

Activity: Underrepresented Peoples in U.S. History

- **Goal of this activity:** For the students to engage United States history by discovering what peoples go underrepresented in traditional tales of U.S. history. They will do this by interviewing community members, their peers, and themselves. This is both an individual and (can be a) group effort.
- **Materials Needed:** Community members to investigate, pens/pencil, paper. **Optional:** Note cards.
- **Participants:** 1-20 (or more, depending on your needs/ability).
- **Time Needed:** 45 – 90 minutes.

1. First, designate a community of people to interview: i.e. a school, a downtown, a class, a library, or etc. Give the following questions/guidelines to the participants (recommended on a piece of paper):

Who were important [your group] in American history? How did they impact the world that we know today? What lessons can we learn from them? (REMEMBER: important people don't have to mean good people)

Go ask people in the area if they can identify any of the following groups of people in American history and ask them the questions specified above (and any other questions you think are important). Record their answers and think about why they gave the answers they did.

The students will fill in the [your group] bracket with one of the following possibilities:

Some groups to choose from:

- People of color
- Women
- Women of color
- Gender queer folks
- Lower-class folks
- Differently-abled folks
- People of non-Christian faiths
- Immigrants
- Political dissenters
- [Add more that you see fit]

(You might want to lay these different options out on a table on note-cards for the students to choose from.)

2. Send the students out to engage with the designated community. A recommend time is anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour. Depending on the needs of your class and your area, you may want to travel around with the students to help them find

individuals to engage and help in facilitation.

3. After a sufficient amount of time, call the participants back. Amount a discussion as to whom they investigated and the answers they received. Here is a list of some recommended follow-up questions:

- Was it easy or difficult for people to think of individuals who have contributed to American History from your groups?
- Why do you think this is the case?
- Regarding African-Americans, is your list of individuals solely those who fought against slavery and in the Civil Rights movement? Why might this be?
- Did you notice any patterns in people given to you in your interviews?
- Who would you say still goes excluded from this list?
- In what ways do you think the influence these groups of people have had over the history of the United States has gone ignored or silenced?
- What are possible ways that we could attempt to change this?
- [More that you wish to include or that the participants inspire]
- Ask the students if they have any questions or comments to explore.

(Optional: Before starting the discussion, ask the students to interview each other with their specified groups. Also a good alternative if you don't have a community available to access for this activity).

4. An Optional Follow Up:

Say to the class/participants: I'm going to recommend something for you to try after this class if you'd like to do something to follow up this activity and engage the subject matter further.

Pose this question to the students (on pieces of paper or etc.)

Choose a certain part of yourself, your whole identity, or some parts. By "identity," I mean any way that you personally view yourself. If you can, talk to people with similar self-representations and ask them about how they think their image has been portrayed or represented in United States history. How well represented are you in traditional tales of U.S. history? In what ways is this identity talked about? What are some representations that you don't associate with? How often and in what ways do you feel these identities have been portrayed in United States history? Do you believe these portrayals of different identities are fair?