

**Social Justice and Math**  
Teaching Liberation and Love

**Meet Our New Director**  
And Other Big News!

**Black Male Educators**  
Resisting White Supremacy With Joy

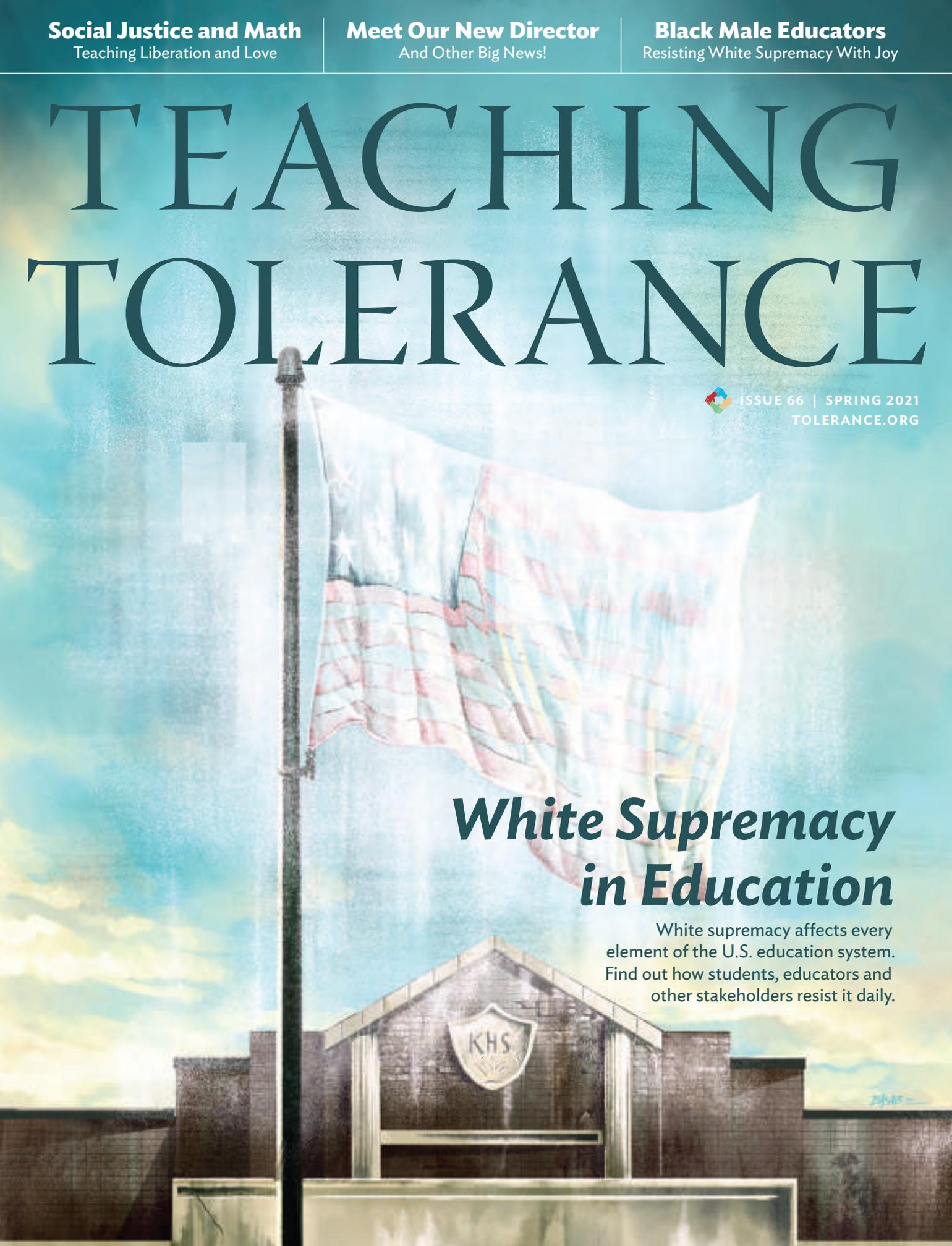
# TEACHING TOLERANCE



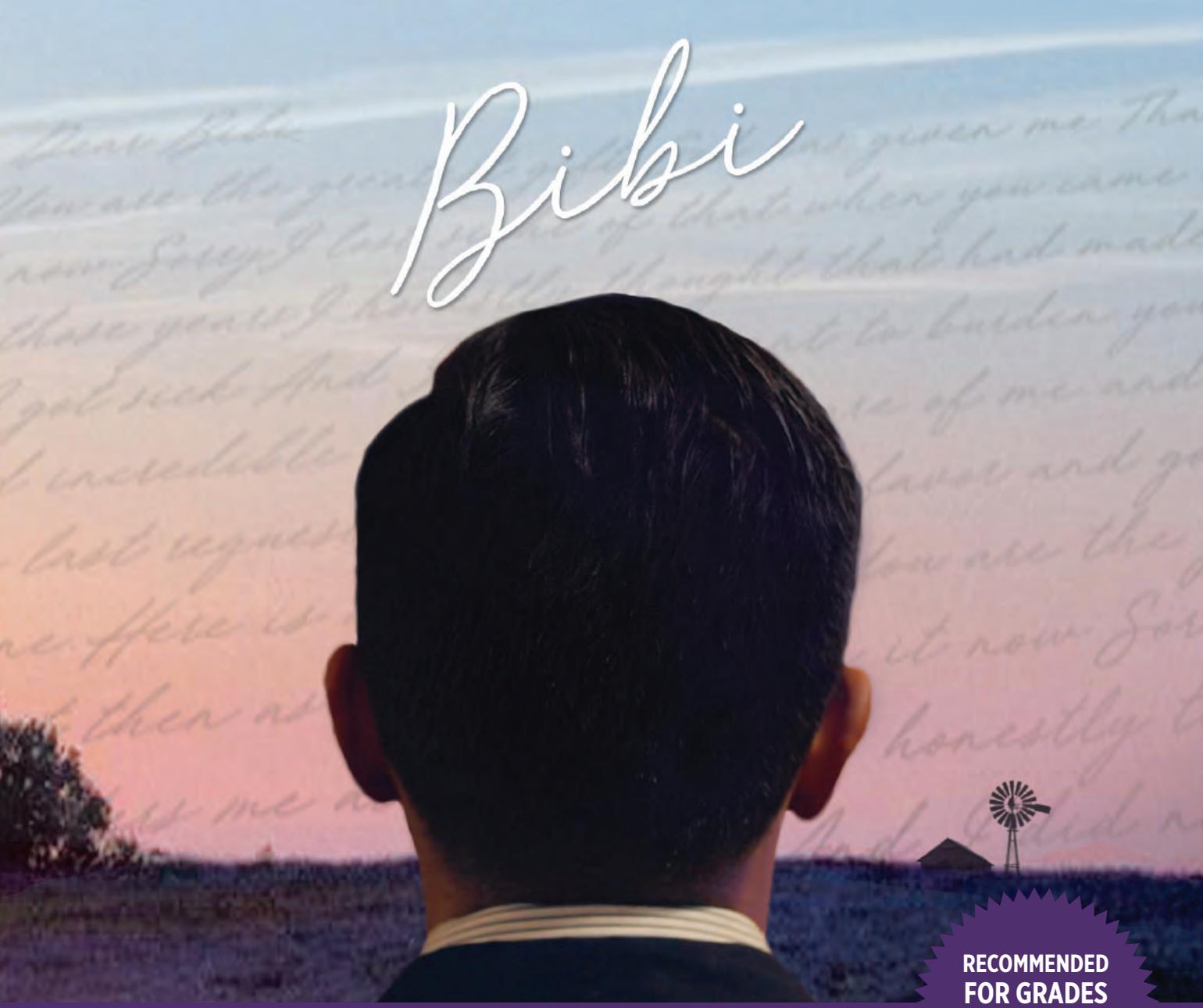
ISSUE 66 | SPRING 2021  
TOLERANCE.ORG

## *White Supremacy in Education*

White supremacy affects every element of the U.S. education system. Find out how students, educators and other stakeholders resist it daily.



# Bibi



RECOMMENDED  
FOR GRADES

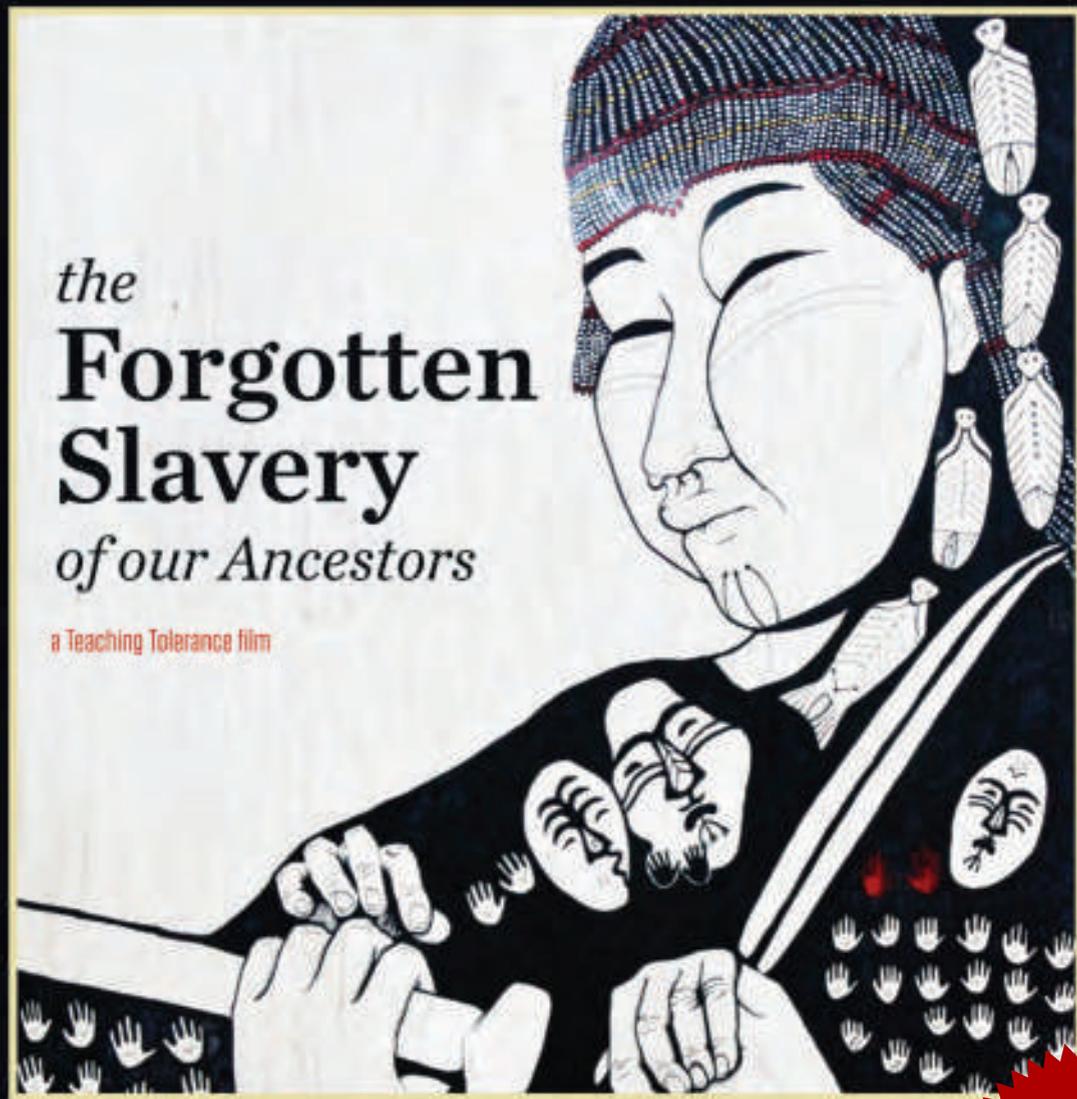
6-12

## BIBI

LESSONS FOR GRADES  
6-12 AVAILABLE

Our new streaming classroom film, *Bibi*, tells the story of Ben, a gay Latinx man, and his complicated relationship with his father and his home. The 18-minute film can inspire critical conversations about identity, culture, family, communication and belonging.

AVAILABLE FOR STREAMING ONLY AT [TOLERANCE.ORG/BIBI](https://tolerance.org/bibi)



*the*  
**Forgotten  
Slavery**  
*of our Ancestors*

a Teaching Tolerance film

RECOMMENDED  
FOR GRADES

**6-12**

# THE FORGOTTEN SLAVERY

OF OUR ANCESTORS

Indigenous enslavement predated and shaped systems of African American slavery on land that is now the United States, stretching across the continent and through the 19th century. Use this new film to introduce students to what historian Andrés Bésendez calls “our shared history.”

**AVAILABLE FOR STREAMING ONLY AT [TOLERANCE.ORG/FORGOTTENSLAVERY](https://tolerance.org/forgottenslavery)**



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ISSUE 66 | SPRING 2021

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*White supremacy affects every element of the U.S. education system.*

ILLUSTRATION BY **CARLOS BASABE**



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THE MISSION OF TEACHING TOLERANCE IS TO HELP TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS EDUCATE CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO BE ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN A DIVERSE DEMOCRACY.



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## Perspectives

*In order for us as a poor and oppressed people to become a part of a society that is meaningful, the system under which we now exist has to be radically changed.*

— ELLA BAKER



**I AM JALAYA LILES DUNN**, and I am delighted, honored and eager to be joining you as the new director of this important project of radical education, justice and democracy.

Twenty years ago, I was introduced to the Southern Poverty Law Center and Teaching Tolerance while serving as an Ella Baker Trainer for the Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools program.

An organizer and human rights activist, Baker understood the work necessary to effect systems change. “We are going to have to learn to think in radical terms,” she wrote in 1969, “getting down to and understanding the root cause. [That] means facing a system that does not lend itself to your needs and devising means by which you change that system.”

Baker’s leadership in empowering ordinary people like you and me continues to call me to this work. That’s why I’m so excited to share that the announcement of my leadership is coupled with other important news: the long-anticipated name change of Teaching Tolerance.

As we’ve written before, this project needs a name that reflects how our work has evolved over the last 30 years—from reducing prejudice to more pointedly supporting action to address injustice.

Learning for Justice is the new name for our work in the struggle for radical change in education and community!

We are called as educators, justice advocates, caregivers and students to reimagine and reclaim our education system so that it is inclusive and just.

In shifting from Teaching Tolerance to Learning for Justice, we’re offering

an urgent call to action: We must learn, grow and wield power *together*.

That’s how we will make justice real in our lives and in the lives of the students, families, educators and communities we serve.

The rollout of our new name will take place over the upcoming months. You will start seeing changes on our website and social media accounts, and gradually in our publications, lessons and other resources. The next time you read this magazine, it will be called *Learning for Justice*.

That’s why we’re so proud that the final issue of *Teaching Tolerance* is also a good look at the work we’ll be doing as Learning for Justice.

In this issue, we highlight stories across the wide spectrum of education, examining the ways systems and institutions perpetuate racism and white supremacy.

Learning from one another is how we begin to determine what justice looks like in schools. In this issue, you’ll have the opportunity to learn from student activists, Black male educators, education professors, math educators, school administrators, grassroots organizers, policy and legislative advocates and others.

But learning is only a first step. As Frederick Douglass wrote, “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”

Together, the voices in this issue demand radical change, challenging white supremacy in school and teacher education curricula, school discipline policies, school facilities and classroom climates.

Radical change is a persistent and protracted process of discourse, debate, consensus, reflection and struggle. The stories in this issue reveal the inner workings of this process.

Read on to hear from Black students and recent alumni fighting to reclaim and rename schools named after Robert E. Lee. Hear what #DisruptTexts co-founder Lorena Germán has to say about anti-racism and decolonized classrooms. Meet the activists working to ensure all students can find themselves in their curricula. Learn how Black male educators are finding—and making—space for joy. And join our advisory board to consider the significant progress toward equity you and your school can make in just 100 days.

We’re pleased to share this issue of our magazine with you. We can’t think of a better way to say goodbye to Teaching Tolerance and begin the work of Learning for Justice.

We’re grateful to all of you who have worked alongside us for so long. And we look forward to continuing our work together and learning for justice with you.

—Jalaya Liles Dunn



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SPRING 2021



SEASON 3  
OF THE **TEACHING  
HARD HISTORY**  
PODCAST IS NOW  
STREAMING!

# TEACHING HARD HISTORY: AMERICAN SLAVERY

## KEY CONCEPT VIDEOS

*A series of 10 videos for teaching and learning  
about the history of slavery in the United States.*

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 [tolerance.org/hardhistory](https://tolerance.org/hardhistory).

Watch the videos at [tolerance.org/thhvideos](https://tolerance.org/thhvideos).

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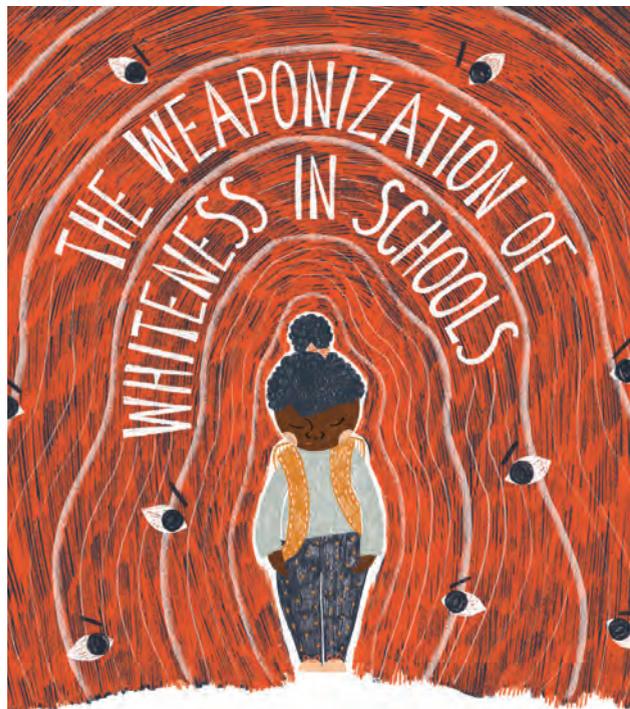


ILLUSTRATION BY MEENAL PATEL

*Teaching Tolerance 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 [editor@tolerance.org](mailto:editor@tolerance.org) or reaching out via Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.*

## TT'S NEWEST FILM: THE FORGOTTEN SLAVERY OF OUR ANCESTORS

I am on the edge of a NM Reservation. My grandma talked about her grandmother being taken from her family and was enslaved. I teach near a reservation and 75% of my students are Native American. This is a great start to the silenced voices of Native Americans. Thanks. My students felt the clip was informative and interesting. They felt angry, sad, hurt. ...

—AMANDA  
CORAMAE GALLEGOS  
[VIA FACEBOOK](#)

## Reader Reactions

In our Fall 2020 issue, Senior Writer Coshandra Dillard wrote about the need for white educators to recognize and disrupt a harmful pattern. Read her story “The Weaponization of Whiteness in Schools” at [t-t.site/whiteness-in-schools](https://t-t.site/whiteness-in-schools).

Great article for self-reflection on how we use our power and authority as white folks.

—@AMYEICHMN  
[VIA TWITTER](#)

This happens way too often, and it's past time to call it out and actually address the issue! ‘When white educators weaponize whiteness to affirm their authority, they can change the trajectory of a Black child’s life.’

—SHANDREKA RANKIN  
[VIA FACEBOOK](#)

This is a reality at all levels of a hierarchy. Weaponization of Whiteness pushed me out of admin.

—@MYRNARELL\_MYRNA  
[VIA TWITTER](#)

## THE VALUE OF EDUCATOR SELF-CARE WEBINAR

Thank you for the practical tips and resources. I felt refreshed after engaging with the webinar, something I don't say very often!

—@DANIELTR83  
[VIA TWITTER](#)

I just wanted to say thank you so much. I attended your Educator Self Care Webinar this summer and it inspired me to start an Educators 4 Self Care club at my university for our Elementary Education program! It was incredible

and I learned so much can't wait to reach more people spreading the message of Self-Love and Self-Care 🧡

—@EDUCATORS4SELF.CARE  
[VIA INSTAGRAM](#)

## AN ANTI-RACIST INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR TIFFANY JEWELL

What a beautiful interview with Tiffany Jewell about her amazing book!! It is important that we as teachers don't avoid conversations about racism and a book like this can make having those conversations less



My 1st grader begins virtual learning tomorrow and a guest room closet will serve as his school nook. ... I framed three [One World Posters] to brighten the space. Full disclosure: adaptability is NOT my strength, but I'm noticing that even a small project where I get to create beauty has helped me walk into the changes with less anxiety.

—@FULLPALETTECOACHING



daunting. Teaching should be an anti racist act!!

—@ELLIEGAUDIN  
VIA TWITTER

**ONLINE ARTICLE: “ACTIVE LISTENING MUST BE THE NORM”**

This article seems very relevant for our entire community. I’m sitting and reflecting on it, and encourage us all to do the same ... and listening to many, with curiosity.

—@LLAPRINCIPAL  
VIA TWITTER

*Editor’s note: Watch TT webinars free on demand at [tolerance.org/webinars](http://tolerance.org/webinars).*

**PUBLISHED ONLINE: “ANTI-RACISM WORK: ARE YOU IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL?”**

I read this a few days ago and the key questions were a good starting point for reflecting on how I commit to long term culture shift in my craft,

not just ‘box checking.’ #teachallhistory

—@MRSKWELLSKMS  
VIA TWITTER

Self-examination is so important as institutions move to adopt anti-racist work. So often these efforts are purely performative and rarely rooted in ideals of justice or equality. Without this praxis we are still mired in quicksand of cognitive dissonance. #RootedinPraxis

—@MIXXMOMMA  
VIA TWITTER

**THE BEAUTY OF BIBI**

It should be the work of every educator to help students feel acceptance, pride, & peace in their own intersectional identities. This story sparks critical conversations, asks how we communicate belonging, & how we respond when others share their story.

—@KIMBERLYWAITE8  
VIA TWITTER

Amazing short film 🎬 The story telling, timing, connections made were perfectly executed! Themes of intersectionality and culture captured beautifully 🥰🍌🍌

—@PERSAUD\_C  
VIA TWITTER

**ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

This is all ... indoctrination, not education. ‘Inclusive education’ is not happening in Saudi Arabia, or India, or Nigeria, or China. Their students are learning vital knowledge to make them competitive and equipped to deal in a world which is not a warm, fuzzy safe space, whilst ours become weaker and more ignorant by the day.

—PIXIE LEYTED  
VIA FACEBOOK

**LOVE FOR “WHY I TEACH”**

“Love it!! Our children need to know there are others out

there like them ... enduring biases that will try to limit or silence their voice (because it’s described as too loud, too expressive, or it’s too blunt). I stand with you in support! #everyvoice

—@SHEBELYA  
VIA TWITTER

“The world needs you to sprinkle your Black girl magic any- and everywhere you go. Don’t let anyone bind you to their low expectations or stereotypes. Don’t let anything stop you from sharing your magic with the world.” Mrs. Wright, you’re making the world a better place.

—@MAEC4ED  
VIA TWITTER

**TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!** Have an opinion about something you see in *Teaching Tolerance* magazine or on our website? Email us at [editor@tolerance.org](mailto:editor@tolerance.org) with the subject line “Letter to the Editor.” Or mail a letter to 400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36104.

## Ask Teaching Tolerance



**Q** My school has gone back and forth between hybrid, in-person and virtual learning due to COVID. What can I do to create structure and stability for my students (and myself)?

All of us—including teachers, school staff, caregivers and students—are facing uncertainty almost daily amid the ongoing pandemic. But there are little ways you can create routines and structures that can be easily implemented in person or virtually. Think about activities like one-minute check-ins, building in a few minutes every hour for a short wellness activity or a game, and quick writes on short prompts for students to focus their thoughts. Give students time to process and take deep breaths. These routines will help ensure that, no matter the format or venue in which you'll be meeting, students can come with consistent

expectations. Bring parents and caregivers into the routine by giving students discussion questions they can talk about after school and then—if they choose—discuss in class.

In addition, please remember you cannot be a consistent presence for students if you aren't taking care of yourself. Along with activities for students, make self-care a part of your routine. That can take many forms; only you know what works best for you. You can check out our webinar *The Value of Educator Self-care* for ideas and inspiration.

**Even though election season is over, my students are still confused by the conflicting and false**

**information they find online. How can I remain nonpartisan and objective while giving them the tools to identify misinformation and think critically about sources they encounter?**

Digital literacy is only increasing in its importance. Your students will continue to encounter false information, opinions framed as facts and sources with varying degrees of trustworthiness. We hope you'll advocate on their behalf with your administration to ensure you are supported in your efforts to teach this critical subject. By teaching digital literacy, you can equip your students to better understand the ways information

makes its way to them and to look at that information critically and with a healthy dose of skepticism. These skills are applicable in any subject area—and can be incorporated into your existing curriculum. In math, for example, you can have students compare data from a range of sources to see whether its presentation is being skewed to favor a particular position.

Educators in any subject can also teach about the algorithms that result in curated filter bubbles and emphasize the importance of distinguishing between fact and opinion. You can talk with students about ways to take action and push back against misinformation. This can include asking clarifying questions, citing reliable sources, and challenging misleading or harmful language and information. Tools like the TT Digital Literacy Framework or Stanford History Education Group resources can be helpful references as you dive into this work. Collaborating with your colleagues to develop a common language will ensure students are hearing consistent messaging throughout the school day when it comes to digital literacy.

### ASK TEACHING TOLERANCE!

**Need the kind of advice and expertise only Teaching Tolerance can provide? Email us at [editor@tolerance.org](mailto:editor@tolerance.org) with "Ask TT" in the subject line.**



ARTICLE 6.30.20 // RACE &amp; ETHNICITY, RIGHTS &amp; ACTIVISM

## Anti-Racist Work in Schools: Are You in it for the Long Haul?

BY ELIZABETH KLEINROCK

As an anti-bias anti-racist (ABAR) facilitator and educator-in-progress, I've had the opportunity to partner with public, charter and independent schools across the United States and can tell you firsthand that there is no "one size fits all" approach to this work. There are, however, a number of things schools should consider as they create objectives for the short and long term.

ABAR is trending in mainstream spaces, and more schools are recognizing its importance and reaching out for resources and training. I do believe that it's better late than never, but schools must be intentional and thoughtful as they begin this life-long commitment.

While there is urgency in ABAR work, urgency cannot be prioritized over relationships or centering the voices and opinions of marginalized community members. Without careful thought and planning, schools risk alienating Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) stakeholders, reinforcing white saviorism and derailing the possibility of future efforts. Standards and skills can always be retaught, but school culture is too important to get wrong. Your north star is always centering your most marginalized and under-resourced students.

### And a reader replied...

Another challenging but important article. How do I ensure that my focus on this work is a way of doing business, not a short term response? A question for me to consider.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE HERE:

[t-t.site/long-haul](https://t-t.site/long-haul)

### ARTICLE SPOTLIGHT

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



**All Students Need  
Anti-racism Education**  
BY CHRISTINA TORRES



**Pandemic Pedagogy:  
A Call to Educators to  
Bring Their Classrooms  
to Reality**  
BY DR. KIARA LEE-HEART



**The Burden of Critical  
Active Conscience**  
BY DR. SHANTÁ  
R. ROBINSON



**To Sustain the Tough  
Conversations, Active  
Listening Must Be  
the Norm**  
BY CHRISTOPHER  
HOWELL

### DID YOU KNOW? DID YOU KNOW?

When reviewing disciplinary records, a 2015 study found, teachers of all races were more likely to label students with stereotypically "Black names" as troublemakers after a second infraction and recommend harsher punishments for them.  
—PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE



*Gerardo Muñoz teaches middle and high school social studies at the Denver Center for International Studies in Denver, Colorado. He is the 2021 Colorado Teacher of the Year.*

# Returning to the Place of Origin

One assumption educators often make is that independence and individual initiative are the highest aspirations of education. We must ensure, conventional thinking goes, that students are able to complete work independently. Once we provide them with tools and a “gradual release of responsibility,” they will thrive.

This moribund, “every-one-for-themselves” mindset has intensified with COVID-19, particularly in communities that are fully remote. There, individual professionals and learners have only themselves to lean on to get through this crisis.

But recently, watching an abolitionist webinar with Dr. Bettina L. Love, Dr. Gholdy Muhammad and Dr. Dena Simmons, I arrived at the realization that this moment isn’t about simply leaning into the “new normal.”

It’s actually about returning to the place of origin: family and community. It’s about rediscovering our humanity and considering what it means to find a way forward from that space.

In that space, we are our most elemental selves. I was not raised in close proximity to my Indigenous Mexican ancestors, but I know that in times of difficulty we return to each other.

We connect and talk and, though the problems of the world are many and overwhelming, we sit in the community space that is help for us. I’ve taken this elemental idea and made it my practice as a descendant of the original people of the Americas. When things become challenging and overwhelming, I have to come back to my place of origin, to the people and communities that inspire me to continue on.

When young people can develop the ability to connect with others and act on behalf of and in solidarity with a larger community, then they can not only thrive in their own lives and paths but also uplift those around them. A collectivist mindset disrupts the alienating prioritization of the individual.

Over 20 years ago, under the tutelage of brilliant and generous educators, I decided that students collaborating and addressing real issues in authentic ways was my greatest aspiration. I participated in project-based programs and initiated, in the spirit of the Mississippi Freedom Schools, the expectation that “this is a classroom for talking. We talk here.”

My students over the years have thrived when they have been expected to connect, communicate,

## 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 [submissions@tolerance.org](mailto:submissions@tolerance.org).

collaborate and act as a community.

Needless to say, this culture was completely disrupted—even, for a time, destroyed—by COVID-19 quarantines and shutdowns. It seemed that collaboration would be the last thing we could strive for.

In fact, in the last year, the teaching landscape has changed so dramatically that it feels presumptuous for me to describe any strategy or method that I have used to engage the largely muted and hidden student community in front of me.

But if school closures and distance learning have offered me anything constructive, it is a reaffirmation that education is not simply about individual students listening to instructions. Teaching is not just about being a taskmaster, assigning things, collecting them and moving on. Even our technology-driven Gen Z-ers complain that they are tired of screens and doing “busy work,” which is code for “work that has no authentic application to the world in which I exist.”

They miss their peers.

We miss them.

In one of my classes, after students collaborated on a project examining virtual communities during the pandemic, one even commented, “This was really helpful; seeing other people’s projects made me feel less alone.”

So my challenge to myself is this: to center all I do in my place of origin.

Community. Conversation.

Asking my students what is and what isn’t working in my remote class. Offering multiple ways to engage—whether through innovative chat rooms, games or shared playlists—and constantly gathering and applying feedback.

I am planning less but building more. Because now, more than ever, we need authentic spaces in which students can consider their humanity—and community.



ARTICLE 9.17.20 // RACE & ETHNICITY, GENDER & SEXUAL IDENTITY

## Stop Talking in Code: Call Them Black Boys

BY DR. DARYL HOWARD

The phrase [“Black males”] brings into our schools a historical stigma and all of the resultant baggage of societal misconceptions that come along with it. The stereotype sets the stage for low expectations and underachievement and the need for highly controlled spaces and zero-tolerance policies.

As an educator who happens to be a Black man, I cringe every time I hear the term, as I see the personhood being stripped from the child or student described. If one is talking about the opportunity gap, why should educators care about a phrase that doesn’t indicate a real person but merely a descriptor for data? Why would they adjust their pedagogy and practice for a mere statistical term? The same thinking exists for reports, scheduling, articulation, referrals and discussions in conference rooms, teachers’ lounges or school parking lots.

What I’m trying to do here is bring attention to the singular coding of “Black males,” as opposed to the nuanced, varied and real human lives of Black boys.



### And a reader replied...

Wow! Such subtle, yet pervasive biases built right into the vernacular. Thank you for sharing.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE HERE:

[t-t.site/black-boys](https://t-t.site/black-boys)

## Demystifying the Process

Over the course of her career, Veronica Menefee taught students from Head Start to the college level.

Today, she is a special education consultant working with schools, community organizations, students and caregivers within the Baltimore Metropolitan area. Late last year, Menefee took time from her work—transformed, like all else, by COVID-19—to speak with Teaching Tolerance. We've edited this conversation for length and clarity.

### What first sparked your interest in special education?

I had a cousin with special needs who ended up in the same high school with me. She was a year behind me. I could see classmates who didn't realize that she and I were related—they would make fun of her and say all kinds of things. One day I just had to speak up.

I said, "You do realize we are related, and she's no different than you or me? She just learns a little bit differently." From that point on, I knew I needed to be in education. I didn't know at that point that I was going to choose special education.

I started out in 2000 as an English teacher for high school. By 2016, I'd taught on every level from Head Start to college. Within these experiences, I was able to see how important special education is in terms of helping students achieve their greatest potential. There has to be a partnership between home and school that helps to shift perspectives, empowering parents—which ultimately benefits the students.



*Veronica Menefee is a special education consultant in Baltimore, Maryland. She is also a member of the Teaching Tolerance Advisory Board.*

### What do you wish people knew about special education?

I wish that people understood that special educators have added job requirements. Most of the time, you will work as a classroom teacher with a hefty caseload of students to monitor, with all of the meetings and responsibilities that already come with being a special educator.

You are responsible for doing the informal and formal testing,

collaborating with the parents, speaking with the teachers at the school and helping structure the meetings.

Special education is not just about a document. There is a student whose name is on that paper who is a real person, and we are doing the best we can to give that child the services that are needed.

We want to give support. It might come in a 504, which provides lighter services than an IEP [Individualized

## Student Reads

Our free, online, searchable Student Text Library is packed with classroom-ready texts for K-12 educators. Each is aligned with TT's topics and our social justice domains and accompanied by a set of text-dependent questions. The text library includes informational texts, images, even videos and songs. Here are a few of our favorite poems to share with students.

### This Little Light of Mine (K-2)

Introduce this anthem of the civil rights movement to students by playing the included audio recording as they read the lyrics.

[t-t.site/light-of-mine](http://t-t.site/light-of-mine)

### We Live by What We See at Night (3-5)

Have students examine this poem's rich imagery about Puerto Rico to better understand the role of place and heritage in each of our identities.

[t-t.site/see-at-night](http://t-t.site/see-at-night)

### Sure You Can Ask Me A Personal Question (6-8)

Encourage students to articulate the unspoken as this poem's speaker anticipates and refutes stereotypes about Indigenous identity and experience.

[t-t.site/personal-question](http://t-t.site/personal-question)

### Hair (9-12)

Share this video of National Poetry Slam champion Elizabeth Acevedo tracing the intersections of history and identity to explain why "you can't fix what was never broken."

[t-t.site/hair](http://t-t.site/hair)

Education Plan]. Students can also have instructional supports, and there can be conversations with teachers to facilitate what these will look like. It's not that we want to give an IEP. That is always the last resort because intervention should be attempted within the classroom first.

It is important for everyone to understand that an IEP is a process. It starts with a parent, teacher or other school personnel expressing a concern. The next step is to do an informal meeting to see if all interventions have been put in place. The ultimate goal in education is to have all students succeed. And within special education, we want to give the student resources and support to thrive and be able to be taken off of the IEP.

My job is to clarify to parents what an IEP is and how it will benefit their student. I don't want parents afraid of giving their child this additional help because of labels. As educators, we should be able to identify a struggling student early to provide needed assistance.

### What do you love most about your job?

I love it all! I especially enjoy workshops where I can impart knowledge and assist the parents in finding the best ways to support their students and answer

questions regarding special education that they were afraid to ask before. Many parents say afterwards, "Thank you so much; I didn't know what was possible. I didn't know I could do this and that there was help available." Parents need advocates who are going to join them and equip them with the tools to empower their students. I make a difference by doing the workshops, hearing parent questions and then following up with answers and resources.

Demystifying the process is what I always set out to do before, during and after the IEP process. I like to see the calm come over the parents' faces, especially those parents who didn't know they had specific rights when it comes to special education. Special education students and their parents and guardians deserve equity within the educational environment, and it is my job to work with the team to make sure that happens.



According to a 2016 study, when high school students at risk of dropping out enrolled in ethnic studies courses, their attendance and grade point averages increased—particularly in math and science courses.

—STANFORD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

## FREE STUFF!

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

### News Literacy Project

Offering a variety of free classroom resources and professional development for educators, the News Literacy Project is a nonprofit dedicated to helping students build the skills they need to be critical consumers of news.

[newslit.org](http://newslit.org)

### The Quarry

From the poetry nonprofit Split This Rock, *The Quarry* is a database of over 500 poems with transformative themes. Searchable by language, poet identity, theme and more, these poems for justice will inform and inspire students.

[splitthisrock.org/poetry-database](http://splitthisrock.org/poetry-database)

### Double Victory Education Guide

A companion to the Lucasfilm documentary streaming free on YouTube, the *Double Victory Education Guide* includes lessons about the Tuskegee Airmen for students in grades 6-12.

[lucasfilm.com/tuskegeearmen](http://lucasfilm.com/tuskegeearmen)

### BLM at School

With resources for all educators from early childhood through high school, Black Lives Matter at School offers a wealth of syllabi, texts, lesson plans and more.

[blacklivesmatterschool.com/curriculum](http://blacklivesmatterschool.com/curriculum)



## ACTION

## Unpacking the Social Justice Standards: Action

The Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards are the anchor standards and learning outcomes created to guide teachers in curriculum development and make schools more just, equitable and safe. Our standards are designed to be used alongside state and Common Core State Standards in all content areas to reduce prejudice and bias and advocate for collective action.

These standards are divided into four domains: identity, diversity, justice and action. This final entry of a series that began in the Spring 2019 issue of *Teaching Tolerance* walks through the “action” domain to help you give students the skills to take what they have learned about identity, diversity and justice and apply it by taking action in their communities.



## Understanding Action

### What Is Action?

- Behavior, conduct, an act of will
- The bringing about of an alteration by force or through a natural agency

*Merriam-Webster.com and Dictionary.com*

In the context of the Social Justice Standards, “action” includes taking steps to honor and celebrate identity and diversity, as well as taking steps to bring about justice.

## Exploring Action

In the feature “We Won’t Wear the Name,” later in this issue, TT Senior Writer Coshandra Dillard tells the stories of students and alumni who took action to change the names of schools honoring Robert E. Lee.

The story explains how the students and recent graduates of these schools acted against an injustice they saw, even though they were at times intimidated or even threatened for using their voices.

When talking about action with students, it’s important to remember that anyone can find a way to take action against injustice—students included. Throughout history, change has happened not because heroes have acted alone but because communities have acted together.

To introduce students to the domain of action, you can adapt our teaching strategy “Say Something.” Put students into pairs and have them take turns answering the following questions:

- What counts as action?
- What do you think motivates people to take action against injustice?
- When is a time you or someone you know has taken action to address an inequity or injustice?

Each student should have a minute to ask follow-up or clarifying questions. After a few minutes, pairs can share out with the class. To explore examples of action, you can use some readings from our text library. For example, K-5 students can read the story “Gloria and Rosa Make Beautiful Music” about two students who work together to raise money for a school music program. They can consider the following questions:

- What injustice do Gloria and Rosa see? What does Gloria’s school have that Rosa’s school does not?
- What obstacles do Gloria and Rosa face when they decide to take action?
- What action do Gloria and Rosa finally take? How will it address the injustice they have recognized?

Students in grades 6–12 can read about a different form of action with the informational text “The First Americans,” a 1927 letter to the mayor of Chicago calling for better teaching of Indigenous history. They can discuss these questions:

- What injustice do the letter writers identify? What examples do they name?
- What action are they taking against this injustice?
- Do you think this injustice has been addressed? Why or why not? How are people today working to fight similar injustices? How might you?

Finally, have students discuss the concept of action together. Divide students into groups of three or four and ask each group to brainstorm answers to this question: “What are some of the ways young people have taken action to fight for justice?”

Have students record their responses and, using our teaching strategy “Text Graffiti,” have them respond to one another’s ideas. (This strategy can work in class by having students record their responses on graph paper or remotely by having them record their responses in a shared document.)

After a few minutes, bring the class back together and have them share ideas that stood out to them. Discuss the following questions:

- What are some reasons that prevent people from taking action?
- Do people have an obligation to take action against injustice, even if it doesn’t directly affect them? Why or why not?

## Action Standards

### Anchor Standards 16–20 of the Social Justice Standards

16. Students will express empathy when people are excluded or mistreated because of their identities and concern when they themselves experience bias.
17. Students will recognize their own responsibility to stand up to exclusion, prejudice and injustice.
18. Students will speak up with courage and respect when they or someone else has been hurt or wronged by bias.
19. Students will make principled decisions about when and how to take a stand against bias and injustice in their everyday lives and will do so despite negative peer or group pressure.
20. Students will plan and carry out collective action against bias and injustice in the world and will evaluate what strategies are most effective.

Next, consider how the action standards show up in the following scenarios.

#### Scenario #1

Marcus has noticed some of his classmates using phrases such as “That’s so gay” or “Don’t be gay” when joking around. He has also noticed that some of his queer friends tend to get quiet or walk away when these classmates are nearby. One day, Marcus finds his classmates after school and asks if he can talk with them. He explains that equating being gay with something shameful demeans people who are LGBTQ and can make them feel uncomfortable or unwelcome. Marcus shares that his dads are gay, and he says very clearly that jokes about gay people aren’t OK. After his classmates apologize, he invites them to their school’s GSA meeting the following week.

➤ Which of the five action standards are demonstrated in Marcus’ conversation with his classmates?

#### Scenario #2

Kia is a Deaf sixth grader who wants to join her school’s chess club. But Mr. Blake, the club sponsor, tells her she probably shouldn’t because she “just wouldn’t be able to participate on the same level as the other students.” Kia challenges Mr. Blake by telling him that this is unfair and unjust.

Catherine has been in the chess club ever since she started middle school. Now, as an eighth grader, she is the leader of the club. She witnesses the conversation between Kia and Mr. Blake. After Kia leaves the room, Catherine finds Kia and asks how she can support her. Kia tells Catherine that it’s critical to create safe spaces for all students in their school, regardless of their ability. With Catherine’s help, Kia organizes the other members of the chess club to boycott meetings. The news of the student protest eventually makes it to some parents and guardians, who decide to sponsor a new chess club. They work with the school to ensure that a sign language interpreter is available at all of the club meetings moving forward.

➤ Which of the five action standards are demonstrated in how Kia communicates both with Mr. Blake and Catherine?

➤ How do Kia’s and the club members’ actions illustrate their understanding of the connection between justice and action?

## Essential Questions

You can incorporate the action standards into your curriculum by writing essential questions for your units of study. You’ll find two examples for different content areas below.

### Sixth Grade Science

A.19, A.20: How can the work of young people such as Mari Copeny (also known as Little Miss Flint) be used as an example for students taking action in fighting for environmental justice?

Answers will vary. Mari Copeny rose to prominence advocating for safer water in her hometown of Flint, Michigan. She helped bring Flint’s water issue into the national spotlight by writing to then-President Obama. Through her activism, she has raised awareness for other cities across the country impacted by pollution and climate change.

To take action in their own communities, students can test the water purity at their homes or schools or in nearby waterways. They can plan ways to take action, including designing campaigns to write or call elected officials, regulatory bodies and private corporations.

### High School Math

A.16, A.18: How can students analyze data about differences in school budgets and resources to advocate for equity?

Have your students research publicly available data on school budgets. Start with your own school. How much gets spent every year on facilities? Maintenance? Supplies? Technology? Staff? Then, have them compare that data with other schools in your district or city. What is similar? What is different? What inferences could be made about the disparities in budgets? Have your students brainstorm ways to address inequities. You could even share the Spring 2020 *Teaching Tolerance* story “They Deserve Better,” about students in one underfunded Mississippi high school who organized to rally support for a local bond issue that funded a renovation of their building.

Now you try! Write an essential question based on one of the five action standards for your own grade level or content area.

### Additional Resources

Our free film *Mighty Times: The Children’s March* tells the story of how, in 1963, young people in Alabama banded together to protest segregation—and won significant victories.

In the Fall 2020 story “School as Sanctuary,” TT Senior Writer Cory Collins highlights educators, school leaders and advocates who pushed to gain stronger protections for immigrant students and their families. The accompanying toolkit provides concrete ways you can take action to support immigrant students and families in your school community.

And “Responding to Hate and Bias in the West,” a story by TT Senior Writer Coshandra Dillard published in the Spring 2020 issue, explains how a group of parents and caregivers worked together to fight racism in their children’s Las Vegas school.

# BUILDING RESILIENCE & CONFRONTING RISK IN THE COVID-19 ERA

A new guide from the Southern Poverty Law Center and American University's Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab offers parents and caregivers tangible steps to counter the threat of online radicalization.

## THIS GUIDE CAN HELP YOU:

- Understand what online radicalization is and why should you care.
- Identify new risks in the COVID-19 era.
- Recognize warning signs.
- Understand why young people are drawn to extremist groups.
- Engage and empower young people.
- Respond to hate.
- Get help for children at risk for radicalization.



Download the  
free guide at  
[splcenter.org/PERIL](https://splcenter.org/PERIL)



# The Fight for Ethnic Studies

Challenging white supremacy  
in curriculum.

BY TINA VASQUEZ ILLUSTRATION BY KATTY HUERTAS

SPRING 2021 **19**

**ON THE LAST DAY OF CALIFORNIA'S LEGISLATIVE SEASON**, September 30, Gov. Gavin Newsom vetoed AB 331, a bill that would have mandated ethnic studies as a high school graduation requirement. Proponents across the state—including educators who had been deeply involved in the fight for ethnic studies for decades—were shocked by the development. At the crux of Newsom's decision was continued disagreement over the proposed model ethnic studies curriculum, which inspired contentious public debate over the framing of history and concerns over who is included and *excluded* as part of ethnic studies.

Throughout the state, rationales supporting the proposed curriculum relied on a common definition of ethnic studies as “the critical and interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity and indigeneity with a focus on the experiences and perspectives of people of color in the United States.” In the decades since it first emerged from California in the 1960s, advocates nationwide have faced an uphill battle in getting the public, school districts and state legislatures to support and adopt a curriculum that includes the perspectives of groups historically denied the rights outlined in the United States' founding documents. While the veto of AB 331 was shocking, the bill was a bold step in attempting to address the persistent erasure that students of color in California experience—and it has reignited crucial conversations about the role of ethnic studies across the nation.

### Gaining a Foothold

Newsom's veto was an “unexpected blow,” said Dr. Dale Allender, associate professor of language, literacy and culture in the Department of Teaching Credentials at California State University-Sacramento. After all, if ethnic studies could not be mandated in its birthplace of California, what does that mean for those living in states that have been hostile toward ethnic studies?

But all hope is not lost, said Allender, co-editor of what is believed to be the nation's first high school ethnic studies textbook, *Our Stories in Our Voices*.

“The most recent activism fighting anti-Black racism resurfaced the importance of Black studies and the ethnic studies movement. When AB 331 passed the state Legislature, it was a full circle moment,” Allender said. “You see the same sentiments present in the push for ethnic studies today

*In 1968, members of the Black Student Union and Third World Liberation Front at San Francisco State College protested for five months until the school established the nation's first College of Ethnic Studies.*



AP IMAGES



**It was so beautiful to see students make sense of the world and to feel affirmed and seen and feel like their culture matters.**

—MAYRA ALMARAZ-DE SANTIAGO



as you did in the '60s. The recent activism pushed things forward quickly, and people are committed to seeing this through.”

This includes educators like Dr. Theresa Montaña, a professor of Chicana/o studies at California State University Northridge. Montaña was one of the leads on AB 1460, which successfully created an ethnic studies graduation requirement in the Cal State system. She was also an advisory committee member for the first iteration of the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

Montaña said that when fights for ethnic studies are successful, it's the result of a coalition of caregivers, community members and teacher activists working together, all of whom understand there will be no “easy wins.”

“When you're pushing against systemic racism, it takes years to actually attain something, and I think one of the reasons ethnic studies is gaining such a foothold right now is because of the Black Lives Matter movement,” Montaña said.

Many teachers involved in the fight for ethnic studies talk about the continued importance of activism, protest and community coalitions—the same strategies that led to ethnic studies as we know it. In 1968, the Black Student Union and a coalition of other student groups known as the Third World Liberation Front sparked a movement at San Francisco State College (now known as San Francisco State University) that would affect education for decades to come. Student

strikers spent five months protesting and performing sit-ins to call attention to the misrepresentation and disregard of Black, Indigenous and people of color in the curriculum. Their activism led to the creation of a Black studies department and the establishment of the College of Ethnic Studies.

A bulk of young people first encounter ethnic studies in college because implementing ethnic studies in K-12 education remains deeply contentious, as evidenced by the challenging, imperfect process and subsequent failure to pass California's AB 331. The proposed curriculum drew criticism from the Legislature's Jewish caucus, which questioned why Islamophobia was defined but not antisemitism. Issues were also raised by pro-Israel groups upset by the framing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Armenian Americans, Indian Americans and Sikhs objected to the model curriculum excluding their experiences.

Historically, ethnic studies in California has focused on African Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans and Native Americans. More recently, Wayne Au said, some educators have pushed to transform ethnic studies into “global education” or “multicultural education.”

Au is a professor at the School of Educational Studies at the University of Washington Bothell and an editor for the social justice teaching organization Rethinking Schools, which last year published *Rethinking Ethnic Studies*, a book offering examples of ethnic studies frameworks, classroom

practices and organizing at the school, district and statewide levels. The former high school teacher has long been involved in racial justice work in education on a national scale, and in Seattle and neighboring school districts, he conducts workshops around K-12 ethnic studies implementation.

“For some people, ethnic studies is purely a different version of multicultural education and they want something that’s going to be palatable, something that doesn’t challenge whiteness or white supremacy in schools,” Au said. “Ethnic studies is supposed to help us challenge the white supremacy in our curriculum, not aid it.”

Montaño said it’s imperative that educators work with the same definition of ethnic studies. According to the professor, there are characteristics that make ethnic studies distinct from other disciplines: its history—including where it came from and that it centers race—as well as the struggle against racism and a focus on the groups that racist policies have affected.

“If we can all operate with these understandings, ethnic studies has positive effects on the entire community,” Montaño said.

### Immeasurable Value

The academic and social benefits of ethnic studies are well documented. In 2011, the National Education Association found that when students of different ages are exposed to ethnic studies, they consistently experience “academic achievement, high level of awareness of race and racism, and positive identification with one’s own racial group.” A 2016 study by scholars at Stanford Graduate School of Education also found that a “high school ethnic studies course ... boosted attendance and academic performance of students at risk of dropping out,” *Stanford News* reports.

What is perhaps more challenging to convey is the transformation educators watch unfold in their classrooms.

“All of a sudden, there is a fire in their hearts and in their bellies. You can see them connecting the dots and begin to understand who they are and how they are in the world and the conditions that

they are living in,” Au said. “There is immeasurable value in that. You see kids start to value themselves and their communities, and they start to envision a different future for themselves.”

There is also evidence that ethnic studies propels young people to become educators. Allender said that in California, kids who experience ethnic studies in school are more likely to approach teaching as a career path. Mayra Almaraz-De Santiago, recognized with a 2018 Teaching Tolerance Award for Excellence in Teaching for her work as an ethnic studies teacher, echoes this assertion. Her ethnic studies students at Chicago’s Taft High School were voracious for more learning. They wanted an ethnic studies part two, Almaraz-De Santiago said, or asked if she could teach them ethnic studies again the following year. While she now works as a high school social science specialist for Chicago Public Schools, she maintains communications with former students, many of whom tell her they are pursuing education.

“It was so beautiful to see students make sense of the world and to feel affirmed and seen and feel like

their culture matters,” Almaraz-De Santiago said, growing emotional. “Kids would tell me I was their first Mexican American teacher and that they left my class feeling proud of their heritage. Kids told me they wanted to major in ethnic studies or that they were going to major in Latin American Studies. Ethnic studies so clearly had a profound effect on their lives.”

Even having tangential exposure to ethnic studies can change a student’s path; such is the case with Alexis Mburu, a student at Foster

High School in Tukwila, Washington. While she’s never taken an ethnic studies class, Alexis has decided to fight for other young people to have the opportunity.

In middle school, Alexis knew of a teacher who taught an ethnic studies class, but she never had the opportunity to take it. This same teacher recognized Alexis’ interest and introduced her to the NAACP and Washington Ethnic Studies Now, which advocates for ethnic studies and focuses on professional development and anti-racist

**21%**

the increase in attendance found when a group of students were enrolled in ethnic studies courses.

—STANFORD STUDY



## Ethnic studies is supposed to help us challenge the white supremacy in our curriculum, not aid it.

—WAYNE AU

training for educators who want to teach ethnic studies. Alexis is now on the youth advisory board for both organizations.

Alexis said ethnic studies “should be the standard,” noting her interest in education. “When I imagine my younger self and my younger siblings being taught the education they deserve, I see a classroom filled with truth, joy, opportunity and prosperity.”

### Best Practices—Beyond Curriculum

While the benefits of ethnic studies are clear, the path forward remains murky—especially in hostile states. However, backlash against ethnic studies can sometimes lead to progress.

In 2010 when former Arizona Governor Jan Brewer signed HB 2281 prohibiting schools from teaching courses “designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group,” it ignited a larger movement across the Southwest, prompting educators in Texas to begin fighting for ethnic studies in K-12 education.

In states where ethnic studies is treated as highly controversial, there is a hyper focus on the curriculum, said Dr. Christopher Carmona, who chairs the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies committee for implementing Mexican American Studies in pre-K-12 education. But that’s because of misconceptions about what is being taught, explained Carmona, who is also an associate professor of Mexican American Studies at the University of Texas Rio Grande

Valley. Educators have long argued that the curriculum is just one facet of ethnic studies, and of increased importance is training educators.

Teacher activist and TT advisor Tracy Castro-Gill, the executive director of Washington Ethnic Studies Now, explained that teaching ethnic studies requires a completely different approach to education and instructional practices. In the nine-module, 18-hour course she developed for educators interested in teaching ethnic studies, Castro-Gill said it’s only in module nine that curriculum even comes up.

“There’s a fundamental shift that needs to happen first in the understanding that we’re not here to create better workers; we’re here to create better engaged citizens and humans of the world,” Castro-Gill said. “You can’t do that with tidy little rows in your classroom where children only speak when they’re spoken to. It’s a lot about interrogating and deconstructing the white Eurocentric norm of the classroom and expectations of education. That’s what the professional development is based on—that and building on background knowledge about critical race theory and intersectionality and anti-racist theories.”

As the co-chair of the Sacramento State Ethnic Studies Teacher Training Credentialing Consortium, Allender facilitates and provides professional ethnic studies and social justice development for teachers in Northern California. His advice to anyone who wants to teach ethnic studies is that, first, they have to engage in a process of self-study and go through their own ethnic studies journey.

“So many of us were subjected to socio-cultural deprivation, and that causes a tremendous cognitive dissonance,” Allender said. “When you promote ethnic studies, it has to be done programmatically and personally. This work must be done in community because it is more than just readings and tests and papers and presentations. Ethnic studies is rooted in civic engagement, service learning and community collaboration. This has always been about being out in the community as much as it was about being in the books.” ♦

*Vasquez is a movement journalist who covers gender, labor, immigration and culture from North Carolina.*

# A Flaw in the Foundation



BY **NATALIE ODOM POUGH**

ILLUSTRATION  
BY **DOLA SUN**

*We can't stop white supremacy in schools until we stop it in teacher preparation programs.*

**LIKE MANY PRODUCTS** of the U.S. education system, I read *The Scarlet Letter* in high school. My English teacher practically danced around the classroom—she loved the story so much. I remember feeling conflicted. I knew some of my classmates had children. Others had unmarried mothers. The discussion felt unfair. I was left feeling dejected by a book that did not speak to me and by a lesson I knew could harm my classmates.

In that class, I learned something all teachers should understand:

“[S]chooling often asks children to be something or someone other than who they really are,” Gloria Ladson-Billings wrote in *Crossing Over to Canaan: The Journey of New Teachers in Diverse Classrooms*. “It asks them to use language other than the one they come to school with. It asks them to dismiss their community and cultural

knowledge. It erases the things that the students hold dear.”

Years later, in my own teacher training and school leadership preparation, I didn’t learn the culturally relevant pedagogy and cultural consciousness that would have helped me preserve the things my students held dear. Instead, I was taught the one-size-fits-all approach to mathematics education that has historically and disproportionately harmed students of color. I spent my first year as a teacher fumbling through multiple strategies to best serve my students.

Today, as a mathematics teacher educator, I prioritize critical conversations about building cultural consciousness and incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy.

But when I begin them, I’m frequently met with students opening their laptops, pulling

out their phones to text or just looking uninterested.

In most cases, I follow up to ask why they chose not to engage. I keep hearing the same responses:

“I thought math was a neutral content area. Why do we have to learn about culturally relevant pedagogy in this class?”

“It’s not my experience.”

“I was taught not to see color.”

### White Supremacy Culture in Teacher Preparation Programs

We know there’s an overwhelming need for teachers who are willing to “see color,” who are committed to anti-racist pedagogy. And with over 1,200 institutions offering teacher preparation programs and countless alternative certification routes, the way these future teachers are prepared to educate the next generation can be a key contributor to systemic change. Unfortunately, far too often, teacher preparation programs maintain and support white supremacy culture—and sustain it in K-12 schools.

“Culture is powerful,” writes educator and social justice activist Tema Okun, “precisely because it is so present and at the same time so very difficult to name or identify.” In her essay “White Supremacy Culture,” Okun explores the ideology that constructs and justifies racist policies, practices and behaviors. White supremacy culture, she writes, appears in any organization that is not actively and effectively working to dismantle it.

Across the United States, many in K-12 school communities are doing that work. Students are coming together

to demand they be seen, heard and respected. Teachers are working to decolonize curricula and interrogate instructional resources. Parent and family organizations are supporting students, teachers and schools through these efforts. Rather than refuting the existence of white supremacy, educators are acknowledging how it is embedded into the fiber of our nation and our schools.

Teacher preparation programs can equip future educators with the knowledge and skills to provide positive learning experiences and environments for students of color. But first, they’ll need to acknowledge, examine and work to eradicate the white supremacy culture that exists within their own programs.

### The Cost of Comfort

While explicit curriculum may push back against racist or white supremacist systems, teacher preparation programs often train white preservice teachers to expect what Okun calls “a right to comfort.” A common characteristic of white supremacy culture, the right to comfort is the “belief that those with power have a right to emotional and psychological comfort.”

It’s important to note that the K-12 teacher population is largely white, middle-class and female. White supremacy culture, by definition, works to center that whiteness. And schools of education recenter it when they limit conversations about race and racism to certain courses.

In that way, not much has changed since 2001, when

Ladson-Billings wrote, “Rather than dismantle the ‘tried and true’ practices, teacher educators believed that adding a course, a workshop or field experience on diversity would be sufficient to suggest that real change was occurring in the profession.”

*“We were taught that green is a good color for our walls and that at least 20% of our walls should be bare. But we never discussed the practices that we see in the field and how they are rooted in white supremacist ideology.”*

BREANA THOMAS

Breana Thomas, an early childhood teacher resident at Clemson University, illustrates how conversations about race and racism are often pushed to the side. In graduate school, she says, she has had one course focused on classroom management.

“We were taught that green is a good color for our walls and that at least 20% of our walls should be bare,” Thomas said. “But we never discussed the practices that we see in the field and how they are rooted in white supremacist ideology.”

Marilyn Pugh, a third-year teacher in Dekalb County, Georgia, had an experience that was different but no better. “My teacher preparation program didn’t teach classroom management,” she said. “I figured it out.”

If future educators aren’t learning about the common

disciplinary practices that disproportionately remove BIPOC students from classrooms; if they aren't taught about the role of implicit bias and adultification bias on educator perceptions of student behavior; if they aren't encouraged to trace the similarities between "zero tolerance" disciplinary policies and the "broken windows" approach to policing that has done so much damage in some communities of color, then the seeds of these racist practices can be planted even before preservice teachers complete their preparation programs.

*"Teacher education programs should weave the thread of race throughout the entire program."*

DR. KRISTEN DUNCAN



Limiting or avoiding discussions of racism and white supremacy does a disservice to students and the teaching profession. There is no clear path to understanding how to educate BIPOC students if there

is no understanding of the systemic barriers they face.

### **The Cost of Keeping the Peace**

Closely aligned with the damaging expectation of a right to comfort is another characteristic of white supremacy culture: the "fear of open conflict." This fear, Okun suggests, becomes evident when "people in power are scared of expressed conflict" and equate "the raising of difficult issues with being impolite, rude, or out of line."

For some, this conflict avoidance goes so far that it shuts down an understanding of white supremacy before it can even begin. But educators who teach and normalize respectful disagreement are incorporating critical social emotional learning skills in their classrooms. And those who manage open conflict to stand up for their students demonstrate a form of bravery that needs to be recognized and appreciated.

I remember a time early in my teacher education career when a student approached me with a concern that brought her to tears. Earlier that day, following yet another police-related murder, she sat in a classroom while her mentor teacher shared her faith in the police officers in their town. The teacher told students they would always be safe if they complied with police.

I recall watching my own student struggle with not speaking up, not knowing *how* to speak up. She hurt for the students of color who had to wrestle with the conflicting statements from

their teachers and their families. She knew they had seen the media coverage that showed their teacher was wrong. But she didn't know what to do.

With no safety net, student teachers often see no way to challenge their mentors. That's why university-school partnerships and clinical practice should go beyond the traditional role of providing student teachers with exposure. Instead of avoiding "uncomfortable" or "confrontational" discussions, teacher preparation programs should teach future educators how to advocate for their students. Current teachers, school leaders and district personnel should work alongside teacher educators to discuss what is happening in schools and in local districts.

How else can we ask future teachers to engage in an educational system we expect them to change?

### **A Better Way**

Educators need support in teacher preparation programs so they can push back against white supremacy in K-12 schools. Along with teaching content areas and instructional methodology, teacher preparation programs need to provide tools to critically interrogate curricula and school policies and practices. A racial justice lens—such as the one taught in critical race theory—would equip preservice educators to recognize and interrupt racist curricula and practices and to explore critical consciousness.

"Teacher preparation programs teach for perfect-world



scenarios,” explained teacher Cornelius Blanding, “but we need real-world scenarios and strategies to overcome them.”

Blanding said he learned to approach his work with a racial equity lens through South Carolina State University’s Call Me MiSTER program. The program operates in 30 colleges and universities in and around South Carolina to increase the number of effective male teachers of color in schools across the nation.

It was gratifying, Blanding said, to unpack critical race theory and racial consciousness as future Black teachers and school leaders. Damian Williams, a fourth-year teacher and graduate of Clemson University’s Call Me MiSTER program, agreed. He attributed two courses led by Black instructors with his introduction to culturally relevant pedagogy.

“As the sole Black male in my classes,” Williams explained, “it made me so comfortable to see professors who

looked like me be intentional about their approach to preparing us to be great teachers for all students.” Williams said it was in those courses that he first grasped a philosophical outlook for teaching.

Dr. Kristen Duncan, assistant professor of education at Clemson, believes a more holistic view of race in education is critical to better equip anti-racist future educators. “Teacher education programs should weave the thread of race throughout the entire program, to where race is discussed in every single aspect [of the work],” she explained.

The Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) School of Education is one of the nation’s leading programs in education, culturally relevant pedagogy and developing anti-racist educators.

Dr. Tandra Jackson, dean of IUPUI’s School of Education, described the program’s

philosophy: “Instead of viewing themselves as managers of students,” she said, “we encourage preservice teachers to establish classroom learning environments where students build community, establish clear expectations for socially acceptable behavior, self-regulate their own behavior and interactions. And for instances when socially accepted norms are violated, then there are restorative justice practices in place.”

IUPUI’s preservice teachers learn how equity affects all aspects of the work, from curriculum to classroom management—and they learn to work through discomfort so they can directly confront the ways white supremacy manifests in schools and classrooms.

As Jackson explained, “equity and anti-oppression are centered and threaded throughout the courses in our programs.”

That kind of reimagining is exactly what’s needed. White supremacy and racism are so deeply embedded in our education system that they will not be eradicated until everyone who wants to see change is ready to accept responsibility for enacting it.

We must recognize and dismantle the deep-rooted presence of white supremacy in our institutions of learning. This is the only way to build the safe, healthy and responsive schools that all students deserve. ♦

*Pough is visiting clinical assistant professor of education at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis and a member of the Teaching Tolerance Advisory Board.*

**Rather than refuting the existence of white supremacy, educators are acknowledging how it is embedded into the fiber of our nation and our schools.**



# What it Means to Be an *Anti-racist Teacher*

Talking culturally sustaining pedagogy with Lorena Germán.

BY VAL BROWN EDITED BY CRYSTAL L. KEELS PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANNIE RAY

**LORENA GERMÁN HAS WORKED IN EDUCATION FOR NEARLY 20 YEARS.** As director of pedagogy at EduColor, chair of the National Council of Teachers of English Committee Against Racism and Bias in the Teaching of English and co-founder of Multicultural Classroom, she has advocated for culturally sustaining pedagogy and practices. Nearly three years ago, Germán joined together with educators Tricia Ebarvia, Dr. Kim Parker and Julia E. Torres to form #DisruptTexts, a grassroots movement encouraging K-12 English teachers to rethink their approach to teaching the “classics,” including deciding whether they need to teach them at all. In 2019, she published *The Anti Racist Teacher: Reading Instruction Workbook*, a resource to help educators develop anti-racist practices in their ELA classes. And late last year, Germán sat down with then-TT Professional Development Manager Val Brown to discuss the damage white supremacy causes in education—and the uplift inherent in reimagining the process. Their conversation, included here, has been edited for length and clarity.

**“Interrupting white supremacy,” “decolonizing education,” “developing abolitionist education”—people use these phrases but aren’t always sure what they mean. How would you define these terms as they relate to your practice?**

White supremacy literally means that whiteness is supreme over others. We see that present in our values as a nation, in our culture, in our ways of being and, therefore, embedded in all of our systems.

When a lot of people think of white supremacy, they connote white men in hoods on corners screaming racial slurs and doing extreme things, but white supremacy could be used interchangeably for racism.

It’s the belief system used to bring racism into action. There are many other terms in education, too, like “equity,” that are unclear to people. They do have their own definitions, but they are all related and they do depend on each other.

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*“We have to envision something that is not what many of us experienced growing up.”*



What's important is that we don't get caught up on these terms because it's less about the words and much more about the approach, the philosophy and the theory. That's why I use "culturally sustaining." I find that it's the most inclusive. Culturally sustaining tells you what I'm for—to nurture and build.

**How did white supremacy show up for you as a student?**

I grew up in a town where most of my classmates were, like me, brown children, but most [teachers]—and probably all, up until high school—were white women.

Is it bad to have a white woman teacher? No. Is it bad to have all white women teachers over x many years? Yes. Because there's so much that happened in terms of how I perceived education to be, how I functioned in the classroom and the tangible cultural gaps that I experienced.

The memories I have, unfortunately, are overwhelmingly negative. I didn't ever have powerful teachers of color in my field, English, until graduate school, which is where I met Dr. Django Paris and his wife, Rae Paris, who were both amazing educators. I also met Dr. David Kirkland and Dr. Adam Banks; I ended up getting flooded. It was a wonderful over-compensation for everything that I went through. But if education was not something that in my home meant everything, I wouldn't have made it there. Why would I go to graduate school after the types of experiences I had?

Being an immigrant, particularly from our Black and brown country, one interesting aspect of that experience is that we come here and while we're taxi drivers, or we're somebody's cleaning lady or we're a barber, in Dominican Republic, actually, that person is an

*“What’s important is that we don’t get caught up on these terms because it’s less about the words and much more about the approach, the philosophy and the theory.”*

engineer; that other person is actually a lawyer. In the same way, I would think about how my grandfather was a science teacher in the U.S., but he's an engineer in Dominican Republic. Oh, my grandmother is a seamstress, but over there she was at the Department of Education. I was always very aware of that duality. I had a consciousness of, "Yeah, we might be whatever this experience is here in the U.S., but I also know that I have a whole nation of people." It was always very much like, "This might be my reality, but this ain't the truth."

**You turned much of your experience as a student and graduate student into a resource for educators, *The Anti***

**Racist Teacher: Reading Instruction Workbook. Can you talk about that?**

So I graduated college and I'm like, "Me? Teacher? No. I will never go work in classrooms." But I have always been drawn to working with young people, and eventually I made my way back into the classroom. I went back to the very high school that I had gone to because, clearly, I had some things to resolve. I was like, "OK, fine. I guess I'm back." It was so much. As I was there, I was like, "OK, the way I'm going to stay sane here is to remember what I'm doing, that I am here to be the teacher that I never had." It all really started then: having to re-envision, to reconsider, to rethink what teaching meant and looked like. The workbook comes out of all of those years of trying to figure that out and wanting to be practical.

**What do you see that needs changing? How do you see white supremacy showing up in curriculum and instruction today?**

It looks like this overwhelming sense of urgency to meet particular deadlines that don't necessarily speak to actual student growth. It's like, "Well, we have to cover this book because that's what's on the test and we have more, more, more." It's about quantity over quality. I think it's really hard for English teachers to consider, "Oh, we will just read two books this year." If an English teacher said that, somebody somewhere would faint. That would be dope, that the whole first semester you go so deep into a rich book and you [work just] with that book. Young people learn it, and you use it to not just read the *word* but read the *world*.

This value for individualism, this idea of "you pull yourself up by the bootstraps"—we see that in classrooms,

that you do the work all by yourself, you got the A and you're at the top of your class. Instead of, "Look, this group took on this work together, and everyone explored their strengths, improved in their areas of growth and there was learning that was both curricular and extracurricular." That's the real world; that's professional life, and we don't necessarily value that in classrooms. It requires stepping back, being honest and reevaluating a lot of the things that we've taken as orthodox practices.

**Why is it necessary to talk about these things? Folks will say, "Why are we talking about this when we have actual work to do?"**

Because that is the work to do. These are not mutually exclusive. A lot of people who say, "Just teach the standards" or "Just teach your content" don't understand that I'm already doing political work just by saying that I teach the standards. I am already indoctrinating, if you will. For example, in the English field, this whole pedestal that we have the five-paragraph essay on—it's problematic! Continuing to demand that students perfect this five-paragraph essay is actually not preparing them for college, which is what we think we're doing. In college, you don't need to write five-paragraph essays, number one. Number two, what we're doing is this factory-model approach where everybody can crank out the same thing. It's very much an American social construct. If I go to Turkey, they're not telling me to write in five paragraphs. If I go to Brazil, they're just writing! If I go to the Cochiti people in New Mexico, they're not even writing. They're like, "We're a storytelling people, so you can take your paper and put it in the trash."

This overemphasis on some of this is, in fact, indoctrination. We have to revisit it. We have to.

**Can you explain why this work should not solely be the concern of humanities teachers?**

If the institution is problematic, then all aspects of it need to be reimagined and reevaluated. There's this big narrative in education and among teachers that's like, "Oh, English and history, that's the easy part, because you guys can talk about books with people," and it feels really obvious. But when we think about the way that racism was even thought of, it was actually [framed as] science. We have to deconstruct the way that science is taught, the concepts that are included and the concepts that are excluded, because what we're *not* talking about is also a problem—those silences in our curriculum are problematic. The same goes for math: We need to think about the way that math has been implicated in the project of racism. For example, the idea of three-fifths of a person—that's math. Or when you think about Indigenous people who have to use DNA to prove their Nativeness—which nobody else has to do, anywhere in this country—that is both science and math.

Educators need to understand that it's important to unpack their own biases and interrogate the ways that their values and their biases show up in how they design their content and lessons. Then it's important to move past that and think more critically about their approach, their practices and the impact that they're having on students and how to take action, both through their content area in their classroom, and also in their field outside of their classroom. That's why activism has to be a part of

this. Activism could be anything—starting a book club with colleagues, pushing your principal to do PD, joining your professional organization at the national level and just learning. All of that counts.

**Describe a classroom that's decolonized, that's culturally sustaining.**

It does require us to reinvent the wheel. We have to envision something that is not what many of us experienced growing up. It looks like a classroom where people, regardless of age, are able to come in and be their full selves, meaning that they don't have to lose or deny any element of their identity or their culture at the door to achieve success. That's culturally sustaining pedagogy. Then, as a teacher: What am I doing in this room to celebrate their strengths, build on their weaknesses and help them learn actual skills, so that they're not just reading words on paper and doing things on paper but participating in thinking critically about our society?

That's where social justice comes in. This has become a real catch-all phrase. It's another term for civic engagement and fighting for what you believe in and the betterment of others. Education is supposed to do that—to push us towards social justice. Otherwise, what is this? And it looks like a classroom where there's joy, there's pain, there's silence, there's talking, there's activity, there's academic learning, but there's also personal learning. It's inside, it's outside, it's talking, it's in groups, it's individuals, it's with partners. It's a classroom where social justice is a term that everybody understands. ♦

*Brown is the principal academic officer at Stand for Children's Center for Antiracist Education. Keels is associate editor at Teaching Tolerance.*



# MATHEMATICS IN CONTEXT: THE PEDAGOGY OF LIBERATION

Math education has harmed students, but it can also repair that harm.

BY **MARIAN DINGLE** AND **CATHERY YEH** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **PETER NGUYEN** AND **STEPHANIE ELEY**



“ I Painted  
MY OWN  
Realities”  
Frida Kahlo

**AS AN ELEMENTARY** teacher with a passion for math and an assistant professor of education who specializes, in part, in math education, our paths have crossed because we both believe in the humanizing power of mathematics. Engaging in mathematics education with a humanizing love can allow students to see themselves as complex human beings who are affected by institutionalized racism but not defined by it. As educators, mothers and organizers of color, we make this argument out of radical love for our students and the education community.

In *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*, Paulo Freire describes radical love as an “armed love.” In *Women, Culture & Politics*, Angela Davis argues that radical means “grasping at the root.” In this spirit, we invite you to consider how education, specifically mathematics education, has harmed students and, importantly, how it can also repair that harm. We believe in

the power of mathematics to quantify the past and present and to also serve as a tool for liberation.

#### **Math Is Political**

Math—including math education—is absolutely political and has been used in violent ways to subjugate, harm and even kill. The use of data science to identify suspects or sentence people to prison has been widely criticized for bias. And the legacy of racist ideologies can be found in the use of data and mathematics today.

For example, the spirometer, a medical tool that measures lung capacity, was once used on plantations to unjustly argue enslaved Black people were most fit for field labor. The tool’s settings, often including a button that “corrects” for race, are still in use today. This is one of many medical tools shaped by anti-Black racism.

In the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were inundated with charts and graphs of infection data,

availability of PPE and statistics on rising xenophobic and racist attacks. The easy action would be to analyze this real-life data with our students in mathematics classes. But data and mathematical models include and exclude information to capture a snippet of the world at a particular time and place. Failure to consider the context, politics and history behind the data is in itself failure.

How can we use math, acknowledge the harm it does and also drive liberation? Educators must spend significant time understanding some basic truths. We must start by acknowledging that we all lead very different racialized lives and that legacies of racism and white privilege permeate our work.

For too many of our students, doing school mathematics consists of sitting silently, using algorithms that are foreign to them and solving problems irrelevant to their interests and experiences. Their knowledge and perspectives are pushed to the margins,

leaving them, especially students of color, silenced and misinformed.

As educators of color, even we must unlearn our conditioning to hold space for whiteness. We must recognize the ways math education functions to destroy students' cultural identities. We must intentionally center folks of color and marginalized voices.

We work daily to bear this out in our lives and pedagogy.



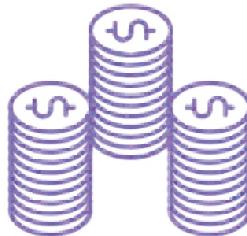
### Marian's Context

I am a Black woman, married to a Black man, with adult Black children. I don't know much about my ancestors beyond a few tales of great-grandparents. I do know they were enslaved. There is a certain shame about not knowing your true country of origin, not knowing your native tongue. Honestly, there is a certain envy I carry of those who do.

I also know that mathematics is the lens through which I see the world. It's not something I became; it's who I have always been. My parents raised me to quantify everything.

My educator mother, who did not describe herself as a math person, would periodically dump the contents of her purse onto the bed to reveal shiny coins of every color. The ongoing challenge? To correctly count it in any way I chose and then present her with my findings. If I could do that successfully, the bounty was mine. In pedagogical language, I had engaged in productive struggle, persevered, made use of structure, modeled with precision, used regularity and constructed my argument.

Did I know I was doing this? Did my mother make sure that I knew those words? Of course not. She knew that the



concepts and my ability to connect them to life were what mattered.

Similarly, long sessions at the kitchen table with my dad as he revealed the secrets of numbers and algebra made me believe he was magical. That math was magic. I loved mathematics—it was as natural to me as breathing. My parents both allowed me to emerge confident in my mathematical reasoning.

Is it possible to teach mathematics this way? It is, and I do. The educator in me thinks mathematically. The accepted mathematical canon is full of Eurocentric postulates and formulas. Cathy and I sense, though, that mathematics is far more intuitive.

### How Marian humanizes math

For most of my career, I have taught elementary students multiple subjects, yet students past and present refer to me as their math teacher. I carry that title with pride. This mathematical part of my identity, along with my Blackness, informs the reframing of math we're arguing for.

On a nondescript day, I'm reading aloud to my fourth and fifth graders the picture book *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson. As children discover a different set of expectations for Black and white characters in the book, symbolized by the fence that separates their properties, I encourage them to dig deeper, relating this story of a time before they were alive to now:

*Why did both the white and Black parents want their children not to cross the fence? What was different about their reactions? Who created the fence? Whose job is it to cut it down?*

I want them to see the interpersonal biases and the systemic forces that create and maintain the fence. I then direct them to the present and connect it to relevant mathematics:

*You have said that the neighborhoods in the book were segregated. Are your neighborhoods segregated today? What about schools? Is this school segregated? Has it ever been?*

I bring in pie charts of the school's current and past racial demographics. Students also analyze historical data of the city's racial demographics. I ask, "What story are the numbers telling?"

Looking at history through a mathematical lens is a step toward humanizing math. As children learn how to create their own graphs and charts, they can also interrogate how the nexus of history, math and humanity lies in the formation of the question to be answered. Whose story is not being told? What question was not asked?

The data is only as good as the questions that birthed it, and if the assumptions under which the questions were formed are biased and racist, then the math is inevitably racist as well.

The lesson using Woodson’s book continues with an analysis of local gentrification—with math at the root.



### Cathery’s Context

I am Chinese American, an immigrant and a mother of a child with a disability. These social identities shape who I

am and what I see and feel about the world around me. I am exhausted. I can’t sleep. My heart aches. I can’t get the image out of my head: Tou Thao, the Asian American police officer who stood by as Derek Chauvin knelt on George Floyd’s neck. He stood by in silence, with his hands in his pockets, even as onlookers pointed out that Floyd wasn’t moving, didn’t seem to be breathing and cried out for his mother. Thao remained silent. Indifferent.

Within the Asian American community, I have seen us join our voices in ongoing protests speaking up against anti-Asian xenophobia and racist attacks normalized by a leader who called the current pandemic the “Chinese virus” and the “kung flu.” Yet, too many remain silent in the face of injustice toward Black lives.

Within the mathematics education community that I call home, how often do we speak boldly for justice but actually continue to inflict violence on Black lives?

### How Cathery humanizes math

Humanizing mathematics begins with challenging racialized myths about

what mathematics is and who can or cannot do mathematics. Mathematics is a human activity tied to languages, histories, lands and culture. As a classroom teacher, I visited over 300 students’ homes while community members and members of grassroots organizations came into my classroom. We taught lessons together centering on the mathematics that takes place within homes and communities—from braiding hair, baking bread, doing carpentry and shop-keeping to examining homelessness, gentrification and affordable housing. These experiences and community-based pedagogies bridged classrooms to community and social movements.

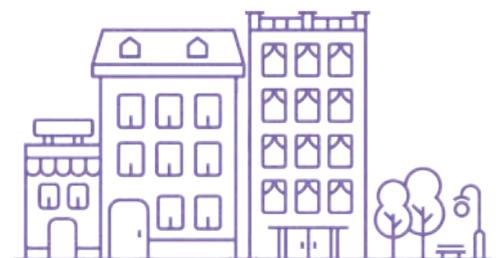
Now, as a teacher educator with future mathematics teachers as students, I use the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards as a road map for humanizing mathematics education. Within my mathematics methods course, I ask my students to develop and implement justice-aligned math lessons that address both a mathematics standard and a social justice standard.

The TT standards offer a way to use mathematics to locate inequities and to look critically at how mathematics is used inside and outside the classroom. For example, data on issues of race in the United States are cast along the lines of Black and white. Asian Americans and other communities of color are intentionally included in statistical models at times and excluded at others when the data perpetuates the model minority myth. Such use of data creates a monolithic identity for Asian Americans and also drives a wedge between communities of color. Mathematics is used to divide.

Attending to the TT Social Justice Standards shifts a math lesson from mere statistical calculations to the development of critical statistical

literacy. *Do you see yourself represented in the data? Who is included? Who is missing? How do the data display, labels and scales convey a particular message? What is the message? From whose perspective?* These questions allow students to see the subjectivity in all text, including mathematical text, and to examine the histories and backgrounds that inform the data.

Naturally, students want to look up and create data displays that honor their social identities, including their membership in multiple groups, as well as honoring their peers. Using this approach, my math education students have had their K-12 students share their own data displays with their peers, the school board, city council and curriculum publishing companies to stand up to exclusion and injustice.





Third World Liberation Front, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the formation of the United Farm Workers Movement by Latinx and Filipinx labor workers and the Black Lives Matter movement all started with a few people who mobilized millions. For decades, social justice organizers have modeled nonlinear growth and the fact that our sum is greater than our division. I am inspired by these narratives despite the social and structural inequalities at hand. Our lives are interwoven; our numbers matter. Our liberation is intricately bound together.

### The Path Forward

Conflict has always been a central part of mathematical stories, but we need to highlight working together and the day-to-day work of finding solutions to problems. Now, as the United States sees mass uprising against racial injustice and police brutality, we need to center the mathematics of solidarity and challenge the mathematics of division. The way we *teach* math is key to this shift.

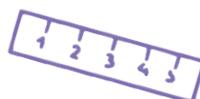
We don't need to reimagine teaching mathematics for liberation. Mathematics—data, mathematical models and numbers—lives everywhere, especially in our organizing. We need only to look to current and historical moments of strategic, mathematical insurgence against structures of oppression as blueprints for liberatory mathematics education. ♦

*Dingle is an elementary teacher in Georgia and a member of the Teaching Tolerance Advisory Board. Yeh is an assistant professor of education in California.*

What is missing from mathematics education is the mathematics of solidarity and interracial resistance. Asian American liberation builds on a history of solidarity between the Asian and Black American communities, starting from Frederick Douglass' denouncement of anti-Chinese laws and continuing to current fights against the racism of the pandemic. When it came to welcoming Asians to the

United States, Douglass highlighted the nation's diversity and used mathematical language to argue for equality: "Only one-fifth of the population of the globe is white," he argued in 1869, noting that "the other four-fifths are colored and ought to have some weight and influence."

Let's use Douglass' work as an example and create lessons on the mathematics of community organizing. The



# BLACK MALE EDUCATOR JOY

*When Black male educators build community, they find healing, learning and growth.*

BY **COSHANDRA DILLARD** ILLUSTRATION BY **ESO TOLSON** AND **ALEX TROTT**

**IN FEBRUARY 2020, 65 BLACK MALE EDUCATORS ASSEMBLED** on the campus of Clayton State University just outside Atlanta for a day of community building. They workshopped, encouraged each other and shared experiences from their respective classrooms.

The men high-fived, hugged, laughed heartily and expressed gratitude during workshopping sessions. It was in those moments that they were free of the white gaze and filled with joy. When Black male educators gather, they

receive what they crave in their school communities: a safe space to revel in joyfulness despite the way the world views Black men and the expectations placed on them. This full breadth of Black men's humanity, which includes joy, often goes unrecognized or is undervalued.

The Atlanta event, BMEsTalk LIVE, is a culmination of online engagement in weekly Twitter chats and at social gatherings. Organized by education consultant and former teacher Ayodele Harrison, it is a way to give this small

segment of the nation’s educators a chance to bond and grow professionally. The day focuses on personal and professional success analysis, mentorship, pedagogical techniques and school community empowerment.

Attendees assert that the meeting counters the daily isolation many of them feel at school.

That’s because Black male educators make up only about 2% of all public school teachers in the United States. Recruiting and retaining Black male educators has been a struggle for schools. In addition to isolation, the “invisible tax”—the expectation that educators of color handle issues around cultural competency, discipline and relationship-building with students of color—makes it more difficult for them to thrive. This pervasive charge means that Black educators are left with less support or end up “typecast” into non-academic roles.

Just as society doesn’t see Black men’s full humanity, the education community also doesn’t see Black male educators as multi-dimensional beings with skills vital to nurturing young minds. The fact that these men must find healing, learning and joy in platforms outside of their schools acknowledges the tokenization and pigeonholing they face. These phenomena result from existing white supremacist structures prevalent in schools, making it more difficult for students and teachers of color to flourish.

According to a 2016 Education Trust report, *Through Our Eyes: Perspectives and Reflections From Black Teachers*, Black educators “face racial discrimination and stereotyping that leave them feeling alienated and restricted from

participating in the school community, impacting their ability to be effective and ultimately their desire to remain in the profession.”

BMEsTalk spaces help Black male educators feel part of a community. They feel valued. They feel seen.

“I don’t think I’ve ever been in a space that was specifically focused on Black male educators and engaging with each other, sharing the successes, the challenges and the opportunities,” one attendee says in a BMEsTalk LIVE recap video.

This community building—and its subsequent joy—is essential work, the men say. It’s necessary to stay motivated, a feat that can become difficult for those who are thrust into disciplinary roles or feel tokenized and burned out.

BMEsTalk isn’t the only group of Black male educators doing this work. There are numerous organizations and alliances across the country creating spaces to celebrate and uplift these educators while helping to broaden their members’ career opportunities.

But it’s not enough to acknowledge the need for Black male educators to have a safe space for professional development or celebration. School communities must reconsider how they perceive Black men’s roles in education. They should act more intentionally so that Black male educators feel included in students’ learning. Colleagues need to respect their skills and abilities and see them more fully.

### IN THEIR SHOES

Now in his second year of teaching, Eric Parker can’t imagine himself doing anything else. When he decided to become a



“Seeing other people just expressing the same feelings and having that open, safe space to talk about your thoughts, your dreams, desires and things like that—it’s been really nice.”

### ERIC PARKER

social studies teacher, he remembered that he’d never had a teacher who looked like him or had similar life experiences. He was going to be that for future students. Today, he teaches middle school students who reflect a very racially diverse part of northern Oklahoma City, including students from immigrant families spanning from Central America and Africa to Asia and Europe.

One of the youngest teachers at his school, Parker is empathetic, committed to social justice education and eager to learn new pedagogical techniques. But he admits some colleagues look beyond that and instead assume he’s there for one reason.

“The first thing I got from a lot of my colleagues was, ‘What do you coach?’... So, it gets annoying, just those little microaggressions like that. They’re saying, ‘Oh, you coach?’ I’m saying, ‘No. I just do this.’ And they’re just like, ‘But you want to coach something.’ I’m like, ‘At the moment, no. That’s not what I’m focused on. Let’s talk about what I’m doing in my room rather than any other stuff.’”

Black male educators are often seen as their schools’ “managers of behavioral misconduct” by default. While they assert that they can effectively manage their classrooms, they note that all teachers should commit to doing the same. It shouldn’t be their burden to manage multiple classrooms.

“As Black male educators, we use our knowledge, expertise and experience to improve school culture, climate and equity in our school communities, which extends far beyond regulating student behavior,” Harrison explains.

LaMar Timmons-Long, an English teacher in Brooklyn, concurs: “It is a piece of the profession that needs to be amplified. We’re only looked at from one lens. ... We’re the ones who are stern and firm. We bring that to that space and [are] not looked at as something else.”

Timmons-Long also couldn’t imagine being anything other than a teacher. He dreamed of that opportunity in the fifth grade.

“I had really good teachers,” he says. “I thought, ‘If I can feel this happy as a student, then I’d probably be happy as a teacher.’”

But being a youthful Black male educator who is passionate about social justice education has earned him some labels he doesn’t necessarily appreciate.

“I think I’m seen as a rebel,” he says. “I don’t feel that, but people have told me that.” He adds, “You may see my passion as angry. ... I’m just speaking my truth.”

Beyond being pigeonholed into disciplinarian and coaching roles, some Black male educators also feel they must prove themselves to colleagues or administrators.

Parker says some coworkers aren’t confident in his content knowledge. He feels supported by colleagues in his social studies department but not by others.

“I keep having to prove myself, especially to some of our newer teachers that haven’t spent time with me, that I know my content matters,” he says. “I research these things, learn more every day about what I teach because I’m constantly challenged.”

In Parker’s case, the scrutiny comes from coworkers and caregivers. He has submitted primary sources to some caregivers when challenged about his content knowledge.

He’s felt the sting of the generations-old view that Black people must work twice as hard in their workplace.

**BMEsTalk Director Ayodele Harrison embraces a participant during the live convening themed “Connect. Grow. Lead.”**





A group of men engage in discussion during the February 2020 BMEsTalk LIVE event at Clayton State University in Atlanta, Georgia.

### **RESISTING WITH JOY, SUPPORT AND COMMUNITY**

In 2018, the hashtags #Blackboyjoy, #Blackmenjoy and #Blackmensmiling began to trend on social media platforms. The messages and the images of men laughing, embracing and frolicking served as a reminder to imagine Black men beyond media stereotypes that portray them as stoic and hardened. It was also aspirational. It was liberating for Black men to unapologetically tap into joy despite the many ways society attempts to rob them of their dignity. Whether in their neighborhoods or as professionals in classrooms, Black men must continuously fight for their dignity.

Establishing connectedness through platforms like BMEsTalk is part of that fight.

“Seeing other people just expressing the same feelings and having that open, safe space to talk about your thoughts, your dreams, desires and things like that—it’s been really nice,” says Parker, who has participated in BMEsTalk chats.

“When it boils down to it, our jobs aren’t easy. Whether it’s battling curriculum, battling colleagues or dealing with the things that our students have to deal with, you always need that time to just recharge yourself. That’s what it feels like it is: It’s like a recharge, a needed quick moment, a breath of fresh air, then back to work.”

Black male educators uplifting and celebrating one another in communal spaces is also a way to resist a white supremacist culture that shows up in school communities.

“What we experience as a Black man and as an educator can be difficult and tough, so we have to stand on the backs of each other in order to support each other, whether it is emotionally, mentally, pedagogically,” Timmons-Long says. “There’s like an automatic brotherhood that happens when we teach together, especially when we are on the same page of equity for students of color.”

But the BMEsTalk gatherings don't always focus on discrimination, inequity or microaggressions. Connecting with other Black male educators reminds Parker to be mindful of self-care.

"It can be a little taxing when everything you talk about is something negative or an issue," Parker says. "[A topic] usually opens up with something like, 'Tell me a story about something funny, or a time when you did this or a time you did that.' Not everything has to be bad. That's a lesson I've had to figure out throughout my life: that anger's taxing. Especially when you're aware of things, you always have to set that time aside to relax and enjoy something."

Organizations that cater to Black male educators also provide support through mentoring programs, recruiting initiatives, leadership trainings and annual conferences. All efforts are intended to help these men thrive—not just survive—in their careers and at their respective schools. It helps that they know they're not alone.

Timmons-Long says he didn't have a Black male educator as a colleague until three years into his profession.

"He took me under his wings like a little brother," he recounts of that colleague. "When we became close and we started to support each other as teachers and Black men, it was pure Black boy joy. ... Our experiences are similar yet different, and we are always learning from each other. There's nothing like the power and love of Black male educators supporting each other."

### THE FUTURE OF BLACK MALE EDUCATORS

Studies about Black male educators support the same conclusion: Schools need more of them in classrooms because all students, particularly students of color, benefit from having Black male educators in school. Their presence means lower dropout rates, fewer disciplinary actions and improved test performances.

This is why there have been concerted efforts in cities such as New York City, New Orleans, St. Louis and Indianapolis to attract more Black male educators. But Black male educators say these initiatives must be for the right reasons.

Through Ayodele Harrison's consulting work, he often fields questions from school administrators who want to know how to recruit more Black male educators.

"Just tell me how you support and celebrate the current ones in your schools," he tells administrators. "If you don't have an answer to that, it's going to be a huge uphill climb to get Black male educators to come. How can we create schools that are welcoming of Black male educators, that will support them, allow them to be who they are to be and not only disciplinarians?"

Harrison says white educators must first be mindful of how they contribute to an environment that hinders Black male educators' professional growth.



"All educators, particularly white educators, should do an investigation of their own identity and understand the way they show up," Harrison says. "Because, honestly, that's where the work is, right? It really is about going internally and looking at, 'Well, what is it that I need to do to be a better educator, to be a better colleague, to be a better contributor to this community so that it's welcoming to all?'"

Black male educators say it all comes back to wanting to be themselves and be respected for their skills. School administrators and colleagues, they say, must trust that their presence in the classroom is integral rather than ancillary. While finding connection in safe spaces brings Black male educators joy, they need to feel that same happiness at work. ♦

*Dillard is a senior writer for Teaching Tolerance.*



# IT WAS ALWAYS ABOUT CONTROL

*How Schools Maintain Order White Supremacy*

BY CORY COLLINS ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN JAY CABUAY

John Jay Cabuay

**LAST SEPTEMBER, IN LOUISIANA**, 9-year-old Ka'Mauri Harrison was taking a test in his bedroom—a reality for many students engaged in online learning during the coronavirus pandemic. His brother walked in, tripping over a BB gun in the background. Ka'Mauri picked it up and carried it toward the computer. His teacher kicked him off the video conference.

For briefly brandishing a BB gun in his own bedroom, Ka'Mauri faced nearly two weeks of suspension and a social worker was sent to his home.

"It is our policy that teachers and administrators may employ reasonable disciplinary and corrective measures," a spokesperson for Jefferson Parish Schools said at the time, "to maintain order."

Ka'Mauri is Black. So is Isaiah Elliott, a Colorado seventh grader who was suspended for holding a toy gun during art class. So is the 15-year-old girl who, in a now infamous case, was incarcerated in Michigan for not doing her homework and thus violating her parole.

The en masse switch to distance learning was unprecedented. But these outsized discipline measures against Black students, sadly, were not. Zoom suspensions followed similar patterns to in-person classroom management tactics that feed Black students into the school-to-prison pipeline.

"It's a pathway that is sadly well-worn and very visible," says Miriam Rollin, the director of the Education Civil Rights Alliance assembled by the National Center for Youth Law.

According to analysis of public data by ProPublica, Black students, nationally, are 3.9 times more likely to face suspension than white students. In some states, like Wisconsin (7.5 times), Minnesota (6.2 times) and Connecticut (6 times), it's even more stark. And according to a 2018 analysis by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, Black students

were overrepresented in every punishment measure evaluated, regardless of poverty level or school type.

The numbers' severity and longevity underscore a systemic and seismic pushout of Black students, whose disproportionate contact with law enforcement leads to disproportionate rates of dropouts, disengagement and incarceration. Disrupting that cycle of punishment will be necessary to end the school-to-prison pipeline and protect the students most disproportionately harmed by such policies—namely Black, Indigenous and Latinx youth.

But experts in school discipline say there is something more insidious and emblematic behind distance learning discipline measures. It hasn't just been suspensions. In a moment when students needed grace and leniency amidst brand-new challenges, a reliance on compliance emerged again and again. Students had to keep cameras on in their homes. Students got in trouble for missing school days or assignments as they were forced to work or care for siblings. Schools enforced dress codes and codes of conduct most Zoom-bound adults could not follow. All designed, as the Louisiana spokesperson put it, to maintain order.

Experts say these stories underscore the limitations of fixing disproportionate discipline outcomes strictly in terms of removing school police or eliminating the school-to-prison pipeline. The U.S. school system is dependent on control and compliance—and historically this dependence reaffirms and is inextricably bound up with tenets of white supremacy. Whether advocates call for reform measures or for a more systemic abolition of all school practices that resemble the carceral state, it's clear that they agree on one thing: Equity requires understanding and excavating those white supremacist roots.



**All systems create what they were designed to create. Sadly, the education system has been designed to weed out, to discriminate and to provide success for kids of privilege.**

—Miriam Rollin

#### **COMPLIANCE AT THE ROOT**

Dr. David Stovall, a professor of Black studies, criminology, law and justice at the University of Illinois at Chicago, draws a distinction between schooling and education. "Schooling in its traditional sense is not necessarily about learning as much as it is about order and compliance," he explains. "And [historically marginalized students] are the ones who will be compelled to adhere to this order and compliance because schools have always reflected a desire to control them."

This function of schooling echoes in the history of assimilation schools, where Indigenous children were forced to abandon their homes, languages, hair and customs. It echoes in the history of policies that have increasingly regulated Black students' hair, dress, behavior and speech.

Stovall pushes people to think beyond the school-to-prison pipeline and consider what he and others call the school-prison nexus. The pipeline, he says, is an argument that schools put students on a pathway to prison based

on dehumanizing actions, including arcane discipline policies.

“What those of us who are arguing about a school-prison nexus are saying is that we have to pay attention to the fact that the logics of those schools and the logics of those prisons are almost identical, especially when we talk about discipline,” Stovall says. He draws direct connections between hallway protocols, restrictive bathroom policies, surveillance cameras and metal detectors that exist in both spaces.

“It’s something a little more insidious” than the school-to-prison pipeline, Stovall explains. “[Students] are reminded based on the discipline and curriculum policies that they’re in a de facto prison in those spaces.”

Stovall links the continued use of punitive policies and whitewashed curricula to a history of racism in schools. He says we know that more inclusive and less punitive environments lead to better learning outcomes.

“But under white supremacy,” he says, “the argument is that [a more inclusive approach] works for the wrong people.”



**The truth is there are some of these policies that just make zero sense and have nothing to do with learning. It’s really just about compliance or oppression.**

—Dr. Nataki Gregory

One definition of white supremacy that gets at its many systemic tendrils, including in schools, comes from Dr. Frances Ansley, who has described it as “a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings.”

In schools, this concentration of power and resource control might look like the overwhelmingly white stakeholders who create curricula, decide state standards, determine school funding and, yes, teach. Superiority and entitlement might look like codes of conduct and curricula filtered through a Eurocentric lens. Dominance and non-white subordination often play out in the enforcement of policies; this includes the obvious (disproportionate punishment) and the more subtle (tracking for AP classes).

“All systems create what they were designed to create,” Miriam Rollin says. “Sadly, the education system has been designed to weed out, to discriminate and to provide success for kids of privilege.”

It’s a painful message sent loud and clear to Black students and their families. Dr. Charles Bell, a professor of criminal justice at Illinois State University, has devoted much of his research to speaking to Black students and caregivers about their perceptions of school discipline.

“[Black students’ and caregivers’] experiences suggest that school inherently functions as an anti-Black institution because they criminalize Black students’ behaviors in ways they do not criminalize white students’ behaviors,” Bell says.

Bell points to the resistance to integration from white caregivers, educators and schools, and the creation of the school-to-prison pipeline that followed shortly after the final court-ordered ends to segregation.

“So you just had a history in which Black students have never been fully accepted in any educational space,” Bell explains.

Bell says that students he interviewed often felt targeted based on the way they dressed, their hair (e.g., locs) and their culture. One student Bell interviewed was facing financial hardship and therefore didn’t have consistent access to laundry. When the student didn’t have clean, white-collared shirts to wear, he came to school out of dress code. He received a 30-day suspension.

It’s an all-too-common occurrence—and one that didn’t end during distance learning.

“What we’re finding is it is just a continuation of bad practices from in-person spaces that has moved into the virtual,” says Dr. Nataki Gregory, the CEO of CT3, an organization that provides training focused on relationship building and student engagement in service of high student achievement.

Gregory says policies must be connected to learning and equitable outcomes. She instructs school leaders to consider who a policy benefits and for whom it might be harmful.

“Because the truth is there are some of these policies that just make zero sense and have nothing to do with learning,” she says. “It’s really just about compliance or oppression. And if that’s what you’re trying to bring into the school, then you have the wrong focus.”

And that focus—endemic in schools across the United States—is doing active harm.

### **THE HARM CAUSED BY COMPLIANCE**

Over the years, Bell says he’s seen two competing, but interconnected, narratives. He has witnessed Black parents removing students from predominately Black schools where they felt punishment tactics were putting their kids “on a pathway to prison.” And he has witnessed Black parents removing students from predominately white schools, which they saw as anti-Black.

“What that does,” Bell says, “is it creates a dynamic of, ‘I’m not safe anywhere.’”

That lack of safety is tangible and has lasting effects. The educational harm is obvious. Bell’s interviews supported what we know empirically: Suspensions, time out of the classroom and school climates wherein certain students feel unwelcome or undervalued hurt those students’ grades and engagement. Students become more likely to tune out and drop out.

Gregory says this educational harm contradicts the stated mission of schools: to center learning and development. And for some students, punitive policies become an escape valve. In settings that frequently dehumanize or humiliate them, students may act out to get kicked out.

“If the goal is to get students to engage more, do more, achieve more, and ‘discipline’ doesn’t get them more excited about doing that, then the discipline is ineffective,” Gregory says. “Because then the discipline is just punishment. And if punishment is your goal, then you’re never going to get to a place where students attend to their work, to your leadership, to your teaching in a way you want. Because now I feel like this is the place I come to be punished. And punishment is always a threat that’s looming over my head.”

For Dr. Thalia González, the effects of that looming threat are key to reshaping the way advocates talk about school discipline practices. A nationally renowned expert in restorative justice, González says much of the discourse surrounding discipline focuses solely on the fact that, over time, Black students are more likely to face punishment and pushout. But she says that ignores, in some ways, the real-time disproportionate health effects.

“It’s a public health issue at its core,” González says. She notes that data show high school graduation can increase life span by as much as 15 years. She points to research that illustrates how removal from school and classroom environments causes symptoms in



children that look a lot like post-traumatic stress disorder.

“In adolescence and early childhood, there are buffers against negative effects of trauma, including peer connectedness and school connectedness,” González says. “And when you remove someone from a classroom environment or a learning environment or a school community, you tear that apart.”

Bell has also seen this firsthand in his work. “I’ve seen some students internalize school rejection or being targeted,” he says, “to the point where I had a few students who told me that they were considering suicide as a result of this continuous targeting and rejection from educators.”

Focusing on health outcomes, González stresses, does not mean ignoring the ways in which racism, white supremacy and social control lead to punitive discipline policies. But it stresses the urgency and stakes for demanding change.

“It’s about saying, ‘How do we make this change, and how do we disrupt these drivers for young people that will continue to persist if we can’t get rid of—or at least purge to a large extent—this whole structure that is about social control of a particular set of bodies?’”

### AN URGENT NEED FOR CHANGE

Across the country, schools will have to take a systematic approach to undoing structures that rely on compliance and punitive discipline.

“Our system is failing kids,” Rollin says, “and we need to hold that system accountable.”

In an ideal world, advocates say, transformation happens from the bottom up: Educators take the steps they can take today to interrupt their own harmful practices. And going forward, coalitions of students, educators and families shape more culturally sustaining school communities. School policies encode a more restorative approach. State policies and codes are amended to incentivize a severe reduction in suspensions and policies imbued with racism, such as dress codes or modes of compliance. And if all of that hits a roadblock, Rollin says, it may be time for a lawsuit.

But while long-term solutions must be found systematically and deliberately, educators and students face urgent need—and immediate consequences. Whether learning at a distance or in person, the harm perpetuated by punitive policies is happening to students right now.

Before a Colorado school suspended Isaiah Elliott for holding a toy gun, they sent a police officer to his home. “You put his life in jeopardy,” his mother said to the school—a school that had followed its systems and policies exactly as designed. ♦

*Collins is a senior writer for Teaching Tolerance.*

# The Classical Roots of White Supremacy

A whitewashed history of the ancient world lays the foundation for white supremacy across the curriculum.

BY **DANI BOSTICK** ILLUSTRATION BY **FATINHA RAMOS**





**I HAVE TAUGHT ANCIENT GREEK AND LATIN**, collectively known as classics, for most of my adult life. When I started studying Latin in seventh grade, I bought into the value of classics promoted in pamphlets from the American Classical League (ACL)—as the demarcation between what was worth knowing and what wasn't worth even acknowledging.

Even today, a tie to the classical world often provides an instant sense of legitimacy, context and greatness. There's a reason why, when President Donald Trump wanted to "make federal buildings beautiful again," he exhorted architects to design buildings in the style of ancient Greek temples.

But there are real consequences to positioning ancient Greece and Rome as the foundation of "Western Civilization," as the unquestioned standard of quality for everything from literature to sculpture to architecture—especially when "Western Civilization" is aligned with whiteness. In schools, the glorification of classics and its artificial linkage to whiteness is a toxic combination.

### **Maintaining Hostile Spaces**

There is a centuries-long tradition of white Americans abusing classics to justify enslavement and, by extension, to promulgate anti-Black racism. This is part of a history of intentional, overt white supremacy within classical education.

Even now, as school districts and departments of education challenge the ways slavery is taught, classics instruction too often supports a sanitized, inaccurate version of slavery, one that relies on the same tropes

used by Southern enslavers and Lost Cause Confederates.

One textbook, for example, unquestioningly reproduces the myth of the benevolent enslaver. Students read that when Davus is sold at auction, "[H]e was filled with fear and doubt as to what might happen to him. But he needn't have worried. Old Titus proved to be the kindest of masters."

A discussion question again reduces systemic oppression to an interpersonal matter when students must imagine themselves as enslavers: "If you were a Roman slave owner, would you use strict discipline or relative kindness to manage your slaves? Why?"

A question from the 2015 National Latin Exam (NLE) required students to select an adjective to describe a person who says to his father, "The slave is valuable. Sell the slave and keep the money." The NLE is taken by over 125,000 students annually. The answer to the question was "practical."

The problem is pervasive. As late as 2019, events held under the National Junior Classical League (NJCL) brand featured fundraising auctions, in which students posing as enslaved people were "sold" to the highest bidder. The NLE and NJCL are not rogue organizations; they are part of the American Classical League, the professional

organization for teachers of Greek and Latin languages, literatures and cultures. Recently, ACL acknowledged that it "has been involved in, perpetuated, and tolerated acts of racism and intolerance within [the] organization."

Bethany Hucks, a Black classicist, explained the impact: "It requires the descendants of enslaved people to talk with white kids and teachers as though this kind of thing didn't directly affect our families through violence for centuries until the present day."

Today, high school Latin classrooms are overwhelmingly white, even in schools that are otherwise diverse. One of the few sources of data about high school classics, the College Board, reveals that only 3.62% of AP Latin Exam test-takers in the last decade were Black. It's unclear whether this lack of diversity explains how the field has maintained racist ideas and practices for so long or whether the hostile spaces created by racist policies and practices explain the overwhelming whiteness of the field.

### **Whitewashing the Classics Curriculum**

In 1933, historian Carter G. Woodson wrote that the education system "dismisses the Negro as a nonentity" and noted, "[Black students are] taught to admire the Hebrew, the Greek, the Latin and the Teuton and to despise the African."

Classics is often ground zero for the positioning of Europe as the pinnacle of human achievement. Although ancient Rome encompassed parts of Africa and the Middle East, in textbooks, the ancient Romans are often all white. Even ancient Greco-Roman temples and statues are shown as

white, although the marble would have been painted vibrant colors. Today, classics curricula still elevate whiteness and devalue contributions to American culture that originate outside of Europe.

“Whenever I learn about the ‘history of medicine,’ I learn that the Greeks and Romans invented sanitation practices,” said Queen McKee, an undergraduate at Wake Forest University. “[And] the Egyptians and Babylonians did nothing to further the progress of medicine aside from herbal remedies. ... I learn that Hippocrates invented the standard of medical care—the oath that everyone takes to ensure proper medical care—and no one else. But that’s not true. ... I know that my ancestors and many people of color have made technological advancements, discoveries and significant contributions to the field of medicine.”

Across education, curriculum signals the superiority of knowledge from ancient Greece and Rome. In math classes, for example, Euclid and Pythagoras figure prominently, while contributions from Babylonia, Egypt and Arab-Islamic cultures are often invisible.

An uncritical veneration of a white classical world has a foothold in K-12 schools, where ancient Greeks and Romans are protagonists across the curriculum. In the humanities, this focus influences what history is taught and which texts are viewed as scholarly or rigorous enough to be worthwhile.

“Traditional humanities curriculum associates multiculturalism with modernity ... as if before we had the modern world, we had a white world,” said Henry Cody Miller, assistant professor of English education at SUNY Brockport and TT advisor. As a result, he explained, “works like Gilgamesh are positioned as the start of the constructed West.”



Furthermore, according to Miller, “most English curriculum doesn’t even include ancient writers from Africa or Asia.” Instead, students are taught that “*The Odyssey* has ‘universal’ themes.” Chinua Achebe spoke to this phenomenon in 1974: “In the nature of things the work of a Western writer is automatically informed by universality. It is only others who must strain to achieve it.”

### Beyond the Classroom

Those framings have a real-world impact. Curtis Dozier, an assistant professor of Greek and Roman studies at Vassar College, directs *Pharos*, a project that documents the ways classics is deployed by white supremacists online.

“The civilizations of ancient Greece and Rome have always been attractive to European nationalist and racist movements, and in more recent years have been adopted by other so-called alt-right groups,” the project’s website explains. Those who have historically deployed and exploited classics to justify white dominance have included American enslavers, Hitler and Mussolini, and members of modern white identity groups.

“The white supremacists I document on *Pharos*,” Dozier said, “turn to Greco-Roman antiquity for validation of many of their political views.”

The problem for educators, as Dozier explained, is that these views “all depend on the widespread

assumption that Greco-Roman antiquity is admirable, foundational and refined. Thus any presentation that promotes uncritical admiration for the ancient world, by presenting it as a source of ‘timeless’ models and wisdom, has the potential to be complicit in white supremacy.”

Cassie Miller, a senior research analyst at the Southern Poverty Law Center, said the use of classical imagery is “common in white supremacist propaganda.”

“For example,” she explained, “American Identity Movement, a white nationalist group that formerly used the name Identity Evropa, has used images of classical sculptures on their flyers along with phrases like ‘Protect Your Heritage’ and ‘Our Future Belongs to Us.’”

“In 2018, they concluded their first national conference by hosting a demonstration at the Parthenon replica in Nashville, where participants held a banner that read ‘European Roots, American Greatness.’”

This connection to classics, Miller said, “helps legitimize white nationalist goals: They are, they claim, the inheritors of a culture passed down for centuries that deserves to be preserved and protected.”

Given the ways classics has been leveraged to legitimize white supremacy in our communities, it is imperative that educators consider how they present this content in their classrooms.

### A Critical Approach to Classics

There is a cost to an uncritical teaching of classics. Students of color can receive an education that amounts to intellectual abuse and betrayal, while white students end up with a sense of inflated dominance.

Educators can interrupt this harm by refusing to teach classical content through a Eurocentric lens. They can expand their learning and teaching

about what constitutes the “classical world.” They can push back against textbooks or curricula that frame classics as a matter of European heritage. And they can teach students to recognize—and challenge—these characterizations for themselves.

Ancient Greece and Rome were not monolithic in terms of culture, and their geography extended outside of Europe. Students benefit from a broader conception of classics that challenges assumptions about Eurocentrism.

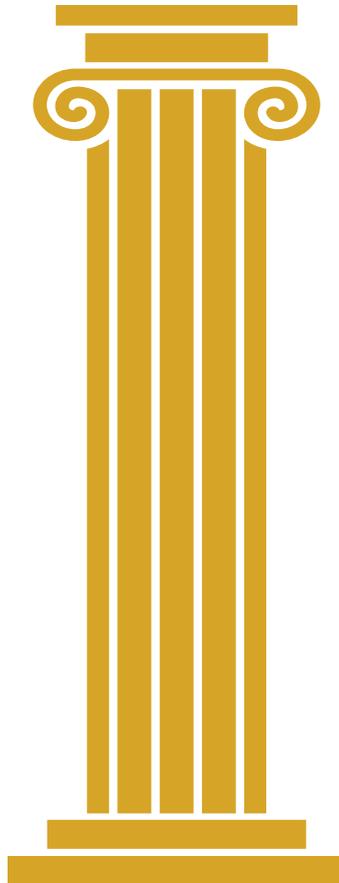
Joshua Johnson, a Black classics major at Cornell University, said that he believes current classical education encourages students to think of non-Greek or non-Roman inhabitants of the classical world as uncivilized, “just like the Greeks and Romans did.”

“I was truly excited when I first encountered a version of classics that moved away from Eurocentric dominance and gave voice to Afro-Asiatic contributions to the ancient classical world,” he said.

College should not be the first place students encounter a balanced, critical approach to history and human achievement more generally. Teaching classics ethically, however, involves more than adding “non-European” content to a Eurocentric curriculum as a footnote. It involves presenting a more expansive view to begin with—decentering ancient Greece and Rome to stress that they were one part of the ancient world, not the ancient world; disrupting the idea that Europe has a monopoly on civilization and progress; and legitimizing sources of knowledge and achievement outside of Europe. Teachers can also expand the artificially demarcated boundaries of a European classical world in terms of geography, language and culture.

But educators can’t just rethink content. We also need to teach students to

In schools, the glorification of classics and its artificial linkage to whiteness is a toxic combination.



be critical consumers of what they’re learning beyond our classes, where students often learn about the influence of Greco-Roman antiquity on the United States as indisputably and exclusively positive.

This is the idea of classics presented by the National Junior Classical League, which seeks “to impart an understanding of the debt of our own culture to that of Classical antiquity.” It does so, as its constitution details, to help students “pattern our citizenship in respect to family, school and nation after the best examples of classical civilizations.”

So students learn about the classical roots of American government without learning about the use of classics to justify the institution of slavery. They learn about democracy in Athens but nothing of how the founders’ specious establishment of ancient Greece and Rome as the cultural forebears of American identity worked to erase the Indigenous nations already established on this land.

Students deserve to know that the version of classics too often taught in today’s schools is essentially the same as the one crafted by white Americans over centuries to justify racist claims of cultural and intellectual superiority. Educators cannot convey this representation as neutral.

Of course, no one is saying that we should not teach about ancient Greece and Rome or that classics should not play a role in students’ education. But it’s our responsibility to provide students ethical encounters with history. This involves recognizing the ways Greco-Roman antiquity has been exploited to establish and maintain white supremacy, naming that exploitation and interrupting it. ♦

*Bostick is a Latin teacher in Winchester, Virginia.*



BY TEACHING TOLERANCE  
ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

ILLUSTRATION BY MARY KATE MCDEVITT

**THE BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR** can feel like a whirlwind, sweeping educators and administrators into a frenzy of excitement, anxiety and anticipation. It's always easy to get lost in the "busy-ness," this year more than most. But as anti-bias, anti-racist educators, it's important we periodically take a moment to refocus, recognize the accomplishments of our commitment and look to the work that lies ahead. The new term gives us an opportunity to do that.

*A new administration. A new year. Join our advisory board in recommitting to equity in education.*

As this new semester begins, a new presidential administration is embarking on its all-important "first 100 days." This public goal-setting got us thinking: What are some things educators can do in 100 days to improve equity in their schools?

We reached out to members of our Teaching Tolerance Advisory Board for answers. Here is their response.

In 100 days, I can reflect on my learning. I can remember courageous conversations I've shared with students, colleagues and supervisors. I can consider the ways I've adjusted in response to what I've learned—and the things I still need to examine or interrogate.

.....  
*In 100 days, I can practice getting used to discomfort. I can push myself to answer hard questions. I can hold myself accountable for moving myself forward, always. I can promise to speak up against unjust or biased speech or policies whenever I can.*

.....  
In 100 days, I can return to the question, "What role does my identity play in my work with youth?" I can lay out an answer.

.....  
*In 100 days, I can speak up for my students. I can share my ideas at a staff meeting, a school board meeting, on social media or in an opinion piece in the newspaper. I can share my expertise, my experience and wisdom.*



In 100 days, I can share my values across my life. If I'm having critical conversations in my classroom, I can make sure I'm having critical discussions at home with my friends and my family, too.

.....  
*In 100 days, I can set the habit of reflecting every day. I can ask myself, "What went well?" "What didn't?" "How can I challenge myself?"*

.....  
In 100 days, I can recenter my work around equity. When looking at grading or programs or school data, I can ask, "What is the equity issue here?" I can insist on an answer, regardless of pushback.

.....  
*In 100 days, I can audit my curriculum, assignments and assessments. I can ask, "Who isn't included?" "Does this assignment measure learning—or compliance?" "Why this text?" "Why this assignment?" "Why this assessment?"*





In 100 days, I can ask others for feedback. I can practice accepting critiques with an open mind and heart, no matter how they come. I can adapt where I need to.

.....  
*In 100 days, I can ensure I am speaking only for myself, not for others, unless they give me permission. I can speak from my experiences, not others'.*

.....  
 In 100 days, I can get cozy with humility.

.....  
*In 100 days, I can practice offering grace. To myself, my colleagues, my students and my community. I can make mistakes and learn something from those mistakes. I can remind myself that with practice, patience and determination, we grow.*

.....  
 In 100 days, I can find my people, my thought partners, my challengers. I can reach out to those in my school, my network, on Twitter or elsewhere. I can find the educators who get me, support me and teach me—and I can be that person for someone else. No one should do this work alone.

.....  
*In 100 days, I can work toward recognizing the funds of knowledge my students' families bring. I can build community, co-creating and holding affinity spaces with families in their home languages. I can invite families to be part of the curriculum.*

In 100 days, I can take time to focus on the physical and mental health of my students, colleagues, and parents and guardians during the pandemic. I can ask what they need in this moment to be better moving forward.

.....  
*In 100 days, I can help connect families with local agencies to meet basic needs like food, housing and medical care. I can set up a video call with experts to visit with families and students in breakout rooms to answer questions and assist them.*



In 100 days, I can practice self-care. I can recognize that it is necessary to build and sustain my capacity to be effective in this work. Whether it's a warm bath, a morning walk, a great TV show, a dance class, a nap, a delicious meal, time with friends and family or time alone, I can do the things that feed my soul and spirit.

.....  
*In 100 days, I can remember my ancestors. I can remember the lessons from those who came before me. I can read the words of Frederick Douglass, listen to Nina Simone and look for inspiration in how our people have thrived in trying times.*

.....  
 In 100 days, I can find ways to remind myself I'm not alone. I can go back to the work of Gholdy Muhammad, Bettina L. Love, Gloria Ladson-Billings and others to remember that I do this work in community, to remember what is possible.

.....  
*In 100 days, I can support students as they lead. I can identify opportunities within and outside of school for students to organize, inspire, teach and learn with their peers, families and communities. If we want this work to continue, young folks will need to be leading it.*



In 100 days, I can meet individually with students, in person or over video calls. Just for 10 minutes, just to talk. I can check in not about grades or school but about their lives. I can share some of who I am with them.

.....  
*In 100 days, I can build strong connections with each of my students. I can remember that I don't need to control everything they are doing. I can laugh with them. I can get to know them as full human beings—their interests, their passions, their goals, their dreams. I can remember that none of this work is possible without strong relationships.*

In 100 days, instead of feeling like I am hammering my head against a stone wall of opposition, instead of getting discouraged, I can think of myself as a beacon. Those who need light will find me. And I will pull in close those who are reaching for me. ♦

This collaborative piece was written by Teaching Tolerance Advisory Board members Lhisa Almashy, Geneviève DeBose, Toni Rose Deanon, Angela Hartman, Danna Lomax, Amy Melik, Veronica Menefee and Alicia Oglesby. TT Senior Editor Julia Delacroix provided editorial support.



CHANGE  
THE  
NAME

BE  
LEGAL

AC  
LIFE  
TT

LIVER LEE

# We Won't Wear the Name

*How students at three schools named for Robert E. Lee fought for change.*

BY **COSHANDRA DILLARD** ILLUSTRATION BY **CORNELIA LI**

**GERTRUDE “TRUDE” LAMB**, 16, describes herself as a shy person. She never wanted to be the center of attention. But, in the summer of 2020, when Trude became the face of a movement to rename Robert E. Lee High School in Tyler, Texas, she was suddenly in a spotlight she'd never imagined.

A friend nudged her to join a local campaign and send a letter to the school board, but she wasn't sure why. Trude, who emigrated from Ghana in 2014, wasn't familiar with Lee or anything related to the Confederacy. So, she began to research.

“At school, they usually just teach the good part about somebody,” she says. “They don't teach the bad part.”

A star athlete on her school's varsity cross-country team, she'd penned a letter to school board members stating she'd no longer wear a jersey that bore the name of an enslaver.

The letter went viral after her mother shared it on social media, catching

the attention of the school board and national media outlets. She later courageously read that letter to school board members at a June 22 meeting.

Trude read, in part:

“I love and enjoy the sports I play at Robert E. Lee. I cannot bear and will no longer wear Lee's name on my race jersey. ... As one of your students I am respectfully asking you to take up the Robert E. Lee name change issue.”

Trude said she was scared and incredibly nervous to speak up, but she did it anyway because it was “the right thing to do.” Support from friends and family got her through it.

“I'm also doing it for others out there, other Black people, and it was the time to get it done,” she says.

In August, school board members voted to rename the school Tyler Legacy High.

Trude isn't alone in her activism. During the uprising of 2020, the impact of COVID-19, police violence

and political discord culminated into a perfect storm. Thousands of young people across the country joined others in the streets, at school board meetings and city halls, building on a valued tradition of youth-led activism to demand the dismantling of Confederate iconography in their communities. School boards across the country, primarily in the South, voted to change schools' names, often as a result of pressure from students.

Young people have always led the way—from the Adkin High School students in Kinston, North Carolina, who staged a massive march in 1951, to the Children's Crusade in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. More recently, we've seen the same activism in Black Lives Matter and March for Our Lives organizing.

Students' activism can lead to cultural and policy change, especially when adults—whether educators, caregivers or community leaders—elevate



their voices and give them space to bravely express themselves.

Trude's teammates and community members had her back. Athletes from her school began posting photos of themselves wearing Lee jerseys that were blacked out on an Instagram account called "wewontwearthename." Some of her teachers, including one who attended a rally for the name change, encouraged her to keep using her voice.

However, other community members spoke out against change, as they'd been doing for years. And Trude received a number of threats, including one from a classmate who said on social media they'd bring a knife to school.

"I can remember them saying something about I'm from Africa, I'm not from the U.S., so I don't really know what I'm saying," Trude recounts. "[They said] I'm just being put up to this, like I have no idea what I'm doing."

While unfamiliar with the Lost Cause narrative, Trude was very familiar

with the history of the dungeons that held enslaved people on the shores of her home country. Seeing a community divided brought these two stories together. She was witnessing, in real time, the residual effects of the transatlantic slave trade.

#### **Persistence and Support**

The histories of most U.S. cities have left some of their citizens marginalized or traumatized. In cities where schools are named after Confederate figures, chances are the same names can also be found on other public buildings, street signs, parks and monuments. In Tyler, Texas, Confederate Avenue runs straight through a predominately Black neighborhood. In Fairfax County, Virginia, county officials are still taking inventory of the numerous spaces that pay homage to Confederates.

That's where seniors Kimberly Boateng and Kadija Ismail demanded that their school board rename their Robert E. Lee High School—a racially

diverse school in Springfield, Virginia. Kadija served on one of the school board advisory committees, while Kimberly served as a student representative on the school board during the 2019–2020 school year.

Discussions about renaming the school had happened in the past, but they didn't get far. In March of 2020, school board members began a five-month process to rename the school. Then the proposal took a back seat to equipping students with tools for online learning.

Students still saw the name change as a priority, however. In June, Kadija started a petition, which earned 1,000 signatures within 24 hours. Kimberly wrote an open letter, which included a link to the petition, and sent it to the school board, the superintendent, the school regional offices and the Fairfax County NAACP. Community leaders, including the NAACP, boosted the girls' voices online. They also found support in a new principal.



“It wasn’t just like a student outcry,” Kadija says. “It was like the community, the teachers that attend the school, the staff members, the alumni, everyone was just kind of like, ‘OK, we want this to happen.’ And so the added support from all realms was really what helped.”

Kadija notes that some educators and administrators had underestimated how the name affected Black students.

“People didn’t really necessarily know that this was something that was really impacting the students until the whole thing was happening, and people went out and spoke at the hearings,” she says.

In July, facing the added pressure of a national uprising around racial injustice, the school board swiftly renamed the school John R. Lewis High School.

“It put them in a difficult space because they’re giving statements about how racism does not belong in Fairfax County, and everyone was like, ‘Well, prove it,’” Kimberly says. “It was very obvious that if they hadn’t done something about it, there would be backlash.”

Today, Kadija says, students there can say where they attend school more confidently.

“There’s more pride that comes with the name John R. Lewis High School,” she says. “You don’t feel ashamed to say the entire name.”

Kimberly and Kadija learned a valuable lesson through their advocacy: It takes passion and persistence to move people in power.

But the teens note that educators should be more open to listening to students’ concerns before there is outside pressure. They shouldn’t have to be the ones advocating for dropping a Confederate name from a school.

“When they first introduced the forum topics this past year in March to rename the school, I heard one of the school [board] members say, ‘We haven’t heard of advocacy involving the name change,’” Kimberly recounts. “That bothered me so much only because you shouldn’t need a lot of advocacy to change the name of a

Confederate general. That’s common sense to me.”

### Why Local History Matters

Last summer’s nationwide protests were more than a rallying cry against police violence; they were also an opportunity to reckon with the history of white supremacy.

That history is still very much alive in Alabama’s capital. At city hall, a seal proclaims Montgomery is the “Birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement”—right above a proclamation that the city is the “Cradle of the Confederacy.”

Following the police killing of George Floyd—and after activists toppled a Robert E. Lee statue in nearby Birmingham—Montgomery activists decided to confront their own city’s Confederate legacy. At Robert E. Lee High School, protesters, including former students, took down a statue of its namesake.

Amerika Blair graduated from Robert E. Lee in 2009. She and other

“I think I’m at a point where I don’t feel like we should have to argue a point of why this is wrong. And we should definitely not have to pressure anyone to do the right thing. And the right thing is to denounce the white supremacy that this country was built on.”

— AMERIKA BLAIR

members of a social justice organization called Southerners on New Ground (SONG) pressured Montgomery Public Schools to rename the school, along with two others—Sidney Lanier and Jefferson Davis. Blair was among those who gave impassioned speeches urging the school board to change their alma maters’ names. In summer 2020, they voted to change all three names.

It was a long time coming.

Blair explains that educators did not spend enough time in school examining the city’s role in national history. As a student, she didn’t realize the impact of that lack of historical context.

“So we—me and my peers—never really took in the fact that we were going to a school named after the Confederate general, and even chanting, “Go Generals!” during our athletic [events],” she says.

She adds, “It’s really a slap in the face. And still ... I don’t think we do a good job at narrating the truth behind the Confederacy, the truth behind the birth of America. We fail everyone on that case.”

As Gregg Suzanne Ferguson explains in the 2019 *Teaching Tolerance* article “Black Students and Educators at

Confederate-Named Schools,” these names function as symbolic violence. They undermine the work educators do to help create inclusive environments and unite school communities around common moral values.

To ignore the pain Confederate names bring students, particularly Black students, is to trivialize the terror inflicted on their ancestors and to continue the dehumanization and lack of regard for the dignity of Black people.

“I think I’m at a point where I don’t feel like we should have to argue a point of why this is wrong,” Blair says, “and we should definitely not have to pressure anyone to do the right thing. And the right thing is to denounce the white supremacy that this country was built on.”

Removing a Confederate name from a school name is more than symbolic. A Confederate name on a building does what the Lost Cause narrative designed it to do: remind people that a racial hierarchy reigns in this country. It’s critical that educators have conversations with students about their education, which should include how they’re taught history and their feelings about Confederate names and symbols.

“I want [students] to be mindful of those who will attempt to steal their voice, those who will attempt to make them feel like they don’t matter and what they’re doing doesn’t matter,” Blair says.

### What to Tackle Next

Activists are optimistic that ridding their schools of Confederate icons will lead the way to addressing systemic problems.

They all name discipline disparities as a key focus to tackle next. Trude, for example, pointed out that white students, such as the ones who sent threats to her online, weren’t treated the same as Black students, who are punished for lesser offenses.

Kimberly and Kadija note that there is a lot of work to be done around anti-Black racism. While they recognize the need to make school safe and inclusive for everyone, they also feel there should be more intentional efforts to make learning equitable for Black students.

“They have a fear that if we elevate one voice, that they’re not elevating other voices,” Kimberly says of school administrators. “They were afraid to talk about specifically Black people. ... They liked to use the word ‘all’ a lot. ... I’m like, ‘But why don’t we talk about Black students?’ I talked a lot about Black students and how we’ve got to say certain words. Specifically, right now, Black lives are being targeted.”

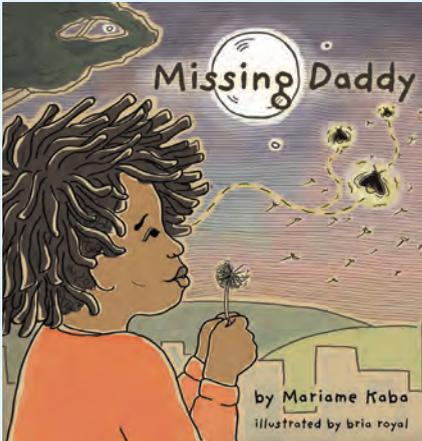
Any advocacy for change isn’t just for right now, the young activists say. They realize they might not see the fruits of their labor for years to come.

“I’m hoping I do, but we may not see it,” Blair says. “But others coming behind us will get a taste of it, and they deserve it more than anything.” ♦

*Dillard is a senior writer for Teaching Tolerance.*

# What We're Reading

Teaching Tolerance loves to read!  
Check out a few of our favorite books  
for diverse readers and educators.



**Missing Daddy** by Mariame Kaba addresses the youngest victims of the prison industrial system—children with loved ones who are incarcerated. Alongside beautiful illustrations by bria royal, Kaba renders in detail the experience of children who may not fully understand their loved ones' extended absence. The story's description of ridicule at school, domestic stress when caretakers manage households alone and enforced separation from a beloved father may help young readers feel less alone as they manage the impact of long-term and long-distance incarceration on their families and themselves.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

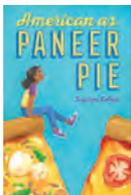
*“Kaba’s emotive work helps children, their caretakers and other interested parties acknowledge the painful impact of incarceration.”*

—Crystal L. Keels,  
Teaching Tolerance  
Associate Editor



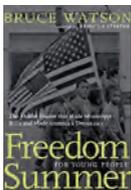
**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

**Her Body Can**  
by Katie Crenshaw and  
Ady Meschke



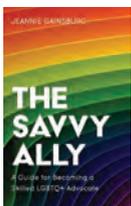
**MIDDLE SCHOOL**

**American as Paneer Pie**  
by Supriya Kelkar



**MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL**

**Freedom Summer for Young People: The Violent Season That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy**  
by Bruce Watson, adapted  
by Rebecca Stefoff



**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**The Savvy Ally: A Guide for Becoming a Skilled LGBTQ+ Advocate**  
by Jeannie Gainsburg



Judith Heumann’s memoir, **Being Heumann**, paints a detailed historical portrait of the birth of the 20th century disability rights movement. Writing with Kristen Joiner in witty and personal prose, Heumann describes how she and fellow disability activists established the groundbreaking Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, developed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and shifted the narrative of disability from a medical issue to a question of civil rights.

*“If you’re searching for an excellent primer on the disability justice movement or a firsthand account of the power of the collective voice, you’ll want to pick up this book!”*

—Jey Ehrenhalt, Teaching Tolerance School-Based  
Programming and Grants Manager



**Punching the Air**, by Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam, is an intricately crafted novel in verse that paints a portrait of a young Black boy’s humanity. At 16, Amal Shahid fights to find hope, freedom and his truth through the arts in the most debilitating space—a juvenile detention center. Salaam, one of the Exonerated Five, writes with Zoboi to expose how systemic racism creates disdain for Blackness, repressing the genius and creativity of Black boys.

*“This must-read, rhythmic masterpiece amplifies the often stifled gifts of Black boyhood while reminding us to extend grace and mercy to those who are failed by oppressive systems.”*

—Coshandra Dillard, Teaching Tolerance Senior Writer



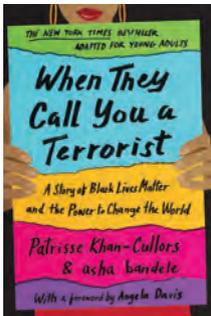
*“This beautiful book is a celebration of the fat and fierce and a love letter to fat bodies. This is a book I wish I’d had as a fat teenager, from a community of incredible fat people with a powerful message about fat acceptance and loving yourself.”*

—Lindsay Shelton, Teaching Tolerance Marketing Coordinator



*“A beautifully illustrated and profoundly told tale that centers the courageous work of Indigenous activists while reminding readers that we are all connected by the water they protect.”*

—Cory Collins, Teaching Tolerance Senior Writer



*“Reading about Patrisse Khan-Cullors’ experiences—and how they inform her organizing journey—will electrify readers.”*

—Anya Malley, Teaching Tolerance Editorial Assistant

Written by Carole Lindstrom, an Anishinaabe/Métis author tribally enrolled with the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe, and illustrated by Michaela Goade, an enrolled member of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, **We Are Water Protectors** connects Indigenous traditions to present-day activism. Facing the threat of a pipeline—a manifestation of a tale of the snake that will threaten the land—a young water protector explains why water is sacred and vows to defend it. This story is a call to action insisting that Indigenous people are not only still here but still at the forefront of the fight for climate justice.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

**The (Other) F Word: A Celebration of the Fat and Fierce** combines personal essays, prose, poetry, fashion tips and more into a visual celebration of fat bodies. Edited by Angie Manfredi, this groundbreaking collection of diverse voices combines the talents of renowned fat YA and middle-grade authors with those of fat influencers and creatives. It offers fat teen readers a guidebook to becoming their best, most confident selves while providing readers of all sizes a road map for reconceiving our notions of body and acceptance.

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

Patrisse Khan-Cullors’ **When They Call You a Terrorist: A Story of Black Lives Matter and the Power to Change the World (Young Adult Edition)** is vulnerable, heart-wrenching and liberating. Written with asha bandele and adapted by Benee Knauer, Khan-Cullors’ memoir starts at the beginning, detailing how she felt like an outsider within her family and felt unsure of herself



*“Dr. Michie makes it clear that, for educators, any division between inside and outside the classroom is impossible.”*

—Crystal L. Keels, Teaching Tolerance Associate Editor

*“This book not only reminds youth (and adults) to take action; it guides them on how.”*

—Kevin Cordi, Teaching Tolerance Advisory Board Member

in middle school. Yet, as she grew—and with the help of her support network—she started to trust in the power within herself to make real change. The incredible story takes readers all the way through her co-founding of the Black Lives Matter movement.

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

Turn the page of a traditional planner, and it might include the date and a quote. However, **Planning to Change the World: A Plan Book for Social Justice Educators** by the Education for Liberation Network, prepares the reader to take action. Each page is filled with details about champions of social justice, quotes by social movers, powerful images and informative articles. The book includes reminders of conferences, essays about current work and thorough suggestions on how to take action for social justice. This plan book is a great tool for educators, caregivers and community organizers.

HIGH SCHOOL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In **Same as it Never Was: Notes on a Teacher’s Return to the Classroom**, Gregory Michie recounts returning, after 12 years away from K–12 schools, to teach at the Chicago public elementary school where he started his career. With testing requirements and the school’s probationary status, Michie, a white educator, wrestles with the realities he and his students—Black, brown, undocumented or with undocumented families—face. In this, his third book, Michie argues that teachers “cannot separate their classroom selves from their citizen selves.”

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## What We're Watching

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

Toni Morrison famously said, “If you are free, you need to free somebody else.” That idea is omnipresent in the documentary chronicling her life and career, **Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am**. Through interviews with Morrison’s editors, colleagues and close friends—and the author herself—the film offers an intimate look into the profound impact Morrison’s work had on literature, the United States and the globe. In a world where whiteness dominates the literary canon, she never apologized for centering Black stories. The film shows how she amplified other Black voices through her work as a publisher and colleague. *Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am* is a wonderful glimpse into the life of an author who used her freedom to free others and to display through her prose the world that we share. (120 min.)

[Available on Amazon and Hulu](#)  
HIGH SCHOOL, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Enjoyable and educational, the 12 episodes of **Bookmarks: Celebrating Black Voices** introduce a range of #OwnVoices children’s books about Black identity. Hosted by Marley Dias, each episode features Black entertainers, activists or authors reading powerful stories about understanding race, finding joy and love within ourselves, fighting injustice and more. With stunning

illustrations and captivating questions featured throughout, young viewers will feel as if they’ve been transported into these magical stories. (5-12 min.)

[Available on Netflix](#)  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Morgan Jon Fox’s short, **The One You Never Forget**, lasts only eight minutes, but each second is packed with relatable teenage feelings. The film follows Carey, a young Black boy getting ready for his first formal dance. His parents use she/her pronouns to refer to his date. But despite those assumptions, Carey’s dad models acceptance when a white boy named Hunter shows up. For students, this film opens a door for talking about how language can impose societal expectations and how small actions can make people feel welcome—even at something as stressful and awkward as a school dance. (8 min.)

[Available on Vimeo](#)  
MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

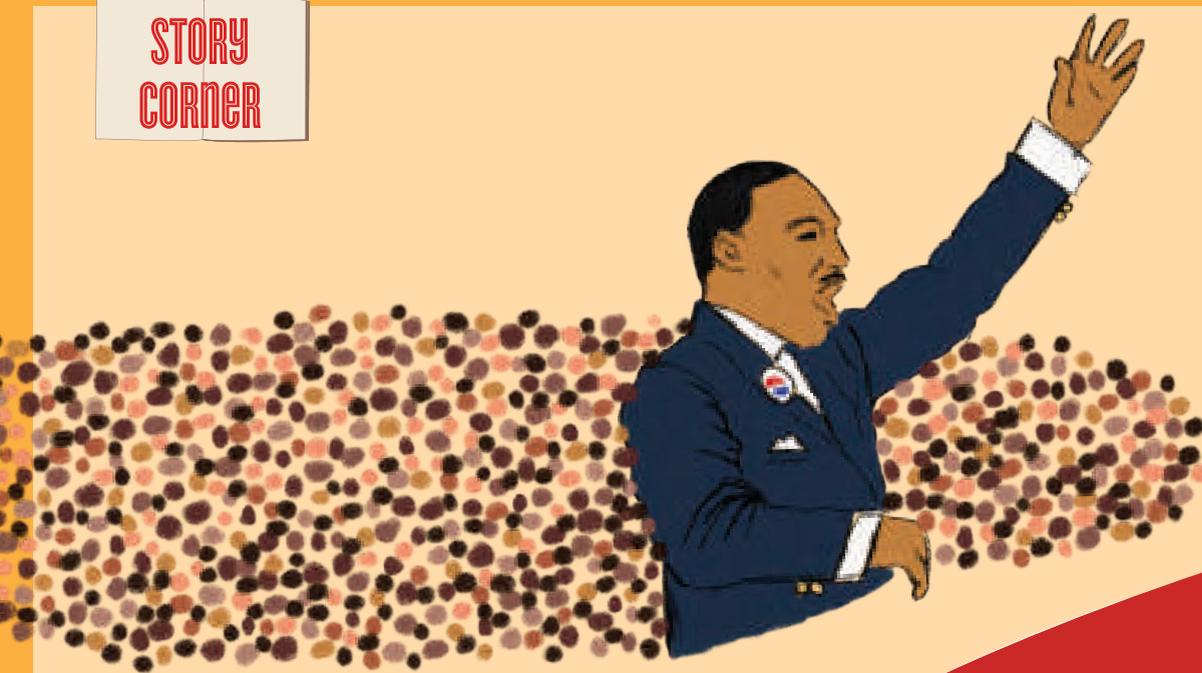
“If you don’t walk away with the whole story, you’re going to walk away with a fairy tale,” Wampanoag journalist Paula Peters says. Peters appears alongside award-winning historians, professors and scholars in the new short film **The Forgotten Slavery of Our Ancestors**. The film introduces the

often-overshadowed history of Indigenous slavery, which began over a century before the first enslaved Africans were brought to these shores. Acknowledgements of the stolen land on which the United States sits highlights this history. Connecting the facts with deeply personal stories, *The Forgotten Slavery of Our Ancestors* is both a call to teach complex history and a welcome complement to the *Teaching Hard History: American Slavery* framework. (12 min.)

[Available at tolerance.org/forgottenslavery](https://tolerance.org/forgottenslavery)  
MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Black Boys** features the voices of Black men and boys of all ages, and those who love and support them, as they discuss the ways they view the world and the ways the world views them. Activist athletes, journalists, educators and musicians provide commentary on the journeys Black boys and men take while living their lives. Interspersed with beautifully compelling scenes of Black boys addressing their hopes and dreams are several horrific, tragically familiar images of state-sanctioned brutality. The film, a Never Whisper Justice production, posits the power of love as the means to celebrate the gifts that Black boys and men bring to the world. (95 min.)

[Available on Peacock](#)  
HIGH SCHOOL, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



## *The Night Before the Dream*

Reunion time! Some drove up, some came down  
To hear Dr. King speak in D.C., our hometown.  
By bus, car and train, many came a long way  
And arrived on the eve of that wonderful day.

We stayed at the home of my dad's Grandma Bea,  
The eldest of all in our large family.  
There was hugging and kissing and *My-how-you've-grown*s,  
Which caused squirming and giggling and quite a  
few moans.

Soon it was my turn to kiss Grandma Bea,  
She said, "Here's the young lady who's named after me."  
Then I joined all my cousins in laughing and playing;  
But we could still hear what the grown-ups were saying.

Uncle Joe, who had driven in sweltering heat,  
Had passed places where he could not stop, rest or eat.  
The older folks somberly shared memories  
Of other such hardships and indignities.

Early next morning we went to the place  
Where people of every age, faith and race  
Had all come together to march peacefully  
For jobs and for justice and equality.

With the Reverend King humbly leading the way,  
We sang as we marched on that bright summer day.  
My kinfolk, the night before tired and glum,  
Were now hopefully singing, *We Shall Overcome*.

We gathered in front of the grand monument  
To Abraham Lincoln, sixteenth President.  
Our anticipation had reached a high peak  
When Dr. King rose and came forward to speak:

"I am happy to join you at this demonstration  
One hundred years after Emancipation.  
But five score years later the Negro's not free;  
He's still chained by injustice and by poverty."

I looked in the eyes of my Great Grandma Bea;  
They were staring at something that I could not see.  
What was she thinking, this woman so brave,  
Who, at one hundred two, had been once called a "slave"?

King said, "Now is the time that we honor our creed  
And the rights its magnificent words guaranteed."  
He'd say, "Now is the time!" Then he'd say it again.  
And each time he did, I heard shouts of, "Amen!"

His words rolled like thunder; they flowed like a stream.  
Then a voice cried out, "Martin! Now tell them  
your dream!"  
That's when his words seem to sprout wings and fly,  
Lifting us up as they soared through the sky:

"I have a dream!" he proclaimed to the crowd.  
His dream made us joyful and thankful and proud.  
"I have a dream that this nation will be  
An oasis of freedom and prosperity!"



King's dream, for Great Grandma, was long overdue,  
But he told of his dream for us younger folks, too:  
That's when this great man simply spoke as a dad  
And mentioned the four little children he had.

He dreamed that one day they would live in a land  
Where all of God's children could walk hand-in-hand.  
They'd be judged by their character, not by their skin;  
That was a land that I longed to live in.

"We must all work together," King said, "white and Black,  
We cannot walk alone and we will not turn back."  
We all would go home, as King asked us to do,  
To work for the day when the dream would come true.

Later that night it was *my* generation  
Who spoke of the future with new inspiration.  
We were filled with the bliss of our planning and dreaming.  
As our parents looked on, all their faces were beaming.

We sang songs we had sung on the mall that great day,  
With *My Country, 'Tis of Thee* leading the way.  
Great Grandma Bea, her voice trembling but strong,  
Joined five generations of family in song.

As it got close to midnight, some nodded with sleep.  
Were they dreaming of promises we'd vowed to keep?  
I yawned as I watched my dear Great Grandma Bea  
Gaze at the now-peaceful scene lovingly.

She smiled and said softly, "Let's end the same way  
That young Martin himself ended his speech today."  
And I'll always remember, as sleep came on fast,  
Hearing her sing, *Free at last! Free at last!*

### Questions for Readers

#### RIGHT THERE (IN THE TEXT)

Why had Bea's family all gathered in Washington, D.C.?

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

Why couldn't Uncle Joe stop at some places on his drive in?

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

How can ordinary people come together to push back against injustice?

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

Bea learned a lot about the fight for justice from her great-grandmother. Who is a person you know or have learned about who has taught you about the importance of fighting for what is right?



**DERRICK A. BELL JR.** (1930–2011) was a renowned civil rights lawyer who wrote and theorized about race and racism. The first tenured Black law professor at Harvard University, Bell lived out his beliefs when he resigned from his position to protest the lack of Black women on faculty.



# BLACK LIVES MATTER AT SCHOOL

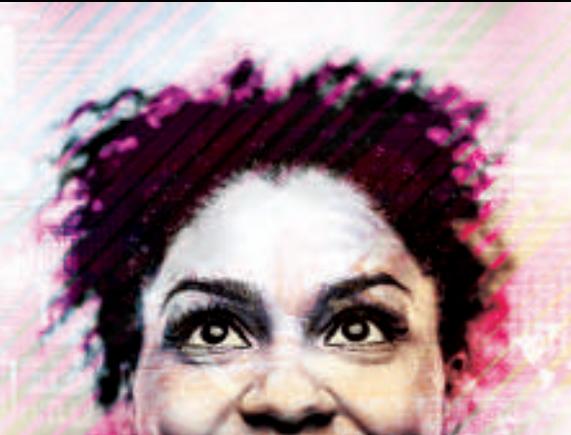
Black Lives Matter at School is a national coalition organizing for racial justice in education.

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.

LEARN MORE AT  
[BLACKLIVESMATTERATSCHOOL.COM](https://blacklivesmatteratschool.com)



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*Deepen your knowledge and improve your practice with podcasts exploring critical topics in teaching and learning for justice.*

Learn about digital literacy with *The Mind Online*, the history of American slavery and the civil rights movement with *Teaching Hard History* and LGBTQ history with *Queer America*.

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Without LGBTQ history, there is no American history. From *Teaching Tolerance* and hosts Leila Rupp and John D'Emilio, *Queer America* takes listeners on a journey that spans from Harlem to the Frontier West, revealing stories of LGBTQ life that belong in our consciousness and in our classrooms.

### THE MIND ONLINE

Through conversations with teachers, librarians, scholars and reporters, *The Mind Online* explores the critical aspects of digital literacy that shape how we create and consume content online. Discover what educators and students alike need to know—and how we can all become safer, better informed digital citizens.

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