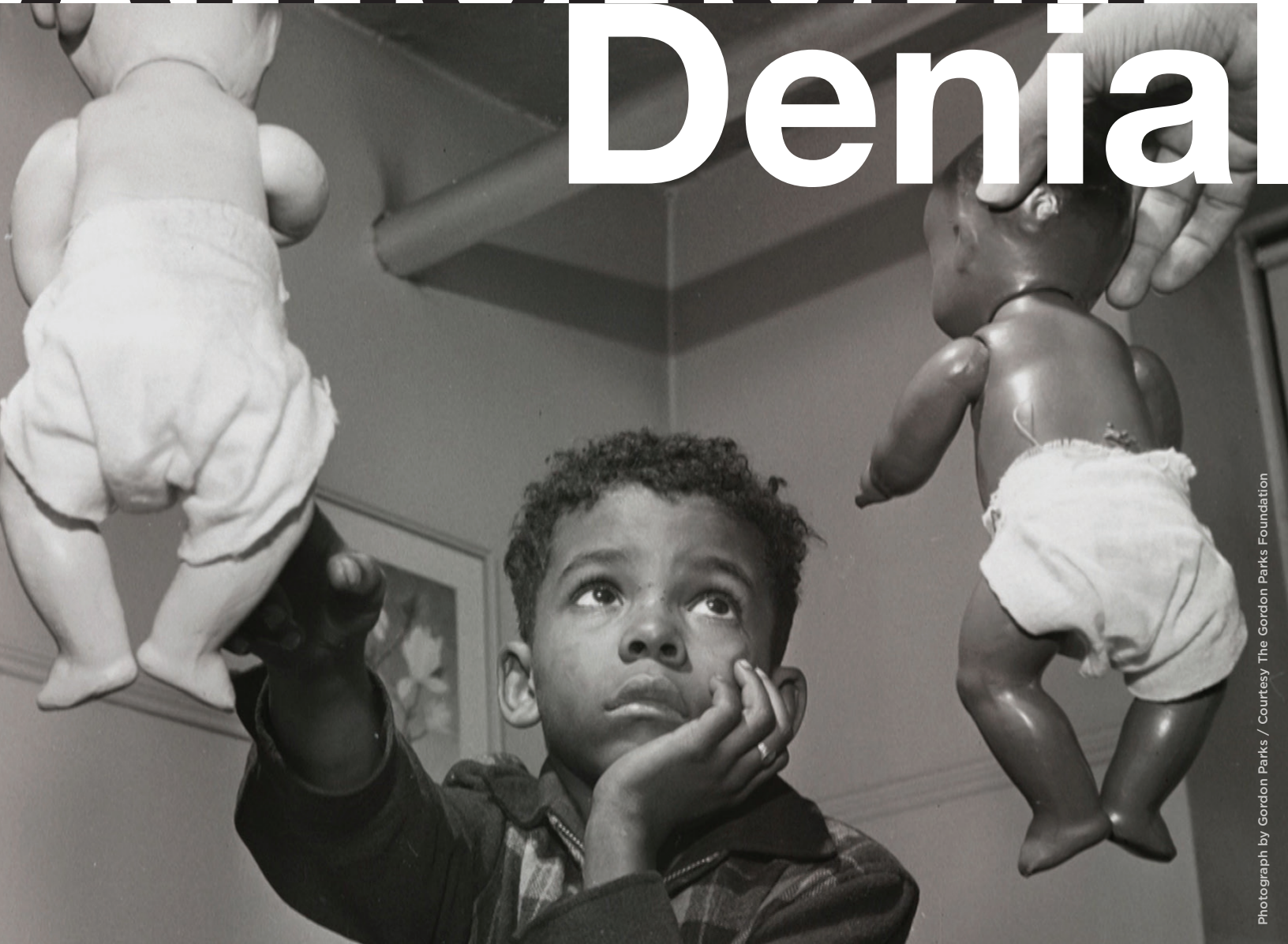


COMMUNITY CINEMA
FREE FILM SCREENINGS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

American Denial



Photograph by Gordon Parks / Courtesy The Gordon Parks Foundation

pbs.org/independentlens/american-denial



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Using This Guide

Community Cinema is a rare public forum: a space for people to gather who are connected by a love of stories, and a belief in their power to change the world. This discussion guide is designed as a tool to facilitate dialogue, and deepen understanding of the complex issues in the film *American Denial*. It is also an invitation to not only sit back and enjoy the show—but to step up and take action. This guide is not meant to be a comprehensive primer on a given topic. Rather, it provides important context, and raises thought provoking questions to encourage viewers to think more deeply. We provide suggestions for areas to explore in panel discussions, in the classroom, in communities, and online. We also provide valuable resources, and connections to organizations on the ground that are fighting to make a difference.

For information about the program, visit communitycinema.org



Note About Facilitating Conversations

Talking about race and implicit biases may prompt challenging and deeply personal conversations in your community, and requires sensitivity and building trust with your audience. Community Cinema's Facilitator Guide, available at communitycinema.org [screening-tools](#), provides helpful tips and suggested ground rules for fostering an environment where audiences feel safe, encouraged, and respected so that they can open up and engage in productive dialogue with one another around issues that are often emotional and have the potential to be polarizing.

There are also professional facilitators trained in this type of dialogue that could be invaluable resources to consider, especially if there are particular local sensitivities or nuances your community is facing. Additionally, the Community Relations Service (CRS) of the United States Department of Justice helps address local community conflicts and tensions arising from differences of race, color, and national origin. Learn more, and find the nearest regional or field office that serves your area at: justice.gov/crs/about-crs/regional-and-field-offices.

From the Filmmakers



Llewellyn Smith

Producer/Director,
American Denial



Christine Herbes-Sommers

Producer,
American Denial



Kelly Thomson

Producer,
American Denial

This film grew out of the research for and making of our previous film *Herskovits at the Heart of Blackness*. Melville Herskovits was dedicated to exploring questions of African American identity and in that capacity, had hoped to be tapped by the Carnegie Corporation to lead its massive study on Jim Crow racism. Instead, “an outsider” — Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal — was chosen. Myrdal’s research identified a key and troubling question: How can a nation that espouses such forward-thinking, human, and democratic vision as embodied in the American Creed justify the exploitation of its black population? In 1940, Myrdal published his study, titled *An American Dilemma*. We believed Myrdal’s question would be salient today. The film uses a number of narrative devices to examine the mechanisms of denial, or cognitive dissonance — the ways in which we deny or rationalize biases and practices that violate our bedrock beliefs — as well as the disturbing historic and contemporary consequences of that denial.

We hope this film will encourage viewers not only to reflect on just how we assiduously blind ourselves to recognizing racial injustices, but also to consider denial as an organizing concept. Our habits of consumption, our religious and gender biases — all fall prey to denial.

Our natural instinct most often is to resist confronting our denial. That’s its power. Our goal was to help make visible what our society often works to keep invisible — unconscious bias, bigotry, prejudice, and their long, dark consequences. The film is meant to stir conversation — and confrontation of denial.

The Film



In 1938, Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal was engaged by the Carnegie Corporation of New York to conduct a study of the social and economic situation of black people living in the American South. Seeking to comprehend and even solve America's racial problems, the Carnegie Corporation of New York chose a non-American, an outsider they felt would provide an unbiased view of the so-called "Negro problem." Myrdal found a deep contradiction between the values that people espoused — such as freedom, democracy, and equality — and the oppression and discrimination practiced throughout the South. *An American Dilemma* was the report of those findings. ***American Denial*** uses Myrdal's study to ask whether racial dynamics have changed since that study was done.

Using archival footage, newsreels, nightly news reports, and rare southern home movies from the 1930s and 1940s, the film provides a graphic portrait of conditions for black people in the early decades of the last century. Myrdal was shocked by what he saw in the South and struggled to reconcile what he assessed as white people's espousal of values of equality with their need to oppress black people. He asked provocative questions, which sometimes got him into trouble. In his own life, he experienced a period of personal crisis when his wife Alva accused him of living the kind of denial and hypocrisy he was studying, specifically, that his belief in women's equality was not reflected in his marriage and family life.

A group of experts — historians, sociologists, psychologists, civil rights advocates — grapple with the central question of the film: Is the conflict Myrdal found in the late 1930s

still true today? Individually, each of the experts points out the ways in which African Americans are still oppressed, such as through discrimination in employment, housing, education, criminal justice, and other domains. It is discussed how there has been a transfer from a past belief in black people's physical inferiority to that of cultural inferiority. Acknowledging how biases that used to be explicit have become increasingly implicit, scholars in the film assert that the "anti-blackness" at the heart of slavery is still with us, but it now exists largely in the realm of the unconscious. Research from the field of social psychology is profiled that indicates that unconscious associations in our minds (also known as implicit biases) are real, pervasive, and can have substantial effects on our behavior.

In *American Denial*, Myrdal's inquiry into the United States' racial psyche becomes a lens for modern inquiry into how denial, cognitive dissonance, and unrecognized, unconscious attitudes continue to dominate racial dynamics in American life. Animation, reenactments, test research, and other devices challenge the viewer to consider their own unconscious associations. In an interview with Gunnar Myrdal in the 1970s, Bill Moyers — referring to Myrdal's assertion in *An American Dilemma* that in the United States almost all the economic, social, and political power is in the hands of white people — asks, "Will we ever make significant progress toward solving this problem?" Now, seventy years after the publication of Myrdal's study, the question is a long way from being answered.

American Denial

Selected Individuals From the Film

- **Sissela Bok and Kaj Fölster**—daughters of Gunnar and Alva Myrdal
- **Walter Jackson**—Gunnar Myrdal biographer
- **Vincent Brown**—Historian, Harvard University
- **John a. Powell**—Civil liberties scholar, UC Berkeley
- **Michelle Alexander**—Legal scholar, The Ohio State University; Civil rights activist
- **Danielle Allen**—Political philosopher, Institute for Advanced Study
- **Sudhir Venkatesh**—Cultural sociologist, Columbia University
- **James Sidanius**—Social psychologist, Harvard University
- **Mahzarin Banaji**—Experimental psychologist, Harvard University

Sources: Karl Gunnar Myrdal

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Sources: Alva Myrdal

- » Nobelprize.org. 2014. "Alva Myrdal - Biographical." nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1982/myrdal-bio.html

GUNNAR AND ALVA MYRDAL AND RALPH BUNCHE

Karl Gunnar Myrdal (December 6, 1898–May 17, 1987) was a Swedish economist and sociologist whose major work was in international relations and developmental economics.

CAREER:

- From the late 1920s to 1967, he held academic posts in Geneva and Stockholm, and through the early 1970s, held several visiting professorships in the United States.
- From 1938 to 1940, he was engaged by the Carnegie Corporation of New York to conduct a major study of the social and economic problems of African Americans, resulting in the groundbreaking publication of *An American Dilemma*. Other publications during his career also combined his economic research with sociological studies.
- Active in Swedish politics, he was elected to the Swedish senate in the mid-1930s and again in the 1940s. From 1945 to 1947, he was Sweden's Minister of Commerce.
- From 1947 to 1957, he served as the executive secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.
- In 1974, he was co-recipient, with Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek, of the Nobel Prize in Economics.

PERSONAL:

In 1924, he married Alva Reimer. The couple had three children: two daughters, Sissela and Kaj, and one son, Jan.

Alva Myrdal (January 31, 1902–February 1, 1986) was a Swedish sociologist and politician who is known for her disarmament work in the years after World War II and the following decades.

CAREER:

- Active in social welfare issues in Sweden, she co-authored (with her husband) *Crisis in the Population Question*, published in 1934. A major focus of her work was the promotion of social reforms that would expand women's liberty and support family life.
- In 1943, as an active and prominent member of the Social Democratic Party, she joined its committee tasked with drafting a postwar program.
- From 1949 to 1955, she held two positions at the United Nations (UN), first as head of its social welfare section, then as head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO's) social science section.
- In 1955, she became Sweden's ambassador to India.
- In 1962, she was elected to Parliament, and was appointed Sweden's representative to the disarmament talks in Geneva, a post she held until 1973. During this period she also served as Sweden's Minister of Disarmament.
- In 1982, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, which she shared with Mexican diplomat Alfonso García Robles.

Ralph Bunche (August 7, 1904–December 9, 1971) was an African American social scientist and diplomat, whose resume is dotted with a string of “firsts.”

Sources: Ralph Bunche

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- » PBS.org. “Ralph Bunche: An American Odyssey: The Man and the Myth: Bunche’s Family Life.” [pbs.org/ralphbunche/myth_fam.html](https://www.pbs.org/ralphbunche/myth_fam.html)

CAREER:

- He excelled academically, graduating from UCLA as a member of Phi Beta Kappa.
- He was the first African American to earn a doctorate in political science (Harvard University, 1934).
- At Howard University, where he taught in the late 1920s and early 1930s, he helped to launch the political science department.
- His work on race relations included the publication of his 1936 book, *A World View of Race*, and his research with Gunnar Myrdal in the American South.
- From 1947 to 1949, he headed the peace talks between Arabs and Israelis to settle the conflict in that region.
- He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950, the first African American and first person of color in the world to receive the award.
- His diplomatic career continued at the UN through the 1950s and 1960s and included helping to settle the 1956 Suez crisis as well as conflicts in the Congo (Zaire), Cyprus, and Bahrain.

PERSONAL:

- In 1930, he married Ruth Ethel Harris. The couple had three children: two daughters, Joan and Jane, and one son, Ralph Jr.

WHAT HAS CHANGED, AND WHAT HASN'T?

Using the historical era of Myrdal's study as a foundation for questions about present-day racial dynamics, the film and this guide focus almost exclusively on black-white relations while recognizing that racism, oppression, and social control are not limited to the experiences of black people.

Since the publication of *An American Dilemma* in 1944, there has been a spate of Supreme Court decisions and federal laws passed that aimed to end discrimination in housing, jobs, education, and other areas. The civil rights movement of the 1960s spurred a number of measures aimed at leveling the playing field for African Americans, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and affirmative action in education. Legal segregation has been outlawed. Black people hold elective office in cities, states, and congressional districts across the country, and even the highest office in the land: president. Black poverty has declined dramatically, and college enrollment has gone up more than sevenfold since the late 1950s (*The Economist*, 2013).

In spite of these advances for African Americans, big differences still exist in the social and economic conditions of black and white people in the United States. Statistics we learn in the film illustrate this, including the following:

- Black men make 76 cents on the dollar compared to white men (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).
- In 2006, black and Hispanic people received subprime mortgages at nearly double the rates of white people (Economic Policy Institute, 2008).

Sources: What Has Changed, and What Hasn't?

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- » Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. 2012. "Prisoners in 2011." bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p11.pdf
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- » Economic Policy Institute. 2008. "Subprime Mortgages Are Nearly Double for Hispanics and African Americans." epi.org/publication/webfeatures_snapshots_20080611
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- » Population Reference Bureau. 2012. "U.S. Has World's Highest Incarceration Rate." prb.org/Publications/Articles/2012/us-incarceration.aspx
- » U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2012. "Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity, 2011." bls.gov/cps/cpsrace2011.pdf

- Roughly 72 percent of black children are in high-poverty schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).
- The United States incarcerates more people than any country in the world (Population Reference Bureau, 2012). The overwhelming majority are people of color (Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2012). If trends continue, one in three black men can expect to go to prison in their lifetime (BJS, 2003; Center for American Progress, 2012).

In addition to the disparities described above, there are marked differences in how many white Americans view the conditions of life for African Americans. In Gallup polls on race relations conducted in 2013, white respondents were significantly more positive about opportunities and conditions for black people than were black respondents (2014). Some results include:

- When asked about *opportunities for black people in jobs, education, and housing*, those responding "yes," that black people have as good of a chance as white people to: get a good job were 74 percent white, 40 percent black; have their children receive a good education were 80 percent white, 55 percent black; and obtain any housing they can afford were 85 percent white, 56 percent black.
- Approximately 37 percent of black respondents saw *racial discrimination as a major factor in black people having on average worse jobs, income, and housing* than white people, while 60 percent thought it was due to "mostly something else," compared to 15 percent of white respondents who saw racial discrimination as a major factor and 83 percent who thought it was due to "mostly something else."
- Generally, around half as many white respondents as black respondents felt *racial discrimination was a major factor in lower education levels, lower income levels, and lower life expectancies* for black people in the United States, and a *higher percentage of black people in U.S. prisons*. About one-third as many white respondents as black respondents felt that racial discrimination was not a factor in these issues.
- Less than half as many white respondents as black respondents feel *the justice system is biased* against black people (25 percent to 68 percent).
- The percentage of black respondents who say they are *treated less fairly in stores, restaurants, bars, and other entertainment venues, and in dealing with the police* in such matters as traffic incidents, is generally two to three times higher than the percentage of white respondents who think black people receive such unfair treatment.

The results of the Gallup survey raise several questions: Why do these disparities and differences in perception persist? How can they be addressed? Are white Americans in a state of denial about the realities of black life in the United States? To what extent might prejudice and discrimination operating on an unconscious level be contributing to these dynamics?

“This is the frightening point: Because [implicit bias is] an automatic and unconscious process, people who engage in this unthinking discrimination are not aware of the fact that they do it.”

– David R. Williams, social scientist, Harvard University

Unconscious or implicit bias is a core concept that *American Denial* explores, and can be complex to comprehend. The below is a “Primer on Implicit Bias” adapted directly from the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity’s publication *State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review 2014*.

Sources: What Is Unconscious or Implicit Bias?

- » Blair, I. V. 2002. “The Malleability of Automatic Stereotypes and Prejudice.”
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- » Rudman, L. A. 2004. “Social Justice in Our Minds, Homes, and Society: The Nature, Causes, and Consequences of Implicit Bias.”
- » Rutland, A., L. Cameron, A. Milne, and P. McGeorge. 2005. “Social Norms and Self-Presentation: Children’s Implicit and Explicit Intergroup Attitudes.” ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15784093
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Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. The key word here is *unconscious*; these biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments and associations, are activated involuntarily and without an individual’s awareness or intentional control (Blair, 2002; Rudman, 2004). In stark contrast to *explicit or known biases* that individuals are aware of and may choose to conceal for the purposes of social and/or political correctness, implicit biases operate outside of conscious awareness yet have a tremendous impact on our behaviors and interactions. Internationally acclaimed social scientist David R. Williams (*Essence*, 2013) emphasizes the real-world impact of this implicit cognitive processing when he states, “This is the frightening point: Because [implicit bias is] an automatic and unconscious process, people who engage in this unthinking discrimination are not aware of the fact that they do it.”

Everyone is susceptible to implicit biases (Nosek, Greenwald, and Banaji, 2007; Rutland et al., 2005). Social psychologist Nilanjana Dasgupta (2013) likens implicit bias to an “equal opportunity virus” that everyone possesses, regardless of his/her own group membership. The implicit associations we harbor cause us to have feelings and attitudes about other people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, and appearance. Early life experiences, the media, and news programming are often-cited origins of implicit associations (Kang, 2012). Dasgupta (2013) writes that exposure to commonly held attitudes about social groups permeates our minds even without our active consent through “hearsay, media exposure, and by passive observation of who occupies valued roles and devalued roles in the community.”

We generally tend to hold implicit biases that favor our own *ingroup*, or those that we perceive as belonging to the same “group” as ourselves. This categorization, *ingroup* vs. *outgroup*, is often automatic and unconscious (Reskin, 2000). Notably, research has shown that we can hold implicit biases against our *ingroup* (Greenwald and Krieger, 2006; Reskin, 2005), which *American Denial* also dismayingly reveals. For example, Project Implicit, the multi-university research collaboration that Mahzarin Banaji co-founded, reports that for the Implicit Association Test for race, 50 percent of African Americans show an implicit black preference while the remaining 50 percent show an implicit white preference. This is in comparison to when Banaji states in the film that approximately 75 percent of white Americans show an implicit preference for whites. The film also depicts both the historical and modern versions of psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark’s famous “Doll Test” from the 1940s, in which young black children displayed negative self-perceptions and associated a black doll with “bad” and a white doll with “good.”

The concept of *stereotype threat* is also explored in the film. Attributed to social psychologist Claude Steele, stereotype threat refers to a fear of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of inadvertently confirming an existing negative stereotype of a group with which one identifies (Steele and Aronson, 1995). Studies have shown that these fears often manifest themselves in lower performance by the stereotyped group, even when the stereotyped group and nonstereotyped group being compared have been statistically matched in ability level (Steele and Aronson, 1995). As seen in the social science research explored in *American Denial*, stereotype threat can cause black students to perform more poorly on tests when they are required to identify their race.

Sources: A Few Key Characteristics of Implicit Biases

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A FEW KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF IMPLICIT BIASES

The following has been adapted directly from *State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review 2014* by the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity:

- Implicit biases are pervasive and robust (Nosek et al., 2007). Everyone possesses them, even people with avowed commitments to impartiality such as judges (Rachlinski et al., 2009).
- The implicit associations we hold arise outside of conscious awareness; therefore, they do not necessarily align with our declared beliefs or even reflect stances we would explicitly endorse (Greenwald and Krieger, 2006; Kang et al., 2012). As Myrdal reflects in the film, "My general impression of human beings is that they are very confused in their minds. Their public opinions are certainly not their private opinions."
- Implicit biases have real-world effects on behavior (Dasgupta, 2004). In the film, Mahzarin Banaji discusses a study she conducted in Boston with a group of doctors that revealed that the unconscious tended to actually be a better predictor of action than the conscious. Many sectors have taken measures to examine the effects of implicit bias in their field. For example, Google launched a series of training workshops for its staff that are based on examining unconscious biases, particularly as they might influence their hiring processes as well as their culture being more accepting of gender and racial diversity (*New York Times*, 2014). The United States Department of Justice hosted an implicit-bias training for St. Louis, Missouri police departments as part of their Collaborative Reform Initiative after the 2014 shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 2014).
- Implicit biases are malleable; therefore, the implicit associations that we have formed can be gradually unlearned and replaced with new mental associations (Blair, 2002; Dasgupta and Greenwald, 2001). For example, some research suggests that being exposed to people who counter commonly held stereotypes (e.g., female construction workers, elderly athletes, male elementary school teachers) can help individuals "reprogram" existing associations (Dasgupta and Greenwald, 2001; Kang and Banaji, 2006).

ROOTS OF RACISM

“History ... does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do.”

—James Baldwin

Sources: Roots of Racism

- » *Science*. 2012. “Roots of Racism.” sciencemag.org/content/336/6083/825.summary

BLACK EXCEPTIONALISM

Black exceptionalism has been described by Michelle Alexander as “the high profile, highly visible, examples of black success” that are in stark contrast to the conditions and lives of the vast majority of black people (*Huffington Post*, 2012). Alexander posits that black exceptionalism supports a system of control in the United States: “Today, the public consensus is that not all black people are bad, not all black people are inferior, but some, and if only they make good choices like Barack Obama, then they wouldn’t be part of the under caste.” In the film, Alexander goes on to point out that this pervasive thinking “isn’t just a phenomenon that goes on among white folks, it goes on in the black community as well, where black folks say, ‘Well, if you just pulled up your pants, if you just stay in school, if you just act right.’ And it allows us to become blind to the structures that are in place that trap people at the bottom.”

Source:

- » *Huffington Post*. 2012. “Author and Legal Scholar, Michelle Alexander, Talks about the War on Drugs and Mass Incarceration (Part 3).” huffingtonpost.com/kathleen-wells/author-and-legal-scholar_1_b_1515766.html

The development of racism in the United States can be traced through the tragic history of black slavery from colonial times through the Civil War and the subsequent rise of Jim Crow laws. In the film, civil liberties scholar John A. Powell explains “In a sense, the anti-blackness which was deeply connected with slavery is still very much part of our culture.” Legal scholar and civil rights activist Michelle Alexander states in the film that “after the death of slavery, a new system of racial and social control was born, known as convict leasing. Black men were arrested en masse, sent to prisons and then leased back to plantations or to corporations. And then yet another system of control was born: Jim Crow.” Many scholars assert that these histories, dating back centuries, have left a legacy that persists in racial stereotypes (*Science*, 2012), fueling attitudes and behavior in present-day America, as well as structural and institutional racism in prisons, education systems, housing, employment, law enforcement, and other institutions.

THE “OBAMA EFFECT”

Has the United States experienced an “Obama effect” as a result of the election of the first black president in United States history? A 2011 Gallup survey found that optimism about Obama’s effect peaked right after he was elected in November 2008, when 70 percent of Americans thought race relations would get better. By October 2009, 41 percent said that race relations had improved, and a year later that figure dropped to 35 percent. (Much larger percentages of black people and Democrats saw an improvement in race relations, compared to white people and Republicans.) The proportion of Americans who thought the Obama presidency hadn’t changed race relations much increased from 35 percent to 41 percent.

In 2012, an Associated Press (AP News) survey found that racial prejudice, measured explicitly and implicitly, increased from 2008. The percentage expressing explicit antiblack attitudes went up from 48 percent to 51 percent; in an implicit racial attitudes test, the percent expressing antiblack feelings increased from 49 percent to 56 percent.

Speculation about the Obama presidency’s effect on race relations varies. Some feel that his election stirred up latent racism within the American population; some see his election as an uncomfortable reminder of larger demographic changes—sometimes referred to as the “browning” of America—that are taking place in the United States; and others claim that expectations for an era of increased racial harmony because of Obama’s election were unrealistic.

Sources: The “Obama Effect”

- » AP News. 2012. “AP Poll: Majority Harbor Prejudice against Blacks.” bigstory.ap.org/article/ap-poll-majority-harbor-prejudice-against-blacks
- » Gallup. 2011. “One-Third in U.S. See Improved Race Relations Under Obama.” gallup.com/poll/149141/One-Third-Improved-Race-RelationsObama.aspx?utm_source=alert&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=syndication&utm_content=plaintextlink&utm_term=Politics

Sources: Hierarchy, Racial Control, and Power Structures

- » Pratto, F., J. Sidanius, and S. Levin. 2006. "Social Dominance Theory and the Dynamics of Intergroup Relations: Taking Stock and Looking Forward." isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic895260.files/PrattoSidaniusLevin_2006.pdf

Academics such as James Sidanius (featured in *American Denial*), Felicia Pratto, and Shana Levin (2006) have written extensively about how humans are predisposed to forming group-based social hierarchies, and the imbalanced relation to power that results from these hierarchies. In particular, this social dominance theory identifies three qualitatively distinct hierarchy systems that are group-based, including

- "an *age system*, where adults have disproportionate social power over children";
- "a *gender system*, in which men have disproportionate social, political, and military power compared to women"; and
- "an *arbitrary-set system*, in which groups constructed on 'arbitrary' bases, that is, on bases not linked to the human life-cycle, have differential access to things of positive and negative social value. Arbitrary-set groups may be defined by social distinctions meaningfully related to power, such as (in various contexts) nationality, 'race,' ethnicity, class, estate, descent, religion, or clan."

Race as an arbitrary-set system of hierarchy is examined in depth in *American Denial*. For example, legal scholar and civil rights activist Michelle Alexander talks about the persistence of racial control in American society. In a system where white people are still largely in control, looking at how black people are affected by the institutions, policies, and practices in place can be a starting point for effecting change that is in line with the American ideals of liberty, equality, democracy, and justice.

Below are a few examples of the negative social impacts associated with arbitrary-set hierarchies that are touched upon in the film:

CRIMINAL JUSTICE:

- African Americans constitute nearly 1 million of the total 2.3 million incarcerated individuals (NAACP).
- Relative to population, 5 times as many white people use drugs as African Americans, yet African Americans are sent to state prison for drug offenses at 13 times the rate of white people (Human Rights Watch, 2000).
- Laws and policies restrict people with felony convictions (especially drug convictions) from receiving a wide range of benefits, including student loans and public housing, as well as the right to vote (Legal Action Center, 2004).

HOUSING:

- The Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness reports that African Americans are greatly overrepresented in United States homeless statistics when compared to white Americans. In 2010, the rate of persons in black families who stayed at a homeless shelter was seven times the rate of persons in a white family (2014).
- The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Urban Institute released a report (2013) that found that while more direct forms of housing discrimination for racial minorities have declined since the first national study in 1977, other forms of discrimination still persist; for example, providing less information than for white people, which results in raising the costs of housing searches for minorities and restricting their options.

- Research from scholars at Rice University and Cornell University (Sharp and Hall, 2014) found that African Americans are 45 percent more likely than white people to switch from owning their homes to renting them. This held true even after adjusting for socio-economic characteristics, debt, education, etc. One of the co-authors states “Despite important movement toward racial equality in access to homeownership, there is growing racial inequality in the ability to remain a homeowner” (*Cornell Chronicle*, 2014).

Sources: Criminal Justice

- » Human Rights Watch. 2000. “United States — Punishment and Prejudice: Racial Disparities in the War on Drugs: Summary and Recommendations.” hrw.org/reports/2000/usa/Rcedrg00.htm
- » Legal Action Center. 2004. “After Prison: Roadblocks to Reentry.” lac.org/road-blocks-to-reentry/upload/lacreport/LAC_PrintReport.pdf
- » NAACP. “Criminal Justice Fact Sheet.” naacp.org/pages/criminal-justice-fact-sheet

Sources: Housing

- » *Cornell Chronicle*. 2014. “Study: Blacks Lose Homes More Today Than in '90s.” news.cornell.edu/stories/2014/07/study-blacks-lose-homes-more-today-90s
- » Institute for Children, Poverty, & Homelessness. 2014. “Intergenerational Disparities Experienced by Homeless Black Families.” icphusa.org/index.asp?page=16&report=91&pg=44
- » Sharp, G., and M. Hall. 2014. “Homeownership Exit, 1968-2009.” jstor.org/discover/10.1525/sp.2014.12161?uid=381062111&uid=3739920&uid=2&uid=3&uid=19825008&uid=33251&uid=67&uid=5910584&uid=62&uid=3739256&uid=21104213515227
- » U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Urban Institute. 2013. “Housing Discrimination against Racial and Ethnic Minorities 2012.” huduser.org/portal/publications/fairhsg/hsg_discrimination_2012.html

Sources: Education

- » U.S. Department of Education. 2014. “Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC).” www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/data.html?src=rt

EDUCATION:

The U.S. Department of Education’s 2014 civil rights survey found multiple inequities in the school experiences of black and white students:

- Black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than white students. At the preschool level, black children represent 18 percent of enrollment but 48 percent of those receiving more than one out-of-school suspension.
- Black students are more than four times as likely as white students to attend schools where 80 percent or fewer of teachers meet certification requirements.
- A quarter of the schools with the highest percentage of black and Latino students did not offer Algebra II, and a third of these schools did not offer chemistry.

See the “Resources” section for additional sources of information on these issues.

Topics and Issues Relevant to *American Denial*

A screening of *American Denial* can be used to spark interest in any of the following topics and inspire both individual and community action. In planning a screening, consider finding speakers, panelists, or discussion leaders who have expertise in one or more of the following areas:

AMERICAN VALUES

LEGACIES OF SLAVERY

RACE AND ETHNICITY IN THE UNITED STATES

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY

IMPLICIT BIAS

OTHER (NONRACIAL) TYPES OF BIAS/PREJUDICE

RACIAL PROFILING

SOCIAL CONTROL THROUGH EDUCATION, JUSTICE, HOUSING, AND POLITICAL SYSTEMS

HISTORICAL ROOTS OF AMERICAN RACISM

EFFORTS TO REDUCE RACISM, PREJUDICE, AND DISCRIMINATION

Thinking More Deeply

1. Do you think the conflict Myrdal found between what people believe and how they act with regard to race is still true today? If a similar study were done today, what do you think the results would show?
2. Do you think that having a black president has moved us closer to racial equality in the United States? Why or why not? Do you think that having a black president has changed anything about perceptions and/or conditions pertaining to race? If so, what changes do you think there have been? What would your response be to someone who says that having a black president proves that black people do not face inequalities or racism?
3. Experimental psychologist Mahzarin Banaji says in the film “When I take my own [implicit association] test, the data that come out that horrify me and humble me show that I cannot associate black with good as quickly and as error-free as I can associate white with good.” Do you believe that unconscious associations may be affecting how you perceive or interact with others? How has what you learned about implicit bias in *American Denial* affected your thoughts around this concept?
4. Is racism only an American issue? What other examples of racism or other types of prejudicial behavior do you currently see elsewhere in the world? What similarities and differences do you notice?
5. Do you think racial oppression also requires the cooperation on various levels of those being oppressed themselves “across the color line,” as social psychologist James Sidanius and legal scholar and civil rights activist Michelle Alexander assert in the film? If so, in what forms do you think that cooperation takes place? What do you think we can do to address this cooperation?
6. Civil liberties scholar John A. Powell says that “the narrative before *An American Dilemma* in many ways was that blacks are not fit, that there’s something defective biologically. But what we moved into today was a culture narrative. And so, it’s not that blacks are unfit as a population or a species, but that the black culture is not fit.” What do you think he means by this reference to the black *culture*? What implications do you think this shift in narrative might carry? Are there any other narratives that you see emerging?
7. What about American civilization do you think has generated poverty, segregation, and the color line? What changes do you think are required in order to eliminate the continuation of those conditions?
8. James Sidanius speaks in the film of the contradiction between extreme racism and the American Creed, noting, “I think one of the ways in which that contradiction is dealt with is through denial. Denial of discrimination, of racism and inequality in society, helps to maintain the stability of those societies. Because most people would prefer to believe that they live in a just and well-ordered universe and that all is well with the world.” What do you think about this statement? Do you agree that American people are “in denial” about discrimination, racism, and inequality? What difference do you think it makes if an individual is conscious or not about his or her biased racial attitudes? What impact do you think denial might have on individuals, and on the functioning of society as a whole?
9. In your mind, what is the most important thing an individual can do to reduce prejudice and discrimination?
10. Implicit-bias research points to the media playing a significant role in shaping implicit or unconscious associations. Think about the types of media you watch or listen to. How do you think they might affect or shape your own perceptions and associations?

Suggestions for Action

- 1.** Review the “Resources” section of this Discussion Guide to learn more about understanding racism and biases, and examine your community in light of the issues raised in *American Denial*. Is there segregation, either de facto or a more deliberate type? How much interaction is there between members of different racial or ethnic groups? What are the residential patterns? What opportunities exist for young black people in education and employment? If you feel that changes are needed, in what areas should changes be made and who should be involved in the efforts?
- 2.** Research suggests that more intergroup exposure and friendships can help to combat unconscious and conscious biases and stereotypes. How many friends or people do you spend time with who are of a different ethnicity or race? Are there ways you can increase intergroup contact in your life? What role can you play in fostering integrated interaction in your community?
- 3.** Do you wonder if you have biases that you’re not aware of? Find out by taking the Implicit Association Test (IAT), the same test that was seen in the film and developed by experimental psychologist Mahzarin Banaji. Go to implicit.harvard.edu/implicit, select your country and click on “Go!” under “Project Implicit Social Attitudes” to enter as a guest, click on “I wish to proceed” at the bottom, and then select “Race IAT.” There are links to other IATs to help you examine various types of bias and prejudice.
- 4.** Within Our Lifetime, a nationwide coalition of more than 15 organizations, launched the “Campaign to Combat Implicit Bias.” Learn about opportunities to participate in the Campaign, and explore their fact sheets, video webinars, and resources to help you address implicit bias. withinourlifetime.net
- 5.** RACE is a traveling exhibition that looks at race through the eyes of history, science, and lived experience. In addition to providing a glimpse of the exhibit, its online component offers games and quizzes to help you and your family understand the concept of race as well as the life experiences of people of different racial groups. Go to understandingRACE.org/home.html and click on “Lived Experience.” The website also lists the tour schedule and upcoming locations of the exhibit.
- 6.** Have a conversation with your family, friends, coworkers, community group, or others about unconscious or implicit bias. The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State University releases an annual publication, *State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review*. The 2014 edition has a section on starting these types of conversations and a fact sheet, starting on page 70. See: kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/2014-implicit-bias.pdf.
- 7.** The Society of Counseling Psychology has developed a resource for use by community leaders, educators, and others who are interested in combating racism. Explore this resource, “Taking Action Against Racism” (TAAR), at div17.org/TAAR and think of ways it might be used in your community. “TAAR through Media” (TAARM) might be especially effective with faith organizations, youth groups, and other community education groups that would like to examine racial prejudice.
- 8.** Find out what you can do to reduce racial disparities on an institutional level. The Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University School of Law works in a number of areas, including voting rights and criminal justice, and volunteer ideas and efforts are welcome. Get more information on how you can be involved at brennancenter.org/get-involved.

For additional outreach and engagement ideas, visit pbs.org/independentlens/american-denial. For local information, check the website of your PBS station.

Resources

Note: Each resource's description is primarily adapted from language provided on the organization's website.

pbs.org/independentlens/american-denial— This is the *Independent Lens* broadcast companion website for the film.

WRITINGS AND REPORTS FROM EXPERTS

APPEARING IN AMERICAN DENIAL

news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2010/12/'one-drop-rule'-persists— “‘One-Drop Rule’ Persists,” by Steve Bradt, reports on research done by **James Sidanius**, Arnold K. Ho, and **Mahzarin Banaji** of Harvard University and Daniel T. Levin of Vanderbilt University, looking at how biracial people are perceived.

rollingout.com/culture/harvard-professor-james-sidanius-discusses-the-psychological-effects-of-racial-inequality/#_— This is the article “Harvard Professor **James Sidanius** Discusses the Psychological Effects of Racial Inequality,” by A.R. Shaw.

Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People by **Mahzarin Banaji** and Anthony Greenwald explores the hidden biases that we all carry from a lifetime of experiences with social groups—age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, social class, sexuality, disability status, or nationality. The book's authors are the developers of the Implicit Association Test.

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness by **Michelle Alexander** is a stunning account of the rebirth of a caste-like system in the United States, one that has resulted in millions of African Americans locked behind bars and then relegated to a permanent second-class status—denied the very rights supposedly won in the civil rights movement. Teaching Tolerance has created lesson plans titled “Teaching ‘The New Jim Crow,’” specifically designed for students in grades 9–12, which are available online for free at: tolerance.org/publication/teaching-new-jim-crow.

UNDERSTANDING RACE, DISCRIMINATION, AND PREJUDICE

implicit.harvard.edu/implicit— The Implicit Association Test (IAT) is the same test that was seen in the film and developed by experimental psychologist Mahzarin Banaji. Select your country and click on “Go!” under “Project Implicit Social Attitudes” to enter as a guest, click on “I wish to proceed” at the bottom, and then select “Race IAT.” There are links to other IATs to help examine various types of bias and prejudice.

kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/implicit-bias-review— *State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review* is an annual publication by the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State University that introduces people to implicit-bias research.

understandingprejudice.org— This website, established in 2002 with funding from the National Science Foundation and McGraw-Hill Higher Education, offers educational resources and information on prejudice, discrimination, multiculturalism, and diversity, with the ultimate goal of reducing the level of intolerance and bias in contemporary society. The site's comprehensive information is based on scientific studies; is divided into short subsections for easy accessibility; and includes links to information on reducing prejudice, racial profiling, segregation, disparities in health care, and other topics.

understandingRACE.org/home.html— RACE is a project developed by the American Anthropological Association in collaboration with the Science Museum of Minnesota. The first nationally traveling exhibition to tell the stories of race from the biological, cultural, and historical points of view, RACE combines these perspectives to offer an unprecedented look at race and racism in the United States.

mediathatmattersfest.org/films/a_girl_like_me— *A Girl Like Me* is a 7-minute documentary that repeats the “Doll Test” conducted by Kenneth and Mamie Clark in the 1940s.

pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm— *RACE - The Power of an Illusion* is a documentary examining race as both a biological myth and a social invention. It was broadcast on PBS and was produced by California Newsreel in association with the Independent Television Service (ITVS).

web.stanford.edu/~eberhard/publications.html— Social psychologist Jennifer L. Eberhardt received the MacArthur “Genius Grant” in 2014 for her work investigating the subtle, complex, largely unconscious, yet deeply ingrained ways that individuals racially code and categorize people, with a particular focus on associations between race and crime. Through collaborations with experts in criminology, law, and anthropology, as well as novel studies that engage law enforcement and jurors, Eberhardt is revealing new insights about the extent to which race imagery and judgments suffuse our culture and society. Her professor profile on Stanford University's website features links to some of her selected publications.

Resources

ferris.edu/jimcrow — The motto of the Jim Crow Museum at Ferris State University is “Using Objects of Intolerance to Teach Tolerance and Promote Social Justice.” The website offers multiple videos and visual resources, including timelines, the history of racial caricatures and stereotypes, and more.

facinghistory.org/for-educators/educator-resources/resources/race-and-membership-american-history-eugenics-movement — Facing History and Ourselves created the resource book *Race and Membership in American History: The Eugenics Movement*, which focuses on a time in the early 1900s when many people believed that some “races,” classes, and individuals were superior to others. They used a new branch of scientific inquiry known as eugenics to justify their prejudices and advocate programs and policies aimed at solving the nation’s problems by ridding society of “inferior racial traits.”

ELIMINATING PREJUDICE AND RACISM

withinourlifetime.net — Within Our Lifetime is a nationwide coalition of more than 15 organizations whose motto is to “take action to end racism.” They recently launched the “Campaign to Combat Implicit Bias” and have an online toolkit that includes information about how to get involved with the Campaign, fact sheets, a facilitator guide, and resources to help address implicit bias. Video webinars that explain implicit bias are also available to watch on their website.

facebook.com/ncramity — The National Center for Race Amity is based at Wheelock College in Boston. Its mission is to help move us from the blame/grievance cycle that has been dominant in racial discourse, toward a perspective that focuses on recognition; examination; and emulation of our ability to overcome racial prejudice through association, amity, and collaboration.

ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/culture/cultural-competence/reduce-prejudice-racism/main — Community Tool Box, a resource developed by the University of Kansas, offers practical “Strategies and Activities for Reducing Racial Prejudice and Racism.”

fastcompany.com/3036627/strong-female-lead/youre-more-biased-than-you-think — “You’re More Biased Than You Think,” by Jane Porter, discusses unconscious biases and ways to combat them.

tolerance.org/supplement/strategies-reducing-racial-and-ethnic-prejudice-essential-pr — This list of 13 principles from Teaching Tolerance, a program of the Southern Poverty Law Center, can provide a framework for those working to reduce racial prejudice.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE, HOUSING, EDUCATION, VOTING RIGHTS, HISTORY

civilrights.org/publications/justice-on-trial/ — *Justice On Trial: Racial Disparities in the American Criminal Justice System* is a publication of the Leadership Conference, a coalition of more than two hundred national organizations working to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States.

aclu.org/voting-rights — The ACLU Voting Rights Project works to protect and expand Americans’ freedom to vote through legislation, litigation, and voter education.

redistrictingonline.org — This is a nonpartisan online resource and knowledge center for redistricting professionals, academics, attorneys, and the general public, whose goal is to make the arcane subject of redistricting less so by providing comprehensive information at a single, easily accessible source and promoting more quality discussion, analysis, and scholarly debate on the many topics that the once-a-decade redistricting process generates.

educationopportunitynetwork.org/how-education-reform-perpetuates-racial-disparity — This article from the Education Opportunity Network discusses the ways in which recent education reforms perpetuate racial disparity.

tolerance.org/magazine/number-43-spring-2013/school-to-prison — This article from Teaching Tolerance describes the school-to-prison pipeline and discusses how school discipline policies feed minority children into the criminal justice system.

theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-for-reparations/361631 — “The Case for Reparations” is an article by Ta-Nehisi Coates in *The Atlantic* that argues “Two hundred fifty years of slavery. Ninety years of Jim Crow. Sixty years of separate but equal. Thirty-five years of racist housing policy. Until we reckon with our compounding moral debts, America will never be whole.”

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ITVS

Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds, presents, and promotes award-winning documentaries on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web, and the Emmy® Award-winning weekly series *Independent Lens* on Monday nights at 10 pm on PBS. Mandated by Congress in 1988 and funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, ITVS has brought thousands of independently produced programs to American audiences. Learn more at itvs.org.

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Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10 pm. The acclaimed series features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by Independent Television Service, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens. Join the conversation at facebook.com/independentlens and @IndependentLens.

