Navigating Sensitive Content While Meeting Students' Needs

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Teaching is full of tension. As educators, we are pulled between having a mountain of content to cover and the difficult choices that limited time frames necessitate. We want to maintain high standards for all students but realize that some students face serious challenges that may impede their learning. The mandates of our school administration do not always match the realities of our classroom. And teaching history, in particular, presents unique challenges: there is hardship in history. There is struggle. There is conflict. Inequity, exploitation, and oppression. Hatred. War. Death. There is no denying that each of these realities has a significant presence in American history.

In addition, we teach children. We teach young people who may not be emotionally or cognitively able to swallow every ounce of the pain and suffering that humans have perpetrated on one another.

Just as importantly, we also know that educators may perpetuate flawed assumptions or inaccurate information by avoiding or underplaying the realities of the past. This choice (whether conscious or not) prevents students from fully understanding the present or the past. *Who are we as a country? How did we get here? What have been the highlights and hardships of our journey?* To sugarcoat is to run the risk of committing "educational malpractice," in the words of Ohio State University historian Hasan Kwame Jeffries.[1]

There is great beauty in our country's history and in African American history. There is wisdom, strength, creativity, and inspiration—alongside countless examples of individuals who worked hard to make life better for others. Joy, pain, triumph, and tragedy are splashed across the broad landscape of African American history. To serve our students well, we must remember that we are charged with teaching history and facts, not myths and fairy tales. This article will explore how to navigate the tensions, and how to guide students through learning challenging content, all while prioritizing sensitivity and discretion.

TEACHING TRUTHFULLY: WHY AND HOW

If educators shield students from important dimensions of history, students' understanding will be neither full nor fully truthful.

[1] To learn more, watch Dr. Hasan Kwame Jeffries's TED Talk, *Why We Must Confront the Painful Parts of US History* at youtu.be/UL95OYBRbOc or read Maureen Costello, "We Rest Our Case: American Slavery Is Widely Mistaught," Learning for Justice, March 1, 2018, https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/we-rest-our-case-american-slavery-is-widely-mistaught.

The humanity of those who were oppressed is central to a full understanding. Victims of historical oppression—just like everyone else—had loved ones, hopes, dreams, strengths, and limitations. They were defined by more than the circumstances of their hardship because they had agency (the power to act and make choices), which they harnessed to resist, to make decisions, and to find joy.

At the same time, it is not possible to adequately teach the 250-year saga of enslavement without an honest appraisal of the brutality that its victims experienced. For example, students' knowledge of Jim Crow will be quite incomplete if they are familiar with separate water fountains but not the terrors of lynching. But the question remains: how do we decide what content students should or should not be exposed to? With graphic or violent content, what is appropriate for a twelfth-grade student may not be appropriate for a sixth-grade student.

As indicated by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, students' emotional maturity and cognitive ability are both important considerations for decisions related to sensitive content.[2] By middle school, most children are able to empathize with victims of violence while understanding the scope of what took place. They can process the difference between ten victims and 1,000 victims and between tragedies that occur in one day versus those that span centuries. Importantly, they also can separate themselves from the content under review—in the sense that they will not have undue fear that what occurred to other people will happen to them.

While teaching your curriculum, following learning objectives, or supporting your students' research projects, many topics related to African American history could contain graphic or violent content. They range from topics typically taught (such as the brutality of the Middle Passage and the violence undergirding the racial hierarchy of Jim Crow) to less prominent topics (like discrimination faced by Black soldiers or forced medical experimentation on Black women and men).

Still, strength, courage, and resistance are embedded even within these topics. Exploring the topics reveals stories of heroism, dignity, resourcefulness, and creativity by Black people subjected to hardship and injustice. And yet there is an inescapable tragedy as well. Talking about these topics—let alone reading sources or viewing images—requires sensitivity and may provoke all sorts of reactions and emotions in your students. Adolescents may react in unpredictable or surprising ways. This can be scary for educators because we deeply understand the importance of controlling our classroom environment. To prepare for both uncertainty and sensitivity, the first order of business is establishing a safe classroom space. A safe classroom is one with established norms pertaining to respect, communication, and students' identities.

Students must feel comfortable expressing themselves while knowing their emotions will be validated. Be prepared with what Kid Power, a nationally recognized social-emotional learning platform, calls an "escape hatch." This tool can be used if students are uncomfortable with something you introduce that contains sensitive content.[3] Engaging the "escape hatch" could involve allowing a student to step outside your classroom for a few minutes, sit in a neighboring classroom, or continue their work in the media center. Many teachers find that journaling—perhaps not to be graded or evaluated—is a wonderful way to provide students an outlet for expressing emotions and reflections after digging into unsettling topics.

Before engaging students in sensitive material, prepare them by describing what it is and explaining that some of them may find it startling or upsetting. Consider touching base beforehand with administration—making sure to justify your decisions with correlations to standards or learning objectives—if there is a chance that students' reactions may bubble up outside your classroom.

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[2] "Age Appropriateness," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed March 10, 2023, https://www.ushmm.org/teach/fundamentals/age-appropriateness.

[3] Tami Mount, "10 Steps: Teaching Sensitive Topics to Students," Kid Power, March 7, 2022, https://gokidpower.org/10-steps-teaching-sensitive-topics-to-students/.

The best path to successfully navigating these tricky waters is through careful discretion in what materials you select. **The best rule of thumb is to use the least graphic or violent example available, but that still helps students to learn what they need to learn**.

When choosing materials for your lesson planning, ask and answer these questions: *What benefits does using this item have? What would I lose or gain by using an alternative image or text*?

For example, many textbooks are written with sterile, unemotional language that only hints at the horrors of violence rained down upon nonviolent civil rights protesters in the 1960s. A clip of documentary footage may prove more effective in provoking students' understanding. On the other hand, it is probably unnecessary to show a photo of Emmett Till's mutilated and lifeless face, which could be disturbing to anyone, young or old. Instead, you could ask students to reckon with the magnitude of this heinous tragedy by analyzing written accounts of what happened or reading comments by the sheriff or attorneys for Till's murderers at their trial.

This is why, when making decisions about what kind of content to use, a good place to start is with your learning outcomes. What would you like students to understand? Consider these examples.

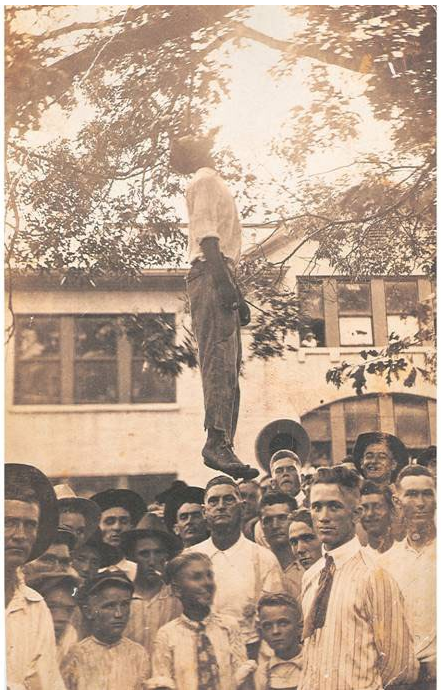
VISUAL SOURCES

When teaching about the Jim Crow era, students need to understand what it was like for Black children to be relegated to crumbling schoolhouses and banned from public swimming pools. But that's not all. Students cannot fully grasp the realities of the time period without grappling with how White people—fueled by beliefs that Black people were inferior or even less than human—used violence to enforce racial separation and subjugation.

There are ways to do this without showing a charred or maimed body hanging from a tree. Consider this postcard depicting the lynching of teenager Lige Daniels in Center, Texas, on August 3, 1920.

Consider cropping out or blocking out everything above Daniels's knees. Reveal the image in segments. First, show a few of the White men's faces at a time. Ask the students: *What do you see? What do you think? What emotions are the men showing? Why might they be gathered together? Where might they be—at some sort of ceremony or public event, perhaps*?

Most of the students' guesses will not gravitate toward an unspeakable act of violence. Revealing Daniels's feet and ankles—and telling your students they belonged to a 16-year-old child—probably will impact your students in ways that help them think about Jim Crow in deep, visceral ways. You will have accomplished that without subjecting them to a highly upsetting image.



The lynching of Texas teenager Lige Daniels, August 3, 1920. Wikimedia Commons.

TEXTUAL SOURCES

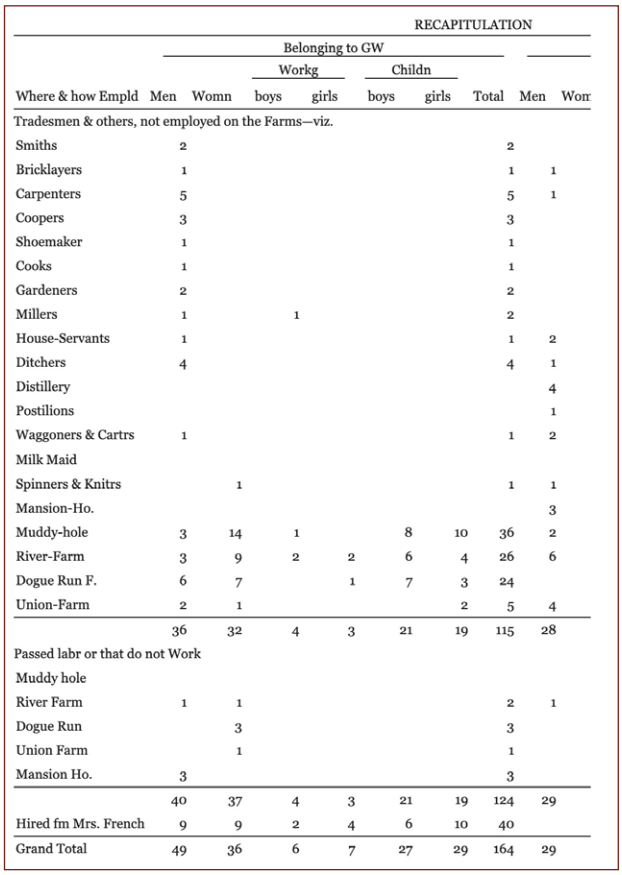
As there are many angles to approaching the study of slavery, it may be unnecessary to show photographs of enslaved people's skin that had been ravaged by the whip—images that could convey savage violence and may include nudity.

Other sources can tell the same historical story but in a different way. Consider having students explore a list of the people enslaved at George Washington's Mount Vernon.[4]

GW MUDDY HOLE F[ARM]

Names	age		Remarks		
Gabriel	30	Wife	Judy	D.R.	GW
Uriah	24				
Moses	19	Son	to Darcus		GW
Kate	old	Husbd	Will	Muddy Hole	dowr
Nanny	ditto	Ditto	Tom—Cooper		GW
Sacky	40	No Husband			
Darcus	36	Husbd	James—Carpr		GW
Peg	34	Ditto	Nathan—C[oo]k		GW
Alce	38	Ditto	Sam ditto		GW
Amie	30	No Husband			
Nancy	28	Husbd	Abram		French
Molly	26	No Husband			
Virgin	24	Husbd	Gabl		Mr Lear
Letty	19	No husband			
Kate long	18	daughr of Kate			
Kate sht	18	Ditto	Alce	Muddy Hole	
Isbel	16	Ditto	Sarah—dead		
Townshend	14	Son	to Darcus		
			Children		
Alce	8	Daughr	to Darcus		
Nancy	2	Ditto	ditto		
Lucy	11	Daughr	to Peg		
Diana	8	Ditto	ditto		
Alexander	3	Son	ditto		
Darcus	1	Daughr	ditto		
Oliver	11	Son	to Nancy		
Siss	8	Daughr	ditto		
Martin	1	Son	ditto		
George	8	Ditto	to Alce		
Adam	7	Ditto	ditto		
Cecelia	2	Daughr	ditto		
Sylvia	10	Ditto	to Molly		
James	7	Son	ditto		
Rainey	8	Daughr	to Amie		
Urinah	2	Ditto	ditto		
Billy	2	Son	to Letty		
Henry	1	Ditto	ditto		

Workers 18
Children 18 together 36



RECAPITULATION

	Belonging to GW								
			Workg		Childn				
Where & how Empld	Men	Womn	boys	girls	boys	girls	Total	Men	Wom
Tradesmen & others, not employed on the Farms—viz.									
Smiths	2						2		
Bricklayers	1						1	1	
Carpenters	5						5	1	
Coopers	3						3		
Shoemaker	1						1		
Cooks	1						1		
Gardeners	2						2		
Millers	1		1				2		
House-Servants	1						1	2	
Ditchers	4						4	1	
Distillery								4	
Postilions								1	
Waggoners & Cartrs	1						1	2	
Milk Maid									
Spinners & Knitrs		1					1	1	
Mansion-Ho.								3	
Muddy-hole	3	14	1		8	10	36	2	
River-Farm	3	9	2	2	6	4	26	6	
Dogue Run F.	6	7		1	7	3	24		
Union-Farm	2	1				2	5	4	
	36	32	4	3	21	19	115	28	
Passed labr or that do not Work									
Muddy hole									
River Farm	1	1					2	1	
Dogue Run		3					3		
Union Farm		1					1		
Mansion Ho.	3						3		
	40	37	4	3	21	19	124	29	
Hired fm Mrs. French	9	9	2	4	6	10	40		
Grand Total	49	36	6	7	27	29	164	29	

An excerpt of George Washington's slave list, June 1799. National Archives and Records Administration.

Seeing fellow children on the list could hit students hard, as they imagine how so many of the things they take for granted in their lives were robbed from enslaved children. *What would these children have dreamed of, yearned for, and enjoyed?* Students could detect clues of families torn apart. *How would this have made parents feel? What would they have tried to do to prevent this from happening?* Students could speculate as to why there are so few old people on the list. They could wonder what it would feel like to be named by your enslaver rather than your parents.

Consider giving students the following transcribed letter, written by George Washington, or an excerpt from it. Here Washington wrote to Oliver Wolcott, Jr. in an attempt to recapture a woman who had escaped from the president's enslavement:[5]

[4] George Washington, "Washington's Slave List, June 1799," The Papers of George Washington, National Archives and Records Administration, accessed January 14, 2023, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/06-04-02-0405.

[5] George Washington, "From George Washington to Oliver Wolcott, Jr., 1 September 1796," The Papers of George Washington, National Archives and Records Administration, accessed January 14, 2023, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-20-02-0397.

To Oliver Wolcott, Jr.

Thursday Morning 1st Sep. [1796]

Dear Sir,

Enclosed is the name, and description of the Girl I mentioned to you last night. She has been the particular attendent on Mrs Washington since she was ten years old; and was handy & useful to her, being a perfect Mistress of her needle.

We have heard that she was seen in New York by some one who knew her, directly after she went off. And since by Miss Langden, in Portsmouth; who meeting her one day in the Street, & knowing her, was about to stop and speak to her, but she brushed quickly by, to avoid it.

By her being seen in New York (if the fact be so) it is not probable she went immediately to Portsmouth by Water from this City; but whether she travelled by land, or Water to the latter, it is certain the escape has been planned by some one who knew what he was about, & had the means to defray the expence of it & to entice her off; for not the least suspicion was entertained of her going, or having formed a connexion with any one who could induce her to such an Act.

Whether she is Stationary at Portsmouth, or was there en passant only, is uncertain; but as it is the last we have heard of her, I would thank you for writing to the Collector of that Port, & him for his endeavours to recover, & send her back: What will be the best method to effect it, is difficult for m e to say. If enquiries are made openly, her Seducer (for she is simple and inoffensive herself) would take the alarm, & adopt instant measures (if he is not tired of her) to secrete or remove her. To sieze, and put her on board a Vessel bound immediately to this place, or to Alexandria which I should like better, seems at first view, to be the safest & least expensive. But if she is discovered, the Collector, I am persuaded, will pursue such measures as to him shall appear best, to effect those ends; and the cost shall be re-embursed & with thanks.

If positive proof is required, of the identity of the person, Miss Langden who must have seen her often in the Chamber of Miss Custis—and I dare say Mrs Langden, on the occasional calls on the girl by Mrs Washington, when she has been here, would be able to do this.

I am sorry to give you, or any one else trouble on such a trifling occasion—but the ingratitude of the girl, who was brought up & treated more like a child than a Servant (& Mrs Washington's desire to recover her) ought not to escape with impunity if it can be avoided. With great esteem & regard I am always

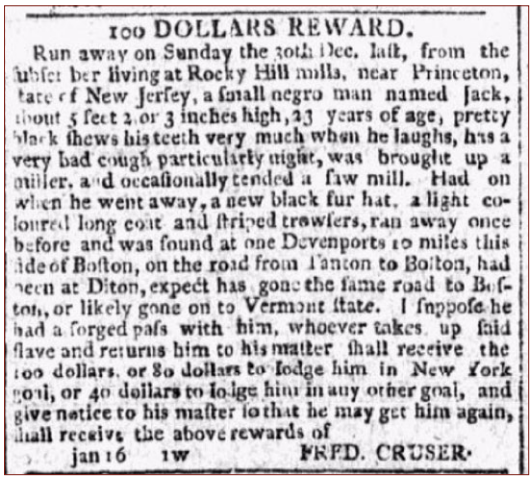
Yours

Go: Washington

Students could reckon with the reality that the Founding Father enshrined on the one dollar bill and countless other places owned, bought, and sold human beings. You can use questions like these to provide an opportunity for students to think about the choices made by Washington and by Oney Judge, the woman who fled Mount Vernon:

- What does the letter tell us about Judge?
- What inferences can you make about Judge's decision to make a risky escape from a man as wealthy, powerful, and well-known as George Washington?
- Judge was 22 years old at the time of her escape. How might that have influenced Washington's views on the situation?
- Why do you think Washington, in the final paragraph, refers to Judge's "ingratitude"?
- Why would Washington, an extremely wealthy man, go to such great lengths to try to have Judge captured?

Another way to have students grapple with what enabled the system of slavery to endure is to have them investigate newspaper advertisements written to bring about the recapture of individuals who had escaped from enslavement. An activity like this could be coupled with a study of the heroism of Black and White individuals who helped runaways to safety.[6] These advertisements describe not only physical characteristics, but also skills: carpentry, sewing, ironworking, machine repair, animal handling, and other abilities. They help to show the humanity of these individuals and the risks that they took (to themselves and their families) in seeking survival, freedom, and a better life.



100 DOLLARS REWARD.

Run away on Sunday the 30th Dec. last, from the subscriber living at Rocky Hill mills, near Princeton, state of New Jersey, a small negro man named Jack, about 5 feet 2 or 3 inches high, 23 years of age, pretty black shews his teeth very much when he laughs, has a very bad cough particularly night, was brought up a miller, and occasionally tended a saw mill. Had on when he went away, a new black fur hat, a light coloured long coat and striped trowsers, ran away once before and was found at one Devenports 10 miles this side of Boston, on the road from Canton to Boston, had been at Diton, expect has gone the same road to Boston, or likely gone on to Vermont state. I suppose he had a forged pass with him, whoever takes up said slave and returns him to his master shall receive the 100 dollars, or 80 dollars to lodge him in New York goal, or 40 dollars to lodge him in any other goal, and give notice to his master so that he may get him again, shall receive the above rewards of

jan 16 1w FRED. CRUSER.

This advertisement in the January 17, 1799 *Daily Advertiser* seeks the return of Jack, an enslaved man who had training as a miller and had experience working in a saw mill. Princeton & Slavery.

The Southern Poverty Law Center's *Teaching Hard History* guide suggests that we teach the bravery, cunning, and strength of Harriet Tubman *and* explore the people, forces, and institutions she fought against in her efforts to free the enslaved.[7] This way, educators can expose students to both the joy and the pain, the triumph and the tragedy—in other words, a richer and more accurate understanding of history.

An example of this more complete approach would be to use the testimony of civil rights leaders such as John Lewis and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. from a trial in the Alabama courtroom of Judge Frank M. Johnson, Jr.[8]

After being severely beaten by Alabama state troopers in March 1965, activists such as Lewis, Hosea Williams, and Amelia Boynton filed a lawsuit. This lawsuit, which was (ultimately) decided in their favor, aimed to secure the right to peacefully march from Selma to Montgomery in support of voting rights.

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[6] George Washington, "Advertisement for Runaway Slaves, 11 August 1761," The Papers of George Washington, National Archives and Records Administration, accessed January 14, 2023, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/02-07-02-0038. Other examples can be found through Chronicling America at the Library of Congress (guides.loc.gov/chronicling-america-fugitive-slave-ads/selected-articles) or the Louisiana State University Libraries Special Collections (louisianadigitallibrary.org/islandora/object/lsu-sc-p16313coll80:collection).

[7] Teaching Hard History, The Southern Poverty Law Center, updated January 31, 2018, accessed March 10, 2023, https://www.splcenter.org/20180131/teaching-hard-history.

[8] Testimony from *Hosea Williams, John Lewis, and Amelia Boynton et al. v. Honorable George C. Wallace, Governor of Alabama* et al., March 1965, Records of District Courts of the United States, Record Group 21 National Archives and Records Administration at Atlanta (NAID 279204), https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/selma-testimony. The testimony of other activists including Amelia Boynton and Hosea Williams is part of the same document, although it is not included in the excerpt on this National Archives webpage.

Sharing their testimony would give students an accurate depiction of the events of Bloody Sunday, including the troopers' brutality, the protesters' courage, and the way that ordinary people fought for change. It is important to preview all primary sources before sharing them with students, as John Lewis's testimony includes racial slurs used against the protesters.

WHY PRIMARY SOURCES?

It may be tempting to stick to the textbook when studying graphic or violent content, with the rationale that it might be "easier" or "safer." However, it is dangerous to skirt the surface of the darker chapters of history if it means leaving students with an inaccurate or insufficient understanding of times when Americans have been denied liberty, justice, rights, and safety. Primary sources are a vital tool.

An article in the National Council for the Social Studies' *Social Education* journal helps explain why:

> Primary sources allow us to discover important details about horrific events of the past, especially the often-overlooked human response. For example, history textbooks make reference to shocking events of the past, but rarely do they provide insight into what people living at the time, who may not have been directly involved with the events, thought about those events—or what actions they took in response. Documents can help reveal those perspectives and actions.[9]

Primary sources can infuse the study of history with humanity. For example, laws were not just passed; they did not spring into existence out of thin air. *People* passed the laws—people with hopes and fears, virtues and vices, families and legacies. And countless other people argued about those laws, supported or opposed those laws, and felt happiness or anger about them.

The Library of Congress notes that primary sources are an effective way to immerse students in doing the vital types of thinking that are at the heart of studying history. Primary sources tend to show rather than tell, which lets the reader process the content in many rich ways. For example:

> In analyzing primary sources, students move from concrete observations and facts to questioning and making inferences about the materials. Interacting with primary sources engages students in asking questions, evaluating information, making inferences, and developing reasoned explanations and interpretations of events and issues.[10]

Students' critical thinking skills—not to mention their enjoyment of learning and understanding of history—grow immensely when we support them in tapping into their curiosity, making observations, drawing their own conclusions, and coming up with connections. Through primary sources, students also can understand different perspectives, which is another real-world skill applicable far beyond the history classroom. Doing so must include a diversity of voices beyond the powerful, wealthy, and well-known.

Providing historical context—the social, economic, political, and cultural circumstances that frame an event—will enhance students' understanding. When sharing this information, do not assume students know what was legal or illegal, what was normal or abnormal, what working or traveling or communicating was like at a certain point in history.

Teachers can provide context as an important pillar of support for students as they dive into primary sources, which provide fertile ground for rich inquiry. When studying the 1921 Tulsa Massacre, for example, consider starting with the following excerpt from a report about the event written by the American Red Cross:[11]

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[9] Lee Ann Potter, "Teaching Difficult Topics with Primary Sources," *Social Education* 75, no. 6 (November/December 2011): 284–290, https://www.socialstudies.org/social-education/75/6/teaching-difficult-topics-primary-sources.

[10] "Getting Started with Primary Sources," Library of Congress, accessed March 10, 2023, https://www.loc.gov/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources/.

[11] To learn more about the Tulsa Race Massacre, visit the Tulsa Historical Society and Museum at tulsahistory.org/exhibit/1921-tulsa-race-massacre/. Access the full report from the American Red Cross from the National Archives and Records Administration at catalog.archives.gov/id/157670060.

When the smoke had cleared it was found that

1256 buildings had been burned.

314 buildings (mostly homes) which were spared the torch, were looted and robbed of everything worth while.

10,000 (approximate) persons were homeless.

183 persons were in hospitals, practically all for gunshot wounds or burns.

531 other persons were seriously enough injured to require first aid medical or surgical care.

Many --- were dead. (Figures are omitted for the reason that NO ONE KNOWS.)

PROPERTY LOSSES.

A conservative estimate, based upon such data as has become available during a seven months period of relief work, places the losses on buildings, business stocks, household goods and personal property, at three million five hundred thousand dollars. (The only purpose of this estimate is to indicate the approximate size of the economic destruction.)

THE AMERICAN RED CROSS AND RELIEF.

In a situation such as this, which can better be imagined than described, it is not strange that the community instinctively turned to the American Red Cross.

True, the disaster was not "an act of God". It was "Tulsa made", but the American Red Cross, in accepting responsibility, generously and properly took the position that disaster had visited thousands of human beings, the majority of whom were innocent victims, helpless, and practically re-

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sourceless. The "Greatest Mother" could not say no to such a challenge, where human need was so great and human suffering so evident.

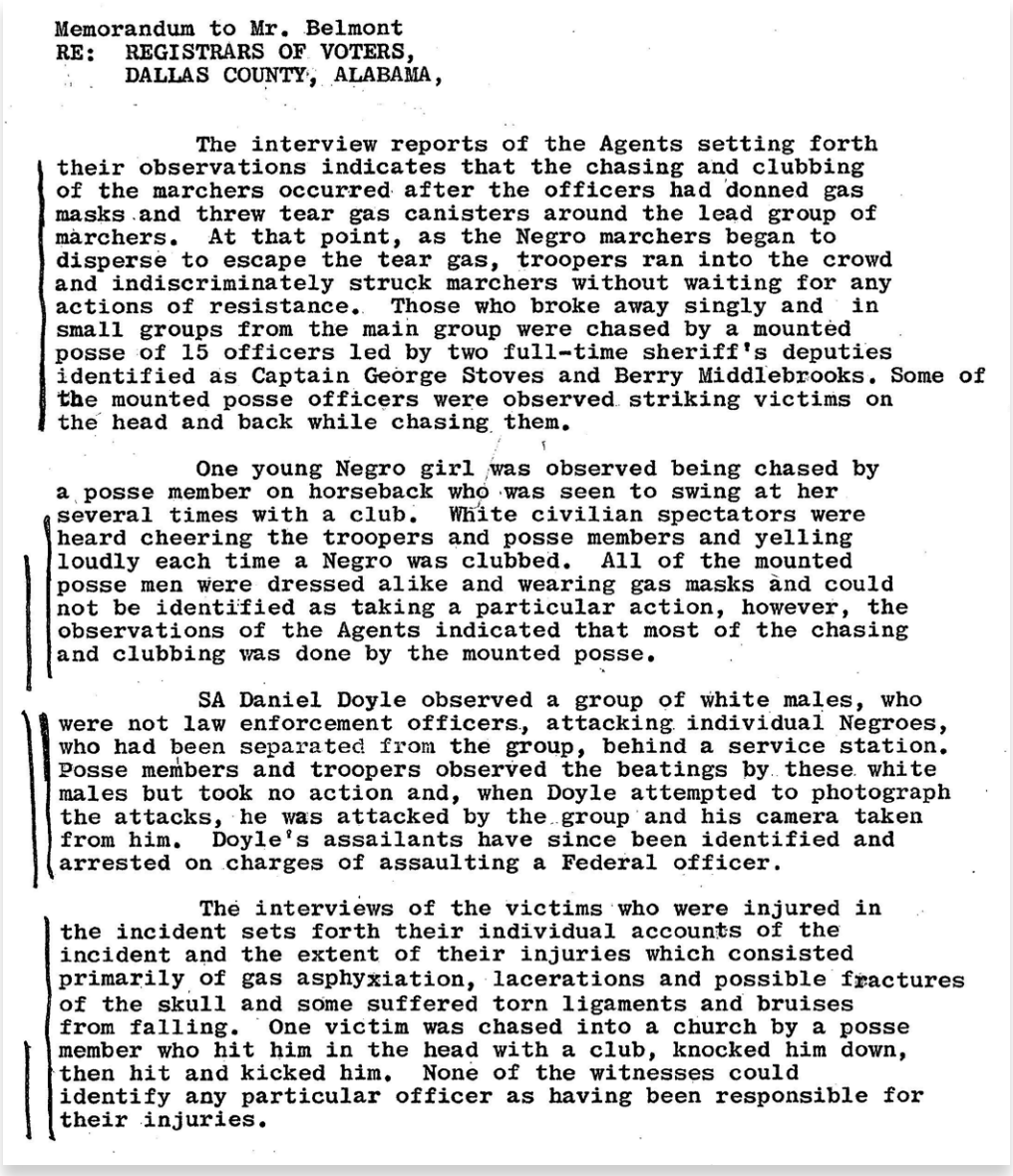
In addition to the wholesale destitution, the whole situation was aggravated by the destruction of morale among the victims. Thousands of them were literally frightened out of the city. Large contingents were found in Sapulpa, Claremore, Muskogee, Oklahoma City, and some were heard from at Kansas City on the north, Los Angeles on the west, Dallas on the south and New York on the east.

The significance of this "scattering" is that the whole relief situation was effected by the wandering of these people and the ultimate return to the site of their old homes, schools, churches and neighbors.

Excerpt from a report written by the American Red Cross detailing its disaster relief efforts in Tulsa, Oklahoma, from May 31 to June 1, 1921. Records of the American Red Cross, National Archives and Records Administration (NAID: 157670060).

Prompt students to generate questions and answer some as well. Both processes are beneficial in their own way. *What would students like to know about what transpired? What do they think were the motivations or objectives of the White perpetrators of the devastation? How might African Americans—even those who did not live in Tulsa—likely have reacted to this tragedy? What do students imagine were the economic effects of the massacre and destruction in the months and years that followed?*

Primary sources allow for open-ended thinking and exploration, making for a more impactful learning experience than a task in which all students are expected to come up with the same answers. Have students take a look at the following FBI memorandum that was issued after the 1965 Bloody Sunday attack on civil rights marchers in Selma, Alabama.[12]



Memorandum to Mr. Belmont
RE: REGISTRARS OF VOTERS,
DALLAS COUNTY, ALABAMA,

The interview reports of the Agents setting forth their observations indicates that the chasing and clubbing of the marchers occurred after the officers had donned gas masks and threw tear gas canisters around the lead group of marchers. At that point, as the Negro marchers began to disperse to escape the tear gas, troopers ran into the crowd and indiscriminately struck marchers without waiting for any actions of resistance. Those who broke away singly and in small groups from the main group were chased by a mounted posse of 15 officers led by two full-time sheriff's deputies identified as Captain George Stoves and Berry Middlebrooks. Some of the mounted posse officers were observed striking victims on the head and back while chasing them.

One young Negro girl was observed being chased by a posse member on horseback who was seen to swing at her several times with a club. White civilian spectators were heard cheering the troopers and posse members and yelling loudly each time a Negro was clubbed. All of the mounted posse men were dressed alike and wearing gas masks and could not be identified as taking a particular action, however, the observations of the Agents indicated that most of the chasing and clubbing was done by the mounted posse.

SA Daniel Doyle observed a group of white males, who were not law enforcement officers, attacking individual Negroes, who had been separated from the group, behind a service station. Posse members and troopers observed the beatings by these white males but took no action and, when Doyle attempted to photograph the attacks, he was attacked by the group and his camera taken from him. Doyle's assailants have since been identified and arrested on charges of assaulting a Federal officer.

The interviews of the victims who were injured in the incident sets forth their individual accounts of the incident and the extent of their injuries which consisted primarily of gas asphyxiation, lacerations and possible fractures of the skull and some suffered torn ligaments and bruises from falling. One victim was chased into a church by a posse member who hit him in the head with a club, knocked him down, then hit and kicked him. None of the witnesses could identify any particular officer as having been responsible for their injuries.

Excerpt from a memorandum entered into FBI Case File #44-28492, following the Bloody Sunday March in March 1965. Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (File #44-28492), National Archives and Records Administration.

[12] Learn more and access this and other files related to the FBI's response to the Bloody Sunday March at "FBI Case File #44-28492: Bloody Sunday," Rediscovering Black History Blog, National Archives and Records Administration, February 24, 2015, https://rediscovering-black-history.blogs.archives.gov/2015/02/24/fbi-case-file-44-28492-bloody-sunday/#jp-carousel-1438.

Ask your students: *What phrases stand out to you? Why? What words would you use to describe the memorandum (memo)? How would different groups of Americans have reacted upon seeing photographs of this event in the newspaper?*

To demonstrate their understanding, students could write news articles that they imagine could have appeared in mainstream newspapers or African American newspapers. They could write a poem or a mock journal entry as if they were a bystander at the scene or a relative of someone who was involved. Or they could assess whether the events in Tulsa in 1921 or Selma in 1965 align with certain laws, Constitutional amendments, or cherished American values.

These sources and activities could facilitate an in-depth understanding of horrific events without exposing students to excessively harsh content.

CONCLUSION

It is widely accepted that educators should not cross certain lines in presenting graphic or violent content.[13] But we also know that we create problems that extend far beyond our classroom if we sugarcoat African American history, touch only superficially on the hardships, and downplay the choices of those who perpetrated injustice. As educators, we need to strike a balance and tell a more complete story.

Furthermore as educators, we should ask ourselves: what does it mean to teach history well? What do you want your students to leave your classroom with in terms of content, thinking skills, and mindset? As you prepare your students for the real world, how can your class help them understand our country today and productively engage in the issues and events that will emerge in coming years?

Answering these questions is not easy. Hopefully, in reading this article, you have found some ideas that will help you to do so.

[13] To learn more, see Fitchett, Paul G., Lisa Merriweather, and Heather Coffey, " 'It's Not a Pretty Picture': How Pre-Service History Teachers Make Meaning of America's Racialized Past through Lynching Imagery." *The History Teacher* 48, no. 2 (2015): 245–69. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43264403.

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