THE CHANGE WE SEEK: Creative History as Social Justice

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Creative History as Social Justice

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Abstract

Abstract

In what ways could digital tools enhance the historical material of oral history to inspire public engagement and deepen understanding of the complexity of systemic racism in America?

The Change We Seek is a project that intends to promote social change through reimagining how oral history can be used and presented to better inform collegiate and high school students on complex issues of race in American society.

Through utilizing the educational value of sharing narratives from people of color (POC), and animation, this project is an all-out effort to redefine how oral history has the potential to provoke a realization within the American public of its sizeable racial disparity.

The research included in this paper also documents significant historical and theoretical research that shapes the content produced for *The Change We Seek*. This research charts numerous instances of how the foundations which shape American society, most specifically education, have significantly affected the lives of black people forcing readers and viewers of content produced from *The Change Week Seek* to understand the gravity of America's racial divide.

Introduction: A Needed Change

The inconvenient truth is that racial progress in this country is always more complex and frequently more illusory than it appears at first glance.

– *Michelle Alexander*

Section 1: American Education

American education has failed to properly enlighten Americans on topics of race. Not only do educational institutions in America have a longstanding history of avoiding racial discussion and sharing the cultural history of its minorities but have also failed to adapt the few lessons that do to investigating the complex nature of how racism operates today. Much of racial education still abides by a simplistic, non-immersive lens that does not provide an understanding needed to challenge a deeply complex and embedded American philosophy that perpetuates ignorance toward movements of social injustice and systemic racism.

Through current events of social unrest, we have seen a lack of American understanding of complex issues of race. As the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and many other black people sparked a nationwide movement for social activism, what also came to the forefront was a lack of empathy and apprehension by many Americans of why POC was stating, “Black Lives Matter” in a time of racial unrest.

Figure 1: *Where George Floyd Was Killed. Yang,* Caroline. New York Times., 2020.

The statement alone may be simple at face value but elicited as much reaction as it did and continues to do because its undertones are complex. That in stating “Black Lives Matter” it presents a declaration acknowledging that black people have lived in a society that has

perpetuated systematic racism for over 400 years—from slavery, to convict labor, to

lynchings, to mass incarceration, to George Floyd.

These continuous injustices had not manifested from thin air but through an American system of racial injustice that instills discomfort in talking about the plight of black people. A plight that today places 1 in 3 black men in prison, positions its black youth at the bottom of America's achievement gap, and ensures Black citizens are contained within a wage gap between its racial majority.

Though those three words are powerful, the common non-critical race theory or non immersive educational models in place do and will not allow the public to understand the importance and complexities presented within the statement unless one is personally exposed to elements of systemic racism or has acquired a deep understanding of black history.

Thus, educational methods that attempt to discuss and educate Americans on racial topics must differ from common forms of education. Education on racial issues must immersively reveal what American society has systematically hidden for generations. That racial injustice happens to persons of color daily.

Figure 2: *The Change We Seek* Prototype Animated Video: Reveal Racism.

Section 2: A Need for Voices

From Abolition to the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, black people have come

together and shared their personal experiences to change the society they lived in. Whether it was Fredrick Douglass or Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK), their determination and communicative skills introduced a collective acknowledgment by American citizens of racial injustice.

POC's resolve, insight, and voices resulted in the overthrow of significant racist ideology that was for generations enforced through American learning and racially biased mainstream media. Through inspiring words and the intellectually versed, POC made successful efforts to create equality in a society that had continually incited white people to go out of their way to define black people as chattel, ignorant, and second-class citizens.

Thus, after May 25, 2020, when American citizens once again have come face to face with its history of continued racism, content and intellectual analysis from America's minority groups must be shared to address the significant issues involved with racial education that plagues this nation.

Just as the written words of Frederick Douglass inspired thousands of people to fight for the abolition of African slaves, or the audible statements of MLK led to the creation of the Civil Rights Bill of 1964; POC must utilize every accessible medium to its fullest potential to change how Americans view their racially insensitive social norms.

Figure 3: The Killing of George Floyd: What We Know. Grisesdieck, Judy, MPR News, 2020

It is a recent acknowledgment of this needed push to share the experiences of POC through various creative mediums that recent literature and social justice studies have begun to utilize. As within the progression of oral history (which are recorded interviews that focus

on significant recollections of historical moments or social issues), POC have redefined racially biased stereotypes and history through the creations of community archives and forms of engaging media.

For example, the effects of police brutality were recorded through a community effort in Cleveland named, *A People's Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland.* Participants of the internet-based archive used oral history to give narratives told by POC a platform for intellectual authority over social injustice.

Moreover, in the creation of a historical graphic novel named *March* by Civil Rights leader John Lewis, Lewis creatively presented his own experiences in a graphic novel that became an immersive way to unveil the history of racial injustice in America to its youth (Lewis; Righting the Record).

These approaches in progressive media were seconded by creations within Critical Race Theory (which is a theoretical framework in social science that examines society and culture as they relate to race, law, and power). This theoretical foundation explains that insights told by black and brown people can result in groundbreaking research that has redefined what racism is and where it exists in American society. This redefinition has resulted in award-winning publications and creative media that immersively challenges hidden systems of American racism, such as Carol Anderson's book *White Rage* (2016) and Ava DuVernay's video documentary, *13th*.

Thus, through the acknowledgment that voices of color need to be heard through newer and immersive mediums, *The Change We Seek* intends to expound upon this need using oral history and critical race theory to understand how one can successfully provide students with an understanding of America's racial disparity and educate them about complex topics of race.

The Change We Seek is an all-out and unapologetic effort to do what generations of black and brown people have worked for generations to do. To change the fundamental parts of society that perpetuate racial inequity through presenting young Americans with voices of

color that expose America’s racially biased nature.

Section 3: Project Definition

The Change We Seek, is an animated oral history series that intends to collect, animate, and evaluate interviews from POC who have experienced moments of racial inequity in American society and made significant efforts to change it for the betterment of all persons. Interviews collected delve into the variance of racial inequity in American society, from the effects of racially biased educational legislation to moments of microaggressions in higher learning institutions.

Through its creation, this project aims to enhance the historical material of oral history using digital media and highlight personal accounts from black and brown people, which are proven forms of cultural education and social justice.

In this project, the term enhancement is defined as an improvement in the visual literacy and educational value of a historical material using digital tools. Within this enhancement, the goal is to create educational content that teachers and students can utilize to gain insight into America’s racial disparities and cultural history.

First Implementation

Within this first iteration of *The Change We Seek* one, four-minute animated video was created. This animated video, called an enhanced oral history, is a part of an educational series that intends to highlight existing racial disparities in America’s learning spaces.

Figure 4: *The Change We Seek* Prototype Animated Video: Education Series Title Card

The education series was established through a process of collecting oral histories about racial inequalities in American schooling, forming a historical argument from accumulated interviews, animating a significant historical memory that parallels the series argument, and evaluating its educational value after it was created. It is a process that seeks to ensure the series' enhanced oral history maintained historical integrity and a meaningful educational message.

Figure 5: *The Change We Seek* Education: Visual Outline

Using the storytelling nature of oral history and the pedological value of sharing narratives from POC the creation of this series is an intellectual exertion to discover what theoretical concepts define the importance of enhancing oral histories, how the historical material can be converted into immersive tools of education, and highlight how aesthetic design can better inform students on topics of race.

It is recommended to read this paper after viewing the enhanced oral history. The enhanced oral history is available for public viewing at NC State's *Innovation Studio* (D.H. Hill Jr. Library), my personal website dbcreates.com, and on YouTube (under the channel DB Creates).

Chapter 1: Defining Oral History

[11]

Oral history's value derives not from resisting the unexpected but from relishing it. By adding an ever-wider range of voices to the story, oral history does not simplify.

- *Donald A. Ritchie* [12]

Section 1: Oral History

In being a public historian, I have always been asked often, what is oral history? Is it an interview? Are they stories? Can anyone do it? During years of archiving in museums, building exhibits, and conducting numerous oral histories, I've realized that there is no other historical artifact with so many different interpretations and definitions. This variety of oral history interpretations has resulted in the litany of questions that people have asked me about oral history. However, the confusion makes sense in terms of how complex and

widely used the historical resource has become.

Oral history is more than just a historical source but an entire field of study as well. As defined by the *Oral History Association*, "oral history is a field of study and a method of gathering, persevering and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events" (Oral History: Defined). Thus, oral history operates on two planes of utilization. It is a practice that must be performed to create the historical resource, and a method of research that once created is analyzed by scholars.

Thus, because oral history is both a tool and method of research its use and theory surrounding it has been defined by numerous disciplines other than history. Without the traditional methods that oral historians held themselves to until the 70s, other disciplines, such as literature and folklore, expanded the uses of oral history that catered to telling stories of marginalized communities (Abrams 2,3). Its result was creating an oral history discipline that helped facilitate a movement towards the forgotten and oppressed. A historical tool that redefined how social justice could be performed.

The tool and discipline grew to be used by social historians that reexamined 300 years of American slavery through the lens of the oppressed, revisited historical moments of racial injustice, and presented new social justice projects intended to challenge how Americans view topics of race in contemporary times.

It is this discipline that *The Change We Seek* intends to utilize to promote social justice and create its content as it gives marginalized communities and POC a voice to correct falsified preconceptions, express the need for societal change, and contains the immersive potential to connect with its audience through personal storytelling.

Section 2: The History of Oral History

To chart the significance that oral history has had on promoting voices in marginalized communities, it is necessary to follow the progression of the field from its origins. Tracing the roots of oral history goes further back than any other historical source. Since the

beginning of historical documentation, oral history has been used as a research tool to illustrate the happenings of a historical moment. It is an instance that is evidenced by the famous Greek historian Thucydides who wrote, the first know historical writing which referenced "eye-witnesses" accounts of the Peloponnesian Wars (Ritchie 49).

However, even though oral history was the first historical record, academic historians strayed away from oral history. In the late 1700s, historians considered printed sources as the authority for curating historical moments. This focus on printed sources was spurred on by advancing press production and a reliance on empirical study created by the German School of Scientific history during this period (Ritchie 3; History of Oral History). Therefore, throughout the late 1700s to mid-20th century, historians relied upon written records to curate history and only referenced oral histories as secondary materials (Ritchie 3; History of Oral History). Thus, the historical tool of oral history and efforts centered around recording personal experiences were only utilized by either non-traditional historians or outside the field of history.

As American memory and historical interpretation became prominent after the Civil War, non-traditional historians began to reuse intellectual interviewing during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This effort of reusing the historical source was meant to preserve cultural history and overturn American history that had begun to illustrate "romantic images of the Antebellum South" after the Civil War (Ritchie 3; Blight 12).

In 1890, historian Frederic Bancroft traveled throughout the South to collect experiences of slavery from freedmen by handwriting their experiences down (Ritchie 3). In his journey across the South, Bancroft sought to expose the harsh realities of slavery that oppressed black people and placed white elites at the top of Southern society.

Bancroft's interviews led to a foundational analysis of slavery he published called *Slave Trading in the Old South* (1931). As stated by The *University of South Carolina Press*, "Frederic Bancroft exploded deeply entrenched myths about antebellum slavery when *Slave Trading in the Old South* was first published in 1931" (Tadman). His publication was a form of social justice analysis created and inspired by oral histories that combated America's

"whitewashing" of American history (Tadman).

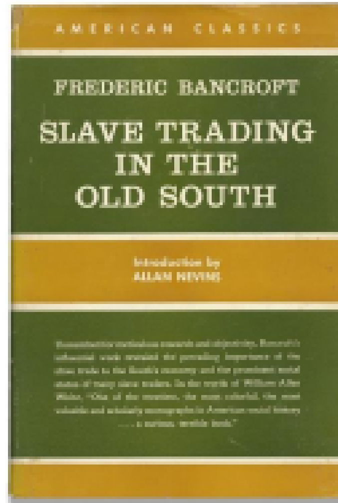


Figure 6: Slave Trading in the Old South, South Carolina Press, Abebooks, 2021

The theme of using written, oral recordings to archive the experiences of marginalized people continued throughout the 1930s with one of the largest efforts of oral history. The New Deal Federal Writers Project (WPA), created in 1935, was made to give many unemployed American citizens, due to the Great Depression, job opportunities. These opportunities provided by the project would include recording the history of everyday American citizens (New Deal Programs).

The WPA included "more than 6,000 writers, recording over 10,000 recollections from a variety of Americans" (Abrams,4). This project expounded on Bancroft's interest in collecting insight from POC as the director of the WPA, Ben Botkin, claimed the handwritten interviewees "gave answers which only they (former slaves) can give, to questions we still ask: What does it mean to be a slave? What does it mean to be free" (Ritchie 4)? These questions from Botkin hint that people performing oral histories inquired about cultural

content that POC could only provide. These oral histories told by former slaves were lived retellings that illustrated experiences that many Americans did not share or understand. The interviews were a gateway into hearing and learning about complex history from the eyes and voices of communities that were oppressed.

Becoming a Discipline

Even though historical projects like Bancroft's and the WPA were large in scope and created a framework for how oral histories could tell the stories of marginalized communities, oral history did not truly become a discipline until 1948. During this year, American historian Allan Nevins, from Columbia University, decided to create the first oral history archive at Columbia University. Nevins sought to create an archive that would utilize an advancement in technology and systematically collect a record of "significant lives" (Abrams 3,44; Ritchie, 4-5). Nevins used a tape recorder with the intent of interviewing "great men" (Ritchie 6-12). Although his approach catered to only elite white men, it made the historical tool a "modern technique" and part of an academic sphere that began to view oral histories as a credible and unique audible source.

To historians, tape recorders made oral history interviews re-playable recordings that could be quickly transcribed compared to written down interviews that were prone to human error (Leavy). Nevins archival process and other Universities, such as the University of California at Berkeley, led to oral history becoming a universal practice throughout the 60s. During this decade, both the Harry S. Truman Library Program, which collected oral histories, and the *Oral History Association* were founded (Ritchie 4,5).

Section 3: A Shift in History

By the early to mid-60s, a dynamic shift in the field or history began to occur, a large part of this due to recognition in the historical field that marginalized communities such as the working class and POC were active agents in history. During this period, a new wave entered the field of history that focused upon history "from the bottom up" as inspired by E.P. Thompson's publication *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) (Ritchie 49).

Thompson's book posited that everyday people were active participants in controlling the outcome of history, introducing what would be called social history. This history presented a significant detour from prior historical beliefs that only the elite or persons of momentous

circumstances dictated significant changes in societal outcomes. This new use of social history made previous works that failed to include marginalized insights outdated (Ritchie 6; Lynd 6).

As American scholars throughout the late 60s and into the 80s began to dive deep into narratives, such as feminism and minority studies, the use of social history resulted in oral history projects that utilized new recordings. Historians began recording new feminist and black and brown interviews, including voices of marginalized and local communities into their curations of history.

Social history, in which oral history was directly influenced, had thus redefined recorded narratives of history that for generations was exclusive, racially biased, and class-favored. As stated by Donald Ritchie in his book, *Doing Oral History* (1994):

> A new generation of American historians began writing history "from the bottom up." Many of these interviewers came out of the civil rights, antiwar, and feminist movements. Eager to write history of those groups left out of the standard history texts, they lacked the abundant manuscript resources and formal documentation available on the elites and turned instead to oral sources. (Ritchie 7)

This growth in using oral sources produced numerous influential bestsellers that addressed significant social topics in American society that would later become creative works that transcended the traditional medium of text and how narratives in oral history could be used, such as Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976).

This publication was a story of a fictional African slave named Kunta Kinte, that was inspired by the personal accounts of slaves located in oral histories. The story followed Kinte's life in slavery, demonstrating the harshness of slavery, the creation of American black criminality, and slavery's generational effect on the African American experience (Hanley). Hanley's work was on the New York Top Seller List for forty-six weeks and was later adapted into an American television miniseries in 1977.

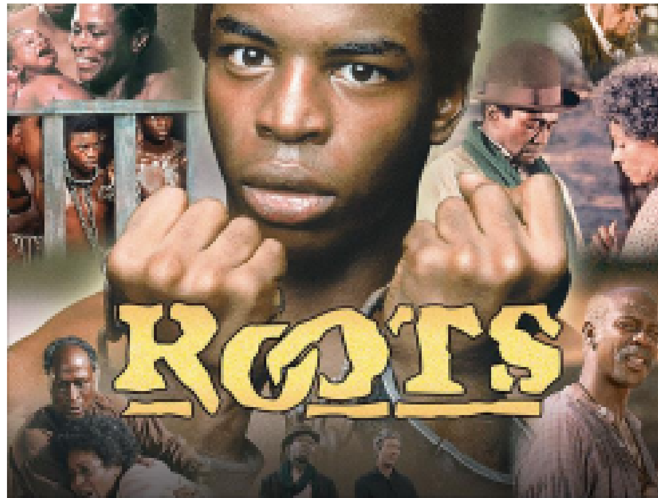


Figure 7: Roots, Alex Haley, Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. 2016.

The miniseries won both a Golden Globe and Peabody award, drawing over 130 million total television viewers, which was more than half of the U.S. population (Best Seller List, ABC). It displayed that oral history was a successful tool for immersively educating Americans on the cultural history of marginalized groups and could be adapted into captivating narratives that made Americans listen to the voices of black people. As stated by Haley when discussing the use of oral histories:

> In those days, slaves were sold and shifted much like livestock, so records were sporadic. Nor did records reflect things like children born from unions between white masters and black women. So, to expect these records to provide an accurate account is pure naivete. When it comes to black genealogy, well-kept oral history is without question the best source. (Kaplan)

Alex Haley's publication and other oral history-inspired projects throughout the 70s and 80s would open Americans' eyes to the reality of their countries' history of racial injustice.

Thus, oral history became an intellectual resource that refined how history was and could be told through its use of auditory and storytelling nature. The historical material grew to develop the innate ability to tell narratives from the perspectives of POC in an intellectually supported and engaging way. This uniqueness of oral history is what postmodern oral

historians have expounded upon to produce more narratives from POC and enhance how the historical material is accessed.

Chapter 2: Postmodernist Oral History

Oral history is a composite genre which requires that we think flexibly, across and between disciplinary boundaries, in order to make the most of this rich and complex source.

- *Lynn Abrams*

Technology enriches a story.

- *Valerie J. Janesick*

Section 1: Postmodernist Oral History

As scholars who use oral history are now continually interviewing people with different

experiences and developing projects that seek to delve into the untold realities of various social issues, the field of oral history has entered an era that branches from postmodernist approaches. As defined by professor of educational and policy studies at the University of South Florida, Valerie Janesick, postmodernist oral historians utilize multiple forms of media to collect oral history and seek to interactively interpret the historical source because they believe it lends itself to creative interpretation due to its storytelling and auditory nature (Janesick 114-116).

Postmodernists are also aware that oral histories can be formulated into projects that seek to tell and present experiences of the unheard, as contained within oral histories are collections of stories that help people make sense of the world around them. This understanding of stories thus shapes one's societal perceptions that are usually skewed towards the majority. (114-116).

Thus, by creatively introducing narratives that are not often told or analyzed, postmodernists use oral history projects as a means for expressing social justice or simply preserving the experiences of others to counter racially biased preconceptions in society.

These two natures of creative interpretation and social justice theory within postmodernist oral history are what *The Change We Seek* intends to utilize and expound upon. To express narratives from POC through oral histories, storytelling nature, and creative potential to promote social justice.

Section 2: The Storytelling Nature of Oral History

A significant reason why oral histories contain a storytelling nature is that it is produced through an interview format. Oral history can only be produced through an interaction between an interviewer and interviewee, making the historical record strictly reliant on human interaction. These human interactions parse out elements of human communication that cater towards explaining how an interviewee interprets the world they live in or how they have experienced it.

These elements of human communication are especially present when individuals retell a lived experience as humans often divulge their experiences through a story format. As stated by Jonathan Gottschall in the *Storytelling Animal* (2012), "Humans are creatures of story, so story touches nearly every aspect of our lives" (Gottschall 15). Therefore, much of oral history tends to include stories, as people often tell their experiences through a narrative. In these narratives, the human mind seeks to impose meaning to a lived moment that an interviewee finds significant. This intellectual exercise performed by the mind forms a story and gives an oral historian an idea of how societal elements or personal interactions can develop personal historical memories.

Thus, oral history is both apart and lends itself to the nature of storytelling as the historical material, through its auditory nature, is an expression of how an interviewee communicates to its interviewer their interpretation of the world by sharing narratives that include specific words and actions which illustrate their thoughts. As defined by the National Storytelling Network, storytelling is "the interactive art of using words and actions to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener's imagination" (What Is Storytelling?). It is this storytelling nature that lends the auditory source to creative interpretation and its public interest.

Section 3: Audio-Based Stories

Through oral history's auditory use, the historical tool becomes an interactive narrative as the words expressed by the interviewee are actively provided to its audience. For example, in listening to an oral history from Joseph McNeil, one of the A&T Four, a listener of his oral history can hear every tonal variation or vocal inflection when he recounts moments leading up to him sitting at a "white-only" lunch counter (Sit-Ins in Greensboro). So, when he puts a deep tonal emphasis on the words "We decided to take a stand" after explaining how living in a segregated society upset him because it continuously labeled him and people who looked like him as inferior to their white counterparts the narratives audience can understand how significant sitting at a "white-only" counter meant to him (NYU Stern).

Figure 8: A&T Four, Moebes, Jack, *News & Record*, 1960.

It is essential context provided and curated by the interviewees' voice; McNeil's vocal inflections convey to its audience an unseen meaning that can emphasize content spoken at certain parts in which we as the listener tend to remember as well.

This audio element separates oral history from other historical materials as the medium can interactively describe a historical memory through the voice of its creator that a historical document or artifact cannot provide, as traditional historical records force the viewer to infer their own emotional interpretation about a specific time or moment instead of being provided by its creator.

Thus, through oral histories humanistic nature of storytelling and medium it allows users of oral history to produce meaningful and creative productions using digital tools that postmodernists have begun to experiment with—an example of this postmodern oral history being displayed through creations from *StoryCorps*. Created in 2003 *StoryCorps* is a company that seeks to bring people together by collecting and sharing emotional experiences that have an overall positive narrative, many of which are oral histories (StoryCorps).

The stories told in *StoryCorps* are far from traditional. They are focused more on presenting the story itself rather than analyzing the cultural environment or historical memory of an archived experience. However, the materials produced in *StoryCorps* have become an unignorable entity in the field of postmodernist oral history. Its stories have been featured

on *NPR* radio, received Peabody Awards because of its creative use of collected narratives, and has acquired millions of views on their YouTube channel. Its success in presenting narratives from oral histories has extensively shown the historical materials potential to connect with large audiences that seem to always be enthralled with an exciting or emotional moment of history (*StoryCorps About*; *StoryCorps)*.

Figure 9: StoryCorps Griot, National Museum of African American History & Culture, *2021*

StoryCorps utilizes an approach to oral history that focuses on the auditory aspect of the material. Being able to hear the voice of a person sharing their lived experience with you brings them to life. Hearing the interviewees' voice defines them as a storyteller, making the auditory experience of an oral history intimate with its listener even if the interviewee is deceased or not in front of you. As expressed by the CEO of *StoryCorps*:

> When you're listening in your car or your headphones, it's as if that person is whispering in your ear. It's very intimate. You're right there. A story authentically told is like an adrenaline shot to the heart. I don't think there's any better way of telling emotional stories. (Singh)

This attention to the auditory nature of oral history from *StoryCorps* expresses how powerful the medium can be if significant stories in an oral history are shared. By focusing on the storytelling nature of oral history, it enhances the engagement and meaning of the historical source.

Rather than forcing the public to listen to an entire hour-long oral history that they must

seek out for themselves, they are instead given a meaningful story fueled by the intimacy of audio (Singh). This gives the audience an emotional investment that encourages them to listen to the full content within the oral history and provides its curators with more possibilities of storytelling with the stories they collect from oral histories.

Section 4: Multimedia and Educational Advancement

As the postmodernist approach has grown since the 80s to become commonly used, what has paralleled with its progression is a vested interest by academics to combine multimedia with oral histories. Because oral history contains narratives that are easily aesthetically imagined through its storytelling nature and contains powerful enlightening statements from its interviewees, postmodernists have sought to utilize an expanding tool belt of mediums to enhance these narratives from POC that exist within the historical record.

From using the format of graphic novels to illustrate vital historical moments to applying animation to break down complex concepts presented by interviewees, a joint agreement in these attempts to enhance the historical record is a definite pedagogical value in adding media to the medium. This significant educational value is found in case studies and academic research, which defines the postmodernists' need to combine oral history and multimedia.

Artistic Oral History

> I know now that Uncle Otis saw something in me that I hadn’ t yet see. That is why we took our trip on June of 51’. There would be not restaurants for us to stop at until we were out of the South, stopping for gas and bathroom breaks took careful planning. Uncle Otis had made this trip before, and he knew which places along the way offered “colored” bathrooms—and which were safer to just pass on by. Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky these we the states we had to be careful in as we made our way North. Black drivers we passed going the other direction, from North to

> South, faced an added danger their license plates making them visible targets. Sometimes they had to face worse. It wasn't until we got into Ohio that I could feel Uncle Otis relax—and so I relaxed, too. (Lewis 39-41)

This experience is a recollection from a Civil Rights leader and once U.S. Representative for Georgia 5th congressional district John Lewis. In this narrative, Lewis retells what it was like to live in America during segregation, recalling when he traveled with his uncle Otis from the South to the North. Lewis explains that in being black he and his uncle had to abide by segregation laws through the South. This American enforcement of segregation limited their ability to venture into certain areas or travel in the South without a constant awareness of white people's presence (39).

His narrative is a powerful one. It is a piece of history that was uncovered through oral history and recorded for others to encounter. Its written depiction does not use either the auditory or visual potential that oral history contains but gives one a brief understanding of what segregation was like. However, what if this narrative was presented differently? What if these once spoken words were presented with aesthetic content that the historical material lends itself to?

It is a question that is answered in John Lewis's historical graphic novel, *March. March* is a graphic novel that uses parts of autobiographical oral histories combined with inked images to construct its narrative following Lewis's experiences during the Civil Rights Movement. It is a narrative that centers upon the importance of using aesthetics to enhance oral history's educational value, presenting its ability to break down complex cultural narratives using imagery.

In knowing this context, now read the same narrative told by Lewis presented earlier with the art style of *March*:

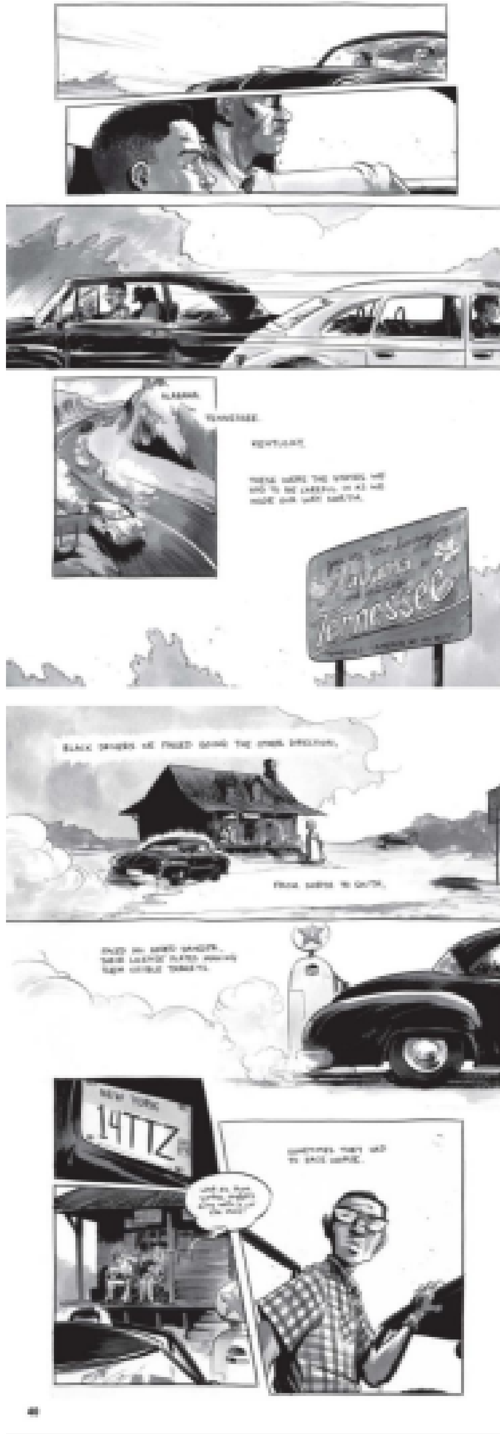

ALABAMA.
TENNESSEE.
KENTUCKY.
Tennessee
NEW YORK
14TTZ

Figure 10: *March*. Aydin, Lewis, Powell. Top Self Productions., 2013. 37
Figure 10A: *March*. Aydin, Lewis, Powell. Top Self Productions., 2013. 38
Figure 10B: *March*. Aydin, Lewis, Powell. Top Self Productions., 2013. 39
Figure 10C: *March*. Aydin, Lewis, Powell. Top Self Productions., 2013. 40
Figure 10D: *March*. Aydin, Lewis, Powell. Top Self Productions., 2013. 41

In the second read, there are apparent differences in how the narrative is interpreted. For instance, the images provide its viewers with a visual bridge that fills gaps in a narrative that requires a level of cultural understanding. As within the transcribed version of the oral history, Lewis never clearly articulates that he and his uncle were avoiding spaces where white people in the South lived or the exact severity of visiting those spaces. However, the images provided within the graphic novel format introduces this existing contextual information using visual literacy.

This is best demonstrated when Lewis states, "…Uncle Otis had made this trip before, and he knew which places along the way offered "colored" bathrooms and which were safer to just pass on by…" referring to places that were best to avoid during segregation for black

people. This graphic novel panel shows the faces of two white men sitting at the front of a gas station who have threatening looks (39).

The visualization is simple, but details to the reader that segregation was enforced heavily between white people and black people showing the existing danger of not abiding by its enforcement that could lead to either arguments or violence. It is an illustrative enhancement of an oral history that educates the reader on racial issues, no matter what pre-existing knowledge they may have or lack, while simultaneously getting them closer to how Lewis reimagines his significant historical memories.

This graphic nature of *March* has resulted in its use in today's public schools. In 2017 both San Francisco and New York schools adopted the novel as part of their 8th-grade "core curriculum" for American History (Carson). The graphic novel was used as an educational resource for teachers to ask questions about historical moments during the Civil Rights Movement and even provoke race-centered critical analysis.

It is a curriculum that invites students to answer questions about racial topics by attempting to infer cultural differences or narratives presented in a visual format. These lessons provoke students to think about these all-important topics in America critically. The graphic novel has become a gateway for both the public and students to engage in critical thinking, a key component of America's core curriculum standards in institutions of higher learning (Foundation for Critical Thinking). As defined by the Common Core Standards, a "graphic novel format, provides verbal and visual storytelling that addresses multi-model teaching, and meets Common Core State Standards" (Jaffe).

Documentaries and Animation

Another key example of a postmodernist approach that utilizes multimedia to enhance the educational value of oral history or interviews is the award-winning documentary the *13th*. This educational documentary created by Ava DuVernay presents the mass criminalization of black men in American society dating back to its creation.

Figure 11: *13th*. Ava DuVernay. Netflix, 2016

Throughout the documentary, DuVernay utilizes numerous forms of media ranging from strictly audio recorded interviews to animated visualizations that break down complex statistical evidence and racial topics. In her documentary, the visuals are used to enhance the viewer's experience and force them to grapple with understanding complex issues of race (DuVernay). An example of this is presented near the beginning of the documentary when DuVernay pairs multiple audio excerpts from interviews she performed with visualizations of historical evidence. As one of the interviewees' states:

> The thirteen amendment to the constitution makes it unconstitutional for someone to be held as a slave. In other words, it grants freedom to all Americans. There are exceptions including criminals, (next interviewee), there is a clause, a loophole (next interviewee). If you have that embedded in the structure in this constitutional language, then it is there to be used as a tool for whichever purpose one wants to use it. (Duvernay)

Through these words spoken by each interviewee, there are several animations displayed that visually enhance these descriptions. When the first interviewee states, "The thirteen amendment to the constitution makes it unconstitutional for someone to be held as a slave. In other words, it grants freedom to all Americans," an animation zooms into a roman numeral of thirteen displaying the words within the 13th Amendment, followed by an animation of doves flying out of the word freedom (DuVernay).

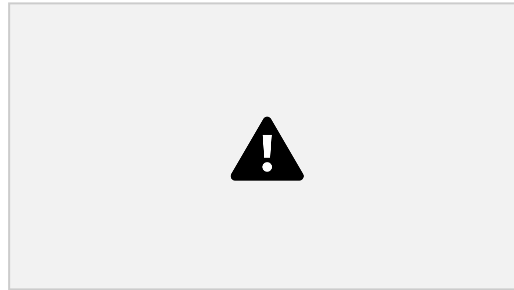
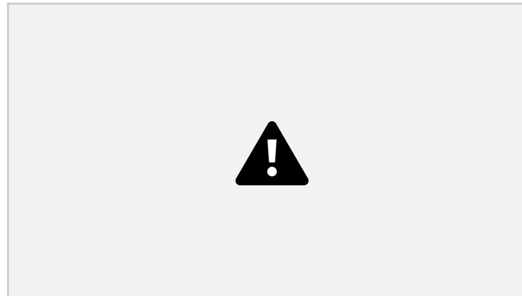


Figure 11A: *13th*. Ava Duvernay. Netflix., 2013. (00:01:51).

Figure 11B: *13th*. Ava Duvernay. Netflix., 2013. (00:01:51).



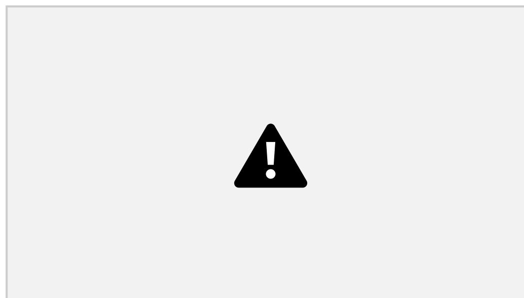
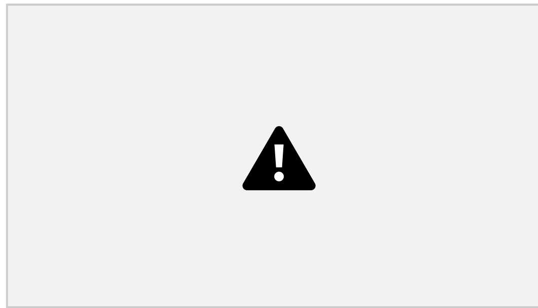


Figure 11C: *13th*. Ava Duvernay. Netflix., 2013. (00:01:55).

Figure 11D: *13th*. Ava Duvernay. Netflix., 2013. (00:02:01).

However, when the scene starts to describe the loophole within the 13th Amendment, it displays within the American flag African slaves, which transitions into a section of the thirteenth Amendment that clearly states this loophole.



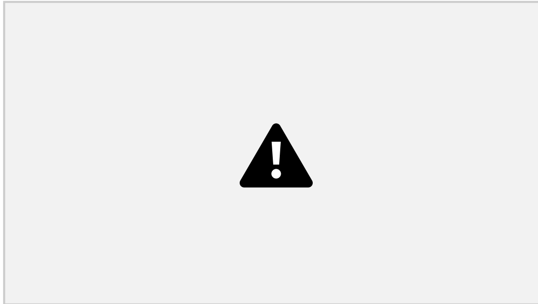


Figure 11E: *13th*. Ava Duvernay. Netflix., 2013. (00:02:06).

Figure 11F: *13th*. Ava Duvernay. Netflix., 2013. (00:02:10).

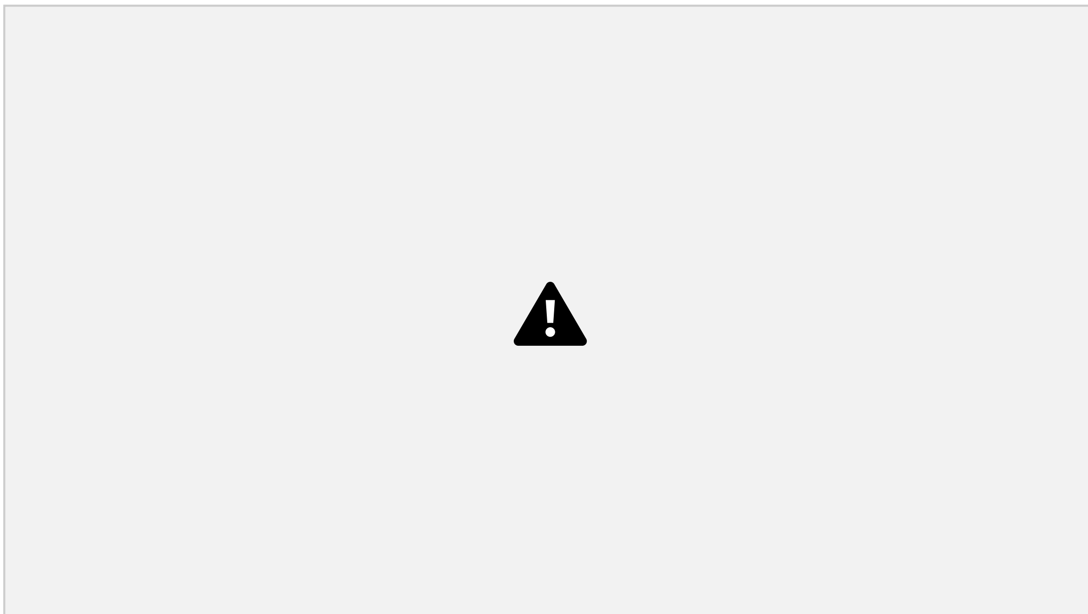


Figure 11G: *13th*. Ava Duvernay. Netflix., 2013. (00:02:15).

It is a visualization that allows the viewer to understand the historical context behind the interviewees' words as one can see America's history of attempting to control black bodies through displaying a slave ship and the ever-present loophole in the thirteen Amendment. These visualizations are significant as they show how multimedia and especially animation can enhance the meaning of an interviewees' words (DuVernay).

As stated by Sara Juarez in The Power of Documentary, "Documentaries not only enhance our aesthetic awareness but also our social consciousness" (Juarez). The interplay between the intimacy of audio and aesthetic visualizations gives any viewer of the *13th* a social consciousness of the historical context behind each interviewee's words. Thus, animation provides an aesthetic bridge of cultural understanding that could not be provided with only the auditory component of oral history.

Thus, *The Change We Seek* will utilize the postmodernist approach by using forms of multimedia, such as edited audio, creative imagery, and animation to provide its viewers with an aesthetic awareness about important historical and cultural context that affects the experiences of POC.

Chapter 3- Defining Critical Race Theory

As race relations continue to shape our lives in the new century—setting the stage for new tragedies and new hopes—critical race theory has become an indispensable tool for making sense of it all.

- *Angela Harris*

Section 1: The Core Concepts of Critical Race Theory

As Americans have started to grapple with the complex nature of race relations in American society due to continuous acts of police brutality, the search for newer models of racial education has become prominent. Citizens who have not been aware of America's long history of racism or deeply embedded racially biased legislation are now seeking to understand why an African American man can be choked by the police for eight minutes and forty-six seconds in a county that claims it is the land of the free (Hill). Thus, many academic professionals and institutions have begun to utilize the theoretical model of Critical Race Theory (CRT). As defined by Purdue University's Online Writing Lab:

> Critical Race Theory, or CRT, is a theoretical and interpretive mode that examines the appearance of race and racism across dominant cultural modes of expression. In adopting this approach, CRT scholars attempt to understand how victims of systemic racism are affected by cultural perceptions of race and how they are able to represent themselves to counter prejudice. (Purdue)

It is an approach that places race at the center of its analysis. Unique from other modes of analysis, CRT seeks to expose racism that is often hidden through generations of unequal racial treatment by using key concepts. These concepts are as follows:

1. "Racism is ordinary." "Racism is ordinary" refers to the theoretical stance that racism is a common occurrence, facilitated by systems of oppression, that POC grapple with on an everyday basis.

2. Closely tied to the "ordinary" belief, is systemic racism (Delgado, 3,4). It is a concept that presents systems in America gives affordances to white people over POC, which

has resulted in both “hidden-psychological” and physical negative effects on POC as expressed by Professor of Civil Rights at Alabama University and co-founder of Critical Race Theory, Richard Delgado:

> Most would agree that our system of white-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes, both psychic and material. The first feature, ordinariness, means that racism is difficult to cure or address. Color-blind, or “formal,” conceptions of equality, expressed in rules that insist only on treatment that is the same across the board, can thus remedy only the most blatant forms of discrimination, such as mortgage redlining or the refusal to hire a black Ph.D. rather than a white high school dropout, that do stand out and attract our attention. (Delgado 30)

3. Race is a social construct- The conception of race is created by the ideals of social “thoughts and relations” because it does not correlate genetically or biologically with American categorizations of race (30).

4. Voices of color are significant because they are forms of cultural education. This concept explains that because POC have unique experiences and histories "with oppression," they can communicate racial matters to "their white counterparts" that they are not aware of (30).

5. Finally, the fifth concept is a shared understanding between Critical Race Theorists. That social activism is all-important, placing the theoretical model in an active sphere. This concept advocates for subscribers of CRT to act on ascertaining social change once they can better understand complex social problems.

Through these fundamental concepts' scholars have begun to analyze the racial problems of today. It is these core concepts and the creations of CRT content in which *The Change We*

Seek intends to define both the educational power of narratives told from POC and the historical argument that formulates the main content produced in the initial conception of its (Education Series) enhanced oral history.

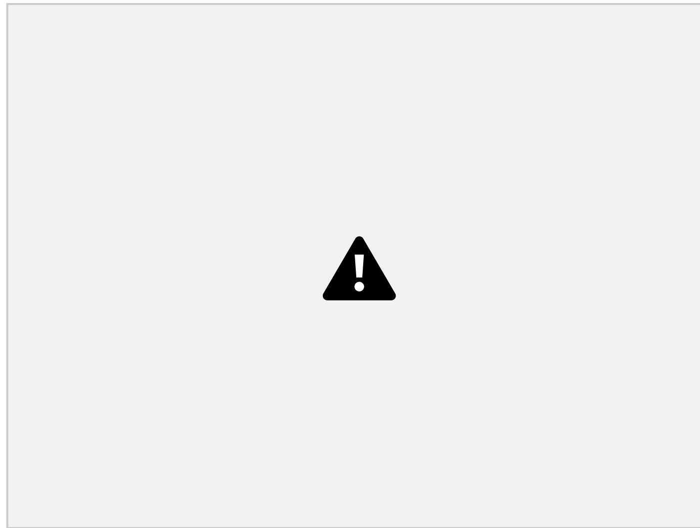


Figure 12: Critical Race Theory, *Ramsey County Law Library*. 2020.

Section 2: The Origins of Critical Race Theory

To fully understand why CRT has been so successful in exposing the pillars of systemic racism present in American society (especially in its systems of education), one must follow its origins. To trace CRT back to a movement that was supported by social activists who sought to create a theoretical model that would promote significant racial equity after American leaders and legislation had stalled social change years after the Civil Rights Movement.

The Beginning of CRT

Even though America's legal decrees have defined much of the racial disparities that exist today, ironically, social activists who have worked in law have created some of the most powerful theoretical models to combat racism, such as CRT. Over America's history, Civil Rights lawyers and social justice advocates studied law to overturn legislation that favored white people over every other race (Crenshaw 1334).

This history of countering racial discrimination was put into action by Civil Rights scholars,

such as W.E.B Dubois, who helped in forming the NAACP on February 12, 1909. The organization's goal was to put an end to "anti-black violence" that had grown rampant throughout America during the early 1900s from lynchings and race riots. Through continuously creating court battles that combatted lynching the NAACP found success in the courts by providing distinctive and empirical arguments that exposed the difference in racial experience and the number of racial disparities in American society (Nation's).

These victories led to the Supreme Court decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954. The case ended legal segregation presenting statistical and personal evidence that legal segregation produced unequal education (Nation's).

However, after the decree of *Brown* and numerous Civil Rights Acts that followed, the large racial disparity in America did not significantly change (Legal Highlight). Throughout the mid to late 60s, Southern schools still refused to desegregate. By the early to mid-1970s,

government representatives such as President Richard Nixon began to approve legislation that rejected the ideals of integration through utilizing "colorblind terminology."

Thus, during the mid to late 1970s, a new theoretical model, called CRT, was created by a group of legal scholars. This group included the first tenured black professor at Harvard Law School, Derrick Bell. Bell operated on the premise of what was defined as interest convergence theory. This theory suggested that "a white majority will support racial justice only when they have personal interest in doing so" (Delgado, 176).

In utilizing this premise, Bell sought to formulate a theoretical model that differed from prior Civil Rights theories. As past theories sought to slowly negotiate elements of social justice through state and federal court decisions, Bell instead questioned the entire legal and theoretical system that America was conceived from. A system that to Bell, and other Civil Rights lawyers began to agree, operated from the interests of its white majority. As stated by Delgado:

> Unlike traditional civil rights, which embraces incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very

> foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law. (Delgado 3)

The theoretical lens of Bell and other founders of CRT, like Delgado, have resulted in critical race theorists' core belief that American society perpetuates systemic racism. Therefore, to combat racism, one must develop an understanding of how race affects American society, examine the foundations of liberal order, and be an active participant in striving for social change in a society that perpetuates inequality (Delgado 3-4).

Section 3: The Power of Storytelling for People of Color

Just for a moment, imagine you are driving home one evening. As you are driving, through your peripheral you notice a police car is following you. As you make a turn, the police car's siren flips on. You pull over and are immediately asked by the cop to put your hands on the dashboard and then slowly reach for your ID.

Throughout the entire process, the officer watches your every movement as his hand is close to his gun. After looking at your ID and running your license plate, he tells you that your taillight was out and gives you a ticket to get it fixed.

Although this story may seem uneventful to some, make one change to that story. If not already, imagine you were an African American man. How would the story change? When you saw the police car follow you or the police officer tell you to reach for your license, what would you do? Or how would you feel? In knowing that American policing was founded on the principles of slave catching, or that the American media have criminalized black men since D.W. Griffith's, *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915, what would you do in this situation? (Smiley, Bonczar, Criminal).

All these questions help one realize there is a racial difference of experience in American society that is best understood through personal insight. It is this realization that American CRT legal scholars have expounded upon in their utilization of legal storytelling.

As stated by clinical professor of law and director of programs at Rutgers-Camden, Ruth Anne Robbins, "Storytelling really is part of general lawyering skills, just as much as legal analysis, logic, and argumentation" (Moorhouse). For lawyers, whether consciously or unconsciously, the arguments they construct in the court of law are structured through the framework of a story. No matter what evidence or "traditional logic-based legal arguments" a lawyer utilizes, they seek to persuade a judge and juries to decide in favor of their client (Moorhouse).

Thus, the power of storytelling is significant in law because stories are practical tools of persuasion (Moorhouse; Delgado; Storytelling 2414). The framework of stories can provide judges and jurors with a deeper insight into the vital context surrounding a lawyer's argumentation.

This fundamental use of storytelling within the court of law in recent years has been examined and utilized by critical race theorists and Civil Rights lawyers to introduce cultural perspectives and factual backgrounds from people who are not within America’s dominant racial group, as POC’s cultural insights were not foreseen in significant racially biased legal cases that have shaped America's history such as *Dred Scott v. Sandford* and *Plessy v. Ferguson*. As defined by Richard Delgado:

> The “legal storytelling” movement urges black and brown writers to recount their experiences with racism and the legal system and to apply their own unique perspectives to assess law’s master narratives. (Delgado 9)

By POC expressing their insights through stories in the field of law, it introduces to America's dominant group what it is like to be non-white. This expression from POC exposes a needed understanding of historical and societal information that shapes the behavior and situations POC are exposed to.

For example, in Delgado's publication *An Introduction of Critical Race Theory* (2001), he

defines an existing cultural gap in racial understanding between dominant and minority groups because American society has produced and normalized material and ideals of the dominant group. As Delgado states, "history books, Sunday sermons, and even case law it makes it difficult to understand or even access stories of minorities" (Delgado 62; Liz).

Thus, the racially dominant group operates on a different basis of societal understanding than POC justified by American society because their experiences are internalized as official or commonplace. Delgado provides an example by describing the built-up cultural hegemony between the dominant racial group (white) in America and minority groups. He

describes the cultural hegemony between white and black people, explaining how the racial majority in America may view the African American historical experience as he states:

> Early in our history there was slavery, which was a terrible thing. Blacks were brought to this country from Africa in chains and made to work in the fields. Some were viciously mistreated, which was, of course, an unforgivable wrong; others were treated kindly. Slavery ended with the Civil War, although many blacks remained poor, uneducated, and outside the cultural mainstream. As the country's racial sensitivity to blacks' plight increased, federal statutes and case law gradually eliminated the vestiges of slavery. Today, blacks have many civil rights and are protected from discrimination in such areas as housing, public education, employment, and voting.
>
> The gap between blacks and whites is steadily closing, although it may take some time for it to close completely. At the same time, it is important not to go too far in providing special benefits for blacks. Doing so induces dependency and welfare mentality. It can also cause a backlash among innocent white victims of reverse discrimination. Most Americans are fair-minded individuals who harbor little racial prejudice. The few who do can be punished

> when they act on those beliefs. (Delgado 40)

Many of America's racial majority view African Americans' historical and current experience in this light because they have not had to experience moments of racial discrimination and have been assured through racially biased legislation and educational tools that the Civil Rights Act solved every social issue for every American citizen. It is a false reality that the dominant racial group can live under because American society has catered to their needs and wants (Delgado 40-41).

It is a history that is far from the reality of how POC and marginalized communities view their history as the racial disparities and inequity suffered in these communities today are staggering.

Thus, by POC sharing their personal experiences and insights of racial disparities, it acknowledges this gap in cultural and historical understanding between the two racial groups. They are exposing the underlying "mindset" of the dominant group and introducing a "shared reality" between both racial groups, which they can both navigate to produce legislation that considers disparities that exist between races (Delgado; Storytelling 2413).

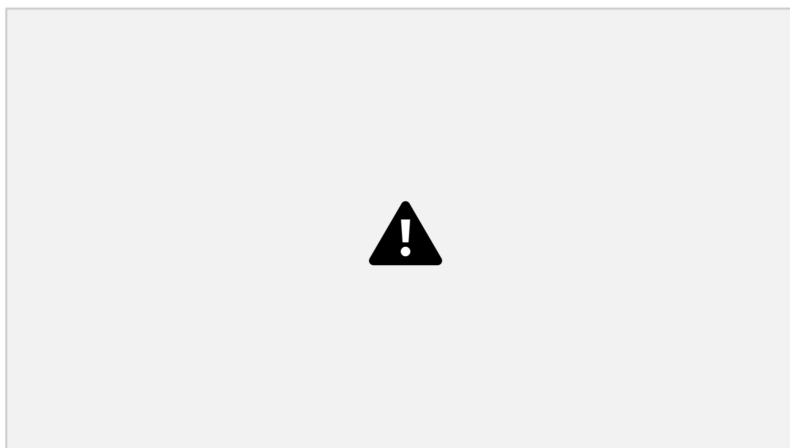


Figure 13: *The Change We Seek* Oral Defense Slide: Legal Storytelling.

Storytelling has evolved to have a powerful meaning for POC. To share engaging personal stories in the hopes to bridge persons of non-color to a "new and unfamiliar world" of social reality that POC already exist in. As stated by Delgado, "The hope is that well told stories

describing the reality of black and brown lives can help readers to bridge the gap between their worlds and those of others" (Delgado 48).

Section 4: Critical Race Theory and Education

As CRT has grown to be utilized by numerous disciplines, scholars in most recent years have decided to use the theoretical tool as a guide to investigating the ever-present racial disparities that have existed in American society for generations. One of the most pressing of these disparities is American education.

The experience of American education is drastically different between POC and non-color. As for POC, they are disciplined at a significantly higher rate than white people. They are more frequently taught by teachers who are not their ethnicity and are more likely to attend schools with less funding and high poverty rates (Gordon).

It is a matter that is a part of keeping black people in a position of second-class citizenship as in American society; the more education one receives, the more likely they are to acquire an occupation of higher income. For example, persons who have received a high school diploma account for 8% of citizens earning $100,000, while on the other hand, 75% of people making the same earnings received a college degree (Greenstone).

Thus, in considering America's racial divide in education, CRT scholars of today have placed race at the center of analyzing it to discover and expose its racial educational gap. As stated by Delgado in *An Introduction to Critical Race Theory*:

> Today, many in the field of education consider themselves critical race theorists who use the theoretical method to understand issues of school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, controversies over curriculum and history, and IQ and achievement testing. (Delgado 3)

It is an effort through CRT that has proven successful. It has created projects such as the *New York Times 1619 Project*, which has garnered interest in overturning existing

educational injustices in American education.

Created by journalist and Critical Race Theorist Nikole Hanna-Jones, the *1619 Project*, has forced Americans to rethink how narratives of history are learned, as often they have been taught through only the perspectives of white Americans.

Published on the 400th anniversary of the first arrival of enslaved Africans to colonial Virginia, the project was a "long-form journalism" venture which aimed to "reframe the country's history, by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of the United States' national narrative" (The 1619 Project). In its first publication, it included 100 pages of content that addressed America's history of social injustice. It was a publication that included essays, poems, and creative photos.

By creating this project, Jones's intent, along with its other contributors, was to force Americans to grapple with its long history of avoiding historical narratives of race. Jones pointed out that American education has so often marginalized the affects and significance of American slavery and African American history. As Jones stated in an interview on *CBS This Morning* on August 22, 2019:

> We don't' know about 1619 the same way we don't learn very much about slavery. It is shameful. No one wants to talk about their sins, or the worst moments and slavery gives contradiction to our entire creation story of the United States. And so, we've tried to push it aside, we've tried to make it marginal, and in doing that we've marginalized the 40 million descendants of the enslaved as well. So, what we're trying to do with this project is force us to confront the truth, and then maybe we can actually to move past slavery and become the country that was written in our ideals in the constitution and the declaration. (CBS This Morning)

It was a project that received backlash from many Americans and historians who

traditionally examine historical narratives through a scope that often romanticizes how this nation was founded. It is a historical lens from traditionalists that has historically diminished the active agency that African Americans have had on the formation of American society (CBS This Morning; Silverstein). It is not to say that the 1619 project is the only way one can examine American history, or that its collection of historical data was a perfect historical effort, but to vehemently dispute its attempt to view history from the eyes of the marginalized is discounting perspectives and narratives that are fundamental in how this country came to exist.

The project culminated in a national reimagining of how scholars analyze historical narratives and how Americans talk about issues of race. It was an effort that resulted in Jones winning a Pulitzer Prize Award for her introductory essay within the project and an acknowledgment by New York University Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute of being one of the ten greatest works of journalism in the decade (2010 to 2019) (Sullivan).

Thus, through the 1619 project's educational focus and so many other CRT-inspired publications that have intended to spark intellectual discussion and force Americans to reexamine issues of race, *The Change We Seek* aims to do the same. Through utilizing concepts from critical race theorists, this project uses the theoretical tool to define its historical argument in the enhanced oral history. It is an effort that seeks to put CRT into creative use so Americans can better understand today's racial inequities in American schooling.

Chapter 4: Critical Race Theory in Practice: A Historical Argument

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Stories can name a type of discrimination; once named, it can be combated. -*Richard Delgado*

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Section 1: Historical Argument

May 17, 1954, was supposed to change American schooling forever. On this day, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), deeming state laws that established racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional. The verdict of *Brown* had overturned 58 years of legal racial segregation defined by the Supreme Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson.* The case was a collective effort from black parents to acquire equal educational funding, facilities, and experience for not only their children but future generations of black people (Meatto; "The Supreme Court").

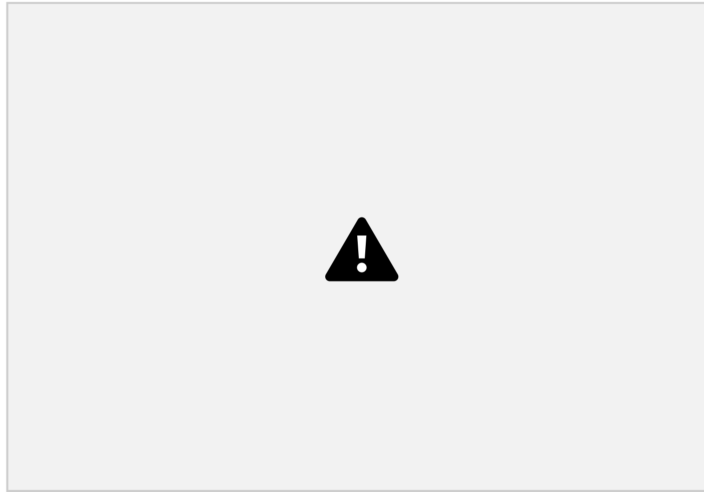

Figure 14: New York World-Telegram & Sun Collection/Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

However, in looking at America's educational landscape today, it has maintained its highly segregated and racially biased existence. For example, in American schools today, "more than half of the nation's schoolchildren are in racially concentrated districts, where over 75 percent of students are either white or non-white" (Meatto).

It is an occurrence that negatively affects black children as segregated schools have proven to depress the educational outcomes of black students, widen the performance gap between white and black students, and give them lesser pedological resources because they are twice as likely to attend high-poverty schools (Garcia).

Thus, it is this project's intent to acknowledge these existing racial inequities in American education that were supposed to be quelled through the approval of *Brown.* As content created for the first iteration (Education Series) of *The Change We Seek* highlights, African American students who attend predominantly white schools exist at the intersection of two historical narratives defined by race.

One narrative that is plagued with white resentment toward black achievement in educational spaces, due to the approval of the Supreme Court case of *Brown,* and another narrative that demonstrates generations of black resolve and courage shown during the Civil Rights Movement and following civil cases that grant Black students the ability to learn in desegregated spaces.

It is a racial crossroads that results in a mixture of frustration and pride by many young black Americans who attend learning institutions in America, such as this project interviewees, because its racially biased systems still exist.

Section 2: White Rage

Within the first historical narrative exists the persistence of white resentment that has created America's racial divide in academics called white rage. It is a term coined by African American professor at Emory University, Carol Anderson, as she defines white rage as white backlash and resentment towards black achievement or gained social status which appears through legislation or subtle acts. As Anderson states:

> White rage is not about visible violence, but rather it works its way through the courts, the legislatures, and a range of government bureaucracies. It wreaks havoc subtly, almost imperceptibly. Too imperceptibly, certainly, for a nation consistently drawn to the spectacular—to what it can see. It's not the Klan. White rage doesn't have to wear sheets, burn crosses, or take to the streets. Working the halls of power, it can achieve its ends far more effectively, far more destructively. (*Anderson, White Rage* ix)

It is a white resentment triggered by black achievement that ultimately harms every American citizen because much of black achievement brings about social change that seeks to implement equality efforts. As defined by Anderson:

> The truth is, white rage has undermined democracy, warped the Constitution, weakened the nation's ability to compete economically, squandered billions of dollars on baseless incarceration, rendered an entire region sick, poor, and woefully undereducated, and left cities nothing less than decimated. All

> this havoc has been wrecked simply because African Americans wanted to work, get an education, live in decent communities, raise their families, and vote. Because they were unwilling to take no for an answer. (xi)

It is a recurring formation of white rage that was mostly created after *Brown* and the Civil Rights Act (1964) as overt declarations of racial segregation or racial discrimination became unconstitutional. This acceptance of new law resulted in the use of racially biased litigation that sought to overturn the ideas of *Brown* or mask methods of white supremacy under colorblind terminology and inadvertent acts of racism (ix, x, 53).

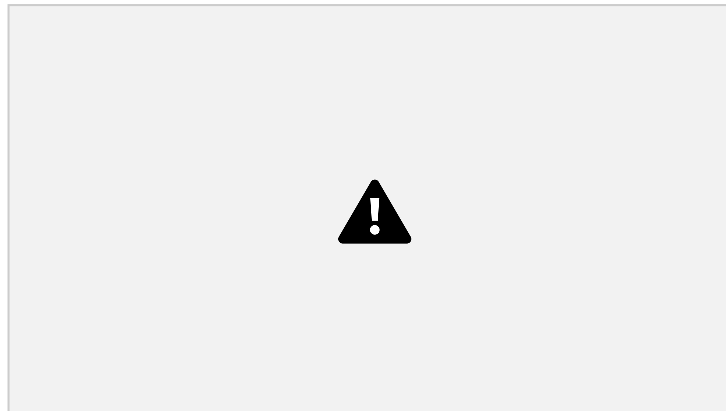

Figure 15: *The Change We Seek* Oral Defense Slide: White Rage Collection.

This existence of white rage has defined the racial inequities that black Americans must face within today's educational environments. Environments that have placed black students who seek equal educational opportunities into either segregated or racially biased integrated spaces, hampering their educational aspirations to achieve.

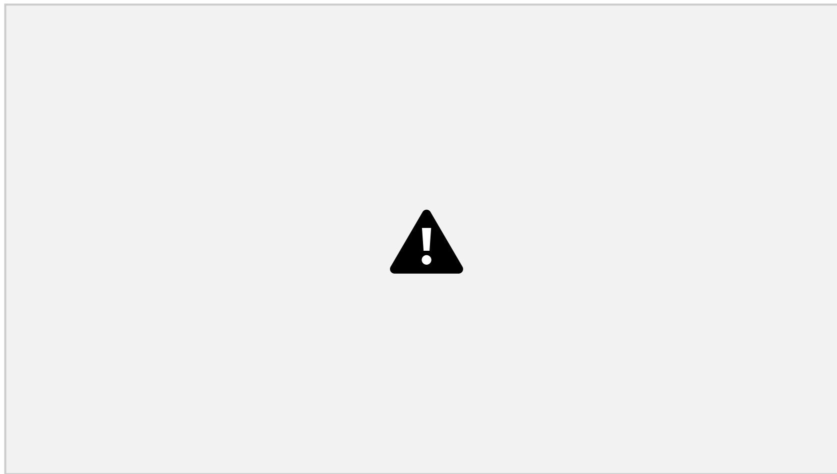

Figure 16: *The Change We Seek* Oral Defense Slide: Carol Anderson-White Rage.

White rage is a theoretical concept that has been present in the history of America for generations, shown in the creation of the Southern Manifesto, racially biased court decisions, and presidential administrations which sought to overturn efforts of integration to appease white people who did not want to adjust their privileges in American schooling to achieve equal opportunities for black people.

Southern Manifesto (1956)

On March 12, 1956, Howard Smith of Virginia, chairman of the House Rules Committee, presented a document on the house floor that was the culmination of white resentment towards laws that would give African Americans educational opportunities to achieve (Aucoin 173; “The Southern Manifesto”).

After the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education II*, which advocated for schools to desegregate with "all deliberate speed," 138 Southern members of Congress signed what was initially named the "Declaration of Constitutional Rights" ("Southern Manifesto"). This document, which would later be named the Southern Manifesto, advocated for continuing racial segregation in public schooling. It was a Manifesto that claimed the decision of *Brown* was a "clear abuse of power" to enforce desegregation upon Southern states ("The Southern Manifesto"; "The Supreme Court"). It was a piece of legislation that was campaigned by its constituencies as a Manifesto that meant to take "a patriotic stand" to

defend the Constitution as *Brown* had infringed upon State rights (Aucion 173-176; Driver).

However, this statement from its creators was only a guise to mask ideological beliefs of maintaining a racial caste system in the South that fostered white supremacy and privilege in American schooling that had existed before *Brown*.

Its original creators, avowed segregationists, Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina and Sen. Harry F. Byrd of Virginia, had made numerous early drafts of the document that had approved utmost interposition toward the Supreme Court's decision of *Brown*. These drafts, as defined by senators who had viewed them, "did not contain a statement denouncing improper and illegal resistance" towards *Brown* and contained rhetoric that

would have prompted white southerners to ignore constitutional law to resist integration" *(*Aucoin 174-175*).*

These drafts, however, were not received well by both Northern and several Southern politicians. Many politicians believed the drafts were "too extreme" and would later come to agree that overt declarations against *Brown* would not last in the court of law because existing evidence of racial discrimination in places of learning was irrefutable (Aucion 175).

Thus, from this realization, "well-educated" lawyers, Sen. Sam Ervin of North Carolina and Sen. John Stennis of Mississippi decided to adjust the document to contain politically safe terminology while still advocating for the rejection of integration and Southern interposition (Driver). Therefore, the conception of the Manifesto began a nationwide utilization of racist tactics during and after the Civil Rights Movement that propelled "colorblind" legislation to advocate to the rest of America the need to maintain a society that favored the needs of white people and slowed the progress of black achievement. As mentioned by Justin Driver of the *Los Angeles Times:*

> Ervin, Stennis and the other manifesto drafters avoided naked appeals to racial bigotry not least because that would alienate the document's intended audience: white Northerners. As numerous manifesto backers explained, the document was designed to

> transmit Southern opposition to *Brown* directly to citizens outside the old Confederacy. Accordingly, the manifesto was excerpted and reprinted in newspapers around the country, including this one. (Driver)

Through these origins, the document was then presented, spawning reactions from press and government officials that declared the Manifesto still promoted Southerners to defy desegregation. It is a standard analysis that is shared by numerous historians who have analyzed the document as stated by Sean D. Cashman:

> The Southern Manifesto' marked a return to the rhetoric and resistance of the old Confederacy. This was the lounge of interposition, nullification, and states' rights resurrected in order to resist desegregation. (qtd.in Aucon 176)

Thus, the Manifesto utilized the issue of states' rights to maintain what each Southern State was fighting for the right to do during the Civil War. The Manifesto was an effort to maintain the subjugation of black people by diminishing their opportunities to achieve. Instead of the South rejecting Abolitionism to halt the freedom of black people, this time, *Brown's* rejection by Southern states would block black people from obtaining freedom from segregation and Jim Crow.

From the Manifesto's plea to all Southern states to exhaust all "lawful means" to resist the "chaos and confusion" that would result from school desegregation," massive resistance took root in the South creating initiatives of white rage that extinguished numerous attempts at desegregation efforts throughout the late 50s ("The Southern Manifesto").

For example, local school boards in Virginia that were placed under federal court orders to desegregate, such as Charlottesville, Norfolk, and Front Royal, were closed by the State's governor James Lindsay Almond. As in Governor Almond's words, he sought to close every "school threatened with desegregation" (Anderson 42, Ch.3). It was an effort of racial segregation and white rage inspired by the Manifesto that unfortunately harmed the

educational experiences of both white and black students.

Governor Almond's decree to close schools in Virginia had halted schooling for "nearly thirteen thousand white children" and maintained unequal schooling for black children for an entire decade after *Brown*. An instance that is shown through statistics as only 1.63 percent of black students were attending desegregated schools ten years following the significant court case (Anderson 41).

The Manifesto also validated white resentment toward social change for many angry white parents who refused to have their children attend schools with Negro children. As most Southern white parents vehemently opposed racial integration, as stated by historian Neil McMillen:

> Not unlike por-slavery zealots of the 1850s, the pro segregationist of a century later were inclined to brook no latter day Abolitionism among fellow southerners… In this repressive atmosphere the moderate was vilified and he who was found 'soft' on integration was adjudged treasonous. (McMillen 235; Segregation in America)

This polarized outrage toward integration by white Southern citizens continued to block black citizens from gaining access to resources that would allow them to achieve, best evidenced in the rise of the White Citizens Council during the mid to late 50s. This council used tactics of white rage to heavily discourage black citizens from speaking out against segregation in the South. For example, in 1955, 53 black residents in Yazoo County, Mississippi, signed a "desegregation petition launched by the NAACP" (Ellis; Segregation in America). In response to this petition, the state's White Citizens Council published an ad in the local newspaper exposing their names to the public. This action subjected the petition signers to widespread harassment, loss of work, and in some cases, cancellation of their bank account (Ellis; Segregation in America). This occurrence is just one example of white rage that was enacted by the Southern Manifesto.

Thus, the Southern Manifesto was a form of white rage. A rage that existed through legislative subtlety intended to incite a rejection towards the social and political achievements that black people had begun to gain during the early Civil Rights Movement. It was a decree that, although did not dispel *Brown*, did slow its progression. Because of the Manifesto, most integration efforts in the South resulted in awkward integration efforts during the late 60s and 70s because it was delayed for so long.

Milliken v. Bradley (1974)

In the early 1900s, millions of African Americans sought to make a change. Tired of racial segregation and discrimination in the South, over 6 million black people decided to forget the Jim Crow South to experience the American dream (Gregory 113). This movement, which became known as the Great Migration, led to black Americans moving to the North to find job opportunities that were abundant in cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit. In particular, Detroit was an epicenter for the Great Migrations' first wave. During this first wave, a total of 1.5 million African Americans migrated to the city because of its attractive auto industry and available property (Gregory 32).

However, through this migration of black people came resistance from white communities that had already existed in the city. Newly migrated black people were barred from white neighborhoods in Michigan with discriminatory housing covenants, racial violence, and redlining (Gregory 32). The use of these methods defined a racial divide across its metropolitan area. Although some of Michigan's discriminatory practices were outlawed after WWII, local neighborhoods still maintained redlining and housing covenant efforts that formulated white-only suburban areas and a majority of black people in the intercity. As highlighted by Professor of Law at Cardozo School of Law, Michelle Adams:

> The story was the story American apartheid, federal redlining of neighborhoods and race-based restrictions on house sales, known as covenants, had made it nearly impossible for black families to move to the suburbs. (Nadworny)

It was an instance of racial discrimination that by the early to mid-70s had created essentially dual school districts based on race because Michigan's housing was so segregated. During this period, at least two-thirds of Detroit's school system was black. Furthermore, these segregated inner-city schools that black students attended received far less attention and resources from the State. For example, Detroit's DeWitt Clinton School was "nearly 100 percent black in the 1960s" and as referenced from Samantha Meinke's in

the *Michigan Bar Journal*, "textbooks were out of date and class sizes expanded to as many as 50 students; classes were held in trailers on the schoolyard because the building was falling apart" (20).

To quell this growing problem of racial segregation in public schooling on April 7, 1970 "four of the Detroit Board of Education's six members" approved an integration plan (20). This plan was immediately met with white resentment as due to bomb threats and the creation of committees from white parents that sought to resist integration, the plan was voided through the state legislature, an effort that was listed as Public Act 48. This act also "placed school districts under control of local neighborhoods" (Burger 791; Meinke 20).

During this period of racial segregation and tension, on August 18, 1970, black parents represented by the NAACP filed a suit against officials within the State of Michigan (Burger 717; Nadworny). This suit argued that both the State and city of Detroit had perpetuated racial segregation in its schools through its enactment of racially biased policies, such as unequal housing, redlining, and the newly created Public Act 48 (Burger 791; James 964; Meinke 20;). Thus, black parents wanted the originally proposed integration plan to be reinstated to overturn Michigan's unequal schooling and generations of housing segregation.

Following the filing of the suit, it was taken to two preliminary lower courts, Judge Stephen J. Roth's courtroom and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. In its early rounds, the suit gained support as the Sixth Circuit declared Public Act 48 unconstitutional because it nullified the local district's attempt to comply with the federal desegregation mandate."

(Burger 791; Meinke 21-22). The case was then put on trial to consider if the Detroit School Board and state government followed de jure segregation.

Thus, a 41-day trial commenced in the district court. It was a trial that presented significant evidence of Michigan's racial segregation in schools and housing. This evidence highlighted policies in the Federal Housing Administration, Homeowners Administration, and

discriminatory practices of banks that created Detroit's racial apartheid between its inner city and suburbs.

The NAACP also exposed the state’s system of racially biased decrees as referenced by Meinke*:*

> The Detroit board and State government actively increased school segregation by implementing an optional attendance zone policy, building new schools in white neighborhoods, and drawing boundaries that created the most racially segregated schools possible. (21-22)

It was this evidence that spawned an interest by the NAACP to press for an integration plan that would “reach beyond the city limits to include white students in the suburbs in an inter-district busing desegregation plan” (Burger 766; Meinke, 21-22). At the end of the district court trials, Judge Stephen Roth declared the Detroit Board and state responsible for school segregation. This decision that was later appealed by Michigan’s State and suburbs and taken to the United States Supreme Court.

Supreme Court Decision

Although the lower and district court trials had shown insurmountable evidence of racial discrimination in housing and schooling in Michigan, when the case was taken to the Supreme Court, the judges sided in favor of maintaining Michigan's segregated operation of school districting in a 5-4 court decision.

The judges had sided with arguments formed in support of Michigan's suburban districts. These districts and the State presented to the court their awareness of the racial segregation in the State's schools. However, they had declared they had not willingly created its school districts with the intent of "fostering racial segregation in public schools." As stated by Elise Boddie, professor at Rutgers Law School, “[The suburbs were] making this

issue a question of white guilt or innocence… we know there may be a problem of segregation, but it’s not our fault. We’re not responsible for it” (qtd. in Nadworny).

The court decision was voted upon by four newly appointed Supreme Court Justices by President Nixon. President Nixon ran on the premise of putting a halt to integration efforts to acquire the vote of a growing white population that was angry about the growth of integration in the North after the South had finally begun to desegregate. As Nixon declared only a year later in *A Special Message to the Congress on Equal Educational Opportunities and School Busing*, “schools exist to severe the children, not bear the burden of social change” (Nadworny; “Special Message to the Congress”).

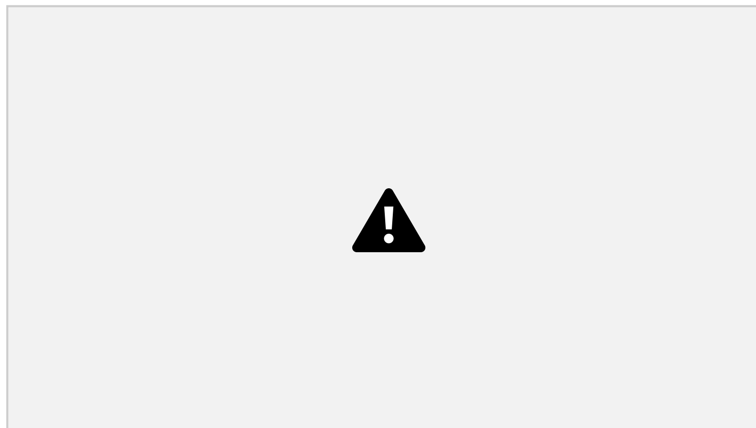

Figure 17: *The Change We Seek* Oral Defense Slide: Milliken-Nixon.

It was a political stance that would soon be utilized throughout future presidential administrations like Ronald Regan's and George W. Bush's to garner white support rather than listen to the ever-pressing needs of black parents and students (Hannah-Jones). The decision resulted from white rage, a collective lack of care and resentment toward black progress that came at the cost of needed social change in educational institutions.

It was a court decision that still affects schooling to this day as many Northern and Southern states in American are still able to keep learning spaces highly segregated because the case of *Milliken* disallows federal involvement in desegregating across district or county lines. It is an instance that enables local governments and school boards to maintain historically

segregated (and racially biased) counties. As stated by Justice Thurgood Marshall in his dissent of the decision of *Milliken*:

> Under such a plan, white and Negro students will not go to school together. Instead, Negro children will continue to attend all-Negro schools. The very evil that *Brown* was aimed at will not be cured but will be perpetuated. (qtd. in Nadworny)

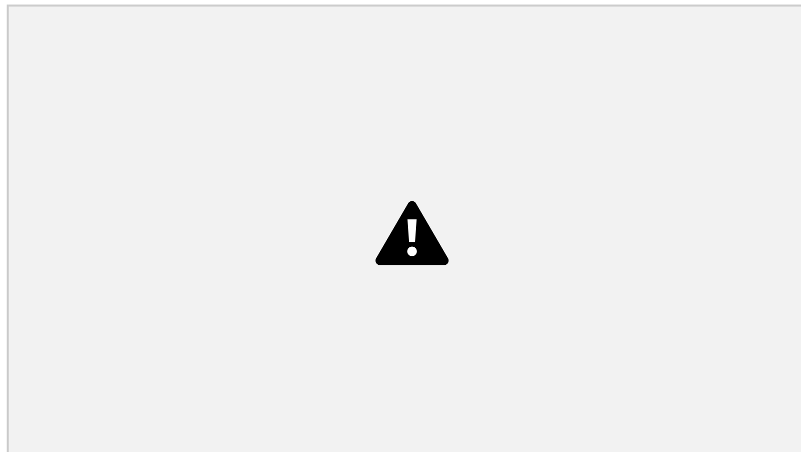

Figure 18: *The Change We Seek* Oral Defense Slide: Milliken.

The existence and allowance of cases spawning from white rage, such as the *Southern Manifesto* and *Milliken*, have contributed to why black students today are exposed to the country's high segregation rates and awkward existence in integrated spaces. Spaces that are often created from only the concerns of white parents and officials.

Section 3: Black Resolve

However, it is a history of white rage that defines the significance of black resolve and achievement to acquire their human right to higher education. As generations of black

people have sacrificed their time and effort for future black students to exist in educational spaces that provide them with newer opportunities that past generations of black people could not benefit from. Much of this effort being exercised through building strong communities that inspired future generations to achieve and creating litigation that has historically pushed for integration efforts in American education.

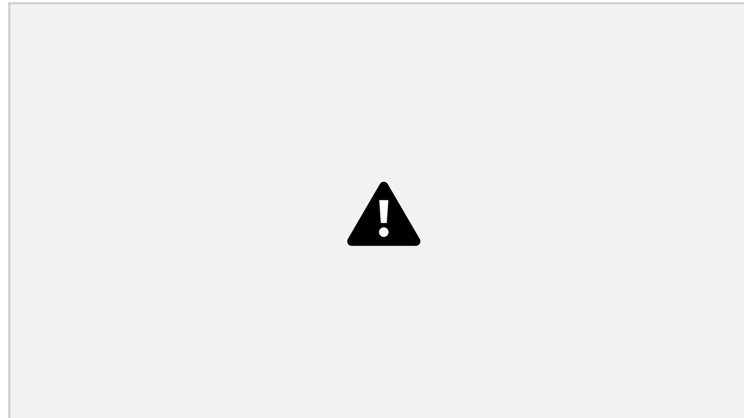

Figure 19: *The Change We Seek* Oral Defense Slide: Black Resolve.

The Importance of Education

Black education is a history of resilient efforts to secure freedoms for future generations of black Americans. Dating before Emancipation, education was always valued by black people as it was never given to them. During American slavery, the education of African slaves, especially in the South, was forbidden as enslavers believed that teaching their slaves would present two concepts that threatened the institution of slavery.

The first concept expressed that if slaves could have access to education, they would begin to revolt against their oppressors. This concept is shown in Southern slave owners' focus on creating laws that banned slave literacy throughout the Antebellum period as religious texts and publications inspired slaves, such as Nat Turner, to rebel against the slave society (Finkelman 445). Thus, slaves that were found reading or writing would suffer severe

punishments such as whippings or amputation of toes or fingers. It was a distinct focus on disrupting black literacy by white oppressors (Bly).

The second concept believed by Southern slave owners was that if African slaves were ever

able to become educated, it would disrupt a Southern social system that relied on the dehumanization of black people. The slaveholding elite believed that giving education to black people provided them with an acknowledgment of humanity as the concept of education itself perpetuated concepts of human improvement and enlightenment (Bly; Finkelman 445-446). Thus, through the education of black people, it would not allow white enslavers to justify the cruelties they had oppressed upon African slaves if they were considered human.

This white resentment and fear on the part of white slave owners developed numerous slave narratives of black people being beaten or whipped for attempting to claim their humanity. As stated by a former slave, "There is one sin that slavery committed against me, which I will never forgive. It robbed me of my education" (J. Anderson, 5).

Thus, when black people gained their freedom, education became their top priority as it did not only facilitate an Abolitionist movement, fueled by literate African Americans, but was a part of their humanity that was taken away by their oppressors (Cameron 212; Douglass iv). Thus, black Americans who had overcome the cruelties of slavery sought to acquire education, which was one of the most significant parts of their humanity, through a collective resolve.

During the late 1800s, ex-slaves created a multitude of free schools, ranging from self teaching to native. As expressed in a report from the Superintendent of the Freedmen's Bureau, John W. Alvord, in 1866, he had identified 500 native schools created by freedmen throughout the South (J. Anderson 6-8). Also, within this black educational movement was the establishment of the first Southern Historically Black College (HBCU) that founded Baptist minister Henry Martin Tupper named Shaw University (HBCU First).

This black resolve to create institutions of education even surprised white Northern missionaries who thought former slaves would be completely dehumanized from the brutal institution of slavery only to discover ex-slaves had already created their own means of securing their freedoms (J. Anderson 6). These early institutions were created on the premise that their education was meant to “expand their ideas and social reality” rather

than giving up control to America's dominant racial group of how their education was taught or distributed (J. Anderson 6).

Black communities created schools and curriculum that, in the long run, would produce an "intellectual and moral development" of a future leadership class that would have the ability to organize themselves to acquire "freedom and equality" (J. Anderson 18-19). With the help of the Freedmen's Bureau, by 1865, "fourteen Southern states had established 575 schools" with an attendance of 71,779 Negro and white children (J. Anderson 19). This establishment of Southern schools resulted from black politicians' initiation during Reconstruction to legalize public education in newly rewritten Southern constitutions after the Civil War. As stated by Anderson, "By 1870, every Southern state had specific provisions in its constitutions to assure a public-school system financed by a state fund" (19).

Although this growth of black communities and education was severely hampered during the late 1800s, through the 1896 Supreme Court decree of *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the rise of white supremacy in politics during Redemption, African Americans had created a framework for themselves to receive an education (Xavier 126). During America's 58 years of legal segregation, these communities eventually spread throughout the country, which gave future generations of black people the social consciousness and tools to successfully overturn the racist structure of segregation.

Desegregation and Integration Efforts

As black communities began to grow around the country in the early 1900s, its members began to utilize their own intuitions of education to formulate ways to receive equal treatment. Through living in American segregation, black people were constantly exposed

to being considered second-class citizens. For example, black people in the South had to give up their seats on the bus, were not allowed to eat at certain white-only restaurants, and throughout all of America were often not accepted into places of higher education.

Most of the time, the only places African Americans could receive education beyond high

school were within established HBCUs such as Howard University. As stated by HBCUs First, throughout late 1800 to 1900s, "HBCUs provided undergraduate training for 75% of all black Americans holding a doctorate degree; 75% of all black officers in the armed forces and 80% of all black federal judges (HBCU First; "Historically Black Colleges"). Institutions such as these produced scholars who sought to overturn America's use of segregation, shown in the creation of the NAACP.

Created in 1909 by white and black activists, the NAACP challenged America's racist social and economic systems by presenting legal battles to ensure equal rights for all its citizens. Through the leadership of Charles Hamilton Houston and his "protegee" Thurgood Marshall, who were both graduates of Howard University's Law school, they helped campaign to end the Supreme Courts decree of *Plessy* ("NAACP History"; "NAACP Legal History").

Expanding from a study conducted by a municipal judge and NAACP supporter Nathan Ross Margold, Houston throughout the 1930s and early 40s sought to slowly chip away at the large system of American segregation by filing lawsuits that exposed "under segregation, the facilities provided for blacks were always separate, but never equal to those maintained for whites" ("NAACP History"; "NAACP Legal History").

Through this strategy, Houston won several cases in the hopes of eventually being able to challenge the decree of *Plessy*. However, this task was eventually passed on to Thurgood Marshall, who by the mid to late 1940s had won cases against segregation in Virginia, Texas, and Oklahoma. They were cases that eventually led to the significant court case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* ("NAACP Legal History"). Represented by Marshall and a collective of NAACP attorneys, the case presented to the nation how segregation in schooling negatively impacted the lives of black students.

It was an instance that was most famously displayed through Doctors Kenneth and Mamie Clark's "Doll Test." ("*Brown v. Board*: The Significance of the 'Doll Test")

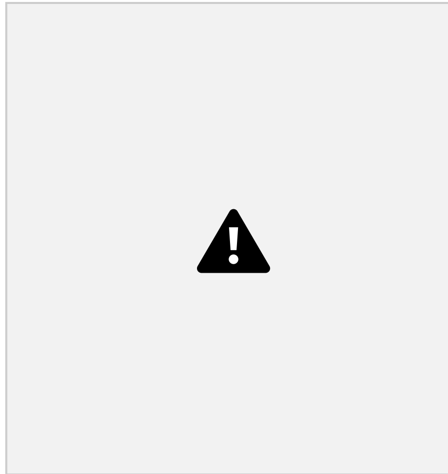

Figure 20: How an Experiment with Dolls Helped Lead to School Integration "Untitled, Harlem, New York, 1947" Gordon Parks/The Gordon Parks Foundation, New York Times.

This test was created to discover how black children were psychologically affected by American segregation. Using four identical dolls that only differed in skin color kids between ages three and seven, as stated by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and Educational Fund:

> ...were asked to identify both the race of the dolls and which color doll they prefer. In this test majority of the children choice the white doll because they had associated "positive characteristics" to it ("*Brown v. Board*: The Significance of the 'Doll Test").

These results from Dr. Kenneth and Mamie Clark presented to the court that "prejudice, discrimination, and segregation created a feeling of inferiority among African American children and damaged their self-esteem" ("NAACP Legal History").

Thus, evidence such as "the doll test" led to Marshall and his supporting group of NAACPs attorneys' victory in the case of *Brown (*"*Brown v. Board*: The Significance of the 'Doll Test"). In the victory, the Supreme Court deemed segregation unconditional, legally overturning the perils of *Plessy*. It was a decision that every place of learning in America had to

acknowledge as, from the influence of *Brown,* the New York City Board of Education gave a public statement, as it claimed:

> Segregated, racially homogeneous schools damage the

personality of minority-group children. These schools decrease their motivation and thus impair their ability to learn. White children are also damaged. Public education in a racially homogeneous setting is socially unrealistic and blocks the attainment of the goals of democratic education, whether this segregation occurs by law or by fact. (Hanna-Jones, "Choosing a School")

It was a notion that took years of black resolve to assert into America's social consciousness. To highlight the country's history of white resentment towards black people. An effort that was only made possible through a collective black resolve to build and use their communities to improve American society for themselves and future American citizens.

Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education

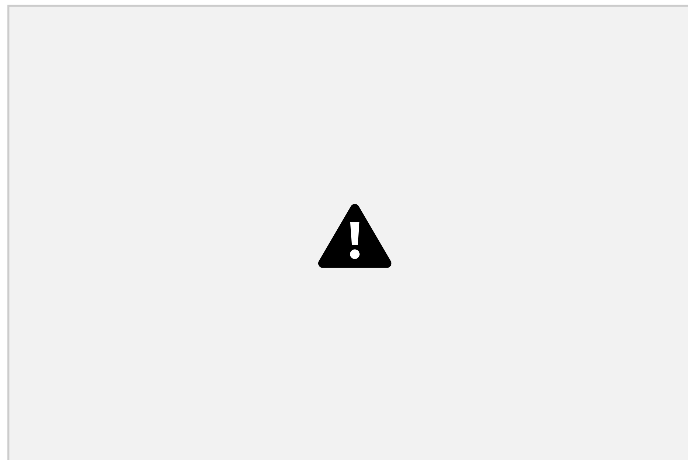

Figure 21: African American and White school children on a school bus, Charlotte, NC. Warren K. Leffler, U.S. News & World report Magazine, 1973.

After the decision of *Brown*, African Americans still found it challenging to implement desegregation in the South. States such as Virginia and Arkansas had taken massive resistance to heart as its governors closed schools and passed state laws to thwart the new freedoms in education that black people had rightfully taken. However, compared to these other Southern States North Carolina was one where black people had made significant

progress in seeking to achieve integration even if it had come decades after it was decreed by law.

Due to the number of black colleges in North Carolina, the State was the location for many significant events during the Civil Rights Movement that pushed for public integration. From the A&T Four that originated through the ideals of students from the historically black-all woman Bennett College, to breaking down Wilmington's operation of segregated schools through forcing its school board to create plans to desegregate in 1968 by Dr. Hubert A. Eaton and NAACP lawyer Julius Chambers, black communities in the State prized education and sought to further efforts of integration to support this value (H. Eaton 56-57; Willis).

Thus, by the late 60s, most counties in North Carolina had begun to desegregate, but this development was unacceptably slow. Throughout the mid-50s, North Carolina had operated through a system that allowed desegregation named the Pearsall Plan. This plan sought to appease the "all deliberate speed" request from the United States Supreme Court, creating desegregation plans that gave students the option and voucher system to choose which school they wanted to attend ("School Desegregation").

This effort, however, did little to integrate as white parents would not assign their children to schools that contained black children, and black parents rarely wanted to subject their children to attending predominantly white spaces of education. The Pearsall Plan was eventually declared unconstitutional in federal court, placing pressure on North Carolina to find ways to integrate instead of desegregating in a fragmented manner ("School Desegregation").