

Advance unedited book review for upcoming issue of the *Journal of Negro Education*
Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching, Teaching for Change/PRRAC:
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By Randolph Carter, East Ed (www.easted.org), September 30, 2004

From two progressive organizations comes a book that merits the attention of scholars, teachers, students and families interested in the Civil Rights movement past and present. *Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching* is the product of years of research, dialogue and collaboration led by Teaching for Change and Poverty and Race Research Action Council. The emphasis on “movement” is timely and intentional. In many of our history or social studies classes where Civil Rights is being taught, the true dynamic nature of a struggle for social justice has been lost. This book is an anthology that places the teaching of Civil Rights where it belongs: a critical dialogue about the nature of movement in constructing democratic change.

The Movement, energy that was harnessed by collective action, allowed generations to teach and learn together. It allowed the older generation to teach the younger generation. It allowed the younger generation to rise to the challenges of leadership and responsibility: “The Civil Rights Movement was not merely an event orchestrated by one or more or a few people, but a series of events and actions collaboratively and strategically planned and carried out by many to achieve equity and justice for all” (p. 279).

50 years after *Brown vs. Board of Education*, this nation is reflecting on our gains in education and society and on the nature of race and social class in America. Those reflections inevitably include an assessment of the prevailing attitudes that forced court action to change deeply rooted attitudes and beliefs about difference and equality. This deliberative process is the energy and the potency that the authors of this book have harnessed. Their work has given us marching orders, an expanded and unified vision of the Movement and a definition of Civil Rights as an inclusive, contemporary mandate for this country.

Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching is more than a guide for teachers or a compendium of articles and resources. Rather, this book is one of the most important contributions to the struggle for Civil Rights (which is mistakenly referred to as an African American movement for voting rights) in recent times. While it is true that African American rights and inclusion were a major focus in 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, this book details struggle for the rights of Latinos, women, American Indians, gays and lesbians, the working class, Asians, and youth.

By offering 31 lesson plans and 86 articles that have been identified for elementary, middle and high school classes, *Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching* can be used as supplemental text for a wide range of classrooms. The authors, too, have marked lessons that have on-line resources and lessons materials. Divided into six chapters, the book uses a thematic approach to hold the breadth and depth of knowledge of the experiences during the critical years of activism. From the arguments of *Brown vs. Board* to the Hip Hop generation, the chapters are a template for reviewing important information that is often unavailable to classroom teachers, students, and their families. The chapters are:

Reflections on Teaching about the Movement

- Citizenship and Self-Determination

- Education
- Economic Justice
- Culture
- Looking Forward

The first chapter, “Reflections on Teaching about the Movement,” shares the experiences of teachers who have integrated the ideals of civil rights successfully in their teaching. Herb Kohl, Vincent Harding and Alana Murray are experienced voices that guide the reader into using the Movement as a teaching device that transcends a block of years or familiar faces. As Dr. Harding asserts, the Civil Rights movement, in many ways, was the beginning of American democracy.

In the chapter “Citizenship and Self Determination” the authors have collected a diversity of voices that span African American identity, women’s issues, the American Indian Movement (AIM), the Black Panther Party, the struggle of indigenous peoples in Mexico, and the fight against apartheid in South Africa. The authors also include the historic voices of Justice Thurgood Marshall, poetry of Rita Dove and perspectives of Bernice Reagan.

In an expansion on the first chapter’s thrust of teaching about civil rights, this section of the book looks to define freedom in terms of rights that people often times must get for themselves. It is reverberated in Malcolm X’s “Bullet or Ballot” speech, it is told again by Ward Churchill at Alcatraz: “There is no movement approach to education without rebuilding the movement”(p. 319).

In the chapter on “Education,” the content turns to exploring the idea of “movement” in education and its intersection with democratic ideals. The connectivity between progress in education for all and civil rights for all is deeply intertwined. Articles range from “Each School had a Graveyard,” a moving commentary on American Indian boarding schools, to the poem “Desegregation” written by Eloise Greenfield:

We walk the long path
 Lined with shouting
 Nightmare faces
 Nightmare voices
 Inside the school
 There are eyes that glare
 And eyes that are distant. (p. 280)

School-aged children, innocent warriors who were sent to battle without a soldier’s training, had an innate sense of a mission that must be won. The rebuilding of the Movement is enlisting young people and explaining their role in developing their future.

“Economic Justice,” the fourth chapter, brings together one of the most important aspects of the Civil Rights years. After being mobilized into marches and demonstrations, capturing media headlines, and electing a few representatives, how did we measure the victory once folks went home? Marcus Garvey, Bill Russell and Caesar Chavez pose critical questions: what is economic justice? How do we change the conditions of the lives of citizens in a way that they retain control of their lives?

In “Culture,” the book examines the contributions of the arts in sustaining and maintaining the Movement and the spirit of the people. Poetry, murals, literature, and an analysis of the Hip Hop culture remind the reader that movements for civil rights can be a liberating force as reflected in creative energies that lift up the author/artist as the guardian of both grand and day-to-day expressions.

The book ends with a look into the future and fittingly asks poignant questions: “Thirty years ago, racial oppression was the main contradiction. Today the contradictions we face are economic, social and environmental...How do we make a living”? (p.534) The overarching theme here focuses on what the continuing legacy of the Movement will be, especially with the younger generations. In “What Happened to Your Generation’s Promise of ‘Love and Revolution,’ A Letter to Angela Davis,” Elsa Ulen writes: “We are crying out to you in the dark. We have come of age without the wisdom of earlier generations. We have your style, but we don’t have your substance. Tupac was just a symbol of our murdered potential” (p. 494). This final chapter challenges the reader, young and old, to take responsibility for the Movement.

One of the great assets of *Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching* is access to the archives of activists and authors who framed the words and actions that moved a nation. The works of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, June Jordan, Caesar Chavez, Bayard Rustin, Septima Clark, Sonia Sanchez, Stokely Carmichael, and Manning Marable are available in a format that allows student or teacher to understand the contributions each person made and their place in history.

The authors recognize that organizations left a powerful imprint on the Civil Rights Movement. Although often reduced to a single phrase, if mentioned at all, The Black Panthers, American Indian Movement, Farm Workers United, Sanitation Workers and others provided logistical and inspirational support to organizers across the country. To provide a connection to these earlier movements, the authors include By Any Means Necessary (BAMN), an exemplary organization of current young people who have taken up the Movement and defined the work of social justice in their own terms.

While the content of the six chapters is compelling, the authors have also organized the 562 pages to be accessible and user-friendly. A multi-media approach has been taken to exploit the availability of technology that may appeal to younger readers and teachers who are internet savvy. For example, websites such as www.laborheritage.org, www.civilrightsteaching.org, www.teachingforchange.org, and www.prrac.org extend the material in the book and connect the teacher/student to other materials and organizations.

Finally, the book is written in a manner that reflects its goals. Authors Menkart, View and Murray themselves represent the diversity of the Movement. Their work as a collaborative team is evident in the sensitivity, inclusion, and articulation of multiple perspectives. This is a book I call a journey that reinforces both scholarship and activism, the essence of our Movement. In the words of Leonard Peltier: “We need each other... We are each absolutely essential” (p. 536).