

TEACHING *The* MOVEMENT

# Beyond the Bus

*Teaching the Unseen Story of Rosa Parks  
and the Montgomery Bus Boycott*



TEACHING  
TOLERANCE

A PROJECT OF THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER

## **ABOUT TEACHING TOLERANCE**

Founded in 1991, Teaching Tolerance is dedicated to reducing prejudice, improving intergroup relations and supporting equitable school experiences for our nation's children.

The program provides free educational materials, including *Perspectives for a Diverse America*, a K-12 anti-bias curriculum. *Teaching Tolerance* magazine is sent to more than 400,000 educators, reaching nearly every school in the country. Tens of thousands of educators use the program's film kits, and more than 7,000 schools participate in the annual Mix It Up at Lunch Day program.

Teaching Tolerance materials have won two Oscars®, an Emmy and dozens of REVERE Awards from the Association of American Publishers, including two Golden Lamps, the industry's highest honor. The program's website and social media pages offer thought-provoking news, conversation and support for educators who care about diversity, equal opportunity and respect for differences in schools.

For more information about Teaching Tolerance or to download this guide, visit [tolerance.org](http://tolerance.org).

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## Introduction

Ask students in the United States to name an important event in civil rights history, and most of them will identify the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott. Ask them to name two important leaders, and most will say Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks.

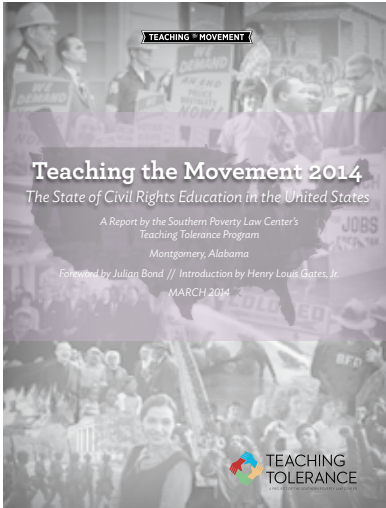
But ask students to describe other details about the movement (e.g., specific tactics, influential groups, opponents of the movement), and the chances of getting an accurate response—or any response at all—shrink dramatically. In 2010, for example, the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP, also known as the “Nation’s Report Card”) reported that only 2 percent of high school seniors correctly answered a simple question about the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*.

These gaps in student knowledge troubled us for years and led us to investigate the question: What exactly are students in the United States expected to learn about the movement? We detailed our findings in two reports: *Teaching the Movement: The State of Civil Rights Education in the United States* (2011 and 2014). Both reports showed that states didn’t expect much. State standards and curriculum frameworks stressed two or three major leaders and a handful of events but missed the crucial elements that show how and why the movement happened—and why it is still relevant today.

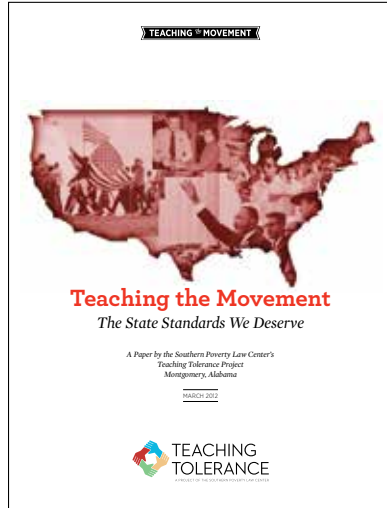
We also discovered that there is little guidance for teachers about what content to teach, how to use the movement to promote civic engagement, and how to talk about issues related to race and racism. Diagnosing the gaps wasn’t enough; we decided to do something about them by developing a set of resources to support robust teaching about this critical history.

The 60th anniversary of the Montgomery Bus Boycott offers a special opportunity to apply the findings of the *Teaching the Movement* reports and related resources. This means teaching about the individuals who acted collectively *alongside* Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks, and about how activists organize and operate, so that students, too, can work collectively with their peers. This means that discussions about Rosa Parks must acknowledge the activists who were arrested before her and the grassroots efforts that mobilized the community to boycott after her arrest. When we give our students the whole story, we provide a way for them to connect the past to the present and continue the march toward racial justice.

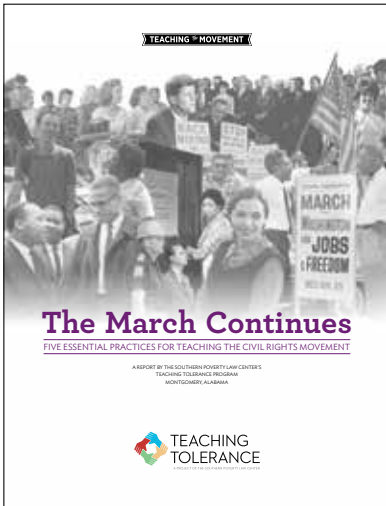
*Beyond the Bus*, a special publication of the *Teaching the Movement* initiative, brings together key elements from resources we developed over the past five years to help educators recognize and fill instructional gaps. They include:



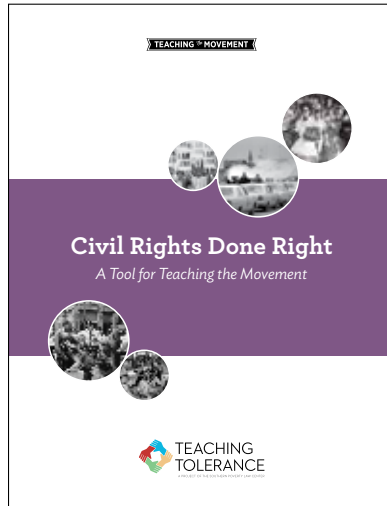
*The State of Teaching the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.* State-by-state results from the 2011 and 2014 studies



*The State Standards We Deserve.* Model standards for states



*The March Continues: Five Essential Practices for Teaching the Civil Rights Movement.* Suggestions for how to integrate the essential areas



*Civil Rights Done Right: A Tool for Teaching the Movement.* Five steps to creating meaningful lessons about modern civil rights history



In this guide, we apply these resources to the story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

## The State of Civil Rights Movement Education in the United States

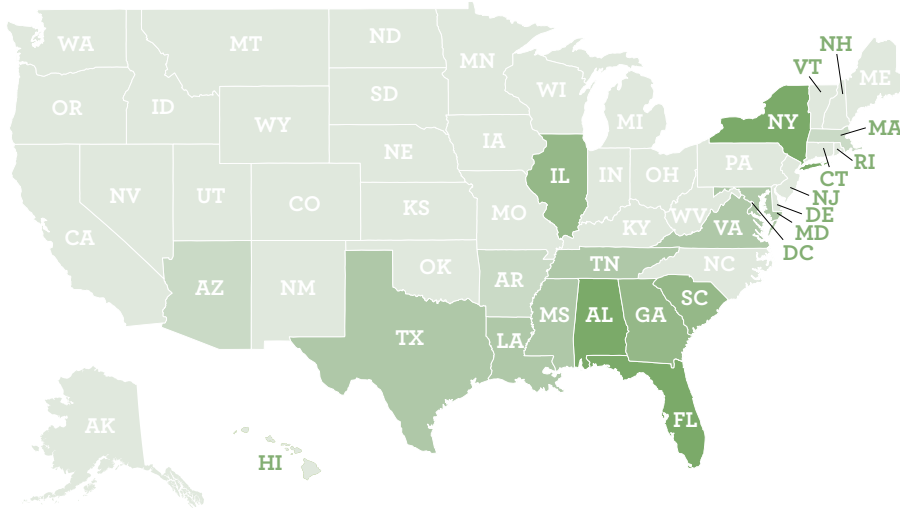
The degree to which states require teaching about the civil rights movement varies radically across the United States, but the overall picture is grim. These maps show the grade assigned to each state based on the quality of civil rights content reflected in its social studies standards, frameworks and resources provided to teachers. (The full reports from 2011 and 2014 are available at [tolerance.org/TTM](http://tolerance.org/TTM).)

We measured two areas in each state: (1) the major documents (content, sequence, depth and connections) and (2) supporting resources (comprehension, promotion of historical thinking, and access and presentation). Even applying the criteria liberally, our researchers were obliged to assign most states an “F” grade in both 2011 and 2014.

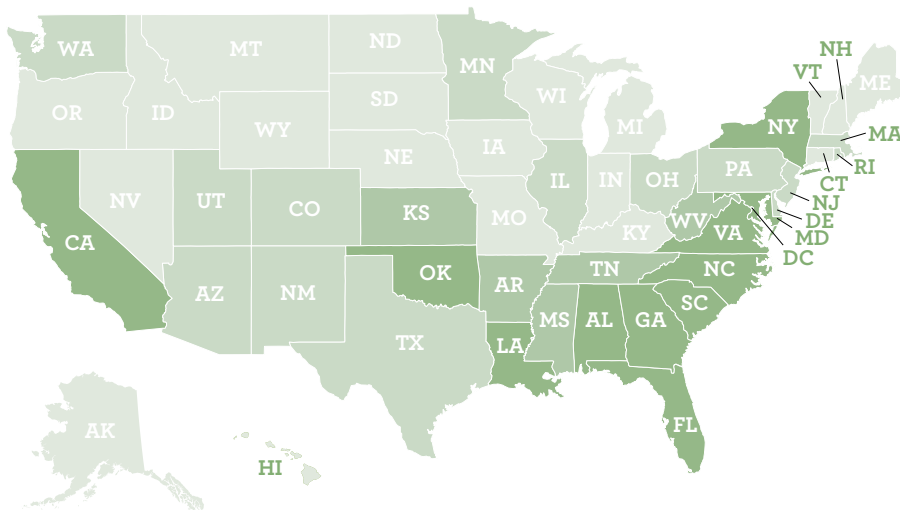
What does it mean that the United States is falling short when it comes to teaching the movement? It means that the majority of our students graduate believing that civil rights history is relevant only to African Americans or to people who live in the South. It means that the civil rights movement is excluded from our collective understanding of the key events that shaped our country. It also means that young people aren’t being taught one of history’s most complex, sustained and successful examples of collective action.

The antidote? Educators who—regardless of what their state standards require—commit to cultivating a deeper understanding of this important history and using its lessons to nurture a new generation of citizens.

2011



2014



GRADES **F** **D** **C** **B** **A**

| STATE                | 2011 | 2014 |
|----------------------|------|------|
| Alabama              | A    | B    |
| Alaska               | F    | F    |
| Arizona              | D    | D    |
| Arkansas             | D    | C    |
| California           | F    | B    |
| Colorado             | F    | D    |
| Connecticut          | F    | F    |
| Delaware             | F    | D    |
| District of Columbia | D    | C    |
| Florida              | A    | B    |
| Georgia              | B    | A    |
| Hawaii               | F    | F    |
| Idaho                | F    | F    |
| Illinois             | B    | D    |
| Indiana              | F    | F    |
| Iowa                 | F    | F    |
| Kansas               | F    | C    |
| Kentucky             | F    | F    |
| Louisiana            | C    | A    |
| Maine                | F    | F    |
| Maryland             | C    | B    |
| Massachusetts        | D    | D    |
| Michigan             | F    | F    |
| Minnesota            | F    | D    |
| Mississippi          | C    | C    |
| Missouri             | F    | F    |
| Montana              | F    | F    |
| Nebraska             | F    | F    |
| Nevada               | F    | F    |
| New Hampshire        | F    | F    |
| New Jersey           | F    | D    |
| New Mexico           | F    | D    |
| New York             | A    | B    |
| North Carolina       | F    | B    |
| North Dakota         | F    | F    |
| Ohio                 | F    | D    |
| Oklahoma             | F    | B    |
| Oregon               | F    | F    |
| Pennsylvania         | F    | D    |
| Rhode Island         | F    | D    |
| South Carolina       | B    | A    |
| South Dakota         | F    | F    |
| Tennessee            | C    | C    |
| Texas                | C    | D    |
| Utah                 | F    | D    |
| Vermont              | F    | F    |
| Virginia             | C    | B    |
| Washington           | F    | D    |
| West Virginia        | F    | C    |
| Wisconsin            | F    | F    |
| Wyoming              | F    | F    |



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**WE DEMAND VOTING RIGHTS NOW!**

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**MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM**

**COLORED WAITING ROOM**

**RACE MIXING IS COMMUNISM**

**STOP THE RACE MIXING IS COMMUNISM**

**RACE MIXING IS COMMUNISM**

**B.F.D.**

**NAACP**



# Essential Areas for Civil Rights Education

What does robust civil rights instruction include? These essential areas can help you select content that moves your lessons beyond the “King-and-Parks” narrative. Pick a topic or event, then research content in each essential area to give your lesson depth and relevance.

Read how one educator applied the essential areas at [tolerance.org/blog/teaching-movement-beyond-four-famous-words](https://www.tolerance.org/blog/teaching-movement-beyond-four-famous-words).

| <i>Essential Area</i>                    | <i>Essential Content</i>   |
|--|--|
| <b>Leaders</b>                           | Students should learn that the civil rights movement was a movement composed of many individuals rather than due to the initiative of any single person or small group of people.                        |
| <b>Groups</b>                            | Students should be able to identify major groups involved in the civil rights movement.  |
| <b>Events</b>                            | Students should be able to identify key events in the civil rights movement and place them in the correct chronology.  |
| <b>Historical Context</b>                | Students should be able to trace the roots of the civil rights movement to slavery through the Civil War and Reconstruction.   |
| <b>Opposition</b>                        | Students should identify obstacles to the civil rights movement’s success. They should examine the persistence of racism and identify key figures and groups that opposed the extension of civil rights. |
| <b>Tactics</b>                           | Students should identify and compare tactics such as nonviolent resistance, boycotts, sit-ins, marches, voter registration and Black Power used at different times during the struggle for civil rights. |
| <b>Connections to other movements</b>    | Coverage of the civil rights movement includes connections to other social movements.  |
| <b>Connection to current events</b>      | The civil rights movement is linked to current events and concerns.  |
| <b>Connection to civic participation</b> | The civil rights movement is incorporated into civics instruction so that students are encouraged to apply the lessons of the movement when forming their own ideas about effective citizenship.         |



# The Unseen Story: Beyond the Bus

The Montgomery Bus Boycott is arguably the most famous event of the 1950s civil rights movement—but what do your students really know about the people involved and the events that surrounded it? Use the content listed here to give your students a deeper understanding of the boycott and of Rosa Parks, the woman widely credited with starting it.

## ROSA PARKS AND THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT

| <i>Essential Area</i>                    | <i>Essential Content</i>  |
|--|---|
| <b>Leaders</b>                           | E. D. Nixon • Clifford Judkins Durr & Virginia Foster Durr • Fred Gray • Charles Langford • Jo Ann Robinson • Ralph Abernathy • Martin Luther King Jr. • Plaintiffs in 1956 federal case ( <i>Browder v. Gayle</i> ): Aurelia Browder, Claudette Colvin, Susie McDonald, Mary Louise Smith • Robert Graetz • Georgia Theresa Gilmore (Club From Nowhere) • Sarah Herbert  |
| <b>Groups</b>                            | Women’s Political Council • Montgomery Improvement Association • NAACP Youth Council • Club From Nowhere • Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters • Montgomery Voters League   |
| <b>Events</b>                            | Arrest and trial • Claudette Colvin refusal, 3/2/1955 • Mary Louise Smith refusal, 10/21/1955 • Rosa Parks refusal, 12/1/1955 • Bombing of Abernathy and King houses; attacks on churches • Arrests of King and other leaders • <i>Browder v. Gayle</i>   |
| <b>Historical Context</b>                | “Separate but equal” decision ( <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> ), 1896 • Previous cases: Jackie Robinson court martial, ( <i>United States v. 2d Lt. Jack R. Robinson</i> ) 1944; Irene Morgan case ( <i>Morgan v. Virginia</i> ), 1946 • Baton Rouge, Louisiana, city-parish Ordinance 222, 1953 • <i>Sarah Keys v. Carolina Coach Company</i> , 1955 • Interstate Commerce Act, 1887 • Mississippi Service Stations Boycott, 1952 • Highlander Folk School |
| <b>Opposition</b>                        | Mayor William A. Gayle • White Citizens’ Council • Withdrawal of insurance coverage for black drivers operating private taxis • FBI investigation of King • Violence against ministers, buses and churches after <i>Browder v. Gayle</i> ruling   |
| <b>Tactics</b>                           | Distribution of flyers • Mass meetings at churches • Boycott: refusal to use public transportation (12/5/1955 to 12/20/1956) • Alternate transport: black-run private taxi services; volunteer car-pool system; walking; biking • Evoking the Declaration of Independence and the ideals of the country’s founding as motivational rhetoric   |
| <b>Connections to other movements</b>    | Alexandra Bus Boycott in Johannesburg, South Africa, 1957 • Bristol Bus Boycott in Bristol, England, 1963 • Freedom Rides, 1961 (interstate) • Founding of Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1957 • Other boycotts: Delano grape boycott, 1965-1970; Gandhi’s March to the Sea, 1930  |
| <b>Connections to current events</b>     | Current connections could include any recent example of a local boycott or a community group challenging a law or regulation.   |
| <b>Connection to civic participation</b> | Holding mass meetings, making strategic use of communications systems, using existing groups to organize and publicize  |

source: montgomeryboycott.com

# Five Essential Practices for Teaching the Civil Rights Movement

As important as *what* we teach about the Montgomery Bus Boycott is *how* we teach it. Reflect on your approach to teaching about civil rights history and how you can integrate these essential practices into your planning and instruction.

You'll find additional guidance and comprehensive descriptions of each practice at [tolerance.org/TTM-essential-practices](https://tolerance.org/TTM-essential-practices).

## PRACTICE 1. Educate for empowerment.

- Challenge students to question the assumptions and narratives they have been taught about the civil rights movement by developing their critical-thinking and questioning skills.
- Prepare students to be change agents and participants in history by emphasizing the importance of young people in the civil rights movement.
- Introduce students to role models in their school and communities who can serve as strong examples of change makers.
- Provide experiential-learning opportunities that allow students to apply what they learn to the real world.
- Teach the tactics and strategies of the civil rights movement, and encourage students to think creatively about how they can address injustice today.

## PRACTICE 2. Know how to talk about race.

- Whatever your racial identity, speak from your own authentic experiences with race and racism.
- Allow regular opportunities for students to talk, in a supportive environment, about their experiences with race and racism.
- Be conscious and curious about the ways race is important in your students' lives.
- Dispel ideas about a biological basis for race.
- Reacquaint yourself with the evolving social constructions surrounding race and how it has been used as a means of control throughout history.
- Avoid colorblind language—make whiteness visible and acknowledge contemporary racial disparities.

### PRACTICE 3. Capture the unseen.

- Push back against the “Montgomery-to-Memphis” frame. Teach a wider civil rights movement that took place across the country (not just in the South) and in daily life (not just in the political sphere).
- Shift the focus from familiar heroes and villains to lesser-known individuals.
- Offer alternative and competing viewpoints of civil rights history by drawing upon original sources and personal narratives and testimonies.
- Promote a model of learning as discovery in which students are producers of knowledge and meaning rather than passive receptacles.
- Teach students to examine historical events in the context of both the past and the present.

### PRACTICE 4. Resist telling a simple story.

- Avoid presenting sanitized accounts that obscure the realities of racial violence and systems of racial control.
- Address work that remains to be done and current-day inequalities and challenges to racial justice.
- Shift students’ thinking away from individuals and toward systems and institutions.
- Dispel the “Malcolm X vs. MLK” dichotomy that casts the civil rights movement as divided over nonviolent resistance.
- Present the U.S. civil rights movement from a global perspective that captures its international implications.

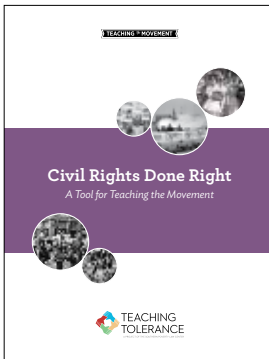
### PRACTICE 5. Connect to the present.

- Build bridges from the civil rights movement to current events related to social justice and racial equality.
- Encourage students to make connections between the African-American struggle for civil rights and other freedom struggles going on today.
- Address goals of the civil rights movement that remain unmet today.
- Make the civil rights movement relevant to students’ lives by drawing on local issues and community struggles.
- Use project-based learning and performance tasks to assess student learning in application to their own lives.



Download  
**Let's Talk!**  
**Discussing Race,**  
**Racism and Other**  
**Difficult Topics**  
**with Students,** and  
prepare yourself for  
Practice 2.

[tolerance.org/lets-talk](http://tolerance.org/lets-talk)



## Civil Rights Done Right: A Tool for Teaching the Movement

*Civil Rights Done Right* is a multistep curriculum design tool, perfect for educators who already teach about the modern civil rights movement but want to improve the breadth, depth and relevance of their coverage.

This “quick” version of *Civil Rights Done Right* can help you integrate the essential areas and practices to create meaningful lessons that cultivate a deeper understanding of civil rights history. A complete interactive version of this tool is available at [tolerance.org/publication/civil-rights-done-right](http://tolerance.org/publication/civil-rights-done-right).

### **STEP ONE: SELF-ASSESSMENT**

Think about how you teach the civil rights movement, and assess your instructional content and practice. Then, choose an existing lesson, activity or unit to “make over.”

### **STEP TWO: THE “WHAT” OF TEACHING THE MOVEMENT**

Begin your lesson makeover by integrating essential content areas into your coverage of the movement: leaders, groups, events, historical content, opposition, tactics, and connections to other social movements, current events and civic participation (see pgs 9 & 11).

### **STEP THREE: THE “HOW” OF TEACHING THE MOVEMENT**

Build personal competency with each of the five essential practices (see pg 12).

### **STEP FOUR: PLANNING FOR TEACHING THE MOVEMENT**

Organize work you’ve completed in previous steps by drilling down into the essential content, unpacking the practices and identifying standards.

### **STEP FIVE: TEACHING THE MOVEMENT**

Finalize your lesson plans, get feedback from other educators and then *teach the movement!* Continue the process of reflection, self-assessment and improvement modeled throughout each step of *Civil Rights Done Right*.

# Acknowledgments

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