



# The March Continues

FIVE ESSENTIAL PRACTICES FOR TEACHING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

A REPORT BY THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER'S  
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TEACHING  
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## About This Guide

This is the fourth publication in the Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching the Movement initiative. The first three reports focused on state standards.

This guide provides practical guidance for classroom teachers.

The publication was prepared under the guidance of Teaching Tolerance Director Maureen Costello. The principal writer was Kate Shuster, Ph.D., with feedback from Sara Wicht. It was edited by Alice Pettway and designed by Sunny Paulk.

## About the Southern Poverty Law Center

The Southern Poverty Law Center is dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of our society. Using litigation, education and other forms of advocacy, the Center works toward the day when the ideals of equal justice and equal opportunity will be a reality.

## About Teaching Tolerance

Founded in 1991, Teaching Tolerance is dedicated to reducing prejudice, improving intergroup relations and supporting equitable school experiences for our nation's children. The program provides free educational materials to educators for use by millions of students and is available to every school in the country.



For more information about Teaching Tolerance  
or to download this guide,  
visit [tolerance.org](http://tolerance.org).

# Introduction

Not too long ago, Teaching Tolerance issued a report evaluating the various sets of state standards on how well they supported teaching about the modern civil rights movement. Our report showed that few states put needed emphasis on the movement. They provided little guidance to teachers about what should be taught and scant support for actual classroom practice.

That report was intended for policymakers. This guide is intended for teachers and school leaders who want to cultivate a deeper understanding of this important era in our history and who want to use its lessons to nurture a new generation of citizens. In it, we identify five essential practices for teaching the civil rights movement that make its lessons fresh and meaningful to students today.

Ongoing and emerging research into the history and teaching of the civil rights movement has revealed what many people have known all along: Our conventional narrative is oversimplified and often inaccurate. Textbooks and resources too often reflect a King-and-Parks-centered narrative that omits the breadth and depth of the people's movement. These narratives sanitize or neglect the intensity of resistance that activists faced. The good news is that the history of the movement is still being written, that stories and artifacts are being preserved, and that new teaching resources are being produced.

The struggle for justice and equality continues, and today's students will take up previous generations' unfinished business. When they learn about the civil rights movement, they learn more than a sequence of events and personalities. They learn about effective citizenship, democratic action and the nature of struggle. They also gain essential frames for understanding the current realities of American society. We expect our children to aspire to a better future and exhort them to be the leaders of tomorrow. By teaching about this great movement for freedom, opportunity and democracy, we give them the tools to create that future and to continue the march.



Maureen Costello  
Director, Teaching Tolerance

# The March Continues

## Five Essential Practices for Teaching the Civil Rights Movement

Teaching the civil rights movement should empower students to be great citizens. If you're reading this guide, you likely share this philosophy. You want to teach about the civil rights movement as more than history—it is part of your mission to empower students with the tools to challenge injustice.

Perhaps you're a new teacher looking for specific planning guidance, or a veteran trying to enrich your lessons. You've already figured out that most students come to you with an established and limited narrative about the movement. They almost certainly learned about Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks in early lessons on holidays and heroes.

They may have encountered poetry or music that refers to the struggle in an English class or during Black History Month. They may have learned that the movement was in the past, and that the injustices it sought to correct have been remedied. This may or may not ring true to your students. You may be using textbooks that rely on a King-centered story about the movement, even though this story has been filled out and enriched by recent historical work.

This guide has emerged from our decades of experience and research into teaching the civil rights movement. In it, we present five essential practices designed to provoke thought and innovation:

**Practice 1. Educate for empowerment.**

**Practice 2. Know how to talk about race.**

**Practice 3. Capture the unseen.**

**Practice 4. Tell a complicated story.**

**Practice 5. Connect to the present.**

These practices work well for many classes and topics, but in this guide, we apply them specifically to teaching the civil rights movement. The topic opens a special window for you to use all of these practices, engaging diverse students in constructive consideration of the present in light of our past and preparing them to continue the work that the civil rights movement began.

## Practice 1. Educate for empowerment.

At its heart, the civil rights movement tells a story of hundreds of thousands of people who believed that they could bring about change. That identity—seeing oneself as an empowered and effective individual—is an essential disposition for effective citizenship and a goal for which most teachers strive. Teaching for empowerment helps students see themselves as participants in history and as agents for change in their schools and communities.

It makes sense to make empowerment a central theme and focus when teaching about the civil rights movement. Without it, the movement makes little sense. Thinking about how to teach for empowerment helps form the essential questions that will drive instruction, planning and assessment.

Empowerment begins by teaching students to think critically about history and to question the conventional story and seek the story beneath. Critical thinking includes examining the common ways in which historical fact is created and presented. As Ohio State University professor Beverly M. Gordon writes, students “question what is *not* being said as well as what is stated.”<sup>2</sup>

The civil rights movement offers many opportunities to question assumptions and poke holes in the conventional narrative. An excellent example, and promising first lesson, is told in Herbert Kohl’s famous essay “Rosa was tired ...” Here, the widely accepted, and false, story of Rosa Parks is unraveled in favor of a more truthful and more complicated version that shows Rosa Parks as a dedicated activist whose resistance was planned.<sup>3</sup>

The movement offers hundreds of role models and case studies that make it easy for students to see how participants critiqued and resisted existing arrangements of power. Using texts such as *Freedom on the Menu*, which tells the story of the Greensboro sit-ins from the perspective of a child, even very young students can relate to the struggle and “find themselves” in history. As students become immersed, they are more likely to understand the issues.

Studying the civil rights movement raises enduring questions immediately relevant to students’ lives. Teaching to empower can help students grapple with these questions in productive ways. Racism and other kinds of discrimination persist in American society. Students who learn about the tactics and strategies used to resist and overturn systems of oppression can learn that they, too, can address injustices closer to home. This makes it more likely that students will internalize new ways of thinking and acting.

Educating for empowerment means adopting a culturally responsive approach to your teaching. In our increasingly diverse classrooms, there is no single perspective from which to teach anything, particularly the civil rights movement. Exploring the movement with students who may be African American, recent immigrants from Asia and Central America or white suburbanites challenges educators to take these varied perspectives and experiences into consideration when planning instruction.

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“We can influence the motivation of students by coming to know their perspective, by drawing forth who they naturally and culturally are, and by seeing them as unique and active. Sharing our resources with theirs, working together, we can create greater energy for learning.”

—RAYMOND J. WLODKOWSKI AND MARGERY B. GINSBERG<sup>4</sup>



The history of the civil rights movement itself includes examples of culturally responsive teaching in action. The Mississippi Freedom Schools, established in the summer of 1964 during the voter-registration drives, created curricula based on students' needs and experiences as African Americans living in the Jim Crow South. The purpose was to engage students in the dangerous activities of citizenship. According to founder Charles Cobb, then a Howard University student, the schools were meant "to create an educational experience for students which will make it possible for them to challenge the myths of our society, to perceive more clearly its realities, and to find alternatives—ultimately new directions for action." Making this possibility concrete meant beginning with students' needs and interests to shape the curriculum.

Be sure to show students how important young people were in shaping the struggle. The Teaching Tolerance film *The Children's March* can inspire your students with the heroism of students in 1963 Birmingham. Build on its message with a look at other young people's work registering voters during the Mississippi Freedom Summer, testing segregation laws in the Freedom Rides and influencing movement tactics and strategy through participation in such groups as SNCC. Emphasizing young people's role in the movement turns around the ubiquitous King-centered narrative and is empowering by example.

Teaching for empowerment, especially when it encourages students to participate in their schools and communities, is particularly important for students of color. It is essential to closing what Harvard professor Meira Levinson has called the "civic empowerment gap." Although young people are plugged in to vast flows of information, students from historically disadvantaged populations consistently score lower on tests of civic knowledge and skills than their peers. These students, according to Levinson, are also likely to feel helpless in the face of social and political developments. Teaching them about the triumphs of the civil rights movement without providing them with an activist pedagogy that can improve their sense of self-efficacy is short-sighted. The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools reports that 81 percent of high school dropouts said they would have been less likely to leave school if there were more opportunities for experiential learning.<sup>5</sup>

Experiential learning can even lead to change in schools. Mariana Souto-Manning used books like *The Story of Ruby Bridges* and *Goin' Somewhere Special* with her first grade classroom to spur meaningful discussions about the civil rights movement.<sup>6</sup> She was able to use her students' experience learning about the movement to spur integration of her school's gifted program. This is in the spirit of the Freedom Schools—students learned to interrogate their own schooling experience as they learned about others who had interrogated other social realities.

The civil rights movement offers an ideal place to plan for experiential learning. The anthology *Putting the Movement Back Into Civil Rights Teaching*, published by Teaching for Change, offers many inspiring examples of teachers who integrate hands-on activism and active learning when teaching the movement.<sup>7</sup> Though not every teacher will be able to raise money to take students on a field trip through

"Education for liberation combats the refusal to see humanness in others, and in doing so allows us all to be fully human. Education for liberation makes necessary and central the full humanity of all people to exist and act upon their world. It assumes, as Charles Payne expresses, that people need to be educated in a way that helps them understand and 'think more critically about the social forces that shape our lives and think more confidently about their ability to react against those forces.'"

—KEITH CATONE<sup>4</sup>

civil rights sites in the South like the Girls' School of Austin did, connections to local and national resources, including partnerships with museums, libraries and university archives (many of which are available online as "virtual exhibits," such as the one offered by the National Park Service), can open any classroom to rich resources for promoting historical thinking and deep understanding.<sup>8</sup>

## Practice 2. Know how to talk about race.

Teachers planning lessons on the civil rights movement must be prepared to talk about race and racism, not simply as remnants of a long-gone past, but as real forces in the world today.

Race is a social construct, not a biological given. Still, race matters. It shapes our experiences and has real impacts, from the smallest interpersonal interaction to the largest institutional arrangements. Many teachers believe that ignoring race—adopting a colorblind stance—is the best way to overcome its negative power. Yet it’s important for teachers to examine the ways that race influences their classrooms every day. Stanford’s Linda Darling-Hammond has argued that, in schools, teachers and students routinely make assumptions about each other on the basis of race. “Those are all assumptions that can be tested, debunked and reframed,” she says, “but you can’t get there without understanding that race is part of the context.”<sup>10</sup>

Certainly, we must talk about race to help students understand the civil rights movement. Learning works through a process of assimilating new knowledge into existing beliefs about the world. Unexplored and unacknowledged background ideas or assumptions too easily create emotional obstacles to student learning. This is particularly true when teaching about race and racism, as Spelman College President Beverly Daniel Tatum writes: “If not addressed, these emotional responses can result in student resistance to oppression-related content areas. Such resistance can ultimately interfere with the cognitive understanding and mastery of the material. This resistance and potential interference is particularly common when specifically addressing issues of race and racism.”<sup>11</sup> If we do not talk about race and racism when we talk about the civil rights movement, we deprive students of the opportunity to understand much of American history.

Talking about race and racism means reaching outside the context of the civil rights movement. We do students a disservice if we encourage them to think that racism is a remnant of a distant historical era. In addition, we risk losing students of color who know all too well the continued effects of race and racism.

Many teachers, wanting to avoid discomfort or conflict, avoid open conversations about race in their classrooms. These reasonable concerns only underscore how important it is to find ways to make the classroom a safe space in which to talk about race and ethnicity.

It is not easy to talk about race. Setting clear guidelines for discussion is an essential first step. Involve students in this process by asking them what kinds of guidelines they would need to feel safe expressing their ideas. Remember that conversations about race are not only about color, but also about whiteness. Too often, teachers discuss race without making white privilege visible and subject to investi-

### Keep in Mind

- ➔ Acknowledge the importance of race in your students’ lives.
- ➔ Dispel ideas about a biological basis for race.
- ➔ Bone up on the history of race as a social construct and means of control.<sup>9</sup>
- ➔ Create a safe environment with clear communication guidelines.
- ➔ Identify common roadblocks to productive discussion.
- ➔ Recognize that disparities exist but need not persist.
- ➔ Speak from your own experience.
- ➔ Create opportunities for students to speak from their own experience.



gation; in the context of the civil rights movement, this can make the struggle difficult to understand and diminish the heroism of white allies who “crossed lines” in solidarity.

Teaching the civil rights movement provides a relevant and historically appropriate opportunity to talk openly with students about the ways discrimination and privilege shaped and continue to mold American society. Teachers who choose to talk about race in the classroom will be rewarded with more-engaged students who gain a deeper understanding of the civil rights movement and its context.

## Tools for Teachers

### ➔ *Start with yourself.*

Before starting conversations with your students about race and ethnicity, it’s good to begin by reflecting on your own identity using a tool like this one: [tolerance.org/reflection-activity-identity](https://tolerance.org/reflection-activity-identity).

### ➔ *Read about it.*

Teaching Tolerance offers a number of articles that grapple with this subject. Try “Race Talk When Diversity Equals One” ([tolerance.org/race-talk](https://tolerance.org/race-talk)), “It’s Still Good to Talk About Race” ([tolerance.org/talk-about-race](https://tolerance.org/talk-about-race)), “It’s Never Too Early to Talk About Race” ([tolerance.org/too-early](https://tolerance.org/too-early)) and “Talking Race” ([tolerance.org/talking-race](https://tolerance.org/talking-race)).

### ➔ *Go deeper.*

Read a book like *Talking Race in the Classroom* by Jane Bolgatz. Spend some time with Teaching Tolerance’s online professional-development tools about culture in the classroom ([tolerance.org/culture-classroom](https://tolerance.org/culture-classroom)). Talk with other teachers to see how they talk about race.

## Practice 3. Capture the unseen.

Because the civil rights movement is so often condensed into two names (Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr.) and four words (“I have a dream”), students can discover much that is usually unseen. When teachers capture the unseen, they open doors for students to enter and explore.

Capturing the unseen helps teach the civil rights movement because it engages students in the process of discovering knowledge. Students see that the movement—and much knowledge—is a “living thing.” It is not only their journey of discovery; scholars, too, continue to map its contours and fissures. When students are producers rather than simply passive receptacles of knowledge, they are more likely to show interest and retain information.

The unseen wider civil rights movement brings female civil rights leaders out of textbook sidebars and places them at the center of discussion. It focuses the classroom’s lens on such places as Sunflower County, Miss.; Albany, Ga.; and Wilson, N.C., to see how the freedom struggle was understood differently in diverse places. The wide civil rights movement reveals what is often obscured by textbooks’ focus on court victories and federal legislation, what University of Texas historian Laurie Green has called the “equally hard-fought struggles centered on home, work, family, and community—areas of daily life commonly perceived as outside the realm of political conflict.”<sup>13</sup> A wider civil rights movement includes the entire nation, as students learn that prejudice and struggle were not limited to the South.

The idea of a longer civil rights movement pushes back against the Montgomery-to-Memphis frame. Teachers opening this door will find the rich roots of the movement stretching back into Reconstruction. A. Phillip Randolph and organized labor, Paul Robeson and music, and the Tuskegee airmen are all behind this door. Students learn about coordinated resistance to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, including dramatic increases in extrajudicial violence. They examine the reasons for urban rebellion in the “long, hot summers” in places like Watts and Detroit, consider the recommendations of the Kerner Commission, and evaluate the trajectory of the Black Panther Party.

Including the stories of individuals outside the familiar list of movement heroes and villains can help students follow the movement’s complicated path while illuminating broader issues. Testimonies can personalize history and help students understand the thoughts, experiences and motivations of people in the past. Students should listen to or read personal accounts of movement activists, including testimonies of young people, like the ones anthologized in *Freedom’s Children*.<sup>14</sup> Mercer University’s Sarah Gardner writes that these autobiographical accounts help students “gain an appreciation for the struggles, hardships, victories, defeats, possibilities, and limitations of civil rights on an intimate level ... personal narratives can also help students reconceptualize and expand the traditional story of the movement by forcing them to rethink chronology.

“By confining the civil rights struggle to the South, to bowdlerized heroes, to a single halcyon decade, and to limited, noneconomic objectives, the master narrative simultaneously elevates and diminishes the movement. It ensures the status of the classical phase as a triumphal moment in a larger American progress narrative, yet it undermines its gravitas. It prevents one of the most remarkable mass movements in American history from speaking effectively to the challenges of our time.”

—JACQUELYN DOWD HALL<sup>12</sup>

In doing so, students also bear witness to the daily travails of ordinary people, hear the voices of white and black women, and confront the psychological and social turmoil experienced by activists ... In the end, personal narratives provide students with the messiness of history by offering them alternative and often competing versions of struggles for freedom.”<sup>15</sup>

Students might learn about Viola Liuzzo, killed in 1965 by Klansman Collie Wilkins. Gary Rowe, an FBI informant, was riding with Wilkins that night. Liuzzo had driven from Detroit to Alabama after seeing photos of activists beaten in Birmingham. This single mother was shot after ferrying marchers to Selma but was not celebrated as a white civil rights martyr the way Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman (killed in Mississippi a year earlier) were. When the classroom’s lens focuses on Liuzzo’s story, students might ask, “Why not?” Hassan Kwame Jeffries explains that the FBI circulated defamatory rumors about Liuzzo because they worried about exposing the fact that their informant was an accomplice to her murder.<sup>16</sup> Exposing students to the unseen workings of the federal government’s efforts to infiltrate and monitor both the Ku Klux Klan and the civil rights movement means opening doors to interrogate the limits and appropriate uses of federal power.

Original historical resources are essential because they include multiple perspectives often left out of textbooks’ summarized accounts. When students encounter artifacts from the past, they engage actively to interpret history. To visualize the reaction to Birmingham protests, students should look at the pictures of snarling dogs and fire hoses that transfixed a nation. Students can listen to participants through oral history projects, many of which are currently underway and are increasingly located online. They can find the history of the civil rights movement in their own communities, even in places where a connection to the movement might not be obvious. Sarah Anderson, a teacher in Portland, Ore., set up a scavenger hunt in consultation with local historians to help her students discover connections between the civil rights movement and their city. She writes that this “gave us the opportunity to learn more about ourselves, our place and the future we want to build for ourselves.”<sup>17</sup>

To the extent possible, try to stay abreast of the growing scholarship produced as a new generation of movement historians, such as Hasan Kwame Jeffries and Emilye Crosby, dig deeper and work locally to tell stories that simply have not yet been told.

Finally, explore hidden dimensions of the well-known by giving students a rich sense of context. As the University of Cincinnati’s Keith Barton argues, “students will be able to interpret Martin Luther King’s ‘I Have a Dream’ speech only if they

## Uncovering History

### The Role of Gay Men and Lesbians in the Civil Rights Movement

[tolerance.org/LGBT-CRM](http://tolerance.org/LGBT-CRM)

Introduce students to four LGBT people of African descent with whom they may not be familiar, yet who were indispensable to the ideas, strategies and activities that made the civil rights movement a successful political and social revolution.

### American Women Who Shaped the Civil Rights Movement Through the Literature of Eloise Greenfield

[yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1997/3/97.03.10.x.html](http://yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1997/3/97.03.10.x.html)

Explore the work of women in the civil rights movement through the writings of Eloise Greenfield in this lesson series from the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute.

### Music and the Movement

[tolerance.org/move-to-the-music-story](http://tolerance.org/move-to-the-music-story)

Bring protest music to the classroom with tips from Teaching Tolerance’s “Move to the Music.” Resources like the 2009 film *Let Freedom Sing: How Music Inspired the Civil Rights Movement* and the Smithsonian Folkways collection CD *Voices of the Civil Rights Movement: Black American Freedom Songs 1960–1966* can help interested teachers build aural literacy skills while enlivening their classrooms.

know that African Americans at the time faced segregation and legal discrimination, that the speech was part of a larger movement for civil rights, and that King was a leader of that movement. They also must understand his references to the Declaration of Independence and the Emancipation Proclamation, or else the speech will be unintelligible.”<sup>18</sup> Students will gain an even richer understanding if they study the way King’s speech has been used in contemporary times, especially by groups with often-opposing political agendas.

## Practice 4. Tell a complicated story.

When we tell a complicated story about the civil rights movement, we refuse to sanitize the past. Students learn about the realities of racism, systems of racial control and racial violence that prompted the civil rights movement and persisted after 1968. Showing students that racism wore both institutional and individual faces will help them understand just how large the achievements of the movement were and see the work that remains.

Too often, students learn that school segregation ended in Little Rock, that the Montgomery Bus Boycott stopped segregated busing, and that passage of the Voting Rights Act eliminated all obstacles to voting. They learn that racial violence ended after Birmingham. Yet those same students may notice that they attend segregated schools, live in segregated neighborhoods, and that poverty and race seem to go together. As educator Terrie Epstein observes, teaching a “disingenuous national history” leaves students without the tools they need to understand present-day inequalities.<sup>20</sup> When teachers reach beyond this commonly accepted narrative, they make the struggle real for students.

To show our history, warts and all, leave the textbook behind. Anthony and Kef-frelyn Brown, University of Texas historians, analyzed commonly used history textbooks. They found that acts of racial violence were portrayed as “aberrational, or temporary exceptions, in the narrative of American democracy. Here, violence becomes a ‘moment of darkness’ in which specific people (e.g., ship captains, slave owners, KKK members, Northern workers, Southern officials) living in specific spatial contexts (e.g., the South, the North) acted in ways that were abnormal and inconsistent with the American ideals of democracy.”<sup>21</sup> This kind of narrative focus on individual bad actors distracts students from seeing how systems of political, social and economic inequality manifested, and continue to perpetuate, institutionalized racism. When students understand the realities of institutional racism, they begin to understand why racism persists.

Refusing to sanitize the past also means refusing to sanitize the movement itself. One common story casts the movement as divided by a debate over violent resistance (often embodied by Malcolm X) and nonviolent resistance (represented by Martin Luther King Jr.). History does not support this dichotomy. Long before Stokely Carmichael called for Black Power, community organizers and activists carried weapons for self-defense. Much of the civil rights movement was “un-violent” rather than nonviolent—even groups like the Deacons for Defense were at times viewed as essential adjuncts to nonviolent protest. These guns are “unseen” in the common civil rights movement narrative. When we make them visible, we help students understand the very real dangers activists faced with little hope of protection from law enforcement, while showing that the struggle had different faces and diverse tactics in different parts of the nation.

“Reducing the causes of racial inequality to the deviant behavior of a couple of supposedly ‘out-of-control crackers’ ignores how deeply embedded white supremacy was in the framework of American society. It also obscures the fact that movement activists, with the important exception of the minority who embraced nonviolence as a way of life, worried less about personal prejudice—changing white hearts and minds—and more about the ways systems and institutions perpetuated the status quo.”

—HASSAN KWAME JEFFRIES<sup>19</sup>



Telling a complicated history can mean connecting to a global context. When the classroom's lens is pulled back to a global view, teachers have the opportunity to capture the unseen international implications of American civil rights restrictions and expansions. Legal scholar Derrick Bell argued that the *Brown* decision and moves toward school integration were made, in part, with an eye toward geopolitical strategy.<sup>22</sup> Historian Manning Marable attributed John F. Kennedy's decision to support civil rights legislation in part to Cold War politics.<sup>23</sup> Students may also learn how the American civil rights movement directly and indirectly influenced calls for change in other parts of the world. When students examine complex causality, they build essential critical-thinking skills that can be applied in other disciplines and to other eras in history.

Revealing that the past and present are littered with violence and persistent systems of oppression helps students understand the exceptional heroism of regular people in the civil rights movement. When history diminishes obstacles, it also diminishes the work of activists who overcame those obstacles.

## Go Beyond the Textbook: Online Resources for Teaching the Movement

**CIVIL RIGHTS TEACHING** is a project of Teaching for Change. The resources section of its website ([civilrightsteaching.org/nationalr](http://civilrightsteaching.org/nationalr)) offers a number of high-quality lessons spanning grades and subject material. The site is designed to support the book *Putting the Movement Back Into Civil Rights Teaching*, but stands alone as a resource for teachers.

**THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS** provides many quality lessons and materials for teaching the civil rights movement. The LOC's Teachers site ([loc.gov/teachers](http://loc.gov/teachers)) is now searchable using the Common Core as well as state content standards by grade level, making resources immediately accessible for any teacher.

**THE VOICES OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT** project archives many oral histories ([loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights](http://loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights)).

**THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES** offers many outstanding resources for teaching with original historical documents. The Teaching With Documents site ([archives.gov/education/lessons](http://archives.gov/education/lessons)) includes lessons aligned with original historical sources related to the civil rights movement.

**DOCS TEACH** ([docsteach.org](http://docsteach.org)) offers an interactive tool for teachers to build their own activities using documents and timelines.

**THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE** maintains the Selma-to-Montgomery, Little Rock, *Brown* and other interpretative historic sites related to the movement. Their website collects curricular materials online ([www.nps.gov/teachers/curriculummaterials.htm](http://www.nps.gov/teachers/curriculummaterials.htm)) that include original historical documents and lesson plans.

**PBS LEARNING MEDIA** helps teachers find excellent resources and lessons. The collection is searchable by Common Core standards and other criteria ([pbslearningmedia.org](http://pbslearningmedia.org)). There are many civil rights resources. One page in particular ([pbs.org/teachers/thismonth/civilrights/index1.html](http://pbs.org/teachers/thismonth/civilrights/index1.html)) organizes lessons, resources and activities dealing with the civil rights movement in American literature.

**THE STANFORD HISTORY EDUCATION GROUP** collects inquiry-focused lessons to teach American and world history, including many about the civil rights movement. The Reading Like a Historian curriculum ([sheg.stanford.edu/rh](http://sheg.stanford.edu/rh)) is especially good for using original historical documents.

## Practice 5. Connect to the present.

Connecting to the present is essential to teaching the civil rights movement. It also is an opportunity to assess student learning in a meaningful context. Students who have learned a complicated history and who have had serious conversations about race are ready to apply their knowledge to the wider world.

Begin by building bridges from the movement to current events, such as the 2013 Supreme Court decision on the Voting Rights Act. But don't look only for headlines that refer to African-American civil rights. The news is full of stories—including those on immigration policy, educational and income disparities and the struggle for gender equality—that have roots in the civil rights movement.

Involve students in the process of finding connections between the movement's ideals and struggles and what's happening now. Mapping the ways in which white privilege and racism persist in contemporary society helps students evaluate the movement's achievements and pinpoint areas that demand additional change. When we think of the civil rights movement as an ongoing struggle, rather than as an event that reached its end in the 1960s, it is easier to identify its relevance today in current events.

Making connections between the African-American freedom struggle and other civil rights struggles can set the stage for productive discussions. Students will better understand current events if they can draw from the rich context of the civil rights movement. This also opens the door to teaching students from diverse backgrounds. When *The New York Times* called for teachers to submit their ideas, Navajo Nation educator Sarah Garcia reported developing a unit comparing the civil rights movement to the American Indian movement, establishing relevance for her students while adding important cultural knowledge.<sup>25</sup>

Connecting to the present means establishing relevance in students' lives. Struggles that students and their communities face can be brought into the classroom as living case studies for the lessons of the civil rights movement. When undergraduates at Washington's Whitman College participated in a community service project called Whitman Teaches the Movement in 2012, they found that students from Walla Walla's emerging Latino population were immediately able to relate the history to their own struggles. "I was impressed with how quickly the 10-year-olds jumped from talking about Jackie Robinson to asking us difficult, fundamental questions about oppression and social injustice," said one volunteer.

Well-constructed curricula for teaching the civil rights movement encourage students to ask those questions from a solid foundation of historical knowledge. Students are more likely to retain and apply the lessons of the past when they "find themselves" in history.

"Educators should be activists with youth. We need to transform schools into places that teach students themselves to take on the civil rights struggle, not just as academics that prepare students passively to receive the benefits that the struggle confirms ... Schools—especially *de facto* segregated schools serving low-income youth of color—should be reconstructed as politically empowering institutions that give young people the tools to fight the civil rights struggles of our and *their* time alongside us."

—MEIRA LEVINSON<sup>24</sup>

Connecting to the present means applying historical knowledge to the present day and the wider world. Develop essential questions and student-performance tasks that encourage thinking and action. For example, students might be asked to consider what causes they would march for, or even go to jail for. You might ask students to assess, from the vantage point of today, to what extent the movement achieved its goals. In discussions about current trends in youth activism, students might compare the tactics and struggles of DREAMers to students in the civil rights movement. Students might choose projects to work on that demonstrate their understanding of justice and the need for action.

When we teach the civil rights movement, we should end where we began: teaching for empowerment. Connecting to the present is an essential and summative activity that helps students develop meaningful contexts for learning while applying it in their own communities to make change.

## Nine Notable State Resource Guides

**1. ALABAMA** The Alabama Learning Exchange (ALEX) indexes more than 200 resources for teaching the civil rights movement. The site ([alex.state.al.us/plans.php](http://alex.state.al.us/plans.php)) features many teacher-designed materials and materials from outside providers. These include dozens of lesson plans and podcasts as well as informational resources and activities provided by sponsoring partners. Teachers can create a personal workspace for storing and sharing lesson plans.

**2. LOUISIANA** The high school civil rights unit in Louisiana's Comprehensive Curriculum ([www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/academic-curriculum/curriculum---social-studies-high-school-world-history-unit-9.doc?sfvrsn=2](http://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/academic-curriculum/curriculum---social-studies-high-school-world-history-unit-9.doc?sfvrsn=2)) is an outstanding resource for secondary teachers working to teach the movement. Multiple units link time-tested teaching strategies to movement ideas, figures and events. The lessons reach well beyond the traditional movement narrative, from the murder of Emmett Till to Watts and beyond. Throughout, the curriculum directs teachers to valuable resources available online, including many original historical documents.

**3. SOUTH CAROLINA** South Carolina's Social Studies Support Document ([ed.sc.gov/agency/programs-services/61](http://ed.sc.gov/agency/programs-services/61)) should be required reading for anyone teaching the civil rights movement. In 1994, the South Carolina Department of Education published *African Americans and the Palmetto State* ([ed.sc.gov/agency/programs-services/61/documents/aapalmettostate.pdf](http://ed.sc.gov/agency/programs-services/61/documents/aapalmettostate.pdf)). At more than 250 pages, this book (available for free on the South Carolina DOE's website) is an extraordinary resource for teachers. Its coverage of the civil rights movement in South Carolina is well-constructed and engaging.

**4. GEORGIA** Georgia's resources ([www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/Pages/Social-Studies.aspx](http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/Pages/Social-Studies.aspx)) include "Share the Journey" packets for grades K-12. They are clearly linked to the Common Core, guiding teachers through detailed units. While they focus on the events of 1963, the "Share the Journey" lessons expand from the March on Washington to cover a broad view of the civil rights movement. They treat resistance to the movement in detail, particularly above the fifth grade. Two lessons use especially innovative connections to world history.

**5. MARYLAND** The Maryland State Department of Education’s partnership with the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture has produced lessons across grade levels that are aligned with museum content. Some of the lessons are collected online ([www.msde.maryland.gov/msde/divisions/instruction/rfl\\_museum\\_md.htm](http://www.msde.maryland.gov/msde/divisions/instruction/rfl_museum_md.htm)). Several are movement-related. The lessons as a whole are excellent—most teachers could immediately use them in their classrooms.

**6. VIRGINIA** Virginia’s History and Social Science Enhanced Scope and Sequence (ESS) Sample Lesson Plans ([www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards\\_docs/history\\_socialscience/2008/lesson\\_plans/index.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/history_socialscience/2008/lesson_plans/index.shtml)) contain many useful lessons for teaching the movement. Additional resources are linked from the state’s History and Social Science Instruction Web page ([www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/history/resources.shtml#civilrights](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/history/resources.shtml#civilrights)). The resources include a variety of audio, video, print resources and lesson plans selected by the Commonwealth of Virginia’s Division of Legislative Services that help explain the civil rights movement as well as Virginia’s role in the movement and the impact of massive resistance in communities across the state.

**7. PENNSYLVANIA** Pennsylvania’s Standards Aligned System website ([www.pdesas.org](http://www.pdesas.org)) does an excellent job of clearly linking resources and supporting materials to the state’s content standards. The site points teachers to many resources related to the civil rights movement. Even when those resources are outside the Pennsylvania site (for example, on a third-party provider like Thinkfinity), the SAS site clearly links resources to state standards and provides a summary of activities, allowing teachers to choose quickly among resources that might be useful to their specific lessons or student populations. The linked resources, in general, are high-quality. Many use original historical documents and encourage teachers to use those documents thoughtfully in the classroom.

**8. NORTH CAROLINA** North Carolina’s new K-12 Social Studies Unpacking Document ([www.ncpublicschools.org/acre/standards/support-tools/#unsocial](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/acre/standards/support-tools/#unsocial)) is an innovation in the construction of state curriculum frameworks. The document’s embedded hyperlinks lead teachers to an exceptionally rich and well-curated set of online resources for teaching the civil rights movement. They have an admirable emphasis on original historical documents, most linked to lesson plans and resources that teachers could easily adopt in their classrooms. The state’s sample unit for teaching the civil rights movement in eighth grade ([ssnces.ncdpi.wikispaces.net/Civil+Rights+Movement+Sample+Unit](http://ssnces.ncdpi.wikispaces.net/Civil+Rights+Movement+Sample+Unit)) is a good example for teachers in the middle grades. Finally, they offer a collection of suggested activities for students during and after field trips to civil rights museums ([ssnces.ncdpi.wikispaces.net/Civil+Rights+Movement+Museum+Activities](http://ssnces.ncdpi.wikispaces.net/Civil+Rights+Movement+Museum+Activities)). While not all teachers will have access to similar museums, these activities could be models for other local exhibits or repurposed for virtual museum tours now widely available online.

**9. UTAH** As part of the anniversary of the March on Washington, Utah has created some additional resources, including a time line of events from 1954 into the 1970s, with links to specific events during each of those years ([www.uen.org/core/socialstudies/civil](http://www.uen.org/core/socialstudies/civil)). This is a rich and well-constructed resource for teachers that curates outside content in a dynamic environment. It is matched by the civil rights resources linked at the Utah Education Network’s “Themepark” ([www.uen.org/themepark/liberty/civilrights.shtml](http://www.uen.org/themepark/liberty/civilrights.shtml)), where coverage expands far beyond the standard movement narrative and resources. In addition, Utah’s State Office of Education now offers an online course for teachers about the civil rights movement as part of an effort to provide substantial professional-development opportunities on this crucial time in U.S. history. The course covers major figures, events and groups in the struggle, including the activities of black and white Americans. This two-credit, eight-week course is unique in its breadth and ambition.

# Endnotes

- 1 Raymond J. Wlodkowski and Margery B. Ginsberg, "A Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching," *Educational Leadership* 53, no.1 (1995) 18.
- 2 Beverly M. Gordon, "African-American Cultural Knowledge and Liberatory Education: Dilemmas, Problems, and Potentials in a Post-Modern American Society," in *Too Much Schooling Too Little Education: A Paradox of Black Life in White Societies*, ed. Mwalimu Shujaa (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1994), 65.
- 3 Herbert Kohl, *Should We Burn Babar? Essays on Children's Literature and the Power of Stories* (New York: New Press, 1995).
- 4 Keith Catone, "Free Minds, Free People: Education for a Just, Multiracial Future," *Voices in Urban Education* 34 (Summer 2012): 4.
- 5 Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, *Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools*, accessed May 1, 2012, <http://www.civicmissionofschools.org/the-campaign/guardian-of-democracy-report>.
- 6 Mariana Souto-Manning, "Negotiating culturally responsive pedagogy through multicultural children's literature: Towards critical democratic literacy practices in a first grade classroom," *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy* 9 (2009): 50.
- 7 Deborah Menkart, Alana D. Murray and Jenice L. View, eds., *Putting the Movement Back Into Civil Rights Teaching* (Washington: Teaching for Change and the Poverty & Race Research Action Council, 2004).
- 8 Both of the following websites offer virtual exhibits about the civil rights movement: [civilrightsoadtrip.wordpress.com](http://civilrightsoadtrip.wordpress.com) and [nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights](http://nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights).
- 9 The *Race: Are We So Different* project is an excellent resource from the American Anthropological Society that covers the science of human variation, the history of racial categorization and the impact of race as a social construct ([understandingrace.org](http://understandingrace.org)).
- 10 "Race, Identity, and Importance of Discussion," YouTube video, 2:57, posted by Teaching Tolerance, March 15, 2012, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=vhY5DGLIpL8>.
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- 12 Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233-1263.
- 13 Laurie B. Green, "Challenging the Civil Rights Narrative," in *Civil Rights History From the Ground Up: Local Struggles, a National Movement*, ed. Emilye Crosby (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 75.
- 14 Ellen S. Levine, *Freedom's Children: Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Own Stories* (New York: Puffin, 2000).
- 15 Sarah E. Gardner, "Coming of Age in the Movement: Teaching With Personal Narratives," in *Teaching the American Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Julie Buckner Armstrong, et al., (New York: Routledge, 2002).
- 16 Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 52.
- 17 Sarah Anderson, "Finding the Civil Rights Movement in Oregon," *Teaching Tolerance Blog*, November 18, 2011, <http://www.tolerance.org/blog/finding-civil-rights-movement-oregon>.
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- 19 "Remaking History: Barack Obama, Political Cartoons, and the Civil Rights Movement," in *Civil Rights History From the Ground Up: Local Struggles, a National Movement*, ed. Emilye Crosby (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011).
- 20 Terrie Epstein, *Interpreting National History: Race, Identity, and Pedagogy in Classrooms and Communities* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
- 21 Anthony L. Brown and Keffrelyn D. Brown, "Strange Fruit Indeed: Interrogating Contemporary Textbook Representations of Racial Violence Toward African Americans," *Teachers College Record* 112, no. 1 (January 2010): 57.
- 22 Derrick Bell, "Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma," *Harvard Law Review* 93 (1980): 518-533.
- 23 Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945-2006* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 71.
- 24 Meira Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).
- 25 Sarah Garcia, January 11, 2012 (12:12 a.m.), comment on Katherine Schulten, "How Do You Teach the Civil Rights Movement?" *The Learning Network*, June 6, 2012, <http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/01/06/how-do-you-teach-the-civil-rights-movement>.





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TOLERANCE.ORG  
400 WASHINGTON AVENUE  
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA 36104



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