When Subjugation Fails

First Name _____ Last Name _____

Date _____ Class _____

How Religion and Colonialism Have Created Generational Barriers for Indigenous Melanated Americans

Research Simulation Task • Grades 6 through 12 • Five days

Essential Question

How have religious authority, cultural erasure, and racial reclassification shaped opportunities across generations, and how can communities respond?

Learning Goals

Analyze a policy and its consequences. Distinguish evidence from interpretation. Compare records with community knowledge. Write an argument using at least three readings.

NJSLS Social Studies

6.3.8.CivicsHR.1 • Argue how human rights are best protected. Inquiry connections include evaluating sources, explaining causation, and constructing arguments.

NJSLS English Language Arts

RI.CR.6.1 • Cite textual evidence. W.AW.6.1 • Write arguments supported by reasons and relevant evidence. Grade 6 entry points with increasing source complexity for grades 7 through 12.

Common Core Literacy Connections

RH.6–8.1, RH.6–8.2, RH.6–8.6 and WHST.6–8.1. Extension strands include RH.9–10.1, RH.11–12.1, WHST.9–10.1 and WHST.11–12.1.

Amistad Connection

Examine African American and Indigenous histories together through the effects of racial hierarchy, enslavement, resistance, and the preservation of family knowledge.

Day 1 ● Early Encounter Accounts

Do Now

What can an eyewitness describe directly? What would require knowledge beyond an appearance?

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Reading A ● Verrazzano Penn and Columbus

Giovanni da Verrazzano’s letter to Francis I, dated 8 July 1524, describes people encountered along the Atlantic coast. In Susan Tarrow’s translation, he calls one group “dark in color, not unlike the Ethiopians.” This passage concerns his early landfall near Cape Fear, not every community along his route. He also acknowledged that his time ashore was short. [7]

William Penn’s letter to the Free Society of Traders, dated 16 August 1683, describes Indigenous people of his province, including Lenape communities. His exact words include “Of Complexion, Black, but by design.” He then attributed their appearance to bear fat and exposure to sun and weather. That explanation was Penn’s interpretation. Students should preserve his description and examine his attempted explanation rather than silently omit either. [8]

A translated account of Columbus’s 1492 journal compares people in the Caribbean with Canary Islanders and uses the phrase “neither black nor white.” It also describes body painting. The surviving journal tradition includes an abstract by Bartolomé de las Casas, making transmission and translation part of source evaluation. [9]

These accounts document how European observers described people already living in the Americas. They also show that observers used different comparisons. A complexion description is evidence of what an author reported; establishing a particular family’s ancestry requires additional evidence. Erasure occurs when histories or continuing communities are excluded or denied. Omitting inconvenient descriptions can distort what an encounter account actually says.

Quick Write

Compare two observers’ descriptions. Explain one detail the accounts establish and one question they cannot settle alone.

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