LEARNING FOR JUSTICE

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The Power of Place

For the greater good of our democracy and nation, we must center the power and autonomy of people in the South engaged in the narrative of liberation.

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Teaching Hard History: American Slavery

A comprehensive framework and resources for teaching this critical topic at all grade levels, helping students understand how slavery influences us in the present day

The K–5 and 6–12 frameworks include Key Concepts (10 important ideas that all students must understand to truly grasp the historical significance of slavery), Summary Objectives (that articulate the content students need to understand and outline additional information to help them get there), and teaching tools (six sample Inquiry Design Models, based on The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards).

Key Concept Videos
Featuring leading scholars and historians, including Ibram X. Kendi and Annette Gordon-Reed, these short videos examine slavery's impact on the lives of enslaved people in the U.S., the nation's development around the institution, and how enslaved people influenced the nation, its culture and its history.

Student Texts
The Teaching Hard History Text Library features over 100 primary and secondary sources, all with text-dependent questions.

Podcast
Hosted by Hasan Kwame Jefferies, Ph.D., this comprehensive series covers the long and brutal legacies of Indigenous enslavement and chattel slavery and reaches through the struggles and victories of the civil rights movement to the present day.

Professional Development Webinars
Our on-demand webinars will introduce educators to the Teaching Hard History resources and share ideas for how they can be used in classrooms.

Explore these resources at

learningforjustice.org/ Hard-History-Spring23

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> "But as a Black woman who is a descendant of enslaved people from Georgia and the Carolinas, I am honored and moved by this opportunity to have a direct hand in developing an interpretation that places us in the center rather than at the margins of our own experiences."
> **Amber N. Mitchell**

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The Power of Place: Art as a Tool for Social Justice

Alabama artists are depicting honest history and challenging historical invisibility—reshaping public narratives of justice in their communities.

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Student-run Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) clubs are a federally protected space for young people to survive and thrive in the increasingly hostile anti-LGBTQ+ climate in schools and across the country.

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Activists Nikole Parker and Brandon Wolf from Equality Florida emphasize the need for each of us to advocate for safer schools where all young people are valued.

Photograph by **Brandon Holland**

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A community Freedom School model in Mississippi embraces transformative practices to strengthen relationships and disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline.

All articles are available for educational use at
learningforjustice.org/magazine

On the Cover
Illustration by Diana Ejaita

LEARNING FOR JUSTICE

The Power of Place

GSA Clubs: Kim Salt; One World: Michael Hoeweler

New Publication — Coming Soon!

Critical Practices for Social Justice Education Second Edition

Critical Practices for Social Justice Education (2023) is a resource to support K-12 educators in growing their understanding of social justice principles and integrating them into their practice. This revised edition is informed by the current social and political landscape. And it acknowledges the new ways educators have been challenged by increased political scrutiny, censorship and debate about what can be taught in schools.

The guide is organized into four pillars, each representing a foundational aspect of social justice education:

I. Curriculum and Instruction helps educators select the content they teach, decide how to teach it and assess students' knowledge and skills. By using the strategies in this section, educators can support students' understanding of justice and their ability to take action.

II. Culture and Climate provides educators with practical strategies and resources to create affirming, inclusive classrooms and schools. When students feel safe, seen and valued, they are more open to learning—not just from adults but also from one another.

III. Leadership encourages educators and students to continue learning about themselves and others, including beliefs about identity and the value of diversity. Developing leadership skills helps everyone—educators, students, families and school staff—recognize and dismantle unjust systems.

IV. Family and Community Engagement equips educators with ways to build meaningful relationships with students' parents and caregivers. These relationships can help educators connect students' home lives to school and draw upon the wisdom of families and communities.

SPLC LEARNING FOR JUSTICE

The Power of Place

Jalaya Liles Dunn (she/her)
Learning for Justice Director

"Democracy in the South and in the United States is hampered by the Southern attitude."
—W.E.B. Du Bois in *Black Reconstruction*

Du Bois' words in response to the failed attempt to reconstruct democracy in the United States post-slavery echo with meaning today. Reconstruction, a short-lived era between the 1860s to 1880s, was the chance to rebuild, redefine and reimagine the possibilities of a democracy that served all: formerly enslaved Black people, dispossessed Native people and poor white people. Unfortunately, the opportunity for reconstruction was not only missed but misused. Instead of honoring the principles of democracy to build a vibrant, inclusive and just nation, the desire for power and wealth cemented the legacy of white supremacy. And the failure of the federal government to support protections offered by the constitutional amendments along with the overturning of the Civil Rights Act of 1875 combined with the proliferation of Black Codes (discriminatory state laws) to institutionalize white supremacy. The promotion of the racial bribe, intended to divide groups, allowed the relegation of Black, Native American and poor white people to a revised system of racial caste. Pressure and influence originating in the South and corroborated in the North channeled white backlash to develop a form of social, economic and political order and power that ensured the placement of Black people at the bottom of the caste system.

In "The Rebirth of Caste," chapter one of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness*, author Michelle Alexander brilliantly takes the reader through the ebbs and flows of power and justice in U.S. history. Using history as a guide, she captivates the reader by illustrating the death and birth of racial caste systems, depicting how Black people have exerted collective power to disrupt systems of control and how white backlash has been coordinated to uphold the principles of white supremacy in new and revised systems of control. Alexander emphasizes how the seeds to revise and reconstruct new systems of control are planted well before the death of the old system. This rhythmic movement of the death of one system and the birth of another demonstrates the reciprocity of power and justice in action.

Power and justice in relationship to place is a critical nexus to explore. History and the current moment both reveal how power has been positioned in the South to limit justice based on race. The interlocking significance of power, justice, place and race is why the Southern Poverty Law Center's president and chief executive officer, Margaret Huang, has repositioned the organization's mission and aligned its impact strategy to increase power and capacity for a multi-racial, inclusive democracy in the South. This involves a deep commitment to the work in Black and Brown communities in five key Southern states—Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Georgia and Florida. The specificity of the SPLC's focus is critical to the greater movement for racial justice as each of us who is committed to true justice must be reminded by the words attributed to Du Bois: "As the South goes, so goes the nation."

The battleground for racial justice remains in the South, and the victories for justice must be fought for and by ordinary people in the South together with allies from other parts of the nation. Although the pestilence of racism has historically affected the lives of Black and Brown people, its reach extends to

Photograph by **Sydney A. Foster**

all who counter the ideals of white supremacy. A shared story of us is clear as we collectively reconstruct a democracy that is real for all, not just some. Centering Black and Brown communities must not become lost in what can be described as a contemporary iteration of Reconstruction. Acknowledging the deep-rooted legacies of power and justice in these communities anchors the battle of today. We must not be cajoled into the thinking that centering Black and Brown perspectives in the current movement for justice minimizes injustices experienced by others. The story we share is that all our liberation is bound together. We are at a point of reconstruction where we must secure and guard our shared liberation.

The current threat to our shared story leads us to the urgency of now. We now witness in real time how the seeds of divisiveness and anti-inclusion are being planted on fertile ground made possible by far-right, conservative leaders specifically, but not exclusively, in Southern states, counties, cities and towns. Therefore, supporting existing and establishing new bases of organized local power that demonstrate bold and radical models of service, advocacy and justice are critical to the success of our new public narrative. This moment more than ever requires a strategic focus on the South for the greater good of our democracy and nation. And power is in the autonomy of local people engaged in this narrative of liberation.

We are in another iteration of the great exchange of power and justice. And we will fight for both and not concede for less. As we grapple with this phase of the reckoning and reconstructing of our democracy, let's be inspired by the words of Martin Luther King Jr.: "Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love." ●

SPLC LEARNING FOR JUSTICE

Learning for Justice seeks to uphold the mission of the Southern Poverty Law Center: to be a catalyst for racial justice in the South and beyond, working in partnership with communities to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements and advance the human rights of all people.

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

Mosaic

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Why I Teach

A Chorus of Reasons Why We Teach

By **Wilkins Elementary School Teachers and Staff**

An episode of ABC's *Nightline* shined a national spotlight on the water challenges we face daily at Wilkins Elementary School in Jackson, Mississippi. In addition to ongoing water issues that make the school's water dangerous to drink, we've used portable restrooms outside of our building where teachers have had to fight off stray dogs to keep students safe. Under these conditions, why would teachers teach? Here are some of our reasons.

"This school has my entire heart," says Principal Cheryl Brown. "The students are hardworking and eager to learn, and the teachers are dedicated. I am passionate about students becoming lifelong learners. We go above and beyond every single day for our students." Principal Brown meets and greets Wilkins students each morning, encouraging

Photographs by **Vanessa Charlot**

them to be great and—despite the end of the mandate—to wear their masks to keep them safe.

“I teach because teaching gives me the opportunity to positively influence, inspire and educate our future,” explains fourth grade teacher Ammie Stewart. “I want students to know that they can truly excel. Teaching goes far beyond knowledge, and my students get to experience that in my classroom. Relationships are built that create opportunities for lifelong learning. I have been truly blessed in continuously helping students understand that they can make a positive impact on the world.”

“Parents send us their children with the expectation for them to grow and learn,” observes school interventionist Dona Brown. “Often this is not just academically. Our students have social, emotional and behavioral needs as well. I teach because our students deserve a chance to be whatever they desire to be, given the opportunity with a quality education.”

“All scholars can learn no matter their disability,” Twana Freeman-Mallard, Ed.D., school interventionist, says. “Seeing children with different disabilities learn brings joy to my face. You must love children and cultivate their minds to prepare them for the future.”

“I teach simply because I love building relationships and making a difference in the lives of my scholars,” remarks third grade teacher Danielle Dixon. “When I see the lightbulb come on, it lets me know that what I am doing is not in vain. I teach my students that we are a family and to always show love to each other. I teach to help make a difference in our future.”

“The number one reason why I teach is simple,” says first grade teacher Tekita Franklin. “I love children! Even as a child myself, I was the neighborhood babysitter. I knew my profession was going to be associated with children. I want to be a part of the upcoming generation and help them to be the best person they can. They deserve a positive and successful education. This is only my first year, but I am looking forward to all the years to follow.”

“When I was a small child, my mom taught me the importance of an education,” fifth grade teacher Nicole Kelly remembers. “She would teach us about everything and made the teaching and learning process fun and engaging. With my mom doing that, I decided in second grade that I wanted to be a teacher. I want children to enjoy learning and take their knowledge and apply it to the real world.”

“Each day in the classroom is an opportunity to mold the hearts and minds of scholars to become productive citizens who care about others, take stands for justice and are lifelong lovers of literacy,” says third grade teacher Kerri Harrion. “Teaching is not only my passion but my calling.”

“It is no kept secret that educators are the lowest-paid profession,” notes music teacher Regan Jackson. “There is a deep need for dedicated educators to reach, teach, motivate, challenge and cultivate the total child. I teach music because it allows me the opportunity to reach my scholars on a level that promotes students expressing themselves. I also love seeing the smiles on the faces of my students.”

“Teaching Our Future”

By Ammie Stewart

I am serious, because serious I am,

Teaching my future, your future,
our future

Isn’t about glitz or glam.

It’s what I choose to do, sometimes
with little rest,

Because my future, your future,
our future

Deserves only my best.

“I teach because I pledge to inspire growth in my students by giving them tools to take into other disciplines and into other domains of their lives,” second grade teacher Linda Porter says. “It is my belief that every student is capable of tasting the same passion that I feel for teaching by becoming collaborators in the exploration of learning.”

“I am a country girl from a small town called Edwards, Mississippi,” explains first grade teacher Tameka Richardson. “One of the reasons I chose to become a teacher was to contribute to my community in a meaningful way. Teaching is one of the most direct ways to make an impact and encourage those students who need a little more support. I was once that student. Thanks to my elementary teachers at Edwards Attendance Center, I made it!” ●

The dedicated teachers and staff of Wilkins Elementary School in Jackson, Mississippi, include Cheryl Brown, Ammie Stewart, Dona Brown, Twana Freeman-Mallard, Danielle Dixon, Tekita Franklin, Nicole Kelly, Kerri Harrion, Regan Jackson, Linda Porter and Tameka Richardson.

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Why I Serve

Where I'm From

By **Lolita Bolden**

Growing up in the small rural town of Utica, Mississippi, I was surrounded by inspiration and hope from family and community. Pride held us together.

My grandparents instilled in me the first commandment to "love God" and the second to "love thy neighbor," and to do so unselfishly. We nourish and take pride in what we love.

Love for family gave my grandparents, Ellis and Wilma, the desire to raise seasonal crops. My grandmother canned almost everything we grew, and we had an endless food supply. When our freezers were full, my grandfather—Papa—gave to the community. Sometimes he would barter for whatever crop didn't do so well during the season.

Living in the shadow of Jim Crow South, oftentimes I heard the stories as we sat on the porch preparing for voting day. Papa talked about what he endured to gain his right to vote, and I read old poll tax receipts from years gone by. "If you don't vote, you don't matter," Papa would say. His words still ring in my head: "I want them to try to stop me today from voting." Papa was a proud man. I was proud every day to be his offspring, but more so on those days.

Election Day was an important day of the year. Folks would put on their Sunday best—including church dresses, hats, gloves, shoes and pocketbooks—to go to vote. Some would send word for Papa to pick them up, and he often made multiple trips, transporting others to exercise their right to cast a ballot.

We listened to Mama and Papa's midnight conversations with pride, and learned not to fear, to stand in our truth and stand for something. Papa and Mama taught us that we were placed on this earth for a purpose greater than ourselves. If we live every day for only ourselves, we have not lived.

Why do I serve? As I reflect upon our community's status, I am reminded of the words of the 1945 song that was recited to us often. If I can help somebody, my living will not be in vain.

Service is enriching, but it gets hard. Nonetheless, it's the connective tissue that binds me to people, aids my personal growth and allows me to visualize how I fit into the larger ecosystem. I sit at tables of justice where some were not allowed to pull up a chair. I am served the bread of diversity, equity and inclusion that

Photograph by **Timothy Ivy**

others before me prepared but never tasted. And I drink from a fountain of democracy.

If I am to play a part in making this nation a better place for the next generation, though tired I may be, I will continue to serve for my grandchildren—Jace, Karson and Jacelyn. They need me. ●

Lolita Bolden (she/her) is a project manager in the SPLC Mississippi state office.

“Where I’m From” By Lolita Bolden

I am from the smell of rain,
From an early April shower.
I am from freshly cultivated dirt between my toes
(warm and soothing to this country girl’s soul).
I am from the prickly stems of berry bushes (black, juicy and delectably sweet).
I am from the coniferous fir,
The pine trees,
Extra-long needles I remember,
As I had to rake them every fall.
I’m from homemade ice cream and peach cobbler,
From the side of grandmama’s porch.
I’m from the landowners
And the farmers
From sunup! To sundown!
I’m from Saturday night hair washes and straightening combs,
Hair frying and scents of Ultra Sheen,
Sunday morning church services
And dinner on the grounds.
I’m from Route 3 Box 133.
There was always fresh collard greens, fried chicken and freshly silked fried corn.
From the purple hull peas we shelled on Wilma’s porch
To the sugarcane harvested from Aunt Dorothy’s field.
The molasses was delicious with those biscuits.
In the chifforobe were old albums,
Spilling over with old pictures,
Faces I had never seen in person but heard stories about,
A moment back in time.
I am from a time when life was simple,
Nights so dark you couldn’t see your hands in front of your face,
Lightning bugs and fireflies,
The clear black-as-night skies
Full of twinkling stars and harvest moons.
I am from a grandmother who had eight children
And sewed dresses for the women in the community,
Oftentimes not using a pattern,
but an image from a Sears and Roebuck catalog and tape measure.
The money she made helped to educate all her children and some others.
I am a grandchild of Ellis,
A Black man who owned more land than any Black person in my community.
He fed those who were hungry and without food
And made sure we knew the value of helping others.
“Go to school and get a good education,” he would say.
“What you get in your head, nobody can take away from you.”
I am from these moments—
The good, the bad and I care not remember,
Those times molded, encouraged and propelled me forward
And gave me hope.
This is where I’m from.

Youth Activism

For Students, By Students

By **Koan Roy-Meighoo**

In March 2021, as high school seniors in Decatur, Georgia, we had the opportunity to imagine an ideal anti-racist school program. Learning about the City Schools of Decatur's plans to institute a JEDI (justice, equity, diversity and inclusion) course for students, we recognized an opportunity—a necessity—to think big about anti-racist education, especially after some highly publicized instances of structural and day-to-day issues in the community. Working with Decatur High School's Student Coalition for Equity, our community's local Black Alliance and our district's Equity Office, we first altered the acronym; education must be paired with practice, so we created the Justice, Action, Diversity and Equity (JADE) Program.

We'd long been advocates for social and educational justice in our community. As student leaders and members of the Beacon Hill Black Alliance, we helped remove Confederate artifacts from our city square and installed new works by artists of color under the Art for the People Project. Our activism was also part of the national fight for justice amplified by protests following the brutal 2020 murder of George Floyd.

Decatur's school district had its own reckoning that summer. Videos of white students using racial slurs and threatening violence against community members of color were leaked during the pandemic. The district's more privileged residents began to realize the hardships many of their neighbors endure daily. The school environment—conditioned by years of exclusionary curriculum,

Julian Fortuna (left) and Koan Roy-Meighoo (right) created a proactive initiative to counter a nationwide war against education.

Photograph by **Ben Rollins**

JADE Summit

Check out the Learning for Justice short video about the JADE Summit.

youtu.be/ZfA9NmOK-7A

unfair gifted-identification practices, and other biased fundamental structures built into our education system, not particular to our district alone—had cultivated a climate of ignorance and insensitivity. Decatur had been working on combating such issues for a while through expansion of the Department of Equity, curriculum-review teams and equitable hiring practices. Yet a lot more work was needed.

Concrete investments in school culture had to be made, and JADE became one such initiative. Relying on building empathy and open-mindedness among students, the program seeks to help students and teachers actualize their power to advocate for justice.

JADE—envisioned as a three-year middle school program—has three main focuses: filling current curricular gaps in the Georgia standards, building communication and empathy skills across demographics, and giving students tools to be active in their communities. JADE can also support schools that cannot implement an entire program, providing a resource bank of lesson plans, pedagogies and teacher-training modules that can meet any district's needs.

We originally intended for the program to be specifically for the City Schools of Decatur. In August 2021, we formed the Decatur Justice Coalition, a local collaborative of community advocacy organizations. And we gathered widespread support for the program—from students to school board members.

We realized JADE's greater potential, however, in late 2021, with the state Legislature's attack on the ability to openly discuss race in classrooms. No longer a simple curricular solution to some of our small district's oversights, our program became an affirmative vision of anti-racism in the classroom. JADE curriculum is scalable to the environments and contexts of different school systems in Georgia. This malleable approach to the course provides educators with options in places where censorship presents risks.

While many politicians are mandating division, JADE embraces unity through engagement in open-minded, honest conversations and empathy through understanding the value of diversity. Holistic, inclusive lesson plans and safely facilitated dialogues are at the heart of the curriculum. Additionally, JADE invests in teachers as much as it does in students through its comprehensive training and protection infrastructure. We showcased teacher-facing support in October 2022 during a JADE Educator Organizing Summit.

JADE isn't a Band-Aid for school systems that were once inequitable institutions. It is a proactive initiative to counter a nationwide war against honest education. The program is a testament to the power of unified communities to endure censorship and tyrannical practices and to grow stronger during such a time.

We plan to continue our work by piloting JADE during the fall 2023 academic year, adapting it to meet the needs of Georgia's students, educators and diverse communities.

> While many politicians are mandating division, JADE embraces unity through engagement in open-minded, honest conversations and empathy through understanding the value of diversity.

To support education justice, we urge everyone to attend school board meetings and advocate for inclusive curriculum, let your representatives know you do not support classroom censorship bills, and communicate with students when advocating for justice in education. JADE has only been successful because it always centered students.

Empathy and unity are at stake in this uncertain time. Initiatives like JADE demonstrate the ability of a community to provide what every student deserves: justice, action, diversity and equity. ●

Koan Roy-Meighoo (he/him) is an education justice advocate from Georgia and co-founder of the JADE Program.

Julian Fortuna (right) at the podium during a JADE event while Koan Roy-Meighoo (center) engages in the work.

Photograph by Calvin Florian

Learning Together

Time Spent Building Community Is Never Time Wasted

By **Hoyt J. Phillips III**

"What's this CPR thing that my child keeps talking about?" a parent asked on family night as others nodded in agreement. Apparently, my students had enthusiastically talked about the acronym without much explanation. I smiled as I explained to my fifth graders' parents and caregivers about my classroom practice of the Circle of Power and Respect (CPR).

The Morning Meeting Book by Roxann Kriete and Carol Davis provided the idea for the CPR model, and I was heartened to know that my first time implementing the practice had resonated with my students. When I could squeeze it into our packed schedule, we would circle up and engage in intentional relationship-building. This practice helped me better understand and appreciate my students, and it helped them connect with one another in a more meaningful and structured way. Sadly, because of time constraints, CPR was not as consistent as I, or the students, would have liked.

The importance of intentionally building and sustaining relationships has stayed with me and been reinforced over the years since I transitioned from classroom teaching.

When I first arrived at the SPLC's Learning for Justice—then Teaching Tolerance—program, I was welcomed with a small handmade banner created from construction paper that was hanging on my desk, and various coworkers invited me to lunch and dinner to help me get better acquainted with a new team and a new town. The time intentionally created for me to learn, ask questions and get to know my new teammates helped me adjust and feel connected.

Later, I was managing the process of creating new in-person learning experiences for educators. Val Brown, our first trainer and eventual professional development manager, was clear from the beginning about the importance of embedding relationship-building throughout every workshop we planned. She would gently remind us that "time spent building community is never time wasted." In practice, the often-dreaded generic workshop icebreaker was transformed into an amazing practice that provided space for connection and learning.

As the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to become an all-remote organization almost overnight, our team encountered disagreements. I came to understand that, while we liked one another, these challenges were more productively navigated when those involved had developed and sustained relationships. I also came to realize that as a manager I had dropped the ball at times by not ensuring intentional and sustained relationship-building was happening.

People across various sectors—including educators and activists—have struggled with these issues over the last few years. And while I am still learning, I have a list of reminders that help keep relationship-building a focus of my practice.

- Relationship-building is planned and intentional. Just thinking folks will come together and bond does not happen without thoughtful planning.
- It is consistent and sustained. Relationships that help folks

Illustration by **Ellice Weaver**

navigate challenges need time. Planning ongoing avenues of engagement will help support stronger relationships.

- It is fun and celebratory. Folks will be more engaged if the time is enjoyable and does not feel like a chore. Also, celebrating work and non-work-related milestones is important.
- It starts small and builds. Brief, consistent types of engagements can go a long way. A simple and fun opening question—one that doesn't require too much vulnerability—to start off meetings can lead to interesting insights. Once this structure is in place, asking folks as they are comfortable to be more vulnerable can happen over time.
- It is transparent. The group clearly knows the purpose and how it is part of and not separate from their work. Transparency—letting folks know why they are doing something—can build stronger relationships, as can providing space for feedback.
- Relationship-building is a group effort. I have learned the hard way that it's more effective and fun when folks have input into planning and sustaining relationship-building efforts.

My commitment stays strong because I am part of an incredible team of activists and educators who know that this work begins and ends with relationship. I have witnessed firsthand how grace is extended, conversations are engaged in more deeply, and change is enacted when individuals have a history of building and sustaining relationships with one another. We cannot achieve the vision for our communities and ourselves if we do not truly relate to and connect with one another in an authentic way. ●

Hoyt J. Phillips III (he/him) is Learning for Justice's deputy director for Program Management & Operations.

Article Spotlight

Search for these headlines at learningforjustice.org.

'Never Again' Starts With Education

By Alon Milwicki, Maya Henson Carey, Joseph Wiinikka-Lydon

Mandating Holocaust education in U.S. public schools and simultaneously banning or censoring other "hard histories" is ineffective, disingenuous and further demonstrates the importance of teaching honest history.

Center Survivors: A Resource for Families and Educators in Responding to Sexual Violence

By Amy Melik

When a young person experiences sexual assault, a survivor-centered approach—from parents, caregivers, educators and everyone involved in the survivor's life—is essential.

The Women's March: Protest and Resistance

By Dorothee Benz, Ph.D.

The greater impact of the 2017 Women's March is its energizing of activists, especially young women, in the United States and around the world.

"Safe Saturday" Conversations About Race

By Teresa L. Reed, Ph.D.

An educator's message motivated by personal unresolved grief leads to the creation of a safe space for intensive, interactive learning about racism and honest U.S. history.

Conversations About Gun Violence, Disinformation and Extremism

By Lydia Bates

To support young people as they grapple with harms motivated by extremism, it's incumbent upon the whole community to address hate-fueled violence.

Celebrate African and Indigenous Cultures: A Resource for Parents and Caregivers

By Learning for Justice

Conversations about African and Indigenous cultures are essential for learning about the history of our country and making connections with a broader world.

Talking to Children About the History of Slavery in the United States

By Learning for Justice

These recommendations for discussing the history and legacy of slavery and race with children also provide age-appropriate information to emphasize in conversations.

Solidarity as Social and Emotional Safety

By Riley Drake, Ph.D.

This model of social and emotional learning emphasizes mutual aid, restorative justice and safety by design.

Mental Health Matters

Self-Care in the Movement

Being healthy and nurturing ourselves enable giving that stems from general well-being and overflow.

By **Jamilah Pitts**

Our collective movement to build an equitable society is unsustainable unless we adopt practices rooted in honoring our humanity and well-being. If we are not well, then our work is undermined and so is our support for the young people we serve. As we seek to dismantle systems of oppression that threaten democracy, we must also disrupt ideas and practices that endanger our ability to *be*.

Rhetoric in education and activist spaces too often suggests—or even insists—that healthy lifestyles and boundaries have no place, praising those who elevate work above well-being. This mindset is harmful to us and the young people in our care. And the prioritizing of work over wellness is especially damaging to communities of the global majority and those who have been historically relegated to societal margins—such as women, LGBTQ+ people, immigrant groups, individuals with disabilities, those experiencing poverty and others. The demand to give so much of ourselves, to labor under destructive conditions, compounds existing injustices in health care, public safety, economic security and environmental sustainability in our communities, thus increasing health risks.

Racist and biased legislation and policies imperil our rights and well-being. In our work to confront and change these systemic injustices, we must keep our health at the forefront so we can continue in this movement for justice and support the young people in our lives.

Illustrations by **Kim Holt**

How Can We Honor Self-Care at the Intersections of Race, Gender and Poverty?

- **Acknowledge self-care and wellness as forms of resistance necessary for survival.**
  Practices that honor our well-being are not merely “nice-to-haves.” We must embrace actions rooted in our right to be and to thrive. We must acknowledge how activist and social justice work impacts the mental health of those being harmed and those working to eradicate harm. We must also pay attention to activists who die by suicide and those who are burdened deeply by the work. We must prioritize our mental health and implement practices to ensure that we are well.

- **Recognize how all forms of bias and oppression are fueled by and work in tandem with our lack of self-care.**
  Forms of oppression and patterns of domination are perpetuated when people are overburdened and less likely to engage in practices of resistance and liberation—such as thinking creatively, utilizing art to resist, creating new ways of being, and working and coming together in community to process, breathe and plan strategies. Educators in particular are often so inundated with work they have little time to adopt liberatory practices, prioritize well-being, or utilize their intelligence to, as Bettina Love, Ph.D., describes it, “freedom dream.”

- **Create cultures of wellness and model self-care practices for young people.**
  We must vigilantly work against “grind culture” and spaces rooted deeply in capitalism. Being conscious of the impact our wellness—and lack thereof—has on the young people in our lives can help better equip us to show up for children in loving, beneficial ways. When we model self-care and healthy practices, we help young people prioritize wellness, which positively affects their learning and engagement in the world. In education and activist spaces, we must build practices of care in our work to promote the rights and well-being of the young people and communities we endeavor to serve.

> When we are healthy and cared for, when we have what we need, we are then able to truly hold space for others because, rather than give from lack, we can give from a place of overflow.

Practices for Health and Wellness

1. **Adopt holistic wellness practices that honor your individuality.**
   Creating care around all parts of our lives is essential to living and working in ways that honor our entire being. For practices to be meaningful, consider brainstorming individual wellness needs in all areas of life. What do we need to be physically, emotionally and mentally well? What financial resources are necessary for our well-being? What do we need to be well in the spaces where we do this work? And what do we need in our personal lives for spiritual and social well-being? Exploring our individual needs in all spheres of our lives encourages us to implement holistic practices.

2. **Reach out for therapy and mental health support.**
   Therapy and other forms of mental health support have been stigmatized historically, which can make seeking this form of support difficult. Yet we can practice active care and model wellness for others by seeking support for our own mental well-being. We should pursue therapy to deal with trauma and for mental health checkups. Working with a professional in a safe environment regarding how to navigate heavy workloads and set goals can help to ensure we live our best possible lives.

   At times, medication can enhance our mental wellness. I unapologetically share that I began taking medication when I worked in schools, and particularly as a school leader, because of the workload and a lack of support—often fueled by dangerous beliefs around wellness and self-care. I suffered panic attacks, serious sleeping problems, anxiety, depression and other bodily issues that necessitated my use of medication. While I was initially ashamed and nervous, combining therapy and medication offered me the stability to continue until I found other ways to support my overall being.

3. **Honor Indigenous and other forms of cultural care and healing.**
   Wellness, especially for people of the global majority, should also include reclaiming, accessing and practicing Indigenous and other forms of cultural care and healing. Often, healing and wellness spaces center what white people consider wellness and negate what Black and Brown people need for healing and wellness.

   As a Black woman, I am learning to lean heavily into cultural forms of care such as laughter, exploring nature and grounding practices like placing my feet into the earth. I have also learned, studied and now teach Eastern practices such as yoga, meditation and Reiki. Wellness does not have to look a particular way. The best forms of wellness are those practices that honor who you are and what you need.

Healing in the Black community includes laughter, healthy gatherings with family and friends, somatic practices, and getting into the body. Letting go of intergenerational trauma happens by learning about it and releasing that pain through movement or sound and engaging with the ocean, for example, or nature in general.

Wellness and healing practices might also include:

- Working with energy healers or medicine people who promote and apply practices outside of Western and European approaches.
- Journaling and creating art.
- Reading and listening to music.
- Camping, hiking, swimming and other outdoor activities.
- Healing in women's circles.
- Participating in ceremonies where negative thoughts, ideas and practices are written on paper and burned—for people of the global majority this is especially healing and serves as a form of reclamation.

4. Create daily practices rooted in wellness and care.
Daily and weekly routines around self-care and mental health might include:

- Waking up early enough to engage in spiritual, gratitude or mental practices—such as affirmation writing or journaling—that help manage the mind for the day.
- Taking time to engage in practices that care for your body and physical health.
- Drinking water—or warm water with lemon or lime—to flush the body.
- Eating nourishing meals to begin the day.
- Preparing healthy meals for the day or week.
- Setting goals for the day.
- Tending to your emotional needs before you attend to everyone else.

- Establishing a practice or routine for winding down at the end of the day.
- Creating a sanctuary in your home in ways that resonate for your needs.

5. Set boundaries and leave when you need to.
Set boundaries. Say no. Believe, trust and know that "no" is a complete sentence. Honor yourself by setting boundaries, even if others villainize you for it. We must advocate for ourselves and know we are more powerful and productive when we have firm boundaries in place.

6. Ask for help and lean into community.
A tool of oppression is praise for individualistic practices. In contrast, many African and Indigenous cultures honor and recognize the importance of community. Return to this; ask for help when you need it. Find your community in the people who accept you and where you feel visible. Find people who recognize the importance of self-care, wellness and healthy boundaries.

Whatever our role in this movement—educator, activist, parent, caregiver or concerned community member—we are needed. The work for justice is crucial, but we are unable to offer support and to give freely unless we are well. When we are healthy and cared for, when we have what we need, we are then able to truly hold space for others because, rather than give from lack, we can give from a place of overflow. ●

Jamilah Pitts (she/her) is an educator, writer, social entrepreneur and yoga teacher whose work centers the liberation, healing and holistic development of communities of the global majority.

Resources

Webinar: ***The Value of Educator Self-Care***
lfj.pub/educator-selfcare

Article: Self-Care Can Be Social Justice by Jamilah Pitts
lfj.pub/selfcare-social-justice

Preventing Youth Radicalization: Building Resilient, Inclusive Communities

The SPLC and American University's Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab (PERIL) are committed to providing evidence-based, iterative resources to the people building community resilience against extremism and creating a more just and inclusive society.

The proliferation of extremist spaces and content online has created new and powerful avenues for radicalization, especially with young people, who are often the targets of radical-right propaganda. Our resources aim to help parents, caregivers, educators and other community members understand how extremists exploit online communication to target young people. Adults who interact with young people have a crucial role to play in building resilient communities of inclusion.

The following resources are intended to provide strategies to address the threat of extremism through early prevention and noncarceral solutions:

- **Building Resilience & Confronting Risk: A Parents & Caregivers Guide to Online Radicalization**
- **Building Networks & Addressing Harm: A Community Guide to Online Youth Radicalization**
- **Educators' Supplement**
- **Counselors' Supplement**
- **Coaches' & Mentors' Supplement**
- **Special Topics in Online Youth Radicalization**
- **Assessments & Impact**

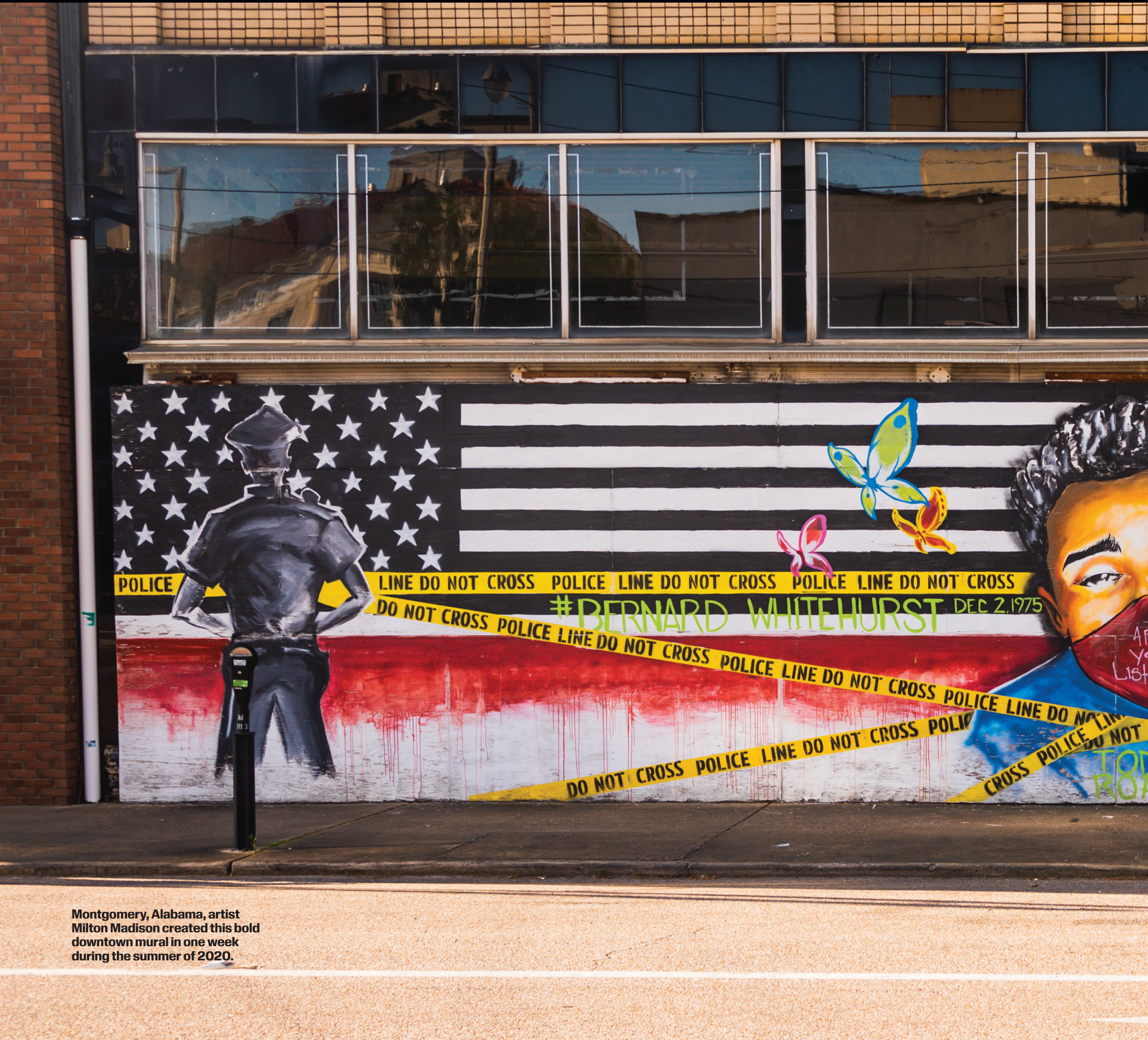
Find more information and download all guides at

splcenter.org/peril

Cover Story

The Power of Place

Art as a Tool for Social Justice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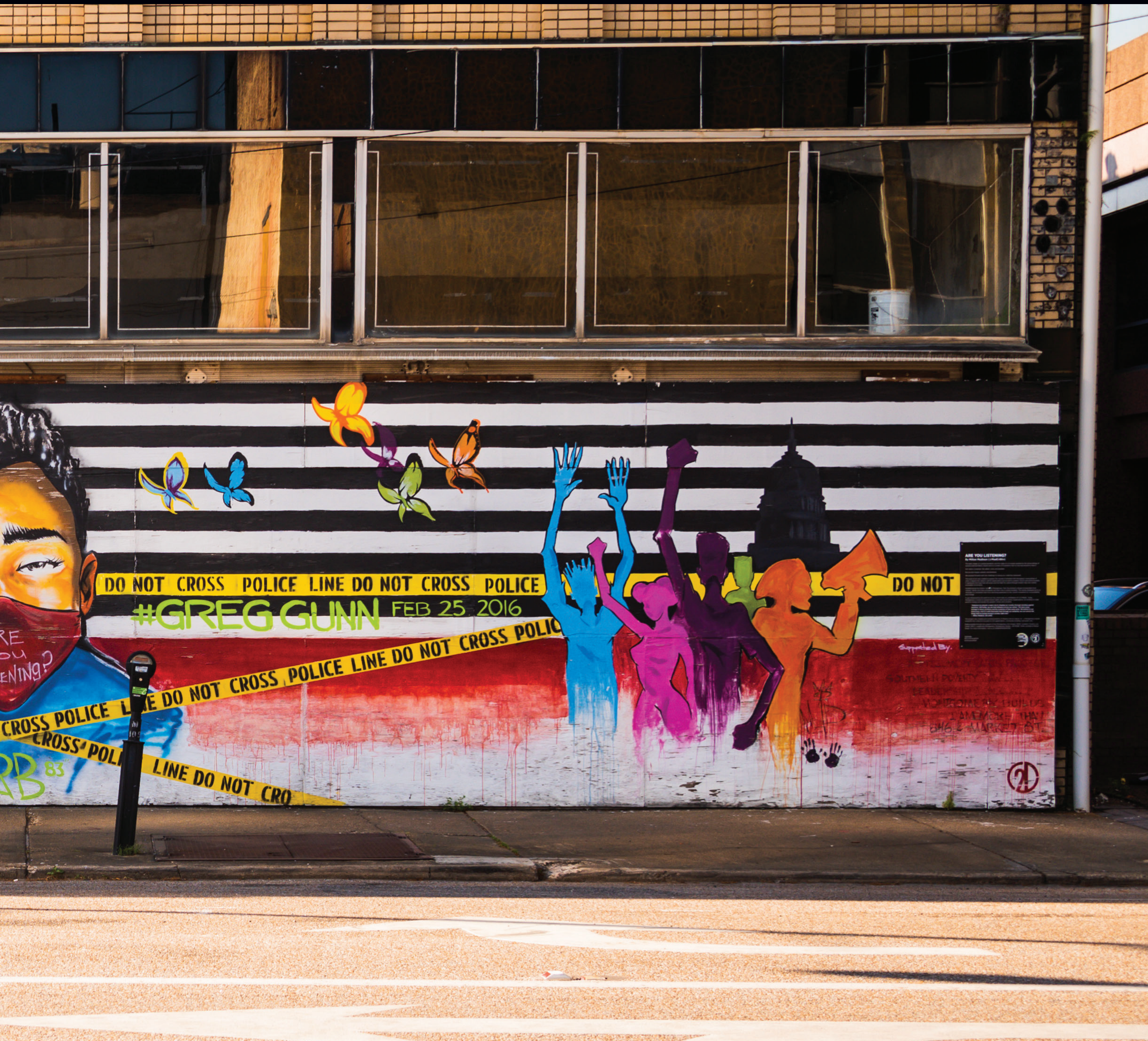
Montgomery, Alabama, artist Milton Madison created this bold downtown mural in one week during the summer of 2020.

Alabama artists are depicting honest history and challenging historical invisibility—reshaping public narratives of justice in their communities.

By **Coshandra Dillard**

Photography by **Cierra Brinson**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In Montgomery, Alabama, a black-and-white United States flag painted on the side of a downtown building is the background for a 10-by-50-foot mural. Red bleeds from the bottom of the flag. A Black child in the foreground, entwined in police barricade tape, wears a mask that reads, "Are you listening?" The mural features names of victims of police violence in Montgomery. A police officer appears in the left corner, his back to the viewer.

"It was basically saying, all of this time we've been yelling, we've been screaming, we've been shouting," explains the mural's artist, Milton Madison, "but it seems we're speaking the loudest during this time where our mouths are supposed to be covered, or our voices are supposed to be muted because we've got masks on. It's hard to hear, it's hard to talk, but we're going to make sure you hear us."

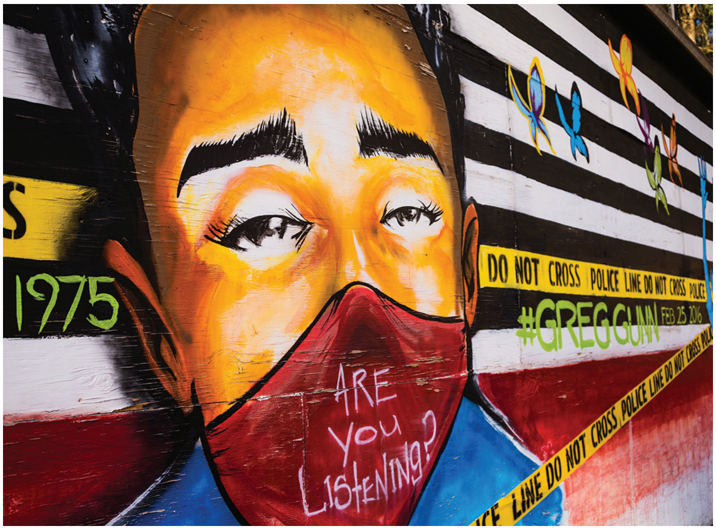
Public art functions as a tool for social change. For many artists, particularly Black artists, art counters a history of invisibility, shapes public sentiment and changes narratives. With its legacy of activism, Montgomery, Alabama, is perfect for viewing history and mobilizing people to action through public artwork.

Following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, Madison conceived and completed his dramatic mural in about one week. Two concurrent crises compelled Madison's work: the endless views of police-shooting deaths on social media timelines and the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately affected Black and Brown communities. The typical grind of everyday work life slowed early in the pandemic, and many people began to contemplate existential problems more seriously. "The coming and going of your day-to-day [routine] didn't distract you from having to be emotionally affected by it," Madison recounts, observing that, despite this stillness, violent police interactions continued. "But you still turn around and make time to kill a Black man—out of all that's going on," he laments. "You don't have enough grace or understanding or patience during this time to handle something in a different way."

During the summer of 2020, artists nationwide created murals, photography, street art and protest signs insisting "We want justice" or "Black Lives Matter."

"Whatever it was, you saw it big and bold, unashamed," Madison says. "You saw it so big because it was almost as if you're screaming visually."

Artist Milton Madison notes that the recent surge in the creation of public art like his serves as a demand for justice.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A Veritable Time Machine

Essential to social justice movements and civic engagement, the arts can counter attempts to dilute or erase history that does not reflect American exceptionalism and white-centered narratives.

Artists describe art as a universal language mirroring and influencing life. "The perpetual question with art is, 'Does art create change that's reflected in society, or does society project into art what it wants to see in the world?'" says Montgomery-based artist Sunny Paulk. "So it's always this circular feed, this continuous feed."

Bill Ford, a veteran Montgomery artist, views art as a vehicle "for conveying the human experience on a visceral level."

"Sometimes a torrent of words can seem preachy, whereas we've all heard 'one picture is worth a thousand words,'" Ford says. "Social justice is a goal that seeks to enable everyone to receive their due from society; when we can identify with others, it's a process that is much easier to implement."

Today's artistic movement extends from the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and '70s, with its focus on Black-centric art in literature, theater, music and the visual arts. Poet Larry Neal referred to the Black Arts Movement as "the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept."

Alabama State University (ASU) art history professor Mary Soylu, Ph.D., observes that in many ways the Black Arts Movement can be considered the predecessor to the artistic arm of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Going back further in time, Soylu says we can chart this artistic lineage to the work of Black artists of the Works Progress Administration and the Harlem Renaissance. "It's interesting to observe the artistic connections between the BLM murals and the civil rights murals of the 1960s, particularly the murals that spawned the nationwide mural movement that emerged from Chicago during that time period."

For documenting the civil rights movement, Ford says photography was the most effective form of art. "The ability to preserve these moments in time without flinching or alteration is invaluable for generations to see—a veritable time machine," Ford explains. "It is proving to play that same

> "Whatever it was, you saw it big and bold, unashamed. You saw it so big because it was almost as if you're screaming visually."
>
> **Milton Madison**

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role in the Black Lives Matter movement. … This reemergence or emphasis on the importance of the Black experience in America, after centuries of much more than benign neglect, puts our artistic expressions in the prominent position [they] rightfully deserve. To know a people, one must know their culture in all its permutations."

The Art of Storytelling for Civic Engagement

While heartbreaking, Madison's Montgomery mural is also infused with symbols of hope: colorful butterflies, symbolizing evolution and diversity, fly across the monochromatic flag. Madison says he visualized citizens pushing government representatives to implement policies that help sustain a more just society and, in the mural's lower right corner, depicted a vibrant group of activists protesting in front of the Alabama Capitol.

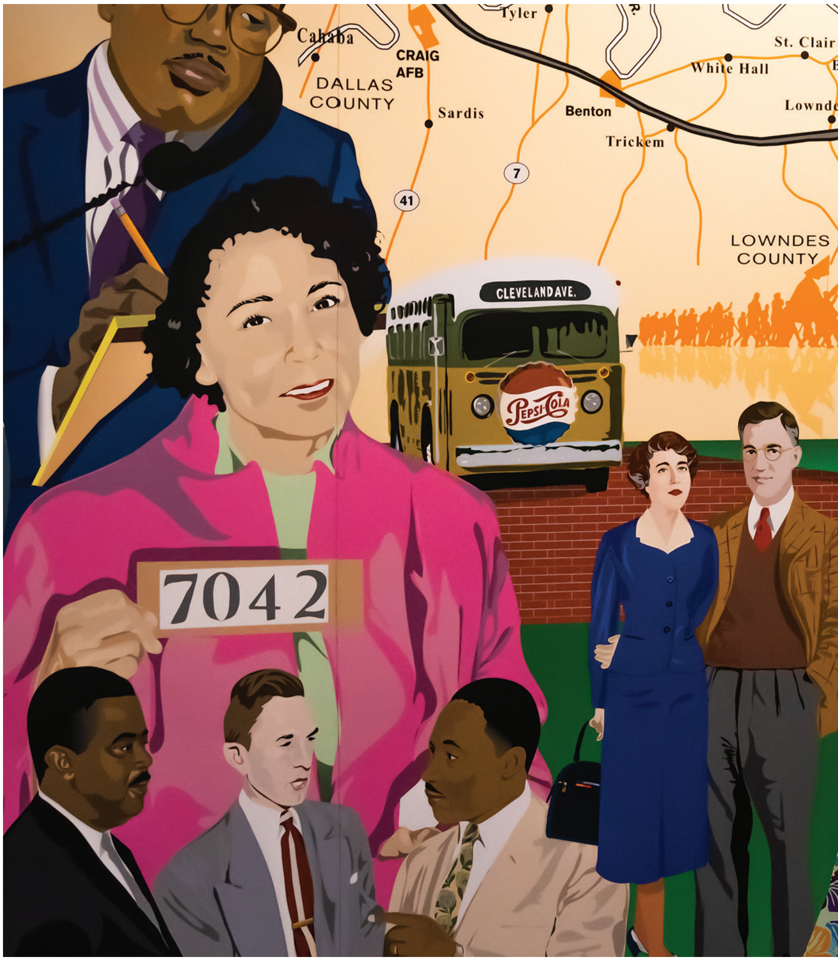
The mural received mostly positive feedback and sparked conversations. "You want it to invoke something that might hopefully change the situation for the better," Madison says.

Kalonji Gilchrist, founder of 21 Dreams Arts & Culture, an organization designed to advance creative and cultural arts in Montgomery, entered the art world through film and revolutionary music. He also belongs to We Create Change Alabama, an artist collective addressing the assault on teaching honest history, mass incarceration and voter suppression. The group collaborated with other nonprofit organizations working on those issues to create a series of pop-up exhibitions.

"I realized that power of art to activate or to bring awareness to social issues," Gilchrist says. "We're using that power to bring people together and then make sure that they have something to take away. They're not just walking away without a directive."

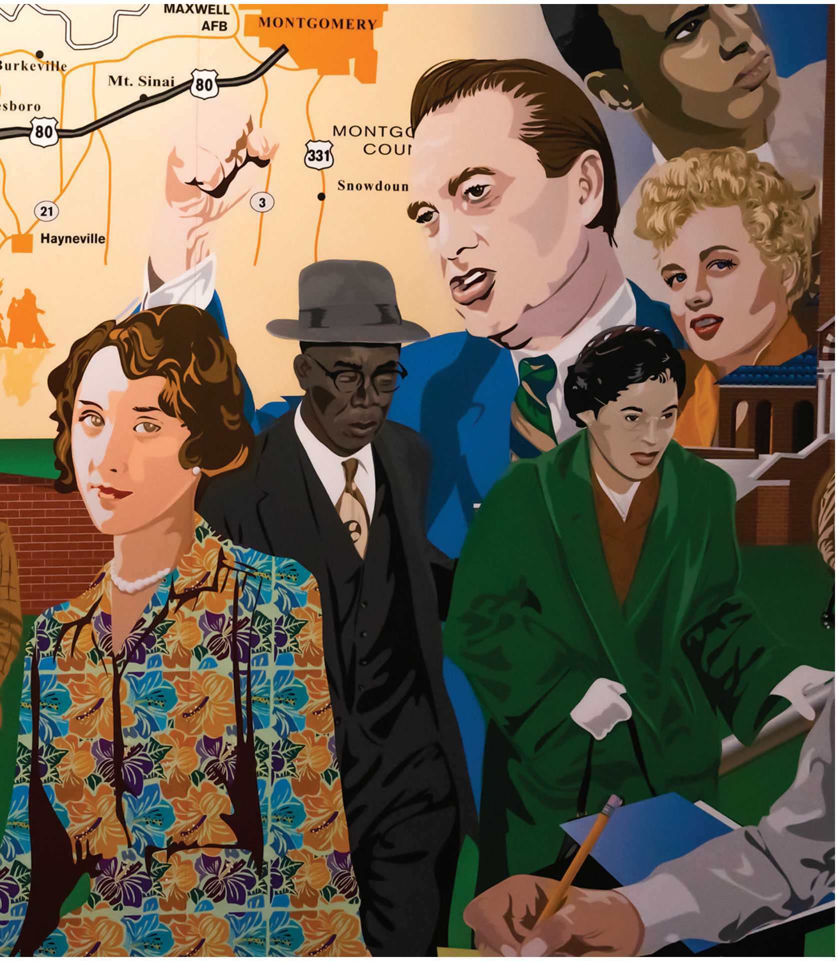
Documenting Montgomery History

Numerous artworks around Montgomery depict stories of justice, injustice, courage and pride. Murals are the most visible examples, from one that uplifts the story of Claudette Colvin to one that celebrates the Montgomery Bus Boycott. These local artists are intentionally foregrounding honest history.



Other types of art do the same. At the Freedom Rides Museum, a quilt depicts the struggle against segregated travel through the South. Downtown, artist Michelle Browder—who is integral to the city's art movement—created 15-foot sculptures in homage to enslaved Black women victimized during the development of early gynecological practices. In 2020, Browder helped lead artists in creating a Black Lives Matter street mural at a Montgomery site where enslaved Black people were once auctioned. Completed on Juneteenth, the mural symbolizes that summer's racial reckoning and brought attention to the city's role in the slave trade.

> "This reemergence or emphasis on the importance of the Black experience in America, after centuries of much more than benign neglect, puts our artistic expressions in the prominent position [they] rightfully deserve. To know a people, one must know their culture in all its permutations."
>
> **Bill Ford**



In one of four murals at a Montgomery, Alabama, library (above), artist Bill Ford (left) depicts the history of the city.

Bill Traylor, a former sharecropper born into slavery, and Mose Tolliver—both Black men who received no formal training—are renowned Montgomery artists and part of the city's rich artistic heritage.

"Some have given Traylor the credit for being the progenitor of modern art in America," Ford says. "It is most likely that a young Mose Tolliver … took inspiration from seeing Traylor do his thing along Monroe Street, but [Tolliver] didn't begin to draw steadily until after an accident in a furniture factory disabled him in his late 40s."

Ford notes new galleries and spaces such as the King's Canvas, the Urban Dream Fine Arts Center and 21 Dreams Arts & Culture join institutions like the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, the Armory Learning Arts Center and the Montgomery Art Guild, presenting various options for artists to create and exhibit their works.

Following the end of slavery and again after school desegregation, public art upheld the "Lost Cause of the Confederacy" myth, which minimized the brutality of slavery and white supremacy in the antebellum South and cast the Confederacy in the best light. The modern art movement works to contest that. Today, Montgomery has Confederate symbols and art representing a more *honest* history. At City Hall an official seal boasts both the "Birthplace of Civil Rights" and "Cradle of the Confederacy."

Alana Taylor, an ASU art professor whose work focuses on healing, symbolism and technology, explains that art often moves people to question their thoughts about these Confederate symbols. "You can't undo your past, but at least you can look at it, evaluate what it was, talk yourself through the transition of what you want it to be, see the benefits of it going this way versus the way you thought it should have been," Taylor says.

While the city created a committee in 2021 to assess the continued exhibition of Confederate iconography, Alabama state law prohibits the removal, renaming or destruction of memorials, statues, buildings and streets named after those in the Confederacy.

Equal Justice Initiative as an Influence

The Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), a Montgomery-based organization working to end mass incarceration and racial injustice, explores connections between slavery and mass incarceration through its museum content, memorial and art. ASU art history professor Soylu believes EJI's work

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Kalonji Gilchrist (above) stands at the Southern Poverty Law Center in front of a mural completed by a group of young artists (detail on opposite page).

motivated local artists to tell—or continue to tell—similar stories.

"Since [EJI's] National Memorial for Peace and Justice (NMPJ) opened in 2018, something has changed in the art community," Soylu says. "It's hard to articulate and profound to witness. In a sense, the art and design of the NMPJ has made history visible to the world, history that has been hidden for so long. This is extraordinary because this region is dominated by Confederate monuments. … Area artists are responding to this unprecedented memorial, and the history and stories it reveals, in a myriad of compelling ways, while also creating a new vision for the future."

Gilchrist agrees. "There was that awakening," he says. "Not only do you have those that are just at their core concerned about social issues or create art around social issues, you now have artists that may have been creating art in a different way see the opportunity to express themselves … and then also have it represented in galleries and in murals."

Portraits of Courage

Art can uplift people whose names we might never know. Last summer, the arts department at ASU received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts for community programming. For the project, they obtained surveillance photos from the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency of the first attempted Selma to Montgomery March, which resulted in the infamous "Bloody Sunday" attack on marchers. Artists asked community members to help identify participants in the photos, then transformed the photographs into other works of art.

Honoring people for their bravery in protecting democracy can lead viewers to examine their own activism. That's what happened for Paulk, the Montgomery artist who created the Selma to Montgomery March mural downtown commemorating the march's 50th anniversary. While working on the Portraits of Courage project, Paulk focused on one boy in the crowd in photos from the march.

"His hands are in his pockets," she describes. "He's very anxious, and tense, but so young. So my decision was to paint him on a very narrow canvas in all black and white, surrounded by black, without any background, just a solid color. And just really hone in on who he was, what he's doing there, how he felt. None of those things I had the answers to. It was just such a small child being part of what became a historic movement, a historic march, but it was so dangerous for him to be there."

> “I realized that power of art to activate or to bring awareness to social issues. We’re using that power to bring people together and then make sure that they have something to take away. They’re not just walking away without a directive.”
>
> **Kalonji Gilchrist**

“In painting him, I feel like, shouldn’t I be a braver person than I feel like I can be, because look what he did?” Paulk says. “All these things go into art-making, yet when I’m painting it and you’re looking at it, none of those words are said. It all has to be communicated through the art itself.”

Supporting the Next Generation of Socially Conscious Artists

To uplift and cultivate artists in social justice spaces, communities must value the arts. The 2021 American Academy of Arts and Sciences report *Art for Life’s Sake: The Case for Arts Education* advocates funding school arts programs, as “there has been a persistent decline in support for arts education, particularly in communities that cannot finance it on their own.”

The lack of such funding, the report indicates, disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous and Latine/x communities, causing “dire effects on the mental health of children and youth.” The report also emphasizes a “causal link between arts education and critical thinking outcomes … increased empathy and higher motivation to engage with arts and culture.”

Alabama artists say funding artistic communities is indispensable. Madison notes he didn’t flourish as an artist until he found community. Without it, Black artists—particularly those who aren’t tied to a postsecondary education art community—don’t feel supported. “We all had the same sentiments that there weren’t places that we could really display our art or that we felt that that culture was being nurtured or created,” Madison recounts.

He imparts the value of art at school, encourages healing through art and aims to elevate students’ moods by painting murals on local school walls. “You see some nice murals in the hallways—that might help change the energy to some kids [who] might be feeling down or sad,” Madison says.

The artists’ work never ends. They should be recognized for their creativity and societal roles as documentarians or historians.

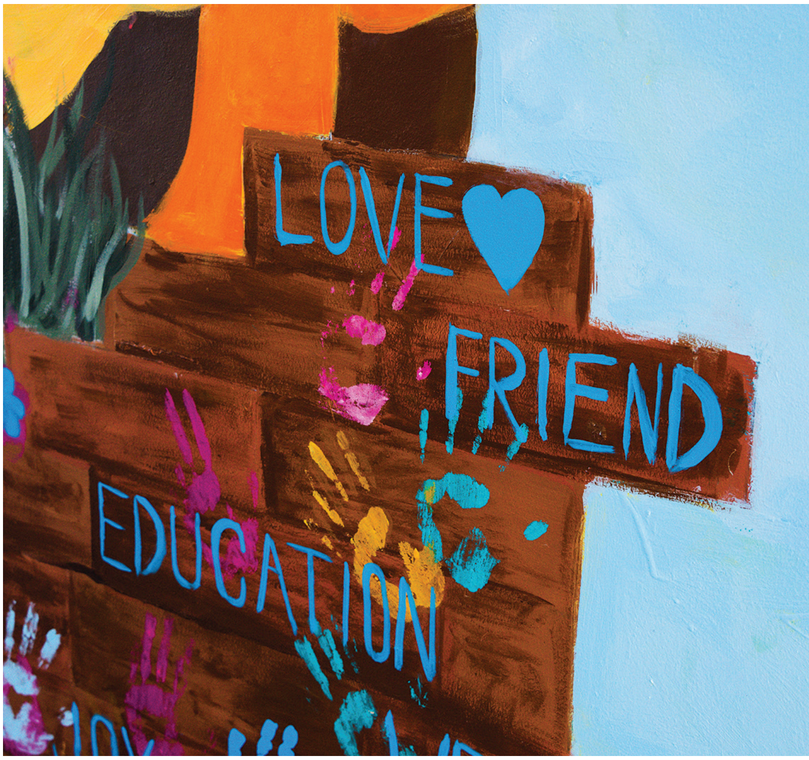
“We haven’t really been so much doing art just for art’s sake, but just really purposeful in building community and advancing community and culture,” Gilchrist says. ●

Coshandra Dillard (she/her) is an associate editor for Learning for Justice.

Resources

A minilesson from Facing History & Ourselves helps students in grades 6-12 use art to advance social change.
facinghistory.org/resource-library/art-imagination-and-quest-racial-justice

This Learning for Justice webinar, *Painting a Just Picture: Art and Activism*, helps us understand our history through art.
lfj.pub/art-and-activism



A Refuge for LGBTQ+ Young People

Student-run Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) clubs are a federally protected space for young people to survive and thrive in the increasingly hostile anti-LGBTQ+ climate in schools and across the country.

By **Dorothee Benz, Ph.D.**
Illustrations by **Kim Salt**

In a Florida school, one counselor's caseload dropped drastically after students started a Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) club. Creating a space where LGBTQ+ young people felt safe and able to connect with one another mitigated the anxiety and loneliness that had brought many of them into the counselor's office.

A community-based GSA in Rosedale, Mississippi, organized an anti-bullying campaign in response to student reports of widespread harassment at school. The campaign included awareness-raising buttons, student and teacher anti-bullying pledges and student-made posters.

These are just two examples of the varied ways Gender and Sexuality Alliances (originally called Gay-Straight Alliances when they first emerged over three decades ago) aid LGBTQ+ students in combating hostility and rejection at school. GSAs are effective in helping transgender and queer young people survive and thrive, and studies have consistently shown that the presence of a GSA results in improved academic achievement, school attachment and overall mental well-being for LGBTQ+ youth.

Nationwide, there are more than 4,000 GSAs, but over the last three years, for the first time since advocates began keeping track, that number has shrunk. In part, this reflects the unique challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, which are hopefully temporary. But significantly, the decline in resources for LGBTQ+ students reflects the growing political extremism and direct threats to young people's rights, health and safety. Mississippi, for example, barred transgender students from participating in school athletics in 2021. In 2022, Florida passed the so-called "Don't Say Gay" law, which aims to prohibit classroom discussion of sexual orientation or gender identity in school classrooms.

GSAs have increasingly come under attack in this environment. "Hostility to GSA clubs is the latest manifestation of surging, largely right-wing discontent with how schools teach about race, racism, history, gender identity and sexuality," reported *The Washington Post* in June 2022. LGBTQ+ and Black, Indigenous and other students of color are in the crosshairs, and for youth of color who are queer, compounded marginalization and discrimination are particularly intense.

"The vitriol is palpable," says Paul Castillo, senior counsel and students' rights strategist at Lambda Legal. "LGBTQ+ censorship and erasure are contributing to the hostile environment that is just sweeping across the South and districts all across the country."

"Kids are afraid, families are afraid, teachers are afraid," reports Ian Siljestrom, director of Equality Florida's Safe & Healthy Schools Project.

Despite the political attacks, it is important to recognize that LGBTQ+ students have legal rights that no school is allowed to impinge upon. Foremost among these when it comes to GSAs is the Equal Access Act of 1984, which protects public secondary school students who want to form a noncurricular club, including GSAs.

What Are GSAs, and Why Are They Important?

GSAs are student-initiated and student-led noncurricular clubs, just like other student clubs in schools across the United States. Because LGBTQ+ young people often face significant threats, bullying and abuse simply because of who they are, GSAs are essential spaces of refuge away from the insults and violence, where

students can connect with peers who face similar struggles and can offer understanding and acceptance.

Anti-LGBTQ+ school environments are pervasive in the United States. GLSEN, an educational organization working to create safer schools for LGBTQ+ young people, conducts a biennial school climate survey that offers some chilling statistics, though numbers alone cannot adequately convey the effects of this hostility. In 2021 (the most recent survey), four out of five queer—especially trans and nonbinary—students reported feeling unsafe in school. Additionally, 76% of LGBTQ+ young people reported being verbally harassed at school, and 31% were physically harassed. Most queer students (59%) also reported that their schools had discriminatory policies or practices. And remarks like “that’s so gay” and “no homo” are ubiquitous in school hallways.

The effects of this virulently anti-LGBTQ+ school culture are severe and lasting. Academic performance suffers, affecting the likelihood of LGBTQ+ young people finishing high school and going on to college. Feelings of belonging at school are drastically eroded. Due to hostility, LGBTQ+ students have lower self-esteem and much higher rates of mental health problems like depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. Queer teens are more likely than their peers to engage in risky behaviors, substance abuse and self-harm. GLSEN’s survey data shows the direct correlation between victimization at school and negative outcomes on all these indicators. Students who experienced severe harassment, for instance, were two to three times as likely to have seriously considered suicide in the past year. The Trevor Project’s *2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health* indicates just how deep this crisis is: 42% of all LGBTQ+ youth had seriously considered suicide, including more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth and more than half of Indigenous and Black queer youth.

GSAs are a resource—and sometimes a lifeline—for young people in this relentlessly hostile climate. According to Siljestrom, at the Florida school where caseloads decreased, the counselor noted students shared that “their outcomes at school were much more positive” after the GSA was created, “and they weren’t expressing anxiety anymore and felt comfortable at school and now had peer groups and support.”

Peer groups and support, which help build feelings of belonging in schools, are a positive function of extracurricular and noncurricular school activities in general, not just GSAs. However, according to GLSEN’s *2021 National School Climate Survey*, the vast majority of LGBTQ+ students (79%) avoid school functions and activities because they feel unsafe or uncomfortable. Thus, GSAs are doubly vital: first, because the school climate is so hostile to queer youth, and second, because that hostility robs them of other opportunities to build the connections they need to survive.

GSAs are student-driven, so their activities vary depending on the group of students involved. A 2021 GLSEN study on GSAs revealed that general socializing is an important part of most GSAs. Other reported activities include providing emotional support to students, learning about and discussing LGBTQ+ topics, and addressing harassment and discrimination at school.

Siljestrom’s experience echoes these findings: “Sometimes it’s just, ‘We want a club after school where we can be ourselves and talk about the same things that other kids talk about without being harassed for it, whether it’s movies, music, games, whatever.’ For other kids, it’s like, ‘Hey, our environment in this school is really toxic; we want to train our teachers on how to support us.’ So, it looks like a lot of different things.”

Legal Resources

If you believe your legal rights to organize a GSA or advocate for LGBTQ+ rights in school have been affected, consider reaching out for legal support.

Lambda Legal
lambdalegal.org

The Southern Poverty Law Center’s LGBTQ Rights Practice Group
splcenter.org/issues/lgbtq-rights

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
aclu.org/issues/lgbtq-rights

Whatever the specifics of the particular GSA club, supporting these student-led spaces builds the “resilience and empowerment of our students,” Siljestrom adds.

Across the board, every measure of well-being for queer young people improves when a school has a GSA, resulting in a significant decrease in homophobic and transphobic speech, victimization, missed school, and levels of depression and suicidal thoughts. Self-esteem improves, along with feelings of belonging and academic performance. Crucially, these improvements are true for LGBTQ+ students whether or not they personally participate in the school’s GSA. Positive developments in school climate may be particularly important for queer youth of color overwhelmed by intersecting sources of hostility.

GSAs, in other words, are not just good for the kids who participate in them; they are good for everybody. They are good for schools and their communities.

> “LGBTQ+ censorship and erasure are contributing to the hostile environment that is just sweeping across the South and districts all across the country.”
>
> **Paul Castillo**
> **Senior Counsel and Students’ Rights Strategist at Lambda Legal**

Rights and Opposition

GSAs are protected by the Equal Access Act that requires schools to treat all noncurricular clubs the same. That means schools must provide “the same process,” explains Castillo, and also the same “access to physical spaces and communication methods. As long as the school has one noncurricular club, then it means LGBTQ+ students can form a GSA.”

GSA coverage by the Equal Access Act was definitively established in a landmark case over 20 years ago (*Colín v. Orange Unified School District*), but the issue is still being relitigated due to disregard for the law and the rights of LGBTQ+ youth. In 2021, a judge issued a preliminary injunction in an Indiana case, ordering the school to grant its GSA the same opportunities as other clubs.

Challenges to, and disregard for, the law are often based on “fears because of community perception that they’re ‘endorsing’ LGBTQ students,” Castillo says. Schools or districts often try to dissuade students from forming a GSA through tactics like claiming they are too short-staffed to provide a faculty sponsor or saying the GSA will be “divisive.” Once a GSA club is formed, a school may try to limit how it can communicate, for instance, by barring it from using the same bulletin board other clubs use. “They’ll say, ‘We’ll let you post on this board over here that no other club uses where no student passes,’” Castillo explains. Sometimes a school will counter the formation of a GSA by saying it is getting rid of all clubs—though Castillo points out that more often than not, it doesn’t actually shut down every club.

Despite their opposition, most of these schools and districts are aware of their responsibilities under the law. And as Castillo points out, “a lot of them will relent when it comes to advocacy letters”—that is, a letter from civil rights attorneys reminding them of their obligations.

Under Attack and Fighting Back

Advocacy letters get sent because students are fighting for their rights and reaching out to organizations like Lambda Legal, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) or the Southern Poverty Law Center when schools oppose a GSA.

Across the country, but most notably in the South, attacks from legislators and policymakers have reached into every corner of LGBTQ+ families’ lives, including schools. In 2022 alone, over 300 anti-LGBTQ+ bills were introduced in state legislatures, and some have been signed into law. That includes “Don’t Say Gay” laws; legislation targeting transgender youth with bans on gender-affirming health care, participation in sports and access to facilities; and restrictions on books in classrooms and libraries.

In 2022, a banner year for book bans in general, most of the targeted titles were books with LGBTQ+ themes and those addressing race and racism. Anti-LGBTQ+ violence is also on the rise, as the Colorado mass shooting at Club Q in November 2022 reminded us. The situation is especially perilous for Black, Indigenous and other LGBTQ+ young people of color, who often face added pressures and discrimination. And the combination of anti-CRT (critical race theory) legislation compounds efforts at erasure.

Not surprisingly, in this current climate, the number of GSAs has declined. In 2019, GLSEN reported that 62% of students surveyed had a GSA club at school; in 2021, that number was cut almost in half, to 35%. For students in the South, the number was 22%. “GSAs are absolutely under attack, and the young people who want to be in GSAs are absolutely under attack,” GLSEN Executive Director Melanie Willingham-Jagger said in a 2022 interview with the website Them.

Laws like Florida's "Don't Say Gay" are "intentionally vague so that way nobody can discern what conduct is prohibited," says Castillo. As a result, these laws have a chilling effect on educators and schools. Some schools or districts are rolling back their anti-harassment guidance, Castillo explains, and some teachers are afraid to be GSA sponsors.

In his work with educators through the Safe & Healthy Schools Project, Siljestrom has heard teachers wonder out loud, "Can I even respond if students are using slurs in the classroom?"

The answer to that question is yes. Schools have an obligation to provide a safe environment for all students. Moreover, while the anti-LGBTQ+ onslaught has intentionally stoked fears, it does not undo the basic rights that students have, including the right to a GSA.

"Clarity and calmness," says Siljestrom, are the keys to Equality Florida's work with school districts. Armed with specifics of what the law does and doesn't allow and require, students, parents, educators and advocates are fighting back to protect queer students' rights.

And LGBTQ+ youth are resisting attempts to erase them. Lambda Legal's Help Desk gets hundreds of calls each year from students seeking legal assistance in their fight for their rights. In Florida, Siljestrom's work with individual school districts often starts with a phone call from a parent who is not satisfied with a principal's or school board's efforts to address their concerns about their child's well-being.

Building Hope for Change

GSAs help build resilience and provide the tools that LGBTQ+ young people need to fight for their rights. This is another reason—in addition to their documented benefits for students in everything from academic performance to mental health—for educators and parents to support and encourage students who have or want to have a GSA in their school.

Jeremiah Smith, co-founder and director of programming at the Rosedale Freedom Project, which sponsors a community-based GSA in Rosedale, Mississippi, talks about the value of authentic relationships, the kind of connection that Smith describes as "only possible when you know someone in their fullness." As Smith explains, "Through their relationships with one another, [young people] get to a place where they feel hope that's grounded in other people. They feel a sense of hope that they have people, a sense of hope that people can change, a sense of hope that spaces and dynamics can change."

The power that kind of hope in humanity gives young people is impossible to overstate, especially amid the anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric from politicians and public figures. Smith recounts examples of young people who used to be overwhelmed by hopelessness and rage when they were mistreated but are now able to "step up rather than shut down" in response. "They start to handle their conflicts and struggles, which never go away, in ways that are generative," he says, "in ways that hold on to their sense of self-worth and dignity, where they aren't captured by a blind rage but instead articulate in their words and their actions a righteous rage that changes things."

For LGBTQ+ young people and their adult allies, "a righteous rage that changes things" sounds like exactly what is needed at this perilous moment. GSAs are an essential model not just for the survival of queer youth but also for the transformation of the hostile environments that make GSAs necessary in the first place. ●

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

Help Young People Start a GSA

Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) clubs are critical supports for LGBTQ+ young people and a necessary part of creating safer and more inclusive school climates for all students.

Take action to support and sponsor a GSA in your school or in your community. Currently, 88% of all GSA advisors are white, 93% are cisgender and 45% are heterosexual. GLSEN's research reveals that advisors feel most competent when they share a demographic background with their students, so increased diversity in GSA advisor ranks is an added support, particularly for Black, Indigenous and other young people of color as well as trans youth.

The following resources provide information on starting a GSA:

- **Starting a GSA at Your School**
  glsen.org/support-student-gsas
- **10 Steps for Starting a GSA**
  gsanetwork.org/resources/10-steps-for-starting-a-gsa
- **How To Start a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA)**
  aclu.org/other/how-start-gay-straight-alliance-gsa
- **Best Practices for Gender and Sexuality Alliance Clubs**
  glsen.org/gsa-study/best-practices

Dear Young Person, You Are Valued

Activists Nikole Parker and Brandon Wolf from Equality Florida emphasize the need for each of us to advocate for safer schools where all young people are valued.

By **Nikole Parker** and **Brandon Wolf**
Photographs by **Octavio Jones**

Decades of activism and research established a foundation for educators to build safer, more inclusive school communities—but this hard-won progress is far from secure. Politically motivated efforts, especially in the South, to erase LGBTQ+ representation and censor Black history have gained momentum in recent years, threatening young people's well-being and creating hostile school environments for students and educators.

Equality Florida activists Brandon Wolf and Nikole Parker took time for a conversation with Learning for Justice to share their insights about the surge of attacks on LGBTQ+ rights in Florida and across the country. Wolf, a survivor of the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, is a nationally recognized advocate for LGBTQ+ civil rights and gun safety reform, as well as Equality Florida's press secretary. And Parker, director of Transgender Equality, is a leading advocate for transgender rights in Florida.

Nikole Parker (she/her) is the director of Transgender Equality at Equality Florida and is a leading advocate for transgender rights.

Lawmakers, political leaders and public figures around the nation are attempting to limit honest teaching about race and to erase LGBTQ+ representation in education. Disinformation campaigns have accompanied these efforts. What are the dangers and harms in such censorship and the accompanying rhetoric?

Nikole: It's truly dangerous to change history for political reasons. We have an obligation to tell history exactly how it happened to learn from and prevent certain things from happening again. Young people deserve to learn accurate history that includes the stories of people and communities who have long been excluded. We are seeing censorship, book banning and discriminatory policies that are undoing affirming policies and the accomplishments of decades of work toward honest history and representation. Every kid deserves a safe environment in school to learn and thrive.

Brandon: Power-hungry leaders wielding censorship of education and information as weapons is not a new phenomenon. Throughout history, governments have banned books and replaced curriculum with propaganda. Politicians have trafficked in disinformation to propel their own careers. Right now, we are witnessing a resurgence of anti-LGBTQ+ bigotry being fueled by those age-old censorship and disinformation tactics. Last year the Florida governor's office smeared LGBTQ+ people online, and similar hate-filled messages spiked by over 400% online.

That anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric has cascaded across the country, leading to dozens of bills aimed at censorship and erasing LGBTQ+ people from classrooms and a surge in hate crimes targeting the community. Books with LGBTQ+ characters are being ripped from shelves across our state. Rainbow "safe space" stickers are being peeled from classroom windows. School districts are refusing to acknowledge LGBTQ+ History Month and warning teachers to leave family photos in desk drawers to avoid running afoul of new laws. All of that weighs most heavily on educators, families and students. Florida has seen a spike in teacher vacancies. Families are worried about sending their children to school. And LGBTQ+ young people nationwide are telling us that debates over their very humanity are making life harder for them. Young people today are paying the high costs of censorship and disinformation that target people and communities who have been marginalized for political gain.

Brandon Wolf (he/him) pledged to fight for a just world after surviving the 2016 shooting at Pulse nightclub.

What motivates you in this work, and what message would you give right now to young people?

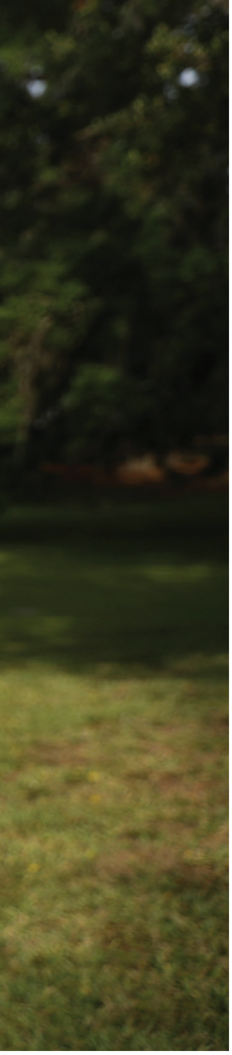
Nikole: Growing up, I always thought I would have to hide my identity forever. I knew this journey to living authentically would be difficult, but I didn't know the loneliness, trauma and overt discrimination I would experience. I choose to advocate and use my voice for those who have been silenced, those who feel they have no power, because I've been there. In a world where we are constantly told we are everything but human, I want to be someone who will always unapologetically remind people that transgender individuals are human beings who deserve dignity and respect like everyone else.

My message to young people is this: However you express yourself is valid; your experience is valid. You are loved regardless of what you hear in the news and media. There are people fighting for our community every day, and though some days may feel hopeless, please know that you bring a beautiful uniqueness to the world that nobody else does.

Brandon: I am in awe of and motivated by people like Nikole. She and the powerful advocates I have the privilege of working alongside each day are bold, unapologetic and unafraid. They stare down the hottest flames of bigotry and refuse to waver, because they know what is at stake. In 2016, I survived the shooting at Pulse nightclub. My best friends, Drew and Juan, were not so lucky. A few days after the shooting, we held a funeral service for Drew. It was there that I made a quiet promise never to stop fighting for a world that he would be proud of. That promise fuels my fight and keeps me grounded.

To young people right now: That world is possible. It's a world that values everyone's human rights. It's a world that treats all of us with dignity and respect. It's a world that sees our diversity and uniqueness as worth celebrating. And it's a world we can all be proud of. Your perspective is necessary. Your existence is valued. And we will never stop fighting for the better future you deserve.

Research demonstrates the positive effects of inclusive and affirming learning spaces for all children. In what ways can teachers and schools



be more responsive in supporting LGBTQ+ young people, especially Black, Indigenous and other LGBTQ+ students of color?

Nikole: I think one thing is to always remember that everyone has a different experience. Our differences are what make the world a beautiful place, and teaching about those differences only helps us educate one another. We all remember being kids and trying to navigate finding out who we are, what we like and where we fit on this earth. Celebrating diversity and always reinforcing that they are OK helps to alleviate the stress of growing up.

Brandon: Affirming young people creates paths to their success. When we support educational environments that empower young people and provide tools that are responsive to their lived experiences, we are investing in the futures of those young people. There are lots of best practices for creating those inclusive environments in schools. Visible displays of allyship, including "safe space" stickers and lanyards, tell students that they belong. Access to mental health care services ensures students at higher risk of bullying and discrimination have a trusted adult on campus to talk to. Investment in training to better understand the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ students—especially Black and Brown LGBTQ+ young people—ensures that educational staff are culturally competent. And books and resources that are representative of the broad diversity of our communities send a signal to all students that they are valued members of society and are deserving of respect and dignity.

What are some of the ways all community members—parents, caregivers, young people and educators—can work to counter the disinformation and censorship policies in education and support one another?

Nikole: It's imperative for community members to attend school board meetings. Make your perspective known, and discuss inclusive policies with your school board members. Connect with the advocacy agency in your area to help you facilitate that. Disinformation can be sneaky and disguise itself as correct. Make sure to check your sources so you are putting out accurate information as much as possible.

Equality Florida's Safe & Healthy Schools Project was launched as a way of providing key tools, resources and support for schools working to create more inclusive, safer environments for young people. For nearly seven years, our team has helped create guidance for creating affirming educational environments and worked alongside school districts so that they have what they need to make those environments sustainable. Education professionals should plug into that program and others like it to ensure we are doing all we can to provide for all students. And parents, family members, allies in the community: plug into these programs as well. Creating better, safer schools is a community effort.

Selected Resources from Learning for Justice on Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth

Inclusive Education Benefits All Children
By Melanie Willingham-Jaggers and the GLSEN Team
lfj.pub/inclusive-education

Queer America podcast series
lfj.pub/queer-america

Gender-Affirming Care: What It Is and Why It's Necessary
By Dorothee Benz, Ph.D.
lfj.pub/gender-affirming

Being There for Nonbinary Youth
By Jey Ehrenhalt
lfj.pub/nonbinary-youth

Brandon: The first step to combating censorship and disinformation is to get educated ourselves. So much of the effort to dehumanize LGBTQ+ people—with the transgender community being disproportionately targeted—is grounded in mischaracterizing and demonizing this community. We break free of that by learning about one another. Challenge yourself to be courageously curious. Get to know a transgender person. Understand your neighbors. When we actively choose to see the humanity in all people, we become less susceptible to efforts to paint them as "other."

And once we've taken the path of courageous curiosity, we are obligated to show up and challenge others to do the same. As Nikole said, go to school board meetings. Know who your legislators are. Volunteer with organizations like Equality Florida. Rattle the status quo in your circle of friends. Each of us is tasked with opening our minds to the possibility of a country that values and respects everyone—and then showing up relentlessly to make it a reality. ●

To learn more about Equality Florida's Safe & Healthy Schools Project, please visit eqfl.org/safe_schools

Brandon Wolf (he/him) is press secretary for Equality Florida, serves as board vice president of The Dru Project, an organization serving LGBTQ+ youth, and is on the Florida Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

Nikole Parker (she/her) is director of Transgender Equality for Equality Florida and co-founder and director of operations for the Gender Advancement Project (GAP); she has served on the boards or advisory councils of numerous rights organizations.

Whitney Plantation offers a vision of the Old South that highlights the experiences of enslaved Black people and their descendants.

Survival, Resistance and Resilience

Honoring the lives of enslaved people, the Whitney Plantation's learning tour deepens our understanding of slavery in the United States, the people who survived it and their legacies.

By **Amber N. Mitchell**
Photography by **Brandon Holland**

Sugar cane dominates the view along Highway 18 in Louisiana's River Parishes. The fields' bounty, over 10 feet tall during the fall harvest season, stretches as far as the eye can see between small rural towns, churches and industry. These fields along the Mississippi River are the remnants of the hundreds of thousands of cash crop acres cultivated on plantations that, between 1719 and 1865, generated millions of dollars of wealth for enslavers, European colonial powers and the United States. Dotting the landscape are some former plantations, now transformed into historic house museums and sites, highlighting the beautiful architecture, manicured grounds and grandeur of collective stereotypes about the Old South.

But a parallel story to those sites exists, one that challenges the mythology of the Old South—a story rooted in survival, resistance and resilience.

The Power of Place

Located between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in the descendant communities of Wallace and Edgard, Whitney Plantation is an 18th-century sugar plantation turned historic site dedicated to sharing the history of slavery in the U.S. from the perspective of the people who were enslaved. Unlike many other former plantations whose tours and narratives focus on the lives of the "great" wealth-accumulating white family dynasties who lived in their beautiful big houses, Whitney Plantation elevates the stories of those whose forced labor made that wealth possible: enslaved Africans, African Americans and, in Southeast Louisiana, Creoles of color. Whitney offers a vision of the Old South in opposition to traditional plantation tour narratives that lessen or ignore the experiences of enslaved Black people and their descendants while uplifting white supremacist ideas about the U.S. and the people who built wealth in the Atlantic World.

At the heart of Whitney Plantation is a representation of the life and labor of Africans in the U.S. who built so much of what we hold dear today. Plantation life played out in a complex, unique pattern that people throughout this country are still working through today.

The current 250-acre plantation site is a collection of three elements: original buildings like the big house, detached kitchen and French Creole barn, all built around 1790; buildings brought from other Louisiana sites for preservation and education; and memorials to those who lived through chattel slavery, both on this land and in the larger United States. In each of these locations, our goal is to re-center the stories of those who survived the institution of slavery through tenacity, strength and ingenuity.

In the big house, women who worked as domestics—whose proximity to their enslavers posed different dangers than those faced by their counterparts in the fields—used their positions to gain information that they shared with other enslaved people, or to take small moments to exercise their humanity. Places like kitchens, blacksmith shops and sugar-boiling houses were run by highly skilled individuals who crafted items into patterns and recipes still found today all over Louisiana and the country. And while field hands in the sugar cane fields worked to the brink of exhaustion, they still claimed their individual freedoms through truancy and self-emancipation and by using their smarts to navigate a system built to keep them in chains. By reconceptualizing the stories of slavery as stories of capitalism built on human trafficking, we've opened new paths for questioning how history is studied, taught and celebrated. Honoring the lives and experiences of enslaved people has resonated with the nearly 500,000 visitors who have joined us looking to better understand slavery in the U.S., the people who survived it and their legacies as individuals—and what these plantation histories can tell us about our society today.

Connecting With History and Questioning Narratives

For young people, the education team at Whitney Plantation has curated a tour that encourages them to think, listen, talk and connect with the history, the site and one another through inquiry-based and experiential learning. Field trips are essential to holistic learning experiences, especially when learning about people and events ignored in

Visitors to the Whitney Plantation are offered opportunities to honor the lives of the people whose forced labor generated great wealth for enslavers and funded the growth of the modern world on both sides of the Atlantic.

You can find free resources on slavery in the United States at **whitneyplantation.org** or deliberately erased from historical narratives. For sites of slavery like Whitney Plantation, physical spaces allow for empathy and connection to the past, where books and other two-dimensional sources fall short. At Whitney Plantation, our team aims to help all learners recognize their power to be critical thinkers and connection-builders through uplifting stories of Black resilience, resistance and strength in the face of unparalleled tragedy. It is important to remind our visitors that Black people were and are at the center of the story of the U.S. and that we have the right to question past and present narratives.

We start our educational tour with seemingly simple questions: “What is slavery? What is a plantation?” The answers always vary—“a farm,” “a violent place,” “a place where they kept Black people,” “a slave-labor camp”—and none of them are wrong. We encourage students to look around where they are: in a place where, between 1752 and 1865, over 350 people had their human rights and their dignity, freedom and labor stolen from them. These people’s physical, emotional, mental and reproductive labor fueled the triangular trade in the New World throughout the earliest years of what would become the United States. Their work funded the growth of our modern world on both sides of the Atlantic.

Using the buildings and grounds as our classroom, we move through 175 years of bondage for people of African descent in Louisiana. We discuss how, despite the intense cruelty of their situation, people not only existed in this world but created their own. Their lived experiences were as complex as our own: Every moment of joy, anger, despair, love and humor that we have ourselves, they had also. While the conditions of slavery in the U.S. were brutal and crushing for the millions of men, women and children who by law were not considered fully

Between 1752 and 1860, over 350 Africans, African Americans and Creoles of color were enslaved at Habitation Haydel—now Whitney Plantation. Research is an ongoing project for the museum, and we have uncovered the stories of several individuals through inventories, sales receipts, baptismal records and local family histories.

Anna and Victor
Anna was enslaved as a domestic at Habitation Haydel, brought to the site during the internal U.S. slave trade (1820-1860). As a domestic, Anna lived and worked in the big house, with direct contact with the enslaver Haydel family—a dangerous place for a young woman seen as property and not as a person. Around age 25, Anna was sexually assaulted by Antoine Haydel, the brother of the site’s owner, resulting in the birth of her son, Victor, in August 1835. Victor Haydel lived and worked at Habitation Haydel well after the end of the Civil War. Sybil Haydel Morial, Victor’s great-granddaughter, is an educator, activist and community leader in New Orleans and the city’s first Black first lady. She is also the mother of the third Black mayor of New Orleans and the current National Urban League president, Marc Morial.

Lise and Hilaire
Lise is first found in the baptismal records of St. John Parish Catholic Church in 1799. Though her mother’s name was lost in damage to the record, Lise’s mother was likely from West or Central Africa or a first-generation African American. Lise lived on Habitation Haydel starting around 1820, where she married Hilaire, a “good cart driver, herdsman, and plough hand.” They are listed by their enslavers as valued between 1,600 and 100 “piastres” in records that span until 1860. However, their value to their community was much higher: Lise is listed in baptismal records as godmother to many children born at the plantation between 1825 and 1860. Both she and her husband are also found in the 1870 census records at 70 and 65 years old, still living on the plantation among the newly freed community. We can infer that Lise and Hilaire were essential members of the Black community of Habitation Haydel before, during and after emancipation.

Julienne and Marie
Julienne and Marie were cooks at Habitation Haydel between 1840 and 1860. The kitchen was one of the most powerful places on a plantation: Cooks controlled the food of the enslavers, knew about the comings and goings of the household, and could get information to other enslaved people on-site. In Creole communities like St. John the Baptist Parish, enslaver families took long meals, often three or more courses, and wanted to enjoy fancy French cuisines. Afro-Creole chefs like Julienne and Marie took French recipes and infused them with African and Indigenous ingredients and cooking styles. The results are the wonderful meals that are uniquely connected to Louisiana: jambalaya, tea cakes, pralines and, of course, gumbo.

Amber N. Mitchell leads educational efforts at the Whitney Plantation.

human, people found ways to resist, rebel and survive enslavement in a place they were never meant to be.

Resistance in Action

The tour truly comes to life in the quarters, where individuals who labored in the sugar fields—one of the most dangerous places to work—rested and were allowed to exist as Black people. At most plantations, the quarters were where families lived, friendships grew and love blossomed. In these homes, despite meager conditions, cultures of the Mandinka, the Wolof, the Fulani and countless other Central and West African ethnicities mixed with Indigenous and European elements to create something entirely new: African American identity. Black cultural practices and performances born in these places have pushed beyond the Southern United States to become a worldwide force today—and the perfect example of resistance in action.

When confronted with these realities during their visit, learners of all ages realize we aren't merely in some place to look passively at history—we are in an active, transformative space where our understanding of the lives of people who were enslaved is challenged directly. This history lives and breathes every day, and we have a role in changing the narratives around enslavement and Black people in the U.S.

A certain power comes with being in a space where seemingly distant events happened—a magic moment, unique to each person, where one becomes physically connected to the past. I see it every day: when a teen spends time in a dwelling where enslaved people lived, thinking about that building's location in physical space and time, about who might have lived there and what their lives were like, feeling the heat of a Louisiana summer. When they move out of that

Black cultural practices and performances born in these places have pushed beyond the Southern United States to become a worldwide force today—and the perfect example of resistance in action.

An outdoor memorial is dedicated to 107,000 people who were enslaved in Louisiana.

Enslaved field hands transported raw sugar cane from the fields to the boiling house using carts made by enslaved blacksmiths.

space and see the harvesting of sugar cane, talk with a classmate about how a person resisted becoming property and see evidence of that resistance in today's descendant communities. When visitors come to Whitney Plantation, they start as newcomers looking for understanding. By the end, they are witnesses to the legacies of this underexplored history and have a better knowledge of how we all can uplift those who have been silenced by white supremacist historical practices.

Enslaved people built everything that could have been built on the property.

After spending time at Whitney, most people are energized to share what they've learned but may not be sure where to go from here. Slavery in the U.S. is a thread that touches nearly every topic relevant to our society today. Of course, subjects like the Black Lives Matter movement, mass incarceration and the overpolicing of Black and Brown people are direct connections. However, Whitney Plantation's location on the Gulf Coast also allows us to talk about collective issues such as climate change and its effects on historic sites, as well as environmental racism and Black rural communities (our location is in the center of Louisiana's "Cancer Alley"). Again, using our site as a jumping-off point, we launch into the challenges facing our communities today and become better informed about how history affects the issues most critical to us right now: justice, civic engagement and our collective future. Our goal is to shape our visitors into critical thinkers who can make connections between past and present and communicate in ways that enhance our future.

As I walk on-site every day, I pause to reflect on this unique opportunity to speak on the stories of our ancestors. Having worked in museum education for many years, I take pride in helping people understand complex historical topics and experience cultural institutions through a unique lens. But as a Black woman who is a descendant of enslaved people from Georgia and the Carolinas, I am honored and moved by this opportunity to have a direct hand in developing an interpretation that places us in the center rather than at the margins of our own experiences. To walk in places where they lived and loved despite the challenges surrounding them; to say their names and return the power denied to them in life and death—these actions make my role in shaping the interpretation of Whitney Plantation deeply meaningful. "Education leads to liberation," as our staff says, and we get to model that through our interpretation daily. ●

Amber N. Mitchell (she/her) is the director of education at Whitney Plantation, where she leads educational efforts for the site.

Learning for Justice Related Resources

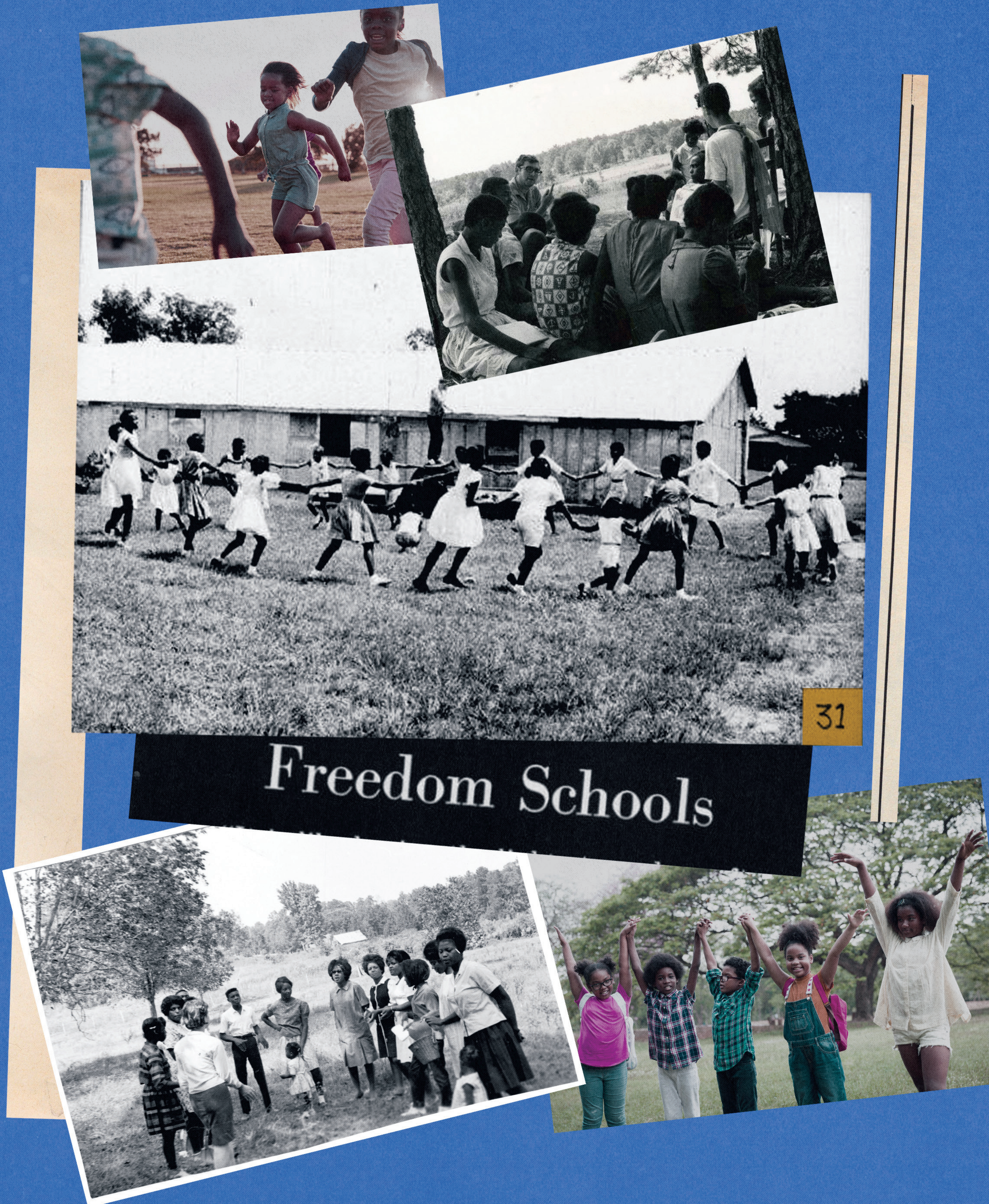
Talking to Children About the History of Slavery in the United States: A Resource for Parents and Caregivers
by Learning for Justice
lfj.pub/talking-about-slavery

Preserving a More Honest History
by Cory Collins
lfj.pub/preserving-honest-history

***Teaching Hard History: American Slavery* frameworks for K-5 and 6-12**
lfj.pub/teaching-hard-history-framework

***Teaching Hard History* Podcast** (Seasons 1 to 4) lfj.pub/podcast-teaching-hard-history

***Teaching Hard History: American Slavery* | Classroom Videos**
lfj.pub/videos-teaching-hard-history



Freedom Schools

Freedom Schools for Today's Justice Movement

To confront current education censorship and voter suppression, modern social justice projects build on the foundations of the historic 1964 Freedom Schools.

By **Anthony Conwright**
Illustrations by **Mark Harris**

Following record-breaking voter turnout in the 2020 election, several state legislatures passed laws to disenfranchise voters, especially in Black communities. These attempts at voter suppression work in concert with censorship policies targeting education to further undermine civics literacy and engagement in the United States. It is no surprise that these attacks on voting rights and education followed the rise of the two largest civil rights movements of the modern era: Black Lives Matter and the Women's March. The fear of a diverse society—of young people in classrooms learning of today's civil rights struggles and their power to effect change—drives this backlash, which employs methods of suppression drawn from our country's history.

Discrimination is entwined into the foundation and systems of the United States, but so are models of people challenging oppression. In the current fight for justice, strategies from our history can help to develop our present leaders. Today, the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools model inspires and guides the work of both national programs, including the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools® program, and local community efforts, such as the Rosedale Freedom Project, part of the Freedom Project Network in Mississippi.

The History of Freedom Schools: The Right to Question

Mississippi stands out as the vanguard of voter disenfranchisement—both past and present. The state has led the effort to prevent Black people from voting ever since its 1817 constitution limited voting to white men who owned property. In 1960, 42% of Mississippi's population was Black, yet in 1964 only 6.7% of Black Mississippians were registered to vote. In some majority-Black counties, not a single Black citizen had access to register.

Understanding the situation in Mississippi, Charlie Cobb, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) field secretary, proposed a school with the mission to fill the creative and academic void and to teach young people to articulate their own desires, demands and questions. Cobb envisioned students asking teachers questions that would challenge the myths of society and lead to new directions for action.

In 1964, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), SNCC and the NAACP operated as a united coalition called the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), and these organizations focused their efforts on increasing Black voter turnout in Mississippi. COFO developed Cobb's vision of a school rooted in self-reflection and inquiry, incorporating these new "Freedom Schools" into the 1964 Freedom Summer, otherwise known as the Mississippi Summer Project.

Related Articles From Learning for Justice

No School Like Freedom School
By Lisa Ann Williamson
lfj.pub/no-school-like-freedom-school

The End of Freedom School
By Sara Bullard
lfj.pub/end-of-freedom-school

The fear of a diverse society—of young people in classrooms learning of today's civil rights struggles and their power to effect change—drives this backlash, which employs methods of suppression drawn from our country's history.

According to COFO's Freedom School data, 41 Freedom Schools operated in 20 communities across Mississippi in July of 1964, enrolling 2,135 students. Church basements and back porches became sanctuaries of learning for a disenfranchised population. Approximately 175 full-time teachers from all over the U.S. taught students with an average age of 15, ranging from small children who had not yet started school to elderly adults who had spent their lives toiling in the fields.

The Freedom Curriculum: An Inquiry Learning Model

The 1964 Freedom School curriculum was a three-part exploration of academics (reading, writing and math), citizenship (case studies on education, economics and history), and recreation and the arts. Jane Stembridge, a graduate student at Union Theological Seminary in New York, was convinced by Ella Baker to work for SNCC and helped develop the first six units of the citizenship curriculum. In her 1964 memo "Notes on Teaching in Mississippi," Stembridge wrote: "This is the situation: You will be teaching young people who have lived in Mississippi all their lives. That means that they have been deprived of decent education, from the first grade through high school. It means that they have been denied free expression and free thought. Most of all—it means that they have been denied the right to question. The purpose of the Freedom Schools is to help them begin to question."

The purpose of part two of the citizenship curriculum for the 1964 Freedom Schools was to intentionally train students to become "agents in bringing about social change." However, the curriculum was not designed "to impose a particular set of conclusions;" the goal was "to encourage the asking of questions, and hope that society can be improved."

Educators used an assortment of questions to help students "look around" to understand their realities and develop an "awareness that there are alternatives." Some questioning was designed to explore why students were attending Freedom Schools and to consider the difference between the conditions of "Negro schools" and "white schools." The students looked at pictures of resources available in non-Black schools and were asked, "What do you see in the pictures that is different from you and your school? Why do these differences exist?"

The segregation that facilitated those differences has persisted. A report by the Century Foundation found that in 2020 nearly half of Mississippi's school districts were subject to a desegregation order or voluntary agreement with a federal or state court or agency for failure to adequately address segregation. The legacy and the current practices of segregation continue to harm Black students and communities in Mississippi and across the U.S.

The Next Generation of Freedom Schools

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools® operate with the same spirit as the 1964 schools. "We're very much mimicking that … same kind of resistance training," said Kristal Moore Clemons, Ph.D., the national director of the program. "Anything we feel will better support children and families, that's what you're going to get on the ground."

Civil rights leader Marian Wright Edelman founded the CDF in 1973 with the mission "to ensure every child a healthy start, a head start, a fair start, a safe start and a moral start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities." The CDF Freedom Schools® program operates in 15 states and the District of Columbia, implementing a model similar to Charlie Cobb's original vision with five components: "high quality academic and character-building enrichment; parent and family involvement; civic engagement and social action; intergenerational servant leadership development; and nutrition, health and mental health."

Recognizing that thriving parents and communities are essential to children's development, the six-week CDF Freedom Schools® program includes six parent meetings about financial literacy, health and wellness, and voter registration. The program also has students participate in a National Day of Social Action. During the 2022 summer program, students learned how to influence community perception by holding a rally focused on food justice, drawing attention to disparities in access to food and the ability to make healthy food choices.

Clemons recounted her experience one year when the National Day of Social Action theme was children's health care. After students learned that more than 3 million children in the U.S. did not have health care, they organized a silent protest. "Strangers were coming up to us [asking], 'What are you doing?'" Clemons said. "And one of the kids says, 'We're in a silent protest because the number of children who are not insured in this country is on my back. And that needs to change.'"

CDF's social justice instruction and intensive reading and language curriculum bolster student learning. According to a 2021 assessment of CDF's model, 70% of students maintained or improved their instructional reading level, avoiding the common setback of summer learning loss. The 2021 survey also showed that 92% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the program helped them prepare for school.

"What we do in the contemporary Freedom Schools context is similar to instilling [the] capacity to make a demand," Clemons said. Making a demand is premised on the ability to know what one needs, which requires the skill of intentionally asking questions. Indeed, one of the cornerstones of the 1964 Freedom Curriculum was "education's most powerful tool: the question."

"If you look back at some of the old lesson plans from '64 in the Freedom School, they taught about Black history, they taught about the art, they taught about movement building," Clemons said. "And that's exactly what our integrated reading curriculum is doing right now."

Freedom Projects in Mississippi

Building on the historic 1964 Freedom Schools model, the Rosedale Freedom Project (RFP) has the stated mission to "[support] the Mississippi Delta's young leaders in the development of critical consciousness and the practice of justice through community building, exploration, artistic creation, organizing, and the study of social history and grassroots democracy." Founded by parents, students and educators, the RFP oversees a variety of academic and social justice programs, including community organizing for voting rights.

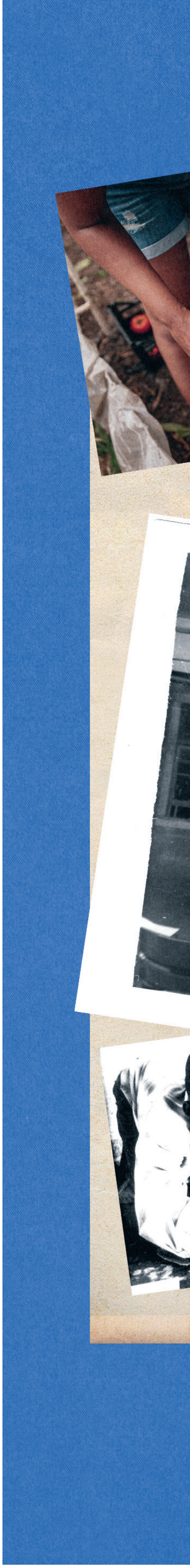
Jeremiah Smith, co-founder and director of programming for the RFP, explained the contemporary challenges of registering to vote in Mississippi. Voter registration in the state requires voter ID, which requires a visit to a Department of Public Safety (DPS) office—Mississippi's version of the Department of Motor Vehicles—which might require, in such a rural state, a journey of many miles. Once, Smith brought a group of students in search of ID from Rosedale to the nearest DPS office, about 20 miles away in Cleveland. When they arrived, a sign on the doors said they needed to go to the DPS in Indianola, another 35 miles from Cleveland.

"We drive to Indianola, and we get there, and there's a sign on that door that says you have to go to Greenville," Smith said. Greenville is about a 30-mile drive from Indianola. "We get to Greenville, and they inform us that we need the student's birth certificate. We can't have a copy. We need his original birth certificate." By the time the group returned to Rosedale, without ID, they had driven more than 100 miles in a circle around the Mississippi Delta.

To stay true to the mission of the RFP, Smith has worked in partnership with Mississippi Votes, an organization whose mission is to "empower young people, encourage civic engagement, and educate communities on voting rights through place-based grassroots organizing."

"They were really trying to think about not only how we register people to vote," Smith said, "but also how … do we sort of get at what the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was trying to do in the sense of building movements for more radical political positions [from] elected officials."

The curriculum of the 1964 Freedom Schools and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party are conceptually linked. In 1964, COFO founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party to "aid local citizens in setting up a Democratic Party structure to challenge" the prevailing exclusion of Black Mississippians from politics. In keeping with that spirit, Smith and Mississippi Votes helped students organize a voter registration project in 2019.



To learn more about historic and current Freedom Schools models visit:

The 1964 Freedom Schools Curriculum
educationanddemocracy.org/FSCpdf/CurrTextOnlyAll.pdf

Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools®
childrensdefense.org/programs/cdf-freedom-schools

Rosedale Freedom Project
rosedalefreedom.org

Freedom Project Network
freedomprojectnetwork.org

"At the time, we were having a district supervisor race," Smith said. "We did door-to-door voter registration, we went out to a bunch of different public events, we met with the candidates and interviewed the candidates about what they wanted and what their positions were." Smith's students communicated with U.S. Rep. Bennie Thompson, who was a former Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party organizer. "That's really the work," Smith said. "We want children who say to themselves, 'I don't have to be 20 years old or 30 years old to participate in making a difference in my community.'"

Education as Mirror and Window

Education and voting rights are inextricably linked, a connection embodied by Marian Wright Edelman, the founder and president emerita of the Children's Defense Fund. In 1965, Edelman became the first Black woman admitted to the Mississippi Bar Association, and she led the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

"Ms. Edelman, she always said, 'You can't be what you can't see,'" Kristal Moore Clemons said. "We look at providing curriculum for children so that they can see themselves in the curriculum and begin to reimagine who they are in the world." ●

Anthony Conwright (he/him) is a journalist and educator based in New York City.

Disability Is Diversity

Embracing diversity means accepting disability as a part of the total human experience and being intentional about practices that remove barriers to learning so all children can thrive.

By **Courtney Wai** Illustrations by **Jessie Lin**

In the article "Confronting Ableism on the Way to Justice," activist Keith Jones remembers the bias and deficit-based approach he experienced in school: "Being Black and a child with cerebral palsy, or 'crippled' as I was called, neither I nor my classmates were expected to put forth any effort to learn. So, little effort was spent on teaching us." Now, Jones, a leader within the disability rights movement, advocates for disability representation in the broader social justice struggle, including in education because "we can't have inclusive schools without disability-inclusive spaces and accommodations for learning."

Ashana Bigard, a New Orleans advocate for educational justice, had similar experiences to Jones, especially early in her education. As a student who has dyslexia, she remembers school as initially stressful and discouraging. "If you told me to stand in front of the class and read aloud, my brain would freeze up—it's not that I didn't want to," Bigard says. "But then that same teacher might see me during recess reading a book like nothing. So they would believe that I was being lazy and obstinate … because I didn't understand what was going on with myself." Later, Bigard transferred to the New Orleans Free School, where dyslexia and diversity in how students learned were accepted and nurtured. When a teacher pointed out Bigard's strengths, Bigard was at first skeptical. As the teacher continued to have honest conversations about both her strengths and areas for growth, Bigard began to change her mindset about herself and about education.

Today, Bigard is the parent of three children—one who is on the autism spectrum and another who has dyslexia—and advocates in support of families and caregivers for students in New Orleans. In the city's all-charter-school system with high teacher turnover and limited accountability, students with disabilities often struggle to have their needs met. Bigard, who is all too familiar with what's at stake, explains, "If the children have accommodations and they have a good education, it can literally make the difference in them going to jail or them having a successful life."

The Curb-Cut Effect: Changing the Environment

Bigard's experiences as a student, parent and advocate illustrate the possibilities and the risks for children with disabilities in the educational system. When educators try to force a singular teaching or learning style, students with individualized learning plans are often left out and struggle. Erika Williams, a former New Orleans educator, likens it to "fitting a square peg in a round hole." Karista Reed, an educational diagnostician in Ascension Parish, Louisiana, notes that when environments do not emphasize inclusion for students with individualized learning plans, the students feel ostracized and notice they are not being included.

However, the potential for children to thrive shines through when educators center the needs of students with individualized learning plans by adapting curriculum and learning environment to fit the child's unique capabilities.

Jon Mundorf, Ed.D., a classroom teacher and assistant professor at P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School at the University of Florida, invites educators to ask, "In what ways is the environment creating barriers to learning?" According to Mundorf, when educators focus on changing the learning environment instead of the learner, they open themselves up to thinking about more accessible learning practices that emphasize flexibility and choice. And that environment can benefit all learners.

> "Disability is the way other people don't accommodate you or respond to you."
>
> **Ashley Dalton**

A helpful way to conceptualize the shared benefits of accessibility is what's known as the "curb-cut effect," which has its roots in disability rights activism. Initially, curb-cuts (replacing steep sidewalk curbs with sloping wheelchair-accessible pathways) were narrowly intended to help people in wheelchairs move between the sidewalk and the street. The ramps, however, turned out to help everyone, from families with strollers to bicyclists to people moving heavy items on trolleys—illustrating how solutions targeted for people who need the most support benefit society.

By applying the curb-cut frame to classrooms, educators can create supportive learning spaces for all children. And focusing on both environment and language that include those who need the most support can help all students—including those whose struggles might not be diagnosed or recognized—to thrive.

The Intersection of Race and Disability

Historically, the education system has not served students with disabilities well; for decades, segregation or denial of accommodations was the norm. The effects of this history of exclusion are still present in practices today, including the language schools use—"special education" or "special needs"—to describe the ways in which students learn. Intentionally using terminology like "students with individualized learning plans," for example, can alter that dynamic by recognizing differences in abilities, including neurodiversity, while being inclusive of students.

Educators need to understand how education's historical approach to different abilities has shaped people's responses. "'Special education' really has a negative connotation in my community," says Ashley Magee, an elementary educator in St. Charles Parish, Louisiana. Magee has encountered Black parents who experienced or witnessed traumatic ways children with disabilities were pushed aside and stigmatized. Understandably, these parents then hesitated to allow their child to receive services for their diagnosis. Magee recalls one student's grandmother explaining that her brother was in the special education program at Magee's school yet could not earn a high school diploma and, therefore, could not get a job after high school. Magee, having built trust with the grandmother, allayed her fears by explaining that students with individualized learning plans are supported differently now and can graduate with a diploma.

Recognizing the effects of history is essential to addressing the injustices of today. Bias against Black and Indigenous people and other people of color, on both a systemic and individual level, often influences how educators treat children with individualized learning plans and engage with their parents and caregivers. Ashley Dalton, an attorney with the Children's Rights practice group of the Southern Poverty Law Center, explains that although the goal of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was to provide all students with access to a quality education, there are still gaps in protection, especially for students of color who have disabilities. And although IDEA requires parent involvement, it does not account for the experiences of working families. “[IDEA] assumes that a parent has time and financial resources to come to a school for what can sometimes be a six-to-eight-hour-long marathon meeting about their child’s needs,” Dalton explains. “And there’s not really anything built into the law to combat the effects of implicit bias on the way the teachers perceive a parent’s participation.”

Schools have traditionally framed disability as something within individuals that needs to be “fixed,” and Dalton emphasizes that educators must reframe their perceptions of disability. “Disability is the way other people don’t accommodate you or respond to you,” she says. By shifting focus to changing systems and practices rather than changing the learner, educators can create a more equitable learning environment for all students that embraces diversity in how children learn.

A Systemic Shift to Embrace Diverse Learners

Kandice Yarbrough, a teacher from Ascension Parish, Louisiana, shares that it’s important to understand students’ abilities more holistically. She points out that schools are sometimes hyper-focused on what students lack—particularly students of color or students from low-income backgrounds—rather than their wealth of experience.

Mundorf recognizes that this mindset shift is something he experienced. He was taught to “retrofit or add modifications or accommodations at the end of [his] lesson,” but now he criticizes that approach as inefficient and exclusionary. Instead, he encourages educators to see the environment as the barrier to learning, rather than the student. “If you are not actively including people, you are probably excluding them,” Mundorf says. “Inclusivity does not occur on its own; it needs to be intentional.”

> “If you are not actively including people, you are probably excluding them. Inclusivity does not occur on its own; it needs to be intentional.”
>
> **Jon Mundorf, Ed.D.**

Educators must begin to center the experiences of students with individualized learning plans, and that requires knowing their students and, as Magee emphasizes, “building relationships with students, families and [their] community.” These relationships are a necessary foundation for having challenging conversations with students who need individualized support. “[Families and caregivers] are going to receive that better because they’re going to see that you care,” Magee explains.

Knowing students’ families and communities can also help educators accurately assess students and guard against bias. Karista Reed notes that when environments do not emphasize inclusion for students with individualized learning plans, the students feel ostracized and notice that they are not being included. This could affect behavior and children’s efforts toward learning and improving skills. Instead of focusing narrowly on a student’s difficulties, Reed considers how the child’s prior experience and past treatment in a school setting might be affecting current behavior. “Sometimes, it’s actually an adjustment period,” Reed says. “Especially in the younger grades … they’re learning to follow the rules and procedures of the classroom. The school environment and the home environment are two different places.”

Educators can also apply this holistic, asset-based mindset to curriculum development. Instead of focusing on why children lack background knowledge, they can reframe and ask, “Why does this content not connect with my students?” The problem then becomes the curriculum, rather than the student, which changes how educators move toward solutions.

Universal Design for Learning: Necessary for Some, Beneficial for All

One emerging approach to supporting students with individualized learning plans—and, therefore, supporting all students—is Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Mundorf, who in addition to being a teacher and teacher educator is on the Universal Design for Learning Rising to Equity Advisory Board, applies UDL in his practice to support learner variability. As he explains, what is “necessary for some [is] beneficial for all.”

A core concept of UDL, a research-based framework, is that all learners are variable; they learn in different ways and respond to different environments. Educators, through intentional design, can reduce barriers by providing flexibility in three main areas: engagement, or how students differ in their motivation for learning; representation, or how students vary in the ways they understand information that comes to them; and action and expression, or how students express what they know or approach a learning activity.

“If everything in a classroom is based on printed text on a piece of paper, that will exclude a certain percentage of the student population,” Mundorf explains. He uses digital texts in addition to printed materials. “The students for whom printed text was the barrier … now have access. So we’ve invited those learners to be a part of the environment.” Students have the same content, but the variability in format adds flexibility

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that benefits all students. “Some students might want the words bigger or smaller,” Mundorf adds. “Some might like to have the voice-to-text feature. Some might like to have the ability to look up words to understand what words mean or search something online for some additional context.” This simple change, one designed with inclusivity in mind, improves students’ ability to engage with texts.

UDL is rooted in architecture and product development, drawing on parallels between the curb-cut effect and supporting students with individualized learning plans. “Architects used to build buildings that were incredibly inaccessible,” Mundorf explains. “In the early 1980s, architect Ron Mace wondered what would happen if we thought about all the people that are going to use this building before we designed it. And so instead of wheelchair ramps being on the back of a building or retrofitted on the side of a building, we see really creative design decisions with stairs and ramps right next to one another. And the thing is, if somebody needs that wheelchair ramp to access the building, because of a mobility difference that they have, without that ramp, they can’t get in.”

The UDL framework also draws on asset-based concepts, which is especially important given the history of racism and ableism in schools. Educators must reject deficit-based approaches—which are largely based on bias—and search for models that emphasize the cultural knowledge and wealth of experiences children bring to school. For example, an educator who uses UDL will also allow multiple ways for students to express their ideas, honoring a diversity of communication modes. In addition, UDL asks that educators build on students’ prior knowledge. By drawing from children’s backgrounds, including knowledge acquired outside of school, teachers not only support students’ learning but also send a message that children’s lived experiences are valued in the classroom.

All of this work—centering the needs of students with individual learning plans, adopting an asset-based approach to teaching and learning, and contextualizing these practices within the history of disability in education—is part of a larger quest for social justice. As activist Keith Jones reminds us: “In education, a focus on inclusive spaces, high expectations for students with disabilities and training for all educators is essential. Listening to the perspectives of those with lived experience is key to understanding that disability is not a problem to solve but part of the human experience to embrace. ‘Nothing about us without us’ has real and consequential meaning.” ●

Courtney Wai (she/her) is a professional learning facilitator with Learning for Justice.

Learning for Justice Resources

The Social Justice Standards
lfj.pub/social-justice

Confronting Ableism on the Way to Justice by Keith Jones
lfj.pub/confronting-ableism

Explore the Universal Design for Learning framework and guidelines
udlguidelines.cast.org

DESHA COUNTY
RIVER
MISSISSIPPI
BANKLINE SYMBOLS

GEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION
MISSISSIPPI RIVER ALLUVIAL VALLEY

Healing Through Restoration and Transformation

A community Freedom School model in Mississippi embraces transformative practices to strengthen relationships and disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, illustrating the power of communities to effect change.

By **Jeremiah Smith**

Illustration by **Zoë van Dijk**

The punitive disciplinary practices used in Mississippi schools disproportionately target Black and Brown students, students experiencing poverty, and students with disabilities, especially those with undiagnosed disabilities.

Lucas sat across from me in the small back office of the Rosedale Freedom Project (RFP) in Rosedale, Mississippi, after a long day at Freedom School, which included academic classes, fitness, Creative Writing Club and a restorative circle. We were both exhausted. “What I really want,” Lucas said, leaning back in his chair, “is to build a community of men who can come together and talk about our problems and how we’re feeling.”

I laughed, not at his suggestion, but at hearing this 13-year-old student articulate so clearly what we needed—not just at the RFP, but across the world, across history. “Let’s do it,” I said.

Students of all genders are involved in our program; when Lucas spoke of building “a community of men,” he was merely describing the context of his own recent situation. Just a day earlier, Lucas and his stepbrother Jay, both ninth grade fellows at the RFP, had nearly gotten into a fight on the basketball court. A post-class game turned into a screaming match between the boys and one of Lucas’ best friends, Chris, a 12th grade fellow. “We were just playing street ball,” Jay later told his dad, Lucas’ mom, the other boys and me in the restorative circle. But everyone in the circle knew that street ball meant trash talk, shoving and anger. The conflict was in a sense quite unremarkable. Three young men got into a heated game of basketball. Words were exchanged, tempers flared, everyone walked away before a physical fight could break out.

When I first began teaching a decade ago, my classroom was next to the principal’s office, so I was privy to a lot of overheard disciplinary actions. When fights like the one involving Lucas occurred, which they routinely did, they were dealt with procedurally. A physical fight meant, at most, a day or two at home. If the principal felt the situation wasn’t a big deal, he might assign in-school suspension or offer students the option to take a paddling instead. (Corporal punishment in schools remains legal in 19 states, mostly in the South, including Mississippi.) Crime and punishment were the order of the day. And yet, again and again, I saw the same young people in the office, day in and day out. Conflicts and frictions escalated into arguments, and verbal fights became physical ones. Fights became “beefs,” and those resentments could escalate even further.

The winter of my first year of teaching, I led after-school tutoring in my classroom. Late one evening, a commotion in the hallway interrupted us as we were wrapping up our program. My students and I hurried to the doorway as a student, Don, ran down the hallway in a daze. He was hollering while several adults rushed around. Although I didn’t teach him and didn’t know Don well, he came toward me.

“Somebody stabbed Wallace,” Don said when I asked what happened.

I froze. Wallace was one of my students. This was his second year as a ninth grader; frequently moving from house to house, he had missed a lot of school. But when he came to class, he was a joy—sharp, thoughtful and funny. My only struggle with Wallace was to get him to stop dancing when it came time to read. I knew his struggles at home meant he was moving fast, being swept up in things beyond his control. But I didn’t expect the consequences to be so swift and so violent.

Without thinking, I extended my arms for a hug. And though we barely knew each other, Don grabbed me, and we held each other for a long time.

As the days passed, we learned that Justin, a senior I taught, stabbed Wallace. A beef had led to an attack on Wallace and his friends, and when Wallace confronted Justin—who Wallace thought had caused the attack—Justin panicked and stabbed him. Wallace died that day.

I thought about Wallace for years afterward. What could have been done to stop that conflict before it escalated? What supports could we have given Wallace and Justin that would have led to a different situation?

Bringing Restorative Practices Home to Rosedale

Years later, in 2015, a group of students and parents came together with me to found the Rosedale Freedom Project. The goal was to provide young people with a liberatory educational space for learning, making art and traveling after school and over the summer.

In 2017, I led the first RFP spring break trip with my now-colleague LaToysha Brown—then a student at the University of Southern Mississippi and graduate of our sister program, the Sunflower County Freedom Project—the RFP's executive director. That year, we took two fellows to Chicago to explore the city and share an oral history project the fellows had completed on the history of education in Rosedale. We had a chance to sit in on a restorative circle with young people at Paul Robeson High School on the city's South Side. We learned how they were using restorative justice to intervene and resolve harm and violence at their school. These students met during their lunch hour to sit and talk about their feelings and the issues with which they were dealing.

When classmates were sent to the principal, they could be referred to the restorative circle instead of being suspended. We saw how the group passed around a "talking piece"—derived from Indigenous traditions—to ensure everyone had an opportunity to share, and how they didn't use a language of blame but instead focused on "I" statements grounded in their own perceptions and feelings. They talked about stopping gun violence through dialogue and about interrupting criminalization by creating student-led spaces for community and care.

LaToysha and I knew then that we had to bring these practices back to Mississippi, where corporal punishment is still common and retributive and exclusionary discipline techniques, like suspensions and expulsions, lead young people across the state to describe school as prison. In fact, participatory action research conducted by RFP fellows found that more than half of students at our local high school felt that way. The punitive disciplinary practices used in Mississippi schools disproportionately target Black and Brown students, students experiencing poverty, and students with disabilities, especially those with undiagnosed disabilities.

Practices to Heal and Transform

At the RFP, our restorative practices focus foremost on building a sense of safety. In daily circle-ups, fellows play games, sing freedom songs and give one another shout-outs. Here, and throughout our academic and arts programs, fellows practice trust and build community. Healing spaces like our Gender-Sexuality Alliance and Parent Community Board events deepen this sense of community and inclusivity, and they embrace and encourage conversation about all that makes us unique.

From this sense of safety and belonging, we establish community agreements based on what the Atom Fire Arts Cooperative calls the ABCs of interpersonal interaction: agency, boundaries and credibility. In our classrooms, fellows work together to identify shared values and goals, then set expectations for the space. Before we can begin, everyone must be able to agree with the expectations and set mutually agreed upon consequences if expectations are not followed.

That is where our peace-building circles come in. When there is a serious violation of our community agreements, we bring together those who are affected and those who violated the agreements to discuss what happened. In these conversations, the goal is to identify the harm done to individuals or the community and to make requests of one another, such as an apology or a commitment to some future behavior that can begin to restore and heal the damage done.

> We hope that creating a strong youth-and-teacher-led alternative to corporal punishment and exclusionary discipline will be a first step toward getting police-free schools that promote genuine safety, healing and liberation for our young people.

These conversations do not simply restore our community to how it was before. They aim instead to transform our community by addressing the root causes of the violation. These circles ask: "What unaddressed conditions were present that led to this situation? What were the pressures, stresses, triggers or traumas that created a dynamic of harm?"

Then we seek out changes to implement as a community that address those root causes. Whether it is changes in our community agreements, adjustments

Rosedale Freedom Project

The Rosedale Freedom Project (RFP) is an after-school and summer program for middle and high school students modeled after the 1964 Freedom Schools started by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Mississippi. RFP was founded after parents, students and educators in Rosedale, Mississippi, learned about the nearby work of the Sunflower County Freedom Project and sought to adapt the program to their community. RFP views “education as the practice of freedom”—in the words of bell hooks—and seeks to create spaces where young people and adults can articulate the terms of their own liberation and act collectively on that vision.

Today, the RFP’s Freedom Fellowship and adult organizing programs support young people, families and community members in building solidarity and critically analyzing local conditions. In struggling for educational justice at the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality and ability, the RFP facilitates filmmaking, creative writing, theater and visual arts workshops; literacy, math and college prep classes; study groups in community organizing, economics, participatory action research and transformative justice; and other community events.

Explore this resource from Learning for Justice

Toolkit: Peace-Building Circles
by Jeremiah Smith

> These conversations do not simply restore our community to how it was before. They aim instead to transform our community by addressing the root causes of the violation.

to our environment or further dialogue to deal with the internal conditions of each person, we seek out changes that can prevent future harm and create healing.

Healing in Our Community

When we gathered our peace-building circle last summer, everyone initially agreed that playing aggressive “street ball” caused the fight between Lucas, Jay and Chris. But then we dug deeper and found that the game was merely the catalyst; the fight itself was fueled by tension between Lucas and Chris going back almost a year. After coming to a group agreement about basketball games and verbalizing how we felt, the boys made a request of one another to talk more in a separate conversation about their friendship.

Today, Lucas and Chris enjoy a deeper, more mature friendship. They are freelance videographers, frequently working on shoots together, and have co-led other restorative conversations with their peers. Without a space for healing work, without a space for—as Lucas said—talking about their emotions, these young men might have found themselves in deeper conflict, which could have led to serious harm. Instead, they built healing and trust.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic and school consolidation in the district, student conflicts and punitive discipline measures—including police presence—increased. RFP families and staff held community-wide healing circles to discuss what was happening and the impact on the school climate. From these circles, we made decisions about how to show up for our young people. We hope that creating a strong youth-and-teacher-led alternative to corporal punishment and exclusionary discipline will be a first step toward getting police-free schools that promote genuine safety, healing and liberation for our young people.

Consistently integrating restorative practices into our relationships, not only with students but also with their families, provides a foundation for transformative justice work, addressing the underlying systems that contribute to conflict and create harm. ●

Jeremiah Smith (he/him) is the co-founder and director of programming for the Rosedale Freedom Project in Rosedale, Mississippi.

*Note
The names of the young people involved in the events in this story have been changed to protect their identities.

Protecting Immigrant Students' Rights to a Public Education

All students in the U.S. have a right to an education free from discrimination, regardless of their immigration or citizenship status.

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

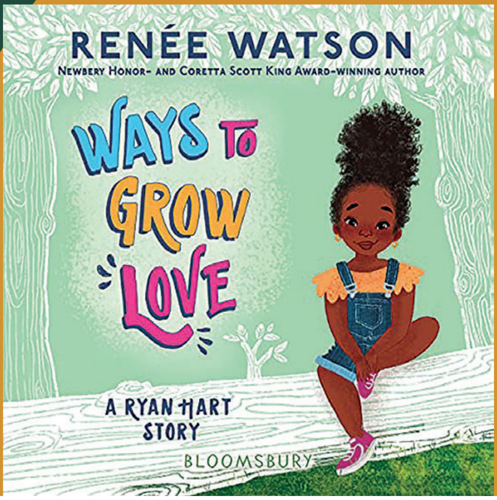
Designed to share with families and available in multiple languages, an accompanying pamphlet offers more information, easy-to-use reference lists and links to further resources.

Download this free guide at:

splcenter.org/plyler

Staff Picks

What We're Reading



In ***Ways To Grow Love (A Ryan Hart Story, 2)***, author Renée Watson perfectly captures the feeling of being in elementary school—of sweet childhood friendships, special moments with family, summer camp shenanigans and the seeming enormity of little things. It's in those little things that this book shines. Ryan Hart is an endearing and relatable heroine—and a passionate Black girl in whom readers will see themselves. Nina Mata's warm illustrations scattered throughout the book are a particular gift.

"Young readers will be captivated by the love, strength and everyday magic of Ryan Hart and her family."
Steffany Moyer, LFJ Program Management & Operations Specialist

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Eugene the Unicorn

In ***Eugene the Unicorn: A Kid's Book To Help Start LGBTQ Inclusive Conversations***, author and illustrator T. Wheeler demonstrates how to engage in age-appropriate discussions about difference, diversity and acceptance. The rhyming text will certainly engage little listeners as they learn that the thing we have in common is that we all have individual differences. In this charming book, Wheeler encourages self-acceptance, celebrates diversity, and writes, "No one can be a better you than you."

"Young children will love the rhythm of this read-aloud book with its specific focus on inclusivity."
Crystal L. Keels, LFJ Editor

JOSIE DANCES
DENISE LAJIMODIERE
Illustrations by ANGELA ERDRICH

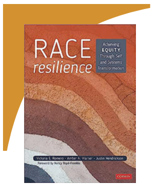
Josie Dances, by Denise Lajimodiere, is a beautiful story of a young Ojibwe girl preparing for her powwow debut. This book, with wonderful illustrations by Angela Erdrich, explores the intersection of Indigenous culture, family, nature and traditions—offering an essential perspective to any library collection. With help from her family and the support of her community, Josie gathers what she needs to receive her spirit name and participate in her first powwow.

"An essential telling of Ojibwe culture that will have readers celebrating and honoring Josie's journey."
Jaci Jones, LFJ Professional Learning Facilitator

THIS BOOK IS FEMINIST

What is feminism, and why do we need it today? In ***This Book Is Feminist: An Intersectional Primer for Next-Gen Changemakers***, Jamia Wilson navigates these questions from a perspective that is at once socially astute and deeply personal. With illustrations by Aurelia Durand, Wilson renders current intersectional feminist thought more approachable by grounding it in her own story and frequently prompting young people to reflect on how these topics come into play in their own lives.

"A beautifully illustrated personal tour of some of the key topics in contemporary feminism."
Steffany Moyer,
LFJ Program Management & Operations Specialist



Authors Victoria E. Romero, Amber N. Warner and Justin Hendrickson designed ***Race Resilience: Achieving Equity Through Self and Systems Transformation*** to help educators, schools and districts develop race resilience using exercises and techniques that address racial biases. The authors develop each chapter with the end in mind: to create schools that model racial justice for all children, particularly Black, Indigenous and all students of color.

"The techniques highlighted here provide realistic scenarios that allow educators to reflect on how personal experiences influence their educational practices."
Kimberly Burkhalter, LFJ Professional Learning Facilitator

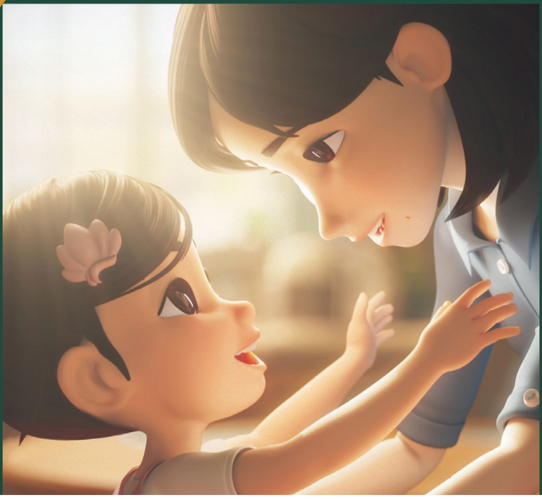
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
REST IS RESISTANCE
A MANIFESTO
TRICIA HERSEY
FOUNDER OF THE NAP MINISTRY

Author Tricia Hersey offers an intervention for the exhausted in ***Rest Is Resistance: A Manifesto***. The artist, poet, theologian and community organizer urges us to reject grind culture and rigid systems that make it difficult to dream or create. With an analysis rooted in Black liberation theology, Hersey asserts that rest is our divine right. She insists that we must rest, not to do more later but to connect with our bodies—sites of liberation—to imagine, invent and heal.

"This book gives a caring, yet firm, nudge to slow down and rest."
Coshandra Dillard,
LFJ Associate Editor

Staff Picks

What We’re Watching



Let’s Eat, an award-winning short film by Dixon Wong, offers a beautiful and moving take on food as an intergenerational love language. This animated film, set primarily in the kitchen, follows a Chinese American immigrant mother and her daughter across a lifetime together as they share lovingly prepared meals. Viewers witness a lively preschool-aged daughter grow into a strong-willed teenager and then an adult. After the mother’s health declines, the daughter shares treasured food traditions with her own daughter. Without dialogue, the animation and music lend themselves to a deeply touching film emphasizing the importance of cultural traditions.
(8 min.) Available on YouTube · Elementary School

*These films contain material that may be unsuitable for younger children. LFJ recommends that educators and parents or caregivers preview the films before deciding to show them to students.

My Shadow Is Pink—based upon the book of the same name by Scott Stuart, who also directed this animated film—is just a bit more than nine minutes long but packs in a mighty amount of wonderful imagery as well as commentary on the power of a parent’s love and support. A school assignment, a little boy’s room where he meets his pink shadow, and his father’s looming presence are all depicted as some of the challenges young children can face in realizing and embracing their identities. This short film reflects a father’s real-life experience of care, concern and celebration of his child’s way of being in the world.
(9 min.) Available on YouTube · Elementary School

Otis’ Dream is a short docufilm from Unashamed Media Group based on the true story of Otis Moss Sr.’s determination to vote in Georgia in 1946 amid widespread voter suppression. Moss was turned away from three polling places, and he walked more than 15 miles attempting to exercise his right to vote. Although Moss never officially cast a ballot before his death, he passed his persistence and inherent civic action on to his son, grandson and great-grandson—who all participate in the film. This must-watch docufilm uplifts the importance of civic engagement and reminds us that, as voter suppression continues in the United States, we must #VoteTheDream.
(14 min.) Available on YouTube · Middle and High School

****The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*** provides a fuller, more honest retelling of civil rights icon Rosa Parks’ work. This documentary, directed by Johanna Hamilton and Yoruba Richen, digs deep into Parks’ radical politics and courageous organizing that go beyond her becoming a catalyst in the historic Montgomery Bus Boycott. Along with archival footage of Parks’ interviews and speeches, family members, others who knew her and modern activists make appearances to shed light on her life. In addition, this film offers opportunities to examine how gender and class issues also affected the civil rights movement.
(96 min.) Available on Peacock · High School and Professional Development

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****Descendant*** details the recovery of the last known relic of the transatlantic slave trade and confirms local residents’ oral histories. Descendants of Africatown—a community founded by formerly enslaved Africans in Mobile, Alabama—ponder what to do with this recovered history, who benefits from it and how to ensure they continue honoring their ancestors. Directed by Margaret Brown, this documentary highlights the value of truth-telling, healing from our past and reconciliation. It also underscores the uniqueness of descendants of enslaved Africans who can pinpoint their ancestors’ origins.
(109 min.) Available on Netflix · High School and Professional Development

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“I never knew slavery as a white story” is how Rachel Boynton, director, producer and writer of ***Civil War (or, Who Do We Think We Are)***, responds to a question a Black child poses in this documentary. This realization echoes throughout the film as a myriad of voices from all parts of the United States—children, K-12 educators, scholars, artists, community members and more—grapple with the Civil War and “the narrative that connects us” as a nation. Carefully crafted, this documentary—which counts Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Brad Pitt among others as executive producers—offers viewers a wide range of perspectives about the past that shapes our country’s present.
(100 min.) Available on Peacock · High School and Professional Development

Story Corner

The Shoebox Lunch

By **Christopher Howell**

Eleven-year-old Jordan sat on the attic floor, lost in memory. While digging through his grandfather's things, somehow the nickel-and-dime *Superman* comics, the shoe polish and brushes, and the aged tea-soaked-looking photos, combined with the sunlight streaming through the window, had whisked him away in thought. Pop and Jordan together again on Sunday drives to church, getting ice cream and rocking in the porch swing.

Illustration by **Richard A. Chance**

But Jordan pulled himself out of those memories. If he remembered too long, he'd cry. Pop was gone, six months now. And Jordan was helping his grandmother clean out her attic before she moved in with his family. Though excited, Jordan knew Nana found it hard to leave this house, with its reminders of Christmases, barbecues and the endless laughter. "She'll be giving that house a long hug goodbye," his mother had said.

Jordan stacked the few items in his lap into the black toolbox he'd found, then carried it downstairs. His grandmother sat at the kitchen table, seeming faraway, and Jordan wondered if she was lost in her memory too.

Nana looked up from her steaming coffee and waved Jordan over. "Hey, baby." She squinted at the toolbox. "What'cha got there?"

"Just a few of Pop's comics, some stuff, pictures. They're in this toolbox."

"Let me see," Nana said. Jordan began to open the toolbox, but Nana interrupted him. "Not the pictures, the whole thing."

Jordan placed the metal box on the table. Nana turned it around and smiled.

"Boy, this ain't no regular toolbox. It's your Pop's shoebox!" She laughed. Jordan hadn't heard Nana laugh in months. "I can't believe he kept this," she said quietly. "I thought it was long gone."

Jordan tapped the box. "What kind of shoes went in this?"

More laughter. "Not actual shoes!" Nana nodded to the seat across from her, and Jordan sat down. "Your grandfather used to take the train every two weeks to North Carolina with his first boss, Mr. Vann. You know he built furniture for him, but Mr. Vann, a white person, also gave a Black woodcarver a chance not many would and made Pop a business partner. Mr. Vann was expecting a baby, and as a gift, Pop built Mr. Vann's sweet baby girl a crib. That cradle later held each of the five Vann babies! After that gift, Mr. Vann brought your Pop along to all types of auctions because Mr. Vann trusted him to choose furniture for the store to resell. But they were traveling in the 1950s, and 50 years ago, those were hard journeys for your Pop."

"Why, Nana?" Jordan asked.

Nana took a deep breath. "As a Black person, your Pop experienced bad treatment—segregation so awful it kept me awake at night. He couldn't sit in the same train car as white passengers, had to look down as he walked in the street, and Mr. Vann couldn't always make sure Pop had a place to eat when they traveled. So, I used to pack Pop a shoebox lunch."

"Tell me it didn't include shoelaces?" Jordan said, and they both smiled.

"No, it had fried chicken and sometimes my spiced ham. Your Pop's favorite. Maybe some hard-boiled or deviled eggs, always fruit, and the almonds your Pop loved. Also, a nice slice of my pound cake. My Mama and I used to make shoebox lunches for church members who were going on trips. She always wanted me to tie the bows of yarn around the boxes. Mama made those lunches with sour cream pound cake. But I like apple butter pound cake better. So did your Pop."

"How come you don't send me to school with cake?" Jordan teased.

She smiled. "You don't need all that sugar. But I sent it with Pop because…" She stopped.

Nana's eyes filled with tears, and Jordan grabbed her hand. His eyes stung too.

"Because my husband needed to eat with dignity. Out there, in a mean world, the least I could do was make sure he could eat the best I had to give him." Nana smiled at Jordan through tears.

Jordan looked down at the metal box, imagining it filled with Nana's fried chicken and pound cake. If it tasted like Nana's Sunday dinners, Jordan knew it was better than anything Pop could ever get on a train ride. "I bet it was the most delicious lunch in the world." ●

Christopher Howell (he/him) is a teacher at Woodbrook Elementary School in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Questions for Readers

In The Text
Why was Jordan helping his Nana pack things up in the house?

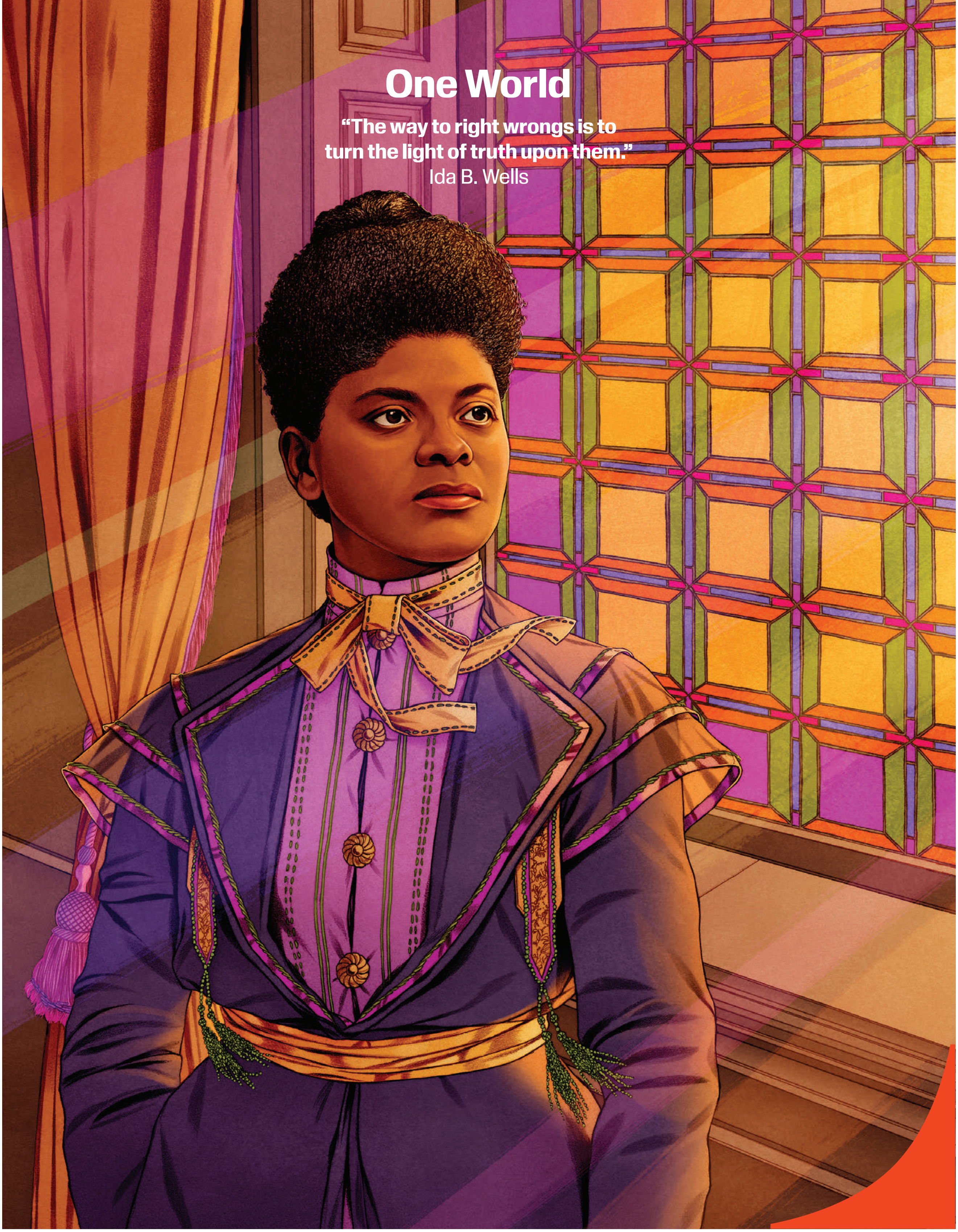
Think and Search Text
Why did Jordan's grandmother make sure the shoebox lunch was always filled with the best food for Pop?

Author and Me
Why was what Pop experienced—segregation—so wrong?

On My Own
What would you do to make sure everyone in our country is treated the right way?

One World

> **“The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them.”**
> Ida B. Wells



SPLC **LEARNING FOR JUSTICE**

Learning for Justice and participating artists encourage you to clip the One World page to hang on a classroom wall or communal space. It is created with just that purpose in mind.

Ida B. Wells (1862-1931), an activist, educator and investigative journalist, brought widespread attention to the murders of Black people in the South by white lynch mobs. In addition to her anti-lynching campaign, for which she was posthumously awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 2020, Wells remained politically active throughout her lifetime.

Illustration by **Michael Hoeweler**

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:

- **End "zero tolerance" discipline and implement restorative justice.**
- **Hire more Black teachers.**
- **Mandate Black history and ethnic studies in K-12 curriculum.**
- **Fund counselors, not cops.**

Learn more at
blacklivesmatteratschool.com

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Professional Development Workshops

Learn with a community of educators committed to diversity, equity and justice.

Learning for Justice offers virtual open-enrollment professional learning workshops for current K-12 classroom teachers, administrators and counselors, and for anyone who coaches classroom teachers and administrators.

Unpacking the Social Justice Standards
An introduction to the Learning for Justice Social Justice Standards.

Let's Talk!
Learn strategies for creating supportive learning environments and facilitating critical conversations with students.

Speak Up at School
Become familiar with strategies that educators and students can use to interrupt bias and injustice.

Advocating for Teaching Honest History: What Educators Can Do
Discover practical tools and resources to teach honest history in classrooms and strategies to advocate in school communities.

"This was an amazing workshop! The presenters were charismatic and offered a perfect amount of guidance and opportunity to develop our own thoughts and strategies. I will definitely be recommending this to fellow educators!"

Find information about workshop dates and registration at:
learningforjustice.org/Workshops-Spring23