

DEBBIE REESE INTERVIEW  
COUNTER BANS ON BOOKS

A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE  
UPHOLD ACCURATE EDUCATION

RURAL SCHOOLS  
APPRECIATE A DIVERSE HISTORY

# LEARNING FOR JUSTICE



ISSUE 02 | SPRING 2022 | LEARNINGFORJUSTICE.ORG



## Teaching Honest History

Educators, students and community members express how they fight attempts to curb truth-telling. To realize a truly diverse democracy, honest education matters.

# LEARNING FOR JUSTICE EDUCATOR FUND

Supporting projects that create more inclusive schools



***Do you have ideas for innovative projects that would address local systemic education inequities—but don't know how you'll find the resources?***

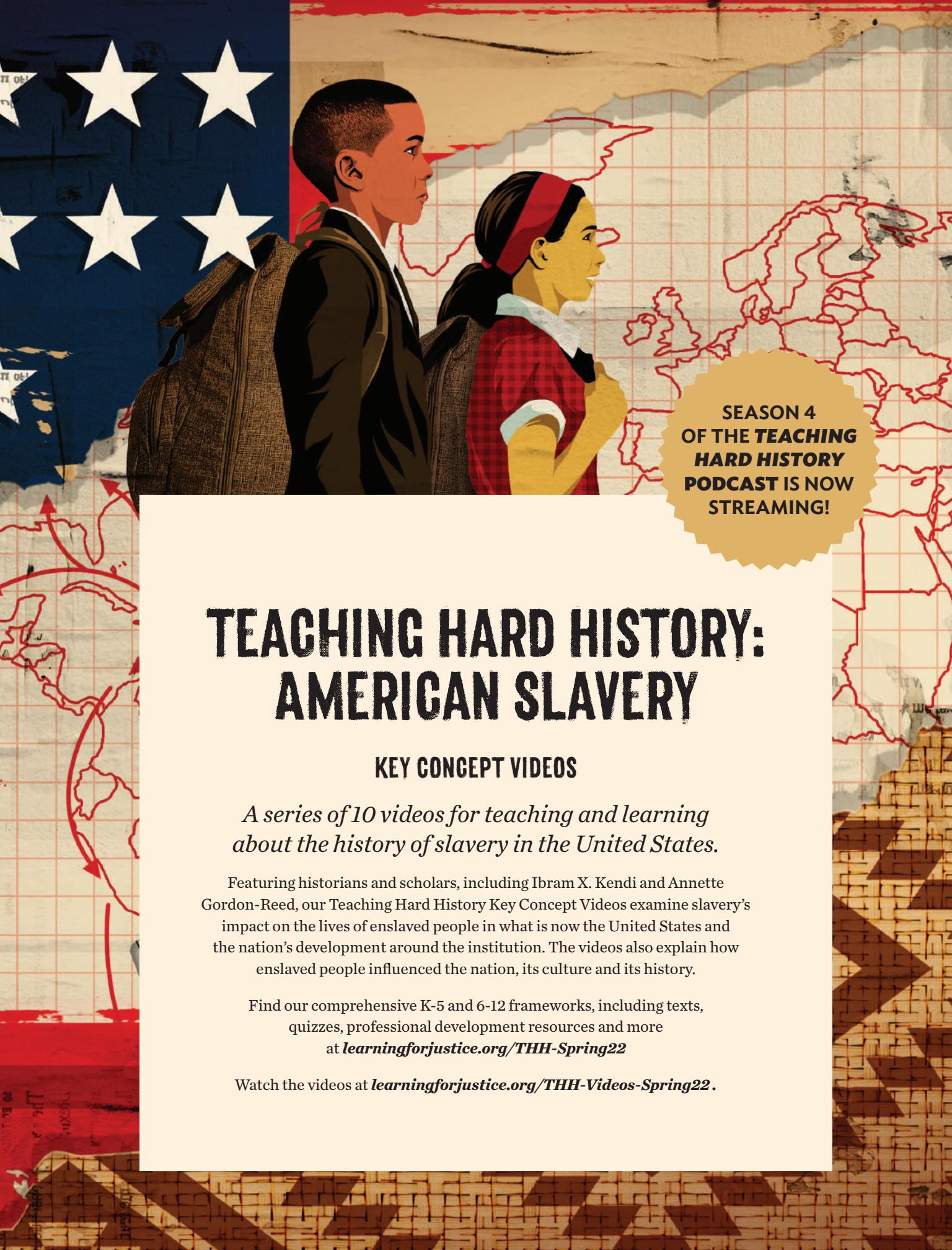
The Learning for Justice Educator Fund offers partnership opportunities that include ongoing guidance and critical resources for your project. With help from your expertise about your own school community, we intend to collaboratively generate innovative solutions that promote affirming school climates, support student action and raise everyone's consciousness.

Priority for the Educator Fund is given to applicants working in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Mississippi.

Find application information and deadlines at

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SEASON 4  
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PODCAST IS NOW  
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# TEACHING HARD HISTORY: AMERICAN SLAVERY

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*A series of 10 videos for teaching and learning  
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Featuring historians and scholars, including Ibram X. Kendi and Annette Gordon-Reed, our Teaching Hard History Key Concept Videos examine slavery's impact on the lives of enslaved people in what is now the United States and the nation's development around the institution. The videos also explain how enslaved people influenced the nation, its culture and its history.

Find our comprehensive K-5 and 6-12 frameworks, including texts, quizzes, professional development resources and more  
at [learningforjustice.org/THH-Spring22](https://learningforjustice.org/THH-Spring22)

Watch the videos at [learningforjustice.org/THH-Videos-Spring22](https://learningforjustice.org/THH-Videos-Spring22).



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ILLUSTRATION BY CORNELIA LI





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**THE MISSION** OF LEARNING FOR JUSTICE IS TO HELP TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS EDUCATE CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO BE ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN A DIVERSE DEMOCRACY.



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# Perspectives



**“We have a powerful potential in our youth, and we must have the courage to change old ideas and practices so that we may direct their power toward good ends.”**

—MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE

**WE ARE WITNESSING** a tumultuous moment in the nation’s public education system. Education as a vehicle for social change—shaped by years of thoughtful scholarship on equity and bold practices of inclusion—is under assault in the United States with an array of regressive mandates designed to uphold a culture of white supremacy. Teaching an honest history counters a prevailing narrative that denies the real origins of this country and maintains an unjust society.

In his 1963 speech to educators in New York, “A Talk to Teachers,” author and activist James Baldwin acknowledged that teaching honestly about the history of the U.S. was not without consequence. “You must understand,” he explained, “that in the attempt to correct so many generations of bad faith and cruelty, when it is operating not only in the classroom but in society, you will meet the most fantastic, the most brutal, and the most determined resistance.”

Today, as many of you meet the responsibility to nurture and support students who are affirmed, curious and innovative, you are met in return with this “most determined resistance” in the form of threatening state legislation, ambiguous school board policies and a deputized base of supporters fueled by fear. If we let this resistance prevail, then our society, as Baldwin warned, is in “intolerable trouble.”

Education is at the nexus of our nation’s current identity crisis and is key in the realization of a truly diverse democracy. Children of color represent the majority of children in the U.S. and will bear the brunt of increasing bans against lessons and texts that offer an inclusive and honest history that

connects our nation’s past to our present and can provide a liberatory path forward for everyone.

In this issue of *Learning for Justice* we are expanding the scope of teaching honest history through various perspectives and experiences. As you engage with these stories, I invite you to mobilize around three core strategies aimed at protecting the future of ethical and responsible education.

Organize with like-minded educators. In this current climate you must support each other and band together as a community of educator advocates. LFJ’s Senior Writer Coshandra Dillard highlights groups of educators who unite to make bold, public statements by teaching the truth about U.S. history in “Teaching the Past to Improve the Future.” And organizer and strategist Dorothee Benz, Ph.D., writes in “A Textbook Case” about the ways many educators correct for flawed textbooks to teach this nation’s whole, hard history.

Mobilize the larger community. As Danielle Neves, deputy chief of academics at Tulsa Public Schools shares in “Teaching Local History in Tulsa,” families can aid in educating students

honestly by engaging constantly with their children and by making use of community resources. To that end, LFJ Program Manager for School Partnerships Jey Ehrenhalt outlines the value of forging partnerships between museums and educators in “Partners in Honest Teaching.” And an Alabama teen shares her journey with her family to develop a more accurate picture of U.S. history and culture in “My History: More Than Two Sugar-coated Paragraphs.”

Support the next generation of leaders and educators. Activist and scholar Debbie Reese, Ph.D., addresses the surge in book bans across the U.S. and what that type of censorship means for Indigenous students and others in “Our Children Are Native Every Day,” an interview with Dillard and LFJ Associate Editor Crystal L. Keels. In “The Promise of Rural Schools,” former LFJ Senior Writer Cory Collins shares how rural communities of color refuse erasure and seek revitalization. And in “From Slavery to School Discipline,” journalist Anoa Changa outlines the nation’s racist “pathology of punishment and control” originating from the “peculiar institution” of slavery and continuing today in school discipline practices.

This issue is a reminder of our collective responsibility to counter untruths, uplift suppressed narratives and engage available educational resources to meet resistance with righteous resiliency—in service of *all* our nation’s children.

—Jalaya Liles Dunn,  
*Learning for Justice* Director

# MORE THAN 2,000 CONFEDERATE MEMORIALS STILL EXIST

The Third Edition of SPLC's *Whose Heritage?* report shows that more than 2,000 Confederate memorials are still present in the U.S.—including 201 schools that remain named for Confederates.



Recent efforts to remove Confederate memorials offer inspiring insights that can assist social justice advocates working to create fairer, freer and more just public spaces. In 2021, 33 schools were renamed or closed—more than any other previous year.

Visit [splcenter.org/whose-heritage](https://splcenter.org/whose-heritage) to read the full report and learn more about the movement to remove Confederate memorials.

ILLUSTRATION BY ZOË VAN DIJK

# FIRST BELL

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PHOTO BY KARSTEN MORAN

*Learning for Justice depends on your support and critical feedback to improve our work. We love hearing from you! Please let us know what you think by emailing [lfjeditor@splcenter.org](mailto:lfjeditor@splcenter.org) or reaching out via Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.*

## THE MOMENT: THE INSURRECTION

This is absolutely amazing that you all work so diligently for us to be able to facilitate real conversations in class! Thank you all so much!

—IVORYLKJR  
[VIA ONLINE COMMENT](#)

## LGBTQ GUIDE: NEW MEDIA LIST!

I just picked up one of these books for my toddler to see LGBTQ characters in a children's book. Check out this great list of books and movies from @learnforjustice to include more LGBTQ representation in your

school or classroom:

[lfj.pub/lgbtq-books](https://lfj.pub/lgbtq-books)  
—@ROSHNIMIRCHI  
[VIA TWITTER](#)

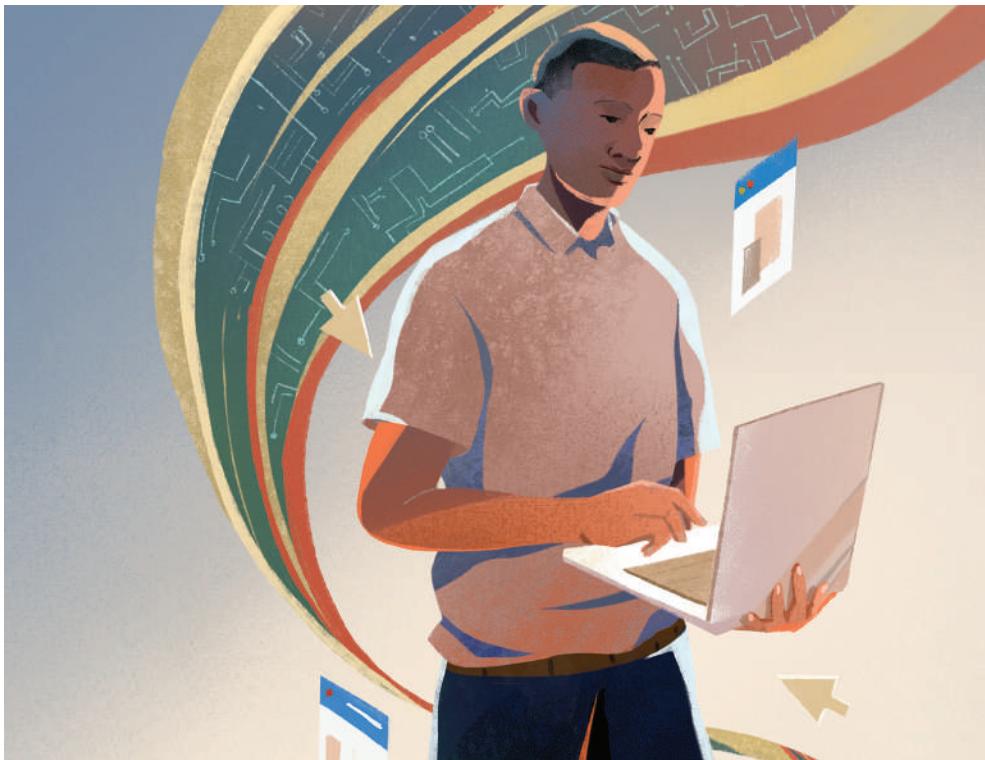
## LEARNING FOR JUSTICE ISSUE 1

I received the "Learning for Justice" inaugural issue last week, and felt compelled to write to you and your staff, to thank you for the content, the intentions, the lessons contained therein.

The magazine's design is clean and accessible; the illustrations are thoughtful and memorable; the

stories so full of helpful resources for further reflection and learning.

I look forward to receiving the next issue. I know that paper can seem such an outdated medium to some, but not to me! And not to my teenage kids either, who will find this magazine open on their desks, so that they may flip through it in idle moments...and most probably find themselves engrossed in a topic about which they hadn't previously thought too deeply.



With gratitude and admiration. Well done, editorial team!

—LISA GOELLER  
[VIA EMAIL](#)

What an incredible resource! So timely.

—ISABELLE SELIKOFF  
[VIA FACEBOOK](#)

The entire issue is a must read, especially appreciate this article on the urgent need to teach critical media literacy [“Reimagining Digital Literacy Education to Save Ourselves”] @learnforjustice

—@LOZALEADLEARNER  
[VIA TWITTER](#)

Imagine a whole issue on ways to work toward educational justice without relying on polygenic scores predicting

educational attainment.  
—@DOROTHYEROBERTS  
[VIA TWITTER](#)

**PD OPEN ENROLLMENT**  
I would highly recommend this for anyone. It was a fantastic PD and even more impressive since it was virtual!  
—LFJ WORKSHOP ATTENDEE

It was the perfect amount of time!  
—LFJ WORKSHOP ATTENDEE

**“LANGUAGE ACCESS”**  
Yes! Transparency and advocacy for ALL no matter the language or background.  
—@BAILEY\_KASEY2  
[VIA TWITTER](#)

**TEACHING HARD HISTORY PODCAST**  
👉 If you all aren't listening

to Season 4 of @learnforjustice's Teaching Hard History podcast w/ @ ProfJeffries, get on it! They're taking on teaching the history of The Jim Crow Era  
[lfj.pub/thh-podcast](http://lfj.pub/thh-podcast) #learningforjustice #sschat #historyteacher  
—@KIDADAEWILLIAMS  
[VIA TWITTER](#)

**ARTICLE ON CRITICAL RACE THEORY**  
This raises two questions: 1. If parents shouldn't control the education of their children, who should and why? 2. Do children belong to the family or the state?  
—C.J. GOIN  
[VIA FACEBOOK](#)

Black history is US history.  
—SUE BUDAK RUNNE  
[VIA FACEBOOK](#)

## FREE ONE WORLD POSTERS

Curious as to why @learnforjustice has quotes by Marianne Williamson? I'm grateful for the free, downloadable art but Williamson is fatphobic, ableist, and has a generally terrible track record with queer people.

—@GENDERPUDDING  
[VIA TWITTER](#)

*Editor's note: Thank you so much for this feedback and for the information about her record. We have since removed these posters.*

## TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

Have an opinion about something you see in *Learning for Justice* magazine or on our website? Email us at [lfjeditor@splcenter.org](mailto:lfjeditor@splcenter.org) with the subject line “Letter to the Editor.” Or mail a letter to 400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36104.



👉 [The Social Justice Standards] are not only essential goals for every classroom, but they recognize that students can do important work. We can help all young people develop the essential skills and dispositions they need to thrive in their diverse communities, locally and globally.



—@KKWORLDSAVVY

## Ask Learning for Justice



**Q** I want to teach honest history, and I want to be sensitive and respectful in how I do it—I don't want to say the wrong thing. What advice do you have?"

Teaching honest history is understandably difficult for a lot of educators, especially when discussing American enslavement. However, being silent on the topic can harm all students, particularly those whose families or identity groups were the targets of harm. One way to ensure you are being mindful when discussing hard histories is to be intentional about language.

While we focus on American enslavement here, teaching honest history—and centering the humanity of historically marginalized communities—means always choosing your language carefully. History is typically presented through a dominant perspective, so taking steps to understand and analyze the historical context of words and phrases is key. In some cases, dominant groups

have weaponized language to stigmatize other groups. For example, when teaching about the history of immigration in the United States, the word *illegal* is often used to describe immigrants without papers and is meant to connote criminality, especially concerning immigrants of color. We recommend using *undocumented* instead. In general, frame class content around personhood.

Our word choices have real-life consequences. For instance, during legal enslavement, Black people held in bondage were called "slaves." Enslavers were "slave holders" or "masters." This language shaped how white people discussed and subsequently thought about enslaved Black people. Over time, this narrative of white power over Black bodies became the prevailing one.

In short, language frames our understanding of U.S. history. And we see the harm language has inflicted on enslaved people and their descendants.

For this reason, we've been intentional with the language choices in our resources and materials, especially our *Teaching Hard History* framework. With a team of historians and educators, we deliberately wrote the framework to center the humanity of people in bondage—that's why we use the people-first term "enslaved people." Calling someone a "slave" undermines their personhood and centers their whole identity on being held captive. In the "Transatlantic Slave Trade" episode of *Crash Course Black American History*, author, scholar

and educator Clint Smith explains that *enslaved person* "emphasizes that slavery is a condition that was involuntarily imposed on someone, rather than being an inherent condition to someone's existence."

Language shifts can take some adjustment, and you'll come across some of that traditional language in valuable scholarship and other academic texts. You'll also encounter it in useful resources outside the academy. The key is to be deliberate about the language you use with students, and it's a good idea to explain why you're using that language. These choices are especially critical as you discuss histories of oppression in your classroom. Otherwise, that prevailing narrative of white supremacy will continue unchecked.

To break this cycle, we need to humanize people who historically have been dehumanized. We must remember and celebrate that these full human beings contributed to American culture in myriad ways and created communities in dire, brutal circumstances.

When your language reflects that enslaved people were more than "slaves," you and your students can tell a more complete and honest historical narrative.

### ASK LEARNING FOR JUSTICE!

Need the kind of advice and expertise only Learning for Justice can provide? Email us at [lfjeditor@splcenter.org](mailto:lfjeditor@splcenter.org) with "Ask LFJ" in the subject line.



ARTICLE 8.5.21 // RACE &amp; ETHNICITY, GENDER &amp; SEXUAL IDENTITY

## Partnering With Families to Support Black Girls

BY ADAM ALVAREZ, PH.D., AND ESHE PRICE

In our work together at Rowan University, we—Latino professor Adam Alvarez and Black woman doctoral student Eshe Price—often share our collective observations, experiences and ideas for improving conditions for youth of color. Being parents of color and former K-12 teachers, we approach the intersection of race, trauma and education with a sense of intimacy. We have witnessed firsthand the racialized wounds that occur in school settings, particularly for Black girls like Emmy, Eshe's daughter.

For Black girls, who are often viewed as less innocent than their white peers, common trauma-based responses like withdrawal, isolation, depression, irritability, aggression or risky behaviors tend to be criminalized. Consequently, their responses to social and economic issues over which they have no control are more harshly punished. In the process, many of their bodies are violated by agents of the state. Many Black girls are pushed out of school, funneled into the justice system and struggle with high levels of cascading stress. This is why the combined support of educators, families and caregivers is crucial.

### And a reader replied...

#BlackGirls often suffer from traumatic stress that goes unnoticed, and #schools can help. Engaging these students and their families with more empathy is essential to dismantling policies that marginalize #BlackStudents.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE HERE:

[lfj.pub/support-black-girls](https://lfj.pub/support-black-girls)

### ARTICLE SPOTLIGHT

Search for these headlines at [learningforjustice.org](https://learningforjustice.org).



**Pay BIPOC Educators for Their DEI Labor**  
BY SELENA A. CARRIÓN



**Parents Push for Student Safety**  
BY COSHANDRA DILLARD



**What Critical Race Theory Is and What it Means for Teachers**  
BY BOB KIM



**Teaching Reconstruction Is Absolutely Necessary**  
BY URSULA WOLFE-ROCCA

### DID YOU KNOW?

A 2019 study found that, per 100 students enrolled in school, Black students missed out on 82 more days because of out-of-school suspensions than their white peers.

—THE CENTER FOR CIVIL RIGHTS REMEDIES AND LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE



*Nefertari Yancie, Ph.D.,  
teaches social studies at Clay-  
Chalkville Middle School in  
Birmingham, Alabama.*

## Ask, Investigate and Advocate

Several of my colleagues have said, “I was born to teach,” and I’ve looked at them in awe—primarily because I know the same is not true for me. Mine was a long and circuitous road paved with many challenges, doubts and triumphs. What I can say with certainty, though, is I was born to be a learner.

I grew up in Plainfield, New Jersey. During my father’s childhood there in the 1960s, at the peak of the civil rights movement, protests for equality—grassroots movements—were taking place. Plainfield gained national attention as one of more than a hundred U.S. cities marked by racial unrest during the “Long, Hot Summer of 1967.” People of color were protesting to receive the political, social

and economic rights promised by the U.S. Constitution. My parents and family were at the center of this social upheaval that would come to shape my worldview.

My father says that every generation has its own unique question. For those like him who grew up in the 1960s, that question was “Why?” and it demanded answers. “Why must we as Black people accept being treated as if we have no dignity?” and “Why are you, the government, failing by not giving us a seat at the table when we are dying in your battlefields and working in your industrial plants?” My family passed down to me the bravery to ask the tough questions and the thirst to find the answers. I believe that, without my knowing and

without my permission, my family set me on the road to become a teacher.

I teach because I am a learner and I need to instill this same drive to learn and ask questions in my students. They must ask, “Why?” because it appears that this will be the question for their generation as well. Ask, investigate and advocate. I believe these skills should be taught in the classroom because when students embrace and master them, these skills will transcend the classroom.

Ask the compelling questions that lead to dialogue about how changes may be made for the common good. Ask if we are learning from the mistakes of our past or looking for avenues to ensure that

### SHARE YOUR STORY

What motivates you to get up each morning and serve students in our nation’s schools? We want to hear from you. Send your 600-word submission for the “Why I Teach” column to [lfjsubmissions@splcenter.org](mailto:lfjsubmissions@splcenter.org).

all races, cultures and genders are fully represented. Investigate different perspectives, even if they conflict with one's own. Investigate history because it teaches valuable lessons about what we, as a nation, have done right and have done wrong. Advocate for change and be the change agent who takes civic action to continue the work of those who have gone before. Advocate so those who have historically been disregarded are recognized.

This kind of inquiry and advocacy was honed in me from childhood. It was listening to my father and uncles enthusiastically debate in my grandmother's kitchen. It was also listening to my Uncle Joe tell my grandmother he was going to protest a landfill being put in our neighborhood and her replying, "Have a good time!" It was receiving a picture book about Benjamin Banneker from Uncle Mike when every other child in second grade was learning about Martin Luther King Jr. And it was my father insisting my first chapter book was *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* instead of *The Wizard of Oz*.

My family instilled in me a love for learning, especially about history, my role in it and what it means to question the status quo. So I teach because it is my way of continuing for my students the legacy that my family passed to me—a legacy of empowerment from knowledge that leads to a future of possibilities for change.

**ARTICLE 7.6.21 // RACE & ETHNICITY, GENDER & SEXUAL IDENTITY, RIGHTS & ACTIVISM**

## Students Say Teach the Truth

BY ELIZABETH KLEINROCK

Although we've recently witnessed a mainstream mass awakening to the prevalence of racism in our society with the increased visibility of movements such as Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate, lawmakers, educators and caregivers in 20 states are currently fighting legislative and other battles over what confused legislators are calling the presence of critical race theory (CRT) in K-12 schools. At this moment, these legislators and their supporters are misusing CRT as an umbrella term for topics such as race, racism, gender, diversity, equity, liberation and identity, among others. However, it's not lost on me that the opinions missing from this conversation are those of the people most directly affected: our students.

As these laws will touch millions of our nation's youth, I wondered what my students thought about this ongoing battle over teaching about race, racism and U.S. history. The following responses were collected from a group of my current and former students, ranging from fifth to ninth grade. (All students who are quoted volunteered to participate and gave permission for their words to be used anonymously.)



### And a reader replied...

"It's only a sensitive topic because people are uncomfortable talking about it". Amen to that, seventh grader!

**READ THE FULL ARTICLE HERE:**

[lfj.pub/teach-the-truth](https://lfj.pub/teach-the-truth)

### DID YOU KNOW?

In 2019, nearly 1 in 5 students attended school in a rural district.

—EDUCATION WEEK

### DID YOU KNOW?

In 2021, nine states passed legislation banning educators from discussing topics considered to be under the umbrella of critical race theory.

—THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

### DID YOU KNOW?

From September of 2020 to September of 2021, recorded attempts to ban school library books rose by 67%.

—AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

# The Relationship Aspect

Nicole Morales serves as the school counselor at Holt Elementary School in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. She taught in K-5 classrooms throughout the South for 20 years and then earned a master's degree in school counseling. Morales shared her thoughts with LFJ about the urgency for intentional relationship building in the current climate of public education. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**With the ongoing pandemic and all that entails, what kinds of things do you notice as your school's counselor? How are students doing?**

Nothing takes the place of a human teaching another human being. Children returning from virtual learning had to be slowly transitioned back into, "What are the normal expectations for school? How do I interact with my peers? Is it OK for me to high-five people?" We're seeing the ramifications of not having daily social interaction.

We see a lot of behavioral issues with younger kids. Some of them would've been 18 months old or right at 2 when COVID started, so many of them were never exposed to day-care, pre-K or Head Start. Where a child of 5 could handle rules, structure and consequences, you're getting more of the mentality of 2-year-olds—having fits and that kind of thing. And when you're trying to teach something, especially with younger children, you must be hands-on. If you aren't, it's just wasted time.



*Nicole Morales is the school counselor at Holt Elementary School in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.*

**What are some ways educators can support students right now?**

Just being there and listening. Educators at my school sit with their classes and talk before the day starts. They call it morning meeting. A lot of schools are implementing that. It has really helped. Students talk about the day or something that's bothering them.

Being mindful of different situations students may be in is so important, even if you talk to them for only a minute. You can do what's called "10 by 2." Choose students who need special care and attention and talk to them daily for two minutes for 10 days straight. A lot of my colleagues do that and it works. Kids will learn more from you if they know you care.

## Student Reads

Our free, online Student Texts Library is packed with classroom-ready texts for K-12 educators. Each is aligned with LFJ's topics and social justice domains and accompanied by text-dependent questions. Here are a few of our favorite Teaching Hard History readings to share with students.

### Meet Frederick Douglass (K-2)

Students will learn about Douglass' amazing journey from slavery to self-emancipation and how he committed his life to fighting for the liberty of others.

[lfj.pub/meet-douglass](https://lfj.pub/meet-douglass)

### The Night Was Dark (3-5)

Elizabeth, an enslaved girl, has never experienced freedom. But when the grownups talk about Harriet Tubman, who helps enslaved people escape, Elizabeth begins to feel hope.

[lfj.pub/night-was-dark](https://lfj.pub/night-was-dark)

### Creating a Culture: The Music of Enslaved People (6-8)

Students will learn how enslaved Africans carried their traditions—like music—to the places where they were held captive. They built instruments, improvised and used music as a form of communication.

[lfj.pub/creating-a-culture](https://lfj.pub/creating-a-culture)

### On Liberty and Slavery (9-12)

George Moses Horton, an African American poet born into slavery, writes about the hardships of bondage and his longing to be free in "On Liberty and Slavery."

[lfj.pub/liberty-and-slavery](https://lfj.pub/liberty-and-slavery)

We've been intentional about building relationships with one another. When you're trying to build back school climate and culture after COVID, our focus is on the relationship aspect.

### Why did you choose to become a school counselor, and what do you love about your work?

I knew that my time in the classroom had run out. It was time for something different. I feel like I can do more preventative measures as a school counselor. Do I miss my regular classroom? I do. I do miss the teaching aspect and just being with one group of students. However, I've been able to broaden that territory and reach a whole school. At the time—about three years ago—I saw that we needed caring counselors and we hardly had any African American counselors. There've been several more since I started. That's a great thing.

The kids make you feel like a rock star. You walk up and down the hallway and hear, "Hey, Miss Morales!" My colleagues and administrators are great. I have a social worker who's phenomenal. I wish she was here every day—she's only here two and a half days a week—then we could really make some significant changes. I'm doing what I can and giving it my all. I'm in the right place with the right people.

### What should people know about school counselors?

It's difficult. It's not for everybody, but it's so important to have a person who can be the mediator between home and school, administrators and teachers. I know it sounds cliché, but it really is about relationships. You can take the toughest, most difficult parent and just give them a chance to be heard. If you make school a pleasant experience—make it transparent and build relationships with parents—it makes a huge difference. Climate and culture.

I don't remember, when I was younger, having a school counselor, but I wish we had more. Some people say, "Oh, you just sit in your office and drink coffee." Well, you didn't see that suicide protocol I had to do for an hour and a half. You didn't see that I'm trying to get somebody's lights paid, keep their water on or trying to get them housing.

We need more counselors. We're seeing so many emotional problems, especially with younger kids and even with some adults. I would encourage more funding for school counselors. Since we have had all these issues with the pandemic, we really had to go back to basics. Learning to de-escalate and calm situations. Thinking about how we talk to one another. Building relationships. With those basic things, we'll see some changes.

## FREE STUFF!

These web resources support and supplement social justice education—at no cost!

### The ACT UP Oral History Project

houses nearly 200 video interviews with folks from the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, New York, including the Latina/o Caucus Archive. From AIDS treatment to youth education and more, learn from firsthand accounts of activists and group members.

[actuporalhistory.org](https://actuporalhistory.org)

### With the Smithsonian

National Museum of African American History and Culture's **Searchable Museum**, even those who can't make the physical trip can explore. Find lesser-known stories, methods of study and comprehensive exhibits across topics in African American history.

[searchablemuseum.com](https://searchablemuseum.com)

### With topics including the

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lesson plans, extended learning from a range of resources and more, **An Educator's Guide to The 1619 Project: Born on the Water** allows you to bring this powerful work to your elementary or middle school classroom.

[1619books.com](https://1619books.com)



## Using Inquiry to Teach Honest History

Learning for Justice's *Teaching Hard History: A Framework for Teaching American Slavery*—available at both the K-5 and 6-12 levels—offers a foundation for teaching honest history through inquiry. The framework and its accompanying resources provide teachers with tools to accurately teach this history and allow students to dig deeper into the content by exploring essential questions, engaging in performance tasks and acting for justice.

Using the framework in conjunction with *The College, Career and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards*, this PD Café will guide you through a high school Inquiry Design Model (IDM). We hope these strategies help you support students as they examine the history of American slavery through compelling, rigorous questions. This approach to using IDMs with the *Teaching Hard History* framework is included in our publication *Teaching American Slavery Through Inquiry*.

## Inquiry Design Model

Teaching history through inquiry helps students make meaning of the world. They can analyze historical content, treating it not merely as a collection of facts but as information they research. They can construct questions and evaluate multiple sources of information to draw conclusions. Inquiry offers students the opportunity to do the following:

- develop a passion for questioning interpretations of the past
- explore and analyze content to shape their understanding of the present
- think critically about the world they live in
- pursue their ideas about an essential question
- become more engaged in the learning process
- awaken their curiosity
- navigate the world beyond the classroom

IDMs highlight key elements of the instructional design process, avoiding overly rigid curricula and honoring educators' knowledge and expertise.

## How to Use the Inquiry Design Model

The IDM is organized into three elements of inquiry:

- questions, which include a compelling question that frames the inquiry, along with aligned supporting questions
- performance tasks, which provide students with learning experiences and teachers with opportunities to evaluate what students know
- featured sources, which offer substance and content for inquiry, such as primary and secondary documents

Here, we will model how to plan and facilitate an IDM using the high school emancipation inquiry focused on the compelling question, “Does it matter who ended slavery?”

### Unpacking an IDM: “Does It Matter Who Ended Slavery?”

#### Step 1: Design the compelling question and a summative performance task.

A strong compelling question frames the IDM by encouraging students to join a historical debate, evaluate the facts behind these arguments and weigh the significance of the arguments themselves. Compelling questions also engage students by asking them to make present-day connections to historical events. After determining the compelling question, you'll design a summative performance task that will ask students to craft arguments and present their findings to that question.

For example, the question, “Does it matter who ended slavery?” draws students in by asking them to understand a contemporary debate about teaching accurate history while using primary and secondary documents. The summative performance task requires students to construct arguments using claims and evidence from the IDM. An optional extension activity asks students to apply their learnings by analyzing a history textbook and proposing revisions. These tasks are strong because they require students to act like historians: They must study 19th-century laws that

provided gradual emancipation, including the 13th Amendment, and draw conclusions about the work of 20th-century historians who represent differing positions.

#### Step 2: Map the compelling question to the Teaching Hard History framework.

After you craft the compelling question and summative performance task, you will map it to a **Summary Objective** in the framework. When you do that, you will see which **Key Concepts** the question connects to as well. If you're an elementary educator, follow a similar process, mapping your compelling question and performance task to an **Essential Knowledge** from the K-5 framework.

For this example, the compelling question ties into the framework in Summary Objective 15.F, which is about the Emancipation Proclamation. This compelling question also maps to Key Concepts 2, 5, 7 and 10.

#### Step 3: Design the supporting questions and formative performance tasks.

Next, you will design the supporting questions and align each one to a formative performance task. Supporting questions flesh out the compelling question by organizing and sequencing the main ideas and help students build their understanding. Formative tasks follow the same logic; they provide smaller “steps” for students to reach the summative performance task, which also allows you to evaluate their understanding throughout the IDM. Formative performance tasks should still require students to practice higher-level thinking while gaining background content.

For example, in the emancipation inquiry, the supporting questions sequence this way:

Supporting Question 1:

What legal steps were taken to end slavery?

Supporting Question 2:

What arguments do historians make about who ended slavery?

Supporting Question 3:

What are the implications of the debate over who ended slavery?

The sequencing of performance tasks requires students to understand background content and then identify and analyze arguments from historians. Formative performance tasks align with each supporting question. For example, for the first supporting question, students' formative performance task would be to create an annotated timeline that describes legal steps taken between 1861 and 1865 to end slavery.

#### Step 4: Choose sources that align to the compelling and supporting questions, and design instruction.

For this step, you will select the sources (from LFJ's Teaching Hard History Text Library or other sources) that students will use to dialogue about their responses. The best sources allow students to analyze competing perspectives and draw their own conclusions. Once sources are selected, you should plan how you

will use them with your students through inquiry-based teaching throughout the IDM.

For example, at the beginning of the IDM, invite students to grapple with the compelling question, “Does it matter who ended slavery?” Students can read and discuss Joe Heim’s article “On Emancipation Day in D.C., Two Memorials Tell Very Different Stories” from *The Washington Post*. Then, students can compare that initial source with photos of the Emancipation Memorial and the African American Civil War Memorial. Facilitating the learning from these featured sources, you can engage students in a conversation about the process of emancipation and how historians and citizens have interpreted events like emancipation. (Note that both these sources are linked in our sample IDM for “Does It Matter Who Ended Slavery?” here: [Ifi.pub/ended-slavery](http://Ifi.pub/ended-slavery).)

### Step 5: Teach from an inquiry stance by facilitating the IDM.

Through deliberate design of the IDM, teachers can position themselves as facilitators, rather than knowledge holders, during this stage. Even careful attention to the order of the IDM can help build a more student-driven space. For example, you could start the IDM by staging the compelling question with aligned resources to hook students and then repeating the process with each of the supporting questions. You would then direct students to complete a summative performance task and, if possible, the extension activity. You can conclude the IDM by helping students take informed action.

You can also facilitate inquiry-based learning through the formative tasks. For example, students create timelines when responding to Supporting Question 1, “What legal steps were taken to end slavery?” After students have completed their timelines, you can facilitate dialogue around the supporting question and then invite them to record their first responses to the compelling question.

## Step 6: Students work on summative performance tasks.

After answering each of the supporting questions through its counterpart formative performance task, students can address the compelling question through a summative performance task. This stage of the IDM pulls the inquiry together and asks students to draw conclusions based on the cumulative knowledge they have gained.

At this point, pose the compelling question, “Does it matter who ended slavery?” Students can construct their arguments through essays, detailed outlines or posters. They should use specific claims and evidence from their engagement with the IDM. As an extension activity, they can continue acting as historians by critiquing and revising a history textbook.

### Step 7: Students take informed action.

This final step can take a wide range of forms (e.g., discussions, debates and presentations) and can occur in a variety of



contexts—inside and outside of the classroom. Key to any action, however, is the idea that it is informed by students' participation in the IDM and compels them to apply what they learned in a real-world setting.

In the IDM “Does It Matter Who Ended Slavery?” students can take informed action by watching the film *Lincoln*, evaluating its historical accuracy, and writing and publishing a review on IMDb.com. This helps students synthesize their understanding of the content and act on it in a 21st-century way.

The complexity surrounding American enslavement and its legacies, as well as the lingering effects of white supremacy, requires deep engagement from students. Using an IDM to teach American enslavement supports such engagement. The IDM, with its focus on questions, tasks and sources, provides a structure for this natural desire to inquire. As James Baldwin said, “History is not the past. It is the present. We carry our history with us. We are our history.” Our capacity to teach about challenging topics—like enslavement and white supremacy—makes the reality of a future rooted in equity, justice and liberation more possible.

**NEW GUIDE**

# **PROTECTING IMMIGRANT STUDENTS' RIGHTS TO A PUBLIC EDUCATION**

## **A Guide for Advocates**

The Southern Poverty Law Center's new resource *Protecting Immigrant Students' Rights to a Public Education: A Guide for Advocates* offers information and recommendations educators, caregivers and other trusted adults can use to ensure that their school or district is meeting its

legal responsibility to ELLs and immigrant students and families.

Designed to share with families and available in multiple languages, an accompanying pamphlet offers overviews of this information, easy-to-use reference lists and links to further resources.



**DOWNLOAD THIS FREE GUIDE AT [SPLCENTER.ORG/PLYLER](http://SPLCENTER.ORG/PLYLER)**

# My History:

MORE THAN TWO  
SUGAR-COATED  
PARAGRAPHS

This Black Alabama  
teen and her family  
had to fill the gaps  
in her education at  
home. Here's her  
advice to teachers.



BY K.C.B.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
PEYTON FULFORD

**“STUDENTS, TODAY WE** are going to take an in-depth look into the history behind the triangular trade route, which happens to involve slavery. We are going to take an unfiltered approach to the concept, and the U.S. wasn’t as heavily involved with slavery as you might think. Actually, more often than not, traders only took captive those that were already slaves in their villages as prisoners of war.”

This is how a teacher explained the institution of slavery in the United States to my classmates and me, and this exact example is often seen as an ample explanation for something so devastating. That classroom experience and others like it sparked an idea in me. Education is the key to a strong society, so when information is hidden and dishonest, that hinders the future of our society and limits the amount of change possible.

An education that consists of glossed-over information like the one that I and so many students have received reduces the importance of substantial events in U.S. history to only a couple of sugar-coated paragraphs in a textbook. This kind of teaching makes statistical excuses for events that took place for over 200 years and that created a system so dehumanizing that the stress it caused in the past is *embedded in the DNA* of an entire people. This kind of education minimizes the start of a national system of legal oppression. Learning this way means only knowing the names of a few historical figures

while the rest collect dust because including them goes against a specific narrative that is so commonly spread throughout our nation.

Our nation: We’re taught that it’s a land for all, a melting pot and a place where liberty is a natural right. So how are we, as students, to execute these ideals if our education doesn’t reflect them? How can we effectively make change and make our society just if we aren’t taught the truth behind what we’re changing? You can’t know where you’re going without knowing where you came from.

#### A Disservice

I went to a middle school where perspective was limited. We didn’t celebrate cultural appreciation months, and we had only those two sugar-coated paragraphs about the unpleasant areas of U.S. history in our textbooks. That sugar-coated education is damaging in the worst way possible: Students in the U.S. are not educated honestly. As a student, particularly as a student of color, my education has been a disservice that has had a weighty impact on my life. I’m forced to work harder because I have to learn about my culture on my own time. And then, as if I haven’t been through the same educational system as the rest of my class, I’ve been expected to know the most.

I had the reputation in middle school for being the one *the teacher* would call on for corrections. I was the one who led class discussions on slavery and

## A TEACHER’S FIRST DUTY IS TO THEIR STUDENTS.

racism, and I was expected to always be in “tip-top” shape academically as the student who filled the diversity quota. And as the only Black cheerleader at the school, I had to explain how the bows they used wouldn’t fit my hair. I had to explain to teachers—some who held master’s degrees in their fields and some who were practicing physicians—how my hair was able to change from braids one week to an afro the next. Then, when I injured myself during the required physical education course, for months I heard whispers of criticism, as if my genetic makeup excluded my ability to feel pain.

All of this pushed me to take back my power and engage with history myself.

A dishonest education is disorienting and destructive to a student’s understanding of the real world. That’s my early education summed up. The foundation of false facts is laid down in early elementary school. From there, you’re only given the tools necessary to



continue to add to the falsities. That's what happened to me. I was completely clueless about what was lacking, and eventually, the negative truth of all these unpleasant experiences I have had with education hit me. I came to this realization thinking about what I was going through and what I wasn't learning. I was forced to take off all the layers of inaccurate information that I was initially forced to put on.

After shedding those layers, I could see bits and pieces of things that I then worked to retain in the form of knowledge. But I had no real connection to my culture as a Black person in the U.S., and I wasn't given the opportunity throughout my education to *know* that I had no connection. So I had to learn on my own. I had to figure out how to

make connections, all while clearing up the confusion I felt after the years of selective or sugar-coated material I was given in school. That's what my education has been like, and this is the impact that it had on my life.

#### **A Family Journey to Cultural Connection**

My mother and I went on a journey to find out about our ancestors. We learned about DNA patterns (which is how I found out that because of the trauma that slavery inflicted on my people, we quite literally pass stress down genetically). We learned that Black women, statistically, are the most educated in the world. We learned that the stigma around mental health in our communities is

fostered by standards that the media portrays for people of color (struggling families, impoverished lifestyles, less fortunate situations, "urban" swag, and more).

My father taught me the intricacies of current Black culture through a lens of love and experience. He helped me truly appreciate and celebrate my culture. He introduced me to the history of our music, foods, fashion and joy, all of which was astounding. Both of my parents helped me connect with my roots. How could all of this be disregarded by an educational system? Was this entire community not worthy of recognition? If not, in whose eyes were we deemed insignificant?

I was a military kid, so I've been able to experience educational norms

in entirely different locations. In elementary school, when I lived in New England, I never learned about slavery—not even from two sugar-coated paragraphs. I never learned about the civil rights movement, never learned about prominent—or any—African American heroes and never learned about Black contributions to society. The only history I learned was Eurocentric in nature—beauty norms, acceptable styles and “true” U.S. heroes.

At an entirely different school, back home in Alabama, I had a teacher who promised to be open and give us knowledge about slavery. What she actually only taught us was that this country had the lowest statistical involvement in the trade of African humans. She taught an entire grade of youth that this country, one that was actually built upon slavery, had the least involvement in it. This is what we were provided with as “education.”

I wasn’t able to learn about the contributions of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in my early elementary classrooms in New England, even though he is a man who has a national holiday celebrating him. I didn’t know that there are a multitude of prominent African American contributors to society until I later learned about Garrett Morgan with his invention of the three-signal traffic light; Mary Eliza Mahoney, the

first Black professional nurse; Marie Van Brittan Brown and her invention of the first home security system; and that African dance and culture largely inspired jazz dance techniques. Those are examples of major accomplishments by Black people that weren’t taught in school.

My journey to cultural connection has been a long one. It takes the help of my family and constant research on my own to root out all the falsities in education and emerge with a clearer picture of U.S. history and culture. As fate would have it, my mom was taking an African American history course during the summer before my sixth grade year. Once I decided to really pay attention to what she had been trying to tell me, I learned. My father has always been a natural teacher, so once I was able to appreciate his lessons, I learned. We did it. We found a way to truly clear away all the untruths I learned in school.

#### **Honesty Is the Answer**

After cleaning up the confusion from falsities and sugar-coated facts, I learned the importance of transparent education through art, music, speech, writing and so on. It’s our only route to a real education, and it’s the root of all of our expressions. How, then, can teachers effectively communicate such important principles to students? How can you teach someone the law, how can you teach them personal finance, how can you teach them literature, how can you teach them history—and how can you teach all of these things effectively? My advice is quite simple: Honesty is the answer.

*Henrietta Lacks (above) sought cancer treatment in 1951. Without her knowledge, doctors harvested her cells that are still used today for medical research. Mary Putnam Jacobi, M.D., (below) created the Association for the Advancement of the Medical Education of Women in 1872.*



A teacher's first duty is to their students. Hindering students with a false education—or a sugar-coated one—does not align with what is so necessary for a teacher to do. Instead of relying on a student's ability to correct a given curriculum, teachers can lean into their ability to lead. Educators can teach with clear expectations and give students ample support to actively engage in learning. Hold steadfast to educational promises made in the classroom, and when being vulnerable enough to show your imperfections (because you should, within reason), lend to students, with that same vulnerability, comfort in knowing the truth behind their curriculum and instruction.

I wish that future youth are given the opportunity to have an honest education. I also hope that all cultures are included in education. Every group deserves to be regarded because, at the very least, that inclusion prepares students for what's to come. Throughout life, we are going to be exposed to people who have different experiences than ours. How are we to be an inclusive society if our education is not inclusive? How are we to exercise liberty and equality if we don't know anything about the other communities that are deserving of those principles?

Education in the U.S. should be all-encompassing. We have to know more about where and what we came from and who we are in order to grow as a nation and to be the embodiment of those founding principles. The methods with which we educate should reflect the truth of each principle we

## **THERE ARE NO MORE EXCUSES TO CONTINUE ALLOWING A SUGAR-COATED EDUCATION WITH INACCURATE INFORMATION TO DOMINATE.**

have laid out as the map to a successful nation (life, liberty, equality and the pursuit of happiness, to name a few). This means all of the importance associated with our natural rights as citizens should also be reflected in how and what we learn. We need lessons that do more than focus on Eurocentric ideas and spaces.

Let's learn how the Wampanoag (who inhabited what is currently Massachusetts) influenced the practice of cultivation that we use presently and how that practice continues to support our nation. Let's take an in-depth look into medical studies involving women like Henrietta Lacks and learn about women like Dr. Mary Putnam Jacobi, while acknowledging both of their contributions to medicine. And we need more classes about financial development and diversity. Simply stated, we need to rise above teaching the minimum on all subjects.

It wasn't until recently that a more student-centered approach to education has been highlighted. Education should always be tailored to meet students' needs. If the educator has enough information on the subject to

teach it, they should be able to tailor it to focus on those learning it. There are so many methods, resources and ways to research today. There are no more excuses to continue allowing a sugar-coated education with inaccurate information to dominate. We can change things for the better.

Education is key to a successful society. Hiding information and being dishonest with learning leaves the society disadvantaged. Educators should teach with honesty. My education started with a foundation that could not support the reality of my life and experiences. I had to sift through falsities and find my way forward. But I was empowered to get a clear picture, and that knowledge has forever impacted me in the best of ways.

If we are to truly be an inclusive society, we must value one another and our stories. We must learn from each other. We are capable of change and success. If we begin our education without sugar-coated paragraphs and with a focus on honesty, the impact on our society—and on the world—will be extraordinary. ♦

*K.C.B. is a high school student in Alabama.*



# A TEXTBOOK CASE

*How teachers are changing history education from the ground up*

BY DOROTHEE BENZ ILLUSTRATION BY ERICK M. RAMOS

**“MAKE TEXTBOOKS BETTER.”** That was the blunt imperative in Learning for Justice’s *Teaching Hard History: American Slavery*, a study that examined how American slavery is taught in U.S. schools and what needs to change for it to be accurately taught. Improving textbooks was one recommendation in the report.

Classroom educators agree there’s a lot of room for improvement.

“When I came into the classroom, there were textbooks in my rooms for me to use that are approved by our state,” says Ciara Hart, an eighth grade history teacher in Louisiana. “I took all the textbooks and put them on a cart and took them to the library because

I went to the slavery section to read how they interpreted that history, and I wasn’t pleased with what I read.

“They’re all sitting in the library right now, collecting dust.”

Slavery was—and is—more than “a chapter” in U.S. history. It was central to the economic and social development of the colonies and was the

prime driver of the nation's wealth. Its principal legacy, racism, has shaped virtually everything: social, economic and educational inequality; housing, health care and labor policy; domestic terrorism, policing and mass incarceration; and so much more. To help students understand the enormity of slavery's role is to equip them with the tools to contest the injustices of the present. Thus, slavery can't be contained to a chapter in a textbook either.

Textbooks fall short in how they teach slavery and its legacy. But in the hands of a skilled educator, they can still be a useful teaching tool, especially in combination with other resources. Many educators effectively incorporate them in teaching the whole, hard history of the U.S. Learning for Justice talked to 19 educators in seven states about how they use textbooks in their classrooms.

Besides uncovering an abundance of useful examples, these interviews underscore the essential role of teacher agency in guiding students to understand the past and its connection to the present. Christopher Rogers, who heads up the curriculum work of Black Lives Matter at School, sums it up like this: "We are professionals, and in owning our practice, we also own the right to determine what is the proper and most effective and relevant way to reach our students."

Professional expertise and agency are especially important now, when teachers are navigating not just flawed textbooks but also political backlash against teaching the truth about U.S. history.

## TEXTBOOKS ARE EMBEDDED WHITE SUPREMACIST STRUCTURES.

Brian Ford teaches U.S. history at Montclair High School in New Jersey and is part of the BLM at School curriculum team. Like Ciara Hart, he is sharply critical of textbooks. "Slavery isn't situated in the broader historical conversation about the construction of race and racism in America," he says.



Ford's colleague in the MHS history department, Shana Stein, teaches from Reconstruction to the present. "Where I start, there is no mention [in the textbook] of slavery at all anymore," she says. "The impression that a student has is that slavery ended in 1865 with the 13th Amendment—end of story." For instance, when the book discusses sharecropping, the Black Codes and the origins of Jim Crow, "there's no mention of enslavement," Stein explains.

Hart's critique is that textbooks disregard the perspectives of the enslaved. "I think there are meaningful ways you can do that," she says, "so students are able to understand capitalism and the economic impact of all those things" without stripping away the humanity of the people involved and reducing it to "the beef between the North and the South."

The failure to adequately explain the centrality of slavery to the formation and shaping of the nation and the lack of content that gives agency to

the enslaved are also identified in the *Teaching Hard History* textbook review.

These failures are directly related to the fact that textbooks are a multibillion-dollar industry in the U.S. Traditional textbooks from the major publishers are not marketed to teachers, students or schools. They are marketed to state education boards, which are political entities controlled by states' executive branches. In part because of this, textbook publishers are risk-averse and avoid anything that might cause "controversy."

But "controversy" in the context of the largely unexamined white supremacist assumptions that shape our national narratives boils down to anything that challenges those assumptions. Textbooks present information in ways that obscure the agency of those who built, maintained and enforced the system of slavery—and that's a problem.

"They often don't have active verbs of people actually enslaving

other people,” says historian David Gerwin. “They talk about slavery in the Americas, rather than a particular person who [enslaved people] or a particular legislative act.”

“It’s not ever going to change because the change we need in the textbooks is one that they’re not willing to make—because they’re not ready to have that conversation,” says N’Kengé Robertson, a high school English language arts teacher in Detroit who has also taught African American history and is a member of the BLM at School curriculum team.

In short, textbooks are structurally connected to the same racial capitalism whose legacy runs from 1619 to George Floyd to today. It is impossible to truly fix textbooks without also fixing the political, economic and social structures in which they are embedded.

### LET STUDENTS’ QUESTIONS SHAPE LESSONS.

But textbooks are a fact of life, and most history teachers use them either because of requirements to do so or because of time constraints. Forgoing the pre-packaged textbook and supplemental materials that come with them means a significant amount of additional work for teachers. Depending on a teacher’s experience, number of students and other workload factors, some are simply not able to do that.

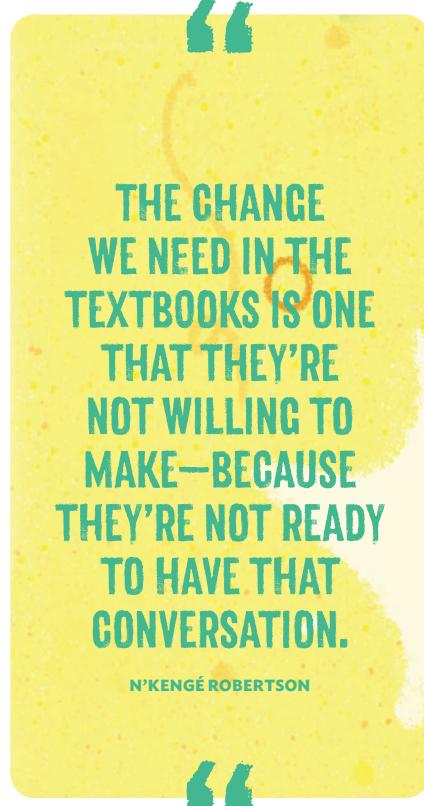
Thus, the critical question for most teachers is *how* to use textbooks when teaching about slavery and its legacy effectively.

Stein has taught both AP history and honors history. The latter gives her more freedom, and she uses the textbook less frequently in that class. But there are still times when the book is helpful in providing background.

“Sometimes the textbook even has good suggestions for understanding questions, but I always add my own questions,” she says. “We do these sort of textbook talk-backs, where I always say, ‘Who is not represented? Whose story isn’t being told and why?’” Together,

Stein says, she and her students “read between the lines”; in the process, she is using the textbook to teach critical reading and thinking skills.

She recalls with delight a student who, unprompted, started keeping a Google Doc of “all the things she felt the textbook got wrong.” Some of these items generated robust classroom discussion, and at the end of the year, the class read through the whole document together.



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N'KENGÉ ROBERTSON

Many teachers use supplemental sources “in conversation with the textbook,” as Joe Costello put it. Costello teaches eighth-grade social studies in Union, New Jersey, and frequently turns to Learning for Justice for those materials. For her part, Stein uses resources from the Zinn Education Project, the Stanford History Education Group and Facing History and Ourselves. Robertson recommended the book *Teaching for Black Lives* from Rethinking Schools.

Many additional sources exist, such as *The 1619 Project* Education Network, BLM at Schools’ collection of classroom resources and a constantly expanding universe of digitized primary sources.

Jordan Lanfair, a former Chicago teacher and current teacher trainer, jokes that he has a “hate/hate relationship” with textbooks. Despite that, he finds them useful as a “springboard.”

“We need some foundation that all of us can access, a jumping-off point,” Lanfair says. From there, what is crucial for him is allowing students’ questions in response to the textbook to shape the lessons. “Let your students ask every question that comes up. Go for it. Let’s explore that. It’s like, ‘But why did that happen?’ I don’t know. Let’s put it on the board.’ That is our big question for homework then.”

Educators are sometimes told to “squash down” questions, Lanfair says, but teachers need to do the opposite. “[Students] are going to think them, so let’s bring that in. Let’s chase up those answers.”

In helping students “chase up” answers, Lanfair drew on various additional sources.

In teaching about slavery, Lanfair started with Columbus and the occasion of Columbus Day/Indigenous Peoples Day, which conveniently falls early in the school year. His students looked at proclamations from individual cities and diaries from Columbus’ crew members. For a teacher with less time to spend on a Columbus Day lesson, he recommends pulling sources from online museum archives.

Like Lanfair, John Skelton sees value in starting with the textbook to provide “common language, what happened, when it happened, maybe some of the aspects of why it happened.”

Skelton teaches high school history in Charlottesville, Virginia, where the 2017 Unite the Right white supremacist rally galvanized the Albemarle County School Division (where Charlottesville is located) to develop both a system-wide anti-racism policy



and a new social studies curriculum, *Reframing the Narrative*. The curriculum is structured around the Inquiry Design Model, which centers the students' agency in the learning process by building lessons around questions that students explore. (See this issue's PD Café for more on using the Inquiry Design Model to teach about slavery.)

"What the inquiries allow us to do is restructure the conversation around a different lens," says Skelton. For example, the curriculum's Reconstruction inquiry asks the question, "How did African Americans construct freedom during the Reconstruction era?" Focusing on the agency of the people at the heart of Reconstruction in this way stands in sharp contrast to textbook approaches, which center actors like Congress. The inquiry draws on curated primary sources and gives students a "more complex understanding of the human aspects of the different components that make up this era," says Skelton.

### ASK THE HARD QUESTIONS.

The *Reframing the Narrative* curriculum is so named precisely because

the dominant narrative—reflected in textbooks—needs correction. The educators featured here and many others across the country are doing this kind of reframing work every day in their classrooms, sometimes "talking back" to textbooks and sometimes bypassing them.

This classroom praxis of reframing U.S. history is part of a larger wave of innovation and activism among educators, and it has drawn intense backlash. Efforts to keep accurate history *out* of schools are ricocheting across the country, fueled by racist fear-mongering and deliberate misinformation. In November 2021, PEN America reported that, in the first nine months of the year alone, 24 legislatures had introduced 54 state bills restricting teaching.

Speaking at *The New York Times'* December 2021 event on teaching *The 1619 Project*, Nikole Hannah-Jones, the project's creator, noted widespread "defiance among educators who are determined to teach what they think is appropriate, what they think is right" in the face of this

backlash. That defiance was evident among the educators interviewed for this piece—along with incredible creativity and joy at leading students to connect the dots and understand the past and present alike.

Ultimately, it's the professionalism and agency of educators—what BLM at School's Rogers calls "owning our practice"—that is the target of the rightwing backlash. Agency and professionalism are also the key to teaching the truth despite it.

"What resources you have to use is not necessarily what you have to teach," says Lanfair. "They gave me the resources, but you can't tell me how to do instruction. And I just ask a lot of questions."

And Hart centers why questioning is so vital: "I want [my students] to ask critical questions of the country they live in—ask the hard questions so that they can really develop and be active members of society." ♦

*Dorothee Benz, Ph.D., is a writer, organizer and strategist who has spent decades on the frontlines of social justice struggles in the United States.*



# Teaching Local History in Tulsa

BY **COSHANDRA DILLARD** ILLUSTRATION BY **KIM SALT**

*For 100 years, the history of the Tulsa Race Massacre was mostly missing from public discussions. Tulsa teachers are among the people trying to change that.*



**WHEN MAY 31** rolls around each year, people—both from Tulsa, Oklahoma, and elsewhere—often discuss when they first learned about the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. Many recall being introduced to that shameful mark in history via word of mouth or from the HBO series *Watchmen* long after they'd left high school.

Vivian Clark-Adams, Ph.D., who left Tulsa after graduating from high school in 1968, learned about the Tulsa Race Massacre in the 1980s when she returned home. She became angry. She had attended school in Tulsa since the fifth grade. She says she learned Oklahoma history in eighth grade. Yet, she'd heard

nothing about what happened in her city in 1921—then called the “Tulsa Race Riot.”

“I came back here to do my doctorate at the University of Tulsa, and they had an exhibit of the Tulsa Race Riot,” Clark-Adams remembers. “And I had never heard or seen anything about it before. ... I was mad for a number of reasons—one, that I had never heard of it.”

The 71-year-old Clark-Adams, who teaches sociology part time at Tulsa Community College, grew angrier when learning about the viciousness of the attacks on Black citizens. As an adult, she was able to handle that anger and frustration.

But she believes there is a devastating emotional effect on young students if they feel important pieces of history have been hidden from them. She says hard history should be taught early in children’s schooling by skilled teachers.

Clark-Adams served on the first committee to examine the event—the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921—which reported its findings in 2001. Different committees formed later, as she says very few of the first committee’s recommendations were adopted by city and state officials. The recommendation for reparations was not one of them.



Students can see the residual effects of what happened 100 years ago in North Tulsa's Greenwood District, often called "Black Wall Street." Residents note that the pain is still palpable there, and truth-telling must come before true healing and reconciliation can occur.

"The effects of the race massacre are still here in Tulsa," says Akela Leach, a fifth grade teacher in Tulsa. "It's still very visible. It's still very segregated. And there's still a huge difference between South Tulsa and North Tulsa, which is where Greenwood was located."

Fallon Laine Dickson, a local business owner, moved to Tulsa with her family at a young age. She didn't hear about the massacre until her 20s, when someone suggested they meet her at their office on "Black Wall Street."

"I'm like, 'Why don't I know this area? I know a lot about Tulsa. I've been here since first grade,'" Dickson reflects. "By the time I looked up the address and [did] just a little quick Google search, I had found out about the community."

While Greenwood rebounded and experienced prosperity by the

1940s, it was devastated again by an expressway cutting through the community. Once again, people lost homes and businesses in the name of "urban renewal."

Dickson says that learning about the local history helps residents make sense of their environment and is a first step in repairing it.

She notes that when residents understand that history and realize their agency, they can positively affect the future of their community.

"Our dollars helped the economic growth of the city," she says, "and so we just get pushed out when we don't know. When we're uneducated, we get pushed out."

Fortunately, Tulsa residents, including educators, are working to make sure that young people know their local history.

"It's a little bit more than just the notion of getting history to stop repeating itself," says Danielle Neves, deputy chief of academics at Tulsa Public Schools (TPS). "How do we leverage our history so that we make different choices, that we understand differently the impacts of decisions on communities, on people, on trajectories and on futures?"

### A New Curriculum in Tulsa

Neves notes that Oklahoma's social studies standards have improved over the years, but more work should be done to center the experiences of historically marginalized people, particularly Black, Indigenous and Latinx people. Tulsa educators are working to fill in those gaps.

A new curriculum, developed by TPS educators, launched at the end of the 2020-2021 school year in alignment with the Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial observance.

Third through 12th grade students in social studies courses learned about the history and legacy of the Greenwood District, the massacre and its aftermath. With each year, students will learn a new layer about their city. Normally, Neves explains, stand-alone units would be introduced at different times throughout the year, depending on grade level. Since the initiative began with all teachers in these grades teaching the lessons at the same time, grade-level teams across the district came together to talk about how it went.

Leach, a Tulsa native, helped develop lessons for third through fifth grades and trained other teachers. She first learned about the massacre at her church as a child, but she did not learn much about it in school. Today, her students and others throughout the district will get a fuller picture of what happened in Tulsa.

"For many of our students in TPS, they live near Greenwood, or they go to school near Greenwood or they have gone to Juneteenth in Greenwood," Leach says. "Students were completely engaged because they knew that they were learning something about themselves."

With the new curriculum, starting in third grade, teachers introduce

new vocabulary and concepts for students before diving into lessons. They also have access to picture books on Tulsa, primary sources and age-appropriate videos that help them make sense of segregation and discrimination.

“By fifth grade, they are very articulate in being able to explain what is happening,” Leach says.

The focus isn’t on the 1921 event itself. Teachers give students some context first. For example, in fifth grade, students spend time learning about all-Black towns in Oklahoma and why Black people viewed the state as the promised land. They then learn why Tulsa was segregated and about the vibrancy of Greenwood and its unique economic prosperity. After they learn about the massacre, they will learn how residents rebuilt their community.

By eighth grade, students will look more broadly at racial terror and can see Greenwood as just one example of what was happening in other places throughout the United States.

“We try to build it across the continuum,” Neves says. “So, what we didn’t want to have is seven, eight, nine years of students reciting what happened on May 31, 1921.”

Middle school and high school students delve deeper into the more traumatic events of the massacre, the effects of gentrification and reparations.

“They have a foundation of what Greenwood was before they even talk about that,” Leach explains.

While planning lessons, Leach says, educators were mindful of the culture of their classrooms. Each lesson has a “Before You Begin” section that prepares teachers to have critical conversations. Teachers also make space to listen and respond to students’ emotional reactions.

#### Preparing Teachers and Listening to Students

From 2018 to 2021, TPS hosted annual summer teacher institutes on the Tulsa Race Massacre, which included sessions with local historians. Teachers also visited the Greenwood Cultural Center, the John Hope Franklin Reconciliation Park and other landmarks. In April and May 2021, nearly 500 teachers participated in additional professional development sessions on hard history and Tulsa Race Massacre lessons.

While some teachers felt they didn’t need this deep historical immersion, others were grateful for that opportunity. They were challenged to understand their own feelings about the ugly parts of the past.

“The point was to recognize [their feelings], whether that was for a white teacher’s fear of doing it wrong or for a Black teacher—especially a Black teacher whose family has lived in Tulsa for generations—feeling more anger and frustration about … the need for us to so actively have to bring this history into schools because it wasn’t always being taught,” Neves says. “It was a learning experience for all of us.”

At the end of the 2020-2021 school year, teachers conducted interviews and focus groups with some students across the district. Neves says this information gathering revealed that students are tuned in; they want to know more. And parents were pleased that their children were learning local history in a way that they hadn’t.

Before the launch, Neves says some parents expressed concern about the accuracy of the lessons. Some questioned the number of people who died during the massacre. It’s an issue that’s long been debated

“Students were completely engaged because they knew that they were learning something about themselves.”

—Akela Leach



locally as official records and first-hand witness accounts don't match.

Regardless, parents approved of teachers diving into the history.

"It was more a question of some parents being concerned about whether or not the history would be taught objectively and with as much historical accuracy as can exist and not to be leveraged as a way to tell, in their words, a different history of Tulsa," Neves recalls.

These conversations have opened students' minds to other histories, too. They also want to learn more about Indigenous peoples and cultures and better understand the relationship between Indigenous and Black people in Oklahoma. After listening to students, Neves says educators will put the same efforts into these histories as they did with the Tulsa Race Massacre curriculum.

"When we are diving into topics that we already know our students are interested in," Neves explains, "it allows us to empower them, to make sense of this hard history in ways that will impact what they're doing today and what they'll do in the future."

#### **It Takes Everyone**

It takes an entire community to uplift uncomfortable, buried local history. While there is movement in Tulsa, some residents are still wary about the future of their city.

Pushback against this kind of education is inevitable. But the work Tulsa teachers are doing around the massacre is critical in a time when some residents believe there is still a "conspiracy of silence" by those in power.

"They did a fantastic job of covering up this history for almost a hundred years, and they're trying to do it again," Vivian Clark-Adams says.

"We've got a number of monuments dealing with Black Wall Street and its resilience, so it's not like we can completely erase it again. But there is that attempt."

Educators say there is a role for parents and caregivers in helping their children learn about local history. TPS shares resources in weekly messages to families. And Tulsa Race Massacre lessons are also published on a district website.

"We believe that families are a child's first and primary teachers, and we always want to provide them with resources to support learning at home," Neves says. "We encourage families to talk with their children about what they are learning at school and to leverage community resources to learn more."

Meanwhile, there are groups of Tulsans with an entrepreneurial spirit who are finding ways to improve economic conditions in North Tulsa while keeping its history alive. As with all movements, it'll take some time to see substantial change.

Educators believe that change is possible with a young population who knows their community's story.

"There are so many passionate educators who recognize that our students are going to need some skill sets that we might not have needed growing up at a different time, and that if they're going to be successful—in our increasingly diverse society—then we've got to equip them with the tools to do that," Neves says.

"I deeply believe that the ability to grapple with hard history and come out with a vision for the future that you feel like you could be part of is one of the best ways for us to do that." ♦

*Dillard is a senior writer for Learning for Justice.*



# “Our Children Are Native Every Day”

Book Bans and the Fear of a Just Society

BY COSHANDRA DILLARD AND CRYSTAL L. KEELS ILLUSTRATION BY ZÉ OTAVIO

**DEBBIE REESE, PH.D.**, is an activist, scholar and former elementary school teacher. With Jean Mendoza, Ph.D., she adapted the award-winning book *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States for Young People* from Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's original for adults. A member of the Nambé Owingeh nation, Reese founded in 2006 American Indians in Children's Literature (AICL), an online resource providing analyses of representations of Indigenous peoples in children's and young adult books. She has lectured widely and has published across multiple academic disciplines.

Reese recently shared her thoughts with Learning for Justice about the most recent spate of book-banning campaigns that began in earnest throughout the United States in 2021. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**Lawmakers around the nation want to ban books in schools that challenge white-centric narratives and offer more honest retellings of history. This includes *An Indigenous People's History of the United States for Young People*. What is the danger in such bans?**

Back in 1990, Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop published an article that became a powerful framework for educators. That article is "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors." In it, she said that books can be windows, offering a view of a real or imagined world where things were familiar or strange to the reader. Windows could also be like sliding glass doors. A reader opens the door and walks in, to become part of whatever an author provides. And, she said,

**"A strong sense of justice can form in a young child's mind when they read books that tell the truth. When they grow into adulthood, that sense of justice can guide them in how they vote and where they work."**

when the light is just right, a person can see themselves reflected in a window, similar to gazing into a mirror.

Today—more than ever before—children from groups that have been marginalized by mainstream U.S. institutions can find books that affirm their existence. The increase of Native authors who write for children is small but significant. Editors used to tell Native authors that the characters and storylines of manuscripts they were submitting for publication would not sell. The reason? Their stories did not match the public perception of who Native peoples are. In other words, if it wasn't a character in feathers who was either a savage aggressor or a tragic figure who greeted everyone with a palm raised to say, "How," the book would not sell. That perception is based upon stereotypes created primarily by non-Native writers. Those stereotypes misinform readers and perpetuate a cycle of ignorance that is difficult to interrupt.

In 2022, the majority of children's books by Native writers are ones set in the present day. In the last few years, we've also seen an increase in nonfiction by Native writers. To circle back to Bishop's metaphor, Native kids are able to find mirrors that reflect who they are. These books hold truths. Truths, however, are perceived as inappropriate.

Here's an example: The politically conservative "Moms for Liberty" group that is challenging books at school board meetings across the country objects to Aliki's biography of Johnny Appleseed. Published in 1963, the book has stereotypical imagery of Native peoples in it but is—unfortunately—included in the *Wit & Wisdom* curriculum used by many schools in the U.S. In their video, a mom says that Johnny Appleseed is usually a great story, but "about three-quarters of the way into the book, there's the angry white people, the mean white people that are chasing the Indians

from their homes; [it] shows the conflict between the white settlers and the Native Americans.”

There was, in fact, conflict. Native peoples were defending their homelands and families from white settlers who wanted to take that land for themselves. Those are facts, but Moms for Liberty thinks teachers should use a happier version of the Johnny Appleseed story. I think it is safe to say they want a happier version of U.S. history. The book Jean Mendoza and I adapted is *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States for Young People*. Written for middle grade students, the book has truths about history that I am certain would be read aloud, indignantly, at school board meetings if those challenging it have actually read the book. Our adaptation is included on lists of books that politicians and parents do not want in their schools.

Book Riot did an analysis of books being challenged and concluded that most of them are ones with LGBTQ+ content. Last year [U.S. Rep.] Sharice Davids published her autobiographical picture book, *Sharice's Big Voice: A Native Kid Becomes a Congresswoman*. When Davids and [current U.S. Secretary of the Interior] Deb Haaland won their campaigns for Congress in 2019, Native families across the country were overjoyed! Native representatives in the U.S. Congress are rare. In her book, Davids talks about two things that Moms for Liberty and other book-banning campaigns would object to: the history of her nation's treatment by the U.S. government and her identity as a lesbian.

On one page, Davids wrote about her tribal nation being in two states

(Nebraska and Wisconsin) because “the U.S. government forced tribes to move away from their homelands.” The accompanying illustration shows a soldier pointing his rifle at Native people. There are also pages in the book where Davids wrote about being a lesbian. On the second page (the book pages are not numbered), she says she had a lot of doubters during the race. “They thought I couldn’t win based on what I look like, who I love, and where I started,” Davids explains. On the final page, she writes that growing up, she had no idea that she “would be one of the first Native American women in Congress and the first lesbian representative from Kansas.”

What, I wonder, do the book banners want in schools? With their campaigns, they are taking away mirrors for kids who so desperately need and deserve to see themselves in books. And they’re depriving others of windows into other peoples’ lives—windows that provide perspectives that they didn’t have access to before!

**People are reportedly objecting to certain books because they fear students will feel some guilt or discomfort about their race or gender, or that it creates anti-American sentiment. But there are rarely considerations for the discomfort of, for example, Native students seeing their histories or cultures misrepresented. What do you think is behind this response to truth-telling?**

Fear of a just society. If we were, in fact, a just society, treaties made between the U.S. government and tribal nations would be respected in

ways they have not been, in the past and present. Respecting them, however, could mean loss of resources—and money—to non-Native people and corporations who want to forge ahead with pipelines and developments that deconsecrate Native lands and put resources like clean drinking water at risk. A strong sense of justice can form in a young child’s mind when they read books that tell the truth. When they grow into adulthood, that sense of justice can guide them in how they vote and where they work. If they work in Congress, they would join someone like Sharice Davids in bills she proposes and supports that are forward-looking with respect to things like water.

**You do events promoting authentic representation for stories by and about Indigenous peoples. So much of the public conversation is about the negative effects of that representation's absence. What positive effects do you see when it's there?**

I have not seen any studies that empirically document the positive effects of books by Native writers. An example of something similar is the studies done by researchers in Tucson, Arizona, when the Arizona legislature felt that the Mexican American courses in the Tucson schools were teaching kids “how to overthrow the U.S. government.” Those courses had been in place for many years. In them, Latinx children learned about Latinx peoples. They read stories written by Latinx writers. The studies showed improvements in attendance, grades and graduation rates by students who had taken the courses. They felt empowered! That empowerment, however, was

# “With their campaigns, they are taking away mirrors for kids who so desperately need and deserve to see themselves in books.”

perceived as a threat, and lawmakers in Arizona passed a ban on ethnic studies courses. It seems reasonable to say that legislators are passing similar laws across the country.

## **Why is it important that *all* children be exposed to books told from Native perspectives? Why is it critical to have more Native-centered books in classrooms and libraries?**

In terms of population, we are few in comparison to nearly all other groups. Children from the other groups will grow up and become policymakers or people who influence policy. If they read Native books and develop empathy for us—if they come to see us as human beings—my hope is that their actions will be shaped by us rather than by stereotypical kinds of information. If they are not involved in work of that kind, they may be in other places of influence. If they’re parents, they’ll choose better books for their children. If they are teachers, they’ll teach about us by using books by us.

## **Earlier, you referenced Bishop’s “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors.” How do you believe these book bans will affect students’**

### **abilities to imagine and create a more just world?**

In psychology, there is a theory that I think applies to the impact mirror books can have on a reader. The theory is “possible selves.” It was developed by Dr. Hazel Markus in the 1980s. I came to know of it through reading the studies she and Dr. Stephanie Fryberg did on mascots. Possible selves are images of the self that a person hopes to become. The images motivate sustained, goal-directed behavior and can play a role in attainment of future goals. Earlier I referenced a book about a lesbian Native woman who is now in Congress. That book contains images that function, for lesbian and/or Native readers, as a possible self. I believe that books by Native writers provide Native children with an array of possible selves that has not existed in the past.

### **How can parents, educators and community members effectively work against efforts to prohibit accurate, honest teaching and books that contain more diversity in perspectives?**

There is an impetus to “buy the book” that is being challenged or banned, and that may make the buyer feel like they’ve

done something good. It may be good for the author and publisher, but an important point is circulating on social media: It does nothing for the children in the classroom who are being denied access to the book. A better strategy is to go to school board meetings when books are being challenged. Defend the books there and on social media, and campaign for and vote in local elections. They matter so much to the well-being of communities.

### **In what ways can teachers be more culturally responsive to Native students?**

Our children are Native every day. But in far too many places, books by Native writers are only brought into the classroom in November [during Native American Heritage month]. We are who we are, all year long. Use the books, all year round. Bring those possible selves into the classroom as a matter of course so that Native children’s identities are affirmed, every day. That affirmation of white children is the default. It happens for them, every day. Our children deserve that, too. ♦

*Dillard is a senior writer for Learning for Justice, and Keels is a Learning for Justice associate editor.*



# The Promise of Rural Schools

The rich history and diversity of rural communities have largely been erased.  
Appreciating both charts a promising path forward.

BY CORY COLLINS ILLUSTRATION BY LORRAINE NAM

**LONG BEFORE MADISON** County, Mississippi, became a majority white Jackson suburb, it was a supermajority Black and agricultural community, its dissonant history tilled into its very soil.

It'd be easy to depict Madison County's past as a sad story—as one only haunted with pain and unequal opportunity. It's a place where more than three-fourths of its residents were enslaved in 1860; where tenant farming and sharecropping exploited the labor of Black workers; where Black people's access to an affirming education was subject to constant disruption—and required constant struggle.

It's a single story that depicts Madison County as rural and bereft of promise. But for Oleta Fitzgerald, who grew up on a family farm there, living in the rural South meant more than that.

"It means what summers were like," she remembers. "It means happier times of plums and blackberries and strawberries and peach trees and big gardens and making syrup, going to church and harvest festivals and knowing everybody."

"In times past it has meant strong community around education."

Fitzgerald is the director of the Children's Defense Fund's Southern Regional Office in Mississippi, the daughter of a businessman and schoolteacher—an heir of their advocacy.

Madison County was home to a Freedom School. It was home to pioneering Black educators like Rosa Allie Lee Scott, who helped secure a Rosenwald School for her community and who now rests on the grounds of a school bearing her name. It was home to a tradition of demanding and charting a freer rural South.

That history matters. That nuanced story of the rural United States matters. A story largely missing from the popular conception of "rural."

Erasing that story obscures not just the history of rural communities but their diversity, the unique needs of each of their schools and the opportunities to reimagine a better education—and future—for their children.

### Rural Isn't Singular

"The prevailing narrative is that rural equals white," says Mara Casey Tieken, Ph.D., author of

*Why Rural Schools Matter*. "This invisibilizes a good chunk of the rural population."

Approximately one-fifth of the nation's rural population—more than 10 million people—identify as people of color. According to the Brookings Institution, roughly 1 in 10 rural counties is majority people of color.

The dominant narrative that erases this diversity, Tieken says, has consequences. Unique needs of rural communities go unaddressed; their strengths go unappreciated.

It means that rural communities of color rarely see their stories told in popular culture or the classroom. It means they are often erased from voting blocs and policy conversations.

That includes how their schools have been left out of the current conversation surrounding inclusive education. Though largely erased from that conversation surrounding the teaching of race and U.S. history, rural schools in the South are disproportionately shaped by it.

### How History Shaped the South's Rural Schools

The Mississippi Delta—a 4-million-acre region between the Yazoo and Mississippi Rivers—sits on fertile soil and, thus, sits on a legacy of slavery and exploitation that persisted long after emancipation.

"Those counties are the counties, historically, where there was the heaviest slave trade and enslaved population," says Fitzgerald. For today's rural South, that history creates "the great dichotomy between the rich and the poor that is the offshoot of plantation owners and the plantation economy."

Then, backlash to Reconstruction helped set the stage for decades of white politicians stripping the region of local control.

"They've been drawn out of power," Fitzgerald says. "The representation we have doesn't by itself have the power to bring resources into the communities they represent."

That systematic theft of power, compounded by racial and economic segregation, informs the conditions of rural schools.

In 1896, the Supreme Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision stated that "separate but equal" was

sufficient; the ruling upheld segregation under a guise of equality, in the same breath maintaining “distinctions based upon color.”

“Separate but equal was never achieved,” explains Valerie Grim, Ph.D., a scholar of rural African American history who grew up in the Delta. “In practice, Black land grants were never properly funded. And as a result of that, Black high schools, Black elementary schools were never properly funded by the state.

“Those schools struggled because there was not equitable money given for teachers, for salaries, for classrooms, for innovation in the classroom, for textbooks, for labs.”

*Brown v. Board of Education* did not change that. Mass white flight to private schools, coupled with a school-funding model based on property value and political power, created a self-fulfilling prophecy.

“What you see today with schools that are ‘failing,’ particularly in Black-majority counties like in the Delta ... it’s because that system that created the failure hasn’t gone anywhere,” Grim explains. “The foundation of racism, institutional discrimination, structural discrimination—which led to poverty and which has sustained poverty in the Delta—is still there.”

According to the Rural School and Community Trust, 1 in 4 students in rural Mississippi schools lives below the poverty line; the state spends \$2,000 less per rural student than the national average.

“This is not a tragedy of rural education,” Tieken says. “This is a tragedy of policymaking.”

If rural schools aren’t closed or taken over—practices that have devastated rural Black communities—underfunding may force them to persist through infrastructural disaster.

Fitzgerald says an audit report in Indianola, Mississippi, read: “It would be cheaper to rebuild all of these buildings than it will be to fix them.”

Facing these realities, it’s difficult for rural school districts to retain highly qualified educators.

“Grow-your-own” initiatives—designed to inspire and recruit local candidates to serve their communities as teachers—struggle when potential future educators are navigating the same historically under-resourced systems. This affects



students' access to college and ability to meet certification requirements. They witness firsthand the difficulty of teaching in underfunded schools—and the better resources and pay elsewhere.

"It really speaks to the importance of providing a quality education," says Sanford Johnson, a former teacher and the Mississippi executive director of Teach Plus. "Because ultimately if we're counting on students in a school to come back and be teachers at this school, they need to feel they had a good experience at that school."

This challenge is exacerbated in communities with immigrant populations. Roughly 4% of rural students are English language learners. But there's

**"Students get tired of reading about how their people were treated when you don't get the story about how their people overcame."**

—Valerie Grim

a huge ELL teacher shortage and few resources to recruit or train them.

In Hendry County, Florida, educator Sherry Blanset says Latino/a/e families are very involved but unlikely to ask for needed resources due to language and structural barriers. With several dialects of Spanish and Indigenous languages within Hendry County alone, stopgap measures like providing students with Spanish-English dictionaries do not suffice.

"It's so incredibly frustrating to our students," she says. "Staffing is an issue; having the money to provide those [ELL] positions is an issue. They're doing what they can and they are helping those students, but it's not enough."

For all these reasons, the consequential history of "not enough" resources looms.

But the history of the rural South and its schools is not just a story of hardship and failed policies; it's a story of resilience, resistance and innovation—a history that proves not all heroes of the story had to leave.

#### Not Just a Place to Leave

Most rural students encounter one of two stories about "place": Rural spaces either effectively don't exist in history or, if they do, they exist as places to leave, devoid of opportunity.

"I had read enough history and I'd talked to enough folks in my life to know that, for a lot of people, Mississippi was a place where you escaped from," Johnson remembers. "You ran as far away from the state as you possibly could. And that's exactly what I thought when I was a high school senior."

Educators can help shift this narrative, opening doors to historic precedent and future opportunities.

"When we tell [more affirming] stories, we offer them a really different frame of reference," Tieken says. "Look at the important things that happened here and what kind of important things can continue to happen here."

Across the rural South, communities of color are rich in admirable history.

"I think every kid in Mississippi should know about Fannie Lou Hamer. Every kid in Mississippi should know about Aaron Henry and the work of Bob Moses and Medgar Evers," Johnson says. "We talk about patriotic education; these are some true patriots and we don't really share those stories as much."

From farmworkers' labor movements to scholarship that arose from Black land-grant institutions, local history can be affirming for rural students of color—and can disrupt a dominant narrative that erases their power.



“Certain kinds of inclusion in the curriculum [are] the exact motivation [students] need to improve,” Grim says. “Students get tired of reading about how their people were treated when you don’t get the story about how their people overcame.”

#### Rural Education as Resistance

In downtown Hayneville, Alabama, where Shatara Clark teaches English at Central High School, two monuments tell two stories. In the courthouse square, a Confederate memorial reads, in part, “No men died there with more glory.”

Steps away, tucked under the shade of a tree, is a monument to Jonathan Daniels, a civil rights activist killed by an off-duty police officer in 1965.

The juxtaposition can feel emblematic of an ongoing injustice, especially in a state that, in 2017, passed a law to protect Confederate monuments—where, four years later, the same governor presided over a vote banning teaching about race

and racism in schools, using the bogeyman of “critical race theory.”

“Because of where I teach and who I teach, predominantly African American students, I am concerned,” Clark admits. “If they’re not getting the truth, if they’re not able to understand that as kids, I would hate for them to go in the world thinking that certain things are OK that are not OK.”

Yet, rural communities are largely left out of debates about state standards and legislation regarding what history should be taught.

“I feel like we’re not represented,” Blanset says. “And then we’re handed whatever the case may be. ... ‘This is what you’re teaching.’ And even just having a voice in that conversation would be incredibly powerful and send a message to our students that even though we live in a rural area, we still matter.”

The history of education itself presents timely lessons on how people overcame systemic neglect and sustained cultural values.



“When you look at educational development in Black communities from slavery through integration, you will find tremendous documentation that indicates Black people supported education for their children, for themselves, and what they were willing to do to make that possible,” Grim explains. “And they were making those determinations because they wanted education not only for literal reasons so that their children would know reading, writing and arithmetic, but [so] they could shape that education in a way to help sustain Black life and Black communities.”

It’s a tradition Grim calls “Black self-determination”—a storied resistance by Black rural communities against white supremacy and paternalism.

For students of color in rural schools today, that history not only resonates; it charts a path forward.

#### **The Promise of Rural Schools**

Sanford Johnson inherited the duality of Delta education. He is the son of a principal who left home for education opportunities and then returned to do the work. His parents both cared deeply for the Delta’s communities. Yet, in time, his parents made the difficult decision to move to Starkville, a college town, where they knew their kids would have more resources and opportunities.

Today, Johnson and his wife, both education leaders, have two kids. They’ve reached a different conclusion.

“We don’t see the things that our kids need,” Johnson admits. “But we’re trying to see, ‘Can we build it here?’ ... ‘Let’s see if we can create the place that we want, so we don’t have to move to another town to provide our kids with what they need.’”

Rural schools’ strengths present unique opportunities in the efforts to build something better. They are, as Fitzgerald says, “the center of community activity in rural areas.” They are, as Blanset says, a place where “if something happens to one of our own, the entire community pulls together.”

Those reciprocal relationships could create culturally sustaining partnerships.

“The education system must reimagine itself to be a space where the capacity to be, to create, to innovate takes place,” Grim says. “That you see rural areas as the places of opportunity.”

Already, Johnson has seen big wins thanks to determined advocacy in the Delta: state-funded pre-K, better-quality sex education, improved after-school programs.

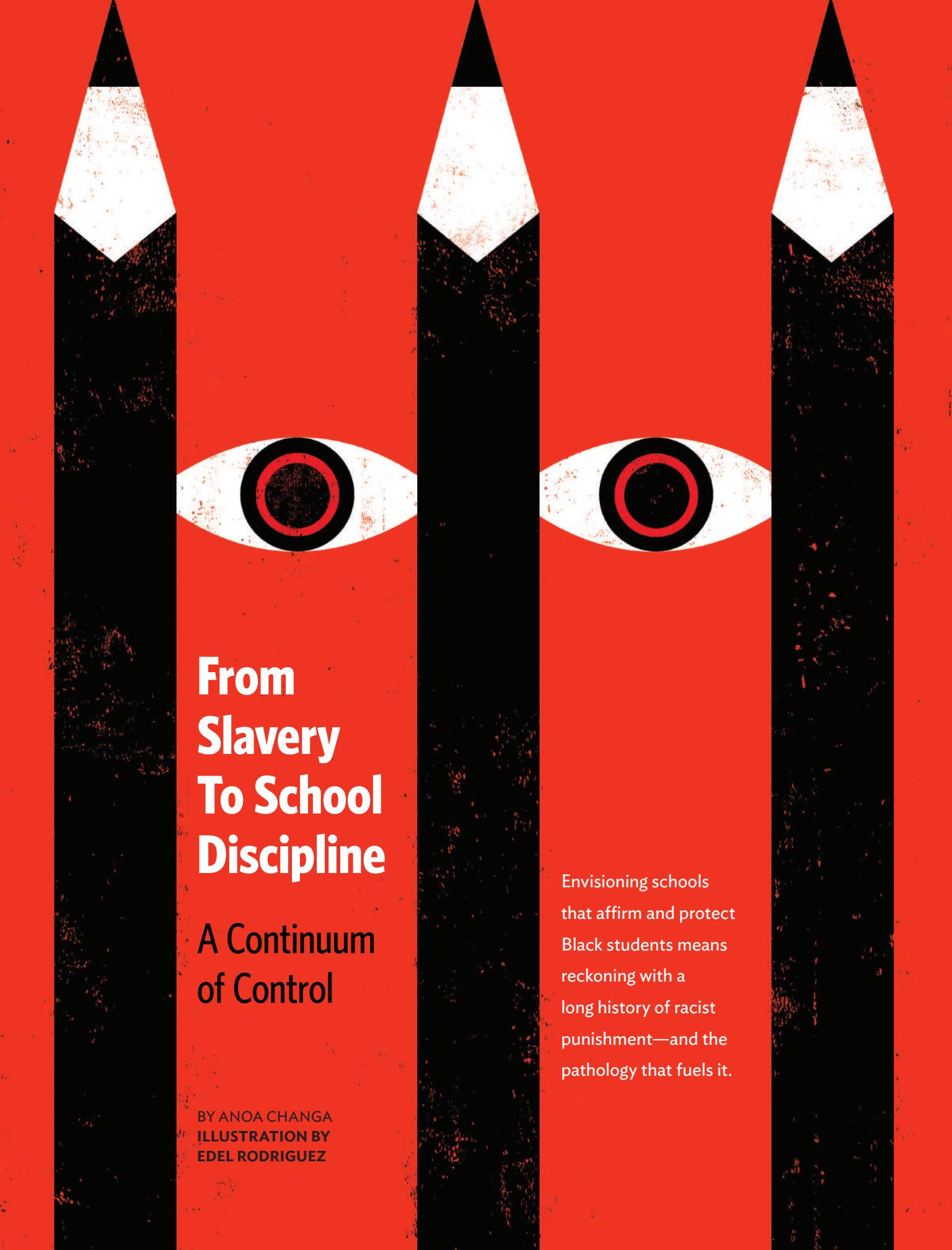
The communities don’t need grit, advocates say; they need an equitable investment.

“How we can marry economic policy and education policy in ways that create equitable, sustainable rural communities is really critical,” Tieken says. This means decoupling school funding from property taxes; investing in “grow-your-own” programs for teachers, including alternative pathways to certification; fighting for curricular standards that include local histories; and fixing inadequate infrastructure.

In that vision, rural schools in the South can accomplish their promise: to become wrap-around, full-service schools—to become affirming spaces informed by the communities that surround them.

It’s the vision many Black educators pioneered in the Delta decades ago. And if part of learning history is about charting paths forward, the story of resilience already resides between Mississippi’s parallel rivers. And the soil is fertile for change. ♦

*Collins is an author and journalist and a former senior writer for Learning for Justice.*



# From Slavery To School Discipline

## A Continuum of Control

BY ANOA CHANGA  
ILLUSTRATION BY  
EDEL RODRIGUEZ

Envisioning schools  
that affirm and protect  
Black students means  
reckoning with a  
long history of racist  
punishment—and the  
pathology that fuels it.

**SHORTLY BEFORE MY** son turned 15, he was expelled for the remainder of his ninth grade year, after already having served a two-week suspension for marijuana possession. What presented as poor judgment and youthful defiance masked a longer battle with pervasive depression and suicidal thoughts that would take another year to surface.

Yet, at every step of the way, the ninth grade administrator failed to follow through with promised interventions. It was easier to suspend and expel. During his expulsion hearing, I suggested he do more volunteer work and put forth a plan for counseling in addition to the two-week suspension he'd already served—pulling mainly from alternatives in the district's student code of conduct.

Despite expulsion being optional for a first offense, the hearing officer decided it was the only way my son could learn his lesson. While I knew about the school-to-prison pipeline and racial disparities in school discipline, it was still shocking to watch it unfold.

#### **Discipline Disparities and the Continuum of White Supremacy and Slavery**

Leslie Jones, a senior staff attorney with the Southern Poverty Law Center's (SPLC) Criminal Justice Reform practice group, sees a throughline from slavery to current approaches to school discipline. Jones said that the treatment of Black children and other children of color is by design, operating within a long history of systems that devalue the importance of investing in them.

“It was at one point illegal for Black and Brown children to even learn how to read,” Jones explains. “And now that we have made progress in some areas, it’s like we have to find other ways to exclude, other ways to marginalize.”

Attitudes toward Black children have been shaped in a society socialized to believe Black behavior requires punitive measures and control. Understanding how to address the ongoing

disparities in student discipline requires a recognition of what Jones describes as “the continuum in the legacy of white supremacy and a continuing legacy of slavery.”

Part of breaking that continuum includes the work of groups like the Alliance for Educational Justice (AEJ), a coalition of intergenerational and youth-led organizations advocating for a holistic approach to school discipline.

Jonathan Stith, national director for the AEJ, recalls a young organizer who described schools as needing mood detectors instead of metal detectors.

“At the root of the vision is young people want to radically transform what safety looks like—what discipline looks like—to a more fair and equitable system that really has community and care at its heart versus incarceration, pushout and punishment,” Stith says.

Drawing the connection between the treatment of enslaved people and modern school discipline, Stith points to the book *Educating for Insurgency: The Roles of Young People in Schools of Poverty* by Jay Gillen, a Baltimore-based educator and facilitator with the Baltimore Algebra Project.

“Look at the age range of runaway Africans and the connection between police and slave patrols,” Stith says. “Historically, Black youth running away, being chased by slave patrols—the same slave patrols now follow young people into schools.”

According to Gillen’s research, an estimated 75% of enslaved people who ran away were between the ages of 13 and 29. He draws a comparison between students in impoverished schools and enslaved people challenging parallel systems of political control.

Pulling on his own decades of experience, Gillen writes that “well-run schools, like well-run plantations, are places where the ‘consequences’ for violating requirements are swift and certain.”

In the school setting, this translates to an emphasis on domination and control, which



disproportionately is focused on the actions of Black children and teens.

#### **The “Pathology of Punishment and Control”**

The fear and systemic devaluation of Black people, originating during slavery, has carried through to subsequent interactions and systems, including school discipline.

Nearly 10 years after the U.S. Department of Education first released data on school-based arrests and law enforcement referrals, there's no doubt that Black students are being exposed to undue harm. Example after example abounds.

In 2015, viral videos showed a school resource officer throw and drag a South Carolina high school student out of her math classroom for “being disruptive.” A classmate, Niya Kenny, was later arrested for encouraging other classmates to record the violent encounter and yelling at the officer to stop. The teacher had called the officer because the first student allegedly had refused to hand in her cell phone. Kenny was arrested for “disturbing a school.”

An October 2021 report from Education Week found that Black children and teens comprised about 75% of the disorderly conduct referrals across South Carolina between August 3, 2015, and July 30, 2020.

Disorderly conduct charges and even corporal punishment persist with large disparities between Black children and their white counterparts. As documented by the 2019 SPLC report *The Striking Outlier*, a range of negative consequences can result from corporal punishment, including physical injury, increased absenteeism, behavioral and mental health challenges, and damaged relationships.

A study published in the journal *Social Problems* in 2021 found a possible correlation between a school's disproportionate use of corporal punishment on Black students and the United States' history of racial terror. This practice is more likely to occur in counties with histories of lynching. And it does not correspond to Black students' behavior.

“We know that Black students are no more likely to ‘misbehave’ than their white peers,” says Tyler Whittenberg, deputy director of Opportunity to Learn at the Advancement Project. “But they are more likely to be suspended, arrested and referred to law enforcement.”

Whittenberg says the difference in treatment experienced by Black students is directly tied to the legacy of Jim Crow and slavery.

“It starts with this idea that Black students in particular need to be controlled and dominated; otherwise, they will not act right.”

He describes a “pathology of punishment and control,” subjugating youth to a system that will prepare them to enter the criminal justice system either as juveniles or as adults. Interacting with police in schools increases those possibilities.

A collaboration among several groups, including the Advancement Project and the Alliance for Educational Justice, the report *We Came to Learn: A Call to Action for Police-Free Schools* outlines the history of police in schools and contextualizes the disparate treatment for students who do not have access to supportive services or staff like social workers or school counselors. An estimated 1.6 million students attend schools with police officers but no counselors.

As highlighted by the report, police presence in schools coincides with early efforts at school integration ramping up during the civil rights era. In many ways, policing in schools has followed a similar approach to policing Black neighborhoods. Broken windows policing inspired broken windows discipline.

The situation becomes even more daunting when school districts collect sensitive student information and share it with local law enforcement for the purpose of tracking instead of helping students. Bacardi Jackson, interim deputy legal director for the Children’s Rights practice group at the SPLC, gave the example of a program utilized by the Pasco County School District in Florida.

According to Jackson, it was discovered that the school district shared sensitive student information with law enforcement, which in turn created a secret list to track hundreds of children and their families. In spring 2021, the PASCO





Coalition—dedicated to ending this practice—demanded the school district discontinue its “data sharing” agreement and participation in this predictive policing.

She describes this program and secret list as resembling a real-life *Minority Report*, referring to the movie in which police predict crimes and arrest people before the crimes happen.

Jackson says that, based on the information available in the database, it isn’t just tied to student behavior. In some instances, students are entered into this list based on grades or having to be institutionalized due to mental health issues—or even if they have witnessed domestic violence.

“They are being criminalized for those things that they may not have any control over or that suggest they need help,” Jackson says. “And instead, we are throwing police at them.”

#### **Barriers to Changing Approaches in School Discipline**

The belief that police keep schools safe is itself a barrier to reapproaching school discipline—even though that belief is not supported by evidence.

According to *We Came to Learn*, the presence of school police exploded between 1997 and 2013, more than doubling from 9,400 to 20,000. Since the Columbine shooting in 1999, responses to school shootings from all levels of government have led to increased funding for school-based police, putting an undue burden on Black and Brown students.

But adding more police to schools has unfortunately not kept students and staff safe; it has only contributed to further criminalizing marginalized groups.

In *The Cost of School Policing*, ACLU of Florida, in collaboration with several organizations, examines the impact of police in Florida schools after the passage of the 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act. “The presence of law enforcement in schools was related to increases in the number of behavioral incidents reported to the state, the number of such incidents reported to law enforcement, and student arrests,” the report reads.

Another challenge teachers and administrators must deal with is personal bias, of which many of

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—LESLIE JONES

them may not even be aware. Jackson pointed to a 2016 Yale study of teachers that found teachers often focused on Black students generally and Black boys specifically when looking for bad behavior.

"It's an unprecedented time," Jackson says, "but we need the teachers to teach courage, and we need them to have courage because they are on the front lines of what is happening in a public education."

Tackling implicit bias and other issues of equity has become even more challenging with recent attacks on progressive reforms in public schools. Under the guise of attacking a scholarly legal framework, critical race theory, school districts and state legislatures have begun adopting policies targeting efforts to address historic inequities in public education and the treatment of Black children.

We certainly need courage to turn the tide.

#### **Embracing Disciplinary Alternatives**

As much as we need courageous educators in this moment, alternative disciplinary approaches are readily available. A former eighth-grade social studies teacher, Whittenberg says Black students and other students of color deserve the same patience, empathy and innovation as their white counterparts on a consistent basis.

"There's nothing in the literature that says exclusionary discipline, suspension and expulsion works to change behavior," explains Whittenberg. "Yet, we continue to do the same practices."

But educators don't have to, and there are resources that can help teachers resolve issues in ways that address behaviors *and* positively affect child development.

In Learning for Justice's "The Foundations of Restorative Justice," experts tout practices such as restorative inquiry, restorative conferencing and restorative circles as less punitive ways to resolve conflicts in school—"a more communal, collaborative system of communication, expectation-setting and accountability." But just as importantly, those experts hope educators first build communities of trust. A culturally sustaining space with authentic relationships, they say, is a necessary precursor to eradicating harmful discipline practices and the biases that fuel them.

Those authentic relationships must extend from the surrounding community to the classroom, experts say. At the community level, that may look like increasing authentic family engagement (through practices like home visits and more accessible communication) to build trust. At the classroom level, according to LFJ's *Reframing Classroom Management*, that may look like learning to understand how behaviors

signal needs; finding proactive strategies that help students feel classroom-ready and resilient; and creating spaces where students can make mistakes and learn from them.

Individual practices, however, cannot overcome deeply embedded policies with built-in biases. To the extent possible, teachers should support efforts to address inherently harmful systems.

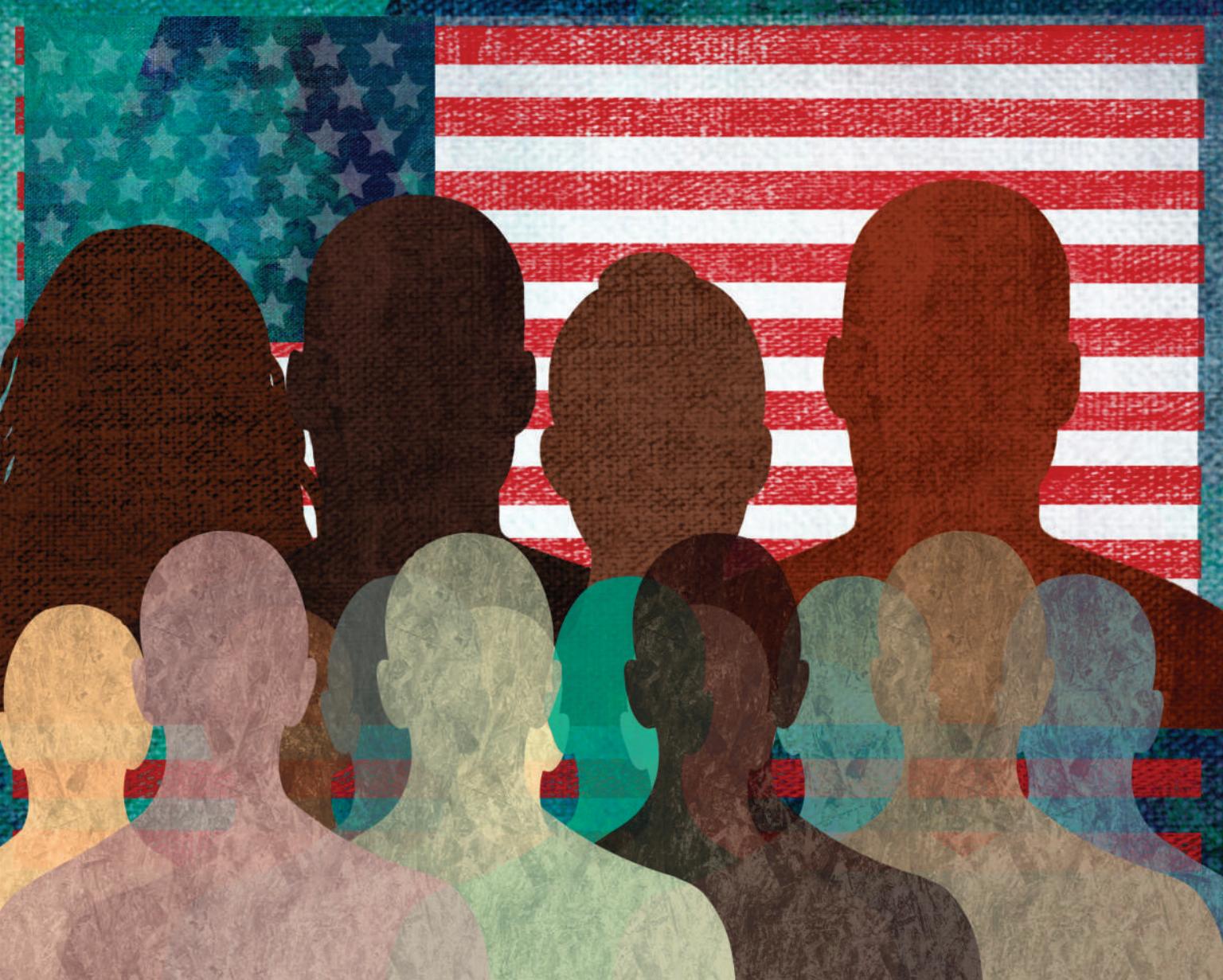
"The first thing is that [we've] got to get rid of all of these systems," Stith says. "We can't just continue to overlay stuff on top of a system that actually really needs to be dismantled."

Whittenberg sees the ideal situation as creating an educational environment that supports a liberatory framework that allows for children to be unapologetically Black while providing a high-quality education.

"You can't have a space like that," Whittenberg says, "if you are being heavy-handed with discipline to the point of trying to alter one's creativity, alter one's self-expression and not allow the child to be vulnerable, get creative and explore their own boundaries."

Creating space for Black children and young adults to feel supported and free to explore possibilities leads to brighter opportunities. Treating Black children, like my son, with compassion and care gives them tools to build for the future. It is past time we end the remnants of slavery and approaches to Black children that treat them like a problem to be controlled instead of people to nurture. ♦

*Anoa Changa is a southern-based movement journalist and retired attorney. She hosts the podcast The Way with Anoa.*



# Partners in Honest Teaching

Looking for support and solidarity in teaching honest history? Partner with a museum.

BY JEY EHRENHALT ILLUSTRATION BY ERIN ROBINSON

**FOR EDUCATORS TEACHING** the truth about race and racism in the United States, these are precarious times. As educators, students, caregivers and community members, we are all encountering a reality in which calculating legislators, special interest groups and some misinformed individuals want to eradicate racial justice

education. As of December 15, 2021, according to an Education Week analysis, 29 states introduced bills to restrict teaching critical race theory or limit discussions of race, and 13 states successfully adopted the bans through legislation or other means. For many educators across the country, it is no longer safe to teach the truth.

“Now that schools are adopting [critical race theory bans] into administrative codes, school boards are passing resolutions, there’s this punitive umbrella that comes with it,” says Tafeni English, director of the Civil Rights Memorial Center (CRMC) at the Southern Poverty Law Center. English works closely with educators

and school groups who visit the CRMC daily. “Educators—even the most courageous ones—will have that pause of, ‘OK, wait, is this going against some type of resolution or administrative code?’ ‘Could [there] possibly be a backlash?’ ‘What is the safest way?’”

These restrictions trigger justifiable fears of retaliation for so many teachers. For others, these limitations compound the strain of pre-existing ones, like district expectations or insufficient time in a school day.

“There are realities like testing and curricula and standards that lead you down certain paths,” says Jasmine Page, former classroom educator and now the education and interpretation manager at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta. “Educators do such amazing work, but they do it in such a constraint of time. Whether that be one day or the school year, it’s hard to tackle everything at once.”

Museum staff have a message for classroom educators: You do not have to face this struggle alone. Many museum sites make intentional space for school communities to learn about racial, gender and other histories and engage openly about it. Museum educators grow and learn from this public collaboration in equal measure.

“Museum educators have such an important role to play in the community,” Page says, “and schools are such pillars of the community. So the partnership is so important.”

#### Diversifying the Narrative

When museum and classroom educators work in tandem, students undertake a sophisticated investigation into both the breadth and depth of U.S. history. Classroom educators provide the historical context, secondary sources and some primary texts needed to understand the material. Supported by this wide-ranging backdrop, museum educators can narrow in on individual

figures’ personal narratives, specific oral histories and artistic creations. This fusion allows the fullest range of historical facts possible. Classroom educators set the stage, and museums use artifacts to bring history to life.

“If the narratives don’t truly come alive,” says English, “we run the risk of not teaching true history. ... We move back to telling those stories through the eyes of the oppressor.”

When educators put their heads together, they can use their collective brainpower to include a greater diversity of narratives in history curricula. When they work in isolation, however, more stories may be overlooked.

Dave Serio, curator of education at the Arab American National Museum (AANM), says he barely heard anything about the Arab world as a student. “The only time I learned about it was possibly in history class,” he remembers. “It was usually ‘us versus them.’ It was usually in some type of political component where the U.S. was the good guy and the Arab countries were the bad guy.”

Most school districts don’t teach Arab American studies, Serio says, leaving the Arab American story “very much out of most curricula.”

The AANM uses artifacts to promote open dialogue about the difficult truths of the Arab American community’s history in the U.S. In 2017, Serio and his team coordinated an exhibit called “THEM,” exploring artifacts and images

from the early 20th century onward that “reflect and encourage separation, hate and violence and foster prejudice and discrimination,” according to the exhibit’s description. The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia contributed part of their collections, and Serio and his team added Arab American components. Museum educators used objects in the installation as a springboard for community dialogue.

Staff host conversations in the museum’s library, a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere outside of the classroom. Interacting with the historical artifacts helped students add personal reflection to critical inquiry, as students openly shared stories of times they had felt bullied, targeted or treated as “other.” The AANM also presents historical documents, oral histories and artifacts to preserve the contributions of Arab Americans and celebrate the community’s rich cultural history.

While many educators seek to be inclusive, it can be difficult to tackle everything. By partnering with experts at a museum, educators can collaborate to tell the truth about who is missing from the history books and why. And for students with shared identities and experiences, witnessing primary sources at sites like these can provide a lifeline in a sea of archival erasure and omission.

“There are many examples of beautiful moments and special parts of every culture, things that inspire and

**No educator can accurately map out the whole landscape of our history alone. We are all stronger when we traverse the terrain together.**



empower us today,” says Ariel Moon, lead education specialist for Early Childhood Programs at the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). “There are some things for every racial identity to learn about and feel like, ‘This makes me feel affirmed to be me.’ And if you cut that out, every child will be starting from scratch in their journey towards thinking, ‘I’m worth something. I matter. I can make a difference.’”

When these inclusive cultural examples are overlooked, students may learn that their cultural histories are either invisible or do not matter enough to be shared.

#### Engaging Honestly About Race and Racism

In school classroom and museum spaces, skilled educators seek out

open conversations about race and racism across lines of difference. Rather than going it alone, they consider this work the collective responsibility of a shared community. These educators forge partnerships to continually learn from and grow with others. They make productive dialogue a reality that expands beyond the walls of either institution.

While museum educators often spend just a few hours with students in informal, open-ended settings, classroom educators take months to create tight-knit communities in more formalized environments. Joining this carefully nurtured learning community, museum educators can directly delve into candid conversations about race in their limited time with students. When cultivated over time, this cooperative framework can become a

*Students from Montgomery Public Schools visit the Civil Rights Memorial Center on Martin Luther King Jr. Day in 2022.*

public model for how a whole community can engage in racial truth-telling.

For some educators, constructing this community model is a personal first. Many—particularly white—educators did not practice talking about race and racial history as young people. While educators of color may be very familiar with talking about race, for some, discussing it across lines of difference feels less familiar. This lack of familiarity can breed dangerous consequences for everyone. Adults may default to shying away from the topic altogether at the expense of their students’ learning.

“A lot of times teachers, educators, caregivers and families, they are not coming out of a space in which they



Visitors tour the Arab American National Museum (above) and visitors tour the National Museum of African American History and Culture (below).



were taught how to talk about these things, or they were not acclimated to how to speak and confront the things they were seeing,” says Candra Flanagan, director of the Teaching and Learning Unit of NMAAHC’s education department. “A lot of adults don’t have the muscle built up to talk about it. So [now] they’re in their classroom and it’s not the easiest thing for them to do, or it’s not necessarily something that even comes to their mind.”

Museum educators may encounter the same mental barriers.

Lorraine McGarry and Virginia Squier were teaching high school and

middle school, respectively, in State College, Pennsylvania, when students in their classes asked to learn more about the complexities of social justice. To respond, they collaborated on a combined elective called “Bridging Divides: Exploring Diversity and Social Justice.” Students spent the first part of the co-taught class investigating issues of division, discrimination and inequality through deliberative conversations and civic action.

As white educators, McGarry and Squier felt nagged by persistent discomfort with leading the class. To de-center their whiteness and practice

cultural humility, they teamed up with seasoned educators at civil rights historic sites in the Deep South. They guided their students in a forum about racial justice with students from Birmingham in the basement of 16th Street Baptist Church. Museum educators with content expertise and lived experience taught students and teachers alike about the history of racial injustice and the civil rights movement. Their initial immersion in classroom learning inspired students to start conversations with tour guides and community members. This respectful, personal engagement benefited all involved.

At the museums, students listened as African American museum educators who had lived through the history told their own stories. In turn, Squier and McGarry saw their Black students resonate with their guides. “Students—especially students who felt like they didn’t have teachers in State College who had experienced what they’d experienced in terms of racial justice—felt this affirmation,” McGarry remembers. “There was this feeling of, ‘Someone gets what I’m going through.’”

#### Finding a Museum Ally

While museums and historic sites offer profound collaborative possibilities, it’s important to know which partnerships to prioritize. Not all museums have openly embraced an honest retelling of our nation’s history. Many, however, are undergoing a sea change. For example, in 2018, Thomas Jefferson’s historic home, Monticello, added exhibits about the

400 individuals Jefferson enslaved there, including one on Sally Hemings, the woman he kept in bondage who bore at least six of his children. James Madison's plantation house, Montpelier, now highlights oral histories, artifacts and letters from the descendants of those he enslaved and features a film about the enduring legacy of slavery in the United States. It's crucial to partner with a space that is willing to present all the facts.

Since its opening in 2016, the National Museum for African American History and Culture has committed to telling what historian John Hope Franklin called "the unvarnished truth." Anna Hindley, director of NMAAHC's Early Childhood Education Initiative, says the explicit value placed on reckoning with racial history has been "baked into the museum's DNA" since its inception.

When searching for a museum educator partner, it may be beneficial to visit the museum anonymously first. A preliminary tour can offer information about the institution and provide a feel for its professional community. In the article "Preserving a More Honest History," former Learning for Justice Senior Writer Cory Collins recommends looking for tour guides and staff who are both knowledgeable and open-minded. "A good staff will be responsive and adapt tours and educational experiences based on the needs of the educator and their students," he writes.

Look for a willingness on the part of the institution and its staff members to honestly address racism and the truth of the past. A museum's exhibits should feature inclusive content that leaves no significant stories—no matter how painful—untold. Prudent museum partners will honor accurate racial histories by humanizing the experiences of oppressed peoples. They



may interweave their personal narratives, oral histories and artifacts into exhibits. Seek out a willingness from museum staff to embrace discomfort, Collins advises, and a clear connection between the past and the present.

#### **Solidarity Equals Strength**

Collaboration between schools and museums is key to advancing truthful education within both spheres. Allied educators understand the advantages of communicating openly about race and racism—and doing it together. They grasp how our collective future depends on it. When we don't attend to race or racism in our past, says Hindley, students are "left to put together their own cognitive puzzle in this dissonance between what we [as educators] say and what this culture actually lives."

Educators in classroom and museum sites alike share the responsibility of teaching students how to think for themselves by engaging

with accurate sources and narratives. Shying away from the truth about our past, Hindley says, dishonors children as learners who naturally notice and observe the world around them. Equipping students with comprehensive knowledge and evidence of what has happened in the past supports them in countering injustice in the future.

No educator can accurately map out the whole landscape of our history alone. We are all stronger when we traverse the terrain together.

"We're all constantly doing the work," NMAAHC's Flanagan says. "We don't see ourselves as experts coming to the educators to bring them along to our level. We are alongside them, and we want to say, 'Let's link arms and do the work.'" ♦

*Ehrenhalt is the program manager for school partnerships with Learning for Justice.*



# TEACHING THE PAST TO IMPROVE THE FUTURE

Despite a range of opposition, educators are committed to teaching honest history in their classrooms—and students are eager to learn.

BY COSHANDRA DILLARD ILLUSTRATION BY FELIPE VARGAS

**LAST FALL IN** Southlake, Texas, a Carroll Independent School District (ISD) school administrator provided baffling guidance to a group of teachers following the passage of a state law banning the teaching of critical race theory (CRT). Heard in a secret recording, she tells the teachers to present multiple viewpoints on contentious subjects and specifically names the Holocaust.

“Make sure that if you have a book on the Holocaust that you have one that has an opposing...that has other perspectives,” the administrator says.

There are audible gasps. One teacher asks, “How do you oppose the Holocaust?”

An author of the Texas bill subsequently argued that school administrators misrepresented what is in the new law. Regardless, the law’s language—and that of other bills introduced across the nation—is restrictive and can hinder teachers from effectively teaching lessons on race, history and current events.

Some consider Southlake “ground zero” for today’s discourse about how race and history are taught.

During the summer of 2020, Carroll ISD officials created a cultural competency action plan to address racism and improve culture at its schools. Parents and an organized political group opposed the plan, citing concerns about divisiveness and indoctrination. Around the same time, political figures

demonized critical race theory—a strategy in response to the summer’s racial reckoning. And it gave opponents of Carroll ISD’s DEI plans new language to explain their irritation.

Since then, campaigns to influence school board elections, ban books on race, prohibit teaching uncomfortable histories and disrupt attempts to adopt DEI programs have been successful across the country.

Just five miles southwest of Southlake, James Whitfield, Ed.D., lost his job as a principal—the first Black principal—at Colleyville Heritage High School. He worked to create a more inclusive school environment while a storm was brewing up the road.

“We know over the course of history, anytime there’s progress made, there’s going to be a level of backlash that comes into play,” Whitfield says. “[Groups have] been disrupting public schools for a long time, just with other issues. Now, it’s just CRT. So this is what they came with to disrupt this movement towards unity and a true reckoning and healing in that community.”

An honest retelling of United States history includes events and experiences of all people who shaped it. To challenge the traditional narrative—one steeped in white supremacy and American exceptionalism—is to challenge power. Hence, the agitation we’re witnessing around what teachers teach and how.



But teachers are using this moment to have honest, critical class discussions. While caught in the middle of hostile political discourse, they recognize this as an effort to simply uphold the status quo. And we know what’s at stake when we uphold the status quo.

## What’s at Stake?

We already know that textbooks and state standards fail to provide comprehensive coverage of American slavery, the modern civil rights movement and other histories involving oppression and resistance. A 2020 CBS News analysis found that seven states don’t explicitly include slavery in their standards. Eight states don’t name the civil rights movement, and 16 identify states’ rights as one cause of the Civil War.

Other histories are also trivialized. According to a 2015 study by



Pennsylvania State University researchers, curricula about Indigenous histories tend to be white-centric and cover only pre-1900 events. Only 20 states require learning about the Holocaust, according to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. And in 2021, Illinois became the *first* state to require the teaching of Asian American history.

What happens when students can't contextualize an accurate retelling of history? Historians and educators warn us that history will repeat itself. As with previous eras, we are now witnessing the regression of equitable policies, a rollback of civil rights and backlash against people who protest and demand a better society for all.

### Truth, Empathy and Making Connections

No matter what is happening around them, though, most students just want to know the truth. They crave it. And in spite of today's sociopolitical climate,

many teachers are still committing to do right by their students.

"What usually happens when students learn something that challenges an existing narrative that they've been taught [is] they have questions and they wonder why they didn't learn that sooner," says Dallas, Texas, history teacher Jania Hoover, Ed.D. She says parents are piqued, too.

Hoover, a Black woman, has made it her life's work to help young people connect the past and present. She's taught U.S. history and a number of other subjects at public schools and now teaches African American and Native American history at a predominantly white private school. She's not afraid to tell the truth about history.

"I became a teacher because I had issues with how Black people were talked about in traditional American history narratives," Hoover says. "So that's literally my purpose for becoming a teacher. And of course, you get in

a classroom and you learn way more about the whole system. But this manufactured [CRT] crisis-slash-controversy just makes it even more proof that I'm right. That I'm on the side that's good."

In her current job, administrators have pushed back on her approach to teaching history. "I was prepared for this because I was getting challenged and criticized for teaching too much about Black people, too much about slavery," she recounts.

In Birmingham, Alabama, high school economics teacher Disney Weaver helps his students, most of whom are Black, think critically about how suburban communities developed around them. Beyond race-based economic opportunity, he addresses issues such as gender pay disparity. Weaver, a white man, says these discussions can be uncomfortable for some students—yet still necessary for understanding economic principles.

"I've said to my principal and others that each day my objective is to commit treason against white economic opportunity and to expose the way in which white business leaders have not just disenfranchised but have limited the economic opportunity of African American entrepreneurs and neighborhoods," he says.

He adds, "I [see] room for growth for me to make the connection that I'm not just telling you the hard history to discourage, but it's to empower my students for a better future."

Discussions about painful events and uncomfortable truths from diverse perspectives not only prepare students to create a better future; it helps them build empathy, too.

"And if you're empathizing, then you might advocate for some of these policies that might challenge some of these existing power structures," Hoover says.

Teaching an honest history also uplifts people's humanity through stories of resistance, which are often omitted from textbooks or unexplored in curricula. Rejecting a white-centric

narrative provides students with a clearer picture of the past. For example, emphasizing Indigenous peoples' fights to stop colonization and elevating Black people's organizing power tell a fuller, more human story. Starting with local history is one way to find and discuss humanizing stories.

### **Uplifting Local History**

Teachers can't teach what they don't know. That's why it's critical they learn the history of their communities.

Teaching eighth-grade world history in Jefferson County, Alabama, Nefertari Yancie, Ph.D., understands the importance of local history. When she taught in Birmingham City Schools, she made sure her students visited local museums and landmarks to help them learn about the civil rights movement.

"If we don't show them what their history is, who they've derived from—and I'm not just talking about Black students, I'm talking about all of them—then they're not going to realize where they're going and what they can do in the future," Yancie says.

In parts of Florida, some teachers are diving into uncomfortable local history, with political support and at other times without it. In 2021, Florida lawmakers banned teaching "critical race theory" but had previously passed a law requiring schools to teach about the Holocaust, the Ocoee Massacre and other historical events.

"The museums have already developed lesson plans and activities to teach the Ocoee Massacre and what caused it and the ramifications of it for local museums in that area," says Bernadette Kelley-Brown, Ph.D., an associate professor at Florida A&M University who serves on the Florida African American History Task Force. "And they have been supported by the Florida legislature and the governor's office. So on paper, it says one thing, but in the support of agencies who are responsible, it says that there is another whole conversation."

Described by historian Paul Ortiz as the "single bloodiest day in modern American political history," the Ocoee Massacre happened when white mobs killed Black residents and ran others out of town on Election Day 1920. That history is integral to students understanding their community today, as they may wonder why the town was all-white for decades.

Florida lawmakers codified teaching African and African American history into law in 1994, but Kelley-Brown says the state isn't doing enough to ensure these lessons are integrated into the U.S. history curriculum. Of the state's 67 school districts, Kelley-Brown says only 10 are faithful in their teaching of African and African American history.

The Florida African American History Task Force is working to help teachers implement lessons about the Ocoee Massacre and other African American histories in K-12 classrooms. Ultimately, Florida educators have the grounding to do this history justice and can start locally.

### **Teachers Won't Back Down**

For many teachers, political pressure won't stand in the way of doing what's right: teaching within the guidelines of states' standards and leading with historical facts backed by original documents.

"If my job fires me for telling the truth, I don't need to work there," Hoover says. "I'm just even more focused on telling an honest history. The kids are seeing and hearing these controversies ... They're dialed in."

The National Education Association, American Federation of Teachers and the Chicago Teachers Union are among the educator groups making bold, public statements. They say they won't be bullied into not teaching the truth about U.S. history. Many educators have signed the Pledge to Teach the Truth, advanced by the Zinn Education Project, to continue teaching critical thinking skills and having necessary conversations.

**"We have some dark and ugly moments in our history that we have to reckon with, but discomfort's OK. Discomfort is where often we find the most growth."**

JAMES WHITFIELD



In a joint statement from the American Association of University Professors, the American Historical Association, the Association of American Colleges & Universities, and PEN America, they reject the restrictions anti-CRT bills are placing on schools and note that a white-washed history won't change the past or improve the future.

A total of at least 151 organizations have signed onto the statement. It says, in part:

“Knowledge of the past exists to serve the needs of the living. In the current context, this includes an honest reckoning with all aspects of that past. Americans of all ages deserve nothing less than a free and open exchange about history and the forces that shape our world today, an exchange that should take place inside the classroom as well as in the public realm generally.”

### Finding Support

Hoover says the first line of defense against today's dishonest history movement is school administrators.

“What happens in a lot of these cases when parents complain [is the] administration folds,” Hoover says. “They need to trust their educators as professionals,

as people that have degrees in teaching. And a lot of people have degrees in the content that they are teaching.”

Teachers committed to this work don't have to look any further than readily available resources to accurately teach history. It's as simple as finding online tools, such as Learning for Justice's Teaching Hard History resources.

“The information is there,” Hoover says. “Teaching Hard History, those key concepts, those videos—they're short enough [that] you can just play them in your class. ... So you don't have to create these resources; you just have to find and use them.”

Hoover recommends that teachers who feel isolated align themselves with other teachers who are passionate about teaching honest history.

“Especially if you're in some of these rural communities, it can feel like you're swimming upstream,” Hoover says, “but there are people who are committed to doing this work.”

### Hope for the Future

Former principal James Whitfield recognizes that we're in the middle of a typical American cycle. As he puts it, the enlightenment of people yields

an inevitable backlash because “you're infringing on somebody's privilege.”

He hadn't heard of critical race theory until it was used to push him out of a job. But he wants to learn more and doesn't see the theory as a bad thing. Neither does Yancie.

“All CRT is saying is that, in America, we have policies that are racist because this country has an issue with race that we have not settled,” Yancie says. “And we have to talk about that. There's no way around it because our students live that. It's their reality. If we don't talk about it or where it came from, then we're doing them a disservice.”

Whitfield says he'll continue anti-racism and truth-telling work with educators. He is hopeful.

“We have some dark and ugly moments in our history that we have to reckon with, but discomfort's OK,” he says. “Discomfort is where often we find the most growth. ... I think the large majority of people are going to take this opportunity ... and lean into the discomfort that sometimes we have to experience to have progress.” ♦

*Dillard is a senior writer for Learning for Justice.*

# What We're Reading

Learning for Justice loves to read! Check out a few of our favorite books for diverse readers and educators!



Written by husband-and-wife team Jamyl and Tracy-Ann Samuels and illustrated by Nidhom, *The Sensationally Super Sandy* tells the story of a sibling struggling for attention from her parents who are busy caring for her brother, who has autism. It's not until her parents carefully explain to her what autism is that Sandy begins to understand their relationship. This compassion extends to a classmate who is also autistic, and Sandy works to educate her classmates—leading to a more inclusive and respectful classroom environment.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

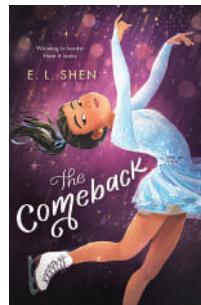
**"A heartwarming story that expresses the need to include children with disabilities in our conversations on inclusion and equity."**

—Jaci Jones, LFJ Professional Learning Facilitator



## ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

*Fauja Singh Keeps Going*  
by Simran Jeet Singh and  
illustrated by Baljinder Kaur

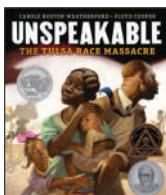


Adults and children will find it easy to cheer for Maxine Chen, the spunky protagonist in E.L. Shen's debut work, *The Comeback: A Figure Skating Novel*. In addition to juggling the challenges of middle school and the pressures of competitive ice skating, Maxine has to attend classes with a student who bullies Maxine for her Chinese heritage. By following Maxine's journey, readers, too, can learn how pride in yourself is the ultimate comeback. Note: This book contains racist language and gestures, including a racial slur.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

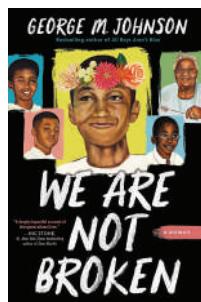
**"This middle grade novel is relatable to anyone who has struggled to love themselves fully when faced with racism."**

—Courtney Wai, LFJ Professional Learning Facilitator



## MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

*Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre*  
by Carole Boston Weatherford and  
illustrated by Floyd Cooper

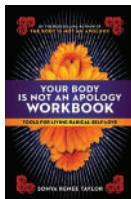


George M. Johnson, an award-winning Black nonbinary writer who identified as a boy in childhood, focuses on joy, adventure, misadventure, loyalty, betrayal, healing and love in their memoir, *We Are Not Broken*. A tribute to their beloved grandmother who creates an expansive space for her four young grandsons to be free, Johnson also offers possibilities that would enable Black boys—and the Black women who love and protect them—to live lives that are even more free. Note: This book contains the n-word, homophobic language and describes instances of sexual abuse.

HIGH SCHOOL

**"George M. Johnson superbly details their definition of Black Boy Joy."**

—Crystal L. Keels, LFJ Associate Editor



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*Your Body Is Not an Apology Workbook: Tools for Living Radical Self-Love*  
by Sonya Renee Taylor

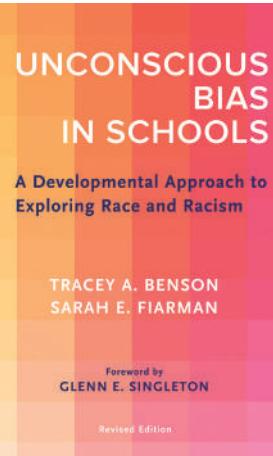


**“These very personal stories from disabled people will move and transform you.”**

—Anya Malley, LFJ Associate Editor

**“A humanizing portrait that cuts through the callousness of national debates with a strong heart, like a swimmer through water.”**

—Cory Collins, Former LFJ Senior Writer



## UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IN SCHOOLS

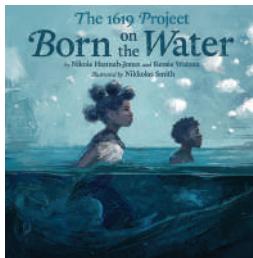
A Developmental Approach to Exploring Race and Racism

TRACEY A. BENSON  
SARAH E. FIARMAN

Foreword by  
GLENN E. SINGLETON  
Revised Edition

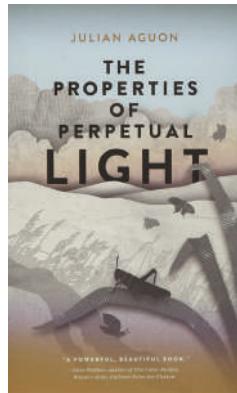
**“Features an impressive array of strategies and resources to help all educators take real steps toward undoing the damage unconscious racial bias inflicts on students.”**

—Crystal L. Keels, LFJ Associate Editor



**“A beautiful tool for being real about our history, which our young ones deserve.”**

Monita K. Bell, Former LFJ Associate Director, Editorial



**“Aguon’s words flow down the page with magic, beauty and power.”**

—Anya Malley, LFJ Associate Editor

“I know the next time I’m at an event and take a picture with someone, I won’t be moving my cane out of the shot,” writes Zipporah Arielle. Visibility: It can be absolutely life changing. In *Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories From the Twenty-First Century*, an anthology edited by Alice Wong, more than 30 disabled authors tell their stories. Filled with emotional testimonies, essays, blog posts and more, the writers explore what it means to be disabled, offering strong representation and education for readers.

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*The 1619 Project: Born on the Water* requires space and honest conversation—and it is well worth it. Written by Nikole Hannah-Jones and Renée Watson and illustrated by Nikkolas Smith, the book features a young student who is assigned to trace her family’s history and is distraught about not knowing those roots. Enter Grandma, who breaks it down one powerfully crafted poem at a time. She goes from ordinary people living, working and creating joy, to the Middle Passage to Black Lives Matter—and all the resistance, brilliance and life in between. This book affirms that Black history didn’t start with slavery and that “we will survive because we have each other.”

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

*Obie Is Man Enough*—a debut novel by acclaimed advocate Schuyler Bailar, the first trans man to compete on an NCAA Division I men’s team—follows Obie Chang as he navigates middle school, swimming competitions and relationships

post-transition. This endearingly honest account of Obie’s life—and how his inherited cultures intertwine to inform his resilience—offers a timely own-voices text exploring what it means to be a trans athlete, to be a kid and to be a friend. Note: This book presents the opportunity for discussions of restorative practices in schools.

### MIDDLE SCHOOL

Julian Aguon, an Indigenous lawyer and writer from Guam, beautifully blends poetry and memoir in *The Properties of Perpetual Light*. Writing in part about issues that he and other Indigenous peoples face, Aguon incorporates conversations around colonialism, climate change and family trauma. He also peppers in nods to other writers he admires, like Arundhati Roy, Audre Lorde and Naomi Klein, offering readers more words to live by.

### HIGH SCHOOL

“With a developmental view of our ability to tackle racism, we recognize that complacency is the enemy of improvement,” Tracey A. Benson and Sarah E. Fiarman write in *Unconscious Bias in Schools: A Developmental Approach to Exploring Race and Racism*. The authors urge school leaders to cultivate “cultures of bravery” wherein the adults serving students think of themselves as learners engaged in ongoing processes addressing unconscious racial biases. The end goal: to create school cultures that engage and serve every student.

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

# What We're Watching

Dim the lights and get ready to learn with these LFJ-approved films!

**Napo**, an award-winning animated short from Miralumo Films, showcases the healing power of multigenerational connection. When an aging man suffering with advancing dementia moves into his daughter's home, his grandson engages creativity and compassion to provide strength and joy for his mother's ailing father. The mother then returns her young son's favor when the boy needs it most. Devoid of dialogue, this special film underscores the priceless attributes of intergenerational care, concern and love. (16 min.)

[Available on YouTube](#)

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Ryan Cannon's **are you okay?** reminds viewers to check in with others about their mental health—and do the same for themselves. When Raquelle sees other students bullying Noah, she brings it to the attention of a school counselor. Students then bully Raquelle for “ratting out” the others. Weighed down by the social media hate they're receiving, Raquelle and Noah are both feeling depressed. But something wonderful happens when they rely on their empathy skills and ask one another a simple guiding question: “Are you okay?” (8 min.)

[Available on YouTube](#)

MIDDLE SCHOOL

**Hindsight** is a six-part docuseries that highlights different communities grappling with the effects of COVID-19. Created by filmmakers from various communities of color, each 10- to 15-minute episode details a moving story of isolation turned into resiliency and community care. For example, “We Stay in This House” follows the lives of four mothers who must become full-time caregivers for their families during the pandemic. Their stories demonstrate the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women of color, such as the frequently cited statistic of women forced to leave the workplace. These quick snapshots work well to contextualize discussions of COVID-19. (82 min.)

[Available on PBS](#)

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

The Netflix series **High on the Hog: How African American Cuisine Transformed America** perfectly illustrates Key Concept 9 of LFJ's Teaching Hard History framework: “Enslaved and freed people worked to maintain cultural traditions while building new ones that sustain communities and impact the larger world.” In this case, it's all about food. Chef and author Stephen Satterfield takes the viewer from Benin to New York to Texas—and from okra, yams and rice to brisket and, of

course, the whole hog. Chronicling the roots of these foods and cooking practices uplifts not only Black people's survival but also their innovation, resistance to oppression and global impact. (47-58 min.)

[Available on Netflix](#)

HIGH SCHOOL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Original documents are central in the teaching of the most harrowing aspects of U.S. colonial history, and **Bounty** hinges upon this importance. Citizens of the Penobscot Nation revisit the moment in Boston when, in 1755, the grisly murder of their ancestors is mandated by the colonial government. In this Upstander Project film, Penobscot elders read the original proclamation and explain this sordid past to their children. And despite brutal efforts to erase their existence, they also foreground their resilience and cultural pride. (9 min.)

[Available on Vimeo](#)

HIGH SCHOOL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

# Tomorrow Night

**“SHHH, PACK QUIETLY.** Just pretend with your little sister that you’re playing a game,” Mama said.

Mia is only 4 years old. I’m her 8-year-old sister, Bibi. Mama always says I’m the boss when she’s away.

“I’m almost packed, Mama. Where are we going?”

“We can’t talk about that here, Bibi. Someone might hear.”

“What if someone hears, Mama?” I asked.

“Bibi, stop asking questions. Pack quickly.”

Mama said we were going to meet Daddy in a field a few minutes from here. He lives on another plantation not far away, but our enslavers never let us visit him. Mama said they don’t care if we ever see Daddy.

Mr. and Mrs. Burns are awful. They make Mama work all day and often at night. Sometimes I hear them yelling at her. When they get real angry with her, the Burnses don’t allow us to eat dinner. Mr. Burns hits Mama sometimes too. When Mama comes home crying, I ask her why and she pretends to stop. She doesn’t want me to know she’s sad.

Very late on the night after we packed, we took the few things we had and left for the field where Daddy would be waiting. Even though we didn’t have a lot, our things were hard to carry. We were weak from starving for three days now.

I could see sweat on Mama’s face. Soon we heard dogs barking in the distance. Mama stopped us. “Stay very still,” she whispered. Mama said Mr. and Mrs. Burns might have found out we left. She worried that their dogs might follow our scent and capture us. Mama said that if they or any other enslavers caught us running away, they might punish us with

beatings, or worse. What could be worse? Living with them was already the worst. After a few minutes, we couldn’t hear dogs barking anymore. Mama said it was safe to walk.

It was very dark. At home, I use the lantern for light. Out here, I had no idea which way to go.

“Mama, how do you know where to meet Daddy?” I asked.

“I have been planning our escape for a long time, Bibi. Your daddy and I have been practicing this route for months whenever we could sneak away from the plantation. Remember when I would play our drum and we would sing? That was my way of telling Daddy to meet me.”

My legs were tired and my shoulder hurt from carrying our things. I wished Mama would carry me like she was Mia.

“We have to move faster and get to Daddy,” Mama said. “We have to get far away before sunrise.”

Finally, we made it to where Daddy would meet us. We waited for a long time. Daddy was supposed to show up before daylight, but he never did. With the sun coming up, Mama decided we should hide in a ditch in case people were looking for us.

My stomach began to growl. Although we had food, Mama said we couldn’t eat until nighttime. She worried that dogs trained to track fugitives like us would smell our food.

When night came, we could finally eat. Then Mama told us to take a nap while she went to look for Daddy.

“Be very still and silent,” Mama said. She kissed us before she left. I was scared. Soon I heard someone running toward us, fast. I put my arms tightly around Mia.

It was Mama. Breathing hard, she said she heard growling



in the dark. She ran. Then a branch cut the side of her leg. She sat on the ground, wiped the blood with her skirt and cried. After a while, Mama said, “Don’t worry. He’ll show up. We just have to wait a little longer.” But she seemed very sad.

An hour later, we saw Daddy walking toward us. We were all so happy. Mia started to squeal when she saw him. Mama covered Mia’s mouth and told her to quiet down. We hugged each other and whispered to Daddy that we had missed him very much.

We returned to the ditch to sleep a little. It seemed like Mama woke us up right after we dozed off. She said we had to keep moving.

Mama unfolded a piece of paper her friend, Sara, gave her before we left. It was supposed to help us. Mama stared at the paper.

“What does it say, Mama?” I asked. She shook her head.

“Mr. and Mrs. Burns did not allow me to learn how to read,” she said.

Daddy took the paper. He knew how to read, a little. One of the men who’d been enslaved with him had taught him. “It says it will take us six weeks to get to Canada, where we will no longer be anyone’s legal property. No one will ever separate us again.” We picked up our things. And as we walked, we talked about all the things we dreamed of doing when we were free. ♦

*Note: This is an abridged version of “Tomorrow Night.” The full version is available at [learningforjustice.org](https://learningforjustice.org) in our Student Texts Library.*

### Questions for Readers

#### RIGHT THERE (IN THE TEXT)

Why are Bibi and her mother packing?

#### THINK AND SEARCH (IN THE TEXT)

Why was it important that Daddy knew how to read?

#### AUTHOR AND ME (IN MY HEAD)

What kinds of things do you think Bibi and her family imagined they would do when they finally arrived in Canada and were free?

#### ON MY OWN (IN MY HEAD)

Bibi’s parents made a plan to keep their children safe even though it was dangerous to do so. Who is a person you know or have learned about who has done brave things to help people live better lives?



**BETHANY YELLOWTAIL** is the creator and CEO of B. Yellowtail, a fashion brand and artist collective based in Los Angeles. A member of the Northern Cheyenne Nation who spent her early life in Montana on the Crow Nation reservation, Yellowtail supports Native communities through collaborations with other Native artists and her own Indigenous designs.

ILLUSTRATION BY **WINK AND WONDER**



# BLACK LIVES MATTER AT SCHOOL

Black Lives Matter at School is a national coalition organizing for racial justice in education.

In this era of mass incarceration, there is a school-to-prison-pipeline system that is more invested in locking up youth than unlocking their minds. That system uses harsh discipline policies that push Black students out of schools at disproportionate rates, denies students the right to learn about their own cultures, and whitewashes the curriculum to exclude many of the struggles and contributions of Black people and other people of color.

That system is also pushing out Black teachers from schools in cities around the country. Educators in the Black Lives Matter at School movement developed these demands for the movement:

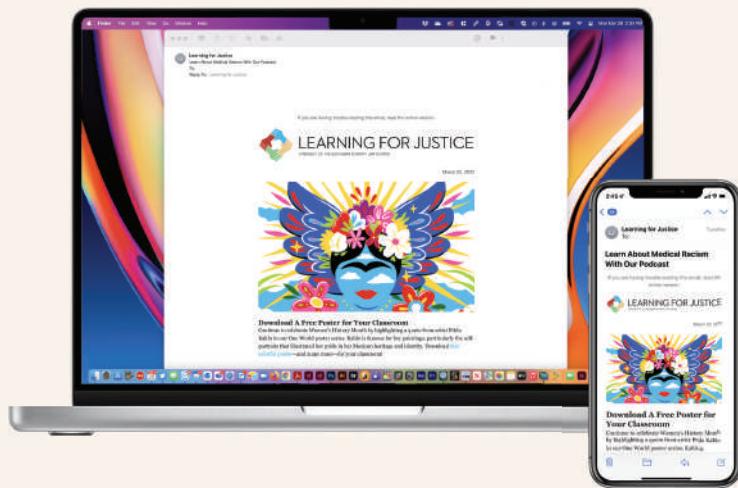
1 END “ZERO TOLERANCE”  
DISCIPLINE AND IMPLEMENT  
RESTORATIVE JUSTICE.

2 HIRE MORE BLACK TEACHERS.

3 MANDATE BLACK HISTORY AND ETHNIC  
STUDIES IN K-12 CURRICULUM.

4 FUND COUNSELORS, NOT COPS.

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