

Considering the Space Race from a Sociological Perspective

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Essential Questions

How might we understand the current billionaire space race from a social class and critical race standpoint? How does one's multiple social identities and social positions inform their worldview of space exploration?

Understanding

Students should walk away with a more nuanced understanding of:

- a) **media literacy**: which perspectives are presented in mainstream media versus other literary texts, such as music?
- b) **standpoint theory**: oppressed groups have a unique perspective on the production of knowledge and offer important, although often silenced, perspectives on current local and world events

Resources

- Begin the lesson by having student listen to “Whitey on the Moon” (1970) by Gil Scott-Heron. Students should make note of the primary themes presented in the song.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goh2x_G0ct4
- Next, students should watch the TeachRock segment “The Moon Landing”
https://youtu.be/jEeEYNz_Gsw
- Finally, students should read a piece about the contemporary billionaire space race. For example, NPR “Bezos Vs. Branson: The Billionaire Space Race Lifts Off” (2021)
<https://www.npr.org/2021/07/11/1014581747/bezos-vs-branson-the-billionaire-space-race-lifts-off>
 - What are the similarities and differences between the 1969 moon landing and the current billionaire space race?

Activities

- Students can analyze local or state budgets, depending on access and learners' familiarity with existing data. How is tax-payer money used in their community? Discussion questions: How are these decisions made? Whose interests are represented?
- Students can co-create a short survey on social attitudes towards space exploration. The survey should include questions on state-funded space exploration and the current privately funded space race. Those surveyed should be from their local communities. Students should identify primary findings and explore any existing relationships between social attitudes and social identities.
- Finally, students can research contemporary musicians' statements or songs on billionaire space race. Students would most likely need access to social media sites, as these perspectives are rarely covered by mainstream media outlets.

Teacher's Note:

- This lesson is intended for an introductory sociology course and students should have existing knowledge about social class and racial inequality. However, the lesson could be used in humanities courses depending on the section's focus. For example, it could be used in a history, communication, or English course that emphasizes knowledge production and dissemination.
- Teachers should be prepared to give a brief introduction to the concept of media literacy and standpoint theory. There are many excellent resources online (ex: <https://medialiteracynow.org/what-is-media-literacy/>), but it might be worthwhile to contact the school's librarian for resources. Additionally, standpoint theory could be briefly presented by someone from Gender Studies or African American Studies. If the teacher does not have access to someone in these fields, select a video or reading created by a Black, feminist, academic.



Virgin Galactic's SpaceShipTwo is seen here in 2018.

Gene Blevins/AFP via Getty Images (source: <https://www.npr.org/2021/07/11/1014581747/bezos-vs-branson-the-billionaire-space-race-lifts-off>)