

Teaching Movements in History: Understanding Collective Action, Intersectionality, and Justice in the Past

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MOVEMENTS have been the driving force of social change through most of human history. As a group of people working together to advance shared ideas, movements have operated differently depending on the period, context, and culture. Yet humans have long used movements for justice to improve their societies, from ancient times to the present. Whether it be Roman slave revolts (73-71 BCE), the movement of women seeking equality with men in Heian Japan (794-1185 CE), the global abolitionist movement (1700s-1800s CE), the modern Civil Rights Movement in the United States (1950s-1970s CE), the Anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa (1950s-1990s CE), or the global Youth Strike for Climate (2018-present), people have used their collective actions to demand those in power make societies more fair (granted, the term “movement” only dates back to the early nineteenth century and the term “activist” to the early twentieth century). Yet despite the important impacts that movements had in the past that led to a more just present, most Americans generally hold low opinions of movements. In U.S. public opinion polls, the modern Civil Rights Movement is the only historical movement that has received positive

approval from a majority of Americans.¹ Similarly, Americans may ahistorically credit wide-scale social change to the actions of one individual, such as George Washington (credited for U.S. independence), Abraham Lincoln (abolishment of slavery), Gandhi (Indian independence), Martin Luther King Jr. (expansion of civil rights), or Nelson Mandela (ending apartheid in South Africa).

We see this as a major failing of history education. In the United States, but also many other nations, the history curriculum is often arranged around the experiences of powerful individuals. Traditionally, history units are organized around presidents, monarchs, or other leaders. Moreover, those individuals are almost exclusively white men, with a few exceptions usually for events that specifically relate to expanded freedom for people of color or women, such as the modern Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Suffrage Movement, or the Indian Independence Movement. In the history curriculum, as Chris Seeger, Tiffany Mitchell Patterson, and Maria Gabriela Paz argued:

[W]hite men are overrepresented and mythologized as individual heroes, while white women and Black people are portrayed as monolithic and are misrepresented. Many other groups, including Native Americans, Latino/a/x/e Americans, and Asian Americans appear minimally, and their portrayals are similarly dehumanized.²

We argue for a need to center the people, rather than individual leaders, and their experiences in the history classroom. The way we do this is to center movements for justice in the organization of history curriculum. This article outlines three important concepts that should guide how history teachers approach the reorganization of their curriculum around movements, and ways this can ultimately help students develop a stronger understanding of the past. First, teachers should emphasize the role of the people organized in movements and engaged *collective action* in the past and present. Second, teachers should illuminate the role of *intersectionality* in movements for justice. Third, teachers should help students understand the difference between movements *for* and *against* justice. Finally, we conclude this paper by presenting ways history teachers can do this work both as renegades and subversives, and how the role of community and school context influences how teachers might approach this work.

Organizing the history curriculum around the lives of ordinary people is not a new concept. With the emergence of social history as a type of historical study in the mid-twentieth century, scholars began to identify the ways that ordinary people's lives were influenced by historical events. In turn, some history teachers (at the K-12 and university levels) began centering different voices in their teaching. Moreover, organizations have been established to support history teachers in this work, including the Zinn Education Project.³ We hope this article outlines this approach and offers practical guidance for how a teacher can reimagine their curriculum through the lens of social history. At the same time, we also argue that all history *is* social history; it is crucial that when students may use other forms of historical study—for example, political, economic, or military history—that the everyday people and their experiences must be centered. We do this work in the spirit of historian and former American Historical Association president Carl Becker, who argued that every person must be their own historian, learning to use history as a tool to understand how we arrived at the present moment and recognize ways that history informs our future decisions as a democratic society.⁴ We argue the history that is most relevant to people's lives are those histories of everyday people organized in the movements that have shaped our current world—and will potentially shape our future world.

Movements and Collective Action

The study of history has long been organized around powerful individuals. It is not unusual in a present-day history classroom to see units on Julius Caesar and the End of the Roman Republic, Egyptian Pharaohs, the Qin Dynasty, the Age of Jackson, Victorian England, or the Reagan Era. When units are not organized around individual leaders, they are often framed by wars, which are usually the result of individual leaders' actions. Some historians have attributed this phenomenon to Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle's infamous lectures on "great men" and heroism in 1840, which seemed to spur an increased admiration for historical individual leaders in European culture.⁵ Yet, many histories, especially in European traditions, have been presented around so-called "great men" for over two millennia. For instance, historians in ancient Rome often framed their histories around the era of particular rulers.

The practice of organizing history around rulers or leaders (or wars) problematically gives historical agency not to the people who lived during those eras, but instead to those individuals with the most power at the time. It sends a clear message to students that a select group of individuals, usually affluent white men, shaped the past. Moreover, similar structures are even applied to the historical study of movements themselves. Movement leaders are portrayed as the movement themselves, often ignoring the fact that typically thousands or even millions of people were engaged in most movements. The quintessential example of this is when the modern Civil Rights Movement is portrayed to students primarily through the actions of Martin Luther King Jr. While King was a crucially important leader within the Civil Rights Movement, the movement could not have existed without its many other leaders and grassroots participants. Moreover, the movement included not only members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, but numerous other civil rights organizations engaged in the collective effort, such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Congress of Racial Equality, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Nation of Islam, and the Black Panther Party, all working simultaneously (with sometimes shared and sometimes divergent goals).

Learning history through the experiences of individuals, and especially powerful individuals, leads students to believe that the people (and by extension themselves) have little power to change the course of history. Yet movements could not have been possible without people like them (sometimes exactly like them, as many children and teenagers have participated and even led movements). When students continually receive implicit and explicit messages that social changes in the past were the result of actions by someone with great power or, at minimum, a single charismatic leader, they not only receive an inaccurate portrayal of the past, but also doubt the power of the people in the present or future to make social change.

Organizing history around individuals, with those individuals usually being white affluent men, also perpetuates the centering of hegemonic nationalistic dominant narratives while simultaneously diminishing and often essentializing the histories of people of color, women, the working classes, queer people, and immigrants.⁶ In regard to race specifically, Maribel Santiago and Eliana Castro

have argued that historical narratives often portray people of color as having monolithic experiences in the past. Instead, students must be presented with anti-essentialist histories that use content that “centers the distinct experiences of differing groups of people of color.”⁷ For instance, Santiago and Castro use the example of school desegregation related to Latino/a/x communities, and the 1940s case of *Mendez v. Westminster* specifically, as a prime issue that is often essentialized (portrayed as a “single story”). Yet when taught in more complex ways, studying the history of the segregation of Latino/a/x people can allow students to better understand how oppression affected Latino/a/x people differently within their group (including the role of colorism) and differently from other groups, while also framing the history around their resistance to injustice.⁸

The “great men” approach to history has had negative effects on our society’s understanding of the past. For example, in both of our social studies methods courses, we have long asked our future elementary and secondary teachers to interview children and adolescents about their study of the past. We have read hundreds of interviews with K-12 students where they generally attribute historical change to important individuals (sharing lines like “Then, Martin Luther King changed the world”) and indicate that they do not believe they can make a difference in the current or future worlds that they live in (“I would not have been able to do what Martin Luther King did”). These same framings of the past are common in surveys of adults’ historical understanding, who report learning at much higher rates about dominant groups and leaders (like the “Founding Fathers”).⁹ We speculate that students and adults tend to frame history around important individuals because it is how history is presented in our classrooms, as well as in the media and society writ large (even before they enter school, many students have been exposed to children’s literature portraying biographies of important people or have watched cartoons presenting historical events through the actions of single individuals).

Alternatively, history teachers should organize their curriculum around movements and highlight the collective actions of activists who worked against racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, xenophobia, and other forms of oppression.¹⁰ To illustrate this, we use the example of a world history unit on European imperialism in Africa. Traditionally, this unit focuses on powerful individuals and

rarely presents the era from the perspectives of Africans. Over the years, we have observed some history teachers lead their students in a Berlin Conference simulation, where they take on the roles of the various leaders of each European nation vying for imperial power and trade access in Africa. Teachers commonly have students read about the explorers David Livingstone and Henry Morton Stanley during British imperialism, or read imperialist works such as Rudyard Kipling's 1899 poem, "The White Man's Burden" (which was actually written in support of U.S. imperialism in the Philippines).¹¹ Lessons like these can be incredibly problematic, as they often do not include the voices of African people. Granted, some teachers may include a role for African leaders in their Berlin Conference simulation, despite that Africans were not allowed to attend the actual historical events, or include a critique of "The White Man's Burden" by having students read African American H. T. Johnson's "The Black Man's Burden" in response to Kipling's poem.¹² Moreover, European imperialism units rarely include examples of African resistance or achievement; instead, the main narrative presented is that Africans were without agency or were helpless in stopping the European invasion and that African nations were not as strong or sophisticated as European nations, which is historically inaccurate.

Instead, we argue that African perspectives must be centered in any unit on European imperialism. We would suggest beginning the unit (or, ideally, including several units before this unit) on Africa before European imperialism. It is essential that students know the great diversity of African peoples, the long history of African civilizations and empires, and the global role that Africa had in regard to education, economics, and culture before the nineteenth century. Next, teachers would organize the unit around Africans' initial reaction to the growing European invasion and then their organized and prolonged resistance to imperialism. Students could experience lessons that grapple with the legacy that the European enslavement and trade of African people had on the continent, the ways that African people resisted enslavement, and the ways that the Transatlantic Slave Trade created conditions that led to Europeans having numerous advantages during their colonization of parts of the continent. Instead of a Berlin Conference simulation, teachers could ask students to represent the many different nations of Africa; they could research and report on how different African nations

responded to European invasions, as well as their vast achievements domestically and internationally during that period. Students could read excerpts from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), which depicts how Igbo people in modern-day Nigeria might have experienced the European invasion.¹³ Students could examine maps of the over 3,000 African ethnic groups in relation to Europe's imperial maps to better understand how Europeans created their own colonial borders with little regard for African peoples. Students could investigate primary sources from various resistance movements, such as movements in Zimbabwe and the Mandinka Empire, and Ethiopia's enduring independence. Students should also be asked to draw similarities and differences between European imperialism in Africa with Asia and the Americas (as the imperialism was global). In a final project, students could research how different African nations resisted imperialism and how that eventually led to twentieth-century African independence movements.

Movements and Intersectionality

The study of history has long presented people from the past, especially people engaged in movements, as monolithic. We learn about activists from the Civil Rights Movements as primarily concerned about race-related discrimination. We learn about anti-war activists as mostly concerned about ending the Vietnam War. We learn about activists during the Gay Liberation Movement as mostly working to end heterosexism and homophobia. Yet, as activist and writer Audre Lorde wrote, as a queer black woman and mother:

I cannot afford the luxury of fighting one form of oppression only. I cannot afford to believe that freedom from intolerance is the right of only one particular group. And I cannot afford to choose between the fronts upon which I must battle these forces of discrimination, wherever they appear to destroy me. And when they appear to destroy me, it will not be long before they appear to destroy you.¹⁴

There has rarely been a movement for justice that only focused on one form of oppression. Civil Rights Movement participants understood that class and gender oppression intersect with racism, which was made clear during the Poor People's Campaign of 1968. Anti-war activists knew that the Vietnam War was the result of American hegemony, racism, and classism, which was often

expressed in the anti-war speeches of the era. People organized within the Gay Liberation Movement understood the intersections between heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia with racism, classism, and sexism, which was illuminated in the queer pamphlets and newspapers of the time. Yet it is uncommon for these movements to be taught in intersectional ways.

Depicting activists and movements as focusing on only one particular type of injustice sends two problematic messages. First, it positions movements as self-serving and unconcerned with others. It leaves students without a more complex understanding of how activists and movements must work in solidarity with others. Yet as Martin Luther King Jr. poignantly stated in his “Letter from Birmingham City Jail” (1963), “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”¹⁵ Activists for justice know this and realize that their success relies on cross-group coalition building. Second, it sends a message to students that society can only handle one major issue at a time. It gives people a sense that while their current time is complicated, the past was much simpler. Yet historians understand that the world has always been complex (likely no more or less than the present) and that there are always many movements operating simultaneously, sometimes with shared causes and sometimes with contradicting aims.

When teaching about movements, it is important for students to understand the role of intersectionality in society, how interlocking oppression often operates in the lives of people, and how justice activists attempt to work in solidarity to end oppression. As Kimberlé Crenshaw defined it, intersectionality is a concept that explains how systems of oppression overlap and result in distinct social experiences based on peoples’ interwoven social identities.¹⁶ Moreover, while dominant groups frequently ignore intragroup differences (often positing that the ultimate goal is to live in a world that is race-evasive, gender-evasive, class-evasive, etc.), it crucial that we acknowledge group differences and use them as lenses to understand the structural, political, and representational aspects of societies. Examining multiple layers of oppression is not intended to further victimize those who have historically faced oppression, but instead to bring to light a fuller picture to their experiences and help foster empathy.¹⁷ Teaching from an intersectional lens means helping students consider the multiple identities of the

activists involved in those movements.¹⁸ Yet it is common in curricular materials and textbooks for historical figures to be only acknowledged for one of their social identities (even when they clearly faced overlapping forms of oppression).

For example, women's suffrage is typically presented in U.S. history classrooms through the stories of middle- and upper-class straight white women. Students learn the individual stories of Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and later Alice Paul, and how they organized suffragists and used various tactics to advocate for votes for women. Yet this approach often leads to the marginalization or erasure of women of color, queer women, and poor women within that movement. It is common to see depictions of white suffragists without any mention of deep-seated racism, classism, and homophobia that existed within the movement and the broader society at the time. For example, no women of color were invited to the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention and the only person of color in attendance was Frederick Douglass, a black man. The conference was also primarily attended by upper-class white women, who were there to advocate for women of their class, but not necessarily all women, to receive the vote.¹⁹ As the movement advanced, the stories of Alice Paul were written and highlighted in the press and later in history texts, but accounts of others—such as Mary Church Terrell, a black woman whose parents were enslaved and who picketed alongside Alice Paul at the White House—were often left out. Terrell challenged white suffragists who often excluded black women, while also working to form the National Association of Colored Women with its infamous motto of “Lifting as we climb.”²⁰ She provides a helpful example of how overlapping oppression operates, and her lived experience provides an example of ways that women of color resisted both racial and gender inequality at the same time.

Alternatively, history teachers should explicitly teach about intersectionality and use it as a concept to better understand the lived experiences of people engaged in movements and how solidarity is built across movements. This will not only help students to gain awareness of how movements were able to build important bridges to other movements in the past, but also to assess if current-day movements are doing their work in similar ways. To illustrate how intersectionality can be approached in the history classroom, we use the example of the Stonewall Uprisings in 1969. The Stonewall

Uprisings have often been taught primarily through the experience of gay cisgender white men. Instead, students can be asked to also examine the ways that activists like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera overcame race, class, gender, health, and sexual orientation barriers as transwomen of color engaged in the same movement. Moreover, Stonewall should also be taught as only one event in a long history of queer activism and movement building. While Stonewall was certainly a trigger event contributing to the growing awareness by straight Americans of the modern Gay Rights Movement in the United States, teaching it as one of the only events in the movement lacks nuance and context. It would be essential to help students understand that homophobic laws were not universal across societies in the past, with some societies in ancient and modern times having varying degrees of acceptance for queer people. Students can examine a series of events that occurred in the twentieth century in the United States that led to Stonewall.²¹ This could include the invention of the term “homosexuality” in the nineteenth century and queer criminalization; the long history of hospitalization and pseudo-treatments for lesbian, gay, and trans people; as well as examples of resistance, such as the formation of the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis to advocate for gay and lesbian rights, the Compton’s Cafeteria Riot and formation of National Transsexual Counseling Unit to provide peer-support for trans people, and the evolving views of sexual orientation by psychological and legal groups. However, while teaching the Gay Liberation Movement, it is crucial that students not only learn about the decades of queer activism predating Stonewall, but also that much of that activism was done by queer people from other oppressed groups who recognized their own intersectionality (albeit, before the term was coined) and its importance within their movement. As Sylvia Rivera herself said of the period, “All of us were working for so many movements at the time. Everyone was involved with the women’s movement, the peace movement, the civil rights movement.”²² Queer rights overlapped with racial, gender, and class equality, but also with movements to stop war and violence. Moreover, when teaching the Civil Rights Movement, it would be important to highlight the intersectionality present in the role of queer civil rights leaders, such as Bayard Rustin, Lorraine Hansberry, James Baldwin, and Pauli Murray. Or when teaching about the anti-war movement of the 1960s and 1970s to emphasize

groups such as Mothers Against the Vietnam War, who understood that war related to both motherhood and sexism. We need to teach a more complete picture of movements honoring all of the people who were engaged in the work, as well as the ways their understandings of intersectionality influenced their work. By teaching about activists' overlapping identities, and how they related to both oppression and privilege, we can help students understand intersectionality in the present day and how it relates to their lives. Additionally, teachers should ask students to look for intersectionality within current-day justice movements. They may discover that multiple leaders of the 2017 Women's March were queer women of color or that black women have been on the front lines of Black Lives Matter activism. They may even see their own peers in the School Strike for Climate arguing that issues of racism, classism, gender, and hegemony are all part of the need to stop global warming and climate change.

Movements For (and Against) Justice

Not all movements were/are just. The European colonization of the Americas was an inherently unjust movement. Pro-slavery was an inherently unjust movement. Fascism was/is an inherently unjust movement. The Ku Klux Klan and White Citizens' Councils were inherently unjust movements. Current-day white nationalism is an inherently unjust movement. It is crucial that history teachers help students distinguish between movements for justice and movements against justice. Not all people working together to advance shared ideas are working toward goals of fairness or freedom. In fact, some are organized to do the exact opposite.

We suggest using the following framework with students for helping them judge the justice-orientation of movements. Based on the work of numerous scholars,²³ regardless of topical focus, we argue that for a movement to be considered just, their members must be working toward the following three goals:

- 1. Advancing fairness and equity.** Does a movement advocate that all be treated without discrimination and that all are having their needs met?
- 2. Ensuring freedom and democracy.** Does a movement promote that all be able to act, speak, think, and live without restraint, and with self-determination and a government by and for the people?

3. Eliminating oppression and hegemony. Does a movement work toward a society where groups or individuals do not face unjust control or treatment, and are not forced by dominant groups to conform socially, culturally, linguistically, politically, or economically?

We encourage teachers to use these criteria as a tool for students to analyze if a movement is just, *and to what degree*. For each framework category, it is a continuum from “in no aspects” to “in all aspects.” Students must learn about the importance of nuance when judging the justice-orientation of movements. History is not black and white, but rather gradations of gray. While there are some clear examples of just or unjust movements, students need to be able to think of movements as existing on a spectrum that goes from more just to less just—and be able to detect movements that are unjust and not on the spectrum. This will prepare students to judge current and future movements to determine if they are truly just.

Moreover, these criteria for just movements can be used on all movements across the political spectrum. While all people will use their particular political values to make sense of and define ideas such as fairness, equity, freedom, democracy, or working against oppression or hegemony, we find it troubling that a politician may argue that these values do not belong to their political ideology. We argue that these views of justice should and must transcend political parties (as many movements often do), as they are rooted in commonly held human rights and values. As we have argued in earlier scholarship:

[J]ustice is nonpartisan. For us to survive as a society, we all must be continually seeking justice. While we may have different political beliefs or conceptions of how to achieve this, ultimately seeking a more just and fair society must be the main goal of citizenship, education, and specifically history education.²⁴

Students will use their own values to make decisions about justice; being honest with students and parents about this approach will hopefully help avoid some of the current political crosswinds related to teaching about justice and oppression. By having students examine justice movements, they create and define their own set of values and guidelines, which will hopefully not only empower students, but also protect teachers, as both must navigate the ever-changing and sometimes uncertain political climates around their schools.

In the history classroom, movements are traditionally depicted as challenging the status quo and advocating for greater justice. For instance, abolitionism, the labor movement, and the anti-Vietnam War movement all challenged government policies and actions that their activists viewed as unjust. Yet there are movements, some of which may be reactionary counter-movements, that aim to maintain the status quo and inhibit or reverse justice. For example, the anti-immigrant Know-Nothing movement of the nineteenth century used political and social power to restrict immigration and target immigrant communities, in some cases through violence. Moreover, there is often an unspecified yet large group of people who use their collective social, economic, and political pressure against reforms that would expand fairness, freedom, and democracy for others. U.S. President Richard Nixon used the label of the “silent majority” during a 1969 television address to position justice activists as running counter to an unspecified number of people who support the status quo (albeit, others argued that the true silent majority was against the war and growing). It is important for students to understand how those in positions of power will attempt to frame movements for justice as contrary to the will of the people (whether it is true or not).²⁵ Otherwise, students are left to wonder why certain movements were not more successful or why it took so long for their more just social visions to be enacted. For example, one cannot understand the anti-Vietnam War movement without understanding the so-called “silent majority” that supported the war. One cannot understand the abolitionist movement without understanding how the pro-slavery movement maintained the status quo and expanded the protection and expansion of enslavement alongside many white non-enslavers actively supporting or at minimum being complicit to the system.

It is also important to recognize that there is a continuum of justice to any movement. While it is often clear when a movement is unjust, the reality is that some movements are partially or primarily just, but include aspects that are unjust. Additionally, reasonable and informed students may disagree on the levels to which a movement was/is just, and that is part of the analysis and discussion process. Using these justice movement criteria, it becomes clear that some movements were/are unjust. For example, fascism (or related ideological movements like Nazism) advanced unfairness, inequity, authoritarianism, confinement, oppression, and hegemony. As a

movement, fascism would be disqualified as a just movement in every aspect. Yet there were movements that advocated for justice, but also included unjust aspects. For instance, some members of the Progressive Movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries advocated for eugenics, which involved voluntary or forced sterilization of people deemed undesirable in society, alongside their advocacy for poverty reduction, regulation of industry (especially against monopolies and increased worker protections), and support for immigrants. The point of this exercise is to not have students discount certain movements (except those that are unjust), but instead see how justice movements exist along a spectrum and how the dominant culture and oppression of a historical era (or the present day) are embedded within some justice movements.

It is essential that teachers teach unjust movements in conjunction with just movements, as it helps students develop a more accurate understanding of the past. Some movements seek to maintain the status quo, while other movements aim to change society. Otherwise, students are left to believe that history was unchangeable and, as a result, history can be disempowering—especially for students of color and students from other groups that face oppression. If teaching mostly focuses on the injustices that happened to their ancestors without including how their ancestors resisted, survived, and succeeded, it leaves students without a sense of hope and with a potential belief that they cannot resist or succeed in the present. Relatedly, it is important for students to learn that some people in the past were also organized to maintain oppression, which will ultimately help students detect similar groups in the present. For example, learning about the Ku Klux Klan and White Citizens' Councils in the twentieth century may help students draw connections to white supremacist groups today. By positioning history as a series of just and unjust movements actively working in tension with each other, it allows students to see that as people living through history, they must detect movements against justice in the present and decide which movements they will support (and that there are many different ways we can support movements; not all activists are “marching in the streets”).

To show how this may look in the classroom, we use an example of a unit on European colonization of the Americas from a U.S. history course. This era of history contained numerous movements for and against justice. Yet it is traditionally taught as if there was relative

agreement among the European colonists and relative agreement among native peoples related to the issues of the period (which is not accurate) and that the outcomes of colonization were almost predetermined (that Europeans would rule over the continent). Instead, we contend that this unit should focus on the work of justice movements—while also highlighting unjust movements—during the period.

From the first arrival of settler-colonists in the Americas, indigenous people led movements against European invasion and incursion.²⁶ These movements were so powerful that they even convinced some white settler-colonists during the era to become allies in solidarity. By framing this era as a struggle between those who supported and those who opposed settler-colonialism, it better helps students to understand the principles of resistance and survivance. It also emphasizes the agency of native people, which is erased or diminished when this unit is traditionally taught from the European perspective. Moreover, during the so-called “colonial period,” native activists engaged in many types of resistance (to refuse to accept or comply) and survivance (to survive and have active presence), with some involving uprisings and others being subversive and hidden. This unit can help students understand that movements may use a number of different tools to achieve justice. It is also important to note that many indigenous justice movement leaders have been missed or intentionally erased from the historical record. Moreover, indigenous histories were often recorded through oral records and lost through time. As a result, many of the movements that were recorded were often done so by Europeans (who more often used written histories) through European perspectives (which simultaneously erased native people from the historical record).²⁷ Teachers should keep this in mind when teaching these histories to seek and use native historians’ work.

We also argue that this unit must begin with native life before the European invasion, which would involve students understanding the histories of the thousands of distinct nations and tribes across the Americas, including how their societies were complex and advanced long before European arrival.²⁸ Teachers often center the white experience in the history curriculum; in many cases, the curriculum begins literally when Europeans first step foot in a place. This has a particularly damaging influence on students’ thinking, as it erases native peoples’ histories and positions them

as only existing within their interactions with white people. Next, the unit would center the indigenous experience of the European invasion. We suggest using Kwakwaka'wakw author and artist Gord Hill's *The 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance Comic Book* (2010) to help students understand how native people responded to various incidents of settler-colonization, connecting those past events to the present era, including the invasion of Christopher Columbus.²⁹ Students should then ask questions that center indigenous perspectives during events such as the Aztecs' and Incas' resistance to Spanish colonizers, the Powhatan Uprising and Opechancanough's leadership, Metacomb's Uprising in New England (called "King Philip's War" by Europeans), and the relationships that various native nations made with Europeans during the French and Indian War or War of Conquest, the Mashpee Revolt, and Tecumseh's Uprising.

It is also important to teach about the role of solidarity within justice movements. This unit could spotlight the numerous unjust movements to expand and maintain enslavement, prevent the free exercise of religion, and subjugate women, trans people, and people in lower social classes while showing each movement's direct relationship to settler-colonialism. For example, this unit could include lessons on Bacon's Rebellion (class struggle), Anne Hutchinson (women's rights and freedom of religion), Mary Dyer's protests (freedom of religion), the Stono Uprising and New York City Conspiracy (abolition and anti-racism), Public Universal Friend/Society of Universal Friends (transgender rights), Edenton Tea Party (women's rights), and Gabriel's Conspiracy (abolition and anti-racism). It could also highlight how indigenous nations had culturally different views of sexual orientation and gender (such as the concept of Two-Spirit people among the Diné and other indigenous nations)³⁰ and how race and social class were European concepts imposed on native people.³¹ By connecting native justice movements with other movements of the time, history teachers can also highlight the solidarity that often occurred across these movements (which is also needed to sustain present-day justice movements). For instance, there was often collaboration between movements for economic freedom and anti-slavery movements. At the same time, it would be important to show how solidarity was not a guarantee between justice movements. For example,

while many white women's rights advocates also participated in the abolition movement (although certainly not all did), there was relatively little solidarity with native peoples' struggles (granted, some nineteenth-century women's rights activists sought to learn from native governmental and family structures, such as those of the Haudenosaunee).³²

Renegade Teachers and Subversive Teachers

Thus far, we have outlined examples of how to make curricular changes that will allow history students to see activism and movements in a deliberate way through collective action, intersectionality, and justice. However, we understand that there are many barriers that some history teachers experience in doing justice work in their classrooms. Moreover, we are in a period where the current political climate makes this work more difficult. Rightfully, teachers are worried about upsetting parents, having unsupportive administrators, and navigating so-called "divisive concepts" laws in some states that aim to silence the teaching of race/racism, sexual orientation/homophobia, and transgender and gender non-binary people, targeting the employment of teachers who engage in justice practices. Their fear is real and valid. Headlines from across the United States include:

- "Fired Over CRT: Missouri High School Teacher Accused of Teaching 'Critical Race Theory' Loses Job"
- "Teachers Accused of Promoting CRT by Celebrating Black History Month"
- "A White Teacher Taught White Students About White Privilege. It Cost Him His Job"
- "Cape Coral Middle School Teacher Fired Over Discussion of Sexual Orientation, Pride Flags"
- "Florida Teen Says They're Being Investigated for Stonewall Lesson"³³

It is no surprise that teachers are afraid and looking for ways to do justice work that will not cost them their livelihood. In the following section, we suggest that teachers can do this work as both renegades and subversives depending on their school context and culture.

In some cases, teachers may engage as a renegade, as Ruchi Agarwal-Rangnath, Alison G. Dover, and Nick Henning called

it,³⁴ and can resist “out in the open” injustice through the school curriculum. They may have the community support or professional status to publicly break conventions; and in some cases, they can do so overtly, because their social context affords them the opportunity to do so. Yet, in other contexts, teachers may need to be subversives or work for justice within the system in ways that support their students’ needs, but possibly do not draw significant attention to themselves. They are revolutionaries, but as part of an underground resistance movement. We appreciate the analogy coined by Prentice Chandler that some teachers (subversives) must “rag[e] against the machine, *quietly*,”³⁵ while other teachers (renegades) can do so loudly. Moreover, this is not an either/or dichotomy. Some days, a teacher may choose to be a renegade, and other days, they must be more subversive in the work. Teachers need to decide what works best within each circumstance.

Subversive Teachers

Many teachers may not be able to openly question the social norms in their community for a number of reasons, from job security to personal security. Yet they also understand that this work must be done for the well-being of their students and our democratic society. As such, they are forced to do their justice-oriented work in more hidden and nuanced ways. The idea of teaching as a subversive activity was introduced by Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner decades ago.³⁶ They argued that schools, as a bedrock of a democratic society, must allow and encourage students to express themselves and think freely, as well as challenge the status quo, and that teachers play an important role in fostering that learning environment. Much of what they wrote in 1969 still holds up today. For example, they wrote: “In our own society, if one grows up in a language environment which includes and approves such a concept as ‘white supremacy,’ one can quite ‘morally’ engage in the process of murdering civil-rights workers.”³⁷ Those lines would certainly resonate with many activists in the Black Lives Matter movement today. Similarly, rooting these ideas in the history classroom, Charles L. Mitsakos and Ann T. Ackerman explained that “teaching social studies must indeed be a subversive activity if teachers are going to be successful in helping their students sustain their ‘ever-

renewing society.”³⁸ They argue society has been moving in an anti-democratic direction for some time and “schools have backed away from promoting innovative thinking and from the commitment to education for democracy.”³⁹

Those who must take a subversive approach still have many avenues for doing this work. First, regardless of being a subversive or renegade teacher, in order to do this work, teachers must look inward to examine themselves and think critically about what bias they hold and what social identities they do not fully understand. Teachers must examine the language environments and social contexts where they live and have lived. They must deeply examine their own curriculum and pedagogy, and those of their colleagues. They must ask themselves whose voices are being centered, and whose voices are being left out. For example, many white teachers tend to center white people when teaching about enslavement or the Civil Rights Movement.⁴⁰ As Hasan Kwame Jeffries explained, we must be careful not to trivialize enslavement or any other racism-related topic, but teach the true history, without further traumatizing our students.⁴¹ Once teachers have done substantial reflective work on themselves, they must begin engaging in community work. This is essential to subversive teaching. Teachers must engage parents, guardians, and community members early and often, which would include inviting families and community members into their classrooms, communicating about the curriculum, and building coalitions of administrators, fellow teachers, and community members to be allies in this work. This work cannot be done alone and there is safety in numbers.

For subversive teachers, it may be easier to start small and local. Moreover, it is essential to provide room for student voice and choice. Let the students drive the change in topic and action. They may choose to start a letter-writing campaign to the school board to make the school calendar more inclusive of religious observances, to look at data in school discipline policies in terms of race and gender and present different approaches to their administration, or to examine ways their school can be more environmentally just. By starting small and local, students can see the results of their activism for change first-hand. Next, help students build on those changes to focus on national issues. This allows students to learn about the levers of political change that movements use and investigate issues of concern to them, without the teacher being seen as advocating for a particular partisan stance.

Renegade Teachers

Due to their circumstances, renegade teachers have more leeway to be public about their justice work. There are particular measures available to teachers who have the ability to be more overt about this work. Renegade teachers have the opportunity to engage in curriculum writing—and rewriting. Here, history teachers can re-center the narrative to teach non-dominant groups in complex intersectional ways. Teachers can rewrite the curriculum (including the sources they have students use) from the point of view of indigenous people, people of color, women, queer people, poor and working-class people, people with dis/abilities, neurodivergent people, and other non-dominant groups. Renegade teachers can lead professional development workshops for their colleagues on how to audit curriculum and look at the ways that their history classrooms are being structured. They can offer to observe classrooms and keep track of what student voices are being privileged and for how long. Renegade teachers can work openly to dismantle the system by looking more broadly into their school community and its related policies. Beyond the curriculum, they should continue to ask hard questions: Is the district or school you work in engaging in active anti-racism? Is there a gender bias present? Are LGBTQ+ students supported? How are non-dominant groups treated? This is an opportunity to do deep examinations of injustice throughout the system and work for equitable changes. Renegade teachers have the opportunity to be teacher activists for justice within their schools, while also modeling that for their students. Finally, renegade teachers need to engage in partnership with students, school staff, and community. In this work, it is essential that teachers uplift student voices, especially those students from oppressed groups, and equally essential that students have spaces within school to not only feel safer, but also work in solidarity with others.

Conclusion

History has long been taught through the narratives of powerful individuals and especially through the experiences of so-called “great men.” Yet social change in the past (and present) has primarily been driven by the actions of everyday people who are engaged in movements. As such, there is a problematic disconnect between the

way that we teach history and the way history is made. Moreover, this sends messages to students that historical outcomes were almost predetermined, were the result of one powerful person's actions, and that they as students are not history-makers in the present. This needs to change. History students deserve a curriculum that gives them the ability to engage in their communities and prepares them for the responsibilities of citizenship. We argue that by transforming history to focus on movement building, centering the narratives and experiences of non-dominant groups, and using intersectionality to examine how people work in solidarity to end oppression, we will improve the learning experiences of history students—and help those students to be more prepared to confront the social dilemmas of the present and future.

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