

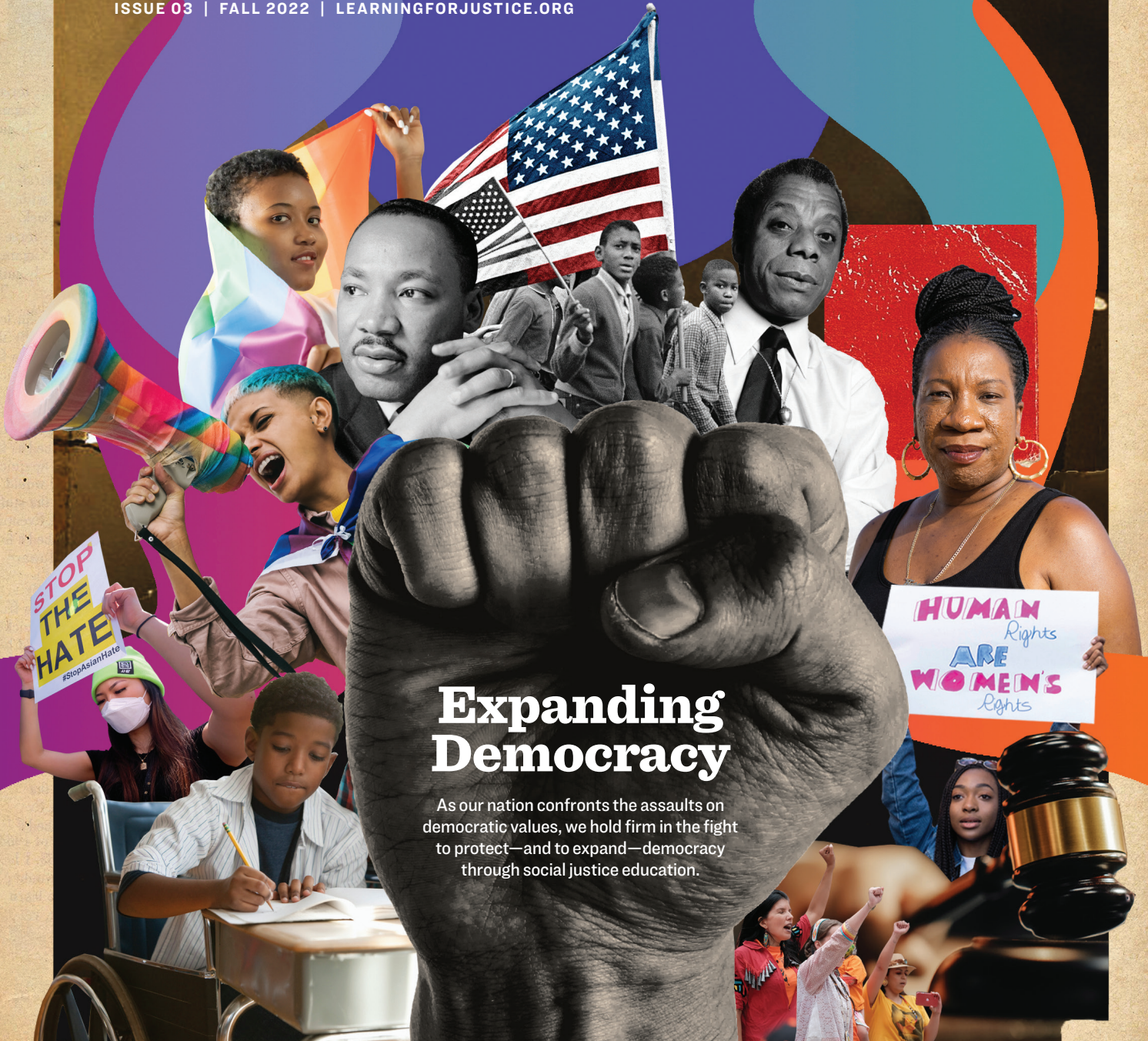
**Intersecting Justice Movements**  
Connect Past and Present  
Freedom Struggles

**School-to-Prison Pipeline**  
Reform Harsh Discipline Practices

**Prevention of Online Extremism**  
Equip a Network to Support Youth

# LEARNING FOR JUSTICE

ISSUE 03 | FALL 2022 | [LEARNINGFORJUSTICE.ORG](https://learningforjustice.org)



## Expanding Democracy

As our nation confronts the assaults on democratic values, we hold firm in the fight to protect—and to expand—democracy through social justice education.







NEW GUIDE

# Advocating for Teaching Honest History: What Educators Can Do



**SCHOOLS HAVE HISTORICALLY BEEN THE BATTLEGROUND FOR JUSTICE,** and the struggle for education is the struggle for democracy. Educators across the country are committed to teaching honest history. While some politicians and a powerful few seek to erase uncomfortable truths from history, widespread support for teaching honest history remains. Learning for Justice’s new guide—*Advocating for Teaching Honest History: What Educators Can Do*—offers resources and tools for teaching honest history in the classroom and strategies for advocating for honest history education in school communities.

Download the guide as well as register for the Advocating for Teaching Honest History workshop online by visiting [learningforjustice.org/Advocate-THH-Fall22](https://learningforjustice.org/Advocate-THH-Fall22)





# LEARNING FOR JUSTICE

ISSUE 03 | FALL 2022

- 5 Perspectives**
- 6 Article Spotlight**
- 8 Why I Teach**  
*Visibility is Power*
- 9 Why I Serve**  
*Belonging*
- 11 Youth Activism**  
*End Poverty. PERIOD.*
- 13 Learning Together**  
*Building Connections Across Communities*
- 15 Mental Health Matters**  
*A Care Plan for Honest History and Difficult Conversations*
- 62 Staff Picks**  
*What We're Reading*
- 64 One World Poster**



## ON THE COVER

In promoting diversity and fighting racism, inclusive education programs forged pathways toward building an equitable democracy.

ILLUSTRATION BY **DAKARAI AKIL**





**IN THIS ISSUE ▶**

*Inspire your students with uplifting words from James Baldwin featured on our latest One World Poster!*



**18 Expand Democracy Through Intersecting Movements**

The connections between past and present intersecting movements in the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Civil Rights Memorial Center educate and inspire individuals to continue the fight for justice.

**24 Community Organizing Uplifts Immigrant Students**

Tapping into their own agency and communities, immigrant students and their families are finding ways to mitigate serious obstacles.

**30 Decarceration Begins With School Discipline Reform**

Educators have a role in ending discipline that criminalizes youth. Reforms, including trauma-informed and restorative practices, can disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline.

**36 Inclusive Education Benefits All Children**

In confronting attacks on LGBTQ+ students’ rights to representation and safety in public education, we hold firm to creating inclusive and affirming learning spaces.

**42 Centering Diverse Parents in the CRT Debate**

Parents of color and parents of conscience, whose children make up the majority of students in public education, must be centered in conversations on race and inclusive education.

**48 Prevention and Resilience: Supporting Young People Through Polarizing Times**

During this time of political and social turmoil, build networks of trusted adults to help young people understand, contextualize and counter manipulative and harmful information.

**54 Confronting Ableism on the Way to Justice**

To build a society that advances the human rights of all people requires the social justice movement to be intentional in including intersecting identities and diverse equity struggles.

**58 Creating a Society Rooted in Justice**

Nationally recognized anti-racist and anti-bias writer and educator Britt Hawthorne provides insights on raising children to become global citizens.





# LEARNING FOR JUSTICE

A PROJECT OF THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER

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THE MISSION OF LEARNING FOR JUSTICE IS TO HELP EDUCATORS, PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS AND COMMUNITIES EDUCATE CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO BE ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN A DIVERSE DEMOCRACY.



## Perspectives

*“It is a time not just for compassionate words, but compassionate action.”*

—Marian Wright Edelman



**“CHILDREN DON’T COME** in pieces,” Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president emeritus of the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF), reminded her staff daily. Her message resonates with me in this contentious struggle for public education and, ultimately, the future of Black and Brown children. Anti-democratic laws and policies produce hostile environments, demonstrating that education is the battlefield for justice. The treatment of children from communities experiencing

systemic oppressions—those at the intersection of race, gender, poverty and geography—will determine the fate of our democracy. Equity across the continuum of education is essential for the pursuit of justice and the expansion of democracy.

We must boldly redefine the narrative of education by recognizing that the continuum of education is lifelong—it stretches from the cradle to adulthood. This progression means expanding the notion that education occurs solely in schools to include home, readiness programs, libraries, voting districts and much more. Narrow views of education have been used to justify limitations put upon our youth and the neglect of inclusive practices. It’s not enough to know one part of the continuum; we must take a holistic approach and learn how multiple systems influence the trajectory of a child’s life.

Through the lens of this inclusive continuum of education, Learning for Justice unapologetically centers the narratives of children made vulnerable by systemic oppression. By addressing the inequities to which these young people are subjected, we work to create a society that doesn’t diminish the narrative of others but embraces the narrative of all. Education is a collective movement, not simply the

means for individual upward mobility. When not burdened by the structures of white supremacy, education can increase equity and instill lifelong values of justice.

This magazine issue highlights the inseparable struggles for equitable education and democracy. LFJ Senior Writer Coshandra Dillard explores the learning experience at The Civil Rights Memorial Center, connecting past, present and intersecting freedom struggles. And disability rights activist Keith Jones reminds us that while we’ve made progress, the equity movement fails to fully reflect the diversity of human experience. We also feature stories that advocate for models of equity and justice. Writer Anthony Conwright examines discipline reform to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, while Dorothee Benz, Ph.D., points out positive models of immigrant communities supporting students. Melanie Willingham-Jaggers and GLSEN highlight attacks on LGBTQ+ students’ rights and urge us to create affirming learning spaces. Parents,

caregivers and communities are powerful collaborators in inclusive education and thus Ivory Toldson, Ph.D., advises centering diverse parents in conversations about critical race theory (CRT). Writer and educator Britt Hawthorne provides insights into raising anti-racist children who will become global citizens. And Lydia Bates of SPLC’s Intelligence Project highlights models to protect youth and counter manipulative information during this time of political and social turmoil.

The struggle for democracy is dynamic and vibrant, and at its heart is action. From the time a limited form of democracy was introduced, abolitionists and activists across a 400-year span challenged the institution to expand—that struggle is foundational to our country. Today, through our work in education and advocacy, we steadfastly answer that same call to action by promoting equitable education that centers children from communities that have been disempowered. I am inspired by the Maasai tribe in East Africa, whose traditional greeting to one another is, “How are the children?” During these polarized times, we must ask that question along the continuum of education—and be intentional in our actions to prioritize the well-being of children experiencing systemic harm. Let us live the words of Marian Wright Edelman: “It is a time not just for compassionate words, but compassionate action.”

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



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# To Counter Racist Violence, Teach Honest History

by **Learning for Justice Staff**

photography by **Matt Rourke/AP Photo**

This year, we’ve seen numerous anti-CRT, anti-LGBTQ+, and anti-immigrant legislation and policies, and threats to reproductive rights—all of which have devastating effects on Black and other marginalized communities. Indeed, these are aimed at harming the most vulnerable among us. The violent attack in Buffalo springs from the same poisoned source as these policies and practices that serve to thwart real democracy.

Acts of violence against Black people and other historically marginalized groups continue because we have yet, as a nation, to be honest with ourselves about the source of such suffering.

A family member of one of the Buffalo shooting victims summed it up this way in an Associated Press report: “America’s Achilles’ heel continues to be ... racism.”

We can’t discuss what happened in Buffalo without acknowledging historical context. Racist shootings don’t happen in a vacuum. These acts of terror against Black people have a long history. The fear of an inclusive multiracial and multicultural society is a common thread that weaves throughout the January 6 Insurrection, the 2015 murders in Charleston, South Carolina, and all the race

massacres—those documented and those not—that occurred throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

Understanding historical context is critical if we are to dismantle white supremacy and end senseless violence. We must teach and learn the connections between current events and the hard histories of local communities across our nation.

## And a reader replied...

Important to remember, in this time when regressive policies and ideas seem to be prevailing, that the majority of Americans do not support the racist, bigoted, hate-filled actions of those who seek to tear our country apart. Speak up for equity and justice for all historically marginalized groups, but especially for those traumatized, terrorized, and subjected to repeated racial, anti-Black hatred.

Read the full article here:  
[lfj.pub/counter-racist-violence](https://lfj.pub/counter-racist-violence)

# My Pride is Black, My Juneteenth is Queer

by **Preston D. Mitchum**

Pride and Juneteenth both remind us of how government control over the lives, health and autonomy of LGBTQ+, Black and other marginalized populations is deeply rooted in the history of this nation. It's no secret that the Black LGBTQ+ community is overpoliced, and not just in terms of police and state violence, which we know is a persistent and deadly issue—but in terms of policing our autonomy, our lives and our identities.

On June 24, 2022, in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health*, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* and held that the right to an abortion is not protected by the U.S. Constitution.

Despite the legal right to safe abortion being the law of the land since 1973, this court decided to restrict, not expand, rights. In many ways, this is deeply connected to recent anti-transgender legislation that prevents access to medical care. These legislations disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous and other people of color; LGBTQ+ people; and poor people—communities whose lives and bodies have been, and continue to be, heavily policed. That's why understanding the Black LGBTQ+ experience means we cannot silo our identities.



## And a reader replied...

This is a good example of the beautiful, complex, and intersectional elements of our identities as humans. Each of us is a complex, unique, and beautiful combination of many different elements integrated into one beautiful whole human body and self.

Read the full article here: [lfj.pub/black-pride-queer-juneteenth](https://lfj.pub/black-pride-queer-juneteenth)

## ARTICLE SPOTLIGHT

Search for these headlines at [learningforjustice.org](https://learningforjustice.org).



### **Black Visibility Matters: The Inconvenient Truths of Bias and Erasure**

by Kevin Myles and LFJ Staff



### **Roe v. Wade—What Can Educators Do?**

by Jamilah Pitts



### **Responding to Children's Bereavement During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

by Dorothee Benz



### **Don't Stop Talking About Gun Violence**

by Coshandra Dillard



### **We Are Once Again Reeling From Grief and Outrage**

by Learning for Justice Staff



### **Where Do We Go From Here?**

by Jalaya Liles Dunn



### **A Supremely Historic Moment**

by Coshandra Dillard



### **Help Ensure Immigrant Families Have What They Need**

by Alison Yager





WHY I TEACH

# Visibility is Power

by **Skye Tooley**

photography by **Ryan Pfluger**

Letters, notes, drawings—we educators cherish the treasures our students and communities hand us. The thank-yous through the year, and especially at the end, wrap around our hearts and sustain us to the next year. I’ve always kept those words and pictures close to me. My notes are often different from those of many other educators. Yes, I receive the thank-yous and the drawings, but now my notes include the words *proud* and *nonbinary*. And I get a lot of rainbows along with messages like “thank you for being you” and “you’re my favorite nonbinary teacher!”

I have the privilege to be visibly out to my students. Not only do I have blue hair, use they/them pronouns and go by Mx. Tooley, but I also had the access to get affirming top surgery this past year and to start testosterone. My journey, even though I didn’t talk about it with my students, was visible to everyone on campus as my voice and body changed. I became more fully myself this year as I stepped into the body that my brain had always envisioned.

Queer people existing as authentically themselves is powerful. It’s no wonder multiple groups

who have always used power to disenfranchise and maintain inequitable structures are focused on removing our existence and LGBTQ+ history from the classroom. From blocking access to gender-affirming care and denying trans kids’ safety in schools to banning queer books, the attacks against queer people simply living openly—and especially those who teach in K-12 classrooms—is widespread in the United States. Hidden under the guise of “protecting children” and the rhetoric that teachers should “only teach curriculum” is blatant and violent homophobia and transphobia. Anti-LGBTQ+ words,

beliefs and policies are being used to systematically erase queer educators as well as our queer students.

Our visibility is power. When we see ourselves represented, we get to know ourselves and know we exist—we are not alone. When we hear and see other people’s stories, we are invited in to share space and to learn. And in learning about one another’s stories, we develop empathy and understanding. We become a community who advocates for one another. This is what happens in my classroom. This year, I watched as my learners became fierce advocates for human rights and developed the first Rainbow Club at



our school. I watched as they asked thoughtful questions, learned about and respected each other's identities and came to new understandings of the world around them.

When we say teaching must be ethical and inclusive, we are not just referring to educators advocating for our students and our communities and teaching social justice. These things are vital, but it goes deeper than that. Teaching must be inclusive because each student comes into our room holding their identities, wondering if they will be seen in the space. Teaching is an ethical responsibility because our students are coming into the classroom with new thoughts, ideas, traumas and

realizations as the world opens up to them, and they are making connections within themselves, to each other and to the broader community—and it's an educator's responsibility to create an inclusive space where students can express those parts of themselves. My visibility opens that space for my students to feel visible, to know they are accepted in all their identities and to see and empathize with one another.

It is in community that action and change happen. In our brave space in the classroom, we can communicate boldly and thoughtfully to challenge preconceived notions of one another and think deeply about the events that are unfolding before us and the events

that unfolded in the past. With those connections, we can then look to the future together, build hope together and create community together. And that's why I teach. I teach because stories and visibility are power. I teach because advocacy and words are power. With that power, we and our young people can lift up ourselves and our communities and work to all thrive together.

**Skye Tooley** (they/them) is a trans/nonbinary, anti-bias and social justice educator in Los Angeles, California, who works to create elementary curriculum with a social justice focus.

## WHY I SERVE

# Belonging

by **Erica Young**

photography by **Elijah Nouvelage**

Fifteen minutes north of downtown Orlando, Florida, is the quiet, unassuming town of Eatonville. Most people are familiar with Eatonville because of author and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston. While Hurston is Eatonville's most famous resident, the town itself is notable as the first Black-incorporated municipality in the United States. Joseph E. Clark founded Eatonville in 1887, 22 years after slavery ended in the U.S. With the establishment of the town, Black people finally found a place where, instead of just existing on the margins of a white town, they could live autonomously.

Having grown up in Eatonville, and being one of Clark's descendants, for me Eatonville is not just a town;

it's the reason for my work. I host the podcast *Belonging*, because beyond the safety of Eatonville's borders, Black and other people pushed to the margins have historically struggled with feelings of not belonging. I've stepped in to serve as a conduit for storytelling and listening, committed to giving space to those affected by bias, and to spark and share stories of transformation.

My role began as I was growing up, reveling in my father's storytelling during family outings when he shared riveting tales of his childhood adventures as well as the sting of things family members faced during Jim Crow. But it was my mother's story of her experience with school desegregation that struck a certain

chord within me. In the 1960s, desegregation required my mother to leave her all-Black school in Eatonville to integrate a school in the nearby predominantly white town of Lockhart. Alabama Gov. George Wallace's televised proclamation of "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever" rang in my mother's young ears and left her terrified to speak, fearful of the violent objections—the protests and the bombings—to school integration happening across the nation.

Being uprooted from safety and normalcy, from where her curiosity and intelligence were nurtured, and landing in a situation where she was silenced transformed my mother from a child who loved school and learning





“

Like the dead-seeming, cold rocks, I have memories within that came out of the material that went to make me. Time and place have had their say. So you will have to know something about the time and place where I came from, in order that you may interpret the incidents and directions of my life.”

Zora Neale Hurston

into a student who was afraid to ask questions in class. My mother knew she would be overlooked when she raised her hand and tried to participate. She was in foreign territory, and her goal was to survive—sitting silent and withdrawn was her means of enduring. She wanted, and she deserved, more from her education.

After talking with my mother about her traumatic experience, I reflected on my own feelings of otherness because of the lack of personal and cultural connections with my teachers. Then I realized my 12-year-old niece is also experiencing feelings of exclusion in her education. This feeling of not belonging has spanned at least three generations in my family. And I became determined to do something about it and created *Belonging*. With this podcast, I serve a national audience of educators and students to help end this kind of inheritance.

One of the first storytelling and listening experiences on *Belonging* is with a former colleague who reflects on her use of racist language with students in her school. We discuss the impact this had on her own and her students' sense of identity

and belonging, and the unlearning she had to do. Vulnerable sharing in the podcast sparks new equity commitments, which then inspire new podcast episodes. Our hope is that engaged professional learning communities thrive and create an increased sense of belonging with higher levels of success in schools and other communities of learning and work—because every person longs for safety, for the freedom to be themselves, and for community.

Eatonville was established as a refuge for the Black community. Zora Neale Hurston captured the essence of the town in her stories, giving the world a peek into the power of

culture and kinship. On *Belonging* we use storytelling, too, to reckon with, reconcile and rebuild, working toward consciousness and equity in schools and communities of learning, harnessing the power of our stories to create pathways of consciousness and healing. This is my way of serving.

**Erica Young** (she/her) is a storyteller from Eatonville, Florida, and host of the podcast *Belonging*.

Learn more about *Belonging*, a podcast about reckoning, reconciliation and rebuilding at [soundsofbelonging.com](https://soundsofbelonging.com)





# End Poverty. PERIOD!

by **Brooke and Breanna Bennett**  
photography by **Cierra Brinson**



Our life's mission is to end poverty. PERIOD! We recently celebrated a major victory in our journey: Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey signed House Bill 50 into law on April 14, 2022, making us only the seventh state in the United States to have a mandate to provide menstrual hygiene products. The law establishes grants to provide free period products to menstruating students in Title I schools, where poverty is highest.

Legislation to end period poverty is trending! Alabama State Rep. Rolanda Hollis introduced similar bills three times before we finally got a law. Other states with laws to end period poverty are California, Illinois, New Hampshire, New York, Utah and Virginia. HB 50 passed unanimously in Alabama, which is quite amazing in a male-dominated House and Senate! Nationally, U.S. Rep. Grace Meng of New York City introduced the Menstrual Equity for All Act of 2021 to provide federal support for menstruators.

We have been recognized nationally for our menstrual equity advocacy. How did we become so passionate about ending poverty, in general, and period poverty in particular? The issue of girls not having the products they need during their menstrual cycle really hit us hard when our mom taught at an all-girls magnet school in Miami, where we lived before moving to Montgomery. Girls used socks and toilet paper to absorb their menstrual blood. We cried when we learned that 25% of American mothers sometimes have to choose between buying food and providing their children with menstrual supplies. We also observed period poverty when we lived abroad.

So, on our 12th birthday in July 2019, we started Women in Training, Inc., or WIT, to help end period poverty. WIT provides menstrual education programs and donates





Learn more about the work of Women in Training at [womenintraining.org](http://womenintraining.org)

monthly WITKITS of menstrual, dental and hygiene supplies to young people who menstruate. Our volunteers give out WITKITS in public schools, after-school programs, homeless shelters, runaway teen shelters, orphanages, foster care facilities and programs for imprisoned women and their children. To date, we have distributed more than 15,000 monthly WITKITS.

Early on, we realized two things. First, we can give out free period products until kingdom comes, but that won't solve the core problem: the cycle of generational poverty. Some teenagers are living in the same public housing projects, attending the same low-performing schools and experiencing the same hypertension, diabetes, unplanned pregnancies and fibroids as did their mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers before them. Next, we realized we need to bring together leaders in the corporate world, philanthropy, the government and young people to solve this solvable problem of poverty. In a world overflowing with resources,

every human being can have plenty of nutritious and delicious food, secure housing, excellent health care, global education ... and a bounty of menstrual products, menstrual education and reproductive freedom!

We collaborate with Always brand of Procter & Gamble to spread our messages to end period poverty, and end poverty. PERIOD! We are currently collaborating with Walmart to do the same. On the federal government level, this summer we traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with the Democratic Women's Caucus. We would also love to work with Republican and Independent elected officials to end poverty and create a society that celebrates menstrual equity. At the U.S. Capitol, we met with Rep. Meng, Rep. Lois Frankel of Florida, and Alabama's Rep. Terri Sewell, who introduced us to Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, Chairman of the Democratic Caucus. The Southern Black Girls and Women's Consortium, led by Ms. Latosha Brown of Black Voters Matter, sponsored our trip to D.C. We took 12 high school WIT Young Leaders with us.

Over the next few years, we are focusing on three areas. First, we are seeking funding to put vending machines of free period products on college campuses. Next, we are seeking funding to organize mission trips to Africa and the Caribbean to provide menstrual education and supplies. Finally, we want to present the President's Volunteer Service Award to corporate volunteers, students and adult mentors who work to end period poverty and end poverty. PERIOD!

**Breanna (she/her) and Brooke (she/her) Bennett** are the founders of Women in Training, a youth empowerment organization based in Montgomery, Alabama.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

**“Equity, Period” by Coshandra Dillard**

Join the movement to destigmatize menstruation and make schools more accommodating for all students who experience it.

Read the article at [lfj.pub/equity-period](http://lfj.pub/equity-period)



## LEARNING TOGETHER

# Building Connections Across Communities

by **Sarah-SoonLing Blackburn**

illustration by **Ellice Weaver**

When I was a third grade teacher at Quitman County Elementary School in the Mississippi Delta, I was fortunate to work with a school team that prioritized teacher learning. We had professional development workshops most weeks, and our school leaders were committed to providing training on topics like classroom culture, lesson planning, social emotional learning and so much more.

But at the same time, professional learning was often a struggle. We were a small school in a rural community, and though we loved our students, our resources were limited—we lacked time, space and money. Taking time off to attend a conference or workshop elsewhere wasn't easy because finding a substitute could be difficult. Our principal often designed and led our PD, or a teacher would volunteer to take

on that responsibility for no extra pay. We did what we could, but we didn't have access to the same professional learning opportunities as educators in better-funded or less geographically remote schools. It often felt isolating.

Eight years later, I was still living in Mississippi, still serving as an educator, but now I was traveling all over the country, facilitating professional learning for schools and





districts as a part of Learning for Justice. It was meaningful work, but I always had a thought at the back of my mind: *Why aren't teachers in schools like the ones I taught in getting access to these learning experiences?* Even though we would offer workshops for little or no cost, I knew there were so many other obstacles. At LFJ, we often hear from educators about these barriers—time, people to cover classes, space to hold trainings, pressures around state testing, competing ideas about what learning should even be happening. The list goes on.

It wasn't until two years later, as COVID-19 raged, that we did our first workshop specifically for educators in Mississippi. It only happened because we were starting to offer workshops online. Suddenly, so many barriers weren't barriers anymore. Teachers could log in after school, from their homes. It was beautiful to see these teachers from across my state interact with one another, realizing there were other people who were dedicated to social justice education, and suddenly in community, learning together. The joy and the relief on their faces were palpable.

We often hear from educators who are doing incredible work with their students and in their communities. They are actively diversifying curricula and making sure that history instruction remains honest—even in the face of legislative efforts to restrict conversations about racism—or they are resisting punitive, inequitable disciplinary policies and advocating for restorative, human-centric school culture initiatives. Yet, as these educators push for a more equitable schooling experience, they don't always feel connected to others who are fostering the same ideals

**It was beautiful to see these teachers from across my state interact with one another, realizing there were other people who were dedicated to social justice education, and suddenly in community, learning together.**

in other contexts. They wonder who else might be doing this work and with whom they can learn and advocate. They wonder if others ever feel alone in the face of resistance. They wonder if a community of like-minded educators exists who can be a resource and a support system.

This work is more sustainable when we share it with others, and LFJ is committed to helping build some of these connections. After attending Let's Talk, a Learning for Justice virtual workshop, one educator wrote, "The most useful part of this workshop was seeing and hearing from different people across the U.S. I enjoyed being able to practice these strategies in both whole and small group[s]."

In the spring of 2022, LFJ began piloting a new type of learning experience, the Teaching Hard History Professional Learning Cohorts. More than 60 educators from around the country participated in this collaborative learning experience. They met online twice a week for three months to dive deeply into the Learning for Justice *Teaching Hard History: American Slavery* (THH) framework, learning and unlearning history, preparing for implementation, and sharing insights, resources, strategies, and support.

By emphasizing shared learning, THH Professional Learning Cohorts have allowed for more meaningful connections between educators. As one participant shared, "I have grown tremendously more competent and confident as a teacher of hard history. I learned a lot from the outside readings we did and from the facilitators, but I got the most out of my peers sharing their valuable perspectives and pedagogical expertise."

At Learning for Justice, we believe that young people learn best when they are part of welcoming communities where the ownership of teaching and learning is shared. We also believe that adults learn best in similar conditions. In the next few years, we'll introduce more cohort models featuring additional topics to engage with LFJ's vast library of resources.

In all our learning experiences, we've tried to replicate that same sense of community I saw in those Mississippi educators. The work of LFJ's learning and engagement team emphasizes community-building and collective learning. We keep in mind the concept of solidarity, which, as I've indicated elsewhere, "not only recognizes difference but also sees power in bringing people who are different in community with one another while working toward a shared goal." All our LFJ workshops are designed to be interactive and to promote listening, collaboration and shared problem-solving. Participants leave equipped not only with skills, strategies and resources; they also leave with the knowledge that they are not alone.

**Sarah-SoonLing Blackburn, Ed.D.,** (she/her) is the Learning for Justice associate director for Learning in Schools.

# A Care Plan for Honest History and Difficult Conversations

A research-based approach for strategies of care that educators, parents and caregivers can practice when teaching honest history or engaging in difficult conversations.

by **Labrea Pringle** | illustration by **Michelle Thompson**

## What is the Care Plan?

Each school year, educators transform classrooms into intentional spaces where growing, sharing, questioning and learning that reflects our world happen as they prepare young people to become global citizens. To do this, educators must grapple with facilitating dialogue and lessons that allow learners to understand what fighting against—and providing solutions to dismantle—oppressive systems looks, sounds and feels like. To that end, my English language arts classroom served as a courtroom for mock-trials as we read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a mindful breathing circle to process the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor as we read *The Hate U Give*, and an urban redlined city with “residents” finding their perspectives in equity and activism as we read *A Raisin in the Sun*. I wanted safe, practical and equitable strategies to make real-life connections between our texts, my students’ world and the experience of the “othered.”

In prioritizing inclusive education that honestly confronts our past and present, educators are often policed by administrators, families and state officials. Anxieties around what and how discussions are facilitated permeate classrooms, often leading to unease that prevents learners from reaching their full potential.

As educators and nurturers for the next generation, to effectively teach honest history, we must prioritize integrity, purposefulness and psychological safety. The care plan I envision to accomplish this is a research-based roadmap for educators, parents and caregivers offering strategies for care before, during and after difficult conversations. Such





care can be a catalyst in positively transforming perceptions around teaching history honestly.

### Theorizing the Care Plan

Psychologists Richard Ryan and Edward Deci collaborated in the late 1970s to create a framework for understanding human motivation through Self-Determination Theory (SDT). One of the key tenets of SDT relevant for any educator is the Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT): all humans have three basic psychological needs that directly impact well-being—competence, relatedness and autonomy.

*Competence* refers to how individuals experience confidence in knowledge acquisition. Everyone benefits from a feeling of “I got this! I know this.” *Relatedness* refers to building and sustaining relationships with others. Everyone needs to feel a sense of belonging in social groups. Finally, *autonomy* centers one’s ability to make choices while operating authentically as themselves. When all three basic needs are met, motivation increases and individuals thrive. The care plan prioritizes these needs for safe and inclusive approaches to crucial conversations.

### Why Is the Care Plan Important?

We can summarize the importance of this care plan by focusing on the three C’s: care, courage and community. As educators, we are taught that the pedagogy of care is one that can be modeled, reciprocated and adapted; it centers personhood and connectivity. Additionally—in the context of teaching honest history—care should be equitable, intentional and oriented toward liberation. We should care for our students in these moments in a way that sets them free because, as author and activist bell hooks states in her book *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*,

“Committed acts of caring let all students know that the purpose of education is not to dominate, or prepare them to be dominators, but rather to create the conditions for freedom. Caring educators open

the mind, allowing students to embrace a world of knowing that is always subject to change and challenge.”

The care plan is a method we can use to serve as courageous facilitators and learners. It takes courage to tell the accurate hard history of our world *and* hold space for the emotions that may result. The aspect of care is no afterthought; the care plan allows us to engage with *radical* care. Planning with that in mind and using resources from our own formulations of the plan push people to think about intentional community building in the classroom, the home and the outside world.

### The “Before” Care Plan

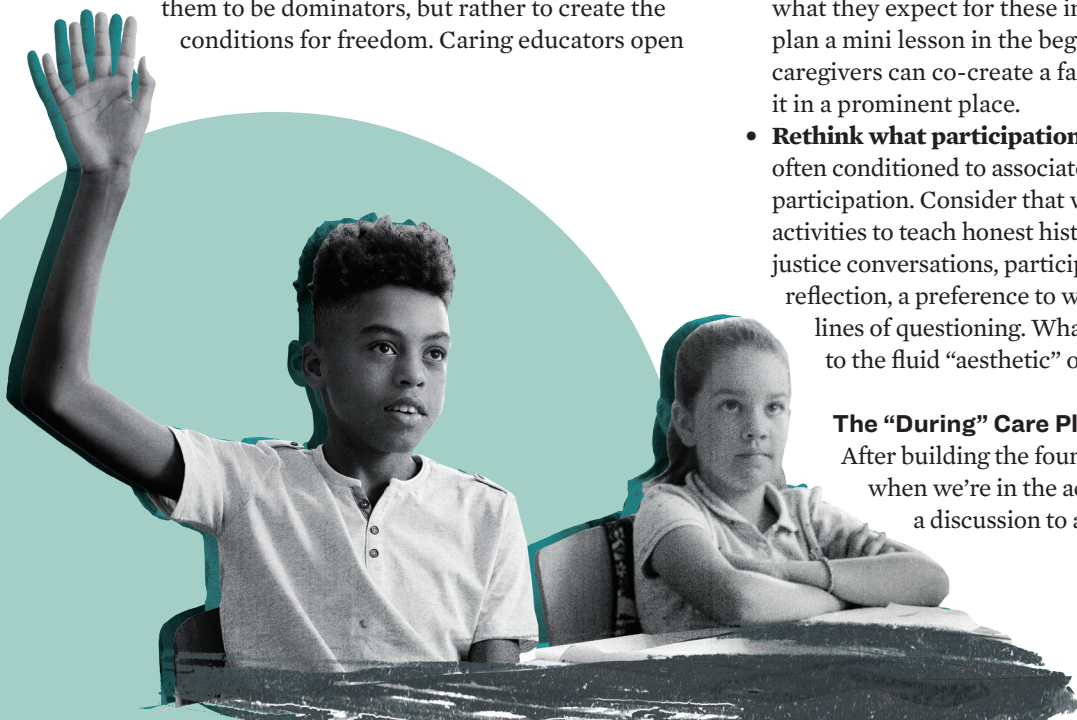
In the before care stage, we lay the groundwork to create and foster respect and honesty. One of the most important terms to consider in building a before care plan is inclusivity. Learning for Justice’s *Critical Practices* discusses inclusive classrooms, stating: “Differences shape who we are and what we know. Life, history, society and power cannot be understood from a single perspective; we need multiple viewpoints to truly see the world. Because of this, inclusive classrooms must function as learning communities built on shared inquiry and dialogue.” Participants must be situated in spaces that welcome and honor their multiple identities and perspectives.

These strategies are useful in formulating an effective before care plan.

- **Display visual symbols of inclusion.** Whether you are hanging posters celebrating diverse identities in your classroom or around your home, positive exposure to these identities can increase feelings of empathy and belonging—two critical aspects when approaching difficult conversations.
- **Facilitate the creation of learner-centered agreements.** Let learners express in their own language what they expect for these interactions. Educators can plan a mini lesson in the beginning of the school year; caregivers can co-create a family agreement and display it in a prominent place.
- **Rethink what participation looks like.** As adults, we are often conditioned to associate dynamic engagement with participation. Consider that when you are engaging in activities to teach honest history, or having difficult social justice conversations, participation may show up as silent reflection, a preference to write instead of verbalize or in lines of questioning. Whatever the expression, be open to the fluid “aesthetic” of participation.

### The “During” Care Plan

After building the foundation, we must prepare for when we’re in the act of teaching or facilitating a discussion to actively hold space for



participants' emotions and our own. How do we ensure that we're engaging in productive discourse? It's no secret that teaching honest history can be difficult. Some may consider engaging in challenging discussions offensive or threatening, thus sparking disruptive emotions, especially between racial groups. This is when significant differences in worldviews and power imbalances within participants can arise.

Instead of merely finding tactics to *engage* in crucial conversations, adult education professor Kayon Murray-Johnson, Ph.D., posits that we should "(en)gauge" with a cyclical model of emotional regulation that includes critical-thinking questions for each stage of the conversation. An awareness of our own and everyone else's needs and emotional transitions allows us to sustain a safe and productive environment. This may mean asking ourselves questions about how much we know about our participants, or how we can be more mindful of our own actions and reactions. Most importantly, we want to ask what risks we're willing to take to grow from our conversations.

In addition to asking these questions, we can employ these strategies:

- **Set the stage:** Begin the conversation with digestible and relatable content to aid in transitions.
- **Create and honor expectations for navigating big emotions:** Let your learners know that these conversations may elicit strong feelings and that's OK! Give them options for self-regulation and suggestions for how to ask for help if needed.
- **Establish intentional pause points:** Sometimes we will have a lot to share. There is no pressure to share all the information at once. Use your discretion (read the room) in pausing for questions and reflections (whether they be silent or aloud).
- **Implement mindfulness:** Mindfulness practices are useful in real-time emotional regulation. Provide learners (and yourself) with tools and strategies to center breathing and to be more aware of where in their bodies their emotions are showing up.

### The "After" Care Plan

What happens when the conversation ends? First, we must realize that teaching honest history requires an ongoing commitment that takes patience and diligence. But what do we do in the interim, until the next conversation? While there is no concrete answer, our answer certainly should not be "nothing." Instead, at the end of a discussion period, we need to take time to center our brains, our lungs and our hearts. We can ask ourselves and our students the following:

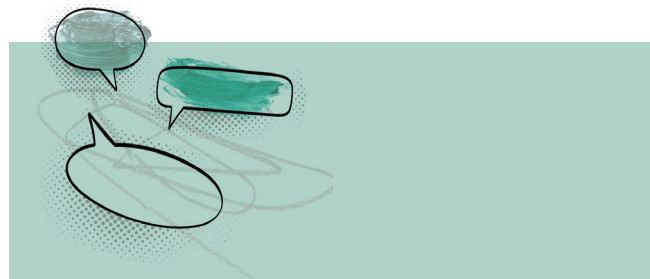
**Brain:** What thoughts do I have about our conversation? What can I do to apply my new knowledge? What else am I inspired to learn about now?

**Lungs:** How can I center my breath when things feel heavy?

**Heart:** How did this conversation make me feel? How will my new knowledge make me a better person?

There is no need to shy away from difficult conversations and honest history simply because it's challenging. These conversations are essential for young people who will build upon the movement for justice. Ultimately, as educators, caregivers and supportive adults, we must commit ourselves to practice radical care and help prepare a generation of caring young people who can then create a radically inclusive society.

**Labrea Pringle** is an educator, activist and doctoral candidate who currently serves as the Village Director for Themed Communities at North Carolina State University.



## Resources

### Critical Practices for Social Justice Education

This guide offers a set of strategies for accomplishing academic and social emotional goals side by side.

→ [ifj.pub/critical-practices](https://ifj.pub/critical-practices)

### Student Mental Health Matters

Cohosted by Charles Barrett, Ph.D. Chair for the National Association of School Psychologists Multicultural Affairs Committee, this webinar focuses on challenges students face regarding mental health, including how those challenges can vary.

→ [ifj.pub/student-mental-health](https://ifj.pub/student-mental-health)





...UNTIL JUSTICE ROLLS DOWN LIKE WATERS  
AND RIGHTEOUSNESS LIKE A MIGHTY STREAM

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR





# Expanding Democracy Through Intersecting Movements

The connections between past and present intersecting movements in the Southern Poverty Law Center's Civil Rights Memorial Center educate and inspire individuals to continue the fight for justice.

by Coshandra Dillard

**THE HISTORY OF** the United States involves, at its foundation, the struggle to expand democracy to people who have been denied even the most basic rights and liberties. Centering the perspective of white cisgender men, a white supremacist social structure has been the dominant narrative, maintaining its power through violence and intentional barriers to freedom and justice. That oppression, however, has never gone unchallenged. The fight for justice has deep roots in our shared history and is dynamic, embracing current intersectional struggles. This connection between past and present and among diverse movements is keenly reflected in the Civil Rights Memorial Center (CRMC), located in downtown Montgomery, Alabama.



### The Civil Rights Memorial Center (CRMC)

The Center opened in 2005 to honor the people who died fighting for civil rights and justice. Today, visitors walking through the Center engage with a learning space that is much more than a repository for civil rights movement history and its heroes. The Center now highlights current intersecting movements, with four galleries that serve to spotlight the Southern Poverty Law Center's (SPLC) work in support of those movements. The galleries include: the Orientation Theater, the Wall of Justice, the Martyr Room and a hallway that focuses on today's activists and the work that continues in the march for justice.

"Before we did the renovations, people would come in thinking, 'Okay, it's a civil rights museum,'" recounts CRMC Director Tafeni English. "Then there were other people who came in and they thought that this was all about the deep dive of the work that SPLC was doing. We can give them both."

Voting rights, Black Lives Matter, the fight for inclusive schools, disability rights, LGBTQ+ rights and women's rights are among the intersecting movements highlighted at the museum. In contrast to the reverent atmosphere in the Martyr Room, the gallery highlighting current movements toward justice reflects a colorful and vibrant energy to evoke hope and inspire action. In that hallway dedicated to more current activists, the names of individuals from recent history—including Islan Nettles, Khalid Jabara, Richard Collins III and Heather Heyer—killed by white supremacists join the names of those slain more than 50 years ago.

Drawing the connections between past and present movements opens up space to discuss the communities and people who aren't always acknowledged in history textbooks or in public discourse. For example, the roles of women, children and the LGBTQ+ community have largely been left out of narratives of the civil rights movement, or viewed as secondary, even though the movement could not have happened without their immense contributions and sacrifices.

English explains that the Center aims to update the museum's content to keep up with what's happening in the world. It's important to go beyond thematic months and events, such as Women's History Month or Martin Luther King Jr. Day. And while some museums are becoming more mindful of explicitly sharing an honest, inclusive history, some struggle to keep up with current events. "It's important for museums to update more frequently than you have seen in the past," English says.

“

**Ella Baker was saying give people light and they will find a way. But ... people [must] ... understand that that light will look different for everyone. And your comfort level may be writing a letter or signing a petition, where somebody else's comfort level may be organizing and leading a protest. Somebody else's radical may be 'I'm running for office.'**

**Tafeni English**

"Most museums keep their exhibits 25, 30 years. Some never change their exhibits. But with us, because we want to be a part of the museums who are also part of the community, and central to the community, we want people to come here and walk away with things that are happening currently in the community that they can get involved in."

### Inspiring Learning and Making Connections

The Center staff welcome visitors from across the country, including Alabama fourth graders—whose visit to the exterior Memorial is part of the state's history curriculum. The Center is vital for young visitors as it takes them on a journey to help connect the past with the present and therefore has the potential to keep the movement-building momentum going.

Visiting groups have an opportunity to tell the Center staff what they already know about this history, and what they'd like to learn more about. Student visitors are tasked with examining the plaques in the Martyr Room that provide details about the life of a person who died in the movement. They are asked to pay special attention to those they've never read about in history books. Educators are encouraged to have honest conversations with their students before, during and after visits, and are also urged to anticipate emotional reactions that could arise from the experience.



HILLARY ANDREWS

The Center offers a curriculum to support educators and community advocates. A guide for high school and college students contains lessons, discussion questions and the exploration of age-appropriate key concepts. For younger students, a children’s activity book is available.

### All About the People

Outside the Center, there are historical sites and markers in every direction. Some detail the fight for civil rights or the city of Montgomery’s role in slavery. And just around the corner from the Center stands the church where Dr. King led a congregation and where members continue to worship to this day. English says it’s crucial that the Center remains grounded in the local community and listens to those who are affected by the issues they uplift. It’s all about the people. The Center is charged with not only creating a space for honest history education, but also presenting humanizing portraits of the people who fought for social justice.

The Martyr Room overlooks the Memorial outside—a round black granite table that pays homage to 40 men, women and children who were murdered in the struggle for civil rights. At an interactive table in the room, by going beyond the details of the traumatizing deaths of the individuals honored there, visitors can explore specifics about each person’s life. English explains that, with the help of family members of those honored at the Center, these

small details shed light on how they lived and the things they enjoyed. The Center’s staff also explain to visitors how, long after the murder of a loved one, white supremacy impacted every facet of life for family members. And that provides an opening to connect to highly publicized deaths today. “I don’t think people think about the aftermath of what families are left to struggle and deal with,” English shares. “Not only are they having to grieve, but they’re also—each and every time—having to defend their loved ones in their death.”

Visitors to the Center can also gain an understanding of the history of police violence against Black people in the United States. Roman Duckworth Jr., a military police officer and a father of six, is one person highlighted at the Center. Duckworth was traveling from where he was stationed in Maryland to his home in Mississippi when he was murdered by law enforcement in 1962. While people may not recognize his name—as Duckworth represents the countless number of largely unreported victims of white supremacist violence—they can make connections to police violence against Black people today. “So, it opens up this conversation about how the fear of law enforcement and overpolicing is nothing new,” English explains. “That was not something that came out of the Black Lives Matter movement. It didn’t start with Ferguson.”

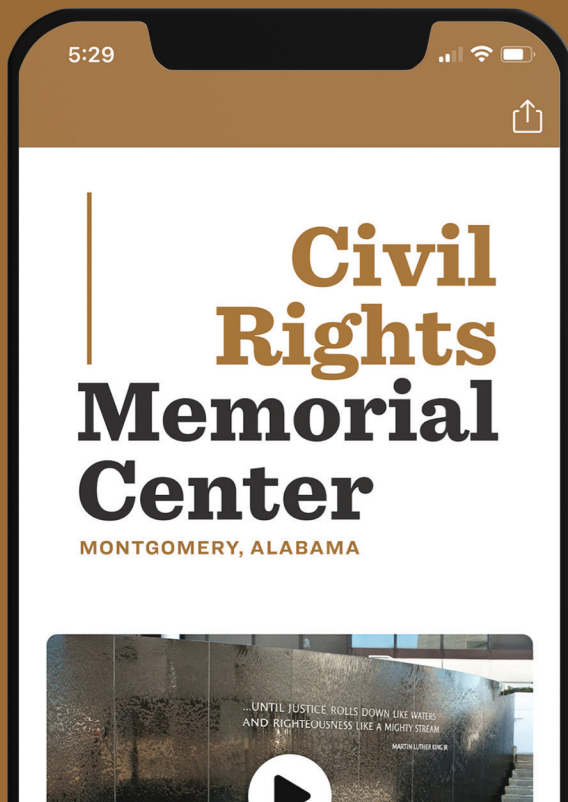
### Stepping Into Our Roles

The effects of white supremacy on daily life can feel overwhelming, and for those committed to social justice, the inevitable pushback to progress can be deflating. But feeling overwhelmed can paralyze people who would otherwise be engaged in the movement for a just and inclusive society.

In the short CRMC video, “Apathy is Not an Option,” activists note that it’s imperative to remember there have been social justice victories along the way. However, the work is not over. The video emphasizes that there will always be a liberatory movement as long as the world is unjust, and it explains that everyone has a role to play in making positive change. We are living history now, and we can shape it. People just have to tap into their individual strengths and passions. And that perspective has made large movements work in the past. Individuals offered support where they could, from providing shelter for on-the-ground activists and creating art, to organizing marches and boycotts. After the video, there’s an opportunity for visitors to dive deeply into the subject matter with staff.

“If we present [the challenges] in this big grand scope, more than likely they leave feeling overwhelmed, and they feel helpless, and they don’t know what they can do,”





## Civil Rights Memorial Center App

The Civil Rights Memorial Center invites visitors to learn about the progress made over the years in the fight for justice and equity—while also reflecting on the many lives tragically lost in the struggle to secure that progress. The new virtual tour app gives you the opportunity to take a deeper dive into the new and improved exhibitions at the Center.

Download the app and experience the tour today.



English explains. “Ella Baker was saying give people light and they will find a way. But ... people [must] ... understand that that light will look different for everyone. And your comfort level may be writing a letter or signing a petition, where somebody else’s comfort level may be organizing and leading a protest,” English adds. “Somebody else’s radical may be ‘I’m running for office.’”

Scaling in from the big picture helps people realize their power. “What I want people to leave with is that [it’s] not just organizations like SPLC or ACLU or the EJIs,” English says. “We have to return the power back to the people, and for people to realize where that power lies and how they can join hands with us in real ways, to really start shifting the political landscape, specifically in the South.”

The content at the CMRC sheds light on the many ways that white supremacy has killed. In addition to acts of violence, some people succumbed to the stress and strain of poverty. “I think that is something that we have to have deeper discussions about—when we’re talking about healing and the amount of trauma—is that we also have to look at the economic injustices and how that continues to oppress and cause health issues,” English notes.

The work of the Center will continue to include perspectives from current activists and community leaders, including the reality that for every social justice issue we face, there is another that affects or compounds it. That’s why many activists today are prioritizing rest, community care and self-care as essential components in the movement toward social justice. These kinds of motivating messages and the context provided throughout the renovated Center are critical to encourage the continued legacy of individuals—ordinary people—fighting together in community for justice and the greater good.

**Coshandra Dillard** (she/her) is a senior writer for Learning for Justice.

**NEW GUIDE**

# ***PROTECTING IMMIGRANT STUDENTS' RIGHTS TO A PUBLIC EDUCATION***

## **A Guide for Advocates**

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

The Southern Poverty Law Center's new resource *Protecting Immigrant Students' Rights to a Public Education: A Guide for Advocates* offers information and recommendations educators, caregivers

and other trusted adults can use to ensure their school or district is meeting its legal responsibility to multilingual and immigrant students and families.

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



**DOWNLOAD THIS FREE GUIDE AT [SPLCENTER.ORG/PLYLER](https://www.splcenter.org/plyler)**





# Community Organizing Uplifts Immigrant Students

Tapping into their own agency and communities, immigrant students and their families are finding ways to mitigate serious obstacles.

by Dorothee Benz, Ph.D. | illustrations by Jim Tsinganos

**IN THE MOTT HAVEN** neighborhood of New York City, a group of third graders visited a local Oaxacan restaurant, La Morada, as part of a program in which they explored the topic of immigration. It was 2019, and the students in the largely immigrant South Bronx neighborhood came from cultures disparaged by then-President Donald Trump and other politicians.

“We wanted to instill pride, and also talk about ... who we are and what we contribute,” explained Myra Hernández, the program’s creator. “And, of course, one of [those contributions] was food,” she added. Two members of the family who owns La Morada, Marcos and Carolina Saavedra, told the students about their

own journey from Mexico to the United States and “their connection to their food being a connection to their culture and their Indigenous identities.”

In San Antonio, Texas, a group of high school and middle school students recently visited the Centro de Artes for an exhibit of art by local immigrants. Afterward they created their own artworks and told their own stories. They told of being reunited with parents after many years and of fears of never seeing their grandparents again; they painted pictures about their hopes and dreams for life in the U.S. and the sacrifices they made to be here. The program was organized by the school district’s Dual Language, ESL and Migrant Department.

The La Morada and Centro de Artes outings are two of the countless initiatives by educators, schools, parents and communities to support immigrant students, and especially students who are undocumented or from mixed-status families. Conversations with educators and organizers in Texas, Louisiana and New York about how they help children and families overcome the challenges they face in the U.S.—inside and outside of school settings—found that while educators can take many concrete measures to lessen obstacles, community organizing can provide significant lessons about agency, resistance and power that students carry with them for a lifetime.



## Legal Obligations of Schools and the Challenges Faced by Undocumented Students

The legal rights of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. are severely limited, as is the ability of people to legally immigrate to the U.S. But one bright spot for undocumented students is the 1982 Supreme Court decision *Plyler v. Doe*, which held that all children in the U.S. are entitled to a free public education regardless of immigration status. The ruling says that schools cannot discriminate in enrollment because of immigration or language status, and all students must have access to regular classes and special programs. In addition, *Plyler* requires schools to provide translation and interpretation services to families.

However, the rights that *Plyler* protects barely scratch the surface of the problems undocumented and mixed-status students encounter. From logistical obstacles to fears for their parents' safety, these kids have a lot to worry about.

"I didn't have a single person on my high school campus or my university one that could help me navigate systems as an undocumented person,"

says Julia Sean, reflecting on both the loneliness and the barriers that status created. "When you are undocumented, it means you don't have a social

**"...while educators can take many concrete measures to lessen obstacles, community organizing can provide significant lessons about agency, resistance and power that students carry with them for a lifetime."**

security number, so it cuts you off at the knees when you need to do things like apply for work or try to get a driver's license or submit financial aid forms." Sean is now an assistant principal who coaches the multilingual learners team at an Austin, Texas, charter school.

Viridiana Carrizales remembers being in seventh grade and overhearing school office staff asking visitors for a driver's license, which was an immediate red flag and "an indication that school was not a safe space nor a welcoming space for people like me." She warned her parents not to come to the school.

As the CEO of ImmSchools—an immigrant-led organization that partners with educators to ensure schools are safe and welcoming for undocumented students and families—Carrizales has heard countless stories like her own. She recalls a parent who was refused entrance to pick up her child at school and was asked not to park on the grounds because the school "saw her as a threat." She explains,

"This is trauma, every time you get put in a position where people dehumanize you and make you feel less than because you don't have a document or an ID."

Students are traumatized, too. Sean recalls, "During the Trump years, kids [were] asking me 'Am I going to get deported? Are they coming for my family? Why doesn't he like us? Why does he say that we're dirty, that we're uncultured, that we are like these uncivilized people? Why, why, why?'"

In these immigrant neighborhoods, one constant is clear: children are living in fear that their parents might not be there when they get home from school. Not surprisingly, numerous studies have documented the adverse effects on children of living with these realities, including academic, emotional and health impacts.

## Implement Supportive Practices in Schools

Educators can't fix everything for their immigrant students, but advocate groups like ImmSchools can ask teachers to "focus on what they can do and what they can control in their classrooms," says Carrizales.

"Every educator has the obligation to serve every student, and our undocumented and mixed-status students are protected by law." But many schools are unaware of their obligations, or unwilling to meet them, so bringing attention to the *Plyler* requirements is often the first step in lowering the barriers students face.

It's crucial for immigrant students to be respected throughout the school, from the front office staff to the curriculum to cultural excursions like the La Morada and Centro de Artes trips. Another positive model is the San Antonio Dual Language, ESL and Migrant Department's annual Dream Summit. They take high school students to visit a local university, tour



the campus and take part in sessions on financial aid that explicitly include information on what's available to undocumented students. The Dream Summit day also includes information about students' legal rights in encounters with ICE.

Best practices call for an “asset-based approach” to teaching, where educators recognize and celebrate the unique experiences and knowledge every learner brings to the classroom. Many schools, for instance, are dropping the term “English language learner,” which erases the fact that such students are already fluent in one or more languages; terms like “emergent bilingual learner” or “multilingual learner” are preferred.

### **Parent Engagement in School and Beyond**

Equally important are practices that make schools as safe as possible and welcoming to families. These include enrollment and visitor policies that don't require identification that undocumented families don't have—like a social security card or a driver's license. Schools should also have a plan for what to do if ICE agents come to the school.

Engaging parents and caregivers is critical to student success and a building block for wider civic participation for both children and adults. In San Antonio, Kelly Manuel, director for content-based language instruction and ESL in the Dual Language, ESL and Migrant Department, and her colleagues organize “parent pláticas,” evenings when they invite parents to campus to talk with program staff and one another about their hopes for the children and the challenges they face. “This gets us to know our parents better,” says Manuel, “and also parents get to know one another,

# A Primer on Immigration Law

**L**egal immigration to the U.S. is unavailable for millions of people. The main routes for legal immigration are employment, which generally requires having a job already lined up, and family-based. Family members of U.S. citizens can legally immigrate, but because of annual quotas, the wait is often decades long. And people admitted as refugees, the last major legal route, must be screened by multiple international and U.S. agencies and demonstrate a “well-founded fear of persecution” based on a limited number of specific categories; the number of refugees admitted annually is capped.

It is also possible to become a lawful resident through asylum, which, while based on the same criteria as refugee status, is not capped. To obtain asylum, a person presents themselves at a port of entry and makes a request for asylum. People already in the U.S. can also apply for asylum if they do so within one year of their date of entry. While presenting oneself at the border is the legal way to request asylum, successive U.S. administrations have treated asylum seekers as criminals, processing their initial paperwork and detaining them rather than releasing them into the country as their claim is adjudicated.

The majority of the estimated 11 million people who've come to the U.S. without access to a legal route are now stuck in a permanent underclass. There is virtually no way to adjust their status and gain legal residency, and their undocumented status bars them from everything from legal employment to government benefits. It also means that an ICE agent could knock on their door or raid their workplace.

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, implemented by executive order in 2012 because Congress has been unable to pass immigration reform for decades, gave a reprieve to certain young undocumented people, but no path to citizenship. It is currently being challenged in court, so while DACA renewals continue, no new people are covered under the program.

Detention has become the primary tool of U.S. immigration enforcement over the last quarter century. The 1996 Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act made more immigrants subject to mandatory detention and made all non-citizens vulnerable to detention and deportation. In 1994 the number of immigrants detained in the U.S. was approximately 7,000; in 2001, it was 19,000; in 2019, it was over 50,000.

The Remain in Mexico policy from 2018 required asylum seekers at the southern border to wait in Mexico while their cases were processed, effectively remanding them to dangerous camps and severely hampering their ability to pursue legal claims. Title 42, a U.S. public health code, was used to summarily—and illegally—expel migrants at the southern border and deny them the ability to apply for asylum at all. The Biden administration has sought to end both programs, but legal challenges have delayed policy changes.





This is a drawing by student Kensity RA.

and that helps them build community so that they can rely on each other.” A WhatsApp group started with one cohort quickly turned into a networking tool, with parents asking and answering questions about finding housing, work and healthcare, among other things.

In New Orleans, Louisiana, Our Voice Nuestra Voz (OVNV) is organizing immigrant and Black parents to fight for their rights. “When immigrant parents are at a school board meeting, or at a charter school meeting, and their children are sitting beside them,” OVNV founder and Executive Director Mary Moran says, the kids see “the courage of standing up to a targeted power center and being able to say ‘actually no, here is my story, here is my testimony, here is what I know about this school and how it’s serving students.’ It’s so powerful for children.” Parents are modeling agency as well as courage, and that example helps their children grow into the next generation of fighters.

### Community Organizing —Nurturing Leaders

In the South Bronx, La Morada’s longtime community involvement and its connection to local educators have provided potent tools both for addressing student and family needs and for helping students become active community members. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the restaurant has organized a mutual aid food program that combines donations from a variety of sources, La Morada’s cooking and scores of volunteers to deliver fresh meals to thousands of families every week.

Hernández lives in the neighborhood and is one of those volunteers. In her role as a program coordinator and curriculum specialist at Behind the Book, a program that supports young readers, she worked with the third-grade team at P.S. 43 to find a way to address food insecurity and hunger among students and families. Hernández designed a six-week program that combined a book—*Lulu and the Hunger Monster*—a (virtual) assembly of the whole third grade with the author, Erik Talkin, interviews of community leaders by the kids, and another (virtual) visit to La Morada. The third graders learned about food deserts, food insecurity and food justice. Immigrant rights activist Marco Saavedra taught the children about mutual aid and the restaurant’s program, and Talkin explained how federal and state governments don’t protect undocumented immigrants.

The idea was to build “understanding that hunger or food insecurity is no fault of folks in the community,” says Hernández, and to show the kids “what people in the community are doing to meet the needs of their community members.” At the end of the program, the third graders produced a digital pamphlet

on food justice, with links to local resources and student reflections, which the school posted on its website.

In the absence of government help, “We take care of us,” Hernández says, using a popular movement slogan. “We wanted the kids not to be put in this impoverished light. We wanted them to feel empowered because there’s a lot of amazing power in this community.” By showing the students an example of effective local organizing and helping them begin to understand the structural causes of poverty, this program made them actors in their own community and not victims in an unjust system. “They now have the language and the tools and the know-how to hopefully speak up,” Hernández says.

All these efforts—from the enforcement of rights in schools to parent activism to community organizing—help immigrant students overcome barriers to their education. Ultimately, it takes political power to

change the systems that create those barriers, from the local level all the way to the national. People like Moran are organizing to build that power. The vision of OVNV is to go beyond fighting for their rights within the education system to “push toward transformational education, liberatory education,” she says, “finding ways for our community to show up in all of its assets and knowledge and wisdom and the technologies we’ve built over civilizations to not just be seen as human, but to lead.”

Immigrant families face systemic obstacles and oppression not just in relation to education, but to their very existence in the U.S. Educators can play a crucial role in easing such obstacles with awareness and enforcement of *Plyler* rights. Equally important, educators can empower students, parents and caregivers through best practices such as an asset-based philosophy in the classroom, and policies that create a safe and

welcoming space for families in the school community. Family engagement is a recognized factor in student success, but in the case of undocumented or mixed-status families, it is also a powerful means to encourage families, when faced with the denial of their rights, to claim their agency.

Marco Saavedra witnesses this in the high school students who volunteer in La Morada’s food program. “Mutual aid and organizing, and even art, it’s all about agency,” he says. And once the students recognize their agency to participate, he continues, they become “active, and not just reactive” drivers of civic engagement.

“[That recognition] unlocks your imagination,” Saavedra says. And that is the best education of all.

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

## Resources to Support Immigrant Students and Families

### ***Protecting Immigrant Students’ Rights to a Public Education***

This SPLC resource offers information educators, caregivers and advocates can use to ensure schools meet their legal responsibility to multilingual and immigrant students and families.

👉 [splcenter.org/plyler](https://splcenter.org/plyler)

### ***Supporting and Affirming Immigrant Students and Families***

Join Learning for Justice, experts from ImmSchools and the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Immigrant Justice Project for a webinar on supporting immigrant students and families.

👉 [lfj.pub/supporting-immigrant-students](https://lfj.pub/supporting-immigrant-students)

### ***Serving ELL Students and Families***

With sections centered on instruction, classroom culture, policies, and family and community engagement, this guide is packed with recommendations for educators and schools.

👉 [lfj.pub/serving-ell-students](https://lfj.pub/serving-ell-students)

## Articles from Learning for Justice

### **Help Ensure Immigrant Families Have What They Need**

by Alison Yager

👉 [lfj.pub/help-immigrant-families](https://lfj.pub/help-immigrant-families)

### **School as Sanctuary**

by Cory Collins

👉 [lfj.pub/school-as-sanctuary](https://lfj.pub/school-as-sanctuary)

### **This is Not a Drill**

by Julia Delacroix and Coshandra Dillard

👉 [lfj.pub/not-a-drill](https://lfj.pub/not-a-drill)

### **What’s a Sanctuary City Anyway?**

by Learning for Justice Staff

👉 [lfj.pub/sanctuary-city](https://lfj.pub/sanctuary-city)

### **Immigrant and Refugee Children: A Guide for Educators and School Support Staff**

👉 [lfj.pub/immigrant-refugee-children](https://lfj.pub/immigrant-refugee-children)









# Decarceration Begins With School Discipline Reform

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Educators have a role in ending discipline that criminalizes youth. Reforms, including trauma-informed and restorative practices, can disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline.

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by **Anthony Conwright** illustration by **Alex Trott**





**I**F THE U.S. education system is to become equitable, its reproduction of historical oppression must be eliminated. The current system—born of the same DNA as a country that rendered the humanity of Black people invalid—is intertwined in a tradition that had the purpose of moving Black people into enslavement through incarceration. No structure in the U.S. educational system is immune to the nation’s legacy as an anti-Black, enslaver country, and that legacy is present in harsh discipline practices that disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous and other youth of color.

### **Criminalizing Blackness Has its Roots in Enslavement**

The mechanisms to criminalize Black people have a history of enforcement that seeks compliance from all citizens. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, for example, forced Northerners to view enslaved people who escaped as criminals and held that “all good citizens are hereby commanded to aid and assist in the prompt and efficient execution of this law.” The law attempted to compel everyone to participate in the capture of fugitives from slavery or face punishment if they aided their escape. And although there was resistance to these laws, as Abraham Lincoln said in his 1855 letter to Joshua Speed, “Northern people do crucify their feelings in order to maintain their loyalty to the Constitution and the Union.”

When the 13th Amendment abolished slavery and involuntary servitude in 1865, it allowed an exception as punishment for a crime “whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.” After the amendment was ratified, Southern states enacted legislation to keep formerly enslaved Black people out of schools and to institutionalize them into the carceral system, thus returning many to an enslaved status. For example, in 1865, the Mississippi legislature passed “An

act to regulate the relation of master and apprentice, as relates to freedman, free negroes, and mulattoes.” The law required civil officers to report to the probate courts the number of Black children who were orphans or whose parents did not have the means to provide childcare. Black children under 18 reported to the court were “apprenticed” to “some competent and suitable person,” and the former “owner” of the minor was given preference. Former enslavers took advantage of the law to keep formerly enslaved children under their control.

### **Harsh School Discipline Contributes to the School-to-Prison Pipeline**

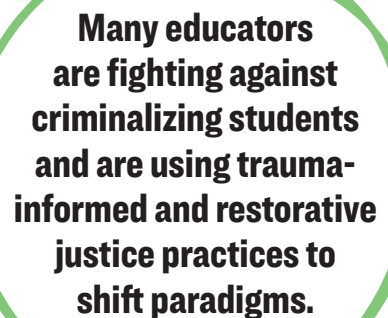
And in the current mass incarceration system, educators who are allies in ending the prison industrial complex often “crucify their feelings” in sacrificing students to show fidelity to “discipline” and “law and order.”

A 2021 study by researchers from Boston University, the University of Colorado Boulder and Harvard University confirms a relationship between experiencing harsh school discipline as a youth and being arrested or incarcerated as an adult. Researchers examined middle-school suspension rates in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) in North Carolina. Half of all students in CMS changed schools because of a shift in school-enrollment boundary lines in the summer before the 2002 academic year.

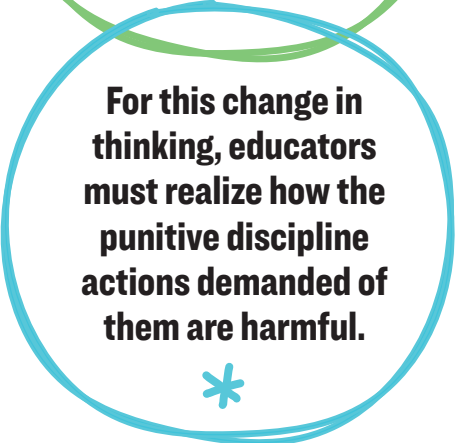
The new school-attendance boundaries meant some students who went to a school with low suspension rates then attended a school with higher rates. The study, which focused on the 26,246 students who experienced the boundary change, found that students who attended the “stricter” school were more likely to be suspended in the 2002-2003 school year. And according to the findings, students who attended stricter schools had a higher chance of being arrested and incarcerated between the ages of 16 and 21. As

researchers explained, “Early censure of school misbehavior causes increases in adult crime—that there is, in fact, a school-to-prison pipeline.”

The same research found that the negative impacts from strict discipline are greatest for Black and other children of color, and for boys, with harsh policies, such as zero-tolerance, exposing students to the criminal legal system. In the same way white Northerners were forced to be surrogates of enslavers in the fugitive-to-enslavement pipeline, educators today are the hydraulics in the school-to-prison pipeline.



**Many educators are fighting against criminalizing students and are using trauma-informed and restorative justice practices to shift paradigms.**



**For this change in thinking, educators must realize how the punitive discipline actions demanded of them are harmful.**



### **Due Process Failures for Black Youth**

When being Black is viewed as synonymous with being a criminal, “duly convicted”—now as in the Jim Crow era—is often an inoperative condition for Black people. Sixteen-year-old Kalief Browder, for instance,



was arrested, charged with theft, which he denied, and held at New York's Rikers Island prison for 1,000 days, 700 of those in solitary confinement, without ever facing a trial. The tragic outcome—Browder's death by suicide after his release—exemplifies the failures of due process for Black youth in a system that sees Black boys as criminals.

The problem of due process failure begins with school discipline practices. Claire Sherburne, staff attorney for the Southern Poverty Law Center's Children's Rights Practice Group, advocates for students facing suspensions and expulsions. Sherburne says that in some cases, schools levy criminal charges against students, bringing them into contact with the criminal legal system.

Two students arrested and expelled from Lee High School in Montgomery County, Alabama, in 2019, echo the pattern. The students, expelled because of alleged video evidence of them passing a handgun, were referred to juvenile court, where they were found innocent—the alleged gun was a cellphone. After their acquittal, however, the school board refused

to allow them to return to campus. Sherburne explains that “One of the kids took his acquittal to school and said, ‘Hey, this was a cellphone. The juvenile court had a full trial and determined this. Can you let us back in?’ And the school said, ‘No, you missed your deadline to appeal your expulsion.’” The SPLC sued the Montgomery County school board for violating the students’ due process rights, and the board finally approved a settlement in 2021, which expunged the disciplinary expulsions and provided funds for educational services to make up for the 14 months the students were barred from school.

Alabama has no due process protections for students facing long-term suspension or expulsions. Each local board of education is required to annually adopt and distribute a code of student conduct that details grounds and procedures for disciplinary actions. State Senator Rodger Smitherman, a Democrat, introduced SB79 to “provide a uniform system of procedural due process protections for students.” The bill, however, is dead in committee.

Sherburne recounts a situation

where a student was disciplined out of school for essentially talking back to a teacher. “She had a dress code violation; the teacher gave her a T-shirt to put on to cover her shoulders. [The student] had a little tantrum and threw the T-shirt across the room, vaguely in the direction of the teacher.” The expulsion churned the mechanisms of institutionalization for this student, who had behavioral issues related to trauma but never received services from the school.

“Because she was expelled,” Sherburne explains, “the county had to find a new placement. ... But she also couldn’t enroll in school in any other counties. It essentially led to her getting placed in a residential treatment facility through the foster care system, because that was where she could get an education because usually those facilities will offer onsite educational services.” These situations create cycles of trauma for students, increasing the likelihood of contact with the criminal legal system.

“In Georgia, there’s a statute that prohibits disruption of public school,” Sherburne said. And anything—simple



# It's about creatively thinking about ways to have an impact.

back talk, for instance—can “disrupt school.” Students can be criminalized for disruption, and even when not arrested, they can face lengthy periods of exclusion from school for almost anything. In addition, students who are suspended or expelled in Georgia face a particularly draconian displacement because of a law that authorizes schools to reject them, even in the absence of due process. These pushouts lead to disengagement with school and exacerbate behavioral problems that increase likelihood of dropping out and potential contact with law enforcement.

This directly impacts students in places like Gwinnett County, Georgia, where 33% of the 180,000 students are Black, but Black students account for 44% of school suspensions. The disproportional rate is also reflected in the Gwinnett County prison population. In 2015, of the 2,482 people in Gwinnett County prison, 1,219 are Black.

## **Educators Must Resist Perpetuating Harmful Systems**

Many educators are fighting against criminalizing students and are using trauma-informed and restorative justice practices to shift paradigms. For this change in thinking, educators must realize how the punitive discipline actions demanded of them are harmful.

Mathew Portell, a former principal and current Director of Communities for Positive/Adverse Childhood Experiences (PACEs) Connection in Tennessee, explains his own evolution. “When I started my principalship, in all transparency, I was far from trauma-informed, and I was definitely far from restorative. So that first half of a year, I suspended kids. We physically contained kids. ... These things that I knew, and I could feel in my gut ... didn’t feel right, but it was what I was trained to do.” Portell attended a Barbara Gay Lecture in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Vanderbilt University that ushered in an immediate change. “They started talking about adversity ... [and the] impact of trauma on the brain. That started the journey. I felt that if I didn’t begin to shift what we were doing, I was committing malpractice.”

Within months, Portell’s school had their first trainings, and Portell hired a trauma-informed therapist. “When I looked at the numbers, the actual statistics of how the school-to-prison pipeline precursors were incarceration, [I knew] if I didn’t do something, then I was contributing. So the last three years I was the principal, we fully eliminated suspensions. We didn’t use them at all.” In their discipline model, Portell and his staff

implemented the essential restorative justice questions: What did you think when you realized what had happened? What impact has this incident had on you and others? What has been the hardest thing for you? What do you think needs to happen to make things right? “The kids’ paradigm began to shift,” Portell explains. Implementing restorative justice practices is challenging because it requires a cultural shift, and that shift can be difficult because there must be capacity-building in staff and students. The change must involve more than simply eliminating punitive discipline.

In May 2022, Masten Park—a predominately Black neighborhood in Buffalo, New York, and a community that has faced poverty and displacement—experienced the trauma of lethal white supremacist violence at Tops supermarket, where a gunman murdered 10 people. Buffalo Collegiate Charter School, which has seven students who lost loved ones in the shooting, is using restorative justice and trauma-informed practices to support students and interrupt the harsh discipline practices that permeate society and schools in the U.S.

Elizabeth Giglia, the school’s restorative justice coordinator, explained that “The same week of the

shooting, our school was named, in addition to a couple other schools, as a threat on Twitter.” The threat toward the school created high tensions within the school community. Using trauma-informed practices, students were able to support one another during the community’s grieving process. “Different classrooms work[ed] with their students to create art and letters that they all deliver[ed] to the vigil at the end of the week. Those things are a great example of what a community would do,” she shares. “That’s such an appropriate, healthy, great way to process.”

Trauma-informed practices must be intentional and focused on emotional calm and stability for students during a time of community trauma. As Giglia explains, “We have to provide support, and that doesn’t mean flooding kids with information, [that] doesn’t mean flooding kids with ... frenz[ied] activity. It means calm, stable, predictable, ... routine, which sometimes butts up against people’s values when it comes to crisis and trauma and grief.”

In addition, restorative justice practices were used to prevent disruption and suspensions. “They encourage the students to build with each other so that the classroom isn’t in a classroom. It’s a community,”

Giglia says, noting that restorative practices help prevent unwanted behaviors. “The prevention piece really is the community piece. If you feel connected to, or responsible for, a space or group of people, restorative practices build community. That’s kind of what it’s for.”

These practices also act as a barrier to keep the pervasive punitive punishment from entering the classroom.

“It’s about creatively thinking about ways to have an impact. Classroom management and discipline doesn’t mean zero tolerance,” Giglia urges. People are complex beings, and schools are structured so compliance takes precedence over learning, which affects the relationship between students and teachers. “Restorative practices ... leverage a relationship that the teachers have spent time building with their students,” Giglia says.

For some schools, restorative justice does not mean no suspensions; it means finding ways to welcome students back after suspension to reduce recidivism. Giglia explains that at Buffalo Collegiate, “To reduce the anxiety of coming back in, we prep the kids who are there to say, ‘Let’s plan what we’re gonna say to welcome them back.’” This fosters student-generated support and a paradigm shift in which students are empowered to take

ownership and facilitate the curation of classroom culture.

“They’re more likely to turn to each other for support when academics are challenging; they’re more likely to support each other when they’re having a hard time. And then when harm does occur, when there’s some kind of misbehavior, the classroom welcomes them back,” Giglia outlines. “The classroom sits in [a] circle and says, ‘You know, we’re happy to have you back. We have a problem with this, too. Here’s how we handle it.’”

Punitive school discipline practices, which disproportionately affect Black and Brown children, contribute to the flow of young people into the criminal legal system and the prison industry. To address the problem requires rethinking discipline and considering the rights of children. Trauma-informed and restorative justice practices are among the beginning models of an equity process to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline. And while systemic change is essential, educators have an immediate responsibility to prioritize the mental health and well-being of students.

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

## Learning for Justice Resources

### TOOLKIT

#### The Foundations of Restorative Justice

by Cory Collins

School discipline and classroom management do not have to be based in compliance. Learn more about restorative practices in this article.

[lfj.pub/restorative-justice-toolkit](http://lfj.pub/restorative-justice-toolkit)

### WEBINAR

#### Trauma-responsive Education

This webinar will help educators gain a common understanding of trauma and how it affects both learning and relationships at school—for students and educators alike.

[lfj.pub/trauma-responsive-education](http://lfj.pub/trauma-responsive-education)

### PD CAFÉ

#### Responding to Trauma in Your Classroom

This PD Café will help educators learn how to recognize the signs of trauma, better understand the causes of trauma, and take steps to establish social and emotional safety in the classroom.

[lfj.pub/responding-to-trauma](http://lfj.pub/responding-to-trauma)





# Inclusive Education Benefits All Children

In confronting attacks on LGBTQ+ students' rights to representation and safety in public education, we hold firm to creating inclusive and affirming learning spaces.

by **Melanie Willingham-Jaggers and the GLSEN Team**  
illustrations by **Marcos Chin**



**ACROSS THE UNITED STATES**, and especially in the South, politicians intent on disenfranchising racially and culturally diverse communities and maintaining inequitable power structures have spent another legislative session pushing bills that censor teaching and curriculum and that ban students from playing sports based on their gender identity. From so-called “Don’t Say Gay” laws that erase LGBTQ+ identities in classroom discussions to bills that would force teachers to report transgender or LGBTQ+ students to unsupportive parents, we’re witnessing a devastating trend that spirals further each day.

Despite recent polling from the Public Religion Research Institute, Gallup and others that documents growing public support for LGBTQ+ rights, transgender people—especially transgender people of color—are being relentlessly attacked. Some politicians have leveraged this gap in support, which is rooted in the public’s lack of familiarity

with transgender people, to build their profile and justify efforts to expand control over people’s access to health care, education and bodily autonomy. These legislations are backed by well-funded special interest groups with the intent to replicate them across the country. This anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric—which has a long history in promoting discriminatory and dangerous policies and practices—significantly affects the lives and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth, particularly nonbinary and transgender youth.

After a grueling spring 2022 semester marked by political attacks on public education, students and educators are bracing for another long year of political exploitation.

## **The Movement for Inclusive School Communities**

There have been great strides in equity and social justice in education over the years, from declining instances of homophobic insults, to increasing numbers of extracurricular



resources like Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs). Decades of research have established a strong foundation for education experts to understand and to build school communities that encourage each student to thrive. For instance, GSAs—LGBTQ+ student-led clubs—provide students a critical space to build a sense of belonging in their community and to learn leadership skills, and they provide a platform for students to engage with their school leaders and peers to advocate for their well-being. Over the last two decades, the rise in availability and acceptance of these clubs has helped contribute to supportive school climates, including declining rates of students hearing homophobic remarks in schools. Along with the presence of GSAs comes a growing network of local advocacy organizations devoted to LGBTQ+ students and the issues impacting the community. For instance, the GLSEN network now partners with GSA chapters in over 20 states.

Within classrooms, too, the very presence of LGBTQ+ topics

can bolster students' sense of safety and belonging. Research shows that students with access to inclusive curriculum and supportive teachers enjoy a more positive school climate where they feel safer in school and experience less harassment. It's no exaggeration to say that school climate can be a life-or-death issue for young people grappling with social stigma, lack of access to resources and other challenges. The Trevor Project has found that LGBTQ+ youth who view their school as LGBTQ+-affirming report lower rates of attempting suicide.

Inclusive curriculum incorporates accurate lessons about historical events, figures and issues relevant to LGBTQ+ people and communities that have long been underrepresented in textbooks and other materials. Accurate and inclusive lessons not only affirm LGBTQ+ students, but also give non-LGBTQ+ students clear information about the diverse world around them and help prepare all young people to navigate and contribute to a multicultural society.



As one high school senior student leader shared when they first saw inclusive materials from a GSA advisor: “That history isn’t taught anywhere. Like, the guy who basically won World War II for us was a gay man. We never discussed that; nobody ever said his name. I never heard his name before. Even out of the mouth of my history teacher. And so it was like stuff like that, especially with my senior year, seeing sophomores and freshmen hearing about people just like them who did things in history. It was really cool; you can just kind of tell that they had never been able to identify with any historical figure before.”

But recent political efforts to disenfranchise and silence are erasing hard-won achievements, and LGBTQ+ young people are once again grappling with discrimination and harassment amid a wave of extremist backlash.

### The Effects of Anti-LGBTQ+ Education Policies on Youth

LGBTQ+, Black, Indigenous and other youth of color have experienced physical violence and detrimental impacts to their mental health and academic performance because of these political developments. According to GLSEN’s 2019 national

school climate survey, for instance, transgender students are far more likely to face harassment in school, with the vast majority of transgender students (84.4%) reporting they have felt unsafe in school because of their gender identity. We also know from GLSEN’s report on supporting students of color that 2 out of every 5 Black LGBTQ+ students experienced harassment or assault at school due to both their sexual orientation and their race, and nearly one third of Black LGBTQ+ students reported missing at least one day of school in the last month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

Research from mental health experts has consistently shown that worrying about political attacks or harassment can exacerbate students’ anxiety and mental health issues. One Trevor Project survey revealed that over 90% of transgender and nonbinary youth are worried about being denied essential medical care or access to the school bathroom due to state or local laws. LGBTQ+ youth already experience some of the highest rates of depression and suicidal ideation among young people.

An LGBTQ+ high school student from Alabama—a member of GLSEN’s National Student Council—recently told BuzzFeed, “For me personally, this has been such a devastating moment. It’s just taking away my rights, my bodily autonomy. It’s making someone else choose what happens to my body, and I’m definitely not OK with that. I’m pretty scared, not just for Alabama, but for the entire country.”

It’s no coincidence that these political attacks look similar across the nation. As one of GLSEN’s chapter organizers in Kansas described, a recent anti-trans lawsuit over school policy was clearly, “a political stunt funded by a right-wing special interest group and doesn’t reflect the views of the vast majority of people in Kansas and across the country who support protections for LGBTQ+ people. Our leaders should be supporting school policies protecting and supporting transgender students, including policies to prevent educators from outing students.”





### **Educators and Youth Hold Firm to Advocating for Inclusive Schools**

In confronting these anti-LGBTQ+ political attacks, students say they're more committed to progress than ever, and many have redoubled their efforts to advocate for equality. These young advocates took time during summer break not only to recuperate, but to mobilize peers and members of their community for the next fight. For instance, GLSEN has received hundreds of recent inquiries from students eager to join a council of national student advocates.

Educators and students will continue to lead the fight for inclusive education and fend off political attacks in their schools and states. Thousands of participants joined GLSEN's most recent Day of Silence, a student-led nationwide protest against anti-LGBTQ+ erasure and discrimination where young people and allies demonstrated their support on social media or in school. Young people are calling for bolder investments from movement supporters and stronger commitments from elected leaders. Advocates say it's a lack of political drive, not a lack of knowledge, that's holding up progress. And research has shown that several key forms of support can help LGBTQ+ students thrive.

"Our research over the past two decades points to clear actions that schools can take to protect students who are facing anti-LGBTQ+ harassment and other forms of discrimination," said Joseph Kosciw, Ph.D., director of GLSEN Research Institute. "It's time for each and

**“Accurate and inclusive lessons not only affirm LGBTQ+ students, but also give non-LGBTQ+ students clear information about the diverse world around them and help prepare all young people to navigate and contribute to a multicultural society.”**



every school leader to understand the barriers that LGBTQ+ students face and to commit to making the changes necessary to protect all students, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.”

Two of these core supports, inclusive curriculum and the presence of supportive educators, have been particularly under fire in recent months as curriculum censorship bills have sought to erase LGBTQ+ history, topics and representation from classrooms. In addition to erasure, LGBTQ+ communities are facing dangerous stigma as politicians blatantly use the rhetoric of “protecting children” to accuse teachers and parents who support LGBTQ+ rights of pushing inappropriate sexual content on children.

The representation of LGBTQ+ people and issues in curriculum can make a world of difference for young people lacking support. And some efforts to shore up protections for LGBTQ+ equality and representation are already underway. GLSEN is equipping students and educators for their return to the new school year with a wide menu of resources. For instance, teachers and librarians can access free LGBTQ+ inclusive books through GLSEN's Rainbow Library program or refer to guidelines for how to assess and build out lesson plans for talking about gender and sexuality. Students, too, can access resources that clarify their legal rights or get materials to prepare for days of action.

Meanwhile, at the federal level, the Department of Education recently released new Title IX guidance to





expand protections for transgender and nonbinary youth. And President Joe Biden commemorated Pride Month this year with an Executive Order urging the Department of Education to defend LGBTQ+ youth amid a dangerous climate, with recommendations for a new working group devoted to LGBTQ+ students and families and for the expansion of the collection of data on sexual orientation and gender identity. GLSEN students and education experts are providing comments and calling on their congressional representatives to advance new legislation as well, including the Safe Schools Improvement Act, LGBTQI+ and Women's History Education Act and LGBTQI+ Data Inclusion Act.

Whether these or future inclusive policies are enacted or enforced at the state level will depend largely on the outcomes of fall elections and the political climate when federal and state legislative sessions ramp up again.

Meanwhile, LGBTQ+ youth and allies across the country will remain resilient and continue fighting for the justice that we all deserve.

**Melanie Willingham-Jaggers** is executive director at GLSEN, which was founded in 1990 by a group of educators and is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safer and more affirming schools for LGBTQ+ students.

## Resources

### GLSEN's Four Key Supports

GLSEN research has identified four major supports that schools can use to cultivate a safe and supportive environment for all students: supportive educators, comprehensive policies, inclusive curriculum and GSAs.

➔ [glsen.org/four-supports](https://www.glsen.org/four-supports)

### Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth of Color

*Erasure and Resilience: The Experiences of LGBTQ Students of Color* is a series of four research reports that examines the school experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), Black, Latinx, and Native and Indigenous LGBTQ youth.

➔ [glsen.org/lgbtq-youth-color](https://www.glsen.org/lgbtq-youth-color)

### GLSEN Navigator and Map Resources

State laws around the nation provide varied degrees of support and protection for LGBTQ+ youth. GLSEN's maps are designed to give communities knowledge about the political environment, student experiences and tools for advocating for positive school change that benefits all young people.

➔ [maps.glsen.org](https://maps.glsen.org)

### Best Practices for Serving LGBTQ Students

This guide helps educators and school leaders make curriculum and policy decisions that include LGBTQ students and prepare all students to thrive in a diverse democracy. And the webinar models how to create an inclusive classroom culture and build an intersectional curriculum that incorporates queer history and perspectives.

➔ [ifj.pub/serving-lgbtq-students-guide](https://www.ifj.pub/serving-lgbtq-students-guide)  
➔ [ifj.pub/serving-lgbtq-students-webinar](https://www.ifj.pub/serving-lgbtq-students-webinar)

### Queer America

From Learning for Justice and hosts Leila Rupp and John D'Emilio, *Queer America* takes listeners on a journey that spans from Harlem to the Frontier West, revealing stories of LGBTQ life. This 13-episode podcast is produced in partnership with University of Wisconsin Press, publishers of *Understanding and Teaching U.S. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History*—the first book designed for high school and university teachers who want to integrate LGBTQ history into their standard curriculum.

➔ [ifj.pub/queer-america](https://www.ifj.pub/queer-america)





# BLACK LIVES MATTER AT SCHOOL

Black Lives Matter at School is a national coalition organizing for racial justice in education.

In this era of mass incarceration, there is a school-to-prison-pipeline system that is more invested in locking up youth than unlocking their minds. That system uses harsh discipline policies that push Black students out of schools at disproportionate rates, denies students the right to learn about their own cultures, and whitewashes the curriculum to exclude many of the struggles and contributions of Black people and other people of color.

That system is also pushing out Black teachers from schools in cities around the country. Educators in the Black Lives Matter at School movement developed these demands for the movement:

- 1 END "ZERO TOLERANCE" DISCIPLINE AND IMPLEMENT RESTORATIVE JUSTICE.
- 2 HIRE MORE BLACK TEACHERS.
- 3 MANDATE BLACK HISTORY AND ETHNIC STUDIES IN K-12 CURRICULUM.
- 4 FUND COUNSELORS, NOT COPS.

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# Centering Diverse Parents in the CRT Debate

Parents of color and parents of conscience, whose children make up the majority of students in public education, must be centered in conversations on race and inclusive education.

by **Ivory Toldson, Ph.D.** | illustrations by **Charles Chaisson**

**BLACK PARENTS MATTER.** Diverse perspectives are essential. Today, less than half of children in the United States under age 15 are white, yet critical race theory (CRT) opponents normalize bigotry and ignore racially and culturally diverse parents' thoughts on education. For more than a century, education has misrepresented and purposely distorted the history of Black, Indigenous and other people of color, along with the narratives of additional communities that have been marginalized.

The U.S. educational system has roots in exclusionary practices that once made it illegal to teach most Black people to read. Even after the 13th Amendment, Jim Crow laws forced Black children into substandard schools with inadequate resources. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that “separate but equal” schools were unconstitutional, yet de facto segregation persists in many school districts across the country. The reality of racism must be honestly confronted for our society to build a more equitable future for all children.

## **Most U.S. Adults Support Inclusive Education**

A recent NAACP co-sponsored survey of 1,625 adults reveals that most people believe parents “should have the most say in deciding how race and history [are] taught in public schools.” Survey participants equally represented—325 each—Black, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Latine/x, Indigenous and white adults. Interestingly, the majority of white survey respondents indicated teachers should have *the least* say in how race and history are taught, placing educators beneath governors and state lawmakers.

The same survey found that over 39% of all participants have a favorable opinion about CRT, while 29% have an unfavorable view, and 32% have no opinion (“didn’t know”). Among white adults, 28% have a favorable opinion and 43% an unfavorable, compared to 50% of Black respondents with a favorable view and 21% unfavorable. In both groups, 29% report no opinion on CRT. And although more than one-third of Latine/x, Asian and Indigenous adults did not know about CRT, the majority of participants from these groups (39%) view CRT favorably. The lack of information to form an opinion—as indicated by more than one-third of participants—reveals a gap in knowledge about CRT that is being exploited by some politicians.

While nearly half of the white survey participants (46%) believe *too much* attention is paid to race and racial issues in the U.S., 56% of Black respondents believe *too little* attention is paid. And overall, the majority of all participants felt *too little* attention is paid to race and racism. Among all participants, the majority, over 60%, felt that the government addressing racism would have a positive impact on the country. The findings of this survey support other media polls—*USA Today* poll, 2021; *Reuters* poll, 2021; *Slate* poll, 2021—that illustrate that most adults in the U.S. support teaching honest history and the effects of slavery and racism.

The NAACP findings underscore a trend. Nationally, some politicians are focusing on “parents’ rights” to disrupt efforts to create more equitable and inclusive education environments. In Virginia, for instance, Gov. Glenn Youngkin set up an email tip line for parents to report “divisive practices” in schools. Similarly, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis backed legislation that prohibited



public schools from teaching aspects of history that make people feel “discomfort.” Politicians like Gov. Youngkin and Gov. DeSantis marginalize parents of color and parents of conscience when they warn “parents” about CRT in school. This insidious strategy normalizes prejudiced white parents, casting them against phantom teachers who are “indoctrinating their children with CRT.”

### Critical Race Theory and Systemic Racism

CRT explains how systems—like education—can have racist outcomes even after racism becomes illegal. CRT is an analytical tool, not a body of facts. And CRT offers ways of understanding how racism manifests in social institutions, helping to explain why some groups are disadvantaged while others hold institutional power.

The practice and enforcement of whose perspective is prioritized and whose is erased creates a clearer picture of the harm intended by anti-CRT legislation. For example, when I was an 11th grader, I felt immense discomfort when my U.S. history teacher taught us that slavery was a “system of a different time” and many enslaved people, “slaves” in her words, “had good relationships with their ‘slave masters.’” Her lesson caused me so much angst that I became combative. Because of my confrontational behavior, the teacher sent me to the principal’s office to be disciplined. I was humiliated and ashamed that I had been disruptive in class, but I was also angry. My parents had instilled in me a love of learning and a respect for educators. They also taught me to be proud of my Black heritage. So, when my history



teacher minimized the experiences of my enslaved ancestors, I could not stay silent. These intense feelings of discomfort among students of color should be considered in these legislations, but they are disregarded.

The relationship between the intent and enforcement of these laws will disadvantage diverse learners. A parent’s “right to know” what their child is learning can quickly become weaponized to silence educators who are having honest conversations about race with their students. To counter these legislations, we need to recenter the arguments around CRT in schools

on the experiences and perspectives of the racially and culturally diverse parent majority in public education, to unify, rather than divide, parents, caregivers and teachers.

Like most African Americans, I can trace my lineage back to the same racist enslavers whose crimes Gov. DeSantis is trying to minimize. My great-great-great-grandfather was a white enslaver in Kentucky who raped an enslaved African woman on his plantation. She gave birth to my great-great grandfather, Granderson Conn. Conn’s white half siblings taught him to read after his enslaver

father moved his children—including those conceived from rape—to North Louisiana. Conn became free as a young adult and volunteered to fight for the Union Army in the Civil War. After the war, he returned to Louisiana and had a daughter (my great-grandmother) who had a son named John Henry Scott (my grandfather). My grandfather became a civil rights activist and father to many children, including my mother, civil rights activist Johnita Scott.

Unlike me, Gov. DeSantis most likely did not have an ancestor who enslaved Black people in the U.S. His ancestors were Italian immigrants. Undoubtedly, the intent of the white “discomfort” legislation is not to conceal the actions of white racists from the past; it is to facilitate the agenda of white racists in the present. The legislation is designed to protect the biased, white-centered lens of education that permeates our current system. As a great-great-great grandson of a white enslaver and rapist, I am sensible enough not to feel discomfort from my family ancestry; I expect nothing less from my distant white cousins. Instead of pacifying our ancestors who oppressed, we can celebrate our ancestors of all races who fought to make the world better.

The vagueness and overbreadth of these divisive concept laws mean teachers are unsure what they are allowed to teach. And that is the goal, because if educators are uncertain, they will pull back from teaching honest history, fearful of the consequences from a loud minority engaged in politically driven efforts. This fear-based retreat from inclusive education is happening now, with school leaders removing diversity-centered books—even

## **The media is adjudicating their responsibility to truth by ignoring parents of color, parents of conscience and the vast majority of people in the U.S. who support teaching about the effects of racism and honest history.**

when not specifically challenged—from library shelves.

### **Understanding the Values of Critical Race Theory**

The politicians who support these anti-CRT laws intentionally distort CRT to generate fear. An examination of CRT principles counters the disinformation or misinformation.

CRT teaches that no race is superior, and that race-based discrimination is wrong. According to CRT, privilege is socially ascribed, not inherent to individuals, and CRT argues that systems of meritocracy have been constructed to favor one race over another—recognizing this fact does not single out individuals.

CRT does not address the moral character of individuals. It teaches that individuals of high moral character, including people of color, can work within systems that promote racist outcomes. CRT was developed to move from the “individual” or interpersonal functions of racism to understanding

racism as systemic. Educators can use this tenant to help students understand that while they did not personally commit past atrocities, they do have a responsibility to learn from history and work to end institutional racism. CRT does not address individual feelings of discomfort, guilt or anguish. However, laws that focus on “discomfort,” if they were truly enforced equally, should protect Black and Indigenous students from teachers who minimize the impact of slavery or colonialism.

CRT does not teach that the U.S. is fundamentally racist. Rather, it teaches that racism is an aberration of our nation’s true potential. CRT and anti-racist education recognize that racism and other forms of bias can be addressed. And CRT does not advocate for the violent overthrow of the U.S. government—unlike those politicians and white supremacists who supported the January 6 insurrection. CRT promotes social change through nonviolent means.

CRT advances racial harmony by creating fair and just systems under the law and within systems. Diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives that are grounded in CRT can help reduce division and resentment by ensuring that everyone is treated fairly. And CRT does not ascribe any traits to individuals. Rather, it is the very politicians and groups pushing anti-CRT and anti-LGBTQ+ legislation who are promoting implicit biases and ascribing traits in their attacks on LGBTQ+ students and educators.

CRT does not argue against the existence of the rule of law. It seeks to change the relationship between law and racial power. That said, the rule of law needs to protect the rights of students of color and the perspectives of diverse parents, and not just used



to assuage the discomfort of some white parents. CRT supports the equity, inclusion, belonging and justice necessary for our inherent human rights to endure. And a core tenant of CRT is that governments should not deny any person the equal protection of the law.

Clearly, CRT, anti-racism, social justice and inclusive education do not threaten, nor do they harm, children of any race or culture. By design, however, divisive concept laws treat reasonable efforts to create inclusive classrooms as a perennial threat. The nationwide effort to short-circuit open discussions about race and racism, by allowing anyone to claim they felt discriminated against by a lesson, endorses the type of monitoring and censorship of teachers typically found in anti-democratic totalitarian governments.

### Parents, Caregivers and Educators Are Partners in Inclusive Education

The data suggests parents should have a say in education. If we refocused the conversation on Black and other parents and caregivers of color and on those of conscience of any ethnicity—who represent the majority of U.S. parents—it becomes clear that there is no division between parents and teachers. Teachers who promote inclusive education have the support of parents, and together they can build partnerships for inclusive learning spaces that benefit *all* children.

The current “division” between parents and educators is artificially manipulated by politicians to represent a particular white perspective. Therefore, we should prioritize the racially and culturally diverse majority of parents and recenter the CRT debate on their perspectives. The following are recommendations on how to do this:

1. Challenge *not* teaching inclusive history and show that the dominant narratives promote white supremacy by focusing solely on white parents and a white-centered lens of history. We should demand promoting anti-racism and social justice education.

2. Amplify the perspectives of racially and culturally diverse parents in the media. Currently, there is a vocal minority of white parents who support these politicians while most parents in the U.S. do not. The media is adjudicating their responsibility to truth by ignoring parents of color, parents of conscience and the vast majority of people in the U.S. who support teaching about the effects of racism and honest history. Social justice organizations also need to center these perspectives and give space to these parents.

3. Promote the political involvement of the majority of parents who favor honest history, CRT and anti-racism education. This can be accomplished through voting, writing letters and op-eds, and attending and testifying at school board meetings.

4. Encourage educators to build partnerships with parents and caregivers, with clear information about what social justice education is, what CRT means, and the benefits of inclusive education for all children. We need to help educators know that the majority of people in the U.S., including most parents, support them in teaching inclusive education.

Today, students in public schools are the most racially diverse in the history of our nation. We need to embrace this diversity, and support caregivers and educators who need the

resources to reach across cultures and prepare students for global excellence. And we need to recognize that Black and Brown parents have always been the experts about their children. Insidious efforts to ascribe parents advocating for quality education for *all* children to irrational xenophobic reflexes are unethical, immoral, and, frankly, undemocratic.

**Ivory A. Toldson, Ph.D., (he/him)** is a professor of counseling psychology at Howard University, editor-in-chief of *The Journal of Negro Education*, and director of Education Innovation and Research at the NAACP.

## Resources

### ***Advocating for Teaching Honest History: What Educators Can Do***

Learning for Justice’s new guide offers resources and tools for teaching honest history in the classroom and strategies for advocating for honest history education in school communities.

[learningforjustice.org/Advocate-THH-Fall22](https://learningforjustice.org/Advocate-THH-Fall22)

### ***The Color of Law***

Explore the role of U.S. segregation in everything from housing and employment to wealth accumulation—and the policies that made it all happen. Inspired by and including excerpts from Richard Rothstein’s book *The Color of Law*, this webinar delves into deliberate governmental practices that created opportunities for white Americans and excluded others.

[lfj.pub/color-of-law](https://lfj.pub/color-of-law)

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# PREVENTION AND RESILIENCE

## Supporting Young People Through Polarizing Times

During this time of political and social turmoil, build networks of trusted adults to help young people understand, contextualize and counter manipulative and harmful information.

by **Lydia Bates** | illustrations by **Irina Perju**



**SINCE THE ONSET** of the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers looking at extremism have warned of the proliferation of hateful and manipulative content online and young people’s increased vulnerabilities to such harmful narratives. Despite such warnings, the Center for Countering Digital Hate found that large tech companies failed to remove 84% of antisemitic posts and 89% of anti-Muslim posts. Alongside the proliferation of hate online, antisemitic incidents increased 34% from 2020 to 2021. Similarly, between March 2020 and March 2022, Stop AAPI Hate collected nearly 11,500 reports of incidents targeting Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, with “AAPI individuals who are also female, [nonbinary], or LGBTQIA+ [experiencing] hate incidents that target them for their multiple identities.”

Online hate speech and offline harm combined with a 250% escalation in educational gag order bills aimed at restricting educators’ agency to discuss race, gender, sexual orientation and accurate U.S. history have severely impacted schools and communities across the nation. Fueled by a vocal minority of people with discriminatory and oppressive aims, such legislative efforts threaten educators’ ability to provide students with an equitable and inclusive education

that can stem the flow of exploitative disinformation. Thus, initiatives to mitigate harm and ensure all young people can access the support they need must be network-based, equipping a coalition of caregivers and community members with the tools to work in conjunction with educators to build resilience against harmful narratives.

### **Supporting Educators and Students to Prevent Extremism**

As trusted figures in young people’s lives, educators are a line of defense against exploitative narratives. It’s therefore essential for educators to feel equipped to counter threats to inclusive schools and communities. As director of the Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab, or PERIL, Cynthia Miller-Idriss, Ph.D., explains, “Educators are trained to recognize and report signs of physical harm and abuse among their students—but we need to update this training to include the online worlds where young people spend so much of their time.”

To support educators in that endeavor, PERIL has partnered with the Southern Poverty Law Center to develop a growing suite of evidence-based resources to challenge and ultimately prevent the radicalization of young people




to extremism. “Teachers need to be equipped to recognize signs of exposure to harmful online content as well as online harassment and abuse,” says Miller-Idriss. “And they also need strategies to help young people build resilience against harmful content and be equipped to reject it when they do encounter it.”

informing an effective approach.

Encouraging dialogue between peers and developing classroom guidelines to ensure inclusive and honest conversations can help build a safe and respectful environment for all students. As Pasha Dashtgard, Ph.D., PERIL director of research, explains, “When a student says

a community of common values and approaches within a school system can connect educators to the resources they need, provide space for mutual support and shared experiences, and develop trust with school administrators. As political polarization deepens and inclusive education remains a target of the far right, curating such spaces among educators is crucial.



## **To bolster resilience against extremism and develop knowledge to identify and confront harmful ideologies before they take root, resources across networks of trusted adults—from parents and caregivers to coaches, guidance counselors and religious leaders—can help form a safety net of support.**

The PERIL supplemental resource specifically for educators offers information to do just that. With notes about harmful rhetoric and narratives to be aware of, and examples of ways to maintain inclusive learning environments, the resource aims to support educators in their efforts to fortify students against hateful content and manipulation online.

While not all young people who encounter hateful material will become radicalized, harmful rhetoric can be repeated in classrooms, even without intent to cause harm. If such beliefs make it into the classroom, it’s important for teachers to confront the harmful or discriminatory language directly, but without ridicule or shame. Following up with moments of individual learning can help educators better understand where such views stem from, thus better

something hateful or dehumanizing in a classroom, one important lesson that the whole class can learn from such an incident is solidarity. The targeted student(s), along with those who witnessed the incident firsthand, can come together and use that teachable moment to affirm what values they hold as a group, and identify which of those values have just been violated.”

Educators can also engage with current events and equip students with the tools to recognize and stem the flow of misinformation and disinformation through digital literacy trainings. Such conversations can increase students’ feelings of agency and develop a foundation for future investment and participation in a thriving and diverse democracy.

As early facilitators of inclusive democracy, educators need to feel sustained and supported. Building

### **Building Networks of Care Outside Schools**

Helping protect young people and communities from manipulation both on and offline goes beyond equipping educators with the tools they need in classroom settings. To bolster resilience against extremism and develop knowledge to identify and confront harmful ideologies before they take root, resources across networks of trusted adults—from parents and caregivers to coaches, guidance counselors and religious leaders—can help form a safety net of support. First published in June 2020, PERIL and SPLC’s flagship *Parents & Caregiver’s Guide to Online Radicalization* provides information on warning signs and drivers of extremism. It also gives parents tools to engage young people and helps adults feel empowered to act.

While staples of adolescence, such as the desire for friendship, a sense of belonging, and teenage rebellion, may seem innocuous, they can also augment young people’s vulnerabilities to manipulative content. As the COVID-19 pandemic deepened in March 2020, nearly 93% of households with young people in the U.S. reported moving to some form of distance learning. As many parents and caregivers worked

to navigate this new landscape, young people were left with unprecedented amounts of unsupervised time online, considerably increasing the likelihood of encountering extremist material. Compounding concerns about time spent online, many young people continue to experience feelings of despair and uncertainty stemming from crises like COVID-19 and climate change. These societal upheavals leave people grasping for simplistic answers to complex issues, fueling the spread of conspiracy theories.

Voids in support and accurate information have too often been exploited by extremists, thus contributing to further political and social polarization. In an April 2022 poll, SPLC found that the bigoted so-called “great replacement”—the false conspiracy that liberals are deliberately driving demographic change in the U.S. to replace white citizens—is believed to some extent by nearly 7 out of 10 self-identified Republicans. As this perceived attack on the white population would necessitate control over people’s reproductive functions, the “great replacement” conspiracy theory has close ties to anti-LGBTQ+ bigotry and misogynistic control over the bodies of people who can become pregnant.

With such beliefs gaining traction among some communities, it’s imperative that inoculating young people far upstream of their potential exposure to extremist material becomes a whole-of-society duty. “One key strategy for disrupting the radicalization process in youth,” notes Dashtgard, “is to take a ‘no wrong door’ approach—to borrow a phrase from trauma-informed care. Kids should feel like any trusted adult in their life that they open up to can help them with this problem. Sometimes



kids and adolescents don’t want to open up to their parents or their primary caregivers; sometimes it’s a friend’s dad, or their favorite staff member at their afterschool program, or their soccer coach.”

Thus, across the coming months and years, PERIL, in collaboration with SPLC, will continue to refine existing materials and publish further evidence-based resources for educators and guidance counselors, mental health professionals, as well as coaches, youth mentors and other trusted adults. Each of these communities of professionals or volunteers has a unique lens into young people’s lives and holds the capacity to build relationships that offer diverse perspectives.

As coaches, mentors and youth group leaders often interact with young people outside of classrooms, they are well-positioned to help foster

positive identity formation in a more casual atmosphere. Imbuing young people with a sense of collaboration can seed such values across various facets of their lives. These individuals have a particular capacity to advocate for policy initiatives that center inclusion and commit to standards of behavior. And they also offer opportunities for networked solutions in case individuals in the young person’s life are espousing harmful and manipulative viewpoints.

Mental health practitioners represent a conduit for inoculating young people against harmful narratives and challenging any such burgeoning belief systems while also protecting youth who are targeted by incidents of bias and bigotry. As these views can coincide with other traumas and situations that create vulnerabilities, counselors might need to first identify and





# RESOURCES

## **Preventing Youth Radicalization: Building Resilient, Inclusive Communities**

The resources on this page from SPLC and the Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab (PERIL) are intended to provide strategies to address the threat of extremism through early prevention and non-carceral solutions.

→ [splcenter.org/peril](https://splcenter.org/peril)

## **Building and Confronting Risks: A Parents & Caregivers Guide to Online Youth Radicalization**

This guide is intended for parents, caregivers and educators, and provides tangible steps to counter the threat of online radicalization, including information on new risks, how to recognize warning signs, and how to get help and engage a radicalized child or young adult.

→ [splcenter.org/peril-guide-online-youth-radicalization](https://splcenter.org/peril-guide-online-youth-radicalization)

## **Learning the Landscape of Digital Literacy**

This framework provides digital literacy training for educators to stem the flow of misinformation and help young people participate meaningfully in online communities, interpret the changing digital landscape, and unlock the power of the internet for good.

→ [ifj.pub/framework-digital-literacy](https://ifj.pub/framework-digital-literacy)

## **Combatting Online Youth Radicalization**

Learning for Justice and cohosts from SPLC's Intelligence Project and American University's Polarization and Extremism Research Innovation Lab (PERIL) present a webinar on combating the radicalization of young people online.

→ [ifj.pub/combating-radicalization](https://ifj.pub/combating-radicalization)

confront extremist beliefs to address underlying drivers. Exploring parallel approaches for pathologies that intersect with some of the patient's extremist attitudes may be helpful in developing effective treatment.

### **Approach and Values**

The resiliency and prevention resources will provide educators, caregivers and all trusted adults in young people's lives with the ability to recognize exposure to harmful content and build resistance to it. However, in a rapidly changing political climate and social and economic conditions, making such resources both dynamic and effective can be challenging. Therefore, to be actionable, these guides strive to always center the needs of targeted individuals, focus on the local community level and take non-carceral approaches.

Similar to ineffectual classroom approaches that shame students who have voiced hateful beliefs, incarceration contributes to feelings of anger and perpetuates cyclical violence. Rather, PERIL and SPLC resources aim to ground prevention efforts in the strength and cohesion of communities. Given the importance of localized contexts and the highly individualized nature of radicalization, communities of caregivers, educators and trusted adults are key to resilience against online and offline manipulation.

To stay true to these values and reduce harms as ethically and effectively as possible, our resources are tested and refined. Miller-Idriss explains that in an impact study of 755 adults, "Our research showed that it only takes seven minutes of reading our guide for parents and caregivers to be better informed about red flags and warning signs related to online radicalization, to feel more

confident about intervening if a child has been exposed to harmful content, and to know how to get more help." Further, every extra minute spent reading the guide helped, too. The longer participants spent reading the guide, the more confident they felt in their ability to recognize extremist rhetoric and intercede. In fact, 87% of respondents reported feeling either satisfied or extremely satisfied with the guide overall.

As the country heads into a contentious midterm election and eyes the 2024 presidential election, polarization catalyzed by manipulative sources will continue to impact people's lives. Such a divisive landscape can be overwhelming, but as Miller-Idriss notes, "It's really important to know that it doesn't have to take an entire online workshop or training to be better equipped to protect your kids from online harms—you can do it while you're drinking your cup of morning coffee."

While it is inevitable that some of the incendiary rhetoric of this landscape will manifest in classrooms, it's important to harness the strength of community in response. Resources like the ones described will empower broad coalitions of trusted adults to act on behalf of, and with, young people targeted by manipulative and harmful information. Such community-based efforts, in partnership with schools and educators, will help cultivate a generation of empathetic and resilient young people.

**Lydia Bates** (she/her) is the program manager of Partnerships in SPLC's Intelligence Project.



## Whose Heritage?

# Help Build a Movement for Racial Justice in Your Hometown

SPLC's *Whose Heritage?* resources offer research and guidance for learning the history of Confederate memorials and how you can take action.

Democracy requires us to be actively engaged, and the process of removing Confederate memorials offer an education in civic engagement—how ordinary citizens have challenged the Lost Cause ideology by exercising their rights and demanding that our institutions live up to their stated ideals.

- ▶ **Report:** Learn about the more than 2,000 Confederate memorials that still exist.
- ▶ **Map:** Find out if there's a Confederate memorial in your community.
- ▶ **Database:** Research who erected memorials, when they went up and where they are located now.
- ▶ **Community Action Guide:** Draw upon guidance for organizing a campaign to remove Confederate symbols and learn useful information about the Confederacy and its symbols.

Visit [splcenter.org/whose-heritage](https://splcenter.org/whose-heritage) to read the full report and learn more about the movement to remove Confederate memorials.

illustration by **Zoë van Dijk**





by **Keith Jones**  
photography by  
**Karsten Moran**

# Confronting Ableism on the Way to Justice

To build a society that advances the human rights of all people requires the social justice movement to be intentional in including intersecting identities and diverse equity struggles.

**THE DISABILITY RIGHTS** movement’s foundational principle—“Nothing about us without us”—has been a rallying cry through much of the movement’s long narrative of intersecting with more high-profile social justice struggles. The legislation most people celebrate in association with disability rights, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, was influenced by the landmark civil rights legislation of 1964, and represents what people with disabilities had always sought: for their rights to be recognized and respected. But ableism doesn’t simply end with legislation; it remains a challenge, and the goals of equity and inclusion—in schools, society and the social justice movement—have yet to be fully realized.

Throughout much of the nation’s history, for the disability community, our existence was one of isolation and segregation. And while education is key to uplifting people, despite landmark decisions (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954) and legislation (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973), having a disability left many people on the margins of equitable education.

The unfortunate truth is that a barrier of ableism exists within the fight for justice. Even now, as intersectional struggles seek to be more inclusive, the disability

community often must ask “the movement” to include us. So, what happened on the way to justice?

## **Where We Have Been—The “Crippled” Little Black Boy**

I began my school journey in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1975, which coincided with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, later reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990. My arrival every day at the Elias Michael School for Crippled Children was a challenge. Being Black and a child with cerebral palsy, or “crippled” as I was called, neither I nor my classmates were expected to put forth any effort to learn. So, little effort was spent on teaching us. The simple act of requesting that actual math be taught got me sent to the principal’s office.

This was my earliest experience of the intersectionality of my identities not being fully considered, except in ways that created barriers. As a child, I was unaware to what extent racism and ableism were shaping my ability to be educated. It would seem these problems should have been addressed with the passage of the Handicapped Children Act and the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. But the fact that I have race and disability at play is often overlooked, as though parts of my identity should be siloed when

focusing on other parts. And the times all my identities are recognized, they compound one another in society’s biased view of both my race and disability.

Being overlooked plays in the back of my mind because my grandmother, mother and several family members were active in social justice and civil rights struggles. As a child, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother and had a unique front-row position to the women’s rights fight and the movement for civil rights coming out of the Jim Crow era. Later, in the 1980s and 1990s, family discussions addressed the possibility of the first Black president of the United States. And I listened intently, even though I didn’t fully understand what my parents were talking about as they spoke of things like affirmative action. Yet, beyond directly relating to me, disability wasn’t in the mix of those powerful topics about justice.

Then, as now, in conversations about criminal legal system reform, or about police interaction with Black and Brown youth, disability is rarely addressed. Or when it is, it’s a secondary effect. As someone who has had related experiences, the question lingered: “Why am I not fully included in these discussions?” That question was reinforced when I became active within the social justice and disability rights



movements. As I worked with various organizations on issues ranging from sexual assault and survivors' rights to criminal legal reform and voting rights, there seemed one glaring omission in each of these struggles—reconciling the multiplicities of an individual's identities. Understanding that a person could be Latine/x, trans and disabled and in need of access to schools and voting, of how those intersecting identities needed to be included, was absent from conversations.

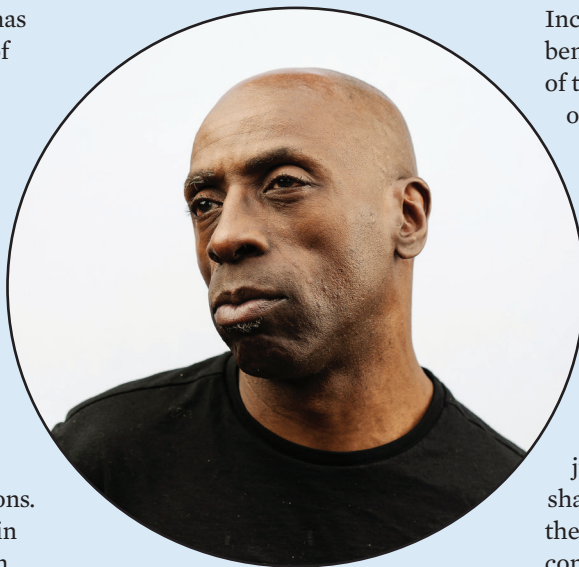
### Where We Are in This Struggle

The social justice movement still has difficulty including various parts of the equity struggle, particularly disability representation. When the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* engendered an outcry, people with disabilities were sidelined in the conversation. This is echoed across not just rights and access to reproductive care but social justice in general. For example, with the unrelenting attacks on voting rights, accessibility to the polls, let alone the ballot, are rare focal points for voting rights organizations.

Disability rights advocate Justin Dart Jr. laid out the possibilities in 1987, when he testified in front of the Select Education Subcommittee that, “We have all the human, technological, economic and political resources necessary to effect a cultural revolution which will utilize the methods and products of science for the dignity and quality of human life. We stand at a historic crossroads. We are approaching foundational decisions about the future of rehabilitation and the fundamental rights of people with disabilities. Let us not seek scapegoats, let us seek

solutions. We have no irredeemable enemies, only enemy attitudes.” More than three decades later, his words remain relevant—both the problem and potential are still present.

Ableism as an impediment to the disability community's inclusion was laid bare with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many Americans dismissed the needs of people with disabilities or failed to understand how callous statements about those with other medical conditions who were dying affects our community.



A recent study by researchers at Syracuse University confirmed that COVID-19 was far deadlier for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Yet the pandemic's increased health risks for students with disabilities is often given minimal consideration as politics have led some officials to refuse the implementation of safety protocols to reduce the spread of COVID-19. This particularly endangers students with disabilities and prevents them from safely

accessing in-person education. The attitude of “getting back to normal” fails to recognize the increased risk for some people and that “normal” wasn't always equitable or inclusive to begin with, not in schools, workplaces, or society in general.

In the three decades since the signing of the ADA, even with other significant legislative gains, disability rights advocates still struggle to break through in attempts to get organizations working in the social justice space to realize that we have a common struggle. We are here. Include us. And not as an extension of benevolence, but because we are part of this shared humanity. Social justice organizations, political parties and national advocacy groups have platforms in which the disability community has vested interests. Yet there is still at times a disconnect. To make that link to the expansiveness of our community, the movement on all sides must be more aware that the -isms are real—including ableism—and they often exist not just “out there” in society, but within shared social justice movements. And the disability community itself must confront its own -isms, whether that is internal ableism, racism, homophobia or any other bias.

Too often, when intersecting identities are recognized, it is in the context of how our identities compound inequities. And while that consideration is important, there needs to be recognition as well that inclusion in the movement itself, in finding the solutions and having a place at the table for those conversations, is essential. No one should have to silo aspects of their identity to support or be supported by the present social

## **Listening to the perspectives of those with lived experience is key to understanding that disability is not a problem to solve but part of the total human experience to embrace. “Nothing about us without us” has real and consequential meaning.**

justice movement. Unfortunately, in organizing and advocating for larger justice issues, the disability community, regardless of their shared identities, has been marginalized within these larger movements. And within the disability rights struggle itself, intersecting identities have also been pushed to the corners.

The essential need to confront ableism in seeking justice has led the disability community to view our challenges through the lens of “disability justice,” a term coined from conversations between disabled queer women of color activists in 2005, including Patty Berne, co-founder and executive and artistic director of Sins Invalid. Disability justice centers on individuals at the intersections of disability, race, gender identity and socioeconomic status, who are often left out of the social justice movement. Understanding intersectionality—not just as part of the inequity problem but also as part of the equity solution—must be a core value in the quest for social justice, and in that quest, the need for visibility of intersectional identities and connected struggles is essential. With that foundational understanding and the desire to solve issues in the affirmative for our communities, we all can strive to work together.

### **Where We Can Go**

What does it mean to have body autonomy, particularly for people

with disabilities? What does it mean to have access to education and housing and health care? These issues in the broader struggle for a just and inclusive democracy have begun shifting to embrace the diverse tapestry of the human experience.

We must work across issues, understanding that expertise is not necessarily found only in the traditional spaces, and that perspectives within the disability community are valid. Pity is not the issue; the desire to live, breathe, eat and be included in our culture, in our neighborhoods, in our communities, in our states, and in our country, is. And this active representation is more significant now with the focus on pride in our diversity. There has been an increase in positive visibility through concerted efforts like #WeThe15, Disability Pride Month and the disability movement flag—these are all notes of progress to elevate disability as part of the diversity of human experience in the quest for social justice.

So how can we improve disability inclusion in social justice and overcome ableism? As our movement seeks anti-racist legal reform, access to economic sustainability and employment, quality education, reproductive rights and bodily autonomy, we must include people with disabilities—who cut across all intersecting demographics. And we must be intentional in that inclusion.

On an organizational level, we can learn from those with a history of

inclusion—Sins Invalid, World Institute on Disability, American Association of People with Disabilities, Disability Visibility Project, POOR Magazine, and Krip-Hop Nation—to share how to engage and make employment and activism more accessible. We are at the stage where fighting this fight minus the disability community undermines the ability to advocate for these issues in their totality.

In education, a focus on inclusive spaces, high expectations for students with disabilities and training for all educators is essential. Listening to the perspectives of those with lived experience is key to understanding that disability is not a problem to solve but part of the total human experience to embrace. “Nothing about us without us” has real and consequential meaning.

We can’t have a truly equitable social justice movement without disability rights representation and visibility. And we can’t have inclusive schools without disability inclusive spaces and accommodations for learning.

We are each the totality of intersecting identities that are all valid. And the social justice movement is a totality of our multiple struggles that must all be valued as well. We can work together and thrive together in building a culture of diversity and inclusion—beginning with the movement for social justice.

**KEITH JONES** (he/him) is the president and CEO of SoulTouchin’ Experiences LLC, a recognized leader within social justice and disability rights movements, and a multi-talented artist who, along with Leroy Moore and Rob Temple, founded the Emmy Award-winning Krip Hop Nation.



# Creating a Society Rooted in Justice

Nationally recognized anti-racist and anti-bias writer and educator Britt Hawthorne provides insights on raising children to become global citizens.

by Britt Hawthorne  
and Learning for Justice

photography by Bethany Brewster

**SAFE AND EQUITABLE** spaces for all young people require dynamic social justice learning. And parents and caregivers are at the forefront in efforts to give children the foundation to build future inclusive societies.

Britt Hawthorne, nationally recognized anti-racist educator and author of *Raising Antiracist Children: A Practical Parenting Guide*, expressed the sentiment in her note to parents that, “It is never too early to start creating a home rooted in justice, compassion, and love.” We agree—it is never too early for children to learn to build a society with those values. Nor is it ever too late for adults to honestly confront our country’s history and our own biases to shape a more just future.

Hawthorne, who provides anti-racism and anti-bias trainings for parents and educators, took time for a conversation with Learning for Justice, sharing her insights as a parent and educator.







***Raising Antiracist Children* serves as a valuable practical guide for parents, caregivers and educators, many of whom feel overwhelmed and are unsure where to start. Please tell us about the practice of anti-racism in our daily lives.**

Every child deserves the right to be parented in an anti-racist way. It's never too late or too early to start practicing anti-racism. What's important is that you're practicing it now. Caregivers practice anti-racism because we wish for our children to reach their fullest potential and become more compassionate, empathetic human beings. Before starting new activities or purchasing new books, we want to cultivate community. The foundation of our liberation framework will always be community.

We must develop the ability and capacity to care for one another deeply. When we're genuinely in and relating to our community, we'll sense the injustices and justices of the world. We will notice who is constantly erased in discussions and the communities most impacted by political decisions. If we're lucky enough to have a strong community, its members will challenge us to take action, encourage us to listen more and share our wisdom. We will truly learn how to hold ourselves accountable.

As anti-racists, we advocate for the justice of other identity groups because liberation should not be exclusionary or conditional. We must remember that Black and Brown folks can be queer, trans, disabled, Muslim, Jewish, neurodivergent and any number of other identities; there is no finite list. Focus on having honest representation in the toys, books and movies in which your children engage. Share what TV shows you're watching that promote inclusivity and justice.

Share books and toys to encourage collectivist thinking. When white folks are overrepresented in books or movies, identify it as racism: "Huh, everyone in this book has pale skin. That's not what the world is really like. This book is upholding racism, so let's put it back."

But don't just stop there; include anti-racism in everything you do, including playtime. When I'm building with my child, I ask him questions that will make him think about his neighbors. For instance, if he wants to build a house, school or castle, I can ask him: "Oh wait, where's our ramp for people who use wheelchairs and have strollers?" "What's this? Wow, a basketball court in the house. How about a swimming pool? We can add a kiddie pool for the younger children. Where are the grandparents going to play?"

Anti-racism also calls us to center Black people and people of the global majority in our home. Children of the global majority need to know they come from a place of power before they learn about the oppression their community experiences. Amelia Allen Sherwood's practice, "Taking Up Space," in *Raising Antiracist Children: A Practical Parenting Guide* reminds us all to make space for Black and Indigenous children to take up.

**You explained that you chose specific anti-racist values that "directly disrupt harmful dominant beliefs, support critical thinking, and allow our children to live out values of justice." Will you elaborate on your chosen anti-racist values?**

Two of my values are love and justice. What drove me to develop them was the slow and deeply vulnerable process of unpacking and analyzing how the white supremacy characteristics—identified by Tema



Okun—unintentionally showed up in my parenting practice. Once I unpacked these characteristics, I was called to choose the values that I would use to lead me. My values resist my natural tendency to avoid conflict and my desire to be the perfect parent with the correct answers who has it all figured out. Instead, I seek authenticity, curiosity, collaboration, accountability, becoming, empowerment and candor. These values are further broken down in my book with examples for each.

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**You use the terms co-conspirator and accomplice and differentiate them from the word ally. Will you define these for us? And what would you say to people who express concerns about using the terms co-conspirator and accomplice?**

Active allies are learning how racism affects the lived experiences of people of the global majority. It's an important place to start, yet it's not to be confused with anti-racism. Remember, anti-racism is the active resistance to racism. Building awareness is crucial but does little to change the current levels of discrimination and oppression that people of the global majority experience.

Accomplices and co-conspirators are aggressively seeking to address how racism is systemic. They understand the power imbalance that has been part of many foundational institutions, including the classroom, throughout history. They already understand that racism can manifest in individual attitudes and behaviors and in formal policies and practices like grading policies, classroom management philosophies and classroom celebrations. The big difference between allies and the latter group is action. Accomplices and co-conspirators are all about change. They're willing to change policies, their minds and their lifestyles for the betterment of all children. When necessary, they're ready to take risks and challenge people.



“ **Accomplices and co-conspirators are all about change. They're willing to change policies, their minds and their lifestyles for the betterment of all children. When necessary, they're ready to take risks and challenge people.** ”



One of my favorite things about using these terms is the awareness and accuracy one must have to understand them. I remember when I first started consulting about anti-racism, potential clients would request that I use another, gentler word instead of anti-racism. I chose not to substitute another word for anti-racism because there isn't any other word that would carry the same clarity and weight. The same goes for accomplices and co-conspirators. When truly practicing anti-racism, accomplices and co-conspirators understand they'll have to risk something in the name of justice.

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**What can parents, caregivers and educators do to help ensure schools are centering justice, equity and affirming spaces for children of all races and identities?**

Expect and accept advocacy in your space. It's time we start moving to action, changing the culture of our classrooms and homes by what we expect and accept from our learners. Gone are the days when classrooms and homes were places of compliance. Now more than ever, we must explicitly teach our learners to advocate for themselves and their peers. I've found success in breaking the idea of action into two different categories: advocacy and activism.

Advocacy happens on an individual level and is usually between two people. Activism occurs on an institutional level and can involve several people. Speaking up, leaving an unsafe situation and reporting are all examples of individual advocacy. Joining a protest, boycotting and creating a new organization are examples of activism. Of course, as grownups, we use these terms interchangeably, and that's welcomed. I choose to take my time and break these concepts into smaller, more manageable ideas for learners.

Role-playing advocacy phrases for common incidents are essential for our youngest learners. It shows them that we expect them to advocate for themselves. But role-playing isn't enough; you must create a culture of accountability and advocacy. As adults, it's imperative that we also model advocacy. Just the other day, we were flying back from Chicago to Houston. While waiting to board, another person attempted to cut in line. Younger me would have let it go and explained it away by saying, "We're all going to the same place." Truthfully, I wouldn't have spoken up because I wasn't confident enough. I've committed to speaking up more and taking up more space. At that moment, I firmly said, "I'm next." Once we found our seats, our 9-year-old told me he was proud of how I spoke up for us. I still have a long way to go, and my children are rooting for me along the way.

I want my children to know that advocacy is the pathway to activism and accountability. Activism offers

radical imagination and action to our community. It's about sharing our most profound hopes, and it challenges us to take full responsibility in a situation. When we genuinely practice activism, we are charged to be our most liberated selves by aligning our values and actions.

**Your book contains some lovely affirming activities. Would you share a favorite one for families and caregivers?**

There's a reason why we regularly witness toddlers and preschoolers dancing, singing and moving their bodies. Music is powerful! Music affects our mood and our attitude. Dancing, singing and movement activities are liberating to our bodies and must become practices we embrace. In our home, we use music to affirm us, build our confidence and make memories. One of my favorite affirming activities is "Make a Playlist!" You'll find my top 10 song choices in my book to build confidence and self-love.

**And would you share one that might be helpful for a teacher in building an affirming classroom community?**

When I consult with schools, I encourage classroom teachers to spend the first six to nine weeks intentionally building community with their learners. We want our learners to have a strong sense of interdependence among themselves and to feel safe with their teachers. This is especially true for classroom communities diving into conversations about racism, homophobia or classism. One of our family favorite activities was "Two Truths and a Wish." It's a play on "Two Truths and a Lie." It is an awesome community-building game but doesn't ask learners to lie to have fun. Allow learners five minutes to think of two things that are true about them and one thing they wish to be true. Break them into pairs or small groups to see who knows them best. This activity can be repeated throughout the school year.

**Britt Hawthorne** (they/she) is an anti-racist and anti-bias writer, educator, advocate and activist, who provides anti-racism workshops and anti-bias training for parents and educators with the goal to move the idea of racial justice to reality and practice.



***Raising Antiracist Children:  
A Practical Parenting Guide***

by Britt Hawthorne  
with Natasha Yglesias

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ISBN13: 9781982185428



# What We're Reading

by Crystal L. Keels, Courtney Wai and Coshandra Dillard

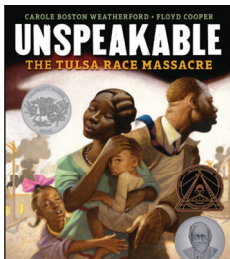
Learning for Justice loves to read!  
Check out a few of our favorite books  
for diverse readers and educators!

Educator, parent and consultant Britt Hawthorne, author of *Raising Antiracist Children*, recommends starting early with our children to create homes “rooted in justice, compassion and love.” Here are a few recommendations for growing readers and their families that affirm identities, celebrate diversity and highlight justice. This selection offers a range of options to engage young readers.



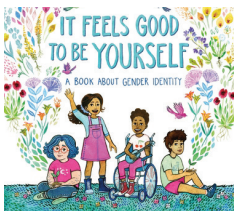
*“This book is Jane Park’s beautiful love letter to the children who grow up working in their family’s stores, just like she did.”*

In *Juna and Appa*, a heartwarming book by Jane Park with illustrations by Felicia Hoshino, Juna helps her father, Appa, at their dry-cleaning shop. When a customer berates Appa for losing a fancy jacket, Juna uses her imagination to search for the jacket, running into different fathers in the animal kingdom. These animals help Juna remember the special relationship she has with Appa, including the sacrifices they make for each other.



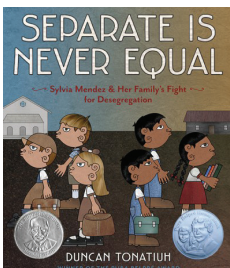
*“This short book ‘is a great primer’ in helping young readers conceptualize how the past shapes their world today.”*

In *Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre*, author Carole Boston Weatherford introduces the story of an American tragedy to young readers. With elaborate illustrations by Floyd Cooper, the book reviews incidents leading up to the 1921 event, and offers the concepts of self-sufficiency, exploration, segregation, racial violence and resilience. Its age-appropriate narrative also reminds readers of their responsibility in creating an anti-racist, nonviolent society, while also evoking pride and hope.



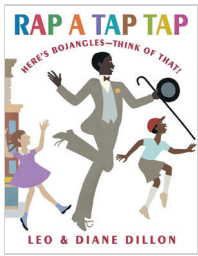
*“This beautiful book is a great introduction to the many expressions of gender in the world.”*

*It Feels Good to Be Yourself: A Book About Gender Identity* by Theresa Thorn and illustrated by trans artist Noah Grigni helps young readers understand gender expression and affirms the spectrum of gender identities. The book includes a glossary, a note to readers about pronouns and a list of additional resources that focus on gender identity. Enchanting illustrations will delight young readers as they learn that all people are valued just the way they are.



*“This work makes it easier for young readers to understand a complex situation through the author’s use of straightforward illustrations and language.”*

In *Separate Is Never Equal*, Duncan Tonatiuh tells the real story of the Mendez family’s fight in the late 1940s to desegregate schools in California, which would then allow their children to attend quality schools rather than the ramshackle place where children of Mexican families were forced to attend. Using accessible language and art gallery-worthy illustrations, Tonatiuh shows young readers some of the ways that people fight for justice.



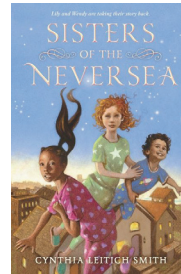
*“This lovely and lively book will delight young readers and introduce them to an artist with an important place in the history of U.S. popular culture.”*

*“Jo Jo and her best friends will make readers—young and old—eager for the next issue in this series.”*



*“Brian Young’s ability to center a Diné perspective of the world radiates throughout this powerful novel.”*

*“Smith combines universal themes of family and identity with dashes of fairy dust, swashbuckling pirates, and unpredictable obstacles to create a mesmerizing adventure for young readers.”*



*“Wheeler’s work models inclusiveness is the most wonderful way. Children will love this story!”*

*“My Maddy is an engaging story for children and adults alike.”*



**Rap a Tap Tap: Here’s Bojangles—Think of That!** by Leo and Diane Dillon, includes the authors’ rich illustrations combined with wonderful rhymes that are sure to capture the imaginations of young readers. This 2002 publication provides a compelling introduction to the artistry of Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, a tap-dancing legend who broke racial boundaries in the U.S. entertainment industry—on the vaudeville stage, on Broadway, on radio and in Hollywood—throughout the early 20th century.

**Jo Jo Makoons: The Used-to-Be Best Friend** is the first in a series written by Native author Dawn Quigley and illustrated by Tara Audibert that features Jo Jo Makoons Azure. Seven-year-old Jo Jo, a member of the Ojibwe Nation, is engaging, smart, funny and attends first grade on the reservation where she lives with her family. The book illustrates the importance of culturally relevant teaching practices, and young readers will certainly recognize themselves in the thoughts and feelings Jo Jo expresses as she moves throughout her busy days.

Readers of **Healer of the Water Monster** by Brian Young will find it easy to immerse themselves in Nathan’s world as he unexpectedly befriends a Water Monster, a Navajo Holy Being, while staying with his grandmother and uncle on the Navajo Reservation. This book explores universal coming-of-age themes such as bravery and friendship while helping readers learn more about the contemporary Navajo Nation, including Navajo science, spirituality, language and culture, along with the challenges the Navajo people face.

Cynthia Leitich Smith, a Muscogee Creek author, writes **Sisters of the Neversea** to provide readers with a refreshing counternarrative to the harmful stereotypes about Native people in J.M. Barrie’s version of *Peter Pan*. Smith’s version centers on Lily, a Muscogee Creek girl, and her white stepsister, Wendy, who travel to Neverland. Upon arrival, Lily and Wendy find that they will have to rely on each other, their inner strength and creative thinking to save themselves.

Keylonda Wheeler writes in the introduction to **Nia Skye’s Friend on Wheels** that, “it’s so important that disabled people are shown in everyday reading just living their lives.” In this charming book—the first in a series titled The Inclusive Krewe—Wheeler accomplishes that goal by highlighting the friendship between two kindergarten-aged girls who learn from each other as they arrange playdates and engage in fun family activities. Steffi Stanley’s delightful illustrations make this story pop.

**My Maddy** by Gayle E. Pitman, Ph.D., and illustrated by Violet Tobacco tells the story of a child and their nonbinary parent, Maddy. Age-appropriate examples of ordinary things that are neither one thing nor the other—for instance, hazel eyes, which are neither green nor brown but a combination of both—allows young readers to gain an understanding of gender expansiveness. Filled with colorful illustrations, this book also includes a substantial note to readers addressing questions that may arise from the reading.



“If you know  
whence you  
came, there  
is really  
no limit to  
where you  
can go.”

JAMES BALDWIN

**James Baldwin** (1924-1987) was a celebrated and prolific literary figure, activist, public intellectual and openly gay Black man whose work focused on the lethal and illogical state of race relations in the United States. For years Baldwin lived in Europe but returned to the U.S. to engage prominently in the civil rights movement.

ILLUSTRATION BY INGRID Y. MATHURIN

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