

Overcoming White Fragility and Becoming an Abolitionist Teacher



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2020 KY High School
Teacher of the Year
Justice Now Learning Hubs
Department of Diversity,
Equity, and Poverty

“It is said that for every “Aha moment” that a white person experiences in regard to racism, a person of color has paid a tremendous emotional price. Yes, the lessons that we teach come at an extraordinarily high cost to us.”

– Pocahontas Gertler, *While I Run This Race*



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5t5hDzVRfEc>

A Bit of my Story



WHITE

Middle Class

**Elementary - Undergraduate
Degree at Private Schools**

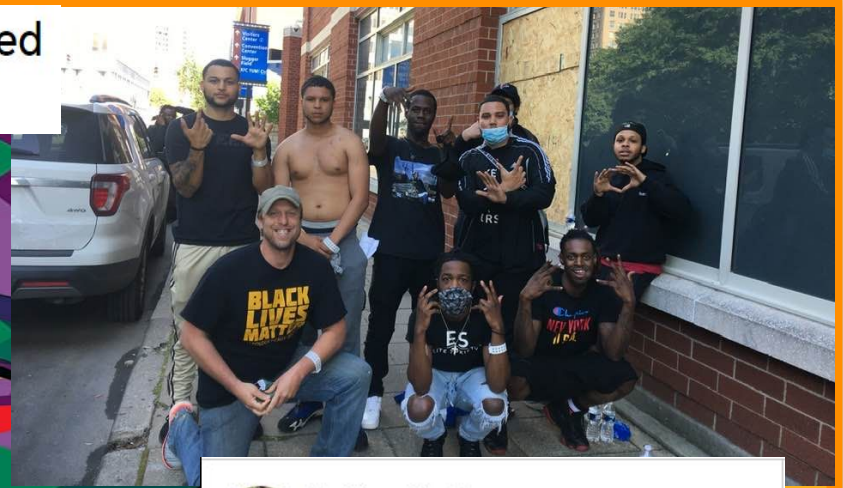
**3 Masters Degrees from a
Public institution.**

**Taught for 7 years in Oldham
County and in my 7th year
now in JCPS as a public
school educator. (14 year teacher)**

Kentucky High School Teacher of the year arrested during protests



[News Source](#)



Matthew Kaufmann

June 1, 2020 · 🌐

Shared a cell with about 30 awesome young men who are active citizens, fighting for a country that lives up to its values of liberty and justice for all.

I learned so much from them and their stories.

Let's be clear. They are not criminals.

They are patriots. Patriots who are also very funny, kind, and wise.

So thankful to share space with them.

#NoJusticeNoPeace
#J5Protest See Less

White Privilege- inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterized by racial inequality and injustice.



Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack

Peggy McIntosh's foundational 1989 article, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" states, "I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group."

Just as systemic racism is reduced to individual bad actors, privilege is misunderstood as something individual rather than a system in which white people as a collective are centered and prioritized.

She lists 50 ways in her article in which white privilege manifests itself. These include:

- I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.
- I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
- I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
- I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.
- I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.

Because I have White Privilege, my parents never had to have this talk with me...


How many of our students get this talk?

10 and 2- by Hannah Drake

"We who are dark can see America in a way that white Americans cannot."

- WEB Du Bois





White Fragility- white people don't experience racism, and therefore, have not built up a "stamina" or the ability to continuously and productively talk about racism.

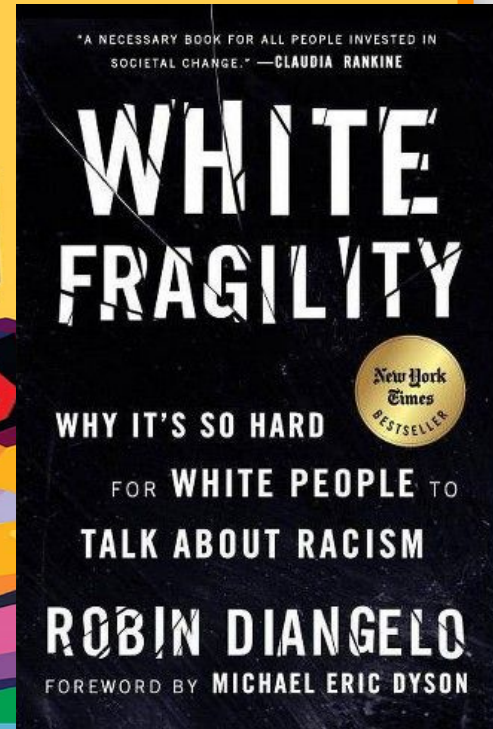
Phrases that are associated with White Fragility:

"I'm not racist."

"I have a Black friend/ family member, so I'm not racist."

"Racism ended with slavery."

"I am colorblind, so I'm not racist."



White woman who called police on a black man bird-watching in Central Park has been fired

By [Amir Vera](#) and Laura Ly, CNN



Central Park this morning: This woman's dog is tearing through the plantings in the Ramble.

ME: Ma'am, dogs in the Ramble have to be on the leash at all times. The sign is right there.

HER: The dog runs are closed. He needs his exercise.

ME: All you have to do is take him to the other side of the drive, outside the Ramble, and you can let him run off leash all you want.

HER: It's too dangerous.

ME: Look, if you're going to do what you want, I'm going to do what I want, but you're not going to like it.

HER: What's that?

ME (to the dog): Come here, puppy!

HER: He won't come to you.

ME: We'll see about that...

I pull out the dog treats I carry for just for such intransigence. I didn't even get a chance to toss any treats to the pooch before Karen scrambled to grab the dog.

HER: DON'T YOU TOUCH MY DOG!!!!

That's when I started video recording with my iPhone, and when her inner Karen fully emerged and took a dark turn...

👍 5.6K 💬 15K ➦ 21K

In comments to CNN as the video spread widely, Amy Cooper said she wanted to "publicly apologize to everyone."

"I'm not a racist. I did not mean to harm that man in any way," she said, adding that she also didn't mean any harm to the African American community.

Is the blindfold an example of white privilege or white fragility?

What does the blindfold lead to?





Are white people willing to accept and/or allow mistreatment of others based on race?


Why?

Does this also happen in our schools?

Is this white privilege, white fragility, or racism?

SOMETIMES
PRIVILEGE LOOKS
LIKE BEING ABLE
TO IGNORE A
CRISIS THAT OTHERS
ARE DYING FROM

BLAIR IMANI



When and How did you first realize racism exists?

How does your awareness of racism in our history and community impact your craft as an educator of diverse students?

Anti-Racism

An active and consistent process of change to eliminate individual, institutional and systemic racism as well as the oppression and injustice racism causes.

Racism

SYSTEMIC

Ongoing racial inequalities maintained by society.

INSTITUTIONAL

Discriminatory policies and practices within organizations and institutions.

INTERPERSONAL

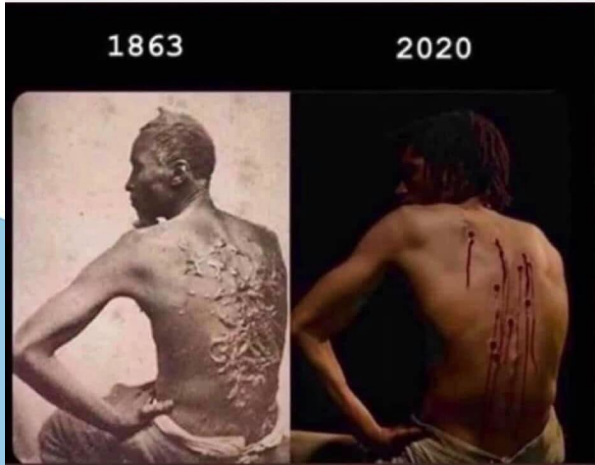
Bigotry and biases shown between individuals through word and action.

INTERNALIZED

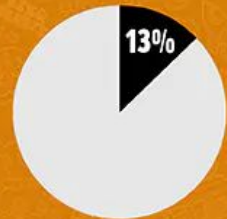
Race-based beliefs and feelings within individuals.

Systemic

Institutional



BLACKS MAKE UP



13% of the
General Population

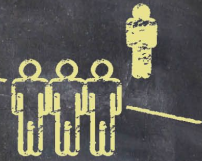


40% of the
Prison Population



Black students are
suspended and expelled

3x
more than
white students.³



Students suspended or expelled for a discretionary violation are nearly three times more likely to be in contact with the juvenile justice system the following year.⁴



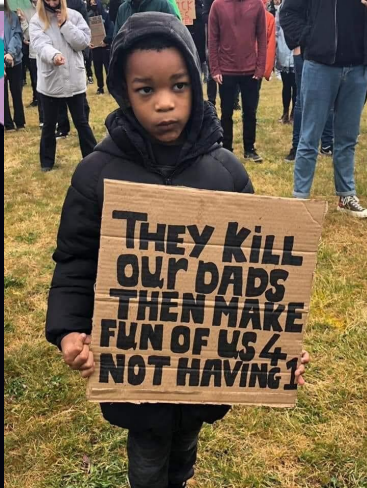
BROWN AT 60: STILL SEPARATE. STILL UNEQUAL.



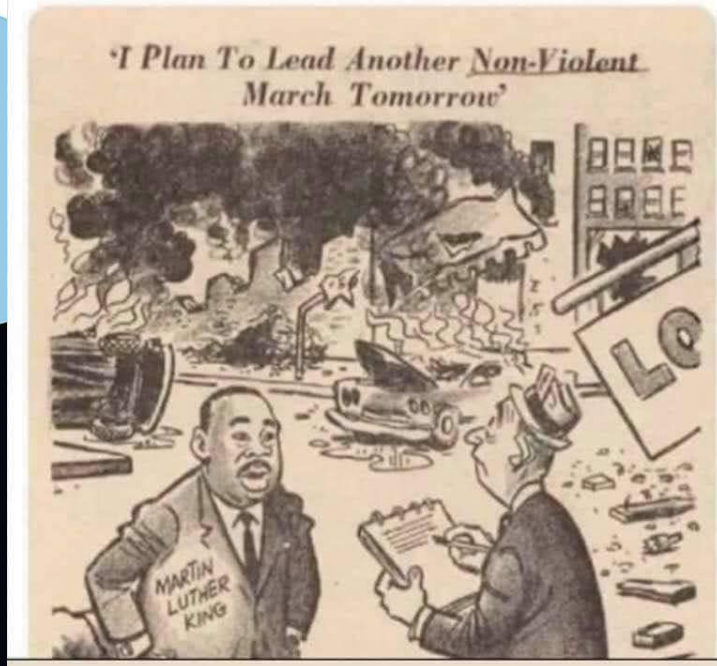
¹ Data Source: http://www.aclulaw.org/documents/2005_School_Discipline_Report.pdf
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Tracking School Status http://disproportionality.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Tracking_School_Status_Report_Final.pdf

Interpersonal

Internalized

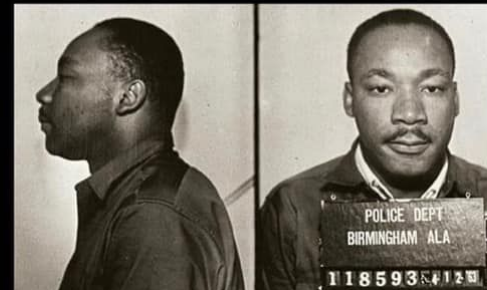


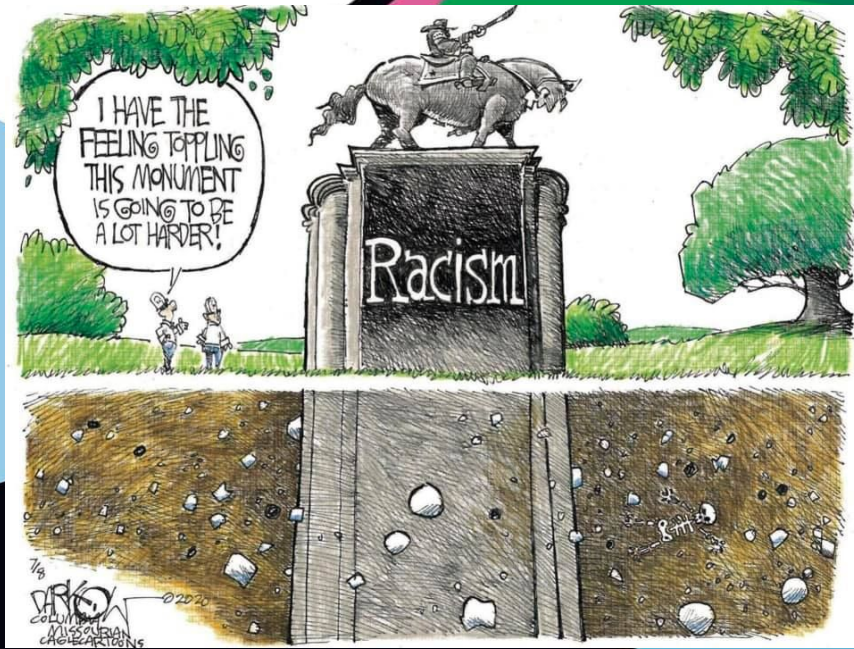
This is how MLK was depicted in 1967 to scare white Americans, in case there's any confusion about what the strategy is.



"I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: 'I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action' ... We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed."

Martin Luther King, Jr., 16 April 1963
Letter from Birmingham Jail





"In a racist society it is not enough to be non-racist.

We must be anti-racist."

Angela Davis



Our city is segregated...

How do the injustices of our community and policies designed against so many of our students.... enter our classrooms?

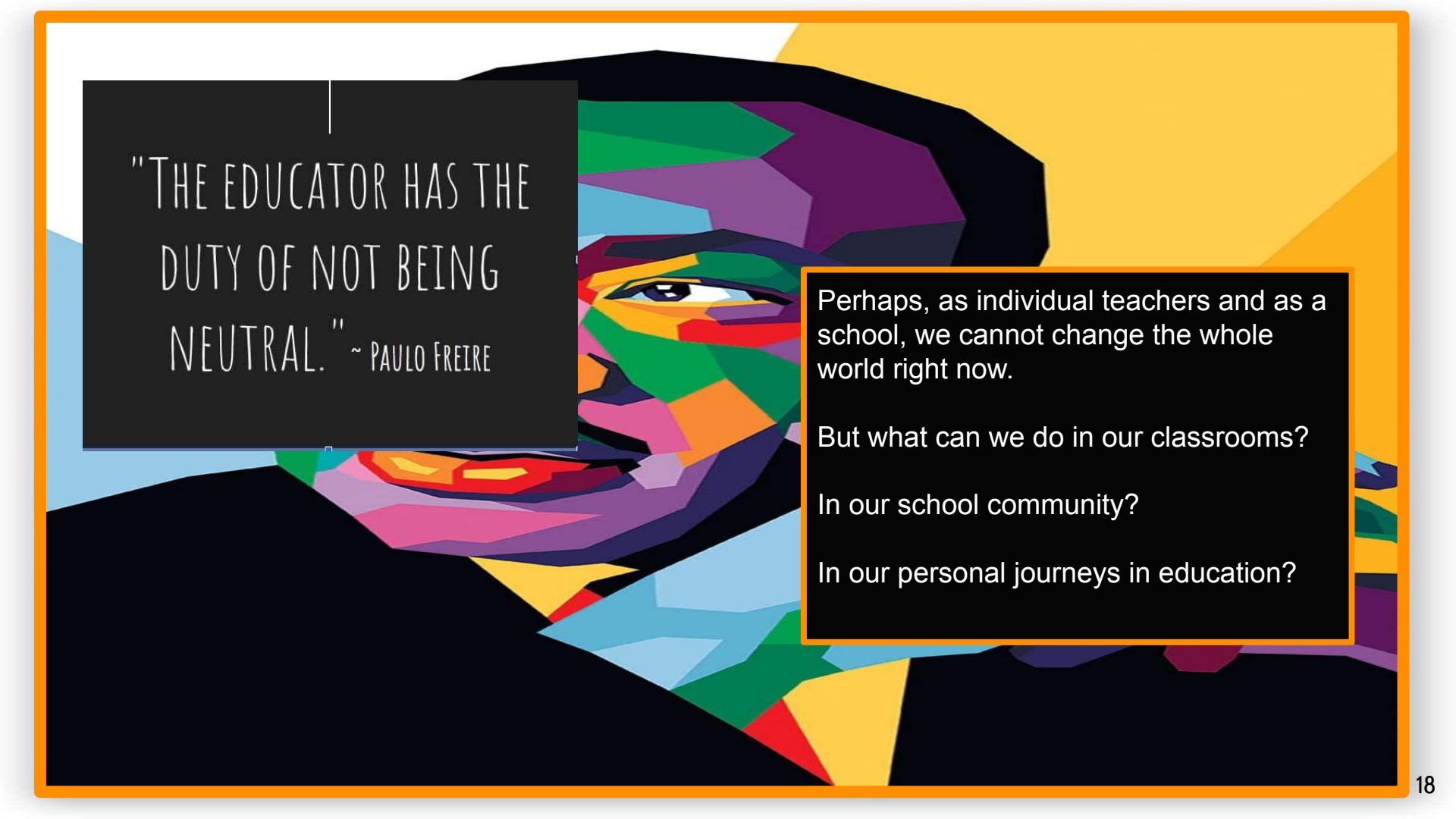
“Americans have long been trained to see the deficiencies of people rather than policy. It's a pretty easy mistake to make: People are in our faces. Policies are distant. We are particularly poor at seeing the policies lurking behind the struggles of people.”
— Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*

Joshua Poe won an award from Harvard University in 2017 for his interactive map “*Redlining Louisville: The History of Race, Class and Real Estate.*”

“Louisville is one of the most segregated cities in the country, and it's segregated differently than most places,” Poe explained. “Most cities are segregated so that you have pockets of groups in different areas. We measure how many white people or black people would have to move to create integration. But in Louisville, African-Americans are corralled in one area of the city. I've never seen anything like that anywhere else.”

- *Louisville Insight*





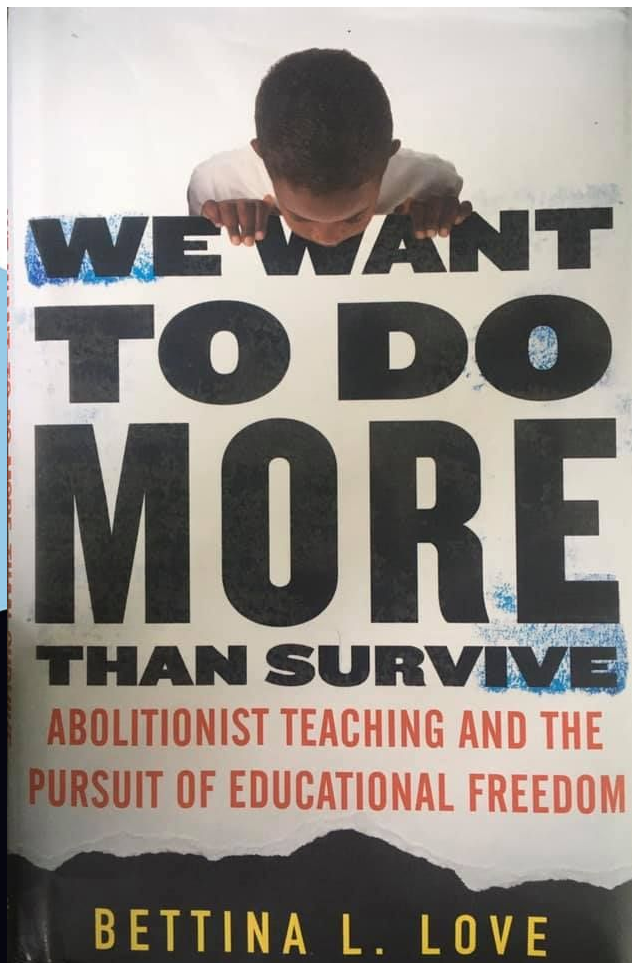
"THE EDUCATOR HAS THE
DUTY OF NOT BEING
NEUTRAL." ~ PAULO FREIRE

Perhaps, as individual teachers and as a school, we cannot change the whole world right now.

But what can we do in our classrooms?

In our school community?

In our personal journeys in education?



“Abolitionist teaching is the practice of working in solidarity with communities of color while drawing on the imagination, creativity, refusal, remembering, visionary thinking, healing, rebellious spirit, boldness, determination, and subversiveness of abolitionists to eradicate injustice in and outside of schools.”

“Pedagogy should work in tandem with students’ own knowledge of their community and grassroots organizations to push forward new ideas for social change, not just be a tool to enhance test scores or grades. Pedagogy, regardless of its name, is useless without teachers dedicated to challenging systemic oppression with intersectional justice.”

“We are not asking for struggle; we just understand that justice will not happen without it.”

As an educator, where are you on the pyramid?

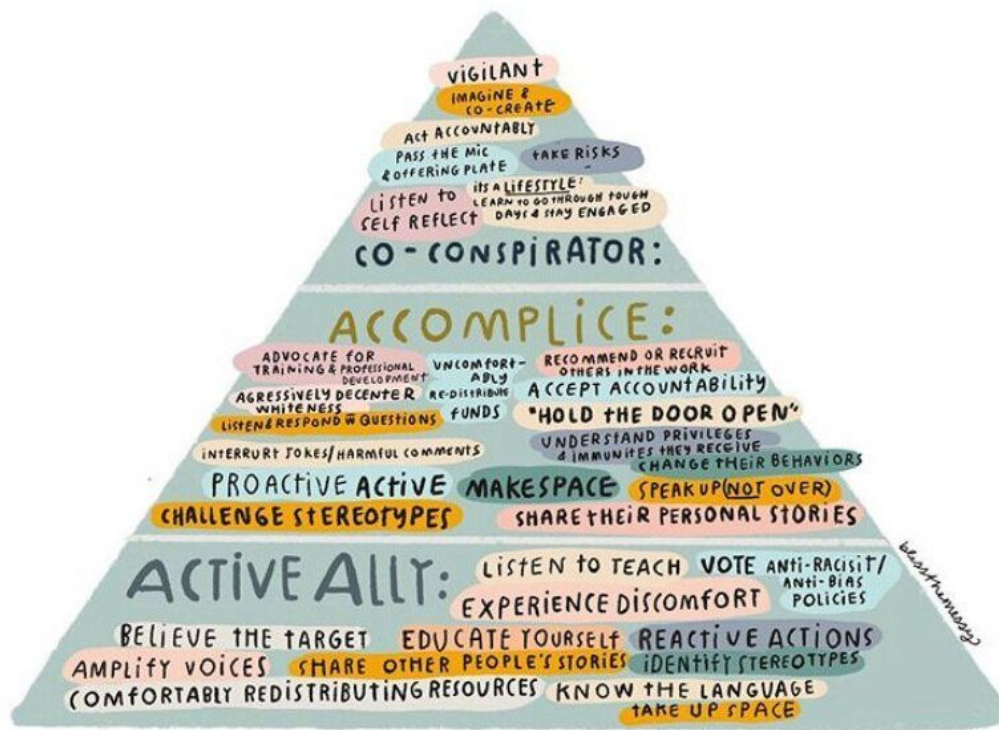
Why?

Where do you want to be? Why?

Who at your school and in your community can support you in this work?

Scaffolded Anti-Racist Resources: Click [HERE!](#)

PYRAMID of ACCOUNTABILITY



@BRITTHAWTHORNE

Meet Ruby Bridges, at 6 years old, she was the first Black child to attend an all-White elementary school in the south.

For her to attend school her first day, men with guns had to make way through a crowd of grown men and women screaming the n word at her, threatening her life and waving confederate flags.

Nearly all the teachers abandoned the school except for one. In her classroom, all her classmates abandoned the class refusing to sit with the 6 yr old

For the entire school year, Ruby went to school to a classroom that was just her and the one teacher that didn't refuse her.

She refused to eat any food that wasn't pre-packaged and sealed because White protestors frequently threatened to poison her like a rat.

Ruby is only 65 years old today, younger than many of our parents.

QUESTION- Why did all but one teacher, refuse to work with her?



This is Joan Trumpauer Mulholland. This is her mugshot from when she was arrested in 1961 for protesting segregation. Her family disowned her for her activism. After her first arrest, she was tested for mental illness, because Virginia law enforcement couldn't think of any other reason why a white Virginian girl would want to fight for civil rights.

I remember learning about the civil rights movement in school. I think the way our history is taught makes it seem like it's so far away, like we're so far beyond slavery and segregation that we can remove ourselves from taking any responsibility for our role in the continued racial injustice in this country. To be able to say things like "I would have been like Joan Trumpauer Mulholland if I had been alive in 1961," with the same gravity as "I would have churned butter on the prairie," is an incredible, undeniable privilege. As if we're characters in a play, and we can hang up our costumes at the end of it.

I've been thinking about history class a lot lately. I think almost every white person I know has at least **thought** that they would have been like Joan. We would have had black friends and marched for civil rights and supported MLK and protected little Ruby Bridges as she walked into an all-white school...

And then I think of Philando Castile. And Eric Garner. And Tamir Rice. Mike Brown. Oscar Grant. Alton Sterling. Freddie Gray. Sandra Bland. John Crawford. Jordan Davis. Trayvon Martin. Breonna Taylor.



I think of how their families will never see justice because the system was not built to protect them. I think of how white terrorists and rapists are safer in this country than black folks who are just existing. I think of how easily people justify their murders. And I think of how simple it is for me-- a white person with more privilege than I'll ever fully understand-- to turn off the news, to go for a walk... to just not think about this anymore.

My whole point comes down to this:

My fellow white people- if you think you would have done something **then**, but are doing nothing **now**, then you wouldn't have done anything **then**, either. So think about what side of history you want to be on, because now's the time for doing something. - Bri Traquair

Breonna Taylor's Western High School teachers remember a 'natural-born leader'

Billy Kobin Louisville Courier Journal

Published 3:27 p.m. ET Oct. 1, 2020 | Updated 7:35 a.m. ET Oct. 2, 2020



jecoreyarthur



**September 23rd 1955
Emmett Till's murderers are
acquitted.**



**September 23rd 2020
Breonna Taylor's murderers
are acquitted.**



To her former teachers at Louisville's Western High School, Breonna Taylor is more than a name chanted repeatedly by people in the streets.

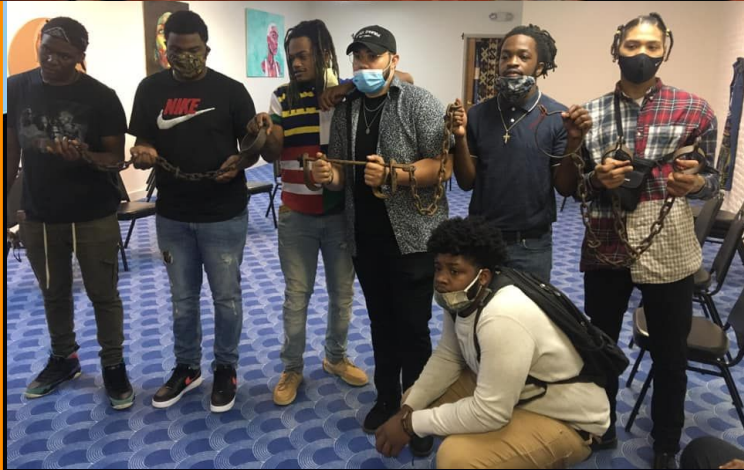
She is more than a hashtag. More than a photo on a billboard or in a magazine.

To these educators, Taylor "was a real person that touched each of our lives very deeply," as Nureka Dixon put it Thursday morning.

Dixon, who was the assistant principal at Western and now holds the same position at Seneca High School, and three other teachers who knew Taylor from her time at Western gathered in the school's library Thursday to share more about their former student.

They described Taylor as a "natural-born leader" who had a beautiful smile, plenty of friends and a desire to help others while succeeding academically and, in 2011, becoming the first in her family to graduate from high school.

<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/local/breonna-taylor/2020/10/01/breonna-taylor-remembered-by-western-high-school-teachers/3589420001/>



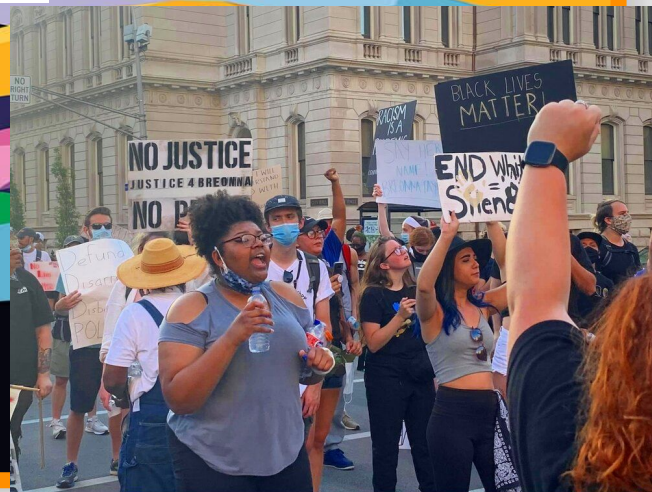


Join us as we **MARCH** from Injustice Square Park
Tuesday, June 23 at 6:30 PM



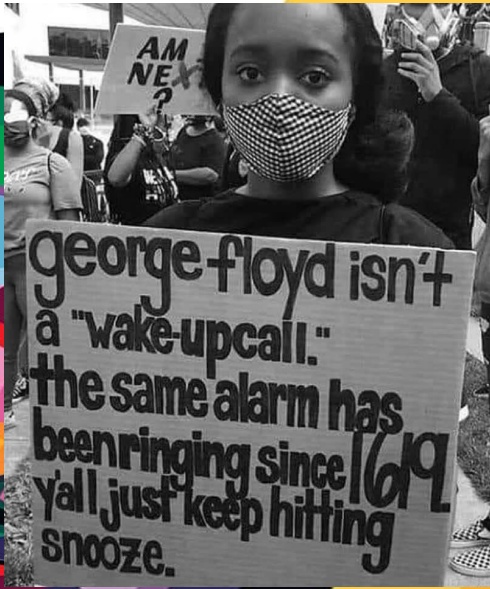
We'll be carrying the casket honoring Black lives who have fallen victim to injustice. We'll march with the casket to its final resting place at Roots 101 African American Museum where it will be on permanent display.

We need you to help build the movement to become better ancestors!



What would an anti-racist, abolitionist teacher do? Why?

What are you willing to do in your teaching practice?





WHAT IS STOPPING YOU FROM ENGAGING IN ANTI RACISM?

If you think...

Try thinking...

I don't know where to start or what to say.

First I will listen/read/watch. I will speak against injustice.

I don't want to get it wrong or get called out.

I will make mistakes, no doubt about it. I will be grateful for each lesson.

It won't make a difference what I do. Nothing is going to change.

Things happen when I take risks and become part of something bigger.

I don't get involved in politics. I don't have time.

This is a human rights issue. This matters. I will make time.

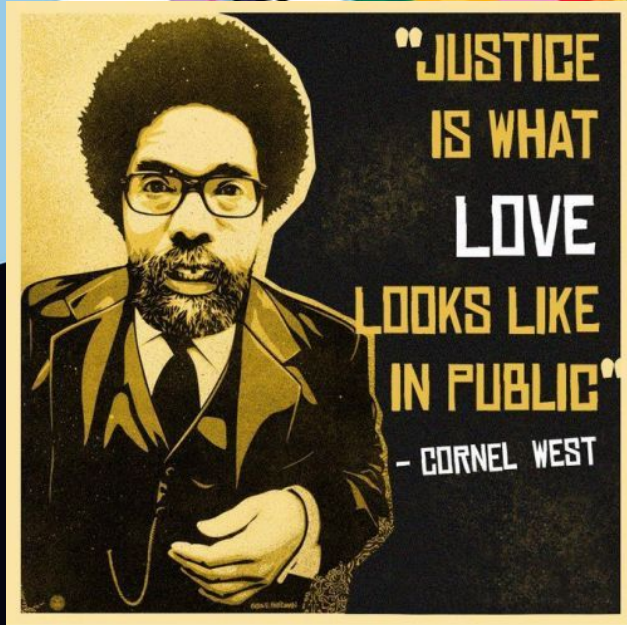
@sylviaaduckworth

Adapted from @holisticallygrace

In what ways can you teach your subject area to your students through a justice lens?

Who else in your building and community can you partner with?

You can connect this work to your learning standards...



"Social Justice is
LOVE applied to
systems, policies
and cultures."

- Bernice King

How can you use your subject area to help students understand and address the root causes of injustices/traumas they face?

An excerpt from Sariah's letter....

“There are no classes I’ve been exposed to that teach African American history with any kind of credible authority... We need credible experts on African American history in our schools to help fill the knowledge gap that we are enduring now and help put an end to the mental health crisis this lack of knowledge is creating. We are ‘learning’ in a system that is systematically depriving us of crucial knowledge on who we are and where we come from. It is my belief that many ‘behavioral infractions’ and the school-to-prison pipeline is a direct result of us being denied our history.”

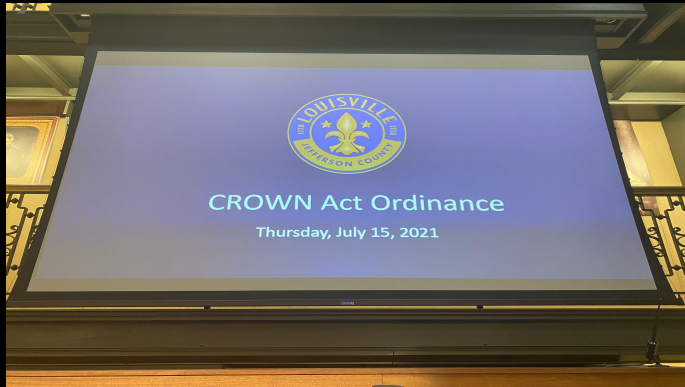


Listen to their interview [HERE](#)

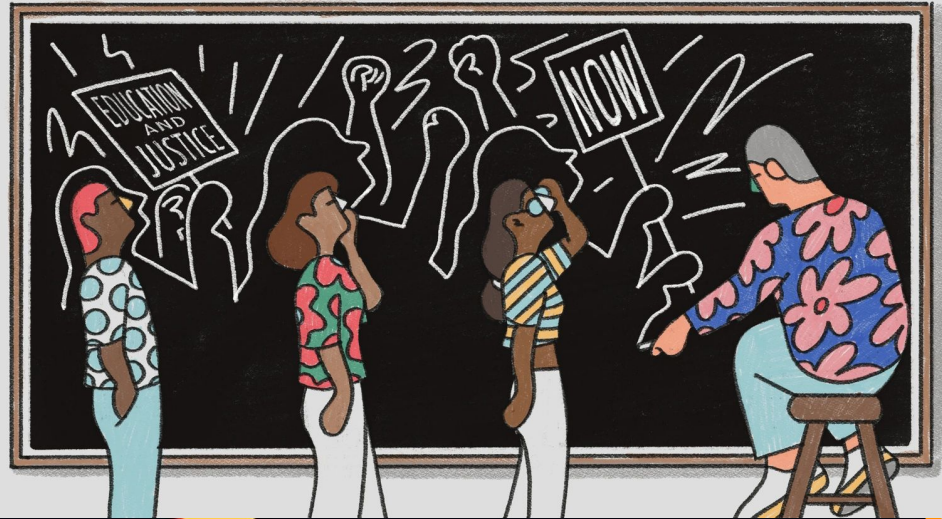
The Young Prodigys have worked so hard to pass the CROWN ACT in a Louisville Ordinance.

The CROWN Act stands for "Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair."

Have you seen students discriminated against for their hair?




What can you do in
your classroom (with
your subject area)
next week, next
month, before the
school year ends?





THANK YOU!



Teacher Interest
Form for Justice Now,
Sign up [HERE!](#)

EDUCATION


'Justice Now': JCPS learning hubs empower students to solve systemic issues in Louisville

Billy Kobin Louisville Courier Journal

Published 6:19 a.m. ET Nov. 12, 2020 | Updated 1:38 p.m. ET Nov. 12, 2020

[View Comments](#)



 10 Photos

[VIEW FULL GALLERY](#)

The After the Vote Youth Rally at Roots 101

A group of JCPS students held an After the Vote Youth Rally at Roots 101 and march to highlight the need to vote

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Justice Now.

Those two words make a concise yet powerful declaration.

In Louisville, those two words also form the moniker of [a new Jefferson County Public Schools "learning hub"](#) that will soon [offer resources and support to students](#) during the period of remote instruction necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.