



Teaching the Movement

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About the Paper

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About the Southern Poverty Law Center

The Southern Poverty Law Center is a nonprofit organization that combats hate, intolerance and discrimination through education and litigation.

About Teaching Tolerance

Founded in 1991, Teaching Tolerance is dedicated to reducing prejudice, improving intergroup relations and supporting equitable school experiences for our nation's children.

The program provides free educational materials to educators for use by millions of students. *Teaching Tolerance* magazine is sent to 450,000 educators, reaching every school in the country, twice annually. Tens of thousands of educators use the program's film kits and more than 5,000 schools participate in the annual Mix It Up at Lunch Day program.

Teaching Tolerance educational materials have won two Oscars, an Emmy and more than 20 honors from the Association of Educational Publishers, including two Golden Lamp Awards, the industry's highest honor.

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Executive Summary

Our September 2011 report, *Teaching the Movement: The State of Civil Rights Education in the United States 2011*, was prompted by the news that American high school seniors knew little about the civil rights movement.¹ Knowing that low expectations often contribute to poor student achievement, we took a close look at the content requirements set by each state.² Our study showed that most states failed to require teaching about the civil rights movement, an important part of our shared history. We called for states to improve their standards and raise expectations of what students should learn. In this report, we offer models for improvement.

In our initial report, we graded states on the scope and quality of their standards for teaching about the civil rights movement. The 51-state report card told a disturbing story.³ Across the country, state history standards—the expectations about what students learn and teachers teach—routinely ignored or over-simplified the struggle for African-American civil rights that took place in the 1950s and 1960s. The farther away from the South—and the smaller the African-American population—the lower the expectations for significant coverage.

Too often, we found, the movement, when it is given classroom time, is reduced to lessons about two heroic figures—Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks—and four words, “I have a dream.”

We found that only a handful of states required educators to pay significant attention to the movement and the lessons it can teach about citizenship. Over 30 states required minimal or even no instruction; many had standards that barely went beyond a superficial treatment of events and leaders. Overall, we noted that, in almost all states, there is tremendous room for improvement.

The report ended with a call for a national conversation, for teachers to be better prepared to teach the movement and, most importantly, for states to integrate a com-

Background

Teaching the Movement: The State of Civil Rights Education in the United States 2011 compared the content required by each state's standards to a rubric reflecting a body of knowledge that civil rights historians and educators consider core information. A state whose requirements matched every item on the rubric earned a score of 100 percent.

No state received a score higher than 70 percent; the average grade was an F. Sixteen states did not require any instruction about the civil rights movement. Other states received poor grades because they gave short shrift to the topic, seeing it as a story important only in the South or to African-Americans. This is a troubling failure to recognize that the civil rights movement is a crucial part of our story, deeply rooted in 400 years of American history. It didn't occur only in the South, and it certainly affected people far beyond the South.

Encouragingly, 46 states and Washington, D.C., have now adopted the Common Core Standards. These standards call for all students to read more informational and nonfiction texts, including (at least in grades six-12) texts in history and social studies. In addition, 20 states and 15 professional organizations are considering a set of common content standards.

The State of Civil Rights Education in the United States 2011 was motivated by a growing concern that the civil rights movement is receding from lived cultural experience into historical memory. Its findings received considerable national and local attention by media and policymakers interested in education policy. Many people were interested in finding a way forward from the current morass—if state standards should be improved, they asked, how should we improve them?

This report takes the standards for Alabama, Florida and New York—the top-ranking states in our earlier report—and makes revisions that would raise their scores to 100 percent. These revised standards provide comprehensive coverage of the civil rights movement. The District of Columbia standards were revised as well, so that we could illustrate a way to raise a low-scoring state's standards—the District scored a “D” in our earlier report—to a level of excellence.

Understanding State History Standards

As we noted in the report, implementation, structure, wording and assessment vary widely among state social stud-

Coverage of the Civil Rights Movement—A Closer Look

Although most states fared poorly in the strict grading used in *The State of Civil Rights Education in the United States 2011*, there is still much to commend among state educational requirements. Many of these standards hold promising elements for states working to make their own standards better.

Our first report involved comparing and evaluating state standards, using a rubric that helped us see similarities and differences across the dramatically different state standards. The rubric identified specified core content in five areas: leaders, groups, events, history and opposition. States were scored on their inclusion of this core content in each area and assigned a score for their coverage. Content was 80 percent of a state's grade. In addition, the rubric graded states based on the context in which their standards presented the civil rights movement. States received a high context grade (20 percent of the total score) if they connected the civil rights movement to

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teacher or test developer and thus fails to set clear expectations for student learning. Indiana's standard is slightly

knowledge to answer a hypothetical question. Other standards, as in these examples from Ohio, Mississippi, Michigan and Connecticut, show an innovative bent by linking content across diverse eras:

*“Explain how civil disobedience differs from other forms of dissent and evaluate its application and consequences including: a. Women’s suffrage movement of the late 1800s; b. Civil rights movement of the 1960s; c. Student protests during the Vietnam War.”*¹⁰

*“Explain Supreme Court rulings that have resulted in controversies over changing interpretations of civil rights, including those in Plessy v. Ferguson, Brown v. Board of Education, Miranda v. Arizona, Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, Adarand Constructors, Inc. v. Peña, and United States v. Virginia (VMI).”*¹¹

*“Ideals of the Civil Rights Movement – Compare and contrast the ideas in Martin Luther King’s March on Washington speech to the ideas expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the Seneca Falls Resolution, and the Gettysburg Address.”*¹²

*“Trace the evolution of citizens’ rights (e.g., Palmer Raids, struggle for civil rights, women’s rights movements, Patriot Act).”*¹³

these are: demonstrations, resistance, organizing, and collective action/unity.”¹⁵

While this requirement is not specific to the civil rights movement (nor should it be, as it has the potential to bring together diverse and global content for thematic understanding), it drives the state’s new movement-related standards, ensuring that content is taught across multiple grade levels—essential for securing lasting and deep understanding.

BEST PRACTICE

SUPPORT TEACHERS WITH SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENTS

Some of the most outstanding and useful state requirements appear outside of the normal, abbreviated lists of standards. South Carolina’s State Department of Education provides official advice on teaching the content standards, including a U.S. history support document with several pages of information per standard. As this paragraph shows, the document uses a narrative style to identify what students need and do not need to know about the civil rights movement:

“Students should understand how changes in African American leadership affected the support given for civil rights legislation. The goals, actions and leadership of the black power movement [Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael and the Black Panthers] among northern, urban African Americans were significantly different from those of southern African Americans. Students should understand the difference between the terms ‘de jure’ and ‘de facto’ segregation. Televised reports of urban riots and the radical rhetoric of the black power movement alienated the general public and undermined support for further government action. Oversimplification of black power should be addressed by including discussion of efforts of black power advocates to protect and empower

the African American community and promote ethnic pride. Opponents of the civil rights movement charged civil rights advocates as dangerous subversives.”¹⁶

ALABAMA

ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL

Identify significant historical sites in Alabama, including locations of civil rights activities, including: Montgomery — birthplace of the Confederacy, birthplace of the modern Civil Rights Movement; Tuskegee — home of Tuskegee Institute; Mobile—site of Fort Morgan and the Battle of Mobile Bay; Huntsville — home of the United States Space and Rocket Center; Tusculumbia — location of Ivy Green (birthplace of Helen Keller); Moundville — location of Moundville Archaeological Park; Birmingham — home of Vulcan and Vulcan Park, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, and Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark; Selma—site of voting rights activities.

- Describe the social, political and economic impact of the Civil Rights Movement on Alabama.
- Identify important people and events of the modern Civil Rights Movement, including Martin Luther King, Jr., George C. Wallace, Rosa Parks, the Montgomery bus boycott, Birmingham church bombing, Selma-to-Montgomery march.
- Identify benefits of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act.
- Explain the impacts and mechanisms of segregation, including Jim Crow laws, school segregation, poll taxes and literacy tests.
- Describe the role of major civil rights leaders and significant events occurring during the modern Civil Rights Movement, including Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., *Brown versus Board of*

Education; Montgomery bus boycott, student sit-ins, march on Washington, D.C., Freedom Rides, Civil Rights Act of 1964, Malcolm X, Freedom Summer and voter registration efforts, Selma-to-Montgomery march.

HIGH SCHOOL

Trace events of the modern Civil Rights Movement from post-World War II to 1970 that resulted in social and economic changes, including the Montgomery bus boycott, the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School, the march on Washington, and the Freedom Rides. Activities should include:

- Tracing the causes of the Civil Rights Movement from slavery through the Civil War, Reconstruction and Jim Crow laws, identifying obstacles to the movement's success, including *de jure* and *de facto* segregation.
- Tracing the federal government's involvement in the modern Civil Rights Movement, including the 24th Amendment's abolition of the poll tax, the desegregation of the armed forces, the nationalization of state militias, *Brown versus Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the 1968 Civil Rights Act.
- Explaining contributions of individuals and groups to the modern Civil Rights Movement, including A. Philip Randolph, Martin Luther King, Jr., James Meredith, Medgar Evers, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the Congress of Racial

- Identifying people and events in Alabama that influenced the modern Civil Rights Movement, including Rosa Parks, Autherine Lucy, John Patterson, George C. Wallace, Vivian Malone, Fred Shuttlesworth, the Children's March, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing, and the Selma-to-Montgomery march.
- Examining the opposition to the Civil Rights Movement, including the extra judicial enforcement of segregation by the Ku Klux Klan, the formation of the White Citizens Councils and the roles of key symbolic figures such as Bull Connor.
- Evaluating tactics such as boycotts, sit-ins, marches, civil disobedience, nonviolence and voter registration used at different times during the struggle for civil rights.
- Describing the development of a Black Power movement, including the change in focus of the SNCC, the rise of Malcolm X, and Stokely Carmichael and the Black Panther Movement.
- Describing the impact of African-American entrepreneurs on the modern Civil Rights Movement. Examples: S. B. Fuller, A. G. Gaston.
- Describing the trajectory of the Civil Rights Movement following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., including Watts and other uprisings, evaluating its accomplishments and remaining objectives.

New or revised content highlighted in gray

FLORIDA

SURVEY OF STANDARDS AND FRAMEWORKS

Florida's *Next Generation Sunshine State Standards* (NGSSS) contain a number of benchmarks specific to the civil rights movement from kindergarten through high school.

The “Remarks and Examples” (abbreviated simply as “examples”) in Florida’s standards are required content. This is clarified in the new U.S. History EOC (end-of-course) Assessment test item document, which describes remarks and examples as “specific content that should be taught and potentially could be assessed.”

ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Identify Florida’s role in the civil rights move-
A

Examples are *Plessy v. Ferguson*, *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, *Miranda v. Arizona*, *Gideon v. Wainright*, *Mapp v. Ohio* and *Roe v. Wade*.

μ# Examine the similarities of social movements (Native Americans, Hispanics, women, anti-war protesters) of the 1960s and 1970s.

μ# Identify the expansion of civil rights and liberties by examining the principles contained in primary

documents. Examples are Preamble, Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, Emancipation Proclamation, 13th, 14th, 15th, 19th, 24th, and 26th Amendments, Voting Rights Act of 1965 and Civil Rights Act of 1968.

μ# Describe the trajectory of the civil rights movement following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., including Watts and other uprisings, evaluating its accomplishments and remaining objectives.

New or revised content highlighted in gray

NEW YORK

ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL

Martin Luther King, Jr. is included in a list of holidays students should understand for effective citizenship.

Unit eleven (“The changing nature of the American people from World War II to the present”)

CONTENT	CONNECTIONS
<p>C. Civil rights movement placed focus on equality and democracy</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Movement’s roots in slavery, Reconstruction and Jim Crow laws. 2. Important executive and judicial decisions supported equal rights 3. <i>Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka</i> (1954) overturned legal basis of segregation. 4. Activists and leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. developed strategies to secure civil rights for African-Americans. 5. Groups like the Ku Klux Klan, White Citizens Councils and symbolic figures such as Bull Connor resisted expansion of civil rights. 6. Women, Native American Indians, and others also sought greater equality. 7. Supreme Court moved to protect individual rights: <i>Miranda v. Arizona</i> (1966), <i>Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District</i> (1969) <p>D. Self-confidence of early postwar years eroded by series of events.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assassinations of major leaders: Kennedy, King 2. Nation split over involvement in Vietnam War 3. Groups in society turn to violence to reach their goals. 4. Resignation of President Nixon 5. Oil crisis and skyrocketing inflation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze the conflict between federal and state law concerning the issue of school desegregation, using primary source documents. • What method did minority groups use in their attempts to gain equal rights? • Create a poster indicating the significant people and events in the struggle for equal rights of a particular minority group. <p>Suggested Documents: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s address at the Lincoln Memorial (1963): “I have a dream ...”; Kennedy’s inaugural speech; song, “We Shall Overcome”</p>

New or revised content highlighted in gray

HIGH SCHOOL

II

Unit Seven (“World in Uncertain Times: 1950-Present”)

CONTENT	CONNECTIONS
<p>II. Containment and Consensus: 1945-1960</p> <p>C. Domestic Policies</p> <p>2. Civil rights</p> <p>a. A. Philip Randolph and the desegregation of the armed forces.</p> <p>b. Jackie Robinson breaks the color barrier</p> <p>c. <i>Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka</i>, 1954; <i>de jure</i> and <i>de facto</i> discrimination.</p> <p>d. Beginnings of modern civil rights movement</p> <p>(1) Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott</p> <p>(2) Little Rock: school desegregation, the conflict between Eisenhower and Orval Faubus.</p> <p>(3) Segregation in public transportation ruled unconstitutional</p> <p>(4) Sit-ins, civil disobedience and nonviolent protest</p>	

6. Describe the Immigration and Nationality Services Act of 1965 and the effect of abolishing the national origins quotas on the demographic makeup of America.
7. Analyze the women's rights movement launched in the 1960s, including differing perspectives on the roles of women, the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).
8. Evaluate the relevance of struggles for civil rights in the current era, linking current events to past movements for civil rights.

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12. Students evaluate and take and defend positions on the scope and limits of rights and obligations as democratic citizens, the relationships among them, and how they are secured.

Students:

1. Discuss the meaning and importance of each of the rights guaranteed under the Bill of Rights and how each is secured (e.g., freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, petition, and privacy).
2. Explain how economic rights are secured and their importance to the individual and to society (e.g., the right to acquire, use, transfer, and dispose of property; right to choose one's work; right to join or not join labor unions; copyright and patent).
3. Discuss the individual's legal obligations to obey the law, serve as a juror, and pay taxes.
4. Understand the obligations of civic-mindedness, including voting, being informed on civic issues, volunteering and performing public service and serving in the military or alternative service.
5. Describe the reciprocity between rights and obligations, that is, why enjoyment of one's rights entails respect for the rights of others.
6. Explain how one becomes a citizen of the United States, including the process of naturalization (e.g., literacy, language, and other requirements).
7. Evaluate the place of civil disobedience and protest in a democratic society.

New or revised content highlighted in gray

Conclusion

The State of Civil Rights Education in the United States 2011 painted a fairly bleak picture of state requirements for teaching and learning about the civil rights movement. While the forest may not be in good condition overall, this paper shows that many of its trees are alive and well. With some care and relatively straightforward modifications, most states can easily transform their existing standards into outstanding requirements. The four models here show different approaches that are applicable to every state.

In a world where classroom time, especially social studies instructional time, is increasingly at a premium, it is sometimes tempting to opt for breadth of coverage instead of depth. These standards show that states and teachers do not need to make that choice when it comes to one of America's most important historical events. Small changes and attention to detail avoid overburdening teachers while setting the high expectations that our students deserve.



Endnotes

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