

# Societal Relations

## Lesson #10: DO PHOTOS LIE?

### TIME

45 minutes

### MATERIALS FROM TRUNK

Graphics #10-15

### TEACHER PREPARATION

Read the historical background section and be prepared to discuss the meanings of stereotype and prejudice. It may be beneficial to read the historical background section in the lesson "'How to Handle Mexican Labor': An Exercise in Generalizations and Stereotypes."

### OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- 1) define the words stereotype and prejudice
- 2) recognize examples of stereotypes and prejudice
- 3) propose methods of dealing with stereotypes and prejudice

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Tension between groups often is based on perceptions of racial, ethnic, and/or religious differences between neighboring societies. So pervasive are these tensions that they permeate every aspect of society. Perceptions of differences matter a great deal because people act on their resultant beliefs no matter how misguided.

Minority ethnic groups are differentiated from the dominant group on the basis of cultural differences such as language, attitudes toward marriage and parenting, food habits, and so forth. Some ethnic groups are set apart from others because of their national origin or distinctive cultural patterns.

**Prejudice** - The word prejudice has come to mean an unsupported judgment usually accompanied by disapproval. Its net effect is to place people at a disadvantage. This is not because they have done anything wrong, but because the prejudiced person is predisposed to respond in a particular way, regardless of the facts.

Focusing on how to eliminate prejudice involves an explicit value judgment: prejudice is wrong and causes problems for those who are prejudiced and for their victims. The obvious way to eliminate prejudice is to eliminate its causes - the desire to exploit, the fear of being threatened, and unacceptable personal failure.

**Mexican Americans** - Mexican Americans are one of the largest ethnic groups in the United

States. The history of this group is closely tied to immigration, which has been encouraged when Mexican labor was in demand and discouraged when Mexican workers were unwanted. Mexican Americans find themselves on the periphery of formal education, facing a curriculum unsuited to their needs and colleges ill-prepared to receive them. As is true of other subordinate groups, the strength of Mexican Americans rests in their organizations - political groups, the church, and the family.

Among some members of the European American population were strong negative stereotypes about Mexican Americans. The anti-Mexican feelings created by these stereotypes sometimes led to mistreatment and violence against Mexican American people. Some states, including Kansas, had systems of segregation that did not allow Mexican Americans to use the same facilities as whites including swimming pools, lunch counters, hotels, cafes, and drive-ins. In some areas movies, churches, schools, and even cemeteries were segregated.

Mexican Americans continue to be victims of prejudice and discrimination. Movies and advertisements that perpetuate stereotypes continue to reinforce prejudice. The stereotypical Mexican village in movies or advertisements depict residents either sleeping near a fountain or walking around in bored laziness. In the late 1960s several Mexican American groups protested against portrayals of Mexicans as either bandits or lazy peasants. Most of the mass media responded by avoiding negative stereotyping by eliminating Mexican Americans from advertisements and films.

**For additional reading see:**

Julie Catalano, *The Mexican Americans* included in this trunk, pages 27-28.

Allport, Gordon W. *The Nature of Prejudice*. 25th anniversary ed. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979.

Pettigrew, Thomas F., et al. *Prejudice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Rose, Peter I. *They and We: Racial and Ethnic Relations in the United States*, 2nd ed. New York: Random House, 1974.

Schaefer, Richard T. *Racial and Ethnic Groups*. New York: Harper Collins, 1990.

## LOCATION FOR PRIMARY SOURCES USED IN THIS LESSON

Complete transcripts for the oral histories with D.C. Garcia and Cipriana (Sue) Rodriguez are located at the Finney County Historical Society, Garden City, Kansas.

The papers of Governor Reed are located in the collections of the Kansas State Historical Society.

## VOCABULARY

- **Discrimination** = The denial of opportunities and equal rights to individuals and groups because of prejudice or other arbitrary reasons.
- **Ethnic group** = A group set apart from others because of its national origin or distinctive cultural patterns.
- **Ethnocentrism** = The tendency to assume that one's culture and way of life are superior to all others.

- Minority group = A subordinate group whose members have significantly less control or power over their own lives than that held by the members of a dominant or majority group.
- Prejudice = A negative attitude toward an entire category of people, such as a racial or ethnic minority.
- Stereotypes = Unreliable generalizations about all members of a group that do not take into account individual differences within the group.

## ACTIVITY

- 1) Introduce the concept of "reading" a photograph. A multitude of information is available from photographs if they are examined closely. If time permits, practice on a photo from the trunk not being used in this lesson.

*- Look it over, top to bottom and left to right.*

*- Ask questions of the photo and come up with possible answers. Is the weather bad? What must it be like to live in those tents? Do the people look cold? Hot? Tired? Is this shot posed or candid? Look at the photo to find possible answers.*

*- Guess at what was happening just before and after the photo was taken.*

*- Look at the objects, clothing, physical condition of visible people or animals, etc. What do these tell you about the location, time period, socio-economic level, reason the photo was taken, etc.?*

- 2) Show the class graphic #10. Have the class "read" the photo. Try to give members of the class a fairly close look at the photograph.

After examining the photo have the students suggest possible captions for it. Discuss reasons why these captions seem appropriate or inappropriate for the photo. Write a list of possible captions on the board.

*Things that the class will very likely see and possibly include in their captions might include that the people seem to be living in tents, the work being done by the people in the photo, and the weather conditions at the time of the photo. They may decide to determine at what date (year) the photo was taken based on the clothing being worn.*

- 3) At this point write the original caption for the photo on the board, "**Learning to work and keep things clean, Mex Ref (Relief) Camp.**" Have the class discuss whether this seems to be an appropriate or inappropriate caption for the photo.

*One point for discussion is the caption's statement that Mexicans are being taught to keep clean. This indicates both that they need to learn how to be clean and that someone is teaching them this. (The photo only shows the Mexicans and they seem to be doing their laundry without any difficulty.)*

- 4) Use this discussion to explore the meaning and consequences of prejudice. Ask the class for a definition of prejudice.

*A negative attitude toward an entire category of people, such as a racial or ethnic minority group. See historical background section for more information.*

Discuss how the attitudes and beliefs of the person who wrote the original caption may have impacted on or influenced other people over the years.

*The only information available about this photo is the words written across the bottom of the image. The class's interpretation of the photo may have been slanted by words written more than half a century ago. This is one example of how prejudiced behavior continues, and how a prejudiced or slanted view can hide the truth.*

- 5) Read the following quotes to the class, show them [graphics #11-#15](#), and have them decide if these quotes and photos support the image of Mexicans described by the label on the photo. Are the images of Mexicans and Mexican Americans portrayed in these quotes one of people needing to be taught to work and keep clean? What images of Mexican Americans do these quotes and photos create?

- Written in response to a letter from Governor Reed in the 1930s asking that Mexican workers be released from their jobs so that American workers can be hired in their place.

**"I wish to get in a good word for the Mexicans. They are much less trouble than other aliens....They do the hard track work, which American citizens do not seem to care for, probably because the employment is not steady; even in the summer time they seldom find work six days in the week, and in the winter time many weeks pass without even one day's work."**

- This quote is about work D.C. Garcia had done in Garden City. From an interview with D.C. Garcia in his home in Garden City, by Robert Oppenheimer, May 27, 1981.

**"Well, other than sugar beet fields, and mowing lawns, and grass...and whatever we could in those days. Then as I grew up I had decided that the field wasn't going to be for me and I started looking around for a different job, you know, a steady job. Which in those days, we weren't given the opportunities to prove ourselves that we would be able to handle the job. Until during World War II, when the help . . . started getting scarce and some of us that didn't make it to the [military] service, why they started giving us the opportunity to work, and so we proved ourselves that we would be able to handle the job, that we was trustworthy, and dependable. So then the businesses started opening up to hiring Mexican Americans."**

- This quote is about work Cipriana (Sue) Rodriguez did during her life. From an interview with Cipriana (Sue) Rodriguez in her home in Garden City, by Robert Oppenheimer, May 22, 1981.

**"The first work that I did was in the sugar beet fields. I must have been about 10 years old. And then from then I did a housework and from then I worked a**

**number of years in the dry cleaners and a mostly my specialty was...doing the silks. Ladies garments. I worked and then I managed a shop towards the last. I managed Acme Cleaners for a number of years."**

- This quote is about work by D.C. Garcia's family in the sugar beet fields. From an interview with D.C. Garcia in his home in Garden City, by Robert Oppenheimer, May 27, 1981.

**"Yes, she [his mother] would get up real early in the morning and get our breakfast, send us out in the field and then when she got done with all that and made the beds, which wasn't much of a bed, picked up the quilt and what have you and then she would go out for about, oh about until 11:00, and then she would come back home and prepare dinner for us and then when dinner was ready we would come over to the house and have dinner and then we would go back out and she would wash the dishes and go back out another two or three hours before we would come back in the evenings. And there were a lot of times when we would go out there and work in the moonlight."**

- 6) Initiate a class discussion about how to deal with stereotypes and prejudices. What are the pros and cons of each solution? What can the class do?

*Solutions may include:*

- *Be responsible for what you say and do since your actions influence a great many people.*
- *Point out the inherent contradictions in stereotypes and prejudices. (example: Blondes are dumb but [insert name of a familiar blonde here] is very smart)*
- *Pass legislation ending prejudicial behaviors and rules (such as desegregation).*
- *Use education and the mass media to change people's beliefs. Examples might include prime time television shows that affected people's views about a certain group or groups, or learning about and beginning to appreciate various cultures in schools.*
- *Increase contact between groups. Perhaps showing that stereotypes are wrong will change some people's beliefs.*

### **EXTENDED ACTIVITIES**

- 1) Have the class find and review written materials, television programs, movies, etc. that are discriminatory and make a list of stereotypes found in these materials.
- 2) Research why people have different skin colors. Find out how the degree of melanin and carotene in the skin affects its color.
- 3) See the complementary lessons in this manual: "'How to Handle Mexican Labor': An Exercise in Generalizations and Stereotypes," and "Bilingual Education: An Example in Discrimination?"

- 4) Divide the class into groups of three to four students. Provide photos from magazines, newspapers, etc. and have the groups write captions for them. How do their captions differ? How important is the caption in communicating a particular message? Ask the class to think about the role of photographs in advertising. How are different ethnic groups represented in advertising?