inequity** is caused by **racism**
- **Equity** is caused by **antiracism**

So how does this play out in practical terms? Kendi tells us. We should implement policies that hold white people to one standard and racial minorities to a different standard. This way, people of color are compensated for the disadvantages they already face under a racist system.

Were I to implement antiracist policies in the classroom, white students would see their grades automatically reduced, due to the unfair advantages they have as white people, while students of color would see their grades automatically increased, not on the grounds of merit, but as a result of classroom policy alone. Were I to apply this same logic to gender identity, and it turned out that the female students in my class were scoring higher than the male students, I would implement an anti-sexist policy, let's call it, that holds female students to a different grading standard than male students. Finally, were I to apply this logic to body types, and it turned out that thin students were scoring higher than heavier students, I would implement a policy that holds thin students to a different standard than heavier students. The only remedy to discrimination, according to this view, is reverse discrimination. As Kendi writes: "The only remedy to racist discrimination is antiracist discrimination."

Thus, to revisit my earlier point, the cultural debate over race and racism is not between anti-racists and pro-racists, but between those who support equity-based racial justice and those who support equality-based racial justice. In support of equity, you will find black scholars and journalists like Ibram X. Kendi, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Ta-Nehisi Coates; in support of equality, you will find black scholars like John McWhorter, Glenn Loury, and Coleman Hughes. To be sure, both parties are fierce opponents of racism, but they disagree on the definition of racism, its causes, and its effects.

For instance, a frequently cited example of systemic racism is redlining, a practice introduced under Roosevelt's New Deal that discouraged banks from investing in black and brown neighborhoods. The opposition contends, however, that redlining on the basis of racial identity has been illegal since 1968, after which time, the practice would base its geographical divisions not on racial identity, but on income level. As a result, modern-day redlining benefits wealthy black neighborhoods and harms poor black neighborhoods, just as it benefits wealthy white neighborhoods and harms poor white neighborhoods. The pro-equality side will argue, on these grounds, that redlining doesn't target racial minorities; it targets the poor, a group that cuts across racial lines. For this reason, they argue, redlining should be understood as systemic *classism*, not as systemic racism.

Add to this another commonly noted example of systemic racism—the underfunding of black and brown schools—and you may begin to notice a trend. Public schools are funded by the state and federal government, but they are also funded by property taxes. Because of this, school districts in wealthy white neighborhoods will have more funding than school districts in poor black neighborhoods. The pro-equity side cites this as proof of systemic racism. As we have already established, however, schools are funded by property taxes, which are based on property value, which, in turn, is largely the result of redlining. As such, school districts in wealthy white neighborhoods will have more funding than school districts in poor black neighborhoods, but, on the flip side, school districts in wealthy black neighborhoods will have

more funding than school districts in poor white neighborhoods. Again, the victim here is poor people—black, white, or otherwise. The **pro-equality** side will argue, on these grounds, that this is yet another example of systemic classism, not systemic racism.

Add to this one more commonly referenced example of systemic racism—police brutality—and the nature of this debate comes into focus. The **pro-equity** side argues that black and brown neighborhoods are unfairly targeted by police departments, while the **pro-equality** side argues that *poor* neighborhoods, no matter their racial makeup, are targeted by police departments because of their high crime rates. Likewise, the **pro-equity** side argues that George Floyd’s murder is proof of racist policing, while the **pro-equality** side argues that the methods used to restrict George Floyd are the same methods applied to white criminals. Tony Timpa, for example, was killed by police under identical circumstances in 2016, but the officer who killed him was never held accountable, and the story never received national media coverage, forcing the **pro-equality** side to ask why?

▶ Tony Timpa and George Floyd, both tragedies shares same methodology, both ends diffe...

In short, the **pro-equity** side argues that slavery, segregation, and the New Deal live on in “color-blind” policies that still result in disparate outcomes today. The **pro-equality** side argues that racial disparities between white and black people are caused by individual choices and class-based discrimination, not race-based discrimination. In their view, the **pro-equity** side has misdiagnosed the problem.

Participation Assignment 13 [60 minutes]

For today’s participation assignment, **odd-numbered groups** will teach the reading selection from **Ibram X. Kendi** and **even-numbered groups** will teach the reading selection from **Coleman Hughes**. Once you have been assigned to a group, you should each choose a single passage to focus your lesson on, following the sequence outlined below:

1. DIRECT QUOTE
2. MAIN POINTS
3. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

As usual, each individual lesson should run for 5 minutes, with the entire group lesson running between 15 and 20 minutes, depending on the number of people in your group. With your instructions complete, I will now group you by numbers and assign your text.

- Divide class into 10 groups of 3-4 students

Then Versus Now [10 minutes]

In your current, combined groups of 6-8 people, compare the race debates of the 1920s with the race debates of the 2020s. Do you see any parallels? There are many ways to answer this question, but you might consider the conflicts listed below:

- Individualism vs collectivism
- The melting pot vs multiculturalism
- Racism vs classism
- Equity vs equality

Is the debate between W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke or the debate between George Schuyler and Langston Hughes in any way similar to the debate between Ibram Kendi and Coleman Hughes? Are there important differences? You have 5 minutes to discuss these questions in small groups. Afterwards, be ready to share your findings with the class.