

COLOR CONSCIOUS OR COLOR-BLIND

A Factor in Political Representation

INTRODUCTION

This exercise explores the role of race in political representation. Through facilitated discussion focused on a series of quotations, students will discuss multiple perspectives, share alternative views, and identify points of agreement and disagreement on this profoundly diverse issue.

To become responsible citizens in an ideologically diverse society, students need to know how to discuss and debate controversial issues. Law-related education often asks students to identify reasons for supporting different sides of controversial issues and to construct arguments that justify their views. Yet because ideas, options, and even vocabulary are often associated with one side of an issue, students have few opportunities for a thoughtful exchange of ideas. This lesson is an example of how to use reflection in law-related education.

OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify varying viewpoints on an issue.
- Recognize the facts used to support the viewpoints.
- Compare and contrast differing viewpoints.

PROCEDURES

1. Explain to students the purposes of the exercise: To draw out multiple perspectives on the texts, to support all interpretations by textual evidence and clear reasoning, to explore alternative views, to think about substantive agreement and disagreement, and to gain new insights.
2. Distribute copies of “Enforcement of Voting Rights” (Student Handout 1) and “Discussion Texts (Student Handout 2). Give students a few minutes to read each of the texts and the “Discussion Guidelines.”
3. Begin discussion with some opening questions, such as these:
 - What does Congress want to accomplish in the text selected from the Voting Rights Act (Student Handout 1)? Can you give an example to support your view?
 - What do you think the terms “color conscious” and “color-blind” mean in this context? How do they apply to quotations 1-4 (Student Handout 2)? Do you think these texts are valid? Do you think they are accurate?
 - What might you assume about the authors of these texts?
 - Do you see any long-term effects that this issue might have on the fabric of our democracy? Would you consider these effects positive or negative? Can you offer an example for discussion?
4. Help analyze the quotations in Handout 2. Encourage them to identify the opinion expressed in each quotation and the information used to support the opinion. Have them examine ways in which the opinions are alike and different.