

A Black Scholar Investigates Colonialism

■ Synopsis



26 minutes

“A Black Scholar Investigates Colonialism” focuses on Ralph Bunche’s two-year sojourn in Africa and the Far East where he studies the impact of colonialism on indigenous peoples and societies. It covers the years 1936 and 1938 and includes:

- his writing *A World View of Race*;
- his stay in London where he studies anthropology in preparation for the research he is about to undertake in Africa and the Far East and where he meets many African students who will later become leaders of their newly independent countries;
- his experiences in South Africa and extensive documentation of South African society in daily notes, in photographs and on film;
- the strain on his marriage created by his almost two-year long absence from home;
- his travels in East Africa and the African interior, including Tanganyika (now Tanzania), Kenya, Uganda, and the Belgian Congo;
- his travel to the Far East and his encounter with the realities of war and wide-spread poverty in China.

■ Historical Background

By 1936, the economic depression that had begun with the 1929 crash of the New York Stock Market had spread worldwide. Fascism was on the rise. In Germany, Hitler was now firmly in power, and was building a military machine preparatory to war. The construction of concentration camps had already begun. The League of Nations was proving itself ineffective as the Spanish Civil War raged and Italy, under the fascist dictator, Mussolini, invaded Ethiopia to establish Italy as a colonial power.

In 1934, Ralph Bunche had distinguished himself as a scholar, earning a Ph.D. in government and international relations from Harvard University. His dissertation comparing French Togo and Dahomey would set the stage for his investigation of the impact of colonialism on native peoples. Bunche saw racism as a worldwide phenomenon with roots in economic exploitation whether in the colonial empires or at home in America.

In This Module (in order of appearance)

TERMS TO KNOW

colonialism, dissertation, "The White Man's Burden," propaganda, Bill of Rights, imperialism, leftist, communist, coloured community (in South Africa), African community (in South Africa), pan-Africanism, lynching

PEOPLE REFERENCED

Melville Herskovits, Bronislaw Malinowski, Benito Mussolini, Mordecai Johnson, Ruth Bunche, Joan Bunche, Jane Bunche, Paul Robeson, Eslanda Robeson, Norman Thomas, Jomo Kenyatta, Prince Akiiki Nyabongo, Isaac Schapera, Peter Koinange

PLACES REFERENCED

Northwestern University, London School of Economics, South, East, and Central Africa, the Far East, University of Chicago, Ethiopia, Abyssinia, London, Cape Town (South Africa), University of Cape Town, Rift Valley, Lake Victoria Tanganyika (now Tanzania), Belgian Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Japan, Hong Kong, China

PEOPLE ON SCREEN

Dr. Jonathan Holloway, Dr. John Hope Franklin, Dr. Ronald Walters, Dr. Charles Henry, Dr. Vincent Browne, Dr. John Henrick Clarke, Dr. Robert Edgar, Professor Robert Hill, Sir Brian Urquhart, Dr. Robert Harris

■ Relevant Standards

National Council for the Social Studies Strands

Strand I. Culture

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of *culture and cultural diversity*, so that the learner can: (h) explain and apply ideas, theories, and modes of inquiry drawn from anthropology and sociology in the examination of persistent issues and social problems.

National Center for History in the Schools Standards

Standard 3. Historical Analysis and Interpretation

The student engages in historical analysis and interpretation:

Therefore, the student is able to

- B. Consider multiple perspectives of various people in the past by demonstrating their differing motives, beliefs, interests, hopes, and fears;
- C. Analyze cause-and-effect relationships bearing in mind multiple causation including (a) the importance of the individual in history; (b) the influence of ideas, human interests, and beliefs; and (c) the role of chance, the accidental and the irrational;
- D. Draw comparisons across eras and regions in order to define enduring issues as well as large-scale or long-term developments that transcend regional and temporal boundaries;
- J. Hypothesize the influence of the past, including both the limitations and the opportunities made possible by past decisions.

■ Map Connection

On maps of Africa and Asia, locate all countries or territories visited by Ralph Bunche. (See “Places Referenced” above.)

■ Before You Watch

For suggested preview strategies and activities, see page 4 of the general reference section of the *Guide*.

If this is the first module screened, ask the students: Have you ever heard of Ralph Bunche? What do you know or think you know about Ralph Bunche? What do you predict you might find out about him in the video you are about to watch?

OPINION Have you ever been exposed to any stereotypes? If so, where have you seen or heard them? What effect do you think these stereotypes have had on you? On the people stereotyped?

RECALL What was the focus of Ralph Bunche's dissertation at Harvard?

**HISTORICAL
CONTEXT** What did Hitler believe about the Aryan race?

■ While You Watch (with teacher's answer key)

For suggestions regarding the use of these questions, see page 4-5 of the general reference section of the *Guide*.

1. In his book *A World View of Race*, what is Ralph Bunche's point of view on colonialism?

[Answers may include: The claim of European colonizers that they were "shouldering the white man's burden" and had a duty to bring civilization to the "dark continent" was a rationalization that allowed them to exploit the natural resources of the less developed world; the industrialized nations were dependent on natural resources for their factories and markets for their manufactured goods; the colonizers enriched themselves at the expense of the colonized peoples; concepts of racial inferiority and superiority were invented to justify taking advantage of other people; the industrialized nations redefined property rights to suit their economic needs.]

2. What was the focus of Ralph Bunche's research project in Africa and Asia?

[He wanted to study the impact of colonialism on traditional cultures and societies from the point of view of the colonized peoples themselves.]

3. What was the effect of colonial powers' propaganda on the world and on colonized peoples?

[The world was taught to regard certain peoples as hopelessly backward; the people themselves were made to think of themselves as backward.]

4. Does Bunche share the attitude of the black middle class toward Africa?

[No, he is closer in his position to the Black lower class, which feels a profound affinity with Africa.]

5. Who are some of the celebrities and future leaders of Africa that Bunche meets while he is in England studying anthropology?

[Answers may include the following: Paul Robeson and his wife Eslanda; Jomo Kenyatta; Prince Nyabongo; Peter Koinange; future leaders of Africa.]

6. Where does Ralph Bunche go in order to observe the impact of colonialism on the people of South Africa?

[Mines, jails, hospitals, remote native locations.]

7. How does he document what he finds?

[He takes extensive field notes, keeps a diary, takes thousands photographs, and shoots 16 mm film.]

8. What observations does Bunche make about the people he meets in South Africa?

[Answers may include the following: he finds their lack of passion for independence disturbing; he gives them pep talks; they are struck by the fact that he, as an American Negro, is free to do things they cannot do in South Africa; colored South Africans are taken aback when Bunche calls himself Negro; the coloreds align with the whites rather than with the black Africans; Bunche feels that coloreds and Blacks in South Africa should form a united front in the struggle for equal rights; he sees race identity and race pride as necessary, if unfortunate, aspects of any successful struggle against white oppression.]

9. How does his long absence from home affect his marriage to Ruth Bunche?

[The marriage is strained; Ruth Bunche says the two-year long separation is a nightmare; he writes to her that he is also despondent about the long separation but that he cannot turn back.]

10. What does Bunche tell the Kenyans who welcome him? How do they respond?

[He tells them about his African background, how his ancestors were enslaved in a strange land and then freed; he tells them of his happiness to be back in the land of his fathers. They give him a Kikuyu name meaning "he who has returned from the dead."]

11. What happens when Bunche goes to China, intending to get a first hand look at sections under Japanese occupation?

[At the last minute, he hesitates because he feels he has no right to take such a risk because of his family responsibilities; the Japanese bomb the train he would have been on.]

12. What is the first thing Bunche sees when he returns home?

[Newspaper reports of a lynching of a black man in Mississippi.]

■ After You Watch

Post-Viewing Discussion Questions

For specific suggestions on how to structure post-viewing discussions or activities, see page 5 of the general reference section of the *Guide*.

1. The colonial powers held that they had the right to exploit land and resources in underdeveloped areas of the world because they knew how to use them more productively. Is there any legitimacy to this claim? Why or why not? Can you think of other examples of one group taking over territory or resources of another in order to develop them for their own economic gain?
2. Dr. John Henrick Clarke refers to a new breed of activists who use scholarly research to effect social change. In his writings and research, Ralph Bunche revealed the truth about colonialism and the destructive impact it had on colonized peoples and societies. Did this lead to change?
3. If you were to do scholarly research on a question of importance to society, what would it be? Brainstorm a list of possible research topics and some of the questions you would want to ask as part of your study.

■ Digging Deeper: Activities and Research Projects

1. Have students read selected chapters of *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn for another example of scholarly research that is also activism. Ask them to write a reaction paper that notes whether anything in Zinn's book causes them to look at an issue differently than before they read it.
2. A number of literary works reflect the theme of the impact of colonialism on colonized peoples or the impact of institutionalized racism on oppressed peoples. Among them are *When Rain Clouds Gather* by Bessie Head, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, *Ake* by Wole Soyinka, *House Made of Dawn* by Scott Momoday, *Ceremony* by Leslie Silko, *The Man Eater of Malgudi*, by R.K. Narayan, *Native Son* by Richard Wright, *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, *Loving in the War Years* by Cherie Moraga, *Maus I* and *Maus II* by Art Spiegelman. Divide the class into literature circles, with each circle choosing one of these works or another that fits the same criterion. Have each circle read and discuss the book they have chosen, then share their impressions with the whole class. Ask the students to note the commonalities and differences in the works.
3. Show the video *Faces of the Enemy* and discuss the way visual images are used in propaganda to dehumanize people. Ask students to look for images in old magazines, children's books, textbooks, encyclopedias, etc., that exemplify this dehumanization or diminishing of peoples, and to look for contrasting images that portray the same people as strong, human, intelligent, competent. Have them create a poster that contrasts these images. (*Faces of the Enemy*, produced by Bill Jersey and Sam Keen, is available from Quest Productions, 877-352-6213.)
4. Have students find accounts in the Western media from 1900-1960 about Africa and Africans, from 1865-1960 about African Americans, from 1935-1945 about Japanese Americans, from 1945-1955 about Chinese and Koreans, and from 1954-1975 about Southeast Asians. Have them compare and contrast these images with those seen in the Western media today for each group.

Alternatively, ask students to compare the accounts of these groups to the accounts in the Western media of Arabs and Muslims from 1991 to the present.

Name: _____ Date: _____

While You Watch “A Black Scholar Investigates Colonialism”

1. In his book *A World View of Race*, what is Ralph Bunche’s point of view on colonialism?
2. What was the focus of Ralph Bunche’s research project in Africa and Asia?
3. What was the effect of colonial powers’ propaganda on the world and on colonized peoples?
4. Does Bunche share the attitude of the black middle class toward Africa?

