

INTRODUCTION

*[A] misunderstanding of the Black freedom movement—and therefore of the history of this country—had dire consequences for everyone, especially for all of us who believe that there is still the possibility of creating “a more perfect Union” in this land. As a result, one of the major challenges available to teachers in every possible institution is to introduce ourselves and our students to an alternative vision of the movement, to see it as a great gift for all Americans, as a central point of grounding for our own pro-democracy movement. —Vincent Harding (1990) *Black History Is America’s History**

Too often, the teaching of the Civil Rights Movement—as a spontaneous, emotional eruption of angry but saintly African Americans led by two or three inspired orators—discounts the origins, the intellect, and the breadth that guided this complex social movement. Rather, strategic brilliance, logistical messiness, exalted joy, heart-gouging sorrow, sharp tactical conflicts, and near-religious personal transformations are all part of the very human story of ending formal racial segregation in the United States. In addition, the civil rights story tends to focus exclusively on the Black freedom struggle, ignoring the struggles of all people for justice, in the U.S. and internationally.

We have published this book to challenge the typical story of the Civil Rights Movement, which, in the name of honoring Black history, is actually a disempowering narrative. By moving beyond “heroes and holidays,” we uncover and humanize the stories of *all* the many, many ordinary people who performed heroic acts in the name of social justice. In doing so, students are able to learn useful lessons about their roles in this world, to develop strategies to address pressing problems in their lives and community, and to see themselves as agents of change.

This book is not intended as a curriculum with step-by-step instructions; rather, it is a resource guide. *Putting the **Movement** Back into Civil Rights Teaching* offers teachers, parents, and others materials and lesson plans for presenting students a more rounded and action-oriented history that includes and affects us all.

Criteria for Selection

We chose material with strong academic content that: (1) meets or exceeds national standards for history and language arts (see www.civilrightsteaching.org for more details on standards); (2) contains useful background information and/or lessons for teachers; (3) is classroom-tested; (4) offers interdisciplinary applications; and (5) uses at least one of the lenses described below for interpreting and understanding the Civil Rights Movement. We were just as careful to select materials that reflect a philosophy of critical teaching, such as the progressive teaching methods pioneered by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and the inclusive educational content crafted by African-American scholar Carter G. Woodson. This philosophy is grounded in the beliefs that the purpose of education is to create equality and justice, that students must play an active part in the learning process, and that teachers and students are both simultaneously learners and producers of knowledge. The materials encourage students and teachers to challenge barriers to student achievement, analyze how injustice is reinforced, and develop information and skills for creating a just world. In addition, the online resource guide provides many excellent books and videos that help students understand the conditions that created the need for social justice movements such as the Civil Rights Movement.

How the Book Is Organized

The materials are organized into six categories. **Section One** includes *Reflections on Teaching about the Movement* from those who have puzzled over the Movement and deepened their own understanding of its vitality. The bookends of the modern Civil Rights Movement are often marked with the 1954 Supreme Court decision banning school segregation and the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. But within what context should we explore these 11 years of rich experience? Do we count backwards from the years since the Supreme Court required a “separate but equal” doctrine? Since slavery was abolished? Since the Spanish conquest? This book describes ways to explain the Movement to young children without becoming simplistic about the “good” and “bad” guys; how to use fiction, film, and art in telling the story; and how to acknowledge the demands and restrictions of state educational standards and testing. In this section, teachers share their thoughts and experiences with colleagues.

Section Two explores *Citizenship and Self-Determination*, the primary motive of the Civil Rights and other social movements. We recognize that for many Indigenous Peoples sovereignty, the honoring of treaties between the U.S. government and Indian nations, and recognition of collective and group identities are more important than being citizens of the United States. Similarly, many Chicanos perceive the U.S.-Mexico border as an artificial barrier, falsely defining who is worthy of citizenship rights. The Black Panther Party and other groups were interested in pushing the agenda beyond striving for civil rights to empowering people who were citizens in name only. The readings and lessons in this section describe the attempts and victories of people to be treated as human beings, to be treated fairly, to enjoy fully the rights articulated in the U.S. Constitution and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and to exercise the ensuing responsibilities, such as voting.

Section Three focuses on *Education* as an arena for social experimentation, as the place where future generations can learn to think and behave judiciously, and as the place where young people gain a critical analysis of power. Unlike the Indian boarding schools that forced children to assimilate to white mainstream culture (see “Every School Had a Grave-

yard”), a variety of freedom schools and desegregation efforts have attempted to uphold marginalized cultures, to promote excellence, to prepare all youth for public leadership, and to help students learn to read the word *and* the world.

Section Four presents the stories of *Economic Justice*—primarily of organized labor movements—as a parallel narrative to securing political power. An important laboratory for lasting social change is the workplace, and the arguments for a section on labor and economic issues are many. Certainly, we are reminded that the 1963 March on Washington was a March for Jobs and Freedom, not the “I Have a Dream March.” In his 1967 book *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* Dr. King expressed the



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Black Panthers from Sacramento, Free Huey Rally, Bobby Hutton Memorial Park, Oakland, August 25, 1968.



Photograph courtesy of The National Archives and Records Administration

A traditional image of Civil Rights leadership. Photo from the 1963 March for Jobs and Freedom.

belief that “the depressed living standards for Negroes are a structural part of the economic system in the United States [where] certain industries are based on a supply of low-paid, under-skilled, and immobile nonwhite labor.” Many northern and southern activists during the Civil Rights Movement learned organizing skills through earlier work with labor unions. At the time of his assassination, Dr. King was helping the African-American sanitation workers in Memphis secure fair wages and better working conditions. We have also included sports in this section, as the labor of athletes is too often exploited. Economic equity and the redistribution of wealth are commonly perceived to be precursors to or the companions of meaningful civic participation, hence the discussion here.

As stated in greater detail below, *Culture (Section Five)* warrants a separate discussion because of the power of culture to win allies and to change hearts. Culture defines what (and who) is beautiful, funny, worthy of praise and emulation, nourishing, comforting, and the source of our strength. Materials in this section describe the role of the arts and personal affect/expression to assert and redefine equality.

Looking Forward intends to inspire today’s students to continue the struggle for universal human rights. Leonard Peltier writes from prison that “to heal we will have to come to the realization that we are *all* under a life sentence together... and there’s no chance for parole.” And as Sonia Sanchez states: “If *We the people* work, organize, resist/ come together for peace, racial, social/ and sexual justice/ it’ll get better/ it’ll get better.”

The *Resource Guide*, found online at www.civilrightsteaching.org, includes books, videos, and audiotapes for bringing the Civil Rights Movement into the classroom at all grade levels, as well as links to many of the other social justice movements that intertwined with the Civil Rights Movement. The guide also includes a list of key websites for teaching about the Movement.

Lenses for Viewing the Civil Rights Movement

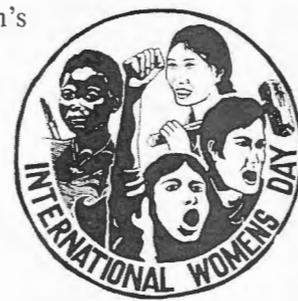
We examined the materials through six lenses, intending to fill the typical gaps in standard Civil Rights Movement teaching. The six lenses—*women, youth, organizing, culture, institutional racism*, and the *interconnectedness of social movements*—guided our selection of texts and images. In selecting photographs and other visual images, we literally attempted to show women, youth, organizing, cultural variations, manifestations of institutional racism, and the interconnectedness of movements; this proved to be a bigger challenge than expected because archives are full of head shots of famous people. Our goal for future editions of this resource—and future movements—is to do an even better job of documenting all participants in social change. In the texts, the lens is a metaphorical magnifying glass on a particular theme. Sometimes, the narrator of an article makes a passing reference to an influence that significantly shapes her or his actions; in these cases the lens is subtler. For example, Section Five describes some of the cultural *products* of social movements and the active intention to transform art by redefining aesthetics. However, the cultural *lens* allows the reader to see how the political and economic choices made by organizers and activists were rooted in and inseparable from their daily lives, foods, songs, and worship.

Through organized religion, conventional wisdom, and the law, *women* have all too often been discouraged—if not banned—from participation in public debate and from holding public leadership outside of female-only groups. Nevertheless, women have voiced public opinion and exercised leadership from the earliest days of European encounter, slavery and abolition, various wars, women’s suffrage, and women’s liberation movements. In the Civil Rights Movement, women’s definitions of their own leadership worked with and against the strategies for change expressed by African-American and white men. This lens helps the reader see the distinctive ways in which women shaped and participated in social change movements. In Clarissa Sligh’s “The Plaintiff Speaks,” the author recounts how her mother’s strength propelled her towards her own civil rights struggles: “I still recall the determination with which she went to meetings with people from the local NAACP and other black parents from our neighborhood to see what they could do about it. This was after being on her feet all day as a domestic worker. All us kids had to help make dinner, but she saw that we sat down to eat.” Selections such as “Literacy and Liberation” (Clark) offer insights from women activists and thinkers of the period, while the female authors of “Understanding Self-Defense in the Civil Rights Movement” (James-Wilson) and “I Have Not Signed a Treaty with the United States Government” (Chrystos) serve as interpreters of history with a different sensibility. We bring particular attention to “Women’s Work” (Menkart, Murray, and View) because it brings forward the stories of over 30 phenomenal women activists who are seldom celebrated in standard texts. The biographies presented here are mere miniatures of the full and complex lives of these women, and these women are only a few of the many who merit recognition. However, it is a start toward broadening the education and perspective of students of social movements.

Economic and social forces over the course of the 20th century reduced the public role of *youth* to little more than consumers. With compulsory schooling laws and laws



Miriam Makeba performing, South Africa, circa 1990.



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Courtesy of the Library of Congress

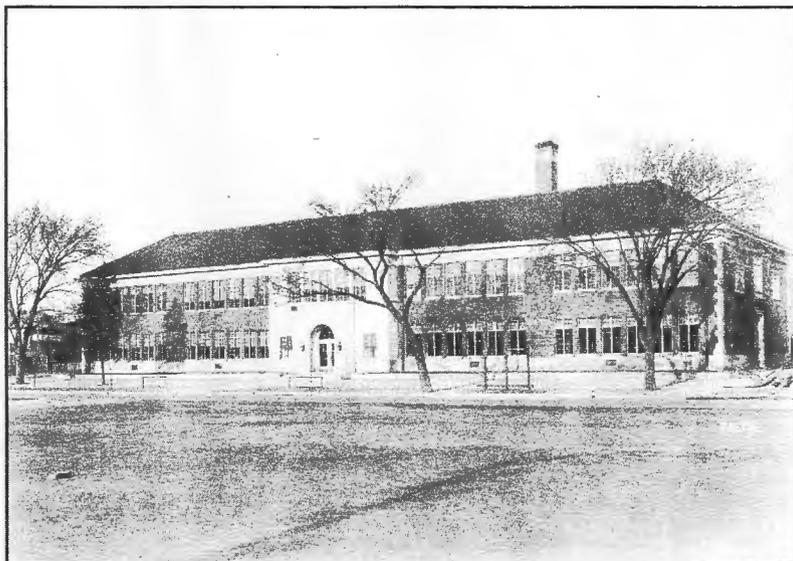
against exploitive child labor, youth were encouraged to pursue schooling rather than compete with adults in the employment market. Economic shifts created a loss of unskilled jobs, making formal education a greater necessity for everyone; one result is that youth now spend more years “apprenticing for real life.” The primary “action” performed by contemporary youth is to shape a separate, media-driven culture, generating billions of dollars for adult companies. Politically, youth are expected to absorb and conform to adult society uncritically, yet countless examples from the Civil Rights Movement show young people exercising strategic thinking, challenging the authority of white supremacy and of community elders seeking to protect them, and changing the turn of political events at the local and national levels. The value of intergenerational power-sharing is evident through stories such as “Democracy and Empowerment: The Nashville Student Sit-Ins of the 1960s” (Douglas), “Movers and Movements: Fighting for Social Justice in South Africa” (Randolph), and four selections on the hip-hop generation (Baraka, Burroughs, Marable, and Wiltz). We want contemporary youth to understand themselves as the makers of history, not passive customers. “Be Down with the Brown” by Elizabeth Martinez showcases students who are doing just that: “Blowouts were staged by us, Chicano students, in the East Los Angeles High Schools protesting the obvious lack of action on the part of the L.A. school board in bringing ELA schools up to par with those in other areas of the city. We, young Chicanos, not only protested, but at the same time offered proposals for much needed reforms.”

35th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) July 12-14, 1944, Chicago, Illinois. Pictured include NAACP staff: Theodore Spaulding, Thurgood Marshall, Ella Baker, Ruby Hurley, Daisy Lampkin, William Hastie, Walter White, Roy Wilkins, Hubert Delany, Charles Drew, and Lillian Jackson.



The celebrity media culture became even more pervasive with the widening popularity of television in the 1950s and 1960s. The coincidental timing with the Civil Rights Movement was both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, the unedited brutality of white supremacy was witnessed worldwide and helped put pressure on policymakers for change. However, it also served to glamorize the marches, rallies, and arrests at the expense of the long, sometimes boring, and always difficult process of *organizing* people to change their attitudes, behaviors, votes, and spending habits. The creation of media stars robs power from the collective efforts of the many hard-working people who comprise social movements, even though it may be easier to teach about charismatic individuals. “Bussing in Boston” (Coles) offers a compelling story in which a group of parents from a low-income Boston neighborhood proved victorious over the city’s de facto segregation:

With the help of local ministers, civic organizations, and civil rights groups, [the Boardman Parents’ Group] managed to get enough [money] for the first weeks,



The Monroe School was one of Topeka's four all-black elementary schools in operation before the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed segregated public education. Before 1954, Topeka had 22 elementary schools—four all black, 18 all white. In the early 1990s Congress designated the Monroe School as the Brown v. Board National Historic Site.

so that by early October they had ventured across the city, enrolled their children in the Faneuil school, sought out a bus driver, learned where they could rent a bus, and [having] done that, arranged the details of parking the bus, and set the time and place of its afternoon departure.

Some of our materials highlight the second-guessing and the conflicts among planners and activists so children can learn about the complexities of organizing and avoid their elders' mistakes. Pieces like "Freedom Song: Tactics for Transformation" (Murray), "The Bloody Wake of Alcatraz" (Churchill), and "What Happened to the Revolt of the Black Athlete?" (Leonard) help the reader understand the complex

tactics and strategies that lie behind the observable movements for change and the range of talents and personalities required to achieve success.

Enduring movements for social change transform the landscape in which people live their daily lives, or their *culture*. Music, visual images, language, clothing/hair, religion, and leadership styles are often the arenas where the transformations are most apparent. The interracial and cross-generational nature of the Civil Rights Movement created new symbols and new uses for culture as a way to attract "converts." Many of these cultural shifts influenced other social movements as well. Through the lens of culture, we see how familiar culture was used as an organizing tool. A prime example of this is "Murals: Redefining Culture, Reclaiming Identity" (Cockcroft and Barnet-Sanchez) which describes the evolution of Chicano murals in the U.S.:

The Civil Rights Movement, known among Mexican-Americans as the Chicano Movement or *el movimiento*, fought against the idea of a "universal" culture, a single ideal of beauty and order. It reexamined the common assumption that European or Western ideas represented the pinnacle of "civilization," while everything else, from the thought of Confucius to Peruvian portrait vases, was second-rate, too exotic, or "primitive." The emphasis placed by civil rights leaders on self-definition and cultural pride sparked a revision of standard histories to include the previously unrecognized accomplishments of women and minorities, as well as a reexamination of the standard school curriculum. Along with the demonstrations, strikes, and marches of the political movement came an explosion of cultural expression.

Other articles show that cultural expressions are central rather than peripheral to building a community of activists, such as "Vietnam: An Anti-War Comic Book" (Bond), "Painting a Picture of the Movement" (Bode and Schmidt), "El Acto" (Chilcoat), and "Malcolm Is 'bout More Than Wearing a Cap" (Warr).

In the United States *institutionalized racism* promotes the ideology that: (1) there are separate races among humans; (2) that the "white race" is superior; and (3) that this supremacy must be reinforced in schools, banks, churches, the workplace, real estate agencies, law enforcement, the judicial system, and other institutions that govern daily life, with the purpose of exploiting other "races" and



preserving privilege for “whites.” Young readers, especially, need to understand that racism comes in faces other than the white-sheeted Klan member and the law enforcement officer with attack dogs and fire hoses. We also want to emphasize that eliminating legal segregation was only one part of dismantling the continuing vestiges of institutionalized racism. In “Be Down with the Brown,” a Chicana student from East L.A. tells of her struggle with the administration after they got rid of all but one Latino guidance counselor at her high school, while Bernice Reagon in “The Borning Struggle” recounts a frightening experience in which local police refused to support her when she was propositioned for sex and almost attacked by a white man. It is important to show that personal and organized resistance to white supremacy—by Indigenous Peoples, by people of color, and by whites—has existed since the beginning of European contact in the Americas. Through this lens readers will see why dissent is often difficult to exercise—especially in the face of this subtle, invisible racism—but that it has always been part of the fabric of public policy and Americans’ personal experience of what is called “race.”



Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Participant at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Washington, D.C., August 1963.

Finally, as inspiring and compelling as is the story of the Civil Rights Movement, it is **interconnected* to other social movements and to the historical and ongoing human call for justice worldwide. In the 20th century alone, Civil Rights Movement activists were connected with the anti-lynching movement, the Spanish Civil War resistance, the labor movement, tenant farmer organizing, Roosevelt’s New Deal, India’s independence, the desegregation of U.S. military forces, African liberation, the American Indian Movement, the Chicano movement, the Asian American movement, the farmworkers’ movement, the women’s movement, the antiwar movement, the Free South Africa movement, the solidarity movement, liberation theology, the sanctuary movement, gay liberation, the environmental justice movement, and, even, some would argue, the tactics used in the antiabortion and religious fundamentalist movements. As many of the first-person accounts demonstrate, many people within the various social justice movements were directly inspired by one another and felt connections beyond their own racial identities and national borders, such as “I Came from a Yellow Seed” (Nagai), “Martin and My Father” (Hernandez), “American Exported Black Nationalism” (Williams), and Leonard Peltier’s “Message to Humanity,” as seen here:

To heal means that we will begin to look upon one another with respect and tolerance instead of prejudice, distrust, and hatred. We will have to teach our children—as well as ourselves—to love the diversity of humanity. To heal we will have to make a conscious effort to live as the Creator intended, as sisters and brothers, all of one human family, caretakers of this fragile, perishable, and sacred Earth.

This essay and others present dissent as a positive, dynamic, hopeful force that improves the quality of democracy and, in the process, can improve the lives of all.

We encourage teachers to use the six lenses as they teach about the Movement in order to ensure that they are covering the breadth and depth of the story: Are women or youth perspectives included in a given lesson? Can students connect a given Civil Rights Movement event to other movements? Can students identify



Courtesy of Jenice L. View



Scene from the video documentary *The Intolerable Burden* by First Run/Icarus Films. In 1965, sharecroppers Mae Bertha and Matthew Carter enrolled the youngest eight of their 13 children in the Drew, Mississippi public schools in response to a "freedom of choice" plan. The *Intolerable Burden* places the Carter's commitment to obtaining a quality education in context, by examining the conditions of segregation prior to 1965, the hardships the family faced during desegregation, and the massive white resistance, which led to resegregation.

generations of bad faith and cruelty, teachers will face brutal and determined resistance. We share the belief that teachers are, in the words of Lerone Bennett Jr., "either oppressors or liberators." The future of the world depends on what teachers and parents teach, and how they teach, so that young people equitably develop key skills and knowledge, and also develop a critical analysis of what is happening in the world and their role and responsibility to make change. *Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching* intends to give teachers and parents the tools to break apart the current narrative on the Civil Rights Movement and reassemble it to include more richness, more depth, more complexity, and more instruction on the *whys* and *hows* of social change. In the end, we offer this resource to help teachers be the "midwives" for this generation as it does what Grace Lee Boggs says each one must—"discovers its mission" for creating a more just, caring, beloved community.

—Jenice L. View, Washington, D.C.,
February 2004

the role of institutionalized racism in creating a particular organizing strategy? How did culture (or a clash of cultures) influence the strategy or outcome of an event? What were the visible and invisible organizing steps taken to produce a particular action? And so on.

James Baldwin reminded us in his "Talk to Teachers" that American history is "longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it, so is the world larger, more daring, more beautiful, and more terrible, but principally larger—and that it belongs to [the student]." He also warns that "in the attempt to correct so many



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Critique of the Traditional Narrative

By Charles Payne

1. Placing so much emphasis on national leadership and national institutions minimizes the importance of local struggle and makes it difficult to appreciate the role “ordinary” people played in changing the country and the enormous personal costs that sometimes entailed for them. It implicitly creates the impression that historical dynamism resides among elites—usually white, usually male, usually educated—and that non-elites lack historical agency. The gender bias of traditional history is especially inappropriate in this case in that we know that at the local level, women provided a disproportionate share of the leadership in the early 1960s.
2. Normative social analysis is analysis that emphasizes the primacy of norms and values in shaping the behaviors of individuals or groups. In the master narrative, it shows up in the emphasis on the morality of national leadership, on the church, legal institutions, and interracialism. The Movement gets reduced to a “protest” movement. African-American activism is sometimes equated with the church, the most normative of institutions. The danger is that this emphasis may oversimplify the motives of actors, understating the salience of disruption, of economic and political pressure. The emphasis on the normative character of the Civil Rights Movement is in considerable contrast to the way other movements are portrayed. When we think about the labor movement, for example, we are a good deal less likely to invoke normative explanations. We see that as a struggle over privilege, although each side tried to wrap its cause in the mantle of higher-morality.
3. A top-down perspective can lose any sense of the complexity of the African-American community—its class, gender, cultural, regional, and ideological divisions—and how that complexity shaped responses to oppression. One gets a few well-defined leaders and then the undifferentiated masses.
4. Concentration on the period between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s—the Montgomery to Memphis framework—underplays the salience of earlier periods of struggle. All apart from their significance for understanding the modern Civil Rights Movement, those earlier periods of struggle are important in their own right as one of the keys to understanding the evolving self-consciousness of African Americans and the shifting constraints that confronted them.
5. A top-down perspective presumes that the most appropriate historical markers have to do with legislative/policy changes. This position makes it very difficult to understand the Movement as a transforming experience for individuals or as an evolving culture, which in turn makes it very difficult to understand the radicalization of the Movement.
6. A top-down perspective typically implies that the Movement can be understood solely through large-scale, dramatic events, thus obscuring the actual social infrastructure that sustained the Movement on a day-to-day basis.

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