



# Exploring and Unpacking Historical Inequities in Public Education

## Competency

Educators will explore and understand historical and present-day inequities in education. They will also identify how they impact schools and systems of public education as well as students and families.

## Key Method

Educator will use their understanding of bias and systemic racism to create a shareable infographic and an action plan to disrupt inequities in public education.

## Method Components

What is DECC?

Diversity, Equity and Cultural Competence (DECC) are essential components of a thriving learning community.

- **Diversity** is the presence of differences that include race, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, age, national origin, religion, disability status, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, language, and physical appearance. Diversity also involves different ideas, perspectives, and values. Being specific about which diversity is lacking in an area is critical. Saying “X” was not a racially diverse space, or “Y” event had little gender diversity, helps clarify what is meant when we say, “diversity.”
- **Equity** refers to fairness and justice. It recognizes that advantages and barriers exist. As a result, everyone does not start from the same place. It is a process that



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begins by acknowledging that unequal starting place and works to correct and address the imbalance. Creating equity is an ongoing process that strives to ensure that people who have been marginalized have ongoing opportunities to grow and thrive.

- **Cultural Competence** is the ability to understand, appreciate and interact with people from cultures or belief systems different from one's own.

Part of being culturally competent includes having cultural humility, a dispositional trait that allows us to be dynamic. "It takes the stance of being open to the "other" when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. Additionally, cultural humility lacks the superiority complex evident when an individual interprets their own cultural values as more meaningful and worthwhile than the values of others. Rather than concentrating solely on knowledge of another person's cultural background, cultural humility proposes openness and humility when engaging with individuals from a cultural background different from our own." *Source: Celebrating Cultural Humility in Education*

In this micro-credential you will demonstrate your ability to support students on a variety of topics related to DECC.

## Definitions

For the purposes of this micro-credential, use the definitions below.

### **Anti-Blackness**

Behaviors, attitudes, and practices of people and institutions that dehumanize and devalue Black people. Anti-Blackness is one of the foundations of racism in the U.S.

### **BIPOC**

The acronym BIPOC refers to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. The term is meant to be inclusive of all people of color, while acknowledging that Black and Indigenous people have faced different and often more severe forms of racial oppression and cultural erasure. BIPOC is a noun, and since it includes the word "people," it would be redundant to say "BIPOC people." It is pronounced "buy-pock" as opposed to saying each letter individually.

### **People of the Global Majority**

This term provides an inclusive way to describe all non-white people in the world. Numerically, Black, Indigenous and other non-white people represent 80% of the world's population. This term points out the demographic inaccuracy of the word "minority." It also includes people of many racial and cultural backgrounds that are often ignored in the U.S. media and data collection efforts (for example, Arab and Aboriginal people). This term is becoming a preferred alternative to "person of color" because it does not center on whiteness.



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## **Racialization**

The concept of race is a social construct that was created by humans. Racialization is the political process of assigning racial identities to people who did not originally identify as such. The result often leads to differential and/or unequal treatment of people in different racialized groups.

## **White People**

A racialized identity that refers to people of European ancestry or origin.

Source: Wikipedia - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_people)

## **Whiteness**

Whiteness and white racialized identity refers to the way that white people, along with their customs, culture, and beliefs, is considered the standard by which all other groups are compared. Whiteness is also at the core of understanding race in the United States. Whiteness and the normalization of white racial identity throughout U.S. history have created a culture where non-white people are seen as inferior or abnormal. Those who identify as white rarely have to think about their racial identity because they live within a culture where whiteness has been normalized.

Source: <https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/whiteness>

## **White Supremacy**

As an ideology, white supremacy purports that white people are superior to non-white people. This fallacy is rooted in the same scientific racism and pseudo-science used to justify slavery, imperialism, colonialism, and genocide at various times throughout history. White supremacist ideologies and their followers continue to perpetuate the myth of white racial superiority.

## **White Supremacy Culture**

White supremacy culture refers to the dominant, unquestioned standards of behavior and ways of functioning embodied by the vast majority of institutions in the United States. These standards may be seen as mainstream, dominant cultural practices; however, they have evolved from the United States' history of White supremacy. In many ways, it is indistinguishable from what we might call U.S. culture or norms—for example, a focus on individuals over groups, an emphasis on the written word as the authoritative form of communication, or the fear of open conflict. But White supremacy culture operates in even more subtle ways, by actually defining what “normal” is – and likewise, what “professional,” “effective,” or even “good” is. In turn, white supremacy culture also defines what is not good, “at risk,” or “unsustainable.” White supremacy culture values some ways of thinking, behaving, deciding, and knowing—ways that are more familiar and come more naturally to those from a white, western tradition—while devaluing or rendering invisible other ways.

Source: Racial Equity Tools - Glossary accessed via <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>



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## Historical Context

The history of education in the United States begins in early colonial America. In the early 1600s, schools focused on educating the children of wealthy white landowners, largely boys. During that time, boys were expected to gain the academic, moral and religious training needed to lead a young democracy.

While today, all children have access to schools, inequities within our nation's educational systems have disproportionately impacted students of color, students with disabilities and girls in the United States. A few highlights:

### 1700s

As early as 1740, laws explicitly prohibited **African Americans** from learning to read and write.

In colonial America, white girls could attend town schools only during the summer months when boys were not there or on days that boys did not attend. This greatly influenced how much a girl could learn. In this era, education for children was prohibited or varied depending on the local laws of their community.

### 1800s

Following the Civil War, the introduction of Jim Crow laws (1877–1960s) created an unequal educational system and unequal schools that were small in number, often did not meet standards, and were under constant threat of closing as funds were often diverted to schools that served white students.

**Indian boarding schools.** From the late 1800s to the mid-1900s, the U.S. government established these schools to force Indigenous children to assimilate into Euro-American culture. This forced cultural assimilation meant Indigenous children would lose all connection to their culture and often access to their families. They were forbidden from speaking their native languages, wearing traditional clothing, hairstyles and more. These schools were violent and provided poor care to children. Some academics estimate that more than 40,000 Indigenous children died in these schools. Source: Reuters:

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/native-americans-decry-unmarked-graves-untold-history-boarding-schools-2021-06-22/>

**Chinese children** were barred from attending schools in San Francisco, California in the mid-1800s. "Tape v. Hurley (1885) is one the most important civil rights decisions that you've likely never heard of. The parents of American-born Mamie Tape successfully challenged a principal's refusal to enroll their daughter and other children of Chinese heritage into the Spring Valley Primary School in San Francisco, California, seven decades before the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case [Brown v. Board of Education](#). Source: Library of Congress:

<https://blogs.loc.gov/headlinesandheroes/2021/05/before-brown-v-education-there-was-tape-v-hurley/>



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**Mexican American children** were also barred from attending “Whites only” schools from the late 1800s–mid 1900s in the southwestern U.S. Mexican-American families sued local school districts for discrimination long before the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* case in 1954.

### 1900s

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case that discrimination in public education was prohibited. In the nearly 70 years since then, U.S. schools are reportedly now more segregated than ever.

In 1975, Congress enacted The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975—a law that allowed all students with disabilities access to public education in the U.S. Prior to this law, students with disabilities had a history of being excluded or marginalized in public education. This legal history dates back to 1893. It was common for students to be placed in separate schools or in separate classrooms, away from their peers. It is widely believed that the *Brown v. Board* case led the way to an understanding that all children—regardless of race, gender or disability—have a right to a public education. Learn more: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/IDEA-History>

## How Historical Inequities are Woven into Student Learning

Historical inequities impact student learning in a variety of ways. After decades and centuries, the impact of the inequities highlighted above are still evident. Across many communities and classrooms, we see school board policies, course topics, curriculum, and teaching methods that continue to center the white experience in the U.S. It’s resulted in a minimal understanding and near erasure of the contributions that people of color and their cultures have made to the country’s collective knowledge. The history of racism, including historical inequities in education, is seldom taught to teachers (in teacher training programs) or to students. This impacts our ability to effectively teach students with racial, cultural and other social identities that might be different from our own. **For example:**

- The most celebrated and referenced mathematicians taught in U.S. public schools are white males, among them, Sir Isaac Newton, Euclid, and Pythagoras. This is done despite the influence and contributions that people of color and cultures have made to mathematics (e.g., Babylonia, Egypt, Arab-Islamic, Chinese, and the Mutapa Empire in Southern Africa) .
- When considering literary classics, Greek and Roman literature are often cited as the exemplars. This practice ignores the literary works of other ancient and Indigenous people, like those in Asia and Africa. This can lead students of color to conclude that those who share the same culture had little or nothing to contribute to literature, while white students might have an inflated sense of dominance in this field.
- While more than 50% of U.S. public school children are students of color, just 22% of all children’s books published in 2019 featured one of them as a main character or protagonist in the story. White students, on the other hand, continue to be the primary characters in children’s books (50%) followed by animals (27%).



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These points illustrate how historical inequities and the normalization of white culture continue to dominate educational experiences for all U.S. students well into the 21st century.

## Laws & Legislation

Federal, state and local laws can serve as primary ways to uphold inequity in education. What follows are highlights from the Learning for Justice timeline for school integration from 1849–1973. For the full timeline, please see the Resources section.

- **1849** The Massachusetts Supreme Court rules that segregated schools are permissible under the state's constitution. (*Roberts v. City of Boston*) The U.S. Supreme Court will later use this case to support the "separate but equal" doctrine.
- **1899**: The Supreme Court allows a state to levy taxes on both Black and white citizens while providing a public school for white children only. (*Cumming v. Richmond County Board of Education*)
- **1927**: The Supreme Court finds that states possess the right to define a Chinese student as non-white for the purpose of segregating public schools. (*Gong Lum v. Rice*)
- **1940**: 30% of Americans — 40% of Northerners and 2% of Southerners — believe that whites and Blacks should attend the same schools.
- **1954**: The U.S. Supreme Court rules that discrimination in public school is prohibited in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case.
- **1959**: Prince Edward County, Va., officials close their public schools rather than integrate them. White students attend private academies; Black students do not head back to class until 1963, when the Ford Foundation funds private Black schools. The Supreme Court orders the county to reopen its schools on a desegregated basis in 1964.
- **1973**: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act is passed, prohibiting schools from discriminating against students with mental or physical impairments.
  - The Supreme Court also finds that the Denver School Board intentionally segregated Mexican American and Black students from white students. (*Keyes v. School District No. 1, Denver, Colorado*)
  - The Supreme Court also rules that education is not a "fundamental right" and that the constitution does not require equal education expenditures within a state. (*San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*) The ruling has the effect of locking students of



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color and poor children who live in low-income areas into inferior schools.

## Impact of inequities on student learning

- **Academic Achievement.** Students who don't have access to well-resourced schools, education supports, and lack culturally relevant curriculum and instruction suffer academically. What these students experience is often referred to as the "opportunity gap." It highlights the differences in outcomes for students with varying levels of educational opportunity.
- **Student Personal Development.** A child's environment influences how they develop their racial and other social identities. Supportive environments that affirm, celebrate and uplift students benefit their personal development. Creating this positive environment is one step toward addressing the impact of historical inequities in education.
- **White Supremacy Culture Also Affects White Kids.** When we grow up in a world where one race of people and their culture, values, appearance, habits, are considered "normal," we limit the ability of all children to see the inherent value of all people. White children can develop a limited view of the world and an inflated view of self. Children of color can see a larger reality, yet live in a world that refuses to embrace them.

## Tips For Talking About Inequity

Talking about historical inequities may make some people fearful or uncomfortable. To help you start these important conversations, review the four agreements outlined below. These agreements are meant to help foster a safe environment:

1. **Stay Engaged**—Listen for your conversation partners' benefit, not just for your own. Model the listening behaviors that you seek.
2. **Speak Your Truth**—Have the courage to share your experience/perspective and ask questions of your conversation partners that will encourage them to also share theirs.
3. **Experience Discomfort**—Searching out experiences/perspectives different from your own. Have the courage to fully engage in dialogue with your conversation partner.
4. **Expect/Accept Non-Closure**—Accept and acknowledge that you and your conversation partner may not agree or come to a final solution about the topic you discuss.

## What you can do when you feel triggered or attacked by these conversations

Discussing historical inequities can be challenging. As we have seen, a lot of U.S. history is taught and presented in ways that center the experiences of white Americans and



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largely neglects the experiences of people of color. If you feel triggered when having these conversations, consider these three actions:

1. **Pause, and take 2–3 deep breaths.** This will help to calm your senses.
2. **Don't try to "win." Try to understand another's viewpoint.** Many conversations become heated when we try to convince someone that their way is wrong and our way is right. More effective communication can happen when we try to understand perspectives that may be different from our own.
3. **Ask for a new time to continue the conversation.** Sometimes our emotions run high, and we're no longer in the best emotional space to authentically engage with another person. It's completely ok to say, *"This conversation is important to me, but I'd like to continue it at another time. What's a good day for us to pick up from here?"*

## Supporting Rationale and Research

Williams, J. W. (2020, July 3). *Let's Clarify the Meaning of Equity*. Project 2043. <https://project2043.com/lets-clarify-the-meaning-of-equity/>

Picara, N. P. [YouTube TEDx]. (2019, May 3). *Dismantling White Supremacy in Education - Noelle Picara* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/L80Zed1wMzc>

Truss, J. T. (2019, July 18). *What Happened When My School Started to Dismantle White Supremacy Culture*. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-what-happened-when-my-school-started-to-dismantle-white-supremacy-culture/2019/07>

Strauss, V. S. (2021, May 16). Breaking Up with Your Favorite Racist Childhood Classics Books. *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2021/05/16/breaking-up-with-racist-childrens-books/>

*Brown v. Board: Timeline of School Integration in the U.S.* Learning for Justice. <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/spring-2004/brown-v-board-timeline-of-school-integration-in-the-us>

Painter, N. P. (2015, June 20). What is whiteness? *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/21/opinion/sunday/what-is-whiteness.html?referrer=&r=0>



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# Resources

[Let's Clarify the Meaning of Equity](#)  
[Opinion | What Is Whiteness?](#)  
[White Supremacy | Defining Extremism | ADL](#)  
[white supremacy culture](#)  
[Native American History and Culture: Boarding Schools - American Indian Relief Council is now Northern Plains Reservation Aid](#)  
[How Dolls Helped Win Brown v. Board of Education](#)  
[Miss Buchanan's Period of Adjustment - Pushkin](#)  
[White supremacy in U.S. school curriculum](#)  
[White Supremacy in Education](#)  
[An Updated Look at Diversity in Children's Books](#)  
[white supremacy culture](#)  
[Two States. Eight Textbooks. Two American Stories.](#)  
[Contact & FAQs — People of the Global Majority Outdoor in the Outdoors, Nature and Environment .](#)  
[I'm Embracing the Term 'People of the Global Majority'](#)  
[The world is not white | Commentary | rutlandherald.com](#)  
[Unequal Opportunity: Race and Education \(The Brookings Institute\)](#)  
[Black and Latino Students Shut out of Advanced Coursework Opportunities \(Education Trust\)](#)  
[Brown v. Board: Timeline of School Integration in the US \(Learning for Justice\)](#)

## Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

*To earn the micro-credential, you must receive a passing score in Parts 1 and 3, and be proficient for all components in Part 2.*

### Part 1. Overview Questions (Provides Context)

**(300–500 words)**  
*Please use the suggested word count as a guide to answer the following contextual questions. This will help our assessor understand your current context for working on this micro-credential.*



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*Please do not include any information that will make you identifiable to your reviewers.*

1. What is the setting in which you teach (rural, urban etc.)? What grade levels & subject(s) do you teach? Describe the school culture/climate as it relates to inequities (racial, ethnic, etc.)?
2. Reflect on your school and community. How can historical inequities still have an impact on your students and school community?
3. What do you hope to learn by completing this micro-credential?
4. What is the desired outcome for your students after completing this micro-credential?

**Passing:** All questions are answered thoroughly and thoughtfully. The response includes a full description of school culture and classroom demographics. The educator reflects on current practice, identifies what they hope to gain, and student outcomes.

## Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts/Evidence

To earn this micro-credential, please submit the following: three artifacts as evidence of your learning.

*\*Please do not include any information that will make you or your students identifiable to your reviewers.*

### **Artifact 1: Sharable Artifact**

Design a brochure or infographic that includes:

- A timeline of historical inequities that affect your students.
- How historical inequities are being replicated or perpetuated in your class or school.
- Changes you and/or your school can adopt to promote an inclusive environment.

### **Artifact 2: Routine**

Plan and implement a short daily or weekly opening activity or daily routine that will create an equitable and culturally sensitive learning environment—and disrupts the perpetuation of historical inequities.

### **Artifact 3: Resources and Plan**

1. Curate and organize a list of 10–15 resources that include links to lessons, videos, books, quotes and other resources. You can use them in your classroom to create a more inclusive learning environment. Be sure to address a variety of topics (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, ESL, disability, and special education)



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Resource Title & Description	Link	How will you use this?

2. Create a plan to use 5–10 of these resources over time. For each activity, your plan should include:
- Intended outcome
  - Timeframe
  - Materials
  - Description of activity

## Part 2. Rubric

	Proficient	Basic	Developing
<b>Artifact 1: Sharable Artifact</b>	<p>The infographic or brochure includes multiple data points that can be shared with others in education.</p> <p>The source for the data is cited.</p> <p>It also includes timelines of the historical inequities in education and describes current impacts on public education.</p>	<p>The infographic or brochure includes only a few data points and sources are not cited.</p> <p>Timeline lists inequities but doesn't include the impact of student learning.</p>	<p>Data is not connected to historical inequities.</p> <p>Data is not cited.</p> <p>Timelines are missing or incorrect.</p> <p>Impact on student learning is missing.</p>
<b>Artifact 2: Routine</b>	<p>Daily routine includes:</p> <p>-Input from the students</p>	<p>Input from the students may be missing.</p>	<p>Input from the students may be missing.</p>



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	<p>-Norms and expectations</p> <p>-It also promotes equity and uses a culturally responsive approach to teaching and learning.</p>	<p>Norms and expectations may be missing.</p> <p>Promotes equity and/or utilizes a culturally responsive approach to teaching and learning.</p>	<p>Norms and expectations may be missing.</p> <p>Does not promote equity and/or use a culturally responsive approach to teaching and learning.</p>
<b>Artifact 3: Resources and Plan</b>	<p>10–15 quality resources were included and contained the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Title</li> <li>-Description</li> <li>-Link</li> <li>-Description of how you can use</li> </ul> <p>Resources include a variety of topics</p> <p>Plan includes 5–10 activities.</p> <p>Each activity includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Outcomes</li> <li>-Timeframe</li> <li>-Materials</li> <li>-Description</li> </ul>	<p>Less than 10 resources</p> <p>Resource list is missing some of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Title</li> <li>-Description</li> <li>-Link</li> <li>-Description of how you can use</li> </ul> <p>Only one or two topics are covered in the resources.</p> <p>Activities are missing some or all of these elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Outcomes</li> <li>-Timeframe</li> <li>-Materials</li> <li>-Description</li> </ul>	<p>Less than five resources</p> <p>Resource list is missing most of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Title</li> <li>-Description</li> <li>-Link</li> <li>-Description of how you can use</li> </ul> <p>Only one topic is covered in the resources</p> <p>Plan is missing activities and or</p> <p>Activities are missing most of these elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Outcomes</li> <li>-Timeframe</li> <li>-Materials</li> <li>-Description</li> </ul>

### Part 3 Reflection

**(400–500) words**

Use the word count as a guide to write a personal reflection about your work on this micro-credential. For tips on writing a good reflection review the following resource: [How Do I Write a Good Personal Reflection?](#)



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Refer to resources. What have you learned and implemented in your learning environment that you used to write a personal reflection about your growth with this micro-credential?

1. After completion of this micro-credential, has your view of historical inequities in public education changed?
2. What are a couple parts of the learning process that impacted you and your students?
3. How will you use what you learned to impact the students in your classroom or school?
4. How will you use this knowledge to make changes in your future practice?

**Passing:** Reflection provides evidence that this activity has had a positive impact on both educator practice and student success. Specific examples are cited from personal or work-related experiences to support claims. Also included are specific actionable steps that demonstrate how new learning will be integrated into future practices.



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