**A & AA Summary**

**Mara Dahlberg**

African Americans are currently the largest minority population in the United States and they are the only population that did not originally immigrate here by their own free will. I believe that the implications of that one fact are significant and should be addressed, not dismissed. I do not believe that most African Americans are hoping for a heart-felt apology from me or you, or anyone 7 generations later. What I do think is that they, and many of us white people too, see a need for a shift in thinking as well as procedure, to see “disparate outcomes that persist and want to see everyone step up to address them” (Browne). Racism is so far ingrained in our society that many of us do not even see it, do not believe that it persists in our back yard, maybe in the south, but certainly not here in open-minded, nice MN. Unfortunately, it does and we need to wake up. We Minnesotans tend to hush-hush the unpleasantness of our world and that cycle needs to be broken. Ignoring – which remember, shares the same root as *ignorance* – a problem never makes it go away. The problem persists and/or gets worse. It’s up to us as responsible individuals to do what we can (Lewis).

Racist ideals can be found in nearly every part of our society, history, and way of thinking. Jefferson stated that “blacks and whites could never coexist in America because of "the real distinctions" which "nature" had made between the two races."  (Takaki) This is coming from the man praised for abolishing slavery and “saving” all of the black people. I am not making the claim that what Jefferson did was not an important step that America took. What I am suggesting is that his part was not so much that of a savior and not such a selfless humanitarian act as what it is depicted by our historical story books. There is more to this than the single story. It is our responsibility as educators to know it and to spread it.

Racism and consequential classism are a huge part of our societal organization. Historically blacks and whites of similar class have been intentionally kept apart, kept from identifying with each other and forming alliances against the oppression that they face. A complex web of historical threads has been woven to ensure that this way will continue for the good of those in power. It will not be easily disentangled. Though there is a real possibility of another way of being, of living together. We must encourage the “elimination of class exploitation which has made poor whites so desperate for small gifts of status, and has prevented that unity of black and white necessary for joint rebellion and reconstruction,” (Zinn) blurring the color line and joining together for the mutual benefit of accomplishment of shared goals and the betterment of everyone’s quality and way of life.

Lesson

African Americans in American Media

Mara Dahlberg

A Collaborative Classroom Learning, Social Action Activity

designed for Middle School Grades 5-7

Objectives:

Students will analyze the affects of media influence by researching and deconstructing messages pertaining to African Americans by popular news and information sources.

Students will produce a report or product that exposes stereotypes by gathering statistical and factual information from their assigned media source.

Students will generate a product designed to reduce stereotypical portrayal of African Americans in news or entertainment media and distribute their findings and suggestions, not only to their classmates through an oral report, but also out into the community.

Overview:

Students will be heterogeneously grouped into three learning teams. Each team will research statistics associated with how often and in what way African Americans are portrayed in their media source. They will find numerous example of the type of portrayal that they found to be most common. Specific stereotypes will be named. They will then report on the affect they imagine this has on African American youth. Their final product will consist of an alternative and more positive approach that could be taken when reporting on or targeting African American youth. Each group will present their project to the class and to one other designated group.

Team 1: Newspaper, using newspapers collected from various sources that represent cities large and small students will notice that black people reported on in articles about crime and violence far more than any other type of coverage. They will give numeric statistics and compare those statistics to the number of African Americans in our country (13%) to see if they are proportionately represented. They will use the internet to find real stories showing African Americans in positions of power and accomplishment. Suggest website: <http://atlantablackstar.com/2013/09/24/15-black-child-proteges-mainstream-media-doesnt-talk/> to get them started. They will produce and distribute a newspaper publication with a minimum of 4 pages to their class mates and school staff.

Team 2: Magazine, using popular magazines aimed specifically at black people (Ebony, Vibe, Upscale, more found at <http://www.blacknews.com/directory/black_african_american_magazines.shtml>) students will make note of themes, attitudes, news of interest, and hot topics. Special attention will be paid to advertisements. Then, looking at popular magazines not specifically aimed at African Americans such as Good Housekeeping, People, Teen Vogue, Martha Stewart Living, O, GQ, etc. students will make observations about any article or advertisement depicting a black person. Students will be asked to provide report on the advertisements and articles featuring African Americans in these magazines, how they were being portrayed, what types of products they were trying to be sold, if there were any overwhelmingly reoccurring overrepresentations (sports) or under representations (business professionals). Using this information students will then develop a strategic plan to include African Americans equally in all types of advertisements, informative and entertainment stories. Discrepancies in proportionate representation, lack of variance of occupation (mainly shown as athletes or musicians) and limited product marketing will be sited, with specific examples. This proposal will be drafted as a business letter and sent to three magazines of the students’ choosing.

Team 3: Television, Students in this group will each observe one hour of television which will include one news program and one sitcom during prime time hours. They will track the appearance of black people and note specifically the context and role in which they appeared. The group will reconvene and compare results. They will match their results with factual research based statistics and 2 internet articles on the subject, recommend <http://newsone.com/1453735/top-4-media-exploitations-of-black-children/> to get them started. They will speculate how this may affect young African American viewers. They will also speculate on how this portrayal may affect how society as a whole view black people. Using facts and examples gained in their research, this group will then write, produce, record and screen a special report on their topic. If there is an adult employee or parent in the school that would be open to being an expert voice to be interviewed briefly during the newscast this would be a great opportunity. Students, after obtaining parental permissions, will submit their newscast to Lakeland Public Television for airing consideration.

Closing:

After each group presents to the class lead students in a wrap-up discussion that engages students' critical thinking skills and elicits their emotional responses with the following four questions, most easily remembered through the acronym DICE: What disturbed you about what the information you uncovered during this exercise? What interested you? What confused you? What enlightened you?

Assessment:

* Project products will be assessed with individualized rubrics that students will have access to viewing in advance.
* Group members will participate in peer assessment by grading their group mates on attitude, work ethic, organizational skills and overall benefit to the project and product as a whole.
* Students will list their biggest ‘aha’ for each of the DICE categories (disturbed, interested, confused, & enlightened) on a peer observation sheet during and after each group’s final presentation of their project.

Time Allocation:

I expect this project, start to finish, to take a minimum of 3 - 45 minute class periods but no more than 5, with some research (television for example) needing to be done from home.

Reflection:

I will be conducting this lesson, with changes based on instructor feedback, after spring break and will report on how it went. \*The magazine section seems a bit messy or missing something, suggestions requested…

Resources & References:

* <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition>
* <http://mhs.mt.gov/research/>
* <http://newsone.com/1453735/top-4-media-exploitations-of-black-children/>
* <http://atlantablackstar.com/2013/09/24/15-black-child-proteges-mainstream-media-doesnt-talk/>
* <http://blackagendareport.com/content/medias-portrayal-black-youths-contributes-racial-tension>
* <http://www.rcgd.isr.umich.edu/prba/perspectives/winter2000/cwatkins.pdf>