“If [people] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.”

-W. I. Thomas (1928)

Social Change
Race

The Social Construction of Reality

The process through which facts, knowledge, and truth are discovered, made known, reaffirmed, and altered by the members of society.
(Berger and Luckman, 1966)

Micro-level
Social interactions

Macro-level
Institutions and culture

Sociology of Knowledge

What we know as “truth” is a product of the culture and historical context in which we exist.

“Knowledge” itself is a human creation.

If “knowledge” and “truth” are created by humans, then humans can perpetuate or change them.

If we can change “truth,” we can change “reality.”
RACE:
an example of a socially constructed reality

BUT

Contested Realities: Power
• Power comes from the ability to control or influence the way a situation is defined or framed.
• Reality construction is not democratic!
• Powerful social actors can promote a version of reality that serves their interests.

Contested Realities
• Race is socially significant. As such it shapes our identity and our social location.
• In our culture, “whiteness” has historically been “normalized.”
  — The default race has privileges

Learning Race
• “Race” is a social construct
  — “Race” is genetically the same as eye color
Contested Realities

There are real-life implications of our socially constructed reality.

On a separate sheet of paper:

- Identify *two contemporary* contested realities
- Describe the differing/contesting view points
- What impact are these contested realities having on society or our culture?

Regarding these notes about slavery: you don’t need to write all of them down if you don’t want to.

But when you see Justin Bieber, you know that stuff is important and you should write it down.

The Beginnings of Slavery in the United States

- The Portuguese and Spanish had already brought Africans to South and Latin America.
- In 1619, the first Africans were brought to the colony Jamestown, Virginia by the Dutch.

Reasons for Using Enslaved African Labor

- **Proximity:** It only took 2-6 weeks to get to the colonies from the Caribbean at first.
- **Experience:** They had previous experience and knowledge working in sugar and rice production.
- **Immunity from diseases:** Less likely to get sick due to prolonged contact over centuries.
- **Low escape possibilities:** They did not know the land, had no allies, and were highly visible because of skin color.
- **Racism:** This one should be obvious.
Slavery in the Colonies

- New England colonies: no large plantation systems; slaves lived in cities and small farms
- Chesapeake Bay colonies: large tobacco plantations; center of the domestic slave trade
- Carolinas and Georgia: large rice and cotton plantations

The Effects of the American Revolution and the Constitution

- Gradual abolition of slavery in the northern colonies
- End of the Atlantic Slave Trade in 1808
- Entrenchment of slavery in the South with the invention of the cotton gin in 1793 by Eli Whitney

Life of a Slave

- Most slaves had Sundays off and they went to church.
- Most slaves could not read or write, and it was illegal for them to learn.
- Slave Codes: They could not: leave their home without a pass, carry a weapon, gather in groups, own property, legally marry, defend themselves against a white person, or speak in court.

Resistance

- Flight: Slaves would runaway.
- Truancy: Flight for a short amount of time and then the slave came back.
- Refusal to reproduce: Women refused to have children.
- Covert Action: Slaves would sometimes kill animals, destroy crops, start fires, steal stuff, break tools, poison food.
- Revolts: Slaves would occasionally rise up against their captors.

Revolts!

- 4 major slave revolts-
  - Stono Rebellion: failed revolt in South Carolina in 1739
  - Gabriel Prosser: led failed revolt in Virginia in 1800
  - Denmark Vessey: led failed revolt in South Carolina in 1822
  - Nat Turner: killed 60 white people in Virginia in 1831

The Dred Scott Decision

- Dred Scott was a slave who was taken to a free territory by his owner.
- He sued for his freedom because he lived in the free territory.
- His case went all the way to the Supreme Court (Dred Scott v. Sanford), where Scott lost because he was not considered a citizen (he was “property”), thus could not sue in federal court.
- Conclusion: Slaves are not citizens and therefore not protected by the Constitution.
Election of 1860 and the Start of the Civil War

- Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860 without any southern electoral votes.
- Many southern states quickly seceded from the Union, South Carolina leading the way.
- Southern troops fired upon Fort Sumter, starting the Civil War.
- The North fought to preserve the Union, while the South fought to preserve slavery.

Causes of the Civil War

- Economic and social differences between the North and the South
  - North: cities and factories
  - South: cotton production and slave economy
- States versus federal rights
- The fight between Slave and Non-Slave State Proponents
- Growth of the Abolition Movement
- The election of Abraham Lincoln

The Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation

- Early in the war, Lincoln began to think about ending slavery in the South to help end the war.
- On September 22, 1862 he issued the Emancipation Proclamation which declared an end to slavery in the states in rebellion on January 1, 1863.
- What did it do? Good PR, but it only freed slaves in the states that had seceded.

End of the Civil War and the 13th Amendment

- The South lost, and the states were forced to accept the 13th Amendment to the Constitution before they could be readmitted into the Union.
- 13th Amendment—It abolished slavery in the United States, except...
- It was ratified in 1865.

The End