

**GENTRIFICATION**

**WHEN DID YOU BECOME GAY?**

**APPROPRIATION VS. APPRECIATION**

**WELFARE**

**WHITE PRIDE**

**WHAT ARE YOU?**

**MODEL MINORITY**

**RACE CARD**

**CODE WORDS**

**FEMINISM**

**WHAT I HEAR  
WHEN YOU SAY**

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**VIEWING GUIDE**

**WHAT ARE YOU?**



## AN INTRODUCTION TO **WHAT I HEAR WHEN YOU SAY**

Deeply ingrained in human nature is a tendency to organize, classify, and categorize our complex world. Often, this is a good thing. This ability helps us make sense of our environment and navigate unfamiliar landscapes while keeping us from being overwhelmed by the constant stream of new information and experiences.

When we apply this same impulse to social interactions, however, it can be, at best, reductive and, at worst, dangerous. Seeing each other through the lens of labels and stereotypes prevents us from making authentic connections and understanding each other's experiences.

Through the initiative, What I Hear When You Say ( WIHWYS ), we explore how words can both divide and unite us and learn more about the complex and everchanging ways that language shapes our expectations, opportunities, and social privilege. WIHWYS 's interactive multimedia resources challenge what we think we know about race, class, gender, and identity, and provide a dynamic digital space where we can raise difficult questions, discuss new ideas, and share fresh perspectives.

# WHAT ARE YOU?



“ When someone asks me ‘what are you’ I think what they’re really trying to say is... you need to help me label you, so I feel comfortable.

Kate Rigg, Comedian

def·i·ni·tion  
**WHAT ARE YOU**  
question

a common inquiry made in order to learn about a person’s ethnic background or identity.

What’s the intent behind a simple question like, “What are you?” Join Actor, Comedian, and Writer, Kate Rigg; Professor, Ann Morning; and Journalist, Documentarian, and Executive Producer, Soledad O’Brien as they share their own stories about living within intersecting identities and explore how we perceive (and count) who belongs.



Watch the full episode “What Are You?”  
[pbs.org/what-i-hear/web-series/what-are-you](https://pbs.org/what-i-hear/web-series/what-are-you)

## A QUICK LOOK AT WHO WE ARE

- As the language related to race evolves, we gain a more nuanced understanding of the U.S. population: In 1960, 88.6% of Americans identified as White, 10.5% as Black, and less than 1% as other. In 2010, 75% of Americans identified as White, (either alone, or in combination with one or more other races), 13% as Black, 16% as Latino, and 5.6% as Asian.<sup>1 2 3 4 5</sup>
- U.S. Census projections show that multicultural populations will become the numeric majority by year 2044 and by the year 2020 for U.S. Children.<sup>6</sup>
- According to a 2015 Pew Research Center survey, 25% of mixed-race adults say people are “often or sometimes confused by their racial background”. And 19% say they felt like they were “a bridge between different racial groups”.<sup>7</sup>

## DIG DEEPER | THE U.S. CENSUS AND AMERICAN IDENTITY

“ When the census and all kinds of official forms change the categories, millions of people automatically get their race changed over night... It really has everything to do with how we count and how we choose to identify ourselves.

Ann Morning, Professor



The United States has been grappling with the question, “What are you?” for over 200 years.

In 1790, Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson, created the first U.S. census to assemble an official count of the country’s population.<sup>8</sup> In addition to gathering basic data--age, gender, place of residence, etc.--the 3.9 million inhabitants of this newly formed country were asked to define themselves according to one of the following five categories<sup>9</sup>:

- Free White male of 16 years and upward
- Free White male under 16 years
- Free White female
- All other free persons
- Slave

The selection of these categories reveals almost as much about the nation and its priorities as the data they collected. Through this census, we get a glimpse of a fledgling country defined by an idea of Whiteness, reliant on an economy of chattel slavery, and concerned about the nation’s economic and military potential.<sup>10</sup> We also begin to understand how the language used in the census reinforced social status and shaped access to economic and political rights and privileges.

## WHAT CHANGED?

The methods and language used to ask, “What are you?” in the U.S. Census have changed and expanded in response to shifting political, economic, and social priorities.

Prior to 1970, people could not self-determine their own race.<sup>11</sup> Census-takers would go door-to-door to collect data and were instructed to complete the “race” or “color” category by ‘observation’.<sup>12</sup> For Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, or other persons of Latinx descent, this meant they would be classified as “White” unless they were definitively perceived as “Negro,” “Indian,” or “some other race”.<sup>13</sup> As a result, the scope of the Latinx and Hispanic populations was concealed for decades, and the community’s participation in U.S. society before 1970 has been, at least partially, erased.

## WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The modern census continues to raise questions about who should be included, and how we classify each other and ourselves.

When the option to select more than one racial group was introduced in 2000, many civil rights advocates protested. Although this new option would help to reveal the extent to which the U.S. population is mixed-race, there was also concern that this data would “dilute” the demographics of Black and Latinx communities and weaken institutional safeguards implemented to combat racial injustice.<sup>14</sup>

In 2017, proposals to introduce a category for “Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity” in the 2020 census were withdrawn, raising concerns about the ongoing lack of data on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, etc. (LGBTQIA+).<sup>15</sup> The Census Bureau’s director at the time, John Thompson, stated, “Our review concluded there was no federal data need to change the planned census and [American Community Survey] subjects.”<sup>16</sup> LGBTQIA+ advocates and service providers argue that the community’s exclusion compromises their access to constitutionally guaranteed rights and services and diminishes their political voice.<sup>17 18</sup>

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

An accurate and comprehensive census is mandated in Article One, Section II of the United States Constitution, and the process is critical because it has a direct impact on the political and economic well-being of the community. Census data helps to determine the number of seats each state has in the U.S. House of Representatives and how federal resources for services such as education, affordable housing, job training, social services, infrastructure, and other community projects are allocated. In order to count, we need to be counted.



### Learn more about the United States Census:

United States Census Bureau: <https://www.census.gov/>

Pew Research Center: <http://www.pewresearch.org/topics/u-s-census/>



Hear different perspectives on the Topic, "What Are You?"  
[pbs.org/what-i-hear/topics/what-are-you](https://www.pbs.org/what-i-hear/topics/what-are-you)

## QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

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- What do people mean when they ask, "What are you?"
- Have you ever had someone ask you that question? What do you think they wanted to know? How did you respond? (Have you ever asked someone else that question? If so, what motivated you? What did you want to know? How did the person respond?)
- How do identity labels inform how we interact with each other?
- What does it mean to "take back your voice"? How can we amplify the voices of marginalized communities?
- If you were curious to learn more about someone, how could you reframe or replace the question, "What Are You?"

## LEARN MORE

### TWO SPIRITS

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/two-spirits/>

Two Spirits explores the life and murder of a Navajo boy who was also a girl.

### LITTLE WHITE LIE

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/little-white-lie/>

Documentary filmmaker, Lacey Schwartz's personal story about dual identity, race and the legacy of family secrets, denial, and redemption.

### KUMU HINA

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/kumu-hina/>

The story of Hina WongKalu, a transgender native Hawaiian teacher and cultural icon who brings to life Hawaii's longheld embrace of mahu—those who embody both male and female spirit.

## VOICES FROM THE EPISODE | WHAT ARE YOU?



**Kate Rigg**  
Comedian & Writer

Recurring actor on Law and Order and Family Guy

Has attended Montreal Just for Laughs Festival, the Toyota Comedy Festival and The Marshalls Women in Comedy Festival

Co-creator and executive producer of the reality competition "Dance Your A\*\* Off"

Activist and inspirational speaker for underrepresented youth, women's rights Mixed race and Asian American causes.

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**Ann Morning**  
Professor

Associate Professor of Sociology at NYU

Member of U.S. Census Committee

Popularized concept of transracial identity in Dolezal/NAACP controversy

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**Soledad O'Brien**  
Journalist, Documentarian  
& Executive Producer

Anchor and producer for NBC, CNN & HBO

Founder of Starfish Media Group

NABJ's Journalist of the Year

Awarded multiple Emmy, Peabody, and Alfred I. duPont awards

Visit [pbs.org/whatihear](https://www.pbs.org/whatihear) for a detailed Viewing Guide on every topic.



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# MODEL MINORITY



“ There is a public perception of Asian American’s being wholly successful and without problems... when in fact we’re a very diverse community with many problems.

Pearl Parks, Filmmaker

def·i·ni·tion  
**MODEL MINORITY**  
noun

A minority group whose members are perceived to achieve a higher degree of socioeconomic success than the population average.

Join Comedian, Helen Hong; Filmmaker, Pearl Park; and Activist Christopher Punonbgayan as they discuss how the Model Minority stereotype has affected their lives and how the Model Minority myth acts as a wedge between Asian Americans and other minority communities.



**Watch the full episode:** Model Minority  
[pbs.org/what-i-hear/web-series/model-minority/](https://pbs.org/what-i-hear/web-series/model-minority/)

## A QUICK LOOK AT THE MODEL MINORITY MYTH

- Approximately 20.1 million Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders live and work in the United States, and they represent over 30 countries and ethnic groups that speak over 100 different languages.<sup>1 2 3</sup>
- Asian Americans are among the fastest growing groups in the United States. As of 2014, Asian Americans made up 5.4% of the total population and is expected to more than double in size by 2060 to 9.3%.<sup>4</sup>

- As of 2015, 87.1% of Asian American/Pacific Islander students graduate high school. However, there is an achievement gap within this broad group. More than 30% of Southeast Asian Americans drop out of high school.<sup>5 6</sup>
- Asian American teachers represent only 2% of the nation's teachers even though Asian American students make up 4.4% of the student population.<sup>7 8</sup>
- Wealth inequality among Asian Americans is greater than that among White Americans and has grown over time. Asian Americans with wealth in the top 10%, earn 168 times more than Asian Americans in the bottom 20%. Whereas White Americans in the top 10% earn 121 times more than the bottom 20%.<sup>9</sup>
- Asian American college students report high incidents of anxiety and depression, due in part to the Model Minority stereotype, and are less likely to seek mental health support.<sup>10 11 12 13</sup>

## **DIG DEEPER | FOREVER FOREIGN AND MODEL MINORITY**

In the early 1970s, historian and civil rights activist Yuji Ichioka coined the term “Asian American” to help unify diverse Asian ethnic groups and increase Asian visibility and political strength.<sup>14</sup> Despite Ichioka’s positive intentions, this umbrella term often masks the diversity within and across Asian communities and reinforces stereotypes associated with a monolithic view of Asians in America.

### **THE MYTH OF THE MODEL MINORITY**

Although the Model Minority myth appears to be positive, like most stereotypes, it is limiting and damaging. The Model Minority myth implies that all Asian-Americans are high-achieving, hardworking, quiet and non-confrontational and have overcome the challenges of immigration and minority status. In the process, it dismisses the complex and historic experiences of racism faced by many Asian Americans and pits minority communities against each other.

The term “Model Minority” emerged in the 60s, at the height of the Civil Rights movement, and was used as a wedge to justify anti-Black bias and isolate marginalized communities.<sup>15</sup> According to Janelle Wong, the director of Asian American Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park, the Model Minority strategy works by:

1. “Ignoring the role that selective recruitment of highly educated Asian immigrants has played in Asian American success” such as the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 which gave preferences to highly-skilled applicants from Asia.
2. “Making a flawed comparison between Asian Americans and other groups, particularly Black Americans, to argue that racism, including more than two centuries of Black enslavement, can be overcome by hard work and strong family values.”<sup>16</sup>

In addition to reinforcing racial stigmas, the Model Minority myth also ignores the diversity of the Asian American experience as well as the personal and institutional racism faced by many Asian Americans.

Despite the stereotype, Asian Americans represent both ends of the achievement spectrum. When viewed as a single group, Asian Americans seem to hold the highest median income and education levels of any communities of color in the United States. In reality, many communities under the Asian American umbrella, specifically Southeast Asian and Pacific Islanders, are more likely to live below the poverty line and less likely to graduate from high school than other minority groups.<sup>17</sup>

The Model Minority myth also has a silencing effect that endangers the most vulnerable members of the population. Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander women aged 15 to 24, as well as women over 65, have the highest rates of suicide among all women across all ethnic and racial groups in the nation.<sup>18 19</sup> The Model Minority myth obscures this reality and makes it more difficult for youth and adults in these communities to access the resources and support they need.

## FOREVER FOREIGN

Asian Americans have been part of America's story for more than four centuries, but they continue to be seen as outsiders and foreigners. This ongoing stereotype of Asian Americans as "forever foreign" has its roots in the long, often contentious, history of American immigration, assimilation, and identity.

Throughout our history, periods of economic uncertainty have fueled anti-immigrant sentiments and stoked fears that foreign communities were displacing 'American' workers and undermining their way of life. In the mid-1800s, anti-immigrant groups, including the Workingman's Party and the Supreme Order of Caucasians, singled-out Asian immigrants who they believed were driving down wages and failing to assimilate.<sup>20</sup> Through aggressive propaganda and violent agitation, they fuelled anti-Asian fears and led public campaigns to halt Asian immigration and limit immigrant rights.<sup>21</sup> In response, the United States government enacted The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first American law to prohibit immigration solely on the basis of race or national origin.<sup>22 23</sup>

In the decades that followed, anti-Asian hostility and distrust intensified and drove increasingly severe restrictions on immigration and immigrant rights. The Immigration Act of 1924 introduced quotas for the entire Eastern Hemisphere and ushered in a period of near complete exclusion of Asian immigration to the United States.<sup>24</sup> In response to anti-Japanese sentiment during World War II, the U.S. government incarcerated more than 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry—including U.S. citizens and legal residents—in remote internment camps.<sup>25</sup>

With the rise of the civil rights movement in the 1950s, anti-Asian policies came under scrutiny and their Constitutional legitimacy was challenged. Finally in 1965, The Hart-Celler Immigration and Naturalization Act overturned more than a century of anti-Asian legislation but the view of Asian Americans as outsiders and "forever foreign" has endured.<sup>26</sup>

## QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

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- What does it mean to be a Model Minority?
- In what ways are the Model Minority and Forever Foreign stereotypes damaging for Asian American communities?
- How does the Model Minority myth isolate Asian Americans from other marginalized communities?
- What are some ways that we can diffuse racial stereotypes like the “Model Minority”?



Hear different perspectives on the Topic, Model Minority  
[pbs.org/what-i-hear/topics/model-minority/](https://www.pbs.org/what-i-hear/topics/model-minority/)

## LEARN MORE

### **ASIAN AMERICANS: MYTH OF THE MODEL MINORITY**

<http://www.pbs.org/video/america-numbers-model-minority-myth/>

This PBS: America By The Numbers documentary examines the Model Minority myth and the education achievement gap among Asian American communities

### **SOUTHEAST ASIA RESOURCE ACTION CENTER (SEARAC)**

[www.searac.org/](http://www.searac.org/)

A national advocacy organization for Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese Americans

### **ASIAN NATION: ASIAN AMERICAN HISTORY, DEMOGRAPHICS AND ISSUES**

[www.asian-nation.org/](http://www.asian-nation.org/)

A sociological resource on the historical, political, demographic, and cultural issues of the Asian American community



## VOICES FROM THE EPISODE | MODEL MINORITY



**Helen Hong**  
Comedian

Performed standup comedy on Last Call with Carson Daly, The Arsenio Hall Show, Comics Unleashed with Byron Allen and Wanda Sykes Presents Herlariou

Plays Janet Fung in the Coen Brothers' film Inside Llewyn Davis

Played roles on Parks and Recreation, Bones, Pretty Little Liars, New Girl, and Inside Amy Schumer



**Pearl Park**  
Filmmaker

Produced award-winning documentary Can

Invitee of community gatherings on Asian American mental health sponsored by the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (WHIAAPI)

Executive board member of Asian American Women Media Makers



**Christopher Punonbgayan**  
Activist

Recognitions from Ford, Strauss, & Gerbode Foundations for his work with Asian American Advancing Justice

Serves on Community Advisory Panel of KQED

Served as Vice-Chair of the San Francisco Immigrant Rights Commission

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# CODE WORDS



“ When you say the word thug... that’s going to color people’s perception of young black males.

Hari Kondabolu, Comedian

def·i·ni·tion  
**CODE WORD**  
noun

a euphemistic or politically acceptable catchword or phrase used instead of a blunter or less acceptable term

Join comedian, Hari Kondabolu; professor & author, Pedro Noguera; and artist, Bayeté Ross Smith as they explore the current function and long history of American’s use of “code words”. Through storytelling, analysis, and humor, we explore the legacy of coded language and its impact on social and political discourse today.



**Watch the full episode:** Code Words

<http://pbs.org/what-i-hear/web-series/code-words/>

## A QUICK LOOK AT CODED LANGUAGE

- Dog Whistle Language uses code words for political purposes with the goal of covertly conveying an often controversial message to a target audience. The term refers to the high-frequency dog whistles that can be heard by dogs but not humans.<sup>1</sup>
- Gendered Code Words are terms and phrases that are used for individuals who are female/female-identifying than for individuals who are male. The use and prevalence of gendered code words in the workplace has been a focus of several recent studies, including an evaluation of 23 tech companies by linguist and tech

professional, Kieran Snyder in 2014, and hundreds of tech and professional-service performance reviews by Stanford University's Clayman Institute for Gender Research in 2015. Snyder's review found that negative language related to personality--such as "bossy", "abrasive", and "aggressive"--showed up in more than 75% of performance reviews of female employees and only twice in reviews for male employees. While Stanford's research has found that women received 2.5 times the amount of feedback about "aggressive communication styles" than men.<sup>2 3</sup>

- Law and Order first emerged as a coded phrase during the civil rights era and was used to stoke fear about civil unrest and discredit and signal opposition to protests and civil disobedience, especially those organized in urban communities by Black and Latinx activists.<sup>4 5</sup>

## DIG DEEPER | DECODING "THUG"

“ That's how awful racism is, a word with Indian origins is used to hurt Black people today.

Hari Kondabolu, Comedian

During a press conference in early 2014, Seattle Seahawks football player Richard Sherman was asked how he felt about regularly being referred to as a "thug" on social media. He responded, "The reason it bothers me is because it seems like it's an accepted way of calling somebody the N-word now. It's like everybody else said the N-word and then they say 'thug' and that's fine...So I'm really disappointed in being called a thug."<sup>6</sup>

John McWhorter, Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, shares a similar analysis of thug as a racialized code word.<sup>7</sup> In 2015, following the acquittal and release of the six Baltimore Police Department officers implicated in the death of Freddie Grey, small factions of the spontaneous public protest escalated into civil unrest. In the wake of the violence, President Barack Obama,

Governor Larry Hoga, Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, and others labeled the African-American youth who participated in the riots as “thugs”. Mayor Rawlings-Blake later expressed her regret at using that word due to its racial implications.<sup>8</sup>

In an interview the following week, McWhorter explained, “the truth is that thug today is a nominally polite way of using the N-word. Many people suspect it, and they are correct. When somebody talks about thugs ruining a place, it is almost impossible today that they are referring to somebody with blond hair. It is a sly way of saying there go those black people ruining things again. And so anybody who wonders whether thug is becoming the new N-word doesn’t need to. It most certainly is.”<sup>9</sup>

## THE HISTORY OF THUGS

Despite the contemporary, racial connotations of thug, resources like Merriam-Webster Dictionary formally define it as “a brutal ruffian or assassin”.<sup>10</sup> This definition hints at the word’s roots in India, where as far back as the 14th century, variations of the Hindi word “thug” or “thuggee” were recorded as meaning thief, swindler, or assassin.<sup>11</sup>

The “Thuggee Cult” or “Thugs”--gangs of professional assassins and highwaymen--were said to have operated throughout India for centuries. In the 19th century colonial British leaders reported that they rounded up 4,000 Thugs, convicted over 2,000, and in the process eradicated the Thuggee threat. Modern historians, however, have raised questions about the British version of events. They suggest that the existence and/or scope of the Thuggee Cult may actually have been an invention of the British colonizers and a convenient excuse for the violent suppression of local groups.<sup>12</sup>

Although the Thuggees were disbanded in India, their legend lived on in English-language literature and travel memoirs about South Asia, including Mark Twain’s, *Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World*. The word, thug, soon migrated to the United States through these stories, retaining aspects of its criminal and dissident heritage.



At first, the word thug was adopted by both pro- and anti-union factions in the late 19th and early 20th century to smear each other as violent brutes and agitators. Later, in the 1930s, thug became a more generalized label for a career criminal or gangster.<sup>13</sup>

By the 1960s and 1970s, thug was being used as a slur against civil rights and anti-war protesters. Activists and community leaders were dismissed as “thugs” at the same time that code words like “law and order” were being used to discredit social justice movements and acts of civil disobedience.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1980s, the film *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* revisited the Thuggee legend, portraying the Thugs as a sinister cult that abducted Indian children. The film’s negative depictions of Indians through grotesque and exaggerated stereotypes was widely criticized by the South Asian community.<sup>15</sup>

By the early 1990s, the word thug had been adopted by emergent Hip Hop culture, particularly through artists like Tupac Shakur and Bone Thugs-n-Harmony, but its association with the African-American community was fraught from the start. In her book *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop and Why It Matters*, Tricia Rose writes: “The thug both represents a product of discriminatory conditions and embodies behaviors that injure the very communities from which it comes.”<sup>16</sup>

## **THUG IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

Today, thug is a hyper-racialized word whose long history as an epithet for criminals, agitators, and gangsters reinforces its power to dehumanize the individuals and communities labeled with it. When organizers and activists are dismissed as “thugs”, it undermines their civic power and the legitimacy of their grievance. As Megan Garber, reporter for *The Atlantic*, explained: “In some sense, the history of language is about people trying to wield power over other people,” she says. “[Thug is] this very effective way of suggesting that the people who are doing the rioting and who are being called thugs don’t actually have a right to their outrage.”<sup>17</sup>

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Public discourse is riddled with code words like “thug” that often have histories that are deeply rooted in stereotypes related to race, culture, class, religion, and gender. The use of coded language allows a speaker to deny any responsibility for the bias content of their messages while reinforcing their relationship with like-minded audience members.

When coded language is normalized in social interactions and political debates it can reinforce oppressive and often dangerous, social biases and in the process obscure the real issues.

## QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

---

- Have you heard/seen the media use code words? Share an example. What are the implications for the community or person being labeled?
- How has “White” functioned as a code word throughout our history?
- Why do you think some people respond to “Black Lives Matter” by saying “All Lives Matter”? What are they conveying? What impact does that have on conversations about racial justice?
- In your experience, what motivates people to use coded language?
- How would you engage in a discussion about code words with your community?



Hear different perspectives on the Topic of Code Words

<http://whatihear.lunchbox.pbs.org/web-series/code-words/>

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### WHO, ME? BIASED?

<https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/pov-biased-lpclips/who-me-biased/#.WbgmqoWeyys>

What is implicit bias? NYT/POV's Saleem Reshamwala unscrews the lid on the unfair effects of our subconscious.

### DEMYSTIFYING THE LANGUAGE OF GENDER

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/blog/demystifying-the-language-of-gender/>

A quick reference guide by PBS Independent Lens reference guide for language related to gender and identity

### THE TALK

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/the-talk>

A PBS documentary about the increasingly necessary conversation taking place in homes and communities across the country between parents of color and their children, especially sons, about how to behave if they are ever stopped by the police.

## VOICES FROM THE EPISODE | CODE WORDS



**Hari Kondabolu**  
Comedian

NYT has called him “one of the most exciting political comics in standup today”

Created standup album *Waiting for 2042*

NYU’s APA Institute’s “Artist in Residence” 2014-15

Standup on the Late Show with David Letterman, Conan, Jimmy Kimmel Live, Live at Gotham and John Oliver’s New York Standup Show



**Pedro Noguera**  
Professor & Author

Distinguished Professor of Education at the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at UCLA

Author of *The Trouble With Black Boys: And Other Reflections on Race, Equity and the Future of Public Education*

Commentor for CNN, MSNBC, NPR

Featured on CSPAN.org, This American Life

Has written for NYT, The Nation, Washington Post



**Bayeté Ross Smith**  
Artist

Educator at NYU, Parson, and The New School

Exhibited with the San Francisco Arts Commission, the Brooklyn Museum, MoMA PS1

Showcased at Sundance Film Festival for *Along The Way* and *Question Bridge*

Visit [pbs.org/whatihear](https://pbs.org/whatihear) for a detailed Viewing Guide on every topic.

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**GENTRIFICATION**

**WHEN DID YOU BECOME GAY?**

**APPROPRIATION VS. APPRECIATION**

**WELFARE**

**WHITE PRIDE**

**WHAT ARE YOU?**

**MODEL MINORITY**

**RACE CARD**

**CODE WORDS**

**FEMINISM**

**WHAT I HEAR  
WHEN YOU SAY**

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**VIEWING GUIDE**

**FEMINISM**



## AN INTRODUCTION TO **WHAT I HEAR WHEN YOU SAY**

Deeply ingrained in human nature is a tendency to organize, classify, and categorize our complex world. Often, this is a good thing. This ability helps us make sense of our environment and navigate unfamiliar landscapes while keeping us from being overwhelmed by the constant stream of new information and experiences.

When we apply this same impulse to social interactions, however, it can be, at best, reductive and, at worst, dangerous. Seeing each other through the lens of labels and stereotypes prevents us from making authentic connections and understanding each other's experiences.

Through the initiative, What I Hear When You Say ( WIHWYS ), we explore how words can both divide and unite us and learn more about the complex and everchanging ways that language shapes our expectations, opportunities, and social privilege. WIHWYS 's interactive multimedia resources challenge what we think we know about race, class, gender, and identity, and provide a dynamic digital space where we can raise difficult questions, discuss new ideas, and share fresh perspectives.

# FEMINISM

“ there should be equality between the sexes socially, culturally, politically across the board.

Jasmine Rivera, Filmmaker



def·i·ni·tion  
**FEMINISM**  
adjective

advocating social, political, legal, and economic rights for women equal to those of men.



**Watch the full episode:** Feminism

<http://pbs.org/what-i-hear/web-series/feminism/>

## A QUICK LOOK AT FEMINISM AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES

- A 2016 national survey by the Washington Post and Kaiser Family Foundation finds 6 in 10 women and one-third of men identify as feminists. Among women who identified as a feminist, 68% were between ages 50 and 54 while 51% were between 35 and 49.<sup>1</sup>
- More than 4 in 10 Americans see feminism as an angry movement that unfairly blames men for women's problems.<sup>2</sup>
- According to a World Economic Forum report, the United States has fallen in the global ranking of gender equality in politics from 66th place in 2006 to 73rd place in 2016.<sup>3</sup>
- In 2006, the U.S. ranked 3rd globally in economic gender equality, but by 2016, the U.S. ranking fell to 26th in the world. Women only earn 65% of men's incomes and this wage gap lands the U.S. below 50 other countries.<sup>4</sup>



- When asked in a poll to select “the bigger factor keeping women from achieving full equality with men” an equal percentage of women (44%) selected “The choices women make themselves” and “Discrimination against women”.<sup>5</sup>

## **DIG DEEPER | BECHDEL, MAKO MORI, AND EXAMINING INCLUSION IN MEDIA**

In her 1929 essay, *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf reflects on the portrayals of female relationships in some of her favorite books: “All these relationships between women, I thought...are too simple. So much has been left out, unattempted. And I tried to remember any case in the course of my reading where two women are represented as friends... They are, now and then, mothers and daughters. But almost without exception they are shown in their relation to men.”<sup>6</sup>

Fifty years later, in 1985, artist Alison Bechdel took up the same issue of women's representation, this time in cinema, through her comic *Dykes To Watch Out For*.<sup>7</sup> In the strip titled, “The Rule”, two characters are talking about going to see a movie and one explains that she only sees films that fulfill three “basic requirements”:

“One, it has to have at least two women in it who,  
Two, talk to each other about,  
Three, something besides a man.”<sup>8</sup>

Her friend responds that her rule is “pretty strict, but a good idea”, but they are unable to find any movies that fit this simple criteria and head home. (Original comic strip: <http://dykestowatchoutfor.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/The-Rule-cleaned-up.jpg>)

This comic inspired The Bechdel-Wallace Test (aka The Bechdel Test), a criteria for measuring women's representation in film and other media, named after Bechdel and her friend Liz Wallace, who originally suggested the idea for the “rule”.

Although the criteria for the Bechdel Test seem to set a fairly low bar, according to [BechdelTest.com](http://BechdelTest.com)--an independent site that crowdsources data using the Bechdel “requirements”--more than 40% of films fail to fulfill these basic standards.

## WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT GENDER REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA?

Despite the Bechdel Test inspiring some conversations around gender diversity in the media, independent projects like BechdelTest.com were the only wide-ranging sources of data on the topic, until recently.

In 2004, actor Gina Davis launched the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media to both study and educate the entertainment industry on issues related to representation.

In their 2014 study with the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, the Institute looked at popular films made from 2010 to 2013 in 11 countries and found that only 31% of named characters were female, and only 23% of the films had a female protagonist or co-protagonist. Women and female characters were also five times more likely to receive appearance-based comments than male characters, and only 7% of these films had female directors. <sup>9</sup>

A more recent 2015 study by USC Annenberg School of Journalism analyzed 700 popular films from 2007-2014, and found that only 30% of speaking characters were female, a ratio of over 2 to 1. They also found that only 11% of the films had gender balanced casts or featured girls/women in at least half of the speaking roles. In addition, in popular films from 2014, no female actors over the age of 45 performed lead or co-lead roles. <sup>10</sup>

In a 2016 “census” of screenplays for 2,000 popular movies, researcher Hanah Anderson and data scientist Matt Daniels found that men consistently have more lines than women across different genres of film. Their findings also corroborated an earlier study that, in 100% of Disney “princess films” made since 1989’s *The Little Mermaid*, male characters had substantially more lines than female characters. <sup>11</sup>

## BEYOND BECHDEL

Although the Bechdel Test has helped to launch a conversation about gender representation in the media, it has been criticised for having too narrow a focus that leaves out films with strong female leads such as *Gravity* and *Pacific Rim* and ignores issues of sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, etc. In response, a range of new media evaluation “tests” have been developed by fans and academics to work alongside and/or strengthen the Bechdel Test. Some examples are:

**The Mako Mori Test:** Inspired by the world-saving character from *Pacific Rim*, Mako Mori, played by Rinko Kikuchi, this test requires a film to have: 1) at least one female character; 2) who gets her own narrative arc; 3) that is not about supporting a man’s story.<sup>12</sup>

**The Vito Russo Test:** Named after GLAAD co-founder and film historian Vito Russo, who wrote *The Celluloid Closet*, this test requires a film or television show to have 1) a character that is identifiably lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender; 2) who is not be solely or predominantly defined by their sexual orientation or gender identity; 3) is tied to the plot in such a way that their removal would have a significant effect.<sup>13</sup>

**DuVernay Test:** Proposed by New York Times film critic Manohla Dargis in honor of filmmaker Ava DuVernay, this test examines representations of African-Americans and other minorities in film and media and evaluates the degree to which these characters have fully realized lives rather than serve as scenery in White stories.<sup>14</sup>

There is also a growing collection of media evaluation tools that analyze diversity and the quality of representation, including the Tauriel Test that evaluates the competency of professional female characters; the Woman in Refrigerators test that evaluates if a woman’s intense suffering is used to kickstart or progress the male protagonist’s storyline; and the The Sexy Lamp Test (SLT), inspired by the sexy leg lamp in *A Christmas Story*. The SLT was created by comic book writer Kelly Sue DeConnick to evaluate how substantial a female character is: “If you can replace your female character with a sexy lamp and the story still basically works, maybe you need another draft.”<sup>15</sup>

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

In addition to helping to raise conversations about the quantity of gender representation in the media, Alison Bechdel's comic strip also revealed a desire for better, more complex stories about women and how they relate to each other.

Like Virginia Woolf, the Bechdel Test and media tests that came after it are really examining who is included in our stories and how much they matter to that story and to the world they exist in. If diverse characters are fully developed people who matter to each other, they are far more likely to matter to an audience.

## QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

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- What does gender equality mean to you?
- What words do you associate with feminism? Do you identify as a feminist? Why or why not?
- In your opinion, why do some people feel uncomfortable being identified as a feminist?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of the Bechdel Test? Does passing the Bechdel Test mean that a movie is good?
- What do you think of the idea that everyone's feminism can be different? Do you agree, or do you think feminism needs to be uniform in order to be effective?
- What is "intersectional feminism"? How can intersectional feminism help to unite people from disparate backgrounds?



Hear different perspectives on the Topic of Feminism  
<http://pbs.org/what-i-hear/topics/feminism/>

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<http://www.pbs.org/show/makers-women-who-make-america/>

This documentary series examines how women have helped shape America over the past 150 years, striving for a full and fair share of political power and economic opportunity.

### **THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT**

[https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/the-womens-movement/#.WZ\\_SSIWeyys/](https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/the-womens-movement/#.WZ_SSIWeyys/)

The Women's Movement collection examines the first two waves of the campaign for equal opportunities for women in the United States in all areas of public and private life

### **THE THE CONTRARY**

<http://www.pbs.org/to-the-contrary/>

TCC is an all-female news analysis series covering national and international issues and policies.

## VOICES FROM THE EPISODE | FEMINISM



**Phoebe Robinson**  
Comedian, Writer & Actress

Author of NYT Best Seller *You Can't Touch My Hair*

Vulture.com, Essence, and Esquire have named one of the top comedians

Has appeared on Late Night w/ Seth Meyers, Last Call with Carson Daly, Conan, and Broad City



**Jasmine Rivera**  
Filmmaker

Director of awardwinning short *Nain Rouge*

2014 Film/Theatre Kresge Fellow

Writer, director and producer *American Prophet*

Member of Film Fatales Detroit



**Kristen Korvette**  
Author

Author of *Witches, Sluts, Feminists*

Founding editrix of Slutist, a sex positive feminist website

Lecturer at The New School

Visit [pbs.org/whatihear](https://pbs.org/whatihear) for a detailed Viewing Guide on every topic.

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**GENTRIFICATION**

**WHEN DID YOU BECOME GAY?**

**APPROPRIATION VS. APPRECIATION**

**WELFARE**

**WHITE PRIDE**

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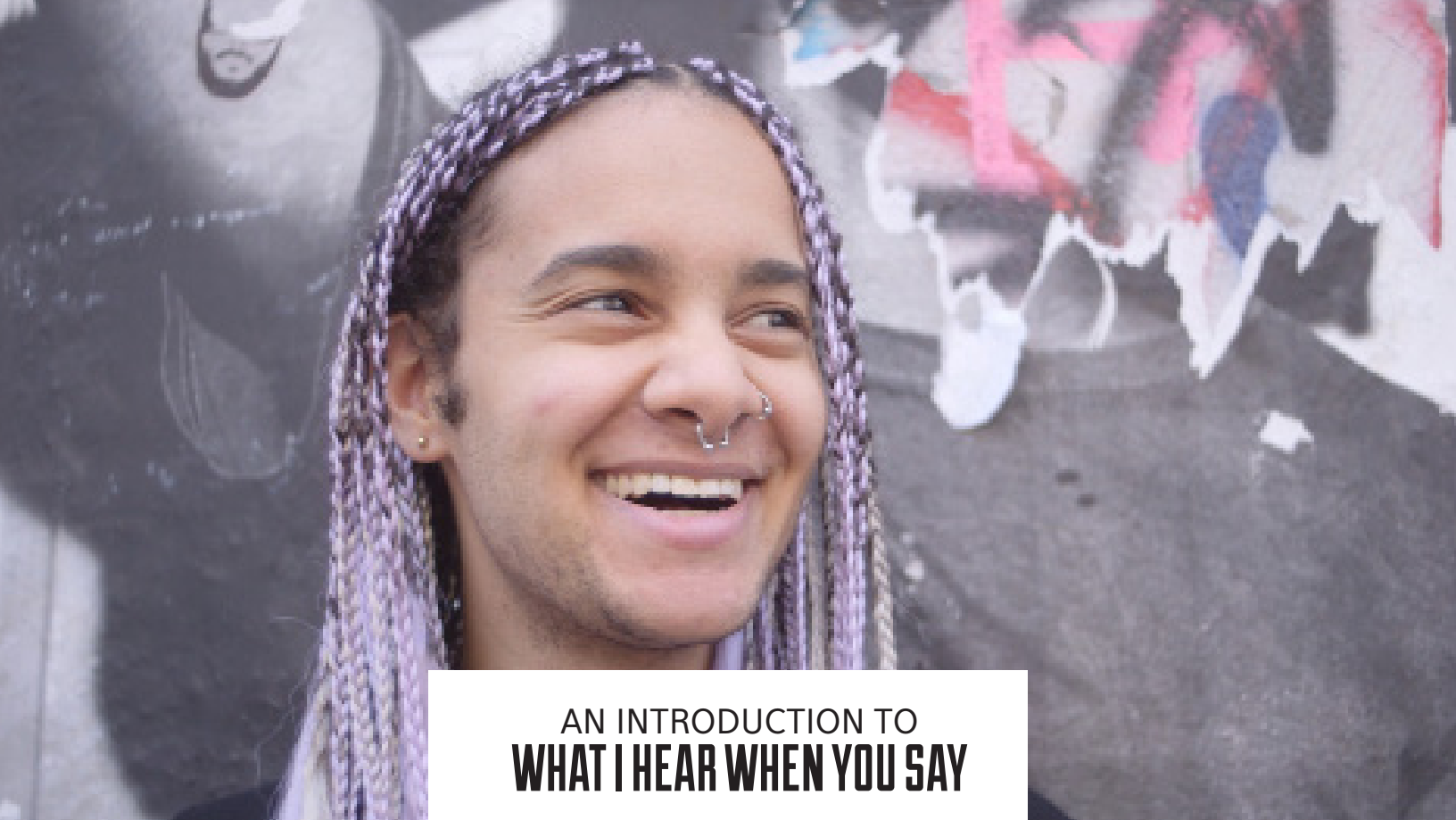
**WHAT I HEAR  
WHEN YOU SAY**

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**VIEWING GUIDE**

**WHEN DID YOU BECOME GAY?**





## AN INTRODUCTION TO **WHAT I HEAR WHEN YOU SAY**

Deeply ingrained in human nature is a tendency to organize, classify, and categorize our complex world. Often, this is a good thing. This ability helps us make sense of our environment and navigate unfamiliar landscapes while keeping us from being overwhelmed by the constant stream of new information and experiences.

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# WHEN DID YOU BECOME GAY?

“ if you don't have an answer it doesn't make you any less gay, it doesn't make you any less queer or less trans because we're all evolving and we all change, and we don't have this one day on our calendar where we suddenly understood everything.

Kristin Russo, Activist / YouTube



def·i·ni·tion

**GAY** [gey]  
adjective

of, relating to, or exhibiting sexual desire or behavior directed toward a person or persons of one's own sex.

Join PBS as we explore sexuality, gender fluidity and the language used to describe LGBTQIA+ communities from unique and differing perspectives.

Take a closer look at the words used to describe LGBTQIA+ communities through storytelling, analysis and humor with Writer, Speaker, and Educator, Kristin Russo; Scholar, Writer, and Activist, Moya Bailey; Speaker and Writer, Tyler Ford.



View the full episode exploring the question, “When did you become gay?”

<http://pbs.org/what-i-hear/web-series/gay/>

## A QUICK LOOK AT SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY IN THE UNITED STATES

- In 2016, 63% of Americans said that homosexuality should be accepted by society, compared with 51% in 2006.<sup>1</sup>

- In a 2013 Pew Research Center survey, about 92% adults identifying as LGBTQ said that society had become more accepting of them in the previous decade.<sup>2</sup>
- Young adults, ages 18 to 36, more likely to openly identify as LGBTQ (7.3%) than adults age 37 to 71+ identify openly as LGBTQ (less than 3%).<sup>3</sup>
- A study by UCLA's Williams Institute in 2011 found that bisexuals make up the largest share of LGBTQIA+ Americans. 1.8% of the total U.S. adult population identified as bisexual, 1.7% were gay or lesbian, and 0.6% of U.S. adults (1.4 million people) identify as transgender.<sup>4</sup>
- In the 2012 court case, *Macy v. Department of Justice*, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) ruled that discrimination based on transgender status is sex discrimination in violation of Title VII.<sup>5</sup>
- The 2015 case, *Lusardi v. Department of the Army*, held that transgender employees have the right to use restrooms that correlate to their gender identity and that intentional misuse of a transgender employee's new name and pronoun can constitute sex-based discrimination.<sup>6</sup>

## **DIG DEEPER | MOVING BEYOND BINARY GENDER**

“ You're assuming that straightness is the default and queerness is deviant...Binary just leaves so many people out.

- Tyler Ford, Writer and Designer

In the early hours of June 1969, plainclothes detectives raided the Stonewall Inn, an unlicensed gay bar in Greenwich Village of New York.<sup>7</sup>

Raids were commonplace at The Stonewall Inn. Because the bar was caught-up in the web of police and mafia corruption, raids were usually preceded by a tip and ended with both a payoff and the token arrest of "men dressed as women".<sup>8</sup> Although there were sodomy

laws on the books at the time, police raids often focussed on enforcing laws banning “cross-dressing” or wearing clothes that were breaking gender norms.<sup>9</sup> It was usually easier for police to arrest and intimidate transgender women and men, drag queens, butch lesbians, and gender non-conforming people of color, because they were marginalized within the gay community.

This raid, however, was different. There was no warning tip, and when the arrests began, the transgender patrons began to fight back. The ensuing Stonewall Uprising, which included protests and riots that escalated and spread across Greenwich Village over several days, sparked the gay liberation movement and was spearheaded by trans-women and men of color.<sup>10 11</sup>

The Stonewall Uprisings almost 50 years ago and Caitlin Jenner’s recent transition have both been cited as catalysts for our modern debates about gender identity and the rights of people who live outside gender norms. The fact is that, a broad range of gender expressions have been documented across cultures for millennia, and today, science is confirming that sex, gender, and identity are far more complex than merely “male” or “female”.

## **THE SCIENCE OF GENDER**

In American media culture, the common depiction of gender is two sexes--male and female—and for the most part, romantic relationships in the media feature male and female characters. This binary view of gender was often reinforced in high school science classes where we learned that sexual identity is determined at conception; fertilized eggs with XX chromosomes develop into girl babies and eggs with XY chromosomes develop into boy babies.

We now know that gender is not that simple. In recent decades, research on the science of biological sex and gender identity has shown that each individual’s gender falls somewhere on a complex spectrum.<sup>12</sup> It’s possible to be XY and mostly female in physical and psychological terms and to be XX and mostly male.<sup>13</sup>

In the instance of “complete androgen insensitivity syndrome” (CAIS) for example, an XY embryo’s cells will develop internal testes but the child has the external traits of a female, and in most cases will grow-up as a girl.<sup>14</sup> A recent study at the University Clinic for Psychiatry and Psychotherapy in Vienna also found evidence that, despite having the same biological sex, transgender women have significantly different brain activity than men whose gender identity corresponds with the sex assigned at birth (also known as “cisgender” men). In addition, the brain activity of transgender men and transgender women were different from each other, suggesting that brain chemistry and activity are also on a broad spectrum.<sup>15</sup>

As scientists continue to unravel the biological foundations of gender, it’s becoming more clear that the human race is about more than just men and women. Dr. Arthur Arnold from the University of California explains: “[There are] cases that push the limits and ask us to figure out exactly where the dividing line is between males and females... And that’s often a very difficult problem, because sex can be defined a number of ways.”<sup>16</sup>

## **THE LONG HISTORY OF GENDER DIVERSITY**

Complex perceptions of gender can be found in cultures around the world where three or more genders have been recognized for centuries if not millennia.<sup>17</sup>

### **North America: Two-Spirit**

In the 1990’s, Two-Spirit was coined to recognize the long and complex history of sexual and gender diversity among First Nation cultures.<sup>18</sup> Prior to the colonization of North America, Two-Spirit people were revered in their communities as spiritual leaders, healers, and counsellors, but gender diversity was violently suppressed after European colonists arrived. Two-Spirit peoples were killed or driven into hiding. The impact of colonization lingers today despite efforts to reclaim the cultural legacy of complex gender identities. Two-Spirit indigenous peoples in North America continue to be stigmatized and

discriminated against within and beyond their communities. <sup>19 20</sup>

#### South Asia: Hwaaja Sira (also known as Hijras)

The Hwaaja Sira, more commonly known as Hijras, have been documented as part of South Asian cultural history for more than a thousand years. The word Hijras refers to a collection of individuals whose identity falls outside of female/male, including transgender and intersex people, and is among the oldest examples of culturally recognized gender variance.<sup>21</sup> Hijras have always played an important role in religion and culture and are believed to be associated with sacred powers. During the colonial period, as the British government imposed Western laws and values in the region, Hijra were criminalized. That social stigma has followed the Hijra community through to the 21st century. Despite recent landmark policies in India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh that legally recognize Hijras as a third gender, most are still shunned and live in poverty, resorting to sex work and begging to survive. <sup>22 23</sup>

#### Indonesia: Warias

Indonesia's Waria community came to global attention in 2012 when it was reported that President Barack Obama was cared for by a Waria woman named Evie when he was a child in Jakarta. <sup>24</sup> In Indonesia, Warias are a surprisingly visible community in the conservative Muslim country. Warias believe they are men born with the souls of women, and the word, Waria, is a blending of wanita, which means "woman," and pria, which means "man".<sup>25</sup> Warias include a range of gender expressions including transsexuals, drag queens, and effeminate gay men, but for religious reasons, few seek sex-reassignment surgeries. Most Warias are practicing Muslims and believe they must return their body to God as it was given to them.<sup>26</sup>

#### Sulawesi, Indonesia: The Five Genders of the Buginese People

Although also located in the majority Muslim country, Indonesia, the Buginese people (or Bugis) of Sulawesi continue to practice their island's pre-colonial religion and culture. An inherent aspect of their culture is the recognition of four genders and a fifth "transcendent"

gender, Bissu, that is central to Sulawesi creation stories.<sup>27 28</sup> Members of this fifth gender are neither “male” nor “female”, and they play specific roles in society as spiritual leaders and shamans.

## GENDER TODAY

Although cultures around the world have recognized diverse gender identities for centuries, the fight for legal recognition and protections began in earnest over past 50 years. Since 2000, multiple South Asian countries have passed laws recognizing non-binary genders, and Australia ruled that Alex MacFarlane had the legal right to identify as “indeterminate sex”.<sup>29</sup>

In the United States, Jamie Shupe, won the right to legally change their gender to “non-binary” in June 2016, a milestone that the Transgender Law Center called “the first ruling of its kind in the U.S.” Three months later, in September 2016, intersex California resident Sara Kelly Keenan became the second person in the U.S. to be legally recognized as non-binary.<sup>30 31</sup>

There continue to be debates about the rights and protections non-binary people should have in areas such as health care, immigration, adoption, military service, and bathroom access. As of 2016, only 21 states and the District of Columbia have legislation that prohibits discrimination based on gender identity in either employment, housing, and/or public accommodations and only 17 states have hate crimes legislation that includes gender identity or expression as a protected group.<sup>32 33 34</sup>

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Despite the persistence of the male/female model of gender in the United States, a more fluid and complex understanding of gender, supported by science and cultural history, is slowly gaining acceptance. These ongoing discussions about gender and identity are also helping to challenge social expectations associated with both masculinity and femininity, and in the process expanding and reinforcing the rights of Americans of every gender.

## QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

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- What conversations have you had with your friends and family about sexual and gender identity? Why are these topics uncomfortable for some people to discuss?
- What challenges does the English language pose for non-binary individuals? Why are pronouns so significant when we talk about gender and identity? What other languages face this challenge? How are they addressing it? E.g. Spanish, Chinese, Hindi?
- The series points out that, unlike the question, “When did you become gay?” we never hear anyone ask, “When did you become straight?” Why not?
- Writer, Speaker, Educator Kristin Russo suggests that, before asking, “When did you become gay?” people should consider why they are asking this question. If you were curious to learn more about someone, how could you reframe or replace the question?



Hear different perspectives on the Topic “When did you become gay?”

<http://pbs.org/what-i-hear/topics/gay/>



## LEARN MORE

### GROWING UP TRANS

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/growing-up-trans/>

In **Growing Up Trans**, FRONTLINE takes viewers on a journey inside the struggles and choices facing transgender kids and their families.

### MEMORIES OF A PENITENT HEART

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/penitentheart/>

Filmmaker Cecilia Aldarondo excavates a buried family secret about her uncle Miguel, who died at a time when homosexuals were pariahs and AIDS was a death sentence. A copresentation with Latino Public Broadcasting (LPB).

### OUT IN THE NIGHT

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/out-in-the-night/>

In 2006, a group of African American lesbians were harassed and assaulted by a man on the street, and when the group defended themselves, they were charged with gang assault and attempted murder. **Out in the Night** follows that case and shows how the justice system can have a devastating effect on those who are already marginalized for their race, gender and sexuality.

## VOICES FROM THE EPISODE | WHEN DID YOU BECOME GAY?



**Kristin Russo**

Writer, Speaker, Educator  
& Consultant

CEO and Editor in Chief of LGBTQ organizations Everyone Is Gay and My Kid Is Gay

Author of *This is a Book for Parents of Gay Kids*

Host and producer of *First Person*, a video series on gender and sexuality from PBS Digital and WNET



**Moya Bailey**

Scholar, Writer  
& Activist

Lecturer at Northwestern University

Founder of Quirky Black Girls

Works with Octavia E. Butler at Legacy Network



**Tyler Ford**

Speaker & Writer

Listed in *Dazed*'s 100 visionary talents shaping youth culture in 2016

Designs "My Friend Tyler" clothing line

Works with Miley Cyrus' Happy Hippie Foundation

Contributor to MTV and *Rookie Magazine*

Visit [pbs.org/whatihear](https://pbs.org/whatihear) for a detailed Viewing Guide on every topic.

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**GENTRIFICATION**

**WHEN DID YOU BECOME GAY?**

**APPROPRIATION VS. APPRECIATION**

**WELFARE**

**WHITE PRIDE**

**WHAT ARE YOU?**

**MODEL MINORITY**

**RACE CARD**

**CODE WORDS**

**FEMINISM**

**WHAT I HEAR  
WHEN YOU SAY**

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**VIEWING GUIDE**

**WHITE PRIDE**



## AN INTRODUCTION TO **WHAT I HEAR WHEN YOU SAY**

Deeply ingrained in human nature is a tendency to organize, classify, and categorize our complex world. Often, this is a good thing. This ability helps us make sense of our environment and navigate unfamiliar landscapes while keeping us from being overwhelmed by the constant stream of new information and experiences.

When we apply this same impulse to social interactions, however, it can be, at best, reductive and, at worst, dangerous. Seeing each other through the lens of labels and stereotypes prevents us from making authentic connections and understanding each other's experiences.

Through the initiative, What I Hear When You Say ( WIHWYS ), we explore how words can both divide and unite us and learn more about the complex and everchanging ways that language shapes our expectations, opportunities, and social privilege. WIHWYS 's interactive multimedia resources challenge what we think we know about race, class, gender, and identity, and provide a dynamic digital space where we can raise difficult questions, discuss new ideas, and share fresh perspectives.

# WHITE PRIDE

“ What is the difference between White Pride, Gay Pride and Black Pride? Two of those come from being powerless and trying to gain power within a power structure. And one is celebrating an existing power structure.

Whitney Dow, Filmmaker



def·i·ni·tion  
**WHITE**  
adjective

(of human beings) belonging to a group marked by slight pigmentation of the skin, often of European descent.

What do you hear when someone says, “White pride?” Join Comedian, Jes Tom; Filmmaker, Whitney Dow; and Activists and Musician, Daryl Davis as they explore the history, significance and consequences of the idea and expression of “White pride.”



**View the full White Pride episode**

<http://pbs.org/what-i-hear/web-series/white-pride/>

## A QUICK LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF RACE AND WHITE IDENTITY

The term “race” as we use it today, emerged during the height of European expansion and colonization in the 17th century. Among the earliest appearances in print was a 1684 article by French physician and philosopher, François Bernier, “A new division of the Earth by the different species or races which inhabit it.” The article defined a hierarchy of four races and appeared shortly before Louis XIV’s Code Noir [Black Code] in 1685 that regulated the triangular slave trade and established harsh controls over enslaved Africans.<sup>1 2 3</sup>

The first known legal prohibition of marriage based on racial categories was enacted in the colony of Virginia in April 1691, as part of "ACT XVI. An act for suppressing outlying slaves." This was also the first use of the term "White" as a legal category that separated the English and Europeans from Africans and Native Americans. The marriage prohibition remained in force until the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the law unconstitutional in *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967. <sup>4 5 6</sup>

In the mid-18th century, Swedish botanist and zoologist, Carolus Linnaeus, presented a model of biological classification (taxonomy) that linked humans with primates and introduced the scientific label *Homo sapiens*. He was also the first to suggest "scientific" subdivisions of the human species, including *H. americanus*, *H. africanus*, *H. europaeus*, and *H. asiaticus*. <sup>7 8 9 10</sup>

The first U.S. census was enacted by Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson in 1790 and required residents to define themselves as one of five categories: <sup>11</sup>

Free White male of 16 years and upward

Free White male under 16 years

Free White female

All other free persons

Slave

The Naturalization Act of 1790 (1 Stat. 103) provided the first rules for granting United States citizenship and limited naturalization to immigrants who were "free white persons" of "good moral character." <sup>12</sup>

In 1795, German physician and scholar, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, attempted to develop a system of racial classification based in 'scientific' observation. He defined five races and labeled light-skinned people of European and Russian origin, Caucasians, because he believed their ancestors came from the Caucasus mountains. Blumenbach also concluded that Linnaeus was wrong and that human races are superficial variations on a single species with equal capacity for intellectual and cultural achievement. <sup>13 14 15</sup>



The Dillingham Commission was established as part of the Immigration Act of 1907 to investigate the effects of immigration on the United States. Cornell University economist, Jeremiah Jenks, and anthropologist, Daniel Folkmar, were commissioned to examine “whether there may not be certain races that are inferior to other races... to show whether some may be better fitted for American citizenship than others.” Their research was collected in *A Dictionary of Races of Peoples* that classified immigrants in racial terms and was used by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service officials until the 1950’s. <sup>16 17</sup>

The 1940 Census sorted the racial identity of American residents according to the following classification system: <sup>18</sup>

“Write “W” for white; “Neg” for Negro; “In” for Indian; “Chi” for Chinese; “Jp” for Japanese; “Fil” for Filipino; “Hi” for Hindu; and “Kor” for Korean. For a person of any other race, write the race in full.

Mexicans - Mexicans are to be regarded as white unless definitely of Indian or other nonwhite race.

Negroes - A person of mixed white and Negro blood should be returned as Negro, no matter how small a percentage of Negro blood. Both black and mulatto persons are to be returned as Negroes, without distinction [...]

Indians - A person of mixed white and Indian blood should be returned as an Indian, if enrolled on an Indian agency or reservation roll, or if not so enrolled, if the proportion of Indian blood is one-fourth or more, or if the person is regarded as an Indian in the community where he lives.

Mixed Races - Any mixture of white and nonwhite should be reported according to the nonwhite parent. Mixtures of non-white races should be reported according to the race of the father, except that Negro-Indian should be reported as Negro.”

In the 2010 Census defined “White” as:

“A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. The White racial category includes people who marked the “White” checkbox. It also includes respondents who reported entries such as Caucasian or White; European entries, such as Irish, German, and Polish; Middle Eastern entries, such as Arab, Lebanese, and Palestinian; and North African entries, such as Algerian, Moroccan, and Egyptian.” <sup>19</sup>

## **DIG DEEPER | BACON'S REBELLION AND THE INVENTION OF "WHITE" AS A RACE**

"I think there is an inherent tension between how we see ourselves as individuals and how we understand our relationship to our history in this country."

- Whitney Dow, Filmmaker

The idea of "race", as we know it today, developed during the height of European expansion when colonizers were encountering unfamiliar cultures and landscapes, and scientists were developing new systems to catalogue and classify the complex natural world.(1)

The ruling classes in Western Europe profited from these developments, but they also wrestled with the fact that their existing power structures were being tested by their rapidly expanding colonial empires. In the midst of these challenges, the emerging theories of human classification based on racial groups provided a template around which new, more profitable social systems could be organized.(2)

### **NEW CHALLENGES IN THE NEW WORLD**

In the earliest years of colonial America, social status and rights were determined primarily by religious affiliation and material wealth (especially property ownership).(3) In this new land, servants, indentured workers, minor landowners, and slaves--regardless of their skin color--often had more in common with each other than with plantation owners or government officials and soon found that they could challenge the traditional power structure and forge new opportunities by banding together in common cause.(4)(5)

As the colonies expanded and populations increased, so too did skirmishes and rebellions by the middle and lower classes against wealthy landowners and the political leadership. The simmering, civil unrest finally reached a boiling point in 1676, when an uprising in Virginia captured the capital city, Jamestown.(6) This event, known as Bacon's Rebellion, marked a dramatic turning-point in colonial history and has influenced the definition and significance of racial identity in America through today.

## BACON'S REBELLION AND THE DANGER OF SOLIDARITY

In the 1670s, small property owners in Virginia were growing increasingly frustrated with the European governing class who they felt was interfering with and undermining their opportunities in their new home.

Among the most contentious issues was the ongoing conflict with Native American communities. Farming tobacco, the primary crop, was labor intensive and damaging to the soil. Landowners wanted to completely eradicate Native American communities within the colonies in order to protect their own properties and workforce against raids and expand their farms into the more fertile tribal lands.(7)(8)

Nathaniel Bacon was among the landowners who were unsuccessfully petitioning Virginia's governor to enact more aggressive policies against local tribes.(9) Taking matters into his own hands, Bacon organized a militia consisting of hundreds people, including landowners, free Black and White farmers, freemen, indentured servants, and enslaved Black laborers, and they began violently attacking tribal communities on their borders, including Native American allies.(10)

The colonial government opposed the militia, but lacked the forces to contain them. Meanwhile, Bacon was expanding his ranks by offering freedom to both White and Black indentured servants and slaves who joined the cause.(11) A ship arriving in England from Virginia reported that Bacon had "proclaim'd liberty to all Servants and Negro's [sic]" and another declared "most of the servants flock to [Bacon] and he makes their master pay their wages." (12)

To appease the militia, the local government implemented a number of sweeping reforms known as Bacon's Laws that limited the powers of the governor and restored voting rights to both White and Black landless freemen.(13) Despite this, the conflict with government forces escalated, and on September 19, 1676, Bacon and his militia marched on the colonial capital, Jamestown, and burned it to the ground.

A month later, Bacon died of a fever contracted during battle, and the rebellion soon collapsed, but the damage was already done. Bacon's Re-

bellion demonstrated to the colonial government that poor Whites and poor Blacks could be united in a cause. What would prevent the poor from uniting to fight them again?

“The events in Jamestown were alarming to the planter elite, who were deeply fearful of the multiracial alliance of [indentured servants] and slaves. Word of Bacon’s Rebellion spread far and wide, and several more uprisings of a similar type followed. In an effort to protect their superior status and economic position, the planters shifted their strategy for maintaining dominance. They abandoned their heavy reliance on indentured servants in favor of the importation of more black slaves.”(14)

- Michelle Alexander, Legal Scholar and Author 2010

## **THE AFTERMATH OF BACON’S REBELLION**

Prior to the uprising, both White and Black freemen had legal rights, could own property, could participate in public life, and if they owned property, were entitled to vote. Indentured servants were the dominant labor force, and once they had worked off their “indenture” they were entitled to to join the free residents of the colony, regardless of race. Chattel slavery—lifelong slavery where the individual is perceived as property—existed but was less common. (15)

Following the Rebellion, landowners decided to ensure against another uprising (and maximize their profits) by shifting from indentured labor to chattel slavery. There was no longer a worry about losing labor after a period of indenture, and the percentage of free laborers would be kept in check.(16) Laws were also enacted establishing that slavery was to be passed through the maternal line, so children of an enslaved mother would be born into slavery and owners could expand their workforce by forcing enslaved women to reproduce.(17)

## THE INVENTION OF THE “WHITE” RACE

Soon after Bacon’s Rebellion, the Virginia government began, for the first time, to pass laws along “racial” lines. In April 1691, the first legal prohibition of marriage based on “race” was enacted in North America.

This policy marked a critical moment, not just because it shifted the criteria by which this new society was organized, but because it is the the first known legal application of the term and concept of “White” as a social category.(18)

Those who became ‘White’ had previously been referred to in law by their country of origin “‘first as ‘British and other Christians’ then ‘British and other freeborns.’”(19) This construction of a legally recognized “White” race soon superseded class, wealth, and religion and became the definitive measure that distinguished the legal rights and “personhood” of English and some Europeans from Africans and Native Americans.

The creation of a “White” race became a way to distance laborers of European descent from their African or Native American peers. “White” Americans were soon offered higher social status in the colonies with legally codified “white-skin” privileges (later referred to as a “racial bribe”).(20) The social elevation of poor Whites was most often achieved by stripping rights from African-Americans, regardless if they were free, indentured, or enslaved.

For example, “masters” were now prohibited from abusing indentured or enslaved White laborers, but were allowed to use, abuse, or sell indentured or enslaved Black people, so long as they did not set them free.(21) Existing free African-Americans were forbidden to own any weapons and were no longer allowed to hold office, strike a White person (even in self-defense), or give testimony in court against a White person.(22)

New and increasingly ruthless race-based policies continued to be introduced for both free and enslaved “Blacks” as the population of enslaved Africans and Americans of African descent rapidly increased throughout the 18th century, especially in the south.

## The Legacy of the Construction of Race

From the perspective of wealthy landowners and the governing class, this new racial hierarchy was a success. (23) Following the introduction of a legally recognized "White" race and the mass enslavement of African-Americans, there were no further rebellions by poor Whites against the wealthier classes. (24)

"Many of the European-descended poor whites began to identify themselves, if not directly with the rich whites, certainly with being white. And here you get the emergence of this idea of a white race as a way to distinguish themselves from those dark-skinned people who they associate with perpetual slavery." (25)

- Robin D.G. Kelley, Chair of the History Department  
at New York University, 2003

This new system of social control---created in colonial North America, founded on the establishment of the White race, and enforced by European Americans from every social class--became the model for agrarian settlements across the colonies. Chattel slavery was eventually abolished after the Civil War, but the arbitrary racial divisions that made slavery possible have endured.

"When the negro slave had supplanted the indentured servant upon the plantations of the colony, a vast change took place in the pride of the middle class. Every white man, no matter how poor he was, no matter how degraded, could now feel a pride in his race. Around him on all sides were those whom he felt to be beneath him, and this alone instilled into him a certain self-respect." (26)

- Thomas J. Wertenbaker, Princeton Historian, 1910

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

“What is there to be proud about just because you’re white?  
What is there to be proud about just because you’re black?  
Nothing. ... it’s what we do with ourselves, that gives us that  
sense of pride.”

- Daryl Davis, Musician and Activist

Humans have always found ways to arrange ourselves into communal groups, but the modern concept of “race” that emerged in the 1600s was unique. It was presented as part of a natural and universal order, despite being an arbitrary classification system adopted to maximize profits and minimize rebellion.

When “White” as a racial category was introduced into the legal landscape in 1691, the definition of this and every other race were rooted in a need for social control, not in science, shared heritage, or even geography (European ancestry was no guarantee of “Whiteness”).

What White or Black is has been ambiguous from the beginning and remains so today. Is it determined by melanin in our skin, nationality, culture, politics, dogma, ancestry (on the maternal or paternal side)? Or can the “White” race be defined using the 2010 U.S. Census criteria? Any of the original peoples of Europe such as Irish, German, and Polish; Middle Eastern peoples, such as Arab, Lebanese, and Palestinian; North African peoples, such as Algerian, Moroccan and Egyptian; or anyone who chooses to identify themselves as White or Caucasian.

Whatever “White” is, it has its foundations in the dynamic of “inclusion and exclusion”. It was created for the purpose of enslaving hundreds of thousands of people, and since then has been used to reinforce privilege, status, and power. When individuals and communities challenge “White Pride” it’s primarily because of the role of “Whiteness” in the context of our country’s divisive history.

Challenging “White Pride” does not mean that people who are categorized as “White” are expected to dismiss or disparage their heritage and

cultural traditions. The strength of our country is rooted in sharing and celebrating our diverse experiences. Throughout the year, people from every background come together to participate in each other's traditions at big events like St. Paddy's Day parades, Oktoberfest, Diwali, Italian Festivals, and Chinese New Year as well as small gatherings that commemorate and honor those that came before.

For many African-Americans commemorating ethnic heritage and cultural tradition is more complicated because ancestors' customs, beliefs, names, and countries of origin were erased by the slave trade. For the generations that followed, culture and identity had to be newly forged through community, creativity, and shared struggle. For the African-American community, "Black Pride" is a way to honor collective experiences, amplify marginalized voices, and challenge the myth of White supremacy that divides all of us.

## QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

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- What does it mean to be "White"?
- What does "White privilege" mean to you? When have you encountered White privilege?
- How has the meaning of White as a race changed throughout history? What does it mean to be White today?
- In what ways is "White pride" the same as or different from "Gay pride" and "Black pride"?
- Why is celebrating White pride controversial but celebrating St. Patrick's Day, Oktoberfest, or St. Anthony's Day is not?
- How would you respond to someone who identifies strongly with the idea of White pride but insists they are not racist? Is it possible to support White pride without supporting White supremacy?



Hear different perspectives on the Topic, White Pride  
<http://pbs.org/what-i-hear/topics/white-pride/>



## LEARN MORE

### TWO TOWNS OF JASPER

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/twotownsofjasper/>

In Two Towns Of Jasper, two film crews, one Black and one White, set out to document the aftermath of the horrific murder of James Byrd, Jr., a Black man, by following the subsequent trials of the local men charged with the crime.

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### WELCOME TO LEITH

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/welcome-to-leith/>

Welcome to Leith chronicles the attempted takeover of a small town in North Dakota by notorious White supremacist Craig Cobb.

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### SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER HATEWATCH

<https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch>

Hatewatch is a blog that monitors and exposes the activities of the American radical right.

## VOICES FROM THE EPISODE | WHITE PRIDE



**Jes Tom**  
Comedian

Has performed in all five boroughs of New York City and a number of colleges  
Has collaborated with rapper Awkwafina, punk band PWR BTTM and spoken word duo DarkMatter  
Created solo show FRESH OFF THE BANANA BOAT which sold out at Dixon Place's HOT! Festival



**Whitney Dow**  
Filmmaker

Creator of The Whiteness Project  
His film Two Towns of Jasper won numerous awards including a Peabody Award, duPont Award, and an Anthony Radziwill Documentary Achievement Award  
Exhibited at The Met, MoMA, Smithsonian



**Daryl Davis**  
Activist & Musician

Chuck Berry's go-to pianist  
Published author on race  
Appeared on Letterman Show, GMA, CNN for his efforts to improve race relations with members of the Maryland Ku Klux Klan

Visit [pbs.org/whatihear](https://pbs.org/whatihear) for a detailed Viewing Guide on every topic.

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**GENTRIFICATION**

**WHEN DID YOU BECOME GAY?**

**APPROPRIATION VS. APPRECIATION**

**WELFARE**

**WHITE PRIDE**

**WHAT ARE YOU?**

**MODEL MINORITY**

**RACE CARD**

**CODE WORDS**

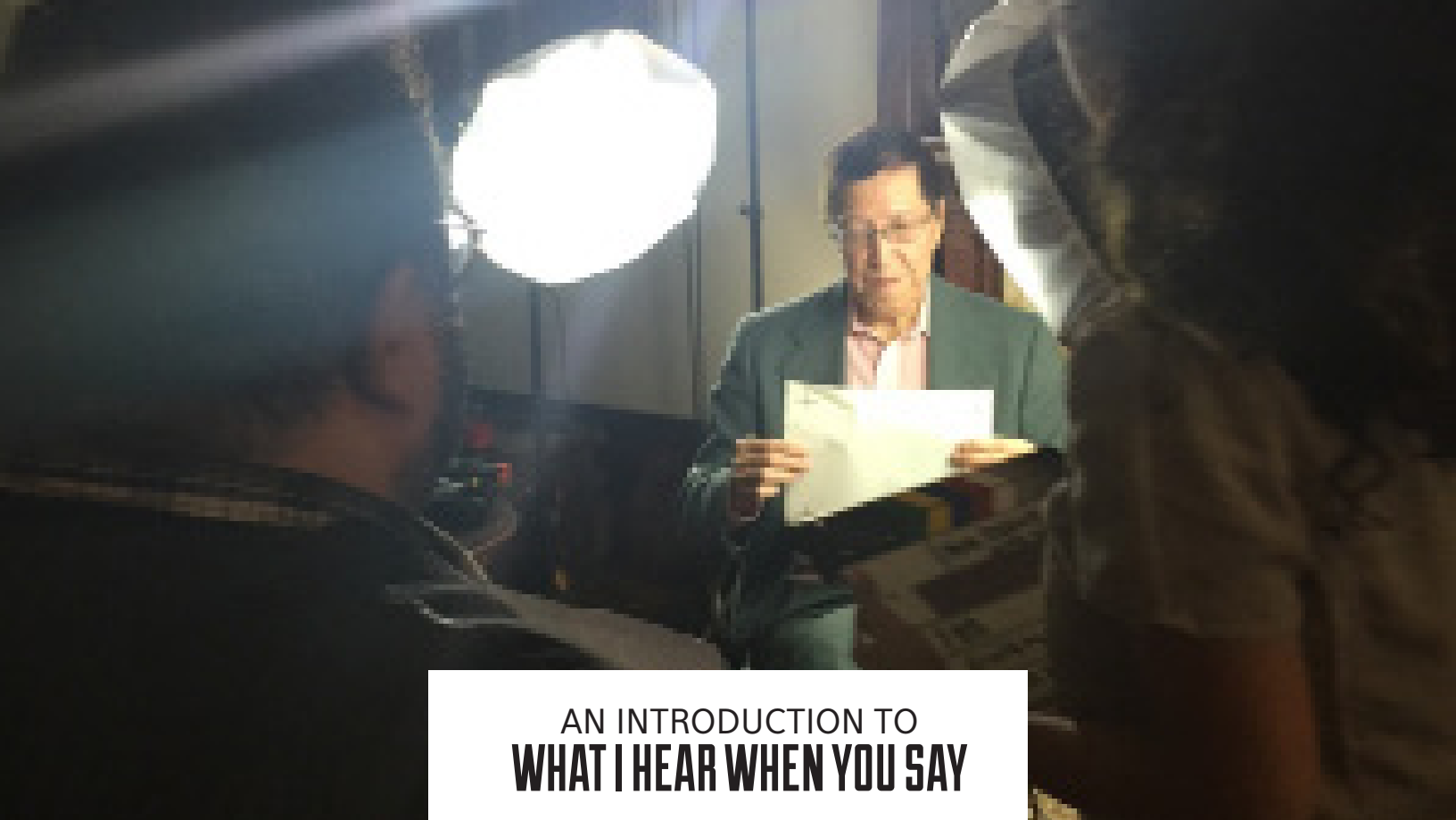
**FEMINISM**

**WHAT I HEAR  
WHEN YOU SAY**

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**VIEWING GUIDE**

**RACE CARD**



## AN INTRODUCTION TO **WHAT I HEAR WHEN YOU SAY**

Deeply ingrained in human nature is a tendency to organize, classify, and categorize our complex world. Often, this is a good thing. This ability helps us make sense of our environment and navigate unfamiliar landscapes while keeping us from being overwhelmed by the constant stream of new information and experiences.

When we apply this same impulse to social interactions, however, it can be, at best, reductive and, at worst, dangerous. Seeing each other through the lens of labels and stereotypes prevents us from making authentic connections and understanding each other's experiences.

Through the initiative, What I Hear When You Say ( WIHWYS ), we explore how words can both divide and unite us and learn more about the complex and everchanging ways that language shapes our expectations, opportunities, and social privilege. WIHWYS 's interactive multimedia resources challenge what we think we know about race, class, gender, and identity, and provide a dynamic digital space where we can raise difficult questions, discuss new ideas, and share fresh perspectives.

# RACE CARD

“ When the subject looks directly into the camera it’s really personal... it’s hard to talk about or think about [racial microaggressions] especially when you have perpetuated it, so it’s really good to confront the audience.

Kiyun Kim, Visual Artist



def·i·ni·tion  
**RACE CARD**  
noun

the issue of a person’s race as it relates to a particular contest (such as a political campaign or a court trial)—often used in the phrase play the race card

What exactly does it mean to play a “race card?” Join Comedian and Writer, Hadiyah Robinson; Psychologist, Derald Wing Sue; and Visual Artist, Kiyun Kim as they explore the implications of the “race card”, the concept of microaggressions, and the many small ways that racism is passively enabled.



**View the full episode about the Race Card**

<http://pbs.org/what-i-hear/web-series/race-card/>

## A QUICK LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF THE “RACE CARD”

- The origins of the phrase “playing the race card” are unconfirmed, but it is believed to have its roots in the phrase “a sure card”, which dates back to the 16th century and means “a person who was sure to succeed”.<sup>1 2</sup>
- A popular, theory about the origin of “the race card” is that it relates back to an 1863 cartoon called Abe Lincoln’s Last Card; Or, Rouge-et-Noir in the British magazine, Punch. The cartoon, derides President Abraham Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation and casts the



abolition of slavery as a reckless gamble. Lincoln is depicted as a devil forcefully throwing down the Ace of Spades with the “spade” on the card in the shape of a Black man’s head. <sup>3 4</sup>

- (View the original image published in Punch magazine: <http://punch.photoshelter.com/image/I0000PXBR3n7PreU>)
- According to Merriam-Webster, the first documented use of the phrase “play the race card” appeared in a 1974 article in the British newspaper, The Observer. <sup>5</sup>
- The phrase entered the common lexicon in the United States by the 1980s and became especially contentious during the criminal trial of O.J. Simpson in the mid-1990s when the prosecution and media accused Simpson’s lawyers of “using the race card” as part of their defense strategy. <sup>6</sup>
- During the 2008 and 2012 campaigns of President Barack Obama, the phrase “the race card” was widely used on all sides and became a regular topic of discussion and debate in the media. <sup>7</sup>
- The first recorded use of “the gender card” appeared in an article in The Boston Globe in August 1990 and was later joined by the phrase “the woman card”. The phrase was used regularly during Hillary Clinton’s 2008 and 2016 Presidential campaigns by her political opponents, her own campaigns, and the media. <sup>8</sup>

## **DIG DEEPER | WHY MICRO-AGGRESSIONS MATTER**

“Our research indicates that race based and gender based micro aggressions are very harmful.”

- Derald Wing Sue, Professor, Columbia

In 1947, the University of Virginia hosted a football game against Harvard University. That game, which took place in front of a crowd of 22,000 people, was historic, not because of the play on the field, but because it was the first time a team with a Black player competed in a college game below the Mason–Dixon line.<sup>9</sup>

Chester M. Pierce was the African-American starting tackle on the otherwise all-White Harvard team, and during the trip, he was subjected to a variety of racial abuses.<sup>10</sup> The University of Virginia and local political leaders tried to prevent him from attending the game, he was told he was prohibited from entering through the front door of the UV dining room, he was barred from staying at the all-White hotel with his teammates, and he was subjected to crowds of protestors before and during the game waving Confederate flags and shouting racial slurs.<sup>11</sup> Despite this, he was applauded at the end of the game by many in the crowd for his skill and performance.

Dr. Chester M. Pierce went on to earn his A.B. degree from Harvard College and his M.D. degree from Harvard Medical School, after which he trained as a psychiatrist. Pierce returned to Harvard as professor of Education and Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, and among other distinctions, became the first African-American full professor at the Massachusetts General Hospital.<sup>12</sup>

In 1970, Dr. Pierce coined the term “microaggression” to describe the regular insults and dismissals he witnessed non-Black Americans inflict on African-Americans. He also theorized that these experiences could impact psychological and physical health over time.<sup>13</sup>

## **WHAT ARE MICROAGGRESSIONS?**

Dr. Derald Wing Sue at Columbia University is following Dr. Pierce’s line of study in his analysis of racial microaggressions. Sue describes microaggressions as:

“[...] the brief and everyday slights, insults, indignities, and denigrating messages sent to people of color by well-intentioned White people who are unaware of the hidden messages being communicated.”<sup>14</sup>

Sue proposes a classification of three types of racial microaggressions:

15

*Microassaults:* Conscious and intentional actions or slurs, such as using racial epithets, such as displaying swastikas or deliberately serving a White person before a person of color in a restaurant.

*Microinsults:* Verbal and nonverbal communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity, such as a person of color being asked how he was able to get accepted into college.

*Microinvalidations:* Communications that subtly exclude, negate, or nullify the thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color. For example, a White American asking a Latinx American, "Where were you born?"

Because microinsults and micro-invalidiations are less obvious, Sue explains that they put people of color in a psychological bind:

"The person of color is caught in a Catch-22: If she confronts the perpetrator, the perpetrator will deny it. While the person may feel insulted, she is not sure exactly why, and the perpetrator doesn't acknowledge that anything has happened, because he is not aware he has been offensive.... that leaves the person of color to question what actually happened. The result is confusion, anger and an overall sapping of energy." 16

## **MICROAGGRESSIONS BEYOND RACE**

Research into microaggressions has expanded to include how a variety of marginalized groups experience multiple, subtle insults based on entrenched and hidden biases. Researchers are also examining if and how these everyday interactions can lead to higher levels of anxiety and anger or contribute to depression and other mental illnesses. 17

### **Sexual or Gender Microaggression:**

Subtle, negative interactions that suggest that a person's sexual

or gender identity is insignificant, less valued, or not deserving of respect.<sup>18 19 20</sup>

For example:

- “Mansplaining”: assuming a woman or non-male presenting person requires a man’s help understanding something that they already know
- Mis-assigning a gendered pronoun to a person based on an assumption or stereotypes about gender identity

### **Ableist Microaggressions:**

Demeaning or dismissive interactions and attitudes based on stereotypes and assumptions about the competency and needs of people with disabilities.<sup>21 22</sup>

For example:

- Using a disability as a euphemism or insult, “You’re so OCD about your record collection!”
- Assuming a that a person’s disability means they are incapable in all areas of their life

### **Classist Microaggressions:**

Subtle and persistent forms of bias on assumptions about wealth, poverty, and social class.<sup>23 24 25</sup>

For example:

- Describing people or objects as “trashy” and “ghetto”
- Correcting a person’s regional or cultural pronunciations because they are perceived as “lower class” or “incorrect”

## **IT’S NOT A BIG DEAL: THE DEBATE ABOUT MICROAGGRESSIONS**

Critics of microaggressions argue that it is generally founded in oversensitivity to or misunderstanding of a speaker’s motives, and like trigger warnings, is another way that overreaching “political correctness” is infringing on free speech.

Sociologist Amitai Etzioni argues in a 2014 article in *The Atlantic*, “Don’t

Sweat the Microaggressions”:

“We may wish for a world in which people say only kind things about each other, but until we get there, we should not take umbrage at every negative note or adjective that is employed.” He goes on to say, “...when you cannot tell if you are aggressive before the other person responds, and anybody can declare he or she has been abused by anything we say, communion between members of different groups becomes even more difficult.”<sup>26</sup>

What Dr. Derald Wing Sue and others counter is that microaggressions are not merely subtle, uncomfortable insults--we all experience those--but that these subtle, uncomfortable insults are tied directly to pervasive, institutionalized biases against people in marginalized communities, and that they occur regularly and accumulate over time in a way that does measurable harm.

In response to criticism of microaggressions that imply, “It’s not a big deal”, The Microaggression Project responds:

“[...] it’ is a big deal. ‘It’ is in the everyday. [...] ‘it’ can silence people. ‘it’ reminds us of the ways in which we and people like us continue to be excluded and oppressed. ‘it’ matters because these relate to a bigger ‘it’: a society where social difference has systematic consequences for the ‘others.’”<sup>27</sup>

## QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

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- When you hear the phrase “playing the race card”, what does that mean to you? When have you encountered that phrase and how did the people involved respond?
- How would you describe a “micro-aggression” to someone who is unfamiliar with the term?
- When people discuss microaggressions, a common response is that they are “innocent acts” and that the person who experiences them should “let it go” and “not make a big deal out of it.” How do you feel about microaggressions?
- Have you ever used phrases like “I cried like a girl”, “You’re so OCD”, or “That is so ghetto..”? What were you trying to express? How common are expressions like this among your friends and family? How could normalizing these comments be harmful?
- What strategies can we use to constructively call attention to micro-aggressions? What are some ways that we can take responsibility for our own biased language?



**Hear different perspectives on the Topic of the Race Card**

<http://pbs.org/what-i-hear/topics/race-card/>

## LEARN MORE

### THE RACE CARD PROJECT

[www.theracecardproject.com](http://www.theracecardproject.com)

Michele Norris started The Race Card Project in 2010 to help foster a candid dialogue about race. Since then, the project has received tens of thousands of stories from around the world.

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### AMERICA AFTER FERGUSON

<http://www.pbs.org/specials/town-hall/america-after-ferguson/home/>

Through conversations and special reports, AMERICA AFTER FERGUSON explores the complex questions raised by the events in Ferguson.

## VOICES FROM THE EPISODE | RACE CARD



**Hadiyah Robinson**  
Comedian & Writer

Has appeared on Nightly Show, Gotham Comedy Live, Comic View, One Mic Stand and Celebrities Undercover  
Featured in NYT, O Magazine, Black Enterprise, Time Out NY and Brooklyn Magazine  
Involved with the New York Comedy Festival, Brooklyn Comedy Festival, Hoboken Comedy Festival, SoCal Comedy Festival and American Black Film Festival Comedy Contest



**Derald Wing Sue**  
Psychologist

Professor of Psychology and Education at Columbia University  
Published microaggressions scholar, including such works as Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation  
Co-founder of AAPA (Asian American Psychological Association)  
Served on Clinton's Advisory Board on Race



**Kiyun Kim**  
Visual Artist

Creator of photo project Racial Microaggressions  
Featured in Daily Mail, Huffington Post, BuzzFeed

Visit [pbs.org/whatihear](https://www.pbs.org/whatihear) for a detailed Viewing Guide on every topic.

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**GENTRIFICATION**

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**APPROPRIATION VS. APPRECIATION**

**WELFARE**

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**VIEWING GUIDE**

**GENTRIFICATION**



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# GENTRIFICATION

“ There is always an internal struggle with gentrification, because on one end there has to be progress: you do want better food, you do want better options. Where do you lose the community?

Shukree Tilghman, Filmmaker



def·i·ni·tion  
**GENTRIFICATION**  
noun

the process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents

Gentrification has a complex and troubling legacy shaped by racial bias, economic opportunism, and conflicting perceptions of what makes a thriving and vibrant community. Join Filmmaker, Shukree Tilghman; Filmmaker, Kelly Anderson; and Journalist and Author, Desiree Cooper as they explore the challenges, the benefits, and the consequences of Gentrification in the 21st century.



**View the full Gentrification episode**

<http://pbs.org/what-i-hear/web-series/gentrification/>

## A QUICK LOOK AT THE HISTORY AND LANGUAGE OF GENTRIFICATION

- As of the mid-20th century, the language of the American frontier became increasingly associated with U.S. cities, including phrases like “urban wilderness”, “urban cowboys”, “urban jungle”. The language of urban renewal and development has followed a similar trend with terms like “urban scouts”, “urban pioneers”, and “urban homesteaders” describing new residents and developers who

“discover” neighborhoods. As with the era of westward expansion across the American “frontier”, the language of urban development suggests that these environments are not already inhabited.<sup>1 2</sup>

- Urban sociologist Ruth Glass coined the term, “gentrification” in her 1964 book, *London: Aspects of Change*, and used the term to describe demographic shifts within urban communities.<sup>3</sup>
- There is some debate about what gentrification entails and its usefulness as an umbrella term for the range of transformations that occur in urban areas. However, it often exhibits the following changes:<sup>4 5</sup>
  - Demographics: a decline in racial minorities, and increase in household incomes and a rise in smaller families and singles.
  - Real Estate Market: an increase in development, a move away from rentals and shift toward home ownership, and escalating cost of living.
  - Land Use: the conversion of industrial buildings to living, work, and business spaces.
  - Culture and Character: a shift in expectations regarding how the community should interact, contribute to the neighborhood, and manage their own properties.
- By 1976, an Urban Land Institute study found that approximately half of 260 U.S. cities with a population over 50,000 had undergone gentrification. Their report specifically highlighted that the young generation of gentrifiers was creating a promising market for “White” middle-class families.<sup>6 7</sup>
- In 1982, the “broken windows” theory of policing and community development was coined by criminologist, George L. Kelling and political scientist, James Q. Wilson. These policies facilitated gentrification through the displacement of low-income communities and the increased criminalization of poor people of color.<sup>8 9</sup>
- In 1985, California passed the Ellis Act, allowing owners of housing properties to evict residential tenants in order to “go out of the

rental business". The act has been cited as a driving force behind gentrification. In San Francisco, Ellis evictions increased from 0 in 1997 to 246 evictions in 2007, and in Los Angeles, owners took nearly 19,000 rent-controlled units off the market between 2001 and 2015.<sup>10 11</sup>

- In 2003, Dr. Loretta Lees, Professor of Human Geography, coined the term "super-gentrification," which she described as "intensified re-gentrification in a few select areas of global cities like London and New York that have become the focus of intense investment and conspicuous consumption by a new generation of super-rich 'financiers.'"<sup>12</sup>

## DIG DEEPER | TRANSFORMATION TO GENTRIFICATION

“ A boy last week, he was sixteen, in San Francisco, told me [...] 'I've got no country. I've got no flag.' Now, he's only 16 years old, and I couldn't say, 'you do'. I don't have any evidence to prove that he does. They were tearing down his house, because San Francisco is engaging—as most Northern cities now are engaged—in something called urban renewal, which means moving the Negroes out. It means Negro removal, that is what it means.”

— James Baldwin, 1963

## WEEKSVILLE AND “GENTRIFICATION CAMP”

In the summer of 2014, children aged 7-12 from Brooklyn started their local summer camp program at Weeksville Heritage Center (WHC), but unlike other summer camps across the country, these campers would be learning how to use digital technology, multi-media mapping, robotics, coding, and 3D Printing to explore the history and impact of gentrification in their community.<sup>13</sup> The campers used their research to identify which neighborhoods were likely to experience gentrification, how the communities might change, and what they could do as residents to be empowered during this period of transformation.<sup>14</sup>

The Weeksville Heritage Center (WHC) opened in 2013 on a few acres of land in Brooklyn that intersects with Bedford-Stuyvesant, Crown Heights, and Brownsville neighborhoods. The WHC was built to celebrate the neighborhood's unique connection with a 19th century African-American town, Weeksville, that was once located on that land and to preserve four original Weeksville homes, the Hunterfly Houses, re-discovered in the 1960s. <sup>15</sup>

Today, changes in urban development and demographics are once again encroaching on Weeksville, as the surrounding neighborhoods experience escalating gentrification. As property values, rents, and the cost of living continue to rise, longtime residents and their children fear that they will be priced out of their homes and the rich history and culture of their community that they helped to create and preserve. <sup>16</sup>

## **BACKGROUND: URBAN RENEWAL, REDLINING, AND THE CHANGING URBAN LANDSCAPE**

The American Housing Act was passed in 1949 and ushered a nation-wide era of urban renewal with the goal of clearing out "slums" to rejuvenate cities. <sup>17</sup> Soon after it began, questions arose about what defines a "slum" and who gets to decide. Many neighborhoods targeted for renewal would likely not be labeled as "slums" today. They were often communities populated by working class families and small businesses. <sup>18</sup>

Once seized through eminent domain, whole communities were razed for infrastructure projects, or they were turned over to private developers for below market rates and repopulated by more economically affluent residents. For working class, low, and middle income families, high-rise communities were built to pack as many residents as possible into a small area of valuable urban real estate. These communities became known as "the projects". <sup>19</sup>

During the same period, "redlining"--the discriminatory practice by which banks, insurance companies, and other institutions refuse or limit services in targeted neighborhoods--made it even more difficult for neighborhoods to attract and retain homeowners. <sup>20</sup> Real estate

agents and developers also practiced “blockbusting” – facilitating the sale of a house to Black residents in a predominantly White neighborhood so that White residents, fearing the loss of property value and demographic changes, would sell their own properties at a loss. The agents would profit on the commissions from both White and Black homeowners.<sup>21</sup> Practices like these resulted in widespread “White flight” to suburban areas, increased racial segregation, decreased services and economic investment in marginalized neighborhoods, and ultimately, urban decay in cities across the country.<sup>22</sup>

## **GENTRIFICATION DEBATES: DATA AND DISPLACEMENT**

Gentrification is a provocative word. Some academics, policy makers, and researchers have suggested that the word gentrification is so overloaded with sometimes contradictory meanings and is so divisive, that it is no longer useful and should be abandoned or replaced.<sup>23</sup> Others argue that, although the meaning of gentrification has expanded since it was coined in the early 1970s, it still provides the important service of anchoring discussions and policies about neighborhood “renewal”, “development”, and “revitalization” in important historic and ongoing conversations about economic, racial and social inequality.<sup>24</sup>

There are strong arguments both for and against gentrification and the changes associated with it. Research and scholarship on the impact of gentrification is a problem because there is limited data on how and why neighborhoods change.<sup>25</sup> Both sides of the debate accuse the other of manipulating or cherry-picking data.

One issue that both sides do agree on is that gentrification results in the displacement of the most economically vulnerable members of the community. As researcher Kathe Newman argues, “Ten thousand displaces a year should not be ignored, even in a city of 8 million.”<sup>26</sup>

## **PROCESS OF GENTRIFICATION**

In the late 20th century, as the urban economy shifted away from manufacturing and toward service-sector professions (ranging from



retail sales to information technology to banking), it once again became beneficial and desirable to live in cities. Rising costs in higher income neighborhoods motivated newcomers to look for more affordable spaces in neighborhoods that had been economically marginalized.

Although causes of gentrification vary from city to city and neighborhood to neighborhood, the stages of gentrification seem to follow a similar pattern:

1. The earliest gentrifiers tend to be interested in purchasing and renovating homes for personal use or renting affordable spaces. Early gentrifiers may come from a diverse range of backgrounds but are often from the lower-middle/middle class and include people from the creative sector, new college graduates, young professionals, couples, etc. <sup>27</sup>
2. The next wave of newcomers are similar to the first – individuals or families looking for inexpensive homes or rental spaces for personal use -- as well as small-scale developers drawn to the neighborhood, in part, by the presence of the first gentrifiers. <sup>28 29</sup>
3. With the success of the first two waves of gentrifiers, the neighborhood gains attention – new businesses open, property values and rents increase, and developers and real estate speculators begin to target occupied properties for resale. Displacement of the original residents increases as more renters are priced out and home owners take the opportunity (or feel pressured) to sell. <sup>30</sup>
4. The popularity of the neighborhood reaches a tipping point. Property values and rents continue to rise, and the relocation and displacement of the original community escalates as they are bought out by higher income homeowners or forced out by rent increases. <sup>31</sup>

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

As high-rise, public housing is torn down and its residents dispersed, the urban American landscape is rapidly changing. The danger is that, due in part to social engineering and urban planning initiatives like mixed-income housing, middle and upper-middle class suburbanites are moving back into cities and displacing low-income communities, particularly communities of color. Housing activists and residents protest that instead of transformation they were promised, communities of color got gentrification.

## QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

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- What words do you associate with gentrification? Would you describe gentrification as a positive or negative process for a community? Why?
- What happens to a neighborhood when it becomes “gentrified”? Is it possible to improve communities through gentrification without making them inaccessible to the people who live there?
- Have you encountered gentrification in your neighborhoods and communities? If so, how does your experience compare to what the series is describing?
- In what ways do redlining and racial segregation harm individuals and communities on all sides?
- All of the voices talk about how traditional models of gentrification lead to the loss of culture, community, and racial and economic diversity. They also highlight the importance of providing support and resources to strengthen the positive aspects of a community before gentrification has to happen. Have you witnessed or heard of examples of community development that successfully brings together the existing community, new residents, businesses, and political leaders? How could a collaboration like that work?



Hear different perspectives on the Topic of Gentrification  
<http://pbs.org/what-i-hear/topics/gentrification/>

## **LEARN MORE**

### **IN JACKSON HEIGHTS**

<http://www.pbs.org/show/jackson-heights/>

Frederick Wiseman's documentary IN JACKSON HEIGHTS shines a light on one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse communities in the world exploring issues of assimilation, integration, immigration, gentrification, and religious and cultural differences.

### **FLAG WARS**

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/flagwars/>

Shot over a four-year period, Linda Goode Bryant and Laura Poitras' Flag Wars is a poignant and very personal look at a community in Columbus, Ohio, undergoing gentrification.

### **THE URBAN INSTITUTE**

<http://www.urban.org/>

The Urban Institute was founded in 1968 as a research institution, known for broad economic and social policy research and scholarship.

## VOICES FROM THE EPISODE | GENTRIFICATION



**Shukree Tilghman**  
Filmmaker

Well-known for his work on 94 Feet, More Than a Month and The March@50

Activist who questions Black History Month and aims to expose African-American history

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**Kelly Anderson**  
Filmmaker

Director of Brooklyn Film Festival's Audience Award, My Brooklyn Emmy-nominated

Works shown at Sundance, Tribeca and on PBS

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**Desiree Cooper**  
Journalist & Author

Pulitzer-Nominated

Kresge Fellow

Work included in Best African-American Fiction 2010

Visit [pbs.org/whatihear](https://www.pbs.org/whatihear) for a detailed Viewing Guide on every topic.

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**GENTRIFICATION**

**WHEN DID YOU BECOME GAY?**

**APPROPRIATION VS. APPRECIATION**

**WELFARE**

**WHITE PRIDE**

**WHAT ARE YOU?**

**MODEL MINORITY**

**RACE CARD**

**CODE WORDS**

**FEMINISM**

**WHAT I HEAR  
WHEN YOU SAY**

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**VIEWING GUIDE**

**CULTURAL APPROPRIATION**



## AN INTRODUCTION TO **WHAT I HEAR WHEN YOU SAY**

Deeply ingrained in human nature is a tendency to organize, classify, and categorize our complex world. Often, this is a good thing. This ability helps us make sense of our environment and navigate unfamiliar landscapes while keeping us from being overwhelmed by the constant stream of new information and experiences.

When we apply this same impulse to social interactions, however, it can be, at best, reductive and, at worst, dangerous. Seeing each other through the lens of labels and stereotypes prevents us from making authentic connections and understanding each other's experiences.

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# CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

“ Cultural Appropriation is like taking a test and getting an “A.” And then someone else copies off your test and gets an “A” plus extra credit.

Franchesca Ramsey, Comedian & YouTube Personality



def·i·ni·tion

**CULTURAL  
APPROPRIATION**  
noun

The unacknowledged or inappropriate adoption of the customs, practices, ideas, etc. of one people or society by members of another and typically more dominant people or society.

What does it mean to appreciate vs. appropriate culture? Join Comedian and YouTube Personality, Franchesca Ramsey; Video Game Artist and Developer, Jamin Warren; Designer, Alyasha Owerka-Moore as they examine the history and social impact of cultural appropriation and talk about cultivating cultural appreciation through education and dialogue.



**View the full Cultural Appropriation episode**

<http://pbs.org/what-i-hear/web-series/cultural-appropriation/>

## A QUICK LOOK AT THE LANGUAGE OF CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

- Cultural diffusion was coined by cultural anthropologist, Edward Tylor, in the late 19th century and describes the human process of transferring elements of culture between societies. There are three mechanisms through which cultural diffusion occurs:<sup>1 2 3 4</sup>
  - Direct diffusion: when two cultures are geographically close to each other, resulting in intermarriage, trade, and even conflict.

For example, the exchange of culture, art, music, language, and food between the United States and Mexico.

- Forced Diffusion: when one culture subjugates another and forces its own customs on the conquered people. For example, colonizers forcing indigenous peoples to adopt their religion.
  - Indirect Diffusion: when traits are passed from one culture to another culture, without the first and final cultures being in direct contact. An example could be the presence of pizza in Indonesia, influenced by global media and the market created by tourists and transplants from North America and Europe.
- 
- Among the earliest references to cultural appropriation can be found in sociologist Dick Hebdige's 1979 book, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. He examines how White subcultures in Great Britain constructed "style" to reinforce communal identity and borrowed cultural or revolutionary symbols from other marginalized groups, particularly groups who have even less social or economic power (for example: punk style borrowed heavily from Rastafarian Culture and working-class apparel).<sup>5</sup>
  
  - The American historian and cultural theorist, George Lipsitz, coined the umbrella term Strategic Antiessentialism\* to define the act of adopting elements of culture outside of your own and using them to define yourself or your group to challenge an imposed cultural identity. Unlike cultural appropriation, strategic anti-essentialism can be practiced by both minority cultures and majority cultures. It only becomes cultural appropriation when an element of culture is adopted from a marginalized group without respect for its cultural meaning or significance or with the purpose of exploiting the culture for economic or social gain. (\*Antiessentialism: the idea that there is not a single experience shared by members of an identity group that defines what that group is.)<sup>6 7 8</sup>

## **DIG DEEPER | UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL APPROPRIATION**

“ Cultural appropriation is when the majority group deems something that’s a cultural artifact or practice of a smaller group as uncivilized or just wrong completely but then find some ways to co-opt it and usually make a profit off of it. ”

- Franchesca Ramsey, Comedian/YouTube Personality

In February 2015, African-American, actor/singer, Zendaya Coleman, wore her hair in dreadlocks at the Academy Awards and was criticized by Fashion Police host, Giuliana Rancic who said, “Like, I feel like she smells like patchouli oil. Or weed.”

The comment was quickly followed by a social media backlash, and Zendaya posted a public response explaining why Rancic’s statement was so provocative and this issue is so significant:

“ There is already harsh criticism of African-American hair in society without the help of ignorant people who choose to judge others based on the curl of their hair. My wearing my hair in locs on an Oscar red carpet was to showcase them in a positive light, to remind people of color that our hair is good enough. ”<sup>9</sup>

Although Rancic issued a series of apologies, commentators pointed out that she and other media outlets had praised White reality-television celebrity, Kylie Jenner, as “edgy”, “raw”, and “boundary pushing” for wearing dreadlock extensions in her first Teen Vogue cover-shoot.<sup>10</sup>

### **UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL APPROPRIATION**

The concept of cultural appropriation has been discussed and debated in some form for over a century, but the term cultural appropriation, and our contemporary examination of the issues related to it, came to

prominence in the late 20th century, along with conversations about globalism, multiculturalism, and Intersectional perspectives on race, class, and gender. The Oxford Dictionary defines cultural appropriation as:

“The unacknowledged or inappropriate adoption of the customs, practices, ideas, etc. of one people or society by members of another and typically more dominant people or society.”<sup>11</sup>

There is considerable criticism about the concept of “cultural appropriation” and it often focuses around two arguments:

1. Sharing culture across communities and even continents is an inherently human process. The concept of “cultural appropriation” runs contrary to this fact and could inhibit future cultural exchange.<sup>12</sup>
2. Not everyone is held equally accountable for “appropriating” culture.<sup>13</sup> For example: “Why is it cultural appropriation when a White woman wears dreadlocks, but not when a Black woman to straightens her hair?”

The key to understanding what cultural appropriation is (and is not), and why it matters lies not in the fact that traditions are transferred across cultures but in the social context in which this exchange is happening.<sup>14</sup>

## **CULTURAL EXCHANGE VS. CULTURAL APPROPRIATION**

It is important that customs, beliefs, art, and culture are shared across and between communities, but there is a long history of socially dominant societies seizing aspects of minority cultures and profiting from them. The artifacts, traditions, or practices are often modified to make them more acceptable to the new marketplace, and in the process, they are disconnected from the artists/communities that

originated them and the cultural significance they once held.<sup>15 16</sup>

An example of this is the adoption of blues and rock-n-roll by White musicians in the 1930s-1970s. In taking on these musical traditions, White artists made these once taboo, Black music forms accessible to White audiences--especially in a still-segregated America--and many became rich and famous in the process.<sup>17</sup> While Black artists were eventually able to gain a level of success as well, White producers, executives, and artists still disproportionately benefited from this “cultural exchange.”

Today, rock-n-roll has become disproportionately identified with White culture.<sup>18</sup> In 2017, African-American Actor and Comedian, Jessica Williams, was criticized on social media for “appropriating” White culture when wearing a Led Zeppelin t-shirt in a promotional photo for her podcast *2 Dope Queens*.<sup>19</sup> As Williams and her co-host Phoebe Robinson pointed out, in addition to the fact that these criticisms disregarded the African-American roots of rock-n-roll, they also ignored the fact that Led Zeppelin themselves cite African-American blues artists such as Muddy Waters, Skip James, and Howlin’ Wolf as their primary musical influences.

## **CULTURAL ASSIMILATION VS. CULTURAL APPROPRIATION**

Aesthetics, fashions, and aspects of culture associated with dominant groups will often be adopted and absorbed by minority cultures either by choice or by force. One version of this is cultural assimilation, which—like cultural appropriation—is an exchange that occurs in an unequal social context.

The Oxford Dictionary defines cultural assimilation as:  
The incorporation of a culture into the general host society...The acceptance of the host culture may result in the loss of cultural identity of an ethnic group. In reality, cultural assimilation can range along a continuum from complete isolation, or segregation (see apartheid), to complete assimilation.<sup>20</sup>

With this in mind, why might we define a White person wearing dreadlocks as cultural appropriation but not a Black person straightening their hair?

Even today, African-American children are ostracized, punished, and in extreme cases, barred from attending school for wearing traditionally “Black” hairstyles.<sup>21 22</sup> Black adults experience bias, stereotyping, and racial profiling for wearing hairstyles that have cultural and historic roots in the African diaspora.<sup>23</sup>

However, when White people--particularly people in positions of privilege--adopt Black hairstyles, they are able to do so as a fashion choice, an act of rebellion, or to establish their “otherness” without facing the risks or the social stakes of those whose “otherness” was imposed on them.<sup>24 25</sup>

On the other hand, because the dominant American culture favors straight or “European” styles of hair, African-Americans are consistently given messages that to succeed, to belong, to be accepted, or to be taken seriously, their hair needs to conform to White standards; they need to assimilate. This does not mean that all Black women with straight hair have adopted that style under duress, or that assimilation is always negative, but the reality is that there are still many arenas in American society where African-American hair is strictly policed.<sup>26 27</sup> In these circumstances, participation is only possible through assimilation.

Other examples of both forced and voluntary assimilation throughout history, include Native Americans being forbidden to speak their traditional languages, Indonesian indigenous communities adopting Islam from the ruling class, Catholic and Jewish immigrants assimilating into American protestant culture, and the global spread of the English language through American media.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The concept of cultural appropriation may seem, at first glance, like yet another way we are constructing barriers between people at a time when we desperately need to be building bridges. But, as we look more closely at the entrenched inequality in the history of cultural exchange, it becomes clear that the term “cultural appropriation” is simply giving a name to the exploitation that has always existed and continues to this day.

Cultural appropriation allows people to be rewarded for the heritage and labor of oppressed and marginalized communities, disregards the origins and significance of what is being taken, and embraces the products of a culture while reinforcing or ignoring the prejudice experienced by the people who originated it. When we dismiss the history and impact of cultural appropriation, we are continuing to prioritize the feelings and desires of privileged communities over the rights of minorities.

Today, it is more important than ever that we have the opportunity to share knowledge, experiences, stories, beliefs, and creativity across cultures and countries. However, it is also essential that we understand and recognize the context in which these exchanges occur and consider our role in perpetuating or dismantling a long history of cultural inequality.

## QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

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- How would you explain cultural appropriation to someone who has not heard the term before?
- What do you think the difference is between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation? Is there a danger of stigmatizing cultural exchange?
- The debate about cultural appropriation is often centered around the arts and fashion. Do you think that artists, authors, and makers should be free to borrow symbols, styles, and objects from cultures other than their own without being criticised? Why or why not?
- Who should decide when culture can and cannot be adopted or borrowed?
- What are some examples of cultural appropriation? What strategies could be used to transform those exchanges from cultural appropriation to cultural appreciation?
- Dive Deeper: What is considered cultural appropriation in this example: A White woman wearing dreadlocks. A Black woman who straightens her hair. Why?



Hear different perspectives on the Topic of Cultural Appropriation  
<https://pbs.org/what-i-hear/topics/cultural-appropriation/>



## LEARN MORE

### **ONSTAGE IN AMERICA: HONKY**

<http://www.pbs.org/show/onstage-america/>

A stage comedy about race, culture and identity in America that combines comedy, satire, and social commentary to examine and challenge contemporary attitudes.

### **EMPIRE**

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/empire/>

An immersive documentary project that examines the still-unfolding legacy of Dutch colonialism and the contemporary aftershocks of the world's first brush with global capitalism.

### **PBS BLACK CULTURE CONNECTION**

<http://www.pbs.org/black-culture/home/>

is your resource and guide to films, stories and voices across public television centered around Black history and culture.

### **SLAVERY AND THE MAKING OF AMERICA**

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/index.html>

A four-part series documenting the history of American slavery from its beginnings in the British colonies to its end in the Southern states and the years of post-Civil War Reconstruction.

## VOICES FROM THE EPISODE | CULTURAL APPROPRIATION



**Franchesca Ramsey**  
Comedian  
& YouTube Personality

Host of MTV News web series Decoded  
Former writer and contributor for The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore on Comedy Central  
Featured on MTV, The New York Times, NPR, Ebony Magazine and The BBC



**Jamin Warren**  
Video Game Artist  
& Developer

Co-founder and chief executive at Kill Screen, a digital media company focusing on video games and culture  
Former culture reporter for WSJ  
Advisor to MoMA's Dept. of Architecture and Design Department  
speaker at SXSW, NYFF, XOXO  
Hosted PBS web series Game/Show



**Alysha Owerka-Moore**  
Designer

Co-founder of "Phat Farm"  
PF-Flyers Brand Historian  
Founder of Alphanumeric and Fiberops Brand

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**GENTRIFICATION**

**WHEN DID YOU BECOME GAY?**

**APPROPRIATION VS. APPRECIATION**

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**VIEWING GUIDE**

**WELFARE**



## AN INTRODUCTION TO **WHAT I HEAR WHEN YOU SAY**

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# WELFARE

“ I think welfare queen is an oxymoron. I can't think of a situation where a queen would be on welfare.

Jordan Temple, Comedian



def·i·ni·tion  
**WELFARE QUEEN**  
noun

a pejorative term used in the U.S. to refer to women who allegedly collect excessive welfare payments through fraud or manipulation.



View the full episode about the term, Welfare Queen

<http://pbs.org/what-i-hear/web-series/welfare-queen/>

## A QUICK LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF U.S. WELFARE

- In the United States, Social Welfare, commonly called “Welfare”, refers to federal and state policies and programs that respond to social problems or improve the wellbeing of those at risk. Welfare programs may include health care, food assistance, financial assistance, housing and utility subsidies, education programs, and resources.<sup>1 2</sup>
- Early attempts to provide relief and support to impoverished Americans began in the 19th century. With the advent of the The Great Depression, the Federal Emergency Relief Act was passed into law in 1932, which gave local governments \$300 million to pay for direct relief and work relief.<sup>3 4</sup>
- During the 1932 Democratic presidential primaries, Franklin D. Roosevelt, promised “a new deal for the American people” who were

suffering from the ongoing Depression. When he took office in 1933, his administration launched the series of federal programs that became known as “The New Deal”. The programs focused on Relief, Recovery, and Reform. Whereas private charities previously took the lead in caring for the poor, the New Deal laid the foundation for the modern welfare.<sup>5 6 7</sup>

- In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson launched the Great Society; domestic programs to end poverty and racial injustice. The Great Society ushered in the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Civil Rights Acts of 1964/68, and the Immigration and Nationality Services Act of 1965 (which abolished the national-origin quotas in immigration law). The most far-reaching and contentious of President Johnson’s programs was the “War on Poverty” initiative and the creation of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO).<sup>8 9</sup>
- In the 1970s, the derogatory term “welfare queen” was coined in media stories that claimed that social welfare subsidies were being abused, especially by women. Ronald Reagan used the “Welfare Queen” trope as part of his 1976 and 1980 campaigns to rally support for welfare “reform”.<sup>10 11</sup>
- In the 1980s, welfare came under increasing bipartisan criticism and during the Presidency of Bill Clinton, in the 1990s, The “Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996” (PRWORA) became law. The stated goal of the law was to “reform” the welfare system and break, what President Clinton referred to as, “the cycle of dependency”.<sup>12 13</sup>
- The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, a controversial U.S. welfare program, was passed under President Barack Obama in 2010. By 2016, the uninsured share of the population had roughly halved.



## **DIG DEEPER | BEHIND THE MYTH OF THE WELFARE QUEEN**

“What I hear when I hear, ‘I don’t want my tax dollars going to Welfare queen,’ is one of the oldest intersectional pieces of discrimination that one can think about...I hear the success of an anti-feminist backlash.” – Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Professor

At a campaign rally in 1976, then-candidate Ronald Reagan launched the myth of the “welfare queen” with a story about a Chicago woman who had defrauded the government: “She used 80 names, 30 addresses, 15 telephone numbers to collect food stamps, Social Security, veterans’ benefits for four nonexistent deceased veteran husbands, as well as welfare. Her tax-free cash income alone has been running \$150,000 a year.”<sup>14</sup>

Although Reagan never used her name or confirmed her identity, this provocative example of an extreme case of Welfare fraud was based, at least in part, on the case of Linda Taylor. A life-long criminal, Taylor was eventually prosecuted and imprisoned for \$8,000 in Welfare fraud, but authorities were unable to build cases for her more serious alleged crimes, including kidnapping, theft, murder, and baby trafficking.<sup>15</sup> Taylor’s outlandish story reinforced almost all of the worst suspicions held by those who opposed the welfare state—that an avaricious woman could live a life of luxury on the taxpayers’ dime—with one exception, Linda Taylor was White.<sup>16</sup>

### **HOW DID POVERTY BECOME RACIALIZED?**

From the start of the New Deal and throughout the development of the U.S. Welfare system, race has informed and defined how support is delivered and how poverty is viewed.

Images of poverty throughout the Great Depression predominantly focused on White hardship, often in rural communities and migrant worker camps, and these depictions were consistent with the demographic of aid recipients at the time. As of 1939, four years after the launch of Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), among the first federal

social welfare programs in the United States, 80% of beneficiary cases were White.<sup>17</sup>

The reality of poverty at that time, however, was much different than what was being presented. African-Americans were disproportionately affected by the Great Depression, but Welfare programs like the 1935 Social Security Act excluded workers from industries that relied on Black labor, such as domestic work and farm labor.<sup>18</sup> States were also given the discretion to restrict access to federal aid programs, which many Southern states used to limit benefits for Black parents and coerce poor Black workers into low-wage labor.<sup>19</sup> Despite or because of these conditions, Black poverty remained largely invisible throughout the mid-20th century.

Following World War II, the U.S. economy began to improve. By 1960, poverty had more than halved, from 48% in 1935 to 21% in 1960.<sup>20</sup> According to social philosopher, Martin Gilens, the post-war media was too busy celebrating the “American Century” to worry about who was being left behind: “*Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report* each published an average of just 16 stories about poverty” throughout the 1950s.<sup>21</sup>

Poverty once again came to the fore when then-candidate John F. Kennedy was struck by the extreme, intergenerational, White poverty he encountered in rural West Virginia. In response, eradicating poverty became the focus of domestic policy throughout Kennedy’s then Lyndon B. Johnson’s presidencies, culminating in Johnson’s “War on Poverty,” launched in 1964.<sup>22</sup>

By the 1970s, however, the image of poverty in the United States changed dramatically. During the previous thirty years, poor, Black families had gained more access to welfare programs through a combination of African-American migration to Northern states and incremental reforms to the welfare system that restricted racial bias.<sup>23</sup> As Civil Rights activists turned their attention to economic injustice, the issue of Black and Latinx poverty became more contentious and more visible.

Percentage of media images that featured African-American poverty:<sup>24</sup>

- 1964: 27%
- 1965: 49%
- 1967: 72%

By 1973, 75% of media images illustrating poverty featured African-Americans—often women and children—even though they were only 35% of Welfare recipients and only 12.8% of the population.<sup>25</sup>

Although White families still received the majority of Welfare benefits, the increase in African-Americans receiving taxpayer-funded assistance and the escalation of protest movements and social justice activism, fundamentally changed the way poverty in America is depicted.

## **THE WELFARE QUEEN: AN INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

The National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) was formed in the mid-1960s and began advocating for more responsive aid programs for women and children.<sup>26</sup> In 1972, Executive Director, Johnnie Tillmon, wrote the essay, "Welfare Is a Woman's Issue", for Ms. Magazine that explained how women's liberation was inextricably linked to economic liberation:<sup>27</sup>

"I'm a woman. I'm a black woman. I'm a poor woman. I'm a fat woman. I'm a middle-aged woman. And I'm on welfare..."

Ninety-nine percent of welfare families are headed by women. There is no man around. In half the states there can't be men around because A.F.D.C. (Aid to Families With Dependent Children) says if there is an 'able-bodied' man around, then you can't be on welfare. If the kids are going to eat, and the man can't get a job, then he's got to go...

The man, the welfare system, controls your money. He tells you what to buy, what not to buy, where to buy it, and how much things cost. If things- rent, for instance- really cost more than he says they do, it's just too bad for you. He's always right.

That's why Governor [Ronald] Reagan can get away with slandering welfare recipients, calling them 'lazy parasites,' 'pigs at the trough,' and such. We've been trained to believe that the only reason people are on welfare is because there's something wrong with their character. If people have 'motivation,' if people only want to work, they can, and they will be able to support themselves and their kids in decency.

The truth is a job doesn't necessarily mean an adequate income."

Almost two decades after this essay was published, Legal Scholar and Professor, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, coined the term Intersectionality, which has helped to highlight the overlapping forces of oppression that Tillmon described.

Crenshaw describes Intersectionality as, "my attempt to make feminism, anti-racist activism, and anti-discrimination law do what I thought they should — highlight the multiple avenues through which racial and gender oppression were experienced so that the problems would be easier to discuss and understand."<sup>28</sup>

By weaving together the story of the Welfare Queen from a combination of outlier anecdotes and racial, gender, and economic stereotypes, politicians and the media tapped into potent Intersectional bigotries with deep social and cultural roots.

In the politically volatile climate of late 1970's America, the public was primed to embrace this image of a lazy, dependent, woman defrauding the government, and they did not need to see a photograph to understand that this Welfare Queen must be Black.

## **THE LEGACY OF THE WELFARE QUEEN**

By the end of the 1980s, two-thirds of Americans believed that, "welfare benefits make poor people dependent and encourage them to stay poor."<sup>29</sup> Then-Presidential candidate William Jefferson Clinton harnessed the power of this dissatisfaction and declared an end to "welfare as we know it".<sup>30</sup>

Instead of attempting to dispel the stereotype of the Welfare Queen, however, Clinton's Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWOA) was shaped as though this social myth was a reality.

PRWOA severely restricted access to support, which fell from of 5.1 million families in 1994 to about 2 million by the early 2000s<sup>31</sup>. It also implemented punitive policies such as penalties for having children, limited access to approved funds, and regular drug testing, all of which reinforced the false link between poverty and immorality.

## **WELFARE TODAY**

The Welfare Queen stereotype continues to shape Americans perspectives on poverty and government aid.

In 2011, presidential candidate Newt Gingrich claimed, "We have people who take their food stamp money and use it to go to Hawaii. They give food stamps now to millionaires because, after all, don't you want to be compassionate?"<sup>32</sup> Although this type of fraud is impossible due to restrictions on how, where, and on what people can use the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) "food stamps", the story was compelling and the myth of widespread fraud was reinforced.<sup>33</sup>

Stories like this contribute to persistent distrust of the U.S. Welfare system. A 2016 survey by the nonpartisan Princeton Survey Research Associates found that the majority of White Americans believe that government-sponsored, anti-poverty programs "make poor people dependent and encourage them to stay poor", while the majority of Black Americans believe that these programs help people to "stand on their own two feet and get started again."<sup>34</sup>

Despite this, research has also found that most middle-class Americans are willing to pay higher taxes if the money were used to fight homelessness or to provide education, medical care or job training for the poor. Unfortunately, about 7 in 10 Americans say they believe that government officials lack the knowledge or ability to take on the challenge of eliminating poverty.<sup>35</sup>

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

As income inequality continues to rise, it is increasingly important for us to reexamine the way we view the poor, and how we respond to poverty as citizens and as a nation.

As an increasing percentage of Americans of every race rely on welfare programs like SNAP to survive, false myths like the Welfare Queen, millionaire SNAP recipients, and poverty as a “Black” problem, will undermine effective programs and leave tens of millions of Americans with no safety net and few options.

## QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

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- What comes to mind when you hear the word “welfare”?
- How does the myth the “welfare queen” continue to stigmatize poor women of color today? How do representations in media reinforce these stereotypes?
- Do you agree that healthy food is a basic social right? How do “food deserts” reinforce poor health in impoverished communities?
- How can understanding your opportunities and disadvantages, particularly those that are societally assigned, help you understand your interactions with others?



**Hear different perspectives on the topic of the term Welfare Queen**

<http://pbs.org/what-i-hear/topics/welfare-queen/>

## **LEARN MORE**

### **CHASING THE DREAM: POVERTY AND OPPORTUNITY IN AMERICA**

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/chasing-the-dream/>

A multi-platform public media initiative that aims to provide a deeper understanding of the impact of poverty on American society: what life is like below the poverty line, its impact on our economic security and on our children, and what has happened to our age-old dream of striving for a better life.

### **TAKE IT FROM ME**

[www.pbs.org/pov/takeitfromme/](http://www.pbs.org/pov/takeitfromme/)

This documentary follows several women and their families navigating the welfare system with its recent controversial reforms that may make it easier to ignore rather than confront the complexities of poverty.

### **BLACK AMERICA SINCE MLK: AND STILL I RISE**

<http://www.pbs.org/show/black-america-mlk-and-still-i-rise/>

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. embarks on a journey from the victories of the civil rights movement up to today, asking profound questions about the last fifty years of African-American history.

### **AFRICAN-AMERICAN POLICY FORUM (AAPF)**

<http://www.aapf.org/>

AAPF is a think tank co-founded by Kimberlé Crenshaw that connects academics, activists and policy-makers to promote efforts to dismantle structural inequality.

## VOICES FROM THE EPISODE | WELFARE



**Jordan Temple**  
Comedian

Writer and star of MTV'S Decoded  
Stand-up set The Meltdown at the NerdMelt Showroom  
Featured on podcast for Cave Comedy Radio



**Kimberlé Williams  
Crenshaw**  
Professor

Professor of Law at UCLA and Columbia Law School  
Co-founder of African-American Policy Forum  
Coined the terms Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality  
Featured in NYT, Huffington Post, Washington Post



**Tracie McMillan**  
Author

Author of New York Times bestseller, The American Way of  
Eating: Undercover at Walmart, Applebee's, Farm Fields and  
the Dinner Table  
James Beard Award-winning journalist  
Written for NYT, Slate, Washington Post

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