

## LESSON: Institutionalized Racism

**GRADE:** 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>

**TIME:** 50 minutes

### SUMMARY

In this lesson students learn about the concept of institutionalized discrimination and examine song lyrics to find examples of it. They practice interpretation skills and using evidence from the text to support their interpretation.

### OBJECTIVES

#### Social Studies

- **SS.9-12.BS.6** Essential Concept and/or Skill: Understand the process of how humans develop, learn, adapt to their environment, and internalize their culture.

#### Literacy

- **RH.9-12.1** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources

### MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- Speakers
- Device to play songs (internet connected if you want to play from YouTube)
- Handout/graphic organizer on institutionalized racism
- Song lyrics handout (see below)

### PRESENTATION

Play songs “Changes” by Tupak and “The Way It Is” by Bruce Hornsby one time through, and ask them:

- How are the lyrics of these two songs similar? How do they differ?
- How can you connect the messages of these songs to what we’ve been learning about?
- What do you think Tupac’s reasoning was for using the piano riff from “The Way It Is”?

- Explain the idea of ‘institutionalized racism’.  
 “Institutionalized racism is defined as racism that is built into political and social institutions. It occurs when institutions, including corporations, governments and universities, discriminate either deliberately or indirectly, against certain groups of people to limit their rights. For example, race-based discrimination in housing, education, employment and health are forms of institutional racism. Institutional racism reflects the cultural assumptions of the dominant group, so that the practices of that group are seen as the norm to which other cultural practices should conform (Anderson and Taylor, 2006).”  
*Source: Taking Action Against Racism*

## DIRECTIONS

1. Play the songs a second time, this time giving students printed lyrics for “close reading”. Ask them to highlight or mark 3-4 parts of the song that are meaningful or challenging to them; each find should be 1-3 lines long.
2. Give students a chance to ask questions about the songs’ meanings (there are references that require background knowledge). *For instance, you can explain that Tupak’s lyric, “they got a war on drugs so the police can bother me.” Is a reference to the practice of mandatory minimum sentences that were much higher for possession of crack cocaine (5 years) compared to powder cocaine. While there are not more black users of cocaine, this disparity in sentencing resulted in a disproportionate number of African American men being jailed because crack had a harsher sentence.*
3. Now give students the handout that explains three ‘distinguishing features’ of institutionalized discrimination. Give them another example and show how it meets criteria.  
*Women earning \$0.78 to the \$1 that men make is a good example. It happens to people with a certain social identity (women) and results in a pattern (nationally women make about ¾ what men make for the same work).*
4. Next ask students to get in pairs or groups to look more closely at the songs to see if they can find places in the lyrics where the writers are pointing out examples of institutionalized racism, classism or sexism. When they find examples they will write down the actual lyrics and their interpretation of what the lyrics mean.

5. After groups have sufficient time to find examples, bring the class back together to see what they found. Have groups share their examples as well as evidence that they are examples. Help the class add meaning and background knowledge to the examples they found and to those they may have missed.

## **REFLECTION/JOURNAL PROMPT**

- Can you think of examples of institutional racism? What are they?

## "Changes" By Tupac

[1]

Come on come on

I see no changes. Wake up in the morning and I ask myself,

"Is life worth living? Should I blast myself?"

I'm tired of bein' poor and even worse I'm black.

My stomach hurts, so I'm lookin' for a purse to snatch.

Cops give a damn about a negro? Pull the trigger, kill a nigga, he's a hero.

Give the crack to the kids who the hell cares? One less hungry mouth on the welfare.

First ship 'em dope and let 'em deal to brothers.

Give 'em guns, step back, and watch 'em kill each other.

"It's time to fight back", that's what Huey said.

2 shots in the dark now Huey's dead.

I got love for my brother, but we can never go nowhere  
unless we share with each other. We gotta start makin' changes.

Learn to see me as a brother 'stead of 2 distant strangers.

And that's how it's supposed to be.

How can the Devil take a brother if he's close to me?

I'd love to go back to when we played as kids

but things changed, and that's the way it is

*[Bridge w/ changing ad libs]*

Come on come on

That's just the way it is

Things'll never be the same

That's just the way it is

aww yeah

*[Repeat]*

I see no changes. All I see is racist faces.

Misplaced hate makes disgrace to races we under.

I wonder what it takes to make this one better place...

let's erase the wasted.

Take the evil out the people, they'll be acting right.

'Cause both black and white are smokin' crack tonight.

And only time we chill is when we kill each other.

It takes skill to be real, time to heal each other.

And although it seems heaven sent,

we ain't ready to see a black President, uhh.

It ain't a secret don't conceal the fact...

the penitentiary's packed, and it's filled with blacks.

But some things will never change.

Try to show another way, but they stayin' in the dope game.

Now tell me what's a mother to do?  
Bein' real don't appeal to the brother in you.  
You gotta operate the easy way.  
"I made a G today" But you made it in a sleazy way.  
Sellin' crack to the kids. "I gotta get paid,"  
Well hey, well that's the way it is.

*[Bridge]*

We gotta make a change...  
It's time for us as a people to start makin' some changes.  
Let's change the way we eat, let's change the way we live  
and let's change the way we treat each other.  
You see the old way wasn't working so it's on us to do  
what we gotta do, to survive.

And still I see no changes. Can't a brother get a little peace?  
There's war on the streets and the war in the Middle East.  
Instead of war on poverty,  
they got a war on drugs so the police can bother me.  
And I ain't never did a crime I ain't have to do.  
But now I'm back with the facts givin' 'em back to you.  
Don't let 'em jack you up, back you up, crack you up and pimp smack you up.  
You gotta learn to hold ya own.  
They get jealous when they see ya with ya mobile phone.  
But tell the cops they can't touch this.  
I don't trust this, when they try to rush I bust this.  
That's the sound of my tool. You say it ain't cool, but mama didn't raise no fool.  
And as long as I stay black, I gotta stay strapped and I never get to lay back.  
'Cause I always got to worry 'bout the payback.  
Some buck that I roughed up way back... comin' back after all these years.  
Rat-a-tat-tat-tat-tat. That's the way it is. uhh

*[Bridge 'til fade:]*

Some things will never change

## Bruce Hornsby – The Way It Is Lyrics

Standing in line marking time--  
Waiting for the welfare dime  
'Cause they can't buy a job  
The man in the silk suit hurries by  
As he catches the poor old ladies' eyes  
Just for fun he says "Get a job"

That's just the way it is  
Some things will never change  
That's just the way it is  
But don't you believe them

They say hey little boy you can't go  
Where the others go  
'Cause you don't look like they do  
Said hey old man how can you stand  
To think that way  
Did you really think about it  
Before you made the rules  
He said, Son

That's just the way it is  
Some things will never change  
That's just the way it is  
But don't you believe them

Well they passed a law in '64  
To give those who ain't got a little more  
But it only goes so far  
There's a the law that don't change another's mind  
When all it sees at the hiring time  
Is the line on the color bar

That's just the way it is  
Some things will never change  
That's just the way it is  
But don't you believe them

Songwriters: HORNSBY, BRUCE  
The Way It Is lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Warner/Chappell Music, Inc.