

Lesson Plan 3:

Senate Debate on Scientific Racism

Grades

6-8, 9-12, College 100 level

Description

Students will watch the segment of "The First Measured Century" tape on scientific racism. They will collect data on the two views (eugenics and its opponents) and research immigration laws resulting from the debates of the time period (1924). The class will be divided into three groups for a re-enactment of the debate on the floor of the U.S. Senate in 1924 about restricting immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, believed by some at the time to be the home of inferior races.

Learning Objectives

By fully participating in this lesson, students will be able to:

- (1) explain the ideas of "scientific racism";
- (2) explain the counter-argument by anthropologists;
- (3) explain the empirical test of these two ideas by Franz Boas;
- (4) explain why America restricted immigration in 1925; and
- (5) develop their own version of laws resulting from the arguments.

Time Required

This lesson is expected to require approximately 7 hours of class time.

Materials and Resources

NOTE: You will need to have Adobe Acrobat installed on your computer to access the Student Worksheets. You may download Adobe Acrobat free of charge at <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html>.

For this lesson you will need:

1. Computers connected to the internet for conducting research and to access "The First Measured Century" website.

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2. Television, VCR, and videotape of the first hour of "The First Measured Century," which can be purchased at <http://www.shop.pbs.org>, ordered by phone by calling 1-800-PLAY-PBS, or recorded during the broadcast:

The First Measured Century Premieres on PBS Wednesday December 20th, 2000 from 8:30 to 11:30 PM Check your local listings at:
<http://www.pbs.org/whatson/index.html>

Schools are permitted to tape The First Measured Century and use the program for educational purposes for one year following each PBS broadcast. Additional information about teacher taping rights can be found at PBSTeachersource:
http://www.pbs.org/teachersource/copyright/copyright_trights.shtm.

Teaching Strategy

Class Session 1

1. Prepare for the lesson by queuing "The First Measured Century" tape 1 to the "Scientific Racism" segment which is approximately 16 minutes into the tape and begins with Ben Wattenberg played bocce in Little Italy. The first segment last around 18 minutes.

2. Once the video is set to begin, prepare students for learning by discussing

- definitions and concepts of racism, eugenicists, immigration laws;
- how people might change physically and mentally in different surroundings or in different circumstances;
- reasons for immigration to the U.S.;
- and concepts of liberty and freedom.

3. Watch the video segment.

4. Hold a post-viewing discussion to see how well students learned the concepts of scientific racism. Questions might be:

- Was Frederick Jackson Turner in favor of immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe? Why not?
- How many races do Americans think of today? How many races did people think of in 1900?
- What is eugenics?
- What did eugenicists like Charles Davenport think would happen because of immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe?
- For eugenicists, biology was _____? What does this mean?
- Who was Franz Boas? What is Boas affectionately known as? What did Boas study? What did he discover?
- What did the eugenicists turn to measuring next?
- What were the 3 categories of mental defectives?
- Who was given the Alpha and Beta tests? What was the difference between the Alpha and Beta tests? Were the questions on the tests appropriate measures of intelligence? Why not?

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Class Sessions 2, 3 and 4

1. Divide the class into two groups of senators to debate the arguments, one group that will take on the opinion of the eugenicists, and the other will take on the viewpoint of anthropologists who think the eugenicists are wrong.
2. Provide the [handout](#) with the information about the positions and instructions for the two groups. Review with each group their understandings of each of the positions along with techniques for arguing a position that one may not believe in for the purpose of demonstration.
3. Direct students in conducting research on their argument. Additional information about scientific racism from the [segment transcript](#) and [interviews](#) can be found at the First Measured Century website at <http://www.pbs.org/fmc>.

Class Sessions 5, 6 and 7

1. Conduct the debate between the senators. Each side gets to present their case in turn, with rebuttals. Each student should speak at least once to present the findings of the group. Presentation of arguments by each student should be developed based on The National Origins Act (pro or con). Students should use posters created by the group to present data collected by the eugenicists or anthropologists to support their argument.
2. With the information provided by the two groups, each senator should then vote on the question presented.

For further discussion:

- If Boas proved that the “fixed and unchangeable” traits did not really exist, why did Congress pass the Act anyway? [Racial concerns were only one part of opposition to immigration. For example, labor unions opposed immigration because they thought it depressed wages, not because of any theory of “scientific racism.”]

Assessment Recommendations

1. Students should all participate in the discussion. You may wish to call on students who do not volunteer questions or responses during the discussion. Students should be able to provide answers to the discussion questions based on viewing the video.
2. Assess students participation in the debate. Students should be able to present convincing, well-researched arguments in favor of their position. Students should be able to present arguments based on the positions of the group represented regardless of their personal feelings on the subject. Each student should present data collected by the group presented.
3. Observe and assess how well students communicate, resolve differences and work together to accomplish the task.

Related Links

History of immigration legislation including the National Origins Act of May 26, 1924:
<http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/aboutins/statistics/LegisHist/>

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Super websites of resources about immigration to the United States;

The official Teacher Resources page at the U.S. Government's Immigration and Naturalization Service: <http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/aboutins/history/teacher/Resources.htm>

The Library of Congress webpage on "Immigration in American Memory":
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/features/immig/immig.html>

The National Immigration Forum
<http://www.immigrationforum.org/>

Anti-Immigration Acts:

<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/wpages/wpages/wpgs670/chinxact.htm>

<http://www-marine.stanford.edu/HMSweb/cea.htm>

Super website about Jane Addams and Hull House:
http://www.uic.edu/jaddams/hull/hull_house.html

Short, valuable webpage about Franz Boas:
http://kroeber.anthro.mankato.msus.edu/information/biography/abcde/boas_franz.html

see also: <http://www.ets.uidaho.edu/levine/u3s2p1.htm>

Extensions

You may extend this exercise by examining the present debate over immigration. Have the students discover the arguments made for and against immigration to America today.

Adaptations

For younger students you may provide them with printed research materials from which each student chooses one fact to create a visual of and present instead of developing a full argument.

Additional Resources

Books:

Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, revised edition (New York: Norton, 1996) Softcover
ISBN: 0393314251

Franz Boas, *Changes in the Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants* Washington, DC:
Government Printing Office: 1911

Relevant Standards

Standards for School Mathematics

From the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (www.nctm.org)

Communication

Instructional programs from prekindergarten through grade 12 should enable all students to—

- organize and consolidate their mathematical thinking through communication;
- communicate their mathematical thinking coherently and clearly to peers, teachers, and others;
- analyze and evaluate the mathematical thinking and strategies of others;
- use the language of mathematics to express mathematical ideas precisely.

Connections

Instructional programs from prekindergarten through grade 12 should enable all students to—

- recognize and use connections among mathematical ideas;
- understand how mathematical ideas interconnect and build on one another to produce a coherent whole;
- recognize and apply mathematics in contexts outside of mathematics.

Representation

Instructional programs from prekindergarten through grade 12 should enable all students to—

- create and use representations to organize, record, and communicate mathematical ideas;
- select, apply, and translate among mathematical representations to solve problems;
- use representations to model and interpret physical, social, and mathematical phenomena.

National Standards for History

From the National Center for History in the Schools (www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs)

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Era 6: The Development of the Industrial United States (1870-1900)

Standard 2: Massive immigration after 1870 and how new social patterns, conflicts, and ideas of national unity developed amid growing cultural diversity