

## FOREWORD:

# CIVIL RIGHTS IN AMERICA: OUR JOURNEY IS NOT COMPLETE

By Alicia L. Moore and La Vonne I. Neal

Angela Y. Davis's activism and life journey focuses on civil rights and collective freedom. Thus, for the purpose of this discourse we revisited Davis's definition of civil rights:

...the rights of citizens, of all citizens, but because the very nature of citizenship in the United States has always been troubled by the refusal to grant citizenship to subordinate groups—indigenous people, African slaves, women of all racial and economic backgrounds—we tend to think of some people as model citizens, as archetypical citizens, those whose civil rights are never placed in question, the quintessential citizens, and others as having to wage struggles for the right to be regarded as citizens. And some—undocumented immigrants, along with ex-felons or “suspected” ex-felons—are beyond the reach of citizenship altogether.<sup>1</sup>

In 2014, we will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the sixtieth anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, salient legislative moments in history that mark the journey toward freedom and equality. Authors in this issue of the *Black History Bulletin* highlight past and present struggles for civil rights and offer suggestions to reframe historical narratives about the civil rights era.

In the same spirit, during his second inaugural address in 2013, President Barack Obama reminded us that the journey to civil rights was guided by a belief that we were all created equal.

We, the people, declare today that the most evident of truths—that all of us are created equal—is the star that guides us still; just as it guided our forebears through Seneca Falls, and Selma, and Stonewall; just as it guided all those men and women, sung and unsung, who left footprints along this great Mall, to hear a preacher say that we cannot walk alone; to hear a King proclaim that our individual freedom is inextricably bound to the freedom of every soul on Earth.<sup>2</sup>

President Obama also reminded us that our journey is not complete and, despite legislative milestones, conditions of subjugation remain.

For our journey is not complete until our wives, our mothers and daughters can earn a living equal to their efforts. Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law—for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well. Our journey is not complete until no citizen is forced to wait for hours to exercise the right to vote. Our journey is not complete until we find a better way to welcome the striving, hopeful immigrants who still see America as a land of opportunity—until bright young students and engineers are enlisted in our workforce rather than expelled from our country. Our journey is not complete until all children, from the streets of Detroit to the hills of Appalachia, to the quiet lanes of Newtown, know that they are cared for and cherished and always safe from harm.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the milestone of President Barack Obama being the first African American elected President of the United States (twice), our journey is not complete until we are all equal. We conclude our thoughts as we began, with a reflection from Angela Y. Davis.

We should be especially aware of how the notion of civil rights, especially for women and people of color, has been redefined in a way that contradicts its collective impact in favor of an individualized interpretation that pits individual white men against groups and classes that have suffered historical discrimination.<sup>4</sup>

## Notes

1. Angela Y. Davis, *The Meaning of Freedom and Other Difficult Dialogues* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2012), 181-182.
2. “Inaugural Address by President Barack Obama” (speech, Washington, DC, January 21, 2013), The White House, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/01/21/inaugural-address-president-barack-obama>.
3. Ibid.
4. Davis, *The Meaning of Freedom*, 131.

## Teacher Resources

1. Freedom's Song: 100 Years of African-American Struggle and Triumph (Farmers Insurance and ASALH, 2006), DVD.
2. La Vonne I. Neal and Alicia L. Moore, "Their Cries went up Together: Brown et. al. v. Board of Education Then and Now," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 20, no. 1 (2004): 5-13.
3. Their Cries Went Up Together: Brown et al. v. Board of Education/Nancy Todd-Noches, directed by La Vonne I. Neal, produced by Alicia L. Moore (2004). DVD available from A. Frank Smith, Jr. Library Center, 1001 E. University Ave., Georgetown, TX 78626.
4. Angela Y. Davis, *The Meaning of Freedom and Other Difficult Dialogues* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2012).
5. James Farmer, Jr., "On Cracking White City," in *Teaching for Joy and Justice: Re-imagining the Language Arts Classroom*, ed. Linda Christiansen (Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools Publication, 2009), 92-93.
6. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012).
7. Henry Louis Gates and Nellie Y. McKay, eds., *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1996).
8. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (letter, April 16, 1963), University of Pennsylvania, [http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html).
9. Lillian Smith, *Strange Fruit* (New York: The Cornwall Press, 1944).
10. National Registry Juneteenth Organizations and Supporters, "History of Juneteenth," accessed July 2, 2013, <http://www.juneteenth.com/history.htm>.

## Secondary Sources

1. Greg Archer, "Angela Davis: I Don't See Myself as an Icon," *Huffington Post*, May 25, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/greg-archer/angela-davis-i-dont-see-m\\_b\\_3332913.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/greg-archer/angela-davis-i-dont-see-m_b_3332913.html).
2. Representative Bill Foster, "Foster Commemorates Anniversary of Civil Rights Act of 1964," *Chicago Tribune*, July 2, 2013, accessed July 2, 2013, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/suburbs/chicugc-article-foster-commemorates-anniversary-of-civil-righ-2013-07-02,0,7863939.story>.

## Lesson Plans

For elementary and secondary lesson plans designed to inspire participation in civil and human rights efforts globally, visit The National Civil Rights Museum (the assassination site of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.), which hosts a free website for teachers and students: [http://www.civilrights museum.org/?page\\_id=77](http://www.civilrights museum.org/?page_id=77). This site offers primary source analyses, activities, and questions, which chronicle key events and the legacy of the American Civil Rights Movement.

Recommended lesson plans for high school or middle school teachers:

1. For footage, speeches, and photo galleries highlighting the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, see <http://www.history.com/topics/civil-rights-act/videos#civil-rights-act-of-1964>.
2. Project C Birmingham—Confrontation (1963). <http://www.civilrights museum.org/wp-content/uploads/9-12-Project-C-Lesson-Plan.pdf>.
3. "Marching on Washington: We Have a Dream Too" (August, 1963). [http://www.civilrights museum.org/wp-content/uploads/9-12\\_March-on-Washington-Lesson-Plan.pdf](http://www.civilrights museum.org/wp-content/uploads/9-12_March-on-Washington-Lesson-Plan.pdf).
4. "I AM A MAN: Memphis Sanitation Strike" (1968). [http://www.civilrights museum.org/wp-content/uploads/9-12\\_Sanitation-Strike-Lesson-Plan.pdf](http://www.civilrights museum.org/wp-content/uploads/9-12_Sanitation-Strike-Lesson-Plan.pdf).

Recommended lesson plans for elementary teachers:

1. Brown v. Board of Education discussion questions for grades 3-6. <http://www.civilrights museum.org/wp-content/uploads/Brown-v-Board-of-Education.pdf>.
2. Biographies of women in the Civil Rights Movement and discussion questions for grades 3-6. <http://www.civilrights museum.org/wp-content/uploads/women-of-the-movement.pdf>.



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