

NEWS MEDIA AND SOCIETAL PERCEPTIONS



ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- How does racial bias in the media impact real-life policies and practices that affect the lives of African Americans? How does news coverage advance or perpetuate racism?
- How can we develop the ability to critically question representations of race in the media we consume?



OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Analyze images and news clips from The New York Daily News, The New York Post, The New York Times, and other newspapers (and movies) and discuss trends of how they report on a specific topic.
- Identify how the language that is used in news stories and newspaper headlines can shift perspectives and perceptions about people of color.
- Write a 1-page evidence-based summary that analyzes the impact of news coverage on people of color in news outlets and movies and how they shaped perceptions of cultures of people of color.



LEARNING STANDARDS

See the [standards alignment chart](#) to learn how this lesson supports New Jersey State Standards.



TIME NEEDED

75–90 minutes



MATERIALS

- Teacher Edition—Vocabulary Planning and Definitions
- Bring Back Our Death Penalty blog post:
<http://apps.frontline.org/clinton-trump-keys-to-their-characters/pdf/trump-newspaper.pdf>



VOCABULARY

CONTENT

Impact

The Exonerated Five

Inhumane

Demonize

Stop and Frisk Policy

Privilege

Minorities

ACADEMIC

Evidence

Argue

Challenge

Discuss

PROCEDURES

PART 1 Introduction (15 min): Knowledge Building

- 1** Say: *Today we will be answering the following questions:*
- *How does racial bias in the media impact real-life policies and practices that affect the lives of African Americans? How does news coverage advance or perpetuate racism?*
 - *How can we develop the ability to critically question representations of race in the media we consume?*

We will be looking at newspaper articles and clips from the movie “When They See Us,” and the documentary “A Most Violent Year.” We will also discuss and examine imagery that will allow us to think critically about the foundations for how anti-Blackness can be perpetuated in the media that we often consume. Before we begin, I want to gauge our knowledge. Have you seen the movie “When They See Us” or have you heard of the Exonerated Five, formerly known as The Central Park Five? (Allow students to respond. If they have seen or heard about the topic, clarify or correct their understanding.)

- 2** Say: *I want to set the context of the 1980s, New York City, and discuss laws that were put in place as a result. The 1980s greatly tested New York City’s strength and was deemed unsafe for many of its residents. People fled the city in record numbers to the outer suburbs (Long Island, upstate New York, etc.), government mismanagement caused financial instability in the city, and the introduction of crack cocaine caused a huge wave of drug addiction and violence. Photographers documented this era through many famous photographs. Here are a few examples. (Show students the slide show and allow them to react.)*

In small groups, please discuss two questions for the next 3 minutes: What do you notice? What impact do you think this had on residents living in New York City during this time? We will come together to hear responses from each group.

NOTE

The content of this lesson may have an emotional impact on students and educators. The Exonerated Five (formerly known as the Central Park 5), is an example of how people who are underrepresented are demonized in the media and often subject to the unfair and inhumane treatment, often as children, by law enforcement and those in power. When those emotions arise, first you can make space for everyone to process those emotions in a circle discussion, but don't let yourselves get stuck there. Bring students back to the essential questions and allow them to think critically about what they could do differently as changemakers.

- 3** Once students share responses to the two questions, confirm or build understanding about the context of New York City during the 1980s by showing students a 6.5-minute video clip: ***Content Warning* The video does make references to violence including gun violence.** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWI8mSPZeC0> (The video clip is also a part of the slide show). After the video, ask students to brainstorm what they think the local government did because of this context.
- 4** Say: *As a result of the crime that existed in New York City, the local government became reactive to crime by heavily profiling (give definition if needed) Black and Latinx people, particularly youth. This type of profiling made it possible for future laws such as stop and frisk to be permissible. The stop and frisk law allowed police and law enforcers to pull over, stop, or arrest anyone that they deemed suspicious. (Show graph in the slide show.) The New York Civil Liberties Union revealed that innocent New Yorkers have been affected by police stops and street interrogations more than 5 million times since 2002. Black and Latinx communities continue to be the target. At the height of stop and frisk in 2011, under the Bloomberg administration, over 685,000 people were stopped. **Nearly 9 out of 10 New Yorkers who were stopped under this law have been completely innocent.** (Source: NYCLU, 2019 Report). In lesson 9, the high school lesson for theme 3, you will learn about a youth-led campaign to change the stop and frisk law and other policing policies that included videos, murals, museum exhibits that had a real impact on local policy.*

PART 2

Content Analysis (40 min)

- 5** Set students up to transition into examining video and text evidence about the Exonerated Five. Tell students they will watch a video clip that involves some disturbing imagery and an important and equally disturbing topic. Also prepare students for this lesson by explaining the context of this moment in history.
- 6** Context: Trisha Meili's body was discovered in New York City's Central Park early in the morning on April 20, 1989. She had been out for a jog the night before. She was so badly beaten and repeatedly sexually assaulted that she remained in a coma for nearly two weeks and retained no memory of the attack. This led to protests and people calling for justice. Police made a quick arrest and convicted five Black and Latinx teens—Antron McCray, 15; Kevin Richardson, 15; Yusef Salaam, 15; Raymond Santana, 14; and Korey Wise, 16—who came to be known as the Central Park Five. Read more at <https://www.history.com/topics/1980s/central-park-five>.

NOTE

We recommend you preview all videos and make viewing decisions based on your particular students.

7 Say: *We are going to watch a few clips of an interview of 5 men who were labeled as criminals and convicted of a crime they did not commit. The clips are from the movie “When They See Us.” Is anyone familiar with this movie by Ava Duvernay? If so, please share what you know with the group.*

8 *They were between the ages of 14–16 years old. As you watch, please take notes, and answer the following questions:*

- *What were the circumstances that allowed for these young men to be arrested?*
- *What assumptions were made about these teenagers? Why?*
- *The news media described these teenagers as a wolf pack. They also used language such as “bloodthirsty,” “animals,” “savages,” and “human mutations.” How does this language impact the perception of these teens?*

9 Movie Clips:

- [When They See Us—Kevin Richardson—Police Interrogation Clip](#)
- [When They See Us ‘Holding Cell Scene’ | Netflix](#)
- [When They See Us | Clip | Netflix](#)

10 Allow students the opportunity to express how they feel after seeing those clips before moving on.

11 Say: *I want to layer our knowledge and introduce a full-page ad, written by Donald Trump for the New York Daily News. He also posted this same ad in The New York Times, the New York Post, and New York Newsday with the headline, “[Bring Back The Death Penalty. Bring Back Our Police!](#)”. The total cost of all the ads he took out was \$85,000. I will read the text aloud as you read along silently. Then you will go back to the article and re-read it, answering the additional questions below. In pairs, please share your responses and add to your notes and responses if you hear additional details that you may have missed.*

- *What impact might someone in power have on influencing the media?*
- *What is Donald Trump arguing in the ads? What evidence supports his argument?*
- *What’s the impact of this ad on innocent victims of police brutality?*

- 12** Students should work in pairs to read the ad handout and give responses to the guiding questions. Students will use this information and the information from their responses to the questions related to the clips to begin forming their own opinion about news media and its influence on the perception of people of color.

PART 3

Writing (30 min)

- 13** Students will write a 1-page summary that analyzes the impact of news coverage on people of color in news outlets and movies and how it shapes perceptions of cultures of people of color. The summary must include textual evidence or evidence from the videos. The focus of the summary must answer the following questions:

- How does the news media impact the perceptions of people of color? What evidence supports your claims? What needs to change and what needs to stay the same when reporting information via news outlets (newspapers, tv, social media, etc.)?

PART 4

Share/Closing (5 min)

- 14** Each student will pair with another student and read their summaries to each other. They will give each other feedback on their work by sharing 1 form of praise and 1 connection they have to their work.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- + To understand the adultification of Black children, specifically girls, see- *Girlhood Interrupted* (Erasure of Black Girls Childhood):
<https://genderjusticeandopportunity.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/girlhood-interrupted.pdf>
- + The Exonerated Five (formerly Central Park Five):
<https://www.history.com/topics/1980s/central-park-five>



Teacher Edition: Vocabulary Definitions

This document is meant to serve to build teacher knowledge and capacity. Please use the following document to know and understand the vocabulary for this lesson. Review and define these terms before teaching your lesson to help better understand and frame the content. There is also space to add any context necessary for your students.

Word	Definition	Teacher Notes/Context
CONTENT VOCABULARY		
Impact		
The Exonerated 5		
Inhumane		
Dehumanize		
Stop and Frisk policy		
Privilege		
Minorities		
ACADEMIC VOCABULARY		
Evidence		
Argue		
Challenge		
Discuss		

THEME 1

THEME 2

THEME 3

How can media be used to advance social justice? How can we connect our learning from the entire unit?

“Every generation leaves behind a legacy. What that legacy will be is determined by the people of that generation. What legacy do you want to leave behind?”

—John Lewis

Across That Bridge: A Vision for Change and the Future of America

The final theme of this unit calls for students to be highly engaged, collaborative, and focused on an authentic purpose to use their voice for social justice. Creating a media campaign and voicing concerns to local politicians is a great way to engage students in social justice through writing and the use of social media. They can relate to real-life situations and issues that not only impact them directly but also impact the greater Black community. This can also be a space to integrate critical pedagogy by posing questions and allowing students to question positional authority. They will be able to use their voice in a safe environment that will prepare them for any social engagement or occurrences outside of the school. Students will be able to build the following skills: community, leadership, scholarship, and collective responsibility. Lastly, you will be providing students with an opportunity to engage in collaborative learning that will be used to impact real change.

To support these lessons, it is recommended that teachers read the following texts and interviews to support their own understanding:

→ [Classroom Activists: How Service-Learning Challenges Prejudice: This interview with teacher Lisa Weinbaum accompanies her Teaching Tolerance article “At Risk’ of Greatness.](#)

→ [Service-Learning and Prejudice Reduction](#)

In grades 3–5, students will create a class campaign that focuses on a topic that advances social justice for the media representation of Black people. Students will discuss what they notice and wonder about how Black people are represented in the media and target specific tv broadcasts and commercials that perpetuate stereotypical ideals of Blackness. Students will also research companies and government entities and write a letter to their offices as a call to action.

In grades 6–8, students will create a class campaign for social media that addresses food insecurity in Black communities which is an issue that is often overlooked, but many people are affected by it. Students will connect to previous lessons by recognizing a problem, researching ways to improve it, and using their voices to advocate for change. Students will learn about how Black communities are impacted by food insecurity and read about Black inventors who fought for agricultural self-reliance. Students will have the option of creating a short group video. Students may also choose to, with the permission of the school administrators, create a class Instagram/Facebook page that highlights Black communities impacted by food insecurities and what the students wish to bring attention to as a call to action.

In grades 9–12, students will create a class hashtag through a series of tweets to local politicians to bring awareness to an issue that impacts Black communities. Students will read about the impact of hashtags on social mobility and use this knowledge to create a standout hashtag worthy of trending on social media. Students will use their voices to advocate for issues of their choice that impact Black residents in high-needs communities affected by high poverty, crime, lack of educational resources, and lack of access to fresh produce. Students will learn that change starts with them, no matter how small. Students will walk away as changemakers in their society with a higher sense of self and collective responsibility.