



**ROBERT F.  
KENNEDY**

**HUMAN  
RIGHTS**

# **SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER**

**HUMAN RIGHTS  
DEFENDERS WHO  
ARE CHANGING  
OUR WORLD**

**RACISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY: A HIDDEN APPROACH**

# BILL RUSSELL

(HE/HIM/HIS)

**“IN ORDER TO ERADICATE RACISM, WE MUST PROVIDE OUR CHILDREN WITH AN EDUCATION THAT INCLUDES ALL AMERICAN HISTORY AND THAT EXAMINES HOW THAT HISTORY CONTINUES TO SHAPE OUR INSTITUTIONS, BELIEFS, AND CULTURE.”**

Those who know of Bill Russell know he was a force to be reckoned with on the court. Through his 13 years in the league, he led the Celtics to 11 championships and was recognized with five Most Valuable Player awards. As extraordinarily accomplished as he is on the court, it is his courage and impact on the Civil Rights Movement that inspired former President Barack Obama to award him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011. When the Celtics arrived in Jim Crow Kentucky in 1961 to play against the St. Louis Hawks, several of Russell’s fellow Black players were refused service at a coffee shop. In the face of adversity and hate, Russell stood firm when he decided he would refuse to play in that match. Two years later, Bill Russell took part in the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and was seated in the front row of the crowd to hear the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. deliver his “I Have a Dream” speech. He went to Mississippi after the civil rights activist Medgar Evers was murdered and worked with Evers’s brother, Charles, to open an integrated basketball camp in Jackson. He was among a group of prominent Black athletes who supported Muhammad Ali when Ali refused induction into the armed forces during the Vietnam War. His impact didn’t just stop there – in 1966, he became the first Black head coach in all the major sports leagues in the country. Years later, in 2020, many NBA players followed his footsteps in taking an active stand against racial injustice. Bill Russell, a 2022 Robert F. Kennedy Ripple of Hope Award Laureate, was a trailblazer and Civil Rights defender on and off the court.

# RACISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY: A HIDDEN APPROACH

## 9TH-12TH GRADE

### OBJECTIVES

By the end of this workshop, students will be able:

- To understand covert racism and the forms it can take
- To recognize its impact on people of color and human rights
- To recognize the ways racism exists outside of the south and challenge the notion that racism exists only in the south.
- To advocate for racial justice within their communities and nationally
- To learn about Bill Russell and his efforts towards a racially just world

### UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

- **Article 7:** All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

- **SDG 10:** Reduced Inequalities
- **SDG 11:** Sustainable Cities and Communities
- **SDG 16:** Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

### TECHNOLOGY

- Internet Access Required

# STUDENT ACTIVITIES

## ACTIVITY 1

The instructor should guide students in differentiating between the words listed below. Post the words in different parts of the room and hand out post-it notes. Students should write and/or draw concepts or words or experiences that come to their minds when thinking of these words. They may even include what they have seen on television or in films!

- Systemic Racism
- Prejudice
- Ignorance
- Inequitable

After students have completed their activity, go through each word and discuss the responses. The instructor may use the following questions to guide students.

- How may ignorance lead to acts of racism and or prejudice?
  - In what way is systemic racism related to inequities?
  - What factors influence prejudiced behavior? How might it relate to ignorance?
- 

## ACTIVITY 2

The instructor should read the following statement aloud to the class and discuss the following two questions. *The instructor may choose to explore topics such as being uncomfortable with racism, ignorance, etc.*

- According to a [2022 U.S. News Poll](#), over 40% of Americans do not believe systemic racism exists in the United States.
1. Why do you think nearly a third of Americans do not consider systemic racism to be a major issue in this country?
  2. How do you think many Americans would define systemic racism?

## ACTIVITY 3

The instructor should ask students what their understanding of covert and overt racism is. Afterward, share the following two definitions with the class.

- Covert Racism Definition:
  - Covert racism is a form of racial discrimination that is disguised and subtle, rather than public or obvious. Concealed in the fabric of society, covert racism discriminates against individuals through often evasive or seemingly passive methods. - Coates, Rodney (2007).
- Overt Racism Definition:
  - Overt racism or explicit racism is the intentional and/or obvious harmful attitudes or behaviors towards another minority individual or group because of the color of his/her skin (Elias, 2015)
- The Instructor should ask students to brainstorm what acts of racism might fall under each category.

The instructor should read the following brief summary of a clip and play the video for the class. As students watch the video, ask them to think about some of the following discussion questions.

- As part of the “Our Story” experience, a community building project at Stanford University, Thomas Booker, Stanford defensive end, discusses what he sees as the difference between covert and overt racism. Booker also educates on systemic racism and how it produces inequities. He ends the discussion with a call to action and how we can all work against bigotry on a daily basis.
- **Thomas Booker speaks on the differences between overt and covert racism**
- Booker describes his experiences with a restaurant that has policies that only appear to apply to certain people. How is this a form of covert racism and what impact does it have? What are other institutions that selectively choose to prohibit service under the guise of a policy?
- In the clip, Booker mentions how the media and television often portray black men in a stereotypical manner. How does this portrayal impact one’s prejudice and how individuals may treat black men in reality?



The instructor should ask students to go into four groups. Each group will be provided with slips of paper that each label an act of racism. The instructor should use the examples in the above pyramid when labeling the slips of paper. Provide each group with examples from both overt racism as well as covert racism. Within their groups, students will identify each slip of paper as either covert or overt racism.

- Once students have identified their slips of paper, they should share which category they put each slip under. Briefly explain why they chose this category for each act of racism.

- Once students have completed the activity in groups, have them come together as a class to discuss the following:
  - What are some ways people could express friendship or seek to understand differences in a way that feels good to both parties?
  - Is it important to address and combat microaggressions or should we “let them go” just because they may not appear to be as harmful and directly hateful as more obvious forms of racism?
- *This activity aims to show that even a comment that is intended as a compliment can have an underlying offensive message. It is important to deconstruct the unconscious message and learn how to address and educate the other person. This ensures we are all playing a role in combating covert racism rather than leaving all the work to communities of color.*

## ACTIVITY 4

Once students have completed the above activity, check in with students. Do they have any questions or comments so far?

- The instructor should then ask students what their understanding of microaggressions is.
  - Share the following definition...
    - They are the thinly veiled, everyday instances of racism that you see in the world. It could be an insult, an unintentionally offensive comment, a behavior, etc.
    - They are a form of covert racism.
- Students will break off into four groups and be assigned one of the following. For each statement, discuss the possible intention behind the statement. Then, discuss how it might be received.
  - “You’re so articulate.”
  - “Can I touch your hair?”
  - “When I look at you, I don’t see color.”
  - “I’m not racist, I have a black friend.”
  - Following a person of color around a grocery store.

# MOVING BEYOND THE JIM CROW SOUTH

## ACTIVITY 5

After students have completed the above activity, ask students the following question.

- Why do we often frame conversations of racism around the South? What are some of the effects such framing may have?
  - ***Instructor Note:** Discuss how covert racism also comes in the form of institutional racism. Through segregation, a history of redlining, and inequitable distribution of resources, institutions such as hospitals and schools promote racism and increase disparities. Northern states may not have a history rooted in Jim Crow Laws; however, they intentionally created larger systems that would discreetly perpetuate racism and marginalize communities of color.*
- For the following activity, students will go into groups and visit the interactive map linked below...
  - <https://projects.propublica.org/miseducation/>
  - Using the map, visit a school in the Northeast region of the U.S. Below are some options for schools you may choose to look at.
    - Huntington Union Free School District, New York
    - New York City Department of Education, New York
    - Bedford School District, Massachusetts
    - Simsbury School District, Connecticut
    - Groton School District, Connecticut
- As a group, analyze the demographics of your chosen school as well as the data on rates of graduation rates, average test scores, number of students enrolled in a free lunch program, how much money is spent on each student, suspension rates, etc. Using a human rights framework, how just and equitable is this school? Give it a letter score (A being the best) and share with the class.
  - Some guiding questions:
    - Looking at the data, do all students have an equal opportunity to enroll in Advanced Placement Courses?
    - Looking at the data, how just and fair is this school when disciplining students?
    - Hint: Does this school abide by relevant human rights under the UDHR?

- After sharing scores, discuss the following as a class.
  - Looking at the map, do you think there are racial educational disparities in schools in the northeast?
  - Why do you think these disparities exist? Are they intentional?
  - What impacts can this impact students of color in the Northeast?
  - What are some ways schools could address these disparities?
  - In what ways is this a human rights violation?

The instructor may share the following resources addressing racial disparities in education if there are further questions.

- <https://www.eraseracismny.org/our-work/education>
- <https://schottfoundation.org>
- <https://ncrc.org/redlining/>

- 
- As a class, discuss the following questions.
  - How has Bill Russell influenced athletes and sports leagues today?
  - He believed that education was the key to eradicating racism. How can we ensure all American students have access to an education that will include the hidden parts of our history? How can systemic policies either advance or inhibit equitable access to a thorough education on the hidden parts of our history?
  - Bill Russell left behind a legacy of human rights advocacy and courage. How can you, as students, honor his legacy and continue his work in your school and community?

*Teachers note:*

*For question 2 above, you may choose to explore themes such as the banning of books, prohibiting teachers from discussing certain themes on racial justice, etc.*