

Educator's Guide to



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FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES is an international educational and professional development organization whose mission is to engage middle and high school students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice and antisemitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry. By studying the historical development and lessons of the Holocaust and other forms of collective violence, students make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives.

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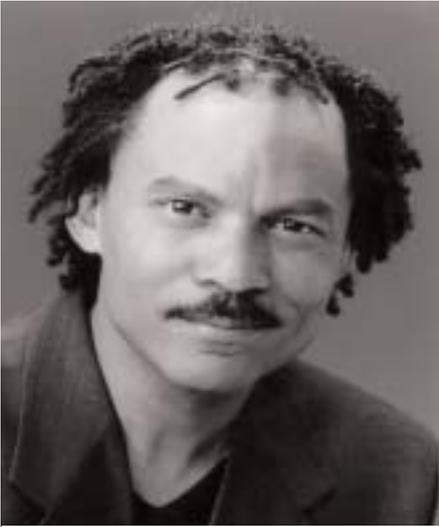
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# Preface



Orlando Bagwell, Executive Producer  
*Matters of Race*

My mother is a beautiful woman. In times of crisis as a child, I remember looking up at her knowing she had the answers to questions I found so hard for my young mind to grasp. Her words would always relax the moment's pain and confusion when once again I was reminded that my brown skin, wooly hair, and full lips made me different to my classmates at my Irish Catholic grade school. Her voice, always gentle but firm, would say, "we're all just human-beings, we're all equal," but she never said, "race didn't matter."

I share this story because in *Matters of Race* we tried to show, through the stories of everyday people from Hawaii to New York, from South Dakota to North Carolina, that race is something we all live with everyday. It is a real part of our lives that keeps us guessing. "Is it race or is it me?" "Was that an insult because of who I am or just because...?" We might not be aware of it everyday but it only takes a look, a word, an inappropriate action, or an overt denial of basic rights or privileges to make race present, felt, and therefore real.

In *Matters of Race*, we seek to explore our separate, as well as shared, past and present. In these stories of our individual and collective lives we see people grappling with race and its meaning in American society. Through these various narratives, we begin to learn about shared experience. And while that which keeps us together can be the burden of the past, that which unites us is also the challenge and the promise of mutual respect, which we gain through knowledge and the greater appreciation for our differences. The films challenge us to find a way to not just tolerate difference, but respect it.

Our nation is a nation of many different cultures, and many different peoples wearing many different colors. While we strive to be a nation of people united with a common purpose, ideals and destiny, we are still a people who come from many places from around the world. We all strive to preserve some of the things that uniquely connect us to those far and varied places of origin. Whether a recent immigrant, native descendent or one who came by force or by choice, we all live here today cherishing our right to express our identity and ourselves as we choose. Our promise to protect and allow difference is what draws many to our shores. But the critical question that writer John Edgar Wideman challenges us to consider in *Matters of Race* is, "If we are different, who determines the meaning of difference, who benefits from its meaning? Who shall create its form and who will benefit from it?"

It is not an easy task but it is imperative to consider race as something more than historical fact or a moment of crisis. I would like to thank Facing History and Ourselves for taking on this challenge and creating this educational curriculum for our nation's teachers to help you engage students in a discussion of race in their everyday lives. I would also like to acknowledge and thank the Nathan Cummings Foundation whose generous support funded this educational project.

Orlando Bagwell, Executive Producer  
*Matters of Race*  
ROJA Productions  
September 2003

# The Filmmakers

## **Orlando Bagwell, Executive Producer & Producer/Director, “Race Is/Race Ain’t”**

A veteran filmmaker of eighteen years, Orlando Bagwell’s extensive award-winning and internationally-acclaimed filmography includes: Executive Producer of *Africans in America: America’s Journey through Slavery*, produced for WGBH and nationally broadcast on PBS in October 1999; *Malcolm X: Make It Plain*, for *The American Experience* in 1995; *Frederick Douglass: When the Lion Wrote History*, for WETA, 1995; two films for the internationally celebrated Blackside Inc. series, *Eyes on the Prize*, *Mississippi: Is This America?* and *Ain’t Scared of Your Jails*. He was also the supervising producer on the national PBS series *The Great Depression* and a staff producer for the national PBS weekly program *Frontline* from 1988-89. In 1989, Orlando Bagwell founded ROJA Productions, an independent film and television production company and produced its first documentary *Roots Of Resistance: A Story of the Underground Railroad*, for *The American Experience*. He served as executive vice president for Blackside, Inc. from 1991 to 1994 and continues today as the president of ROJA Productions. Bagwell received his undergraduate and graduate degrees from Boston University.

## **Jacque Jones, Senior Producer**

Jacque Jones is an award-winning writer, director and producer of documentary films. Her credits include producer/director of “Brotherly Love” an episode of the PBS series *Africans in America: America’s Journey through Slavery*. *Africans in America* has received numerous awards including a Peabody Award in 1999. Jones’ credits also include a feature-length documentary *From Behind Close Doors: Sex in 20th Century America*, which aired on Showtime in 1999 and a series of interstitials for the History Channel titled *The World Before Us*. This series of 15 shorts looks at arresting moments in international history relying primarily on eyewitnesses filmed on location in nine countries. Her other films include *Switched at Birth* and the award-winning short *Freestyle*, a portrait of female rap artists in the San Francisco area. In addition to her filmmaking, Jacquie Jones is a widely published critic of popular culture. She holds a BA in English from Howard University and an MA in documentary filmmaking from Stanford University.

## **Dale Pierce Nielsen, Series Producer**

Dale Pierce Nielsen has been a vital part of the New York filmmaking community since 1986. She has served as Assistant Director on documentary films such as the Emmy Award-winning *A Hymn for Alvin Ailey* as well as the critically acclaimed *Twilight Los Angeles* and *Malcolm X: Make It Plain*. She began her film career as a production assistant on the feature film, *Turk 182*, and has since worked on more than 25 major theatrical films as Production Coordinator, Assistant Director and Associate Producer. Those films include *Malcolm X*, *The Best Man*, *Blair Witch II*, *Having Our Say*, *Remember The Titans*, *One True Thing*, *The Preacher’s Wife*, *Jungle Fever*, *Mo Better Blues* and *The Arrangement*. Dale is also president of MBali Pictures, an independent film and video production company based in Brooklyn, NY. Nielsen is a native of Chicago, Ill., a graduate of Vassar College and a member of the Directors Guild of America.

**Lulie Haddad, Supervising Producer & Producer/Director,  
“Race Is/Race Ain’t”**

Lulie Haddad has more than ten years experience in documentary film. Prior to joining the *Matters of Race* team, Lulie’s credits include producer/writer/director of *Guide My Feet*, an episode of the *This Far By Faith* series produced by Blackside Productions. She has worked on several award-winning PBS series including *The Great Depression*, *America’s War on Poverty* and “Truman” for *The American Experience*. She has also worked for ABC News, Wall Street Journal Television and VH-1. Lulie has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Brown University, and is currently pursuing her Masters in Theological Studies at Harvard University.

**Sharon La Cruise, Coordinating Producer**

Sharon La Cruise has worked in television and film for fifteen years, both in the corporate and production aspects of the business. She began her television career with ABC Primetime sales, working closely with the account executives and advertising agencies. Sharon has worked for The Faith Project, Blackside Inc, The Coca-Cola Company, the 1996 Summer Olympic Games, and the Cable News Network (CNN). Her credits include: *This Far By Faith: African-American Spiritual Journeys*, *The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*, and CNN’s *Through the Lens*, *The Road to the White House* and *The Planetary Police*. She has a B.A. in history from Adelphi University, and a M.A. degree in television journalism from New York University.

**John Valadez, Producer/Director, “The Divide”**

John Valadez is an award-winning director who has been producing documentaries for PBS for the last ten years. John directed the critically acclaimed film *Passin’ It On*. The film aired nationally on the PBS series POV. He went on to direct the first hour of the four-hour documentary series *Making Peace*. John is also a producer for the new PBS series *Visiones: Latino Arts and Culture*, which will air nationally in 2004 and he is the director of two forthcoming PBS documentaries. He has twice been a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellow, is a Rockefeller Fellow and sits on the Artists Advisory Board of the New York Foundation for the Arts. He is a founding member of the New York Chapter of the National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP) and a graduate of the film program at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts. John has also worked on projects for Carlton UK Television, Frontline, American Masters, CBC, The Learning Channel & HBO.

**Sindi Gordon, Producer/Director, “We’re Still Here,” Co-Producer,  
“I Belong to This”**

Sindi Gordon is a filmmaker and programmer whose experience in the film industry spans three continents: Africa, Europe, and North America. She has produced documentaries for SABC Television in South Africa, which included an interview with Nelson Mandela. She coordinated the 2nd Johannesburg Film Festival and, while working for Sithengi (Southern African International Film and Television Market), she co-produced the first African Mini INPUT in South Africa. She also coordinated a documentary forum for UNESCO in Zimbabwe. In her native England, Sindi produced the short film *Cousins* for the British broadcaster, Carlton Television, and co-programmed the seminal *Taking Care of Business* event at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London.

**Jean-Philippe Boucicaut, Co-Producer/Editor, "We're Still Here," & Editor, "The Divide"**

Jean-Philippe Boucicaut is an Emmy award winning editor and producer with over fifteen years experience in film and television. Jean-Philippe's credits include: Producer/Editor of *Liberia: America's Stepchild*, a documentary for Grain Coast Productions and PBS, Producer/Editor of *Secret Daughter*, winner of a National Emmy and a Dupont-Columbia Gold Baton, produced for WGBH and PBS. He has received numerous awards for his work including a Peabody Award, a Cine Golden Eagle Award, a United Press International Award and an Associated Press Award.

**Phil Bertelsen, Producer/Director, "EveryOther"**

Phil Bertelsen is an award-winning filmmaker for both his fiction and non-fiction work. His first film, *Around the Time*, was honored with several awards, including a Student Academy Award for drama and a Wasserman Award as Best Film at NYU where he was a Johnson Scholar and Spike Lee Fellow. His next film, *The Sunshine*, has screened in numerous festivals and has also won several awards for achievement in documentary. His last film, *Outside Looking In*, won a Paul Robeson Award for its exploration of transracial adoption among three generations of American families adopting across racial lines since the 1970's. It airs on public television and is a presentation of ITVS. Prior to coming to New York, Bertelsen, who has a B.A. in Political Science from Rutgers University and an M.F.A. in Film from New York University, helped to launch Philadelphia's PBS station WYBE-TV.

**Shola Lynch, Co-Producer, "EveryOther"**

Shola Lynch has seven years of experience in documentary film, five of which were working with Ken Burns and Florentine Films on the Peabody Award winning *Frank Lloyd Wright* and the ten part *JAZZ* series. She has also worked on the Emmy Award winning *Do You Believe in Miracles? The Story of the 1980 US Olympic Hockey Team*. Lynch is currently producing and directing *Chisholm for President'72*, a documentary on Brooklyn Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm's run for the Democratic Presidential nomination in 1972 that will air on PBS in 2004. Lynch graduated from the University of Texas and also has a master's degree in American History from the University of California, Riverside.

**Dustinn Craig, Producer/Director, "I Belong to This"**

Dustinn Craig is an enrolled member of the White Mountain Apache Tribe. Craig's early work in film and video documents skateboarders on both the White Mountain Apache and Navajo reservations. Craig is currently working as an independent producer in Arizona, working primarily for the native communities in his area, and has recently created a re-installation project for the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona. Craig's work is in the tradition of documentary filmmaking by and for the people. He and his wife, Velma, currently reside in Tempe, Arizona with their four children Kraig, Chance Michael, Ashlee and Tristan. *I Belong to This* is Craig's first film for national television.

**Spencer Nakasako, Producer, “Who I Became”**

Spencer Nakasako is an award winning filmmaker and current Artist-in-Residence at the Vietnamese Youth Development Center where he trains at-risk Southeast Asian youth in San Francisco to make videos about their lives. He produced and directed the Emmy Award-winning film, *a.k.a. Don Bonus*. His other works include, *Kelly Loves Tony*, which aired on POV in 1998; *Life is Cheap...But Toilet Paper is Expensive*, a feature film, co-directed by Wayne Wang, in 1997; and *Refugee*, an hour-long documentary about a young Cambodian refugee, Adoe “Mike” Siv’s, journey back to Cambodia to reunite with his brother and father. He was artist-in-residence at Stanford University in 2003, artist-in-residence at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in 2001 and recipient of the James D. Phelan Art Award in Video. Spencer has a BA from UC Berkeley, was a Rockefeller Fellow in 1996.

**Mike Siv, Co-Director/Editor, “Who I Became”**

Mike Siv is a 25-year-old Cambodian American filmmaker from San Francisco. He currently works at the Vietnamese Youth Development Center in San Francisco’s Tenderloin District where he trains Southeast Asian youth in video production, and coaches the neighborhood basketball team. He recently completed the film, *Refugee*, with award-winning filmmaker Spencer Nakasako. *Refugee* follows Mike and two friends as they return to Cambodia to reunite with their families. It is currently on the festival circuit. *Who I Became* is his first film.

**Aram Collier, Co-Director/Editor, “Who I Became”**

Aram Collier first worked with Spencer Nakasako as a high school student in 1996 as part of a youth video workshop in the Tenderloin. The workshop resulted in *Tenderloin Stories*, a program of four short videos that won several youth video awards, and was broadcast on public television and played at various festivals, including the San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival and Taos Talking Pictures. Collier attended University of California at Santa Cruz where he graduated in 2001 with a B.A. in Film and Digital Media.

# Introduction

When I was growing up in Memphis, Tennessee, in the 1950s, there was a powerful silence in my classes about race in general and racism in particular. Were my teachers' voices stifled? If so, what silenced them? Did anyone resist? Did anyone try to alter the curriculum? Connect history to ethics? Teach scientific understandings that would have challenged the myths and misinformation that legitimized racism?

I'll never know the answers to these questions. I only know that my classmates and I should have been trusted to examine history in all of its complexity and its living legacies of prejudice and discrimination and resilience and courage. Conversations would have been difficult, even painful. Many teachers today approach such discussions with apprehension because of the unexamined—often raw—opinions they will hear before their students can begin to confront the myths and misinformation that still shape our knowledge of one another.

Yet those discussions are essential to democracy. They are the work of every citizen, because democracy is not a product but a process. It is a process that can only be carried out in what Judge Learned Hand once called “the spirit of liberty.” He defined it as the spirit “which is not too sure it is right,” the spirit “which seeks to understand the minds of other men and women,” and “weighs their interests alongside one's own without bias.”

Scientist Jacob Bronowski placed a high value on that spirit. In *The Ascent of Man*, he likened it to physicist Werner Heisenberg's “Principle of Uncertainty”—the idea “that the exchange of information between man and nature, and man and man, can only take place within a certain tolerance.” For Bronowski, that principle applied not only to science but also to everyday life. He called it “a major tragedy of my lifetime and yours” that scientists were refining that principle “to the most exquisite precision,” and “turning their backs on the fact that all around them tolerance was crashing to the ground beyond repair.”

Ironically, “tolerance was crashing to the ground” in Europe in the 1930s because of dogma that ranked humanity by race. Hitler's National Socialist party used that dogma as a rationale for the murder of millions considered “unworthy of life.” How do we keep “tolerance from crashing to the ground” today? How do we encourage students to walk even briefly in someone else's shoes?

One way is by providing students with an education that is informed by history and tested in conversations that expand their knowledge, challenge their thinking, and stretch their imagination. Since 1976 Facing History and Ourselves has promoted such learning by engaging adults and adolescents in a study of history and human behavior that focuses on the moral questions in the world today. Documentaries like Orlando Bagwell's MATTERS OF RACE help us confront the complexities of history in ways that promote critical thinking about the challenges we face in preserving and expanding freedom and democracy.

We cannot afford to betray yet another generation of young people.  
Education matters.

Margot Stern Strom, Executive Director  
Facing History and Ourselves

# Overview

MATTERS OF RACE is a four-part documentary series that explores race, culture, and identity in the United States today. Each of the 60-minute programs focuses on a single story or set of stories that reveals how “matters of race” continue to shape and misshape American life. Each program challenges conventional thinking about difference. Each also raises important questions:

- What is race? How does it shape identity and inform relationships between self and other?
- How do notions of race shape a community? A nation?
- What is the relationship between race and culture?
- What is the relationship between race and power?
- How are long-held notions of difference based on race changing today? How are those changes redefining what it means to be an American?
- What meaning, if any, will race have for future generations?

ROJA Productions, under the leadership of executive producer Orlando Bagwell, has brought together a diverse group of filmmakers to create documentaries that address such questions. Each program focuses on one or more communities in which racial attitudes and beliefs are being challenged. These stories reveal how the past informs the present and shapes the way we imagine the future. Author Jane Lazarre says of such stories, “By telling one’s own story honestly and deeply and with all of the contradictions included, you begin to tell the story of a culture, and even many cultures within a nation.”

**Program 1: The Divide** Until the 1990s, Siler City, North Carolina, was a small town about evenly divided between black and white residents. Today, about 40 percent of Siler City’s population is Latino. Many are recent arrivals from Mexico and some have entered the nation illegally. The changes that are taking place in Siler City mirror those in other parts of the nation. Throughout the documentary, authors Eric Liu and Ruben Martinez reflect on the meanings many Americans attach to race and discuss their personal experiences with both race and racism.

**Program 2: Race Is/Race Ain’t** The second program chronicles the impact of race on the King-Drew County Medical Center in South Central Los Angeles. It explores how race can be divisive even in an institution that considers diversity necessary and desirable. The personal reflections of authors John Edgar Wideman, Jane Lazarre, Luis Rodriguez, and Angela Oh underscore key ideas and deepen understanding of the ways a diverse hospital staff responds to race and charges of racism.

**Program 3: We’re Still Here** The third documentary is a study of two communities that are struggling to maintain their cultural identity—Lakota families on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota and Native Hawaiians. Each provides insights into the legacies of race and the power of culture and tradition to unite a people.

**Program 4: Tomorrow’s America** The fourth program consists of three 20-minute documentaries produced and directed by young filmmakers. Each examines race and its meanings through the eyes of a new generation.

**EveryOther** uses satire to highlight the issues in the debate over racial classifications on the 2000 census. The film raises the question of what it means to define oneself as a person of “mixed races.”

**Who I Became** is the story of a young Cambodian American who struggles to find his way in American society.

**I Belong to This** considers what it means to be both Navajo and American as young parents examine what aspects of their heritage they would like to pass on to their children.

### **The Study Guide**

This study guide is designed to help teachers use MATTERS OF RACE in the classroom by providing activities, information, and questions that prompt discussion and reflection. The guide is divided into three parts: **PreView**, **Spotlight**, and **Reflections**.

**PreView** prepares students for the series by raising questions about such key concepts as race, identity, culture, and history. It contains three short readings. Each is followed by “Connections,” a set of questions and activities. Connections encourage critical thinking and deepen understanding of key concepts. They also help students link abstract ideas to their lives today.

**Spotlight** provides suggestions for using the six documentaries in the classroom. This section of the guide contains a summary of each film, curriculum connections, a central question, and activities that explore that question from various vantage points. The structure allows teachers to use the various programs in a variety of courses and adapt them to particular courses of study. In the **Reflections** section, questions and activities encourage students to evaluate what they learned from the series as a whole and consider how they might apply their insights and discoveries to their own communities.

## “Dividing the World”

Who are you? It is a question that we have all been asked. In answering, we define ourselves by placing greater emphasis on some characteristics than on others. Most of us view our identity as a combination of factors, including physical traits and social ties—connections to a family, an ethnic group, a community, or a nation. Although this way of defining ourselves seems ordinary, it has consequences. “When we identify one thing as unlike the others,” observes Martha Minow, a law professor, “we are dividing the world; we use our language to exclude, to distinguish—to discriminate.” She goes on to say:

Of course, there are “real differences” in the world; each person differs in countless ways from each other person. But when we simplify and sort, we focus on some traits rather than others, and we assign consequences to the presence and absence of the traits we make significant. We ask, “What’s the new baby?”—and we expect as an answer, boy or girl. That answer, for most of history, has spelled consequences for the roles and opportunities available to that individual.<sup>1</sup>

For most of history, a baby’s gender has mattered. For the past 300 years, so has the color of his or her skin. Until about 50 years ago, many scientists in Europe and North America insisted that humankind was divided into separate and distinct races based primarily on skin color. Although they disagreed as to how many races there were in the world, they generally agreed that their own race—the white or Caucasian race—was superior to others. Author Jack Foley traces the history of that notion:

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first appearance in print of the word white meaning “a white man, a person of a race distinguished by a light complexion” was in 1671. . . . The term *Caucasian* is even later: “Of or belonging to the region of the Caucasus; a name given by [Johann] Blumenbach (ca. 1800) to the ‘white’ race of mankind, which he derived from this region.”

“Through the centuries of the slave trade,” writes Earl Conrad, in his interesting book, *The Invention of the Negro\**, “the word race was rarely if ever used. . . . Shakespeare’s Shylock uses the word *tribe*, *nation*, but not *race*. The Moor in *Othello* calls himself black and the word *slave* is several times used, but not *race*. The word does not appear in the King James Version of the Bible in any context other than as running a race. The Bible refers to nations and says: ‘God made the world and all things therein; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.’ The Bible, with all its violence and its incessant warfare between peoples, does not have racist references to tribes, groups, provinces, nations, or men.”

And again, on the subject of slavery: “The traffic grew with the profits—the shuttle service importing human chattel to America in overcrowded ships. It was on these ships that we find the beginnings—the first crystallizations—of the curious doctrine which was to be called ‘white supremacy.’ Among the first white men to develop attitudes of supremacy were the slave ship crews.”<sup>2</sup>

By the time Americans declared independence from Britain in 1776, the color of a person’s skin mattered throughout the new nation. Local, state, and federal laws regarded African Americans, whether enslaved or free, as inferior to white Americans. The same was true of Native Americans. Beliefs about racial superiority also affected how newcomers were regarded. In 1790 Congress welcomed “the worthy part of mankind” to the nation and established a process that would allow immigrants to become citizens. Each had to live in the nation for two years and provide proof of good character. Each also had to be white. Non-whites could not become citizens.

In 1868, the nation added a new amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The 14th Amendment states that anyone born in the United States is a citizen. Soon after its passage, Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts suggested that “all acts of Congress relating to naturalization be... amended” so that immigrants could become citizens with “no distinction of race or color.” His colleagues in the Senate mocked the idea “that the Chinese coolies, that the Bushmen of South Africa, that the Hottentots, the Digger Indians, heathen, pagan, and cannibal, shall have equal political rights under this Government with citizens of the United States.”

In 1870, Congress simply added to those eligible for citizenship persons “of the African race or of African descent.” The change failed to address the question of who is white. It was a question that would be raised in the nation’s courts for years to come. The first to do so was a Chinese immigrant named Ah Yup. In 1878, he asked the court whether a person of the “Mongolian race” qualified as a “white person.” After quoting from the works of various “race scientists,” the judge ruled, “No one includes the white, or Caucasian, with the Mongolian or ‘yellow race.’”

In the years that followed, judges continued in their efforts to define “the white race.” Were Armenians white? Hawaiians? Turks? Are people from India white? What about Mexicans? Were Native Americans white? In each case, judges relied on a combination of “race science” and “popular understanding” to determine who was “white.” Two cases in the early 1920s illustrate how, as one historian notes, “race has served as a powerful instrument for jealously guarding privilege rather than as a neutral, coolly biological basis for understanding the relationship among the world’s people.”

In October 1922, Takao Ozawa, an immigrant from Japan, petitioned the courts for the right to become a US citizen. He argued that the 1875 law that extended citizenship to “Africans” was inclusive rather than exclusive. He also cited cases where judges had ruled that anyone not black was “white.” And finally, he observed, “The Japanese are ‘free.’ They, or at least the dominant strains, are ‘white persons,’... a superior class, fit for citizenship. They are assimilable.”

The justices on the Supreme Court ruled against Ozawa, arguing that he was “white” but not “Caucasian.” A few months after the Ozawa decision, the court heard a similar case. This time the government wanted to take away citizenship from Singh Thind, an immigrant from India, because he was “not white.” The same justices that denied Ozawa citizenship because he was “white” but not “Caucasian” now ruled that Thind was also ineligible because he was “Caucasian” but not “white.” They stated, “It may be true that the blond Scandinavian and the brown Hindu have a common ancestor in the dim reaches of antiquity, but the average man knows perfectly well that there are unmistakable and profound differences among them today.”

In 1924, Congress passed a new immigration law based on race. It favored immigrants from Northern Europe over those from Southern and Eastern Europe. At the same time, the law cut off nearly all immigration from Asia and Africa. That law remained substantially unchanged until 1965, when Congress replaced it with one that favors refugees, people with relatives in the United States, and workers with needed skills. The result was a dramatic increase in immigration from Latin America and Asia.

In 1990, the law was revised. This time Congress set a limit on the number of people who could immigrate each year. It continued to favor people with relatives in the nation and highly skilled workers. At the same time it set up a visa lottery for countries that did not take advantage of the family reunification or employment preferences. According to Angelo N. Ancheta, a civil rights attorney, the new law favored immigrants from Europe and Africa and deliberately excluded from the lottery Asian countries such as China, India, South Korea, and the Philippines, and Central American countries such as Mexico and El Salvador.

Who decides which differences matter? How is that point of view enforced? What do the Supreme Court decisions in the 1920s suggest about the meaning of race? About its relationship to power?



The table below is based on information from the U.S. Census. It shows where most of the nation's immigrants were born. What do the numbers suggest about the effects of the 1965 law? What do they suggest about the effects of the 1990 law? Angelo N. Ancheta believes that the 1990 law has racial and ethnic biases built into it.<sup>3</sup> What are those biases? How are they similar to ones held earlier in U.S. history? What differences seem most striking?

For generations, many Americans have viewed race in terms of the relationship between black and white Americans. How do you think recent immigrants to the United States may challenge those views? How may their experiences complicate discussions of race?



One way to look at identity is by constructing an identity chart. It contains the words or phrases people attach to themselves as well as the ones that others give them. Create an identity chart for yourself by drawing a circle with your name in the middle. Around that circle, write the words you use to describe yourself. In a second color add the labels others attach to you. How is your chart similar to those of your classmates? To what extent is each

chart unique? What part has race played in shaping your identity and those of your classmates?



Write a working definition of the word *race*. A working definition is one that grows as you read, observe, reflect, and discuss experiences and ideas. Begin your definition by explaining what the word *race* means to you. To what extent is your understanding of the concept based on experience? What role has your family played in your understanding? What role has the media played? Add to your working definition the meanings provided in this reading. As you complete other readings and watch MATTERS OF RACE, continue to add to your working definition.



Create a working definition of *racism*. Keep in mind that the ending *ism* refers to a doctrine or principle. Can you be a racist if you do not believe that humankind is divided into races?

Sources of Immigration 1980–2000

	1980 Census		1990 Census		2000 Census	
1	Mexico	2,199,000	Mexico	4,298,000	Mexico	7,871,000
2	Germany	849,000	Philippines	913,000	China*	1,457,000
3	Canada	843,000	Canada	745,000	Philippines	1,227,000
4	Italy	832,000	Cuba	737,000	India	1,027,000
5	U.K.	669,000	Germany	712,000	Cuba	922,000
6	Cuba	608,000	U.K.	640,000	El Salvador	796,000
7	Philippines	501,000	Italy	581,000	Vietnam	778,000
8	Poland	418,000	Korea	568,000	Korea	715,000
9	Soviet Union	406,000	Vietnam	543,000	Canada	688,000
10	Korea	290,000	China*	530,000	Dom. Republic	601,000
11	China*	286,000	El Salvador	465,000	Germany	598,000
12	Vietnam	231,000	India	450,000	Jamaica	488,000
	<b>All Others</b>	14,080,000	<b>All Others</b>	19,767,000	<b>All Others</b>	31,108,000

\* Includes Hong Kong and Taiwan

<sup>1</sup> *Making All the Difference: Inclusion, Exclusion and American Law* by Martha Minow. Cornell University Press, 1990, 3.

\* The word *Negro* was commonly used in earlier centuries to refer to individuals of African descent. Its use reflects a particular time period.

<sup>2</sup> From "Multiculturalism and the Media" by Jack Foley in *MultiAmerica: Essays on Cultural Wars and Cultural Peace*, edited by Ishmael Reed. Viking, 1997, 367-369. Originally published in *Konch* Magazine.

<sup>3</sup> *Race, Rights, and the Asian-American Experience* by Angelo N. Ancheta. Rutgers University Press, 1998, 38.

## What Is Race?

Dictionaries often define the word *race* as “a group of people distinguished by genetically transmitted physical characteristics.” According to most scholars today, those “genetically transmitted physical characteristics”—skin color, hair texture, shape of eyes, etc—have no scientific meaning. In 2001 the American Museum of Natural History opened an exhibit entitled “The Genomic Revolution.” In a prominent place, the organizers featured the following statement:

### The Only Race Is the Human Race

#### No Biological Basis for Race

New data from the mapping of the human genome reveal that all humans are incredibly similar—in fact, we are 99.9% genetically identical. **We are all members of one species, *Homo sapiens*.** Scientists have confirmed, as they long suspected, **that there is no genetic or biological basis for race.**

Genetic variation between people within the same “racial” group can be greater than the variation between people of two different groups. Many people of African descent are no more similar to other Africans than they are to Caucasians. Genetic distinctions between Asians and Caucasians are less pronounced than those between groups from, for example, parts of East and West Africa.

No matter how scientists today scrutinize a person’s genes, they can’t determine with certainty whether an individual is from one “racial” group or another. **Differences of culture and society** distinguish one group from another, but these distinctions are not rooted in biology.

*“Mapping the DNA sequence variation in the human genome holds the potential for promoting the fundamental unity of all mankind.”* —Dr. Harold P. Freeman.<sup>4</sup>

If race has no basis in biology or genetics, what is it? Poet Lori Tsang likens it to water: “Like water, it takes on the shape of whatever contains it—whatever culture, social structure, political system. But like water, it slips through your fingers when you try to hold it.”<sup>5</sup> In the 1950s, Tsang’s aunt and uncle took a trip across the United States. Aware of segregation laws in the South, they were careful to sit at the back of buses and in separate compartments on trains. In one southern city, however, a white bus driver ordered them to move to the front of the bus to sit with whites. Tsang says of the incident, “Race is the myth upon which the reality of racism is predicated, the wild card the racist always keeps hidden up his sleeve. The racist has the power to determine whether the card will be a diamond or a spade, whether a Chinese is black or white.”<sup>6</sup>

Author John Edgar Wideman also views race as a “wild card.” He writes:

Think of a blank screen, then seat somebody at a keyboard controlling what appears on the screen. Race is whatever the operator decides to punch up. The meaning of race is open-ended, situational, functional, predictable to some extent, but a flexible repertoire of possibilities that follow from the ingenuity of the operator privileged to monopolize the controls.

On the other hand, race signifies something quite precise about power, how one group seizes and sustains an unbeatable edge over others.<sup>7</sup>

Sociologist Barbara Katz Rothman views race as a set of physical differences that matter socially.

We see race as this physical reality, this recognizable pattern of differences between people. It is foolish to try to persuade people that the differences don't exist. They do. It is pointless to try to convince people that the differences don't matter. They do.

What confuses us is that the differences exist physically, but matter socially. There are physical differences, and even physical consequences. But there is not a physical cause-and-effect relationship between them. Take something relatively simple: There is a much higher infant mortality rate among blacks than among whites in America. The differences between black and white women are there, real and measurable. But those differences, the physical, biological characteristics marked as race—level of melanin in the skin, shape of the nose, or whatever—are not the cause of the different infant mortality rates. The darkness of the mother is a physical, biological phenomenon, as is the death of the baby. But the relationship between the two is a social reality; it is the social consequence of race....<sup>8</sup>

In what sense is race a “wild card”? How do the decisions reached by the Supreme Court in the 1920s (Reading 1) support that idea? How do those decisions support the idea that “race signifies something quite precise about power, how one group seizes and sustains an unbeatable edge over others”? How do your own experiences with race support both ideas? To what extent do they challenge those ideas?



During the years of apartheid in South Africa, hundreds of people officially changed their race each year by applying to a special government agency. In 1985, a government official reported:

- 702 Colored people turned white.
- 19 whites became Colored.
- One Indian became white.
- Three Chinese became white.
- 50 Indians became Colored.
- 43 Coloreds became Indians.
- 21 Indians became Malay.
- 30 Malays went Indian.
- 249 blacks became Colored.
- 20 Coloreds became black.
- Two blacks became “other Asians.”
- One black was classified Griqua.
- 11 Coloreds became Chinese.
- Three Coloreds went Malay.

One Chinese became Colored.  
 Eight Malays became Colored.  
 Three blacks were classed as Malay.  
 No blacks became white and no whites became black.  
 Why would a government have a procedure for changing one’s race? To what extent does the procedure support the way Lois Tsang and John Wideman define race and racism? To what extent does it support the way you define the term?



What does Barbara Rothman mean when she writes, “differences exist physically, but matter socially”? How does she challenge the idea of a simple relationship between a physical difference and a physical consequence? What other examples in the local or national news support her view of cause-and-effect relationships based on race?

<sup>4</sup> www.amnh.org

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in *Half and Half*, ed. By Claudine Chiawei O’Hearn. Pantheon Books, 1998, 209-210.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> John Edgar Wideman, *Fatheralong: A Meditation on Fathers and Sons, Race and Society*. Pantheon Books, 1994, xv—xvi.

<sup>8</sup> Barbara Katz Rothman, *The Book of Life: A Personal and Ethical Guide to Race, Normality, and the Implications of the Human Genome Project*. Beacon Press, 1998, 2001, 63.

## What Is Culture?

How we see the world and how we interpret what we see are both cultural. A culture is the way that a group of people live together in a community or set of communities. It includes both written laws and the unwritten rules of a society. The way parents rear their children is cultural, as is the way a community educates those children. A people's past, its memories, and experiences are also a part of its culture. So are its values and beliefs. Race then is a cultural idea—a belief about difference. It is a way that some people have tried to make sense of the differences they see between themselves and others. Culture shapes identity in small ways and large.

Xuefei Jin was born in 1956 in a part of China then known as Manchuria. He came to the United States in 1985. Although English is his second language, he writes only in English under the pen name Ha Jin. In a poem entitled “The Past,” Ha Jin reflects on the relationship between past and present, culture and identity:

I have supposed my past is a part of myself.  
As my shadow appears whenever I'm in the sun  
the past cannot be thrown off and its weight  
must be borne, or I will become another man.

But I saw someone wall his past into a garden  
whose produce is always in fashion.  
If you enter his property without permission  
he will welcome you with a watchdog or a gun.

I saw someone set up his past as a harbor.  
Wherever it sails, his boat is safe—  
if a storm comes, he can always head for home.  
His voyage is the adventure of a kite.

I saw someone drop his past like trash.  
He buried it and shed it altogether.  
He has shown me that without the past  
one can also move ahead and get somewhere.

Like a shroud my past surrounds me,  
but I will cut it and stitch it,  
to make good shoes with it,  
shoes that fit my feet.<sup>9</sup>

What does it mean to view the past “as a shadow”? How does one “wall” the past “into a garden”? How does one set up the past as a “harbor”? What may prompt someone to “drop the past like trash”? To regard it as a “shroud,” or burial garment? How does the poet view his own relationship with the culture in which he was reared? In what other ways do people see their culture? Which view is closest to your own?

What does Ha Jin mean when he writes, “the past cannot be thrown off and its weight must be borne, or I will become another man”? How does he challenge that idea in his poem? Why do you think he decides to “stitch” his past into “good shoes,” “shoes that fit my feet”?



There are many different ways to live in a culture. What are the ways Ha Jin describes in his poem? What other ways might be added to his list?

<sup>9</sup> “The Past,” in *Facing Shadows* by Ha Jin. Hanging Loose Press, 1996, 63.



Psychologist Deborah Tannen writes, “We all know we are unique individuals but we tend to see others as representatives of groups. It’s a natural tendency; since we must see the world in patterns in order to make sense of it; we wouldn’t be able to deal with the daily onslaught of people and objects if we couldn’t predict a lot about them and feel that we know who or what they are.” Although it is “natural” to generalize, stereotypes are offensive. A *stereotype* is more than a judgment about an individual based on the characteristics of a group. Stereotyping reduces individuals to categories. In *House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros explores the way stereotypes shape our view of the world:

Those who don’t know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we’re dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives. They are stupid people who are lost and got here by mistake.

But we aren’t afraid. We know the guy with the crooked eye is Davy the Baby’s brother, and the tall one next to him in the straw brim, that’s Rosa’s Eddie V. and the big one that looks like a dumb grown man, he’s Fat Boy, though he’s not fat anymore nor a boy.

All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight. Yeah. That is how it goes and goes.<sup>10</sup>

Cisneros refers to outsiders as “those who don’t know better.” What is she suggesting about the way ignorance shapes *their* perceptions of *us*? What does her story suggest about the way ignorance affects *our* views of *them*? *Our* behavior? How does knowledge affect the way *we* perceive ourselves? How does her short story relate to the way people in Siler City view one another? How does Cisneros suggest that the cycle she describes can be broken?



One way that people come to know one another is by listening to one another’s stories. What do we learn about the newcomers from their stories about how they came to live in Siler City? What do we learn about their experiences since their arrival? What do we learn about Siler City from the stories told by African American residents of the city? From the stories told by white residents of the city?



Individuals have an identity. So do communities. Create an identity chart for Siler City. (See Reading 1 in the PreView section.) What are the words or phrases that residents use to describe their town? In a second color add the labels that others might attach to Siler City. What part has race played in shaping Siler City’s identity? What other factors have shaped the town?

Some longtime residents of Siler City view newcomers as “aliens.” Others speak of their arrival as an “invasion.” Maria Palmer of the North Carolina School Board says of their responses, “People are seeing their racial mix change. Not just a different accent that they think, ‘Okay, we’ll take care of that in the next generation.’ They see this is going to permanently change the racial makeup of the state. And for some people that’s scary.” What is a “racial mix” and for whom in Siler City do changes in that mix seem particularly scary? Would the arrival of large numbers of Canadian immigrants be equally scary? How do your answers relate to the title of the film? What divides Siler City? How deep does the divide seem to be? What sustains it?



In response to the arrival of the newcomers, county officials like Rick Givens travel to Mexico on a “fact-finding mission.” What are the “facts” they hope to uncover? Why do you think they did not begin their mission by meeting with new residents to discuss problems, raise concerns, and seek mutually acceptable solutions?



LaShanda Brower says, “I think I became very race conscious when I got to the high school because things were so separate. They didn’t want to see diversity and change. They’re just so used to the way things were and change was not an answer.” What does she suggest is the answer? When did you become aware of race? What prompted your awareness?

Why do you think that tensions in the larger community are reflected in schools? To what extent do schools in every community mirror the larger society?



The film refers to several racist incidents in the schools. Adolfo Aguilar tells of teachers who made his and other Latino children feel unwelcome. Two African American students, LaShanda Brower and Chris Taylor, describe photographs in the school yearbook showing white students holding nooses as if they were preparing for a lynching. Rick Givens, the county commissioner, receives a tape recording of a one-sided conversation in which the principal of the high school calls a student a “nigger.” Each of these incidents sends a message. What is that message? Why do you think it is addressed to African American students as well as Latino students?



As a result of the furor over his racist remarks, the principal of the high school resigned. What message did community leaders send when they allowed him to quietly leave? How did African Americans in the community respond to that message? How does the incident help us understand why the film is called “The Divide”? Who benefits from the divide? Who maintains it? What role do the schools play in preserving it? How have the newcomers threatened the divide? How do groups like CRISIS try to bridge the divide? In what other ways might individuals and groups in the community bridge the divide?

Maria Palmer, a member of the North Carolina state school board, says of the new arrivals, “This is a permanent change. We’ve had articles in the newspapers saying the solution is just teach ‘em all English and teach ‘em how to act American.” If the solution is to teach them “how to act American,” what is the problem? What does it mean to “act American”? What does it mean to be an American? When does an immigrant become an American? Who gets to decide who is an American and who is not?



Journalist Ruben Martinez says of himself as a boy in California, “Through my first 16 years I did everything I could to become white from plucking a five-string banjo to buying Beach Boys’ albums.” Crystal Ocampo, a Siler City high-school student nominated for homecoming queen, tells an interviewer, “You say the term ‘American’ I think of the blonde, and the blue eyes, and the white skin. And, of course, I could never be American in the full sense because of my skin color and my background.” Where do you think they got the idea that to be an American they had to be white? A stereotype is often referred to as a script that someone else expects you to follow. How did stereotypes shape the way Martinez and Ocampo viewed themselves and others? How has each tried to defy those stereotypes? How has each tried to write the script for his or her own life?

Ralph Ellison once wrote that as an African American, he is invisible “simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you sometimes see in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of distorting glass. When they approach me, they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed everything and anything except me.” The distorting mirrors are stereotypes. To what extent are Latinos “invisible” in Siler City? What does the film suggest about the importance of seeing one another without the distortions that render some of us invisible and turn others among us into perpetual foreigners?

<sup>10</sup>From *The House on Mango Street*. Copyright © Sandra Cisneros, 1984. Published in the United States by Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New York. Reprinted by permission of Susan Bergholz Literary Services, New York.

## “Race Is/Race Ain’t”

### Overview

“Race Is/Race Ain’t” explores the impact of race on one of Los Angeles’s busiest and most diverse hospitals—the King-Drew Medical Center. Built after the Watts riots of 1965, the hospital has long been viewed by African Americans as *their* hospital—visible proof of the value of collective political struggle. Today the hospital serves a primarily Latino population. Between 1986 and 1996, 19 members of the hospital staff filed suit against the hospital administration, claiming that non-blacks were being excluded from leadership positions. Others insist that the hospital serves everyone but has a special relationship with African Americans in Los Angeles because of its history. Throughout the film, the personal reflections of authors John Edgar Wideman, Jane Lazarre, Luis Rodriguez, and Angela Oh deepen understanding of the ways the past informs the present and influences the way we consider and imagine the future.

### Curriculum Connections

“Race Is/Race Ain’t” complicates our understanding of race by examining its role in a single institution—a public hospital. The film may be used in US history, sociology, and ethnic studies courses to explore the legacies of race and racism in the nation. It also may be used in literature courses to explore themes related to memory, legacy, and “race.” If the film cannot be shown in a single class period, it may be divided into three parts to allow time for discussion and reflection at the beginning and the end of each class period.

**Central Questions:** How do the legacies of race and racism affect institutions within a society? To what extent do such institutions mirror the attitudes and values of the larger society?



Dr. Alice Singleton with a patient at King Drew Hospital, 1980  
Courtesy: Dr. Alice Singleton



*Above:*  
 Writer, John Edgar Wideman and son Daniel  
 Photographer: Lynda Koolish

*Below:*  
 Writer Jane Lazarre & son Adam  
 Credit: Jane Lazarre

In a 1998 article on Los Angeles, reporter Michael Fletcher observes:

[The] new immigrants have renewed old neighborhoods, created new businesses and enriched the culture of Los Angeles. But the exploding diversity also has changed the nature of racial conflict and drawn new groups into battles that once were waged almost exclusively between blacks and whites. Here, black and Latino civil servants square off over public jobs. Black activists and Asian storeowners fight over control of local businesses. And Latino and Asian gangs battle for control of their turf.

This new reality fuels the racial isolation evident in many walks of life here. Researchers have found deep racial divisions in the Los Angeles job market—partly the result of discrimination but reinforced because people typically find jobs through personal connections that most often do not cross racial or ethnic lines. Many of the furniture factories in South Central have only Latino workers. The toy factories near downtown employ mainly Chinese. Many of the small grocery stores are owned and run by Koreans. And African Americans disproportionately work in government jobs, where they are desperately trying to hold their place in the face of fierce competition from Latinos who want in.<sup>11</sup>

How do Fletcher's observations explain why Jane Lazarre says, "There are so many situations in which all of us are uncertain and are going to continue to be uncertain about whether ...situations are racial or not. Everything on this subject of race is and at the same time ain't." What does she mean? What role does uncertainty play in the controversy over King Medical Center? What role does race play in that controversy?



What links African Americans? Latinos? Other groups within Los Angeles and other cities? John Wideman offers one answer by reflecting on the things that connect him to other African Americans:

The paradigm of race authors one sad story, repeated far too often, that would reduce the complexity of our cultural heritage. Race preempts our right to situate our story where we choose. It casts us as minor characters in somebody else's self-elevating melodrama. ...The common ground is elsewhere: the bonds we struggle to sever, discover, invent, sustain, celebrate. If we pay attention, we hear many stories of black people trying to work out ways of living on the earth. ...

African-American descent plays a part in all our stories, a powerful role in many. Racism appears as a factor just as often. ... Racism can stunt or sully or deny achievement, but many black people are on the move beyond the power of race to pigeonhole and cage. They are supplying for themselves, for us, for the future, terms of achievement not racially determined.<sup>12</sup>

According to Wideman, what links African Americans? To what extent do similar things connect Latinos? Asians? What links all Americans regardless of race or ethnicity?



Jane Lazarre says of stories like those told in “Race Is/Race Ain’t,” “By telling one’s own story honestly and deeply and with all of the contradictions included, you begin to tell the story of a culture, and even many cultures within a nation.” What do you hear in the stories Randle Foster tells of life in Los Angeles in the 1950s? In the stories Alice Singleton tells of what it was like to work in the hospital just after it opened?

Annabel Lemus came to Los Angeles as a child from El Salvador; Luis Rodriguez was born in Mexico but grew up on the streets of Los Angeles. What do you hear in their stories of life in Los Angeles? How are they similar to the ones Foster and Singleton tell? Why are the differences important? What might be gained if people in Los Angeles and other cities knew one another’s stories?



What is the role of a hospital in a community? How is it like other institutions in the community? In what sense is the role of a hospital unique, special? How do your answers help explain the importance of King Hospital to African Americans in South Central Los Angeles? How do your answers also explain the way Latinos view the hospital?

Joe Hicks, an African American county official, says, “It had always been assumed that this was a built primarily for and by black folks to service black folks.... The south end of L.A. and Watts and Wilmington were considered to be black turf, black terrain, the black community. And I think there was consideration that that’s the way things would always be.” Who made those assumptions? To what extent do they reflect racism within the larger community? To what extent have they influenced the decisions that hospital administrators like Randle Foster have made?



Randle Foster says of King Hospital, “I think it’s important to see, how the hospital came to be. It wasn’t constructed like any other hospital. It came out of a riot. It came out of the struggle of the people. So it’s beginnings were different; it’s measurements were different; it’s expectations were different.” How does the history of an institution shape the way it is seen by others in the community? How does it shape the expectations people have for it? What happens to that history and to those expectations when the demographics of the community change—when, in this case, a primarily African American hospital becomes a primarily Latino hospital?

No two people view an event in the same way. In the film, Randle Foster, Luis Rodriguez, and Angela Oh each recall the “Los Angeles riots” of 1992. On what aspects of the story do they agree? How do you account for differences in the way they recall the event? To what extent is the story each tells shaped by his or her own history? To what extent is that story shaped by race?



Physician Alice Singleton says, “The fact that the community has changed its ... racial and ethnic mixture ...should have nothing to do with the name of the hospital or its mission. The mission has been all embracing. We have never been exclusively African American. Everyone will be cared for, but we will not use the term *diversity* to mean ‘forget about black people.’ ...That makes us different.” For Annabel Lemus, the issue is not *whether* everyone is cared for but *how* they are cared for:

A lot of our patients come already feeling that they are imposing on us and that they have to take ...whatever they get and so for them to see that they can be treated with respect in their own language [is important].... We’re acknowledging them as people and can understand their culture, where they come from.

How does each woman’s personal history shape the way she views the hospital and its patients? What do the two women have in common? What issues divide them?

Regina Freer, a professor of politics at Occidental College in Los Angeles, has written about matters of race in the city and the nation. She says, "If race is not real, it shouldn't matter who is occupying positions [in the hospital], who is delivering services, who is receiving services. It shouldn't matter. But in a context where racism impacts all of us, it does matter." Who is responsible for the racism that "impacts all of us"? How does it shape the competition for jobs at the hospital? How does it shape the way services are delivered?



In reflecting on the racial and ethnic isolation he observes among college students, sociologist David Schoem writes:

The effort it takes for us to know so little about one another across racial and ethnic groups is truly remarkable. That we can live so closely together, that our lives can be so intertwined socially, economically, and politically, and that we can spend so many years of study in grade school and even in higher education and yet still manage to be ignorant of one another is clear testimony to the deep-seated roots of this human and national tragedy. What we do learn along the way is to place heavy reliance on stereotypes, gossip, rumor, and fear to shape our lack of knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

How do Schoem's observations apply the controversy at King Hospital? To what extent are the problems at the hospital a result of a "heavy reliance on stereotypes, gossip, rumor and

fear"? How do Schoem's remarks apply to the "racial isolation" Michael Fletcher observes in Los Angeles? To what extent is your own community similarly divided? How can we as individuals overcome our reliance on "stereotypes, gossip, rumor and fear"



Susan Goldsmith claims that a hospital, particular one that bears Martin Luther King's name, should be "colorblind." What does she mean by that term? Two African Americans respond to that idea in the film: John Wideman says:

What appalls me is the premature wishful thing that posits the notion of color blindness, or that ...we've somehow overcome our early history of race. Because it's not only a lie; it's a 'willed ignorance,' as James Baldwin said.

James Hill remarks:

I don't think you should ever have a colorblind society. I don't think people should stop seeing people's color. I think it's important that I see you your color and you my color. The issue is: Can I respect you for being who you are and the race that you are, and the gender that you are? And can you respect me for being who I am?

Whose ideas are closest to your own? What role should color, race, or ethnicity play in the way a hospital or any other institution defines its mission? Find out how people in your community define the mission of their hospitals and medical centers.

<sup>11</sup>In L.A., a Sense of Future Conflicts" by Michael A. Fletcher. *Washington Post*, April 7, 1998, A1.

<sup>12</sup>John Edgar Wideman, *Fatheralong: A Meditation on Fathers and Sons, Race and Society*. Pantheon Books, 1994, xxi-xxii.

<sup>13</sup>From the Introduction to *Inside Separate Worlds* by David Schoem. University of Michigan Press, 1991, 3.

## “We’re Still Here”

### Overview

“We’re Still Here” focuses on two communities often overlooked in discussions about race: Native Americans and Native Hawaiians. Because of their history, both groups have signed treaties with the US government that guarantee their rights to their land and culture even though members of these groups are US citizens. On the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, three generations of Lakotas consider the ways their past affects the present and shapes their future. On the islands of Hawaii, Native Hawaiians reflect on a series of lawsuits that have challenged federal programs designed to redress past injustices. The stories told in both places raise important questions about the right of individuals and groups to define their own identity and preserve their culture. Like the other films in the series, it also challenges the way we think about the legacies of race and racism.



The Bordaues live on the Pine Ridge Reservation. They and their children share views on race, membership, and identity.  
Credit: Bordaue family

### Curriculum Connections

“We’re Still Here” examines how the cultures of two indigenous peoples have been affected by “race.” The film may be used in US history, anthropology, sociology, and ethnic studies courses to elicit discussion of culture, assimilation, legacy, and memory. It also may be used in literature courses to explore themes related to culture, assimilation, memory, and legacy. If the film cannot be shown in a single class period, it may be divided into three parts to allow time for discussion and reflection at the beginning and the end of each class period.

**Central Question:** How do race and racism complicate the efforts of indigenous peoples to preserve their sovereignty and maintain their cultural identity?



Mary Bordeaux and son  
Credit: Bordeaux family

In “Race Is/Race Ain’t,” author Jane Lazarre speaks of the importance of stories: “By telling one’s own story honestly and deeply and with all of the contradictions included, you begin to tell the story of a culture, and even many cultures within a nation.” How do the stories told by three generations in a Lakota family explain the title of the documentary? What do they reveal about the relationship between past and present, history and culture?

Eva Witt declares, “We are who are and we should be who we are.” In an essay written for the American Indian Policy Center, Nora Livesay places Witt’s Lakota identity in a larger perspective:

Ask who is Indian, and you will get divergent responses depending on who’s answering. The US Census Bureau, state governments, various federal government programs and agencies, and tribal governments all have different definitions. The criteria vary from a specific amount of blood quantum [degree of blood] and descendency to residency and self-identification.

But, the answers don’t really tell you who is Indian. They tell you who can receive health care from the Indian Health Service (IHS), ...who qualifies for educational assistance or who can vote in tribal elections. These artificial definitions don’t come close to describing how it feels to sit with one’s own people sharing a joke or a ceremony. They don’t describe the cultural and historical bonds that guide one’s life. Identity reaches into the intangible parts of ourselves. The rest are definitions with an agenda.<sup>14</sup>

What do the stories of Eva Witt, her grandson Nate Bordeaux, and other members of their family suggest about the way “identity reaches into the intangible parts of ourselves”? What do those stories suggest about the dangers of the definitions others impose on us? Why does Livesay call them “definitions with an agenda”? What is that agenda?



Alani Apio, a poet and playwright, says of himself and other Native Hawaiians:

No one lynches us. No citizenry chain us up and drag us from the backs of pickup trucks. Just a thousand little cuts to our self-esteem, self identity. Rather than obliterating the people, simply obliterate the glue that binds them: culture.

What are the “thousand little cuts” to which Apio refers? How are similar cuts reflected in the stories the Bordeaux family tells? What does Apio mean when he describes culture as the “glue” that binds people? In what sense does he view culture as “glue”?



Larry Swalley is a Lakota. His wife is of Spanish, Apache, and Navajo descent. He fears that their daughter will not be considered a Lakota because her Lakota “blood quantum” “falls below a certain fraction.” “Blood quantum” is the percentage of “Indian blood” an individual has. In many tribes, including the Lakota, it determines who is considered a member of the tribe and who is not. Nora Livesay explains how the system evolved:

[In the 1800s] federal officials began deciding on a person-by-person basis who qualified as a member of the tribe and therefore, qualified for treaty benefits. Eventually the federal government settled on the idea of blood quantum, similar to what was used to determine which African Americans could be enslaved.

In 1887, under the General Allotment Act (also known as the Dawes Act), Congress adopted the blood quantum standard of one-half or more Indian blood. This meant that if an Indian could document that he (women were excluded) was one-half or more Indian blood, then he could receive 160 acres of tribal land. All other Indians were excluded regardless of their standing within the tribe. After all the “blooded” Indians were parceled out land, the rest of tribal lands were declared “surplus” and opened up for non-Indian settlement.

Limiting the allotted land to 160 acres per qualified person ensured that there weren't enough Indians meeting the genetic requirements to retain the original land base of the tribe; land that was rightfully theirs by aboriginal occupancy and recognized as such by treaties with the US Government. In this way, the aggregate Indian land base was “legally” reduced from 138 million acres to 48 million acres in less than 50 years. ...From then on, the federal government began imposing various blood quantum eligibility requirements on Indians for commodity rations, education, annuity payments and health services.<sup>15</sup>

Today the federal government no longer requires that tribes use “blood quantum” to determine their membership, but some programs still require a specific percentage of “Indian blood.” Therefore a number of tribes, including the Lakota, still require that members have as little as one-sixteenth or as much as one-half “Indian blood.” Such requirements are controversial. Livesay explains:

Tribal enrollment raises thorny issues in Indian communities, not the least of which is identity. Should federally-imposed blood quantum requirements be thrown out? If they are, how does one ensure that only “real” Indians are enrolled? If they aren't thrown out, how can Indians avoid fulfilling the federal government's original objective of defining themselves out of existence?

What about future generations of Indians? How can tribes ensure that Indian children being adopted outside of the Indian community are not lost? How can tribes address the issues of fractional heritage and the continuing trend toward intermarriage with non-Indians?<sup>16</sup>

How do the Lakota seem to answer the questions Livesay raises? Why do those answers trouble Larry Swalley and others on the Pine Ridge Reservation?

Journalist Clarence Page once wrote, “It is not biology that determines race. It is bureaucrats.” How does the history of blood quantum support that view? How does it shape and misshape life on the Pine Ridge Reservation? How is it reflected in the ways other Americans view Indians?



Blood quantum relies on race to determine membership. According to Haunani-Kay Trask, “Hawaiian people identify each other according to their genealogy. Genealogy simply means a line of descent. Most Hawaiians know their genealogy, we know who are parents were, who their grandparents were, who their great-great grandparents were and that's how we determined who is Hawaiian. The federal government does not accept genealogy. They only accept their own classification by blood quantum.” Hawaiians who meet federal standards have had access to federal programs that seek to address problems that resulted from the American takeover of the islands. Now some Americans in Hawaii are challenging those classifications as “reverse discrimination, even “racist.” Trask agrees, “Of course they are, we agreed with them. We didn't create the original classification, but now those classifications enable some of our people to have access to some of our resources.” What is the dilemma he describes? How is it similar to the one the Lakota face? What differences seem most striking?

Native Americans and Native Hawaiians are U.S. citizens. They pay federal taxes and obey federal laws. They serve in the US armed forces—in fact, one out of every four Native Americans is a veteran. Yet, according to treaties between various Native American tribes and the US government, the Lakota have sovereignty. What does the word mean? How do the Lakota seem to define the word? How do Native Hawaiians define it? How is the sovereignty of a nation linked to power? To land? To culture? How does sovereignty shape the relationship of both groups to their neighbors and to the nation as a whole? How does the idea of sovereign peoples within the United States complicate what it means to be an American?



Most Americans view land as something that can be bought and sold. A white American interviewed in the documentary describes his own attachment to the Black Hills. He says, “I’ve grown up here, this is part of my land. Indians feel exactly the same way, and why shouldn’t they?” How would you answer his question? How do the Lakotas interviewed in the film view their attachment to the land? How is their connection to the land similar to his? What differences seem most striking? What might the white American learn if he were to discuss the Black Hills with Larry Swalley or Larry’s cousin, Nate Bordeaux?

“To be considered a nation,” Aaron says, “you’ve got to have a language. You’ve got to have spirituality, a way to pray. You’ve got to have resources. To us, it is land. And you’ve got to have ...a [younger] generation.” According to Aaron, how did the federal government try to destroy all four of those things even though it officially viewed the Lakota and other tribes as nations? Today the Lakota are no longer sent to boarding schools. They educate their children in their own schools. What do the interviews with young Lakota students suggest about what learn in those schools? What do they suggest about why the right to teach their children has been so important to the Lakota and other Native Americans? How do Native Hawaiians view education? How does the importance both groups place on education relate to the title of the documentary—“We’re Still Here”?

<sup>14</sup> “Understanding the History of Tribal Enrollment” by Nora Livesay. Copyright 2002, American Indian Policy Center. All Rights Reserved. Airpi@cpinternet.com

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

## Tomorrow's America

The fourth show consists of three short documentaries that explore the impact of race on a new generation of Americans. The documentaries can be shown and discussed individually or in various combinations.

### “EveryOther”

#### Overview

“EveryOther” satirizes the racial classifications on the US census and the importance individuals and groups in the nation place on those classifications. The story is told from the perspective of a young woman who is of “mixed race.” Based on 1998 essay by novelist Danzy Senna, the film explores what the “mixing of the races” may mean for the future of racial identity in the United States.

#### Curriculum Connections

The film may be used in US history, literature, anthropology, sociology, and ethnic studies courses to introduce or reflect on what happens when the personal issues of identity collide with a political agenda.

**Central Question:** How do personal choices—the ways we identify ourselves and others—become a political issue?



Yong-Suk Jones, the young woman bewildered by the 2000 census, and her family.  
Credit: Yong-Suk Jones

“EveryOther” is a satire. Dictionaries define a *satire* as an artistic work in which human vice or folly is attacked, often through irony. What folly does the film attack? The word *irony* describes a contrast between what is stated and what is meant or between what is expected to happen and what actually takes place. There are various forms of irony.

- irony of situation—an event that directly contradicts one’s expectations. To what extent is the young woman’s dream about the “census police” an example of irony of situation?
- dramatic irony—a contradiction between one’s thoughts and what one knows to be true. What is the irony in a debate over how to classify races at a time when scientists say it is impossible to determine with certainty whether an individual is from one racial group or another?
- verbal irony—a word or phrase that suggests the opposite of its usual meaning. To what extent is the term *racial preference* an example of verbal irony?

Every ten years, the United States government conducts a count of people living in the nation. A census is more than a count, however. It is a statistical portrait of the nation that provides detailed information about who we are as a nation. Every census has asked about race and every census has defined race differently. Why does the government consider race important to defining the nation even though it has never found a satisfactory definition? Why do many ethnic groups encourage the government to continue including race in its count?



Just before the 2000 census, journalist Farai Chideya wrote:

By some estimates, 80 percent of African Americans have at least some white blood, and a quarter have some Native American blood. Nothing demonstrates this fact more clearly than a story that made front-page headlines in November 1998: evidence that Thomas Jefferson had fathered at least one black child....

What happened in the Jefferson family is just a high-profile example of the way most black Americans became mixed with white blood through sexual unions—sometimes consensual, often forced—between white male slave-owners and black female slaves....

What is new in America’s racial classifications is the trend toward identifying as multi-racial. In the past, American defined anyone with “one drop” of black blood as black. And it became a point of pride in the black community for even those who could “pass” for white to proudly proclaim their black identity. It shouldn’t come as a surprise, then, that most young mixed-race blacks still identify as black. But more and more are identifying as multi-racial, and a few (depending on skin color as well as upbringing) as white. The issue is far broader than just a black and white one. Today’s young adults include black-Asian individuals like [Tiger] Woods, Asian Hispanics, white Native Americans, and every other possible combination.<sup>17</sup>

Journalist Clarence Page, an African American, once wrote, “It is not biology that determines race. It is bureaucrats.” How do his remarks explain why many individuals find it so difficult to find a box on a census form that describes their identity? How do explain why some feel it is important to find a box that defines their identity? What does the box represent?

<sup>17</sup> From *The Color of Our Future*, by Farai Chideya. William Morrow & Co., 1999, 38-39

## “Who I Became”

### Overview

“Who I Became” is the story of Pounloeu Chea, a first-generation Cambodian American. He and his family escaped from Cambodia in the early 1980s and settled in San Francisco. Five years ago, his father returned to Cambodia, leaving behind his wife and three sons. A year ago his mother joined his father. Since she left, Pounloeu was found guilty of driving stolen cars intended for export and placed on parole. About to become a father, he has to hold a job and stay out of trouble to avoid being sent to jail or shipped back to Cambodia. What will he make of his life when all he knows is displacement and the street life common among the children of many Southeast Asian immigrants in his community?

### Curriculum Connections

The film may be used in US history, literature, anthropology, sociology, and ethnic studies courses to explore issues related to immigration, assimilation, poverty, and education.

**Central Question:** What tools, opportunities, and understandings are needed for an immigrant to become an American?



Director: Mike Siv & Pounloeu Chea  
Credit: Mike Siv

In 1975, a Communist named Pol Pot and his guerilla army, the Khmer Rouge, overthrew the government of Cambodia and systematically killed about two million people as part of their efforts to rebuild the nation as a Communist state. They targeted artists, minorities, urban dwellers, people with some education, and the middle class. As the terror spread, towns were emptied, schools closed, and temples destroyed. In 1979,

Reread the short story by Sandra Cisneros on page 00. How is Pounloeu’s neighborhood like the one she describes? How do you account for differences? What images did you have about Pounloeu’s neighborhood before he took you on a tour of it? What surprised you about the neighborhood and the people who live there? How did his tour change your perceptions of him and his friends?



Create two identity charts for Pounloeu—one that shows him at the start of the film and other at the end of the film. Compare and contrast the two charts. What aspects of Pounloeu’s identity have changed? How do you account for those changes? How do the two charts help explain the title of the film: “Who I Became”? What does Pounloeu’s story suggest about the way individuals grow and change?



Marian Wright Edelman, the founder of the Children’s Defense Fund, has written, “Too many people—of all colors, and all walks of life—are growing up today unable to handle life in hard places, without hope, without adequate attention, and without steady internal compasses to navigate the morally polluted seas they must face on the journey to adulthood.” To what extent does her observation apply to Pounloeu? Who are the individuals, groups, and institutions in the film that help him “handle life in hard places”? How much courage did it take for him to accept their help so that he could change his life? What motivated him to make the change?



Pounloeu Chea displays a certificate showing that he completed his job training program  
Credit: Pounloeu Chea

Vietnam invaded Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge responded to the attack by arming children and sending them into battle. Most did not survive. Pounloeu and his family managed to flee the country. They lived in a refugee camp in Thailand for a time before coming to the United States. How do you think the chaos of his earliest years may have shaped Pounloeu’s identity? What effect do you think his parents’ return to Cambodia had on the way he saw himself? How may it have strengthened his ties to the people in his neighborhood? In what sense does he see them as *family*? What do they offer him that he cannot seem to find elsewhere?

## “I Belong to This”

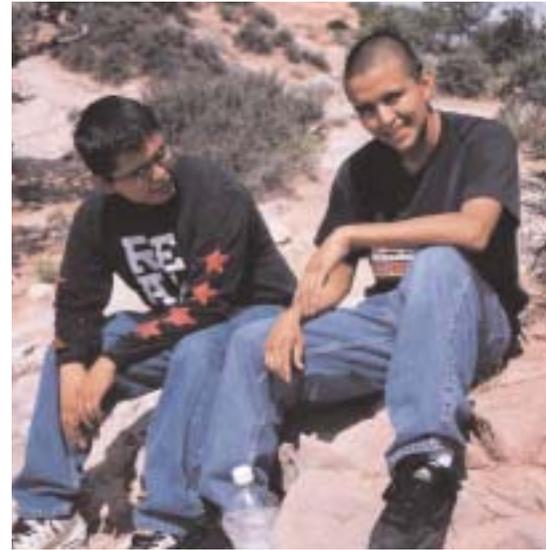
### Overview

“I Belong to This,” the final film in *MATTERS OF RACE*, is a personal look at culture and heritage. Filmmaker Dustinn Craig, a White Mountain Apache, lives in Tempe, Arizona, with his wife Velma, a Navajo, and their four children. The couple considers what aspects of their cultural heritage they would like to pass on to their children.

### Curriculum Connections

The film may be used in US history, literature, anthropology, sociology, and ethnic studies courses to explore the way history and culture shape the choices parents make about their children.

**Central Question:** How do parents decide which parts of their heritage to pass on to their children?



Dustinn Craig and his brother Nephi share childhood stories  
Credit: Dustinn Craig

## CONNECTIONS

### I BELONG TO THIS

Reread the poem “The Past” by Ha Jin in the PreView section. How does Dustinn Craig view the relationship between past and present? Between culture and identity? How do his answers explain the title of the film? What does Craig mean when he says, “When you’re outside you adapt, but there are always costs. Some of those costs I’ve carried into adulthood? What are the costs of adapting? Of leaving the place he considers “home,” the place “where my history lives”? What does he suggest may be the costs of staying on the reservation?



As Craig struggles to find a place for himself and his family, he tells three stories—how he acquired a gerbil in third grade, a family debate as to

whether his daughter Ashlee will have a sunrise dance, and his return to the reservation for his uncle’s funeral. What insights does he gain from each of these incidents? How do they lead to the following conclusion?

How we choose to teach our children is where real power lies. I know my children will be different from me. But I have a feeling that those differences will be the strengths we longed for.

What does he mean? What do his remarks suggest about the way he defines the relationship between past and present, identity and culture? If you were to make a film entitled “I Belong to This,” what stories would you tell? How have those stories shaped your efforts to find a place for yourself in society?

# Reflections

MATTERS OF RACE tells a variety of stories, some familiar and some not.

- Which stories did you find most memorable? What qualities set those stories apart? Which stories surprised you? Which did you find disturbing?
- What do the stories have in common? What does each reveal about “matters of race”? How has each challenged your ideas about race and racism?
- What did you learn from the series about race? About yourself and the way you view the world?
- What did you learn from the series about what it means to be an American?

Discuss your observations with friends and classmates. Was everyone struck by the same stories? How do you account for differences?



Brief biographies of the filmmakers begin on page 3. If you were to meet them, what questions would you ask them? What would you like them to know about your stories, your experiences with race?



Actor and playwright Anna Deavere Smith believes that we can learn a lot about a person “in the very moment that language fails them.” In which films do we see moments when “language fails”? What do those moments reveal? How do they help us see the individual beyond the stereotypes?



Director Martin Scorsese once told film critic Gene Siskel about the concept of a “master image”—one frame that can summarize an entire film. What image summarizes each of the films you watched? Share your ideas with your classmates. How similar are the choices each of you made? How do you account for differences?



Revise the working definitions of race and racism that you began in the PreView section to reflect what you learned from the film and your discussions about it. How does race and racism both shape and misshape communities today? How can we begin to bridge the divide within communities to create a civil society that respects and values all of its citizens?

## For Further Reading

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Martinez, Ruben. *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail*. Picador, 2002.

Senna, Danzy. *Caucasia*. Penguin Putnam, 1999.

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