Reclaiming Narratives Through Culturally Sustaining Teaching: Women of Color, Historical Significance, and the Civil Rights Era

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IN THE SPRING OF 1968, John C. Fremont High School, located in South Central Los Angeles, became a symptom of what was happening nationally and globally. At the height of the Civil Rights Movement, the "climate of unrest" inspired a radicalization among a predominantly Black student body ignited by overcrowding, resource shortages, and racist practices among staff at Fremont.[1] School administrators and teachers at Fremont discriminated against the Black students and other students of color by not providing them with equal educational opportunities, despite their academic abilities being the same as their white peers. They placed Black students in lower-level classes and denied them access to advanced placement courses. Moreover, the staff punished students of color more harshly for minor infractions and "made racial slurs and derogatory comments."[2]

As the student body at Fremont became aware of the educational injustices plaguing their school, the Fremont Black Student Union (BSU)—a club created to "celebrate Black culture and history while fostering unity among students"—organized a series of walkouts in effort to combat the educational racism practiced at the school.[3]

Inspired by the creation of other BSUs at the high school and college level through the Black Power Movement, Fremont students sought to provide a space for Black students to come together, discuss issues affecting their community, and demand change.[4] The young Black women students primarily spearheaded the day-to-day organization. They organized student-led forums, raised awareness among the student body, and produced informational pamphlets. Additionally, the young women helped shape the cultural landscape of Fremont's student activism as they adapted the Black Panther Party fashion of black beret, black leather jackets, and wearing their natural hair.[5] Nonetheless, the unofficial uniform at Fremont represented a call for unity and solidarity among Black students in the struggle for social justice for students of color. Organized through ideology and clothing, on November 2, 1968, approximately 2,400 students picketed on San Pedro Street as BSU members handed leaflets stating, "The following list of teachers and administration has displayed racist, insensitive, and incompetent characteristics. We demand that they dismiss themselves or be dismissed."[6]

The unity of Fremont students—reflecting a broader movement among students of color for more relevant history curricula and better educational opportunities known as the Los Angeles Walkouts and Chicano Blowouts—made it clear that Fremont needed change.[7] As students continued to lead demonstrations, their demands reached the South Central community meetings and, eventually, the Los Angeles Board of Education took action to address the inequities. By the end of 1968, John C. Fremont High School hired Black educators and embedded college preparation courses, demonstrating the success of student-led activism and the vital role of organizing a student body through ideology and clothing.

Examining the political activism of high school students provides a window to fully understand the rich history and resistance of young people of color from South Central Los Angeles who blazed the trail in many crucial battles during the civil rights era. Researching Fremont's history shows that the high school reflects a tradition of student-led organizing and activism, especially for educational equity. However, fast-forwarding to the present day, Fremont has gradually made efforts to improve education, especially for historically marginalized students of color, but, most significantly, student-led activism has ceased.

Attempting to Reach Educational Equity

As a Chicana history teacher and alumna of John C. Fremont, I have witnessed a loss of interest in history from students of color and a decline in student activism at Fremont. With the recent challenge of educational apathy, lower graduation rates for students of color continue to worsen an existing educational crisis; however, culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy interwoven with history offers an opportunity to address educational inequity through student engagement.

To reach educational equity nationally, reformers in the 1990s developed "culturally responsive teaching" (CRT), which aims to close the achievement gap through intersecting culture and teaching while emphasizing community building, thus empowering students of color.[8] According to educational theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings, "ideas of cultural relevancy center upon the classroom teacher."[9] In other words, when teachers create a classroom where students feel represented and appreciated, student achievement levels rise.

CRT revolves around three pillars emphasizing "academic success, forming a cultural identity, and cultural competency."[10] More recently, scholars H. Samy Alim and Django Paris took the idea of "relevancy" to "sustaining" by arguing how reimagining schools is necessary to reframe the idea of oppressive structures. If CRT began the conversation on the importance of affirming cultural identities in the classroom, culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) "explicitly calls for schooling to be a site for sustaining the cultural ways of being of communities of color."[11] Schools become accountable to the community in this framework by shifting a "culture of power" where decisions become community-based.[12] In the case of John C. Fremont High School, the South Central community members and the school itself reveal a history of activism and resistance. Therefore, to sustain the community's culture of resistance, revealing this power to students becomes necessary to create agents of change.

In 2022, *U.S. News and World Report* indicated a graduation rate of 84% at John C. Fremont, with the school comprising 89.9% Latinx students, 8.9% Black students, and less than 1% indigenous students.[13] According to a 2016-2017 report by the California Department of Education (CDE), African American and Latinx students in the Los Angeles Unified School District had a one-

year dropout rate of 11.0% (four-year 43.3%) and 7.9% (four-year 34.1%), respectively.[14] The CDE also reported for 2019-2020 that 46.1% of Fremont students enroll in a four-year college/university.[15] Although it becomes difficult to pinpoint persistent inequities, what becomes most apparent at John C. Fremont High is apathy in learning, a disconnection to the South Central community and history, and the loss of student political activism. In a school experience survey of Fremont High, 62% of the students revealed teachers not "knowing" their students, while others mentioned the lack of representation in the school curriculum.[16]

Given the struggles of educational apathy primarily due to this disconnect, this article focuses on how I implemented critical components of culturally responsive and culturally sustaining teaching in an eleventh-grade United States History curriculum to create an inclusive and positive classroom environment where students feel validated and culturally represented. When wedded to second-order historical thinking concepts such as agency and resistance in a United States history class, culturally responsive and sustaining teaching methods provide a way for teachers to make learning meaningful, and the classroom becomes a radical space[17] of possibility that empowers all students (especially for my classroom that includes a total of thirty-five students, with twenty-six identifying as Latinx and nine as African American). Therefore, the second part of this article reveals how developing personal relationships, building historical literacies, and designing effective assessments within a unit of study cultivated my students' second-order historical thinking while creating more student engagement.

Challenging the Master Narrative
with Culturally Sustaining Teaching

Although United States history textbooks have undergone some changes since the student walkouts of 1968, scholars have noted that the basic outline of United States history continues along a traditional arc.[18] As historian Bruce VanSledright has shown, the master narrative taught in United States history follows a "quest-for-freedom" narrative that centers on people of European ancestry as the definition of "American."[19]   Within this version of U.S. history, students of color at Fremont need more representation to

engage more with the content. As students come to history class with "different sociocultural frames of reference," this shapes their idea of historical significance.[20] The idea of historically "othering" communities in U.S. curricula affects students of color, in which students' connection to history becomes diminished.[21] On the other hand, representation in narratives creates a lively classroom community, and justice in history education informs social action.[22] When combined with a push toward building a culturally sustaining environment, an inclusive approach to historical representation offers a path to higher student achievement in which students feel comfortable and represented. Teachers guide students rather than lecture them in this dynamic, therefore amplifying students' voices. The goal of the following unit of study focuses on creating lessons using a culturally sustaining and history-for-justice framework while helping students understand that the "ordinary" can also make history—just as previous Fremont students have.

From "Powerless" and "Ordinary" to Empowered and Liberated

The Civil Rights Unit in California State standards for U.S. history accounts for a shift toward an inclusive history, compared to the other units highlighting the "quest-for-freedom" narrative. However, simply including "multicultural heroes of U.S. history" in the Civil Rights Unit supports the nation-building storyline. Furthermore, the California History-Social Science standards—not to mention most textbook accounts—reinforce such a narrative, focusing on Martin Luther King Jr. and singling out MLK as the individual that created historical change while dismissing the long struggle for civil rights and the organizing beyond legal pursuits. In "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," Jacquelyn Dowd Hall argued how the Civil Rights Movement's remembrance and commemoration have significant political implications. Hall contended that the selective remembrance and mythologizing of the Civil Rights Movement often obscures the ongoing struggle for civil rights and social justice.[23] Moreover, in "The Black Freedom Struggle in the Urban North," Thomas Sugrue argued that the civil rights struggle in the United States was not solely a Southern issue, but a national struggle.[24] By focusing mainly on the North, Sugrue

broadened the civil rights narrative to include not only a battle for legal and political rights, but also a mission of economic and social justice. Although many historians work towards presenting a more nuanced narrative of this era, the *misrepresentation* in secondary classrooms thus paints the civil rights era as a "one-man job" and, in return, dismisses the complexity of the civil rights era as a group effort, further removing the chance that students of color like those at Fremont High might see themselves as agents of change and pursue other avenues of activism.[25] Remembering and commemorating this era can shape the present and future of civil rights struggles. It is crucial to recognize the ongoing work required to achieve genuine equality and justice beginning in the classroom.

The history classroom becomes the place to present the complexity of the civil rights era by engaging students with historical thinking. In "Benchmarks of Historical Thinking," Peter Seixas discussed how the active role (or agency) of individuals and groups relates to "promoting, shaping, and resisting change in history."[26] Indeed, the complexity of the civil rights era cannot unfold through a four- to five-week unit. However, the unit of instruction I developed—"Women of Color in the Civil Rights Era"—brings forth another layer to the nuances of changes by analyzing not only governmental policies, but also cultural liberations shaped by women of color in the civil rights era.

When researching Fremont's 1968 walkouts, discovering the significance of young Black women in student organizing added a new perspective to my understanding of activism through cultural forms. For Fremont students in 1968, fashion became a symbol of resistance in expressing a political message of unity and pride in their Blackness.[27] Fashion as a cultural form shaped their cultural identities in the school and created solidarity among the student body. Recognizing this, the concept of a cultural history of the civil rights era presented through the narratives of women of color attempts to update the California State standards (created twenty-five years ago) and reflect a new perspective into the ongoing historical literature on the civil rights era. Most meaningfully, the unit of study engages students in an investigation of the different accounts of historical actors (in this case, Black, Chicana, and Native American women) and their significance during this era by asking the following central historical question: "To what extent

were women of color significant in shaping equitable governmental policies and cultural forms in American social movements of the 1960s and 1970s?" With this central historical question, this unit of study changes how students think about historical significance during the civil rights era by asking them to explicitly assess the change driven by multiple historical actors and different forms of activism. Moreover, the unit of study demonstrates that—far from operating on the Black/white binary posited in textbook accounts—a multiracial and geographical coalition of activists helped to achieve the Civil Rights Movement's successes. Using lessons based in the culturally responsive/sustaining framework allows students to feel represented in the lesson sequences and reflect on the possibility of becoming agents of change in their community.

Reflecting broader shifts in the historiography over the past several decades, this unit of study in particular singles out the narratives of women of color to provide a more comprehensive picture of the civil rights era. From the late 1960s until the present day, the historiography of women of color in the civil rights era evolved from a male-centric narrative essentially excluding women to an increasingly more inclusive and nuanced narrative recognizing the various oppressive structures confronting Black, Chicana, and Native American women. Early historians grappled with placing women of color within social movements, while others dismissed them altogether. However, during the 1990s, scholars Hazel V. Carby and Deborah White critically analyzed how race, class, and gender intersected and created further marginalization for women of color, exploring the concept of "identity politics."[28] As the historiography moved into the 2000s, the historical literature focused on Black women, creating a narrow path only centering Black women's narratives. *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (2001), edited by Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin, brought to light "autobiographical, biographical, and sociopolitical analyses of African American women in the Civil Rights Movement," placing Black women's herstories at the center of the Black Liberation movement.[29]

As a "narrowing" of the Black women narrative proceeded, the topic of women of color during the civil rights era began to branch into different sections in the overall historiographical conversation.[30] Benita Roth's *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and*

White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave (2004) became the first monograph to assess the rise of Black, Chicana, and white feminist movements in the 1960s and 1970s.[31] Roth's analysis is a significant contribution to the scholarship of Black feminism, but also it also introduced Chicana feminism as a topic that needed further analysis. Adding on to Chicana feminist scholarship, Maylei Blackwell's *¡Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (2011) emphasized the significance of Chicanas within the Chicano movement.[32] As the Chicano movement became marginalized within the Black Liberation historiography, Chicanas' herstories embodied another marginalization; however, Blackwell's scholarship shed light on Mexican American women's unique experiences, thus revealing the complexity of the U.S. civil rights era.[33]

As most of the historiography focuses on women of color's identity and the reasons why and how they began to splinter into separate movements, contemporary scholarship has started to examine other ways women of color became significant in shaping not only equitable governmental policies, but also cultural forms during the civil rights era. Ruth Feldstein's 2013 book chapter, "'More Than Just a Jazz Performer': Nina Simone's Border Crossings," centered on vocalist and songwriter Nina Simone to highlight Black women's cultural production as a political action.[34] Feldstein's analysis outlined the importance of Simone's role as a cultural producer who spread ideas of gender and Black Power through her music. In recent years, historians have continued to shift their focus to show how style and fashion became a more robust cultural production of Black women that spread activism around the U.S. and transnationally. Tanisha Ford's *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul* (2015) examined the role of Black women in the Black Liberation movement.[35] Ford's analysis of soul style showed how women used their style to spread Black feminist thought locally and across national boundaries. As Feldstein mentioned, these cultural producers created cultural norms and formed a Black feminist identity in which Black women were in solidarity with other Black women transnationally. Previous scholars discussed how women of color organized and shaped governmental policies; however, Ford demonstrated how cultural forms pushed forward civil rights. By wearing their hair naturally or dressing with African
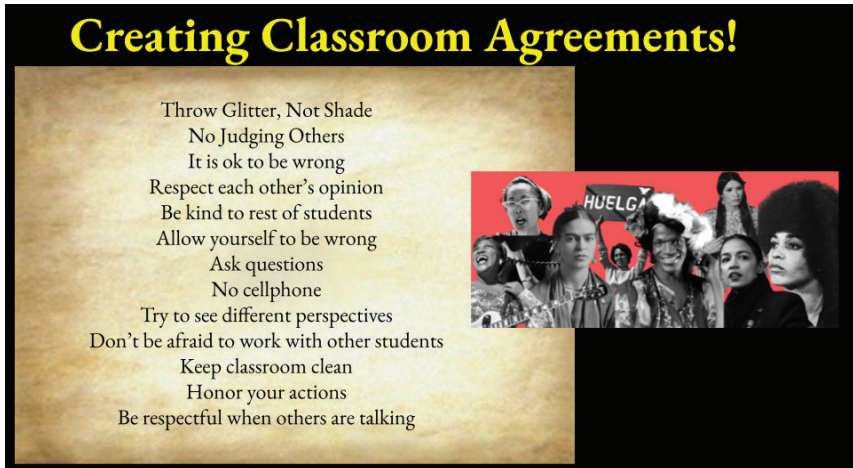
Figure 1: Student-Created Classroom Community Agreements

prints, Black women used their hair and fashion as a tool of resistance against white supremacy, while at the same time inspiring a cultural shift of viewing "Black as Beautiful."[36] In sum, by analyzing how ordinary people's clothing or hair became a political act of resistance, historians have created a more complex narrative that shows how the struggle for civil rights was waged in everyday life. Moreover, through this cultural history lens, students move beyond the traditional focus on legal activism during the civil rights era.

Developing Personal Relationships with Students

Implementing culturally relevant/sustaining teaching strategies begins on day one of every school year. In my classroom implementation, instead of beginning with history content, I focused on building rapport with students and creating a classroom community. On the first day of class, we created guidelines called "classroom community agreements." Then, students took the lead, worked as a class, and voted on the most important norms for our classroom (**Figure 1**). Although it is a small-scale activity, it set the tone for a student-driven class where the students became more inclined to follow the norms that they created, versus rules forced by a teacher. After that, we focused on students exploring their identities and personal stories for the rest of the week. We engaged

in a storytelling activity where students shared a significant life event with the class. In a class of twenty-five students, four shared the murder of their family members due to gang violence. As these brave students shared their narratives, six other students shared stories of witnessing police violence, and others spoke on the treatment of undocumented people.

As a very emotional class period continued, I asked the students to write a response to the following questions: "Is change possible in our community? Who can bring change?" The students' responses included a sense of hopelessness. Student A responded:

> No change is impossible because nothing ever changes in the ghetto. I think that only important people can make a change or like rich people. Most of us cant do nothing.

Meanwhile, Student B responded:

> Change isn't possible because people dont care. Maybe the best thing is to leave here. I dont know who brings change maybe like a big activist like some type of person that can be like Martin Luther King.

Throughout this first week of building community, my approach assisted in genuinely understanding my students beyond the surface level and developing a connection where students felt comfortable sharing intimate stories. As I began to create personal relationships, I reflected on my unit and intentionally molded a unit that revolved around resilience and resistance. The "Women of Color in the Civil Rights Era" unit centered on the "ordinary," in realization that Fremont students do not need another traumatic narrative of BIPOC being victims, but instead narratives of how the "ordinary" brings change. Therefore, the students' narratives guided my planning to reflect their interest while embedding a history-for-justice framework centered on culturally sustaining practices.

Preparing for the Unit of Study: Building Historical Literacies

Traditional history classrooms focusing on facts and memorization must account for long-term learning through critical thinking and skills development. Since the unit's central historical question—"To what extent were women of color significant in shaping equitable governmental policies and cultural forms in

American social movements of the 1960s and 1970s?"—is heavily loaded and the unit deals with more abstract concepts such as "respectability politics" and "machismo," I had to be tactical about breaking down complex concepts for my students. One of the most significant barriers to presenting the unit of study was building my students' historical literacies; specifically, in 2022, I administered an English proficiency exam to my students in which five scored proficient in English, sixteen scored below average, and four scored far below average.

To support my students' English proficiency, I front-loaded vocabulary to prepare them for the unit of study. In addition, the students completed a digital Frayer Model graphic organizer for each word. According to scholars Robin Dazzeo and Kavita Rao, implicit vocabulary instruction allows for active processing of retention and comprehension through the Frayer Model.[37] Since the unit of study involved the analysis of primary and secondary sources from women of color and abstract concepts, it became vital to incorporate several guidelines for the active processing of words. For example, in the graphic organizer, students wrote their definitions, drew/inserted a picture representing the words, and explained how comfortable they were with understanding the word (**Figure 2**). Of course, incorporating such a method adds another dimension to connecting to the words; however, the section asking students, "Did you know this word before today's vocabulary activity? How comfortable do you feel with the definition of this word? Explain," demonstrates a CSP practice that I intentionally used to assess my students' understanding of the words. In her 2020 article, "Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Academic Vocabulary Teaching and Learning," Hetty Roessingh explained how a classroom where students feel safe to express understanding a concept or not, reflects a culturally relevant classroom.[38] Since I have created a safe space for students, asking my students their feelings about particular words informs how I will move forward with my unit. Based on the students' responses, about 80% understood all vocabulary words; however, a few students mentioned having difficulty comprehending "identity politics." Therefore, I reviewed all vocabulary terms the following day to affirm their learning. To further welcome them to these vocabulary words, I implemented a word-play activity suggested by Margarita

Vocabulary/ Web Definition	Define in your OWN words	Insert an image or draw an image that represents the word.	Did you know this word before today's vocabulary activity? How conformable do you feel with the definition of this word? Explain
Example: Respectability Politics: "respectability politics was practiced as a way of attempting to consciously set aside and undermine cultural and moral practices thought to be disrespected by wider society, especially in the context of the family and good manner"	Following the guidelines that society has labeled as "respectable." For example, there is pressure for women to be "respectable" like they cannot wear revealing clothing because they need to follow these "respectable" guidelines.		I never heard this word before, but I have seen this happen before like when my mom told me that I am a girl, so I need to cover up because it makes me more respectable. Now that I know this word, I can say, "I do not follow respectability politics."
Feminism: "The belief in full social, and political equality for women."	Believing in that we all are equal socially and politically, that we have the same rights as men.		I have heard of this word before and seen it very often in protests. I feel comfortable with this word because I've heard of it a lot and I can say that I'm a feminist.
Agency: "People's ability to act independently and make their own free choices."	Agency means to operate separately on your own and to make your own decisions.		I have heard of this word but not with this definition. I feel pretty good about the definition of this word because it's an ability that all people have.

Figure 2: Vocabulary Graphic Organizer

Calderón and her colleagues in their article, "Bringing Words to Life." Students were assigned a particular term and needed to teach a classmate their particular term.[39] Nonetheless, front-loading vocabulary for my students assisted in building their vocabulary and equipped them with the necessary skills to analyze the documents embedded in the unit.

Furthermore, engaging students in historical inquiry means grappling with different texts, including written and non-written sources such as photographs, diary entries, political cartoons, graphs, records, and music. Early in the semester, I began the implementation of historical literacy, which scholar Jeffery Nokes advocates over traditional instruction methods in order to engage students to become historians by investigating and interpreting the past.[40] Since the center of the historical processes involves sources, historical literacy also involves working with primary, secondary, tertiary, and public histories. Nonetheless, giving my students the "practice" of historical inquiry was vital. When confronted with a source for the first time, students who might not possess such historical literacies might need to learn how to interpret different sources correctly. Moreover, giving them the practice of working with different sources relates to CSP—where I understand my students' academic needs and provide the necessary steps in a culturally appropriate method to help students achieve higher literacy. I explicitly used the "sourcing" method by Sam Wineburg, where students ask the *who, what, when, why, and how* of a source, giving my students a set of guidelines to follow when looking at any source.[41] I noticed that the more the students practiced historical skills rather than being told a narrative, the more significant the content became for the students. The unit plan included primary and secondary sources for students to continue to practice sourcing documents, meaning they answered the *who, what, when, why, and how* (**Figure 3**). In addition, I explicitly continued to teach students the sourcing method to give them a firm grasp of the source itself, and therefore formulate a more in-depth analysis of our inquiry.

Three Critical Areas of Data: Pre-Assessment, Unit Summative Assessment, and Post-Unit Evaluation

To effectively evaluate the outcome and success of the unit of study, I set up three critical data areas. I administered a pre-unit assessment for the first section to determine my students' prior knowledge of the civil rights era. The second critical area reflected the students' summative assessment outcome of the unit's central question. Lastly, the third area considered the students' reflection on the unit itself.
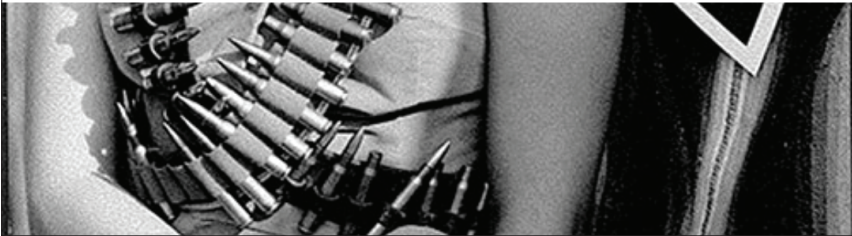
Figure 3: Example of the "sourcing" method by Sam Wineburg, where students ask the "who, what, when, why, and how" of a source.

Pre-Assessment

In the method of education theorist Evelyn Young, to determine my students' prior knowledge of the civil rights era, I incorporated a non-high-stakes method "to allow them to acquire and demonstrate knowledge in multiple ways."[42] At the beginning of the unit of study, I asked students to create bubble maps (**Figure 4**). The students wrote "Civil Rights" in the center of the bubble map. I then prompted the students to think about the following questions as they completed their bubble map: "What do you know about the Civil Rights era? Do any significant people/leaders come to mind?"
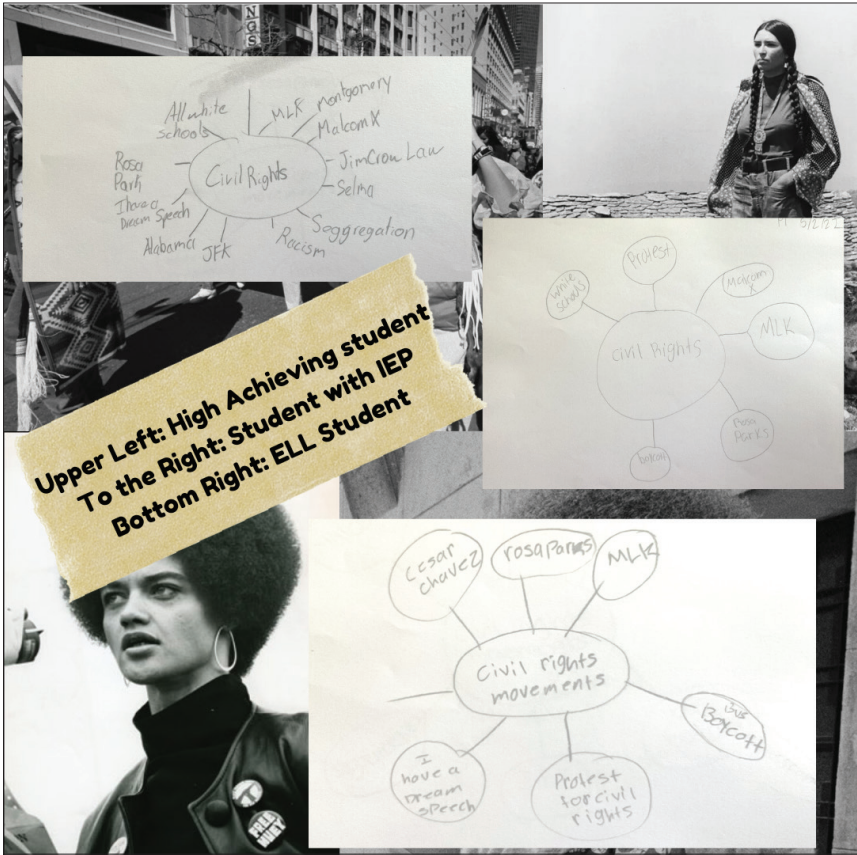
Figure 4: Assessing Prior Knowledge through "Bubble Maps"

After fifteen minutes, I collected the bubble maps as an informal pre-assessment. Analyzing the data, 90% of students included Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, 50% included Rosa Parks, and 20% included Ruby Bridges. Interestingly, only 5% of students included events such as the Montgomery Boycotts and the JFK assassination. Overall, the data revealed that the students regarded the civil rights era with the traditional narrative presented in textbooks—a narrative that removes the idea of community mobilization. Moreover, the data demonstrated the lack of representation of other marginalized groups fighting for equity simultaneously, such as Chicano/a/x and Native American activists. Nonetheless, this data informed my lesson sequences. As the Black Freedom Movement inspired the

A. The Rise of Black Feminism	B. The Chicana Feminist Movement	C. Native American Women Activism
Lesson Sequence A CHQ	Lesson Sequence B CHQ	Lesson Sequence C CHQ
To what extent were Black women's roles significant in shaping governmental policies and cultural forms?	**To what extent was the Chicana Feminist Movement significant in creating equity and reconfiguring cultural forms?**	**To what extent were Native American women significant in creating equity and reconfiguring cultural forms?**
Lesson CHQs for Sequence A	Lesson CHQs for Sequence B	Lesson CHQs for Sequence C
1. How have historians discussed Black women's narratives in civil rights history? (Historiography/ Historical significance)	1. What caused the rise of Chicana Feminist Ideology? (Causation/Significance)	1. What caused Native American women to feel the need to break away from the American Indian Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement? (Causation/Significance)

Figure 5: Unit of Study Lesson Grid

uprising of many other social movements (which were concepts my students demonstrated), I created a lesson sequence for students to engage with, beginning with (a) The Rise of Black Feminism, moving into (b) The Chicana Feminist Movement, and ending with (c) Native American Women Activism (**Figure 5**).

While every lesson sequence helped students uncover the narratives of women of color movements during the civil rights era, the unit also focused on refining the students' understanding of the historical significance—in other words, asking, "What makes an event or topic worthy of our attention?" As confirmed in earlier lessons, my students struggled with rating what was significant or not in history, and the extent of the significance. The students attributed significance to "someone remarkable," yet the idea of "being remarkable" varied depending on the person asked. In *The Idea of a Historical Education* (1980), Geoffrey Partington suggested applying a set of interrelated criteria in discussing why and to what extent people or events matter.[43] Since "significance" can become
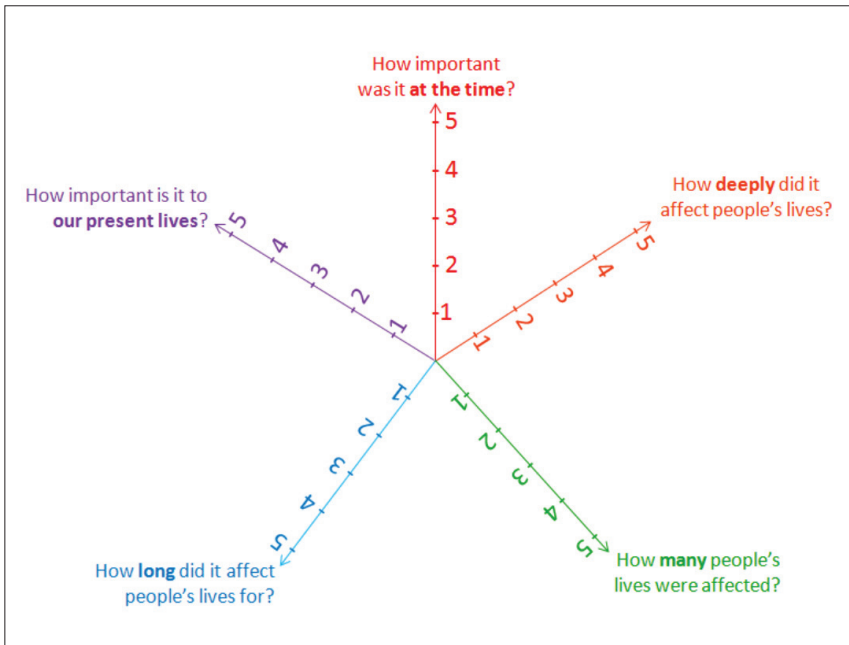
Figure 6: Visual Representation for Partington's Historical Significance

an abstract concept, Partington framed historical significance within the following criteria (as visualized in **Figure 6**):

Importance: *How important was it at the time?*
Profundity: *How deeply did it affect people's lives?*
Quantity: *How many people's lives were affected?*
Durability: *How long did it affect people's lives?*
Relevance: *How important is it to our present lives?*[44]

Using Partington's criteria, I molded similar criteria and reframed this visual chart with an approach I call "The Three Rs" (**Figure 7**), which the students applied with great success. Before investigating Black women's cultural forms and acts of resistance, I asked students, "Is wearing a 'natural' hairstyle as a Black woman during the 1970s significant?" A student answered, "No, it is not important because it is just hair like, more for fashion," and many agreed with this idea. However, after a lesson on thinking about historical significance using The Three Rs and engaging with sources of hair as resistance, students developed a more in-depth analysis of the question.

The Three Rs

1. <u>**Results**</u> **in Change**: How did groups try to make a change? In what ways were people affected by this change?

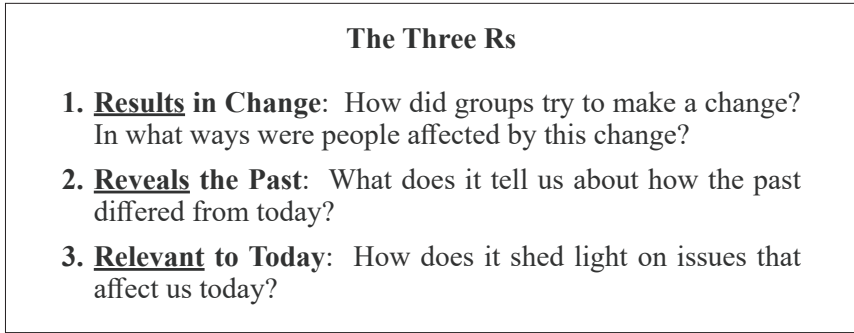2. <u>**Reveals**</u> **the Past**: What does it tell us about how the past differed from today?

3. <u>**Relevant**</u> **to Today**: How does it shed light on issues that affect us today?

Figure 7: "The Three Rs" and Historical Significance

Unit Summative Assessment

Once students navigated through the women of color lessons, they completed a summative assessment to determine if they understood the concepts presented in the unit plan and, ultimately, if they answered the main unit question using The Three Rs criteria.

The summative assessment challenged students to create a zine that included articles about women of color during the civil rights era. Their main article addressed our central unit question. The reasoning for assigning a zine project rather than an essay demonstrates culturally responsive assessment, which ties back to CRT/CSP practices. According to Geneva Gay, adjusting the way we administer assessment is also a culturally relevant teaching practice.[45] Instead of giving students formal assessments such as essays or multiple-choice tests that do not foster creativity, project-based learning allows students to showcase their learning differently.[46] Since my students enjoy working together and are creative, I tailored my summative assessment to give them a creative way to express their understanding of the unit and support their academic needs. However, most importantly, the zine gave my students a medium to express their cultural resistance.

Looking at the data provided by my students' zines, it is evident that they understood the significance of cultural forms for women of color. In their creations (as shown in **Figure 8**, **Figure 9**, and **Figure 10**), students articulated well-written responses and used the historical significance criteria. In addition, students used the related vocabulary presented at the beginning of the unit while expressing
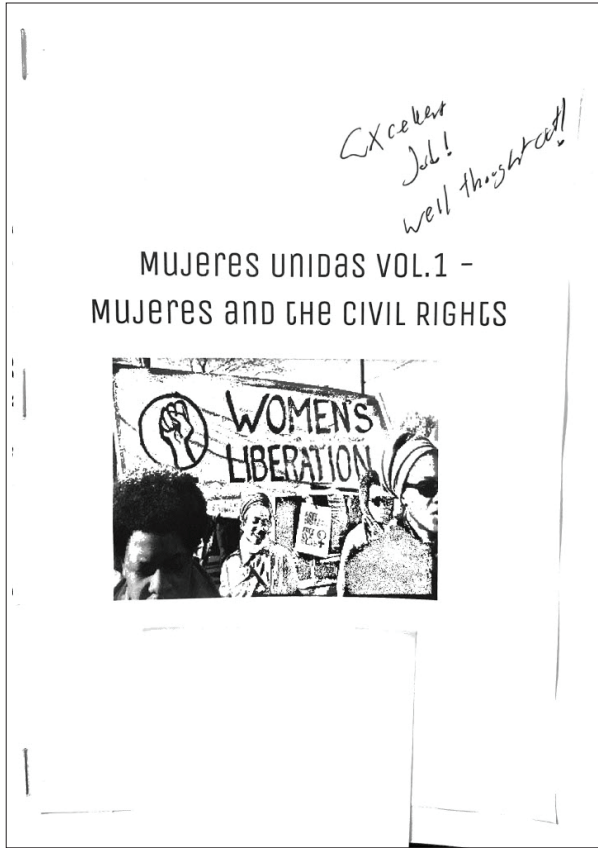
Figure 8: Student-Created Zine on Women of Color in the Civil Rights Era

their creativity. Two groups did not fully complete their assessment out of the six that submitted their zine. Although these two groups only completed some parts of the zine, the students did complete the main article by answering the unit question. Realizing that some groups may need more writing support, I later added a podcast component to the assessment to provide other methods for students to reflect on their learning.

Post-Unit Evaluation

The student reflection on the unit offered data to assess if my students understood the concepts and, more importantly, if they

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Figure 9: Student-Created Zine on Women of Color in the Civil Rights Era

enjoyed the unit. For example, I used a Google form that contained seven open-ended questions, such as "What is one way this unit changed how you think about Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movements?" Student A's response demonstrated how the unit made students rethink social movements and move away from the "one-hero" narrative, with the student also commenting on how cultural forms can be a form of resistance:

> To be honest, I thought mlk was the only one that ended segregation, but after this unit, I learned that it was many people involved and it was an everyday fight. Also that there are different ways to protest and it is effective like Black women wearing natural hair or dashikis, also chicana creating art.
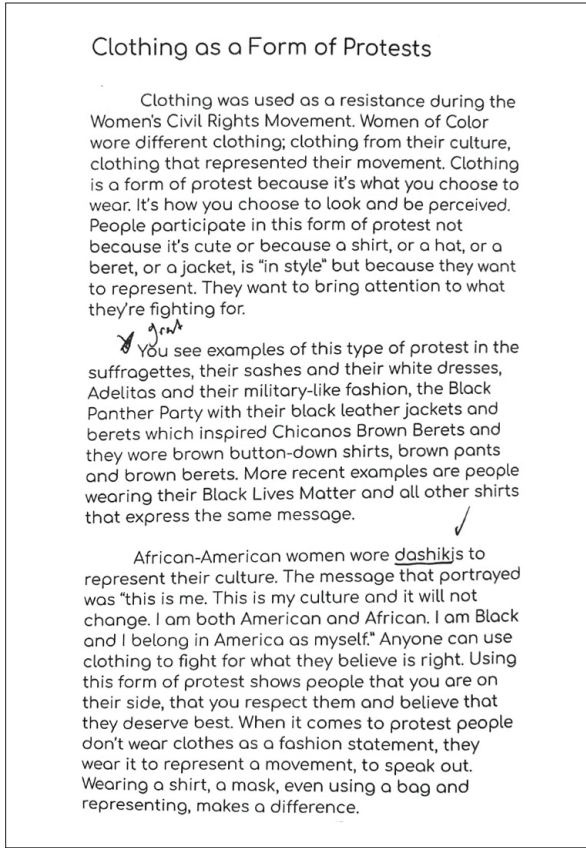
Clothing as a Form of Protests

Clothing was used as a resistance during the Women's Civil Rights Movement. Women of Color wore different clothing; clothing from their culture, clothing that represented their movement. Clothing is a form of protest because it's what you choose to wear. It's how you choose to look and be perceived. People participate in this form of protest not because it's cute or because a shirt, or a hat, or a beret, or a jacket, is "in style" but because they want to represent. They want to bring attention to what they're fighting for.

You see examples of this type of protest in the suffragettes, their sashes and their white dresses, Adelitas and their military-like fashion, the Black Panther Party with their black leather jackets and berets which inspired Chicanos Brown Berets and they wore brown button-down shirts, brown pants and brown berets. More recent examples are people wearing their Black Lives Matter and all other shirts that express the same message.

African-American women wore dashikis to represent their culture. The message that portrayed was "this is me. This is my culture and it will not change. I am both American and African. I am Black and I belong in America as myself." Anyone can use clothing to fight for what they believe is right. Using this form of protest shows people that you are on their side, that you respect them and believe that they deserve best. When it comes to protest people don't wear clothes as a fashion statement, they wear it to represent a movement, to speak out. Wearing a shirt, a mask, even using a bag and representing, makes a difference.

Figure 10: Student-Created Zine on Women of Color in the Civil Rights Era

Another question in the post-unit assessment asked, "Do you think the representation of Black Indigenous People of Color is important in U.S. History?" Student B's response reflected my students' awareness of the narrative of victimization in BIPOC history. As this student expressed, they are "tired of learning about slavery" as the curriculum's only narrative presented on Black history. However, the student expressed that the unit made them *see themselves* and *participate in change*. This powerful statement by my student ties back to the effectiveness of CSP and teaching history focused on resistance and social activism, where students of color saw themselves in the unit of study and created a sense of empowerment:
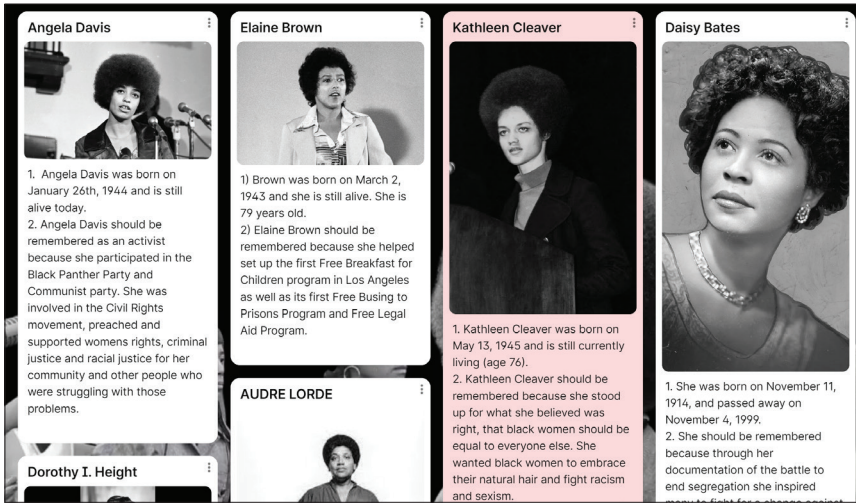
Figure 11: Student-Created Images from Lesson A.4: Black Women's Narratives

> Yes, very because, as a student of color im tired of learning about slavery, I want to learn about the resistance like this unit. By seeing how these women brought changed, I saw myself, and it has made me feel like I can also be a part of creating change. And also, I can protest through music or art or any other cultural form because it is also effective.

Additionally, students answered the question, "Now that you learned that ordinary people could bring change, how can we bring change to our South Central community?" Student C's response displayed a shift in the student becoming an agent of change. At the beginning of the class, students shared a sense of hopelessness; however, according to this student's response and many others, the students now believed that community is essential for change:

> At first, I thought it was not possible because so many bad things happen here, but now I see why community is important and the power that we all have.

Applying Data to Improve Future Teaching

The pre-assessment, summative assessment, and student reflection revealed that my culturally relevant/sustaining framework encouraged my students to connect to the unit of study and, as

> **Exit Ticket: "What is a new concept you learned today?"**
>
> I learned about people getting sidelined for their work, specifically women of color. People were able to ignore women for their work and how they weren't able to be seen as equals. Imagine putting in all this work being the reason this happened and it being seen as accidental. This should be taught everywhere else
>
> a new concept taht i personally had learned from todays lesson is the fact that women really arent given teh respect that they deserve. especially african american women as they contributed to a lot of things to get others out there such as the man himself marther luther king jr who is known as a historical figure. and taht if women fough back for tehir rights tehy werent shopwing obdient femininity and that they were accidentally put on a matriarch, so like all im saying is that women reallydont have much shown in history articles or books as they should be but now with more knowledge we begin to learn more about what women actually did to help.
>
> A new concept I learned today is that women were the ones that organized the civil rights movement. Eventhough women organized it and put effort into it they were put in the background. Women were the backbone of the organization but they were not aknowledged as much as the men. Women were not as important and they didnt have that much attention and they were always looked down on.

Figure 12: Student Responses to Lesson B.4 Exit Ticket: "What is a new concept you learned today?"

a result, improved student achievement. Although my students face social and academic barriers, they are resilient and meet my expectations. However, this only became possible by building authentic relationships and allowing a space of vulnerability from day one. In subsequent semesters, I allowed students to create podcasts as part of the summative assessment. A few of my students understood the content and could articulate it verbally, yet their writing became a barrier when asked to respond to the unit's central questions. The podcast option gives students another avenue to showcase their understanding. Podcasting also develops their voice and can be helpful for my ELL students that need additional language support.

Taking "Power" Back

Culturally relevant/sustaining teaching should not correlate with one unit of study, it should instead be an everyday implementation. Student achievement rises when students feel valued, seen, and represented in the narratives presented in their history class, as shown in the unit's data. The immediate result of the unit plan also revealed a newfound passion for combating social injustices within the students' community. Although inequities continue at John C. Fremont High School and student educational apathy remains, this unit gave my students undeniable hope. Teaching with a history-for-justice framework equipped students with an understanding of the past and its connection to the future. It provided a sense of social action and inspiration. Striving to present a diversity of perspectives and voices—including those historically marginalized or silenced—enables students to make sense of the present and shape a more just and equitable future.

The success of student-led activism and organizing at Fremont in 1968 became possible through unity and resistance. It came with acknowledging power in numbers, realizing young women's organizational skills, and understanding the inequities in educational resources for students of color. With an expansion of culturally relevant/sustaining teaching and historical narratives that reveal how the ordinary have power, the brewing of additional positive change awaits John C. Fremont High School.

Notes

1   Capitalizing Black is about claiming power. See Mike Laws, "Why We Capitalize 'Black' (and not 'white')," *Columbia Journalism Review*, June 16, 2020, <https://www.cjr.org/analysis/capital-b-black-styleguide.php>.

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7.   Jonathan Zimmerman, "Black Activism, White Resistance, and Multiculturalism," in *Whose America?: Culture Wars in the Public Schools*, second ed. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2022), 98-118.

8.   Kristan A. Morrison, Holly H. Robbins, and Dana Gregory Rose, "Operationalizing Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: A Synthesis of Classroom-Based Research," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 41, no. 4 (October 2008): 433-452.

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16.   Los Angeles Unified School District, "LAUSD School Experience Survey Results, Student Subgroups 2020-21 (Fremont SH: School Climate, Connecteness)," <https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/17633>.

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