



Building Bridges

Revealing Hidden Histories through Ethnic Studies

Student Edition



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CHAPTER 1



UNDERSTANDING COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Academic Standards

- **PA Social Studies Core Standard 8.1.12.A:** Evaluate patterns of continuity and change over time, applying context of events.
- **PA Social Studies Core Standard 8.1.12.B:** Evaluate the interpretation of historical events and sources.
- **PA Social Studies Core Standard 8.1.12.C:** Analyze the fundamentals of historical interpretation.
- **PA Social Studies Core Standard 8.1.12.D:** Evaluate how conflict and cooperation among social groups and organizations impacted the history and development of the U.S.
- **PA Social Studies Core Standard 8.2.12.A:** Evaluate the role that groups and individuals from Pennsylvania played in the social, political, cultural, and economic development of the U.S. and the world.
- **PA Social Studies Core Standard 8.2.12.B:** Evaluate the impact of historical documents, artifacts, and places on Pennsylvania history.
- **PA Social Studies Core Standard 8.2.12.C:** Evaluate continuity and change in Pennsylvania history as it relates to the U.S. and the world.
- **PA Social Studies Core Standard 8.3.12.A:** Evaluate the role groups and individuals played in the social, political, cultural, and economic development of the U.S.
- **PA Social Studies Core Standard 8.3.12.B:** Evaluate the impact of historical documents, artifacts, and places on the development of the U.S.
- **PA Social Studies Core Standard 8.3.12.C:** Evaluate how continuity and change have impacted the development of the U.S.
- **PA Social Studies Core Standard 8.3.12.D:** Evaluate how conflict and cooperation among groups and organizations have influenced the growth and development of the U.S.
- **PA Core Standard CC.1.2.11-12.L:** Read and comprehend literary nonfiction and informational text on grade level, reading independently and proficiently.
- **PA Core Standard CC.1.4.11-12.S:** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research, applying grade-level reading standards for literature and literary nonfiction.
- **PA Core Standard 8.1.12.A:** Evaluate patterns of continuity and rates of change over time, applying context of events.
- **PA Core Standard 8.2.12.C:** Evaluate how continuity and change in Pennsylvania are interrelated to the U.S. and the world.
- **PA Core Standard 8.3.12.D:** Evaluate how conflict and cooperation among groups and organizations in the U.S. have influenced the growth and development of the world.
- **PA Core Standard CC.1.2.11-12.A:** Determine and analyze how an author's ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or portions of a text; provide an objective summary of the text.
- **PA Core Standard CC.1.2.11-12.B:** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences and conclusions drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- **PA Core Standard CC.1.2.11-12.C:** Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in their exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

- **PA Core Standard CC.1.4.11-12.A:** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately.
- **PA Core Standard CC.1.4.11-12.B:** Develop and analyze the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, extended definitions, concrete details, and examples.
- **PA Core Standard CC.1.4.11-12.U:** Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update writing products in response to ongoing feedback.
- **PA Core Standard CC.1.5.11-12.A:** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- **PA Core Standard CC.1.5.11-12.D:** Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective.

Pennsylvania Department of Education Common Ground Framework

- **Common Ground – CA1.B:** Understand individuals can unintentionally adopt societal biases that can shape the nature of their interactions with groups and individuals.
- **Common Ground – CA2.E:** Recognize institutional biases and their consequences.
- **Common Ground – CA3.B:** Integrate multiple perspectives into learning experiences and interactions that capitalize on learners' experiences, identities, and heritage.
- **Common Ground – CA3.C:** Recognize that learners are connected to local and global communities and events that influence and impact learning, relationships, and the understanding of institutions and society.
- **Common Ground – CA3.F:** Provide rigorous learning experiences and relevant projects in culturally supportive spaces that integrate advocacy skills, listening and thinking, collaboration, resource gathering, and strategic actions.
- **Common Ground – CA4.D:** Create multiple pathways and opportunities for students to achieve academic and social success.
- **Common Ground – CA5.B:** Recognize and acknowledge the cultural, racial, and linguistic differences of learners, educators, educational leaders, and families (race, skin color, ethnicity, gender identity, age, nationality, language, class, economic status, ability, level of education, sexual orientation, and religion).
- **Common Ground – CA6.F:** View family and community engagement as a priority.

Introduction to Chapter 1: Understanding Collective Identity

Essential Question:

How do shared histories, struggles, and systems of exclusion shape collective identity in the United States—and who gets to belong?

Collective identity is a powerful force that shapes how people think, feel, and act as members of a group. It is more than just an affiliation—it is the deep emotional and political connection that ties individuals together through shared experiences, values, histories, and struggles. Social scientists Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper define collective identity as “...not merely a label but an ongoing process of connection to something larger than oneself” (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Whether through cultural traditions, labor movements, or social resistance, collective identity influences how communities define themselves and interact with the world around them.

In this chapter, we explore how collective identity is formed, preserved, and sometimes contested. Through historical and contemporary examples, we will examine how collective identity can foster solidarity, but create exclusions too. From labor movements in 19th-century Pittsburgh to modern immigrant communities navigating assimilation and resistance, we will analyze how belonging and exclusion are intertwined in shaping individual and group identities.

Why Does Collective Identity Matter?

Understanding collective identity allows us to ask fundamental questions about society:

- Who gets to belong? What determines who is accepted into a group or community and who is not?
- How do communities respond to discrimination and exclusion? What strategies do marginalized groups use to resist oppression?
- How does history shape our sense of self and our perceptions of others today? How do past struggles continue to influence identity and belonging?

For instance, the experiences of Black domestic laborers in antebellum Pittsburgh, the Jewish relief efforts during waves of immigration, and the exclusionary policies that targeted Chinese immigrants all highlight how identity is shaped by both internal resilience and external pressures. These historical narratives connect across time, revealing how discrimination, resistance, and adaptation play crucial roles in shaping collective identity.

The Complexity of Collective Identity

While collective identity can unite people, it can also divide. A strong sense of group identity can lead to the exclusion or marginalization of those perceived as outsiders. Nativism, xenophobia, and racial discrimination have historically functioned as barriers to inclusion, often defining identity in opposition to the “other.” For example:

- A job advertisement from 1852 that preferred Black workers while excluding Irish applicants highlights how race and ethnicity structured economic mobility.
- Political cartoons depicting immigrants as threats reflect the fears and anxieties that shaped exclusionary policies.
- Poetry carved into the walls of Angel Island by detained Chinese immigrants illustrates the emotional and cultural resistance of a community facing systemic discrimination.
- Flyers from early 20th-century labor movements reveal how workers organized to protect their jobs, sometimes at the expense of excluding others based on race or nationality.

These examples show how collective identity is a dynamic force that can be both a source of empowerment and a tool for exclusion. By examining historical and contemporary case studies, we can better understand how collective identity continues to influence society today, from online communities forming around shared interests to social movements such as Black Lives Matter, which mobilize around a collective sense of justice and belonging.

Reflection and Relevance Today

In an era of globalization and digital connectivity, collective identity is more complex than ever. People often belong to multiple overlapping groups, each influencing their perspectives and actions. Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" explains how people can feel a strong connection to others they have never met, whether through national identity, religious affiliation, or digital communities (Anderson, 1983). These evolving identities raise important questions:

- How does technology shape modern collective identities?
- What happens when a person belongs to multiple communities with conflicting values?
- How do communities sustain their identity in the face of discrimination and forced assimilation?



Marchers at ACT UP protest in New York City

Lenape Presence in Pittsburgh and Historical Timeline

The Lenape (Delaware) people originally inhabited a vast region known as Lenapehoking, encompassing present-day Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and parts of New York. In Pittsburgh, the Lenape lived along the Allegheny, Ohio, and Monongahela Rivers, maintaining vibrant communities rooted in farming, fishing,

governance, and spiritual connections to the land. Despite this deep-rooted presence, the Lenape have been systematically displaced and rendered invisible through colonization, coercive treaties, and settler narratives that erase or distort their identity.

Key Time Periods of Lenape Displacement in Pittsburgh



Opal Lee and Juneteenth Celebrations

In her 90s, Opal Lee—often called the “Grandmother of Juneteenth”—continues to shape the nation’s understanding of the holiday through activism, historical storytelling, and civic leadership. In a June 2024 interview with NPR, Lee recounts her lifelong mission to secure national recognition of Juneteenth and reminds listeners that this work is rooted in personal memory and deep injustice. “When I was 12 years old, a mob of 500 people set fire to our home,” she said, recalling a racially motivated attack in 1939. This formative experience inspired her decades-long advocacy, which culminated in President Biden signing legislation in 2021 that made Juneteenth a federal holiday. But Lee sees the holiday as only one step toward a more just future. “We’ve got to dispel the myths, we’ve got to teach the history, we’ve got to have unity,” she asserted, emphasizing that Juneteenth must be paired with education and collective truth-telling.

Lee’s reflections align closely with the Western Pennsylvania celebrations of Juneteenth, where historical truth and community resistance remain central. At Bethel AME Church in Pittsburgh’s Hill District, Rev. Dale Snyder emphasizes that their Juneteenth events focus on reparations and historical recovery. “We are looking at equality, equity, and ways in which we can find remedies to solve these historic wrongs,” Snyder said, referencing

how the church’s property was destroyed during the Civic Arena’s construction in the 1950s. He connects this past harm to the urgency of Juneteenth celebrations: “You can’t correct what has happened until you have the truth.” Similarly, in Sewickley, Shawnda Davis and the Community Center’s Juneteenth Committee are working to “get true history out” to a new generation of residents. “We wanted the community to be aware of Juneteenth before it became a national holiday,” Davis explained, highlighting how local commemorations are forms of both education and cultural reclamation.

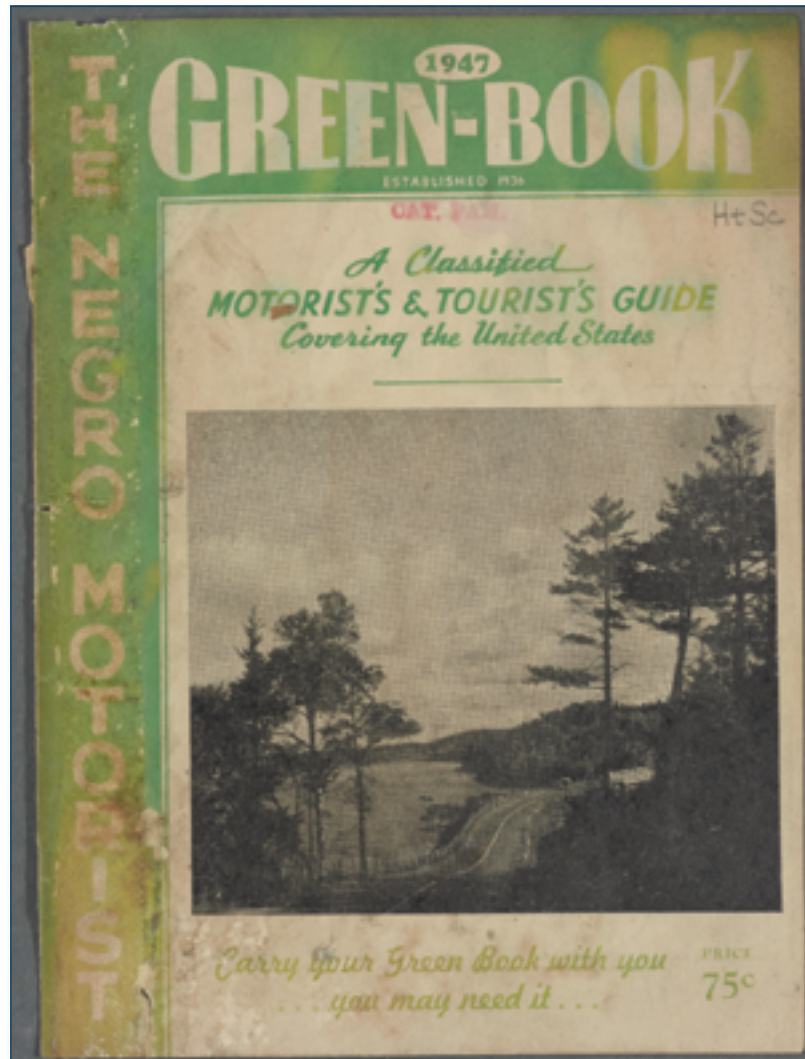
Together, Lee’s national advocacy and the regional observances in Pittsburgh illustrate how Juneteenth has evolved into a multi-layered civic tradition—one rooted in memory, resistance, and the ongoing struggle for justice. These efforts go beyond symbolic celebration and instead activate collective memory to push for restorative policy. Lee calls for this explicitly: “I want people to know that we’ve got to work together. We’ve got to stop this divisiveness.” Her message resonates with the calls for truth and reparations emerging from Pennsylvania’s faith-based and community organizations, proving that Juneteenth, at its best, is both a national and hyperlocal demand for recognition, restoration, and repair.

Negro Motorist Green Book

The Negro Motorist Green Book in Pittsburgh

The Negro Motorist Green Book was an annual travel guide published from 1936 to 1966 by Victor Hugo Green, a Black postal worker from Harlem. During the Jim Crow era, African Americans faced systemic racism, segregation, and threats of violence when traveling across

the United States. In Pittsburgh, the *Green Book* listed safe havens—particularly in the Hill District, a nationally renowned Black cultural and economic center. Places such as the Apex Hotel on Wylie Avenue, the Collins Hotel on Centre Avenue, and numerous beauty salons,



The Negro Motorist Green Book 1947 issue.

Racial Justice in Pittsburgh: Protest, Public Memory, and Systemic Inequity

Protest can be a vehicle for social change, as evidenced by these two powerful images of racial justice activism in Pittsburgh—one from the Civil Rights Era and one from the present day.



The first one is Vincent “Roots” Wilson’s 1966 solo demonstration outside the Allegheny County Courthouse to call attention to racial injustice and systemic oppression. He also connected the civil rights struggle in the United States to the border context of the Vietnam War, criticizing the U.S. for sending Black men to fight overseas while denying them basic rights at home.



The second image captures a demonstrator holding a sign reading “Justice for Antwon Rose” during a community-led protest in Pittsburgh a day after Antwon Rose II’s funeral. Rose was a 17-year-old African American who was fatally shot by an East Pittsburgh police officer on June 19, 2018. The demonstrator’s sign reflects the community’s demand for accountability and highlights the border national conversation about police use of force. The protests in Pittsburgh were part of a series of demonstrations addressing systemic issues of racial injustice and law enforcement practices.

Land Acknowledgement

The first artifact is a statement by the University of Pittsburgh's Sustainability Office. The Pitt Sustainability office works on balancing the environment, equity, and economics so that future generations can thrive. The statement honors the history, cultures, and continued presence of Indigenous communities, while committing to care for the land and continue to support those communities.

The second artifact is an excerpt from "Reconciling Relationships with the Land Through Land Acknowledgements" by Deborah McGregor and Emma Nelson. Here, Gregor

and Nelson offer a sharp critique of land acknowledgements that risk becoming "scripted spectacles" with no commitment to justice or repair.

Land acknowledgements have become more common across the United States as a way to recognize and respect Native peoples' histories, particularly in light of the large amount of land that was taken from Indigenous tribes between 1776 and 1887. These statements are meant to educate, correct false historical narratives, and show support for Native communities whose sacred lands were taken.

Artifact 1 | Statement from the University of Pittsburgh

We recognize that the University of Pittsburgh occupies the ancestral land of the Seneca, Adena culture, Hopewell culture, and Monongahela peoples, who were later joined by refugees of other tribes (including the Delaware, Shawnee, Mingo, and Haudenosaunee), who were all forced off their homelands and displaced by European colonists. We honor the original caretakers of this region and uplift their historic, unique, and enduring relationship with this land, which is their ancestral territory. We pay our respects to their Elders and their past, present, and future people, community, and culture. While we cannot change the past, we commit to continued gratitude for the gifts of nature, along with ongoing respect, care, and stewardship of the land, each other, and future generations. We are committed to learning and supporting indigenous communities in the region today and in the future.

Why Do We Do a Land Acknowledgement?

As the U.S. continues to reckon with the history of its indigenous peoples, land acknowledgements have become more common. Land acknowledgments help recognize indigenous peoples' "resilience and resistance in the face of violent efforts to separate them from their land" (U.S. Dept of Arts & Culture). Between 1776 and 1887, the United States seized over 1.5 billion acres from America's indigenous people by treaty and executive order, largely without regard for their livelihoods, communities, and culture. Today, sacred indigenous lands are still being exploited to extract wealth.

Land acknowledgements are a "simple, powerful way of showing respect and a step toward correcting the stories and practices that erase Indigenous people's history and culture

Pittsburgh Baker Honors Asian American Activists with Cookie Portraits

The following is an interview between Lakshmii Singh and Jasmine Cho, an Asian American, Pittsburgh-based baker and artist who turns her cookies into works of art that celebrate unsung Asian American heroes. She creates intricate cookie designs that tell stories of resilience and cultural pride. Her edible art shines a spotlight on figures often left out of mainstream history and education, from present-day influencers to historical trailblazers such as the 106-year-old Filipina tattoo artist Apo Whang-Od.

Despite facing personal grief and depression, Cho found strength in her vulnerability. She

believes in the power of “tenderness,” comparing it to the softness of good baked goods—a symbol of staying open to both pain and joy. Her story encourages students to consider how art, identity, and activism can intersect in powerful ways. Cho reminds us that storytelling, even through something as simple as a cookie, can be a tool for healing, justice, and change.

In this interview, Cho talks about how she first began creating portrait cookies, and her journey to honoring her Asian American heroes.

Interview Transcript

Jasmine Cho turns cookies into works of art. As part of her mission for social justice, the Pittsburgh baker creates detailed portraits of unsung Asian American heroes.

ARI SHAPIRO, HOST: We want to introduce you now to a baker in Pittsburgh, who uses cookies to honor the stories of unsung Asian American heroes. Here’s NPR’s Lakshmi Singh.

LAKSHMI SINGH, BYLINE: Jasmine Cho is about to try something she has never dared try before. She’s going to take a bite of her own cookie.

JASMINE CHO: (LAUGHTER)

SINGH: Wait! -No pressure.

CHO: This is pressure. You’re right. I’ve never bitten into a face cookie before.

SINGH: Cho’s reservations are understandable, given the hours, sometimes days she spends on her custom-made creations. Underneath every layer of icing is a remarkable story of a warrior who’s confronted discrimination and injustice at great personal cost. Each inspiration is plucked from the pages of history books or present-day postings on social media.

CHO: I don’t want to bite any further (laughter).

SINGH: On this day, the founder of the online bakery Yummyholic is struggling to show me the ropes around this commercial kitchen in Pittsburgh. This place is filled with the intoxicating aroma of vanilla, sugar and butter, lots and lots of butter. Cho remains fixed, though, on a photo of a young woman with a bashful smile and gets to work.

CHO: So I’m mixing a little bit of color right now, a little bit of green.

SINGH: She presses the tip of a slender brush into a palette of food coloring and icing, then applies the sweet ingredients in gentle strokes across a four-inch canvas of baked dough.

CHO: All right. I’m just going to go for it and just start maybe with her eyebrows here.

SINGH: Within minutes, the familiar contours of eyes, a dimple and a smile emerge and bear an uncanny resemblance to her subject’s photo.

Hispanic Nobel Peace Prize Winners

This image is a mural painted in 2013 in Philadelphia, depicting Nobel Peace Prize winners Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral alongside excerpts from their work. Pablo Neruda was a Chilean poet, diplomat, and politician who won the Nobel Peace Prize in Literature in 1971. Gabriela Mistral was a Chilean poet, diplomat, and educator who was

the first Latin American author to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1945.

Mistral's poetry, grounded in maternal imagery and advocacy for vulnerable populations, reflects themes of empathy and care, while Neruda's verses often convey passion, loss, and solidarity with the oppressed.



Mural painting in the hispanic district of Philadelphia illustrating Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral, within the "Mural Art Program" which began in 1984