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# Countering narratives of white supremacy in social studies classrooms with *America Redux*

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## **America Redux: Visual Stories from our Dynamic History**

by Ariel Aberg-Riger. HarperCollins/Balzer + Bray. 304pp.

Trade ISBN 978-0063057531.

Recommended for grades 9-12.

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – This practitioner paper provides instructional strategies and resources to supplement the content of *America Redux: Visual Stories from our Dynamic History*. This text and accompanying lesson provide critical perspectives on U.S. history that challenge dominant narratives in high school social studies classrooms, particularly those that downplay or ignore the prevalence of White supremacy. The pedagogical approaches offered are meant to aid teachers in scaffolding and synthesizing the many counternarratives provided in *America Redux*.

**Design/methodology/approach** – An Inquiry Design Model has been developed to support inquiry-based instruction on the text and to extend learning about its themes. The compelling and supporting questions ask students to evaluate the influence of White supremacy in U.S. history through the investigation of counternarratives provided in *America Redux*. The lesson begins with a teacher-led activity about the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the consequences of the Lost Cause myth, which includes guiding questions created to illuminate revisionist history.

**Findings** – The instructional approaches in this paper are aligned with NCSS standards and position statements, the C3 Framework, and the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Social Justice Standards. The lesson asks students to examine bias and contextualize historical viewpoints, which is central to themes of continuity and change, dimensions of power, and perspective-taking.

**Originality/value** – The curated resources in this practice proposal offer students diverse perspectives on US history that challenge the influence of White supremacy on dominant historical narratives. Topics include nativism, immigration policies, Hawaii’s colonization, the contamination of the Navajo Nation land, convict leasing, redlining, and the United Farm Workers.

**Keywords** Counternarratives, Revisionist history, Colonialism, White supremacy, NCSS notable trade book

**Paper type** Practitioner paper

### **Book summary**

Organized into 21 thematic chapters, *America Redux* provides engaging counternarratives to dominant curriculum in high school history classrooms. The stated aim of Ariel Aberg-Riger is to illuminate stories that challenge renditions of history viewed through White, Eurocentric, and/or Christian lenses. The book is skillfully written, with an understanding of common “myths” and omissions in social studies education. Each chapter provides critical perspectives on a theme in United States history, often written with a sarcastic tone. For example, in the first chapter, titled “The Good Old Days,” Aberg-Riger details the genesis and propagation of the Lost Cause of the Confederacy and traces its ill-effects to contemporary social studies classrooms. Other chapters, “Traditional Family Values,” “This Is Your Land,” and “White Picket Fences” tackle themes of Christian nationalism, Native American dispossession, and housing discrimination respectively. Perhaps the greatest strength of *America Redux* is the way White supremacy is exposed and confronted, despite only mentioning the construct explicitly in one chapter. Stories about the Eugenics movement, colonialism, environmental racism, xenophobia, and other human rights violations illustrate consequential forces in United States history that have enormous potential to develop critical consciousness in high school history students.



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**Lesson overview**

This multi-day lesson uses inquiry-based learning to examine the counternarratives provided in *America Redux*. First, teachers will read the opening chapter of the text aloud with their students. This chapter lays the foundation for the concept of counternarratives and introduces students to how history is written from specific perspectives, often accompanied by bias and manipulation. While reading this chapter, the teacher will answer the ten questions provided in [Appendix 1](#) to stage these objectives. For the remainder of the lesson, students will work in small groups to read and analyze five additional chapters of *American Redux*, guided by the Inquiry Design Model (IDM) in [Appendix 2](#).

The IDM is an approach to instruction recommended by the developers of the *C3 Framework* for addressing their social studies standards. It is a brief, simple representation of the key questions and sources that define a line of curricular inquiry. According to the IDM's creators, the key three elements of the inquiry process include developing a central question (also called compelling or essential questions), creating a summative task that involves making and supporting arguments, and access to curated collection of diverse sources ([Grant et al., 2022](#)). Furthermore, the IDM can be used to frame a wide range of topics in social studies classrooms ([Krutka and Hlavacik, 2025](#)). Inquiry-based practices embedded in the IDM have been tied to 'deep learning' in social studies instruction, meaning learning is more engaging and transformational ([Grant et al., 2022](#)). Accordingly, Rodriguez and Swalwell (2025) argue, "A great curricular approach for engaging students in anti-oppressive learning is *inquiry*" (p. 166) and further assert that IDMs must include a critical dimension to properly frame instruction that challenges dominant narratives in social studies classrooms. Furthermore, inquiry-based learning promotes perspective-taking, which is especially important when discussing contested history ([Selwyn, 2014](#)), including curriculum that addresses the role of race and racism in United States history ([NCSS, 2023](#)). By merging inquiry with the critical perspectives in the text and enrichment sources, this lesson aims to scaffold counternarratives that contribute to historical understandings which will contribute to justice-orientated citizenship at a time when such instruction is under attack ([Corrigan, 2025](#)).

Each chapter of *America Redux* provides specific examples of often overlooked dimensions of racism in United States history. Topics include immigration policies inspired by White supremacy, Japanese American internment, the contamination of Navajo land, the colonization of Hawaii, convict leasing, and the exploitation of Asian and Latinx farmworkers. During this portion of the lesson, students will focus their attention on the lesson's compelling question: *How does America Redux challenge what you have previously learned about the role of race and racism in United States history?* To address this question, students will answer the three supporting questions in the IDM, which require investigation beyond the content in the text. The documents, videos, and maps curated for the IDM provide additional and engaging illustrations of the counternarratives in *American Redux*. Guided by the IDM, students will focus on the specific examples of racism raised in these chapters. Finally, there are two culminating tasks/options for this lesson. First, students may create a graphic representation of a newly learned counternarrative that they find compelling and/or essential to the understanding of United States history. Second, students may write a five-paragraph essay that addresses the following question: How has racism influenced United States history? The IDM has been structured to support the traditional five paragraph essay format/template ([Appendix 3](#)).

The anti-racist objectives of this proposed lesson aim to raise student critical consciousness about race and racism in United States history. This approach is grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and utilizes its applications to social studies education. CRT is concerned with issues of White supremacy, colonization, and forms of oppression that have been racially motivated and maintained. Key CRT concepts include discontent with liberalism, differential racialization, interest convergence, and revisionist history ([Delgado and Stefancic, 2023](#)). Moreover, [Solorzano \(1997\)](#) outlined five central themes in CRT, with the first and most central assumption being the centrality of race and racism in the United States and its history.

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Second, CRT must challenge dominant ideologies that perpetuate racism. The third tenet expresses CRT's commitment to social justice, particularly efforts to eliminate all forms of subordination related to race and/or other forms of discrimination. Fourth, *counterstories* are needed to challenge dominant narratives that often advantage those in power while erasing knowledge and experiences of minoritized groups. And the fifth, interdisciplinary perspectives on racism are needed to provide new and evolving tools to dismantle White supremacy and racism. Moreover, CRT has guided critical instruction in social studies classrooms, where [Ladson-Billings \(2000\)](#) argues students can engage in "the process of developing a worldview different from the dominant worldview" (p. 258). For example, [Dozono \(2022\)](#) found that explicitly naming concepts central to CRT in a high school social studies class, such as White supremacy, institutional racism, bias, stereotypes, White privilege, and the racial wealth gap, helped students understand counternarratives and raise critical consciousness about the legacies of slavery in the U.S. Additionally, [Faulkner \(2022\)](#) noted that counterstories about Black excellence in U.S. history taught students about the erasure and motivated them to pursue diverse perspectives not necessarily provided in dominant curriculum. Lastly, [Demoiny and Ferraras-Stone \(2018\)](#) found that instructional resources specifically crafted to challenge traditional classroom materials were effective in developing critical historical thinking skills and priming students question official curriculum. Consequently, the themes and structure of *America Redux* support CRT themes by providing clear counternarratives about race/racism in the U.S. and support prior scholarship on the effectiveness of the theoretical framing of this lesson. Since racism is often downplayed or ignored in social studies classrooms ([Howard and Navarro, 2017](#); [Sleeter and Zavala, 2020](#)), the stories told in *America Redux* have the potential to interrupt hegemonic curricula. Ultimately, the instruction offered here highlights an exceptional anti-racist text and translates its many counternarratives into classroom practice. With few ready-to-use, standards-based lessons that utilize critical inquiry to diversify perspectives on U.S. history, this scholarship supports social studies educators that want to challenge dominant stories in America's past through institutionally sanctioned approaches that are also aligned with tenets of resistance pedagogies.

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### NCSS themes

- (2) Time, Continuity, and Change
- (5) Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- (6) Power, Authority, and Governance

### NCSS position statements

- (1) Toward Responsibility: Social Studies Education that Respects and Affirms Indigenous Peoples and Nations (2018)
- (2) Human Rights Education (2021)
- (3) Racial Literacy (2023)

### C3 framework

D2.His.2.9–12. Analyze change and continuity in historical eras.

D2.His.5.9–12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.

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D2.His.6.9–12. Analyze the ways in which the perspectives of those writing history shaped the history that they produced.

### Southern Poverty Law Center social justice standards

(10) Students will examine diversity in social, cultural, political and historical contexts rather than in ways that are superficial or oversimplified.

(12) Students will recognize unfairness on the individual level (e.g. biased speech) and injustice at the institutional or systemic level (e.g. discrimination).

(13) Students will analyze the harmful impact of bias and injustice on the world, historically and today.

(14) Students will recognize that power and privilege influence relationships on interpersonal, intergroup and institutional levels and consider how they have been affected by those dynamics.

### Materials

- (1) *America Redux: Visual Stories from our Dynamic History*, by Ariel Aberg-Riger.
- (2) Chapter 1 Discussion Questions, “The Good Old Days” ([Appendix 1](#)).
- (3) Inquiry Design Model ([Appendix 2](#)).
- (4) Small group or individual internet access.
- (5) Supplies to create posters/pamphlets.
- (6) Five-paragraph essay template ([Appendix 3](#)).

### Objectives

Students will:

- (1) Analyze how the Lost Cause myth influenced dominant narratives of US history.
- (2) Understand the tenets and purposes of counternarratives in history education.
- (3) Evaluate the role of racism in United States immigration policies.
- (4) Examine racist colonial practices from the perspectives of Native Hawaiians and Native Americans.
- (5) Analyze how racist labor and housing policies have contributed to economic inequality in the United States.
- (6) Evaluate how racism is ignored and/or downplayed in dominant historical narratives.

### Lines of inquiry

*Compelling question*

- (1) How does *America Redux* challenge what you have previously learned about the role of race in United States history?

*Supporting questions*

- (1) How has racial discrimination influenced immigration and citizenship policies of the United States government?
- (2) How have Native Americans and Native Hawaiians been dispossessed of their land, and what are the effects of these actions today?
- (3) How have labor and housing policies in the United States exploited non-White people, and enriched White Americans?

*Enrichment question (for essay)*

- (1) How has racism influenced United States history?

**Procedure**

- (1) Teacher introduces *America Redux*, the compelling question, and the learning objectives for the lesson.
- (2) Students preview the ten questions that accompany Chapter 1, “The Good Old Days” ([Appendix 1](#)).
- (3) Guided class reading of Chapter 1 in *America Redux*.
  - A teacher read aloud is recommended for this portion of the lesson.
  - The answers to the chapter questions appear in order and should be answered during the reading. It is suggested that the teacher pause after reading questions 3, 5, and 8 are answered, as they mark transitions within the chapter.
  - The illustrations and images in this chapter are thought-provoking, so the teacher may also want to probe student thoughts on them during the reading, particularly about the flowery descriptions of plantation life and Confederate monuments.
- (4) Teacher checks students’ answers to Chapter 1 questions, allowing time for discussion of the modern parallels to curricular controversies in social studies.
- (5) Teacher introduces supporting content to Chapter 1 (links in IDM). These sources can be read directly by students or synthesized by the teacher. Either way, they are provided as enrichment for the teacher and/or students, and summarized here:
  - Document: The Lost Cause of the Confederacy. The six parts of the Lost Cause myth are detailed, as well as how this revisionist historical narrative made its way into textbooks and the Southern/national psyche.
  - Video: How Southern Socialites Rewrote Civil War History. This video focuses on the United Daughters of the Confederacy and their role in propagating the Lost Cause myth. Examples of the romanticization of slavery are provided.
  - A definition for “counternarratives” from a prominent Advanced Placement test prep site is provided. The utility of counternarratives is also discussed.
- (6) IDM-focused segment of lesson:
  - Students will be divided into small groups of approximately four members.
  - Teacher will review the compelling question and introduce culminating task options for the lesson.

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- Students will read a total of seven chapters that address the compelling section for the lesson. Three supporting questions/themes, with corresponding chapters and enrichment resources are provided below. The sources below should be watched or read after reading the corresponding chapters. Students should take note of information that will help them address each of the following supporting questions:
  - How has racial discrimination influenced immigration and citizenship policies of the US government? (Chapters 4 and 15)
    - \* Document: This document explains the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 at a middle/high school reading level. It is accompanied by an image from a period magazine titled, “An Act to Prevent the Country from being Overrun by Foreigners,” which illustrates the White supremacist ideology behind the act. The immigration quotas by country are also displayed, laying out the clear biases in terms of countries of origin for preferred immigrants.
    - \* Video: Summary of Japanese American internment during World War II. This video also contextualizes this policy within larger discriminatory practices that have affected Asian Americans from several countries of origin.
  - How have Native Americans and Native Hawaiians been dispossessed of their land, and what are the effects of these actions today? (Chapters 11 & 14)
    - \* Video 1: Overview of mining practices on Navajo Nation land, with a focus on uranium mining from the 1940s–1970s. This video does an excellent job explaining the long-term effects of water and soil contamination on Navajo Nation residents, including the denial/cover up of such effects by the US government.
    - \* Video 2: This video summarizes how the Hawaiian Kingdom was deposed by agents of the United States with missionary origins, whose primary goal was to exploit the valuable agricultural land of the Hawaiian Islands.
  - How have labor and housing policies in the United States exploited non-White people, and enriched White Americans? (Chapters 12, 17, & 20)
    - \* Video 1: Using Cesar Chavez as a central character, the United Farm Workers’ advocacy for basic dignity are chronicled. Cesar Chavez’s tactics as an activist are explored, as are the labor conditions and fair wages won by the UFW for (primarily) Latinx and Asian workers.
    - \* Video 2: This video succinctly describes the system of convict leasing, emphasizing its role in maintaining White power and wealth in the southern United States.
    - \* Maps: These interactive maps allow students to view redlined maps from cities across the United States.
- (7) Once students have synthesized the information above (chapter readings and extension sources) to address the supporting questions, they are ready to use their notes/deductions to address the compelling question and complete the culminating tasks.

### **Assessment and extension**

This lesson plan provides two options for a summative assessment, though teachers could choose to have students complete both culminating activities. Both assessments use the

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concept of counternarratives to provide critical perspectives on United States history, namely the (re)examination of dominant historical narratives from the perspectives of minoritized groups. In the first option, students construct a visual representation (such as a poster or pamphlet) that discusses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from *American Redux* and the supplemental sources. Student work should advocate for the inclusion of specific counternarratives (from *America Redux* and/or the IDM resources) that are not currently a part of high school history curriculum. Furthermore, the visually rich pages of each chapter of the text provide a model for artwork/images that enhance messaging. This objective makes an explicit connection to counternarratives and CRT. In the second option, students write a five-paragraph essay that answers the following question: *How has racism influenced United States history?* This question forces students to directly engage with issues of race, which is the core theme of *American Redux*. The essay provides an additional opportunity for students to grapple with the legacies of racism in the contemporary US. [Appendix 3](#) provides a basic template for writing a five-paragraph essay. It is suggested that students discuss the Lost Cause in the introduction, with the three body paragraphs each addressing a supporting question from the IDM. Lastly, both summative assessments prepare students for informed action. In an extension task, students create an advertisement, pamphlet, or poster that advocates for social change or reparations based on knowledge gained from counternarratives in *America Redux* and the supplemental sources provided in the IDM. For example, students could detail how the U.S. government could compensate the Navajo Nation for contaminating reservation water.

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### Closure

Class members return to a whole group setting to discuss their thoughts on the counternarratives in *America Redux*. Students can also review new perspectives gained about the role of race in United States history and share their visual representations or essays. The teacher may ask students if they have any questions about the assignment's content or share opportunities to learn about additional examples of historical revisionism.

### Considerations

Teachers that implement this lesson could encounter pushback from students, colleagues, or parents. While scholarship on critical approaches to social studies education demonstrates increased engagement and achievement of standards-based learning objectives, sociopolitical factors will influence its broader reception. Additionally, recent censorship laws, book bans, and social/institutional pressures have caused teachers to forego instruction that challenges dominant discourses in social studies classrooms, causing a “chilling effect,” whereby teachers self-censor to avoid possible negative consequences ([Stevens et al., 2025](#)). With these factors in mind, it is recommended that teachers implementing this lesson allow *America Redux* and supporting sources to speak for themselves. The pedagogy offered here scaffolds much-needed diverse perspectives in social studies classrooms through critical inquiry, discussion questions, and the IDM, all of which are explicitly aligned with multiple sets of social studies standards. To avoid possible allegations of “indoctrination,” teachers should focus instructional attention on student interpretations of instructional materials and the progression of tasks in the IDM.

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**Acknowledgments**

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**Appendix 1****Discussion Questions for Chapter 1, “The Good Old Days”**

- (1) When and why was the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) formed?
- (2) How did White Southerners respond to gains in Black power and wealth during Reconstruction?
- (3) What was the mission of the UDC and how did the UDC pursue their goals?
- (4) Describe how White Southerners justified erecting Confederate monuments in the late-1800s and early-1900s.
- (5) How did Black Southerners respond to the statue of John C. Calhoun in Charleston, South Carolina?
- (6) How does the “Lost Cause” myth depict slavery and slave owners?
- (7) How did the culture of the Lost Cause spread in U.S. schools?
- (8) How did Black adults resist the use of textbooks that taught the Lost Cause?
- (9) Describe current debates about how students should be taught about race and racism in U.S. history?
- (10) What parallels exist between struggles over the Lost Cause narrative and current book bans/ censorship regarding “divisive concepts” in social studies classrooms?

Appendix 3, Source: Author’s own creation.

**Appendix 2****Table A1.** IDM: Scaffolded inquiry and enrichment resources

## Inquiry design model (IDM) Blueprint™

Compelling (Essential) Question	How does <i>America Redux</i> challenge what you have previously learned about the role of race and racism in United States history?
Standards and Practices	C3 Framework, <u>Dimension 2</u> D2.His.2.9–12. Analyze change and continuity in historical eras D2.His.5.9–12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people’s perspectives D2.His.6.9–12. Analyze the ways in which the perspectives of those writing history shaped the history that they produced
Staging the Question	Teacher facilitated reading of Chapter 1, “The Good Old Days,” which introduces the concepts of historical revisionism. Answer accompanying questions ( <a href="#">Appendix 1</a> ) Supporting Video <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOkFXPblpU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOkFXPblpU</a> Supporting Documents <a href="https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/lost-cause-definition-and-origins">https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/lost-cause-definition-and-origins</a> <a href="https://fiveable.me/key-terms/hs-ethnic-studies/counter-narratives">https://fiveable.me/key-terms/hs-ethnic-studies/counter-narratives</a>

(continued)

**Table A1.** Continued

Supporting question 1 (chapters 4 and 15)	Supporting question 2 (chapters 11 and 14)	Supporting question 3 (chapters 12, 17, and 20)
<i>How has racial discrimination influenced immigration and citizenship policies of the United States government?</i>	<i>How have Native Americans and Native Hawaiians been dispossessed of their land, and what are the effects of these actions today?</i>	<i>How have labor and housing policies in the United States exploited non-White people, and enriched White Americans?</i>
<i>Formative</i>	<i>Formative</i>	<i>Formative</i>
<i>Performance Task</i>	<i>Performance Task</i>	<i>Performance Task</i>
<i>Examine immigration quotas and their relationship to the desired racial makeup of the United States</i>	<i>Describe the causes and consequences of uranium mining on Navajo Nation land</i>	<i>Describe the laws and labor practices that caused the exploitation of Black, Latino, and Asian Americans workers</i>
<i>Analyze arguments for the internment of Japanese Americans and its legacy</i>	<i>Explain how White Americans seized political power in Hawaii and forced its annexation</i>	<i>Examine the origins and legacy of redlining in US housing policy</i>
<i>Featured Sources</i>	<i>Featured Sources</i>	<i>Featured Sources</i>
<i>Document, <a href="https://immigrationhistory.org/item/1924-immigration-act-johnson-reed-act/">https://immigrationhistory.org/item/1924-immigration-act-johnson-reed-act/</a></i>	<i>Video, <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETPogv1zq08">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETPogv1zq08</a></i>	<i>Video, <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wznw9TA2jXk">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wznw9TA2jXk</a></i>
<i>Video, <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZTioTkHcB0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZTioTkHcB0</a></i>	<i>Video, <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2bjjwv4134">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2bjjwv4134</a></i>	<i>Video, <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fATymSYfSWA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fATymSYfSWA</a></i>
<i>Maps, <a href="https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/map">https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/map</a></i>		
<i>Summative</i>	<i>Argument</i>	Construct a visual representation (e.g. poster, pamphlet, artwork,) that discusses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from historic and/or current sources
<i>Performance Task</i>	<i>Extension</i>	Write a five-paragraph essay that answers the following question How has racism influenced United States history?
<i>Taking Informed Action</i>		Understand: The need for counternarratives about United States history to understand current inequalities in the country Assess: Opportunities for additional counternarratives about minoritized groups not discussed in <i>American Redux</i> Act: Create a political advertisement/pamphlet/poster that advocates for social change or reparations based on knowledge gained from these counternarratives. For example, what could the U.S. government do to compensate the Navajo Nation for contaminating its water?

Appendix 2, Source: Author’s own creation.

**Appendix 3**

**Five-paragraph essay template**

**Paragraph 1: Introduction**

Background Information:  
Thesis Statement/Main Argument:

**Paragraph 2: First Body Paragraph**

Topic Sentence:  
Supporting Details:

**Paragraph 3: Second Body Paragraph**

Topic Sentence:  
Supporting Details:

**Paragraph 4: Third Body Paragraph**

Topic Sentence:  
Supporting Details:

**Paragraph 5: Conclusion**

Summary of Arguments and their Implications/Importance.

[Appendix 3](#), Source: Author's own creation.

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