"There Must Come A Change": School-Based Black Educational Activism in Philadelphia

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Unit Content

Abstract: In tracing the history of Black education and the School District of Philadelphia from the earliest antebellum literary societies to the current State Supreme Court case, this unit helps English or history students to situate themselves within a lengthy heritage of uncompromising activism and advocacy for meaningful and respectful education. Students demonstrate their understanding and grow their own skills as readers and historians through rhetorical analyses of relevant speeches, peer and family interviews and preparing for a student-led Socratic Seminar as a culminating activity. This is a broad survey meant to give students "the big picture," possibly at the start of a year or semester, or individual lessons and resources can be expanded upon.

Keywords: African-American History, School District History, 1967 Walkout, Literary Societies, Rhetoric

Introduction & Teaching Context

I teach sections of 10th, 11th, and 12th grade Humanities at Vaux Big Picture High School in Philadelphia, Pa. Our school functions under a unique model. As a Big Picture school, we are project-based and internship-based; students spend one to two days a week on off-campus internships with local organizations, pursuing passions through volunteer, supervised placements in fields from architecture to zoology. To the extent practicable, students' academic learning is to be aligned to and supportive of their internship learning, particularly in our combined English Language Arts & Social Studies blocks. In order to better support student projects connected to internships and allow for authentically integrated content, English 2 & African-American History, English 3 & United States History, and English 4 & Social Science are all taught as combined classes Humanities 201, 301 & 401. This means that while my curriculum is closely aligned to state standards, I do not use the School District of Philadelphia's specific texts and lessons for either English Language Arts or Social Studies classes. In addition to state standards and some local alignment, my lessons and plans for student projects must be aligned to Big Picture competencies that emphasize the real-world application of student learning.

Vaux is not unique in being a Big Picture school; Big Picture is a loose network of internship-based schools spread across multiple continents and going back more than 30 years. Nor is Vaux the only high school in Philadelphia emphasizing project-based and student-driven learning in its course design; most of the schools within the Innovation Network model this approach. However, it is important to note that Vaux is a neighborhood public school, meaning we may not impose any requirements on admission and must accept all students who live within the catchment area. In the 2021-2022 school year, this largely geographically-based student body was 99% African-American, and 97% of students lived in households at or below the poverty line. The average household income for the school's zip code was $15,888 a year in 2019. In addition to this endemic poverty, my students live in one of the epicenters of Philadelphia's gun violence epidemic. In the '21-22 school year alone there have been six nonfatal shootings of currently enrolled students; two of these shootings occurred at school dismissal, witnessed by staff and students. Our students require additional academic support delivered with an awareness of this persistent trauma. 31% of the current student body requires an individualized educational plan, and less than 20% of our incoming 9th graders read at a 5th grade level or above.

This context and background is important to understand in viewing my unit, as this material will hopefully be useful to teachers in high needs schools but who have the freedom to teach using primary sources, project-based learning, and combined content areas. Teachers in schools where more students are already reading on grade level may find some of the literacy strategies & scaffolds unnecessary. Teachers in schools where subjects are not combined may find it helpful to either coordinate with another teacher or focus on either the historical aspects or rhetorical analysis aspects of this unit.

Rationale & Alignment

This unit is intended as the introduction to a combined English 2 and African-American History course, using about 10-12 80-minute block periods to trace the evolution of Black educational activism in Philadelphia from antebellum literacy societies to current advocacy efforts, both adult- and student-driven. While this course of study will touch on several of the themes of the Roadmap prepared by the Educating for American Democracy (https://www.educatingforamericandemocracy.org), our primary focus will be on theme 1, Civic Participation, and theme 5, Institutional & Social Transformations. The unit will be organized around a modified thematic question from theme 1: "How have [Philadelphians] come together in groups, made decisions, and affected their [school] communities? And how can that history inform our civic participation today?" By situating students' study within an area that they are extremely familiar with (the school) I hope to address Design Challenge 1.1: "How can we help students understand the full context for their role as citizen and civic participants, without creating paralysis or a sense of the insignificance of their own agency?" At the same time, the story of educational progress towards equality in Philadelphia is certainly one of

two steps forward and one step back, and so students will also need to engage with Design Challenge 3.1, addressing the value and danger of compromise.

By beginning their 10th grade year with a broad overview of the history of Black educational activism in Philadelphia, I hope to engage students in the history of a system that they have perforce spent a decade studying through experience. By examining student, teacher, and community member influence on Philadelphia education, I will be able to scaffold student civic involvement beyond the classroom after they have had an opportunity to examine their civic role in an area where they are more likely to see immediate results from their activism.

This unit will be aligned with state and local curriculum standards for 10th grade reading, writing, speaking, and listening, specifically through the use of rhetorical analysis, primary and secondary sources, close analysis of author's purpose and strategies, and scaffolded, student-led discussion.

Obviously, expected content for an African-American History course does not begin with education in Philadelphia, but by beginning the course with this short overview I will both ground students in a realm of activism that is familiar and accessible, and have a chance to implement community-building and literacy-building activities drawn from some of the earliest documented literacy study groups in Philadelphia. My lessons will be organized using the Historically Responsive Teaching model outlined by Dr. Gholdy Muhammad in *Cultivating Genius* (2020). Furthermore, I will be teaching this unit first in the fall of 2022, a time period when the School District of Philadelphia will be welcoming a new superintendent and when a decision on a historic school funding case is likely to be either recent or imminent.

Overview of Historical Content

Philadelphia has a rich and contradictory history around liberatory education for Black Americans. My own students are very conscious that we learn together in an elegant, imposing Art Deco building, complete with scholarly stained glass windows—a building that sent a middle school chess team to an international competition in the 1980s and holds regular alumni gatherings of successful Black Philadelphians. They are also aware that they learn in a building with unreliable heating and power, regular vermin infestations, unsafe water, and an auditorium that cannot be used due to water damage unrepaired for more than a decade. They learn in a school that was closed in 2013 for poor performance and that, frankly, did not well serve many of their parents or grandparents who graduated from Vaux when it was a junior high.

This contradiction runs through Philadelphia's history. The first Black literacy and education society, the Reading Room, was formed in Philadelphia in 1828, and free public education was, at least legislatively, the right of all poor students without regard to

race as early as 1818. And yet, private school Girard College, visible from my classroom windows, did not admit Black students until 1968, and testimony has just concluded, in 2022, in a state court case where plaintiffs argued that school funding in Pennsylvania is so inequitable, particularly along racial lines, as to violate the state constitution. We are a school system that has been at war with itself almost from the beginning, with the education of Black children a frequent casualty of that war.

My students and I will begin by studying the literacy and writing societies of early-to-mid 19th century Philadelphia. Similarly, we will explore the opening of free schools for Black children in Philadelphia, a problematic history of promises delayed or ignored until other factors increased the pressure on school controllers (one of whom was our school's namesake). Students will then trace the development of this public education through the mid-1800s, the work of educator and voting rights martyr Octavius Catto, the early 20th-century shift to schools as social institutions, the impact of the Great Migration on Philadelphia in general and our school's neighborhood in particular, the 1967 student walkout, the gradual disinvestment of the 1980s and 90s, and the eventual state takeover and school closures that are likely to have impacted my own students' earliest schooling. Finally, students will study recent and current activism, including student testimony before the school board, social media organizing through Instagram accounts like @BlackAtMasterman, and the state fair funding trial that concluded testimony in March of 2022.

In reviewing all of this history, I will rely on primary sources including letters, speeches, Census records, and public meeting notes. Students will be tasked with organizing their information around three key essential questions:

1) How have Philadelphians come together to organize for educational justice?
2) Who were significant leaders in educational activism in Philadelphia, and what was their impact?
3) What strategies, actions, and compromises have been effective or ineffective in furthering educational equity?

In order to address ELA standards of writing, I will explicitly teach rhetorical strategies and structure, and students will closely analyze such rhetorical writing in order to use as a mentor text. Students will examine the following documents for rhetorical flourishes & discussion:

1) William Whipper's 1828 address to the first meeting of the Reading Room Society.
2) Octavius Catto's 1864 commencement speech at the Institute for Colored Youth (later Cheyney University).
3) An excerpt from Chapter VIII, "Education & Literacy," in *The Philadelphia Negro.*

4) A student selection from the oral histories of the Great Migration included in West Chester University's oral history project Goin' North.
5) Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1967 "What is Your Life's Blueprint?" speech delivered at a Philadelphia middle school.

As this unit is conceived as an introductory unit of study, student tasks and projects will be designed to maximize opportunities for community building while giving me usable data on students' reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. I will use the Library of Congress protocol for analyzing primary sources, modified slightly to include guiding questions drawn from Gholdy Muhammad's work. Additionally, each student will develop a personal "blueprint" setting their goals for the year in the course, their internship and their post-secondary plans, and also participate in a structured class consensus discussion to draft a "preamble" setting goals for the class community (Muhammad, 2020, p. 127). Jigsaw research and reading activities will allow me to assess, explicitly teach, and strengthen students' strategies for nonfiction reading. Specific discussion strategies modeled and practiced throughout the unit will prepare students to lead their own short Socratic seminars as a culminating activity.

A general overview of events, organizations & individuals crucial to understanding the history of school-based Black educational activism in Philadelphia follows.

Freedom to Read: Early African-American Education in Philadelphia, 1800-1860

The earliest stories of Black educational activism in Philadelphia are stories of self-determination, community organizing, and relentless persistence. As a stronghold of Quaker activism and the base of one the earliest Black middle- and upper-class communities, Philadelphia was well-positioned to be a city where incipient Black scholars of any age could be supported and heard. Unfortunately, this promise was only ever intermittently fulfilled.

The earliest documented mutual aid societies for Black Americans grew up in Philadelphia, beginning with the Free African Society founded by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones in 1787 (Porter, 1936), but these were societies organized around economic and legal support. Forty years later, on March 28th, 1828, a group of young Black men, led by a largely-self-educated coal-heaver named William Whipper, formed the nation's first Black literary society. The "Colored Reading Society for Mental Improvement" or "Reading Room Society" gave its purpose as "the mental improvement of the people of color in the neighborhood of Philadelphia," and loaned out books weekly to its small group of subscribed members who then met to discuss and debate their readings.

A few weeks after its founding, Whipper delivered an address to the group that provides an excellent example for students of the rhetorical style and underpinnings of these early self-educational groups. Basing his speech on recent developments in rhetorical philosophy that distinguished between the necessity of developing "taste" to assess good writing, and "genius" to create it, Whipper unknowingly set the tone for much of subsequent Philadelphian education when he declared, "The first object of education is to exercise, and by exercising to improve the faculties of the mind" (Bacon & McClish, 2000, p. 6). Jacqueline Bacon and Glenn McClish closely deconstructed Whipper's address as an exercise in 19th-century rhetoric in their "Reinventing the master's tools: Nineteenth-century African-American literary societies of Philadelphia and rhetorical education" (2000). The address begins as a straightforward call to self-improvement that could be found in any current growth-mindset professional development session, adding, "Men do not differ so much from each other by original distinctions of genius, as by their success in improving what they have." However, in a smooth rhetorical progression that would later be imitated (perhaps unconsciously) by Octavius Catto in his valedictorian speech, Whipper draws a direct line from education to abolition and highlights the hypocrisy of American writers, movers, and shakers who cheered the Declaration of Independence but supported "a bondage ten times as severe as the one…that their fathers denounced as being too ignominious to be borne by man" (Bacon & McClish, 2000, p. 27). Whipper's speech provides excellent teaching examples of pathos, metaphor, establishing and subverting audience expectations, and many other writing strategies useful for students to review. At what is arguably the birth of multiracial education in Philadelphia, he throws down the gauntlet, declaring of the struggle for both education and abolition that "We would rather court than shun the contest, as the very sparks which may be elicited by the clashing of our weapons will in some measure tend to dissipate the surrounding darkness." Education and literacy here are not a luxury or a means of economical self-improvement, but a blow struck against injustice and oppression.

Although Whipper proudly practiced a school of oratory that never shrank from elevated rhetoric, he was not alone in his steadfast belief that these nascent societies and budding libraries could change the world. Addressing the American Moral Reform Society nine years after the founding of the Reading Room, the prominent Black abolitionist and activist James Forten would define these societies' mission as "to accomplish an intellectual and moral reformation," and then list a set of goals that would make any teacher proud, as the members of these societies grew "by reading, by examining, by close comparisons and thorough investigations, by exercising the great faculty of thinking" (Porter, 1936, as cited in Muhammad, 2012). Dr. Gholdy Muhammad explains eloquently that, in antebellum Philadelphia, "reading and writing were more than a set of skills for African-Americans to possess; they were pathways to define their lives and advocate for civil rights" (Muhammad, 2012, p. 6). A May, 1850 issue of the "Colored American Newspaper" defined the "Literary Character" of African-Americans as key to their success and activism.

Additional societies & means of self-education sprouted throughout the first part of the 19th century, quickly specializing to meet the needs of individual Black Philadelphians. The Colored Reading Room most likely morphed into the Philadelphia Library Company of Colored Persons by 1833 (Bintrim, n.d.). The Female Literary Association formed in 1831, directed in large part by Philadelphia native and educator Sarah Mapp Douglass, with an approach to reading best described as "to hold a feast, to feed our never-dying minds, to excite each other to deeds of mercy, words of peace" (Lindhorst, 1998). In her opening address, Douglass, the daughter of a prominent Black family, specifically connected her reading and writing to a new call for activism. She described her life hitherto as comfortable and all too ignorant of the "iron hand of the oppressor," and then called her listeners to follow her into a new and unrelenting battle against the racist and pro-slavery backlash growing even in Philadelphia in the wake of Nat Turner's rebellion (Lindhorst, 1998). A few years later, in 1836, the Rush Library Company & Debating Society formed *exclusively* for Black Philadelphians under the age of 21. This organization, and the other literary and debate societies, were not only centers for activism, community, and the formation of an educated elite; they were, in many cases, the only options young people had to continue their learning.

Although Philadelphia was in many ways the center of Black intellectual life in the antebellum period, it did not escape from the racism embedded throughout the nation. By 1860, no other northern city had greater numbers of Black citizens or a greater percentage of Black citizens present in the city (Martin, 2002), but those same citizens had been disenfranchised in 1838 by state-level legislation. The laws calling for free public education for indigent children were understood to apply to Black children as early as 1802, but the actual history of Black public education is another story of promises delayed, ignored, or poorly kept.

A short explanation of the structure of Philadelphia schools in the early 1800s may be in order. When public schools were first established in 1818, the city was divided into four areas, each with a controller who managed the mini-school system therein, including the elected school directors. Roberts Vaux (the namesake of my school) was the first president, maintaining the position from 1818-1832. As Harry C. Silcox lays out in "Delay and Neglect: Negro Public Education in Antebellum Philadelphia" (1972), the first attempts to establish schools for Black children in Philadelphia quickly became an elaborate game of "Not-It" among the school controllers, school directors, and city officials. Controllers of the new system placed all of their energy on the development of a "Model School." Vaux expended his own political capital on fierce opposition to the budding Missouri Compromise, a stance that, however quickly vindicated by history, decreased Abolition Society membership. Since the Abolition Society was a major funder for would-be Black students, his political actions limited the availability of Black schools.

When city funding was requested, other city controllers claimed the decision to open and staff a school for poor Black children was the decision of individual school directors, ignoring the fact that it was controllers and not directors who held the power of the purse. Black families & activists advocated and individuals like Sarah Mapp Douglass opened their own schools, but it would not be until the end of 1821 that the thumb-twiddling controllers finally undertook to open a school. Silcox (1972) argues that it was less community pressure or sentiments of equality that drove the final decision and more a drastic dip in white student enrollment, a minor scandal of inflated enrollment records, and a spike in media coverage of robberies and assaults by Black youths. In a report to the city, Vaux blamed this crime on a lack of educational opportunities, and finally, in the spring of 1822, the Mary Street School opened to an eventual enrollment of over 200 pupils. These schools, and most to follow, all operated on a "Lancastrian" system, where a single teacher managed a room of as many as 200 students by designating more advanced students to teach those younger than them.

By four years later, there were two such single-room "schools" for Vaux to praise, trumpeting the "proficiency," "orderly habits," and "the happiest results" emerging from these schools (Silcox, 1972). In what would become a common problem of Philadelphia education, however, the actual progress of the students and the satisfaction of their families in no way matched the rosy declarations of the authorities. Of the 324 upper elementary students enrolled in the Mary Street and Gaskill Street schools, only 64 knew their alphabet at the end of the first year. In 1827, two mothers wrote to *The African Observer* objecting to poor instruction, crowded conditions, and underqualified teachers. In 1828, as William Whipper was urging his adult peers to become driven autodidacts of the classics, the controllers moved Black students into the recently vacated (by white pupils) Lombard Street School. This building remained on the Lancastrian system, with staffing ratios of 1:200 or more, even as white schools across the city began to abandon such an approach. Lombard Street would cycle through six principals in five years and employ mostly new, underqualified instructors, with brief passages of success under the leadership of principal James Bird followed by times of chaos and declining enrollment.

For the first time, but certainly not the last, Philadelphia decision-makers responded to a challenge of resources and staffing in a Black school by proposing closure, suggesting in 1840 the complete removal of any Black middle school in favor of two Black primary schools and only backing down in the face of significant advocacy by Black families (Silcox, 1972). The first public high school had already opened in 1837, explicitly refusing Black students; sixteen years later, in 1853, abolitionist and activist Robert Purvis would publicly refuse to pay the School Tax because his children were denied entry to public school and referred instead to a "miserable shanty" in Mechanicsville (Woodson, 1926, p. 178). The School Law of 1854 codified this neglect while still pretending to a commitment to educate students regardless of race, by permitting segregated schools so long as there were at least 20 Black children (of any

age) within the school system and allowing Black schools to be considered sufficient even if open as little as four months of the year (Silcox, 1972).

The first major attempt to fill this gap in meaningful education had come in the form of an 1837 bequest from Robert Humphreys to found a "benevolent society or institution…having for its object the benevolent design of instructing the descendants of the African race in school learning, in the various branches of the mechanic arts and trade, and in agriculture, in order to prepare and fit and qualify them to act as teachers in such of those branches of useful business as in the judgment of the said society they may appear best qualified for" (Giesberg et al, 2015). Although the Quakers managing the bequest at first considered any attempt at preparing Black youth for college or "learned professions" as "chimerical" (G., 1833), by 1851 the Institute focused on teaching the future teachers. In antebellum Philadelphia, the Institute for Colored Youth quickly became a center for the highest intellectual achievement, facilitated by highly educated and committed Black teachers. The next section will address the increasing role of the Institute, and other public and non-public schools for Black youth, as centers of activism and change in Philadelphia.

"There Must Come A Change:" Fighting for Black Teachers & Activist Schools, 1860-1930

The period immediately before, during, and following the Civil War saw a sea change in Black education in Philadelphia, while also foreshadowing the ways in which funding, staffing, and ensuring liberatory education for Black youth would be an afterthought at best for many white city leaders for more than a century to come. Although DuBois observed in his seminal *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899) that *de jure* school segregation had been illegal since 1881, in 1896 barely 1/5th of the eligible Black youth (ages 14 to 20) of Philadelphia attended school, and those who attended were often frequently absent, while the norm was for boys to leave school by 16 and girls by 17. This was neither a new problem nor an easily solvable one. As discussed earlier, from the earliest days Black public education in Philadelphia was an afterthought, often conducted in the buildings, by the teachers, and using the methods that had been previously rejected by the white school system. In reviewing the history of education in Philadelphia, DuBois tracks the development of new schools for Black youth between 1837 and 1848, noting a proliferation of public, paid, and "charity" (private but free to the students) schools and yet a decrease in the percentage of children attending, likely due to a poor economy and the need for children to work. By 1896, there were seven public schools for Black students, five with predominantly or exclusively Black faculty, yet DuBois could state with confidence that fewer than 100 Black Philadelphia students had graduated college since the Civil War.

Many of those students might have completed their high school work at the prestigious Institute for Colored Youth, for a lengthy period the only high school

available to Black students in the city (meaning that students who could not meet its rigorous standards for free admission had no chance of education beyond the 8th grade). The Institute was a leadership factory throughout the 19th century, with a rigorous classical curriculum including Latin, Greek, and Trigonometry, final exams open to the public, and such demanding standards that only 37 students graduated between 1852 and 1866. Notable alumni and faculty included Fanny Jackson Coppin, born in slavery and later the first Black superintendent; Jacob C. White, first Black principal and the mentor or classmate of, by one estimate, 75% of the Black teachers in late 19th-century Philadelphia and New Jersey; and Caroline LeCount, a Philadelphia public school teacher and principal and one of the organizers, along with her fiance and fellow alum Octavius Catto, of the civil disobedience that led to the desegregation of Philadelphia streetcars (Giesberg et al, 2015).

Black students were too often forced to be activists merely by the fact of their seeking education, but many schools and students embraced education as a means of activism. A young student of the first public school described the need for "some rare marathon sprinting to escape both the cold and the hoodlum" (Biddle & Dubin, 2017, p. 102) due to gangs of white children and adults who would harass Black schoolchildren. When the sympathetic governor of Pennsylvania visited the Institute for Colored Youth in 1855, a young Jacob C. White publicly demanded when the state would "acknowledge the common brotherhood of her children…based on manhood and not on color" and deliver the franchise to Black Pennsylvanians (Biddle & Dubin, 2017, p. 168). The Institute produced leaders, but operated on the assumption that those leaders would also challenge power structures and advocate for better opportunities for all Black Philadelphians, Pennsylvanians, and Americans.

White's best friend since childhood, Octavius Catto, had always assisted him in these endeavors. Born to prominent Black families with activist fathers who educated and empowered them from infancy, the two had participated in literary societies, learned together at the Institute, and, after graduating in 1857 and 1858, organized a volunteer regiment of Black recruits to fight in the Civil War, only to be rejected once they arrived at Harrisburg. After the war, they remained pillars of educational and civic activism in Philadelphia, Catto as a teacher at the Institute and White as a teacher and principal in the public school system, while organizing the Philadelphia Pythians, an early Black baseball team.

In 1864, only six years out of high school himself, Catto was invited to be a speaker at the Institute's commencement. His assignment was to describe the history of the Institute for an audience that would include not only the Black faculty, graduates, and families, but also the school's white donors and managers. In the classroom, Catto's speech serves as an excellent example for student review of allusion, of prose, and of the ways in which an excellent writer subtly leads listeners and readers to their point. He begins "Our Alma Mater: An Address" by cogently and concisely summarizing the

history of the Institute, citing specific financial numbers and tracing the Institute's development from Humphrey's will to its current state, citing luminaries such as Aristotle and Martin Luther to argue for the importance of education and briefly summarizing the state of public and private education in other societies. Then, however, Catto shifts focus to "the part which this, and other similar institutions, are destined to lay in determining the future condition of the colored American" (Catto in Giesberg et al., 2015). He brags of the successes of the alumni of the school, many of whom were educators, and implies that the white teachers staffing most of the Black schools in the city were subpar instructors, only teaching Black children because the teachers' "intelligence and success…could neither obtain or secure for them position which we know would be more congenial to their tastes." As his audience shifted uncomfortably (Biddle & Dubin, 2017), Catto called for a plan for the widespread education and support of the innumerable Black Americans whose theoretical emancipation had just been declared, even as the war raged on, and explicitly called for the preparation of Black teachers to welcome and educate their Southern fellows. Many ICY alum, answering Catto's call, would teach in other cities or establish schools in the former Confederacy in the years to come.

Catto himself left the Institute on leave only a year before his death supporting the curriculum development of new Black schools in Washington, D.C. After his return, both White and Catto worked tirelessly to organize their students to vote in the 1870 election, the first in decades when Black men could vote. Although that Election Day, under federal troop protection, proceeded without major incident, the following year would see an Election Day riot fomented by white mobs (and uniformed police) attempting to repress the Black vote. After sending his students home to avoid the violence, and while gathering his supplies for an expected National Guard activation that evening to quell the unrest, Catto was encountered, shot, and killed by a political operative who would elude justice for six years—and then be found not guilty by a white jury. In 2017, a statue was erected to Catto at Philadelphia City Hall, the first public statue commemorating a Black man since the city's founding in 1682.

White and Catto were far from the only voices calling for more Black educators, and this issue would only become more urgent as the Black population of Philadelphia continued to increase. Following one set of the traditionally open-to-the-public final exams and graduation ceremony at the ICY, one writer for *The Christian Recorder* declared, "These five graduates are now prepared to act as teachers. We hope that the Board of Trustees of the Sixth Street Colored School will…give us colored teachers, to teach our children" (in Giesberg et al., 2015). While DuBois' statistics 30 years later do report that most Black schools were led by Black teachers, the ongoing segregation of students and teachers would continue to cause difficulties throughout the early 20th century. A new superintendent and the consolidation of the "ward" system into a single school district alleviated some of the overcrowding in 1906, but the city continued to resist building new Black schools or, indeed, enough schools at all; by 1909, one third of

the city's children could only attend school part time due to space constraints (Kitzmiller, 2014; Finkel, 2011).

At the same time that schools in Philadelphia, particularly for Black students, were significantly underfunded, changes in child labor laws and the decreasing influence of churches were making schools more and more important to not just children but their parents and neighborhoods. In 1911, the then-superintendent of Philadelphia observed a shift in the way schools were perceived, a "growing tendency for the community to regard the school as the center of much of its social life," only to remind his hearers that "these things cannot be done without money" (in Finkel, 2011). Just as this shift in school importance was beginning, the population of Philadelphia and the number of children who needed to be educated was skyrocketing; the city would add over 300,000 people from 1910 to 1920, and the Black population specifically would grow from 85,000 to 220,000 souls (Finkel, 2011; "Goin North," 2016). Groups like the Armstrong Association helped new Black migrants settle into the city, but many of their white supporters were not prepared or particularly motivated to educate Black citizens into competition with working-class white Philadelphians (Hayre in "Goin North," 2016). At the same time, Black teachers were strictly segregated to Black elementary schools, not permitted to teach white children or secondary level at all. Ruth Wright Hayre, later a principal and teacher in Philadelphia, commuted 10 miles to Chester in 1931 to student-teach as a University of Pennsylvania senior while her classmates strolled a few blocks away to West Philadelphia High (Mezzacappa, 2018). Wright would also face a hostile verbal exam not required of her white classmates after passing the written exam for would-be teachers. Allan Freelon, an experienced Black art teacher, was celebrated in a new leadership role in 1938 as the supervisor of multiple schools, only to see the Board of Education invent a new civil service exam requirement for school supervisors. Although Freelon passed the exam, there was little doubt that the requirement had been invented in response to the promotion of the city's first Black teacher into a public leadership role (Toloudis, 2019). Just outside the city, a few years earlier, Chester County had refused permission for a young Black woman to attend the area's only high school, directing her instead to an overcrowded, ill-equipped junior high. When her family sued, Chester responded by dismissing the 58 Black teachers at the junior high, claiming they would have nowhere to place them if the case resolved in the student's favor since any "mixed" school could not employ Black teachers to teach white children. Through union and civic advocacy at school board meetings, the teachers were eventually reinstated, but this unplanned side effect of an attempt at desegregating the schools was also a concern in Philadelphia.

Although the city would "merge" its teacher lists in 1937, theoretically desegregating the teaching force, many teachers remained concerned that desegregating schools would amount to a mass firing of Black teachers and subject Black students to white racism in classrooms that had hitherto been safe spaces. This battle for

desegregated schools, and even over whether desegregation was a worthy goal, would continue throughout the 20th century.

"Give the White-Dominated School System An Eviction": The Civil Rights Movement in Philadelphia Schools, 1930-1970

Attempts to desegregate Philadelphia schools date back to the early 19th century, and *de jure* segregation was illegal following the 1881 case of *Allen v. Meadville school District* (Mealy, 2016), but the question became increasingly urgent as the city's Black population increased following World War I and as the Great Depression drove students from work into school just as the funding for schooling dried up. Floyd Logan's Educational Equality League, formed in 1932, spent over four decades fighting for integrated schools, Black teachers, and eventually, when true integration seemed impossible, at least an equal quality of education. One of the EEL's earliest actions took place in a suburb of Philadelphia, when two towns in Chester County proposed to build a new, shared elementary school for white children while maintaining Black children in older schools within the town. After being stymied in attempts to register their children at the new school, Black families boycotted the school system for nearly two full academic years, managing home-schooling collectives and, by the start of the second year, accepting jail sentences for truancy rather than enrolling their children in segregated schools. EEL organized a protest march of more than 5,000 in Philadelphia to be held in March of 1934; though the permit would eventually be denied, the mere threat of the demonstration in an election year brought the school boards to the table, and the issue was settled out of court in the Black families' favor by April of 1934 (Canton, 2010). Organizations such as EEL and Local 192, the more radical and Communist-aligned of the various nascent teachers' unions, also worked to protect teachers and students, such as ensuring the tenure and job of a Black teacher in Chester was respected when her "special class" (simply a segregated, self-contained classroom of all the Black students) was dissolved and she was let go rather than placed in authority over white children (Toloudis, 2019).

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Logan, Cecil B. Moore, and other Philadelphia activists fought an ongoing battle with a School Board and district leadership that was gratifyingly willing to declare its support for desegregation, its commitment to "intercultural education," and its promise to educate all children equally—but only if these goals could be achieved with the absolute minimum disruption to a thoroughly segregated city. Setting a precedent that will be unfortunately familiar to anyone who closely follows the functioning of the Philadelphia School Board today, Logan and other volunteers worked tirelessly to research and publicize the state of segregated education in Philadelphia when the district itself was slow to share information. Logan wrote "thousands" (Delmont, 2012) of letters demanding statistics and data on the city's failure to fulfill its supposed mission. The Educational Equality League, the NAACP, and the Urban League noted the negative impacts of increasing segregation of schools: worse and

newer teachers clustered in the predominantly or exclusively Black schools, abysmal graduation rates at those same schools (less than 20% at Ben Franklin High), and openly racist faculty such as the West Philadelphia High principal who pulled aside the roughly ⅓ of the student body who were Black and blamed them for all surrounding crime (Delmont, 2012) or the teacher at South Philadelphia High School who claimed their Black students were "inferior" with "smaller brains" (Countryman, 2006, p. 237). Even if students could count on trustworthy instructors and functioning facilities, the School District adopted a "life adjustment" curriculum approach that tracked young people into three distinct paths based on junior high IQ tests of dubious merit, denying the vast majority of Black students even the opportunity to consider college or higher education (Delmont, 2012; Countryman, 2006; Delmont, 2010). In 1955, 46% of white students in Philadelphia were participating in the "academic" or college prep curriculum, compared to only 24% of Black students, and only 10% of Philadelphia's high school graduates attended college (Delmont, 2010). To add insult to injury, even the vocational-technical paths offered to Black students, such as at the Bok school, were pathways to lower-paid menial labor rather than the union apprenticeships that their white peers had access to (Countryman, 2006). Although the School District trumpeted its commitment to intercultural education and its "Living Together" and "Open Mindedness" pamphlets, it nevertheless remained committed to segregated education, refusing to even consider redrawing attendance boundaries for individual schools despite that being the clearest way to integrate (Delmont, 2012; Phillips, 2005), and continuing to build schools exclusively in the center of single-race neighborhoods instead of on boundaries where children might mix together (Countryman, 2006).

In fact, in the ten years following the official 1954 Supreme Court ruling that segregated schooling was unconstitutional, Philadelphia schools became *more* segregated (Phillips, 2005). A NAACP lawsuit in 1961, *Chisholm v. Board of Education*, accused schools of deliberately designing student enrollments, teacher assignments, and student transfer approvals within the District to "create, continue, and intensify racial segregation in said school district" (in Phillips, 2005, p.54). Faced with increasingly overcrowded Black schools, as the Black population of the city grew from 18% to 34% and 92% of those families sent their children to public schools, the District continued to do anything except redraw attendance boundaries and integrate schools. Black students were educated in trailers or portables mere blocks from white schools with 500 open spots (Phillips, 2005), were only permitted to attend school for half- or alternate days (Countryman, 2006), or were offered to choose "team teaching" classes in lieu of being bussed to an unknown white school, without informing parents that a "team" might teach 100 students in a classroom at one time. The high schools for Black students continued to be rated as "minus" schools, meaning IQ scores were considered below average, and therefore offered only an extremely limited curriculum. This practice continued even as, at West Philadelphia High School, new principal Ruth Wright Hayre created self-funded, objectively successful programs like WINGS, preparing Black children for college or well-paying careers and exposing them to concerts, operas, and museums (Delmont,

2010). Black parents seeking meaningful education for their children had to contend not only with the openly racist objections of anti-busing protests and a tell-all news article in 1964 that dismissed Black schools as "overburdened with the intellectual, moral and economic remnant of society" (Fonzi, in Delmont, 2010, p. 224), but also with the gaslighting of a school district that blamed segregation on mere natural housing preferences and a new migration of Black citizens who needed to be trained in "urban life and acceptable community behavior" (Delmont, 2012). Despite court cases, vigorous parent activism from the Coordinating Council for School Integration, and the support of groups such as the Four Hundred Ministers, that demanded and received an Educational Improvement Program providing books, certified teachers, and full-time classes in 60 predominantly Black schools (Phillips, 2005), any successful new initiative or attempt at equality was inevitably abandoned after a year or three, and the District reverted again to lip service.

By the late 1960s, students and even their families were becoming disenchanted with gradualist and liberal responses to school segregation and underfunding. The NAACP's *Chisholm* lawsuit, settled and then re-filed when the District's response to part-time classes was to simply overcrowd Black schools full-time rather than assign students to "white" schools, was not being funded or publicized as the precedent-setting NAACP case the local chapter had hoped it would be (Countryman, 2006). In 1965, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had come to town and, with Cecil B. Moore and Floyd Logan, led marches and protests at charity boarding school Girard College, a walled complex in the heart of North Philadelphia that insisted it was only permitted by the terms of its founding to educate "white, male" students. The court case and public pressure were successful, but even as the last bastion of *de jure* segregation collapsed in Philadelphia, the policies that fostered and even rewarded *de facto* segregation continued. An ambitious effort to replace most schools with fully integrated, well-funded K-12 clusters or "educational parks" was abandoned partly because statistics made it clear that, whatever the city did, the school district would be majority Black within a decade as the city's demographics changed (Phillips, 2005; Delmont, 2012; Countryman, 2006). Students began to seek more opportunities to speak out for themselves, and found supportive leadership in the city.

This curriculum is focused on antiracist and liberatory activism in and around the school setting, so I will not in detail cover the general rise of the Black Power movement in postwar Philadelphia, but Matthew Countryman's *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power In Philadelphia* is an excellent in-depth resource for teachers who wish to go further into this field specifically. In his chapter "Community Control of the Schools," Countryman efficiently and evocatively summarizes the unrest of the summer of 1967 in Philadelphia: the constant arrests, infiltration, and harassment of Black organizers who were often mentors to students, the installment of Police Commissioner Frank Rizzo and the embattled, up-for-reelection mayor's promise to be tough on crime, and the way riots in Newark and Detroit were used to create selectively-enforced curfews and states-of-

emergency that all but explicitly targeted Black youth and young adults. By the time high school students reentered their variously maintained and highly segregated buildings in September 1967, extensive community organizing and training was underway with the support of adults like Walter Palmer and a newly disenchanted-with-the-NAACP Cecil B. Moore.

Just like the writers of the 1900s, Black students were demanding more Black educators, courses in Black history, and curriculum that prepared them meaningfully for success. Like their parents and older siblings, Black students were also demanding the right to express their African identities through clothing, names, and hairstyles, were objecting to forced patriotic actions at the height of the Vietnam war, and were debating the relative merits of founding independent, Afrocentric schools or changing the public school system that the overwhelming majority of Black youth in Philadelphia attended. The Black People's Unity Movement worked to organize this student discontent into a movement, leaning on a combination of student government and "corner kids" who knew their neighborhoods well, and hoping to leverage the recent appointment of a new, sympathetic superintendent whose first act had been to enroll his own children in majority-black Germantown High. (Countryman, 2006; Graham, 2017; Bixler, 2018).

The fall of 1967 saw a ratcheting up of activism (Countryman, 2006). Administrator and media attention were seized by a student teach-in demanding African-American history courses at Bok High School, a midday Black Power rally outside Gratz High School, and regular meetings at the Church of the Advocate by a council of students from across the city. In October, the Southern Christian Leadership "Freedom Tour" brought Dr. King, Aretha Franklin, Sidney Poitier, and Harry Belafonte to Philadelphia. King gave his "What Is Your Life's Blueprint?" speech as part of a spontaneous visit to Barratt Junior High School (Wolfman-Arent, 2018), encouraging students to remember "Black is beautiful" and to adopt a slogan of "Learn, baby, learn so we can earn, baby, earn" over "Burn, baby, burn" (King, in Wolfman-Arent, 2018). The November 7th municipal election, when activist Cecil B. Moore resoundingly lost his bid for mayor, was both a disappointment and a catalyst for many of these students. When class walkouts on October 27 and November 11th at Bok High School led to the suspension of student leaders, the organizers had had enough. Flyers distributed among students and families that week warned, "If the Philadelphia School System defeats your child now, he will remain defeated for the rest of his life," and, "Give the white-dominated school system an eviction from the Black community" (Countryman, 2006). After almost a year of organizing and preparing, students were ready to take their demands to the leadership in a way that could not be ignored.

The November 17th, 1967 student walkout summoned over 3,000 students from schools across the city to the then-site of the Board of Education. Armed with 25 demands that included Black history courses, dress code changes to allow African fashion, more Black educators and administrators, and the removal of police from

schools, student leaders and adult organizers met with Superintendent Mark Shedd and President of the School Board Richardson Dilworth. After a few hours, one exuberant Bok student yelled out the window to the swelling crowd that the School Board had agreed to 24 of the 25 demands. Fifty years later, Walter Palmer would remember the day as one where people were asking, "How do we do this right? How do we create a responsive school system?" (Graham, 2017). The atmosphere of the protest was festive, with students calling out their schools and waving signs calling for "more Black Power in the school system." When the protest was first discussed the Board of Education had explicitly requested no police presence and only reluctantly allowed a plainclothes unit (Bixler, 2018). However, some police officers and a hostile Commissioner Rizzo felt differently, and around noon, Rizzo loaded 111 newly sworn-in police sergeants onto two buses and descended on the school board building. People present at the protest testified they heard Rizzo shout, "Get their black asses" (Countryman, 2006; Graham, 2017), and the resulting police attack on protestors and student response descended into violent chaos, with dogs unleashed and batons flying. Students ran through Center City to escape the violence, clashing with white pedestrians, and by the end of the day 15 protestors were hospitalized, and 57 teenagers and adults arrested. An irate President Dilworth railed that "Commissioner Rizzo, without our request, saw fit to loose a couple of hundred men, swinging clubs and beating children," but Rizzo responded by leaning into racist stereotypes, insisting that the students had been "beating everyone in their path" and questioning snidely "whether these are children" (in Countryman, 2006, p. 240).

The student walkout was a beginning, not an end, sparking ongoing protests and sit-ins in schools both successful (as when a tense student occupation at Ben Franklin High that led to evicting white teachers was resolved through an overnight meeting that settled on calling for more Black faculty and African languages added to the curriculum) and alarming (as when white adults threatened and harassed Black students at Bok High School and chanted "Close the school or we'll burn it down!" sparking a weeklong, city-wide interracial conflict that ensnared many high schools). Rizzo not only avoided negative repercussions for his violent approach to the protest but was elected mayor in 1971, and would campaign for his third term urging Philadelphians to "Vote White" (Bixler, 2018). Dr. Shedd, who recognized student anger as part of the "tremendous distrust…resulting from generations of unfulfilled promises" (in Graham, 2017), worked to add African-American history to the curriculum, but he would be ousted upon Rizzo's election in 1971 and the course would not become required for over 30 more years. Nonetheless, Philadelphia was the first school system in the country to require African-American history as a graduation requirement, and this milestone is due directly to the walkout.

"Generations of Unfulfilled Promises": State Control, State Funding, & Next Steps

This final section covers history that has to a large extent occurred within the lifetime of most high school students in 2022, and certainly of their parents. Although I

will briefly sum up the events, therefore, this is an area that I would suggest having students research independently, using some of the student-friendly sources listed in the annotated bibliography and through conducting interviews with their own parents and older siblings. In the spring of 2022, my senior homeroom contained no fewer than 5 out of 18 children directly affected by the closures or charter-takeovers of schools such as Reynolds, Germantown and Gratz. For teachers, Dr. Camika Royal's newly published *Not Paved For Us: Black Educators and Public School Reform In Philadelphia* also summarizes and analyzes the events of Philadelphia schools from the 1960s to 2017 and their relevance to the greater national context.

The history of Philadelphia schools, and the student activism that emerged from them, in the second half of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century is a mix of common urban stories and uniquely Philadelphian struggles and successes. The 1983 government report *A Nation At Risk* prompted a panic about "underachieving" schools that were, theoretically, not preparing the future astronauts, mathematicians and scientists necessary to counter the Soviet Union. Philadelphia was as much of a victim of white flight and urban disinvestment as other major cities, and would lose more than a quarter of its population between 1950 and 2000 (Royal, 2022) . When Frank Rizzo became mayor in 1971, he was anxious to counter the racist reputation he had earned by unleashing police violence on, at best, mildly unruly teenagers, but his tenure as mayor and collaboration with the new superintendent would be yet another example of shallow gestures towards diversity while ignoring the true needs of Philadelphia schools. Some integrated magnet schools saw more funding during Rizzo's tenure, and he added additional Black members to the School Board, but his commitment to low taxes outweighed any commitment to the school district. The early 1970s saw constant chaos in the school system, further driving families who could to flee it: there were lengthy teachers strikes in 1972, 1973 and 1981, two different school years when school ended in April because there were simply not funds to run a 180-day school year, and teachers kept as long-term "substitutes" for eight years or more to avoid paying the salaries and benefits of full-time employees. The first superintendent Frank Rizzo appointed to replace the, in his view, overly accommodating Dr. Shedd did not agree with this parsimony; in a 1972 speech to the school board, Matthew Costanza declared that families could not be "deluded" into "thinking they are sending their children to school for a [sic] education. They will be sending their children to school for babysitting" under the proposed budget (in Royal, 2022, p.38). Black students, by now nearly a majority of the school system, bore the brunt of this disinvestment and instability, but some Black educators also faced harassment and even threats from white colleagues when they crossed picket lines rather than risk Black students not graduating on time.

The 1980s saw a new superintendent, Constance Clayton, and a decade of relative stability and success for the district; Clayton instituted standardized curriculum and city

tests focused on proficiency, but in such a way that one teacher remembered "the focus seemed to be on providing structure and support fo us to do what we needed to do for our children," not punishing or disinvesting from struggling schools (in Roay, 2022, p. 53). She actively and openly promoted the success of Black women to leadership positions within the district, and under her leadership the Board of Education approved policies permitting the distribution of condoms to students, better support for pregnant and parenting students, and other actions students had been advocating for. Her attempts at even a mild desegregation plan encountered extreme enough resistance from the Northeast and South Philadelphian neighborhoods, however, that she intermittently required police protection. She also oversaw the decentralization of school budgets, an issue that even today is both a blessing and a curse in the School District; since budgets are school-based, superintendents and boards have for the last 40 years been able to shrug and say it is a principal's decision to cut a popular program or a desperately needed school nurse or counselor, even if the principal's choices are actually starkly limited by financial realities.

Consistent and targeted advocacy continued throughout the second half of the 20th century. The Human Relations Commission managed a forty-year court case calling for desegregation of students and staff in Philadelphia schools, a case that resulted in a consent decree that, at least temporarily, addressed staff segregation until it was dissolved under the pressure of a teacher shortage (Mezzacappa, 2018). Youth organizing groups like the Philadelphia Student Union and the Youth United For Change advocated effectively for better staff and police trainings, capital investments in otherwise forgotten schools, and even basic needs like well-stocked bathrooms and an end to corporal punishment (Conner et al, 2012). The youth advocacy specifically had a measurable impact on Board and district leadership decisions, with one School Board member remembering that “the [Philadelphia Student Union] youth could kind of bring you back to reality, back to what really was important” in meetings that otherwise devolved into adult pet projects (Conner et al, 2012, p. 576). They also demonstrated a propensity for effective and media-savvy public actions, including a “window-washing” protest when students staged a guerrilla clean up of the School District central office’s windows as part of a call for greater transparency and accountability.

Unfortunately, no amount of prioritization, advocacy, or clever protest gimmicks would be enough to protect Philadelphia schools, teachers and students from the funding crises of the 1990s and the increasing animosity between a largely conservative Harrisburg state government and the theoretically liberal Philadelphia. In 1993, frustrated by low school performance, the state froze funding to the school district. In 1998, then-superintendent David Hornbeck threatened that schools might need to close in March of 1999 if additional funding was not forthcoming from the state; the legislature responded by passing a law that allowed the state to take over any school district with performance, funding, or scheduling issues that, conveniently, matched Philadelphia’s. The city managed to hold off the dreaded event for another year and a half, but in 2001, one of

Governer Schweiker's first actions after ascending to office (following his predecessor's appointment to the new Homeland Security Office) was to dissolve the Philadelphia School Board and replace it with a "School Reform Commission" whose majority was appointed by the governor. The SRC's first actions were to offload many of the struggling schools (as defined by standardized test scores) in the city to private management companies; by mid-2002, 45 of the 264 schools in the city were run by companies such as Edison Schools Inc. (Ewert, 2015). This belief in private industry and the accepted narrative that public schools were failing students, as proven by standardized tests that were the only legitimate measure of a school's quality, was not unique to Philadelphia and was being codified into federal law through the No Child Left Behind act, but Philadelphia was the first district of its size to suffer a state takeover and such a piecemeal distribution of its schools to private and for-profit companies (Ewert, 2015; Travers, 2002; Royal, 2022). Over the next five years, even more schools would be given over to private management either for improvement or as "boutique" schools that were privately funded and could be closed on a dime if enrollment dipped. The District would dispense millions of dollars to consultants promising to raise test scores, give significant payments to local universities such as Temple and University of Pennsylvania for student support programs (programs that could have been easily funded if those theoretically nonprofit universities paid city taxes), and pay additional money to these private companies that claimed they could run schools both more efficiently and cheaper (Royal, 2022). The schools taken over by Edison Schools and other companies not only failed to fulfill this promise, but underperformed compared to peer schools, even with additional resources (Whitehorne, 2013). Charter schools proliferated as well, pulling 35% of Philadelphian students by 2014 at the same time that regular neighborhood schools were required to educate a 30% larger share of students with special needs that charters were uninterested in (Royal, 2022; Kitzmiller & McWilliams, 2019). In Dr. Royal's assessment, the early 2000s were a time when district leadership "sacrficed stability in the lives of students…for a false sense of choice" (Royal, 2022, p. 95) and pursued endless contracts with consultants, outside organizations, and private groups with little to show for it.

In 2012, after ten years of state control had failed to produce anything like financial or educational stability, Dr. William Hite became the first black male superintendent of Philadelphia, and his ten year tenure is all most current high schoolers will have known. His tenure began with a "doomsday" budget; while spending $400 million on a new prison for Philadelphia residents, the state had allowed a $300 million gap to develop in Philadelphia's budget, and the District anticipated not being able to make payroll by June (Royal, 2022). The five-year budget proposed by the Boston Consulting Group hired by the SRC called for the elimination of all full-time nurses and librarians, bigger classes, stripping art and music from most schools and closing entirely over 60 schools (Whitehorne, 2013). Militant action and protest by multiple student and parent organizations caused the SRC to withdraw slightly from these recommendations, but the 2013 school year was nevertheless dire. Twenty-three schools were closed,

overwhelmingly concentrated in predominantly Black neighborhoods, with clear racial ptterns in which schools managed to remove themselves from the intiial closure list and which could not (Kitzmiller & McWilliams, 2019). 90% of the schools slated for closure were predominantly Black schools, at a time when Black students were a bare majority of 55% of enrollment, and the District made only the slightest attempt to claim that students would do better at the new schools; future City Councilwoman Helen Gym observed at the time that one high school already had a population that was 30% special education students, and would be merging with another school that served 33% special education students, both more than two times the District average, while at the same time all of the staff that might help welcome and acclimate new students were being laid off (Gym, 2013). Community meetings initially presented as opportunities for "input" were in fact used to share the closures as a fait accompli, prompting one anguished parent to exclaim "our children's education is not always about efficiency. It's about community!" (Kitzmiller & McWilliams, 2019) and neither adequate time nor adequate transparency about supposed savings occurred between the announcement of each school's closure and the final vote to make it so. Many of the current middle schoolers and high schoolers in the School District of Philadelphia were in the earliest stages of their education at this time, learning in overcrowded classrooms without access to counselors, librarians, or nurses, after a lengthy commute that may well have taken them past the shuttered building their parents or older siblings had attended. These buildings, many of which take up full city blocks, can be seen a decade later throughout much of the city, bearing forlorn For Sale signs, or already sold to private developers and charter school operators.

Into this environment came an integrated, holistic response to not only school needs but questions of economic justice, living wages, and police brutality. In 2017, the newly formed Racial Justice Organizing Committee spearheaded the first Black Lives Matter At Schools Week of Action in Philadelphia, a week of education and activism in and outside of the school walls that would eventually settle on four specific demands: an end to zero-tolerance discipline policies, funding for counselors and not police, hiring and retaining Black teachers while requiring antiracist training for all teachers, and the infusion of Black and ethnic studies across the curriculum. The story of this founding is succinctly recounted in teacher Tamara Anderson's chapter "From Philly With Love" in *Black Lives Matter At School: An Uprising for Educational Justice* (2020). In a callback to the way literary societies grew out of mutual aid societies some 200 years ago, the RJOC was one of the first organizations to leap into action during the pandemic school closures of 2020, providing monthly grocery distributions at shuttered school buildings across the district. While this organizing did not grow in response to "a specific event" but rather "ongoing adverse conditions," (Anderson, 2020), this arguably makes it an even clearer example for students of the necessary ground-laying work of organizing, long before the marches and walkouts.

Black Lives Matter at School, and other initiatives, operate in a different school system in 2022 than at their founding even a few years ago. One unquestioned success of

Hite's was the 2019 dissolution of the School Reform Commission and the creation of an appointed (though not elected) School Board ("The Promise of Local Control," 2019) that at least claims to be more responsive to local issues and concerns. In the 2022-2023 school year, local media and this new school board's meetings are likely to address a number of issues that will directly impact students or their younger siblings. First, the District has relaunched its pandemic-delayed facilities planning process, one which many families and activists fear may be a prelude to a second round of devastating closures (Graham, 2022). A new superintendent has just begun his tenure, and has promised a first 100 days of listening tours to schools and communities throughout the city (Calhoun, 2022). Finally, April of 2022 saw the conclusion of an ongoing state Supreme Court case. Six districts have sued the state, claiming that the "irrational" funding formula used by Pennsylvania is so consistently unfair to students living in poverty and students of color that it violates both the equal protection clause and the Pennsylvania Constitution's requirement that districts provide a "thorough and efficient system of education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth" (Graham & Hanna, 2022). The plaintiffs produced evidence that the wealthiest 20% of districts in the state spend almost $5,000 more per pupil than the poorest, that this insufficient funding overwhelming impacts students of color, and that, in other states where court-ordered funding equity has been implemented, student achievement rose along with the budgets. The state has responded by defending its fulfillment of its constitutional obligations and claiming poor districts are disproportionately *well*-funded in Pennsylvania -- a claim that lost some of its luster when one of hte state's expert witnesses was forced to admit that, when charter school funding losses are taken into account, poor students actually receive 3% less and Black and Hispanic students 6% less funding than their better-heeled and lighter-skinned fellow Pennsylvanians. While probable years of litigation remain in this case, students can still closely follow the news of the case in the fall of 2022.

In this broad and necessarily brief review of Black educational advocacy in Philadelphia, three distinct themes emerge. First, from the earliest days of free education in Philadelphia, advocates have called for Black teachers for Black students, and consistently encountered challenges in finding and even more importantly retaining these teachers (Mezzacappa, 2018; Rizga, 2016). This call for black educators remains one of the demands of the Black Lives Matter In Schools Week of Action each year, is the mission of the local nonprofit Center for Black Educator Development, and is a stated goal of the new superintendent installed in June 2022 (Calhoun, 2022). Secondly, Black students and their parents have consistently and repeatedly needed to advocate for curriculum, resources and educators that recognize students' potential, be it an 1827 mother complaining her child was merely practicing rote learning "for a *show-off* against visitation day" (in Silcox, 1972, p.453) or students at the city's premier magnet school encountering daily racism in their quest for the best possible education ("Black At Masterman," n.d). Finally, Black students and families have demanded accountability, transparency, and respect from the educational leadership of the city, a quest that has been only intermittently successful since the earliest school controllers dilly-dallied on

Black education until declining enrollment and moral panic about crime forced their hands. Though it may be tempting to trace the repetition of these stories over the last two centuries of Philadelphia education and feel despair, teachers can use this history to help students in Philadelphia and elsewhere see themselves as inheritors of a rich, undefeatable and indefatigable tradition of activism, and to learn from the successes and struggles of the many readers, writers, and, yes, revolutionaries, who have gone before them.

Teaching Strategies

In her writing throughout the last five years, Dr. Gholdy Muhammad has proposed a revolutionary new approach of "historically responsive literacy" (2020). Partly inspired by the structure of the literary societies that are discussed at the start of this unit and by the textual lineages work of Alfred W. Tatum (2009), Muhammad's work organizes all text selection and instruction around four key questions:

> 1. Identity: How will my instruction and text selection help students learn something about themselves and about others?
> 2. Skill: How will my instruction and text selection build students' literacy skills and standards?
> 3. Intellect: How will my instruction and text selection build students' knowledge and mental powers?
> 4. Criticality: How will my instruction and text selection engage students' thinking about power, equity, and the disruption of oppression? (Muhammad, 2019, p. 353)

Throughout the lesson plans below, I propose connected questions to each of these four key questions for each daily lesson plan. By balancing students' skills, need to for knowledge, personal identities, and critical analysis of the world and systems, Muhammad's model in many ways fulfills the promise and continues the legacy of organizations like the Institute for Colored Youth.

Layered texts, another strategy promulgated by Muhammad (2020, 2019, 2012), consists of a teacher sharing multiple short, multimodal texts with students to engage interest and share knowledge on a common issue. In this curriculum, I utilize layered texts as an introductory activity for each day's lesson, combining past and present examples to help students draw connections between the Philadelphia school system of the past and the one educating them today, and students will engage in an extended exploration of layered texts as part of participating in their classmates' culminating Socratic seminars.

Gallery Walk is a literacy and engagement activity that offers students a chance to briefly examine a variety of texts posted around the room. Within this unit, a lengthy gallery walk will open the unit, allowing students to explore digital and physical copies of all the primary sources that will be used. Students will leave short notes responding to a minimum number of sources and also cycle through a second time to respond to at least one peer's observations. In addition to being a bird's eye view of the entire unit, this Gallery Walk session will provide me useful data on students' discussion & response skills and also introduce students to the observe/question/reflect process we will use in

more depth on all primary sources. At other points throughout the unit it may be helpful to use a Gallery Walk to share students' work.

When asked to "jigsaw" a text, students work in small groups or individually and are each responsible for understanding a particular smaller part of a whole-class text and then sharing their knowledge with the rest of their group or with the whole class. Jigsaw reading can be an effective way to break down a larger text, to differentiate for individual student needs, and to give students more opportunities to function as the teachers in the classroom. All the texts suggested for "jigsaw reading" will also contain suggestions within the lessons on where and how to split up the text.

Whenever engaging with primary sources, students will use a modified version of Library of Congress Primary Source Protocol. This protocol, documented in more detail here, encourages students to move among three stances, observing, reflecting and questioning what they see in a primary source. I have modified this slightly both to support greater background knowledge by adding an "Engage" section and to align questions with some of the proposed questions related to identity, intellect, skills and criticality in Gholdy Muhammad's book *Cultivating Genius.*

The Save-The-Last-Word-For-Me Discussion Protocol is a simple means of guided text discussion usable for any text and in any small-group or whole-group discussion. Each student selects a single quote from the text that they find compelling or worthy of discussion, and shares that quote without explaining the reasoning behind their selection. Other members of the group (or specific volunteers within a whole-class context) share their own thoughts on the quote and suggest connections to other ideas and reasons the original speaker might have selected the quote. After all members of a small group or 3-4 volunteers have shared, the original speaker gives their own reasons for selecting the quote and responds to their peers' thoughts. This discussion protocol will guide most discussion while gradually scaffolding students towards more specific conversation and participation.

A Socratic Seminar is a specific literacy engagement strategy that centers student discussion rather than teacher-led content exploration. A Socratic seminar is not a debate or thesis-driven argument but is instead meant to be a path for students to arrive at a "shared understanding" of a text ("Teaching Strategy: Socratic Seminar," 2020) through deep textual analysis of a short text they have prepared thoughts on in advance. Especially in larger classes, it is common for a Socratic seminar to be conducted in a "fishbowl" style, where part of the class discusses while others observe and then the groups switch. After building strong classroom discussion skills earlier in the unit, students will progress to participating in a whole-class Socratic seminar led by the teacher, and then, as a culminating activity, prepare their own questions for a Socratic seminar on a primary source text of their choice.

A peer or family interview is a way to both increase student engagement by allowing them to see direct connections between their historical study and their daily life, and an important introduction to the importance of personal experience and documentation in history. The Library of Congress offers techniques for teachers preparing students to conduct interviews, and teachers can help students draw questioning tactics from the Goin' North oral interviews.

Classroom Activities

Below is a suggested outline for 12-14 lessons, followed by detailed lesson plans for days 2, 4, and 8.

General Unit Outline

Lesson 1: Layered Text Introduction & Class Preamble

Objective: Make text-supported predictions about future learning & draft clear, concise goal statements.

In this "launch" lesson, students will explore digital and physical copies of all primary sources that will be used in the unit in order to make predictions about the history of Black educational activism in Philadelphia (and to gain familiarity with the primary source analysis tool we will use throughout the unit). The student deliverable will be a proposed "preamble" for our own class, setting goals for both our study of this content and the rest of the year.

Lesson 2: Freedmen's Literary Societies & Social Support

Objectives: Identify and evaluate specific rhetorical strategies; revise a text in consensus with peers.

In this lesson, students will examine primary sources related to the initial reading societies established in Philadelphia, and conduct a rhetorical analysis of William Whipper's short 1828 address in order to explain both the goals of such societies and the rhetorical strategies used to support them. The student deliverable will be a modified, consensus-based complete class preamble as well as the rhetorical analysis.

Lesson 3-4: The Fight For Public & Relevant Schools

Objectives: Recognize & evaluate rhetorical strategies with attention to audience & context; briefly summarize primary sources in context.

In these lessons, students will use the jigsaw literacy strategy to create a picture of the state of Black antebellum schooling in Philadelphia, using a combination of timelines, primary sources (Robert Purvis' letter refusing to pay school taxes until his children could attend, Emilie Davis' diaries, etc) & secondary sources. Students will also conduct a rhetorical analysis of Octavius Catto's 1864 commencement speech at the Institute for Colored Youth.

Lesson 5: Status Quo

Objectives: Recognize & evaluate rhetorical strategies with attention to the use of supporting evidence; compare and contrast charts & statistics.

In this lesson, students will conduct a rhetorical analysis of excerpts of Chapter 8 of *The Philadelphia Negro*, and compare 1899 statistics on schooling, literacy & educational attainment to current Philadelphia school district statistics, using the "Save The Last Word For Me" discussion strategy to begin building towards final socratic seminars.

Lesson 6-7: A Changing City

Objectives: Draw supported inferences from primary source texts; recognize and evaluate rhetorical strategies with attention to narrative use.

In these lessons, students will examine the impact of the Great Migration on our immediate neighborhood, including the building of our school, and select an oral history of the Great Migration from an online database to explore independently and analyze. Students will share out discussion through the Save The Last Word For Me discussion strategy.

Lesson 8: Dr. King comes to Philadelphia.

Objective: Write with attention to rhetorical strategies; evaluate writing for prose, allusions, and transitions among ideas.

In this lesson, students will closely analyze Martin Luther King, Jr's "What is your life's blueprint?" speech and create a first draft of their own academic blueprint.

Lesson 9: *Another* Fight For Public & Relevant Schools

Objective: Use multiple sources & perspectives to compile a timeline of events; compare and contrast statistics from different periods of history.

In this lesson, students will explore multiple primary and secondary sources on the 1967 student walkout of Philadelphia, and also analyze current curriculum and statistics in the School District of Philadelphia, in order to analyze the challenges and successes of this movement and engage in a whole-class discussion.

Lesson 10-11: Current Issues & How To Respond

Objectives: Use multiple sources & perspectives to compile an argument; conduct peer interviews & organize information.

In this lesson, students will summarize multiple sources on the school funding trial and also interview their peers and family members to develop a history of their own schooling and any impact. Student will also revise and improve their "blueprint" writing with attention to their own educational and literary goals.

Lesson 12-13: Student-Directed Seminars

Objectives: Closely read and analyze a text; engage in Socratic Seminar discussion as both participant and reader.

As a culminating activity for the unit, each student will select 1-2 texts that we have examined, deeply or in brief, and prepare for and lead a small group discussion comprising up to 1/3rd of the class.

Sample Lesson Plans

Day 2 Lesson Plan: William Whipper and the Reading Room Society

Objective & Materials

- Objective: Students will be able to identify rhetorical devices in a segment of William Whipper's speech and describe their own identities as readers.
    - Identity: Who are you as a reader?
    - Skills: What specific rhetorical strategies does this author use?
    - Intellect: What challenges and supports existed in antebellum Philadelphia for Black students, of any age?
    - Criticality: How did early Black Philadelphians engage with literacy as a means of activism and fighting back? How is this relevant today?
- Layered Texts: Excerpts from Whipper's address; Freedom Journal excerpt & history of the Reading Room Society, Timeline of Black libraries; recent article on the loss of school libraries in Philadelphia.
- Warm-Up (10 minutes):

  How do you define yourself as a reader? As a writer?

  Explore the layered texts. Document three things you notice about the history of libraries and reading in Philadelphia, two things you wonder about, and one thing that surprised, upset or inspired you.

- Background Information & Lecture: Freedmen's Literary Societies (8 minutes)
    - Using the information contained within this document and the layered texts, the teacher provides a brief overview of the literary societies of Philadelphia. Students document in the notes section of their rhetorical analysis sheet.

- Reflection & Peer Check-In (2 minutes)
    - Students check their notes with each other for misunderstandings or gaps.
- Close Reading for Comprehension Jigsaw (15 minutes)
    - Taking notes on the right side of their notetaker and working individually or in small groups, students read specific excerpts from Whipper's address. Recommended excerpts: Introduction (p.106-107), Response to Objections (p. 108-109), The Purpose of Education (p.110-112), Objections to Slavery & Hypocrisy (113-114). Excerpts can be shorter or longer depending on the needs and abilities of each classroom.
- Share-Out (10 minutes)
    - Students present the results of their analyzed excerpt to each other in order to "jigsaw" Whipper's complete address.
- Rhetorical Strategies: Simile, Metaphor, Analogy, Hypophora, Repetition, Logos (10 minutes)
    - Teacher briefly reviews the definitions and examples of these rhetorical devices (a good breakdown exists here). Students can document on a graphic organizer, but as these will be referred back to continually throughout the unit, a better strategy may be a student-developed anchor chart. Elicit examples from students when possible.
- Close Reading for Rhetorical Strategies Jigsaw (10 minutes)
    - Working individually now, students review their section of Whipper's address and identify examples of rhetorical strategies to be added to their note taker.
- "Words of the Day" Share Out & Exit Ticket (10 minutes)
    - Calling back to the opening question, students identify one phrase from today's reading that in one way or another connects to their own identity as readers and writers and briefly explain why, either in writing or (time permitting) in whole-class discussion.

Day 4 Lesson Plan: Octavius Catto & the Institute for Colored Youth

Objective & Materials

- Objective: Students will be able to identify rhetorical devices in Octavius Catto's commencement speech and describe their own identities as activists.
    - Identity: Who are you as a scholar?
    - Skills: What specific vocabulary and rhetorical & reasoning strategies does Catto use to make his points?
    - Intellect: What was the history of the Institute for Colored Youth and the impact of one of its most famous alumni?

    - Criticality: Why did some applaud and some become uncomfortable by Catto's speech, when everyone present supported the idea of free Black education? How has your history of schooling supported or undercut your ability to make change in the world?
- Layered Texts: Catto's speech, information on and images of the recent memorial, NPR segment on Octavius Catto, civil rights timeline

Order of Instruction

- Warm-Up (10 minutes)
    - How do you define yourself as a scholar or a student?

    - Explore the layered texts. Document three things you notice about the life of Octavius Catto and his alma mater in Philadelphia, two things you wonder about, and one thing that surprised, upset or inspired you.

- Background Information & Lecture: The Institute for Colored Youth (8 minutes)
    - Using the information contained within this document and the layered texts, the teacher provides a brief overview of the the Institute and of the life of Catto. Students document in the notes section of their rhetorical analysis sheet.
- Reflection & Peer Check-In (2 minutes)
    - Students check their notes with each other for misunderstandings or gaps.
- Close Reading for Comprehension Jigsaw (15 minutes)
    - Taking notes on the right side of their notetaker and working individually or in small groups, students read specific excerpts from Catto's address. Recommended excerpts: From "Fortunately…" to "symoptical history."; from "There are now.." to "in the beginning of the Institute."; from "But there is…" to "devoutly to be wished."
- Share-Out (10 minutes)
    - Students present the results of their analyzed excerpt to each other in order to "jigsaw" Catto's complete address.
- Rhetorical Strategies: Allusion, Rhetorical Question, Ethos, Pathos (10 minutes
    - Teacher briefly reviews the definitions and examples of these rhetorical devices (a good breakdown exists here). Students can document on a graphic organizer, but as these will be referred back to continually throughout the unit, a better strategy may be a student-developed anchor chart. Elicit examples from students when possible.
- Close Reading for Rhetorical Strategies Jigsaw (10 minutes)
    - Working individually now, students review their section of Catto's address and identify examples of rhetorical strategies to be added to their note taker.
- "Words of the Day" Share Out & Exit Ticket (10 minutes)

- Calling back to the opening question, students identify one phrase from today's reading that in one way or another connects to their own identity as readers and writers and briefly explain why, either in writing or (time permitting) in whole-class discussion.

Day 8 Lesson Plan: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. & Your Life's Blueprint

Objective & Materials

- Objective: Students will be able to identify rhetorical devices in Dr. King's speech and brainstorm a short writing on their own life's blueprint.
  - Identity: Who (not *what*) do you want to be in your life, and how do you define excellence?
  - Skills: How does King organize his thoughts to hold the audience's attention and remain in their memory?
  - Intellect: What was the role of Philadelphia in the Civil Rights movement?
  - Criticality: Often an edited version of this speech is shared that elides King's words on Black pride and his references to Black celebrities. What does this coopting of King's words do and how should it be combatted?
- Layered Texts: King's speech, WHYY segment on the students who encountered King 50 years later, video of King at Girard college, image of new Girard College mural, text of "Mother to Son."
-

Order of Instruction

- Warm-Up (10 minutes)
  - How do you define excellence in your life? What are the ways you have achieved it, or want to?
  - Explore the layered texts. Document three things you notice about civil rights in Philadelphia, two things you wonder about, and one thing that surprised, upset or inspired you.

- Background Information & Lecture: Dr. King In Philadelphia (5 minutes)
  - Using the information contained within this document and the layered texts, the teacher provides a brief overview of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s two mid-1960s visits to Philadelphia. Students document in the notes section of their rhetorical analysis sheet.
- Small-group rhetorical analysis, using video & transcript (25 minutes)
  - Using their rhetorical analysis sheet, by now familiar, and working in small groups, students should listen to or read the entirety of King's speech. If time or ability constraints necessity a jigsaw, each group can engage with a different one of the three key sections King lays out.

- Save the Last Word Silent Discussion Gallery Walk (10 minutes)
    - This discussion can be done with chart paper, large pieces of paper left out on desks, on board space around the room, using an online tool like Padlet, or even writing in pencil on student desks depending on the materials involved. Each student should write a quote from the speech that deeply resonated with them, then rotate throughout the room leaving comments, questions and thoughts on their peers' selections. Upon returning to their desk, students briefly reflect, aloud or in writing, on what their peers have written.
- What is *your* life's blueprint?: QuickWrite Outline (15 minutes)
    - Working individually, students will complete a brainstorming for their own Life's Blueprint writing, focusing on generating examples and anecdotes to keep their writing specific and vivid.
- Share Out & Exit Ticket (5 minutes)
    - Calling back to the opening question, students share out in writing or verbally one single way in which they intend to pursue excellence in their lives.

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- *This contains the entire text of Whipper's 1828 address.*

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- *This short radio program reviews antiracist activism at Julia R. Masterman, the city's premier magnet school.*

Woodson, C. G. (Ed.). (1926). *The Mind of the Negro as Reflected in Letters Written During the Crisis, 1800-1860*. Martino Fine Books.

- *This book contains the complete text of Purvis' letter refusing to pay taxes until school segregation is ended.*

Appendix

Evaluative & Instructional Materials

Sample Class Preamble

Primary Source Analysis Tool

Rhetorical Analysis Note-Taker

Rhetorical Analysis Rubric

Life's Blueprint QuickWrite

Life's Blueprint Rubric

Socratic Seminar Planning Tool

Socratic Seminar Rubric

Standards

Pennsylvania Core Standards Addressed

CC.1.2.9–10.A Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CC.1.2.9–10.B Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences and conclusions based on an author's explicit assumptions and beliefs about a subject.

CC.1.2.9–10.D Determine an author's particular point of view and analyze how rhetoric advances the point of view.

CC.1.2.9–10.E Analyze in detail how an author's ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text.

CC.1.2.9–10.F Analyze how words and phrases shape meaning and tone in texts.

CC.1.2.9–10.I Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance, including how they address related themes and concepts.

CC.1.2.9–10.L Read and comprehend literary nonfiction and informational text on grade level, reading independently and proficiently

CC.1.4.9–10.E Write with an awareness of the stylistic aspects of composition. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms of the discipline in which they are writing.

CC.1.4.9–10.O Use narrative techniques such as dialogue, description, reflection, multiple plotlines, and pacing to develop experiences, events, and/or characters; use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, settings, and/or characters.

CC.1.5.9–10.A Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CC.1.5.9–10.E Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks.

Educating for American Democracy Driving Questions Addressed

What are the opportunities and responsibilities of citizenship and civic agency in the 21st century?(CDQ1.4D)

What practical opportunities for participation are available to me?(CDQ1.4E)

How did past generations of Americans understand and answer calls to civic duty in civil society, religious communities, and politics?(HDQ1.4A)

What distinctive challenges have accompanied race relations in the U.S., compared with other countries around the world?(HDQ3.4B)

What are my personal values, principles, and commitments? What fundamental sources do I look to or invoke for these? What gives those sources their credibility and authority?(CDQ3.4A)

What efforts have been made over time to build a "more perfect union" upon the one forged in 1776 and redesigned by the U.S. Constitution in 1787-88? How do perspectives on this question differ depending on whether people have or have not had access to political rights?(HDQ4.4B)

What issues in current elections or local, state, national, or international decision-making are of most interest to you?(HDQ7.4A)

How can your learning from U.S. history suggest strategies for how to address our shared contemporary problems?(HDQ7.4A)