

The Construction of Race and Nationalism in United States History

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Overview and Purpose

The purpose of the following activities is to illustrate the evolution of the idea of race and how it created white nationalism that persists to this very day. Through readings, film, charts and graphs, students will see that Europeans and Americans constructed an idea of racial inferiority to justify slavery, imperialism and ultimately white superiority. There are also many resources to help tell the story of America's rich multicultural history. These resources illustrate that although the American population is diverse, the stories of the people who make up the country are quite similar. The stories can help build bridges between people who think they have nothing in common during one of the most polarized eras in United States history.

Part One: 1619 - 1840 Performance Objectives

Locate on a map the region where Omar Ibn Said and Ibrahim Abdul Rahman lived before being captured into slavery.

Identify and describe the ways in which Europeans and Americans justified race-based slavery.

Identify and describe religious traditions and educational backgrounds of the people brought to America from Western Africa.

Materials Needed

Film: *Prince Among Slaves* and accompanying material on Muslims in Early America found at the following site: <https://www.upf.tv/films/prince-among-slaves/teachers/>

Pictures of primary source documents found in Alford, Terry. *Prince Among Slaves: The True Story of an African Prince Sold into Slavery in the American South*. Oxford University Press, 2007.

- Great Mosque at Timbo
- Plan of the Town of Teembo
- 1788 Deed of Sale for Ibrahim Abdul Rahman
- Picture of the colony at Monrovia, Liberia as it appeared in the 1820s.

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Shaheen, Basima Kamel, "Literary Form and Islamic Identity in the Life of Omar Ibn Said" in *Journeys of the Slave Narrative in the Early Americas*. University of Virginia Press (2014), 187-208.

Zinn, Howard. "Drawing the Color Line," *A People's History of the United States*, Harper and Row (1980), 24-38. <https://mvlindsey.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/peoples-history-zinn-1980.pdf>

Activities Description/Procedure

- For homework, students will read Zinn's "Drawing the Color Line" <https://mvlindsey.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/peoples-history-zinn-1980.pdf>
- View the video *A Prince Among Slaves* (one class period)
- Students, in groups, will look at the primary source documents in Terry Alford's Book.
- For homework, students will read "Literary Form and Islamic Identity in the Life of Omar Ibn Said." [Article Link](#)
- In a discussion, the class will compare Ibrahim Abdul Rahman and Omar Ibn Said. Some questions to consider:
 - How was race constructed to justify lifetime servitude?
 - After watching the film and reading the articles, how do the lives of Said and Rahman defy European and American race constructions?
- In the "Literary form and Islamic Identity in the Life of Omar Ibn Said," Bahima Shaheen states that "Ibn Said's experience reveals what American life looked like from an Islamic and enslaved African perspective. In fact, his narrative is a valuable relic of a perspective that was systematically and brutally silenced throughout the slaveholding territories—and it could be all that remains of that perspective." What does the author mean?
 - According to the article, Ibn Said converted to Christianity. How does his narrative contradict this?
 - According to the author of the article, why did Ibn Said never marry?
 - How does Said's literary use of Arabic and Islamic values reflect a unique development in American literature?
 - How does Ibn Said's story add to the slave narrative as we have understood it up to now?

Historical Fiction Short Story

Not a lot is known about Omar Ibn Said. Scholars are trying to piece together his life with his narrative, articles and some letters he left behind. Use Bahima Shaheen's article and information in the following link to construct a historical fiction story about Said.

<https://mideast.unc.edu/impossible-documents-how-an-enslaved-muslim-scholar-illuminates-southern-identity/>

Historical fiction is a made-up story set in a specific time and integrates references to real people, places, and or events. The link below explains in detail how to write historical fiction.

<https://teachingenglishlanguagearts.com/writing-historical-fiction/>

Part Two: 1840-1882 Performance Objectives

- Define, nativism, xenophobia, Protestant or Puritan work ethic, Chinese Exclusion Act, and manifest destiny.
- Explain why Irish people emigrated to the U.S. beginning in the 1840s and describe how their culture differed from the mainstream American culture at that time.
- Describe the education and skill level of the majority of Irish immigrants.
- Explain the emergence of the Know-Nothing Party (American Party) and explain why it was established.
- Explain the reasons Chinese men emigrated to the United States in the mid to late nineteenth century.
- How did the Chinese exclusion laws affect the Chinese in America? How did these laws transform the United States into a gatekeeping nation, in which immigration restriction—largely based on race and nationality—came to determine the very makeup of the nation and American national identity?

Materials Needed

Blaisdell, A., S. R. Kirby and American Party. *The Principles and Objects of the American Party*. New York, 1855.

Fukayama, Francis. “The Calvinist Manifesto.” *The New York Times*. 13 March 2005, p. G35.
<https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:a35808e9-21fa-4e67-9c16-2b7e426e724b>

Hogan, Michael. *The Irish Soldiers of Mexico*. Intercambio Press, 2010.

Lee, Erika. *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2003.
<https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:96252930-fb1a-462a-8a68-a5f31de6d329>

Menendez-Ortero, Carlos. “The Forgotten (Irish) History of the Mexican-American War: An Interview with Pino Cacucci.” *A Journal of Irish Studies* (2017), 369-380.
<https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:1c36254c-94ee-4c0b-9e88-c37f1976e337>

Activities Description/Procedure

Race superiority/inferiority was not only classified by skin color, but by religion. The Chinese were considered undesirable by many native-born Americans because of their skin color and religion. On the

other hand, the Irish were undesirable because of their religion. Read some excerpts from *The Principles and Objects of the American Party*. Why were nativists fearful of Irish immigrants? What were some of the principles and aims of the American or Know Nothing Party? Then, after a class discussion about the Protestant/Puritan work ethic, students will read Fukayama's article. According to Fukayama, how accurate was the idea of the Puritan work ethic? What evidence does he give to support his assertions?

All students read Hogan, Michael. "The Race Question and Manifest Destiny." In *The Irish Soldiers of Mexico*. Intercambio Press, 2010.

- What role did Manifest Destiny play in the Irish immigrants' decision to desert the U.S. Army and join the Mexican side during the Mexican-American War?

Divide the class in two halves. For homework, assign "The Forgotten (Irish) History of the Mexican-American War" to one group and selected chapters of *At America's Gates* to the second group. Students will make group presentations about their assigned readings for the next class meeting. To make the assignment less cumbersome, students can divide up the reading. Some questions the students should consider are:

- What are some of the reasons that Irish immigrants deserted the American Army to fight on the side of the Mexicans? What modern-day groups does the author compare the Irish who came to the U.S. in the mid 19th century? According to Caccuci, is racism as bad today as it was in the 19th century? Why were native-born Americans afraid of the Irish, and how does this compare to treatment of immigrant groups today?
- Who were some of the early Chinese immigrants, and what types of things did they accomplish in their new lands? What were the many reasons American nativists turned against Chinese immigration?
- What is the importance of the 1882 Exclusion Act, and how does it still affect immigration policy today?

Part Three: 1882-1929 Performance Objectives

Define and explain the following ideas, concepts and laws, and how each helped to construct American ideas of race and national identity: Social Darwinism, "white man's burden," eugenics, the Reed-Johnson Act of 1924 and the Immigration Act of 1929.

During the latter half of the 19th century, immigrants came to America from southern and eastern Europe to escape death and famine and to make a living. The Greeks, Italians, Poles, Russians, etc. who came to America were frowned upon by native-born white Protestants. These "new" immigrants were Catholic, Jewish and Christian Orthodox, and did not conform to the native-born idea of being "civilized." At the same time, the United States was becoming an imperial power. The "new manifest destiny," as it is called, meant that it was the United States' God-given right to spread Protestantism and American ideals to the "underdeveloped" world. It was "white man's" burden to raise these people up. Americans disagreed on whether or not these people should be given full citizenship. The same was true for the "new" immigrants.

Many native-born Americans did not believe they deserved citizenship either, because they did not possess the qualities of good Americans. The concept of Social Darwinism became prevalent during this era. This is the idea that human groups and races are subject to the same laws of natural selection as Charles Darwin perceived in animal and plant life.

The “new” immigrants, many with darker skin than their native-born American counterparts—and almost all of whom practiced religions that seemed antithetical to American culture—were put at the bottom of the Social Darwin hierarchy. They were deemed physically and mentally inferior. Italians were at the bottom of the hierarchy and worked for less wages than all the other groups. Irish and Italian immigrants were called “illegals” and “terrorists”. It is true that some of these people were anarchists and many played violent roles in protests. Followers of anarchist Luigi Galleani planted dozens of bombs in the U.S., touching off the Red Scare of 1919. However, for the most part, these “new” immigrants were hardworking people trying to make a better life for their families.

Stories like those about Luigi Galleani fueled hysteria in America, leading to the eugenics movement and, ultimately, the Reed-Johnson Act of 1924.

Materials Needed

O’Brien, Benjamin Gonzalez, “1929 nativist immigration law framed today’s debate.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 27 December 2018, p. A10.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1oxykHQR1vm1reft_oDAPVT66dKJpD9L0gyI6MvljmPw/edit?usp=sharing

Ordovery, Nancy. “Calculating Hysteria.” *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism*.” University of Minnesota Press (2003), pp. 9-31.

<https://www-jstor-org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/stable/pdf/10.5749/j.cttt7tz.6.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Afa4176614f98ec74229601eaa7e3bcd9>

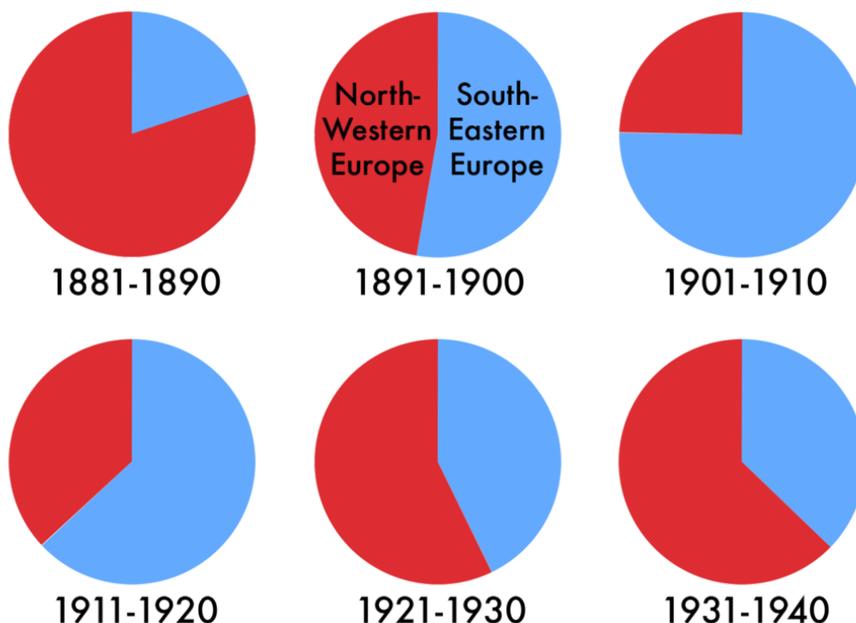
Ziegelman, Jane. *97 Orchard Street: An Edible History of Five Immigrant Families in One New York Tenement*. Harper Collins, 2010.

Country	Quota		Country	Quota		Country	Quota
Germany	51,227		Poland	5,982		Africa (other than Egypt)	1,100
Great Britain and Northern Ireland	34,007		Italy	3,845		Armenia	124

<i>Irish Free State (Ireland)</i>	<i>28,567</i>		<i>Czechoslovakia</i>	<i>3,073</i>		<i>Australia</i>	<i>121</i>
<i>Sweden</i>	<i>9,561</i>		<i>Russia</i>	<i>2,248</i>		<i>Palestine</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>Norway</i>	<i>6,453</i>		<i>Yugoslavia</i>	<i>671</i>		<i>Syria</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>France</i>	<i>3,954</i>		<i>Romania</i>	<i>603</i>		<i>Turkey</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>Denmark</i>	<i>2,789</i>		<i>Portugal</i>	<i>503</i>		<i>Egypt</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>Switzerland</i>	<i>2,081</i>		<i>Hungary</i>	<i>473</i>		<i>New Zealand & Pacific Islands</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>Netherlands</i>	<i>1,648</i>		<i>Lithuania</i>	<i>344</i>		<i>All others</i>	<i>1,900</i>
<i>Austria</i>	<i>785</i>		<i>Latvia</i>	<i>142</i>			
<i>Belgium</i>	<i>512</i>		<i>Spain</i>	<i>131</i>			
<i>Finland</i>	<i>471</i>		<i>Estonia</i>	<i>124</i>			
<i>Free City of Danzig</i>	<i>228</i>		<i>Albania</i>	<i>100</i>			
<i>Iceland</i>	<i>100</i>		<i>Bulgaria</i>	<i>100</i>			
<i>Luxembourg</i>	<i>100</i>		<i>Greece</i>	<i>100</i>			
Total (Number)	<i>142,483</i>		Total (Number)	<i>18,439</i>		Total (Number)	<i>3,745</i>
Total (%)	<i>86.5</i>		Total (%)	<i>11.2</i>		Total (%)	<i>2.3</i>

(Total Annual immigrant quota: 164,667)						
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Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States (Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, 1929), 100.



Activities Description/Procedure

Divide the class in two halves. For homework, assign “Calculating Hysteria” in *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism* to one group. To the second group, assign “The Baldizzi Family” in *97 Orchard Street: An Edible History of Five Immigrant Families in One New York Tenement*. Students will make group presentations about their assigned readings for the next class meeting. To make the assignment less cumbersome, students can divide up the reading. Some questions the students should consider are:

- What is eugenics? How was it used to prove that the “new immigrants” were inferior to native-born Americans? How did the pseudoscience of eugenics pave the way for the Reed-Johnson Act of 1924?
- The Baldizzis are more representative of the immigrants who came to America than those who were criminals and anarchists. Describe the Baldizzis’ life in Sicily and explain why they wanted to emigrate to America. What happened when Mr. Baldizzi finally acquired enough money to bring his wife to America? How was Mrs. Baldizzi finally allowed in the United States?

- As a class, look at the graph. People from what countries had an easier time emigrating to the United States after the Reed-Johnson Act was passed? People from what countries had the most difficult time emigrating? Why do you think people from some countries were allowed to emigrate while people from others were not?
- The Johnson-Reed Act did not achieve the limit of Southern and Eastern European immigrants. The 1929 Immigration Act fixed the amount of immigrants allowed to come to the United States at 150,000. That limit cut off immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe and Asia. However, the Johnson-Reed Act and the national origins quota system did not limit migration within the Americas. The [Undesirable Aliens Act of 1929](#) (Blease's Law) criminalized border crossing to limit the rights of Mexican immigrants. This law would also be used during the Great Depression to deport Mexicans--many who were American citizens because they were born in the United States. Read "1929 nativist immigration law framed today's debate" in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. How did the 1929 law lead to the immigration debates that we have today? What are some of those debates?

Part Four: 1965-Present Performance Objectives

- Describe the reasons people continue to immigrate to the United States.
- Identify the regions of the world where most of today's immigration originates.
- Compare and contrast American attitudes toward immigration in the modern era with those of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 (Hart-Celler Act) abolished the quota system put in place during the 1920s. The 1965 act is based on national origin and established a new immigration policy based on reuniting immigrant families, attracting skilled labor to the United States and providing refuge for the oppressed. Since 1965, immigration to America has mainly come from Latin America, Asia and Africa. However, since the attacks on 9/11, immigration has become a hot topic once again in the United States. Although the countries immigrants are traveling from are different, the rhetoric and reasons for keeping them out remain the same.

Materials Needed

Lean, Nathan. "Politicizing and Legislating Fear of Muslims." *How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims*. 2nd Edition. Pluto Press (2017), 179-207.

<https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:c21d0744-cc5b-4b53-b953-c3e429105ba4>

Rogers, Katie. "Trump Highlights Immigrant Crime to Defend His Border Policy. Statistics Don't Back Him Up." *New York Times*. 22 June 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/22/us/politics/trump-immigration-borders-family-separation.html>

TABLE 1

Sources of Immigration to the U.S., by Era

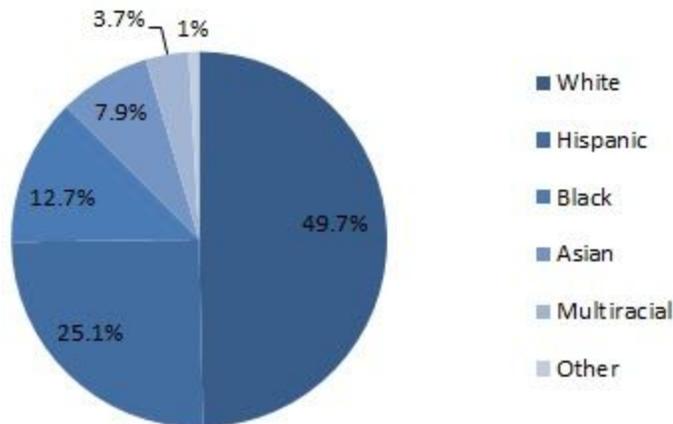
Era and country	Total	%
Modern Era (1965-2015)	58,325,000	100
Mexico	16,275,000	28
China*	3,175,000	5
India	2,700,000	5
Philippines	2,350,000	4
Korea	1,725,000	3
Vietnam	1,500,000	3
Cuba	1,500,000	3
El Salvador	1,500,000	3
Former USSR	1,450,000	2
Dominican Republic	1,325,000	2
Latin America	29,750,000	51
South/East Asia	14,700,000	25
Europe, total	6,900,000	12
Africa/Middle East	4,550,000	8
Canada**	1,150,000	2
All other	1,450,000	2
Southern/Eastern Europe Wave (1890-1919)	18,244,000	100
Italy	3,764,000	21
Austria-Hungary	3,690,000	20
Russia & Poland	3,166,000	17
United Kingdom	1,170,000	6
Germany	1,082,000	6
Ireland***	917,000	5
Europe, total	16,134,000	88
North/West Europe	4,757,000	26
South/East Europe	11,377,000	62
Canada	835,000	5
Latin America	551,000	3
South/East Asia	315,000	2
Africa/Middle East	332,000	2
Other/Notspecified	77,000	<0.5
Northern Europe Wave (1840-1889)	14,314,000	100
Germany	4,282,000	30
Ireland***	3,209,000	22
United Kingdom	2,586,000	18
Norway-Sweden	883,000	6
Europe, total	12,757,000	89
North/West Europe	11,700,000	82
South/East Europe	1,058,000	7
Canada	1,034,000	7
Latin America	101,000	1
South/East Asia	293,000	2
Africa/Middle East	5,000	<0.5
Other/Notspecified	124,000	1

Note: Population figures rounded to the nearest 25,000 for 1965-2015; nearest thousand for earlier waves. Data for 1965-2015 include legal and unauthorized immigrants; for 1840-1919, only legal admissions are included. *Includes Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macao. **Includes other North America. ***Includes Northern Ireland. Persons from Puerto Rico not included.

Source: For 1965-2015, Pew Research Center estimates based on adjusted census data; for 1840-1919, Office of Immigration Statistics, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 2008, Table 2*

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Racial Make-up of US Population- 2044



Activities Description/Procedure

Have students read the two articles and respond to questions on a discussion board:

- How are depictions of 21st-century immigrants similar to earlier immigrants? Give examples.
- How are 21st-century immigrants different from earlier immigrants? Give examples.
- Explain and give examples of similarities between present and past immigration policies.
- Look at the graphs. How might the changing racial composition of the United States be fueling today's immigration debate?

Extension/Assessment

Contrary to the arguments of nativist groups, most people believe that the diversity of our population has contributed much to the success of our nation. Students will write an essay on the contributions to the United States by an immigrant group of their choice. There are many examples in this lesson plan, such as Islam's influence on the Blues, Omar Ibn Said's contributions to early American literature and the history of American slavery. While Italians contributed much to American cuisine, the first United States citizen to be canonized as a saint was Italian-born Frances Cabrini. Mother Cabrini established orphanages and schools throughout the United States, Europe and Latin America. Although most people are aware that the Chinese and Irish were instrumental in building the Transcontinental Railroad, they also made many other contributions. For example, two Chinese immigrants made contributions to agriculture. Lue Gim Gong (b.1858), known as "The Citrus Wizard," developed the frost-resistant "Valencia" orange. Ah Bing, a farmer in Milwaukie, Oregon, developed the Bing Cherry in 1875. These are just a few examples. There are many untold stories yet to be discovered.