



A Union of Professionals

VOL. 45, NO. 1 | SPRING 2021  
aft.org/ae

# AMERICAN Educator

A JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL EQUITY, RESEARCH, AND IDEAS

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

**INCREASING AWARENESS  
OF SYSTEMIC RACISM**  
PAGE 26

**UNDERSTANDING THE  
HISTORY OF RESIDENTIAL  
SEGREGATION**  
PAGE 32

**TEACHING FOR  
SOCIAL JUSTICE**  
PAGE 38

**ORGANIZING AND  
MOBILIZING FOR  
PUBLIC EDUCATION**  
PAGE 44

## Creating the Conditions for Students to Thrive

Increasing opportunities  
for families experiencing  
homelessness and youth  
seeking academic,  
emotional, and cultural  
supports

# “Where Do I Start?”

## Free Resources to Support Effective, Courageous Conversations About Race with Students



### First Book Educator Tip

Design your curriculum and lesson plans using an inquiry-based method to help evaluate materials through an anti-bias, antiracist (ABAR) lens.

Learn More: [FirstBook.org/AFTempower](https://www.firstbook.org/AFTempower)

## Empower Your Classroom!

Explore the full Empowering Educators series of resources, thanks to support from our friends at Pizza Hut:

- ✓ Free educator resource: Guidebook on Race and Racism
- ✓ Video series with tips from anti-bias, antiracist (ABAR) teaching experts
- ✓ Special edition #OwnVoices stories



**Access Free Resources: [FirstBook.org/AFTempower](https://www.firstbook.org/AFTempower)**

Need help finding additional resources or placing an order with First Book?  
Call us at 1-866-READ-NOW or email us at [help@firstbook.org](mailto:help@firstbook.org).



## Tools, Time, and Trust

*The Keys to Reopening and Recovery*

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

THE AFT IS COMMITTED to ensuring that every person in America has the freedom to thrive—especially children. That’s why we’ve been fighting to safely reopen school buildings since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Children have gone hungry and suffered from social isolation. Families have struggled in so many ways, from tragic deaths to job losses. Although educators and school staff have made herculean efforts, remote learning was never a substitute for in-person learning—even for those students with reliable internet access. Despite legitimate fears for their own and their families’ health, educators understand the importance of in-person instruction, but they have a right to be safe.

Reopening schools safely requires tools, time, and trust. Tools of mitigation, testing, and resources to prevent transmission of this deadly, invisible virus and to meet the academic, emotional, and social needs of our students and families. Time to put those tools in place. And trust that as new information emerges—such as variants of COVID-19—district leaders and other key officials will work with us to prioritize safety. The Trump administration fell down on all of this.

Thankfully, the Biden administration is literally a breath of fresh air in this fight against the COVID-19 respiratory virus. It has been transparent and honest—making decisions based on science and on the needs of Americans. President Biden is committed to safely reopening the majority of K-8 school buildings for in-person learning in his first 100 days and has championed the bold level of funding needed to increase vaccinations, support state and local governments, and provide critical resources to schools and colleges. Under Biden’s leadership, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released (as it should have a year ago) a rigorous road map that our members can use to fight for a safe reopening.

Since releasing our first reopening blueprint in April 2020, we’ve learned from

our experiences: *science is important, but so are common sense and collaboration.*

Buildings differ, as do communities’ resources. We have been calling for common sense and collaboration in applying six essential pillars for reopening:

- COVID-19 testing must become a way of life in schools, with regular and rapid testing to monitor the virus.
- Proper safety protocols—including masks, physical distancing, cleaning, and sanitizing procedures—and ventilation upgrades must be implemented.
- High-risk teachers and school staff need appropriate accommodations to keep them safe.
- Vaccine prioritization for teachers and school staff, starting with those doing in-person learning.
- Given the new variants, communities need a metric for community infection rates that will trigger increasing safeguards, including temporary closures.
- Safety committees, situation rooms, and building walk-throughs build trust and help to abate fear about reopening.

According to a recent poll of our members, 88 percent of educators favor this reopening plan and 85 percent would feel comfortable in their classrooms if these recommendations were followed.\*

What should happen if a ventilation system needs major renovations? Not bringing in cheap fans that the manufacturer itself says are not appropriate for non-household use, as at least one large school district attempted. That’s why educators and parents protested. But there are common-sense solutions, which working together would produce, as it has in districts large and small, like New York City and Meriden, Connecticut. These include upgrading filters, cleaning vents, opening windows, and bringing in air purifiers and appropriate fans. Also, vaccinate the teachers and staff who want it, and since many families are

still choosing remote instruction, prioritize vaccines for teachers and staff who will be working in schools.

Educators want what students need, but they deserve to be safe. And there are ways to do so.† In New York City, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) has worked with the district on a massive testing and tracing strategy, with the data posted online. After more than 250,000 tests, the in-school positivity rate was just 0.42 percent. Ongoing testing and other mitigation strategies (personal protective equipment, HVAC upgrades, distancing, building walk-throughs to check safety protocols, and more) give educators and families confidence. The Boston Teachers Union negotiated a phased reopening, starting with in-person priority students, including special education students and English language learners. The Albuquerque Teachers Federation and district devised an accommodations plan that protects the highest-risk staff and those caring for

**Educators want what students need, but they deserve to be safe.** ”

high-risk family members. And, after the AFT pressed hard for educators and other essential workers to have vaccine priority (behind healthcare workers of course), the Washington Teachers’ Union won vaccinations for school staff and the UFT stood up its own vaccination effort.

This fight to safely reopen our buildings for in-person learning and to reconnect with our students is some of the hardest work educators have faced—made worse by the ongoing fights against austerity and hazards like lead, mold, and asbestos in schools. Together, we are overcoming the crises gripping our country. With President Biden’s recovery plan, our schools and colleges will have the resources to address trauma, meet emotional and academic needs, and ensure the full recovery of our students. □

\*For the poll results, visit [go.aft.org/poll\\_on\\_return](https://go.aft.org/poll_on_return).

†For case studies, visit [aft.org/reopen-schools](https://aft.org/reopen-schools).



## OUR MISSION

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

**RANDI WEINGARTEN**  
President

**FEDRICK C. INGRAM**  
Secretary-Treasurer

**EVELYN DEJESUS**  
Executive Vice President

**LISA HANSEL**  
Chief Publications Editor

**JENNIFER DUBIN**  
Managing Editor

**LUKE STEELE**  
Editorial Coordinator

**SEAN LISHANSKY**  
Copyeditor

**JENNIFER CHANG**  
Art Director

**JENNIFER BERNEY**  
Graphic Designer

**RACHEL ANDERSON**  
Production Assistant

AMERICAN EDUCATOR (ISSN 0148-432X, USPS 008-462) is published quarterly by the American Federation of Teachers, 555 New Jersey Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2079. Phone: 202-879-4400. [aft.org](http://aft.org)

Letters to the editor may be sent to the address above or to [ae@aft.org](mailto:ae@aft.org).

AMERICAN EDUCATOR cannot assume responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.

Please allow a minimum of four weeks for copyright permission requests.

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the viewpoints or policies of the AFT.

AMERICAN EDUCATOR is mailed quarterly to AFT members in preK-12 education and biannually to members in higher education and other educational roles, as a benefit of membership. Subscriptions represent \$2.50 of annual dues. Non-AFT members may subscribe by mailing \$10 per year by check or money order to the address below.

**MEMBERS:** To change your address or subscription, notify your local union treasurer or visit [aft.org/members](http://aft.org/members).

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to American Educator, 555 New Jersey Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2079.

Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices.

© 2021 AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS, AFL-CIO



Cover illustration:  
DAVID VOGIN

## Creating the Conditions for Students to Thrive

The myriad effects of the pandemic, from the tragic loss of life to the terrible impacts of the digital divide, underscore the need to create the just and equitable conditions that will revitalize learning. By increasing opportunities for families experiencing homelessness and youth seeking academic, emotional, and cultural supports, these articles show how we can ensure that students not only survive these challenging times but also thrive long after them.

### 4 Supporting Students Who Are Experiencing Homelessness

*A Brief Guide for Teachers and Schools*

BY RONALD E. HALLETT AND LINDA SKRLA

### 8 Being Part of the Solution: From Early Childhood Through Higher Education

### 10 Unlocking Social Studies Text

*How High School Teachers Can Support Students with Reading Difficulties*

BY JEANNE WANZEK

### 16 In College, But Not Always Earning College Credit

*Evidence-Based Instructional Strategies for Success During—and Beyond—Developmental Courses*

BY ELIZABETH L. TIGHE, MEAGAN C. ARRASTÍA-CHISHOLM, AND NJERI M. PRINGLE

### 22 A Formula for Success

*Teaching Native American Community College Students Math—and to Believe in Themselves*

BY EVA L. RIVERA LEBRÓN

### 26 Learning History, Facing Reality

*How Knowledge Increases Awareness of Systemic Racism*

BY PHIA S. SALTER

### 32 Suppressed History

*The Intentional Segregation of America's Cities*

BY RICHARD ROTHSTEIN

### 38 Teaching for Social Justice

*Using All American Boys to Confront Racism and Police Brutality*

BY ASHLEY S. BOYD AND JANINE J. DARRAGH

### 44 Organizing and Mobilizing

*How Teachers and Communities Are Winning the Fight to Revitalize Public Education*

BY LEO CASEY

### 51 Mailbox



# Caring for Grieving Students and Families



CARLO107/E+/GETTY IMAGES

Supporting grieving students, and their families, is always challenging. Now, more than a year into the pandemic, many educators are overwhelmed, processing their own grief even as they continue doing all they can to care for their students. No one should face this challenge alone. The Coalition to Support Grieving Students, of which the AFT is a founding member, was formed to help teachers and other education professionals comfort students and families experiencing loss. Here, we highlight materials focused on grief and trauma created by the coalition that are available through Share My Lesson.

## Helping Students Cope

Very few educators have had the benefit of professional development on how to understand, approach, and connect with grieving students. The coalition's comprehensive guide to its video and print materials is a valuable place to start. "Supporting Grieving Students During a Pandemic" offers modules on connecting with families remotely, explanations of grief triggers, and information about organizations supporting grieving children and their families. Similarly, the webinar "Supporting Grieving Children in Our Schools" outlines the strategies that teachers and paraprofessionals can use to help bereaved students who are withdrawing from friends, family, and academics.

An important first step in reassuring grieving students is starting a conversation. The resource "Talking with Children" offers advice on how to initiate contact with students and reassure them that they are not alone. With simple strategies for being genuine and approachable, and even some examples of what to say, this short guide will help educators take that first crucial

step: creating an opportunity for the student to share. Even if a student does not want to talk at first, it is vital to show there are people who do care and are available to listen, if and when they are ready.

In offering words of consolation, many of us fear saying the wrong thing. Even a well-intentioned comment might inadvertently encourage those grieving to hide or even deny their feelings. The coalition's "What Not to Say" module provides concrete suggestions to ensure that supportive comments are helpful and that students are given the space to express their emotions in a healthy manner. These suggestions include listening more and talking less (so that grieving students are leading the conversation), showing empathy, and avoiding efforts to simply cheer them up. Classmates also play an important role in processing loss. To support a grieving peer, the "Peer Support" resource suggests educators provide basic information to classmates about a peer's loss, give classmates opportunities to ask questions of the teacher before a grieving student returns to class, and offer a safe environment to share thoughts and feelings.

## Connecting with Families and Colleagues

In the module "Connecting with Families," the coalition highlights the need to partner with students' primary caregivers to provide students a firmer basis for emotional support and to ensure family members are aware of school and community resources. Cultural considerations also play a role in building these connections. The coalition's "Cultural Sensitivity" resource underscores the importance of approaching each family in a sensitive, thoughtful manner. It's essential to ask questions and intentionally avoid making assumptions so that each family's unique perspective is honored.

In supporting students experiencing loss, coordination by the entire school staff is crucial. The module "Coordinating Services and Supporting Transitions" explains how each member of the school staff has the potential to help grieving students, and how they can provide the most effective support if they work together as a team, especially as students navigate potentially difficult transitions (such as to a new grade or school, especially since grieving is a long-term process).

Helping grieving students express their feelings and accept emotional supports will give them the tools to help themselves. It will also prepare students to sustain themselves and their loved ones in difficult times that will inevitably come later in their lives. To see what other resources Share My Lesson offers on grief and loss, visit our collection of lesson plans, materials, and activities. If you have additional ideas or requests, please reach out to us at [content@sharemylesson.com](mailto:content@sharemylesson.com).

—THE SHARE MY LESSON TEAM

## Recommended Resources

**Supporting Grieving Students During a Pandemic**

[go.aft.org/ae121sml1](http://go.aft.org/ae121sml1)

**Supporting Grieving Children in Our Schools**

[go.aft.org/ae121sml2](http://go.aft.org/ae121sml2)

**Talking with Children**

[go.aft.org/ae121sml3](http://go.aft.org/ae121sml3)

**What Not to Say**

[go.aft.org/ae121sml4](http://go.aft.org/ae121sml4)

**Peer Support**

[go.aft.org/ae121sml5](http://go.aft.org/ae121sml5)

**Connecting with Families**

[go.aft.org/ae121sml6](http://go.aft.org/ae121sml6)

**Cultural Sensitivity**

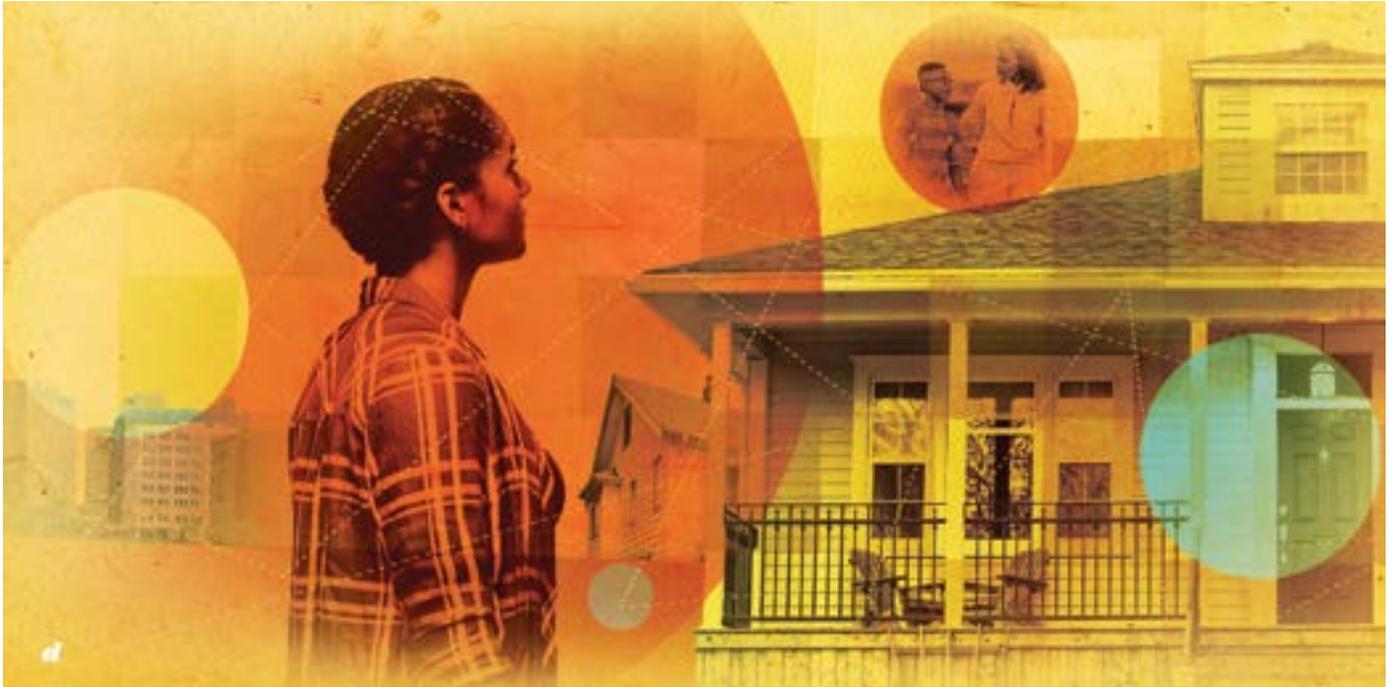
[go.aft.org/ae121sml7](http://go.aft.org/ae121sml7)

**Coordinating Services and Supporting Transitions**

[go.aft.org/ae121sml8](http://go.aft.org/ae121sml8)

# Supporting Students Who Are Experiencing Homelessness

A Brief Guide for Teachers and Schools



BY RONALD E. HALLETT AND LINDA SKRLA

*Anastasia sleeps on her friend’s couch and borrows her friend’s clothes to wear to school. Her dad kicked her and her mom out of the house after a fight that turned physical. She’s unsure where her mom is staying, but her mom assures Anastasia that she’s fine.*

*Diego lives with his parents and his dog in a bedroom illegally subleased to them by other renters after his parents lost their suburban home due to a job layoff and illness. He hides his dog when the landlord comes around because pets are not allowed.*

*Fredrick lives with his two brothers, one sister, and mom in a motel room after a bad storm three months ago made their old house unlivable. He attends high school in a different school district because the storm also destroyed his old school. Fredrick worries about what will happen to his family because his mom’s place of work has not reopened following the storm.\**

\*Although we have used pseudonyms, these three examples of young people experiencing homelessness are recent and real. Among the myriad families we have worked with, we selected these because their experiences in urban and small-town settings in three different states are common, but are not typically thought of as homelessness.

These young people, though their circumstances differ, have one thing in common—they all meet the federal definition of *homeless youth* under guidelines spelled out by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.<sup>1</sup> Although this act has been in place since 1987, the act and its implications for schools are not as widely known as they should be among educators and administrators. The McKinney-Vento Act, including revisions made during its reauthorization in Title IX, Part A, of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015),<sup>2</sup> defines youth experiencing homelessness in a far more expansive way than traditional conceptualizations. We offer details below, but in brief, the act defines homelessness as any student without “a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.”<sup>3</sup> It also provides legal guidelines

Ronald E. Hallett is a professor of education in the LaFetra College of Education at the University of La Verne and a former elementary special education teacher. Linda Skrla is a professor in the department of Leadership, School Counseling, and Sport Management at the University of North Florida. A former public middle and high school teacher and administrator, she was previously a faculty member and department chair at the University of the Pacific and a faculty member and associate dean at Texas A&M University. Hallett and Skrla are the authors of *Serving Students Who Are Homeless: A Resource Guide for Schools, Districts, and Educational Leaders* (Teachers College Press, 2017). Hallett also coauthored *Addressing Homelessness and Housing Insecurity in Higher Education: Strategies for Educational Leaders* (Teachers College Press, 2019).

and funding that can be used to help improve schooling experiences for youth who are homeless. Although McKinney-Vento primarily focuses on protections related to students in preschool through high school, the revisions as part of ESSA also lay the foundations for college access, and higher education practitioners have begun to build similar protections.<sup>4</sup> Since the federal protections are more clearly outlined for students in high school or lower grades, we focus primarily on summarizing that information in this article. However, our sidebar on page 8 includes more information for higher education practitioners.

We believe that educators, administrators, and staff members play important roles in the lives of students experiencing homelessness. Our goal is to provide educators with information and tools<sup>†</sup> as they continue their essential work of educating all students. In this article, we give an overview of student homelessness and examine the federal guidelines that frame how schools and postsecondary institutions serve students experiencing homelessness. Federal law outlines legal rights for students, but these mandates should only be considered a minimum standard when providing support. Additionally, we discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic strife on students and families experiencing homelessness. Finally, we provide promising practices that encourage academic engagement and success for students who are homeless.

### National Statistics on Student Homelessness

Identifying the exact number of students experiencing homelessness is difficult. These students tend to be highly mobile and experience a significant amount of shame that reduces the likelihood of reporting their housing status.<sup>5</sup> Schools and districts have increasingly created processes that allow for gathering more accurate information from students. However, available estimates likely underestimate the reality of student homelessness.

Before the pandemic, families with children constituted 30 percent of the homeless population in the United States.<sup>6</sup> At the start of the 2017–2018 school year, 1.5 million students in the US reported experiencing homelessness. This is a 15 percent increase since the 2015–2016 school year and more than double the number of students who were homeless (590,000) in 2004–2005.<sup>7</sup> In large cities, the percentages of student populations experiencing homelessness are even larger than the national averages. In New York City, for example, one in ten (114,085) youth experienced homelessness during the 2018–2019 school year.<sup>8</sup> In addition, researchers at the University of Chicago who gathered data in 2016 and 2017 estimate that 700,000 young people between ages 13 and 17 experience some form of homelessness annually, including running away and being kicked out of their homes.<sup>9</sup> That's one out of every 35 people in this age group experiencing homelessness in recent years. Young people of color, LGBTQ youth, students in special education, and pregnant/parenting teens all disproportionately experience homelessness. Many urban schools and districts we have worked with report rates of student homelessness between 10 and 20 percent.

Seventy-five percent of children experiencing homelessness live doubled-up with other families. Living doubled-up means

that multiple households are living in a space designed for one family as a result of economic crises and out of necessity; these living arrangements are not considered stable or adequate housing.<sup>10</sup> For example, we have worked with three families—involving a total of 10 people—who lived in a small two-bedroom apartment. The next highest percentage of students experiencing homelessness live in shelters (15 percent); these children are disproportionately young, with 10 percent under age 1.<sup>11</sup>

Experiencing homelessness negatively impacts students' schooling outcomes. Compared with traditionally housed peers, attendance and graduation rates are lower, as are academic achievement rates in reading and math. Also, special education placement rates are higher, and incidences of multifaceted trauma are much higher.<sup>12</sup> Even after students regain stable housing, their academic outcomes may continue to lag behind those of their peers who are consistently housed.<sup>13</sup>

## Estimates likely underestimate student homelessness, which includes students without “a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.”

### McKinney-Vento Act

Research on the impact of homelessness on educational access and outcomes, as well as advocacy on behalf of students experiencing homelessness, prompted the federal government to broaden its definition of student homelessness. The emphasis on *any student without “a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence”* includes children and youth who:

- share the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason (doubled-up);
- live in motels, hotels, and campgrounds;
- reside in emergency or transitional shelters;
- have been left in hospitals by parents (many young and homeless themselves) who see no alternatives;
- live in public or private spaces not typically used as housing;
- reside in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, train stations, or similar settings; and
- are migrants who experience the above housing situations.<sup>14</sup>

This expansive and inclusive definition of homelessness affords legal protections for children and youth who are without stable and adequate housing. Importantly, states, school districts, and schools are required to meet certain obligations, including:

- allowing students to remain at their school of origin even when they move outside of the school boundaries;
- reviewing policies at all levels (e.g., state, district, and school) to ensure that children and youth in homeless situations are not denied access to school;

<sup>†</sup>For additional resources on supporting students who are homeless, visit the National Center for Homeless Education at [nche.ed.gov](http://nche.ed.gov), the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth at [naehcy.org](http://naehcy.org), and the National Center on Family Homelessness at [air.org/center/national-center-family-homelessness](http://air.org/center/national-center-family-homelessness).



## Precarious living situations can undermine students' development—but with supports, students can reach their full potential.

- designating a homeless liaison in each school district who receives professional development and trains the school-site point of contact;
- supporting district efforts at the state level by gathering and posting data, providing professional development for liaisons, and responding to inquiries;
- allowing children and youth who are homeless to enroll immediately, regardless of health records, transcripts, proof of residency, dress codes, fees and fines, application deadlines, or other paperwork;
- allowing unaccompanied youth to enroll without a parent or guardian;
- having homeless liaisons inform unaccompanied youth of their rights and independent status in relation to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA);
- using district and state funds for outreach and emergency/extraordinary assistance; and
- subjecting living arrangements and records to Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protections.<sup>15</sup>

Most of these requirements have been in place for more than 30 years, yet too many districts and schools continue to be unaware of their existence or how to fully implement them.

Thus, many children and youth experiencing homelessness continue to face barriers and challenges accessing educational services. This is especially true in districts and schools that do not have homeless shelters within their attendance zones and do not have many of the traditional, visible signs of a homeless population. And most importantly, this is an opportunity for better-informed educators to strengthen their advocacy for their students.

## What Teachers and Schools Can Do

Homelessness for children and youth in the US is, of course, embedded in larger societal structures over which educators have limited direct control. We do not assume that educational shifts will resolve challenges involving adequate access to housing, consistent employment with living wages, and the many social issues related to housing insecurity (e.g., foster care, immigration status, domestic violence, mental health issues, and discrimination associated with race, sex, religion, and LGBTQ identities).

Even though we recognize these constraints, research consistently shows that many districts, schools, and teachers could do more to meet the needs of students and families experiencing homelessness. Increasing educational access and success has the potential to improve the long-term economic and housing stability of students as they transition into adulthood and start their own families. In this section, we provide an overview of promising practices emerging from our research.

**Educate yourself and others about homelessness in your school community.** An essential first step toward addressing the needs of students experiencing homelessness is to learn—about law, policy, populations, needs, resources, and best practices. What does student homelessness look like in your community? How many students experience homelessness in your school? How did COVID-19 change the economic context of the community your school serves? Did more students become housing insecure? In particular, are more families living doubled-up than in previous years?

This information is essential. Educators should be highly skeptical if current data suggest that no students experience homelessness at their school; consider seeking another source, such as the local branch of the United Way or a food pantry that may have insights into homelessness in the community. In conjunction with gathering accurate data, pursue systematic professional development—ideally this should be done with the entire school site so the response can be coherent and sustained. A one-stop, generic professional development session is unlikely to result in any lasting improvement to the school experience for students in homeless situations.

**Integrate improved responsiveness to homelessness into school plans.** School and district administrators typically make decisions about resources based upon explicit goals written in school plans. The reality is that we focus on what we measure and report. Just like goals for improving student achievement, the likelihood of accomplishing goals for homelessness responsiveness greatly increases when they are written into formal plans for school improvement. Including goals to improve outcomes for students experiencing homelessness also allows for tracking growth in this area. We also encourage teachers and administrators to advocate for students to receive the resources guaranteed by federal protections because these supports will be necessary to achieve the goals outlined in school plans.

**Secure resources.** States receive modest funding from the federal government that is authorized by the McKinney-Vento Act. Most states divide this money into subgrants that are distributed to school districts. Find out if your district has a McKinney-Vento subgrant. If so, learn where resources are currently being directed and work with the school improvement team to see if these expenditures match current needs. If the district does not receive the grant, find out why not and if there is a possibility of applying for

one in the future. Even if there is not a subgrant, students are guaranteed the protections under McKinney-Vento, and the district is mandated to cover these costs (e.g., supplies, transportation, uniforms, etc.).

**Collaborate and form partnerships.** What resources are available in your local community? Many schools and districts collaborate with community agencies to help implement and expand the supports covered under McKinney-Vento. For example, a local service agency or church may provide backpacks with supplies at the beginning of the school year, or the uniform company may be willing to set aside a certain number of free uniforms for students experiencing homelessness. Some of these programs may already exist in the community.

**Investigate trauma-sensitive school practices.** We strongly encourage schools to explore trauma-informed approaches\* to support students experiencing homelessness. To that end, we created a practitioner-focused book on how to navigate this process.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, a trauma-informed approach has been linked with improving outcomes for *all* students. Basically, this approach recognizes that what occurs in students' lives outside of school influences how they participate in class, and it is beneficial for the culture of the school to be sensitive to the realities of students' lives. Many elementary school teachers engage in practices like a morning check-in to begin each day by connecting with these realities. It is important to emphasize here that the type of trauma-sensitive school culture we advocate for is assets-based. This work is not about labeling students; it is about forming authentic relationships in order to develop trust, build on strengths, and better respond to needs.<sup>17</sup>

**Provide academic and psychological support in addition to support for basic needs.** In recognizing the trauma associated with housing insecurity, students will likely benefit from counseling and other related supports. The consistent movement inherent in precarious living situations can undermine students' academic and psychological development—but with supports, students can reach their full potential. Although most educators are not trained counselors and many do not have the capacity to offer academic interventions like intensive tutoring, seeking academic and psychological supports can be another opportunity to coordinate with your school district and community-based organizations to identify resources available for students.

**Prepare students for the transition to life after high school.** Graduating from high school can be a challenge for students who experience housing insecurity; however, earning a diploma alone will likely not be enough for students to achieve financial security as they move into adulthood.<sup>18</sup> McKinney-Vento requires schools and districts to provide priority access to college preparation programming for students experiencing homelessness. We encourage schools to work with students to explore how to find postsecondary opportunities and funding. In particular, students will need support in figuring out housing issues as they make decisions about higher education. For example, if the community college does not have housing, how does the student find a stable place to live? Does the four-year institution have year-round housing? If not, where will the student spend breaks?

\*For more on trauma-informed practices, see "Supporting Students with Adverse Childhood Experiences" in the Summer 2019 issue of *American Educator*: [aft.org/aef/summer2019/murphey\\_sacks](http://aft.org/aef/summer2019/murphey_sacks).

## Conclusion

The three young people whose stories we shared at the beginning of this article are positive examples of what can happen when schools recognize and respond to student homelessness. We return to them here.

A professor at the university Anastasia's mom attended noticed something was amiss with her mom and found out that she had been sleeping in her car on campus while Anastasia stayed with her friend. He connected Anastasia's mom to a women's shelter, which, in turn, provided legal assistance and help with housing. Anastasia and her mom are now on the path to residential stability.

# Provide priority access to college preparation for students experiencing homelessness and work with them to find postsecondary housing.

## COVID-19 and Student Homelessness

The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting all aspects of schooling. Students experiencing homelessness are one of the groups disproportionately hurt. Many of the resources such students depend on were completely unavailable when schools were closed, and some of these resources have not returned while schools are in distance or hybrid mode.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, educational decision makers operating in completely unfamiliar circumstances when developing pandemic school plans have sometimes denied services to students in homeless situations, likely in violation of McKinney-Vento and other federal and state laws.<sup>2</sup>

It is vitally important that educators and administrators understand that the extraordinary situation the pandemic created for schools did not suspend requirements to serve students

experiencing homelessness. For example, if a student living in a shelter does not have adequate access to technology that would allow full participation in online learning, then it is the responsibility of the school district to provide appropriate technology or to make other provisions (such as in-person learning, if it can be offered safely, or paper packets with the necessary learning materials) to satisfy legal requirements for immediate enrollment and removal of barriers to school access for students in homeless circumstances.<sup>3</sup>

—R. E. H. and L. S.

### Endnotes

1. K. McKenzie, *Community Equity Audits: Communities and Schools Working Together to Eliminate the Opportunity Gap* (Santa Fe, NM: McKenzie-Gunn Educational Consulting, 2020).
2. SchoolHouse Connection, "FAQ on COVID-19 and Homelessness," updated October 12, 2020, [schoolhouseconnection.org/covid19-and-homelessness](http://schoolhouseconnection.org/covid19-and-homelessness).
3. SchoolHouse Connection, "FAQ on COVID-19."

Diego graduated from high school while living with his family in a single room and, with assistance from his school, enrolled in a college where he is in his second semester and participating in athletics.

Fredrick's community continues to slowly recover from the widespread natural disaster it experienced. His neighboring community's schools, under the leadership of their superintendent, learned about McKinney-Vento and launched an integrated response to serving the students and families displaced by the storm that hit Fredrick's town. He and his family are cur-

rently on the waiting list for a subsidized apartment, and his school year is going well.

Homelessness is one of the most life-altering experiences young people can have during their school years. It is, however, an experience that can be addressed and overcome. Responsive schools with caring and informed teachers are essential parts of the support infrastructure and process. Schools and districts that are educated about child and youth homelessness, have plans and procedures in place to respond, and are staffed with caring

## Being Part of the Solution

Educators tend to develop close relationships with students. Learning that a student is experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity may lead an educator to feel a personal responsibility to resolve the issue. The size of the issue can be overwhelming. While some educators may choose to spend a portion of their hard-earned money to support students, we do not believe this is the solution. In addition to the potential hardship this creates for educators, there is no way that all students could be served by siphoning money from educators' salaries.

Being aware that homelessness and housing insecurity exist in the communities you serve is the first step. The next step is to consider what you can do to support students, families, and communities. We begin with some overarching ideas and then identify additional strategies that are specific for pre-K to 12 and higher education. In what follows, we provide some guidance for educators to improve the educational opportunities for students experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity.

### General Approaches

- *Choose words carefully.* Avoid using the term "homeless" when developing resources and programming. Students and families experience significant social shame associated with lacking stable housing. Many students will avoid using resources that are targeted for "homeless" because they do not want to be associated with that term. Using "housing insecurity" can be a more amenable term. Similarly, we recommend using person-first language—for example, *students experiencing homelessness or students with housing insecurity*. This allows for prioritizing the identity of being a student and also recognizes that homelessness is (hope-

fully) a temporary situation, instead of being a permanent aspect of the student's identity.

- *Increase access to counseling.* Housing insecurity is a form of trauma. Even when students gain access to stable housing, most will benefit from processing their experiences with a trained professional. Students often need assistance and encouragement to access these forms of support. You can leverage your relationship with students to build connections with counselors in your school system or on your campus.
- *Spread the word.* Learning more about homelessness and housing insecurity can make you a more effective and empathic education professional. However, students have many relationships and experiences as they navigate the educational system. Feeling supported in one class and then discouraged in another class will undermine their ability to succeed. Students are far more likely to remain enrolled in school and graduate when they experience consistent support from educators.

### Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Professionals

- *Be informed of federal, state, and district policies related to student homelessness.* In the main article, we provide an overview of federal education policy. However, states and districts may layer on additional protections and resources to support students and families. The National Center for Homeless Education ([nche.ed.gov](http://nche.ed.gov)) and the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth ([naehcy.org](http://naehcy.org)) are two organizations that summarize policy developments, create resources for teachers and families, and announce advocacy opportunities. Each state has a coordinator who manages federal funding related to homelessness and often creates resources related to the state context.

- *Know the point of contact.* All school districts are required to have a homeless liaison. The liaison is responsible for providing direct support to schools, teachers, and students. Some school districts also require each school to have a point of contact, which is often a counselor or assistant principal. This person receives training related to homelessness and connecting students with resources. Having current contact information at the beginning of each year will enable you to assist students and families when they experience an issue.
- *Inform students and families of their rights.* Federal and state laws exist to protect the educational rights of students in preschool through high school. We encourage leveraging these laws as a resource to meet the needs of students. Students and their guardians often do not know they qualify for support. The aforementioned organizations (NCHC and NAEHCY) have multiple family resources available; consider beginning with this brochure for parents and guardians, which is available in English ([nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/parent\\_brochure\\_eng.pdf](http://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/parent_brochure_eng.pdf)) and Spanish ([nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/parentbrochure\\_sp.pdf](http://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/parentbrochure_sp.pdf)).
- *Collaborate with social service and community agencies.* Some schools have developed food pantries, clothing closets, and other resources on campus by partnering with other agencies. Bringing the resources to your school site often makes it easier for students and families to access support, especially in emergency situations. Working with local agencies and organizations, your school can also create a comprehensive list of local resources available.
- *Keep track of and in contact with every child.* With schools operating in a variety of modes (in-person, remote, hybrid), it is easier for vulnerable children to fall through the cracks and miss out on instructional and support services. Individual educators can help by making

professionals can better support students and families experiencing this profound life challenge. □

## Endnotes

1. Statement of Policy, 42 US Code §§11431-11435 (2002).
2. Every Student Succeeds Act, Pub. L. 114-95 (2015).
3. National Center for Homeless Education, "The McKinney-Vento Definition of Homeless," [nche.ed.gov/mckinney-vento-definition](http://nche.ed.gov/mckinney-vento-definition).
4. R. Hallett, R. Crutchfield, and J. Maguire, *Addressing Homelessness and Housing Insecurity in Higher Education: Strategies for Educational Leaders* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2019).
5. W. Tierney and R. Hallett, "Social Capital and Homeless Youth: Influence of Residential Instability on College Access," *Metropolitan Universities Journal* 22, no. 3 (2012): 46–62.
6. US Department of Housing and Urban Development, *The 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress* (Washington, DC: 2020), [huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2019-AHAR-Part-1.pdf](http://huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2019-AHAR-Part-1.pdf).
7. National Center for Homeless Education, *Federal Data Summary School Years 2015–2016 through 2017–2018: Education for Homeless Children and Youth* (January 2020).
8. R. Amin, "Number of Homeless NYC Students Remains Stubbornly High," *The City*, October 29, 2019.
9. M. Morton et al., "Prevalence and Correlates of Youth Homelessness in the United States," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 62, no. 1 (2018): 14–21.

(Continued on page 52)

extra efforts to check on the whereabouts and participation levels of all students frequently.

## Higher Education Professionals

- *Stay informed of state and federal policies.* At present, the federal government has not developed comprehensive guidelines related to homelessness and housing insecurity among college students. As a result, some states have created policies (e.g., California, Colorado, Florida, and Louisiana). In addition to being aware of the current opportunities in your state, we encourage advocacy for continued policy development at both the state and federal levels.



- *Develop a single point of contact on campus.* Some campuses have started developing a single-point-of-contact approach to providing services. One office exists where students can meet with someone who has information about all the resources both on and off campus. The professionals in this office meet with the student to learn about their unique needs and then coordinate connections to the available supports, including meeting with financial aid officers to review available funding, accessing the food pantry for emergency assistance, getting information about housing support, and setting up a meeting to apply for federal or state supplemental aid. In addition to

providing direct support for students, the single-point-of-contact approach allows for someone to consistently be looking at the holistic needs of students as well as the potential gaps that exist in service.

- *Provide access to emergency shelter on campus.* Many of the students who experience homelessness begin college with stable housing. When a financial or personal crisis emerges, they end up housing insecure. Without emergency support, most of these students will drop out of college. Among institutions that have housing, a few rooms may be set aside for short-term housing while a social worker coordinates a long-term plan for the student. Some campuses have also turned one of their parking lots into a safe space where students can sleep in their cars, if needed. Another option is to coordinate with local hotels to obtain housing vouchers for students as an emergency option.
- *Provide access to showers on campus.* Most postsecondary institutions have showers in the gyms or other places on campus. We recommend having these showers open to all students even if they cannot afford the fees associated with the gyms. In addition, the showers should be open before the earliest class time in order for students to be able to address personal care needs prior to class. If possible, distribute hygiene and personal care items to any student who requests them.
- *Collaborate with public spaces on campus, including the library and student union.* Students experiencing homelessness often spend considerable time in public spaces on campus, including the library and student union. Individuals who work in these spaces may have a sense of which students are in need of support. In addition, understanding where students spend time on campus can allow for more effective dissemination of information. This is especially important during the pandemic, as closures, reduced hours, and increased reliance on technology for service

delivery have disproportional impacts on students experiencing homelessness.

- *Inform all students of their rights.* All students on campus should be given information about how to access food and housing support. In addition to avoiding false assumptions about what homelessness looks like, you also want to leverage the social relationships of students. Having all students with information not only normalizes utilizing the support (similar to how students use financial aid) but also enables students to share information with friends who may be experiencing challenges. Information about food and housing support could be placed on all course syllabi, and financial aid offices could include a list of resources with all financial aid offers.
- *Do not hide resources.* Sometimes, resources related to food and housing insecurity are placed on the corner of campus or in spaces that are out of general view. Many times, this is done because professionals want to protect the privacy of students who use the services. While we appreciate this sentiment, the message sent to students is that they should be ashamed to need the services. In addition, having the resources hidden results in few students being aware that services exist and/or finding them when they need assistance. Centering these resources on campus helps to normalize the services, just as financial aid is a common aspect of the college experience for most students.
- *Create resources for the diversity of students you serve.* Students experiencing homelessness come from a variety of backgrounds. Avoid creating supports designed only for single, white, 18- to 24-year-old students. For example, food pantries should have baby food for parenting students and foods representing different cultures. Housing options should also be provided for those in relationships and with children and/or pets.

—R. E. H. and L. S.

# Unlocking Social Studies Text

How High School Teachers Can Support Students with Reading Difficulties



BY JEANNE WANZEK

**H**igh school students with reading difficulties face incredible challenges navigating content learning. Content-area teachers in disciplines such as social studies seek to cultivate students who can identify and communicate key ideas, provide explanations of and evidence for these ideas, and evaluate differing perspectives on a topic by assessing evidence and claims. These crucial goals require active engagement of students to obtain a great deal of new content knowledge and to assimilate it with their existing background knowledge. In addition, students need to learn and use the language of the discipline, read and understand text within the discipline, and actively apply their newly obtained knowledge to reasoning and decision-making tasks.

However, across the United States there are students in nearly every class who have not achieved proficiency in reading by the time they enter high school.<sup>1</sup> These students face significant barriers in preparing for college, for careers with livable wages, and for civic engagement.

*Jeanne Wanzenek is the Currey-Ingram Endowed Chair and a professor in the Department of Special Education at Peabody College of Vanderbilt University. A former special education and elementary school teacher, she researches effective reading instruction, intervention, prevention, and remediation for students with reading difficulties and disabilities.*

Social studies teachers also face significant challenges; it is very difficult to meet all students' needs when some can easily learn independently from text and others require extensive supports to understand text adequately. The data from a recent study with 11th-grade social studies classes revealed that disparities between students are often quite stark: fall reading achievement scores in a typical class spanned more than 2.5 standard deviations of reading achievement,<sup>2</sup> which means reading achievement in many classes can span more than 70 percentile points (e.g., 9th percentile to 82nd percentile). With such a wide range of reading abilities in their classes, it was impossible for those social studies teachers to focus solely on the content and discourse of the primary and secondary text sources in their curricula. Although there is enormous variety among high school students with limited literacy, many have some foundational word-reading skills\* but may struggle with text because of its vocabulary, structure, or length; they may also have difficulty making connections and inferences in the text, in part because they lack assumed background knowledge or effective strategies for monitoring their comprehension of the text while reading.

How can a teacher address the needs of students who are not proficient readers at the same time they are trying to teach a moun-

\*For more on foundational literacy skills, see "Teaching Reading Is Rocket Science" in the Summer 2020 issue of *American Educator*: [aft.org/ae/summer2020/moats](http://aft.org/ae/summer2020/moats).

tain of content? Although it is critical that students with reading difficulties receive appropriate interventions outside of the social studies classroom to improve their reading achievement, embedding disciplinary literacy within the content may help teachers address the diverse needs of students and stay focused on the important content they are teaching. In truth, most students (even many who are strong readers) need instruction in successfully reading and understanding text in specific disciplines.<sup>3</sup> For example, a historian may read a diary entry by a famous politician skeptically (i.e., is she intentionally writing for posterity?), but take a diary entry by a not-famous waitress in a small town at face value. Likewise, a historian would consider related factors, such as when and where each diary entry was written, what ideas and events were prominent locally and globally, and other issues that may have affected the writers. Then, there are the vocabulary, structure, and other text-specific aspects of historical reading.

Embedding discipline-specific literacy instruction within social studies content can assist a variety of students, including those with reading difficulties, to build higher-level reading abilities, increase knowledge acquisition, and improve their overall content learning. Moreover, many state learning standards already address the need for discipline-specific literacy instruction in content areas such as social studies.<sup>4</sup>

## Enhancing Students' Comprehension in Social Studies

So, what are some instructional practices that can feasibly be embedded in the content, that enhance (and do not detract from) the content, and that have demonstrated the ability to improve students' content understanding? The research on adolescent academic literacy suggests several recommendations, such as providing support for students to read and comprehend increasingly complex text, offering explicit instruction in vocabulary and concepts that are a part of the discipline and text reading, and engaging students in content and text discussions to promote higher-level reasoning and critical thinking.<sup>5</sup>

Based on this body of research, five instructional practices are outlined below. Social studies teachers can embed these practices into their existing instruction to further engage students in the subject matter and provide support for discipline-specific reading. Middle and high school social studies teachers who have embedded these instructional practices in their units consistently see increased student content knowledge as compared with typical instructional practices,<sup>6</sup> including for students with disabilities.<sup>7</sup>

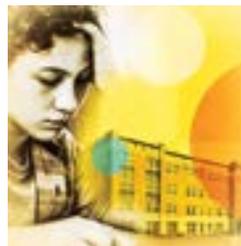
### Start with a Comprehension Canopy

The comprehension canopy serves as a unit starter and consists of three very brief components: establishing a purpose, asking an overarching question, and priming initial background knowledge. At the beginning of each instructional unit, teachers provide a purpose for the upcoming unit and readings, along with an overarching question to guide comprehension during the unit. This question is revisited throughout the unit as students learn new content that addresses the question. Therefore, the question gives students an explicit organizer for the content they are learning. The question should be broad and cover the key ideas from the unit so that students can organize the critical information they learn to fully address the question by the end of the unit. For

example, in a unit on the Gilded Age, the unit question may be "During the Gilded Age, how did the economic, political, and social landscape of America change?"

Teachers also provide a brief introduction to the unit, to build some background knowledge about the upcoming content. When possible, it is helpful for this introduction, or part of it, to be provided in a short video (of three to five minutes). Videos should provide information about at least one key concept that will be covered in the unit and be chosen to pique student interest in learning the content of the unit. Students briefly discuss a prompted question or two about the video with a partner to process the video. Questions can help students make connections between their knowledge and the content of the video and the upcoming unit. For example, to introduce a unit on the Gilded Age, a teacher may start with a video about Ellis Island and provide questions such as "Who in your family was the first to come to America?" and "Why did they leave their native land to come here?" Or a teacher may decide to connect to the perspective of the people in the video, asking "Imagine you were the first in your family to come to America. Why might you choose to leave your native land to come here?" To prepare for their discussion, stu-

**Most students (even many who are strong readers) need instruction in successfully reading and understanding text in specific disciplines.**



dents could write at least two reasons a person might have immigrated to America. That discussion concludes the comprehension canopy, which is intended to be simple and brief (taking only 7 to 10 minutes) to provide a framework to engage students in the upcoming content.

### Teach Essential Content-Specific Words and Concepts

Another beginning-of-the-unit instructional practice is to explicitly introduce four or five essential words or concepts necessary for understanding the content of the unit. Explicit vocabulary instruction benefits students' comprehension of material, particularly for students with reading difficulties.<sup>8</sup> Selection of these words should consider usefulness and importance in the discipline. For example, the word *revenue* is an important and useful word in many social studies units. It

# Students need repeated exposure to new words and opportunities to apply their word knowledge in order to retain the word or concept in their vocabulary.

## Using the Five-Step Routine to Teach *Urbanization*

### Definition

The movement of people from rural to urban areas and the resulting physical growth of cities.

### Visualization



ANGMOKIO / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

### Related Words

Urban expansion, urban sprawl, development, migration

### Example of Word Use

The United Nations forecasts that the pace of global *urbanization* will continue to quicken, and that 60 percent of the world's population will live in cities by the year 2030. (That's amazing, considering that only 13 percent of the world's population lived in cities in 1900.)

### Example

New York City

### Nonexample

Harvard, Illinois (a small town in the Midwest)

### Turn and Talk

Select one of the following topics to address: economic opportunity or climate change. For the selected topic, tell your partner two benefits and two challenges of urbanization.

- Example: Urbanization creates more economic opportunities for individuals because there are more businesses and more job training opportunities. However, individuals moving to big cities to pursue economic opportunities face high rents and many other newcomers also searching for jobs.

may be essential for a student to fully understand this word if they are to engage in discourse and analysis of the social studies discipline. As a result, *revenue* may be selected as an essential word to explicitly teach students. Often, teachers provide the essential word instruction right after completing the comprehension canopy to help increase equity in terms of vocabulary and background knowledge before any other unit content is taught.

After selecting the essential words for the unit, explicit instruction is provided in the meaning and the use of the words. Research on learning new words and concepts points to the importance of providing instruction beyond just definitions of the words.<sup>9</sup> The following five-step routine is an effective way to introduce and discuss each word. It usually takes a total of 15 to 20 minutes.



1. Provide a student-friendly definition.
2. Show a visual representation of the word to help students remember its meaning.
3. Present related words to help students make connections between the new word and other known words.
4. Discuss examples and nonexamples of the word or word use.
5. Prompt pairs of students to discuss and apply the meaning of the word.

The box to the left provides an example of this routine for the word *urbanization*.

Research on vocabulary learning suggests students need repeated exposure to new words and opportunities to apply their word knowledge in order to retain the word or concept in their vocabulary.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, essential words should be used throughout the unit, including in the texts students will be reading. Essential words can also be reviewed through short warm-up activities at the beginning of several class periods throughout the unit. These warm-up activities are developed to allow the students to work independently for two to three minutes to apply word knowledge within the content. For example, after students have been learning and reading about the pros and cons of urbanization, a warm-up activity to review and apply the word might include students examining a photograph of a large urban area that they have been studying and then writing one challenge of urbanization and a potential solution in each of several areas (e.g., environment, public health, housing, transportation, employment). Warm-up activities can be spread out over the course of the unit, with each of the essential words and concepts reviewed in this mode at least once during the unit.

### Provide Support for Critical Content Readings

The critical readings instructional practice helps ensure that all students, even those who are still developing as readers, work through and comprehend content within primary and secondary text sources. In order to provide sufficient support for the varying levels of readers in the class, critical readings happen during class time and typically require approximately 20 minutes.

To begin a reading, teachers provide a brief introduction that sets the context. This introduction can include emphasizing

essential words students will encounter and connecting the information they will read to the overarching question for the unit. For example, building on the question “During the Gilded Age, how did the economic, political, and social landscape of America change?” a teacher may say, “In this reading, we will learn about some of the economic issues facing workers during the Gilded Age.” Students can read the text as a whole class with the teacher, in small groups, in pairs, or independently. Depending on students’ needs, teachers may also divide the class, with some reading independently and others reading as a group with teacher support. Even when teachers are assisting, it is important that students do the majority of the reading (rather than the teacher or another student reading it to them). Students can only gain practice in reading and understanding content-area text independently if they are actually reading.

Teachers guide the students to stop in two to three predetermined places in the text (e.g., after one to two paragraphs or one section) to monitor comprehension of the text. At these stopping points, students answer key text questions about the text read thus far, verbally or in writing (e.g., In what ways does the author seem to feel that immigrants were once important to the American economy? How does the author feel labor conditions have now changed?), and briefly discuss responses before continuing the reading. Discussions should be brief and focused on the reading and the text question, rather than a time to provide an extended lecture on the content. The teacher also leads a debriefing of the whole text after the reading is completed. The critical readings routine is typically used two to three times during a two-week unit.

### **Use Teams to Monitor Content Understanding**

Team-based learning, a practice first used in higher education and adapted for middle and high school,<sup>11</sup> involves the use of heterogeneous, permanent teams of students (three to five students at the high school level) to discuss and apply content throughout the unit. One use of these teams is to monitor student understanding and learning of the content using comprehension checks. These occur a couple of times during each unit and are designed to take about 15 minutes, with an additional 5 minutes for targeted instruction.

How are comprehension checks implemented? A short quiz (about five multiple-choice questions) of the content and vocabulary learned in the unit thus far is given to all students. Teachers intentionally develop questions that do have a correct answer, but require students to integrate and evaluate key aspects of the curriculum. For example, rather than asking “What is urbanization?” a teacher may ask “Which of the following is not a cause of rapid urbanization during the Gilded Age?” requiring students to integrate their knowledge of urbanization with the causes during the Gilded Age.

Students first complete the quiz individually and turn it in to the teacher. This provides the teacher with information on individual student understanding and retention of the unit content covered. Next, students get into their teams and answer the same questions again. Because the questions have been carefully crafted to draw on multiple aspects of the content, they are likely to elicit discussion of the content during the team work. In addition, because each student has already taken the quiz, each is prepared to contribute to the discussion.

During the teams’ work on the quiz questions, they are allowed to use their texts and notes from class to find evidence supporting their answers. The teams discuss each question and come to consensus on an answer with their evidence. As teams mark their answers, they receive immediate feedback from a scratch-off card or a digital version of the quiz (that, like a scratch-off, only indicates whether an answer is right or wrong). If a team does not get the correct answer, they go back to discussing the question with their text and notes until they come to consensus on another answer. The teacher moves between teams as they discuss, facilitating their use of evidence and reasoning. The teacher can also identify any misunderstandings or content gaps in the students’ discussions. The teacher collects the scratch-off cards or digital results when the teams are finished, particularly to examine questions that took teams multiple attempts before obtaining the correct answer.

**Even when teachers are assisting, it is important that students do the majority of the reading.**



Together, these individual and team comprehension checks provide information on students’ understanding of the content thus far and their readiness for content application activities. The teacher uses the information from the individual answers, discussions, and team answers to plan individual, small-group, or whole-class instruction that is targeted to address knowledge gaps.

### **Use Teams to Apply Content Knowledge**

At the end of the unit, students apply the knowledge they have acquired. Students once again work in their teams to integrate

the unit content in a problem-solving or perspective-taking activity. Because the activity is designed to elicit discussion and decision making using the content from the unit, prompts are complex. For example, teams may be asked to “Imagine you serve on an advisory committee to a Gilded Age president. As a team, make a recommendation regarding whether the United States should limit immigration. Provide at least two economic, two political, and two social reasons in support of your recommendation.” Each team discusses each aspect of the task; identifies evidence or support for their reasoning from their notes, readings, and other class resources from the unit; and records key information.

## A reading difficulty should not mean that students have to fall behind in their other academic areas.



Providing graphic organizers—such as a table for each of the unit readings on immigration where students can identify the author’s perspective, audience, general argument, and supporting evidence—and breaking the task into clear steps can help high school students work through the activity effectively. By the end of the activity, each team prepares a written response stating their decision and rationale (e.g., the team’s recommendation and their economic, political, and social support points). Coming back together as a whole class, the teams report on their conclusions and rationales. The teacher highlights high-quality use of text to support ideas, requires teams to report on their text evidence when it is lacking, and facilitates student questions about a team’s conclusions. Key connections between the activity, the student conclusions, and the overarching question are

then discussed to bring closure to the unit. Finally, the teacher facilitates an evaluation of the team process and success working together. For example, each team member might rate their team or their peers on items such as use of text-based evidence, active contributing, active listening, critical thinking, or teamwork.

Together, consistently using this set of practices to provide instruction for each content unit can help all students, including students with reading difficulties, read and understand the content as well as fully engage in the content. These practices ensure students engage in not only knowledge acquisition but also the application of that knowledge. The table on page 15 provides a summary of the activities within each instructional practice.

Students with reading difficulties need continuity in the supports they are provided across their academics in order to succeed in high school. A reading difficulty should not mean that students have to fall behind in their other academic areas. Social studies teachers can substantially raise achievement when they have the tools to engage and support a variety of students in learning their discipline. □

### Endnotes

1. Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, *Time to Act: An Agenda for Advancing Adolescent Literacy for College and Career Success* (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2010); and National Center for Education Statistics, US Department of Education, *National Assessment of Educational Progress Report Card*, 2019, [nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard](https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard).
2. J. Wanzek et al., “Promoting Acceleration of Comprehension and Content Through Text in High School Social Studies Classes,” *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness* 8 (2015): 169–188.
3. C. Lee and A. Spratley, *Reading in the Disciplines: The Challenges of Adolescent Literacy* (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2010).
4. Common Core State Standards Initiative, *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* (Washington, DC: 2010), [corestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/ELA\\_Standards1.pdf](https://corestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/ELA_Standards1.pdf).
5. See, for example, Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, *Time to Act*; R. Heller and C. Greenleaf, *Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas: Getting to the Core of Middle and High School Improvement* (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007); Lee and Spratley, *Reading in the Disciplines*; National Association of Secondary School Principals, *Creating a Culture of Literacy: A Guide for Middle and High School Principals* (Reston, VA: 2005); and J. K. Torgesen et al., *Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents: A Guidance Document from the Center on Instruction* (Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation, Center on Instruction, 2007).
6. S. Vaughn et al., “Improving Reading Comprehension and Social Studies Knowledge in Middle School,” *Reading Research Quarterly* 48 (2013): 77–93; S. Vaughn et al., “Improving Middle-School Students’ Knowledge and Comprehension in Social Studies: A Replication,” *Educational Psychology Review* 27, no. 1 (2015): 31–50; S. Vaughn et al., “Improving Content Knowledge and Comprehension for English Language Learners: Findings from a Randomized Control Trial,” *Journal of Educational Psychology* 109, no. 1 (2017): 22–34; J. Wanzek et al., “The Effects of Team-Based Learning on Social Studies Knowledge Acquisition in High School,” *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness* 7 (2014): 183–204; and Wanzek et al., “Promoting Acceleration of Comprehension.”
7. S. C. Kent et al., “Team-Based Learning for Students with High-Incidence Disabilities in High School Social Studies Classrooms,” *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice* 30 (2015): 3–14; E. Swanson et al., “Improving Reading Comprehension and Social Studies Knowledge Among Middle School Students with Disabilities,” *Exceptional Children* 81, no. 4 (2015): 426–442; and J. Wanzek et al., “English Learner and Non-English Learner Students with Disabilities: Content Acquisition and Comprehension,” *Exceptional Children* 82, no. 4 (2016): 428–442.
8. A. M. Elleman et al., “The Impact of Vocabulary Instruction on Passage-Level Comprehension of School-Age Children: A Meta-Analysis,” *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness* 2, no. 1 (2009): 1–44.
9. I. L. Beck and M. G. McKeown, “Increasing Young Low-Income Children’s Oral Vocabulary Repertoires Through Rich and Focused Instruction,” *Elementary School Journal* 107, no. 3 (2007): 251–271; M. D. Coyne, D. B. McCoach, and S. Kapp, “Vocabulary Intervention for Kindergarten Students: Comparing Extended Instruction to Embedded Instruction and Incidental Exposure,” *Learning Disability Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2007): 74–88; and T. S. Wright and G. N. Cervetti, “A Systematic Review of the Research on Vocabulary Instruction That Impacts Text Comprehension,” *Reading Research Quarterly* 52 (2017): 203–226.
10. J. F. Baumann, “Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension: The Nexus of Meaning,” in *Handbook of Research on Reading Comprehension*, ed. S. E. Israel and G. G. Duffy (New York: Routledge, 2009), 323–346.
11. L. K. Michaelson and M. Sweet, “Team-Based Learning,” *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 128 (2011): 41–51; Vaughn et al., “Improving Reading Comprehension”; and Wanzek et al., “The Effects of Team-Based Learning.”

# Instructional Practices for Promoting Adolescent Comprehension Through Text



INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES	ACTIVITIES
Comprehension Canopy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build background knowledge and motivate students for the new unit.</li> <li>• Provide a brief, engaging video introducing the topic. Present a purpose for viewing the video and debrief with a short discussion after the video.</li> <li>• Introduce a unit-long overarching question that is researchable, has a problem to solve, or is a task to complete throughout the unit as the content is learned.</li> </ul>
Essential Words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce four to five critical vocabulary words and concepts with high utility in the content area.</li> <li>• Provide student-friendly definitions, a visual representation, examples and nonexamples where appropriate, and a quick discussion prompt to apply the word meaning.</li> <li>• Review the words throughout the unit in readings and through brief warm-up activities to apply the meaning of the word to a real-life situation.</li> </ul>
Critical Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide support for reading material related to the unit topic.</li> <li>• Introduce the reading emphasizing essential words in the reading and what students will learn.</li> <li>• Read the material as a whole class, in small groups, in pairs, or individually.</li> <li>• Provide stopping points in the text to discuss the reading and take notes.</li> <li>• Make connections to the comprehension canopy's overarching question, essential words, and any previously learned content.</li> </ul>
Team Comprehension Check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare a short multiple-choice content quiz covering content taught in the unit thus far.</li> <li>• Develop questions that challenge students to integrate key aspects of the content.</li> <li>• Have students take the quiz individually and turn it in.</li> <li>• Have teams (heterogeneous groups of three to five students working together throughout the course) take the quiz using their texts and notes to discuss the questions and evidence for the correct answers. Provide immediate feedback to each team (e.g., scratch-off cards or virtual quizzes) on whether team answers are correct or incorrect. Teams continue discussing the questions and examining evidence until they get the correct answers.</li> <li>• Provide targeted instruction to address any misunderstandings noted in the individual quizzes, team discussions, or team quizzes.</li> </ul>
Team Knowledge Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a problem-solving and/or perspective-taking activity for the unit content that allows students to apply the content to making a decision or choice.</li> <li>• Have student teams (same teams described in the comprehension check) complete the activity engaging in discourse and using the unit content and evidence to support their claims, reasoning, and decision making.</li> <li>• Provide students support for working through the activity as needed (e.g., steps to complete the activity, graphic organizers).</li> <li>• Have teams share their solutions or decisions alongside their rationales and evidence with the rest of the class.</li> <li>• Facilitate a peer review of the team process to help teams work better together each time to achieve the class goals.</li> </ul>

# In College, But Not Always Earning College Credit

Evidence-Based Instructional Strategies for Success During—and Beyond—Developmental Courses



BY ELIZABETH L. TIGHE, MEAGAN C. ARRASTÍA-CHISHOLM, AND NJERI M. PRINGLE

**A**cademically underprepared postsecondary students make up a large proportion of college campuses. Recent estimates indicate that up to 70 percent of incoming students at two-year community colleges and up to 40 percent of incoming students at four-year colleges enroll in developmental courses.<sup>1</sup> These courses, sometimes also referred to as *remedial*, *basic skills*, *college preparatory*, or *pre-curriculum*, typically do not offer credit toward an associate or bachelor's degree. They largely enroll students who have completed high school (earning a traditional diploma or GED) and are offered across an array of subject areas (e.g., reading, writing, mathematics) to prepare students to progress to the demands of postsecondary coursework.

*Elizabeth L. Tighe is an assistant professor of developmental psychology and the assistant director of the Adult Literacy Research Center at Georgia State University. Meagan C. Arrastía-Chisholm is an associate professor of educational psychology and the program coordinator for the Center for Gifted Studies at Valdosta State University. Njeri M. Pringle is an adjunct mathematics instructor at Georgia Military College and a graduate assistant within the Academic Support Center at Valdosta State University, where she co-coordinates the Supplemental Instruction Leader Program.*

There has been some criticism of the effectiveness of many of these developmental courses, as many students either do not complete them (most notably developmental mathematics) or do not progress to passing credit-bearing courses.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, there are supportive, developmental instructional strategies that a substantial body of research demonstrates to be effective. In this article, we begin with suggestions for motivating students that apply across subject areas. Then, we provide more detailed descriptions of several evidence-based strategies that developmental instructors can use across reading, writing, and mathematics courses. We also offer some tips for teaching on virtual platforms. Although we describe these strategies individually, they are best used in concert through a mix of whole-group, small-group, and individualized instruction.

## Motivating Adult Learners

Motivation encompasses many thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Within the framework of self-regulated learning that is inherent to higher education,<sup>3</sup> motivation includes students' intrinsic interest, goal orientation, and self-efficacy. Each student enters the classroom with a unique motivational profile. By incorporating questions about motivation into relationship-building exercises at the beginning of a course, instructors can take this information into account and help promote higher self-efficacy. In turn, higher academic self-efficacy is associated with lifelong learning and the

enjoyment of learning. In essence, these positive motivational attributes are associated with good short-term learning outcomes, as well as achievement beyond formal education.<sup>4</sup>

Some research shows that instructors assume college students in developmental courses have low motivation, despite most students reporting high self-efficacy and a desire to learn.<sup>5</sup> Such assumptions could be problematic if they result in instructors making fewer inquiries into their students' needs. Imagine a young man who is routinely 10 minutes late to class. One might assume that he is not motivated, or one might inquire and discover that he works full time and his manager makes him do a few extra tasks each day as his shift ends—but he always rushes to class, skipping dinner, because he is highly motivated. This is a student who needs an accommodation—such as the instructor's class opener or warm-up exercise in an email earlier in the day. Common reactions, such as a warning or even an incentive to do better, are not likely to change his behavior, since the root cause is outside his control. Indeed, research shows that developmental students who enter the classroom motivated do not need extra incentives.<sup>6</sup>

Although motivation is often understood in the context of teaching K-12 students, there are some added considerations when teaching adult students in developmental courses, many of whom may be nontraditional students (e.g., adults with jobs and children). When teaching adults, it is especially important to acknowledge, honor, and incorporate their lived experiences in the classroom whenever possible.<sup>7</sup> Instructors should not only help their students find relevance in the material and utility in the skills being acquired but also actively elicit ways students can contribute to the lesson. In other words, students in developmental courses should be positioned as the experts whenever possible. On a contrasting note, developmental instructors need to be cautious when foundational skills are missing. Whereas in other classes an instructor might employ reciprocal teaching (making students dependent on each other), collaborative peer learning may not always work if students are lacking some skills required to teach fellow students. In these situations, consider creating opportunities for students to help inspire each other through exchanging life experiences.

Because of the independent nature of higher education, self-regulation (i.e., directing one's thoughts and behavior toward a task) should be modeled and explicitly taught.<sup>8</sup> For example, instructors should help students set goals, monitor their own progress, reflect on their learning, and seek help. Emphasizing learning goals over performance goals, in addition to making the connection between content and real life, can decrease anxiety and promote learning.<sup>9</sup> More research is needed on the motivation of developmental students, but teaching a growth mindset should be combined with academic intervention so that students both understand that they can improve and are given the knowledge and skills needed to improve.

Motivational components cannot stand in place of content instruction, but they can aid in cognitive changes that may help students persist.<sup>10</sup> Here are a few essential strategies:

- Communicate high expectations from the course outset. Make it clear that you expect that all of the students want to learn and that they will master the content. During the first class, provide learning objectives on the syllabus and orally communicate high expectations.<sup>11</sup>

- Allow students to be the experts when possible. Provide opportunities for students to share their knowledge and experiences (related to their professions, personal lives, and cultures) and acknowledge the skills they bring to the class.<sup>12</sup>
- Use incentives only if needed. Assume all students are motivated to learn, but increase motivational messaging and inquire about needs for those who lack or appear to lack motivation (e.g., through follow-up emails or texts if they are missing class). Build optional incentives into the course that will help students boost their performance, such as extra-credit assignments, multiple submissions (with feedback to scaffold learning), and/or dropping the lowest grade.<sup>13</sup>

## When teaching adults, it is especially important to acknowledge, honor, and incorporate their lived experiences in the classroom.

- Be consistent with expectations and deadlines. Even with self-pacing, deadlines should be enforced with penalties for the sake of consistency. Grades in the course should come from performance-based assessments, not fluff grades (e.g., attendance, logging into the course, attitude).<sup>14</sup>

Higher-achieving developmental students may already know how to self-regulate their learning,<sup>15</sup> but lower-achieving students may not. In addition to the strategies above, instructors can weave lessons and tips for self-regulation into the instructional strategies for reading, writing, and mathematics described below.

### Reading and Writing Instruction

Many developmental courses have recently shifted toward combining reading and writing instruction. These skills are essential not only for most of adult life but also for almost all subject areas—even within a developmental math course, for example, there are considerable reading and writing skills that students need in order to approach more complex word problems and to develop critical-thinking and mathematical reasoning skills.<sup>16</sup> A recent literature review provides an excellent overview of current, high-quality research on integrating reading and writing instruction (broadly termed *literacy*) for post-secondary students enrolled in developmental courses.<sup>17</sup> The review differentiates between bodies of literature that highlight different types of instructional approaches that can be common to reading and writing skills needed for struggling postsecondary students. We briefly outline each broad approach, as instructors may consider adopting aspects of different approaches to fit their unique classroom needs, and present some examples from research conducted within each approach. We also include specific strategies and skills within each approach for instructors to focus on in the classroom.



## More research is needed on motivation, but teaching a growth mindset should be combined with academic intervention.

### Discrete, Decontextualized Skills Approach

When assessments (including projects and other assignments developed by instructors) reveal specific skills and knowledge that individual students have not yet mastered, it is helpful for instructors to be efficient in addressing the particular weaknesses. For instance, in terms of reading instruction, this may include focusing on explicit instruction in basic phonological decoding, understanding vocabulary definitions and related synonyms and antonyms, and building metalinguistic awareness, such as unpacking the structure of complex words (e.g., peeling off prefixes and suffixes). In isolation, this type of approach often relies on repeated drilling of skills through worksheets or on practicing composing several essays. There is little focus on instructors modeling strategies (e.g., to approach reading passages or composing essays), on embedding digital materials, or on connecting work to current events and trends.

If assessments indicate a broad array of literacy needs and instructors are deciding where to begin parts of a discrete, decontextualized approach, developmental instructors may want to focus on the following skills:

- For lower-level students, address needs related to basic decoding, vocabulary knowledge, and background knowledge. For vocabulary, assign worksheets to extend familiar words (e.g., *vary*) to teach more complex morphologically and/or etymologically related words (e.g., *variable*, *variability*, *variety*, *variance*, *variants*, *variations*, *invariable*, *invariably*). To facilitate

morphological problem solving, and thus help increase vocabulary and comprehension, focus the materials on using knowledge of base words, roots (i.e., etymology), and affixes to decompose complex, unknown words (e.g., with *multivariate*, a student can learn to relate it to *vary* and to known words with the same prefix like *multiplication* and *multivitamin*).<sup>18</sup> Also, instructors can work on building fluency by timing students as they practice reading increasingly complex connected text.

- For more advanced students (i.e., those who demonstrate strong foundational reading skills and at least a basic academic vocabulary), provide opportunities with many different types of texts to engage in monitoring comprehension (reflecting on and understanding what is read), paraphrasing (putting the text into their own words), identifying the main idea and summarizing text, forming bridging inferences across sentences within the text, elaborating (incorporating background knowledge to form inferences about the text), and predicting (inferring what might come next in the text).<sup>19</sup>

### Strategy Instruction

This approach expands and deepens understanding of the skills from the discrete, decontextualized approach by allowing for instructor modeling and scaffolding using a step-by-step model (e.g., graphic organizers, mnemonic devices, think-alouds). It also builds off the concept of reciprocal teaching, in which after instructors provide modeling, students can teach-back material to the instructor and/or peers. Reciprocal teaching can foster deeper learning, critical thinking, comprehension monitoring, and idea development (especially for writing). The following are some evidence-based strategies that instructors can apply to reading and writing in developmental courses:

- Use pre-reading strategies (e.g., brainstorming, skimming) to help students comprehend complex text. For example, PILLAR—preview, identify, list, look online, attempt, read—is a pre-reading strategy to help students digest complex reading tasks in which they have limited background or content knowledge on the specific topic.<sup>20</sup> Of note, the “look online” step of PILLAR integrates the idea of using online resources to gain more information about new topics and take more self-initiative in the learning process.
- Integrate instructor modeling and scaffolding during writing instruction into the drafting and revision phases. In one example, students worked in small groups to discuss teacher expectations, and then the instructor modeled on a whiteboard the steps of revision. In addition, the instructor gave evaluative, individualized feedback on students’ drafts.<sup>21</sup>
- Introduce a variety of metacognitive reading strategies and model them using multiple examples and think-alouds in class, then have students practice on texts and collaboratively with peers. For example, asking students to relate personal knowledge or experiences to the text, generate questions about the text, use annotations and notes to self during reading, and generate inferences were metacognitive strategies identified as useful in one developmental reading course.<sup>22</sup>
- Allow students to self-select reading comprehension strategies, which can facilitate greater autonomy and also enhance motivation and the desire to read and write more often.<sup>23</sup>

## New and Multiple Literacies

New and multiple literacies view reading and writing as broader social constructs; instructors are more interested in how students express themselves and communicate than in coaching students to demonstrate mastery of specific discrete skills.<sup>24</sup> Although we caution that all students need to master reading and writing skills in academic English—for everything from writing an accurate lab report in a chemistry class to drafting a concise proposal for a business class (not to mention accomplishing these things professionally)—there is value in cultivating individual expression and helping students find their voices. The following are some ideas for instructors who want to incorporate a broader concept of literacies:

- Use blogs and social media content that align with course curricula and goals to have students draft reflective essays.
- Integrate other modalities, such as podcasting and video-making, to allow students alternatives to communicate and convey ideas (while also refining writing skills as students draft and revise scripts or talking points).
- Focus on self-reflection during the writing process and allow students to examine their self-beliefs and identities related to writing.<sup>25</sup>

- Encourage students to share ideas about culture and cultural practices in discussions, readings, and writing activities.

## Disciplinary and Contextualized Approaches

These approaches rely on bridging discrete reading, writing, and critical-thinking skills to other content areas (e.g., anthropology, geology). In particular, embedding vocabulary and morphological training on academic words and content-area passages related to US history and civics has been shown effective with students enrolled in English as a second language courses.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, there has been evidence of effectiveness of embedding reading strategy and self-explanation training into an introductory biology course with college students.<sup>27</sup> Specific to students in developmental courses, some work has shown effectiveness of integrating reading and writing strategies, such as building vocabulary and background knowledge, generating main ideas, identifying supportive details, summarizing, and thinking critically with historical texts<sup>28</sup> as well as with



## Adapting Instructional Strategies for Online Courses

With the increase in online learning opportunities and the need for remote instruction due to COVID-19, it's important to consider the challenges and features of online learning.<sup>1</sup> For instance, increasing motivation can be a tricky endeavor, especially if students do not have adequate technology and high-speed internet; and yet, technology enables greater personalization<sup>2</sup> and can even be adapted to appeal to students' emotions, which helps with motivation.<sup>3</sup>

Online learning also increases the accessibility of coursework in terms of both differentiating instruction and geographical location.<sup>4</sup> Although some online classes have regular meeting times when all students need to log in, others also increase accessibility by allowing students to access modules asynchronously. Students taking such classes can work at their own pace on coursework that is personalized to their skill level. Students can skip modules for content they have mastered and find additional exercises for skills they are still practicing. With online learning, students who live in rural or remote areas can access education without the financial burden of lengthy commutes or relocation. This also increases the

capacity of any institution of higher education to provide instruction for more students.

One downside of the physical distance between online students may be a decreased sense of presence and community. Even if students are working on personalized learning plans online, providing networking opportunities may help increase collaboration, inspiration, and support among students online. For example, the use of synchronized learning—for some, if not all, sessions—can provide opportunities to connect through videoconferencing.

The following are additional practical strategies for online or hybrid developmental courses (also see the "Digital Teaching Strategies" section on page 20):

- Survey students about their resources and needs for online learning. It is important to know what technology and type of internet connection is available to students if the institution is not providing the same resources for all students.<sup>5</sup>
- Personalize student content based on a diagnostic assessment. This will enable acceleration or remediation so that students can focus on the skills they need to master.<sup>6</sup>
- Provide motivational messages and personalized feedback online. Instructors with very large classes may consider using some automated feedback through scheduled

announcements or through the use of intelligent tutors.<sup>7</sup> Although more capable intelligent tutors are in development, most readily available learning management systems (e.g., Blackboard, D2L, iCollege) have some built-in intelligent tutoring capacities that save instructors time.

- Provide opportunities for students to connect and find commonalities. Use videoconferencing and messaging applications to connect with students and build a learning community so that students may get to know each other despite physical distance.<sup>8</sup>

—E. L. T., M. C. A.-C., and N. M. P.

## Endnotes

1. J. Crawford et al., "COVID-19: 20 Countries' Higher Education Intra-Period Digital Pedagogy Responses," *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching* 3, no. 1 (2020): 1–20.
2. C. Kim, "The Role of Affective and Motivational Factors in Designing Personalized Learning Environments," *Educational Technology Research and Development* 60, no. 4 (2012): 563–584.
3. C. Kim and C. Hodges, "Effects of an Emotion Control Treatment on Academic Emotions, Motivation, and Achievement in an Online Mathematics Course," *Instructional Science* 40, no. 1 (2012): 173–192.
4. T. Kidd, "Brief History of Online Learning," in *Online Education and Adult Learning: New Frontiers for Teaching Practices*, ed. T. Kidd (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2010), 46–53.
5. Crawford et al., "COVID-19."
6. Kim, "The Role of Affective."
7. D. Hickey et al., "Internet-Based Alternatives for Equitable Preparation, Access, and Success in Gateway Courses," *Internet and Higher Education* 44 (2020): 100693.
8. Crawford et al., "COVID-19."

scientific texts.<sup>29</sup> Thus, instructors should try to integrate academic vocabulary and topics specific to college-level history and science courses into discussions, writing topics, and readings.

### Digital Teaching Strategies

With recent technological advances, many developmental courses have been taught partially or fully online for many years. Some courses integrate online features (e.g., discussion boards and online chats often found through common university platforms such as Blackboard, Canvas, and iCollege) and use programs (e.g., Google Docs) for live peer editing of writing and feedback as well as social media platforms to connect learners (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Slack channels, WhatsApp). For instance, in one study an instructor used a private Facebook page for a developmental writing course; compared with a traditional course (without such technology), the Facebook-enhanced version was more successful in promoting confidence among students in writing and interacting about writing.<sup>30</sup> Digital tools can enhance collaboration among instructors and classmates as well as foster a sense of community, particularly if instructors embrace the many modalities that are inherent in the multiple literacies approach.

## Learning mathematics requires greater literacy than is often assumed—especially for students for whom math has not been easy to digest.

Empirical research has also considered various digital technologies for enhancing reading and writing skills. The program iSTART (Interactive Strategy Training for Active Reading and Thinking), for example, provides instruction and practice in five of the reading comprehension strategies described above in the discrete skills section (monitoring comprehension, paraphrasing, bridging, elaborating, and predicting); iSTART has been iteratively modified and has shown promising gains in self-explanations of complex texts and reading comprehension for middle schoolers, high schoolers, post-secondary students, and struggling adult readers.<sup>31</sup>



**B**efore moving on to mathematics, it's important to remember that although we have presented these strategies individually, effective instructors combine them as needed. For instance, comprehension strategies could be integrated into developmental courses using a combination of approaches. Instructors could model and scaffold how to paraphrase complex sections of different texts and then apply this to texts on topics of interest to

students, vary the type of text (e.g., blog, newspaper article, passage), and/or vary the content area of the texts (e.g., science, history). In addition, for students who need even more practice, instructors could consider offering resources such as ThinkingStorm (in particular for writing feedback, [thinkingstorm.com](http://thinkingstorm.com)) or MyLab (available for self-paced reading and writing as well as math practice, [pearsonmylabandmastering.com](http://pearsonmylabandmastering.com)).<sup>\*</sup> Building on the new literacies framework, instructors could also allow students more active roles in communicating, such as through writing reflections to a complex text—and those reflections might lead to ideas, elaborations, and further predictions related to the text.

### Mathematics Instruction

Learning mathematics requires greater literacy than is often assumed—especially for students in developmental courses for whom math has not been easy to digest. Students need to be able to read effectively to understand concepts and questions (e.g., word problems, directions), to acquire procedural knowledge (understanding mathematical functions, operations, symbols, and rules), and to apply the appropriate strategies. Educators can help students develop skills to move their understanding from concrete to abstract. For example, students may have developed an understanding of specific symbols and functions (e.g., percentages [%]), and instructors can help students learn to express statements as mathematical operations (e.g., convert word problems into solvable equations, such as “What is the total amount of *simple* interest (in dollars) accrued on \$4,832 at a yearly rate of 5.5% over 4 years?” translates to  $4,832 \times 0.055 \times 4$ , which equals \$1,063.04). Research specific to students enrolled in either developmental math courses or college-level math courses finds scaffolding is particularly effective in breaking down complex strategies and rules (e.g., mathematical proofs) into explicit steps. It also allows students greater autonomy as they learn to apply different methods.<sup>32</sup> Instructors can gradually lessen their role, providing hints and other partial supports as students continue to progress in their understanding and gain independence.

Scaffolding that is gradually removed also discourages rote memorization of mathematical steps; instead, it encourages students to articulate and work through problem-solving strategies. Some research has suggested that rote memorization of rules and formulas may be ineffective because students may not be developing the critical-thinking skills and knowledge necessary to form connections among mathematical concepts.<sup>33</sup>

Developmental mathematics instruction needs to be engaging and accessible. The following are some evidence-based instructional strategies to support students in these courses:

- Provide *worked examples*—which are problems that are already solved in an explicit, step-by-step way—with scaffolding,<sup>34</sup> enabling students to feel more comfortable and confident in their math abilities. Consider scaffolding learning to address areas of perceived weakness by adding an additional week of learning and reviewing foundational math skills—with worked examples and problems for students to

<sup>\*</sup>Most of the widely available programs are based on research but have not been empirically tested, so we encourage instructors to periodically search for stronger resources.

solve—so students can build toward more complex topics at a comfortable pace. Throughout the course, reserve time to address mathematical concepts that students struggle with and need much more scaffolding and repetition to master. Instructors need patience and flexibility to come up with creative ways to reconceptualize and reteach mathematical topics that students persistently find challenging.

- Use tools (e.g., graphing calculators) and visuals (e.g., graphing paper, flash cards) to enhance learning concepts—but discourage solely relying on a calculator for all basic calculations.<sup>35</sup> For example, it is helpful to use a graphing calculator to quickly and accurately visualize graphs based on linear and quadratic equations, but many students may not learn the underlying math concepts if they never plot the points and draw the graphs by hand. Tools should be used to save time, not to substitute for understanding.
- Consider using manipulatives, such as blocks or other concrete objects, when introducing discrete or abstract mathematical concepts. A demonstrative example of this would be using a staircase when teaching slope.<sup>36</sup> Although manipulatives tend to be popular and can increase understanding, they can also be counterproductive if they do not help draw attention to key concepts. By explaining the manipulative and how it relates to the mathematical idea, instructors increase the likelihood of the manipulative being helpful.<sup>37</sup>
- Offer self-directed learning opportunities that are self-paced for further remediation while also providing supplemental instruction and creating opportunities for peer support.<sup>38</sup> In addition, use self-pacing for acceleration. Let students work ahead if desired and allow for multiple opportunities to master skills.
- Contextualize instruction by providing real-life examples.<sup>39</sup> This promotes transfer to the outside world and across classes. Whenever possible, ground exercises and assignments in authentic situations or set up real problems to be solved. For example, students may appreciate incorporating financial literacy into developmental mathematics courses (e.g., learning spreadsheets, balancing a checkbook, calculating percentages for tips, projecting retirement expenses).
- Allow students to create their own data sets and problems to solve. For example, students could use a bouncing ball to collect data on rebound heights and graph relationships,<sup>40</sup> or they could develop a survey to determine students' views on a topic, administer the survey to collect data, and develop a variety of charts to present their findings.

### Combating Math Anxiety

Although anxiety about learning exists in developmental reading and writing courses, math anxiety is a particularly important issue to address. In fact, it is estimated that approximately 80 percent of community college students and 25 percent of four-year college or university students taking mathematics courses struggle with moderate to high math anxiety.<sup>41</sup> Math anxiety can decrease performance in math courses, as well as performance on placement exams into developmental courses (resulting in students who do not actually need a developmental course being required to take one).<sup>42</sup> Further, there is some evidence that female students may



need more support, as they may exhibit higher levels of math anxiety compared with male students.<sup>43</sup>

Some strategies that developmental mathematics instructors may want to consider to combat math anxiety include:

- Acknowledge anxiety and fear early on in the course to help normalize the uncomfortable aspects of the learning process.<sup>44</sup> Instructors may even share their own stories of overcoming math anxiety to model perseverance.<sup>45</sup>
- Cultivate fearlessness by establishing an open, collaborative, and participatory classroom.<sup>46</sup> Allow students to work together, share resources, and hold each other accountable through classroom partnerships.
- Foster self-monitoring by acknowledging progress. For example, have students set goals, plan steps, and identify barriers as well as supports.<sup>47</sup> Then, have students monitor their progress through the learning management systems (e.g., Blackboard, D2L, MyLab Math). Provide motivational feedback that includes the tracking of progress in terms of percentage of content mastered or improvement of skill level.<sup>48</sup>

It is important to note that there is no one-size-fits-all instructional approach to developmental education. We encourage instructors to apply a broad array of strategies that bridge different content areas and meet students' unique needs. We also hope instructors will consider integrating motivational aspects (e.g., goal setting, interests, personal experiences) into discussions, assignments, and learning—especially in online courses. □

### Endnotes

1. E. Rutschow, "Understanding Success and Failure of Students in Developmental Mathematics: Developmental Mathematics Reform," commissioned paper, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, March 2019.
2. Rutschow, "Understanding Success and Failure."
3. M. Cohen, "The Importance of Self-Regulation for College Student Learning," *College Student Journal* 46, no. 4 (2012): 892–902.
4. Cohen, "The Importance of Self-Regulation."
5. V. Mesa, "Achievement Goal Orientations of Community College Mathematics Students and the Misalignment of Instructor Perceptions," *Community College Review* 40, no. 1 (2012): 46–74.
6. R. Moore, "Academic Motivation and Performance of Developmental Education Biology Students," *Journal of Developmental Education* 31, no. 1 (2007): 24.
7. S. Merriam and L. Bierema, *Adult Learning: Linking Theory and Practice* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2013).
8. Cohen, "The Importance of Self-Regulation"; and B. Zimmerman et al., "Enhancing Self-Reflection and Mathematics Achievement of At-Risk Urban Technical College Students," *Psychological Test and Assessment Modeling* 53, no. 1 (2011): 141–160.
9. M. Ironsmith et al., "Motivation and Performance in College Students Enrolled in Self-Paced Versus Lecture-Format Remedial Mathematics Courses," *Journal of Instructional Psychology* 30, no. 4 (2003): 276–284.

(Continued on page 52)

# A Formula for Success

Teaching Native American Community College Students Math—and to Believe in Themselves



BY EVA L. RIVERA LEBRÓN

Community colleges have long provided students a gateway to greater economic opportunities, primarily through two pathways: completing two years of college courses while preparing to transfer to earn a four-year degree or career training that can lead to stable, well-paying positions. The community college where I teach offers something more: a much-needed affirmation of Native American students' histories, values, identities, and cultures.

I teach math to students at Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. When it comes to issues of culture, math as a discipline mostly goes unnoticed. Given that subjects in the humanities and social sciences more easily lend themselves to students' lived experiences, classes about equations and functions hardly seem to connect to values and identities. But at SIPI, we show students that these connections do in fact exist, and we ensure that they play a central role in Native students' education. In

*Eva L. Rivera Lebrón is a professor of mathematics at Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She has given several presentations on supporting community college students' transition into and success in developmental and credit-bearing mathematics courses at conferences held by the National Indian Education Association.*

teaching math and other subject matter content, we intentionally build on our students' cultural knowledge because research shows that doing so is invaluable to their academic, social, and emotional development.\* By incorporating students' backgrounds into the classroom, we as educators help them learn more effectively.

One of 37 tribal colleges and universities in the United States, SIPI is a community college funded through the Bureau of Indian Education. All of the approximately 460 students enrolled† in the college are Native American. They come from 18 states and represent 71 different tribes.

SIPI not only respects Native students' cultural backgrounds and traditions but also intentionally supports tribal nation-building through its array of two-year degree and certificate programs. SIPI collaborates with tribes to understand their education and workforce needs—which in recent years have centered on healthy food, clean and sufficient water, sustainable energy, and accessible and equitable healthcare—and then responds with tailor-made degrees and certificates in fields such as culinary arts, environmental science, natural resources management, and vision care. At the same

\*For more on why it's important to build on students' cultures, see *How People Learn II: Learners, Contexts, and Cultures*: [nap.edu/catalog/24783/how-people-learn-ii-learners-contexts-and-cultures](http://nap.edu/catalog/24783/how-people-learn-ii-learners-contexts-and-cultures).

†I am offering an approximation because enrollment fluctuates each trimester.

time, SIPI provides degrees and certificates in fields that meet universal needs and offer broad opportunities, such as accounting, early childhood education, and computer-aided drafting and design, to name just a few.

Because mathematics is a required course for every program, I have students from a range of disciplines, and I teach the full gamut of math courses—from pre-algebra to calculus. Classes are typically small, with only 10 to 15 students, so I get to know my students quite well. Many work full- or part-time jobs, and some are raising children or caring for family members while they attend school.

Nearly 70 percent of students at SIPI test into developmental math courses, which consist of pre-algebra and algebra.\* These courses, for which students don't receive college credit, are ones they must take in order to enroll in credit-bearing math courses required for a degree. I find teaching these courses—and building relationships with my students through them—especially rewarding.

### Confronting Bias

I wanted to teach at SIPI because it's specifically for Native students. Such students are typically not well represented in higher education—as students or professors. As a Black woman from Puerto Rico, I myself did not see many people who looked like me in my undergraduate and graduate programs, not only because of my race and ethnicity but also because of my gender. I often tell my students about the time 20 years ago when one of my college math professors in Puerto Rico looked right at me and said in front of the entire class that women should not be studying math. His words stung. Because I was so intimidated by this professor, I considered dropping the class, but I decided to stay; I needed to prove him wrong. I paid careful attention in class, completed all the assignments, and studied hard for tests—and I passed the course. While proving him wrong, I also learned a lot about what being a professor could and should mean. Less than 20 percent of the students passed the class, which I think says more about that professor than it does about the students. We all had potential, but we had to look outside the class for support. I was a determined student, but I was also fortunate to find the help that my professor was not offering.

To this day, people still assume I don't have much education just because of the way I look. Whether it's due to implicit biases or systemic racism or a combination of both, they are surprised to learn I have a PhD in math education. I make it a point to share my story with my students so they know they can succeed even if others doubt their abilities.

Part of the key to being successful is having somebody who believes in you. One of my students last year was a 27-year-old transfer student who thought he couldn't do math. He really struggled with the material, and after every class he would tell me he just couldn't learn the content. But I started tutoring him after class and kept encouraging him to stick with it, and he started earning good grades. I remember the time he was so proud of his A on a test. He told me he couldn't wait to go home and show it to his mother so she could put it on the refrigerator door. He's no longer my student, but we keep in touch; he often texts me updates on his life. Sometimes I still tutor him when he's stuck on a particular concept.

\*For more on supporting students in such courses, see the article on page 16, "In College, But Not Always Earning College Credit."

Part of my job—and also my passion for teaching—is tutoring students. At SIPI, faculty members are required to spend a few hours each week tutoring students during their office hours or in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) Lab and Writing Lab on campus. In my role as a math professor, I am the students' main contact for the STEM Lab, where I tutor about four hours each week. In March 2020, because of the pandemic, we moved all classes and tutoring sessions at SIPI to synchronous meetings online. So now I tutor my students through Zoom. I try to be available at times that work for them, including nights and weekends, since many of them work full time.<sup>§</sup>

## Part of my job—and also my passion for teaching—is tutoring students. I am the main contact for the STEM Lab, where I tutor about four hours each week.



### Engaging Students in the Content and Their Cultures

A couple of years ago, to better support students, our department decided to modularize beginning algebra. "Modularization" is a term for breaking up a semester-long course into smaller parts so that students have more time to grasp key concepts and master

<sup>§</sup>Although supporting students in and out of class is core to who I am as a professor and I am deeply nourished by my work, I recognize that in many higher education institutions there are professors who become stretched too thin as they strive—too often alone—to meet students' needs. For a thought-provoking article that explores "diversity service work," see "How Diversity Rhetoric Obscures Structural Inequities in Higher Education": [bit.ly/2Kb2EUL](https://bit.ly/2Kb2EUL).

skills. If students fail a module, they can repeat it (without failing the course) before moving on to the next module. We also modularized intermediate math, the course that follows beginning algebra. Although the research on modularization has shown mixed results,\* it is helping our students make progress. Passing rates in beginning algebra have increased from 47 percent to 57 percent and in intermediate algebra from 44 percent to 49 percent. We've also noticed that because students are not nearly as stressed about their grades, they can focus more on understanding the content. The emphasis on tutoring and the availability and approachability of faculty members has also helped students in these courses.



## One of my students talked about quilting in her Native culture, so we incorporated the art of quilting into our patterns and problem-solving unit.

As a professor, I like the modular approach because it gives me more time to teach the material over the course of the year. I don't have to rush to cover a particular concept, and I can incorporate more projects and group work to help students grasp the content.

At a tribal college, such projects are especially important. I see them as a way to bring students' cultures, languages, and experi-

\*For more on the research behind modularization, see *Modularization in Developmental Mathematics in Two States* ([bit.ly/3o4FQnK](https://bit.ly/3o4FQnK)), "Modularization—a Road to Relevance?" ([bit.ly/2LDmHfu](https://bit.ly/2LDmHfu)), and *Effects of Modularisation* ([bit.ly/3bTFsGc](https://bit.ly/3bTFsGc)).

ences into our math classes and show students how math relates to their daily lives. For example, in a recent class on math for prospective elementary school teachers, as we were studying patterns and problem solving, one of my students talked about quilting in her Native culture. So we incorporated the art of quilting into our patterns and problem-solving unit. Another student in the class compared the beadwork that her family does, with its specific patterns and colors, to the math we were studying. And she then turned in a marvelous project on beading. In another class, I was teaching about percentages and students related it to their blood quantum,<sup>†</sup> the degree to which a person can prove a certain amount of Native ancestry. They started talking excitedly about what blood quantum their children would have if they married people from various tribes. While my students usually shy away from doing fractions because they find them challenging, they eagerly made these calculations because the mathematical concepts suddenly became real for them.

Making such connections to our students' lives happens throughout the college. In English courses, many assigned readings are by Native authors and relate to Native cultures. Culinary classes often feature projects in which students incorporate their cultures into dishes to give them a Native flair. (I'm not sure which ingredients they use, but I've tasted many of their meals, and they are delicious!) In environmental science courses, students learn about Native plants and Native botanists. In pre-engineering classes, students learn how to program robots to respond to Diné, the Navajo language. It's a language students can also learn at SIPI, which offers this language class since more than 60 percent of students are Navajo.

Since many of our students enjoy strong bonds with their tribes, they often attend ceremonies for holidays at home. The college calendar does not always line up with the various holidays students from different tribes celebrate, so sometimes students miss school. While they still must complete their course work, we definitely make space for them to engage in their cultural practices. At SIPI, we explicitly let students know just how much we respect their heritage.

It's a heritage that I'm continuing to learn more about. Growing up in Puerto Rico, the history books we read in school only superficially explained how Puerto Ricans are descended from Spaniards, Africans, and Taínos, the Indigenous people of the Caribbean. But we didn't really study Indigenous people in school, and I have no real knowledge of the Taíno or their culture, though I'm interested in building it. Attending a SIPI colleague's feast was my first real exposure to Native celebrations, and I'm eager to attend more.

### Bolstering Student Success

Modularization is not the only way SIPI tries to support students' academic success. Many students take advantage of services, besides tutoring, offered on campus at the STEM Lab and the Writing Lab. The STEM Lab offers plenty of resources, such as a group collaboration area, a semi-private computer area with whiteboards, calculators, graphing paper, and workstation equipment with paper cutters, staplers, and hole punches. To further support students in

<sup>†</sup>For a fuller discussion of blood quantum, see "So What Exactly Is 'Blood Quantum'?" ([n.pr/3gShzz7](https://n.pr/3gShzz7)).

developmental math courses, we ask that they sign math contracts. By signing such contracts, students commit to two hours of mandatory tutoring each week outside of class. Students can sign up for this tutoring at the STEM Lab or the coaching center on campus, which offers peer tutoring.

A popular childcare option for students with young children is an early childhood center on campus. Students can enroll their children in the center (as space allows) while they take their classes. Under the supervision of faculty members, students studying to be early childhood teachers work with the children of SIPI students and gain actual student-teaching experience.

One effort that is especially close to my heart is the Summer Bridge\* program that I direct at the college. It's specifically geared for students who need support in reading, math, and study skills, and as a result, may not be college ready. I started the program in 2018 to help students successfully transition to college. We actually run two separate programs—a residential program for traditional-age students (typically 18 to 20) who live on campus and a nonresidential one for older students who live off campus. At SIPI during the school year, the majority of students live in dorms on campus, while the rest commute from Albuquerque and the surrounding suburbs.

We started Summer Bridge because we found that student attrition was highest in the first trimester. By helping students build their knowledge and skills *before* the academic year begins, we can increase the number of students who persist in college and eventually earn their degree. Throughout both the residential and nonresidential programs, faculty members support students in English and math, share study tips and information about college life, and engage students in community-building activities. The program is free for students and funded through a mix of government funding and grants. It's worth noting that students are not required to enroll in SIPI after Summer Bridge. The whole point of the program is to ensure they have a successful transition to higher education no matter where they attend.

Results so far have been promising.<sup>§</sup> In 2019, the residential program enrolled 30 students and ran for five weeks with classes held during the day. Of those students, 77 percent matriculated at SIPI. The nonresidential program enrolled 11 students and ran for eight weeks with classes in the evenings to accommodate students' work schedules. Of those students, 91 percent matriculated at SIPI. Because of the suite of supports for students who are not yet college ready, the percentage of students earning credit hours in their first trimester has increased from 74 to 83, while their first-term grade point average has increased from 1.81 to 2.15. Overall, the passing rate in courses has increased from 53 to 64 percent.

While students attend SIPI, we make every effort to prepare them for enrolling in a four-year college or entering the workplace. Guidance counselors help students with their transcripts and resumes. The campus holds career fairs every trimester, and a staff

member works with students to land internships. Of the students who decide to pursue university studies, many attend the University of New Mexico (UNM), New Mexico State University, and New Mexico Highlands University. One of my former students is now studying math at UNM, and another is pursuing a major in Native American studies at Arizona State University.

## With Summer Bridge, the percentage of students earning credit hours in their first trimester has increased from 74 to 83.



**W**herever my students end up, I want them to understand and appreciate math as it relates to their lives, and I want them to believe in themselves. I still keep in touch with another student from 2019 who almost withdrew from one of my classes the first week of the trimester. At the time, he was 30 years old. He confided in me that he had never been good at math, and he said a professor at another college even told him as much. So I asked him, “Do you believe him?” When he said yes, I knew I had to help change his mindset.

I convinced him to stay in the class, and I worked with him to ensure he understood the material. At the end of the trimester, he ended up with the highest grade in the class. He is hands down one of the best students I have ever had. When he recently asked me if I thought he could be a math tutor at SIPI, I told him, “Of course you can.” My job isn't just to teach students math—it's to help them see themselves as individuals who, once they make the effort, can succeed at math and anything they do. □

\*For more on the Summer Bridge program, see [sipi.edu/apps/pages/summerbridge](http://sipi.edu/apps/pages/summerbridge).

§Because of the pandemic, we did not hold the Summer Bridge program this past summer; for months, the campus has been closed to ensure student and staff safety, and all classes are now synchronous meetings online. I'm currently working on making Summer Bridge a virtual program that can be held at any time during the year.



# LEARNING HISTORY, FACING REALITY

HOW KNOWLEDGE INCREASES AWARENESS OF SYSTEMIC RACISM

BETTMANN ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

BY PHIA S. SALTER

**A**mong the many tensions that the year 2020 laid bare, the divisions in our beliefs about the continued role of racism in the United States were central. While some of these divisions were drawn along political lines, with liberals far more likely than conservatives to see systemic racism as an ongoing problem, many were also drawn along racial lines. Although Black Lives Matter protests in the wake of George Floyd's and Breonna Taylor's deaths brought together one of the largest multiracial coalitions in recent protest history,<sup>1</sup> our nation remains divided in beliefs about the root causes of racial injustice, what we should do about it, and who is willing to do the work.<sup>2</sup>

According to several national polls, white Americans are more likely to deny that racism is a problem in contemporary US society than people from many communities of color.<sup>3</sup> Even in the wake of increased televised and social media conversations about systemic racism, white Americans were less likely to

take actions to better understand the racial issues plaguing American society, or to indicate support for Black Lives Matter, than people in other racial groups.<sup>4</sup> In my home state of North Carolina, polling indicated that while 87 percent of Black Americans thought systemic racism was a serious issue, only 40 percent of white Americans agreed with this sentiment.<sup>5</sup>

In the face of persistent disparities that impact Black Americans' experiences and outcomes regarding education, health, income, wealth, and criminal justice,<sup>6</sup> these gaps in our perceptions about what constitutes racism and whether it is a persistent problem only widen another gap: what we need to do to address these disparities. As an educator, I'm interested in how we might bridge these perception gaps in the classroom. As a researcher, I also have some ideas about where to start. I am a social, cultural, and critical race psychologist who draws upon a diverse set of research tools—including experiments, quantitative analyses, and qualitative field research—to integrate scientific inquiry with applications to racial justice.

## OUR STORIES SHAPE OUR PERCEPTIONS

To begin, take a moment to think about what you would say if I asked you to tell me your life story, your personal history. What if you had limited time or only 500 words? What aspects of your life story would you think are most important to highlight? Would your highlights (or lowlights) differ if I were to ask you to tell your

---

*Phia S. Salter is an associate professor of psychology at Davidson College and the principal investigator of the Culture in Mind Research Collaboratory, where her research focuses on collective memory, social identity, and systemic racism. Previously, she was an associate professor of psychology and Africana studies at Texas A&M University.*

Left: National Guard troops lining Beale Street in Memphis on March 29, 1968, as civil rights activists march. Right: Tiana Day, with megaphone, leading the “March 4 Our Future” in San Francisco on November 1, 2020.



SCOTT STRAZZANTE / THE SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE VIA GETTY IMAGES

story to your students or to your colleagues? What kind of impact would you want your story to make, and would that change which details you included or excluded? Honestly, how much would you focus on the parts that make you feel good and those that make you feel bad?

I have been considering these types of questions in relation to our nation’s history since I started graduate school 15 years ago at the University of Kansas. Social-psychological research suggests that many of us are motivated to maintain a positive view of ourselves when recounting our pasts.<sup>7</sup> I wondered: What does that emphasis on the positive mean for how we think about our country and, in particular, our history of racism? My master’s thesis and dissertation both focused on the dynamic relationships between identity, knowledge of America’s racial history, and beliefs about what constitutes racism. In my work, I consider both how our identities impact what aspects of our nation’s history we include in the collective narrative (especially what we commemorate) and what impact these narratives can make on engaged students.

In 1965, James Baldwin, a scholar and civil rights activist, implored white Americans to come to terms with the oppressive and bloody history of our nation’s past and asserted that doing so would be necessary to resolve the emotional and historical baggage perpetuating ongoing racism and discrimination. In an *Ebony* magazine article, he wrote:

White man, hear me! History, as nearly no one seems to know, is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally *present* in all that we do. It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations.<sup>8</sup>

History—or perhaps more accurately the stories we collectively tell ourselves about the past—shapes how we see the world, who we believe we are, and who we hope to be. At the same time, how we see the world, who we believe we are, and who we hope to be all play important roles in our interpretations and attitudes about what is significant about the past. What happened in the past and its relevance for the present can be ambiguous, and this ambiguity provides space for psychological meaning-making, intervention, and action. My research leverages this ambiguity to empower educators committed to addressing racism in their classrooms. I’ve found that as students’ knowledge of America’s racial history deepens, so does their interest in addressing persistent inequities. But we have a long road ahead.

Representations of American history tend to sanitize or silence the more negative or racist elements in order to maintain a positive view of our country’s past and present.<sup>9</sup> Our textbooks, cur-

ricula, and government-sanctioned holidays are no exception. These sources of historical information are not neutral accounts of what factually happened in the past; they are vulnerable to biases carried forward from the past and biases cultivated in the present.<sup>10</sup> Take the enslavement of Black people, for example. In its comprehensive report on “teaching hard history,” the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) indicated that American slavery is often divorced from its brutal context:

Taken as a whole, the documents we examined—both formal standards and supporting documents called frameworks—mostly fail to lay out meaningful requirements for learning about slavery, the lives of the millions of enslaved people or how their labor was essential to the American economy for more than a century of our history. In a word, the standards are timid.... The various standards tend to cover the “good parts” of the story of slavery—the abolitionist movement being foremost here—rather than the everyday experiences of slavery, its extent and its relationship to the persistent ideology of white supremacy.<sup>11</sup>

## As students’ knowledge of America’s racial history deepens, so does their interest in addressing persistent inequities.

In addition to reviewing state standards, the SPLC examined popular textbooks, interviewed teachers, and tested students’ knowledge of slavery. Every source pointed to the conclusion that our country is struggling to effectively address the topic of slavery. This is an urgent problem because, as the SPLC noted, “The persistent and wide socioeconomic and legal disparities that African Americans face today and the backlash that seems to follow every African American advancement trace their roots to slavery and its aftermath. If we are to understand the world today, we must understand slavery’s history and continuing impact.”<sup>12</sup>

When it comes to historical narratives in our racial history that include enslavement, rape, segregation, lynching, political assassinations, and other forms of terroristic violence, unsanitized examinations reveal a deep and disturbing past that is not in accord with the cherished view of America as a land of liberty and opportunity. Honest discussions can raise a tension between wanting to distance ourselves from ugly truths and needing to reckon with them so that we might understand their relevance and manifestations in the present. In my own work, I’ve seen how this tension arises within celebrations of Black History Month, a time often dedicated to celebration, but also a time in which the relevance of these conversations is central.

### HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE CAN FACILITATE PERCEPTIONS OF SYSTEMIC RACISM

When I entered my psychology graduate program, I was primarily interested in racial identity and how that was related to perceptions of racism. However, several faculty members, including my advisor, were also discussing the implications of history knowledge as an important psychological variable for various perceptions;<sup>13</sup> I was immediately drawn in. We were conducting several initial studies (including my master’s thesis<sup>14</sup>) measuring the relationship between Black history knowledge and perceptions of racism when I wondered about the cultural sources of Black history knowledge. I wondered what type of Black history content might be present (or absent) in different schools. I thought Black History Month might be a particularly good time to ask this question.

During Black History Month, schools vary in what events or people they think are best to highlight. While some schools may take their cues from larger districtwide initiatives or turn to historical societies (like the Association for the Study of African American Life and History) for ideas, the representations of Black history that wind up in the library or school display cases are also contingent on who volunteers to lead the efforts (students, teachers, or staff) and who is perceived to be the audience of such content.

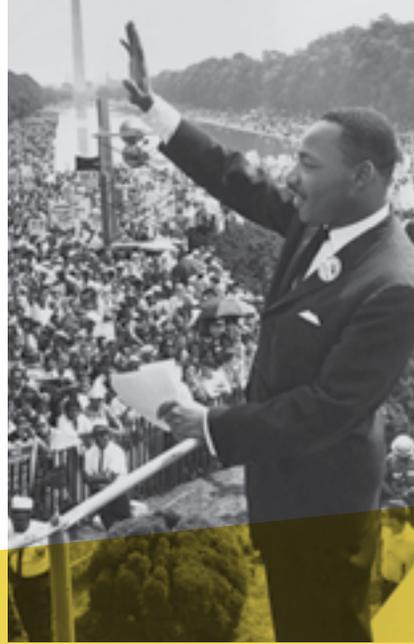
During graduate school, I began conducting a series of studies<sup>15</sup> to explore how Black History Month was commemorated in local high schools. The first, an ethnographic field study<sup>16</sup> in 12 high schools, revealed that Black History Month commemorations differed according to the student population. In the seven schools where most (84 to 92 percent) of the students were white, the more negative and painful aspects of Black history were less likely to be included than in the five schools where most (72 to 98 percent) of the students were Black and Latinx.

Generally, most Black History Month commemorations used two sanitizing strategies to silence negative histories. One strategy was to highlight individual Black American achievement—whether inventors, intellectuals, or civil rights heroes—while minimizing the historical barriers that these individuals faced or the collective struggle involved in order to eliminate those barriers. For example, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech would be highlighted, and he would be celebrated as a civil rights hero, but the violent context that necessitated King’s speech, as well as the organizing and demonstrations of the civil rights movement, would not be mentioned. The other strategy directed discussions about Black history toward multicultural tolerance and diversity instead of discussing race or history at all. The ongoing legacy of systemic expropriation, exploitation, and oppression was not brought to the table because of concerns that these conversations could make students feel bad. Instead, messages like “diversity is the one true thing we all have in common” appeared to be designed to make students feel good.

Although these sanitizing strategies were evident in all 12 schools, they were used far more extensively in the predominantly white schools. When students of color were in the majority, Black History Month commemoration materials were more likely to acknowledge historical racism, institutional barriers, and current impacts of longstanding oppression.

In a follow-up study,<sup>17</sup> I asked college students to engage with high schools' Black History Month materials. The college students saw materials from schools that enrolled mostly Black and Latinx students and mostly white students, but where the materials came from was kept hidden. Notably, white college students preferred the content from the predominantly white schools (which was more likely to be celebratory and diversity focused without explicitly presenting narratives about historical racism) over the materials from predominantly Black and Latinx schools (which were more likely to acknowledge historical racism).

After this preference emerged, my research team and I wanted to know whether these varying representations of history impacted perceptions of racism today. We conducted a third study<sup>18</sup> in which participants were randomly assigned to engage with one of the three sets of facts (which I created based on the high school materials): celebratory representations of Black history that emphasized past achievements of Black Americans, critical representations of Black history that emphasized historical instances of racism, and (as a control condition) representations of US history that excluded people of color. Then, they were asked to indicate (1) whether various ambiguously racist events were due to racism and (2) their support for anti-racism policies.



HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES



BETTMANN ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

Left: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. after delivering his “I Have a Dream” speech on August 28, 1963. Right: Former police officer Benny Oliver kicking Memphis Norman, a college student participating in a Woolworth’s lunch counter sit-in on May 28, 1963.

## Historical knowledge can be a *directive force*, influencing how we comprehend current events and proposed responses.

A key finding from this work is that participants exposed to critical representations of Black history not only perceived greater racism in US society but also indicated greater support for policies designed to address racial inequality than did participants in the other two conditions. Sanitized representations that minimized racism in the past undermined perceptions of racism in the present and, in turn, resulted in less support for anti-racism policies. Think about that for a moment: accurate historical knowledge increased perception of racism in the present and also facilitated support for anti-racism policies. Historical knowledge can be a *directive force*, influencing how we comprehend current events and proposed responses (e.g., reparative action, apologies, or compensation).

Further support for the power of accurate Black history knowledge has emerged from my research collaborations examining the Marley hypothesis.<sup>19</sup> The Marley hypothesis generally proposes that the perception (rather than denial) of racism in US society reflects accurate knowledge about historically documented instances of past racism. The name comes from Bob

Marley’s song “Buffalo Soldier,” which reminds us of essential historical truths: “There was a Buffalo Soldier, In the heart of America, Stolen from Africa, ... fighting for survival, ... If you know your history, Then you would know where you coming from, Then you wouldn’t have to ask me, Who the heck do I think I am.”

In the original study<sup>20</sup> and the replication,<sup>21</sup> Black American college students were more accurate about historically documented racism than white American college students. For example, Black students were more likely to know that the Emancipation Proclamation did not abolish slavery throughout the United States and that full citizenship was not established for Black Americans until the 14th Amendment. As evidence of the Marley hypothesis, differences in historical knowledge facilitated differences in perceptions of racism in contemporary events among the Black and white students. In other words, the racial gap in perceptions about racism today—much like the gaps in perceptions evident in the national polls described in the introduction—was in part explained by racial differences in historical knowledge.

The implication of this work is that Black Americans’ tendencies to perceive racism are not forms of strategic exaggeration (i.e., “playing the race card”), but instead constitute realistic concerns about enduring manifestations of racism that are grounded in accurate knowledge about America’s racial history. In our studies, denial of racism was associated with ignorance about historically documented facts in our country’s racial history.

### CLASSROOM INTERVENTIONS TO INCREASE RECOGNITION OF SYSTEMIC RACISM

This line of research suggested some fairly straightforward, fruitful directions for interventions in the classroom. If we want to bridge the gap between perception and denial of systemic racism, then we could teach critical histories. In a study<sup>22</sup> led by my collaborator Courtney Bonam of the University of California, Santa Cruz, we recruited a sample of white Americans to listen to a clip of historian Richard Rothstein on NPR’s *Fresh Air* program discussing the fed-

eral government's role in creating Black ghettos and the ongoing legacy of systemic racism in housing.<sup>23</sup> Participants learned about redlining, blockbusting, and other discriminatory housing practices. (If you would like to learn more about this history, turn to page 32 for an excerpt from Rothstein's 2017 book, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*.) We found that listening to the NPR clip increased critical history knowledge (in comparison to a control condition), increased beliefs about the government's active role in creating Black ghettos, and, in turn, increased perceptions of systemic racism.

However, though effective overall, participants' identities interacted with the effectiveness of the intervention. In the original Marley hypothesis study,<sup>24</sup> the more positively Black Americans regarded their racial identity, the more likely they were to perceive racism in American society. In contrast, the more positively white Americans regarded their racial identity, the less racism they saw in contemporary events. In the context of our intervention, the tensions between white racial identity and perceptions of racism were notable. As white racial identity increased, engagement with our critical history lesson (the NPR clip) became less likely to increase systemic racism perceptions. The data suggest that critical historical knowledge is important, but the effectiveness of teaching critical history may depend on how open our students are to information that can be threatening to their identities and what we can do to mitigate that threat.<sup>25</sup> The study results are also consistent with my own personal experience in the classroom.

## Tying in critical historical content across subject areas is key if you are committed to helping your students understand racism as a historical, cultural, and structural construct.

### BRIDGING THE DIVIDE IN MY OWN CLASSROOM

Over the last 10 years, I have primarily taught courses in higher education that count toward diversity requirements for bachelor's degrees, diversity requirements for psychology majors in particular, or courses that meet other general requirements related to racial equity or justice. In the past, sometimes those classes were large, hosting around 100 students, and other times they were intimate, small-class settings with only 10 to 12 students. Regardless of the size, there were always some students who self-selected into my courses because of genuine interest, while others openly admitted that they were just looking to check off another course from their list of required classes.

I am committed to teaching these courses because critical diversity content is intimately tied to my research expertise and my training as a cultural and critical race psychologist. I think it is important to tie in critical historical content across subject areas, even in

domains where students may not believe the connections are relevant (at least initially). This is not always an easy approach, but it is a key one if you are committed to helping your students understand racism as a historical, cultural, and structural construct.

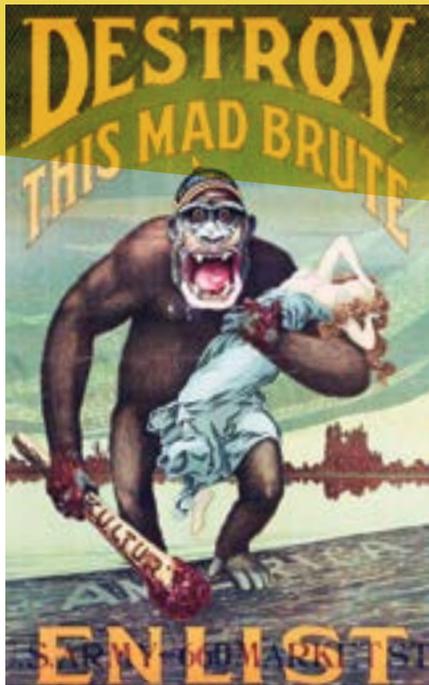
I accepted early on that one of the consequences of teaching critical diversity content is that it can be emotionally challenging for students.<sup>26</sup> Highlighting the kind of issues instructors can encounter, Alexander Kafka of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* discusses the disproportionate amount of emotional labor spent by instructors in diversity courses.<sup>27</sup> Kafka reviews research presented at the Association for the Study of Higher Education's annual conference by Drs. Ryan Miller, Cathy Howell, and Laura Struve in which they defined emotional labor as "attending to students' needs beyond course content, both inside and out of the classroom, as well as addressing one's own emotional management and displays as a faculty member."<sup>28</sup> Of course, any class could require some additional attention to students' needs and requests outside of the classroom, but as Howell, who is a Black woman, revealed, a significant portion of her own emotional labor included "being the depository of anger and frustration experienced by students."<sup>29</sup> As a regular instructor for these types of courses, I have experienced being such a depository personally (often through eye-rolling and outbursts in class) and grappled with it on teaching evaluations. I know those written-in comments can really shine or rain on your parade.

A few years ago, as I was preparing to deliver a lecture on "Racism and Oppression" in my Psychology of Culture and Diversity course, I realized that I had come to anticipate some level of anger and frustration among some of my students—so much so that it had impacted some of my teaching practices. After some critical reflection, I knew I was managing their reactions to both the message and the messenger. I learned that it was important to cover what is typically experienced as the most uncomfortable content after I've had some time to earn their trust. At the very beginning of the semester, many students express their excitement for learning more about psychology in "other" cultures. They do not necessarily anticipate the critical, challenging lessons about racism that lie ahead.

My courses challenge students to understand themselves as cultural beings with "different" cultural patterns too. Culture and diversity are not just about "others" and their psychological experiences; everyone's psychological experiences are intimately tied to cultural processes as consumers and producers. My lectures on racism and oppression build on this idea by asserting that racism is systemic and embedded in our cultural context. In psychology textbooks, systemic racism is not a term often used; most of my students are not used to thinking about racism this way. One way I manage this is by packing the lecture with interactive and experiential activities<sup>30</sup> that aim to help them process a sociocultural understanding of racism; this larger concept of racism may be more threatening than the typical portrayal of racism as individual bias.<sup>31</sup>

Another approach I use includes arriving to class early to play Bob Marley's "Buffalo Soldier" before introducing my students





DEAGOSTINI / GETTY IMAGES

**Left: A 2008 *Vogue* cover of LeBron James and Gisele Bündchen. Right: A 1917 US Army recruitment poster. Contrasting the two reveals the importance of historical knowledge.**

to the Marley hypothesis. We discuss explicit and ambiguous examples of racism and their connections to the past. One particularly vivid example includes discussion of a 2008 *Vogue* cover of LeBron James and Gisele Bündchen. When the image is presented on its own, many students suggest that claims of racism are wildly exaggerated. When paired with a World War I recruitment poster from 1917 with a gorilla abducting a fragile white woman (a la *King Kong*) with the central message “Destroy This Mad Brute,” the juxtaposition of the two images suggests that James and Bündchen were styled to mirror racial stereotypes about Black men as dangerous. I ask them to consider Emmett Till and how false accusations of him inappropriately interacting with a white woman precipitated his lynching. Then, I ask the students to consider how their knowledge of the historical poster has shaped their perceptions of racism when reexamining the *Vogue* cover. Suddenly, claims of racism are not deemed so wildly exaggerated.

Throughout my courses, we look backward and forward. When we discuss historical instances of racism, we also discuss their implications for the present. For example, many psychology students will read about the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment as a lesson on research ethics, but it’s also important to discuss the legacy of historical racism to gain new perspective on who feels comfortable participating in medical trials and who has access to quality medical care.

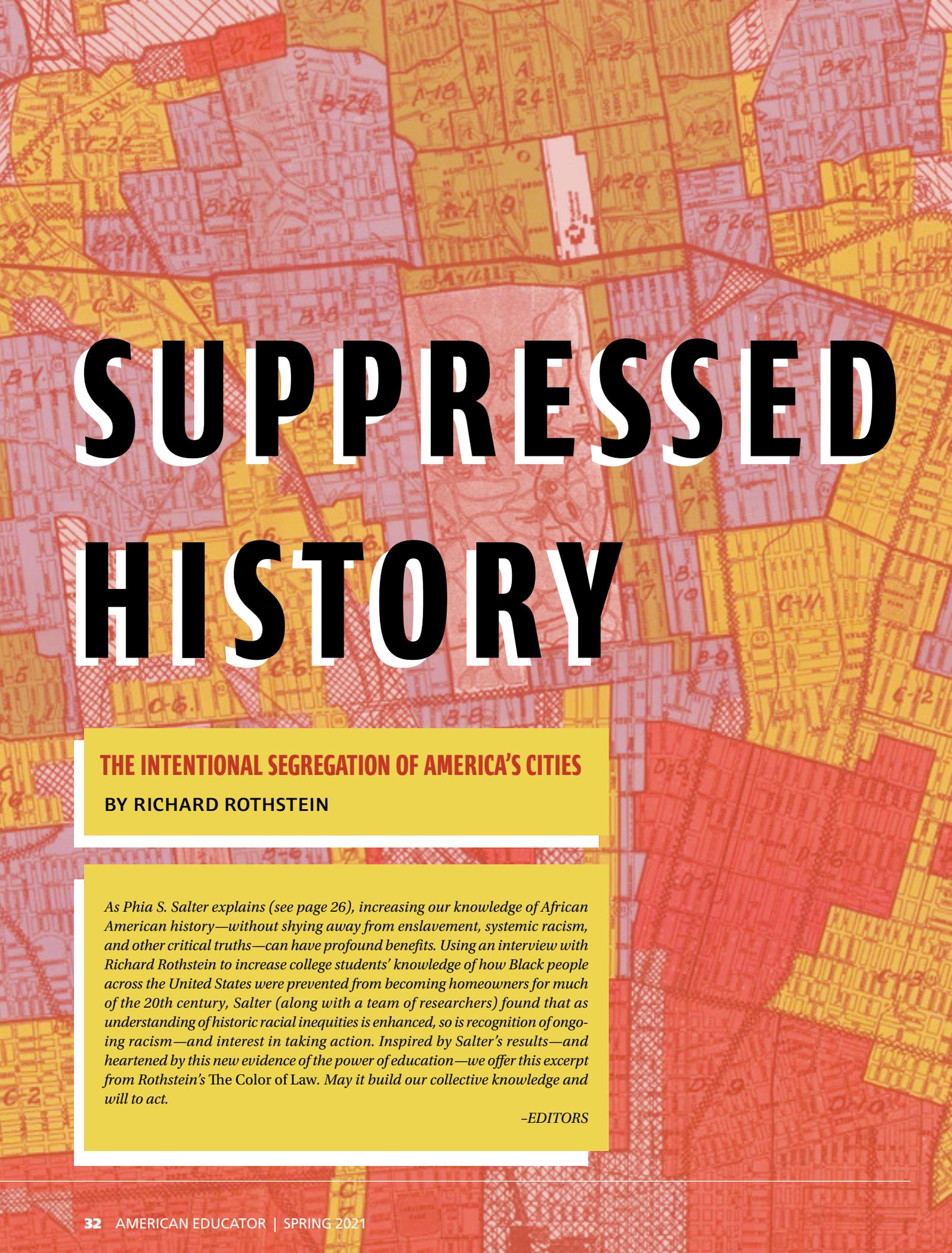
**D**espite the challenges, my research and teaching experiences have only strengthened my belief that, as teachers, we can have a positive impact on our students’ and our society’s responses to systemic racism. In many ways, it is striking that brief interventions in laboratory settings can shift our awareness and perceptions of systemic racism. Recognizing sys-

temic racism is only a first step; dismantling racism will require collective action with support from robust anti-discrimination laws and anti-racist policies. But, recognition is a crucial step, nonetheless. I hope, with future work, that we can better understand the social conditions that facilitate acceptance of the difficult truths in our racial history and commitments to social action. The classroom is a great place to start deepening society’s understanding of racism past and present, and our willingness to do something about it. □

#### Endnotes

1. L. Buchanan, Q. Bui, and J. K. Patel, “Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S. History,” *New York Times*, July 3, 2020.
2. F. Newport, “Seeking Solutions for Racial Inequities,” Gallup, September 11, 2020.
3. See, for example, UMass Lowell Center for Public Opinion, “American Opinions on Race, Policing, Systemic Racism,” August 20–25, 2020; CNN, study conducted by SSRS, August 28–September 1, 2020, [cdn.cnn.com/cnn/2020/images/09/04/re9b-.race.pdf?utm\\_source=link\\_news9&utm\\_campaign=item\\_320096&utm\\_medium=copy](https://www.cnn.com/cnn/2020/images/09/04/re9b-.race.pdf?utm_source=link_news9&utm_campaign=item_320096&utm_medium=copy); and M. Brennan, “Optimism About Black Americans’ Opportunities in U.S. Falls,” Gallup, September 16, 2020.
4. A. Florido and M. Peñaloza, “As Nation Reckons with Race, Poll Finds White Americans Least Engaged,” NPR, August 27, 2020.
5. M. Burns, “Poll: Nearly Quarter in NC Don’t View Systemic Racism as a Problem,” WRAL, October 16, 2020.
6. See, for example, S. Roberts and M. Rizzo, “The Psychology of American Racism,” *American Psychologist*, June 25, 2020, advance online publication; and D. Francis and C. E. Weller, “The Black-White Wealth Gap Will Widen Educational Disparities During the Coronavirus Pandemic,” *Center for American Progress*, August 12, 2020.
7. A. Wilson and M. Ross, “The Identity Function of Autobiographical Memory: Time Is on Our Side,” *Memory* 11, no. 2 (2003): 137–149; and D. P. McAdams and K. C. McLean, “Narrative Identity,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 22, no. 3 (2013): 233–238.
8. J. Baldwin, “The White Man’s Guilt,” *Ebony*, August 1965, 47.
9. J. W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: Touchstone, 1996); and Richard Rothstein, “Historian Says Don’t ‘Sanitize’ How Our Government Created Ghettos,” interview by Terry Gross, “Fresh Air,” NPR, May 14, 2015.
10. A. Wong, “How History Classes Helped Create a ‘Post-Truth’ America,” *The Atlantic*, August 2, 2018.
11. K. Shuster, *Teaching Hard History: American Slavery* (Southern Poverty Law Center, January 31, 2018), 29.
12. Shuster, *Teaching Hard History*, 9.
13. J. C. Nelson et al., “The Role of Historical Knowledge in Perception of Race-Based Conspiracies,” *Race and Social Problems* 2, no. 2 (2010): 69–80; and B. Doosje et al., “Guilty by Association: When One’s Group Has a Negative History,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75, no. 4 (1998): 872.
14. P. S. Salter, “Perception of Racism in Ambiguous Events: A Cultural Psychology Analysis” (master’s thesis, University of Kansas, 2008).
15. P. S. Salter and G. Adams, “On the Intentionality of Cultural Products: Representations of Black History as Psychological Affordances,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 7 (2016); P. S. Salter, G. Adams, and M. J. Perez, “Racism in the Structure of Everyday Worlds: A Cultural-Psychological Perspective,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 27, no. 3 (2018): 150–155; P. S. Salter and G. Adams, “Provisional Strategies for Decolonizing Consciousness,” in *Antiracism Inc.: Why the Way We Talk About Racial Justice Matters*, ed. F. Blake, P. Ioanide, and A. Reed (Santa Barbara, CA: Punctum Books, 2019), 299–323; and G. Adams and P. S. Salter, “They (Color) Blinded Me with Science: Countering Coloniality of Knowledge in Hegemonic Psychology,” in *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness Across the Disciplines*, ed. K. Crenshaw et al. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 271–292.
16. Salter and Adams, “On the Intentionality,” 1166.
17. Salter and Adams, “On the Intentionality.”
18. Salter and Adams, “On the Intentionality.”
19. J. Nelson, G. Adams, and P. Salter, “The Marley Hypothesis: Denial of Racism Reflects Ignorance of History,” *Psychological Science* 24, no. 2 (2013): 213–218; and C. Bonam et al., “Ignoring History, Denying Racism: Mounting Evidence for the Marley Hypothesis and Epistemologies of Ignorance,” *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 10, no. 2 (2019): 257–265.
20. Nelson, Adams, and Salter, “The Marley Hypothesis.”
21. Bonam et al., “Ignoring History.”
22. Bonam et al., “Ignoring History.”
23. Rothstein, “Historian Says Don’t ‘Sanitize.’”
24. Nelson, Adams, and Salter, “The Marley Hypothesis.”
25. See also A. Haugen et al., “Theorizing the Relationship Between Identity and Diversity Engagement: Openness Through Identity Mismatch,” in *Venture into Cross-Cultural Psychology: Proceedings from the 23rd Congress of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology*, ed. M. Karasawa et al. (2018).

(Continued on page 52)



# SUPPRESSED HISTORY

## THE INTENTIONAL SEGREGATION OF AMERICA'S CITIES

BY RICHARD ROTHSTEIN

*As Phia S. Salter explains (see page 26), increasing our knowledge of African American history—without shying away from enslavement, systemic racism, and other critical truths—can have profound benefits. Using an interview with Richard Rothstein to increase college students' knowledge of how Black people across the United States were prevented from becoming homeowners for much of the 20th century, Salter (along with a team of researchers) found that as understanding of historic racial inequities is enhanced, so is recognition of ongoing racism—and interest in taking action. Inspired by Salter's results—and heartened by this new evidence of the power of education—we offer this excerpt from Rothstein's *The Color of Law*. May it build our collective knowledge and will to act.*

—EDITORS

In 2014, police killed Michael Brown, a young African American man in Ferguson, a suburb of St. Louis. Protests followed, some violent, and subsequent investigations uncovered systematic police and government abuse of residents in the city's African American neighborhoods. The reporting made me wonder how the St. Louis metropolitan area became so segregated.

Most of us think we know how segregated neighborhoods in places like Ferguson—with their crime, violence, anger, and poverty—came to be. We say they are “*de facto* segregated,” that they result from private practices.

That has some truth, but it remains a small part of the truth, submerged by a far more important one: until the last quarter of the 20th century, racially explicit policies of federal, state, and local governments defined where whites and African Americans should live. Today's residential segregation in the North, South, Midwest, and West is not the unintended consequence of individual choices and of otherwise well-meaning law or regulation but is the result of unhidden public policy that explicitly segregated every metropolitan area in the United States. The policy was so systematic and forceful that its effects endure to the present time. Segregation by intentional government action is not *de facto*. Rather, it is what courts call *de jure*: segregation by law and public policy.

To prevent lower-income African Americans from living in neighborhoods where middle-class whites resided, local and federal officials began in the 1910s to promote zoning ordinances to reserve middle-class neighborhoods for single-family homes that lower-income families of all races could not afford. Certainly, an important and perhaps primary motivation of zoning rules that kept apartment buildings out of single-family neighborhoods was a social class elitism that was not itself racially biased. But there was also enough open racial intent behind exclusionary zoning that it is integral to the story of *de jure* segregation.

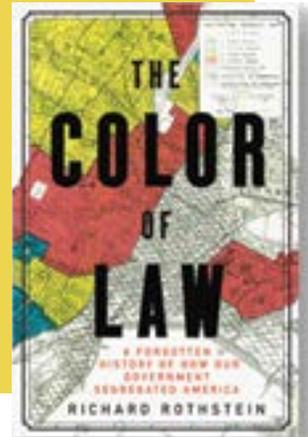
St. Louis appointed its first plan commission in 1911 and five years later hired Harland Bartholomew as its full-time planning engineer. His assignment was to categorize every structure in the city—single-family residential, multifamily residential, commercial, or industrial—and then to propose rules and maps to prevent future multifamily, commercial, or industrial structures from impinging on single-family neighborhoods. If a neighborhood was covered with single-family houses with deeds that prohibited African American occupancy, this was taken into consideration at plan commission meetings and made it almost certain that the neighborhood would be zoned “first-residential,” prohibiting future construction of anything but single-family units and helping to preserve its all-white character.

According to Bartholomew, an important goal of St. Louis zoning was to prevent movement into “finer residential districts

*Richard Rothstein is a distinguished fellow of the Economic Policy Institute and an emeritus senior fellow at the Thurgood Marshall Institute of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. He is the author of many articles and books on race and education, including Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap and Grading Education: Getting Accountability Right. This article is excerpted from The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America by Richard Rothstein. Copyright © 2017 by Richard Rothstein. With permission of the publisher, Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. All rights reserved.*

Racial segregation was a nationwide project in the 20th century. *The Color of Law*, from which this article is excerpted, demonstrates that racially explicit government policies to segregate our metropolitan areas were neither subtle nor intangible and were sufficiently controlling to construct the *de jure* segregation that is now with us in neighborhoods (and hence in schools). The core argument of this book is that African Americans were unconstitutionally denied the means and the right to integration in middle-class neighborhoods, and because this denial was state sponsored, the nation is obligated to remedy it.

—R. R.



## Until the last quarter of the 20th century, racially explicit policies of federal, state, and local governments defined where whites and African Americans should live.

... by colored people.” He noted that without a previous zoning law, such neighborhoods have become run-down: “Where values have depreciated, homes are either vacant or occupied by colored people.” The survey Bartholomew supervised before drafting the zoning ordinance listed the race of each building’s occupants. Bartholomew attempted to estimate where African Americans might encroach so the commission could respond with restrictions to control their spread.

The St. Louis zoning ordinance was adopted in 1919. Guided by Bartholomew’s survey, it designated land for future industrial development if it was in or adjacent to neighborhoods with substantial African American populations.

Once such rules were in force, plan commission meetings were consumed with requests for variances. Race was frequently a factor. For example, one meeting in 1919 debated a proposal to reclassify a single-family property from first-residential to commercial because the area to the south had been “invaded by negroes.” On other occasions, the commission changed an area’s zoning from residential to industrial if African American families had begun to move into it. In 1927, violating its normal policy, the commission authorized a park and playground in an industrial, not residential, area in hopes that this would draw African American families to seek housing nearby. Similar decision making continued through the middle of the 20th century. In 1948, commissioners explained

they were designating a U-shaped industrial zone to create a buffer between African Americans inside the U and whites outside.

In addition to promoting segregation, zoning decisions contributed to degrading St. Louis's African American neighborhoods into slums. Not only were these neighborhoods zoned to permit industry, even polluting industry, but the plan commission permitted taverns, liquor stores, nightclubs, and houses of prostitution to open in African American neighborhoods but prohibited these as zoning violations in neighborhoods where whites lived. Residences in single-family districts could not legally be subdivided, but those in industrial districts could be, and with African Americans restricted from all but a few neighborhoods, rooming houses sprang up to accommodate the overcrowded population.

## Zoning decisions permitted liquor stores, nightclubs, and houses of prostitution to open in African American neighborhoods but prohibited them in neighborhoods where whites lived.

### FEDERAL SUPPORT FOR SEGREGATIONIST ZONING

Local officials elsewhere, like those in St. Louis, did not experiment with zoning in isolation. In 1921, President Warren G. Harding's secretary of commerce, Herbert Hoover, organized an Advisory Committee on Zoning to develop a manual explaining why every municipality should develop a zoning ordinance. The advisory committee distributed thousands of copies to officials nationwide. A few months later, the committee published a model zoning law. The manual did not give the creation of racially homogenous neighborhoods as the reason why zoning should become such an important priority for cities, but the advisory committee was composed of outspoken segregationists whose speeches and writings demonstrated that race was one basis of their zoning advocacy.

The segregationist consensus of the Hoover committee was reinforced by members who held positions of leadership in the National Association of Real Estate Boards, including its president, Irving B. Hiatt. In 1924, two years after the advisory committee had published its first manual and model zoning ordinance, the association followed up by adopting a code of ethics that included this warning: "A realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood ... members of any race or nationality ... whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood."

Secretary Hoover, his committee members, and city planners across the nation believed that zoning rules that made no open

reference to race would be legally sustainable—and they were right. In 1926, the Supreme Court for the first time considered the constitutionality of zoning rules that prohibited apartment buildings in single-family neighborhoods. The decision, arising from a zoning ordinance in a Cleveland suburb, was a conspicuous exception to the Court's previous rejection of regulations that restricted what an owner could do with his property. Justice George Sutherland, speaking for the Court, explained that "very often the apartment house is a mere parasite, constructed in order to take advantage of the open spaces and attractive surroundings created by the residential character of the district," and that apartment houses in single-family districts "come very near to being nuisances."

In the years since the 1926 Supreme Court ruling, numerous white suburbs in towns across the country adopted exclusionary zoning ordinances to prevent low-income families from residing in their midst. Frequently, class snobbishness and racial prejudice were so intertwined that when suburbs adopted such ordinances, it was impossible to disentangle their motives and to prove that the zoning rules violated constitutional prohibitions of racial discrimination. In many cases, however, like Secretary Hoover's experts, localities were not always fastidious in hiding their racial motivations.

The use of industrial, even toxic waste zoning to turn African American neighborhoods into slums was not restricted to St. Louis. It became increasingly common as the 20th century proceeded and manufacturing operations grew in urban areas. The pattern was confirmed in a 1983 analysis by the US General Accounting Office, concluding that, across the nation, commercial waste treatment facilities or uncontrolled waste dumps were more likely to be found near African American than white residential areas.

### A NEW HOUSING DEAL, FOR WHITES ONLY

Even before the Great Depression, homeownership was prohibitively expensive for working- and middle-class families: bank mortgages typically required 50 percent down, interest-only payments, and repayment in full after five to seven years.

The Depression made the housing crisis even worse. Many property-owning families with mortgages couldn't make their payments and were subject to foreclosure. With most others unable to afford homes at all, the construction industry was stalled. The New Deal designed one program to support existing homeowners who couldn't make payments, and another to make first-time homeownership possible for the middle class.

In 1933, to rescue households that were about to default, the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration created the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC). It purchased existing mortgages that were subject to imminent foreclosure and then issued new mortgages with repayment schedules of up to 15 years (later extended to 25 years). In addition, HOLC mortgages were amortized, meaning that each month's payment included some principal as well as interest, so when the loan was paid off, the borrower would own the home. Thus, for the first time, working- and middle-class homeowners could gradually gain equity while their properties were still mortgaged.

HOLC mortgages had low interest rates, but the borrowers still were obligated to make regular payments. The HOLC, therefore, had to exercise prudence about its borrowers' abilities to avoid default. To assess risk, the HOLC wanted to know something about the

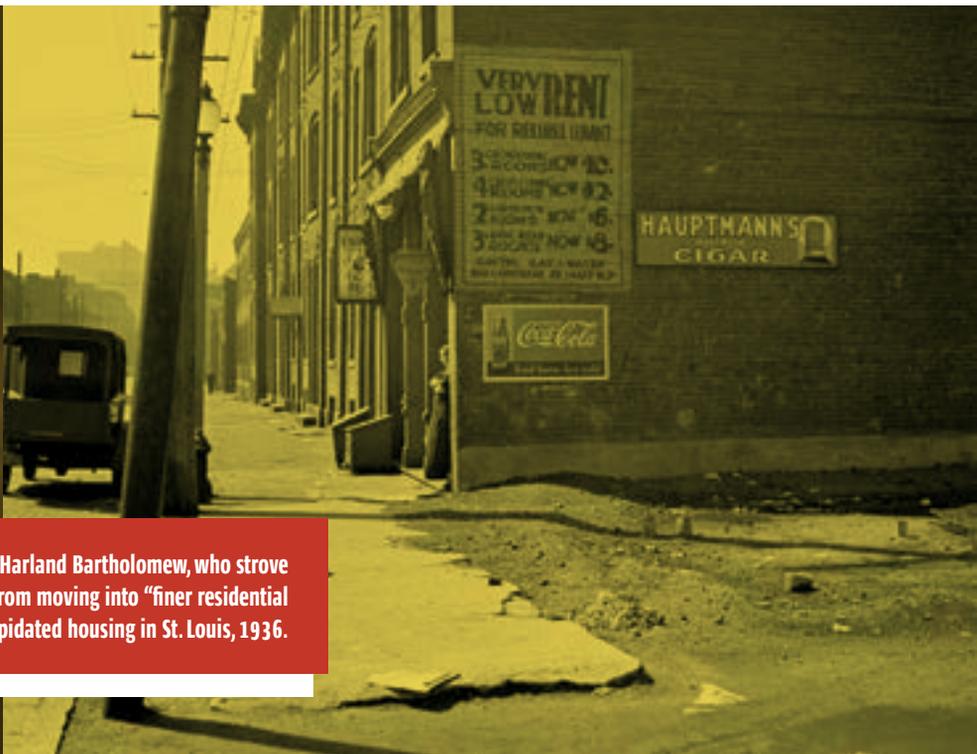
condition of the house and of surrounding houses in the neighborhood to see whether the property would likely maintain its value. The HOLC hired local real estate agents to make the appraisals on which refinancing decisions could be based. With these agents required by their national ethics code to maintain segregation, it's not surprising that in gauging risk, the HOLC considered the racial composition of neighborhoods. The HOLC created color-coded maps of every metropolitan area in the nation, with the safest neighborhoods colored green and the riskiest colored red. A neighborhood earned a red color if African Americans lived in it, even if it was a solid middle-class neighborhood of single-family homes. Although the HOLC did not always decline to rescue homeowners in neighborhoods colored red on its maps (i.e., redlined neighborhoods), the maps had a huge impact and put the federal government on record as judging that African Americans, simply because of their race, were poor risks.

To solve the inability of middle-class renters to purchase single-family homes for the first time, Congress and President Roosevelt created the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) in 1934. The FHA insured bank mortgages that covered 80 percent of purchase prices, had terms of 20 years, and were fully amortized. To be eligible for such insurance, the FHA insisted on doing its own appraisal of the property to make certain that the loan had a low risk of default. Because the FHA's appraisal standards included a whites-only requirement, racial segregation now became an official requirement of the federal mortgage insurance program. The FHA judged that properties would probably be too risky for insurance if they were in racially mixed neighborhoods or even in white neighborhoods near Black ones that might possibly integrate in the future.

When a bank applied to the FHA for insurance on a prospective loan, the agency conducted a property appraisal, which was also likely performed by a local real estate agent hired by the agency. As the volume of applications increased, the agency hired its own appraisers, usually from the ranks of the private real estate agents

## Maps of redlined neighborhoods put the federal government on record as judging that African Americans, simply because of their race, were poor risks for mortgages.

who had previously been working as contractors for the FHA. To guide their work, the FHA provided them with an *Underwriting Manual*. The first, issued in 1935, gave this instruction: "If a neighborhood is to retain stability, it is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes. A change in social or racial occupancy generally leads to instability and a reduction in values." Appraisers were told to give higher ratings where "protection against some adverse influences is obtained," and that "important among adverse influences ... are infiltration of inharmonious racial or nationality groups." The manual concluded that "all mortgages on properties protected against [such] unfavorable influences, to the extent such protection is possible, will obtain a high rating." The FHA was particularly concerned with preventing school desegregation. Its manual warned that if children "are compelled to attend school where the majority or a considerable number of the pupils represent a far lower level of society or an incompatible racial element, the neighborhood under consideration will prove far less stable and desirable than if this condition did not exist," and mortgage lending in such neighborhoods would be risky.



Left: St. Louis planning engineer Harland Bartholomew, who strove to prevent "colored people" from moving into "finer residential districts." Right: Low-rent, dilapidated housing in St. Louis, 1936.

COURTESY OF THE MISSOURI HISTORY MUSEUM

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

# REVERSE REDLINING

Racially discriminatory government activities did not end 50 years ago. On the contrary, some have continued into the 21st century. One of the more troubling has been the regulatory tolerance of banks' "reverse redlining"—excessive marketing of exploitative loans in African American communities. This was an important cause of the 2008 financial collapse because these loans, called subprime mortgages, were bound to go into default. When they did, lower-middle-class African American neighborhoods were devastated, and their residents, with their homes foreclosed, were forced back into lower-income areas.

In 2000, 41 percent of all borrowers with subprime loans would have qualified for conventional financing with lower rates, a figure that increased to 61 percent in 2006. By then, African American mortgage recipients had subprime loans at three times the rate of

white borrowers. Higher-income African Americans had subprime mortgages at four times the rate of higher-income whites. Even though its own survey in 2005 revealed a similar racial discrepancy, the Federal Reserve did not take action. By failing to curb discrimination that its own data disclosed, the Federal Reserve violated African Americans' legal and constitutional rights.

In 2010, the Justice Department agreed that "the more segregated a community of color is, the more likely it is that homeowners will face foreclosure because the lenders who peddled the most toxic loans targeted those communities." For those dispossessed after foreclosures, there has been greater homelessness, more doubling up with relatives, and more apartment rental in less stable neighborhoods where poor and minority families are more tightly concentrated.

—R. R.

## For Levittown and scores of such developments across the nation, the plans reviewed by the FHA included a commitment not to sell to African Americans.

Subsequent editions of the *Underwriting Manual* through the 1940s repeated these guidelines. In 1947, the FHA removed words like "inharmonious racial groups" from the manual but barely pretended that this represented a policy change. The manual still specified lower valuation when "compatibility among the neighborhood occupants" was lacking, and to make sure there was no misunderstanding, the FHA's head told Congress that the agency had no right to require nondiscrimination in its mortgage insurance program. The 1952 *Underwriting Manual* continued to base property valuations, in part, on whether properties were located in neighborhoods where there was "compatibility among the neighborhood occupants."

After World War II, the newly established Veterans Administration (VA) also began to guarantee mortgages for returning servicemen. It adopted FHA housing policies, and VA appraisers relied on the FHA's *Underwriting Manual*. By 1950, the FHA and VA together were insuring half of all new mortgages nationwide.

### EXCLUSIVE ENCLAVES

The FHA had its biggest impact on segregation not in its discriminatory evaluations of individual mortgage applicants, but in its financing of entire subdivisions, in many cases entire suburbs, as racially exclusive white enclaves. Mass-production builders created these suburbs with the FHA- or VA-imposed condition that they be all white.

Levittown, New York, for example, was a massive undertaking, a development of 17,500 homes. It was a visionary solution to the housing problems of returning war veterans—mass-produced two-bedroom houses of 750 square feet sold for about \$8,000 each, with no down payment required. William Levitt constructed the project on speculation; it was not a case in which prospective purchasers gave the company funds with which to construct houses. Instead, Levitt built the houses and then sought customers. He could never have amassed the capital for such an enormous undertaking without the FHA and the VA. But during the World War II years and after, the government had congressional authority to guarantee bank loans to mass-production builders like Levitt for nearly the full cost of their proposed subdivisions. By 1948, most housing nationwide was being constructed with this government financing.

Once Levitt had planned and designed Levittown, his company submitted drawings and specifications to the FHA for approval. After the agency endorsed the plans, he could use this approval to negotiate low-interest loans from banks to finance its construction and land-acquisition costs. The banks were willing to give these concessionary loans to Levitt and to other mass-production builders because FHA preapproval meant that the banks could subsequently issue mortgages to the actual buyers without further property appraisal needed.

For Levittown and scores of such developments across the nation, the plans reviewed by the FHA included the approved construction materials, the design specifications, the proposed sale price, the neighborhood's zoning restrictions (for example, a prohibition of industry or commercial development), and a commitment not to sell to African Americans. The FHA even withheld approval if the presence of African Americans in nearby neighborhoods threatened integration. In short, the FHA financed Levittown on condition that it be all white, with no foreseeable change in its racial composition.\*

Although Levittown came to symbolize postwar suburbanization, Levittown was neither the first nor the only such development financed by the FHA and VA for white families. Metropolitan areas nationwide were suburbanized by this government policy. Only in 1962, when President John F. Kennedy issued an executive order prohibiting the use of federal funds to support racial discrimination in housing, did the FHA cease financing subdivision developments whose builders openly refused to sell to Black buyers.

By the time the federal government decided finally to allow African Americans into the suburbs, the window of opportunity for an integrated nation had mostly closed. In 1948, for example, Levittown homes sold for about \$8,000, or about \$90,000 in today's dollars. Now, properties in Levittown without major remodeling (i.e., one-bath houses) sell for \$350,000 and up. White working-class families who bought those homes in 1948 have gained, over three generations, more than \$200,000 in wealth.

Most African American families—who were denied the opportunity to buy into Levittown or into the thousands of subdivisions like it across the country—remained renters, often in depressed neighborhoods, and gained no equity. Others bought into less desirable neighborhoods. Consider the example of one African American World War II veteran, Vince Mereday, who worked for his family-owned trucking company that helped to build Levittown. He was prohibited from living there, so he bought a home in the nearby, almost all-Black suburb of Lakeview. It remains 74 percent African American today.

One-bath homes in Lakeview currently sell for \$90,000 to \$120,000. At most, the Mereday family gained \$45,000 in equity appreciation over three generations, perhaps 20 percent of the wealth gained by white veterans in Levittown. Making matters worse, it was lower-middle-class African American communities like Lakeview that mortgage brokers targeted for subprime lending during the pre-2008 housing bubble, leaving many more African American families subject to default and foreclosure than economically similar white families (see “Reverse Redlining” at left). Seventy years ago, many working- and lower-middle-class African American families could have afforded suburban single-family homes that cost about \$90,000 (in today's currency) with no down payment. Millions of whites did so. But working- and lower-middle-class African American families (indeed, working-class families of any race) cannot now buy homes for \$350,000 and more with down payments of 20 percent, or \$70,000.

\*As explained in *The Color of Law*, the *Underwriting Manual* also recommended that deeds to properties explicitly prohibit resale to African Americans so that these new communities would remain white.

The Fair Housing Act of 1968 prohibited future discrimination, but it was not primarily discrimination (although this still contributed) that kept African Americans out of most white suburbs after the law was passed. It was primarily unaffordability. The right that was unconstitutionally denied to African Americans in the late 1940s cannot be restored by passing a Fair Housing law that tells their descendants they can now buy homes in the suburbs, if only they can afford it. The advantage that FHA and VA loans gave the white lower-middle class in the 1940s and '50s has become permanent.

## By the time the federal government decided finally to allow African Americans into the suburbs, the window of opportunity for an integrated nation had mostly closed.

**W**e as a nation have avoided contemplating remedies because we've indulged in the comfortable delusion that our segregation has not resulted primarily from state action and so, we conclude, there is not much we are required to do about it.

It's not that private choices haven't also been involved. Many Americans had discriminatory beliefs and engaged in activities that contributed to separating the races. Without the support of these private beliefs and actions, our democratically elected governments might not have discriminated either. But under our constitutional system, government has not merely the option but the responsibility to resist racially discriminatory views, even when—especially when—a majority holds them. In the 20th century, federal, state, and local officials did not resist majority opinion with regard to race. Instead, they endorsed and reinforced it, actively and aggressively.

Undoing the effects of *de jure* segregation will be incomparably difficult. To make a start, we will first have to contemplate what we have collectively done and, on behalf of our government, accept responsibility. □

For a far more detailed discussion of how communities across the United States became segregated, including substantial historical evidence and detailed source citations for the assertions made in this article, as well as suggestions for beginning to address the lasting inequities, please see *The Color of Law* (the book from which this article is excerpted): [www.norton.com/books/the-color-of-law](http://www.norton.com/books/the-color-of-law).



# TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

## Using *All American Boys* to Confront Racism and Police Brutality

BY ASHLEY S. BOYD AND JANINE J. DARRAGH

Racism is a systemic issue, meaning it is much larger than one person, although people certainly uphold and perpetuate it both knowingly and unknowingly.<sup>1</sup> It is woven into the fabric of daily life so tightly that it can be difficult to untangle. Racism works alongside white privilege, a system of unearned benefits, such as obtaining financial breaks and loans, being reflected consistently in classroom curriculum, and being assumed as the “norm.” Assumptions about people with light skin include their being honest, responsible, and safe. Thus, white privilege also simultaneously works through the oppression of people of color, about which the opposite assumptions are made—they are often portrayed (especially through the media) as unsafe, powerless, and less deserving of resources such as health care.

In this article, we focus on the novel *All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely (2015) to help students work through

the implications of racism and the manifestation of racism in police brutality. Reading about youth who are similar in age will potentially help students discern how they are affected by racial relations in their own lives and to consider (and hopefully act on) the methods through which they can enact change to combat the negative effects of racial inequity.

### *All American Boys*

*All American Boys* is a novel that reflects an incident of police brutality through the perspectives of two adolescent males, one Black, Rashad, and one white, Quinn. Told in alternating points of view, the story catalogs how Rashad is wrongly assaulted by a police officer, Paul, who mistakenly assumes that Rashad is stealing from a local convenience store. Paul’s attack is ruthless and leaves Rashad with a broken nose, fractured ribs, and internal bleeding from torn blood vessels around his lungs.

Quinn, a classmate of Rashad’s, accidentally stumbles upon the scene and watches from the shadows, horrified and astonished that Paul, a person he looked up to as an older brother, could commit such violence. As the novel progresses, Rashad is treated in the hospital for his wounds and is encouraged by his brother, Spooky, to confront the racist act of which he is a survivor. Raised by his former-police-officer traditional father, who is “all about discipline

Ashley S. Boyd is an associate professor of English education at Washington State University, and Janine J. Darragh is an associate professor of literacy and English as a second language at the University of Idaho. This article is excerpted with permission from their book, *Reading for Action: Engaging Youth in Social Justice Through Young Adult Literature* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).



## *All American Boys* is an especially valuable text because it simultaneously tackles white privilege and racial oppression.

familiar with structural privilege will need an introduction to the concept. All students, however, could benefit from unpacking key terms. Thus, we suggest that teachers begin with basic vocabulary with which to discuss the topic of the book and the social problem it addresses, including terms such as *privilege*, *oppression*, *micro-aggressions*, *discrimination*, *prejudice*, *race*, and *socialization*. It will be key to note that:

Oppression is different from prejudice and discrimination in that prejudice and discrimination describe dynamics that occur on the individual level and in which all individuals participate. In contrast, oppression occurs when one group's prejudice is *backed by historical, social and institutional power*.<sup>3</sup>

and believed that if you work hard, good things happen to you no matter what,"<sup>2</sup> Rashad learns more about his family and struggles to come to terms with institutional racism and its impact.

As the story progresses, Quinn learns to recognize his white privilege and to speak out for others. His best friend, Guzzo, is Paul's brother, who has served as a father figure to Quinn after Quinn's own father was killed in Afghanistan while serving in the US military. Being raised by a single mother, Quinn wrestles with defying close friends and family members to do what is right, recognizing that if he does not act against such forms of racism, the system will continue to thrive. In the end, all characters participate in a march to protest police brutality and perform a die-in, or lying on the ground, to protest. They then read a list of real names to honor those who have suffered from such assault. The novel's conclusion, however, does not include any indication of what becomes of Paul, and thus readers are left in somewhat of a state of uncertainty regarding systemic racism and justice.

*All American Boys* is an especially valuable text because it simultaneously tackles white privilege and racial oppression, rather than focusing only on one issue or the other. It provides students multiple perspectives from which to examine the social problem and does so in ways that are thoughtful and prompt dialogue. Thus, we chose this book to delve into police brutality because of the way it represents the themes from readers' potential viewpoints and because it challenges and informs its audience.

### Teaching Strategies

#### Before Reading

The context in which a teacher works will certainly influence the approach they should take with this novel. Often, students of color will be familiar with systemic discrimination and racism, having experienced it in their own lives. White students who may be less

The chance to explore lives and cultures different from our own is among the many benefits of reading for pleasure. Whether fiction or nonfiction, the written word has the power to deepen our understanding of ourselves and others—and inspire us to change the world. In *Reading for Action: Engaging Youth in Social Justice Through Young Adult Literature*, Ashley S. Boyd and Janine J. Darragh show educators how to harness that power in their classrooms. The authors devote each of the book's 12 chapters to a work of young adult fiction focused on a critical issue of our time, such as bullying, global poverty, women's rights, and immigration reform. Here, we excerpt chapter 9, which addresses police brutality through the novel *All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely. The novel can help to ground discussions of systemic racism in the United States and engage youth in learning more about our country's complex relationship with race.

—EDITORS

*Reading for Action*, by Ashley S. Boyd and Janine J. Darragh, is published by Rowman & Littlefield, which is offering a 20 percent discount off the purchase of this book. To order, visit [rowman.com](http://rowman.com) and use discount code RLEGEN20. This offer is good through December 31, 2021.



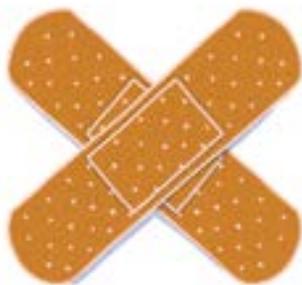
Students must understand that discrimination can happen against any one person by another, but oppression includes an element of power and works on a larger scale. In order to facilitate understandings, teachers could ask students to give examples from their own experiences or from events in society to demonstrate their understanding of each of the above terms (once definitions have been provided).

Other concepts for discussion include the use of *white, people of color, Black, and African American*. Students could read a few informational texts to more deeply consider these topics, such as *The Observer* article “Should We Say Black or African American?”<sup>4</sup> and Ta-Nehisi Coates’s essay “What We Mean When We Say ‘Race Is a Social Construct.’”<sup>5</sup> Discussion questions based on these two could include: *Why should people self-identify their race or ethnicity, rather than having someone label them? What does it mean to say race is socially constructed? How is race important in our society?*

Once students have a basis for engaging in conversation around these issues, teachers can move them into considering white privilege as a system. They might ask students to construct a list, similar to scholar Peggy McIntosh’s,<sup>6</sup> of the benefits and unearned advantages that white individuals experience in our society.\* McIntosh<sup>7</sup> catalogs the everyday benefits she experiences, such as being able to find bandages that match her flesh or not being assumed to represent her entire race if she makes a mistake. Reading her list and updating it would be helpful, and students could complete this activity regardless of their own racial identity to denote the aspects of white privilege that permeate today’s world. They could be encouraged to consider television, movies, and music, such as Macklemore, Ryan Lewis, and Jamila Woods’s song, “White Privilege II,” as well as everyday activities such as shopping and resources available in hotels and grocery stores. Teachers could assign these categories to groups of students so that they are looking collectively at our culture with a critical eye rather than only at their individual selves.

Beyond these sorts of individual privileges, however, it is key to help students discern the systemic nature of racial oppression. Professor Barbara Applebaum<sup>8</sup> warns against merely stopping at “white privilege pedagogy” because “students often walk away from reading McIntosh’s article thinking that all there is to being anti-racist is ‘taking off the knapsack’ without acknowledging that privilege is often ascribed even when one is not aware of it and even when one refuses it.”<sup>9</sup> Instead, she advocates for utilizing “white complicity pedagogy,”<sup>10</sup> which focuses on the ways that the dominant group maintains their status and encourages individuals to discern their part in upholding the status quo.

In order to illustrate this for students, teachers can ask students to practice skills of critical literacy and to examine instances in which ignorance or complicity exists, both historic and current, and ask them to imagine how people could act differently in that situation. For



\*For a collection of Peggy McIntosh’s work, see [nationalseedproject.org/about-us/white-privilege](http://nationalseedproject.org/about-us/white-privilege).



**Discrimination can happen against any one person by another, but oppression includes an element of power and works on a larger scale.**

instance, they might examine the case of Silent Sam, the statue of a confederate soldier at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill that was torn down by protestors and set off a firestorm of debate. Teachers might ask students, upon learning about Silent Sam and the issues surrounding his existence on campus: *Who were the protestors? Who were the bystanders? Who had privilege in this situation, and how could they have used those privileges productively, for the safety and betterment of students of color on this campus?*

Helping students understand that racism is everyone’s issue is vital. As Jill, Paul and Guzzo’s cousin, tells Quinn in the novel, “But everyone’s seen it, Quinn. It’s *all our* problem. But what *is* that problem?”<sup>11</sup> Facilitating students’ ability to name the problem and address it are key classroom goals for the study of this text. Learning for Justice has some great resources for helping teachers prepare to talk with students about race and for engaging in those difficult conversations, such as a self-evaluation for teachers to assess their own comfort levels talking about race and strategies for facilitating related discussions with youths.<sup>†</sup>

<sup>†</sup>One Learning for Justice resource we find especially helpful is the “Let’s Talk” guide: [bit.ly/30UNvMI](http://bit.ly/30UNvMI).

### During Reading

As students read the novel, they will likely identify with one or the other of the protagonists—Quinn or Rashad. Teachers could select one point in the book, such as after the incident of brutality or when tensions rise on the basketball team, and ask students to compose a diary entry, tweet, or Facebook post, as if they were one of the two characters. Or, they could write a letter to the protagonist with which they most identify (Quinn or Rashad) and explain the connections they experience. These text-to-self connections<sup>12</sup> are key for honoring all students' voices in the classroom and highlighting the different ways that they will relate to the text. They might choose to share these with the class as a way of explaining their own relationship with race in their context.

Students could also be encouraged to empathize with the difficult decisions each of the protagonists makes in the story as they develop their understandings of race and society. At first, Rashad does not wish to become the face of a movement. He says, "I gotta admit, there was a part of me that, even though I felt abused, wanted to tell him [Spoony] to let it go. To just let me heal, let me leave the hospital, let me go to court, let me do whatever stupid community service they wanted me to do, and let me go back to normal."<sup>13</sup> Teachers can ask students to consider: *Why would Rashad not want to be on the news? Why would he admit to doing something he didn't do and perform community service? Why might Rashad not want to be the face of a protest? What do you think eventually makes him embrace the role he does?*

At the same time, Quinn struggles to understand his white privilege and worries about his responsibility in reporting what he has seen during the incident. He realizes, "If I wanted to, I could walk away and not think about Rashad, in a way that ... any of the guys at school who were not white could not.... My shield was that I was white.... It wasn't only that I could walk away—I already *had* walked away."<sup>14</sup> Realizing, as mentioned above with the danger of the knapsack metaphor from McIntosh's work, that he cannot take off his skin color but instead that he has unearned advantages because of it, Quinn begins to embrace his responsibility. He avows, "And if I don't do something ... if I just stay silent, it's just like saying it's not my problem."<sup>15</sup> Teachers can ask students here: *Why is it difficult for Quinn to speak up and report what he saw to the police? What does Quinn sacrifice by making a report? Why does Quinn try to justify what happened to Rashad to his friends on the basketball team?*

Students could create digital stories about a time they had to speak up or take action to do what was right, or they could research key figures in history and share those stories with classmates. They could also note the similarities and differences between these individuals and Quinn or Rashad. Digital stories require research, writing, storyboarding, and a host of other technical elements that promote students' various literacies<sup>16</sup> and are engaging ways to share information.

Another aspect around which to cultivate students' critical literacies is through media representations related to race. In the novel, Rashad's brother Spoony releases a photo of Rashad in his ROTC uniform for the media, saying he wanted "to make sure we controlled as much of the narrative as possible," because if he had not he was certain the news reporters would have "dug all through the Internet for some picture of you looking crazy."<sup>17</sup> In order to

scaffold students' critical media literacies,<sup>18</sup> they could begin by examining movie posters that tell stories of youths, examining how the images differ based on the youths portrayed—inner-city youths of color are often portrayed in dark colors with images that instill fear, while white youths are depicted in bright colors and ways that promote a "party" storyline.<sup>19</sup>

Teachers can then utilize resources provided by the Critical Media Project,<sup>20</sup> which provide an overview of stereotypes in the media and contain clips with discussion questions. One that relates well to the discussion of *All American Boys* is the Pepsi advertisement<sup>21</sup> that gained negative attention for its casual treatment of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Teachers can then prompt students to consider the depiction of the protest in the

## Text-to-self connections are key for honoring all students' voices in the classroom.



advertisement, which they could then relate back to the march in the novel.

Finally, students could conduct character analyses of the major figures in the book. Many of the characters are dynamic in nature, such as Rashad's father, who shifts from a mentality of blaming Rashad to having a more sym-

pathetic attitude toward Rashad's innocence. Most of the characters therefore undergo major transformations and exemplify internal growth. Students can trace this development through illustrations of each character's journey and/or symbolic images to represent the entities that become most important to each character. These will lead to how race is a defining aspect of each character's identity and development. For example, Quinn's whiteness is something he comes to recognize, question, and battle, and students could choose to represent that metaphorically in their artistic responses.

### After Reading

The conclusion of the book does not offer a tidy culmination of its events. For some students, especially those who desire a happy ending, this can be difficult to process. Teachers could suggest that students compose and act out scenes they imagine would happen after where the book leaves off, either in the near or distant future. Students could write scripts and perform them for their classmates to illustrate the world they want to live in or to show where they hope the characters would be in the time to come.



**It's important that students understand the historic oppression in which today's events are rooted rather than highlighting a few key figures and only praising them as heroes.**

The realistic nature of the ending, however, which portrays resistance but not necessarily justice for Rashad, shows the complex nature of the topics tackled in the book, and this ending is worth having students consider deeply. Students could therefore research the history of resistance, especially in movements such as the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the #BlackLivesMatter movement, and discuss the forms of resistance taken and the achievements for change such movements have secured.

As many critique classroom curricula for romanticizing the civil rights movements, it's important that students understand the historic oppression in which today's events are rooted rather than highlighting a few key figures and only praising them as heroes. Educator and author Jamilah Pitts<sup>22</sup> offers guiding questions for this research, such as, "What distinguishes a rebellion from a riot? Whose murders are labeled genocide? What racial groups and tactics of resistance are praised over others?"

Once students have researched these histories, they can then draw connections to contemporary instances of police brutality and racism. In groups, they can investigate one case of police

brutality and examine court documents, news articles, and first-hand narratives to construct their understanding of the instance and then share it with the class. As a whole class, they can trace patterns across these cases to again discern how the issue is systemic and broad reaching.

In order to further emphasize the institutionalized nature of racism, students could research national and local policies for training police, especially as related to implicit bias.\* They would first need to unpack the concept of implicit bias, which "refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner" and "are activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control."<sup>23</sup> Students can examine an Implicit Association Test themselves that assesses the test taker's own biases, and they could explore the Project Implicit website ([implicit.harvard.edu/implicit](http://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit)).

In the novel, Quinn states, "I don't think most people think they're racist," to which Jill later responds, "I think it's all racism."<sup>24</sup> The notion of implicit bias will help students discern that while individuals may not consider themselves racist because they do not commit individual acts of discrimination openly or knowingly, social conditioning leads many to harbor negative associations with people of different races. This can be connected to Rashad's dad in the book, who mistakenly assumes a Black adolescent male is culpable in a fight with a white male. These biases are deeply embedded in our culture and can infiltrate the psyche of all members.

### Ideas for Social Action

From the research conducted after reading, students can then move into action. Students might decide to organize their own resistance movements, protesting police brutality at large, or they could choose a more local (even school) issue dealing with racism about which to raise awareness and work to remedy. For instance, students might wish to address microaggressions, or "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color."<sup>25</sup> These include comments such as, "'You [a Black person] are not like the rest of them. You're different,' 'If only there were more of them [Black people] like you [a Black person],' and 'I don't think of you [a Black person] as Black.'"<sup>26</sup>

In order to act for change surrounding microaggressions, students might design a poster campaign, sharing examples of microaggressions through social media and visibly throughout the halls of their school to encourage their peers to stop using damaging language. They could research common microaggressions and provide evidence of how these are psychologically destructive to the groups they target.

Students might also design a survey to implement at their school to determine what areas of racial inequity are most prevalent and need to be

\*For more on implicit bias, see "Understanding Implicit Bias" in the Winter 2015–2016 issue of *American Educator*: [aft.org/ae/winter2015-2016/taats](http://aft.org/ae/winter2015-2016/taats).



addressed, and they could analyze the results and present their findings to school administrators, board members, and district representatives and provide recommendations for addressing the concerns they collected.

From their research on resistance, students might also write and perform their own protest songs or poems at an open-mic night hosted at the school. This would require research on popular songs and poems of resistance from the past and the movements they supported, such as Curtis Mayfield's "People Get Ready," Sam

From their research on resistance, students might write and perform their own protest songs or poems at an open-mic night.



Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come," or Gil Scott Heron's "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised." Students might attempt to emulate these and relate them to their present concerns. They might also wish to examine current songs such as Childish Gambino's "This Is America," which rocked the popular music scene in 2018 for its graphic presentation of injustice in the country. Students could consider why such songs receive national attention and how they reflect those affected as well as the public conversation about topics such as racism and police brutality.

Since police brutality is an issue that affects the entire community, students could organize a community meeting to discuss the issue and generate solutions. They might consider a

public reading group in which parents, stakeholders, and community members are invited to read and discuss the book with the students.<sup>27</sup> Engaging intergenerational dialogue about racism could deepen understandings as well as develop empathy among all participants.

Students might also wish to broaden their study of police brutality and race to examine how other minoritized groups, such as Latinx and Native American populations, are similarly targeted. They could research specific instances, such as police assault at Standing Rock or even at the US border with Mexico, extending their understandings of how racialized groups are mistreated and are often the recipients of violence.

Finally, from their work on police training and implicit bias, students could create a document compiling suggestions for officer preparation and continued education. They might include articles, documentaries, and personal narratives they located and think are relevant. The key here is that their recommendations are research based but are balanced with their own creative ideas for what could make a more just world for all. Enacting and offering solutions to police brutality will help students see that this is a social problem that can and should be addressed. □

### Endnotes

1. Ö. Sensoy and R. DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, Routledge, 2012).
2. J. Reynolds and B. Kiely, *All American Boys* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 51.
3. Sensoy and DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal?*, 39.
4. M. Mendez, "Should We Say Black or African-American?," *The Observer*, October 14, 2016.
5. T.-N. Coates, "What We Mean When We Say 'Race Is a Social Construct,'" *The Atlantic*, May 15, 2013.
6. P. McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," National SEED Project, Wellesley Centers for Women, [nationalseedproject.org/Key-SEED-Texts/white-privilege-unpacking-the-invisible-knapsack](http://nationalseedproject.org/Key-SEED-Texts/white-privilege-unpacking-the-invisible-knapsack).
7. McIntosh, "White Privilege."
8. B. Applebaum, *Being White, Being Good: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 29.
9. Applebaum, *Being White*, 31.
10. Applebaum, *Being White*, 179.
11. Reynolds and Kiely, *All American Boys*, 182.
12. L. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1938).
13. Reynolds and Kiely, *All American Boys*, 59.
14. Reynolds and Kiely, *All American Boys*, 180.
15. Reynolds and Kiely, *All American Boys*, 184.
16. B. Robin, "Digital Storytelling: A Powerful Technology Tool for the 21st Century Classroom," *Theory Into Practice* 47 (2008): 220–228.
17. Reynolds and Kiely, *All American Boys*, 94.
18. E. Morrell et al., *Critical Media Pedagogy: Teaching for Achievement in City Schools* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013).
19. J. Trier, "'Sordid Fantasies': Reading Popular 'Inner-City' School Films as Racialized Texts with Pre-Service Teachers," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 8, no. 2 (2005): 171–189.
20. Critical Media Project, "Topic Overview: Race and Ethnicity," March 2018, [criticalmediaproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Race-and-Ethnicity-Topic-Overview.pdf](http://criticalmediaproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Race-and-Ethnicity-Topic-Overview.pdf).
21. Critical Media Project, "Pepsi Protest Ad (Kendall Jenner)," 2018, [criticalmediaproject.org/2088-2](http://criticalmediaproject.org/2088-2).
22. J. Pitts, "Bringing Black Lives Matter into the Classroom, Part II," *Teaching Tolerance* 56 (2017).
23. Kirwan Institute, "Understanding Implicit Bias," Ohio State University, 2015, [kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias](http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias).
24. Reynolds and Kiely, *All American Boys*, 184.
25. D. Sue et al., "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life," *American Psychologist* 62, no. 4 (2007): 271.
26. D. Solórzano, M. Ceja, and T. Yosso, "Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate: The Experiences of African American College Students," *Journal of Negro Education* 69, no. 1/2 (2000): 60–61.
27. A. Boyd and J. Darragh, "Complicating Censorship: Reading *All American Boys* with Parents of Young Adults," *English Education* 51, no. 3 (2019): 229–260.

# Organizing and Mobilizing

## How Teachers and Communities Are Winning the Fight to Revitalize Public Education



BY LEO CASEY

**A**s winter swept across the United States at the outset of 2018, ushering in the bitterest and bleakest days of the year, American teachers and their unions had little to celebrate. The first eight years of the decade had exacted a heavy toll, and still more trouble was lurking on the horizon.

In the wake of the Great Recession, funding for public education had been slashed across the country, with particularly deep cuts in the red states, many of which were granting massive tax cuts to the wealthy and corporations and thus reducing state revenues. A growing portion of the funds that remained were diverted from public schools to voucher programs for private schools and to charter schools.

For American teachers, the 2010s had been a long, dark night. And at the start of 2018, there had been very few signs that it would end. But, in the words of the old Irish peasant saying, it is always darkest before the dawn.

In those early months of 2018, West Virginia teachers, education workers, and their unions found themselves grappling with one of the state governments that had acquired a deep red political hue over the decade.

---

*Leo Casey is the executive director of the Albert Shanker Institute, a think tank affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, and is a member of the editorial board of Dissent magazine. Previously, Casey served as a vice president of the United Federation of Teachers; worked with teacher unions and teachers in Russia, Tanzania, and China on civics education; and taught civics, African American studies, political science, and more in Brooklyn. For 10 years in a row, his classes—entirely students of color, largely immigrant and largely female—won the New York City championship of the national We the People civics competition; they also won the state championship four times and placed fourth in the nation twice. This article is excerpted from The Teacher Insurgency: A Strategic and Organizing Perspective by Leo Casey, November 2020, published by Harvard Education Press. For more information, please visit [hepg.org/hep-home/books/the-teacher-insurgency](http://hepg.org/hep-home/books/the-teacher-insurgency).*

As 2018 began, the salaries of West Virginia teachers were near the bottom nationally, and lagged well behind the surrounding states of Kentucky, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Virginia.<sup>1</sup> The salaries, health insurance, and pensions of West Virginia teachers and education workers were decided by the state, and for a number of years the government had been shifting the costs of health insurance onto teachers and other public workers through increased copays and premiums. These changes cut into real income, as the increased health insurance costs ate away at stagnant salaries. In early 2018, the governor had proposed a token 1 percent raise in teacher salaries in his State of the State address, and another round of cost shifting in healthcare threatened to further plunder teachers' take-home pay.

Four southern counties of West Virginia—Logan, McDowell, Mingo, and Wyoming—had been the center of its coal mining industry and the heartland of the United Mine Workers. It was in these counties, where teachers were often the children and grandchildren of coal miners who had lived and breathed union, that the first rumblings of resistance to the state government's plans were heard.<sup>2</sup> In January, teachers and education workers from these counties organized meetings to discuss what was happening in the state capital—the inadequate salary proposal, the detrimental changes in health insurance, and the underfunding of public education—and what to do in response. In keeping with their rich labor heritage, they made plans for one-day county walkouts in defiance of the law. On February 2, they conducted a one-day strike and held a protest at the state Capitol. For the first time in West Virginia history, this action brought together members of the three statewide education unions—AFT-West Virginia, affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers; the West Virginia Education Association, affiliated with the National Education Association; and the independent West Virginia School Service Personnel Association, a union of school-related support workers such as custodians, bus drivers, and cafeteria workers.

The February 2 walkouts were reported by state and national media outlets. They quickly became the talk of West Virginia

teachers in their schools and on social media, and they provided inspiration to teachers from other parts of the state.<sup>3</sup> A Facebook group of West Virginian teachers that was the center of much of the social media discussion grew to over 20,000 members in the first months of 2018.<sup>4</sup> In short order, teachers and education workers in additional counties, including Wayne, Cabell, and Lincoln, were organizing their own one-day walkouts. A movement was rapidly taking shape and spreading across the state.

Coming as it did in the doldrums of a decade when American teachers and their unions had been under sustained attack and were expecting more of the same, the dramatic appearance of these walkouts on the political center stage was unexpected. No one—not the state government, not the state unions, not even the teachers who organized the first walkouts—had anticipated that this movement would emerge, much less how quickly it would proliferate. But as soon as the walkouts began, the three state unions began to mobilize, with their national affiliates providing key organizational support. Local leaders were asked to assess the potential support for a statewide strike action, and state leaders organized tele-town halls and took to social media to take the pulse of members around the state. Meetings were organized that brought together the members of all three unions in each of the state's 55 counties, and a vote was taken on whether to call for a statewide walkout, with an overwhelming “yes” response. On February 22, the entire education workforce of West Virginia was on strike and demonstrating at the state Capitol. Their slogan was “55 Strong,” a statement of the solidarity that had been built among teachers and education workers from every county in the state.

They remained on strike for nearly two weeks, faithfully walking the picket lines in the dead of winter. Five days into the strike, the governor announced his support for a 5 percent raise for teachers, education workers, and other public-sector workers, and union leaders recommended its acceptance and a conclusion to the strike. But teachers were profoundly distrustful that the state government would deliver on the governor's promise: the Republican president of the state Senate, an outspoken opponent of the strike, had declared his unwillingness to pass the deal advocated by the governor and was doing his best to sow discord between teachers and other public-sector workers and between public-sector employees and the community. Consequently, teachers refused to end the strike and demanded actual legislation. It was only after the full salary increase was signed into law on March 6 that teachers and education workers ended their strike. They had

won their major demand, and they returned to their classrooms the next day.

The West Virginia strike provided a spark, and in the months that followed, it lit a prairie fire of teacher strikes across the United States. On April 2, Oklahoma teachers and education workers began what would become a 10-day statewide strike for improved salaries and increased funding of public schools. On the same day, teachers in several Kentucky counties held one-day walkouts over the governor's efforts to gut their pensions. On April 26, Arizona teachers and education workers launched a weeklong statewide strike, also for improved salaries and increased school funding. And on May 16, North Carolina teachers and education workers held a one-day statewide strike demanding improved compensation and increased funding for public schools. These strikes were signs of the dawn of a new day for American teachers, their unions, and America's public schools.

The West Virginia strike had been focused not simply on the needs of teachers and education workers, as important as they were, but also on the chronic underfunding of the public schools and the fiscal policies that provided tax cuts to corporations and the wealthy while starving schools and other public services. Against efforts to divide the strikers from other public workers and the community, it put forward a broad solidaristic vision that fought for all public-sector employees and for the schools that their communities needed and deserved. In one especially telling illustration, West Virginia teachers organized to make sure that students who relied on public schools for the meals were fed dur-

The West Virginia strike in 2018 focused on the needs of teachers and the fiscal policies that provided tax cuts to corporations and the wealthy while starving schools.



ing the strike. As a consequence, it enjoyed an unprecedented level of public support, as did the subsequent strikes of 2018.

The strikes were all the more powerful for having taken place mostly in states where they were prohibited by law, making them acts of civil disobedience. Moreover, they had mostly occurred in deep red states with extremely conservative Republican state governments. In four of the five states—West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Arizona—teacher salaries, health insurance, and pensions were set centrally by the state government, with only a minimal role for local school districts. This system, which is employed by relatively few states, meant that the strikes were of necessity mostly statewide, a largely unprecedented development in both teacher union history and in American labor history. That statewide strikes were organized

The strikes of 2018 were all the more powerful for having taken place mostly in states where they were prohibited by law, making them acts of civil disobedience.

is all the more remarkable when one understands that in these deep red states, teacher union membership was less dense and teacher union organizational infrastructure less developed than in most parts of the country. The one exception to this rule was West Virginia, where union density is approximately 75 percent, taking into account all three statewide unions.<sup>5</sup> It is telling that the West Virginia strike had the greatest success in winning its demands.

In 2019, the fire continued to spread, with four particularly noteworthy strikes. In Los Angeles, the second-largest school district in the United States, teachers struck for eight days in January. Teachers in Denver walked out for three days, and teachers in Oakland struck for eight days in February and March. In Chicago, the third-largest school district in the nation, teachers and education workers walked out for 11 days in the middle of October. These four strikes were by no means the only ones in that year; many smaller districts also experienced walkouts.

Unlike the 2018 strikes, many of the 2019 strikes occurred in deep blue states where the governments were controlled by Democrats. (Even the Denver strike in purple Colorado took place after the Democrats had taken control of state government in the 2018 election.) Given the greater likelihood of blue states' public employees having the right to strike, these strikes often took place in the states (only one-quarter of all states) where they were legal.

The spread of the teacher strikes to the blue states indicated that while the issues that generated them may have found their most extreme manifestations in deep red states, they were being experienced across the country. Not content to simply raise traditional union demands on compensation and work conditions, and even

moving beyond educational issues such as class size that teacher unions had always bargained, the 2019 strikes took up issues such as the impact of excessive testing on education, the need for social and health services for students living in poverty, supports for homeless students to ensure the continuity of their education, the impact of the unregulated expansion of charter schools on public district schools, and protections for undocumented students from Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids.

## Resistance and Rebirth

Social movements and protest movements—including the labor movement—are by their nature dynamic and changing, not permanent and fixed. Movements wax and wane: they are born in bursts of activism, and they wither into periods of inertia and even inactivity. On occasion, they completely expire. But these trajectories are life cycles, so a movement can be renewed and reinvigorated, even reborn. And the life of a movement can be long or transitory, productive or barren. It can be like the civil rights movement, vanquishing de jure Jim Crow segregation and begetting landmark civil rights and voting rights legislation, or it can be like Occupy Wall Street, which, for all the attention it brought to the growth of extreme income inequality, rapidly disappeared without any discernible impact on American economic policy.

In no small measure, these different trajectories are shaped by what the participants and leaders of a movement do. Their actions directly impact how long a movement thrives and what it accomplishes in the way of social, political, and economic changes while it is still vibrant and dynamic. When a movement is young and in the ascendant, as the Teacher Insurgency\* that began in 2018 now is, the interventions of participants and leaders are particularly important in shaping its trajectory and life path. Simply put, there is no law of history, politics, or economics that guarantees that the Teacher Insurgency will continue to advance and impact American education in progressive ways: it will happen because teachers and unionists employ sound strategic and organizing approaches, or it will not be.

As teachers and union activists, our strategic approach must be based on a thorough understanding of the relations of power in education politics and American politics more generally, with the knowledge of how to craft interventions on that political terrain to positive

\*I use this term to describe the entire movement of strikes in 2018, 2019, and beyond.



effect; our organizing must be rooted not only in the issues that are important to teachers, but in a deep understanding of why they are important to teachers and how they shape a collective “teacher” identity. The issues that motivated the teacher strikes of 2018 and 2019 fall into two general categories: those that ensue from the underfunding of public education, and those that involve the deprofessionalization and deskilling of teaching. Both sets of issues are the product of discrete government policies. In some instances, these policies were long-standing, such as austerity plans that date as far back as the mid-1970s; in other cases they are of a more recent origin, such as the deprofessionalization caused by the expanding role and importance of standardized exams. But all of these policies developed a particularly aggressive intensity in the decade of the 2010s, creating the basis for the Teacher Insurgency. The logic of the Teacher Insurgency is fundamentally a political one, with government choices and policies—and resistance to them—being the driving forces.

In *The Teacher Insurgency: A Strategic and Organizing Perspective*, I explore these forces in detail. Here, I focus on teacher union strikes. There is a productive tension between protest (including strikes and demonstrations) and politics (including election activism); each brings distinct capacities and unique strengths to a social change project, and a strategic approach that employs both in their appropriate context is most likely to be successful. The continued use of the strike as a vital direct-action tactic in the Teacher Insurgency requires a solid understanding of what leads to success, if it is to be replicated.

## The Teacher Strike: Conditions for Success

Strikes are not spontaneously born. They are a form of collective action and, like all collective action, must be organized and mobilized. As protest and direct action, strikes can gather energy and acquire momentum from the general tenor of the times. In a period of mass protests such as the 1960s and early 1970s and again in more recent years, teachers and other working people are inspired by witnessing and participating in nonviolent direct action against the exercise of illegitimate and arbitrary authority. Such protests make clear that resistance is possible. But inspiration is the start, not the finish, of effective collective action, and is no replacement for organization.

Strikes are complex operations, involving a multiplicity of critical tasks that must be coordinated: picket lines, rallies, internal union communications, union meetings, media relations, community relations, and negotiations. The better organized the strike and the more fully these tasks are accomplished, the greater its chance of success. In this respect, the 2019 strikes in Chicago and Los Angeles, with their careful and thorough school-by-school and teacher-by-teacher organizing and years of preparing the ground for the actual strike mobilization, stand as exemplars.

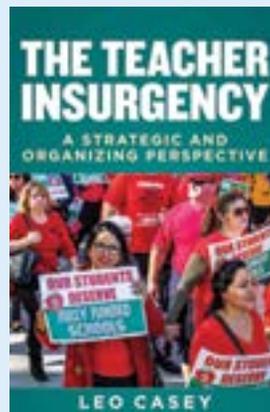
The most essential organizational task is winning and keeping the allegiance of teachers to the strike. Teachers are knowledgeable and discerning political actors. They understand full well that strikes are a high-intensity and high-risk tactic, with the potential both to deliver advances and victories that could not be otherwise obtained and to end in major setbacks and defeats. The risk side of this equation is particularly acute in the three-quarters of all states where teacher strikes are illegal; in these states, striking becomes an act of civil disobedience and can result in severe penalties to teachers and their unions.

To be willing to go on strike and stay out until a settlement is won, therefore, teachers need to be convinced on a number of different counts: first, that they are fighting for important, worthwhile objectives; second, that those objectives cannot be achieved through other means that are not as high-intensity and high-risk as a strike; third, that the strike has reasonable prospects of success; fourth, that the strike objectives have strong support in the community; and fifth, that the solidarity among teachers, which is essential to a strike’s success, is strong and will hold. In significant measure, the last of these points is dependent not simply on the organization and mobilization of the strike, but also on the four antecedent conditions. If teachers become doubtful on any of these points, it will become difficult to mount or sustain a successful strike.

Given these conditions, what political reasoning do teachers employ to make the difficult decision to strike?

## The Civic Traditions of Labor

Adapting the precepts of the civic republicanism expounded by Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, among others, the 19th-century American labor movement saw the strike as a fundamental right of citizenship.<sup>6</sup> According to this perspective, the strike was not simply an expression of the collective power of working



The purpose of *The Teacher Insurgency*, from which this article is drawn, is to identify the strategic and organizing approaches that will best situate us to build and sustain collective power—power that is capable not only of defending public education and teaching from those who seek to dismantle and diminish them, but of realizing their rich democratic promise. With the right strategic and organizing approaches, a new day is possible.

The strategic challenges posed by the Teacher Insurgency strikes of 2018

and 2019 are questions of what we teachers should collectively do to build our power, especially through our unions, so we can change our schools and our society for the better. What is the work of mobilization and the work of organization, and in what ways are both forms of work central to collective action? What is the relationship between mobilization and organization, and what role does social media play in that relationship? What is the relationship between protest and politics? How and when should we use the two different forms of collective action—direct action and electoral politics? What does each form of action accomplish, and how can synergy between them be optimized? How should we organize our strikes to maximize their success? And how should we work in partnerships with community? These are the strategic challenges we face, and each requires choices on the political roads we will take.

Edicts delivered from on high do none of the hard work that must take place in schools, and they can even be counterproductive when they provide none of the supports or resources necessary for such change. Real democratic change in education is demanding, but possible when teachers take the lead and engage in collective action. That is the most important lesson of the Teacher Insurgency.

—L. C.

people, but also a manifestation of the republican liberty of free labor—an assertion of the freedom from domination that is the necessary foundation for the self-rule of the citizenry in a republic.<sup>7</sup> Workers must be able and willing to withdraw their labor through a strike, 19th-century unionists contended, or they will no longer be their own masters, but powerless subjects in a system of wage slavery. Much as elections and voting were understood to be the means for the civic reenactment and renewal of the social compact on which the republican government was based, strikes were viewed as public affirmations of the dignity and civic worth of the citizen-worker. The often-elaborate pageantry of

workers can be fired for nothing more than their sexual orientations or gender identities—only 22 states provide full employment protection for LGBTQ employees. If workers in nonunion workplaces wear buttons supporting candidates for public office opposed by their employers or have bumper stickers on their cars supporting causes opposed by their employers, they can be fired with no remedy in law.

As Alexander Hertel-Fernandez has thoroughly documented, US employers in nonunion settings use their unchecked power over their workplace to compel political action on behalf of candidates, legislation, and causes that promote the interests of the business and its owners.<sup>10</sup> When economic domination is turned into political coercion in these ways, it collides directly with the foundational republican idea of the self-rule of citizens. This is why the founding slogan of the AFT—“Democracy in Education, Education for Democracy”—focused on the vital connection unionists saw between teachers’ ability to exercise the rights of citizenship inside the educational workplace on the one hand, and their work to promote democracy through their teaching on the other.

Civic republicanism was the source of another central concept in American labor’s understanding of the 19th-century strike: the duty of solidarity. The first truly national labor union in the United States, the Knights of Labor, articulated a labor-republican vision of the future society it sought to establish, the cooperative commonwealth. At the center of that vision was the idea that government should promote the common good: “The best government [is one] in which an

injury to one is the concern of all.”<sup>11</sup> For the Knights of Labor, this principle of seeking the common good—what classical republicans called *civic virtue*—defined not only how government and society should function but also how working people themselves should act with respect to each other.<sup>12</sup> Contemporary American unionists will recognize the Knights of Labor formulation as an early version of an axiom of labor solidarity that has continued to this day: “An injury to one is an injury to all.”

At the heart of republican citizenship and civic virtue is the willingness to make personal sacrifices: citizens in a republic exercise civic virtue through a myriad of sacrifices, great and small, from putting their lives at risk to defend their nation from attack to paying taxes that support government goods and services that do not personally benefit them. Going on strike and practicing solidarity entails sacrifices ranging from the loss of one’s income to the loss of one’s job. When strikes are prohibited by law, rank-and-file unionists can incur fines and union leaders can go to jail. Yet American teachers have demonstrated again and again that they are prepared to make such sacrifices if going on strike means that they can secure a better future not only for themselves and their families, but also for the students they teach and nurture, the schools in which they work, and the communities they serve. By their very choice of vocation, entering an occupation with modest pay and benefits in order to make differences in the lives of young people, teachers have demonstrated that they are prepared to make sacrifices for a greater good.



19th-century strikes—the marches, demonstrations, rallies, and picket lines; the songs and dramatic performances; and the banners, garb, and regalia of the unions—would symbolically stake this public claim on a republican citizenship for working people. Successful teacher strikes often highlight an analogous theme of the dignity and civic worth of teachers and the value of the work they do, and that powerful symbolic statement is one of the less appreciated motivations for teachers when they go on strike. It has been a theme in the strikes of the Teacher Insurgency.

If this discussion of the republican liberty of working people seems like an exercise in antiquarian history and political philosophy, it is worthwhile to consider that under current American labor law, workers surrender most of their rights of citizenship—freedoms of speech, of press, of peaceful assembly, and to petition to seek redress of their grievances; rights to due process; rights to fair and equal treatment—at the door of a nonunionized workplace. The legal protections for workers organizing a union have been whittled away over seven decades, and they are now very weak and mostly unenforced by government.<sup>8</sup> American law allows nonunion workplaces to be “private governments,” or what philosopher Elizabeth Anderson calls “dictatorships in our midst.”<sup>9</sup> Under the doctrine of at-will employment that governs such workplaces, workers can be fired for any reason or no reason at all, save those instances where a firing involves documentable discrimination against a member of a protected class under civil rights law. In jurisdictions with incomplete civil rights protections,

## Building Power Through Direct Action, Politics, and Community

Since the early 1980s, the decline in the use of the strike has been as much an effect of the decline of the power of the American labor movement as it has been a cause. A successful strategy for the revitalization of unions must be more multifaceted and more dialectical than a simple focus on mounting strikes. At its height during the 1960s, the civil rights movement engaged in constant tactical innovation and experimentation, with the insurgency peaking again and again as new forms of direct action were introduced. As Doug McAdam explains in his study of the “Black insurgency,” this creativity was key in keeping the Jim Crow regime off guard and off balance; no sooner did white supremacist authorities adjust to one tactic, finding ways to respond to and check it, than they would find themselves confronted with a new strategy.<sup>13</sup>

The point here is not to retreat from the use of direct action, with its capacity to disrupt the existing balance of political forces, but to expand its use—to not become dependent on just one tactic, even a tactic as potentially powerful and important as the strike. To the extent that teachers and their unions have a

wide repertoire of direct-action tactics, every action in that repertoire—including the strike—will be more effective.

In the United States, politics have always been central to the outcomes of strikes, both in victory and defeat. The refusal of President Franklin Roosevelt and Michigan Governor Frank Mur-

To the extent that teachers and their unions have a wide repertoire of direct-action tactics, every action in that repertoire—including the strike—will be more effective.

## Learn More About Teacher Unions, Organizing, and Mobilizing

Inspired by teachers’ activism—especially their demands to provide the schools that all youth deserve—several scholars have written recently about teacher unions, bargaining for the common good, strikes, and more. Here are two new books that complement Leo Casey’s *The Teacher Insurgency*.

### ***Strike for the Common Good: Fighting for the Future of Public Education***

Edited by Rebecca Kolins Givan and Amy Schragger Lang

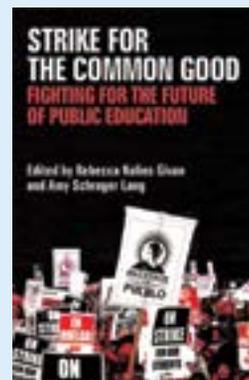
Although amplifying collective voice and being heard are central to any strike, relatively little of the writing about the recent Teacher Insurgency strikes has been by the teachers, students, and parents at the center of the action. *Strike for the Common Good*, published by the University of Michigan Press, stands out for prioritizing the voices of these essential strikers and supporters. Through personal essays, and some contributions by analysts, we better understand the motivations and aspirations of educators and the families they serve. From the inadequate resources directed toward schools in communities of color to the devaluing of women’s work, many longstanding, urgent

issues are examined—and it’s clear that systemic inequities are preventing public schools from fulfilling their promise. To truly educate for democracy, we must address the deplorable conditions of far too many school buildings, rampant school violence, structural racism, and neoliberalism’s weakening of public education. This volume shows that there is much to celebrate in teachers’ recent victories and also much more to be done. To learn more, visit [press.umich.edu/11621094/strike\\_for\\_the\\_common\\_good](http://press.umich.edu/11621094/strike_for_the_common_good).

### ***Teacher Unions and Social Justice: Organizing for the Schools and Communities Our Students Deserve***

Edited by Michael Charney, Jesse Hagopian, and Bob Peterson

Published by Rethinking Schools, this comprehensive anthology includes more than 60 articles and offers insights into social justice unionism past and present—all for the purpose of helping students reach their potential. Educators are sure to be inspired reading “Why Teachers Should Organize,” a speech Margaret Haley, vice president of the Chicago Teachers’ Federation, gave at



the 1904 National Education Association convention.

As Haley said, “It is the public school teachers whose special contribution to society is their own power to think, the moral courage to follow their convictions, and the training of citizens to think and to express thought in free and intelligent action.” In recent years, and especially through the Teacher Insurgency, our nation’s teachers have displayed that moral courage. And with this anthology, today’s activists are sure to learn new strategies, from mobilizing to establish more community schools to organizing through site-based engagement and social media to fighting privatization and student debt. Tying social justice unionism to social justice teaching, a section is devoted to bringing issues like anti-racism, equity, and climate change to the classroom. To learn more, visit [rethinkingschools.org/tusj](http://rethinkingschools.org/tusj).

—EDITORS

phy to use troops to suppress the 1936–37 Flint sit-down strike was decisive in forcing General Motors to recognize and negotiate with the United Auto Workers, thus generating the breakthrough of industrial unionism in the United States that followed the unionization of the largest corporation of its era.<sup>14</sup> President Reagan’s willingness to break the 1981 air traffic controllers’ strike destroyed their union and was a significant factor in the decline of strikes as a direct-action tactic of unions in the following decades.<sup>15</sup> Different elected officials with different relationships to labor would most likely have produced different outcomes.

What is true of strikes in general is doubly true of teacher strikes and other public-sector strikes, as the employer is the government. By their very nature, these strikes are political. The 2018 strike in

Politics have always been central to the outcomes of strikes, in victory and defeat. This is doubly true of teacher strikes, as the employer is the government.



West Virginia had the most success of the strikes that year precisely because the unions in that state were well established, with strong union density and a real and active political force; they were able to use their political capacity to move the state legislature and governor to act on those demands. The 2019 Los Angeles strike brought to public attention the question of how charter school expansion had a negative impact on district schools, but it still required the organized political presence of the state’s teacher unions to pass legislation that reformed, for the very first time, the process by which new charter schools were authorized. A reliance on the strike alone would not have achieved either of these victories.

This understanding of strikes as part of a broader strategic approach is especially important when one considers a critical factor in the decline of the potency of teacher union strikes in the late 1970s and 1980s—the divisions that had opened up between the unions and the communities they served. The austerity conserva-

tism that emerged out of the fiscal crises of the mid-1970s—known as Reaganism in the United States—had as its primary objectives the gutting of the public sector and the evisceration of the social welfare safety net. It thus set its sights both on the workers and the unions that provided public goods and services on the one hand, and on the working-class and poor communities, disproportionately of color, that relied on those public goods and services on the other. Attacks on public-sector employees as lazy, incompetent, and overcompensated were matched with attacks on racialized “welfare queens” and the “undeserving” poor, and both were condemned as “parasitical” on the “taxpayer.” To have had any realistic hope of blunting the assault of this austerity conservatism, it would have been necessary to develop a common front between the workers who provided public goods and services and the communities that relied on them. Like any political alliance, this front would have to be actively built and organized. But as much as the logic of joint opposition to attacks on the public services and goods was clear, there were also deep-seated suspicions and distrust on each side.

One of the most positive aspects of the strikes of the Teacher Insurgency has been the strong support the teachers and their unions have received from their communities. That support did not simply appear. It was the product of a decade and a half of work on the part of teacher unions to build deep, long-lasting ties to communities. Far too much of what passes for thinking about strikes in the United States—including teacher strikes—rests on a “field of dreams” theory: call it, and they will come. We must go beyond such romantic notions, which are recipes for disaster, and consider the different conditions and approaches that have led teacher strikes to victory and defeat, to find a way forward that will continue the success of the strikes of the Teacher Insurgency. □

#### Endnotes

1. M. Will, “See How Your State’s Average Teacher Salary Compares,” *Education Week*, April 24, 2018.
2. There are a number of published narratives of the West Virginia strike, often combined with the other strikes of 2018. Steve Greenhouse’s recent book *Beaten Down, Worked Up: The Past, Present, and Future of American Labor* (New York: Knopf, 2019) contains an informative chapter (chapter 20) on the subject. See also Diane Ravitch’s *Slaying Goliath: The Passionate Resistance to Privatization and the Fight to Save America’s Public Schools* (New York: Knopf, 2020), chapter 15. While it will become clear over the course of this book that I disagree with the theoretical framework that informs Eric Blanc’s *Red State Revolt: The Teachers’ Strike Wave and Working-Class Politics* (New York: Verso, 2019), his account of the strikes of 2018 should also be read. I have found particularly useful a collection of first-person accounts written by West Virginia teachers themselves: E. Catte, E. Hilliard, and J. Salfia, eds., *55 Strong: Inside the West Virginia Teachers’ Strike* (Cleveland: Belt Publishing, 2018). The collection allows the reader to see the events from different teacher vantage points in different parts of the state, while many other published narratives are seen through the eyes of only a small number of teachers.
3. For national coverage, see J. Delk, “Hundreds of Teachers Hold Walkout, Protest in West Virginia,” *The Hill*, February 2, 2018.
4. Jay O’Neal, “Jay O’Neal, Stonewall Jackson Middle School, Kanawha County,” in *55 Strong*, 22.
5. Personal communication with Bob Morgenstern, an AFT regional representative with responsibility for West Virginia.
6. On the strike and republicanism, see J. Bartlett-Lambert, “If the Workers Took a Notion”: *The Right to Strike and American Political Development* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005). For a more general consideration of labor and republicanism, see A. Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and D. Montgomery, *Citizen Worker: The Experience of Workers in the United States with Democracy and the Free Market During the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For an appreciation of the influence of civic republicanism on trade union and then Socialist Party leader Eugene Debs, see N. Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1984).
7. For an exposition of civic republicanism based on the idea of freedom as nondomination, see P. Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
8. Human Rights Watch, *Unfair Advantage: Workers’ Freedom of Association in the United States Under International Human Rights Standards* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2000), [hrw.org/reports/pdfs/u/us/uslbr008.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/reports/pdfs/u/us/uslbr008.pdf).
9. E. Anderson, *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don’t Talk About It)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

(Continued on page 52)



# REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING ABOUT RACE

I want to thank Louise Derman-Sparks, Julie Olsen Edwards, and Catherine M. Goins for their article, “Teaching About Identity, Racism, and Fairness,” which appeared in the Winter 2020–2021 issue. As a white female teacher in a school with a large number of students who are Hispanic, and as someone who studied the topic throughout my doctoral program, I am all too aware of the need to validate our students’ feelings when racism exists.

I was particularly glued to the following text: “Very early, white children come to value their whiteness, presume it is the definition of normal, and believe that therefore all other skin colors are strange and less than.” The article speaks to a sense of “white superiority” for these children. When I admit that I teach my students that this sense of superiority is ridiculous, there are some comments from even the most educated individuals who deny that racism or white privilege exists. While I am still learning, a class on deep-rooted bias challenged me to look deeply into my own beliefs. I have become more focused and ready to step up through reflection and reading.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his “I Have a Dream” speech put truth at the forefront. The only way to recognize that racism and white privilege do in fact exist is to dig very deep, which can be painful and raw. Can we, all humans, put down any bullying ways and walk as brothers and sisters in love and truth?

—**DR. KATHY O'BRIEN**  
Middle School Teacher

In “Teaching About Identity, Racism, and Fairness,” I want to comment on the sidebar “Strategies and Activities About Racialized Identities and Fairness.” In the example given in the “Use Teachable Moments” section, after Jamal says that he didn’t like Hector touching his hair, the teacher proceeds to ask Jamal if it would be OK if Hector asked first. Instead of this, the teacher could have acknowledged Jamal’s boundaries. This would have still been a teachable moment (in respecting one’s body and boundaries), and the teacher could have gone on to still have a lesson about appreciating different kinds of hair. It would have been



quite OK for Hector to be told “No” and for that to be the end of it.

Sometimes when a person in a position of authority (a teacher) asks a child (or an adult for that matter) to answer a question, one can feel pressured to answer the way they think the person would like them to answer—especially at age 4.

—**DANICA ONWUDIWE**  
Robert F. Wagner Middle School  
New York, NY

## THE CALL TO SAVE OUR DEMOCRACY

I am not one to write in response to magazine articles, but I was moved to do so after the Fall 2020 issue. The cover title, “Saving Our Democracy,” encapsulates what is at stake in our country, and all of the articles included in this issue are not only timely and vital, but should be required reading for everyone who cares about the direction our country is going in. I want to applaud AFT President Randi Weingarten and the editorial team for curating such an inspiring and useful selection of articles.

In my current teaching post, I worked to ensure that all of my students registered to vote and actually got out and voted. Even though I teach theatre, it is critical that my students learn how to be informed and engaged citizens. The development of their theatre abilities comes as a nice bonus.

We certainly live in precarious times, made more dangerous by our former administration. I want to thank President Weingarten and all who work at the AFT for helping us navigate this season of

unrest. We will do all that we can to ensure our country learns from its past mistakes and creates a new paradigm moving forward.

—**MIKE RICCI**  
North Hennepin Community College  
Brooklyn Park, MN

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt’s article, “The Crisis of American Democracy,” summarized much of our current situation well, but it is guilty of promoting the very polarization it bemoans. Specifically, it makes no mention of the plurality of Americans, estimated at 40 to 45 percent, who now consider themselves independent, irrespective of how they may officially register to avoid being disenfranchised in a closed or semi-closed primary election. Questions such as “Are you Republican or Democrat?” or “Are you liberal or conservative?” create false dichotomies and divert our attention from the obvious solution, which is to build a strong centrist coalition. (“Paper or plastic?” “No, I always bring my own reusable bags.”) If we centrists (guilty as charged since my high school days) are no longer welcome in either major party, so be it, but the system has to be opened up to eliminate the two major parties’ stranglehold on every aspect of it.

My prescription starts with outlawing closed primary elections and caucuses as unconstitutional, particularly as long as taxpayers foot the bill for them. It continues with eliminating party preference from voter registration. California’s top-two primary system can help to ensure that an intelligent, pragmatic Republican voter, instead of sitting out a Democrat v. Democrat runoff, will vote for the more moderate and less extreme of the two choices.

—**JOHN A. ELDON**  
University of California San Diego



## Supporting Students Who Are Experiencing Homelessness

(Continued from page 9)

10. R. Hallett, *Educational Experiences of Hidden Homeless Teenagers: Living Doubled-Up* (New York: Routledge, 2012).
11. Child Trends, "Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness," May 8, 2019, [childtrends.org/indicators/homeless-children-and-youth](http://childtrends.org/indicators/homeless-children-and-youth).
12. R. Hallett and L. Skrla, *Serving Students Who Are Homeless: A Resource Guide for Schools, Districts, and Educational Leaders* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2017), 11–25.
13. Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, *Aftershocks: The Lasting Impact of Homelessness on Student Achievement* (February 15, 2016).
14. Hallett and Skrla, *Serving Students*, 28.
15. Hallett and Skrla, *Serving Students*, 28–31.
16. Hallett and Skrla, *Serving Students*.
17. M. B. Spencer, "Increasing the Opportunity for Academic and Life Success: Trauma-Informed Schooling and Consequences" (annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Antonio, TX, April 27, 2017).
18. Hallett, Crutchfield, and Maguire, *Addressing Homelessness*.

## In College, But Not Always Earning College Credit

(Continued from page 21)

10. I. Mills and B. Mills, "Insufficient Evidence: Mindset Intervention in Developmental College Math," *Social Psychology of Education* 21, no. 5 (2018): 1045–1059.
11. Cohen, "The Importance of Self-Regulation."
12. Merriam and Bierema, *Adult Learning*.
13. Mesa, "Achievement Goal Orientations."
14. M. George, "Ethics and Motivation in Remedial Mathematics Education," *Community College Review* 38, no. 1 (2010): 82–92.
15. Moore, "Academic Motivation and Performance."
16. D. Pugalee, *Writing to Develop Mathematical Understanding* (Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon, 2005).
17. D. Perin and J. Holschuh, "Teaching Academically Underprepared Postsecondary Students," *Review of Research in Education* 43 (2019): 363–393.
18. J. Anglin, "Vocabulary Development: A Morphological Analysis," *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 58, no. 10 (1993): v–165.
19. See, for example, E. Snow et al., "iSTART-2: A Reading Comprehension and Strategy Instruction Tutor," in *Adaptive Educational Technologies for Literacy Instruction*, ed. S. Crossley and D. McNamara (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 104–121.

20. S. Armstrong and J. Lampi, "PILLAR: A Reading Strategy for a New Era of Strategy Instruction at the College Level," *Journal of College Literacy and Learning* 43, no. 3 (2017): 3–17.
21. See, for example, S. Perun, "'What the Hell Is Revise?': A Qualitative Study of Student Approaches to Coursework in Developmental English at One Urban-Serving Community College," *Community College Review* 43 (2015): 245–263.
22. S. Nash-Ditzel, "Metacognitive Reading Strategies Can Improve Self-Regulation," *Journal of College Reading and Learning* 40, no. 2 (2010): 45–63.
23. See, for example, P. Flink, "Adapting Self-Selected Reading Practices for College-Level Developmental Reading Courses," *Reading Improvement* 54, no. 3 (2017): 87–92.
24. Perin and Holschuh, "Teaching Academically Underprepared."
25. See, for example, L. Fernsten and M. Reda, "Helping Students Meet the Challenges of Academic Writing," *Teaching in Higher Education* 16 (2011): 171–182.
26. A. Durgunoglu et al., "Improving the Comprehension and Vocabulary Skills of English Language Learners with Content Integrated Language Instruction for Adults," *Adult Literacy Education: The International Journal of Literacy, Language, and Numeracy* (2021).
27. D. McNamara, "Self-Explanation and Reading Strategy Training (SERT) Improves Low-Knowledge Students' Science Course Performance," *Discourse Processes* 54, no. 7 (2017): 479–492.
28. S. Armstrong and M. Newman, "Teaching Textual Conversations: Intertextuality in the College Reading Classroom," *Journal of College Reading and Learning* 41, no. 2 (2011): 6–21.
29. D. Perin et al., "A Contextualized Curricular Supplement for Developmental Reading and Writing," *Journal of College Reading and Learning* 43, no. 2 (2013): 8–38.
30. A. Ingalls, "Facebook as a Learning-Management System in Developmental Writing," *Journal of Developmental Education* 40, no. 2 (2017): 26–28.
31. See, for example, A. Johnson et al., "iSTART-ALL: Confronting Adult Low Literacy with Intelligent Tutoring for Reading Comprehension," in *Proceedings of the 18th International Conference on Artificial Intelligence in Education*, ed. E. Andre et al. (Wuhan, China: Springer, 2017), 125–136; and Snow et al., "iSTART-2: A Reading Comprehension."
32. M. Blanton, D. Stylianou, and M. David, "The Nature of Scaffolding in Undergraduate Students' Transition to Mathematical Proof," *International Group for the Psychology of Mathematics Education* 2 (2003): 113–120; and R. Brower et al., "Scaffolding Mathematics Remediation for Academically At-Risk Students Following Developmental Education Reform in Florida," *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 42, no. 2 (2018): 112–128.
33. See, for example, J. Stigler, K. Givvin, and B. Thompson, "What Community College Developmental Mathematics Students Understand About Mathematics," *MathAMATYC Educator* 1, no. 3 (2010): 4–16.
34. Brower et al., "Scaffolding Mathematics"; S. Coleman,

- S. Skidmore, and N. Martirosyan, "A Review of the Literature on Online Developmental Mathematics: Research-Based Recommendations for Practice," *Community College Enterprise* 23, no. 2 (2017): 9–26; and L. Smith et al., "Students' Reactions to Reform Mathematics Pedagogy in a Postsecondary Remedial Mathematics Course," *Mathematics Enthusiast* 14, no. 1–3 (2017): 289–308.
35. Coleman, Skidmore, and Martirosyan, "A Review of the Literature"; and R. Laceyfield, "Bouncing Ball Experiment," in *Best Practices in Developmental Mathematics*, ed. T. Arrington (New York: Mathematics Special Professional Interest Network, National Association for Developmental Education, 2002).
36. WGBH (PBS), "Stairway Slope," Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 2014.
37. D. Willingham, "Ask the Cognitive Scientist: Do Manipulatives Help Students Learn?," *American Educator* 41, no. 3 (2017): 25–30, 40.
38. Brower et al., "Scaffolding Mathematics"; Coleman, Skidmore, and Martirosyan, "A Review of the Literature"; L. Deka and J. Lieberman, "An Effective Model for Teaching Developmental Mathematics," *Journal of Mathematics Sciences & Mathematics Education* 8, no. 1 (2008): 48–61; and X. Wang, N. Sun, and K. Wickersham, "Turning Math Remediation into Homeroom: Contextualization as a Motivational Environment for Community College Students in Remedial Math," *Review of Higher Education* 40, no. 3 (2017): 427–464.
39. Wang, Sun, and Wickersham, "Turning Math."
40. Laceyfield, *Bouncing Ball Experiment*.
41. S. Beilock and D. Willingham, "Math Anxiety: Can Teachers Help Students Reduce It?," *American Educator* 38, no. 2 (2014): 28–32.
42. A. Dowker, A. Sarkar, and C. Looi, "Mathematics Anxiety: What Have We Learned in 60 Years?," *Frontiers in Psychology* 7 (2016): 508.
43. See, for example, T. Woodard, "The Effects of Math Anxiety on Post-Secondary Developmental Students as Related to Achievement, Gender, and Age," *Inquiry* 9, no. 1 (2004): 1–5.
44. Wang, Sun, and Wickersham, "Turning Math."
45. S. Kesicic and A. Erdogan, "Predicting College Students' Mathematics Anxiety by Motivational Beliefs and Self-Regulated Learning Strategies," *College Student Journal* 43, no. 2 (2009); and Zimmerman et al., "Enhancing Self-Reflection."
46. J. Bakal, "Creating a Participatory Classroom Environment," in *Best Practices in Developmental Mathematics*, ed. T. Arrington (New York: Mathematics Special Professional Interest Network, National Association for Developmental Education, 2002); Deka and Lieberman, "An Effective Model"; and Wang, Sun, and Wickersham, "Turning Math."
47. L. Bol et al., "The Effects of Self-Regulated Learning Training on Community College Students' Metacognition and Achievement in Developmental Math Courses," *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 42, no. 2 (2016): 480–495; and Mesa, "Achievement Goal Orientations."
48. Kesicic and Erdogan, "Predicting College Students' Mathematics"; and Mills and Mills, "Insufficient Evidence."

## Apply to Become a Peer Reviewer

American Educator strives to publish the highest quality research and ideas. To strengthen our work, we need to draw on your experience and expertise—so we're developing a peer review board. If you share our commitment to educational equity from early childhood to adulthood, please visit [aft.org/ae-peer-review](http://aft.org/ae-peer-review) to learn more about becoming a reviewer and submit your application today.

## Learning History, Facing Reality

(Continued from page 31)

26. C. Kernahan and T. Davis, "Changing Perspective: How Learning About Racism Influences Student Awareness and Emotion," *Teaching of Psychology* 37, no. 1 (2007): 49–52.
27. A. Kafka, "Instructors Spend 'Emotional Labor' in Diversity Courses, and Deserve Credit for It," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 15, 2018.
28. Kafka, "Instructors Spend."
29. Kafka, "Instructors Spend."
30. T. Kurtis, P. Salter, and G. Adams, "A Sociocultural Approach to Teaching About Racism," *Race and Pedagogy Journal* 1, no. 1 (2015); and B. Morling and D. Myers, "Teaching Current Directions in Psychological Science," Association for Psychological Science, March 30, 2018, [psychologicalscience.org/observer/teaching-current-directions-in-psychological-science-47#racism](http://psychologicalscience.org/observer/teaching-current-directions-in-psychological-science-47#racism).
31. G. Adams et al., "Teaching About Racism: Pernicious Implications of the Standard Portrayal," *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 30, no. 4 (2008): 349–361.

## Organizing and Mobilizing

(Continued from page 50)

10. A. Hertel-Fernandez, *Politics at Work: How Companies Turn Their Workers into Lobbyists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).
11. T. Powderly, *Thirty Years of Labor, 1859–1889* (Columbus, OH: Excelsior Printing House, 1889), 248, 250. On the Knights of Labor and solidarity, see P. Dray, *There Is Power in a Union: The Epic Story of Labor in America* (New York: Anchor Books, 2011), 122ff.
12. A. Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), chapter 5.
13. D. McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 164ff.
14. S. Fine, *Sit-Down: The General Motors Strike of 1936–1937* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969); and N. Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).
15. J. McCartin, *Collision Course: Ronald Reagan, the Air Traffic Controllers, and the Strike That Changed America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).



# Filling the gaps left by traditional insurance.

TRAUMA COUNSELING *plus* ENHANCED BENEFITS

Extend your AFT-provided counseling benefit at a discounted rate with Trauma Coverage:

- ✓ Income security
- ✓ Expense reimbursement
- ✓ Family protection

[traumacoverage.com/aft/enhanced-benefits](http://traumacoverage.com/aft/enhanced-benefits)



## ENJOY LOW AFT MEMBER-ONLY RATES!

Free Weekender Tote with your purchase of \$25 or more



Order online at [offers.buymags.com/tote](http://offers.buymags.com/tote) or call us at 800-774-9163

■ Time (50)	\$12.00	■ InStyle (12)	\$12.00	■ TV Guide (52)	\$39.96
■ Better Homes & Gardens (12)	\$14.97	■ Reader's Digest (10)	\$15.00	■ Entertainment Weekly (22)	\$20.00
■ New Yorker (47)	\$69.99	■ Sports Illustrated (16)	\$16.00	■ The Nation (30)	\$32.00
■ People (54)	\$40.00	■ Good Housekeeping (10)	\$10.00	■ Southern Living (13)	\$11.00
■ Highlights (12)	\$39.99	■ Real Simple (12)	\$15.00	■ Vanity Fair (12)	\$24.00
■ Atlantic Monthly (12)	\$59.99	■ Smithsonian (12)	\$26.00	■ Woman's Day (9)	\$12.00
■ New York (26)	\$70.00	■ Consumer Reports (13)	\$30.00	■ Economist (51)	\$189.99

Number of issues you'll receive with your 1-year subscription.

### Easy Ordering

Simply mark the magazines you'd like to order and mail this page and payment to:

AFT Subscription Services  
PO Box 830460  
Birmingham, AL 35283

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Bill Me    Check Enclosed (payable to AFTSS)



**Buymags**

Member Subscription Services  
Serving AFT members for over 30 years!

# Register for AFT Share My Lesson's 9th Annual Virtual Conference March 23–25, 2021



Be a part of the best online professional development event of the year, hosted by the AFT's Share My Lesson, for teachers, school staff, and parents.

This three-day virtual conference features 40+ free webinars on issues that are top of mind for supporting preK–12 students, including learning recovery, social and emotional recovery, culturally responsive practices, civic engagement and current events, cross-curricular instructional strategies, and trauma-sensitive practices.

Each session is worth one hour of professional development credit. Share My Lesson is now a New York State Education Department–approved provider for continuing teacher and leader education requirements. Details available upon registration.

*Note: All sessions will be available to watch on demand after the conference.*

## Keynotes



***The State of Public Education, 2021***  
Randi Weingarten, AFT President



***Road Map for Excellence in History and Civics Education for All Learners***  
Danielle Allen, Director, Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics at Harvard University, with iCivics

Register for free at  
[ShareMyLesson.com/vc2021](https://ShareMyLesson.com/vc2021)



**sharemy  
lesson**  
By Educators, For Educators

**virtual 2021**  
conference

The 2021 Virtual Conference is proudly sponsored by:

